

**2,000 Trees a Day:  
Work and Life in the American Naval Stores Industry, 1877 to 1940**

by

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## Abstract

This project explores the lives of nineteenth and early twentieth century naval stores workers in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. After the Civil War, turpentine operators faced a high demand for their product, limited capital to embark on new operations, and an uncertain labor supply. Therefore, these men resorted to deceitful labor recruitment tactics to entice free workers to their camps. In addition, operators also supplemented their work force with convict labor. The preliminary focus of this dissertation is the experience—nature of work, work culture, and daily life—of turpentine employees. Previous historians, with the exception of Robert Outland, have dismissed turpentine harvesting as a makeshift operation on the periphery of civilization. In turn, this assessment has led to the misconception that turpentine workers were wild and violent frontiersmen, who rarely formed social bonds, idolized outlaws, and ascribed to a rough and tumble way of life. This work seeks to restore the reputation of naval stores laborers and contends that these men—both African American and white, both free and captive—shared a similar work culture to other industrial workers and established and supported families within the camps. Because this project deals with both African American and white workers, and their families, it will also address the relationship between race, class, and gender, with a particular focus on laborers' concepts of masculinity. The presence of women within the camps complicates the discourse on

gender because it not only adds the dimension of female labor and feminine culture to this study, it also provides male workers with a standard to define their own masculinity.

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Introduction:  
Reevaluating Life and Labor within the American Naval Stores Industry

“His connection with the outside world is almost severed,” explained Albert Pridgen, a naval stores entrepreneur from Metcalfe, Georgia in 1921. Describing the isolation and privation of life in the southern pine belt, he likened early-twentieth-century turpentine production to life on the western frontier. As a “pioneer in the vast stretches of pine forests,” naval stores producers endured “primitive” living conditions within the woods where “modern comforts and conveniences become as dim as a mythological story of another planet.” In addition to foregoing the luxuries of urban dwelling, Pridgen believed that close contact and prolonged exposure to “the lawlessness which characterizes the majority of negro [sic] labor makes the life of the operators one of danger.” Attributing negative racial stereotypes to the predominantly African American workforce, he maintained that their “inherent recklessness” combined with a penchant for alcohol fostered “a state of lawlessness” within turpentine operations that served to further isolate these communities from southern society.<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on both the remote nature of the industry and racially based perceptions of black labor, Albert Pridgen’s account of turpentine manufacturing exemplified commonly held misperceptions of life and work within the southern naval stores industry.

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Pridgen, “Turpentine in the South Atlantic Country,” in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), 104.

Pridgen and his contemporaries believed that African Americans required forceful management and strict discipline, because “Anyone who had dealt with the negro to any extent knows that where a large number of negroes are collected, there is, and will always be, an element of lawlessness.”<sup>2</sup> Echoing these sentiments, a Floridian naval stores supervisor explained, “They liked to be ruled by an iron hand and no velvet glove.”<sup>3</sup> Moreover, these interpretations of turpentine workers were further reinforced by the employment of convict labor in the piney woods.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, inmates—in conjunction with free labor—worked the turpentine orchards of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. Leased from the state for an annual fee, these men became the responsibility of southern industrialists, who sent them to coal mines, brickyards, and naval stores operations. While it augmented manufacturers’ labor supply, this system also became synonymous with brutality, corruption, and collusion between government officials and lessees.<sup>4</sup> As a result of this widespread cruelty, the lease became the subject of muckraking exposés and journal articles—with one of the most enduring and widely cited accounts depicting the naval stores industry.

In 1891, H. J. Smith and Company published *The American Siberia or Fourteen Years’ Experience in a Southern Convict Camp*. Captain John C. Powell, who penned this memoir, supervised a Floridian turpentine camp that held a contract with Dutton,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>3</sup> Unidentified turpentine foreman quoted in, Stetson Kennedy, *Palmetto Country*, reprint (1942; reprint, Tallahassee: Florida A & M University Press, 1989), 265.

<sup>4</sup> Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (London: Verso, 1996), 3.

Ruff, and Jones, a northern-based naval stores company.<sup>5</sup> He regaled readers with shocking accounts of violence and brutality, daring escapes, and cautionary tales of wayward women who found themselves embroiled within Florida’s criminal justice system. Powell’s memoir painted a vibrant and lasting picture of “‘cracker’ outlaws and cut-throat negroes,” who represented an “exceptionally dangerous and desperate class of men.” Although some of his vignettes remain powerful, Powell’s account conveys a false impression of life within a convict camp. Turpentine hands were not, as Powell would have his readers believe, “desperadoes of the first order,” but ordinary men and women laboring their lives away in the piney woods of the deep South.<sup>6</sup>

Mobilizing these narratives, historians—with the exception of Robert B. Outland—have dismissed turpentine harvesting as a makeshift operation on the periphery of civilization. In turn, this assessment has led to the misconception that naval stores laborers were wild and violent frontiersmen, who rarely formed social bonds, idolized outlaws, and ascribed to a rough and tumble way of life. This work challenges this notion by examining the life and labor of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century turpentine workers in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida—three states located within the southern pine belt that all experienced a rapid expansion of the naval stores industry during the 1880s. Although the term naval stores historically referred to the materials required to build and maintain ships, this work employs the nineteenth century definition

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<sup>5</sup> Noel Gordon Carper, “The Convict-Lease System in Florida, 1866-1932” (PhD dissertation, Florida State University, 1964), 49.

<sup>6</sup> J. C. Powell, *The American Siberia* (Philadelphia: H. J. Smith & Company, 1891; reprint Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976), 30-31.

of naval stores that only includes tar, pitch, resin, and spirits of turpentine.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, throughout this work, I use the terms naval stores and turpentine production interchangeably. Focusing on gum naval stores production, I argue that men and women within this trade—both African American and white, both free and captive—developed a work culture that mirrored the experience of laborers in agricultural, extractive, and industrial sectors.<sup>8</sup> Through the establishment and support of families within camps, these men forged and maintained relationships while working in the piney woods. Moreover, the narrative of turpentine workers’ lives and labors in the southern pine belt reveals the interplay between race, class, and gender within the nineteenth and early twentieth century New South.

Recent studies in labor history have placed workers and their culture squarely at the center of the discourse on race, class, and gender. Building off the pioneering work, *Like a Family*, scholars in this field continue to analyze company towns and the cultural consciousness of workers. Another seminal work, Herbert Hill’s “Myth-Making as Labor History”—a response to Herbert Gutman—laid the framework for a continued debate over the primacy of race or class within industrial unionism. In his 1968 article “The Negro and the United Mine Workers,” Gutman contended that UMW members

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<sup>7</sup> Robert B. Outland III, *Tapping the Pines: The Naval Stores Industry in the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Turpentine products can be derived through a variety of difference processes. This study focuses exclusively on gum naval stores, which are produced through the extraction and distillation of oleoresin from longleaf pine trees. The wood naval stores industry gained prominence in the 1900s when turpentine was produced through the steam distillation of dead pine stumps or wood. Sulphate paper production also created turpentine as one of the process’s byproducts. *Naval Stores Statistics 1900-1953*, Statistical Bulletin No. 181 (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1956), 1-3; Carroll B. Butler, *Treasures of the Longleaf Pines: Naval Stores* (Shalimar: Tarkel Publishing, 1998), 93.

privileged class-based interests over racially oriented issues and successfully organized both black and white miners. In sharp contrast to Gutman's analysis, Herbert Hill maintained that it is impossible to reduce "race consciousness to class consciousness," because of the centrality of race in the work environment.<sup>9</sup> Scholars have engaged this discussion within the context of numerous industries—particularly meatpacking, steel, tobacco, lumber, and coal. While authors such as Alice Kessler-Harris and Michelle Brattain call for more research on women laborers and the role of gender within working-class history, other historians focus on the relationship between labor and masculinity. These studies explore not only the correlation between dangerous work and conceptions of manliness, but also the association of a family wage with masculine responsibility to provide for a household. Despite this diversity of topics across a wide array of industries, analyses of naval stores laborers are woefully absent.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Herbert Gutman, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers," in *The Negro and the American Labor Movement*, ed. Julius Jacobson (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1968), 52; Herbert Hill, "Myth-Making as Labor History: Herbert Gutman and The United Mine Workers of America," *Politics, Culture, and Society* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1988): 132.

<sup>10</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al., *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Hill, "Myth-Making as Labor History," 132-200; Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-1954* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Henry M. McKiven, Jr., *Iron and Steel: Class, Race, and Community in Birmingham, Alabama, 1875-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Michelle Brattain, "The Pursuits of Post-exceptionalism: Race, Gender, Class, and Politics in the New Southern Labor History," in *Labor in the Modern South* ed. Glenn T. Eskew (Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 2001); Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (June 1993): 75-112;

In the same way as labor historians, scholars evaluating the convict lease have tended to marginally address prisoner work within this industry. Following Edward L. Ayers' groundbreaking work, *Vengeance and Justice*, the majority of research in this field examines both the economic and social function of the lease. Following Ayers's study, Alex Lichtenstein and Matthew J. Mancini investigate the profitability and racial implications of prisoner labor. Focusing exclusively on Georgia, Lichtenstein finds that the convict lease allowed the South to industrialize while preserving white hegemony. In a comparative multistate approach, Mancini finds distinct continuities between southern states' leasing practices. In 1998, Daniel Letwin and Karin A. Shapiro both used prisoner labor as a lens through which to examine the possibilities of interracial cooperation and unionism within industries that employed both free and convict workers. While previous studies have focused on the lease holders and free workers' reactions to this system, the most recent research in the field addresses the day-to-day experiences of convict laborers. Through an examination of Tennessee Coal and Iron Company and Sloss Iron and Steel Company's mines, Mary Ellen Curtin recreates the life of Alabama's inmate miners. Talitha LeFlouria also explores the lives of Georgia's female prisoners.<sup>11</sup> Just as labor

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William P. Jones, *The Tribe of Black Ulysses: African American Lumber Workers in the Jim Crow South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor*, 5; Matthew J. Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866-1928* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996); Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Karin A. Shapiro, *A New South Rebellion: The Battle Against Convict Labor in the Tennessee Coalfields, 1871-1896* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Mary Ellen Curtin, *Black Prisoners and their World, Alabama, 1865-1900* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Talitha LeFlouria, "The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Cuts Cordwood": Exploring Black Women's Lives and Labor in Georgia's Convict



historians have paid little attention to turpentine manufacturing, however, convict lease scholars have also failed to produce in-depth analyses of inmates who worked in naval stores operations. Moreover, historians in both fields tend to separate studies of free and prisoner labor when a combined approach would be far more useful.

The years following emancipation represented a time of flux and negotiation for both southern laborers and industrialists, and more broadly the region as a whole. Newly liberated African American men and women made the transition from enslavement to freedom. Both black and white laborers wrestled with the decision to shift from agricultural to industrial employment. Moreover, questions about the place of race in the work-environment occurred. Concurrently, entrepreneurs—who had operated forges and harvested fields and pine orchards with an enslaved workforce—grappled with the advent of free labor. In addition to these economic adjustments, the state also underwent changes within the penal sector. Although convict leasing had existed prior to the Civil War, the need for funding and rapid industrialization after the war allowed this system to become more fully entrenched within the southern justice system. The postbellum chronicle of the naval stores industry and its workers provides an excellent synthesis of all these factors, illuminating the complex and often contradictory contours of southern life and labor.

Described by Robert B. Outland III as “a prototypical southern industry,” pine gum harvesting and turpentine manufacturing bridged the gap between an agrarian and industrial economy.<sup>12</sup> The seasonal preparation of trees and resin collection closely

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Camps, 1865-1917,” *Labor Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 8, Issue 3 (2011): 47-63.

<sup>12</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 4.

mirrored the agricultural rhythms of sugarcane and tobacco production. Just as single cane fields produced annual harvests for three to four years, tracts of trees remained profitable for approximately the same period of time. Moreover, plants in both the longleaf pine forests and the tobacco fields yielded multiple harvests over the duration of a single season. While the initial steps of naval stores production were comparable with an agricultural harvest, the distillation process that transformed pine gum into spirits of turpentine and rosin shared characteristics with other southern extractive industries. Much like the coal and iron operations that mined and refined natural resources, naval stores manufacturing processed raw materials into saleable products.<sup>13</sup> For new turpentine workers, this hybridization of agriculture and industry facilitated the transition from farmland to forest. Within the woods and within the camps, naval stores workers brought with them the community and mutuality that existed under an agricultural economy.<sup>14</sup>

In order to understand the significance of working class mutuality and class-consciousness, scholars began their analyses with the examination of workers' relationship to industrial labor and life within company towns. W. J. Cash, in *Mind of the South*, along with Broadus Mitchell, laid the foundation for negative assessments of southern workers. Through an evaluation of textile employees, he contended that these men, women, and children were industrial drudges, "inferior to even... the old poor white," who clung to the idea of a proto-Dorian bond that linked their economic and social interests with those of elite white landowners instead of with African American

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<sup>13</sup> John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes 1862-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 13; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, xxiii, 21-22, 151-152.

workers, who shared similar economic conditions.<sup>15</sup> This pre-industrial, agrarian mindset of workers led to an, “almost complete disappearance of economic and social focus on the part of the masses.”<sup>16</sup> The Cashian concept of labor provided an early framework for other historians to explain the dearth of worker organization and militancy in the South, and remained largely unchallenged until the publication of *Like a Family*.

While Cash used textile workers to showcase the apparent lack of class-consciousness in southern laborers, the authors of *Like a Family* weave together a rich history of mill company towns to demonstrate interdependence and eventually class-consciousness among these laborers. Mill workers in the Piedmont region of the New South likened their relationships with their neighbors to that of family. According to the authors, “they were not using this imagery to describe their dependence on a fatherly employer so much as they were explaining their relationships to one another.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, unlike Cash’s workers, who maintained a pre-industrial ethos, the laborers in *Like a Family* used these quasi-familial bonds to ease the transition between rural and industrial life. Although these authors successfully demonstrate cultural cohesion within the mill village, they are careful to note that it did not form at the expense of individuality.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, workers engaged in individual and sometimes spontaneous acts of resistance to work conditions. Although refusing to go to work, walking out, and lodging complaints against supervisors fell outside the realm of organized protest, these acts demonstrated a continuum of collective consciousness that complicates the concept

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<sup>15</sup> W. J. Cash, *Mind of the South* (1941; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 200, 110.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>17</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, xxiii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

of southern individualism. In addition to personal forms of resistance, southern textile workers sense of community propelled them into the ultimate expression of collective identity through participation in the General Textile Strike of 1934.<sup>19</sup>

Much like Carolinian textile workers, West Virginian and Appalachian coal miners also developed a distinct adaptation of rural values to suit an industrial environment. In his work, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (1991), Crandall A. Shifflett contends that “rural traditions of mutual help and reciprocity continued to function in the coalfields.”<sup>20</sup> In addition to forming close bonds within coal camps, West Virginian miners continued to maintain their rustic roots by tending livestock and harvesting vegetable patches in coal towns. Ronald D. Lewis also contributes to the discussion of the fluidity between agricultural and industrial culture in the West Virginian coalfields. Lewis, in *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict 1780-1980* (1987), asserts that African American miners, “use[d] coal mining as a cash crop, and viewed the mines as a way to maintain farms back home.”<sup>21</sup> This belief, rooted in agrarian traditions, allowed miners to participate in an industrial economy while preserving the close relationships and mutuality found in a rural setting. It is also important to note that the desire to maintain ties to the land crossed racial boundaries. In both the predominately white textile mills and the predominately African American coalfields, workers shared the practice of returning to farms once they had completed industrial labor. These similar

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 91, 97-100.

<sup>20</sup> Crandall A. Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 109.

<sup>21</sup> Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class and Community Conflict 1780-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 130.

findings within the two industries suggest that a diversity of southern laborers transitioning from a rural to industrial environment had parallel experiences and formed similar cultures in response.

Just as workers in the textile and coal industry drew on rural values to form a collective culture and foster class-consciousness, early-twentieth-century African American lumber workers emphasized community through the creation and maintenance of families within lumber camps. Arguing against the concept of an immoral, highly mobile, and fiercely individual lumberman, William Jones, in his work *The Tribe of Black Ulysses: African American Lumber Workers in the Jim Crow South*, asserts that African American lumber workers used industrialization to bolster family ties.<sup>22</sup> Unlike mill and mine workers, who maintained rural ties, these men abandoned life on the farm due to an inability to afford parcels of land. According to Jones, falling wages and higher land prices in 1919 forced men to rely exclusively on wage work.<sup>23</sup> This shift did not cause a breakdown in families, as contemporary sociologists, particularly Howard Odum, had argued. Jones asserts that, “Black men did not abandon family life when they moved from agriculture into industrial work. Instead they adjusted their relationships with wives and children to fit a new economic context.”<sup>24</sup>

Under these new conditions lumbermen conceptualized themselves as the head of the household and the primary source for family income. Unlike textile laborers, whose families remained intact when working at either the mill or the farm, lumber workers used high wages as a justification for leaving loved ones during the logging season. Like

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<sup>22</sup> Jones, *The Tribe of Black Ulysses*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

textile laborers and coal miners, whose class-consciousness stemmed from bonds among family units, lumbermen created a collective identity through the need to support their own families. During the 1930s, Jones contends that New Deal legislation prompted men to join unions and use these organizations as a vehicle to promote a family wage.<sup>25</sup>

While the historiography dealing with workers in the textile, coal, and lumber industry has moved past the Cashian notion of individualistic agrarians, whose entrance into industrial labor had a debilitating effect, treatment of naval stores laborers has not progressed past this concept. Historians dealing with this type of worker often still classify him as a violent, individualistic outsider. In his dissertation, "Prisoners of the Pines: Debt Peonage in the Southern Turpentine Industry, 1900-1930," Michael Tegeder asserts that, "camps were full of violent men, black and white, and the weekends invited trouble for both management and labor alike."<sup>26</sup> Unlike textile and coal towns, migratory turpentine camps fostered brutality in both operators and workers. The remoteness of encampments engendered extralegal forms of discipline, and Tegeder contends that this type of labor control stimulated aggressive behavior in laborers.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, intense stretches of work during the spring and summer months separated men from their families. Although he acknowledges that some men brought their wives and children to camps, Tegeder argues that even the presence of relatives precluded labor militancy and collective culture.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines: Debt Peonage in the Southern Turpentine Industry, 1900-1930" (PhD dissertation, The University of Florida, 1996), 9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

While Tegeder emphasizes the violence and loneliness of the camps, Robert B. Outland maintains that it was the type of labor that insulated workers. In *Tapping the Pines*, an environmental and industrial history of the naval stores industry from the antebellum period to its demise in 1950, Outland states that the “task system, as used by naval stores producers, denied slave laborers community.”<sup>29</sup> Under this system, lone workers harvested isolated sections of trees and rarely came in contact with fellow laborers. Although this argument deals with enslaved hands, the same holds true for free employees, because turpentine collection techniques changed very little from the antebellum to postbellum period. While he suggests that laborers were unable to forge bonds through common work experiences, Outland acknowledges that they did create a vibrant community life in the camps.<sup>30</sup> However, unlike the authors of *Like a Family*, who connect mill village bonds with the formation of class-consciousness, Outland argues that these relationships did not transfer to labor militancy or even spontaneous protests.<sup>31</sup>

While familial ties in the textile and lumber industries factored prominently in the development of class-consciousness, both Tegeder and Outland neglect to address the importance of kinship and family bonds in the naval stores industry. For Tegeder, the presence of families at woodland outposts reinforced his contention that turpentine camps “were more or less self-contained societies.”<sup>32</sup> Because his study is predicated on the insular, violent nature of these operations, Tegeder finds that turpentine hands rarely left their encampments and only married within the community. Drawing obvious parallels

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<sup>29</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 81.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>32</sup> Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 40.

to enslavement, he suggests that naval stores families created a self-perpetuating cycle of captivity, because their “natural reproduction replenished the labor supply of the camps.”<sup>33</sup> While Tegeder gives little attention to the formation of households, Outland argues that socialization and mutuality did exist in certain camps. Because life in the woods offered little entertainment, he suggests that families relied on each other’s company to pass the time. According to Outland, “Families in close-knit communities would visit and make their own music” once the workday had ended.<sup>34</sup> Outland does not make the connection between community ties and collective identity; however, it is my contention that turpentine workers did form bonds through shared work and life experience. Although these ties did not manifest in organized protests, these men and women gained support from family and community to endure the harsh conditions of life within the woods.

As naval stores workers made the transition from agricultural to industrial labor, the southern justice system also underwent transformation. Much like their northern counterparts, antebellum southerners undertook the widespread construction of penitentiaries in the 1820s. Under the guise of deterrence and rehabilitation, these institutions served as a locus of control and containment for deviant and unruly segments of the population. While northern criminologists viewed incarceration as a solution for the perceived moral laxity and disorderliness of the working class, within the southern states “slavery kept the great majority of the South’s poor under tight control.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>34</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 182.

<sup>35</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 34. For a discussion of penitentiaries during the nineteenth century see: W. David Lewis, *From*



However, the end of the Civil War brought a reorientation of punishment systems. Unable to cope fiscally with so many new prisoners, southern governments leased inmates to private parties for an annual fee.

Scholars of southern punishment generally approach this topic from an economic angle or use it as a lens through which to examine the effect of racial manipulation and labor control of free workers. In the first comprehensive work on southern punishment, *Vengeance and Justice*, Edward Ayers contended that, “The convict lease system was not simply slavery reincarnated, and ex-slave-owners were not the only employers interested in convict labor. The lease system must be viewed in relation to the new demands of the postbellum South and not merely as the inertia of the antebellum South.”<sup>36</sup> Using Georgia as a case study, he maintained that leasing prisoners benefitted both the state and lessees by providing much-needed funds to the government and cheap, reliable labor that filled the void left by emancipation. According to Ayers, “Convict labor...developed as an adjunct of a nascent industrial capitalism short of capital and labor.”<sup>37</sup> In addition to fulfilling an economic requirement, he also suggested that the lease filled a social need. Because the termination of slavery “destroyed the basic structure that gave shape to the

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*Newgate to Dannemora: The Rise of the Penitentiary in New York, 1796-1848* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965); Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America*, rev. ed. (1980; New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002); Adam Jay Hirsch, *The Rise of the Penitentiary: Prisons and Punishment in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, eds., *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Robert David Ward and William Warren Rogers, *Alabama's Response to the Penitentiary Movement, 1829-1865* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 178.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

South,” postbellum southerners required a new method of shaping both labor and social relations.<sup>38</sup>

Ayers’ work laid the foundation for other historians to evaluate the lease. In *Twice the Work of Free Labor*, Alex Lichtenstein asserts that convict labor became “a system of labor recruitment, control, and exploitation particularly suited to a post-emancipation society.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, he maintains that this type of labor symbolized “the most obvious ‘continuity’ with... slavery,” because it used captive labor.<sup>40</sup> Focusing on state legislation and industrialists, Lichtenstein demonstrates how leasing Georgia’s inmates greatly enhanced economic modernization in southern states. After emancipation destabilized the regional labor market, southern capitalists often preferred inmate workers, as these prisoners provided a “stable, cheap, and readily available labor force at a fixed cost.”<sup>41</sup> This guarantee was particularly important for the naval stores industry because the remoteness of the camps was not conducive to attracting and maintaining reliable workers. According to Lichtenstein, African American box-cutters “prized their mobility” and readily left camp when better opportunities presented themselves.<sup>42</sup>

While Lichtenstein concentrates on the political economy of Georgia’s prisoner labor, Matthew Mancini takes a more multifaceted approach. In *One Dies, Get Another*, he not only examines the economic and racial implications of prisoner labor, but also analyzes this system throughout the entirety of the South. Arguing that “state studies

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>39</sup> Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 170.

have dominated the field,” he contends that “The southern region leaps out as one with a distinctive way of handling prisoners.”<sup>43</sup> Through a state-by-state analysis, Mancini demonstrates that prisoner work helped to bolster each state’s economy and increase restrictions on African Americans through the tightening of vagrancy laws. As he argues, “Certainly the control of black labor was a leading motivation behind every single effort to establish or maintain convict leasing for fifty years.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Mancini’s discussion of Florida is particularly salient to the study of turpentine workers. Because “Florida’s sparse population and frontier circumstances impart a singularly untamed flavor to its leasing story,” he argues that free and convict turpentine workers “were housed together and were not distinguished in the treatment they received.”<sup>45</sup> Although his examination of free and inmate laborers does not go any further than this statement, other scholars provide a more in-depth analysis.

In *Emancipation Betrayed*, Paul Ortiz demonstrates that the volatile labor market was to blame for increased arrests and violence against African American workers. He contends that after emancipation these men who valued mobility quit their jobs to protest arduous working conditions. As a result of this labor instability, Ortiz argues that turpentine operators used the convict lease system as a tool to arrest and control peripatetic laborers.<sup>46</sup> Agreeing with this assessment, Michael Tegeder asserts that debt peonage was the easiest way to dominate Florida’s naval stores workforce. Through the mobilization of restrictive labor legislation and extralegal violence, turpentine operators

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<sup>43</sup> Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 183, 196.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 17, 53.

held their laborers captive.<sup>47</sup> While these scholars acknowledge that free workers shared a similar experience with convicts, the historiography does not directly confront this issue. Labor and New South scholarship exclusively examine either convict or free workers, and does not adequately address the shared experiences or responses of these men. For men within the turpentine industry the line between convict and free laborer was often blurred due to restrictive labor legislation and corrupt law enforcement.

While these historians analyze the economic implications of prisoner labor, other scholars use the lease to explain interracial cooperation between workers. In both Alabama and Tennessee black and white miners united in protest against the use of convicts in the mines. In *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism*, Daniel Letwin contends that the United Mine Workers' (UMW) success with mobilizing laborers "emerged out of a wide-ranging set of conditions that white and black miners faced in common."<sup>48</sup> One such grievance was the use of inmates as strikebreakers and miners at Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company's mines.<sup>49</sup> While he maintains that the UMW did not advocate racial egalitarianism—but rather a practical approach to unionization—Letwin argues that "As with convicts, the fact that many strikebreakers were black did not render the two interchangeable in the miners' eyes."<sup>50</sup> This assertion suggests that white workers did not automatically equate the use of African American laborers with coal operators' oppression and labor control. Moreover, this statement also implies that miners sometimes placed class above race and coalesced around a set of shared grievances.

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<sup>47</sup> Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines," 1, 26, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism*, 31.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 102, 128.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

Just as the UMW in Alabama united against the use of prisoners in the mines, East Tennessean miners and townspeople protested the employment of inmates at the Tennessee Coal Mining Company's mines. In *A New South Rebellion* (1998), Karin Shapiro links the decline of Populism to hostility toward convict labor.<sup>51</sup> The advent of prisoner labor threatened the economic stability of free miners, because it significantly lowered wages and rendered their jobs obsolete. It also jeopardized the economic viability of surrounding businesses, because decreased wages prevented local laborers from patronizing town shops. In sharp contrast with Letwin's miners in Alabama, who articulated their grievances through UMW mobilization, Shapiro's laborers employed more drastic measures. Initially, the Tennesseans believed they would gain success through petitioning the government and by union agitation. However, the revenue provided by the lease superseded the demands of the miners. Because prisoners remained in the mines, Shapiro asserts that "the miners failed to achieve their immediate objectives."<sup>52</sup> From July 1891 to August 1892, therefore, free miners and local townspeople engaged in a series of strikes and raids that forcibly removed prisoner strikebreakers from the mines.

While the preceding works analyze the fiscal and psychological effects of the convict lease system, they neglect to fully address the lived experience of the men who worked for the states' profit. When addressing this type of penology, most historians take a top-down approach not only because inmates left behind few records, but also because, as Alex Lichtenstein writes, "to tell the story from 'below' is to recount horrific

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<sup>51</sup> Shapiro, *A New South Rebellion*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

tales of racial brutality and torture.”<sup>53</sup> Prisoners endured pitiless conditions when building railroads, mining for coal and phosphate, and harvesting turpentine in the New South. Those personal experiences are a vital component of understanding the lease system. By ignoring their experience, scholars have presented an incomplete analysis of this topic. Mary Ellen Curtin’s work, *Black Prisoners and Their World, Alabama, 1865-1900*, begins to fill this void. Although the bulk of her study scrutinizes the role of Alabama’s Board of Prison Inspectors and their attempts to pass ameliorative legislation, Curtin maintains that “Although incarcerated, black prisoners pursued a variety of goals that included gaining legal justice, returning home, learning to mine, or simply surviving.”<sup>54</sup>

She asserts that work in the coal mines did not have the rehabilitative effect that the Board of Prison Inspectors had expected; however, labor in the mines afforded African American convicts the opportunity to contest coal operators’ power. According to Curtin, “During the 1880s and 1890s, prisoners engaged in sabotage, strikes, arson, and other forms of outright resistance. These were not random acts of rebellion but responses to specific changes in the circumstance of the workplace. Prisons ‘schooled’ convicts in mining, but it also provided an opportunity to contest white power.”<sup>55</sup> Much like Jones’s examination of southern lumbermen, Curtin’s study serves as a model for the analysis of inmate turpentine works. Her thorough use of government records and inmate testimony sheds light on how prisoners experienced and responded to the lease. In addition, Curtin’s work demonstrates that a study of inmates provides a greater

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<sup>53</sup> Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor*, xvii.

<sup>54</sup> Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World*, 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

contribution to the historiography than a salacious volume of violence and brutality. By refusing to ignore the arduous conditions within the mines, Curtin presents a more informative and useful study of prisoner labor.

While these two historiographies have remained separate, the life and work experience of turpentine laborers offers a new synthesis. Reconstructing the lives and labor of nineteenth and early twentieth century naval stores hands does, however, present certain challenges. Because turpentine production during this time period was highly transitory, naval stores proprietors rarely saved company records when transferring from one location to another. Moreover, the men and women of the piney woods rarely left written accounts of their time in the longleaf barrens. Despite these initial obstacles, further investigation revealed an abundance of sources pertaining to the work and life of turpentine laborers. Thomas Gamble's *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution and Consumption*—a compilation of articles and business statistics detailing the intricacies of turpentine production—proved to be an invaluable resource for evaluating the expansion and business practices of the nineteenth and twentieth century naval stores industry.

Florida's Convict Lease Program subject files and published biennial reports from the Florida Department of Agriculture contain a bounty of information pertaining to turpentine workers within the State's convict lease system and the day to day experience of these inmates. These files encompass a wide berth of material, including administrative records, detailed reports from the State's Inspector of Convicts, prisoner grievances, and detailed arrest records that provide an accounting of prisoners' crimes. In addition to these official documents, J. C. Powell's *The American Siberia* also sheds

light on life within Florida's convict camps. Although his memoir must be viewed as a sensationalized account of inmate labor in the piney woods, historians have treated Powell's interpretation as wholly accurate. These scholars have ignored the circumstances of the publication of Powell's narrative. Meant to compete with contemporary muckraking accounts and George Kennan's 1891 work, *Siberia and the Exile System*, Powell seemed more concerned with weaving an exciting tale than creating an accurate portrayal prisoner labor. Despite these limitations, *The American Siberia* requires the researcher to read between the lines of Powell's account to glean important glimpses into the lives of leased turpentine workers.

Similarly valuable, yet equally problematic are the interviews from the South Georgia Folklife Collection. Between 1996 and 2006 field researchers from Valdosta State University, under the direction of Laurie Sommers, conducted interviews with naval stores laborers in southern Georgia. These recordings provide the bulk of information detailing the day-to-day experiences of both African American and white turpentine workers. In addition, these tapes also recount the activities of women and children within naval stores camps. While oral histories allow researchers to hear the voice of their subjects, there are certain limitations. The memories of interview subjects may not be entirely accurate. Moreover, these men and women tend to remember and express decidedly more positive accounts of time spent harvesting turpentine. Nevertheless, these interviews provide an important account of life in the longleaf barrens in the workers' own words.

Through an evaluation of these sources, this dissertation finds that the men and women within this industry forged and maintained successful social and familial bonds,



and shared work experiences similar to laborers within other industries. Chapter One analyzes the rapid growth and expansion of the American naval stores industry. Through an analysis of turpentine operators and their business practices, this chapter lays the framework for the shifting relationships between capital and labor. Chapter Two details the demographic composition and work experience of both African American and white men within the woods. While other industrial labor relegated black men to the lowest rung on the industrial ladder, within the woods these workers had the opportunity to rise to supervisory positions. For white men, however, hostility toward wage labor and racial assumptions about work in the woods prevented them from engaging in tiresome manual labor within the longleaf woods.

Chapter Three considers the convict lease system and demonstrates that prisoners' experience within the woods mirrored that of not only free turpentine hands, but also inmates in other industries. Chapter Four shares a similar theme to Chapter Three but explores the use of debt peonage to acquire and maintain a sustainable workforce. The use of African American guards and the exploitation of white immigrant peons suggest that the naval stores industry was not racially stratified in the ways historians have assumed. Chapter Five sheds light on the work activity and free time spent within turpentine camps. While harvesting oleoresin took place deep within longleaf pine forests, the manufacturing and distillation of turpentine occurred at the camps. In addition, this chapter addresses race relations in the southern pine belt. Although there is little evidence of direct interracial cooperation within the camps, it is significant that families of both races shared similar experiences. The epilogue explains the eventual end of the gum naval stores industry. Beginning with the termination of the convict lease

system, the gum naval stores industry was unable to compete with more efficient methods of turpentine production. Through this exploration of life and labor within the piney woods it becomes evident that nineteenth and early-twentieth-century turpentine workers had more in common with other industrial laborers than “desperados of the first order.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Powell, *The American Siberia*, 31.

## Chapter 1: Transforming Turpentine: The Scramble for Pines and Workers in the New South Naval Stores Industry

“It is yet thought a hazardous venture to start the business where more than thirty miles of wagoning [sic] is required to bring the spirits of turpentine to a rail-road, or navigable water,” wrote Frederick Law Olmsted of North Carolina’s naval stores industry. Traveling south through the state in 1853, he observed that the majority of turpentine producers were “small proprietors of the long-leafed pine forest,” who tapped slim tracts of trees with a handful of slaves.<sup>1</sup> These producers remained tied to established transportation routes and virgin timber. Sixty-eight years later, Thomas Gamble described a very different industry that relied on “the pine trees of Georgia and Florida and Alabama [and] brought fortunes to many among the factors and operators.”<sup>2</sup> In the intervening years between these two accounts, southern turpentine manufacturing underwent both a geographic and an industrial transformation. Following the Civil War,

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with Remarks on their Economy* (New York: Dix and Edwards, 1856), 339, 350-351. In December 1852, Henry J. Raymond, editor of the *New York Daily Times*, commissioned Olmsted to provide an account of the commercial—manufacturing and agricultural—and social aspects of the slave economy. Olmsted wrote a series of correspondence that the newspaper published over the course of the following year. Meant to serve as an answer to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, he provided a dispassionate depiction of the antebellum South. John Emerson Todd, *Frederick Law Olmsted* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 23; Melvin Kalfus, *Frederick Law Olmsted: The Passion of a Public Artist* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 160.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Gamble, “Savannah as a Naval Stores Port 1875-1920,” in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), 61.

transportation gateways opened and large operators with vast acreages of timber soon dominated the business.

