I. African Americans in Camden: The Colonial Period through the Civil War
A. Political Participation

It may at first seem counterintuitive to speak of African-American political participation in Camden before Emancipation, when the vast majority of black people in Camden and Kershaw District were the property of other human beings. How could enslaved people, denied basic human and civil rights, be political actors? Even the small numbers of free people of color, while clearly not owned by a master, lived in a precarious world between slavery and freedom that excluded them from citizenship. What, then, constitutes antebellum black politics? Evidence from across the slaveholding South indicates that enslaved Africans tended to exploit every opportunity they had to make choices, to improve their living conditions, and to build communities. Such actions had profound political significance, moderating to some degree a brutally oppressive system and endowing African Americans with communal identities and structures that they carried forward into the post-Civil War world.¹

The Roots of Black Politics

Within the confines of an oppressive system, slaves sought a variety of means to shape their collective lives. They often went to great lengths to preserve marriages and families. When they were not able to do so, they created extensive networks of “fictive kin,” people who were not physically related but who took on familial responsibility for each other. Such familial relationships were often the basis of slaves’ attempts to influence their working conditions. This is most clearly evident in the development of the family-based “task system” of labor and of extensive family vegetable gardens along the South Carolina coast; almost everywhere, however, slaves with special skills sought to make money for themselves and their families through hiring out. Trade in vegetables and handicrafts, both among slaves and between slaves and whites, could also be a source of cash, enabling some slaves to accumulate personal property.

Slaves developed community institutions, often kept carefully out of the sight of their masters. Most important in this regard were religious organizations, the informal slave churches and “hush arbors” that offered spiritual nourishment, collective identity, and an arena for the emergence of leaders within the slave community. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Christianity of the slaves had messianic and millennialist overtones: they expected a divine intervention that would overturn an unjust social order, punish their oppressors, and lead them into freedom.² Indeed, after the Civil War churches emerged as the centers of black community life and political organization.³

For a small minority of particularly thrifty or lucky slaves, accumulation of wealth through trade enabled them to purchase their own freedom. By the beginning of the Civil War,

¹ For recent scholarship that broadens the concept of black political participation, see especially Steven Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
² Hahn, A Nation under Our Feet, 47.
there were some two hundred free people of color in Kershaw District out of a total black population of over 8,000.\(^4\) While a few slaves were able to buy freedom, others assessed their own circumstances and chose the risk of running away. Often those who ran away were younger people without children or other strong family ties. The Camden and Charleston newspapers frequently included notices placed by owners about their runaway slaves.\(^5\) In the eighteenth century, the main destination for slaves from coastal South Carolina was Spanish Florida, which promised freedom for slaves who escaped from the British colonies. In the Camden area, runaways were more likely to head for the colony’s frontiers, where they joined outlaw bands or formed small settlements.\(^6\) In late 1864, during the confusion of the Civil War, Lucy, a young slave of John M. DeSaussure of Camden, made her escape to Charleston where she passed herself off as a free person.\(^7\)

![Camden Gazette Notice, 1819](image)

**Figure 1.** *Camden Gazette Notice, 1819*

Notice for runaway slaves running in the *Camden Gazette*. It was typical for owners to advertise rewards for runaway slaves in local papers in hopes that it would lead to their capture.

Whether an enslaved person gained his freedom through purchase or running away, an additional option was to leave the country altogether. Before the Civil War, thousands of free people of color emigrated from America to Africa. One of them was James Churchill Vaughan,


\(^7\) W. S. Frazer to J. M. DeSaussure, 3 January 1865, DeSaussure Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.
born in Camden in 1828 to a mother about whom little is known and a father recently freed by his late master’s will. Vaughan emigrated to Liberia as a young man, about 1848. From there he went with a party of Baptist missionaries to Nigeria, where he married a local woman, prospered in the carpentry and hardware business, and supported the mission work.\(^8\)

**Rebellion**

Perhaps the most extreme form of resistance to enslavement was violence, ranging from the torching of farm buildings and the murder of individual masters to collective armed rebellion. From the early eighteenth century until the Civil War, groups of slaves and free people of color in South Carolina planned and attempted numerous collective uprisings. Most were betrayed by other slaves or discovered by whites, and the few revolts that moved past the planning stages were not strong or well organized enough to overthrow the slaveholding regime; yet masters and slaves alike knew the potential for large-scale violence.

The timing and organization of planned and attempted uprisings indicated that throughout the colonial and antebellum periods, South Carolina slaves maintained extensive networks of communication that enabled them to keep abreast of important social and political currents in white South Carolina and abroad.\(^9\) In 1720, when South Carolina’s propertied elite had just overthrown the proprietary government and the colony was threatened by attack from the Waccamaw Indians and the Spanish, a slave betrayed a plot by his fellows to destroy plantations and attack Charleston.\(^10\) The largest slave uprising in British North America took place in South Carolina in 1739, when the white population was weakened by successive outbreaks of disease and again threatened by war with Spain. Preceded by an upsurge in runaways, the Stono Rebellion began on September 9 when a group of slaves took up arms at the Stono River south of Charleston. With shouts of “Liberty!” they marched towards the freedom of Spanish Florida, gaining supporters and killing twenty to twenty-five whites along the way. Pursued by whites on horseback, most of the approximately one hundred insurgents were killed or captured within a day, but some eluded capture for months. The next year, another revolt followed.\(^11\) In response to the violence, the South Carolina legislature passed a new highly restrictive slave code.\(^12\) Before and after the Revolutionary War, news of similar uprisings from New York to the West Indies fueled the fears of white South Carolinians and likely provided encouragement to other groups of slaves who were contemplating violence. In 1793, South Carolina whites were horrified when slaves in the Caribbean sugar colony of St. Domingue seized on the egalitarian rhetoric of the American and French revolutions and successfully overthrew their French masters. In 1805, whites uncovered an insurrectionary plot in Columbia.\(^13\)

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\(^{8}\)“Vaughan Family.” Located in “Vaughan Family Folder,” Vertical Files, Camden Archives and Museum, Camden, SC.

\(^{9}\) Edgar, *South Carolina*, 73-4.

\(^{10}\) Edgar, *South Carolina*, 110.

\(^{11}\) The most comprehensive work on the Stono Rebellion is Mark M. Smith, ed., *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005).


