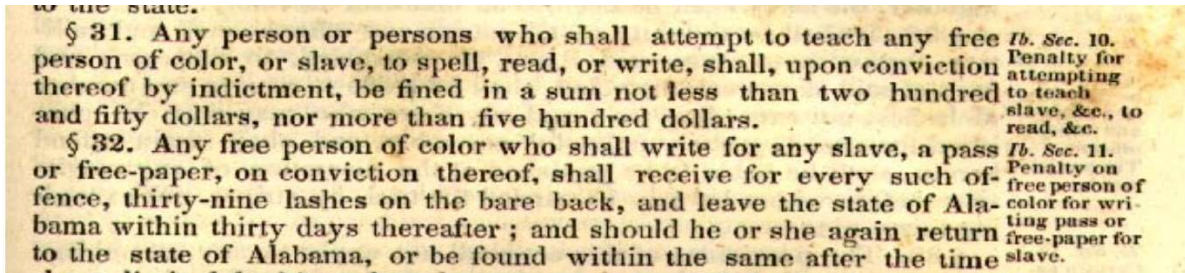


Teaching – or even allowing enslaved people to learn to read and write – was punished by flogging or whipping, which shows the level of fear white slave owners had of slave rebellion, especially after the Nat Turner incident. Enslavers were afraid that literacy would make keeping African Americans in chains more difficult. If enslaved people could read, then information – about laws, about politics, about other slave uprisings, the persistent abolition movement, and more about the wider world – would be that much harder to keep from them, giving the captured some hope for their own situation and encouragement to run away or revolt. For example, writing could enable an enslaved person – like Peter – to forge a travel pass, which was required by law in Georgia, enabling him to escape notice in certain situations.



*Just one example of laws passed against literacy among any people of color.
John G. Akin, A Digest of the Laws of the State of Alabama, 1833, Alabama Department of Archives & History.*

Elliott Thomas ran his advertisement in the *Columbus Enquirer* on September 27th, October 4th, and October 11th, 1834, and apparently in no other issues before or after. We can't know if Thomas succeeded in re-capturing Peter (if so, his punishment would have been horrific). We can only hope that Peter did escape his captor and made it to a permanently safe haven, although there was little safety for any people of color in antebellum America. As Library of Congress author Arlene Balkansky writes, the runaway slave ads “bear witness to the bravery and unique characteristics of individuals who defied a massively powerful system allied against them.”

Elliott Thomas' notice was just one of thousands run by slaveholders in American newspapers up to the end of the Civil War. Ads for runaway slaves appeared in almost every issue of antebellum papers in the South. Researchers estimate there were “roughly 100,000 runaway slave advertisements” in North American newspapers. Hundreds are printed in our valuable resource, *Georgia Historic Newspapers*, and I encourage you to read them.

In these published descriptions, enslavers included all kinds of personal details about the enslaved person: the clothing he or she had been wearing; scars and other signs of the violence of slavery such as missing fingers or limbs; distinctive physical characteristics or habits; or even a manner of carrying him or herself. If the enslaved person had stolen items – for example, tools to help them earn a living in freedom, or warm clothing – those might be listed. The descriptions of the enslaved – albeit from the point of view of the enslavers – open a small but revealing window onto this often less described group of people.

RUNAWAYS

Fifty Dollars Reward

LEFT my plantation on Sunday morning, the 17th of July, my negro man JEP. I believe JEP has been decoyed off by some white man, or is killed and secreted in this neighborhood, as there was no cause whatever for him to **runaway** at the time he left.

I will pay the above reward to have the negro and white man or men put in any safe jail in the State so I can get them with proof sufficient to convict the latter; or I will pay the above reward for proof sufficient to convict those who may have killed the negro, provided that he is killed, or ten dollars for the negro alone, delivered sound and alive to me, or put in any safe jail so I can get him.

