

**“ ‘Black’ Concubines, ‘Yellow’ Wives, ‘White’ Children: Race and Domestic Space  
in the Slave Trading Households of Robert & Mary Lumpkin  
and Silas & Corinna Omohundro.”**

**Phillip Troutman**

Mellon Lecturing Fellow, Duke University

Southern Association of Women Historians  
Sixth Conference on Women’s History, Athens, GA, 5 June 2003.

This is the story of two unusual families, the Lumpkins and the Omohundros of antebellum and Civil War-era Richmond, Virginia. They were neighbors and their broad patterns of life bore striking similarities. Mary Lumpkin was both slave and spouse to Robert Lumpkin. Corinna Omohundro was both slave and spouse to Silas Omohundro. These women were legally slaves and legally non-white, and therefore not legally spouses to these men<sup>1</sup>—but the evidence suggests that it makes sense to speak of them as spouses (though I do use that term advisedly), as opposed to, say, concubines.<sup>2</sup> Their children were educated in the north, and they and their children were recognized in their husbands’ wills as the chief heirs. In the case of Mary Lumpkin, she appears to have been distinguished from another of Robert’s sexual partners: she was described as his “yellow wife” and the other woman as his “black concubine.” That these color differences went with status seems significant, especially in light of the fact that, in the case of the Omohundros, the children passed and became white after their emancipation. What they inherited was not only their freedom and their whiteness, but—and this is what makes these families all the more unusual—they

---

<sup>1</sup> Colonial-era laws prohibited whites from marrying non-whites; a 1705 law defined “mulatto” as a person having one-eighth or more “negro” ancestry. Jordon, *White over Black*, 168. Rothman, diss., 90. Higginbotham & Kopytoff, “Racial Purity.” Wallenstein, “Law and the Boundaries of Place and Race.” Wallenstein, *Race, Marriage and the Law of Freedom.* Bardaglio, “Shameful Matches,” in *Sex, Love, Race*, ed. by Hodes.

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia Kennedy-Haflett suggests the term “moral marriage” in cases of illegal interracial marriage, instead of concubinage (though her case at hand is that between two free people). Cynthia Kennedy-Haflett, “ ‘Moral Marriage’: A Mixed-Race Relationship in Nineteenth-Century Charleston, South Carolina,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 97:3 (July 1996), p. 217 n. 29.

inherited the respective fortunes that these two men each gained in the domestic slave trade. Robert Lumpkin and Silas Omohundro not only bought and sold thousands of African Americans over some two decades, but each also ran a jail and boarding house--incarcerating other traders' slaves and boarding visiting traders and buyers from the Deep South. Their neighboring compounds, occupying roughly a city block in downtown Richmond, were the El Mina and the Goree of Virginia's export slave trade.<sup>3</sup>

This is an ongoing and evolving project. When I first presented a version of this paper two years ago, my focus was on the men.<sup>4</sup> I argued that they had enveloped their enslaved families in something of a sentimental domestic sphere, all the while imposing the violence of separation and sexual exploitation on other African Americans. Like other traders, they used profits gained from that violence to create their own domestic havens. Important for me here was to see these men not as southern provincials and not only as market men, but rather as cosmopolitan patriarchs whose broad market connections put them in touch both with domesticity (which we tend to associate with the north) and with color-conscious concubinage (which we tend to associate with the deep south and the Caribbean). Their "wives," though of partial African descent, were thus not "black," and their children were white—or rather could become so, under the right circumstances. It strikes me, too, that we might also read these relationships as having a certain African quality—slaves being absorbed into the family of the master, thereby losing slave status, and becoming indistinct from the non-slave population.

---

<sup>3</sup> I say this knowing that there were other large trading compounds, particularly that of Price, Birch, & Co., in Alexandria (discussed below), which had once belonged to Franklin and Armfield, the most successful traders of the 1830s. Baltimore traders also bought slaves in Virginia's hinterlands.

<sup>4</sup> " 'Fancy Girls' and a 'Yellow Wife': Sex, Patriarchy, and Domesticity in the Domestic Slave Trade," paper presented to Southern Historical Association Annual Meeting, November 2000.

