

**"THE TIES THAT BIND":
EX-SLAVE EMIGRANT FAMILIES IN LIBERIA,
1820-1843**

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I. INTRODUCTION

African family life faced a crisis when it fragmented during capture, the Middle Passage, sale, and enslavement. Africans confronted the task of re-creating family relationships under the slave system. Whether slaves accomplished this task remains a controversial question in Afro-American slave historiography. Slavery, some suggest, either destroyed Black family life or deformed it into an abnormal matrifocal unit. Recently, some scholars have argued that Africans and Afro-American slaves did manage to build families and kin groups in which children were nurtured and socialized in the slave culture. Strong familial and extended kin ties provided a way for the slaves to construct a world of their own, distinct from their master's world.¹

Determining how slaves organized and viewed their families is a challenging task. Although much information about the slave family emerged from studying the freedmen after the Civil War, this paper proposes to focus on an earlier period. Much can be learned about the family structure of slaves when they were freed, emigrated to Liberia, and took up independent lives between 1820 and 1843. The kind of life they created, specifically their family existence, may shed light on the family life they led under slavery. In addition, a more precise understanding of that existence may be obtained through comparing the emancipated slaves' experiences with those of the freeborn emigrants to Liberia. The freeborn people usually possessed a family structure which developed without the restrictions and oppression of slavery. A comparison of freeborn and slave emigrant families may answer several questions. Are there any differences in the freeborn families and slave-born families that may be attributed to the impact of slavery? What sort of household composition dominated among freeborn and ex-slave settlers? Was the incidence of family break-up common? If so, why? Were there an unusual number of female-headed households? Did ex-slave fathers take responsibility for their wives and children? Were extended kin ties maintained between emigrants to Liberia and those left behind in the United States?

The first step in evaluating the families of ex-slaves and the freeborn Blacks is to examine the lists of emigrants from the ships'

logs to determine the number of slave and freeborn families emigrating to Liberia. The "family" is defined as father, mother, and children as opposed to "household," which is categorized as a group of people, both blood-kin and non-kin, residing together. Secondly, analysis of the 1843 Liberian Census indicates if the family structure of the settlers changed, remained the same, or broke down in the new environment far from the slave regime of the United States South. Thirdly, a closer, more intimate focus on the lives of three emigrant families may deepen the understanding of the ex-slave emigrant family. Ultimately, the nature of the emigrant family in Liberia reflects upon the nature of family life which existed under slavery.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BLACK IMMIGRANT FAMILY IN LIBERIA

The West African land to which Afro-Americans voyaged, Liberia, became a colony through the efforts of the American Colonization Society, an organization created in 1816 in Washington. A U.S. government agency established under the Slave Trade Prohibition Act of 1820 assisted in resettling Africans rescued from slave ships and also found settlement sites for Afro-American emigrants. Thus, the land for the Liberian colony was acquired and the first settler families, eighty-six freeborn Afro-Americans sailed east January 31, 1820, for Africa. All Liberian emigrants until 1827 were freeborn Blacks. After that year, freed slaves and rescued Africans also began to arrive in the colony.²

Between January, 1820, and December, 1843, 58 ships transporting 4,454 Black Americans dropped anchor in Liberia. Of this total number of colonists, 1,687 (38 percent) had been freeborn, 97 (two percent) had purchased their freedom, 2,290 (51 percent) were emancipated, while the status (ex-slave or freeborn) of the rest is unknown. More than half the Liberian emigrants were former slaves and several indicators suggest that they arrived in family units. First, the adult sex ratio is balanced; second, the age distribution shows a wide base of children. Finally, a pattern of family organization becomes clearer when ship emigrant lists are analyzed according to family and other kin groups.³

Most of the Liberian settlers arriving between 1820 and 1843, stepped ashore as members of families that included two parents and children. This is true for the 166 (54 percent freeborn double-headed families and for the 81 (27 percent) ex-slave two-parent families. A significant number of families, 58 (19 percent), in the unknown (previous condition of servitude unknown) category were double-

headed families. It is probable that some of these families consisted of former slaves. The next largest group included those people who arrived in female-headed families. There were slightly more such groups among the freeborn settlers--62 female-headed families--than among the emancipated group with 53 such families. (45 percent of female-headed families were freeborn; and freeborn female-headed families are 11 percent of total emigrant families. Thirty-eight percent of all female-headed families were ex-slave; while nine percent of total families were ex-slave female-headed families.) Finally, there are 97 kin groups composed of persons that could be identified only as relatives or other kin. Of this group, 46 (47 percent) were ex-slaves, 24 (24 percent) were freeborn Afro-Americans, and 27 (28 percent) were of unknown status. This analysis suggests that the majority of Liberian settlers came with kin in families of various types.⁴