The growth and development of the naval stores industry within the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American South played an integral role in shaping the relationship between turpentine producers and their workforce. Originating in antebellum North Carolina, naval stores manufacturing rapidly increased during the early nineteenth century due to abundant natural resources, increased market demand, and enthusiastic operators who embraced manufacturing. They also invested in substantial enslaved workforces. Moreover, the culmination of the Civil War did little to affect the larger scope of the industry. Michael Tegeder broadly describes turpentine as an archaic business that “clung... to the habits and traditions, even the technology of an antebellum trade that had come of age with slavery.” Examining the transition from slavery to debt peonage, Tegeder maintains that a lack of capital necessitated violent forms of labor management and precluded industrial modernization.<sup>3</sup> While Tegeder’s assessment deals exclusively with debt bondage, Robert B. Outland also finds similarities between the antebellum and postbellum naval stores industry. In a more nuanced study that explores American turpentine manufacturing from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, Outland contends, “Despite new labor arrangements and somewhat altered gum collection practices, the continuation of the antebellum businesses’ basic characteristics—large-scale production, primitive harvesting methods that led to

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<sup>3</sup> Michael David Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines: Debt Peonage in the Southern Turpentine Industry, 1900-1930” (PhD dissertation, University of Florida, 1996), quotation from 1, 6-7.

environmental degradation and reliance on forced labor—demonstrates a relative degree of continuity between the Old South and the New.”<sup>4</sup>

Tegeger and Outland saw continuity within turpentine manufacturing, nonetheless fundamental shifts refashioned the relationship of naval stores operators to the industry. During the postbellum era, these men dealt with dwindling natural resources, limited capital, and an unstable labor supply. Destructive harvesting techniques employed during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century rapidly depleted North Carolina’s lush pine forests. Consequently, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, turpentine producers shifted their manufacturing operations southward to Georgia, Alabama, and Florida. Moreover, the inherent mobility of the industry and lack of tangible assets precluded operators from obtaining credit through banks and traditional lending institutions.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, in order to meet the expanding markets amid the rapid industrialization of the 1890s, naval stores operators courted northern financiers and struck deals with factorage houses for much needed investment. Increased production required a constant and industrious workforce; therefore, manufacturers conceived of a twofold strategy to maintain labor stability—the mobilization of repressive labor legislation and a systematic move toward efficiency within the workplace.

During the antebellum era, naval stores production centered in North Carolina with Wilmington acting as the main shipping port. The state’s prominence within turpentine manufacturing originated in the early eighteenth century when Great Britain required a more economical supplier of tar and pitch. Prior to the colonial period,

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<sup>4</sup> Robert B. Outland III, *Tapping the Pines: The Naval Stores Industry in the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 310.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99, 116-120; Tegeger, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 47.

England had obtained these products from Scandinavian manufactures. However, the Great Northern War between Sweden and Russia, from 1699 to 1721, dramatically decreased the availability of Nordic tar and pitch. Within one year of Russia's invasion of Finland, Sweden's colony and chief naval stores supplier, England, reduced its importation of Swedish tar and pitch by 77.9 percent. In 1701, Great Britain had acquired 30,117 barrels of Swedish naval stores products, and the following year that number reduced to 6,654 barrels. Moreover, in 1703 the directors of the Stockholm Tar Company, who held the monopoly on Nordic naval stores, ceased exportation to England because they were unable to meet the country's demand for tar. In addition to Great Britain's inability to obtain Scandinavian products, the advent of the War of Spanish Succession, from 1700 to 1713, led to maritime mobilization that rapidly increased the demand for supplies throughout Europe. The preparation for battle coupled with the reduction in materials caused the prices of turpentine, tar, and pitch to reach historic levels.<sup>6</sup> The concurrence of these two wars and the vacuum they created required the British to obtain naval stores from a source independent of European purveyors.

Although entrepreneurs had made previous attempts to foster turpentine manufacturing within the colonies, it was not until this scarcity of Baltic materials that British Parliament passed "An Act for Encouraging the Importation of Naval-Stores" in 1704.<sup>7</sup> Commencing on January 1, 1705 for the duration of nine years, English

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<sup>6</sup> Justin Williams, "English Mercantilism and Carolina Naval Stores, 1705-1776," *The Journal of Southern History* 1, no. 2 (May 1935): 171-173; Percival Perry, "The Naval-Stores Industry in the Old South, 1790-1776," *The Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 4 (November 1968): 511; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> Colonists in the sixteenth and seventeenth century found abundant natural resources for the production of tar and pitch. Initially, settlers in Jamestown achieved moderate success producing tar and pitch. However, exorbitant shipping costs to Europe

lawmakers intended this act to achieve the threefold purpose of alleviating Britain's reliance on Nordic naval stores, defraying the shipping costs of commodities from the Americas, and curbing competition with woolens produced in the northern colonies.<sup>8</sup> By providing a bounty for each ton of naval stores brought to England, British Parliamentarians envisioned that northern colonists would abandon wool manufacturing in favor of tar and pitch production. One ton of tar or pitch garnered the importer four pounds, and one ton of rosin or turpentine paid three pounds. These men, however, wrongly assumed that New Englanders would automatically cease production of commodities that directly competed with English-made goods. Moreover, northern colonists lacked sufficient natural resources to engage in large-scale naval stores production. At the close of the seventeenth century, they had already cleared the majority of usable pine timber. Unlike their northern counterparts, southern colonists had access to vast longleaf pine forests and began exporting tar and pitch to Great Britain. Although the 1704 act did not immediately increase the amount of naval stores produced within the colonies—hostilities in Europe still kept the cost of transatlantic shipping prohibitively high—there was a rapid upsurge in the importation of American naval stores once the

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and the far more profitable cash crop tobacco prevented naval stores from gaining a foothold in the early colonies. Thomas Gamble, "Early History of the Naval Stores Industry in North America," in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), correction of page 17, 15; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> Without referencing the actual legislation, Robert B. Outland incorrectly makes the argument that, "The act, in fact, called for bounties to be paid only on naval stores produced in the New England and middle colonies." Although British lawmakers targeted the northern colonies, because of their proximity to England and their encroachment on the British woolens trade, the act permitted the payment for all naval stores originating in the Americas. Justin Williams contends, "Though the bounties were to be paid on ship supplies brought from all American plantations, the London government assumed that the northern colonies would be the prime source." Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 14; Williams, "English Mercantilism," 174.

wars ended. In 1715, colonial imports rivaled European products when English merchants imported 25,279 barrels from America and 25,947 barrels from the Baltic. The following year, America surpassed the Nordic region as England's chief supplier of tar and pitch. According to scholar Justin Williams, "After 1716 New World tar and pitch literally flooded the English market and Baltic naval stores radically declined."<sup>9</sup>

North Carolina was particularly suited to turpentine production, not only because it had abundant natural resources, but also because it lacked sufficient soil quality to cultivate other crops that would compete with these manufacturing interests. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, producers derived naval stores products from both the pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*) and the longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris* also *Pinus australis*). Primarily located along the northern Atlantic coast and the New England area, the pitch pine produced a limited amount of tar and pitch until the supply became depleted during the late 1770s. Longleaf pine, on the other hand, served as the dominant tree for the manufacturing of naval stores, because of its vast forests and highly resinous quality.<sup>10</sup> Unlike their northern counterparts, southern producers had access to a seemingly endless supply of virgin pine forests. Covering approximately sixty million to ninety million acres, these woodlands stretched from the Norfolk area of Virginia through the southern states and culminated in eastern Texas. Labeled the longleaf pine belt, because that

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<sup>9</sup> England and Wales, *An Act for encouraging the importation of naval-stores from Her Majesties plantations in America*, (London), (1704), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, Auburn University. 14 July 2014; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 13-14; Williams, "English Mercantilism," 170-171, 174-175.

<sup>10</sup> Francois Andre Michaux, "Pine Trees of the South and their Products: as Described by a French Scientist Over a Century Ago," originally published in *The North American Sylva* 1819, reprint in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), 9, 13; Outland, 14.



species of tree comprised about 80 percent of the forest, this crescent-shaped swath followed the coastal region of the country and extended one hundred to two hundred miles inland.<sup>11</sup>

Because of its biology, the longleaf pine is well suited to thrive in the southern landscape. These trees grow easily in infertile soil, clay, or sand—the type of earth that dominates the southeastern coastal plain—and possess natural adaptations that permit them to flourish in an environment prone to forest fires. As part of a semi-tropical climate, the Carolina and Gulf coasts are especially prone to thunderstorms. When hot, humid air rises and collides with cooler air, swept in from the Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico, storms with heavy lightening occur. Moreover, wiregrass, pinecones, and a perpetual layer of dry needles provide the perfect tinder when lightening does strike. Consequently, fires within longleaf forests are so prevalent that environmental author Lawrence S. Earley likens them to “rain in a rainforest.” While other trees succumb to these blazes, longleaf pines have specific traits that not only allow them to withstand extreme heat, but also to proliferate under such circumstances. Extraordinarily thick bark acts as a heat barrier and protects the trees’ internal vascular system from burning. In

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<sup>11</sup> Within the literature, there are differing accounts of the approximate size of the pine belt. Robert B. Outland places the forest’s scope somewhere between sixty to ninety million acres; while, F. V. Emerson estimates the pine belt’s coverage to be approximately two hundred and fifty million acres. This discrepancy potentially stems from the fact that the longleaf pine belt abuts another pine range that is comprised of shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*) and loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*). It is possible that Emerson incorporated these varieties of pine trees in his approximation of the longleaf pine belt. Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 14-15; F. V. Emerson, “The Southern Long-Leaf Pine Belt,” *Geographical Review* 7, no. 2 (February 1919): 81-82; William N. Byrd, Jr., “Wiregrass: The Transformation of Southeast Alabama, 1880-1930” (PhD dissertation, Auburn University, 2009), 12; William P. Jones, *The Tribe of the Black Ulysses: African American Lumber Workers in the Jim Crow South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 17.

addition, the germination process is only successful if the seeds fall on cleared earth; thus, brush fires are a vital component to the regeneration of longleaf woods.<sup>12</sup>

For all these reasons, longleaf pines made naval stores manufacturing a viable industry in eighteenth and nineteenth century North Carolina. While planters in other pine belt states viewed naval stores production as subordinate to agriculture, entrepreneurs in North Carolina were unable to depend solely on cotton cultivation and agribusiness for survival. Moreover, the poor soil quality of the state's pine belt precluded any large-scale farming in that region. According to Robert B. Outland, "North Carolina, with few other staple crops.... never lost its hold on the naval stores trade once it achieved dominance after 1720."<sup>13</sup> Home to mature longleaf pines that reached fifty to sixty feet tall with a girth of up to three feet in diameter, the state produced four marketable products—tar, pitch, spirits of turpentine or simply turpentine, and rosin. Throughout the eighteenth century, tar and pitch were the most popular products, because they were required to waterproof wooden seagoing vessels. Colonists obtained tar through burning stacked pine branches in earthen kilns. As the wood charred, it secreted a sticky, viscose substance. Workers then collected this tar in troughs

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<sup>12</sup> Byrd, "Wiregrass," 13-15; Lawrence S. Early, *Looking for Longleaf: The Fall and Rise of an American Forest* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), quotation 20, 22-27; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 15-18.

<sup>13</sup> As part of the longleaf pine belt, businessmen in states like Virginia and South Carolina also had the opportunity to engage in turpentine manufacturing. However, these men kept production on the periphery of the economy, because the states possessed sufficient soil quality to sustain large agricultural plantations. Virginians found large-scale tobacco planting more profitable than turpentine harvesting. South Carolinians, too, abandoned naval stores manufacturing when the second exportation bounty to Great Britain terminated in 1724. In order to maintain profits, businessmen in this state turned toward rice and indigo production—particularly when Parliamentarians created a six-pence-per-pound bounty for indigo in 1748. Michael Williams, *Americans and their Forests: A Historical Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 83-84; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, quotation from 8, 11, 26, 31.

located underneath the kilns. In order to produce pitch, laborers boiled tar in great vats that were housed in furnaces. Once the tar reached a more concentrated consistency, it became pitch.<sup>14</sup> Increased demand not only spurred production, but also earned these products the title of North Carolina's chief export. Between 1730 and 1733 naval stores shipments to Great Britain increased by 122 percent. In 1730 the colonies sent 33,062 barrels of tar and pitch to the motherland and in 1733 that number increased to 73,487 barrels. Over the course of the eighteenth century, these exports climbed to such levels that by 1775 North Carolina single-handedly shipped 130,000 barrels to England.<sup>15</sup>

While tar and pitch were key exports during the eighteenth century, spirits of turpentine and rosin became the principal products produced in the nineteenth century. Spirits of turpentine and rosin obtained through the distillation of longleaf resin gained popularity both commercially and domestically. Prior to the nineteenth century turpentine was primarily used in manufacturing ventures, but this exclusivity ended once it became a valuable product within the home. Although it was still employed in shipyards as a waterproofing agent, turpentine became prominent in the rubber and paint industry. As rubber manufacturing grew during the 1830s, laborers utilized it as a diluting agent. By 1855, it had become such a necessary component that India rubber production used approximately 187,000 gallons annually. The paint trade also consumed great quantities of turpentine as solvent for oil-based paints. In addition to its commercial use as a diluting agent, retailers marketed the spirits as a household paint thinner. Another turpentine-based consumer product that entered the market was a newly

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<sup>14</sup> Early, *Looking for Longleaf*, 8; Thomas Gamble, "Early History of the Naval Stores Industry," 17-20; Carroll B. Butler, *Treasures of the Longleaf Pines: Naval Stores* (Shalimar, Florida: Tarkel Publishing, 1998), 3-13.

<sup>15</sup> Justin Williams, "English Mercantilism," 176; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 32.

invented lighting fluid. Dissatisfied with tallow-dipped candles and sperm whale oil illuminants, entrepreneurs searched for other viable alternatives. After unsuccessful experimentation with pure spirits, these inventors derived a flammable mixture of alcohol and turpentine called camphene or palmetto oil. Touted as “the cheapest light known,” camphene cost 40 cents a gallon and soon replaced other types of illumination because it was inexpensive and burned strongly and more efficiently.<sup>16</sup>

In conjunction with its more practical applications, turpentine also developed a mythic reputation as a panacea. Capturing the mood of nineteenth-century consumers, Lawrence S. Earley contends that, “‘Getting turpentine’ became a mania.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, its appearance in a plethora of medicinal and household remedies is indicative of the turpentine frenzy that swept through the United States. The pungent odor of spirits seemingly cured all types of respiratory illness. When applied to the chest, the vapors acted as a decongestant. Several drops on a sugar cube reportedly cured a sore throat, and a mixture of turpentine with castor oil reduced cold symptoms. In fact, doctors so strongly believed in the curative properties of turpentine vapors that they instructed convalescing tuberculosis patients to live on naval stores farms for the duration of their recovery. Because of its powerful laxative property, turpentine also became a remedy for digestive ailments. A small dose taken orally alleviated constipation; consuming larger quantities rid the body of worms. Healers even claimed that turpentine’s topical

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<sup>16</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 6, 38-39; Perry, “The Naval-Stores Industry in the Old South,” 512-514; Butler, *Treasures of the Longleaf Pines*, 218-219; “The Southern Pine Forest—Turpentine,” *De Bow’s Review* 18 (February 1855): 190-191; Williams, *Americans and their Forests*, 158; Timothy C. Prizer, “Pining for Turpentine: Critical Nostalgia, Memory, and Commemorative Expression in the Wake of Industrial Decline,” (masters thesis, Chapel Hill, 2009), 42; *The New York Times*, “Distilling Turpentine,” May 8, 1895.

<sup>17</sup> Earley, *Looking for Longleaf*, 97.

application to the stomach drew worms out of the body. Indeed, nineteenth-century Americans saw turpentine as a cure for virtually every ailment. They applied it to cuts, bruises, sore muscles, toothaches, burns, and even the genitals of those infected with gonorrhea. So powerful were turpentine's perceived effects on the body that one contemporary author proclaimed that: "The turpentine, acting on the lungs, kidneys, and whole system, gives one a new life."<sup>18</sup>

As a result of this increased consumption, naval stores production in North Carolina intensified. Hoping to capitalize on the consumer fascination with turpentine, planters invested in large manufacturing operations and became the state's main producers. Moreover, the stability of the naval stores market coupled with a drop in cotton prices made turpentering a more secure and lucrative venture. Prior to the nineteenth century, small and moderately sized operators produced a substantial

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<sup>18</sup> The McFarland place, a turpentine operation located in St. Johns County and still functional in 1984, was the focus of a research project on the naval stores industry undertaken by the editorial office of the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS), University of Florida Gainesville. IFAS created a master videotape and catalogued the videocassettes containing research data and photographs by color code. Originally, the master and data cassettes were archived in the University of Florida Oral History Archives, Florida Museum of Natural History, Gainesville, but have since been destroyed. Original citation taken from, Robert N. Lauriault, "From Can't to Can't: the North Florida Turpentine Camp, 1900-1950," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (January, 1989): 312. Copies of some of the IFAS tapes are now located within the South Georgia Folk Life Collection, Odum Library, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia. IFAS videotape, white 5, DVD1002-55C, South Georgia Folk Life Collection, Odum Library, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia. Hereafter the tapes will be cited as IFAS videotape, [color], [call number]; Olmstead, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 346; quotation from, *The New York Times*, "Distilling Turpentine," May 8, 1895; Prizer, "Pining for Turpentine," 39-40; Francis Peyre Porcher, "Uses of Rosin and Turpentine in Old Plantation Days: The Long Leafed Pine One of God's Great Gifts to Man," in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), 29-39; Outland, 38; Butler, *Treasures of the Longleaf Pines*, 220-221.

percentage of tar, pitch, and turpentine. However, the size of these ventures shifted during the 1840s and 1850s when large slaveholders entered naval stores manufacturing. As Robert B. Outland explains: “With access to capital resources and control of large, slave labor forces, these market sensitive entrepreneurs invested in thousands of acres of previously undesirable pineland, constructed their own distilleries, and began production on a grand scale.” James R. Grist and his brother-in-law Daniel L. Russell, for example, engaged in naval stores manufacturing with a considerable number of slaves. Grist harvested turpentine in both Brunswick and Columbus County with 100 slaves. Daniel L. Russell’s Brunswick county holdings totaled 25,000 acres of pineland that he worked with 150 slaves.<sup>19</sup>

This influx of large-scale proprietors resulted from depressed cotton prices and the realization that more profits lay in turpentine production. As the Panic of 1837 weakened cotton prices, increased demand for naval stores both domestically and within English markets caused the price of turpentine to strengthen. In 1836 one pound of cotton fetched 13.3 cents. By 1839, the value decreased to 7.9 cents per pound, and bottomed out at 5.5 cents per pound in 1844. Turpentine rates, on the other hand, steadily climbed from \$2.30 per barrel to higher than \$5.00.<sup>20</sup> As a result of this market shift, North Carolina planters transferred their enslaved laborers from the cotton fields to the piney woods, prompting Frederick Law Olmstead to explain that “owners oftener see their profits in employing them [slaves] in turpentine orchards than in the cotton-

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<sup>19</sup> Perry, “The Naval-Stores Industry in the Old South,” 1790-1860,” 516-517; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, quotation from 37, 41-42. *Wilmington Herald* quoted in “A North-Carolina Farmer,” *Arator* 1, no. 2 (May 1855): 43.

<sup>20</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 43, 40.

fields.”<sup>21</sup> The transition from field to forest demonstrates that for large-scale planters in North Carolina, naval stores manufacturing provided the stability that agriculture did not. Their participation in turpentine production demonstrates that these men possessed a keen awareness of both national and international markets and an enthusiasm for economic diversification. Moreover, their use of a largely enslaved labor force and investment in considerable operations reveals the prevalence and profitability of antebellum industrialization.<sup>22</sup>

During the 1840s and 1850s, these planter-industrialists earned large profits through turpentine production. Between 1840 and 1850 naval stores manufacturing

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<sup>21</sup> Olmstead, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 338.

<sup>22</sup> Historians of southern industrialization debate the viability and profitability of manufacturing within the antebellum South. In an economic study of the South’s lack of industrial power, Fred Bateman and Thomas Weiss contend that, “The development of southern manufacturing appears to have been retarded by a general inability to transfer capital out of agriculture.” Moreover, planters feared the advent of industrialization because it threatened their “vested interest [in] the slave system.” In contrast with Bateman and Weiss’s assessment, Charles Dew demonstrates that manufacturing was both viable and profitable in the antebellum South. Through an examination of Buffalo Forge, a Virginian ironworks establishment, he determines that “slave workers had made Buffalo Forge merchant bar a premium article in the Virginia iron trade.” Fred Bateman and Thomas Weiss, *A Deplorable Scarcity: The Failure of Industrialization in the Slave Economy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 125, 121; Charles B. Dew, *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 12. For further examples see the following works. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black & White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Joyce E. Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation & Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Michele Gillespie, *Free Labor in an Unfree World: White Artisans in Slaveholding Georgia, 1789-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000); Sean Patrick Adams, *Old Dominion, Industrial Commonwealth: Coal, Politics, and Economy in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class 1800-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Tom Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South: Masters, Merchants, and Manufacturers in the Southern Interior, 1790-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

increased by approximately 34.8 percent. In 1840 operators produced 593,451 barrels and by 1850 that number reached approximately 800,000 barrels valued somewhere between \$1,700,000.00 and \$2,476,252.00.<sup>23</sup> While these numbers represent statewide profits, one local proprietor estimated that each season earned him a profit of \$300.00 per hand. According to his calculations, each worker produced 150 barrels of dip turpentine—valued at \$2.50 per barrel—and 50 barrels of scrape—valued at \$1.25 per barrel—per season. He then deducted his packaging and transportation expenses. Each barrel cost 30 cents to make and 25 cents to transport to port for shipment. He also paid \$27.50 in commissions to naval stores brokers. Another more conservative manufacturer assessed his profits at \$3,000.00 per season. He ran a South Carolinian operation with 40 laborers, who each produced 125 barrels. Assessing the price of each barrel at just under \$2.00, he made approximately \$9,000.00 in sales. After subtracting \$6,000.00 in expenses, he made a profit of \$75.00 per worker.<sup>24</sup> Despite the disparity between these two operations, naval stores remained profitable for Carolinians throughout the remainder of the antebellum era.

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<sup>23</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, 1840*, Prepared at the Department of State (Washington: Printed by Thomas Allen, 1841), 357; Percival Perry, “Naval-Stores Industry in the Old South, 1790-1860,” *The Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 4 (November 1968): 515; “The Manufacture of Turpentine in the South,” *De Bow’s Review* 8, no. 3 (March 1850): 451; J. D. B. De Bow, “Turpentine Business of North Carolina,” in *The Industrial Resources, Ect., of the Southern and Western States*, vol. 3 (New Orleans: The Office of De Bow’s Review, 1853), 350; U.S. Census Bureau, *The Statistics of the Wealth and Industry of the United States, 1870*, Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior, Francis A. Walker (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 627.

<sup>24</sup> Scrape turpentine was derived from resin remnants. It fetched a lower price at market, because it was less pure than turpentine manufactured from dipped rosin. Statistics on naval stores profits from, “The Manufacture of Turpentine in the South,” *De Bow’s Review* 8, no. 3 (March 1850): 454-455.



In order to meet the market demands of the 1840 and 1850s, however, producers embarked on what Robert B. Outland terms a “suicidal harvest” within North Carolina’s lush pine forests.<sup>25</sup> Determined to acquire as much gum as possible, naval stores manufacturers directed their laborers to cut multiple boxes and enormous streaks within a single tree. Boxing trees required workers to hollow out a shelf in the trunk of the pine to collect the sap. Streaks caused scarification on the face of the tree that made the longleaf trunk exude sap.<sup>26</sup> These practices severely weakened the pines and rendered them susceptible to high winds, forest fires, insects, and disease.<sup>27</sup> As these methods continued through multiple seasons, the trees grew increasingly weak and yielded less gum, creating a one to five year harvest period for a particular tract of timber.<sup>28</sup> Because the heyday of North Carolina’s turpentine production commenced in the 1840s, the trees that had supported the state’s foray into naval stores manufacturing were tapped to the point of exhaustion by the 1850s. Moreover, because of the longleaf’s inability to reproduce sufficiently, producers, who continued to harvest in the late 1850s, sought out virgin timber in other pine belt states.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 98.

<sup>26</sup> A. W. Schorger & H. S. Betts, *The Naval Stores Industry* (Washington D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1915), 15-16.

<sup>27</sup> Earley, *Looking for Longleaf*, 141-143; Schorger & Betts, *The Naval Stores Industry*, 25-26.

<sup>28</sup> Butler, *Treasures of the Longleaf Pines*, 19; Earley, *Looking for Longleaf*, 143-144; Albert Pridgen “Turpentine in the South Atlantic Country,” in Thomas Gamble, ed., *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption* (Savannah: Review Publishing & Printing Company, 1921), 103.

<sup>29</sup> The depleted longleaf pine forests were unable to regenerate for two primary reasons. The first obstacle the pines faced was wild hogs. These animals lived within the longleaf woods and consumed vast quantities of pinecones before they were able to sprout and take root. Even if seedlings succeeded in sprouting, hogs still made meals out of the smaller trees. In addition, longleaf pines required ground fires for successful germination because their cones only sprout on cleared soil. Moreover, these blazes

The search for new pines came to a grinding halt with the advent of the Civil War, and the conflict created a temporary cessation in naval stores production. Southern brokers feared that local hostilities would prevent them from profiting in the international naval stores trade. Consequently, the price of turpentine, rosin, and pitch dropped for the duration of the war. Moreover, in February 1861 the Confederate Congress further hurt the naval stores market when it levied an export tax on products leaving southern ports, thus increasing manufacturers' shipping expenses. While these events caused prices to hit rock bottom in the Confederacy, the cost of naval stores skyrocketed in the northern states. During the antebellum era, southern manufacturers had supplied northern and international markets via northern ports; however, President Lincoln's blockade of southern ports precluded the shipment or purchase of any naval stores regardless of the continued need for these products. Hence, the price of gum reached between \$4.50 to \$5.00 per barrel and turpentine climbed to 75 cents to 80 cents per gallon.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the war's deleterious effect on southern industry, naval stores manufacturing regained a strong foothold in 1865. Turpentine operators found the years following the war fraught with changes, and these shifts shaped the relationship between naval stores manufacturers and their laborers. Because the demand for turpentine and its sister products remained at wartime highs, scores of entrepreneurs entered the business during the late 1860s and 1870s. In addition to competing amongst each other for both

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serve a second function by destroying other vegetation that competes with the longleaf pine. Although these fires do occur naturally—as a result of lightning strikes—consistent ground clearing does require some human intervention. However, operators abandoned barren tracts, which became overgrown due to lack of fire or completely consumed by rampant natural conflagrations. Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 98-111.

<sup>30</sup> Perry, "The Naval-Stores Industry in the Old South," 1790-1776," 525; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 123-124.

land and labor, operators had to contend with land speculators and amply funded northern lumber interests for pine belt timber. This scramble for pines and workers decreased the profit margin for naval stores companies and caused these entrepreneurs to rely on factorage houses for loans to fund their operations. Moreover, in an attempt to further offset the cost of production, turpentine manufacturers embarked on a course of action to establish labor efficiency through work standardization and the mobilization of repressive labor legislation.<sup>31</sup>

While North Carolina's forests had almost exclusively served as the locus of production during the antebellum era, destructive harvesting techniques forced manufacturers to transfer their operations to tracts of longleaf in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. These men were drawn South by access to verdant pine tracts and swayed by the same booster literature meant to attract northern investors. Four years after the close of the Civil War, the state of Alabama boasted over 7 million acres of longleaf that yielded "tar, pitch, and turpentine in great abundance." As one writer bragged, "all the gold production of California would not equal it in value."<sup>32</sup> Alabama's pride in its natural resources and call for investors was, however, premature, because the majority of its longleaf pines were held under the Southern Homestead Act of 1866. This legislation designated roughly 47.7 million acres of federal land in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi for the settlement of homesteaders and freedpeople. Intended to prevent speculation and land monopolies, this act also barred the cash purchase of these acres. Much to the chagrin of naval stores entrepreneurs and other industrialists,

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<sup>31</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 122, 126; Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines," 30-32.

<sup>32</sup> Alabama Commissioner of Industrial Resources, *Alabama: A Few Remarks Upon Her Resources, and the Advantages She Possesses as Inducements to Immigration* (Montgomery: Jno. G. Stokes & Co., 1869), 4-5; Byrd, "Wiregrass," 85-86.

the Homestead Act sequestered some of Alabama's most valuable assets: longleaf pine forests and natural coal and iron deposits. Placing pressure on Congress, these men successfully lobbied to have the legislation reversed in 1876.<sup>33</sup>

The repeal of the Southern Homestead Act had a dramatic effect on late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century naval stores manufacturing. With the release of hundreds of thousands of acres within Alabama and Florida, the northern entrepreneurs and lumbermen, who had so zealously depleted timber in the Great Lakes region, now descended upon southern forests.<sup>34</sup> Spurred by the exhortations of booster literature that promised "immense forests, which cover uninterruptedly hundreds of thousands of acres," these men competed with southern turpentine producers for tracts of pine.<sup>35</sup>

During the late 1870s and 1880s, both northern and southern investors purchased 878,413 acres of federal land in Alabama and 1,021,112 acres in Florida. Timber prices ranged from \$1.00 to \$1.25 per acre for serviceable timber and bottomed out at the bargain price of 25 cents for less desirable swamplands located in Florida and along the Gulf Coast.<sup>36</sup>

Historians have suggested that this influx of northern financiers, whose business ventures focused on extractive industries, created a colonial economy within the South.

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Wallace Gates, "Federal Land Policy in the South 1866-1888," *The Journal of Southern History* 6, no. 3 (August 1940): 304-305, 310-311; Byrd, "Wiregrass," 89-90.

<sup>34</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* (1951; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 116-117; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 124. For a detailed description of Great Lakes lumbering see: Williams, *Americans and their Forests*, 193-237.

<sup>35</sup> I. F. Culver, Commissioner of Agriculture, *Alabama's... Resources and Future Prospects* (Birmingham: Roberts & Son, 1897), 251.

<sup>36</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 136-137; Gates, "Federal Land Policy in the South," 315; Williams, *Americans and their Forests*, 242; William Frazer & John J. Guthrie, Jr., *The Florida Land Boom: Speculation, Money, and the Banks* (Westport: Quorum Books, 1995), 21.

Beginning with C. Vann Woodward's assertion that, "the penetration of the South by Northeastern capital continued at an accelerated pace [throughout the 1890s]," this school of thought viewed southern industries as beholden to northern funding, and southern businessmen as auxiliaries to their northern counterparts.<sup>37</sup> While this assertion holds true for certain southern ventures—particularly railroad construction and the consolidation of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company—naval stores manufacturing's relationship to northern capital was more complicated.<sup>38</sup> Michael Tegeder contends that "a colonial economic mentality was forced upon" turpentine producers because they toiled in an "underdeveloped economy." He finds that this fledgling economy left naval stores men perpetually indebted and pushed them to the periphery of southern industry.<sup>39</sup> Because these locals lacked sufficient capital, as Paul Gates notes, northern investors acquired "large blocks of the most valuable strands of timber" when federal lands opened.<sup>40</sup> In sharp contrast with Tegeder's assessment, however, southern naval stores entrepreneurs zealously participated in the scramble for southern land. Although they found it difficult to obtain local funding, these men still got swept up in the zeitgeist and ascribed to the mantra that "You can make a living easier and get rich faster" through the acquisition of vast longleaf tracts.<sup>41</sup> In both Alabama and Florida, southerners purchased the majority of federal pineland between 1880 and 1888. With the acquisition of 463,242 acres, southern manufacturers procured approximately 79.1 percent of Alabama's federal

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<sup>37</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 292.

<sup>38</sup> In 1894 J. P. Morgan established the Southern Railway from the remnants of two failed southern ventures, and in 1907 U.S. Steel became the primary shareholder of Tennessee Coal and Iron. *Ibid.*, 292, 300.

<sup>39</sup> Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines," 31-32.

<sup>40</sup> Gates, "Federal Land Policy in the South 1866-1888," 304.

<sup>41</sup> I. F. Culver, Commissioner of Agriculture, *Alabama's... Resources and Future Prospects* (Birmingham: Roberts & Son, 1897), 251.

timber, leaving northern interests with the remaining 121,983 acres. Of the 189,415 acres purchased in Florida, northern interests acquired only 64,243 acres of timber, while southern investors obtained 125,172 acres.<sup>42</sup>

The arrival of northern lumber interests did complicate the economic position of southern naval stores manufacturers. During the antebellum era, turpentine producers faced little competition for access to timber. Because the majority of early-nineteenth-century lumber originated from the northeast and the Great Lakes regions, southern output represented a modest 1 to 1.9 percent of the national production in 1849 and 2 to 3.9 percent in 1859.<sup>43</sup> Once these supplies became depleted, northern lumbermen moved production to the fertile forests of the southern pine belt. This shift took a toll on local naval stores manufacturers, because the arrival of a competing industry drove up the cost of both available timber and labor. During the 1880s, Georgian pines sold for \$2.00 to \$3.00 per acre, which represented an approximate 60 to 140 percent increase from the

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<sup>42</sup> These acreages are based upon land sales to individuals that total more than 5,000 acres per purchase. It is also important to note that these figures do not include the purchase of federal land by foreign interests or the sale of federal swampland. In addition to local entrepreneurs, foreign investors acquired vast acreages of land. For example, Englishman Daniel F. Sullivan purchased 100,000 acres in Florida and 150,000 acres in Alabama; thereby gaining a controlling interest in the shipping ports of Pensacola and Mobile. In addition, millions of acres of Floridian timber passed into the hands of British and Scottish investors. In the 1883 a Scottish company acquired 500,000 acres of pines; during the same time period, Sir Edward Reed obtained 1.6 million acres. In the 1880s, the federal government also unloaded millions of acres of swampland, with the largest purchase by Philadelphian investors totaling 4 million acres. Gates, "Federal Land Policy in the South," 322-323; Williams, *Americans and their Forests*, 241-243.

<sup>43</sup> Byrd, "Wiregrass," 23-26; Williams, *Americans and their Forests*, 161-163.

price of federal land.<sup>44</sup> Lacking the liquid capital to challenge this incursion, turpentine producers increasingly relied on factorage houses to fund their operations.

Factorage houses based within the major port cities of Jacksonville and Pensacola, Florida, Savannah, Georgia, and Mobile, Alabama served as both commodities brokers and lending institutions for naval stores operators. These businesses originated in the antebellum era to facilitate transactions between large producers and consumers. For a modest 2.5 percent commission, factors accepted consignments of oleoresin products, arranged shipments, and dealt with any issues that might arise between their client and purchasers. Factorage houses also extended funds to naval stores manufacturers and secured supplies for their operations on credit. This service granted turpentine producers vital access to funds, a benefit that was denied them by local banks. Financial institutions were loath to extend loans to naval stores manufacturers, because of the transitory nature of their operations and their lack of tangible assets.<sup>45</sup>

While factors played a prominent role during the antebellum era, they became even more crucial during the 1880s and 1890s. In the postbellum era, factors took on a regulatory role within the industry. Operating within a high margin of risk through granting loans to turpentine producers with little or no collateral, these businessmen found themselves in a precarious position. Factors only received repayment of loans through the successful sale of consigned naval stores. However, during the 1880s the rapid expansion and the lack of product regulation challenged the effective sale of turpentine products. Between 1870 and 1900, the shipment of spirits of turpentine and

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Gamble, "Charleston's Story as a Naval Stores Emporium," in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), 35.