\(^{13}\) Edgar, *South Carolina*, 328.
In the summer of 1816, a group of slaves in Camden planned their own uprising.\textsuperscript{14} They planned to seize weapons at the unguarded arsenal in the heart of town on the fourth of July turn them on the whites, most of whom they knew would be inebriated at Independence Day celebrations, and make their escape. Contemporary accounts from white Camden indicated that the object of the plot was to destroy the town, murder all the white male inhabitants, and violate the white women. Scipio, a slave of Colonel James Chesnut, warned his master of the plot in mid-June. The white authorities in the town conducted a quiet investigation until they had enough evidence to arrest and try those they believed responsible for the plot. On 2 July a posse of young men arrested the suspects, and the town council met to question them. Beginning on 3 July and continuing for two weeks, a special court composed of two justices of the peace and five landowners tried the cases of fourteen slaves. Six were found guilty, sentenced to death, and hanged in front of the town jail. One slave, Big Frank, was found guilty but sentenced to one year in irons in solitary confinement. Another slave, Stephen, was found guilty and sentenced to death, but, curiously, he was set free after all the others had been executed. Nine others were found not guilty and released to their owners.\textsuperscript{15} Scipio was rewarded for his service in betraying the plot; an 1817 act of the General Assembly gave him freedom and a lifetime allowance of fifty dollars a year.\textsuperscript{16}

Little is known of the condemned six except for their names and those of their owners, all prominent Camden citizens. Ned belonged to Sarah Martin, the elderly widow of a Revolutionary doctor. Cameron and Isaac were the property of another widow, Sarah Lang. Her son Thomas Lang, a prominent planter, owned Jack. Thomas Lang’s father-in-law, Duncan McRae, owned Spottswood. March belonged to Chapman Levy, a lawyer and legislator. All but one of the conspirators were hanged on 5 July; Ned’s sentence was carried out on 12 July. The \textit{Camden Gazette} reported that “those who were most active in the conspiracy occupied a respectable stand in one of the churches, several were professors [of Christianity] and one a class leader.”\textsuperscript{17} Significantly, at least two of the convicted plotters were literate. Another contemporary account said:

Two brothers engaged in this rebellion could read and write, and were hitherto of unexceptional characters. They were religious, and had always been regarded in the light of faithful servants. A few appeared to have been actuated solely by the lust of plunder, but most of them by wild and frantic ideas of the rights of man, and the misconceived injunctions and examples of Holy Writ.\textsuperscript{18}

Like the slave insurrectionists in St. Domingue and elsewhere, the Camden plotters appear to

\textsuperscript{14} The timing of the Camden incident seems to support the contention that slaves planned insurrections when their masters were most vulnerable. In the summer of 1816, a particularly severe outbreak of malaria struck Camden, killing many white inhabitants and weakening more. A contemporary account of the Camden plot suggests that the proposed date was moved forward to early July because “there was a scarcity of provisions—that the crops not yet made would be lost in the confusion that would ensue, and that famine would accomplish what force might not be able to effect.” Francis Deliesseline, quoted in L. Glen Inabinet, “‘The July Fourth Incident’ of 1816: An Insurrection Plotted by Slaves in Camden, South Carolina.” In \textit{South Carolina Legal History: Proceedings of the Reynolds Conference, University of South Carolina, December 2-3, 1977}, ed. Herbert A. Johnson (Columbia: USC Southern Studies Program, 1980), 212.

\textsuperscript{15} Inabinet, “‘The July Fourth Incident,’” 215.

\textsuperscript{16} Inabinet, “‘The July Fourth Incident,’” 220.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{The Camden Gazette}. Camden, 18 July 1816, quoted Inabinet, “‘The July Fourth Incident,’” 217.

\textsuperscript{18} Francis Deliesseline, quoted in Inabinet, “‘The July Fourth Incident,’” 218.
have imbibed the “wild and frantic ideas of the rights of man” of the American and French revolutions, as well as the liberatory teachings of the Bible. At least one of the leaders of the plot, Isaac, was a drummer for the local militia company. He had accompanied the militiamen to Charleston in 1814 when the city was under threat of British attack, and likely had at least some familiarity with weapons.\textsuperscript{19}

The attempted insurrection of July 1816 had a profound effect on blacks and whites in Camden and throughout South Carolina. Later in 1816, whites uncovered another plot on the Ashepoo River south of Charleston. In response to the two attempted rebellions, the state legislature passed a law forbidding the importation of slaves from other states. It was soon repealed as unenforceable, but in its stead was passed a stronger patrol law designed to keep watch over the slave population.\textsuperscript{20} In 1817, the General Assembly increased the budget for repairs and security at Camden’s arsenal.\textsuperscript{21} Whites also meted out harsher punishments on runaway slaves. In late July 1816, a Kershaw District court sentenced a runaway to be taken before the public gallows, be branded on the cheeks and the forehead, and have half of each ear cut off.\textsuperscript{22} An 1819 notice in the \textit{Camden Gazette} informed readers that a man and two young women had escaped from Margaret Exum’s plantation at Lynches Creek near Camden, taking with them “a considerable quantity of Ladies very fine clothes, silk dresses, shawls, &c.” The accompanying illustration included in the background a small image of a body hanging from the gallows.\textsuperscript{23} The Camden attempt, along with the one on the Ashepoo, may have encouraged other slaves to rebel or run away. In July 1822, whites uncovered a massive plot in Charleston. A free person of color, Denmark Vesey, was convicted as the ringleader. He and thirty-four others were sentenced to death, with another thirty-seven found guilty and ordered sold out of state.\textsuperscript{24} In 1828, perhaps remembering Isaac’s role in the 1816 plot, Kershaw District whites petitioned the state House of Representatives to forbid slaves and free people of color from serving as musicians in the militia.\textsuperscript{25}

Circumscribed as they were by the system of slavery, people of African descent in South Carolina made efforts at individual and collective self-determination ranging from the preservation of family ties to revolt. The community structures built during slavery were the foundation of formal political participation after the Civil War.

\textit{Associated Sites}\n
The site of the Camden arsenal, Church Street between Rutledge and York Streets. Built by slave labor, the arsenal was the focus of the planned 1816 slave insurrection.

The site of the courthouse and city jail, currently the site of the Robert Mills courthouse (1827).

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Inabinet, “The July Fourth Incident,” 218.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Edgar, \textit{South Carolina}, 328.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Inabinet, “The July Fourth Incident,” 219.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Inabinet, “The July Fourth Incident,” 219.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Quoted in Kirkland and Kennedy, \textit{Historic Camden}, 191.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Edgar, \textit{South Carolina}, 328. For a reappraisal of the Vesey plot, see Albert J. von Frank, “Remember Denmark Vesey.” In \textit{Reviews in American History} 29.1 (2001), 40-48.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Inabinet, “The July Fourth Incident,” 218.
\end{itemize}
The accused 1816 insurrectionists were held in the jail and tried in the original courthouse. The
death sentences were carried out at the gallows on the grounds of the jail.