(Others have read similarly the relationship of white slave trader Zephaniah Kingsley and his West African wife, Anna Madgigine Jai.<sup>5</sup>)

What I want to do today is to focus on the women, and in particular to try to flesh out the bounds of domestic space that they worked within and against there in those slave trading compounds—for that is where, of necessity, they made their homes. If, in antebellum reform ideology (which people both north and south entertained when they could afford to), the home was to be a shelter (gendered feminine) from the market (gendered masculine)—a haven in a heartless world<sup>6</sup>—then what was it like to try to build a home at the very heart of the slave market? Understanding the physical layout of the domestic space, I think, helps us see the logic of the complex and changing racial identities that shaped the lives of these women and their children. It helps us see how place, to a certain degree, helped make race, or at least the particular racial hierarchies at play here.

These African Americans' status as family members bound by sentimental ideals of the day are most evident for the Omohundros. Silas kept a personal account book detailing expenditures on his household, which are extant from 1855 through his death in 1864. There he documented the affection he lavished on his enslaved wife and

---

<sup>5</sup>In addition to Jai, whom Kingsley married and manumitted, Kingsley had recognized children by and bequeathed property to at least three other slave women, whom Daniel L. Schafer terms "co-wives." Daniel W. Stowell casts some doubt on the fully polygamous nature of the relationships, noting that Kingsley only referred to Jai as his "wife." Daniel L. Schafer, "Shades of Freedom: Anna Kingsley in Senegal, Florida, and Haiti," *Slavery and Freedom* 17:1 (April 1996): 130-154, esp. 134, 138, 144-147. Stowell, ed., Introduction, Balancing Evils Judiciously: The Proslavery Writings of Zephaniah Kingsley (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2000), p. 4 n. 5.

<sup>6</sup>This literature is too enormous to recount here. But I will note several signal works: XXXX, Domestic Individualism, emphasizes Harriet Beecher Stowe's critique of slavery for its subjecting the home and the family to the (slave and produce) market, at the behest of patriarchs. Amy Dru Stanley offers a corrective to the notion that northerners succeeded in divorcing the home from the market; patriarchy reigned, north and south (see [essay] in *The Market Revolution*...). Anja Jabour's *Marriage in the Early Republic* and Jan Lewis's *Pursuits of Happiness* can each be read as a history of the southern sister to northern domesticity. In addition, Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, especially in light of his *Consuming Fire* [need full cite], can be read as a history of the failed southern domestic reform movements, the attempt to divorce slavery from the market.

children, expressed, of course, in material goods and money. He gave the children large gifts of cash (from \$5 to \$20 at a time), but also bought them more personal items, suggesting his involvement in their upbringing. In 1855, he entered, "Give to Daughter Alice 1 Locket," \$7.50; and a \$2.50 wheel barrow for Silas [Jr.] Alice was five and Silas was six at the time. Twice in July he gave them money "to go see the [hot air] Balloon." Twice he sent them on a short trips to Petersburg. In all that year, Silas spent over one hundred fifty dollars on the four children. As the children grew older, Silas bestowed on them goods befitting young southern ladies and gentlemen; in 1859, he bought a parasol for nine-year old Alice and "leghorn or Panama" hats for the boys, plus boots for ten-year old Silas [Jr.] and a gun for six-year old Colon. Silas and his children partook in technology's latest aids to domestic sentiment, paying to have eight "likenesses" (ambrotypes or daguerreotypes) made for Colon and seven-year old Lucy. Moreover, like other doting southern parents, he sent them north for a proper education. The younger Silas had begun his schooling locally in 1855, but by 1859, he and his sister Alice were taking music lessons in the north. Their father had provided them with an arithmetic book, a grammar, a dictionary, and other unnamed volumes, provided them with music and dancing lessons, and sent them gifts of candy and cash while they were away.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>On 19 Sept. 1859, Omohundro listed "Cash sent to buy Silas 2 pr Boots," "Candy sent to Silas and Alice 2 lbs.," and "Freight on box to Silas"; he did not name the destination. On 28 December 1859, he listed "Cash Advanced for teaching Children Music," \$50.00, and "Expenses North Dancing lessons Books and," \$88.32; most likely this last entry was for the children. Omohundro Papers, LVA. Ages of children estimated from dates of birth given by Malvern Omohundro, *Omohundro Genealogical Record*, pp. 471-486; the source for these dates is unknown, but most likely Silas and Corinna's grandsons Howard S. Omohundro (Colon's son, 1881-1947) or Colon Marble Omohundro (George's son, b. 1890 and living in 1936 at least). These two gave the most information about their own lives and so may have had the most information about their parents' generation. [Note that the daughters of slaveholder Nathan Sayre and his mixed-race mistress Susan Hunt were also given music lessons, if not a fully literate education. Adele Logan Alexander, *Ambiguous Lives: Free Women of Color in Rural Georgia, 1789-1879* (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1991), pp. 77-78.

