



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

Out of the Attic

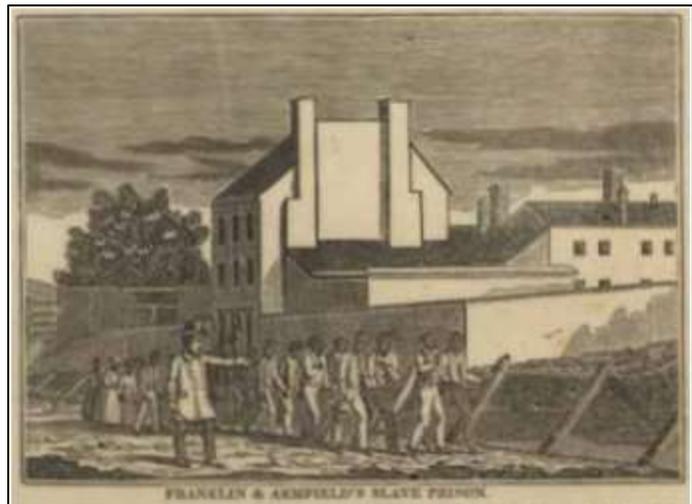
The center of Alexandria's slave operations

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Image: 1836 woodcut illustration taken from a broadside advertisement of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Library of Congress.

When the American Anti-Slavery Society singled out Alexandria in an infamous 1836 broadside advertisement that condemned the practice of slavery, the organization's finger-pointing was an understatement.

Although the nation's capital had a strong history of slave trading from its inception at the turn of the 19th century, Alexandria's 50-year head start in what was called "The Slave Market of America" had evolved over the years from independent traders selling the forced labor of human beings captured and transported from Africa, spontaneously on street corners or a quick auction in the market, to a well-organized, highly efficient industry that sealed the fate of thousands.



By the 1820s, slave operations were concentrated along Duke Street, facing the rail lines and just outside the 10-mile square limits of the nation's capital, where Northern Virginia farmers could deliver excess slaves for sale and reshipment to the cotton fields of the Deep South.

Pictured in this woodcut segment from the broadside is the Franklin and Armfield slave jail at 1315 Duke St. Operated by Isaac Franklin and John Armfield, who referred to themselves as "Dealers in Slaves," the two men formed a partnership and in 1828 leased the three-story home and yard of Brig. Gen. Robert Young of the Second Militia, District of Columbia, built in 1812.

Before then, Armfield had conducted business at Eli Legg's Tavern on St. Asaph Street, and Franklin had worked for nearly a decade as a trader in Natchez, Miss. Coming to Alexandria in a quest to move slaves more quickly from the exhausted tobacco fields of Virginia to the lucrative cotton fields of further south, Franklin foresaw the huge fortunes that could be made by this endeavor.

Immediately upon taking possession of Young's property, the home was rehabilitated to house offices and a basement slave jail, and the adjacent garden was cleared for construction of two crude buildings to temporarily house male and female occupants owned by the dealers, and those put up for sale by other slave-owners who were charged a rate of 25 cents per day until a final sale was consummated.

A treeless yard, walled off to contain its prisoners in the scorching sun, provided only the most basic escape from the intolerably crowded conditions. The two dealers constantly advertised in local



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

newspapers, seeking ever larger numbers of “Negroes of both sexes, from 12 to 25 years of age,” and their human cargo was shipped southward by vessels at least twice per month, at other times moving by cart, train or the power of their own feet.

One local writer complained, “Scarcely a week passes without some of these wretched creatures being driven through our streets. After having been confined, and sometimes manacled in a loathsome prison they are turned out in public view to take their departure for the South. The children and some of the women are generally crowded into a cart or wagon, while others follow on foot, not unfrequently handcuffed and chained together.”

“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.