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# Winney Grimshaw, a Virginia Slave, and Her Family

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**ABSTRACT** My biographical sketch of Winney Grimshaw is drawn from a larger study of the 973 slaves who lived and worked at Mount Airy plantation in Virginia between 1808 and 1865. My basic source is a series of 52 slave inventories, which enable me to track the careers of Winney's grandparents, parents, and siblings as well as to reconstruct Winney's life history. My sketch is illustrated by three letters written by or to members of Winney's family, documenting a stormy story of slave escape, of family breakup, of slave migration from Virginia to Alabama, and of interracial sex.

The greatest problem in writing about antebellum slavery is that almost all the surviving information about slave life was written down and collected by the white masters. In consequence it is usually impossible to hear individual slave voices, to recover slave thoughts and opinions, or even to trace slave actions. I am acutely aware of this problem because I am trying to reconstruct the experiences of the 973 African Americans who lived and worked at Mount Airy estate in the Northern Neck of Tidewater Virginia between 1808 and 1865.<sup>1</sup> The only way that I can study these Mount Airy people is by working with the documents preserved by the owners of this plantation—John Tayloe III (1771–1828) and his son William Henry

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1. In parallel fashion I am also reconstructing the lives of the 1,103 slaves who lived and worked at Mesopotamia estate in western Jamaica between 1762 and 1833. My book, now nearing completion, is provisionally entitled *Two Thousand Slaves: The Peoples of Mesopotamia Estate in Jamaica and Mount Airy Plantation in Virginia, 1762–1865*.

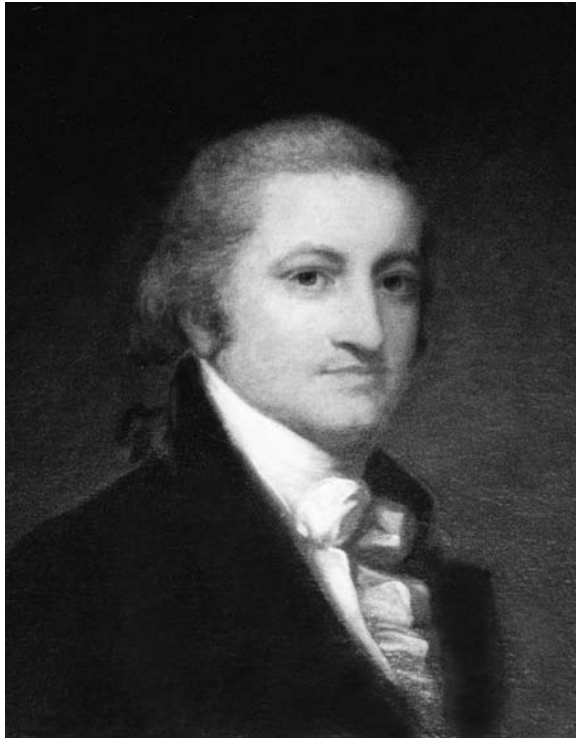


Figure 1. John Tayloe III in a portrait at Mount Airy. Courtesy of Mrs. H. Gwynne Tayloe; photograph by the author.

Tayloe (1799–1871).<sup>2</sup> But I undertook this project because I believed that the richly detailed slave lists and slave work logs compiled by the Tayloes for bookkeeping purposes could be put to other and (to my mind) better uses. Father and son constructed a series of fifty-two Mount Airy inventories that identify each slave by name, age, occupation, and location in all but six of the years between 1808 and 1865.<sup>3</sup> By correlating these lists I

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2. The Tayloe Papers at the Virginia Historical Society (hereafter cited as VHS), Richmond, Va. (hereafter cited as Tayloe) richly depict three hundred years of Mount Airy history. The Tayloe Papers have been microfilmed in the *Records of Antebellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War, Series M*, reels 1–57 (hereafter cited as TPF). I wish to thank the Tayloe family and the VHS for permitting me to use and cite this magnificent collection of records.

3. The Mount Airy slave inventories recorded by John Tayloe III (hereafter cited as JT3) and William Henry Tayloe (hereafter cited as WHT) are dated 1808–47, 1849–55, and 1861–65. JT3 very probably kept a slave inventory book for 1792–

have been able to track all 973 of the slaves individually from year to year and reconstruct their skeletal biographies. And for some of the Mount Airy people I have found highly revealing personal information. This essay focuses on Winney Grimshaw (1826–?), who is among the best documented of these Virginia slaves. By great good fortune, three letters to or from Winney’s father and sisters survive among the 28,000 documents in the Tayloe Papers at the Virginia Historical Society, and these letters—reproduced below—provide special insight into the actions and opinions of the Grimshaw family. The plantation records also provide helpful information about two dozen members of Winney’s family, including her maternal grandparents, Harry and Winney Jackson, her parents, Bill and Esther Grimshaw, her sisters, Elizabeth (known as Lizza), Anna, Juliet, and Charlotte Grimshaw, her brothers, James and Henry Grimshaw, her husband, Jacob Carrington, and her children, John Carrington and John, Julia, Lizza, Willie Anne, William Henry, and Thornton Grimshaw. To supply context for Winney’s story, we need to go back two generations, to Winney’s grandparents Harry and Winney Jackson.

On January 1, 1808, John Tayloe III took the first of his Mount Airy slave inventories that has survived.<sup>4</sup> Tayloe was an imperious and aggressive planter, one of the half dozen largest slaveholders in Virginia. He held 375 African Americans at Mount Airy in 1808 and another 250 or so slaves on the many other farms, ironworks, and urban properties that he owned in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. He had stopped growing tobacco at Mount Airy, because Chesapeake tobacco sales to Britain and France had collapsed following the American Revolution. Instead, his cash crops were wheat and corn, and he also sold livestock from his Mount Airy farm quarters. When he was at Mount Airy he lived in a stately mansion built by his father, John Tayloe II, around 1758, which his descendants have occupied ever since. In 1808 the Mount Airy slave force was divided into two parts: 105 people—domestics, craft workers, and their young children—lived at the home plantation, and 270 people—agricultural workers and their young children—lived on the eight farm quarters. The craft and farm workers all labored for long hours six days a week, their only free time

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1807, which has been lost. His inventory book for 1808–28 is Tayloe d 538, VHS. Most of WHT’s lists are in four of his notebooks: Tayloe a 13, d 13410, d 13424, and d 23707.

4. The 1808 inventory is in Tayloe d 538; the first few pages have been torn out, so that returns from three farm quarters—Forkland, Oaken Brow, and Old House—are missing.

being on Sundays and a few holidays. Many of the domestic workers who attended the Tayloe family must have worked on Sundays and holidays as well.<sup>5</sup>

Winney Grimshaw's grandparents Harry and Winney Jackson were both domestic workers. Indeed, they were among the Tayloes' favorite personal retainers. In 1808 Harry was thirty years old and served as John Tayloe III's coachman. His wife, Winney (for whom Winney Grimshaw would be named), was twenty-eight years old, the mother of three children, and one of the two chambermaids who waited on John III's wife, Ann Ogle Tayloe. The Jacksons' master and mistress lived at Mount Airy from mid-April to mid-October, and during the other half of the year they moved to the Octagon, their elegant new town house in Washington, built in 1799–1801 at the intersection of 18th Street and New York Avenue, two blocks from the White House. To handle this situation, John Tayloe III employed a staff of nearly forty domestic slaves, divided into three groups. In 1808 nineteen of these people worked year-round at the Mount Airy plantation house. Another ten or so (the number is uncertain because they were never listed in the Mount Airy inventories) worked year-round at the Octagon. And eight servants, including Harry and Winney, traveled back and forth a distance of about one hundred miles with their master and mistress, spending the summer months at the country mansion and the winter months at the city mansion.

The Jacksons worked in two of the most impressive houses in the Chesapeake region. Mount Airy and the Octagon, though very different in architectural design, both celebrate the authority and the hospitality of a large-scale slaveholding plantation master. Mount Airy, an imposing Palladian villa built of brown sandstone with twin dependencies connected by curving passageways, spreads grandly across an open park, whereas the Octagon, a three-story brick structure, distinctively wedge-shaped and six- (not eight-) sided, fits into a tight city lot.<sup>6</sup> In both houses, a spacious central entrance hall leads to a drawing room and dining room for the entertainment of guests, but the Octagon has one feature not found at Mount Airy. Behind the elegant oval staircase is a hidden flight of narrow back stairs that the

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5. Slave work logs kept by JT3 between 1805 and 1814 show that the Mount Airy craft and farm workers all labored more than three hundred days per year. No work logs have survived for the domestic workers.