III. THE EFFECTS OF THE LIBERIAN ENVIRONMENT ON THE BLACK IMMIGRANT FAMILY STRUCTURE

The months after debarkation in Liberia were harrowing. Twenty-two percent of all settlers died during the first year in Liberia, while the death rate for adults (ages 24-45) ranged between 60 and 90 deaths per thousand per year. This astounding death rate resulted from the acclimation period in the unfamiliar tropical environment. More than 45 percent of the deaths prior to 1844 were attributed to African fever, probably malaria, contracted during the initial acclimation year. Census enumerators in 1844 counted only 2,390 persons living in the nine Liberian settlements, a severe population decline from the 4,454 people who had emigrated between 1820 and 1843. Liberia's total number of survivors included 1,745 (73 percent) emigrants--families who arrived by ship between the years 1820 and 1843--and 587 (25 percent) persons born in the colony to Afro-American parents. Others included 12 persons born to mixed Afro-American and African parents, and 46 people born of African parents who were adopted into emigrant Afro-American families. The records show that 529 emigrants left the colony sometime before 1843. Conflicts with the Africans resulted in 74 fatalities during the years 1820 through 1843. These figures show that death spared no group, touching all categories of families alike, disrupting the lives of all, and preventing any increase in population.⁵

These statistics also indicate the major cause of family breakup--disease and death. For example, the Stubblefields, Isaac and Rachel, and their three children Abraham, Elizabeth and James,

ex-slaves from Virginia, emigrated to Liberia aboard the ship *Harriet*, arriving in Monrovia on March 24, 1829. The fever hit quickly, killing Isaac and the two youngest children in the first year. The next year Rachel died of pleurisy, leaving the eldest son, 11 year-old Abraham, to fend for himself. He survived, married, and by 1843 had three young sons of his own.⁶

Afro-Americans, both freeborn and ex-slave, who arrived at various times over the twenty years between 1820 and 1843, and who suffered family breakup because of death, resumed their lives after the acclimation period, created new marriages, new families, and took in orphans and kin. By the year 1843, the colonizers of Liberia had set up new and reconstituted households and begun the long process of building their country. In that year, 1843, the Liberian government conducted a census which reveals social and economic conditions for that one year. Examination of this document provides a profile of the families in Liberia.

Among the total census population of ex-slaves were 110 households (76 percent) with both male and female adults present along with children. Only the males' status relative to slavery is known for 73 (66 percent) of these households since the wives often arrived in the colony before marriage and therefore had a different name. However, there were 34 (31 percent) double-headed households where the known status of both adults was ex-slave. Among the ex-slaves who had emigrated during the 23 years from 1820-1843, a majority lived in double-headed families. Many of these families had been formed after arriving in Liberia because of the death of the primary emigrant families. The freeborn emigrants maintained a majority of double-headed families as well. Freeborn settlers constituted 95 (75 percent) two-parent households in 1843. The Black family--ex-slave and freeborn--characterized by the two-parent family weathered the storms of pioneer life.⁷

Among all families in 1843, 84 percent of the heads of household were male while just 16 percent were females. Among ex-slaves, there were 35 single-headed households, 17 of which were female-headed and 18 male-headed. In comparison, the incidence of freeborn female and male-headed households were very similar; 16 and 15 respectively. A significant breakdown of family structure as evidenced by single-headed families is not apparent in 1843 Liberia.⁸

These ex-slave and freeborn double-headed families adapted to the unique conditions of early Liberia and are characterized by the predominance of double-headed families plus kin, orphans, apprentices, and others living together. Only fifty-one (13 percent) nuclear families lived in households without others present. One

typical household belonged to Anthony and Elizabeth Gibson and their three children. This ex-slave family arrived in the colony in April, 1836, and settled in the agricultural village of Marshall. Seven years later, in 1843, the Gibson family consisted of two more Gibson children, four young boys listed as orphan-apprentices, and a washerwoman.⁹ Another ex-slave immigrant, Louis Sheridan, his young wife Flora, and his two daughters sailed to Liberia in early 1838, settling in the farm community of Bexley. By 1843, the Sheridan household grew to include four orphans, three teenagers of unknown status, a female cook, and a washerwoman, Betsey Spendlove and her three children. Since Louis Sheridan was a farmer, the orphans and the other teens, six of whom were boys, probably provided agricultural labor, although the two youngest were in school. Betsey Spendlove, most likely a widow, probably did the household laundry while her eldest son, James, served as an apprentice. Such a large household was not unusual among farm families anywhere; many hands were needed to work the land. While double-headed families are the norm, the family household expanded to include other people--kin, friends, orphans, boarders--as a way of adapting to the conditions in Liberia.¹⁰