B. Economic Life

Slavery in Camden

During the colonial years and continuing up to the Civil War, slavery was a vital institution not
only in the South and the state of South Carolina, but also in the town of Camden. While
defining the economic livelihoods of plantation owners in Camden, it also impacted the overall
experience of blacks living under this system of oppression. Prior to the Revolutionary War,
Camden was one of the most developed plantation areas in the colony’s interior. By 1787, there
were 1,025 slaves inhabiting Camden, and by 1830, this number had jumped to 8,333. This large
number of slaves was necessary for large-scale cotton production, which gained popularity with
farmers in the decades following the Revolutionary War. In Camden, “the wealthiest one-fifth of
the white population owned an average of twenty four slaves;” however, one-half of Camden’s
taxpayers owned no slaves at all.26 Throughout South Carolina, some free blacks even owned
slaves, but these black slaveholders were a small minority.27

While evidence suggests that slaves planted cotton as early as 1797, other crops proved
just as successful. Masters put their slaves to work in the fields surrounding Camden planting
indigo, wheat, corn, and tobacco; however, in the early years of the nineteenth century, cotton
replaced indigo as the major cash crop in the area. Slaves also tended more subsistence-based
crops such as potatoes, onions, turnips, pumpkins, wheat, and even rye. Aside from tending
crops on farms or plantations, slaves also tended livestock. Evidence suggests that some
Camden planters owned cows, pigs, and chickens as early as 1783.28 Some slaves, most often
women, worked in their master's homes cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, serving food, and
nursing the master’s children.29

Between 1783 and the coming of the Civil War, the profits from planting corn, indigo,
wheat, tobacco, and especially cotton led to the creation of a planter elite surrounding Camden.
Many of these planters owned town homes in addition to their plantation homes.30 While living
in these town homes, slave owners would have brought at least some slaves along to perform
domestic duties.

26 Historic Property Associates Inc., Historic Resources Survey, 3, 6, and 9.
27 According to the 1810 Census, Elijah Bass, was the only free person of color who owned slaves; he owned two.
For a brief period of time Bonds Conway owned one slave, a female who was over the age of forty-five. By 1830
Bass was once again the only free person of color listed as owning slaves. U. S. Bureau of the Census, The Third
Federal Census: 1810, Kershaw County, South Carolina (Camden, SC: Kershaw County Historical Society, 1972),
23; U. S. Bureau of the Census, The Fourth Federal Census: 1820, Kershaw County, South Carolina (Camden, SC:
Kershaw County Historical Society, 1973), 32; and U. S. Bureau of the Census, The Fifth Federal Census: 1830,
Kershaw County, South Carolina (Camden, SC: Kershaw County Historical Society, 1994). See also Asa Gordon,
Sketches of Negro Life and History in South Carolina (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1929), 30.
29 Claude H. Nolen, African American Southerners in Slavery, Civil War and Reconstruction (Jefferson, NC:
In addition to their regular labor, owners often hired their slaves out to whites. They went to work performing various tasks including fieldwork, construction, wood chopping, procuring turpentine, laboring on railroads, and working in factories. In town, they were hired to work as maids, porters, messengers, and cooks. Whites employed these slaves for various lengths of time. Sometimes they hired them by the day, the month, or even the year. Those employing slaves often provided food, clothing, shelter, and medical care if needed. In most cases, a large portion of the money earned by these slaves went to their masters; however, sometimes slaves made money for themselves through this practice. While there is no direct evidence of whites hiring slaves from Camden, the practice was common throughout the South. In Camden, several slaves worked at DeKalb Factory, a cotton mill. The factory, established in 1838, stood at the west end of the dam on Factory Pond until fire destroyed it just before the Civil War. Until around 1849, DeKalb Factory used blacks as their primary operatives except in the weaving department where white women worked. It is believed that the company often preferred black laborers. In 1850, DeKalb Factory let go all but thirty of their black workers because white workers became easier to acquire than black workers. The thirty black workers they kept belonged to the factory. Therefore, DeKalb Factory not only made it practice to hire slaves, but they also owned their own slaves.

Purchasing Freedom: Free People of Color

For slaves who retained some of their wages from hired labor, purchasing freedom became more of a reality. Occasionally slaves were able to save enough money with which to purchase their freedom and sometimes the freedom of loved ones. Prior to 1820, manumissions of slaves were fairly common in Kershaw County. While state law prohibited the freeing of slaves after 1820, except by an act of the legislature, the population of free blacks in Kershaw District continued to grow. In 1840, there were 250 free blacks throughout the district. By 1850, the census revealed 100 free blacks living in Camden alone. Additionally, in 1860, approximately 130 of 197 free blacks within Kershaw District lived in Camden. Based upon this information it is likely that many of the free blacks in 1840 lived in Camden as well.

Some may find the number of free blacks in Camden surprising, but it is clear that the purchasing of freedom or outright manumission occurred throughout Kershaw District, particularly in Camden. Perhaps the most well known free black in Camden was Bonds Conway

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who purchased his freedom on 17 December 1793. Many believe Conway was the first black man to purchase his freedom in Kershaw District, although some Kershaw District historians claim there is no firm evidence to support this. Records from the Kershaw County Court House indicated that Bonds Conway not only was allowed to travel around the area freely, but also was a businessman of sorts able to "hire himself, and be free of molestation of any person or persons." 

Bonds Conway made the most of his master allowing him to trade and conduct business. He made money selling ginger beer and gingerbread door to door, as well as offering his carpentry skills for sale. With this money and the help of Zacariah Cantey, he purchased his freedom. The purchase papers show that Zachariah Cantey “purchased the within named Negro man, Bonds, with his own money, of Mr. Edwin Conway, and do relinquish any title or claim to him.” 

Bonds Conway became a landowner as early at 1803, and by 1812, he had purchased one third of a block, in what was the “heart” of Camden, bounded today by York, Market, King and Lyttleton Streets. Eventually, he owned the entire block. At the time he began purchasing

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land, free blacks comprised less than one percent of the district’s population. As a skilled carpenter, he built his own house, which is presently located at 811 Fair Street. Throughout his life, Bonds Conway married three times and had eleven children. Eight of these children lived to adulthood. When he died in 1843, Conway had his property divided into four parcels, each containing a house, and given to four of his eight surviving children. Bonds Conway and his descendants appear as significant individuals in Camden's history because they left behind more documentation than other free blacks who lived in Kershaw District.