Corinna received some education along with Silas's intermittent gifts of cash and gold, ranging from \$5 to \$100 in value. Silas lavished extravagant gifts on Corinna. In July 1858, after returning from a trip west, he gave her two presents: a jeweled breast pin and a diamond ring. Together, he had spent \$265 on them. That fall, he gave her one thousand fifty dollars cash in one lump sum, and before he died in 1864, he had presented her with a second diamond ring, a diamond cross pendant, and a gold watch and chain. On November 7th, 1863, despite the shortages and inflation of the wartime blockade, he spent \$44 for "1 gallon Jamaker Rum for Corinna"—perhaps for medicinal purposes, perhaps not. Clearly, he had found in her a suitable life partner. As he testified in his will, she had "always been a kind, faithful and dutiful woman to me, and an affectionate mother."<sup>8</sup> And while he did not claim her as his "wife" in his will, when the family was away from Richmond, he did. A witness in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, stated that "Whilst visiting both Lancaster & Philadelphia," where Silas owned property, "he introduced to different Parties the Woman Corinna as his wife and the children as his children."<sup>9</sup> Silas sought to provide Corinna, along with their children, not only with their freedom but with a home and an income after his death. He left virtually the entire estate to Corinna and the children. She was to take possession of the house, while the executor was to sell the other property (including other slaves), to divide the proceeds evenly into trust funds for the children, and to pay

---

<sup>8</sup>For the 1855 to 1859 gifts, see "Market and General Account Book, 1858 [i.e., 1855]-1864," Omohundro Papers, LVA. Will Book 2, Richmond City, Circuit Court, 228.

<sup>9</sup>George N. Kline, auditor's report to the Lancaster Orphan's Court, copy 22 Sept. 1866, in ended file 494, Chancery Court, Richmond, VA, cases of *Omohundro et als. v. Omohundro's exr. etc. and of Street and wife v. Omohundro's exr. etc.* Kline was weighing evidence of the marriage for the purposes of applying an inheritance tax; though by all appearances in Pa. they were married, the auditor noted that Silas's will made clear that they were not, since he had emancipated her as his slave.

the interest on those investments to Corinna for the family's support.<sup>10</sup> He understood profoundly the economic dangers which might befall them. As an expert in the manipulation of property, he knew how men used the common law principle of coverture to gain control of a wife's estate. He acted to remove that economic threat to Corinna, explicitly providing that if she were to take a husband, her inheritance could not fall "subject to his debts, contracts, or control."<sup>11</sup>

Omohundro further understood, especially in the uncertain time in which he wrote, that Corinna might want to quit Richmond and raise the children elsewhere. He left her their home on Seventeenth Street in Richmond, including his slave jail, but he had also provided her with an alternative home in Philadelphia, a double lot with "tenements" on Poplar Street. Lumpkin—and I won't go into the details—did nearly the same thing.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> "In the first place," he began, I do absolutely emancipate and forever set free from all manner of servitude my woman Corinna Omohundro, and her five children, Allice Morton Omohundro, Colan Omohundro, Riley Crosby Omohundro, William Rainey Omohundro, and George Nelson Omohundro, and who are also my children." (Will Book 2, Richmond City, Circuit Court, 228-230. My thanks to Josh Rothman for providing me with a copy of the wills of both Lumpkin and Omohundro.) All these children were mentioned in the account book. Two other children acknowledged in the account book--Silas and Lucy--were not mentioned in the will; they had both died by March 1864. Silas Omohundro, "Market and General Account Book," Omohundro Papers, LVA. According to the published family genealogy, Silas Jr. died at age 16, and an unnamed child died in "infancy" (I take this to have been Lucy, though in 1859, when she last appears in the account book, she would have been seven years old). Malvern Hill Omohundro, *The Omohundro Genealogical Record: The Omohundros and Allied Families in America* (Staunton, Va.: for the author by McClure Printing Co., 1951), p. 472.

<sup>11</sup>On common law restrictions of married women's property-holding, and on the foothold women gained through separate estates, see Suzanne Lebsock, *Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), 23-24, 77-79.