Households of freeborn emigrants were of a similar structure to those of ex-slaves. John N. Lewis and Susannah Waring arrived in Liberia in February, 1824, as teenagers. Later the former shipmates married and by 1843 had four children. Living in their house were three girls listed as servants, a nurse and a laborer, Yorick Curd, an ex-slave who came from Kentucky in 1842. This was an elite family; John Lewis was the Colonial Secretary, and later in the 1850s he became the Liberian Secretary of State. His wife was the daughter of Colston Waring, a free black minister from Petersburg, Virginia, who founded a mercantile business after the support for his missionary work ended. Ex-slaves and free black families of lesser means and status living in similarly structured households adapted to the conditions of Liberia. The country at this time was a struggling agricultural and trade colony with only one town of significance, Monrovia. People lived together in larger households to economize, sustain one another, and work together. Though double-headed families were typical, the households of these families also included kin, friends, boarders, and servants--a situation deemed practical in the pioneer society.¹¹

The census of 1843 showed a number of female-headed households which made up about 16 percent of all households and like many households often included children, orphans, kin, and others. In addition, families headed by women who lived in other people's

homes as kin, friends, or workers, existed. Not surprisingly, sometimes female heads of households were widows; 16 free-born women and four emancipated women were listed as such in the census. For example, one widowed head of household, Eliza Gray, the wife of a North Carolinian ex-slave, lived and worked as a "Farmeress" in Caldwell during 1843. Only her four children, age 13 to four lived with her.¹²

Some ex-slave women came as heads of families and remained as such while living in other households, or they set up separate households of their own as the ex-slave Frances Horace did after she came to Liberia with her seven children in 1834. Once settled, Frances worked as a nurse, her eldest son as a laborer, and her three youngest children attended school. The household also contained a single male, Isaac Walker, an ex-slave carpenter from Virginia. Walker had come to Liberia with his father, also named Isaac, a stepmother, Sarah, and three sisters aboard the *Ninus*, the same ship on the which the Horaces arrived. Sarah Walker died of the fever in 1834. Isaac's two sisters were killed that year in a massacre at Port Cresson, a community founded by pacifists, when rival chiefs involved in slaving attacked the settlement. Twenty settlers died and the rest retreated to Monrovia.¹³

Liberia also had a few single fathers with young children to rear after their wives died. Drawing from the 1843 census, there were 18 households headed by male ex-slaves and 15 headed by freeborn men. One emancipated single father, Henry Russ, had arrived in the colony in 1835 with his wife and four children. The youngest, an infant, died in 1837. Henry's wife passed away five years later leaving him with five children ranging in age from 20 to seven. Another man, Adam Lockett, was left with five small children ages ten to three years, after his wife, Charlotte, died during childbirth. Fortunately, Adam's sister-in-law, Eliza Butler, resided in his household and probably aided him in caring for his young family.¹⁴

These ex-slave men felt responsibility for their families and love for their children. Letters written by some ex-slave fathers makes this clear. As a matter of fact, virtually all the correspondence of male Liberian settlers gives evidence of their affection for family and children either by describing their children's health, activities, religious progress, and schooling or through direct statements of fatherly love. For example, the former slave, Jacob Gibson, wrote American Colonization Society officials following his arrival in the colony in 1833. After describing a safe voyage, he stated he would be "ten thousand times obliged to you if you will make an effort to

get my children freed and sent out to me. Neither of you, perhaps, know the pain which a father feels at being separated from his own offspring." Another ex-slave, Paul F. Lindsay wrote in 1839 to John H. Latrobe, an official of the Colonization society, pleading for help in freeing his family from bondage. Even though Lindsay was satisfied with Liberia, he declared, "in one thing only I can say that I am not satisfied in that my wife and children that I have left behind me being slave as I was but have not the chance that I had of getting their freedom." Perhaps, he said, he might come to the United States and "with a few friends I may be the means of getting them out of bondage. . ."¹⁵ Men who grew to maturity under slavery had the capacity to love and care for their kin. This is a crucial point because many historians, and other scholars, believe that slavery emasculated the black male-father; the master as father took the place of the slave father. Slave fathers lacked the ability to protect their families from punishments and sale. Thus, some scholars contend, powerless, weak males lacking love or responsibility for their families resulted from the slave system. Significantly, this image is in great contrast to those men who emigrated to Liberia in these years, for the legacy of slavery had not damaged their sense of paternal love and responsibility.¹⁶

