

FOR: FAIRFIELD COUNTY MUSEUM BRICE FILE

The following is a copy of a paper I wrote during my sophomore year at Yale University for a history class. It details the Brice family of Fairfield County as well as other families in the county and their experiences during the Civil War. An updated and lengthier paper on the same topic is forthcoming in April 2001. This paper was awarded with a Yale University writing prize in May 1999, the Andrew White Prize in American history.

Leslie Neeland  
August 1, 2000

Leslie Neeland  
7425 Wynlakes Blvd.  
Montgomery AL 36117

(334) 244-1449

e-mail: leslie.neeland@  
yale.edu

# *Black and White Reactions to Sherman:*

A comparative case study of the Brice Family Plantations  
in Fairfield County, SC during the time of Sherman's March

Leslie Neeland  
History 449b  
Professor Peter Hinks  
4/27/99  
Research Paper

*Few events in American history have been as devastating to civilians as Sherman's* March through the South. Sherman's men looted and plundered their way from Atlanta to the sea and then through South and North Carolina in the winter of 1864-1865. Throughout the Great March, Sherman was an advocate of "total war" and had very few reservations about breaking traditional rules of warfare. He allowed his men to destroy Southern states and many soldiers who behaved reprehensibly towards Southern civilians escaped without punishment.<sup>1</sup> South Carolina, however, undoubtedly suffered the most under the wrath of Sherman's men. The Union troops possessed a desire to punish the state that was first in secession, and those left to defend their homes in South Carolina, usually helpless women, children, and slaves, paid the price. Sherman seems to have sensed his men's desire to decimate South Carolina and expressed such beliefs in a letter to General Halleck as his army was entering the state: "The truth is the whole army is burning with an insatiable desire to wreak vengeance upon South Carolina. I almost tremble at her fate, but feel that she deserves all that seems in store for her."<sup>2</sup> South Carolina suffered immensely during the occupation by Sherman's men; whole cities were burned, numerous private homes were looted, and women and slaves were mistreated and tortured. Although this behavior occurred in other states, it seemed to be the rule rather than the exception in South Carolina.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the best way to analyze the impact of Sherman and his army is to examine its effect on one family in a small geographical region of the state. One such family that had extensive encounters with Sherman's men was the Brice family of Fairfield County, South Carolina. Fairfield County was a rural cotton district in the antebellum years, much like many of

---

<sup>1</sup> John Bennett Walters, *Merchant of Terror: General Sherman and Total War*, (Indianapolis: Bobb-Merrill Company, Inc., 1973). xii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

the other areas in upcountry South Carolina. The county was directly north of the state capital at Columbia and felt the wrath of Sherman only a few days after Sherman's men burned Columbia to the ground. The Brice family was a relatively wealthy family in the central and slightly northern part of the county in a region known as the New Hope area about 40-50 miles north of Columbia. There were several Brice plantations that existed prior to the Civil War and all were within about a ten mile radius of each other. Although probably ten Brices had plantations and slaves in the region according to the 1860 census, meaningful documentation has survived from only three of the families.<sup>4</sup> These families were those of Dr. Walter Brice, Robert Wade Brice, and to a lesser extent, William Brice. Walter and William were in their sixties at the time of the war and were brothers; Robert Wade was one of the elder sons of Walter and had already established a home and married by the time of the Civil War.

The Brices were representative of Fairfield county's white planter population in many ways and their experiences with Sherman seemed to have been reflective of the treatment of the county as whole. Fairfield County was known as a wealthy area, and in this respect, the Brices represented this wealth, although they were probably somewhat richer than the average Fairfield County residents merely because they were more prominent.<sup>5</sup> The family was well-educated and consisted of several doctors, ministers, and lawyers prior to the Civil War, so they were likely a distinguished family in the area.<sup>6</sup> Religiously, the Brice family was representative of the county as a whole; the Brices were devout members of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, a prominent Christian denomination in the area. In addition, all the members of the Brice family

---

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of the Census. *Fairfield County, S.C.: Slaveowners of the name Brice and no. of Slaves of each*, 1860, (Washington, D.C., 1860).

<sup>5</sup> Capt. David P. Conyngham, *Sherman's March Through the South*, (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1865), 340-341.

<sup>6</sup> Maymie W. Stevenson, "History of New Hope." *A Fairfield Sketchbook*, ed. Julian Stevenson Bolick, (Clinton, S.C.: Jacobs Brothers, 1963), 204.

were planters. Most planted large amounts of cotton, but they farmed other crops and tended animals as well.<sup>7</sup> The family was therefore fairly representative of the region of South Carolina in which they lived, and more importantly, they faced Sherman's men in a similar manner as other families in Fairfield County.

When Union soldiers arrived in Fairfield County, they encountered two differing groups of people on the Brice plantations who reacted to and coped with their invasion. These two groups were the white families (usually composed of the women and children left at home while the men were away at war) and the slave population. Whites were obviously frightened and completely uncertain about what fate awaited them at the hands of the unpredictable soldiers, and the Brice family was no different in this regard. White reactions, however, were also complex; it is misleading to suggest that their only response to Sherman's army was one of fear. Whites were also often defiant and outraged at the treatment they received from the invaders and the members of the Brice family seem to have offered some resistance to the advancing soldiers. White slaveowners witnessed their entire social system collapsing around them as the "Yankees" destroyed the Confederacy. Thus Sherman represented more than mere damage to their property; he humiliated the Southerners and effected a profound change on their way of life.

