

# EXPLORING THE MARITIME TASK SYSTEM OF SOMERSET PLACE

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Eastern North Carolina's maritime industry was dependent on the labor of free and enslaved maritime workers. These maritime laborers contributed to maritime development in a multitude of ways, from working on large seagoing vessels to preparing flatboats to carry plantation produce along canals. This thesis examines the personal characteristics, social relationships, and cognitive understandings which fabricated maritime tasks of an enslaved community belonging to the Collins family living in Edenton, in Chowan County and Somerset Place in Washington County, North Carolina from 1786 to 1864. This research analyzes the historical documents of the plantation owners and businessmen in the area to understand the motivation of task assignment within the maritime industry of northeastern North Carolina.



EXPLORING THE MARITIME TASK SYSTEM OF SOMERSET PLACE

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by

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## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to all the enslaved people who were ever enslaved by the Collins Family. It is for them and their descendants that this research seeks to share their stories and vastly important roles in the building of the maritime history of North Carolina. While they did not choose to be studied, I hope that their memory is honored in the sharing of their stories.

Thank you.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

North Carolina's maritime history represents a unique narrative of the larger American industrial evolution. In addition to agricultural labor, planters assigned and profited from free and enslaved black tasks such as digging flatboat canal thoroughfares, working in fisheries, ropewalks and shipyards, and navigating pilot boats through treacherous coastal inlets. This study will focus on the case study of the Collins family who owned Somerset Plantation in Washington county and various properties in Chowan County in the years of 1786 to 1864. The town of Edenton was founded in 1712. The location of Edenton, as shown in James Wimble's 1738 map, "Chart of His Majesties Province of North Carolina" (Figure 1) was ideal for maritime trade and development as the Roanoke Inlet opened directly into the Albemarle Sound compared to the other inlets along the Outer Banks which were difficult to navigate and took a longer amount of time to navigate to their ports. The Albemarle Sound also connected the coastline to areas deep within the state, increasing the number of miles the vessels could travel. During the American Revolution, the British Navy blockaded most of the major ports leading to the development of trade along intercoastal waterways. Even after the end of the American Revolution, the newly formed United States sought various trade routes to be more self-sufficient and less reliant on international trade. In an effort to increase this intercoastal trade, many canal-building projects were planned and began, leading to an increase in slave labor in the area ([Angley 1986:1-3](#); [Minchinton 1994: 2-3, 10, 15-17](#); [Cecelski 2001: 85-86, 103-106](#)).

The entirety of maritime development of Northeastern North Carolina was heavily dependent on both free and enslaved black labor. Enslaved watermen, or persons were assigned to build canals, pilot vessels in canals, rivers, and along the coast, work in shipyards, fish in fisheries, and generally any industry businessmen attempted in the area. Two narratives from

formerly enslaved people inform specific aspects of an enslaved experience in the Albemarle Sound area ([Grandy 1844](#); [Brent 1861](#)).

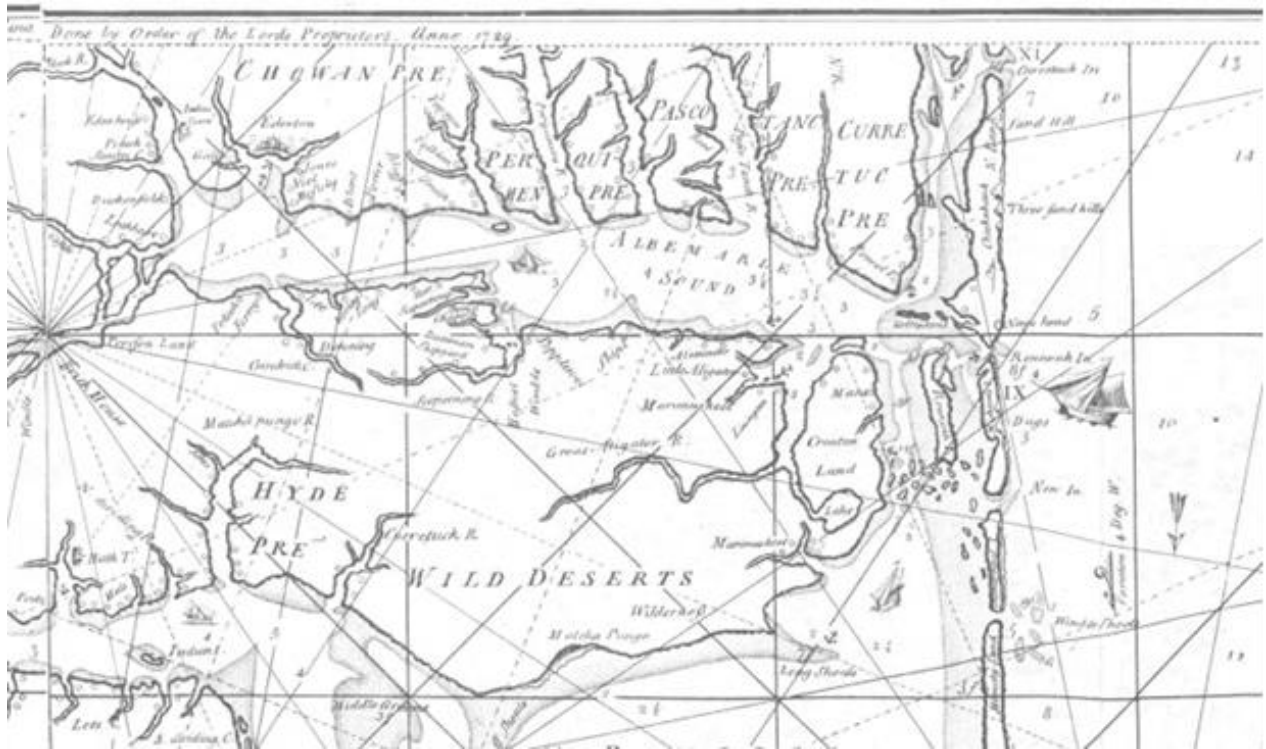


FIGURE 1. A portion of James Wimble's 1738 map, "Chart of His Majesties Province of North Carolina." North Carolina Maps from UNC.

The narrative of Moses Grandy describes an individual experience of an enslaved maritime laborer including his tasks on transportation canals and vessels traveling throughout the Albemarle Sound and into the Great Dismal Swamp along the Virginia and North Carolina state line. Grandy's narrative exemplifies how his specialized skills as a maritime laborer provided more avenues for movement in the region. Linda Brent, also known as Harriet Jacobs, tells of her proposed maritime escape from enslavement in 1830's Edenton. Brent describes the difficulty of planning an escape via maritime routes as travel was dependent on the weather and secrecy. Brent also describes how her friend Peter's skills as a maritime laborer permitted him to be able

to build trust with enslaved individuals and white maritime laborers ([Grandy 1844: 8, 16-25](#); [Brent 1861:560-572](#)).

Somerset Place is a plantation located in Washington County, North Carolina on the northern shore of Lake Phelps. Since the beginning of the land development by the Lake Company, of which Josiah Collins I headed, the plantation at Somerset Place had been a part of the expanding maritime industry of northeastern North Carolina. The partners of the Lake Company recognized the use of enslaved labor to build economic and social standing. In 1786, *Camden* entered Edenton carrying 80 enslaved Africans purchased by the Lake Company to build a canal system and create a productive rice field. As the enslaved labor force grew and were assigned to other maritime activities, a maritime task system developed ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#); [Tarlton 1954:6-7](#); [Redford and D’Orso 1988:69](#); [Michinton 1994:17](#)).

The task system was deeply intertwined and determined by the plantation system. Plantations are agricultural centers in which paid and/or enslaved labor is utilized to produce goods for a commercial market while plantation systems combine environmental, agricultural, economic, social, cultural, and political systems to form one general system of function. By adding the term tidewater, we simply describe a plantation system which is located in an area dependent and/or controlled by tidal patterns. The tidewater region of North Carolina stretches from Brunswick to Currituck County and from the Outer Banks to the end of Washington County, which includes the city of Edenton and Lake Phelps, the two areas of enslaved movement in this research. Little has been written about the maritime activity performed by the enslaved community on tidewater plantations in northeastern North Carolina. The previous research focused on the agricultural practices of tidewater plantations have remained in South

Carolina and Georgia. The tidewater regions of North Carolina have not proved as profitable as those in southern areas ([Singleton 1985:2](#)).

Each plantation had its own task systems dictated by the tasks needing completion, the individuals available, and the time needed to perform them. The two general forms of plantation labor, gang labor and task system, differed based on the presence of specialized tasks assigned and the amount of free time enslaved laborers were given aside from their assigned tasks and even occasionally had the opportunity to create informal economies on their own time. Much of the scholarship on plantation tasks systems focus on the tasks performed under the enslavers and/or overseer's watch, however, little is focused on the tasks performed by an enslaved individual on their own time. This readjustment is because the tasks performed to appease the enslaver were regularly documented and these tasks could determine every other aspect of an enslaved individual's life on the plantation ([Pruneau 1997:12](#); [Morgan 1982:564-565](#)).

Studying the task system of Somerset Place provides insight into the value of maritime industry in the northeastern region of North Carolina in the post-revolutionary to the Antebellum periods. The Collins family of Somerset Place represent an exceptional situation for the time period and yet still exemplify sections of North Carolina maritime industry which brought in substantial wealth, activity, and sought to compete with the more urban industries in cities like Wilmington and Charleston. The task system at Somerset Place, while not representative of most task systems of enslaved laborers in North Carolina, does display the importance of maritime activity.

Somerset Place fits into multiple categories of note. Firstly, the Collins family properties were all located in the tidewater region meaning that the movement of plantation products and people within the properties was dependent on tidal patterns and zones. Secondly, the Collins



family enslaved more people than most plantation owners between 1800 and 1860. While the sheer number of enslaved people may be the reason Somerset Place has been studied, the number of enslaved individuals provided numerous opportunities to create social, cultural, familial, and political systems within the enslaved community. Thirdly, Josiah Collins I purchased and imported half of the original enslaved laborers directly from Africa. This direct link to Africa permitted the enslaved community to continue and continue African traditions through the 1840s as described by white visitors to the plantation. Lastly, labor for the Collins family was dependent on seasons and on which individuals maintained the skills necessary to complete the tasks ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#); [Warren 1885:200-201](#)).

Through the study of Somerset Place's task system and the role the maritime industry played in it, we may further understand how prevalent maritime activity determined the life of the enslaved community. This research analyzed how specific maritime tasks, both simple and complicated, defined the seasonal patterns of labor as well as how the assignment and definitions of maritime labor impacted the lives of the enslaved folks who performed them.

Still, Somerset Place and the Collins family are not representative of white slaveholding properties and families in North Carolina, particularly in the western parts of the state. A vast majority of concentrated enslaved activity occurred along the intercoastal and costal lines, and thus the enslaved community in and near Edenton still represent a large percentage of the concentrated numbers of enslaved people in North Carolina at the time and many aspects of their experience can be likened to others in the area ([Parker 1993:12-21](#)).

Few plantations with the same slave holding capacity as Somerset Place existed in North Carolina. Many of the larger and thoroughly studied plantations along the coast focus on South Carolina and Georgia ([Littlefield 1981](#); [Morgan 1982](#); [Pruneau 1997](#)). Stamp (1956:31)

considers that the majority of large slaveholdings were found in the Deep South or states like Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, South Carolina, and Georgia where the alluvial river bottoms provided a more stable environment for cash crops and the markets were easily accessible. Somerset Place, located in northeastern North Carolina maintained a similar environmental setting as the Deep South, was not easily accessible to the large markets but maintained at times, over 300 enslaved people. Somerset Place is one of the few tidewater and large slaveholding plantations in northeastern North Carolina that has seen thorough historical and archaeological studies and time and care dedicated to telling the stories of the enslaved community.

### Research Objectives

This research seeks to analyze and understand the ways in which enslaved communities influenced the maritime culture and environment of eastern North Carolina through their labors under the Collins family from 1786 to 1864. The historical documents and analysis also discuss how the characteristics of enslaved individuals determined to which maritime tasks they were assigned. These questions guided this research:

#### Primary

- How did the enslaved community at Somerset Place and other Collins family properties interact with the physical and cultural maritime environment through the task system?

#### Secondary

- What are the demographic patterns, such as age, gender, or skill sets which correlate with specific maritime tasks delegated among the enslaved population at the Collins properties?

## Defining the Terms

This research explores the assumption of agency by enslaved people through their maritime labor. While the general definition of agency is the ability to take action or to choose what action to take, the concept of agency is slightly more complex. In his article, “The Subject and Power,” Michael Foucault (1982) describes taking agency as the individuals overcoming their objectification. According to Foucault, sources of power create systems which objectify individuals, and those individuals face struggles which combat their place within the system.

Foucault writes, “Generally, it can be said that there are three types of struggles: either against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way...” (Foucault 1982:781). For the enslaved individual, most of the systems of which they were a part, they were objectified and commodified. Agency, in the case of enslaved individuals at Somerset Place, was acting outside of the expectations of the system. In the context of this research, maritime tasks are evaluated for opportunities they presented for individuals to display their agency.

The development of the task system will be discussed further in Chapter Three however, the definition and understanding of the task system has transitioned throughout study. The task system at Somerset Place could be more individualized dependent on multiple external factors including season, agricultural and industrial needs, as well as factors of individuals such as specialized skills, gender, age, and physical attributes. This research examines the task system of the enslaved community assigned to Somerset Place and the other Collins Family properties to understand how and where maritime tasks informed the structure and patterns of the task system.

## Thesis Outline

Chapter Two: *Historiography*, summarizes the studies which have examined the various aspects of this research and formed the framework for this study. This chapter begins with various studies of Somerset Place analyzing the general history and archaeology of the site, the kinship patterns, religious, and medical care of the enslaved community, and the representation of the current State Historic Place. The analysis then moves to the system of slavery in tidewater North Carolina and onto the various approaches to studying the history and archaeology of American slavery.

Chapter Three: *The Task System*, defines the concept of task system as it is employed in this research. This chapter discusses how scholars have defined the task system of plantations in research and how it has been studied both historically and archaeologically throughout the years. This chapter introduces maritime slavery into the structure of the slave system and how specialized skills, gender, and age patterned the maritime tasks of the system.

Chapter Four: *The Task System of a Maritime Industry, 1786 - 1829*, discusses the establishment of Somerset Place and the Collins Family entrance into the maritime industry of eastern North Carolina as well as the early and establishing members of the enslaved community. This chapter focuses on the management of the task system under the first Josiah Collins as it transitioned to his son, Josiah Collins II and explores the various maritime tasks including canal building, managing a rice field, and outfitting vessels at the Ropewalk, a long covered walk where rope was manufactured in Edenton. This chapter examines the various duties and lives of enslaved laborers with specialized skills and their place within the task system and structures of the enslaved community.

Chapter Five: *Centralizing the Maritime Task System, 1829-1864*, discusses the task system of the enslaved community under the management of Josiah Collins III. Plantation documents from this time record much of the personal life and familial structures of the enslaved community as well as the investment and management of fisheries. This task system reflects the shift towards paternalism in attitudes of southern plantation owners towards black and enslaved people. This chapter analyzes these plantation documents for distribution of tasks and valuation of various enslaved individuals. This chapter also focuses on the development of commercial fisheries along the Albemarle Sound and the tasks systems practiced there.

Chapter Six: *Analysis and Conclusion*, analyzes why the maritime task system of Somerset Place is important to the understanding the roles of the enslaved community in North Carolina's maritime industry. This chapter adapts the patterns discussed in Chapters Four and Five to be representative of the larger maritime task system in the Albemarle Sound region as well as explore other areas which would benefit from further study.

The history of Somerset Place as well as the current public education produced by state park historians attempts to focus on the voices and narratives of the enslaved community. Descendants have recorded and recounted much of their history. Additionally, the staff at Somerset Place Historic Site has taken care to record and dictate the stories of the enslaved community utilizing various methods to inform the public.

Still, white researchers, including myself, have undertaken a majority of the maritime and terrestrial archaeological research of the region surrounding and including Somerset Place. The reality of white researchers studying an area in which an enslaved community spent so much of their lives, leaves out potentially significant data and considerations and many of these researchers take the time to acknowledge their biases and faults while studying an enslaved black

community. While my role as a white researcher limits the interpretation of the enslaved community, this project seeks to close the gap by recognizing the role of the white ideological view of slavery in task formation.

This research has undergone a variety of phases since the initial prospectus. The COVID-19 pandemic created a lack of access to many of the primary documents including the Collins family papers located at the North Carolina State Archives however, many of the staff members were incredibly helpful in accessing digitized and specific pieces of information. Additionally, archaeological evidence directly linked to the maritime tasks performed at Somerset Place proved to be very limited leaving much of the historical understanding of maritime activities surmised from historical documents. Lastly, the pandemic and health and safety concerns, and my own relocation limited the collection of oral histories. In the end, this research analyzes the maritime movement and industry of the enslaved community under the ownership of the Collins family based on historical documentation.

## CHAPTER TWO: HISTORIOGRAPHY

Various aspects of Somerset Place's plantations systems have been the focal point of studies by historians such as William Tarlton ([1954](#)) and Dorothy Redford ([1998](#); [2005](#)) as well as for research conducted by students like Alisa Y. Harrison ([2008](#)), and E. Arnold Modlin Jr. ([2008](#)), William Gregory Lewis ([2016](#)) and Jay Colin Menees ([2018](#)). The study of North Carolina's institution of slavery was reliant upon John Spencer Bassett's ([1899](#)), Freddie L. Parker's ([1993](#)), and David Cecelski's ([2001](#)) work while the relationship of economics and slavery in the Albemarle area was thoroughly examined in Jacob T. Park's ([2018](#)) thesis. Lastly, the understanding of the various aspects of slavery as an institution was furthered by historians such as Daniel C. Littlefield ([1981](#)), Whittington B. Johnson ([1993](#)), Leigh Ann Pruneau ([1997](#)), Deborah Gray White ([1999](#)), Kevin Dawson ([2005](#); [2006](#); [2013](#); [2018](#)), and many others.

### Studies of Somerset Place

Since the reconstruction and recognition of Somerset Place as an educational State Historic Site, multiple researchers have studied the various aspects of enslaved life within the plantation system. While William Tarlton ([1954](#)) conducted in-depth state-ordered studies and reports on Somerset's foundation, the stories and narratives of the enslaved community were not a priority until Dorothy Redford's introduction into the leadership of Somerset Place's interpretation.

The 1977 television show *Roots* inspired Redford to research her family history and discover more about the portion of her family who was enslaved before Emancipation. Redford's research not only produced a comprehensive timeline of the white and black inhabitants at Somerset Place but also gathered personal and detailed stories of the enslaved community and family histories told by the descendants of that community ([Redford and D'Orso 1988](#)).

*Somerset Homecoming: Recovering A Lost Heritage*, Redford's (1988) first work surrounding Somerset Place is mainly a narrative of Redford's personal journey of connecting her roots to Somerset Place. Redford collects a multitude of details from newspapers, port records, Collins family papers, and other plantation documents to illustrate portions of the stories of the enslaved people who lived at Somerset Place and bring the humanity of the enslaved people to the forefront of Somerset's narrative.

Redford served as the Executive Director at Somerset Place from 1990 to 2008 and gathered numerous resources to expand the enslaved narrative. *Generations of Somerset Place: From Slavery to Freedom* (2005) is a collection of photographs and stories of the families of the formerly enslaved at Somerset Place and details of where they settled and the various jobs and skills they found after emancipation. Other documents, unpublished but sold in Somerset Place's gift shop document various details of daily life and attempt to document the lives and deaths of each person who was enslaved or worked at Somerset Place (Redford 2001).

Dorothy Redford's multitude of works provides an in-depth understanding of the enslaved community at Somerset Place. Additionally, Redford's perspective, while singular, does include and partially represents the descendants of the enslaved community at Somerset. While the entire community's ideals cannot and should not be placed upon a single individual, it is invaluable to comprehend the familial and humanistic implications of this study and thus, bring the enslaved experience to the forefront of historical and archaeological research.

A combination of student and professional historians have conducted research focusing on important structural components of Somerset Place ranging from the 1780s to the 1860s. Alisa Y. Harrison (2008), William Gregory Lewis (2016), and Jay Colin Menees (2018) all



focused on the narrative and experience of the enslaved community within Somerset's history. Each topic of research combines aspects of the lives of individuals enslaved at Somerset.

Alisa Y. Harrison's (2008) dissertation, *Reconstructing Somerset Place: Slavery Memory and Historical Consciousness* describes the development of Somerset Place following the Civil War and its transition into a State Historic Site. Harrison's examination discusses how the educational curriculum of Somerset Place now celebrated the contribution of the enslaved community. Harrison collected first-hand accounts of how members of the public, including descendants of the enslaved community, viewed the history of enslavement and the legacy of Somerset Place through various perspectives.

Harrison discusses Dorothy Redford's goal of creating and exemplifying positive studies of enslaved communities which would combat the racism found in academic research. The family reunions, initiated by Redford, were a method to connect the generations to each other and this made descendants active participants in the story of Somerset Place and share the narratives of the enslaved community with the community surrounding modern Somerset Place (Harrison 2008:312-326).

William Gregory Lewis's (2016) research, "The Lake Chapel at Somerset Plantation and Religious Instruction in the Antebellum South," examines Somerset's Lake Chapel membership and records to provide insight into the religious relationship between the enslaved community and the Collins family. More specifically, Lewis's research analyzes the levels of religious and cultural agency displayed by enslaved individuals within the context of religious practices, which were heavily regulated by white power. Lewis utilizes the Lake Chapel at Somerset as a prime example of the heavily entwined relationship of religion and slavery in the Antebellum American south. The ideological relationship many white owners held regarding the enslaved under their

legal ownership maintained religious connotations and reasoning to maintain and perpetuate the institution of slavery. The Lake Chapel at Somerset Place served as an avenue for religious expression. However, the location and leadership of the Chapel allowed for the white Collins family to preserve a certain amount of control over the religious instruction of the black community.