<sup>12</sup>Robert Lumpkin's family situation mirrored closely that of Omohundro. Like Silas, Robert kept house with an enslaved woman, Mary F. Lumpkin, whom he treated as his wife and who bore him several children, including Martha Dabney, Annie E., Robert, Richard C., and John L., all bearing the surname Lumpkin. Like Omohundro, Lumpkin apparently sent at least two of his daughters north for their education. Since he did not compose his last will until 1866, the emancipation of his wife and children was a *fait accompli*, but in almost every other way, Lumpkin's will resembled Omohundro's. He gave Mary the choice of residences, either the property in Shockoe Bottom which included the jail, or a lot he had bought in Philadelphia, on South Eleventh Street. He left the entire estate to Mary--unless she married, in which case it was to be divided among the children. He went even further along these lines than Omohundro had, setting up trusts for his daughters so their inheritances could never fall prey to any husbands' debts. Lumpkin also established Mary as the sole executrix of the will, furthering her

All of this, of course, is complicated by the fact that, as patriarchs, these men could have assaulted or sold any of their family members at any given moment for any reason or no reason at all (and we don't know that they did not). While the chattel principle ensured that all slaves were always in the market, being members of the slave trader's enslaved family—rearing children in the slave trading compound itself, amidst people caught up on those transactions—surely underscored this on a daily basis for Mary Lumpkin and Corinna Omohundro.

Color played an important role here, qualifying to some degree the status of slaves. James B. Simmons of the Baptist Home Missions Society met Mary Lumpkin and described her as “fair-faced, . . . nearly white.” Simmons speculated that the Lumpkin daughters could have passed “as colored or whites,” and according to Charles Corey, the Lumpkin daughters “were so white,” that while in the north both before and after the war, “they passed in the community as white ladies.”<sup>13</sup> In the biography of Anthon Burns, the famous fugitive who was jailed at Lumpkin's compound on his recapture from Boston, Mary Lumpkin was described as Robert's “yellow wife.” And according to Burns and his biographer, there was at least one other woman in the house with whom Robert had sexual relations. She was described as “black” and as a “concubine.”<sup>14</sup> This seems to indicate something of the more complex racial attitudes of the deep south, as well as the relations of concubinage that, in Louisiana at least, had

---

autonomy in the management of his estate. Like Omohundro, too, Lumpkin found some difficulty describing his actual relationship to Mary and to their children in the legal language of the will. He first named her as “Mary F. Lumpkin, who resides with me.” He introduced his other heirs as “her children,” though he acknowledged his paternity obliquely, through their surnames but also by appending to the list of Mary's children, “and any other child she may hereafter have by me.” Richmond City, Hustings Court, Will Book 24, pp. 419-422.

<sup>13</sup> Corey, *History of the Richmond Theological Seminary*, 48, 74-75.

<sup>14</sup> Stevens, *Anthony Burns*.

some limited legal standing.<sup>15</sup> It is possible that Robert Lumpkin freed this woman or another such woman: in 1858 he manumitted Henrietta Miller, “in consideration of her faithful service & excellent character”—as opposed to the monetary consideration he gained in two other manumissions he made.<sup>16</sup>

It is also likely that Corinna Omohundro was of mixed white and black parentage. The most clear evidence for this is the fact that all her children that I have so far been able to trace passed and became white, so successfully so that in their family’s genealogy, their ex-slave status and color or racial identity are completely erased.<sup>17</sup> It is also conceivable that Silas Omohundro kept a “concubine” as well. He stressed in his will that everything he owned was to be left to Corinna and the children, making only one crucial exception. “My woman Agness,” he said, “and her two children, Virginia and Waverly,” were to be set free. These three did not received any property and he made no other comment about them in the will.<sup>18</sup> There is no other reason to believe Agness was a concubine, but perhaps the parallel way Silas referred to “my woman Corinna Omohundro, and her five children” and to “my woman Agness and her two children” reflected more than a perfunctory use of language. Under slavery’s laws (or

---

<sup>15</sup> Judith Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana*, ch. 7.

<sup>16</sup> For Henrietta Miller: Richmond City, Hustings Deeds, Book 72-B, p. 204. For Henry Hunt: Richmond City, Hustings Deeds, Book 79-B, p. 225. For “Henrietta Hucles (the wife of Robert Hucles, a free man of color) and the four children of the said Henrietta”: Richmond City, Hustings Deeds, Book 80-B, p. 338.

<sup>17</sup> Malvern Omohundro claims her parents were Samuel and Martha Clark of Dinwiddie County, outside Petersburg, and her birth year was 1823. I do not find them in Dinwiddie in the census index, but there was a Samuel Clark in neighboring Chesterfield County. In 1820, he and the white woman who I take to have been his wife were both over age 45, and by 1830—if this is the same Samuel Clark family—she was over 60: not the likely mother of Corinna in 1823. More likely was the slave woman (who in 1820 was aged between 15 and 26 and who may be among the four slave women present in 1830: one age 10-23 and three age 24-54). There are reasons to doubt the genealogist, as he completely elided the facts of Corinna’s color and the ex-slave status she shared with her children (he does not cite the will, for example, though he does cite other documents that make clear this ex-slave status). But if he was relying on the correspondence and documents of Silas and Corinna’s descendants, as is likely (he indicates as much for the book as a whole, p. 17), then Samuel may well have been Corinna’s father. And if Corinna was born in that household, she could easily have been the daughter of Samuel and a slave woman.