6. Mount Airy is a private residence, not open to the public. But the Octagon, which is now owned by the American Architectural Foundation and has been recently closed for rehabilitation, is generally open to visitors.

Tayloes' slaves used to get from the basement kitchen to the public rooms on the first floor and up to the bedrooms on the second and third floors through a series of discreet service doors. The Tayloes employed an elaborate bell system to summon their black servitors. Winney and Harry must have climbed up and down those back stairs thousands of times.

The other six domestics who traveled with the Tayloes back and forth from Mount Airy to the Octagon were John III's manservant, Archy; a cook named Billy; Peter and John, who were probably butlers or footmen; Gowen, who shared the coachman's duties with Harry; and Betty, who joined Winney as Ann Tayloe's personal attendant. Harry and the other male servitors were decked out in livery: blue coats, red vests, and white stockings.<sup>7</sup> At both Mount Airy and the Octagon the domestics lived in outlying slave quarters, which have long since been torn down. The 1808 inventory gives valuations for all the Mount Airy slaves, stated in British rather than American currency.<sup>8</sup> Pricing ranged from £15 to £120, depending on age, occupation, and gender—males were generally valued at £10 more than females of the same age and occupation. Harry was said to be worth £100 (equivalent to \$333) and Winney £90 (or \$300). The coach that Harry drove was reckoned to be twice as valuable as he was; it was appraised at £200.<sup>9</sup>

Winney and Harry Jackson had three young children: Betsy, who was ten in 1808 and valued at £60, Esther, who was nine and valued at £60, and Henry, who was seven and valued at £40. The Jackson children lived at Mount Airy year-round and so were separated from their parents for the winter months. They were probably supervised by Winney's elder sister Phillis, a textile spinner who lived at Mount Airy. Young Betsy entered training as a spinner in 1810, then was sent to Old House farm quarter at thirteen to become a field hand. Her sister, Esther (the future mother of Winney Grimshaw), began to work as a spinner in 1812 and continued in

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7. Laura Kamoie, *Irons in the Fire: The Business History of the Tayloe Family and Virginia's Gentry, 1700–1860* (Charlottesville, 2007), 148.

8. A generation after the Revolution the Mount Airy records from the 1800s and 1810s sometimes state values in pounds, shillings, and pence and sometimes in dollars. One pound sterling was equivalent to \$3.33.

9. On March 10, 1794, JT3 instructed the Philadelphia coach maker Robert Monteath to adorn the new carriage Monteath was building for him with “a wrist and hand holding a dagger with a boars head on its point” (Tayloe uncataloged papers, box 1). This carriage may have been the coach inventoried in 1808. A second vehicle, a phaeton, was valued at £150. Tayloe's seven carriage horses were valued collectively at £525.



Figure 2. River facade of Mount Airy, Richmond County, Virginia.  
Photograph by the author.

this line of employment at Mount Airy for the next thirty-four years. Their brother, Henry, started to work as a stable boy in 1812. During these years the senior Jacksons appeared only intermittently in the Mount Airy slave inventories, which were taken on December 31 or January 1, since they spent their winters at the Octagon. They were listed on January 1, 1808, and again on January 1, 1809, because in those two years the Tayloes spent Christmas at Mount Airy. But from 1810 to 1814, when the Tayloes celebrated the holiday season in Washington, Harry and Winney disappeared from the records. Young Henry Jackson was also absent in 1813–14; he had evidently joined his father as a stable boy at the Octagon. The three Jacksons resurfaced at Mount Airy on January 1, 1815, because President James Madison was occupying the Octagon. When the British invaded Washington in 1814 and burned the White House, John Tayloe III lent his town house to President Madison, and the Tayloe family spent the winter of 1815 at Mount Airy. But in 1816 the three Jacksons spent the winter in Washington. Then in 1817 John and Ann Tayloe decided to live year-round at the Octagon, and they took Harry, Winney, and Henry Jackson with them. In 1824 Harry returned to Mount Airy, but his wife and son stayed on at the Octagon and after 1815 never reappeared in the Mount Airy records.



Figure 3. The Octagon, Washington, D.C. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Our attention now turns to Esther Jackson, Winney Grimshaw's mother. From the age of eighteen onward she saw very little of her immediate family, since her parents and brother lived in Washington and her sister, Betsy, lived at Old House farm quarter, several miles away. Esther probably shared a cabin with her aunt Phillis, who was also a spinner in John Tayloes' textile



production unit at Mount Airy. Before the American Revolution, the Tayloes had imported all their cloth from England. But in the 1770s, when commerce with the mother country was cut off, John Tayloe II set up a spinning and weaving shop at Mount Airy for the local manufacture of woolen, cotton, and linen cloth, and John III expanded this cloth production. In 1808 he had two ginners, ten spinners, and two weavers. By 1812, when Esther started to work, he was employing thirteen spinners, and in 1828 there were twenty spinners, partnered with one ginner and three weavers.<sup>10</sup> In the generation before the Civil War, machine-powered textile mills spread rapidly in the northern states, but slave women continued to spin yarn and weave cloth at Mount Airy until 1865.

Using cotton and flax grown at the farm quarters and wool sheared from the plantation sheep, Esther Jackson and her fellow Mount Airy textile workers produced a good deal of the fabric needed for slave clothing on the estate. Two males ginned the cotton to separate lint from seed. The spinners—all women or girls—then combed or carded the cotton, flax, and wool, and spun these fibers into skeins of yarn. Two weavers, Israel and his daughter Eliza, wove this yarn on hand looms into lengths of cloth. A Mount Airy spinning book has survived that records weekly production during a two-year period, January 1806 to December 1807.<sup>11</sup> This book shows that during the course of a year the spinners spent forty-two weeks spinning cotton, four weeks spinning wool, three weeks harvesting grain, and two weeks picking cotton. The spinning proficiency of each worker was recorded week by week. Most of the women produced one and a half pounds of cotton yarn or five and a half pounds of woolen yarn per week. By this measure, Esther Jackson was spinning sixty-three pounds of cotton yarn and twenty-two pounds of woolen yarn each year.

In 1820, when Esther was twenty-one years old, her situation changed for reasons characteristic of slave life at Mount Airy. John Tayloe III, having decided to live year-round at the Octagon, needed to delegate the management of the home plantation to one of his sons, so he settled his eldest son, John Tayloe IV (who was twenty-seven years old), at Mount Airy with a

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10. The Mount Airy ratio between spinners and weavers was standard. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich observes that “in textile-producing areas of Europe, eight to ten spinners kept one weaver supplied with thread.” See Ulrich, “Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labor in Eighteenth-Century New England,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 55 (1998): 9.

11. Tayloe a 9 (TPF reel 1:483–519). Fragments of similar spinning books for 1805–6 and 1816–19 are in Tayloe uncataloged papers, box 1.

retinue of forty household and craft slaves. He gave the young man six of the seventeen spinners on the estate, including Esther and her aunt Phillis. But he was willing to spare only one of his fourteen carpenters. So he moved an eighteen-year-old named Bill Grimshaw from his Neabsco ironworks in Prince William County, some sixty miles away, to serve as John IV's second carpenter at Mount Airy. From 1820 to 1824 Esther and Bill both worked for John Tayloe IV, but this suddenly ended in 1824, when the young man died. There was debate within the Tayloe family as to who should replace John IV at Mount Airy, and since the second son, Benjamin Ogle Tayloe, didn't want to live there, the third son, William Henry Tayloe, took charge. William was twenty-five years old in 1824 and newly married. So Esther became one of William Henry Tayloe's six spinners and Bill became one of his two carpenters. And at some point in the early 1820s Bill Grimshaw married Esther Jackson. Their first child, a girl named Lizza, was born in 1824.