Black reactions to Sherman are equally if not more difficult to characterize because of the immediate change in status that Sherman's men effected upon the slaves. Sherman's men inspired a much more visible mixture of emotions in the slave population. Many slaves throughout the South were jubilant at the arrival of Union troops; to these slaves the Union troops brought liberation. Yet in other areas, slaves were as terrified as their masters about the arrival of Sherman and his men. These slaves most likely welcomed the chance at freedom as well but were unsure of what to expect from the soldiers. In Fairfield County and especially on

---

<sup>7</sup> R. W. Brice diary, 1861. Courtesy of James and Sarah Brice, Woodward, S.C..

the Brice plantations, slaves seemed to be of the latter sort. Most feared the Yankees as much as their owners and despised how the Union troops treated them and their masters. In addition, slaves were disturbed by the soldiers' blatant disregard for individual property rights, whether these rights were claimed by white or black. Because black and white residents of Fairfield County received similar treatment from Union troops, the slaves in some way identified with their masters in the sense that both viewed the troops as invaders in their homeland. Thus the Brice family and their slaves did share many of the same emotions and both viewed Sherman's men from more of a conservative perspective.

This shared perspective between black and white was probably the result of several social factors. The most convincing reason that slaves and masters seemed united was simply because of the uncertainty and chaos imposed by Sherman's men. The destruction left by Sherman forced these two groups together out of necessity rather than out of loyalty to the antebellum slavery system. Slaves therefore remained "loyal," at least superficially, to their masters by staying on the plantations even when freed. Slaves stayed because they knew no other way of life and probably did not want to act hastily. The slaves in Fairfield County were extremely prudent in their decisions not to leave immediately because they were then able to make more reasoned decisions as the post-Civil War society emerged. In addition, personal relationships probably played a large role in slaves' decisions to stay; many desired to protect the white women and children left alone and destitute. The slaves in the Fairfield region and especially in the Brice family appeared to have had reasonably amiable relationships with their mistresses and wanted to protect them in the wake of the destruction. Moreover, the slaves were just as mistreated in this region as the whites and Sherman's men probably helped promote the temporary "loyalty" of slaves by alienating them from the Union cause. Although the slaves initially proved willing to

stay with their former masters, it is misleading to suggest that they were therefore content as slaves and were satisfied in their position. The slaves of the Brice family proved to be anything but loyal when they staged an aborted slave rebellion on Dr. Walter Brice's plantation in the time immediately following the departure of Union troops. Thus the reactions of both black and white residents on the Brice family plantations in response to Sherman's march truly illuminated the complexity of race relations in South Carolina. Although Sherman's march highlighted some of the similarities that these two groups shared, the effects of the march in changing the Southern social system also shed light upon the tension in the relationships between slave and slaveowner during the time of the Civil War.

#### **The Destruction of Fairfield County: What "bummers" did**

In order to understand how blacks and whites reacted to Sherman, it is first necessary to attempt to reconstruct exactly how Sherman's men behaved and what they destroyed in Fairfield County. A great difficulty lies in reconstructing such a narrative because Southerners have tended to exaggerate and embellish such stories over the years in order to vilify the Yankees. Most of the documentation from the Brice plantations about the Union troops' invasion was written after the turn of the century or is oral history passed through family members. These sources can be very problematic and can render attempts to recreate an accurate narrative difficult. In addition, many of the slave accounts that might provide an alternate perspective and remain from this time period are at least worthy of caution. These accounts from the Brice plantations are all featured in the Federal Writers' Project Slave Narratives written in the 1930s during the depths of the Depression. Many former slaves viewed their experiences as slaves somewhat idealistically in the face of starvation and abject poverty that abounded in the

Depression. In addition, many may have recounted feelings of loyalty to their former masters based on relationships forged after the time of slavery in the free labor system that emerged. By their very nature, oral accounts taken sixty years after any event are somewhat unreliable and must be considered in a skeptical context aware of their limitations.

What is certain from these accounts, however, is that Sherman's men treated Fairfield County reprehensibly and looted and plundered much of the area. The first area to feel the wrath of the troops was Winnsboro, the county seat, which was located in the slightly southern and central part of the county and was about 40 miles north of Columbia. The men partially burned this town on February 20-21, 1865 as three division of the army passed through the area.<sup>8</sup> The New Hope section of Fairfield County where many of the Brice families lived was only approximately ten miles north of Winnsboro and many foragers likely preceded the army and ransacked this area, as was the pattern.<sup>9</sup> Diary and letter accounts from residents in the county confirm that the area was devastated, although rather inconsistently. Some places were hardly touched while other homes were plundered and burned mercilessly. A resident of Winnsboro wrote in his diary that "During each night we could discover fires in every direction in the country, and from what we have subsequently learned, no doubt many houses, both occupied and unoccupied, have been burnt and probably a large portion of the mills, gin houses and barns."<sup>10</sup> Many slaves from this region also report similar destruction on their plantations. A slave on a plantation neighboring the Brice family's home in the New Hope area claimed that the Yankees destroyed the gin house and school and took all the animals. He also reported that the soldiers set the house on fire but the family managed to extinguish the flames before any real damage

---

<sup>8</sup> Colonel S.M. Bowman and Lieutenant Colonel R.B. Irwin, *Sherman and His Campaigns: A Military Biography*, (New York: Charles B. Richardson Press, 1865), 343-344.