<sup>45</sup> Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines," 48; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 56.

rosin from port cities in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia grew exponentially. Within these thirty years, Alabama's export of rosin and turpentine rose from 885 to 58,646 barrels; Florida's from 518 to 243,452 barrels; and Georgia's from 519 to 1,408,928 barrels. Moreover, as the world's main hub for naval stores trade and distribution, Savannah's port received 1.6 million barrels of products during the 1896-1897 season.<sup>46</sup> With mammoth quantities of barrels passing through their offices on a daily basis, factors had no means of monitoring the quality of their merchandise. Moreover, during these same years, prices for turpentine products, although consistent, remained low. According to naval stores inspector Harris M. King, "Operators were working almost hopelessly against financial losses, and few indeed were able to wind up a year's work and break even."<sup>47</sup> Between 1883 and 1900 the average price for spirits of turpentine hovered between 30 cents and 34.5 cents per gallon with a low of 27 cents in the years 1884 to 1886.<sup>48</sup> As a result of these negligible profit margins, unscrupulous producers padded their yields by adding mineral oil to turpentine barrels. When purchasers—particularly paint and varnish companies—discovered the adulterated merchandise, they would refuse shipment, the factor would receive back the barrels, and subsequently return them to the producer. This type of transaction hurt the factor more than the naval stores operator.

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<sup>46</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Volume IX: Manufactures, Part III: Special Reports on Selected Industries* (Washington: United States Census Office, 1902), 1007; Thomas Gamble, "Savannah as a Naval Stores Port, 1875-1920," in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), 61.

<sup>47</sup> Harris M. King, "How the Purity of Naval Stores is Protected," in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), 67.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Gamble, "The Production of Naval Stores in the United States," in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), 83; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 149.



Producers simply rectified the problem by adding more spirits to the tainted barrel; whereas, factors risked losing their loan repayment, commission, and potentially their reputation.<sup>49</sup>

With a growing need to protect their interests and manage the naval stores market, factors in Savannah established the Naval Stores Exchange in July 1882. In existence for a year, this council set prices and reported daily sales statistics for turpentine and other oleoresin products. Because of its early success, the Exchange grew to encompass all commerce that passed through the city's port. Then renamed the Savannah Board of Trade and divided into five departments, the Naval Stores Department became a subsidiary of the Commercial Bureau. A council of three factors and three exporters or brokers headed the Quotations Committee, the main department within the naval stores division. Serving as the primary regulatory board, they developed quality and grading standards, structured and enforced inspection regulations, and moderated disagreements between members. In addition, the committee's principal responsibility was to set and report the daily prices of naval stores products.<sup>50</sup>

Conducting 95 percent of the port's naval stores exchange within its walls, the Board of Trade opened daily to facilitate the transactions between factors and consumers. Each morning, factors informally released an accounting of their daily product offerings to the city's brokerage offices. Once the bidding hour commenced, these men assembled on the trading room's floor of the Board of Trade, and the factors posted a formal list of

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<sup>49</sup> King, "How the Purity of Naval Stores is Protected," 67.

<sup>50</sup> Gamble, "Savannah as a Naval Stores Port," 60; Thomas Purse, "How the Savannah Board of Trade Fixes Prices and Regulates Trade," in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), 55-56; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 140.

available products, specifying the quantity of barrels and quality of grades. Brokers then submitted offers in writing to the board's chairman. After the chairman inspected the bids, he announced the highest offer and presented the factor with the opportunity to accept or reject the price. At the close of the bidding hour, the Quotations Committee tabulated the sales, declared the "tone of the market," and set the day's value for naval stores.<sup>51</sup> This system set the precedent for naval stores sales within the port and continued without exception until the market grew remarkably strong. When turpentine products were in high demand, the committee permitted direct sales between factors and brokers. Sold "in barbershop fashion," factors set the prices of their merchandise and offered it on a first come first serve basis to consumers.<sup>52</sup> This flexibility in procedure demonstrates that the Quotations Committee's chief concern was the maintenance of a steady market. Through the use of a central trading floor, the council could control prices through the regulation of sales, and prevent products from flooding the market. In times of high demand, the committee permitted the operation of a free market.

In addition to sustaining price values, the Naval Stores Department implemented a set of regulatory standards for the packaging and grading of oleoresin products. As Robert Outland demonstrates, the purpose of this system was to "institute more uniform industry product regulations to replace the existing chaotic, state-by-state system that resulted in product inconsistency."<sup>53</sup> In 1894, the Savannah Board of Trade established the office of Supervising Inspector of Naval Stores. The inspector served as an

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<sup>51</sup> Purse, "How the Savannah Board of Trade Fixes Prices and Regulates Trade," 56.

<sup>52</sup> Spencer P. Shetter, "The Old Savannah Naval Stores Exchange," in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), 63.

<sup>53</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 140.

“impartial arbiter,” who enforced grading, weighing, and cooperage guidelines. In order to safeguard the quality and uniformity of naval stores products, the inspectors maintained samples of appropriate spirits and rosin grades. To guarantee the legitimacy of these grading standards, the samples received an endorsement stamp that read: “Approved by the Savannah Board of Trade.” They also ensured that turpentine barrels were filled within one gallon of capacity and appropriately sealed with at least two coats of glue. In addition, inspectors mediated any dispute pertaining to these regulations. Although these guidelines only concerned products exiting through the Savannah Board of Trade, they came to represent the industry criterion and subsequently the federal standard in the 1920s.<sup>54</sup> The Savannah Board of Trade and the implementation of regulations governing the sale and grading of oleoresin products represented a significant advance in the naval stores industry. The advent of regulation indicated that southern naval stores entrepreneurs were keenly aware of market demands and readily participated in capitalistic enterprises. Moreover, this transition demonstrates that turpentine producers were not casualties of a colonial economy, but active participants in both national and international markets. Through standardization and efficiency, these men propelled their businesses into more structured and profitable enterprises.

After establishing business protocols, naval stores manufacturers turned their attention to growing labor problems within the industry. The turn of the century witnessed a dramatic shift in the process of turpentine extraction and the scramble for labor. Since the 1870s, naval stores manufacturing had rapidly increased—in 1869 a

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<sup>54</sup> King, “How the Purity of Naval Stores is Protected,” 67; Purse, “How the Savannah Board of Trade Fixes Prices and Regulates Trade,” 56-57; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 140.

mere 2,638 men toiled within this industry and within thirty years that number had increased approximately sixteen-fold to 41,864 men. Railroads facilitated transportation to more remote areas of pineland and large lumber companies vied with turpentine manufacturers for available acreage. As naval stores operations expanded into the virgin forests of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, an agricultural boom coupled with industrial growth swept through the South. Textile mills, steel and iron manufacturing plants, and tobacco factories dotted the landscape. Entrepreneurs discovered and extracted natural resources, such as coal and phosphate. These burgeoning industries increased the demand for labor within all sectors of the economy. Consequently, naval stores manufacturers had to compete with other, more appealing, employers for a workforce.<sup>55</sup> In an attempt to rectify this issue, operators devised a twofold strategy to retain laborers: the mobilization of restrictive labor legislation and the implementation of corporate efficiency and welfare programs.

The close of the Civil War realigned naval stores producers' relationship with their laborers. During the antebellum era, large-scale operators harvested tracts of pines with a predominately enslaved workforce. Through purchase or hire from other slaveholders, turpentine manufacturers acquired a constant supply of labor. Although these men were guaranteed stable and reliable workers through the slave system, naval stores entrepreneurs still worried that lack of supervision within the woods would destabilize labor discipline. Because turpentine harvesting required individuals to spend solitary hours in the woods, operators employed the task system to manage their workers. Supervisors assigned slaves a weekly quota of trees and employed a practice of rewards

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<sup>55</sup> Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 106-125; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 132, 136, 163; Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines," 111.

for exceeding their assignment or punishment for failure to meet this allocation.<sup>56</sup> This system proved effective during the antebellum era and operators continued to employ it well into the twentieth century.

Although the task system efficiently maintained labor within the woods, in the postbellum era naval stores operators had trouble retaining a reliable workforce. Despite the best assertions of boosters that, “the free labor system is working well, and planters and others employing hands already have larger profits than under the slave system,” turpentine manufacturers and other businessmen, particularly large plantation owners, relied on coercive labor legislation to keep expenses low and to maintain a steady labor supply.<sup>57</sup> Vagrancy statutes, enacted during Reconstruction and reestablished after Redemption, compelled African Americans to sign and comply with labor contracts. Described by journalist Douglas Blackmon as a device that allowed “white farmers to recapture their former slaves,” these vaguely worded acts criminalized the failure to maintain gainful employment.<sup>58</sup> Viewing these statutes as an essential component to retaining a constant workforce, turpentine manufacturers joined the Georgia-Florida Sawmill Association, and demanded more stringent vagrancy laws and other legislation that would protect their interests. As a result, local governments passed several laws

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<sup>56</sup> James Battle Averitt, “Turpentine with Slaves in the 30’s and 40’s,” in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), 25-26; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 78-79; Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 78-79.

<sup>57</sup> Alabama Commissioner of Industrial Resources, *Alabama: A Few Remarks Upon Her Resources, and the Advantages She Possesses as Inducements to Immigration* (Montgomery: Jno. G. Stokes & Co., 1869), 22.

<sup>58</sup> Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday 2008), 53.

sympathetic to the naval stores agenda.<sup>59</sup> In 1891, Florida codified its first “false pretenses” statute that prohibited laborers, who had received advancements of money or goods in return for work, from leaving their place of employment. For both naval stores operators and workers, these laws had important ramifications. According to Georgian naval stores producer Albert Pridgen, “The labor problem in the industry promises to become more acute from year to year.” In his estimation, workers absconded from turpentine camps as soon as they received their first pay advance, and this law gave operators a modicum of protection under the law.<sup>60</sup> For laborers, this statute had more dire consequences: it sanctioned debt peonage. Men and women within the industry typically began their terms of employment in debt. Charged for transportation costs and advanced goods from a company store, these laborers were effectively bound to their employer until the debt was paid in full.

While vagrancy and “false pretenses” statutes aimed at keeping workers tied to an employer, enticement acts and emigrant-agent laws indicate the tactics operators used to obtain and control labor. Naval stores producers would send scouts to infiltrate competing firms’ camps to seduce laborers with artificial promises of better pay and conditions. Enticement acts made this custom illegal and had a two-fold effect on labor within the industry. These laws solidified operators’ dominance over their hands by fostering an “owner-type relationship,” and lack of competition theoretically lowered the price of labor. Emigrant-agent laws functioned under the same principle as the enticement acts. These statutes levied high licensing fees on labor agents, who

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<sup>59</sup> Jerrell H. Shofner, “Forced Labor in the Florida Forests 1880-1950,” *Journal of Forest History* 25, no. 1 (January 1981): 15-16.

<sup>60</sup> Pridgen, “Turpentine in the South Atlantic Country,” 104.

transported workers from one state to another. Naval stores producers embraced this restrictive labor legislation and used it to their advantage. “False pretenses” and enticement acts reinforced turpentine operators’ belief that they “owned” the laborers within the piney woods, and gave these men the mechanism with which to preserve a viable labor force through involuntary servitude.<sup>61</sup>

In conjunction with restrictive labor legislation, some of the larger naval stores companies also embarked on a program of corporate efficiency. Representative of large-scale turpentine manufacturers, the Kaul Lumber Company serves as a prime example of an operation that embraced both labor legislation and work efficiency. Much like other large outfits within the South, the Kaul Lumber Company originated during the land prospecting boom of the 1880s and 1890s. In 1889, John Lanzel Kaul—the company’s founder—traveled to the southern pine belt in search of sizable tracts of available timber. Settling on vast stretches of longleafs in Hollins, Alabama, this Pennsylvania native purchased one-fourth interest in Alabama’s Sample Lumber Company in 1890. After acting as secretary and treasurer for one year, John Kaul consolidated his timber interests with that of the Sample Lumber Company and renamed his business the Kaul Lumber Company.<sup>62</sup>

Much like other lumber ventures with northern origins, the Kaul Lumber Company’s primary business was lumber production. Owners periodically operated a

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<sup>61</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 166-167; Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 106-107; *The Acts and Resolutions Adopted by the Legislature of Florida* (Jacksonville: The Times-Union Book and Job Office, 1891), chapter 4032, p. 57-58; William Cohen, *At Freedom’s Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control 1861-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 232-234.

<sup>62</sup> *American Lumbermen: The Personal History and Public and Business Achievements of One Hundred Eminent Lumbermen of the United States* (Chicago: the American Lumberman, 1906), 265-267.

naval stores division when manufacturing proved profitable.<sup>63</sup> Kaul's turpentine operation was centered in Bibb County, Alabama. Although it is unclear if the proprietors created this division with the incorporation of the company, evidence suggests that the turpentine outfit existed from at least 1905 to 1910. Financial statements reveal that in December 1905 naval stores manufacturing netted the company \$14,583.35 in profits. Despite these financial gains, Kaul liquidated this division of the company in 1910 and transferred all the equipment to George R. Burton of Talladega, Alabama for his naval stores outfit, located in Valdosta, Georgia.<sup>64</sup> Around 1918, management reinstated the naval stores division and it remained in operation until at least 1926.

While the naval stores department remained operational, the company officers' chief concern was the maintenance of a steady labor supply. In the 1920s, both the lumber and naval stores division embarked on a concerted effort to increase company efficiency through the employment of effective management. Through correspondence with the management engineers at the Management Service Company of Chicago, Illinois, administrators at Kaul instituted programs recommended by these efficiency experts. In a pamphlet attached to a packet of their communications, productivity specialists discouraged promotions within the company. They believed that foremen,

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<sup>63</sup> Because of the transitory nature of naval stores production, turpentine companies typically burned their records when they transferred locations. Consequently, company records of naval stores operations are practically nonexistent. The most complete records of turpentine companies are typically those outfits that were attached to a lumber operation, and even those are spotty at best. I have chosen to examine the Kaul Lumber Company because this operation has been rarely treated in the secondary literature. Moreover, it shares characteristics with other lumber and turpentine companies. For a treatment of the Jackson Lumber Company, see Byrd, "Wiregrass."

<sup>64</sup> Kaul Lumber Company Financial Statement, December 1905, Kaul Lumber Company Records File #1230.10.63 G-27, Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham, Alabama. Hereafter cited as, Kaul Lumber Company Records.



who had previously toiled as laborers, would never truly understand the company's best interests. According to the article's author, Harold Attwood, "Foremen who have been promoted from the ranks of workers are apt to be astride of a 'mental fence', most of the time." Moreover, when labor unrest occurred, a foreman with labor experience "is pulled toward the worker's side of the fence and may take their part, forgetting that he is management's representative."<sup>65</sup> In keeping with this advice, senior officers at Kaul hired trained managers for the naval stores division. Their first supervisor, T. E. Brett, took up the post from 1918 to 1919. Receiving a salary of \$250 a month, he was responsible for the entirety of Kaul's turpentine operation.<sup>66</sup> Hugh Adams followed T. E. Brett as chief of department from 1919 to 1927. Although he received the same monthly pay as Brett, Adams's contract included a significant change. In 1919 Adams received 2 percent of the company's profits as a bonus if his charges harvested at least fifty-five barrels of spirits of turpentine. Beginning in 1921, Adams's laborers only had to produce fifty barrels of spirits for him to receive a yearly 6 percent bonus.<sup>67</sup> The addition and subsequent increase of Adams's bonus demonstrates that the Kaul Lumber Company ascribed to the theory that monetary incentives successfully increased production.

In addition to fostering efficient management techniques, the Kaul Lumber Company also mobilized repressive labor legislation to maintain their workforce. In 1926, company management contacted its legal team regarding an issue of labor stealing.

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<sup>65</sup> The Management Service Company to Kaul Lumber Company, 20 March 1928, Kaul Lumber Company Records; Harold Attwood, "The Foreman's Mental Attitude," *The Bulletin Board* 2, no. 3 (no date), stapled to a letter from The Management Service Company to Kaul Lumber Company, 1 February 1928, Kaul Lumber Company Records.

<sup>66</sup> Mr. Headdy to T. E. Brett, 28 March 1918, Kaul Lumber Company Records; Mr. Headdy to T. E. Brett, 28 November 1918, Kaul Lumber Company Records.

<sup>67</sup> Hugh Adams Employment Contracts 1919-1927, Kaul Lumber Company Records.

According to Kaul's supervisors, a naval stores hand had accepted a new position at an operation located in Mississippi. Despite having "no positive evidence of the fact that any of your turpentine laborers have been persuaded to leave," Kaul officials demanded recourse against the Mississippian, who brought a truck onto their property and collected the employee, his family, and belongings and transported them out of state. The law offices of Bradley, Baldwin, All & White, however, provided management with a tempered response. Because the worker "paid all of his indebtedness to you before leaving....It appears to us that you are without remedy against the circumstances."<sup>68</sup> Although their lawyers refused to help them prosecute the offending operator, Kaul's attempted mobilization of repressive labor legislation demonstrated their commitment to securing their labor force.

The development and expansion of the naval stores industry in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century South had a profound influence on the relationship between turpentine manufacturers and their workforce. Rapid growth during the antebellum era brought on by "turpentine mania," depleted North Carolina's forests and caused producers to transfer their operations to the pines of Georgia, Alabama, and Florida. In addition, the culmination of the Civil War further spurred industrial expansion. Wartime demand for naval stores transformed low-level operations to grand-scale enterprises concurrently with the transition from enslaved to free labor. Consequently, sizable manufacturers, who had previously worked tracts of timber with a captive workforce, found themselves bereft of the labor security that slavery had ensured. Moreover, emancipation afforded previously enslaved workers with the opportunity to seek more

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<sup>68</sup> Bradley, Baldwin, All & White, 25 March 1926, Kaul Lumber Company Records.

appealing employment in other industries. In order to preserve a constant labor supply, naval stores producers turned toward restrictive labor legislation and management efficiency. Vagrancy and “false pretenses” statutes in conjunction with enticement and anti-emigrant laws set a precedent for operators to maintain strict control over their workforce. Despite these efforts, the men and women who toiled in the turpentine forests developed work patterns and agendas of their own.

## Chapter 2: Not “Outlaw Work Carried on by Outlaws”: Recasting Labor within the Longleaf Pine Belt

“Turpentine niggers are a class by themselves,” explained the foreman of a Floridian naval stores camp. He continued: “They are different from town niggers, farm laborers, or any other kind. Mostly they are born and raised in the camps, and don’t know much about anything else. They seldom go to town, and few of them ever saw the inside of a schoolhouse.”<sup>1</sup> Stemming from the nature of work and the isolation of the camps, this depiction of African American turpentine hands originated during the late nineteenth century and influenced the perception of all laborers within the industry, regardless of race. Monolithically described as single black men, who were “a peculiar, separate, independent group of people... [that had] never done anything but make gum or turpentine,” these workers gained a reputation for leading a transitory existence on the periphery of civilization.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, both contemporary observers and more recent historians have characterized naval stores workers as wild and violent frontiersmen, who rarely formed social bonds and ascribed to a rough and tumble way of life.

Although turpentine harvesting and manufacture was both transient and remote, labeling naval stores production as “outlaw work carried on by outlaws” is a

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<sup>1</sup> Unidentified turpentine foreman quoted in, Stetson Kennedy, *Palmetto Country* (1942; reprint, Tallahassee: Florida A & M University Press, 1989), 265.

<sup>2</sup> Inman F. Eldredge, interviewed by Elwood R. Maunder, February 3, 1959, in *Voices from the South: Recollections of Four Foresters: Interviews with Inman F. Eldredge, Elwood L. Demmon, Walter J. Damtoft, Clinton H. Coulter* (Santa Cruz: Forest History Society, Inc., 1977), 36.

mischaracterization that has become deeply entrenched within the historiography of the industry.<sup>3</sup> Describing turpentine laborers in Mississippi, historian Nollie Hickman wrote in 1962 that, “In the period between 1895 and 1908 many of the Negroes who migrated to Mississippi were criminals and escaped convicts.” Such lawlessness engendered brutality within the supervisory ranks according to Hickman, because foremen and woodsriders required weapons for self-protection and employed extralegal violence to maintain order.<sup>4</sup> In his opinion, the atmosphere in the piney woods fostered dangerous and debased behavior. Dennis Smith, a turpentine worker interviewed by Hickman, characterized gum harvesting as “outlaw work carried on by outlaws.”<sup>5</sup>

Following the publication of Hickman’s monograph, scholars mobilized Smith’s quotation to craft arguments that inextricably linked turpentine laborers with violence, gambling, and a crude existence.<sup>6</sup> Maintaining that Spartan conditions at woodland outposts caused workers to abandon their employment and operators to forcibly return indebted hands, Pete Daniel concluded that, “The savagery and lawlessness duplicated frontier conditions; violence and peonage became a standard way of life in the turpentine

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<sup>3</sup> Dennis Smith quoted in Nollie Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest: Lumbering in the Longleaf Pine Belt 1840-1915* (University: The University of Mississippi Press, 1962), 147. As part of his research for *Mississippi Harvest*, Nollie Hickman conducted a series of interviews with naval stores manufacturers and their laborers. On July 12, 1954, Hickman spoke with Dennis Smith, a turpentine hand from Mississippi, and included this quotation in his assessment of the character of naval stores laborers. See Hickman, 288.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, (quotation from) 145, 144.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>6</sup> Scholars who have quoted Smith include: Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South 1901-1969* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 37; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 126; Lawrence S. Earley, *Looking for Longleaf: The Fall and Rise of an American Forest* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 137.

woods.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this ruthlessness further stigmatized naval stores laborers, because manufacturers maintained strict authority over their workforce. Sharing Daniel’s assessment of savagery in the woods, Edward Ayers contends that white operators’ domination of their laborers cultivated scorn even from other African Americans: “Turpentine workers met disdain from other blacks, including those who worked in the lumber mills, for being so much under the control of whites...and for having a large number of criminals among them.”<sup>8</sup> While these depictions shed light on the harsher aspects of labor in the piney woods, the consistent representation of naval stores hands as vulgar bandits distorts the common life and labor practices of these workers.

Although turpentine production was seasonal and transitory, laborers maintained connections with relatives, established new families within the camps, and shared similar experiences with workers in other industries. Moreover, through an evaluation of the workforce composition, it becomes evident that labor within the woods was not as racially stratified as scholars have previously thought. While the majority of turpentine hands were black men, they were not confined by a rigid hierarchy that relegated them to manual labor. Through skill and knowledge of turpentine extraction, these men had the possibility of rising to the position of woods rider—a job that entailed supervising laborers within the forests and maintaining order at the camps. Despite this upward mobility for African American men, it is important to note that the reverse rarely held true for native white workers. These men traditionally occupied supervisory positions

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery*, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 126.

and rarely toiled in work crews within the woods.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, white laborers became stigmatized for toiling in the woods, because these jobs were traditionally considered African American. In addition to male workers, women and children also participated in naval stores harvesting. Although they were not the primary earners, their contributions were vital to the maintenance of the family. Moreover, while other industrial workers organized to improve conditions and increase wages, naval stores laborers did not overtly protest, but expressed their discontent through moving from one turpentine orchard to another.

The late nineteenth century represented a time of sweeping change for naval stores workers. Following Reconstruction, freed people who had harvested gum while enslaved remained within the industry; others made the shift from field work to turpentine production. Concurrently, destructive harvesting techniques depleted the forests of North Carolina and caused producers to move their turpentine operations to the verdant pines of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. Joining manufacturers in new states, African American men and women negotiated two postwar transitions, one from slavery to freedom and the other from agricultural to industrial labor. For white workers, the years after the Civil War were also transformative. Hostility toward wage labor and competition with black workers drew these men into a shifting discourse of race and labor. Despite these changing dynamics in the postbellum era, physical work within the woods remained a constant.

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<sup>9</sup> There are, of course, exceptions to this statement. As discussed in chapter 4, the naval stores division of the Putnam Lumber Company held white immigrant workers in a state of peonage. In addition, during the 1920s and 1930s, several turpentine white producers from chapter 5 remember working their way through the ranks of dipper, chipper, and then woods rider before they became owners of naval stores operations.

Each year, the turpentine season commenced at the start of November, when laborers began preparing the pines for harvest. Using long-headed axes, these men started the “boxing” process by cutting three horizontal gashes into the tree’s trunk. The “boxer” would then hollow out the bark and wood between the initial slashes to form a conical “box,” used to collect sap in the trunk of the tree. The length and placement of these boxes depended on the size and age of the tree. Mature pines could sustain up to three boxes cut horizontally around the trunk, with each cavity measuring approximately twelve to fourteen inches wide, seven inches tall, and three and a half inches deep. Younger longleafs maintained one box that could be as small as eight inches across. The same variability also held true for the height of the box from the ground. In larger trees, workers cut boxes approximately eight to twelve inches above the ground and in smaller trees approximately five to six inches above the ground.<sup>10</sup>

In the winter months, laborers entered the woods in squads of six to ten men. During the antebellum era, enslaved boxers had toiled under the task system with each worker tasked individually. Men had from sunup to sundown to complete their assignment. Despite their desire for profitability, turpentine manufacturers were more concerned with accuracy than volume, because incorrectly cut boxes would result in a low gum yield. Experienced hands could complete a box in four to eight minutes and possessed the ability to chop approximately seventy-five to ninety boxes a day with an average of 450 to 500 boxes a week. Inexperienced laborers averaged about fifty boxes a

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<sup>10</sup> “Production of Turpentine in Alabama,” *De Bow’s Review* 7 (December 1849): 561; Robert B. Outland III, *Tapping the Pines* (Baton Rouge: The Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 68; A. W. Schorger & H. S. Betts, *The Naval Stores Industry* (Washington D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1915), 15; “Turpentine: Hints for Those about to Engage in Its Manufacture,” *De Bow’s Review* 19 (October 1855): 486.



day and received a much lower task, because “nothing [is] gained by tasking them too high, until they have got well used to the proper shape of the boxes.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, operators tasked hands according to their skill. In the postbellum era, however, manufacturers abandoned the task system and compensated workers for piecework. In 1901, turpentine proprietors paid 1.5 cents per box. At this rate, skilled workers had the ability to earn between \$1.12 and \$2.00 a day.<sup>12</sup>

After boxing terminated in the beginning of March, workers began the “cornering” process. Armed with standard axes, squads of two men—ideally one left-handed and one right-handed—descended on the longleaf forests. Each laborer removed a one-inch thick chip above the top of the box. The left and right channel extended above the box to form a V-shaped channel used to guide the gum into the box. As with boxing, hands performed this task at a fast pace with experienced workers producing 500 to 600 corners a day and roughly 8,000 boxes in a season.<sup>13</sup>

Requiring not only specialized tools, but also practiced skill, chipping proved to be the most challenging step in turpentine harvesting. Deemed “the hardest work of all”

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<sup>11</sup> Schorger & Betts, *The Naval Stores Industry*, 15; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 69; Mr. Williams Interview, IFAS videotape, White 4, DVD1002.54C; “Turpentine: Hints for Those about to Engage in Its Manufacture,” *De Bow’s Review* 19 (October 1855): 486

<sup>12</sup> Schorger & Betts, 15; E. B. Bailey’s Testimony Concerning the Worth of the Convicts, 2 March 1901, Before the Board of State Institutions, Florida, quoted in Noel Gordon Carper, “The Convict-Lease System in Florida, 1866-1923” (PhD dissertation, Florida State University, 1964), 392. General Bailey’s assumption that free workers could earn over \$2.00 a day is extremely high. At a pay rate of 1.5 cents per box, a laborer would have to cut at least 134 boxes to earn \$2.01 a day. In order to reach that number, a worker who chopped at a rate of four minutes would have to box continuously for 8 hours and 56 minutes. Moreover, this time frame does not allow for travel between trees or breaks.

<sup>13</sup> Schorger & Betts, *The Naval Stores Industry*, 16; “Turpentine: Hints for Those about to Engage in Its Manufacture,” *De Bow’s Review* 19 (October 1855): 486; “Production of Turpentine in Alabama,” *De Bow’s Review* 7 (December 1849): 561.

by Captain Powell, a Floridian camp supervisor, chipping occurred at weekly intervals for thirty-four weeks after cornering.<sup>14</sup> Laborers used a “hack,” a specially developed tool, to widen the box’s corner and stimulate the release of sap. The hack, an eighteen-inch long wooden pole equipped with a steel hook on the end, was particularly heavy because the base of the rod was weighted with a five to seven pound weight. Using the momentum gained by swinging the weight, laborers would cut two “streaks” at a ninety-five degree angle to form a V shape above the box.<sup>15</sup> According to Captain Powell, “It requires a man of immense stamina and in perfect physical condition, for he not only has to stoop continually, but drive the hack through the wood with one muscular exertion.” In addition to brute strength, chippers also had to master the technique of driving the hack into the bark at a specific angle to create a slightly curved angle above the streak to prevent the sun from drying out the surface of the cut.<sup>16</sup> Since chipping required specialized skills, laborers with this ability were highly sought after and typically paid 75 cents to \$1.00 per thousand streaks.<sup>17</sup>

Because “the strongest and most expert hands” would be put to chipping, naval stores proprietors assigned less experienced men and women and children to dipping.<sup>18</sup> Dipping occurred in early April and continued throughout the season concurrently with chipping. During this season, camp captains divided laborers into separate chipping and dipping squads. The squads worked in two separate lines “drifting” through the pines,

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<sup>14</sup> J. C. Powell, *The American Siberia* (Philadelphia: H. J. Smith & Company, 1891; reprint Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976), 29.

<sup>15</sup> Schorger & Betts, *The Naval Stores Industry*, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Powell, *The American Siberia*, 29; Schorger & Betts, *The Naval Stores Industry*, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Schorger & Betts, *The Naval Stores Industry*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> “Turpentine: Hints for Those about to Engage in Its Manufacture,” *De Bow’s Review* 19 (October 1855): 487.

while a foreman called a “woods rider” followed on horseback.<sup>19</sup> Workers tasked with dipping moved through the woods in teams of two, armed with a “spoon” and two four to five gallon buckets. These teams collected the accumulated sap from the pine boxes and deposited it in buckets strategically placed throughout the woods. While chipping was arguably the more taxing job, dipping also required a specific technique. In order to transfer the sap, dippers forced the trowel-shaped spoon under the gum and subsequently flipped it into the bucket. Because of the sap’s viscosity, dipping took place at a high rate of speed to prevent spillage. Operators expected laborers to dip 1,800 to 2,000 boxes a day, with a highly skilled worker producing six barrels of gum per day.<sup>20</sup>

Since boxing, chipping, and dipping took place across vast pine acreages, turpentine manufacturers arranged their workforce in adjoining sections of timber. Each segment, called a crop, contained approximately 6,000 to 8,000 boxes. These numbers signified the quantity of faces that a chipper could attend over the course of a week. Producers further sectioned crops into drifts of 2,000 boxes—roughly the amount a chipper could hack in a day. These divisions facilitated supervision by the operation’s foreman or woods rider who traversed the forest on horseback. Responsible for monitoring a “ride” that contained six to eleven crops, woods riders ensured that laborers performed their assignments satisfactorily.<sup>21</sup> Despite their supervisory role, these men

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<sup>19</sup> Powell, *The American Siberia*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> “Turpentine: Hints for Those about to Engage in Its Manufacture,” *De Bow’s Review* 19 (October 1855): 487; “Production of Turpentine in Alabama,” *De Bow’s Review* 7 (December 1849): 561; Schorger & Betts, *The Naval Stores Industry*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> *A Naval Stores Handbook: Dealing with the Production of Pine Gum or Oleoresin*, compiled by The Forestry Service, The Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, and The Bureau of Plant Industry (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, January 1935), 43; Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest*, 122; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 84.

were still beholden to naval stores operators and held responsible for the productivity of their charges. Moreover, during the postbellum era there was fluidity between the position of turpentine hand and the position of woods rider. This flexibility reveals that woodsriders occupied a position between labor and management and in certain circumstances shared more commonalities with workers than proprietors.

Because the most intense periods of harvesting occurred during the spring and summer, the men and women who toiled within the woods inhabited a middle ground between agricultural and extractive labor. During the antebellum era and in the years directly following the Civil War, naval stores manufacturers worked tracts of timber with a seasonal workforce. During chipping and dipping season, hands labored in the woods and then returned to agriculture in the off-season.<sup>22</sup> Following a similar pattern to workers in the textile, lumber, and coal industries, laborers entered full-time turpentine manufacturing in the postbellum era, because it was becoming “more and more difficult to earn an adequate living from the land.”<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in the years immediately after the Civil War, the demand for naval stores remained at wartime highs. Sizeable profits enabled turpentine operators to offer comparatively higher wages than those available in the agricultural sector. Although these initial earnings helped draw laborers into the

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<sup>22</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 85; Thomas F. Armstrong, “Georgia Lumber Laborers, 1880-1917: The Social Implications of Work,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 438-440; Thomas F. Armstrong, “The Transformation of Work: Turpentine Workers in Coastal Georgia, 1865-1901,” *Labor History* 25 (Winter 1984): 523-525.

<sup>23</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al., *Like a Family: The Making of Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 31; William P. Jones, *The Tribe of the Black Ulysses: African American Lumber Workers in the Jim Crow South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 2, 47-51; Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict 1780-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 130.

industry, it is important to note that pay rates changed with market shifts. In times of low profit margins turpentine workers received a negligible salary, if any at all.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to initially competitive wages, certain aspects of naval stores production helped ease the transition from farm to forest. Unlike textile workers who had to become accustomed to operating machinery and the rhythms of factory life or coal and phosphate miners who made the transition from manual to mechanized labor in the twentieth century, the techniques of turpentine manufacturing had remained largely unchanged since the antebellum era.<sup>25</sup> Sap extraction required specialized manual techniques, and the density of trees and uneven woodland ground impeded the use of vehicles. Thus, in order to transport barrels of gum from the forest to the distillery, naval stores operators favored mule drawn carts. Just as southern agriculturalists valued mules for their grit and resiliency, turpentine hands prized their animals' fortitude.<sup>26</sup> Swelling with pride, Willie White proclaimed that there was, "no smarter animal in the world than a turpentine mule." According to White, the animals responded to verbal commands and possessed an inordinate amount of strength. In his estimation, a single mule was capable of pulling five resin barrels through the woods and teams of two could transport six to

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<sup>24</sup> Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 125-126; Mark V. Wetherington, *The New South Comes to Wiregrass Georgia 1860-1910* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 28; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 162-163; Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines," 37-38.