While Conway and his descendants experienced lives considerably less restricted, they were merely an exception to the “rule” during the antebellum period. During this time many more blacks remained enslaved than lived free. By 1860, there were 7,841 slaves in Kershaw District but only 197 free blacks.

Thousands of slaves within Kershaw District remained enslaved during the antebellum period. Slavery controlled their lives. While free blacks had their freedom, their economic lives were limited because of racial stigmas, but those that persevered created the foundations for a successful business community that arrived in the twentieth century.

**Associated Sites**

The Bonds Conway House, 811 Fair Street. A small cottage with clapboard is typical of houses built in the early nineteenth century. It is believed to have been built by Bonds Conway circa 1810-1820 and sat sideways on the lot much like the houses of Charleston. This house is a prime example of the carpentry and architectural skills of this former slave.

**C. The Impact of War**

Slave and free black struggles for individual rights took physical, violent forms in addition to the political and economic strategies mentioned previously in sections A and B. American involvement in various wars presented enslaved Africans with the opportunity to fight for their own advancement – socially, politically, and economically – within America. Many slaves hoped that the valor, courage, and sacrifice they showed during battle would translate directly into a better life for other members of their community. In particular, slaves and free blacks participating in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War worked towards the abolition of slavery and the recognition of personal freedoms.

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45 Velasco, “Freed Slave’s Legacy.”
46 Taylor-Goins and Taylor-McConnell, “Naudin-Dibble Family,” 5. This house originally sat at 411 York Street, but when the Kershaw County Historical Society purchased it in 1977 they moved it to its present location. The historical society received a matching grant from the Department of the Interior the following year to restore the house. 46
47 Velasco, “Freed Slave’s Legacy.”
48 Historic Property Associates Inc., *Historic Resources Survey*, 7. Figures for Camden were not widely available, therefore figures for Kershaw District were used. This pattern likely existed in Camden.
In the early morning hours of 16 August 1780, Levi, a soldier fighting for American independence, found himself in the most unfortunate of situations. A Frenchman of African descent, in addition to a soldier, Levi stood in the midst of one of the largest battles of the Revolutionary War: the Battle of Camden. Almost as soon as the battle began, the young man witnessed his fellow white soldiers break from their ranks and retreat from British forces. Under the command of General Charles Cornwallis, British forces chased after soldiers and officers. Slaughter ensued. Nearly 900 of Levi’s fellow soldiers died at Sanders Creek and another 1000 became prisoners of war. However, Levi survived – and so did his unique legacy.  

Unlike Levi, most slaves and free blacks in South Carolina found participating in the Revolutionary War to be far different than the white and foreign soldiers who participated in the conflict. The start of the Revolutionary War saw the widespread use of slave labor on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Because convention forced African slaves to earn their freedom either by purchasing it themselves or by receiving it through the choice of their masters, slaves mobilized around alternative methods of obtaining freedom whenever the chance presented itself. Impending war between the American colonies and Britain offered slaves this opportunity. This was especially true for slaves living in the colony of South Carolina.  

While African slaves willingly volunteered for military service, the white power base of the American colonies had its reservations: many white men in the south rejected the idea of allowing slaves to fight for their own political freedom. Before September 1775, most of the North accepted the influx of slave soldiers. However, South Carolina and Georgia whites made strong protests against allowing their property to participate so freely in combat. Southern white colonists also objected to slave participation in battle because they feared that slaves with army training would lead open revolt against slavery, freeing slaves and ending the plantation economy of the South. Consequently, southern colonies not only stopped recruiting slaves into militias well before the start of the Revolution but also prohibited free or enslaved blacks from being able to own or use weapons. Expressing their worries of slave insurrection and revolution, southern representatives lobbied other members of the Continental Congress. The South created a consensus in the Congress to remove any slave and free blacks, who enlisted after 1776, from fighting in the national army. 

Even though the opportunities for slaves to prove themselves on the battlefield became increasingly scarce as opposition to their participation increased, they still played important, peripheral roles in the Revolutionary War. Both white colonists and British officers forced

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50 Thomas J. Kirkland and Robert M. Kennedy, *Historic Camden: Part One, Eighteenth Century* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1926), 146, 169 – 170, 179 – 180. Kirkland and Kennedy acknowledged that this battle was also known as “The Battle of Sanders Creek” and “The Battle of Gum Swamp” because the fighting occurred near Sanders Creek, eleven miles outside of the city limits.


54 Alt and Alt, *Black Soldiers*, 17.

slaves to serve in some capacity during the war. Slaves in South Carolina found jobs assisting white soldiers on both sides of the Revolutionary War. In the army, many slaves constructed fortifications, roads, and bridges important for strategic positioning in battles and defense.\textsuperscript{56} For example, slave carpenters and laborers from Camden built fortifications to protect the city from British conquest in 1780.\textsuperscript{57} Other slaves in the region performed important tasks. Extinguishing fires, they also acted as emergency agencies during battles and raids. Slaves in South Carolina were skilled at finding lead from local churches and other buildings throughout the state and using the metals to supply the military with ammunition and weapons.\textsuperscript{58} In the navy, slaves from South Carolina found themselves just as close to warfare. Slaves acted as oarsmen in naval ships and often worked in the shipyards and on the docks. In addition to laboring, slaves acted as messengers and even spies for both sides during the war. Colonists and British forces used slaves not only as laborers but also as property. As the war neared a conclusion, slaves in South Carolina and other colonies became bounty for both sides; officers, depleted of funds and resources, offered slaves to newly enlisted and re-enlisted soldiers as a signing bonus.\textsuperscript{59}

Despite their efforts as laborers, spies, and other important workers, slaves were not able to translate their participation in the Revolutionary War to direct political, social, and economic freedom in the newly established United States. The story of Levi, a Frenchman of African descent, illuminates the abilities of slaves and foreign blacks to obtain free status for themselves after the Revolutionary War. Breaking with the convention of the time, Levi fought along side his French and American comrades. Unlike many of his fellow soldiers who died in the Battle of Camden, Levi survived and remained in the newly formed country – living in the Camden district with some of the same soldiers he fought alongside. However, his social, political, and economic status within society mirrored other slaves and free blacks, who lived in Camden at the time. Despite the courage and valor he showed in fighting, Levi became a servant in the Whittaker household.\textsuperscript{60} Even though Levi’s efforts failed to produce liberty for slaves, the battle for freedom was not over. A future generation of slaves and free blacks would have another opportunity to fight for their freedom.