Liberia's ex-slave settlers lived in families and households molded after those they had while slaves in the United States. Those North American slave experiences and the special circumstances of African pioneer life were blended together to form the Liberian family and household which is depicted in the census of 1843. Hardship, disease, and time battered, but certainly did not destroy these families and households. The high incidence of fairly large households made up of blood kin--parents and children, relatives and in-laws--as well as orphans, apprentices, and servants may have been a response to conditions unique to Liberia during the period. The hostile tropical environment, the difficult economic conditions, and the stresses of settling a foreign land forced people to rely heavily on family and kin. Orphans, newly-arrived relatives and friends, boarders, apprentices, and servants had to live within the houses of others. Illness and death frequently broke up families, forcing them to relocate in other households and create new families. Orphaned children of friends and kin were often welcomed into the home, as well as newly arrived kin from the United States. Liberians settlers were adapting family and household structure brought from the United States to the conditions in Liberia. In fact, fictive kin relations and extended family ties developed under bondage aided these people in dealing with loss of family and subsequent reorganization of people into new families.¹⁷

These Liberian households were complex groupings rather than simple nuclear structures. This was in sharp contrast to Black families of late 19th century Philadelphia where 75 percent were nuclear. Furthermore, in the rural southern United States of the 1880s the percentage of nuclear households ranged from 84 percent in Mount Auburn, Mississippi to 68 percent in Lowndes County, South Carolina. Figures for the urban South ranged from 65 percent in Richmond, Virginia, to 71 percent in Beaufort, South Carolina. The majority of families living in Liberia in 1843 were complex since they usually included a nuclear family augmented by other household members such as kin, orphans, and servants. Emigrants responded to the special conditions found in the colony and created complex, or augmented family structures. The strong ex-slave, emigrant family adapted readily to the new life.¹⁸

Liberian family households differed from those in the U. S. because they were larger. For instance, a double-headed ex-slave household in Monrovia consisted of 6.2 members, while a freeborn household was slightly larger with 6.8 members. Similar figures for Philadelphia of 1838 show only 4.27 members in ex-slave households and 3.88 in freeborn Black households. Over half the South's rural Black households included two to four members; just over a third contained five to seven people. In the urban south, 58 percent to 63 percent of households contained two to four persons; and slightly under one-third of Blacks lived in households of five to seven members. Among all ex-slave households in Monrovia, 29 percent lived in households of two to four members, 50 percent in households of five to seven. Sixteen percent in households of eight to ten members, and eight percent in households of over 11 members. Freeborn households had a more even distribution of residents: 18 percent lived in households of two to four members, 21 percent in households of five to seven members, 16 percent in households of eight to ten, and 6 percent in those of over 11. Monrovia households were larger for both ex-slave and freeborn Blacks than those in the United States because the family in Liberia, in a healthy response to harsh conditions, adapted and formed a new household pattern.¹⁹

This paper has focused on households in only one year, 1843, a restriction caused by the absence of additional census data. For this reason, determining the interior nature of family life in Liberia at other times has been impossible. However, calculated judgments can be made based on letters written by ex-slaves since several family groups who arrived in Liberia during the 1830s kept up a correspondence with their former masters for years. These letters reflect the closeness of family ties in the colony, the enduring love

of family still in the United States, the effects of the novel African environment, and the wonderful aspects of new-found liberty. Three kin-groups of ex-slaves, the Pages, and Minors, and the Skipwiths, came to Liberia and subsequently maintained contact with their former masters in the United States. Through their letters a glimpse of the intimate aspects of Liberian family life can be obtained.

IV. IN-DEPTH FAMILY PORTRAITS - THE PAGE FAMILY

Robert, John, and Thomas Page, three brothers, each with their wives and children, all of whom had been slaves on a Virginia plantation and emancipated in late 1834 by Anne Randolph Page, landed in Liberia in 1835. Robert wrote in 1839 to Anne Randolph Page's daughter and son-in-law, Sarah and Charles Andrews, describing the "tolerable comfortable" conditions at the Edina farm settlement. He worked as a farmer and blacksmith and wrote that "three of our boys, Alfred, John, and Robert go to school constantly." Despite Robert's two jobs, he still needed aid from his former masters to support his growing family, and he did not hesitate to request supplies and gifts. This was a common practice among liberated slaves who maintained ties with their old masters because provisions sent with the emigrants often proved insufficient. Also, agricultural practices were strange and difficult, cash was short, and few goods that the emigrants needed or wanted were available in the new colony. Robert closed this letter as did so many other slaves, with greetings to both Black and white friends. A special note requested Charles Andrews to "Please give my love to my dear mother and all my dear friends in America. If I should not see them again in this world I hope to meet them all in heaven. . . ." ²⁰

Thomas, Robert's brother, worked as a cooper, or barrel-maker, on a coastal trading vessel, while his children stayed in Robert's home. This represented yet another example of emigrant households containing relative's or other people's children. Kin and friends helped each other with childcare because of jobs away from home, illness, or death. The three brothers and their families remained in fair health, working their farms throughout the 1840s. ²¹