<sup>25</sup> Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 49-58; Robert H. Woodrum, "Everybody Was Black Down There:" *Race and Industrial Change in the Alabama Coalfields* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 17-18, 155-158; Arch Fredric Blakey, *The Florida Phosphate Industry: A History of the Development and Use of a Vital Mineral* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 78-86; Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines," 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> George B. Ellenberg, *Mule South to Tractor South: Mules, Machines, and the Transformation of the Cotton South* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), 21-24.

eight barrels.<sup>27</sup> For workers who spent long solitary hours in the woods, these animals also came to represent constant companions, who—much like their masters—braved the taxing conditions of the longleaf woods. Jeff Wilcox explained this bond between mule and handler: “a lot of them thought [of] their mules...like one of their children.”<sup>28</sup> When men left agriculture for industrial employment, these animals provided a semblance of familiarity.

In addition to recognizable elements, naval stores producers tended to hire employees who were already accustomed to the labor. As they moved operations southward from the Carolinas to Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, turpentine manufacturers transported experienced African American labor with them. Because these men had toiled in the woods during the antebellum era, they were already familiar with naval stores production. While Thomas Armstrong argued that, “the cyclical work pattern...led to transience among...turpentine workers,” separating men from their families for a protracted period of time, this impermanence did not automatically lead to the breakdown of familial and social bonds.<sup>29</sup> Just as William Jones finds that “Industrial employment... sustained nuclear families among both black and white lumber workers in the rural South,” similar models hold true for naval stores laborers.<sup>30</sup> As the nineteenth and early twentieth century progressed, turpentine hands who had followed the industry south sent for their families or settled in states and married local women.

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<sup>27</sup> Willie White interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, July 6, 2003, audiocassette, CAS1002.05.1, South Georgia Folklife Collection, Odum Library, Valdosta State University, Valdosta Georgia. Hereafter cited as, SGFLC.

<sup>28</sup> Jeff and Bernice Wilcox, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, January 28, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.10, SGFLC.

<sup>29</sup> Armstrong, “Georgia Lumber Laborers,” 439.

<sup>30</sup> Jones, *The Tribe of the Black Ulysses*, 51.

A sampling of Georgia census records from Echols and Lowndes County demonstrates this phenomenon. Through an examination of twenty-six households, it becomes evident that between 1880 and 1900 the majority of turpentine workers were married African American heads of household. Over the course of twenty years, 85 percent of naval stores hands were black men and the remaining 15 percent comprised white men. These workers varied in age from early twenties to mid to late thirties. Slightly over half of these laborers originated from North and South Carolina and 43 percent represented native Georgians. Within the sampling of African American households, 60 percent of men were married, while only 40 percent were single. All of the white workers had wives and at least one child. Of the twelve married men, who emigrated from the Carolinas, ten wed women from Georgia and two brought wives from their native state. In addition to familial patterns, the census records also describe the educational level of these men. Exactly half of the naval stores workers could write, while approximately 57 percent could read.<sup>31</sup> These findings are particularly significant, because they counter the assertion that turpentine laborers were largely single men who moved through the industrial landscape with few ties to family and friends.

Equally telling is the fact that the wives of these men are not listed with an occupation. This omission suggests that the black men and women in turpentine production shared similar values and work patterns to African American families in other industries. Just as post-Reconstruction male agricultural workers “asserted themselves as

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<sup>31</sup> U.S. Manuscript Census, Population, 1880, Lowndes County, Georgia; U.S. Manuscript Census, Population, 1900, Lowndes County, Georgia; U.S. Manuscript Census, Population, 1900, Echols County, Georgia; U.S. Manuscript Census, Population, 1910 Lowndes County, Georgia; U.S. Manuscript Census, Population, 1910, Echols County, Georgia.

heads of household and routinely discouraged their wives from working outside the home,” men in the naval stores industry kept their wives from woodwork.<sup>32</sup> Although these men viewed themselves as the primary wage earners in their households, times of economic downturn made it necessary for women and children to contribute financially to the household.

Although scholars have classified turpentine harvesting as a “distinctively ‘male’” profession, women also toiled in the woods as chippers and dippers.<sup>33</sup> Ralph Wilkerson, a Georgian naval stores worker, recalled that several of his aunts gained positions as chippers and dippers. Risa, a formidable woman, earned the respect of male woodsmen because she took great pride in her job. According to Ralph, “they [male chippers and dippers] treat her good, cause she didn’t play.”<sup>34</sup> Another lady, who also gained the admiration of male laborers, was Eva, a dipper from Atkinson County, Georgia. Wilburt Johnson remembered her particularly well because she could “swing a dip bucket like a man.” Wilburt’s recollections are particularly telling, because he contended that women were equally capable chippers and dippers. Moreover, he asserted that his sisters who

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<sup>32</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 59; Quotation from Talitha LeFlouria, “‘The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Cuts Cordwood’: Exploring Black Women’s Lives and Labor in Georgia’s Convict Camps, 1865-1917,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 8, issue 3 (2011): 48.

<sup>33</sup> Robert B. Outland, Daniel Letwin, and Michael Tegeder argue that male workers comprised the bulk of chippers and dippers within the woods. While evidence suggests that men were the primary laborers in the longleaf woods, Nollie Hickman contends that chippers ruthlessly ridiculed male dippers, because “Much of this work was done... by women and children, as most adult Negro men considered it a low-caste job.” See Outland, *Tapping the Pines*; Quotation from Daniel Letwin, *The Challenges of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 155; Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines”; Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest*, 125-126.

<sup>34</sup> Ralph Wilkerson, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, February 22, 2004, audiocassette vol. 2, CAS1002.12, SGFLC.



also toiled in the piney woods were “treated just like a man...they wouldn’t push them women off into them bad places [of the forests].”<sup>35</sup> Although Johnson appears to express admiration for women turpentiners, there is a certain ambiguity about his statement. Wilburt might also be implying that his sisters’ skill and strength deterred men from making sexual advances toward them. Moreover, if this assumption is correct, then it would suggest that the woods were typically a dangerous place for lone women.

Further bolstering this interpretation is the fact that female naval stores workers typically served as auxiliaries to their husband’s labor. When she was not caring for her eight children, Bernice Wilcox’s mother joined her husband in the woods and held tins for him during boxing season. Moreover, her work continued during the off season, when women and children flocked into the forests in groups to weed around the base of the pine trees in an effort to protect them from brush fires. Bernice’s husband, Jeff, also recalled how women helpers held a special place in the woods. He explained: “men looked up to women being women in them days, they gave more respect than they do now, they’d look out for them all they could.”<sup>36</sup>

Although Jeff does not explicitly state why working women needed protection within the woods, several possibilities warrant discussion. He could simply be suggesting that the arduous labor of chipping and dipping was too taxing for female hands. Though possible, this explanation is entirely too simplistic particularly because all women who lived and worked in the piney woods participated in some form of manual labor. A more likely interpretation is that female workers were subject to sexual

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<sup>35</sup> Wilburt Johnson, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, February 21, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.11, SGFLC.

<sup>36</sup> Jeff and Bernice Wilcox, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, January 28, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.10, SGFLC.

harassment or assault within the orchards. Just as they suffered abuse under slavery, black women were threatened with exploitation and rape within the postbellum work environment. Because “The humiliations of slavery remained fresh in the minds of black women who continued to suffer physical abuse at the hands of white employers, and in the minds of their menfolk who witnessed or heard about such acts,” male family members attempted to protect their wives, sisters, and daughters at any cost.<sup>37</sup> As in domestic work—where individual women spent hours at the home of employers—laboring in the woods as lone women had the potential to be especially dangerous. Just as housemaids were denied protection in an isolated work environment, chipping and dipping left female workers in remote pine tracts for hours on end. Thus, an unaccompanied woman could be a target for unscrupulous woodsriders.<sup>38</sup> In addition, it is particularly telling that the single women that Ralph Wilkerson and Wilburt Johnson remembered possessed, at least in their memories, remarkable strength and particularly masculine characteristics; married women ventured into the woods in groups or by the side of their husbands.

Just as women found employment within the woods, African American boys supplemented the family income through working as chippers. From an early age these children felt a strong responsibility to contribute to the household economy. At eleven years old, Wilburt Johnson began toiling in the pine barrens because, “We was poor

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<sup>37</sup> Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 60; LeFlouria, ““The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Cuts Cordwood,””: Exploring Black Women’s Lives and Labor in Georgia’s Convict Camps, 1865-1917,” 50-51.

<sup>38</sup> Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom, South Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 34, 51-52.

folks, you know, so we had to try to help our parent[s] make a living.”<sup>39</sup> Echoing Wilburt’s sentiments, Jeff Wilcox explained that familial duty superseded attending school. Only reaching the fifth grade, Jeff entered the woods at age sixteen to help support his sister and her children. He declared: “I had to work to help take care of them...It was a must.”<sup>40</sup> Younger than both Wilburt Johnson and Jeff Wilcox, Junior Taylor, of Blackshear Georgia, began his sixty-year naval stores career at the tender age of eight years old.<sup>41</sup>

While youngsters typically worked alongside their parents, one camp in Hoboken, Georgia organized specific dipping squads of children. Ralph Wilkerson, for example, joined the “little boys’ squad” when he was twelve years old. Consisting of approximately seven to eight youths between the ages of eleven and fourteen, this group dipped sap once the school year had ended. Another member, Willie White, described the daily procedure of this operation. Because some of the boys were too small to carry dip buckets, he remembered that a tractor followed them through the woods. Despite their small stature, these young dippers were productive. Swelling with satisfaction, White recalled, the bossman “would pride over us too, because us little boys did more than the grownups did!” According to White, they filled eighteen barrels a day.<sup>42</sup>

Although this number is unrealistically high for dippers to complete in one day, their time

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<sup>39</sup> Wilburt Johnson, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, February 21, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.11, SGFLC.

<sup>40</sup> Jeff and Bernice Wilcox, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, January 28, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.10, SGFLC.

<sup>41</sup> Junior Taylor, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, July 14, 2002, audiocassette, [need to check up on the call number], SGFLC.

<sup>42</sup> Ralph Wilkerson, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, February 22, 2004, audiocassette vol. 2, CAS1002.12, SGFLC; Willie White, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, July 6, 2003, audiocassette, CAS1002.05.1, SGFLC.

on the squad not only supplemented their household's income, but also instilled in them a sense of pride and self-worth. According to Ralph Wilkerson, the money he earned "helped buy my school clothes." In addition, subsidizing his parents' wages imparted a sense of accomplishment. He continued: I "support[ed] myself to go to school."<sup>43</sup> Children, who began turpentine work at an early age, typically remained in the naval stores industry for the duration of their adult life. While most continued on to become chippers, some rose to the position of woods rider.

Mr. Williams started turpentine harvesting at the age of twelve and continued on to become a woods rider as an adult. Although scholars have consistently described woods riders as "cruel and overbearing" white men who treated their charges in a style reminiscent of antebellum slavery, men of both races held this supervisory position.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, it is a mischaracterization to attribute brutality within turpentine manufacturing purely to racial animosity. Because they were ultimately held responsible for the productivity of their charges, "Woods riders attempted to rule workers completely and harshly in order to gain their respect, maintain order, and extract efficient work." Located deep within the woods, naval stores operations were isolated from local authorities. Moreover, producers generally begrudged the interference of law enforcement and preferred to police their own camps with the aid of their woods riders.<sup>45</sup> Further developing this point, one foreman recalled: "The supreme authority in the camp is the foreman. To the niggers he is the law, judge, jury, and executioner. He even ranks

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<sup>43</sup> Ralph Wilkerson, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, February 22, 2004, audiocassette vol. 2, CAS1002.12, SGFLC.

<sup>44</sup> Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines," 163.

<sup>45</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 175-176.

ahead of God to them.”<sup>46</sup> While there are definite racial undertones to his statement, aggression was not the exclusive prerogative of white woodsriders. Bessie Kincaid Smith recalled one black woodsrider who robbed her father and appropriated the entirety of his paycheck.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, much of these men’s ruthlessness seems to be derived from production demands.<sup>48</sup> According to Williams, a black woodsrider, “You must see them boxes, cause if it gets too bad... and you let them leave ’em too bad, they give you your paycheck and put a man in your place.” During his time as a woodsrider in the 1920s, Williams explained, “You had a harder time riding the woods than a chipper did,” because his employers expected him to inspect 70,000 boxes per day. Moreover, unlike the chippers and dippers who could pace themselves by the week, woodsriders “had every crop on that ride to see every day.”<sup>49</sup> Although violence at the hands of these men was pervasive within certain camps—a topic explored more fully in the chapter on debt

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<sup>46</sup> Unidentified naval stores foreman quoted in, Stetson Kennedy, *Southern Exposure* (1946; reprint, Boca Raton: Florida Atlantic University Press, 1991), 50.

<sup>47</sup> Bessie Kincaid Smith, interview by Laurie Sommers, December 6, 2004, DAT1002.13, SGFLC.

<sup>48</sup> Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 14.

<sup>49</sup> Mr. Williams interview, IFAS videotape, white 4, DVD1002.54C. The McFarland place, a turpentine operation located in St. Johns County and still functional in 1984, was the focus of a research project on the naval stores industry undertaken by the editorial office of the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS), University of Florida Gainesville. IFAS created a master videotape and catalogued the videocassettes containing research data and photographs by color code. Originally, the master and data cassettes were archived in the University of Florida Oral History Archives, Florida Museum of Natural History, Gainesville, but have since been destroyed. Original citation taken from, Robert N. Lauriault, “From Can’t to Can’t: the North Florida Turpentine Camp, 1900-1950,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (January, 1989): 312. Copies of some of the IFAS tapes are now located within the South Georgia Folk Life Collection, Odum Library, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia. IFAS videotape, white 5, DVD1002-55C, South Georgia Folk Life Collection, Odum Library, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia. Hereafter the tapes will be cited as IFAS videotape, [color], [call number].

peonage—it is important to acknowledge that the work experience varied from location to location. In Ralph Wilkerson’s estimation his “bossmen” were “pretty good.”<sup>50</sup> Elliot West also recalled the typically non-violent consequences for incomplete chipping. Upon discovering the missed trees, woodsriders would simply dock the laborers pay and return them to the woods to complete the remaining faces.<sup>51</sup>

While the position of woodsrider commanded respect from turpentine hands, many white men scorned manual work within the pines because of its traditional association with black labor. Boxing, chipping, and dipping trees was particularly arduous work and naval stores men spent long hours in the woods battling extreme heat, poisonous snakes, and woodland insects.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, tapping and dipping pines had customarily been the task of antebellum slaves in North Carolina, causing native white men to label jobs in the piney woods as “negro” or “nigger work.”<sup>53</sup> After the Civil War, the stigma attached to turpentine harvesting intensified. As one contemporary observer noted: “The work [turpentine labor] is too severe and the pay too small for white laborers. Too, there is a feeling among the white workers that such disagreeable work is negroes work, and that white men would demean themselves by doing it.”<sup>54</sup> According to David

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<sup>50</sup> Ralph Wilkerson, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, February 22, 2004, audiocassette vol. 1, CAS1002.12, SGFLC.

<sup>51</sup> Elliot West, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, no date 2002, audiocassette, CAS1002.08.1, SGFLC.

<sup>52</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 93.

<sup>53</sup> For a contemporary discussion and classification of “Negro work” see, Gunner Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944), 1079-1124. Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 154-159; Tegeeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 37-38.

<sup>54</sup> A. Stuart Campbell, Robert C. Unkrich, and Albert C. Blanchard, *Studies in Forestry Resources in Florida*, vol. 3, *The Naval Stores Industry* (Gainesville: Bureau of

Roediger, white workers gained a “psychological wage” by proclaiming their whiteness and consequent superiority over laborers of color. Within the naval stores industry, white workers who had performed similar tasks as small-time producers during the antebellum era now refused to work as chippers and dippers alongside African Americans.<sup>55</sup>

While white workers refused to carry out manual labor within the woods, white men who occupied the position of camp supervisors and foremen became stigmatized for their close and constant association with black workers. Because turpentine harvesting and manufacture took place deep within the woods, naval stores proprietor Albert Pridgen explained, “Instead of the society to which in days past he has been accustomed, he [the turpentine operator] is forced into daily contact with hired labor and negroes of his constituency.”<sup>56</sup> Pridgen and his contemporaries believed that prolonged association with turpentine hands would cause otherwise respectable entrepreneurs to become debased, because “the turpentine camp is no place for a man who is timid or cowardly, or averse to being prepared to use force or weapons in self-defense.”<sup>57</sup>

While Pridgen condemned daily interactions with, in his estimation, vulgar criminals, other naval stores manufacturers viewed brutal behavior as an advantage when managing woodland hands. Inman Eldgredge, for example, excused that fact that the majority of camp foremen were “a very crude set of people,” because “they knew how to

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Economics and Business Research, College of Business Administration, University of Florida, 1934), 32.

<sup>55</sup> David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 2007). Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 30-32.

<sup>56</sup> Pridgen, “Turpentine in the South Atlantic Country,” 104.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

work Negroes and that was the key to the whole situation.”<sup>58</sup> Bolstering Eldredge’s contention, one Floridian camp foreman unabashedly described his “talent” for managing woodland hands. He proclaimed: “Seems like I always had a knack of handlin [sic] labor. Bein [sic] born and raised with turpentine niggers I learned their nature.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, this phenomenon was not limited to the naval stores industry. Similar patterns could be found among white tenant farmers in the Texan cotton fields. Much like white turpentine workers, Neil Foley contends that white tenant farming became tainted because of its close association with African American and Mexican labor. Connecting landownership with respectability, farm owners attributed negative black stereotypes to white farmers because of their tenant status. Labeling these men and women as transitory idlers who reproduced far too quickly, proprietors determined that poor whites represented the “scourge of whiteness.”<sup>60</sup> The defining factor in both the case of naval stores workers and tenant farmers was their landless status. Because these laborers were able to move to different locations, in the eyes of their employers their labor was not guaranteed.

Moreover, this high rate of mobility played a defining role in both the operators’ estimation of their workforce, and turpentine hands’ mastery over their work conditions. Manufacturers considered this transience to be a consequence of laborers’ inherent lawlessness. According to Inman F. Eldredge, the supervisor of a sizable naval stores outfit in Georgia, “Turpentine Negroes are largely transient and they get into trouble in

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<sup>58</sup> Inman F. Eldredge, interviewed by Elwood R. Maunder, February 3, 1959, in *Voices from the South*, 35-36.

<sup>59</sup> Unidentified naval foreman quoted in, Kennedy, *Palmetto County*, 265.

<sup>60</sup> Neil Foley, *The Scourge of Whiteness: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 70, 79, 65.



various places with the law.” Describing his employees’ departures as a consequence of their lawless behavior, Eldredge explained: “They move out and go to a camp in some other region when the law shows up.”<sup>61</sup> Echoing Eldredge’s evaluation, historians have also rationalized these departures as the result of legal problems. Robert Outland suggests that, “Because a large number of turpentine laborers had been in trouble with the law,” these men were quick to leave camp at “the sight of a sheriff or his deputies.”<sup>62</sup>

There is, however, another possible explanation for turpentine workers’ peripatetic behavior. For these men and women, frequent moves represented manifestations of discontent with labor conditions within the piney woods. Although scholars have dismissed notions of labor militancy within naval stores manufacturing, because “patterns of production and labor discipline...essentially remained unchanged since the 1830s,” other academics have demonstrated that the absence of overt action does not necessarily preclude protest.<sup>63</sup> James C. Scott’s framework of analysis proves exceptionally useful when addressing dissent among turpentine workers. He asserts that working and subaltern classes created hidden transcripts to confront the authority of governing classes. Although they appear mundane on the surface, Scott contends that these actions are imbued with clandestine political activity that reveals itself through songs, folktales, and industrial sabotage.<sup>64</sup>

For naval stores laborers, these hidden transcripts are discernable through workers’ decisions to leave turpentine operations if the working conditions were

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<sup>61</sup> Inman F. Eldredge, interviewed by Elwood R. Maunder, 4 February 1959, in *Voices from the South*, 74.

<sup>62</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 175.

<sup>63</sup> Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 45.

<sup>64</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xii, 39.

unsatisfactory. Just as William Cohen demonstrates that black agricultural workers “clung tenaciously to the most important right, the right to move,” because they were “deprived of many of the most basic rights of citizenship” in the postbellum South, turpentine hands favored mobility as a solution to conflict.<sup>65</sup> Without a doubt, these decisions were also a consequence of the brutal realities of the Jim Crow era, because any overt confrontation would result in harsh reprisals. In order to avoid detection, Bessie Kincaid Smith and her family had to “slip away” from a Floridian naval stores operation, because her father’s employer was “so mean.” Describing the move, she explained that her father changed employment because he “didn’t like Florida,” because the manufacturer “tried to work him like a slave.”<sup>66</sup> Elliot West shared a similar, albeit less intense, experience. Generally, West remembered good work experiences with his foremen; however, if he ever had a problem, he would leave the camp and find work elsewhere.<sup>67</sup> Although it is difficult to judge the impact of their actions, in times of heavy competition and labor shortages workforce mobility could be disastrous to operators. In fact, turpentine manufacturers sometimes readjusted their labor handling techniques to combat this problem. One operator lamented: “They had to be handled, and handled just right. You couldn’t be rough with them or they’d leave you. They wouldn’t fight back; they wouldn’t fight white people, but they’d just pick up and leave.”<sup>68</sup> As the nineteenth

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<sup>65</sup> William Cohen, *At Freedom’s Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control 1861-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), xvi.

<sup>66</sup> Bessie Kincaid Smith, interview by Laurie Sommers, December 6, 2004, audiocassette, DAT1002.13, SGFLC.

<sup>67</sup> Elliot West, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, no date 2002, audiocassette vol. 2, CAS1002.08.1, SGFLC.

<sup>68</sup> Inman F. Eldredge, interviewed by Elwood R. Maunder, February 3, 1959, in *Voices from the South*, 36.

and early twentieth century progressed and the industry boomed, laborers' perpetual mobility coupled with the necessities of production caused naval stores manufacturers to seek other viable forms of labor acquisition and retention.

Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century naval stores workers have been classified as boorish fugitives by both historians and contemporary observers. Unable to form familial or social ties, these men moved across the industrial landscape as individualist outsiders. However, evidence demonstrates that despite the transitory nature of turpentine manufacturing, these men maintained strong ties to existing families or married and created new ones within the camps. Moreover, work within the woods was not as racially stratified as scholars had previously imagined. Through skill and knowledge of production, African American men acquired the position of woods rider. In conjunction with male workers, women and children also entered the woods during dipping season to augment the family's income. While black turpentine workers took pride in their skillful woodwork, the same did not hold true for white workers. Because of their landlessness, white workers became stigmatized for their close association with black workers. Although this mobility hampered white laborers, African American hands employed it as a means of protesting unsatisfactory work conditions. Moreover, their protests became so troublesome for naval stores manufacturers that they began to look for alternative means of securing steady labor within the woods. For operators, the convict lease system soon became a viable and at times favored alternative to free labor.

### Chapter 3: Florida's Convict Lease System: The Inextricable Link Between the Naval Stores Industry and Prisoner Labor

“Each man carried a torch, and the long procession filed slowly out of the cell-house, looking like some unearthly troop of hobgoblins, that would melt into thin air at cock-crow,” wrote Captain James C. Powell. Continuing this preternatural description of a predawn prisoner transfer, he wrote, “To add to the grotesque impressiveness of the scene, the negroes struck up one of those strange, wailing, unintelligible chants, that are born in the mouth of every genuine African, and the echoes caught the weird melody and moaned it back and forth for miles.”<sup>1</sup> Authoring a memoir after fourteen years as an overseer in a Floridian convict camp, Powell titled his work *The American Siberia* after American explorer and war correspondent George Kennan’s *Siberia and the Exile System*. Intending to conjure ghastly images of depravity, the book’s publishers assured readers that they would “be surprised and shocked to learn that the terrible cruelties [Kennan] there depicts have their counterpart in the convict-lease system of one of our Southern States.”<sup>2</sup>

Following Powell’s writing, scholars of southern penology have echoed his harrowing accounts of life within Florida’s convict camps. Titling his chapter on the

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Powell, *The American Siberia or Fourteen Years’ Experience in a Southern Convict Camp* (Philadelphia: H. J. Smith & Company, 1891; reprint Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976), 138.

<sup>2</sup> George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 2 vols. (New York: The Century Co., 1891); Publishers Preface, in *The American Siberia*.

lease “American Siberia” after Powell’s memoir, David Oshinsky contends that, “To maintain crumbling discipline, prisoners were tortured for minor infractions of the rules. Some were whipped to death; [and] others, strung up by their thumbs.”<sup>3</sup> Agreeing with Oshinsky’s position, Douglas Blackmon equates prisoner labor with “new slave enterprises” that permitted lessees to “chain prisoners, shoot those attempting to flee, torture any who wouldn’t submit, and whip the disobedient—naked or clothed—almost without limit.”<sup>4</sup> Although they shed light on the more ruthless and brutal attributes of prisoner labor, these assertions obscure the broader aspects and wider significance of this subject.

Historians have traditionally viewed the convict lease as the fulfillment of both an economic and social need following the Civil War. According to Edward Ayers, prisoner labor represented a “hybrid” form of punishment that encapsulated elements of both the antebellum and postbellum eras. He contends that southern governments, still committed to the concept of maintaining centralized control over their inmate population, were ill-equipped to deal with the large numbers of newly freed African Americans. In addition, Ayers views the lease as a shrewd economic endeavor meant to fill economically and expediently the labor void left by emancipation. He maintains that, “Convict labor also developed as an adjunct of a nascent industrial capitalism short of capital and labor.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> David M. Oshinsky, *“Worse Than Slavery:” Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 56.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 56.

<sup>5</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance & Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 222, 185.

Following Ayers's assessment, Alex Lichtenstein demonstrates that, "convict labor was a central component to the region's modernization."<sup>6</sup> In the rapidly industrializing post-emancipation South, inmate workers alleviated the uncertainty generated by the advent of free labor. According to Lichtenstein emancipation produced a "nascent working class," who were "willing to work for wages only on their own terms."<sup>7</sup> In addition to acknowledging the fiscal significance of prisoner labor, David Oshinsky determines that "There was more to this system, however, than the profits it generated and the development it spurred. Convict leasing would also serve a cultural need by strengthening the walls of white supremacy as the South moved from an era of racial bondage to one of racial caste." As a post-emancipation society, the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American South required a period of transition from slavery to freedom. He contends that for industrialists, the lease served as a "functional replacement for slavery."<sup>8</sup>

While these historians have discussed the economic and social importance of convict labor, more recent scholarship emphasizes prisoners' role in shaping their work experience within the lease. Analyzing Alabama's convict mines, Mary Ellen Curtin finds that, "Despite their pitiful status, Alabama's black prisoners influenced a multitude of events, including the shaping of prison policy."<sup>9</sup> Through sabotage, malingering, and refusal to follow regulations, both male and female inmates challenged "white power" in

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<sup>6</sup> Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (London: Verso, 1996), xvii.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Oshinsky, "Worse than Slavery," 57.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Ellen Curtin, *Black Prisoners and their World, Alabama 1865-1900* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 4.

the Jim Crow South.<sup>10</sup> Agreeing with Curtin's assessment, Talitha LeFlouria demonstrates that Georgia's female prisoners "did not accept their victimization but explored and implemented passive and active methods of resistance: arson, running away, malingering, disobedience, fighting, talking back, and destroying clothes."<sup>11</sup> This nascent scholarship adds a significant component to the historiography that has often been ignored in economically-based studies.

Although the general historiography has moved past *American Siberia's* depiction of prisoner labor, accounts detailing Florida's implementation of the convict lease still emphasize the "intense, violent quality" of the Sunshine State's version.<sup>12</sup> Despite the truth in these depictions, they tend to obscure the symbiotic relationship between naval stores production and the implementation and perpetuation of the lease. While inmate workers did not have a profound effect on the naval stores industry, the harvest and manufacture of turpentine did play a vital role in the consolidation and sustenance of Florida's convict lease. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, state prisoners were almost exclusively contracted to turpentine operators. Moreover, these proprietors increasingly favored the use of convict workers as a means of controlling personnel costs and securing a viable stream of constant labor. In addition to its political and economic aspects, the lease had an acute effect on the men and women sent to work in longleaf pine barrens. Though comprising only 10 percent of laborers within the industry, 90 percent of Florida's inmates worked in manufacture between 1907 and 1909

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 134, 127, quotation from 5.

<sup>11</sup> Talitha LeFlouria, "The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Cuts Cordwood": Exploring Black Women's Lives and Labor in Georgia's Convict Camps, 1865-1917," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 8, issue 3 (2011): 62.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew J. Mancini, *One Dies Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866-1928* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 183.

at the apex of the state's turpentine production.<sup>13</sup> These men and women endured long sentences, toilsome labor, and questionable camp conditions. Notwithstanding their daily struggles and much like their free labor counterparts, prisoners managed to forge relationships, protest harsh treatment, and carve out a world for themselves within the turpentine industry.

In 1877 the State of Florida accepted a convict lease bid that would inextricably link convict labor to the turpentine industry for the next forty-six years. On 3 March of that year, Florida's government paid two lessees, Green A. Chaires and Henry A. Wyse, \$5,000 to take charge of the state's prisoners for the period of two years. Chaires worked his convicts at a plantation in Leon County. Wyse sent his prisoners to a turpentine farm near Live Oak, an uncultivated area midway between Jacksonville and Tallahassee. Over the next ten years, Henry Wyse or his business affiliates became the major lessees of Florida's convicts. Shortly after the 1877 lease, Wyse obtained a contract with Charles Dutton and Ruff Jones, New York-based businessmen who dealt in naval stores, turpentine, and rosin. This lucrative venture prompted Wyse to place a bid of \$200 to obtain the 1879 to 1881 lease. Under the new contract, Wyse also agreed to pay for all the expenses related to the inmates' care, including food, housing, and medical treatment.<sup>14</sup> The lease changed hands in 1883 when H. M. Wood, an agent for Charles

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<sup>13</sup> Robert B. Outland III, *Tapping the Pines: The Naval Stores Industry in the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 188; Jeffrey A. Drobney, "Lumbermen and Log Sawyers: The Transformation of Life and Labor in the North Florida Timber Industry, 1830-1930" (PhD dissertation, West Virginia University, 1995), 265, 208; John Lewis, *Eleventh Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida for the Period Beginning January 1, 1909, and Ending December 31, 1910* (Tallahassee, T.J. Appleyard, State Printer, 1911): 567-568.

<sup>14</sup> *Biennial Report of the Adjutant-General, of the State of Florida 1877-8* (Tallahassee: C. E. Dyke, Sr., State Printer, 1879): 6-7; Mancini, *One Dies Get Another*,



Dutton, offered the sum of \$9,200 to the state for the lease of all of Florida's prisoners to work at his turpentine operation.<sup>15</sup> Because there were no bids for the 1885 lease and the state was ill-equipped to supervise its prison population, the legislators offered H. M. Wood \$8,500 to retain the convicts for one more year.<sup>16</sup> Despite losing money the previous year, state officials believed that a continued lease to turpentine operators would be beneficial because, "the manufacture of naval stores is an exhaustive industry, requiring large bodies of cheap pine lands...and there is no other industry in the State in which so large a body of convicts can be profitably employed." Subsequently, Charles Dutton remained in control of the lease until 1889.<sup>17</sup>

Just as the state legislature favored awarding the lease to naval stores manufacturers, turpentine operators preferred the use of convict labor to free workers. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Florida already had tracts of virgin pineland required for naval stores production, but proprietors needed a cheap and tractable labor force to work the forests. During the antebellum era, slaves had toiled in large-scale turpentine operations from the forests of North Carolina to the Gulf Coast of

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186-187; Powell, *The American Siberia*, 16. In his writing, Powell mistakenly refers to H. A. Wyse as Major Wise.

<sup>15</sup> *A Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly of the State of Florida at the Twelfth Session of the Legislature, Begun and Held at the Capitol, in the City of Tallahassee, on Tuesday, January 2, 1883* (Tallahassee: Charles E. Dyke, State Printer, 1883), 35.

<sup>16</sup> *A Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly of the State of Florida at the Thirteenth Session of the Legislature, Begun and Held at the Capitol, in the City of Tallahassee, on Tuesday, January 6, 1885* (Tallahassee: Charles E. Dyke, State Printer, 1885): 39.

<sup>17</sup> *A Journal of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Regular Session of the Legislature of the State of Florida, Begun and Held at the Capitol, in the City of Tallahassee, on Tuesday, April 2, 1889* (Tallahassee, N. M. Bowen, Printer, 1889): 35.

Alabama.<sup>18</sup> After the Civil War, former planters were left bereft of a work force and remained anxious about the prospect of dealing with highly mobile free laborers. Because of arduous work and remote camp locations, Florida's post-bellum industrialists found maintaining an adequate labor supply particularly challenging. Thus, convict labor became appealing, because it "bridged the chasm between an agricultural slave economy and a society in the earliest stages of capitalist industrial development."<sup>19</sup> Inmate workers gave naval stores operators the security of a constant labor force that allowed them to expand and sustain large turpentine operations. Indeed, as one state official proclaimed, "At least 90 per cent [sic] of the State prisoners and a large number of county prisoners are worked in the manufacture of turpentine, and all camps, with a very few exceptions, are in the most remote places and their labor used where free labor is hard to get or control."<sup>20</sup> Echoing this sentiment, Charles K. Dutton favored the State's prisoners, because "Turpentine culture was exhausting work, and it was difficult to obtain enough labor for the proper cultivation of any great number of trees. Natives in Florida's piney woods would quickly abandon the work when any other type of livelihood became available."<sup>21</sup> Dutton's decision highlights the very problem that numerous turpentine operators faced. Moreover, an erratic workforce was not the only issue that plagued camp owners. When free labor became available, producers described these men as a "class of undesirable, roving, gambling characters that seem to have more faith in the 44

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<sup>18</sup> Percival Perry, "The Naval-Stores Industry in the Old South, 1790-1860," *The Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 4 (November, 1968): 516, 523.

<sup>19</sup> Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 192.

<sup>20</sup> John Lewis, *Eleventh Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida for the Period Beginning January 1, 1909, and Ending December 31, 1910* (Tallahassee, T. J. Appleyard, State Printer, 1911), 567-568.

