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Working on the Dock of the Bay:  
Labor and Life along Charleston's Waterfront, 1783-1861

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By

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B.A., University of Michigan, 2002  
M.A., Emory University, 2007

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An abstract of  
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Emory University  
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## **ABSTRACT**

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This dissertation focuses on waterfront workers in Charleston, South Carolina, from the city's incorporation in 1783 to the Civil War. Those who labored upon the wharves and transported goods to and from the waterfront – including stevedores, dock hands, porters, draymen, and carters – were indispensable to the city's commercial maritime economy. I highlight the continuous struggle over the terms of waterfront work, and how the repeated efforts of employers and municipal and state authorities to control and dominate the labor and lives of Charleston's most important workforce was met with vigorous resistance. I survey these dock workers and the work they did, including hiring practices, the work process, labor conditions, and wages. Also considered is the relationship between race, class, and ethnicity in an antebellum southern port which employed black slaves, free blacks, native-born whites, and immigrant whites. After studying the enslaved workers who dominated wharf labor since the colonial period, I trace the changing racial and ethnic composition of Charleston's waterfront workforce during the 1840s and 1850s. I then examine labor competition between the city's black and white wharf laborers, and analyze how the deadly yellow fever epidemics of the late antebellum period impacted this contest for employment on the docks.

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Archival research can be an exasperating and lonely endeavor. The professionals I encountered during my time on the road truly are among the best in the country. This dissertation was improved inestimably by the suggestions, hunches, and hard work of these scholars, archivists, and librarians. But long hours of scrutinizing manuscripts and laboring over microfilm readers was intermixed with time spent talking, eating, drinking, golfing, and attending baseball games with many of these new and dear friends. I would like to thank Allen Stokes, Henry Fulmer, Robin Copp, Graham Duncan, and Brian Cuthrell at the South Caroliniana Library; Jane Aldrich, Mary Jo Fairchild, and Mike

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## INTRODUCTION

Maritime commerce was the key to Charleston's economy throughout the antebellum period. With the waterfront at the center of commercial trade, those who worked upon the city's wharves and transported goods to and from the waterfront – including stevedores, dock hands, porters, draymen, and carters – were linchpins in the flow of commodities into and out of the port. Despite their large numbers and the indispensable role that waterfront workers played in Charleston's pre-mechanized, labor-intensive economy, little is known about who these laborers were and what kinds of work they performed.

Scholars have explored the history of dock workers in ports throughout the world, but few have given significant attention to waterfront laborers or dock work in the antebellum American South or in a slave society. Drawn by the violence and struggles surrounding late nineteenth and twentieth-century labor unionization, scholars of Charleston's waterfront – and other southern waterfronts – have emphasized the post-Civil War era and have employed a narrowly conceived perspective primarily focused on worker-employer relations, labor strikes, and the increased mechanization of work.<sup>1</sup> Consequently much historical evidence remains to be discovered and examined.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the following studies of southern waterfront workers all fail to look back at the antebellum period: Daniel Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers: Race, Labor, and Unionism, 1892-1923*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988; Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994; Arnold R. Hirsch, "On the Waterfront: Race, Class, and Politics in Post-Reconstruction New Orleans." *Journal of Urban History* 21 (May 1995): 511-7; and Clifford Farrington, "Biracial Unions on Galveston's Waterfront, 1865-1925." Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 2003; The following studies of Charleston's waterfront similarly ignore the city's antebellum history of race, ethnicity, class, and labor on the docks: William C. Hine, "Black Organized Labor in Reconstruction Charleston." *Labor History* 25 (Autumn 1984): 504-17; Eli A. Poliakoff, "Charleston's Longshoremen: Organized Labor in the Anti-Union Palmetto State." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 103 (July 2002): 247-64; and Suzan Erem and E. Paul Durrenberger, *On the Global Waterfront: The Fight to Free the Charleston* 5. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008.

Since the seventeenth century, sailing vessels carrying goods between Europe and America followed a clockwise route formed by the prevailing winds of the North Atlantic and the flow of oceanic currents. Geographically located along the western edge of this flourishing highway of Atlantic World trade, Charleston was a convenient place for ship captains to stop and have additional cargo loaded or unloaded before proceeding to ports further north along the North American coast and then on to Europe. And thus Charleston enjoyed what historians have termed a “golden age of commerce,” which began in the early eighteenth century and lasted until the Panic of 1819 and the collapse of the cotton market.<sup>2</sup> With the 1820s came an end to Charleston’s reign as the greatest commercial seaport in the South and the initiation of a forty-year period of relative economic decline that culminated in the devastation of the Civil War.

Several additional factors contributed to the end of the city’s golden age. The close of the age of sail – attended by the introduction of steam-powered vessels – and an innovative understanding of thermal navigation meant that trading vessels no longer had to follow a circular path around the perimeter of the Atlantic. Ships thereafter could sail directly between Europe and northern ports and thus bypass Charleston. Meanwhile, the shallow bar or entrance to Charleston harbor also hindered an increasing number of large ships from calling at the port.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most significantly, Eli Whitney’s invention of the

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<sup>2</sup> According to historian George C. Rogers, Charleston’s “golden age of commerce” stretched from the 1730s until roughly the 1820s. P. C. Coker argues that the city’s commercial golden years more accurately stretched from 1795 until 1819. George C. Rogers Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980), 3; P. C. Coker III, *Charleston’s Maritime Heritage, 1670-1865: An Illustrated History* (Charleston: CokerCraft Press, 1987), 171, 35; Cotton prices plummeted from roughly 30 cents per pound in 1818 to about 12 cents per pound in 1823. During the 1840s and 1850s cotton prices were lower still, averaging only 10 cents per pound. But a significant increase in cotton production, sales, and exports made up for these depressed prices. Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 273-4.

cotton gin in 1793 and the subsequent cotton boom prompted thousands of planters along with their slaves to abandon the depleted soil of South Carolina and migrate westward to grow the cash crop in the rich and productive soil of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. As a result, the port failed to keep pace with commercial rivals such as Mobile and New Orleans, the last of which overtook Charleston as the leading port in the South by 1820. Making economic matters worse, beginning regularly in the early 1820s, New York shippers operated coastal packets to transport cotton from Charleston to New York, where the bales were transferred to larger ocean-going vessels and shipped to European ports. Although Charleston continued to ship some of its cotton directly to Europe, New York interests pocketed a substantial portion of the profits for those bales shipped to Europe via New York, a major financial loss for Charleston's merchants, factors, and businessmen.<sup>4</sup>

As Charleston fell behind more rapidly expanding southern ports, South Carolina went from being the nation's leading cotton producer in 1821 to the fourth ranked in 1850 and the seventh in 1860. South Carolina's decline was relative, however, for the state experienced an impressive expansion of cotton production during these decades. South Carolina produced approximately 20 million pounds of cotton in 1801, 40 million pounds in 1811, and 50 million pounds in 1821. By 1850 the state's plantations and farms turned out over 150 million pounds of the staple and nearly 177 million pounds in 1860. Rice production was also on the rise in South Carolina amid this relative economic decline. During much of Charleston's golden age, rice was the port's primary export. In

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that a national economic depression following the Panic of 1819, persistently low cotton prices, the South's position on slavery, and the passage of laws such as the Negro Seamen Acts also contributed to Charleston's relative commercial decline. See Coker, *Charleston's Maritime Heritage*, 172.

<sup>4</sup> Coker, *Charleston's Maritime Heritage*, 174, 176-8.

both 1773 and 1774, for instance, approximately 67 million pounds of rice were loaded onto ships in Charleston. By 1850 over 104 million pounds of rice were produced, and a decade later more than 117 million pounds of the staple were generated.<sup>5</sup>

Escalating cotton and rice production created a corresponding rise in goods exported from Charleston. Between 1822 and 1829, an average of approximately 172,000 cotton bales were exported annually from Charleston. An average of about 225,000 bales were shipped each year in the 1830s, 309,000 bales in the 1840s, and 451,000 bales in the 1850s. Over half a million bales of cotton were loaded onto vessels at Charleston's docks in 1855, 1856, and 1860. In addition, tens of thousands of tierces (a type of barrel) of rice and hundreds of thousands of bushels of rough rice were shipped from the port each year during these decades.<sup>6</sup> Charleston's economic decline, in short, was only relative to other southern port cities.

Though acknowledging the relative nature of Charleston's economic decline after 1819, scholarship routinely has depicted an inward facing, provincial port with a sluggish, dilapidated commercial waterfront absent of the hustle and bustle of the past. Top-down approaches have revealed the perspectives and waning fortunes of South Carolina's planters, merchants, wharf owners, bankers, and other elites. I consider how the city's relative economic decline affected waterfront work and workers.

Increasing quantities of exports created more work and required more workers on the docks. Historians have been so focused on the city's commercial decline relative to

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<sup>5</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 146, 269, 271, 274-5, 287.

<sup>6</sup> John G. Van Deusen, *Economic Bases of Disunion in South Carolina* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), 333, Appendix C; Also see Frederick Burtrum Collins, "Charleston and the Railroads: A Geographic Study of a South Atlantic Port and its Strategies for Developing a Railroad System, 1820-1860" (M.A. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1977), 100, Table V.

New York and New Orleans, they largely have failed to notice this real and substantial rise in exports. It is true that an increasing proportion of cotton shipped from Charleston was stowed aboard vessels bound for New York rather than directly for Europe. And it is undeniable that New Orleans dethroned Charleston as the “Queen City of the South,” exporting over a million bales of cotton a dozen times between 1843 and 1859 and over 2 million bales in 1860. But to a drayman, wharf hand, or stevedore in Charleston, the city’s comparative standing to other American ports, how many more cotton bales were being shipped from competing ports, or the destination and price of the commodity was irrelevant. Regardless of the destination, the bales still had to be transported to the wharves, pressed, marked, and weighed, stored into warehouses and removed to shipside, hoisted onto vessels and into ships’ holds, and finally stowed into place. What mattered to a waterfront worker in antebellum Charleston was that more cotton bales than ever before were arriving at the South Carolina port and necessitated handling. The result was a steadily increasing demand for waterfront labor, rendering the subjects of this dissertation ever more vital and indispensable.<sup>7</sup>

This study begins in 1783, the year of Charleston’s incorporation and the year that the city assumed responsibility from the South Carolina General Assembly to regulate its laboring population and the privately-owned wharves extending beyond the city’s eastern fortifications. It concludes in 1861, on the eve of the Civil War that not only destroyed the institution of slavery that supplied a large portion of the city’s waterfront workers but also physically destroyed the Cooper River waterfront. Chapter one reconstructs the physical boundaries, sights, sounds, and smells of the city’s antebellum waterfront.

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<sup>7</sup> See Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans*, 24, 38, 176.

Placing dock workers and the work they did at the center of this project, I carefully explore the labor process, including the tools, techniques, and technologies used to load and unload ships in antebellum Charleston. Also examined are the hiring and payment processes, wages, work hours, seasonal employment, and the danger of waterfront work, including injuries, accidents, and death. I further analyze work songs to uncover additional information about the work process and to reveal the sentiments of the laborers toward their work, employers, and the labor environment. This opening chapter introduces many of the major themes of this dissertation. Chief among them is the continuous struggle over the terms of waterfront work; the repeated efforts of city and state authorities and employers to control and dominate the labor and lives of Charleston's most important workforce was met with vigorous dock worker resistance.

Chapter two examines Charleston's enslaved waterfront workers. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, common labor on the city's docks was dominated by slaves and free blacks. I offer a careful estimation of how many slaves were employed on waterfront docks and drays over the decades. Drawing on extraordinary collections of wharf and business papers, I discuss the choice between owning and hiring slave wharf hands, and whether it was typical for enslaved dock workers to be transferred back and forth between the city's wharves and rural plantations. This chapter further revisits a number of topics fundamental to understanding the history of Charleston and the Old South that have not been examined from the workers' or labor history perspective. For example, I reconsider the Negro Seamen Act of 1822 and its several amendments and South Carolina's 1841 New York Ship Inspection Law, and analyze their impacts upon waterfront workers. In addition, scores, perhaps hundreds, of slaves took advantage of

the relative autonomy and anonymity of waterfront work to stow away on northern-bound vessels, dramatically illustrating one of the many ways the experiences of enslaved waterfront laborers differed both from those of slaves on southern plantations and dock workers in free labor ports in the North and throughout the Atlantic World. This chapter ends with the revelation of a black dock worker shortage during the 1836 cholera outbreak on the eve of the arrival of thousands of unskilled, working-class, white immigrants.

Chapter three examines the changing racial and ethnic composition of Charleston's waterfront labor force during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Most native white southerners had eschewed wharf labor as demeaning "Negro work." Quantitative census and city directory data and qualitative contemporary accounts reveal, however, the influx of Irish and German immigrants during the 1840s and 1850s. By the mid-nineteenth century Charleston's waterfront and transportation workforce was no longer cornered by one race or invariably avoided by another. It included black slaves, free blacks, a few native whites, and many white immigrants. These immigrants inevitably competed with the city's free blacks and slaves, and I examine the vigorous and at times violent struggle for employment on the docks. I also explore the legislative efforts of white workers to eliminate black competitors through petitions to the Charleston City Council and state General Assembly as well as letters to the editors of the city's newspapers. Irish and German immigrants successfully replaced black stevedores and draymen. I consider why whites succeeded in displacing black rivals in some fields of employment but failed in others. Also, did employers prefer to hire one racial or ethnic group over others, and if so, why?

Chapter four examines the ways that yellow fever epidemics and nineteenth-century theories of epidemiology, maritime quarantine, and race-based disease acclimation affected waterfront labor competition. Although Irish and German immigrants supplanted many free blacks and slaves on the city's docks and drays during the 1850s, that decade's deadly yellow fever epidemics actually aided blacks to hold onto their waterfront jobs. I have discovered that "acclimated" free black and enslaved stevedores, laborers, and draymen were sought after and even required by law to handle and transport "infected" cargo during the yellow fever season. As a result, "unacclimated" white workers were at a severe disadvantage in the contest for such waterfront and transportation work. While historians and public health scholars have examined the frequent outbreaks of yellow fever and other diseases in the urban antebellum South, they have not considered the impact of public sentiment and official regulations passed in response to these epidemics. Expanding upon the theme of regulation, this chapter highlights the ways in which Charleston's leaders used municipal ordinances to control and shape both waterfront labor and those who performed it.

Chapter five employs waterfront theft and worker pilferage as a lens to reflect on the themes of this dissertation. An antebellum southern port that employed black slaves, free blacks, native southern whites, and white immigrants tells us much about the complicated relationships of race, class, ethnicity, and whiteness. Elite white Charlestonians assumed that blacks, and especially black dock workers, were responsible for most waterfront theft and pilferage. But presuming blacks to be thieves by nature and thus not particularly blameworthy, city authorities directed scorn and legal actions at "unscrupulous" white shop keepers, who purchased stolen goods and enabled black theft.



Though some native southern whites too stole from the docks, white theft oftentimes went unpunished until after the arrival of poor and purportedly unprincipled immigrants, who were perceived as not entirely white and were thought to share slaves' thieving character. I also compare and contrast theft and pilferage from Charleston's docks to plunder in free labor ports and on southern plantations, and inquire whether the city's thieving waterfront slaves stole as a form of resistance to their employers or the institution of slavery.

Finally, while this study is principally a history of labor, it is also a social, cultural, and political history of the workers and their families. Labor historians long have recognized the need to investigate beyond the workplace and inquire into the lives of laborers. And some scholars have taken note that despite the historical and occupational importance of dock workers, they have yet to be examined within the broader analytical framework of the "new social history" – that is, the study of groups not traditionally considered and the use of sources not previously utilized. When possible, this project follows these laborers after the end of the workday to explore their neighborhoods, family life, property holdings, social organizations, and political activities.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**“using violent exercise in warm weather”:**  
**The Waterfront Labor Experience**

Not long after Charleston was relocated in 1680 from Albemarle Point to Oyster Point at the tip of the peninsula formed by the confluence of the Cooper and Ashley rivers, commercial wharves were built that protruded from the walled city's eastern fortifications. Though only 68 trading vessels docked in Charleston in 1706, the city's eight wharves welcomed 217 ships in 1739. By the 1760s and early 1770s more than 500 ocean-going and hundreds of additional coastal and plantation vessels dropped anchor within the harbor each year.<sup>1</sup> Charleston was the third busiest seaport in British America in 1770, surpassed in total annual tonnage by only Philadelphia and Boston. As the number of commercial vessels calling at the port increased, new and impressive wharves sprouted. On the eve of the American Revolution, merchant and patriot Christopher Gadsden undertook the seven-year construction of Gadsden's Wharf, which extended nearly a thousand feet into the Cooper River and was one of the largest wharves in North America. In 1774 Gadsden boasted to Samuel Adams that his wharf could accommodate thirty large vessels at one time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas J. Tobias Papers, “Wharves and Warehouses” folder, SCHS; Walter Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!: The History of a Southern City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 63; According to Charleston maritime scholar P. C. Coker, some accounts from the 1730s reported that as many as 100 ships were in the port at one time during the fall months. Also, the total annual tonnage of vessels calling in Charleston increased by 80 percent between 1717 and 1737. Coker, *Charleston's Maritime Heritage*, 37-8, 45; In 1748 nearly 200 vessels sailed out of Charleston harbor loaded with exports, including 68 ships bound for Europe, 87 for the West Indies, and 37 for northern ports. Clement Eaton, *A History of the Old South* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 47; William and Jane Pease, *The Web of Progress: Private Values and Public Styles in Boston and Charleston, 1828-1843* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Gadsden began construction on Gadsden's Wharf in 1767 and it was advertised as open for business in March 1773. Gadsden claimed that his was the largest wharf in all of British North America, and it was indeed the largest in the southern colonies. Also beginning in the 1770s, wharves were built along the Ashley River, including William Gibbes's 800-foot long dock. Thomas J. Tobias Papers, “Wharves and

By the early Republic more than twenty wharves stretched for over half a mile along the Cooper River.<sup>3</sup> Visitors could not help commenting on the wharves, though not always favorably.<sup>4</sup> Europeans particularly found them lacking in aesthetics. When French botanist Francois Andre Michaux visited Charleston in October 1801, he found the quays “ill-constructed...with the trunks of palm trees fixed together.” The foundations of the wharves indeed were made of palmetto wood, and the Frenchman pointed out that “Experience had shown that the trunks of these trees, although of a very spongy [*sic*] nature, lie buried in the water many years without decaying.” At least one mid-nineteenth-century traveler found the use of palmetto wood for wharf construction revolting despite its utility. Already disappointed and annoyed at being welcomed into the “Palmetto State” by an utter lack of “this half-tropical species of tree,” Swedish writer Fredrika Bremer lamented the “Vandal-like manner” in which palmettos were cut down for use in wharves and ship building.<sup>5</sup>

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Warehouses” folder, SCHS; Clark G. Reynolds, Fort Sumter National Monument “Dockside II Study,” 3, SCHS; Coker, *Charleston’s Maritime Heritage*, 42.

<sup>3</sup> The 1790 city directory listed twenty-four wharves, and the 1802 city directory listed twenty-two wharves; Jacob Milligan, *The Charleston Directory and Revenue System*. Charleston: T. B. Bowen, 1790 (hereafter cited as 1790 city directory); J. J. Negrin, *New Charleston Directory and Stranger’s Guide for the Year 1802*. Charleston: John A. Dacqueny, 1802 (hereafter cited as 1802 city directory); Scottish lawyer and journalist Alexander Mackay noted that the wharves were “concentrated upon the eastern side of the town, the main rendezvous for shipping being on the Cooper River.” Alexander Mackay, *Western World, or, Travels in the United States in 1846-47* (London: R. Bentley, 1849), vol. 2, 175.

<sup>4</sup> The introduction to Thomas D. Clark’s collection of South Carolina travel narratives includes an excellent forewarning about the use of travel accounts as historical sources: “Travelers, no matter what their biases, could only describe what they saw, heard, and understood. Few remained in one place long enough to take a second look or to get more than a surface notion of what was going on...One must question the reliability of travel accounts as historical sources. They, like a small field photograph, show only the central area of focus. Unfortunately many intimately associated facts are left out. There is also always the weighty factor of the writer’s own prejudice.” Clark nevertheless goes on to point out that despite such limitations, travel accounts often provide historians with a unique and otherwise inaccessible firsthand view into antebellum life. Thomas D. Clark, ed., *South Carolina: The Grand Tour, 1780-1865* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), 10.

Charleston benefited from a large harbor, with wharves located only a few miles from the open Atlantic Ocean. English author James Buckingham remarked in 1839 that Charleston was “most advantageously situated for commerce” and bore “a striking resemblance to the position of New York.” Swedish scholar Carl David Arfwedson agreed, stating in 1832 that this “advantageous situation” placed Charleston “in the rank of the most considerable city for commerce...which I firmly believe it will continue to occupy for a long period.”<sup>6</sup> Visitors often were impressed by both the quantity and diverse origins of the ships that called at Charleston to unload and load cargo at the wharves. Michaux, for instance, observed in that the port was “generally full of small vessels from Boston, Newport, New York, and Philadelphia, and from all the little intermediate ports.” Other observers extended this list into the Caribbean and across the Atlantic to include ships from Havana, London, Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Greenock, and Le Havre.<sup>7</sup> In November 1839 seaman Charles Barron wrote to his father in Maine that there were approximately 200 sailing vessels in the port in addition to many

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<sup>5</sup> Francois Andre Michaux, *Travels to the West of the Alleghany Mountains, in the States of Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and Back to Charleston, By the Upper Carolines...Undertaken in the Year 1802*, quoted in Clark, *South Carolina*, 36; Fredrika Bremer, *Homes of the New World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854), 273; For a description of how wharves were constructed using palmetto logs and stones during the colonial period, see Coker, *Charleston's Maritime Heritage*, 39, 42; Charles Mackay claimed that a worm consumed all other available types of timber while sparing palmetto. Charles Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America: or, Sketches of a Tour in the United States and Canada in 1857-8* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1859), 195; British consul William Ogilby reported to the Crown in June 1833 that the surfaces of Charleston's wharves were covered with gravel. William Ogilby, “British Counsel Report on Trade and Shipping in Charleston, S.C., 1833 June 29,” no. 15, SCL.

<sup>6</sup> James Buckingham, *The Slave States of America* (London, Fisher, Son & Co., 1842), vol. 1, 46; Carl David Arfwedson, *The United States and Canada, in 1832, 1833, and 1834* (London: Richard Bentley, 1834), vol. 1, 379.

<sup>7</sup> Michaux, *Travels to the West*, quoted in Clark, *South Carolina*, 36; Buckingham, *Slave States of America*, vol. 1, 53; Charles Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America*, 195; Basil Hall, *Travels in North America, in the Years 1827 and 1828* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Carey, 1829), vol. 2, 190-1; Letters of an American Traveler, 1810-1812, 9, SCHS.

steamboats.<sup>8</sup> And the editor of the *Illustrated London News*, Scotsman Charles Mackay, commented that “The wharves of Charleston...present an animated spectacle, and the port is filled with vessels.”<sup>9</sup>

What most fascinated travelers who found themselves strolling along East Bay Street or down the many cobblestone streets and alleyways that ran toward the Cooper River were the immense quantities of commercial goods piled on the wharves. Not surprisingly, cotton and rice left the greatest impression. “Nothing but bales of [cotton] and barrels of rice are seen in the lower part of the city,” wrote Carl David Arfwedson. “The streets and quays are sometimes so filled with them,” he added, “that the agility of a sailor is required to effect a passage.”<sup>10</sup> Though many goods indeed were stacked on the open wharves, some were stored in warehouses. One anonymous traveler took note in the early nineteenth century of the many “Spacious & substantial” brick waterfront storehouses that could accommodate thousands of cotton bales and rice barrels.<sup>11</sup> By 1847 the City Council proudly reported that Charleston’s warehouses could hold 100,000

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Barron Letters, November 11, 1839, SCL.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America*, 195.

<sup>10</sup> Arfwedson, *United States and Canada*, vol. 1, 381; Englishman John Henry Vessey similarly observed in April 1859 that “Cotton is the great article of export from Charleston. All the wharves are filled with it, and I suppose that this is not the most busy season of the year.” John Henry Vessey and Brian Waters, ed., *Mr. Vessey of England: Being the Incidents and Reminiscences of Travel in a Twelve Weeks’ Tour through the United States and Canada in the Year 1859* (New York: Putnam, 1956), 62.

<sup>11</sup> Letters of an American Traveler, 1810-1812, 85, SCHS; Also see Ogilby, “British Counsel Report,” no. 14 and no. 15; Alexander Mackay, *Western World*, vol. 2, 184-5; D. J. Dowling, *Dowling’s Charleston Directory and Annual Register for 1837 and 1838. Containing: Names of Persons in Business, Heads of Families, List of the Streets, Lanes, Alleys and Courts, Hotels, Taverns, Boarding Houses, Churches, Public Buildings, Packets, Insurance Companies, Banks, Pilots, Officers of the United States, State, and City Government &c. And Embellished with a Plan of the City of Charleston* (Charleston: D. J. Dowling, 1837), i-ii (hereafter cited as 1837-38 city directory); David M. Gazlay, *The Charleston City Directory and General Business Directory for 1855: Containing the Names of the Inhabitants, Their Occupations, Places of Business and Dwelling Houses: A Business Directory, A List of the Streets, Lanes, Alleys, the City Offices, Public Institutions, Banks, &c.* (Charleston: David M. Gazlay, 1855), 119 (hereafter cited as 1855 city directory).

cotton bales and that it was common for between 40,000 and 50,000 bales to be stored there at any one time.<sup>12</sup>

The port's commercial trade extended far beyond cotton and rice, however. Englishman Robert Russell also recognized lumber as a leading export, a product that Charlestonians had cut from the Carolina forests from the earliest days of settlement. Another Englishman Walter Thornbury noticed "brown sheaves of tobacco...black casks of tar, pitch, and turpentine, from the North Carolina and western forests." Others found imported items most intriguing. Francois Andre Michaux, for instance, noted provisions such as flour, salt, potatoes, onions, carrots, beet-roots, apples, oats, planks, and other building materials. Furthermore, the commercial section of local newspapers listed additional export and import items including peanuts, cigars, feathers, bagging, deer skins, and rosin.<sup>13</sup>

In 1828 Basil Hall, a Scottish author and officer in the Royal Navy, penned one of the most detailed – though much romanticized – descriptions of "the great seaport of Charleston" and its commercial goods.

I was much struck with the sort of tropical aspect which belonged more to the port of Charleston than to any other I saw in America. I remember one day in particular, when, tempted by the hopes of catching a little of the cool sea breeze, I strolled to the shore. In two minutes after leaving the principal street, I found myself alongside of vessels from all parts of the world, loading and unloading their cargoes. On the wharf, abreast of a vessel just come in from the Havannah, I

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<sup>12</sup> The city's wharf owners argued that there was only storage for 55,000 bales. City Council Minutes, February 15, 1847, *Southern Patriot*, February 16, 1847, and City Council Minutes, March 5, 1847, *Southern Patriot*, March 6, 1847.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Russell, *North America, its Agriculture and Climate; Containing Observations on the Agriculture and Climate of Canada, the United States, and the Island of Cuba* (Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1857), 162; Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States: With Remarks on their Economy* (New York: Dix & Edwards, 1856), 511; Walter Thornbury, *Criss-Cross Journeys* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1873), vol. 1, 278-9; Michaux, *Travels to the West*, quoted in Clark, *South Carolina*, 36; *Charleston Daily Courier*, January 1, 1859, and January 2, 1859.

observed a great pile of unripe bananas, plucked from the trees only four or five days before in the Island of Cuba. Close by these stood a pyramid of cocoa nuts, equally fresh, some with their husks still on, some recently stripped of their tough wiry coating. The seamen were hoisting out of the hold of a ship, bags of coffee and large oblong boxes of sugar...On every side the ground was covered, in true commercial style, with great bales of cotton, boxes of fruit, barrels of flour, and large square cases of goods, built one upon the top of another, with the owner's initials painted upon them within mystical circles and diamonds, visible between the crossings of the cords which had held them tight on their voyage from Europe or from India. The whole scene, though any thing but new to me, was certainly not on that account less pleasing. The day, also, was bright and sunny, and the numerous vessels which fringed the wharf, or were scattered over the ample bay, were lying with their sails loosed to dry. I almost fancied myself again in the equatorial regions; a vision which brought many scenes of past voyages crowding upon my recollection.<sup>14</sup>

Contemporary accounts did not capture solely what visitors saw but also what they heard and smelled along the waterfront. Despite idealized descriptions of exotic products and semi-tropical surroundings, the waterfront was not a sleepy or tranquil place. Coopers and ship carpenters hammered away at their trades, the wheels of drays and carts rumbled over cobblestone streets and the wooden planks of the wharves, and merchants and ship captains barked orders to the throngs of laborers and seamen scurrying hither and thither. Cotton and rice brokers continually beseeched prospective buyers to sample the ubiquitous staples. "The ear is continually annoyed with sounds proclaiming the price of these articles," the Swede Arfwedson grumbled.<sup>15</sup> Shouting came in all languages. Basil Hall, for instance, heard the "broken English and peculiar Creole tone" of two black coopers, which "showed them to be natives of some French

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<sup>14</sup> Hall, *Travels in North America*, vol. 2, 189-91.

<sup>15</sup> Arfwedson added that "merchants and dealers are incessantly engaged in drawing samples from the bales, for the purpose of trying the goodness of the article, by pulling out long threads between their fingers, or dipping their hands into the barrels of rice, to examine its whiteness and purity." Arfwedson, *United States and Canada*, vol. 1, 381-2.

West India Island.”<sup>16</sup> And those who spoke English did not always use the King’s English. Seaman Henry P. Burr wrote to his family in 1838 that “My ears have been so long grated” with the profane language of his captain, who was “often heard in his out-breakings to every ship 2 or 3 docks on each side of us.” So loud and persistent was the swearing, in fact, the captain “has become notorious.”<sup>17</sup> Maine ship captain James Carr captured the street criers and hucksters who habitually roamed the wharves hawking their wares and services.

[T]he cries of Charleston are to me rather annoying – when you are passing quietly along the street, to be overtaken or fall in with a fisherman screaming out with open throat, fine fresh fish – fine whiting, mullet, black fish, &c – if you cross the other side tis a chance if you do not fall in with the shrill voice of an old wench, crying, fine oistr, fine oists – oists who will buy my oists – or shrimp – fine fresh shrimps – who will buys my shrimps for nothing, at seven pence a dozen – you turn the corner & you meet direct in your teeth – fine hot chicken pie – or fine pancakes [*sic*] – hot pan e cakes, and all these things with such an accent & tone that is was a long time before I could understand them – the chimney sweeps, little black imp, they look and make a noise like young devils. I never could distinguish that they said any thing but merely make a hideous scream – though there was something novel in all this it was not of the agreeable kind.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, the smell of sea water mingled with those of fresh coffee, tobacco, fish, fruit, and other goods assembled upon the docks. But not all the smells were pleasing. The sun’s rays beat upon a mixture of exposed pluff mud and decaying matter

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<sup>16</sup> Hall, *Travels in North America*, vol. 2, 191; Also see Pease, *Web of Progress*, 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> The Letters of Captain Henry P. Burr and His Family, November 11, 1838, and December 7, 1838, CRCMS.

<sup>18</sup> Carr conjectured that had his young sons witnessed this scene they would have been curiously amazed by “such strange sounds.” James Carr Papers, SCL; When the English painter Eyre Crowe was in Charleston in March 1853, he noted that the waterfront afforded opportunities to observe and record the “callings” of black workers. Eyre Crowe, *With Thackeray in America* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1893), 152; For examples of city ordinances and state acts regarding the sale of goods on the waterfront, see George B. Eckhard, ed., *A Digest of Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston From the Year 1783 to Oct. 1844. To Which are Annexed the Acts of the Legislature which relate Exclusively to the City of Charleston* (Charleston: Walker and Burke, 1844), 78-80, 137-50, 158-9, 171-2, 255, 406-7.



beneath the wharves, producing a less than pleasant odor that saturated the air all along the water's edge.<sup>19</sup> Also disagreeable to many who strolled along the waterfront was the smell of the workers themselves. Always a meticulous observer, Captain Carr facetiously remarked upon "the savoury smell that may be supposed to arise from twenty negroes using violent exercise in warm weather, in the hot and confined hold of ship and you may imagine what a delicious treat I enjoyed."<sup>20</sup>

Carr's remarks about these dock hands were anomalous. Although visitors sketched a vivid portrait of Charleston's antebellum waterfront, they were generally less helpful in depicting the workers and the labor that was performed on these wharves. Who, after all, actually transported the cotton bales, barrels of rice, and other cargo to and from the wharves? Who unloaded and loaded the vessels moored at the docks, and who transferred goods between the ships and waterfront warehouses? What tools and techniques were used to carry out this vital work? How and by whom were these laborers hired and paid? These are the topics addressed in the remainder of this chapter.

The waterfront workforce in Charleston – which included common wharf hands, porters, stevedores, draymen, and carters – was variously comprised of black slaves, free blacks or persons of color, and some whites. Though the relative proportions of these groups changed over time, slave labor long predominated on the city's docks. Slaves were employed to work on Charleston's waterfront from the building of the first wharves in the late seventeenth century until the waning months of the Civil War. Some wharf owners purchased slave dock workers or leased them from their masters for extended

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<sup>19</sup> Rogers, *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*, 88.

<sup>20</sup> James Carr Papers, SCL.

periods of time. But many urban slaves alternatively secured permission from their owners to hire themselves out to wharf managers (known as wharfingers), merchants and factors, ship captains, or dray owners. Those hired-out slaves who did not work on the docks toiled at a wide array of jobs, including as tradesmen or mechanics, coopers, fishermen, house servants, washerwomen, hucksters, venders, or fruiterers, butchers, barbers, and chimney sweeps. Though pecuniary arrangements varied, employers often paid hired slaves for their labor directly, and the bondsmen subsequently were expected to turn over a substantial portion of their earned wages to their masters.

But this was only one of the many ways in which elite white Charlestonians controlled and circumscribed the labor and lives of waterfront workers. State and municipal authorities continuously passed laws and ordinances and implemented policies that endeavored to subjugate laborers and render them mere powerless creatures of their employers and owners. Aimed primarily at slaves, such efforts provoked an incessant struggle between capital and labor that also sometimes impacted free black and white workers. But Charleston's waterfront laborers – whether enslaved or free, black or white – were not so easily dominated.

During the earliest decades of the city's history, masters permitted their slaves to roam from wharf to wharf seeking employment for the highest wages they could obtain. But beginning in 1712, laws sought to centralize and control the labor market by regulating both the hiring process and the wages of enslaved dock workers.<sup>21</sup> During the 1760s slave porters – a term adopted in colonial Charleston to describe dock workers –

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<sup>21</sup> Harlan Greene et al., *Slave Badges and the Slave-Hire System in Charleston, South Carolina, 1783-1865* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2004), 15-16; David J. McCord, ed., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina; Edited, Under Authority of the Legislature* (Columbia: A. S. Johnston, 1840), vol. 7, 363.

and common laborers conspired to boost their wages.<sup>22</sup> A 1764 act responded by empowering city authorities – known as the Commissioners of Streets – to regulate or fix “the rates of portorage and labour of such slaves, and also, to appoint the places where such slaves shall ply” for hire.<sup>23</sup> Soon after it was determined that slave porters and common laborers were to “ply at the Curtain-line, between the Watch-House and the Gap opposite to Col. Beale’s house, and not elsewhere.”<sup>24</sup> The curtain line being the wall of fortification just to the east side of East Bay Street, slaves seeking to hire out in colonial Charleston thus were required to wait along the Cooper River waterfront, and no longer were allowed to wander the wharves seeking employment.

As for wages, the 1764 law stipulated that slave porters engaged in “Labour in Ships at the Wharves” were to receive ten shillings per day, while the “rolling of rice [barrels], or other common portorage” on the docks paid seven shillings and six pence a day. As for more casually hired common laborers, those who worked for two hours earned two shillings and six pence, between two and four hours brought three shillings and nine pence, and half a day of work garnered five shillings. Slaves who failed to comply with these set wages were to receive up to twenty lashes, while white employers were left unpunished.<sup>25</sup> The 1764 statute also regulated transportation workers plying for

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<sup>22</sup> According to historian Walter Fraser, “Venturesome black apprentice chimney sweeps, slave porters, and black common laborers sought to manipulate the local economy by combining to fix the pay for their services during the 1760s.” And Richard Walsh reports that “The tailors combined in 1760, and the Grand Jury complained that Negro apprentice chimney sweeps had joined together to raise their wages.” Both Fraser and Walsh maintain that these were among the first unionizing and wage fixing efforts in American history, but neither scholar uncovered additional evidence or information. Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 105; Richard Walsh, “The Charleston Mechanics: A Brief Study, 1760-1776,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 60 (July 1959): 134. Walsh cites the *South Carolina Gazette*, November 5, 1763.

<sup>23</sup> Greene, *Slave Badges*, 18; Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 398.

<sup>24</sup> Greene, *Slave Badges*, 19.

hire. Draymen and carters – white and black, free and enslaved – were required to obtain a license, and the commissioners of Charleston were authorized to fix the rates of drayage and cartage, which were to be published in the local newspaper and also “hung up in some public place in the said town.”<sup>26</sup>

After the Revolution and the incorporation of Charleston in 1783, the waterfront and its largely slave workforce remained too vital to the city and state’s economic fortunes to operate according to laissez-faire principles. The new state and municipal governments therefore continued to enact laws regulating the employment and wages of enslaved waterfront workers. An ordinance passed in September 1801 sought to again “regulate the wages of licensed porters, and other day labourers” and to fix the locations of their hiring “stands.” Despite the wage rates established for slaves under pain of twenty stripes in 1764, this ordinance was prompted by continued “exorbitant and varying demands made by licensed porters, and other day labourers.” Remarkably, white hirers required economic protection from the black slaves who virtually monopolized waterfront labor during this period. In order to “prevent further imposition” upon employers, the edict declared that dock workers – now including any free blacks or whites – were not to demand and were not “entitled to receive any other than the following rates, to wit:”

For a full day’s labour, or the lading or unlading of the cargo of any vessel, or for any other employ in which a porter or day labourer may be engaged,	85 cents.
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<sup>25</sup> Greene, *Slave Badges*, 18-19; Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 105.

<sup>26</sup> Any carter, drayman, or wagoner accepting more than the rates established were to be fined £5, which was to be given to the overcharged party. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 394-6; The terms drayman and carter were not interchangeable in antebellum Charleston. Though their tasks were often very similar, draymen hauled goods using a simple two-wheeled vehicle and usually pulled by a single horse, while carters or cartmen operated a larger four-wheeled cart powered by one or more horses.

For a half day's labour, 42 cents.

For a quarter of a day's labour, 25 cents.

The ordinance defined the hours of a full day's labor as lasting "from sun rise to twilight in the evening," with a one-hour break permitted for breakfast and another hour for dinner. In the summer months of June, July, August, and September – which were those with the most daylight and thus the longest work days – the ordinance allowed for a two-hour dinner.<sup>27</sup> Further, any slave who asked for, demanded, or received wages higher than those stipulated still could receive up to twenty lashes on the bare back. If the offender was a free man – black or white – he was to be fined up to \$5. The harbor

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<sup>27</sup> In general, waterfront workers – much like plantation slaves – toiled from sunrise to sunset. Port rules in place during the late eighteenth century stipulated that cargo be discharged in the "open day," and penalized violators with a \$400 fine and the forfeiture of the goods. According to an act of Congress, merchandise arriving in the U.S. from foreign ports could not be unloaded and delivered onto the wharf "after the setting of the sun and Before the rising of the said Sun" without a special license from the chief officer of the American port. Intended to better ensure that custom duties were paid on imports, this law confirms that night work on Charleston's docks was rare. City ordinances enacted throughout the first half of the nineteenth century further codified these diurnal waterfront work hours. An 1810 edict, for example, required coal weighers and lumber measurers working on the wharves to be available to perform their duties "between sun rising and sun setting." An 1848 ordinance obliged the coal scales to be kept "ready for use, and at any and all times between the rising and setting of the sun, (Sundays and holidays excepted)." An 1801 ordinance indeed prohibited labor on the Sabbath and subjected those who employed slaves on Sundays to a twenty-dollar fine. Others employed on the wharves too worked long hours. The harbor master was expected to be at his waterfront office between the rising and setting of the sun. But during the busy commercial season port officials often remained at work much later. Harbor Master Thomas Paine complained to the General Assembly in 1823 that during the winter months he frequently performed his duties on the wharves until 8 or 9 o'clock at night. Henry Clay Robertson, who worked at a cotton factor's office in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, recalled, "Little did I dream of what unreasonable hours I would be keeping during the winter months – 10, 11, 12 o'clock and frequently until 2 a.m., 4 a.m. being really the latest I ever did work." Of course, Robertson added that the office often closed at 3 o'clock in the afternoon during the summer. And seamen aboard vessels docked in Charleston also worked long days. Those on the New York schooner *Hopewell*, for instance, often commenced work at 6 o'clock in the morning and did not quit until 6 o'clock in the evening; See 1790 city directory, 52; U.S. vs. 6 bags of coffee, Admiralty Final Record Book, District of South Carolina, vol. 1 (1790-1795), NASER; Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 85, 272-3; H. Pinckney Walker, ed., *Ordinances of the City of Charleston From the 19th of August 1844, to the 14th of September 1854; and the Acts of the General Assembly Relating to the City of Charleston, and City Council of Charleston, During the Same Interval* (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1854), 46; Henry C. Robertson, "Personal Recollections of Henry C. Robertson While Engaged in a Sea Island Cotton Factor's Office, 1898-1923," SCHS; and Logbook of the Schooner *Hopewell*, December 21, 1843-May 20, 1844, CRCMS; Also see Walker, 73; Eckhard, 109; G. T. Fox Journal, November 5, 1834, Pease Collection, ARC; and Petition to the General Assembly, 1823 #39, SCDAH.

master was required to familiarize ship captains with these regulations regarding the fixed “wages of porters and laborers on hire.”<sup>28</sup>

The ordinance also called on the city marshal “to fix proper stands” where porters could offer themselves for hire. It took over two years for marshal James Browne to announce the locations of these porter stands, but when he did so in November 1803 all were situated on or near the waterfront: No. 1, at the lower end of Tradd Street, below the curtain line; No. 2, north side of Beale’s wharf; No. 3, fronting Mr. Cambridge’s vendue store (on Exchange Street); No. 4, the north side of the Exchange (at the corner of East Bay and Broad streets); No. 5, fronting Mr. Cochran’s wharf. The sole hiring stand established back in 1764 probably fell into disuse during and after the Revolution. But the increase from one to five hiring locations in 1803 and the continued proximity of the stands to the wharves testify to the physical and commercial growth of the waterfront, the associated rise in demand for dock workers, and the burgeoning supply of slaves seeking employment as porters or day laborers on the city’s bustling docks. This boom on the waterfront coincided with Charleston’s commercial golden age that lasted from roughly 1795 until 1819 and was fueled by a rapidly expanding cotton trade. Though the first shipment of cotton from Charleston to England took place in 1785, Eli Whitney’s cotton gin led to a bonanza in cotton exports beginning in the 1790s. One visitor in the early 1810s remarked that Charleston was “destined to be the Emporium of Trade for an extensive & valuable Part of the Southern Continent of North America.” And indeed, in 1815 the city was first among southern ports with \$6 million in cotton exports.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Charleston Times*, November 11, 1803; The harbor master also was obliged to provide visiting captains with a copy of this ordinance. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 173.

Meanwhile, as with the colonial-era law, workers were warned that these five stands were the only places within the city that they could “offer themselves for work as Porters,” and violators were liable to receive as many as ten stripes. But as the number of slaves working on the wharves increased, so too did whites’ need to structure, police, and control waterfront labor and laborers. Not only could slaves still not wander from wharf to wharf in search of employment, they now were obliged to remain at these stands even “while they are not engaged or employed to work.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, unemployed or underemployed wharf laborers awaiting hire could converse, play cards or other games, perhaps even sleep – as long as they remained at a porter stand. But they were not supposed to roam aimlessly or drift into nearby alleyways, houses, or dram shops between jobs. Intended as a slave management and safety mechanism, this measure also better ensured that wharf hands were readily available and in abundance when needed. Furthermore, slaves had been exercising the freedom to pick and choose those employers for whom they did and did not wish to work. Therefore the 1801 law also included a provision stating that if a licensed slave waiting at one of these porter stands refused or neglected “to work for any person that applies to him, and tenders him the established rate for his hire,” the guilty bondsman could be placed in the stocks for up to one hour or receive up to ten stripes. The porter or laborer was allowed to decline a solicitation for

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<sup>29</sup> See Coker, *Charleston’s Maritime Heritage*, 171-6; Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 187; Rogers, *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*, 3-4, 11; Eaton, *History of the Old South*, 405; Letters of an American Traveler, 1810-1812, 85, SCHS; Russell, *North America*, 162-3; and Thornbury, *Criss-Cross Journeys*, vol. 1, 278-9.

<sup>30</sup> This provision was in the ordinance defining the duties of city marshals, passed in July 1807. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 158.

work, however, if he was “previously employed, or actually engaged to work for some other person.”<sup>31</sup>

The Charleston City Council reiterated these hiring and wage rules in a comprehensive ordinance “for the government of negroes and other persons of color” passed in October 1806. There were some amendments and additions, however, which were likely implemented in response to actual practices and to close loopholes in the law. Despite increasingly tighter constraints on their already limited autonomy, enslaved waterfront workers seemingly seized every opportunity to buck domination and maintain some control of the terms of their own labor. For example, compelled to accept a job if offered, slaves resolved to take their time in getting to the work site. This forced municipal authorities to proclaim that “as soon as any porter or day laborer is engaged to work, he shall immediately depart from his stand to such place as shall be ordered by the person engaging him.” Any black laborer who failed to promptly leave the stand and report directly to the designated place of employment was liable to punishment.<sup>32</sup> Though the penalties for those workers who refused to accept a job offer or demanded or received higher wages were tweaked, the wage rates were not.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the section pertaining to meals was refined, further tipping the financial scales in the favor of white employers. If the employer provided a day laborer with food and drink, now 6¼ cents

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<sup>31</sup> *Charleston Times*, November 11, 1803; The ordinance gave the owners or employers of offending slaves the option to pay \$2 for the remission of the corporal punishment.

<sup>32</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 172.

<sup>33</sup> Unengaged porters and day laborers refusing an employer who offered the established wages now were to receive between twelve and twenty stripes on the bare back either at the Work House or at the Public Market. The offending slave’s owner still could pay \$2 in lieu of this punishment, and a free offender could pay \$5 to avert the whipping. Meanwhile, slaves receiving other than the fixed wages now also were subject to between twelve and twenty lashes on the bare back. Free workers were fined at least \$5 and confined in the Work House until the sum was paid. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 173.



could be deducted from the worker's wages for each meal, up to 18¾ cents per day if the hirer furnished breakfast, lunch, and dinner.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, the laws regulating the hiring process and wage rates of hired-out slave draymen and porters were updated. An ordinance passed in December 1805 adopted the concept of the porter stands by proclaiming that “No carts or drays shall stand or ply for hire in any of the streets, lanes, or alleys, but be divided and placed by the City Marshal...at such place or places as may be appointed out by him.”<sup>35</sup> As with dock workers, draymen and carters were directed to remain at these hiring stands “while not engaged or actually employed,” and therefore were not to loiter in adjacent neighborhoods or drive their vehicles around town soliciting employment.<sup>36</sup> Despite their intentions, these laws did not ensure that employers in need of a drayman, porter, or wharf hand were certain to find one. The 1764 statute had declared that all draymen and carters plying for hire in the city were required to work “at all times of the day,” Sundays excepted.<sup>37</sup> But the ordinances passed in the early nineteenth century failed to stipulate the precise hours which workers had to be available. As a result, one ship captain who set out in September 1835 in search of drays to transport twenty-six packages from Roper's Wharf to a warehouse reported that “he was not successful, it being late in the

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<sup>34</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 172.

<sup>35</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 33.

<sup>36</sup> This provision was in the ordinance defining the duties of city marshals, passed in July 1807. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 158.

<sup>37</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 395.

afternoon.”<sup>38</sup> With a sizable share of slaves’ wages destined for their masters’ pockets, it is little wonder why many workers knocked off early.

To enable the standardized measure of distance from one area of the city to another, the December 1805 edict divided Charleston into twelve zones.<sup>39</sup> Draymen and carters were paid by the job – defined as the loading, transporting, and unloading of goods – and the rates or wages were fixed based on both the distance traveled and the type of freight carried.<sup>40</sup> Since the great preponderance of Charleston’s draymen and carters were employed conveying goods to and from the waterfront, all of the thirty-seven possible distances or routes enumerated in the ordinance began or ended at the wharves.<sup>41</sup> For example, if a drayman or carter conveyed a load of lumber between any of the wharves and the zone bounded by Meeting, Broad, Church, and South Bay streets, he was due 43 cents. If the same load was taken between the wharves and the area of the city confined within Meeting, Broad, King, and South Bay streets, he was to be paid 50 cents for having driven a little further. This confirms not only the ubiquitous presence of draymen and carters on the wharves, but also the central and indispensable role these transportation workers played in the smooth and efficient flow of goods through the port. But as with similar regulations for other waterfront laborers, this ordinance was designed not only to standardize transportation rates within the city but also to restrain the

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<sup>38</sup> Charleston Chamber of Commerce Award Book, case 75, November 3, 1835, SCHS.

<sup>39</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> The categories of goods included firewood, lumber, bricks, shingles, slate, tiles, dye wood or coal, and grain, lime, salt, or bush. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 35-6.

<sup>41</sup> The ordinance added, “That for every full cart or dray load of produce, or goods, wares, merchandise and commodities whatsoever, not heretofore particularly enumerated, to or from any place as above specified (not described in the above rates) a sum shall be paid proportionate to the rates for carting of lumber as mentioned in this ordinance.” Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 33-7.

economic power of the workers. Draymen and carters who demanded or received higher wages than those expressly specified therefore were subject to punishment.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, slave badges were another integral component of the slave hiring system on Charleston's waterfront.<sup>43</sup> A ticket or badge requirement first was introduced in the late seventeenth century and evolved over time. Local authorities declared in 1751 that no slave could hire out as a porter or laborer in the city "until the Owner or Persons having Charge of such Slave, shall have obtained a License from the Commissioners of the Streets for doing so." The law continued that "if any Person hire or employ any Negro not having a Badge or Ticket," the offender was to be fined ten shillings.<sup>44</sup> A 1764 act – the same act that first fixed waterfront workers' wages and established hiring stands – repeated the prohibition against slaves hiring out as porters and laborers without a license, and added that the ticket or badge had to be worn publically.<sup>45</sup> After incorporation in 1783, city officials adopted the badge system and passed various badge laws through the remaining years of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century.<sup>46</sup> The basic system, however, remained unchanged up through the Civil War and the end of slavery.

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<sup>42</sup> White or free black offenders were fined \$5. If a guilty slave or his owner or employer refused to pay this fine, the slave faced corporal punishment. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 37.

<sup>43</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the slave badge system in Charleston, see Greene, *Slave Badges*.

<sup>44</sup> Greene, *Slave Badges*, 17-18.

<sup>45</sup> Greene, *Slave Badges*, 18; Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 398.

<sup>46</sup> A 1789 ordinance temporarily abolished the municipal badge system established by the 1783 ordinance and amended by a 1786 edict. The slave badge system was revived in 1800, and once again slaves working out were required to visibly wear a badge. Ordinances passed in 1806 and again in 1843 consolidated existing badge laws. See Greene, *Slave Badges*, 22-30; and Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 21-3, 169-74.

Slaveowners who wished to employ bondsmen in the city were required to annually purchase slave badges, upon which were inscribed the year, a general occupation – usually porter, servant, mechanic, fruiterer, or fisher – and a badge number. Porter badges, which cost \$2 before 1837 and \$4 after, were worn not only by slave porters but also day laborers and draymen.<sup>47</sup> These tags beneficially enabled masters to avoid cumbersome contracts each and every time their slaves were hired for hourly or daily labor on the docks.<sup>48</sup> In some years, 1801 and 1802 for instance, porter badges were physically larger in size than those of other hired-out slaves, such as mechanics and servants. One scholar has suggested that this was done so that prior to the reestablishment of fixed hiring stands in 1803 an employer could quickly scan the waterfront and identify and summon an available dock worker.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to generating revenue, the badge system was yet another means by which city authorities could track and control urban slave labor. Since slaveowners were required to purchase a new tag for their hired-out slaves each year, badges aimed to curtail the number of slaves working out without the knowledge or consent of their masters.<sup>50</sup> The badge system also sought to prevent runaway slaves from finding work in Charleston. To enforce the laws, an ordinance passed in 1786 reiterated the requirement that hired-out slaves “wear the Badge...on some visible part of their dress,” and

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<sup>47</sup> For information regarding badge prices, see Greene, *Slave Badges*, 22, 29, 34, 48-50, 64-5.

<sup>48</sup> “Between the Tracks: The Heritage of Charleston’s East Side Community,” 13, ARC; Also see chapters two and three.

<sup>49</sup> Greene, *Slave Badges*, 82.

<sup>50</sup> Before the Revolution merchant and planter Henry Laurens punished his slave Ishmael, who attempted to conceal £30 he earned working as a porter without Laurens’s permission. Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 105.

permitted constables or other authorized persons “to command any negro applying for hire or working out, to produce his or her badge.” Slaves refusing or failing to present a badge upon request were to be taken immediately to the Work House.<sup>51</sup> Beginning in 1807 city marshals likewise were obligated at least once a month to check the badges of hired-out slave porters and day laborers.<sup>52</sup>

But as with other attempts to monitor and control waterfront workers, slaves frequently evaded badge laws. Though evidence suggests that municipal officials strictly enforced the regulations on occasion, employers in need of labor frequently undermined the laws and slaves lacking badges were hired illegally and often escaped punishment.<sup>53</sup> One ex-slave recalled his near run-in with city authorities while working on the docks as a runaway in the 1830s. The day after this fugitive arrived in Charleston, he walked to the waterfront and waited at a porter or “stevedore’s stand” with other hands seeking work. After being hired without a badge to stow cotton, the slave described how he found a tag during a lunch break.

One day in going from the cook-shop to the vessel, I was walking along among the bales of cotton on the wharf and saw something shining on the ground. I did not know what it was, but picked it up and put it in my pocket. It had a chain to it and some marks on it. That night, when we were all at work, the policeman came on board the vessel with a paper in his hand and said, ‘Holloo, have you got any runaway niggers here?’ The stevedore said ‘no, - no runaways in this lot.’ Then the police man said he must see badge. So he made them all show badge. When

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<sup>51</sup> Astonishingly, this edict called for illegally hired slaves to be put to hard labor for a year and then sold. The 1800 badge ordinance jettisoned these excessive punishments. Though guilty slaves still were taken to the Work House, if convicted they were publically whipped and confined in stocks. The 1786 ordinance is quoted in Greene, *Slave Badges*, 25. For the 1800 ordinance, see Greene, 29-30.

<sup>52</sup> Marshals likewise were required to examine the licenses and numbers of drays, carts, and other vehicles let out for hire in the city once every quarter. This ordinance was ratified on July 29, 1807. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 158.

<sup>53</sup> Walter Fraser argues that “Employers did not scruple to hire unlicensed slaves without ‘tickets’ despite the threat of heavy fines. One white Charlestonian observed that even runaways ‘who will work, may get employ.’” Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 105.

he came to me, I took the thing that I had found out of my pocket, because I saw it looked just like the rest. I was very much frightened, because I did not know as it would do, but he looked at it and said it was right, and then I felt mighty glad. If I had not had that badge I should have been carried straight to the [work] house.<sup>54</sup>

Another runaway slave similarly found work on the docks without a badge and recounted how one of the enslaved wharf hands inquired whether he had one. After being informed that every slave who hired out in Charleston was required to wear one and those slaves unable to produce a badge when requested were “liable to be put in jail,” the fugitive became frightened and fled the wharf to hide.<sup>55</sup>

For decades the hiring practices and wage rates of Charleston’s dock workers were regulated by these ordinances enacted in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, the edicts granted the City Council the authority to annually assess and if necessary revise and alter these fixed wages. In the case of dock workers, such a change was allowed “if there be any essential rise or fall in the necessary articles or life,” such as rent, food, and clothing. Any modification to the pay of draymen and carters, on the other hand, was not determined solely by a fluctuation in the cost of living in Charleston, but by “any material rise or fall in the price of grain, fodder or other articles of life.”<sup>56</sup> This differentiation was due to the fact that whereas most waterfront laborers only needed strong muscles to perform dock work, enslaved draymen and carters needed at least one horse and a dray or cart. As a result, slave draymen and carters likely were required to hand over a portion of their wages to dray owners or companies in addition to

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<sup>54</sup> *The Emancipator* (New York), October 18, 1838.

<sup>55</sup> John Andrew Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1862), 25; This account mistakenly claims that the badges were inscribed with slaveowners’ names and addresses. Though individual masters may have etched such information into their slaves’ badges, there is no evidence that the tags were manufactured in this manner. See Greene, *Slave Badges*.

<sup>56</sup> *Charleston Times*, November 11, 1803; Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 37.

the sum given to their masters. Unlike so much else, the amount of slaves' earnings handed over was not regulated or fixed by city or state authorities. According to one ex-slave, hired-out dock workers – some of whom lived out on their own as well – had “to maintain themselves, and clothe themselves, and pay their masters two-and-a-half dollars per week out of this,” or they would “receive a severe castigation with a cat-o'-nine-tails.”<sup>57</sup> Slaves who resided on their masters' urban property, on the other hand, also often had their clothing and food provided, and thus were expected to give up a greater proportion of their wages. As on rural plantations throughout the antebellum South, employment and wage agreements were negotiated between urban masters and slaves in an informal give-and-take cycle of accommodation and resistance. Accordingly, the arrangement oftentimes benefitted both parties. If a hired-out bondsman earning a \$20 monthly wage surrendered \$10 each month, the slaveowner made a profit while the slave could pocket the \$10 earned above and beyond the master's share.

In any case, waterfront workers' pay remained static until February 7, 1837, when the City Council amended both of the ordinances fixing wage rates. Unlike in 1801 when the wages of white, free black, and enslaved porters and day laborers were prescribed equally, by 1837 the minority of white dock workers were free to demand and receive as high a wage as possible. But for a “negro or other slave” hiring out as a porter or day

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<sup>57</sup> Jackson, *Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*, 25; This ex-slave also claimed that he earned \$1.25 each day stowing cotton at the wharves, which would have totaled \$7.50 per six-day work week. After the \$2.50 said to be commonly handed over to slaveowners, enslaved dock hands would have been left with \$5 each week to provide for their needs; A visitor to Charleston in November 1841 observed that a slave stevedore “pays his master a dollar a day & earns from three to five \$ per day.” As we will see, by the 1840s the term “stevedore” came to mean a highly skilled stower of cotton rather than a common dock worker, which explains why this slave would have earned such a high daily wage. N. M. Perkins to George W. Anderson, November 25, 1841, author's copy of privately owned letter; Robert Smalls, who described himself in an 1863 interview as “a rigger and Stevedore,” hired out his own time in Charleston during the 1850s and paid his master Henry McKee \$15 of his earnings each month. John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 373.

laborer, his wages were increased in 1837 from 85 cents to \$1 for a full day's labor, which still was defined as lasting from sunrise until twilight, "allowing one hour for breakfast and one hour for dinner." Rather than assigning rates for a half or quarter day's work, black laborers employed for less than a full day now simply were to be paid 12½ cents per hour.<sup>58</sup> This wage hike was implemented not for the benefit of the slave laborers, but to assist urban masters to offset increased expenses ranging from merchandise and provisions to the cost of slaves themselves. Even the price of porter badges doubled from \$2 to \$4 the month after this wage change.<sup>59</sup>

The ordinance amending drayage and cartage rates also simplified the wage system, jettisoning the twelve zones and thirty-seven routes laid out in 1805 and implementing twenty new distances. But again, all of the 1837 rates used the wharves as a baseline or starting point, and often also the point of destination, as demonstrated by the following sampling:

From any part of one wharf to any part of the two adjoining wharves, or any place therein, and the Bay opposite thereto,	12½ cents.
From any part of one wharf to any part of the tenth wharf adjoining, or any place therein, and above the third wharf,	18¾ cents.
From Dawes' wharf to Market wharf, or from any one wharf to another, or the Bay opposite, exceeding ten,	25 cents.
From any of the wharves to the north side of Broad-street, as far as the west side of Meeting-street, and both sides of Broad-street,	12½ cents.

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<sup>58</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 177; An hourly laborer therefore would have had to work on the docks for eight hours to earn the \$1 given for a full day. Hourly workers were not paid for any meal time. But it is unclear whether those hired for a full day's labor but who worked for longer than eight hours between sunrise and twilight (especially during the summer) were compensated for overtime.

<sup>59</sup> *Ordinances of the City of Charleston: from the 5th Feb., 1833, to the 9th May, 1837. Together with Such of the Acts and Clauses of Acts of the Legislature of South Carolina as Relate to Charleston, passed since December, 1832* (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1837), 148.



From any of the wharves to any part of the city, between the west side of Meeting-street, and north side of Broad-street, 25 cents.

From any wharf on South-Bay, to north side of Tradd-street, 18¾ cents.

From ditto to north side of Boundary-street, 43¾ cents.

As for those relatively few loads not transported either to or from the waterfront, the ordinance directed that draymen and carters conveying goods “to and from any other place not mentioned above” were to be compensated “in proportion with the above rates and distances.” This ordinance is yet more evidence that the work of draymen and carters indeed centered on the Cooper River wharves on the eastern side of the city.<sup>60</sup>

Though these laws and rates were established to limit the income, movements, and ultimately agency and power of hired-out slaves, many nonetheless found ways to game the system. When former Charleston merchant Thomas Napier moved back to the city from New York in 1857, he wrote to factor John P. Deveaux with specific instructions for the handling of his furniture, which was shipped in nine boxes aboard the schooner *Robert Caldwell*. Napier directed Deveaux to engage a drayman to deliver the boxes to his house on Rutledge Street near Montague Street and to “drive into the large Gate and go around to the Kitchen.” He also instructed the factor to hire “two hands to help in with the Boxes, and get the hands to agree to put them into the places pointed out, even though we should have to pay them extra for it.”<sup>61</sup> Taking advantage of Napier’s apparent unfamiliarity with the current wage rates, not to mention his old age and

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<sup>60</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 39-40.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Napier to J. P. Deveaux, April 24, 1857, Thomas Napier Papers, SCL.

blindness, these three hired slaves sought to maximize their opportunity. Napier described to Deveaux what transpired.

On Saturday the men commenced carrying up the Furniture to my House, and took the whole day to carry four Boxes, for which the Drayman charged 75 cents per load, and the two men who assisted in loading and unloading charged at the rate of  $18\frac{3}{4}$  cents per hour apiece from 9 O'clock A.M. to 6 O'clock P.M. amounting in all for Drayman, and men to \$6.25 which I paid them on last Saturday evening.

In other words, only four of Napier's nine boxes of furniture were delivered to his house over a period of nine hours. Granted, the slaves had to load the heavy and cumbersome containers onto the dray, drive over half a mile to the house, remove them from the vehicle, and carry them into the residence through the back kitchen. But these bondsmen also likely embraced the chance to control and slow their pace of work.

Furthermore, according to the rates established in 1837, draymen who transported goods "From any of the wharves from the north side of Broad-street to Ashley river, north side of Beaufain-street, west side of King-street" – which included Napier's new house – were to receive only  $31\frac{1}{4}$  cents per load, not 75 cents. The two day laborers hired from the waterfront porter stands to assist this crafty slave drayman were duplicitous as well, charging  $18\frac{3}{4}$  cents per hour rather than the  $12\frac{1}{2}$  cents stipulated in 1837. And even though these hourly workers undoubtedly paused for one and perhaps two meals during the long work day, they charged Napier for the full nine-hour day.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, Napier paid the workers in cash at the end of the work day. Though slaves'

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<sup>62</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 40; According to the 1837 city ordinance, only those porters and day laborers who were hired for a full day's work were allowed an hour for breakfast and an hour for dinner. Hourly workers were compensated only for the time they toiled. Being late April, there was about twelve hours of daylight between sunrise and twilight. Therefore, even after subtracting the two hours allowed for meals, it would have been much more economical for Napier to have hired these two day laborers for a full day's work at \$1 per day. Instead, he paid them approximately \$1.63 each for one day's labor.

wages, labor, and lives were tightly proscribed by law, these workers recognized an advantageous opportunity when they saw one.

Had Thomas Napier been better apprised of the prevailing wages, he may have refused payment. Still, exhibiting annoyance with the workers, he instructed Deveaux to make changes for the delivery of the other five boxes: “I think that it would be better to employ two or three Drays so that they could help each other on and off with the Boxes, and dispense with the two hands to assist.” Since draymen were paid to load, transport, and unload their freight to earn their wage, even at the extravagant rate of 75 cents Napier only would have had to pay \$3.75 for the conveyance of the remaining five containers. But since he needed the furniture carried into the house as well, Napier suggested that the factor pay the draymen “a little extra for putting away.”<sup>63</sup> But the matter was far from over. Thirteen more boxes were on their way to Charleston aboard another vessel, to be followed by a third shipment yet to leave New York, “which will close this very troublesome business.”<sup>64</sup>

Though all types of goods, including furniture, were shipped to and from Charleston and handled by waterfront workers during the antebellum period, cotton exports reined supreme.<sup>65</sup> As a result, maritime commerce was highly seasonal. Dictated

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<sup>63</sup> Napier asked Deveaux if he would “oblige me by settling with the said men for the amount that you think right and I will refund you the money as soon as I hear from you the amount.” He also recommended that “The Mate of the Schooner might inform [the draymen] when the Boxes would be out of the Vessel so that they need not be detained waiting for them at the wharf.” This may explain in part why the three workers took nine hours to deliver the first four boxes. But it also shows that Napier was privy to workers’ penchant for being paid during down time and for slowing the pace of the work day. Thomas Napier to J. P. Deveaux, April 27, 1857, Thomas Napier Papers, SCL.

<sup>64</sup> Napier asked Deveaux to send these addition boxes to the house “in the manner above mentioned.” Thomas Napier to J. P. Deveaux, April 27, 1857, Thomas Napier Papers, SCL.

by nature's clock, the wharves boomed with activity when there was cotton, rice, and other exports to be shipped, and slid into relative sluggishness during the growing season when cash crops were yet to be harvested. The shipping season began in October when bales of cotton and tierces of rice began flowing into the port city, and roared on until Christmas when waterfront commerce came to a momentary standstill.<sup>66</sup> But with the New Year came the annual peak of the trading season, which continued into the spring and through the end of April. Robert Russell remarked during his visit to the city in January 1855 that "The greater part of the business being transacted in winter, the wharves were covered with bales of cotton, and the harbour crowded with ships."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> For cotton export numbers from 1822-1859, see Van Deusen, *Economic Bases of Disunion in South Carolina*, 333, Appendix C; For cotton export numbers from 1825-1860, see Collins, "Charleston and the Railroads," 100, Table V.

<sup>66</sup> Master cooper Jacob Schirmer's diary illuminates holiday activity on Charleston's waterfront. Schirmer noted in his diary in 1834 that he traveled to the country on December 24 and returned on December 29. In 1856 he commented that "the wharves [were] kept closed for 3 days" since Christmas fell on a Thursday that year. Jacob F. Schirmer Diary, December 31, 1834, and December 25, 1856; There was some activity on the waterfront during the Christmas holiday. On December 26, 1833, Schirmer wrote that it was only "A Sort of Holyday," and that though the wharves were "all shut," he had coopered some rice and paid his slave hands for working. December 26, 1833; On Friday, December 26, 1845, on the other hand, Schirmer noted that it was "still a Holyday, [and] staid home mostly all day." The next day, however, he wrote that the "Wharves all doing business, stores filling with rice." December 26, 1845, and December 27, 1845; New Year's Day was not a day off for Charleston's dock workers. On January 1, 1841, Schirmer "Kept shop open [and] pd hands for making half bls [barrels]," and New Year's Day 1855 was "very little of a Holy day on the wharves." January 1, 1841, and January 1, 1855; In 1842 and 1856 there was so much rain during the holiday season that "Work had so accumulated that the Wharves [were] kept at work all day." January 1, 1842, and January 1, 1856; But in many years, Schirmer and other employers on the waterfront only required their laborers to work a half day on New Year's, often closing at noon or 2 o'clock in the afternoon. See January 1, 1835, January 1, 1848, January 1, 1850, January 1, 1853, January 1, 1859, and January 2, 1860; The wharves often were open for only half a day on Good Friday as well. In 1843 the copper closed his shop after breakfast. April 14, 1843. But in 1850, though the morning was very busy, "nearly all the wharves closed" at 2 o'clock. March 29, 1850. Good Friday 1854 was "very little of a Holy day," but again the "Wharves & Shop Shut at 2 O'Clock." April 14, 1854. Also see April 21, 1848; In 1832 Schirmer observed a "half holy day" by keeping his shop open but allowing his "hands [to] work for themselves." April 20, 1832; But in some years, Good Friday was not even a half day. See March 25, 1842, April 2, 1847, April 6, 1849, April 6, 1855, and March 21, 1856.

<sup>67</sup> Russell, *North America*, 162-3.

During the summer, however, the waterfront lapsed into relative inactivity that lasted until the fall and the beginning of a new commercial cycle.<sup>68</sup>

After cotton was picked, ginned, and baled on hundreds of South Carolina plantations, slaves oftentimes hauled the bundles to the nearest river wharf where they were loaded onto relatively small plantation boats or schooners and shipped to the port. When the cotton arrived at Charleston's commercial waterfront, dock workers – mostly slaves who were either owned or hired by the wharf owner or wharfinger – unloaded or “landed” the bales and any other cargo.<sup>69</sup> Other planters sent their bales to Charleston on carts or wagons down bumpy country roads, and after 1833 an increasing proportion of the cotton exported from Charleston was conveyed to the city via railroads.<sup>70</sup> Draymen were employed to transport the bales from the rail yards to the wharves.<sup>71</sup> But whether via plantation boats, country carts, or the railroad, when the hundreds of thousands of

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<sup>68</sup> According to visiting ship captain James Carr, “the cotton is usually picked in Octr or Novr – depending some on the season, a rainy cold autumn puts it back, as a warm autumn has the contrary effect – rice is harvested in October, but not considered in shipping order until the following spring – cotton comes in to market from the last of Octr – the greater part of it is in by Christmas – this however depends on its prices – this year [1815-1816] the season and price were both favourable – and considerable quantities of the new crop was in market by the 6th of Novr.” James Carr Papers, SCL; Also see Eaton, *History of the Old South*, 406-7; Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers*, 43; and Pease, *Web of Progress*, 40-1.

<sup>69</sup> The resultant “landing” charges, in addition to planters’ payments for other services such as the weighing and storage of their cotton, financed the wages of the hired-out slave workers and any provisions for the owned laborers.

<sup>70</sup> Collins, “Charleston and the Railroads,” 103, Table VII.

<sup>71</sup> Planters paid the cost of this drayage in lieu of the payment to the wharf for unloading the cotton from vessels and landing it on the wharf. The account books of Charleston's waterfront factors and merchants clearly show this difference. Planters who sent their cotton to the city via water commonly paid 50 cents per bale for shipping or freight, and 4 cents per bale for landing or unloading at the wharf. Those who used the railroad, on the other hand, usually paid \$1 per bale for freight and 12½ cents per bale for drayage to the wharves. Regardless of how the cotton arrived at the port, weighing cost 6 cents per bale. See, for example, Anonymous Charleston Merchant Account Book, 1849-1852, SCL.

cotton bales and barrels of rice arrived at the waterfront, as one clerk later put it, “work was on.”<sup>72</sup>

The waterfront bustled with activity as various persons busily weighed, sampled, classed, and priced the cotton. Though often crudely pressed on the plantation, bales of cotton often were compressed again in the city.<sup>73</sup> “After the bales come from the planters to a seaport like Charleston,” Englishman John Henry Vessey observed during his visit in 1859, “they are compressed by steam power, or they would take up too much space on shipboard.”<sup>74</sup> Walter Thornbury described a cotton press in New Orleans. When the bales first arrived on the Crescent City’s levee from plantations along the Mississippi River, they were “fluffy on the edges, and white handfuls of cotton bunched out at the tears of the sacking.” Draymen conveyed the bales to a building that housed the “creaking and groaning” press, where they were transformed from “a mere disheveled bundle of loose cotton” into “a neat, hard, square parcel, even and compact.”<sup>75</sup>

In addition to transporting goods to and from the waterfront and between the railroad yards and the wharves, many draymen thus found employment carrying cotton bales to and from the various cotton presses located near or on the waterfront. Fitzsimons’ Wharf factor John Schulz frequently paid free black drayman Alexander

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<sup>72</sup> Robertson, “Personal Recollections,” SCHS.

<sup>73</sup> An ex-slave from Marion, South Carolina, described to a WPA interviewer how horses were used to “work de screw dat press de bale togedder.” George Rawick, *American Slavery: A Composite Autobiography*, narrative of Genia Woodberry, 3B. Also see the narrative of Lewis Evans, 2B.

<sup>74</sup> Vessey added, “It is a simple process: the covering of the bale, which having been pressed by the machinery on the plantations where it is picked, does not meet by twelve or eighteen inches; after steam pressure this covering considerably overhangs, as you see when the bales arrive in Europe.” Vessey and Waters, *Mr. Vessey of England*, 61.

<sup>75</sup> Thornbury explained that “Every bale is to be crushed and squeezed into exactly half its present size, so as to go more compactly into the hold of the swift vessel that will skim over with them to England.” Thornbury, *Criss-Cross Journeys*, vol. 1, 214.

Harleston and other transportation workers in the 1810s and 1820s for “Drayage to [Cotton] Screw & back.”<sup>76</sup> Likewise, North Boyce’s Wharf factor and commission merchant Charles T. Mitchell regularly engaged the services of another free black drayman, Thomas Cole, who in the 1850s and early 1860s collected hundreds of dollars in cash each year for hauling cargo and goods consigned to Mitchell.<sup>77</sup>

Cotton required many tenders. “Cotton on account of its being thrown several times from one boat into another,” explained a Chamber of Commerce report, “arrives in bad order...and is then subject to much expense for mending.”<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, Charleston’s factors and commission merchants regularly hired slaves to mend the torn cotton bagging either before or after the bales were compressed. John Schulz, for example, “Paid Negro hire Mending Cotton Bales” 50 cents on May 31, 1819, and between 1856 and 1861 Charles T. Mitchell made cash payments ranging from \$1.60 up to an astounding \$202 to a slave mender named Berney.<sup>79</sup> Charlestonian Daniel E. Huger Smith helped explain why a task as menial but necessary as mending could be so costly. “The mending was done by a gang of cotton menders to whom this charge was paid over,” the cotton exporter recalled, “they supplying their own twine and bagging as well

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<sup>76</sup> Schulz regularly patronized and made payments to Alexander Harleston for drayage. Harleston appeared as a free black drayman in the 1822 city directory; *Directory and Stranger’s Guide for the City of Charleston*. Charleston: Miller, 1822 (hereafter cited as 1822 city directory); Receipt Book/Business Ledger, 1812-1815, January 13, 1813, page 7; Ledger, 1815, May 23, 1815; and Account Book, 1817-1822, January 8, 1821, page 346, and May 27, 1822, page 451, John Schulz Account Books, 1812-1824, SCL.

<sup>77</sup> See Cash Book, 1856-1865, Charles T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS.

<sup>78</sup> Charleston Chamber of Commerce, “Report of a Special Committee Appointed by the Chamber of Commerce, to Inquire into the Cost, Revenue, and Advantages of a Rail Road Communication Between the City of Charleston and the Towns of Hamburg & Augusta” (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1828), 32.

<sup>79</sup> John Schulz Account Book, 1817-1822, May 31, 1819, SCL; Cash Book, 1856-1865, December 1, 1856, and October 31, 1859, Charles T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS.

as the labor.”<sup>80</sup> At some point the bales as well as other goods also had to be marked with symbols and numbers indicating their owners or consignees. English painter Eyre Crowe, who accompanied novelist William Makepeace Thackeray to Charleston in March 1853, was captivated by a young slave, who “with brush in hand, dipp[ed] it into a tar-pot, in order to mark the proper hieroglyphics upon the side of the compressed cotton bale. There he sits enthroned – not a bad emblem of the saying ‘Cotton is king.’”<sup>81</sup> This scene was also a symbolic reminder that black slaves – both on southern plantations and waterfronts – made the preeminence of cotton possible.

If goods were not needed immediately at shipside for loading, they either were piled up on the open wharf or put into storage. After being drayed or rolled to waterfront warehouses, bales and barrels sometimes had to be hoisted manually to a second or third story with the assistance of a rope and tackle or an inclined plane.<sup>82</sup> When needed for shipment this painstaking and strenuous process was reversed, with the goods being removed from storage and drayed or rolled to the requisite vessel waiting at the wharf.

Not all ports utilized the same methods to unload and load vessels, and Charleston lagged European ports in the adoption of waterfront technologies such as cranes. But not everyone was aware of Charleston’s technological backwardness. As early as 1742, Charleston merchant Robert Pringle wrote to Englishmen William Cookson and William

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<sup>80</sup> Smith was born in 1846 and worked as a cotton exporter in Charleston in the years immediately following the Civil War. Daniel E. Huger Smith, *A Charlestonian’s Recollections, 1846-1913* (Charleston: Carolina Art Association, 1950), 138.

<sup>81</sup> Crowe, *With Thackeray in America*, 152, 157.

<sup>82</sup> City Council Minutes, March 5, 1847, *Southern Patriot*, March 6, 1847; Several images of Charleston’s waterfront during the 1870s depict workers using hand carts (similar to modern-day dollies) to transport large bales of cotton about the wharves. It is unclear when these hand carts were first used on Charleston’s docks, but there is no evidence that they were introduced before the Civil War. Meanwhile, images also show dock workers still manually rolling cotton bales during the 1870s. See *Harper’s Weekly*, January 19, 1878; and *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, November 16, 1878.



Welfitt that the packages of goods they had shipped from Hull were so huge that they “Occasion’d a great Deal of trouble, [and] Inconveniency in landing them.” According to Pringle, one bale of their goods was equal in size to four standard bundles, and declared that “Never was so Large a Bale seen here.” So too with the English merchants’ casks, which were “so ponderous & so Large.” The *Charlestonian* explained that “We not being provided with Cranes & Such Convenienys [*sic*] for Landing goods as in England,” the attempt to discharge the oversized cargo ended in disaster. While hoisting the first bulky cask out of the vessel’s hold using Charleston’s customary methods and equipment – consisting of “canocks” or a basic tackle – the rim of the barrel broke under the massive weight and fell back into the hold and burst into pieces, causing damage to other goods awaiting discharge. Pringle therefore advised that in the future, “Goods in the Smallest Packages are most Proper for this Place, [and] are always Landed in the Best Order.”<sup>83</sup> Foreign shippers, in short, needed to take into account the peculiarities of waterfront work in Charleston and other American ports.

Dozens of plats depicting the city’s waterfront in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reveal the locations and dimensions not only of the wharves, docks, and adjacent streets and passageways, but also of warehouses, sheds, scales houses, and offices. Only two plats, both produced in 1824, portray cranes: three on Kunhardt’s Wharf and one on Magwood’s Wharf.<sup>84</sup> Whether these four devices actually existed or were simply contemplated is unclear. What is clear, however, is that few cranes were

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<sup>83</sup> Robert Pringle to William Cookson & William Welfitt, March 15, 1742, in Walter Edgar, ed., *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), vol. 1, 338; The correspondence of other English merchants confirms the use of cranes on European docks. See, for example, W. & J. Galloway to Mr. Stuart, October 6, 1840, John Lucas Letters, SCL.

<sup>84</sup> Simon Magwood Plats, SCL.

used in Charleston before the Civil War. A survey of the port published in the early twentieth century confirmed that “In American ports little use has been made of freight-handling machinery for general cargo, i.e., cranes. In Europe they are universal.”<sup>85</sup>

In Charleston, in place of cranes, a ship’s spars and a block and tackle powered by the muscles of dock workers and horses were used to unload and load ships.<sup>86</sup> Many antebellum vessels similarly were fitted with a jib hoist or a derrick, a simple lifting device consisting of a tackle fixed to the end of a beam that pivoted back and forth above the wharf and the vessel’s hold. In the early 1830s one ship’s log noted docking at a Charleston wharf and getting the vessel’s derrick ready to discharge ballast.<sup>87</sup> A description from Savannah illustrates how the apparatus could be used to load cotton.

Then a derrick from the ship let down a great hook and hoisted a bale on which knelt [*sic*] a Negro to balance the load. Up went the hook, while cotton and Negro moved slowly through the air; then down through the open hatch into the hold the bale was lowered, to be seized by the waiting packers and stowed away while the hook swung up and out again with the dangling Negro clinging to it. Bale after bale with its human ballast was thus lifted and dropped.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> According to the report, in Europe “a row of movable half-gantry electric cranes of 3-5 tons lifting capacity straddle the pier-edge tracks and supplement or supplant the ship’s tackle in handling freight between ship’s hold and car or pier-shed platform. In America the same service is performed by the ship’s tackle, often using a ‘cargo mast’ rail over the roof-edge of the shed, in connection with an electric pier winch. Though the cranes look better, there does not seem to be much difference in efficiency between them and the most approved American system, which the steamship companies here prefer.” Edwin J. Clapp, “Charleston Port Survey” (Charleston: Walker, Evans & Cogswell Co., circa 1921), 26.

<sup>86</sup> Coker maintains that even as European ports were utilizing early versions of cranes known as “shears” to unload vessels, wharves in colonial Charleston “continued to rely largely on block and tackles and the spars of the ships as loading and unloading equipment.” Coker, *Charleston’s Maritime Heritage*, 39, 41, 45; Vessels’ rigging also may have been used to hoist cargo. See the following examples of ships’ logs and journals noting seamen at work setting up and tearing down rigging while docked in Charleston: Logbook of the Schooner *Amazon*, November 7, 1837, CRCMS; Journal of the Schooner *Ganges*, January 6, 1844, CRCMS; and Journal of the Schooner *Nameaug*, June 4, 1856, and June 10, 1856, CRCMS.

<sup>87</sup> Logbook of the Ship *Robin Hood*, February 4, 1833, CRCMS.

<sup>88</sup> Natalie Curtis Burlin, *Negro Folk-Songs* (New York & Boston: G. Schirmer, 1918), 28.

Dock workers, free and enslaved, probably participated in similar scenes along Charleston's antebellum waterfront.

A sketch of Charleston in *Harper's Weekly* shows another method by which cotton and other goods were loaded onto ships.<sup>89</sup> There are several drays lined up on the wharf along the length of the ship. Assisted by other workers, draymen are removing the large and cumbersome bales from their vehicles and maneuvering them close to the vessel. But rather than ship's tackle, three inclined planes or gangplanks reach from the vessel's deck to the wharf below.<sup>90</sup> The laborers on the wharf are positioning a bale at the bottom of the nearest gangplank, where they will attach a rope. This rope leads up the plank to the deck, where either the ship's seamen or other dock hands are pulling the bundle upward. In some cases the rope was connected to a hoisting device on the deck, such as a capstan or a windlass, which workers operated by turning or pumping handles attached to the respective apparatus.

