

Shifting Attitudes Towards Slavery in Antebellum Rockbridge County

Fitzhugh Brundage



DURING the summer of 1983, in a paper written while a Northern Fellow at the Stonewall Jackson House, I surveyed the history of slavery in Rockbridge County. I concentrated on the questions of who owned slaves, what the slaves were used for, and what the quality of slave life was. Not surprisingly, the institution of slavery in this county shared many characteristics with slavery as it existed throughout the rest of the upper South. There were liveried house slaves, skilled slave craftsmen, and, of course, the simple field hands. The slave owners varied from very wealthy men such as the owners of Mulberry Hill, Buffalo Forge, and Fancy Hill to middling farmers such as J. H. B. Jones of Brownsburg.

Just as the size of the slave holdings varied, so did the treatment of slaves in Rockbridge County. Some slaveholders espoused and practiced sincere paternalism towards their slaves, whereas others showed little, if any, restraint in their exercise of authority over their bondsmen. And like slaves throughout the South, most slaves developed a grudging accommodation with their owners. But some bondsmen in Rockbridge County were, or so their masters claimed, "troublesome chattels." They ran away; they

Fitzhugh Brundage had been a Mary Moody Northern Fellow at the Stonewall Jackson House during 1982-83. He was a candidate for the Ph.D. in United States history at Harvard University at the time he delivered this address in the garden of the Mulberry Hill estate (the home of Samuel McDowell Reid, 1837-71) in Lexington, July 23, 1984.

attempted to poison their masters; they burned white men's property; and they even physically attacked their masters. If there was anything surprising that came up in my research, it was the shockingly high death rate of slaves in Rockbridge County. Whether compared to Augusta County to the north or to Southampton County in the Tidewater, the death rate among slaves in this county was higher. But aside from this puzzling and as yet unexplained point, there was little in my research that was peculiar or noteworthy about slavery in Rockbridge County.

I would like to focus on the larger question of the influence of slavery on the development of the county. To answer that question I would like to concentrate on the economic explanations for the expansion of slavery in the county as well as the attitude of the white residents of the county towards slavery. I hope to demonstrate that the attitudes of many whites drifted from ambivalence towards slavery to outspoken defense of the institution.

The white residents of the Shenandoah Valley have acquired a reputation as critics of slavery. The myth of the Scotch-Irish has been no less fertile and tenacious than the legend of bucolic plantations. The Scotch-Irish of the Valley were supposedly an industrious, frugal, and democratic people imbued with a Calvinist work ethic. These sturdy yeomen of legend proclaimed the spiritual equality of all men: slavery was an anathema to their traditions and their deep-seated religious convictions. Devoting themselves to their small farms, they remained untainted by privilege and pretension. Contemporary observers certainly marvelled at the industriousness of the Scotch-Irish, but otherwise their portraits diverged considerably from the Scotch-Irish of legend. Frederick Law Olmsted, one of the ablest and most inquisitive observers of the antebellum South, noted that the Scotch-Irish were "certain in a few years to acquire money enough to buy a negro, which they are said to be invariably ambitious to possess." Whatever doubts the Scotch-Irish entertained about the morality of slavery were dissolved by the financial and social profits promised by slaveholding. No county in the Shenandoah Valley had a higher proportion of Scotch-Irish than Rockbridge County—at least two-thirds of the white residents could claim Scotch-Irish descent—and no county possessed a more vigorous or expansive slave economy.¹

1. For a recent portrait of Valley antislavery sentiment, see Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate 1831-1832* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), pp. 25-33; Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1856), p. 356; on the ethnicity of Valley residents see R. D. Mitchell, "The Shenandoah Frontier," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 61 (September 1972): 471. Mitch-

Let me begin my discussion with the rather obvious but important point that slavery was a means of labor exploitation. If slavery were to grow in this county there had to be a congenial economic environment. In fact, whites brought slaves into the county at a surprisingly early point in the county's history. The initial impetus for the introduction of slaves can be directly traced to the Revolutionary war. With foreign sources of hemp inaccessible, the Continental army had to rely on American production. Well suited to the crop, Rockbridge County (initially part of Augusta) quickly became one of the major areas of hemp production in Virginia. The hemp boom created the first—although brief—demand in the county for slaves. With less than 3,100 white residents in 1782, Rockbridge County had a slave population of at least 600. Had the demand for hemp—a highly labor intensive crop—remained high, this county might have developed along very different lines. But with the conclusion of the war the demand for hemp diminished as international sources for the crop became accessible again; as a result the need for slaves also diminished.