**Fighting for Freedom: The Civil War**

Through their participation in the Civil War, slaves finally achieved the legal freedom they actively pursued. While the Revolutionary War focused on the freedom of the colonies from British control, the Civil War emphasized the status of slaves in American economic systems and society.

While slaves and free blacks held a vested interest in the Civil War, they found entering the war for either side to be difficult and delayed. Considerations for enlisting black soldiers did not occur until the war depleted the white, male population on both sides. The Confederate government ignored the slave population as a potential fighting force until the final year of the

\textsuperscript{56} Farley, “The South Carolina Negro,” 78.
\textsuperscript{59} Farley, “The South Carolina Negro,” 82, 85.
\textsuperscript{60} Kirkland and Kennedy, *Historic Camden: Part One*, 179 – 180.
war and, even then, the Confederates only allowed slaves onto the battlefield because it was absolutely necessary.61 Fortunately for slaves, their service time was virtually non-existent: Robert E. Lee surrendered before the South forced the slaves to fight against their own future freedom. In contrast to Confederate policy, Union forces utilized fugitive and captured slaves in their ranks well before the end of the war. Looking for replacements from casualties and injuries, Union generals like General Hunter openly admitted slaves, who volunteered to fight for the United States and its vision of freedom for slaves.62

Much like the Revolutionary War, the Civil War created opportunities for slaves and free blacks in many of the peripheral jobs that did not involve direct combat with the opposition. Despite their willingness to fight, slaves and free blacks found that the white-controlled governments relegated them to the background. During the first two years of the war, slaves and free blacks served as laborers and camp attendants in both the North and South. Throughout the rest of the war, Confederate forces continually utilized slaves in supporting roles. Occasionally in moments of urgency, slaves close to fighting found themselves on the battlefield. Union forces, in addition to using slaves initially as general workers, also employed ex-slaves as cooks in the camps and sailors in the navy.63 Camden slaves in particular shared some of these peripheral roles with Union troops. Entering Camden to raid houses for jewelry and other valuables, northern troops utilized slaves both to make meals for them and to act as guides in order for Union soldiers to find particular homes in the city. It was even rumored that with their pockets stuffed and their hands full, northern troops abandoned the spoils they could not carry and gave the items to Camden slaves as payment for their years of laboring without compensation.64

While the accuracy of the looting was in doubt, the efforts of slaves and free blacks in the war were not. As the war progressed, both the fighting roles and the peripheral roles of blacks presented slaves with the opportunity to fight for freedom from discrimination and economic exploitation. With the surrender of the Confederacy, slaves slowly gained new identities in American society: legislation changed the status for many blacks, from slaves to African-American citizens.

D. Education

The education of slaves in South Carolina was always a shifting and sensitive issue in the colonial and antebellum periods. A slave’s education lay in the hands of his or her master. They chose whether to teach slaves skills such as reading and writing. Some schools did appear, notably one in Charleston, whose main function was to educate slaves through religious teachings.65 Many whites, however, feared that educating slaves, religiously based or otherwise, would lead to a general sense of unhappiness with their place in the southern world. In turn, this

61 Alt and Alt, Black Soldiers, 33, 47.
63 Alt and Alt, Black Soldiers, 34, 35, 46.
unhappiness could bring on the potential for violence as slaves attempted to gain their freedom. White fears increased as the population of slaves swelled.

Rumors of a slave rebellion led by literate slaves in Antigua in 1736 frightened many South Carolina planters. Whites viewed slave education with suspicion and doubt because of the connection in so many minds to shirking duty and violent revolts. The Stono Rebellion of 1739 confirmed the fears percolating in many planters’ minds regarding the relationship between slave education and slave revolt. Stono caused many frightened planters to pass stringent laws curtailing slave activities, including education. One of the many restrictive laws stated that a fine was to be collected from “anyone who taught a slave to read and write English.”

In the following century after the Stono Rebellion, the debate on educating slaves continued in the legislature and on the plantation. One effort to start a “Negro School” failed in the state assembly. The assembly felt slave education was acceptable if the slaveholders should choose to do so with their slaves privately, state-sanctioned school however, was not.

During the late eighteenth century, the South Carolina legislature also passed a law making it illegal for slaves to gather behind closed doors or at night. These restrictions kept slaves from church and/or educationally oriented activities. As a reaction against Nat Turner's 1831 Revolt in Virginia South Carolina again restricted slave activities in 1834 with the passage of some of the harshest laws in the southern states prohibiting literacy among slaves.

With such oppressive laws in place prohibiting the education of slaves, it is somewhat surprising that twentieth-century interviews with former slaves reported that about five percent of the total interviewees said they learned to read and write while living as slaves. They came from all over the South and from a variety of backgrounds. Reconstruction era records also indicate that a number of literate freedmen and women were found during missionary trips. Stories circulated among the missionaries and the freedpeople about the “secret schools” and religious schools in operation before Reconstruction in which slaves learned to read.

Camden shares in the legacy of the public prohibition and the secret education of slaves. Quakers figured prominently in the early roots of Camden, and it was the Quakers who first spoke to the benefit of literacy among slaves. Indeed, they understood it as a first step toward freedom. There are few records in Camden today to answer the question of whether masters or religious schools educated slaves regularly. Mary Boykin Chesnut was one of the few recorded cases of a slave educator in Camden. She took up the education of her slaves intermittently through her life, at times organizing Sunday school for her slaves on Mulberry Plantation. However, given its early Quaker influence and the stories and evidence of literacy among slaves in spite of the law, there is a good possibility that educated slaves lived in Camden before the end of the Civil War, in secret and in silence.

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66 Cornelius, When I Can Read My Title Clear, 18.
67 Cornelius, When I Can Read My Title Clear, 22.
68 Cornelius, When I Can Read My Title Clear, 27, 33, 37.
69 Cornelius, When I Can Read My Title Clear, 7, 10.
70 Cornelius, When I Can Read My Title Clear, 18.
E. Religion

In *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, Eugene D. Genovese argues, “For good reason the whites of the Old South tried to shape the religious life of their slaves, and the slaves overtly, covertly, and even intuitively fought to shape it themselves.” This statement characterizes the nature of black religion in Camden and throughout the South in the colonial and antebellum periods.

When African slaves first arrived in the American colonies, they retained their native religions. There were small numbers of Muslims and Catholics among these new slaves; however, the predominant religions were tribal ones. Whether African slaves converted to Christianity in the New World or in Africa (as was the case for many Catholic slaves), they blended their African traditions with Christian ones. The continuing influx of slaves directly from Africa meant that African beliefs remained prevalent among South Carolina slaves. Slaves combined their new Christian faith with African worship traditions such as “prayer, song, and shout (a loud exultation accompanied by ‘polyrhythmic hand-clapping and foot-stomping’).” Slaves also continued to believe in a variety of spirits: haunts, plat-eyes, and hags.