<sup>18</sup> But in December 1863, he had given Waverly a gift of \$2, a Christmas gift he also gave to several other servants.

lack thereof), both women were legally sexually “his.” But Agness’s subordinate domestic status—and therefore, that of her children—whatever her sexual or nonsexual relationship with him—is clear from the language of his will: not only did fail to leave them any property, he failed to honor them with any surname, quite unlike Corinna Omohundro and her children, all recognized individually as Omohundros.<sup>19</sup> And if, like in Lumpkin’s household, Agness were more “black” than Corinna, this would only have underscored that status.

In creating social identities, of course, phenotype and other visible genetic features were complemented by wealth, social standing, education and behavior. “Money whitens,” as the saying goes in Brazil. Silas Omohundro and Robert Lumpkin had amassed a respectable amount of wealth (however disrespectably acquired) and had distributed it to their enslaved families during their life as well as after their deaths. The women each had access to large amounts of cash at the time of their husbands’ deaths. Mary Lumpkin, in claiming Robert’s inheritance, posted \$40,000 bond to the court, while Corinna Omohundro acted as security for a portion of the \$100,000 bond Silas’s executor had posted. Behavior strengthened their claim to the white men’s name, property, and, for the children at least, racial identity. One source for Mary Lumpkin claims that she together with Robert decided to send their daughters north in the winters for their education.<sup>20</sup> Another witness said that in Ipswich, Massachusetts, where they went to school, they had “passed in the community as white ladies”; this man met the daughters as adults in Philadelphia and “found them to be cultivated and

---

<sup>19</sup>A third woman, listed in the Account Book only as “C. H.,” appears to have acted as a sort of nanny for the children, escorting them to Petersburg and buying their clothing on occasion. Since Corinna was named separately in that book, I doubt “C. H.” is Corinna. “Market and General Account Book,” Omohundro Papers, LVA. Will Book 2, Richmond City, Circuit Court, 228-230.

<sup>20</sup> Simmons, quoted in Corey, *Richmond Theological Seminary*, pp. 75.

refined.”<sup>21</sup> If Corinna Omohundro similarly taught little Alice how to wear her bonnet and how to hold her parasol, then she and her children, too, partook in a somewhat elevated plane of southern social life, their behavior helping them to pass into whiteness.<sup>22</sup>

But let me turn now to how these relationships may have been played out across the domestic confines of the slave trading compounds. These were, as I said, homes within the discrete physical space of the slave market. I say “discrete” because the slave market could be said to have extended throughout the streets of Richmond. Frederick Bancroft in 1931 documented the locations of dozens of sites of sale and slave incarceration that littered Richmond’s commercial downtown, from its finest hotels down to “Hell’s Half-Acre”—the name African Americans gave to the Lumpkin compound in Shockoe Bottom.<sup>23</sup> I say “discrete” also because slaves everywhere were always in the market, a fact that infused every ex-slave narrative and drove the critique behind *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.<sup>24</sup> But Lumpkin and Omohundro’s quarters were specific places, like those New Orleans pens and examination rooms in Walter Johnson’s study, *Soul by Soul*, where the abstract market was constituted, where market relations were consummated and rendered concrete. These were hubs in the wheel of the market, cycling people in and spinning them back out again. There were specialized built landscapes, simultaneously functional and symbolic.

We get a pretty good idea of the layout of Lumpkin’s compound—its component spaces and something of their relationship to one another—from several sources. It was

---

<sup>21</sup> Corey, *Richmond Theological Seminary*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>22</sup>For Lumpkin’s will: Richmond City, Hustings Court, Will Book 24, pp. 419-422. For Omohundro’s will: Will Book 2, Richmond City, Circuit Court, 228-230. “Market and General Account Book,” Omohundro Papers, LVA.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South*, pp. 94-101.