In many ways the formative years for the county were from 1790 to 1830. The combination of increasing agricultural sophistication and the nascent growth of manufacturing contributed significantly to the development of a more varied and complex economy. Each federal census testified to a growing market for slaves. By 1830 nearly one out of every five residents of the county was a bondsman. The transformation of Rockbridge County during the early nineteenth century is even more graphic when compared with other counties in western Virginia. While the 120 percent increase in the county's white population was exceeded by several counties, no neighboring county came close to the nearly 500 percent increase in the number of slaves. Even the growth of the slave populations of Augusta County to the north and Bedford County to the east lagged more than 200 percent behind that of this county. The only county west of the Blue Ridge mountains (and this includes all of what is present day West Virginia) that had a slave population which grew as much as this county's was Kanawha County. While several counties bordering on Rockbridge had larger slave populations, none witnessed as dramatic nor as rapid a growth.²

ell concludes that 78 percent of the residents of Rockbridge County in 1778 were Scotch-Irish. I have used a more conservative estimate of 65 percent. Regardless of the exact percentage, no county in the Valley had a higher percentage of Scotch-Irish residents. On the Scotch-Irish elsewhere in the South, see James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), pp. 15-16.

2. Because there was no comprehensive colonial census for Virginia, the basic sources of population data are the county tithable records, which were produced for

A partial explanation for the success of slavery in Rockbridge County was the considerable production of tobacco. By 1860 Rockbridge produced well over 400,000 pounds of tobacco a year. The largest landowners in the county, not surprisingly, were also the largest slave holders. Hobson Johns's fifty-six slaves worked his extensive tobacco fields which produced 28,000 pounds of tobacco in 1860 as well as 1,000 bushels of corn, 800 bushels of oats, 600 bushels of wheat, and 500 pounds of butter. Many of Samuel McDowell Reid's sixty-one slaves tended his tobacco fields which produced nearly 20,000 pounds of the crop. In many ways, tobacco was well-suited to the mixed economy of this county. Although it required extensive labor, tobacco still allowed the slaves enough time to devote to other major cash crops such as corn, wheat, and oats. These large landowners and slave holders did not account for the rapid growth of slavery in this county solely by themselves, but their contribution was very considerable. Over the course of three decades of aggressive acquisition, Reid, for example, had increased the number of his slaves from ten to sixty-five in 1860.³

The iron masters and manufacturers of the county composed another conspicuous group of slave holders. Drawn to the rich mineral resources in the Valley, iron masters figured prominently in the economic maturation and growth of the county. With each new furnace and forge they built in the county, iron masters increased the demand for slaves. The county's leading iron master, William Weaver, owned sixty-six slaves who worked both as field hands and in the furnaces. Weaver also hired large numbers of forge-hands from other slave holders in both the Valley and in eastern Virginia. His chief competitors were John Jordan and Francis T. Anderson who both operated several furnaces and were large slave owners in their own right.⁴

tax purposes rather than as demographic inventories. Although there are considerable difficulties in converting tithables into the total number of residents, I have followed R. D. Mitchell and used a multiplier of four for white tithables. Although Mitchell suggests a multiplier of two for negro tithables, I find it difficult to believe that there were 1006 slaves in 1782 and only 682 in 1790. It is probable that most of the slaves in Rockbridge County in 1782 were tithable. See R. D. Mitchell, "The Shenandoah Valley Frontier," pp. 469-473; U. S. Census Manuscripts 1790-1830, Rockbridge County; Patricia Catherine Click, "Slavery and Society in the Shenandoah Valley 1790-1830," unpublished Master's thesis, University of Virginia, 1974, pp. 15-33.