Until the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were no serious attempts to convert slaves to Christianity although some slave owners attempted to discourage African tribal practices. Especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, slave owners feared the government would free slaves who chose to convert and be baptized. Because of these growing concerns, the South Carolina Assembly passed the following law:

> Since charity and the Christian religion, which we profess oblige us to wish well to the souls of all men, and that religion may not be made a pretense to alter any man’s property and right, and that no person may neglect to baptize their Negroes or slaves or suffer them to be baptized for fear that thereby they should be manumitted … such slave or slaves [who] shall receive and profess the Christian religion … shall not thereby be manumitted or set free.

In this legislation, the Assembly addressed slaveholders’ concerns. The Assembly guaranteed that the government would not emancipate Christian slaves by clearly legislating that baptism and profession of Christianity would not be legal grounds for emancipation. Once assured that converted slaves would not be freed, some slave owners made individual efforts to convert their slaves.

The Church of England made one of the first serious attempts to convert slaves. Its Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPGFP) came to South Carolina in 1702. In part the SPGFP focused on white colonists, but it also focused on slaves. With the

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74 Edgar, *South Carolina*, 185.
75 Edgar, *South Carolina*, 185.
SPGFP’s help, Alexander Garden established a school for black males in Charleston, which would convert them to Christianity, teach them to read the Bible, and then send them back to their masters to convert their fellow slaves. In this period, Baptists in the Pee Dee region were the only other religious group that made a concerted effort to convert slaves in South Carolina.

Beginning in the 1740s, the First Great Awakening brought evangelical religion to the South. Slaveholders were greatly concerned about the evangelical movement, which included the Baptist faith, Methodism, and New Light Presbyterianism, because they upset the social structure. Many slaveholders feared that evangelical religions would encourage slave insurrections. Throughout the Upper South including Virginia, many slaves first encountered Christianity in these revivals; however, the First Great Awakening had little impact on colonial South Carolina, which remained “a bulwark of conservatism.” Evangelical preachers had some success in colonial South Carolina, but they mostly faced the wrath of slaveholders. One convert in this period was Hugh Bryan, a Lowcountry planter. After his conversion, Bryan began to preach to slaves in St. Helena’s parish using Exodus as his text. With the Stono Rebellion (1739) fresh in their minds, Lowcountry slaveholders were especially alarmed at Bryan’s activities. The Commons House of Assembly confronted Bryan, who eventually claimed that Satan inspired his preaching. The reaction to Bryan helps explain why the First Great Awakening ultimately had little impact on colonial South Carolina.

These religious patterns likely held true in colonial Camden as well. Colonial Camden had three religious groups: the Quakers, the Presbyterians, and the Anglicans. The Quakers and the Presbyterians both had meeting houses; the Anglicans met in the Presbyterian meetinghouse with an Anglican itinerant, Charles Woodmason, serving them as early as 1768. While Quakers took a strong antislavery stance, most Quaker groups did not make an effort to convert blacks to their religion. As a result, it is unlikely that any Camden slaves belonged to Camden’s Quaker congregation. If allowed to attend church, Christian slaves in Camden likely experienced segregated worship with either the Presbyterian or Anglican congregation.

Following the Revolution, evangelical sects, especially Methodism, swept throughout the new nation. The Second Great Awakening arrived in the upstate of South Carolina in 1802 and continued across the rest of the state. For example, between 1802 and 1805, the number of

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81 The First Great Awakening was a revival movement that swept the colonies, beginning in the 1730s and 1740s with Massachusetts preacher, Jonathan Edwards. English evangelist George Whitefield continued the movement, preaching at revivals throughout the colonies. Evangelical denominations such as the Baptist faith and Methodism began in the First Great Awakening. See “First Great Awakening,” *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Great_Awakening (accessed 28 April 2006).
Methodists in South Carolina doubled. Slaves converted to the Baptist and Methodist denominations in large numbers because these faiths appealed to them more than the Anglican/Episcopalian faith. First, itinerant preachers argued that all Christians were equal in the eyes of God. As a result, these early itinerants also strongly condemned slaveholding. Second, Methodism allowed blacks to serve as lay preachers, stewards, and class leaders. Finally, evangelical worship had several elements in common with traditional African worship practices. These elements included enthusiastic singing, clapping, dancing, and spirit-possession. Evangelical religions, particularly Methodism, were more popular among blacks than whites. The membership figures of Camden’s Baptist church and Camden’s Methodist church both support this trend. This table shows that Camden’s Methodist and Baptist churches both had much higher followings among blacks than whites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Baptist Membership</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Methodist Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>14 whites, 9 blacks</td>
<td>1812</td>
<td>93 whites, 518 blacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1828</td>
<td>19 whites, 49 blacks</td>
<td>1821</td>
<td>117 whites, 398 blacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829</td>
<td>21 whites, 38 blacks</td>
<td>1822</td>
<td>127 whites, 490 blacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>100 whites, 166 blacks</td>
<td>1823</td>
<td>100 whites, 497 blacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1824</td>
<td>97 whites, 402 blacks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Second Great Awakening aroused slaveholders’ fears of slave insurrections as much as the First Great Awakening had. Throughout the South, slaveholders criticized Methodist preachers for evangelizing to blacks. Slaveholders feared that the Methodist teachings about equality and the sin of slavery would encourage insurrections. In Camden, these concerns also surfaced, as white Camdenites feared that black conversion to Methodism would encourage slave revolts. In a 1799 letter, Camdenite William Luyten complained to Lewis Ballard about Dan Carpenter, a Methodist layman in Camden, about how Carpenter “makes preachment to the Negroes.”

Because of these fears, many slaveholders demanded their slaves’ attendance at white-controlled churches and refused to allow them to worship independently. State law codified these practices. In 1800 and 1803, the legislature passed several acts that restricted blacks’ religious rights. These laws declared that any black religious meetings held between sunset and

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88 Edgar, South Carolina, 292.
89 Lyerly, Methodism and the Southern Mind.
90 Wikramanayke, A World in Shadow, 120.
93 Inabinet, Lyttleton Street, 25. Dan Carpenter was extremely important in the success of Methodism in Camden. He housed visiting preachers, and the Methodists may have held early worship services at his house. See Inabinet, Lyttleton Street, 9-10, for more information about Carpenter.
sunrise were illegal and that all daytime meetings needed to be majority white. At these white-controlled churches, the ministers preached obedience to the master as the highest religious ideal, which went against slaves’ understandings of Christianity as equality and freedom. In response, many slaves continued to practice their own religious beliefs in the slave quarters without their owners’ knowledge. Slaves met in “hush arbors” where “they freely mixed African rhythms, singing, and beliefs with evangelical Christianity.” African-American spirituals and black preaching styles developed through these secret meetings. In these “hush arbors,” slaves countered the gospel of their owners with their own gospel in which God condemned slavery. They applied the story of Exodus to their own lives and believed that God would liberate them from bondage as he had the children of Israel.

