

Peter Little and the Pennsylvania Connection in Antebellum Natchez

by Chad Vanderford

In 1798, an eighteen-year-old Pennsylvanian named Peter Little moved to Natchez, Mississippi. He remained there until his death in 1855. During that time southern planters and their slaves transformed the lower Mississippi valley into a cotton kingdom, making Natchez into one of the brightest jewels in that kingdom's crown. From his base in that city, Little participated in this economic metamorphosis as a cotton gin mechanic, sawmill operator, investor, and merchant. Through these early entrepreneurial pursuits, Little became wealthy enough to buy thousands of acres of plantation lands and hundreds of slaves. In transforming himself from a merchant entrepreneur into a slaveholding planter, Little changed professions while simultaneously moving up the social scale. But he did more than just that; he became a southerner.

Peter Little was not the first Pennsylvanian to move to Natchez and transform himself in this way. When one places the distinctiveness of the South in the fact that southern society had slavery at its center, an interesting fact becomes evident: in the protean world of the southern frontier, Pennsylvania-born citizens not only adapted to slave society, but they helped to make it. Their efforts contributed to making Mississippi

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what one historian has called “the most Southern place in the world.”¹ But these Pennsylvanians who moved to Natchez not only helped create the plantation South, they made themselves into southerners at the same time. They simultaneously adapted to and assisted in the creation of a distinctive regional identity. In order to understand the nature of that two-fold enterprise, one must first consider the nature of the society they created. How distinctive was it?

That question has troubled historians and writers for decades. Indeed the question of southern distinctiveness is probably the oldest of the many historical perennials available to those who study southern history. Even as scholars have moved to understand the region in terms of a “market revolution,” the older and unfortunately more speculative question of southern distinctiveness has continued to reappear like a proverbial skeleton at the feast. Charles Sellers, the historian who has done more than any other to popularize the market revolution paradigm, has scoffed at the idea that the large planters of the South eschewed capitalism. He gave that honor, such as it is, to the “precapitalist farmer majority” existing throughout the United States.² Other historians, like Douglas Egerton, caution that southern distinctiveness must remain a part of this new paradigm: “Those who would argue that the South was merely the North with whips and chains should ponder the ways in which dominant southern social relations both kept a capitalist mentality at bay and hindered the growth of precisely those market mechanisms necessary for a well-rounded capitalist economy.”³

Historians of the market revolution have not been first, nor will they be the last, to find themselves face-to-face with the problem of southern distinctiveness. The question occurs, to a greater or lesser extent, in most writings about the South. One historian has stated that “all writing on the South is ultimately about the problem of defining the South,

¹ Christopher Morris, *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xiv.

² It upsets Sellers that “liberal historiography embraces both southern romantics and the odd Marxism of Eugene Genovese to sustain a myth exculpating capitalism from black enslavement.” Elsewhere he depicts Jacksonian America as a struggle between “rival capitalisms of slave-labor and free-labor exploitation locked in combat for the Trans-Mississippi domain stretching to the Pacific.” Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 279, 407, 472.

³ Douglas R. Egerton, “Markets without a Market Revolution: Southern Planters and Capitalism,” *Journal of the Early Republic* XVI (1996): 207–21, quote from page 210.

of attempting to discern the one predominant trend.”⁴ It is fair to question the necessity of this obsession, but one does not thereby escape the predicament. For merely by questioning it, one has fallen into the old trap. With that rejoinder in mind, one can ask the question: why does southern history ultimately resolve itself into a discourse on southern distinctiveness? In 1940, a historian gave an influential answer to this question: since the South has never been a “political entity with boundaries clearly marked by treaty, constitution or law,” it has always lacked determinative boundaries. The absence of these boundaries make it difficult for historians to agree on the “metes and bounds” of the South and they therefore find themselves “compelled to seek unifying principles of southern history in social, economic, and cultural fields.”⁵

One early and influential school of thought looked to climate to answer the question of southern distinctiveness. U.B. Phillips began his magnum opus with this line: “Let us begin by discussing the weather, for that has been the chief agency in making the South distinctive.” Climate certainly played a large part in differentiating the North from the South, and in noting that fact, Phillips carried forth an idea first advanced by Thomas Jefferson. The Virginian claimed that a knowledgeable traveler in the United States could tell where he was at any given time, “without the aid of a quadrant,” if he paid attention to “the character of the people among whom he finds himself.” With a table, Jefferson mapped out the differing characteristics of the people who occupied the two halves of the country: northerners are “cool, sober, laborious [and] persevering”; southerners are “fiery, voluptuary, indolent, [and] unsteady.” Jefferson attributed this difference to the warmth of the South, the temperature of which “unnerves and unmans both body and mind.” In establishing such a model the Virginian had done something new. He had taken the climatological theories of the French philosopher Montesquieu and applied them to the southern United States. Despite all the influence that must accrue to a tradition boasting a pedigree of thinkers such as

⁴ Laurence Shore, *Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832–1885* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 14.

⁵ Charles S. Sydnor, “The Southerner and the Laws,” *The Journal of Southern History* VI (1940): 3–23, quotation from page 3.

Montesquieu, Jefferson, and Phillips, it seems these writers had found a necessary, but not yet a sufficient cause for southern distinctiveness.⁶

The southern climate made large-scale plantation agriculture possible, thereby providing an important prerequisite for a distinct way of life. But it is slavery that makes this form of economic endeavor distinct from all other types known in the United States of the nineteenth-century. Another French philosopher, Alexis de Tocqueville, broke away from the climatic determinism of his predecessors to look at American social institutions in their own right. After examining civilization on both banks of the Ohio River, he concluded that “the tastes of idle men” characterized the Kentucky side while the inhabitants of the Ohio side demonstrated an “ingenious resourcefulness” in their pursuit of profit. Tocqueville argued that the differences between the two sides should not be attributed to climate, which was identical on either side of the river, but to the social institution of slavery. In other words, “nearly all the evident differences between the southern and northern characters stem from slavery” By thus emphasizing the peculiar institution, this French visitor took an essential first step toward isolating the key variable in the distinctiveness of the antebellum South. Today, many important scholars of southern slavery work within the Tocquevilleian tradition. One such scholar, Peter Kolchin, has argued that “those who have played down Southern distinctiveness have seriously understated the impact of slavery on the antebellum South.”⁷

Tocqueville understood the phenomenon that contemporary scholars call the market revolution, but he viewed it as primarily a northern development. According to Tocqueville, the northerner “boldly explores every path that fortune uncovers.” If the path of economic opportunity

⁶ Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1929), 1; Thomas Jefferson to Chastellux, September 2, 1785, in Merrill D. Peterson ed., *Thomas Jefferson, Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 826-28; Montesquieu made his best-known statement on the importance of climate in Book XIV, “Of Laws in Relation to the Nature of the Climate,” in *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Thomas Nugent (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 221-34. For a convincing argument that colonial Americans did not perceive climate as the “powerful, independent, variable it would become in antebellum historiography,” see Joyce E. Chaplin, “Climate and Southern Pessimism: The Natural History of an Idea, 1500–1800,” in Larry J. Griffin and Don H. Doyle, ed., *The South as an American Problem* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 57–82.

⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Library of America, 2004), 401; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 171.

led to the South, a northerner would not hesitate to follow it. Tocqueville exaggerates when he says that “[a]lmost all the men who engage in commercial enterprises and seek to use slavery in the southernmost states of the Union come from the North.” But he certainly proved correct in noting that these immigrants “discover resources that the residents had failed to notice, and, adapting to a system which they disapprove, capitalize on it more effectively than the people who founded it and still support it.”⁸ Although northerners came south in search of economic opportunity, they ended up participating in the construction of a social order that would gradually become distinct from the one that they left behind. The life of Peter Little offers a clear demonstration of both tendencies diagnosed by Tocqueville: first, a society profoundly influenced by the ingenuity and resourcefulness of Yankee immigrants; and second, a society that, through its reliance upon slave labor, gradually became distinct from the North.

If slavery made the South different from the rest of the country, it made Natchez different from the rest of the South. Antebellum Natchez had more of the very wealthy planters, known to their contemporaries simply as “nabobs,” than almost any other location in the country. According to historian Morton Rothstein, the nabobs occupied the uppermost rung of a three-stage social hierarchy. The farmers at the bottom each owned fewer than twenty or no slaves at all; in the middle, the “planters on the make” owned between twenty and fifty slaves; but the nabobs sat at the very top, owning at least fifty slaves and establishing themselves as the “true elite of the Southern economic system.” Considered as a whole, the Lower Mississippi Valley had more nabobs than any other region in the United States. Even in this region, however, the nabobs never made up more than one percent of the population. These elites constructed Natchez to function as the epicenter of economic activity in the Lower Mississippi Valley. As one historian has pointed out, “It may actually have been true that, as some said, Natchez had more millionaires than any city in the country.”⁹

⁸ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 401.

⁹ Morton Rothstein, “The South as a Dual Economy: A Tentative Hypothesis,” *Agricultural History* XLI (1967): 373–82, quotation page 376; Winthrop Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993; revised edition, 1995), 33; the definitive work on southern nabobs is William K. Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

The nabob class set the standard that other citizens in the area aimed to reach. In this sense, the elites of Natchez fulfilled the criterion for an aristocracy given by Richard Weaver. A true aristocracy must be “small in number,” and can exist only over certain “restricted areas . . .” Nevertheless, “such is the nature of aristocracy that if it is genuine—and that means if it earns and receives respect—its relative number is of little importance. It will set the tone of society, and those who aspire to rise in the world will seek to identify themselves with it.” If Pennsylvanians like Peter Little wanted to transform themselves into southerners, and especially if they wanted to transform themselves into nabobs, they had to come to terms with slavery. In Little’s youth Pennsylvania still had slaves, but it never became a slave society: it existed as a society with slaves. In places of the former sort, the peculiar institution stands “at the center of economic production,” while in the latter this form of labor plays a role “marginal to the central productive processes.” When Little moved to Mississippi he found a society with slaves not unlike that he had left behind in Pennsylvania. But through his efforts, and the efforts of those around him, that society with slaves transformed into something different: a true slave society.¹⁰

The role played by Pennsylvanians in making Natchez has yet to receive the attention that it deserves, for their presence in bulk at the inception of this distinctive society surely deserves further study. But it is difficult to determine exactly how many of the people in antebellum Natchez came from Pennsylvania. One difficulty stems from the fact that the United States census did not begin to record place of birth until 1850. The Pennsylvania connection in Natchez certainly went back many years before that. To discover the rudiments of this connection one must string together bits and pieces of information in order to establish some rough indications of the number of people coming into Natchez from the Keystone State. For instance, in 1788, fifty-seven boats filled with immigrants docked at Natchez. Of that fifty-seven, fourteen came from Pennsylvania.¹¹

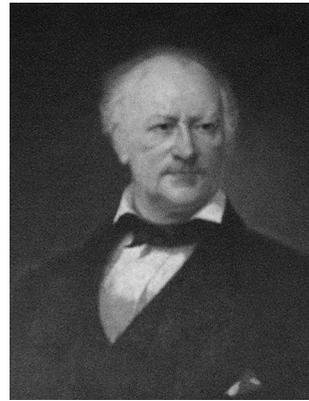
This Pennsylvania connection began even before the American Revolution. In 1771, for instance, James Willing left Philadelphia for

¹⁰ Richard Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1968), 74; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 8.

¹¹ D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 87.

Natchez, becoming one of the first merchants in the area. There he established a business on the riverfront. Unsatisfied with his profits, he soon returned home. While living in the North, Willing devised a scheme to lead an expedition through Spanish territory, to harass the English settlers who lived in the Natchez District, and then drive them from the region. The Spanish quickly granted Willing permission for this mission. In 1778, he launched his expedition at Pittsburgh, bringing along a gunship and twenty-six volunteers. Floating this force down the Ohio River to the Mississippi River and on to New Orleans, Willing plundered and wreaked havoc all along the way. Though he made it to the safety of New Orleans, when he tried to sail from there, the British caught him on the open seas and imprisoned him.¹²

After Willing, Samuel Postlethwaite became the next prominent Pennsylvanian to seek fame and fortune in Mississippi. In the 1790s, Postlethwaite honed his business acumen and financial connections through apprenticeships in Philadelphia and later in Lexington, Kentucky. In 1800 he relocated to Natchez, where he quickly became one of the most prominent merchants in the area. After a few years he married into the wealthy Dunbar family. Important positions followed, including the presidency of the First Bank of the Mississippi from 1815 to 1825.¹³ His successor at the bank, Dr. Stephen Duncan, may



Stephen Duncan, courtesy the Historic Natchez Foundation.

well have been the most successful of all the Pennsylvanians to merge with the planter elite of Natchez. Born in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1787, Duncan left for Natchez in 1809, where he found work as a physician. After Postlethwaite's death, Duncan assumed the presidency of the

¹² Robert V. Haynes, "James Willing and the Planters of Natchez: The American Revolution Comes to the Southwest," *Journal of Mississippi History* XXXVII (1975): 5–39; William C. Davis, *A Way Through the Wilderness: The Natchez Trace and the Civilization of the Southern Frontier* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 7–8.

