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# Emigration to Liberia from the Chattahoochee Valley of Georgia and Alabama, 1853-1903

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EMIGRATION TO LIBERIA FROM THE CHATTAHOOCHEE VALLEY  
OF GEORGIA AND ALABAMA,  
1853-1903

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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in

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## ABSTRACT

Between 1853 and 1903, approximately five hundred African-Americans left the Chattahoochee Valley of Georgia and Alabama to start new lives in the West African republic of Liberia. Most of the emigrants came from Columbus, Georgia, and Eufaula, Alabama, and departed for Liberia during the uncertainty of the post-Civil War years of 1867 and 1868. Most sought safety and escape from a still intact white supremacist society. The ready availability of land in Liberia also promised greater opportunities for prosperity there than in the South. Black nationalism and evangelical zeal motivated others. Liberia would be their “own” country and afford an opportunity to spread Christianity throughout Africa.

The emigrant group was largely made up of families and included many children; consequently, the group was of a young average age. Most were farmers, but a significant number of tradesmen and clergymen also emigrated. All faced many hardships in Liberia, and some returned to the United States. However, most stayed, and a small number prospered. Thus, although the Chattahoochee Valley emigration to Liberia was a disappointment to many, some resourceful few found what they had sought: escape and safety from a white supremacist society, and their own land in their own country.

Although historical sources on this regional migration are limited, the American Colonization Society (ACS), the primary sponsor of the Liberian emigration movement, recorded demographic data on the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants. Some emigrant correspondence was preserved in the journal of the ACS and in local newspapers of the period. From these sources, the history of this movement, the motivations and characteristics of the emigrant group, and the experience of the emigrants in Liberia can be developed.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The cities of Columbus, Georgia, and Eufaula, Alabama, share a largely forgotten, historical bond with the small, struggling West African country of Liberia. Almost 150 years ago, just after the Civil War, 486 citizens of Columbus and Eufaula felt they had a better chance for safety, freedom, and prosperity in a small, struggling African republic than in the United States.

Today, the landscape of Columbus, Georgia, continues to evolve, and change has obscured the city's historic past. Once one of the most prominent industrial cities in the antebellum and post-war South, the city has lost many of its old, brick mills, factories, and warehouses to mysterious fires and the wrecking ball. In large part, cotton built "old" Columbus, but a visitor to the city and region today would hardly make that connection. Although cotton is still an abundant crop in Georgia, little is grown near metropolitan Columbus or even the surrounding region, the northern stretches of the Chattahoochee Valley. Visitors are more likely to encounter suburbia or rolling pine plantations than a cotton field. Eufaula, Alabama, about forty-five miles south of Columbus, now lies on the shores of Lake Walter F. George (known as Lake Eufaula in Alabama) rather than the narrow Chattahoochee River, and the city has become a tourist town and service center for the many retirees and new homes springing up around the lake.

Across an ocean, Liberia, on the Atlantic Coast of West Africa, was the first republic on that continent and elected the first female African head-of-state in 2005. Founded in the early nineteenth century as a haven for free blacks and emancipated slaves from the United States, the colony became independent in the middle of the nineteenth century. Largely a project of the white-led American Colonization Society (ACS), Liberia was the result of conflicting motives:

some members and supporters, typically northerners, hoped the colony would provide a means for the slow abolition of slavery; others, typically southerners, hoped sending free blacks from the South would remove a troublesome demographic segment and better secure the “peculiar institution.” The colony and country attracted only a small percentage of free blacks and freed people before and after the Civil War, and similar black-led efforts after Reconstruction and during the Jim Crow-era never amounted to much. Those who survived Liberia’s many tropical diseases and adapted to its equatorial climate developed their own culture that, in many ways, resembled the white-ruled South left behind. These “Americo-Liberians” represented a minority in the country but asserted political, economic, and technological authority over the native peoples through the late twentieth century. Violence and sporadic fighting with the native people have occurred throughout Liberia’s history, but none matched the decades of gruesome civil warfare in the late twentieth century from which the country is only now emerging. To some degree, the conflict represented people of native descent rebelling against over a century and a half of Americo-Liberian rule. Many symbols of Americo-Liberian hegemony, such as the American-style, historic architecture and the country’s museum and archives, were destroyed. Currently, an uneasy peace holds, and new leadership leads Liberia into its still uncertain future.

Although Columbus and Liberia were both founded at about the same time (in 1826 and 1822 respectively), the two communities followed very different paths. However, they share a bond: more than 500 free blacks and freed people left the Chattahoochee Valley for Liberia, most from Columbus. Indeed, of the 4,093 black emigrants the ACS sponsored and sent to Liberia after the Civil War, more than one in ten came from the Chattahoochee Valley, including 447 from Columbus and 39 from Eufaula.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of these emigrants left in two large

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<sup>1</sup> Peter J. Murdza, *Immigrants to Liberia: 1865 to 1904, An Alphabetical Listing* (Newark, DE: Liberian Studies Association in America, Inc., 1975), i.

groups just after the Civil War in late 1867 and early 1868. Liberian emigration from the region before the Civil War and during and after Reconstruction appears to have been minimal. Thus, the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants represented a substantial number of all post-war emigrants and were a major contingent in the ACS's short-lived, post-war emigration "boom."

Liberian emigration has been ignored in the histories of Columbus and is at best a footnote in most histories of Georgia and Alabama. The Chattahoochee Valley emigration, however, is significant given its relative magnitude and timing. Who were these people? And why, when so many stayed in the South, did this group leave? What became of them? The answers to these questions are problematic. The historical record, including the records of the ACS, newspaper accounts, and a handful of letters, is limited but provides primary clues when piecing together an account of the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants. Despite the limitations of this evidence, enough remains to develop an idea of who they were, why they left, and, to some extent, what happened to them.

The historiography of Liberia is not expansive but it is varied. Several books survey the history of the country.<sup>2</sup> Others focus on Liberia's origins, early history, and the genesis and role of the American Colonization Society.<sup>3</sup> These studies are valuable for developing the context within which the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants made their decisions to leave and arrived and

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<sup>2</sup> See Charles Morrow Wilson, *Liberia: Black Africa in Microcosm* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), and Richard West, *Back to Africa: A History of Sierra Leone and Liberia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970).

<sup>3</sup> See P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), Amos J. Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1991), Tom W. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), and James Wesley Smith, *Sojourners in Search of Freedom: The Settlement of Liberia by Black Americans* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987).



settled in Liberia. As the ACS declined at the end of the nineteenth century and closed its doors at the beginning of the twentieth, black-led, grassroots “back-to-Africa” emigration and internal migration schemes replaced it. The history and significance of these largely unsuccessful efforts have been recorded and partially explain why the interest in Liberia persisted in the Chattahoochee Valley never led to any more significant emigration.<sup>4</sup>

Correspondence and related newspaper items provide the bulk of the evidence that can be studied to track the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants once they arrived and settled in Liberia. Most of the previously known letters that have survived from Liberian emigrants have been published. Randall M. Miller edited the early to mid-nineteenth century correspondence of the Skipwith family of Virginia and Alabama to their former owners in *Dear Master: Letters of a Slave Family*. Bell I. Wiley followed Miller’s work with *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833-1869*, a comprehensive volume that included all known Liberian correspondence untainted by connections to the ACS.<sup>5</sup> Wiley was skeptical of glowing letters written to the ACS or published in its *African Repository and Colonial Journal* and used few of them. Both Miller and Wiley identified common themes within the correspondence, such as the hardships facing the emigrants in a strange, new land, and their sometime reliance on and affection for former owner families. These themes were reflected in the letters of the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants. Many emigrants thanked God for true freedom in their own land, but never forgot the friends and families they left behind in the United States. One of the greatest hardships all emigrants faced was mere survival. A variety of diseases, particularly malaria, killed many emigrants, most

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<sup>4</sup> See Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890-1910* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1969) and Ibrahim Sundiata, *Brothers and Strangers: Black Zion, Black Slavery, 1914-1940* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> See Randall M. Miller, *Dear Master: Letters of a Slave Family* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press: 1978) and Bell I. Wiley, *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833-1869* (Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1980).

shortly after their arrival. Antonio McDaniel, in his statistical analysis *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: The Mortality Cost of Colonizing Liberia in the Nineteenth Century*, indicates that Liberian colonists may have paid the highest “reliably recorded” mortality cost in the history of human migration.<sup>6</sup>

Recent works include several regional studies and focus on events in the United States leading to emigration as well as reception and settlement of emigrants in Liberia. Richard Hall provides a comprehensive history of Maryland’s colony in Liberia in *On Afric’s Shore: A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834-1857*, and Kenneth C. Barnes’s study of the unique, late nineteenth century surge in emigration from Arkansas, *Journey of Hope: The Back to Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s*, explains why almost half of the emigrants during that period came from Arkansas. Following Reconstruction, as that state’s rural whites and blacks banded together against the white elite, that elite reacted violently against the “weakest link” in the coalition, and, most importantly, Arkansas dramatically and rapidly shifted from a supposed place of black opportunity to a place of Jim Crow oppression. Claude A. Clegg III’s *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* utilizes nineteenth century, North Carolinian emigration to Liberia as a case study to examine the complex, invasive culture African Americans created there. Clegg’s use of ACS records to develop demographic statistics for all North Carolina emigrants provides an opportunity to compare that group with the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants. Journalist Alan Huffman’s *Mississippi in Africa: The Saga of the Slaves of Prospect Hill Plantation and their Legacy in Liberia Today* finds the memory of

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<sup>6</sup> See Antonio McDaniel, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: The Mortality Cost of Colonizing Liberia in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Liberian emigration lost in a rural Mississippi county but vital among descendants of emigrants in Liberia who dream of returning to the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the significant scale of their post-war Liberian emigration, the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants do not appear in any historiography. Some of the more recent works, such as Clegg's *Price of Liberty*, reflect the type of analysis possible for the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants: to identify the factors that drove emigrants to their dramatic decisions, to develop a portrait of who those emigrants were, and to piece together what happened to them after they arrived in Liberia. Thus, the present effort is an attempt to do just that—to tell the story of the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants. In large part, their story is one of misinformation, disappointment, and, above all, hardship. But for those few who did succeed, they achieved what most had hoped they would find in Liberia: freedom, prosperity, and escape from a racist, white world where those things had been denied to them.

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<sup>7</sup> See Richard Hall, *On Afric's Shore: A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834-1857* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2003), Kenneth C. Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back to Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), Claude A. Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), and Alan Huffman, *Mississippi in Africa: The Saga of the Slaves of Prospect Hill Plantation and their Legacy in Liberia Today* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004).

## CHAPTER 2: DEPARTURES, 1853-1903

Before and after the Civil War, both white and blacks from North and South pondered the status of freed blacks. For a variety of often conflicting motives, some whites and blacks thought the best thing to do was for blacks to go back to Africa. Before the Civil War, some Northern abolitionists and moderates saw the return of free blacks and emancipated slaves to an African colony as a means to chip away at the slave system itself. Colonization would provide some opportunity and safety for free blacks who had presumably no prospects in a white supremacist society. Slave-holding Southerners, on the other hand, viewed African colonization as an excellent method of removing free blacks who were a destabilizing influence on those still in bondage. These two conflicting concerns led to the establishment of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816 and the colony of Liberia on the West African coast in 1822. Liberia became Africa's first republic when it declared its independence from the ACS in 1847.

The pre-Civil War ACS was essentially a white men's organization meeting white men's goals, and pro-slavery Southerners held important leadership positions within the organization. Following the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, the colonization movement changed. Political and financial support for the ACS dwindled following the end of slavery, but blacks themselves now began writing to the organization in great numbers asking for assistance to emigrate. Although blacks had their freedom, in the uncertain years immediately following the war, many understandably desired to leave and try their lot elsewhere. Some whites, also believing the races could not live side-by-side, proposed internal colonization schemes in the West and Florida, as well as Caribbean colonies. These schemes never gained momentum, and the established pattern of emigration to Liberia persisted. The depleted ACS struggled to meet

the demand and essentially exhausted its remaining resources to send as many freed people to Liberia as possible.

As Reconstruction governments took hold in the South, many blacks responded hopefully, and emigration to Liberia slowed. However, the end of Reconstruction, the advent of Jim Crow laws, and the corresponding surge in white on black violence encouraged many blacks to again ponder moving their families in the late nineteenth century and seek opportunities elsewhere. Interest in Liberia was renewed and letters flooded the ACS with pleas for help, but the society was only a shadow of its former self and could only send much smaller, more selective groups. As blacks realized the ACS was no longer a viable option, black leaders, most often clergy, formed new national and regional organizations, particularly in black-majority areas where the violence tended to be the most extreme. Such black-led societies formed in South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas, but none approached the former success of the ACS. Many were outright failures. Back-to-Africa emigration schemes would persist well into the twentieth century, but no organization or plan, the ACS included, was very successful. Relatively few blacks actually emigrated. Ironically, due to the recent political instability and gruesome violence that persisted through two decades of civil war in Liberia, the descendants of many of the African-Americans who emigrated in the nineteenth century wish to come to the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Emigration to Liberia from the Chattahoochee Valley of Georgia and Alabama was concentrated during the immediate post-Civil War period, although evidence suggests sporadic

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth C. Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back-to-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 190-193; and see also Alan Huffman, *Mississippi in Africa: The Saga of the Slaves of Prospect Hill Plantation and their Legacy in Liberia Today* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004).

emigration occurred throughout the period of the national emigration, from the early to mid-nineteenth century through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Prior to and just after the Civil War, schemes to send free blacks and then emancipated slaves from the South and United States were well known in Columbus and the surrounding communities. The colonization program organized and run by the ACS was the best known and was by far the best organized and most successful.<sup>2</sup> The ACS formed and began activities at about the same time the city of Columbus was incorporated (1822 and 1826 respectively); thus, both white and black residents brought an awareness of the ACS colonization scheme to the new, rapidly growing town. Although few early Columbus newspapers survive, the ACS and African colonization were certainly discussed in their pages, as was the case in newspapers of Columbus's sister city to the east, Macon, Georgia.<sup>3</sup>

Interest and support for the "back to Africa" movement can be documented in Columbus soon after the founding of the town. Columbus residents appear as early as 1837 in the donor and subscriber lists of the ACS's monthly journal *African Repository and Colonial Journal*. This interest and support was sustained. A few Columbus citizens made donations for the years 1837, 1841, 1849, 1850, 1852, and 1853 in increments ranging from \$20 to \$100; others subscribed to the *Repository* in 1844, 1848, 1850, and 1851. Lock Weems, Esq. and Rev. C. B. King were identified as Columbus's only "Life Members" in the ACS in 1849 and 1852,

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<sup>2</sup> Columbus newspapers dating from just before and just after the Civil War included news items regarding African-American removal schemes to Africa, Florida, Mexico, the Caribbean Islands, and western U.S. territories.

