Agrarian Reform and the Slave System: A Case Study of James Galt's Point of Fork Plantation, 1835-1865

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Agrarian Reform and the Slave System: A Case Study of James Galt's Point of Fork Plantation, 1835-1865

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts

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This thesis examines the ways in which the implementation of agrarian reforms affected the lives of both masters and slaves on a nineteenth-century Virginia plantation. Utilizing the diary of James Galt, a Fluvanna County planter, the duties of mastery and the nature of slave labor at Point of Fork plantation are explored. Contrary to the historiography on agrarian reform and fears of many Southerners, this thesis argues that the case of James Galt indicates that utilizing agricultural innovations strengthened the institution of slavery as opposed to undermining it.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ii

Introduction 1

Chapter 1  
“Order is Heaven’s First Law” 16

Chapter 2  
“In the Fields by Daylight and Wuken ‘em ‘til Dark” 43

Conclusion 57

Selected Bibliography 59

Vita 64
Acknowledgements

There are several people I wish to thank for aiding me in the completion of this project. First of all, I am very grateful for Professor Melvin Ely's advisement on this thesis. Professor Scott Nelson also deserves thanks for directing me to look in directions I would not have originally, mainly the importance of transportation and infrastructure in Fluvanna County, Virginia. What seemed at first tangential led me to the topic of agrarian reform, which became the focus of this thesis. I am especially appreciative of Professor Frederick Corney's advice to define my terms better and to consider the irony and complexities of recording one's own acts of oppression (as James Galt did in his diary). Professors Carol Sheriff and Jim Whittenburg were helpful as well in finalizing the thesis. Finally, I would like to thank my network of friends in the department who bring levity to the occasionally burdensome life which is graduate study.
Introduction

In 1876, the men of the once-great Galt family of Fluvanna County, Virginia gathered (perhaps nervously) for the reading of the will of their patriarch. As he had been for most things in his life, James Galt was well-prepared for his death. His will carefully articulated the distribution of his property to his heirs, appointed executors, and provided for the settlement of his debts. Galt’s property was to be equally divided among his seven surviving children (an eighth child, James, had died of illness years earlier), but he also made sure that each of them would have something to remember him by. His four sons were given fine gold watches and chains. His daughter Jean received all the furnishings from her bedroom. Frances Ann inherited household furniture and the piano forte, which she apparently loved to play. His oldest daughter Mary was given the majority of the furniture and two treasured portraits of her father and mother (Mary Galt had predeceased her husband in 1872).¹

The mementos that were distributed that day were not far from the sum-total Galt’s heirs received. By the time all debits and credits for his estate had been tabulated,

¹ James Galt, will and codicils as of 14 April 1873, Fluvanna County Will Book 11, pages 164-166, Fluvanna County reel 60, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.
a mere $2,732.90 remained to be divided seven ways.2 Perhaps Galt foresaw the grim prospects for his estate. In his will, he had warned his heirs not to quarrel over their inheritance, advising, “it is not seemly for Brother to go to law with Brother.” Moreover, he included a codicil that denied his son John Allan Galt any compensation for acting as one of the executors, noting “payments [previously received] and his clothing &c. are more than his services are worth for no estate could be more unprofitably managed.”3 These words of warning and his fierce condemnation of his own son echoed the tension Galt must have felt while attempting to keep his crumbling finances in order.

Had James Galt died a decade earlier, the content of his will, its codicils, and the atmosphere at the reading of the document would have been vastly different. The American Civil War had proven to be his ruin. Local and state infrastructure had been badly damaged, as Union forces sought to cripple the Confederate supply system and the Confederacy desperately destroyed its own supplies and transportation lines to prevent them from falling into Union hands. Plantation tools and resources had been plundered and damaged by the passing armies. Debts owed to planters like James Galt by the Virginia and Confederate Governments for services and supplies went unpaid.4 Most importantly, escaped and then emancipated slaves had thinned Galt’s wealth

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3 James Galt, will, quotes from main body of will and 14 April 1873 codicil, page 165.
significantly. Ultimately, it was the end of the nearly two hundred fifty years of human slavery in America that brought men like Galt and his peers to their knees.

Arguably, as a businessman, Galt had done no wrong. Prior to and throughout most of the Civil War he had always turned a profit, mainly from the sale of tobacco and wheat. Galt owned land that was strategically positioned near transportation networks, followed the fluctuations of the markets for his agricultural products, was ahead of his time in implementing agrarian reforms, and took advantage of demands brought about by the Civil War. Thus his case illustrates of how tightly the South was bound to the forced labor of generations of African American men, women, and children. Even James Galt, whom one historian claims (rather uncritically) “remind[s] us that in addition to the Simon Legrees, there were humane slave masters in the antebellum South,” could not escape hardships stemming from his strong ties to slavery.

James Galt’s Point of Fork plantation in Fluvanna County, Virginia provides an excellent case for an examination of how firmly the roots of slavery held, even for reform-minded planters in the Upper South. Fortunately, Galt’s plantation diary has been preserved, with near-daily entries covering a thirty-year span. From 1835 to 1865, Galt kept a record that addressed matters such as the weather, work performed, rations of clothing given to slaves, disciplinary problems, and the course of the American Civil War. This invaluable resource allows for an evaluation of daily life for both master and

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slave during a time of immense social and economic upheaval. More important, it enables the historian to ask questions about the nature of mastery and slave life.

Mainly utilizing Galt's plantation daybook, this thesis will address a number of issues related to the implementation of agrarian reform at Point of Fork plantation. In doing so, I have chosen to divide the analysis into two parts: one from the master's perspective and one from the slaves'. In a number of instances, the nature of plantation slavery blurred this distinction. One cannot understand why the master acted a certain way without looking at how the slaves were acting, and vice-versa. Moreover, the information available on slave life on Galt's plantation is limited. It would be more of an injustice, however, not to present the information on the slaves at Point of Fork than it is to offer only the brief account that the evidence makes possible.

Despite these complications, framing the study in this manner is arguably the best approach for understanding the plantation experiences of master and slaves. There is no doubt that, although the lives of masters and slaves overlapped, they experienced daily life, plantation duties, and major events (such as the American Civil War) in very different ways. The overarching question here is how did master and slave experience agrarian reform and life on a modernizing plantation differently? To address this topic, several smaller questions, specific to the ways in which Galt and his slaves understood and were influenced by these phenomena, must be evaluated. For example, what was

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6 Two studies of the plantation South that effectively employ this structure are Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Charles B. Dew, *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994). The former examines family life and gender roles in the white and slave spheres and the latter addresses white and black perceptions of labor, slavery, and identity.
entailed for a master to employ agrarian reforms? How did agricultural innovation affect the way he viewed his relationship with his slaves? Did these changes alter the nature of mastery or his understanding of the institution of slavery? How did the course of the Civil War affect the implementation of reforms? From the slaves' perspective, how did a reformist master change slave life and labor? Did the implementation of agricultural reforms bring a simultaneous reformation of the institution of slavery? How did the slaves experience the socio-economic crisis of the Civil War on such a plantation?

Researching the plantation experience of James Galt (and, by inference, other reformist planters like him) is rather straight-forward. In his plantation diary, Galt recorded his daily experiences, and also clearly articulated the ways in which he went about managing his plantation. The agricultural methods which he laid out and described have been compared with plantation manuals and texts on agrarian reform from the period. By combining these sources, we begin to see how these reforms were implemented, what they meant to the master class, and how successful they were. Galt also offered enough commentary on the operations of his plantation to help us to understand what he thought of these processes.

By contrast, getting at the slave experience at Point of Fork was by no means as simple. Coming to understand slave life on this Fluvanna plantation calls for a creative reading of Galt's diary. Between the lines, we begin to see the material lives, work routines, and even attitudes towards plantation life of the numerous slaves who toiled
without reward for Galt's profit. To complete the picture of slave life at Point of Fork, primary and secondary descriptions of plantation labor and daily happenings have been analyzed. To ensure as much accuracy as possible in this difficult task, I have been careful to utilize accounts and descriptions specific to the region (the Upper South, mainly Virginia) or the type of agriculture that was being implemented (wheat, tobacco, and corn farming).

This study of Galt's Point of Fork plantation lies at the junction of several important strands of the historiography of the antebellum and Civil War South. First of all, the case analysis builds on a fragmentary scholarship on the Gaits of Fluvanna County. Second only to the Cocke clan, the Gaits were the most prominent people in the county in the antebellum era and left behind numerous records, yet the sources they left behind have been studied very little. A 1979 article on James and his brother William, though extremely flawed in its apologist portrayal of slavery, does provide useful information about the two men's inheritance from their uncle and the growth of their plantations. It also suggests the importance of agrarian reform for the brothers, especially William, stating that they "chose to become planters just at the time that a new breed of farmers emerged in Virginia and the South." Two other publications on the Galt brothers have been released by the Fluvanna County Historical Society. The first, from 1971, is an annotated version of part of James Galt's diary from 1864 to 1865.

7 Herndon, "From Orphans to Merchants to Planters," quote from page 27.
The main focus is the effect the Civil War had on the plantation. The other, by the same author as the 1979 article on the two brothers, focuses on William Galt as an agricultural reformer.

It is no surprise that county and state historical publications have printed several articles on James and his brother. Nor is it shocking that the articles do little more than praise two favorite sons of Old Flu (as Fluvanna County is affectionately known). Although the articles provide valuable information about the upbringing of James and William, their inheritance from their uncle, and their involvement in agricultural reform, the two men’s lives have never been put under careful historical scrutiny. For one thing, the fact that the two men owned the largest slave work forces in the county is not considered to be incongruent with their being benevolent masters who sought to change the South’s mode of agricultural production. Similarly, the agrarian reforms implemented by the brothers are merely described. Why James and William facilitated the changes when they did and what making those shifts in agricultural processes meant are not considered.