¹³ Robert C. Weems, "The Makers of the Bank of the Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History* XV (1953): 147; Morton Rothstein, "The South as a Dual Economy," 378; *ibid.*, "Acquisitive Pursuits in a Slaveholding Society," in Katherine J. Adams and Lewis L. Gould, eds., *Inside the Natchez Trace Collection* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 105–06.

bank. By that time he owned more than one hundred slaves in Adams County alone, and by 1840 he had expanded that number to nearly four hundred. Duncan also owned plantations in Issaquena County, Mississippi, and in the Louisiana parishes of Tensas and St. Mary. By 1850, Duncan owned nearly a thousand slaves, making him a candidate for the title “richest planter in the South.”¹⁴



John C. Jenkins, courtesy the Historic Natchez Foundation.

Duncan may have owned more slaves than any other transplanted Pennsylvanian, but John C. Jenkins embraced southern values more enthusiastically than any other member of that group. Born into a prominent family in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where his father worked in the iron business and later served as a congressman, Jenkins earned his baccalaureate degree at Dickinson College and a medical degree at the University of Pennsylvania. He moved to Natchez at the invitation of his uncle, Dr.

John Flavel Carmichael. In the first years of the nineteenth century, Carmichael had worked as the port collector at Natchez. In that capacity he played a role in the legendary Burr Conspiracy of 1806. Like his hero Aaron Burr, Carmichael eventually won acquittal from conspiracy charges. But by 1837, with his eyesight failing, he needed Jenkins's assistance in serving his large clientele. Soon after arriving in Natchez, Jenkins elevated himself to nabob status by marrying into the Dunbar family and netting a substantial dowry in the process. He used the money to buy Elgin Plantation and seven hundred acres of prime bottomland about six miles south of Natchez. Before long he owned two additional plantations in nearby Wilkinson County: River Place, which consisted of 2,412 acres, and Stock Farm, with 1,794 acres.¹⁵

¹⁴ Rothstein, “The South as a Dual Economy,” 378; Scarborough, “Lords or Capitalists? The Natchez Nabobs in Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of Mississippi History* LIV (1992): 239–67, quotation page 245.

¹⁵ James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 107; Thomas Perkins Abernathy, “Aaron Burr in Mississippi,” *Journal of Southern History* XV (1949): 9–21; Shearer Davis Bowman, “Reflections of Sectional Conflict in the Natchez Trace Collection,” *Inside the Natchez Trace Collection*, 132–33; John C. Jenkins Diary, February 1, 1851, July 9, 1854, Jenkins (John C.) Family Papers, 1840–1900, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Hill Memorial

Moving beyond the numbers of acres owned, all evidence suggests that Jenkins fully adapted to the cultural norms of the large planters of Natchez. Indeed, he may very well be the archetypical nabob described in Frederick Law Olmsted's well-known book *A Journey in the Backcountry*. In this work, Olmsted relays a conversation he had with a rather resentful common citizen of Natchez. Concerning the nabobs, the commoner stated: "Why, a good many of them has two or three plantations, but they don't often live on any of them." Jenkins owned three plantations, although most of the time he stayed in residence at one or the other of them. In the eyes of this commoner it may have seemed that Jenkins lived somewhere else entirely. The commoner also noted that the nabobs: "Must have ice for their wine, you see, or they'd die; and so they have to live in Natchez or New Orleans." In his diary, Jenkins tells of the great lengths that he would go to assure that he had ice, even in the hot summer months. According to the commoner, the nabobs spent their summers making luxurious trips: "they go North, to New York, and Newport, and Saratoga, and Cape May, and Seneca Lake—someplace that they can display themselves worse than they do here." Jenkins kept a travel diary in which he recorded the luxurious trips to the North he took with his family, among them trips to Niagara Falls and Saratoga. In a final exclamation, Olmsted's commoner states: "Good God! I wouldn't have my children educated, sir, among them, not to have them as rich as Dr. ___, every one of them. You can know their children as far off as you can see them—young swell-heads! You'll take note of 'em in Natchez." It seems reasonable to infer that Jenkins was the doctor belittled by Olmsted's commoner. Even if Olmsted's common man is not referring to him specifically, one can nevertheless infer that this Pennsylvanian did an excellent job of taking on the stereotypical surface behaviors of the nabob class.¹⁶

It is no surprise that Jenkins not only lived the lifestyle of the planter elite, he also defended the social system that made such a lifestyle possible. He viewed slavery as a normal and inevitable part of human

Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; Albert G. Seal, "John Carmichael Jenkins: Scientific Planter of the Natchez District" (M.A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1937), 9, 33.

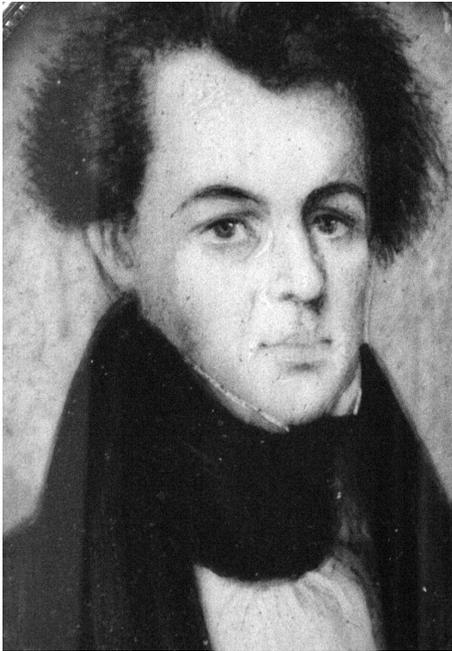
¹⁶ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country, 1853–1854* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860; reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 25–27; Jenkins Diary, May 27, 1843.

society. He thought people of African descent especially well suited for slavery, arguing that white people committed a positive social good by enslaving them. Indeed, in 1851, he went so far as to articulate this view publicly, publishing a series of open letters advancing proslavery views. According to this transplanted Pennsylvanian, English statesmen abolished slavery in the West Indies to draw attention away from the “grinding oppression of the white race at their own doors,” and because they hoped to “create an agitation in this country which might eventuate in a dissolution of our Union.” He argued that the English pressed for abolition not out of sympathy for the slave but rather out of fear and envy of the American nation. Predicting that continued agitation on the slavery question would produce a civil war that would destroy the United States, Jenkins argued that the nation needed to find a political solution to the sectional crisis over slavery. He directed a peroration to the northern elites he left behind: “Rouse then, and rouse your Whig party to rally to the rescue, and to do their duty to their God, to their country and to their race.”¹⁷

While Peter Little never rose to the prominence of a Stephen Duncan or became a proslavery polemicist like John C. Jenkins, his experience in the Natchez District may nevertheless provide the key to unlocking the larger significance of the Pennsylvania connection. Becoming a southerner meant adapting to the necessities of an economy centered upon large-scale plantation agriculture; it meant learning how to use coerced labor to make a profit. Pennsylvanians could not have had much experience with either of these endeavors. Some men, such as Stephen Duncan, made a full-scale transformation right away, but Little seems to have kept his feet in two worlds for an extended period of time. He worked as a merchant and entrepreneur, slowly buying his way into the planter elite. While only one of several Pennsylvanians to make a name for himself as a planter in Natchez, an examination of Little’s life is instructive because of the slowness of his transformation from entrepreneurial capitalism to seignorial capitalism. By taking longer to transform himself into a southerner, Little sheds light on the magnitude of that transformation.