3. U. S. Census Manuscripts, 1860, Schedule IV, Rockbridge County, Virginia.

4. The papers of the various iron masters are remarkably extensive; see especially the Beverly Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society; Anderson Family Papers, University of Virginia; W. W. David Ironworks Papers, University of Virginia;

The rest of the county's bondsmen were the property of small slave holders. Of the 560-odd slave holders in 1860, nearly half owned four or fewer slaves. Seemingly these owners had little in common with the largest masters such as Samuel McDowell Reid, but, in fact, both the small slave holders such as Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson and the planter Reid knew of the value of slaves as investments. In an age when both banks and stocks were notoriously risky, slaves were a sure investment. When a farmer or a local merchant had saved sufficient capital, often the wisest investment was a slave. Bondsmen were not only a valuable source of labor, but also were far more easily converted into cash than stocks and bonds.

Unneeded slaves could be rented out for additional income. Cornelius Baldwin, for example, proved to be a very successful investor in slaves. His part-ownership and editorial duties at the *Lexington Gazette* were hardly more profitable than his chattels. By hiring out his first slave, and then reinvesting the profits in more bondsmen, Baldwin had increased his total number of slaves to twelve by 1860. For ministers, lawyers, merchants, and farmers alike, slaves were a lucrative and secure investment. I am convinced that herein lies one of the most significant explanations for the growth of slavery in this county. Both farming and manufacturing were sufficiently lucrative that there was a market for slaves both as laborers and as investments. Thus a middle-class Lexingtonian such as Stonewall Jackson invested in a bank, a tannery, and slaves. And since the Jacksons didn't need all their slaves, they rented one to a hotel at Rockbridge Alum Springs. While the astute investor today may have a portfolio consisting of stocks, bonds, and real estate, the antebellum investor's portfolio would surely have included slaves—slaves which might produce returns equal to or greater than those on most stocks.⁵

Weaver-Brady Papers, University of Virginia. See also S. Sydney Bradford, "The Negro Ironworker in Antebellum Virginia," *Journal of Southern History* 25(May 1959): 194-206; Kathleen Bruce, *Virginia Iron Manufacture in the Slave Era* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968); Charles B. Dew, "David Ross and the Oxford Iron Works: A Study of Industrial Slavery in the Early Nineteenth-Century South," *William and Mary Quarterly* 31(April 1974): 189-224; Charles B. Dew, "Disciplining Slave Ironworkers in the Antebellum South: Coercion, Conciliation, and Accommodation," *American Historical Review* 79(April 1974): 393-418; Ronald L. Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves: Industrial Slavery in Maryland and Virginia 1715-1865* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979); Robert Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

5. Diary of J. H. B. Jones, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia; U. S. Census Manuscripts 1820-1860, Rockbridge County; Oren F. Morton, *A History of Rockbridge County* (Staunton, Virginia: McClure Co., 1920), pp. 119, 246, 249, 271; Charles W. Turner, ed., *Captain Greenlee Davidson, C.S.A.: Diary and*

If there was significant economic incentive for the growth of slavery in Rockbridge County, there was also a gradual but noticeable acceptance and, to a limited extent, defense of the institution. Until late in the antebellum period, the attitude of the white elite was ambivalent. There were simultaneously whites who were convinced of the adverse effects of slavery and others who were equally sure of the positive virtues of the institution. Many of the economic incentives I previously mentioned contributed to the erosion of antislavery sentiments in this county, but there were also significant social and cultural incentives. And since most of these influences exerted their greatest effect on the county's elite, I devote most of my attention then to them.

The local elite was never entirely isolated from either eastern Virginia or the rest of the South, but until the beginning of the nineteenth century residents of the county had their greatest contacts in the North. Thereafter there was a demonstrable shift to increasing social and economic ties with eastern Virginia in general, and Richmond in particular. The county's elite, which included the planters, merchants, and iron masters, gained greater and greater familiarity with eastern elites. And while there remained tensions between the two groups related both to political and religious differences, the county's elite in 1830 knew eastern Virginia and eastern Virginians far better than their predecessors had. Both the Virginia Military Institute and Washington College attracted Virginians from outside the Valley, and simultaneously eastern Virginia colleges attracted some county men.

The various spas and "resorts" in the county provided another source of contact between this county and both eastern Virginia and the upper South. Each summer brought surprisingly large numbers of vacationers from throughout the Tidewater South to the springs. Marriages between county residents and eastern Virginians also served to bind the two regions. I believe that this increased contact and familiarity with eastern Virginia enabled county residents to gain personal knowledge of the much older and more ingrained eastern slavery. Some reacted with disgust towards the perceived decadence of the east, while others relished the more cosmopolitan character of eastern Virginia. For both groups slavery lay at the heart of the qualities they associated with eastern Virginia.