Publications on James and his brother William make it very clear that agrarian reform was of central importance to the Galts, a fact that provides the focal point for this thesis. Arguably the best book on agricultural innovation in the South is Joyce Chaplin’s An Anxious Pursuit. Chaplin makes the argument that Southerners in the early republic

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were not opposed to progressive farming, but cautiously engaged in agrarian reform in response to the Enlightenment discourse of progress. Unfortunately, the work only covers the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, thus rendering Chaplin’s analysis of the types and purposes of agrarian reform inapplicable to James Galt’s period. She does, however, provide an explanation for what she sees as a decline in the progressive attitude among Southern planters, arguing that sectional tensions and the link between agrarian reform and abolition led to the unpopularity of these ideals.\footnote{Joyce E. Chaplin, \textit{An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815} (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1993).} Despite the difference in her period of focus, Chaplin’s framework and methodology are both insightful and apt for the case of Galt and his Point of Fork plantation. By examining agrarian reform as an issue of intellectual history (instead of economic or scientific history), one gets a much better sense of what these progressive techniques meant to the men who employed them and what the fact that they \textit{did} employ them suggests about their worldview.

Other scholars have made contributions to the study of agrarian reform as an intellectual phenomenon in the nineteenth century. Steven G. Collins’ article on the effects the spread of railroads had on Southern conceptions of time, organization, and technology is one such piece. In it he argues that the coming of the railroads (mainly managed by Northern companies and employing that region’s work ideals and processes) began to change Southern perceptions of labor. Mechanization, division of labor, and controlled production made their way onto plantations through agrarian
reforms. Collins’s approach cleverly shows that agrarian reform was as much a change in the Southern mindset and worldview as it was a practical change. Similarly, Sarah T. Philips’s essay on agricultural reform and republican ideology frames the changes as part of intellectual as well as economic history. She suggests that Southerners were by no means opposed to the improvements in productivity that could come from agrarian reform, but were resistant to making changes because of the link such changes had to the Northern ideal of the republican smaller farmer (the antithesis of the Southern plantation owner).

Unfortunately, works that deal with agrarian reform as a topic in intellectual history and assess the implementation of those reforms are few and far between. A number of other works on antebellum-Southern intellectual life focus on individuals who advocated progressive farming, especially Edmund Ruffin. The recent book by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class* and Michael O’Brien’s *Conjectures of Order* are two such intellectual histories of the region that assess the contribution of reformers like Ruffin, but do not evaluate the implementation of his

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suggested reforms.\textsuperscript{13} Several works also specifically address the life and reformist (and secessionist) ideology of Edmund Ruffin.\textsuperscript{14} These works provide essential information about and analyses of the ideas presented by Southern agrarian reformists, but fail to examine carefully the ways in which they were applied.

The older works on agricultural reform in the antebellum South do still prove useful for this study. These sources include descriptions of what reforms were being called for and how successful or unsuccessful Southern planters were at implementing them. For the most part, this sector of the scholarship looks at this period of farming in the South as an economic problem, arguing that slavery and reformed agriculture were

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different production systems that were not easily adaptable to one another.\textsuperscript{15}

The second sector of the Southern historiography that is hugely important to this project is that on paternalism and mastery. I am fully in agreement with the numerous historians who have argued that mastery and slavery were as much a mindsets as they were hierarchical positions. These mindsets were informed by ideologies.\textsuperscript{16} The lives of Southern slaves and slave owners were influenced by honor, racialized and gendered hierarchies, and religious values. There were, of course, many other things that informed the white and black \textit{Weltanschauung} in the antebellum South, and the aforementioned systems of order fed off of one another. Arguably, however, the ideology of paternalism lay at the heart of the region's social relationships.

Historians have explained paternalism in a number of ways, but I have chosen the definition Eugene Genovese lays out in \textit{Roll, Jordan, Roll} to frame my argument in

\textsuperscript{15} The most detailed and useful economic analysis of agricultural reform is the dissertation of Eugene Genovese. See E.D. Genovese, "The Limits of Agrarian Reform in the Slave South" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1960). Other works that analyze the topic through an economic lens include Walter Licht, \textit{Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century} (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) and Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, \textit{Life and Labor in the Old South} (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1929). The latter work must be read with caution, since although Phillips provides useful data about the economy of the plantation, his work is plagued by an apologist attitude toward slavery. Of similar interest and utility is the recent work by Lynn A. Nelson, \textit{Pharsalia: An Environmental Biography of a Southern Plantation, 1780-1880} (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2007). The book is a clever application of environmental studies to plantation history, describing the often unknown effects agrarian reforms and cultivation were having on the land and soil on a Virginia plantation (in an area that happened to be near Galt's Point of Fork plantation).

\textsuperscript{16} When referring to ideology in this thesis, I am heavily influenced by the understanding of the term put forth in Harold Walsby, \textit{The Domain of Ideologies: A Study of the Development and Structure of Ideologies} (Glasgow: William Maclellan for the Social Science Association, 1947). In this work, Walsby defines ideology as a system of positive and negative beliefs (beliefs which you use to uphold your outlook on the world and beliefs you exclude from your worldview) that is very powerful in informing the decisions you make and the actions you take.
this thesis. Genovese argues that, in a social system where "neither [master nor slave] could express the simplest human feelings without reference to the other," a system of paternalism flourished. Fully aware of the incompatibility of slavery and democratic society, Genovese argues, the master class turned to paternalism to satisfy their consciences and northern critics. For slaveholding whites, paternalism meant the demonstration of care and protection for slaves, while slaves viewed the ideology as a system of reciprocity. According to Genovese, paternalism "protected both masters and slaves from the worst tendencies inherent in their respective conditions." The ideology Genovese so aptly describes explains the way Southern slaveholders understood their volatile labor system and also informs us as to how slaves coped with and resisted the South’s peculiar institution.

To fully understand how masters like James Galt (as I will argue) embodied paternalism, comprehending the meaning of the social positions of master and slave is

17 Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), quotes from pages 3 and 6. Genovese's Roll, Jordan, Roll contribution to the historiography of paternalism needs to be examined in conjunction with the work of James Oakes, The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), who argues that the power of the planter class has been drastically overemphasized by historians (directly refuting Genovese). He asserts that the planter class was not representative of the body of slaveholders overall. He also promotes the idea that the importance of paternalism has been exaggerated, claiming that the main interest of all slave owners was economic gain, not maintaining the façade of care and concern for slaves. Earlier scholarship on paternalism interpreted it as a manifestation of genuine care for a people who were infantile and unable to take care of themselves, thus making it an essential manner of treatment to ensure the longevity of the South’s labor force. For examples of this antiquated interpretation, see Ulrich B. Phillips, American Negro Slavery (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918) and Stanley M. Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959).
also necessary. Numerous works offer excellent descriptions of the responsibilities
and difficulties of being a plantation master, arising from crises of conscience and the
practical problems of controlling human property. Among the best scholarship on the
role of mastery in the South are Drew Faust's *James Henry Hammond and the Old South*
and James O. Breeden's edited collection *Advice Among Masters.* With respect to slave
life on Southern plantations, I believe the most useful works are John W. Blassingame's
*The Slave Community*, Charles Joyner's *Down by the Riverside*, and Charles Dew's *Bond of
Iron*. These works (in addition to numerous others) provide excellent analyses of how
slaves resisted being crippled by the institution of slavery and carefully examine how
the oppressive social system shaped their lives.

This analysis of agrarian reform's effects on master and slave at Point of Fork
takes into account the previous scholarship on the Galt brothers, the processes and
ideals of agrarian reform, the South's ideology of paternalism, and the nature of mastery
and slave life. Although much ground has already been covered within these
historiographical fields, some questions remain unanswered and the treatment of some
topics lacks nuance. The few brief essays written on James Galt merely emphasize his

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18 See Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton
Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1982) and James O. Breeden, ed., *Advice
Among Masters: The Ideal in Slave Management in the Old South* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood
Press, 1980). Other useful references for analyses of mastery in the Old South are Fox-Genovese
19 See John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New
York: Oxford University Press, 1972), Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave
Black and White*. 
involvement in agricultural reform and suggest that he was a benevolent slaveholder.

Scholarship on agrarian reform as an intellectual phenomenon able to influence worldview in practice in the nineteenth-century South is certainly lacking. Perhaps most important, the interpretations of paternalism and mastery argue for the prevalence of the ideology and hierarchy, but do not often account for how much effort was necessary to maintain the institution of slavery and these ideals, especially when found in conjunction with agrarian reform.

A case study of Galt’s Point of Fork plantation speaks to all these issues. In this thesis, I will argue that the implementation of agrarian reform and the ideology of paternalism went hand in hand. Improving farming techniques and bettering the lives of slaves (in the eyes of the master, at least) happened simultaneously. At the same time, certainly for Galt, agricultural reform did not lead to the crumbling of slavery that many white Southerners so dreaded. In fact, employing the mechanisms of control and order that were needed to be a progressive farmer easily complemented the goal of controlling slaves and maintaining the South’s racially based social hierarchy. I will also carefully analyze the effects of reform on the slaves and suggest what they may have done to combat some of those effects. Agrarian reform in no way meant a more lenient form of slavery. In some respects, I will argue, slavery was more restrictive under the mastery of a man like James Galt. It is my hope that an examination of life on a reformist plantation and the collapse of that way of life during and following the American Civil War will shed light on the link between agrarian reform and the South’s
paternalistic ideology and, at the same time, complicate the picture of the worldviews of master and slave in the antebellum era.
"Order is Heaven's First Law”¹
Agrarian Reform and Mastery at Point of Fork Plantation

It could have gone for James as it did for his brother Thomas. Born in Irvine, Scotland in 1798, Thomas was the first child of William and Jean Galt. The family grew with the birth of William in 1801 and twin boys, James and Robert, in 1805. Later that year, tragedy struck the Galts when Jean and her infant daughter succumbed to the effects of a difficult childbirth. The boys' father William, a sea captain, left the boys in the care of a widowed relative that year, only to die himself (perhaps at sea) in 1810. Orphaned, Thomas sought to follow in his father's footsteps. By the age of fourteen, he had landed a career as a sailor. Life on the high seas proved less than romantic. Thomas eventually made his way to New York, where he continued working on various merchant ships. He spent most of his life penniless, unable to provide for his basic needs, and became dependent on his brothers for their support for the rest of his life.