<sup>9</sup> John G. Barrett, *Sherman's March Through the Carolinas*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), 96.



occurred.<sup>11</sup> Most occupied homes in this area, however, escaped the torch. Several slaves in Fairfield County reported that most of the houses that the Yankees burned were the abandoned ones.<sup>12</sup>

One of the greatest fears white residents of the county faced was the mere uncertainty surrounding Sherman's visit. For weeks, the area believed that the army was likely to visit Charleston and not make its way to Columbia, much less as far north as Fairfield County. As late as February 16<sup>th</sup>, four days prior to the march into Winnsboro, the *Winnsboro Daily News* published that Sherman was likely to visit only Charleston. "It is believed by some of our military authorities that Sherman will not attempt to capture Columbia at present, but content himself with cutting the railroads and then move on to Charleston."<sup>13</sup> Two days later, the same paper reported that Columbia had been burned and warned "all who intend staying to keep perfectly quiet. A word out of place may cause some very unpleasant suffering."<sup>14</sup> This sudden and unexpected change in the army's path prevented residents of Fairfield County from preparing for the invasion and the uncertainty and change was undoubtedly terrifying.

### **Destruction to the Brice Family Homes**

Many soldiers appeared to have visited the home of Dr. Walter Brice and the home received the same treatment as many other homes that were robbed by Yankees looking for valuables. According to two separate accounts of the ransacking of the home, someone buried the silver and valuables in the Doctor's Shop, a small building in the front of the house where Dr.

---

<sup>10</sup> Augustus Robert Taft diary, 25 February 1865, as reprinted in the *Winnsboro News & Herald*, ca. 1941.

<sup>11</sup> George McAlilly, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 3, pt. 3 of *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, ed. George P. Rawick, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972), 144.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Boulware, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 69. Henry Davis, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 1, pt. 1, 261.

<sup>13</sup> *Winnsboro (S.C.) Daily News*, vol. 1, no. 4, 16 February 1865.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 6, 18 February 1865.

Brice treated his patients, in order to prevent the Yankees from taking anything. The accounts diverge, however, about who exactly buried the goods. One account written in the 1960s suggests that Mrs. Brice and a loyal butler hid the treasure while another states that Dr. Walter and the butler hid the valuables unbeknownst to Mrs. Brice. In the first story, the Yankees whipped and tortured the slave to force him to reveal the hiding place of the goods, but he only relented and led them to the loot when Mrs. Brice pleaded on his behalf. This first story ends with a particularly evil Yankee soldier taunting the women on the place. Brave and defiant, this proud Southern woman, one of the elder daughters at the home, remarked, "This will be the first time in my life that I have not had a silver spoon with which to stir my tea."<sup>15</sup> The soldier took a small spoon from the bag of silver, bent it, and threw it at her feet.

In the second story, the Yankees threatened to burn down the house and even made a torch-mark in one of the columns of the home if Mrs. Brice did not reveal the hiding place of the silver. Since she did not know, she pleaded with the butler to lead the soldiers to it and he relented despite orders from Dr. Brice to protect it at all costs. As defiant as his sisters, the youngest son of the family, Samuel George Brice (who was then fifteen or sixteen), took out his new shotgun and threatened the soldiers with it.<sup>16</sup> His granddaughter remembers him vividly retelling the tale of how he promised to "shoot every damn Yankee I see."<sup>17</sup> Although the soldiers took Samuel's gun and broke it, he made the attempt to defend his home valiantly because he was the only male left on the plantation. The Walter Brice family probably encountered more of the Union troops than other residents in the area. Samuel's granddaughter remembers her grandfather telling how many men actually camped on the Walter Brice place,

---

<sup>15</sup> Stevenson, *Fairfield Sketchbook*, 204.

<sup>16</sup> *Winnboro News and Herald*, 8 September 1938. As copied by Frances Brice Webb.

<sup>17</sup> Frances Brice Webb, interview by the author, tape recording, Fairfield County, S.C., 8 March 1999.

and some soldiers even slept in the house in the beds.<sup>18</sup> A slave on a nearby plantation confirmed that the soldiers made a camp at this home as well.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Reactions of White Citizens: How the Brice Women coped**

Whatever the true story and exact details may be, it is clear that the whites on the Brice plantation reacted to the Yankees with a mixture of emotions. Frightened and intimidated by the threats of the soldiers, Mrs. Brice acquiesced to the demands for the silver, but the Brice family made it clear that they refused to take the offense peacefully. Although these individuals could not defend their home physically against such a superior force, they made every attempt to prove uncooperative to the soldiers and made what threats they could in return. The Brices were extremely fortunate to have escaped much harm to their property. Many other citizens in the area had to deal with the devastation or demolition of their homes and all their livestock. The diary of a Winnsboro resident states that “I am inclined to think that where occupied residences have been destroyed it has generally been in consequence of some imprudence on the part of the occupants, either by word or deed . . .”<sup>20</sup> Thus perhaps Mrs. Brice showed defiance but within proper limits of sensibility in order to save her property and family. One local historian claimed that the Northern troops did not burn many homes in the New Hope area of Fairfield County because “The stamina and fortitude of the women and the loyalty of most of the Negroes were responsible for this.”<sup>21</sup> Perhaps Mrs. Brice was one such remarkable woman.

What is most perplexing and difficult to understand are the reasons why Mrs. Brice and her children were so defiant, even resisting the troops. Many other women left alone on

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Aleck Woodward, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 3, pt. 4, 255.

<sup>20</sup> Taft diary.

<sup>21</sup> Stevenson, *Fairfield Sketchbook*, 192.

plantations resorted to crying and begging and gave in to their every fear when confronting the soldiers. Although there is no evidence to prove that Mrs. Brice didn't do the same, it seems more likely that she kept a calm head in the face of crisis and dealt with the soldiers appropriately. Mrs. Brice perhaps felt safer than many other women in the area might have felt. This relative sense of security might have been due to the fact that her husband's brother's family (the Robert Brice family) lived on a plantation nearby that was close enough to see from her front porch. In addition, all evidence seems to suggest that her husband, Dr. Walter, was in the near vicinity as well. Walter's son, Samuel, told his granddaughter Mrs. Frances Brice Webb, that Dr. Walter was elsewhere in Fairfield County with the Confederate troops tending to their wounds.<sup>22</sup> Although Mrs. Brice faced the Yankee soldiers alone, she was therefore not the typical plantation mistress who had no male support for miles around.