We know very little about Bill's background. Grimshaw was an uncommon surname in early nineteenth-century Virginia. An Englishman named Samuel Grimshaw, who came to Henrico County in 1795 and operated a tavern there in the 1820s, may possibly have owned members of Bill's family. Bill's mother was named Letty, and she appears on slave inventories taken in 1825 and 1828 at the Neabsco ironworks. In 1825 Letty was the only domestic servant among the sixty-seven slaves living at Neabsco, and she was listed as forty-six years old. Three years later she was still a house servant but must have looked a lot older because she was said to be fifty-five. Bill's father was apparently named James, and in 1825 there was a ship carpenter called Jim at Neabsco who was listed as fifty-one years old and therefore of the right age and occupation. But this Jim was identified in two inventories of that year as Jim German or Garman, not Grimshaw. And he was gone from Neabsco or dead by 1828.<sup>12</sup>

In 1825 William Henry Tayloe moved Bill and Esther Grimshaw from Mount Airy to Old House farm quarter, along the bottomlands adjoining Cat Point Creek, several miles from the family mansion. Esther's sister, Betsy, lived at Old House, and Esther may have been sent to Old House to take care of her because Betsy had been sickly for several years; the plantation slave doctor visited her three times in 1824. Betsy died some time in 1825; she was childless and only twenty-seven years old. A few months

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12. The Neabsco inventories of 1825 that list Letty and Jim are in Tayloe d 538, d 8402-22, and d 8471-8520. Letty appears but Jim does not in a Neabsco inventory for 1828 in Tayloe d 992.

later, Esther gave birth to her second child, Winney Grimshaw, the chief figure in our story. There was no birth register for the slaves at Mount Airy, so we cannot tell exactly when Winney was born. It was probably early in 1826, since she was reported to be one year old when she was listed for the first time in the Old House inventory of January 1, 1827.<sup>13</sup> The name “Winney” was chosen by her parents, but she was given no surname by the record keeper. At this date almost all the Mount Airy slaves were identified in the inventories by a single name or nickname. The Mount Airy people were certainly keenly aware of their lineages, and gradually William Henry Tayloe took note of family connections. In the 1830s he started to identify slave fathers as well as mothers; in the 1840s he started to supply family names; and by the 1860s he was according almost every black person he owned the same two-name dignity as white people. From 1827 onward Tayloe identified Winney as Esther’s daughter. In 1835 he noted in the record book that she was one of “Car. Bill and his wife Esthers children.” In 1845 he referred to Winney’s father as “Billy Grimshaw.” And in 1862—when Winney was thirty-six years old—he finally wrote her name down for the first time as “Winney Grimshaw.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1824, two years before Winney was born, her grandfather Harry Jackson had returned to Mount Airy. William Henry Tayloe, the new master of the plantation mansion, needed a coachman and ostler, so he asked his father to send Harry Jackson back to Mount Airy. Harry was now forty-six years old. And when John Tayloe III died in 1828, coachman Harry continued as the property of William Henry Tayloe and lived at Mount Airy until he died in 1838 at age sixty. His wife, Winney, and son, Henry, continued as the property of the widowed Ann Ogle Tayloe, who was given life use of the Octagon, along with a coach and carriage and twelve house servants.<sup>15</sup> Winney Jackson lived and worked at the Octagon with her mistress until she died, probably in 1847. What happened to Henry Jackson (who was twenty-seven in 1828) is unclear; most probably he succeeded his father as coachman and ostler at the Octagon.

Meanwhile, Esther and Bill Grimshaw were raising a sizable family of seven children. The sequence: Lizza born in 1824, Winney in 1826, Anna

13. The Old House inventory for 1827 is in Tayloe d 8539–90. Inventories for the other slave quarters at Mount Airy in 1827 are in Tayloe d 538, d 8402–22, and d 8539–90.

14. For the 1835 reference, see Tayloe d 13410; for the 1845 reference, see Tayloe d 16253–485; for the 1862 reference, see Tayloe d 8632–67.

15. Ann Ogle Tayloe lived at the Octagon until her death in 1855.

in 1827, Juliet in 1829, James in 1831, Charlotte in 1834, and Henry in 1837. No birth dates are recorded for these children, but it is evident that Esther's first five babies were born a little less than two years apart and her last two babies about three years apart. Charlotte died in 1840, but none of the other six children died young.<sup>16</sup> None of them lived very long at Mount Airy, however, for reasons that we shall see.

The Grimshaws, not being domestic servants, had many fewer personal dealings than the Jacksons with their owners, but William Henry Tayloe certainly knew this family well. Bill Grimshaw was one of the most skilled and versatile workers on the estate, and he served as Tayloe's head carpenter from 1832 to 1844. An inventory taken in 1839 highlights his skills. The four carpenters he worked with were each supplied with eight or ten basic items: axes, hammers, saws, chisels, planes, and not much else. Bill, on the other hand, was equipped with twenty-five tools of his trade. He had at his disposal two axes, two hammers, two planes, two augers, one adze, one bevel, two gimlets, two handsaws, one cross saw, one compass saw, one drawing knife, a pair of compasses, and seven chisels. He was the only craftsman on the estate entrusted with finish carpentry.<sup>17</sup>

Several Mount Airy work logs from the period 1805–14 detail the daily tasks assigned to the carpenters throughout the year, though Bill Grimshaw's routine in the 1830s and 1840s was probably rather different, because his master, William Henry Tayloe, employed only five carpenters, whereas John Tayloe III had had a crew of sixteen back in 1805–14.<sup>18</sup> According to the work logs, in January and February the Mount Airy carpenters collected timber for barrel staves and fencing and cut rails and posts at the plantation sawmill. During March and April they constructed new fencing in the several farm quarters. In May and June they joined with almost all the other workers on the estate in harvesting the wheat and oat crops. William Tayloe noted in June 1825 that Bill was one of the eight cradlers who performed the most skilled harvest labor by cutting the ripe wheat so that other workers could rake and bind it into sheaves.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the summer the car-

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16. Charlotte's death is reported in the 1840 inventory for Lansdown quarter, in Tayloe a 13.

17. This inventory of carpenters' tools, dated February 10, 1839, is in Tayloe d 8539–90.

18. The fullest surviving Mount Airy work logs are dated 1805, 1811–12, and 1813–14. In these years the Mount Airy carpenters were frequently sent to Washington to make repairs at the Octagon, and they also did carpentry in JT3's outlying plantations and ironworks in Virginia and Maryland.

19. WHT diary, 1824–31, Tayloe d 7923.

penters made corn barrels. In 1834, for example, they must have assembled hundreds of casks because Tayloe shipped 568 barrels of corn from the estate that year.<sup>20</sup> During the fall months they spent much of their time constructing, repairing, or reshingling buildings on the estate, or they were sent to do carpentry at other Tayloe properties. In September 1828 Bill Grimshaw worked at the Octagon, and he was given permission to call at Neabsco ironworks for a day or two on the way home, to see his mother and his old friends.<sup>21</sup>

Winney's mother, Esther, continued to work as a spinner. Her fellow cloth makers seem to have preferred this line of work to agricultural field labor: at least four of the spinners in 1826 had their daughters working along with them, and two other spinners were the daughters of former spinners. But William Henry Tayloe evidently regarded textile production as marginal. By the 1830s half of the spinners on the estate were elderly semi-invalids, and few young girls were being recruited into the craft. Yet in 1834 they manufactured 310 yards of shirting cloth, enough to supply the field hands on two farm quarters with five or six yards apiece.<sup>22</sup>

In 1829, when Winney was three years old, she moved with her mother from Old House to Lansdown quarter, where William Henry Tayloe had set up a spinning house. At the same time, Winney's father moved to the home quarter at Mount Airy to be with the other carpenters. A spinner could set up her wheel almost anywhere, and Tayloe allowed several other textile workers who were married to field hands to spin or weave at their husbands' farm quarters. But for some reason he separated the Grimshaws by several miles. From this time onward Esther and Bill probably lived apart much of the time, though they had three more children.

Young Winney lived at Lansdown quarter with her mother and siblings for more than a decade, from age three until age fourteen. Perhaps she envied her older sister, Lizza, who had gone to Washington as a small child to live with their grandmother Winney Jackson and stayed on to become a domestic at the Octagon. But Winney had plenty of company at Lansdown, a large farming unit inhabited by about sixty slaves, nearly half of them children. She did not yet have an assigned job in 1839, when she was thirteen years old, by which age over 90 percent of the girls and boys on the estate were already working. She may have been sickly, because there was a

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20. See Tayloe d 13410.