Another image from *Harper's Weekly* – this time a scene of a New York City dock – depicts workers unloading a vessel.<sup>91</sup> Prominent in the foreground are two white horses connected to a system of ropes and pulleys. As the horses strain forward, a large bale is rising out of the ship's hold and is perched above the deck waiting to be lowered to the adjacent wharf. Hoisting horses commonly were employed in antebellum

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<sup>89</sup> Though this image appeared in 1878 and the vessel depicted is larger than those used before the Civil War, the basic loading techniques were the same as the antebellum era. *Harper's Weekly*, January 19, 1878; Also see Coker, *Charleston's Maritime Heritage*, 174.

<sup>90</sup> With a smaller vessel the distance between the surfaces of the wharf and the ship deck would have been much reduced, and at low tide workers sometimes would have had to carry or roll goods down the gangway to the deck. See image on Coker, *Charleston's Maritime Heritage*, 45.

<sup>91</sup> Again, though this image appeared in 1877, the work process was generally the same during the antebellum era. *Harper's Weekly*, July 14, 1877.

Charleston as well to discharge and load trading vessels. An auction in May 1856 advertised horses that had “been used by stevedores for hoisting on the wharves.” Many waterfront employers invested in horses of their own, including the proprietors of Adger’s Wharves who owned two horses in the years before the Civil War. When not using these horses themselves, their owners often hired out the animals for a lucrative \$3 a day, about three times the wages of a common laborer.<sup>92</sup>

Though the raw muscle of men and horses continued to power these relatively basic methods of unloading and loading ships in the years both before and after the Civil War, new tools, techniques, and technologies gradually appeared on Charleston’s waterfront. The late antebellum years witnessed small mobile steam engines for hoisting.<sup>93</sup> Charleston’s 1859 city directory included an advertisement for A. L. Archambault, a manufacturer of portable steam engines in Philadelphia. These machines were mounted “On wheels with Tongues for Horses,” and generated between four and thirty horsepower. On the market since July 1849, among the engine’s diverse utilities

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<sup>92</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, May 28, 1856; See Adger’s Wharf in “List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1859,” Charleston: Steam-Power Press of Walker, Evans & Co., 1860; Cash Book, February 27, 1858, page 46, C. T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS; Account of the Dutch Bark *Nederland*, February 6, 1860, Charles O. Witte Estate Records, 1851-1871, SCHS; Stevedores were still using and hiring horses for hoisting goods on Charleston’s docks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See receipt dated December 28, 1891, in Doran Family Papers, 1890-1934, SCHS.

<sup>93</sup> Benjamin Willard of Portland, Maine, recounted how stevedores and riggers used a combination of horses and small mobile steam engines on antebellum northern docks as well: “After leaving the coasting trade I went into company with William Lowry in the stevedoring business, our first outfit being two horses with coal tubs, etc. We worked one horse on a double whip, taking out from 100 to 125 tons of coal a day. The yearly total that came to Portland was 11,000 tons. After two years the firm dissolved and I went into business for myself. At that time sugar and molasses were hoisted out with the old-fashioned winch. Two or three years later oxen were used, and then horses; my span being the first used for Chase & Sloan, the riggers. In those days riggers took out all cargoes of sugar and molasses. In 1856 I took Mr. Daniel Gould into company. We had a steam engine made in East Boston, set on wheels to haul around the wharves and hoist coal and molasses.” Benjamin J. Willard, *Captain Ben's Book: A Record of the Things which Happened to Capt. Benjamin J. Willard, Pilot and Stevedore, During Some Sixty Years on Sea and Land, as Related by Himself* (Portland, ME: Lakeside Press, Engravers, Printers, and Binders, 1895), 48.

was the unloading of cargo from commercial vessels.<sup>94</sup> Though it is impossible to know how many such hoisting devices were purchased and employed, evidence suggests that there were at least a few. Archibald McLeish, a local machinist and wheelwright, informed Charlestonians in the 1860 city directory that he made and repaired items such as weighing scales, iron axles for drays and carts, and “Hoisting Machines for Stores.”<sup>95</sup> Though belated, the introduction of such technology in Charleston may have been impelled by the unprecedented quantity of cotton bales arriving at the wharves in the 1850s. Perhaps also prompting the change was – as we shall see in later chapters – the concurrent exodus from the city of low wage enslaved waterfront workers and the influx of more costly white immigrant labor.

After cotton and other goods arrived in a ship’s hold, a gang of laborers – or sometimes the vessel’s seamen – went to work stowing the cargo. The entire work gang toiled together to turn and tighten a large jack screw to once more compress the cotton, and the most skilled of the workers – known in some ports as screwmen – used hand screws to squeeze bales into particularly tight spots. Proper stowage could increase the cargo capacity of a ship by about 15 percent.<sup>96</sup> In this fashion, hundreds and even thousands of cotton bales were packed into a single vessel’s hold.

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<sup>94</sup> Leonard Mears and James Turnbull, *The Charleston Directory: Containing the Names of the Inhabitants, a Subscribers’ Business Directory, Street Map of the City, and an Appendix of Much Useful Information* (Charleston: Evans, Walker, & Co., 1859), 51 (hereafter cited as 1859 city directory).

<sup>95</sup> W. Eugene Ferslew, *Directory of the City of Charleston, to Which is Added a Business Directory, 1860* (Savannah: J. M. Cooper and Co., 1860), 122 (hereafter cited as 1860 city directory); Stevedoring firm James Doran Company paid \$55 in December 1891 for the rental of an engine to unload a steamship, and on another occasion paid \$75 for the use of an engine for 7½ days. Doran Family Papers, 1890-1934, SCHS.

<sup>96</sup> Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 188; Simple hand screws that could be used for packing cotton were advertised for sale in Charleston as early as 1813, and retailers of various mechanics’ tools also likely

In Charleston and ports throughout the antebellum South, work songs were an integral and almost ubiquitous component of the waterfront labor process, especially the stowing of cotton.<sup>97</sup> Whether in a plantation field or a ship's hold at the wharf, slaves in the American South employed work songs to coordinate and invigorate their movements, pass the time, and even protest their labor environments. For those toiling on the wharves and stowing cotton, synchronized movement often was essential and therefore was the primary purpose of dock workers' songs. As one early scholar of African-American folk music explained

To the Negro, to work in unison means to sing; so as the men strained at their task, a laboring chant arose whose fine-toned phrases were regularly cut by a sharp high cry, "hey!", which emphasized the powerful twisting of the [jack] screws by the rhythmic muscular movement of the singers. Verses without number were made up, and many were the cotton-packing chants.<sup>98</sup>

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sold stevedores' cargo hooks. See John Whiting's ad for "Hand Screws of different sizes" in the 1813 city directory; Joseph Folker, *A Directory of the City and District of Charleston and Stranger's Guide for the Year 1813*. Charleston: Printed by G. M. Bounetheau, 1813 (hereafter cited as 1813 city directory); Also see T. L. Bissell's and Lucas & Strohecker's ads for various mechanics' tools in the 1855 and 1859 city directories respectively; Archibald McLeish's 1860 ad also mentioned the repair of jack screws; One stevedore's large and assorted collection of such work tools nearly got him into trouble in September 1857, when he was prosecuted for violating a city ordinance prohibiting second hand shops. Upon further inspection, it was discovered that "the informer was mistaken as to the nature of his business, he being a stevedore, and his storeroom of tools presented the appearance of a junk shop." The stevedore was Irishman William Doran. See City Council Minutes, September 1, 1857, *Charleston Mercury*, September 3, 1857; and City Council Minutes, September 29, 1857, *Charleston Mercury*, October 1, 1857; John R. Horsey, ed., *Ordinances of the City of Charleston from the 14th of September, 1854, to the 1st December, 1859; and the Acts of the General Assembly Relating to the City Council of Charleston, and the City of Charleston, During the Same Period* (Charleston: Walker, Evans & Co., 1859), 40-1; A minor cotton fire on Liverpool's waterfront on August 13, 1860, was blamed on Charleston's dock workers. According to the *New York Herald*, "A bale of cotton, ex *Richard III*, from Charleston, was discovered on fire this morning, in the warehouse, supposed from spontaneous combustion as the bail [*sic*] burnt was soaked with oil. On examining the cotton still undischarged from the *Richard III*, two bails were found; on which sweet oil had apparently been spilt, and several strands of rope which had imbibed sweet oil were discovered loose among the bales, which appeared to have been used by stevedores in Charleston to clean the screws, and thrown carelessly amongst the cargo." *New York Herald*, August 27, 1860.

<sup>97</sup> Early twentieth-century ethnomusicologist Natalie Curtis Burlin contended that the "impulse in the Negro to sing at work is inborn" and was "a racial trait common to his African forebears." Burlin, *Negro Folk-Songs*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> Burlin, *Negro Folk-Songs*, 28.

Offered as a typical example was the “Cott’n-Packing Song,” which was sung “*ad infinitum*” by slaves working on Savannah’s riverfront.<sup>99</sup> Not unlike field labor on plantations, dock work had a cadence and thus this song was described as “Absolutely rhythmic and rather slow, with regular and monotonous emphasis.”<sup>100</sup>

Screw dis cott’n,  
                                   *hey!*  
 Screw dis cott’n,  
                                   *hey!*  
 Screw dis cott’n,  
                                   *hey!*  
           Screw it tight – *hey!*

Screw dis cott’n,  
                                   *hey!*  
 Screw dis cott’n,  
                                   *hey!*  
 Screw dis cott’n,  
                                   *hey!*  
           Wid all yo’ might – *hey!*

Here we come, boys,  
                                   *hey!*  
 Here we come, boys,  
                                   *hey!*  
 Here we come, boys,  
                                   *hey!*  
           Do it right – *hey!*

Don’t get tired,<sup>101</sup>  
                                   *hey!*  
 Don’t get tired,  
                                   *hey!*  
 Don’t get tired,  
                                   *hey!*

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<sup>99</sup> Burlin, *Negro Folk-Songs*, 28, 31; Another song from the Georgia lowcountry – “Anniebelle” – reportedly was sung not only by stevedores loading lumber, but also while building railroads, chopping wood, and cutting weeds. Daryl Cumber Dance, ed., *From My People: 400 Years of African-American Folklore* (New York: Norton, 2002), 511-2.

<sup>100</sup> Burlin, *Negro Folk-Songs*, 31.

<sup>101</sup> Pronounced in two syllables: “ti-yerd.”

Time ain't long – *hey!*

Keep on<sup>102</sup> workin',

*hey!*

Keep on workin',

*hey!*

Keep on workin',

*hey!*

Sing dis song – *hey!*<sup>103</sup>

The consistent and predictable rhythm of such songs kept the work gang in unison and the slaves' recurring retort of "*hey!*" – which accompanied the turning of the screw – was "a sharp, rather aspirant ejaculation," both of which rendered their physical efforts more forceful and efficient.<sup>104</sup>

Ship captain James Carr recorded the lyrics of several unique work songs he heard on Charleston's docks. "As you approach the wharves," the attentive outsider wrote in his diary in August 1815, "the Song of the negroes at work greet your eer [*sic*] cheerfully from every quarter." After discharging a cargo of lumber from Bangor, Maine, Carr rented four pairs of jack screws and hired four gangs of five slave dock workers for five days to "work on board the ship stowing cotton" bound for Liverpool. Carr accompanied the slaves into the hold, where their singing "made such an impression on my mind, as to enable me to give a few specimans [*sic*] of the African working songs in Charleston." When toiling in gangs, the captain noted, the slaves "work & sing with

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<sup>102</sup> Pronounced with a long o: "*ōn*" or "*ohn*."

<sup>103</sup> Burlin recorded two additional modern verses: "Pay-day here, boys, *hey!* I hear dem say – *hey!*"; and "We'll have money, *hey!* Dis yere day – *hey!*" Burlin noted that these modern verses, as well as "fresh extemporaneous verses," were added by the black workers. Burlin, *Negro Folk-Songs*, 29-31.

<sup>104</sup> In fact, so important was the rhythm of the tune, it often took precedence over the logic of a song's words, leading some observers to conclude that many slaves' work songs were nonsensical and amusing. See Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1838* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1864), 128-9; Newman I. White, *American Negro Folk-Songs* (Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, Inc., 1965), 251; and Henry Edward Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs: A Study in Racial and National Music* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1967), 48-51.



all their might & whither hoisting, hauling, rowing or heaving at the Jack screw, they keep in perfect time in all their motions – this gives them more force as they are united & simultaneous in their exertion.”

Cheerly up, and cheerly down;  
hey boys hey.  
 Cheerly up, and cheerly down;  
ho boys ho.  
 Cheerly up, and cheerly down;  
high land a.  
 Cheerly up, and cheerly down;  
high land o.

Sing talio, Sally is a fine girl, sing talio;  
 Sally is a good girl, sing talio, sing talio;  
hoora, hoora, sing talio.  
 Sally in the morning, Susan in the evening;  
Sing talio, sing talio;  
 Sally is a sweet girl, Susan is a beauty;  
sing talio, sing talio,  
hoora, hoora, sing talio.<sup>105</sup>

Typically, one worker – oftentimes the gang’s header or leader – sang “what they consider the words of the song,” and then the entire gang belted out the chorus. According to Carr, the underscored words were the chorus, and those double scored were “sung more loud & strong, in which the whole gang join with all their force, and generally much glee.” Down in the hold amid this cacophony, the captain vividly recalled how “it often happened that they all had their throats open at the same time as loud as they cou’d ball.” But he added that “The blacks having remarkable nice ears for music, are very correct in their time & pauses.”

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<sup>105</sup> It was not uncommon for slave laborers to sing about women. See White, *American Negro Folk-Songs*, chapter 10.

The visiting New Englander recorded the lyrics of two other work songs he heard in the hold of his vessel in Charleston, both of which refer to alcohol:

Ceasar should you like a dram;  
Ceasar boy Ceasar.  
 Ceasar will you have a dram;  
Ceasar boy Ceasar.  
 Ceasar is a smart fellow,  
Ceasar boy Ceasar.

Tis grog time o day,  
huzza my jolly boys, tis grog time o day;  
 Back like a crow bar, belly like a tin pan,  
huzza my jolly boys, tis grog time o day;  
Tis grog time o day; tis grog time o day;  
huzza my jolly boys, tis grog time o day.  
 Tis time for to go, tis time for to go;  
huzza my jolly boys, tis time for to go;  
 Haul away so tis time for to go,  
huzza my jolly boys, tis time for to go.<sup>106</sup>

Charlestonians had long bemoaned the dram and grog shops of the city, which illegally sold or traded liquor to slaves and allegedly corrupted their morals and encouraged laziness and pilferage. Various city ordinances had sought to crack down on these shops and slave drinking. But as the lyrics of these work songs demonstrate, slaves boldly pushed back against white control and persisted in their desire and quest for alcohol. Despite long hours of exhausting work, the bondsmen laboring in the hold of Carr's vessel boasted of their strong backs and stomach muscles, while motivating themselves with the prospect of a drink during an impending break or at the end of the work day. Other records show that wharf owners illicitly provided their slave workers with alcohol. When Vanderhorst Wharf required repairs between July and December 1823, among the expenses was \$22.62 "paid for Rum for hands during time of Work." Likewise, it cost

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<sup>106</sup> James Carr Papers, SCL.

\$386 in one year to purchase “food & Liquor” for the eight slave wharf hands regularly employed on Vanderhorst Wharf.<sup>107</sup>

Meanwhile, because efficiency and a quick and steady work pace resulted in greater output and profits, ship captains and waterfront employers recognized and appreciated the functional advantages of work songs. Slaves who could lead the songs oftentimes received extra wages. Having studied the origins and history of African-American music, Booker T. Washington wrote that “Whenever companies of Negroes were working together,” including on antebellum southern wharves and levees, “some man or woman with an exceptional voice was paid to lead the singing, the idea being to increase the amount of labor by such singing.”<sup>108</sup> Early twentieth-century ethnomusicologist Natalie Curtis Burlin too remarked that so widespread was the belief among employers that “the Negro labors best when he labors with song, that in old days a man who could lead the singing of a gang of workmen was well worth extra pay.”<sup>109</sup> But as traveler Charles Peabody discovered, a gang could become perturbed with this leader if the tempo of the songs selected were too brisk and the labor too arduous.<sup>110</sup> The pace of the work, after all, was among the few aspects of the labor process that enslaved dock workers could hope to manipulate and even control.

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<sup>107</sup> Also see wharf repair account for July-December 1824. Wharf Business Papers: Vanderhorst Wharf, 1698-1892, folders 4, 6, Vanderhorst Family Papers, 1689-1942, SCHS; Similarly, when the plantation boat hands of Col. Thomas Taylor arrived in Charleston, factor John Schulz usually paid their wages and provided them with meat and grog. John Schulz Account Books, 1812-1824, SCL.

<sup>108</sup> Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and Booker T. Washington, *Twenty-four Negro Melodies* (Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1905), viii; Also see Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs*, 47.

<sup>109</sup> Burlin, *Negro Folk-Songs*, 8; Also see White, *American Negro Folk-Songs*, 251.

<sup>110</sup> Peabody’s observations are discussed in Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs*, 47, and White, *American Negro Folk-Songs*, 250.

But noted scholar of African-American folk music Newman Ivey White argued in 1928 that the primary purpose of work songs was not physical, but mental. Rather than to increase the efficiency of the laborers' united efforts, White claimed that the songs were chiefly intended "to keep the singer's thoughts from interfering with his work, to pacify his mind with the semblance of thought without yielding to any of the distractions which more serious thoughts would involve." In other words, the primary function of these ostensibly lighthearted tunes was "to keep the worker's mind contented with at least the illusion of thought while his body is allowed to work mechanically."<sup>111</sup> Work songs surely helped slaves to pass the time and instituted a measure of camaraderie among the laborers.<sup>112</sup> If their purpose was pacification, one should not conclude that these songs produced contented slaves. But some white contemporaries drew exactly that conclusion. James Carr deduced not only that work songs made slaves' "tasks go off hand more cheerily," but also that since "a Negro alone, seems a solitary being – he delights to work in large gangs – is loquacious & appears perfectly happy."<sup>113</sup>

Slaves knew better. One slave in Charleston later reflected on his first impressions of his fellow bondsmen when he arrived in the city in the early nineteenth century: "Draymen, porters, and workmen of every description, seemed generally merry and hearty; and, in the loading of ships with cotton, rice, &c., a stranger would think the negro one of the merriest creatures in the world: such continual singing and bawling going on, as if there were no such thing as care in the world." Time and personal

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<sup>111</sup> White, *American Negro Folk-Songs*, 290, 251.

<sup>112</sup> See Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs*, 46; and Miles Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1990), 140.

<sup>113</sup> James Carr Papers, SCL.

experience revealed, however, that he “had yet only seen the bright side of the picture,” and had “observed few of the evils of slavery.”<sup>114</sup> The editor of the magazine *The Nation* – which was founded by abolitionists in July 1865 – likewise cautioned in 1867 that the outwardly jocular lyrics and buoyant tone of slave work songs could misleadingly suggest “the easiness of the yoke of bondage.” The songs, the editor argued, rather were “the embodiment of the mental and physical anguish of a bruised race – the safety valve of their complaining and revolt against oppression.”<sup>115</sup> In other words, just as plantation slaves broke tools, played the fool, feigned injury, or subtly slowed the pace of labor, the work songs of urban slaves served as a means to protest grueling and perilous work conditions, long hours, and paltry or no wages without directly confronting the overwhelming force of slaveowner power.<sup>116</sup>

White Charlestonians also knew better than to assume that singing meant happy slaves. Whereas many visitors to the city thought the slaves’ songs endearing and even

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<sup>114</sup> When Zamba first arrived in Charleston, he indeed thought his fellow slaves contended and unoppressed: “As we walked along the streets I was much struck with the appearance of the houses; and the shops especially attracted my notice: the wealth which they displayed in goods of every description seemed inexhaustible. But, alas! I was only a poor slave, and in a land of strangers. It cheered me, however, to observe, as I went along, that my countrymen, who thronged the streets at every hand, seemed in general happy and contented. Some were driving drays, others drove fine and elegant carriages, and numbers were busy in the grog stores, or standing in groups at the doors of them; and their incessant laughing and chattering bespoke anything but misery. Then, as we passed the foot of the public markets, the appearance of black men, and women too, decently, and many of them flashily dressed, and all apparently in high spirits, was quite pleasing. As I passed by some barbers’ shops I peeped in, and there again were my countrymen quite busy, soaping and shaving the beards, and cutting the hair of white gentlemen.” Peter Neilson, ed., *The Life and Adventures of Zamba, an African Negro King; and his Experience of Slavery in South Carolina* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1847), 139, 109.

<sup>115</sup> *The Nation* quoted in Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States*, 12-13.

<sup>116</sup> White argued in 1928 that the work songs of gang laborers characteristically “reflects his immediate environment.” Though White discusses modern rather than antebellum African-American folk songs, he points out that labor gangs often expressed their “transient moods” about their employers, the difficulty, pace, or danger of the work, and wages. Workers had to take care that the boss did not hear certain lyrics, but other songs were meant for the ear of the employer: “Many of his remarks are intended for the captain to hear, or rather half-hear, in the manner familiar to most Southerners, wherein the Negro wishes to signify a state of disgruntlement but is unwilling to make a clear-cut issue of the matter.” White, *American Negro Folk-Songs*, 252-4.

pleasant, locals evidently found them jarring, repulsive, and profane. The City Council passed an ordinance in September 1801 in an attempt to regulate and suppress loud, bawdy, and perhaps seditious work songs that permeated the waterfront.<sup>117</sup> The law was said to be justified because “it has of late become a practice with slaves, to be whooping and hallooing indecently about the streets, or on the wharves, and to sing aloud obscene songs, in which practice they more especially indulge while working on board shipping, to the great hindrance of those who are engaged in business, on the wharves, and to the general disturbance of the citizens.” Offenders were to receive up to ten stripes at the Work House, the expense of which was to be paid by the slaves’ owners. But if the transgression took place on a ship at the wharves, then “the master, mate, owner, or consignee of the vessel, on board of which such whooping, hallooing, or obscene singing is heard” was obligated to pay for the correction.<sup>118</sup>

Lawmakers seemingly were more concerned with the loud, indecent, and obscene nature of the songs than with the singing itself. After all, work songs served a useful and even indispensable function. But like talking vociferously or cursing publicly, singing

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<sup>117</sup> Krehbiel argued that “It is possible, of course, even likely, that restrictions were placed upon the songs of the slaves,” which helps explain “the general tone of cheer, not unmixed with pathos, which characterizes the music.” Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs*, 46; Actress and author Fanny Kemble variously described the work songs she heard in coastal Georgia as original, extemporaneous, agreeable, and pretty. But she also detected a measure of plaintiveness and lamentation in the lyrics, and suggested that the jovial tone of most slave work songs often did not accurately reflect the bondsmen’s true sentiments: “I have heard that many of the masters and overseers on these plantations prohibit melancholy tunes or words, and encourage nothing but cheerful music and senseless words, depreciating the effects of sadder strains upon the slaves, whose peculiar musical sensibility might be expected to make them especially excitable to any songs of a plaintive character, and having any reference to their peculiar hardships. If it is true, I think it a judicious precaution enough – these poor slaves are just the sort of people over whom a popular music appeal to their feelings and passions would have an immense power.” Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation*, 127-9.

<sup>118</sup> *Charleston Times*, November 11, 1803; Charleston’s Grand Jury called on the legislature in January 1793 to “prevent the scandalous practice of profane Swearing,” and among the complaints in September 1799 was “the noise, and disturbance made by Domestic thro’ the Streets” of Charleston; Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, January 1793, SCDAH; September 1799 presentment quoted in Governors’ Message, 1799 #744, SCDAH.

bawdy lyrics while unloading or loading a vessel at the wharves again was a means by which overworked and underpaid urban slave wage laborers could protest their work conditions and meager earnings as well as their enslavement. Fully aware of whites' efforts to stamp out slaves' consumption of alcohol, the enslaved waterfront workers aboard Captain Carr's vessel nonetheless sang openly and subversively about grog and dram. Not only displaying slaves' irreverence and potential rebelliousness, but also embarrassing to the city's more genteel inhabitants and their guests, the worst features of the work songs therefore were targeted for eradication.

But the 1801 ordinance did not sufficiently curb such behavior. Another edict passed in October 1806 reaffirmed the prohibition against blacks "whooping or hallooing any where in the city, or of making a clamorous noise, or of singing aloud any indecent song." The punishment for those who violated this ordinance was increased to a maximum of twenty lashes. And if the crime took place on a vessel, now the ship master was to be fined \$20 for each offense. As with workers' fixed wages, the harbor master was assigned the duty of familiarizing every captain who docked at the wharves with this clause.<sup>119</sup>

Collections of slave work songs indeed reveal the boldness and obscenity of some tunes. Songs about sex, hard drinking, gambling, and other riotous behavior were common among southern work gangs.<sup>120</sup> When James Carr visited Charleston a decade after the passage of this latter law, though he commented on the volume of the singing and captured the references to alcohol, he did not describe or complain of any profane or

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<sup>119</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 173.

<sup>120</sup> White, *American Negro Folk-Songs*, 251-2.

otherwise inappropriate lyrics being sung by the twenty slaves he hired to pack cotton into the hold of his vessel.<sup>121</sup> Nonetheless, the prospect of twenty lashes and the potential fines imposed on the owners of hired-out slaves or ship masters such as Carr again failed to stamp out or control the much maligned “whooping and hallooing” early in the nineteenth century. Just a few years after Carr’s observations, the City Council was compelled to amend and toughen the 1806 ordinance in July 1819. “Whereas, public decorum and due observance of public decency are at all times worthy of the attention of this Council,” the 1806 law had “been found inefficient to secure these objectives.” Still under pain of twenty stripes, blacks were barred from using “any blasphemous or indecent words, or crying out in a blasphemous, obscene or indecent manner.” Furthermore, blacks who carried out “any loud or offensive conversations” on street corners or other public places in the city were subject to between five and twenty lashes.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> The first collection of American slave songs published – *Slave Songs of the United States* – included the following comments from a man in Delaware: “Some of the best *pure negro* songs I have ever heard were those that used to be sung by the black stevedores, or perhaps the crews themselves, of the West India vessels, loading and unloading at the wharves in Philadelphia and Baltimore. I have stood for more than an hour, often, listening to them, as they hoisted and lowered the hogsheads and boxes of their cargoes; one man taking the burden of the song (and the slack of the rope) and the others striking in with the chorus. They would sing in this way more than a dozen different songs in an hour; most of which might indeed be warranted to contain ‘nothing religious’ – a few of them, ‘on the contrary, quite the reverse’ – but generally rather innocent and proper in their language, and strangely attractive in their music; and with a volume of voice that reached a square or two away.” William Francis Allen et al., *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York: A. Simpson & Co., 1867), vii-viii.

<sup>122</sup> The ordinance left it to the discretion of the warden of the Work House whether to accept a payment of between \$1-\$5 from slaveowners or the guardians of free blacks in lieu of this corporal punishment. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 174-5; An ordinance “to suppress riots and disturbances, at and in the vicinity of disorderly houses” enacted in 1821 prohibited “all clamorous singing, whooping, or other obstreperous, wanton and unnecessary noises, calculated to disturb the peace and quiet of the city.” Another ordinance passed in 1838 punished “All indecent and disorderly conduct, cursing and swearing, clamorous noises, drunkenness, quarrelling, fighting, or profanity” committed on the Battery located at the end of the peninsula. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 53-4, 24-5; Such decrees also may have been attempting to crack down on street cries. One Charlestonian called for



Just as James Carr hired twenty slaves in 1815 to stow his vessel, other ship captains as well as factors and merchants sometimes walked to one of the waterfront hiring stands to employ porters, day laborers, or draymen as needed.<sup>123</sup> When the brig *Alexis* arrived at Gadsden's Wharf in July 1823, for example, factor Charles Edmondston hired and paid an unspecified number of slave porters or "labourers for discharging the Cargo & relading" the vessel. He also paid a drayman to transport turpentine and cotton unloaded from the *Alexis* to a warehouse or store in the city.<sup>124</sup> In February 1833 the captain of the *Robin Hood*, Joseph Nickerson, hired anywhere from two to eleven slaves each day to assist his crew in discharging ballast and loading the vessel with rice and cotton. On February 27, Captain Nickerson noted that local "stevedores [were] employed part of the day stowing cotton."<sup>125</sup> Much as the term porter was adopted during the colonial era to describe a common dock worker, during the early nineteenth century wharf hands and other unskilled or semiskilled waterfront laborers often were referred to as stevedores. In the 1830s and 1840s, however, the definition and function of the stevedore gradually and significantly changed. Though the term continued to be

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the regulation of the city's street criers. *Charleston Courier*, March 26, 1823, quoted in Greene, *Slave Badges*, 43.

<sup>123</sup> In these cases, the factors usually paid the wharf hands in cash, and then subtracted the cost from a planter's or ship owner's account, depending on who owned the cotton or other goods at the time they were handled.

<sup>124</sup> Edmondston paid the laborers \$42 and the drayman \$5.25. He also employed and paid \$45 in cash to a man named Archey Condy – perhaps Archibald Cohler or Cooler, who will be discussed later in this chapter – to direct the other hired hands in the stowing of the vessel. Edmondston furthermore shelled out cash to cover bills for services ranging from cotton mending and the captain's wages to a Gadsden's Wharf bill for landing, wharfage, storage, shipping, and wood. In the end, the owners of the *Alexis* reimbursed Charles Edmondston \$894.88 and paid him a 5 percent commission of \$44.74 for his services. Edward Hudson Papers, 1823, SCL.

<sup>125</sup> Logbook of the ship *Robin Hood*, 1832-1833, CRCMS.

conflated with and used by some contemporaries to describe common dock workers, stevedores came to be a relatively small but highly skilled and well paid group.

Charleston's stevedores defined their job in the following way: "I mean by stevedore the responsible man; the one who makes the contract and directs the work. He is the stevedore. Those that are in his employ are headers, foreman, screw hands, &c."<sup>126</sup> Able to properly, efficiency, and quickly stow the maximum amount of cargo into a vessel's hold, stevedores both hired and supervised the port's dock hands in carrying out this vital task.<sup>127</sup> This emerging group of stevedores at first lacked guidelines on stowage based on scientific principles and knowledge of ship construction, center of gravity, capacity, and so on. But by the mid-nineteenth century, stevedores could study manuals such as *Nautical Routine and Stowage, with Short Rules in Navigation*, and *On the Stowage of Ships and their Cargoes*.<sup>128</sup> The authors of the former text pointed out in 1849 that it was only in the second quarter of the nineteenth century that "stowage became not only a distinct department by itself, but subsequently indeed, a separate profession." These books accordingly sought to educate the "professional stower" in the

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<sup>126</sup> *Charleston Courier*, January 30, 1860.

<sup>127</sup> Robert Greenhalgh Albion, the dean of American maritime history, noted that whereas common dock workers only required the muscle needed for moving and hoisting freight, the stevedores who directed them were responsible for the proper stowage of the cargo and required and possessed "a considerable amount of skill." Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *The Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1939), 223.

<sup>128</sup> John McLeod Murphy and W. N. Jeffers, *Nautical Routine and Stowage, with Short Rules in Navigation*. New York: Henry Spear, 1849; Robert White Stevens, *On the Stowage of Ships and their Cargoes*. Plymouth, MA: Published by Stevens, 1858; Early stevedores also read W. N. Glascock, *The Naval Service: or, Officer's Manual for Every Grade in His Majesty's Ships*. London: Saunders and Otley, 1836; and W. N. Glascock, *The Naval Officer's Manual, for Every Grade in Her Majesty's Ships*. London: Parker, Furnivall, & Parker, 1848.

rules and practices – including “a few ‘Yankee notions’” – that governed the adroit stowage of vessels.<sup>129</sup>

By the 1850s the rise of a cadre of skilled, professional, and – as we will see in chapter four – increasingly white stevedores had transformed the hiring, work, and wage payment processes on Charleston’s waterfront. Wharfingers, factors, and ship captains still occasionally walked over to one of the porter stands and engaged workers. But over time this task increasingly was left to stevedores, who were more familiar with many of the individual laborers and their physical strength, experience, abilities, and work habits. After a stevedore was hired to oversee the loading or unloading of a vessel, he personally selected, hired, and subsequently supervised his work gang throughout the job. As for the disbursement of wages, ship owners or captains typically paid the stevedore some cash once a week while the work was taking place, and then paid him the balance of wages when the stowage was complete.<sup>130</sup> The stevedore then distributed this cash among his labor gang, and he had the choice to pay them either at the end of each week or at the end of a job. Stevedores probably handed over the wages of some slave dock

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<sup>129</sup> Murphy and Jeffers, *Nautical Routine*, introduction to Part III; This book was advertised as “Being a complete manual of practical reference for merchants, insurance companies, naval officers, masters of vessels, constructors, navigators, stevedores, sailors, &c., &c...This work treats of every important subject touching the nautical profession...also, rules for the stowage and management of every species of merchandise.” *The Boston Atlas*, June 25, 1849.

<sup>130</sup> If an employer refused to pay a stevedore’s wages, he had to appeal to an official body such as the Charleston Chamber of Commerce, City Court, Admiralty Court, or harbor master. See Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 106, 328-36; If enslaved stevedores or other dock workers were denied the payment of their wages, on the other hand, the bondsmen could turn to their masters for help. Thomas H. Jones, who worked as a stevedore in Wilmington, North Carolina, recalled such an instance. Jones had reached an agreement with a ship captain to stow a vessel for \$150, with Jones providing all the hands. When the captain refused to pay Jones, “I took the case at once to my master,” who inquired if the stevedore had tried to overcharge the captain. After adding up the expenses and confirming Jones’s claim, the master proclaimed that “if an educated white man had allowed an ignorant slave to impose upon him, he ought to be made to bear it.” The stevedore’s owner then took out a pistol and a long dirk-knife and assured Jones, “I’m going to get your money for you.” Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones, Who Was a Slave for Forty-Three Years. Written by a Friend, as Related to Him by Brother Jones* (New Bedford: E. Anthony & Sons, Printers, 1885), 60.

workers directly to the slaveowner, who then could control how much the slave actually received for his labor on the waterfront.<sup>131</sup>

Mercantile account books captured this payment process. The cash book of factor Charles T. Mitchell not only listed the payments he made to draymen and cotton menders, but also the money he paid out and took in on account of his patrons. Many of these cash transactions were on behalf of ship owners whose vessels called in Charleston to fill with cotton bound for destinations such as New York or Liverpool. Though Mitchell usually did not specify the names of the stevedores who worked on his clients' vessels, he meticulously recorded the payments he made to them over a period of several years.<sup>132</sup> For instance, under an account for the owners of the ship *Home*, Mitchell entered a payment of \$200 to a "stevedore on a/c [account] for Stowing" – which included both the transfer of goods from the dock onto the vessel and packing the cargo into the hold – on February 13, 1858. This disbursement was followed by an additional \$200 on February 20, and finally the "Stevedore Bal. [Balance] of Bill" of \$203.84 on February 27. In all, this stevedore received \$603.84 for overseeing the stowage of the *Home* over about a three week period.<sup>133</sup> Even as the stevedore and his labor crew

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<sup>131</sup> Other slaveowners, especially those residing on rural plantations, entrusted their factors in Charleston to collect and distribute the wages of their urban slaves hired out on the docks. For example, see John Schulz Account Books, 1812-1824, SCL; and Legare, Colcock, and Company Records, 1855-1865, SCHS; Sometimes other middlemen were used. John V. Holmes, for instance, advertised his services in the 1856 city directory as a "Collector of Accounts, House Rents, Servants' Hire, &c." Slaveowners also could hire men like Holmes to identify and contract work for hired-out slaves; R. S. Purse, *Charleston City Directory and Strangers Guide for 1856* (New York: J. F. Trow, 1856), between pages 80 and 81 (hereafter cited as 1856 city directory).

<sup>132</sup> Some ship owners and captains likely paid stevedores directly, cutting out middlemen like Mitchell.

<sup>133</sup> Mitchell also fronted money for the captain's wages, bills for clothing, shipping, tonnage, water, pilotage in and out of the harbor, Custom House clearance, pressing and insuring the cotton, and for the services of the harbor master and British consul. Cash Book, 1856-1865, 45-6, Charles T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS.

squeezed the last bales of cotton and other goods into the hold of the *Home*, another stevedore was beginning work on the ship *Alexandrine*. On February 20, Mitchell paid this second stevedore \$200, followed by installments of \$280 on February 27, \$170 on March 6, and \$46.19 on March 13 for the “Bal of a/c for Stowing Cargo.”<sup>134</sup>

Some stevedores were hired to discharge a vessel, which was comparatively easier, less time consuming, and paid less than stowing. Nonetheless, this task could require great skill and was potentially very dangerous. Some of these discharging stevedores – men such as John Torrent and John Symons – doubled as riggers and possessed their own horses to assist with hoisting goods out of ships’ holds.<sup>135</sup> In December 1858, for example, Charles T. Mitchell paid “Torrents Bill for discharging” the ship *Minnesota* totaling \$145.28, in addition to nearly \$800 doled out over five payments to another stevedore for stowing the vessel.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Again, Mitchell also covered the ship owner’s costs for the captain’s wages, riggers, a ship carpenter, butcher, tonnage, water, freight, cotton presses, and insurance on the cotton while at the cotton presses. Cash Book, 1856-1865, 45-9, Charles T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS.

<sup>135</sup> See John Torrent & Son’s advertisement between pages 178 and 179 in the 1856 city directory; Also see William Doran, George Jefferson & Co., G. B. Stoddard, John Symons, and John Torrent in Charleston Tax Records, 1860-1865, CLS; and see William Purvis in 1861 Charleston Free Black Capitation Tax Book. Charleston Free Black Capitation Tax Books, 1852, 1861-1865, CCPL (1852, 1861, 1864) and CLS (1862 and 1863); Torrent and Symons & Co. owned eight horses in 1858, and John Torrent and John Symons owned six and four horses respectively in 1859. See “List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1858,” Charleston: Steam Press of Walker, Evans & Co., 1859, and “List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1859”; Several scholars have maintained that John Symons (often misspelled Simmons or Symmons) employed Robert Smalls for a number of years in the 1850s. In addition to working as a wharf hand, stevedore, wheelman, and pilot, Smalls evidentially also directed hoist horses on the city’s wharves. See Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 373-9; Dorothy Sterling, *Captain of the Planter: The Story of Robert Smalls* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958), 41-7, 52, 59, 156; Bernard E. Powers Jr., *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 11; Okan Edet Uya, *From Slavery to Public Service, Robert Smalls 1839-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 6-8; and Andrew Billingsley, *Yearning to Breathe Free: Robert Smalls of South Carolina and His Families* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 42-3, 52, 90.

<sup>136</sup> Cash Book, 1856-1865, pages 68-71, Charles T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS; For another example of a discharging stevedore, see Cash Book, 1856-1865, 113-6; In addition to discharging stevedores, Captain Henry P. Burr wrote to his father in Connecticut in 1845 that “It is customary to have a discharging officer” in Charleston, who evidently was tasked with ensuring that unloaded goods were

The records of another merchant, Charles O. Witte, help elucidate these stowage costs. When the Dutch bark *Nederland* was in Charleston in January 1860, the stevedore collected 23 cents for the stowage of each bale of cotton, 9 cents for tierces of rice, and 5 cents for barrels of rosin. It took the stevedore and his laborers twenty-seven days to stow 1,452 cotton bales, 220 tierces of rice, and 335 barrels of rosin, which cost the owners of the *Nederland* \$402.01.<sup>137</sup> Compensating the stevedore based upon the number of items stowed, rather than the time spent loading, rewarded the skillful and efficient loading of the vessel. After all, the ability to pack an extra 100 cotton bales into a hold at 23 cents per bale put \$23 more into the stevedore's pocket.<sup>138</sup> This arrangement, however, did not benefit the slaves under the stevedore's supervision and who toiled at the jack screw to squeeze in those additional bales. Like those laborers who transported Thomas Napier's furniture, hired-out slave dock hands were paid a fixed daily or hourly rate and thus had an incentive to work as slowly as possible to stretch out the work and increase their wages. The pay of stevedores, on the other hand, was not regulated. As a result, stevedores were rewarded not only for skill and efficiency but also speed. In the case of the loading of the *Nederland*, for instance, the stevedore would have received the same total payment whether it took him and his work gang two weeks

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delivered to their proper consignees in the city. The man who Burr employed "made out so badly that I discharged him and as he sent many of the goods to wrong places I have had trouble enough to rectify mistakes." The Letters of Captain Henry P. Burr and His Family, September 4, 1845, CRCMS.

<sup>137</sup> Stowage costs could be even higher if cargo had to be loaded or discharged using lighters. The judge of an 1806 maritime salvage case emphasized the relative difficulty and danger of "hoisting goods out of the hold of a vessel, and putting them on board another laying alongside" in open water. Conveying cotton bales from the deck of a lighter to that of an ocean-going vessel was not easy either, leading to higher costs and additional expenses. When the ship *Minnesota* was in Charleston in January 1861, the vessel's owners were charged \$181.80 or 60 cents per bale for "Lighterage on 303 Bales [of] Cotton over [the] Bar," and then were billed \$20 for a "Pilot Boat bringing back stevedore's hands" to the city. Helen Tunnicliff Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro* (Buffalo: W.S. Hein, 1998), vol. 2, 287-8; Cash Book, 1856-1865, pages 135-6, Charles T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS.

<sup>138</sup> Cash Book, 1851-1866, Charles O. Witte Estate Records, 1851-1871, SCHS.

or four weeks to complete the job. But if it only took two weeks, then the stevedore was able to pay his crew a smaller share of the earnings and then move on to the stowage of another vessel.

Ship owners and captains also embraced a fast pace of work since less time in port meant lower dockage charges and other costs, and enabled additional profit-generating voyages during the course of the year. Port rules or shipping contracts often specified a limited number of “running days” or “lay days” (Sundays usually excepted) to unload and load vessels, and required those captains who failed to clear the wharf in time to pay hefty demurrage fees.<sup>139</sup> In general it was in the financial interest of merchants, factors, ship owners, and captains to discharge and stow cargo as quickly as possible, and money was lost when slow work or bad weather delayed the sailing of vessels. In 1810, Charleston merchant and future wharf owner Christopher Fitzsimons assured one client that “Your ships are loading as fast as circumstances will admit” and that when the stowing of approximately 1,800 cotton bales was complete that “you will have two of the best cargoes of upland cotton ever shipped from this port.” Captain Henry C. Keene admitted to his ship’s owners in Bath, Maine, that due to the difficult work of compressing and stowing cotton, the stevedore was “progressing rather slowly in loading.” Nonetheless, Keene promised that “we shall fill up as fast as possible” and

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<sup>139</sup> See, for example, the Admiralty Court case of Woolf Myer Cohn vs. Brig *Berentine*, Admiralty Final Record Book, District of South Carolina, vol. 3 (1799-1800), NASER; Also see Benjamin Jarvis to Captain Daniel Deshon, February 16, 1796, Daniel Deshon Letters, SCL; Charleston Chamber of Commerce Award Book, case 82, November 8, 1836, SCHS; Anonymous Charleston Merchant Account Book, January 29, 1850, page 100, SCL; Roy S. MacElwee and Henry F. Church, “A Comprehensive Handbook on the Port of Charleston” (Charleston: Bureau of Foreign Trade and Port Development, circa 1924), 17-19; and Clapp, “Charleston Port Survey,” 29; Occasionally, locals merchants had to pay the ship captain for demurrage. See Henry C. Keene Letters, September 5, 1859, and September 25, 1859, CRCMS.

attempt “to put away nearly 800,000 lbs.” of the article, which was bound for Kronshtadt, Russia.<sup>140</sup>

In some ports, New York for example, pay was linked directly to speed. In August 1829, one New York newspaper reported that “On Monday the cargo of the French sloop *Mars*, 70 hhds. [hogsheads] molasses, was discharged by a gang of stevedores in sixty-one minutes. They were paid \$50. Two hours were allowed, and in case of failure, they were to forfeit their pay.”<sup>141</sup> In Charleston the owners of the brig *Jessie Miller* paid a two-dollar “Gratuity to [the] stevedore’s foreman” in April 1853, undoubtedly recompense for a job well and quickly done.<sup>142</sup>

Even when there was no financial reward or penalty attached to a stevedore’s performance, he could establish a reputation for skill, efficiency, and speed, and could even draw public praise. The *Columbus Times & Sentinel* (Georgia) published the following announcement in March 1858: “Large Cargo – The ship *Agamemnon* was cleared at Charleston Custom House on the 16th inst., for St. Petersburg, having on board a cargo of 2,982 square bales cotton, containing 1,286,999 pounds. This exceeds the heaviest cargo ever carried in the same ship from New Orleans, to the extent of 177,000 pounds. Her stevedore was Samuel Pervis, a colored man.”<sup>143</sup> The editors of Savannah’s

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<sup>140</sup> Christopher Fitzsimons to Stephen Girard, February 18, 1810, Christopher Fitzsimons Letterbook, 1799-1813, SCL; Henry C. Keene to Magon and Clapp, March 14, 1859, and March 29, 1859, Henry C. Keene Letters, CRCMS; Also see Coker, *Charleston’s Maritime Heritage*, 68.

<sup>141</sup> Unspecified New York newspaper quoted in *New Hampshire Statesman and Concord Register*, August 29, 1829.

<sup>142</sup> Journal, 1850-1858, page 238, Charles T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS.

<sup>143</sup> The notice added that “The *Agamemnon* was loaded by C. A. Atkinson & Co.,” which was a commission merchant firm located on Central Wharf. *Columbus Times & Sentinel* (Georgia), quoted in *Daily Morning News* (Savannah), March 23, 1858; 1855 city directory; Samuel Pervis does not appear in Charleston’s city directories, death records, or the 1850 and 1860 U.S. Census records. A free black



*Daily Morning News*, which reprinted this item, stated that “We cannot see the point of the above paragraph,” and argued that “The cargo of the *Agamemnon* was certainly not an extraordinary one,” citing a ship in Savannah loaded with over 4,400 bales and weighing over 2 million pounds.<sup>144</sup> The next day a reader responded to the editors: “It is very plain; it is to show what is not generally known to ship owners, that in Savannah and Charleston we can put more pounds of cotton into a ship, because we have the best cotton presses in the United States, and our stevedores do ample justice to their work.” The respondent then cited his own examples in support of the argument that the stevedores along the south Atlantic coast routinely stowed vessels more effectively than those in New Orleans or Mobile.<sup>145</sup>

Working quickly in such a hazardous environment led to accidents, injuries, and even death. In all steps of the waterfront labor process, from the draying of goods to the stowing of cotton, speed meant danger for the laborers. That waterfront work was strenuous and dangerous, in Charleston and elsewhere, contemporaries understood well. Back injuries and hernias suffered by dock workers were ubiquitous. According to the city’s wharf owners, the average weight of a bale of cotton in 1790 was 200 pounds, but by 1856 that average had ballooned to 450 pounds. Cotton bales had become so large and heavy, in fact, that it often required two dock hands rather than one to handle and roll the bales about the wharves.<sup>146</sup> Meanwhile, the Charleston Chamber of Commerce

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stevedore named William Purvis, however, does appear in the city’s free black tax records in 1861, 1862, and 1863. William Purvis owned three slaves in 1861, and in 1862 and 1863 the stevedore owned two slaves. Charleston Free Black Capitation Tax Books, 1852, 1861-1865, CCPL and CLS.

<sup>144</sup> *Daily Morning News* (Savannah), March 23, 1858.

<sup>145</sup> *Daily Morning News* (Savannah), March 24, 1858.

standardized barrels of rice at 600 pounds, though some weighed even more.<sup>147</sup> Merchants' and factors' account books often documented the weight of each bale of cotton or barrel of rice handled, bought, or sold, and Charles T. Mitchell's records include a bale of cotton weighing a gargantuan 746 pounds.<sup>148</sup> Draymen had to lift and roll these burdens as well. In fact, Mayor Charles Macbeth reported to the City Council in 1858 that the "heavy loads which were carried by the carts, drays, &c." – many totaling 3,000 pounds – were so great that the vehicles' wheels were breaking the streets.<sup>149</sup>

Some slaveowners considered waterfront labor too hazardous for their costly slave property – a topic which will be discussed further in later chapters.<sup>150</sup> Other masters purchased life insurance for their particularly valuable bondsmen. Though most of the less numerous free dock workers could not afford a policy, life insurance

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<sup>146</sup> "Memorial of the Wharf-holders of Charleston to the General Assembly of South Carolina," Charleston: Walker, Evans, & Co., 1859; Petition, ND #1587, SCDAH.

<sup>147</sup> "Rules for the Government of the Charleston Chamber of Commerce, Revised and Adopted December 26, 1842: Together with the Tariff of Commissions and Other Regulations, Adopted by the Chamber. To Which is Added a List of the Officers and Members of the Chamber in May, 1844" (Charleston: Burges & James, 1844), 14; Also see Arnoldus Vanderhorst, Estate Case Papers, 1763-1817, folder 9, Vanderhorst Family Papers, 1689-1942, SCHS.

<sup>148</sup> C. T. Mitchell & Co., Invoices Outward, Charleston, 1858-1861, page 29, C. T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS.

<sup>149</sup> City Council Minutes, November 23, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, November 29, 1858; In a WPA interview, ex-slave Tom Morris related how he worked as a drayman in Brandon, Mississippi, and how "dat work wus so heavy it most broke me down in my lines [loins]." Rawick, *American Slavery*, narrative of Tom Morris.

<sup>150</sup> Scholar Michael Kaplan, for instance, mistakenly argued that in antebellum New Orleans slaves were rarely used for waterfront work because it "was so dangerous that it was unprofitable to use slaves. It cost \$500 or \$1500 to replace a slave killed on the job, but to replace a [white] wage worker, all they had to do was hire another one." Michael Kaplan, "A Century of Struggle on New Orleans Docks," *Class Struggle* (1976), 38; One South Carolina judge ruled in 1848 that "When the hiring is general, the hirer may employ the [slave] in any way he chooses, 'consistently with his obligation not to employ him in any dangerous work, such as a prudent man would not employ his own negro in.'" Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, vol. 2, 409; also see Catterall, vol. 2, 443 and 457, for cases in which slaves were employed and killed performing dangerous tasks in violation of the hiring contracts.

advertisements targeted “Persons who possess but limited incomes...and all others whose families might be in danger of being reduced to poverty and distress, by the death of those on whose daily exertions they are dependent.”<sup>151</sup> If anyone needed such coverage, it was those who toiled amid the constant perils of the waterfront. But aside from injuries of excessive physical exertion, what were the risks of laboring on Charleston’s antebellum wharves?

For starters, workers and others who frequented the waterfront had to take care where they walked and stood. Warehousemen and wharf hands rushing to remove goods from storage did not always exercise appropriate caution. In September 1804 the City Council passed an ordinance “to prevent the pernicious practice of throwing cotton in bales, goods, or any other articles from the second or upper floors of ware-houses, stores, or other buildings within the city of Charleston.” Prompted by “several distressing accidents,” the measure further prohibited cotton bales and other articles from being lowered “without a good and sufficient tackle and rope.” Violators of this ordinance, including those who permitted workers under their employ to throw goods from upper stories, were subject to a \$50-\$100 fine.<sup>152</sup>

It was much more costly – both in terms of time and labor – to properly lower rather than simply heave cotton bales from the upper floor of a waterfront warehouse to the wharf or street below. As a result, accidents still occurred. On the afternoon of

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<sup>151</sup> See advertisement in Morris Goldsmith, *Directory and Strangers’ Guide, for the City of Charleston and its Vicinity, From the Fifth Census of the United States* (Charleston: Printed at the Office of the Irishman, 1831), 185 (hereafter cited as 1830-31 city directory); This ad concluded by announcing that “Persons owning Slaves, may secure a perpetuity or income by insuring their lives.”

<sup>152</sup> In other words, the white merchants, factors, and wharfingers who supervised common warehousemen and wharf hands could be blamed and fined for the actions of their workers. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 52-3.

December 29, 1838, merchant Samuel Patterson was standing near a wharf warehouse when a bale of cotton was “thrown on him from the upper story.” Badly injured, Patterson was taken home but died a few hours later.<sup>153</sup> But the ordinance was at least periodically enforced. Factor John Lewis and wharfinger John Elford, for instance, were brought before the City Court and fined \$50 each in July 1840.<sup>154</sup> Some offending wharfingers – held accountable for the actions of their workers – petitioned the City Council for relief from the penalty resulting from what they claimed was “an accidental violation of the Ordinance.”<sup>155</sup> In June 1844 alderman Robert Seymour proposed a bill allowing goods to be lowered with a parbuckle – a sling usually made of rope that could be used to roll or pull barrels and bales of goods up or down an inclined plane – “or some other safe mode other than the one now prescribed.” And in December 1845 the Council amended the 1804 ordinance permitting the use of parbuckles to “lower Cotton in Bales, Goods, or any other articles in bales, from the second floor of warehouses, stores, or buildings, situated to the east of East Bay Street.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Schirmer Diary, December 29, 1838, SCHS; Similarly, a slave was killed instantly at the East Bay Street store of a merchant named Morris in October 1835 when a stack of iron bars fell on him. Schirmer Diary, October 28, 1835, SCHS.

<sup>154</sup> City Council Minutes, July 21, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, July 24, 1840; Also see City Council Minutes, April 27, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, April 30, 1840; 1837-38 city directory; T. C. Fay, *Charleston Directory and Strangers' Guide for 1840 and 1841, Embracing Names of Heads of Families – Firms, and the Individuals Composing Them; Together with All Persons in Business, and Their Residences, Alphabetically Arranged. Also, Each Street and Numbers Where Practicable, with the Names of the Occupants Respectively Noted – Thereby Answering the Purpose of a Cross Index*. Charleston: T. C. Fay, 1840 (hereafter cited as 1840-41 city directory).

<sup>155</sup> City Council Minutes, April 19, 1842, *Southern Patriot*, April 21, 1842; Also see City Council Minutes, January 23, 1843, *Southern Patriot*, January 25, 1843; City Council Minutes, ND, *Charleston Mercury*, August 16, 1843; City Council Minutes, November 21, 1843, *Southern Patriot*, November 22, 1843; and City Council Minutes, June 10, 1844, *Southern Patriot*, June 12, 1844.

<sup>156</sup> City Council Minutes, June 10, 1844, *Southern Patriot*, June 12, 1844; City Council Minutes, December 2, 1845, *Southern Patriot*, December 3, 1845; Walker, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1844-1854*, 16; For what appears to be an image of a parbuckle, see Coker, *Charleston's Maritime Heritage*, 37.

And if workers and others on the waterfront had to beware of goods falling from above, those toiling on ships' decks had to take care not to tumble through an open hatch. In April 1840, free black stevedore Archibald Cooler – the first stevedore to appear in Charleston's city directories – died after falling into a hold.<sup>157</sup> Similarly, in March 1856 an Englishman named William Baxter was working for stevedore John Torrent when he “accidentally fell through the forward hatch into the hold” of the steam packet *George's Creek*, which was being unloaded at Brown's Wharf. The fall fractured Baxter's skull and after about four hours “death relieved him of his sufferings.”<sup>158</sup>

Not even horses could withstand a falling cotton bale. In one stunning accident, the *Charleston Mercury* reported how “A horse attached to a dray belonging to Mr. McClue, was instantly killed yesterday morning by the cotton, with which the dray was loaded, falling on him. It appears that another dray being driven rapidly along the Bay, the two came in contact; and in attempting to get clear of each other, the tail of one of the drays struck the legs of Mr. McClue's horse, causing him to fall; and the cotton rolling off the dray on him, crushed him to death.”<sup>159</sup> Draymen too encountered life-threatening perils while working on or near the waterfront. One slave drayman was killed instantly near the Exchange at the corner of East Bay and Broad streets after his horse spooked and the drayman jumped or was thrown to the ground.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Schirmer Diary, after April 29, 1840, SCHS; Cooler was listed in the 1830-31 city directory as Archibald Cohler, but appeared as Cooler in both Schirmer's diary and the 1837-38 city directory.

<sup>158</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, March 27, 1856; Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL; Also see *Charleston Tri-Weekly Courier*, January 28, 1860.

<sup>159</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, January 26, 1856.

<sup>160</sup> Schirmer Diary, January 26, 1847, SCHS.

When waterfront accidents did not end in death, the injuries could be devastating nonetheless. When the horse of a slave carter took fright, the driver's leg was broken and had to be amputated.<sup>161</sup> Likewise, one ship captain had his leg broken "by a bale of cotton falling on it," and Adger's Wharf commission merchant T. L. Wragg "had his foot crushed so severely, that amputation was necessary."<sup>162</sup> Alms House hospital records show waterfront workers being treated for injuries including a broken tibia, fractured cranium, sprained ankle, bruises, and wounds of the side, head, and sternum.<sup>163</sup> In addition to medical care from the Alms House, some injured workers turned to local charities for aid. In December 1845 the Hibernian Society's Committee on Relief gave \$10 to Mrs. Sweeney after her husband – probably Irish drayman John Sweeney – broke his leg.<sup>164</sup> And in March 1852, Charles Patrick and his wife similarly received \$50 from the New England Society "to procure a comfortable passage home" to Westport,

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<sup>161</sup> Schirmer Diary, March 20, 1847, SCHS; Draymen and carters sometimes injured or killed pedestrians in the rush to transport goods to and from the bustling waterfront. For example, in June 1859 a child was "Run over on the Bay by a horse and Dray and almost instantly killed." Schirmer Diary, June 1, 1859, SCHS. Also see Schirmer Diary, June 23, 1834, SCHS; Reverend John B. Adger recalled how in the mid-1810s his young brother – future merchant and wharf owner James Adger III – was run over by a dray carrying a hogshead of tobacco. John B. Adger, *My Life and Times, 1810-1899* (Richmond, VA: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1899), 45.

<sup>162</sup> *Charleston Tri-Weekly Courier*, January 17, 1860; Schirmer Diary, May 7, 1855, SCHS; Schirmer noted over a year later that Wragg "recently returned from the north with an artificial foot in the place of his natural foot which he had crushed on 7 May last year; Schirmer Diary, May 25, 1856, SCHS; An interview with ex-slave James Johnson revealed that "One of [Johnson's] feet was mashed off and the other badly damaged by handling bales of cotton several years ago." Rawick, *American Slavery*, narrative of James Johnson, 3A.

<sup>163</sup> See Alms House Hospital Register, 1841-1856, April 24, 1842, December 27, 1844, January 2, 1846, December 9, 1853, August 29, 1854, October 26, 1855, November 5, 1855, and February 9, 1856, Charleston Alms House Records, CCPL; Also see Robert Pringle to Edward and John Mayne and Edward Burn, December 14, 1742, in Edgar, *Letterbook of Robert Pringle*, vol. 2, 461; and Marine School Ship *Lodebar* Log Book, December 29, 1862, SCL.

<sup>164</sup> Hibernian Society Minutes, December 2, 1845, page 351, SCHS; See Sweeney in the 1856, 1859, and 1860 city directories, and in the 1860 U.S. Census.

Connecticut, after Patrick had been “disabled by an accident from getting a livelihood” in Charleston.<sup>165</sup>

Drowning was another common risk for those who entered the hustle and bustle of the waterfront. In all, death records recorded 310 drownings among whites, free blacks, and slaves in Charleston between August 1819 and April 1865. Of those 310 deaths, 293 or 94.5 percent of the victims were male. And of the 293 men who drowned during those years, 248 or 84.6 percent were sixteen years of age or older. In other words, 248 or exactly 80 percent of the 310 people who drowned in Charleston over a period of nearly half a century were men of working age. Of course, some of the victims died while fishing, bathing, or swimming, and others perished during hurricanes or severe storms. A few no doubt fell into a dock or mill pond while in a drunken stupor. But the majority were men who drowned while toiling as stevedores, wharf hands, porters, clerks, seamen, captains, and merchants on the city’s waterfront wharves.<sup>166</sup>

In January 1832, for instance, an unidentified slave – perhaps a hired-out wharf hand – fell from Gibbs’ North Wharf and his body was not recovered until the next day.<sup>167</sup> A slave owned by factor and wharf owner George Chisolm was found drowned in a dock in September 1834.<sup>168</sup> Likewise, three slaves belonging to Accommodation Wharf owner Joseph Prevost drowned in March 1855, and two “valuable negroes” owned by captains Barlin and Brooks drowned “off from the Wharf where the Steamer Gordon

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<sup>165</sup> New England Society Records, March 31, 1852, and April 2, 1852, SCHS.

<sup>166</sup> Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL.

<sup>167</sup> *Charleston Courier*, January 2, 1832.

<sup>168</sup> Schirmer Diary, September 25, 1834, SCHS.

was laying” in August 1859.<sup>169</sup> Waterfront clerks too were prone to falling or being knocked into the docks. Zamba, a slave who claimed to be an African king, worked as a porter in his master’s auction store on Vendue Range. He recalled how he had saved a young Scottish clerk named Mr. Thomson in the early years of the 1800s. Zamba and Thomson had been ordered to go down to the wharf and arrange for some goods to be unloaded from a vessel for a sale the next day. According to the slave’s account

The ship lay across the end of one of the wharves, and was a few feet distant from the land; in walking up the plank which reached to the ship’s gangway, Mr. Thomson unfortunately slipped his foot, and was instantly swept by the tide, which runs pretty strong here, astern of the ship, and in a few minutes would have been far out in the harbour. At this season, sharks were tolerably plentiful about the harbour, ranging about for prey at all times; so that poor Mr. Thomson, who could only swim a few strokes, was in imminent danger.

Able to “swim like a seagull,” Zamba quickly jumped into the water and reached Mr. Thomson just as he was about to sink below the surface. With Thomson “in a state of insensibility” and Zamba “well ducked and completely out of breath,” a boat soon came alongside and pulled the two men to safety.<sup>170</sup>

As this account suggests, drowning was not the only threat to life and limb if a worker fell off a wharf or docked vessel. A young slave owned by merchant John Holland slipped off of Crafts’ Wharf in September 1810, and while being swept away by the tide was “dragged down by a shark.” When the shark was caught, pieces of the

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<sup>169</sup> Schirmer Diary, March 18, 1855, and August 13, 1859, SCHS.

<sup>170</sup> Neilson, *Life and Adventures of Zamba*, 169-70; Schirmer noted the near drowning of a clerk named Keetz Rennekers in August 1843, and the drowning of an Accommodation Wharf clerk named James L. Yates in December 1851; Schirmer Diary, August 17, 1843, and December 21, 1851, SCHS; Also see *Charleston Courier*, January 1, 1829, quoted in Charles R. Rowe, *Pages of History: 200 Years of the Post and Courier* (Charleston: Evening Post Publishing Co., 2003), 17; *Charleston Courier*, March 19, 1835; *The Globe* (Washington, D.C.), October 31, 1835; *Charleston Mercury*, February 15, 1858; and Schirmer Diary, October 19, 1835, July 13, 1847, February 15, 1858, and September 5, 1859, SCHS.



slave's arm and coat were found in its maw.<sup>171</sup> The *Charleston Courier* announced in August 1818 that a shark measuring twelve feet long and six feet around had been caught at Daniell's Wharf, and advised readers that "This should operate as a caution to persons who are in the habit of bathing at the different wharves in the city."<sup>172</sup> Nor was the proximity of these sharks to the wharves mere flukes. During the 1840s and 1850s, master cooper Jacob Schirmer frequently noted the capture of large sharks "off Southern Wharf" or "near the Wharves," some measuring over eleven feet long.<sup>173</sup>

Severe weather oftentimes posed a threat to exposed dock workers. Captain Henry P. Burr wrote to his sister in July 1845 about "the enervating effect of the weather" in Charleston and described how "the oppressive heat disinclines one from any exertion beyond what necessary business calls for."<sup>174</sup> But for those living hand to mouth, waterfront labor was a necessity that transcended any disinclination or debilitation brought on by severe summer heat. One month prior to Burr's letter, Schirmer noted in his diary that a seaman had died on Magwood's Wharf "by Heat internally &

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<sup>171</sup> *The Hornet, or Republican Advocate* (Maryland), October 3, 1810; Abraham Motte, *Charleston Directory and Stranger's Guide for the Year 1816; Including the Neck to the Six Mile House*. Charleston: Printed for the Publisher, 1816 (hereafter cited as 1816 city directory); Henry B. Hill, who served as a cabin boy on the Charleston brig *Chili* in the 1830s, chronicled the death of his grandfather in Massachusetts. According to Hill, the man was a shipmaster and one day fell overboard, "and the minute he struck the water he was bitten in halves by [a] shark." Henry B. Hill, *Jottings from Memory, from 1823 to 1901* (s.n., 1910), 116-7.

<sup>172</sup> *Charleston Courier*, August 17, 1818, quoted in Rowe, *Pages of History*, 17; Dr. Thomas Y. Simons advised the Charleston City Council in December 1842 that a bath house was essential to the health of the city's residents, but that the threat of sharks rendered it too dangerous to bath in the salt water of the harbor during the summer months; City Council Minutes, December 28, 1842, *Southern Patriot*, December 29, 1842, and *Charleston Mercury*, December 30, 1842.

<sup>173</sup> See Schirmer Diary, October 5, 1847, August 1, 1849, May 17, 1851, June 8, 1852, June 8, 1853, and June 1, 1856, SCHS.

<sup>174</sup> The Letters of Captain Henry P. Burr and His Family, July 24, 1845, CRCMS.

externally.”<sup>175</sup> Nor was Burr entirely immune to the effects of the heat, complaining to his father during a later trip to the city in June 1847 about “a most severe headache...brought on by exposure to the sun.”<sup>176</sup>

Charleston indeed was no stranger to dangerous heat waves.<sup>177</sup> Schirmer observed on July 4, 1860, that though the morning weather was pleasant, the day was “very hot and so intense was the heat that an unusual number of deaths have taken place by Sun Stroke.” After the festivities of Independence Day had concluded and the well-off retreated to the relative cool of their piazzas and parlors, working people remained exposed. Schirmer reflected on July 6 that “the last few days we have had the most intense heat as ever was known” and noted that local newspapers reported “a large number of deaths caused from the effects of the heat.”<sup>178</sup> Also on July 6, the *Charleston Mercury* declared, “It has been terrible; for eight long days our citizens have panted and sweltered.” Temperatures reached as high as 102 degrees, resulting in “a record of deaths from exposure, sun strokes, &c., unexampled in the history of Charleston.” In addition to those reported dead on previous days, the *Mercury* informed readers that a cooper on Gadsden’s Wharf named Peter Dolan, who “had been complaining of the heat on Monday and Tuesday,” died suddenly on Wednesday afternoon. Also “prostrated from the excessive heat,” a drayman named Myers was stricken and taken to the ice house where

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<sup>175</sup> Schirmer Diary, June 24, 1845, SCHS.

<sup>176</sup> The Letters of Captain Henry P. Burr and His Family, June 4, 1847, CRCMS.

<sup>177</sup> See Schirmer Diary, September 17, 1842, May 31, 1844, after August 1850, after July 31, 1851, June 30, 1854, after July 1854, after June 1858, August 8, 1858, and September 11, 1861, SCHS; Also see *Charleston Standard*, August 2, 1854, quoted in *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), August 7, 1854.

<sup>178</sup> Schirmer Diary, July 4, 1860, and July 6, 1860, SCHS.

he was revived. On July 7, the newspaper continued “the sad record of the unfortunate and often fatal results from this terrific term,” which included three laborers who were being treated at Roper Hospital, and then offered the following editorial on the heat wave: “Certainly the past week has left a mark upon the history of Charleston which it has never before experienced. We may have had, at rare intervals, terms of as excessive heat, but such have never before been accompanied with a glut of murders, or even signalized by more than an occasioned sun stroke. It is to be hoped that the pre-eminence of this week may never be contested.”<sup>179</sup> The deaths of large numbers of the city’s workers over a short duration clearly distressed at least some elite Charlestonians, not least because of the economic loss of crucial labor power including valuable slaves.

Bitter cold too made for miserable and sometimes dangerous work conditions. Christopher Fitzsimons wrote to Gustavus and Hugh Colhoun in Philadelphia in February 1803 explaining that “a heavy fall of snow has so completely inundated our streets that it would be almost impracticable [*sic*] and certainly injurious to ship cotton at such a crisis.”<sup>180</sup> Even visiting captains from New England states occasionally noted the unexpected cold they encountered in Charleston.<sup>181</sup> In January 1834, Jacob Schirmer observed that freezing rain had created icicles that were hanging from the trees. A few weeks later, wharfinger John Crawford wrote to Vanderhorst Wharf owner Elias

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<sup>179</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, July 6, 1860, and July 7, 1860, quoted in *New York Herald*, July 11, 1860; Myers was perhaps Henry Meyers, who was listed as a drayman in the 1860 city directory; Schirmer noted on July 11 that the city’s “Bill of Mortality this week is unusually large,” and included “12 deaths by the intense heat.” The next day, he reported that “the heat of the weather [was] so intense” that twenty firemen were overcome while fighting a blaze on Moreland’s Wharf. Schirmer Diary, July 11, 1860, and July 12, 1860, SCHS.

<sup>180</sup> Christopher Fitzsimons to Gustavus and Hugh Colhoun, February 18, 1803, Christopher Fitzsimons Letterbook, 1799-1813, SCL.

<sup>181</sup> See, for example, James Carr Papers, SCL, and The Letters of Captain Henry P. Burr and His Family, December 7, 1838, CRCMS.

Vanderhorst that Dublin – a slave wharf hand who Crawford had hired from Vanderhorst – had been unable to work for some time. “During the late Icy weather,” Crawford elucidated, “he fell down & broke one or two of his Ribs.”<sup>182</sup> Nor were such treacherous work conditions unusual. Schirmer frequently noted the “stinging cold,” “thick Ice,” sleet, and snow he encountered on the waterfront.<sup>183</sup> “Raw Rainy & Cold...weather very unpleasant, looks like snow,” he wrote on January 19, 1851. And on New Year’s Day 1856, the cooper complained that “the weather was so unpleasant that very little work could be done.”<sup>184</sup>

In addition to heat and cold, thunder storms threatened dock workers. A twenty-six-year-old slave named Isaac belonging to former governor and rice mill and wharf owner Thomas Bennett was struck by lightning and killed during the summer of 1847.<sup>185</sup> It was not uncommon for vessels moored at the wharves to be struck by lightning, and persons on board occasionally were killed.<sup>186</sup> Besides lightning, the fall and spring months often brought hail, such as on May 2, 1848, when after a severe storm “the Ground was covered with Hail, some of them measured nine inches in circumference.”<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> John Crawford to Elias Vanderhorst, January 31, 1834, Wharf Business Papers: Vanderhorst Wharf, 1698-1892, Vanderhorst Family Papers, 1689-1942, SCHS.

<sup>183</sup> For example, see Schirmer Diary, March 16, 1828, February 2, 1843, January 7, 1847, December 16, 1851, January 20, 1852, January 10, 1856, and January 24, 1857, SCHS.

<sup>184</sup> Schirmer Diary, January 19, 1851, and January 1, 1856, SCHS; As this comment suggests, bad weather such as strong winds and heavy rain sometimes did prevent waterfront work. See Logbook of the Ship *Robin Hood*, February 20, 1833, CRCMS; Logbook of the Schooner *Hopewell*, March 15, 1844, and March 16, 1844, CRCMS; Journal of the Schooner *Ganges*, December 23, 1844, CRCMS; Abstract Logbook of the Bark *Edward*, October 11, 1845, and December 24, 1845, CRCMS; Journal of the Schooner *Nameaug*, June 9, 1856, CRCMS; and Henry C. Keene Letters, March 3, 1859, and November 1, 1859, CRCMS.

<sup>185</sup> Schirmer Diary, July 27, 1847, SCHS; Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL.

<sup>186</sup> Schirmer Diary, August 6, 1841, May 2, 1848, June 8, 1853, and June 8, 1861, SCHS.

Waterfront laborers also had to be aware of ship and cotton fires, bursting steamship boilers, and the falling walls of nearby dilapidated warehouses, not to mention a regular traffic of drunkards, pickpockets, and violent criminals.<sup>188</sup> Stray dogs roamed the wharves and “wild cattle dash[ed] madly about the streets” while being driven from the southernmost wharves to butcher pens in the northern neighborhoods of the city.<sup>189</sup> Vessels docked at the waterfront with captains and crewmen sick with yellow fever and other deadly diseases. Ships’ holds were moldy, damp and dirty, and home to pests such as rats and cockroaches.<sup>190</sup> Offal, rubbish, dead animals, and other “nuisances” were cast onto the wharves and into the docks where they lingered before being flushed out with the tide.<sup>191</sup> Some citizens recommended that the docks be cleaned more regularly, “as the

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<sup>187</sup> Schirmer Diary, May 2, 1848, SCHS; Also see Schirmer Diary, April 12, 1832, June 5, 1836, June 4, 1840, May 9, 1846, August 4, 1850, May 31, 1855, and April 1, 1860, SCHS.

<sup>188</sup> For items regarding the danger of ship and cotton fires, see City Council Minutes, January 20, 1847, *Southern Patriot*, January 21, 1847; City Council Minutes, September 20, 1859, *Charleston Mercury*, September 22, 1859; *Charleston Mercury*, June 16, 1859; Also see *New York Herald*, April 8, 1858; For examples of steamship boilers bursting, see Henry L. Pinckney, “Report; Containing a Review of the Proceedings of the City Authorities, from the 4th September, 1837, to the 1st August, 1838. With Suggestions for the Improvement of the Various Departments of the Public Service. Presented to the City Council, August 6, 1838, By Henry L. Pinckney, Mayor” (Charleston: Thomas J. Eccles, 1838), 4-5, 46-7, 49; Petition, ND #3512, SCDAAH; Schirmer Diary, August 14, 1830, December 22, 1853, March 30, 1854, and May 3, 1858, SCHS; Also see *Charleston Courier*, August 5, 1823, and August 6, 1823, quoted in *Independence Chronicle & Boston Patriot*, August 16, 1823; For examples of falling walls near the waterfront, see Schirmer Diary, January 28, 1845, July 12, 1853, and March 19, 1859, SCHS; *Charleston Patriot*, January 29, 1845, quoted in *Boston Daily Atlas*, February 4, 1845; and *Charleston Mercury*, no date, quoted in *Daily Morning News* (Savannah), March 21, 1859; Also see City Council Minutes, May 11, 1846, *Southern Patriot*, May 12, 1846, in which a special committee reported that a building at the corner of East Bay Street and Boyce’s Wharf was “in a decayed state” and was “dangerous to the safety of persons employed in its vicinity, or passing to, or from the wharf,” and recommended that the structure therefore be taken down “or so secured as not to endanger the lives of the citizens.”

<sup>189</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 57-8; City Council Minutes, May 19, 1857, *Charleston Mercury*, May 21, 1857.

<sup>190</sup> An 1840 city ordinance prescribed that “no vessel lying at a wharf, or in a dock, shall be smoked for the purpose of destroying rats,” and captain James Carr expressed his aversion to Charleston’s “large winged Cockroach, with many other legged & winged insects as well as offensive to the eye as the ear & feeling, among them the musquitoe [*sic*] will come first in rank.” Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 105; James Carr Papers, SCL.

filth collected in many of them emits effluvium,” which was thought to be “greatly injurious to health.”<sup>192</sup>

Similarly, perishable cargo sometimes arrived in Charleston rotten and putrid.<sup>193</sup> Port Physician Thomas Y. Simons informed the governor in 1824 that vessels from northeastern ports often arrived with rotten cabbage or other vegetables, which commonly were thrown onto the wharves to decompose.<sup>194</sup> In July 1844 the brig *Dante* docked at Commercial Wharves after a long voyage. Upon examination the vessel was found to have a leak, which had damaged nearly its entire cargo of corn and oats. A city ordinance from 1806 called for the removal from the city of “all damaged grain, and all putrid substances, by which the air shall or may be impregnated with foul and noxious effluvia.”<sup>195</sup> The city register, Dr. A. G. Howard, concluded that the introduction of this decaying cargo into the city “would prove prejudicial to the public health.” He therefore recommended that salvageable portions of the cargo be landed at the wharf, but that the

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<sup>191</sup> On November 11, 1838, seaman Henry P. Burr wrote about how he “picked a [pig’s] head from a pile upon the wharf last evening...& got the old Cook to boil it for Dinner.” The Letters of Captain Henry P. Burr and His Family, November 11, 1838, CRCMS; Also see Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, May 1824, SCDAH; and City Council Minutes, August 2, 1859, *Charleston Mercury*, August 5, 1859; For examples of complaints about nuisances in waterfront docks, see City Council Minutes, June 25, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, June 27, 1840; City Council Minutes, July 21, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, July 24, 1840; and City Council Minutes, August 3, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, August 5, 1840; For city ordinances and state acts regarding the throwing of various offensive materials into the docks or onto the wharves, see Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 106, 113, 129, 305, 394; and Walker, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1844-1854*, 17.

<sup>192</sup> Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, September 1799, in Governors’ Message, 1799 #744, SCDAH.

<sup>193</sup> See B. B. Strobel, “An Essay on the Subject of the Yellow Fever, Intended to Prove Its Transmissibility” (Charleston: Printed by Asa J. Muir, 1840), 172; At a City Council meeting in late August or early September 1837, it was resolved “that it shall hereafter be the duty of the Harbour Master to examine the Fruit and Vegetables, which may from time to time be brought by any vessel into this Harbour, and when he shall find any unsound Fruit or Vegetables on Board of any Vessel, he shall report the same to the Port Physician whose duty it shall be to have the same destroyed.” City Council Minutes, no date, City Council Minutes Manuscript, 1834-1836, CCPL.

<sup>194</sup> Governors’ Message, 1824 #1361, SCDAH.

<sup>195</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 257. Also see Eckhard, 265-6.

damaged and potentially deleterious grain “be discharged from the vessel into the outer edge of the channel, opposite said wharf; and that the vessel be then cleaned and properly ventilated.” But whereas this may have spared the residents of waterfront neighborhoods from the stink and potential risk of this cargo, the dock workers who unloaded, discarded, and swept away the remnants were left exposed.<sup>196</sup>

Finally, some of the cargo laborers handled was simply filthy and malodorous. The smell of guano was so pungent and offensive, for instance, that Charlestonians living on East Bay Street near Commercial Wharves petitioned the City Council in June 1854 “complaining of the annoyance and inconvenience” of having the fertilizer unloaded and stored so near their residences. Alderman James M. Eason introduced a bill to regulate the storage of guano, which was passed in October 1854 and prohibited its mass storage near occupied houses without the knowledge and consent of the inhabitants. It was much more difficult, of course, for dock workers to avoid the stench.<sup>197</sup>

Despite a reputation as a place to catch cool and salubrious sea breezes, the waterfront clearly was neither a safe nor healthy work environment. Add to this the tightly proscribed labor arrangements and an endless effort to dominate nearly every aspect of workers’ lives, and waterfront labor in antebellum Charleston was a hellish experience. This was especially true for the city’s black slaves. But as with slaves in cities and on plantations all over the Old South, Charleston’s enslaved dock workers resisted subjugation at every turn, whether by exploiting legal loopholes, overcharging

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<sup>196</sup> City Council Minutes, July 30, 1844, *Southern Patriot*, August 1, 1844.

<sup>197</sup> City Council Minutes, June 21, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, June 23, 1854; Horsey, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1854-1859*, 1; Also see Schirmer Diary, September 30, 1853, SCHS; Steam Ship *Southerner* vs. Ship *Harkaway*, Admiralty Minute Book, District of South Carolina, vol. 5 (1843-1857), NASER; and *Charleston Courier*, January 19, 1860.

unwary consumers, or singing subversive work songs. But the black slaves who long predominated the labor market on Charleston's docks and drays did not stop there. The next chapter will examine more fully not only the work, lives, and struggles of these vital bondsmen, but also their remarkable ability to capitalize on their employment positions on the wharves to overcome restrictions and to even escape enslavement.



**CHAPTER TWO**  
**“almost the whole of the working population are Negroes”:**  
**Charleston’s Enslaved Waterfront Workers**

From the colonial period through the first four decades of the nineteenth century common dock labor was dominated by black workers, slave and free. Stigmatized as “nigger work,” waterfront employment was shunned by most native white South Carolinians and southerners.<sup>1</sup> “From the nature of our Society,” alleged members of Charleston’s Chamber of Commerce, “menial occupations are necessarily confined to colored persons – White men disdain and are unwilling to undertake them.”<sup>2</sup> A white Virginian similarly explained to Frederick Law Olmsted that even destitute white laborers refused to do “certain kinds of work” typically reserved for slaves, and that “if you should ask a white man...to do such things, he would get mad and tell you he wasn’t a nigger.”<sup>3</sup> Unskilled urban wage labor was considered not only the province of black slaves, but also dishonorable and a blot on the character of anyone aspiring to upward social mobility in the Old South.<sup>4</sup> During three years of travels through eleven southern states, abolitionist

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 106; Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 234-5, 237-8; Christopher Silver, “A New Look at Old South Urbanization: The Irish Worker in Charleston, South Carolina, 1840-1860” in Samuel M. Hines and George W. Hopkins, eds., *South Atlantic Urban Studies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1979), vol. 3, 147; Among all free stevedores, porters, draymen, and carters – white and black – listed in Charleston’s 1850 U.S. Census, only approximately 5 percent were native white southerners, and only 5.5 percent in 1860. Native white southerners furthermore constituted 13.6 percent of all *white* waterfront and transportation workers in Charleston in 1850, but by 1860 they made up only about 7 percent of all such white workers. Instead, working-class southern whites tended to toil on the waterfront as cooper, riggers, rope makers, or ship carpenters; 1850 U.S. Census, and 1860 U.S. Census.

<sup>2</sup> Petition, 1826 #33, SCDAH.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1862), vol. 1, 82.