<sup>3</sup> Circa 1825-1840 editions of the *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, published in Macon, Ga., contained regular news items and commentary regarding African colonization schemes and the ACS. Macon, like Columbus, was also sited on Georgia's "Fall Line" (the natural northern limit of navigable rivers), was incorporated in 1823, and also experienced relatively rapid growth and industrialization.

respectively. A single Eufaula, Alabama, donation was noted in 1854.<sup>4</sup> The activity recorded in the *Repository* indicates that not only were Columbus residents aware of the Liberian project, some few supported it financially and wished to be kept apprised of the ACS's progress.

The ACS was also actively recruiting in middle Georgia before the Civil War. Rev. R. R. Gurley, longtime secretary of the ACS and its chief administrative officer, visited middle Georgia's "Fall Line" cities of Augusta, Columbus, Milledgeville, and Macon in the summer of 1853. Gurley was eager both to garner support from the white population and recruit emigrant candidates from the black population. His reports indicate that both the white and free black populations of Columbus were receptive. In Columbus, Gurley found "several friends disposed to secure to me an opportunity of addressing the public." Having spoken in a few churches, Gurley organized several men (presumably white) to disseminate information, receive donations, and otherwise promote the ACS. He was assured by his white hosts that if any of the free blacks chose to emigrate, their expenses would be defrayed.<sup>5</sup> Sensibly and successfully, Gurley did not promote the abolitionist tendency within the ACS during his visit but took a more moderate and effective tone that would appeal to the white, slave-owning population of Columbus. His white hosts, interestingly, steered him toward some of the free black families in town. They saw in Gurley a man who could help get rid of some of the troublesome free blacks in town, whose very presence they perceived as a threat to the safety of Columbus and slave-holding society generally. During the visit, he met with several black families, describing them as "very

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<sup>4</sup> *African Repository, and Colonial Journal (ARCJ)*, 13 (October 1837): 328; 18 (July 1841): 206; 20 (September 1844): 288; 24 (May 1848): 160; 24 (July 1848): 224; 25 (August 1849): 255; 26 (January 1850): 28; 26 (March 1850): 96; 26 (April 1850): 128; 26 (June 1850): 191; 26 (November 1850): 352; 27 (August 1851): 256; 28 (January 1852): 27-28; 29 (October 1853): 318; and 30 (February 1854): 64.

<sup>5</sup> *ARCJ* 29 (September 1853): 277; and *ARCJ* 30 (February 1854): 52.

intelligent and respectable free colored families” who, he declared, would “probably at no distant day emigrate to Liberia.”

Liberian emigration from Columbus and the Chattahoochee Valley was very minimal before the Civil War. The slave owners of Columbus were generally reluctant to part with their income-producing property, and only a few free blacks were willing to board ships for a land unknown. Although some whites in Columbus supported the ACS and “back to Africa” colonization efforts, others were concerned that the very idea of Liberia was dangerous. To them, it was fine if the free blacks volunteered to leave, but those remaining in bondage had no reason to concern themselves with freedom in a far off and unattainable land. Furthermore, the Liberian colonists themselves were proving incapable of running a successful government or caring for their own people. Thus, white opposition in Columbus had a two-fold purpose: to maintain stability within the region’s slave populations and to reinforce the righteousness of the slave system.

This dual-purpose sentiment was reflected in newspaper items published before the war. Although some items in pre-war Columbus newspapers concerned general, sometimes whimsical, information regarding the struggling republic, such as promising cotton production or an unusually large pineapple plantation, articles and items more often told of Liberia’s troubles and the severe hardships of its colonists. Typical items included “Difficulties in Liberia” citing the “great distress and suffering among the Colonists” and transcripts of gloomy letters from the country’s president.<sup>6</sup> Stories of individual emigrant failures in Liberia were re-published in Columbus and held up as proof that slavery was the best and most benevolent station for the “negro.” An Atlanta item reprinted in the *Enquirer*, titled “Lo!! The Poor Slave!,” told the story

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<sup>6</sup> *CE*, 15 April 1856, 2; *CE*, 12 June 1858, 2; and *CE*, 19 November 1858, 2.



of an emancipated slave, who, after transport to Liberia and “enduring all manner of privations and sufferings and witnessing the death of many of his companions, and the wretched condition of the survivors” begged to return to the United States and requested “the privilege of returning to bondage.”<sup>7</sup> Other articles in Columbus newspapers, such as “Liberia a Swindle,” accused the ACS of over-charging freed people and not supporting them on their arrival in Africa. The common theme of slaves eagerly returning to the United States and to their former servitude in these pre-Civil War articles was starkly manifested in this same item from the *Farmville (Va.) Journal* reprinted in the *Enquirer*. After indicating that two Liberian returnees were once again slaves, the Virginia editors claimed these two people believed:

That freedom to the negro in Africa, is the greatest curse that could possibly befall him; and that had the Liberians means of getting away *seven-eighths of them would gladly return to the United States, and serve the hardest masters to be found in the South,* feeling that the condition of the slave here is far preferable to that of the most favored of the inhabitants of Liberia.<sup>8</sup>

Another Virginia item reprinted in Columbus told of emancipated slaves on their way to a ship bound for Liberia, who, rather than be freed and transported to Liberia, supposedly escaped and returned to the plantation, “preferring slavery to freedom.”<sup>9</sup> Whether any of these stories were wholly true or false, or somewhere in between, they painted a grim picture of Liberia and were certainly intended to filter down to the slaves themselves in an attempt to subdue their desire for freedom, Liberia, or both. However, whites’ eagerness to paint Liberia a disaster may also have had the unintended consequence of deterring free blacks who had the opportunity to emigrate via the ACS.

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<sup>7</sup> *CE*, 19 May 1857, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *CE*, 10 June 1858, 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Daily Columbus Enquirer (DCE)*, 17 May 1859, 2.

Some emigration did occur prior to the Civil War. At least one free colored person, Mathew Hill of Columbus, may have been swayed by Gurley. Only a few months after Gurley's Columbus visit, the 24-year-old emigrated alone, on December 16, 1853, traveling by the ACS brig *General Pierce* out of Savannah and bound for Sinou, Liberia.<sup>10</sup> At least two more free blacks emigrated before the Civil War. The *Repository* recorded that two Columbus free persons emigrated on June 20, 1856, from Tybee Island, Georgia (Savannah vicinity), on the ACS ship *Elvira Owen*.<sup>11</sup> The *Columbus Enquirer* made note of the ship's 321 "colored" passengers, 38 from Georgia, and "2 of whom (free negroes) were from this city."<sup>12</sup> No other details were recorded regarding this couple. Whether these three persons represent the first Liberian emigrants from the Chattahoochee Valley or were part of a pattern of regular, small scale migration is not known; however, their emigration does confirm at least some pre-Civil War emigration to Liberia.

By the time of the Civil War, Columbus had developed into one of the south's leading industrial centers. The falls of the Chattahoochee River provided abundant water power, and five and six-story, brick factories and warehouses lined the city's waterfront. By 1860, Columbus was second only to Richmond in textile production, and a paper mill, furniture factory, cotton gin manufacturer, and iron foundries diversified the city's industrial base.<sup>13</sup> During the war, these same factories produced uniforms, guns, cannon, ammunition, swords, and other essentials of warfare, and, because of this industrial capacity, Columbus became a strategic target for raiding Federals late in the war. U.S. Major General James Wilson's "lightning"

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<sup>10</sup> *ARCJ* 30 (February 1854): 55-56.

<sup>11</sup> *ARCJ* 32 (July 1856): 193-194.

<sup>12</sup> *Columbus Enquirer (CE)*, 24 June 1856, 2.

<sup>13</sup> John S. Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia, 1828-1978* (Columbus, Ga.: Columbus Sesquicentennial, Inc., 1978), 23.

cavalry raid, meant to show the military potential of a speedy, large-scale, and exclusively cavalry campaign, targeted the industrialized Fall Line cities of Alabama and Georgia. On April 17, 1865, Wilson's quick and successful attack on Columbus, arguably the "last land battle of the Civil War," left the town's large factories and many of its principal buildings in ashes.<sup>14</sup> Thus, although very nearly spared as the war drew to a close, Columbus would not only have to adjust to a new post-war reality, but also physically rebuild.

Soon after the war, plantation owners, factory owners, and the press began contemplating the future of labor in the Chattahoochee Valley and the rest of the South. Slavery was finished, and many freed people had left plantations and farms and congregated in Columbus. Although the city avoided any significant civil disturbances, idle whites and blacks kept an uneasy peace in the city. The labor issue was pondered in the press: given their new found freedom, would the freed people return to the fields and be a reliable source of labor? Or should the southern states actively recruit European immigrants, such as were beginning to arrive in droves in the north? Some feared that European immigrants and their culture would not be a good fit in the South's climate and culture, and that any such immigration would take a lengthy adjustment period for employers and labor alike.<sup>15</sup> These concerns shifted white focus to returning blacks to the cotton fields as paid laborers and thereby producing raw materials for Columbus's rebuilding factories. Thus, rejuvenating black labor became the Chattahoochee Valley's best chance for a rapid economic recovery.

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<sup>14</sup> See James Pickett Jones, *Yankee Blitzkrieg: Wilson's Raid Through Alabama and Georgia* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> *CDE*, 25 March 1866, 1; 20 June 1866, 2; and 4 May 1867, 3.

Post-war uncertainty was almost total for blacks. Property-less and penniless, the freed people had little to celebrate after the initial euphoria of emancipation. Prospects were few in the Chattahoochee Valley, white racism abounded, and the promise of black political power was unrealized. During the early post-war years, Federal military rule in Georgia was temporarily withdrawn while defiant whites and former Confederates cleverly and effectively maneuvered to retain white supremacy in the new state legislature. To freed people across the state, this political maneuvering was disheartening and perplexing. The South had lost the war; the slaves had been emancipated; black men could now vote; and black members had been elected to the Georgia legislature. Yet conservative whites, some of whom were ex-Confederates, still firmly controlled state government, and, during the summer of 1868, they managed to expel all the black members of the state legislature. To some degree, in the early years of Reconstruction, the freed people of Georgia and the Chattahoochee Valley faced a political status quo: despite their new “freedom,” political power remained in the hands of the “old guard” white elite. Although Congress would eventually react against Georgia’s defiance, reinstating military rule in 1869, the years 1867 and 1868 remained uncertain ones for the state’s freed people. However, with freedom came choice. Although most were destitute, freed people at least had the opportunity to ponder leaving the South. Further, the ACS’s history of providing passage to Liberia was well known in the Chattahoochee Valley, as was that country’s free land and black-only government. Thus, Liberia returned to the consciousness of the Chattahoochee Valley. To blacks, the prospect of Liberia was escape, safety, and opportunity. They could own their own land in their own country and be governed by their own people. Liberia was a new start and a new future for families, far from the whites who had oppressed them.

For many whites, Liberia represented the loss of crucial labor, and opposition was reflected in Columbus newspapers. Numerous newspaper stories suggested that not only was a new life in Liberia a desperate proposition, but that even getting there was unlikely. As a warning against the “Liberian emigration scheme” being “agitated in Middle Georgia,” a front page item in the *Daily Sun* reported that blacks being transported overseas were being duped and were to be sold back into slavery in Cuba.<sup>16</sup> These “sharppers” were taking advantage of “recent negro emigration schemes” to market free transportation to Liberia as a method of entrapping blacks and transporting them to Cuba or other Caribbean islands where slavery persisted.<sup>17</sup> Despite little evidence that this particular scheme was successful, the Cuba myth persisted in Columbus newspapers. Another post-war rumor that circulated in Columbus warned that all freed people would soon be expelled from the country. The *Daily Columbus Enquirer* supposed the rumor must have originated from the “efforts of some of them to get up in this section a colony for Liberia.”<sup>18</sup> The papers also lauded “conservative” and “sensible” blacks who spoke against emigration and argued that the freed people’s best “interest” remained in the South.<sup>19</sup> Despite such “bad press,” interest in Liberia among freed people in Columbus grew during the uncertain years following the war and eventually led to the only two significant emigration movements from the Chattahoochee Valley.

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<sup>16</sup> *The (Columbus) Daily Sun (DS)*, 31 July 1866, 1.

<sup>17</sup> *DS*, 29 September 1866, 4.

<sup>18</sup> *DCE*, 11 September 1866, 3.

<sup>19</sup> *(Macon) Georgia Weekly Telegraph (GWT)*, 6 September 1867, 7. The Macon and Columbus newspapers frequently shared news items, and some editions of the *GWT* contain Columbus items no longer available in the original Columbus editions.

The Columbus press anxiously followed the interest in Liberia that the *Sun* reported “so popular among the negroes about Macon and other localities.”<sup>20</sup> The *Enquirer*, noting that “quite a grand Liberian emigration scheme is on foot among the negroes in Middle Georgia,” warned local freed people against “Northern auspices” that promised them an “Eldorado” gained “without work” in a land without the “restraints of law upon their natural propensities to do wrong.” They were sure to be “disappointed.”<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, the *Enquirer* included a Macon item noting “an expedition, upon a very large scale” was preparing for departure, and, soon after, reported that potential Liberian emigrants paraded in that town “with music filling the air, and banners floating in the breeze.”<sup>22</sup> The prospect of Liberian emigration—and escape from the South—was a cause for celebration in Macon.

As concerned Columbus papers reported Macon’s growing interest in Liberian emigration, that interest was growing in the Chattahoochee Valley as well. White opposition and the press were not subduing freed people’s desires to look elsewhere for opportunity. By simply following emigration events, Columbus newspapers may have facilitated that interest. The *Sun* reprinted a letter from William McClain, Financial Secretary of the ACS, addressed to the *Macon Messenger*, who noted that the “colored people in your State are agitating the question of going to Liberia,” and, in response, the ACS would have a ship at Savannah in November of 1866. McClain, and thus the ACS, promised “free passage to Liberia” and “six months support.”<sup>23</sup> An October, 1866, item in the *Enquirer* noted that the ACS, “unusually flourishing just now,” had purchased a new ship, the 1016-ton *Golconda*, and proposed regular sailings for

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<sup>20</sup> *DS*, 31 July 1866, 1.

<sup>21</sup> *DCE*, 28 July 1866, 3.

<sup>22</sup> *DCE*, 28 July 1866, 2, and 29 July 1866, 3.

<sup>23</sup> *DS*, 12 August 1866, 4.

Liberia each November and May.<sup>24</sup> By February of 1867, the ACS had received 78 applications for emigration from Columbus and another 25 from nearby LaGrange, Georgia.<sup>25</sup>

At least eight persons from Columbus took advantage of the *Golconda's* first May departure in 1867. Fifty-two-year old John F. Simpson, his children and grandchildren, and Alfred Howard, twenty-one years old and apparently single, were the first eight Columbus emigrants sponsored by the ACS to leave for Liberia after the Civil War.<sup>26</sup> They left together on May 30, bound for Sinou County in southern Liberia. Simpson and Howard were the only Chattahoochee Valley emigrants to declare for that area of the country. Simpson took with him a son, two daughters, and two grandchildren, the latter ages eighteen months and five years. Whether Alfred Howard was somehow related to the Simpson family is not known. Howard, John Simpson, and his son, Frank Simpson, all identified themselves as farmers; three of the four Simpson adults claimed to be literate.<sup>27</sup>

The May, 1867, departure from Charleston and the *Golconda* itself were described in a *Charleston Daily News* item reprinted in the *Repository*. The scene at the wharf presented a “picturesque appearance,” as the emigrants bid friends farewell and “colored damsels” were

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<sup>24</sup> *DCE*, 21 October 1866, 1.