DESCRIPTION.—Jep is about twenty-two years old, five feet ten or eleven inches high, black complexion, rather slim and spare made, will weigh from one hundred and fifty to one hundred and sixty-five pounds, and has a sleepy look out of his eyes.

JAMES M. RENFROE.

Hallock, Muscogee co., Ga., Aug. 2, 1853—w4

Taken Up,

BY the subscriber, a negro boy who says his name is WILLIAM, that he belongs to one James Wilkinson, of Hinds county, Mississippi. Said boy is about five feet to or five inches high, nearly copper color, stout built, on the chunky order, large eyes, teeth project a little, and is about twenty years old.

Says a trader by the name of McKinney brought him from Virginia. The owner is requested to come forward, prove negro, pay charges and take him away.

E. VARNER.

Pataula, P. O., Randolph co., Ga., sept 13—tw2&w4

Runaway.

FROM the residence of Daniel D. Ridenhour on the 26th of August last, a negro man by the name of JEF; said negro is about 40 years of age, dark complexion, the toes on both feet are short and deformed. The fingers also are deformed; he sometimes dresses himself in woman's clothes, and endeavors to pass himself off as a female. Any information concerning said negro so that I can get him, either myself or D. D. Ridenhour, will be liberally rewarded.

J. B. JACQUES & BRO.

Columbus, Ga., September 13—w4

\$25 Reward.

RANAWAY from my plantation, in Baker county, on the 9th of June last, my negro man WILSON, thirty two or thirty three years of age, six feet high, weighs about 100 lbs., dark complexion, and has a very intelligent countenance. Said negro was raised in Talbot county, where he lived until about the 1st of June last, and is now probably in that vicinity. I will give the above reward for his delivery at any Jail where I can get him.

Albany, July 26—w4
WM. W. CHEEVER.

\$10 REWARD.

THE subscriber will pay ten dollars reward for his negro man BILL, lodged in Jail or at his house. The said negro is supposed to be in the neighborhood of Columbus, Ga. He is about twenty-one or twenty-two years of age, dark complexion, weighing one hundred and sixty pounds.

August 23—w3
JESSE CARTER,
Talbot county.

NOTICE.

RANAWAY on the 6th inst., a negro man by the name of DICK, twenty years old, complexion is black, tolerably quick spoken, about five feet six or eight inches high. Any intelligence from him will be thankfully received at Cotton Valley P. O., Macon county, Ala. Doubtless he is on his way to Carolina, and is trying to find his way by the Railroad.

April 26—w4
WM. H. GARNER.

LABORERS WANTED.

Fifteen Able-Bodied White Men or Negroes,
Are wanted by the
COWETA FALLS MANUFACTURING CO.,
to whom high wages will be given.
Columbus, Sept. 3—tw3&w1

NOTICE.

D. A. GARRETT is my duly authorized agent to transact any business of mine, that may hereafter be found in his hands.

Columbus, July 1—w&rw4
J. H. HICKS.

2 The “Runaways” section of the *Tri-weekly Times & Sentinel*, September 16, 1853, page 4.

Stop the **Runaway.**



RUNAWAY from the subscriber on the night of the 19th inst. a negro man named BILL, about 28 or 30 years of age, rather sparely made, weighing about 150, his head moderately bushy, of a very pleasant countenance and having a very plausible address, well calculated to impose. He has probably some shoe-making tools with him—Carried off several suits of clothes, among which was a long black surtout with metal buttons, and a fashionable but partly worn hat, with a velvet band. It is likely he has directed his course to Rutherford county, North Carolina, his former place of residence; will probably take the road by Sparta, Washington and Petersburg. Any person who will deliver the said negro in any safe jail shall be liberally rewarded.

August 22 45—tf

S. BOYKIN.

There is no doubt but that he is accompanied by another, who has been lately brought from the same county, a short square built fellow, of a surley countenance, & about the same age.