Lewis discusses the tensions between the Southern plantation owners in the 1820s and 1830s who fought between the ideas that religious instruction and care of an enslaved labor community would either nurture the attitudes of those enslaved or give them a false sense of quality which would lead to insurrection. Lewis dives into the legal and social policies which influenced the ways in which he informed and controlled the religious instructions of the enslaved community as well as some of the combinations of Christian instruction to enslaved Africans and their descendants and a few of the unique customs and cultures at Somerset Place ([Lewis 2016:43](#)).

In his research, “The Health and Medical Care of Enslaved African Americans at Somerset Place, 1839-1863,” Jay Colin Menees ([2018](#)) studied the overall health of the enslaved community through the medical records written by the doctor who frequented Somerset and the manner of care provided at the slave hospital built by Josiah Collins III. This analysis of medical needs and care relates to the physical effects of tasks assigned to enslaved individuals at Somerset.

Menees ([2018](#)) gathers the large collections associated with Somerset Place including the medical records of Doctors who visited the plantation, the Lake Chapel Records, and the Collins family documents to understand the health patterns of the enslaved community at Somerset Place based on seasonal tasks and/or crops produced. A large portion of Menees’s analysis focuses on

the mortality rate and patterns of enslaved women and children during the years in which births and deaths of children and mothers were recorded in the Lake Chapel Records. Meness looks at the effects seasonal climates had on the health of the enslaved community members, particularly children and how the care or lack of specialized care of enslaved women might have been the cause of deaths for their infants ([Menees 2018](#)).

Wayne K. Durrill, a historian of Southern Antebellum and reconstruction society, has examined the social structures of Somerset's enslaved community through labor routines and kinship relationships ([1995](#); [1992](#)). In his article, "Slavery, Kinship, and Dominance: The Black Community at Somerset Place Plantation, 1786-1860" ([1992](#)), Durrill explains the enslaved community at Somerset Place to be structured based on the access and proximity to resources and often how members within the enslaved community exhibited power and dominance over other members. Durrill explains that the majority of the first important of enslaved African laborers did not survive long enough within the plantation system to create strong and influential relationships or cultural practices. In addition, the acquisition of many small groups or individuals did not provide the kinship or social relationships within the early enslaved community.

Durrill utilizes the Collins family records to recognize the patterns of kinship alliances. The marriages, or alliances, between the adults on the plantation occurred between either strangers brought to the plantation or enslaved laborers on different plantation who were eventually bought by the Collins family and brought to Somerset. Gender division among the enslaved community at Somerset Place was rooted within the marriage relationship. On average, women were younger than their husbands and began to have children at an earlier age. More younger children provided a labor source outside of the Collins family as not as much was

expected of children younger than 12, creating a higher social value in women who produced more children. However, men with older and skilled children gained value in the community as they had more labor resources to offer from their family unit ([Durrill 1992:5-10](#)).

Marriages within the enslaved community tended to last many years and produce a larger web of kinship ties. Most individuals married outside their familial relationships but often, within other families on the plantation or individuals brought to the plantation. Durrill highlights the different purposes marriages and kinship relationships served within the enslaved community as compared to marriages within the white Collins family. In the 1850s, an attempted uprising by individuals at Somerset Place as well as growing uncertainty of the politics of the country, the Collins family divided many families between their various properties, purposely dividing kinship structures. At that division, many new kinships were created between separated family members and their neighbors or friends within the community. Overall, the enslaved community at Somerset Place did not necessarily build kinship structures in any singular fashion and were often formed under the uncertainty of how long those relationships would last. Mates and kin were largely chosen because of personal resources rather than social or economic standing ([Durrill 1992:12-16](#)).

Durrill's ([1995](#)) later article, "Routine of Seasons: Labour Regimes and Social Ritual in an Antebellum Plantation Community," examines the labor systems of Antebellum Washington County by looking at the distribution of enslaved people among the enslavers in the county. While separate plantation systems encompassed the region, much of the seasonal labor followed similar patterns. Durrill's research maps out how the various labor and plantation systems interacted and determined each other. While this article forms this examination on the basis of

the plantation owner's perspective, this study provides insight into how the enslaved community may have interacted with other surrounding enslaved laborers.

Tsutomu Numaoka's (1998) article, "Josiah Collins III, A Successful Corn Planter: A Look at His Plantation Management Techniques," examines how the younger Josiah Collins adapted methods for corn production to transform Somerset Place into a profitable business along the North Carolina coast specifically by taking advantage and control of shipping connections and schedules. While Numaoka's article does create a detailed examination of the economic planning which Collins translated to ensure profitability, the discussion fails to acknowledge the active roles the enslaved laborers performed to manage those crops. Instead, Numaoka explains Collins's allotment of the "Negro Patch" as a system of incentives and rewards to ensure the productivity of the labor force. The article praises the decisions of Josiah Collins III for his management practices while failing to discuss the detailed tasks which made the success of Somerset Place possible.

#### Studies of Slavery in the Albemarle Region

As this research indicates, the enslaved community working under the Collins Family industries were tasked with activities along Edenton Harbor and the shore of the Albemarle Sound. As the enslaved community was representative of the enslaved people in and around Edenton, the study of slavery and economics of the greater Albemarle Sound area is necessary for a more complete understanding of Somerset Place's maritime influence. For a base of this research, David Cecelski's work, *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina*, highlights the significant role of free and enslaved black maritime presence in the structure of the North Carolina maritime economy. Cecelski studies the diverse types of maritime tasks which were essential to the commercial prosperity of North Carolina and were

assigned to enslaved black labor or taken up by free black individuals, including the labor at fisheries, canal-building, and boatmen. ([Cecelski 2001](#)).

Cecelski specifically analyzes the harsh realities of enslaved people assigned to the task of canal building at the Lake Phelps properties. Cecelski recognizes the unique and harsh reality of the enslaved Africans assigned to dig the canals connecting Lake Phelps to the Scuppernong River as the “nightmare of maritime slave life” ([Cecelski 2001:105](#)). These enslaved individuals were geographically and socially isolated and worked in grueling conditions where death was always a possibility. Canal building was an essential process, particularly for agricultural development within the swampy environment and so canal building in northeastern North Carolina became a frequent practice. However, Cecelski discusses the intersection of maritime and plantation tasks within a plantation system dependent upon canal networks ([Cecelski 2001:103-117](#)).

Additionally, Cecelski’s work discusses enslaved maritime laborers at North Carolina’s fisheries. According to Cecelski, the Antebellum Albemarle Sound contained the most substantial fisheries which relied upon enslaved labor, and thus, many of the agricultural heads in the area also commanded the fishing and seine industry. Cecelski analyzes the group labor methods of the fisheries as like the community labor necessary to run plantations. However, building fisheries, like canals, required intense manual labor to prepare the land and environment for efficient fishing. Enslaved laborers needed to clear the waterfront of Cyprus stumps and roots so that the seines were not caught but this process required specific maritime skills including boating and diving ([Cecelski 2001:83-102](#)).

By utilizing Cecelski’s work and research as a base for the understanding of enslaved and black maritime labor, this research is grounded with a comprehension of the general culture and

products resulting from these specific tasks. For instance, the analysis of the Albemarle fisheries provides insight to the special skill set enslaved individuals assigned to the Collins fisheries would have obtained there. Moreover, as the fisheries were reliant upon enslaved labor, at least a handful of enslaved individuals would need to understand watercraft and how to move along the sound to ensure the productivity of the seines, and thus, specific maritime knowledge may have been available to the enslaved person based on their assigned or undertaken task.

Darlene M. Perry's (2004) thesis research, "A Profitable, But Risky Business: Slave Hiring in Colonial and Antebellum North Carolina," explores the importance of the system of slave hiring in North Carolina's economy. According to Perry, most of the enslaved laborers who were hired out or hired out themselves were skilled and often had more freedom in their movements which often caused tension between the skilled enslaved laborers and white laborers. Perry examines slave hiring from the perspectives of the owners and/or hirers against the view of the enslaved people.

Perry's work argues that a discussion of slave-hiring is necessary to explore the reality of the enslaved experience in North Carolina. While not enslaved laborers had the specialized skills to paint them as profitable for hiring, Perry and many of the scholars utilized in the study argue that slave hiring was a steppingstone to emancipation by expanding agency of the individuals hired. Perry emphasizes that slave hiring offered unique opportunities for enslaved laborers while also for white hirers. Slave hiring was a method to bypass the expense of buying and maintaining enslaved laborer while still taking advantage of the social and economic benefits of having access to slave labor.

Robert S. Thompson's (2008) dissertation, "Soil and Slaves: An Environmental History of Northeastern North Carolina, 1548 – 1860," analyzes how the climate of the Roanoke River

and Albemarle Sound watershed influenced the socio-economic institutions of the people in the region. Thompson discusses the purchase of large numbers of enslaved Africans was seen as a necessity by landowners in the region to compete with the agricultural success of their neighbors along the coasts of Virginia and South Carolina. Additionally, Thompson highlights the racially charged expectations of slave holders which maintained that non-white laborers were scientifically more suited to perform canal building and rice cultivation ([Thompson 2008:162-194](#)).

The thesis of Jacob T. Parks ([2018](#)), “The Price of Bondage: Slavery, Slave Valuation, and Economics in the Albemarle,” is an evaluation of the economic implications of slavery in the antebellum Albemarle region. According to Park’s analysis, enslaved people were utilized as tools to create profit for enslavers whether that was by their sale, their purchase to ensure profitability of crops or industry, or ensuring their reproduction. The ownership of enslaved people ensured a certain amount of economic, political, and social value.

Parks’s analysis utilizes the perspective of enslavers and plantation owners by viewing enslaved people as commodities and property rather than active participants in the region’s economy and often experienced poor quality of medical care or food to keep the costs of maintenance lower. Parks contrasts the viewpoint of the enslaved with examples of how enslaved people in the Albemarle Region took advantage of their economic value to make determinations in their own lives, particularly within hiring out situations ([Parks 2018:30-56](#)).

### Studies of North Carolina Slavery

Freddie L. Parker’s ([1993](#)) work, *Running for Freedom: Slave Runaways in North Carolina 1775-1840*, evaluates how enslaved individuals, particularly escaped individuals, were identified by the people seeking their return. Parker analyzes the runaway slave advertisements



from North Carolina newspapers to note which physical attributes were deemed identifiable by the enslavers seeking their return. This analysis provides insight to the economic values placed on enslaved individuals and point out patterns of who was able to escape from slavery.

Parker provides a detailed distribution of the growth of slavery in North Carolina, particularly along the coast as well as a discussion of slave law and codes in the state. Parker also explains the process which would occur at the publication of a runaway advertisement as well as the patrolling system created to track down and return fugitives. Parker also discusses the active role free black people played in attempting to protect enslaved runaways including appealing to courts and creating safe havens in many coastal towns in communities ([Parker 1993:44-52, 65-76](#)).

While this analysis does provide insight into the various situations or attributes which allowed more opportunities for an enslaved person to run away, it is necessary to remember that these advertisements were only created if the enslaved individual or individuals were deemed worth the expense of paying a reward. The details in these advertisements offer insight into the reality of if enslaved individuals with certain physical attributes or skills were more likely to be able to run away and the methods they may have utilized ([Parker 1993](#)).

### Studies of Task Systems

Daniel C. Littlefield's ([1981](#)) book, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* provides a base for the early task system of the enslaved laborers at Somerset Place. Littlefield analyzes the economic necessity of enslaved people within a successful rice plantation system. Littlefield explores how enslavers, colonists, and British-American landowners categorized Africans into potential labor tasks based on visitors to Africa

had described physical and characteristic attributes of various ethnic groups. Littlefield describes how Africans were commodified specifically regarding rice cultivation ([Littlefield 1981:8-32](#)).

Leigh Ann Pruneau's ([1997](#)) dissertation entitled, *All the Time is Work Time: Gender and The Task System on Antebellum Lowcountry Rice Plantations* is a detailed study of a task system on rice plantations in lowcountry South Carolina and Georgia. This dissertation describes how labor was performed, divided and measured. Pruneau discusses the difference between working on the plantation owner's time and many enslaved laborer's goal of accumulating their "own time" and how individual agency was practiced by laborers when they worked against the system. A large portion of Pruneau's research centers on the experience of enslaved women and how gender shaped task assignment in the rice fields. Pruneau discusses how the expectations for field production were the same for enslaved women and men, even when women were in the later stage of pregnancy and explores the relationship between the requirements of hard physical labor and neonatal mortality ([1997:102-158, 252-302](#)).

Whittington B. Johnson ([1993](#)) analyzes the presence and development of black labor within the industrializing United States in his work, *The Promising Years, 1750-1830: The Emergence of Black Labor and Business*. Johnson examines the difference in black labor in the northern and southern states while pointing out the racial disparities in both regions including the use of enslaved black labor and the tendency for free black labor to serve white patrons and audiences. Specifically, Johnson acknowledges the overwhelming presence of black individuals in spaces designed to be black occupations such as maritime or domestic service spaces. By examining all forms of black labor within the development of the industrialization of the United States, Johnson recognizes the various methods in which black individuals created their own spaces in labor despite their legal or social statuses.

Johnson's work explores the development of maritime industry as a space in which social movement was more flexible for black workers. Johnson explains that this maritime industry extended to land-based maritime tasks like Edenton's ropewalk and shipyards. The enslaved community under the Collins family management exemplified this early distribution of black labor. In addition to laboring in the fields, the enslaved community gained specialized skills to ensure the production of industries such as the ropewalk and fisheries. The accounts of visitors to Somerset Place also record the interactions with black ferrymen and riverboat pilots.

Kevin Dawson's collection of work has focused on the maritime activities of enslaved and free black people and the aftermath of the institution of African slavery. Dawson's dissertation, "Enslaved Watermen in the Atlantic World, 1444 -1888" (2005), analyzes how the maritime skills typically held by West Africans influenced the destinations in the Americas as divided on the economic goals of white landowners in the regions. Dawson examines how the maritime skills and knowledge of black people informed cultural practices in the new world.

Kevin Dawson's (2018) later research, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora*, discusses the various maritime tasks and skills which many enslaved black individuals maintained and utilized and adapted while enslaved. Dawson utilizes historical narratives to describe how many maritime activities and skills originated and were highly practiced within African cultures and how those skills and activities were translated in a world dominated by slavery and oppression. Dawson highlights the unique maritime skills which were from black people and cultures to normalized coastal cultures, particularly in the Americas.

While this collection of research covers a wide range of topics and perspectives of the enslaved experience at Somerset Place and the general region, the specific maritime task system of Somerset Place has not been at the forefront. This research attempts to begin to fill that gap by

evaluating the historical record of Somerset Place and the Collins family for maritime tasks and formation and combining the evidence with studies which focus on the task systems of enslaved communities on and off the physical plantation.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE TASK SYSTEM

The Collins family industries required task systems tailored to each industry. The Collins family owned two family farms and/or houses in Edenton, the Edenton Ropewalk along the waterfront, and leased out at least two fisheries in addition to the plantation at Somerset Place. While all these properties maintained separate boundaries, all properties were connected by their patterns of labor. The Collins family documents establish where enslaved laborers were assigned and what tasks would have been performed at these locations. This task system spanned approximately 25 miles and was determined by a variety of characteristics.

The two common management organizations, the task system, and gang system directed plantation labor in the American southeast. The task system was primarily utilized at plantations producing cash crops such as tobacco, rice, corn, and cotton. The task system was commonly experimented with by larger coastal and tidewater plantations in Georgia, South Carolina where rice fields were separated by drainage ditches and as some plantation owners believed the benefits of completing tasks quickly would encourage the enslaved laborers to be more productive. However, a few plantation owners did not find the task system beneficial on its own and thus incorporated a combination of the task system and the gang system. The system utilized was decided by the tasks needing completion and those completing them ([Stampp 1956:55-56](#)). Through studying the task system, we understand how characteristics such as age, gender, and specialized skills impacted task assignment, in addition to how outside societal, cultural, and economic patterns characterized the task system.

Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the task system was the distinction between the plantation owner's time and the enslaved laborer's time. Lewis Cecil Gray writes, "Under the task system the slave was assigned a certain amount of work for the day, and after

completing the task he could use his time as he pleased. Under the gang system, slaves were worked in groups under the control of a driver or leader” ([Gray 1993:547-551](#)). With the completion of assigned tasks and the additional work, a few enslaved individuals in Lowcountry plantations produced their own crops and raised their own livestock ([Morgan 1982:589-595](#)).

The development of the task system occurred for a multitude of reasons. First, the long absence of plantation owners for most of the year was a major contributing factor. Many plantation owners left their plantations to escape the intense heat and disease or simply, did not normally live on their plantation lands. Without the constant presence of the plantation owner, the oversight of the labor force was relegated to white or black overseers who may not have maintained the same economic goals as the plantation owner. Phillips writes “...the necessity of the master’s moving away from his estate in the warm months, to escape malaria, involved the adoption of some system of routine which would work with more or less automatic regularity without his own inspiring or impelling presence” ([Phillips 1907:418](#)).

Historian Philip Morgan noted that large plantation owners in the Caribbean did not widely adopt the task system so popular along the eastern seaboard of North America. Instead, the presence of enslaved laborers with specialized skills and knowledge may have mitigated the need for so much supervision. Additionally, Morgan suggests that the hardiness of crops such as rice or corn allowed for less attentiveness from the laborers, and thus, less direct supervision from either the plantation owner or overseer, leaving the laborer to define and complete the task on their own terms ([Morgan 1982:566-568](#)).

The introduction of rice to the Americas was the prime reason for the enslavement and importation of so many laborers to the Carolina region. Europeans did not have a successful record while cultivating rice or many other crops grown in tropical areas. Even before the

introduction of rice or large-scale crops, European colonists faced the problem of cheap and efficient labor. As many white Europeans entered the Americas as indentured servants, their presence was limited by the number of years on their labor contract. Additionally, when Europeans attempted to enslave Native Americans, they faced threats from the neighboring Native relations. Thus, the enslavement of Native Americans proved less beneficial for European settlers. Africa was physically and culturally far removed from the new settlement and thus, seemed a valuable and more secure option as a labor source area ([Wood 1975:35-55](#)).

Daniel C. Littlefield expands on the idea of the promise of Africa and suggests that many enslavers in the Americas sought to purchase people from certain ethnic and cultural groups to complete certain tasks based on European travelers' perceptions. For instance, travelers to the African coast in the eighteenth century reported that the Senegambia region was naturally suited for growing rice. Because of reports such as these, many plantation owners who sought to cultivate rice, particularly in South Carolina inquired about and purchased enslaved Africans from this area, presumably because they already had the expertise to produce a successful crop. This knowledge further pushed enslaved and freed black people's influence on the successful economy of the early United States ([Littlefield 1981:76-79](#)).

Knowledge of rice cultivation was not the only skill that increased the economic value of black laborers. The flexibility of the task system served the various needs of large and isolated plantations in the lowland areas. Occasionally, specific enslaved laborers were either trained or hired to complete tasks such as bricklaying, working as stable hands, blacksmiths, or boat hands, and whatever was needed to accomplish the industrial goals of the plantation. The development of specialized skills provided opportunities for enslaved laborers to engage within society and the economy as active participants.

In his book, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860*, John Hope Franklin ([1943](#)) discusses that many skilled black laborers, usually free, were met with distrust from their white counterparts in urban settings, Franklin writes,

It was unfortunate for the free Negro artisan that he was the object of such contempt and distrust. In a world that was none too friendly, this attitude on the part of his white competitors made his lot immeasurably more difficult. For the better part of the period, the white artisan failed to see any wisdom in developing a close relationship between himself and the free Negro ([Franklin 1943:139](#)).

Franklin goes on to discuss that many skilled free black laborers likely learned their skills while enslaved and thus, were unable to visualize the potential economic and social benefits their skills could provide for themselves, their family, and their community. Still, practically all skilled labor contributed from enslaved and free black labor ([Franklin 1943:139-140](#)).

Critics of the task system claim that the incentive for an enslaved laborer to complete the task as soon as possible inspired lower quality work. Many argued that the gang system was the superior method of plantation management. More recent studies have reevaluated claims that the task system alleviated the workload of enslaved laborers and more likely, increased the exploitative nature of slavery. Scholars who contributed to the early analysis of the tasks system argue that this method permitted the enslaved laborers to have an independent life and agency. Leigh Ann Pruneau's dissertation argues that the tasks, beyond back breaking field labor, were central to the lives of the enslaved laborers and dictated much of their life experience ([Pruneau 1997:12-17](#)).

Pruneau discusses that many of the tidewater and low country plantations were dependent on slave labor to transform the physical environment to create successful and efficient



plantations and as the number of enslaved laborers increased, so did the need for land transformation. The enslaved labor force adjusted their tasks to the cultivation cycle of the intended crop. Tasks circulated in a seasonal cycle enough so that they only need slight adjustments with each new season. Pruneau discusses how the introduction of mills and such equipment eased some of the physical demands for the enslaved laborers however, the care of that equipment was transferred to other laborers ([Pruneau 1997:43-45](#)).

While the task system entailed the physical work performed at a given plantation, the task system remained central to the lives of the enslaved community and should be evaluated as such. Theresa Singleton's approach to plantation archaeology is rooted in the interdisciplinary of the plantation system which included economic, cultural, social, political, agricultural, and ecosystems to create one complex system. This approach to plantation archaeology and history seeks to understand the movements and tasks of the enslaved community by also analyzing the underlying systems which influenced them. However, an important aspect of Singleton's approach to studying plantations is the region's systems of influence. While this research included only minimal archaeological analysis, Singleton's interdisciplinary approach to plantation history and archaeology helps explain how the enslaved community at Somerset Place interacted with the physical and cultural maritime environment through the tasks they undertook ([Singleton 1985:2](#)).

A significant contributor to the task system at plantations was the distinction between gender-based tasks and the complex relationship gender had within task assignment. Pruneau suggests that gender played a large role in designing the task system of rice plantations and enslaved women played a particularly important role in plantation production. In Pruneau's analysis of thirteen rice plantations between the years 1802 and 1859, enslaved women either

account for more or equal to the male laborers working in the rice fields, and most of those women were expected to work as much as the men. Thus, gender had a complex impact on task assignments during and after the completion of routine fieldwork for the planter ([Pruneau 1997:60-66](#)).