<sup>25</sup> *ARCJ* 43 (February 1867): 39.

<sup>26</sup> *ARCJ* 43 (July 1867): 210, 212.

<sup>27</sup> *ARCJ* 43 (July 1867): 210, and see also Peter J. Murdza, Jr., *Immigrants to Liberia: 1865 to 1904, An Alphabetical Listing* (Newark, DE: Liberian Studies Association in America, Inc., 1976). The Murdza inventory of American emigrants is derived from the ACS's *African Repository* and *Liberia Bulletin*; Murdza notes the likelihood of inaccuracies in the original data as well as in his own compilation of that data for publication. However, the data recorded in these publications and compiled in the Murdza inventory is the most accurate data that is readily available and accessible. Nonetheless, one significant error in the Murdza compilation was identified: Murdza incorrectly identifies “Marion, Ga.” as Marion County, Georgia, an existing county located in the Chattahoochee Valley area of Georgia and bordering Columbus-Muscogee County to the east. Cross-checking this identification against the *African Repository* and various Georgia history texts indicates that Marion, Georgia, was the pre-Civil War county seat of Twiggs County, near Macon, Georgia. However, the rest of the data were cross-checked against issues of the *African Repository* and represents an accurate transfer of the Chattahoochee Valley emigrant information found in that journal.

assisted across steps “to and from the boat by their attentive beaux.” The *Golconda* was described as “in every respect a superior vessel,” a “handsome vessel, heavily sparred” that sat “gracefully in the water.” Although “not built for an emigrant ship,” it had been well-adapted to “comfortably” carry 650 to 700 emigrants, far more than the 321 on this, the vessel’s maiden emigration voyage. The ship had been altered to accommodate seven to eight-foot heights between decks, and three large ventilators and three new hatches, all of which would afford “sufficient ventilation,” had been added. Meals for the emigrants would be cooked on “apparatus...of the first order,” capable of cooking “at the same time, a barrel of salt meat, with rice or potatoes, and baking a barrel of flour into bread.”<sup>28</sup>

This scene of departure, and the accommodation provided by the *Golconda*, would await the two major emigrations from the Chattahoochee Valley later in 1867 and in the spring of 1868. As whites moved to consolidate political power, many freed people pondered their futures. In Columbus and Eufaula, many would choose to leave. As the November ACS expedition neared, the Columbus newspapers reported the *Golconda* in Baltimore, soon to set sail for Charleston, South Carolina, and take on up to 600 emigrants for Liberia.<sup>29</sup> The *Enquirer* reported that “quite an interest in the subject of emigration to Liberia” had been “aroused among the colored population” of Columbus and its vicinity. A. M. Hill of the ACS had addressed the Columbus freed people on the subject “once or twice” and disseminated ACS literature, espoused Liberia’s “advantages,” and made that organization’s offer to furnish transportation and support to those who wished to emigrate. The *Enquirer* described the offer as “tempting” and

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<sup>28</sup> *ARCJ* Vol. 43 (July 1867): 201-202.

<sup>29</sup> *DCE*, 12 October 1867, 3.



was not surprised to hear that “hundreds of the freed people contemplate accepting it.”<sup>30</sup> Liberia was no longer just a dream or a potential prospect; the ACS was in Columbus and had extended the offer directly. No payment was required. The freed people of Columbus had the opportunity to lead their families onto a ship bound for Africa if they so chose. By the end of October, the *Enquirer*, noting that “many of the colored people of this city and vicinity are interested in Liberia and the facilities for reaching that country,” reported the pending departure of the ACS ship *Golconda* from Baltimore for Charleston.

On November 11, 1867, 235 Columbus residents left for Liberia. The *Enquirer* reported that “quite a crowd of negroes” departed Columbus via a Macon train, bound for Charleston, and then by ship to Liberia. The emigrants were “collected by the beating of a drum, and appeared to be about two hundred in number,” and the paper understood that “many more want to go, but have to wait for the next vessel.”<sup>31</sup> In only a week, the Columbus contingent would be aboard the *Golconda* and en route to Liberia, having indicated the village of Bexley, south of Monrovia and on the St. John’s River, as their ultimate destination. With them traveled the Rev. R. R. Gurley, the longtime chief officer of the ACS who had spoken in Columbus in 1853.<sup>32</sup> His presence was a likely comfort to many of the emigrants aboard. This voyage was largely a Columbus expedition: of the 312 emigrants who departed Charleston on November 18, 235, or seventy-five percent, were from Columbus. Other passengers included emigrants from South Carolina and Tennessee.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *DCE*, 18 October 1867, 3.

<sup>31</sup> *DCE*, 12 November 1867, 3.

<sup>32</sup> *DCE*, 24 November 1867, 3.

<sup>33</sup> *ARCJ* 43 (December 1867): 366 – 370, 376; 44 (March 1868): 66 – 67; and *DCE*, 24 November 1867, 3.

As the *Enquirer* indicated, Columbus freed people's interest in Liberian emigration apparently exceeded the allotment provided for them on the November, 1867, sailing. In the December *Repository*, the ACS reported that "never in the history of the Society" had "so many pressing appeals come to it for passage and settlement in Liberia." Noting that applications had come from across the South, the ACS referred to the applications received on behalf of "some three hundred at E-----, Alabama, and six hundred at C-----, Georgia, who desire to emigrate under the auspices of the Society in May, 1868." The communities referenced were certainly Eufaula, Alabama, and Columbus, which would be represented in the future voyage. The ACS appealed for "large contributions" to support these prospective emigrants who were "unable to help themselves."<sup>34</sup>

Letters from the Chattahoochee Valley to the ACS were printed in the March and April, 1868, editions of the *Repository*. One from Eufaula, dated Christmas Day, 1867, from "A. E. Williams, and two hundred others, with their families," asked assistance to emigrate on the upcoming May expedition. The Eufaula party requested that the ACS "furnish...free transportation from this place to Liberia" because they were "all poor, and have not any money."<sup>35</sup> A letter from Philip L. Monroe of Columbus, dated January 7, 1868, was received at the ACS with a list of "four hundred and twenty names" of persons desiring emigration to Liberia, and the suggestion that "about three hundred more" would want to make the May sailing. Monroe inquired "how many more names I may be privileged to enrol [*sic*] from our city," and, interestingly, noted that some of these prospective candidates were "waiting to hear from the company who went from here last fall." Understandably, many potential emigrants

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<sup>34</sup> *ARCJ* 43 (December 1867): 376 – 377.

<sup>35</sup> *ARCJ* 44 (March 1868): 72.

would be swayed by the reports of the first large group. Notably, Monroe's letter also indicates communication and cooperation between the Columbus and Eufaula emigration movements. In his letter, Monroe notes that Willis Fort, a master mechanic from Eufaula who could "make almost anything, from a saw-mill up to a steamboat," had approached him about joining the proposed Columbus party with a hundred or so people from Alabama. Monroe was impressed by Fort and his group, and, noting the "splendid workmen" in the Eufaula contingent, he urged their acceptance by the ACS. This prospective Eufaula group was likely representative of both the city's freed people and those who came into town from the surrounding countryside. Many apparently did not have homes in the town and were camping in tents "until the time comes to embark for Liberia."<sup>36</sup>

This correspondence to the ACS is suggestive of the conflicting motives driving Liberian emigration following the Civil War. The letter from Eufaula was brief and mentioned only the emigrants' basic desire to leave and their lack of resources to do so. Surrounded by white racism, with an uncertain future looming, and without any money, the Eufaula emigrants saw in Liberia both escape and opportunity. On the other hand, the ACS described Philip Monroe, the writer from Columbus, as the son of a "worthy and wealthy man of color."<sup>37</sup> Although Monroe also recognized the basic promise of opportunity and equality in Liberia, he was further driven by a sense of honor and "pure principles." His relative "wealth" allowed Monroe to focus on higher goals for his people and his God. Monroe wrote that his emigration to Liberia was driven by a "sense of duty to my self and fellow-man, and I might say to God."<sup>38</sup> His comments

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<sup>36</sup> *ARCJ* 44 (April 1868): 121.

<sup>37</sup> *ARCJ* 45 (March 1869): 83.

<sup>38</sup> *ARCJ* 44 (April 1868): 121.

suggested a sense of both black nationalism and evangelical mission. Judge Cook, a Columbus minister who had made the decision to emigrate, would not only bring two of his deacons with him but would depart with thirty members of his former congregation.<sup>39</sup> Undoubtedly, evangelical zeal played a key role in Cook and his followers' decision to leave; in fact, Cook would become a prominent minister in Liberia. Thus, although similar motivations drove most potential emigrants, the relative situations of those emigrants determined the focus of that motivation.

The May, 1868, departure of the *Golconda*, this time from Savannah, Georgia, carried Monroe and another large Columbus contingent, as well as Willis Fort's smaller group from Eufaula. On the morning of April 28, the emigrants left Columbus by train for Savannah.<sup>40</sup> Only a week later, they would be aboard a ship bound for Liberia. The May 4 departure of the *Golconda* and the Columbus emigrants was recorded in Macon's *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, which sarcastically wished the emigrants "a pleasant voyage, and comfortable houses in the El Dorado of the East."<sup>41</sup> The ship departed Savannah with 451 total emigrants, most from Columbus and Savannah. Of the 451 emigrants, 204 were from Columbus and 39 were from Eufaula, all of whom designated Bexley as their destination. Thus, forty-five percent of the departing group was from Columbus, and, when combined with the Eufaula emigrants, over half of the total passengers originated in the Chattahoochee Valley.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, like the earlier November, 1867, sailing, the May, 1868, departure was largely a response by the ACS to

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<sup>39</sup> *ARCJ* 44 (June 1868): 188.

<sup>40</sup> *GWT*, 1 May 1868, 2; the Macon newspaper reprinted the *CDE*'s April 28 item "For Liberia" regarding the emigrants mode of departure.

<sup>41</sup> *GWT*, 22 May 1868, 7.

<sup>42</sup> *ARCJ* 44 (June 1868): 173 – 179.

accommodate “emigration fever” in the Chattahoochee Valley. These emigrants made a favorable impression on at least one person familiar with the conditions they would face upon their arrival in Liberia. Rev. Robert F. Hill of Liberia, who had previously visited Columbus to advocate emigration, supposed his “little Republic would be blessed if people equal to these would be sent out.”<sup>43</sup>

The 1868 sailing represented the last significant Liberian emigration from the Chattahoochee Valley. Two factors combined to reduce interest and to prevent further large-scale emigration. In July of 1868—not long after the May emigration—Georgia’s Reconstruction government ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, and the state was readmitted to the Union. This action was the first in Georgia that indicated meaningful change in the status of freed people. Voting rights meant political power, a voice in decisions that would affect them, and reason for cautious optimism. Although the Georgia legislature would maneuver to remove the results of this enfranchisement and expel black legislative members in late 1868, Congress reacted by re-instating military rule in 1869, forcing passage of the Fifteenth Amendment assuring black suffrage, and reinstating the expelled black legislators. Furthermore, the ACS had lost most of its financial support following the Civil War and the subsequent abolition of slavery. Without additional resources, the ACS essentially depleted its remaining funds and sent as many emigrants to Liberia as it could.

Thus, the low pace of emigration from the Chattahoochee Valley prior to the Civil War, the “spike” in emigration right after the war, and the subsequent post-war drop-off generally corresponded to the national trend. The ACS saw a predictable national increase in emigration interest immediately following the war as many freed people felt their best chance for success

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<sup>43</sup> *ARCJ* 45 (March 1869): 83.

lay anywhere but the South; the number of ACS-sponsored emigrants soared in the several years following the Civil War but then decreased as the ACS exhausted resources and became more selective, and interest on the part of freed people waned.<sup>44</sup> As Reconstruction came to an end and “Jim Crow” laws began to take effect in the 1880s and 1890s, interest in Liberia spiked again. However, by then, the ACS was only a shell of its former self. Black, grassroots emigration organizations sprang up across the South in the 1880s and 1890s to take the ACS’s place, but all had few resources and were much less effective or outright failures.

Interest in Liberia on the part of Chattahoochee Valley freed people waned as the political situation evolved after the May, 1868, emigration, but it did not disappear. Letters home from the 1867-1868 emigrants and occasional press items kept Liberia and the idea of emigration fresh in the minds of both black and white. This interest was not limited to the larger towns of the Chattahoochee Valley. In Talbotton, Georgia, a farming community northeast of Columbus, freed people considered their options following the May, 1868, departure of the Columbus and Eufaula emigrants but prior to the Georgia legislature’s passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. White concern was evident in that community as well. A letter from “Occasional,” a white, anonymous writer to the local Talbotton newspaper, sums up both white and black perspectives as Georgia grudgingly entered the Reconstruction era. The writer explained that “radical negroes” were becoming “very doubtful about their future hopes in this country” and that “a decided disposition on the part of many to emigrate” had developed. An “intelligent old negro” had remarked to the writer that “there is nothing but trouble in this country,” and that “the black people of the South cannot stand the conflict with the whites.” The writer went on to suggest that such freed people should emigrate or be removed to Liberia due to the political circumstances:

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<sup>44</sup> Murdza, *Immigrants to Liberia*, i – ii.

Political considerations, if no other cause combined, must appear of sufficient importance to predicate a movement of this kind. Remove the cause and you remove the source of evil. If half the negroes were gone to-day, the Southern people would hold the balance of power. The freedom of the negro is fatal to the liberty of the whites, where political power is vested in ignorance.<sup>45</sup>

“Occasional’s” supremacist political views reflected those of many white Georgians as the state’s legislature convened and prepared to pass the Fourteenth Amendment.

Although in decline, interest in emigration persisted in Columbus as well. In March, 1869, the ACS declared that “numbers continue to look to Liberia ... with the double purpose of improving their own condition and aiding in the spread of civilization and Christianity among the natives of Africa.” The ACS had again received applications for passage to Liberia from Columbus.<sup>46</sup> However, no third, large emigration would take place. As “radical” Reconstruction took hold in Georgia, and blacks returned to their seats in the state legislature, the urgency some freed people felt to leave began to subside. The press reflected this waning interest and published fewer and fewer Liberian items after 1868 and through the early and mid-1870s. Newspapers occasionally published letters written back from Liberia by the earlier immigrant groups. A *Talbotton Standard* item reprinted in the May, 1872, *Repository* noted the arrival of a “colored girl” from Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. The woman had been a teacher and provided the *Standard* with a copy of a Liberian newspaper that contained various descriptions of the country.<sup>47</sup> Whether this woman was from Talbotton, or even Georgia, is not known, but the item suggested the small farming community’s continued interest in Liberia. A January, 1873, article in the *Sun* discussed the New York departure of 150 “select colored

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<sup>45</sup> *GWT*, 12 June 1868, 8.

