

## **Background: Slavery in Charlotte-Mecklenburg**

According to D. A. Tompkins' *History of Mecklenburg County*, slavery was introduced to Charlotte Mecklenburg in 1764. By 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, the slave population of the county was approximately 6800 out of a total population of 17,000, or 40% of the entire population. In addition to slaves, there were 293 free blacks who lived in Mecklenburg in 1860. Most were common laborers but there were also two barbers, three blacksmiths, a carpenter, two iron moulders and three painters. The lives of free blacks were carefully restricted and free blacks were a concern to slaveowners. In September 1852, a group of free blacks was accused of inciting slaves to rebel.

During the Civil War, Mecklenburg slaves were donated to the Confederate cause on at least three occasions. In April of 1863, county slaveholders donated slaves, at the request of the Confederate government, to help construct fortifications in eastern North Carolina and in July of 1864, 65 Mecklenburg slaves helped repair the rails of the Statesville Railroad. Finally, in March of 1865, as General William Sherman's troops advanced northward through South Carolina, slaves were donated to the Confederate cause and helped blockade the roads leading to Charlotte from the south.

It is difficult to determine how slaves were treated in Charlotte Mecklenburg. The reminiscences of whites and blacks on the subject often vary and contradict each other. (See slave narrative and J. B. Alexander excerpts, Doc.#1 (e-g).) It is safe to say that the treatment of slaves varied from master to master, and that most areas of the south had both kind and cruel masters. During the Civil War, local Charlotte newspapers praised slaves for their loyalty to the Confederacy. However, many slaves chose that time to escape. Runaway slave notices were published frequently during the Civil War. (See Document #1(a) and (b).)

*Note to 8th Grade Teachers: This section complements pages 249-60 of Parramore's North Carolina, The History of an American State.*

### **Document #1(a) and (b): Runaway Slave Notices**

These ads are taken from a Charlotte newspaper, the *Western Democrat*.. Both of them were published in 1863, in the middle of the Civil War. It appears from the frequency of such ads that many slaves took advantage of the absence of masters and the confusion surrounding the war to escape. The city and county employed slave patrollers who tried to capture runaways. Remember that after the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850, all runaways had to escape to Canada to find freedom; according to this federal law, all

runaways to the north had to be returned to their owners, under strict penalty. Notice in Document #1a, above the runaway ad, that an executor's sale featured "Eight Likely Negroes", among them women and children.

*Suggestions for the classroom: By having students read these ads, they can get a sense of the fact that slaves were indeed property and that many slaves were so unhappy with their lot that they risked severe punishment in escaping. These ads can help spark discussion about slavery and what it must have been like to escape and be hunted down.*

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Document #1(a)

\$300 Reward.

I will give the above reward to any person who will take up my boy SAM, if captured without serious injury and delivered to me or confined in Jail so that I can get him. He has been lying out over twelve months ranging from near Charlotte to Reedy Creek. He is 22 years old, medium size, and has a scar on his forehead. Address me at Charlotte, N.C.

Feb. 24, 1863

Jno. Wolfe

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Document #I(b)

\$20 REWARD

Runaway from my plantation, nine miles from Charlotte, on the Statesville Railroad, a negro boy named DANIEL. The boy is about 22 years old, five feet one or two inches high, right or left foot cut off by a railroad car, and walks with a stick. I will give the above reward if the boy is brought to my plantation or confined in any jail so that I can get him. The boy was raised in Petersburg, Va., and was purchased in Richmond last winter.

Aug. 24, 1863

R. P. Poindexter

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## **Document #I(c): Charlotte Town Ordinances, 1864**

These additions to the Charlotte Town Ordinances were published in the *Western Democrat* on January 26, 1864. Not only do they show the restrictions placed on both slaves and free blacks, but they also reflect the concerns and problems of everyday life in Charlotte during the Civil War. These codes refer to public whippings of violators, particularly slaves and free blacks. Public whippings were held on the Square in Charlotte, at the intersection of Trade and Tryon, where pillories stood. Public whippings ended in Charlotte in 1865, with the occupation of Federal troops during Reconstruction.