### **The Destruction of the Robert Wade Brice home**

The invading soldiers seemed to have equally mistreated those that were living on the Robert Wade Brice plantation, the home of one of Walter's eldest sons. At the time of the march, Robert was away at war as a member of the cavalry and his wife, Martha Matilda Watson, was at their home with their slaves.<sup>23</sup> It is unclear how many slaves Robert had at the time, but the 1860 census mentions a Wade Brice who owned ten slaves.<sup>24</sup> Robert's wife wrote letters to "Wade" so it is likely that he was known in the area by his middle name, perhaps to avoid confusing him with his uncle of the same first name. Robert lists the names and ages of his slaves in his diary as well and the eleventh slave listed was one born in July of 1860.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Webb, interview.

<sup>23</sup> Josephine Bell, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 3, pt. 4, 152-153.

<sup>24</sup> Bureau of the Census.

<sup>25</sup> R.W. Brice diary.

Perhaps by the end of the war Robert had a few more, but he certainly did not have a plantation of the magnitude of his father's yet. Thus Robert Wade Brice's plantation better represented the experience of a smaller-scale slaveowner.

The Robert Wade Brice family received roughly similar treatment to that received at the Walter Brice home. More details are available, however, about the exact pillaging of this plantation. According to one of his slaves on the plantation who was later interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project Slave Narratives:

De Yankees burned and stole everything on de place. They took off all de sheep, mules, and cows; killed all de hogs; cotch all de chickens, ducks and geese; and shot de turkeys and tied them to deir saddles as they left. De gin-house made de biggest blaze I ever has seen. Dere was short rations for all de white folks and niggers after dat day.<sup>26</sup>

Again, the Brice family was fortunate to have escaped with only this damage. Although the gin-house was burned and many animals taken, the main house was not burned. In addition, the family managed to save some food and didn't have to rely on relatives and the government to survive. Matilda Watson Brice confirmed some of the fortunate outcomes as well as some of the hardships endured by the family in a letter written to her husband:

I have written you once since the Yankees passed through . . . . Very little of our corn was taken- we will get on very well as far as eating is concerned. Our greatest difficulty is in getting something to work. Peter, W[illia]m and Tom (your brother T) are trying to get us something but horses are so high we have not the money to pay for them but I still hope we may be able to hire or get a few mules in some way – if not we can only try & make bread with the hoes.<sup>27</sup>

Mrs. Brice was understandably upset and confused in the wake of the visit from Sherman's army, but she seemed to be in control of her home and considered herself fortunate to have ample food. The rest of her family, however, may not have been as lucky. A resident of a

---

<sup>26</sup> Bell, interview, 153.

<sup>27</sup> Martha Matilda Watson Brice to Robert Wade Brice, 18 March 1865. Papers of the Brice, Waters, and Watson Families, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

nearby town wrote in a letter that “the Boulwares and Watsons, I hear, are living off the corn left by our cavalry men in the woods. They have it to beat and make into Bread but I hope they are not that bad off . . .”<sup>28</sup>

Mrs. Robert Wade Brice better represented the typical wife left alone at home than did Mrs. Walter Brice. Robert’s wife did not have an almost grown son to threaten Yankees with his shotgun and her husband was away fighting the war in another part of the country. She had only a few slaves and one small child (born on January 17, 1864) that she had to protect and comfort.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the tone of her letter to her husband is not desperate and she managed to hold the plantation together effectively. She states that her greatest problem is attempting to direct the slaves because they had no horses with which to do work. She also had the family support of the nearby Brice relatives, so that perhaps was a comfort to her as well. In fact, the letter even mentioned that Robert’s brother Thomas helped her through the difficult times.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, the white families appeared to have survived the invasion relatively well. Fear was doubtlessly a pervading emotion, but plantation mistresses tried to carry on with their work and defend their homes whenever possible.

### **More Destruction to the Brice Family at the Hands of Sherman’s Men**

A few other Brice families appear to have been visited by the invading soldiers, although not as much documentation has survived from these areas. One woman in a nearby town claimed that “An old man by the name of Brice lived in Fairfield District. He used to send Beef here for sale every week. The Yankees hung him because he would not tell where he hid his

---

<sup>28</sup> Julia Frances Gott to Annie Gott, Chester, S.C., 27 February 1865, *When Sherman Came: Southern Women and the “Great March,”* ed. Katharine M. Jones, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964), 229.

<sup>29</sup> L.S. Brice. *The Brice Family: Who Settled Fairfield County South Carolina About 1785*, unpublished, 1956.

<sup>30</sup> M.M.W. Brice to R.W. Brice.

money and silver.”<sup>31</sup> On the Calvin Brice place (Calvin was the son of William Brice, brother of Walter), a slave reported that the Yankees burned all Mr. Brice had.<sup>32</sup> On his father William’s plantation, the Yankees tortured one of the slaves by hanging him from his thumbs to force him unsuccessfully to reveal the hiding place of the silver.<sup>33</sup> The William Brice family apparently suffered the most of all the Brice families. One slave on the plantation remarked that all the “young masters” were away at war and the Yankees first burned the gin and smoke houses and finally the “big house.”<sup>34</sup> The “Robin” (probably Robert, Walter’s brother) Brice home was ransacked and buildings burned as well.<sup>35</sup> On balance, the Brices appeared to receive treatment that represented the area as a whole. The invading soldiers ransacked their homes, burned their gin houses, and took their animals, but only a few of the plantation homes actually burned.