<sup>46</sup> *ARCJ* 45 (March 1869): 72.

<sup>47</sup> *ARCJ* 48 (May 1872): 157.

people” from Georgia for Liberia, and claimed that the ACS had “more applicants than ever.”<sup>48</sup>

The item, derived from a recent issue of the *Repository*, made no mention of interest or emigrants from the Chattahoochee Valley.

As the hopes of Reconstruction faded in Georgia in the late 1870s and 1880s, and the Jim Crow-era began in the early 1890s, blacks were essentially disenfranchised and, in some cases, violently opposed, attacked, and even murdered. With the loss of political representation and the upsurge in violence, many blacks again pondered their futures in Georgia and the South. The depleted ACS, while still functioning, was no longer a viable option, and the black-led organizations that attempted to fill the void left by the ACS were ineffective. Although interest in emigration to Liberia from the Chattahoochee Valley appears to have revived during this period, as evidenced by the renewed frequency of Liberian items in Columbus newspapers, no other significant departures occurred. As the means to reach Liberia were uncertain at best, white opposition to emigration also persisted, and grim and grisly press items continued to paint Liberia and passage there as futile. A *Daily Enquirer-Sun* article from June of 1878 noted the recent and rough passage of a group from South Carolina. Twenty-three of the South Carolinians had died during the voyage, the paper said, and the survivors, upon reaching the “fabulous free realm,” would have to “suffer long” before reaching even the standard of living they left behind. With this sort of news and knowledge of the struggles of the previous Columbus emigrants “who left this country several years ago,” the paper suggested that blacks in Columbus “ought to have had enough of emigration to Liberia.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *DS*, 26 January 1873, 2.

<sup>49</sup> *DES*, 20 June 1878, 2.



A brief survey of 1878 Liberian news items provides numerous examples of the types of gloomy press coverage—some of it not without merit—that the country received in the Columbus newspapers. Among others, headlines included “Liberia the Deadliest Place on Earth” and “Liberia Not a Land of Promise.”<sup>50</sup> In the “Deadliest” article, the *Daily Enquirer-Sun* paraphrased a letter from a black former United States minister to Liberia, J. Milton Turner, stating that:

the climate is a deadly one; horses and cattle are poisoned by the atmosphere of the coast and die; people are sick six months out of the year; the republic has never been able to produce its own food, although everything can be grown there.

Continuing to rely on Turner, the newspaper indicated that emigrants are “penniless within six months” after their arrival, and that Turner had received a “dozen applications” per ship arriving in Liberia for return trips to the United States. The paper described Liberia as a “West African graveyard” and the colonization efforts as “an outrageously cruel business.” The article concluded that the “American negro who goes with his family to Liberia might as well say his prayers and pray for death.” The “Not a Land of Promise” article followed a similar and familiar track, noting that “several hundred of the best population left this section for Liberia,” and that although some had returned with “a sorry account of toil, hardships, and privations,” many others had “died like sheep” in Africa. As the race became more intelligent, the article continued, “they have lost the desire to emigrate.” A brief July item noted that, as of 1872, over 20,000 “colored people” had emigrated to Liberia, but that “many are dead, and many who still live would like to get back, but cannot.”<sup>51</sup> An August article declared that “Liberia has played out with the colored man.” He can be “fooled no longer by the false pictures of content and

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<sup>50</sup> *DES*, 26 January 1878, 2, and 25 June 1878, 4.

<sup>51</sup> *DES*, 27 July 1878, 2.

happiness to be found beyond many leagues of ocean.” In Liberia, the “banjo does not flourish” as “it is all suffering and mourning” there. The article continued, addressing the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants:

Of the many carried to Liberia from this section whom we have personally known, we have heard of only one who is doing passably well, and none who would not have made more money at the old home. Many have written to “ole master” and “ole mistress” to return to the plantation. In some cases requests were granted and they have come back; in others the whites did not have the money, and others cared not whether the former slaves returned or not. The large majority have found resting places in the grave. These colonization societies have proved a curse instead of a blessing to the freed people.<sup>52</sup>

The pre-Civil War theme of slave, or in this case freedperson, returning to the plantation rather than endure Liberia continued. Superstition was also brought into play. A brief July item related an anecdote that a bird took refuge aboard an emigrant ship, was “fed and petted,” and so considered a good omen, “until the Captain’s black cat ate it, whereupon the cat was considered a bad omen.”<sup>53</sup> The regular occurrence of these types of articles in the late 1870s indicates that emigration had not “played out” with the freed people. Conditions and prospects in the Chattahoochee Valley for blacks were bad enough that at least some dreamed of not just leaving Georgia and the South, but leaving the country for Liberia. However, a freedperson’s prospects of actually boarding a ship for Liberia had sharply declined.

Although occurring less frequently, articles and items concerning Liberia continued in the Columbus press into the 1880s and 1890s. The tone of these articles did not change and suggest that emigration to Liberia still held a vivid place in the Chattahoochee Valley freedperson’s mind. Many of the articles of this period discussed the troubles recent returnees had in Africa. An April, 1883 *Enquirer-Sun* item described the return of some North Carolina emigrants to

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<sup>52</sup> *DES*, 2 August 1878, 2.

<sup>53</sup> *DES*, 19 July 1878, 2.

Liberia who told “woful [*sic*] tales of their ancestral home.” The returnees suffered from a foot disease borne by poisonous insects in “Afric’s Golden Sands.” The paper pondered that “Africa, it would seem, is a poor place for Africans,” and reported that the returnees “all agree that America is good enough for colored folks.”<sup>54</sup> Despite the deplorable press Liberia continued to receive in Columbus, a few small groups of emigrants made their way to Liberia. Of only 63 total emigrants settled in Liberia by the ACS in 1887, seven came from Columbus.<sup>55</sup> Who these emigrants were is not known. Another seven Columbus emigrants, the Edwards family, departed from New York via the ship *Liberia* on November 1, 1890. Jeremiah Edwards, a farmer, and his wife Ollie, ages 45 and 37 respectively, sailed for Liberia with their five children: Susan, 15; Fannie, 13; Joseph, 9; Stephen, 7; and George, 3. As a reflection of the ACS’s increasing selectivity due to its limited resources, the November, 1890, ACS sailing included only two other people, a painter from Wisconsin and a Baptist minister from Minnesota. Only one other group, Joe Freeman and his family, from Meriwether County, Georgia, north of Columbus, is known to have emigrated to Liberia. A brief May, 1903, *Enquirer-Sun* item mentioned his departure since Christmas, his safe arrival in Liberia, and his regret that he had not emigrated sooner.<sup>56</sup> Nothing else is known about the Freemans. The ACS disbanded in 1904.

Although emigration from the Chattahoochee Valley, and specifically Columbus, essentially ceased after 1890, some additional efforts were made to attract new candidates. Benjamin Gaston, an 1867 Columbus emigrant, returned to the United States sometime before August, 1891. Under the auspices of the newly formed Liberia Emigration Company of New

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<sup>54</sup> *DES*, 26 April 1883, 2.

<sup>55</sup> American Colonization Society, *Seventy-First Annual Report of the American Colonization Society; with Minutes of the Annual Meeting and of the Board of Directors, January 15, 17, & 18, 1888* (Washington D.C.: 1888), 4.

<sup>56</sup> *Columbus Enquirer-Sun (CES)*, 15 May 1903, 3.

York, Gaston encouraged more people to emigrate. The *Enquirer-Sun* suggested he would “discover that the colored people of the South don’t want to go to Liberia—that is, any considerable number of them,” an admonition that appears to have been the case at least for the freed people of the Chattahoochee Valley.<sup>57</sup> A man named Callaway visited Columbus in October of 1891 for the “purpose of forming a colony of Columbus darkies to cross the ocean.”<sup>58</sup> No records indicate that Callaway had any success.

Of note, Benjamin Gaston’s efforts in Georgia were initially suspected to be fraudulent. A group of Atlanta freed people had signed on with Gaston, and they became anxious when the promoter missed an agreed upon date for the provision of a ship. The *Enquirer-Sun* lamented that they had “warned the colored people of Georgia” that Gaston’s scheme was “merely the same old game to deceive and defraud the easily duped negro out of his little store of hard earned money.”<sup>59</sup> Gaston was arrested in New York in 1893 but quickly released after a determination was made that his organization’s efforts were legitimate if not efficient.<sup>60</sup> Another supposed fraud reported in the *Enquirer-Sun* regarded a large group of emigrants apparently stranded on the wharves of Savannah in 1895; however, in this case as well, an upstart colonization society, the International Emigration Society of Birmingham, Alabama, was slow with a ship rather than fraudulent.<sup>61</sup> Oddly, both the initial report of the Savannah “fraud” and its explanation as a legitimate expedition were included in the same newspaper edition, in separate articles on

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<sup>57</sup> *CES*, 5 August 1891, 2.

<sup>58</sup> *CES*, 21 October 1891, 1.

<sup>59</sup> *CES*, 17 January 1892, 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun (CDES)*, 24 November 1893, 4.

<sup>61</sup> *CDES*, 12 March – 20 March 1895.

separate pages.<sup>62</sup> The theme of emigration scheme as fraud became increasingly common in Columbus papers of the 1890s, reflecting the difficulties and failures the new colonization societies were experiencing.

Some fraud, however, may have been real. Sketchy details of an apparent local fraud were reported in an August, 1894, article in the *Daily Enquirer-Sun* involving a “large number of Liberia bound darkies” encamped outside of Columbus but mostly from the “surrounding counties.” Each person paid \$2.50 for passage to Liberia. When a promised train never appeared, and the “unscrupulous swindler” vanished, the group eventually dispersed.<sup>63</sup> No record indicates an emigration from Columbus at this time. The incident, however malicious, was an example of the continued interest in emigration from the Chattahoochee Valley and may have represented the most significant emigration effort since 1868.

Bad press for Liberia continued until the end of the nineteenth century, and emigrants for Liberia from other parts of the country would pass through Columbus via rail. Gloomy headlines continued to prevail in the *Enquirer-Sun*: “A Liberian Victim”; “Bad News from Liberia: Fever Rapidly Takes Off the American Negroes”; “The Liberian Snare”; “Slavery in Liberia”; and “Liberia as Seen By a Negro Consul: A Land of Misery and a Government Worse Than a Farce” were just a few examples of headlines found throughout the 1890s.<sup>64</sup> Yet, from points across the South and Midwest, emigrants passed through Columbus on trains bound for a port city, then an ocean voyage, and finally “back” to Africa. The *Enquirer-Sun* reported on these passages and the emigrants, from as near as Hatchechubbee and Birmingham, Alabama, and as distant as

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<sup>62</sup> *CDES*, 12 March 1895, 2 – 3.

<sup>63</sup> *CDES*, 31 August 1894, 4.

<sup>64</sup> *CDES*, 6 September 1891, 1; 11 May 1894, 1; 10 March 1895, 4; 9 February 1896, 10; and 1 February 1898, 5.

Kansas City, on their way to Savannah or New York for departure. Liberia must have remained a constant in the Chattahoochee Valley freedperson's mind, in whatever form; however, by the turn of the century, emigration to that distant land, only a trickle before and after the brief spike during the departure years of 1867-1868, was coming to its end.

### CHAPTER 3: EMIGRANTS, 1867-1868

Developing a collective portrait of who left the Chattahoochee Valley for Liberia is challenging. Although the American Colonization Society recorded significant demographic details on the more numerous 1867 and 1868 emigrants, this data is not comprehensive and may contain significant inconsistencies or errors. Emigrants from other years numbered in the single digits and were not well documented. Some show up in the historical record without names. Nonetheless, enough demographic data was recorded by the ACS that developing a statistical portrait of the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants yields some significant clues to who they were and why they left.

The ACS recorded its most detailed demographic data on emigrants just after the Civil War and published it in its *African Repository and Colonial Journal*. The society gathered this information at the time of departure, recording emigrant names and ages. The emigrants also reported their occupations, education, and religion. From this data, Peter Murdza compiled and published an inventory, *Immigrants to Liberia: 1865 to 1904, an Alphabetical Listing*. From this data and the order in which persons were listed in the *Repository*, Murdza extrapolated additional information, such as the family organization of emigrants, although he admits, as with all of the published ACS data and its interpretation, the possibility of error exists. He points to the potential for internal inconsistencies by ACS compilers at the time of the voyages, particularly in terms of the criteria used to record education and religious affiliation. Furthermore, blank spaces in the emigrant rolls require further extrapolation to create useful data, particularly in the cases of women and children's religious affiliation.<sup>1</sup> Information regarding family groups tended to be listed alongside the apparent head of household. Some blank spaces in the rolls create "null"

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<sup>1</sup> Murdza, *Immigrants to Liberia*, ii – iii.

values within the data as opposed to those values that can be extrapolated from blank spaces due to patterns within the overall data, such as consistently not attributing any occupation to women or any persons under the age of eighteen.

Additionally, as Murdza also suggests, transferring a large amount of data from the *Repository* into a database can also lead to error; for example, Murdza incorrectly attributes persons from “Marion, Georgia,” a now defunct town, as coming from “Marion County, Georgia” in the Chattahoochee Valley. Furthermore, research for this paper indicates that persons listed in the emigrant rolls as “from” a given community, such as Columbus, might be from the vicinity of that community or from the region surrounding it. For example, Spencer Parker, who emigrated with his family in 1868, was listed as “from Columbus”; however, when he later wrote back to the United States, communications described in Columbus newspapers, his servitude and residence on a plantation in Russell County, Alabama—across the Chattahoochee River from Columbus—was noted.<sup>2</sup> Other items in the *Repository* regarding Talbotton, Georgia, another Chattahoochee Valley community, are suggestive of a broader, regional interest, and that Columbus may have been a catch-all descriptor for persons departing from the area.<sup>3</sup>

Despite such errors, the ACS records gleaned from the *Repository* and compiled by Murdza represent the most complete data regarding the Liberian emigrants from the Chattahoochee Valley. This information and its analysis is a valuable tool for developing some idea of who the emigrants were and identifying any significant patterns or trends in the groups’

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<sup>2</sup> *Columbus Enquirer-Sun (CES)*, 3 May 1892, 1, and 27 September 1903, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *GWT*, 19 June 1868, 8, and *ARCJ* 48 (May 1872): 157.



makeup.<sup>4</sup> Of the 4,093 freed people who, sponsored by the ACS, left the United States for Liberia between the years 1865 and 1904, 493 or 12% came from the Chattahoochee Valley of Georgia and Alabama. Thus, more than one in ten came from that region alone. Of these 493 emigrants, including only persons described as “from” Columbus, Georgia, and Eufaula, Alabama, 486 departed in 1867 and 1868 and represent the only well documented and statistically significant group. Coincidentally, the number of emigrants during the two migration years of 1867 and 1868 were equal. In 1867, combining the eight persons from the May, 1867, departure with the 235 of the November voyage totals 243 emigrants; likewise, the 204 Columbus and 39 Eufaula passengers on the May, 1868, departure also total 243.