<sup>24</sup> xxxxx, *Domestic Individualism*, ch. 1.

in Shockoe Bottom, along the west side of Shockoe Creek on an unpaved street called “Lumpkin’s Alley,” between Franklin and Broad Streets, which was at the center of the slave trading district; there were at least four other walled trading compounds along and near Lumpkin’s Alley,<sup>25</sup> including Omohundro’s. One antebellum Richmonder remembered a “tall brick wall” surrounding it,<sup>26</sup> while a freedmen’s worker remembered the border being a “fence, in some places ten or twelve feet” high.<sup>27</sup> Anthony Burns abolitionist biographer said the compound was “enclosed by a high, close fence, the top of which was thickly set with iron spikes.”<sup>28</sup> An antebellum visitor described walking through an entrance marked “Lumpkin’s Jail” and into an “open court” with “ a large tank for washing or lavatory.”<sup>29</sup> Three brick buildings stood near the fence. These were (1) Lumpkin’s house and office, (2) a boarding house (where traders, buyers, and some slaves seem to have been housed), and (3) a kitchen and bar-room. In the middle of the lot, at some distance from these three, stood a brick two-story jail, with bars on the windows and an enclosed upper porch.<sup>30</sup> It housed men on

---

<sup>25</sup> On Lumpkin’s Alley as the “center”: Capt. J. Thompson Brown, letter to Bancroft, 30 July 1917, quoted in Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, p. 100 n. 29. [Brown was a real estate dealer who knew many of these traders; see *ibid.*, p. 96 n. 23.] Lumpkin’s Alley had been known as Birch Alley, and was subsequently known as Wall St. [surely for the walls that lined it] and 15th St. [note: there is some discrepancy about whether Wall and 15th were the same.] The site is now marked by a sign in the parking lot next to the old train station. On antebellum Richmond, see Gregg Kimball, *American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Richmond, Virginia* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2000); and, on interracial sex and the slave trade in Richmond, see Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood*, pp. 92-132.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, letter to Bancroft, 9 Feb. 1904, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 101 n. 31.

<sup>27</sup> James B. Simmons, quoted in Charles H. Corey, *A History of the Richmond Theological Seminary* (Richmond, Va.: J. W. Randolph Co., 1895), p. 76.

<sup>28</sup> Stevens, *Antho Burn: A History*, p. 188.

<sup>29</sup> “MS. recollections of Otis Bigelow,” quoted in Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>30</sup> Corey, *Richmond Theological Seminary*, pp. 46-47, 55. Simmons, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 76. Curiously, Omohundro’s compound in 1851 had nearly the same layout: three brick buildings facing a side alley and one set towards the middle of the lot; in his case, though, the lone brick building set apart appears to have been his main dwelling house. Mutual Assurance Society Records, v. 121 (reel 19), (Richmond City), policy 16433 (1851), Library of Virginia. Robert Lumpkin only insured his dwelling house [but check these again]. See *ibid.*, policy 8753, v. 95 (reel 14), 11 May 1840; policy 12558, v. 108 (reel 17), 5 Sept. 1844; policy 16375, v. 121 (reel 19), 2 May 1851; policy 19830, v. 132 (reel 22), 21 May 1858; policy 21435, v. 138 (reel 23), Dec. 1863.

the ground floor and women upstairs.<sup>31</sup> As indicated by fig. 1, there was also a garret room which conceivably could have served as additional cell space.<sup>32</sup> Inside this building was a “whipping room,” fitted with iron rings on the floor for securing victims for paddling. Lumpkin, like other slave jailors, also ran a commercial punishment service for Richmond’s slaveholders and slave-hirers.<sup>33</sup>

We can get a more vivid sense of places like this by looking at these images of Price, Birch, & Co., in Alexandria, photographs taken after Union occupation (i.e., liberation) in 1861. The first one here shows two houses, the one at left a typical looking (though quite substantial, three stories, brick, large chimneys) urban row house. Indeed, though it stood alone here, it stands today among similar row houses on Duke Street, rather indistinguishable from its neighbors (now owned by the National Urban League). The other house looks more like tenement house, though its Georgian porch gives it something of a rural plantation look (not uncommon in city houses, in fact).<sup>34</sup> Inside, there was a large open yard with a washing area, and along two other sides a long two-story barracks, a hospital, and punishment room. When Franklin and

---

<sup>31</sup> Bigelow, quoted in Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, p. 103. Bigelow also mentioned dining with traders in the boarding house.