21. WHT to his younger brother Henry A. Tayloe in Washington, September 17, 1828, Tayloe d 5849–5959.

22. See Tayloe d 13410.

lot of illness in her family during the 1830s. Medical bills from Dr. William G. Smith, who treated the Mount Airy slaves, show numerous visits to Esther and her children. Winney's mother became seriously ill in 1834 and again in 1839, and was a semi-invalid thereafter.<sup>23</sup> Dr. Smith also prescribed medicine for Winney's grandfather Harry Jackson during his final illness in 1838. Upon hearing of old Harry's death, a friend wrote to William Henry Tayloe: "I am sure you will miss him greatly as an ostler. I understand Ralph has ruined one of your carriage horses allready."<sup>24</sup> Ralph Ward was the new slave ostler referred to in this letter, and, despite his inauspicious start, he handled Tayloe's horses into the 1860s.

In 1840, at age fourteen, Winney had her first job. She was sent with two of her sisters—twelve-year-old Anna and ten-year-old Juliet—to work for the wife of a local clergyman, Mrs. William N. Ward. William Henry Tayloe was not hiring these girls out; he was lending them to Mrs. Ward, who was expected to supply their food, clothing, and housing for a year. Most years he lent out several slave children to his neighbors; it was a convenient way to train them into domestic service. Probably he sent out the Grimshaw sisters together so that they could keep one another company. Their three younger siblings—James, who was eight, Charlotte, five, and Henry, two—stayed with their mother, and it was during this year that young Charlotte died of unexplained causes.

In 1841–42 Winney returned to the plantation to work in the overseer's house at Doctor's Hall quarter. For the first time in her life she was completely on her own, separated from family and close relatives, and living on a farming quarter inhabited by forty slaves who were almost all strangers to her. But this was a common experience at Mount Airy, where girls and boys were typically moved away from their parents in the early to mid-teens, when they were old enough to start regular jobs. And at Doctor's Hall Winney did not have to labor in the fields with the other girls her age. Her assignment was to nurse Mrs. Monday, the ailing wife of the white overseer. Winney Grimshaw was becoming schooled in the slippery art of waiting on the white folks.

In 1843, at age seventeen, Winney embarked on an adult career pattern that was strikingly reminiscent of her mother's. She started to spin yarn and weave cloth with six older women in the Mount Airy spinning house. And she married a nineteen-year-old youth named Jacob Carrington, who had

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23. Dr. W. G. Smith's medical bills, 1831–40, are in Tayloe d 14410–520, 15332–579, 15919–16082.

24. J. W. Collins to WHT, April 30, 1838, Tayloe d 2860–70.

been working at the plantation gristmill since he was a boy of nine. Her husband had an unusual parentage. Jacob's mother was a slave field hand named Criss, but his father, David Carrington, was a free mulatto, one of the very few emancipated African Americans who lived in the vicinity of Mount Airy.<sup>25</sup> This, however, did Jacob no good at all. Since Criss was a Tayloe slave, all of her ten children by David Carrington were Tayloe slaves also. Perhaps the stigma of enslavement struck Jacob with special force. He had six living brothers and sisters when he married Winney, and four of them were working as field hands at Fork quarter. Jacob himself was described by William Henry Tayloe in 1841 as "a smart lad," experienced at grinding and at dressing the millstones.<sup>26</sup> In 1844 he was put in charge of the mill, although he was only twenty years old; he had two assistants to help him, thirteen-year-old Alfred Lewis and twelve-year-old Cornelius Ward. Jacob and his young wife lived at the home quarter, and in 1844 Winney gave birth to her first child, a son named John.

The following year an event occurred that changed the whole direction of Winney's life. Sometime during the summer of 1845 her father, Bill Grimshaw, had an altercation with one of his white supervisors and was whipped. Floggings were rare at Mount Airy, and Bill was so incensed by his treatment that he ran away. William Tayloe advertised for him in the *Alexandria Gazette* in November 1845 and offered one hundred dollars for his capture.<sup>27</sup> But he never caught Bill Grimshaw. Between 1808 and 1860, Bill was the only Mount Airy slave who managed to abscond permanently.

William Henry Tayloe did not tolerate runaway slaves, and his policy—like his father's—was to take revenge by breaking up the offender's family. First he crossed Bill's name off the 1845 slave list, and then he took action to discourage any others from following the carpenter's example. "Sent this family away for misconduct of the parents," was Tayloe's cryptic comment on the Grimshaws in his inventory book.<sup>28</sup> Evidently he laid blame on Esther Grimshaw as well as on Bill, but what her "misconduct" consisted of

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25. David Carrington was living in Richmond County in 1830, according to the U.S. census for that year. He was described as a single free colored man, aged between thirty-six and fifty-five (U.S. Census, Richmond Co., Va., M 19, roll 194, p. 81, National Archives). His wife, Criss, who was thirty-six in 1830, died in 1836, and David also died or moved away at about this time, for he is not listed in the indexes to the Virginia censuses of 1840, 1850, or 1860.

26. WHT to Benjamin Boughton, March 16, 1841, Tayloe d 2371–2452.

27. WHT paid \$3.75 to run this ad for a month. His bill from the *Alexandria Gazette* is in Tayloe d 16253–485.

28. For WHT's comments on the Grimshaws, see Tayloe a 13.

he did not say. Perhaps she had concealed her husband's getaway until Bill had too much of a head start to be captured. Tayloe wanted to sell Esther, but he had trouble finding a buyer, since she was middle-aged and in poor health. So he moved her temporarily to the Lansdown farm quarter, where he wouldn't have to see her, and separated her from all her children. Bill's seventeen-year-old daughter, Anna, had been employed as a domestic for the previous five years by the Reverend Mr. Ward, and in the fall of 1845 Tayloe sold Anna to Ward in exchange for a girl of the same age. Bill's sixteen-year-old daughter, Juliet, had been similarly employed for the preceding two years by another white neighbor, Dr. Tyler, and Tayloe made the same arrangement with Tyler, selling Juliet to him in exchange for another teenaged girl. In October 1845 he took a more drastic step, sending Bill's nineteen-year-old daughter, Winney, her infant son, John, and her fourteen-year-old brother, James, to faraway Oakland plantation, his new cotton estate in Alabama. Tayloe didn't need to do anything about Bill's oldest child, twenty-one-year-old Lizza, who belonged to his widowed mother, Ann Ogle Tayloe, and had been working at the Octagon for many years. By the close of 1845 only Bill's wife and their youngest child, Henry (who was eight years old) were still living on Tayloe's Mount Airy property.

In the spring of 1846 young Juliet Grimshaw responded to this crisis by sending a letter to her sister Lizza in Washington. The formal styling of this letter, the accomplished penmanship, and the almost flawless spelling indicate that Juliet dictated her message to an amanuensis, perhaps to her new mistress, Mrs. Tyler. If Mrs. Tyler composed the letter for her, it would explain why Juliet claims to be "satisfied" with her sale to a new owner. But if the wording is not exactly Juliet's, and if her statements sound guarded, the letter nevertheless tells us what was going on among the Grimshaws and conveys Juliet's deep distress at her family's fractured situation. Here is her message to Lizza:

March 27 [18]46

Dear Sister

I would not have postponed writing so long but circumstances which I could not control have prevented me: this is the first letter you have received from me I have been truly sorry it should be so. You I know are too well convinced of my affection for you to let that circumstance make you doubt its sincerity. Our dear mother looks better than I ever saw her Master has moved her on the farm. She is much opposed to Ann's marr[y]ing—and I also am much averse to it, I think she had better wait until she is older.<sup>29</sup> Ann is very well, she had lately written to Sister Winny, who is

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29. I do not know who Anna's prospective husband was.



in Alabama, but has not received an answer yet.<sup>30</sup> Brother Henry is well. You *ought* to write to Sister Winny and try to get an answer. We have not heard from father since he left. You do not know how anxious we are to see you and your little boy, do try to visit us soon. I feel very anxious to see my little nephew Armsted says you and he are engaged is it so?<sup>31</sup> I think if it is so you ought to let us know You ought to give your mother and sisters your confidence. Armsted says you are to marry him in June is that so? Are you coming down to Master Charles' to live or not?<sup>32</sup> Aunt Nancy is well and has moved to the farm also.<sup>33</sup> Mother and Aunt N are much better satisfied now. I suppose you know both Ann and myself are sold Ann to Mr Ward and I to Dr Tyler we are much better satisfied than when at home. Aunt Betsy is very well but she has lately lost one of her sons, she seems to bear the loss very well.<sup>34</sup> Dear Sister you can not imagine how lonely I feel sometimes when I think how our family is scattered, my father I know not where nor how he is whether dead or alive, one sister in Alabama mother at home alone with out any of her children with her, and we never hear from you. This is enough to make me low spirited is it not? But we have one consolation we will hope one time to meet in heaven never to part again Aunt Betsy sends her love to you and says you must give her love to her Brother. Mother and Ann join me in love to you. Either visit us soon or write. Believe me your affectionate sister

Juliet Grimshaw<sup>35</sup>

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30. Juliet forgets to mention that her fourteen-year-old brother, James, had also been sent to Alabama in October 1845.