Much of what we know about Little’s early years in Natchez comes from a discussion he had with Benjamin Wailes in 1853. In his diary, Wailes describes an encounter with Little in which the two men remi-

¹⁷ Seal, “John Carmichael Jenkins,” Appendix A, vii-viii, xxiii, xliii; Appendix B, lv.



Peter Little, courtesy Mississippi State Society, Daughters of the American Revolution.

nised about the early years of the cotton boom that had transformed Natchez. Wailes asked Little questions about his initial move there. Little reflected that he had first arrived on a boat carrying “Mr. Wilkins’s cotton to New Orleans.” The Mr. Wilkins in question owned a cotton gin at a place called “Pine Ridge,” located a few miles north of Natchez. Little remembered that Wilkins had stuffed his cotton into round bags, a way of handling the crop that southerners soon abandoned in favor of the more efficient method of pressing it into bales. Soon after arriving, Little went to work in a different part of the cotton-based economy, acquiring his

first job in town at a cotton gin owned by David Greenleaf. He built it about twelve miles north of Natchez on the Old Post Road at a settlement called Selsertown.¹⁸

Little picked the right man to apprentice with, learning through Greenleaf about the tools that would transform the lower South in a cotton kingdom. George Seltzer had recently founded his eponymously named town, by building an inn for the comfort of travelers moving up the Old Post Road. By the 1830s, that road became better known as “the Natchez Trace.” Running from Natchez to Nashville, it served as a footpath for flatboat men to walk home after floating down the river to Natchez. At Selsertown, Greenleaf built one of the first cotton gins in the state of Mississippi. He processed other people’s cotton, taking

¹⁸ Benjamin Wailes Journal, May 12, 1853, typescript, George Armstrong Library, Natchez, Mississippi. Benjamin Wailes worked as a planter, a scientist, and an early trustee of Jefferson College, which was located about seven miles northeast of Natchez in the town of Washington. Charles S. Sydnor, *A Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region: Benjamin L.C. Wailes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1938; reprint, Westport: University Reprints, 1970).

10 percent of the ginned cotton as payment. Some years later Greenleaf moved to Natchez, where he built cotton gins that he sold to other planters. In addition to pioneering the cotton gin in Mississippi, he also developed a new form of cotton press capable of turning out between twelve and thirteen cotton bails a day.¹⁹

From his humble beginnings as a day laborer, Little found it possible to move up the social scale in Natchez. Before long he began to demonstrate his entrepreneurial nature and his willingness to take commercial risks in pursuit of profit. He began buying land in Natchez as early as 1799, paying \$250.00 for 100 acres on the outskirts of the town near a place called "Crooked Creek." He also invested in lands located in Natchez-Under-the-Hill. In 1806, he bought a lot on the river and another lot with a warehouse and a tavern. From these locations he sold goods on credit and advanced money at interest in the form of promissory notes. Court records indicate that he sold everything from saddlery to lumber in his first ten years in Natchez. Little's name first appears in the Adams County court records in 1801, filing a lawsuit seeking damages for an unpaid note. Such lawsuits soon became a regular part of his life. Most merchants in the antebellum South sold between two-thirds and three-quarters of their merchandise on credit. Little seems to have followed that practice as well. Not surprisingly, his customers often found themselves unable to meet their financial commitments. Little worked as a merchant, not as a wealthy plantation-owning patron. As a result, he made sure to take his debtors to court.²⁰

Little soon became successful enough in his mercantile enterprises that the nabobs wanted him to play a part in the governance of the town. Each year from 1808 to 1813, the selectmen of Natchez appointed Little their town marshal. Qualified voters who had lived in the city for a year

¹⁹ William C. Davis, *A Way Through the Wilderness: The Natchez Trace and the Civilization of the Southern Frontier* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 33–34, 50, 70; John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 11, 64; Charles Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1933), 181.

²⁰ James Eliot to Peter Little, December 10, 1799, Deed Records Book A, Adams County Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi; *Peter Little v. Laurence Sigler and Tunstall Quarles*, 1801, box 23, folder 98; *Peter Little v. John L. Perry*, March 17, 1807, box 17, folder 1; *Peter Little v. William J. Voss*, April 22, 1807, box 17, folder 36, *Peter Little v. Jonas Carl*, 1808, box 17, folder 109, Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi (hereafter HNF); Lewis E. Atherton, "The Problem of Credit Rating in the Ante-Bellum South," *Journal of Southern History* XII (1946): 534–56; Davis, *A Way Through the Wilderness*, 245.

chose the selectmen for a term of one year. As marshal, Little had to collect debt payments from defendants found guilty by the circuit court. So after only ten years in Mississippi, Peter Little had worked at a cotton gin, operated a tavern, speculated in town lands, advanced funds on interest, moved goods as a merchant, and worked as an agent of the town government. The promissory notes he accepted and the amount of land that he bought demonstrate that he had significant amounts of money available to him and that he had a quick eye for profits. But unlike other members of the Pennsylvania connection, Little still hesitated to join the plantation elite.²¹

Little could have chosen a faster path to nabob status. Indeed he neglected an oft-used means to greater wealth: marrying up. Little's choice of a marriage partner did not increase his social standing. In 1808, he married Eliza Ann Low, the fifteen-year-old orphaned daughter of the local ferry pilot, who had contracted yellow fever during the epidemic of 1805. Before he died, Low asked Peter Little to be the guardian of his daughter. Three years later, the twenty-seven-year-old Peter Little married the fifteen-year-old Eliza. According to Natchez lore, Little married Eliza to prevent the town government from confiscating her small inheritance, a common practice for town governments confronted with large orphan populations. Immediately after the marriage, Little sent Eliza to a Baltimore "finishing school," from which she returned to Natchez several years later to live with him as his wife.²²

Even after marriage, it does not seem that Little did much to push Eliza in the direction of nabob culture. In 1817, for instance, he allowed her to convert to Methodism. Had he been interested in joining the nabob ranks, joining the Episcopalian church would have proven

²¹ *Margret Williams v. James McCury and Walter Irwin*, 1813, Box 17, Folder 8; *John Shaw v. John Vermonet*, 1808, box 15, folder 32, HNF; Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom*, 201.