For the three other Galt boys, things followed a much brighter path. Following the death of their father, William, James, and Robert were adopted by their father's

¹ Quote from Alexander Pope, found on the title page of A Southern Planter, Plantation and Farm Instruction, Regulation, Record, Inventory, & Account Book (Richmond, Virginia: J.W. Randolph, 1852), Special Collections Research Center, Earl Gregg Swem Library, The College of William and Mary.
bachelor cousin, also named William Galt. The boys' were most fortunate to fall under the care of their new guardian. A resident of Richmond, Virginia, William Galt was the owner of a profitable mercantile business and possessed real estate throughout the state. Upon adopting the brothers, Galt appointed a guardian in Scotland to care for the boys and get them a sound education. When William reached the age of sixteen, he sailed to America and began working in his adopted father's store. The young man proved worthy and was swiftly made a partner in the business. Shortly after his brother left for America, Robert died of a severe sickness (it is not known what). Now alone in Scotland, James hurried to complete his education and left for Virginia in 1821 to become a partner in the mercantile firm.

Galt was approaching seventy when he adopted the boys. A mere four years after James's arrival in Richmond, William Galt, Sr. passed away. Unlike the time of their previous orphaning, the Galt brothers' future was secure. The two young men inherited the Richmond mercantile and split the estate of their guardian with his nephew John Allan (John Allan would become the foster father of Edgar Allan Poe and the future author was often found in the company of the Galt family). The most substantial property James and William inherited was a six thousand-acre plot with slaves in Fluvanna County. Of this property, William took 3,031 acres and 113 slaves. James became the owner of 2,921 acres and 114 slaves. The brothers remained at the
store in Richmond while homes were constructed and assumed the position of master at their respective plantations in 1834.²

James began the account of his life at Point of Fork Plantation rather simply. The first entry, from November 21, 1835 stated: "Moved to this place to reside on the 17th day of August last."³ Galt's reference in that preliminary entry to "this place" by no means did Point of Fork justice. The plantation was situated on an economically and historically important piece of property. The land's name was centuries old. It sat at the junction of the James River (the James west of Richmond was formerly known as the Fluvius Anna, named for the Queen) and the Rivanna River (also named for the monarch). The name Point of Fork was a loose translation of the Native American name for the place and had also been attached to a strategically important Revolutionary War-era arsenal on the land. The intersection of the two rivers had made the area a bustling commercial zone in the Piedmont region. In fact, one of Thomas Jefferson's early acts as a politician had been a successful campaign to dredge and improve the Rivanna River to

² The only account of the Galt brothers' early history can be found in G. Melvin Herndon, "From Orphans to Merchants to Planters: The Galt Brothers, William and James," Virginia Cavalcade 1 (Summer 1979): 22-27. Unfortunately, the article does not cite its sources, so the information is difficult to check. James Galt's diary does confirm the date he moved to the plantation and the number of slaves he inherited. Unfortunately, William Galt, Sr.'s will cannot be located to confirm the boys' inheritance. It is neither in the records for the city of Richmond, nor those for Fluvanna County.
³ Diary of James Galt of Point of Fork, 21 November 1835, Special Collections Research Center, Earl Gregg Swem Library, The College of William and Mary. James Galt's diary is in five volumes. Four of the volumes (1835-1844, 1844-1850, 1851-1854, and 1859-1864) can be found at the College of William and Mary. The diary is missing between 1854 and 1859. A fifth volume, that covers the period between mid-1864 and 1865 is privately owned, but a large portion has been published by the Fluvanna County Historical Society, as it contains a lot of information about the Civil War in the county. Specific references from the four volumes of the diary held by William and Mary will hereafter be cited as Galt Diary, volume, date.
ease shipping for the numerous settlers who had headed west from the Tidewater region as good farm land became scarce. By the time James moved to the spot, bateau traffic filled the rivers, as slave boatmen moved the area's produce to market in Richmond to the east, crossing paths with their comrades heading west for Old Flu with finished goods that could be found in the capitol.⁴

The impressive view of the rivers was complemented by the impressive edifice which overlooked them. Galt's plantation home (still standing today) was large by any Southern standard, even when compared with the great plantations of the South Carolina and Georgia low-country. Visitors to the house were greeted by large columns, detailed brickwork, and fine marble window slabs. Point of Fork was built with a large center passage, from which an elaborate spiral staircase led to the second story. Both floors of the home featured two large rooms on either side of the hallway and were extensively detailed. Galt's inheritance from his guardian had enabled him to finish the home with the finest cornices, extravagant ceiling modillions, and beautiful Neo-Classical mantels above the home's four fireplaces.⁵ By the time he moved into the dwelling, it was very clear that the young man (then only twenty-nine) had risen to prominence.

It is undeniable that James Galt had a lot handed to him. He was by no means a self-made man. The property he inherited was situated at a transportation hub. It was

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also close to the town of Columbia, which by 1835 featured numerous grist mills, skilled craftsmen, churches and schools, and even several small clothing factories. This would have been bustling by rural standards. The proximity of the land to the two rivers meant that they were ideal for crop cultivation. Galt did not have to exhaust his own finances purchasing land and slaves (although certainly his ornate home did not come free of charge). James Galt, however, lacked what most farmers and planters had: experience with agriculture. As the son of a Scottish seaman and the adoptee of an urban merchant, Galt entered the role of plantation master near-blind. Undoubtedly, he had been exposed to some aspects of agriculture after almost a decade in the South. He certainly understood the crop markets very well; mercantile firms like the Galt store were often paid in agricultural products. Compared to other members of the planter class, Galt’s inexperience seemingly put him at a disadvantage.

Perhaps the young planter’s lack of familiarity with agriculture was not without benefit. In his short article on James and William, G. Melvin Herndon suggests that since “they had to learn the business of farming from scratch, they apparently had no inhibitions about trying new farm practices, crops, and implements.” This assessment is apt. Not being native Southerners imbued with the notion that innovation meant Yankifying, the Galt brothers were more likely to adopt agrarian reforms that other

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6 Bearr, Historic Fluvanna, 39.
7 The Account Book of the Mercantile Firm of William Galt, Sr. and William Galt, Jr., 1824-1833, Special Collections Research Center, Earl Gregg Swem Library, The College of William and Mary, shows that a large number of customers to the store paid for their purchases with tobacco. The market price for tobacco is tracked in the account book along with the various purchases made.
planters in the region would have feared undermined the institution of slavery. Their inclination to accept new techniques, however, did not mean that James and William too would not become deeply attached to the forced labor of their fellow men.

Evidence from his journal suggests that James began his tenure as a planter having become well-acquainted with the latest agricultural innovations. As he sat each day at his desk in the small, wooden clapboard office building, just steps away from his lavish plantation home, Galt recorded detailed information about the day’s activities. Some of what he wrote about was personal; visitations from friends, comments about his wife and children, or occasional reflections on church services. The bulk of the entries, however, concentrated on the business of plantation management. Each day he wrote in the log, Galt began by describing the weather. He would then devote most of his attention to what had been planted, fertilized, harvested, tilled or plowed, slaughtered, and where each crew of slaves was working. Usually twice a year, he included a detailed table that showed what clothing was issued to his laborers. When crops were planted and harvested, Galt made a detailed inventory. Notes in the margins make it clear that he frequently went back and referred to his previous entries, commenting on the success or failure of certain processes.

The form of James Galt’s plantation daybook itself is evidence that he was influenced by writers on agrarian reform and plantation management. The title page of an 1853 plantation manual included a quote from eighteenth-century English poet
Alexander Pope: "Order is Heaven's First Law." According to agrarian reformers, order was at least the farm's first law. Central to organizing labor and production on the farm or plantation was recording all of the business that went on there. The same manual noted that a journal "will be useful to him [the planter] in many ways in the proper ordering, management, care, and preservation of the property." Both master and overseer were responsible for noting all provisions given to slaves, describing daily activities, carefully recording plantings and harvests, and writing down the weather. This data, that author suggested, "will not only prove interesting, useful and instructive to himself [the overseer], but will be made a valuable record to his successors, and an interesting and useful source of information to the Proprietor, respecting the management of the plantation, seasons, crops, improvement, health of negroes, and every thing particularly affecting the property, from year to year."  

Other plantation manuals, farming books, and agricultural reformers of the day were advocating the same sorts of methods for keeping the agrarian business organized. Henry Stephen's 1852 work, The Book of the Farm, advised that the "first year is generally spent almost unprofitably, and certainly unsatisfactorily to an inquisitive mind. But attentive observation during the first year will enable him, in the second, to anticipate the successive operations ere they arrive, and arrange every minutia of labor as it is required." Through proper observation and reflection on those notes, Stephens

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9 Southern Planter, Plantation and Farm Instruction, 3.
contended, a significant profit could be quickly achieved. Edmund Ruffin and the contributors to his publication also emphasized the importance of order and record in the *Farmers' Register* (1833-1843). Keeping effective records, numerous articles argued, led farmers to “be astonished to see the returns from [their] lands...for the little labor and attention bestowed.” Ruffin’s own example, as seen in the form of his diary (although his diary was commenting on the plantations of others), emphasized the benefits of keeping detailed data.