<sup>21</sup> Edward C. Williamson, *Florida Politics in the Gilded Age: 1877-1893* (Gainesville: The University Presses of Florida, 1976), 35.

calebra [sic] revolver than in the laws of the state.”<sup>22</sup> These laborers’ “roving” behavior concerned operators because their primary objective was to maintain a reliable workforce. The mobility of assertive free workers undercut that goal. By the early twentieth century prisoner labor became so dominant that turpentine operators began demanding more stringent vagrancy laws to create an even larger captive labor force. In 1906, the Georgia-Florida Sawmill Association created a resolution asking the states’ legislatures to “make the vagrancy laws in Georgia and Florida more effective” so that more potential workers would become embroiled within the system.<sup>23</sup>

Since the industry employed both convict and free labor, it would be expected that this competition would create tension between free and imprisoned labor.<sup>24</sup> However, according to Florida’s governor, William Sherman Jennings, “The present competition with free labor is not in fact as serious as it appears on the face of the proposition.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> William Sherman Jennings, “State Convict Speech,” p. 2, William Sherman Jennings Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

<sup>23</sup> *Southern Lumberman*, September 10, 1906, 10, quoted in Jerrell H. Shofner, “Forced Labor in the Florida Forests 1880-1950,” *Journal of Forest History* 25, vol. 1 (January, 1981): 16.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Letwin demonstrates that TCI’s free miners in Birmingham, Alabama, “regularly decried the use of convicts as subversive of both moral and material condition of the district, an assault on their livelihood, and an affront the dignity of their craft. The convict lease, many argued, pitted free miners against cheap and powerless labor.” Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 48-49. Karin A. Shapiro examines a similar phenomenon in Tennessee. Through legislative means and violent protests, miners in Tennessee sought to remove inmates from the state’s mines. According to Shapiro this narrative is particularly telling, because it reveals a “new angle on the tumultuous transformation of the 1890s—including the character of Populism the nature and limits of late-nineteenth-century labor militance, and the impact that Jim Crow had on the southern industrial workplace.” Karin A. Shapiro, *A New South Rebellion: The Battle Against Convict Labor in the Tennessee Coalfields, 1871-1896* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 2-3.

<sup>25</sup> Jennings, “State Convict Speech,” p. 2.

Two reasons for this lack of competition between free and imprisoned labor warrant discussion. Unlike the southern coal industry that also benefitted from convict labor, naval stores production did not have a strong organized labor presence. Although the Knights of Labor spent the 1880s and 1890s organizing lumber and sawmill workers in the longleaf pine belt, they did not include turpentine workers.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, post-emancipation labor shortages drove up the price of free labor while the arduous nature of turpentine harvesting and its association with “Negro work” caused white workers to abandon the industry. In his paper on the convict lease system, Governor Jennings suggested that, “This labor that is the class of work performed by convicts, is work that is not performed by white labor. The free labor is scarce and every valuable man that can be employed for this class of work is given employment at higher wages.”<sup>27</sup> The fact that free labor preferred other occupations meant that there were fewer workers to organize.

While the tension between free and imprisoned labor appeared negligible, there were confrontations nevertheless. In his memoir, Captain Powell explained how townspeople sabotaged the harvesting process at his Live Oak convict camp. The saboteurs drove nails into the trunks of the longleaf pines right above the boxes. When workers attempted to chip the trees to loosen the sap, the chipper would break. However, these attempts were unsuccessful at forestalling the harvesting process, because Major Dutton, the proprietor of the operation, declared that: “he could buy hacks [chippers] as long as they could buy nails.”<sup>28</sup> Unlike the destruction of the chippers, a second instance that Powell described had more disastrous consequences for the Live Oak camp. During

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<sup>26</sup> Nollie W. Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest: Lumbering in the Longleaf Pine Belt, 1840-1915* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1962, reprint 2009), 225.

<sup>27</sup> William Sherman Jennings, “State Convict Speech,” p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Powell, *The American Siberia*, 332-333.

the “dipping” season, when prisoners gathered sap from the boxes, miscreants krept into the camp and filled the tree boxes with dirt, thereby destroying the entire harvest. Powell lamented that, “Thousands of dollars worth of turpentine was no doubt lost, from first to last, by this species of deviltry, and it still breaks out at intervals at the side-camps, where the woods are worked.”<sup>29</sup> Although he acknowledged that, “We were never able to discover the perpetrators of this mischief,” Powell was certain that free laborers were to blame.<sup>30</sup> While some animosity between free and convict labor might explain these isolated incidents, there are other possibilities as well. Surrounding woodsmen or livestock proprietors might have been displeased with the arrival of large naval stores operations. During the late nineteenth century, these companies purchased enormous swaths of land and commenced enclosing their acreages. Denied grazing access to this land, it seems likely that locals would attempt to sabotage production.<sup>31</sup>

Despite these conflicts, prisoner labor remained a profitable and popular enterprise for the state. Beginning in 1889, Florida’s convict lease fell under the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture with the Commissioner of Agriculture issuing biennial reports. These reports are an invaluable resource for understanding who these inmates were, including their race, gender, age, and alleged crimes. Between the years 1889 and 1910, Florida’s judicial system sentenced approximately 7,061 African American men and 1,169 white men to hard labor. Unlike male prisoners who were first leased in 1877, the State of Florida began sending its female prisoners to private parties in 1880 and continued this practice until 1910, with the majority of these women going to

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>31</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of a New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 127.

turpentine operators.<sup>32</sup> These women entered the lease in much fewer numbers than their male counterparts, with approximately 250 African American women and thirteen white women arrested and sent to prison camps. During this twenty-one-year period, the age of prisoners ranged from children as young as twelve and thirteen to adults in their fifties and sixties, although the majority of convicts were between the ages of eighteen and thirty-two.<sup>33</sup>

While these statistics describe the average inmate within the lease as an African American male in his mid-twenties, the crime statistics are more instructive when it comes to determining the character of the workforce. Previous scholars have asserted that naval stores workers were typically violent and dangerous; however, when examining these numbers it becomes evident that the vast majority of these men and women were not brutal criminals.<sup>34</sup> In compiling the statistics, their crimes break down into four categories: gambling and mayhem, violent crimes, property crimes, and sexual crimes. Between 1889 and 1910 approximately 8,281 alleged offences occurred in the state of Florida. Of those crimes approximately 4,796 were property related, 2,077 were assaults or murders, 420 were some form of “sexual deviance,” and fifty-three were for gambling and mayhem. Moreover, these numbers demonstrate that property crimes accounted for the majority of crimes committed between 1889 and 1910 at approximately 57 percent. In relation to property crimes, violent crimes represented only 25 percent of

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<sup>32</sup> Drobney, “Lumbermen and Log Sawyers,” 206, 215.

<sup>33</sup> I obtained the numbers to compile this data from the *Biennial Reports of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida* for the years 1889 to 1910.

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of the violence of naval stores workers see, Oshinsky, “*Worse than Slavery*,” 72; Tegeder, “Prisoners in the Pines.”

crimes committed in those twenty-one years.<sup>35</sup> Although the statistics do not provide irrefutable proof that inmate workers were not violent, they do present a convincing case that the majority of prisoners were not convicted of violent crimes.

After conviction and sentencing, prisoners traveled from local jails to the turpentine camps. Transportation was the lessee's responsibility and usually involved travel by train, carriage, or boat to reach the woodland location.<sup>36</sup> Once at the camp, inmates received their prison stripes and assignment in the woods. Unlike other prison industries—with the exception of coal mining—turpentine production was a highly specialized process that required immense physical prowess and precise knowledge of the correct techniques used to harvest gum from the trees. Just like their free labor counterparts in the industry, inmates labored under the task system and depending on their skill and strength retained the same job throughout the season. Convicts in the Floridian forests began the turpentine harvesting process at the start of November by “boxing” longleaf pine trees.

During collection season, camp captains sent three or four squads of inmates into the woods under the supervision of two guards and tracking dogs. About six or seven men made up each squad and the men were either tasked individually or as a squad.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Numbers used to compile this data came from the *Biennial Reports of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida* for the years 1889 to 1910.

<sup>36</sup> *Biennial Report of the Adjutant-General, of the State of Florida 1877-8* (Tallahassee: C. E. Dyke, Sr., State Printer, 1879): 6; Powell, *The America Siberia*, 255, 170; Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., *McCranie's Turpentine Still, Atkinson County, Georgia, A Historical Analysis of the Site, with Some Information on the Naval Stores Industry in Georgia and Elsewhere* (Atlanta: Department of Natural Resources, 1975), C-1.

<sup>37</sup> A. W. Schorger & H. S. Betts, *The Naval Stores Industry* (Washington D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1915), 15.

Men had from sunup to sundown to complete their task.<sup>38</sup> Because they prized accuracy over volume and acknowledged that inmates might not be well versed in turpentine harvesting, camp supervisors set the convicts' task at approximately sixty to ninety boxes a day.<sup>39</sup> When compared to the standards set for free laborers, the wide latitude allowed to inmates demonstrates that turpentine operators were more concerned with the accuracy than volume. Following the same work patterns as free laborers within the piney woods, inmates commenced the chipping and dipping season in the early spring.

While working in the piney woods, making task challenged both inmates and camp captains. Turpentine harvesting required prisoners to learn often unfamiliar specialized skills and lessees held the captains responsible for reaching the camp's quota. For Will Haines, a prisoner at P. H. Baker's turpentine camp, failure to make task resulted in a severe beating. Haines, an inexperienced chipper at Baker's Campville operation, whose "hands were raw in the palm caused from blisters made pulling," was unable to meet his daily quota, because he had not mastered the correct technique. Haines also stated that, "he had never worked turpentine before and could not do as much work as the other men," and as punishment, the camp supervisor Captain Casey beat him

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<sup>38</sup> *Tenth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida for the Period Beginning January 1, 1907, and Ending December 31, 1908* (Tallahassee, Florida, 1909), 374.

<sup>39</sup> Powell, *The American Siberia*, 27-28; Mancini, *One Dies Get Another*, 47. In his assessment of convicts' task, Mancini suggests that prison laborers could box ninety trees a day as opposed to free workers who could accomplish 133 trees a day. When compared to other sources, Mancini's approximations fall on the high end of the spectrum. He uses these numbers to formulate the argument that convict labor was less productive than free labor and therefore, the "most important feature of convict labor was not its productivity but its reliability." Jeffrey Drobney also contends that inmates worked torturous hours for six to seven days a week and were on a whole 30% more productive than free labor. However, it is difficult to ascertain the validity of his claims as his information was ascertained from an unpublished paper in his possession. Drobney, "Lumbermen and Log Sawyers," 211.



savagely. When questioned by the prison supervisor about the reason for such harsh treatment, Captain Casey replied, “that he could not get any work out of the negro.”<sup>40</sup> Numerous other inmate supervisors shared Captain Casey’s belief that corporal punishment would drive inmates to work harder. Whipping prisoners for inadequate work remained a persistent problem at Dowling Park Naval Stores Company. Operators of this camp, located in Newport, Wakulla County, Florida, received numerous censures from state prison supervisors for mistreating their inmates. In a letter to the Commissioner of Agriculture, State Supervisor Ferrell wrote: “Examined the bodies of all the prisoners I saw and 6 out of one squad showed signs of laceration.”<sup>41</sup> According to the camp captain, he needed to repeatedly whip the entire squad, because it “was a squad he could get no work out of and he had to punish them.”<sup>42</sup>

Just as state prisoners were held to stringent task requirements, county prisoners also received corporal punishment for incomplete work. To an extent county convicts also found themselves in a more arduous environment than state prisoners. Unlike state convicts, whose sentences lasted for years, county inmates served sentences in terms of months. Less time within the convict lease system forced county inmates to contend with a separate set of issues. The majority of camp captains held county prisoners to the same tasks as state prisoners. For county inmates, who did not have the same experience or

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<sup>40</sup> H. L. Griffin to W. A. McRae, July 7, 1913, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>41</sup> J. D. Ferrell to W. A. McRae, May 28, 1913, p. 3, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>42</sup> J. D. Ferrell to W. A. McRae, May 17, 1913, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

time to adapt as state inmates, the task could be insurmountable. Thus, county camp captains meted out more frequent punishments. Explaining whipping incidents at the Camp of J. W. Ward, Supervisor Titcomb wrote: “most of [the inmates] having never worked in turpentine, the captain having been used to working State prisoners, had an idea that county men could do as much work as State men, and punished more than he should have done.”<sup>43</sup> In addition, state prison supervisors seemed to be more lenient with these captains. Supervisor Ferrell excused one captain for the excessive number of punishments—each beating containing between three and five hits—because “we have to consider working short term prisoners in Turpentine [sic] is a trying proposition.”<sup>44</sup> Ferrell acknowledged that these inmates did not have the technical knowledge or skill to successfully accomplish their task. Unlike Supervisors Titcomb and Ferrell, who shared the belief that whipping was sometimes a necessary aspect of the lease, Supervisor Hillman chided the proprietors of J. Buttgenback and Company in Cordeal, Florida for using punishments rather than incentives. In a letter to the company he wrote: “If the men you have working these convicts cannot give you satisfaction in work, without having to punish so many of them, you are very hard to please or else your managers do not know how to work convicts.”<sup>45</sup> Hillman’s view may stem from the fact that in addition to acting as a Supervisor for the State’s Convicts, he was also a turpentine

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<sup>43</sup> F. J. Titcomb to W. A. McRae, June 18, 1913, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>44</sup> J. D. Ferrell to W. A. McRae, June 30, 1913, p. 4, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>45</sup> W. J. Hillman to J. Buttgenback and Company, August 9, 1889, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

operator. Because he possessed first-hand experience in dealing with turpentine laborers, Hillman must have understood that corporal punishment was not always an effective method of producing results.<sup>46</sup>

Although at times it promoted the mistreatment of inmates, the task system also gave convicts a degree of freedom and latitude within the prison camps. After working continuously throughout the week, inmates had a brief respite on Sundays. While all the workers had a break at the end of the week irrespective of whether they completed their task, at Lemon Bay Turpentine Company of Manatee County, Florida, inmates who completed their task early received both Saturday and Sunday afternoon off.<sup>47</sup> Men could continue to work in the piney woods for additional pay or spend time resting in camp.<sup>48</sup> The conditions within prison camps varied from location to location, depending on the behavior of the captain and the guards and the diligence of state supervisors. Beginning in 1899, the State of Florida created the post of Supervisor of the State Convicts to insure that lessees complied with the rules and regulations set forth for the proper treatment and care of the prison population. Over the subsequent years until the termination of the lease in 1923, supervisors submitted monthly reports to the commission of agriculture detailing the physical condition of inmates, provisions of acceptable food, healthcare, and clothing.

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<sup>46</sup> W. J. Hillman to W. D. Bloxham, July 25, (there is no specified date; however, from the other letters in the package it appears that the date is 1899), Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>47</sup>F. J. Titcomb to W. A. McRae, July 30, 1913, p. 3, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>48</sup>*Tenth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida for the Period Beginning January 1, 1907, and Ending December 31, 1908* (Tallahassee, Florida, 1909), 374-375.

<sup>49</sup> Although supervisors had considerable latitude when writing reports and submitted recommendations based on their own judgment, the condition of the convicts appeared to improve with the inception of the Supervisor of State Convicts post.

Resembling naval stores operations that employed free labor, lessees of the state's prisoners built camps deep within the piney woods. These locations usually consisted of two stockades and a cluster of surrounding buildings that housed the camp captain, guards, kitchen, and commissary. The primary stockade, built from rough pine boards, surrounded a large building that resembled a warehouse or enormous livestock shed that housed the inmates. The interior of the barracks was rough and unfinished, dotted with heavily barred windows, and consisted of two rooms—one outfitted for sleeping and one used as a dining room.<sup>50</sup> During the early twentieth century, sleeping quarters consisted of two long rows of steel-framed beds covered with decrepit mattresses. While these accommodations may not seem satisfactory, early incarnations were little more than “rude,” windowless log houses with dirt floors and crude straw-covered wooden sleeping platforms. In addition, prior to 1906 state convicts remained shackled with chains while they slept. Each prisoner wore a set of leg irons attached to a central chain that ran down the center of the bunkroom.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>*Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida for the Period Beginning January 1, 1889, and ending December 31, 1900* (Tallahassee: Tallahasseean Book and Job Print, 1901), 47-48; Drobney, “Lumbermen and Log Sawyers,” 213.

<sup>50</sup> William Alonzo Register, interview, interviewed by Clifton Paisley, January 28, 1978, audiotape cassette, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida; Marc N. Goodnow, “Turpentine: Impressions of the Convict Camps of Florida,” *The Survey* 34 (April, 1915-September, 1915): 104; Drobney, “Lumbermen and Log Sawyers,” 208-209.

<sup>51</sup> Goodnow, “Turpentine,” 104; Powell, *The American Siberia*, 17; *Tenth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida for the Period Beginning January 1, 1907, and Ending December 31, 1908* (Tallahassee, 1909), 383-

A timber partition separated the dining hall from the sleeping quarters. This room usually contained two zinc-covered tables with mismatched chairs and boxes for seating. The only utensils allowed within the stockade were dishes, pans, and spoons with knives and forks reserved for the captain and guards. Prisoners and guards ate the same fare, prepared from a detached kitchen. The dining room also served as a bathing facility for the inmates. Nineteenth-century inmates bathed in unsanitary wooden tubs. Since these facilities spread contagion, state guidelines required the switch to porcelain tubs and running water in the twentieth century. Although many turpentine operations had the facilities for running water, supervisors documented multiple complaints that these lavatories were in disrepair. When visiting Camp #2 of J. W. Ward Jr.'s turpentine operation, Supervisor Titcomb noted that the quarters had the required plumbing for bathroom facilities, but lacked bathtubs and a water tank.<sup>52</sup> Walton Land and Timber Company, in Walton County, Florida, had facilities with broken urinals and water closets but had not hired a plumber to remedy the situation.<sup>53</sup> Despite instances of camp captains who were derelict in their duties, Supervisor Farrell offered rare praise for one camp that

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384; *Ninth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida for the Period Beginning January 1, 1905 and Ending December 31, 1906* (Tallahassee: Capital Publishing Company, State Printer, 1907), 282.

<sup>52</sup> Goodnow, "Turpentine," 104; F. J. Titcomb to W. A. McRae, "State Prison Report," April, 10, 1913, p. 5, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>53</sup> Unsigned by Supervisor of State Convicts to W. A. McRae, April 10, 1913, p. 2, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

had fully functioning tank-fed toilets and bathtubs. Moreover, this same camp used fresh hand-pump water for drinking and cooking.<sup>54</sup>

While male inmates spent the majority of their day in the woods, female prisoners served their time within the prisoner stockade. Serving as auxiliary labor within the camps, women toiled as laundresses, cooks, and in some exceptional cases as chippers. Because they comprised roughly 3 percent of the prison population, women within the convict lease system often served their sentence as the lone female within the camp. They washed the inmates' clothes and bedding, cleaned the guards' and captain's quarters, and prepared meals. In addition to fixing the food, women convicts tended the camp garden and livestock. As per state regulations, convicts were to receive "good and wholesome food," with meals consisting of fresh meat, vegetables, and starches.<sup>55</sup> State officials expected lessees to order in the necessary foodstuffs, plant gardens for fresh vegetables, and raise hogs for meat. As with other regulations, compliance with these rules varied from camp to camp. Supervisor Titcomb praised Padget Lucas and Company, in Lee County, Florida for having a "good garden, [and] vegetables [sic]."<sup>56</sup> However, two months later he criticized R. H. McDougald and Company, of Manatee County, Florida, for feeding the convicts, "the same thing week in and week out." To remedy the situation, Titcomb instructed that potatoes, cabbage, and other vegetables be

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<sup>54</sup> J. D. Ferrell to W. A. McRae, March 28, 1913, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>55</sup> *Tenth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida for the Period Beginning January 1, 1907, and Ending December 31, 1908* (Tallahassee 1909), 469.

<sup>56</sup> F. J. Titcomb to W. A. McRae, "State Prison Report," April 10, 1913 p. 1, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

brought to camp.<sup>57</sup> Regardless of what the supervisors ordered, the typical diet of Florida's inmates consisted of bacon, beans, and cornbread. One prisoner explained his daily dietary intake: "Three biscuits and a piece of meat for breakfast; biscuits or cornbread, and meat for dinner in the woods; biscuits, meat, and beans for supper."<sup>58</sup> In addition to camp-issued meals, convicts found a variety of ways to supplement their diets. Several men from D. G. McCormick and Company's Camp #1 "finished task early in the morning" and had "gone fishing" in their spare time.<sup>59</sup> Other prisoners hunted raccoons and opossums in the nearby forests for fresh meat.<sup>60</sup>

Although there was no official policy on separating the sexes, sometimes the very structure of the camp reflected this gendered division of labor. While visiting P. H. Baker's turpentine camp in Campville, Florida, Earnest McLine, a Florida State prison supervisor, noted that the women prisoners' cell was directly attached to the camp kitchen. It is unclear whether this structural choice was a pragmatic decision to house the camp's cooks in close proximity to the kitchen or to protect the women prisoners from

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<sup>57</sup> F. J. Titcomb to W. A. McRae, June 13, 1913 p. 2, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>58</sup> Provisions Issued to Convict Force, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 4, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida. Goodnow, "Turpentine," 106.

<sup>59</sup> F. J. Titcomb to W. A. McRae, June 13, 1913 p. 3, Convict Lease Program Subject File, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>60</sup> Marc N. Goodnow, "Turpentine: Impressions of the Convict Camps of Florida," *The Survey* vol. 34 (April, 1915-September, 1915): 106.

the advances of male inmates. McLIne does, however, make it clear that both the kitchen and the women were distinctly separate from the male prisoners' stockade.<sup>61</sup>

While female inmates in Campville remained sequestered from the men's camp, there is evidence of sexual contact between men and women at the camps. While inspecting the Daniels Brothers' camp in Luraville, Florida, McLIne discovered that one of the black female prisoners was pregnant. When questioned, the pregnant inmate, Marie Davis, stated that Captain Daniels routinely raped her, and that she "knew there was no use to resist and was afraid to."<sup>62</sup> When questioned further, Davis admitted that she also carried on a consensual relationship with another male prisoner, who acted as one of the camp trustees. Upon discovering this information, McLIne adamantly declared: "I consider the Camp the poorest in the State," and that Captain Daniels was "not a man to be in charge of prisoners."<sup>63</sup> While she was forced into sexual liaisons with the camp captain, Marie Davis chose to form a relationship with another one of her fellow prisoners. Although the reasons for her decision are unascertainable, several possibilities exist. Just as Mary Ellen Curtin suggests, inmate women "developed strategies for survival, some unique to their gender."<sup>64</sup> Because Davis's companion was a trustee, he might have been able to offer her protection from other inmates or more freedoms within the camp. Another possibility is that Davis carried on a relationship

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<sup>61</sup> Earnest McLIne to Governor W. S. Jennings, April 1, 1902, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>62</sup> Earnest McLIne to Governor W. S. Jennings, April 1, 1902, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>63</sup> Earnest McLIne to Governor W. S. Jennings, April 1, 1902, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>64</sup> Curtin, *Black Prisoners*, 4.



with this man as a means of alleviating the brutal conditions of the camp and maintaining some semblance of normality.

Just as Marie Davis formed a bond with her fellow inmate, male prisoners, too, sought relationships with women in the surrounding communities. William Hadley, a prisoner at Captain Powell's Life Oak camp, repeatedly sneaked through the woods to the cabin of a young lady that he was secretly seeing. As a trustee, one of Hadley's duties was to deliver the inmates' noontime meal from the camp to the forest. When the lunch rations arrived short, Captain Powell endeavored to "play the detective" and discovered that "the missing portions had been left with Hadley's inamorata, and that he would pause for a tete-a-tete, before returning to camp." As punishment for this transgression, Powell ordered both Hadley and his mistress to beat each other in turn.<sup>65</sup> Hadley's relationship with this young woman demonstrates two important points. His ability to meet and visit a free woman in the forest shows that inmate camps were not as isolated as they might seem. While turpentine outposts were not located near bustling towns, there were free laborers who lived in close proximity to these operations. In addition, George Hadley refused to accept his conditions as a convict and endeavored to maintain some semblance of a normal life within the pine forests.

While Marie Davis and William Hadley assuaged their status as inmates by forming relationships with members of the opposite sex, other prisoners employed other tactics to protest and alleviate their circumstances as convicts. Offenders' reactions ranged from malingering and complaining to Supervisors of the State's Convicts to engaging in more violent means, including fighting, escaping, and self-harm. Two of the

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<sup>65</sup> Powell, *The American Siberia*, 129-130.

most common methods of rebellion were shirking responsibilities and voicing complaints to the Board of State Institutions. Once a month, state prison inspectors would visit naval stores camps to survey the condition of these locations. As part of their review, officials would interview inmates and permit them to lodge complaints. State prisoners at Walton Land and Timber Company, in Walton County Florida, marked the arrival of a new camp captain with the refusal to work. When describing the situation to Supervisor Ferrell, the new captain J. F. Kinninger explained, that “when he took charge of the Camp [sic] good many of [the convicts] had knocked off work and he had to use the leather to get them started, as talking did not seem to do any good.” This situation arose because the captain prior to Kinninger, Captain Lewis, had severely mistreated and overworked the inmates. In order to insure that they were never mistreated again, Mr. Lee—drift rider for the camp—explained: the “prisoners, or some of them made the remark that Lewis was dead and they would not allow any other Captain to control them as he did.”<sup>66</sup> Just like their compatriots in Walton County, who were unhappy with long hours, inmates at Escambia Land Manufacturing Company, near Jay, Florida, complained that the captain kept them in the woods from 4 a.m. until after dark.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to complaining about the arduous work schedule, prisoners also commented on the quality and quantity of their food. Men leased to the Cold Water Naval Stores Company, declared that they were getting less than their one-pound daily allotment of meat. However, when confronted with this information, Mr. Rigel—the

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<sup>66</sup> J. D. Ferrell to W. A. McRae, March 28, 1913 p. 2, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>67</sup> R. R. Tomlin to W. A. McRae (Tallahassee Florida), July 31, 1913 p. 3, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

supervisor of the camp—“stated if their meat did not suit them they would throw it in the swill barrel and call for more.”<sup>68</sup> Similar complaints were echoed at Southern Timber Company, in Washington County, Florida. Inmates had an inadequate vegetable and “bread stuff” supply. Instead of serving beans the kitchen turned out old field peas.<sup>69</sup> The validity of food complaints is quite difficult to decipher. While state inspectors accepted the excuse that the inmates just did not like the food, it is quite possible the camp operators were serving rotten food.

The most serious grievances that inmates voiced included guards’ abuse and violence. Walton Land and Timber Company received numerous complaints that the guards mistreated the inmates. Located in Walton County, Florida, this outpost gained a reputation for excessive beatings and poor treatment of its prisoners. The inmates singled out one guard, McKinnon, and lobbied for his removal, because he “abused them in the woods.”<sup>70</sup> Management at this operation was also particularly poor. Upon viewing the condition of the inmates, Supervisor Ferrell concluded that there were an excessive number of beatings and that the captain’s incompetence, not sadism, was to blame. He wrote: “I think he means well but all Captains have to be a judge of human nature. Some prisoners you can manage by talking to them and others have to be managed in a different

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<sup>68</sup> J. D. Ferrell to W. A. McRae, April 24, 1913, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>69</sup> J. D. Ferrell to W. A. McRae, June 30, 1913 (Second Letter), Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>70</sup> Unsigned by Supervisor of State Convicts to W. A. McRae, April 30, 1913 p. 1, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

way so any Capt. to manage his Camp successful will have to learn his prisoners.”<sup>71</sup>

According to one prisoner, Ed Thompson, his treatment was so bad that he requested a transfer to a different camp. Thompson felt that he was singled out and not “treated as well as the other prisoners,” because “the Capt. would not take the shackles off him.”<sup>72</sup>

These complaints of mistreatment sometimes escalated into violent confrontations between the guards and prisoners or manifested themselves in escape attempts. Amos Lassiter, a guard for Walton Land and Timber Company, lost his job after entering into a violent confrontation with a convict. On the day of the incident Lassiter was so incensed that he “struck one of the prisoners with a pine knot inflicting an ugly wound on the man’s head.” Although it was not uncommon for guards to routinely mistreat their charges, Lassiter’s situation was certainly unique, because both the camp captain and the state supervisor sided with the inmate.<sup>73</sup> While it is uncertain what provoked Lassiter, another incident at Blountstown Manufacturing, in Calhoun County, Florida, transpired because a squad of workers carelessly completed their task. Berry Hurst and two other chippers in his squad “had been running over their work half doing it,” so the captain ordered them punished. Despite his two friends’ submission, Hurst ignored the captain’s orders and continued chipping. Minutes later other prisoners attempted to restrain him and he “drew his cutter on them and told them they had best not come about him.” The

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<sup>71</sup> J. D. Ferrell to W. A. McRae, June 30, 1913 (Second Letter), Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>72</sup> J. D. Ferrell to W. A. McRae, June 30, 1913 (Second Letter) p. 3, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>73</sup> R. R. Tomlin to W. A. McRae, January 31, 1914 p. 3, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

camp captain approached him and Hurst attempted to stab him, and in response, the captain then hit him in the head with a tree branch. Surprisingly after the event the captain “did not punish him” and instructed the guards “not to let him work anymore that evening.”<sup>74</sup>

A similar incident occurred at J. W. Ward Jr.’s #2 Camp, located in Polk County. Unlike Hurst, whose primary objective was to escape punishment, Will Davis used the opportunity to attempt an escape. On August 8, 1913, Davis refused to complete his chipping work and Captain Langford, the camp superintendent, attempted to whip him. As the captain approached, Davis “pulled his cutter and told the capt [sic] that if he came near that he would kill him.” The captain, then, returned to the camp to get help, and Davis took this opportunity to attempt an escape. Davis managed to run approximately four miles outside of camp when Captain Langford overtook him on horseback and fired upon him. Davis survived a shot to the back and was returned to camp to recuperate.<sup>75</sup> The incidents regarding White and Davis are instructive, because they demonstrate that inmates actively and violently challenged their superiors. In addition, prisoners were willing to risk life and limb to escape from life within the convict camp.

While some prisoners attempted escapes in order to leave the pine woods, other inmates devised ways to be allowed to remain within the stockade to convalesce. Although there is little historical evidence suggesting that self-harm was a prevalent problem within the convict lease system, particular attention is paid to this phenomenon

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<sup>74</sup> J. D. Ferrell to Governor Park Trammell, April 30, 1913, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>75</sup> F. J. Titcomb to W. A. McRae, August 21, 1913, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

in works detailing the lease. Throughout his fourteen years as a convict camp supervisor, Captain Powell detailed four instances of attempted suicide and two instances of purposeful self-harm. Powell described the first prisoners as arriving at camp “Afflicted with an incurable malady, which...greatly preyed upon his mind.” Upon his arrival, he begged Captain Powell to shoot him, and when Powell refused, the new inmate “endeavored to get hold of a knife, for the avowed purpose of cutting his throat.” He was, however, unsuccessful and subsequently “lapsed into a morose, brooding state.”<sup>76</sup> Powell’s description of this inmate suggests that he had an underlying mental condition before he arrived at camp. The remaining three suicide attempts that Powell addressed resulted from threats of whippings for failure to work. In two of the incidents, prisoners attempted to slit their throats with box saws, and in the last instance the convict attempted to fracture his skull and, as Powell puts it, “knock his own brains out.”<sup>77</sup>

In addition to attempting suicide, a few prisoners engaged in self-harm or feigned illness. In an attempt to be exempted from work in the woods, a convicted forger named Clow endeavored to blind himself. Because he was allegedly “incorrigibly lazy,” and already blind in one eye, Clow commenced a plan to destroy his functioning eye by spearing it with a needle. Before he could carry out his plan Powell discovered it and punished him severely.<sup>78</sup> Whatever Clow’s actual intentions, “Feigned insanity and pretend sickness were common dodges.”<sup>79</sup> Powell had two inmates in his charge that affected insanity. The first, Jim Johnson, spoke gibberish and attacked a longleaf pine tree instead of performing his assigned labor. When Captain Powell learned of his ruse,

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<sup>76</sup> Powell, *The American Siberia*, 36.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-62.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

he “prolonged the punishment until [Johnson] admitted the ruse and promised to drop it in the future.” The second convict was so convincing that she almost fooled Powell. One of his female inmates had a habit of faking epileptic fits so that she would be exempted from working. Her spasms were so realistic that Powell only realized she was acting when he checked her pulse and discovered, “the tell-tale artery beating steadily as ever, proving conclusively that there was no collapse.” As with Jim Johnson, swift punishment quickly terminated the fits.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to feigning injury and illness, there were instances where inmates required medical attention for work-related injuries or illnesses. One of the most common injuries sustained in the woods were sore and swollen feet. These ailments resulted from ill-fitting shoes and infected blisters. At Dowling Park Naval Stores Company, located in Wakulla County, Florida, Supervisor Ferrell expressed his dismay that, “10 [were] lying in with sore feet and hands, 3 with fever, 2 with dropsay [sic].”<sup>81</sup> Poorly fitting shoes were not the only cause of blisters in the piney woods. Inmates who were unaccustomed to chipping and dipping, tended to rub their skin raw in frantic attempts to make task. An inmate at South Florida Naval Stores Company, of Desoto County, required another job assignment, because he “had abused himself with a dipbucket [sic] allowing it to rub some skin from his knee and arms.”<sup>82</sup> Skin lesions and infection were not the only health issues that convicts had to deal with. The two most

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>81</sup> J. D. Ferrell to W. A. McRae, April 30, 1913 p. 2, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>82</sup> J. S. Blitch to Governor N. B. Broward, June 6, 1906 p. 3, Convict Lease Program Subject Files, Series 42, Carton 6, Florida Department of Archives and History, Tallahassee, Florida.

prevalent diseases within the prison system were syphilis and tuberculosis.

Approximately 25 percent of the state's inmates entered the prison system with syphilis and another 25 percent were infected with tuberculosis.<sup>83</sup> When dealing with consumptive prisoners, R. A. Willis, the physician to the state's convicts, recommended, "Just as long as a prisoner with tuberculosis can work, it is best to keep him at it and out in the open air, therefore, you can see the wisdom of having these prisoners at the kind of work that is being given to them to do out in the open air and on the turpentine farms."<sup>84</sup>

Because of these high rates of illness and infection, proprietors realized that it would be prudent to investigate other avenues of labor maintenance within the woods. Despite the initial partnership between state governments and naval stores operators, as the twentieth century progressed Florida's phosphate industry grew and began competing with turpentine manufacturers for the state's convicts. As phosphate companies won bids, naval stores producers increasingly turned toward debt peonage to maintain their workforce.

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<sup>83</sup> *Tenth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida for the Period Beginning January 1, 1907, and Ending December 21, 1908* (Tallahassee 1909), 447.

<sup>84</sup> *Eleventh Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida for the Period Beginning January 1, 1909, and Ending December 31, 1910* (Tallahassee: T. J. Appleyard, State Printer, 1911, 552.