General analysis of the records of the 1867 and 1868 Chattahoochee Valley emigrants points to two simple truths: their emigration was a series of family migrations and, because those families often included children, a young migration. Examination of the ACS records indicates that approximately 81.5% of persons were part of a family group, and that almost half (49.8%) of the total emigrants were seventeen years old or younger.<sup>5</sup> Thirty-one percent of all emigrants were ten years of age or younger. Although overall ages ranged from only a few months to eighty-seven, the average age of all emigrants was only 21.4 years of age. Although the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants were relatively young, the adult parents and single men and women who would be the backbone of all efforts in the new country were, of course, well represented. Overall, 232 persons, or 47.7% were between the ages of eighteen and sixty, with

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<sup>4</sup> Murdza’s Columbus, Georgia, and Eufaula, Alabama, data was cross-checked against the *African Repository* and used to compile statistics regarding the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants. The ACS/Murdza data was entered into a Microsoft (R) Office Access database and queried for the purposes of this analysis. Because Liberian emigration was minimal, sporadic, and poorly documented outside of the 1867 and 1868 major departure years, these emigrants are not included in the statistical analysis provided in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> ACS records suggest the age of 18 was used by the society to demarcate the threshold between childhood and working-age adulthood. No males 17 or younger were described as having an occupation, whereas almost all males 18 or older (93.7%) were described as having a skill or occupation.

178 persons, or 36.6% between the prime working and parenting ages of eighteen and forty. Thus, 86.4% of all emigrants were under the age of forty.

Only twelve persons over the age of sixty emigrated to Liberia from the Chattahoochee Valley, but, perhaps, given the known frontier conditions in the developing country and the unpromising information provided by whites and the local press, the fact that any at all chose to make the journey is significant. Of the twelve elderly emigrants, five were in their sixties, six were in their seventies, and Micajah Frazier, the oldest emigrant, was eighty-seven. Furthermore, all six male emigrants in this age group gave an occupation: four farmers, a preacher, and a blacksmith. Micajah Frazier was listed as a farmer. Such older persons may have had enough of life as it was or was likely to be in the Chattahoochee Valley, or may have felt a calling to do their part to start a new country for themselves and their families or to help disperse Christianity to the “heathen” African as the ACS promoted. Others may have simply wanted to stay with families and acted according to their family’s desires. All but two of the older emigrants left for Liberia as a part of a family group. All six males in this age group were described as fathers, two of whom were the apparent heads of large family groups of fifteen or more that included grandchildren. Two other men brought smaller families but came without wives. Micajah Frazier came only with his eighteen-year-old grandson, Henderson, and seventy-two-year-old Arthur Shivers, a Baptist preacher, brought only his seventy-one-year-old wife, Celia. The females over sixty ranged in age from sixty-two to seventy-one, and included three mothers, a sister, and two women to whom no family affiliation was described, possibly indicating that sixty-two-year-old Mimi Jackson and seventy-year-old Martha Adams embarked for Liberia independently. Certainly, making the decision to depart for Liberia was an act of courage at any age, given the uncertainties of a nineteenth-century, trans-Atlantic voyage, the prospect of

“African fever,” and the hardships of frontier life in a strange land, but to do so at an advanced age was quite remarkable. Nonetheless, although the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants were, on the whole, a young group, they left the United States in the *Golconda* with the experience and wisdom of age aboard.

Although the emigration was, generally, a family affair, slightly more males, 262 or 53.9%, left the Chattahoochee Valley for Liberia than females, 220 or 45.3%.<sup>6</sup> This trend was consistent by age group, family position, and year of departure. Males represented 57.3% of children ages ten or younger, and 55.8% of all persons seventeen or under. The age group eighteen to forty, a more balanced group by gender, still contained more males, 91 or 51.1%, than females, 87 or 48.9%. Males also made up 55.6% of the forty-one to sixty age group. The twelve persons who made up the over sixty years of age group were evenly divided by gender. Remarkably, for the departure years 1867 and 1868, the male to female ratios are almost exactly the same; according to ACS records, 131 males departed each year, whereas 111 females departed in 1867 and 109 in 1868.<sup>7</sup> The fact that the prime parenting age group, eighteen to forty, was almost balanced by gender, in an emigration movement heavily populated by children, is indicative of the familial nature of the Chattahoochee Valley emigration and the importance of mothers in those family units.

Eighty-six family groups can be identified as two or more people sharing the same surname and listed together; 46, or just over half (53.5%) included persons identifiable as a father, mother, and at least one child. Sixteen (18.6%) groups were married couples without children, and the remaining 24 (27.9%) groups included single parents and sibling pairs. Some

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<sup>6</sup> Four persons on the emigrant rolls were either not identified by gender or could not be identified by family position or by a first name associated with a gender, thus accounting for 0.8% of the total emigrants.

<sup>7</sup> Four persons on the emigrant rolls could not be identified by gender (see Note 6 above).

family groups were large and appear to have included multiple adults of parenting age, adult siblings, and other relatives. However, no ACS documentation confirms the relationships between family members. Indeed, some young couples identified as married by Murdza could have been siblings instead, such as nineteen-year-old Peter Dunwoody and sixteen-year-old Frances Dunwoody.

The un-alphabetized ACS emigrant rolls suggest that information on emigrants was compiled as individuals and families lined up for an ACS official, possibly at the time of boarding ship. The probable “leader” or “head” of a family group spoke to, or was recorded by, the ACS representative first and so appeared as the first entry within a group. This likelihood provides the opportunity to identify and develop some characteristics for family leaders. Overall, although mothers appeared to outnumber fathers 68 to 64, men were much more likely to be the head of family groups, although not exclusively so. At least 13 of 86 heads of family groups, or 15.1%, were female. These women were either single mothers or the elder of sibling pairs. Ten women appear to have been single mothers who headed families. Several of these women were quite young and took infants and toddlers with them: on the 1868 expedition, twenty-five-year-old Mollie Creighton boarded the *Golconda* with her eighteen-month-old son, Robert; on the same voyage, twenty-eight-year-old Sarah Staples brought her children Hattie, Robert, and James, ages twelve, eight, and three respectively. Other, older single mothers may have been separated from their mates, perhaps during slavery, or been widowers, such as forty-two-year-old Mary Bell, who traveled in 1867 with her daughter Nora, twenty-two, and her son Stewart, sixteen. Lucy Carns, forty-eight, also departed in 1867, along with seven children, ranging in age from one to seventeen. Although a few fathers—and even a grandfather—set off for Liberia as single parents, such was rarely the case.

Five pairs of siblings can be identified from the ACS emigrant rolls. This group speaks to the courage of the relatively young emigrant group, as well as to its few elders. Two brothers, the Grays, two sisters, the Howards, and three brother-sister couples, the Lamars, Lowes, and Tharps, departed the Chattahoochee Valley as sibling groups. Notably, all but the Howards were quite young: the Gray brothers, Edmund and Primers, were eighteen and sixteen; Anna and Chesley Lamar were twenty-six and fifteen; Marian and Missouri Lowe were nineteen and sixteen; and George and Nora Tharp were twenty and sixteen. The Howard sisters, Kitty and Celia, were seventy and sixty respectively.

Family positions could not be determined for 56 adults, including 37 men and 18 women; they represented 11.5% of all 1867 and 1868 emigrants and 29.1% of adult males and 15.5% of adult females.<sup>8</sup> Although, from the available data, the actual numbers of those who were single and without family cannot be determined, a reasonable conclusion would be that some of these persons—if not many or most—chose to migrate alone. Thus, although the great majority of Chattahoochee Valley emigrants left with some family member (approximately 81.5%), a significant portion may have been single people striking out for a new life.<sup>9</sup> Most were male. Perusal of the emigrant rolls indicates that some of these people may have traveled alone while others may have traveled in groups. For instance, on the November, 1867, voyage, fifty-eight-year-old Violet Williams and sixty-year-old Katy Teasdale were listed together and between two family groups. On the same trip, Nathan David, Randall Carter, James Miller, and James Snell, all between the ages of nineteen and twenty-two, were similarly listed together and between the Jones and Howard families. Although such listings may be coincidental, they suggest that some

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<sup>8</sup> One adult on the emigrant rolls could not be identified by gender (see Note 6 above).

<sup>9</sup> Some null “family position” values in apparent family groups in the ACS/Murdza data, particularly for children, suggest that perhaps more than 80% of all emigrants left in some sort of family group.

friends or relatives may have left for Liberia together. Or such a list may only have resulted because people of like ages had gravitated toward one another within the larger group by the time of departure.

Identification of the heads of family groups and single people without family, or independent operators, within the 1867 and 1868 emigrants provides a means to develop a limited idea of who the likely “decision makers” were within the overall group. Who were the people who made the ultimate decision—often for others, considering the large number of young children in the many family groups—to cast their lot in Liberia? Again, most were men: of 121 identified family heads and independent operators, 96, or 79.3%, were male; 24, or 19.8%, were female. Of the 86 family heads, 73, or 84.9%, were male, and 23 of the 35 independent operators, or 65.7%, were male. Heads of families tended to be older, reflecting that some older parents traveled with teenage children, and some grandparents and older, married couples without children made the journey. Male heads of families averaged 39.6 years of age, and female heads averaged 35.6. The overall average age for heads of families, thirty-nine, reflects that most were male. Thus, although older males tended to fulfill the traditional roles as the heads of families and the “decision makers” within the emigrant group, this was not exclusively the case. A significant number of younger, single mothers either felt comfortable enough within the larger group or simply had the courage to make the same decision to move their families to Liberia.

Among the heads of families, the age of women and men were roughly the same; however, the emigrants who traveled alone represented a significantly different group. Independent operators came from a different demographic. Among them, males tended to be young, with an average age of twenty-four, whereas female tended to be older, with an average

age of 50.5. Young men were more likely to strike out on their own, whereas women who did the same were more likely to be older, perhaps indicating that the age old trend of young men seeking their fortunes was, to some extent, reflected in the Chattahoochee Valley emigrant group. On the other hand, the frontier conditions and dangers of Liberia, particularly as described in the local press, may have deterred many young, independent women. Older, independent women who emigrated may have relied on their experience, their survival of slavery, and perhaps their faith as sources of confidence.

In its emigrant rolls, the ACS documented occupations for men only. The omission of occupations for women may suggest that the ACS expected women to continue to, or revert to, a domestic role in Liberia. In addition to their family responsibilities, many of the adult female emigrants likely held occupations on the plantations or within the households or factories they were leaving behind. Jennie Parker, an 1868 emigrant documented, like all other women, as having no occupation, had been a seamstress.<sup>10</sup> Thus, according to the ACS documentation, and because no children and no women were described as having any occupation or skill, of the 486 emigrants to Liberia from the Chattahoochee Valley in 1867 and 1868, only 119, or 24.5%, had an occupation. However, almost all adult men (93.7%) were listed as having an occupation.<sup>11</sup> Approximately two-thirds (79 or 66.3%) of men listed with occupations were farmers, perhaps not a surprising fact given that, despite the cluster of factories at the “Falls of the Chattahoochee” in Columbus, the area surrounding that town and Eufaula was a robust cotton producing region. Nonetheless, one-third of the men did not have exclusively farming occupations and reflected the labor pool that the urban areas of Columbus and Eufaula could provide. Nine carpenters and

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<sup>10</sup> *CES*, 3 May 1892, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Of the 127 adult males (18 or older) listed on ACS emigrant rolls, eight were listed without an occupation.

eight blacksmiths were counted on the emigrant rolls, as well as five preachers, three each of shoemakers, brickworkers, and “male laborers,” two each of gardeners and barbers, and a bridgebuilder, an engineer, a cook, a miller, and a painter.

The male occupational category is one of the few that suggests some differentiation in the 1867 and 1868 departure years and reflects a decline in the ratio of farmers to non-farming occupations. This trend could have been coincidental, or could have been in response to news or suggestions received by the 1868 group from the 1867 group. Further, news items published in Columbus occasionally suggested that there were too many farmers in Liberia already and not enough tradesmen, or that farming was extremely difficult in that country’s fickle equatorial climate. Such warnings might have been conveyed to the 1868 group and, thus, perhaps discouraged potential farmers from emigrating while encouraging tradesmen. Regardless, 48 farmers (61% of all farmers) departed for Liberia in 1867, but only 31 (39%) departed in 1868. The decline in farmers is also represented in overall statistics regarding men with listed occupations: in 1867, 75% of all men with occupations were farmers, but the same statistic dropped to 56.4% in 1868. Conversely, the number of non-farming tradesmen increased from 16 in 1867 to 24 in 1868. Of the 17 carpenters and blacksmiths who would depart the Chattahoochee Valley, 14 of them did so in 1868, which largely accounts for the disparity between the two years, and perhaps suggested construction needs communicated back to the United States from either a growing Liberia or from the communities then being settled by the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants.

The education emigrants had obtained was also recorded by the ACS and was considered integral to achieving lasting success in Liberia. The ACS standards for determining “education,” whether an emigrant could read and write, were probably left up to individual ACS



representatives to interpret and record as the emigrants boarded ships; thus, the accuracy of the recorded data and the proficiency of the “educated” Chattahoochee Valley emigrants are uncertain. Nonetheless, the acceptance that such data represents some level of education, if not proficiency, provides an opportunity to develop some idea of the educational level of emigrants at the time of their departure. Furthermore, if emigrants who could only read are combined with those who could also write, “literacy” rates, or overall percentages of those who could at least read, can be determined from the data and for the various demographic groups.

On the whole, and not surprising given their only recent emancipation from a system where the education of slaves was illegal, the 1867 and 1868 Chattahoochee Valley emigrants were not a well educated group, only 22.8% being able to at least read. Of course, 30.9% of all emigrants were ten years of age or younger, so perhaps the fact that two in that young age group were identified as being able to read is significant. When removing the under ten age group, the literacy rate increases to 32.4%, a percentage that is consistently borne out when examining other age groups. Notably, the eleven to seventeen age group was the most literate by percentage, perhaps an indication of post-Civil War efforts by the Freedmen’s Bureau and northern missionaries to educate the children of freed people; of this group, 20.7% were described as being able to read and 13% as also able to write for a 33.7% literacy rate. However, this rate was not much above the same rates for older age groups. Of persons eighteen to forty years of age, 19.7% could read and another 12.4% also write for a literacy rate of 32%; for persons forty-one to sixty, 22.2% could read and 9.3% also write for a literacy rate of 31.5%. Of the 12 emigrants older than 60, three could read and another write for a consistent 33.3% literacy rate. Notably, heads of families, who represented the majority of those who made the decision to migrate their families to Liberia, tended to be better educated than the other adults. Family heads had a

literacy rate of 51.2%; when family heads are removed from rest of the adults, the remaining adults had an literacy rate of only 27.8%. By contrast, single people without family, or independent operators, reflected the more general education trend; this group had an overall literacy rate of 34.3%. Differences based on geography may be less meaningful given the small size of the Eufaula sample, which represented only thirty-nine of the 486 emigrants of 1867 and 1868. Nonetheless, across all age groups, the Eufaula emigrants tended to be better educated than those from Columbus. The Eufaula emigrants included four (10.3%) who could read and an additional eight (20.5%) who could also write for a literacy rate of 30.8%. The much larger Columbus sample included 67 (15%) who could read and another 32 (7.2%) who could also write for a lower literacy rate of 22.2%. Men also tended to be better educated than women, perhaps suggestive of the male tradesmen in the emigrant group or simply reflecting gender differences of the time period. Of all males, 46 (17.6%) could read and 25 (9.5%) also write for a literacy rate of 27.1%; 25 (11.4%) females could read and another 15 (6.8%) write for a literacy rate of 18.2%.