*Suggestions for the classroom: Have students carefully read excerpts from this document and ask the following discussion/essay questions:*

- (1) What do these town ordinances say about the quality of life in Charlotte in 1864? What were the main concerns of Charlotteans? How do you imagine Charlotte looked (and smelled) in those days?
- (2) How "free" were free blacks in Charlotte? Why do you think that free blacks were forbidden to associate with slaves at night and on Sunday? (see #20) Why were free blacks not allowed to work in stores as clerks and retailers? Why do you think they had to register with the mayor every year?
- (3) Discuss restrictions placed on slaves. Why were they forbidden to smoke, carry weapons, and drink alcohol?
- (4) How much freedom did slaves have to move around the town of Charlotte?
- (5) Based on this document, compare and contrast the freedom of slaves and free blacks.

### **Document #I(c)**

The *Western Democrat* January 26, 1864. Excerpts from: "Ordinances of the Town of Charlotte, Compiled and amended from the Minutes of former Boards of Commissioners".

1. Be it Ordained by the Commissioners of the Town of Charlotte, and it is hereby ordained by the authority of the same: That no person shall keep, or suffer to be kept, any hay, straw, fodder, shavings, or other combustible matter, in any building where fire is kept constantly or occasionally, or in any place peculiarly exposed to danger from fire, nor suffer the same to be negligently stowed or put away, or managed so as to become dangerous on the account of fire; and any person offending in either of these particulars, shall forfeit and pay the sum of Five Dollars for each and every offence, and One Dollar for each day if the same is suffered to remain.

5. Be it further ordained, That any person or persons whose chimney or stove pipe shall take fire or burn, unless the same be in wet weather, shall forfeit and pay the sum of Five Dollars for each and every offence.

6. Be it further ordained, That any person or persons who shall discharge any gun or pistol, or sell or set fire to explode, or use any squib or fire crackers, within the city limits of the Town, shall forfeit and pay for each and every offence the sum of Five Dollars, if the offender is a free person: and if a slave, shall receive twenty five lashes.

9. Be it further ordained, That any person or persons who shall deposit in any of the streets, any rubbish, refuse, or filth of any kind whatever to remain, shall forfeit and pay for each and every offence, if free, the sum of Five Dollars, and if a slave receive not less than thirty lashes. And any person or persons who shall suffer his, her, or their chips, wood, boxes, hogsheads, bales or anything (material for building excepted) calculated to obstruct the free passage of the streets, sidewalks, or water in the gutters, to remain in the said streets, walks, or gutters, longer than forty-eight hours, shall forfeit and pay each and every offence the sum of Two Dollars, and One Dollar for every day that said obstructions remain.

11. Be it further ordained, That any person or persons who shall deposit the carcass of any dead animal in any street or lot, or suffer such to remain on their premises within the limits of the town, shall forfeit and pay for each and every offence the sum of Five Dollars if a free person, and if a slave shall receive not less than thirty lashes.

12. Be it further ordained That no person shall erect any Hog-pen within one hundred feet of the main streets nor shall anyone allow their hogs to be fed in the streets under a penalty of Five Dollars.

14. Be it further ordained, That any person or persons who shall run, ride or drive any horse or horses at a rapid speed through the streets, shall, if a free person, forfeit and pay the sum of Ten Dollars for each and every offence, and if a slave receive twenty lashes ...

20. Be it further ordained That if any free negro be found by the Town Constable or Guard, in the nighttime or on the Sabbath day, in any kitchen or outhouse not their own, in the company of, or associating with, any slave, shall by said Constable or Guard, be brought before the Mayor, and upon conviction be fined not more than Two Dollars, and upon failure to pay said fine and costs, shall receive not more than thirty-nine lashes- unless said free negro is there and associating with said slave by the permission of the owner of the premises.

21. Be it further ordained, That no person shall employ in his or her store or grocery, any free negro in the capacity of clerk or retailer of any article, without forfeiting the sum of Twenty-five Dollars for each and every day.