### **How the Slave Reacted: The Yankees as “Buckra”**

Although the emotional as well as property damage inflicted on whites was very high, few realize that slaves also paid a tremendous toll at the hands of Sherman’s men. The Yankees often stole what little they could from the black residents of the South and did not perform their duties as “liberators” very effectively in the state. One slave remembered that the soldiers were even confused about what role they should play. When one soldier threatened to whip her, “Another say: ‘No, us come to free niggers, not to whip them.’”<sup>36</sup> The Northern men were deeply divided over their feelings towards blacks; although many soldiers were true abolitionists, racism was pervasive in the army as well. Soldiers’ beliefs in the inferiority of blacks undoubtedly

---

<sup>31</sup> Gott to Gott, 229.

<sup>32</sup> Al Rosboro, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 3, pt. 4, 41.

<sup>33</sup> Andy Marion, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 3, pt. 3, 170.

<sup>34</sup> Anne Broome, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 1, pt. 1, 105-106.

<sup>35</sup> Ben Leitner, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 3, pt. 3, 102.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Woodward, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 3, part 4, pg. 258.

contributed to the harsh treatment slaves received.<sup>37</sup> Many slaves interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project reported being tortured, robbed, or even forced to accompany the army against their will. Both slaves and plantation mistresses concur that the soldiers treated blacks cruelly. One woman in southern Fairfield County near Ridgeway wrote "The Yankees had treated our Negroes shamefully; stolen the little silver some had, killed, eaten or stolen their fowls . . . . One of the slave girls, they had dressed in their own regimentals and carried her off."<sup>38</sup> The soldiers appeared to have treated the slave women with little respect, and one woman claimed that the men "took notice of me! They was a bad lot dat disgrace Mr. Lincoln dat sent them here. They insult women, both white and black . . . ." <sup>39</sup> On the Brice plantations, several slaves reported receiving similar treatment. One slave who belonged to Jane Brice Younge, the married daughter of William Brice, passed rather harsh judgment on the troops.

By instint, a nigger can make up his mind pretty quick 'bout de creed of white folks, whether they am buckra or whether they am not. Every Yankee I see had de stamp of poor white trash on them. They strutted 'round, big Ike fashion, a bustin' in rooms widout knockin', talkin' free to de white ladies, and familiar to de slave gals, ransackin' drawers, and runnin' deir bayonets into feather beds, and into de flower beds in de yards.<sup>40</sup>

The soldiers also tied up two Brice slaves already mentioned (belonging to Walter and William) because they refused to reveal the location of the family silver. Overwhelmingly, slaves in the area seemed to look down upon the invading soldiers as "poor white trash" and "buckra" probably because they thought that civilized people would not rob and pillage in such a fashion. One woman who lived slightly north of Fairfield County wrote that the Northern soldiers forced her slaves at gunpoint to bring them valuables and that "Our Negroes were too indignant over this treatment ever to have any use for Yankees. They believed them to be the lowest types of

<sup>37</sup> Joseph P. Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond*, (New York: New York University Press, 1985), 53.

<sup>38</sup> Anna Hasell Thomas diary, *When Sherman Came: Southern Women and the "Great March,"* 216.

<sup>39</sup> Eliza Hasty, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 252.



‘poor buckra’.”<sup>41</sup> Thus the same soldiers who supposedly freed the slaves from cruel treatment became perpetrators against the slaves as well.

For this reason, many slaves, especially those in Fairfield County, despised and feared the Yankees as much as their owners. In fact, of all the seventy or so slaves interviewed in the county, only one expressed overwhelming support for the soldiers. “Us looked for the Yankees on dat place like us look now for de Savior and de host of angels at de second comin’.”<sup>42</sup> Several other slaves in Fairfield County expressed mixed emotions about the invasion and most of these slaves mentioned that they were happy not because of the Yankees visit but because they were free. One slave who belonged to the Simonton family (the Brices and the Simontons intermarried) said that he “was glad when marster called us up and told us we was free.”<sup>43</sup> At the same time, he stated that the Yankees “made me run after chickens and I had to give up my onliest hen dat I have. My pappy was took off by them to Raleigh, wid dat I ‘member, was de saddest day of slavery time.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, slaves welcomed liberation but not the liberators and the destruction they brought.

Slaves also viewed the Yankees with disdain because they, like whites, considered the Northern troops to be invaders in their homeland. Although blacks and whites were divided on many issues, they were united in their identification as Southerners and respect for their land of birth. Slaves possessed a distinct “pride in their homeland, now being ravaged by strangers who evinced little regard for the property and lives of Southerners, white or black.”<sup>45</sup> Because both groups were victims during this invasion and were residents of the same locality, they could at

---

<sup>40</sup> Andy Brice, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 75.

<sup>41</sup> Mrs. J.H. Foster diary, *When Sherman Came: Southern Women and the “Great March,”* 232.

<sup>42</sup> Savilla Burrell, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 151.

<sup>43</sup> A. Woodward, interview, 255.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>45</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 108

least identify with one another on these grounds even if they disagreed on the justice of slavery and the Confederate cause. For this reason, it is possible that the Union troops and the immediacy of the invasion and its results caused slaves temporarily to identify with their masters more than before. Even if slaves did not support the slave system per se, they still loved their homeland and resented the invasion of the Northern army. Slaves in great numbers considered themselves to be Southerners and "they did sense that their lives and destinies were intricately bound with the white people of the South."<sup>46</sup> Slave and master shared a common goal of protecting the honor of their homeland and this goal brought the two groups together out of necessity during the trying times of Sherman's march. Thus because black and white received the same treatment by the army and were residents of the same locality, Sherman's army perhaps temporarily strengthened the bond between slave and slaveowner on certain plantations.