Another category recorded by the ACS was emigrants' religious affiliation. Religious mission was a concern integral to the ACS's hopes in Liberia, and, as noted previously, five preachers, three Baptist and two Methodist, emigrated from the Chattahoochee Valley. The ACS recorded the religious affiliations of adult emigrants, but many adults had only a blank space under "Religion." No information was recorded for children. Of 244 adult emigrants, 95 (38.9%) were listed as Methodists and 82 (33.6%) as Baptists. A single Presbyterian, Wingo McAllister, a miller, made the journey to Liberia. However, if the children of religiously affiliated parents can be presumed—at least at the time of departure—to have been similarly affiliated and that adults who provided no religious affiliation at the time of their departure are

presumed to have been unaffiliated, then information regarding religious preferences can be developed for the overall group. If such presumptions are even marginally accurate, then those who professed a religious affiliation remained relatively evenly divided between Methodists (172 overall or 35.4%) and Baptists (166 or 34.2%). Females (72.3%) were slightly more likely to have a religious affiliation than males (67.2%). Thus, 70% of all emigrants appear to have had a religious affiliation. Whether the 30% who had no religion listed had no religious affiliation or were affiliated with a specific denomination that was not documented cannot be known. Some emigrants may have attended non-denominational churches or worship services on plantations during the slavery-era and had yet to formally affiliate. Nonetheless, although the accuracy of this information is in doubt, the majority of emigrants—and certainly emigrant families—appear to have been religious people.

Unfortunately, the data the ACS recorded for the 1867 and 1868 Chattahoochee Valley emigrants is difficult to compare to census data of the era. In the 1860 Federal census, only 173 free “colored” persons were recorded in Muscogee County, of which Columbus was the seat; thus, few blacks had any demographic details preserved. The 7,445 slaves in the county were counted but not documented in any detail. However, comparing the 1867 and 1868 ACS data for the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants to the 1860 census data does reveal that at least a few former free blacks of the antebellum era chose to emigrate after the Civil War. Arthur and Celia Shivers appeared in the 1860 census as free colored persons in the “Upper” district of Muscogee County, and the couple departed for Liberia in November, 1867. Arthur Shivers was listed as a carpenter in the census and as a preacher in the ACS emigrant rolls. Of note, their ages in the

census data and ACS data do not correspond.<sup>12</sup> A Marion and Missouri Jones of the Wynton suburb of Columbus were also noted in the 1860 census and in the same household as a Dick Hudson; a Marian and Missouri Lowe and a Richard Hudson were described in the May, 1868, departure group.<sup>13</sup> Although these entries reflect the likelihood of inaccuracies in the Federal census, the ACS data, or both, they do indicate that some free persons of color who chose not to emigrate from the Chattahoochee Valley before the Civil War chose to do so afterwards, and that the great majority of emigrants were former slaves who had been emancipated following the Civil War. The census data also indicates that the Shivers, the “Jones-Lowes,” and Richard Hudson were not from Columbus proper, a further indication that ACS data regarding city of origin was general in nature. Because demographic categories recorded by the 1870 Federal census and by the ACS do not correspond, no comparisons can be drawn between the emigrants and those they left behind. The 7,618 blacks in Muscogee County in 1860 increased to 9,220 by 1870, indicating the post-war migration by freed people from plantations and farms to urban areas that was common across the South. However, these figures do suggest that the 447 emigrants who left “Columbus” in 1867 and 1868 were a significant percentage. More or less than 5% of the black population of post-war Columbus, men and women, young and old, chose to cast their lot by boarding a ship, crossing an ocean, and trying to build their own country, rather than stay in the one that had so recently enslaved them.

Although comparisons to national data may not be practical, some opportunity exists to compare the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants to another regional group. Claude A. Clegg III’s

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<sup>12</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860* (Washington, D.C: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860): Roll M635\_132, page 381. Arthur Shivers was noted as 45 in the 1860 census data and 72 in the 1867 ACS data; Celia Shivers was noted as 38 in the 1860 census data and 71 in the 1867 ACS data.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Roll M635\_132, page 312. Marion and Missouri Jones, and Dick Hudson, were noted as 9, 8, and 40 in the 1860 census data; Marion and Missouri Lowe, and Richard Hudson, were noted as 19, 16, and 49 in the 1867 ACS data.

*The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* includes demographic analysis based on ACS records for 2,030 North Carolina emigrants between 1825 and 1893.<sup>14</sup> Although Clegg’s analysis covers an entire state over a more extended period of time, several trends within the North Carolina data correspond to the Chattahoochee Valley data. North Carolina emigration was more consistent during the nineteenth century, but it too peaked in the years immediately following the Civil War. Like their Chattahoochee Valley counterparts, North Carolinian emigrants tended to be male, to depart in family groups and thus be quite young, to be Baptist or Methodist, if a religious affiliation was noted by the ACS, and to be overwhelmingly agrarian. Indeed, the percentage of farmers who left North Carolina and the Chattahoochee Valley for Liberia was almost identical: of all adult, male emigrants, 66.4% of North Carolinian and 66.3% of Chattahoochee Valley emigrants were farmers.

In one area, however, the two emigrant groups diverge. The Chattahoochee Valley emigrants were better “educated” according to ACS documentation, meaning that more could read and write. Only 7.8% of the North Carolinian emigrants could at least read, whereas 22.8% of the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants could at least read. However, this statistic may only reflect that the North Carolina emigration spanned the nineteenth century and that the Chattahoochee Valley emigration was essentially limited to the immediate, post-Civil War period. Limited educational opportunities available to North Carolinian slaves in the early nineteenth century likely dragged down the state’s literacy percentage and thus do not correspond to those of mid-nineteenth century Georgia following the Civil War. At the very least, the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants would have had access to the schools the Freedmen’s

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<sup>14</sup> Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 201-248.

Bureau established right after the war.<sup>15</sup> Despite this educational disparity, if Clegg's North Carolina data is indicative of a broader pattern within the Liberian emigrants from the South, the 1867 and 1868 Chattahoochee Valley emigrants fit into that pattern.

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<sup>15</sup> Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia: 1828-1978*, 48.

## CHAPTER 4: LIBERIA, 1867-1903

The Liberia in which the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants settled in was slow to experience prosperity. Although founded in 1822 and claiming expansive boundaries at the time of its independence in 1847, by the late nineteenth century, Liberia remained largely a nation of small towns and villages clustered along the Atlantic Coast. Native tribes, such as the Bassa, Vai, Kru, and Dei, accounted for the majority of the country's population and remained largely independent in the country's interior. Native people within or located closer to the coastal towns developed trading partnerships with the colonists and settlers, or "Americo-Liberians," who, because of their alien culture, the natives often referred to as "white." As Liberia expanded its borders, both to extend "civilization" to the natives and to claim resources, friction often ensued, and military skirmishes were not uncommon. Agricultural production was generally limited to what land had been cleared near the coast, and affluence was often gained not by farming but by trading with European merchants. Settler farmers had a difficult time clearing land, raising unfamiliar crops, and struggling against an unfamiliar climate and strange pests.

These earlier, American colonists and settlers transplanted to Liberia much of the economic and cultural system that had discriminated against them or enslaved them in the United States in the early to mid-nineteenth century. They imported the plantation system they knew from the United States, and some of Liberia's city merchants were also absentee landlords of coffee, sugar, and rice plantations, where lower strata blacks, including poor settlers, worked in a familiar station.<sup>1</sup> The earlier Americo-Liberians also established social strata in which newcomers, such as the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants, were generally relegated to the bottom. Towns resembled American villages, and well-to-do families built homes that resembled those in

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<sup>1</sup> J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987): 21.

the American South. They dressed like Americans and, preferring imported foods to indigenous varieties, still ate like Americans.

Determining what became of the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants who entered this black-led, American-style world in tropical West Africa proves the most elusive task when telling their story since the evidence is limited. The information that has survived does provide a glimpse of what the emigrants found when they arrived in Liberia and how they fared over the years. Most of this evidence survives in a handful of letters written by the emigrants and published in the ACS's *Repository* and in local newspapers.

Bell I. Wiley, who edited "nearly all" of the Liberian emigrant letters known to exist in private possession or public depositories in 1980, was rightfully wary of drawing conclusions based on the letters written to the ACS and published in the *Repository*. He therefore chose to include few of them.<sup>2</sup> The ACS generally chose and edited letters to show Liberia in the best light, though this was not exclusively the case. This same caution applies to those letters selected and published by the local press in Georgia, which had its own agenda to protect the local workforce, partly by discouraging black emigration. To dismiss the correspondence found in the *Repository* or in local newspapers, however, is to reduce the available evidence on what happened to the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants to practically nothing. Thus, despite the somewhat flawed reason for their preservation, these letters are utilized for this study. Moreover, there are reasons to give the surviving letters credence. The Chattahoochee Valley correspondence, although a small sample, does not follow the pattern suggested by Wiley or that established by the Columbus press. One of the letters published by the ACS in the *Repository* gives no glowing account of Liberia but describes the hardships of a young man from Columbus

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<sup>2</sup> Bell I. Wiley, *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia: 1833-1869* (Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1980), 7-8.



and his desire to return to the United States. Several of the letters published in the Columbus newspapers describe emigrants who were faring well in Liberia, not the harsh conditions the newspapers more often described.

The first post-war Chattahoochee Valley emigrants to arrive in Liberia were the Simpson family and Alfred Howard. They sailed from Charleston with a larger group on May 30, 1867, and arrived at Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, on July 8, where they stayed ten days before sailing again for Greenville, a smaller port on the southern coast of the country. Frank Simpson, a farmer and the twenty-five-year-old son of John Simpson, wrote home to his sister and to his former master, J. R. Jones, after a month in Liberia. The letters had much the same content. They described the birth of a daughter during the voyage and the family's inland accommodation and provisioning by the ACS. In the letter to his sister, Simpson raved about Liberia's agricultural prospects and encouraged those he left behind to follow him:

Give my love to the people at the plantation, and tell them if they can get to Liberia they must come, for Liberia is a country where a man can make a support by working half of his time. Everything grows here wild in the woods. Coffee grows all over the woods. Cotton grows here into a tree. The sugar cane grows larger than any I have ever seen. Potatoes grow all the time. Pine apples, cocoa nuts, oranges, lemons, and everything else grows wild in the woods.

Simpson went on to describe Liberia as "one of the best countries in the world." Interestingly, in his letter to his former master, J. R. Jones, published in the *Columbus Enquirer*, Simpson described similar agricultural conditions, but added that he had not been in Liberia long enough to give a "full account of the country." The letter to Jones also indicated that four people had died on the voyage, a woman and three infants, a fact omitted from the letter to his sister, or edited out of the version published by the ACS.<sup>3</sup> Simpson's letter to Jones was published in Columbus on October 20, 1867, only weeks before the first large emigrant group would depart

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<sup>3</sup> *ARCJ* 43 (November 1867): 347; and *CDE*, 20 October 1867, 2.

that city. Undoubtedly, his glowing report influenced the decisions of many to leave that November. Simpson not only described a lush environment where food grew wild and subsistence required half the work, he confirmed that the ACS was, in fact, supporting the emigrants upon their arrival, despite newspaper accounts suggesting the contrary.

Simpson's account of Liberia reflected a tendency by the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants to write home after only a brief period of residence with satisfactory or even glowing accounts of the country. Some of the 243 freed people from Columbus who left the following November, 1867, and arrived in Buchanan, Liberia, in January, 1868, quickly wrote home to announce their safe arrival. Some of these letters were published in Columbus newspapers in March, 1868; others were reproduced in the *Repository* several months later, but their content would have been known in the city. Eliza Sullivan, writing to friends in Columbus, debunked a rumor that had been circulating in the city. "We are all in Africa," she wrote, and "did not go to Cuba, as you all said we were going." Eliza and her husband, Richard, had been "joyfully" received, and were certain her friends back home would be pleased with the country if they chose to come. Like Frank Simpson, she described a thriving agriculture and urged her friends to come to Liberia in the spring.<sup>4</sup> Rev. Alexander Herron, who left at the head of a thirteen-member family group, wrote back to Rev. Judge Cook. He described a single death on the voyage, anticipation of contracting "African fever," and plentiful fruits growing wild. Herron, too, was well pleased with what he had found in Liberia so far. "It is a good country, I assure you," he wrote. "You may know that I think so, for there is nothing to induce me to come back to America." Herron also encouraged his friend to emigrate, and asked Cook to tell the

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<sup>4</sup> *ARCJ* 44 (July 1868): 220-221.

Woolfolk family “that this is the place for them.”<sup>5</sup> Cook would depart the following May, but the Woolfolks apparently declined the opportunity.

Other early letters from the November, 1867, arrivals touted the agricultural and economic opportunities Liberia appeared to afford. Henry Lewis, who took his wife and three children, was “very well satisfied” with the country. After only a week in Buchanan, Lewis had already picked his land outside of town. He noted the ease with which land could be had in the country: “all the trouble you have in getting your land is to walk about and pick it out for yourself.” Coffee plants, coconut trees, lemon trees, and palm trees already grew on Lewis’s land. He reported the palm tree as the most important as it produced oil, cabbage, butter, shingles, cord, thread, and, “best of all,” wine.<sup>6</sup> Lewis urged his brother, Washington, to come to Liberia. Nelson L. Pierce, a sixty-seven-year-old grandfather who emigrated with four younger family members, wrote back to his former master, Rev. Dr. Lovick Pierce. He, too, touted the opportunity of Liberia: “there are few, if any, countries that present greater opportunities for wealth” for the “diligent and industrious hand.” Pierce described abundant crops, and Buchanan as a bustling seaport, with vessels from England, the United States, and Germany trading for cam wood and palm oil.<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Johnson, writing back to his “old employers,” Blackmar & Chandler, only a week after his arrival, was already pitching trade of Liberian goods for American products. If calico and leaf tobacco could be shipped from Columbus, Johnson could ship back cam wood, palm oil, ginger, and arrow root, which he could buy from the native people “for most anything.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *ARCJ* 44 (July 1868): 221.