31. Armistead Carter was a twenty-five-year-old dining room servant at Mount Airy in 1846, and he was probably in a position where he could travel to the Octagon to see Lizza. He may well have been the father of her little boy. Armistead continued working as a domestic at Mount Airy until he was emancipated in 1865 at age forty-four. Instead of marrying Lizza, he married a slave named Maria who was owned by a neighboring planter.

32. Charles Tayloe, William Henry Tayloe's youngest brother, was the master of Oaken Brow plantation in King George County, which had previously been a Mount Airy farm quarter.

33. There were two women of this name at Mount Airy in 1846: Nancy Carter, age fifty-four, and Nancy Richardson, age forty-six. Both were spinners like Esther Grimshaw, and neither of them appears to be related to the Grimshaws.

34. Juliet's Aunt Betsy, whose brother Henry worked with Lizza at the Octagon, had died in 1825, before Juliet was born. Probably Juliet is here referring to Betsy Yeatman, then a sixty-nine-year-old retired spinner. She had at least three living sons in 1846–47; I cannot trace the son who died or identify the brother who worked at the Octagon.

35. This letter is filed in Tayloe d 27453–504 (TPF reel 33:38–40). The envelope is sealed, and written on it is the following address, indicating that the letter

What comes through loud and clear in this letter is young Juliet's devotion to her parents and siblings, and her grief at the breakup of her family. She was upset by Lizza's detachment from the family crisis. Also evident is her sustaining religious faith, as well as her belief in the serious business of marriage: sister Anna at seventeen was too young to marry. Unfortunately for Julia, the Grimshaw family situation deteriorated further in the months after she wrote to Lizza. In July 1846 William Henry Tayloe finally got rid of Esther and her young son Henry for the low price of \$300. "Sold," he noted after her name on the Lansdown list, "or rather given away." There were now no Grimshaws left at Mount Airy. Only Winney, her baby, John, and her brother, James, still belonged to Tayloe, and they were eight hundred miles away in Alabama.

Probably a year later, in an undated letter that seems to have been written in March 1847, Juliet sent another message to Lizza. Or was this message sent by Juliet? The scrawled initials at the close of this second letter may be "J G" but could also be "S P" or "J P" or several other combinations. This undated document is puzzling in many ways. It is written in a different hand from Juliet's letter of March 1846, is much less polished, and reads as though the author was Lizza's close acquaintance rather than her sister—referring to "your" rather than "our" mother and grandmother, and signing off as one of Lizza's "friends." If Juliet *was* the author, she had been resold by Dr. Tyler to Robert Wormley Carter II and was now living at Sabine Hall, the Carters' mansion two miles from Mount Airy in Richmond County.<sup>36</sup> It is more likely the letter was written by an African American friend of Lizza Grimshaw who lived at Sabine Hall. The slaves at Mount Airy and Sabine Hall were closely connected, and some of the Tayloe people had Carter husbands or wives. The only thing certain is that Lizza was trying to get in touch with her mother, Esther, to tell her that grandmother Winney Jackson had died in Washington and to ask how to dispose of her belongings. The answer to Lizza's plea is as follows:

Sabine Hall Mar 22nd

It is now a month, my dear Lizzy since I received yours of the twenty-second of February I would have Answered yours immediately as you requested if I Could

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was mailed three days after it was written: "Warsaw Va/March 30/Miss Elizabeth Grimshaw/care of Mrs John Tayloe/Washington City."

36. Robert Wormley Carter II, great-grandson of the famous diarist Landon Carter, was the owner of Sabine Hall in the 1840s. He and William Henry Tayloe were the two largest slaveholders in Richmond County.

have seen your Mother I have been waiting day after day and week after week in hopes of Seeing her I had com to the conclusion to write to day Wheather I saw her or not She Came over yesterday to see me, and to hear about you<sup>37</sup> I read your letter over to her She sends you too dollars as a present for your Boy She is very Sorry that it is not more She Wishes you to sell all belonging to your Grand Mother<sup>38</sup> but her Clothes and keep the money for your own use I hope this letter will not put you back in any of your plains I am sorry that I have so little in my power to assist you but what little I have is at your service I will be Responsible for what you owe to A [?]<sup>39</sup> and feel pleasure that I can bee of that much service to you your letter gave me both pleasure and pain Excuse this short and imperfect letter I hope you will not be disapointed my dear Lizzey in your expectation if all thing[s] end well w[h]ich I hope will be the case you will not fail to lett your friends know

Yours truly

J G [?]<sup>40</sup>

Juliet Grimshaw, or whoever responded to Lizza Grimshaw, was evidently able to read and write. Thus, in contrast to Juliet's dictated letter of March 1846, we have a document apparently written by a slave. The letter shows the difficulties that slaves had in communicating by long distance. Lizza, who was evidently very anxious to reach her mother, did not write to her directly, perhaps because Esther was illiterate. But Lizza may also not have known the name and address of her mother's new owner. And Esther for her part took a month to visit Sabine Hall and receive Lizza's message, probably because she had to get permission from her new master. The letter also raises a series of teasing questions. Why was Lizza going to be disappointed with her mother's direction to sell grandmother Winney's belongings and keep the money? Evidently Lizza was breaking up with her beau, Armistead Carter, but what was her new "expectation"? What were her "plains"? Regrettably, we have no answers for these questions, because

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37. Esther evidently went to Sabine Hall on March 21. Sunday was by far the most likely travel day for a slave, which leads me to believe that this letter was written in 1847 because March 21, 1847, was a Sunday.

38. Winney Jackson was last reported in the Mount Airy records as living at the Octagon in 1844, when she was sixty-five years old.

39. Uncertain reading; probably Armistead Carter; see Juliet's letter of March 27, 1846, above.

40. This letter is filed in Tayloe d 27453-504 (TPF reel 33:35-37). The envelope is sealed, and written on it is the following address, indicating that the letter was mailed four days after it was written: "Warsaw Va/March 26/Elizabeth Grimshaw/Washington/D.C."

Lizza—along with Esther, Juliet, Anna, and Henry Grimshaw—all disappeared from the Mount Airy records after Bill Grimshaw ran away.

Bill himself, however, did resurface by long distance in William Henry Tayloe's file of correspondence. When he fled in 1845, he kept heading north until he reached Canada. He settled in Saint John, New Brunswick, where he met an abolitionist named William Francis. Bill asked Francis to write to William Tayloe on his behalf, to say that he wanted to buy his freedom from Tayloe. Apparently Francis sent several letters in the late 1840s but got no reply. In August 1851 he tried again, with the following message:

Saint John NB Aug 14th 1851

Sir

Not knowing whether you have received the letters I have written to you, I again comply with the wishes of William Grimshaw, by once more writing to you concerning him. According to his request I wrote to you in regard to purchasing his body, but have not as yet received any answer. He seems to be quite anxious to know for what amount you will give him a bill of sale of his body, that he may be at liberty to go or come where his business may call him. He says however he knows he is safe and free from any danger of being again taken back to the South, but he is no less willing to make some recompence to you for the labor of which he is well aware you were deprived at the time he ran away from you. He says he never should have ran away from you if he had not been whip'd, for in no other way had he the slightest reason to complain. If you wish to sell his person and receive the cash for it you can by writing to me and stating for what amount you will give a satisfactory bill of sale.