²² Harnett T. Kane, *Natchez on the Mississippi* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1948), 264–71; Sarah Gordon Turner Hicks, *Silhouettes of Settlers* (Natchez: Natchez Historical Society, 1974), 111; Reid Smith and John Owens, *The Majesty of Natchez* (Montgomery: Paddle Wheel Publications, 1969), unpaginated. Contemporary Natchezians often class the above works as "pilgrimage propaganda." The pilgrimage they refer to is the Natchez Pilgrimage, an annual festival in which the locals open their mansions to tourists. Harnett T. Kane's book is the chief source for Hicks, Smith, and Owens. Admittedly, Kane has no citations in his book, and it is difficult to validate his information, but historians working in Natchez have found it impossible to extricate themselves fully from the oral tradition that he put to paper mid-way through the twentieth century.



Eliza Little, courtesy Mississippi State Society, Daughters of the American Revolution.

a wiser course of action. But Lorenzo Dow, a Methodist evangelical and “soul merchant” from Connecticut, inspired Eliza’s conversion. A combative preacher with a long untrimmed beard who always wore a long black coat, Dow inspired controversy as well as conversions. Though he called himself the “Cosmopolite” in reference to the breadth of his travels, his contemporaries sometimes referred to him as “Crazy Dow.” Methodist preachers who settled in one area usually received a charter from the Western Conference of Methodist Churches, but Lorenzo Dow worked principally as a freelance preacher. He eventually

established his own church in Washington, a small village located six miles above Natchez. Professing a devout creed, Dow led Eliza away from the more staid services of the Episcopalians. The epitaph on her tombstone reflects how seriously she took religion: “The record of her Christian spirit, moral integrity, social and domestic virtues is in the hearts of her surviving friends and with her Savior and her God. Verily there is a reward to the righteous.”²³

With a significant investment in mercantile holdings and a wife from a poor family belonging to the “wrong” religious group, Little moved slowly in the direction of nabob status. More important, during his early years in Natchez, Little seems to have made only halting first steps toward becoming a master. In 1811, for instance, he paid \$450 for a thirty-five-year-old “mulatto woman named Rosanna.” Three years later, he sold her to “a free man of colour” for \$250. That same

²³ Margaret Des Champs Moore, “Protestantism in the Mississippi Territory,” *Journal of Mississippi History* XXIX (1967): 358; Thomas D. Clark and John D.W. Guice, *The Old Southwest, 1795–1830: Frontiers in Conflict* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 95; Davis, *A Way Through the Wilderness*, 235; Hicks, *Silhouettes of Settlers*, 111.

year Little spent \$250 on “a certain negro slave named Joe,” whom he purchased from a man in Concordia Parish, Louisiana. Within three years, Little decided to free Joe. Freeing a slave involved considerable paperwork. One had to publicly announce his intention to free a slave and to declare the honesty and respectability of that slave. Finally, one had to commit to providing for the slave’s upkeep should he or she prove unable or unwilling to take care of himself. Little testified that Joe had “led an honest conduct for the past four years and indeed through life without committing any robbing or been guilty of any criminal misdemeanor against the laws.” The sheriff of Vidalia, Louisiana, provided the opportunity for “any person who may have any legal opposition to said emancipation” to file a complaint within forty days.²⁴

Freeing slaves or selling discounted slaves to their loved ones was not the fastest way to become a nabob. Instead of hurrying into the world of large-scale plantation agriculture, Little continued to earn money as an urban entrepreneur, seizing opportunities wherever he could find them. The Mississippi River provided him with many such chances. In 1818, Little took a risk by investing money to salvage an abandoned but well-stocked boat that had sunk at the waterfront. The owner, a Georgian, had spent a few days trying to raise the boat before returning home. Little decided to try the job himself. He bought ropes and hired some help. After nearly a week of hard work, he brought up the contents and sold them at a profit. He then used the money to build a lumber mill. An enterprise of this sophistication required considerable investment and expertise. Little used the steam engine of the sunken boat to operate the mill’s saw. This five-horsepower engine drove a single blade, allowing the mill to produce between two and three thousand feet of lumber per day. Three-quarters of a mile away from the main steamboat landing Little built a breakwater of logs and stones, forming a pond in which he floated logs for storage. Eventually, Little added a canal that led to a steam-powered, funicular railroad that pulled logs up the steep bluff to the sawmill. Like most sawmill operators in those days, Little

²⁴ Pleasant H. Hunter to Peter Little, September 4, 1811; Peter Little to Edward Smith, June 10, 1814, Deed Record Book H, Adams County Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi; Henry Postlethwaite to Peter Little, March 17, 1814, Deeds of Conveyance Book C, Parish of Concordia Office of Records, Vidalia, Louisiana.

frequently purchased wood for his mill from raftsmen and individuals who floated their timber to Natchez.²⁵

In 1829, Peter Little sold the mill to Andrew Brown for \$3,500. Having worked at Little's mill since the early 1820s, Brown knew how the sawmill business worked. After purchasing it, he expanded the mill until it became the largest one in the state of Mississippi. Most of the sawn wood ended up at Brown's lumberyard in New Orleans, where he eventually ran one of the nation's largest woodworking factories. The historian D. Clayton James referred to Brown as a "nabob," but Brown was the only member of that class who built his mansion at Natchez-Under-the-Hill. Brown eventually owned more slaves in Natchez proper than anyone else, but these slaves lived as urban slaves, not plantation slaves. He gave them privileges and responsibilities nearly identical to those held by freemen. Like Little, Brown embraced both business enterprise and slavery, functioning in both the entrepreneurial and seignorial worlds of antebellum Natchez.²⁶

Little did not hesitate to immerse himself into the different and distinctive culture of everyday life in Natchez-Under-the-Hill. According to one nineteenth-century traveler, the location where Natchez hit the river "justly merited" its reputation as a violent place known for "the frequency and sanguinary character of its single combats." Little frequently witnessed acts of violence. In an 1818 court docket, he offered testimony that described the rough-and-tumble nature of life in this area located

²⁵ Davis, *Way Through the Wilderness*, 41–42; Kane, *Natchez on the Mississippi*, 266; Hicks, *Silhouettes of Settlers*, 104; John Hebron Moore, *Andrew Brown and Cypress Lumbering in the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 20–23.