<sup>4</sup> An 1867 pamphlet recruiting immigrant labor to South Carolina stated, “It has been reported that manual labor was not honorable in the South. If this ever was a truth, hard work and steady employ have now become fashionable.” “South Carolina: A Home for the Industrious Immigrant” (Charleston: Joseph Walker, 1867), 24. Also see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old*

Philo Tower indeed observed that whites who made a living performing manual wage labor could “scarcely gain admittance into the [aristocratic] class, any sooner than the poor slave himself, of the regular woolly-heads, simon pure.”<sup>5</sup>

Those southern whites willing to endure the indignity of lowly occupations were not guaranteed employment since slaves usually could be hired for lower wages. Though the transportation rates and thus wages of all draymen and carters – white or black, free or enslaved – were regulated and set by the City Council, only the wages of black porters, day laborers, and other dock workers were fixed under the city ordinances enacted in 1806 and 1837.<sup>6</sup> Whites seeking waterfront employment therefore legally could request and receive higher wages than blacks. Renowned Charleston architect Robert Mills reported in 1826 that white workmen in the city earned \$2 per day, while black slaves received \$1. Mills also calculated that white mechanics – including coopers, riggers, and ship carpenters – earned an average wage of \$1.37½ per day, compared to 82½ cents per

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*South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982; and Michele Gillespie, *Free Labor in an Unfree World: White Artisans in Slaveholding Georgia, 1789-1860*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Tower added that “the poor white man in the south, whether native or not, suffers as much, if not more, from southern institutions, both civil and social, as do the colored race in the free states.” Philo Tower, *Slavery Unmasked: Being a Truthful Narrative of a Three Years’ Residence and Journeying in Eleven Southern States* (Rochester: E. Darrow & Brother, 1856), 109; Moreover, native whites performing “Negro work” often were associated with blacks or persons with ambiguous racial backgrounds. The wife of John Cain, one of only two white draymen in the 1819 city directory, was granted \$78 from the Charleston City Treasurer for taxes she paid from 1805 to 1820 under the “misapprehension” that she was a free woman of color. Perhaps, then, unskilled and impoverished Irish immigrants who arrived in the mid-nineteenth century were not the first or only workers who were not considered entirely “white” by their social betters. See John Wroughton Mitchell Lawyer’s Receipt Book, July 31, 1821, page 35, SCL; Schenck and Turner, *The Directory and Stranger’s Guide for the City of Charleston; Also a Directory for Charleston Neck between Boundary-Street and the Lines for the Year 1819. To Which is Added an Almanac: The Tariff of Duties on All Goods Imported into the United States; Rates of Wharfage, Weighing, Storage, Cartage and Drayage, &c. &c.* Charleston: Schenck & Turner, 1819 (hereafter cited as 1819 city directory); and Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> It is unclear whether the ordinance passed on September 4, 1801, applied to white as well as black porters and day laborers. White porters are not mentioned specifically, and the verbiage of the edict suggests that only free blacks and especially slaves performed such work in Charleston at the beginning of the nineteenth century. See *Charleston Times*, November 11, 1803. Also see Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 169-74, 177.

day paid to slave mechanics. Blacks had an even clearer advantage over whites when hired by the month. According to Mills, slaves could be hired for \$10-\$12 per month.<sup>7</sup> During the 1830s, the City of Charleston employed both black and white laborers for public works projects. A white worker reportedly earned about \$26 each month, but a slave laborer only cost the city \$12 per month plus \$1 each week for food. In all, the city's twenty-two white laborers cost \$572 per month or \$6,864 each year, whereas it cost \$415 a month or \$4,992 annually to employ twenty-six black slaves. In the aftermath of the Panic of 1837, Mayor Henry L. Pinckney urged the City Council to cut the number of municipal workers from forty-eight to thirty and to employ blacks rather than whites to save money.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes slaves could be hired for even less. In August 1846, for example, one master advertised his "PRIME young Negro" wharf hand and laborer for only \$8 per month.<sup>9</sup> As Scottish traveler James Stuart noted while in Charleston in March 1830, "the prodigious saving by employing slaves is obvious."<sup>10</sup>

Visitors to the port did not fail to note the ubiquity of slaves on and near the waterfront. A traveler wrote to a friend in Newburyport, Massachusetts, that he was

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Mills, *Statistics of South Carolina, Including a View of its Natural, Civil, and Military History, General and Particular* (Charleston: Hurlbut and Lloyd, 1826), 427-8.

<sup>8</sup> See Pinckney's report in the *Charleston Mercury*, September 21, 1838; According to Pinckney, the city paid white laborers \$1 per day. Pinckney's argument that "laborers can be obtained for less than \$20 per month" implied his preference for black workers since whites cost \$26 per month; Mayor Pinckney noted elsewhere in 1838, "It is also worthy of remark, that the prices of labour on the public works...have been unusually high." Pinckney, "Report, 1837-1838," 11; City records reveal that white laborers were still earning \$1 per day in the early 1850s. See Charleston City Council, "Statement of Receipts and Expenditures by the City Council of Charleston From 1st July 1849, to 1st July 1850," Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1850; and Charleston City Council, "Statement of Receipts and Expenditures by the City Council of Charleston From 1st Sept. 1850, to 1st Sept., 1851, With a List of the Tax Paying Citizens in the Upper and Lower Wards – Separated," Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1851.

<sup>9</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, August 5, 1846, and *Southern Patriot*, August 5, 1846.

<sup>10</sup> Stuart then added that "The wages of a white man in Charleston cannot be reckoned at less than 500 or 600 dollars." James Stuart, *Three Years in North America* (Edinburgh: Printed for R. Cadell, 1833), vol. 2, 103-4; Also see Clark, *South Carolina*, 162.

forcibly struck by the sheer proportion of blacks in the city. “The streets are thronged with them,” he observed. “They are the draymen, the market tenders, the carriers of burdens, hewers of wood and drawers of water.”<sup>11</sup> Liverpool merchant G. T. Fox made similar observations, noting that “In the city almost the whole of the working population are Negroes, all the servants, the carmen & porters.”<sup>12</sup> And as late as the mid-1840s, Scottish journalist Alexander Mackay remarked

Charleston has many peculiarities to remind the stranger of its latitude, but none so striking or so constantly before his eyes, as the swarms of negroes whom he meets. They are everywhere, in the capacity of domestic servants within and of labourers out of doors, about the wharves and shipping, and in the streets, toiling, singing or whistling and grimacing.<sup>13</sup>

Some visitors were repulsed by what they encountered. Despite prefacing his comments with a reminder to readers that “all of my sympathies are enlisted on the side of the poor slaves,” Philo Tower demurred during his visit to Charleston that “one of the most disgusting sights presented to a Northerner, in walking the streets of a Southern city, and one that meets him at every corner, not only in the streets, but on the quays, levees, and on all the public walks and squares, is the mighty, rolling, headlong mass, or tide of negro servants.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *The Liberator* (Boston), April 18, 1835.

<sup>12</sup> G. T. Fox Journal, November 5, 1834, Pease Collection, ARC; Charles Lyell, who visited Charleston in January 1842, observed that “the slaves have at present a monopoly of the labour market.” Charles Lyell, *Travels in North America in the Years 1841-2: With Geological Observations on the United States, Canada, and Nova Scotia* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), vol. 1, 151-2; As in the colonial period, porters in Charleston were common laborers employed to handle cargo on the docks and to transport goods and baggage between the waterfront and stores or hotels in the city.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Mackay, *Western World*, vol. 2, 183.

<sup>14</sup> Tower, *Slavery Unmasked*, 136-7; Others were appalled as well. “It is horrid to see such swarms of negroes as are seen in the streets of Charleston,” wrote John Perrier to Boston merchant Thomas Lamb in 1833. Perrier elucidated that “they are nearly all slaves; and I never like to see such beings; besides that, a

Native white waterfront workers, on the other hand, were few and far between. Cart owners seeking to hire drivers to transport goods to and from the wharves in late colonial Charles Town noted that “there is but very few white people who will follow that Employment in this Town.”<sup>15</sup> Of the 1,620 white Charlestonians listed in the 1790 city directory – the first to include any free transportation workers – only 13, or less than 1 percent, were draymen or carters.<sup>16</sup> These figures were relatively high, however. In the eleven subsequent city directories published between 1794 and 1819, an average of fewer than six (5.45) total white draymen and carters appeared.<sup>17</sup>

Since the wages of both black and white transportation workers were fixed equally, some waterfront employers demonstrated a racial predilection for hiring whites rather than slaves. For example, commission merchants Rowland Hazard and Peter Ayrault regularly patronized at least two white draymen during the 1790s. Every five to ten months between August 1796 and July 1798, Hazard and Ayrault settled drayage accounts with Henry Hyer and John Woodmancy with payments ranging between \$12.30

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negroe [sic] in the worst state of poverty is a disgusting animal; and thousands of that sort are to be seen here.” John Perrier to Thomas Lamb, June 1, 1833, Thomas Lamb Papers, MAHS.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 106; Charles Town was renamed Charleston when the city was incorporated in 1783.

<sup>16</sup> The 1790 city directory listed four draymen and nine carters; There were 8,089 whites in Charleston in the 1790 U.S. Census, so only about 20 percent of whites appeared in the 1790 city directory.

<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in the eight subsequent city directories published between 1822 and 1840-41, no white draymen or carters appeared. Other sources reveal, however, that a few whites were performing this work during this period. For example, a white drayman was arrested and fined \$5 for the improper driving of a cart in December 1839. See *Charleston Mercury*, December 19, 1839; City records show that fifty-three-year-old native Charlestonian and drayman Samuel Williams was admitted to the Alms House – which was generally reserved for whites only – on March 26, 1825, and died four days later. See Register of Transient and City Poor, 1803-1912, Charleston Alms House Records, CCPL; The Alms House had a hospital attached for the medical care of the local as well as transient poor. Usually no slaves or free blacks were admitted. For more information about the Alms or Poor House, see Pinckney, “Report, 1837-1838,” 39-40; Finally, the texts of a legislative act passed in 1764 as well as city ordinances enacted in 1805, 1806, and 1816 demonstrate that some whites indeed did work as draymen, carters, and possibly porters during the late colonial period and the early nineteenth century. See Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 33, 37-8, 59, 396.

and \$35.75.<sup>18</sup> The firm's records reveal no payments to slave draymen for transporting goods to and from the waterfront.

Meanwhile, the 1816 directory was the lone city guide between 1782 and 1848 to include porters, and only two white men – Henry Clime and P. Crevier – were listed.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, only one white stevedore – H. C. Cortea in the 1837-38 edition – appeared in the city directories prior to the 1850s.<sup>20</sup> These figures confirm that during the early decades of the nineteenth century few whites were willing to perform waterfront labor. But unlike the wages of white draymen and carters, those of white dock workers were not

<sup>18</sup> William R. Bagnall, *The Textile Industries of the United States* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1893), vol. 1, 283-4; Hazard and Ayrault employed a third drayman named Henry Grimes. Though Grimes likely was also white, there is no evidence to substantiate his race. None of these three draymen were literate and thus all accepted their payments by making their marks. Hazard & Ayrault Company Receipt Book, 1796-1805, SCL; Hyer resided on Boundary Street (later Calhoun Street) and was listed as a drayman in the 1801, 1802, 1807, 1809, and 1816 city directories; John Dixon Nelson, *Nelson's Charleston Directory and Strangers Guide for the Year of our Lord, 1801. Being the Twenty Fifth Year of the Independence of the United States of America, until July Fourth*. Charleston: Printed by John Dixon Nelson, 1800 (hereafter cited as 1801 city directory); J. J. Negrin, *Negrin's Directory for the Year 1807: Containing Every Article of General Utility*. Charleston: J. J. Negrin, 1807 (hereafter cited as 1807 city directory); Richard Hrabowski, *Directory for the District of Charleston: Comprising the Places of Residence and Occupation of the White Inhabitants of the Following Parishes: to Wit -- St. Michael, St. Philip, St. Philip on the Neck, St. John (Colleton), Christ Church, St. James (Santee), St. Thomas and St. Dennis, St. John (Berkeley), St. Stephen and St. James (Goose Creek)*. Charleston: Printed by John Hoff, 1809 (hereafter cited as 1809 city directory); Hyer is also spelled Hire and Heir in some city directories; Both Woodmancy and Hyer appear in court records. In 1806 bricklayer John Duggan was indicted for assaulting John and Ann Woodmancy, and when James Oliver was indicted for murder in 1809, Henry Hyer was among twelve witnesses, including wharf owner George Chisolm, to the coroner's inquest of the deceased, an Irish printer named James Walsh. In rendering this public service Hyer was required to swear an oath. These records suggest that Woodmancy and Hyer were white rather than free black draymen. Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1806-24A, and 1809-7A, SCDAH.

<sup>19</sup> The 1816 city directory listed 3,181 whites, so only 0.063 percent were white porters. A third porter appearing in the 1816 directory, Amos Cruckshanks, is identified later as a free person of color (denoted as "FPC") in the 1819 and 1822 city directories. The 1816 directory intentionally did not include free persons of color; Whites do not appear again as porters until the late 1840s, after the arrival of Irish and German immigrants. See J. L. Dawson and H. W. DeSaussure, *Census of the City of Charleston, South Carolina, for the Year 1848*. Charleston: J. B. Nixon, 1849; Also see John H. Honour, *A Directory of the City of Charleston and Neck for 1849; Containing the Names, Residences and Occupations of the Inhabitants Generally: to Which is Appended, a List of the Banks, Insurance Companies, Societies, Fire Department, Military, and Various Other Matters of General Interest*. Charleston: Printed by A. J. Burke, 1849 (hereafter cited as 1849 city directory).

<sup>20</sup> Archibald Cohler, listed as a stevedore in the 1830-31 city directory, was the first and only free black stevedore to appear prior to the 1850 U.S. Census; One white and one free black stevedore were listed in the 1848 municipal census, but no names were given; 1837-38 city directory.

constrained by law and could exceed the wages prescribed for slave porters and day laborers. Consequently, waterfront employers who hired the city's relatively few whites not only exercised their racial preference for white workers, but also revealed an economically irrational willingness to pay higher wages than if they engaged blacks. But the fact that so few white porters and other waterfront workers were listed in the city's directories also demonstrates that most employers indeed hired blacks. And unwilling to work for slave wages, the vast majority of native white southerners left such vital but largely unskilled waterfront and transportation occupations to the city's copious slave laborers.<sup>21</sup> In short, black slaves essentially monopolized common dock work in Charleston from the colonial period through the early nineteenth century.

White Charlestonians frequently placed notices in the city's newspapers regarding their slave property working on the waterfront.<sup>22</sup> In 1799 Archibald Calder announced the absconding of his slave Cyrus, who was "well known upon all the wharves in Charleston, as a drayman."<sup>23</sup> A runaway advertisement that paradoxically appeared in the New York abolitionist newspaper *The Emancipator* called for the arrest of a mulatto slave named Ben Elliot, who despite being "rather dandyish" was "in the habit of

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<sup>21</sup> Ira Berlin and Herbert Gutman report that less than 2 percent of native-born white southerners undertook unskilled wage labor of any kind in late antebellum Charleston. Ira Berlin and Herbert Gutman, "Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves," *American Historical Review* 88 (December 1983): 1187.

<sup>22</sup> Silver, "A New Look at Old South Urbanization," 156-7.

<sup>23</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, June 7, 1799, and *Charleston Mercury*, August 23, 1799; John Smith warned readers in January 1808 "not to employ my two fellows, ABRAM and JACOB – the first a carpenter, the other a stevadore [*sic*]," both of whom had been hiring themselves out without Smith's permission. *Charleston Times*, January 2, 1808; In addition to the contemporary accounts cited above, see Loren Schweninger, "Slave Independence and Enterprise in South Carolina, 1780-1865," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 93 (April 1992): 113; Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 11; and Robert S. Starobin. *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 9, 30.

working about the wharves as a Stevedore or an Assistant.”<sup>24</sup> Captain Richard Clark claimed that a description of his servant Ely – who “had a badge to work on the wharves generally, [and] was also hired by Mr. W[illiam]. Patton, to work on the Steamboat wharf” – was “needless, as he is well known.”<sup>25</sup> And Peter Bee offered a ten-dollar reward in April 1807 for the return of Sancho, a twenty-eight-year-old runaway slave who “Had on when he went away...his Badge as a Porter No. 20, by which means he gets work about Gadsden’s Wharf, as he was seen there last Monday.”<sup>26</sup>

Just as Bee hoped that Sancho’s slave badge would assist in the identification and return of his fugitive bondsman, these badges help approximate the number of slaves who worked on the waterfront during the first half of the nineteenth century. Charleston’s city directories did not include slaves, and while U.S. Census records decennially reveal the total number of slaves residing in the city, they fail to provide slaves’ occupations. Scholars therefore can only estimate how many enslaved wharf hands, porters, draymen, and carters toiled on Charleston’s waterfront. Slave badges, which again were required to be purchased anew annually, offer the best resource for this undertaking. The most recent and comprehensive scholar of Charleston’s slave badges calculated the number of tags sold each year – and thus hypothetically the number of slaves who hired out on the

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<sup>24</sup> *The Emancipator* (New York), May 12, 1836; This advertisement also appeared in the *Charleston Courier*, March 3, 1835, suggesting that Ben was on the run for over a year and was thought to possibly have fled to New York.

<sup>25</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, December 3, 1836; Richard Clark was listed as a pilot in the 1835-36 city directory, and as a captain and pilot in the 1840-41 directory. William Patton, the future owner of Patton’s Wharf, was listed in the 1830-31 directory as a wharfinger, and in the 1835-36 directory as employed at the Steam Packet office on Fitzsimons’ Wharf; James Smith, *The Charleston Directory and Register for 1835-6. Containing the Names, Occupations, and Residences of Persons in Business, &c. Collected by James Smith and The City Register; Consisting of a Variety of Useful Information, Connected with Our Trade and Commerce*. Charleston: Daniel J. Dowling, 1835 (hereafter cited as 1835-36 city directory).

<sup>26</sup> *Charleston Times*, April 17, 1807.



waterfront and elsewhere in the city – between 1800 and 1865. These estimates range from as few as 302 badges in 1809 to a prolific 5,196 sold in 1860.<sup>27</sup>

<u>Badge Year</u>	<u>Number of Badges</u>
1800	2,116
1805	1,354
1810	656
1815	1,898
1820	2,050
1825	3,269
1830	3,459
1835	3,508
1840	4,191
1845	3,843
1850	4,135
1855	3,834
1860	5,196
1865	88

By 1807 each occupational category of slave badges was numbered independently. So, for example, if a surviving fisher badge from 1820 was stamped or engraved with the number 100, then it can be ascertained that at least 100 slaves worked out as fishermen in the year 1820. Porter badges were issued not only to enslaved porters but also to hired-out slave draymen, carters, and day laborers, many and probably most of whom worked on the docks. In the early twentieth-century Charleston journalist and lay historian John Bennett reported seeing a porter badge numbered 1376 from 1842. An extant 1847 porter badge is numbered 1283.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that in the 1840s well over 1,000 of Charleston's slaves were employed as porters, draymen, carters, and day laborers. Since strict enforcement of badge laws was sporadic and some slaves –

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<sup>27</sup> For the estimated number of slave badges in each year between 1800 and 1865, see Greene, *Slave Badges*, 86, 99, 108, 119, 133-4, 157, 167.

<sup>28</sup> Greene, *Slave Badges*, 79-80, 128, 3, 80; Greene also refers to Bennett seeing an 1843 porter badge number 1375. One of these reports may be in error. Greene, 80.

including runaways – illegally were hired to work the docks without a badge, the actual number was probably even higher.

Furthermore, in two years the city published the number of badges produced for each occupational category. In 1850, 4,480 total slave badges were made, 1,400 or 31.3 percent of which were for porters.<sup>29</sup> And of the 6,350 badges made for 1851, 1,600 or 25.2 percent were porter badges.<sup>30</sup> Despite an influx of unskilled immigrant laborers in the last two decades of the antebellum period – which will be examined in the next chapter – with more cotton passing through Charleston’s waterfront in 1849 than ever before, the demand for slaves to work on the city’s docks and drays was on the rise in the early 1850s.<sup>31</sup>

Badge statistics also provide an idea of how many drays and carts operated for hire in antebellum Charleston. Though slave draymen wore porter badges, the city also required all persons letting or driving for hire a dray, cart, or wagon to obtain badges or tags to be placed on the vehicles. In 1850 municipal officials ordered 415 dray and 145 cart badges.<sup>32</sup> Over the years the number of drays and carts – and thus the number of draymen and carters – had increased as the amount of cotton arriving in Charleston swelled. According to a report of a South Carolina Railroad stockholders’ meeting held

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<sup>29</sup> Greene estimates that only 4,135 of the 4,480 badges were sold. Greene, *Slave Badges*, 126-8; U.S. Census records show that 19,532 slaves resided in Charleston in 1850, and therefore roughly 23 percent (4,480/19,532) of the city’s slaves engaged in hired-out occupations that required a badge, and approximately 7 percent (1,400/19,532) of the city’s slaves worked out as porters.

<sup>30</sup> Greene, *Slave Badges*, 136.

<sup>31</sup> In 1849, 458,000 cotton bales were exported. The previous high was 422,000 bales in 1845. Collins, “Charleston and the Railroads,” 100, Table V; Also see Van Deusen, *Economic Bases of Disunion in South Carolina*, 333, Appendix C.

<sup>32</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 32, 41-2, 394-6; Greene, *Slave Badges*, 127; Greene also reports that 700 dray and 400 cart tags were ordered in 1851. Greene, 136.

in the mid-1840s, there were 206 drays and 81 carts licensed in the city in 1831; in 1842 there were 231 drays and 107 carts; and as of May 1845, 311 drays and 127 carts.<sup>33</sup> Thus, probably more than 1,000 slaves worked on the city's docks in the decades before the Civil War, while hundreds of others hauled goods to and from the waterfront.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, waterfront employers had to decide whether to hire or purchase these slave workers. The calculations were complicated. On the one hand, hirers had to take care not to be too careless or cruel. If a slave leased for a fixed term of service became ill, was injured, or ran away, the hirer not only sustained the loss of the bondsman's labor but also remained responsible for the payment of the slave's wages for the duration of the contract.<sup>35</sup> In addition, many agreements obligated the hirer rather than the permanent master for costs such as medical bills.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, some extolled the advantages of hiring rather than owning workers. Hiring did not require the considerable capital investment of purchasing slaves. Former governor Thomas Pinckney pointed out in 1822 that employers of hired slaves also did not have to care for the "superannuated, the infirm, or the indolent, who are now

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<sup>33</sup> South Carolina Railroad Stockholders Meeting Report, in *Miscellaneous Communication to the General Assembly*, ND #169, SCDAH; Buchanan noted that these figures were "exclusive of contract carts" and other vehicles, such as omnibuses.

<sup>34</sup> Further evidence to help approximate the number of slaves who worked on the city's waterfront comes from the early postbellum period. Charleston's dock workers formed the Longshoremen's Protective Union Association just years after the Civil War, and in 1875 this mostly black union counted between 800 and 1,000 members. Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 129.

<sup>35</sup> Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, vol. 2, 369.

<sup>36</sup> In addition to medical attention, contracts also often required hirers to provide slaves with clothing and food. For example, see *Wharf Business Papers: Vanderhorst Wharf, 1698-1892, Vanderhorst Family Papers, 1689-1942, SCHS*; On the other hand, Charleston factor Charles Kershaw informed widow and planter Charlotte Anne Allston that he had spoken to Mr. Black about hiring Allston's slave James in the city, but that Black insisted that Allston provide James with clothing and shoes and also pay all doctors' accounts. Charles Kershaw to Charlotte Anne Allston, February 8, 1819, *Charlotte Anne Allston Factors' Letters, 1809-1824, SCHS*.

so heavy a tax on the proprietor.” Furthermore, an employer could select a hired-out slave with the requisite skills that matched a specific job. As Pinckney put it, the hirer could “contract for efficient service,” which, he added, “if the person employed, should be incapable or unwilling to perform, he would be discharged, and a more suitable subject engaged.”<sup>37</sup> Hired bondsmen, meanwhile, could be worked harder since the employer had little interest in the slaves’ long-term well-being or value. “Hired slaves are commonly treated more harshly, or with less care and attention, than those in possession of their owner,” explained a South Carolina judge in 1839. Employers generally were less concerned about hired-out slaves’ physical health, and “their moral qualities are almost always deteriorated” while in the employ of a temporary master.<sup>38</sup>

The South Carolina Railroad needed dozens of laborers at the company’s Charleston depot to unload cotton bales from the cars, roll the massive bundles around the rail yard, and load them onto drays bound for the Cooper River wharves.<sup>39</sup> In the early 1840s the company’s leaders debated whether to purchase slaves for these menial but indispensable tasks. President Tristram Tupper opposed calls for ownership, arguing in July 1840 that the railroad lacked the capital means for such a substantial expenditure. Tupper furthermore pointed out that ownership brought additional responsibilities while sacrificing the benefits of hiring. “The privilege of promptly dismissing an inferior, vicious, or otherwise worthless negro from our service” would be lost if slave laborers

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Pinckney specifically was arguing that the hire of free white domestic workers would be more economical than owning slaves. Pinckney also pointed out that “the families of the hired servants would be no incumbrance [*sic*] on the employer,” and concluded that “It may be fairly presumed, from what has been adduced, that hired service would be most efficient.” Achates [Thomas Pinckney], “Reflections, Occasioned by the Late Disturbances in Charleston” (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1822), 18-19.

<sup>38</sup> Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, vol. 2, 374.

<sup>39</sup> Slaves also were needed to man workshops in Charleston and to maintain the line elsewhere in the state.

belonged to the company. Meanwhile, though masters often protested the maltreatment of their hired-out slaves, employers likewise could complain to the master of a misbehaving or indolent worker. The railroad therefore also would stand to lose this mode of redress if it owned the slaves.<sup>40</sup>

But when James Gadsden assumed the presidency of the South Carolina Railroad later in 1840, he sought to reverse course.<sup>41</sup> Gadsden – who was also the owner of Gadsden’s Wharf – not only advocated for the company’s purchase of slave workers, but also called for the company to acquire a Cooper River wharf and then extend the railroad tracks to the waterfront. Gadsden calculated that “If labor owned could be substituted for labor hired, and we could own a wharf,” the railroad could reduce their overall expenses by between 20 and 25 percent. Acknowledging Tupper’s concerns about the initial cost of such an investment, Gadsden ensured that he was “not for spending any more money uselessly,” but stated that he was confident that a relatively small outlay in the short-term would be rewarded with considerable savings and profit.<sup>42</sup> To James Gadsden’s frustration and dismay, however, he was unable to persuade the Charleston City Council to allow the railroad tracks to be extended to the waterfront, and the company’s fiscally

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<sup>40</sup> Tupper insisted: “It is also important to have the eye of an owner to look to the treatment as well as the conduct of the slaves. If the Company owned them, the overseers might be cruel to them without redress; and it could not be expected they would attend much to their habits. But it is different where there is a master to appeal to, or to inquire after them, who feels nearly the same for them, [as] he does for his children, besides the protection of their value, which is a great stimulant to see they are not abused.” South Carolina Railroad Co. Semi-Annual Report, July 1840, 10-11, Pease Collection, ARC.

<sup>41</sup> A committee of stockholders supported Gadsden’s recommendation to purchase slave laborers for the railroad in November 1840, but the matter was referred to another committee and was not approved. Proceedings of the Stockholders of the SWRR Bank, November 17-20, 1840, 13, 15, Pease Collection, ARC.

<sup>42</sup> Gadsden argued that investing in slave laborers simultaneously would increase the value of the company’s stock. James Gadsden to James Edward Calhoun, July 25, 1842, James Gadsden Papers, SCL.

conservative board of directors restricted the acquisition of slaves “to single Fellows, who can only be purchased at great risk as to character and for Cash.”<sup>43</sup>

But just months after businessman and banker Henry Workman Conner replaced Gadsden as company president, the railroad reorganized its Charleston cotton yard labor force. On September 20, 1850, the directors resolved to hire black laborers for up to \$12 per month, but that if workers could not be procured for that rate then five or six slaves were to be purchased.<sup>44</sup> Evidentially unable to hire slaves for this amount, Conner was authorized two months later “to purchase 10 Male Negroes, on the best possible terms.”<sup>45</sup> By the spring of 1852 the railroad had embraced fully the purchase policy, buying fifty-four additional slaves at a sale in Aiken on April 27.<sup>46</sup>

Like the South Carolina Railroad, many wharf and mercantile companies in early and mid-nineteenth century Charleston calculated the comparative costs of slave ownership and slave hiring. Slaves purchased to work the docks not only were attached to waterfront property but also frequently were deeded to heirs along with the wharves on

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<sup>43</sup> Gadsden also noted that in 1846 the South Carolina Railroad suspended the purchase of slave laborers. James Gadsden to James Edward Calhoun, August 20, 1846(?), James Gadsden Papers, SCL.

<sup>44</sup> South Carolina Railroad Minute Book, September 20, 1850, page 4, SCHS.

<sup>45</sup> South Carolina Railroad Minute Book, November 20, 1850, page 9, SCHS; At a meeting in October 1851, “The President was requested to investigate the subject of Labor in Charleston Cotton Yard: and apply such remedy, and make such Contracts, as in his opinion would best promote the Company Interest.” Clearly, the board preferred to own rather than hire slave labor. South Carolina Railroad Minute Book, October 28, 1851, page 33, SCHS.

<sup>46</sup> At the meeting on April 20, 1852, “The Double Track Committee were [*sic*] requested to attend the Sale of Negroes at Aiken on the 27th inst. and to exercise their discretion in purchasing.” And at the meeting on May 20, 1852, “The purchase of 54 Negroes by the Committee on ‘the Double Track’ at the Sale at Aiken 27th ulto. was confirmed.” The price paid for these slaves is not revealed, but a slave was purchased from J. C. Sproull in 1852 for \$922.50. Also, it is unclear how many of these slaves worked at the company’s Charleston depot or cotton yard. However, the Charleston City Assessor reported in November 1858 that the company owed taxes for the cotton yard property, a “House and Lot occupied by the Negroes,” and twenty-six slaves. South Carolina Railroad Minute Book, April 20, 1852, page 42; May 20, 1852, page 43; and November 20, 1858, page 215, SCHS.

which they labored.<sup>47</sup> When Revolutionary War veteran and former mayor and governor Arnoldus Vanderhorst divvied up his substantial property holdings in 1810, he bestowed to his two younger sons (John Stanyarne and Elias) Vanderhorst Wharf “with all the Stores and buildings thereon...[and] Together with the Negro Slaves usually attached to the said Wharf.” In fact, Arnoldus and Elias Vanderhorst required those wharfingers who rented and managed their wharf to hire these enslaved wharf hands during the term of the lease.<sup>48</sup> William Pritchard Jr. granted his wife the use, rent, and profits of his wharf and “Wharf Negroes” for her support after his death in 1817.<sup>49</sup> In 1835 Simon Magwood prescribed that Magwood’s Wharf be given to his son Charles A. Magwood, along with nine male slaves who likely worked on the family’s wharf.<sup>50</sup> And Irish-born merchant James Adger (1777-1858) left to his wife all of his enslaved house servants, but not “the slaves that may be attached to and employed upon the Wharves now usually called Adgers [*sic*] North and South Wharves.” These slave wharf hands, along with the

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<sup>47</sup> City death records offer further evidence about slaves owned by and attached to wharf and mercantile companies. Two of Hamilton & Co.’s enslaved wharf hands, for example, died in the early 1840s. Between 1850 and 1860, Boyce and Co.’s Wharves lost three of its slave laborers. Three slaves owned by Mills, Beach, & Co. and Otis Mills & Co. – including a sixty-five-year-old drayman named Primus – died in the five years before the Civil War. And in February 1857, a fifty-year-old slave owned by Savannah Wharf accidentally drowned. See Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL; Also see Charleston Tax Records, 1860-1865, CLS; “List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1858”; and “List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1859.”

<sup>48</sup> Wills, vol. 32, 924-36, SCDAH; See Wharf Business Papers: Vanderhorst Wharf, 1698-1892, Vanderhorst Family Papers, 1689-1942, SCHS.

<sup>49</sup> Wills, vol. 33, 1297-1301, SCDAH; William Pritchard Jr., a shipwright, also mentioned the use and income of his slave ship carpenters. In fact, it was common for white shipwrights to own wharves in or near the city and to include in their wills enslaved ship carpenters who were attached to their ship building wharves. For example, in 1791 Paul Pritchard left his sons (William and Paul) thirteen slave ship carpenters and caulkers. And in 1852, James Marsh Sr. devised to his son “six Negro Carpenters and Caulkers.” See Wills, vol. 24, 963-6, and Wills, vol. 46, 219-23, SCDAH; When merchant and wharf owner Florian Charles Mey drafted his will in 1819, he specified that his “Wharf Servant” George be paid \$50 within one year of Mey’s death. Wills, vol. 38, 538-40, SCDAH.

<sup>50</sup> Wills, vol. 40, 475-8, SCDAH.

houses, stores, furniture, and other personal property “attached or appertaining to the said Wharves,” were bequeathed equally to his four sons.<sup>51</sup> Though Adger did not specify how many of his city slaves worked on the docks, he owned eighteen slaves in Charleston in 1850 and sixteen at the time of his death in 1858.<sup>52</sup>

Rather than transferred to family members, some attached slave wharf hands were sold along with their wharves. When Charles Edmondston sold his wharf, stores, and warehouses in November 1837, also auctioned were fifteen slaves who were said to be “accustomed to work on the wharf.”<sup>53</sup> Jacob Schirmer similarly noted in July 1853 the sale of West Point Mills and all of the attached mill and wharf hands to factor and commission merchant Thomas Bennett Lucas, who already owned a portion of Cannonsboro Wharf and Mill Company located on the Ashley River.<sup>54</sup> In 1860 the West Point property again was sold, including about 180 slaves, “most of them bought by the parties who purchased the Mill.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Wills, vol. 48, 338-50, SCDAH; In 1824 William Clarkson left his second son Kunhardt’s Wharf along with the “Negroes Debts &c due to the Said Wharf.” Wills, vol. 36, 1181-6, SCDAH; Also, in 1839 lumber merchant and wharf owner Robert Little bequeathed to his clerk, Robert Brodie, all of the lumber upon his wharf and in his waterfront stores at the time of his death, as well as his counting house desk and other personal property on the wharf or in the stores, “Except my Slaves, my Books & Valuable papers.” Wills, vol. 43, 565-79, SCDAH; And in 1840 William Smith Jr. instructed that “my Mansion house and Wharf property Should not be sold until the final division of my estates and I order and direct that my Executors and Trustees shall retain the Same with a sufficient Number of Negroes to manage the Wharf until the period of final distribution, unless some advantageous offer should be made for a sale.” Wills, vol. 43, 490-7, SCDAH.

<sup>52</sup> 1850 U.S. Census Slave Schedules. These records show that of the eighteen slaves, eleven were male and seven were female; “List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1858,” 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, November 10, 1837.

<sup>54</sup> Schirmer Diary, after July 1853, SCHS; Also see James B. Campbell Business Papers: The Cannonsboro Mill and Wharf Company, 1850-1865, folder 11/102D/7, James Butler Campbell Papers, 1814-1897, SCHS.

<sup>55</sup> Schirmer Diary, March 6, 1860, and March 13, 1860, SCHS; Charleston’s tax records reveal that West Point Mills owned ninety slaves in 1862, 1863, and 1864. Charleston Tax Records, 1860-1865, CLS; Also



Owned slaves were substantial financial assets as well as a wharf's labor force. When in February 1859 Lucas and C. M. Furman sought to buy out the portion of Cannonsboro "and the negroes thereon" owned by the late J. C. Blum, the representatives of Blum's widow reminded Lucas and Furman that the mill property had appreciated greatly in value. In particular they pointed out that aside from the real estate, "negroes are selling much higher than they did at the time they were purchased."<sup>56</sup> When Otis Mills and E. M. Beach petitioned the state legislature for the incorporation of Atlantic Wharves to form the Atlantic Wharf Company in 1859, they transferred "the said wharves with the Wharf hands" to the corporation, which was valued at \$400,000.<sup>57</sup> Tax records from 1858 show that Otis Mills & Co. – the proprietors of Atlantic Wharves – owned eighteen slaves, while the grain merchant firm Mills, Beach & Co. that operated on Atlantic Wharves possessed an additional thirteen slaves.<sup>58</sup> Finally, the owners of Railroad Accommodation Wharf Company, which was incorporated by the South

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see the petition for the incorporation of West Point Mill Company. Petition, 1860 #106, SCDAH; The owners of ship building wharves also sold their attached slave carpenters along with the other wharf property. For example, when Robert Eason retired in 1835, he advertised the sale of his wharf, ship yard, and ten slave mechanics, ship carpenters, and caulkers. The ad stated that "The wharf and Negroes to be sold together or separately." *Charleston Courier*, March 13, 1835; And a sale of the estate of shipwright John F. Knox in 1839 included a wharf (probably Knox's Wharf) and thirteen slave ship carpenters, "among whom are several prime Hands." *Charleston Mercury*, February 6, 1839.

<sup>56</sup> Henry, Elias and Daniel Horlbeck to C. M. Furman, J. B. Campbell, and T. B. Lucas, February 14, 1859, James B. Campbell Business Papers: The Cannonsboro Mill and Wharf Company, 1850-1865, James Butler Campbell Papers, 1814-1897, SCHS; The parties proceeded to debate the fate of Blum's share of the company's slaves, with the widow's agents urging immediate sale to ensure a substantial profit while slave prices remained high, and the mill arguing that these enslaved hands were absolutely vital to the operation of the firm and could not be spared until the end of the year. Henry, Elias, and Daniel Horlbeck to J. B. Campbell, February 21, 1859, and J. B. Campbell to Henry, Elias, and Daniel Horlbeck, March 19, 1859, James B. Campbell Business Papers: The Cannonsboro Mill and Wharf Company, 1850-1865, James Butler Campbell Papers, 1814-1897, SCHS.

<sup>57</sup> James B. Campbell Legal Case Papers: Otis Mills Litigation/Wharf Litigation (Land), 1856-1860, folder 11/102/8, James Butler Campbell Papers, 1814-1897, SCHS.

<sup>58</sup> "List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1858"; The "List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1859" recorded Otis Mills & Co. as owning seventeen slaves, and Mill, Beach & Co. as owning fifteen slaves; Also see Charleston Tax Records, 1860-1865, CLS.

Carolina General Assembly in December 1856, invested \$10,541.50 to purchase ten slave wharf hands.<sup>59</sup>

But a lack of capital prevented many wharf owners from purchasing enough slave laborers to carry out all of the required work, especially during the peak commercial season. As a result, most wharves were worked by a combination of owned and hired slave hands.<sup>60</sup> “Wanted. – Ten Able Bodied NEGROES, for Wharf Hands, whose wages will be punctually paid,” read an advertisement in Charleston’s *Southern Patriot* in December 1841.<sup>61</sup> In addition to the scores of slave porters, day laborers, draymen, and carters awaiting work at the waterfront stands, slaveowners frequently offered their enslaved wharf hands and transportation workers for monthly hire in the city’s

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<sup>59</sup> Of course, companies owning only male slaves could not benefit from natural reproduction, since the progeny of female slaves became the property of female slaves’ masters; Rutledge and Young Miscellaneous Business Papers, 1860-1861, SCHS; Records show that Railroad Accommodation Wharf indeed paid taxes for ten slaves in 1861, 1862, and 1863, and for seven slaves in 1864. Charleston Tax Records, 1860-1865, CLS; When Thomas Bennett Lucas and the other proprietors of Cannonsboro Mill and Wharf Company petitioned the state legislature for incorporation in 1857, they claimed ownership of fifty-four slaves to operate the rice and saw mills and work on the company’s Ashley River wharves and storehouses. Petition, 1857 #76, SCDAH; In 1859 the Cannonsboro Mills Company paid city taxes for forty-nine slaves. “List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1858.”; In 1859 the Cannonsboro Wharf and Mill Company paid \$150 in city taxes for fifty slaves. “List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1859.”

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Bennett Lucas informed his fellow owners of the Cannonsboro Wharf and Mill Company in August 1852 that though the corporation had purchased slave workers in February, there had yet to be a reduction in disbursements for slave hire. Lucas explained that as many as twenty of the wharf and mill slaves had been contracted for an entire year, and that their masters insisted that the company continue to employ the hired bondsmen – and pay the masters their wages – until the agreements expired in November and December. “Report to the Owners of Cannonsborough Property,” August 1852, James B. Campbell Business Papers: The Cannonsboro Mill and Wharf Company, 1850-1865, James Butler Campbell Papers, 1814-1897, SCHS; Ship building wharves and firms also utilized a combination of owned and hired labor. In May 1833, shipwrights James Marsh and James Poyas corresponded with Jesse D. Elliott of the U.S. Navy regarding the construction of a naval yard in Charleston. Marsh and Poyas informed Elliott that there were eight master shipwrights or ship building firms in the city, and that each owned between seven and nineteen slave ship carpenters. Marsh and Poyas reported that “These eight master carpenters own, in the aggregate, one hundred slave carpenters.” In addition, “There are about seventy-five transient negroes that work out by the day in the ship carpenter yard, when business will admit of their being employed.” Slave mechanics, such as house carpenters and joiners, also could be hired from their masters by the month, and common laborers could be hired by the day or by the month. U.S. Congress, 1st Session, 1833-1834, House Report, no. 541, May 13, 1833, page 19, Pease Collection, ARC.

<sup>61</sup> *Southern Patriot*, December 6, 1841.

newspapers. “TO HIRE. THREE prime wharf hands,” read a May 1835 ad in the *Southern Patriot*. The same newspaper announced the availability in July 1846 of a “WHARF HAND AND LABORER TO HIRE.” And a twenty-one-year-old slave carter and laborer was offered for hire in August 1841 for \$10 per month.<sup>62</sup>

Some white Charlestonians relied upon the monthly wages of one or two hired-out urban slaves to make ends meet. As G. T. Fox observed during his visit to Charleston in November 1834, “Many persons invest their property in slaves & let them out...& draw from their wages nearly their whole income.”<sup>63</sup> For example, the General Assembly received a request for assistance in 1800 from a widow named Mary Norton, who was “in indigent circumstances” after her valuable slave Cuffy – “from whose labor she derived so much of her support” – was executed for larceny and attempting to cut the throat of a white man.<sup>64</sup> Naomi Smith, who was nearly sixty years old and “very infirm,” found herself in a similar situation in November 1822 after her slave Caesar was executed for involvement in the alleged Denmark Vesey conspiracy. Caesar had been “a prime healthy able bodied negro” of about twenty-five years of age who clothed and supported himself at his own expense and regularly paid Smith \$10 each month out of his wages working as “an active drayman.” The woman’s only other source of income was \$4 per month from a fourteen-year-old slave boy and an annual \$100 stipend from the charitable

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<sup>62</sup> *Southern Patriot*, May 1, 1835; *Southern Patriot*, July 23, 1846; and *Charleston Courier*, August 24, 1841, Pease Collection, ARC.

<sup>63</sup> G. T. Fox Journal, November 5, 1834, Pease Collection, ARC.

<sup>64</sup> Cuffy was valued at £70, but Norton asked for more since the slave had provided such a substantial portion of her income. Norton received \$122.44 from the legislature. Petition, 1800 #189; Petition, 1801 #126; and Committee Report, 1800 #143, SCDAH.

St. Andrews Society. Though Smith did not object to Caesar's death sentence, this "peculiarly severe personal loss" forced her to turn to the state legislature for assistance.<sup>65</sup>

Few masters who hired out their slaves on the waterfront were so impecunious. Lydia Jane Ball Waring, whose name alone announced her familial connections and affluence, owned eleven urban slaves and hired out as many as seven to various employers in Charleston at one time.<sup>66</sup> For instance, the owners of Southern Wharf paid Waring \$47.67 in cash for the hire of Frederick for a total of five months and ten days in 1841.<sup>67</sup> One of Waring's contemporaries, Miss Juliet Georgianna Elliott, began hiring out slaves in Charleston as a substantial if not sole source of income as early as 1844. Each January, Elliott purchased numerous slave badges and then at the end of the year recorded in her personal account book the income generated by her slaves' wages. In 1853, for example, Miss Elliott collected \$865.25 from seventeen slaves. She raked in \$1,130 from her urban bondsmen in 1860, and was still living off these wages as late as

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<sup>65</sup> Charleston's Intendant (Mayor) James Hamilton attached a note to Smith's petition attesting that "her situation is one peculiarly hard and well entitled to the compassionate consideration of the Legislature." Petition, 1822 #128, SCDAH; Also see a similar petition from Catherine L. Faber, whose slave Polydor (a rope maker, sawyer, and "useful in all laboring branches") was executed for his involvement in the Vesey conspiracy. Petition, 1822 #125, SCDAH; Joseph Martin was indicted in the Court of General Sessions in 1829 for the cruel punishment of a slave with intent to kill after he was seen one evening on Fitzsimons' Wharf "pelting Archy, the slave of Miss Susan Evans, with stones, one of which hit the slave in the head and injured him badly thus harming Evans." Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1829-10A, SCDAH; Finally, Mrs. Mary E. Boyden's slave drayman Jacob was killed when the brick wall of a warehouse on Magwood's South Wharf fell on him during a fire. See Schirmer Diary, January 28, 1845, SCHS; *Boston Daily Atlas*, February 4, 1845; and Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL.

<sup>66</sup> Waring paid the Charleston City Treasurer \$22 in January 1842 for seven slave badges. Waring also owned sixteen plantation slaves. Lydia Jane Waring Estate Book, 1840-1847, January 31, 1842, page 24, and pages 2-11, SCHS.

<sup>67</sup> Lydia Jane Ball was married to Francis Malbone Waring, who died in 1839; Waring received \$34.34 for four months hire of Frederick on August 3, 1841, and she received \$13.33 for one month and ten days hire on October 7, 1841. Lydia Jane Waring Estate Book, 1840-1847, pages 19, 21.

1864.<sup>68</sup> Though Miss Elliott neglected to record to whom or where her slaves hired out, some most likely worked as porters or common laborers on the city's wharves. Meanwhile, the wife of well-off factor John Colcock was paid \$169.60 from Commercial Wharf for the hire of her hands.<sup>69</sup> And John Colcock's business partner, James Legare, received a total of \$192 from Commercial Wharf between July 1856 and July 1857 for the wages of his slave wharf hands James and Jim.<sup>70</sup>

Charlestonians who hired out their slaves had to choose whether to let them to urban employers or rural planters. Slaveowners seeking maximum profits simply hired their bondsmen to the highest bidder, regardless of where the employer was located. After hiring Frederick to Southern Wharf in 1841, Lydia Jane Ball Waring contracted him out to K. L. Ball's plantation for \$50 per annum beginning in November 1842.<sup>71</sup> Conversely, some rural masters hesitated sending their bondsmen to the city given the belief that slaves developed corrupting habits when exposed to the relative autonomy of the urban environment. In 1819 factor Charles Kershaw counseled Charlotte Anne Allston, a Georgetown District planter and widow who already had several slaves hiring

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<sup>68</sup> Juliet Georgianna Elliott, *Miss Elliott's Daily Account Book, 1844-1874*, CLS; Also see *Account Books of Benjamin Perry's Wards, 1841-1864*, SCHS.

<sup>69</sup> *Cash Book, January 1858-June 1859, February 17, 1859*, Legare, Colcock, and Company Records, 1855-1865, SCHS; J. S. Lewis received the payment from the wharf on Mrs. Colcock's behalf.

<sup>70</sup> *Cash Book, June 1856-December 1857, July 31, 1856, January 1, 1857, and July 29, 1857*, Legare, Colcock, and Company Records, 1855-1865, SCHS; These cash books also show that Mrs. J. J. Butler received \$24 in July 1858 from a commission merchant named Salas for the hire of Ben for two months. Also, Daniel Heyward was paid \$140 in August 1859 and \$98 in September 1860 by W. C. Bee & Co. for the wages of George. William C. Bee was a factor on Vanderhorst's Wharf in 1855. *Cash Book, January 1858-June 1859, July 10, 1858, and Cash Book, June 1859-February 1861, August 5, 1859*, Legare, Colcock, and Company Records, 1855-1865, SCHS; 1855 city directory.

<sup>71</sup> It appears that Frederick was hired out in the city from August 1841 until September 1842, and then was hired to the plantation from November 1842 through at least December 1847. Lydia Jane Ball Waring *Estate Book, 1840-1847*, SCHS; K. L. Ball was perhaps Keating Ball, who was listed as a planter and as possessing a residence at 21 East Bay Street in the 1840-41 city directory.

out in Charleston, not to continue employing her slave James in the city. Kershaw had spoken to a Mr. Black (likely merchant Alexander Black) about hiring James, but Black only offered \$10 per month. The factor therefore advised Allston to put James to work in the plantation fields, where “he will earn more than double what he will do in this place.” Besides this financial consideration, Kershaw warned Allston about the pitfalls of urban wage labor. “James may perhaps go on very well with Mr. Black for a few months,” he explained, “but after that he will have bad notions put into his head – he will want to work out and pay Wages which is much the same as giving him his freedom.” Kershaw then stated that as Allston’s factor in Charleston he would collect and forward James’s wages from Mr. Black if she chose to hire the slave in the city, but added, “you may be assured, James will not be obedient or attentive to his Work.”<sup>72</sup>

While some enslaved waterfront laborers were casually and regularly transferred back and forth between the city and plantation, habitual relocation was much less common for owned dock hands. The majority of owned urban slave stevedores, wharf hands, warehousemen, and even draymen and carters developed and possessed specific knowledge and skill sets for waterfront work that not only precluded rural field hands from performing such labor, but also rendered it uneconomical for skilled urban slaves to be put to work chopping cotton.<sup>73</sup> In short, waterfront and plantation laborers were not interchangeable. According to Daniel E. Huger Smith, who was born in Charleston in 1846 and split his own childhood between the city and the family’s plantation, rural

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<sup>72</sup> Charles Kershaw to Charlotte Anne Allston, February 8, 1819, Charlotte Anne Allston, Factors’ Letter, 1808-1824, SCHS.

<sup>73</sup> This is similar to how most skilled slaves on plantations, such as slave carpenters or boat hands, were separated from field hands and rarely if ever were employed in the fields. See Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, vol. 2, 416, 431-2.

plantation slaves were “quite distinct” from those who labored in Charleston.<sup>74</sup> Wharf owners’ wills also often distinguished between what was to be done on the one hand with “Wharf Negroes” or “Wharf Servants,” and on the other with their “plantation Negroes” or field hands.<sup>75</sup> There were exceptions, of course. Thomas H. Jones, a former slave stevedore from Wilmington, North Carolina, recalled that despite his experience and aptitude for urban waterfront labor and the fact that he was among only a few of his master’s slaves who “were kept at Wilmington,” he accompanied his master to his rural plantation every spring where he “acted as general waiter for the family.”<sup>76</sup> Jones was not put to work in the fields, but rather was assigned a task comparable in skill level to his work in the city.

Meanwhile, the actions of slaves laboring on Charleston’s wharves were governed by laws and regulations ranging from badges and hiring stands to fixed wages and work songs. The reexamination of several controversial legislative acts – the Negro Seamen Acts passed between 1822 and 1856, and the 1841 New York Ship Inspection Law – reveals additional information about the labor experiences and lives of the city’s enslaved

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<sup>74</sup> Smith, *Charlestonian’s Recollections*, 5, 9-11.

<sup>75</sup> See wills of William Pritchard Jr., Florian Charles Mey, Arnoldus Vanderhorst (1748-1815), and William Clarkson (Kunhardt’s Wharf). Wills, vol. 33, 1297-1301; Wills, vol. 38, 538-40; Wills, vol. 32, 924-36; and Wills, vol. 36, 1181-6, SCDAH; Claudia Dale Goldin introduced the concept of “elasticity of demand” for urban slaves, meaning that slaveowners collectively increased or decreased the aggregate number of urban slaves as slave values fluctuated. According to Goldin, masters sold urban slaves to the countryside when slave prices rose during the 1830s and 1850s. She also argued that when urban slaves were sold away from cities, substitute laborers – such as native whites, free blacks, or immigrants – took their occupational places. Though some free black wage laborers likely filled slaves’ vacated jobs, prior to the 1840s few immigrants performed waterfront work in Charleston. And this chapter has demonstrated that the vast majority of native whites shunned waterfront labor. Goldin’s claims seemingly did not apply to slave dock workers in Charleston. Claudia Dale Goldin, *Urban Slavery in the American South: A Quantitative History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

<sup>76</sup> Jones, *Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones*, 49; Robert Smalls similarly explained in 1863, “I have never lived on a plantation except when I waited upon private families and they moved out for a few months in the Winter season.” Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 373.

waterfront workers. The Negro Seamen Acts were a series of laws enacted in southern coastal states beginning in the early 1820s intended to prevent seditious communication between slaves and foreign or northern free blacks. Although South Carolina's Negro Seamen Acts have received the most scholarly attention, similar laws also were passed in Georgia (1829), North Carolina (1830-1831), Florida (1832), Alabama (1839, 1841), and Louisiana (1842), suggesting that the subsequent discussion and findings reach far beyond Charleston and inform the history of many antebellum southern ports. Though much has been written about the legal, political, and economic impacts of the Negro Seamen Acts, conspicuously absent has been a discussion of how the acts affected waterfront work and workers. Given that these laws sought to forestall the "evil consequences" of free black seamen maliciously mingling with and contaminating the city's slaves, it is important to consider their impact upon the hundreds and perhaps thousands of enslaved waterfront workers who were most exposed to the influences of seamen from all over the Atlantic World.<sup>77</sup>

The Negro Seamen Acts were prompted by the discovery and preemption in 1822 of the alleged slave revolt led by Charleston free black Denmark Vesey. White Charlestonians suspected that visiting free black seamen had encouraged Vesey and intended to assist the rebellion. Several of the meetings among the plot's leaders, for example, took place on the Cooper River waterfront, and the black conspirators planned to rendezvous at the docks and flee the city by water.<sup>78</sup> And according to the extant trial

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<sup>77</sup> Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, May 1851, SCDAH; Grand Jury Presentment, Richland District, May 1852, SCDAH.

<sup>78</sup> Reverend John B. Adger recalled in his memoirs that "Vesey had proclaimed amongst [the conspirators] that as soon as they had robbed the banks of their specie and the King street shops of their goods and got



transcript, among the thousands of slaves said to have been recruited for the Vesey plot were “600 men on the bay” and “some hundred draymen.”<sup>79</sup>

The South Carolina General Assembly responded swiftly and passed the first series of Negro Seamen Acts on December 21, 1822. Under the provisions of the legislation, free blacks employed on board vessels docking at a South Carolina port from any other state or foreign nation were to be seized and placed in jail until their vessels were ready to depart the state. Furthermore, the captains of these vessels were required to pay for the expenses of these confinements, and if they failed either to remove the free black seamen from the port or refused to pay for their detentions, the captains could be fined at least \$1,000 or imprisoned for two months, and the free black seamen could be sold as slaves.<sup>80</sup>

Proponents of the Negro Seamen Acts insisted that the laws were “a necessary precaution to prevent [colored seamen] access to our slaves” and that South Carolina had a right to self-preservation.<sup>81</sup> The South Carolina Association – a group of prominent

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everything on board ship, they should then sail away to San Domingo to enjoy their treasure.” Adger, *My Life and Times*, 52.

<sup>79</sup> Edward A. Pearson, ed., *Designs Against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 221-2; Robert Starobin points out that Vesey’s co-conspirators were “mostly slave draymen, sawyers, stevedores, ricemillers, ropewalk workers, and artisans.” Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*, 88; In addition to Pearson, recent works on the Vesey conspiracy include David Robertson, *Denmark Vesey*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1999; and Douglas R. Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey*. Madison, WI: Madison House, 1999; Michael P. Johnson, however, has prompted a reconsideration of the Vesey conspiracy. Johnson contends that scholars too uncritically have accepted the version of events as recorded in the official reports and trial transcripts, and argues that the Vesey plot in fact did not occur. See Richard C. Wade, “The Vesey Plot: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of Southern History* 30 (May 1964): 143-61; Michael P. Johnson, “Denmark Vesey and his Co-Conspirators,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (October 2001): 915-76; and Robert L. Paquette, “From Rebellion to Revisionism: The Continuing Debate about the Denmark Vesey Affair,” *Journal of the Historical Society* 4 (Fall 2004): 291-334.

<sup>80</sup> McCord, *Statutes at Large*, vol. 7, 461-2.

<sup>81</sup> *Charleston Southern Standard*, December 16, 1851, in “The Law of Colored Seamen,” Charleston: s.n., 1852?; Governors’ Message, 1824 #1362, SCDAH.

white Charlestonians formed in 1823 to maintain order and implement stricter controls over the city's black population – warned that “To permit a free intercourse to exist...between our slaves and [northern] free persons of colour, would be, to invite new attempts at insurrection.” Members of the association, which included many wharf owners and merchants, also decried the “abundant opportunities” northern free black mariners had “for introducing among our slaves, the moral contagion of their pernicious principles and opinions.”<sup>82</sup> In fact, the Negro Seamen Acts were frequently compared to maritime quarantine regulations enacted to inhibit the importation of deadly infectious diseases, and free black seamen accordingly were likened to “clothes infected with the plague.”<sup>83</sup> The sentiments of the acts' defenders were summed up by one Charleston merchant when he averred, “we think it necessary, and the niggers and the Yankee merchants must learn to put up with it.”<sup>84</sup>

Despite the fervent defense of the Negro Seamen Acts, they encountered widespread opposition and generated endless controversy. Critics argued that the acts were ineffective and failed to prevent dangerous interactions with the city's slaves. Some Charleston merchants labeled the laws “totally useless and inefficient” and contended that they were “liable to perpetual evasion and infractions.”<sup>85</sup> One Charleston Grand Jury expressed concern that free black seamen confined under the Negro Seamen Acts

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<sup>82</sup> Petition, ND #1415, SCDAH; See Alan F. January, “The South Carolina Association: An Agency for Race Control in Antebellum Charleston,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 78 (July 1977): 191-201.

<sup>83</sup> Governors' Message, 1824 #1362; Also see Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, vol. 2, 323-4.

<sup>84</sup> Richard Hildreth, *The White Slave, or Memoirs of a Fugitive* (Boston: Tappan and Whittemore, 1852), 312.

<sup>85</sup> Petition, 1826 #33, and Petition, 1826 #34, SCDAH.

nevertheless were coming into contact with slave prisoners in the city jail.<sup>86</sup> Some foreign observers simply thought the acts perplexing. “And how can such a measure be useful? I should be at a loss to reply,” wrote the Marquis de Lafayette’s secretary Auguste Levasseur during the Frenchmen’s visit to Charleston in March 1825.<sup>87</sup> The British consul for the Carolinas, George Mathew, concurred with Levasseur, pointing out that given the thousands of free blacks living in the city and the state and the constant presence of foreign visitors in Charleston, it was unlikely that any of the city’s slaves were yet unaware of black freedom and the geographical limits of slavery.<sup>88</sup>

Meanwhile, foreign and American ship captains alike complained that the Negro Seamen Acts caused significant cost, inconvenience, and delay, and deprived them the labor of their colored crewmen. British captain Peter Petrie, for example, protested in January 1824 that “the release of these unfortunate men from jail, fees and loss of their services put me to considerable expense.”<sup>89</sup> Another captain wrote to Boston shipping merchant Thomas Lamb, “you will see by our bill of disbursements that it is two expencive to bring blacks here after this.”<sup>90</sup> One Charlestonian estimated that the costs

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<sup>86</sup> Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, May 1851, SCDAH.

<sup>87</sup> Levasseur dismissed South Carolinians’ argument that the law was intended to prevent “all dangerous contact between the slaves of this state and free blacks from other places, who would not fail to talk to them of liberty!” Auguste Levasseur, *Lafayette in America, in 1824 and 1825; or, Journal of Travels in the United States*, vol. 2, quoted in Clark, *South Carolina*, 85-6.

<sup>88</sup> George Mathew also insisted in January 1852 that the Negro Seamen Acts “in their present shape” were unnecessary. “H.B.M’s Consulate of N. and S. Carolina, Charleston, January 5, 1852,” in “The Law of Colored Seamen,” 34; Also see Philip M. Hamer, “Great Britain, the United States, and the Negro Seamen Acts, 1822-1848,” *Journal of Southern History* 1 (February 1935): 3-28; and Philip M. Hamer, “British Consuls and the Negro Seamen Acts, 1850-1860,” *Journal of Southern History* 1 (May 1935): 138-68.

<sup>89</sup> Governors’ Message, 1824 #1362, SCDAH; Also see “Memorial of Sundry Masters of American Vessels, Lying in the Port of Charleston, S.C.” (Washington, D.C.: Printed by Gales & Seaton, 1823), 3-4; For an account of a Boston captain upset by the seizure of his free black cook and five of eight of his sailors who were also free blacks born in Massachusetts, see Hildreth, *White Slave*, 309-14.

incurred from the acts amounted to a “tax” of \$20,000 annually on those trading in Charleston rather than other southern ports.<sup>91</sup> Such sentiments prompted members of Charleston’s Chamber of Commerce to protest that the laws were impoverishing the city by driving trade to competing ports such as Savannah and were threatening to “Shackle the commerce of Charleston.”<sup>92</sup>

The Negro Seamen Acts indeed contributed to Charleston’s relative economic decline during the four decades before the Civil War. The severity, expense, and inconvenience of the laws undoubtedly dissuaded vessels with free black seamen from entering Charleston harbor and impeded attempts to revive the city’s commercial prosperity. Nonetheless, hundreds of vessels employing colored mariners continued to dock at Charleston’s wharves. Captains could hire free black cooks, stewards, and seamen for lower wages than white mariners. The South Carolina Association pointed

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<sup>90</sup> Thomas paid \$22.75 for registry fees and three weeks’ confinement for two free black seamen. Briggs Thomas to Thomas Lamb, October 30, 1828, Thomas Lamb Papers, MAHS; Another Boston ship captain observed, “there is quite an expense attached to this unhuman [*sic*] law.” Erastus Sampson to Thomas Lamb, December 20, 1829, Thomas Lamb Papers, MAHS; The most steady and fervent salvos against the acts were launched from representatives of the British government, who decried the treatment of free British subjects and argued that the acts violated the free trade provisions of the 1815 Commercial Convention between the United States and Great Britain. Meanwhile, not confining their discontent to petitions and protests, opponents of the Negro Seamen Acts also questioned and challenged their constitutionality. Only weeks after the acts’ passage a lower court in South Carolina upheld their constitutionality. But then in August 1823, the U.S. Circuit Court ruled that the laws violated the exclusive right of the federal government to regulate commerce and was therefore unconstitutional. Proponents of the acts declared that the court’s decision violated the state’s sovereignty and independence, thus placing the emerging doctrine of states’ rights at the heart of the defense of the Negro Seamen Acts. Officials in South Carolina accordingly disregarded the ruling and continued to imprison free black seamen, igniting what some historians consider the first nullification crisis between the state and the federal government.

<sup>91</sup> This citizen also mentioned that the acts deprived ship masters of their crews, and suggested that since the City Guard was more observant and efficient than in the past, it was time to reconsider laws that arose “out of the transactions of 1822.” *Charleston Mercury*, August 8, 1837.

<sup>92</sup> Petition, 1826 #33, Petition, 1826 #34, and Petition 1830 #124, SCDAH; On December 6, 1830, the *Charleston Courier* reported, “The Bill to amend the law in relation to colored cooks and stewards, has been rejected, and the commercial interest of Charleston is therefore to be longer embarrassed by the existing law.” Similarly, Charleston’s grand jurors declared in January 1832 that the “Present law regarding colored stewards and seamen coming into Charleston port is injurious to merchants and the general interests of the city and the states,” and recommended legislation amending the law. Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, January 1832, in *Charleston City Gazette*, January 20, 1832.

out that “scarcely a vessel which arrives in our port from the North, which has not two or three, or more black persons employed,” while some dropped anchor with all black crews.<sup>93</sup>

Once vessels arrived in Charleston and their black seamen were removed to the jail, replacement crews had to be found. At times white seamen were used to fill the vacated positions. In November 1839 mariner Charles Barron wrote to his father in Maine that he was the steward of his vessel for twelve days in Charleston. “They took our Cook and Steward and put them in jail,” Barron explained, adding “The Captain wanted me to act as Steward and I did.”<sup>94</sup> But not all seafaring and native working-class whites were as willing or able as Barron. Members of the Chamber of Commerce insisted that local whites were not innately suited for such work: “very few if any whites...are qualified to act as cooks and Stewards whilst numerous persons of colour have been regularly bred to those offices, and are capable of performing them with great dexterity.” These mercantile men further contended that passengers were distressed when whites served in these traditionally black positions. White replacements were not only “extravagant and extortionate in their demands,” but also often quit without notice.<sup>95</sup>

With free black seamen in jail and most native southern whites inept or indisposed to performing waterfront and shipboard labor, visiting ship masters frequently had little choice but to hire black slaves to temporarily take the place of detained free black crewmen. Thirty years after the passage of the Negro Seamen Acts, British consul

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<sup>93</sup> Petition, ND #1415, SCDAH.

<sup>94</sup> Barron also described making three trips to the city jail where he saw fifty-two free black cooks and stewards, some of whom were for sale. Charles Barron Letters, November 30, 1839, SCL.

<sup>95</sup> Petition, 1826 #33, and Petition, 1826 #34, SCDAH.

George Mathew reported allegations that “the owners of wharf and dock laborers” in Charleston had lobbied for and long supported the acts to reap the financial gains that accompanied the expanded need for their waterfront slaves.<sup>96</sup> Henry B. Hill, who in the 1830s left Massachusetts and went to sea as the cabin boy of the brig *Chili*, recalled that when a northern vessel arrived in Charleston, “her crew would leave her, cook and all,” and that “The place of cook would be supplied by parties on shore who kept slaves that they let for that purpose.”<sup>97</sup> The Negro Seamen Acts, therefore, indirectly increased demand for local enslaved waterfront laborers and further solidified black slaves’ domination of waterfront work in early nineteenth-century Charleston.

Such potentially profitable circumstances and schemes did not come without risk, however. Mathew also observed that much ill-will and “deep irritation” was generated among northern and foreign white seamen who sometimes were forced to unload and load their vessels alongside hired black slaves. While a vessel’s white crewmen may have been used to laboring shoulder to shoulder with free black men, many considered it demeaning to work with black slaves. What’s more, Mathew warned that placing

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<sup>96</sup> “H.B.M’s Consulate of N. and S. Carolina, Charleston, January 5, 1852,” in “The Law of Colored Seamen,” 34; Elias Vanderhorst was a member of the South Carolina Association and owned slave wharf hands who would have been in higher demand due to the Negro Seamen Acts. He wrote to his wife in New York City in October 1835 that she could not bring her black nurse who accompanied her to the North back to South Carolina. Blacks who left South Carolina and thus were exposed to the knowledge and notions of freedom were barred from returning to the state. Vanderhorst wrote: “You must recollect that I told you directly & could not make any arrangement whatever for her return to this place. I am one of the Standing Committee of the S.C. Association & appointed for the express purpose of preventing Mulattoes & negroes from returning to this place, therefore, you will see that I cannot (without loss of reputation) have anything to do in the business. You can send her to Savannah, if that will suit her, & you can hire a white nurse to come on with you & send her back by the returning the boat.” Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Elliott Morris Vanderhorst, October 3, 1835, Pease Collection, ARC; Edward Laurens argued in September 1832 that the presence of free blacks, northern and native, among Charleston’s slaves was dangerous because it encouraged thought of freedom and perhaps even insurrection. Edward R. Laurens, “An Address Delivered in Charleston, Before the Agricultural Society of South Carolina, on September 18th, 1832” (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1832), 12-13.

<sup>97</sup> Hill, *Jottings from Memory*, 21.

enslaved waterfront workers in such close contact with aggravated white seamen “might be productive of the very danger [the acts] are designed to preclude.”<sup>98</sup> A young Frederick Douglass in slaveholding Baltimore, after all, was told about northern freedom by two white men who were unloading stone ballast from a scow and who had “the most decided hatred of slavery.”<sup>99</sup> And as we will see shortly, South Carolina’s Negro Seamen Acts failed to suppress abolitionist-minded communication between slaves and white sailors from free states and countries, and in fact may have inadvertently facilitated such perilous associations and exchanges.

Meanwhile, the extensive criticisms leveled against the Negro Seamen Acts prompted several alterations to the laws over the years. The General Assembly passed the first modifications in December 1823, repealing the enslavement provision and allowing free blacks employed on naval vessels to remain aboard while in port. But the 1823 law also enacted more severe penalties for free black offenders, and in 1835 the enslavement provision was reinstated.<sup>100</sup> Seeking to close a loophole, legislators amended the 1823 act in December 1825. The 1825 edict called for free black seamen to be removed and jailed, but lawmakers believed that colored mariners were evading the

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<sup>98</sup> “H.B.M’s Consulate of N. and S. Carolina, Charleston, January 5, 1852,” in “The Law of Colored Seamen,” 34; While in Charleston in November 1838, seaman Henry P. Burr complained to his father that he was “worked as hard as possible – fair as poorly – abused from morning till night by the mate, and by him obliged to the hardest labor in company with a negro slave.” The Letters of Captain Henry P. Burr and His Family, November 11, 1838, CRCMS.

<sup>99</sup> Douglass claims that these two white Irishmen encouraged him to run away to the North. Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton & Co., 1857), 169-70; A scow is “a large flat-bottomed boat with broad square ends used chiefly for transporting bulk material (as ore, sand, or refuse).” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.

<sup>100</sup> For the 1823 amendment, see McCord, *Statutes at Large*, vol. 7, 463-6; For the 1835 amendment, see McCord, vol. 7, 470-4, or Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 378-82.

law by passing as “free Moors, Indians and Lascars.”<sup>101</sup> It therefore required vessels arriving with free black cooks, stewards, and seamen to drop anchor in the stream of the Cooper River at a distance of at least 150 yards from the wharves and to unload and load cargo using lighters.<sup>102</sup> The amendment presumed that forcing vessels arriving with free blacks – or suspected free blacks – to remain in the river would avert dangerous contact between slaves and any such deceitful colored mariners. Lawmakers inexplicably did not account for the fact that lightermen, like other dock workers in early nineteenth-century Charleston, were overwhelmingly black slaves. Consequently, scores of enslaved lightermen daily rowed out to vessels in the stream, where they mingled with not only potentially sympathetic white captains and crewmen but also any masquerading free black seamen. Under far less local white supervision than shoreside slave stevedores and wharf hands, enslaved lightermen discharging and loading ships in the river more easily could have been told about freedom, slipped an abolitionist pamphlet, or stowed away in the hold of a northern-bound vessel.

The Negro Seamen Acts again were altered in 1856, permitting vessels to dock at the wharves and allowing free black seamen to remain on board rather than being removed to the jail. Captains were required to provide bonds to assure that their colored mariners would not go ashore.<sup>103</sup> But this amendment too had unintended consequences.

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<sup>101</sup> McCord, *Statutes at Large*, vol. 7, 466; A Lascar is “an Indian sailor, army servant, or artilleryman.” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.

<sup>102</sup> McCord, *Statutes at Large*, vol. 7, 466-7; Members of Charleston’s Chamber of Commerce maintained that the obligation to lighter goods between the wharves and vessels in the river was among the acts’ chief inconveniences and subjected trade to “delays, damages, and vexations.” Petition, 1826 #33, Petition, 1826 #34, and Petition, 1830 #124, SCDAH.

<sup>103</sup> Scottish author Charles Mackay observed this amendment in action during his visit to Charleston in March 1858. See Charles Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America*, 195-6; For examples of ship captains and



One ship captain petitioned the City Council in March 1858 asking relief from a fine after free black members of his crew had been “decoyed on shore by parties eager for the half penalty which goes to the informant.”<sup>104</sup> But visiting captains sometimes took advantage of unforeseen loopholes in the 1856 law. Henry C. Keene, captain of the bark *Burlington*, wrote to his ship’s owners in Maine that since sailors were scarce in Charleston, “I get \$1.12½ per day for my black boys, at work on cargo.” Though prohibited from going ashore, Keene’s free black seamen may have been moving from ship deck to ship deck and perhaps even laboring on the docks, and thus were competing with Charleston’s slave wharf hands.<sup>105</sup>

Most importantly, like the 1825 amendment’s provision requiring lighters, the 1856 alterations failed to inhibit contact between Charleston’s enslaved dock workers and all free black seamen. Charleston’s mayor, Charles Macbeth, expressed his opinion to the City Council in November 1858 that he did not think the 1856 amendment to the Negro Seamen Acts fulfilled its intended purpose.

The object of the bond was to prevent any communication with our slaves, but while our slaves, in the capacities of stevedores and laborers, worked on board of vessels in which [free blacks] were, that object was so far frustrated. The evil which it was the purpose of the legislation on the subject to guard against...was but little lessened.

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owners paying bonds for their free black crewmen after 1856, see Cash Book, 1856-1865, November 26, 1858, page 67, and January 8, 1861, page 135, C. T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS; and Cash Book, 1851-1866, Disbursement Account of the Hamburg Bark *Hamburg*, February 18, 1860, Charles O. Witte Estate Records, 1851-1871, SCHS; It appears from these factors’ account books that the bond was \$1 for each free black seaman.

<sup>104</sup> City Council Minutes, March 2, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, March 3, 1858; The Council granted this captain relief from the fine at the April 20, 1858 meeting. City Council Minutes, April 20, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, April 21, 1858.

<sup>105</sup> Henry C. Keene to Magon and Clapp, March 3, 1859, Henry C. Keene Letters, CRCMS.

Furthermore, whereas in the recent past an average of only 140 free black seamen had arrived annually in the port, 220 entered the harbor between December 1856 and December 1857.<sup>106</sup> And the eight months preceding Macbeth's report – “during which there was but little trade” – had witnessed the arrival of no less than 233 colored seamen. Fearful of the corrupting influence of these increasing numbers of free black seamen upon enslaved stevedores and other waterfront laborers, the mayor asserted that “it would be prudent for Council to request the Legislature to repeal the Act of 1856.”<sup>107</sup>

Macbeth's suggestion was disregarded and the 1856 provisions remained in effect. Then in 1859 a small but articulate group of white stevedores, who were competing for work with slaves, alerted the General Assembly that

ships having Collerd Crews from 14 to 16 men Commanded by Northern men and owned at the North, hire your Slaves as Stevedores to Load and unload their ships, and place your Slaves in direct communication with any emisary the North may think proper to send amongst us. Collerd persons are prohibited from colecting together for any purpose, but on board ships they can collect from 40 to 60 at any time without any White Person among them, from 10 to 20 feet below decks, and 50 to 60 feet from the Ladder to go below decks.

Due to the 1856 amendment to the Negro Seamen Acts, such evil-intentioned northern emissaries included not only white abolitionists but also free black mariners permitted to

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<sup>106</sup> An 1857 report from Charleston's sheriff listed the number of free black seamen who entered the port between December 1856 and December 1857, and includes the date, name and origin of the vessel, and the number and occupation of the free black seamen on each vessel. According to Sheriff John E. Carew, registers of these free black seamen were kept in both the mayor's and harbor master's offices. Committee Report, 1857 #93, SCDAH, and Miscellaneous Communication, 1857 #1, SCDAH; The General Assembly passed a resolution in 1856 requiring the sheriffs of Charleston, Beaufort, and Georgetown to report the number and origin of free blacks entering these ports from foreign or non-slaveholding states. Resolution of the General Assembly, 1856 #16, SCDAH; In 1823 Harbor Master Thomas Paine petitioned the General Assembly asking for compensation for providing Charleston's sheriff with lists of free black seamen who entered the port. Paine argued that this task ought to be performed by the sheriff and asked to be relieved from the duty. His petition was rejected. See Petition, 1823 #39, SCDAH, and Committee Report, 1823 #87, SCDAH.

<sup>107</sup> City Council Minutes, November 23, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, November 29, 1858.

remain on board.<sup>108</sup> The white stevedores underscored this point in a letter to the editors of the *Charleston Courier* in January 1860. They self-interestedly argued that though “free negroes [*sic*] arriving in our port cannot come on shore and mingle with your slaves,” the city’s enslaved waterfront workers “are permitted to go on board by fifties, and then have uninterrupted intercourse with them, and not a white person present but the officers of the vessel, and perhaps they are too much occupied to pay any attention to what passes between the crew and laborers.”<sup>109</sup> One city resident similarly had warned of the evil of “foreign philanthropy” or interference intended to “incite our people to rebellion.”<sup>110</sup> But was this just paranoia on the part of white Charlestonians? Did northern “abolitionists spies and conspirators” really have designs against Charleston and the South?<sup>111</sup> Did visiting seamen ever actually distribute “inflammatory” and “incendiary” publications to Charleston’s enslaved waterfront workers?<sup>112</sup> In short, the answer is yes. But it was a northern white mariner rather than a free black seaman who circulated the subversive materials.

On the evening of Saturday, March 27, 1830, the ship *Columbo* from Boston arrived in Charleston and docked at the wharves. “[W]hen the Negroes came on board to discharge the cargo,” Edward Smith, the white steward of the northern vessel, anxiously handed one of the slave dock workers a pamphlet. Taking notice, other slave laborers

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<sup>108</sup> Petition, ND #2916 Oversize, SCDAH; This petition was considered in the South Carolina Senate on December 5, 1859, and in the South Carolina House of Representatives on December 6, 1859. See *Charleston Tri-Weekly Courier*, December 8, 1859, and *Charleston Mercury*, December 8, 1859.

<sup>109</sup> *Charleston Courier*, January 30, 1860.

<sup>110</sup> Laurens, “Address,” 3-7.

<sup>111</sup> Hildreth, *White Slave*, 312.

<sup>112</sup> Laurens, “Address,” 5-7.

aboard the vessel approached Smith and asked him for copies, and Smith quickly gave away his two remaining booklets. Suspecting that Smith was “engaged in distributing some pamphlets of a very seditious & inflammatory character among the Slaves & persons of color” on the city’s waterfront, the captain of the City Guard, Frederick Wesner, concealed himself and eavesdropped on a conversation between Smith and “a Negro fellow.” According to Wesner, when the slave asked Smith for a pamphlet, the white steward replied that he did not have any more copies but that he could get more in Boston.<sup>113</sup>

Smith was arrested and taken to the Guard House, where he explained that on the day before departing Boston “a colored man of decent appearance and very genteely [*sic*] dressed” – who Smith took for either a minister or a bookseller – boarded the *Columbo* and asked Smith whether he would do him a favor. Smith said that he would, so long as “it would not bring him in trouble.” Handing Smith a packet of pamphlets, the black Bostonian instructed Smith to “give them secretly to the Black people” in Charleston and “not let any White person know any thing about it.” Smith claimed that he did not know what the pamphlets were about, that he only distributed them because he had promised to do so, and that he was unaware that he had done anything wrong or had violated the law.<sup>114</sup>

The Grand Jury rejected Smith’s excuses and indicted him for “falsely and maliciously contriving and contending to disrupt the peace and security of this State and to move a sedition among the Slaves of the people of this State with force and arms at

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<sup>113</sup> Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1830-1A, SCDAH.

<sup>114</sup> Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1830-1A, SCDAH.

Charleston.” The pamphlets in question were none other than David Walker’s “Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World,” which was first published only months earlier in September 1829 and promoted violent rebellion.<sup>115</sup> Smith, described in the *Charleston Courier* as a “foreign steward,” was convicted of seditious libel on May 17, 1830, sentenced to rather lenient twelve months in prison and fined \$1,000.<sup>116</sup>

For many white Charlestonians, this episode not only fueled anxiety about potential slave revolts but also justified the Negro Seamen Acts and confirmed the laws’ continued necessity.<sup>117</sup> Though Edward Smith was a white mariner, his case exemplified the type of seditious communication that the city’s white residents most feared. But the Negro Seamen Acts made no attempt to prevent interactions between slaves – especially those working on the waterfront – and white seamen or other whites visiting the city.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> David Walker, “Walker’s Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829,” Boston: David Walker, 1830.

<sup>116</sup> Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1830-1A, SCDAH; *Charleston Courier*, May 24, 1830; Also see *Charleston City Gazette*, May 26, 1830, and *Boston Daily Advertiser*, June 1, 1830.

<sup>117</sup> One scholar has pointed out that “In 1830 the discovery that an incendiary pamphlet was being circulated among the slaves resulted in a rigorous enforcement of the law regarding Negro seamen.” Hamer, “Great Britain, the United States, and the Negro Seamen Acts, 1822-1848,” 14.

<sup>118</sup> Most northern visitors, including known abolitionists, seemingly mingled with slaves in Charleston and throughout the South with impunity. According to historians Michael Johnson and James Roark: “City officials, assisted by assorted volunteer vigilance committees, were determined to rid the city of abolitionist sympathizers poisoning the minds of ignorant slaves with fanaticism. One Charlestonian pointed out that ‘It is well known that our city is at the present time overrun with Abolition emissaries who are disseminating incendiary principles among our negroes....’ The Charleston police were so ineffective at eliminating these ‘Northern loiterers about our streets, without apparent occupation,’ that the writer charged they did not even bother to hide their activities.” Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 275-6; Also see the letters written by “The Wandering Gentile” in William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator* (Boston), September 1, 1854, and September 8, 1854; And in the late 1840s, Thomas H. Jones was laboring as a slave stevedore on Wilmington’s waterfront when he had the following encounter with the captain of the Philadelphia brig *Mentis*: “The Captain met me as I stepped on board and said he had heard of the sale of my wife and children, and expressed a hearty sympathy for me in my great affliction...He then came up close to my side, and in a low tone said, ‘Stevedore, I believe the time is coming when you and all your oppressed brethren

Nor did the laws halt contact with all free black seamen. Yet despite the acts' numerous defects, loopholes, and inconveniences, planter Alexander Mazyck pointed out in 1851 that a slave rebellion had not occurred in Charleston in the nearly thirty years following the Vesey conspiracy and the passage of the original 1822 Negro Seamen Acts.<sup>119</sup>

Charleston's bustling waterfront offered slaves more than employment and opportunities to interact with northern and foreign mariners, however. Waterfront labor also afforded slaves ample occasion to stow away in dockside vessels and run away to northern ports. As with the knowledge of freedom and insurrectionary materials, northern and foreign seamen sometimes encouraged and assisted slaves desiring to flee Charleston and bondage via the "Maritime Railroad." Leaders of the South Carolina Association, including Elias Vanderhorst, warned the state legislature in the early 1820s that there were increasing attempts to "inveigle away our slaves." So many packet lines existed between Charleston and New York that "the opportunities for embarking are occurring almost every day in the year," and consequently there was "no security, that our slaves, will not be seduced from the service of their masters, in greater numbers than heretofore."<sup>120</sup> In fact, countless bondsmen had escaped enslavement by stowing away in northern-bound vessels since the colonial period. Maritime runaways continued during and after the Revolution.

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and sisters will be free. Your friends at the North are earnestly praying and laboring for the accomplishment of that end.' He also spoke of one Mr. Garrison, who was holding conventions and delivering lectures for the purpose of arousing public sentiment against the awful sin of human slavery. I thanked him for the encouraging words he had spoken, and went down in the hold to look after the men." Jones, *Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones*, 46-8.

<sup>119</sup> *Charleston Southern Standard*, December 5, 1851, in "The Law of Colored Seamen."

<sup>120</sup> Petition, ND #1415, SCDAH.

Runaway slaves, it seems, were drawn to the waterfront. In an August 1781 runaway advertisement, William Sams announced that his slave Will “has been seen about the wharfs [*sic*] in town.”<sup>121</sup> James Lynah similarly informed readers in May 1784 that his man Guy “has been frequently seen about Rose’s wharf.”<sup>122</sup> Some slaveowners plainly stated their fears, such as William McWhann whose “stout made negro lad named SAM” was supposed to be “lurking about till he gets an opportunity of going on board some vessel.”<sup>123</sup> Slave masters were so concerned that their absconded slaves would stow away and sail to freedom, hundreds of runaway advertisements issued warnings to ship captains. A typical notice read: “Masters of vessels are hereby cautioned against suffering such a slave to be harboured by their crews, concealed on ship board or carried off.”<sup>124</sup>

Though “inveigling, stealing and carrying away” slaves became a capital offense in 1754, the problem evidently remained so acute that Charleston’s Grand Jury – which included wharf owners Florian Charles Mey and John Blake – complained in September 1797 that “great numbers of Negroes and other Slaves, are carried off the State to the

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<sup>121</sup> *Royal Gazette*, August 25-29, 1781, in Lathan A. Windley, *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 586.

<sup>122</sup> *Charleston Royal South Carolina Gazette*, May 22-25, 1784, in Windley, *Runaway Slave Advertisements*, 736.