This use of enslaved women, including those with children, was a common practice in plantation labor systems in the late eighteenth century. Enslavers believed that children would discourage the enslaved female population from running away. Many women and children fugitives were either caught or in other ways unsuccessful in their attempt at escape. Enslaved women were still expected to perform tasks outside of fieldwork such as child-rearing and household chores for their families leaving them little personal time. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese points out that gender-based task assignment might only have been possible on plantations with many laborers and various forms of production ([White 1999:66,72-74](#); [Fox-Genovese 1988:157](#)).

Societal understanding of the institution of slavery impacted the implementation of the task system and the relative freedom of movement and agency of enslaved labor. John Spencer Bassett categorizes North Carolina's institution of slavery into two parts, starting in the colonial period and changing in the year 1831 when "the conditions of slavery became more severe" ([Bassett 1899:7](#)). Bassett emphasizes a few events that sparked the change in the idealism of slavery. Firstly, the older political generation which envisioned that one day the enslaved people would be free, lost power because of age or declining popularity. Secondly, Nat Turner's rebellion in August of 1831 sparked a religious and social fear of enslaved communities for many in the southern United States. Thirdly, the abolitionist and anti-slavery activists grew louder and greater in number in the northern states ([Bassett 1899:9](#)).

Studies of the task system at maritime-based plantations have not extended far beyond the complexity of rice cultivation and irrigation practices and the seasonal fishing patterns of a few select enslaved laborers. It is evident that maritime tasks were integral to the function of coastal and tidewater plantations of North Carolina. These maritime tasks were not as well documented historically by the plantation owners as the terrestrial tasks, with a paucity of information about extent of supervision. Studies show that maritime activity, particularly in North Carolina included a high number of enslaved and freed black laborers. To many white, higher-class laborers, maritime duties, particularly on sea-going vessels was less than attractive. Ships served as a form of imprisonment with a high likelihood of danger and death and long stints apart from family. Maritime labor, which required a level of skills, provided opportunities for mobility which plantations did not so readily offer. Philip D. Morgan writes, “Maritime slavery is thus not only about *objects* being moved but also about *subjects* doing the moving. Some slaves were *actors*, not simply the *acted-upon*” ([Morgan 2010:311](#)). Maritime tasks provided laborers with the agency which might not have been available within other realms of slavery ([Johnson 1993:62](#)).

Enslaved laborers did undertake a multitude of tasks in the maritime services; with the assigned task dependent upon skill level or relationship to the person in charge. Morgan writes that many freed and enslaved black men gravitated toward maritime tasks all over the world but often undertook the work deemed undesirable or dangerous by white laborers. Nonetheless, “skin colour often mattered less than skill” ([Morgan 2010:314](#)). Thus, maritime labor also provided a different level of equality and camaraderie between the races. However, black maritime laborers still faced heightened dangers on vessels. Not only did the nature of seafaring provides its own

uncertainties, but the forced close proximities of black and white laborers provided opportunities for interpersonal violence between the two ([Morgan 2010:35, 312](#)).

Coastal trading activities encompassed more enslaved and freed black laborers working on vessels and in ports. Black mariners served as pilots, sea captains, ferrymen, navigators, boat hands, sailors, and cooks while on land black mariners labored in shipbuilding facilities such as ropewalks, shipyards, and naval yards. On plantations which were dependent on maritime activity, enslaved laborers had a generally wider knowledge base of tasks that could accommodate both terrestrial and maritime settings. This knowledge and adaptability of black free and enslaved laborers was a large reason for the success of coastal economies like that in northeastern North Carolina ([Johnson 1993:62](#)).

Most scholarly studies focusing on the task system revolve around rice plantations in South Carolina or Georgia with the occasional acknowledgment of similar management styles in tidewater North Carolina. While plantations cultivating rice or other hardy crops such as corn, permitted the use of the task system more so than crops such as tobacco or sugar, task system management was primarily utilized in the low country. Somerset Place planters experienced some success as a rice and corn producers, but continued to utilize maritime activities, structures, and nearby waterway infrastructure throughout its time as a working plantation. It is evident from primary sources, that the enslaved laborers did not stay within the physical plantation limits and were sent to complete seasonal tasks at other locations within the Collins family properties and the town of Edenton. Studying the enslaved community at Somerset Place provides an understanding of the types of task systems utilized within an eastern North Carolina tidewater plantation. Collins plantation management utilized various management methods including gang systems and hiring in addition to or as an extension of the task system. As one of the largest

plantations in North Carolina, Somerset Place serves as an exceptional study of the history of North Carolina's institution of slavery ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#); [Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)).

This plantation system does not make Somerset Place representative of the complete reality of slavery in of the entirety of North Carolina; but Somerset Place provides a glimpse specifically into the maritime activities and slavery of North Carolina. The goals the Collins family set in place for Somerset Plantation are based on the economic successes of lowland rice plantations in Wilmington, South Carolina, and Georgia. All these locations came with easy access to inland waterways and the ocean while Somerset Place faced, Sounds and difficult inlets and shoals as well as challenging swamps with little to no irrigation.

The Collins plantation documents ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)) provide a decent understanding of how the task system functioned on the plantation itself, however, little is known about the task system structure at the ropewalk, fisheries, or even the other Collins family homes in Edenton. Most likely, the enslaved labor force would have an equivalent amount of oversight for a smaller group of people. Still, the fisheries and ropewalk would require a certain level of specialized skill or at least knowledge and experience from its labor force thus, the level of skill and proximity to people in the city may have been enough reason for limited oversight.

The task system at Somerset Place does follow a similar pattern to the conclusions of scholars Pruneau ([1997](#)), Fox-Genovese ([1988](#)), and White ([1999](#)). Enslaved women were also expected to work full time in the fields around the same ages they were expected to have children suggesting that on these hard labor plantations, the need for profit outweighed the need for reproduction of enslaved property. As noted in the Somerset plantation daybook from 1850 to 1853 ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)), it is clear that on the days that all hands worked in the field,

and manual labor tasks were not separated by gender. However, other days clearly distinguish certain tasks were performed by men or performed by women. The occasional distinction between the two genders, included references to more specialized skills and more community-focused tasks. Only enslaved women performed tasks pertaining to the care of children or running the hospital when the doctor was away. On the other hand, only enslaved men are recorded to have specialized maritime skills related to the repair of vessels such as ship carpenters or a pilot ([Pruneau 1996:70-71](#)).

Somerset operated as a working plantation with enslaved laborers for a roughly eighty-year period. During this time, the new generation of plantation owners adjusted their respective management styles based on economic demands and social and moral understandings of their own relationship to the institution of slavery. Josiah Collins III came to inherit Somerset Place in January of 1830 and managed the enslaved community differently than his father and grandfather. Josiah Collins III was the first Collins family member to live at Somerset Place with his family full-time. The constant presence of the plantation owner as well as these societal changes shifted the task system for the enslaved community. Unfortunately, the nature of the tasks assigned to the enslaved laborers, beginning with canal cutting, were extremely physical and challenging ([Cecelski 2001:109-114](#)).

While there are only a few accounts of canal cutting at the Lake Company lands, they are proof of the hardships associated with canal cutting. William Trotter, who worked as an overseer at Lake Phelps for the Lake Company, recalled of this time, “Many of the Africans succumbed under this work. When they were disabled they would be left by the bank of the canal, and the next morning the returning gang would find them dead” ([Bassett 1899:93](#)). The work of canal

building at Lake Phelps isolated the enslaved laborers and placed them in harsh environments which exposed them to unfamiliar diseases ([Cecelski 2001:103-106](#)).

Another narrative from the formerly enslaved Moses Grandy further depicts the realities of canal cutting. Just a few hundred miles away from Lake Phelps, Grandy worked at the Dismal Swamp Canal. Grandy recalled, “The labor there is very severe. The ground is often very boggy; the negros are up to the middle, or much deeper, in mud and water cutting away roots and baling out mud; if they can keep their heads above water, they work on” ([Grandy 1844:22](#)). Grandy also recalls that the overseer would flog those who could not complete their task of the day and tie them to a pole with open wounds to prevent them from escaping ([Grandy 1844: 22-23](#)).

The Collins family maintained manufacturing businesses as well as fisheries. Thus, they practiced both agricultural and industrial slavery. Like other plantations of the antebellum American south, Somerset became increasingly dependent on enslaved and cheap industrial labor, almost entirely responsible for the building of canals, iron mining, logging, turpentine extraction, railroad construction, and most intercoastal maritime transportation ([Starobin 1970:132-133](#)).

Another aspect of industrial slavery was in the Edenton Ropewalk. A ropewalk was a long covered building where rope was manufactured. Hemp material was transformed into yarn and spun to create rope, twine and cords ([Shaeffer 2013](#)). Figure 2 and figure 3 depict what the Edenton Ropewalk may have looked like. Not many sources document the intricacies of Edenton’s Ropewalk however, local newspapers document that various types of twine, seine rope, white lines, and cordage were manufactured and sold at the Ropewalk. If a city or port maintained a shipyard, a ropewalk was nearby. Carl Bridenbaugh writes that in 1774, the city of Philadelphia contained six ropewalks and in them, “all the crafts connected with shipbuilding

were represented: three blockmakers, two riggers, five caulkers, two mastmen, five boatbuilders, and thirteen sailmakers who contributed to the completion of the vessels made by its forty-five shipwrights and joiners” ([Bridenbaugh 1990:94](#)). Based on the 1840 ([Collins 1840](#)) list, both enslaved men and women were labeled to have specialized skills such as ship caulker, carpenter, and weaver that would have contributed to the business of the Ropewalk. As this list was recorded at least many years after the Edenton Ropewalk saw its busiest seasons, most likely older generations of enslaved laborers would have maintained these skills as well.

Aspects of the plantation system at Somerset Place were also considered industrial labor. The rice machine, built under the Lake Company, added an element of rice production which may not have normally been on a plantation of Somerset’s size. After Josiah Collins transitioned to more profitable crops like wheat and corn, a grist mill was utilized to finish the cycle of cultivation. The addition of machinery did make these tasks more dangerous and on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1841, Jim Blount was “killed in the mill wheels.” In the late 1850s and early 1960s, the construction of the North Carolina Railroad offered opportunities for Josiah Collins to hire out enslaved laborers for extra income. In 1862, Collins hired 37 men to the railroad for two years of labor where at least two of those men died ([Collins 1841, 1862](#)).



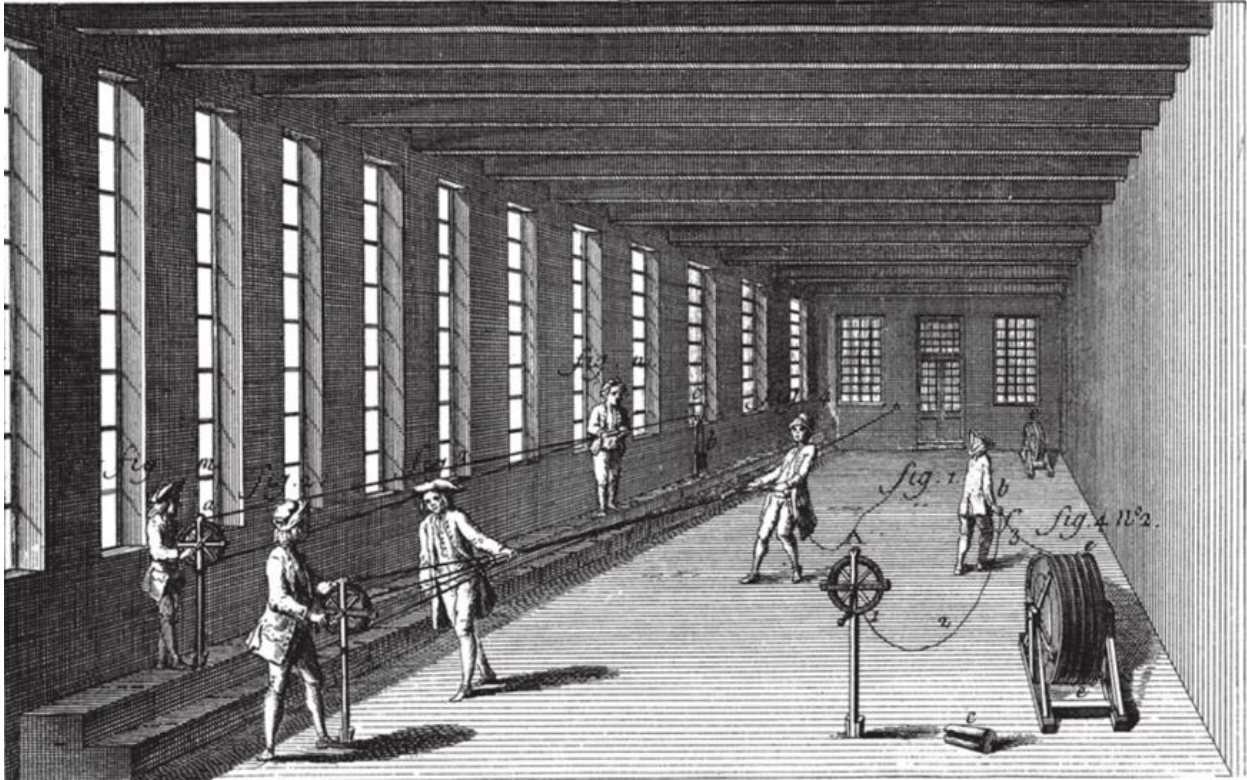


FIGURE 2. The indoor operation of a common seaport ropewalk. From Carl Bridenbaugh's 1990, *The Colonial Craftsman*.

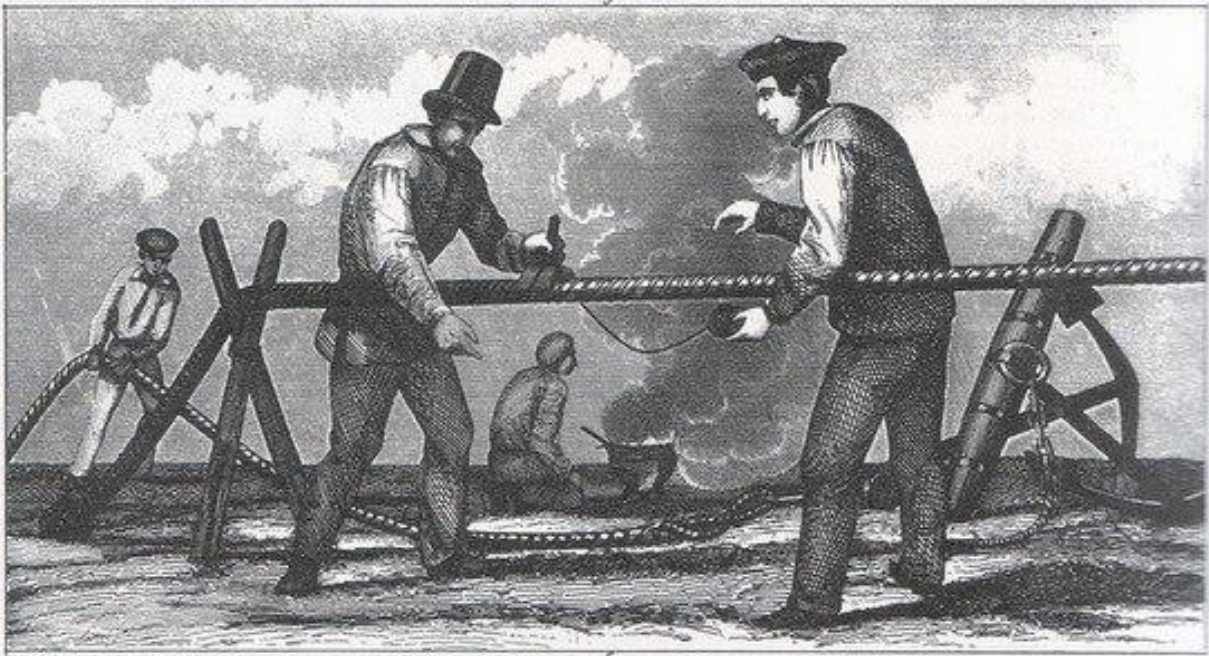


FIGURE 3. Drawing of ropewalk machine for twisting rope. Courtesy of Historic Edenton State Historic Sites.

Enslaved laborers also utilized their personal plots to practice their culture. Morgan presents accounts of southern white citizens who recalled that enslaved people grew a variety of African varieties of vegetables and thus, extended the opportunities for others to continue making cultural food. Additionally, the ability to hire themselves out to neighbors and surrounding plantations provided a form of revenue independent from the plantation owner. Enslaved laborers who were masters of their trade maintained the ability to determine the length and ability of a task ([Morgan 1982:565, 573](#)).

Many of the enslaved laborers under the Collins family maintained specialized skills which were deemed important enough by the Collins family members to record. In the list of Collins's 1940 estate, the specialized skills recorded amongst the enslaved men included carpenters, a ship carpenter and caulker, and shoemakers. For the enslaved women, the specialized skills included a weaver and a seamstress. These skills permitted the enslaved laborers to exercise some control over the locations where they were assigned but also display their increase of value to the Collins family. While these skills permitted some enslaved laborers to hire themselves out under the management of Josiah Collins I, as evident in the Lake Company records, under the paternal style of management practiced by Josiah Collins III, these specialized skills might only determine where an enslaved laborer would be assigned to a task. Not much is known about how the enslaved community spent their own time in the later time of Somerset Place's occupation as a working plantation however, Josiah Collins III took an active role in the teaching and religious activities at the plantation's chapel. In this Antebellum period, many southern enslavers viewed themselves as the paternal figure in the lives of their human property, responsible for the physical and spiritual well-being of all those associated with their plantation ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#); [Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#); [Lewis 2016:42-62](#)).

A descendant of enslaved family on Somerset plantations, Uriah Bennett gave an interview in 1937 which did not indicate any personal time given to his family besides the enslaved children. Bennett was only about 15 years old at the time of emancipation and thus, did not experience many opportunities to discover what enslaved life in the Antebellum south was like for enslaved adults. Bennett does describe the strict distinction in access to the Collins family between field hands and “house servants.” Presumably, as the two class of enslaved laborers were separate at this time, it can be concluded that personal time and the use of that time, also held distinct differences between field laborers and house servants ([Bennett in Scuppernong Farms Project 1937](#)).

Based on the plantation log books from 1850 to 1853 ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)), Josiah Collins assigned a number of enslaved laborers to cultivate and harvest in the negro patch. While this seemingly means that this particular patch was solely for the use of the enslaved community, the work was done within work time limits. While the other explanations of the task system dictate that enslaved laborers earned time to work in their own fields, the “Negro Patch” at Somerset Place would have been entirely necessary to support an enslaved labor force of over 400 people and thus, would have been a part of normal work time for enslaved laborers.

Tidewater plantations of northeastern of North Carolina have largely lacked the scholarly attention of those in South Carolina and Georgia. However, Somerset Place, and plantations like it have much to offer to the knowledge of maritime tasks on tidewater plantations. Because of the complicated layer of slavery, the historical discussion of Somerset Place needs to occur within the context of plantation and slavery in order to understand the intricacies of the plantation system. Somerset Place’s plantation management does not fit perfectly within any one

management system however, Somerset does hold many similarities to the other large plantations which utilized the task system.

The examination of the task system can be seen as problematic as the early examinations completed by white researchers maintain racist prejudices and the lack of primary sources from the enslaved perspective. The task system gave enslaved laborers agency within the plantation setting and even the American economy, of course within the violent and coercive reality of American slavery. In the instance of this research, similar issues arise. Very few accounts from the formerly enslaved specifically discussing the task system within Somerset Place, exist and much of this examination still relies on the plantation accounts and personal correspondence between white enslavers.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE TASK SYSTEM OF MARITIME INDUSTRY, 1786-1829

Josiah Collins I immigrated from England to the colony of Rhode Island in 1773 but the economic prospects of Edenton led him to move his family to Edenton, North Carolina in 1777. Upon his arrival in Edenton, Josiah Collins I established himself in the regional maritime industry including shipping and vessel outfitting. Collins was the senior partner in a shipping business called Collins, Stewart, & Muir. Business records ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)) from 1782 through 1785 indicate that Collins, Stewart, & Muir owned or rented and regularly operated at least nine different vessels. The vessels included sloops, schooners, brigs, and ship-rigged vessels and transferred rice, sugar, tobacco, and corn between Edenton and ports along the Atlantic coast including Philadelphia, Charleston, and Jamaica. This company provided access to many vessels, including ships and schooners with shipping services primarily between the United States and the West Indies. In some instances, schooners and brigs like *Alliance* would later transport supplies along the canals to Lake Phelps ([Tarlton 1954:2-5](#)).

Collins, Stewart, & Muir recorded the expense of vessel care and maintenance. For instance, in May 1783, the company purchased tar, pitch, and pump tacks for repairs to the schooner *Dolphin*. In July and August of the same year, the company purchased nails, oil, and cordage from the old ropewalk for another brig, *Alarm*. The Collins, Stewart, & Muir company brought maritime revenue to Edenton and provided the vessels which harbored in Edenton's waters. In the same year, Josiah Collins purchased the Edenton Ropewalk from the Joseph Hewes Estate further contributing to the maritime industry of Edenton ([Collins 1783](#)).

In 1784, Nathaniel Allen and Samuel Dickinson and other individuals from Halifax and Edenton received authorization from the General Assembly to conduct a project to drain Lake Phelps and establish substantial agriculture on the land. The group was given a period of seven

years to develop the land tax-free but after a survey of the land, the members decided a rice plantation which maintained and utilized the water in the Lake would be more beneficial and economical than completely draining the Lake. Within a few years, Josiah Collins joined the partnership to formerly create the Lake Company ([Tarlton 1954:2-7](#)).