<sup>32</sup> Image source: Corey, *Richmond Theological Seminary*, p. 47. Zephania Kingsley had two prison cells installed in the attic of his own plantation house. See “Fort George Island, Florida, House of Anna Madagegine Jai and Slave Quarters – Driver’s Cabin, Photographs, Written Historical and Descriptive Data” (Historical American Buildings Survey, Bernard W. Close, District Officer, Dist. No. 15, Jacksonville, Fla., [post-1933]), p. 3; PDF files for Anna Jai House, Historic American Building Survey, Library of Congress, HABS, FLA, 16-FOGEO.V, 1-, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/hhhtml/hhhome.html> (accessed 30 May 2003).

<sup>33</sup> A. M. Newman, *Baptist Home Mission Monthly*, Nov. 1888, p. 295, quoted in Corey, *Richmond Theological Seminary*, p. 50. See also Simmons, quoted in Corey, *Richmond Theological Seminary*, p. 76, which describes a single ring in the center of the jail [i.e., of a room]. In addition, it is possible that Fredrika Bremer is describing Lumpkin’s jail, including the whipping room; quoted in Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>34</sup> Image source: Library of Congress, “Photographs of African Americans During the Civil War: A List of Images in the Civil War Photograph Collection,” p. 2, [http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/081\\_cwa2.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/081_cwa2.html). LC-USZ62-65306, LOT 4161-H. For other images of this compound, see Library of Congress, Photographs of African Americans During the Civil War: A List of Images in the Civil War Photograph Collection, p. 2, [http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/081\\_cwa2.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/081_cwa2.html); and use the search engines for the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog, <http://memory.loc.gov/pp/mdbquery.html>; and Library of Congress, American Memory Collections, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/mdbquery.html>.

Armfield owned this compound in the 1830s, an abolitionist visitor described the fair-skinned slave family who lived in separate quarters inside the compound; the woman had “been with him some time” and the children were well dressed in “neatness and taste,” which resonates strongly with the discernable pattern at Lumpkin’s and Omohundro’s in Richmond.<sup>35</sup>

The second photograph here is also from the era of Federal occupation of the Alexandria site. It is useful here because it helps us locate an African American woman within the confines of this space—she is standing either just inside or just outside the walls.<sup>36</sup> Her clothing—apron and bonnet—mark her as a servant. She carries a market basket. She might be pregnant. An iron lattice serves as the doorway in the large brick wall, where two male figures stand, peering in (or out, as the case may be). On the building behind her, shutters dress the upper floor windows in a bid for respectability and privacy while bars screen the lower windows, preventing escape (not entry, in this case) and leaving the rooms exposed from the street or yard level.

These images, together with accounts of people who met Mary Lumpkin, can help us place her, and the “black concubine” (whose name we do not know) in the trading compound, to see her interactions with other people in that space, and help us to see how race was in part made in that place. The Lumpkin house was two or three

---

<sup>35</sup> In the jail’s kitchen, Leavitt had taken note of “a little boy and girl, five or six years old, who were better dressed than the others”; their “complexions were quite light,” he noted, and their “clothes had an air of neatness and taste, such as free mothers love to impart to their little ones.” “The mother of these had been with him some time,” Armfield had confirmed. She was among those whom he had bought locally and trusted “to go at large in the town”; these personal servants lived in their own separate quarters inside the jail compound and adjacent to Armfield’s own residence. This woman’s proximity to Armfield, her relative freedom to come and go, and the obvious favoritism bestowed upon her children probably left Leavitt’s readers to guess her children’s paternity as Armfield’s. Leavitt, in the *New York Evangelist*, 1 Feb. 1834, quoted in the *New Hampshire Anti-Slavery Convention Proceedings* (Concord, N.H., 1834), 18-20, copy at American Antiquarian Society, 20.

<sup>36</sup> Image source: Library of Congress, “Civil War Treasures from the New-York Historical Society,” Digital ID nhnycw/ad ad31007, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpcoop/nhihtml/cwnyhshome.html>. LC-B811-2300, LOT 4161-H.

stories tall and served as both dwelling and office; my guess is that the office was on the ground floor. It was Anthony Burns's biographer, the abolitionist Charles Stevens, who had written of Lumpkin's "yellow wife" and "black concubine," based apparently on what Burns had told him. Burns had quite different interactions with the women and his testimony (if we can take it at face value) indicates quite different levels of mobility of the two women within Lumpkin's compound.