The money is ready at any moment, that the bill of sale may be produced in Boston or New York as there are persons there who will transact the business for him. He wishes to be remembered to your family with his best respects, and to all with whom he was acquainted who may enquire about him.

If you conclude to write to me concerning him you would very much oblige me by doing so as soon as you could make it convenient as I expect to leave Saint-John on a visit to the United States for some length of time; but if you write within a couple or three weeks I will receive it, before I leave and will be able to know how to proceed.

P.S. Please direct your letter to William Grimshaw to the care of Mr Wm Francis, King Street, Saint John, N.B. And believe him your most obedt

William Grimshaw<sup>41</sup>

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41. William Francis to WHT, August 14, 1851, Tayloe d 3280. The envelope is stamped "St John N.B. Au14 1851." It is addressed to "Mr William Tayloe/Warsaw Court House/Monterey/Richmond County/Virginia."

William Francis's letter was posted from Canada to Virginia at a cost of ten cents. Bill's amanuensis did the runaway carpenter no favor by phrasing his request so disparagingly: asking Tayloe for a "bill of sale of his body." Bill had repeatedly asked Francis to write on his behalf, so he really *did* want to purchase his freedom from Tayloe. If he could obtain a written declaration of settlement from his former master, he would be able to move about more freely in the northern United States, and he may well have wished to get away from New Brunswick, where the Saint John city charter specifically excluded black people from practicing a trade or selling goods. Whether Bill had earned enough money to pay Tayloe's asking price, or whether he was dependent on his abolitionist friends, I do not know. It seems very unlikely that William Henry Tayloe replied to this letter. But he did keep it, writing "Grimshaw" on the envelope. It would be fascinating to find out whether Bill Grimshaw stayed in Canada or moved back to the States, but I have not been able to track this talented and venturesome man past August 1851.

Bill's daughter Winney Grimshaw can, however be followed from the 1840s into the 1860s. In October 1845, as we have seen, she was sent with her baby, John, and her fourteen-year-old brother, James, to William Tayloe's new cotton plantation named Oakland, situated in what is now Hale County in the Canebrake region of west-central Alabama, north of Demopolis and west of Selma. She was thus one of the 220 Mount Airy people whom William Tayloe moved between 1833 and 1862 from Virginia, where agricultural prospects were declining, to Alabama, where cotton fortunes could be made. The larger significance of Winney's move to Oakland is that she was part of an enormous forced mass migration by which upwards of a million slaves were taken from the upper South to the cotton South during the two generations before the Civil War.

The three Grimshaws were consigned to a large party of forty-five Mount Airy slaves who were moved to Oakland plantation in 1845. But Winney's husband, Jacob Carrington, was not a member of this group. William Tayloe was unwilling to send his best miller to a plantation in Alabama where he had no mill. Two of Jacob's brothers did go to Oakland in this party, and also the mill boy Alfred Lewis, but Jacob himself stayed on at Mount Airy grinding grain until the Civil War. Winney probably never saw her parents again, and she didn't see her husband, sisters, or youngest brother for at least twenty years.

Winney's party trekked the eight hundred miles from Mount Airy to Oakland accompanied by five horses and mules and a heavy wagon, and camped each night in tents. Because she had a young baby, Winney may

have ridden with her child in a wagon, but most of the slaves walked the entire way. They left Mount Airy on October 14, 1845, went from Richmond through western Virginia and across the Appalachian Mountains to Knoxville, Tennessee, then cut down to Summerville, Georgia, and passed through a series of small Alabama towns until they reached Marion, and traveled from there a few miles farther to Oakland plantation. This route required about forty days, so they probably reached Oakland before the end of November.<sup>42</sup> The people in this party were mostly young field hands of the right age to walk the long distance to Alabama and to learn how to cultivate and pick cotton. Their median age was sixteen. Only three members of the group were over the age of thirty. There was one complete family of eight: Alfred and Sinah Lewis and their six children (the oldest of whom was Alfred Jr., the mill boy). There were also several mothers with babies, like Winney. But most were young teenagers migrating without their parents, sometimes in the company of a brother or sister, and sometimes all alone. Winney's Carrington brothers-in-law were in this category. Austin Carrington was a twenty-year-old scullion from the Mount Airy kitchen, and his brother David was a fourteen-year-old field hand from Fork quarter. Their mother had died by 1845, but the Carrington boys left three brothers, a sister, a brother-in-law, a sister-in-law, and four little nephews back home at Mount Airy.

Once these transplanted Virginians finally arrived at Oakland plantation, they found themselves on a raw new cotton farm of six hundred acres. The newcomers must have seen immediately that they were in for hard times. There were not enough cabins to accommodate the migrants, and new cabins were not built for them until early 1847. Almost all the Virginians who were old enough to work were put into the cotton fields, but Tayloe treated Winney and James Grimshaw differently. He directed that James, who had started training as a carpenter at Mount Airy just before his father ran off, be continued in this craft at Oakland. Winney posed more of a problem, since there was little demand in Alabama for textile workers. Tayloe purchased all the cloth needed at Oakland for slave clothing from the New England textile mills, and he kept only one spinner on the plantation to make a little yarn or cloth. So Winney became the housekeeper for Tayloe's new overseer, a man named Richard H. Donnanhan. In 1846 and 1847 she also had a sickly son to nurse. When Tayloe visited Oakland in May 1847,

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42. Winney's party is enumerated in several lists in Tayloe a 13, a 2119, d 8632-67, and d 13425; the Oakland overseer, R. H. Donnanhan, describes the route they took in a letter to WHT, June 20, 1847, Tayloe d 2969-85.

he listed young John, then nearly three years old, among the slaves. But John died in 1848.

Winney Grimshaw Carrington was a young and evidently attractive woman in the bloom of life. Her supervisor, Richard Donnahan, had a wife and children but this did not stop him from pursuing Winney. By 1848 if not earlier she became his mistress. In 1849 she bore him a mulatto son and named the infant John in memory of the black boy she had just lost. Sex with slaves was a taboo topic in the antebellum South, and Winney is the only Tayloe slave woman that I know about who is identified as a black mistress in the family correspondence. Miscegenation certainly occurred. At least ten of William Henry Tayloe's slaves were listed as mulattoes in the 1860 slave census.<sup>43</sup> But Tayloe himself was a pious, abstemious, and sober-minded family man who was very much opposed to interracial sex. And he was upset at seeing Winney's child when he next came to Oakland.

William Henry Tayloe became more exercised when Winney bore a second mulatto baby named Julia (probably after her sister Juliet) in 1850. Mrs. Donnahan, in Tayloe's view, was part of the problem: she "was a delicate little woman very helpless—she could not get on without Winney and countenanced the two families under her eye."<sup>44</sup> So Tayloe intervened to break up this Oakland ménage à trois. First, in 1852 he tried to get Donnahan to move away from Winney to Walnut Grove, a plantation that Tayloe had an interest in, and manage Oakland from several miles away. But Donnahan said that this was impractical and refused.<sup>45</sup> Since Richard Donnahan was the best overseer he had in Alabama, Tayloe capitulated temporarily. Then a third mulatto baby named Lizza (after Winney's elder sister) appeared in 1853. Deciding to put pressure on Winney instead, Tayloe took her son John away from her when he was four years old and presented the child to his widowed niece Lucy Tayloe as a New Year's gift on January 1, 1854.<sup>46</sup> Next, that same year he dealt with Donnahan more firmly: "I moved

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43. The slave census of 1860 identifies the slaves on each property only by age, sex, and race, not by name. So WHT's ten mulatto slaves cannot be definitely identified.

44. WHT's comment on Mrs. Donnahan is in a memorandum he wrote in 1868 about his pre-Civil War problems in Alabama. In it WHT never talked very explicitly about Winney's relations with Donnahan, simply noting that Donnahan "had children by marriage and others by my servant Winney" (Tayloe d 2123–35).

45. R. H. Donnahan to WHT, October 16, 1852, Tayloe d 2969–85.

46. Lucy Tayloe's letter of thanks to WHT, dated January 1, 1854, is in Tayloe d 6342–43. She promised to take great pains to train John properly, and asked WHT to assure Winney that her son would be well taken care of.