The Lake Company made multiple purchases of private and unsettled land to total nearly 109,978 acres for their agricultural project. In order to cut irrigation canals to create a plantation capable of yielding rice, the Lake Company needed a large amount of cheap labor. The task of canal cutting was dangerous and intensive, particularly in an unsettled piece of land. Given this reasoning, the Lake Company partners did not have the financial benefit of hiring out the enslaved laborers of neighboring farms and plantations. Additionally, northeastern North Carolina did not contain large numbers of concentrated enslaved people at this time, leaving the collection of a large cheap labor force more complicated ([Tarlton 1954:7-14](#); [Cecelski 2001:112-114](#)).

Unlike southeastern North Carolina in cities such as Wilmington, the port of Edenton was not easily accessible and thus, larger vessels which carried enslaved people did not easily navigate the shoals of the Outer Banks. Not many records remain to provide extensive analysis of the North Carolinian seaborne slave trade however, a few ports, like Brunswick and Roanoke took records that give glimpses into the number of enslaved individuals arriving through these ports. In the early eighteenth century, most of the seaborne enslaved imports arrived from surrounding American colonies or the West Indies. Minchinton writes that Edenton received a total of 203 enslaved individuals divided in eighteen vessels from Antigua and Jamaica ([Minchinton 1994:9-10](#); [Cecelski 2001:105](#)).



Still, the interest in enslaved Africans directly from Africa began to increase in frequency in North Carolina toward the end of the eighteenth century. A schooner delivered a shipment of enslaved Africans to New Bern in 1774. While it is likely that the ports did not consistently record enslaved importations, the state of North Carolina received a total of 993 enslaved individuals on 122 vessels through the seaborne slave trade between the years of 1784 to 1790 and The Port of Roanoke, which fed to Edenton, received 323 individuals on 9 vessels in the period. Specifically, port records indicate that 231 enslaved individuals on three vessels were transported to Edenton from Africa, with at least 161 of those headed to provide labor for the Lake Company ([Minchinton 1994:10-16](#)).

In the eighteenth century, many of the enslaved people who were shipped to North Carolina primarily traveled through land routes through Virginia and South Carolina. In the following decades, the number of black people, either enslaved or free increased however, very few maritime imports of enslaved people accounted for the increase. Still, North Carolina port records indicate less enslaved cargo than what was advertised in contemporary newspapers. By 1780, North Carolina contained around 91,000 enslaved black inhabitants, a 30.7% increase from 1770 and 25.2% of the total population ([Parker 1993:6-7](#)).

The majority of families in North Carolina did not lay claim to enslaved people. By 1790, 31 percent of white families in North Carolina legally owned enslaved people leaving a majority of enslaved people gathered in larger coastal or near-coastal cities including, Halifax, Edenton, Newbern, and Wilmington. According to the North Carolina 1790 census ([Chowan County Census 1790](#)), only thirteen white families claimed between 100 and 299 enslaved people. By 1800, enslaved people numbered 21,632 and accounted for 38% of the city's total population ([Parker 1993:11-14](#)).

## The Lake Company

Circa 1784, Collins entered into an agreement with a contact from Collins, Stewart, & Muir, named Richard Grinnell, to acquire and transport enslaved individuals directly from Africa to North Carolina. In 1786, *Camden* entered the port in Edenton with a cargo of 80 enslaved Africans. *Camden* brought another shipment of enslaved Africans in March of 1787 with 70 enslaved individuals. Just a few months later, in June of 1787, *Jennett* brought another 81 enslaved laborers presumably because the shipment did not reach its desired location. In total, 231 Africans were enslaved and brought to Edenton to create a functioning rice field for the Lake Company. The Lake Company's payment for *Camden*'s travel to Africa and back is seen in Figure 4 ([Tarlton 1954:6-7](#); [Redford and D'Orso 1988:90](#); [Michinton 1994:17](#)).

The enslaved laborers brought to Edenton on *Camden* were described as between the ages of 20 and 25 with very black skin. The origin of these particular enslaved people would have aligned with common European and American expectations and generalizations to create an ideal labor force for the extreme conditions of canal building at a proposed rice plantation. West Africans established a highly successful cultivation of rice in the 1500s. As cultivation expanded and transatlantic trade grew, enslavers began to frequently visit the popular and successful rice production areas and transport enslaved laborers to the Americas under the assumption that the knowledge of the crop and familiarity of the production process made African laborers the most qualified to do the manual labor in rice fields ([Redford and D'Orso 1988:59](#); [Littlefield 1981:8-32](#)).

North Carolina and Virginia contain several natural lakes surrounded by swampland and forested wetlands which provided travel, trade, and agricultural potential. Canal-building projects contributed to each of those activities and thus, was not an uncommon undertaking at the



Camden 12<sup>th</sup> March 1787

Am <sup>o</sup> Bro. forward		1366.10.5 <sup>2</sup>
✓ Negro account for 12 <sup>th</sup> Negroes		
Sam <sup>l</sup> 1 <sup>st</sup> - Sam <sup>l</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> - Stephen 2 <sup>nd</sup> - Geo <sup>l</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> - 1100		1100
John 2 <sup>nd</sup> - Sam <sup>l</sup> 3 <sup>rd</sup> - Peter 2 <sup>nd</sup>		300
Robert 2 <sup>nd</sup> - Peter 3 <sup>rd</sup> - 290		290
		<u>2090.10.5<sup>2</sup></u>
✓ Samuel Dickenson		
Negroes acc <sup>t</sup> for 12 <sup>th</sup> Negroes	32	
Brig Camden for 12 <sup>th</sup> Negroes	38	17.5.6
Coat <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 357.7.10 <sup>2</sup>		<u>60.5.6</u>
✓ James & Anthony		
Brig Camden for 12 <sup>th</sup> Negroes of her Cargo at Phil <sup>a</sup>		
as of acc <sup>t</sup> date 2 <sup>nd</sup> 1787	148.5.2 <sup>4</sup>	
Coat <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 357.7.10 <sup>2</sup>	31.3.	<u>149.8.2<sup>4</sup></u>
✓ Sundries to Samuel Dickenson		
Brig Camden for acc <sup>t</sup> of Phil <sup>a</sup> at Phil <sup>a</sup>	70.2.4	
Coat <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 357.7.10 <sup>2</sup>	4.17.6	77.19.10
General Expenses Sundries of the Brig Camden	165.1.4	
at Phil <sup>a</sup>	122.3	
Coat <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 357.7.10 <sup>2</sup>	207.9.4	
Coat <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 357.7.10 <sup>2</sup>	19.16.7 <sup>2</sup>	<u>317.5.11<sup>2</sup></u>
✓ William Collins for Coat <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> at Phil <sup>a</sup>	122.1.3	
Coat <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 357.7.10 <sup>2</sup>	8.2.9	<u>130.3.</u>
✓ Richard Bennett for Coat <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> at Phil <sup>a</sup>	335.16.3	
Coat <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 357.7.10 <sup>2</sup>	22.7.9	<u>358.4.</u>
✓ Brig Camden for Coat <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> at Phil <sup>a</sup>	29.15	
Coat <sup>s</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 357.7.10 <sup>2</sup>	1.19.2	<u>31.14.3.</u>
		<u>915.8.8<sup>2</sup></u>
✓ Sundries to William Collins		
Brig Camden for acc <sup>t</sup> of 12 <sup>th</sup> Negroes	13.15	
Charges acc <sup>t</sup> for 12 <sup>th</sup> Negroes	16.3	
		<u>29.4.</u>
✓ Sundries to Richard Bennett		
Brig Camden for acc <sup>t</sup> of 12 <sup>th</sup> Negroes	14.8	
Charges acc <sup>t</sup> for 12 <sup>th</sup> Negroes	240.16	
		<u>254.14.</u>
✓ Sundries accounts to Brig Camden		
General Expenses for 12 <sup>th</sup> Negroes	17.15.8	
Negroes acc <sup>t</sup> for 12 <sup>th</sup> Negroes	1000	
✓ General Expenses		
paid for carrying Instruments	99.1.7	

FIGURE 4. Entry from the Lake Company Books of payment for enslaved Africans from Camden March 12th, 1787. From the Anne S. Graham Collection.

turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Canal systems were crucial to the development of maritime commerce in the area. Larger canals connected ports and served as avenues for larger trade vessels while smaller canals allowed for swamp draining, producing water power, rice cultivation, and local waterways. However, the realities of canal cutting proved difficult and dangerous ([Cecelski 2001:105-106](#)).

Just north of Elizabeth City, the Great Dismal Swamp canal system, the largest canal constructed before the Civil War, connected Chesapeake Bay to the Albemarle Sound. Moses Grandy experienced the labor of canal cutting in the Great Dismal Swamp and recounted the experience of the canal labor, “The labor there is very severe. The ground is often very boggy; the negroes are up to the middle, or much deeper, in the mud; if they can keep their heads above water, they work on. They lodge in huts, or, as they are called, camps, made of shingles or boards. They lie down in the mud which has adhered to them, making a great fire to dry themselves, and keep off the cold...” ([Grandy 1844:22](#)). In the first comprehensive study of slavery in North Carolina, John Spencer Bassett records the severe conditions of Lake Company’s enslaved laborers cutting the canals as told by an unnamed “intelligent gentleman” who spent time at Somerset Place, “When they were disabled they would be left by the bank of the canal, and the next morning the returning gang would find them dead” ([Bassett 1899:93](#)).

The first maritime task assigned to the Lake Company’s enslaved community altered the landscape of Lake Phelps’s northern shore and the formation of maritime paths between the Lake and Albemarle Sound. Modification of the lands for rice production brought more problems for neighboring plantations. The survey initially taken to draw boundaries along the land for the Lake Company was deemed unfair by people who sold their land to the Company, bringing a multitude of official complaints in the following years. Charles Pettigrew wrote that he received

the lower quality of his land while the Lake Company had acquired his profitable land. Pettigrew also claims that the boundaries drawn by the Lake Company caused his land to flood because the amount of water moved by the mills along the canal made Lake Phelps rise too high and flood the shoreline ruining Pettigrew's crops without a draining ditch ([Pettigrew in Lemmon 1971\[1\]:179-182](#)).

Additionally, draining pocosins and swampland permitted a higher likelihood for destructive wildfires. In the absence of wetlands, the soil served as more of a fire starter rather than a way to keep the fire at bay. In a letter from Lake Company partner, Nathaniel Allen to Charles Pettigrew dated April 25, 1791, Allen describes a wildfire that started south of Lake Phelps and quickly spread northward only to be extinguished by rain before it could cause damage to the Lake Phelps plantation ([Allen in Lemmon 1971\[1\]:98-100](#); [Cecelski 2001:108-109](#)).

The enslaved Africans were purchased for the sole purpose of canal building and suffered significant but documented losses due to the severity and reality of enslavement. Additionally, as the Lake Company pursued a working rice plantation, the Company allocated funds to hire out and purchased enslaved and freed black laborers to complete the more specialized skills needed at the Lake Company lands. From 1787 to 1789, the Lake Company hired out enslaved or freed black laborers to travel to the canal. Most of the entries for hire do not detail the assigned tasks, however, a few individuals were hired consistently with the hire of smaller vessels to pilot and/or accompany those vessels ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)).

Hiring enslaved people proved more economically beneficial for farmers and plantation owners. Enslaved labor, even while temporary, was less expensive than hiring free white labor. According to Darlene M. Perry's ([2004:7, 91](#)) thesis hiring skilled enslaved laborers allowed

opportunities for white landowners to move up in social status. Traditionally, the hiring period of an enslaved individual lasted for around a year while the Lake Company did hire a small number of enslaved laborers for a longer period, the partners' typically contracted laborers for only a few days at the Lake. This could be explained by the presence of several freed skilled black laborers in the Edenton area who hired out themselves and their family members or the simple movement of enslaved property belonging to the Lake Company partners. Regardless of the reason for the significantly shorter hire periods, the enslaved community members which supplied the labor on the Lake Company's land participated in an elevated level of movement between properties.

The Lake Company hired enslaved and freed black men, and on occasion, women with specialized skills to conduct specific tasks at the Lake Company's land. On July 27, 1787, the Lake company partners "paid Negro Will for 3 days hire going over [to Lake]" ([Collins, Allen, and Dickinson 1787](#)). Additionally, Josiah Collins paid "a Black for 400 needles" on October 2, 1787. The Lake Company members also hired out their personal enslaved property to conduct work at Lake Phelps. On October 26, 1787, the Lake Company paid Josiah Collins for "7 days hire Bricklayer Welcom at the Lake" ([Collins, Allen, and Dickinson 1787](#)). Another example was to Samuel Dickinson for "General Expenses for 33 days hire negro [Jack] (shoemaker)" on April 1, 1790 ([Collins, Allen, and Dickinson 1790](#)). Additionally, in a letter dated January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1789, from Josiah Collins II to John Gray Blount, Collins mentions the hire of "Dick the Pilot" for a one-year period ([Collins in Blount 1952:453](#)).

While most of the consistent hires for the Lake Company did not necessarily name the enslaved individual, particularly if there was more than one person being hired, a few individuals were named. While the Lake Company records are not entirely clear why these individuals were named while the others were not, the records do indicate that the tasks performed by the named

individuals were more specialized and detailed rather than just “going to the Lake.” For example, a man named Dick was hired at least eleven times by the Lake Company in the four years of records, many times with along with the hire of a few other enslaved individuals to take food and supplies to the Lake. One hire of Dick in 1790 pays for the general expenses of his seven days hire at the levee. It is possible that this Dick is the same enslaved person as “ Dick the Pilot” as the skillsets seem to align. Andrew and Isaac also have consistent hirings in the Lake Company records, most likely transporting supplies to the labor force at the Lake. However, in September of 1787, Andrew was hired for a total of four days to go after and find a canoe ([Collins, Allen, and Dickinson 1787](#)).

The length of hire for these tasks suggests the length of time needed to travel from Edenton to the canals at Somerset Place. Beginning in 1735, William Mackey’s Ferry transported people and cargo across between Edenton and the southern shore of Albemarle Sound. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a sailboat, like the one at Mackey’s Ferry, would take most or all day to cross the Sound, depending on the weather. However, the Lake Company and Collins vessels passed through Columbia and down the Scuppernong River. Whereas the distance between Edenton and the Landing at Mackey’s was approximately eight miles, the distance from Edenton to the Town of Columbia was approximately 25 miles and the mouth of the Transportation canal 36 miles ([Watson 1974:248-253](#)).

From the Lake Company records, many of the short-term hires lasted three to four days. For the four instances of hired individuals carrying someone over the Sound, the hiring period was either one day or one and three-quarters of a day. For the hires which specify that the individuals were going to the Lake or the Canal, the hire time was usually four days. Assuming

this time included work such as loading and unloading cargo, a trip carrying cargo between Edenton and Lake Phelps and back would regularly last four days.

In December of 1777, Ebenezer Hazard visited Edenton to establish a post office system between Philadelphia and Savannah. Ebenezer describes his experience crossing the Albemarle Sound. “Put my horse on board the Ferry Boat, but as the Wind was ahead, & the Passage would be tedious I preferred going in what they call a Canoe but it is more like one of our New York small Pettiaugers without Masts. For this Purpose, I hired a Negro to assist one of the Ferrymen in rowing me over...” Hazard goes on to recount the circumstances that led to the need to cross the Sound on a rowboat further inland to account for the wind. His horse did not cross the Sound on the ferry until much later that night ([Johnston 1959:358-359,368](#)).

### Lake Company Hires of 1787

# of Individuals	Length of Hire	Compensation
2	3 days	0.18.0
1	4 days	0.12.0
1	4 days	0.12.0
3	3.5 days	1.11.6
1	3 days	0.9.0
2	3 days	0.18.0
1	4 days	0.12.0
1	4 days	0.12.0
1	NA	0.5.0
2	1.3 days	1.0.0
1	3 days	0.12.0
1	NA	1.15.0
2	14.5 days	2.3.6
1	NA	2.13.0
1	NA	1.16.0
1	9 days	1.7.0
2	3 days	0.18.0
1	1 day	0.4.0
1	NA	1.4.0
2	6 days	1.16.0
1	7 days	2.16.0
2	6 days	1.16.0
1	NA	0.2.16
3	1 day	0.14.4

TABLE 1. Lake Company Hires of 1787. Data from Anne S. Graham Collection, MfP. 127, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.

### Lake Company Hires of 1788

# of Individuals	Length of Hire	Compensation
1	1 year	29.0.0
1	1 year	20.19.9
1	12 days	NA
3	6 days	2.14.0
2	6 days	1.16.0
1	5 days	0.15.0
3	4 days	1.16.0
1	4 days	0.12.0
1	1 year	15.0.0
2	1 month & 24 days	6.0.0
1	7 days	1.1.0
3	6.3 months	31.3.4
1	NA	0.9.0
1	1 day	0.11.0
1	20 days	1.2.0
1	3 days	0.9.0
2	4 days	1.11.0
4	3 days	30.0.0
1	4 days	NA
3	3 days	1.19.0
1	22 days	1.4.5
1	2 months & 10 days	3.17.6
1	4 days	0.12.0
2	4 days	1.4.0
2	2 days	0.12.0
2	1.75 days	0.10.6
2	2 days	0.12.0
2	3 days	0.18.0
3	3 days	1.17.3
3	4 days	1.16.0

TABLE 2. Lake Company Hires of 1788. Data from Anne S. Graham Collection, MfP. 127, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.



### Lake Company Hires of 1789

# of Individuals	Length of Hire	Compensation
1	6.5 months	NA
1	20.5 months	NA
3	1 day	4.9.0
2	6 Days	1.16.0
1	6 days	0.18.0
2	6 days	1.16.0
1	10 months	10.0.0
1	6 days	0.18.0
3	6 days	2.14.0
3	3 days	1.10.9
1	4 days	0.12.0
1	40 days	2.0.0
2	5 days	1.10.0
1	3 days	0.15.0
5	4 days	3.16.0
2	4 days	1.4.0
1	4 days	3.18.9
4	3 days	2.4.0
1	2 days	6.6.0
3	2 days	0.18.0
5	1 day	1.6.8
2	4 days	1.4.0
3	3 days	1.7.0
1	NA	3.15.0
5	1 day	1.2.6
1	1 day	0.12.0
4	1 day	0.12.0
4	1 day	0.16.0
1	4 days	0.12.0
4	4 days	2.1.0
4	4 days	2.8.0
1	7 months	3.18.6
4	9 days	6.8.0
1	1 year	23.11.0
1	28 days	1.13.4
2	5 days	1.10.0
4	4 days	2.8.0
2	2.5 days	0.15.0
2	4 days	1.13.0
2	4 days	1.7.0
3	5 days	2.5.0
5	4 days	2.16.0

TABLE 3. Lake Company Hires of 1789. Data from Anne S. Graham Collection, MfP. 127, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.

### Lake Company Hires of 1790

# of Individuals	Length of Hire	Compensation
4	3 days	1.16.6
3	3.5 days	1.11.6
1	3 days	0.9.0
1	7 days	1.1.0
2	12 days	3.12.0
1	11 days	1.13.0
3	3 days	1.7.0
1	5 months & 15.5 days	27.19.7
1	3 days	1.5.0
1	33 days	5.1.5
4	4 days	2.8.0
1	1 years	45.0.0
1	3 months & 22 days	11.10.0
1	1 year	16.0.0
1	6.15 months	10.6.6
2	8.15 months	27.6.6
1	9 months	15.0.0
1	6 weeks	2.9.6

TABLE 4. Lake Company Hires of 1790. Data from Anne S. Graham Collection, MfP. 127, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.

The consistency of individuals hired to complete maritime tasks, whether more simple or complex, indicate that the enslaved and freed black community surrounding the Lake Company's business partners maintained significant maritime industrial knowledge and skills. While these Lake Company records supply information for only four years, this provides a good base for the maritime movement and the enslaved community's transition from the task of cutting canals to more of the tasks on a typical plantation system.

The navigation canals built by the enslaved community were navigable for small schooners and plantation vessels which created an easy pathway to transport agricultural goods between the Lake Company lands and Columbia or Edenton. The Pettigrew letters list multiple occasions in which messengers were sent in both directions along the canals to transport information or goods. In a letter to his wife, Mary, Charles Pettigrew asks her to send a barrel of

“cyder” to a neighbor by canoe or another letter which was delivered by a ferryman. Additionally, a letter from Alexander Millan states that Josiah Collins requested Charles Pettigrew attend the funeral of a friend and even offered “a canoe & hands” ([Millan in Lemmon 1971\[1\]:120,144,274](#)).

Letters from the Pettigrew family document the more common methods of movement between Edenton and the properties along Lake Phelps’s shore. In 1801, Alexander Millen wrote to Charles Pettigrew to inform him of a funeral with a request for Pettigrew to leave his property in Washington County and travel to Edenton, writing “...a Canoe & hands wait on you at Mr. Chessons.” Additionally, produce was transported from ports to the Lake properties in canoes traveling along the canal. James Hoskins wrote Ebenezer Pettigrew of the return of the vessel, *Sally Ann* to Columbia and a list of what Pettigrew could expect to receive, “... the canoe will not carry all your things you will receive the following articles – Viz 4 par hand Irons 2 saws, chair Harness, 3 bundle of Plains, I ditto Cambrick, 1 ditto files – 24 Hats, the remainder shall be taken care of” ([Hoskins in Lemmon 1971\[1\]:274,634](#)).

Along the Scuppernong River and at the opening of the canals, merchants towed and docked vessels to transport goods. In a letter from Charles to Ebenezer dated September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1806, Charles wrote about Daniel Bateman, who owned and managed a shipyard in Columbia, and his actions with a damaged vessel, “Bateman got into the River this morning & moored his vessel... If it is Damaged the vessel must be Towed up either to the mouth of the Canal the wheat to be got in the upper Story of Mr. Trotter’s Warehouse...” ([Pettigrew in Lemmon 1971\[1\]:395](#)). Because of the potential damage to the vessel’s mast and rigging, Bateman later mentioned that he would need to acquire another vessel for the upcoming season. On other

occasions, vessels waited at the canal opening to transport goods to and from the Lake properties ([Lemmon 1971\[1\]:528](#)).