<sup>6</sup> *DS*, 20 March 1868, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *DS*, 28 March 1868, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *DS*, 17 March 1868, 3.

Like Frank Simpson's letter, these early letters from the November, 1867, emigrants—all of which were written within days of the emigrants arrival in Buchanan—must have also favorably influenced many potential emigrants still planning their course of action in the Chattahoochee Valley. Agricultural opportunities were varied and abundant in Liberia. Ports provided ample commercial outlets for the ambitious. Land was available for the taking. In other words, opportunities denied to freed people in the Chattahoochee Valley abounded in Liberia. Emigrants could establish productive farms, on their own land, and the ambitious could go into business. The content of these early letters was almost exclusively positive, and most of the letter writers encouraged others to follow their lead.

Other themes within individual letters, such as freedom and religion, were common to emigrant letters of the period, as noted by Bell I. Wiley, and may have been equally or more convincing than economic opportunity to some of the Chattahoochee freed people. In his letter, Henry Lewis wrote “I thought I was free in America, but I was not until I stepped ashore in Liberia; and I thank God that I can now declare my freedom without any fear.” Lewis's comment is notable given the uncertainty of what freedom meant in the Chattahoochee Valley in the years immediately following the Civil War and the fears many freed people had as whites tried to reassert their authority. Nelson Pierce claimed Liberia was “the home of the *black man*,” and that the emigrants “should feel thankful [that] an All-wise Providence has so provided for them.” Pierce was also deeply concerned about the ACS's religious mission in Africa. Describing the mission churches he found upon arrival in Liberia, he bemoaned what he perceived as their lack of sustained support from the United States.

Early letters also acknowledged the families left behind and some maintained connections with whites in the United States. Each letter, whether to white or black, sent

greetings to family members and often encouragement for them to come to Africa. Letters from emigrants to former masters likely reflected two motives: a genuine affection for some white families and a sensible desire to maintain connections with those families and their resources. Some emigrants may have received financial or other assistance from former owners, and, although all the emigrants seemed optimistic and impressed by what they had found in Liberia, those who maintained cordial relations with white families recognized the wisdom of keeping it intact should their situation in Liberia go awry.

As the emigrants arrived in the port cities of Liberia, including Monrovia, Buchanan, and Greenville, they were surprised to find how, in some ways, it resembled the South they had just left. Frank Simpson noted the brick architecture of Monrovia, and Nelson Pierce described the wooden buildings of Buchanan as “after the American style.” The colonial architecture of Liberia reflected the technologies and styles the former slaves had known and built in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Most buildings were one- or two-story gabled structures of brick or wood, and the towns were laid out in familiar, loose grid patterns. The Liberians had also adopted the social trappings of the whites they had known in America, a fact not lost on Pierce, who wrote:

The civilized part of the inhabitants are those who emigrated from the United States, or descendants. The mode of living is very similar to the style, manner and customs of the white and the best class of colored people in the United States. I see but little difference.

Pierce and his fellow emigrants would soon learn that Liberian society was indeed stratified, with the early settler families, the freeborn, and mixed race people at the top of the social structure, and the recently emancipated, plantation workers, like most of the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants, near the bottom.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Svend E. Holsoe and Bernard L. Herman, *A Land and Life Remembered: Americo-Liberian Folk Architecture* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Liebenow, *Liberia*, 19-22.

The few natives encountered by the newly arrived emigrants were described as “friendly,” but no emigrants had yet been more than a few miles inland. Although the November, 1867, Chattahoochee Valley emigrants had indicated the village of Bexley as their ultimate destination, ACS reports and letters from the emigrants indicated some settled there and others at Buchanan and Edina, all in Grand Bassa County. The Simpson family, who sailed in May, 1867, had settled south of Grand Bassa County, at Greenville in Sinoe County. All of these villages were either on the Atlantic Coast or only a few miles inland along a river. While some emigrants stayed in the shelter provided by the ACS, others, like Richard and Eliza Sullivan quickly began construction of a “loghouse.” Henry Lewis had already picked out his farmland. At the time they wrote, no emigrants had yet caught the dreaded “African fever.” Provisions, whether their own or from the ACS, were still at hand. Those who brought money had yet to spend much of it. No one had experienced a full year of Liberia’s tropical climate. No one had grown a successful crop. They had been in Liberia little more than a week.

Thus, as the May, 1868, departure date loomed in the Chattahoochee Valley, the news from Liberia was almost exclusively positive. Only an editor’s note attached to the Nelson Pierce letter suggested that not all were favorably disposed. Having seen a letter from Mingo Mott, the editor noted that Mott was “not pleased” at the time he wrote and “desired to come back.”<sup>11</sup> The ACS reported the Columbus emigrants were “delighted with the country, and say that they have come to the ‘promised land.’”<sup>12</sup> This enthusiasm had certainly been borne out by the letters the Columbus emigrants wrote back, several of which were published in Columbus

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<sup>11</sup> Mingo Mott does not appear in the ACS emigrant roll for the November, 1867, sailing. Mingo Mott may refer to Mingo McAllister who did depart at that time, or the notation of Mott may reflect an error on the part of the ACS or the *Daily Sun*.

<sup>12</sup> *ARCJ* 44 (April 1868): 123-124.

newspapers in mid- and late March. On May 14, 1868, 243 more people from the Chattahoochee Valley sailed for Liberia. As the May, 1868, emigrants crossed the ocean in the *Golconda*, they passed another ship coming from Liberia with more mail, and news that the November emigrants were “generally enjoying good health and were doing well.” The farming season appeared prosperous, with vegetable, rice, coffee, and sugar crops all performing well. Commerce was bustling, and the seaports were busy. The Liberian merchant marine counted 47 ships.<sup>13</sup>

However, reports from the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants would soon reflect the hardships they faced and the disenchantment some felt as they attempted to settle into their new country. Willis Fort, a mechanic and carpenter of Eufaula, and one of the leaders of that city’s emigrant group, became disenchanted with Liberia almost immediately. The *Eufaula News* described and paraphrased a portion of a letter Fort sent to “a prominent gentleman,” perhaps a former master, in Eufaula in October, 1868. This date indicates the letter was probably written in July or August—probably soon after the May, 1868, emigrants arrived. Fort described deplorable conditions for a farmer: no livestock or wagons. He had no money and felt he had no prospects to make any. He pleaded for assistance to return to Eufaula: “If any of my white friends will send for me I will pay them well for it.” Fort flatly stated that he had been “a great fool” for coming to Liberia and begged for assistance. He and his family were well and “yet alive.”<sup>14</sup> Had letters like this been received in Columbus and Eufaula prior to each of the 1867 and 1868 departures, from friends and former neighbors, fewer people may have emigrated. Certainly, communications like Fort’s, with others likely received and more to come, combined

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<sup>13</sup> *GWT*, 6 August 1868, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *GWT*, 25 October 1868, 3.

with the evolving promise of Reconstruction to diminish potential emigrants' fervor. The May, 1868, departure was the last large group to leave the Chattahoochee Valley for Liberia.

Whether Fort actually returned to Eufaula is not known; however, others who desired to return were able to do so. Gus Giddens made his way back to Columbus from Liberia in August, 1869, only a year after his arrival there, and was interviewed by the *Daily Sun*.<sup>15</sup> He had led a family group of nine to Liberia. Although purportedly “amply satisfied” with his experience, and noting the day he landed in Liberia as the “happiest” of his life, Giddens otherwise told a woeful story of his experience. His wife and three children had died, and he made an exaggerated claim that 200 of 300 emigrants from Columbus had died (only 204 from Columbus were in his departure group). He had also lost \$2,000 of his own money. Giddens claimed that, of the Columbus emigrants who had survived, most were “much dissatisfied” and also wished to return. He noted that even the few who were successful simply intended to save their money and then return to the United States. Although Giddens went on to explain the sickly, rainy climate of Liberia, and the poor state of agriculture, he also described a busy national trade in palm wood, sugar, coffee, and syrup, and the methods by which some merchants became wealthy. Nonetheless, Giddens advised the “colored people” to stay in Columbus.

Although Giddens's account is flawed, it is not without some merit. His claim that 200 of 300 May, 1868, emigrants died was certainly wrong, but many of the emigrants may have perished as “African fever,” often malaria, and other diseases took hold. Mortality of arriving colonists in Liberia in the nineteenth century was extraordinarily high, arguably the highest mortality ever reliably recorded for a human migration. However, if colonists survived their first

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<sup>15</sup> *DS*, 6 August 1869 in *GWT*, 13 August 1869, 3. Gus Giddens was reported as Augustus Giddings in the ACS rolls.



year, their life expectancy was comparable to those who remained in the United States.<sup>16</sup> Undoubtedly, a significant number of the Columbus emigrants did die, as occurred within Giddens own family. Giddens's description of Liberian trade also reflected the pattern in place during the nineteenth century. Native crops, dense forest or rugged terrain, and the lack of work animals encouraged many emigrants to barter with native peoples for products rather than develop their own farms.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Giddens was certainly right that other Chattahoochee Valley emigrants wished to return home.

Even the ACS published portions of letters from disgruntled emigrants and pointed out that the organization had never claimed Liberia was a "paradise." One such item was from a Columbus emigrant that had been printed in a Columbus newspaper. The ACS claimed the writer, a young barber, although no name was given, was brought up "daintily" in Georgia and, thus, was perhaps ill-equipped for the rigors of frontier Liberia. The letter was written to a former and "kind" master, and the writer begged assistance to return. Liberia lacked population, progress was slow, and the writer could get little work as a barber. The country needed more farmers, and the plantation people, those who had been used to "drudgery of any description," felt the hardship. The writer claimed it was "impossible" to "live in Africa much longer," and he begged his former master, if still a "friend and father," to provide assistance.<sup>18</sup> The unknown writer was almost certainly 24-year-old Aleck Sample, the only barber identified who emigrated

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<sup>16</sup> Antonio McDaniel, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: The Mortality Cost of Colonizing Liberia in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 104-106.

<sup>17</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> *ARCJ* 45 (September 1869): 283-284.

from Columbus, who left with the *May*, 1868, group by himself. Sample did eventually return to Columbus, where he died in 1886.<sup>19</sup>

Although many of the Columbus emigrants were meeting with hardships in Liberia—or, in fact, were not surviving—others were becoming settled and beginning to prosper. Even Giddens’s gloomy letter noted that some of his fellow emigrants were having some success, and Giddens’s own hardships and apparent cynicism may have partially exaggerated his description of the mortality and difficulties the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants faced. Chapman Abercrombie, in Buchanan, was one of those emigrants becoming established in Liberia. Abercrombie, listed as a bridge builder by the ACS, and later also described as a carpenter, emigrated to Liberia with his wife and five children in November, 1867. He wrote back to Columbus, in September, 1869, apparently to a former master or another white acquaintance, declaring that after twenty months experience in the country, he was “in a position” to provide an account of Liberia. Abercrombie and his family were all well, and he boasted that he had not been in bed one day since arriving. He had been contracted by one of the “leading merchants” in Buchanan to build a brick building in the center of the town and had also ordered iron machinery, possibly from Columbus, to construct a mill. Aside from his work as a builder, Abercrombie also had two acres under cultivation, where he was growing potatoes, taros (called eddoes in Liberia), and other vegetables. He also indicated that most of the emigrants he traveled with had survived and were “in a very fair way of being useful to themselves and the Republic.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *DES*, 7 July 1886, 8.

<sup>20</sup> *ARCJ* 46 (February 1870): 58-59.

Judge Cook, a minister from Columbus who emigrated with a large party of his former congregation, had undertaken the missionary work that at least partly inspired him to resettle in Liberia. He was preaching to the native peoples at Donogba, in the vicinity of Edina and Bexley, and managing a school for native children. Although he reported difficulties with his evangelical work, due to frequent rains and the lack of an appropriate church building, Cook concentrated his efforts at the small school. He was pleased to report to the ACS that the local “King” had shown an interest in learning to read the Bible and a “desire to be a Christian.”<sup>21</sup>

Another Columbus letter published by the ACS, probably written by Philip Monroe to his father, described Liberia as a “good country.” The “young man” argued that with additional population, intelligence, wealth, and Christianity, Liberia would be “second to no country on the globe.” However, just as the writer acknowledged the country’s shortcomings, he also touted those things that Liberia offered black people that the United States still could not:

Of course there are no large and fine cities with every convenience as in the United States; no reasonable person will expect to see such; but you will be in a free country, one of your own, and one that debars none of its citizens from all the rights and privileges of a freeman. You will be upon free soil, and you will breathe free air, with no one to make you afraid, which is not the case in America.<sup>22</sup>

If Philip Monroe did write this letter, he may not have stayed on “free soil” much longer after having written it. Alex Stanford and “Philip Munro and his wife” were reported to have returned to Columbus in March, 1871.<sup>23</sup> Although both Monroe and Munro families were in the 1868 emigrant party, no Munros were named Philip. Others returned. Also in March, 1871, the *Daily Sun* interviewed a “man and brother” who had returned from Liberia after a “very uncomfortable

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<sup>21</sup> *ARCJ* 48 (April 1872): 120.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. A letter from Philip Monroe to the ACS was published in the *Repository* prior to his emigration to Liberia in 1868. At that time, Monroe was described as the son of a “wealthy man of color,” and he emigrated with his wife and two children. The writer of this letter, as quoted in the February, 1870, *Repository*, was described as a “young man...who removed with his wife and two children...and possessing some means.”

<sup>23</sup> *DCE*, 4 March 1871, 3.

experience in that model negro Republic.” They had been able to return on money sent by their former master. Pay in Liberia was poor, and farming hard. The climate killed all horses and mules, and, thus, farmers spent years clearing ground for planting by hand. Long periods of rain were followed by long periods without, and fever and sickness were abundant.<sup>24</sup> Further, the returnees complained that they ate too much rice and had “not the ghost of a chance for hog end hominy, and ditto as to possum.”

The early communications and correspondence from the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants reflected elation at their escape from the South and their arrival on their “own free soil.” The earliest correspondence, some of which was written within days of arrival, expressed an almost euphoric desire on the part of the emigrants to be pleased with everything they encountered. The emigrants described a “good country” where they had been welcomed. Here a man could make a living working half his time. Indeed, fruits and vegetables grew wild in the woods. Land was available for the taking. The native tribes were friendly. No one had been sick. However, this initial optimism faded as the realities of frontier life in Liberia set in. The Chattahoochee Valley emigrants were predominantly farmers and emancipated slaves. This fact alone worked against them in a variety of ways. Without adequate livestock, the emigrant farmers had great difficulty clearing forest, and their farms remained small, struggled to survive, or failed. Even when land was finally cleared, the rainy, equatorial climate was foreign, as were the agricultural products and the methods for producing them in abundance. Further, the farmers status as recently emancipated slaves and agricultural workers meant they arrived in Liberia on the lowest rung of the Americo-Liberian social ladder. Notably, the two emigrants whose correspondence confirmed they were having some level of success at their chosen professions—Chapman Abercrombie, the builder at Buchanan, and Judge Cook, the preacher near Bexley—were not

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<sup>24</sup> *GWT*, 14 March 1871, 8.

dependent on agriculture. Abercrombie was making a living off the more successful merchant class, and Cook, as a missionary preacher, would have been supported by a denominational church or missionary society. As time passed, and all the emigrants were exposed to the sickly, rainy season of Liberia, many became sick and an unknown number—possibly a significant number—died. Thus, although some of the buildings, and perhaps the social structure, may have seemed familiar to the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants, they were in an alien land and a poorly developed one at that. Despite the initial optimism, an optimism that, to some degree, persisted for a few years, several of the emigrants chose to return to the United States. Even the ardent Philip Monroe, who wrote the ACS for assistance to carry the emigrants to Liberia, and who touted the country’s “free soil” and “free air” several years after his arrival, may have been one of them. Perhaps given the hardships in Liberia, news from Georgia that the political situation there was evolving, that black men now had the right to vote and held seats in government, induced some to return. Nonetheless, many did stay, with mixed results, and some few would prosper.