3 Georgia Journal, September 29, 1818, p.1

This ad, placed on the front page of the *Georgia Journal* by physician and botanist Dr. Samuel Boykin (my four-greats uncle) then living near Milledgeville, ran from August 22 through September 29, 1818. I didn't find any ads in later issues. It is notable for the number of details Dr. Boykin provides: the description of clothes that he thinks the enslaved man, Bill, took with him, and "some shoe-making tools." In particular, the way in which Dr. Boykin described Bill: "of a very pleasant countenance and having a very plausible address, well calculated to impose," made me so curious about this man, who may have been trying to get back to family members in Rutherford County, North Carolina, "his former place of residence." Dr. Boykin even calculated a possible route that Bill might take. In later records, and in Samuel Boykin's estate inventory (he died in 1848) which lists more than 160 enslaved people, there is no Bill listed.

Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.

SOURCES

Alabama Slave Codes, 1833: <https://archives.alabama.gov/cornerstone/slavecode1833/page01.html>

Arlene Balkansky, "Runaway! Fugitive Slave Ads in Newspapers," Library of Congress blog, October 1, 2019: <https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/2019/10/runaway-fugitive-slave-ads-in-newspapers/>.

LOOK-OUT—\$10 REWARD!

RUNAWAY from my farm, in Russell county, Ala., on the 27th inst., my negro boy Collins, about 28 years old, of dark complexion, about 5 feet 8 inches high, and weighs about 150 pounds; is shrewd and sensible, and is probably wearing a goatee or whiskers; has relatives in Columbus among John Reese's family of negroes, and Shepard (the painter,) is a great friend of his. He is, no doubt, lurking about Columbus. I will pay the above reward for his confinement in jail, or expenses added if delivered at my farm.

Auburn, Ala, June 30 D. T. HALLIDAY.



Columbus Daily Times, July 2, 1860, p.2

This runaway advertisement for the young man Collins, who is "shrewd and sensible," deserves more research. It draws together slaveholders and enslaved families in Auburn, Alabama, and Columbus, as well as a "painter" named Shepard, and hints at friendships among slaves, a little-documented but obviously commonplace event. Who are all these people and what were their relationships to each other?

A riveting and well-illustrated post about Ona Maria Judge, the enslaved woman who successfully escaped George and Martha Washington in 1797 and was interviewed about her reasons for running away in the 1840s.

Mike Bunn, Gary Sprayberry and Virginia Causey, *Let the Records Show: Discovering the Valley's Black Community in Slavery and Freedom* (Columbus, Ga.: The Columbus Museum, 2010). (exhibition catalog)

Anthony Gene Carey, *Sold Down the River: Slavery in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley of Alabama and Georgia* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 2011), especially pages 111-142.

Marie H. Godfrey, *Early Settlers of Barbour County, Alabama, vol.1* (Eufaula, Ala. [1971?]), 156, 160.

Colette Coleman, "How Literacy Became a Powerful Weapon in the Fight to End Slavery,"
<https://www.history.com/news/nat-turner-rebellion-literacy-slavery>

Freedom on the Move: <https://freedomonthemove.org/>. And, original press release for *Freedom on the Move* website:
<https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2016/03/runaway-slave-ads-portray-grim-period-us-history>

Danny Lewis, "An Archive of Fugitive Slave Ads Sheds New Light on Lost Histories," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 25, 2016:
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/archive-fugitive-slave-ads-could-shed-new-light-lost-histories-180959194>

Christopher A. Nordmann, "Runaway Slaves," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2125>.

Smithsonian American Art Museum

<https://americanexperience.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Literacy-as-Freedom.pdf>

Mattie Thomas Thompson, *History of Barbour County, Alabama* ([Eufaula, Ala.: Mattie Thomas Thompson], 1939), esp. 22, 538 ; also available on Ancestry.com.

Wikipedia, "Anti-Literacy Laws in the United States," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-literacy_laws_in_the_United_States.

Jeffrey R Young, "Slavery in Antebellum Georgia," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 2003, rev. 2020:
<https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/slavery-antebellum-georgia>

Rachel Dobson