Robert Page wrote the Andrews again in 1849 sending news of his farm and his "thriving" family. He extended good wishes to those in Virginia and said that "the children join me in love to their Grandmother whom they have never seen." In this way, the Pages and other ex-slave emigrant families maintained generational ties across both long distances and many years. Although Robert's Liberian children might never meet their grandmother in the United

States, they knew her through the words of their father.²²

By 1849, Thomas Page married after the death of his first wife, a situation that many other Liberians faced due to the high death rate in the initial years of settlement. Thomas praised the attributes of his second wife noting that "she has faithfully discharged the office [of] Mother to my first wife's children," and "she is quite an industrious woman, she Performs all the duties relative to housekeeping, makes all the clothes. . . ." Thomas's wife seems to have been a valued helpmate, performing the traditional duties of wife, mother, and homemaker.²³

While it is difficult to determine, evidence indicates many of the ex-slave married women remained in the home. Similarly, widowed or single mothers who were forced to work often took in washing or sewing, tasks that could be done in the home in conjunction with domestic duties. Liberian society, small and isolated as it was, at least did not have the racism and discrimination which deprived urban Black males in the U.S. of jobs, thereby forcing Black women into the jobs outside the home. Economic conditions in Liberia were fairly egalitarian within a rural, subsistence society. Ex-slaves and freeborn emigrants held jobs as artisans and semi-skilled laborers. The most successful combined a trade, such as stonemason, with farming. A small elite made up of freeborn Blacks, such as the Warings and Roberts families arose. In 1843, the 22 members of the upper class held the professional and governmental offices in the colony. For the majority of the people jobs and a fair livelihood were available with hard work and luck--meaning survival during the acclimation period and good health later.²⁴

Other women in the Page circle of kin did not fare so well mainly because of the death of a spouse, a common occurrence in the colony for all emigrants--ex-slave and free. For example, the Page brothers' cousin, Sarah, mother of two, was widowed soon after her arrival in the colony. Later "she was married a second time, had a daughter by her second husband [and the child] not being three years old, was taken with a disease and soon died, the Father not long surviving the daughter died also" in April, 1849.²⁵

The Page family letters end in 1854. However, the communications shows how an ex-slave family--three brothers, their mother, their wives and children, and other kin, lived after their arrival in 1835. In the census of 1843, Robert Page headed a nuclear family which included his wife, Matilda, two sons, and a daughter. Thomas Page, a cooper, lived with his wife and son, Peter, in a household headed by the farmer, Isaac Craven. John Page is not listed in this census. The Page letters indicate that the brothers and

their families remained close over the years, caring for one another's children, sharing precious books sent from Virginia, and grieving over a dead brother. Frequent messages and inquiries about relatives left in the United States revealed the same close extended kin ties as existed under slavery in the U. S. South.²⁶

V. IN-DEPTH FAMILY PORTRAITS - THE MINOR FAMILY

Some slaves were freed and sent to Liberia before they were old enough to head a family. Sometimes they emigrated alone or with parents or relatives. Later, though, they would continue the family tradition learned from their slave parents by establishing their own families in Liberia. One such man, James Cephas Minor emigrated with his mother, Mary Ann, both having been freed by John Minor of Fredericksburg, Virginia, in 1828. James had been prepared for freedom by his owner and Lucy Landon Carter Minor, John Minor's mother. James, by age twenty, had been trained in his master's printing business and taught to read and write. He sailed aboard the *Harriet* for Liberia in 1829. By May of 1830, he was working for the *Liberia Herald* newspaper. Although his first letters were lost, reports in others indicated he got along well.²⁷

James's first extant letter, dated February 11, 1833, was full of Liberian news--a ship arrival from Charleston with 170 passengers, another from Maryland with 154 emigrants, new buildings being erected in Monrovia, friendly natives and "presumptuous" Africans rescued from slave ships. One newcomer, Burwell Minor, had come from James' old plantation. John Minor sent him to James for guidance and shelter. Like so many other emigrants, James added a new member to his household--one that needed shelter and guidance in the new land. James wrote later that Burwell was farming in Caldwell, although upon his landing "he acted like a young horse just out of the stable--he tested [his] freedom. I gave him the best instruction I could."²⁸

James married sometime between his arrival and 1843. It is possible that he married twice since the Census lists his wife with four children of her own and two children belonging to him. Probably both James and his second wife had experienced the ravages of disease and death in the loss of their first spouses. However, they, like so many others, chose to join their two families by marriage and continue on in the harsh new land. Besides the family, two teenaged apprentices also lived in the household. In 1851, James wrote that he and his "family are still surviving the wreck of nature and are in tolerable good health, thank God." He expressed much interest in,

and nostalgia for, friends and his former masters. Writing to Mary B. Blackford, his former master's sister, he expressed a wish to see her and "to have been present at the assembling of your brothers and son and daughters, and grandchildren." After many years, James could still imagine "a view of Fredericksburg--Toppen Castle, Edgewood, and many other places over which I have walked in your beloved country in the day of early youthood."²⁹