It is not surprising that antebellum Rockbridge residents placed so much importance on slavery. One of the most interesting aspects of this county's antebellum history is that slavery took root and grew precisely

Letters 1857-1863 (Verona, Va.: McClure Press, 1975), pp. 1-2; U. B. Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), pp. 314-315.

when the topic of slavery was commanding greater and greater national attention.

The most noteworthy expression of antislavery in Rockbridge County was the so-called Ruffner Pamphlet. Henry Ruffner, then Presbyterian minister, owner of four slaves, and president of Washington College, published the highly controversial document in 1847. While calling for the gradual abolition of slavery, he readily admitted that slavery was too firmly entrenched in eastern Virginia to be exorcised without prohibitive expense. But west of the Blue Ridge, he boldly proposed, "it may be gradually abolished without detriment to the rights or interests of slave holders." His program included the transportation of all blacks in the Valley to Liberia and a prohibition of all future importation of slaves into the Valley. Without denying his sincere opposition to the perpetuation of slavery, Ruffner expressed equal concern about the political discrimination that plagued the western portions of the state. His antislavery campaign was intimately connected with the bitter sectional hostilities which repeatedly erupted in antebellum Virginia. Outraged by the selfish policies of eastern antebellum Virginia, which he claimed retarded the development of the Valley, he castigated the very foundations of eastern Virginian slavery.⁶

Agitation for emancipation in the Valley declined noticeably after the ratification of a revised constitution in 1851, a constitution that addressed many of the complaints of western Virginia. Content with newly acquired political power, many residents of the county no longer were convinced that slavery was detrimental to the region. No better evidence of this can be given than the repudiation of the pamphlet by John Letcher and Samuel McDowell Moore, two men who had earlier endorsed it. While campaigning for the governorship in 1859, Letcher explained that he had endorsed Ruffner's proposal "not through any abolition feeling, but to compel the eastern portion to do justice to the western portion." He admitted that he had regarded slavery as a social and political evil, but emphatically asserted that "I did not regard it then, or since, as a moral evil, for I was at that time, and have been ever since, the owner of slave property by purchase and not by inheritance." Reflection had convinced him that slavery was not a threat to western Virginia.

6. Henry Ruffner, *Address to the People of West Virginia; Showing that Slavery is Injurious to the Public Welfare and That It May Gradually Be Abolished Without Detriment to the Rights or Interests of Slaveholders*, (Lexington, Va., 1847). For interpretations of the Ruffner pamphlet, see William G. Bean, "The Ruffner Pamphlet of 1847: An Antislavery Aspect of Virginia Sectionalism," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 61(July 1953), and Carl Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982), pp. 54-55, 62-64, 87.

Similarly, Moore renounced his earlier antislavery sentiments. The two races could not live together on terms of equality, he explained, and thus the peculiar institution was a necessary evil. "I was in favor of getting rid of negroes in our section," he later recalled, "but I did not design to set them free, I wanted to remove them by sale." Propelled by sectionalism and negrophobia, Ruffner, Letcher, and Moore showed little concern for the slaves. The very fact that Ruffner's views encountered antipathy rather than acceptance attests to the region's growing commitment to the institution of slavery. If Ruffner's pamphlet signified anything it was the determination of western Virginians to achieve political parity with the rest of the state. Once that goal was attained, earlier proposals for the emancipation of slaves were forgotten.⁷

The failure of Dr. Ruffner's pamphlet is hardly conclusive evidence of the development of a more positive attitude towards slavery in the county. Blatantly proslavery arguments were seldom, if ever, widely accepted, but there was a perceivable shift from ambivalence to general consensus that slavery was an institution which could not be challenged or threatened in any way by the federal or the state governments. As suggested earlier, the Ruffner pamphlet by 1860 was no less scorned than Northern abolitionist tracts.

Antislavery sentiments with their antieastern bias were countered by a growing appreciation for the refined qualities of the east. Some county residents read a new genre of literature which depicted the planter aristocrat as a combination of natural aristocrat and European gentleman, nature and civilization, freedom and restraint. Those who labored to develop such literary heroes were aspiring men seeking to understand the values of the society in which they made their way. They were very rarely born members of the planter class, seldom of English ancestry, and are best described as—in historian William Taylor's phrase—new men.