Galt’s entries in his diary not only included all of the information that was suggested in the plantation manual, but also followed the precise form that was recommended (label each date, note weather, and describe all work in a neat and concise manner). The information in the diary implies that Galt required his overseers to keep a record of agricultural matters as well. There are no tables that list the amount of tobacco, wheat, or corn produced by individual slaves or on each day of the harvest. All that was recorded in Galt’s diary was the harvest total for each crop. The data used to obtain these numbers was most likely reported to him by his overseers. In terms of style

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12 Southern Planter, *Plantation and Farm Instruction*, an example of the proper form of an entry in a plantation journal is found on page 3.
and content, the plantation daybook kept by James Galt was exactly what reformers were suggesting was required to keep operations on the plantation running smoothly. The aptitude with which he assumed the work of plantation management suggests that Galt had carefully read reformist publications in preparation for becoming the master at Point of Fork.

Of equal importance to his familiarity with ways of managing a reformed plantation was the company Galt kept. Both his brother William and his close friend John Hartwell Cocke were very active in agrarian reform. William's plantation, Glenarvon, was farmed using the most current techniques and machinery. According to his will, William possessed every issue of *The American Farmer* (another periodical that championed agrarian reform) from 1839-1851 (the year of his death) and a large number of other agricultural publications. It seems the Galt brothers were both very well-read on the latest agricultural innovations. William put the theories he read in those pages into practice. Previous research on the planter has shown that he experimented frequently with the latest fertilizers (mainly Peruvian guano, plaster of Paris, and lime

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products). The application of various manures\footnote{Interestingly, manure meant far more in the nineteenth century than it does today. There were three classes of manures: vegetable, mineral, and animal. Vegetable manures included compost, clover, and peas, which were placed in a field before plowing or grown directly in a field when cash crops were not being grown during the crop rotation cycle. Mineral manures, including lime and plaster, were the most effective according to agrarian reformers. Animal manures included the dung of all farm livestock and the contents of human chamber pots, but also highly-prized bat guano. Mineral and animal manures were placed on a field and then plowed under before planting. For a complete discussion of manures, see Southern Planter, \textit{Plantation and Farm Instruction}, 9.} ensured bountiful crops, but tending and harvesting the produce required innovative uses of slave labor. For that purpose, William Galt acquired a number of new pieces of farm machinery. These included twenty-six plows of varying types, cultivators, two McCormick reapers, planters, a horse-powered wheat thresher, and an endless list of hand tools.\footnote{Herndon, “William Galt, Jr.,” 12.}

James Galt’s brother, whom he saw almost daily according to his diary, undoubtedly shared and discussed agricultural innovations with him. Another frequent acquaintance, John Hartwell Cocke (master of Bremo Plantation), was the leading advocate for agrarian reform in Fluvanna County. Cocke had been born to a wealthy Tidewater family, but migrated west as good lands became exhausted by tobacco cultivation. Although initially a producer of tobacco, Cocke gradually turned very critical of the soil depletion the crop caused and transitioned almost completely to wheat farming. Like the Galt brothers, he employed all of the latest agrarian technology (tools, machines, crop rotation, fencing, deep plowing). Cocke possessed a huge scientific farming library, organized agricultural societies in Fluvanna and surrounding counties, and successfully sought to improve the bounty of his crops and the efficiency with
which they were harvested. He despised the inefficient methods of agriculture so frequently utilized in the South, and “eagerly embraced ever plausible means of correcting the great prevailing error.”16

Well read himself on the latest in agrarian reform and scientific farming, in frequent conversation with his reformist brother and neighbor, and in possession of enough prime land and numerous slaves, James Galt had all the tools he needed to apply the latest techniques on his plantation and prosper from their use. His descriptions of labor performed on his plantation inform us of what being a reformist master entailed and the harvests he tabulated prove that his methods were successful. From experimenting with fertilizers, to acquiring useful tools and machinery, to practicing crop rotation, to diversifying crops, Galt did all he could to ensure his success as the master of Point of Fork.

Upon moving to the plantation, all Galt had to go on was what he had read in manuals and heard from his peers. The information he would exchange with his brother and Cocke only came later. The implementation of all he had learned prior to assuming the role of master at Point of Fork began immediately. The second entry in his diary, following the brief announcement of his arrival at “this place,” noted that his slaves “Commenced on the 17th [of November, 1835] breaking up low grounds with 2-4 horse plough [by this he means two plows, operated by four horses each].” The work continued that week, as his laborers were “ploughing again with 2-4 horse and 1-2 horse

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with 3 Horses with ploughs.” Plowing was essential preparation to ensure the soil would receive the proper nutrients. It was advised that “the first ploughing or all crops should be done in good time, when the land is not too wet, and in a deep and thorough manner.” Galt seemingly followed this procedure, as November was a dry month (according to his weather observations) and the fields were well-plowed for the sowing of winter wheat (planted in the late-autumn) and tobacco (planted January-March).

Also essential to the proper preparation and sustenance of land and planted crops was fertilization. One of the most influential manuals on scientific farming of the period instructed:

[T]here is no hope of keeping up and increasing the produce of any land, unless there is from some source a supply of fertilizing substances to restore those that are carried away by the crops. Some soils containing constantly decomposing rocks, or peculiar springs, or subject to annual overflows whereby enriching substances are deposited, need no other foreign supply; but these are rare when compared with those that require a constant and regular system of addition, to render them properly productive.

Galt’s diary shows that the James River occasionally flooded, but this was not a consistent source of nutrients for his fields. Therefore, much of his slaves’ time was occupied preparing, spreading, and plowing under various fertilizers. In March, 1845,

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17 Galt Diary, 1835-1844, quotes from 21 November 1835 and 25 November 1835.
18 Southern Planter, Plantation and Farm Instruction, 10.
19 Galt’s diary indicates that this was when wheat and tobacco were planted. The planting times were consistent from year to year. Allan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800 (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1986), confirms the tobacco planting season on page 383.
Galt noted that several of his fields had a clover crop plowed under. Plowing vegetable manures under the soil was a commonly advocated fertilization practice.\textsuperscript{21} Galt also employed animal manures to improve his yields. For example, he commented on October 18, 1850 that "the lot behind quarters, which was in wheat this sumr. has been again sown in it, a considerable portion of it manured from Cow pens and Stables."\textsuperscript{22} In April of 1860, he had his slaves utilize one of the best fertilizers: "a mixture of Peruvian and Sombrero Guanoes and 2 lbs alum salt to the acre."\textsuperscript{23} Through his years at Point of Fork, Galt experimented with various fertilizers. Some he found successful; others he did not. Most of the time he utilized vegetable and animal manures.

Like his contemporaries at Bremo and Glenarvon, James Galt employed other methods advocated by agrarian reformers in the nineteenth century. On numerous occasions, Galt noted that his slaves were expanding or repairing fencing. Reformers considered this to be necessary to keep unwanted livestock out of fields and properly separate different crops.\textsuperscript{24} Galt's use of new farm technology was also indicative of his dedication to following the latest agrarian techniques. The fact that he owned three and four horse plows suggests that he acquired the equipment which allowed his slaves to do the deepest (and therefore most effective) plowing. Galt also acquired several...

\textsuperscript{21} See Southern Planter, \textit{Plantation and Farm Instruction}, 9-10 and Norton, \textit{Elements of Scientific Agriculture}, 91-93. On page 93 of his manual, Norton advised that although vegetable manures "are not so energetic in their action as other manures yet to be noticed, but are invaluable as a cheap means of renovating, bringing up, and sustaining the land. Clover is one of the principle crops employed for this purpose."

\textsuperscript{22} Galt Diary, 1851-1854, 18 October 1851.

\textsuperscript{23} Galt Diary, 1859-1864, 11 April 1860.

\textsuperscript{24} See Southern Planter, \textit{Plantation and Farm Instruction}, 6-9.
McCormick reapers. On June 28, 1844, he described the implements use: "Here finished cutting oat by 11 with the ‘Reaper,’ have cut all the oats with it at this place, in a little over 3 days, did not begin until the dew was off in the morng and stopped before it fell in the eveng, a vast saving of labor and better than the best cutter can do."25 Crop rotation, a requirement to keep land fertile (especially when tobacco was being grown), was practiced religiously at Point of Fork. One reformer warned that "he who cultivates his lands without rotation of crops and without manure, is like the boy in the fable gutting his goose for the golden eggs, and will find them lacking."26 Galt divided his plantation into two sections (Lower Plantation and Middle Plantation; a third, Upper Plantation, was acquired upon the death of his brother William in 1851) and regularly rotated the crops planted in each (wheat, oats, corn, tobacco, peas, and clover were cycled yearly).

Practically from the day of his arrival at Point of Fork, James Galt had employed the latest techniques for organizing, recording, performing, and sustaining the work on his plantation. Edmund Ruffin, the South’s leading voice for agrarian reform, would have viewed Galt as a model for the new Southern planter of the mid-nineteenth century. Although the changes in technique that agricultural reformers employed were important, men like Ruffin and Galt understood their project simultaneously as one of continuity. In publications such as The Farmer’s Register, appearing side by side with articles on fertilizers, fencing, and farm diary keeping were pieces of a more troubling

25 Galt Diary, 1844-1850, 28 June 1844.
26 Southern Planter, Plantation and Farm Instruction, 9.
nature. The enthusiasm with which changes in farming techniques were promoted was paired with anxiety and concern about maintaining the institution of slavery.