VI. IN-DEPTH FAMILY PORTRAITS - THE SKIPWITH FAMILY

The most extensive collection of Liberian letters are those from the ex-slaves of the Virginian, John Hartwell Cocke, who in 1833, freed and sent to Liberia the Skipwith family--Peyton, his wife Lydia, and their six children. These people were chosen by Cocke because he thought they were a healthy, Christian family prepared for the trials of pioneer life. Peyton Skipwith was a stonemason which proved to be a valuable skill in Liberia where rock houses were preferable since African insects and weather doomed wooden buildings.³⁰ Although Cocke chose the Peyton Skipwith family to go to Liberia precisely because he thought they were a stable group, they were born, reached maturity, and began their family under the oppressive slave system. At least some of the family strength and cohesion must have derived from a tradition of family living during slavery times. Certainly, the Skipwith family exhibits the continuance of a viable family even without the presence of the white master to enforce or bolster its existence.

Peyton Skipwith and his family moved to Liberia in 1834. The dreaded African fever struck swiftly and claimed the lives of his wife, Lydia, and two of their children. Additionally, Peyton suffered from a strange ailment, "night blindness," that prevented him from working. By 1836, though, he was able to write "thanks be to God my health and sight is recovered and that day of awful gloom is gone and I feel satisfied with my present home and desire no other." Friends and family in Virginia were not forgotten, for Peyton wrote: "Give my love to all the family both white and colored and all my friends in general." His oldest daughters, Diana and Matilda, attended school and kept house for their father until he remarried. Diana wrote letters home with messages to her grandmother and other kin. Often she sent packages of seeds and other small gifts. As with many others in Liberia who had kin in the United States, ties remained strong over the years.³¹

Prior to 1843, Diana married a seaman, captain of a colonial vessel, and was enjoying married life. Matilda still lived at home in

her father's two-story rock house since her favorite suitor had drowned. Tragedy continued to mark Matilda's life. In 1844, when her sister Diana died, she was "completely left alone [with] only Nash my brother. . ." and her father. Still she looked ahead for, "in a month or two from this I expects to change my life." She married Samuel B. Lomax, a man of many trades, "firstly a Cooper, 2dly Printer, 3dly Sea Captain and Clerk." By this time, her father had married again to a widow with two children. The year 1848 found Matilda the mother of two daughters, Eliza, Adala, and Lydia Ann; a third child had died. The next year brought much sorrow. First, in July, Samuel, Matilda's husband, drowned; then Peyton died in October. Matilda felt devastated, left "with three small children . . . in this New Country Where Every thinge is hard for a widow. . . ." She requested aid from her master for, "if I Ever in all my life needed Help, it is now. . . ." In addition to her own offspring, she also had to care for Peyton's "small children who are Depending on me. . . ." ³²

Nash, Matilda's younger brother, inherited Peyton's stone house and carried on the masonry business until he, too, died in the autumn of 1851. Matilda wrote that she was "doing as well as a lone woman situated as I am could expect to do. By hard labor and the assistance of some friends I and my Children are kept from suffering." She recognized the universal inequities between laboring men and women for she had to "Work one Day for a lone 25 cts and men get \$1.50 cts pr Day, Masons." Although times continued to be grueling for Matilda, she kept her faith in God and provided for and educated her children. She remarried in 1854 to a Mr. Richardson. ³³

A cousin from Virginia, James Skipwith, landed in Monrovia on Christmas Day, 1857, optimistic and ready to succeed, even though he regrettably had not been able to "carry my wife and Childreans. . ." Initially, he moved into Matilda's brick house, opened a bake shop, and bought ten acres of farm land. Soon James wrote he had "enjoyed som[e] of the Privalige of a free man."--jury duty and voting. He was satisfied with Liberia although "Our work is almost like Building the walls of Jerusalem. We have to carry our tools all day in our hands and our Bibles at night." Despite hardship he professed "it [Liberia] is the Best Country for the Black man. . . God intended Africa for the Black Race." This vibrant, hard-working man died unexpectedly in 1861 despite Matilda's nursing. She wrote that although he was bedridden James remained hopeful until the end, continuing to dream of seeing his wife "and as she did not come it made him worse. But he spoke very cheerful about dieing." James' desire to reunite his family in Liberia could not be fulfilled. After his death, there were no more letters; however a visitor to Monrovia

reported that Matilda and her husband lived in bad circumstances on the poor side of town. Nevertheless, they continued to accept God's will for them.³⁴

The experience of the Skipwith family depicts the pains and joys of one emigrant family. Through it all they remained close-knit, aiding each other, welcoming kin from the United States, and going about the daily business of making a living. Set-backs and grief were stoically accepted as part of life in Liberia that no family, former slave or freeborn, could escape.

