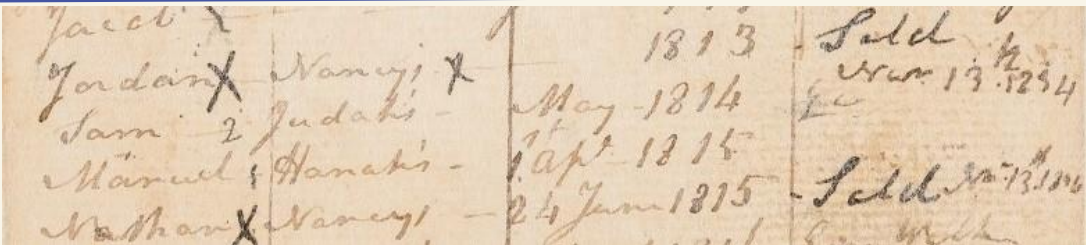


JORDAN BORN 1813

NATHAN BORN JUNE 24, 1815

November 2022

This month we meet Nancy, and two of her sons, Jordan and Nathan. Nineteen-year-old Nancy, her baby Fanny, her older brother Little Jim, age 21, and their 49-year-old mother Margery came to



Isaac Hite Jr.'s Commonplace Book, Virginia Museum of History and Culture (Mss5.5.H67375.1_24a),

Isaac Hite Jr. from his father's will. Likely Margery was partnered with "Big Jim." The name's second use was for "Little Jim." Nancy, wanting to use it for her own first-born son, may have had to wait through one or more lost infants before giving it to her boy born in 1805, who happily grew to manhood. Records show ten children whose mother was Nancy (see family tree), and although there is a second enslaved woman with that name, we are presently attributing to this one. Their father is unknown as of now.

Nancy appears in Isaac Hite Jr.'s inventory until age 59, one of the wool spinners like Young Truelove. This, along with the information that Nancy was loaned for ten days to Ann Maury Hite Williams to set up her household upon her marriage, suggests she was a domestic worker.¹

This issue focuses on Nancy's sons Jordan and Nathan, who at age 18 and 21 respectively, were torn away from the family and lost forever when Isaac Hite Jr. sold them into the slave trade on Thursday, November 13, 1834. They fit a profile much sought by slave traders, per this advertisement: seeking to purchase "One

hundred and fifty likely young negros of both sexes between the ages of 8 and 25 years." Highest prices paid.²

Agents for the major slave trading companies in Alexandria were omnipresent, pockets full of bills, and one made Isaac Hite Jr. an offer he thought too good to pass up. It seems likely the deal was concluded at Belle Grove, and the young men snatched up to join a coffle, or caravan of enslaved persons, on the Valley Pike and immediately marched away. Can you imagine the horror that resonated through the enslaved community? Continue reading on the reverse for an explanation of why this happened.

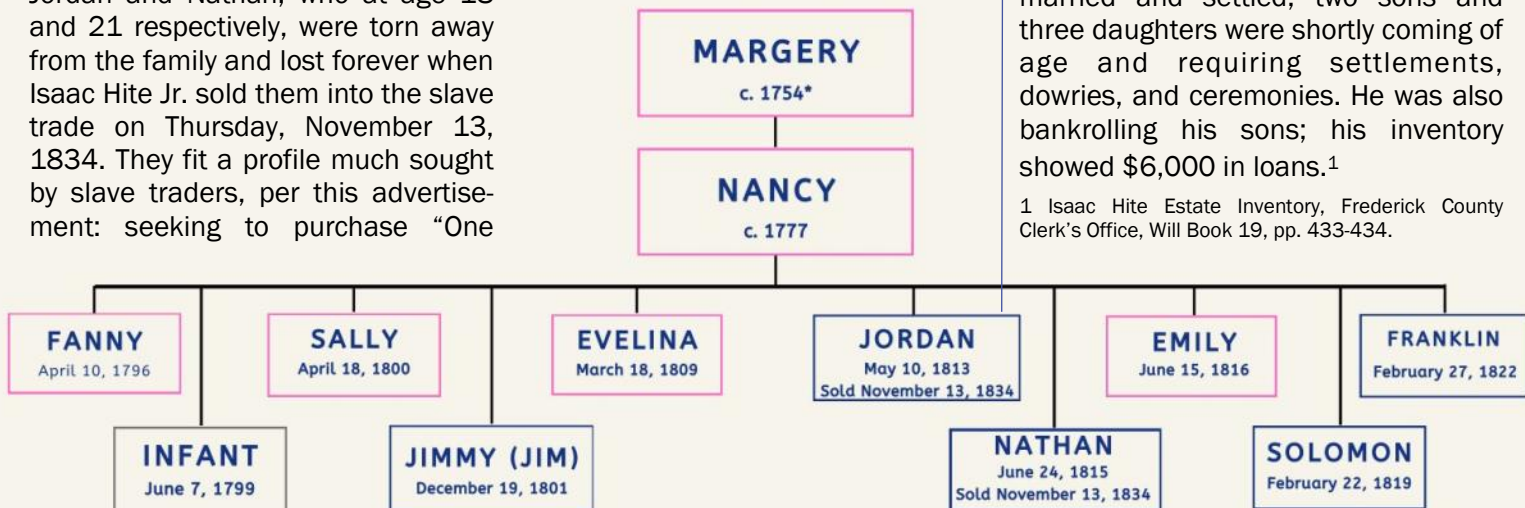
1 May 6, 1826 letter from Ann Hite to Ann Williams, WFCHS Box 1, Correspondence 1821-1826.
 2 Rothman, Joshua, *The Ledger and the Chain, How Domestic Slave Traders Shaped America*. p. 98.