The form and message of the two types of articles that appeared in Southern agricultural journals were strikingly similar. Knowledgeable authors provided insight into a process of control and order that would achieve impressive results. To the modern reader, the link is rather disturbing. Slaves were to be cultivated rather like crops or cattle. To the Southern planter, the link was likely taken for granted. His goal was to get the most utility and best results out of all his property. An article which ran in *The Farmer's Register* in 1834 referred to slaves as having “some of the best traits of character of any people on the globe.” By this the author meant that they were moldable. He went on to provide suggestions for keeping slaves in line (“moderate punishment” and “impartiality of treatment to be used toward them all”), described methods for caring for them (“give the rogues plenty of pork to eat” and “they should be well clothed”), and cautioned masters not to get too familiar with their slaves.27 Just like with tobacco or wheat, articles like this implied, if the proper method was followed, the results were predictable.

Such a pattern of thought seems to have been present in the mind of Galt. His diary reveals a near-formulaic regularity in his relationship with his slaves, a certain amount of distance, and enough involvement to make Galt appear to be their paternalistic caregiver. At Point of Fork, dealing with the slaves was as much a function

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of the business of plantation life as was monitoring the wheat and tobacco markets. Galt followed the suggestions made in *The Farmer's Register* article and similar publications. He made sure order was kept in labor and discipline, recording work performed and proscribing punishments when he found them necessary. He saw that his slaves were well-fed and clothed. Most importantly, Galt maintained the ideal balance between removal and presence in the lives of the slaves at Point of Fork.

Slaves were mentioned nearly every day in Galt’s diary, but on very few occasions were there any descriptions of individual laborers. Most days, slaves made their way into the record with remarks like “Hands finishing shelter repairing fences” or “hands putting up Dick[’s] House, some grubbing [removing grubs from fields].” More frequently, the presence of “hands” was not even mentioned. Galt remarked about work being done using verbiage that made their labor sound like an extension of his duties as proprietor. Phrases such as “commenced on the North River Low Grounds,” “Sowed wheat in the afternoon in the North River field,” or “Hanging Tobo. cut yesterday” were the most common types of references to labor at Point of Fork. The way in which Galt commented on labor performed on his plantation indicated a clever perception of the role of master. Well ordered and well documented, the work performed by slaves was well within his control. In a very real sense, their labor was his labor.

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28 Galt Diary, 1835-1844, quotes from 7 December 1835 and 11 December 1835.
29 Ibid, quotes from 16 December 1835, 27 September 1837, and 30 September 1837.
The ordered, reformist style of management on Galt's plantation was further enhanced by the hierarchical organization he employed. It is apparent from the content of his diary that he was not going about each day to articulate what work had to be done, nor was it his daily task to observe the duties the slaves were performing. Galt had two overseers on staff; one each at Lower and Middle Plantation, and then a third when he acquired Upper Plantation upon his brother William's death. The responsibility of seeing that work was carried out properly at Point of Fork fell on these men. Seemingly, each day the overseers would report to Galt on the day's activities and Galt would record them in the log. Galt frequently went to different parts of the plantation to see that things were going smoothly. For example, on October 6, 1837, Galt noted that he "Rode to MP [Middle Plantation]. Ploughing Tobo. land in Fork field and taking corn off he flat on the creek." Each week in his diary, Galt mentioned visits to the various parts of his plantation to check on things. When Galt made such visits, however, he noted them, suggesting it was not a daily occurrence. Most of his time was probably spent tabulating accounts, meeting with buyers, arranging purchases, acquiring necessary supplies, or visiting neighboring plantations.31

30 Galt Diary, 1835-1844, 6 October 1837.
31 Galt mentioned visiting neighbors rather frequently in his diary. The calculated tables of prices and crops and his extensive knowledge of the processes of reformed agriculture indicate that a significant portion of his time was spent attending to the business matters of the plantation. See Charles B. Dew, Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994), the chapters “Bath Iron Works,” 63-82 and “The Master of Buffalo Forge,” 98-121 talk about how much business (paperwork, arrangements, meetings, etc.) was involved in mastery.
Having an overseer as a plantation middle-man was especially important when it came to punishing slaves. The presence of an overseer was meant to force slaves to associate punishment with him, not the master. We do know (contrary to the claim of several county histories that he was a benevolent master) that Galt approved of punishment, though it is interesting to note that he referred to it specifically on only one occasion. On June 29, 1846, Galt recorded an incident that had occurred with one of his slaves whose labor he had loaned to a neighbor for the day. The slave feigned sickness and then went to work elsewhere. “Mr Phillips the overseer at Lower Byrd went to correct him, he kept him off with his cradle and then run. I had him [the slave] well paid for that.”

The distance between master and slave, made possible by the presence of overseers, was yet another mechanism utilized by masters like James Galt to keep order on their plantations. This allowed masters to be the organizers and observers of work (not the man who forced it to be done) and enabled them to be distant when punishments were meted out.

The hierarchical order of the plantation made it possible for Galt and his peers to be involved in their slaves’ lives in a much more positive (in the masters’ eyes) manner. The separation between master and slave that was the daily norm for labor, rule, and punishment was replaced on certain occasions by a much closer relationship between the two. James Galt and other masters throughout the South made an effort to be very present in the lives of their slaves when there were opportunities to display care or

32 Galt Diary, 1844-1850, 29 June 1846.
compassion. Most frequently, as was the case at Point of Fork, these types of interactions involved the master's providing something for the slaves. This aspect of the master-slave relationship was central to the ideology of paternalism. Masters displayed this aura of kindness in exchange for deference and obedience from their laborers.33

Galt's diary contains numerous references to providing for his slaves. The most frequent and extensive examples of this were the annual tables of clothing given to his laborers in the fall (and occasionally a second time in the spring). Most of the entries in Galt's diary were slightly imperfect. Words, names, and phrases were crossed out or abbreviated. Tables of wheat and tobacco crops were surrounded with notes and calculations. The lists of clothing distributions, however, were comparatively pristine. Each table had a title written in Galt's best hand: "Delivery of Fall Clothing at LP [Lower Plantation] 1837" or "Delivery of Fall Clothing 1836, MP [Middle Plantation] Mechanics." In both cases, the charts were carefully labeled and LP and MP were written in calligraphy.34 Once or twice a year, Galt passed out new clothing items to his laborers. Slaves were usually given a coat and pants or a heavy dress, a shirt (the women were given extra cotton material), shoes, socks, a blanket, a hat, and flannel. He

33 It cannot be overstated how important overseers were to upholding paternalism. Eugene Genovese has argued that slaves often pitted master and overseer against one another. "The game [of playing master and overseer against each other] had unpleasant consequences. Most obviously, it reinforced the slaves' dependence on the master. Negatively, it provided, in the overseer, a conducting rod for their dissatisfactions; the master often dropped from sight as the man responsible for their condition." See Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), page 21.
34 These two specific headings come from Galt Diary, 1835-1844, charts for Delivery of Fall Clothing 1837 and Delivery of Fall Clothing 1836. The same sorts of charts, almost always formed in this ornate manner, can be found in every volume of the diary.
did not simply list the items given out to each slave. Every individual name was recorded, sizes were listed, and check marks were put on the page to show that the items had been received. Interestingly, Galt’s clothing lists were the only places where information can be found about slave deaths at Point of Fork. For example, on the chart for the delivery of clothing in the autumn of 1837, Galt recorded “George (died July 1838)” and “Angel (died Sept. 1838).” On the same table, the single mention of a slave being sold in the diary was made; “Kipia (sold 1838).”

Several things are very telling about Galt’s clothing tables. First of all, with very few exceptions, they were the only place in the plantation log in which individual slaves were listed. Most certainly, Galt desired to know individual slaves only when something positive (as he would have viewed clothing distribution) was happening. At the same time, the tables brought out the ugly reality of slavery. The institution created the indignity of dependency. Galt’s slaves had to rely on him to bestow clothing on them. Moreover, these encounters that master viewed as positive were also required master and slave to confront the realities of death in bondage and the possibility of sale. For masters like James Galt, however, the ideology of paternalism made interactions such as the yearly distribution of garments essential encounters. It is not hard to imagine that Galt attended these functions with the expectation of praise and thanks for his benevolent providership.

35 Galt Diary, 1835-1844, chart for Delivery of Fall Clothing at LP 1837.
Handing out clothing rations were not the only times when Galt felt the need to act as a paternalistic provider. In December, 1835, Galt commented on the timing of the distribution being delayed by the overseer. He wrote: “the work of the last two days has been interrupted by the hands waiting on Mr. Daniel to get their Clothes cut, it is too late, it will be done sooner next fall, tho' none have suffered.” This statement is rather interesting, as it reveals that Galt saw handing out clothing as an obligation, but also needed to reassure himself that he had not failed as a provider in noting that “none have suffered.” Galt also recorded his own perceived kindness during the Civil War. He recorded: “I have had a patch of Tobo. planted at each place for the hands, nearly all chew or smoke, the supply has given out, I did not think of it last year, or I would have planted it for them, the price is so high they cannot buy it.” Galt reassured himself as a master by providing luxuries to his slaves, even in times of hardship.

Tobacco for slaves must have been the least of Galt’s worries during the Civil War. With three sons in the Confederate Army and troops from both sides passing and stopping at the plantation, the War Between the States threw Point of Fork into chaos. The uncertainty and danger the war created, not to mention the economic problems stemming from the fighting, made the continuation of the ordered way of life Galt so valued very difficult to maintain. Farming patterns were interrupted, a carefully

36 Ibid, 10 December 1835.
37 Galt Diary, 1859-1864, 13 June 1863. This statement indicates that Galt knew that his slaves had money. This is not at all surprising. Numerous WPA slave narratives and histories of slavery indicate that slaves sold eggs and produce they tended at night or were occasionally allowed to be paid for odd jobs after hours.
ordered labor system was made unstable, and Galt’s power to remain a paternalistic
provider was challenged.