Slaveholders apparently had legitimate reason to fear the effects of Methodism and other evangelical faiths. In 1817, Morris Brown, a free black lay preacher, led 4,367 black Methodists to withdraw from the church. They left in protest to 1815 revisions to Methodist regulations, which abolished separate black quarterly conferences and placed black collections under the control of white stewards. These withdrawing blacks formed one of the few southern congregations of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), a northern black denomination. The Denmark Vesey revolt in 1822 ended this separate congregation. Many conspirators were members of the AME church; for example, Vesey was a Sunday school teacher. In the aftermath, the government closed the church and demolished the building. Some of the leaders of the planned Camden insurrection of 1816 were class leaders in local congregations, but there is no evidence that they were members of either the Methodist or the Baptist church.

Despite the concerns of slaveholders, many South Carolina slaves did attend and join both the Methodist and the Baptist church for the reasons stated above. This trend holds true in Camden as well. They did not join the churches because their owners were members of the congregations. Very few members of either congregation were owned by white members of those congregations. In the 1830s, records indicate that member John Reynolds owned black member Charles, who was also a licensed preacher. Of the twenty-three original covenant members of the Baptist church, nine were black. Only one, Hester, belonged to a member, who happened to be the minister, Reverend Cook. In general, white members of these congregations were neither affluent nor slaveholders. In both congregations, blacks outnumbered whites.

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95 Maffly-Kipp, “American Religion, Pt. I: To the Civil War.”
97 Wikramanayake, A World in Shadow, 122.
98 Edgar, South Carolina, 328.
99 Inabinet, Lyttleton Street and Inabinet, His People.
100 The other eight original black members were Davy, Charity, Frank, Colia, Binah, Jumper, Anthony, and Sally. Inabinet, His People, 17.
101 Inabinet, His People; and Inabinet, Lyttleton Street.
Blacks (both slave and free) joined both the Methodist and the Baptist churches because they offered them opportunities for leadership and independent worship. Methodist congregations segregated their weekly class meetings, so black members had the opportunity to serve as class leaders. In addition, the Methodists licensed some slaves as preachers. The names of six Camden-area slaves licensed to preach in the 1830s exist in the quarterly conference records: David, Hector, William, Charles, Abram, and Quash. The Baptist church encouraged black members “to participate in their own religious self-government.” For instance in February 1820, the church leaders appointed Frank (and, in his absence, Monday) to “meet & Pray with & try to reconcile little disputes between the black members of our church.” In June 1828, the church also strongly considered licensing a slave member, Gilbert, to preach; however, the records do not indicate the result of these deliberations. Prior to the church’s consideration of licensing, Gilbert had been exhorting black members for at least a year. This is shown in a letter from Patricia Scott, a free black member, who complained in April 1827 that Gilbert’s exhorting took so long that her daughters were late to services.

The Methodists and Baptists also offered their congregations other independent opportunities and spaces. In 1853, the Camden Baptist Church built a separate black Sunday school room onto their building. According to oral tradition, there was a separate black Methodist meetinghouse dating to the 1830s. This was apparently a prayer house built in 1833 for “the colored members” as a place “to hold class and prayer meetings.”

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102 Inabinet, *His People*, 25.
104 Inabinet, *His People*, 25.
In the 1830s revivals swept across South Carolina again. This revival also apparently swept through Camden because Camden’s Methodist church saw a rapid increase in its black membership in the early 1830s. As part of this revival movement, many white South Carolinians decided it was their duty to evangelize to blacks. In the 1830s and 1840s, devout white Christians from Abbeville, Chester, and Sumter petitioned the General Assembly to alter its 1834 law that forbade teaching slaves to read. This law was problematic for missionaries to slaves because it made catechism difficult. It was also during the 1830s that the Methodist Episcopal Church established “Negro missions” throughout the state. This included one along the Wateree River near Camden in 1833, which served several plantations. This included Colonel James Chesnut’s Mulberry Plantation, where he built a chapel for his slaves. Both he and his wife, Mary Boykin Chesnut, occasionally attended services at the chapel.

While antebellum blacks tended to prefer the Methodist and Baptist denominations, blacks also attended other Christian denominations, Presbyterian and Episcopalian in Camden’s case. The Presbyterian Synod of South Carolina had a thirty percent black membership; the South Carolina Episcopal Church had approximately a fifty percent black membership. Slaves joined these congregations, but it is difficult to determine if slaves attended these churches because their owners insisted that they attend or because they preferred those congregations. The records at Grace Episcopal Church indicate that black children were baptized in the antebellum period. The Camden Presbyterian Church was reorganized in 1805 as Bethesda Presbyterian Church. In 1808, 36 people joined the church, including 12 “persons of color.” Again in 1823, there were blacks among the new member class. In 1820, Robert Mills designed the new Bethesda Presbyterian Church building with the segregation of the races in mind. Known as the church with five porches, Mills planned for crisscrossing sets of stairs up to two galleries. One set of stairs led to the choir and organ loft while the second set of stairs led to the segregated slave gallery.

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108 Inabinet, Lyttleton Street, 65. Between December 1830 to 1832, 257 blacks joined the Methodist church while only 51 white members joined.
109 Edgar, South Carolina, 293. Most denominations created special catechisms for blacks that did not require them to be able to read. The Episcopal Church had Catechism to be used by the Teachers in the Religious Instruction of Persons of Color, the Methodist church had A Short Catechism for the Use of Colored Members on Trial in the Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina, the Presbyterian church had A Plain and Easy Catechism, designed chiefly for the Benefit of Colored Persons with suitable Prayers and Hymns annexed. From Luther P. Jackson, “Religious Instruction of Negroes,” The Journal of Negro History 15 (1930), 86-87. An 1862 Episcopal catechism, A Catechism, to be Taught Orally to Those Who Cannot Read, Designed Especially for the Instruction of the Slaves, in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States, is available at http://docsouth.unc.edu/catechisms/catechsl.html.
110 Inabinet, Lyttleton Street, 65.
113 Bell E. Dubose, Bethesda Presbyterian Church Camden, South Carolina, 1805-1955 (published for the church’s sesquicentennial celebration, 1955), 8-9. The new black members were Cupid, Billy, Bordeaux and wife (free), Scipio, Nanny, Isaac, Cuba, Rinah, Daniel, Phoeby, and Glasgow.
114 Dubose, Bethesda Presbyterian Church, 10-11.
Regardless of where they worshipped, religion was central to the lives of many antebellum blacks. In weekly services and class meetings, the slaves “entered a different world where they met and talked freely, sang, danced, chanted, ‘witnessed,’ and found social consolation in the fostering of one another’s soul.” In Camden, slaves and free blacks especially found these opportunities at the Methodist and Baptist churches, but they also attended the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches.