²⁶ Peter Little to Charles Dart and Andrew Brown, March 28, 1829, Deed Records Book R, Adams County Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi. Though the merchant Charles Dart signed on as a co-purchaser, he never became involved in the operation of the sawmill. Brown rented Dart's portion of the sawmill. Much to Brown's chagrin, Dart defaulted on the \$4,800 owed Little. Brown and Dart sent a shipment of lumber to New Orleans—the proceeds of which they planned to give to Little as payment—but Dart took the money and "left New Orleans for the North." Brown insisted that he was "much mortified" at having to take out a public advertisement to "protect himself and his family" from the loss that they would incur should Dart "pay the notes to an assignee." Brown promised to make use "of the statute law, which authorizes him to offset all claims against the note in the hands of any assignee of Mr. Dart." *The Ariel*, March 16, 1827, 278; *The Natchez*, June 12, 1830, 189. Moore, *Andrew Brown*, 20; James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 206; Moore, *Emergence of The Cotton Kingdom*, 204, 208–09, 249. For the story of one of Brown's most trusted slaves see John Hebron Moore, "Simon Gray: A Slave who was almost Free," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* II (1962): 472–84.

precariously close to a town famed for its gentility. When the constable tried to issue a warrant on a local ruffian the young man threw the constable in the river, holding his head under the water “intending as I thought to drown him.” The hoodlum then grabbed a gun and threatened to shoot anyone “who should oppose him” Holding the crowd off for a time, he “finally made his escape” with the assistance of a “boatman in a small canoe.” Peter Little added that this young man “afterward expressed great regret that he had not drowned the damn constable.”²⁷

Sometimes Little went beyond being a witness and actually became involved in the violence himself. The free black barber of Natchez, William Johnson, recorded one such instance in his diary. It centered on a confrontation between Peter Little and a group of men bound for Texas. “The Boat Landed at Peter Little’s place to wood & those men went on shore and Robbed his Hen Roos [*sic*] and then whipped his Negro Boy” Little came out and told the men to stop, but the Texans “knocked him down and then pounded him pretty severely—they then Left and went on Bourd of the Steam Boat taking with them all the old Fellows Chickens & Turkeys.”²⁸

When Little fought, he did not fight like a nabob. Instead he fought in a style that antebellum southerners called the “rough and tumble.” Practitioners of this style strove to strike out the eyes of their opponents. According to historian Elliot Gorn, “gouging out an opponent’s eye became the *sine qua non* of rough-and-tumble-fighting, much like the knockout punch in modern boxing.” Indeed, this practice of eye-gouging became so prevalent that in some parts of the South every third man lost an eye to such combats. Planter nabobs refused to embrace this style, instead creating an elaborately ritualized *code duello*.²⁹ Peter Little apparently lacked the social status to engage in such ritualized

²⁷ Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The Southwest By a Yankee*, 48–49; *State of Mississippi v. George Young*, May 3, 1818, Box 39, Bolder 57, HNF.

²⁸ William Ransom Hogan and Edwin Adams Davis, eds., *William Johnson’s Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 133.

²⁹ Elliot J. Gorn, “‘Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch’: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” *American Historical Review* XC (1985): 18–43, quotations from pages 20, 27. For a description of the evolution of the code duello see: Steven Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 5–49 and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 350–61.

combats, even when involved in protracted disputes that tended to turn into duels. For instance, in 1838, Little sued Richmond Bledsoe for trying “with force and arm” to enter his house and stable. Bledsoe complained that Little had “demurred” the property to him for a term “which is not yet expired” and had unjustly expelled him from the land. Little sought \$500 damages, but the court awarded him only one cent in damages and \$101.18 in court fees. Three years after seeking mediation the dispute still rankled, so Little decided to settle the matter with fisticuffs. William Johnson described the fight as follows: “Peter Little and R Bledsoe met under the Hill and had a fight, Old Peet knocked Mr. Bledsoe Down and hurt his Eye, Bledsoe started off[f] for a gun, a pistol, seying, give me a gun, a pistol, shoot Peter Little, Look at my Eye, Gun Pistol, &c.”³⁰

Even after selling his lumber mill to Andrew Brown, Little did not try to rise into the nabob ranks. Instead he concentrated his attention on commerce in partnership with Richard Abbey. These men catered to an elite clientele, selling a variety of luxury goods, most notably carriages. Such vehicles served as hugely important status symbols for the nabobs. Joseph Holt Ingraham remarked on the extent of carriage use in Old Natchez: “[T]he stranger is struck by the extraordinary number of private carriages, clustered before the doors of the most fashionable stores, or millineries, rolling through the street, or crossing and recrossing it from those by which it is intersected, nearly every moment, from eleven till two on each fair day.” Nabob women made the most use of these vehicles. The men preferred to ride alongside on horseback, usually putting a trained slave in charge of driving the carriage. According to one historian’s description, these carriages had “huge wheels which stood taller than the occupants of the carriage itself,” making it possible for them to ford small streams. Though ordinary white people sometimes carried merchandise around in wagons, and some of the white middle classes even had access to “cabs,” only the nabobs owned “luxury” or “pleasure” carriages of the type sold by Richard Abbey and Company.³¹

³⁰ *Richmond Bledsoe v. Peter Little*, April [day?]1838, in Peter Little and Alonzo Mercer Griffin Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi; *William Johnson’s Natchez*, 337.

³¹ *Richard Abbey and Company v. Charles E. Wilkins*, September 29, 1834, Records of Judgment, Book 3447; *George Francis v. Richard Abbey and Company*, March 27, 1840, Records of Judgment, Book 3466, HNF, Natchez, Mississippi; Joseph Holt Ingraham *The South-West By a Yankee* (New York: G.C. Evans, 1835; reprint, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1966), 29; Winthrop D. Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek*, 10–11.