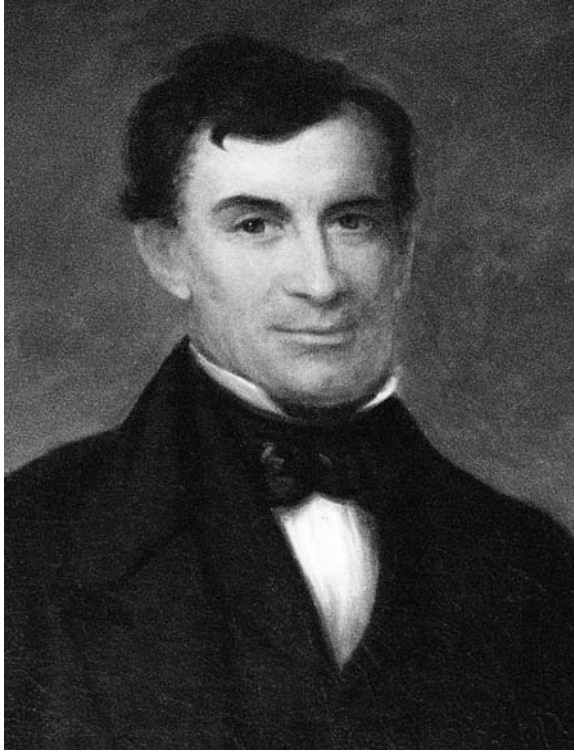


Figure 4. William Henry Tayloe in a portrait at Mount Airy. Courtesy of Mrs. H. Gwynne Tayloe; photograph by the author.

him to Woodlawn to separate him and Winney, but in my absence he made other arrangements.”<sup>47</sup> Woodlawn was another cotton plantation that Tayloe owned some miles from Oakland, and as soon as Tayloe went back to Virginia Donnanah took Winney to live with him at Woodlawn. Here in 1855 she bore a fourth mulatto child named Willie Anne. And when Tayloe visited Woodlawn in April 1857, he discovered that yet another birth had taken place. “Winny has an infant,” he reported to his son in Virginia, “which I am told is ‘much like the others.’”<sup>48</sup>

What Tayloe didn’t mention was that this fifth mulatto child was named William Henry. Why, one may ask, did Winney choose to name this latest

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47. WHT memorandum, 1868, Tayloe d 2123–35.

48. WHT to Henry Augustine Tayloe (hereafter cited as HAT), April 20, 1857, Tayloe d 6046–6170.



infant for her intrusive master? Possibly she did it to mock or shame him. But I am inclined to believe that Winney had genuine affection for William Henry Tayloe despite what he had done to her, and that she named the baby in his honor. She may also have chosen the name in the hope that Tayloe would not take a boy named after him away from her. If so, her strategy worked, for little William Henry Grimshaw grew up in his mother's household.

While Winney was serving Donnahan, her brother Jim Grimshaw worked as a carpenter first at Oakland and then at Woodlawn. From 1845 to 1857 he probably shared a cabin with Winney and her children. Jim clearly had some sexual adventures or misadventures as a young man, because during 1857, at the age of twenty-five, he received eighteen treatments for syphilis over an eight-month period, from March to November.<sup>49</sup> By 1858 he was back at Oakland, apparently in an improved state of health, and there he found and married eighteen-year-old Arabella Ward, who had been sent to Alabama from Mount Airy in 1854. James and Arabella had undoubtedly known each other in Virginia as young children, and James had worked in Alabama with two of Arabella's brothers. The Wards were a family very similar in slave status to the Grimshaws. Arabella's father, Ralph Ward, was the groom at Mount Airy, the man accused in 1838 of ruining one of Tayloe's carriage horses when he replaced Jim's grandfather Harry Jackson as coachman and ostler. Arabella's mother, Eliza Ward, was a spinner who had worked with Jim and Winney's mother, Esther Grimshaw, in the Mount Airy and Landsdown spinning houses for twenty years. Arabella had also been a spinner at Mount Airy, and she continued to ply this craft at Oakland, the only spinner listed on the estate inventories from 1855 through 1863. When William Tayloe visited Oakland in March 1858, he remarked to his son, "You know Jim Grimshaw married Arabella and has got her to breeding."<sup>50</sup> But if Arabella was pregnant when Tayloe wrote this letter, she either miscarried or her child died in infancy. Four years later Jim and Arabella successfully started their family. Their first recorded child was a daughter, Sylvia, in 1862, followed by a second daughter, Eliza (named for her maternal grandmother), in 1864.

Meanwhile, back at Woodlawn, William Tayloe was glad to hear that his overseer, Donnahan, was talking of moving to Texas, for "I think it is time

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49. For Jim's syphilis treatment, see the 1857 medical bill to WHT from Drs. Clarke and Langhorn, Tayloe d 19551-697.

50. WHT to HAT, March 25, 1858, Tayloe d 5960-6045.

for him to separate from us.”<sup>51</sup> In early 1858 he finally broke up Donnanhan’s liaison with Winney by dismissing him. It was at this time that Winney (now thirty-two years old) fell seriously ill: William Tayloe paid Dr. G. W. Browder eighty dollars to visit her daily for nearly a month, from February 10 through March 7, 1858.<sup>52</sup> In this same year Tayloe sold Woodlawn plantation and moved his slaves to another cotton farm called Larkin in Perry County. On the eve of secession he owned and operated two Alabama cotton plantations—Larkin and Oakland—and, according to the federal slave census of 1860, the two plantations had a combined population of 277 slaves.<sup>53</sup> In 1860 Jim Grimshaw and his wife lived at Oakland, and Winney lived at Larkin with three young children, occupying one of the thirty-four cabins in the slave quarters. Her first son, John, had died, her second son, John, had been taken away, and her daughter Julia had also died, but she still had Lizza (age seven), Willie Anne (age five), and William Henry (age three). In 1861 Winney began keeping house for the new Larkin overseer, a man named J. W. Ramey, who had a wife, a daughter, and two teenaged sons.

Soon after the Civil War broke out, Tayloe moved most of the able-bodied workers still living at Mount Airy to Alabama, in order to keep them from being captured or deserting to the Union Army in Virginia. By 1863, 250 people were crowded into the slave quarters at Larkin, and another 141 at Oakland. Many families that had been torn apart during the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s were suddenly reunited. Austin and David Carrington, for example, who had been separated from their siblings in 1845, were once again living in the same neighborhood with their brothers Godfrey and Israel and their sister Becky. They also had twenty-two nephews and nieces among the slaves on Tayloe’s two Alabama plantations. But one member of the Carrington clan was conspicuously missing. The man Winney had married in 1843, the Mount Airy miller Jacob Carrington, had deserted to the Yankees in December 1861 when he saw that his master

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51. WHT to HAT, April 27, 1857, Tayloe d 6046–6170.

52. Dr. Browder billed WHT \$251 for making seventy-six visits to Woodlawn between January 1 and September 20, 1858. He spent much more time with Winney than with any other slave patient. See Tayloe d 19688–830.

53. For WHT’s 152 slaves at Larkin, see U.S. Census, 1860, Schedule 2, Perry Co., Ala. (M 653, roll 34, pp. 478–79, National Archives). For the 125 slaves at Oakland, see *ibid.*, Marengo Co., Ala. (M 653, roll 31, pp. 89–90). The slave census of 1860 is very carelessly compiled and unreliable. The returns for Larkin and Oakland categorize ten of WHT’s 277 slaves as mulattoes, but none of Winney’s three children seems to be among those listed as mulattoes.

was planning to move him to Alabama. Freedom was more important for Jacob than reunion with his lost wife.