After the construction of the canals, the most commonly assigned maritime task for enslaved laborers was the cultivation of rice fields. A letter from Charles Pettigrew to Mary Pettigrew in October of 1795 provides an idea of how long the process of cutting and preparing was. Pettigrew writes, “When I arrived I found the negroes had been cutting rice almost all the week – we finished reaping yesterday, & there is a good deal down which I must see put up in stacks before I leave them, which I expect we can have done by Saturday [sic] evening” ([Pettigrew in Lemmon 1971\[1\]:166-167](#)). From this information, the process of preparing the rice at the Pettigrew’s plantation would have taken a little over a week. While Pettigrew’s plantation would likely have different expectations and precedents than the Lake Company’s plantation, the workload would have been comparable. Still, Pettigrew continues in the same letter to comment on the perceived laziness of the enslaved laborers at Lake Phelps writing that all they had done was weed a road since he had last visited ([Pettigrew in Lemmon 1971\[1\]:167](#)).

Funds dedicated to the “negro account” also paid for food, medicine, and essential items to maintain the enslaved community. Consistent purchases of rum, corn, molasses, and pork for the enslaved laborers as well as served as payment for hired labor at the Lake. Additionally, the Lake Company’s books made payments to women in town for making clothes, shoes, and blankets for enslaved laborers. Samuel Dickinson, one of the partners in the Lake Company also provided necessary monthly medicine and medical care for many of the enslaved individuals at the Lake Company lands ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)).

### The Ropewalk

Another maritime industry in which Josiah Collins was the manufacturer of textiles for vessels traveling on the Albemarle Sound. Edenton served as a vital port for North Carolina's maritime industry. The number of ships and vessels present at any time in Edenton's harbor created the necessity for locations of repair and shipbuilding. Edenton's ropewalk was built around 1777 by Joseph Hewes near the Edenton's Bay (Figure 5). In 1783, the elder Collins purchased the Ropewalk with another Edenton businessman and appointed his son, Josiah Collins II, as manager. A ropewalk was a series of low buildings where the fiber from hemp was spun into various versions of cord and rope by the spin of a turning wheel. The Edenton ropewalk sat on a 131-acre tract of land and included several buildings to complete the ropewalk industry ([Johnston 1959:362](#)).

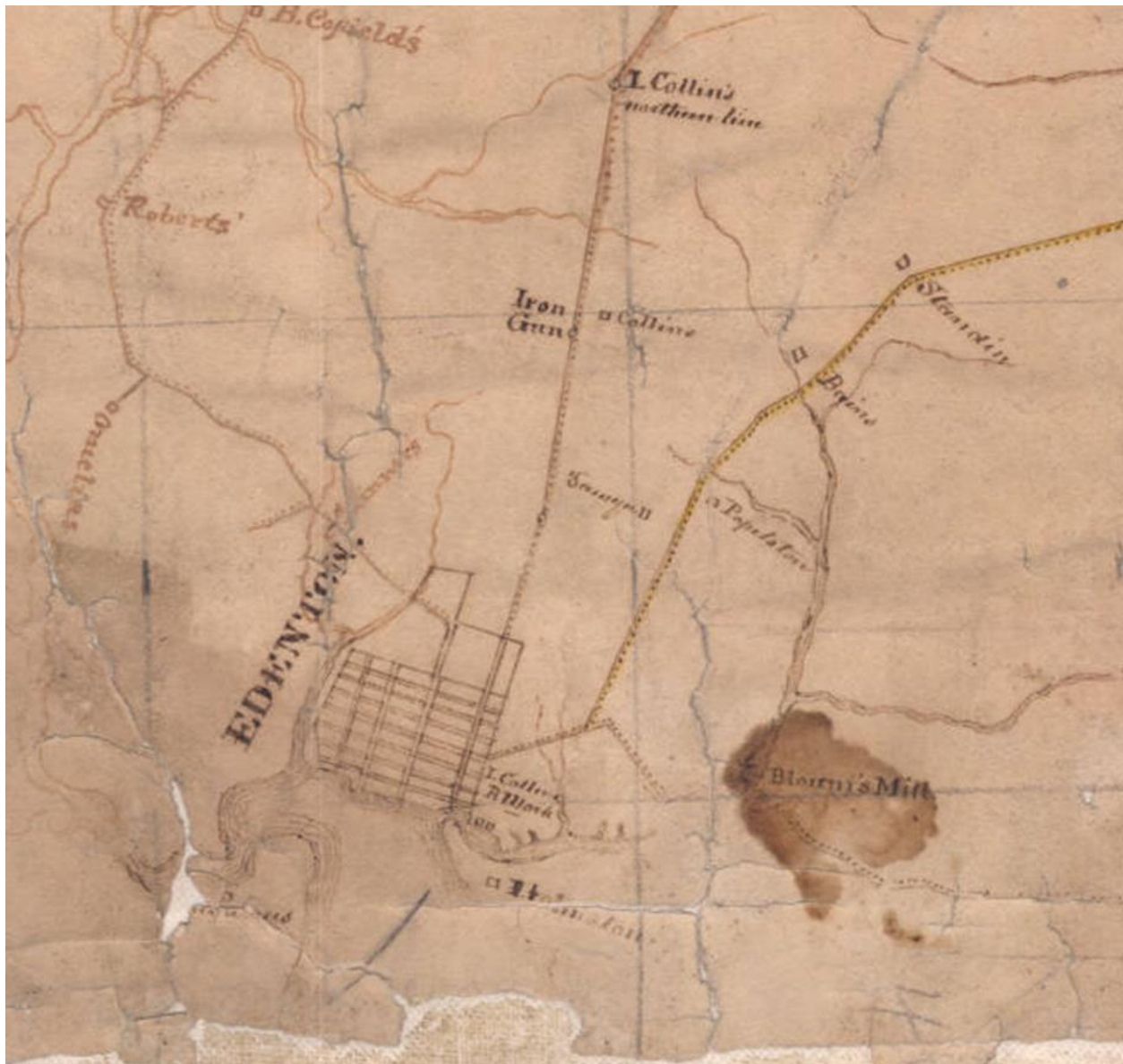


FIGURE 5. Section of "A Map of the Roads and Country Between Edenton and Norfolk with the Dismal Swam and Great Canals Park." From North Carolina Maps from UNC.

According to a list of taxable property of Josiah Collins II in 1839, the ropewalk was a total of 131 acres with 20 cultivation acres. The ropewalk land included one house, the ropework, a wheel house, two yarn houses, one tailors shop, one kitchen, one mill house, one cotton house, one carpenters shop, one engine house, one warehouse, a stable and carriage house, a cow house, and a fowl house. The development of the Ropewalk was a strategic move to

further establish Edenton as an important maritime center in the North Carolina coastal landscape. Edenton sat close to Roanoke Inlet on the shallow Albemarle Sound, allowing for vessels in need of rigging and repairs to be transferred with little difficulty from the open ocean to the safety of Edenton Harbor. The Edenton shipyard was located on the other end of the Harbor and relied on the Ropewalk's resources to supply the vessels in the yard.

The ropewalk in Edenton was the only local supplier of rope and cordage in the area for a while and thus, in constant need of labor. For instance, the Edenton Ropewalk was remarkably busy in the spring of 1795. In a letter to John Gray Blount, Josiah Collins II writes that he did not have the time to travel due to the high demand of cordage for rigging vessels in Edenton's harbor, "Such has been the demand for Cordage at this place for a month or two past, that I have not been able to keep even a coil of rope on hand to supply those who frequently apply for it in small quantities" ([Blount 1952:549](#)).

In the 1780s and 1790s, the Edenton Ropewalk benefited from the outfitting of many vessels in the Collins shipping industry as well as the many vessels built in the Edenton shipyard and those that visited the port. The Lake Company books ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)) indicate that the Ropewalk fitted and repaired *Camden's* rope and cordage system. According to *The North Carolina Journal* ([1795:3](#)), in Figure 6 thirty vessels also called for the constant employment of eighteen hands. Before the turn of the nineteenth century, the Ropewalk was a profitable and frequently visited business. However, after the closure of Roanoke Inlet around 1800 and the reopening of coastal trade at the end of the War of 1812, the Ropewalk faced a shift in the vessels serviced.



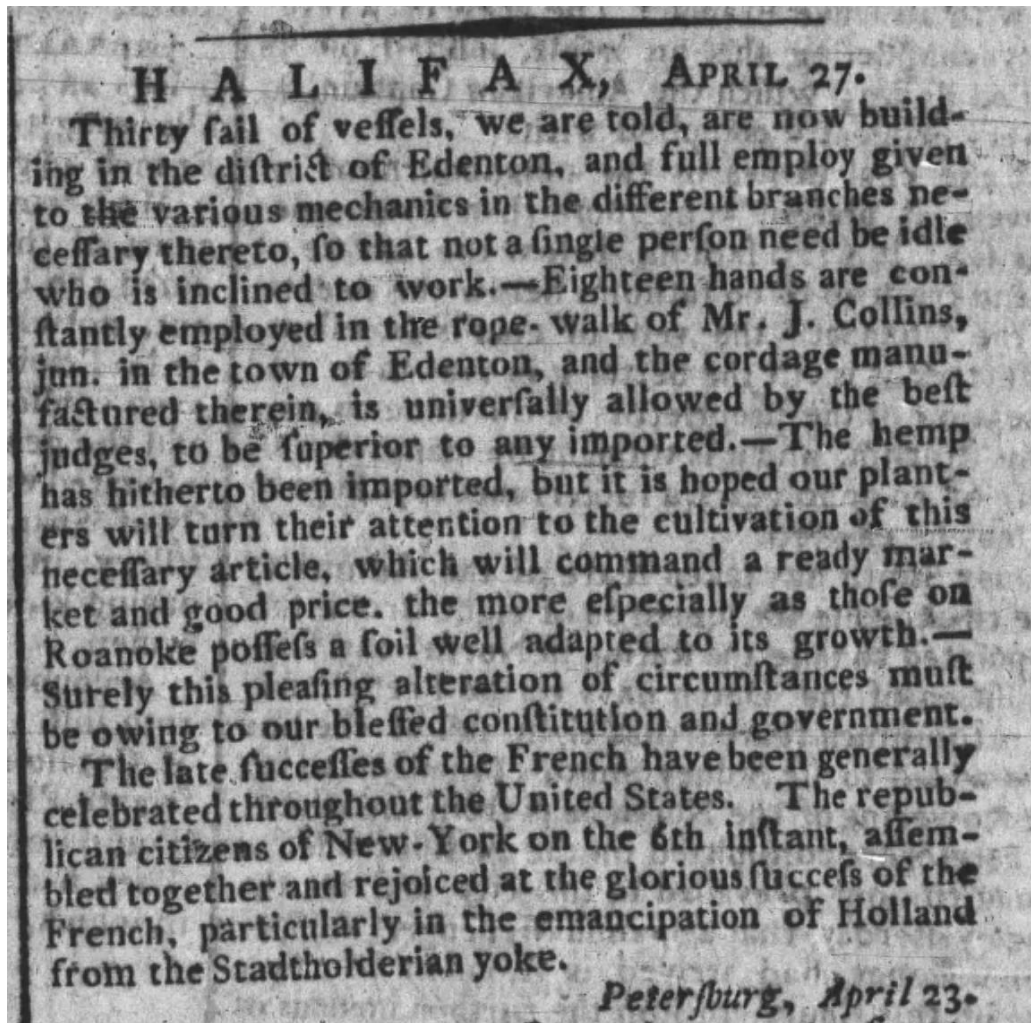


FIGURE 6. The North Carolina Journal April 27, 1795. Halifax, North Carolina.

Most of the laborers employed at the ropewalk at this time were enslaved labor. The tasks completed at the Ropewalk required specialized manufacturing skills. As discussed previously, specialized skills typically increased the price or compensation for enslaved work and the value of the enslaved individual. An advertisement from *The State Gazette of North Carolina* (1793:4) (FIGURE 7) calls for the capture of an escaped enslaved man named Yarmouth. The author of the advert mentions that Yarmouth was taught specialized rigging skills in the Edenton ropewalk and thus, could be useful to vessels leaving the area. The author also mentions that he paid more for the purchase of Yarmouth, because of his specialized skills. With that, it is



gathered that employment at the ropewalk and the specialized training which came with it, raised the financial value of those enslaved individuals, raising the business and social value of the ropewalk.

**TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS REWARD,**  
**W**ILL be given for taking up and delivering to me, or securing in some gaol that I get him, my Negro-Man **YARMOUTH**, who ran away about ten days past; he is about five feet nine inches high, black, with his knees pretty close, and when alarmed by fear, stutters, his eyes rather small; he has been brought up in a rope-walk, and very ready at work in rigging; from which circumstance, I judge he will endeavour to get a passage to the northward in a vessel; but I hope, as he cost me the price of four common negroes, and has never, since I owned him, received a stroke from me, no master of a vessel would be guilty of so high an offence to justice, as to endeavour to deprive me of him; and they may rest assured that I shall send through all the northern states in pursuit of him, and if transported hence by any vessel, the utmost rigour of the law will be pursued. He may be lurking about Edenton, as he there obtained his trade, in Mr. Collins's rope-walk.  
**WHITMILL HILL.**  
*February 8, 1793.*

FIGURE 7. Runaway slave advertisement from The State Gazette of North Carolina. March 9, 1793.

Edenton's Ropewalk would have been an essential counterpart to Edenton's shipyard. According to local oral history and tradition, Joseph Hewes, the founder of the ropewalk, also established a shipyard where Pembroke Creek meets Edenton Bay ([Pruden in Cheeseman 1980](#)). In 1936, W.D. Pruden, an Edenton resident living near the supposed site of Edenton's former

shipyard, described the remains as they had been exposed after a large storm. According to Pruden, the shipyard maintained an outer bulkhead of solid logs filled with large stones. The shipyard included a wooden railway which Pruden rationalized as a track to haul vessels out of the water for repair. However, the 1883 Marine Corp of Engineers Map depicts the Norfolk Southern Railroad extension of the railroad wharf to transport cargo from vessels to train carts in the same area as described by Pruden. Still, C. J. Sauthier's 1769 plan of Edenton indicates this general location as one of five wharves along Edenton's waterfront. Because of the previous establishment of a wharf, the presence of multiple vessels as described in the newspapers, and the relatively close proximity of Edenton's ropewalk, it would make sense for a shipyard to be present in this area however, no shipyard is noted nor visible on Exum Newby's later map created some time prior to 1845 ([Pruden in Cheeseaman 1980](#)).

Other specialized skills also allowed enslaved individuals to leave Collins's supervision and provide personal agency. Josiah Collins II was assigned to the management of the ropewalk and international shipping business and participated in limited direct observation of enslaved laborers equipped with more maritime skills. In a January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1789, letter to John Gray Blount, Josiah Collins II mentions the hire of "Dick the Pilot" for a one-year period ([Blount 1952:453](#)).

#### Enslaved Agency and the Enslaver

There are a few documented ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)) instances where the enslaved community at Lake Phelps displayed their agency by stepping outside of the normalcy of the slavery system. In a few instances, enslaved individuals utilized maritime skills and maritime cultural practices to resist enslavement. Of the instances documented, most of these displays were enslaved escapees and only the payments for those who were caught were

recorded. Of the escapees recorded in the Lake Company's books from 1787 to 1790, all were male.

Displays of agency also occurred in the forms of cultural or religious practice. The only documented display of cultural and/or religious nature at this time was spread orally through Thomas Trotter, the overseer and plantation planner,

At night they would begin to sing their native songs...In a short while they would become so wrought up that, utterly oblivious to the danger involved, they would grasp their bundles of personal effects, swing them on their shoulders, and setting their faces towards Africa, would march down into the water singing as they marched till recalled to their senses only by the drowning of some of the party ([Redford and D'Orso 1988:132](#)).

Displays of agency did not only occur in acts of defiance but also in the ability of enslaved laborers to receive the profit of their skills and labor. Much of the money for hire recorded in the Lake Company Books would be given to the legal owner of the enslaved person or persons hired to provide labor. However, a few enslaved persons received money directly for the task assigned to them. For instance, Joe Welcome, a bricklayer and masonry worker, received payment for his work on the buildings at the Lake Plantation even though he was, in some form, legally owned by the Lake Company itself ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)).

Many of the recorded acts ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)) of defiance occurred at the plantation at Lake Phelps as they typically resulted in payment to the person with the damaged property or tasked with going after a runaway person. Outside of the plantation, Yarmouth who was an escapee armed with the specialized skills he learned at the Edenton Ropewalk. Agency was still displayed as many of the enslaved persons with specialized skills which gained their funding and increase in economic value could move in between Edenton and Lake Phelps with

the permission of the enslaver or overseer. Many of these specialized skills such as bricklaying, manufacturing skills, and vessel care were learned in the town of Edenton while the land at Lake Phelps was reserved for hard labor.

Josiah Collins I managed the Lake Company plantation indirectly and from his home in the town of Edenton and even then, the direct management was carried out by hired overseers. This management structure created a vastly separate relationship between the enslaver and enslaved and thus, allowing spaces for agency display during tasks and daily life. Because of the separation, the main taskmaster had limited control over the assignment of tasks.

Many of the patriarchal plantation owners of this time did not take a personal interest in the lives of their enslaved property and instead viewed such as an economic investment. Many businessmen viewed the enslaved labor force as an unfortunate necessity for nation building. In a letter to François Jean de Beauvoir, Marquis de Chastellux, Thomas Jefferson discusses his goals for the future of the United States, “It is possible that in my own county these strictures might produce an irritation which would indispose the people towards the two great objects I have in view, that is the emancipation of their slaves, and the settlement of their constitution on a firmer and more permanent basis” “I believe the Indian then to be in body and mind equal to the whiteman. I have supposed the blackman, in his present state, might not be so. But it would be hazardous to affirm that, equally cultivated for a few generations, he would not be so” ([Jefferson 1785](#)).

Various works analyzing the management practices of well-known plantation owners reveal similar conclusions. Thomas Jefferson desired to manage a machine-perfect plantation, not recognizing the human realities of the enslaved labor force. In doing so, Jefferson and plantation owners like him completely separated themselves from their enslaved property and did

not concern themselves with more intimate details of the lives of these individuals ([Stanton 2012:74-75](#); [Gordon-Reed and Onuf 2016:50-51](#));).

The attitudes of Josiah Collins I and the other Lake Company partners are evident in the information recorded in their slave records. The initial enslaved Africans are not named in any remaining records until years later when many of them had passed away and then, only recorded for tax and property purposes. Entries documenting the hire of enslaved individuals simply as “negros” rather than with their name unless the name is listed with specific tasks or a method of separating individuals between the three partners. In a letter from Charles Pettigrew to his son Ebenezer, Charles writes, “It is a pity that agreeably to the nature of things, [Slavery] & Tyranny must go together- and that there is no such thing as having an obedient & useful Slave, without the painful exercise of undue & tyrannical authority. I sincerely wish there was not a Slave in the world” ([Pettigrew in Lemmon 1971\[1\]:286](#)).

The death of Josiah Collins in May of 1819 introduced a management change in the task system of Somerset Plantation. As Collins had already bought out his partners in the Lake Company, Josiah Collins II was left to control and manage all industries in Edenton as well as Somerset Place until his children were old enough to obtain ownership. According to his will, the eldest Josiah Collins divided his property between his descendants.

11thly: - I lend to my son Josiah Collins during his natural life all that tract, piece or parcel of land lying and being in the counties of Washington and...being a part of the lands late the property of the Lake Company together with all the ways, woods, canals, mills buildings and improvements also all the negroes upwards of one Hundred in number, horses, mules, cattle, sheep, hogs, farming utencils and everything of every kind which are thereon unto me belonging the whole to my son Josiah during his natural life

only and after his death I give and bequeath to the seven children of him the said Josiah and Ann Rebecca Davis namely Ann Davis, Mary, Matilda, Josiah, Henrietta, Elizabeth, Hugh Williamson, John Davis and Louisa their heirs and assigns forever all the aforesaid lands to be divided among them... as all the personal estate lent as above to the said Josiah. I give it after his death to be equally divided among the above named seven children share and share a like as nearly as possible.

12thly: - I give and bequeath to my son Josiah his heirs and assigns my two thirds of an undivided tract of land adjoining the town of Edenton called the Rope Walk land, together with all the buildings and improvements thereon and appurtenances thereunto belonging; also about nine acres of land adjoining conveyed to me by the late Samuel Johnson by deed bearing the date of the 9<sup>th</sup> of Jan. 1790 ([Collins 1819](#)).

The tasks the Lake Company partners assigned to the hired hands which included the transportations of goods and people on vessels, Josiah Collin's utilization of enslaved labor at the Ropewalk, the Lake Company's access to vessels suggest that several enslaved laborers maintained maritime knowledge and skills. The Lake Company and Josiah Collins I's management of the enslaved laborers throughout the many different properties represent the methods of physical and social movement which may have been accessible for enslaved maritime laborers, particularly those with maritime skills. The enslaved community under the management of Josiah Collins I and the beginning of Josiah Collins II exemplify the impact of free and black maritime laborers on northeastern North Carolina's maritime industry.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CENTRALIZING THE MARITIME TASK SYSTEM, 1829-1864

When newlyweds Josiah Collins III moved to Somerset Place with his wife, Ann Rebecca Daves in 1829, the constant presence of a Collins patriarch altered the social and physical structure of the plantation and the enslaved community. Josiah Collins III's station at Somerset Place meant that he took an active role in the daily lives of the enslaved laborers including daily tasks, medical care, free time, and religious instruction. This chapter analyzes the task system under the management of Josiah Collins III as we have more access into the daily lives of the enslaved community at this time.

Josiah Collins II, who lived primarily in Edenton, loaned enslaved laborers to his son to run Somerset Place. On an April 1829 list entitled, 63 enslaved individuals, both men and women, ages 12 and older, were loaned to Josiah Collins III however, already owned 58 enslaved individuals, making a total of 120 enslaved taxable adults assigned to Somerset Place. The 1830 United States Census ([Chowan County Census 1830](#); [Washington County Census 1830](#)) contains two entries for the Josiah Collins family. In Edenton, the Census records 205 enslaved persons while in Washington County, the census records 227 enslaved individuals. Of those 227 enslaved individuals assigned to Somerset Place, 71 or 31% were children under the age of 10. Of the remaining adults, 80 or 35% were men and 76 or 33% were women. With a similar distribution in Edenton, the genders were relatively evenly split under each management system at their respective location ([Collins 1829](#)).