### **Why Brice Family Slaves Stayed: Loyalty Reevaluated**

Although slaves and their masters did share a common perspective on some issues during the army's visit, slaves did not prove to be unfalteringly loyal to their masters and the slave system even in the face of Northern abuse. Many thousands of slaves rebelled outright and ran off with the army.<sup>47</sup> In Fairfield County, however, most slaves appeared to have been relatively reticent to leave. A woman near Monticello in southern Fairfield County reported that "Our Negroes behaved very well. Only one went off . . ." <sup>48</sup> On the Robert Wade Brice plantation, Mrs. Brice proudly reported to her husband that "Our negroes have acted very well – except

---

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>48</sup> Nancy Armstrong Furman to Mrs. James C. Furman, *When Sherman Came: Southern Women and the "Great March,"* 220.

Albert and Andy who went off with the Yankees - & seem willing to do what they can . . . .”<sup>49</sup>

From these few accounts, it seems likely that not as many slaves as would be expected left with the invading soldiers in Fairfield County. Slaves in this area even showed disdain for their fellow slaves who left with the army. One woman claimed that “De worst nigger men and women follow de army.”<sup>50</sup> Although slaves did not leave in large numbers from the Brice plantations, they were also not necessarily loyal and did not fit into the traditional perceptions of the faithful servant. Slaves had many motivations for their decisions not to leave their plantations, and many slaveowners probably overemphasized the importance of a shared slave-master perspective as a factor in slaves' decision to stay and placed too much faith in the myth that their slaves were loyal. When examined more closely, this "loyalty" as demonstrated in the decision not to run away with invading troops perhaps signifies that some slaves were not really loyal at all. The mere fact that some slaves stayed at the plantations doesn't necessarily imply a sense of loyalty or duty towards the institution of slavery; simple caution and personal sympathies were more likely possibilities. On the whole, slaves were loyal for many reasons, few if none of which was a respect for the system of slavery.<sup>51</sup>

Undoubtedly, the main reason the slaves stayed was the sheer uncertainty and fear that Sherman's men imposed. Sherman's army effected the largest social revolution possible on Southern society and many slaves viewed this alteration with caution and apprehension.<sup>52</sup> In some cases, this caution reinforced the dependency that slaves had on their masters. Many of these slaves undoubtedly clung to the only way of life they had ever known during these desperate times. In these cases, the invading soldiers caused slaves to depend more on their

---

<sup>49</sup> M. W. W. Brice to R. W. Brice.

<sup>50</sup> Violet Guntharpe, interview by W. W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 217.

<sup>51</sup> Litwack, *Storm*, 154.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

owners for protection, and the confusion often bound these two groups closer together.<sup>53</sup> Many slaves expressed this uncertainty about the freedom the Union troops imposed so quickly and acknowledged that they were unprepared for the immediate changes that came:

Honey, us wasn't ready for de big change dat come! . . . The Yankees sho' throwed us in de briar patch but us not bred and born lak de rabbit . . . When the Yankees come and take all dat [cows, corn, cotton, etc.] away, all us had to thank them for, was a hungry belly, and freedom.<sup>54</sup>

The slaves in Fairfield County therefore initially remained wary of the changes brought by the soldiers and often were remarkably willing to stay with their fellow slaves on the plantations. Their decisions not to leave immediately were often extremely prudent and appropriately cautious. The slaves that stayed on the Brice plantation might have been feeling some of these same concerns and pressures. The post-Civil War society was still unknown; many slaves were unsure about future employment and probably wanted to remain in the favor of whites who still possessed economic authority. Even more disturbing and threatening was the threat of retaliation from whites once the Yankee "protectors" left. Because of these concerns, the slaves adopted at the very least a noncommittal position with regards to the Northern troops.<sup>55</sup> Too many extenuating circumstances were present to believe that these slaves for the most part were faithful to slavery and their bondage.

### **The Importance of Personal Relationships: Loyalty in Another Light**

In order to reevaluate the notion of loyalty, the aspect of personal loyalties deserves consideration as well. In the personal realm, loyalty was more of a reality than it was within the realm of the slavery system. One of the most important reasons many slaves remained on

---

<sup>53</sup> Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 178.

<sup>54</sup> Violet Guntharpe, interview, 216-217.

<sup>55</sup> Litwack, *Storm*, 119.

plantations and appeared to be "loyal" during the march was their relationship with their owners, especially the mistresses. Slaves, especially those interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project who were children or young adolescents during the time of slavery, appeared to have cared deeply for their mistresses. The slaves on the Brice family plantations were no different. One who lived on the William Brice place reported to have had a cruel master, but "My mistress was a angel, good, and big hearted. I lay my head in her lap many a time."<sup>56</sup> Josephine Stewart, who was a slave on the Robert Wade Brice plantation said that her mistress, Matilda Watson Brice, was "a perfect angel, if dere ever was one on dis red earth."<sup>57</sup> Another slave on the Samuel Brice plantation claimed he greatly admired his mistress and that "sometime I sit on de door-step and speculate in dee moonlight whut de angels am like and everytime, my mistress is de picture dat come into dis old gray head of mine."<sup>58</sup> The personality and Christian kindness of the women on the plantation probably influenced many slaves to stay even when given the opportunity to leave with the Northern troops. For these slaves, the loyalty to their mistresses existed prior to Sherman's march and this loyalty was one based on personal relationships that extended beyond the traditional roles of master and slave. These personal relationships, however, were not synonymous with a loyalty to the slave system. As one recent scholar suggests

Mistresses who found instances of slaves' loyalty deceived themselves about its nature. Slaves' loyalty was a reflection of their feelings about a particular individual; it was not loyalty to slavery. White women never understood the distinction.<sup>59</sup>

Slaves therefore remained on their respective plantations in Fairfield County and elsewhere because they felt personal attachments that overrode a desire to seek immediate emancipation.