By the early 1870s, Liberia had attained some limited wealth. The country walked a fine line as European powers carved the African continent into colonies, and, in some cases, those powers encroached upon territory Liberia claimed. Nonetheless, the country had kept up a relatively brisk trade with Europe and the United States and had exported sugar, coffee, rice, and forest products. However, the Liberian economy had peaked, and, by the mid-1870s, a combination of factors pushed the country’s trade into decline. Global depression, European colonialism and control of African trade, and the emergence of sugar and coffee production elsewhere coalesced to send Liberia’s economy into a downward spiral. Thus, in the late nineteenth century, emigrants and settlers faced new economic hardships and uncertainty.

During this time, correspondence from Liberia to the Chattahoochee Valley declined, and only a few scattered letters and news items give an indication of how the remaining emigrants fared. General hardship remained a theme. In August, 1880, John W. Herron wrote from Grand Bassa County to E. A. Banks in New York, a member of the family that had owned the Herrons. John was the son of Alexander Herron, a preacher who had written back to Columbus upon his arrival, touting the promise of Liberia and encouraging others to come. Although Alexander and his wife, Catharine, who would have been fifty-eight and forty-eight respectively, had survived, they were sick at the time John wrote and had been so for some time. In his letter, John Herron, now thirty-two, acknowledged a “box” that Banks had sent to his mother and expressed the family’s gratitude and appreciation that Banks had not forgotten them. Herron described the many difficulties and hardships the family faced, including sickness and poverty, and noted that “sometimes we find it very good, then again it comes hard.” They were having “quite [a] sickly time,” and people were “dying in every direction.” To make matters worse, the “Kroo” people, a native tribe, were threatening the community. Herron wrote that “they says this country belongs to thare [*sic*] fore fathers, and they intend to have it.” However, if it came to conflict, he was “ready at any [moment] to go and discharge my [duty].” In spite of these troubles, life went on for the Herrons. Two of Herron’s sisters were married, and John had made his best efforts to advance them socially:

I did the [best] I could for them while they were living with us. To keep them up in [order] that they may be able to walk & talk in the first class and society. If they do [go] astray now, it will not be my fault.

Herron also announced his own forthcoming marriage to a “poor girl,” and declared it his “duty” to call upon Banks for assistance in acquiring the proper clothes and house wares. Perhaps in return, Herron hoped to send some coffee, although the current crop had yet to “yeald [*sic*]

enough to think of shipping.” He closed his letter with a request for Banks to send a number of medicines not available in Liberia.<sup>25</sup> Thus, after twelve years in Liberia, the Herron family was holding on despite the hardships. The parents, Alexander and Catharine, had survived along with at least their son, John W., and two daughters.<sup>26</sup> Alexander Herron was described as a preacher in ACS records and likely had continued preaching when healthy, and the family was farming as well. The letter suggests that the Banks and Herrons had continued to correspond over the years, and that trading had occurred between the families. The Banks sent necessities to Liberia, and the Herrons sent Liberian products, such as coffee, in return. Despite the hardships, the Herrons were content in Liberia. They were as concerned about family social stature as about pending military conflict. John Herron’s letter to Banks contained no requests for assistance to return to America.

W. E. Johnson, probably William Johnson who left Columbus in 1867 at the age of twelve, was also enduring when he wrote back to his brother in May, 1891. Johnson was still at Bexley, and he reported that meat was scarce and pork “25 cents a pound.” Liberia’s troubled economy had driven up prices, particularly for imported items, such as the foods the emigrants had grown accustomed to eating. To solve this dilemma, Johnson asked his brother to send along “two hound dogs and a gun.” The letter was referenced in an *Enquirer-Sun* item, and the editor claimed Johnson “likes Liberia, but says it is not as good as old Columbus.”<sup>27</sup>

Despite the multitude of hardships life in Liberia entailed in the late nineteenth century, at least one Chattahoochee Valley emigrant, Spencer Parker, appeared to be truly prospering.

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<sup>25</sup> John W. Herron, Grand Bassa, Liberia, to E. A. Banks, New York, New York, 26 August 1880, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia, Athens, Ga.

<sup>26</sup> The Herrons emigrated as a family group of thirteen.

<sup>27</sup> *CES*, 30 June 1891, 4.

Parker and his wife, Jennie, had emigrated from Russell County, Alabama, and Columbus, in 1868. They brought with them four children, all under the age of seven, and settled at Bexley, where they farmed and remained. Parker learned to read and write in Liberia, and he corresponded regularly with the family that formerly owned his wife, the Lewis family of Columbus. The two families occasionally traded goods or gifts. In May, 1892, Mrs. U. M. Lewis, who had personally owned Jennie, indicated to the *Enquirer-Sun* that the Parkers were “thriving finely.” She had recently received a box of aromatic wood, which contained twenty-one pounds of coffee wrapped in a hide. The newspaper reported that the coffee, when roasted, “made a delicious beverage.” A letter that accompanied the coffee noted that it had been grown on “Parker’s own land.” Mrs. Lewis was “delighted” with the gift, and “still more by the assurance that she was held in affectionate remembrance after so many years by her old servants.”<sup>28</sup> Parker may have been returning kindnesses that the Lewises provided to his family as they settled and became established in Liberia. In 1895, Parker sent a number of Liberian newspapers along with a letter to the Lewises, and the *Enquirer-Sun* commented on them. Parker was reported to have a “large coffee plantation,” and that his family was doing “remarkably well” and were “perfectly contented.” He supposed his family was “much better off than many of the Southern negroes, although there are quite a number of Georgia negroes in the vicinity who are doing well.”<sup>29</sup> Parker apparently made no specific mention of any Chattahoochee Valley emigrants among the “Georgians” he described.

As late as 1903, Parker was still corresponding with the Lewis family. He wrote to Mrs. U. M. Lewis’s son, John, in response to a query about his life in Liberia. After niceties regarding

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<sup>28</sup> *CES*, 3 May 1892, 1.

<sup>29</sup> *CES*, 12 June 1895, 1.



each family's good health, Parker, then sixty-four, wrote: "I will give you the truth as to my experience in Liberia, where I have been for thirty-five years...as you wish to hear, I am ready to relate." Parker described the basics of his family's life in Africa. They ate "rice, flour, butter, ham, bacon, sugar, cane, carado potatoes, plantation eddoes, corn, bananas." Game included wild cows, wild hogs, and fish "of many kinds." Given this abundance, Parker claimed only the "lazy" could not live in Liberia, and he was not among them. He had been commissary of Grand Bassa County for six years, which paid \$250 a year, and he earned another \$300 annually from his "cane farm" and another \$50 a year by operating his own mill. Parker suspected laziness was the reason many recent emigrants had been "dying out." He closed the letter with his "motto" that "any colored man who wishes to live, come to Liberia, for as to the negro staying in the United States and being the equal of the white man—it will never be on this side of eternity."<sup>30</sup>

Also in 1903, perhaps one of the last Liberian returnees arrived in the city. Rosa Crawford returned after thirty-eight years in Africa, and, in an interview with the *Enquirer-Sun*, she related her story. Originally from Columbus, she had run away at eighteen to join the November, 1867, emigrant party and had married in Augusta, Georgia, en route to Charleston for departure.<sup>31</sup> Upon arrival in Liberia, she and her husband had settled in Monrovia, where she was a laundress and made a "good living...almost the same she could have made at home." She spent almost all of her time in Monrovia or its vicinity, rarely going into the interior, where the native people were "dangerous" as opposed to the "peaceable" natives in and near the city. Agriculture had been concentrated near the coast, where corn, grains, and "all the vegetables ordinarily raised in Georgia" were grown, "but not cotton." Crawford noted that the country's

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<sup>30</sup> *CES*, 27 September, 1903, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Rosa Crawford was most likely Rosa Shelton, an 18-year-old female that departed alone in 1867.

sugar and molasses industry had declined, and that its lumber industry had also faltered since her arrival. Such products were produced internally when she arrived but were being imported at the time she left. She supposed it to be a drop off in ambition and energy from the “original settlers” to the “present generation,” rather than the global market forces that were the true culprit. Her notice of a corresponding decline in American merchant ships and an increase of European shipping would have been indicative of the changing economy in West Africa. Crawford went on to describe a simple truth that probably described the emigrant experience of many in nineteenth century Liberia: “while a good many of the American negroes there are dissatisfied with their lot and wish to return to America and would do so if they could pay their passage, yet many are content with their surroundings and intend to spend the rest of their lives in Africa.” Further, the ACS would undoubtedly have been pleased by her description of the “civilizing influence” the “American negroes” and their churches and schools were supposedly having on the “native Africans.” When Crawford’s husband died in 1898, she moved to Sierra Leone where she could make more money “for fine laundry work.” There she saved enough after a few years to return to the United States and ultimately to Columbus.<sup>32</sup>

The later correspondence of the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants is less plentiful than the earlier letters sent as settlers arrived in Liberia, but it does give hints that earlier themes had persisted in the minds of some despite the hardships they had encountered. At least two of the preachers had survived past 1880. Reverend Judge Cook, as late as 1883, was still preaching to the settler communities, as well as spreading the “civilizing influence” of Christianity to the native peoples. The Reverend Alexander Herron, when healthy, had likely fulfilled a similar role. As late as 1903, Spencer Parker, a successful farmer, was certain he had made the right decision to leave the United States. He still believed true freedom was impossible for the black

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<sup>32</sup> CES, 14 July 1903, 5.

man in the United States but a reality—at least for Americo-Liberians—in his new African country.

A detailed and certain account of what became of the all the approximately five-hundred Chattahoochee Valley emigrants to Liberia cannot be developed. The evidence is scant, often edited, and incomplete. However, what information is available does provide ample clues and suggests that the Liberian experience was, if not a success, neither a failure nor a disaster. Simply arriving in Liberia had its own set of challenges. A significant number of emigrants, both adult and child, probably did not survive their first year in the country; mortality was unusually high for emigrants, and, as a group, the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants would have suffered. Gus Giddens lost his wife and three children. Further, as a largely agrarian group, the emigrants were ill prepared for a quick transition from destitution to prosperity. Success or failure was on the individual level. Farming was extremely difficult in Liberia, particularly for newcomers. Dense forests, a new climate, new crops, and new pests and problems meant hard work, trial and error, and for many farmers, little production or failure. The social hierarchy of Liberia probably did not encourage those who struggled. Not only were their farms producing little, but other blacks, fellow Liberians, looked down upon them in many of the same ways the whites of the South had. Free soil in Liberia had a steep price, and some could not pay it. Those who wished to and were able returned to the United States, where at least they had familiarity and some comfort level with the conditions, if not the political situation. But, of those who had survived the acclimation, most stayed—probably the great majority—either because of a lack of means to return or a lack of desire to do so. Many, like the Herrons, likely had a fairly hardscrabble existence, similar to the lives they would have led if they had remained in the South. Good times were cyclical. It took hard work to survive. Sickness came and went.

And life went on. A lucky and hard working few appear to have achieved some level of prosperity in Liberia, and, notably, were either not farmers or not exclusively so. Chapman Abercrombie was a successful builder but did keep a small farm. Judge Cook was a missionary preacher and likely had some form of outside support. Spencer Parker, a farmer, was also a government official and operated a mill. The Herrons, who were farmers and apparently not thriving in 1880, were led by a preacher and may have received some additional resources because of his position. Some measure of success, particularly in Grand Bassa County, appeared to hinge on hard work and a recognition that farming alone could not support a family.

Thus, the Chattahoochee Valley emigrant experience appears to have been a “mixed bag.” Some died, some returned, some struggled on as they would have had they remained in the South. Some few, probably very few, realized the dream they envisioned upon their departure in 1867 and 1868.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In many ways, the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants fit into the broader patterns of Liberian emigration. Their timing, their demographic composition, their correspondence, and their experience in Liberia were in some ways shared by the greater emigrant group or by other regional groups, and by other settlers upon arrival in the country.

Almost all the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants departed right after the Civil War as political turmoil and general uncertainty influenced their decisions. Many others across the South made the same decision as record numbers sought assistance from the American Colonization Society. Like their North Carolinian counterparts, the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants were primarily farming families with numerous children. They wrote home, always remembering family, even their white “families,” thereby maintaining important social and economic bonds as they labored in a new, unfamiliar land. And they suffered. Some died, some gave up and returned to the United States, and others struggled to make a living in Liberia. Most stayed. Only a few prospered.

Some of the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants were inspired by the ACS’s mission to spread Christianity and civilization in Africa, but most were looking for freedom, safety, property, and prosperity in their “own,” black-led country. However, Liberia was neither American nor African, but a strange medley of the two worlds, and it disappointed many of the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants. Freedom they had, but within a stringent social hierarchy, in some ways similar to the one they had just escaped from, led by their “own” people, including early settler and mixed race people and families who looked down upon unskilled newcomers. This Liberian elite mimicked the customs and styles of the whites who had once looked down upon them. The villages and farms contained familiar, American-style buildings but under a

tropical sun and within jungle like growth, where strange, unknown plants and pests grew. Most emigrants owned land, and, although farmers, they knew little of what to do with it under conditions so different from those they had known in Georgia or Alabama. Even safety was an uncertainty. The disease environment killed many, and settlers sometimes came into conflict with native tribes. Furthermore, Liberia was a developing country with a large frontier into which most of the Chattahoochee Valley emigrants attempted to settle. Rural, Grand Bassa County would have had few amenities to offer.

Many emigrants, including those from the Chattahoochee Valley, did not adapt. Farmers tried to grow the crops they had known in the South and failed. Rather than eat native foods, they persisted in importing expensive, American-style foods. Of those that survived “African fever,” some eventually gave up and tried to return to the United States. Others gradually did adapt and persist, preferring to endure hardship in their own land rather than return to a white supremacist society. They grew coffee and local fruits and vegetables, hunted and fished local game, and supplemented their incomes with other work. For those willing to adapt to Liberia as they found it, rather than as they wished it to be, the Liberian dream could be realized.

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