### Paternalism

Josiah Collins III's generation of enslavers viewed themselves within the structure of slavery differently than their forebearers. This generation viewed themselves as the father figure of their human property and thus sought to control the social organization of the community.

This ideology of paternalism identified itself through the intrusive control plantation owners played in the lives of the enslaved. The construct of paternalism in within the system of American slavery hangs is dependent on the view of humanity of the enslaved while creating a hierarchy. In his pivotal study, Eugene D. Genovese writes,

Southern paternalism, like every other paternalism, had little to do with Ole Massa's ostensible benevolence, kindness and good cheer. It grew out of the necessity to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation. It did encourage kindness and affection, but it simultaneously encouraged cruelty and hatred. The racial distinction between master and slave heightened the tension inherent in an unjust social order ([Genovese 1974:4](#)).

For this new wave of plantation owners in antebellum southern society, a paternalistic form of management served what was perceived as a religious and familial responsibility and a response to the proximity of the enslaved community. "For the slaveholders paternalism represented an attempt to overcome the fundamental contradiction in slavery: the impossibility of the slavers' ever becoming the things they were supposed to be. Paternalism defined the involuntary labor of the slaves as a legitimate return to their masters for protection and direction. But, the masters' need to see their slaves as acquiescent human beings constituted a moral victory for the slaves themselves" ([Genovese 1974:5](#)). This means that while Josiah Collins recognized the humanity of the salved individuals and displayed as such by providing basic needs and avenues for structural development, Collins viewed the enslaved individual only in relationship to himself.

Jeffrey R. Young's ([1993:676-677](#)) study of the Manigault family on a Lowcountry rice plantation in Charleston provides an example of these paternalistic actions of the white enslaver



towards the enslaved community. Manigault took particular care to personally give necessary supplies to the enslaved people on the plantation to reinforce his paternal role. Manigault personally handed clothes and blankets to each enslaved person using their name while handing it over. Young also discusses the familial characteristic of paternalism. The Manigault family envisioned the enslaved community as an extension of their own family but only as an eternal infantile extension.

Josiah Collins III displayed his projection of paternalism by introducing new physical and social structures into the plantation system. After Josiah Collins III established himself at Somerset Place, he called for the building of a large plantation house, which currently stands. In contrast to the overseer house, this plantation house is situated to look directly upon the living spaces of the enslaved community. Josiah Collins' bedroom as well as his office, the two spots in the house in which he spent most of his time were always privy to the daily lives of the enslaved people also living there. By situating his home with direct oversight of the enslaved community, Collins established and displayed his perceived authority. As Genovese notes: "The paternalism encouraged by the close living of masters and slaves was enormously reinforced by the closing of the African slave trade, which compelled masters to pay greater attention to the reproduction of their labor force" ([Genovese 1974:50](#)). Collins III exemplified this ideology of paternalism in his treatment and interactions with the enslaved community at Somerset and the other Collins properties. While all Collins patriarchs kept detailed lists of enslaved individuals, the third Collins extensively mapped the family trees of each person while even placing family members with parents and siblings at different properties ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)).

The records and lists taken of the enslaved community are quite different from the previous Collins patriarchs in that they listed family groups including both mothers and fathers,

when applicable, as well as the daily tasks and specialized skills. In the characteristic of paternalistic management, Collins also recorded births, deaths, and marriages. The paternal plantation owner would also push the “moral” southern Christian practice of marriage thus, encouraging family building with a new fervor compared to his father and grandfather ([Genovese 1968:384-379](#)).

In addition to the social management of the plantation, the business management practices also transformed. While the first Josiah Collins had shared task assignments with two other patriarchs, he had quickly taken leadership in the business. When the properties passed to his son, Josiah Collins II spent more time on the plantation but still maintained distance as well as managed each property in Edenton and at Lake Phelps. As the third generation of Collins’s family entered the appropriate ages to obtain their legal property, management became more scattered while still under patriarchal rule. More Collins grandchildren inherited land and enslaved individuals however, their father and then elder brother served as a control until their proper age. Therefore, Josiah Collins III not only served as a paternal figure for the enslaved community under his legal ownership but also to those under the ownership of his siblings, and his siblings ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)).

### Fisheries

While the enslaved laborers assigned to the fisheries were still legally the property of Josiah Collins, Hugh oversaw the production of the fishery. However, being either young and inexperienced or a bad manager, Hugh found himself in several predicaments and Josiah focused much of his attention and resources on correcting the misfortunate business ventures of his younger brother. Thus, Josiah still found himself documenting the business of the fisheries in addition to his other ventures.

Hugh set his ventures on two main fisheries called Long Beach or Beach/Beech Island and Sandy Point fishery. Legal documents locate Sandy Point Fishery on the shores of Albemarle Sound about ten miles below Edenton. The Collins brothers leased one-half of Sandy Point for ten years starting in November of 1838. However, Collins family documents suggest that enslaved laborers were assigned to the fishery in April of that year. The Collins seines utilized at the Fishery measured between 1,800 and 2,000 yards in length. The general long length of Hugh's chosen seines moved many neighboring fisheries to complain about the considerable number of fish caught and the complaints caused a legal settlement in 1841 ([Collins v Benbury 1841](#)).

Large-scale fisheries along the shores of the Albemarle sound were first established around 1769 and according to local tradition, based on a combination of fishing methods from their European ancestral homes and the local Native Americans. Joshua S. Creecy, Thomas Benbury, and General Duncan McDonald were thought to have established the first seine fishery on the Albemarle Sound at Sandy Point Beach around 1814 followed by another fishery at Skinner's Point by Charles W. Skinner and Josiah T. Granberry beginning the establishment of multiple fisheries along the Sound. According to William J. Leary, the Collins family established a smaller fishery on Edenton's Bay at a location called Collins' Point and later Cherry's Point ([Leary 1915: 173-176](#)).

Fisheries normally operated from March to May and employed 40 to 80 black men, women, and children as labor with white managers or overseers. Based on Mark T. Taylor's ([1992](#)) article, "Seiners and Tongers: North Carolina Fisheries in the Old and New South," the process of fishing at an Albemarle Fishery was involved and complex and often required significant labor, usually cheap labor. Many fishery owners hired free or enslaved black laborers

to carry out the many tasks in seine fishing. Taylor mentions a letter written in 1849 in which a fishery manager struggled to hire enslaved labor from their owners because of the lack of vessels traveling through the Sound. However, for the fishery owners or managers who also laid legal claims to enslaved people, the search for cheap labor was less stressful ([Leary 1915:186](#)).

During the fishing process, the men and the overseer would lay the seine out in the water and then haul it into shore with the fish caught inside. Porte Crayon's visit to the fisheries along the Albemarle Sound in 1857 recounts, "when the seines were placed out in the waters of the Albemarle Sound by the means of flats, called bateaux, propelled by oars, handled by men, and drawn in from the waters of the sound by means of windlasses drawn by mules or horses."

([Crayon in Leary 1915:183](#)). Crayon also recounts,

In the foreground was the landward boat moored to the beach, while her swarthy crew were actively engaged in piling up the seine as it was drawn in by the exertions of four lively mules at the windlass hard by. In the centre, upon a bank a little elevated above the water, rose a group of sheds and buildings, alive with active preparation. Beyond these the seaward boat appeared, while upon the surface of the water, enclosing the whole beach in a grand semi-circle, swept the dotted cork line of the seine... The approaching cries of the mule-drivers at the windlasses warn us that the seine is gathering in, and on sallying forth we perceive that the dotted semi-circle of cork line is narrowed to the diameter of fifty paces. Both boats are at hand, their platforms piled high with enormous masses of netting, like great stacks of clover hay... All hands now leave the boats, and, at a signal from the chief, dash into the water waist deep to man the rope. A train of women, armed with knives and bearing larger tubes, is seen hastening down the bank. Within the circuit of the net one may already see a thousand backs and fins swimming rapidly over

the surface of the water... 'Hard cork, mind lead! Ay, ay sir!' roar the fifty black dripping tritons as they heave net upon the beach... One more hurrah, and the haul is landed, a line of wide planks is stacked up behind, the net withdrawn, and the wriggling mass is rolled upon the beach...'To the boats! to the boats!' and away go the men; now the boys and women rush knee deep into the gasping heap. The shad are picked out, counted, and carried away to the packing-house ([Crayon in Leary 1915:185](#)).

From Crayon's description of this fishery highlights the gender distribution of the tasks performed at the fishery. While primarily men performed the hauling and pulling of the seines, the women and older children processed the fish which included killing and splitting the fish. One fishery recorded that talented processors were able to process 4,000-6,000 fish in one day. Older men and boys were then assigned the next task of handling the fish. This included coating the fish with salt and then packing them so the moisture would be drained from this fish without spoiling. Crayon's perception of the Albemarle Sound fisheries are seen in FIGURE 8 and FIGURE 9 ([Taylor 1992:4-7](#)).



FIGURE 8. "Going Out." From *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 82(14):440.

The deed ([Collins 1837](#)) dated October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1837, Josiah Collins II names Hugh Collins as the proprietor of the Sandy Point Fishery for the three year lease beginning in January of 1838. In this deed, Josiah leaves Hugh the sein, hands, bateaux, and all fishing apparatuses. According to an evaluation of the Collins' fisheries from an unknown year indicates that Sandy Point and Long Beach fisheries both maintained two "bateaux." The vessels which were called bateaux would have likely been chine-built or built out of planks on frames with a hard edge where the sides met the bottom in the tidewaters of South Carolina, these types of vessels were ideal for hauling cargo along rivers as the bateaux were more slim but capable of carrying loads ([Fleetwood 1995:87](#)). Cecelski ([2012:92-93](#)) describes these "shad galleys" as typically 40 to 60 feet in length, 8 to 10 feet in width, and slightly less than four feet deep. The



galleys were built out of white oak and cedar and maintained a flat bottom, sharp bow, and a wide transom stern.



FIGURE 9. "Heading Herrings." *From Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 382(14):438.

Receipts and bills ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)) record Hugh Collins hired enslaved and free black laborers from Edenton neighbors to complete tasks at the fisheries. For example, in 1840, Hugh Collins hired two unnamed boys from David Dickinson for three days work in February and three and a half days work in March of Long Beach Fishery. Hugh Collins also hired two men named Tom and Frank from David Dickinson for four periods from March to April of 1840 to complete tasks at Long Beach and Sandy Point Fishery. This period would have been the busiest season for the fisheries in Albemarle Sound. The 1838 list of enslaved laborers

in the Chowan County properties list 52 enslaved individuals at Beach Island and 44 at Sandy Point. Beach Island contained twelve slave cabins.

As previously discussed, the construction of the Great Dismal Swamp Canal in 1805 and the closing of the Roanoke Inlet around 1800 changed the nature of maritime industry of Edenton. The Ropewalk adapted to the lower number of sea-going vessels to outfit vessels for the Albemarle fisheries. An 1839 to 1840 record book indicates what supplies the Edenton ropewalk may have supplied to the fisheries on the Albemarle Sound. In October of 1839, Hugh purchased five bales of twine and in November, purchased 2 bales of twine. In January of 1840, Hugh purchased three bales of twine and at the beginning of the busy season, in March, Hugh purchased forty-nine coils of seine rope ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)).

Bills of expenses paid to Hugh W. Collins indicate the amount of fish the fishery was producing. In Figure 10, a receipt from John W. Littlejohn in April 1838 lists 1,000 salted herring for \$2.50, 25 barrels of herring for \$100.00, 10,00 herring for \$25.00, and 1 barrel of Shad for \$9.00 ([Collins 1838](#)). In Figure 11, receipt from William [Dreams] in April of 1839 includes 3,500 Herrings for \$414.00 and later in the month, \$11,500 herrings for \$46.00 and in May, two barrels of cut herring for \$11.00 ([Collins 1839](#)).



John W. Littlejohn  
1838 Bought of Hugh M Collins

April 20 <sup>th</sup>	1000 Salt Hgs	25¢	\$2.50
	25 Bth Hgs	4¢	1.00
	10000 Corned Hgs	25¢	25 "
	1 M Family Shad	9¢	9 "
April 1839	6 Shad of Gen Henry		60 "
			<u>\$137.10</u>

EE

FIGURE 10. Receipt of purchase from Hugh Collins to John W. Littlejohn for fish purchase. From Josiah Collins Papers. PC.417, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.

William Dreams Dr  
1839 To Hugh M Collins Dr

April 4	To 3500 Hering	21¢	(for Mr Maull)	\$14.00
	1/2 Bus Salt	2¢	do	1.00
24	" 11500 Hering	21¢	do	24.00
	Cash of		"	50
May	2 Bonells out Aug 9 55¢		"	11.00
				<u>\$72.00</u>

EE May 1839 Settled  
Hugh W. Collins

FIGURE 11. Receipts from Hugh Collins to William Dreams for fish purchase. From Josiah Collins Papers. PC. 417, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.

The 1838 list ([Collins 1838](#)) of enslaved laborers on Chowan County properties records family groups including, when applicable, the mother and father, children and to which location each enslaved laborer was assigned. These properties included the Collins house in Edenton, Monticello, the Ropewalk, Sandy Point, and Beach Island fisheries. Figure 12 displays the total distribution of enslaved laborers among the Chowan County properties, Figure 13 displays the distribution of enslaved men among the Chowan County properties and Figure 14 displays the distribution of enslaved women. The distribution reveals patterns in the familial structure of seasonal labor. Mothers and fathers, with one exception, were not assigned to the same location. Mothers tended to be assigned with their children who were under the age of 12. This follows the pattern of young children not being assigned a value separate from their mothers. If a father was recorded, children between the ages of 12 and 17 were usually assigned to the same location as their father, no matter their gender.

52 enslaved laborers were assigned to the fishery at Beach Island. 32 of those were adult males (adult is defined as over 12 years of age) and only four adult females. Of those 32 adult males, four were fathers and had their older or adult-age children present with younger children assigned to other locations. At Beach Island, five adult females were either there alone or with a brother. Six younger children were present at Beach Island, but all were aged 11 or 12 and thus would be amendable to the age pattern. Additionally, only one of those younger children was a female and was assigned to the fishery with distant family members. The general pattern of older and able-bodied enslaved laborers, fewer females than males, and minimal families suggest that Beach Island required harder labor from those assigned there.

Sandy Point Fishery's 1838 list displays a different pattern than that of Beach Island. A total of 44 enslaved laborers were assigned to tasks at Sandy Point. Only three enslaved males all

over the age of 50 and with no children were assigned to this fishery. Seven of the 12 adult females present were assigned with their children, adult-age children, and/or grandchildren. One woman, Rebecca, was assigned to Sandy Point while her older children were assigned to Beach Island. However, eight children were assigned to Sandy Point without the presence of a listed mother or father. As the women were often expected to care for the younger children no matter if they maintained a blood relation with them, it may have been the most practical option for Josiah Collins to place these independent children in the location with the most women present.

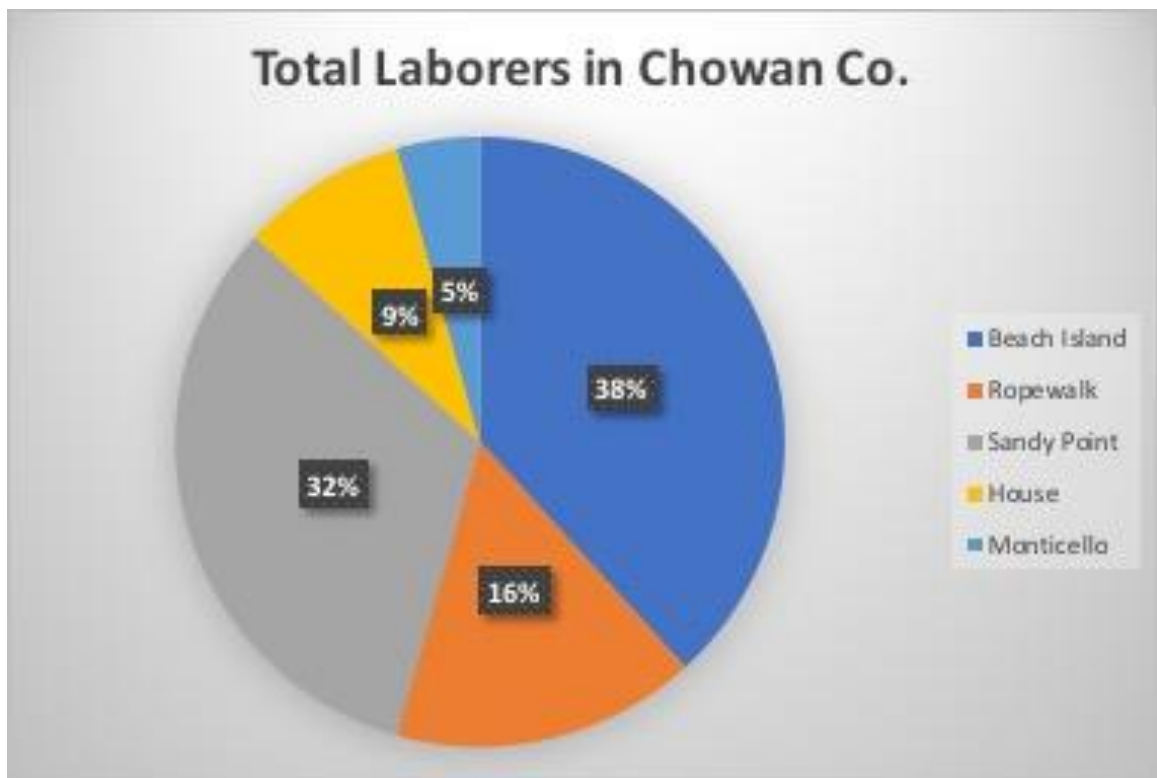


FIGURE 12. Distribution of Enslaved Laborers in Chowan County, North Carolina, 1838. Data from Josiah Collins Papers, PC.417, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.

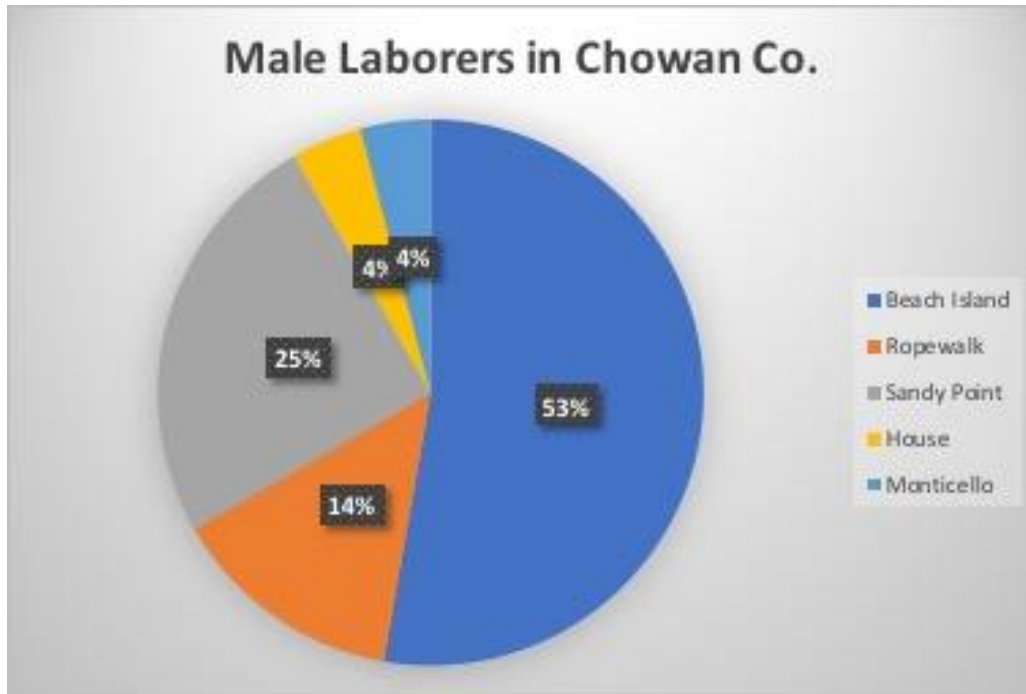


FIGURE 13. Distribution of Enslaved Male Laborers in Chowan County, North Carolina, 1838. Data from Josiah Collins Papers, PC.417, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C

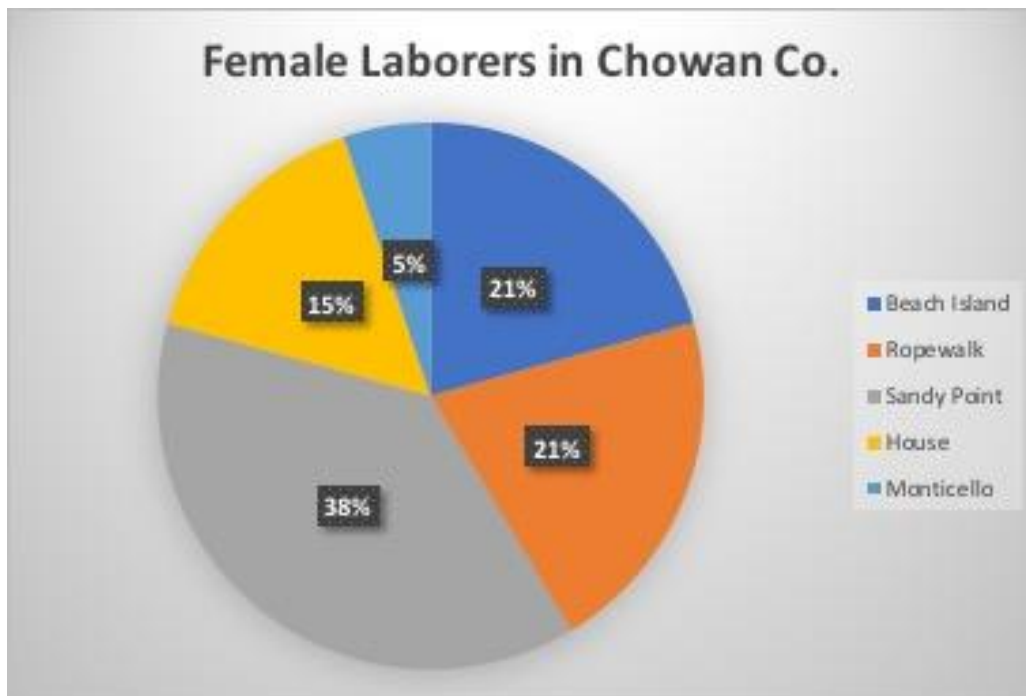


FIGURE 14. Distribution of Enslaved Female Laborers in Chowan County, North Carolina, 1838. Data from Josiah Collins Papers, PC.417, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C

However, of the total 44 individuals at the fishery at the fishery at the Point, most likely referring to Sandy Point rather than Collins/Cherry Point, 50% were female, 41% were male, and 9% were gender unconfirmed. For whatever reason, while Beech Island's community was mostly male, Sandy Point was more evenly split and contained mostly mothers with smaller children. Several reasons could have caused this difference in gender distribution including a discrepancy in tasks tied to the two different fisheries. Or Beach Island may have proved more profitable than the Point in the fishing season. If the Point from this list is in fact, Collins/Cherry Point, this fishery was smaller, requiring less labor, and closer to resources at Edenton for the care of the younger children ([Collins 1838](#)).