23. Be it further ordained That if any slave shall be found in any dram or grog shop either in the day or night time, without having a written permit from his or her owner stating that he or she was sent for a specific purpose, shall receive fifteen lashes at the public whipping post ... And the owner or keeper of a grog shop where a slave may be found, shall forfeit and pay for each and every offence Twenty-five Dollars, and a suspension of his license.

25. Be it further ordained, That it shall not be lawful for any person or persons to permit any assemblage of slaves on his or their lot, without having first obtained permission from the Mayor or Commissioners; and any one violating this ordinance shall forfeit and pay Twenty Dollars; and if any slave attends such assemblage without permission from his owner, or the agent of his owner, shall receive thirty-nine lashes.

26. Be it further ordained, That no slave or free negro shall smoke a pipe or cigar in any street, or walk with a club or bludgeon, or carry any weapon, under a penalty, if a free negro, of Five Dollars, and on failure to pay such fine, shall receive not less than five nor more than thirty-nine lashes; and if a slave receive the same number of lashes.

28. Be it further ordained, That if any slave shall be found from his or her home after the hour of half-past nine o'clock ,p.m., unless by written permission from his or her owner, said slave shall be put in the guardhouse and kept there until the next morning and shall receive twenty-five lashes, and the owner or employer shall then be notified of his or her arrest and shall come forward and pat Two Dollars and remove the slave ...

29. Be it further ordained , That if any free negro or slave shall sell or give to any person whatever any spirituous liquor, either in the day or night time, he or they shall receive Thirty-nine lashes.

41. Be it further ordained, That it shall be the duty of the Town Guard to patrol the streets from 9 p.m. until daylight next morning and visit all suspected negro houses;...

42. Be it further ordained, That on and immediately after the first day of July next, and on each succeeding 1st day of July thereafter... all Free Negroes now resident in the town of Charlotte, who may hereafter become residents of the same, being of the age of twelve years and upwards, shall be required to appear before the Mayor, enroll their names, and upon satisfactory evidence of a peaceable character and industrious habits, obtain from him a certificate of such enrollment, together with a description of their persons, character and trade, or employment, to be signed by the Mayor, countersigned by the Clerk and sealed with the corporate seal of the town. And if any free person of color liable to such enrollment shall be found without such certificate, said free persons shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and on conviction before the Mayor, shall be punished at his discretion by either fine, whipping, imprisonment, or hiring-out for a time not exceeding six months for each offence. And for each and every such enrollment and certificate so granted, a tax of two dollars shall be collected by the Clerk for the use of the Treasury of the Town.

44. Be it further ordained, That no slave shall go at large as a free person, exercising his or her discretion in the employment of their time, nor shall any slave keep house to him or herself as a free person exercising the like discretion in the employment of his or her time;...

45. Be it further ordained, That any person who shall sell or deliver to a slave as a gift any spirituous liquors, at any hour of the night or day, without an order from the owner or manager of said slave, shall, upon conviction, be fined one hundred dollars, and in default of payment or securing the same, be imprisoned not exceeding ninety days; and said slave shall be punished by whipping not exceeding thirty-nine lashes.

46. Be it further ordained, That no retailer of spirituous liquors, either by the small or large measure, shall employ any slave or free person of color, to sweep out or clean up his or her grocery, nor for any purpose whatever, in the absence of the proprietor or other white agent from said grocery, or while in bed; and any person so offending shall, upon conviction, be fined twenty-five dollars.

49. Be it further ordained, That in order to prevent the spreading of Small Pox, that when any case shall be reported to exist in any house in the Town, the person or persons so reported as having the disease shall not be permitted to come outside of the boundary of the lot they are living upon until the physician in attendance shall certify that all danger of communicating it to others shall have passed away; nor shall any person other than the regular

members of the family and necessary attendants upon the case, and servants employed in the family, go upon said lot; and if it shall be deemed necessary by the Board, the Mayor shall have power to remove any negro so affected beyond the limits of the corporation. Any persons violating any of the provisions of this Ordinance shall forfeit and pay one hundred dollars; and if the party offending be a minor, apprentice or servant, then in that case the fine shall be collected off the parent, guardian or master of such minor, apprentice or servant.