## Chapter 4: Debt Peonage: Challenging Involuntary Servitude

“I felt myself in a strange land,” lamented Nathan Himmelfarb. On October 10, 1906, Himmelfarb, a recent immigrant from Eastern Europe, gave a deposition recounting his encounter with Sigmund S. Schwartz and detailing his experience at a turpentine camp in Maytown, Florida. Speaking only in Hebrew, Himmelfarb explained how Schwartz, a labor agent in New York City, lured him into an employment agreement with false promises of sawmill work in Buffalo Bluffs, Florida, high pay, and cheap food. After traveling with a group of forty other recruits for three days by steamship and seven hours by railroad to Jacksonville, Florida, he and the other laborers met F. J. O’Hara. Unbeknownst to Himmelfarb and his compatriots, O’Hara had contracted with Sigmund S. Schwartz to supply the labor for his company, Hodges and O’Hara naval stores and lumber operation. After surveying the new hands, O’Hara placed the men under the strict guard of one of his agents, Mr. Thompson, who was tasked with transporting the men from Jacksonville to Maytown—another seven hours travel by rail. Exhausted and famished, Himmelfarb found himself in unfamiliar surroundings with accommodations akin to “rat holes,” the prospect of arduous labor tapping trees in Florida’s swamps, and mounting debt accrued from his travel arrangements and meager meal purchases at the company store.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deposition given by Nathan Himmelfarb, October 10, 1906, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, U.S. Department of Justice, *The Peonage Files of the U.S. Department of*

Although he does not seem like the typical turpentine laborer, Nathan Himmelfarb's circumstances in the piney woods exemplifies the experience of nineteenth and early twentieth century naval stores workers in Florida, Alabama, and Georgia. During this time period, the majority of turpentine laborers were young African American men, who, at the close of the nineteenth century, traveled with their employers from North Carolina to pine belts further south.<sup>2</sup> Because turpentine extraction was physically taxing and required highly specialized skills, naval stores operators desperately clung to experienced workers. Moreover, the scarcity of labor at the turn of the century coupled with the transitory nature of the industry intensified the need for workforce retention. Thus, turpentine operators turned to increasingly coercive tactics to maintain a viable labor force. In addition to leasing the States' convicts, producers exploited repressive labor legislation, transportation costs, and pay advances to keep their workers in a state of constant debt that, at times, led to involuntary servitude.<sup>3</sup>

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*Justice, 1901-1945* (Bethesda: University Publications of America, 1989). Hereafter cited as, The Peonage Files; Jerrell H. Shofner, "Mary Grace Quackenbos, a Visitor Florida Did Not Want," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (January 1980): 278.

<sup>2</sup> Nollie Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest: Lumbering in the Longleaf Pine Belt 1840-1915* (University: The University of Mississippi, 1962), 131; Thomas F. Armstrong, "Georgia Lumber Laborers, 1880-1917: The Social Implications of Work," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 67, no.4 (Winter 1983): 447-448; Mark V. Wetherington, *The New South Comes to Wiregrass Georgia 1860-1910* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 119; Robert B. Outland III, *Tapping the Pines: The Naval Stores Industry in the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 164-165.

<sup>3</sup> Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 10-11; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 166-171; Michael David Tegeger, "Prisoners of the Pines: Debt Peonage in the Southern Turpentine Industry, 1900-1930" (PhD dissertation, University of Florida, 1996), 12-14; Jeffrey A. Drobney, "Lumbermen and Log Sawyers: The Transformation of Life and Labor in the North Florida Timber Industry, 1830-1930" (PhD dissertation, West Virginia University, 1995), 245-251.

Violence, indebtedness, and peonage have been inextricably linked to labor control within the naval stores industry. Though traditionally examined through the lens of sharecropping, debt peonage had a lasting impact on turpentine manufacturing. Reinforcing its connections to naval stores production, Michael Tegeder contends that, “Debt peonage was central to the turpentine industry.”<sup>4</sup> Through an examination of coercive labor practices within naval stores manufacturing, he demonstrates that labor scarcity coupled with primitive work conditions, necessitated the use of violence to retain a sustainable workforce. Moreover, turpentine operators harnessed the power of sympathetic law enforcement officials to aid in the enforcement of stringent labor legislation.<sup>5</sup> Tegeder’s assessment represents a marked departure from Pete Daniel’s contention that peonage represented a “new kind of slavery.”<sup>6</sup> In his pioneering study, *The Shadow of Slavery*, Daniel analyzes specific peonage trials to demonstrate that the advent of debt servitude represents continuity between the antebellum and post-bellum South by eroding the economic self-determination of African Americans and preserving the social hierarchy “inherited from slavery.”<sup>7</sup> Although he takes a more social and legal approach to involuntary servitude, Daniel offers a valuable framework with which to categorize indebted labor in the late nineteenth century. Dividing workers into three categories, he maintains that peonage only occurred when an operator prevented an indebted laborer from leaving his employment.<sup>8</sup> According to Daniel, the majority of southern agricultural workers were free to change employment at their will and operate

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<sup>4</sup> Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 10-14.

<sup>6</sup> Pete Daniel, “The Metamorphosis of Slavery, 1865-1900,” *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 1 (June 1979): 89.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery*, 23, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 24.

within the market economy. The second group represented peons, who continually remained indebted to their employer and “coerced to work out what they owed.” Daniel describes the third group as operating within “a twilight zone between freedom and involuntary servitude.” These men and women ended their employment season still in debt, but because they voluntarily continued to work off their dues, they operated within the “free” category. However, the moment that force and violence became a factor in the laborers’ decision to stay, they crossed the line into peonage. According to Daniel, “The line was that thin. No doubt many workers drifted from freedom to peonage often in their lifetimes, never realizing that they had crossed the line.”<sup>9</sup> When this categorization is applied to turpentine workers, Robert Outland aptly argues that, “It is probably within this uncertain gray area between freedom and compulsion that most naval stores workers labored.”<sup>10</sup>

Charged for transportation, housing, and provisions, men and women within the piney woods usually began their employment indebted to turpentine operators. Although violence was certainly present, and at times, pervasive, it is a mistake to characterize the majority of turpentine workers as cowed “prisoners of the pines.”<sup>11</sup> Through a closer examination of coercive labor within the backwoods of Florida and Alabama an additional narrative becomes evident. Debt peonage affected both African American and white workers within turpentine manufacturing. In conjunction with the black men and women, immigrant laborers also toiled as captive, indebted workers within the woods. Thus, naval stores operations that employed forced labor represent a nexus of race, class,

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel, “The Metamorphosis of Slavery,” 89.

<sup>10</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 171.

<sup>11</sup> Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 8.

and gender. Moreover, men and women within the piney woods developed varying strategies to combat the adverse conditions of their circumstances. Much like their free and convict counterparts, these laborers forged alliances, maintained ties to friends and relatives in surrounding communities, and did not hesitate to seek aid when attempting to escape from woodland camps. Moreover, through affidavits and letters written to the federal government, the story of African American women in the turpentine industry starts to unfold. Hired as camp cooks and laundresses, these women experienced not only gendered forms of violence and labor control, but also learned to navigate these situations and at times manipulate them to their advantage.

On February 6, 1901, Frederick C. Cubberly, a United States Commissioner from Bronson, Florida, witnessed an incident that would challenge the use of peonage within the naval stores industry. During a visit to J. L. Medlin & Company's turpentine operation in Meredith, Florida, Cubberly encountered J. O. Elvington, another turpentine manufacturer from Otter Creek, Florida. Elvington had come to Meredith to search for one of his hands, the man's wife, and small daughter. He claimed that his employee, George Huggins, had left the Otter Creek operation owing \$40.00. Huggins, upon hearing the charge, appealed to his current employer and begged for a loan to repay Elvington, so that he would not have to return to Otter Creek. Huggins, a native of South Carolina and cooper by trade, claimed that an agent of Oliver, Elvington & Company lured him from his previous employer under false pretenses. According to Huggins, when he arrived at the Otter Creek operation, Elvington ordered him to work as a dipper for significantly lower pay and housed him in a building "formerly occupied by horses

and mules.” Despite his pleas, Mr. Medlin refused to help and Elvington returned to Otter Creek with Huggins and his family.<sup>12</sup>

Approximately one week after the incident at J. L. Medlin & Company, Cubberly received word from J. R. Deen that three “man hunters” from Georgia had raided his Gainesville turpentine operation with the help of the local sheriff.<sup>13</sup> These men, acting as agents of S. M. Clyatt, arrested four African American men from Deen’s camp, and claimed that the fugitives had absconded from Clyatt’s Tifton, Georgia operation without settling their debts. Eager to keep his employees, Deen offered to take responsibility for their debts. However, Clyatt refused to accept payment for two of the workers—Mose Ridley and Will Gordon—because he wanted to “make an example of them.”<sup>14</sup> Upon learning of the incident, Cubberly charged Clyatt with kidnapping and sent out a warrant for the deputy sheriff, who had aided in the arrest.<sup>15</sup> *Clyatt v. United States*, thus, became the test case for the 1867 federal peonage statute. Although the outcome was frustrating to Cubberly—despite being convicted Clyatt never served jail time and Mose Ridley and Will Gordon disappeared—the case confirmed the constitutionality of the federal statute

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<sup>12</sup> Frederick C. Cubberly to Mr. Russel, December 18, 1906, case file 74682, reel 5, The Peonage Files; Frederick C. Cubberly to John Eagan, May 30, 1901, case file 74682, reel 5, The Peonage Files; Frederick C. Cubberly to Mr. Russel, December 18, 1906, Frederick C. Cubberly Papers, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville Florida. Hereafter cited as, Cubberly Papers; Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery*, 3-4; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 236.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick C. Cubberly to Mr. Russel, p. 2, December 18, 1906, case file 74682, reel 5, The Peonage Files.

<sup>14</sup> Frederick C. Cubberly to Mr. Russel, December 18, 1906, Cubberly Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Frederick C. Cubberly to Mr. Russel, p. 2-3, December 18, 1906, case file 74682, reel 5, The Peonage Files; Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery*, 4-5. For further discussion of the Clyatt case see: Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery*, p. 5-18 and Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 88-99.

and paved the way for its enforcement.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, scholars have almost exclusively referenced this case when discussing peonage in the New South. While *Clyatt* plays a vital role in the history of peonage prosecution, other cases are far more instructive when reconstructing the experience of naval stores workers.

Although laborers in both the Elvington and *Clyatt* cases were African American, black naval stores hands were not the only workers who toiled under involuntary servitude within the southern pine belt. The early twentieth century saw a dramatic rise in the recruitment of foreign labor to work within turpentine manufacturing. With waves of immigrants arriving daily in New York City and the need for manual laborers growing in southern industries, resourceful—and more often than not—unscrupulous entrepreneurs established labor recruitment offices.<sup>17</sup> One such recruitment enterprise took center stage in the 1907 peonage case against F. J. O’Hara. Historians typically reference *United States vs. O’Hara* to demonstrate that peonage within the naval stores industry was a result of capitalist demands rather than racial control, because the majority of laborers in this case were white.<sup>18</sup> While the presence of white workers does suggest that the need for labor trumped racial concerns, the case against F. J. O’Hara serves an equally important role in shedding light not only on the relationship between race and class, but also on gender within the pine woods.

On July 15, 1906 Benjamin Wilenski returned to New York City destitute, sick, and injured from beatings sustained during his employment with the Hodges and O’Hara naval stores operation. Wilenski, a fifty year-old Russian Jew, applied to the People’s

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery*, 17; Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 99.

<sup>17</sup> Jerrell H. Shofner, “Mary Grace Quackenbos, a Visitor Florida Did Not Want,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 3 (January, 1980): 274-275.

<sup>18</sup> Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 113, 8; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 170.

Law Firm for aid and recounted “an almost incredible story” of abuses that transpired at the company's camps in Buffalo Bluffs and Maytown, Florida to the firm’s proprietor Mary Grace Quackenbos.<sup>19</sup> Within a few days of meeting Wilenski, Quackenbos received another appeal, this time from a Brooklyn-based saloonkeeper, Meyer Freeman. Freeman’s brother-in-law, Samuel Fink, had been arrested in Palatka, Florida under the “false pretenses” statute and was grievously injured from cruel whippings at the hands of O’Hara’s camp foremen.<sup>20</sup> While Fink was imprisoned, Quackenbos learned that F. J. O’Hara had been brought up on peonage charges, but that it was unlikely that the case would succeed because of O’Hara’s “great political influence” and the lack of sufficient evidence. Fearing that O’Hara would escape prosecution, she posted Fink’s bond and secured his release with help from members of Palatka’s Jewish Relief Society so that he could serve as a witness against O’Hara.<sup>21</sup> Determined to gather as much evidence as possible, Quackenbos and Assistant Attorney General Charles Wells Russell traveled to Florida to investigate conditions at the Buffalo Bluffs and Maytown camps and to obtain

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<sup>19</sup> Mary Grace Quackenbos was instrumental in exposing the plight of European immigrants within the naval stores industry. Described by Jerrell Shofner as a “militant, middle-class reformer,” Quackenbos used her personal wealth and legal expertise to interview and gather witnesses for the case against F. J. O’Hara. Quotation from Shofner, “Mary Grace Quackenbos,” 275. Because of her extensive work with recent immigrants, she was able to gain the trust of witnesses in the O’Hara case and became such an asset to the Justice Department that she was appointed as a special assistant to the U.S. attorney. Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery*, 83.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Grace Quackenbos to U.S. Attorney General, February 8, 1907 p. 3-4, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files; Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery*, 83-84; Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 114.

<sup>21</sup> Initially, Quackenbos sent \$100.00 bail to the United States Attorney in Jacksonville, Florida, but he refused delivery. Upon receipt of the returned funds, she secured Fink’s release through the Attorney General in Washington, D.C. The initial refusal of bail suggests that O’Hara’s political connections extended to Florida’s State’s Attorney. Mary Grace Quackenbos to U.S. Attorney General, February 8, 1907 p. 4, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files.



affidavits from O'Hara's laborers.<sup>22</sup> The story of involuntary servitude that began in New York City with labor agent Sigmund S. Schwartz, culminated in Buffalo Bluffs at the Hodges and O'Hara naval stores operation.

Sigmund S. Schwartz, dubbed "the most corrupt labor agent of the lower East side," dealt almost exclusively with European immigrant workers.<sup>23</sup> Owning several agencies in the lower east side of Manhattan, Schwartz procured workers for numerous industrial ventures throughout the South and Northeast. Advertising through trade journals, newspapers, and bulletins, Schwartz boasted that he could supply gangs of laborers who were "Not spoiled from City life."<sup>24</sup> In addition to O'Hara's turpentine operation, he supplied men to the Langhorn Company, a railway venture in Roanoke, Virginia, to mining operations in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and to various other industries in Delaware and New York State.<sup>25</sup> A very charismatic entrepreneur, Schwartz used a variety of tactics to lure recruits into his lower east side office. He mobilized a plethora of contacts, such as cooks and stewards on steam ships, to spread the word about his agency. Paul Werner, a German steamship steward, explained that, "Schwartz offered me a fee if I would bring my friends to him from Germany."<sup>26</sup> In addition, he employed "runners" to physically bring recent immigrants to the agency. Speaking to recruits in

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<sup>22</sup> Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery*, 83-84.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Grace Quackenbos to U.S. Attorney General, February 8, 1907 p. 5, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files.

<sup>24</sup> Telegram sent from Schwartz's Labor Office, affixed to: Mary Grace Quackenbos to U.S. Attorney General, February 8, 1907 p. 12, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files.

<sup>25</sup> Mary Grace Quackenbos to U.S. Attorney General, February 8, 1907 p. 15-16, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files.

<sup>26</sup> Affidavit of Paul Werner. 13 December 1906. Enclosed in, Mary Grace Quackenbos to U.S. Attorney General, February 8, 1907 p. 14, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files.

their native language, Schwartz promised warm weather, high wages, and employment in a place where they could eventually settle down.<sup>27</sup> According to Benjamin Wilenski, Schwartz promised him sawmill work at Buffalo Bluffs that would pay \$1.50 per day.<sup>28</sup> Nathan Himmelfarb received a similar offer of \$1.50 per day with a pay increase to \$2.00 a day for a woodworking job at the same sawmill.<sup>29</sup>

After Wilenski accepted Schwartz's offer, he and thirty-two other recruits boarded a steam ship on July 6, 1906 bound for Florida. Once they left New York City, Wilenski and his compatriots' experience followed a path similar for other peons within the naval stores industry. Traveling for approximately three and one-half days to O'Hara's turpentine camp, the recruits disembarked in Maytown, Florida. Expecting sawmill work and comfortable lodging, Wilenski was shocked to discover that Maytown was a turpentine operation, and his lodgings consisted of "small cabins... filled with dirt and vermin."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, he had already begun his term of employment in debt to the company. Wilenski expected that the \$13.00 transportation fee would be deducted from his pay at a rate of 50 cents per week, but was shocked to learn that he would have to purchase his own provisions from the commissary.<sup>31</sup> "Half starved, [from] being very poorly fed on their journey," the recruits eagerly lined up to purchase tinned sardines and salmon from the company store. To Wilenski's surprise, sardines cost almost three times

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<sup>27</sup> Mary Grace Quackenbos to U.S. Attorney General, February 8, 1907 p. 5, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files.

<sup>28</sup> Deposition given by Benjamin Wilenski, July 1906, p. 6, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9.

<sup>29</sup> Deposition given by Nathan Himmelfarb, October 10, 1906, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files.

<sup>30</sup> Deposition given by Benjamin Wilenski, July 1906, p. 6a, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files.

<sup>31</sup> Deposition given by Benjamin Wilenski, July 1906, p. 6, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files.

as much as they did in New York.<sup>32</sup> The situation became all the more desperate when, in less than a week, all the laborers had amassed at least seventy cents of debt. Wilenski stated: “At the end of the week their wages amounted to \$6.30, and that the bill on the books against each one was \$7 and over, keeping the workmen always in debt to the company.”<sup>33</sup>

Surprisingly, in both the piney woods and camp, Wilenski and other immigrants toiled under the constant surveillance of African American hands. Describing his first day, Wilenski claimed that black guards roused him at 4 a.m. and, after a two hour journey into the woods, instructed him to distribute eighty to ninety pound barrels at each pine tree.<sup>34</sup> Samuel Fink echoed Wilenski’s account, stating that: “Two of the negroes were on horseback and two walked with us. We were forced to dip turpentine from trees, each carrying a heavy barrel.”<sup>35</sup> Once the day’s work ended, Wilenski and Fink returned to the stockade and “were watched by negroes with long guns.”<sup>36</sup>

Such testimony shed light on a somewhat unique situation within the camp. O’Hara employed African Americans as woodsriders and guards. This situation was somewhat anomalous, because African American men during the turn of the century usually occupied the position of boxers, chippers, and dippers. Although chipping was a

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<sup>32</sup> Deposition given by Benjamin Wilenski, July 1906, p. 6a, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files. According to Wilenski sardines at Maytown cost 15 cents whereas in New York City the same item cost between 5 to 10 cents.

<sup>33</sup> Deposition given by Benjamin Wilenski, July 1906, p. 6a-7, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files.

<sup>34</sup> Deposition given by Benjamin Wilenski, July 1906, p. 7, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files.

<sup>35</sup> Deposition given by Samuel Fink, 10 October 1906, p. 9b, case file 50-162, reel 15, section 8, The Peonage Files.

<sup>36</sup> Deposition given by Benjamin Wilenski, July 1906, p. 8, case file 100937, reel 4, folder 9, The Peonage Files.

highly specialized skill, black workers rarely held supervisory positions within naval stores camps that employed debt servitude. While it is impossible to ascertain for certain the motivation behind O'Hara's decision, there are several possible explanations that warrant discussion. O'Hara primarily employed unskilled immigrant labor at the Maytown location. Because naval stores workers were traditionally African American who for generations had passed down the specialized chipping and streaking techniques, it is highly probable that the men O'Hara placed in charge were some of the few skilled laborers within the camp.

Another possible explanation, however, derives from the demographic composition of the camp. Maytown had an extraordinarily high turnover rate. Dissatisfied workers complained to O'Hara that Schwartz had promised them sawmill work at Buffalo Bluffs, but had sent them to Maytown. In response to these claims, O'Hara readily sent dissatisfied recruits to Buffalo Bluffs only after they signed another labor contract that added an additional \$17.00 to their transportation costs.<sup>37</sup> This quick turnover created a location where the majority of employees were single men, because the high rate of mobility prevented workers from settling and raising families. In a purely male-dominated environment, the racial hierarchy did not need to be observed as closely as in arenas where white women had a visible presence; thus, allowing for black men's superior position over white immigrants.<sup>38</sup> While the dearth of women altered the racial

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<sup>37</sup> Deposition given by Samuel Fink, 10 October 1906, p. 9b, case file 50-162, reel 15, section 8, The Peonage Files; Michael David Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines: Debt Peonage in the Southern Turpentine Industry, 1900-1930," (Ph.D. Diss., University of Florida, 1996), 130.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Letwin makes this argument in correlation to the advent of biracial unionism in Alabama's coalmines. He writes: "In contrast to most areas of the mining community, the mines themselves were an exclusively male environment. The absence

dynamic in Maytown, African American women were a very visible presence at other naval stores operations.

Although the Cross City and Blue Creek turpentine operations serve as an excellent location for examining the impact of involuntary servitude on both black men and black women, these camps are particularly instructive on the effect that this institution had on women. In the twenty years since the Clyatt case, Frederick Cubberly, the northern district commissioner for Florida's Justice Department, systematically prosecuted cases of involuntary servitude in his part of the state. In 1921, he began preparing a case against Captain W. Alston Brown. Brown managed two camps for the Putnam Lumber Company located in Cross City, Florida. Approximately forty-five miles west of Gainesville, the Cross City and Blue Creek camps and their Captain became infamous for the mistreatment of laborers.<sup>39</sup> In order to build a winning case against Brown, Cubberly sent numerous special agents to locate and obtain affidavits from Brown's current and previous workers. Through their testimony, camp laborers described a story of not only coercion and violence, but also one of incredible resilience and determination to overcome a bad situation. In addition, these affidavits offer a rare glimpse into the lives of camp women, who demonstrated a fierce resolve to maintain gainful employment and to protect their families. Unlike their male counterparts, however, female naval stores workers experienced gendered forms of violence and labor control at the hands of both the camps' Captain and other male workers. Despite the

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of women at the mines and their marginal place in unions served quietly but significantly to open up space for interracial unionism in the constraining landscape of Jim Crow." Daniel Letwin, *The Challenges of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 154-155.

<sup>39</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 247, 236.

general lawlessness and peonage abuses, turpentine hands at Brown's operation demonstrated a keen sense of mutualism in the face of such adversity.

Much like his counterparts in Maytown and Buffalo Bluffs, Captain Brown employed labor agents, sign-on bonuses, and false promises to obtain his labor supply. James Jones, a sixteen-year-old from Jacksonville, Florida, found employment at Cross City through Brown's recruiters.<sup>40</sup> Just as Jones fell prey to unscrupulous labor agents, Lizzie Bush had a similar experience when she met Captain Brown in 1919. While she was working as a hotel cook in Trenton, Florida, Brown offered her \$20.00 a week to prepare meals for two hundred turpentine hands. Tempted by the "good wages at this place," Bush eagerly traveled to Brown's naval stores operations to begin work as a cook. However, upon her arrival, Lizzie Bush realized that "she was trapped and could not get away," because Brown refused to allow her to leave the camp.<sup>41</sup> While Lizzie Bush understood that she was a captive, other laborers came to Cross City in search of better opportunities. Sam Herrall, who had previously worked at another naval stores operation in Arthur Creek, traveled to the Blue creek camp because Captain Brown had sent him money and offered him a chipping job.<sup>42</sup> Rena French, too, independently sought employment at the turpentine camp. At Cross City, she ran the kitchens and prepared meals for the camp hands.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to these methods, Brown also obtained laborers by entrapping the family members of his employees. During a visit with his mother at the Blue Creek

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<sup>40</sup> Affidavit report taken by Howard P. Wright, 9 September 1921. Cubberly Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Affidavit report taken by John Bonyne, 14 November 1921, p. 1. Cubberly Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Affidavit report taken by John Bonyne, 3 May 1922, p. 27. Cubberly Papers.

<sup>43</sup> Affidavit report taken by John Bonyne, 3 May 1922, p. 5. Cubberly Papers.

operation, Arthur Williams joined the camp as a cooper. Although he hired Williams at a rate of 15 cents a barrel, Brown claimed that Williams owed him money and held him at the camp for seven years.<sup>44</sup> Rosa Whitlock had a similar experience when she traveled to Cross City to see her husband. According to Whitlock, “she received several letters from her husband,” who had worked as a dipper for two years, requesting that she visit. After a two-week stay at the camp, she endeavored to return home to Savannah, but Eddie, her husband, claimed that he could not pay her fare home because he owed Captain Brown money. Brown, then, informed her that she would stay on as a camp cook and laundress at a pay rate of \$4.80 a month in order to work off her family’s debt. She eventually fled the camp and returned to Savannah.<sup>45</sup>

Once he obtained his workforce, Captain Brown enlisted the help of his nephew Mose to maintain control within the camp through the use of isolation, guards, and violence. Fortifying the camp perimeter with barbed wire, Captain Brown built his house at the entrance of the compound, so that no one could leave the camp without his knowledge. Moreover, he posted four men on guard twenty-four hours a day.<sup>46</sup> Rosa Whitlock explained the complete seclusion within the camp: “people who have been in

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<sup>44</sup> Affidavit report taken by John Bonyne, 3 May 1922, p. 20, Cubberly Papers.

<sup>45</sup> Affidavit report taken by John Bonyne, 10 June 1921, p. 2-3. Cubberly Papers. Rosa Whitlock’s story, however, is more complicated than it appears to be. Brown monitored the incoming and outgoing mail of the camp. Although Eddie Whitlock wrote the letters asking Rosa to join him, it is possible that Captain Brown prompted him to extend the invitation so that he could endeavor to entrap her within the camp. Even if Whitlock sent the letters of his own volition, Brown certainly knew that Rosa would be arriving at Cross City and his move to entrap her was certainly calculated. Moreover, in his affidavit Eddie Whitlock states that he “would go with some of the women” in the camp and that Brown would deduct their fee from his wages. This evidence suggests that he was not entirely devoted to his wife. Therefore, it appears as though he did not send for her purely out of fondness. Affidavit taken by John Bonyne, 3 May 1922, p. 6. Cubberly Papers.

<sup>46</sup> Affidavit taken by John Bonyne, 10 June 1921, p. 3. Cubberly Papers.

this camp for 15 years have never seen an outside person, nor any of their relatives.”<sup>47</sup>

Despite the remoteness of these operations, Whitlock’s charge of prolonged isolation is extreme. Although he prevented laborers from leaving the camp, Brown did permit visitors to his turpentine operation.

While Brown endeavored to keep his workers isolated from the surrounding Floridian population, men and women within the naval stores operation surreptitiously kept in contact with friends and relatives outside of the camp. According to Mollie Squire, Captain Brown intercepted and read any letter that entered or left the camp through the commissary.<sup>48</sup> Will Anderson also described the process of mailing letters. He stated that he had to deliver an unsealed letter to the Captain, and if Brown were dissatisfied “he would tear it up and give him a beating.”<sup>49</sup> Despite these precautions, laborers managed to smuggle out messages to loved ones or influential benefactors who had the potential to secure their release. James Jones, the youth from Jacksonville, successfully contacted his mother, Georgia Jones on August 9, 1921 and asked for \$4.00 so that he could settle his debt with Brown and leave Cross City. According to Jones’s letter, adverse work conditions had caused his feet to swell and contract “water poison” that rendered him unable to work. After hearing that her son was ill, Georgia sent the requested money, and upon receiving no response she hastened to Cross City to rescue him. Unfortunately, Georgia’s attempts to locate her son were futile, as Brown claimed that James had been arrested for leaving without settling a boarding house tab and subsequently escaped from jail and had not been heard from again. It is unclear if James

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<sup>47</sup> Affidavit taken by John Bonyne, 10 June 1921, p. 4. Cubberly Papers.

<sup>48</sup> Affidavit taken by John Bonyne, 10 June 1921, p. 1. Cubberly Papers.

<sup>49</sup> Affidavit report taken by John Bonyne, 3 May 1922, p. 19. Cubberly Papers.



Jones escaped the grasp of involuntary servitude or met his demise at the hands of Captain Brown. According to camp resident Lucile Thomas, James had run as far as Newberry, Florida, but was apprehended by Brown, returned to camp, and severely whipped.<sup>50</sup> Given Brown's propensity for violence towards those who defied him—he lynched another laborer, Mose Nellum, for writing to his mother requesting that she send the sheriff to rescue him—it is quite possible that he did the same to James Jones.<sup>51</sup>

Although the fate of James Jones is uncertain, Lizzie Bush was able to successfully escape debt bondage. Bush, a cook and laundress for the naval stores operation, persuaded three escapees to smuggle out a letter for her and mail it to Mr. Howard of Tampa, Florida. Mr. Howard had previously employed Lizzie as a cook. Although she did not specify the content of the letter, Mr. Howard used his influence to secure her release.<sup>52</sup> When asked about her escape, Lizzie declared that “if it had not been for Mr. Howard at Tampa she probably would have been dead.”<sup>53</sup> Lizzie Bush's story is instructive on several levels. Although she does not explain her relationship to the escapees, Lizzie's account demonstrates that laborers formed bonds under adverse circumstances and were willing to risk danger to help each other. This aid was also particularly significant because it negates the assertion that turpentine workers were largely individualistic, friendless outsiders. Moreover, her letter shows that turpentine communities were not as insular as previously assumed. Even though she no longer

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<sup>50</sup> Affidavit report taken by Howard P. Wright, 9 September 1921, p. 1-3. Cubberly Papers.

<sup>51</sup> Affidavit report taken by John Bonyne, 10 June 1921, p. 30. Cubberly Papers.

<sup>52</sup> There are two probable scenarios of how Howard secured Lizzie's release. Howard could have offered Brown full payment of Lizzie's debts or he could have used his political or social influence to sway Brown.

<sup>53</sup> Affidavit report by John Bonyne, 11 November 1921, p. 1-3. Cubberly Papers.

worked for him, Lizzie managed to maintain contact with a benefactor who lived almost 150 miles away.

Although Lizzie Bush successfully left Cross City, other laborers at Brown's operation were not as fortunate. Captain Brown kept his workers under strict guard both while they toiled within the woods and when they returned to camp. Moreover, he mercilessly punished captured escapees. Within the woods, laborers chipped and dipped the pines in heavily guarded squads. Brown named one worker the squad foreman and held him responsible for the actions of his underlings. Will Anderson, an African American foreman, guarded a gang of dippers. He explained that Captain Brown held him accountable for the men and, if any escaped, Anderson would be responsible for their debts. Moreover, Brown gave him disciplinary power over the squad. According to Anderson, Captain Brown "told him to whip the men if they did not do enough work and that if ANDERSON did not whip the men that he, BROWN, would whip ANDERSON."<sup>54</sup> By placing laborers in charge of one another, Brown set up an oppositional dynamic that fostered an atmosphere of distrust. Brown also mobilized a host of other methods to instill fear in his labor force. Sam Harrell recalled how Brown hung Archie Blake and Louise Carter by their thumbs for attempting to escape. Despite his privileged position as a guard, Harrell also suffered the same punishment for not informing Captain Brown of an unauthorized moonshining operation.<sup>55</sup> Jas Elliot

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<sup>54</sup> Affidavit report by John Bonyne, 3 May 1922, p. 19. Cubberly Papers. Emphasis in the original text. In their affidavits, laborers and foremen did not distinguish between squad and gang labor. However through other statements, it becomes evident that workers engaged in task work, where their performance was judged individually.

<sup>55</sup> Affidavit report by John Bonyne, 3 May 1922, p. 30. Cubberly Papers. Hanging by the thumbs was a common punishment used to discipline convicts within naval stores operations. It seems as though Captain Brown did not distinguish between

received two broken ribs as reprisal for leaving the camp. Prior to the incident, Captain Brown informed Elliot that he owed \$47.00. Elliot, then, requested and received permission to travel to Eugene, Florida in order to obtain the funds from Mr. Wade. When he returned to camp empty handed, Elliot received a merciless beating “with a strap and billy [club].” After the hiding, Brown threatened Elliot with a sentence on the chain gang if he ever left camp again.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to daily physical brutality, W. Alston and Mose Brown used sexual violence not only as a means of labor control for male and female workers, but also as a method of perpetuating involuntary servitude. Talitha LeFlouria notes that “Camp bosses ‘owned’ the labor of black women convicts...and attempted to exercise control over these bondwomen through sexual and physical assault.”<sup>57</sup> The Brown men, however, took it one step further, forcing the Cross City and Blue Creek camp women to not only work as turpentine hands, but also as prostitutes for the male laborers. Although they had no choice in the matter, some camp women decided to manipulate the situation to their advantage. When a new woman arrived at the camp, male turpentine hands had the opportunity to apply to Captain Brown for permission take the woman as a sexual partner. Whether she was married or not, willing or unwilling, was of no consequence. For, just as Tera Hunter contends: “A black woman’s body, in slavery and freedom, was

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his convict and free laborers, because he sometimes worked convict and free men on the same squad. Frank Cureton recalled working with convicts at the Brown’s Blue Creek operation. Affidavit report by John Bonyne, 3 May 1922, p. 7, Cubberly Papers. For a description of the punishment see, J. C. Powell, *The American Siberia* (Philadelphia: H. J. Smith & Company, 1891; reprint Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976), 15.

<sup>56</sup> Affidavit report by John Bonyne, 3 May 1922, p. 8. Cubberly Papers.

<sup>57</sup> Talitha LeFlouria, “‘The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Cuts Cordwood’: Exploring Black Women’s Lives and Labor in Georgia’s Convict Camps, 1865-1917,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 8, issue 3 (2011): 61-62.

treated as though it were not her own, nor even the conventional prerogative of her father or spouse.”<sup>58</sup> This assertion becomes further evident when Captain Brown sent husbands who protested directly to the prisoner stockade and had recalcitrant women severely whipped.<sup>59</sup>

Minnie Bryant and her husband Fred faced this dilemma when they sought employment at Cross City in 1911. Brown hired Fred as a camp hand and Minnie accompanied her husband to the camp. While she and her husband worked at the Cross City camp, another turpentine hand, Willie Johnson, took a particular interest in Minnie and petitioned Brown to have her as his mistress. Because of Johnson’s request, Minnie weighed the decision to submit to the Captain’s demands that she engage in sexual relations with another worker or to refuse. For five and one-half years, Minnie rebuffed the advances of Willie Johnson. For her insubordination, Brown savagely beat and punished her.<sup>60</sup>

Unlike Minnie who categorically refused to accept her position as camp prostitute, many women within the camp navigated their circumstances as a complex set of negotiations and displayed varying degrees of resistance to workers’ propositions. Women such as Della Green and Eva Brown, for example, did not openly rebel against Brown for fear of reprisal, but did confide in Special Agent John Bonyne when he visited

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<sup>58</sup> Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom, Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 106.

<sup>59</sup> Affidavit report by John Bonyne, 11 November 1921. Cubberly Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Affidavit report by John Bonyne, 3 May 1922, p. 21. Cubberly Papers.

them at camp. Eva Johnson explained how she, “had to go to bed with any dirty old negro that came along and asked CAPT BROWN [sic] for her.”<sup>61</sup>

While it is evident that fear and violence pressured camp women into these relations, other possibilities also warrant discussion. First and foremost women dreaded sharp reprisal for disobeying camp orders. One such woman was Salina Jones, who began work at the Blue Creek camp milking cows. After he claimed that she owed him money, Captain Brown forced Jones to prostitute at the camp to repay her debt.