Little prospered in his partnership with Abby, and in 1834 he sold his share of the company for the immense sum of \$100,000. Little's willingness to involve himself with many different types of business enterprises had finally allowed him to generate enough capital that he could, all at once, buy his way into the plantation elite. He probably entered into the purchasing of slaves and cotton lands with the same sort of entrepreneurial spirit that he took toward his other business decisions and investments. After all, investments in land and slaves proved lucrative for many Mississippians. Little may have purchased slaves because he thought he could profit economically as a slaveowner, but by so doing so he transformed himself into a southerner. And while his personal motivations remain largely unknown, the extant land deeds, court records and probate records demonstrate the extent of Little's commitment to the world of large-scale plantation agriculture.³²

When Little decided to make himself into a plantation aristocrat he struck for the epicenter of European culture on the Mississippi river. He built himself one of the grandest mansions in Natchez, calling it Rosalie in honor of the fort that had commenced European settlement on the Mississippi. In building this mansion, Little made a grand testimonial to his status and his expectations of becoming a grand seignior. For this reason, it is not surprising that dozens of other masters built their Natchez-area mansions in imitation of Rosalie. One could class Melrose, Choctaw, and even the most palatial of all the mansions in Natchez, Stanton Hall, as successors to Rosalie. Frederick Stanton, a nabob in the grand style, built his eponymously named mansion in the 1850s to compete with the grandeur of Little's mansion. Architectural historians believe that the architect of Rosalie, whoever he was, influenced the design not only of other Natchez mansions but of plantation homes throughout the South. Because of its prime location and because it appeared relatively early in the antebellum era, Rosalie has become instantly recognizable as a symbol of Natchez.³³

³² Peter Little to Richard Abbey, et. al, November 25, 1834, Deed Records Book BB, Adams County Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi. This deed stipulated that Little receive his money from not only from Richard Abbey but from the company's five other stockholders as well. These stockholders were William Harris, Nathaniel Harrison, Sincon Gibson, Orlando Lane and W. Vancumben.

³³ J. Wesley Cooper, *Antebellum Houses of Natchez* (Natchez: Southern Historical Publications, 1970), 128; Mary Miller and Ronald Miller, *The Great Houses of Natchez* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), 89.

The story of Little's Rosalie began in 1820, when Peter Little paid \$3,000 for "twenty-two acres of land" situated at "the Old Fort so called." When it came time to build a mansion there, Little drew the name "Rosalie" from the "Old Fort" itself. By that time, the fort had reached an advanced state of disrepair. A contemporary of Little described it thus: "Fort Rosalie, a fine old ruin, overhanging the lower town, sunk growling away among the hills." Little's mansion set the scale for material displays of affluence within the Natchez District for years to come, but just as important, it showed how an outsider from Pennsylvania could build himself into the narrative of Mississippi history.³⁴

The Old Fort that supplied Little with a name for his mansion had served as the cornerstone of European settlement on the Mississippi. Its history began more than one-hundred years before Little bought the land. In 1716, French settlers strategically constructed the fort on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. The French named the fort "Rosalie" in honor of the Duchess de Pontchartrain, whose husband, Jerome Pheypeaux the Comte de Pontchartrain, actively supported French colonial activities. Fifty years later, after English victory in the French and Indian War, the English sent a detachment of the Royal Scotch Fusiliers to occupy the fort. The soldiers immediately rechristened it as Fort Panmure in honor of the commanding officer of their unit, one William Maule, the First Earl of Panmure. During the Spanish occupation, most of Natchez's inhabitants remained loyal to Great Britain and the fort continued to be identified as Fort Panmure throughout that time. Yet in 1797, when Spanish troops left Fort Panmure and Americans took it over, the Americans wasted no time in rechristening it. This time they named it Fort Sargent in honor of Winthrop Sargent, the new governor of

³⁴ Gamaliel Pease to Peter Little, December 22, 1820, Deed Records Book L, Adams County Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi; Joseph Holt Ingraham, ed., *The Sunny South, or, the Southerner at Home: Five Years Experience of a Northern Governess in the Land of the Old South* (New York: G.G. Evans, 1860; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), 23; historian Jack Elliott contends that by choosing to name his house "Rosalie," Little brought about a renaissance of the name of the Old Fort. Jack Elliott believes that Little's inspiration for naming his house Rosalie came from his reading of the English translation of François René Chateaubriand's historical novel *The Natchez*. Jack D. Elliott, *The Fort of Natchez and the Colonial Origins of Mississippi* (New Orleans: Eastern National Press, 1998), 3. If Elliott is correct, Little did not name his house Rosalie until some time after 1827, the year that *The Natchez* reached publication. Letha Wood Audhuy, "Natchez in French Louisiana and Chateaubriand's Epic, *The Natchez*," Noel Polk, ed., *Natchez Before 1830* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 31.



Peter Little's plantation house, Rosalie.

the Mississippi Territory. In reclaiming the Fort's original name, Little staked a claim of both legitimacy and, more important, of primacy.³⁵

Hundreds of tourists visit Peter Little's Rosalie each year, and all of them are certain that they are examining the home of a bona fide plantation aristocrat. The tourists should not be dissuaded from holding this view, for Rosalie is as impressive as any piece of southern architecture that has survived from the 1820s. The mansion faces north, with the parsonage—built by the Methodist church in 1853 on land donated by Peter Little—directly visible from the front porch. The west side faces a four-acre park that terminates in a steep bluff overlooking Natchez-Under-the-Hill and the Mississippi River. Rosalie presents itself as a solid brick edifice, two stories high, constructed with notes of both the Federal and the Georgian styles. Four white Doric columns support a portico in the front of the house and a full-length gallery in the rear. A hipped, triangular-shaped roof sits atop the columns. This design proved ably suited for making Natchez's hot and humid summers more enduring.³⁶

³⁵ Jack D. Elliott, Jr., *The Fort of Natchez*, 7, 19–21; Robert V. Haynes, *The Natchez District and The American Revolution* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1976), 27–49.

³⁶ Antebellum Natchezians knew the area west of Rosalie as "Little's Bluff." Townspeople both black and white could be seen there. The free-black barber of Natchez, Wil-

The question of who designed Rosalie has remained controversial. Zaida M. Wells argues that her great-grandfather, one James Shyrach Griffin, laid out the plans. A Baltimore-based architect, Griffin certainly had the experience to do the job. And as Peter Little's brother-in-law, he had a family-connection that makes the story seem plausible. There is, however, no extant documentation to prove Ms. Wells's claim. The architectural historian Samuel Wilson speculates that Andrew Brown may have been involved in the design of Rosalie. Brown, the man who purchased Little's sawmill in 1829, was indeed an architect. Brown designed the Old Masonic Temple in Natchez, but his connection with Rosalie, if in fact there was any, remains undocumented.³⁷ Whoever the architect may have been, construction finished in 1823, and unlike the fort from which it takes its name, the house is still standing and is owned today by the Mississippi State Society, Daughters of the American Revolution. Its durability enabled it to withstand the tornado of 1840, which killed upwards of three hundred people, caused millions of dollars in property damage, and nearly leveled Natchez. Rosalie survived the storm relatively unharmed losing only a chimney and some architectural ornaments. Little's repair costs totaled \$1,500.³⁸