<sup>123</sup> *Royal Gazette*, October 31-November 3, 1781, in Windley, *Runaway Slave Advertisements*, 590; G. Hooper likewise assumed that his slave Jupiter would “endeavour to get away by sea.” *Charleston South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser*, March 20, 1784, in Windley, 730; Thomas Forbes of East Florida notified Charlestonians that his slave Mick, who was a skilled sailmaker and a good sailor, was thought to have “hired himself on board of some vessel in the harbour” and warned masters not to carry him away. *Royal Gazette*, September 21-28, 1782, in Windley, 698-9.

<sup>124</sup> *Charleston South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser*, May 20, 1783, in Windley, *Runaway Slave Advertisements*, 715.

great injury of the Citizens thereof.”<sup>125</sup> Taking notice, Governor Charles Pinckney called upon the General Assembly to pass legislation requiring all departing vessels to stop at Fort Johnson – located on James Island near the mouth of Charleston harbor – and be searched for runaway slaves. A legislative committee subsequently reported that laws formerly designed to thwart such “mischief” had fallen into disuse after the Revolution. The committee therefore recommended that a new act be passed “to prevent the Evil complained of.”<sup>126</sup>

Lawmakers failed to enact such legislation, and slaves continued to run away on the Maritime Railroad. But rather than merely loitering about the wharves and awaiting a chance occasion to slip into a ship’s hold, many runaway slaves sought waterfront work that presented ample “opportunities for embarking.” After all, Charlestonian Edward R. Laurens included slave stevedores, wharf laborers, and draymen among those occupations “the very nature of which relieves [slaves] in a great measure from the wholesome restraint of a master’s eye.”<sup>127</sup> Waterfront employment, in other words, was an ideal halfway house on a runaway’s road to freedom.

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<sup>125</sup> Stealing slaves was made a capital felony by an act passed on May 11, 1754. Another law enacted on December 20, 1821, prescribed punishments for those who harbored or concealed runaway slaves. See McCord, *Statutes at Large*, vol. 7, 426-7, 460-1; Jacob Schirmer noted the 1859 trial of Francis Michel “for stealing a Slave in endeavoring to take him away in one of the Steamers.” Though the jury found Michel guilty, they recommended him to mercy. He was sentenced to be hung on March 1, 1860, but the governor pardoned Michel in February 1860. Schirmer Diary, July 6, 1859, January 28, 1860, and February 4, 1860, SCHS.

<sup>126</sup> For copy of the Grand Jury Presentment, see Governors’ Message, 1797 #703, SCDAH; Pinckney argued that “The personal property of our planters consists chiefly of slaves,” and that these “Instruments of our cultivation” were too vital to the wealth and commercial success of the state to allow them to be “clandestinely carried off.” Pinckney also called for captains to present a pass signed by the governor and countersigned by the port collector. Governors’ Message, 1797, #701, SCDAH; The committee noted that the previous laws fell by the wayside when the regulation of trade was transferred from the state to the federal government. Committee Report, 1797 #59, SCDAH.

<sup>127</sup> Laurens, “Address,” 7-8.



In October 1838, *The Emancipator* chronicled the first-hand and plausible account of one South Carolina slave's escape from bondage.<sup>128</sup> This unnamed slave detailed the beatings and abuse he had received while working for a railroad company in rural South Carolina. The day after a particularly severe whipping, he slipped away and into some nearby woods. That night, under the cover of darkness, the slave returned to the railroad, boarded a car, and hid among cotton bales bound for Charleston. After arriving in the city, the fugitive made his way to the waterfront "and waited there with the rest of the hands to get work." Before long a stevedore approached and offered the slave a job, and he followed the stevedore to a wharf where he worked alongside other slaves "stowing away cotton in a vessel" from Boston.

Each day the slave wharf hands went to a cook-shop for meals. But lacking money, the runaway returned to the vessel where he became acquainted with the white steward, who gave the slave something to eat. When asked one day "how much of your wages do you have to give your master," the slave answered all, to which the steward responded that "it was not so where he came from," and that "There the people are all free." Apparently having never heard of black freedom, the ex-slave recalled, "When he told me this I began to think that there was a free country, and to wish that I could get there." During subsequent conversations, the steward proposed assisting the slave to run away to the North.

He said the vessel was all loaded and would sail next morning. That day was Saturday, and he told me that after I knocked off work and had got my pay, I must

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<sup>128</sup> Like travel accounts, ex-slave narratives cannot be read uncritically. In addition to the imprecision and factual errors attributable to lapses in memory, the accounts of many former slaves were edited and published by abolitionists who oftentimes pursued their ideological objectives at the expense of the accuracy of the ex-slaves' experiences. The evidence regarding waterfront work and workers utilized here, however, not only is plausible but also generally is confirmed by other, less potentially flawed sources.

stay about there till it was dark and all the people in the ship were asleep and that he would wait for me. He said he had got a place made to hide me in, and that if I was sure not to cough, or make any noise, he thought he could get me away safe.

After dark, the fugitive crept along the wharf to the vessel where he was greeted by the steward, who hastily opened the scuttle and instructed the slave to quietly jump in.<sup>129</sup>

Once the scuttle was closed, the stowaway “crowded in between the bales.” After a harrowing four-week voyage to Boston, the steward assisted the runaway out of his hiding place and directed him to walk up the street and inquire for a colored boarding house. The newly freed slave soon encountered a black man who quickly perceived “from my dress and the cotton on my head and clothes” that he was a runaway, and saw to it that he was cared for.<sup>130</sup>

Another former South Carolina slave, John Andrew Jackson, told a similar story of working on Charleston’s waterfront in the winter of 1847-1848. Jackson claimed to have become aware of the geographical limits of slavery from northern travelers passing through rural South Carolina.

The “Yankees,” or Northerners, when they visited our plantations, used to tell the negroes that there was a country called England, where there were no slaves, and that the city of Boston was free; and we used to wish we knew which way to travel to find those places...I had often been to Charleston – which was 150 miles distant from our plantation – to drive my master’s cattle to market, and it struck me that if I could hide in one of the vessels I saw lading at the wharfs, I should be able to get to the “Free country,” wherever that was.

During a three-day Christmas holiday, Jackson slipped away from the festivities of the slave quarters and made his way to Charleston on a pony. Recalling that it was the custom in the city for masters to hire out their bondsmen, he joined a gang of slave wharf

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<sup>129</sup> A scuttle is “a small opening or hatchway in the deck of a ship large enough to admit a person and with a lid for covering it.” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.

<sup>130</sup> *The Emancipator* (New York), October 18, 1838.

hands on the docks and – despite not having a badge – earned wages “without arousing any suspicion.”

After working on the docks for several weeks, Jackson boarded a ship and inquired of the free black cook whether the vessel was bound for Boston. After the cook affirmed that it was, the runaway asked, “Can’t you stow me away?” The free black seaman immediately said that he could, but having second thoughts he asked Jackson, “Did not some white man send you here to ask me this?” Since this occurred in early 1848, the Negro Seamen Acts did not yet allow free black seamen to remain on board while their vessels were in Charleston. The cook explained that the black members of the crew had been in jail since the vessel’s arrival, but that in preparation for departure the captain had paid to release them from confinement the day before.<sup>131</sup> Despite his misgivings, the free black cook agreed to look for a place to hide Jackson, but beseeched the fugitive not to betray him.

When Jackson returned to the vessel the next morning, the cook again had second thoughts and told the slave to go ashore and that he wanted nothing to do with him. Jackson obeyed, but snuck on board after the cook entered the ship’s galley. Tiptoeing to the cargo hatch, the runaway waited there for the captain or mate to emerge from the cabin. When the mate appeared Jackson asked permission to remove the hatch, and “He thinking that I was one of the gang coming to work there, told me I might.” He descended and was soon joined in the hold by a gang of slave laborers, who began questioning Jackson about his occupation and owner.

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<sup>131</sup> When Jackson asked “What did they put you in jail for?”, the free black cook replied, “They put every free negro in jail that comes here, to keep them from going among the slaves.” Jackson, *Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*, 26.

Just then they were all ordered on deck, and as soon as I was left, I slipped myself between two bales of cotton, with the deck above me, in a space not large enough for a bale of cotton to go; and just then a bale was placed at the mouth of my crevice, and shut me in a space about 4-ft. by 3-ft., or thereabouts. I then heard them gradually filling up the hold; and at last the hatch was placed on, and I was left in total darkness.

Cramped, dehydrated, and lacking fresh air, John Andrew Jackson was forced to reveal himself en route to Boston. The captain, like the free black cook, was convinced that he was being tricked and that Jackson had been ordered by a white Charlestonian to stow away in the vessel. The captain therefore resolved to return the runaway aboard the first southward vessel encountered; “however, he met no vessel.” On the evening of February 10, 1848, the vessel and stowaway docked in Boston and Jackson obtained his freedom.<sup>132</sup>

A final example comes from the WPA interview of ex-slave Susan Hamlin. Hamlin’s father, Adam Collins, was a slave coachman on Edisto Island, located about twenty miles south of Charleston. The day after Collins received a whipping, the slave drove his master four miles into the woods, tied him to a tree, “an’ give him de same ‘mount of lickin’ he wus given on Sunday.” Collins frequently had been permitted to go to Charleston on errands, so he made his way to a landing and boarded a boat taking agricultural products to the city. Once in Charleston, “he gone on de water-front an’ ax for a job on a ship so he could git to de North.” Evidently not required to provide proof of free status, Collins was hired and eventually sailed to New York, where he worked as a store clerk.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Jackson, *Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*, 23-8; The slave stevedore in Wilmington, Thomas H. Jones, successfully colluded with the steward of a vessel to stow away to New York in 1849. Jones, *Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones*, 42-3.

Most slaves were not successful in their attempts to run away via Charleston's waterfront. From September 1838 to August 1839, city authorities apprehended 115 runaway slaves, many of whom probably had planned to stow away.<sup>134</sup> In June 1837 two slaves owned by Langdon Cheves were discovered at sea aboard the brig *New York* and transported back to Charleston on a pilot boat.<sup>135</sup> Under the title "Another Attempt at Escape," the *Savannah Georgian* reported in May 1845 that a slave named James, the property of Charleston's mercantile firm Williams and McBarney, was "fortunately discovered" hiding between a water cask and a cotton bale aboard a British bark anchored off Long Island and bound for Liverpool.<sup>136</sup> Ex-slave Amie Lumpkin recalled the episode of "one big black man who tried to steal a boat ride from Charleston." This slave absconded from his master's plantation in Fairfield and made it to the city before being apprehended. According to Lumpkin, the returned runaway admitted to the overseer, "Sho', I try to git away from this sort of thing. I was goin' to Massachusetts, and hire out 'till I git 'nough to carry me to my home in Africa."<sup>137</sup> And cooper Jacob Schirmer recorded in his diary the daring but failed attempt of a slave who stowed away on the steamer *S. R. Spaulding*, which was bound for Boston and carried delegates from the Democratic National Convention held in Charleston in late April and early May 1860.

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<sup>133</sup> Rawick, *American Slavery*, narrative of Susan Hamlin, 2B.

<sup>134</sup> U. B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918), 418; Also see Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 27.

<sup>135</sup> Edward Pettingill to Langdon Cheves, June 22, 1837, Pease Collection, ARC.

<sup>136</sup> *Savannah Georgian* quoted in *The Liberator* (Boston), May 30, 1845; Williams and McBarney and Co. does not appear in the 1840-41 or 1849 city directories. There is, however, a William McBurnie in the 1840-41 directory and a merchant named William McBurney in the 1849 directory.

<sup>137</sup> This episode occurred in or around 1856. Rawick, *American Slavery*, narrative Amie Lumpkin, 3A.

This stowaway was discovered at sea, transferred to a vessel that took him to Baltimore, and returned from there to Charleston by rail.<sup>138</sup>

Anecdotal evidence demonstrates that Boston – the cradle of the American antislavery movement and home to prominent abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and David Walker – was the preferred destination of Charleston’s maritime runaways. While many seafaring Bostonians offered stowaways aid ranging from benign neglect to active assistance, not all in the northern port were abolitionists. In April 1852 the *Charleston Courier* printed with “considerable gratification” a letter sent from a Boston merchant house to one of the firm’s ship captains in Charleston.

See that you do not bring any negroes – slaves – away. If you find any secreted after you get to sea, no matter if in Boston Bay, we wish you to return to [Charleston] and deliver any such slaves to their owners, or the proper authorities. We would spare neither expense or [*sic*] trouble in restoring to our Southern friends their slaves.

These Bostonians, it seems, valued commercial trade and prosperity more than they did freedom for black southerners. The paper commended these “Northern brethren” for their “praiseworthy conduct” and for exercising the “right spirit.”<sup>139</sup> This type of sectional harmony, however, was the exception rather than the rule, and this was no more evident than during the aftermath of the “Virginia Controversy.”

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<sup>138</sup> Schirmer Diary, May 17, 1860, SCHS.

<sup>139</sup> *Charleston Courier* quoted in the *Savannah Morning News*, April 13, 1852; Of course, there was also plenty of tension between the citizens of South Carolina and Massachusetts. For instance, when Massachusetts agent Samuel Hoar arrived in Charleston in late 1844 to initiate legal suits challenging the arrest of free black citizens of the Bay State, the South Carolina legislature condemned him as a seditious danger to public safety, and Hoar was compelled to flee under the threat of mob violence. Similarly, South Carolina authorities derided the Massachusetts legislature in 1845 for its increasing hostility toward the institution of slavery and lamented the potential “downfall of our once happy union.” See January, “The South Carolina Association,” 200; Hamer, “Great Britain, the United States, and the Negro Seamen Acts, 1822-1848,” 21-3; Resolution, 1844 #61; Resolution, ND #1216; and Committee Report, 1845 #217, SCDAH.

In the summer of 1839 the schooner *Robert Center* sailed into Norfolk, Virginia, for repairs with three free black seamen aboard. As a slave ship carpenter named Isaac worked on the schooner, these three black seamen advised the slave that he was “foolish to remain in Virginia as he could get good wages in the north.”<sup>140</sup> After the *Robert Center* was repaired and departed the slave carpenter could not be found, prompting his owner John G. Colley to suspect that his skilled and valuable bondsman had escaped on the New York-bound vessel. He immediately dispatched a party to travel to New York and recover the absconded slave, who indeed was found hiding in the ship’s hold. The runaway was returned to Virginia, but New York Governor William Henry Seward refused to arrest and extradite the three black seamen for prosecution in the Old Dominion.<sup>141</sup>

Then in May 1840, the New York state legislature passed a fugitive slave act that was viewed by some south of the Mason-Dixon Line as “manifestly designed...to throw obstacles in the way of the recovery by Citizens of the Southern states of their fugitive slaves.” This New York law granted runaways the right to jury trials and provided them with legal counsel and representation. Outraged authorities in Virginia responded with an appeal to fellow slaveholding states for support and collaboration.<sup>142</sup> Legislators in Columbia answered this call and on December 17, 1841, passed “An Act to Prevent the

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<sup>140</sup> William Seward to Henry Hopkins, October 24, 1839, in George E. Baker, ed., *The Works of William Seward* (New York: Redfield, 1853), vol. 2, 468. See Stephen J. Valone, “William Henry Seward, the Virginia Controversy, and the Anti-Slavery Movement, 1839-1841,” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 31 (January 2007); The three free black seamen’s names were Isaac Gansey, Peter Johnson, and Edward Smith.

<sup>141</sup> Committee Report, 1847 #237, SCDAH; Valone, “William Henry Seward.”; Also see Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (Da Capo Press, 1991), 147.

<sup>142</sup> Committee Report, 1847 #237, SCDAH.

Citizens of New York from Carrying Slaves or Persons Held to Service out of this State and to Prevent the Escape of Persons Charged with the Commission of Any Crime,” more commonly known as the New York Ship Inspection Law. This law, which was similar to one enacted in Virginia, was a “retaliatory measure” against New York and “was passed in testimony of the high confidence which South Carolina reposed in the Counsels of Virginia and as a manifestation of her determination to cooperate with the Commonwealth and other States in maintaining by all proper methods an institution in which she has a common interest.”<sup>143</sup>

South Carolina’s 1841 New York Ship Inspection Law stipulated that vessels owned in any proportion whatsoever by a citizen of New York could not depart Charleston before undergoing an inspection for runaway slaves or fleeing criminals. Given that valuable slaves had long used northern-bound vessels to escape bondage, this statute struck many slaveowning South Carolinians as commonsensical and necessary policy. But the law oddly did not oblige the examination of vessels owned by Bostonians or northerners other than those from New York. And like the Negro Seamen Acts, this edict had critics as well as unintended consequences for Charleston’s commercial waterfront and its workers. And arguments similar to those both for and against the Negro Seamen Acts often were applied to the 1841 law.

Opponents insisted that the law was unconstitutional, inefficient and ineffective, inhibited free trade, and drove much needed business to competing ports. Each mandatory inspection cost \$10, which amounted to an annual cost of \$120 for packet

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<sup>143</sup> Committee Report, 1847 #130; Petition, ND #2895; Committee Report, 1847 #237, SCDAH.



vessels monthly conveying passengers and goods between Charleston and New York.<sup>144</sup> Ship owners complained that in addition to this inspection fee, they were required to execute a \$1,000 bond to secure compliance with the law and cover “all damages which may be assessed against them, if a slave should be found on board.”<sup>145</sup>

Critics also protested that payment of this \$10 “tax” was required even if the inspector did a poor job and failed to detect a stowaway.<sup>146</sup> Indeed, if a fugitive slave was later discovered the vessel’s owner was fined \$500 for violating the law.<sup>147</sup> In 1845, Charleston’s ship owners asked the state legislature to repeal the act and reminded lawmakers of the city’s relative economic decline: “Our aim should be, not to close our ports, but to open every avenue, and widen every channel that would lead us once again to that commercial pre-eminence which once marked our City but has so long departed from us.”<sup>148</sup> And less commercial trade meant less work for waterfront laborers, resulting in less income for wharf and dray owners who invested in the purchase of slaves and masters who hired out their bondsmen on the city’s docks and drays.

Also controversial was the provision that required an inspection even if New Yorkers owned only a small percentage of a vessel and South Carolinians owned the

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<sup>144</sup> For the \$120 figure, see Petition, 1845 #30, and Petition, ND #2823, SCDAH; Various other petitions from Charleston’s ship owners claimed that this “Tax” collectively cost them the “large and enormous amount” of \$1,000, \$1,900, or \$2,000 per year. See Petition, 1853 #58; Petition, 1845 #30; Petition, ND #2823; Petition 1847 #90; and Petition, 1847 #91, SCDAH.

<sup>145</sup> Committee Report, 1847 #237; Petition, 1847 #90; and Petition, 1847 #91, SCDAH; Also see Petition, 1845 #30; and Petition ND #2823, SCDAH.

<sup>146</sup> Petition 1847 #90; Petition, 1847 #91; Petition, 1845 #30; and Petition ND #2823, SCDAH.

<sup>147</sup> Petition, 1845 #30; Petition ND #2823; Petition, 1847 #90; and Petition 1847 #91, SCDAH; The captains or owners of vessels departing the state without having undergone an inspection were fined \$500. Committee Report, 1847 #237, SCDAH.

<sup>148</sup> Petition, 1845 #30; Petition, ND #2823, SCDAH; Also see Petition, 1847 #90; and Petition, 1847 #91, SCDAH.

remainder.<sup>149</sup> The law was also in effect if a ship owned entirely by citizens of South Carolina was commanded by a New Yorker. Stockholders in the Charleston-New York packets lines – including James Adger, Otis Mills, and Charles T. Mitchell – reminded legislators that they too were slaveowners and were “interested in all laws tending to the security of slave property.”<sup>150</sup> Nonetheless, they joined with other ship owners and merchants to ask for relief from the act’s “exceedingly onerous” tax burden, and argued that South Carolinians were being “made to bear all the weight of the retaliation that was intended for the people of New York” after the enactment of the 1840 fugitive slave law.<sup>151</sup>

Champions of the law answered that it was “a wise and necessary protection to her citizens” from northern abolitionists who sought “to tamper with our slaves, to seduce them from their obedience, and to protect them when fugitive.”<sup>152</sup> Legislative committees assigned the task of reviewing grievances regarding the 1841 New York Ship Inspection Law repeatedly rejected calls for repeal.<sup>153</sup> The Committee on Federal Relations even called for “the adoption of more stringent and effectual measures to protect our Citizens from the outrages of New York on our Slave property.”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Petition, 1845 #30; Petition, ND #2823; Petition, 1847 #90; Petition, 1847 #91; Petition, 1853 #58, SCDAH.

<sup>150</sup> Petition, 1853 #58, SCDAH.

<sup>151</sup> Petition, 1853 #58; Petition, ND #2895, SCDAH.

<sup>152</sup> Committee Report, 1847 #237, SCDAH.

<sup>153</sup> See Committee Report, ND #2548; Committee Report, 1847 #237; Committee Report, 1847 #130; and Committee Report, 1853, #141, SCDAH.

<sup>154</sup> Committee Report, 1847 #130, SCDAH.

But as time passed and Charleston's export economy continued to lose ground to rival ports such as Savannah, Mobile, and especially New Orleans, legislators acknowledged that alterations were advisable. In 1848 the members of the Committee on Federal Relations had a temporary change of heart and agreed that the law was "only productive of injury to individuals" and failed to efficiently curtail slave stowaways. Though they were "inclined to recommend" the law's repeal, this report came too late in the legislative session to take action.<sup>155</sup> The Committee on the Colored Population maintained in 1851 that if the law was fully and faithfully enforced it was sufficient to prevent waterfront runaways but conceded that amendments were needed.<sup>156</sup> And twice the Committee on Federal Relations suggested that the inspection fee be reduced – in one instance to \$5 and in the other to only \$1 – in the effort to relieve the burden upon Charleston's ship owners and to increase both the number of vessels owned by South Carolinians and those trading in Charleston.<sup>157</sup>

The 1841 act remained on the books essentially unrevised until the Civil War rendered the matter of stowaway slaves moot. But while Charleston's slaveowners fretted over slave insurrections and "foreign" tampering with their primary source of wealth and the port's primary labor force, external threats of a different kind loomed. In the 1830s cholera joined northern abolitionists and incendiary literature to imperil not only urban masters' valuable human property, but also the economic revival of "this once flourishing city."<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Committee Report, 1848 #235, SCDAH.

<sup>156</sup> Committee Report, 1851 #16, SCDAH.

<sup>157</sup> Committee Report, 1853 #235; Committee Report, ND #2548, SCDAH.

First appearing in the United States in 1832, cholera is an infectious disease rapidly spread by contaminated water or food.<sup>159</sup> Consequently, black slaves and impoverished whites living in back alley quarters and unsanitary dwellings along the waterfront and often lacking access to fresh and clean provisions were exceedingly vulnerable to the deadly disease. When contemplating the surest means of preventing cholera, Charleston's City Council focused on sanitation measures and internal medical police. The 1830s witnessed the passage of ordinances establishing or expanding the duties of the Superintendants of Streets, Board of Health, and Board of Inspection, all of which aimed at improving the cleanliness and salubrity of the city.<sup>160</sup> In June 1832 the Council authorized two additional scavenger carts for the removal of rubbish and other nuisances, and a year later resolved to employ four more carts.<sup>161</sup> City officials also enacted strict regulations on the marketing of fresh foods such as fish, fruits, and vegetables, especially during an outbreak of the "Malignant Cholera."<sup>162</sup> "All precautions are now making in our City to allay the disease, if it should visit us," wrote Jacob Schirmer on August 1, 1832, adding, "But May God in his Mercy withhold it."<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Hugh Swinton Legare, *Southern Review* (1828), quoted in Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 206-7.

<sup>159</sup> Although cholera did not appear in North America until 1832, the first cholera pandemic spread across the Indian subcontinent and China from 1816-1826, prompting municipal authorities in Charleston to consider how to stop the spread of the disease as early as 1827.

<sup>160</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 263-70, 113-7, 123-5. Also see Eckhard, 254-9.

<sup>161</sup> City Council Minutes, June 25, 1832, *Charleston Courier*, July 2, 1832; City Council Minutes, June 18, 1833, *Charleston Courier*, June 20, 1833.

<sup>162</sup> *City Ordinances, 1833-1837*, 94-7. This ordinance was ratified on September 12, 1836; Also see Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 79-80; Schirmer noted the passage of this ordinance when he wrote on September 12, 1836, "Cholera – Council passed an Ordinance prohibiting the sale of certain articles." Schirmer Diary, September 12, 1836, SCHS.

<sup>163</sup> Schirmer Diary, August 1, 1832, SCHS.

Schirmer also noted that “this scourge” already was ravaging New York City, where “as many as 100 die daily.”<sup>164</sup> And so, recognizing that cholera could potentially invade the city by sea as well as land, authorities directed that all vessels arriving in Charleston harbor from places stricken with cholera be quarantined for forty days and that communication with persons on these detained vessels be prohibited “without the express permission of the Port Physician or the Intendant of the City.”<sup>165</sup> In the fall of 1832 when the brig *Amelia* wrecked off of Folly Island – located just south of the entrance to Charleston harbor – on its way from New Orleans with “malignant cholera on board,” Charlestonians sprung into action to prevent “the introduction of that dreadful malady within the city.”<sup>166</sup> Members of the City Guard were deployed to secure the island, the vessel and its cargo were burned, and both the guardsmen and volunteer citizens patrolled the Cooper River wharves to prevent quarantined crewmen, passengers, or island residents from entering the city. In all, the City Council expended nearly \$5,300 dealing with the *Amelia*, and in 1838 the South Carolina state legislature granted an

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<sup>164</sup> Schirmer Diary, August 1, 1832, SCHS.

<sup>165</sup> Petition, 1827 #31, SCDAH; Also see Committee Report, 1827 #42, SCDAH; The terms “Intendant” and “Wardens” were changed to “Mayor” and “Aldermen” by an act of the South Carolina legislature in 1836; Charleston’s maritime quarantine laws were extended and enlarged on December 20, 1832. See Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 373-4; Prompted by the appearance of cholera in both New York and New Orleans, the City Council passed resolutions enforcing the quarantine regulations for vessels arriving from those cities in December 1848. City Council Minutes, December 14, 1848, *Charleston Mercury*, December 15, 1848; City Council Minutes, December 29, 1848, *Charleston Mercury*, January 1, 1849; At the meeting on March 2, 1849, the City Council concurred with Port Physician Thomas Y. Simons’s recommendation that the quarantine be lifted for vessels arriving from New Orleans, since it was reported that the disease had subsided in the Crescent City. And on July 28, 1849, Jacob Schirmer noted that, “some excitement [was] caused by the Public Authorities ordering the Savannah Mail Boats to do Quarantine, two deaths of cholera having occurred on one of them.” Schirmer Diary, July 28, 1849, SCHS; For more information regarding quarantine laws, see chapter four.

<sup>166</sup> Pinckney, “Report, 1837-1838,” 46.

indemnity of \$11,253 more “to relieve the city from the onerous obligation thus imposed on it” by lawsuits brought for the recovery of damages.<sup>167</sup>

Charleston escaped in 1832 with only a few cases of cholera reaching the city. But most white Charlestonians remained ignorant of the comparatively greater threat cholera posed to blacks. On August 8, 1832, while the disease wrecked havoc in New York, the *Charleston Courier* passionately disavowed rumors that blacks were immune to cholera, and warned that the failure to recognize this fact could “lead to disastrous results.” Among the potentially catastrophic consequences of such false information was not only the mass death of valuable slaves, but also an insufficiency in the port’s vital labor force.<sup>168</sup> Whether Charlestonians took notice of the *Courier*’s admonition is unknown, but the summer of 1836 offered a morbid lesson in the deadliness of this disease. On August 20, 1836, Jacob Schirmer noted, “during the last week several very sudden deaths among the Blacks, said to be cholera.”<sup>169</sup> In early September 1836, Richard Bacot observed that the victims of the disease were “either negroes or dutchmen & low people” and that only two respectable whites – both old ladies – had died.<sup>170</sup> Reverend John Bachman concurred, remarking that “The disease is confined principally to our domestics, and the irregular among the whites.”<sup>171</sup> And having estimated that 300

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<sup>167</sup> Pinckney, “Report, 1837-1838,” 7, 46, 50; Petition, 1832 #30; Committee Report, 1832 #84; Committee Report, 1838 #214; Committee Report, 1838 #271, SCDAH.

<sup>168</sup> *Charleston Courier*, August 8, 1832.

<sup>169</sup> Schirmer Diary, August 20, 1836, SCHS; Later in August, Schirmer noted, “Cholera rumored to be here, and on [August] 29 Physicians officially announced its appearance, increasing every day and as yet principally confined among the Blacks.” Schirmer Diary, August 27, 1836, SCHS; Also see Schirmer Diary, September 3, 1836, September 27, 1836, September 29, 1836, and after October 1836, SCHS.

<sup>170</sup> Bacot went on to blame the stricken blacks and poor whites for their carelessness with food. Richard Bacot to Dewar Bacot, September 7, 1836, Pease Collection, ARC.

<sup>171</sup> John Bachman, September 15, 1836, 137-9, Pease Collection, ARC.

people already had died, William Mazyck Porcher wrote to a friend in New York in mid-September 1836,

You may suppose that there was & is a considerable panic here – this is not the case; I never saw people take anything so coolly in my life & never did I suppose that I could live in [the] city when the cholera was prevailing & care so little about it – It has killed so few white persons that they are not afraid of it on their account, but are distressed about their servants. There have been some melancholy deaths among the Negroes – some of them have been carried off in a very short time.<sup>172</sup>

Black Charlestonians indeed had good reason not to share white residents' calm disposition regarding the disease. Schirmer reported the "very alarming" news that during just one week in late September and early October, cholera had killed eighty blacks living in the city proper south of Boundary Street.<sup>173</sup> By early November – as vessels filled the wharves and the waterfront sprung into full gear – despite only sporadic cases of cholera still occurring in the city, ship master Charles Hunt wrote to a Boston merchant that many of the city's slaves had been "frightened...from here." Whether this demonstrated slaves' agency and ability to flee the city of their own volition, or slaveowners' resolve to remove their valuable human property from the threat, the result was the same: perhaps for the first and only time in Charleston's long commercial history the city experienced a shortage of dock workers. According to Charles Hunt, "The problem now is loading," since "Negro's are very scarce." Hunt went on to explain that he had only been able to assemble two work gangs to stow the cargo, and that many other

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<sup>172</sup> William Mazyck Porcher to Robert Marion Deveaux, September 15, 1836, and September 17, 1836, William Mazyck Porcher Letters, SCL.

<sup>173</sup> During this week ending on October 2, the Board of Health reported the deaths of 118 Charlestonians, exclusive of the Neck north of Boundary Street. Of these, only 4 of the deceased were white and the remaining 114 were black. All of the whites died from cholera, and 80 of the 114 blacks died from the disease. Schirmer Diary, October 4, 1836, SCHS.

vessels had to be loaded by their crews rather than Charleston's black dock workers as was customary.<sup>174</sup>

With waterfront work still dominated by blacks and regarded as demeaning to the vast majority of native whites, no substantial alternative labor force existed in mid-1830s Charleston. Whether owned by a wharf or mercantile company or hired by the day or month, slaves employed on Charleston's waterfront repeatedly challenged and overcame efforts to control their labor and lives. Despite measures such as the Negro Seamen Acts and the 1841 Ship Inspection Law, which largely aimed to regulate the communications and movements of the city's bondsmen, many enslaved dock workers circumvented such restrictions and found ways to interact with visiting seamen or stow away in northern-bound vessels. But the 1840s and 1850s would witness the changing racial and ethnic composition of the city's waterfront workforce, as millions of Irish and German immigrants crossed the Atlantic and settled in port cities along the eastern seaboard.

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<sup>174</sup> Charles Hunt to Thomas Lamb, November 5, 1836, Thomas Lamb Papers, MAHS.



**CHAPTER THREE**  
**“laborers from abroad have come to take their places”:**  
**The Racial and Ethnic Diversification of the Waterfront Workforce**

While visiting Charleston in 1857, James Stirling noted that “the natural flow of immigration is damned back from these [southern] States by slavery.” The Englishman conjectured that few Irish or other white immigrants settled in the South because “There is a natural aversion in the free labourer to put himself on a footing with a slave. Free labour, therefore, is scarce and dear in the Slave States.”<sup>1</sup> Correspondingly, one scholar of labor in Charleston has argued that black laborers, mostly slaves, performed the arduous work of loading and unloading ships in the antebellum South, and furthermore that white laborers “invariably” eschewed such exhausting and crude work as “an anathema and demeaning.”<sup>2</sup> Chapter two demonstrated that prior to the 1840s common dock labor as well as the transport of goods to and from the waterfront and through Charleston’s streets was conducted predominantly by slaves and free blacks. But during the middle decades of the nineteenth century the city’s waterfront labor force underwent significant change, and by the eve of the Civil War dock work was no longer cornered by one race or invariably avoided by another.

This chapter examines this racial and ethnic transformation on Charleston’s docks and drays during the late antebellum period and the significant friction, even violence, that accompanied the resultant labor competition between the city’s black workers and those anomalies of the Old South – free and white urban wage laborers in a slave society. It will also analyze white workingmen’s legislative efforts to eliminate or reduce black

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<sup>1</sup> James Stirling, *Letters from the Slave States* (London: J. W. Parker, 1857), 247, 230.

<sup>2</sup> Hine, “Black Organized Labor in Reconstruction Charleston,” 505.

competitors, an endeavor that not only proved largely unsuccessful, but also exposed and exacerbated rifts between more highly skilled and paid white stevedores and less skilled and often destitute white workingmen on the waterfront.

Though black laborers dominated waterfront work in Charleston throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, labor competition between the city's white and black workingmen long predated the late antebellum period. The law was largely on the side of the city's white workers. The comprehensive slave act passed in 1740 after the Stono Rebellion chastised slaveowners who allowed their slaves "to go and work where they please" and prohibited slaves from hiring out without a ticket or pass from their masters.<sup>3</sup> A law enacted in 1764 proscribed slaveholders from having "more than two slaves to work out for hire" and declared it unlawful for slaves "to carry on any mechanick or handicraft trade of themselves, in any shop or otherwise in Charlestown."<sup>4</sup> In 1796 the Charleston City Council passed an ordinance barring slave mechanics from hiring out their own time, and another municipal regulation in 1806 outlawed slaves from practicing any mechanical pursuits on their own accounts.<sup>5</sup> These laws, however, were rarely if ever enforced, and slave mechanics, tradesmen, and other skilled and unskilled manual laborers continued to compete with and displace white workingmen.

Aggrieved by a dearth of employment opportunities and slumping wages, Charleston's white workers aimed to eradicate or at least reduce their slave competitors.

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<sup>3</sup> McCord, *Statutes at Large*, vol. 7, 408-9; A petition from white master coopers claimed that the legislature revived the 1740 act with an edict on March 12, 1783. Petition, 1793 #63, and Petition, 1793 #64, SCDAH.

<sup>4</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 398.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 176; The 1806 ordinance did not prohibit slaveowners from hiring out their slave mechanics, but did bar such slaves from hiring their own time. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 170-1.

The first salvo came as early as 1742 when whites complained to colonial authorities about “the hiring out of negro tradesmen,” which was followed two years later by a similar objection from shipwrights.<sup>6</sup> The protests continued after the Revolution. When in 1783 a lack of construction work in Charleston made it difficult for white bricklayers and carpenters to support their families, they appealed to the South Carolina General Assembly for relief from “jobbing negro” competitors who casually moved from job to job and accepted paltry wages.<sup>7</sup> Ten years later the city’s white master coopers sought to draw legislators’ attention to the “very great and growing evil” long perpetrated by slaves who illegally carried out various trades and occupations “free from the Direction and Superintendance [*sic*] of any White person whatever,” and worked for wages much lower than whites could “possibly afford.” As Robert Mills reported decades later, white coopers and other skilled workers earned nearly twice the daily wages of their slave rivals, which whites argued was necessary to meet their higher cost and standard of living.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, lawmakers rejected the request for the incorporation of the Society of Master Coopers of Charleston, which was necessary not only “for the Purpose of general Utility” and mutual aid, but also as a means “of discouraging and utterly preventing those Practices of Slaves” which threatened the white coopers’ livelihoods.<sup>9</sup>

White workers did have a few prominent advocates around the end of the eighteenth century. For instance, one leader of the Constitutional Convention held in

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<sup>6</sup> Yates Snowden, “Notes on Labor Organizations in South Carolina, 1742-1861” (Columbia: University Press, 1914), 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Petition, 1783 #159, and Petition, 1783 #253, SCDAH.

<sup>8</sup> Mills, *Statistics of South Carolina*, 427-8.

<sup>9</sup> Petition, 1793 #63, and Petition 1793 #64, SCDAH; Committee Report, 1793 #60, SCDAH.

Charleston in 1788 openly contended that “cheap negro labor was steadily undermining the white artisan class” in South Carolina.<sup>10</sup> And in September 1795, Charleston’s Grand Jury presented state legislators with the “very great grievance, that Slaves that are Mechanics are allowed to carry on various handicraft Trades on their own account to the great prejudice of the poor [white] Mechanics in this City.”<sup>11</sup> But many lawmakers also hired out their own slaves in Charleston and thus had a vested pecuniary interest in protecting the jobs of the city’s enslaved blacks.

Nevertheless, Charleston’s white mechanics pressed state leaders in 1794 “to pass a Law for regulating [the] exercise of Mechanic trades by slaves in the City of Charleston.” Though a bill to regulate slave mechanics in both Charleston and Georgetown was introduced and debated, the measure was defeated in the state senate by a vote of sixteen to eleven.<sup>12</sup> Down but not out, members of the nascent Mechanic Society of Charleston petitioned the legislature for incorporation in 1798. But mindful of their setback in 1794 – and perhaps taking note of the coopers’ failure only a few years before – the mechanics changed tactics. Though this association of white workingmen would continue to play an active and vocal role in the crusade against black labor competition, their petition for incorporation was devoid of any mention of slaves or free blacks. Focusing instead on the desire to pool funds for the support of sick and injured fellow workers, the city’s white mechanics curried favor with the slaveholders in power

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<sup>10</sup> Snowden, “Notes on Labor Organizations in South Carolina, 1742-1861,” 9.

<sup>11</sup> Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, September 21, 1795, SCDAH.

<sup>12</sup> Snowden, “Notes on Labor Organizations in South Carolina, 1742-1861,” 9.

in the state capital in Columbia, who passed a bill chartering the Charleston Mechanic Society for five years.<sup>13</sup>

By not granting a permanent charter of incorporation, state legislators revealed a cautious distrust of these white workers' true intentions. Wary of efforts by either whites or blacks to organize or fix wages, slaveholding legislators more importantly sought to defend the institution of slavery, while those with slaves hired out in Charleston additionally wanted to protect their own earnings. Mindful of these obstacles, the Charleston Mechanic Society again wisely steered clear of the issue of black labor competition when asking for a perpetual charter in 1803. Once more appealing to legislators' humanity, the petitioners emphasized the society's objective of benevolent financial and material support for the destitute families of unemployed, ill, injured, and deceased mechanics. Then praying to be put on an equal footing with the state's other charitable institutions – such as the aristocrat laden South Carolina Society and the German Friendly Society – the white workers asked, “are your Petitioners less useful Citizens than any other Class of men? are they less orderly or less moral or less attached to the Constitution or Laws of their Country? and if they are not, why should a badge of Suspicion distinguish them while others are cloathed [*sic*] in honor?” Acutely aware of their vulnerable and peculiar status as free wage laborers in a slave society, these

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<sup>13</sup> Petition, 1798 #45, SCDAH; Committee Report, 1798 #98, SCDAH; According to Yates Snowden, the Charleston Mechanic Society was founded in 1794. Other sources suggest that the society was established in 1791. Michael Johnson and James Roark, for instance, report that the society celebrated its 67th anniversary in February 1858. A petition from 1817 implies that the society was established in 1798. Much of this confusion is likely due to the difference between when the society was founded and when it was incorporated by the state legislature. See Snowden, “Notes on Labor Organizations in South Carolina, 1742-1861,” 11; Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 179; *Charleston Mercury*, February 2, 1858; and Petition, 1817 #187, SCDAH.

workingmen also were staking claim to justice and their rights as free and white men.<sup>14</sup> Evidently not convinced that this collection of white workers were solely interested in charitable pursuits, the General Assembly rejected their request for a permanent charter in 1803 but renewed the incorporation of the Charleston Mechanic Society through 1817.<sup>15</sup>

The alleged Denmark Vesey conspiracy of 1822 presented Charleston's white mechanics and other workingmen with a golden opportunity to take off the gloves and strike boldly and decisively at their black competitors. Just months after the supposed plot was foiled, former governor Thomas Pinckney – under the pseudonym Achates – published his “Reflections, Occasioned by the late Disturbances in Charleston,” in which he suggested measures aimed at preventing a future slave revolt in the city. Pinckney began by including among the causes of the Vesey conspiracy the ease with which black Charlestonians, free and enslaved, were able to obtain money “afforded by the nature of their occupations...as mechanics, draymen, fishermen, butchers, porters, hucksters, &c.” Blacks so employed not only spent their wages in pursuits of drunkenness and debauchery but also were “willing instruments of any delusive plan of mischief which may be presented to them.” According to Pinckney, the knowledge acquired through these occupations as well as the requisite tools of employment – such as horses, vehicles, and even knives – “increase[d] their ability to do mischief.” But admitting the impracticality of directly preventing these “ill effects,” Pinckney sought to remedy the

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<sup>14</sup> Petition, 1803 #22, SCDAH.

<sup>15</sup> In 1817 the society again requested that state legislators renew the organization's charter, and accentuated their “humane and benevolent views and intentions.” See Petition, 1817 #187, SCDAH.

one “evil” that was within the control of city and state authorities: “The disparity of numbers between white and black inhabitants of the City.”<sup>16</sup>

In 1800 there were 1,213 more blacks than whites in Charleston. By 1820 the black majority had increased to 3,574, with 14,227 black and 10,653 white Charlestonians.<sup>17</sup> This “rapidly increasing evil – this *sine qua non* of insurrection,” had to be reversed. But, Pinckney asked, “what substitute can be obtained to occupy the employments now filled by the Negroes?” Most free white men were repulsed by the notion of being placed on the same footing with black slaves, let alone working shoulder to shoulder with them. As a result, white immigrants supposedly were deterred from settling in Charleston. The solution, Pinckney argued, was to entirely eliminate blacks from certain occupations and replace them with whites.

First and foremost among arguments in favor of free labor was the increased security and diminished risk of slave revolts that would accompany an elimination of Charleston’s black majority. An inflow of free white laborers simultaneously would enlarge the ranks of the city’s militia and offer better protection in wartime. The reduction blacks would lead to less depravity and idleness, while whites’ superior morals would provide a more wholesome example to the city’s impressionable children. Not only would the burden on local government and charitable institutions decline as impoverished whites found employment, but also the labor would be better and more industriously performed. After all, what incentive did slaves have to work hard and efficiently if the bulk of their wages had to be turned over to their masters? Black

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<sup>16</sup> Pinckney, “Reflections,” 7, 9.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Census figures in Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 340, Table 3.

laborers similarly mistreated their work tools and equipment, including horses and other animals, thus causing much unnecessary expense and waste. It was further suggested that hiring white workmen actually could prove cheaper than slaves, who often had to be fed, clothed, housed, and treated when ill, injured, and old. And even if whites were more expensive, their advantages far outweighed the extra wages that they would have to be paid. Pinckney concluded, in short, that jobs including draymen and porters “would be more advantageous filled by white men.”<sup>18</sup>

But before Charlestonians could “get rid of the blacks” and their occupations turned over exclusively to free white workingmen, white substitutes had to be recruited. Pinckney insisted that the supply would follow the demand, that is, once it was known “that Charleston requires any number of mechanics, draymen, &c. who will be liberally paid for their services,” white laborers would come to the city like moths to a flame.<sup>19</sup> And fully a quarter of a century before Ireland’s Great Famine, the impoverished and oppressed Irish were thought ideal candidates for recruitment.

Who that contemplates the unhappy condition of Ireland, where impolitic regulations, and the enormously unequal distribution of property have reduced a brave, industrious, and honest peasantry to perish by famine in a fruitful country, when at the time there is no real scarcity of provisions, can doubt that from that ill-fated Island alone an accession might soon be received, of active, industrious mechanics and labourers, to a City, where are already comfortably established, so

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<sup>18</sup> Pinckney argued that since all of the white mechanics, draymen, fishermen, and porters would be male, approximately 5,000 men would be added to the city’s militia; An editor’s note at the end of the essay sought to inform readers of the “expense attending the employment of Negro Slaves,” and concluded that “it is probable that the labour of white men will, on the whole, be as cheap as that of the slave.” Pinckney, “Reflections,” 10-26, 29-30.

<sup>19</sup> Pinckney acknowledged that this migration of free white workers would only occur if past impediments to immigration were removed, namely labor competition with blacks and the impression of an unhealthy climate. The obstacle of black competition would “cease with their removal.” As for the climate, once potential immigrants were “informed...that a considerable portion of our population consists of acclimatized foreigners” and that “the general salubrity of Charleston is scarcely surpassed by any city of great population, when not visited by yellow fever,” this impediment too would be removed. Pinckney, “Reflections,” 15-16.



many of their countrymen, who having passed through their seasoning, and now understanding the precautions necessary to be taken on change of climate, would with their accustomed benevolence and hospitality, effectually advise and assist the new-comers to establish themselves with safety and advantage.<sup>20</sup>

This exchange of black laborers for white, Pinckney conceded, would not be easy, convenient, or without cost. For example, time would have to be allowed for slaveowners to sell, hire, or transport their bondsmen out of town, and employers would need time to advertise and fill vacated positions. The question was, “whether the object be worth the cost?” History and experience had shown that “nothing good and valuable can be obtained without exertion and expense.”<sup>21</sup> In short, the disadvantages of such a fundamental change ought not to overshadow the immense advantages, the principle being greater security and the removal of terror.

Thomas Pinckney failed to win the broad support of white Charlestonians for his plan to replace urban slave laborers with immigrant whites and essentially relegate slavery to a rural institution in South Carolina.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, shortly after the discovery of the Vesey plot, Intendant James Hamilton and the members of the City Council petitioned state legislators recommending, among other things, that “the number of male slaves [in Charleston] be greatly diminished,” including “all those who hire themselves out or are hired by their owners.”<sup>23</sup> Slave badges and waterfront porter stands had been

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<sup>20</sup> Pinckney noted that nor was Ireland the only country from which the indigent yet industrious laborer could be induced to emigrate with the promise of profitable employment in Charleston. Pinckney, “Reflections,” 16-17.

<sup>21</sup> Pinckney added that “The expense will be nothing more than the difference of price between the labour of freemen and of slaves; the inconvenience will only be severely felt, while the alteration is carrying into effect.” Pinckney, “Reflections,” 20, 26.

<sup>22</sup> See Pearson, *Designs Against Charleston*, 155.

<sup>23</sup> Petition, ND #2059, SCDAH.

introduced in part to render the short-term hiring of slaves simpler and more convenient. But a state statute passed in December 1822 indeed outlawed all male slaves from hiring their own time, that is, making labor agreements with employers without the direct involvement of their masters. Under the new law, slaveowners who permitted their bondsmen to do so were liable to the seizure and forfeiture of their valuable human property.<sup>24</sup>

This law was intended to limit the ability of urban slave workers to act as if they were free, and thus to lessen their overall autonomy and the threat of future slave insurrections. According to the act, a master wishing to hire slaves out was obligated to roam the wharves and workshops of the city to identify and contract each job on behalf of his slaves. It was common for Charleston's slaveowners to sign contracts hiring out slaves for a month or a year. But this 1822 law made it impractical and bothersome to hire out bondsmen for shorter time periods. In other words, the letter of the law required that the master personally make the employment arrangements each time a slave was needed to haul a dray load of cotton from the railroad depot to a dockside vessel, or a stevedore or ship captain wanted to hire a slave awaiting work at a waterfront porter stand. This tedious and time-consuming task clearly would not have been worth the hassle for the majority of Charleston's slaveowners and would have opened the labor market for many waterfront occupations to white workingmen.<sup>25</sup>

It was not long before it became evident to all in Charleston, and especially to the city's white workers, that like past regulations the self-interested slaveowners in power

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<sup>24</sup> McCord, *Statutes at Large*, vol. 7, 461-2.

<sup>25</sup> See Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 176.

were not enforcing the 1822 law. In a petition to the General Assembly just a few years after the passage of the act, more than 100 white mechanics bluntly declared that this potentially salutary statute “fell dead-born” and had “never been in any manner carried into execution.” Masters routinely evaded the law, the petitioners contended, by providing their slaves with notes or certificates stating that the bondsmen were permitted to work out. The mechanics went on to object that “such is the indolence of Mankind, that there are but few owners who do not prefer turning loose their Slaves upon the Community, with such a Certificate, to hunt for Work...than put themselves to the trouble of making the contract.” Hard hit by Charleston’s recent “decay of Trade” and relative economic decline, the white workers claimed that due to competition with enslaved and free black workmen, their situation had become “so unprosperous, as to hold out to those who would be willing to...gain their livelihood by honest and laborious Industry in their avocation, a prospect full of gloom, and almost of Despair.”<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, contrary to Thomas Pinckney’s hope that the disparity between blacks and whites in the city could be corrected with an influx of white laborers, the petitioners claimed that the number of white workingmen in Charleston was actually decreasing. Moreover, some white mechanics were having to turn to more menial employment. Harkening back to the Denmark Vesey affair and the fear that first prompted both Pinckney’s essay and the 1822 law, the white workingmen warned that “Charleston, already swarming with a population of Free Blacks, and of Slaves, more

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<sup>26</sup> Petition, 1811 (circa 1828) #48, SCDAH. This petition is misdated, and was in fact submitted in approximately 1828. The white mechanics likely petitioned the General Assembly rather than the Charleston City Council not only because they were complaining specifically about the law passed by state legislators in 1822, but also because they may have perceived a better chance for success since a lower percentage of the slaveowners serving in Columbia owned and hired out slaves in Charleston; Also see Loren Schwenger, ed., *The Southern Debate over Slavery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 101-3.

Licentious than if they were Free, must, in a very short time, be in the condition of a West India Town, which it will be impossible to defend without a Regular Military Force.”<sup>27</sup> The specter of insurrection and slaughter was a new dart in the white workers’ quiver, and one that would be employed often in the decades to come.

Planter and Charleston resident Edward R. Laurens came to the defense of the city’s struggling white workingmen in an address to the Agricultural Society of South Carolina in September 1832. Like Thomas Pinckney, Laurens expressed views and policies that he readily acknowledged were “heterodox and unpopular” among the vast majority of South Carolinians and especially slaveholders.<sup>28</sup> Rather than calling for the replacement of blacks with whites in the city, Laurens argued that “slaves should not be allowed residence within the city in greater numbers than are *actually necessary*.” He conceded that the use of urban slaves in occupations such “as draymen, stevedores, wharf-labourers, and mechanics” had been too long established to accomplish their entire removal from the city. The use of slave labor on Charleston’s waterfront, in short, had reached and passed a point of no return. But there was still the potential to reduce the “great redundancy” of slaves engaged in these crucial yet abundant positions by offering payments to entice white emigrants.”<sup>29</sup> If this were to be done, Laurens argued, within only a few years Charleston would have a much more effective and wholesome workforce and population. Laurens rejected the claim that an unhealthy climate

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<sup>27</sup> The petition concluded with a request for permission to form the “Charleston Mechanics’ Association.” Petition, 1811 (circa 1828) #48, SCDAH.

<sup>28</sup> Laurens, “Address,” 3.

<sup>29</sup> Laurens also suggested creating and attaching a Mechanic Institute to the city’s Orphan House for the training of native white children, which would in time increase the city’s white population and presumably help squeeze out “the great redundancy of slave mechanics among us.” Laurens, “Address,” 8-9.

explained why few white laborers had immigrated to Charleston, and echoed Pinckney in maintaining that the supply of free and white draymen, laborers, and mechanics would meet the demand if only the city offered a little “liberal encouragement.”<sup>30</sup>

Slaveowning interests evidently precluded any serious or sustained attempt to recruit white immigrants in the decade after Thomas Pinckney’s 1822 essay. In fact, the disparity between Charleston’s black and white populations had increased.<sup>31</sup> Laurens claimed that recent laws that were “honestly intended to benefit the mechanic interest” in fact had produced the opposite effect by placing “further difficulties in the path of the poor young white man.” He was particularly critical of an edict that exempted from “extra taxation” the slaves of white master mechanics who worked under the direction of their owners.<sup>32</sup> This measure not only “operated to make the rich richer” but also led to the exclusion of white journeymen in favor of cheaper slave apprentices. Many of the city’s white workers consequently were being “driven from their honest trades to earn their bread by other means.” Others were simply packing up and moving on. But rather than blaming slaves for this “ultimate exclusion of the bone and sinew of our

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<sup>30</sup> Laurens, “Address,” 7-8, 11-12.

<sup>31</sup> In 1820 there were 14,227 blacks – both free and enslaved – and 10,653 whites residing in Charleston, a black advantage of 3,574. By 1830 there were 17,461 blacks and 12,828 whites in the city, a black majority of 4,633. U.S. Census figures in Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 340, Table 3.

<sup>32</sup> Laurens, “Address,” 8; Laurens likely was referring to the following city ordinance passed in 1830: “*Be it ordained*, That from and after the publication of this Ordinance, no mechanic engaged in the exercise and pursuit of his particular trade or profession, shall be required to take out or obtain a badge or badges for his negro or negroes, in cases where such negro or negroes is or are hired by such mechanic to one or more individuals, carrying on the same trade or business with himself. *Provided*, That such negro or negroes be themselves of the same trade and are hired out in the capacity of mechanics, and that such hiring do not altogether, whether to one or more individuals, exceed the term of six months in any year; and *provided also*, that the number of negroes so to be hired shall not at any time exceed six.” Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 176.

population,” Laurens pointed the finger at Charleston’s “intermediate class” of free blacks.<sup>33</sup>

By 1832 it was clear to Edward Laurens and many other advocates for free labor in Charleston that a war against urban slavery was not just an uphill battle, but a losing battle.<sup>34</sup> With the Nullification Crisis underway and controversial legislation such as the Negro Seamen Acts sparking tensions between the North and South, southerners shifted their defense of slavery from an argument that the institution was a “necessary evil” to one that it was a “positive good” focused on the beneficial and paternalistic nurturing of an inferior race.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the seats of power in Charleston and Columbia were occupied by slaveowners who had long enjoyed the fruits (i.e. wages) of their hired-out urban slaves.<sup>36</sup> Free people of color, on the other hand – a “third class in our community” – had far fewer allies and defenders than did slaves and thus were much more vulnerable.<sup>37</sup> “By far the greatest evil...which slave-holding communities have to

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<sup>33</sup> Laurens added that the “exclusion of our effective white population is the greatest evil of our intermediate class.” Laurens, “Address,” 8, 11-12; Charleston ship carpenters James Marsh and James Poyas reported in 1833 that “Many of our young mechanics have left Charleston to seek employment elsewhere.” U.S. Congress, 1st Session, 1833-1834, House Report, no. 541, May 13, 1833, page 19, Pease Collection, ARC.

<sup>34</sup> Another reason so many native white southerners avoided waterfront work and labor competition with slaves was their understanding that open conflict with the powerful slaveholding class was a battle rarely won, a lesson that immigrant and other non-southern white workingmen learned the hard way in antebellum Charleston.

<sup>35</sup> Historian Jeffrey Young argues that this shift began decades before the 1830s. See Jeffrey Robert Young, *Proslavery and Sectional Thought in the Early South, 1740-1829: An Anthology*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> An anonymous Charlestonian accused Mayor Jacob F. Mintzing of hiring his own slaves for municipal public works projects “to the exclusion of our poor white laborers, who are our own fellow-citizens, and do militia duty, and fight for the country, and have families to support.” *Charleston Courier*, September 3, 1841; A white mechanic writing to the *Charleston Mercury* in May 1858 urged members of the community to support local white workingmen, but concluded that “There are some however (in office), who are of different opinion.” *Charleston Mercury*, May 31, 1858.

content with,” free blacks not only deprived jobs from hard-working whites but also planted notions of freedom and insurrection in the minds of Charleston’s slaves. Denmark Vesey, Laurens reminded his audience, was a free black man. And if nothing was done about the ongoing exodus of white laborers from the city, “worse than savage massacre may yet be the consequence of their absence.” The remedy to this free black “nuisance” was their “entire extinction” or banishment from the city and state.<sup>38</sup> Though white authorities throughout the South curtailed the rights of free people of color in the decades before the Civil War, they did not drive free blacks from their urban occupations in Charleston or elsewhere.

The Great Famine in Ireland and social and political unrest in Germany precipitated what essays and speeches could not. Between 1830 and 1860 nearly 5 million foreign immigrants poured into the United States, most of whom originated from Western and Central Europe and especially Ireland and Germany.<sup>39</sup> A great majority of these white foreigners landed in the North, and finding work and relatives in large port

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<sup>37</sup> Laurens, “Address,” 9; See Petition, 1820 #143, SCDAH; Throughout the antebellum period, however, a group of influential white Charlestonians defended the city’s free black population. The future treasury secretary of the Confederacy Christopher G. Memminger, for example, argued that free blacks were “entitled to the protection of our laws” and pointed out that it was a free black man who while still a slave blew the whistle on the Vesey plot. What’s more, Memminger contended that white workingmen rather than free blacks were the greater moral menace to both Charleston’s slaves and the South’s peculiar institution. Johnson and Roark term prominent Charlestonians’ protection of the city’s free blacks the “Charleston defense.” Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 167-73; Also see Petition, ND #2801, SCDAH.

<sup>38</sup> Laurens, “Address,” 9-14.

<sup>39</sup> By the eve of the Civil War, approximately 1.6 million Irish immigrants resided in the United States. David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 20; For other studies of immigration to and immigrants in Charleston, see Berlin and Gutman, “Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves”; Silver, “A New Look at Old South Urbanization”; Jeffery Strickland, “Ethnicity and Race in the Urban South: German Immigrants and African-Americans in Charleston, South Carolina during Reconstruction,” Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2003; and Herbert Weaver, “Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Towns of the Lower South,” *Journal of Southern History* 13 (February 1947): 62-73.

cities such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, most remained north of the Mason-Dixon Line and thus avoided labor competition with black slaves.

But immigrants did make their way to southern cities, including Charleston, in search of employment and opportunities for upward social mobility. Irishman Thomas Carrol, for example, arrived in New York City as an eight-year-old child in September 1847 and by 1860 was working on Charleston's waterfront as a stevedore. The *Charleston Mercury* referred to Carrol in 1891 as "a well known stevedore," and he still lived in the city in 1900 at the age of sixty-two.<sup>40</sup> John Torrent was born in Spain in 1804 but by the mid-1830s was in Maryland. Before long Torrent and his family made their way to Charleston, where John was employed as a rigger in 1840. Eventually partnering with his two eldest sons, the Spaniard operated a rigging and stevedoring business throughout the 1840s and 1850s. By 1860, fifty-six-year-old John Torrent owned \$4,500 in real and \$2,500 in personal property, including several horses for hoisting cargo and rigging vessels and a male slave who was likely employed on the docks.<sup>41</sup> And William Doran – born in Ireland in 1809 or 1810 but residing in South Carolina by 1849 – also was working as a rigger in 1855 and then as a stevedore by 1857. Despite losing an arm

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<sup>40</sup> *Irish Immigrants: New York Port Arrival Records, 1846-1851*. Ancestry.com database. Provo, UT: The Generations Network, Inc., 2001; 1860 U.S. Census; *Charleston Mercury*, October 3, 1891; 1900 U.S. Census.

<sup>41</sup> Torrent married and had his first son, Joseph Torrent, in Maryland before moving to South Carolina. In addition to the two sons who worked as stevedores, Torrent and his wife had five children, all of whom were born in South Carolina. By 1870, Torrent, his wife, and these five other children had left Charleston and were farming in Richmond County, Georgia; See 1850 U.S. Census; 1860 U.S. Census, 1860 U.S. Census Slave Schedules; 1870 U.S. Census; 1840-41 city directory; J. H. Bagget, *Directory of the City of Charleston for the Year 1852: Containing the Names, Occupation, Place of Business & Residence of the Inhabitants Generally: With Other Information of General Interest*. Charleston: Printed by Edward C. Councill, 1852 (hereafter cited as 1852 city directory); 1856 city directory; 1859 city directory; 1860 city directory; For horse ownership figures, see John Torrent in "List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1858"; "List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1859"; and Charleston Tax Records, 1860-1865, CLS.



during the Union bombardment of Charleston, Doran continued to work as a stevedore after the Civil War until his death in 1880.<sup>42</sup> In all, federal census schedules tallied 2,359 Irish immigrants living in Charleston in 1850, comprising 5.5 percent of the city's total population and 11.8 percent of white inhabitants. By 1860 there were 3,263 Irish-born Charlestonians, 8 percent of the city's residents and 14 percent of whites.<sup>43</sup> In addition, 1,901 Germans populated the city in 1860.<sup>44</sup> And a local census conducted in 1861 found that 3,662 Irishmen, 2,437 Germans, and 1,401 immigrants from all other countries resided in the city.<sup>45</sup>

Such population figures may be low, however. Though some immigrants – such as Carrol, Torrent, and Doran – settled in Charleston permanently, many others migrated seasonally between northern and southern port cities. Thomas Pinckney proposed in 1822 that in addition to recruiting Irish and other foreign laborers to immigrate to Charleston, itinerant workers could be convinced to settle in the city permanently. For years Charlestonians had witnessed “every autumn...the importation of a considerable number of industrious mechanics and fishermen from the Northern and Eastern States.”

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<sup>42</sup> William Doran was listed as a stevedore in the 1860 city directory, but City Council Minutes reveal that he was working as a stevedore in 1857. Doran's oldest son James, who was born in South Carolina in 1849, was working as a stevedore in Charleston in 1870. See City Council Minutes, September 1, 1857, *Charleston Mercury*, September 3, 1857; City Council Minutes, September 29, 1857, *Charleston Mercury*, October 1, 1857; 1856 city directory; 1870 U.S. Census.

<sup>43</sup> See Gleeson, *Irish in the South*, 35, Table 3, and 36, Table 4.

<sup>44</sup> Jeffery Strickland, “How the Germans Became White Southerners: German Immigrants and African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, 1860-1880,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28 (Fall 2008); Of the 9,986 foreign-born inhabitants of South Carolina in 1860, 6,311 or 63 percent were living in Charleston. There were 4,906 Irish and 2,947 Germans in the state in 1860. James Curtis Ballagh, ed., *The South in the Building of the Nation: A History of the Southern States Designed to Record the South's Part in the Making of the American Nation; to Portray the Character and Genius, to Chronicle the Achievements and Progress and to Illustrate the Life* (Richmond: The Southern Historical Publication Society, 1909), vol. 5, 603, Table II A; 1860 U.S. Census.

<sup>45</sup> Frederick A. Ford, *Census of the City of Charleston, South Carolina, For the Year 1861* (Charleston: Evans & Cogswell, 1861), 11-12.

As with immigrants, if the humiliation of being “placed so nearly on a level with the slave” could be removed along with the city’s bondsmen, Pinckney argued that these transient white laborers could be convinced to end their “present practice of returning home in the summer” and remain in Charleston year around.<sup>46</sup>

Pinckney’s observation that workers typically travelled southward in the fall and returned to the North in the summer was indeed accurate. When Robert Russell visited Charleston in January 1855, the Englishman remarked that “The greater part of the business being transacted in winter...A large influx of merchants and labourers takes place in winter, but they again depart during the hot season.”<sup>47</sup> A number of plausible explanations for this seasonal pattern of migration have been offered, including that immigrant laborers left frigid New York City due to a dearth of employment opportunities in the late fall and winter, and departed Charleston before the arrival of the summer heat and the onset of the annual threat of diseases such as malaria and especially yellow fever.<sup>48</sup> Irish immigrants living in the North also were recruited to come South to toil at tasks considered too dangerous for valuable slaves, such as the construction of roads, canals, railroads, and large buildings. After the completion of such projects, workers often set out in search for another job or returned to New York.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Pinckney pointed out that the financial reward of their hard work in Charleston must have outweighed not only competing with or working alongside black slaves, but also “the expense of two sea voyages in a few months.” Pinckney, “Reflections,” 17.

<sup>47</sup> Russell, *North America*, 162-3.

<sup>48</sup> Gleeson, *Irish in the South*, 29; Silver, “A New Look at Old South Urbanization,” 149-50.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher Silver found that only 23 percent of Charleston’s Irish population appearing in the 1850 U.S. Census still resided in the city in 1860. Among the city’s unskilled Irish workers, only about 10 percent were in the city in both 1850 and 1860, while 25 percent of semiskilled and skilled workers and 50 percent of white-collar Irishmen remained. Silver, “A New Look at Old South Urbanization,” 150, 154; Also see

Unexplored, however, is the possibility that many of these transient Irish immigrants came to Charleston specifically to work on the city's waterfront.<sup>50</sup> Again, the majority of native white southerners eschewed menial waterfront employment. But whether by choice or necessity, many white immigrants found such work to be acceptable. Since the preponderance of immigrants, and especially the newly arrived Irish, qualified only as lowly paid day laborers performing the most grueling, unhealthy, and perilous tasks, most regarded unskilled or semiskilled jobs such as loading and unloading ships on the docks or draying and carting goods to be relatively desirable.<sup>51</sup>

Because commercial shipping was seasonal, so was dock work. The port was, of course, open for business all year around, but demand for waterfront and transportation labor waned in the late spring and summer months.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, stevedores, wharf hands, porters, draymen, and other waterfront workers in Charleston only could rely upon steady work about seven months of each year. For those slaves, free blacks, and whites who lived and labored in Charleston year around, the remaining five months typically were split between the docks and working other jobs.<sup>53</sup> Some Irish draymen and carters – and

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Barbara L. Bellows, *Benevolence among Slaveholders: Assisting the Poor in Charleston, 1670-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 102-3, 130.

<sup>50</sup> Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 227; Lending credence to the premise that many of these transient white immigrants worked on Charleston's waterfront, many of New York's poor and unskilled Irish had experience working on the wharves of New York City, thus increasing the likelihood that they would find work on Charleston's docks. Moreover, once in Charleston many working-class immigrants lived in shanties near the Cooper River waterfront, unquestionably filthy and unhealthy living conditions, but also a short walk to work. See Silver, "A New Look at Old South Urbanization," 150-1.

<sup>51</sup> For examples of cases when the use of Irish immigrants was considered preferable to more valuable black slaves, see Dennis Clark, *The Irish in Philadelphia: Ten Generations of Urban Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), 66; Silver, "A New Look at Old South Urbanization," 149-51; and Earl F. Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 48-9.

<sup>52</sup> For tables of the monthly numbers of vessels arriving and departing Charleston harbor between April 1828 and December 1848, see Dawson and DeSaussure, *Census of Charleston for 1848*, 59-71.

even stevedore William Doran – bid for contracts as city scavengers or street contractors, while other workers joined fire companies or moonlighted as city guardsmen or night watchmen.<sup>54</sup> Many unskilled immigrant laborers, on the other hand, departed Charleston at the close of the shipping season and set out in search of employment on the thawing docks of northern port cities such as New York and Boston, only to return to the South looking for work in the fall. One scholar has discovered, for example, that Irish immigrants who worked as longshoremen in Quebec City migrated southward each fall when the St. Lawrence River froze over to labor on the waterfronts of New Orleans, Savannah, Mobile, and Pensacola.<sup>55</sup>

This seasonal circuit of dock workers took place in Charleston as well. With the establishment of more regular and reliable coastal packet service between Charleston and New York in 1822, the steady flow of seasonal workers became a torrent.<sup>56</sup> Created to transport cotton and other goods between the two Atlantic ports, the packet lines also

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<sup>53</sup> Irish drayman Michael Lyons, for example, received payments in 1857 for unspecified work done on a local plantation. See Cash Book, June 2, 1856- December 31, 1857, April 13, 1857, April 16, 1857, Legare, Colcock, and Company Records, 1855-1865, SCHS; 1855 city directory; 1860 city directory; and 1860 U.S. Census.

<sup>54</sup> Regarding bids for city contracts, see City Council Minutes, October 27, 1857, *Charleston Mercury*, October 29, 1857; City Council Minutes, December 8, 1857, *Charleston Mercury*, December 10, 1857; City Council Minutes, October 26, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, October 28, 1858; City Council Minutes, November 23, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, November 29, 1858; City Council Minutes, December 21, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, December 23, 1858; and City Council Minutes, December 6, 1859, *Charleston Mercury*, December 8, 1859; English stevedore John Symons was a member of the Palmetto Fire Company from its inception in 1841 and served as the president of the company in 1859. See Petition, 1841 #33, and Petition, 1841 #34, SCDAH; and 1859 city directory; Regarding workers moonlighting as city guardsmen, see City Council Minutes, September 29, 1847, *Southern Patriot*, September 30, 1847.

<sup>55</sup> It is possible, even probable, that these Quebec workers traveled to Charleston as well; Monica Hunt, "Savannah's Black and White Longshoremen, 1856-1897" (M.A. thesis, Armstrong State College, 1993), 22-8.

<sup>56</sup> According to maritime scholar P. C. Coker, "On average two packet ships would leave Charleston each week during the 'cotton season.' During the summer months when there was little to haul, only about two departures per month were scheduled." By 1825 some packets left both Charleston and New York every four days. Also, "The packet ships quickly cut a normal New York to Charleston trip from ten days down to an average of six, depending upon the weather and the speed of the vessel." Coker, *Charleston's Maritime Heritage*, 176-8.

initiated an active passenger service. In addition to relatively affluent cabin travelers, these vessels also offered steerage passage, enabling thousands of transient white workers – most of whom were poor and unskilled Irish immigrants – to travel back and forth between New York and Charleston in search of employment.<sup>57</sup> One scholar estimates that the Charleston-New York vessels accommodated 10,900-14,800 one-way travelers in 1824 and 26,000-32,500 one-way trips in 1836.<sup>58</sup> In the years before the Civil War, the New York and Charleston Steamship Line charged \$7 or \$8 for one-way steerage tickets, about the half the price of cabin fares.<sup>59</sup>

In the years 1845, 1849, and 1855, the greatest influx of steerage passengers to Charleston took place during the fall and winter months, the port's commercial peak.

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<sup>57</sup> Silver, "A New Look at Old South Urbanization," 149; Dean of American maritime history Robert Greenhalgh Albion almost entirely ignored the working people who traveled on the packet lines. Albion instead focused on the better sorts of Charleston society, who in "large numbers sought to avoid the unhealthy and uncomfortable heat of the Southern cities" and escaped to summer homes in New Jersey or to patronize the shops and theaters of New York City. For example, Albion cites May 1825, when 164 cabin passengers departed Charleston for New York on two coastal packets. The cabin fare was \$30 and included food and wine. But according to Albion, only "A few steerage passengers were occasionally carried," and he did not note the cost of a steerage ticket. Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *Square-Riggers on Schedule: The New York Sailing Packets to England, France, and the Cotton Ports* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938), 229.

<sup>58</sup> Allan R. Pred, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United States System of Cities, 1790-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 170-3; Further corroborating the presence in Charleston of significant numbers of transient workers from New York, records reveal that between September 1, 1848, and August 31, 1849, forty transient poor from New York – many of whom were Irish immigrants – were admitted to the city's Alms House, the most of any state excepting South Carolina. Since transient workers often arrived from New York and elsewhere without the assurance of employment and probably without having arranged for housing, those who found themselves unemployed or underemployed once they arrived in Charleston often had little choice but to turn to the Alms House for shelter and sustenance. Only three transient poor from New York, for instance, received outdoor support from the Alms House, suggesting that these workers had another place to reside. See Committee Report, 1849 #27, SCDAH; The records of Charleston's charitable institutions, such as the Hibernian Society and the New England Society, include expenditures to enable indigent working-class immigrants to return to northern cities. See, for instance, Hibernian Society Minutes, 1827-1967, SCHS, and New England Society Records, 1819-1995, SCHS.

<sup>59</sup> In 1859 steerage tickets cost \$8 and cabin tickets cost \$15. In 1860 steerage fares dropped to \$7. One of the line's four steamships departed Adger's Wharf every Wednesday and Saturday at high tide, and the trip to New York took between forty-eight and fifty hours. Steerage passage between Charleston and Philadelphia was offered for only \$5 in 1860. See 1859 city directory, and 1860 city directory; Also see Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1830-17A, SCDAH.

The heaviest flow of steerage passengers back to New York occurred between March and August, as maritime commerce and the resultant demand for waterfront labor dwindled. More specifically, 400 steerage passengers arrived in Charleston between May and August 1855, but over 1,000 passengers left the city and returned to New York. But between September and December, as cotton bales and barrels of rice were piled up on Charleston's wharves and an increasing number of vessels entered the harbor, over 1,700 passengers traveled from New York to Charleston in steerage whereas only 400 made the northward trek, a net inflow of 1,300 workers.<sup>60</sup>

As a result, the laboring population of Charleston fluctuated greatly during the year, ebbing and flowing with the seasons of maritime commerce. But this annual flux of thousands of working-class immigrants into and out of Charleston via the New York packet lines often did not produce a significant net increase in the city's permanent white laboring population. In 1855, for example, approximately 2,800 steerage passengers travelled to Charleston, but about 2,700 went to New York.<sup>61</sup> The number of white laborers – and particularly waterfront workers – clearly swelled in the fall and winter. But since census and city directory data often were collected during the summer months, many of these seasonal workers were not in the city at the time and thus were not included in these counts. The 1860 U.S. Census, for instance, was conducted in Charleston between June 1 and August 2, the nadir of the southern shipping season and a

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<sup>60</sup> Silver, "A New Look at Old South Urbanization," 149-50.

<sup>61</sup> Many of these individuals sailed both ways, some were one-way passengers on their way elsewhere such as New Orleans, while others were settling permanently in the South.

time of year when the vast majority of transient white laborers were not present in the city.<sup>62</sup>

But even if white waterfront and transportation workers did not always appear in official population counts, their presence in Charleston was well documented by a myriad of other sources. For example, when a brutal heat wave swept through the city in July and early August 1854, scores of immigrant workingmen died. The *Charleston Standard* reported that “men and animals have been overcome and dropped lifeless in the streets,” including one man who “fell upon the pavement as though he had been shot.” Michael Kennedy, “a native of Ireland, and employed as a drayman by Mr. Woodside,” suffered sunstroke and died within half an hour. Another Irishman named Carey expired shortly after he “was overcome by the heat on Union wharf.” Some victims had been in Charleston for such a brief time that they could not even be identified, such as “A laboring man, whose name our reporter was unable to ascertain.”<sup>63</sup>

Sometimes bad behavior drew the community’s attention and ire. In February 1858 the *Charleston Mercury* reported that “Great indignation was manifested yesterday by the bystanders, at the conduct of a white drayman, who threw down an elderly lady at the corner of Broad and East Bay streets.” Likely in a rush to transport cotton bales

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<sup>62</sup> Due to this seasonal fluctuation in the city’s population, accurately tracking the shifting racial and ethnic composition of Charleston’s waterfront labor force based on U.S. Census records is a difficult and imperfect task; 1860 U.S. Census; The 1850 U.S. Census was collected in Charleston between August 1 and December 22, 1850. 1850 U.S. Census; Robert Mills argued in 1826 that the 1820 U.S. Census in Charleston was undercounted by 1,500-2,000 due to the fact that it was collected when the city’s population was “at the lowest computation.” He estimated that there were 27,000 rather than 24,780 inhabitants in 1820, and pointed out that most of the absent citizens temporarily were in the North. Mills, *Statistics of South Carolina*, 396.

<sup>63</sup> Also mentioned in this report were Germans, a Scotsman, and a Frenchman. *Charleston Standard*, August 2, 1854, quoted in *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), August 7, 1854; See the city’s death records for dozens of cases of immigrants dying from sunstroke or “coup de soleil.” Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL.

between the railroad depot and the Cooper River wharves, “he drove on without heeding,” and neither the driver nor the dray number was identified.<sup>64</sup> A drayman named James Morgan, listed in the 1860 U.S. Census as an Irish laborer, was arrested for extortion in September 1859. Upon the arrival of the New York packet ship *Columbia*, Morgan loaded the luggage of a Frenchman onto his dray and promised to transport it for 25 cents. But finding the route longer than expected and disregarding that drayage rates were fixed and capped, the white drayman asked for another quarter. “The Frenchman assented, which so encouraged Morgan that the trip was prolonged indefinitely. The fee had reached the size of a dollar, when the drayman imprudently driving past the Guard House, was arrested and locked up for examination.”<sup>65</sup> And during the devastating fire of December 1861, Charlestonians extolled the actions of a free black drayman named Richard Dereef who transported for free several loads consisting of the belongings of a destitute white woman. Whereas there had been “no single case of attempted extortion by a colored drayman or driver,” the correspondent observed that “White men demanded \$50 a load.”<sup>66</sup>

Contemporary images also confirm the racial and ethnic diversification of waterfront and transportation workers in late antebellum Charleston. Englishman Eyre Crowe sketched the scene inside the lobby of the Charleston Hotel on March 22, 1853. Amid the crowd of well-dressed gentlemen smoking, reading, and conversing, Crowe captured at least two white workingmen – either porters or draymen who like James

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<sup>64</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, February 20, 1858; Similarly, in February 1856 white drayman Phillip McGuire “was reported for the improper driving of his dray and running against the wagon of Mr. Veronee.” *Charleston Mercury*, February 19, 1856; 1856 city directory.

<sup>65</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, September 16, 1859.

<sup>66</sup> *Fayetteville Observer* (North Carolina), January 6, 1862.



Morgan probably met arriving travelers on the docks – carrying luggage and cases into the hotel.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, during the late 1850s advertisements for the printers Walker, Evans & Co. frequently included an image of a white drayman transferring wooden crates between his dray and the company’s building at 3 Broad Street near East Bay Street.<sup>68</sup>

Whether white immigrants came to Charleston to work and settle permanently or for seasonal labor, they inevitably came into competition with the city’s free blacks and slaves for waterfront and transportation work. And it was indeed on the docks and drays that these newcomers successfully challenged black workers.<sup>69</sup> Considered unskilled common labor, most of Charleston’s free dock workers were enumerated among all of the other “laborers” on the 1850 and 1860 U.S. Census schedules.<sup>70</sup> Tabulating their actual numbers with any degree of precision is therefore impossible.<sup>71</sup> In spite of this, census

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<sup>67</sup> Later images that clearly were based on Crowe’s 1853 sketch depict blacks doing this work. For example, see the image that appeared on the front page of the *Illustrated London News* during the Secession Convention in Charleston in December 1860, in Robert N. Rosen, *Confederate Charleston: An Illustrated History of the City and the People During the Civil War* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 43; While in Charleston on February 28, 1857, James Stirling wrote that the waiters employed at the Charleston Hotel were “partly Irish and partly slaves.” Stirling, *Letters from the Slave States*, 230.

<sup>68</sup> This image appears in the 1859 city directory, page 41; Also see images in John W. Jones, *Confederate Currency: The Color of Money, Images of Slavery in Confederate and Southern States Currency* (West Columbia, SC: The Olive Press, 2002), 102, 118.

<sup>69</sup> See Silver, “A New Look at Old South Urbanization,” 149-51, and Gleeson, *Irish in the South*, 33-5, 38, 53.

<sup>70</sup> The unspecified “laborers” employed on Charleston’s antebellum wharves performed tasks corresponding to the work of longshoremen, a term that did not gain ascendancy in Charleston until after the Civil War. Waterfront laborers in antebellum Charleston were often referred to as wharf or dock hands, but they were not listed as such in the 1850 or 1860 U.S. Census; Christopher Silver counted 507 Irish laborers and 50 free black laborers in the 1850 U.S. Census, and 497 Irish laborers and 44 free black laborers in the 1860 U.S. Census. Silver, “A New Look at Old South Urbanization,” 156, 160, Table 1.

<sup>71</sup> Census records report that there were 2,336 laborers and only 31 stevedores and longshoremen in Charleston in 1870. And yet, in 1875 Charleston’s mostly black Longshoremen’s Protective Union Association counted an estimated 800-1,000 members. This supports the argument that many of those recorded as unspecified “laborers” both before and after the Civil War indeed worked on the city’s docks

takers did specifically list free stevedores, draymen, carters, and porters on their rolls.<sup>72</sup> In 1850, for instance, the census shows that in addition to an unrecorded number of slave stevedores, six free black stevedores worked on Charleston's waterfront along with seven whites, five of whom were Irish immigrants (table 1).<sup>73</sup> By 1860 whites had shattered the equal distribution of stevedoring jobs among free blacks and whites, claiming eighteen out of nineteen of the stevedore positions listed, including seven Irishmen, the most of any ethnic group (table 2).<sup>74</sup>

The 1850s were the years of transition for other waterfront occupations as well. In 1850 the census listed seventy-five free draymen in Charleston, forty-seven of whom were free blacks and twenty-eight were whites, while of the twelve carters recorded, eight were free blacks and four were whites. In the same year nineteen porters were listed, with fourteen free blacks and only five whites (table 1). By 1860 a dramatic shift had

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and identified themselves as dock workers; 1870 U.S. Census figures in Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 270-2, Table 13. Also see Powers, 128.

<sup>72</sup> The entire free population of the city of Charleston as listed in the 1850 and 1860 U.S. censuses was evaluated for this study. In an undertaking of this magnitude, errors are inevitable despite my own most conscious efforts to avoid and eliminate them. Nevertheless, I am confident that any errors that are incorporated into the figures appearing in this study are few enough in number and limited enough in scope as to have a negligible influence upon my conclusions; Though the accuracy of the 1848 local census is highly doubtful, it also tabulated the number of white and free black stevedores, porters, draymen, and laborers: one white and one free black stevedore; eight white and five free black porters; eighteen white and eleven free black draymen; and 192 white and 19 male free black laborers. Dawson and DeSaussure, *Census of Charleston for 1848*.

<sup>73</sup> The 1850 U.S. Census listed three free black (James Cross, Francis Hale, and Andrew Sinclair) and three free mulatto (John Lovely, James Boudeau, and Charles Mikell) stevedores in Charleston. The Irish stevedores were Charles Farley, John Riley, Thomas Noland, Clark Raining, and William Farley. The other two white stevedores listed in 1850 were Emanuel Rosa, a native of Portugal, and William R. Green, a native of Connecticut. No German immigrants were working as stevedores in Charleston in 1850.

<sup>74</sup> Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*, 122; The Irish stevedores in Charleston in 1860 were Thomas Nolan, Edward Fortune, Thomas Elliot, Thomas Carrol, John Conroy, Patrick Welsh, and Clark Leiky (elsewhere spelled Leckie). There were three Englishmen (William Palmer, William Smith, and John Symons), two Spaniards (Magna Rose and John Torrent), an Austrian (George Jefferson), a Canadian (William Watson); one native of Massachusetts (G. B. Stoddard), one Marylander (Joseph Torrent), and two white South Carolinians (Samuel Barr and John Torrent Jr.). The free black stevedore was mulatto Joseph Edmonston.

occurred. In that year's census 147 individuals were listed as draymen, but with only 25 reported as free black and 122 as white. Moreover, among the thirty-four carters listed in the city in 1860, twenty-three were now whites and only eleven were free blacks, while of the seventy-five porters, whites claimed fifty-two and free blacks twenty-three of these positions (table 2). In short, by 1860 white immigrants – and particularly the Irish – had established a dominant presence among free workers on Charleston's wharves, occupying nearly 80 percent of the recorded positions.