Although she complied with Brown’s orders, Jones confessed that, “CAPT BROWN [sic] had whipped her twice for refusing to go to bed with men.”<sup>62</sup> While fear of physical violence may have compelled some women to submit, equally significant evidence is found in the remainder of Jones’s testimony. She continued that when men wanted to employ her services, “BROWN [sic] would sent [sic] the men with slips to her.”<sup>63</sup>

The “slips” that Salina Jones referred to were cross time slips that kept track of the amount of time each woman spent with a particular worker. Women turned in their cross time slips to the company store where Edward F. Scruggs, Cross City’s white commissary accountant, would deduct money from the male workers’ accounts and deposit it into the woman’s company store account.<sup>64</sup> This form of payment suggests another reason why some women might submit to this arrangement. Captain Brown set different prices according to the woman and duration of the encounter. Prices ranged

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<sup>61</sup> Affidavit report by John Bonyne, 3 May 1922, p. 10, 24. Cubberly Papers. Emphasis in the original text.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 9. Emphasis in the original text.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

from \$1.00 to \$5.00 with \$3.50 buying an overnight stay.<sup>65</sup> Flossie Henderson explained her arrangement at the Blue Creek camp. Originally hired to cook and wash for the African American workers, poor wages required Henderson to supplement her income by entertaining male workers. According to Henderson this arrangement was not only a necessity for her, but also a lucrative venture for Captain Brown because for every \$3.50 charged for an overnight sexual encounter, Captain Brown kept \$2.00 and she received \$1.50 on her company account.<sup>66</sup> For Brown, the use of female laborers as prostitutes served a dual purpose. It allowed him to exploit the camp women for extra money and to keep the male workers in perpetual debt. For the camp women, it afforded them an opportunity to supplement their income.

The story of another family is particularly instructive on the resilience of some of Brown's female workers. When Hattie Johnson arrived at Cross City with her two young daughters, she was unaware of what her position as camp cook and laundress would cost her children. Upon her arrival, Brown immediately separated Johnson from her two girls, Lillie Johnson and Vina Lee. Captain Brown then brought Lillie and Vina to his house within the campgrounds under the auspices of having them work as assistants to his cook.<sup>67</sup> Lillie Johnson recalled in 1922 that she had worked for Captain Brown as long as she could remember, and that from the time she was twelve to her sixteenth birthday Brown forced her to have "immoral relations" with him.<sup>68</sup> Vina Lee shared her sister's experience. Lee asserted that when she was also thirteen, Brown "made her do whate

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 16, 20, 19.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 8-9.

<sup>68</sup> Affidavit report by M. J. Cronin & John Bonyne, 5 through 8 May 1922. Cubberly Papers.

[sic] he wanted.”<sup>69</sup> Moreover, while the girls resided at Brown’s house, their mother reported that both gave birth to Brown’s children.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, despite her young age, Lillie Johnson had the courage to challenge Brown’s authority. On November 13, 1921, Captain Brown brought Lillie to Jacksonville, Florida so that she could attend the State Fair. According to Lillie, Brown paid her \$5.00 when they left Cross City and \$10.00 to spend at the fair. This payment suggests that Lillie was paid for sexual services at least some of the time. When Brown decided to return to the turpentine operation on November 19, Lillie adamantly refused. For this defiance, Brown clubbed Lillie with a pistol. Undeterred by her injury, Lillie attempted two escapes on the journey back to Cross City—once at the train depot and once on the train. Once Lilly and the Captain returned to camp, Brown claimed that Lillie owed him \$10.00 for her railway ticket and informed her that she would receive a stringent whipping for her insolence. After the thrashing, Brown had Lillie’s head shaved. According to Lillie, Captain Brown “made me take off all my dresses and wear overalls for two or three days.”<sup>71</sup> By shaving her head and denying her the privilege of women’s clothes, Brown intended to humiliate and demoralize Lillie.<sup>72</sup> Despite being denied her mother’s protection, Lillie had defiantly protested her circumstances.

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<sup>69</sup> Affidavit report by John Bonyne, 3 May 1922. Cubberly Papers.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> Affidavit report by M. J. Cronin & John Bonyne, 5 through 8 May 1922, p. 1-2. Cubberly Papers.

<sup>72</sup> Henrice Altink discusses the implementation and purpose of shaving female inmates’ hair in Jamaican workhouses. She contends: “As it [head shaving] stripped the women of those marks of identity that defined them as persons and subjects, this practice, then, primarily served to humiliate them.” Henrice Altink, “Slavery by Another Name: Apprenticed Women in Jamaican Workhouses in the Period 1834-8,” *Social History* 26, no. 1 (January 2001): 47-48.

While Hattie Johnson was unable to defend her children, mothers outside of the naval stores industry actively petitioned the United States Department of Justice to help locate and liberate ensnared family members. Nancy Fletcher, for example, wrote a letter to this government agency begging for the “return” of her son. Fifteen-year-old Ivy had traveled to a turpentine manufacturing operation in St. Cloud, Florida, fallen ill, and was then prevented from returning home. Desperate, his mother beseeched officials: “This boy of mine is a minor and if he owes this man Mr. Moore any money I am ready to pay it and send him RR [railroad] fare back home.”<sup>73</sup> Much like Mrs. Fletcher, Sallie Talbert penned a missive on behalf of her son-in-law, Anthony Hawthorne, and husband, Richard. Both fell prey to the deceptions of a labor recruiting agent, who promised sizeable wages at a turpentine orchard in southern Florida. After receiving communication from a “thinly settled country in which the timber has recently become available,” named Holopaw—located in Osceola County, Florida—Mrs. Talbert learned that Anthony had died while in the company’s employ. According to the dispatch, he had been shot while trying to escape.<sup>74</sup> While it is unclear if Mrs. Fletcher or Mrs. Talbert’s messages were answered, their communications with the United States Department of Justice suggest that naval stores workers maintained contact with relatives at different locations.

Just as Nancy Fletcher and Sallie Talbert attempted to aid their family members, other laborers, also trapped within the piney woods, attempted to ameliorate conditions of

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<sup>73</sup> Nancy Fletcher to US Department of Justice, May 28, 1923, p. 3, reel 19, case file 50-622, frame 0283, The Peonage Files.

<sup>74</sup> L. L. Fabinski to Department of Justice, June 3, 1925, reel 10 case file 50-17-3, frame 455. The Peonage Files; Frederick Cubberly to The Attorney General, May 30, 1925, reel 10 case file 50-17-3, frame 457, The Peonage Files.



involuntary servitude and develop strategies for survival within the piney woods. Through forging alliances, maintaining contact with friends and relatives, open defiance, and attempted escapes, these men and women challenged their position as peons and subverted the authority of their employers. Moreover, the presence of Eastern-European immigrants and the implementation of African American guards complicates the discourse of race, class, and gender within the longleaf woods. Despite the brutality and violence at Cross City, female turpentine workers mobilized various strategies for enduring and undermining Captain Brown's regime. Though these experiences were particularly grueling, conditions within naval stores operations primarily depended on the camp's foreman. Furthermore, an examination of camp life and leisure demonstrates that turpentine workers maintained a thriving existence outside of the woods.

## Chapter 5: Camp Life: Work and Play Away from the Woods

“It was a hard life, but it was a good life—it was healthy. We never worried about money, we worried about something to eat once in a while, but that wasn’t ever a big problem. We always had gardens,” reminisced Allen Nease about life within a turpentine camp. Born in Florida in 1913 and raised in Schlatterville, Georgia, he spent the majority of his life working within the naval stores industry and as a professional forester.<sup>1</sup> As a young boy, Nease rode the pine forests with his woodsrider grandfather. The allure of working in the woods was so strong that as a youth, he would avoid school and ride his horse straight to the nearest work crew. As Nease fondly remembered, “I was supposed to go to school, most of the time I didn’t go. He [Nease’s grandfather] didn’t know what I was doing, but I’d get tangled up with some crew, dippin’ crew,

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<sup>1</sup> The McFarland place, a turpentine operation located in St. Johns County and still functional in 1984, was the focus of a research project on the naval stores industry undertaken by the editorial office, University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS), University of Florida Gainesville. IFAS created a master videotape and catalogued the videocassettes containing research data and photographs by color code. Originally, the master and data cassettes were archived in the University of Florida Oral History Archives, Florida Museum of Natural History, Gainesville, but have since been destroyed. Original citation taken from, Robert N. Lauriault, “From Can’t to Can’t: the North Florida Turpentine Camp, 1900-1950,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 3 (January 1989): 312. Copies of some of the IFAS tapes are now located within the South Georgia Folk Life Collection, Odum Library, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia. IFAS videotape, yellow e, DVD1002.46C, South Georgia Folk Life Collection, Odum Library, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia. Hereafter the tapes will be cited as IFAS videotape, [color], [call number]. Stanley C. Bond, Jr., “The Development of the Naval Stores Industry in St. Johns County, Florida,” *The Florida Anthropologist*, vol. 40, no. 3 (September, 1987): 187.

chipping, pulling...I'd forget about school and go with the crew." After he finished high school and graduated from college in North Carolina with a degree in forestry, Nease returned to the naval stores industry. While working for the U.S. Forestry Service in Chipley, Florida, Nease endeavored to buy his first tract of pineland so that he could continue the same traditions from his childhood. Chipping and dipping by moonlight during the week and throughout the weekend, he remembered: "That's how I paid for the first 200 acres I ever owned."<sup>2</sup>

While the piney woods represented the locus of work for Allen Nease and other naval stores laborers, the turpentine camp served as the locale for auxiliary personnel within the field and provided workers with a place of refuge between forays into the forest. Some scholars have described turpentine camps as frontier outposts on the periphery of civilization where both "economic and geographical circumstances conspired to create an overwhelmingly exploitative situation in which the bull whip set the tone of daily life in the camps."<sup>3</sup> Michael Tegeder views camp brutality as an extension of endemic savagery within the South, because it was "a region that was culturally predisposed toward violence."<sup>4</sup> Unappealing work in the woods not only necessitated cruelty at the job site, but also permeated life within the encampment. As one anonymous producer from the 1930s aptly explained, "The supreme authority in the

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<sup>2</sup> Allen Nease interview, IFAS videotape, yellow 3, DVD1002.46C, SGFLC; *St. Johns County Government*, "Nease Beachfront Park," (accessed April 15, 2014).

<sup>3</sup>Robert Be. Outland III, *Tapping the Pines: The Naval Stores Industry in the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 178; Michael David Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines: Debt Peonage in the Southern Turpentine Industry, 1900-1930" (PhD dissertation, University of Florida, 1996), 155.

<sup>4</sup> Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines," 155.

camp is the foreman. To the niggers he is the law, judge, jury, and executioner.”<sup>5</sup> While these assessments hold true for operations that employed debt peonage, other accounts demonstrate that the quality of the laborers’ experience heavily depended on the operator. Stanley Bond offers a more positive interpretation, describing the “‘womb to tomb’ services for the workers.” Moreover, he argues, “Although the operator owned the camp, he provided housing, medical treatment, transportation and food.”<sup>6</sup> Building on Bond’s claim, Robert Lauriault presents a more balanced view of life within a turpentine town. He contends that “a kind of benign neglect disrespectful of human dignity...[and] condescending paternalism” pervaded the camp quarters.”<sup>7</sup> Although naval stores operators supplied the necessities for sustaining a workforce—housing and transportation—it was the laborers’ responsibility to acquire provisions, food, and medical care. Moreover, the turpentine producers who ascribed to the notion of benevolent paternalism could be woefully unaware of the reality and privations of life within the pine barrens. Mrs. McCauley, a Floridian naval stores operator, whose family had been in the business since the nineteenth century, explained how she and her relatives treated their workforce. She proudly declared: “They have a good life, at least I know. Look at Willie Lee. He looks so young.... I think they really like it [working in the woods].... They know they’re not going to be neglected.”<sup>8</sup> The threat of constant violence on the one hand and the paternalism of producers such as Mrs. McCauley on the other represent the two extremes of the spectrum of life within the average turpentine

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<sup>5</sup> An unidentified naval stores operator quoted in: Stetson Kennedy, *Palmetto Country* (1942; reprint Tallahassee: Florida A & M University Press, 1989), 265; Tegeder, “Prisoners of the Pines,” 162.

<sup>6</sup> Bond, “The Development of the Naval Stores Industry,” 197.

<sup>7</sup> Lauriault, “From Can’t to Can’t,” 323.

<sup>8</sup> IFAS videotape, yellow D, DVD1002.45C.

camp. The reality for most workers and their families—people such as Allen Nease—fell somewhere in the middle. There were violent episodes, particularly during the weekend when laborers received their wages and frequented the local juke joints, but these occurrences did not define daily camp operations. Moreover, naval stores operators did not implement full-scale programs of welfare capitalism or corporate paternalism. Producers occasionally hosted picnics celebrating the Fourth of July or brought Christmas bonuses or gifts of fruit to the quarters, but they did not try to establish a distinct company ethos.<sup>9</sup>

An examination of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century turpentine camps demonstrates how these locations served a dual importance for both naval stores operators and their workforce. While producers developed camps to serve as their base of operations deep within the longleaf woods, laborers used these venues to create and preserve families, forge bonds with fellow workers, and at times to challenge the racial hierarchy of the Jim Crow South. Despite the highly transitory nature of the industry, laborers established families within the camps and maintained friendships with naval stores laborers in other locations. Unlike manufacturing industries, particularly textiles, that employed entire families, work in the pine barrens proved too taxing to employ women and children as full time laborers. Thus, naval stores camps also became venues for families to create small-scale cottage industries to supplement their income.

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<sup>9</sup> Elliot West, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, no date 2002, audiocassette, CAS1002.08.1, South Georgia Folk Life Collection, Odum Library, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia. Hereafter audiocassette interviews from the South Georgia Folk Life Collection will be cited as SGFLC; Mr. Williams interview, IFAS videotape, White 5, DVD1002-55C, SGFLC; Bessie Kincade Smith, interview by Laurie Sommers, December 6, 2004, audiocassette, DAT1002.13, SGFLC; Ralph Wilkerson, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, February 22, 2004, audiocassette vol. 2, CAS1002.12, SGFLC.

Over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, turpentine settlements evolved from primeval outposts to burgeoning company towns. Two inventions facilitated this shift. The advent of the lightweight copper still in 1834 permitted the distillation of crude gum near the harvesting site. Because the still was more affordable and transportable, naval stores producers no longer needed to set up operations near transportation lines or port cities. Moving deeper into the forest gave these men greater access to pine land, which allowed them to remain in the same location for longer periods of time.<sup>10</sup> The second technological innovation was the use of the cup and gutter system for harvesting sap. Beginning in 1901, Dr. Charles Herty conducted a round of experiments in nondestructive gum harvesting techniques. With the cooperation of the federal Bureau of Forestry, he developed a system that eliminated the boxing of trees.<sup>11</sup> Rather than cutting a box into the trunk, workers made two slashes approximately one-fourth of an inch deep on the face of the tree. The cuts formed the shape of a “V” with one slash extending one inch past the other. Two iron strips were then placed into these slashes to form a gutter that would guide the gum into a metal cup

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<sup>10</sup> Percival Perry, “Naval-Stores Industry in the Old South, 1790-1860,” *Journal of Southern History* vol. 34, no. 4 (November, 1968): 514; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 45; Catherine Gyllerstrom, “Turpentine Industry in Alabama,” published September 8, 2011, *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, (accessed April 22, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Herty was not the first scientist or forester to develop nondestructive gum harvesting techniques. French naval stores operators developed a system in which laborers collected gum from holes that they dug at the base of the pine tree. This method was inefficient because the gum was contaminated with rubble. During the 1840s, laborers replaced the hole with a clay pot buried in the ground. Influenced by French methods, American inventors began devising new methods of gum collection. Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 213-214; AD. Genvrain & Co., “Naval Stores Industry in France,” in *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution and Consumption*, ed. Thomas Gamble (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Company, 1921), 160; A. W. Schorger & H. S. Betts, *The Naval Stores Industry* (Washington D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1915), 18-22.

hung on the face of the tree.<sup>12</sup> Herty's method prolonged the tree's life, because it was far less traumatic than boxing and increased the gum yield, thereby making the crop more profitable.<sup>13</sup> These innovations allowed naval stores operators to extend the harvest and remain in the same location for a longer period of time.

Because of these extended yields, manufacturers pragmatically situated camps to locate "workers near the timber because it was much more economical" to harvest and still gum in the same place.<sup>14</sup> Initially, late-nineteenth-century camps resembled shantytowns with temporary single-room shacks to shelter the workers.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, there was little differentiation between housing for free and inmate labors. Captain Powell explained that the first turpentine camp he managed in the late 1800s did not have established lodgings. Trekking into the woods, he ordered the inmates to construct "a rude log-house, twenty by forty feet, for sleeping quarters. Like Solomon's temple, it was erected without the sound of hammer, and the roof was secured by a curious system of pegs and weights."<sup>16</sup> Although historian Robert Outland found that "turpentine camps of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended to be isolated and temporary,"

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<sup>12</sup> Charles H. Herty, *A New Method of Turpentine Orcharding* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903), 17-18; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 215-219.

<sup>13</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 220; Herty, *A New Method of Turpentine Orcharding*, 12-13, 29-31

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey A. Drobney, "Lumbermen and Log Sawyers: The Transformation of Life and Labor in the North Florida Timber Industry, 1830-1930" (Ph.D. Diss., West Virginia University, 1995), 291. Drobney makes this argument about cutting and milling lumber; however, the same assessment holds true for turpentine production.

<sup>15</sup> Nollie Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest: Lumbering in the Longleaf Pine Belt 1840-1915* (University: The University of Mississippi, 1962), 147; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 86; Gaynelle Goodman Wright, "Turpentinizing an Ethnohistorical Study of Southern Industry and Way of Life" (masters thesis, University of Georgia 1979), 109.

<sup>16</sup> J. C. Powell, *The American Siberia* (Philadelphia: H. J. Smith & Company, 1891; reprint Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1976), 17.

as the twentieth century progressed, naval stores encampments grew increasingly more permanent and stable, due to prolonged harvests.<sup>17</sup>

Turpentine settlements in the twentieth-century shared similarities to company towns in other industries. They consisted of the operator's home, laborers' quarters, the commissary—or company store—still and cooperage shed. Locations where convicts worked featured a stockade to house the inmates.<sup>18</sup> Naval stores hamlets typically had one road connecting the community to other towns or transportation depots. The operator's home and the dwellings of white woodsmen and their families lined this thoroughfare so that they could monitor the activity in and out of the camp. Rosa Whitlock remembered that Browns' house was located at the gate of the camp to prevent workers from leaving.<sup>19</sup> Laborers and their families lived further off the road in noticeably shabbier dwellings. Arranged in rows with outhouses located in the rear, workers' homes were constructed out of unfinished wood planks and had thick wooden

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<sup>17</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 178.

<sup>18</sup> For works that discuss company towns in the coal, lumber and textile industries see: Crandall A. Shifflet, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Sothern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), William P. Jones, *Tribe of the Black Ulysses: African American Lumber Workers in the Jim Crow South* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2005), and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al., eds., *Life a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987); William Alonzo Register, interview, interviewed by Clifton Paisley, January 28, 1978, audiotape cassette, State Archives of Florida, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy C. Prizer, "Pining for Turpentine: Critical Nostalgia, Memory, and Commemorative Expression in the Wake of Industrial Decline" (masters thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009), 60; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 180; Affidavit report taken by John Bonyne, 10 June 1921, Frederick C. Cubberly Papers, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.



shutters used to secure the home at night.<sup>20</sup> The average cabin was not weatherproof and had slats where the wall boards did not meet. In addition, they lacked plumbing and electricity, and were heated with a large fireplace. Building size varied from camp to camp and geographical location, but usually consisted of two to five rooms. Bernice Wilcox, who grew up in Georgia turpentine operations, remembered living in a single room cabin. Despite having to weatherproof the family's house by stuffing paper into the wooden slats, she recalled: "It was good...cause that's all I knew."<sup>21</sup> At a Florida camp, Bessie Kincade Smith explained that the African American quarters were too crowded for her family, so she and her relatives stayed in a three-room house in the woods. W. C. "Dub" Tomlinson, on the other hand, described his childhood home in the white section of a naval stores operation in Echols County, Georgia as larger, yet equally austere. According to Tomlinson, the cabin he inhabited as a boy had four or five rooms with a porch. Despite the home's size, it was also unsealed and not weatherproof.<sup>22</sup> Outside, small garden plots flanked the homes because laborers grew produce to supplement provisions from the company store. Although workers of both races lived in similar housing, the quarters remained segregated with African American workers occupying one section and white workers living in another. At some locations, single male workers remained sequestered from family housing in order to maintain a peaceful atmosphere. As a foreman at one camp explained, "We always aimed to have separate quarters for the

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<sup>20</sup> Robert N. Lauriault, "From Can't to Can't," 323-324; William Alonzo Register, interview, interviewed by Clifton Paisley, January 28, 1978, audiotape cassette, State Archives of Florida, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>21</sup> Jeff and Bernice Wilcox, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, January 28, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.10, SGFLC.

<sup>22</sup> Bessie Kincade Smith, interview by Laurie Sommers, December 6, 2004, audiocassette, DAT1002.13, SGFLC; William Candler "Dub" Tomlinson, interviewed by Laurie Sommers, July 15, 2003, audiocassette, CAS1002.07.1, SGFLC.

single niggers to keep them from messin-up [sic] with the married men's wives."<sup>23</sup>

Although this decision rested on a clear set of racial assumptions about the camp's workers, as much as a desire to promote a more family friendly environment, it does suggest a need to maintain harmony within the quarters.

As naval stores operators began to expand and consolidate their ventures in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the inclusion of a copper still within the camp became paramount to turpentine production. Prior to the advent of the lightweight still, producers shipped barrels of crude turpentine to distilleries, which caused production costs to become prohibitive.<sup>24</sup> On-site stilling lowered production costs, and provided naval stores laborers with the opportunity for job advancement. This access to positions of skilled labor became increasingly important for African American workers, who began working as stillers in the early twentieth century.

Distilling turpentine required specialized knowledge and a mastery of highly temperamental equipment. Manufacturers located copper stills within the camp's boundaries in two-story wood buildings with a brick base. On the first level a wood-burning furnace heated the copper still located directly above it on the second floor. Stilling commenced at the beginning of April concurrently with dipping. Mule drawn carts brought gum barrels directly from the woods. Each barrel held approximately fifty-five gallons of crude gum and a good team of mules could haul six to eight barrels with a single mule transporting five barrels. Drivers took great pride in their animals, and

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<sup>23</sup> An unidentified naval stores operator quoted in: Kennedy, *Palmetto Country*, 265.

<sup>24</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 45.

believed that there was “no smarter animal in the world than a turpentine mule.”<sup>25</sup> Still laborers then unloaded the barrels, rolled them up a ramp to the second story and poured them into the copper kettle, which held approximately 400 to 1,000 gallons of gum. The head stiller fired the oven to heat the gum and evaporate water from the substance. As the natural water evaporated, the distiller added spring water to the kettle through a three-fourths inch wide copper pipe. When the mixture reached the correct temperatures to create steam, vapor flowed through a tube at the top of the still and into a copper coil called the “worm.” The worm consisted of eight coils that were located within a large wooden still filled with cold water. The cold water caused the vapor to condense and drip into the wooden barrel. The distiller, with the help of assistants, then processed this mixture through three barrels. The mixture consisted of spirits of turpentine and water. As the turpentine rose and separated from the water, still workers skimmed it from the surface and transferred it to a second barrel. They repeated this distillation process with the second barrel and then shipped the third barrel.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 75; Kenneth H. Thomas Jr., *McCranie's Turpentine Still, Atkinson County, Georgia: A Historical Analysis of the Site, with Some Information on the Naval Stores Industry in Georgia and Elsewhere* (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 1975), 30; C. Krout, “Production of Turpentine in Alabama,” *De Bow's Review* 7 (December 1849): 561; Willie White, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, July 6, 2003, audiocassette, CAS1002.05.1, SGFLC.

<sup>26</sup> IFAS videotape, White 6, DVD1002.56C; Robert B. Outland III, *Tapping the Pines: The Naval Stores Industry in the American South* (Baton Rouge: The Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 75-76; Thomas, *McCranie's Turpentine Still*, 30-31; Albert Pridgen, “Turpentine in the South Atlantic Country,” in Thomas Gamble, ed., *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution and Consumption* (Savannah: Review Publishing & Printing Company, 1921), 101; Gyllerstrom, “Turpentine Industry in Alabama”; Robson Dunwody, “Proper Methods of Distilling and Handling in the Production of Turpentine and Rosin,” in Thomas Gamble, ed., *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution, and Consumption* (Savannah: Review Publishing & Printing Company, 1921), 128.

After the distillation process completed and the copper kettle cooled, stillers drained the byproduct from the caldron. The remains were rosin, an equally saleable product. In the back of the still building, still workers loosed the “tail gate” that subsequently released the rosin. The rosin traveled down a chute and through a series of three strainers to remove the remaining impurities. The finest strainer rested at the bottom of the gutter, wrapped with cotton batten. Laborers then barreled this product and prepared it for shipment.<sup>27</sup>

Distillers became highly skilled employees who took great pride in their work. Crude gum is a highly temperamental substance, particularly during the distillation process. Depending on its composition, different types of gum began distillation at different temperatures. Raw gum is comprised of 25 percent spirits and 75 percent rosin and boils at 363 °F. Because rosin starts deteriorating at 392 °F, stillers only had a 29 °F margin of error before the entire batch would be ruined. Because the margin was so slim, distillers began adding water to the raw gum to decrease its boiling point. When combined with water, the substance would boil at the temperature range of 313 °F to approximately 324 °F, thus giving the distiller more leeway with temperature.<sup>28</sup>

Despite this increased flexibility, a minor miscalculation in temperature could have catastrophic results. When water begins to boil out of the crude turpentine during the distillation process, the vapors become trapped within the viscose resin. This reaction causes the contents of the still to bubble up and expand in volume. At this point in the distillation process, it becomes imperative that the distiller maintains the appropriate

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas, *McCranie's Turpentine Still*, 32; IFAS videotape, Green 3, DVD.1002.19C; Dunwody, “Proper Methods of Distilling,” 133.

<sup>28</sup> Schorger & Betts, *The Naval Stores Industry*, 13-14; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 76.

temperature for the duration of the process. If the temperature of the still increased too rapidly, the contents would continue to expand and bubble over. If the temperature dropped, the viscosity of the resin increased thereby trapping more vapors and creating the potential for overflow. Because turpentine is flammable, this overspill had the potential to cause fires. Although some stills in the twentieth century came equipped with a thermometer to measure the temperature inside the kettle, master distillers developed their own system of sound distillation. By listening to the boiling sound that the gum and water mixture created, an experienced distiller could tell the “height and condition” of the cauldron’s contents and regulate the heat accordingly.<sup>29</sup>

Although skilled labor in the naval stores industry traditionally belonged to white workers, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century opportunities for African Americans to enter the distillery became available. The limitations placed on black workers stem from the antebellum era, when as Robert Outland explains: “Evidence suggests that whites usually served as head distillers, although their assistants were likely to be skilled slaves.”<sup>30</sup> Even though relegated to the role of assistant in the nineteenth century, African Americans laborers found and created opportunities to work as stillers. For example, Lawrence Williams explained that his uncle Bose Williams owned a turpentine still in Florida. According to Williams, the still had a 4,000-gallon tank ordered from Pensacola, Florida. Moreover, as he explained, all the employees were African American. One of the laborers was Ralph Dupree’s father. Trained as a distiller

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<sup>29</sup> Dunwody, “Proper Methods of Distilling,” 128, 132; Thomas, *McCranie’s Turpentine Still*, 31; IFAS videotape, Green E, DVD1002.19C, SGFLC; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 76; *Spirits of the Pines*, produced by the Institute of Community and Area Development, University of Georgia, 1978, digital file.

<sup>30</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 77.

and cooper, Dupree's father lived in the town of Esto, Florida, where Ralph was born in 1912. Once he became old enough, Ralph joined his father at work.<sup>31</sup> Although labor in the distillery could be quite hazardous, some distillers believed in the healthful benefits of their jobs. Wilburt Johnson, a naval stores worker, remembered the prevailing theory that "smelling that there rosin and that water and stuff you know...it was good for your health and for you...they lived till they got way on up in age."<sup>32</sup>

Serving as a distiller was not the only skilled labor available for African American turpentine workers. Because they preferred to manage as many aspects of production as possible at their harvesting location, naval stores operators installed cooperage sheds within the town. Unlike distilling, which had traditionally been the job of white workers, barrel making was open to both races. According to Robert Outland, "most coopers in the [antebellum] turpentine industry were slaves."<sup>33</sup> After the Civil War, producers continued to hire black barrel makers. Barrels represented an essential component in the harvesting, distillation, and transportation of turpentine. Within the woods, dippers transferred gum from boxes and tins to four- or five-gallon wooden casks. They then emptied the casks into fifty-five-gallon barrels that were subsequently transferred to the still. The distillation also required vats for the purification of the gum. Once the turpentine was ready for shipment, still workers sealed the drums and producers sent them to factorage houses. Cooperage techniques typically passed down from father to son. African American cooper Ralph Dupree, for example, learned to make barrels

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<sup>31</sup> Ralph Dupree, interviewed by Jan Rosenberg, January 7, 1989, audiocassette, CAS1002.010, SGFLC.

<sup>32</sup> Wilburt Johnson, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, February, 21, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.11, SGFLC.

<sup>33</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 77.

from his father. At twelve years of age, he commenced working in the cooperage shed and remained in Esto, Florida as a vat maker until he was twenty-one. Ralph explained that producers purchased #26 wooden hoops from the West Florida Naval Stores Company in Pensacola, Florida. Once those supplies arrived, he would use these hoops to hold thirty-inch-long staves. It took approximately twenty to twenty-one of these staves to complete the entire barrel.<sup>34</sup> Because containers were in such high demand, coopers worked the entirety of the year. The constant, rhythmic sounds of their hammering echoed throughout the camp and attracted herds of children from the camp housing who would play in time to the sounds.<sup>35</sup>

Turpentine operations that leased convicts also employed them within the cooperage shed. Captain Powell described one prisoner, George Smith, who used his time constructing barrels to satisfy his “inordinate appetite for pork.” Smith would trap hogs that lived within the camp’s boundaries under vats and then asphyxiate them with burning rags. In order to mask the noise of the panicked pig, “Smith would be bustling about, making a pretense of work, and in order to drown the squeals of his victim he would vigorously hammer down hoops, making a most infernal noise.”<sup>36</sup> Although George Smith’s story is exceptional, it is instructive about life within the piney woods. The fact that Smith and other inmates acted as coopers demonstrates that there were skilled black laborers within the convict lease system. In addition, the presence of hogs indicates that turpentine camps were not as isolated as previously believed. Although

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<sup>34</sup> Ralph Dupree, interviewed by Jan Rosenberg, January 7, 1989, audiocassette, CAS1002.010, SGFLC.

<sup>35</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 77; Junior Taylor, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, July 14, 2002, audiocassette, [need to check up on the call number], SGFLC.

<sup>36</sup> Powell, *The American Siberia*, 338-339.

Powell does not specify whether the hog was feral or someone's property, there is evidence to suggest that livestock men grazed their animals throughout the longleaf pine forests. "Dub" Tomlinson, for example, worked both hogs and turpentine throughout the course of his life.<sup>37</sup>

While men worked in the still and cooperage shed, women's work took place within the remainder of the camp. Women cared for their homes, minded children, and ministered to injured or ill workers. In addition to these daily activities, the responsibility of providing meals and food supplies fell on the camp women. They supplemented provisions from the company store by planting gardens, canning produce, and raising chickens and hogs. In addition to tending to their own families, enterprising African American women found ways to supplement their family's income through taking in washing, working as domestics for producers or white families in nearby towns, foraging for saleable vegetation in the surrounding woodlands, and even occasionally joining turpentine crews as chippers and dippers.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike male laborers who traveled to turpentine camps in search of employment, women of both races tended to join towns as the spouses and children of naval stores workers. Moreover, the position of their husband or parents tended to dictate their experience within the camp.<sup>39</sup> Bernice Wilcox, an African American woman, fondly remembered her time spent at various turpentine towns. Born in 1925 in Jasper

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<sup>37</sup> William Candler "Dub" Tomlinson, interviewed by Laurie Sommers, July 15, 2003, audiocassette, CAS1002.07.1, SGFLC.

<sup>38</sup> Lauriault, "From Can't to Can't," 326; Tegeder, "Prisoners of the Pines," 39-40; Wright, "Turpentine: An Ethnohistorical Study," 110.

<sup>39</sup> Single African American women also traveled to turpentine camps in search of employment. As they have already been discussed in the chapter on detailing peonage, this chapter will deal primarily with married women and girls.



County, South Carolina, she and her parents moved to the quarters of a camp in Long County, Georgia when she was one year old. Remaining at the same camp until 1940, she reminisced, “We had a pretty good life.” There, she met her husband, Jeff Wilcox, and they married on the front porch of one of the homes in the quarters. Only fourteen at the time of her marriage, she remembered: “I was small.”<sup>40</sup> Margaret Blunt Triage also retained fond memories of her time at a Neoga camp in Flagler County. Born in 1919 to a white woods rider and partner in the Neoga Naval Stores Company, she spent thirty-four years living in camps throughout Florida. Reminiscing about her time within the industry, she recollected: “I just love turpentine still, if I see a tree with a chip on it, with a cup on it, I just kind of go back to those days.”<sup>41</sup>

While Bernice Wilcox and Margaret Blunt Triage recalled positive experiences living in company towns, other women—generally the wives of white woodsriders—were unhappy with their new living arrangements. After she joined her husband, Captain J. C. Powell, at Florida’s Sing Sing prison camp, Lizzie Powell was ready to defend her home against escaping inmates. While she lived at the encampment, a white convict named Columbus See and two of his compatriots, John G. Lippford and John Williams, attacked one guard, disarmed another, stole the tracking dogs, and fled the camp. In his memoir, Captain Powell described his wife’s reaction to this incident: “When she saw Hillman [a camp guard] disarmed, she ran to a bureau and taking out a revolver of mine waved it to him.” After tending to Hillman, Lizzie angrily confronted the escaping

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<sup>40</sup> Jeff and Bernice Wilcox, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, January 28, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.10, SGFLC.

<sup>41</sup> Margaret Blunt Triage interview, IFAS videotape, Yellow-Green 3, DVD1002.53C, SGFLC.

prisoner, “‘Jim,’ she called, ‘go back to camp!’”<sup>42</sup> Although Lizzie Powell represents one of the stronger camp mistresses, her experience encapsulated captains’ wives fears that inmates and male laborers might pose a danger to them and their families.