Fortunately for my argument, Rockbridge County produced one of the most significant of the cavalier myth makers. William Alexander Caruthers, born in Lexington in 1802, wrote three novels which detailed the heroic adventures of the cavaliers of Virginia and the Knights of the Golden Horse. Almost nothing at first glance seemed to destine Caruthers to become, in his biographer's phrase, a chronicler of cavaliers. Reared in a merchant's family in Lexington, educated at Washington College, and trained as a physician in Philadelphia, he could scarcely have had less contact with the cultural heritage he examined in his novels. But his imagination and a hankering for a gentleman's style of life led him to adopt

7. Quoted in Bean, "The Ruffner Pamphlet of 1847," p. 272.

\$200 REWARD!

RAN off from my Furnace, in Rockbridge county, several weeks ago, two NEGRO MEN, the property of Mary Coghill, of Spotsylvania county, Virginia, named JOHN and SAM. Also a NEGRO MAN by the name of SPENCER, the property of Wm. L. Day, of the same county. It is apprehended that they are aiming to get to the State of Ohio, as they ran off without provocation, and they have probably taken the route by New River. John and Spencer are probably from 35 to 40 years of age; Sam from 20 to 25 years. They are all negroes of dark complexion, and John has had tetter worm on his neck.— Spencer is rather darker than the other two, and has very thick lips. I am authorized by Mary Coghill, to offer a reward for the apprehension of hers, if they are taken hereafter in this State, and secured so that she gets them, \$75 a piece; if taken in any other State, \$100 a piece; and if taken in a non-slaveholding State, \$200, to be delivered to her, or secured in Spotsylvania or Frederickburg jail. Mr. Day has not authorized me to say what reward he will pay for the apprehension of his man, but I doubt not he will pay a liberal reward.

FRANCIS T. ANDERSON,
Glenwood, Rockbridge Co., Va.

sep 7-coaw4w

Lynchburg Daily Virginian advertisement, September 7, 1860.

values far different from those of his Presbyterian ancestors. In 1823 he married the daughter of a wealthy sea-island cotton planter and added a dowry of seventy-nine slaves to his already modest fortune. He then settled down in Lexington to practice medicine, something for which he apparently had little aptitude. Not to be discouraged by his professional difficulties, he bought a house to which he added a three-story piazza with white pillars and other symbols of a Tidewater mansion, and commenced to offer entertainment on a scale unheard of in Lexington. In six years he managed to run through his entire fortune and that of his wife, as well as encumber himself with debts he was never able to pay. And all this in Lexington! Finally he took an oath of insolvency in 1829 and moved his family to New York City. After a number of years he abandoned his still-growing debts and still-floundering practice in New York and moved to Savannah. But his fortune failed to improve in that city and in 1846 he died of tuberculosis at the age of 44.⁸

8. Two excellent discussions of Caruthers can be found in Curtis Carroll Davis, *Chronicler of the Cavaliers* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1953), and William Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 204–225.

Neither Caruthers's life nor his novels revolved around slavery. But wealth derived from slavery and the leisure insured by servile labor were vital to both. Rather than delve into a discussion of the themes of the novels—a lengthy but wholly worthwhile effort—I would rather suggest a few explanations for his fascination with the eastern aristocracy. Caruthers, like some other county men, enjoyed the good fortune of wealth. But his background offered few guidelines for the enjoyment and disposal of his wealth. His education and travel, while still provincial by some standards, were as wide as most of his county peers. His marriage to a wealthy Savannah heiress completed his conversion to a life-style and values which were aristocratic by adoption, if not by heritage. The magnitude of his pretensions was of course quite rare in this county, but his general predicament was not. The Rockbridge County elite, like elites everywhere, drew upon tradition and external influences to define and advertise themselves, and for Caruthers and others the Tidewater Cavalier tradition was the model. Admittedly, this is the most conjectural aspect of my argument, but I believe that additional research will demonstrate a growing admiration for the finer qualities of the Tidewater aristocracy. Caruthers, like Ruffner, knew that slavery was the bedrock of the society he admired so greatly.