Regardless of whether it was the Union or Confederate armies who were near
Point of Fork, work could not go on as usual. Upon the outbreak of the hostilities, like
many Americans, Galt thought the conflict would be brief. He continued to keep up his
diary until July of 1861. Between July and October, his thoughts were occupied with the
safety of his sons and family and the security of the plantation. On October 3, he
resumed his diary.

Ever since the War began, I have felt very little disposition to make notes
of my plantn. business or to take interest in my Crops, which I have
heretofore done, the daily anxiety about the War and its results, the
anxiety about my 4 sons who are in it, the feeling that so many could
scarcely escape unscathed through it, had a very depressing effect on my
family and myself, rendering me, in a far greater sense indifferent to my
temporal affairs, than I have every before felt, going but seldom on the
plantns. as what I have heretofore done.  

Galt would remain in this melancholy mood for the duration of the war, only having
“great cause for thankfulness that my 4 sons have preserved thru’ so many dangers.”
Matters would get far worse for those living and working at Point of Fork.

The ordered system of labor which Galt enforced and recorded on his plantation
was regularly interrupted during the American Civil War. On occasion, the
interruptions did bring prosperity to the master of Point of Fork. Beginning in February,
1863, Galt contracted with a Captain Rooke of the Confederate Navy to harvest timber

38 Galt Diary, 1859-1864, 3 October 1861.
39 Ibid, the quote is from a passage that Galt added to his diary on 12 April 1863, but the note is
placed in the April 1861 section of the diary.
on his plantation. He did not have to use his own slaves to do the work, as the Department of the Navy provided their own laborers (perhaps soldiers, perhaps slaves). He allowed the sailors to set up a camp and small port on the river bank on the plantation as well.\textsuperscript{40} Later that year, Galt also began to sell his farm produce to the Confederate Army. The month of April brought in $200 from the sale of hay, $1662.01 from wheat, and $6000 worth of corn.\textsuperscript{41} Galt continued to contract with Confederate military officials for the remainder of the war. These contractual obligations meant that it was not business as usual at Point of Fork, but some profit was still being earned.

More often than not, interruptions to work and business on Galt's plantation took a more negative form. By December of 1861, things began to go awry. Shipping was severely interrupted. "A great deal of the Baltr. and Ohio railroad has been torn up, bridges blown up, stopping the navigation, and heavy batteries [artillery] have been put up."\textsuperscript{42} Transporting goods (in order to obtain a profit at market) only became more difficult as the war progressed. By March, 1865, the Union Army sought to harm the Confederacy by "destroying the canal as much as they could and they have done a great deal of injury to it from Tye River down to Cedar Point."\textsuperscript{43}

Halting the transportation of farm produce was not the whole of the problem for planters in Fluvanna County. Slave labor itself was interrupted by the war. In late 1863, Galt himself was appointed "one of the counters to appraise the value of the negroes,  

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, 3 February 1863.  
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, sales chart, April 1863.  
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 21 December 1861.  
811, sent from the county to work on the entrenchments near Richmond.” In
November, 1864 he “sent off 6 hands to the government to work as teamsters,” which
Galt “did not like... as my force is now weak for the land.” Far more troubling and
damaging to business on the plantation were the intrusions of the Union Army. In
March of 1865 he noted: “I have lost 13 negroes carried off by them; some no doubt went
willingly, but some I know were forced off who did not wish to go.”

In the same entry, Galt described what had been plundered and damaged on his
plantation by the Yankees.

From 5 to 600 barrels of corn were taken, all of the bacon except some 53
or 54 pieces, 3 or 4 oxen, 2 sheep, 2 hogs, 13 bbl. of flour; miles of fencing
were burned from blow the aqueduct nearly to the line. All the fencing
was burned on the house side of the road and about half on the other,
from below the quarters to the public road and across to the branch on
North River Field – all is burnt.

Although the destruction caused to his land and supplies disturbed him greatly, it was
the toll the Civil War took on his ability to remain a paternalist that bothered Galt the
most. The conflict made it difficult for him to keep his slaves well-supplied with food
and clothing. This effect was felt early. For example, on December 19, 1861, Galt
complained about the difficulty he had obtaining salt to cure bacon to keep his work
force fed. “I have been fortunate,” he wrote, “some 12 or 18 months ago, I bought 80
sacks of damaged [salt].” That was the best he could do in the situation. As important
to a paternalist as being a good provider was being viewed by one’s slaves as a

44 Galt Diary, 1859-1864, 6 October 1863.
45 Diary of Galt, 5 November 1864, 14.
47 Galt Diary, 1859-1864, 19 December 1861.
protector. Galt was deeply troubled by his inability to keep the Union from plundering his slaves' goods. He complained: "My negroes were stript of everything of any value they had: coat, pants, shoes, hats, blankets and any watches or money they had and almost every one of their chickens."48

It is clear that the Civil War caused an immense crisis for the ideology of paternalism. Further damaging Galt's wounded self-image as a master, the only recorded incident of slaves' challenging his paternalistic persona occurred during the Civil War. Since it is, arguably, the most revealing excerpt from Galt's diary, the incident warrants being quoted at length. The first entry was written on October 16, 1863.

Mr. Hackett, my overseer at the upper place, came down at 3 today to tell me that the pile of the straw stack was set on fire early this morn. - before day and burnt down, that some flames had been against the barn (a wooden one) under the machine shelter, but had gone out, without doing any injury. I cannot think who could be guilty of such a deed. I never have had any difficulty with my neighbors or their hands, nor with the boatmen, and every thing was going on, I thought, as smoothly on the Plantation as could be desired. It can only be some of my own hands. I deserve better treatment at their hands, for I know myself to be a good and humane master and have never kept a harsh overseer. Mr. Hackett will have lived with me next month, 9 years, and I have never had cause to complain of his harshness or cruelty. I told him to set a watch of 2 hands each night until I can deliver the government the crop of wheat, 860 bus., which is all in that Barn and to tell all the hands that if there is any more burning, I will sell the plantn. And every man, woman, and child on it and this I feel determined to do. I have lived here 28 years and have never done an injury or treated any one, black or white, to cause them to do me such an injury.

Galt concluded his rendering of the incident three days later on October 19.

An hour or so before day, the barn (below the hill) and the stable on the hill back of my house, of Charles Boswick at Glenarron were burned down, 2 horses lost, 700 bus. Wheat in the barn, all his straw, [unreadable] and some oats were burnt in the barn. No doubt the same party who attempted to burn my barn 2 nights before – It takes off very much the apprehension I have felt that it was some of my own people who had tried to burn mine, every one seems to be at a loss what to ascribe it to, negroes put up to it by some white person, perhaps to help the enemy.49

The social system that Galt thrived in and upheld was being called into crisis. Although he was able to assure himself that he had done no wrong, this incident must have signified an end to the ordered world Galt strived to maintain.

Any apprehension Galt may have felt was not unfounded. On the one hand, he had a lot to be thankful for. All three of his sons survived the Civil War unscathed, which was most improbable. However, the cause that the Galt boys had fought for was lost. The Southern way of life, based so heavily on slavery, was no more. The end of the Civil War also brought an end to Galt’s diary keeping. Seven months after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Galt made his last entry. He wrote: “I have had no heart to continue my notes; the sudden and to me unexpected collapse of the war – I ought to say Rebellion, as it is now called (and by many who were loud in calling for secession!) – somewhat demoralized me, and the State of our affairs [on the plantation] has not yet been such as to let me get quite over it.” This was Galt’s first and last entry since the Civil War’s end. This fact should be no surprise. A document so rooted in slave labor itself had no reason to be continued. Before closing, Galt

49 Galt Diary, 1859-1864, 16 October 1863 and 19 October 1863.
commented on the former slaves who still remained on his land without working. He still felt they needed a provider. Rather grimly he predicted, no longer under the supposed care of whites, "Their fate is that of the Indian. Fifty years hence there will be comparatively few of them."\textsuperscript{50}

Galt's vision of the future of African Americans proved to be incorrect, but in his statement is contained an historic truth. The Southern ideology of paternalism was grounded in the perceived dependency of the black race and the providership of the white race. This frame of mind had helped masters justify the institution of slavery to themselves and to their critics in the North. As Galt's case has shown, this ideology was complemented by agrarian reform. A new system of agriculture, which emphasized order and control, went hand in hand with a system of beliefs that relied on hierarchy and control. The fear many Southerners had that agrarian reform meant the end of slavery was unfounded. Men like Galt used new ideas and techniques to better control labor, make a greater profit, strengthen hierarchy, and enhance paternalism. Although agrarian reform required the planter to be a businessman, thus sacrificing the Southern ideal of leisure, it reinforced the slave system on which the region was dependent. Perhaps agricultural reform made James Galt more dependent on slavery. He would never again make a profit after the institution's demise.

\textsuperscript{50} Diary of Galt, October 1865, 23.
"In the Fields by Daylight and Wuken 'em 'til Dark"¹
Slave Life at Point of Fork Plantation

When James Galt “moved to this place to reside” in August of 1834, the 114 men, women, and children he inherited were already well-acquainted with their surroundings. Previously owned by their new master’s uncle, William Galt, the slaves at Point of Fork had toiled on the property for at least a decade (although it is somewhat unclear when William Galt began cultivating his land).² They likely looked upon that August day with some trepidation. What would their new master be like? Would they have to work harder than they did in the past? What freedoms would they gain or lose? Would families be kept together or were they in danger of being sold? Their fears were not unfounded. They had no way of knowing how their new master would behave. Moreover, by the mid-nineteenth century, large-scale tobacco production was losing its hold in Old Dominion. Cotton had not taken off in the region. As the state’s planters slowly transitioned to wheat and corn farming, one of their greatest sources of profit

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² Quote from Galt Diary, 1835-1844, 21 November 1835. For information on slaves inherited from William Galt, see G. Melvin Herndon, “From Orphans to Merchants to Planters: The Galt Brothers, William and James,” Virginia Cavalcade 1 (Summer 1979): 26-27.
was the domestic slave trade. Galt’s newly inherited slaves could only hope that this would not be their fate.