The 1856 city directory provides a snapshot of Charleston's waterfront workforce in the midst of this transformation. In that year, forty-four white draymen, eighteen carters, thirty-two porters, and twelve stevedores were counted. On the other hand, among free blacks only thirteen draymen, three carters, six porters, and two stevedores were found to be laboring in the city in 1856.<sup>75</sup> Already gone from the wharves were all six of the free black stevedores who had appeared in the 1850 U.S. Census. And several white stevedores who would appear in the 1860 U.S. Census, such as William Watson and George B. (G. B.) Stoddard, had established themselves in the business.<sup>76</sup> Irish draymen such as James Corcoran and Thomas Green had made their journeys to Charleston and had found employment in this traditional black occupation, as did fellow Irishman Miles Moran, who began work as a porter as early as 1855.<sup>77</sup> Though city directories admittedly are flawed, these figures generally corroborate the changing racial

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<sup>75</sup> The 1856 city directory listed approximately 392 white laborers and only 2 free black laborers.

<sup>76</sup> G. B. Stoddard appeared in the 1855 and 1856 city directories and in the 1860 U.S. Census; William Watson appeared in the 1856 and 1860 city directories and in the 1860 U.S. Census.

<sup>77</sup> James Corcoran appeared as a drayman in the 1855 and 1859 city directories and in the 1860 U.S. Census; Thomas Green appeared as a drayman in the 1856 and 1860 city directories and in the 1860 U.S. Census; Miles Moran appeared as a porter in the 1855, 1856, and 1860 city directories and in the 1860 U.S. Census.

and ethnic makeup of Charleston's waterfront labor force in the years before the Civil War.

Meanwhile, just as the Irish and other white immigrants displaced many free black stevedores, draymen, carters, and porters, they also made inroads against Charleston's slaves. As discussed in the previous chapter, calculating the number of slaves who worked on the city's antebellum waterfront is challenging. United States Census records and city directories excluded the names and occupations of slaves. A local census taken in 1848 (the accuracy of which scholars have long doubted) listed only 2 slave stevedores, 35 porters, 67 draymen, and 838 male laborers.<sup>78</sup> Although many of these slave laborers surely were hired as dock workers for at least part of the year, these figures fail to indicate how many. Most definitively, data from slave badge sales suggest that between 1,000 and 1,600 of Charleston's hired-out slaves worked on the waterfront as porters, draymen, carters, and day laborers during the 1840s and early 1850s.<sup>79</sup>

How were these slaves affected by the arrival of unskilled and semiskilled white immigrants? Contemporaries observed the shifting racial composition of the city's labor force. As early as 1840 the commissioners of Charleston's Alms House reported that "the labouring classes in our City are daily changing, the white labourer is gradually taking the place of the Slave." In fact, the commissioners were so concerned about the rising numbers of poor white working people who were turning to the Alms House for shelter and sustenance that they urged that land owned by the institution not be sold to the

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<sup>78</sup> Carters were not counted separately in the 1848 census and do not appear under that title. Dawson and DeSaussure, *Census of Charleston for 1848*; Also see Silver, "A New Look at Old South Urbanization," 156, 160, Table 1.

<sup>79</sup> Greene, *Slave Badges*, 3, 79-80, 126-8, 136.

Charleston Literary and Philosophical Society in case an expansion of the Alms House became necessary.<sup>80</sup>

The authors of the city's 1848 census, John L. Dawson and Henry W. DeSaussure, acknowledged that the number of slaves and free blacks in the city indeed had decreased. They reported that whereas between 1840 and 1848 the white population of Charleston had increased by 8.9 percent, the percentage of blacks – both free and enslaved – had dropped by nearly 25 percent, including almost 3,000 slaves who had “been removed from the city and its neighborhoods.” “It is a question of interest, and one of some importance to the city,” wrote Dawson and DeSaussure, “as to the cause of this rapid decrease of her slave population.” Some Charlestonians thought this decline “a mere change of domicile,” that is, due to the relocation of slaves and free blacks from the city proper to the Neck north of Boundary Street. But others believed that this was “a bona fide decrease,” the slaves having been “driven away by free labor introduced from abroad.”<sup>81</sup>

When northern author and future Union Army officer and Freedmen's Bureau agent John W. DeForest arrived in Charleston in 1855, he was struck by what he observed upon reaching the wharf. “[T]he crowd of porters & coachmen that met us on the dock presented not above half a dozen black faces,” DeForest wrote to his brother. “Instead, I saw the familiar Irish & German visages whom I could have met on a dock at

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<sup>80</sup> Commissioners quoted in Benjamin J. Klebaner, “Public Poor Relief in Charleston, 1800-1860,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 55 (October 1954): 213, note 8; Also see *Charleston Courier*, January 1, 1840; The report went on to argue that unlike many slaves, “The white Labourer in times of sickness, poverty, or distress has no one to provide for him, accustom'd to spend Weekly all that he makes, little or nothing is put up for future emergencies, and he is often compelled to seek the shelter of an Alms House or an Hospital.” Records of the Poor House, 1834-1840, April 15, 1840, Pease Collection, ARC.

<sup>81</sup> Dawson and DeSaussure, *Census of Charleston for 1848*, 7-9, 11; Also see Bellows, *Benevolence among Slaveholders*, 106-7.

Boston or New York.” After DeForest discussed his experience on the wharves with Charlestonians, he explained that the racial makeup of the city’s workforce “was different years ago...and it is only lately that the whites have begun to crowd the blacks out of the more responsible lower employments.”<sup>82</sup>

This recomposition of the labor force was not unique to Charleston. In fact, Irish, German, and other white immigrants displaced or replaced slaves and free blacks in cities throughout the late antebellum South. An observer in Baltimore, for example, commented as early as 1835 that even though there were 20,000 free blacks and 3,000-4,000 slaves residing in the city, “The Irish and other foreigners are, to a considerable extent, taking the place of colored laborers, and of domestic servants.” As one Marylander put it in 1851, “The white man stands in the black man’s shoes, or else is fast getting into them.”<sup>83</sup> When British traveler Charles Lyell visited New Orleans in 1846, he heard that “the white race has been superseding the negroes.” He also learned that ten years before, “all the draymen of New Orleans, a numerous class, and the cabmen, were colored. Now, they are nearly all white,” and mostly Irish immigrants.<sup>84</sup> In the early 1850s, Frederick Law Olmsted, too, observed that “White working men were rapidly displacing the slaves in all sorts of work,” and had “very much gained the field of labor in

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<sup>82</sup> John William DeForest to Andrew DeForest, November 9, 1855, quoted in Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 178.

<sup>83</sup> Ethan A. Andrews, *Slavery and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States* (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1836), 73; *Maryland Colonization Journal* 6 (October 1851): 71, quoted in Berlin, *Slaves without Masters*, 231-2; Berlin points out that blacks had long dominated as stevedores and hod carriers on Baltimore’s docks, but white immigrants successfully supplanted blacks from such waterfront occupations.

<sup>84</sup> Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States of North America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1850), vol. 2, 125.

New Orleans to themselves.”<sup>85</sup> From the Chesapeake to the Mississippi River, white immigrants and especially Irishmen replaced blacks on the South’s docks and drays.<sup>86</sup>

Nor were black waterfront workers north of the Mason-Dixon Line immune to foreign competition. “These impoverished and destitute beings – transported from the trans-atlantic shores, are crowding themselves into every place of business and of labor, and driving the poor colored American citizen out,” one northern black man wrote in the New York-based *The Colored American*. “Along the wharves, where the colored man once done the whole business of shipping and unshipping...there are substituted foreigners or white Americans.”<sup>87</sup> And in Philadelphia, an 1849 letter appearing in one of that city’s newspapers declared, “That there may be, and undoubtedly is, a direct competition between [the blacks and the Irish] as to labor we all know. The wharves and new buildings attest this fact, in the person of our stevedores and hod-carriers as does all

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<sup>85</sup> Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 589-90.

<sup>86</sup> About New Orleans, Earl Niehaus writes, “the immigrant Irish draymen in New Orleans were the most striking example of the Irish forcing competition out of an employment field. Before they arrived Negroes, free men of color and hired-out slaves, were carting goods from wharves to the warehouses.” But by the 1850s, the Irish “clearly monopolized this field of labor.” Niehaus, *Irish in New Orleans*, 49; For more information about black and Irish labor competition in New Orleans, see Niehaus, 43-58; And according to Edward Shoemaker, “Before the Irish came to Savannah, slaves worked as stevedores in the shipping season...When Irish laborers entered the [labor] market...they went to work on the same docks where, mainly because of their greater numbers and flexibility and slightly lower cost (there being no liability to the owner of an injured or dead Irish hand) they came to dominate.” Edward Shoemaker, “Strangers and Citizens: The Irish Immigrant Community of Savannah, 1837-1861” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1990), 281-2.

<sup>87</sup> *The Colored American* (New York), July 28, 1838, quoted in Leon F. Litwack *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 163. Also quoted in Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 43.

places of labor; and when a few years ago we saw none but blacks, we now see nothing but Irish.”<sup>88</sup>

Similar observations appeared in the pages of Charleston’s newspapers. In February 1861 the fire-eater editor of the *Charleston Mercury*, Leonidas W. Spratt, asserted that “Within ten years past as many as ten thousand slaves have been drawn away from Charleston by the attractive prices of the West, and laborers from abroad have come to take their places.”<sup>89</sup> These Irish and other foreign workers who were flowing into Charleston “have every disposition to work above the slave, and if there were opportunity would be glad to do so; but without such opportunity they come to competition with him; [and] they are necessarily resistive to the contact.” Spratt observed that “Already there is the disposition to exclude [slaves]; from the trades, from

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<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Theodore Hershberg, “Free Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia,” 426-7, in Elinor Miller and Eugene D. Genovese, *Plantation, Town, and County: Essays on the Local History of American Slave Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 426-7; Hershberg adds that “The 1847 [Philadelphia] census identified 5% of the black male work force in the relatively well-paying occupations of hod-carrier and stevedore...According to the 1850 U.S. census the percentage of black hod-carriers and stevedores in the black male work force fell in just three years from 5% to 1%. The 1850 census, moreover, reported occupations for the entire country and included 30% more black male occupations than the 1847 census; nevertheless, the absolute number of black hod-carriers fell sharply from 98 to 28 and stevedores from 58 to 27.”; For similar circumstances in New York, see Robert Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1863* (Port Washington, NY: I. J. Friedman, 1965), 67, 69, 71, 104-7; and Albon P. Man Jr., “Labor Competition and the New York Draft Riots of 1863,” *Journal of Negro History* 36 (October 1851): 378-7; Also see Carl Wittke, *The Irish in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), 125-6.

<sup>89</sup> Charleston did experience a decrease in its slave population and an increase of Irish inhabitants during the 1850s. Spratt may have been correct in his observation that as many as 10,000 of Charleston’s slaves had been sold to work on the booming cotton plantations of the new Gulf Coast states. But since slaves also entered Charleston, the city experienced a net loss of only 5,623 slaves between 1850 and 1860. During the same decade, the number of Irish immigrants residing in Charleston increased from 2,359 in 1850 to 3,263 in 1860, a net gain of 904. Richard Wade and Claudia Dale Goldin have offered clashing explanations as to why some southern cities such as Charleston experienced sharp decreases in their slave populations during the 1850s. Wade argues that this decrease was a natural result of the fact that slaves could not be properly controlled in the urban environment. In other words, slavery was incompatible with the urban environment. Goldin disagrees and argues that the redistribution of the slave population from cities such as Charleston into the countryside was due to a rising demand for slave labor on rural plantations as slave and cotton prices rose. Both arguments are problematic because neither explains why the slave population in cities such as Richmond, Mobile, and Savannah increased during the same decade. See Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964; and Goldin, *Urban Slavery in the American South*.



public works, from drays, and the tables of hotels, [slaves are] even now excluded to a great extent.” If the African slave trade was not reopened to replenish the slave population in Charleston, then “pauper labor from abroad” as well as unemployed immigrants from the North would continue to pour into the city and supplant slaves. Some white Charlestonians welcomed this gradual shift to white labor and the consequent decline in the city’s black majority. But Spratt bemoaned that these whites laborers “will question the right of masters to employ their slaves in any works that they may wish for,” thus endangering not only slaveowners’ profits but also their long held power. After all, as increasing numbers of white workingmen settled in the city, they inexorably “will invoke the aid of legislation; they will use the elective franchise to that end; [and] they may acquire the power to determine municipal elections.” If this were to occur, Spratt was concerned that even Charleston – the bastion of states’ rights and “at the very heart of slavery” – could morph into “a fortress of democratic power against” the South’s peculiar institution. What’s more, a “contest for existence may be waged” between free and slave labor, in which “one race must increase as the other is diminished.” “It is to be feared,” Spratt concluded, that “the slave must ultimately fail.”<sup>90</sup> The Irish and other white immigrants, in short, threatened slave masters’ power and the institution of slavery itself.

Given this combative rhetoric, some contemporary observers were surprised by the infrequency of violence between competing white and black laborers. When Massachusetts clergyman Nehemiah Adams visited the South in 1854, he noted the

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<sup>90</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, February 13, 1861. See also L. W. Spratt, “The Philosophy of Secession; A Southern View, Presented in a Letter Addressed to the Hon. Mr. Perkins of Louisiana, in Criticism on the Provisional Constitution Adopted by the Southern Congress at Montgomery, Alabama, by the Hon. L. W. Spratt,” Charleston: s.n., 1861.

absence of mobs. “Street brawls and conflicts between the two races of laboring people...are mostly unknown within the bonds of slavery.” Adams attributed this relative lack of interracial violence in the South to blacks’ subordination to whites. The historical examples of the Egyptians and Israelites, and the Spaniards and Moors, proved “the impossibility of two races living together unless one race is dependent.” The northern apologist for slavery predicted that if the South’s slaves were ever emancipated, “The fighting propensity of the lower class of the Irish would expose the blacks to constant broils through the rivalry of labor.”<sup>91</sup>

For a glimpse of the scene that some believed awaited southern docks if the slaves were granted their freedom, Reverend Adams reproduced the report of an “Irish and Negro Row” in Buffalo, New York. In early June 1854, “There was a protracted and somewhat bloody fight...on the dock at the foot of Washington Street, between some negroes and Irishmen.” The mêlée drew a crowd of roughly 1,000 people, and three of the black dock workers were badly beaten and one nearly died. According to one newspaper’s account, the fight broke out spontaneously and seemingly “without any other cause than the mutual jealousy and dislike subsisting between the Celtic and African races.”<sup>92</sup> It is likely, however, that the brawl was prompted by waterfront labor competition.

Racial violence again visited Buffalo’s waterfront in July 1863 when white stevedores prevented black laborers from working. One of the blacks shot an Irishman, which precipitated “a general onslaught on the negroes,” several of whom were killed and

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<sup>91</sup> Adams also argued that like the Moors from Spain, the emancipated blacks would be driven out of the South. Nehemiah Adams, *A South-Side View of Slavery* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), 44, 120.

<sup>92</sup> *Buffalo Advertiser*, June 5, 1854, quoted in Adams, *South-Side View of Slavery*, 120.

many others “badly handled.” Though the violence eventually gave way to calm, it was reported that “the Irish express a determination to prevent the negroes from working.”<sup>93</sup>

July 1863 was also the month of the New York Draft Riots. Prior to the 1840s blacks dominated waterfront work in New York City, but by the early 1860s Irish immigrants had almost entirely displaced their black competitors on the docks.<sup>94</sup> Waterfront employers may have used blacks as strikebreakers in the years before the Civil War, further escalating tensions between the two races of workingmen.<sup>95</sup> But the riots were prompted in large part by the mounting fear among the white Irishmen that emancipated southern slaves were going to make their way to northern cities and usurp their jobs.<sup>96</sup> During the 1860 presidential campaign, Kentuckian Leslie Combs addressed a Democratic Party mass meeting in New York, where he warned of “a terrible conflict between white labor and black labor” if the South’s nearly 4 million slaves were set free. “The unemployed slaves will be found among you in sufficient numbers to compete with you at your wharves and your docks, and in every branch of labor in which white people alone are now employed.” And in 1862 Irish nationalist George Francis Train alleged that abolitionism was a “conspiracy against the Irish.”<sup>97</sup>

As the frustration of labor competition boiled over into bloodshed in the North, was Nehemiah Adams correct to claim that such violence was nonexistent in southern

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<sup>93</sup> *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, July 7, 1863.

<sup>94</sup> Man, “Labor Competition and the New York Draft Riots of 1863,” 376-7, 392.

<sup>95</sup> Man, “Labor Competition and the New York Draft Riots of 1863,” 386, 393-4; Also see Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, 17.

<sup>96</sup> Man, “Labor Competition and the New York Draft Riots of 1863,” 375.

<sup>97</sup> *New York Herald*, October 25, 1860, quoted in Man, “Labor Competition and the New York Draft Riots of 1863,” 378; Man, 380.

cities? After all, Charlestonian William Henry Trescot contended that “Free labor hates slave labor,” and Olmsted observed the “hatred of the negro” and disinclination to compete with slaves among immigrant laborers in South Carolina.<sup>98</sup> One historian contends that in general “racial competition for waterfront employment in the antebellum era rarely erupted into large-scale racial violence, in New Orleans or elsewhere.”<sup>99</sup> Another points out that this “absence of racial conflict is surprising considering the racist foundations upon which slavery rested,” citing the lack of reported violence between Irish and enslaved dock workers, deck hands, and canal diggers who often worked side by side.<sup>100</sup> Both scholars concede, however, that occasional acts of racial violence related to labor competition indeed occurred on antebellum southern waterfronts. Irish draymen in New Orleans, for example, hurled paving stones at black rivals who dared to drive through areas of the city deemed the Irish workers’ terrain.<sup>101</sup>

At times Charleston’s Irish immigrants, restive and frustrated with the contentious “contest for existence” too turned violent and vicious. One local judge declared in 1855, “it is but too true, that a great proportion of those we receive in Charleston from Ireland, manifest a proclivity to turbulence. I am afraid there is an inclination to make war upon the Negro.” The judge recalled an incident from a few years before when “one of the only two Irishmen who drove drays in this city...was tried...for knocking out the eye of a

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<sup>98</sup> William Henry Trescot quoted in Bellows, *Benevolence among Slaveholders*, 183; Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 512.

<sup>99</sup> Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans*, 20.

<sup>100</sup> Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*, 143. Starobin adds that “Racial hostilities occurred, of course, but they were much less significant than the striking extent of interracial co-operation among workers at most integrated industries.” There is little evidence of cooperation between white and black waterfront workers in antebellum Charleston.

<sup>101</sup> For information regarding labor competition related violence in New Orleans, see Niehaus, *Irish in New Orleans*, 50-4.

slave, his competitor.”<sup>102</sup> Cooper Jacob Schirmer noted this or a very similar case in August 1846, writing in his diary that a slave drayman named Sam – who was owned by Southern Wharf merchant A. O. Andrews – “got a severe beating from an Irish drayman.”<sup>103</sup> More than a decade later, Schirmer reported “a row” that broke out near a boat “between some young men from town and the Irish, when Scott the carter was considerably cut up.”<sup>104</sup>

Nor were these isolated incidents. In fact, violence against the city’s slaves was on the rise in the years corresponding to the arrival of white working-class immigrants. By 1854 the problem was so acute that Charleston’s Grand Jury – led by dry goods merchant and slaveowner James S. Bowie – complained that “The unlawful beating and stabbing and otherwise maiming of slaves, is increasing and becoming a very serious evil.” Not only revolting to human nature and disruptive of civic peace but also injurious to slaveowners’ valuable human property, the grand jurors asked state legislators to implement more severe penalties and punishments for offenders.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Charleston Courier*, March 26, 1855; When a “converted Monk” named Mr. Leahey announced his plans in March 1852 to deliver a public lecture on “the gross immoralities of the Romish Church,” he was denied access to the city’s Masonic Hall since a “riot by the Irish was feared.” A few months later the fire alarm was signaled at half past two in the morning, but the disturbance “proved to be a Riot between the Guard and some Irishmen in Chalmers Street.” Schirmer Diary, March 20, 1852, and June 13, 1852, SCHS.

<sup>103</sup> Schirmer added that “Mr. Sanders also whipt [*sic*] him, and at the examination before the Mayor, some high words passed between Andrews & Sanders” Schirmer Diary, August 7, 1846, SCHS; 1849 city directory; The 1850 U.S. Census Slave Schedules reveal that Andrews owned four slaves in Charleston in 1850, two of whom were adult black males.

<sup>104</sup> This fight evidently took place on Sullivans Island near the ferry boat landing. Schirmer Diary, August 23, 1857, SCHS; Scott the carter may have been a slave. But there were also three free black carters or draymen named Scott in 1850s Charleston: James Scott, a free black carter in the 1856 city directory; Daniel Scott, a mulatto carter in the 1850 U.S. Census; and Joseph Scott, a free black drayman in the 1850 U.S. Census.

<sup>105</sup> James S. Bowie owned four slaves – two males and two female – in Charleston in 1850. See 1850 U.S. Census Slave Schedules; 1850 U.S. Census; and 1855 city directory; Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston

Charleston's antebellum court records are rife with cases of white waterfront workers running amok. In late October 1856, for example, stevedore G. B. Stoddard was indicted for assault and battery. Irish stevedore Thomas Nolan also was charged with assault and battery in November 1856 and sentenced to a one-month imprisonment and a hundred-dollar fine.<sup>106</sup> Some Irish workers were brought before the court for beating slaves. Laborer Morris Roach was indicted for beating a slave in January 1859.<sup>107</sup> Drayman Martin Murphy was convicted for beating a slave owned by commission merchant Charles L. Trenholm in October 1859 and fined \$20. On the same day the Grand Jury indicted Murphy, it elected not to endorse a bill of indictment for the same offense against Patrick Carroll. This thirty-two-year-old Irish drayman did not remain out of jail for long, however. He was charged with murder in April 1860, convicted of the lesser charge of manslaughter, and sentenced to a twelve-month imprisonment and a hefty five hundred-dollar fine. Patrick Carroll was joined in the city jail by three other Irish draymen. James Smith was serving a sentence for murder, and Michael Lalby and Patrick Holleran were being held for assault, an offense which also landed five Irish laborers behind bars, some of whom probably worked on Charleston's waterfront.<sup>108</sup>

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District, October 1854, SCDAH. In this same presentment grand jurors complained about the practice of carrying deadly concealed weapons, which often led to "riots which frequently end in bloodshed."

<sup>106</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, November 1, 1856; *Charleston Mercury*, November 22, 1856; Assault and battery offenses were so common in late antebellum Charleston that Grand Jury presentments from 1860 complained about the large number of these "petty and trifling cases" that were costly, time consuming, and required jurors to listen to "a history of midnight brawls amongst a number of inebriates." Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, January 1860, April 1860, and June 1860, SCDAH.

<sup>107</sup> Roach was found not guilty in April 1859, but co-defendant T. O'Brien, was found guilty. Court of General Sessions, Criminal Journals, Charleston District, vol. 1 (1857-1860), 334, 395, SCDAH; 1860 U.S. Census.

<sup>108</sup> While sources revealed sparse evidence for these cases, it is probable that some of these Irishmen's crimes were related to employment competition with slaves or free blacks; Martin Murphy was indicted again for the same offense in April 1861, but the criminal journals do not reveal the result of the case.

The fact that the wages of black and white transportation workers were fixed at the same rates helps explain not only why their struggle was the most fierce, but also why white draymen and carters were so successful in displacing their black rivals. Though draymen and carters could request and receive less than the established rates, thus undercutting their competitors, the rate caps nonetheless placed white and black workers on a relatively even playing field. The result was a minimal difference in wages, thus enabling waterfront employers to make hiring decisions based on racial or ethnic predilection rather than simply financial necessity.<sup>109</sup>

Meanwhile, rather than openly assaulting, beating, or killing a rival, the dangerous nature of waterfront work presented copious opportunities to eliminate a competitor. Take for instance the case of Harry Simmons, a black stevedore who died in March 1847 from “an injury received by the falling of a bale of cotton on him.”<sup>110</sup> With white stevedores and dock hands vying for Simmons’s job, it is conceivable that they intentionally dropped this 400-500 pound cotton bale onto their unsuspecting competitor in the hold below. But anyone playing such dirty and deadly tricks had to be mindful of a similar fate. On January 25, 1860, David Nagle – an eighteen-year-old Irishman who had

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Patrick Carroll, recorded as P. Carroll, and the other convicted Irishmen appeared in the 1860 U.S. Census as confined in the Charleston city jail. See Court of General Sessions, Criminal Journals, Charleston District, 1857-1892, SCDAH; Court of General Sessions, Criminal Dockets, Charleston District, 1859-1863, SCDAH; 1855 city directory.

<sup>109</sup> Responding to a petition from white draymen in 1854, the City Council’s Committee on Licenses rejected a request for an increase in the established drayage rates. The committee argued that the costs of provisions and living had not risen since the rates were updated in 1837, and insisted that “if draying is not at present as remunerating as formerly, it is owing rather to the keenness of competition than the rates established by law.” City authorities endeavored to protect the community by setting limits to drayage charges, but then allowed “the matter generally to be arranged by the contract of the parties concerned.” In other words, it was legal for draymen and carters to ask for and receive less than the set rates. City Council Minutes, February 14, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, February 16, 1854, and City Council Minutes, March 14, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, March 16, 1854; Also see Silver, “A New Look at Old South Urbanization,” 156-7.

<sup>110</sup> *The North American* (Philadelphia), March 5, 1847.

arrived from New York three years before and was employed in Charleston by white stevedore John Torrent – “was knocked into the hold...by a bale of Cotton, while it was being hoisted from the wharf, and fell a distance of about 10 feet, injuring him so seriously that he died.” Though the *Charleston Tri-Weekly Courier* concluded that “This occurrence was the result of [Nagle’s] own imprudence,” slave wharf hands also could have conspired to do the Irishman in.<sup>111</sup>

Despite occasional acts of violence and notwithstanding the undeniable dislocation of many slaves and free blacks from the city’s docks and drays, Irish and other white immigrants certainly were not able to expel all black Charlestonians from their jobs. As a result, white waterfront and transportation workers continued their protracted battle against black labor competition with both public appeals and official petitions to state and municipal officials.<sup>112</sup> For instance, at a “large and enthusiastic meeting” of Charleston’s white mechanics and workingmen held in Masonic Hall on King Street on the evening of October 8, 1858, it was unanimously agreed “that a baneful evil exists in our City and State at large, to wit: the hiring by slaves of their own time.” The ensuing petition to the state legislature contended that this enduring and pernicious practice harmed not only white workers, but also the state and her institutions and citizens, slaveowners, and the “well-being and usefulness of the slave himself.” Labeling

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<sup>111</sup> *Charleston Tri-Weekly Courier*, January 28, 1860; Though there is evidence of slaves acting violently toward whites, no clear case of a waterfront slave or free black assaulting a white competitor in Charleston has been unearthed. Though Nehemiah Adams attributed the supposed lack of interracial violence in the South to blacks’ subordination to whites, he admitted that blacks’ “natural passions and propensities sometimes get the mastery over them, because they are men,” but added that “they are not predisposed to violence and insubordination.” Adams, *South-Side View of Slavery*, 43.

<sup>112</sup> White workers’ frequent use of petitions, rather than extensive violence, to protest black competition illustrates the attempt among immigrants to display respectability or “acceptable” behavior to city and state officials. By participating in this legitimate and democratic legislative process, immigrant workingmen also demonstrated that they were Americans while simultaneously exercising and appealing to their rights as white men in the slave South.



existing slave hiring laws as “a dead letter,” the workingmen called for the indictment of both the employer and the owner of any slave hiring out his or her own time and “the more rigid enforcement” of legislative statutes.<sup>113</sup> This petition was signed by 163 white workers, including stevedores John Symons and William Watson. About 80 percent of the signers were common laborers or tradesmen (such as carpenters, ship joiners, printers, and shoemakers), while only twenty of the petitioners were employed in nonmanual or white-collar occupations. It also found that more than three-quarters of the signers did not own property in the city, and only four were slaveowners.<sup>114</sup>

Similar petitions were submitted to the General Assembly by the officers of the Charleston Mechanic Society and the officers of the South Carolina Mechanics Association in November 1858, suggesting that the city’s white workingmen were launching a coordinated and concerted assault against black competitors.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, all three petitions noted that the ineffective and unenforced laws against slave hiring currently on the state statute books had been the topic of several recent Grand Jury presentments and had “gained the consideration of many influential [legislative] bodies.” And indeed, in October 1857 the Grand Jury in Charleston informed state legislators of “the alleged frequent infraction of the laws in relation to the hiring or employment of negroes otherwise than from their owners,” and asked that an officer be appointed to

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<sup>113</sup> Petition, ND #2892 Oversize, and Petition, ND #5649, SCDAH; For an advertisement of the meeting, see *Charleston Mercury*, October 8, 1858; Also see *Charleston Courier*, October 11, 1858.

<sup>114</sup> Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 173, 180-1; Stevedore G. B. Stoddard also may have signed this petition. An index at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History (SCDAH) listed Stoddard as a signer, but the signature on the petition does not match that of Stoddard’s on a later petition (Petition, ND #2916 Oversize).

<sup>115</sup> Petition, ND #4744, SCDAH; Though the verbiage of this petition is very similar to that of Petition, ND #2892 Oversize, and Petition, ND #5649 (which was based on the meeting on October 8, 1858), it was based on a meeting of the Charleston Mechanic Society held on November 1, 1858; Petition, 1858 #85, SCDAH.

enforce the law.<sup>116</sup> In the spring of 1858 the Charleston City Council debated a new ordinance to outlaw slaves hiring their own time, but the aldermen eventually rejected the measure by voting to postpone it indefinitely.<sup>117</sup> In October 1858 the Grand Jury again complained about “the privilege given by owners to their slaves of hiring their own time,” which was deemed an evil demanding the “prompt intervention of the law” and “the most strenuous measures for [its] prevention.”<sup>118</sup>

The South Carolina House of Representatives instructed the Committee on the Colored Population to consider all of these grievances conjointly. On December 7, 1858, the committee presented its findings.<sup>119</sup> The committee members, led by Chairman John Harleston Read Jr., agreed with Charleston’s white workingmen that existing laws against slaves hiring their own time were defective in that they failed to punish the hirer

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<sup>116</sup> Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, October 1857, SCDAH.

<sup>117</sup> City Council Minutes, March 16, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, March 17, 1858, and City Council Minutes, May 11, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, May 12, 1858.

<sup>118</sup> Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, October 1858, SCDAH; The foreman of the October 1857 Grand Jury was planter John Rutledge, who in 1860 owned seventy-one slaves in St. Peter’s Parish (Beaufort) and thirteen slaves in Charleston. The foreman of the October 1859 body was Vanderhorst Wharf factor John P. Deveaux, who owned eleven slaves in Charleston in 1860. As demonstrated by Thomas Pinckney and Edward R. Laurens, however, not all slaveowners were champions of prevailing slave hiring practices. Two slaveowning white stevedores, John Torrent and William Doran, sat on the Grand Jury in early 1859 even as – we shall see shortly – they railed against slave competitors who were permitted to hire out their own time on the docks. At times, non-slaveholders may have outvoted self-interested slaveowning grand jurors, resulting in presentments critical of slaves hiring out their own time in Charleston. See 1855 city directory; 1860 U.S. Census; 1860 U.S. Census Slave Schedules; and *Charleston Mercury*, January 11, 1859.

<sup>119</sup> The committee also considered, and rejected, two bills proposed by the white mechanics: “A Bill to prevent slaves from hiring out their own time and carrying on mechanical pursuits,” which included proposals to penalize both the employers and owners of illegally hired-out slaves, and to fine both \$100 rather than \$50; and “A Bill to prevent negroes from carrying on mechanical pursuits.” See “Report of the Committee on Colored Population, on the Petition of the South Carolina Mechanics’ Association; also, the Petition of the Mechanics and Working Men of the City of Charleston; also, the Memorial of the Charleston Mechanics’ Society; also, the Presentment of Grand Jury for Charleston District; also, on Two Bills; All in Reference to the Enactment of Laws Preventing Negroes from Hiring Out Their Own Time, &c” (Columbia: Steam-Power Press Southern Guardian, 1858), 3-4; This committee report also was printed in the *Charleston Mercury*, December 15, 1858; Also see Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 181.

as well as the slave owner. They also agreed that the practice of hiring was an evil and needed reform. But whereas the white workers perceived the crux of the evil to be labor competition with slaves working as stevedores, porters, draymen, laborers, and mechanics, the committee pointed to a much broader concern: “the breaking down [of] the relation between master and slave – the removal of the slave from the master’s discipline and control, and the assumption of freedom and independence, on the part of the slave, the idleness, disorder and crime which are consequential, and the necessity thereby created for additional police regulations to keep them in subjection and order, and the trouble and expense which they involve.” In short, in the eyes of city and state leaders the erosion of slavery rather than labor competition was the main problem.

The committee acknowledged that the act passed in 1822 and a subsequent amendment in 1849 indeed prohibited slaves from hiring their own time.<sup>120</sup> But as a slaveholding people, South Carolinians were “habituated to slave labor.” And notwithstanding that many urban occupations and jobs could be performed by blacks and whites alike, “We are accustomed to black labor, and it would create a revolution to drive it away.” Thomas Pinckney had argued back in 1822 that the complete replacement of Charleston’s slaves with white workers would lead not to revolution among slaveholders, but instead to the eradication of urban slave revolutions. A decade later Edward R. Laurens had discerned both the opposition of slaveowners and the impracticality of driving slave labor from South Carolina’s cities entirely. Nonetheless, he advocated for the removal of “redundant” or superfluous urban black laborers. And then, even as Irish,

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<sup>120</sup> The 1849 amendment of the 1822 act added female slaves to the prohibition against slaves hiring their own time. It also decreased the fine for offending slaveowners to \$50. Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 177.

German, and other immigrants streamed into American ports, a report to the General Assembly in 1845 revived the arguments made by Pinckney and Laurens in the preceding decades. “In deminishing [*sic*] the necessity for Draymen, Cartmen, Porters, Stevedores & all that class of underlaborers, who are chiefly comprised of the most intelligent and able bodied of the Negroes and who are in command of time, opportunities and horses for mischief, and turning them to more useful employment and less dangerous associations, something will be attained worth all consideration.” Blacks’ access to horses was particularly troublesome and perilous, and in keeping with the theme of previous reports and future petitions, the communication concluded with the warning, “The History of 1822, should not be forgotten.”<sup>121</sup> Again, whereas white workers were concerned about black labor competition, municipal leaders were alarmed by potential disorder and rebellion.

Nonetheless, by the late 1850s the Committee on the Colored Population was arguing that white Charlestonians were irreversibly committed – really addicted – to slave labor, especially for particular jobs. Despite the influx of immigrants, “The domestic servants, most of the common laborers and porters, draymen, wagoners, cartmen, and on the seaboard, the stevedores, are mostly negroes,” the committee declared.<sup>122</sup> If laws against slave hiring were enforced or strengthened and slaveowners made to personally contract every job, it would become impossible for slaves to be employed as waterfront and transportation workers. “The subject, therefore, is full of difficulty,” the report argued, “and, until you can change the direction of the public

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<sup>121</sup> Miscellaneous Communication, ND #169, SCDAH.

<sup>122</sup> The committee’s use of the term stevedore refers here to common wharf or dock hands rather than skilled contractors and supervisors.

prejudice, prepossession and habit, you can never enforce a law which conflicts with them.” In other words, Charlestonians were so used to slave labor to unload and load ships and transport goods to and from the waterfront, “there must inevitably be an exception to the rule which prohibits the slave working out, as in the case of licensed draymen, carters, wagoners, stevedores, porters, &c.”<sup>123</sup> These were, of course, the bulk of the very occupations for which white immigrants sought employment and competed with slaves in late antebellum Charleston. Though the committee’s report emphasized employers’ habit and dependence on slave labor, the convenience and especially profits of influential slaveowners were the true forces driving resistance to white workers’ petitions.

To add insult to injury, the Committee on the Colored Population not only recommended that state legislators reject the petitions, but it also presented a new bill for consideration that would have rendered *de jure* the *de facto* exemption of enslaved waterfront workers from slave hiring laws. “That slaves working or employed in cities, towns, or villages as porters, common laborers, stevedores, cartmen, draymen, wagoners or hackmen, or drivers of licensed carriages or vehicles plying for freight or hire, which slaves shall have licenses or badges granted for such employments by the proper municipal authorities, shall not be included within the inhibitions of the acts heretofore passed to prevent slaves from hiring their own time,” the proposed measure stated.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> “Report of the Committee on Colored Population,” 5; Also see *Charleston Mercury*, December 15, 1858; Johnson and Roark observe that “In essence, the committee proposed to make the law conform to everyday practice. Rather than providing white mechanics with relief from slave competition, they offered slaveowners relief from inconvenient laws.” Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 182-3.

<sup>124</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, December 15, 1858.

Despite having displaced substantial numbers of black workers, most of the white draymen, carters, porters, and common laborers who toiled on the Cooper River and Ashley River waterfronts could do little to protest the committee's report or to alter employers' long-standing dependency upon and inclination toward hiring slaves. But the city's burgeoning contingent of white stevedores was alarmed and offended by the Committee on the Colored Population's suggested bill, and they soon demanded the exclusive right to stevedoring in Charleston. In early December 1859 the South Carolina House and Senate considered a petition from the white stevedores "praying legislation in the employment of slaves as stevedores."<sup>125</sup> The stevedores who signed this petition had diverse origins: Massachusetean G. B. Stoddard, Englishman John Symons, Irishman William Doran, Maine native Daniel Lapham, Canadian William Watson, Spaniard John Torrent, Marylander Joseph Torrent, and South Carolinians John Torrent Jr. and Adolphus W. Lacoste. But besides their profession, what these men had in common was their status as free and white workers in a slave society and on a southern waterfront that traditionally had been the milieu of black slaves.

The white stevedores began their petition by appealing for justice and to be placed "on equality with our fellow Citizens the Mechanics, and not to Class us with Slaves, as the Bill now before you reads."<sup>126</sup> As explained earlier, though the term "stevedore" was frequently used (and is still used today) in reference to common wharf hands, in late antebellum Charleston the word had taken on a different meaning. Charleston's white stevedores clarified that they were not common dock workers, but rather skilled, well-

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<sup>125</sup> *Charleston Tri-Weekly Courier*, December 8, 1859, and *Charleston Mercury*, December 8, 1859.

<sup>126</sup> Petition, ND #2916 Oversize, SCDAH.

paid, supervisors of common laborers.<sup>127</sup> And, therefore, like their fellow skilled workingmen the mechanics and artisans, the white stevedores demanded respect and the protection of their vital jobs. The bill under the consideration of the General Assembly, however, grouped the stevedores with the unskilled and stated that urban slaves working “as Stevedores...shal [*sic*] not be includid [*sic*] within the inhibition of the act” against slaves from hiring their own time.<sup>128</sup>

To demonstrate that they were not unskilled common laborers, the white stevedores pointed out that they had “upwards of \$40,000 invested in the business on which they have to pay taxes, [and] they have to perform all the duties that the City or State may require of them,” such as militia or fire duty. But then the stevedores turned from an appeal for justice to one of fear. As discussed in the previous chapter, northern captains were hiring slave stevedores and thus undermining the Negro Seamen Acts by enabling seditious communication between the city’s bondsmen and northern free blacks or abolitionists. Moreover, by employing slave stevedores, who in turn hired gangs of enslaved porters and wharf hands, blacks were able to assemble without any white oversight. The white stevedores warned that though it was illegal for Charleston’s black slaves to gather unsupervised in large groups, they were doing so while stowing vessels.<sup>129</sup> The implication was that within the depths of ships’ holds at the city’s own

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<sup>127</sup> See *Charleston Courier*, January 30, 1860.

<sup>128</sup> Petition, ND #2916 Oversize, SCDAH.

<sup>129</sup> Petition, ND #2916 Oversize, SCDAH; After Charleston’s Grand Jury complained about free blacks and slaves assembling, a legislative committee in 1791 deemed this dangerous to the public safety and recommended that another body be appointed “to revise the negroe Law and to provide particularly against the assemblage of free negroes & Slaves in great numbers under any pretext whatsoever.” An ordinance from 1836 stated that “No slaves or free persons of color being more in number than seven, shall be allowed to assemble and meet together (except when attending funerals or fires, or when engaged in their

wharves, slaves were surreptitiously plotting their next insurrection and massacre of Charleston's white population. If white stevedores were exclusively hired to contract work gangs and supervise the stowing and unloading of vessels, no such secretive and potentially catastrophic scheming would be possible.

But these "Master Stevedores" wanted to be clear that "the object of this Petition is not to drive away Slave Labour, but to prevent them from becoming Contractors." They were not abolitionists who sought to replace black dock workers with whites. In fact, "we are desirous [*sic*] to give the slaves the preferance [*sic*] as Labourers on all Ocasions [*sic*]," the petitioners insisted.<sup>130</sup> In other words, though the stevedores often had joined common white workingmen to protest slave hiring, these efforts having been repeatedly stymied by local and state officials, they now sought to shield their own positions on the wharves from black competition. But in doing so the white stevedores revealed a willingness to turn their backs on less skilled fellow whites who sought work on the city's wharves.<sup>131</sup>

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owners or employers business, under the direction of such owner or employer) unless some responsible white person is actually present, and for some lawful purpose." The exceptions enumerated seemingly would have included slave work gangs stowing the holds of vessels. Then in 1856 a Grand Jury presentment complained that many of Charleston's row houses or tenements were filled with between 50 and 100 slaves and free blacks, and pointed out the illegality of a gathering of seven or more slaves without the supervision of a responsible person. Committee Report, 1791 #145, SCDAH; Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 176-7; Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, March 1856, SCDAH; Also see Eckhard, 93-4, 170, 223-4, 228, 376-8; and Laurens, "Address," 7-8.

<sup>130</sup> Petition, ND #2916 Oversize, SCDAH; In a series of letters written by a northern abolitionist and published in *The Liberator* in 1854, the author spoke to a German immigrant in Wilmington who maintained that many non-slaveowners in southern cities, such as laborers, mechanics, and store keepers, were abolitionists. See *The Liberator* (Boston), September 1, 1854.

<sup>131</sup> The stevedores' comments expose an undeniable rift along class and skill level lines among Irish and other white waterfront workers. These workers were united by their common whiteness and free status in a southern society based on the institution of black slavery. They also were joined by the fact that in the slaveholding South little respect was afforded those whites who engaged in manual wage labor, which was viewed as "nigger work" and thus menial and degrading. Charleston's Irish laborers furthermore had a shared ethnicity, history, and culture, and at times presented a united front against a common enemy. The political challenge presented by the nativist Know Nothing Party brought together the Irish of all classes in



Despite the pleas of the white stevedores, the Committee on Commerce, Manufacturers, and the Mechanic Arts declared its unanimous opinion that “it is inexpedient to legislate on the subject” and recommended that their petition be rejected.<sup>132</sup> The legislature also never adopted the bill proposed by the Committee on the Colored Population that sought to officially exempt enslaved waterfront workers from hiring laws. Nonetheless, everyday practice continued to shield from prosecution the owners, employers, and slaves who hired themselves out on Charleston’s docks and drays. Clearly white waterfront workers – skilled or unskilled – were not going to find relief from legislators in Columbia. Abandoning appeals for statewide laws that endeavored to minimize slave competition for white workingmen throughout South Carolina, they reluctantly turned to the slaveowner friendly Charleston City Council, which of course was limited to legislating the hiring practices of waterfront workers in the port of Charleston.

In January 1860 the City Council considered yet another bill to prohibit slaves from hiring their own time, labor, or service. The contemplated ordinance would have subjected both the offending slaveowner and employer to \$50 fines.<sup>133</sup> Almost immediately slaveholders and businessmen – who dominated city government – attacked the proposed ordinance, claiming that it would injure the city’s commercial economy and drive away not only slaves but also much needed business. “The bill offered in relation to slaves hiring out their own time, would, if it became an ordinance, extend and

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southern cities during the mid-1850s. But as the stevedores’ petition demonstrates, when the Know Nothing challenge faded and the menace of slave competition reclaimed center stage, this interclass harmony did not last for long. See Gleeson, *Irish in the South*, 118-20.

<sup>132</sup> Committee Report, 1859 #104, SCDAH.

<sup>133</sup> City Council Minutes, January 17, 1860, *Charleston Mercury*, January 19, 1860.

aggravate the disabilities to which vessels are subject which visit our port,” argued one opponent in the pages of the *Charleston Evening News*. Then embracing the stance of the Committee on the Colored Population in 1858, “Why not except from the operation of the ordinance that class of laborers which are essentially necessary to load vessels, and without which dispatch could not be obtained?” Ignoring that hundreds and oftentimes thousands of white laborers were available for short-term hire on the city’s waterfront, the defender of slave hiring contended that “The difficulty of obtaining stevedores and other laborers, through the rigid application of such an ordinance, would have the obvious tendency to give a preference over Charleston to [other] Southern ports, thus discriminating against ourselves.”<sup>134</sup> Though it is uncertain whether there were enough white waterfront workers to perform all of the labor on the city’s docks, an enforcement of laws against slaves hiring their own time likely would have sparked a significant influx of unemployed and underemployed whites from New York, Boston, New Orleans, and other ports to fill vacated positions.

Still smarting from their defeat one month earlier, the white stevedores responded to this assessment in a letter to the editors of the *Charleston Courier* on January 30, 1860. Clearly irritated, the stevedores claimed that the writer of these statements knew little if anything about the state of stevedoring in Charleston. Ship captains and merchants already were suffering under the “present system of granting a licentious freedom to slaves,” who were acting as free white men and “will work only where and for whom they please, and only so long as it suits them.” “The white stevedores of Charleston,” on

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<sup>134</sup> *Charleston Evening News*, January 20, 1860, quoted in *Charleston Courier*, January 30, 1860; Advocates of waterfront slave labor also ignored that Charleston had been vulnerable to a black dock worker shortage during the 1836 cholera epidemic, which predated the mass arrival of white immigrant laborers.

the other hand, “are responsible men, men of family, and have from thirty to forty thousand dollars invested in the city; and most of them have a home of their own, and all are tax-payers, and are identified with South Carolina in every sense of the word.”<sup>135</sup> Of the eighteen white stevedores listed in the 1860 U.S. Census, at least fourteen indeed were married and nine had children living with them in the city.<sup>136</sup> But like the signers of the white mechanics’ petitions, most stevedores were not slaveholders, with only William Doran and John Torrent owning slaves between 1858 and 1864.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, only three of the eighteen white stevedores in the 1860 Census – South Carolinians Samuel Barr and John Torrent Jr., and Marylander Joseph Torrent – were native-born southerners. Most white stevedores, like the vast majority of unskilled white waterfront workers, did not generate income by hiring out slaves and thus had nothing to lose and everything to gain financially and professionally by eradicating slave competitors. In that sense, city and state authorities – most of whom were slaveowners – could question the stevedores’ loyalty to South Carolina, the South, and the institution of slavery. Perhaps well aware of these obstacles, the stevedores stressed that “They have faced your yellow fever, and are found in your banks, your jury box, or at the brakes [of fire engines] whenever required of them. And these are the citizens to be proscribed. Have they not

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<sup>135</sup> *Charleston Courier*, January 30, 1860.

<sup>136</sup> Two others did not have wives listed in Charleston, but were marked on the census schedules as married. The other two unmarried white stevedores were the relatively young sons of John Torrent – Joseph Torrent and John Torrent Jr.

<sup>137</sup> Charleston Tax Records, 1860-1865, CLS; “List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1858”; and “List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1859”; Also see John Torrent in the 1860 U.S. Census Slave Schedules.

paid their taxes and done all the duties required of them? If so are they not as good citizens as any other class in the city? and they ask the same protection.”<sup>138</sup>

Having presented their case for allegiance and reliability, the stevedores reiterated that just because most of them did not own slaves they did not seek to abolish common slave workers from Charleston’s waterfront. Instead they again proposed that if the white stevedores were granted the exclusive right to act as contractors and supervisors, “The owners of slaves hiring their own time can hire them to the white stevedores at the same price they pay, and perhaps more.” In other words, these skilled white stevedores did not oppose the employment of common slave dock hands on the city’s waterfront, so long as the bondsmen were not allowed to work as stevedores and were hired out directly by their masters rather than hiring their own time. Then pointedly addressing their critics, they asked, “Where, then, is any injury to come to the shipping? Will [slaves] not be employed at the same work and the same facilities afforded as at present, and more?” The white stevedores concluded their letter by imploring the City Council to protect them, not their slave competitors. But if it was the goal of local authorities “to drive away from Charleston those [white] stevedores, some of whom have been living here for upwards of twenty years, it is time that the stevedores should be aware of the fact.”<sup>139</sup>

At the end of February 1860, the City Council delivered bad news to the white stevedores. A special committee assigned the task of considering the proposed ordinance against slaves hiring their own time agreed with its counterpart in Columbia that it was

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<sup>138</sup> *Charleston Courier*, January 30, 1860; Brakes refer to the handles or levers used to pump water from early fire engines.

<sup>139</sup> *Charleston Courier*, January 30, 1860.

“both inexpedient and improper” to adopt such a rule.<sup>140</sup> Again at the heart of the matter was the inconvenience (not to mention lost profits) slaveowners would encounter if they had to personally contract every job for their slaves. “In all large cities,” the special committee explained, “the successful prosecution of trade and commerce requires a great number of laborers by the day or by the hour, and during the business season. They are generally employed, and are constantly changing their employers. At times almost every one engaged in business, are [*sic*] obliged to employ this kind of labor; but, very few require it permanently.” In short, the economic health and uninterrupted function of the port necessitated that slaves be permitted not only to hire out, but also to hire out their own time without the direct involvement of their masters. The committee members, all three of whom were slaveholders, predicted that if laws banning slaves from hiring their own time were adopted or enforced, then “The stevedores, barbers, chimney sweeps, woodsawyers, and laborers who are slaves, would be stopped and the business thrown into other hands.”<sup>141</sup> This assertion must have flabbergasted the city’s white stevedores and other waterfront workers, since this was the very aim of their many petitions and complaints over the years.

In the year before the Civil War, Charleston’s skilled white workingmen – including the stevedores – refined their protests. Reluctantly accepting that laws against slaves hiring out on Charleston’s waterfront would not be implemented, strengthened, or enforced, white workers targeted their less numerous but more vulnerable free black

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<sup>140</sup> City Council Minutes, February 28, 1860, *Charleston Mercury*, March 1, 1860.

<sup>141</sup> City Council Minutes, February 28, 1860, *Charleston Mercury*, March 1, 1860; The special committee consisted of John Kenifick, E. W. Edgerton, and William Ravenel. Their report went on to argue that if slaves were proscribed from working such jobs, “there may arise occasions when the slave labor would be greatly needed.”; Johnson and Roark conclude that this special committee report was adopted by the City Council, thus granting local approval to the position of the Committee on the Colored Population and to “the existing black market in slave hiring.” See Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 184.

competitors.<sup>142</sup> But the class division between skilled and unskilled white workers deepened as well. A petition to state legislators from December 1860, for example, complained “That it is a prevailing and common practice in the City of Charleston for free negroes and persons of color to carry on and conduct mechanical and other pursuits as contractors and masters.” The petitioners contended that the skilled white workingman such as the stevedore “who understands, and is capable of conducting his business *must* be endowed with intellectual powers above what are necessary for mere manual labor.” Under existing law, “every other pursuit, except such as your petitioners are engaged in, where skill and intelligence are required, above what is necessary to the mere laborers, is carefully protected by stringent enactments of law against the intrusion of the colored and slave races.” Interestingly, the Charleston City Council had itself complained to the General Assembly in the 1820s about the use of free blacks and slaves as clerks, salesmen, or “any engagements which require the exercise of greater intelligence and improvement,” since such situations were “inconsistent with their Condition.”<sup>143</sup> By the early 1860s the city’s white workingmen argued that clerks, shop

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<sup>142</sup> Free blacks comprised approximately only 14.7 percent of Charleston’s free population and 8 percent of the city’s total population in 1850. They made up 12.2 percent of the free population and 8 percent of the total population in 1860. U.S. Census figures in Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 340, Table 3; The South Carolina Mechanics Association appealed to state authorities for relief from competition with free blacks in 1858: “Your petitioners would further request that Your Honorable body would take into consideration the class of negroes known amongst us as Free Negroes and that a tax be imposed upon them or that some other remedy be made that shall at least place us in such a position that we may be able to compete with them if they are to be on an equality with us.” Petition, 1858 #85, SCDAAH; Johnson and Roark argue that free blacks in antebellum South Carolina stood in a tenuous limbo between slavery and freedom. Unlike slaves, whose jobs were protected by powerful and influential slaveholders, free blacks often relied upon the kindness and generosity of sympathetic whites for the protection of their jobs and freedom, thus leaving free blacks in an extremely vulnerable state. Charleston’s free blacks, however, did have prominent and powerful white allies as well. See Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 167-73, 184-94.

<sup>143</sup> The petitioners also argued that “To effect this it is necessary to fix as far as possible the grade of employments in which such persons may be employed and to exclude them by Legislative enactment from all others.” They admitted that “At first view it may be regarded as an unnecessary interference with the rights of owners,” but insisted that the welfare of the state and its citizens was more important. The

keepers, wharfingers, lawyers, and doctors were all shielded by law, though sometimes not in practice, from black competition.<sup>144</sup> Jacob Schirmer reported in November 1853 that a commission merchant on Atlantic Wharf was “tried this week for employing a coloured clerk and found guilty.”<sup>145</sup> The vocations of mechanics and stevedores, however, were not equally protected, and the “unjust and unfair” laws that permitted this “degrading distinction” were “serious public evils.” But, of course, the menial workers who comprised the vast majority of whites seeking employment on Charleston’s waterfront were neither protected by law nor represented or defended by their better-off fellow whites.<sup>146</sup>

Also in December 1860, James M. Eason – a Charleston foundry owner and member of the Committee on the Colored Population – introduced a bill in the General Assembly that sought to legislate the sentiments of the skilled white workers. The proposal called for barring free blacks from “carrying on any mechanical business on

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aldermen then claimed that blacks had always been employed as “domestics, cultivators of the soil, labourers and labouring mechanics,” demonstrating that municipal officials indeed were not interested in protecting the employment positions of white mechanics or other workingmen. Petition, ND #1799 Oversize, and Petition, ND #207, SCDAH. This petition was signed by Intendant Joseph Johnson, who served from 1825-1826; Also see Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 14-15.

<sup>144</sup> According to the petitioners, “The merchant is not allowed to employ his slave or a free negro or colored person as his clerk; so too is it of the Wharfinger, of the Lawyer, of the Doctor, the Tradesman, and the Shop-keeper; all these avocations and all others whatever they may be, are as your petitioners understand it, protected by law from the intrusion of the colored race. The law does not allow them the chance of an equality, and it makes it a penal offense for those who attempt it in any other pursuit, except in the Mechanic arts.” What’s more, since blacks were excluded from these occupations, they turned increasingly to the unprotected employments of the petitioners. Petition, ND #4330, SCDAH; Though free blacks and slaves could not work independently at occupations such as clerks, wharfinger, lawyers, doctors, and shop keepers, they often were permitted to serve under white persons so employed. An ordinance passed in 1806, for instance, stated that “No person or persons whatever, vending goods, wares, and other merchandize, or retailing spirituous liquors in a public or open shop within the city, shall on any pretense employ or permit any negro or other slave to sell any such goods, wares, merchandize or liquors, unless the owner thereof or another white person in the employ of such owner be present.” Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 172.

<sup>145</sup> Schirmer Diary, November 5, 1853, SCHS; The offending merchant was H. W. Kuhntmann or Kuhlman. See 1852 city directory.

<sup>146</sup> Petition, ND #4330, SCDAH; Also see *Charleston Mercury*, December 12, 1860.

their own account,” or from “entering into contracts for any mechanical pursuits,” likely including agreements between master stevedores and ship captains. Eason’s bill, in other words, endeavored to prevent free blacks from achieving master status in their occupations and thus to relegate them to mere menial labor. To the chagrin of Charleston’s skilled white workingmen, however, even this effort was countered and defeated when Eason’s bill never received a vote in the legislature.<sup>147</sup>

But much to the satisfaction of frustrated white waterfront workers, many of Charleston’s free blacks – including some of the few remaining stevedores – fled the city in late 1860 and early 1861. In what has been described as a late “antebellum *Krystalnacht*,” free blacks had their freedom besieged after city authorities began requiring free people of color to purchase and wear badges and threatened violators with enslavement. The announcement of this policy in the *Charleston Courier* on August 9, 1860, sparked a panic among the city’s free blacks and subsequently prompted hundreds to leave Charleston for northern cities such as Philadelphia and New York. As many as 1,000 free black Charlestonians and 300 adult males participated in this “Colored Exodus from South Carolina,” which was comprised mostly of those “bred to industrial calling” and included skilled tradesmen such as tailors, carpenters, shoemakers, barbers, blacksmiths, shipbuilders, and stevedores. The *Philadelphia Press* and the abolitionist

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<sup>147</sup> Eason’s bill quoted in Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 276-7; Also see *Charleston Mercury*, December 6, 1860, and *Charleston Mercury*, December 18, 1860; See Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 266-70, 276-81; and Bellows, *Benevolence among Slaveholders*, 186-7; Also, in a report of the Committee on the Colored Population, Eason warned that “in allowing Free Negroes to carry on the Mechanical trades as Masters, there is a very great tendency to infuse into our slaves coming into contact with them a spirit of dissatisfaction and insubordination – and fasten on his mind the fact that it is only for him to obtain his freedom – to be placed as an equal in carrying on any Mechanical trade with the white man.” Eason also insisted that it was “not the object of the petitioners or the Bill now before the Legislature, to deprive the Free Negro or person of color from working at any trade which they may choose to follow but to prevent him from assuming the standard of a Master, and consequently degrading the Free white man, who occupies that position.” Committee Report, 1861 #90, SCDAH.



*The Liberator* reported how one free black man arrived in Philadelphia with his porter badge.<sup>148</sup>

Simultaneous to this free black emigration, however, white transient workers were being denied access to Charleston. With sectional tensions approaching a boiling point following the election of Abraham Lincoln, the City Council began to enforce an ordinance requiring steamship captains to pay “heavy bonds for the support of steerage passengers who would otherwise be an incumbrance [*sic*] on the city of Charleston.” The edict originally was intended to reduce the burden on the city’s charitable institutions. But as South Carolinians contemplated secession, the ordinance additionally aimed to cut down on the number of abolitionist spies thought to be entering Charleston. On November 30, 1860, *The Liberator* reported that the packet vessels *Nashville* and *James Adger* – both of the New York Steamship Line – had not been allowed to land in Charleston and were forced to return to New York. Eighty-one steerage passengers aboard these two ships, described as “mostly mechanics and laborers,” were “treated with politeness” by Charleston’s authorities, who even paid for the transient workers’ return voyage to New York. Also in late November the *New York Journal of Commerce* announced that the proprietors of the steamship *Marion* “were obliged to refuse a large number of applications or steerage tickets.” As a result, “many poor mechanics and workmen who have been employed to go South, and others who think that their chances

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<sup>148</sup> Newspaper reports indeed indicated that stevedores were among those free blacks who made their way northward in the late summer and fall of 1860. But since the collection of the 1860 U.S. Census in Charleston was completed on August 2 – before the announcement of the new policy on August 9 – it accurately reflected the shifting racial and ethnic composition that was taking place on Charleston’s waterfront prior to this crack down on free blacks. This is confirmed further by the city directory data from the mid-1850s. See Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 236-7, 274-5, 290-2; *The North American* (Philadelphia), quoted in *The Liberator* (Boston), November 16, 1860; and *The Liberator*, November 23, 1860. Also see Committee Report, ND #2183, and Committee Report, 1860 #10, SCDAH.

for employment will be quite as good there, notwithstanding political troubles, as they will be [in New York] during the winter,” were forced to seek passage to other southern ports. The pro-trade newspaper bitterly concluded that “Abolitionists have made Northern people almost universally hated and shunned at the South.”<sup>149</sup>

In the months leading up to the firing on Fort Sumter and the beginning of the Civil War that would settle decisively the contentious matter of slave hiring and labor competition, Charleston’s slaveowners effectively curtailed the onslaught of white laborers aspiring to make further inroads against the city’s enslaved waterfront workers. Though native white southerners long had spurned wharf labor, unskilled and semiskilled immigrants mainly from Ireland and Germany diversified the city’s waterfront workforce during the 1840s and 1850s. Complicating already complex relations of race, class, and ethnicity, these new white workers employed a combination of legislative and public appeals and occasional acts of violence to successfully displace many black rivals. But as the next chapter will show, slaveholder power and profits were not the only obstacles white immigrants encountered in their pursuit of employment on Charleston’s docks and drays.

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<sup>149</sup> *The Liberator* (Boston), November 30, 1860; *New York Journal of Commerce* quoted in *The Liberator*, November 30, 1860; The city ordinance requiring either the payment of bonds or commutation money for steerage or deck passengers who were not citizens of South Carolina or residents of Charleston was passed in the early 1840s. Protests from agents of the New York packet lines seemingly led to the sporadic enforcement of the law until early 1860. See Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 110-2, 162, 203, 205, 324-5, 370; Walker, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1844-1854*, 29-30; City Council Minutes, January 6, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, January 9, 1840; City Council Minutes, February 3, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, February 6, 1840; City Council Minutes, January 2, 1849, *Charleston Mercury*, January 3, 1849; City Council Minutes, March 27, 1849, *Charleston Mercury*, March 29, 1849; and City Council Minutes, October 26, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, October 28, 1858; Also see Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 275-6; For a case of two northern workingmen hanged as alleged abolitionist spies near Charleston, see *Bangor Daily Whig and Courier*, February 12, 1861.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

##### **“the unacclimated stranger should be positively prohibited from joining the party”: The Impact of Yellow Fever Epidemics on Waterfront Labor Competition**

In January 1853 the South Carolina-based and pro-slavery *Southern Quarterly Review* decried that poor white immigrants were “gradually usurping the places of blacks” in Charleston. Pushing aside “the submissive, acclimated, non-voting Negro” was “the turbulent, feverish, naturalized foreigner,” who not only arrived “with habits adapted to far different climates,” but also “constitutions prone to every febrile disease.”<sup>1</sup> Though white immigrants supplanted many free blacks and slaves on the city’s docks and drays in the years before the Civil War, the annual threat of yellow fever prevented blacks from losing even more waterfront jobs. Already stigmatized for performing “nigger work” in the slave South, immigrant laborers were further branded as “unacclimated” to lowcountry diseases. As hundreds of Irishmen and Germans continued to flood the city’s unskilled and semiskilled labor markets during the 1850s, that decade’s deadly yellow fever epidemics prompted public statements and municipal decrees voicing preference for and even requiring seasoned or “acclimated” black waterfront workers over their “unacclimated” immigrant competitors.

During the mid-nineteenth century, medical theories were embedded within contemporary notions of race, class, ethnicity, and nativity. These theories, though often fallacious, had a strong impact upon the labor history of Charleston’s antebellum docks. It was widely believed that if a native of Charleston maintained uninterrupted residence in the city until maturity, he or she was thereafter “acclimated” or virtually immune to

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<sup>1</sup> “Yellow Fever in Charleston in 1852,” *Southern Quarterly Review* 7 (January 1853): 142-3.

yellow fever.<sup>2</sup> A few doctors questioned this conventional wisdom, however. In 1840 B. B. Strobel – who served as the physician of the Charleston Marine Hospital during the 1839 yellow fever epidemic – warned of “the delusion of trusting” long held theories of acclimation, stating that among those who had fallen victim to the disease were persons twenty years of age who had been born and bred in Charleston. “And this leads us to believe,” Strobel argued, “that if 20 years do not acclimatize, a whole life will not.” In reality, aged natives did not always enjoy immunity. Dr. Julian John (J. J.) Chisolm reported the “most remarkable case” during the 1854 epidemic of an eighty-four-year-old woman who had never left Charleston and had lived through numerous epidemics, but nonetheless died with black vomit, the latter regarded as the truest indicator and “most dreaded symptom” of yellow fever. As Chisolm put it, “No age was exempt.”<sup>3</sup>

Race was a different matter. Contemporary medical authorities agreed – and modern science has confirmed – that Charleston’s black residents, both slaves and free

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Thomas Y. Simons plainly stated in 1851, “all natives arriving at the adult age are exempt from this disease.” Thomas Y. Simons, M.D., “An Essay on the Yellow Fever as it Has Occurred in Charleston, Including its Origins and Progress up to the Present Time. Read before the So. Ca. Medical Association, at its Anniversary Meeting, 1851, and Published by Their Request,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 6 (November 1851): 782.

<sup>3</sup> Strobel, “Essay on Yellow Fever,” 201-2; J. J. Chisolm, M.D., “A Brief Sketch of the Epidemic Yellow Fever of 1854, in Charleston,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (July 1855): 439; Dr. D. J. Cain observed during the 1854 epidemic that “Age, independently of any other circumstances, seemed to exert, in a marked manner, a protective agency, very few persons, either white or black, native or foreign, acclimated or non-acclimated, being attacked after the climacteric period of life, say after 45 or 50 years of age.” D. J. Cain, M.D., “History of the Epidemic of Yellow Fever in Charleston, S.C., in 1854” (Philadelphia: T. K. and P. G. Collins, 1856), 12; As for the children of natives, some considered them unacclimated, whereas others thought them to be “partially acclimated – not as altogether exempt, but as measurably so, from its attacks.” Henry L. Pinckney, “A Report, Relative to the Proceedings for the Relief of the Sick Poor, During the Late Epidemic; and on the Subject, Generally, of the Public Health; to which is Annexed the Report of the Commissioners of the Temporary Hospital; Presented to the City Council on the 5th of November, 1838” (Charleston: W. Riley, 1838), 26; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Letter to the late Editors,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 137; Dr. Cain noted that the “Native children of foreign parents, appeared to be more liable than those of native parents.” Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 11; Charleston doctor Samuel Henry Dickson explained that after the occurrence of black vomit “recoveries were rare, and indeed, were never expected.” Samuel Henry Dickson, M.D., L.L.D., “Yellow Fever,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 747.

blacks, were decidedly less susceptible to the disease than whites. Though scholars continue to debate whether African blood afforded blacks an innate or acquired immunity to fellow fever, the results were the same.<sup>4</sup> In 1891, Dr. Henry B. Horlbeck offered the following statistical evidence from the city's antebellum yellow fever epidemics:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Deaths</u>	<u>White Deaths</u>	<u>Black Deaths</u>
1819	172	167	5
1838	354	350	4
1839	134	133	1
1849	124	123	1
1852	310	309	1

"In the above list...", commented Horlbeck, "the great exemption from the disease among the black race is evident."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of relative black immunity to yellow fever, see Philip D. Curtin, "The Epidemiology of the Slave Trade," *Political Science Quarterly* 83 (June 1968): 190-216; Kenneth F. Kiple and Virginia H. Kiple, "Black Yellow Fever Immunities, Innate and Acquired, as Revealed in the American South," *Social Science History* 1 (Summer 1977): 419-36; Kenneth Kiple, ed., *The African Exchange: Toward a Biological History of Black People*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987; Philip D. Curtin, *Death by Migration: Europe's Encounter with the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989; Kenneth Kiple, ed. *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993; Sheldon Watts, "Yellow Fever Immunities in West Africa and the Americas in the Age of Slavery and Beyond: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Social History* 34 (Summer 2001): 955-67; Kenneth Kiple, "Response to Sheldon Watts, 'Yellow Fever Immunities in West Africa and the Americas in the Age of Slavery and Beyond: A Reappraisal,'" *Journal of Social History* 34 (Summer 2001): 969-74; and Sheldon Watts, "Response to Kenneth Kiple," *Journal of Social History* 34 (Summer 2001): 975-6.

<sup>5</sup> H. B. Horlbeck, M.D., "Maritime Sanitation at Ports of Arrival" (Concord, NH: Republic Press Association, 1891), 9; Philadelphia physician René LaRoche, who in 1855 published a massive two-volume treatise on yellow fever, concluded that under all circumstances blacks were decidedly less liable to the disease than whites. In 1858 Charleston physician F. M. Robertson stated his opinion that LaRoche "stands 'a head and shoulders' above any living writer, so far as the history and literature of this disease is concerned." "Review of R. LaRoche, M.D., *Yellow Fever, Considered in its Historical, Pathological, Etiological, and Therapeutical Relations*," *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (November 1855): 831; F. M. Robertson, M.D., "Notes on a Case of Yellow Fever, from Jacksonville, Florida," *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 13 (January 1858): 59; Thomas Y. Simons agreed, asserting that "The number of blacks who die is small, and the deaths are among those who have been brought from the country and are unaccustomed to the city." Even though these "unseasoned negroes were not exempt from its ravages," added Simons, "they escaped oftener than the white strangers; and when attacked they had the disease in a lighter degree, and if properly treated were more generally cured." Thomas Y. Simons, M.D., "A Report on the History and Causes of the Strangers or Yellow Fever of Charleston: Read Before the Board of Health" (Charleston: W. Riley, 1839), 14; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 6 (November 1851): 782, 780; City Register J. L. Dawson reported in September 1856 that during the epidemic that summer "an

Among whites, doctors correctly warned that rural folk, northerners, and especially recently arrived foreign immigrants were particularly vulnerable. “Our Stranger’s Fever is most emphatically well named from its inhospitable tendency to assail...the newly arrived stranger,” wrote Charleston physician Samuel Henry Dickson in January 1840. The editors of the *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* asserted in November 1856 that “The Irish Celts, and the lower classes from Southern Europe, are most susceptible to the disease, and succumb most readily to its deleterious influence.”<sup>6</sup> Not only were immigrants considered “unacclimated,” but also working-class immigrants – such as Irish dock workers – were thought to be the most vulnerable to their new surroundings. Mayor Henry L. Pinckney, reporting on the relief of the sick poor during the 1838 epidemic, claimed that the disease “was confined to those who were not only not accustomed to our climate, but whose constant exposure to the sun, aided by hard labor and dissipated habits, had emphatically prepared them to become its victims.”<sup>7</sup>

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unacclimated slave” residing near South Bay Street was attacked, and though “regarded by the physician in attendance as a very severe case – recovered.” But such cases were few and far between, and Dr. Cain revealed that of the fifteen blacks who died in 1856, five were native children and the ten adults were natives of other states, so that “No native adult black died of the fever.” J. L. Dawson, M.D., “Report of the Cases of Yellow Fever which Have Occurred in our City, and on Ship-board in our Harbor, up to August 25th,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (September 1856): 701; Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 10; This greater degree of acclimation among blacks prompted some white Charlestonians during the 1850s to petition the state legislature to reconsider a bill aimed at driving free blacks from the state: “Their labor is indispensable to us in this neighborhood. They are the only work men who will, or can, take employment...in the summer. We cannot build or repair a house in that season without the aid of the colored carpenter or bricklayer.” The petition was signed by, among many others, Mayor Charles Macbeth, suggesting that the document was written during the late 1850s. Petition, ND #2801, SCDAH.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Henry Dickson to B. B. Strobel, in Strobel, “Essay on Yellow Fever,” 128-9; Strobel argued that “The inhabitants of the interior [of Mexico] are as apprehensive of approaching [the coast]...as Northerners would be of coming to Charleston during the prevalence of the fever.” Strobel, 142-3; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever in Charleston,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 846.

<sup>7</sup> Having hinted at alleged links between morality and susceptibility, Pinckney added that “Of the moral causes of the epidemic...it is but little hazardous to say, that it is distinctly traceable to the prevailing vice of intemperance, and the long catalogue of vicious and destructive habits, that are invariably connected with it.” Pinckney, “Report During the Late Epidemic,” 10; Port Physician Thomas Y. Simons concurred

Many medical doctors maintained, however, that immigrants who resided in Charleston for a number of years could develop acclimation. Others held that if an unacclimated person, including a foreign stranger, was stricken with yellow fever but recovered from the attack, then “the individual having it is not liable to another attack.”<sup>8</sup>

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with Pinckney, arguing that “among the number of strangers who take the fever and die, there are many who have to expose themselves to the hot sun in their daily labor.” Simons, “Report on the History and Causes of Yellow Fever,” 13; On August 31, 1852, Jacob F. Schirmer recorded in his diary that yellow fever was raging “principally among the lower classes.” Schirmer Diary, August 31, 1852, SCHS; Dr. Cain noted in 1854 that “It is the laboring class, upon whom the curse of poverty – one of fearful magnitude – presses with iron hand; in whom there is utter hopelessness of change of condition for the better, in short, in whom are united and intensified all the influences, moral, mental, and physical, which contribute to make up the sum of human wretchedness and woe – this is the class which, thereby rendered extremely liable to morbid impressions.” Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 23; And in November 1856 the editors of the *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* attributed the elevated vulnerability of the Irish to personal hygiene and filthy living conditions. “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever in Charleston,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 846; But on October 7, 1854, Henry Gourdin wrote to his brother Robert N. Gourdin, “It is observable now that there are many new cases among people in the upper and better classes, and so many have taken it who were supposed to be climatized that hardly any one now is regarded as exempt from its attack.” Philip N. Racine, ed., *Gentlemen Merchants: A Charleston Family’s Odyssey, 1828-1870* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008), 283.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, Dr. J. J. Chisolm wrote in July 1855 that “This is well exemplified in Charleston, where its native inhabitants and long resident strangers are alone acclimated.” Chisolm, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (July 1855): 434; Also see “Review of LaRoche,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (November 1855): 831; Simons, “Report on the History and Causes of Yellow Fever,” 21; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 6 (November 1851): 782; B. B. Strobel also argued that “nothing affords an exemption from an attack of Yellow Fever, but the fact of having had the disease under some of its modified forms.” Strobel, “Essay on Yellow Fever,” 201-2; Dr. Dickson wrote to B. B. Strobel on January 14, 1840, that “Every one is aware of...the extreme rarity of second attack of this terrible pestilence – immunities well know and observed in Europe as well as America.” Strobel, 128-9; And Savannah physician H. L. Byrd wrote in May 1855 that “One attack of yellow fever exempts the patient to a great degree from subsequent ones, provided he continues to reside in the same city, or if he should remove, and settle in any other of the Atlantic cities where yellow fever occasionally prevails as an epidemic, his exemption would still be the same.” H. L. Bird, M.D., “Observations on Yellow Fever,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (May 1855): 333; Just as some argued that immigrants could acquire acclimated status, many professed the notion that native Charlestonians who had been away from the city for an extended period of time could lose their acclimation. The historian and physician David Ramsay advised in 1790 that “our own citizens who have been long absent” return to the city in November to enable “at least half a year to be assimilated to the climate, before their health would be endangered by any thing peculiar to it.” David Ramsay, M.D., “A Dissertation on the Means of Preserving Health, in Charleston, and the Adjacent Low Country. Read Before the Medical Society of South Carolina, on the 29th of May, 1790” (Charleston: Markland & McIver, 1790), 30; Thomas Y. Simons wrote in March 1855 that of the four adult native Charlestonians who had died during the 1854 yellow fever epidemic, two “had been many years out of the city, and became unacclimated.” Thomas Y. Simons, M.D., “Observations in Reply to William Hume, M.D.,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 185; In June 1859 Ann Elliott Morris Vanderhorst, wife of wharf owner Elias Vanderhorst, noted in her diary that her son-in-law John W. Lewis had returned to Charleston, adding, “I trust he will not be attacked with fever having remained so long in the country.” Ann Elliott Morris Vanderhorst Diary, 1859-1860, Ann Elliott

But these theories too had their exceptions and detractors. There was a lack of consensus regarding how long it took an immigrant to gain acclimation. Some physicians thought only a couple of summers in the city sufficient. In January 1855 Dr. William Hume described the “remarkable” case of a Spaniard who had been a resident of Charleston for three years but nonetheless became ill during the 1854 fever. Dr. J. L. Dawson reported that in August 1856, Elizabeth Graham, “from Ireland, four years in Charleston,” died with black vomit.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, as early as the mid-eighteenth century, Dr. John Moultrie Jr. declared that “It is falsely supposed by some that those who have once been victimized by this disease never incur it afterwards; but this groundless opinion is contradicted both by reason and experience, for I have seen poor creatures who have twice suffered from this disease.”<sup>10</sup> In July 1855 Dr. Chisolm too reported that some victims of the 1854 epidemic had had yellow fever previously, which he conceded were “exceptions to the generally received opinion of immunity obtained by the first attack.” And both Dr. Dickson and Dr. Daniel J. (D. J.) Cain warned their colleagues that a mild illness may not protect immigrants from future attacks, and that a misdiagnosis of yellow fever during a previous epidemic could lure some into a false sense of security.<sup>11</sup>

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Morris Vanderhorst Papers, Business and Personal Papers, 1859-1882, Vanderhorst Family Papers, 1689-1942, SCHS; Likewise, Maine ship captain James Carr observed in 1815, “it is considered almost fatal...for a countryman to visit the city” during the summer. James Carr Papers, SCL; Indeed, even native South Carolinians who were not natives of the lowcountry were considered “strangers to our seaboard” and “altogether unacclimated to a Yellow Fever atmosphere.” See R. A. Kinlock, M.D., “A Brief Description of the Yellow Fever as it Prevailed at Mount Pleasant and in Charleston Harbor during the Summer of 1857, with a Critical Inquiry into its Probable Origin,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 13 (January 1858): 10, 16.

<sup>9</sup> William Hume, M.D., “On the Introduction, Propagation, and Decline of the Yellow Fever in Charleston, during the Summer of 1854,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 21; Dawson, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (September 1856): 701.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph I. Waring, “John Moultrie Jr., M.D., Lieutenant Governor of East Florida: His Thesis on Yellow Fever” (n.p.), Reprinted from *The Journal of the Florida Medical Association* 54 (August 1967): 772-7.



No individual enjoyed complete immunity to yellow fever. But in late antebellum Charleston, it was evident that blacks were far less likely to contract or die from the disease than were whites. Therefore, blacks were regarded as “acclimated” and thus essentially immune to yellow fever, whereas immigrants were “unacclimated” and vulnerable to contracting and spreading the disease. And it was in the context of such realities and beliefs that Charleston’s municipal leaders – some of whom were physicians – debated the origins of yellow fever and how best to prevent the disease in the city.

In 1800 Charleston physician and historian David Ramsay told a doctor in New York that “The disputes about the origin of yellow-fever which have agitated the Northern States have never existed in Charleston. There is but one opinion among the physicians and inhabitants, and that is, that the disease was neither imported nor contagious.”<sup>12</sup> Nearly forty years later this harmony was so well intact that when Dr. B. B. Strobel concluded that yellow fever was imported from the West Indies in 1839, he found that Charleston’s physicians were in almost unanimous and “decided opposition to such a conclusion.” Though his claims had become “a subject of ridicule and laughter” among the city’s doctors, Strobel nevertheless published his findings in 1840. “Let it not be supposed, however, that we contend for the *exclusive* importation of Yellow Fever,” Strobel explained; “We believe on the contrary, that it may, and does arise sometimes

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<sup>11</sup> Dr. Chisolm added that “persons having had yellow fever with black vomit in 1852, were again treated for yellow fever in 1854.” Chisolm, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (July 1855): 446-7; Dickson, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 745; Dr. Cain similarly reported that during the 1854 epidemic, “Many foreigners (adults) who had suffered an attack of the disease in a former epidemic were attacked again; and in a few cases, recently arrived strangers had it twice during this season.” Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 11, 20-1; Charleston physician A. B. Williman observed in Norfolk in 1855 that “So far as the immunity to disease existed, it stood in direct relation to the *severity* of former attacks.” Accordingly, Williman also argued that “any recurrence of disease, after its previous manifestation by black vomit, or hemorrhage, was extremely doubtful.” A. B. Williman, M.D., “An Account of the Yellow Fever Epidemic in Norfolk during the Summer of 1855,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (May 1856): 333-4.

<sup>12</sup> Ramsay quoted in Horlbeck, “Maritime Sanitation at Ports of Arrival,” 7.

from local causes, under certain conditions of the atmosphere.” Despite this concession, Ramsay’s harmony had been shattered, and during the next two decades some of Charleston’s most learned and influential physicians and leaders contentiously debated whether yellow fever was domestic or foreign in origin.<sup>13</sup>

In this “origins debate” the preponderance of the city’s mid-nineteenth century medical professionals – influenced by the teachings of Ramsay and especially of the Philadelphia physician Benjamin Rush – subscribed to the erroneous theory that yellow fever arose in Charleston from a variety of local sources.<sup>14</sup> These “localists” insisted that

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<sup>13</sup> Strobel, “Essay on Yellow Fever,” 130, 11; Dr. Dickson stated that a committee consisting of Port Physician Simons and “his medical colleagues” concluded “with the unfailing bias of that day” that the 1839 epidemic “was not imported.” Dickson, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 753; And reflecting upon the “industry and zeal of the late Dr. B. B. Strobel,” Dr. William Hume noted in March 1854 that Strobel’s 1840 essay was “the first instance of a rebellion against the established creed of our physicians, and a determination to investigate and publish the truth as it was seen.” William Hume, M.D., “Report to the City Council of Charleston, on a Resolution of Inquiry Relative to ‘the Source and Origin of Yellow Fever, as it Has Occasionally Prevailed in Charleston, and the Means of Prevention or Exclusion, as May Seem Worthy of Adoption, in Order to Obviate its Future Occurrence,’” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 154; In January 1859 Dr. Elias Horlbeck wrote, “Among the medical men in Charleston thirty years ago, there was hardly an advocate of the importable or contagious character of yellow fever.” Robert Leiby et al., “Report of the Committee of the City Council of Charleston, on the Origin and Diffusion of the Yellow Fever in Charleston, in the Summer of 1858” (Charleston: Walker, Evans & Co.’s Steam Power Press, 1859), 28.