---

<sup>56</sup> Marion, interview, 168.

<sup>57</sup> Stewart, interview, 152.

<sup>58</sup> Nelson Cameron, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 172.

<sup>59</sup> Weiner, 176-177.

Relationships with mistresses, however, were not all based on personal admiration or feelings of friendship. In fact, compassion and even pity were probably the greatest emotions involved in slaves' decisions to remain on plantations. In most cases, slaves felt like they could comfort and protect their mistresses by staying and working for them throughout the war.<sup>60</sup> They pitied the women left alone and destitute and even adopted a type of reverse paternalism.

"Where the mistress and her daughters were the only remaining whites on the plantation, the slave women sometimes reversed paternalistic roles and insisted upon moving into the Big House . . . to afford them a greater degree of security."<sup>61</sup> In these instances, slaves possessed a rare form of bargaining power; they suddenly found themselves in the role of protectors and realized that their owners probably feared that all their slaves would leave them. This created a deep sense of pity in some slaves; one slave of a prominent Fairfield County resident commented that "Us slaves was sorry dat day for marster and mistress. They was gittin' old, and now they had lost all they had, and more that dat, they knowed their slaves was set free."<sup>62</sup> Slaves in Fairfield County may have been more willing to stay because they felt pity, and the roles of protectors and comforters were more available to them. For the Brice families, where women and children were universally alone, slaves probably had these opportunities to wield the power of protector and provide compassion more frequently.

### **Thomas W. Brice and Isaiah Moore: As Good as Ever Fluttered<sup>63</sup>**

---

<sup>60</sup> Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80*, (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 177.

<sup>61</sup> Litwack, *Storm*, 110.

<sup>62</sup> Samuel Boulware, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 65.

<sup>63</sup> "As good as ever fluttered" is the inscription on the gravestone of Isaiah Moore, located at Concord Cemetery near Major Tom's grave. The grave was originally outside the cemetery fence, but was included when Major Tom's descendents petitioned to extend the fence in 1997. The inscription was placed on the stone at the insistence of Major Tom's son, according to Isaiah's daughter as interviewed by the Federal Writer's Project Slave Narratives (interview with Charity Moore, vol. 3, pt. 3, p. 207-208).

Many slaves reported feeling loyalty to both their master and mistress and historians should not dismiss these relationships so quickly. For many slaves, however, these relationships were not true human relationships since whites did not view blacks as equals. The relationships were probably inextricably bound up with feelings of paternalism and dependence. One slave characterized these relationships rather insightfully: "My marster was a kind and tender man to slaves. You see a man love hosses and animals? Well, dat's de way he love us. Though maybe in bigger portion, I 'low."<sup>64</sup> Although many residents in Fairfield County and throughout the South were kind to their slaves, it is difficult to characterize the relationships as distinctly human and certainly not as relationships between human equals. Feelings of dependence pervaded the social structure of the time. These feelings of dependence caused slaves to make statements like one in Fairfield County did later that sometimes "I sorry I's free."<sup>65</sup> Other slaves, however, help clarify and qualify these statements by claiming that "I like being free more better. Any niggers what like slavery time better, is lazy people dat don't want to do nothing."<sup>66</sup> Perhaps the reason these "lazy" former slaves wished for slavery again is because the whites took care of the slaves much like they took care of their other property. These former slaves had probably never quite adjusted to life in a free society after growing up in slavery and dependence. In addition, because these slaves were interviewed in the 1930s, they probably especially longed for protection during their old age and during the horrors of the Great Depression.

Although most slave-master relations were probably connected on a deep level to feelings of dependence, many masters did develop more meaningful relationships with slaves. The best example of such a relationship is the one that existed between Isaiah Moore and his master Thomas William Brice, a son of Walter. Much oral history and folklore about Isaiah and "Major

---

<sup>64</sup> Reuben Rosborough, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 3, part 4, 45.

<sup>65</sup> Ed McCrorey, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, 146.

T.W.” remains in the Brice family to this day. Major T.W. and Isaiah were roughly the same age and went off to war together. When Major T.W. sustained an injury in battle, Isaiah brought him back home to Fairfield County and probably saved his life, according to his granddaughter.<sup>67</sup> Isaiah and Major Tom remained good friends for the rest of their lives and Isaiah even asked to be buried as close to his former master as possible.<sup>68</sup> These two families were intimately connected for decades after slavery ended; in fact, Isaiah's daughter continued to find employment with the Brice family well into the 1920's.<sup>69</sup> Examples such as this one illustrate that many slaves and masters had friendships and perhaps even had a reason to be loyal to one another. Examples such as the story of Isaiah and his family complicate any attempt to conveniently characterize and describe master-slave relationships. In this instance, genuine human compassion and trust existed between two parties that were supposedly in conflict in a more straightforward analysis of the slave system. This example is therefore constructive to a fuller understanding of slave relationships; they varied greatly and historians should avoid excessive generalization. This example of Isaiah better clarifies the meaning and focus of loyalty; Isaiah's loyalty to Major T.W. was one based on personal relationships that extended beyond and outside of the slave system. Thus personal relationships sustained plantation life in the South during the war and particularly during the time of Sherman's march and not a loyalty to the slave system itself.