Luckily for the slaves at Point of Fork, Galt seems usually to have refrained from selling his people. In fact, the record in Galt’s diary shows a remarkable stability in population over its thirty-year period, seemingly experiencing mainly increase from birth and the acquisition of his brother’s slaves (Galt notes deaths, but there are not more than twenty over the period he kept the diary). While this gave the laborers some security, it by no means meant that slavery on the plantation was benevolent. Life under a reformist master like James Galt was, perhaps, more restrictive than on typical (if there were such things) Southern plantations. Galt’s obsession with order and careful observation meant that slave life was likely more scrutinized and structured by master and overseer. Agrarian reformists’ insistence on efficiency meant continuous labor went hand in hand with the implementation of technology. The fact that using a tool like a McCormick reaper took less manpower did not translate into less work being done. It enabled a larger amount of work to be done more quickly. Thus reformed agriculture went hand in hand with more duties and more control. Slaves at Point of Fork were not powerless to resist, however. Several instances in Galt’s diary point to slaves’ attempts to subvert his control. Also, while the Civil War created crises for slaves as well as

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masters, the coming of the Union Army and the North’s eventual victory meant escape from the burdens of plantation labor and the system’s eventual end.

Unfortunately, the historical record does not allow for as complete a story to be told about the slaves at Point of Fork as it does for the master. Information about Galt’s childhood, his emigration from Scotland, and his rise to prominence greatly enhances the historian’s ability to tell his story. The same type of evidence is simply not available for the slaves at his Fluvanna County plantation. Although the institution of slavery attempted to erase individualism, it is still possible to paint an illuminating picture of slave life at Point of Fork. James Galt’s plantation daybook allows for a few glimpses at individual slaves, but a careful analysis enables a reconstruction of slave labor and daily life. Combining this information with other sources on slave life and labor is the historian’s best tactic for giving a voice to a people an institution attempted to silence. Interviews with former slaves, descriptions of plantation material life, plantation manuals, and numerous secondary sources are the means for completing this picture.

Arguably, to understand slave life, it is essential first to look at the world of the plantation. Examining this environment is critical for comprehending the setting in which slaves carried out their daily routines. Point of Fork was a vast place. When Galt acquired the property in the 1830s, he became the master of a 2,921 acre estate. From his perspective, the vista of the junction of the James and Rivanna Rivers was symbolic

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4 Herndon, “From Orphans to Merchants to Planters,” 27.
of what he had achieved. From his great plantation home on the top of the hill, he looked down on all that gave him prosperity. The rolling hills of wheat, tobacco, and corn must have symbolized to him his status and the power he exercised over the land and the people.

The view from the slave quarters was very different. The exact location of the slave housing at Point of Fork cannot be known, but a map drawn by Galt in his diary shows that the quarters were somewhere along the edge of the fields at Lower Plantation. From their cabins, the slaves did not have the same river view their master enjoyed. Uphill stood the “big house” and the fields of Middle Plantation that many of the slaves made the long walk to tend early each morning. Surrounding them on the low grounds was a sight more unpleasant than the imposing home of their master which their labor enabled him to dwell in. Towards the rivers were the fields of Lower Plantation that were often rendered soupy by flooding. An observation by Galt in his journal noted that “the lot behind quarters, which was in wheat this sumr. has been again sown in it, a considerable portion of it manured for Cow pens and Stables.” The slaves found themselves encircled by fields and subjected to the noise and stench of the plantation’s stables.

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5 Galt Diary, 1851-1854, the map is found in the middle of the pages covering the month of April in 1851.
6 Galt Diary, 1844-1850, 18 October 1850.
Most of the quarters at Point of Fork were likely small, wood-frame structures with crude, wooden weatherboard siding, constructed by several slaves. In December of 1837, Galt wrote on several occasions that his slave “Carpenters [were] putting up 2 new quarters.” These slave carpenters must have been skilled woodworkers and possessed enough talent to construct masonry chimneys for the dwellings as well, as they are the only people whom Galt credits with the work. Inside the dwellings, plantation manuals recommended that every “family will have a separate room with fireplace, to be furnished with beds, bedsteads, and blankets, according to the size of the family; each room will also be furnished with a table, chairs or benches, and chest for clothes, a few tin plates and cans, a small iron pot for cooking &c.” One cannot be certain if all of this was provided to slaves on a given plantation, as the description is a guidebook’s ideal, not a reality. Regardless of how much can be determined about the physical space of the quarters, architectural historian John Michael Vlach’s observation is apt. He contends that the physical separation and difference in appearance between “big house” and quarters was a reinforcement of the social difference between master and slave. This was certainly the case at Point of Fork.

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8 Galt Diary, 1835-1844, 1 December 1837.
9 A Southern Planter, Plantation and Farm Instruction, Regulation, Record, Inventory, & Account Book (Richmond, Virginia: J.W. Randolph, 1852), page 6, Special Collections Research Center, Earl Gregg Swem Library, The College of William and Mary.
10 Vlach, Back of the Big House, 164-165.
Some slaves who served Galt had another perspective. Crecy was James’s cook, Lucy and Phyllis were his maids, Jemima was nurse to the Galt children, Hannah did the laundry, and Henry and William were the formal house servants. Unlike Galt’s field hands, these slaves experienced bondage differently. Much of their time was spent in and around the “big house” in direct contact with the master and his family. Some good could and probably did come from this closeness. Extra and finer food was certainly a possibility, better clothing would have been given to slaves under the eyes of plantation visitors, and house slaves had a chance to earn the favor of their masters. This proximity also had a more negative side. Being nearer to Galt and his family meant that house slaves were under stricter scrutiny and more likely to face correction for their failure to carry out orders in the manner in which their master or mistress saw fit. Resentment from the other slaves on the plantation was also a possibility. The seven men and women who served Galt in his home (and perhaps their families) were housed in a nicer quarter next to the plantation house. This quarter was rather large and was built of brick. One wonders if the higher quality of the house servants’ quarter outweighed the negative effects they might have suffered from the rest of the slave community.

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11 Galt Diary, 1844-1850, information obtained from the chart of the 1847 distribution of fall clothing.
12 An excellent argument about the benefits and detriments of being a house slave is found in Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 80-86.
The sparse and probably unpleasant surroundings in most of the slave quarters at Point of Fork were accompanied by a monotonous diet. Galt's diary does not make many specific mentions of provisions of food to his slaves, but several clues in the journal suggest what their diet probably consisted of. Like many planters, the main sources of protein and fat for Galt's slaves were bacon and salted pork. The plantation, in fact, maintained two slaves as full-time hog keepers: Jim Shelton and Old Dick.14 Each year, Galt recorded the slaughter of hogs for the year in November or December. One former slave recalled the process. "For our meat we used to kill fifteen, twenty, or fifty, and sometimes a hundred hogs. We usually had hickory. It was considered the best for smoking meat, when we butchered."15 Jim Shelton and Old Dick were busiest in the late fall, but would have had to mind the hogs the rest of the year. The bulk of the slaves' diet, however, was cornmeal. Three pieces of evidence support this. First of all, it was common practice. It was advised that each slave be given one to two pecks (16 dry pints) of cornmeal per week, depending on age and type of labor.16 Second of all, Galt kept most of the corn his slaves grew each year.17 Finally, James and his brother William inherited a grist mill on their property from their guardian. The two brothers shared it and had their slaves use it to grind corn.18 To supplement their diet, slaves on many

14 Galt Diary, 1844-1850, information obtained from the chart of the 1847 distribution of fall clothing.
16 Southern Planter, Plantation and Farm Instruction, 6.
17 This is shown in the tables in his diary where he lays out each season's harvest. In those charts, Galt also listed the market price of the produce and how much he sold.
18 Herndon, "From Orphans to Merchants to Planters," 29.
plantations were allowed to keep vegetable gardens.\textsuperscript{19} There is no reason to believe this wasn’t the case at Point of Fork.

It was from these uninviting surroundings and off of this meager diet that James Galt’s slaves went to perform their labor each day. Their food and shelter were products of their own labor as well. However, the majority of the labor performed at the Fluvanna County plantation was centered on the production of Galt’s two main cash crops: tobacco and wheat. By far, tobacco required the most labor. Even as technology changed, and Galt employed the latest technology, the process for growing tobacco remained much the same as it did in the seventeenth century. In late winter, the tobacco seeds were laid in beds where they grew until May. At that time, the young plants were moved to the fields and planted in mounds in the ground approximately four feet apart. The spring and summer were occupied by constant weeding and grubbing to maintain enough nutrients in the soil for the plants to flourish. In late-summer, the tops of the tobacco plants were cut. This step was performed to improve the quality of the leaves by harvest time. Finally, in late August, the tobacco crop was harvested and dried in barns specially designed for hanging. The dried leaves were at last packed in hogsheads (large barrels) and shipped to market.\textsuperscript{20} Galt’s diary indicates that all of these steps were followed.

\textsuperscript{19} Southern Planter, \textit{Plantation and Farm Instruction}, 6.