VII. CONCLUSION

The Liberian experience between 1820 and 1843 demonstrates that the institution of slavery did not damage or destroy the attachment to family of those ex-slaves who emigrated to that African colony. Rather, those involved journeyed to the promised land as family or kin groups and when death took their loved ones, survivors recovered and established new families and households. At the same time, the family structure, built in the United States under slavery, was adapted to the special conditions settlers encountered in Liberia. Large, complex households were common with relatives, orphans, apprentices, and others residing together under one roof. These complex units provided mutual aid, sustenance, and economic security to their members. Kin ties remained strong over time. Relatives from the United States joined settler families who helped them until they were ready to live on their own. Those family members that stayed behind in the U. S. remained in the minds of their Liberian relatives. Parents told Liberian-born children of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in the land across the sea. Generally speaking, former male slaves exhibited strong, durable ties to wives, children, and relatives. They suffered when their families were absent and they cared for, educated, and praised their children. Despite Liberia's hardships, it was a land of liberty, modest opportunity, and one without the evil discrimination based on color or previous condition of servitude. There, as demonstrated by the analysis of the 1843 census and the ex-slave correspondence, the sturdy emigrants who survived the initial years built strong, cohesive, families adapted to the conditions in Liberia. Those families clearly copied the traditional structural foundations formed during slavery in the United States South.

NOTES

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¹The historiography of the slave family is long and controversial. Ulrich B. Phillips in *American Negro Family* (1918) saw the slave institution as a civilizing force. E. Franklin Frazier in *The Negro Family in the United States*, (1939) saw stable marriages and families only among the "elite" artisans and houseslaves. Female-headed families characterized most others and following emancipation most slave families broke down. Kenneth B. Stampp, in *The Peculiar Institution* (1956), argued that the slave system had destroyed the Negroes' native culture, families were not close, and parents often regarded children with indifference. Stanley M. Elkins in *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959) contended that slave families were too dependent upon their owners to form "a meaningful unit." Slave fathers were deprived of authority and hence were not really fathers at all. Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 government study of the Negro family attributes current Black social maladies to the demise of the Black family and the predominance of the matriarchal family, both considered as legacies of slavery. More recently, other historians have revised earlier views. Eugene Genovese in *Roll, Jordan, Roll: the World the Slaves Made*, (1972) sees a slave family surviving, even under the paternalistic slave system. Herbert G. Gutman in *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (1976) argues that the slaves created their own culture distinct from that of the masters with a strong family structure which lasted after emancipation.

²Tom W. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, 1980) Pp. 19-23. Hereafter cited as *Behold the Promised Land*.

³U. S. Congress, Senate, U.S. Navy Department, tables showing the number of Emigrants and captured Africans sent to the colony of Liberia by the government of the United States. . . together with a census of the colony and a report of its commerce, & c. September, 1843, Senate Document No. 50, 28th Congress, 2nd sess., 1845, Pp. 152-414. Here the sources will be identified as *Emigrant Role* for the information from the ships' logs and as *Census* for

information from the 1843 Liberian Census. These rich sources include the "Roll of Emigrants that have been sent to the Colony of Liberia, Western Africa, by the American Colonization Society and its Auxiliaries, to September, 1843," along with tables on schools, agriculture, and crime. The ships' emigrant rolls usually list passengers in groups identifiable as families along with age, status--emancipated, freeborn, or unknown, former owner, place of origin and debarkation, occupation, education, and year of death, if applicable. The census lists people by household, name, age, date of arrival in the colony, connections in the colony, occupation, education, and state of health; 1845b.

⁴Ibid. p. 32. Other books useful for Liberian background history and the American Colonization movement were: Charles Henry Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, Vol. 2. (New York, 1947) and Philip J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement 1816-1865*, (New York: 1961).

⁵*Emigrant Roll*; Tom W. Shick, "A Quantitative Analysis of Liberian Colonization from 1820 to 1843, with Special Reference to Mortality," *Journal of African History*, 12, no. 1 (1971): Pp. 46-51. Hereafter this article will be cited as "Quantitative Analysis."

⁶*Emigrant Roll*; most ships carried groups of passengers identifiable as family or kin groups; however, the *Ontario* arrived in 1828 with all freeborn male emigrants; the *Randolph* arrived in 1828 with 27 ex-slaves of a Mr. McDermitt of Georgia. All except one of these people had the same last name--McDermitt--thus it was not possible to be certain of family groupings. Also the ship *Heroine* had an all-male roll each person having been emancipated in view of emigrating by the U.S. Government; Shick, "Quantitative Analysis," Pp. 48-51. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, Pp. 26-27; "Quantitative Analysis," Pp. 45-59; *Emigrant Roll*, Pp. 193.