<sup>14</sup> Following the yellow fever epidemics of 1793, 1794, and 1797 in Philadelphia, Dr. Rush “strongly advocated” that the disease was contagious, but denied that it was imported. In 1802 Dr. Rush abandoned the contagionist camp and became the leading proponent for the non-contagious nature and local origin of yellow fever. When in March 1854 William Hume attacked Rush’s “flimsy and imaginative arguments,” Thomas Y. Simons came to Rush’s defense, writing that such “strong epithets...should scarcely have been applied by any one to the writings of an authority so venerable in the profession as Dr. Rush.” In January 1855 Dr. Hume argued that “In vain did a few free thinkers and close observers oppose the authority of Rush and his proselyte [David] Ramsay, and all subsequent proselytes to the present day.” Simons again took offense at “the unceremonious manner in which [Hume] referred not only to the opinions of those who did believe that yellow fever arose principally from local causes, but of the illustrious and venerated dead, from whom those opinions were derived.” In January 1856 Hume warned of the powerful influence of physicians on public opinion, writing, “The physicians seeing no immediate source of the disease, proclaim it of domestic origin; and the community, having no other means of information, adopt their opinion, and maintain it with a tenacity which is truly astonishing.” Hume continued, “In matters of this kind it need not be left to physicians to decide what an intelligent community can determine on the evidence furnished,” adding that “It becomes every juryman to arrive at a true verdict, according to the evidence, and to rely upon the evidence, rather than the authority of names.” In 1840 B. B. Strobel argued that Dr. Rush changed his views on the contagious nature of yellow fever in 1802 in part due to the pressure of commercial and mercantile interests. Strobel also copied the following account from the *Dictionnaire des Sciences*

yellow fever was caused by “meteorological phenomena” and was “Produced by a vaporous poison, engendered in the soil, out of the decomposition of the animal and vegetable matter, aided by heat and moisture, and precipitated on the subject.”<sup>15</sup> Others including Thomas Y. Simons – who was both the port physician and chairman of the city’s Board of Health – similarly blamed dock mud mixed with decomposed vegetables and other offensive materials swept in by the tides, which released a venomous vapor when disturbed.<sup>16</sup> Another explanation hypothesized that “the germs of the disease exist everywhere in the soil of our city, ready to spring up under the favorable influence of our usual summer temperatures, whenever the earth is upturned during the season, surely to grow, ripen, and yield the harvest of death.”<sup>17</sup> Other commonly espoused local causes included stagnant water and low lots, the dumping of offal in the streets, and crowded and filthy dwellings and neighborhoods. Localists even imaginatively suggested that one of the “active agents of the disease” was the excitement of municipal elections. Irish and

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*Medicales*: “Rush thought the disease at first was contagious. He sustained from 1802 a contrary opinion, But this Physician declared in dying, that in so doing, he had yielded to *particular considerations*, and that he never ceased to believe that the Yellow Fever was contagious. He disavowed in his last moments, all that he had written in favor on non-contagion.” Simons, “Report on the History and Causes of Yellow Fever,” 15; “Review of LaRoche,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (November 1855): 833; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 148; Thomas Y. Simons, M.D., “A Report Read before the City Council of Charleston, and Ordered to be Printed with the Proceedings; with an Appendix, in Reply to the Report of Wm. Hume, M.D.,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 342; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 1; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 175; William Hume, M.D., “On the Introduction of Yellow Fever into Savannah in the Year 1854, in Reply to a Letter to the Editor from R. C. Mackall, M.D., Late Health Officer of the City of Savannah,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (January 1856): 10, 15, 18-19; Strobel, “Essay on Yellow Fever,” 8.

<sup>15</sup> William Hume, M.D., “Meteorological and Other Observations in Reference to the Causes of Yellow Fever in Charleston, with an Outline of a Plan for its Prevention,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 5 (January 1850): 2-3, 27.

<sup>16</sup> Simons, “Report on the History and Causes of Yellow Fever,” 18; Strobel, “Essay on Yellow Fever,” 34, 210.

<sup>17</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, November 5, 1858.

German immigrants were particularly vulnerable to this cause since their votes were always vigorously pursued by competing political factions.<sup>18</sup>

Rejecting local explanations, a few Charleston doctors rightly focused on external sources of yellow fever. Back in 1753 Dr. John Lining observed that “This fever does not seem to take its origin from any particular constitution of the weather,” but that each time the disease had broken out in Charleston “it was easily traced to some persons who had lately arrived from some of the West Indian islands, where it was epidemical.” Almost exactly 100 years later, Dr. William Hume – a city alderman and professor of experimental science at the Citadel, the state military academy in Charleston – joined Dr. Strobel to argue that rather than originating in the soil or climate of the city, commercial trade with foreign vessels was to blame for the introduction of the disease.<sup>19</sup> Medical

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<sup>18</sup> After the disease became epidemic among the Irish and Germans in early September 1852, local authorities were so convinced of the “great influence” of the municipal elections that they petitioned the state legislature to alter the dates of these contests. On December 16, 1852, the General Assembly passed an act changing the day of elections in Charleston from early September to early November. On October 28, 1853, the Charleston City Council ratified an ordinance confirming that the election of city officers would thereafter take place in early November; Thomas Y. Simons, M.D., “A Report on the Epidemic Yellow Fever as it Occurred in Charleston in 1852, with Statistical and Other Observations,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 8 (May 1853): 363-4; William Hume, M.D., “An Inquiry into Some of the General and Local Causes to which the Endemic Origin of Yellow Fever Has Been Attributed by Myself and Others,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (November 1854): 727; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 5; Petition, ND #5557, SCDAH; Also see Committee Report, ND #5866, SCDAH; Walker, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1844-1854*, 149, 185, 187; In 1824 the Charleston Grand Jury complained of the “disgraceful and increasing evil” and “the riotous and disorderly conduct” which took place during recent city elections. Grand Jury Presentments, Charleston District, January 1824 and May 1824, SCDAH.

<sup>19</sup> Dr. John Lining to Dr. Robert Whytt, Professor of Medicine in the University of Edinburgh, December 11, 1753, quoted in Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 148-9; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 162; In the January 1853 continuation of his January 1850 essay exploring the role meteorological factors played in the origins of yellow fever, William Hume showed a willingness to reconsider his own views and reject erroneous theories after the discovery of contrary scientific evidence. By November 1854 Hume had abandoned the localist viewpoint and embraced the importationist cause. Hume explained that “finally, I had to yield to the power of truth,” and that “In 1854 I was convinced of my error and embraced the opposite side, for the only alternatives of faith were domestic origin or foreign introduction.” As for his former fellow localists, “it was not that I loved my colleagues less, but that I loved truth more.” William Hume, M.D., “Sequel to Meteorological and Other Observations in Reference to the Causes of Yellow Fever in Charleston, Brought Forward to 1852,”

authorities later confirmed this importation theory: yellow fever was not endemic in the Carolina lowcountry.<sup>20</sup> But it was not yet known that indigenous *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes – which live and breed in stagnant water and thus pervaded Charleston’s waterfront – were the vectors responsible for transmitting the yellow fever virus from infected foreigners at the wharves to susceptible Charlestonians. Without the benefit of this knowledge, “importationists” mistakenly claimed that inanimate objects including cargo or a vessel itself could become contaminated while lying in a port where yellow fever was prevailing, such as Havana and other West Indies ports. Importationists contended that upon arrival in Charleston, the disease could then be passed to unacclimated individuals who came into contact with the “foul air” of the vessel and imparted to those who handled the “infected” cargo.<sup>21</sup> In short, importationists believed

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*Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 8 (January 1853): 60; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (November 1854): 727; Dr. Dickson also argued that “One single coincidence has always presented itself in connection with the occasional prevalence of Yellow Fever in places where it is not annually or permanently endemic. Whether it occur in New York or Boston, Philadelphia or Baltimore, Norfolk or Charleston, Savannah or Mobile, it is always coincident with, or subsequent to some foul arrival from the West Indies or New Orleans, perpetual sources, as I suppose will be admitted, of the pestilence.” Dickson, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 754-5.

<sup>20</sup> According to the World Health Organization, an endemic disease requires “The constant presence of a disease or infectious agent within a given geographic region or population group.” Yellow fever is endemic in thirty-four African countries, and though for more than 200 years the tropical and subtropical Americas – including South Carolina and much of the southeastern United States – were subject to yellow fever epidemics, the disease was never endemic in the U.S.; Dr. Jari Vainio and Dr. Felicity Cutts, “Yellow Fever” (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1998), 5, 10, 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, November 10, 1858; Also see Edward McCrady, *A Series of Articles upon the Means of Preventing the Recurrence of Yellow Fever in Charleston, Addressed to the Citizens of Charleston: Published in the Charleston Mercury over the Signature of “E. McC.”* Charleston: Steam Power Press of Walker, Evans & Co., 1858; Dr. Dickson argued in 1856 that “it has been so obviously and often carried on ship-board from an infected to a healthy locality, and under so many contingencies has given rise to unmistakable [*sic*] attacks among those who, in these healthy localities, have visited the infected vessels, that this point admits no longer of reasonable question.” For more information regarding purportedly infected cargo, see Dickson, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 749; And William Hume wrote in 1858, “That the yellow fever may be brought, or, rather, has been brought from the West Indies to Charleston by vessels,” and “That its presence on board of a ship in our harbor infects that ship – that is, expands its poisonous productions throughout the ship – in such a manner, that any one, unaccustomed to its influence, on coming on board, in the course of time will acquire the same disease, with all the powers and properties appertaining to the original imported case.” William

that yellow fever was a contagious disease, spread by direct contact rather than by a vector.

Meanwhile, this scientific squabble between localists and importationists over the origin of yellow fever in Charleston led to profoundly different preventive policies. Localists urged municipal and state leaders to improve the sanitation of the city. Among the recommendations made in the name of eliminating potential domestic causes of yellow fever were the following: cleansing the docks of decomposed vegetable and other disagreeable matter; flushing the city drains in wintertime; removing filth and offal from the streets to beyond the city limits; draining stagnant water and filling up low lots; keeping cellars dry and properly ventilated; outlawing internments within the city; preventing the excavation of the earth during the summer; and paving or macadamizing the streets. “[T]hese measures, if they can be accomplished,” wrote Dr. Simons in 1839, “constitute...judicious and important preventive means.”<sup>22</sup>

The Charleston City Council enacted numerous sanitation measures during the early nineteenth century. The Council outlawed the casting of human bodies into local rivers and marshes in 1805, forbade the throwing of dock mud or any other substance “of an offensive character” onto the wharves between May 1 and November 1 in 1839, and required the removal of offal or other “dangerous nuisance...by which the air shall or

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Hume, M.D., “On the Germination of Yellow Fever in Cities, in Contrast with the Incubation of Fever in Individuals,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 13 (March 1858): 177.

<sup>22</sup> Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 6 (November 1851): 795-6; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 5 (January 1850): 28; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 8 (January 1853): 65; “Review of LaRoche,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (November 1855): 838; Simons also concluded “that a city atmosphere is necessary to generate Yellow Fever; and it is a wise system of medical police, that all causes, which may, by a possible contingency, prove agents in producing disease, should be removed.” Simons, “Report on the History and Causes of Yellow Fever,” 22.

may be impregnated with foul and noxious effluvia” in 1806 and 1836.<sup>23</sup> Also in 1836 under the leadership of Mayor Robert Y. Hayne, a “general system of internal medical police” was implemented, and, Dr. Simons boasted, “In order to carry out sanitary measures I served as member of Council many years, in which time I was instrumental in assisting in carrying out the following measures: 1st. To have a general system of drainage established, and to have low lots filled up. 2d. To have cellars water tight or closed, and not to allow houses subsequently erected to have excavated cellars. 3d. To prevent the accumulation of water remaining in low lots or cellars, which previously used to remain until stagnant.”<sup>24</sup>

While importationists acknowledged that such actions would likely inhibit the propagation of yellow fever after the disease was introduced into Charleston by a foreign vessel, they argued that maritime quarantine regulations offered the best defense against its introduction. In 1840 – after yellow fever struck down 354 individuals in 1838 and 134 in 1839 – Dr. B. B. Strobel concluded his lengthy “Essay on the Subject of the Yellow Fever, Intended to Prove its Transmissibility,” by stating that “We have tried the plans of those who contend for the local origin of the disease for more than 100 years ineffectually. Let us make now the experiment suggested by an opposite theory – a rigid and efficient quarantine.” Strobel reported that between May 1 and July 30, 1839, at least

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<sup>23</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 129, 305, 254-9, 263-8; The ordinance regarding the throwing of mud upon the wharves was amended in 1845 to permit mud, but added that decayed vegetables and fruit was not to be thrown into the docks. Walker, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1844-1854*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review*, 10 (March 1855): 171-2; Simons also noted that the main goals of this system of “great and general improvement” were 1) to drain or fill every low lot and remove all stagnant water, 2) to prevent the accumulation of water in cellars, 3) to forbid underground cellars in all new buildings, and 4) to pave or macadamize the streets convexly so as to again prevent the accumulation of stagnant water, as well as to keep the drains clean. Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 6 (November 1851): 794-5; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 333.

thirty-six vessels arrived in Charleston from infected West Indies ports. Of those ships, twenty-three were not subjected to any quarantine and were allowed to come directly to the wharves. And of the thirteen that were detained, the length of quarantine ranged from five days to only a few hours, with one day the most common period of detention before docking in the city. Though the vessels subject to quarantine often were relatively few, their potential impact upon the city's health and prosperity could be disproportionately devastating. Dr. Strobel thus reasoned that a strict quarantine was well worth a trial. After all, he argued, "where there are two sides to a question, the *one safe*, the other *doubtful*, we should always take the *safe side*."<sup>25</sup>

In the wake of the yellow fever epidemic of 1839, the Charleston City Council passed "An Ordinance to Provide and Establish Quarantine Rules and Regulations for the Port and Harbor of Charleston," which was ratified on June 29, 1840. According to this edict, vessels arriving "from any place where infectious or malignant maladies usually prevail," were to report to the quarantine ground – located two miles from the city near Fort Johnson – and remain there at least five days. Vessels with sick persons on board at the time of arrival in Charleston, regardless of the vessels' port of departure, were quarantined for at least twenty days. The ordinance further stipulated that if the mayor or the port physician deemed it necessary or expedient, all "infected" cargo was to be removed, after which the vessel was to be cleaned and purified. Also, no one was allowed to board or communicate with a quarantined vessel without the special permission of the mayor or port physician. This official authorization seemingly would

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<sup>25</sup> Strobel prefaced his essay by arguing that if the disease was indeed transmissible from port to port, then it becomes "the solemn duty of all governments, to stay the progress of the evil, by the enforcement of the most rigid quarantine." Strobel, "Essay on Yellow Fever," preface, 171-4, 223-4.



have applied to laborers hired to discharge “infected” cargo or to clean and purify vessels at quarantine. An earlier state quarantine act, in fact, expressly included those persons “handling such infected cargo” as necessitating this special consent. Finally, after serving their quarantine and with the permission of the port physician, these vessels could come to the city.<sup>26</sup>

The 1840 ordinance remained on the books as Charleston’s quarantine rules and regulations for fifteen years. In the opinion of importationist William Hume – the most outspoken advocate of quarantine measures in late antebellum Charleston – it was “sufficiently comprehensive to embrace all the necessary details when directed to be rigidly enforced.” But with the majority of the city’s physicians and municipal leaders still adhering to a belief in local causes of yellow fever, Dr. Hume suggested in March 1854 that the laws were being “loosely and carelessly carried out” due to a “neglect of duty in our officers.”<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly, localist Thomas Y. Simons – who as port physician ironically was the chief enforcer of the city’s quarantine – took great umbrage to Hume’s “conclusion that no attention was paid to quarantine.”<sup>28</sup> Yet Simons admitted that the quarantine regulations, much like slave hiring measures, were not being executed to the letter of the law. The port physician claimed that after the passage of the 1840 quarantine ordinance he had detained the first vessel that arrived from a West Indies port

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<sup>26</sup> On December 20, 1832, the South Carolina state legislature passed “An Act to Enlarge and Extend the Powers of the Governor, and of the City Council of Charleston, Over Quarantine.” Under the authority of this act, the Charleston City Council passed the June 1840 quarantine ordinance. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 373-4, 211-4.

<sup>27</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 162.

<sup>28</sup> Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 172; Simons described himself as “the principal officer to whom the external and internal medical police of the city has been entrusted.” He served as the port physician from 1821 until his death in 1857. Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 350.

and subjected it to quarantine in accordance with the edict. But “remonstrances were made in relation to this law,” and by a resolution of the City Council, Simons “was instructed to permit all vessels having no sickness on board, on arrival at quarantine, to come up.” And if there was sickness on board, Simons stated that he was directed to retain the vessel at quarantine, send the sick to the Lazaretto – the quarantine hospital located nine miles from the city on Morris Island – and have “the cabin and forecastle cleansed and purified as far as practicable.”<sup>29</sup> Although the ordinance called for “infected” cargo to be removed and for the hold to be cleaned and purified as well, Simons explained that “The cargo could not properly be taken out to disinfect the hold of the vessels, there being neither ware-houses nor lighters, nor any means for such purposes.”<sup>30</sup> Such were the quarantine procedures pursued from 1840 to 1854 by the localist-dominated City Council.<sup>31</sup>

Since it was the directive of the City Council not to execute the quarantine laws as they were written in 1840, William Hume recommended in March 1854 that municipal leaders issue “the reverse instructions” and enforce the ordinance. But Hume also desired

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<sup>29</sup> Simons did not specify how long vessels with sickness on board were quarantined. In effect this policy differed very little from that which was in place during the summer of 1839 and before the 1840 quarantine ordinance was passed. Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 334; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 171, 174.

<sup>30</sup> Lighters are boats used to transport cargo to and from ships in open water; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 171; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 334.

<sup>31</sup> Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 172, 171, 174; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 334; British Consul William Ogilby confirmed Simons’s claim that Charleston lacked the means to disinfect the holds of vessels at quarantine. He reported to King William IV on June 29, 1833, that “vessels performing quarantine are now obliged to anchor in the stream, at about the distance of about two miles from the city, & the same [distance] from the opposite shore without any facilities being offered for their purification.” Ogilby, “British Counsel Report,” no. 18, SCL; Simons added that “The City Council and the Port Physician, therefore, with their means and appliances, did all that was practicable and in accordance with the approved medical opinion up to 1854.” Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 174-5.

to extend and strengthen the rules. To keep “infected” vessels from unhealthy ports away from the city’s waterfront and susceptible inhabitants, Dr. Hume suggested that such vessels ought to be discharged using lighters at the quarantine ground rather than at Charleston’s wharves. The purportedly tainted cargo could then be purified and transported to their consignees in the city, after which the emptied holds would be thoroughly ventilated and cleansed at the quarantine before the vessels were permitted to enter the docks to load export cargo. Hume emphasized that it was vital that the quarantined vessels’ holds be purified before coming up to the city. Otherwise upon their “arrival at the wharf, and the hatches removed, the infection is diffused” among “the mass of clean vessels, and...the usual congregations of seamen and other foreigners.”<sup>32</sup>

William Hume insisted that this process occurred regularly but usually went unnoticed. In 1849, for instance, three vessels – the *Numa*, the *Isabel*, and the *Merchant* – arrived from Havana between July 18 and August 25. None having sickness on board at the time of arrival, contrary to law but in accordance with prevailing practice, all three ships were allowed to come up to the city and dock at Union Wharves without

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<sup>32</sup> Hume insisted that the “Transshipment of the cargo, in order to ventilate and purify the hold of the vessel, is indispensable to an efficient quarantine.” Hume also recommended that to “guard against the failure of complete disinfection” of either the cargo or the vessels, “it would be prudent to assign an especial and separate wharf...removed to the greatest possible distance” from the eastern Cooper River wharves. Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 160-4; Meanwhile, Thomas Y. Simons maintained that he would not be opposed to more stringent quarantine measures should they be enacted. “I am perfectly willing to co-operate cheerfully in any improvement in regulating quarantine that might prevent the introduction of disease,” wrote Simons in May 1854, adding that he nevertheless still disagreed with Hume’s and the importationists’ inferences and reasonings for doing so. The port physician – being intimately familiar with the quarantine – even had a few recommendations of his own for improving the system, which were based on his opinion that “no vessel should be allowed to lie twenty days at the quarantine ground,” as the current ordinance required, “and then come up with the cargo and hold more infectious from long detention, without the means of discharging her cargo and disinfecting her thoroughly.” Simons therefore joined Hume in calling for lighters and warehouses to enable the removal of the supposedly infected cargo, and the proper means for disinfecting the vessels. Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 171, 174; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 334.

performing quarantine. But on August 6 a seaman from the *Numa* took ill and died at the Marine Hospital with black vomit, and on August 7 the engineer of the *Isabel* sickened. Meanwhile, two vessels – the *Queen Victoria* and the *Huron* – arrived from British ports where yellow fever was not prevailing and legally moored at the wharves north and south of Union Wharves respectively, so that “the pure and the impure vessels were all in the vicinity of each other.” By the end of August the captains of both British vessels had been sick with yellow fever and one had died, and five sailors from the *Queen Victoria* were attacked but all recovered.<sup>33</sup>

Charleston’s more vulnerable residents were also affected. Mr. Sahlman, a twenty-four-year-old German who resided at the corner of East Bay and Elliott streets, regularly boarded the West Indies vessels tied up at Union Wharves to purchase cigars. On August 26, the day after one of these visits, Sahlman became ill and on September 2 he died of yellow fever.<sup>34</sup> Then in August 1852, three vessels from the West Indies similarly were allowed to come up to the city without being cleansed at quarantine and unload their cargoes at Atlantic Wharf, and two others at Accommodation Wharf. The *Clara S. Bell* docked among these West Indies vessels at Brown’s Wharf, where Mrs. Cole – a forty-one-year-old passenger from Boston – died during the week of August 15 from yellow fever. About two weeks later, an eight-year-old “little Irish girl” named Mary Ryan, “who was in the habit of frequenting the wharves to pick chips,” died of

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<sup>33</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 163-4, 157.

<sup>34</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 158. Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL.

yellow fever at her house on Philadelphia Street not far from the waterfront.<sup>35</sup> Incidents such as these prompted William Hume to implore his fellow city aldermen in March 1854 to take action to keep West Indies vessels away from the wharves altogether. “Exclude the foreign element from our port, or extinguish it in the harbour,” he pleaded, “but never let it reach our wharves.”<sup>36</sup>

Although sharing Hume’s and the importationists’ passion for preventing future outbreaks of yellow fever, localists continued to deny the efficacy of more rigorous quarantine measures. In May 1854 Thomas Y. Simons dismissed evidence suggesting that yellow fever may have been introduced into Charleston by means of foreign contagion as “accidental coincidences” and chided his “ultra-contagionist” opponents for their dogmatism.<sup>37</sup> “I must, in candor, say that I do not believe the yellow fever was ever

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<sup>35</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (November 1854): 728-9. Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL.

<sup>36</sup> Hume also declared: “So long as the enemy entered secretly to our camp, we were unprepared for resistance: but now, as we have learned his mode and manner of attack, he is disarmed of half his terrors. Our city is our castle; and we will close our doors...and bid defiance to our former enemy. Our strategy is self-defense, our base of operations the Charleston bar, and our prison the quarantine ground. On this frontier we will wage the war.” Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 160, 147, 162.

<sup>37</sup> Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 348, 335-6, 350; In 1839 Simons similarly dismissed importationists’ explanations as “coincidence of circumstances.” Simons, “Report on the History and Causes of Yellow Fever,” 10; Simons’ writings offer several illustrations of what he likely considered a “coincidence of circumstances.” For example, he argued, “In the summer of 1849 the Gas Company opened a drain from Church street through Market street to the wharf, through made land, which was filled with all kinds of materials which were very offensive, and likewise a drain from Hasell street to Patton’s wharf, likewise made ground, and having very offensive stuff, and that stuff was sent to fill up a portion of King-street. On the wharves adjacent to these opened drains seamen took sick, and it is attributed by Alderman Hume to vessels which had come from Havana; none of the crew being sick, yet strange to relate, the other vessels coming from Havana at other wharves, seamen not suffering from exposure to such offensive mater, did not generate yellow fever.” Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 177; Hume responded that such an argument “is an example of confounding the propagation of the disease with its origin.” Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 4-5; A frustrated Hume added in 1858 that “the enemies of Quarantine would have rejoiced in another case of spontaneous ignition of the fever attributable to the filthy dock, unconnected with foreign introduction, and exhibiting the perfect fallacy and folly of all Quarantine regulations.” “Memorial of William Hume, M.D. to the Honorable the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Charleston” (Charleston: Walker, Evans & Co., 1858), 9.

produced in Charleston from importation, and this is the result of an experience of thirty years as Port Physician, and twenty-four years a member of the Board of Health, many years of which I have been its Chairman,” Simons declared.<sup>38</sup> Simons also pointed out the long held opinion of the South Carolina Medical Society that a stringent enforcement of quarantine laws was not necessary to prevent yellow fever.<sup>39</sup>

Frustrated with municipal authorities’ unwavering confidence in sanitation measures alone – which Dr. Simons still insisted could render Charleston mostly if not entirely safe from yellow fever – William Hume protested, “The belief in local causes was so predominant, that the people would rather attribute the origin of a case to a mud puddle in the street” than to a nearby vessel recently arrived from the West Indies. “Unfriendly as we are to mud puddles and low lots,” Hume derided, “we would rather see one thousand of them than see one infected vessel at the wharf.” Even if it was decided to cover the entire city with ten feet of sand, “we will not counteract the danger, nor materially mitigate the risk of foreign introduction...of yellow fever.” Then echoing B. B. Strobel in calling for a rigid enforcement of the quarantine laws, Hume implored that “we are at least entitled to perform an experiment with them.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 334; Also see Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 6 (November 1851): 795-6.

<sup>39</sup> Simons, “Report on the History and Causes of Yellow Fever,” 16-17; In 1854 Simons and Hume debated whether the South Carolina Medical Society maintained this view of quarantine laws. See Hume *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 148, 153, 162; and Simons *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 344-5.

<sup>40</sup> Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review*, 9 (May 1854): 333; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 147, 151, 161-2; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review*, 10 (January 1855): 19-20; Hume went on to add, “that puddles and low lots aid powerfully in propagating the disease, we are fully convinced, and that they should be abated we have often urged.”; In 1838 Mayor Henry L. Pinckney noted that “The foregoing works [on street improvements] have been completed, exclusive of numerous mud puddles filled.” Pinckney, “Report, 1837-1838,” 28; And in 1840 Dr. B. B.

As an alderman, William Hume was not restricted to rhetoric and recommendations. On February 14, 1854, a new quarantine bill penned by Hume received its first reading at the City Council meeting. Hume's goal was to inhibit potentially lethal vessels, cargo, and persons from coming up to the city. The bill newly proposed that all vessels arriving between May 31 and October 1 from ports where yellow fever existed at the time of departure, or having sickness on board during the voyage to Charleston, would be quarantined for no less than thirty days after arrival and at least twenty days after the discharge of all cargo. Hume explained that prevailing practice had permitted those West Indies vessels with healthy crews to bypass the quarantine ground and immediately dock at the wharves. But due to the periodic outbreaks of fever in the city, prudence "would urge us to close this mode of possible entrance, which the present bill most earnestly provides for." Like many diseases, yellow fever has an incubation or latency period – meaning the time elapsed between exposure to the virus and the onset of symptoms – of three to six days. As a result, persons arriving in Charleston and declared to be healthy may have already been infected with yellow fever but had not yet begun to experience symptoms of the disease. Hume accordingly maintained that while vessels were being discharged and purified at the quarantine ground, "the period of incubation of the fever is advancing, and it is probably that these delays will equal the time necessary to decide whether the disease will or will not be developed in the crew." Another rationale for such stringent measures was as follows: "The detention of a vessel for thirty days, is a penalty to enforce the discharge of cargo and undergo a purification, while the twenty days detention after discharge of cargo is to

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Strobel pointed out that in 1817, "an attempt was then made to attribute the fever to some local cause, such as a gutter, or a small pond." Strobel, "Essay on Yellow Fever," 200.

encourage or enforce the re-loading at the quarantine ground,” rather than at the city’s wharves. The bill accordingly permitted quarantined vessels, after being thoroughly cleaned and purified and if no sickness prevailing on board to load cargo at the quarantine ground using lighters, thereby enabling such vessels to return to sea before the expiration of their detentions. And so, with the cases of Mr. Sahlman, Mrs. Cole, and Mary Ryan in 1849 and 1852 still fresh in his mind, Hume concluded that “There is certainly more safety in the absence of doubtful vessels from the wharves, than in their presence.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, better safe than sorry.

On May 9, 1854, approximately 200 merchants and mercantile companies involved in “an extensive European and domestic business,” presented a petition to the Council in support of Hume’s proposed bill. Believing that yellow fever was imported from the West Indies “and subsequently extends over the city, involving the non-acclimated inhabitants in disease and death,” these merchants called for the enactment and enforcement of quarantine laws that would “render our commercial intercourse less intimate and direct with all infected ports.” Though not desiring the destruction of this traffic, they asked that their commercial interests not be sacrificed to those of the

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<sup>41</sup> City Council Minutes, February 14, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, February 16, 1854; City Council Minutes, April 21, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, April 25, 1854; City Council Minutes, May 23, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, May 27, 1854; Hume’s quarantine bill also proposed that the port physician have the following powers: to force any quarantined vessel to discharge its cargo at the quarantine ground for the purpose of purifying the cargo and vessel; to prevent all persons arriving in quarantined vessels from leaving the quarantine ground until twelve days after sailing from the port of departure, fifteen days after the occurrence of the last case of fever on board, and eight days after arrival at quarantine; to permit cargo deemed free from infection or contagion to be conveyed to the city, but only with the written approval of the mayor; to permit quarantined vessels to transfer cargo or a portion of cargo directly to another vessel “for exportation by sea, provided the vessel receiving the same shall not approach nearer than three hundred yards to the wharves of the city.”; and to order vessels at the wharves or in their vicinity to depart and report to the quarantine ground. Also, vessels permitted to come up to the city were required to deliver a permit from the port physician to the mayor’s office within twenty-four hours of being released from the quarantine ground, but such vessels were not to “approach within three hundred yards of the city, without the written permission of the Mayor.” Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 164.



lucrative West Indies trade. When yellow fever was introduced into Charleston, all trade was impacted negatively. Those trading with ports where the disease was not endemic therefore were concerned that city leaders would bow to pressure from influential West Indies merchants and continue to condone the lax enforcement of quarantine laws.<sup>42</sup> At the May 23 meeting, twenty-nine Charleston physicians echoed these calls to “refuse to concede to the advantage of any one interest” and to enact and rigidly enforce stringent quarantine measures. But acknowledging that the bill currently under consideration would be “inconvenient and burdensome to mercantile men,” these doctors warned that it “was likely to meet with powerful opposition on account of the restrictions it proposes unavoidably upon certain branches of our commerce.” The bill was then passed by the City Council. But these new quarantine regulations still had to be ratified at the next Council meeting before going into effect.<sup>43</sup>

Opponents wasted no time in attacking the pending ordinance. David Ramsay had observed in 1790 that in Charleston and the surrounding lowcountry, “Health and wealth seem to be at variance.” In 1840 Dr. B. B. Strobel similarly observed, “It is the object and interest of all commercial communities, to establish, if possible, the non-contagious character of all diseases; and for the very plain reason, that the restrictions necessary to prevent the extension of such diseases, are calculated to interrupt free intercourse between commercial cities.”<sup>44</sup> In the late spring of 1854 the interests of

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<sup>42</sup> City Council Minutes, May 9, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, May 11, 1854.

<sup>43</sup> City Council Minutes, May 23, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, May 27, 1854.

<sup>44</sup> Ramsay, “Dissertation on Preserving Health,” 29; Strobel additionally exclaimed, “These are questions that involve the interest and lives of others, and which we have no right to jeopardize! Dare we place the life-blood of our fellow men in one scale, and coldly calculate how many pounds, shillings and pence in the other shall preponderate?” Strobel, “Essay on Yellow Fever,” 7, 9-10; Echoing Ramsay, Hume declared in

commercial wealth again overcame the concerns of community health. On May 29 the Chamber of Commerce – which was dominated by West Indies merchants opposed to stringent quarantine measures – passed resolutions unanimously declaring the legislation “unnecessarily rigid” and “calculated to prostrate a large and valuable trade with Southern ports.” Its members stated their willingness, however, to make as many sacrifices as necessary to ensure the enactment of local sanitation measures. And in a memorial to the City Council, merchants involved in the West Indies trade proposed deleting the clause calling for the “indiscriminate” detention of vessels for twenty days after being discharged at the quarantine ground, even when there was no illness on board. They suggested replacing it with the phrase “Such time as the Mayor and Port Physician may prescribe.”<sup>45</sup>

William Hume did not welcome this proposed amendment. In a report to the City Council he described a long meeting with a committee from the Chamber of Commerce in which West Indies merchants insisted that “no modification of the present system was practicable” and pleaded for “the uninterrupted commerce of the West Indies.” Specifically, the Chamber of Commerce representatives argued that the thirty-day quarantine was “useless” and that the discharge of cargo was “ruinous in expense.”<sup>46</sup> Transferring cargo between ocean-going vessels and lighters in open water in fact was more difficult and costly than discharging and loading goods at the wharves.<sup>47</sup>

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January 1855 that “Health and wealth have been arrayed against each other in hostile attitude.” Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 35.

<sup>45</sup> City Council Minutes, June 6, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, June 9, 1854.

<sup>46</sup> Frustrated, Hume wrote that “To confute these positions and assertions was not expected, for they are like the man who refuses to practice each virtue, because he cannot practice all.” City Council Minutes, May 23, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, May 27, 1854.

With opposition to his bill mounting, Hume sought to preserve its ratification by offering one concession: reduce the detention of quarantined vessels after discharge of cargo from twenty to ten days, which would enable vessels to come up to the city as early as the eleventh day after arrival in Charleston harbor. Hume was willing to compromise, but only so far, insisting that “The discharge of cargo and purification of the whole vessel is a *sine qua non* of the bill.” But even if the bill was ratified, Hume knew it had been “mutilated” by the change, and he held no delusions that it would effectively curb the ills of the past. He warned that this concession would allow “a dangerous liberality...which a few years experience will exhibit, and we trust a firmer tone, and stronger conviction will correct after its fatal fruits become manifest.” Hume then urged that the City Council act quickly to resolve this dispute and to ratify the ordinance, since “as time wears on, the disease may arrive before we are ready to [impose] any impediment to its entrance into our city.”<sup>48</sup> But reminiscent of the “remonstrances” that pressured city leaders into lax enforcement of the quarantine rules and regulations in 1840, on June 6 the City Council voted eleven to five to “indefinitely postpone” the ratification of Hume’s bill.<sup>49</sup> One week later during the Council meeting on June 13, 1854, the port

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<sup>47</sup> See chapter 1, note 137.

<sup>48</sup> City Council Minutes, May 23, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, May 27, 1854; The last quote appears in the *Charleston Mercury* as follows: “...as time wears on, the disease may arrive before we are ready to oppose any impediment to its entrance in to our city.” It can reasonably be assumed that the word oppose was a misprint, and thus the word “impose” has been substituted; On May 11 the steamship *Isabel* steamed into Charleston harbor from Havana, and three days later one of her steerage passengers – who had been taken on board at Key West where yellow fever was already prevailing – was taken to the Marine Hospital with symptoms of the disease. Fortunately, this man recovered, and the malady did not spread. Charleston dodged a bullet, but this scare may have prompted the City Council to pass the proposed quarantine bill at the May 23 meeting. Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 13-14.

<sup>49</sup> City Council Minutes, June 6, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, June 9, 1854.

physician suggested the propriety of putting into effect the summer quarantine measures, “as heretofore existing, until some new ordinance is established.”<sup>50</sup>

On June 25, 1854, the British barque *Aquatic* departed Matanzas, Cuba, with a cargo of molasses bound for Cork, Ireland. On July 3 a member of the ship’s crew died of yellow fever, and the next day a second died and two more seamen took ill. Meanwhile, the vessel sprung a leak and with “the remainder of the crew being more or less disabled,” the captain was forced to run the vessel ashore north of Georgetown, South Carolina. The steamer *Nina*, under the command of Captain Magee, left Charleston and went to the *Aquatic*’s assistance, and when Magee arrived the barque had eight feet of water in her hold. After pumping out the water and discharging some of the cargo to prevent the vessel from sinking, the *Nina* towed the *Aquatic* to Charleston with a steam engine pumping water out of the hold the entire way. On July 13, “in a sinking condition” and “with her hold in a very foul state,” the *Aquatic* arrived and dropped anchor at Charleston’s quarantine ground, where only her fore and aft cabins were cleansed and disinfected. None of the remaining members of the vessel’s crew were ill, but all were sent to the Lazaretto “so as to see if sickness would occur, which did not.” With the steam engine pump still running continuously to keep the *Aquatic* afloat and with no lighters available to unload the cargo, the port physician was faced with the decision of “whether she should sink or be brought to the city.” Thomas Y. Simons choose the latter, and with her hold still filthy and “containing molasses in a state of

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<sup>50</sup> City Council Minutes, June 13, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, June 15, 1854; Simons claimed that it was “not through my agency, that the bill did not pass,” and that “After this defeat of the bill, I addressed a letter to Council in which I requested to be instructed whether I should carry on the quarantine as previously it was done, or according to the ordinances [of 1840], and I did this because of the contending feelings as regarded quarantine. I was officially informed that I was to continue quarantine as it was previously pursued, and not according to the proclamation, which order, as an Executive officer, I obeyed.” Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 175-6.

fermentation, bilge-water, &c.,” the *Aquatic* was released from quarantine and came up to North Commercial Wharf where she laid for two days. Then on July 16, the vessel was towed to Union Wharves to be pumped out, discharged, and cleansed.<sup>51</sup>

Having taken a substantial public health risk by allowing the *Aquatic* to come up to city’s wharves in such an unsanitary condition, Dr. Simons stressed, “As regards the men to work on board the *Aquatic*, I had made it an especial condition with Captain Magee and the Stevedore, that blacks should be employed in discharging the cargo, which was done.” Or so he thought. When on July 21 the stevedore commenced discharging the *Aquatic*’s remaining cargo – approximately 900 hogsheads of molasses – he was reported to have “prudently determined to employ acclimated negroes in the hold, while his Irish hands laboured on deck, and on the wharf.” A few hours into the unloading of the vessel, the Irish dock hands noticed that the Custom House officer, who ordinarily would have been carrying out his duty aboard the ship, was instead sitting on the wharf. When these white laborers asked him for an explanation, he replied that “the vessel had had yellow fever on board, and that he would rather remain where he was.” Having begun work on the *Aquatic* without being informed of the vessel’s allegedly

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<sup>51</sup> Hume and Simons reported in 1855 that the *Aquatic* was bound for Dublin, Ireland. Jacob Schirmer noted Cork as the vessel’s destination, and that the *Aquatic* went ashore on Long Bay north of Georgetown. Simons recorded that the vessel was ashore on the Pawley Island Beach. Simons also wrote that the *Aquatic*’s fore and aft cabins were cleansed and disinfected before arriving in Charleston, and that “A crew of blacks and whites, the latter North Carolinians, were put on board the barque to work; her crew not being employed, during her progress to Charleston.” Simons added that none of this new crew was sick upon their arrival in Charleston. Meanwhile, Hume argued that since the vessel arrived at the wharves without any of its original crew, the infection must have been attributable to the vessel. Finally, Dr. Cain reported that the *Aquatic* went to Dry Dock Wharf, rather than Union Wharves, on July 15, where she was finally pumped out and disinfected on or after July 16. Captain Magee was probably Captain Arthur Magee, who lived at 101 Broad Street in 1852. Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 4-5, 30; Chisolm, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (July 1855): 436; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (September 1854): 710-1; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 180-1; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 18-19; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (January 1856): 3; Schirmer Diary, July 10, 1854, SCHS; 1852 city directory.

poisonous atmosphere, one of the Irishmen retorted, “And, by jabbers, is it yellow fever that’s aboard this vessel, and divil a turn more will we give the windlass.” Exercising remarkable agency, the Irish wharf hands immediately went on strike until they were able to renegotiate their wages to account for the added peril inherent in such unhealthy and potentially fatal work.<sup>52</sup> But for Charleston’s dock workers, the threat of yellow fever was just another of the copious dangers of waterfront labor. Unacclimated as they were, the Irishmen who worked aboard vessels such as the *Aquatic* had little choice but to take the risk of contracting the disease if they wished to make ends meet during the summer months.

On August 4, after the last hogshead of molasses had been unloaded by the joint efforts of the Irish and black dock workers, the unnamed stevedore, accompanied by a Mr. Garvey and a Mr. McNeal, descended into the rancid and damp hold of the *Aquatic*, which they washed out with a fire hose. Eight days later Mr. Garvey became ill and within forty-eight hours he was dead. Subsequent reports revealed that Garvey was a twenty-six-year-old Irish stevedore who resided at 20 Pinckney Street. He had been “employed in pumping out and disinfecting the barque *Aquatic* during the greater part of which time he worked in the hold,” where “heated by work he was wet by rain.” The City Register, who kept a record of all marriages, births, and deaths, reported that on August 12, Garvey “had been at work on board of the *Aquatic*, and residing in Pinckney-street, sickened with fever and died on the 14th without throwing up black vomit.” Dr. Simons seized on the fact that Garvey “had no black vomit,” and that he was originally

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<sup>52</sup> The workers probably negotiated with the stevedore, who hired, contracted, and supervised dock hands in late antebellum Charleston. Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 181; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 22; Schirmer Diary, July 10, 1854, SCHS.

determined to have died from “Congestion of the Brain.” But Simons admitted that “afterwards the physician said it was yellow fever,” and death records affirm the disease as the cause of Garvey’s death. As for Mr. McNeal, described as “an Irishman employed with Mr. Garvey in the hold of the *Aquatic*,” he also fell ill with yellow fever, but recovered.<sup>53</sup>

Dr. D. J. Cain, who was the physician of the Marine Hospital during the 1854 epidemic, reported that Garvey and McNeal “were the only men who were employed *in the hold of the vessel*,” presumably, that is, besides the black slaves. Fifteen other men – evidently the Irishmen who had struck for higher wages – were said to have been employed on the deck of the *Aquatic* during her unloading, but did not enter the hold.<sup>54</sup> The port physician, who likely was much annoyed that Captain Magee and the stevedore had broken their agreement to employ only blacks during the unloading of the *Aquatic*, wrongly claimed that these “15 were not sick at all.”<sup>55</sup> In fact, two of these men died, whereas according to William Hume, “the rest still live ready to unload another yellow

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<sup>53</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 22; Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 6, 31; Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (September 1854): 711; Chisolm, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (July 1855): 437; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 182; Garvey is also referred to as Garrie, and he appears in the death records as M. Garvin. McNeal is also spelled McNeall. Many medical experts believed that getting wet or sleeping in open air and thus being exposed to dew were contributing causes of yellow fever. For example, Dr. Cain wrote that “Prominent among the *exciting* causes of the disease were a wetting by rain and sleeping in the open air,” and Dr. Simons recounted that the pastor of Charleston’s Marine Church (in a letter to the editors of the *Charleston Courier*) reported that during the 1852 yellow fever epidemic seamen were advised “to avoid getting wet with rain, or sleeping upon the deck exposed to the dew.” Cain, 14; *Charleston Courier* quoted in Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 8 (May 1853): 369; Dr. Cain reported that Garvey died “of coma.” Some physicians reported congestion of the brain as a symptom of those stricken with yellow fever, especially among the intemperate. For example, see Williman, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (May 1856): 333.

<sup>54</sup> Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 6, 31.

<sup>55</sup> Simons never acknowledged that Garvey, McNeal, and at least a number of these fifteen men were Irish and likely unacclimated. Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 182.

fever vessel at the same wages.”<sup>56</sup> Hume also claimed that the thirteen surviving Irish workers “had resided here many years, and may now be considered acclimated to the infected hold of a vessel.”<sup>57</sup> In other words, though these Irish wharf hands were likely unacclimated at the time they were hired in 1854, after having worked on the *Aquatic* they thereafter were considered by some to be acclimated and therefore ostensibly could continue to safely work on the Cooper River waterfront, including during future yellow fever epidemics.

Among those purportedly newly acclimated Irish wharf hands who had worked on the deck of the *Aquatic* was Mr. Gorman. Though Gorman did not sicken with yellow fever, Dr. Cain hypothesized that “it was communicated to his wife by the fomites of his clothes.” Mrs. Gorman, who was twenty-five years old in 1854 and described both as “an Irishwoman” and the “wife of an Irishman,” resided on Calhoun Street near Elizabeth and Anson streets with her husband and two-year-old daughter Mary. Mrs. Gorman came down with yellow fever on August 15, and lay sick in her house for two days before calling a physician. Despite the best efforts of the doctor and several visiting friends,

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<sup>56</sup> The names of these two deceased workers were not revealed. But an examination of Charleston’s death records from August 1854 reveals that Patrick Loone, a forty-year-old Irishman, died of yellow fever at the Poor or Alms House on August 25, 1854, and that Francis Long, a twenty-six-year-old Irishman, died of yellow fever on Tradd Street on August 26, 1854. In addition, two other Irishmen died of yellow fever at the Marine Hospital (which was normally reserved for seamen) on August 20 and August 22, and two more Irishmen died of the disease on August 31, one at the Alms House and the other on Calhoun Street. Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 22.

<sup>57</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 22; This is an astonishing statement from Hume, who as a medical doctor and professor of experimental sciences was well aware of and a participant in the debates over what constituted acclimation. Just one page earlier in the same report, in fact, an amazed Hume noted the aforementioned case of the Spaniard who despite a residence of three years in the city sickened with yellow fever in 1854. Only Garvey, McNeal, and the unnamed stevedore were said to have gone into the hold, so it makes little sense to argue that the workers who did not labor in the hold “may now be considered acclimated to the infected hold of a vessel.” According to even disputed contemporary medical beliefs, only Mr. McNeal – who sickened and recovered – was thereafter acclimated to the disease, not those workers who had simply been in its atmosphere.



having thrown up black vomit she died on August 18. Not only did Mr. Gorman lose his wife, his daughter Mary – who shared a bed with her sick mother – died five days later also with black vomit. William Hume mused that although Mr. Gorman came to Charleston at the same time as his family, he “passed the whole summer in the same house in perfect health.” Death records reveal that Mary Gorman was born in New Jersey, and being two years old when she died in August 1854, Mr. Gorman could not have resided in Charleston for more than two years. And in fact, in an essay appearing in the *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* in March 1858, Hume revealed that the Gormans arrived in Charleston in January 1854, only seven months before Mrs. Gorman and Mary Gorman took ill and died. This refuted Hume’s claim that the white workers who had labored on the *Aquatic* had lived in Charleston for “many years,” and confirmed that unacclimated Irishmen were hired to work on ostensibly contaminated vessels on Charleston’s waterfront during the summer of 1854.<sup>58</sup>

Before the 1854 epidemic Hume recognized that unacclimated dock workers were potentially a major chink in the city’s quarantine armor, and he warned that laborers who

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<sup>58</sup> Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 6, 32, 34; Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (September 1854): 712; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 6-8, 26; Chisolm, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (July 1855): 437; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 13 (March 1858): 146; Dr. Cain refers to Mr. and Mrs. Gorman as Gorham, and the death records refer to Mrs. Gorman as Mrs. German. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines a fomite as “an object (as a dish or an article of clothing) that may be contaminated with infectious organisms and serve in their transmission.” *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, not Mr. Gorham’s clothes, were the actual vectors of the disease. Also, a minority of those infected with the yellow fever virus do not experience any symptoms and recover without being aware of ever having had the disease. It is therefore possible that Mr. Gorham did have yellow fever during the summer of 1854, and may have been the source of his wife’s and daughter’s infection. See John R. Pierce and Jim Writer, *Yellow Jack: How Yellow Fever Ravaged America and Walter Reed Discovered Its Deadly Secrets* (Hoboken, NJ: J. Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005), 7; Hume’s January 1855 report stated that “the husband who came to Charleston at the same time, passed the whole summer in the same house in perfect health.” Dr. Cain claimed that Mary Gorman was attacked with the fever on August 17 and died on August 20, but the death records (which refer to Mary Gorman as Mary Gooman) indicate that the infant indeed died on August 23 from yellow fever. Hume reported in March 1858 that Mr. Gorman “is still alive and well.” Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 13 (March 1858): 146.

discharged “infected” cargo could become ill and spread yellow fever throughout the city. Though Thomas Y. Simons unequivocally dismissed Hume’s claims – stating that such a “circumstance has not occurred in my experience of thirty years” – the 1854 epidemic demonstrated that Dr. Hume was not too far off the mark.<sup>59</sup> Again, ubiquitous mosquitoes along the Cooper River waterfront rather than “impure” cargo and vessels served as the true vectors of death, transmitting yellow fever from infected persons to those who were healthy but susceptible. Hence the presence of scores and perhaps hundreds of unacclimated Irish and other immigrant dock workers such as Garvey, McNeal, and Gorman did put the city at greater risk and played a major role in the widespread propagation of the disease in 1854.

After all, Garvey and McNeal were the second and third Charleston residents to sicken with yellow fever in 1854, and by all accounts Garvey was the city’s first resident to die in that year’s epidemic. And, indeed, some implicated these Irishmen for the proliferation of the fever from the waterfront to the rest of the city. William Hume, for instance, implied that Mr. Garvey was to blame for spreading the disease to his home and infecting Pinckney Street. Death records reveal that a twenty-five-year-old German named Mr. Livingston, who resided on the street, died of yellow fever on September 2. And John Slattery, a forty-seven-year-old Irishman and also a resident of Pinckney Street, was taken by the disease on September 21.<sup>60</sup> Meanwhile, Mrs. Gorman was blamed for

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<sup>59</sup> Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 334; Concurring with Simons, one physician later explained to another, “A ship arriving in port, having yellow fever on board, may impart the disease to persons exposed to its atmosphere; but the disease produced under such circumstances will never spread through the community.” Leiby et al., “Report on Yellow Fever in the Summer of 1858,” 36.

<sup>60</sup> Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 4-7, 28-34; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (September 1854): 710-2; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 22; Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL.

propagating the disease throughout her neighborhood on and near Calhoun Street. “Mrs. Gorham’s case seemed to be the centre of radiation of the fever in that locality,” wrote Dr. Cain in his history of the 1854 epidemic. Dr. Hume argued that three individuals from various areas of the city became ill after visiting Mrs. Gorman, and that shortly after she died “several cases occurred in the immediate vicinity, gradually enlarging the circle so as to involve the four streets bounding the square.” On Calhoun Street alone, between Elizabeth and Meeting streets near the Gorman’s residence, thirteen people were said to have died from yellow fever in 1854.<sup>61</sup>

The *Aquatic* was not the only West Indies vessel permitted to come up to the city’s wharves during the summer of 1854. On July 21, the very day workers began discharging the *Aquatic*’s cargo, the two Spanish polacres *Concha* and *Columbus* sailed into Charleston harbor from Havana. Two days into the vessels’ eight-day voyage, a seaman aboard the *Columbus* died of yellow fever, which under Hume’s aborted quarantine bill would have subjected the vessel to a thirty-day detainment in the effort to prevent her from reaching the wharves. But upon inspection at Charleston’s quarantine ground, evidence of the deceased sailor was concealed, overlooked, or ignored, and the crews of both vessels were deemed healthy. In accordance with the practices in place since 1840, the *Concha* and the *Columbus* were permitted to proceed to the city. The

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<sup>61</sup> Not realizing that Mr. Gorman had worked on the *Aquatic*, Hume attempted to trace Mrs. Gorman’s movements during the days leading up to her attack. “We have no reason to believe that she ever visited the immediate neighborhood of the infected vessels,” Hume puzzled. On a trip to and from the city market it was estimated that she must have come within 1,200 feet of the *Aquatic* and within 900 feet of the *Concha*, and that “if she went to the market on or after the 12th [of August], she must have passed within one hundred and fifty feet of [Garvey’s] house, in Pinckney-st., where the Irishman who worked on board of the *Aquatic* died.” Of course, according to the prevailing medical beliefs of the day, Mrs. Gorman did not have to go to the disease; the disease came to her via her husband’s clothing. Hume finally concluded that “we attribute the origin of Mrs. Gorman’s case to the lowness and moisture” of her house, conditions which enabled the propagation of the imported disease. Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 8, 26-7; Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 34.

*Concha* moored at Central Wharf and the *Columbus* at Accommodation Wharf, where a horse was hired and the seamen went to work hoisting out the ballast that filled the holds of both vessels. Ballast – a weighty substance such as stone, gravel, or sand used to stabilize an otherwise empty cargo vessel – was thought incapable of transmitting yellow fever. But on August 25, Dr. C. C. Pritchard was called upon to attend to several “slight catarrhal cases” on board the *Concha*, and the next day Dr. John P. Chazal alerted Mayor T. Leger Hutchinson and the port physician of a case of yellow fever aboard the *Columbus*. Thomas Y. Simons immediately visited the *Columbus* and resolved to order her away from the wharf, and thus “she was sent to the quarantine ground with her sick man, and underwent a thorough disinfection.” The stricken seaman was sent to the Lazaretto, where he died with black vomit. Also examining those sick aboard the *Concha*, Simons determined that none had yellow fever. Nonetheless thinking one case suspicious and “desirous of being prudent,” he ordered this man to the Lazaretto where he “recovered speedily, and...was not considered a case of Yellow Fever.” Consequently, the *Concha* was not ordered to the quarantine ground, and since the stowing of the vessel was nearly complete, the mayor and the port physician “concluded to let her remain twenty-four hours, until loaded, and then depart.” According to a certificate signed by Hall & Co., the consignees of the *Concha*, she cleared the Custom House on July 28 and went to sea on the 30th.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 5, 29; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 179-80; Chisolm, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (July 1855): 436; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (September 1854): 711; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (January 1856): 12-13; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 21-2; Cain, Simons, Chisolm, and the editors of the *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* all reported that the *Concha* and *Columbus* arrived on July 22. The editors mistakenly reported that both vessels arrived at Commercial Wharves, and Hume and Chisolm reported that both moored at Accommodation Wharf. Dr. Simons quotes a certificate from Hall & Co. stating that “the

About a week after the departure of the *Concha*, Mr. F. Salus, a clerk for Hall & Co. on Central Wharf and a native of Barcelona who had been in Charleston for only six months, was attacked with yellow fever. The next day, August 8, a physician confirmed that Salus had the disease, and after undergoing treatment the Spaniard recovered.<sup>63</sup> Several reports noted that Salus had been on board the *Concha* frequently, “took his meals on board, and even indulged in a *siesta*, while his compatriot captain pursued his necessary avocations.” Thus Dr. D. J. Cain argued that “there can scarcely exist a doubt,” that Mr. Salus contracted yellow fever during his visits aboard the *Concha*. Then on August 17, Mr. Friday, a clerk for factor and commission merchant Rice Dulin on Central Wharf, was attacked with yellow fever. Like Mr. Salus, this native of Columbia, South Carolina, had often visited the nearby *Concha*; but unlike Salus, Mr. Friday died with black vomit at his hotel on King Street on August 27. Hume reflected with bitter-sweet irony that “In [Friday’s] innocence and mistaken zeal for the commercial welfare of Charleston, he signed the fatal and successful petition against the enactment of the quarantine law, and fell martyr to his own creed.”<sup>64</sup>

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sailor who was sick on board of the *Concha*, was sent to the Lazaretto, but was well enough to go to sea with the vessel.”; The concealment of sick or dead crewmen was not uncommon. In 1840 Dr. B. B. Strobel included “the facility of deception” as one of “the causes which in great epidemics, have effaced all traces of the disease, and have concealed the original source.” Strobel revealed that some vessels arriving in Barcelona from Havana in 1821 claimed that those who had succumbed to yellow fever during the voyage died from accidents, “whilst others who had sick on board, which they did not wish to acknowledge, forced them to dress and to make their appearance at the hours of health visitation, as if they had been well.” Strobel, “Essay on Yellow Fever,” 65-6, 56.

<sup>63</sup> Salus was referred to in reports as Mr. F. Salus, but was listed in the 1855 city directory as F. Salas.

<sup>64</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 21-2; Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 5-6, 29, 32; 1852 city directory; 1855 city directory; Chisolm, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (July 1855): 437; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (September 1854): 712; Responding to the explanations made by Simons, William Hume scathingly wrote, “With the certificate and facts before us, who could have supposed danger to exist in the so-called catarrhal cases of the *Concha*? yet [sic] it was the *Concha* that communicated the genuine yellow fever to Mr. Salus, living at the Planter’s Hotel, and visiting the vessel, and to Mr. Friday, at Victoria Hotel, who also occasionally went on board.” Openly mocking the localists, Hume suggested that those of “the

Both Dr. Hume and Dr. Cain argued that the *Aquatic*, *Concha*, and *Columbus* were simultaneously “three distinct centres of the disease.” And so, as in 1849 and 1852, ineffective quarantine measures in 1854 left unacclimated residents working on or living near the waterfront exposed to the deadly scourge of yellow fever.<sup>65</sup> As Dr. Cain observed, “It occurs first among the shipping, and then spreads” through the entire city and mainly “among the unacclimated foreign population, chiefly the Irish and Germans.” On August 23, 1854, with nearly twenty yellow fever deaths in Charleston since the arrival of the *Aquatic* in mid-July, Jacob Schirmer made the following entry in his diary: “Yellow fever – for some days rumor has been about, that this disease is amongst us, and no doubt several cases were in the Hospital from Ashley River and Frazer’s Wharf, but to day the [Charleston] Courier announces the fact, and gives the names of the cases, but I fear it is worse than represented and the Doctors say it is spreading.”<sup>66</sup> In September

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old school...must seek about for some local cause, or some filth secreted on the premises of one of the cleanliest and best kept Hotels in the city. Some cabbage stocks or turnip tops may have been found to explain the origin of the disease. We did not seek such a cause when we had a truer and a better one.” Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (January 1856): 12; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 21.

<sup>65</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 17-19; Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 30-1; The disease early claimed the lives of a number of seamen from healthy northern vessels docked next to or near West Indies vessels. The barque *Vesta*, for example, arrived from Boston on July 16, 1854, and lay in the same dock as the *Aquatic*. Two of the *Vesta*’s seamen were attacked with yellow fever, and they died on August 9 and August 15. Similarly, the ship *Sullivan* from New York arrived in Charleston on July 21, and shared a dock with the *Columbus*. Two of this northern vessel’s seamen soon were sickened with yellow fever, and one died with black vomit on August 10. Additionally, an Irish woman residing on East Bay Street – nearly opposite North Commercial Wharf where the *Aquatic* had been for two days – was struck down on August 16, and two German men living at the foot of Hasell Street near Dry Dock Wharf were both sickened on August 19 and died on August 22 and August 23. Cain, 5-7; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (September 1854): 711-2; Chisolm, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (July 1855): 436-7.

<sup>66</sup> Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 32, 7; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 19; Schirmer Diary, August 23, 1854, SCHS; Dr. Strobel stated in 1840 that “the policy of Boards of Health, the Mercantile interests, and the Captains of vessels in their employ, all seem linked together for the purpose of concealing the existence of the disease, until it has made such progress and become so manifest, as to announce itself.” He likewise argued that, “Truth and justice have been too often sacrificed to expedience and policy, and never more so than in reference to Yellow Fever. Has it not occurred, when the disease had actually invaded us, that there were men who regardless of the lives of others, and listening

1854, the editors of the *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* belatedly announced, “It is with great regret that we record the prevalence, in this city, of the Yellow Fever,” and added that “This summer the destroyer has laid his heavy hand upon...Charleston.” Indeed it had. Dr. Samuel Henry Dickson reported that the number of sick was estimated at 20,000 or more, prompting him to remark that “In 1854 the number of persons attacked by Fever in the city was wholly beyond precedent.” Dr. Cain labeled the outbreak a “Pandemic.” By the end of September the number of yellow fever deaths already far exceeded the city’s previous record death toll of 354 during the 1838 epidemic. By late autumn, when frost killed off the disease-carrying mosquitoes, 627 were dead. Of these, 612 were white, and 256 – over 40 percent of the victims – were natives of the Emerald Isle. The Germans were a distant second with 131 dead.<sup>67</sup>

In the aftermath of this devastating epidemic, William Hume excoriated localists, stating that “Fifty-four years of experience in internal medical police, should satisfy the most credulous that its efficacy still lies in hope and false promises, quite successful when the fever is not brought to us, but a total failure when an infected ship arrives in our

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only to the sordid suggestions of avarice, have endeavored to conceal the fact?” And Strobel noted that in 1839 when importationist or contagionist physicians argued that yellow fever was present, “For more than a month, we absolutely lived in an atmosphere of ‘curses *deep*, tho’ not *loud*.” Strobel, “Essay on Yellow Fever,” 215-6, 9.

<sup>67</sup> “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (September 1854): 710; Dr. William T. Wragg also refers to yellow fever as “the destroyer” in a February 1859 letter to Dr. Robert Leiby. Leiby et al., “Report on Yellow Fever in the Summer of 1858,” 745; Jacob Schirmer remarked at the end of September 1854 that “the past Month is one which will ever be remembered in Charleston, The Almighty in his wisdom, has chastened us as a People most severely – The Yellow fever has been very fatal, and many have been summoned from this world, and it is still spreading its destructions and is now getting very bad among children.” Schirmer Diary, September 1854, SCHS; Dickson, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 745; At the end of September 1854, an estimated 445 people had died. Horlbeck, “Maritime Sanitation at Ports of Arrival,” 9; Cain, “History of the 1854 Epidemic,” 7-8; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (November 1854): 851; J. L. Dawson, M.D., “Statistics Relative to the Epidemic Yellow Fever of 1854, in the City of Charleston.” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 200.

harbour.”<sup>68</sup> Hume then renewed calls for more stringent quarantine regulations. Labeling existing laws as defective, Dr. Hume again recommended “The exclusion of infected, or presumed infected vessels from our wharves,” which would – if enforced – be “common justice” to foreign seamen and unacclimated “citizens of our own.”<sup>69</sup> In his opinion, there were only two general courses of action: suspend West Indies commerce entirely during the fever season, which after the attack on his bill the alderman surely knew would never happen; or implement a judicious quarantine system that would “place the vessels under such restrictions when in port, as will cut off any possible

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<sup>68</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 20.

<sup>69</sup> The 1832 law’s main defect, Hume argued in January 1855, was that “it only takes cognizance of vessels which are ‘foul and infected’ with any ‘malignant and contagious disease,’ but takes no notice of those vessels which become ‘foul and infected’ after their arrival, and after they are moored at the wharf. To establish the fact that a vessel is ‘foul and infected,’ the port physician must see the disease on board; but how often does it occur that a vessel passes quarantine inspection, is pronounced sound, and in a few days after the disease manifests itself. She is now beyond the jurisdiction of the port physician, the decree and certificate of health [issue by the port physician] cannot be revoked, and the captain or consignee is not bound to report the foulness and infection after the port physician has decreed that there is none.”; Not mincing his words, Hume charged that “This ordinance is the law, and it is the duty of the port physician to execute it, but his peculiar reading has so altered the law as to render it valueless.” But ultimately choosing not to blame Simons for the outbreak, Hume declared that “An officer who obeys instructions is not responsible for a failure, and if the yellow fever has been imported into Charleston at different times, the fault is in the law, rather than in the executor of the law.” Hume added, “Where the error was all can see, but where the blame was none can say. He who actually performs his duty with a firm faith in his own integrity, certainly deserves no blame for the miscarriage of his intentions.” However, Hume did allege that rather than an attempt to preserve human life, the decision to permit the *Aquatic* to leave the quarantine ground and approach the city was “to save the property invested in the *Aquatic*.” Jacob Schirmer mentioned that the steamer that went to the assistance of the *Aquatic* and towed her to Charleston (which he identified as the *General Clinch* rather than the *Nina*) “now claims Salvage” for saving the sinking vessel and her “over 900 packages of Molasses.” Dr. Hume admitted that “It would seem cruel to reject from our ports all distressed vessels with sick crews.” But allowing such vessels and persons to come up to the city was too dangerous, as demonstrated by the case of the *Aquatic* which had “caused many a pang of sorrow in the bosom of [Charleston’s] citizens.” Hume continued, “Can commerce take away the pain of a wound? Does commerce grant a pension to the bereaved wife and children? No!...An exclusive commerce, then, has no right to infringe upon the rights of others for its peculiar and special benefit, and should be restrained by civil authority, which professes to all the enjoyment of equal rights and equal privileges.” In March 1855, after explaining the decision to allow the sinking *Aquatic* to come up to the city’s wharves, Port Physician Thomas Y. Simons wrote that “if there is any blame, I, and not the Mayor and Council, am to blame.” Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 2-3, 31-2, 35; Schirmer Diary, July 10, 1854, SCHS; Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 181.



communication with other vessels, and with the inhabitants of the city,” which his 1854 bill had been designed to accomplish.<sup>70</sup>

Alarmed by the previously unfathomable loss of life and pressed by “considerable excitement on the subject,” the Charleston City Council passed and ratified a new quarantine ordinance in April 1855. These rules proved to be nearly identical to William Hume’s failed 1854 bill. Vessels arriving between May 31 and October 1 from ports prevailing with yellow fever at the time of departure or having fever on board during the voyage to Charleston were to be detained for at least thirty days after arrival and at least twenty days after all cargo was unloaded. This ordinance aimed at preventing unhealthy vessels from coming up to the city’s wharves, which were swarming with “pure” vessels as well as unacclimated and thus highly susceptible immigrant dock workers and foreign seamen. After discharging their cargo and having their vessels “thoroughly cleaned and purified” at the quarantine ground, captains were encouraged to load freight using lighters and go back to sea without serving the full duration of their quarantine and without ever coming up to the city.<sup>71</sup>

In the past, city authorities – most of whom were localists who doubted the efficacy of quarantine measures – had not enforced even flawed quarantine rules and regulations. But William Hume and the importationists perhaps now could rely upon the support of Charleston’s new mayor, William Porcher Miles, who was elected in 1855

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<sup>70</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 32; The editors of the *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* made similar recommendations in November 1856. See “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever in Charleston,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review*, 11 (November 1856): 850.

<sup>71</sup> “CHARLESTON” to the Editors, *Charleston Mercury*, August 20, 1856; Vessels arriving from April 1 to November 1 (exclusive of May 31 to October 1) from the same ports or having fever on board during the voyage “shall be subject to such quarantine and other rules and regulations, as the Port Physician shall prescribe.” Horsey, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1854-1859*, 7-14.

with the strong support of Irish immigrants. In fact, disappointed supporters of the anti-immigrant Know Nothing Party maintained that 300 of the votes for Miles, who won by only 400, had been cast illegally by immigrants who only recently had arrived in the city. And after Miles overhauled Charleston's police force, with Irishmen largely filling the rank and file, the mayor's critics derided the city's policemen as "Paddy Miles's Bulldogs." So perhaps feeling obliged to better protect his Hibernian constituents laboring on or living near the waterfront, Mayor Miles advised the City Council to "Keep vessels arriving in our harbor from infected ports at a safe distance from our docks, and prevent their cargoes, charged with the seeds of death, from being at once landed on our crowded wharves teeming with an unacclimated laboring population, peculiarly susceptible to disease."<sup>72</sup>

Yellow fever did not strike Charleston during the summer of 1855, likely causing some to credit the new quarantine policies. But on July 8, 1856, after a six-day voyage from Havana, the brig *St. Andrews* appeared off the bar of Charleston harbor with a healthy captain and crew. Under the old quarantine practices, this vessel would have been allowed to proceed to the city's wharves just as the *Columbus* had done two years earlier. But under the new April 1855 regulations, because she had arrived directly from Havana after May 31 and because two seamen aboard had died of yellow fever while in the Cuban port, the *St. Andrews* reported to the quarantine ground. On July 15 the vessel's cargo of sugar was discharged using lighters, which then delivered the sugar to Brown's Wharf. Having no additional cases of yellow fever while in Charleston, the *St.*

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<sup>72</sup> Gleeson, *Irish in the South*, 118-9; William Porcher Miles, "Mayor's Report on City Affairs: Submitted to Council at a Meeting Held Tuesday, September 29th, 1857" (Charleston: Walker, Evans, and Co., 1857), 25.

*Andrews* was apparently then loaded with export cargo again using lighters at the quarantine ground, and she sailed out of the harbor having never docked at the city's wharves.<sup>73</sup> The quarantine laws, it seemed, were working.

But then on July 26, John Abbott became ill at his residence on King Street one door north of Broad Street with what was thought to be yellow fever. The attending physician asked Dr. J. L. Dawson to visit Abbott, and agreeing that the case was yellow fever, Dawson advised Mayor Miles to remove the sick man to the Lazaretto. Early the next morning Abbott was sent from the city to the Lazaretto, where he recovered. John Abbott was a twenty-three-year-old Irishman who had arrived in Charleston in February 1854, and had remained healthy during the 1854 epidemic while working as a servant at the Mills House. Not previously having had yellow fever, and only having been in Charleston for a little over two years, it is improbable that this recently arrived immigrant was acclimated. Nonetheless, during the week leading up to his sickness, Abbott had been employed loading the *St. Andrews* at the quarantine ground. According to the city's Committee on Health and Drainage, consisting of Dr. William T. Wragg, James M. Eason, and William Hume and reporting "on the Origin and Diffusion of Yellow Fever in Charleston in the Autumn of 1856," Abbott's case "may be fairly traceable to the infected vessel."<sup>74</sup>

Michael Denning was less fortunate than John Abbott. Denning, an Irishman who had likely only recently arrived in Charleston, got sick with fever on July 31 and was sent

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<sup>73</sup> William T. Wragg, William Hume, and James M. Eason, "Report of the Committee on Health and Drainage, on the Origin and Diffusion of Yellow Fever in Charleston in the Autumn of 1856" (Charleston?: s.n., 1856), 2-3, 8, 11; Dawson, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (September 1856): 698-9; Lebbly et al., "Report on Yellow Fever in the Summer of 1858," 7.

<sup>74</sup> Wragg, Hume, and Eason, "Report on Yellow Fever in the Autumn of 1856," 15, 14; Lebbly et al., "Report on Yellow Fever in the Summer of 1858," 8-9.

from his residence on East Bay Street near Pinckney Street to Roper Hospital in the city. There it was ascertained that Denning had been employed loading the barque *Industria* at the quarantine ground. The *Industria* had arrived from Havana on July 13 with a load of wine and lead, twenty crewmen, and an unspecified number of passengers, and was detained at quarantine. The next day a sick passenger was sent to the Lazaretto where he died on July 17. On the 16th, three men were sent from the vessel to the Lazaretto but recovered, but two others were sent on July 23 and both subsequently died. Early in August lighters landed the *Industria*'s cargo at Union Wharves, and soon thereafter lighters from South Dry Dock Wharf loaded the vessel at the quarantine ground. The *Industria*, like the *St. Andrews*, went to sea without ever docking in the city. But once Mayor Miles was informed that Denning had been working on the *Industria*, he ordered the Irishman to be transferred from Roper Hospital to the Lazaretto on August 6. Having thrown up black vomit, Michael Denning died the next day.<sup>75</sup>

William Hume maintained that the *Industria* was an infected vessel, and that although Denning had no contact with any of the sick persons on board, "it is apparent that [he] took his disease on board of the vessel after the sick crew had been removed." The Committee on Health and Drainage agreed, concluding that even though Denning lived on East Bay Street not far from Palmetto Wharf, like Abbott he "most probably got

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<sup>75</sup> Denning does not appear in the 1850 U.S. Census or the city directories, therefore it is assumed that he had only recently arrived in Charleston. Denning is also referred to as Dening and Denner, but these names do not appear in local records. Dawson reports that Denning lived at 125 East Bay Street, and the 1856 Committee on Health and Drainage reported 142 East Bay Street. In March 1858 William Hume reported that the *Industria* "lost six of her crew at the Lazaretto," but the 1856 Committee on Health and Drainage report suggests that six total passengers and crew members sickened, and only three died at the Lazaretto. Dawson, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (September 1856): 699; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 13 (March 1858): 160-1; Wragg, Hume, and Eason, "Report on Yellow Fever in the Autumn of 1856," 3-4, 7, 11, 14.

his illness in the vessel.”<sup>76</sup> In short, even though the new quarantine rules had kept the *St. Andrews* and *Industria* away from the docks, they had failed to keep unacclimated immigrants such as Irishmen John Abbott and Michael Denning away from these West Indies vessels, their captains, crews, and passengers, and their cargoes, all thought to be shrouded with “seeds of death.”

As a result, as with Mr. Garvey and Mr. McNeal in 1854, Irish waterfront workers were the first Charleston residents to sicken with yellow fever in 1856, and Denning was the first to die from the disease.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, like his fellow Hibernians Mr. Garvey and Mrs. Gorman, the deceased Denning was blamed for spreading the disease to and throughout his neighborhood. The Committee on Health and Drainage reported that “other cases occurred near [his residence] afterwards which by some are attributed” to Denning. Hume theorized that when Denning was taken from his house on East Bay Street to Roper Hospital, “he left behind him the influence of his disease.” Denning’s fever reportedly spread when it struck Mr. and Mrs. Douglas who dwelled with Denning, and Ann and Bridget Burns who lived in an adjacent house. Ann was a seventeen-year-old Irish girl who died with black vomit on August 21. In total, the 1856 yellow fever epidemic claimed 212 lives, of whom 203 were white and only 9 were black.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 13 (March 1858): 160; Wragg, Hume, and Eason, “Report on Yellow Fever in the Autumn of 1856,” 16; Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL.

<sup>77</sup> Dr. Dawson’s city register report stated that John Abbott and Michael Denning were the first and second Charlestonians to sicken with yellow fever in 1856. Dawson also reported that the first case in 1856 occurred on July 14 on board the schooner *Exchange* at Palmetto Wharf, and the second case was Mr. Collens, a man from Savannah who had only been in Charleston for ten days when he took ill on the same day as Abbott, and thus could hardly be considered a Charleston resident any more than a visiting seaman. Dawson, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (September 1856): 698-9.

<sup>78</sup> Wragg, Hume, and Eason, “Report on Yellow Fever in the Autumn of 1856,” 16; Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 13 (March 1858): 160; Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL; Horlbeck, “Maritime Sanitation at Ports of Arrival,” 9.

Notwithstanding the new and more stringent quarantine ordinance, in a fresh public debate some turned to an old problem to explain the 1856 yellow fever epidemic. In a letter to the editors of the *Charleston Mercury* on August 13, 1856, “A Citizen” contended that “the lax and imperfect manner in which our quarantine laws have been administered” was to blame.<sup>79</sup> In particular, this anonymous Charlestonian complained that vessels other than the *St. Andrews* and *Industria* had not been properly detained according to law. “A Citizen” pointed out that between June 26 and July 5, 1856, four vessels had arrived at quarantine from Cuban ports (Matanzas, Cienfuegos, St. Jago de Cuba, and Trinidad de Cuba) without sickness on board, but had only been quarantined for five days – as required under the old 1840 ordinance – before the port physician permitted them to come up to the wharves. A fifth vessel, the bark *Minerva*, arrived at quarantine from St. Jago de Cuba on July 8, and was allowed to proceed to the city after seven days. But like the *Columbus* two years earlier, after reaching the wharves a seaman aboard the *Minerva* took ill with yellow fever, and the vessel immediately was ordered back to the quarantine ground where the sick man subsequently died. “These vessels were all from ports known to be unhealthy,” wrote the concerned citizen, “and I certainly must think their admission to our wharves was a violation of the Quarantine Regulations.”<sup>80</sup> Though the docks still were swarming with unacclimated workers, the

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<sup>79</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, August 13, 1856; The editors of the *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* similarly argued in November 1856 that “A somewhat rigid quarantine system, instituted last year, seemed, if properly enforced, sufficient to prevent the introduction of the Yellow Fever from abroad.” “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever in Charleston,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 845.

<sup>80</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, August 15, 1856; *Charleston Mercury*, August 18, 1856; *Charleston Mercury*, August 21, 1856; Whereas “A Citizen” pointed out that there had been several published statements announcing sickness in Cuban ports, Thomas Y. Simons contended that the ports were not sickly and then mistakenly claimed that under the quarantine ordinance he had the discretion whether to detain vessels

port physician seemed hell-bent on ignoring the new ordinance, and making old mistakes. And so in mid-July 1856 the City Council ordered all vessels from the West Indies to unload and load at the quarantine ground, thus forcing Thomas Y. Simons to more scrupulously administer the quarantine laws.<sup>81</sup>

“A Citizen” furthermore alleged that the officers and crew members of quarantined vessels regularly had been “permitted to visit the city immediately after their arrival at quarantine.”<sup>82</sup> The 1855 ordinance prohibited all persons arriving in detained vessels from leaving quarantine until twelve days after sailing from the port of departure, fifteen days after the last case of fever on board, and eight days after arrival at Charleston’s quarantine ground, unless discharged sooner with a certificate of acclimation from the port physician.<sup>83</sup> Simons confirmed on August 18 that “In accordance with the Ordinance, no persons are permitted to come from any vessels at Quarantine, unless the Port Physician is satisfied that they are acclimated.”<sup>84</sup> “A Citizen”

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from healthy ports. The April 1855 quarantine ordinance did give the port physician discretion whether to detain vessels from prescribed ports at quarantine. But the ordinance also explains that this discretion only applies to vessels arriving between April 1 and November 1, *exclusive* of May 31 through October 1. See section 1, points 3 and 4 of the April 1855 quarantine ordinance, Horsey, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1854-1859*, 8; On August 21 “A Citizen” argued that the published reports were regarding Matanzas and Cienfuegos, that St. Jago de Cuba “is notoriously the most unhealthy port in the Island,” and that the sickness of Trinidad de Cuba “ought to be taken for granted, that when Yellow Fever prevails as an epidemic, every haunt of commerce in Cuba is infected.”

<sup>81</sup> City Council Minutes, April 14, 1857, *Charleston Mercury*, April 18, 1857.

<sup>82</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, August 13, 1856.

<sup>83</sup> Horsey, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1854-1859*, 9.

<sup>84</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, August 18, 1856; Simons also presented a statement from five of Charleston’s commission merchant firms regarding “men coming from vessels at Quarantine for provisions.” The certificate, dated August 13, 1856, stated that “We herby certify that the Captains arriving from the different ports of Cuba have been acclimated, and that the permit of the Port Physician has been to allow an officer and four men to come, when necessary, to the city for provisions. One man to go to the market, the others to remain in the boat or consignee’s office; that they came in the morning, and returned after obtaining their marketing.” Simons made no further comment concerning the acclimation status of these four crew members who typically accompanied the vessels’ supposedly acclimated captains.

snapped back that the bark *Balear* arrived on June 27 from Havana, where yellow fever had been prevailing. The very next day and on subsequent days Captain Sagrista and his mate Jose Fiol were allowed to come up to the city, where they were entertained by respectable families, attended church, “and mingled freely with our people.” Mr. Fiol returned to the quarantined *Balear* on a Sunday evening, by Monday morning he was sick with yellow fever, and a week later he was dead.<sup>85</sup>

Similarly, the Committee on Health and Drainage described the case of the schooner *George Harris*, which arrived from Baltimore on July 21 without any sickness on board, and therefore was allowed to dock at Central Wharf. A thirty-four-year-old sailor from Delaware named Stephen Pellighon serving on the *George Harris* “had felt great alarm” by the fact that the captains and crew members of quarantined vessels regularly landed at Central Wharf. Pellighon even “was heard to say that there was no use in keeping the vessels at Quarantine if the men were allowed to come up” to the city. On August 3 Pellighon fell ill with yellow fever and died at the Marine Hospital, a death likely enabled by the very flaw in the quarantine policy that drew his concern.<sup>86</sup>

Why, many Charlestonians began to ask publicly, were lightermen such as Abbott and Denning allowed to continuously pass between the quarantine ground where they toiled amid infection and the city where they lived, thus endangering the entire community? “A Citizen” protested that workers employed in lightering cargo to and

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<sup>85</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, August 21, 1856.

<sup>86</sup> In March 1854 William Hume had warned, in Simons’s words, “That the crew and passengers of a vessel arriving at quarantine may be well, and after coming to the city, cases of fever may occur, and thus cause an epidemic.” Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 334; The Committee on Health and Drainage report refers to Pellighon as Pettijohn. Wragg, Hume, and Eason, “Report on Yellow Fever in the Autumn of 1856,” 16; Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL.



from vessels at quarantine were “allowed free intercourse with the city,” and were “permitted to visit the city at their pleasure, and mingle indiscriminately with the acclimated and unacclimated portions of our community.”<sup>87</sup> Dr. Dickson too observed that a large number of “foul vessels” had anchored in the Cooper River not far from the wharves, and “kept up a continual intercourse by captains and consignees and their boats’ crews, lighters, and lightermen – the latter furnishing...two of the earliest subjects” of the epidemic.<sup>88</sup> And the 1856 Committee on Health and Drainage confirmed that “The lighters employed in this business usually returned to the wharf after their trips to Quarantine,” and noted the frequency which small boats had docked at the city’s Cooper River wharves “with hands returning from working in the vessels at Quarantine.”<sup>89</sup>

As early as March 1854, William Hume had foreseen the danger of lightermen transferring cargo from vessels at quarantine directly to the Cooper River wharves, and had called for the City Council to examine and perhaps replicate New York’s quarantine

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<sup>87</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, August 13, 1856; *Charleston Mercury*, August 15, 1856; Though “A Citizen” was not identified, it seems likely that he was an editor for the *Charleston Medical Journal and Review*. In September 1855, the editors candidly acknowledged their support for the theory of importation of yellow fever and rejection of localists’ explanations, stating about the latter that “The readers of this Journal are aware that we do not subscribe to this opinion.” And in November 1856 an editorial in the journal almost exactly echoed the complaints put forth by “A Citizen” in the pages of the *Charleston Mercury* a few months earlier. “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever in Norfolk and Portsmouth,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (September 1855): 733; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever in Charleston,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 846-7.

<sup>88</sup> Dickson, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 755.

<sup>89</sup> But denying that such communication could have introduced yellow fever into the city, the same report maintained that although Brown’s Wharf “had by far the most intercourse with the vessels and cargoes arriving from infected Ports,” such as that of the *St. Andrews*, “it should not be forgotten that among the numerous laborers and others employed about Brown’s wharf not a single case of fever occurred.” And even though an Italian seaman on a vessel from New York became fatally ill while at the wharf next to Brown’s, the committee reasoned that if this unacclimated sailor “did contract his disease from the intercourse of the wharf with vessels from infected ports, others equally subject to the disease and exposed to it for a longer time,” such as unacclimated Irish dock workers, “failed to suffer.” That may have been so in 1856, when the afflicted Irish workers had been employed at the quarantine ground on lighters, but it had not been the case for Mr. Garvey and Mr. McNeal in 1854, who had worked on what were thought to be contaminated ships tied up at the city’s wharves. Wragg, Hume, and Eason, “Report on Yellow Fever in the Autumn of 1856,” 8, 9, 15.

system. The city of New York required a group of stevedores and dock workers to be hired to labor exclusively at an enclosed quarantine station located at a safe distance from the city, and then prohibited these workers from leaving the station and entering the city. Although the Charleston City Council formed a committee in January 1854 to look into such modifications, like the previous laws, the April 1855 quarantine ordinance only stated that “All persons arriving in, or going on board of vessels brought to quarantine, shall be liable to be removed to such place as Council may appoint,” but municipal authorities never designated such a location.<sup>90</sup>

Dr. Hume had also made strong recommendations to the City Council in March 1854 about who should and who should not be permitted to work on cargo lighters. “The acclimation of our [native] citizens to the infection of yellow fever presents a great advantage in the process of transshipment [*sic*],” Hume argued, “for they can pass from the vessels to the city without danger of taking the disease and transferring it to the city, while a foreigner would receive it in the vessel, bring it up in apparent health, and in a few days be the means of counteracting all previous efforts, by its development and subsequent extension.” William Hume had predicted exactly what was thought to have happened in 1856: unacclimated immigrants such as John Abbott and Michael Denning had been hired to work on lighters at the quarantine ground, became infected while

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<sup>90</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 164; City Council Minutes, January 19, 1854, *Charleston Mercury*, January 23, 1854; Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 373; Walker, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1844-1854*, 213; Horsey, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1854-1859*, 12; The 1832 act granted the governor or Charleston City Council the power to “cause all persons arriving in or going on board of [a quarantined] vessel, or handling such infected cargo, to be removed to such place as may be designated by the Governor or City Council, there to remain under the orders of the Governor or City Council.”; For information regarding New York’s quarantine policies and stevedores, see the *New York Herald*, August 27, 1856; *New York Herald*, September 5, 1856; *Charleston Mercury*, September 20, 1858; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Yellow Fever in Charleston,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 851-3; and “Proceedings and Debates of the Third National Quarantine and Sanitation Convention, Held in the City of New York, April, 1859,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 15 (March 1860): 219-20.

working on quarantined vessels, and then transferred the disease to the city where it was spread throughout the community. Therefore, he went on to explicitly advise that “Great caution should be exercised in the selection of the transferring crews and labourers; negroes are decidedly to be preferred, and the unacclimated stranger should be positively prohibited from joining the party.”<sup>91</sup> In short, if the 1854 epidemic suggested the impropriety of employing unacclimated stevedores and dock hands on the Cooper River wharves during fever season, it was also unwise to allow unacclimated men to work on cargo lighters and at the quarantine ground.