Whereas Lizzie Powell felt compelled to defend herself and her home from inmates, Ida Willis’s time at her husband’s turpentine camp was filled with days of loneliness and monotony, punctuated with fear of her husband’s employees. After meeting her husband, Alan, through his sisters—friends of hers from Columbia College in South Carolina—Willis began her married life as the wife of a naval stores operator in northern Florida. Her husband had been working on an 11,000-acre tract of pine since 1913, and Willis joined him shortly after their marriage in 1915. The Willis’s turpentine camp was a grueling three-hour journey from the closest town. It was situated on the New River, twenty miles north of Carabelle, Florida. When she arrived at the encampment, Willis met with the inquisitive eyes of the site’s inhabitants. She remembered “every window was full of Negroes looking out to see the owner’s wife.”<sup>43</sup> If this event was not unsettling enough, she learned that one of the laborers had attempted to murder her husband. Even though her house was separated from the quarters, Willis was wary of the laborers, because the majority of them were African American men who had been inmates. While her husband was away, she slept with a gun to protect herself.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Willis spent her days in almost total isolation. Her husband left the house at approximately 5 a.m., leaving her alone until lunch at 1 p.m. After a lunch of venison or pork and beans, he napped and then returned to the woods, where Willis would seldom

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<sup>42</sup> Powell, *The American Siberia*, 65-68.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, *McCranie’s Turpentine Still*, C-1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, C-3, C-1.

join him. She spent the majority of her day cleaning the home—with the help of an African American “girl” from the camp—embroidering, and making tablecloths and napkins. She also tended chickens and a small garden that grew only cabbage. With the exception of her husband, the only human contact Willis had was with Mrs. Richardson, the woodsrider’s wife. Although these women were of the same race and social standing, Willis and Richardson did not form a social bond. In fact, Willis disliked the camp so much that by 1917 she had already moved to Greenwood, Florida.<sup>45</sup>

As demonstrated with the cases of Lizzie Powell and Ida Willis, the wives of naval stores operators and camp captains found life in turpentine towns to be a taxing endeavor. They usually lived apart from relatives and had little personal contact with friends or family members. Wives of the woods laborers, on the other hand, found a commonality through shared experiences within the camp. Although living quarters were segregated, Gaynelle Wright suggests that: “Living together...in virtual isolation from the larger society [working class women within the camp] developed a kind of hospitality, though still governed by the standards of the segregated South.”<sup>46</sup> According to Nettie Ruth Brown, a white woman whose relatives managed a turpentine camp in Baker County, Georgia, these women were bound together by a mutual need to survive and adapt to the Spartan living conditions. When describing their life within the camp, she explained: “The white and the black women lived a very demanding life.”<sup>47</sup> The

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<sup>45</sup> Through the notes of her interview, it seems as though Ida Willis disliked Richardson. The interviewer made notes that Ida commented on Mrs. Richardson’s highly nasal voice and imitated her when describing her voice. *Ibid.*, C-1-C-4; *Outland, Tapping the Pines*, 185-186.

<sup>46</sup> Wright, “Turpentine an Ethnohistorical Study,” 110.

<sup>47</sup> Nettie Ruth Brown interview, IFAS videotape, Yellow F, DVD1202.47C, SGFLC.

typical day began before dawn, cooking breakfast for their husbands to either eat at home or bring with them to the woods. Junior Taylor had a daily meal of eggs and sausages or pork and beans. Ralph Wilkerson, also, remembered daily bacon sandwiches that he brought to the woods.<sup>48</sup> After the men were fed and packed off to the pine forests, the real work of the day commenced. Because homes within the quarters lacked indoor plumbing, women had to draw water from pumps located within the camp. In the early mornings the pump shed bustled with activity. Nettie Ruth Brown recalled spending many mornings observing the camp women drawing water or tackling tubs of laundry.<sup>49</sup> While some women chose to do the laundry near the water pumps, Bernice Wilcox washed her clothes at home. After boiling them in a large vat to soften the gum, she would place them in a tin tub and scrub them on a board until they were clean.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to preparing meals and cleaning, both African American and white women supplemented provisions from the camp commissary with homegrown plants and livestock as well as items gathered from the woods. Bessie Kincade Smith and her parents grew potatoes and greens. Other families grew peas, cabbages, and other hearty vegetables.<sup>51</sup> In addition to cultivating garden patches, naval stores workers raised

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<sup>48</sup> Junior Taylor, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, July 14, 2002, audiocassette, [need to check up on the call number], SGFLC; Ralph Wilkerson, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, February 22, 2004, audiocassette vol. 2, CAS1002.12, SGFLC.

<sup>49</sup> Nettie Ruth Brown interview, IFAS videotape, Yellow F, DVD1202.47C, SGFLC.

<sup>50</sup> Jeff and Bernice Wilcox, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, January 28, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.10, SGFLC.

<sup>51</sup> Bessie Kincade Smith, interview by Laurie Sommers, December 6, 2004, audiocassette, DAT1002.13, SGFLC; William Candler "Dub" Tomlinson, interviewed by Laurie Sommers, July 15, 2003, audiocassette, CAS1002.07.1, SGFLC; Allen Nease interview, IFAS videotape, yellow 3, DVD1002.46C; Thomas, *McCranie's Turpentine Still*, C-5; Wright, "Turpentine an Ethnohistorical Study," 110; Lauriault, "From Can't to Can't," 325.

poultry and, if they were fortunate, some livestock. May Lambert explained: “Most all of us had a garden plot and chickens, and if you could get them one or two pigs.”<sup>52</sup> These plots represented an important part of survival within turpentine towns. They not only supplemented foodstuffs from the company stores, but their products also served as a form of currency among the camp inhabitants. Women of both races shared and traded food supplies and extra produce with one another and used it to pay for services rendered. Mr. Williams, an African American woods rider, remembered that midwives were commonly paid with food supplies rather than money.<sup>53</sup>

When farming and maintaining animals were insufficient means to support a family, it became the women’s responsibility to bring in supplementary income. One of the primary ways in which both women and children made extra money was scavenging in the woods. Bernice Dunlap, an African American woman, who had lived in turpentine camps for thirty-seven years, explained that she and other women in the area collected Deer Tongue in the woods to sell to cigar manufacturers. Deer Tongue is an aromatic plant, indigenous to the southeastern piney woods, that is used for filling cigars and maintaining the freshness of off-season clothes. Beginning in the late spring and throughout autumn, groups of women descended into the woods with sticks to ward off snakes and bearing sacks to collect these plants. Once they harvested the Deer Tongue and returned to camp, they hung it on the roofs to dry. Every Thursday or Friday, Bernice recalled, a man would come and pay her 10 cents a pound. This endeavor

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<sup>52</sup> May Lambert, quoted in Wright, “Turpentine an Ethnohistorical Study,” 110.

<sup>53</sup> Mr. Williams interview, IFAS videotape, White 5, DVD1002-55C, SGFLC.

became even more profitable when the price increased to 48 cents per pound.<sup>54</sup> Young children, who accompanied their mothers into the woods, turned foraging into a game. When she was a young girl, Bessie Kincade Smith picked blueberries both for entertainment and to bring home. Her mother subsequently canned them, keeping some for the family while her father sold the remainder.<sup>55</sup> Just as Bessie Smith went into the woods with her mother, Willie White's first introduction into the pine forest was with his father. As his father chipped boxes, Willie kept himself entertained by finding and picking blueberries, huckleberries, and gopher berries to bring home.<sup>56</sup> It was not just workers' children who hunted in the woods for edible produce. Although her family bought the majority of their groceries at the commissary, Margaret Blunt Triage, the daughter of a partner in the Neoga Naval Stores Company, also found huckleberries for her mother. It is unclear whether she was rummaging purely for fun or out of necessity; however Margaret's adventures demonstrated that children's games within the camp served a practical purpose, as well.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to making money by collecting produce in the woods, African American women also found gainful employment outside of the home. They worked as maids and laundresses for camp operators and woodsriders' families, and in the

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<sup>54</sup> Bernice Dunlap interview, IFAS videotape, Orange 4, DVD1002.26C, SGFLC; Willie White, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, July 6, 2003, audiocassette, CAS1002.05.1, SGFLC; Wright, "Turpentine an Ethnohistorical Study," 111-112.

<sup>55</sup> Bessie Kincade Smith, interview by Laurie Sommers, December 6, 2004, audiocassette, DAT1002.13, SGFLC.

<sup>56</sup> Willie White, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, July 6, 2003, audiocassette, CAS1002.05.1, SGFLC.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret Blunt Triage interview, IFAS videotape, Yellow-Green 3, DVD1002.53C, SGFLC.

surrounding community if distance permitted.<sup>58</sup> “Dub” Tomlinson remembered various African American women who helped his mother when they lived in the Barnes camp in Georgia. To assist with the ironing, Tomlinson’s mother hired the wife and daughter of one of the workers, Henry Coleman. In addition, she employed another woman, named Amy, to mind her children. “Dub” remembered Amy as a strict disciplinarian who would “whoop me more times than momma, and momma would say ‘put it on him Amy!’” any time he grew unruly.<sup>59</sup> Although laundress and childcare jobs were more desirable, because they permitted workers to set their own hours and toil within the comfort of their own homes, the fact that most turpentine camps were in relatively isolated settings precluded this option for the majority of women. Instead, they found jobs as auxiliary labor within the naval stores industry. Ralph Wilkerson’s mother, for example, took employment as a field worker on both a nearby farm and on a tobacco plantation.<sup>60</sup>

In conjunction with providing a supplementary income for their family, women also acted as healers and midwives within the camp. Since neighboring towns were a long journey away, naval stores producers only summoned professional doctors to the camp for serious injuries or illnesses. At times, operators took it upon themselves to act as the attending physician. Ida Willis explained that her husband served as the camp dentist, and “pulled teeth for the Negroes by using forceps.”<sup>61</sup> To ease ailments, women within the camp had a whole arsenal of homemade products made from turpentine or

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<sup>58</sup> Bessie Kincade Smith, interview by Laurie Sommers, December 6, 2004, audiocassette, DAT1002.13, SGFLC.

<sup>59</sup> William Candler “Dub” Tomlinson, interviewed by Laurie Sommers, July 15, 2003, audiocassette, CAS1002.07.1, SGFLC.

<sup>60</sup> Ralph Wilkerson interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, 22 February 2004, audiocassette,

<sup>61</sup> Mr. Williams interview, IFAS videotape, White 5, DVD1002-55C, SGFLC; Thomas, *McCranie’s Turpentine Still*, C-2.

other products found in the woods. The most prevalent medicinal use for turpentine was as a cure for sore throats and coughs. Camp wives and mothers created homemade lozenges from sugar cubes and drops of turpentine. Jeff Wilcox, Wilburt Johnson, and Nettie Ruth Brown all remember sucking on turpentine coated sugar cubes when they were children to ease sore throats. However, if the lozenges were not strong enough, a poultice soaked in turpentine and wrapped around the neck or placed on the chest speedily cleared congestion. To enhance the healing properties of the turpentine, women within the camp used it in conjunction with teas brewed from woodland herbs. Any time Jeff Wilcox caught a cold, his wife, Bernice, ministered to him with cups of clove and catnip tea. If those elixirs proved ineffective, Bernice had a failsafe cure for the common cold. After boiling a hog's hoof in water, she would strain it and make a tea from the broth. Laughing, she recalled, "It don't taste good, but it works!"<sup>62</sup> In addition to curing colds, turpentine had other restorative properties. Williams's niece used spirits of turpentine to remove worms from the digestive tract. She would rub the liquid in a circular motion on the stomach repeatedly. Within a few days this cure would push the parasites through the digestive tract and expel them from the body. Elliot West also used turpentine to heal bodily ailments. When added to bath water, the tonic created a potent soak to alleviate muscle soreness acquired from hours of work in the forests. In addition

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<sup>62</sup> Jeff and Bernice Wilcox, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, January 28, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.10, SGFLC; Wilburt Johnson, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, February 21, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.11, SGFLC; Nettie Ruth Brown interview, IFAS videotape, Yellow F, DVD1202.47C, SGFLC.



to restorative bathes, Elliot West used his supply to heal stomach pains, as a small spoonful quickly caused heartburn to dissipate.<sup>63</sup>

Toiling in the woods created a host of ailments that required creative solutions. The piney woods of Georgia, Alabama, and Florida were filled with hazardous creatures, such as snakes, wasps, yellow jackets, and mosquitoes. Junior Taylor explained that one of his work-mates was attacked by a swarm of mosquitoes and succumbed to his wounds once he returned home.<sup>64</sup> Two other creatures that posed a particular danger to naval stores laborers were yellow jackets and hornets. These insects lived around longleaf pine trees and built nests within hollow logs. Moreover, chippers and dippers took particular care not to disrupt these hives, lest the inhabitants attack them viciously. Receiving insect stings while in the woods was inevitable, however. Jeff Wilcox explained that packing the stings with used chewing tobacco decreased the swelling and eased the pain.<sup>65</sup> Just as wildlife represented a hazard in the forest, the tools for chipping and dipping could also injure laborers. Wilburt Johnson, for example, stabbed himself with a tin puller while he was preparing trees after the dipping season. In order to stop the bleeding, he slathered the wound with pine tar and tallow, and then tightly bandaged it.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Mr. Williams interview, IFAS videotape, White 5, DVD1002-55C, SGFLC; Elliot West, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, no date 2002, audiocassette, CAS1002.08.1, SGFLC.

<sup>64</sup> Junior Taylor, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, July 14, 2002, audiocassette, CAS1002.15, SGFLC. Although it is highly unlikely that Taylor's acquaintance died purely as a result of his mosquito bites, it is possible that the insects stings exacerbated an underlying condition or transmitted malaria.

<sup>65</sup> Jeff and Bernice Wilcox, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, January 28, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.10, SGFLC.

<sup>66</sup> A tin puller is a pronged utensil that is used to remove the tin cups from the face of the tree after dipping season. Wilburt Johnson, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, February 21, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.11, SGFLC.

Because of naval stores laborers' tireless efforts to maintain and provide for their families, children in turpentine towns were able to engage in regular childhood activities. Boys and girls played in the woods. At their parent's insistence, they attended school either in nearby towns or within the camp boundaries and only engaged in work within the turpentine industry when necessity dictated it. Daily interaction between African American and white children demonstrated that youngsters at the camps did not fully ascribe to the rigid racial hierarchy of the Jim Crow South. Nettie Ruth Brown characterized her time at the 10 Mile Turpentine Camp in Baker County, Georgia as an idyllic experience filled with racial egalitarianism. Using her aunt, who minded black children while their mothers' worked, as an example, she explained that women of both races indiscriminately took care of each other's children. As a young girl, she was part of a biracial group of children, who spent their days playing together. Describing the camp, Nettie Ruth stated: "Blacks and whites played together, we ate together, we had a lot of fights, there was always some older black and white women around who would tell stories and supervise and keep us all straight."<sup>67</sup> Bessie Kincade Smith also recalled playing with the child of a white woods rider when she lived in the quarters of a Georgia camp. While Nettie Ruth and Bessie made friends within the camp, other children explained that they predominately spent time with their siblings. Margaret Blunt Triage recalled that as a child she picked flowers and huckleberries with her two sisters and a brother.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Nettie Ruth Brown interview, IFAS videotape, Yellow F, DVD1202.47C, SGFLC.

<sup>68</sup> Margaret Blunt Triage interview, IFAS videotape, Yellow-Green 3, DVD1002.53C, SGFLC.

Regardless of their choice in playmates, youngsters at naval stores operations had limited accesses to store bought toys. Rather than do without, enterprising youngsters entertained themselves with objects found within the camp or made toys from accessible materials. Nettie Ruth Brown and her compatriots rolled each other around in spare turpentine barrels, and on one of their more rambunctious days they stole a hack and proceeded to cut streaks on the back of the commissary wall for entertainment.<sup>69</sup> Junior Bloomfield, an African American chipper who worked in Dixie County, Florida, described making a ball out of used stockings so that he and his friends could play kickball during their spare time. While youngsters contented themselves with intramural games, Junior Bloomfield explained that the adults engaged in competitive baseball games with other turpentine camps. Although these teams were not company sponsored, they became a weekend activity where naval stores workers and children left camp and socialized.<sup>70</sup> As a boy, Ralph Wilkerson enjoyed playing baseball and marbles with his friends. He also made slingshots and toy wagons from debris that he found within the camp.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Bernice Wilcox did not require any toys to have fun as a child. She enjoyed hide and seek, hopscotch, and weaving baskets for her mother.<sup>72</sup> While the majority of camp children made do with homemade toys, Bessie Kincade Smith's parents lavished her with hula hoops, store bought dolls, and for one Christmas she and her ten siblings received bicycles. Although Bessie's case seems rather exceptional, given that

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<sup>69</sup> Nettie Ruth Brown interview, IFAS videotape, Yellow F, DVD1202.47C, SGFLC.

<sup>70</sup> Junior Bloomfield interview, IFAS videotape, Green G, DVD1002.21C, SGFLC.

<sup>71</sup> Ralph Wilkerson, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, February 22, 2004, audiocassette vol. 1, CAS1002.12, SGFLC.

<sup>72</sup> Jeff and Bernice Wilcox, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, January 28, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.10, SGFLC.

her father labored as a turpentine sharecropper and her mother did housework, it is possible that her parents generated enough income to provide her with store bought toys.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to playthings, juveniles found entertainment in productive activities. While their mothers supplemented the family income through foraging and working outside the home, children also augmented the family food supply through fishing. Because turpentine stills necessitated the use of waterpower, turpentine camps were usually located near streams and ponds. Children found endless hours of entertainment swimming and trawling the streams for fresh fish to bring home. Nettie Ruth Brown and her gang spent days minnowing in ditches. Ralph Wilkerson and Junior Bloomfield, too, would swim in the surrounding lakes and catch catfish.<sup>74</sup> According to Willie White, he and his brother's love for fishing earned them the nicknames "Coon" and "Possum." As young boys White and his brother worked for turpentine producer, Frank Dukes, in Hoboken, Georgia. When Dukes' relative, Arthur, visited the camp he would bring White and his brother fishing. According to White, Arthur gave the boys nicknames. He chose "Coon" for White, because he caught such a vast number of fish, and "Possum" for White's brother, because he kept trying to steal White's fish.<sup>75</sup> Although White insists

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<sup>73</sup> Turpentine sharecropping operated much like agricultural sharecropping. Men worked tracts of trees for an owner for a portion of the product. Bessie Kincade Smith, interview by Laurie Sommers, December 6, 2004, audiocassette, DAT1002.13, SGFLC.

<sup>74</sup> Ralph Wilkerson, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, February 22, 2004, audiocassette vol. 1, CAS1002.12, SGFLC; Junior Bloomfield interview, IFAS videotape, Green G, DVD1002.21C, SGFLC.

<sup>75</sup> Willie White, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, July 6, 2003, audiocassette, CAS1002.05.1, SGFLC.

that his nickname was derived from the behavior of wildlife, it is impossible to ignore the racial overtones implicit in his nickname.<sup>76</sup>

Despite childhood notions of racial parity, there was an implicit inequality that ran throughout naval stores operations. Margaret Blunt Triage, when interviewed in the 1970s, described how her father would rouse his workers during the 1920s. As she explained, her father had to blow the horn of his pickup truck to “get the niggers up and out.”<sup>77</sup> Although less discernible than Margaret referring to her laborers in such terms, one of Nettie Ruth Brown’s favorite pastimes is equally telling. While staying with relatives in Baker County, Georgia, Nettie Ruth would visit the African American quarters at the 10 Mile Turpentine Camp and linger by the pump house with the hopes of seeing a brawl. “There was always a fight of some kind going on in the weekends,” she recalled. Disputes between men would sometimes carry into Monday or Tuesday when camp women would continue the argument after the men left for work. Because it served as a gathering place within the camp, the pump house represented a prime location to continue disputes. Nettie Ruth recalled that black women allegedly hid knives or cutters in the “bosom” of their dresses and used these weapons to go after unsuspecting

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<sup>76</sup> Derived from the word raccoon, “coon” stereotypes originated from nineteenth century minstrel shows. Created as a counterpart to “Jim Crow’s” dim-witted laziness, “Coon” represented a smooth-talking, suave criminal. See Robert J. Norrell, *The House I Live in: Race in the American Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 29-31, and Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk thought from Slavery to Freedom*, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 427-428.

<sup>77</sup> Margaret Blunt Triage interview, IFAS videotape, Yellow-Green 3, DVD1002.53C, SGFLC.

adversaries.<sup>78</sup> Despite her fondness for her African American playmates, Nettie Ruth still viewed the quarters through a racial lens that tinted her impressions of black life.

Another aspect of camp life that demonstrated a distinct inequality was the level of schooling that black children achieved. Because turpentine camps were located near available timber tracts, their remote locations created a situation in which schools were not always accessible. Moreover, African American children typically left school at an earlier age to help support their families. Mr. Williams, a black woods rider who had a second grade education, explained: "I had twelve miles to get to school.... I didn't have no chance."<sup>79</sup> While Williams represented one of the more extreme cases, his story demonstrates that attending school was a daunting process at some of the more remote camps. However, in more centrally located camps, youngsters had varying degrees of access to schools. Junior Bloomfield described the educational set up in Dixie County, Florida. One schoolhouse supported three turpentine towns in the surrounding area. Although the building was only a five mile walk from his camp, Junior preferred to play hooky and dip gum in the woods.<sup>80</sup>

Other children were more fortunate and attended school within the naval stores camp. Although settlements did not have a designated schoolhouse, teachers conducted classes in any structure that was available. Bernice Wilcox's lessons took place in a one-room wooden building set in the quarters. Located in Long County, Georgia, this school held approximately twenty-five pupils and bussed in a teacher from the local town.

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<sup>78</sup> Nettie Ruth Brown interview, IFAS videotape, Yellow F, DVD1202.47C, SGFLC.

<sup>79</sup> Mr. Williams interview, IFAS videotape, White 5, DVD1002-55C, SGFLC

<sup>80</sup> Junior Bloomfield interview, IFAS videotape, Green G, DVD1002.21C, SGFLC.

Although Bermice Wilcox does not specify how long she attended classes, her marriage at the age of fourteen suggests that she left school in her early teenage years.<sup>81</sup> At camp locations, school was seasonal so that pupils could contribute to woodwork during dipping season. According to Bessie Kincade Smith, school session occurred in the winter months. While she did not work in the woods, the majority of the class's fifteen pupils did.<sup>82</sup> Although the exact demographic make-up of these schools is unclear, evidence suggests that boys attended class to a lesser degree than girls. While his wife attended school into her early teenage years, Jeff Wilcox had only received a fifth grade education by the age of sixteen, because he spent the majority of the year within the woods.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, this deficiency in education might also be a contributing factor to why workers remained within the industry.

Naval stores camps provided workers with a place of refuge from arduous turpentine harvesting. As the nineteenth and twentieth century progressed, innovations such as the portable still and Herty cup extended the longevity of camp locations. The stability of these settlements allowed naval stores workers to develop families, forge relationships with other camp members, attend school, and develop small-scale cottage industries to supplement their income. The creation and sustenance of families within these settlements is particularly significant because it counters the depiction of naval stores workers as predominately single, highly mobile African American men. Moreover, the presence of families demonstrates that turpentine camps shared similarities

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<sup>81</sup> Jeff and Bernice Wilcox, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, January 28, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.10, SGFLC.

<sup>82</sup> Bessie Kincade Smith, interview by Laurie Sommers, December 6, 2004, audiocassette, DAT1002.13, SGFLC.

<sup>83</sup> Jeff and Bernice Wilcox, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, January 28, 2004, audiocassette, CAS1002.10, SGFLC.

to company towns in other industries. Despite the formation of communities within these locations as the twentieth century progressed, the industry began to change and decline. New, less labor-intensive methods of producing turpentine gained popularity rendering gum naval stores almost obsolete and altered forever the lives of laborers within this industry.



## Conclusion: The Epilogue

“Ain’t got nobody much to work it,” explained Wilburt Johnson when asked in 2004 to explain the decline of the American naval stores industry. Born in 1921, Mr. Johnson spent his entire life working in Georgia’s longleaf pine belt. He began dipping pines in Atkinson County when he was eleven years old, and he could skillfully chip around 3,200 trees a day by the time he reached adulthood. After spending over seventy years in the industry, Mr. Johnson proudly declared that if he were still capable, he would “get me a crop an chip it.” Crediting the hard work and dedication of naval stores workers for the success and survival of the industry, Mr. Johnson blamed a decline in work ethic for the deterioration of gum turpentine production. He declared: “Now you take young folks, they don’t want to do nothing but smoke that dope and mess with junk like that.”<sup>1</sup>

While Wilburt Johnson criticized youths for their lack of productivity and blamed their lackluster effort for the waning of naval stores manufacturing, the deterioration of the industry actually was the culmination of several interrelated factors. The first blow to the industry occurred with the termination of Florida’s convict lease system in 1923. Because turpentine manufacturing was continually underfunded and plagued by labor shortages, gum turpentine production was unable to compete with the highly mechanized

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<sup>1</sup> Wilburt Johnson, interview by Timothy C. Prizer, 21 February 2004, CAS1002.11, audiocassette, South Georgia Folk Life Collection, Odum Library, Valdosta State University, Valdosta Georgia.

pulpwood industry as it developed a technique of turpentine distillation from paper manufacturing in the 1940s and 1950s. As Robert Outland explains, “The demise of the gum naval stores industry... represents the defeat of a poorly capitalized, technologically primitive and labor-intensive business by a well-funded, sophisticated, and highly mechanized one.”<sup>2</sup>

The termination of Florida’s convict lease system removed a much-needed supply of labor from the state’s naval stores industry. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the convict lease received staunch criticism from reformers for its archaic and inhumane treatment of prisoners. Julia Tutwiler censured Alabama’s lease system for sentencing inequalities and the state’s inability to deal with young offenders: “One of the most distressing features about the mining-prisons is the extreme youth of some of the inmates, and the petty nature of the offenses for which they have been condemned to constant companionship with burglars and murderers.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, even James Powell, author of *The American Siberia*, recognized the brutality of Florida’s lease: “There are many things about it which may seem harsh, stringent and cruel, and would be, in a northern penitentiary, but are stern necessities here.”<sup>4</sup> Though acknowledging the violence, he deemed it an unfortunate requirement when managing the labor of convicts.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert B. Outland III, *Tapping the Pines: the Naval Stores Industry in the American South* (Raton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 313.

<sup>3</sup> Julia Tutwiler, “Our Brother in Stripes, in the School Room” (Paper read before the Elementary Department of the National Educational Association, St. Paul Minnesota, July 1890), 3.

<sup>4</sup> J. C. Powell, *The American Siberia* (Philadelphia: H. J. Smith & Company, 1891; reprint Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976), 5-6.

These “necessities” remained largely unchanged until the death of a white farm boy from Munich, North Dakota grabbed national headlines in 1923. Although Florida had abolished the practice of leasing state convicts in 1919, counties continued renting their prisoners to private parties. The majority of these men went to naval stores operators. Under this arrangement, Martin Tabert found himself embroiled within a system that ultimately took his life. His story began with the decision to leave home and travel the country. As the youngest son of an agricultural family, Tabert worked on the family farm for the majority of his twenty-two years. After his brother, Otto, returned from his service in World War I, bursting with tales “of new countries and adventures,” Tabert decided that he “was not so badly needed at home” and resolved to travel through the United States.<sup>5</sup>

He journeyed across the country without incident until he reached Florida. Though he had brought money, Tabert planned to supplement his savings with work along the way. Once in Florida, his fortunes changed as he was unable to “sell his labor in a market that preferred cheap forced black labor” and he shortly “went broke.”<sup>6</sup> After stealing a train ride through the panhandle, Tabert reached Leon County where a deputy sheriff arrested him for vagrancy and brought him before Judge B. F. Willis. After receiving a conviction, Tabert was unable to pay the \$25.00 fine and was subsequently confined to the Leon County jail for ninety days. Once in custody, the sheriff turned

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<sup>5</sup> “A Victim of Convict ‘Slavery,’” *Literary Digest* (21 April 1923): 41.

<sup>6</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 252; “A Victim of Convict ‘Slavery,’” *Literary Digest* (21 April 1923): 40.

Tabert over to the Putnam Lumber Company, which had a contract for the county's prisoners.<sup>7</sup>

Early in February, his parents received a letter from the company informing them that Tabert had died of a "fever and other complications." Though they initially believed that malaria was the cause of his untimely demise, witnesses came forward with a different account of Tabert's death.<sup>8</sup> In July 1922, the Taberts received a letter from former inmate Glen Thompson who had witnessed Tabert's death at the hands of the camp's whipping boss Walter Higginbotham. According to Thompson, Tabert and other inmates trudged several miles through waist-deep water to reach their worksite. As a result of these brutal conditions, Martin's feet became swollen and infected due to ill-fitting shoes.

Over the following weeks, Tabert's condition deteriorated. Unable to work fast enough, he received nightly beatings. Covered with oozing cuts, Tabert quickly declined and withered to 125 pounds. Moreover, after his final beating, "Tabert was unable to move from his cot, and the odor coming from his quarters was very offensive."<sup>9</sup> One day later, he succumbed to his wounds. After hearing the truth about Tabert's death, his parents and their lawyer petitioned the North Dakota legislature to pressure the Florida legislature to examine these allegations. Florida's inquest resulted in a trial that revealed collusion between Leon County's sheriff and the Putnam Lumber Company—for every

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<sup>7</sup> Carper, "Martin Tabert," 116-117.

<sup>8</sup> "A Victim of Convict 'Slavery,'" 42; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 252.

<sup>9</sup> "A Victim of Convict 'Slavery,'" 42; Carper, "Martin Tabert," 124.

convict the sheriff turned over the company paid him \$20.00. Higginbotham received a conviction of second-degree murder, but had the sentence vacated on a technicality.<sup>10</sup>

The trial became a national sensation fixating the media on stories of cruelty, corruption, and collusion between county officials and the Putnam Lumber Company. This event, and the publicity it received, intensified the campaign to end the practice of county leasing. In April 1923, the legislature approved a bill that effectively ended this practice.<sup>11</sup> As a result of this legislation, naval stores operators no longer had access to the employment of convict labor. Inmates who had previously toiled in privately owned turpentine orchards now transferred to state-run projects.

As they lost access to a portion of their captive labor, naval stores operators also faced competition from a new distillation technique. Wood distillation emerged at the turn of the century and gained popularity during World War I when the demand for naval stores products reached record highs. Unlike gum turpentine distilled from oleoresin, wood distillation produced turpentine from pine board and stumps salvaged from the timber industry. This process dramatically cut the cost of naval stores production because it eliminated the need for boxers, chippers, and dippers. Moreover, this procedure worked well in conjunction with the lumber industry. After lumber companies cleared the timber, wood turpentine manufacturers came through and collected the remaining stumps. Beginning in the 1920s processing plants sprang up across the South.

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<sup>10</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 252; Carper, "Martin Tabert," 120.

<sup>11</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 253.

By 1961, these operations produced 54 percent of rosin and 24 percent of turpentine in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to wood naval stores production, gum turpentine manufacturing also faced competition from the pulpwood industry. In order to obtain cellulose for the paper industry, pulpwood plants boiled chipped wood in a light sulfuric acid solution. This process produced turpentine as a byproduct. As a result of the proliferation of these plants, the gum naval stores industry rapidly declined. According to Robert Outland, “By 1955, sulfate naval stores production exceeded that of gum, and over the next thirteen years it almost completely replaced all other methods.”<sup>13</sup> Because of these new methods of production, gum naval stores manufacturing became obsolete in the late twentieth century.

Despite its eventual decline, the gum naval stores production represented an important New South industry. Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century turpentine manufacturing played an integral role in shaping the lives and labor of both African American and white workers in the piney woods South. The postbellum South represented a time of change and negotiations for both producers and laborers. Emancipation perpetuated manufacturers’ concerns over the use of free labor. Their fears helped to fuel the state’s implementation of the convict lease system and the perpetuation of coercive labor practices. For the men and women who toiled in the woods, this time period also symbolized a time of flux. Newly freed African American men and women became part of the market economy. Both black and white workers wrestled with the

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<sup>12</sup> Carroll B. Butler, *Treasures of the Longleaf Pines and Naval Stores* (Shalimar, Florida: Tarkel Publishing, 1998), 97-98; Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 155-156.

<sup>13</sup> Outland, *Tapping the Pines*, 304.

shift from agricultural to industrial labor. Despite these challenges, naval stores workers created their own life and culture within the woods.

Although previous historians have relegated turpentine production to the outskirts of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century industrial development and dismissed forest laborers as backwoods misanthropes, this work counters those assertions by demonstrating that the men and women who toiled in the gum naval stores industry developed strategies—based in agrarian mutuality—to help them survive the arduous conditions of work and life within the New South’s piney woods. A comparison of the diversity of naval stores labor—free, convict, and peon—demonstrates the distinct role these men and women played in shaping their own experiences and sometimes even in defining the terms of their own labor.

Through the establishment of families and through the maintenance of social ties, naval stores workers eased the isolation of remote camp locations. In addition, these alliances allowed laborers to challenge the authority of camp captains and supervisors. Convicts and peons mobilized the support of relations, friends, and sympathetic benefactors to temper the harsh realities of their situation. Through writing letters to kinfolk and government officials and through escape attempts, these men and women altered the relationship between workers and supervisors.

Moreover, analyses of workforce composition and evaluations of camp life further complicate existing concepts of turpentine laborers. Unlike previous assessments that monolithically describe naval stores workers as single black men, this work finds greater diversity within the industry. Expertise in turpentine harvesting and distilling provided African American men with the opportunity to acquire supervisory positions as

woodsriders and head distillers. In addition, women and children played an integral role in sustaining piney woods families. They supplemented the household's income through tending produce, foraging in the woods, and laboring outside the home. Though they did not engage in full-time woods work during the harvest season, they, too, entered the longleaf orchards in dipping squads.

Finally, and perhaps just as importantly, this work sheds light on current labor practices within the modern forestry industry. Workers with something less than freedom, not unlike the naval stores hands of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century, still toil in the South's longleaf barrens. As an outgrowth of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, the guest workers under the current H-2B program have become a significant avenue for foresters to obtain short-term workers for their planting crews. Originally intended to alleviate labor shortages by providing non-U.S. citizens with temporary work visas, this program raises questions about the treatment and protection of guest workers.<sup>14</sup> Much like their historical counterparts, H2B laborers are charged for visa, transportation, and equipment costs, paid less than minimum wages, and refused overtime pay. Moreover until 2008, these men were denied the protection of federally funded legal aid. In addition, supervisors attempt to sequester their crews to prevent workers from communicating with one another.<sup>15</sup> Because of these obstacles, scholars characterize H2B laborers as operating under the conditions of virtual debt peonage.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Brinda Sarathy and Vanessa Casanova, "Guest workers or unauthorized immigrants? The case of forest workers in the United States," *Policy Sci* 41 (2008): 97; Josh McDaniel and Vanessa Casanova, "Forest Management and the H2B Guest Worker Program in the Southeastern United States: An Assessment of Contractors and Their Crews," *Journal of Forestry* (April/May 2005): 114.

<sup>15</sup> Sarathy and Casanova, "Guest workers," 97, 110.

<sup>16</sup> McDaniel and Casanova, "Forest Management," 118.



Denied a voice and “reluctant to talk about their experiences in the woods,” these men’s responses to their treatment in the longleaf forests echo those of Wilburt Johnson, a seasoned turpentine worker. He explained: “Every once in a while you’d have one [foreman] that [was] kina [sic] bad. All he wanted you to do was work and he didn’t buy you nothing and give to you like that...if I was working with one and he treated me good, I stayed there, I didn’t be runnin’ here and here and everywhere.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Sarathy and Casanova, “Guest workers,” 100; Wilburt Johnson, interviewed by Timothy C. Prizer, February 21, audiocassette, CAS1002.11, SGFLC.

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