As the war got under way, William Henry Tayloe took up residence at Oakland plantation in order to keep an eye on his Alabama operations, leaving Mount Airy in the hands of his son Henry Augustine Tayloe. He also frequently visited Larkin plantation, but he felt uncomfortable with the overseer's family, having taken an intense dislike to young Charles Ramey, who was eighteen years old in 1861. This youth had managed to get quickly out of Confederate Army service, and according to Tayloe he spent his time at Larkin shooting squirrels instead. He "took Winney's son [William] Henry to tote them for him, and he visited the girls." Soon Ramey's black housekeeper was pregnant yet again. When Winney's baby was born in 1862, the infant—named Thornton by his mother—was unmistakably another mulatto child. Mrs. Ramey was less compliant about this sort of thing than Mrs. Donnahan had been, and when she saw Winney's new baby, "a bomb exploded" in the Ramey household. Tayloe reported that "Winney wanted clothes for the Baby. I had scolded about the D's—so she kept out of my way. I never saw Baby nor asked any questions."<sup>54</sup> The situation was indeed an awkward one. Tayloe wanted to get rid of the Rameys, but he knew that it would be extremely difficult to find a replacement overseer during the war. And Ramey was unwilling to quit the Larkin job because he could keep his sons out of the Confederate Army by claiming that they were doing essential plantation work. So Tayloe and Ramey kept an uneasy truce over the next three years.

When the Yankees captured Vicksburg in July 1863, Tayloe sensed that his side was likely to lose the war. In Alabama the Confederate government was increasingly requisitioning slave labor for military purposes. During 1863 thirteen of Tayloe's slaves were impressed to work on an elaborate fortification system designed to defend Selma, which was the chief Confederate munitions manufacturing center in the Deep South. Two of these slaves were men named Jim, but James Grimshaw was probably not in this group, since only field hands were chosen for this kind of pick-and-shovel work.<sup>55</sup> In 1863, doubtless aware that he might soon lose his slaves, William Henry Tayloe made a thorough appraisal of the people whom he had gathered together at Oakland and Larkin plantations. He listed all the slaves by

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54. WHT memorandum, 1868, Tayloe d 2123–35.

55. Tayloe d 20258–359. There were five Tayloe slaves named James or Jim at Oakland and Larkin in 1863. The two impressed men were most likely Jim Glasgow from Oakland and Jim Moore from Larkin, who were both field hands.

families, indicating who lived in each cabin, and he calculated a monetary value for each person. For example, he reckoned that Jacob Carrington had a market price of \$1,500—a value wiped out by his getaway. James Grimshaw was priced even higher, at \$1,800, as a skilled carpenter, and his wife, Arabella, was also valued at \$1,800, the highest price for a female on Tayloe's list. Winney was reckoned to be worth \$1,000, and her children were valued at \$800, \$700, \$600, and \$200—young Thornton, a toddler, being valued at \$200. Tayloe's slave valuations in 1863 were about four times as high as the values assigned to his father's Mount Airy slaves back in 1808.<sup>56</sup> Tayloe also recorded the ages of his slaves in 1863, but his age statements are not very accurate. He stated that Winney was thirty-two years old in 1863, whereas she was actually thirty-seven.<sup>57</sup>

On April 2, 1865, the Union forces captured Selma, and a week later Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Court House. Soon the blue coats flooded into west-central Alabama. Tayloe's slaves, suddenly liberated, stopped working at Oakland and Larkin and collected in the local towns—Selma, Uniontown, Demopolis—to talk with the Yankee soldiers or to consult among themselves.<sup>58</sup> There was great confusion; the freedmen and freedwomen were hoping for land of their own, which they didn't get, and instead were told that their only employment choice was to keep working for their former masters. At least they now had the option of moving about in search of better work sites.

At Oakland plantation most of the former slaves decided in 1865 to stay on for a while, and they contracted to work for Tayloe's overseer as hired cotton hands. Jim and Arabella Grimshaw were still at Oakland in early 1866: both are entered on an Oakland employment and housing list for this year. But they evidently dropped out after about three months, since Jim was paid only \$33 and Arabella was paid \$22, whereas the men who worked for a full year in 1866 received about \$115, and the women about \$75.<sup>59</sup> Once they quit Oakland, Jim and Arabella disappeared from sight; I have not been able to find them in the U.S. census of 1870. But quite a few of

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56. WHT's valuations reflected the rising prices for slaves just before and during the war; in December 1858 at a sale near Selma, young men who were "nothing more than field hands" fetched \$1,600 to \$1,960, and girls aged fifteen to seventeen "commanded as many hundred dollars" (Tayloe d 2123–35).

57. WHT's data on his Alabama slaves in 1863 is in Tayloe d 13453, d 8597–8605, and d 8632–67.

58. See WHT at Oakland to his daughter-in-law Courtenay Tayloe in Virginia, 8 June 1865, Tayloe d 5292–5327.

59. The Oakland lists for 1866 are in Tayloe d 8632–67 and d 13450.

their Mount Airy companions did stay on at Oakland for at least several years. Austin and David Carrington were among twenty-one hired hands born at Mount Airy—fourteen men and seven women—who continued to work at Oakland through 1868, when the surviving employment records for this plantation terminate. And some thirty-seven freed people originally from Mount Airy can be traced in the U.S. census of 1870 as living with their families in the vicinity of Oakland, so a good many of these men and women were very probably still working in the cotton fields at the plantation where they had been enslaved.

In contrast to Oakland, there was violent upheaval at Larkin plantation in 1865. William Tayloe visited Virginia after the war was over, leaving Ramey in charge, and after he returned in October he counted 126 adult freedmen and freedwomen and their 98 children as living at Larkin. But he also found the plantation in disorder and accused Ramey of feasting the ex-slaves at his expense, and of stealing a mule. Ramey threatened to kill the old man (Tayloe was sixty-six) and apparently did hit him. So Tayloe fired Ramey, and in revenge Ramey persuaded about a third of the Larkin freedmen—including many of Tayloe's best hands—to leave with him, promising that he would find them more attractive and better-paying jobs. Before the end of the year another third or more of the freed people also departed to work on other plantations. In January 1866 only a small remnant of Tayloe's workforce was left at Larkin. But Winney was still there with her four children, now aged twelve, ten, eight, and three.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Winney may have given birth to one more baby, because on a Larkin list dated November 1865 she is credited with five children.<sup>61</sup>

Here, most regrettably, the paper trail of information about Winney Grimshaw suddenly stops. She evidently left Larkin in 1866 or 1867. More than half of her companions at Larkin and Oakland can be located in Alabama, Virginia, or the District of Columbia in the U.S. census of 1870, but Winney and her children slip out of sight.<sup>62</sup> She was forty years old in

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60. A list of the Larkin hands, showing who had left by January 1866 and who stayed on, is in Tayloe d 13453.

61. Tayloe d 13450. On this Larkin list of mothers with children, the children are not named.

62. I have searched for Winney Grimshaw and her children, and also for Jacob Carrington, as well as for James Grimshaw and his family, in all available printed state indexes to the 1870 census, and in the Soundex index to twenty-three states in the 1880 census, with no success. It is possible that I found Winney's elder son: a thirty-one-year-old mulatto carter named William Henry Grimshaw was living with his family in Washington, D.C., in 1880, but this man was born in Virginia,

1866. With no education and four (or five) small dependent children, this freedwoman had meager chances for a better sort of life.



Winney Grimshaw's slave experience, when pieced together from the Tayloe records, reveals disappointingly little about her personal life. We need a letter from her comparable to her sister Juliet's letter of March 1846. But the narrative of her slave career reveals quite a bit about power relations between whites and blacks. Subversive interracial sex cuts like a knife through Winney's story. She was manipulated to an extraordinary degree. And her family was deliberately torn apart. She had to cope with continual exploitation by her white masters—and cope she did. The last reference to her that I can find comes from her former owner, William Henry Tayloe. Reminiscing about his experiences as a slaveholder in 1868, Tayloe remarked that "Winney Grimshaw could fill a volume with interesting events, if [she] could write."<sup>63</sup>

If she could write . . .

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whereas Winney's William Henry was born in Alabama and would have been only twenty-three years old in 1880.

63. WHT's full statement reads: "Archy Williams, Nat Moreton and Joe Saunders, Edward Hall and Winney Grimshaw could fill a volume with interesting events, if they could write." (WHT memorandum, 1868, Tayloe d 2123–2135) Williams, Moreton, and Saunders had also been WHT's slaves; like Winney, they lived at Larkin and probably witnessed WHT's quarrel with Ramey. Williams and Moreton left with Ramey, and Saunders stayed on with WHT in 1866. Edward Hall had not been a slave of WHT's; he worked at Larkin as a freedman in 1865 and left at the end of the year, though not with Ramey.