In fact, city authorities had sought to regulate the acclimation of such workers after the passage of the April 1855 quarantine ordinance but before the 1856 epidemic.<sup>92</sup> At a City Council meeting on May 15, 1855, Alderman Hume had offered a preamble to a resolution to establish acclimation restrictions.

Whereas, It has been well observed that long residence in the City of Charleston, or the actual having and recovering from Yellow Fever, affords ample protection against the same, and that personal communication between the city and infected vessels, or vessels presumed to be infected, is indispensable to the due executions of the Quarantine Ordinance; and whereas the Quarantine Bill provides that in certain circumstances, certificates of acclimation may be granted by the Port Physician.

The resolution then stated that persons could prove their acclimation and thus obtain a certificate by presenting a “competent witness,” obtaining documentation from an attending physician, or by any other means the port physician may deem “satisfactory and conclusive.” And as for workers hoping to gain employment on cargo lighters and

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<sup>91</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 164.

<sup>92</sup> The April 1855 quarantine ordinance only vaguely declared that “No lighter shall be employed to load or unload vessels at quarantine, without permission of the Port Physician and Mayor, and subject to such restrictions as they shall impose.” Horsey, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1854-1859*, 9.

aboard quarantined vessels, only those with certificates of acclimation “shall be employed about, or allowed to board, any vessel performing Quarantine, and afterwards return to the city.”<sup>93</sup>

With the City’s Council’s authority, the port physician began to issue certificates or permits to those working on cargo lighters. Dr. Thomas Y. Simons publicly asserted on August 18, 1856, that “The officers and crews of the lighters are required to be acclimated. Now, no permit has ever been given before the Port Physician has been fully satisfied that they were acclimated.” But how, if the port physician rigidly enforced the May 1855 resolution requiring lightermen to be acclimated, were Irishmen John Abbott and Michael Denning permitted to work on board quarantined vessels and to move freely between the quarantine ground where they likely contracted yellow fever, and the city where – as with Garvey and the Gormans in 1854 – Denning was accused of propagating the disease into the city? Simons explained that “of the great number of vessels to which the lighters have gone, either to discharge cargoes or load at Quarantine, only two cases of sickness occurred.” One of these cases – evidently Michael Denning – was sent to Roper Hospital with a “suspicious case of fever.” There the man confessed to the port physician in the presence of Dr. Gaillard “that he had no permit, but that Capt. Mills had obtained the permit, with [Mills] and three negros [*sic*] as his crew, and no white man, to carry to Quarantine.” In other words, Mills claimed that his crew would be comprised of

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<sup>93</sup> “Editorial and Miscellaneous: Quarantine Regulations for the Port of Charleston, Ratified May ’55,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (July 1855): 596-7; City Council Minutes, May 15, 1855, *Charleston Mercury*, May 17, 1855; The resolution also required passengers desiring to leave a quarantined vessel and come to the city to obtain certificates of acclimation, and declared that those who did not qualify but on their way to cities outside of South Carolina could, “at the discretion of the Port Physician, and with the concurrence of the Mayor, if in health, be transported to the Railroad Depot, by way of the uppermost wharf, with the *bona fide* intent to depart from the city, and not return within twenty-one days, nor to remain within the State.”

acclimated blacks only, but nonetheless hired the unacclimated Irishman Denning to work on his quarantine lighter. Captain Mills acknowledged his guilt and Simons took away his permit, thus depriving Mills of any future command of a lighter.<sup>94</sup>

Thomas Y. Simons also detailed the case of John Abbott, “a decent young man, who had been here several years, and in the fever of 1854,” and had been working “on board of a vessel carrying a cargo to the brig St. Andrew [*sic*], with a black crew.” When Abbott became ill he was sent to the Lazaretto, but convinced that the man’s condition was due to prolonged exposure to the sun and not yellow fever, Simons ordered Abbott to be treated at the “Doctor’s House” of the Lazaretto. Despite the fact that the Irishman soon recovered from his illness, Simons declared that “After this circumstance, no new permits were given to white men to go on board of lighters.” Then in a letter appearing in the *Charleston Mercury* on August 20, 1856, “CHARLESTON” affirmed that “Rigid regulations should be applied to vessels engaged in lightering cargos, that none should be employed on board but persons who can bring clear proof of their being acclimated.”<sup>95</sup> In short, the rising public sentiment held that no Irish or other white immigrants need apply for lightering work in Charleston.

Not only did the port physician stop issuing lightering permits for white workers, but employers, even those who wished to hire white stevedores and laborers, felt

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<sup>94</sup> Simons also informed the City Council in April 1857 that “the law instructed me...to have cargos discharged by lighters with crews acclimated, to be brought to the city,” and then added that “If the course pursued...as regards persons going in lighters and laborers to discharge cargo of vessels and load them, is defective...you have full information so as to guide you in making improvements.” *Charleston Mercury*, August 18, 1856; City Council Minutes, April 17, 1857, *Charleston Mercury*, April 18, 1857.

<sup>95</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, August 18, 1854; *Charleston Mercury*, August 20, 1856.

mounting pressure to hire only acclimated blacks to safeguard the city's health.<sup>96</sup> Five of Charleston's leading West Indies commission merchants, for example, were obliged to issue the following public proclamation:

In regard to the stevedores the following is offered:

Charleston, 13th August, 1856.

We hereby certify that we have had none but black stevedores to load our vessels at Quarantine or discharge.

P. A. AVEILHE  
MORDECAI & CO.  
HALL & CO.  
CAY, MONTANER & CO.  
STREET BROTHERS.

NOTE. – The above statement holds good, with the exception, in our case, that the steamer *Isabel* had white acclimated persons to load and discharge early in the season, but not on the last trip.

MORDECAI & CO.<sup>97</sup>

During the 1854 epidemic Simons had attempted to ensure that Captain Magee and the stevedore employed only blacks – who were assumed to be acclimated and indeed were far less susceptible – to unload the *Aquatic*. Also in 1854, William Hume reported that the loading of the *Concha* and the *Columbus* “was performed by acclimated negroes.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Though it is true that native whites were also considered acclimated, very few native Charlestonians, South Carolinians, or southerners performed waterfront or transportation work.

<sup>97</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, August 18, 1856; The steamship *Isabel* plied regularly between Charleston and Havana during the 1850s, and according to the *Charleston Mercury*, the vessel departed Charleston for Havana via Key West on the 4th and 19th of each month, and departed Havana for Charleston on the 10th and 25th of each month. Since it typically took three days for the *Isabel* to complete the trip between Havana and Charleston, and since the testimony of the commission merchants was recorded on August 13, 1856, it is assumed that the last trip of the steamship referred to by Mordecai & Co. was that which departed Havana on July 28, 1856, and arrived in Charleston on approximately July 31, 1856. This was over three weeks after the arrival of the *St. Andrews* from Havana, and about two and a half weeks after the arrival of the *Industria* from the same port. Also, the 1856 Committee on Health and Drainage report stated that “On the 13th of July the steamship *Isabel*, with an assorted cargo, arrived in two and a half days from Havana, with a crew of 40 men, and with 49 passengers. She had two sick on board, but their diseases did not prove to be serious. She did not come to the city.” The report also stated that on “July 12th, a boat came from the *Isabel* once or twice during her stay at Quarantine, on this trip, to the Savannah Packet Wharf, but she was soon ordered off, and on one occasion, probably this same trip of the *Isabel*, some clothing was brought from her up to Adger's wharf.” See *Charleston Mercury*, April 14, 1856; Wragg, Hume, and Eason, “Report on Yellow Fever in the Autumn of 1856,” 3, 11.

Increasingly, then, Irish and other unacclimated white workers were at a severe disadvantage in the contest for lightering and waterfront work in Charleston.

White immigrant draymen also were unable to escape the impediment of their unacclimated status. Prompted by the outbreak of yellow fever during the summer of 1856, the City Council appointed a special committee to examine the quarantine system and suggest improvements. In April 1857 the committee published its findings, written by William Hume, and recommended that a wharf and warehouses on the city's western Ashley River waterfront – an area where far fewer immigrants resided – be acquired for the landing and storage of “infected” cargo lightered from the quarantine ground. Then, based on the principle that “where there is no unacclimated population, there will be no yellow fever,” the committee suggested “That these cargos shall remain in these stores until wanted for immediate consumption, when they shall be delivered to acclimated negro draymen, to be conveyed on drays to their proper destination.” The report also called for draymen to be “known,” further minimizing the likelihood that recently arrived immigrant draymen would be hired to transport this cargo.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps anticipating the protests of Irish and German draymen and even the apprehension of a mayor elected with the votes of immigrant waterfront and transportation workers, Hume reiterated that the key to thwarting the spread of the “poison” into the rest of the city was that “the draymen

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<sup>98</sup> Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (March 1855): 181; Hume added that “We have searched in vain for the propagation of the disease by the labourers engaged in discharging and loading the Concha and Columbus,” and concluded that none was found precisely because acclimated blacks performed the loading of the vessels. Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 22.

<sup>99</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, April 7, 1857; Despite the fact that very few native white Charlestonians worked as draymen, they were considered acclimated. It is unclear why, then, the committee did not also permit native white Charlestonians to transport cargo brought from the quarantine. One possibility is that by establishing such regulations along racial lines, employers could more easily and quickly determine who was and who was not acclimated.

should be acclimated negros [*sic*].”<sup>100</sup> At least in this case, then, acclimation alone was not sufficient; though regarded as not entirely white in the eyes of some native white southerners, immigrant and especially Irish draymen – even those who were considered acclimated – were barred by their whiteness from handling this hazardous cargo.<sup>101</sup> Evidently persuaded by Hume’s remonstrations and choosing to protect the entire city at the risk of alienating Irish and other white draymen, the City Council and Mayor Miles resolved to adopt the committee’s recommendations word for word on May 12, 1857.<sup>102</sup>

Irish and German draymen were not only denied employment in transporting the goods of quarantined vessels from this western wharf; but also they were prohibited from hauling potentially tainted cargo arriving at the eastern wharves. At the City Council meeting on June 23, 1857, commission merchants Hall & Co. petitioned for the cargo of the quarantined vessel *Eben Atkins* to be brought to the city in lighters and landed at Union Wharves. At a special meeting held three days later, the Council granted this

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<sup>100</sup> Hume added that “The law assumes that we are to use such measures as will protect the city against a disease which is both contagious and infectious, and when we omit such precautions, we must suffer the consequences of our own neglect; and when the majority of the citizens shall determine that it is preferable to have the disease among us, than to suffer the inconveniences of the proper means of its exclusion, we may resign our authority to the State who gave it, and rest satisfied that we have demented ourselves, that we may be destroyed.” *Charleston Mercury*, April 7, 1857.

<sup>101</sup> See David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 2007; Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*; and Peter Kolchin, “Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America,” *Journal of American History* 89 (June 2002): 154-73.

<sup>102</sup> City Council Minutes, May 12, 1857, *Charleston Mercury*, May 14, 1857; This policy was continued under Charles Macbeth, who served as Charleston’s mayor from 1857-1865. See *Charleston Mercury*, July 21, 1858; In his final “Mayor’s Report on City Affairs” presented to the Council in late September 1857, Miles was likely articulating the position of many Charlestonians when he wrote that although “it is obviously the duty of the city authorities in carrying out measures for the public good, to see that they work as little individual injury as possible...Still the general interest of the community must override the convenience and advantage of any special interest.” Although in context Miles seemed to be responding to complaints made by Charleston’s mercantile community regarding the stringent quarantine measures, the mayor states that the general interest of the community ought to come before *any* special interest, which in mid-nineteenth-century Charleston politics would include the Irish. Miles, “Mayor’s Report on City Affairs,” 25.



request, provided that the cargo “be conveyed to the store by negro or acclimated draymen.”<sup>103</sup>

Employment opportunities for white immigrants dwindled as the number of quarantined vessels swelled.<sup>104</sup> In 1856 Dr. Dickson noted “the continuous squadron of foul vessels, sometimes amounting to nearly a score in number” at the quarantine ground. New Port Physician William C. Ravenel – who the governor appointed after the death of Thomas Y. Simons in June 1857 – reported that between May 1 and October 1, 1857, seventy-eight vessels arrived at quarantine, thirty-six of which were detained and required lighters to discharge and load cargo. And during the six months between May 1 and October 31, 1858, 103 vessels arrived at quarantine, 65 of which were detained.<sup>105</sup> Clearly an increasing number of vessels required black acclimated laborers to unload and load cargo at the quarantine ground and to transport these goods throughout the city. The result was far fewer jobs for unacclimated workers during the yellow fever season.

With dock work already relatively scarce in the summer months, some white immigrants had to give up waterfront labor and turn to other sources of income to make ends meet. During the devastating epidemic of 1858 – the deadliest in the city’s history claiming 716 lives – the first case of yellow fever was John Abbott, “a policeman...taken sick on his post in Market, near East Bay street, at 1 o’clock, A.M., of the 10th July.”

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<sup>103</sup> City Council Minutes, June 23, 1857, *Charleston Mercury*, June 25, 1857; City Council Minutes, June 26, 1857, *Charleston Mercury*, June 29, 1857.

<sup>104</sup> It should be kept in mind that the quarantine rules and regulations typically were only in effect for five or six months of the year, and that the laws usually were not in force during the peak commercial season.

<sup>105</sup> Dickson, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 11 (November 1856): 755; Miles, “Mayor’s Report on City Affairs,” opposite 88; Lebby et al., “Report on Yellow Fever in the Summer of 1858,” 5, Table C; Though approximately thirty-six vessels arrived from infected West Indies ports between May 1 and July 30, 1839, at this time black slaves still dominated waterfront work and thus few unacclimated laborers would have been even seeking employment on Charleston’s wharves that summer; Strobel, “Essay on Yellow Fever,” 171.

The committee assigned the task of reporting on the origin and diffusion of yellow fever in 1858 reminded the City Council of the incredible fact that “John Abbott had yellow fever in 1856, was the first case that year, traceable to the brig St. Andrew [*sic*], at quarantine, on board of which he had been employed.”<sup>106</sup> Perhaps unable to find work on the city’s docks or lighters after his much publicized case in 1856, Abbott was forced to change jobs. John Abbott nonetheless was attacked by the fever in 1858 just blocks away from the waterfront. Regardless of occupation, it seemingly was unsafe for white immigrants to venture too close to the wharves during fever season. Clearly, residing in the city for over four years, passing through the 1854 epidemic unscathed, and recovering from the disease in 1856 did not provide the “acclimated” Abbott sufficient protection. After throwing up black vomit for days, twenty-five-year-old Irishman John Abbott died at his residence on Tradd Street on July 17, 1858.<sup>107</sup>

But notwithstanding mounting obstacles, some unacclimated white immigrants continued to find work on lighters and on the city’s docks and drays during the fever season. After all, John Abbott and Michael Denning had managed to evade the rules in 1856, much in the way that Charleston’s slaveowners habitually disregarded city ordinances prohibiting their slaves from hiring themselves out. And since immigrants were not barred from working on or handling the goods of non-quarantined vessels, city

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<sup>106</sup> Horlbeck, “Maritime Sanitation at Ports of Arrival,” 9; Leiby et al. reported 717 deaths in 1858. Leiby et al., “Report on Yellow Fever in the Summer of 1858,” 67, Table D, 6, 13.

<sup>107</sup> Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL; Leiby et al. and the editors of the *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* reported that Abbott died on July 18; City authorities tried to explain that Abbott’s illness in 1858 “must have been of city origin, as he had, in 1856, the Havana *imported fever*.”; The editors of the *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* stated after the 1858 epidemic that “the charmed circle of acclimation has been unusually contracted, and not a few, who little suspected their danger, have discovered, when too late, that they were beyond its pale.”; “Editorial and Miscellaneous: The Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1858,” *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 13 (November 1858): 843, 842; Leiby et al., “Report on Yellow Fever in the Summer of 1858,” 7.

death records reveal that many were employed on the Cooper River waterfront during these months in the years before the Civil War: twenty-nine-year-old Irishman John McElroy died on board the ship *Southern* from the “effects of heat” in July 1856; thirty-five-year-old Irishman Matthew Stevens drowned near the *Southern* in August 1857; twenty-two-year-old Irishman Michael Lanneau died of yellow fever on South Atlantic Wharf in November 1857; twenty-nine-year-old Irishman Thomas O’Brien died of yellow fever on Gadsden’s Wharf in August 1858; fifteen-year-old Irishman John E. McMahon died of yellow fever on Cromwell’s Wharf in September 1858; forty-five-year-old Irishman Michael Quinn drowned at Gadsden’s Wharf in September 1858; thirty-year-old Irishman John Fisher died from sun stroke while on board a ship in July 1859; and thirty-two-year-old German J. A. Fleischmann died after an accident on Boyce’s Wharf in June 1864.<sup>108</sup> Admittedly, some of these deceased immigrants may not have been waterfront workers, while others may have been considered acclimated. But despite what ought to have been the lessons of the 1854 and 1856 epidemics, rising public fear and sentiment against the employment of unacclimated immigrants, and official resolutions requiring the use of acclimated blacks for particular jobs while the quarantine was in effect, white immigrants nonetheless clearly continued to find waterfront work during and after the summer of 1856.

Why did Charleston’s wharf owners, commission merchants, stevedores, and lighter captains persist in hiring unacclimated dock workers and lightermen? Some, no doubt, were localists who refused to accept that yellow fever was an imported disease. Perhaps others in the city’s commercial community preferred to hire white workers

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<sup>108</sup> Charleston Death Records, 1819-1870, CCPL.

regardless of official restrictions or intense public pressure.<sup>109</sup> After all, by the mid-1850s an increasing number of Irish employers, including stevedores, were joining more established and prominent Hibernians such as wharf owners James Adger and Charles A. Magwood on the city's waterfront. Germans too perhaps turned to men such as William Kunhardt or Jacob Schirmer for work. Again, employers had to balance any racial predilections with the fact that white laborers usually were more expensive to hire than enslaved dock workers. But as the episode of the striking workers on the *Aquatic* in 1854 demonstrates, once the Irish were hired it was not as easy to fire and replace them with black slaves as one might expect. Not only did the striking Irishmen exercise extraordinary agency and self-assertiveness – not to mention a willingness to work any job irrespective of personal safety and health – but also their apparent lack of concern about being fired suggests that there was a relative shortage of slave dock workers in Charleston during the mid and late 1850s. In other words, as L. W. Spratt suggested in 1861, Irish immigrants evidently were occupying jobs vacated by slaves removed from the city and sent to rural plantations, rather than pushing the slaves out of those positions.

Meanwhile, some in antebellum Charleston may have considered the lives of white immigrants to be less valuable than those of slaves. In the aftermath of the 1854 epidemic, William Hume suggested that greed was influencing hiring decisions, and alleged that “the decree has gone forth that some must die that others may be enriched.” And Hume argued in March 1854 that “there is among our merchants a moral principle paramount to the love of gain,” adding, “Of death and desolation we need not argue, for habit has rendered us callous to such considerations; and the exemption which the native

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<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, other employers preferred to hire slaves in support of the increasingly embattled institution of slavery.

enjoys, may make him careless of the suffering of others.”<sup>110</sup> The Irish and Germans, despite their rising numbers, no doubt fell under the category of “others” in 1850s Charleston, and for some an immigrant worker struck down by yellow fever could be quickly replaced by another Irishman or German and was much less costly than the loss of valuable slave property.

Also making Irish workers more expendable was the notion shared by some Charlestonians that Irish immigrants were not entirely white. After all, unlike the vast majority of native white southerners, the Irish were willing not only to work unpleasant and hazardous jobs traditionally performed by blacks but also to labor side by side slaves on the city’s waterfront. In mid-nineteenth century New York, as in most free labor northern ports, Irish immigrant dock workers were “becoming white” in part due to their refusal to work shoulder to shoulder with blacks, as the 1863 Draft Riots later laid bare. Even in the border state port of Baltimore, Frederick Douglass was nearly beaten to death in the mid-1830s by white ship carpenters who refused to continue working alongside black competitors.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 10 (January 1855): 12, 35; William Hume also asked “whether the gain in property is a compensation for the loss of population,” and insisted that yellow fever would not be excluded from the city “so long as human life is esteemed to be less valuable than the gains of commerce.” Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 160; Hume demonstrated his own concern for the potential affliction of strangers, albeit in an odd manner, when in 1850 he urged the *City Register* to “issue a weekly price current of the value of foreign life in Charleston.” “It would be as valuable as any other price current,” Hume explained, “and far more benevolent, and let men run risks on their own responsibility, with a full knowledge of the facts.” Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 5 (January 1850): 11; A price current was a publication listing the prevailing prices of merchandise such as cotton and rice.

<sup>111</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave; Written by Himself* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 93-6; Meanwhile, other Charlestonians suspiciously questioned whether Irish immigrants – many of whom spent several years in the abolitionist strongholds of Boston and New York before migrating to the South – fully supported the institution of slavery, concerns that were compounded by the fact that few working-class Irish owned slaves.

Plainly, the Irish and other white immigrants in the South had far different experiences than those in northern cities. And they had an impact on Charleston and southern history that went far beyond their labor contributions to the city's and region's vital export economy. The influx of unacclimated immigrant workers to ports susceptible to yellow fever put these cities at substantially greater risk for the importation and widespread propagation of the potentially devastating disease. Prior to the arrival of thousands of white immigrants in Charleston, yellow fever epidemics as deadly as that in 1856 were rare and as ruinous as those in 1854 and 1858 unimaginable. Throughout the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s there were only four years in which yellow fever claimed more than 100 lives, and in most years the disease either did not strike or claimed only a few. According to Thomas Y. Simons, yellow fever did not spread to laborers who were unloading and loading "foul" vessels at the city's wharves during the 1838 and 1839 epidemics.<sup>112</sup> In these years, however, those who were discharging and loading West Indies ships and mingling with sick captains, mates, and crew members were almost exclusively acclimated black slaves.

But after the immigration of substantial numbers of mostly working-class Irishmen beginning in the mid-1840s, Charleston suffered its second most lethal yellow fever epidemic in 1852 when 310 people died, and three of the four deadliest yellow

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<sup>112</sup> About the 1838 yellow fever epidemic – the deadliest in Charleston's history to that time with 354 deaths – Simons observed that the disease did not attack "even those who were loading and unloading the said-to-be infected [*Lord Glenelg*]," a British barque that arrived from Demerara in British Guiana on July 4 and was docked at Boyce & Co.'s Wharf. Likewise, Simons inquired about the 1839 epidemic, which claimed 134 lives, "If the infectious principle was so powerful, why should it be confined so long to the [seamen], when a free intercourse was had with them by laborers." Simons, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (May 1854): 345; Simons, "Report on the History and Causes of Yellow Fever," 11; Also see Hume, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (March 1854): 154; and Strobel, "Essay on Yellow Fever," 124.

fever epidemics in the city's history during the 1850s.<sup>113</sup> The higher death tolls of the 1850s were in large part due to the greater preponderance of immigrant "strangers" present in the city. As one Charlestonian wrote in the midst of the 1854 epidemic, "the besotted Irish" were to blame for "keep[ing] the fever up by giving it constant fuel."<sup>114</sup> But Charleston had lost its defensive wall of acclimated black workers along the waterfront. The fact that in the past the vast majority of stevedores and wharf hands who had mingled with foreign sailors in ship holds, on the docks and in warehouses, and in the city's filthiest taverns and back alleys were black men more or less immune to yellow fever had prevented the propagation of the imported disease into the heart of the city. But despite efforts to prevent susceptible white immigrants from handling "infected" cargo or exposure to the "poisonous" atmosphere of West Indies vessels, once scores of unacclimated Irishmen and Germans began working alongside acclimated black slaves on Charleston's mosquito-infested waterfront and at the quarantine ground, the city's human health shield was easily penetrated.

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<sup>113</sup> Horlbeck, "Maritime Sanitation at Ports of Arrival," 9.

<sup>114</sup> Mrs. Porcher to Mrs. Allston, October 16, 1854, quoted in M. Foster Farley, *An Account of the History of Stranger's Fever in Charleston, 1699-1876* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), 107.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**“some rascally business”:**  
**Theft and Worker Pilferage from Charleston’s Wharves: A Reflection upon Themes**

On August 21, 1835, Jacob Schirmer recorded in his diary that “Lynch Law was exhibited this morning on the person of a Mr. Carroll, who has been carrying on the business of a Barber, but who has attended more to the purchase of Stolen cotton.” The *Charleston Courier* explained that R. W. Carroll – an alias for Richard Wood – had used his shop at 4 Queen Street near East Bay Street and the Cooper River wharves to receive “stolen goods, from negroes” and to export “about 60 bales of cotton annually.” Schirmer reported that Wood shipped as many as 75 bales in one season. Richard Wood had been prosecuted many times for carrying out this illicit trade, but he had been “shielded...from *legal* punishment” due to technicalities of the law. Though the “Lynch Club” had advised Wood to leave the city by August 20, he greeted such warnings with “contempt and defiance” and persisted in “his dishonest traffic.” Taking matters into their own hands, a number of citizens assembled on the 21st and removed the villain from his shop.

[Wood] was immediately marched down to Price’s wharf, tied to a post, and there received about twenty lashes on his bare back; a tub of tar was then emptied upon his head, in such a manner as to cause it to extend over his whole body; and the *gentleman* was properly decorated with a covering of loose cotton, the principal material in which he had carried on his illicit traffic, with much advantage to his purse.

After being “tarred and Stuck with Cotton,” Wood was escorted up East Bay Street and marched through the market and other public streets “in order that others guilty of the



like practices should take warning by his fate.” Afterward, Wood was lodged in the city jail for this own protection before being “put on board of a vessel & sent to New York.”<sup>1</sup>

Extant sources make no mention of punishing the thieving slaves who were said to have stolen and then sold cotton to Richard Wood. Instead, these bondsmen were portrayed as the victims of the unscrupulous white cotton trader. “It is sincerely to be hoped that this exhibition of the popular feeling,” declared the *Courier*, “will operate as an effectual warning to all engaged in the nefarious practice of corrupting our colored population, by purchasing stolen property from them, to desist from their illegal and dishonest course,” adding that it was “the fixed determination of the inhabitants of Charleston no longer to submit quietly to such a system of spoliation and robbery.”<sup>2</sup>

The theft and pilferage of cotton, rice, and other valuable commercial goods from Charleston’s waterfront was a common occurrence during the antebellum period. Also typical was the tendency to assume that blacks were natural thieves and were the perpetrators of these crimes. Though not all the goods that disappeared from the wharves were stolen by the city’s enslaved dock workers, few occupations surpassed the degree of access, opportunities, and enticements to steal and pilfer as afforded to waterfront

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<sup>1</sup> Schirmer Diary, August 21, 1835, SCHS; *Charleston Courier*, August 22, 1835; The 1830-31 and 1835-36 city directories both listed R. W. Carroll as a hairdresser at 4 Queen Street; Wood did not deal solely in stolen cotton. The *Charleston Courier* announced on August 24: “We are requested by the Sheriff of Charleston District to state that several Trunks, (removed from the late residence of R. W. CARROLL, in Queen street, containing articles supposed to have been stolen by and received from Negroes) have been left for the inspection of the public at the auction store of Mr. DUNN, Vendue Range. It is requested that all persons who may have lost, at that time, silver spoons, fine linen, and other articles of value, will go and examine the trunks, and claim their property, if found therein. The balance of articles, unclaimed, will be sold, and the amount paid over to the Intendant of the City, to be remitted to the Wife and Children of CARROLL.” A later account of this episode similarly added that “several trunks were taken therefrom, which contained silver spoons, fine linen, ladies’ apparel complete, bed drapery, etc.” *Charleston Courier*, August 24, 1835; William L. King, *The Newspaper Press of Charleston, S.C.: A Chronological and Biographical History, Embracing a Period of One Hundred and Forty Years* (Charleston: Edward Perry Book Press, 1872), 150-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Charleston Courier*, August 22, 1835.

laborers. As a result, more laws were passed in the effort to further restrict and control slave workers' labor and lives. But unwilling to acknowledge that slave theft contradicted proslavery claims that the South's bondsmen were docile and contented, white Charlestonians rationalized that thieving slaves simply did not know any better. Though guilty slaves frequently were punished for their crimes, elite whites transferred responsibility for the plunder from the thieves to "unscrupulous" and "corrupting" white shop keepers like Richard Wood who induced slaves to steal by purchasing the purloined goods. Meanwhile, though southern whites also sometimes stole from the docks, their whiteness and nativity often shielded them from prosecution and conviction. White theft and pilferage, however, was increasingly prosecuted after the arrival in the 1840s and 1850s of poor, working-class immigrants, whose principles and whiteness were questioned. The history of theft and pilferage give dramatic testimony to the ways contemporary notions of race, class, and ethnicity impacted the employment and work processes, the relentless struggle for control of slaves' actions, and labor competition between white and black waterfront workers.

Large quantities of commercial goods awaiting shipment were left unstored and unprotected on Charleston's open wharves. Charlestonians owning real estate near the waterfront complained in March 1847 that "Many of the wharves are nearly inaccessible at times by the immense accumulation of Cotton piled out doors and in the streets leading to the wharves."<sup>3</sup> Visitors could not help but notice the abundance of unstored cargo. In April 1859 English traveler John Henry Vessey observed that "The wharves here abound in cotton," adding that "The bales are piled up a considerable height and quite exposed to

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<sup>3</sup> City Council Minutes, March 5, 1847, *Southern Patriot*, March 6, 1847.

the atmosphere, never under shelter.”<sup>4</sup> Uncovered, export goods on Charleston’s wharves were frequently damaged or ruined. In June 1818 factor Timothy Lee paid \$2.50 “for drying Cotton on Wharf,” while Fitzsimons’ Wharf factor John Schulz “Paid Negro hire drying Cotton & turng over” in January 1821.<sup>5</sup> In March 1835 merchandise for Moffett and Calder’s dry goods store on King Street was left on the wharf for several days, during which time the goods were severely damaged by rain.<sup>6</sup> And in September 1851 five barrels of lard consigned to dray owner Felix Meetz were “left exposed to the sun upon the wharf for several days, whereby it became melted, and was in such a bad condition, when offered to [Meetz], that he declined to accept it.”<sup>7</sup>

Not just subject to the elements of nature, goods stored on the open wharves were also accessible to thieves. As early as 1740 merchant Robert Pringle advised John Erving of Boston that bricks were “the worst Commodity a Ship Can bring here” since “There is always a very great Breakage on them & as they Lye expos’d on our Common Wharfs after Landing are Lyable to be Stolen and Embezell’d by all Comers.”<sup>8</sup> Planter and wharf owner William Smith Jr. testified on December 1, 1808, that “two barrells of tar of the value of seven dollars, were on this morning feloniously stolen, taken and carried away from his wharf” by a white man named Joseph Daniel – a perennial rabble-rouser who

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<sup>4</sup> Vessey and Waters, *Mr. Vessey of England*, 61-2.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Lee Business Journal, June 13, 1818, page 99, SCL; Schulz paid the slave \$1. Account Book, 1817-1822, January 27, 1821, page 351, John Schulz Account Books, 1812-1824, SCL; 1816 city directory; 1819 city directory; 1822 city directory.

<sup>6</sup> Charleston Chamber of Commerce Award Book, case 72, March 17, 1835, SCHS.

<sup>7</sup> Felix Meetz vs. Bark *Dudley*, Admiralty Minute Book, District of South Carolina, vol. 5 (1843-1857), NASER.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Pringle to John Erving, September 9, 1740, in Edgar, *Letterbook of Robert Pringle*, vol. 2, 243-4. Also see a similar letter to Erving on December 7, 1743. Edgar, vol. 2, 616.

was indicted at least three times during the year 1809.<sup>9</sup> And in June 1823, fifteen barrels of flour valued at \$108.75 and belonging to bakers James and William Maynard were stolen from the wharves. Unsure who to blame for the theft, Chamber of Commerce arbitrators simply concluded “that it must have been carried off by some person or persons, who had no right to the said flour.”<sup>10</sup>

Thieves also targeted the vessels moored at the wharves and waterfront stores. Patrick Cassin swore that in December 1810 that he had shipped on board the sloop *Delight* bound for Savannah “fifty three pieces of shawls, some pieces of silks, and sundry other articles of Merchandize,” which he believed to have been stolen from the vessel. Auctioneer Timothy Sullivan testified that on May 9, 1811, a grocer named John Thomas brought a portion of these stolen goods to his vendue store “with instructions to sell them, for what they might bring.” Thomas was subsequently charged with larceny and receiving stolen goods.<sup>11</sup> And on the evening of August 22, 1833, the store of J. C. & C. Burckmyer & Co. at 140 East Bay Street was broken into and two barrels of flour were stolen. The barrels were soon recovered from a boat at Magwood’s Wharf, and two of the vessel’s crewmen were found guilty of the crime and sentenced to twenty-five lashes in the city market. But according to Jacob Schirmer, these men purchased the flour from a slave owned by David B. Lafar, a cooper on Magwood’s Wharf.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel was acquitted in this case, despite Smith’s fellow wharf owner Charles F. Mey serving as the foreman of the jury. Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1809-53A, SCDAH.

<sup>10</sup> Charleston Chamber of Commerce Award Book, case 2, June 5, 1823, SCHS.

<sup>11</sup> The stolen goods were valued at \$107. The jury in this case included merchants and wharf owners James Adger and Paul Pritchard. Thomas was acquitted. Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1811-39A, SCDAH; 1816 city directory.

As this case suggests, waterfront workers sometimes stole merchandise from the wharves. On October 2, 1823, merchant Michael Lazarus claimed “That there was feloniously stolen & carried away from Prioleaus Wh [his] property Ten Barrells of Rice branded RV.” Between 8 and 9 o’clock that morning, a white man named Charles Smally arrived with a dray at the end of Meeting Street at South Bay Street and pointed out a number of rice barrels to the slave drayman. Having noticed that he was being watched by a group of white men, Smally began to walk away. But “believing that [Smally] was concerned in Stealing the Rice,” several of these men followed him and seized him for questioning. Asked if he had come to the waterfront for the rice, Smally “answered no, that he came to Take a Load from on board the Steam Boat.” After a Mr. Murden interjected “that there was no Load on board the Steam boat,” Smally awkwardly replied that he had come to get a berth on board the vessel. But when “he was then ask’d what he wanted with a dray with him, [Smally] made no answer.”<sup>13</sup>

That same morning a white grocer named Thomas Ryan who was on South Bay at the end of Meeting Street “saw a niger fellow Take Two Barrells of Rice marked RV.” Ryan followed the dray to the residence of James Davis at 3 Swintons Lane, where the rice was emptied onto a carpet and the barrel heads with the markings were thrown into a fire. Ryan also observed “Two other Barrells with the Same Marks” delivered to Davis’s house. Maria Davis (presumably the wife of James Davis) claimed that “a man named Jack came to her house No. 3 in Swintons Lane with a dray with Two Barrells of Rice

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<sup>12</sup> Schirmer Diary, August 22, 1833, SCHS; The *Charleston Courier* noted that the back of the store was broken open “by wrenching off the pad lock,” which demonstrates that even waterfront goods that were locked up were subject to theft. The *Courier* also claims that the boat where the stolen flour was found was lying at Dewees’ Wharf. *Charleston Courier*, August 24, 1833; 1830-31 city directory; The 1835-36 city directory listed Lafar as a cooper at 18 Vendue Range.

<sup>13</sup> Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1823-55A, SCDAH.

and ordered them to be Roled in,” and that afterward Charles Smally hastily arrived with two additional barrels. Mrs. Davis also confirmed that “Two of the Barrells were Emptied on a carpet in the yard,” and that she saw the barrel headings in the fire. After a state constable found four of Lazarus’s stolen barrels of rice worth \$50 at Davis’s house, Charles Smally was charged with grand larceny and James Davis with receiving stolen goods. On October 15, 1823, both were found guilty and sentenced to be branded on the left hand with the letter T and to one-month imprisonment. It is unclear whether the draymen in this case knowingly abetted the theft of Michael Lazarus’s rice from Prioleau’s Wharf, but these waterfront workers evidently were not punished for their role.<sup>14</sup>

Other workers were not so fortunate. In February 1826 a parcel of 300 new bricks belonging to builders Henry and John Horlbeck were stolen from Mey’s Wharf. The Horlbecks “had frequently lost Bricks at divers times which they were unable to find out,” so upon learning that some of their stolen materials were in the yard of Patrick O’Connor’s store at the corner of Hard Alley and East Bay Street, the brothers at once went to confront O’Connor. Henry Horlbeck testified that upon entering the door of the shop, O’Connor immediately approached him and pointed out the bricks, stating that “they were [brought] here by your Carter a Black man.” The bricks, which the Horlbecks examined and confirmed to be their property, “were laying in a heap in the yard as if just dropped from a Cart,” and “the Gate into the yard was large enough for a Cart to drive in.” A young woman named Judy Cumming who frequented O’Connor’s store swore that she “never knew [him] to buy Bricks from any person whatever.” But she recalled

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<sup>14</sup> Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1823-55A, SCDAH.

being at O'Connor's one day in February while he was not present when "two Black men came to the Shop Door – and soon after heard the Noise of some Bricks falling out of a Cart in the yard." Cross-examined by O'Connor's attorney, "Mr. Horlbeck said the Negro Carter's name who drove the Cart the day [the bricks] were taken away from Meys Wharf was Abraham" and that "he was punished on the Tread Mill [at the Work House] for a month, or Six Weeks, till he got Sick when he was taken out of Confinement." But not letting O'Connor off the hook, the Horlbecks also obtained a warrant and had him "taken up for the offence of receiving their stolen property." Despite O'Connor's claims that he did not know the bricks were stolen and that he did not purchase the bricks, the jury found him guilty on October 6, 1826.<sup>15</sup>

The transportation and market revolutions of the nineteenth century – highlighted in South Carolina by the completion of the South Carolina Railroad linking the plantations along the Savannah River to Charleston in 1833 – facilitated a rise in the amount of cotton arriving in Charleston for export.<sup>16</sup> In 1825 approximately 159,327 bales of cotton were shipped from Charleston; one decade later 204,119 bales were exported, and in 1840 the number had risen to 307,679.<sup>17</sup> With such an immense amount of cotton piled on the city's waterfront, it should come as no surprise that the late 1820s and early 1830s witnessed a sharp increase in the theft – and subsequent sale – of cotton from the wharves.

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<sup>15</sup> Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1826-4A, SCDAH.

<sup>16</sup> See George Rogers Taylor, *Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1989; and Charles Sellers, *Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

<sup>17</sup> Van Deusen, *Economic Bases of Disunion in South Carolina*, 333, Appendix C; Also see Collins, "Charleston and the Railroads," 100, Table V.

Some of the attempted cotton thefts were simply astonishing. On the evening of January 10, 1830, Ezekiel Hartley was at the residence of Captain John Todd at 16 Market Street along with Enias Prin and a free black man named Richard Thompson. Between 9 and 10 o'clock "a free mulatto man" named William Simpson came into the house and proposed to Prin and Thompson "to go on some Wharf and roll away a bale of cotton, sell it for Six dollars and share the profits." Hartley claimed that he had "warned Prin not to go, saying it was some rascally business, & he would get himself into trouble." Nonetheless, Prin accompanied Thompson and Simpson across the street to Fitzsimons' Wharf and "in about a half-hour they returned with a bale of cotton" and with city guardsmen in pursuit. But when Prin ran into the house, Hartley claimed to have "collared him & delivered him over to the Guard saying he was the man that stole the cotton." Future wharf owner William Patton, who during the 1830s was a wharfinger and factor on Fitzsimons' Wharf, testified on January 11 that the stolen bale of short staple cotton was the property of merchants William Montgomery and George Platt, and "was lying on Fitzsimons Wharf last night." Believing that Prin, Thompson, and Simpson had stolen the bale, estimated to be worth \$30, Patton called for them to be "prosecuted according to law." Thompson and Simpson were tried and convicted by a Court of Magistrates and Freeholders, which heard the cases of free blacks and slaves. But despite the testimonies of Hartley, Patton, and Todd, the Court of General Sessions acquitted Enias Prin on January 20.<sup>18</sup> In short, whereas the two free black culprits were held accountable, the white offender was not.

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<sup>18</sup> The stolen bale was worth \$15. Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1830-20A, SCDAH; 1830-31 city directory; 1835-36 city directory.



Not all cotton thieves were as brazen or stole on such a grand scale; and indeed the embezzlement and sale of small amounts of cotton was common. On May 9, 1835, for instance, a slave named Lewis sold an eight pound bag of cotton to Elizabeth Mills for only 8 cents – less than 6 percent the commodity’s prevailing value.<sup>19</sup> But for the purchasers of this purloined cotton, such relatively small and not easily detectable parcels could add up to a substantial and profitable traffic, especially if resold at market price.

The plunder became so pervasive, in fact, that during the 1830s over forty wharf owners, wharfingers, and merchants – including Charles Edmondston, George Chisolm Jr., William Dewees, Ker Boyce, and James Adger – petitioned the South Carolina Senate.<sup>20</sup> “The evil has at length gone so far that Your Memorialists...are now induced to come before your Honourable Body for [the] relief and protection...of the Cotton and Rice lying upon the Wharves of Charleston,” they explained. The petitioners elucidated that “Cotton especially, from the immense quantities received, and the little injury it sustains from exposure to the weather, is frequently not Stored, and is always in large quantities lying upon the wharves.” Unmentioned were the hefty and deterring expenditures of time and labor associated with storing and removing cotton bales from waterfront warehouses. Thus exposed, the unstored bales were “liable to continual depredations by Slaves and free persons of Colour who frequent” the waterfront, and in this way “Rice, and Cotton especially, to an immense amount, are plundered upon our wharves.” Despite the thieving of white men like Charles Smally and Enias Prin, the

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<sup>19</sup> Mills was found guilty of “Negro Trading” in October 1835. Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1835-9A, SCDAH.

<sup>20</sup> This petition is undated, but probably was written in the 1830s. It was not until the mid-1830s, for instance, that Boyce and some other signers owned wharves.

assumption was that blacks – often docks workers – stole the valuable commodities from the waterfront. The wharf owners estimated that “As Startling as the fact may appear,” the equivalent of at least 500 bales of cotton were purchased illegally each year by Charleston’s store keepers from thieving slaves and free blacks. In addition to unprincipled shop keepers motivated only by profit, the wharf owners blamed such extensive theft on the widespread forging of slaves’ trading passes or tickets and ineffective laws prohibiting traffic with slaves and free blacks. “[T]he Laws as they exist against trafficking with Slaves, admit of such easy expedients for evading their applications,” the petitioners argued, “that they are equivalent to no laws at all.”<sup>21</sup> Paradoxically, many of these same slaveowners and waterfront employers later dismissed the similar complaints of white workingmen decrying the weak enforcement and willful elusion of slave hiring laws.

Illicit trading with slaves was not a new problem. The 1740 Negro Act passed in response to the Stono Rebellion was the first to prohibit slaves in Charleston from buying, selling, or trading any goods on their own account, or on behalf of their masters without first obtaining a ticket granting permission to do so. But only offending slaves and not the white shop keepers who traded with them were punished under this statute.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, an 1796 act sought “more effectually to prevent slaves without tickets from

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<sup>21</sup> Particularly upsetting was the fact that the wharf owners exclusively were shouldering the financial loss for the theft of the planters’ property. The petitioners therefore requested that the legislature either enact efficacious laws, or “leave them to protect themselves, by abolishing all legislative regulations of the rates of wharfage.” The latter option was decidedly preferred, they explained, not only because it would remove what they long perceived as an injurious, unjust, and arbitrary hindrance of free trade, but also because the wharf owners could then “put the rates of wharfage at such a point, as shall indemnify them for the thefts committed,” and thus “The loss will then fall where it ought to fall, upon him who is plundered.” Petition, ND #1895, SCDAH.

<sup>22</sup> McCord, *Statutes at Large*, vol. 7, 407-8; Alex Lichtenstein, “‘That Disposition to Theft, with Which They Have Been Branded’: Moral Economy, Slave Management, and the Law,” *Journal of Social History* 21 (Spring 1988): 429.

dealing with shop-keepers, traders and others,” and another in 1817 “increase[d] the penalties which are now by law inflicted on persons who deal or trade with negro slaves, without a license or ticket from their master or owner.”<sup>23</sup> An 1806 ordinance declared that “No negro or other slave...shall on his or her own account, buy, sell, barter, trade, traffic or deal in any goods, wares, provisions, grains, or commodities, of any kind whatsoever, upon pain of forfeiting the same.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, slaves “with or without a written license or ticket” selling, hawking, or offering for sale any article or commodity – except for provisions such as butcher’s meat, poultry, fruit, and vegetables – had to forfeit such articles “to any person or persons seizing the same.”<sup>25</sup> A penalty though this was, simply denying the offending slaves their goods was not an effective deterrent from theft. In fact, if the goods seized from slaves proved to be stolen, the ordinance only called for the property to be restored to the rightful owner. An advertisement in the *Charleston Mercury* therefore read: “Brought to the Guard House by a person unconnected with the Guard, a quantity of CORN, said to be offered for sale by Negroes on Mays [Mey’s] wharf. Any person claiming said Corn will call, and verify the same on or before Thursday next, otherwise it will be disposed of according to Law.”<sup>26</sup> Though official legislation seemingly reprimanded white buyers more harshly than slave thieves, blacks did not necessarily avoid punishment. Like the Horlbecks’ carter Abraham,

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<sup>23</sup> McCord, *Statutes at Large*, vol. 7, 434-5, 454-5.

<sup>24</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 171.

<sup>25</sup> This ordinance also prohibited slaves from “exposing any article or commodity for sale [upon] a bench, table, or other board, in any street, lane, alley or public thoroughfare, or on any wharf within the city,” unless they do so at a station in the open market and abide by the regulations established by the Commissioners of the Market. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 171-2.

<sup>26</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, December 24, 1839.

masters often paid to have corrections doled out at the Work House, while some punished their offending bondsmen themselves.

Prior to the mid-1830s, such vague and weakly enforced laws and ordinances failed to halt the theft and pilferage of cotton and other goods from the wharves. So “after repeatedly endeavouring to right themselves by the Laws as they Stand,” and since “Experience has proved, that to concede the privilege of trafficking with Slaves is to license and encourage plundering,” the petitioners recommended that all trading with free blacks and slaves – “either with or without a ticket” – be outlawed. State law, after all, prohibited slaves from owning property, and since the wharf owners and merchants claimed not to handle any rice or cotton produced or legally owned by free blacks or slaves, when blacks sold these commodities “the presumption is in fact, and ought to be in law, that they are Stolen.”<sup>27</sup> In 1834 the General Assembly modified the laws regarding slaves and free persons of color to include the provision that “it shall be sufficient for the conviction” of store keepers who unlawfully traded with slaves if it could be proven that the slave entered the shop with an article and then left the shop without that same item.<sup>28</sup>

This act still allowed store keepers to trade with slaves bearing tickets purportedly signed by their masters; but by significantly lowering the burden of proof in illicit trading cases, the new law facilitated the prosecution and conviction of unscrupulous white

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<sup>27</sup> Petition, ND #1895, SCDAH.

<sup>28</sup> McCord, *Statutes at Large*, vol. 7, 469; In addition, a November 1836 city ordinance “regulating retailers of spirituous liquors” penalized such retailers for purchasing or trading for any goods, provisions, grain, or other commodity, and prohibited grocers and other shop keepers from purchasing “from any slave any goods, provisions, grain, or other commodity whatever,” unless he can “produce a ticket or permit from the master or person having the charge of such slave, authorizing him to sell such provisions or other commodities.” Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 221, 224.

buyers.<sup>29</sup> On May 5, 1835, E. W. Walker swore “that John R. Daniels and his wife named Mary Daniels...did on Friday last, (they being traders residing on State Street in the City of Charleston) then and there purchase from three negro men slaves divers parcels of Cotton contrary to the law of the land.” The Daniels accordingly were indicted for purchasing a parcel of cotton worth \$1 from a slave named Trim, but they were not dissuaded from their illicit dealings in the lucrative staple crop. In an affidavit taken on July 1, 1835, James Hector swore that he lived next door to Mary Daniels, and that the night before Mrs. Daniels had “received into her premises eight, ten, or twelve negroes, carrying with them each parcels of cotton, [and] that the said negroes came out without the cotton.” Nor was this an isolated incident, since “the same practises [*sic*] are carrying on, and have been so for some months past,” and were even repeated that morning. Then, state constable Moses Levy claimed on July 31 “that on yesterday evening between the hours of seven and eight, he saw three negroes carry cotton in parcels of twenty or thirty pounds each into the house or shop of John Daniels in State Street.” Like Hector, Levy swore that the slaves exited the property without the cotton, and that “John Daniels is a trader in cotton, and he has no doubt that the said Daniels purchased the said cotton contrary to law.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Historian Alex Lichtenstein has noted, “Nowhere in any of the acts of 1796, 1817, or 1834 were the penalties for slaves specified, increased or amended beyond those prescribed in 1740.” These state statutes instead focused on preventing and punishing those white shop keepers who continued to unlawfully trade with slaves. Lichtenstein makes no mention, however, of the 1806 city ordinance, which did alter penalties for slave traders, albeit weak and ineffective. For an excellent analysis of these legislative acts, see Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 428-30.

<sup>30</sup> In a separate deposition given on August 15, Levy claimed that he had seen yet another slave enter the Daniels’s premises with a parcel of loose cotton; Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1835-29A, 1835-42A, 1835-45A, SCDAH; The 1835-36 city directory reveals that J. R. Daniels lived at 68 State Street, but no occupation is given.

Utilizing the new provision under the 1834 act, authorities indicted John and Mary Daniels for as many as fifteen counts of purchasing cotton from slaves between May 1 and August 14, 1835. The individual parcels of stolen cotton were estimated to be worth anywhere from 50 cents to \$5, and in most cases were purchased from male slaves owned by “a person and name unknown,” and “having no written permit of his guardian to sell” the cotton. In one instance, however, “a Slave supposed to be the property of John Fraser,” – a wharf owner and factor who may have employed this slave as a dock hand – sold a bag of cotton weighing about twenty pounds and worth \$4 to John Daniels.<sup>31</sup> John and Mary Daniels, meanwhile, pled guilty in October 1835, and were sentenced to an imprisonment of three months and a fine of \$100.<sup>32</sup> There is no evidence suggesting that the slaves who stole and then sold the cotton were either charged or disciplined for their misdeeds, perhaps because it was much easier to identify the location of a purchaser’s residence or shop than to recognize a slave seller in the night and early morning hours. But it is also true that most of Charleston’s records from the Court of Magistrates and Freeholders have been destroyed or lost. Historians therefore must turn to other sources such as local newspapers and scattered police records for a glimpse at how frequently slaves were punished for theft, and this topic remains open to further exploration.

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<sup>31</sup> Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1835-29A-1835-46A, SCDAH; John Fraser & Co. owned one slave in 1858, 1859, 1860, and 1862, and sixteen slaves in 1864. In 1864 the company was involved heavily in blockade running; Charleston Tax Records, 1860-1865, CLS; “List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1858”; “List of the Tax Payers of the City of Charleston for 1859.”

<sup>32</sup> Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1835-29A, SCDAH; Mary Daniels also plead guilty to additional charges of trading cotton during the same session and was sentenced to an additional month imprisonment. Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1835-45A, SCDAH; Elizabeth Mills, who was mentioned above, also was found guilty of “Negro Trading” in October 1835. Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1835-9A, SCDAH.

Despite an apparent increase in the prosecution and conviction of white cotton traders after the passage of the 1834 act, the law was not a panacea. After all, before being “lynched” and run out of town in August 1835, Richard Wood had exploited legal technicalities to evade conviction and continued to trade in purloined cotton “in perfect defiance of the community.”<sup>33</sup> Choosing to respond commensurately to trafficking on a grand scale, one group of Charlestonians turned to extralegal actions in dealing with this particularly egregious offender. Frustrated as many city residents and leaders clearly were with the failure of the law to rein in the illicit traffic in stolen cotton and other commercial goods, they rarely resorted to such extraordinary acts of summary justice.

But Charleston’s mercantile community did take practical measures to prevent theft. On September 29, 1835, twenty-six packages of goods consigned to Benjamin Mordecai in Beaufort were drayed to Roper’s Wharf where the schooner *Col. Simons* was moored. The captain of the vessel, Charlestonian John Philips, upon learning these goods were lying on the wharf, “declared that he could not take them, at that time, as he intended to transport his Schooner round to South Bay, to be repaired.” After consulting the wharfinger, Mr. Ward, it was agreed that the goods would be placed in storage rather than being left on the open wharf.<sup>34</sup> But late in the afternoon while Captain Philips was unsuccessfully seeking draymen to transport the goods to the warehouse, “his black Crew took the said packages on board, and they were carried in the Vessel to the Ship Yard on South Bay.” Remaining in the hold of the *Col. Simons* for three weeks while the vessel

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<sup>33</sup> *Charleston Courier*, August 22, 1835; In May 1842 Jacob Schirmer remarked upon the trial of John K. Brown “for receiving stolen cotton from a Mr. Howard.” Schirmer noted that “this case created very great Interest,” and that “The Jury returned about 15 minutes and brought a verdict of ‘Not Guilty’; when the verdict was announced, the Persons in the Court house (which was crowded) cheered when the Judge ordered the Constable to arrest any one that would repeat it.” Schirmer Diary, May 11, 1842, SCHS.

<sup>34</sup> John Ward was listed as a wharfinger in the 1840-41, 1849, and 1852 city directories.

underwent the repairs, the goods were damaged by sea water. Though the Chamber of Commerce concluded that Captain Philips was liable for not having the goods discharged and properly stored after arriving at the ship yard, the arbitrators also declared their opinion “that so far as to taking the Goods on board for safe keeping during the ensuing night, Captain Philips acted correctly.”<sup>35</sup>

Some owners of waterfront property sought to slow down thieves with barriers. At the end of July 1835, Jacob Schirmer mentioned that a brick wall was being built around the stores of Thomas Napier & Co. on Gadsden’s Wharf.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, Robert Adger of the commercial merchant firm James Adger & Co. petitioned the City Council “in behalf of the owners of Hamilton & Co.’s wharves praying permission to enclose with a railing the shed in the centre of their wharves, used for storage of cotton.”<sup>37</sup> The Committee on Wooden Buildings, to which the request was referred, “recommended that the prayer of the petitioner be granted, provided that he arrange the rails so as to have the

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<sup>35</sup> Charleston Chamber of Commerce Award Book, case 75, November 3, 1835, SCHS; Philips was listed as a captain living at 4 Lynch Street in the 1837-38 city directory, and as a captain living at 4 Atlantic Street in the 1840-41 city directory (the street name changed, not his residence); The following is typical of the daily notices that later appeared in the city’s newspapers: “Notice – The Ship Champion, Jenkins master, from Boston, is now discharging cargo at Palmetto Wharf, Consignees are notified that all goods not called for before sundown, will be stored at the expense and risk of the owners...J. W. Caldwell, Agent.” *Charleston Courier*, March 26, 1855.

<sup>36</sup> Schirmer Diary, after July 1835, SCHS; 1835-36 city directory; Some port cities dealt with theft and pilferage by constructing enclosed docks, both to keep thieving non-workers out and to enable the frisking of workers before exiting the waterfront each day. For information about London’s enclosed docks, see Linda Cooke Johnson, “Criminality on the Docks,” in Sam Davies et al., *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, 1790-1970* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2000), vol. 2, 730. Johnson points out that “Dock enclosure was the most effective method of halting theft, but it was expensive.” For information about the closing of Hamburg’s docks to the public, see Michael Grüttner, “Working-class Crime and the Labour Movement: Pilfering in the Hamburg Docks, 1888-1923,” in Richard J. Evans, ed., *The German Working Class, 1888-1933: The Politics of Everyday Life* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1982), 59.

<sup>37</sup> City Council Minutes, August 25, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, August 27, 1840; James Adger & Co. was located on Hamilton & Co.’s Wharves in 1840; 1840-41 city directory.



north, west and south side with gates.”<sup>38</sup> The committee later explained that having visited and examined the site, they “found that repeated fires from time to time occurred among the Cotton stored under said shed.”<sup>39</sup> Thus laid out, the barrier would obstruct audacious thieves like Prin, Thompson, and Simpson from rolling away an entire bale of cotton, yet the gates would afford access to the city’s fire companies. What’s more, the solid railing on the eastern side of the shed facing the Cooper River would prevent some villain from simply opening a gate and affecting an escape out of sight of any passersby on East Bay Street to the west.<sup>40</sup>

Nor did the city’s wharf owners and merchants entirely lose faith in legislative action. In 1836 approximately forty petitioners, including Otis Mills, Ker Boyce, and James Adger, asked members of the state Senate to pass an act permanently closing Mitchell’s Alley in Charleston. Running 300 feet in length from East Bay Street to Bedon’s Alley, Mitchell’s Alley was said to be a “receptacle of much filth and trash of every description,” and thus was “frequently a nuisance.” Only eight feet wide at one end and five feet in width at the other, the “Alley is too narrow to admit the passage of any carriage or cart, and is, in fact, of no advantage to the public, as it is not used by the citizens generally who live in the neighborhood of [the] said alley as a passage way.” But most importantly, the memorial declared “That [the] said Alley being little frequented, and, at night, very dark, is the resort of negroes and disorderly white persons,

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<sup>38</sup> City Council Minutes, September 28, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, October 1, 1840.

<sup>39</sup> City Council Minutes, October 14, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, October 17, 1840.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Adger wrote on January 15, 1874, “By the permission of Mr. EV [Elias Vanderhorst]; I have placed a gate at the entrance of his Wharf into Tradd Street; which I promise to have removed whenever notified by him; or his agent.” Wharf Business Papers: Vanderhorst Wharf, 1698-1892, folder 16, Vanderhorst Family Papers, 1689-1942, SCHS.

and it has not infrequently facilitated the escape of negroes who have been detected in Stealing from the wharves.” Again, blacks were the assumed perpetrators of waterfront theft. Legislators in Columbia acted relatively quickly and on December 21, 1836, authorized and empowered the Charleston City Council “to cause Mitchells’ alley...to be permanently closed up at that end of Mitchell’s alley which terminates at Bedon’s alley.” In late February 1837 the City Council formed a committee “to adopt such measures as might be deemed expedient for shutting up Mitchell’s Alley,” and by the end of the year this waterfront escape route was closed.<sup>41</sup>

Legislation, practical measures, or extralegal actions caused the theft and sale of Charleston’s valuable cotton exports to decrease dramatically during the second half of the 1830s. But the lack of complete success provoked additional efforts to control waterfront theft in the 1840s and 1850s. In August 1840 the City Council was informed that there were 1,981 oil lamps lighting the city streets, including hundreds of them on the wharves.<sup>42</sup> But this was not sufficient, in part due to “the large number of Lamps not lighted as specified by the Guard House Book.”<sup>43</sup> So concerned were the city’s wharf owners and merchants, in fact, that in August 1848 they urged the City Council “that the interest, welfare and security of the city would be eminently promoted by lighting the wharves in a more effectual manner than at present.” The existing lamps needed to be

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<sup>41</sup> Petition, ND #5564, SCDAH; McCord, *Statutes at Large*, vol. 7, 146; City Council Minutes, February 28, 1837, CCPL manuscript; City Council Minutes, April 4, 1837, *Charleston Courier*, April 18, 1837.

<sup>42</sup> The Clerk of the Commissioners of Streets and Lamps reported the following waterfront tallies: 106 on East Bay Street; 32 on South Bay Street; 4 on Gibbs’ Wharf; 4 on Dawes’ Wharf; 10 on Magwood’s North and South Wharves; 8 on Exchange Wharf; 11 on Boyce & Co.’s Wharf; 9 on Vanderhorst’s Wharf; 8 on Commercial Wharf; 6 on Southern Wharf; 2 on Price’s Wharf; 8 on Fraser’s Wharf; 2 on Fitzsimons’ Wharf; 1 on Market Wharf; 3 on Holmes’ Wharf; 3 on Williams’ Wharf; 8 on Laurens’ Wharf; and 4 on the street leading to Bennett’s Mills and Wharf. City Council Minutes, August 3, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, August 5, 1840.

<sup>43</sup> City Council Minutes, December 12, 1842, *Charleston Mercury*, December 14, 1842.

“more judiciously distributed,” and with the incorporation of the Charleston Gas Light Company in December 1846, needed to be lighted with gas. Concerned about fires as well as theft, the memorialists reasoned that,

The immense quantity and great value of the merchandize and produce stowed upon the wharves, the value of the real estate and shipping, considered solely in reference to the revenue derived from them, would of themselves offer an adequate motive for this additional protection against incendiarism. But when it is considered that serious depredations upon private property are frequently committed under cover of the darkness and facility of escape offered by the wharves and docks...your petitioners feel persuaded that your Honorable body will not fail to perceive that the public good will be eminently promoted by granting the prayer of this petition.<sup>44</sup>

The City Council concurred with a committee report recommending that this petition be granted, and called upon the Gas Light Company to ascertain the number and location of the city’s street lamps.<sup>45</sup> Street lamps continued to serve as a crime fighting tool throughout the 1850s. On August 3, 1858, wharfinger Edwin C. Holland petitioned the City Council for three additional lamps on Commercial Wharves, and by the August 17 meeting a committee reported that it had visited the waterfront and recommended “that a Gas Lamp be placed at the southeast corner of the new brick store on Commercial Wharves.”<sup>46</sup> In October 1858 the City Council did not object when the Charleston Gas Light Company communicated “their intention to light three additional lamps on Railroad Accommodation wharf,” located in the upper wards of the city on the Cooper River.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Walker, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1844-1854*, 169; City Council Minutes, August 9, 1848, *Southern Patriot*, August 11, 1848.

<sup>45</sup> City Council Minutes, September 26, 1848, *Southern Patriot*, September 28, 1848.

<sup>46</sup> 1855 city directory; 1856 city directory; City Council Minutes, August 3, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, August 5, 1858; City Council Minutes, August 17, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, August 19, 1858; This lamp cost the city \$4.35 to erect. City Council Minutes, December 21, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, December 23, 1858.

To further preclude theft from the wharves, and to ensure that more than just the intermittent pedestrian was monitoring the waterfront at night, merchants and wharf owners increasingly employed night watchmen. Slaves long had been hired to keep an eye on unstored goods at night. Between 1813 and 1822, factor John Schulz – whose patrons included wealthy planters Wade Hampton II and Col. Thomas Taylor – hired dozens of slaves to watch cotton on the wharves.<sup>48</sup> For example, on November 29, 1820, Schulz debited Robert Caldwell’s account 12 cents for a “N[egro] Hire Watching his Cotton 1 Night.” And having 100 bales of cotton in the city in December 1820, Hampton paid \$2.50 for a “Negro hire watchg 3 nights on Wharf.”<sup>49</sup> When the repair and extension of Vanderhorst’s Wharf necessitated the use of expensive palmetto logs during the summer of 1849, Elias Vanderhorst paid three slaves – including one owned by factor Thomas Middleton – “for minding logs at night.”<sup>50</sup>

But given that most Charlestonians thought that slaves themselves were responsible for the vast majority of waterfront theft, hiring slaves to watch the wharves at night was a little like employing the fox to guard the hen house. By 1840 the South Carolina Railroad hired white watchmen to protect property at the company’s depot and

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<sup>47</sup> City Council Minutes, October 26, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, October 28, 1858; These three lamps cost the city \$11.32 to erect. City Council Minutes, December 21, 1858, *Charleston Mercury*, December 23, 1858.

<sup>48</sup> See Receipt Book/Business Ledger, 1812-1815, and Account Book, 1817-1822, John Schulz Account Books, 1812-1824, SCL; 1822 city directory.

<sup>49</sup> Account Book, 1817-1822, November 29, 1820, page 335, and December 9, 1820, page 339, John Schulz Account Books, 1812-1824, SCL.

<sup>50</sup> Wharf Account between Elias Vanderhorst and Vanderhorst’s Wharf, 1849, Wharf Business Papers: Vanderhorst Wharf, 1698-1892, folder 14, Vanderhorst Family Papers, 1689-1942, SCHS; Mr. Middleton’s man was paid 50 cents on July 13, 1849; Mr. Bird’s man (perhaps the slave of ship builder and wharf owner William Bird) was paid 50 cents on July 16; and Mr. Freeman’s man was paid 25 cents on July 16; A receipt in the same folder shows that Elias Vanderhorst paid wharf builder George Just \$800 on October 23, 1849, for repairing and building a new wharf head on Vanderhorst’s Wharf.

workshops, and the 1855, 1856, and 1860 city directories listed white watchmen permanently employed by the railroad.<sup>51</sup> By the 1850s, wharf owners and wharf companies also were hiring full-time white watchmen. In 1855 Patrick Scanlan was a watchman for Union Wharf, while in 1860, P. McWee was employed by North Atlantic Wharf, P. Sheen by Boyce's Wharf, and W. S. Smith by Lafitte's Wharf.<sup>52</sup> The city's waterfront rice and lumber mills too took action to protect the valuable commodities left on their wharves at night; Robb's Rice Mill, Potter's Mills, Bennett's Rice and Saw Mills, and Cannonsborough Wharf and Mill Company all had white watchmen on their employment rolls.<sup>53</sup> A white man also was hired to guard West Point Rice Mills, located at the west end of Calhoun Street on the Ashley River. "[D]uring last night an atrocious murder was committed by 2 Negroes on a Mr. Thomas Morrisson, the Watchman at West Point rice Mills," wrote Jacob Schirmer on June 10, 1849. Schirmer explained that Morrisson had "detected them stealing, when they killed him with a stick and tied him to a Cog Wheel and threw him overboard." The offending slaves – Jimmy belonging to a Mr. Jenkins, and Charles owned by Thomas Bennett Lucas, a factor and commission merchant who purchased West Point Mills in 1853 – were both found guilty and hanged

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<sup>51</sup> South Carolina Railroad Co. Semi-Annual Report, January 1, 1840, Pease Collection, ARC; P. Kelly appears as a railroad watchman in the 1855 city directory, Haron Steimmann in the 1856 city directory, and John Rogers in the 1860 city directory; Goods were stolen from the South Carolina Railroad yard. A commission appointed by the state legislature reported in February 1845 that the company's "Depots and Workshops are exceedingly frail and liable to every danger of accident or malice," adding that "Property and machinery of very great value is exposed." And indeed, six head bags, eleven pairs of silk gloves, and three pairs of leather boots were taken from the depot in 1836, and in 1840 grocer William Prett was accused but acquitted of stealing "2 copper oil cans worth \$20 from the yard of the South Carolina Canal and Rail Road Company." South Carolina Railroad Stockholders Meeting Report, in *Miscellaneous Communication*, ND #169, SCDAH; Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1836-23A, and 1840-19A, SCDAH.

<sup>52</sup> 1855 city directory; 1860 city directory; In addition to enclosing the docks in London, the West India Company employed an armed company of militia to patrol the docks in the nineteenth century. Johnson, "Criminality on the Docks," 730.

<sup>53</sup> 1855 city directory.

in the jail yard on July 6.<sup>54</sup> By the 1850s white watchmen largely had replaced the use of slaves.

Municipal authorities also stepped up the presence of the City Guard on the waterfront. As evidenced by the 1830 case of Enias Prin, Richard Thompson, and William Simpson, the use of guardsmen on the wharves was not new. On July 22, 1834, a member of the City Guard named Hugh McCurley testified that “while on wharf duty this Evening between the hours of Seven & Eight o’clock,” he was assaulted and severely beaten while attempting to stop a fight.<sup>55</sup> Then between 9 and 10 o’clock on the night of November 19, 1835, city guardsman James Thrower witnessed two men fleeing the schooner *John C. Calhoun*. Thrower identified one of these men as Jacob Craig, who along with fellow seaman Isaac Dillon was later convicted for the larceny of \$215 in coins from a chest in the vessel’s cabin.<sup>56</sup>

Posting city guardsmen on the wharves also aimed at preventing cotton and wharf fires, which often were coupled with theft. In fact, the 1806 city ordinance establishing the City Guard directed that “If a fire breaks out at night,” the city guardsmen were “to prevent robberies, disorders, or other mischiefs, until the fire is over.”<sup>57</sup> Charleston suffered many devastating fires during its long history, and arson or incendiary scares –

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<sup>54</sup> Schirmer Diary, June 10, 1849, SCHS; Schirmer noted Lucas’s purchase of West Point Mills at the end of July 1853; Thomas Morrisson was listed in the 1849 city directory as residing at 120 Church Street, but no occupation was given; 1852 city directory; 1855 city directory.

<sup>55</sup> T. M. Harris was indicted for assaulting McCurley on October 6, 1834, but was found not guilty on January 21, 1835. Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1834-38A, SCDAH.

<sup>56</sup> Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1837-5A, SCDAH; James Thrower was listed in the 1840-41 city directory as living at 10 Pitt Street, but no occupation was given.

<sup>57</sup> This ordinance was ratified on October 17, 1806. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 91.

usually thought to be linked to slave insurrections – were a part of life as a white Charlestonian. For example, fires broke out in the city almost every night during the first few months of 1826, causing much alarm.<sup>58</sup> After a catastrophic fire in April 1838 destroyed nearly \$4 million of property, including many commercial buildings on East Bay Street, approximately twenty-five arson attempts were reported in May and June.<sup>59</sup> Jacob Schirmer captured the city’s reaction when he declared on June 1, 1838: “[I]n consequence of continued attempts to set fire, the Intendant has requested the citizens to do [patrol] duty.”<sup>60</sup> But the city’s wharfingers petitioned the state legislature to be exempted from fire guard duty and militia duty, which would “require the Wharfingers to be absent from their respective Wharves.” Organized to supervise and control the city’s bondsmen and to battle slave revolts, foreign invasions, and conflagrations, these patrols generally obliged the service of all able-bodied male citizens. The wharfingers explained “That it frequently happens that goods of considerable value are allowed to remain on the Wharf unstored for a part and often for the whole of a day,” and that during fire alarms or other disturbances “it is the duty of the Wharfingers to be personally on the Wharfs of which they have charge for the protection of all property there at the time being.” Despite these seemingly reasonable arguments, a legislative committee rejected the wharfingers’ petition, thus leaving waterfront goods unsecured during fires.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 205-6.

<sup>59</sup> Walter Edgar, ed., *South Carolina Encyclopedia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 113; Walter Fraser claims reports the damage at approximately \$3 million. Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 216-7.

<sup>60</sup> Schirmer Diary, June 1, 1838, SCHS; Schirmer added on June 7, 1838, that the community was still in great excitement. Schirmer Diary, June 7, 1838; Though the term “Intendant” officially was replaced with “Mayor” in 1836, it was still used by many in the later 1830s.

Indeed, slaves habitually set fires to protest their enslavement, wreck havoc, and – according to anxious white Charlestonians – divert attention from insurrectionary attempts. But fires also long were used to aid the theft of goods from the waterfront. As early as 1778 the South Carolina General Assembly passed an act stating “That if any wicked or evil-minded person, taking advantage of the confusion and sad calamity of fire, shall rob, plunder, purloin, embezzle, convey away, or conceal any goods, wares, merchandizes or other effects...and being thereof duly convicted at the Court of General Sessions, shall be adjudged to stand in the pillory, and forfeit four times the value of such goods, wares, merchandizes or other effects, so stolen and embezzled.”<sup>62</sup> But many thieves remained undeterred. On June 22, 1786, merchant Robert Stewart described to his business partner Alexander Nesbitt how a fire had “Distroyed a most Immense property” valued at £70,000-£80,000, including the firm’s waterfront stores, furniture, and an attached dwelling house. Stewart explained that he had saved the account books and papers and that about 300 barrels of flour were taken “out of the Store before it was on fire, but the Loss sustained by Stealing, the Barrels bursting,” and water damage from the fire engines “has been considerable.”<sup>63</sup> In a like manner, Schirmer noted in September 1842 that during a blaze on nearby Prioleau’s Range “the counting house of H. & Lowndes on Crafts Wharf was broken open.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Petition, 1838 #117, SCDAH; Committee Report, 1838 #33, SCDAH; Committee Report, 1838 #281, SCDAH.

<sup>62</sup> Though this act focused on goods stolen from those “distresses inhabitants, whose houses are on fire, or are endangered thereby, and do remove their goods and effects for fear of fire,” it is reasonable to deduce that the law also applied to those who stole from the wharves during fires. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 413.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Morris Papers, June 22, 1786, SCL.



Already labeled as incendiaries, blacks were blamed for theft during conflagrations as well. In April 1837 municipal officials adopted regulations that prohibited black women and children from attending fires under pain of corporal punishment, and stated that “Negro men or other persons of color shall not be allowed to remain within the line of operations, unless actually employed” fighting the fires.<sup>65</sup> After the 1838 fire, Mayor Henry L. Pinckney announced that “numerous articles of merchandize, taken from Negroes during the late fire, and believed to have been stolen, have been deposited at the Main Guard House.”<sup>66</sup> Then in August 1840 the city’s aldermen debated whether the slaves attached to the fire department ought to have uniforms to “distinguish them from that class of idle negroes who frequent fires with no other object but that of plunder.”<sup>67</sup> In May 1841 another ordinance was passed barring “all slaves and free persons of color, not attached to any of the Fire Engines...or otherwise engaged in the Fire Department, nor actually removing, saving or guarding the property of his or her owner or employer” from attending fires. It furthermore was enacted that slaves and free blacks who were attached to the fire department “shall be distinguished by a Fire Badge...which they shall be required to wear at all times of

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<sup>64</sup> Schirmer Diary, September 25, 1842, SCHS; Schirmer also noted on February 15, 1840: “Robbery – last night McCartney & Gordon’s store broken open, and robbed of \$500; the villains then set fire to the Desk, but it was discovered before it got ahead.” This demonstrates that robbers also used fire to cover up evidence of theft.

<sup>65</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 70; This regulation was renewed in October 1852. See Walker, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1844-1854*, 134.

<sup>66</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, April 30, 1838.

<sup>67</sup> City Council Minutes, August 2, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, August 4, 1840; In June 1815 the City Council passed an ordinance forming the Board of Fire Masters, which stipulated that fire companies were to “be formed for the express purpose of removing the goods and effects of the citizens which shall be endangered by the fire, to such places of safety as are herein directed,” and that “each and every member of the said companies shall wear some distinguishing mark.” Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 66.

fire.”<sup>68</sup> And then, at a meeting on August 23, 1841, the City Council concurred with a special committee’s recommendation that during fires mounted patrols prevent any property from being “conveyed out of the city in boats or through streets leading beyond the bounds of the city, unless the property is in charge of some known responsible white person.”<sup>69</sup> While all blacks again were assumed thieves, one wonders whether native whites like Charles Smally or Enias Prin would have been deemed “responsible.”

In the meantime, after a large fire destroyed 800 bales of cotton and a building used as a counting house on Fraser’s Wharf in early March 1845, Jacob Schirmer remarked that the “City Council & Wharf Owners have had a Meeting and have increased the Guards and offered a Reward of 500 Dollars” for the capture of the supposed incendiary.<sup>70</sup> The announcement of this meeting in the *Southern Patriot* read: “Wharf holders, are requested to assemble THIS AFTERNOON, at 5 o’clock, P.M. at the Reading Room for the purpose of making arrangements to organize an efficient Wharf Watch.”<sup>71</sup> Unlike the appeals of white waterfront workers for relief from slaves hiring out their own time, the wealthy and influential wharf owners evidently got what they wanted. At the end of the fiscal year the mayor and the Committee on Accounts – which included wharf owner Otis Mills and merchant Casmier Patrick – reported that the city

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<sup>68</sup> Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 78.

<sup>69</sup> City Council Minutes, August 23, 1841, *Southern Patriot*, August 25, 1841; Concerned Charlestonians even formed a “Society for the Protection of Property at Fires,” which in the early 1850s was led by wharf owner William Bird and Port Warden and factor L. A. Edmondston; 1852 city directory, 159.

<sup>70</sup> Schirmer Diary, March 5, 1845, SCHS.

<sup>71</sup> Readers also were warned not “to pick up or introduce into the City of Charleston, any of the Cotton thrown into the harbor by the order of the Fire Department on the morning of 5th inst.” *Southern Patriot*, March 5, 1845; The journal of the schooner *Ganges* noted on March 5, 1845: “Lay at anchor in South bay, picked up some loose Cotton which was thrown into the river by the fire Companies in order to extinguish a fire upon one of the wharves.” Journal of the Schooner *Ganges*, March 5, 1845, CRCMS.

spent \$220 for “the temporary increase of the City Guard for special duty on the wharves, during the accumulation and pending the shipment of Cotton.”<sup>72</sup>

Nor was this a one-time expenditure. A special committee reported to the City Council in February 1847 that in addition to the over \$4,000 paid out of the city’s coffers for fighting cotton fires on the waterfront, the protection of the property piled on the open wharves “required seven men of the guard detailed specially for this duty,” costing the city an additional \$1,300 annually. These guardsmen were said to report to their posts at twilight, which could be as early as 5 o’clock during the peak commercial season, and remain there until relieved at around half past nine at night, at which time they reported to the Guard House unless impelled to return to the wharves by an emergency.<sup>73</sup> This committee had been appointed “to enquire into and report on the expediency of passing an ordinance to prohibit the piling of Bales of Cotton on the wharves,” which presumably would reduce the need for and cost of the wharf guard.<sup>74</sup> Calling for “safeguards against exposure to weather, to plunder and to fire,” the committee claimed that there was more than ample warehouse space to store all of the cotton on the waterfront, and insisted that

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<sup>72</sup> 1840-41 city directory; City Council Minutes, August 26, 1845, *Southern Patriot*, August 28, 1845.

<sup>73</sup> City Council Minutes, February 15, 1847, *Southern Patriot*, February 16, 1847; Charleston police records reveal that these wharf patrols persisted into the 1850s. On February 26, 1856, for instance, Private Lyans “Could not be found on Post on Sunday Evenings Wharf Duty on Southern & Commercial Wharves between Bells and not returning to the Guard House.” On the same day, Private Sullivan was caught “Lying a Sleep on post Atlantic Wharf on a Bale of Cotton at 3/4 past 10 o’clock P.M.” And on March 13, 1856, Private Daly “Could not be found on his Post No. 7 Frazers Wharf near 4 o’clock A.M.” All three guardsmen were fined \$3, and Private Sullivan was dismissed from duty at his own request. Charleston Police Records, February 26, 1856, and March 13, 1856, CLS.

<sup>74</sup> City Council Minutes, February 15, 1847, *Southern Patriot*, February 16, 1847; An ordinance ratified on August 15, 1844, prohibited persons from piling cotton on any lot or within any building not made of brick, but only to the west of East Bay Street and south of Boundary Street (later renamed Calhoun Street). Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 271-2.

banning the piling of cotton on the open wharves would “assure to the wharf interests increased security.”<sup>75</sup>

But the city’s wharf owners preferred the status quo regarding storage. In a subsequent petition to the City Council, they acknowledged “the frequent cases in which wharf owners are made to pay for theft, or injury from exposure to the weather.” Nonetheless they argued that the city’s intelligent and respectable class of factors offered “a surer safeguard against the evils of a temporary exposure of [the planters’] property, than can be provided by the legislation of Council.” The petitioners reasoned that if cotton was stored in warehouses rather than on the open wharves it actually would become more difficult to detect arsonists – not to mention thieves – who would be hidden from “the eye of the night watch, and that of every accidental passer by.”<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, the wharf owners claimed that “The great increase of labor and expense that would attend the incessant turning into store, and out again, of every parcel of Cotton,” not only “would be a waste of labor and a useless expenditure of money,” but also would make the wharf business “altogether unprofitable.” To ensure that such a costly ordinance would not be passed, the wharf owners and merchants even threatened to move their lucrative commercial trade to wharves north of the city and thus out of reach of the city’s

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<sup>75</sup> The committee maintained that “there is storage room on our wharves sufficient for 100,000 bales of Cotton.” City Council Minutes, February 15, 1847, *Southern Patriot*, February 16, 1847.

<sup>76</sup> In January 1859 the *Savannah Republican* reported the following incident: “Another Burglary. – The cotton warehouse adjoining the stables of Messrs. Freeman and Henderson, on the Bay, was broken into on the lane, Saturday night. A square bale of cotton was cut open and the contents were being repacked by the burglars into a round bale, when the noise attracted the attention of some persons in the stables, who, upon seeing what was going on, gave the rascals, who proved to be two negroes, chase; but without success. They left in such a hurry that a hat and coat remained behind. Bad white men are at the bottom of these thefts, as negroes cannot dispose of cotton without their assistance. Ships should refuse to carry any round bales of Upland cotton without it is sent by some responsible party known to be engaged in the purchase or sale of cotton.” *Savannah Republican* quoted in *Charleston Mercury*, January 5, 1859.

regulations and tax collectors.<sup>77</sup> Not surprisingly, the City Council did not approve a measure prohibiting the piling of cotton on the open wharves.

Unwilling to foot the bill to better protect waterfront property, Charleston's commercial community nonetheless persisted in its calls for an increased security presence on the wharves. In September 1847 nearly 150 Charlestonians – including wharf owners James Gadsden and Charles Edmondston, wharfingers Robert Aldrich and F. P. Elford, merchant Charles T. Mitchell, and rigger and future stevedore John Torrent – called on the City Council to employ a Police Guard “whose whole time should be at the command of the City.” In contrast to the current system, under which guardsmen typically worked daytime jobs and then patrolled for the guard at night, the petitioners preferred “an efficient body of men ready for service who had not been exhausted by the labours of the preceding day.” And since by the late 1840s significant numbers of immigrant Irishmen were beginning to fill the ranks of the guard – many of whom worked shoulder to shoulder with black slaves on the city's docks – it was suggested that “The men who would act as watchmen at night would be entirely separated from contact or trading with the negroes, and would have no inducement to screen them from punishment.” Ostensibly then, it was assumed that those who worked with or otherwise interacted with slaves during the day were united by crime rather than separated by race,

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<sup>77</sup> The wharf owners also claimed that there was only a storage capacity for 55,000 bales; that wet cotton not allowed to dry on the open wharf and instead packed away in a warehouse would be subject to “spontaneous combustion”; and that the proposed prohibition would interfere with free trade and drive business to Charleston's commercial rivals. As for the labor saved by not having to put cotton bales into storage, the wharf owners wrote: “the saving of labor and expense is great of not putting into store, (perhaps hoisting into the second or third story,) again turning out and restoring large parcels of Cotton for the several purposes of drying in case of need, sampling and weighing...It also frequently occurs, that much larger quantities of Cotton are placed alongside of vessels than can, from unforeseen causes, be put on shipboard for several days after. These parcels of Cotton, under the new regulation, would have to be drayed away again, and replaced in store at a heavy and useless expense, to be again delivered and reconveyed to the ship on the following day.” City Council Minutes, March 5, 1847, *Southern Patriot*, March 6, 1847.

and were turning a blind eye to theft, pilferage, and other transgressions committed by their fellow workers at night.<sup>78</sup>

Meanwhile, the heightened vigilance on the wharves continued to pay dividends. In May 1844, for example, the City Council received a petition from John Kennedy, a member of the City Guard, requesting the twenty-dollar reward for “detecting a person in the commission of a robbery on Fraser’s wharf, under an ordinance of January 1818.”<sup>79</sup> And the *Charleston Mercury* reported in February 1856 that “Jim, a colored [sic] boy, the property of Mr. Magrath” – an Irish merchant who in 1850 owned four male slaves in Charleston, some of whom were likely employed assisting Magrath on the waterfront – “was arrested by Officer Levy, for stealing two large sample baskets of cotton.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> City Council Minutes, September 29, 1847, *Southern Patriot*, September 30, 1847; The City Guard, first established in October 1806, primarily served from evening until morning and on weekends and holidays. As of March 1836 it consisted of 110 officers and guardsmen. An ordinance in March 1846 established and organized a City Police, with 109 officers and policemen, but only called for 6 full-time officers. In June 1848 the name was changed back to the City Guard, with 130 officers and guardsmen. Finally, under the leadership of Mayor William Porcher Miles in the 1850s, a full-time police force was organized consisting in large part of Irish immigrants. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 93, 100; Walker, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1844-1854*, 25-7, 60; For a petition from citizens concerned about the City Guard being mostly composed of foreigners thought to be lacking in character and unconcerned with the interests of the community, see City Council Minutes, December 12, 1842, *Charleston Mercury*, December 14, 1842.