A less speculative explanation for the gradual eclipse of antislavery sentiments in the Valley was the deep and virulent antipathy to Northern abolitionism. Northern abolitionism was not a seemingly abstract threat to residents of the county. In 1835 during the peak of early turmoil over abolitionism, a Northern antislavery advocate arrived in Lexington. James F. Otis of Boston arrived from White Sulphur Spring late on a Saturday evening. The following morning he left for Natural Bridge and returned later in the day. During his absence several of his conversations, which included apparently furious antislavery statements, were repeated throughout town. A mob collected in hopes of catching Otis upon his return, but local magistrates decided to protect against violence by arresting and searching the Northerner. Otis proved to be the match for both the mob and the town officials. He successfully convinced the gathered audience that he was above suspicion. Tranquility returned and Otis was able to leave town without incident. Only with the arrival of information about Otis later in the week did his duplicity become obvious. Not only was he tainted "with the infamous heresy," but was also "a captain to the banditti." The *Lexington Gazette* spelled out the general sentiments concerning the abolitionist:

A more cowardly incendiary never travelled through our country. Otis is a small man, with a cast in one eye which gives his countenance rather a sinister expression; but his tongue is swung upon the yankee principle, namely, in the middle, and works at both ends. We suspect that he has a

large development of Destructiveness, and no firmness or conscientiousness. We would like to have his head in our collection.⁹

Fear of abolitionism was matched by growing fear of the slaves in the county. Nothing aroused white fears as quickly as did rumors of slave insurrection. Each rumor raised the specter of another Nat Turner. Few communities in the South escaped the turmoil of rumored insurrection, and Lexington was no exception. The most dramatic insurrection scare began during the Christmas holidays in 1850. The plans for a surprise attack on the Virginia Military Institute were discovered in a letter found on a road outside Lexington. The plan called for three hundred slaves to attack the Institute and carry off as many of the arms as they could. Next, the armed bondsmen would storm Lexington, "killing all they could get hold of." While many residents thought the letter was a hoax, few whites were willing to risk being unprepared.

Cadet Giles Gunn, in a letter to his sister, explained: "You had better believe it made some stir. The militia was called out and now they parade the streets from night to morning." He also noted, "It is curious how quickly the people of this county can be roused to a state of watchfulness when their all depends on this."

Although hopeful that the letter was a hoax, the superintendent of the Institute, Colonel Francis H. Smith, prepared for any eventuality. "I do not presume to say whether or not it is a hoax," he wrote, "—it may not be—but my confidence is not excessive in the colored population here."¹⁰

Local authorities failed to identify any insurrectionists, but the town council took action to insure that at least one slave was removed from the county. Henry Allen, a slave belonging to Washington College, was declared dangerous to the community. In a petition addressed to the trustees of the college, the town council emphatically stated their reservations about the bondsman:

He has been and is now exerting as we believe him eminently capable of exerting over the slaves of Lexington and its vicinity an influence highly prejudicial not to say dangerous in the extreme, and believing that his longer continuance in our midst should be productive of incalculable evil, we request you to into consideration of his immediate removal.

Confronted with such a forceful petition, the trustees quickly complied with the request and sold Allen outside of the region.¹¹

9. *Lexington Gazette*, August 28, 1835.

10. Giles Gunn to Mary Gunn, January 6, 1851, William Couper Collection, Virginia Military Institute; Francis H. Smith to William Richardson, January 2, 1851, Records of the Superintendent, Virginia Military Institute Library.

11. Memorial to the Trustees of Washington College, January 6, 1851, Records of the Trustees of Washington College, Washington and Lee University Library.

So at last I have arrived at the conclusion of this rather circuitous discussion of slavery in this county. I hope that I have at least partially explained both why slavery took root in this county and why it prospered. I also hope that some of the attitudes of county residents have been clarified. I do not mean to have suggested that the county was the seedbed of proslavery ideology, but a subtle transformation had brought Rockbridge County far closer to Tidewater and Piedmont Virginia. It is hard to imagine anyone in Rockbridge County in 1810 arguing, as the *Gazette* did in 1860, that "slavery is the highest state of happiness that a negro can reach." Perhaps the simplest way to summarize the transformation is to say that the county progressed from a mildly hostile ambivalence towards slavery to a consensus that slavery was a less than positive good, but far more than a necessary evil.¹²

12. *Lexington Gazette*, September 26, 1860.