⁷*Emigrant Roll; Census*, Pp. 356-360; Shick, Tom W., *Emigrants to Liberia, 1820-1843: An Alphabetical Listing*, Liberian Studies Research Working Paper No. 2 (Newark, Del., 1971). This list was particularly useful when tracing the people named in the census back to their arrival in order to determine their status--emancipated, freeborn or unknown.

⁸*Census*, Pp. 369-372.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹*Census*, Pp. 326-327; Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, Pp. 46-47 and 106-108.

¹²*Census*, Pp. 341-349.

¹³*Census*, Pp. 366-369; Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, Pp. 60. *Census*, Pp. 341-349; It is interesting to note that female-headed households were not as common in Liberia as in some cities of the U.S. during a similar period. For example, among ex-slaves and freeborn Blacks in Philadelphia between 1837 and 1847 there were about 30% or three households in ten headed by a woman. The difference between Philadelphia and Liberia in the category of female-headed households may have been due to the lack of urban environmental disruptions, racism and discrimination in the latter, or to the fact that some female-headed families were taken into larger Liberian households, thus obscuring their numbers; Theodore Hershberg, "Free-born and Slave-born Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia," in *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies*, edited by Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975) Pp. 395-426. Also pertinent is work by Frank M. Furstenberg, Jr., Theodore Hershberg, and John Modell, "The Origins of the Female-headed Black Family: The Impact of the Urban Experience," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, VI:2 (1975), Pp. 211-233. Their table on Page 219, "Family Composition by Ethnicity, 1850 and 1880," shows inferred headship in Philadelphia to be:

	<u>1850</u>	<u>1880</u>
Female-headed	22.5%	25.3%
Male-headed	6.0%	5.9%
Couple-headed	71.5%	68.8%

These historians assert that disorganization of the Black family was not due to slavery, but to urban economic and demographic factors. They state that sickness and death played the main role in creating female-headed families. However, Elizabeth Pleck in *Black Migration and Poverty, Boston 1865-1900*, challenges this and argues that many women who claimed to be widows were not, thus marital breakups were an important factor in creating female-headed families. Herbert G. Gutman in "Persistent Myths About the Afro-American Family," in *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, 3rd Edition, edited by Michael Gordon, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983) Pp. 459-481 gives information in Table 4 "Household Status of All Black Women Aged 20-29, in 1880," On the percentages of female heads of households in several Southern towns:

Beaufort, S. C.	18%
Natchez, Miss.	14%
Richmond, Va.	9%

These figures are much closer to the Liberian 16% female-headed households.

¹⁴*Census*, Pp. 350-356; *Emigrant Roll*, Pp. 259, Henry Russ' wife's name is not given in the ship's roll of passengers.

¹⁵Bell I. Wiley, ed., *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia 1833-1869*, (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1980). Pp. 216-220. Quotes from the ex-slaves' letters often contain grammatical and spelling errors; however, these do not usually interfere with understanding the content of the passage. Therefore the letters will be left in the form written or as edited by Wiley.

¹⁶Hershberg, "Freeborn and Slave-born Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia," Pp. 400; Furstenberg, Hershberg, and Modell, "The Origins of the Female-headed Black Family," Pp. 215.

¹⁷The information in this paragraph is based on the author's analysis of data as well as information gleaned from Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*; Hershberg, "Freeborn and Slave-born Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia;" and Furstenberg, Hershberg, and Modell, "The Origins of the Female-headed Black Family."

¹⁸Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, in Table A-10, "Composition of Black Households and Subfamilies, 1880," Pp. 487.

¹⁹Hershberg, "Freeborn and Slave-born Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia," Pp. 427.

²⁰Letters of the Page-Andrews Negroes, in Wiley, *Slaves No More*, Pp. 102-103. Since all quotes and ex-slave letter sources are from Wiley's book, the notes will be cited by book page number.

²¹*Ibid.* Pp. 103-104.

²²*Ibid.* Pp. 108-109.

²³*Ibid.* Pp. 111-112.

²⁴*Ibid.* Pp. 108.

²⁵*Ibid.* Pp. 112.

²⁶Letters of the Minor-Blackford Negroes, in Wiley, *Slaves No More*, Pp. 15-16; *Census*.

²⁷*Ibid.* Pp. 13-14.

²⁸*Ibid.* Pp. 15-17.

²⁹*Ibid.* Pp. 26-27.

³⁰*Ibid.* Pp. 33-35.

³¹*Ibid.* Pp. 36-38.

³²*Ibid.* Pp. 56, 62, 71.

³³*Ibid.* Pp. 73-75.

³⁴*Ibid.* Pp. 82-83, 95, 98-99.