WHAT WAS HAPPENING AT BELLE GROVE IN 1834?

Two years after this sale, Isaac Hite Jr. was dead and all his belongings, including the 43 people he enslaved, were inventoried. This snapshot of six non-working seniors, and 11 children and toddlers, meant his actual enslaved workforce was 31 people. Three were young men 17-21, prime age for field work, valued at \$1,000 apiece.

A network of family letters document Hite's years of enfeeblement from severe head and neck pain, diagnosis unknown. It was unlikely that in the last decade of his life that he actively supervised his agri-business of Belle Grove, and may have shifted toward less labor-intensive operations like fattening cattle herds for sale, instead of a diversity of field crops. By 1834, half of his children by Ann Hite were married and settled; two sons and three daughters were shortly coming of age and requiring settlements, dowries, and ceremonies. He was also bankrolling his sons; his inventory showed \$6,000 in loans.¹

1 Isaac Hite Estate Inventory, Frederick County Clerk's Office, Will Book 19, pp. 433-434.



JORDAN, NATHAN & THE SLAVE TRADE

The Great Coffle of 1834 passed Belle Grove sometime during the week of August 23, 1834, attracting attention for its abnormal size. Some 300 manacled and shackled men, women, and children trudged down the Valley Pike, escorted by armed men on horseback with whips, and supply wagons. Six days out of Alexandria, they were headed for sale in the slave market of Forks in the Road (Natchez), Mississippi, a booming cotton growing area, and had another 1,000 miles to walk. After back-to-back cholera epidemics depleted teams of field hands, competition for new workers, and with new acreage under cultivation, drove prices to the highest level in a decade. The major slave trading firm of Franklin and Armfield, which normally ran an end-of-summer coffle one-third this size to the Lower South, was sending all available human merchandise at once for maximum profit.¹

The neighborhood likely buzzed for days afterwards. Depending on the onlooker, this was absolute depravity, or proof of Virginia's healthy economy. The 43 remaining enslaved people at Belle Grove trembled at this reminder of the fragility of their existence, and hoped they would never find themselves in such a forced march away from everyone they knew; luckily this coffle was not purchasing. Could a white person from Belle Grove have gossiped with the "soul dealer" about business trends? Perhaps payments still seemed low. The firm had plans to send 900 more to Natchez when the new season started in the fall, using their packet boats that made the trip in only four weeks. Their agent Rice Ballard had ample funding to start the process with local agents like Jourdan Saunders, and certainly handbills flaming "Cash for Negroes" would soon be decorating trees and fences advertising they would "Pay the very highest prices for 50-60 Young Men and Girls, from 14-25 years."²

In Virginia, one in three young, enslaved persons was in danger of being sold into the slave trade. White people forced the migration of 120,000 enslaved persons out of Virginia into the Lower South in the 1830s, a 55% increase over the prior decade.³ In announcing slave sales the