F. The Built Environment

Close Quarters

The planning of a city’s public spaces, business districts, and residential areas plays a key role in the story of its development. Indeed, the development of the built environment directly affects city inhabitants. Documenting the relationship of slaves and free people of color to Camden’s built environment is an exercise in historical detective work. Although limited documentary evidence remains detailing the lives of Camden’s slaves, general economic trends throughout the South and local demographics suggest that blacks shaped Camden in significant ways. As in other towns in pre-industrial America, Camden’s residences and workplaces were not highly differentiated from each other, with the rich and the poor living on the same streets. As a large portion of the population—nearly half of the town’s inhabitants during much of the colonial and antebellum period—and a majority of the skilled and unskilled labor force, slaves and free people of color lived and worked in close proximity to Camden’s white inhabitants from early on. Indeed, slaves and free people of color also constructed much of the built environment that all three groups navigated on a daily basis. Walking through the muddy streets of Camden in the decades before the Civil War, visitors would have encountered a diverse population working in a shared environment and living in close quarters.

The origins of Camden date back to 1730 when James St. Julien was employed to survey a township on the Wateree River. King George II instructed Governor Robert Johnson to lay out eleven such townships in hopes of ringing the settled tidewater areas of the colony. These townships would also serve as a defensive buffer against the Native Americans and the Spanish. By attracting more European settlers to the backcountry, the new townships counteracted an exploding slave population, which had already reached some sixty-five percent of the colony’s total. One of these was Fredericksburg Township, located on the Wateree River some sixty miles above Charleston in the territory of the Wateree and Catawba Indians.

In the early 1750s, Irish Quakers came to Fredericksburg, settling on either side of the Wateree River; parts of these original settlements would later fall within Camden’s municipal limits. In 1758, Joseph Kershaw founded a settlement named Pine Tree Hill (the site of modern Magazine Hill), opening stores, mills, and other business establishments. Ten years later, by an act of the colonial legislature, the name of Pine Tree Hill was changed to Camden.

A plan of Camden from the early 1770s shows the town’s square and streets, bounded by York Street to the north, Gordon Street to the west, Mulberry Street to the south, and Fair Street to the east. A number of streets marked on the plan still exist today, including Campbell, York, and Broad. A plan created almost thirty years later in 1798 indicates that the center and limits of the town had moved northward. The town’s population continued to shift northwards during the nineteenth century.

Where did slaves and free people of color fit into the story of Camden’s origins? More precisely, what was their relationship to the built environment? In one sense, Camden owes its very existence to black people, whose overwhelming presence on the coast led the colony’s white leaders to promote the inland township scheme. Perhaps ironically, the success of plantation agriculture soon led to a dramatic increase in the area’s black population. Slaves almost certainly accompanied Joseph Kershaw from Charleston, South Carolina to the area in 1758. Some thirty years later, a total of 1,025 slaves lived in Kershaw District. By 1810, non-whites constituted roughly half of the district’s population, and by 1820 they were the majority. While slaves living on plantations around Camden counted for most of the black population, many slaves and free persons of color resided within the town as well.

Camden’s situation near the Wateree River, the main thoroughfare on which the area’s indigo, grains, and cotton were shipped to market in Charleston, reflected its founders’ reliance on slaves and free people of color, who likely performed the bulk of the work of the river port.

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122 Interview with Glen and Joan Inabinet 17 February 2006.
Blacks also built the town itself. In cities and towns across the South, owners often hired out their slaves as unskilled laborers and as carpenters, painters, masons, bricklayers, and glaziers. For example, in 1780, enslaved “Artificers & Labourers,” both men and women, were “employed in Erecting the Works for the defenses of the Magazine at Camden.” Free people of color also worked in the construction trades. Bonds Conway, a former slave and skilled carpenter, built a number of houses in Camden.

Table 2. 1800-1860 Kershaw County, South Carolina Population Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area Surveyed*</th>
<th>Slaves</th>
<th>Free Persons</th>
<th>Total Non-Whites</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>TOTAL POPULATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Kershaw District</td>
<td>2,530</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2,634</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>4,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>Kershaw District</td>
<td>4,832</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>4,910</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>4,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>Kershaw District</td>
<td>6,692</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>6,804</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>5,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>Kershaw District</td>
<td>8,333</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>8,529</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>5,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Kershaw District</td>
<td>8,043</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>8,293</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>3,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Kershaw District</td>
<td>9,578</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>9,792</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>4,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Camden Town</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>Kershaw District</td>
<td>7,841</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>8,060</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>5,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>Camden Town</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>1,028</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Before the 1850 federal census the city of Camden was not independently listed.
* According to the document from which this figure was drawn the total population of 1810 Kershaw District is 9,822; however, this was a miscalculation/type error.

While black and white Camdenites lived and worked in close quarters, it is important to note that blacks, neither slave nor free, were not buried in cemeteries alongside whites. Cedars Cemetery, located on Campbell Street near the King Street intersection, was Camden’s only black burial ground. Although the property was not purchased by Camden’s Town Council until 1860, some of the oldest markers in the cemetery date back to the early 1800s. Many prominent black Camdenites are buried there, including Andrew Dibble.

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125 The Naudin-Dibble Family: Camden, SC (computer printout, Camden, SC: Naudin-Dibble Heritage Foundation, July 2003), 4
127 See Inabinet, *Lyttleton Street*, 17; and *Come Meet the Players! African-American Historical Sites in South Carolina’s Olde English District* (Chester, SC: Olde English Tourism Committee, 2005).
Associated Sites

Cedars Cemetery, Campbell Street nearing the King Street intersection. For a long period of time Cedars Cemetery served as Camden’s only black burial ground. Dating to the early 1800s, many prominent black Camdenites are buried there.