The Edenton Ropewalk's enslaved labor force was more evenly split. *The North Carolina Journal* ([1795:4](#)) recorded 18 to 22 completed tasks at the Ropewalk. Five adult men were assigned to the Ropewalk with only two father-child relationships between John Tayland and Urias and Ivan and Tamar with her children. The other three men were over 50 years old, the age when men commonly lost substantial economic value. Four adult women were present at the Ropewalk but of them, Mary Anne, aged 62, and Old Betty, aged 79 would have lost most of their value with Mary Anne valued at only \$25 just two years later. Of the 12 children present, 9 children were aged under 12 and from only two families. While not much is known about tasks performed by the enslaved laborers at the Ropewalk, many of these textile tasks may have been lighter labor and could have been performed by both younger and older people.

Figure 15 displays the approximate locations of Collins family Edenton and Chowan County properties in 1838. The exact location of Beach or Beech Island is unclear, however, a notice of sale ([Collins 1840](#)) describes Beech Island as about 1100 acres laying about 4 miles from Edenton with 500 acres of cleared and fertile land and one of the most fertile plantations in



the area. The lines represent familial relationships and connect family members between each location as no family had all members in one place. While this separation of family members was based on the tasks that need to be completed, it also served as a method of risk management to decrease the likelihood of escape or opportunities to run away from Collins' control.

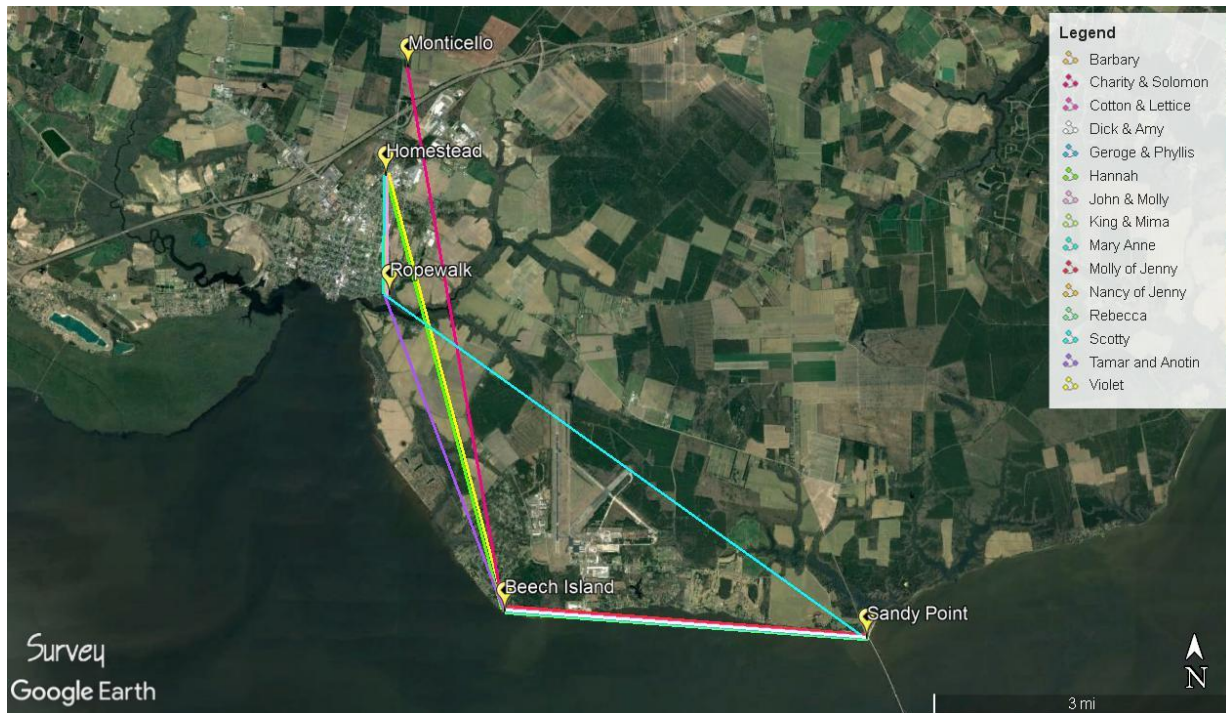


FIGURE 15. Familial connection among the Chowan County properties in 1838 (approximate location). Data from Josiah Collins Papers, PC.417, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.

The distribution of children at the Chowan County properties does provide insight to the added responsibilities for enslaved parents, particularly mothers. On this list, enslaved mothers with young children were not seemingly expected to participate in the more labor-intensive maritime tasks, including manning the seine however, the presence of children may have provided the opportunity for enslaved women to gain or maintained more specialized skills such as tasks in the ropewalk or preparing fish and repairing seine nets.

For the enslaved laborers at under the Collins family, gender was decisive for task assignment. Based on the account books, logbooks, and other records, primarily enslaved men gained the skills and knowledge, or at least the recognition, to receive the maritime skill assignments. It is clear based on the 1838 list of enslaved laborers in Chowan County, that enslaved women were assigned to the Edenton Ropewalk and the fisheries and would be the primary laborers if many of the men were assigned to a central location. However, only a few women were called out by name in the records for completing a specialized skills and none were recorded to have had the same experiences as those of enslaved men like Dick, Isaac, or Andrew.

Age and familial relationships also impacted task assignment within the task system. While enslaved children had economic value, children under 12 did not maintain a value separate from their mothers or closest relative. Based on the 1838 list of laborers in Chowan County, younger children were assigned to the same location as their mothers, typically more younger children meant more women present. Additionally, older children were assigned to the locations with their father, if recorded, or at a location which provided more economic profit.

Still, according to Uriah Bennet's ([Farm Security Administration 1937](#)) interview, the children of the enslaved community were permitted the paces and opportunity to play and go to school (most likely religious instruction). Records indicate the enslaved children even played or at least, interacted with the canals during play. In the 1850 to 1853 Somerset Place logbooks, children were occasionally assigned to complete tasks with the women or other children on the plantation. These tasks usually included cleaning ditches or rolling logs ([Collins 1993](#)).

An 1840 valuation ([Collins 1840](#)) of the enslaved laborers belonging to the Estate of Josiah Collins II provides an example of the ways in which specialized skills increased the value of enslaved persons. The valuation included age, any disability, and specialized skill the enslaved

person may have maintained. Aaron, a 51-year-old with a “disabled shoulder” is listed with a value of \$0.00. King Jun, a 12-year-old who was blind, also has a value of \$0.00. The most economically valuable males aged 15 to 28 are valued at \$700.00. Specialized skills are also listed including one tailor, two shoemakers, two carpenters, and Charles, a “ship carpenter and caulker.” However, Charles, at 49 years old, was worth \$500.00, a total amount less than that of the younger men. Therefore, while specialized skills did increase an enslaved individual’s economic value, age and physical abilities affected their economic value first. All the same, Charles’s specialized skills as a ship carpenter and caulker did increase his value compared to the other enslaved men his age. The other men, ranging in age from 45 to 50 years without specialized skills were assigned values of \$200 - \$300. The only exception was a 47-year-old carpenter valued at \$600.

### Somerset Place

At the death of Josiah Collins II in 1839, the enslaved property initially left by Josiah Collins I, passed down to his grandchildren. As the proprietor of his father’s estate, Josiah Collins III legally loaned out enslaved individuals to his siblings, changing the distribution of the enslaved community. The death of Josiah Collins II also changed the industrial goals of the Collins family, particularly in the maritime industry. After 1839, the shipping industry, as well as the Ropewalk, became less profitable and thus, less of a priority for the Collins family. The closing of Inlets along Outer Banks slowed mercantile trade with the port city of Edenton and after Collins II’s death, little trade was conducted outside of ports accessible by intercostal waterways. Because of developments like the closure of the Inlets as well as the construction of the Great Dismal Swamp and the infrastructure at other coastal ports, the need for a highly active ropewalk in Edenton lessened. Therefore, the Ropewalk began to primarily outfit the vessels



which remained or made port in the Albemarle Sound as well as supply seine materials for the local fisheries.

In November of 1839, Edmund Ruffin visited Somerset Place, crossing over a drawbridge across the Scuppernong River to reach the property. In *The Farmer's Register*, Ruffin describes the canal system on the land.

When it is desired to prepare a cargo of corn for the Charleston market, there is no need of commencing until notice has been received of the vessel having arrived in the river below. The shelling of the corn is then commenced, by a shelling machine of immense power, then fanned, next lifted by elevating machinery, from the first to fourth story of the house, these measured, and then emptied through a spout into a large flatboat lying in the canal, which, as soon as loaded in bulk, is conveyed along the canal to the vessel. Thus, the risk of keeping a large quantity of shelled corn in bulk is avoided and, by the aid of water, all the operations necessary to load a vessel may be completed in a very short time ([Ruffin 1839:729](#)).

Ruffin wrote about sailing across like Phelps in Josiah Collins's "nice little pleasure boat" to take a closer look at the savannah land on the other shore. However, the pleasure boat could only reach within 60 yards of the shore as the Lake was too shallow. Ruffin describes the water of Lake Phelps as, "... free from all taste of vegetable or other impregnation, and is a delightful drinking water" ([Ruffin 1833:725](#)). In another case, the narrative indicates enslaved individuals were assigned to accompany the Collins family members and their guests in these maritime activities. A letter from Ebenezer Pettigrew to William Pettigrew dated February 3, 1843, reads, "It is with deep regret I inform you that Edward & Hugh Collins were drowned last evening together with two little negroe [sic] boys..." concerning the tragedy, William S.

Pettigrew writes, “Edward and Hugh were drowned in their Father’s canal on Thursday 4 ½ P.M. Fe. 2<sup>nd</sup> 1843. They were seen by my father’s servant Jim as he carried the mail over, together with two Negro boys nearly of the same age in a boat in the canal... midway between the dwelling house and the mill” ([Pettigrew in Lemmon 1971\[2\]:557](#)).

The canal waters were described as 10 feet deep and so cold that the older men could not stay in the water long without becoming numb with cold. Another instance of enslaved individuals tasked with accompanying the white Collins family members in maritime activities occurred just a few years later when another son, George Collins was traveling across Lake Phelps from a bear hunt on the southern shores. The boat overturned after a large gust of wind, and George and the two enslaved attendees spent the night hanging onto the boat. Kevin Dawson’s ([2005: 52-53](#)) indicates that many enslaved and free black people utilized their maritime skills for their own leisure or business. Dawson explains that James Battles Avirett, born at Avirett plantation near Richlands, North Carolina, recalled that outdoor activities such as swimming, fishing, and sailing encouraged friendships between the plantation owner’s sons and a number of similarly aged enslaved children ([Ruffin 1839:728-729](#); [Tarlton 1954:33-35](#); [Lemmon 1971\[2\]:557](#)).

The 1840 United States Census ([Chowan County Census 1840](#); [Washington County Census 1840](#)) records two separate entries for the estate of Josiah Collins, again, one in Edenton and the other in Washington County, where Somerset Place stood. The Edenton entry lists 191 enslaved individuals and one free black woman and black female child. The census also includes that out of the total 203 individuals, freed and enslaved, 110 were employed in “agriculture”, 22 in “manufacture and trade,” and one in a “learned profession and engineering.” Meanwhile, the Washington County census records, 17 white, one free black woman, and 281 enslaved

inhabitants. 156 of those are employed in “agriculture,” 46 in manufacture and trades,” and two in “learned profession and trade.” This employment division does account for Collins family white adults as well as the enslaved adults and any free black adults living on Collins properties.

In 1840 the Collins estate ([Collins 1840](#)) set a value to the enslaved individuals belonging to Josiah Collins II after his death. Along with their economic value, specialized skills, and physical malformities. Aaron, a 51-year-old with a “disabled shoulder” is listed with a value of \$0.00. King Jun, a 12-year-old who was blind, also has a value of \$0.00. The most economically valuable males aged 15 to 28 are valued at \$700.00. Specialized skills are also listed including one tailor, two shoemakers, two carpenters, and Charles, a “ship carpenter and caulker.” However, Charles, at 49 years old, was worth \$500.00, a total amount less than that of the younger men. Therefore, while specialized skills did increase an enslaved individual’s economic value, age and physical abilities affected their economic value first. All the same, Charles’s specialized skills as a ship carpenter and caulker did increase his value compared to the other enslaved men his age. The other men, ranging in age from 45 to 50 years without specialized skills were assigned values of \$200 - \$300. The only exception was a 47-year-old carpenter valued at \$600.

In the 1840s, the enslaved community at Somerset Place and the other Collins properties experienced the ramifications of the death of Josiah Collins II. As a few of the Collins children were still young enough to be socially and financially dependent on a patriarchal figure, they moved to Somerset Place from Edenton to live with their brother, Josiah Collins III. In this instance, more enslaved laborers were living at Somerset Place than ever before. However, the enslaved property of Josiah Collins II was divided among the Collins siblings. A list from

January 12, 1943 ([Collins 1843](#)) records a series of exchanges of enslaved individuals and families between three sisters, Ann D. Collins, Henrietta C. Collins, and Luisa M. Harrison.

After the enslaved community's division, the task system included less recorded maritime activity besides the packing of vessels for the canals. This lack of maritime activity could be the effects of multiple developments. Specialized maritime skills were more common among the enslaved laborers who worked and resided in Edenton. After the death of Josiah Collins II and the eventual close of the Ropewalk, the manufacturing needs for the task system diluted to the vessels and sines of the fisheries. After the economic decline and death of Hugh Collins, the Collins' involvement in Albemarle fisheries also declined greatly.

The continuity of religions was a vital role of the plantation system at Somerset Place. Religion provided opportunities for the enslaved community to practice their own forms of cultural practice and agency while congruently encouraging Josiah Collins's practice of paternalism. After 1830, the majority of southern plantation owners began to see religion, specifically, the Christian religion, as a means of social control. This wave of religions instruction to the enslaved and freed black community included primarily oral instruction and the encouragement of humane treatment but still proslavery, leaving the plantation owner to take charge of the religious teachings. Genovese noted: "The heart of black slave culture rested in a religion that, however intimate its connections with white religion, emerged as a product of the black experience. For the slaves and for black people generally, it did not constitute one feature of life or merely one element in an ideological complex; rather, it constituted the fundamental spiritual expression of their entire worldview, as manifested in attitudes toward time and work." ([Genovese 1974:186-189, 288](#)).

Like many large plantations in the lowcountry in South Carolina, Somerset Place maintained a chapel with Josiah Collins occasionally preaching. The Lake Chapel was built by Collins to keep the religious instruction of the enslaved community under a watchful eye. During Edmund Ruffin's visit to Somerset Place in November of 1839, he attended a service in the Lake Chapel since the road leading to the church regularly attended by the Collins family and members of the enslaved community Ruffin describes the morning service as less than 100 people in attendance with about 3 times more enslaved females than males in attendance, persuading him to believe that their presence was optional ([Ruffin 1839:731](#)).

The tasks system for a plantation was highly dependent on seasonal patterns. Genovese ([1974](#)) discusses the importance of typically higher level of care for enslaved laborers assigned as house servants. These laborers performed more skilled or practiced tasks which were more valuable to the personal lives of the plantation owner's family. Occasionally, the distinction of the enslaved laborers assigned to the house and assigned to the field would create a hierarchy. Uriah Bennett recalls this system. According to Uriah, there were two groups of enslaved workers with one group who worked in the house and called "house servants" and the other were the "laborers or hands who worked in the field. If any enslaved laborer or hand wanted to speak with Josiah Collins, they would first need to speak with a house servant. However, the access to free time may have been more readily available to fieldhands on many plantations as house servants lived in the house with the plantation owners and remained on call as needed ([Genovese 1974:328-330, 337](#)).

According to the 1850 United States Census ([Washington County Census 1850](#)), Josiah Collins laid legal claim to 288 enslaved individuals with 45% of those under the age of 12. At the point that the 1850 Census was recorded, Josiah Collins did not own any enslaved person

permanently residing in the town of Edenton. Josiah's siblings and cousins had established their ownership of the enslaved property of Josiah Collins II. Thus, most of the tasks performed by the enslaved laborers were conducted within the boundaries of Somerset Place plantation. Josiah recorded the tasks of the enslaved laborers in his plantation logbook from 1850 to 1853 ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)).

In this logbook ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)), Josiah made the distinction between tasks performed by enslaved men, enslaved women, and enslaved women. According to the logbook, women and children commonly cleared out the ditches and canals unless men were needed to remove large stumps or clear the canal gates. Once a field was ready for planting, men were assigned to create water furrows for irrigation. Additionally, if the laborers were working in a further field, they utilized flat boats to transport crops and tools along the canals. While the plantation log books clearly exemplify the importance of the canals and ditches to the function of the plantation, it is also clear that the recorded tasks assigned to the enslaved laborers were limited to the confines of the plantation boundaries.

In the early 1850s, a physician by the name of Dr. William C. Warren attended to the Collins family and members of the enslaved community. Dr. Warren's son, Edward Warren, recorded his time as an assistant to his father, occasionally traveling to Somerset Place. Warren writes, "Mr. Josiah Collins, who lived on Lake Scuppernong, in Washington County, regularly employed us, and to reach his house the sound had to be crossed and a journey of thirty-five miles made by land" ([Warren 1885:196](#)). Most likely, Dr. Warren and Edward crossed the Albemarle Sound at Mackey's Ferry and traveled by horse from the landing to Somerset Place, rather than utilizing the canal system.

Through Warren's account ([1885](#)) it is clear that the enslaved community, particularly at the plantation at Somerset Place, were able to maintain, develop, and practice their particular culture, separate to the culture of white Collins. Edward Warren recalled the presence of a few "Guinea Negroes," or enslaved Africans from 1786 or 1887 remained at the plantation ([1885:200](#)). According to Warren, these men spoke in a mixture of their original language and English and maintained a few cultural beliefs from Africa. While much of Warren's description contains racist language and stereotypes, Warren acknowledges the uniqueness of the enslaved community's culture which resulted from the combination of African traditions and the social isolation of Somerset Place.

Edward Warren describes a unique cultural practice among the enslaved community at Somerset Place referred to "John Koonering." Warren writes,

... this was more of a *fantasia* than a religious demonstration; that it had, however, some connection with their religion is evident from the fact that they only indulged in it on Christian festivals, notable on Christmas day. The *leading* character is the 'ragman' whose 'get-up' consists in a costume of rags, so arranged that one end of each hangs loose and dangles; two great ox horns, attached to the skin of a raccoon, which is drawn over the head and face, leaving apertures only for the eyes and mouth; sandals of the skin of some wild 'varmint;' several cow or sheep bells or strings of dried goats' horns hanging about their shoulders, and so arranged as to jingle at every movement; and a short stick of seasoned wood, carried in his hands ([Warren 1885:201](#)).

Warren goes on to describe other individuals who were dressed in their "Sunday-go-to-meeting suit" or in ribbons, rags, and feathers laying music on "gumba boxes, which consist of wooden

frames covered over with tanned sheepskins.” The individuals taking part in the practice would then dance and sing in front of the plantation house. According to Warren, one of the two principal dancers would then offer a blessing to Josiah Collins III and his family. Warren claims that the only other place he saw this type of ritualistic practice was in Egypt with the aligned with Islamic holidays ([Warren 1885:200-203](#)).

By the 1860’s threat of insurrection and the need to supplement Josiah Collins’s accumulation of debts, called for the further division of the enslaved community. A number of the remaining Collins siblings gathered moved to other locations with their enslaved property and Josiah sent a number of individuals to his property at Hurry Scurry in Franklin County, North Carolina. Josiah also hired out many enslaved laborers to the railroad and other locals to supplement his declining finances. As seen in Figure 12, a list from 1864 ([Collins 1864](#)) and 1865 ([Collins 1865](#)) record where enslaved laborers were hired. The list includes individuals who hired for various lengths of time and reasons, including twenty-eight men to the North Carolina Railroad in 1864 and thirty-four individuals hired to four different hospitals in 1865.

An 1862 agreement ([Collins 1862](#)) between Josiah Collins III and his cousin, Ann C. Blount records the payment of seventy-five dollars to Isaac Bale to “keep” Jenny Rambo and children (Sylver) and Susan. On this agreement, it notes, “The negroes are not to go by Water, nor to Fish, nor to work at a Fishery, nor to be carried out of the County except at the risk of the Hirer.” This transition in the 1860s demonstrate the almost complete distance of maritime industrial labor apart from the necessary work of the plantation including cutting smaller canals (as shown in Figure 17) and the cleaning of the canals and ditches. The above agreement indicates that laborers who performed maritime tasks were risks to their hirer.