Wheat farming was by no means as labor intensive. On Galt’s plantation, both a winter and a summer crop of wheat were planted. Seeds for summer wheat were sown in the late-winter or early-spring. The winter crop was planted in the late-summer or early-fall. Galt varied from year to year on the time at which he had his slaves seed his wheat fields. As with tobacco, wheat fields were constantly weeded and checked for grubs and bugs, but no other steps seem to have been required in its cultivation. As we know, wheat harvesting at Point of Fork was a very efficient process, as Galt’s slaves utilized the McCormick mechanical reaper. Corn, harvested in late-summer and fall by hand, required similar steps to wheat. The corn was then shucked, a process which Galt claimed his slaves enjoyed as a reprieve from harder labor. He wrote: “The Hands here, except 3 at the Mill, enjoyed the break in shucking and yesterday Housing Corn.”

To this point, the differences between labor so far described on any other plantation and Galt’s reformist plantation were probably slight. One important distinction, however, was the number of crops grown by reformist planters and those grown by more traditional Southern masters. One of the main critiques agrarian reformers had of planters was cash-crop monoculture. Growing solely cotton or tobacco would quickly, they observed, “exhaust the best lands.” “Rotation or change of crops is as necessary to the preservation and improvement of the land, and consequently to

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21 The wheat and corn cultivation processes are described in bits and pieces nearly daily throughout the duration of the diary. Utilizing the McCormick reaper is described in Galt Diary, 1844-1850, 28 June 1844.
22 Galt Diary, 1835-1844, 11 November 1837.
successful cropping, as manure." While employing such tactics greatly enhanced productivity, it certainly took a toll on slave laborers. Raising multiple crops meant that cyclical seasons overlapped. There was always something that had to be planted, tended, or harvested. The utilization of fallow crops like peas and clover for fertilizer added even more of a burden. Moreover, the application of the latest and greatest fertilizers (ranging from bat guano to human feces) created unpleasant work at least and health hazards at worst. Clearly, the implementation of agrarian reforms did not make slavery a more benevolent institution. Arguably, in many ways, it was worse. Slaves at Point of Fork had more on their plates throughout the year than many slaves probably did.

Agrarian reform on Galt’s plantation may have also fostered stricter control of the slave population. James Galt’s journal indicates that he required his overseers to report detailed information to him on a regular basis. In line with the advice of plantation manuals discussed in the previous chapter, everything had to be observed and accounted for. It can be assumed with some certainty that this scrutiny meant a stricter, more regulated form of slave labor. The centrality of productivity may have also meant that it was more dangerous for a slave to fall behind in his or her labors. Although he only recorded one incident of punishment directly, we know that he at least approved of it. Perhaps he preferred to ignore an ugly reality. Regardless, it is

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23 Southern Planter, Plantation and Farm Instruction, 9.
easy to see a possible link between agrarian reform and more rigid controls on the
slave population.

Reformist plantation manuals argued for the importance of a rigid schedule for
slaves. Not only would this improve productivity, but it also kept slaves in order. It
was advised that overseers “rise at dawn of day every morning; that he blow a horn for
the assembling of hands.” The slaves were then required to gather for a roll call. The
sick had to report before they could return to their cabins. “Immediately after morning
call, the manager will himself repair to the stable, together with the ploughmen” to
prepare for fieldwork. Hands were expected to work from dawn until 8 in the morning,
when they would break for breakfast. The labor would then continue until 1pm for
lunch and would commence, yet again, only to end at sundown. 24 Most probably,
agrarian reformers like Galt kept such a rigorous schedule on a daily basis in hopes of
improving yields and maintaining ever-important order.

With so much control on a reformist plantation, there had to have been some
way of resisting being broken by the institution of slavery. The only instances of
resistance Galt referred to directly were the slave who attempted to avoid work on a
neighboring plantation (for which he was beaten) and the fires set on his plantation
during the Civil War (which he convinced himself were not set by his slaves). It can also
be inferred that Galt’s slaves showed him enough gratitude to keep up their end of the
bargain that was paternalism. With the fire incident, Galt was shocked that such an act

24 Ibid, 5-6.
would be committed toward such "a good and humane master" who "never kept a harsh overseer." Given he held this opinion of himself, he likely would have commented any time his slaves did not affirm this self-image. How, then, can we assign agency and the power to shape the institution to Galt's slaves? Perhaps John C. Willis's argument about slave honor holds the answer. Willis suggested that slaves, particularly in Virginia, avoided being demoralized by the slave system by taking great pride in their work. Most importantly, Willis contends, slaves created their own code of honor through hard work, avoidance of punishment, and looking out for fellow slaves. This may have been one of the few mechanisms of resistance available to slaves at Point of Fork.

The oppressive system of labor inherent to antebellum slavery and enhanced by the dictates of agrarian reform finally began to crumble during and after the Civil War years. Despite the excitement for the coming Jubilee, the War Between the States was as difficult an experience for the slaves at Point of Fork as it was for their master James Galt. For one thing, the Civil War increased the amount of labor slaves had to perform on the plantation in order to satisfy contracts with the Confederate Army. The crops they grew and harvested for the army were, of course, grown in addition to those used for their own sustenance and the plantation's profit. Moreover, the state forced slaves to perform duties for the war effort. In July, 1864, for example, "Six Hands, Frederick and

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25 Galt Diary, 1859-1864, 16 October 1863.
Ned from LP, Abram and Charles from MP, Isaac and Moses from UP left here to work on the entrenchments near Richmond.″27 Although they were absent from plantation labors, the duties they had to perform for the state were at least as arduous and took them away from their families and dangerously close to the battle lines.

The movement of both armies on and around Point of Fork also created difficulties. As an ardent supporter of the Southern cause, Galt frequently housed and fed soldiers and allowed their horses to graze on the plantation. The 28th of May, 1864 saw “Twenty soldiers of the 2nd N.C. Cavalry with 60 horses.” Days later, the “1st N.C. Cavalry came here with 40 men and 134 horses.” By July of 1864, the Confederate Army’s presence was even more burdensome, as Galt noted that “Soldiers have been here very regularly all the week getting meals and staying all night. Yesterday over 700 broken-down horses belonging to the Georgia Cavalry passed here.”28 Galt’s slaves most likely lost rations, experienced numerous inconveniences, and were perhaps exposed to dangers such as sexual assault with so many men passing by.

Even for slaves, the arrival of the Union Army was also something of a problem. As Galt described on the 13th of March, 1865, the Federal soldiers pillaged all parts of Point of Fork other than the “big house.”29 The slaves probably lost much of what they owned to the soldiers. The presence of the Union Army also presented a dilemma. The slaves had undoubtedly heard of the Emancipation Proclamation by the time of the army’s arrival. Although liberation was most certainly a promising prospect, slaves had

27 Diary of Galt, 28 July 1864, 13.
28 Ibid, 28 May 1864, 4 June 1864, and 9 July 1864, 10-11, 13.
to consider the safety and cohesion of their families and social networks before making the decision to run away. Not many of Galt’s slaves found escape to be the best option, or at least not the most plausible. Only thirteen of his laborers were lost when the Union passed through Point of Fork.

For James Galt, the collapse of the Confederacy marked the end of a prosperous career as a reformist planter. For his slaves, the day of the surrender was a new beginning. Still, by October of 1865 there were “still over 200 [slaves] left [at Point of Fork], scarcely ¼ of whom do any work, and with some exceptions none do more than they can help.”30 At very least, the slaves who remained, unsure of what the future held for them, had the autonomy to determine when and for whom they would work. One wonders what they made of their freedom.

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30 Ibid, October 1865, 23.
Conclusion

For the South, the second quarter of the nineteenth century began a period of chaos and decline. The abolitionist challenge to their peculiar institution had gathered sufficient strength to be perceived as a real threat to their way of life. The time had come for even the strongest defenders of slavery to at least reassess the system. Southern intellectuals found one answer to the abolitionists’ criticisms in agrarian reform. By making their plantations more orderly, more productive, and more in tune with new technology and practice, these men thought they were reasserting the legitimacy of the institution of slavery.

Men like James Galt adopted the methods of agrarian reform for a number of reasons. Some, perhaps, sought to do what Southern intellectuals suggested: improve efficiency to better the image of plantation slavery. Others, Galt among them, saw scientific farming as a way of enhancing profits. The Galt brothers, remember, were first businessmen. Whatever their rationale may have been, Southern slaveholders who practiced agrarian reform quickly saw the benefits. Contrary to critics’ fears, technology and innovation did not undermine the region’s beloved institution. By employing the methods reformers advocated, planters like Galt were able to enhance the profit
produced by each slave, maintain stricter control over their human property, and reinforce their hierarchical position as paternalistic providers.

The benefits enjoyed by masters keen enough to employ agrarian reforms were matched with burdens put on slaves. Slaves at Point of Fork and other reformist plantations across the South suffered while planters profited. Their workloads increased, perhaps dramatically. They were more closely observed by their masters and overseers. Slaves’ ability to resist the demoralizing effects of the system was also hindered by the ways in which agrarian reform enforced order on Southern plantations.

The American Civil War put the world enhanced by agrarian reform into a state of crisis for both master and slave. James Galt and his laborers all endured hardships linked to the passing of the armies, the destruction of the war, and the shortages the wartime economy brought about. In the end, at least at Point of Fork, the slaves fared far better than their master. Even though Galt deployed the latest farming techniques, his success as an agriculturalist relied even more on the slave labor of several hundred men, women, and children. Unable to free himself from the ideological and economic ties to slavery, James Galt ended his life a relatively poor man. Galt’s slaves by no means faced an easy path. The obstacles of race and economic circumstance would plague African Americans well through the Reconstruction era. The distinction was clear, however. For Galt, the end of the Civil War meant the death of a way of life and the failure of reforms that seemed so promising. For his slaves, the surrender at Appomattox meant “a new birth of freedom.”
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