Virginia Herald proclaimed on its front page "Agreeable to law," and indeed it was,⁴ for all levels of government aided and abetted the \$52 million trade (in 2022 dollars).⁵ Frederick County jailer Charles Hulet obligingly opened his jail to slave catchers and traders. One British observer commented that "human flesh is now the greatest staple of Virginia." Those enslaved born in "the Virginia nursery" were prized.⁶

The impetus for the cotton boom was President Andrew Jackson's land grab and eviction of Native American peoples in the 1830s. Forced to migrate west of the Mississippi River, along the Trail of Tears, many died. Millions of acres of their land were sold as low as 40 cents an acre to "white men with a few dollars and big dreams," who then sought enslaved labor.⁷

One major slave trafficker boasted he provided a service by taking away "rebellious or otherwise troublesome and dangerous people."⁸ Is that what Nathan and Jordan were? Or were they a commodity whose value had increased in three months to \$1,000 a field hand (\$35,000 in 2022 dollars)?⁹

Had an agent flashed a \$1,500 wad of bills before Isaac Hite? Jordan and Nathan were likely immediately shackled into chains and prodded onto the Valley Pike north to the new toll road, the Little River Turnpike into Alexandria, where many slave pens and prisons were available to hold those awaiting a boat. Once aboard, perhaps on the first of December, the farm boys were chained below decks—like their ancestors—for a four-week sail to New Orleans, their boat then towed upriver by steamboat to Natchez. Unloaded, they shuffled the short distance into the shabby shanty slave-selling hamlet of Forks in the Road.¹⁰

The domestic slave trade bustled in the Lower South early fall to late spring, providing steady labor to work all phases of the cotton harvest. An older strain of cotton grew well where tobacco did not, enriching the southernmost states and territories. Once planted in April-May, it sprouted, budded, blossomed, and a boll formed over the fibers, demanding dawn-

to-dusk-toil, hoeing, and plucking off worms. A fully desiccated plant was required for harvest in October-November or later, after which ginning and baling required labor.¹¹ This chart shows the rapid increase in labor for this crop:

Growth in Enslaved Workers 1820s-1830s			
State	# of people	% increase	increase for cotton
Louisiana	30,000	80%	63%
Alabama	96,000	200%	90%
Mississippi	100,000	500%	400%
Total	226,000		

Growth of profit was predicated on the labor and commodity value of enslaved people. Black bodies propelled the American economy toward the future, but Blacks pocketed no wealth.¹²

The boys arrived in good time to be purchased for work on a cotton plantation for the rest of their lives. No records exist from this location, so no further tracing is possible. Their story teaches us that Nancy's being a house worker, or being an enslaved family owned by the Hites for generations, was no guarantee of safety or special treatment. These realities of slavery in America makes the notion of a "kind enslaver" impossible.

Enslaved people were the single largest financial asset in America, worth \$3.5 billion in 1860¹³ (\$125.6 billion in 2022 dollars), more than railroads, banks, factories, or ships.¹⁴

1 Rothman pp. 229-30.

2 Rothman, p. 86.

3 Rothman, p. 102.

4 *Virginia Herald* Vol. XVIII No. 1386. www.si.edu/object/virginia-herald-vol-xviii-no-1386:nmaahc_2011.51.1

5 Inflation Calculator at officialdata.org.

6 Rothman pp. 62, 103.

7 www.americanyawp.com/text/11-the-cotton-revolution

8 Rothman p. 93.

9 Inflation Calculator at officialdata.org

10 Rothman pp. 238-9.

11 lsuagcenter.com/topics/crops/cotton

12 Rothman p. 104-5.

13 Trammel, Jack, *The Richmond Slave Trade*, p. 87

14 Inflation Calculator at officialdata.org

This issue produced by Robin Young and Kristen Laise with proofreading by Craig Morris and family tree design by Elizabeth Dalton.

**NEXT MONTH WE WILL HONOR
Christmas &
Eveline born March 18, 1809**

Research is underway about the 276 men, women, and children enslaved by the Hite family at Belle Grove Plantation in Middletown (Frederick County), Virginia. Enslaved individuals made the plantation a success. Since 1967, Belle Grove has been a 501c3, nonprofit historic site and museum. [Understanding and uplifting the contributions of the enslaved community is an ongoing effort and priority.](#) If you wish to help, consider volunteering or donating to Belle Grove, Inc. at the address below or online at www.bellegrove.org/support/donate.

Belle Grove Plantation

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