### **The Destruction of the Slave System: Runaways and Rebellion**

---

<sup>66</sup> Victoria Adams, interview by W.W. Dixon in *South Carolina Narratives*, vol. 2, part 1, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Emily Brice Busbee, interview by the author, tape recording, Winnsboro, S.C., 10 March 1999.

<sup>68</sup> Dan Huntley, "The church that stretched its fence," *The Charlotte Observer*, 10 April 1997, Carolinas Section, p. 2C.

<sup>69</sup> Emily Brice Busbee interview.



When Sherman's army came through Fairfield County, it completely destroyed the slave system and exposed the true nature of black and white relationships. Many slaves stayed with their masters because they depended on them for employment in the new free labor economy. More importantly, the march revealed that many slaves were not as loyal to their masters as they had originally believed. Those that ran off with the Northern soldiers proved that support for the slave system was one-sided, and many plantation mistresses felt bewildered and betrayed by this seemingly unexplainable behavior.<sup>70</sup> More revealing, however, was the fear of disorder and the onset of slave rebellions that Sherman's march left in its wake. Women left at home alone were often terrified of the unreliability of their slaves during such tumultuous times, and many were confused and were simply incapable of dealing with the implications of freedom.<sup>71</sup> The Brice family was faced with similar terror when the slaves on the Walter Brice plantation threatened rebellion soon after the Yankees left. The true nature and details of this aborted rebellion are relatively unclear and only one account has survived of it.

After the bummers departed it was whispered that the rebellious Negroes were planning to raid and take over the plantation for themselves. Members of the Brice family and their faithful people gathered at this house to protect themselves. The raid was staged on a moonlight night and those within the house could see and hear the angry mob approaching. Just before they reached the dwelling they noticed the figure of a large black man in the road between the building and the marchers. He raised both arms into the air above his head and motioned to them to go back. Strangely enough they did; some of them at a trot!<sup>72</sup>

The story speculated that the figure might have been the leader of the rebellion who changed his mind, but folklore in the area reported that the figure was the ghost of a loyal slave.<sup>73</sup> Whatever the true details of the rebellion, one of the causes must have been the uncertainty and confusion in the society after Sherman's march. The fact that someone stopped it proved that race relations

---

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 176, 191.

<sup>72</sup> Stevenson, *Fairfield Sketchbook*, 205-206.

were indeed complex; slaves held great resentment for their masters but also perhaps had feelings of kindness and respect.

Sherman's march truly helped shed light on the nature of race relations in the South, as exemplified in Fairfield County on plantations belonging to the Brice family. The march created a common bond between whites and blacks because both faced the invasion and destruction of the Northern troops. Both responded with a mixture of fear and defiance when faced with the realities of threats and torture. The march proved, however, that the similarities between the two races often stopped at that point. Although both races were participators in the slave system and residents of a common locality, it became clear that only whites truly supported the system of slavery. Slaves' feelings of loyalty were ones of loyalty only to their homeland and not to the enslavement that their homeland supported. The reality of division between the races manifested itself when slaves ran off with Sherman's men and in the slave rebellions that resulted. The mixture and variety of reactions that appeared illuminated a very important lesson about the history of slavery; the experiences of every slave were different. In addition, the experience of each slave was varied because slaves experienced both feelings of kindness and hostility towards their owners who were providers and oppressors. Sherman's march through the South brought these latent and often contradictory emotions to the forefront of the social and political system.

The war revealed, often in ways that defied description, the sheer complexity of the master-slave relationship, and the conflicts, contradictions, and ambivalence that relationship generated in each individual. The slave's emotions and behavior invariably rested on a precarious balance between the habit of obedience and the intense desire for freedom.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>74</sup> Litwack, *Storm*, 162.

Sherman's march through the Carolinas therefore exposed the rifts in the social system of slavery and revealed the complexity of race relations by clarifying the feelings and tensions inherent in the system.

## Bibliography

- Barrett, John G. *Sherman's March Through the Carolinas*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956.
- Bowman, Colonel S.M. and Lieutenant Colonel R.B. Irwin. *Sherman and His Campaigns: A Military Biography*. New York: Charles B. Richardson Press, 1865.
- Brice, L.S. *The Brice Family: Who Settled Fairfield County South Carolina About 1785*. Unpublished. 1956.
- Brice, Martha Matilda Watson. Letter to Robert Wade Brice. 18 March 1865. *Papers of the Brice, Waters, and Watson Families*. South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
- Brice, Robert Wade Diary. *Book of Record or Memorandum*. 1861-1870. Courtesy of James and Sarah Brice, Woodward, S.C..
- Bureau of the Census. *Fairfield County, S.C.: Slaveowners of the name Brice and no. of Slaves of each, 1860*. Washington, D.C., 1860.
- Busbee, Emily Brice. Interview by the author. Tape recording. Winnsboro, S.C., 10 March 1999.
- Conyngham, Captain David P. *Sherman's March Through the South*. New York: Sheldon and Company, 1865.
- Dixon, W.W.. Various interviews in *South Carolina Narratives*. Vol. 3, pt. 3 of *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*. George P. Rawick, ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972.
- Glatthaar, Joseph P. *The March to the Sea and Beyond*. New York: New York University Press, 1985.
- Huntley, Dan. "The church that stretched its fence." *The Charlotte Observer*. 10 April 1997. Carolinas Section, p. 2C.
- Jones, Katharine M., ed. *When Sherman Came: Southern Women and the "Great March"*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964.
- Litwack, Leon F. *Been in the Storm So Long*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979.
- Stevenson, Maymie W. "History of New Hope." *A Fairfield Sketchbook*. Julian Stevenson Bolick, ed. Clinton, S.C.: Jacobs Brothers, 1963.