Throughout Josiah Collins III's occupation at Somerset Place, the methods that the enslaved community interacted with the physical and cultural environment transitioned to a centralized location with limited opportunities for maritime movement beyond the physical boundaries of the plantation. While specialized skills were still present within laborers, they remained confined to the older generation and not necessarily maritime activity related. The free time of the enslaved community also transitioned to be more governed by the Collins family. Whereas religion may have once been a separate and safe haven for the enslaved, Josiah Collins III took an active role in the leadership and religious teachings at the Lake Chapel and even took an active role in cultural practices ([Warren 1885:196-203](#)). Enslaved children participated in play and other activities with the Collins children ([Bennett in Scuppernong Farms Project 1937](#); [Tarlton 1954:35](#); [Pettigrew in Lemmon 1971\[2\]:557](#)).

Overall, Josiah Collins III's transition to the paternalistic plantation owner at Somerset Place dramatically transitioned how the enslaved community interacted with the physical and cultural maritime environment. The enslaved community was centralized in location and did not noticeably hold as specialized skills as the previous generations however, the records and plantation documents ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)) do indicate that there was more focus on the family and community units within the plantation.

Negroes, where hired for 1864		
A.C.A.R. @ \$200.00	Hired out by Dr. Harris	Individuals-
Agster (taken off)	Albert \$21 f. S. Home	Andrew } Cain & Ruggin
Daniel 900 (dead)	Alphons \$20 America Webster	John } @ \$250.00
Davidson	Dave - \$175 for Adcock	
Danbar	Heracles \$250 S.A. Laws	Charles } also H. Bryan &
Frank	Joseph \$125 America Thompson	Carson } @ \$250.00
Freeman (taken off)	Jim - \$50 for Adcock	
Hamilton	Madison \$225 H. Delaney	Gilbert } Dr. J. Cain
Henry	Ransom \$50 for Adamsford	Obone } @ \$225.00
Hobart	Smith - \$75 Sarah Kelly	
Josh	Selman - \$175 America Webster	Brian - f. L. Coon. @ \$125
Oridan	Tony - \$50 for Dr. Ellis	
Limmet	White - \$100 H. Latta	Morris - Samuel Bradford @ \$200
Tracy (taken off)		Peter King - W. A. Linn @ \$250
Matthias		
Mills Blount	<u>Pettigrew Hospital</u>	
Mills Tamas (taken off)	Harrison	
Mitchell (dead)	Tony	<u>Remarks</u>
Pem	Clarissa	Some of the names are
Sullam	Bob	undelineated. these were part
Reuben	Asen	of the year at one place & part
Rof.	Freeman	at another. - Harrison was
Simon	Tracy	given up by Dr. Bryan &
Stephen		placed at the Pettigrew hos-
Thompson		pital. Tony was given up
Wallace		by Dr. Ellis, & put at the
Warren	<u>Peace Hospital</u>	Pettigrew - Providence
Waldson	Augustus	was returned to me from
Whitmill	Providence - (given up)	the Peace on account of
Annette 90.00	Sam Budge (exchanged for Mills)	his health, & put at Kittick
Becky 2.00	Welcome	for his board, to get the benefit
	Mills Tamas	of the water. - Asen, Freeman
		& Tracy were taken off the A.C.
		& put at the Pettigrew - Mills T.
	<u>Kittick Springs Hospital</u>	was taken off, & put in place of
	Providence - (hired for his board to	Sam to within & took to suit on me.
	drink the water.)	P. Collins -

FIGURE 16. "Negroes, Where Hired for 1864. From Josiah Collins Papers, PC. 417, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.

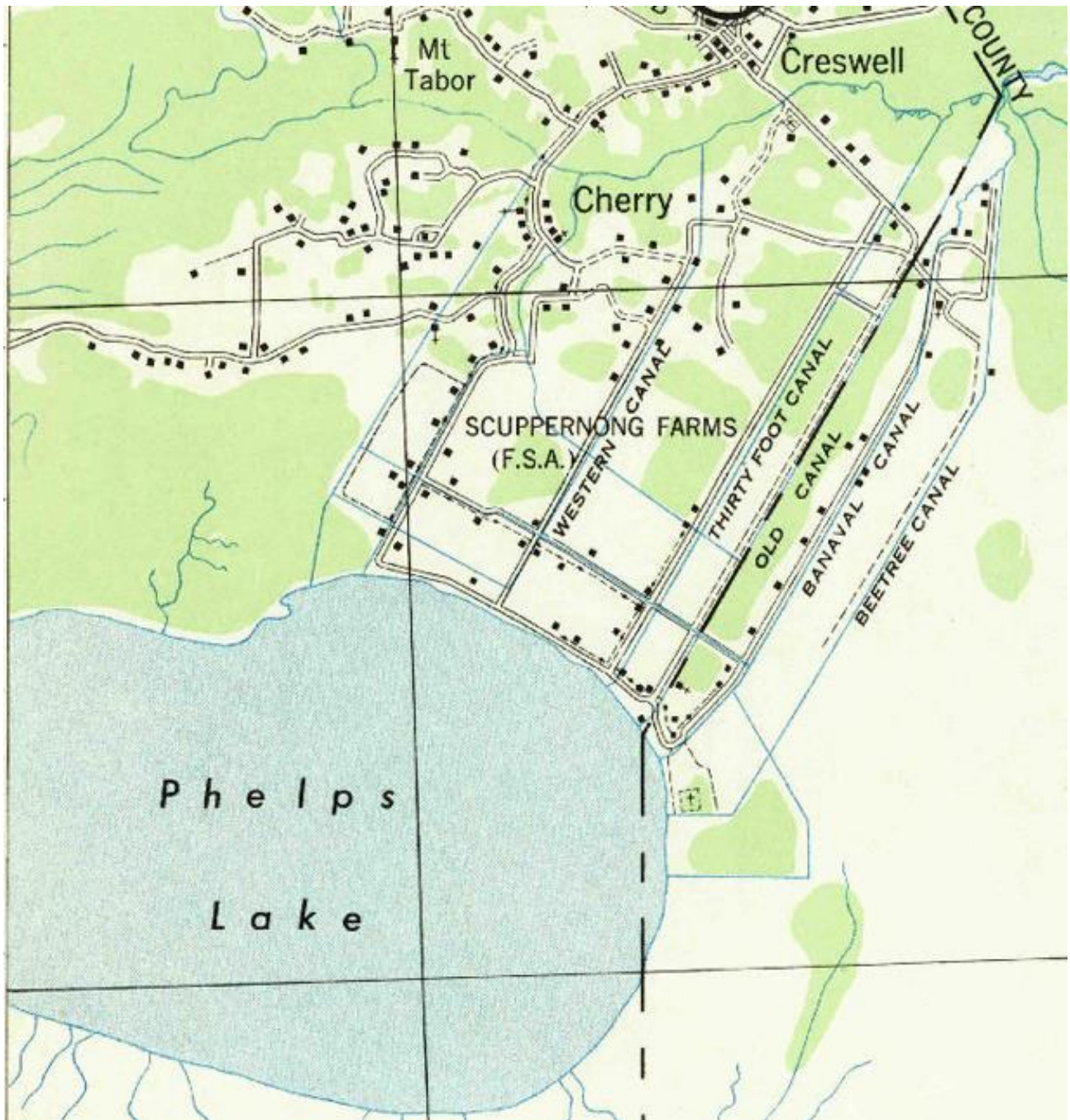


FIGURE 17. United States Geological Survey USGS, Quadrangle Map, 7.5 minute series. Columbia, N.C. (1942).

## CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

This research seeks to discover the impact of the enslaved community and labor upon the maritime culture and industry of northeastern North Carolina. While the Collins family is not representative of the social and financial reality of slaveholding landowners in the entire state of North Carolina in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Collins family, Somerset Place, and the enslaved community is indicative of the maritime culture and industry of northeastern North Carolina in the New Nation and Antebellum time periods. Northeast North Carolina's economy and society was not strictly dependent on the maritime environment nor entirely on the terrestrial environment but rather, a combination of the two.

This research sought to analyze one of the largest slaveholding families and plantations in North Carolina and its distinctive combination of maritime and terrestrial landscape to understand the historical formation of the task system. The economic needs of the regions and the general social and cultural understandings of those in the area shaped the formation of the enslaved community and their labor. The two questions this research attempted to answer are as follows:

1. *How did the enslaved community at Somerset Place and the other Collins family properties interact with the physical and cultural maritime environment through the task system?*
2. *What are the demographic patterns such as age, gender, or skill sets which correlated with specific maritime tasks delegated among the enslaved population at the Collins properties?*

To answer these questions, this research analyzed the historical evidence as presented in Chapters Four and Five to understand the maritime task patterns and structures of the enslaved



community at the Collins properties and the economic, social, cultural, and legal circumstances which defined the surrounding maritime environments. The various understandings of slavery informed the task systems of the enslaved community within the Collins properties.

The task system of each Collins property utilized a combination of task and gang system based on the expected outcome of each task. For example, the introduction of the enslaved Africans to cut the canals along the Lake Company Lands were brought to Somerset Place to conduct gang labor while other enslaved laborers, such as Dick, Isaac, and Andrew who maintained specialized skills were assigned to various, specifically maritime tasks and were paid for their labor. The Lake Company partners generally managed the Lake Plantation from a distance, similarly to many of the large-scale plantations of that time ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)).

An enslaved laborer who worked within a maritime environment was likely to develop skills which allowed them to interact with their physical and maritime environment with varying levels of agency. For instance, the enslaved Africans assigned to cutting the canal worked to design the maritime landscape and create a shorter convenient maritime for the Lake Company partners' economic goals. This portion of enslaved laborers were purposely isolated and worked to exhaustion. Overseers observed and controlled their movement and thus, the enslaved community maintained little social agency. However, Lake Company occasional payments ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)) and accounts from overseers ([Bassett 1899:92-93](#)) indicate that the enslaved laborers displayed their agency by acts of resistance. The narrative ([Bassett 1899:92-93](#)) of drowning in Lake Phelps may have been an effort to escape the realities of slavery and transition to the afterlife and reconnect to their familial culture and identity ([Stevenson 2018:101-110](#)).

Dick, Isaac, and Andrew were the three enslaved men most frequently hired by the Lake Company to complete maritime tasks between the years of 1787 to 1790. While most of these hirings were for tasks which included transporting goods or peoples to and from the Lake Plantation, these tasks also included traveling in hired canoes, carrying individuals across the Sound, and working on the levee ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)). These specialized maritime skills and knowledge provided these enslaved individuals to move more freely within the maritime environment however, specialized skills also posed risks to enslavers.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Dick, or “Dick the Pilot,” was hired out to the Lake Company on to transfer cargo to enslaved labor force at Lake Phelps. In 1789, Dick was hired to John Gray Blount for a year in 1789 to assist with shipments along the east coast and West Indies, however, Dick position made the Blount anxious about the likelihood of his attempt to escape. A letter dated May 18, 1789 from Jacob Blount informs John Gray Blount that Josiah Collins planned to sail to Cape Francois and Kingston, Jamaica to conduct business. Jacob adds, “I last night took dick and shall have him Ironed and sent down by the Brig, I was oblig’d to give a Negroe five pounds to betray him he Complains of very hard usage both of Wallace & Davis and if he ever gets an opportunity will runaway...” ([Blount 1952:480](#)).

Parker’s study of the advertisements for enslaved runaways in North Carolina newspapers from 1775 to 1840 examines the characteristics of those that were able to run away. The advertisements included name, age, gender, skin complexion, height, scars, diseases, and any identifying information to provide the best opportunity for return. Of the documented 2,661 adult runaways, 2,179 (82%) were men and only 482 (18%) women ran away. Parker analyzes the skills listed for 339 enslaved runaways. Of those 339, 25 enslaved laborers held strictly maritime occupations. An enslaved runaway with a specialized skill would have more

opportunities to run away from enslavement as they were more likely to interact with people of other races and provided a level of social freedom not necessarily attainable to unskilled enslaved laborers. Enslaved laborers with specialized skills were often hired out and thus, usually maintained passes from their enslaver and could move more freely in the area ([Parker 1993 65, 143-150](#)).

Whitman Hill's 1793 advertisement ([Parker 1994:21-22](#)) for the enslaved man Yarmouth, exemplifies importance of specialized skills to an enslaved runaway. Hill believed that the skills Yarmouth learned at the Edenton Ropewalk would permit Yarmouth with opportunities to obtain a position on a vessel. According to Hill, Yarmouth's skills called for a high economic value. Additionally, in 1807, Josiah Collins placed an advertisement for an enslaved runaway named Isaac ([Parker 1994:339](#)) According to the advertisement, Isaac was a cooper by trade. This Isaac is most likely the same Isaac who the Lake Company hired to complete many tasks from 1788 to 1790 ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)). If this is the case, Isaac would have had extensive knowledge of the waterways from the multiple deliveries to and from the Lake Company lands. The advertisement lists a \$40.00 reward for the return of Isaac, a relatively high amount. The average reward for a runaway enslaved man was \$23.07 with a reward of \$30.00 or above reserved for 21.7% of enslaved men ([Parker 1993:197](#)).

As discussed in Chapter Three, a defining characteristic of the task assignment was the ability to exercise agency over personal time. The Lake Company records ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)) and Collins family papers ([Josiah Collins Papers: 1966](#)) reveal little on how the enslaved laborers spent their free time outside of the assigned of the plantation task system. However, the accounts of specialized skills hints at the tasks which may have been performed during personal time. The plantation logbooks ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)) indicate that the

enslaved community at Somerset Place maintained a patch for growing their own food. Other studies ([Morgan 1982](#); [Gray 1993](#); [Pruneau 1997](#)) of the task system quantify personal time through the production of an enslaved person's personal crops, but in the case of Somerset Place, a separate field for the cultivation of crops for the enslaved community would have been necessary to maintain the labor force. In other words, this "negro patch" cannot not necessarily be evidence of personal time on its own.

Uriah Bennett's account of his childhood gives a glimpse into the personal time of enslaved children in the 1850s and 1860s. Bennett recounts,

Slave's children played about in the yard. Collins had a big lawn between the house and the Pettigrew's and they had overseers to show them how to play, and after playing, they had biscuits, sometimes a peck or more for refreshment. They picked dandelions, and then if they did anything wrong, they were told to go home and tell their mama to correct them ([Bennett in Scuppernong Farms Project 1937](#)).

Bennett's ([Scuppernong Farms Project 1937](#)) account describes that enslaved children had the ability to play during the day however, plantation logbooks indicate that children were occasionally assigned to perform tasks with the women or older laborers.

Plantation documents ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)) do not indicate whether or not the enslaved community utilized any maritime surroundings in their free time however, records indicate that enslaved laborers maintained skills to do so if they had the opportunity. The tragic account ([Pettigrew in Lemmon 1971\[2\]:557](#)) of the drowning of the four boys, two Collins children, Hugh and Edward, and two enslaved children, Anderson and Zacharias, occurred in the canal in front of the Collins house. While the cause of their drowning is not clear, it can be assumed that these boys were entertaining themselves in or around the canal. Additionally, this



canal separated the cabins from the lawn where the enslaved children played in Bennett's account. The other instance in which a Collins older son traveled across Lake Phelps with two enslaved boys indicate that at least some enslaved older children and young adults maintained the knowledge and skills to operate small vessels on Lake Phelps and in the surrounding canals. While these tasks may have been performed in the presence of at least one Collins family member and not necessarily during free time, there is no indication that they could not have been undertaken during instances of personal times as well.

The Collins documents demonstrate the patterns of task assignment. The most thorough extensive example of these patterns is in the 1838 list of enslaved laborers in Chowan County. A total of 147 enslaved laborers are included on this list. Some names are unclear and thus, some genders are not confirmed, however, most of those are children. Of the total 147, ten laborers were hired to other Edenton businessmen. Of the remaining 136, 58 of those were female and 72 were male with the other six unconfirmed children. The distributions of enslaved laborers are in the following graphs.

The enslaved laborers under the legal ownership of the Collins family interacted with the physical and cultural maritime environment based on the tasks to which they were assigned in the maritime task system. Different tasks permitted more movement than others. For example, enslaved laborers like Dick, Isaac, and Andrew were assigned to tasks which provided opportunities to cross the Albemarle Sounds, travel up and down the Scuppernong River, and even, at times, go to sea. Simultaneously, the enslaved Africans at the Lake Company Lands were isolated to the canals at the plantation.

The task system influenced how the enslaved laborers interacted with the maritime culture of the region. The enslaved laborers assigned to Edenton's Ropewalk maintained

specialized knowledge for outfitting vessels, perhaps even to the point of expertise. According to the advertisement for Yarmouth, his Ropewalk skills and outfitting knowledge permitted him with the possibility to be hired by vessel captains, regardless of his social and legal status as a runaway enslaved man.

Later, under Josiah Collins III, the enslaved community was more centralized at the plantation at Somerset Place. Enslaved laborers with specialized maritime skills maintained a higher economic value and could be hired out more often than others. Additionally, at least a few enslaved laborers maintained the capability to use vessels along the canals and the Lake. These tasks assignments permitted the enslaved laborers to participate in the recreational maritime environment.

The Lake Company Records ([Anne S. Graham Collection 1972](#)) indicate that maritime tasks such as bringing supplies to the Lake plantation for the Lake Company partners or the hire of a pilot ([Collins in Blount 1952:453](#)), or going after another enslaved individual in a vessel, were exclusively assigned to enslaved men. This assignment is not particularly surprising as much of the obviously maritime work of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were conducted by men, regardless of legal status. However, it is evident that enslaved women performed vital tasks for the maritime industry of Edenton. Meanwhile, Josiah Collin's plantation logbooks from 1850 to 1853 ([Josiah Collins Papers 1966](#)), indicate that enslaved women primarily performed the same tasks as men with exceptions such as plowing or removing large stumps from the canals. Still, enslaved women were tasked with much more than laborious plantation or industrial physical labor.

As it may seem strange that the two genders were assigned mostly the same physical plantation work, more pressures were commonly placed upon enslaved women for the social

preservation of the enslaved community. Leigh Ann Pruneau's work, "All the Time Is Work Time: Gender and the Task System on Antebellum Lowcountry Rice Plantations,"(1997) analyzes the role of women within the heavy labor system on a rice plantation while highlighting the essential but often undervalued work in the tasks assigned to enslaved women. Pruneau writes that an average rice plantation in the Lowcountry, usually South Carolina or Georgia, was populated with anywhere from 51% to 69% female enslaved laborers. Pruneau's study suggests that gender did not influence the amount of work each person was given. Often men and women in the rice plantation were expected to produce the same amount but women were often tasked with not only plantation labor but also the other tasks of supporting the enslaved community (Pruneau 1997:61). Additionally, Deborah Gray White's study, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* examines the struggles of enslaved women in the antebellum south. According to White, an enslaved woman's priority task regarding the enslaved community was motherhood. In customary practice, the marital status of the enslaved parents did not necessarily create the same social dynamics for a black, enslaved child as it did for a white child. The enslaved family was a matriarchal environment with the status of the mother setting the future of the child (White 1999:159-160).

Throughout the Collins documentation (Josiah Collins Papers 1966), it is clear that specialized skills, particularly maritime skills, increased the value of an individual. Not only did the individual's economic value increase, but so did their value within the maritime culture and industry. Highly specialized skills were limited to a small group of enslaved people. Gender also dictated which skills an enslaved laborer obtained. Under Josiah Collins I, primarily enslaved men were hired to conduct maritime tasks while more women were purchased for the Lake Plantation between the years of 1787 and 1890. In April of 1838, men were more likely to be

assigned to Beach Island fishery than the other Chowan County properties while women were more evenly distributed. Additionally, women were more likely to be assigned to a location with their young children. However, by the 1850s, men and women primarily worked together to perform similar tasks at Somerset Place.

Age also dictated task assignment for enslaved individuals. As children under the age of 12 were not old enough to be taxable property separate from their mothers, younger children were often placed with their mothers or older female family members. Children older than 12 in Chowan County were likely to be assigned tasks alongside their fathers or other male family members. At Somerset Place in the 1850s, children had the freedom to play during the day and sometimes with the white Collins children. Still, children would occasionally assist the women or older men with tasks in the field.

This research exposed a number of stories and insights for many enslaved individuals and the general community. The revelations of these patterns open a pathway to other research avenues to expand these stories. East Carolina University's Anthropology department has conducted a few archaeological excavations of structures which were central to the enslaved community including the Kitchen, and slave cabins. As important as these archaeological investigations were, little was found to suggest personal items of enslaved members or their interactions with Lake Phelps or the canals.

In the summer of 2019, East Carolina University's Program in Maritime Studies conducted a walking survey along the northern shore of Lake Phelps. This survey recovered no archaeological evidence of the enslaved community's use of Lake Phelps however, the Lake has greatly receded since of the time of enslaved at Somerset and has undergone multiple recreational uses since the Collins family left the plantation.

Further archaeological studies and investigations of black utilization of eastern North Carolina's waterways would open further avenues of study and comprehension of the impact of free and black labor on the maritime task system of this region. Additionally, archaeological surveys and investigation of the former location of Edenton's ropewalk and potential locations of Edenton's shipyard would provide additional understanding of Edenton's presence in colonial and early American maritime commerce and navigation.

This research provided an analysis of the maritime tasks and movement of the enslaved community under the legal ownership of the Collins family. Analyzing the records of the Collins family, their business partners, and neighbors, display the ways in which the maritime industry of Edenton and the rest of northeastern North Carolina was dependent, not only on the enslaved laborers of Somerset Place, but all the free and enslaved black maritime labor in the region. The maritime task system of the enslaved community under the Collins family demonstrate that maritime industry does not always included movement on bodies of water but often includes tasks completed on land and inland. While the Collins family and Somerset Place are not very representative of families or even enslaving families in the entire state of North Carolina, the Collins family and enslaved community does demonstrate the economic and social pressures and efforts to maintain a maritime industry.

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