<sup>79</sup> City Council Minutes, May 27, 1844, *Southern Patriot*, May 28, 1844; An ordinance ratified on January 31, 1818, indeed stated that “whenever any member of the City Guard shall detect, and prove to conviction, any person or persons breaking into and opening the doors of any house or building, or getting into the same by any means for the purpose of robbing or in any wise injuring the same, or the property therein,” the guardsman was to receive a reward of no more than \$20 for every such detection. But rejecting Kennedy’s request without an explanation, the City Council apparently did not consider theft from an open wharf as a robbery thus defined in the 1818 ordinance. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 97.

<sup>80</sup> Originally in the Mayor’s Court, “The case was turned over to Magistrate Dingle for investigation.” Officer Levy may have been either police officer Moses E. Levy (who appeared in the 1835 case of John and Mary Daniels), or Orlando Levy, a second lieutenant in the guard. Regardless, Levy regularly patrolled the wharves. On February 1, 1856, it was reported that “Officer Levy arrested Elihu Miller for severely beating Charles Mawholland, the Mate of a schooner lying at Commercial wharf,” and that “Henry Schnippel was arrested by Officer Levy for attempting to kidnap Charles Busing, a seaman on board the schooner Joseph Webster, Capt. Bennett, lying at Boyce’s Wharf.” *Charleston Mercury*, February 14, 1856; *Charleston Mercury*, February 1, 1856; 1855 city directory; In August 1865 Elias Vanderhorst described

Despite the increased surveillance, these cases also demonstrate that the theft of cotton from the wharves did not cease entirely.

The crackdown on the illicit cotton trade begun in the mid-1830s did result in a significant decline in the theft of cotton from the wharves.<sup>81</sup> But shop keepers were more than willing to trade in other stolen goods. In May 1837, for instance, Market Street grocer Emanuel Canter colluded with Custom House officer George Wood to steal a hogshead containing 144 canisters of fresh preserved salmon.<sup>82</sup> The *Charleston Mercury* proclaimed on January 22, 1838: “STOPPED – From a Negro last evening, one barrel of MOLASSES.” The owner of the stolen cask was instructed to apply for its return at 5 Elliott Street, just steps away from the wharves.<sup>83</sup> And Schirmer noted in December 1841 that on the “night of [the] 23rd a store on Boyce’s Wharf was broken open and several Bags of Coffee stole.”<sup>84</sup>

Indeed, the continuation of worker pilferage, that is, the stealthy and habitual theft of small quantities of goods by those laboring on the waterfront, prompted South Carolinians Thomas Pinckney and Edward R. Laurens to advocate replacing enslaved dock workers with free white laborers. And there was no shortage of evidence that black workers pilfered. In April 1840 Marshall Prendergast reported arresting two slaves, one for stealing corn from on board a vessel and the other for taking the corn to a shop at the

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the theft of three cotton bales from a building on Vanderhorst Wharf. Wharf Business Papers: Vanderhorst Wharf, 1698-1892, folder 15, Vanderhorst Family Papers, 1689-1942, SCHS.

<sup>81</sup> There is a gap in the extant Court of General Sessions Indictment records at SCDAH from 1841-1867. But other sources utilized for this study nonetheless show a significant decrease in the cases of cotton theft from the wharves after 1835.

<sup>82</sup> 1837-38 city directory; Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1837-21A, SCDAH.

<sup>83</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, January 22, 1838.

<sup>84</sup> Schirmer Diary, December 20, 1841, SCHS.

corner of East Bay and Atlantic streets. Both slaves were tried and convicted by a Court of Magistrates and Freeholders, while the white shop keeper was prosecuted for receiving the stolen corn.<sup>85</sup> And a slave named Tom owned by Otis Mills – the proprietor of Atlantic Wharves and Otis Mills & Co., which owned fifteen slave wharf hands in 1862 – was arrested by the City Guard “For stealing a lot of Rope and offering the same for sale,” on January 28, 1862.<sup>86</sup>

Warehousemen, cotton weighers, and those who were hired to paint identifying marks on cotton bales had only to slip a handful of loose cotton into their pockets while merchants, factors, and wharfingers were busy elsewhere. Noted in the account book of factors Ker Boyce & Co. on January 17, 1837, was “125 lbs. cotton Robbed from 1 B[ale] C[otton].”<sup>87</sup> Wharf owners complained that “after the Cotton is weighed and before it is shipped the weights have fallen short...repeatedly.”<sup>88</sup> In 1849 the City Council passed an ordinance that deemed it illegal “to pack, bale up, or otherwise prepare for sale” loose cotton without having received a license, or for anyone (whether licensed or not) from transporting loose cotton to any location west of East Bay Street “unless the same be in original packages, or has been packed at a licensed press.” Indicative of the severity of the pilferage problem, wrongdoers could be fined \$1,000 for each violation. Furthermore, “If any person or persons, within the City, shall steal loose Cotton, or shall

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<sup>85</sup> City Council Minutes, April 27, 1840, *Charleston Mercury*, April 30, 1840.

<sup>86</sup> Charleston Police Records, January 28, 1862, CLS; In 1850 Otis Mills owned sixty-four slaves in Charleston, fifty of whom were adult males. Otis Mills & Co. owned eighteen slaves in 1860, sixteen in 1861, fifteen in 1862, and fifteen in 1863. In addition, Mills’s grain merchant company, Mills, Beach, & Co., owned thirteen slaves in 1860, fourteen in 1861, and twelve in 1863; See 1850 U.S. Census Slave Schedules; and Charleston Tax Records, 1860-1865, CLS.

<sup>87</sup> At 17 cents per pound, this purloined cotton afforded the thief with \$21.25 worth of cash or traded goods. K. Boyce & Company Account Book, January 17, 1837, page 114, SCHS.

<sup>88</sup> Petition, ND #1895, SCDAH.



buy or receive stolen loose Cotton, knowing the same to be stolen,” the offender – if white or a free person of color – was to be fined \$250, whereas slaves were to “be arrested and dealt with according to law.” And finally, licensed cotton presses were to place a brand and number on every bale of cotton, with a one hundred-dollar fine to be doled out to anyone caught altering, erasing, or obliterating such marks.<sup>89</sup>

Cotton menders also had ample occasion to pilfer loose cotton. Paid to stuff protruding cotton back into the bale before sewing up the torn bagging, it was not difficult for cotton menders to pilfer small amounts of cotton from each bale.<sup>90</sup> An ordinance ratified by the City Council in September 1855 sought to remedy this very behavior. Entitled “An Ordinance to Prevent Depredations upon Cotton,” this edict explicitly decreed that “it shall not be lawful for any mender or menders of cotton bags or cotton bales, to carry with him, her or them, any basket, bag or other vehicle, for the purpose of taking away...any sample or samples of cotton, or any loose cotton, from any bags or bales they may be employed to mend.” The ordinance went on to outlaw menders from taking or pulling out cotton from any bag or bale, unless the cotton was damaged and the mender was directed to pick it out by the owner. “For the purpose of detecting and reporting offenders,” the mayor was to assign a police officer “who shall

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<sup>89</sup> “An Ordinance to regulate the granting of licenses for packing loose cotton, to prevent depredations upon the same, and for other purposes therein mentioned,” was ratified on March 27, 1849. Walker, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1844-1854*, 72-3; Cotton sometimes disappeared from cotton presses. On December 24, 1859, commission merchant Charles T. Mitchell made an entry of \$46.64 in his cash book “for 1 Bale of Cotton Short from Union press & to be deducted from their Bill.” Less than a year later, Charles O. Witte recorded \$52.63 in cash “collected from Union Press for 1 Bale missing.”; Cash Book, 1856-1865, December 24, 1859, page 106, Charles T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS; Cash Book, 1851-1866, November 1, 1860, Charles O. Witte Estate Records, 1851-1871, SCHS.

<sup>90</sup> Occasionally, when planters desired that their cotton be guarded on the wharves at night, Charleston factors hired the same man to both repair and guard the cotton, as when John Schulz paid a hired slave \$5 to mend and watch 100 bales owned by Wade Hampton on February 28, 1817. Account Book, 1817-1822, February 28, 1817, page 22, John Schulz Account Books, 1812-1824, SCL.

keep watch on and along the wharves of the city, at least three hours each day,” from October 1 through June 1. And to keep pilfering menders on their toes, this officer was to “change his hours of watch from time to time, for the more effectual enforcement of his duty.” White cotton menders caught violating this ordinance were to be fined \$50, whereas free black and slave menders were fined only \$25, but if they failed to pay were to receive no less than twenty-five lashes. Of course, police patrols and the threat of fines and corporal punishment could not deter all cotton bandits. The ordinance therefore declared it illegal for any licensed cotton packer to purchase any loose or sample cotton from anyone other than a factor, shipping merchant, or the head clerk or salesmen of such persons.<sup>91</sup>

Sometimes the bagging was so badly damaged it could not be mended and the entire bale had to be repacked. In 1817 merchant James Adger wrote to upcountry planter William Smith informing him that when his thirty-eight bales of cotton arrived in Charleston “the bagging of all of them [was] injured very much and nearly rotten,” and that two of the bales “were wet and the bagging so tender they could not be mended” and had to be repacked. Similarly, on June 25, 1817, Adger wrote to Messrs. Campbell and Cumming in Savannah that their cotton on the schooner *Harvest* “was generally in bad order” and that “there was one Bale below deck that was so bad it must be repacked.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Horsey, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1854-1859*, 16; The City Council also passed an ordinance in March 1858 to license and regulate second hand or junk shops, several sections of which seemed to be aimed at preventing the traffic of stolen goods. One section, for instance, declared that shops were only to be kept open between sunrise and sunset, and were subject to police inspection at any time. Another stipulated that keepers of such shops were not permitted to trade with minors, apprentices, slaves, or free blacks without the permission of their guardians or owners. Horsey, 40-1.

<sup>92</sup> James Adger Letterbook, 1817-1819, March 13, 1817, and June 25, 1817, SCL; Also, in June 1818 William Meyer paid for “repacking 4 Bales & putting them into 3.” See Timothy Lee Business Journal, June 13, 1818, page 99, SCL.

Such cases would have presented the laborers hired to repack or mend these damaged bales the occasion to pilfer some of the cotton; but the stevedores and other dock workers in the *Harvest's* hold also would have had ample and often unsupervised access.<sup>93</sup>

Also essentially unsupervised, draymen and carters hauled loosely wrapped bales of cotton and other goods to and from the waterfront. Already mentioned were the cases of the slave draymen who assisted in the theft of Michael Lazarus's rice from Prioleau's Wharf in 1823, and the slave carter owned by Henry and John Horlbeck who stole 300 bricks from Mey's Wharf in 1826. But transportation workers also pilfered smaller amounts of goods. "The slave Gadsden," for instance, "was hired as a drayman by...the agent of a line of vessels between New York and Charleston, to transport goods and merchandise from the vessels to the Rail Road depot." Thus entrusted with the conveyance of valuable goods from New York and destined for wealthy South Carolina planters, Gadsden – like the slave drayman and porters who transported Thomas Napier's furniture in 1857 – seized on this opportunity to supplement his income. According to court records, "He broke open two boxes of hats and carried part of the contents" to a grocer named Tiedeman, who was later found guilty of receiving the stolen hats.<sup>94</sup>

No doubt, hundreds of petty pilferers remained undetected. Only the careless or unlucky were caught and prosecuted. For every documented loss, scores, perhaps hundreds, of items disappeared from the docks without a trace; in the vast majority of pilferage cases, a missing item was the only evidence of the illicit act. Merchant James

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<sup>93</sup> Gerald Mars's study of waterfront pilferage in St. Johns, Newfoundland, indeed found that most worker theft and pilferage took place in ships' holds rather than on the open docks or in waterfront warehouses. Gerald Mars, "Dock Pilferage," in Paul Rock and Mary McIntosh, eds., *Deviance and Social Control* (London: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1974), 211, 217-8.

<sup>94</sup> Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, vol. 2, 415; The 1849 city directory listed J. F. Tiedeman as a grocer on Elizabeth Street, and Otto Tiedeman as a grocer on Boundary Street (later Calhoun Street).

Lloyd Parker, who routinely produced statements “showing the final disposition of the Goods, and accounting for the contents and amount of every package received,” noted in January 1808 that twelve pair of silk hose, one hair band, and one flower were all missing from a shipment.<sup>95</sup> In late February 1857, John Fraser & Co. paid East Bay Street grocer James Bancroft Jr. \$11.38 to cover the cost of a cask containing seven dozen pints of porter “Short delivered” from the vessel *Gondar*.<sup>96</sup> Two and a half years later, the agents of the *Ann & Susan* paid Bancroft 84 cents “for 6 Bottles Ale taken out of one of the casks,” which was a portion of the 114 bottles purchased by the store keeper.<sup>97</sup>

In one major case of waterfront pilferage, Otis Mills was informed on November 3, 1857, that commission merchants Cay, Montaner & Co. intended to hold him responsible for the disappearance of sugar “occasioned since [its] deposit in your warehouses” on Atlantic Wharves.<sup>98</sup> Hauled before the city’s Chamber of Commerce, Otis Mills & Co. acknowledged that they owned the storehouse in which were stored 148 hogsheads of sugar belonging to Cay, Montaner & Co. They neither admitted nor denied “that several of [the] said hogsheads have been robbed of their contents while in [the] said store, as alleged,” but they did reject the charge that they were liable for any missing sugar.<sup>99</sup> Cay, Montaner & Co., on the other hand, alleged that between September 11,

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<sup>95</sup> James Lloyd Parker Papers, January 5, 1808, SCL.

<sup>96</sup> Journal, 1850-1858, February 28, 1857, page 424, Charles T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS.

<sup>97</sup> Cash Book, 1856-1865, July 19, 1859, page 92, Charles T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS.

<sup>98</sup> James B. Campbell Legal Case Papers: Otis Mills Litigation/Wharf Litigation (Land), 1856-1860, November 3, 1857, James Butler Campbell Papers, 1814-1897, SCHS.

<sup>99</sup> “Before the Chamber of Commerce. Between Messrs. Cay, Montaner & Co., Claimants, and Messrs. O. Mills & Co., Respondents. Claims for loss of Sugar stole while in the Warehouse of Respondents, on Atlantic Wharf,” in James B. Campbell Legal Case Papers: Otis Mills Litigation/Wharf Litigation (Land), 1856-1860, James Butler Campbell Papers, 1814-1897, SCHS.

1857, when the sugar was deposited in Otis Mills & Co.'s warehouse, and December 18, "divers quantities were at divers times abstracted from the warehouse, (by what means it is not for us to enquire)." But Cay and Montaner contended that "due diligence was not used" by Mills & Co., since "the locks to the doors of the warehouse were not secure, and the windows not properly fastened." After the first pilferage of sugar was discovered, "the insecure condition of the warehouse was brought to the attention of [the] respondents by Mr. Gordon, a Custom House inspector, and soon after the locks were changed for others, and further measures of precaution taken by Respondents."<sup>100</sup> But despite such preventative measures, Cay, Montaner & Co. claimed that the equivalent of "the contents of five hogsheads valued at \$500, were missing."<sup>101</sup> Otis Mills & Co. owned numerous slaves who were variously employed on Atlantic Wharves, and most or all would have had access to the company's warehouses where this sugar was stored and opportunities to embezzle it.<sup>102</sup>

Though Charlestonians assumed blacks the culprits of waterfront plunder, court records reveal pilferage by white waterfront workers as well. Stevedore Thomas Coffey pleaded guilty to the petit larceny of goods belonging to grocer Gustavus Follin in

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<sup>100</sup> "Before the Chamber of Commerce. Between Messrs. Cay, Montaner & Co., Claimants, and Messrs. O. Mills & Co., Respondents. Claim for damages sustained by reason of the loss of certain sugar, while stored with Respondents," in James B. Campbell Legal Case Papers: Otis Mills Litigation/Wharf Litigation (Land), 1856-1860, James Butler Campbell Papers, 1814-1897, SCHS.

<sup>101</sup> Cay, Montaner & Co. asked the Chamber of Commerce arbitrators for an award of \$234.50, being the \$500 for the value of the missing sugar less the cost for storage and weighing owed to Otis Mills & Co. The decision of the Chamber of Commerce is unknown. "Before the Chamber of Commerce. Between Messrs. Cay, Montaner & Co., Claimants, and Messrs. O. Mills & Co., Respondents. Claim for damages sustained by reason of the loss of certain sugar, while stored with Respondents," in James B. Campbell Legal Case Papers: Otis Mills Litigation/Wharf Litigation (Land), 1856-1860, James Butler Campbell Papers, 1814-1897, SCHS.

<sup>102</sup> Charleston Tax Records, 1860-1865, CLS; Also see Otis Mills & Co. in the 1855, 1859, and 1860 city directories, and in Ward Books, 1852-1856, CCPL.

January 1861, and was sentenced to one week in jail and five stripes.<sup>103</sup> In 1863 merchant and former Southern Wharf factor Peter C. Gaillard accused Irish drayman Edward Reynolds and Irish laborers Patrick Dunovant and James Mooney of larceny. Only Dunovant – who probably worked on the city’s docks – was found guilty and was punished with fifty lashes, a fine, and imprisonment.<sup>104</sup> Drayman William Murray also was indicted and found guilty of larceny, an offense serious enough for the judge to direct that “the Defendant be imprisoned Twelve months, and receive at the Public Market, on the bare back...Twenty lashes, and pay a fine of One Hundred Dollars.”<sup>105</sup> Though the public whipping of white men was increasingly rare in antebellum Charleston, working-class immigrants and especially Irishmen – already considered by some as not entirely white – not only competed with and worked alongside slaves but also sometimes were treated like them.

Just as waterfront workers, black and white, helped themselves to pocketfuls of cotton, sugar, and other easily concealed merchandise, they sometimes intentionally damaged goods and broke open barrels to gain access and enable pilferage. The logbook of the fittingly named ship *Robin Hood* reveals that on February 9, 1833, all of the

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<sup>103</sup> Court of General Sessions, Criminal Journals, Charleston District, vol. 2 (1860-1864), 125, 129, 167; Also see Court of General Sessions, Criminal Dockets, Charleston District, 1859-1863, January 1861 term, SCDAH; “Thomas Coffey” was listed as a stevedore in the 1859 directory. “Thomas Coffee” also was listed in the 1850 U.S. Census as a thirty-eight-year-old Irish laborer, and in the 1860 U.S. Census as a fifty-five-year-old Irish laborer; Follin appeared in the 1855 city directory and the 1860 U.S. Census.

<sup>104</sup> Court of General Sessions, Criminal Journals, Charleston District, vol. 2 (1860-1864), 433, 441, 463, SCDAH; Also see Court of General Sessions, Criminal Dockets, Charleston District, 1859-1863, June 1863 term, SCDAH; Reynolds was simultaneously accused by F. G. Behre of receiving stolen goods; Reynolds was listed as a drayman in the 1850 U.S. Census and as owning or working at a livery stable in the 1855 city directory; 1860 U.S. Census; 1859 city directory.

<sup>105</sup> Court of General Sessions, Criminal Journals, Charleston District, vol. 1 (1857-1860), 160, 167, 198, SCDAH; 1859 city directory.

vessel's crew was employed discharging ballast and loading 1,790 bushels of rough rice. There was so much work to be done, in fact, that the captain "hired 4 negroes to work this day." Likely employed stowing the bushels of rice in the ship's hold, these hired slaves apparently worked up an appetite and "broached 1 barrel of pork."<sup>106</sup> In 1853 Charleston grocer John H. Graver brought suit against the steamer *Palmetto* because only four of the five barrels of bacon shipped from Baltimore and consigned to Graver were delivered. The *Palmetto's* agents averred that when the barrel in question was unloaded it "was found to be so badly broken, as not to be able to hold the Bacon." The defendants went on to explain that all of the bacon was taken out of the broken barrel, packed into a new cask, and delivered to the consignee Mr. Graver. But upon receiving this fifth barrel, Graver protested that it lacked the proper marks and was "rancid [*sic*] and bad, inferior in quality, and of a smaller sized flitch than that in the other four casks."<sup>107</sup> Though possible that the barrel of bacon was damaged while en route from Baltimore, it is equally feasible that stevedores and dock hands engaged in discharging this tasty commodity from the hold broke open the cask and pilfered a portion of the otherwise rarely enjoyed meat. Graver pointed out, after all, that some of the bacon seemed to be missing from this later arriving barrel. Workers similarly may have broken bottles and barrels of beer intentionally. In February 1861 the owners of the *Samoset* paid the grocer Bancroft \$5 for breakage on casks of ale.<sup>108</sup> Dock workers worldwide have gone to great

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<sup>106</sup> Logbook of the Ship *Robin Hood*, February 9, 1833, CRCMS.

<sup>107</sup> John H. Graver vs. The Steamer *Palmetto*, Admiralty Minute Book, District of South Carolina, vol. 5 (1843-1857), NASER.

<sup>108</sup> Cash Book, 1856-1865, February 16, 1861, page 138, Charles T. Mitchell Account Books, 1850-1862, CLS; According to historian Linda Cooke Johnson, waterfront managers "counted a certain quantity of 'spillage' as part of the cost of transport," and that "in the rice transport of eighteenth-century China, a routine addition of 30 to 40 per cent was required to compensate for spoilage en route and 'spillage'.

lengths to obtain a free drink, a perennial target of pilferage. One British ship captain even reported that after longshoremen in St. Johns, Newfoundland, intentionally broke several bottles of whiskey, “Almost before the damned crate was down they were there with cups and cans and what-have-you.”<sup>109</sup> And in New York, “The wharves spawned...[a] breed whose chief concern was to find a shady secluded spot on the lee side of a hogshead of rum, away from the eye of the wharfinger, insert a straw, and drink themselves into insensibility.”<sup>110</sup>

So clearly, not all pilfered goods were sold by the perpetrators, but neither were they necessarily eaten or drunk. Clothing, for instance, was expensive and thus sometimes stolen for personal use. It was not uncommon for runaway advertisements to mention that slaves took extra garments when they absconded. John Place notified readers of the *Gazette of the State of South-Carolina* on January 8, 1784, that his twenty-four-year-old slave Bow – predictably described as being bow legged – “has sundry pieces of wearing apparel with him, which he stole from the Schooner Britain.”<sup>111</sup> A dock worker named Billy ran away with an “abundance of clothing” in May 1825.<sup>112</sup>

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referring to pilferage by workers.” See Johnson, “Criminality on the Docks,” 724, note 8; Also, the rules of the Charleston Chamber of Commerce prescribed a standard “Allowance for Leakage and Breakage,” which stated: “Two per cent on the gauge on all merchandise paying duty by the gallon, contained in casks. Ten per cent. on all beer, ale, and porter in bottles, and five per cent. on all other liquors in bottles, to be deducted from the invoice quantity, in lieu of breakage; or it shall be lawful to compute the duties on the actual quantity, by tale, at the option of the importer, *at the time of entry*.” “New Tariff Amended, or Duties Payable on Goods, Wares & Merchandize Imported into the United States of America: Likewise the Rates of Tonnage, Drawback, Tares, &c.” (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1823), 24.

<sup>109</sup> Mars, “Dock Pilferage,” 218; For additional examples and details regarding dock workers intentionally breaking and damaging goods, see Mars, 215-9.

<sup>110</sup> Albion, *Rise of New York Port*, 224.

<sup>111</sup> *Gazette of the State of South-Carolina*, January 8, 1784, in Windley, *Runaway Slave Advertisements*, vol. 3, 381-2.

<sup>112</sup> *Charleston Mercury and Morning Advertiser*, May 3, 1825, quoted in John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 140.



And in July 1862 a slave named Nero owned by commission merchant John Burckmyer received twenty paddles and was subjected to three days of solitary confinement for “Taking the Coat of Pompy...during his Working Time on Atlantic Wharf.”<sup>113</sup> And in November of that year, William Campbell claimed that a blanket, a pair of shoes, a coat, and four shirts were taken from Brown’s Wharf.<sup>114</sup> Though one cannot be sure that the clothing stolen in these cases were not sold, surely some of the thieves used the apparel to shore up deteriorating or insufficient wardrobes.

Wood could be used as fuel for cooking or to warm an ill constructed dwelling on a cold night. An advertisement appearing in the *Charleston Times* on March 12, 1808, read: “Stolen last night, From alongside of the British ship Valentine, lying at Wm. Pritchard, senior’s wharf, a large LOG of MAHOGANY.”<sup>115</sup> Captain Brooks’s slave Amos received twenty paddles after he was caught “Stealing wood from the State Wharf.”<sup>116</sup> And in late October 1831, Timothy Bull accused John W. Trott of stealing from Fitzsimons’ Wharf a log of timber worth \$3 as well as “a lot of wood, of a miscellaneous character,” including a vessel’s beam, three slabs, a raft-tie, and other assorted pieces of wood from a wreck. The embezzled wood was estimated to be worth about \$4.50, not an insignificant amount if traded for cash by someone living hand-to-mouth. But the season in which these random items were taken from the wharf suggests

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<sup>113</sup> Charleston Police Records, July 8, 1862, CLS; 1855 city directory; 1860 U.S. Census; The 1860 U.S. Census Slave Schedules show that John Burckmyer owned five male slaves.

<sup>114</sup> James B. Campbell Legal Papers: Miscellaneous Criminal Cases, 1861-1867, November 5, 1862, folder 11/102A/7, James Butler Campbell Papers, 1814-1897, SCHS; Campbell did not know who stole his clothing, but suspected it to be concealed by Conrad Ragan on Queen Street. Ragan appeared in the 1860 U.S. Census as a thirty-year-old Irishman and store keeper, but it is unknown if he still was a shop keeper in 1862, and nonetheless it is unknown whether Ragan was found guilty of receiving the stolen goods.

<sup>115</sup> *Charleston Times*, March 12, 1808.

<sup>116</sup> Charleston Police Records, January 3, 1862, CLS.

that this was a case of pilferage for personal use.<sup>117</sup> Even in the midst of the summer heat some of Charleston's less fortunate residents scoured the waterfront for scraps of fuel for cooking or in anticipation of the coming cold. Take for instance the little Irish girl who sickened with yellow fever in August 1852 after gathering chips on the wharves, likely her contribution to this immigrant family's survival.<sup>118</sup> Of course, there were also clear cases of wood being stolen for resale or motives other than self-consumption. Myer Audler alleged in 1830 that a slave named Sam stole ten boards from a raft and that these boards, worth \$5, were received by Charles Drayton.<sup>119</sup> Slaves sometimes may have acted at the behest of their masters. John, a slave owned by lumber merchant F. C. Blum, was charged with stealing a raft of lumber from Henry Schulte, who was evidently another lumber dealer.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1831-25A, SCDAH; Trott was listed in the 1829 city directory as residing at 42 Society Street, but no occupation was given. He was listed as a grocer at 110 King Street in the 1835-36 city directory; O. Cromwell, *Directory of Guide to the Residences and Places of Businesses of the Inhabitants of the City of Charleston and its Environs; Prefaced with a Description of Our Various Public Buildings and Other Local Information*. Charleston: James S. Burges, 1828 (hereafter cited as 1829 city directory); 1835-36 city directory.

<sup>118</sup> Hume, *CMJR* 9 (November 1854): 728-9; This was similar to how children were assigned the task of collecting buffalo or cow chips on the Great Plains in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; Historian Michael Grüttner claims that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the docks in Hamburg, Germany "exerted a considerable attraction" for women, youths, and children, "which had little to do with the romance of seafaring and much more to do with concrete material needs." Grüttner, "Working-class Crime," 59.

<sup>119</sup> Drayton was acquitted of the charges. Court of General Sessions, Indictments, Charleston County, 1786-1840, 1830-26A, SCDAH.

<sup>120</sup> Charleston Police Records, February 3, 1862, CLS; Henry Schulte did not appear in the 1855 or 1859 city directories or in the 1860 U.S. Census. But there is a lumber factor named Herman Schultz at 100 Beaufain Street in the 1855 directory, a lumber merchant named J. Hermann Schulte in the 1856 city directory, and a lumber dealer named J. H. Schulte in the 1859 city directory and in the 1860 U.S. Census.

Coal too could be used for heating and cooking.<sup>121</sup> Scotsman Charles Mackay observed during a visit to Charleston in March 1858 that the port was filled with British vessels “taking away cotton in huge and multitudinous bales for the mills of Manchester and Glasgow, and bringing in exchange for the white freight which they carry home the black freight of the English and Scottish collieries.” But so much of the imported fuel disappeared over the years that an ordinance was passed in 1848 specifically to prevent the amount of coal pilfered.<sup>122</sup> After being discharged from ships’ holds and loaded onto carts, each cart load of coal was weighed and then issued a certificate stating its weight (measured in tons) and specifying either the name of the cart owner or the number of the cart. The ordinance declared that if “Any person who may suspect that Coals have been taken from any cart or carts, after the same has been weighed...may, previously to the unloading of the carts or carts containing the Coals so suspected, cause the said cart or carts to be driven back again to the public scales, and have the same reweighed.” If ten or more pounds of coal were found to have been taken from the cart, the carter – if a white man – was to pay 10 cents for every missing pound and was to be fined \$20. If the offender was a slave carter, the owner of the cart was to pay these penalties. When fifty or more pounds of coal were missing, white carters were to pay \$50, lose their license, and be disqualified from receiving a carter license in the future; if a slave, the cart owner was again to suffer the consequences. In other words, it was assumed that if coal was missing, especially in relatively small amounts, the carters who transported it were

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<sup>121</sup> Charles Mackay noted that the vessels bringing coal to Charleston were principally from Liverpool and Greenock. Mackay added, “Coal for cotton or rice is the ultimate barter into which the commerce of Charleston resolves itself, to the mutual advantage of all concerned.” Charles Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America*, 195.

<sup>122</sup> This ordinance was ratified on January 18, 1848, then amended on December 29, 1848. The ordinance was amended again on May 9, 1854. See Walker, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston, 1844-1854*, 45-8, 62-5, 159.

pilfering. The weight of a load also could decrease if wet or damp coal dried out or if pieces were jolted out on an unpaved and rutted street or alley. But given carters' access and opportunities, they almost certainly were pilfering small quantities. And since the ordinance turned a blind eye if less than ten pounds of coal was missing, it almost behooved workers to craftily slip handfuls into pockets and pouches for the survival and comfort of themselves and their families.

It was only when a carter became too greedy or brazen that suspicion was raised and the law intervened. When, for instance, one vessel's cargo of coal was weighed and a few tons found to be missing, authorities included Charleston's carters among the suspected culprits. The judge in the ensuing Admiralty Court case affirmed that "A carrier is responsible to the consignee for the safe delivery of property committed to his care," but "The cartmen employed by the respondents depose[d] that they carted to the public weigher all the coal they received." After considering the evidence, it was concluded "that the loss cannot be attributed to want of care, [or] theft," but instead was within the "usual allowance of 2 1/2 per centum for loss." The judge also mentioned that "There was some evidence of loss happening by the transfer of coal from the vessel to the wharf, but it was too indefinite to be the basis of a conclusion."<sup>123</sup> Much of the coal that was dropped on the wharf or remained at the bottom of the hold surely made its way into the pockets of stevedores, dock hands, draymen, and non-workers who were roaming the wharves and doing what was necessary to make ends meet.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> McCrady Motte & Co. vs. R. L. & W. E. Holmes, Admiralty Journal, U.S. District Court, Eastern District of South Carolina, Charleston, 1857-1861, NASER.

<sup>124</sup> Johnson compares such pilferage to "the ancient agricultural custom of gleaning," and suggests that it actually helped to keep ships' holds clean. Johnson also claims that in ports all over the world, "Dock labourers felt entitled to that part of the cargo that was left over when bulk shipments such as grain or coal

Most white Charlestonians had a much different interpretation of theft and pilferage. Slaves stole not out of material need but due to the inherent moral depravity of the entire African race. In other words, slaves were thieves by nature; and since it was instinctive for slaves to steal, slaveowners defined a thieving bondsman as “one who stole much more than the average.”<sup>125</sup> As South Carolina Judge John Belton O’Neill wrote in an 1839 court decision, “Occasional thefts among the tolerably good slaves may be expected.”<sup>126</sup> But in a society in which it was insisted that its slaves were contented, docile, and loyal, and where the institution of slavery was defended as a civilizing mission, many slaveholders also reasoned that slaves stole because they did not “know the difference between right and wrong.”<sup>127</sup> Of course, such excuses for slave theft did not preclude the punishment – whether carried out privately or through the legal system – of guilty slaves. Meanwhile, some slaves understood theft to be morally wrong, and Christian sensibilities prompted self-contempt among thieving bondsmen. But others successfully reconciled theft with their religious and moral beliefs by creating a “counter-

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had been unloaded or items that had fallen out of ripped sacks or broken barrels...Workers brought home left over sweepings from bulk cargoes and staples like sugars, the odd bottle of wine and liquor, and damaged goods from broken crates as a matter of course.” Johnson, “Criminality on the Docks,” 725; Grüttner writes that in Hamburg “in all areas of the docks where coal was loaded, groups of women and youths, equipped with prams, would gather to wait for an unguarded instant in order to collect some of the valuable fuel.” Grüttner, “Working-class Crime,” 59; Also, South Carolina planters complained in January 1860 that bags of guano had been filled fraudulently with coal stone and other “weighty and worthless substances.” One Charlestonian suggested that while shoveling the guano from ships’ holds into bags, “Unless we watch the stevedore, when he gets to the bottom of the ship some coal may get in by accident.” Not only does this episode suggest that dock workers were frequently left unsupervised in the holds of ships, thus offering opportunities to pilfer small quantities of cargo, but also that some vessels had left over coal on the bottom of their holds for the workers’ taking. *Charleston Courier*, January 19, 1860.

<sup>125</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 599-600; Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 421.

<sup>126</sup> Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, vol. 2, 373.

<sup>127</sup> “Remarks on Overseers and the Proper Treatment of Slaves,” *Farmers Register* 5 (1837): 302, quoted in Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 422.

morality of theft” based on the observation of slaveowners’ irreligious and hypocritical behavior.<sup>128</sup>

White southerners also thought slaves to be natural drunks and thus conjectured that they stole in order to trade the purloined goods for alcohol. In January 1859 a Charleston Grand Jury objected to the drinking houses located just outside the northern city limits, which slaves frequented at night and on Sundays “with stolen property to be exchanged for poisonous...whiskey.”<sup>129</sup> These grievances were echoed a year later, with the jurors alleging that the sale of liquor to large numbers of slaves was “causing them to steal, get drunk, and to commit other misdemeanors in the City.”<sup>130</sup>

Did such racial assumptions prompt waterfront employers to hire white immigrants over their allegedly sticky-fingered black competitors? Not really. Though native whites stole from the docks, wharf owners rarely assumed that the thieves were white southerners. Consider, for instance, Enias Prin, who was acquitted for stealing the bale of cotton from Fitzsimons’ Wharf in 1830 while his black accomplices were convicted. But with the arrival of Irish and German immigrants, elite white Charlestonians became increasingly willing to acknowledge white plunder. Some southerners even speculated about these recent immigrants’ innate thieving character. British actress and writer Fanny Kemble observed how one Georgia planter likened

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<sup>128</sup> Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 608-9; Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 420-1; Whereas Genovese argues that slaveowners were able to use theft to strengthen their own sense of morality and to claim the moral high ground over their thieving and morally degraded slaves, Lichtenstein maintains that “theft could be integrated into a coherent counter-morality opposed to that of the master class, undermining the slaveowners’ claims to moral and ideological, as well as economic, superiority.”

<sup>129</sup> Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, January 1859, SCDAH.

<sup>130</sup> Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, January 1860, SCDAH.

slaves and Irish immigrants for “their subserviency, their flattering, their lying, and pilfering, as traits common to the characters of both peoples.”<sup>131</sup> Consequently, unlike earlier laws designed to prevent waterfront theft, the city ordinances passed in the 1840s and 1850s stipulated punishments for white as well as black offenders. The coal edict called for guilty white carters to suffer the same fines and whippings as doled out to pilfering slave carters. And though thieving white cotton menders were spared the pain of whipping, they were fined \$50 rather than the \$25 prescribed for slaves and free blacks. There is little doubt that many in late antebellum Charleston persisted in assuming that blacks were responsible for most waterfront theft. But the influx of white immigrants and the accompanying racial, ethnic, and class diversification of the city’s waterfront workforce triggered a reconsideration of such long held convictions. Unknown, unskilled, impoverished, and willing to perform “Negro work” in the slave South, Irish and German immigrants often were considered slave-like in their character and actions, including a predisposition to theft.

But whereas no one excused pilfering poor white immigrants for not knowing any better, thieving slaves were portrayed as the victims of “unscrupulous” white traders, who like Richard Wood corrupted the city’s slaves and enabled their theft and pilferage.<sup>132</sup> Concerned about whites who resorted to the “disreputable mode of gaining a livelihood” by selling liquor to slaves, the Grand Jury complained in May 1851 that such degraded men “induce the slave to drink drugged beverages, which speedily destroy his health and

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<sup>131</sup> Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation*, 278.

<sup>132</sup> Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 595; Olmsted noted an item in the *Charleston Standard* from November 23, 1854, which stated that “This abominable practice of trading with slaves, is not only taking our produce from us, but injuring our slave property,” adding that “the negroes will steal and trade, as long as white persons hold out to them temptations to steal and bring to them.” Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 441; Also see Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 427.

encourage him to pilfer as a means to pay for the poison.”<sup>133</sup> Similarly decrying those “unprincipled white men” who seduced slaves “into crimes and practices, calculated to destroy them, and despoil their owners,” yet another Grand Jury insisted that if laws prohibiting the receiving of stolen goods were not enforced, “we shall soon be overrun by a lazy, drunken, and pilfering set of slaves.”<sup>134</sup>

But white traders drew the ire of the city’s slaveowners and authorities for more than debasing slaves. Many white shop keepers in late antebellum Charleston were German immigrants, “strangers” of questionable background and character. Just as some natives considered Irish immigrants toiling on the city’s waterfront as not entirely white, they may have doubted the whiteness of Germans too. Disparities of wealth and class erected additional barriers between white traders and haughty Charleston nabobs. And finally, paltry incomes meant that most white shop keepers did not own slaves, generating further uncertainty about their loyalty to the South and devotion to the increasingly embattled institution of slavery.

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<sup>133</sup> Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, May 1851, SCDAH.

<sup>134</sup> Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, May 1852, SCDAH; Attempts were made to cut back on waterfront theft thought to be related to slave drinking and drunkenness. An ordinance ratified in March 1840 included the following stipulation: “No [liquor] license whatever shall be granted to any person residing on or having a store on either side of the streets leading to the wharves, East of East Bay-street, or either side of South Bay-street, or on any of the wharves or wharf lots.” In April 1842 the section of the March 1840 ordinance prohibiting “the granting a Licence [*sic*] numbered Two, for retailing taverns, to any person residing on Vendue Range or East of that part of East Bay street, which lies north of Society street, be and the same is hereby repealed.” And in April 1841 it was deemed illegal to “sell any wines, malt or spirituous liquor...on board of any vessel at the wharves, in smaller quantities than the original pipe, hogshead, cask, barrel, box, case or package, in which the same was imported in this city,” without first obtaining a license. Eckhard, *Digest of the Ordinances of Charleston, 1783-1844*, 229-30; Also, a debate over the granting of liquor licenses to grocers preceded the passage of “An Ordinance Regulating Retailers of Spirituous Liquors, and to Prevent All Unauthorized Dealing with Negroes and Other Persons of Color” in November 1836. Eckhard, 219-30; For examples of the public debate, see the letters written by “Carolinian” and “A Friend to Good Order” in the *Charleston Courier* on March 4 and March 14, 1835, respectively.



In an antebellum southern economy built upon the ownership, employment, and labor of valuable slave property, corrupted and thieving bondsmen were no minor concern. “How long are we to submit to these worse than abolitionist enemies?” asked Charleston’s grand jurists in May 1851, warning state legislators of the “disastrous effects” unprincipled whites were having upon slaves, slaveowners, and the entire institution of slavery. More specifically, they argued that “Slave property in this District, and especially in this City is every day decreasing in value...in consequence of the corrupt influence” of the white liquor dealers.<sup>135</sup> One South Carolina judge explained that slaves’ market values were determined by their habits, character, and behavior, and that vice could render even the strongest and most skilled slaves worthless and dispensable. Furthermore, much depended upon “the opportunities he has to commit crimes, and the temptation to which he is exposed,” and few occupations surpassed the degree of access, opportunities, and enticements to steal and pilfer as afforded to slave wharf hands and other waterfront workers.<sup>136</sup> In July 1807 wharf owner Christopher Fitzsimons informed David Oliver in New Orleans that “By the schooner Milly you will receive two negromen...which I have shipped to your address as per inclosed [*sic*] bill of lading.” Sambo was “a new negro” who Fitzsimons had owned for only four months. “When at home he worked well,” the wharf owner explained, but “In that time he ran away three times.” As for the other slave: “Jim is an Affrican [*sic*] and has been about two years in this country. He is a very sensible handy fellow and can turn his hand to any work, but is a most notorious thief and as I wanted him on the wharf I found he would not answer to that employ.” Sambo and Jim, Fitzsimons instructed, “you will please sell on a

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<sup>135</sup> Grand Jury Presentment, Charleston District, May 1851, SCDAH.

<sup>136</sup> Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, vol. 2, 318.

credit of six months.”<sup>137</sup> Thieving workers in free labor ports could simply be fired and replaced by another wage laborer. But on the docks of the slave South, an employer sometimes endured pilfering slaves for months and even years before finally giving up on his investment of time, training, and treasure.

Hard-working and valuable plantation slaves too were sold for habitually absconding or stealing from their masters’ fields and storehouses. But on southern plantations, masters sought to thwart or control theft and pilferage by limiting their slaves’ access to external markets and barter networks for stolen plantation goods.<sup>138</sup> One planter prohibited his slaves from selling goods without his permission in the effort to forestall “a spirit of trafficking” which would tempt slaves “to commit robberies to obtain things to sell.”<sup>139</sup> Another slaveowner, calling himself “A Practical Planter,” summed up this approach best when he wrote that “where there are no receptacles [for stolen goods] there will be no deposits.”<sup>140</sup> The owner of a South Carolina rice plantation, Mr. X, told northern traveler Frederick Law Olmsted how he prevented his slaves from dealing with unscrupulous white shop keepers who traded in stolen plantation goods. “He has a rule to purchase everything they desire to sell,” Olmsted explained, “and to given them a high price for it, himself.” But rather than giving the slaves money for their commodities, which would only encourage them to seek out markets beyond the

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<sup>137</sup> J. J. Negrin, *Negrin’s Directory and Almanac for the Year 1806; Containing Every Article of General Utility*. Charleston: J. J. Negrin, 1806 (hereafter cited as 1806 city directory); 1807 city directory; Christopher Fitzsimons to Mr. David Olivier, July 28, 1807, Christopher Fitzsimons Letterbook, 1799-1813, SCL.

<sup>138</sup> Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 423.

<sup>139</sup> “On the Management of Slaves,” *Southern Agriculturalist* 6 (June 1833): 285-6, quoted in Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 425.

<sup>140</sup> [“A Practical Planter”], “Observations on the Management of Negroes,” *Southern Agriculturalist* 5 (April 1832): 182, quoted in Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 425.

boundaries of the plantation, “He has a store, usually well supplied with articles that they most want, which are purchased in large quantities, and sold to them at wholesale prices.” This arrangement thus afforded Mr. X’s slaves “a great advantage in dealing with him rather than with the grog-shops.”<sup>141</sup> Clearly then, rural masters could turn to internal plantation management strategies to curtail theft and pilferage, including severe whippings and other punishments.<sup>142</sup>

But urban slaveholders had fewer options. Urban slaves seeking to trade, steal, or pilfer encountered far less slaveowner supervision.<sup>143</sup> As in most antebellum southern cities, thousands of Charleston’s slaves were hired out or hired their own time to persons other than their masters. Hence, though some enslaved waterfront laborers were owned by wharf owners or mercantile companies, most were employed by unknown men with whom the slaves had little or no personal relationships; associations were ephemeral, based solely on an economic exchange of wages for labor. As a result, urban employers

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<sup>141</sup> Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 442-3; Also see Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 426.

<sup>142</sup> And in addition to closely controlling slaves’ economic autonomy and access to outside markets, planters also sometimes simply gave their slaves more food to eat, or permitted slaves to grow their own crops in provision grounds. Lichtenstein notes, however, that many slaveowners believed “that the economic autonomy and customary rights inherent in the provision grounds aided and encouraged the slave in his attempts to pilfer his master’s moveable property.” But like Mr. X, most slaveowners stipulated that food and other commodities raised were not to be sold or traded outside of the plantation. This give and take between masters and slaves on southern plantations could rein in slaves’ independent market dealings, thus blunting the menace of theft. Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 416-8, 424-6; For more information on slave provision grounds, see Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 535-40; Philip D. Morgan, “Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700-1880,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (October 1982): 563-99; Philip D. Morgan, “The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the mid-Nineteenth-Century Low Country,” *Journal of Southern History* 49 (August 1983): 399-420; Sidney Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989; Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *The Slaves’ Economy: Independent Production by Slaves in the Americas*. London: Frank Cass, 1991.

<sup>143</sup> Lichtenstein points out that when slave theft and pilferage moved outside the boundaries of the master’s own plantation, it also shifted “beyond the sphere of paternalism and master-slave relations, and impinge[d] upon issues of property and authority in the more open context of Southern society, rather than the closed and more easily controlled realm of the plantation.” He adds that it was then that slaveowners turned from internal slave management to the law. Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 423.

and slaveholders relied heavily upon the law to monitor and control waterfront workers. Whereas masters, overseers, and drivers usually disciplined plantation slaves outside of the legal system, urban masters relied on laws to regulate the labor and lives of Charleston's enslaved dock laborers. Laws ranged widely, from wage rates and hiring procedures to work songs and access to outside seamen.<sup>144</sup>

But taking advantage of the comparative free movement and lack of supervision of the urban environment, Charleston's enslaved waterfront workers found it logistically easier to steal or pilfer than did their more closely watched counterparts on rural southern plantations, where access, opportunities, and targets for theft were relatively limited. Moreover, given the relative autonomy of their daily lives and occupations, slaves in Charleston and other cities could more easily consume or sell the objects of their plunder without being caught. With an almost infinite number of hiding places and with a plethora of ready and willing buyers of the stolen merchandise, urban slaves not only likely stole more but probably were less often detected and punished than more tightly controlled rural bondsmen who had far fewer occasions and options to dispose of purloined goods.

But was theft and pilferage from Charleston's waterfront a form of resistance or protest? Scholars of plantation slavery in the American South long have argued that in addition to running away, breaking tools, feigning illness, and starting fires, the theft and pilferage of plantation food and supplies was a common means of protesting or

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<sup>144</sup> Lichtenstein argues that "Plantation owners found it frustratingly difficult to use the law to protect the plantation," and acknowledges the difficulties planters faced in detecting and punishing slaves who traded stolen goods outside the boundaries of the plantation. He also points out that "slaves were often the only available witnesses to illegal transactions, and the law barred their testimony from court." Lichtenstein, "That Disposition to Theft," 431.

expressing resistance to the institution of slavery.<sup>145</sup> But it must not be assumed that slaves in southern cities shared the same motives and aims as their rural counterparts. Historians repeatedly have contended that rural slaves claimed an economic or “customary right” to the fruits of their labor.<sup>146</sup> Slaves who were underfed and inadequately clothed reasoned that their work in the fields from “can see to can’t see” had entitled them to a proper diet, and thus that they had more than earned what they took and consumed.<sup>147</sup> The theft of food, in other words, was a struggle between slaves and resident masters over the slaves’ diet and over claims to the agricultural goods produced on plantations.<sup>148</sup> Urban slaves generally shared this desire or need to supplement their diets or wardrobes. But unlike the millions of slaves toiling on cotton, rice, and sugar plantations, Charleston’s enslaved waterfront workers produced only sweat, thus hypothetically undermining any claims to the fruits of their labor.<sup>149</sup> Again, since most

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<sup>145</sup> See, for instance, Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*. New York: International Publishers, 1993; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*. New York: Knopf, 1956; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*; and Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft.”

<sup>146</sup> Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 602; Lichtenstein also discusses customary rights and “moral economy,” and explains that “This theory was developed by E. P. Thompson and other British labor historians with reference to the plight of the English laboring poor in the face of economic transformations and changing social relationships during the eighteenth century.” He also argues that “Theft in Southern slave society was similar to the ‘social crime’ of eighteenth-century England.” Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 415-6, 432-3.

<sup>147</sup> Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 604; Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 417; Slaves on antebellum southern plantations differentiated between “taking” from their masters what they believed to have been rightfully earned by their undercompensated labor, and “stealing” from one another. Regarding the latter, Genovese argues that though “such stealing did constitute a problem on some plantations...Not many slaves seem to have stolen from each other.” Genovese, 602, 606-7. Also see Olmsted quoted in Genovese, 602.

<sup>148</sup> Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” 415; For a good discussion of the theft of food from southern plantations, see Michael Stephen Hindus, *Prison and Plantation: Crime, Justice, and Authority in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 140-1.

<sup>149</sup> Grüttner found that class conscious and unionized dock workers in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Hamburg did regard it as a right to obtain at least some of their food via pilferage. “Many workers

slave wharf hands and draymen were hired rather than owned by their waterfront employers, they earned wages for their labor. And though a substantial portion of these wages typically were turned over to the slaves' masters, it was expected that slaves use the remainder to purchase food, clothing, and the other necessities that on plantations were owned, controlled, and doled out by the masters.

However, this does not mean that urban slaves did not create a rationale and justification for stealing and pilfering waterfront goods. Slave dock workers, like waterfront laborers all over the world, were aggrieved by insufficient and irregular wages, to which was added the unique burden of forfeiting a significant portion of their wages to their owners. The result was that Charleston's dock workers likely viewed pilferage as a "moral entitlement" and as a way to redress an "exploitive contractual situation" between slaves and their employers.<sup>150</sup> In other words, thieving and pilfering waterfront laborers claimed "wages in kind" that not only compensated for and supplemented paltry incomes, but also – as we have already seen – met immediate material needs and served as a means of coping and survival.<sup>151</sup> A longshoreman in St.

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clearly regarded it as a customary right, which was sometimes exercised as a matter of course and which was violently defended against the encroachments of employers and the state." Grüttner, "Working-class Crime," 60, 74; And Johnson utilizes Eric Hobsbawn's work on pre-political social movements to argue that dock workers were essentially like Hobsbawn's peasant "social bandits" and ship owners and employers were akin to landlords. According to this logic, pilfering workers "were acting as social bandits, stealing from the rich to give to the poor and deserving – often themselves." Johnson, "Criminality on the Docks," 727, 744.

<sup>150</sup> Mars, "Dock Pilferage," 224, 226; Also see Johnson, "Criminality on the Docks," 723-5, 744.

<sup>151</sup> See Grüttner, "Working-class Crime," 57-9, 64-6, 70; Though much of what they stole, especially cotton, could not be eaten, inedible goods could be traded for food or clothing or sold for cash that supplemented their income and enabled the satisfaction of needs and wants alike; Adopting a Marxist view, Grüttner cites Frederick Engels's argument that "Crime, and in particular theft, was regarded...as the 'earliest, crudest and least fruitful form' of social rebellion." In Grüttner's view, resistance and protest combined with opportunities to lead to theft. He also considers waterfront theft as an "index of social misery" among dock workers and their families as well as a barometer of the changing relations between capital and labor on the docks, and refers to pilferage as "militant self-help." Grüttner, 54, 69, 71; Also see Johnson, "Criminality on the Docks," 722, 725, 727, 744.

Johns, Newfoundland, reasoned that consumer goods owned by impersonal firms were “suitable for pilferage” since “it’s all insured and nobody’s heard of an insurance company going broke.” This same dock worker added that “In any case, they’ve made millions out of this port and it’s us who do the work.”<sup>152</sup> Longshoremen in Brooklyn likewise contended that “stealing from your neighbour was never allowed,” but “Stealing from the outside world...was perfectly legitimate.” In fact, the prevailing sentiment among waterfront workers the world over seemingly was that “the world owed them something beyond a ruined back after forty years of labour.”<sup>153</sup> An enslaved wharf hand or drayman in antebellum Charleston, if we had any evidence of his view, likely would have agreed; and accordingly, commercial goods owned by unseen or unknown men – whether in the workshops and factories of London, the plantations of the South Carolina upcountry, or the dry goods store on the other side of town – were fair game since such men were either themselves exploitive slaveowners or enablers of the system that enslaved them.<sup>154</sup>

But whereas the relative absence of supervision on the city’s wharves made it easier for urban slaves to steal, the often impersonal relations between hired slave dock workers and their unfamiliar and temporary employers rendered theft an unlikely

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<sup>152</sup> Mars, “Dock Pilferage,” 224.

<sup>153</sup> Jerry Della Femina and Charles Sopkin, *An Italian Grows in Brooklyn* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), 53, quoted in Johnson, “Criminality on the Docks,” 727.

<sup>154</sup> Frederick Douglass wrote regarding his time on a Maryland plantation in the 1830s that “It was not always convenient to steal from master,” so “It was necessary that the right to steal from *others* should be established.” Douglass explained his reasoning at length: “‘I am,’ thought I, ‘not only the slave of Master Thomas, but I am the slave of society at large. Society at large has bound itself, in form and in fact, to assist Master Thomas in robbing me of my rightful liberty, and of the just reward of my labor; therefore, whatever rights I have against Master Thomas, I have, equally, against those confederated with him in robbing me of liberty. As society has marked me out as privileged plunder, on the principle of self-preservation I am justified in plundering in turn. Since each slave belongs to all; all must, therefore, belong to each.’” Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 189-90.

expression of resistance to repressive masters' hegemony. When one scholar inquired whether dock workers in colonial ports dominated by European powers used theft and pilferage as "tools of protest against a colonial oppressor," she found that such petty criminal acts were not consciously employed to undermine colonial masters. In stark contrast to what historians have concluded about plantation slaves in the American South – where bondsmen deliberately stole and pilfered from brutal resident masters as a form of "day to day resistance" – "it appears that dock workers were too distant, too far removed from foreign ship-owners and capitalists, to conceive of protest in such personal terms." In Charleston too, enslaved dock workers probably did not steal to resist or protest ephemeral employers. Instead, worker theft and pilferage was rational economic behavior carried out by laborers aggravated by their exploitation, and who capitalized on some of the countless opportunities to steal and embezzle unstored and easily accessible commercial goods as partial compensation.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> See Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 587, 594, 598-9; Johnson considers evidence from the following ports: Jaffa, Haifa, and Tel Aviv under the British mandate; Mombasa, Kenya, under British control; Tanga, Tanzania, under German and British control; and the port of Shanghai, China, which was largely controlled by the Japanese, British, and other European powers until the end of World War II. Johnson also contends that "petty criminality...did not in itself constitute deliberate rebellion or sabotage against management as Engels posited." Johnson admits that "the nature of the sources, often collected while areas were still under colonial domination, may have inhibited descriptions of protest," and she welcomes further research on this topic. Johnson, "Criminality on the Docks," 732-4; Lichtenstein maintains that theft performed by plantation slaves was "economic, not moral, behavior." Lichtenstein, "That Disposition to Theft," 432, 424; Mars argues that workers in St. Johns pilfered with no or little advanced planning, but instead stole opportunistically. Moreover, the workers made little or no financial profit from their plunder, which instead served to supplement their oftentimes meager and irregular incomes. Mars, "Dock Pilferage," 220.



## POSTSCRIPT

The election of Abraham Lincoln in November 1860 set off a series of events that culminated in the Civil War, the abolition of slavery, and the devastation of Charleston's commercial waterfront. Following South Carolina's secession from the Union in December 1860, the nascent Confederate Congress quickly passed a tariff on goods arriving from northern ports. The tariff act, passed on February 18, 1861, exempted northern goods purchased before February 28 and shipped before March 1. Endeavoring to avoid the heavy 24 percent tax on northern imports, Charleston's merchants hastened to purchase shiploads of consumer goods prior to the looming deadline. In New York, newspapers reported on the "furore" [*sic*] and "Busy Scenes" that accompanied this "Sudden and Immense Shipment of Goods for the South." To accommodate all of the cargo necessitating transport, northern shippers were obliged "to employ all the vessels of every class bound for ports of the Southern republic."<sup>1</sup>

The stowing of these many vessels was carried out by an army of New York dock workers. "Stevedores, longshoremen and dock hands have been in constant demand with plenty of employment for them," announced the *New York Herald* on March 1, 1861. Pressed for time and working day and night, laborers finished unloading vessels using one gangplank or hoisting horse, while simultaneously loading the ship with another. The holds and decks of steamers and packet vessels destined for Charleston were packed full until cargo had to be turned away.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *New York Herald*, March 1, 1861; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 14, 1861.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Herald*, March 1, 1861.

When these southbound vessels reached Charleston, they were greeted by factors, wharfingers, and dock laborers in desperate need of work and income. Secession had bred much financial and commercial instability and uncertainty in the city. With hundreds of workingmen already unemployed, a correspondent for the *New York Tribune* wrote on January 4, 1861, “There is almost a total suspension of business...there is no collection of debts, credit is collapsed, property is without sale or value; the avenues of trade are closed up; and the prospect is darkening every hour.” The military defense of Charleston harbor, including sunken vessels blocking many of the shipping lanes, further dampened maritime commerce. By February 1861 little waterfront work remained, and even the city’s once affluent cotton factors and commission merchants faced financial ruin and impoverishment.<sup>3</sup>

The rush of trading vessels arriving from northern ports in early and mid-March 1861 proved to be the last hurrah for the city’s antebellum waterfront and its workforce. A reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* observed the lively scene in Charleston on March 10, but then made a dire prediction.

In less than a week the New York line of steamers will probably be laid up, the wharves will be deserted, and hundreds of stevedores and laborers will be without employment, and minus food. Truly these violent fanatics will have, within the next six months, to answer for such scenes of distress and misery as even the densely populated cities of the North are total strangers to; for, while all means of employment are daily, and in rapid succession, gliding from the reach of the poor, the imposition of the illegal and treasonable Tariff will raise all kinds of provisions to at least one-fourth more than their highest market price during the past year.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson and Roark, *Black Masters*, 289-90. *New York Tribune* quoted in Johnson and Roark, 290.

<sup>4</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 14, 1861.

Unfortunately for Charlestonians, this northern journalist was not too far off the mark. A voluntary embargo of southern cotton exports – intended to create a “cotton famine” in Europe and force England and France to recognize the Confederacy – proved a failure while stifling the flow of the commodity to Charleston’s docks. Then, after Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor on April 12, 1861, President Lincoln promptly ordered the blockade of Confederate ports. By the end of April, Jacob Schirmer noted the rising prices of basic staples such as butter and bacon, which were already in short supply. The master cooper added that all but one of the Charleston-New York steamers had been detained in the northern city to be converted into warships, further choking off the regular shipment of essential provisions into Charleston and eliminating waterfront employment opportunities. “Business of every Kind almost perfectly paralyzed,” wrote Schirmer on April 27, 1861.<sup>5</sup>

Blockade running became a significant and potentially lucrative business in wartime Charleston. Though the vessels that evaded the Union Navy required unloading and loading, they were too few in number to employ more than a handful of dock workers at any given time. Commercial waterfront activity was so slow, in fact, that many of the port’s Custom House officers were discharged at the end of June 1861. Jacob Schirmer explained that there was simply “no Work for them to do.”<sup>6</sup> English hardware manufacturer and merchant William C. Corsan traveled to the United States in late 1862 to evaluate his waning consumer market in the South. When in Charleston he commented upon the sluggishness of the city’s commercial districts. Conceding that the

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<sup>5</sup> Schirmer Diary, April 27, 1861; Also see Adger Family Correspondence, folder 24/1/8, Adger Family Papers, 1796-1893, SCHS; The Union blockade of Charleston officially began on May 28, 1861.

<sup>6</sup> Schirmer Diary, June 29, 1861.

blockade runners employed a number of porters, draymen, and other laborers, Corsan observed that Meeting, King, Hayne, and East Bay streets, “bustling places in times of peace – were now little more than rows of closed stores, and looked very much as if a perpetual Sunday or holiday prevailed.” The Englishman concluded, in short, that “In a commercial sense Charleston is, for the present, out of business.”<sup>7</sup>

What then became of Charleston’s hundreds and perhaps thousands of waterfront workers during the Civil War? Like those free blacks who fled to the North in late 1860 and early 1861 and the northern transients who simultaneously were chased from Charleston, other free workers too scattered. Some entered the Confederate Army. Stevedore John Conroy, for instance, was a first corporal in the Charleston Battalion of the Irish Volunteers. Joining Conroy in military service were dozens of Irish porters and draymen.<sup>8</sup> Other white waterfront workers remained in Charleston attempting – but often failing – to make ends meet. A report to the South Carolina General Assembly in 1862 reveals that large numbers of Irish immigrants were receiving relief from Charleston’s Alms House.<sup>9</sup>

Enslaved dock hands often were put to work constructing the city’s military defenses. Wharf owner Otis Mills, though born in Massachusetts, was an ardent secessionist and supporter of the Confederacy. When Mills died years after the Civil

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<sup>7</sup> W. C. Corsan and Benjamin H. Trask, ed., *Two Months in the Confederate States: An Englishman’s Travels through the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 65-6; Between October 1 and December 31, 1862, only seven vessels arrived at the docks and only thirteen exited the harbor. Corsan and Trask, 65, note 14.

<sup>8</sup> Donald M. Williams, *Shamrocks and Pluff Mud: A Glimpse of the Irish in the Southern City of Charleston, South Carolina* (Charleston: BookSurge Publishing, 2005), Appendixes 6 and 7; 1859 and 1860 city directories; 1860 U.S. Census.

<sup>9</sup> Miscellaneous Communication, 1862 # 25 Oversize, SCDAH.

War, his obituary recounted how “In 1862, when Charleston was threatened, he turned out his wharf hands and with them went out of the city to the fortifications, and although in feeble health, remained with them and superintended their work upon the entrenchments.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, a large number of slaves owned by the South Carolina Railroad, joined by white laborers in the company’s employ, occasionally were sent to the Sea Islands to work on the fortifications.<sup>11</sup> But with Union forces occupying many of the islands along the South Carolina and Georgia coasts by late 1861, and with the blockading fleet located just miles from Charleston’s wharves, some slaves continued to seek freedom via the Maritime Railroad. Shortly after the commencement of the blockade, for instance, two slaves “attempted to go off in the British Ship A & A,” but were discovered and returned to Charleston.<sup>12</sup> On April 28, 1862, Jacob Schirmer commented how the night before “some 8 negroes run away with one of Genl Ripley’s boats and gone out to the Fleet.”<sup>13</sup> Still more daring, on the night of May 13, 1862, former dock hand and stevedore Robert Smalls guided the steamship *Planter*, with his family and several other slaves on board, out of Charleston harbor and delivered the vessel to the Union Navy.

For those relatively few laborers, free and enslaved, who continued to toil on the waterfront during the war, to the many hazards of the work was added the Union

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<sup>10</sup> The announcement of Mills’s death appeared on an undated clipping from an unknown newspaper found in the index of Jacob Schirmer’s diary; Slaves from the surrounding countryside also were employed on the fortifications. See, for example, Schirmer Diary, August 25, 1862.

<sup>11</sup> South Carolina Railroad Minute Book, April 19, 1861, page 277, SCHS.

<sup>12</sup> Schirmer Diary, May 27, 1861.

<sup>13</sup> Schirmer Diary, April 28, 1862; Schirmer was referring here to Confederate Brigadier General Roswell Sabine Ripley.

bombardment of the city that lasted from August 1863 until February 1865. The boiler of the steamer *Hibben* was struck with a shell while being discharged at the wharf of Fort Sumter on August 12, 1863, wounding eleven on board.<sup>14</sup> Among the casualties were nine black laborers who were scalded horrendously, some fatally.<sup>15</sup> Nor were workers safe after the end of the work day. The daughter of a former slave and free black man named Forest Gibbs, who labored on the docks both before and during the Civil War, recalled how “Her father had returned home one afternoon and was resting from a hard days work, when a shell crashed through the walls of their little home on Tradd street, and passed immediately over him as he lay on his cot.” Though the humble house was destroyed, Forest and his family escaped unharmed.<sup>16</sup> Irish stevedore William Doran was not as lucky. Though it is unclear whether Doran continued to work on the waterfront during the war, he ran a boarding house at his home on Bedon’s Alley in the southern portion of the city and well within range of the Federal guns. During the Union bombardment, Doran was said to have “opened his house to refugees, as the structure had very thick walls.” But a story passed down from generation to generation of the Doran family maintains that “on one occasion during the bombardment he was reaching for a match on the dining room mantel to light someone’s pipe when a cannon ball took off his arm. For years afterwards, he was teased: ‘Generous old William Doran, ask for a light and he gives his arm.’”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Yearbook City of Charleston 1888* (Charleston: News and Courier Book Presses, 1889), Appendix, “Calendar of Events in the Defense of Charleston, South Carolina.”

<sup>15</sup> John Johnson, *The Defense of Charleston Harbor, Including Fort Sumter and the Adjacent Islands, 1863-1865* (Charleston: Walker, Evans, & Cogswell Co., 1890), 116-7.

<sup>16</sup> Rawick, *American Slavery*, narrative of Susan Nelson (aka Susan Forest), 3A.

Union shelling, which lasted 567 days, destroyed the Cooper River wharves, some of which remained in disrepair and useless to maritime commerce for years after the war.<sup>18</sup> Countless fires also contributed to the waterfront's devastation. Noting the frequent conflagrations, Jacob Schirmer wrote on September 18, 1864, that "Another fire broke out...all no doubt caused by Shells as the Enemy is now shelling the city furiously."<sup>19</sup> Even before the end of the bombardment, Schirmer thought the lower part of the city "heartrending," adding that "it has almost become a Wilderness of weeds."<sup>20</sup> At war's end, mere wreckage remained.

The postbellum history of Charleston's waterfront and its labor force has received significant scholarly attention. Only two years after the Civil War, Charleston's dock workers – many of whom were former slave porters or day laborers on the antebellum wharves – formed the Longshoremen's Protective Union Association. The union was incorporated in 1869, and by January 1875 the *Charleston News and Courier* reported its membership to be comprised of 800-1,000 "of the bone and sinew of the colored workingmen of Charleston." One historian has argued that "During Reconstruction and throughout the remainder of the [nineteenth] century, the longshoremen launched the most ambitious, aggressive, and well-organized campaign to secure their interests as workingmen," and "were a force to be seriously reckoned with on every wharf in Charleston."<sup>21</sup> Other scholars point out that "It was among the longshoremen that the

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<sup>17</sup> *Charleston Post and Courier*, April 7, 1980.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, "Some Charleston Wharves" in *Yearbook City of Charleston 1936* (Charleston: News and Courier Book Presses, 1937), 184, 189.

<sup>19</sup> Schirmer Diary, September 18, 1864.

<sup>20</sup> Schirmer Diary, after July 1864.

first successful Negro labor organizations were formed,” and only a few years after the end of the Civil War the longshoremen’s union, the membership of which was comprised of a large black majority but also some white dock workers, “was referred to in the press as ‘the most powerful organization of the colored laboring class in South Carolina.’”<sup>22</sup>

The question of how such a sizable, strong, and successful union – the successor of which endures today as one of South Carolina’s only unions – was able to form and flourish so soon after the Civil War remains to be more fully explored. The institution of slavery and divisions of race, ethnicity, class, color, and skill level among workers had prevented the formation of waterfront labor organizations in antebellum Charleston. Though many of these schisms persisted after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, the city’s postbellum dock workers united long enough to extract employer concessions that were unattainable before the war, namely regular work hours, higher hourly wages, overtime pay, and the exclusive use of unionized workers.<sup>23</sup> The common struggle and perpetual resistance against oppressive employers and city and state authorities before the

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<sup>21</sup> Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 127-9; *Charleston News and Courier*, January 26, 1875, quoted in Powers, 128.

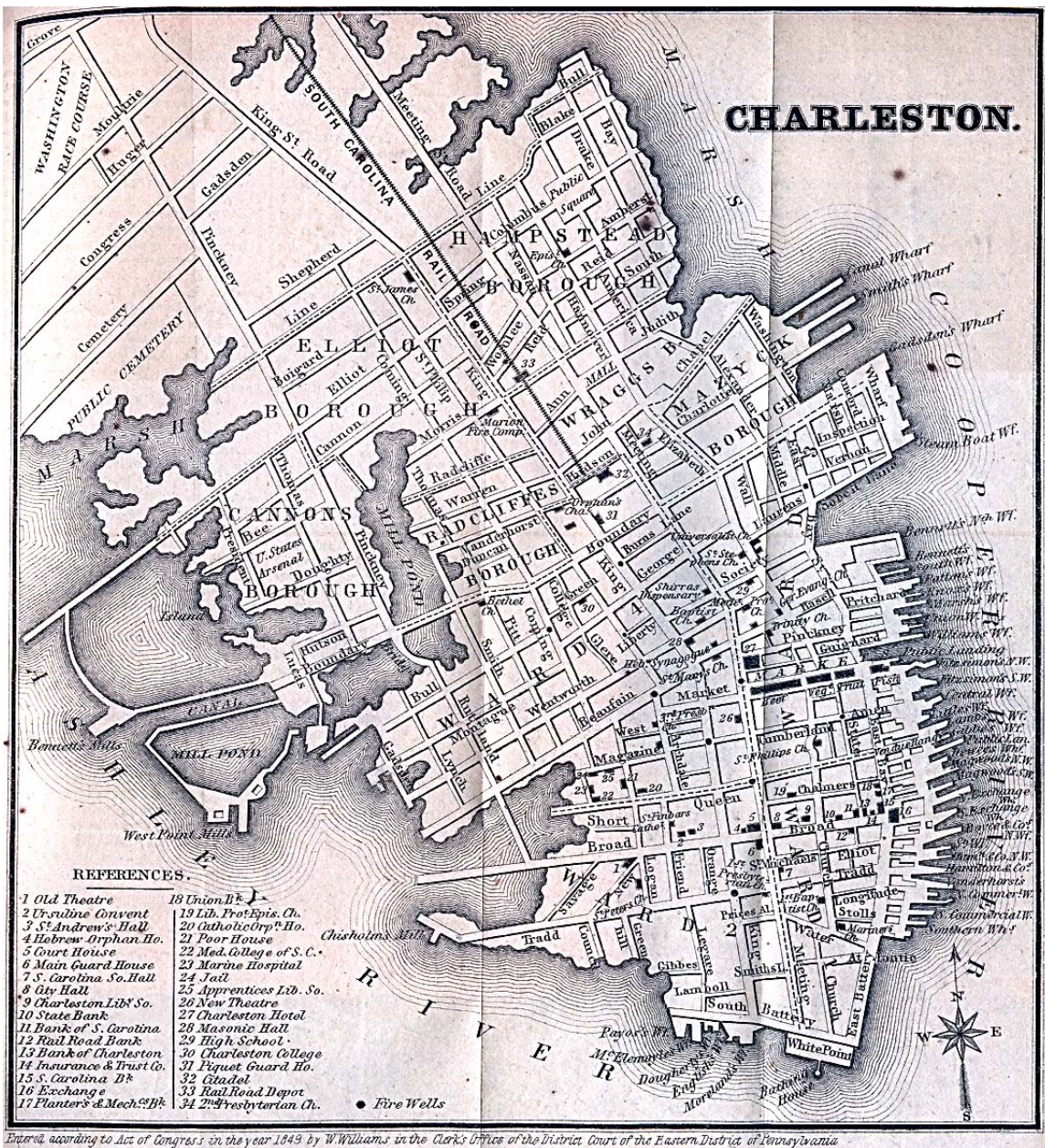
<sup>22</sup> Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, 182-3.

<sup>23</sup> Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 129-35; In an astonishing turn of events, stevedore G. B. Stoddard – who by all accounts had led his fellow white, skilled workers in the assault on their black competitors before the Civil War – was a Republican and a member of the longshoremen’s union after the war. According to historian Bernard Powers, “In late October 1869, the cotton shippers refused to utilize the ship *A. B. Wyman* because it was being loaded by George B. Stoddard, a white Republican and a member of the Longshoremen’s Union. Stoddard was subsequently dismissed. After word of his dismissal spread along the wharves, the members of the union immediately suspended work. At first they struck all wharves but later directed their work stoppage specifically against those lines shipping cotton to Europe as these made up the core of opposition against Stoddard. An emergency meeting of the men took place on October 28; approximately three hundred union members were present, along with many other workingmen who were not members of the union. After discussing Stoddard’s case, the meeting resolved that the strike should continue ‘until the shippers withdraw all discrimination against longshoremen on account of their political sentiments, whether such members be Republicans or Democrats.’ According to those present, an aggressive defense was necessary because the action of the shippers was ‘but the first move of a determined effort to crush out the longshoremen who have demanded and received higher wages.’ The strike was successful, and by November 2, Stoddard was reinstated, and the workmen resumed normal activities.” Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 130.



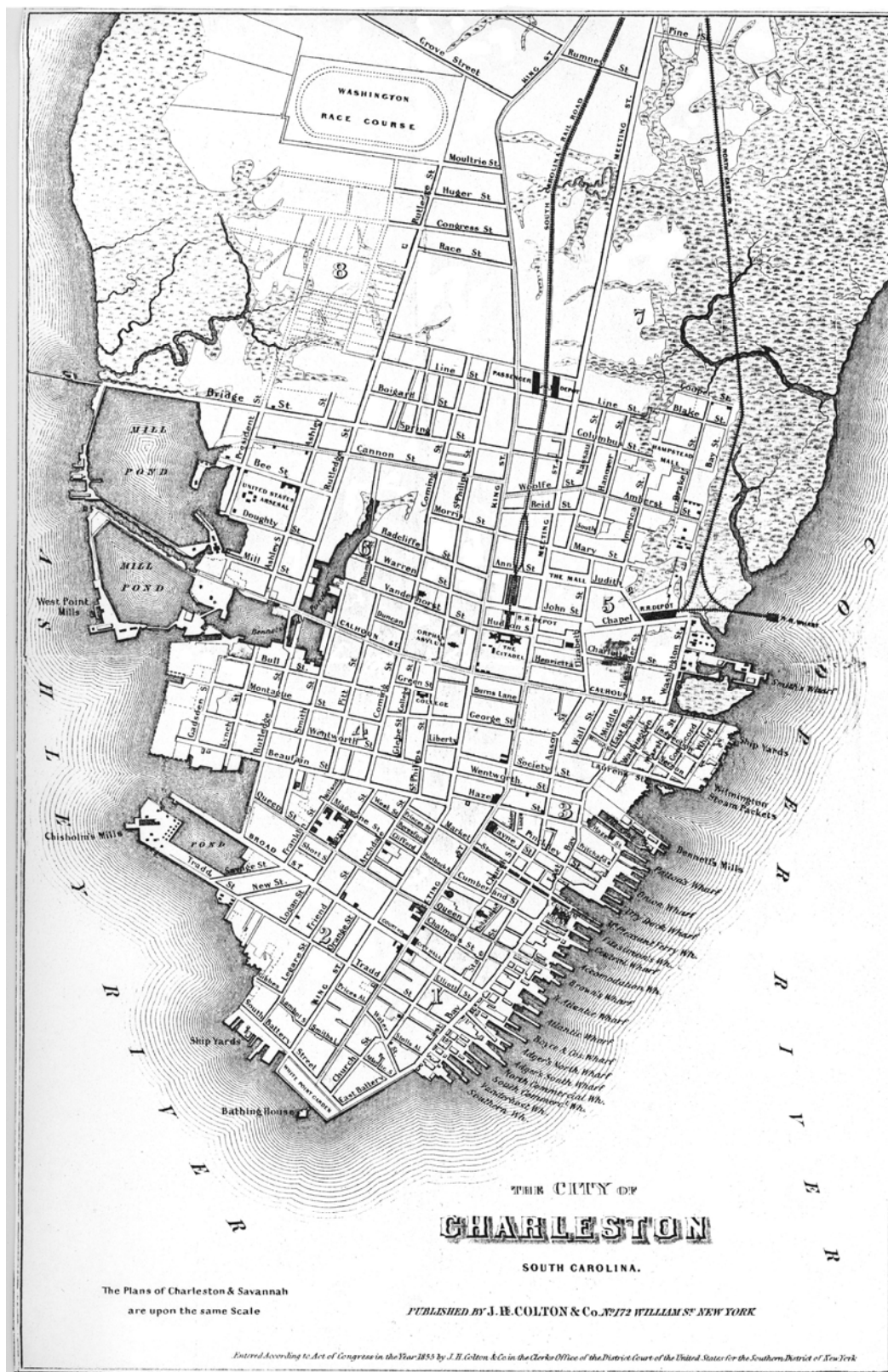
war had equipped Charleston's postbellum waterfront workforce – which remained as vital and indispensable as ever – with the tools and resolve to collectively improve their labor conditions and lives.

MAPS

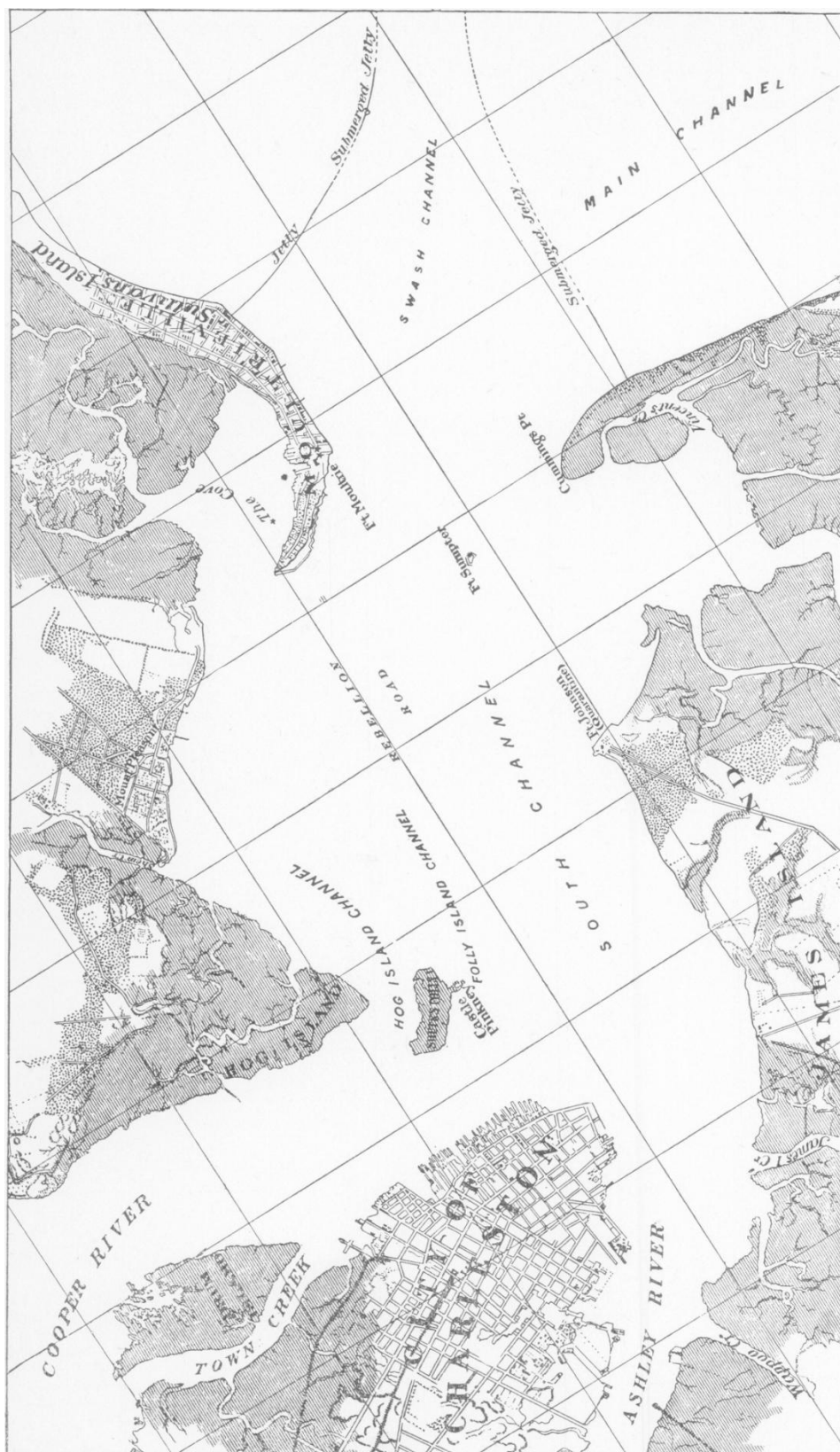


Charleston, South Carolina, 1849.





Charleston, South Carolina, 1855.



Charleston harbor, circa 1891 (Hornbeck, "Maritime Sanitation at Ports of Arrival").

## TABLES

Table 1: Free Waterfront Workers in Charleston, South Carolina, 1850.

	Total	Free Blacks	Whites	% Free Black	% White
Stevedores	13	6	7	46	54
Porters	19	14	5	74	26
Draymen	75	47	28	63	37
Carters	12	8	4	67	33

Source: 1850 U.S. Census.

Table 2: Free Waterfront Workers in Charleston, South Carolina, 1860.

	Total	Free Blacks	Whites	% Free Black	% White
Stevedores	19	1	18	5	95
Porters	75	23	52	31	69
Draymen	147	25	122	17	83
Carters	34	11	23	32	68

Source: 1860 U.S. Census.

**ABBREVIATIONS IN NOTES**

ARC	Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina
CCPL	Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, South Carolina
CLS	Charleston Library Society, Charleston, South Carolina
CRCMS	Collections Research Center, Mystic Seaport, Mystic, Connecticut
MAHS	Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts
NASER	National Archives Southeast Region, Morrow, Georgia
SCDAH	South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina
SCHS	South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina
SCL	South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina

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