As a symbol, Rosalie went far towards marking Little as a member of the planter elite of Natchez. But Little located the economic center of

liam Johnson, notes a visit to Little's Bluff in his diary *William Johnson's Natchez*, 218. Cooper, *Antebellum Houses of Natchez*, 128. Mary Miller and Ronald Miller, *The Great Houses of Natchez*, 89

³⁷ Zaida M. Wells makes her claims in the pamphlet "Rosalie," Vertical File, Armstrong Library, Natchez, Mississippi. Samuel Wilson provides side-by-side photographs of Rosalie and the Old Masonic Temple to demonstrate similarities in their style. "The Architecture of Natchez before 1830," in *Natchez Before 1830*, 150–51. Even if James Shyrach Griffin was not the architect, his role as the patriarch of much of Peter Little's family deserves mention. James Griffin married Peter Little's sister, who gave birth to Alonzo Mercer Griffin in 1811. When Peter Little died in 1856, Alonzo Griffin took control of his estate. James Shyrach Griffin also had a daughter named Eliza. Peter Little refers to her as his "adopted daughter Eliza Little, she whom was raised in my family from a child and who now lives with my family and is one of my family." This Eliza Little—who should not be confused with Little's wife—married Douglas L. Rivers. Alonzo M. Griffin and Douglas L. Rivers were the main protagonists in the lengthy litigation that followed Peter Little's death. *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi* (Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1891), 821; Sarah Gordan Turner Hicks, *Silhouettes of Settlers*, 113; Will of Peter Little, May 26, 1834, Adams County Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

³⁸ *William Johnson's Natchez*, 280; R. Bruce Davis, "The Tornado of 1840," *Journal of Mississippi History* XXXVI (1974): 43–51.

his plantation holdings not at Rosalie but at Forrest House plantation in Concordia Parish, Louisiana. Little's use for this plantation went against the wishes of the previous owner of the land. When Judge James Green owned Forrest House, it contained more than one thousand acres. After he died in 1832, the Mississippi Colonization Society attempted to follow his wishes by allowing his slaves to return to Africa. Thanks to the financial support made possible by Green's inheritance, the Mississippi Colonization Society formed for emigrants from Mississippi a separate African colony that they christened "Mississippi in Africa." The society named the capital of this colony "Greenville" in honor of their benefactor.³⁹

Little remained aloof from these proceedings. With its prime location eight miles south of the town of Vidalia, directly across the Mississippi River from the Natchez landing, Forrest House plantation served him well as the basis for large-scale plantation agriculture. He began acquiring the land in the area in 1834, paying \$1,500 at a public probate auction for 415 acres. He already owned land bordering on this property. Later that year, Little paid \$2,200 for another 350 acres located "about twelve miles below the town of Vidalia." Little continued in this manner, buying a great deal of land on both the Louisiana and the Mississippi sides of the river. In 1840, he bought Cliffs plantation adding an additional 1,200 acres of land to his holdings.⁴⁰

When Peter Little's wife died in 1854, an appraisal of Forest House indicated that it contained 1,731 acres and had a market value of \$69,273.20. Two years later, after Peter Little's death, his adopted daughter and her husband took control of that plantation. By this time it contained 1,940 acres and the land alone had a market value of \$85,087.30. Upon Little's death the settlement of his estate provoked much tension between his prospective heirs. The Concordia Circuit Court, to resolve matters, appointed Peter Little's old friend David F. Miller to appraise the value of Little's slaves and then divide them between Alonzo Mercer Griffin and Douglas Rivers. Miller divided Little's

³⁹ Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, 212, 214, 221–24.

⁴⁰ Lillard and Sparrow Mortgage to Peter Little, March 15, 1834, Deed of Conveyance Book F, Parish of Concordia Office of Records, Vidalia, Louisiana; John S. Alexander to Peter Little, April 21, 1834, Deed of Conveyance Book G, Parish of Concordia Office of Records, Vidalia, Louisiana; Thomas Henderson and Alexander Henderson to Peter Little, January 4, 1841, Deed Records Book CC, Adams County Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

slaves in the Parish of Concordia into two lots. The first lot, which Griffin appropriated, contained forty-eight slaves with an average age of eighteen years and valued at \$54,200. The second lot, appropriated by Rivers, contained fifty slaves with an average age of seventeen years and a total value of \$35,100.⁴¹

These facts present a clear picture. By the middle of his life, Peter Little had amassed a substantial fortune based upon extensive entrepreneurial endeavors. Wherever a chance to make a profit presented itself, Little quickly moved in and exploited the opportunity. At different times in his life, he ran a tavern, a sawmill, a carriage shop, and various sorts of merchant firms. He invested heavily in banking and in real estate. Nothing seemed out of bounds to him within the arena of the Natchez cotton-based economy. But Little had another side as well. All of his business activities occurred in the context of a slave-based economy. Nothing he did as an entrepreneur challenged the pre-eminence of the Natchez District's commitment to slavery and plantation agriculture. Indeed, when one examines Little's entrepreneurial efforts in the context of the world created by slavery, one sees that Little used his fortune to embrace that economy. At his death, he owned thousands of acres of plantation land and hundreds of slaves.

Little's total immersion into a culture rooted in slave ownership and the material culture of mansions and garden estates demonstrated itself most visibly in the extravagant Rosalie, Cliffs, and Forest House plantations. Although Peter Little continued until the end of his life to invest in various mercantile pursuits, he went to his grave as the proud owner of Rosalie and the master of numerous slaves. No longer just a retainer of the planters, Peter Little had become one himself. Other Pennsylvanians reached the pinnacle of plantation society with greater speed. Others undoubtedly lagged behind. But Little's path towards becoming a southerner epitomized the Pennsylvania connection in antebellum Natchez. He used the entrepreneurial ingenuity of the North to move into the plantation society of the South. And in so doing he helped to create a society that would eventually see itself as so different that it no

⁴¹ Inventory and Appraisement slip, December 14, 1853, Peter Little and Alonzo Mercer Griffin Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Folder 5. Eliza Little to G.B. Shields, January 7, 1858, Deed of Conveyance Book X; Eliza L. Little to D.L. Rivers, February 1, 1858, Deed of Conveyance Book O; Eliza Little to Douglas Rivers, March 6, 1858, Deed of Conveyance Book N, Parish of Concordia Office of Records, Vidalia, Louisiana.

longer wished to remain in the Union with the North. Seeking economic opportunity in an era when the market revolution restructured much of American society, Pennsylvanian immigrants like Little unwittingly constructed a society that would come to exist at odds with the society they had left behind.