In thinking about these spaces, about how they reflected and augmented Lumpkin's patriarchal and market power, and about how that shaped to a large degree these women's social lives, it is useful to think about other such spaces and about the social construction of space in general. Daphne Spain argues, in *Gendered Spaces*, how architectural spaces both reflect and reinscribe social power.<sup>37</sup> In my cases here, Lumpkin and Omohundro held inordinate legal power over the women and children in their households and over the ones passing through. They also held the real estate, and made decisions about what and how to have them configured. The buildings, then, reflected that social power. They were caused by it. But they also caused the reinscription of that power. The built environment acted as an agent of that social power by forcing certain actions, underscoring social status in relationships played out within the compounds. Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, argues that homes shape people even more deeply:

"[O]ver and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits. . . . [It] has engraved within us the hierarchy of the various functions of inhabiting. We are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house. . . . The word habit is too worn a

---

<sup>37</sup> Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1992); ch. 1, esp. 5-7.

word to express this passionate liaison of our bodies, which do not forget, with an unforgettable house."<sup>38</sup>

Bachelard here is talking about good habits, ones that root our sense of self in a home, ones that feed our daydreams. But we might apply this insight to the kinds of habitudes that fed what must have often been a waking nightmare for the slave traders' family members who were themselves enslaved: what habits were engendered by living in the midst of these slave pen compounds?

With this in mind, we can look at what evidence we have for these households, especially the Lumpkins'. One of the two major sources is Anthony Burns's biography. According to his biographer, Burns was kept confined four months in the garret room of Lumpkin's jail, which stood somewhat apart from the other three buildings. This was solitary confinement in the worst lodging Lumpkin had to offer: "The place of his confinement was a room only six or eight feet square, in the upper story of the jail, which was accessible only through a trap-door. He was allowed neither bed nor air; [only] a rude bench fastened against the wall" in this "narrow, unventilated room, beneath the heated roof of the jail." Even in this, the most confined spot in Lumpkin's compound, Lumpkin had Burns shackled, so that his confinement was almost complete.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated from the French by Maria Jolas (first published in French, 1958; translation, New York: Orion Press, 1964), 14-15.

<sup>39</sup> I explore elsewhere the significant fact that Burns contested his confinement in surreptitious and powerful ways. By a hole in the floor, Burns opened up correspondence with his peers in the room below, and by flinging letters to black passersby in the street below, outside the fence, Burns did manage to communicate with the outside. Troutman, "Grapevine in the Slave Market: African American Geopolitical Literacy and the 1841 *Creole* Revolt," in *Domestic Passages: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas, 1808-1888*, edited by Walter Johnson (Yale Univ. Press, forthcoming). Charles E. Stevens, *Anthony Burns: A History* (Boston: Jewett, 1856; electronic ed., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 1999, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/stevens/stevens.html>), pp. 188-189. [See also the recent work on Anthony Burns...]

Despite this isolation, Burns gained contact with two women of the Lumpkin household. The “yellow woman”—whom he does not name but also calls Lumpkin’s “wife”—“manifested her compassion for Burns by giving him a testament and a hymn-book.” Burns/Stevens does not say where this ministry took place, but the most likely place is in Burns’s cell. Burns had communications by different means and of a different kind with the woman he called Lumpkin’s “black concubine.” As Stevens put it:

“The house of Lumpkin was separated from the jail only by the yard, and from one of the upper windows the girl contrived to hold conversations with Anthony, whose apartment was directly opposite. Her compassion, it is not unlikely, changed into a warmer feeling; she was discovered one day by her lord and master; what he overheard roused his jealousy, and he took effectual means to break off the intercourse.”<sup>40</sup>

It seems unlikely they could have communicated across the space of the yard from their small garret windows, so Burns may have been held in the attic of the boarding house, which did also house slaves, and which stood next to Lumpkin’s house. In any case, this woman’s location in Lumpkin’s house and the actions Lumpkin takes to halt the communication are significant. If by “upper windows” we can infer a garret or attic space, this would be a low-status location that might have been an unfinished or semi-finished room—pretty common house servant sleeping quarters. If so, it would have paralleled the extreme version of the garret cell Burns himself was holed up in—the most confined and most isolated and most observable and controlled space in the building.<sup>41</sup> Even if it was simply a room in the upstairs of the house, this would be an

---

<sup>40</sup> Stevens, *Anthony Burns*, pp. 192-193.

<sup>41</sup> Zephania Kingsley’s prison cells were in the attic of his house.

area where the woman's comings and goings could be observed by Lumpkin, as she would likely have to pass through some downstairs space to have access outside. Lumpkin obviously exercised his power over Burns's access to her by moving either her or Burns to other locations within the compound. And it would likely have also been marked as a socially inferior location within the house. Even in extraordinary situations—like that of Anna Jai and Zephaniah Kingsley, or of Sarah Hunt and Nathan Sayre (in Adele Logan Alexander's book)—where women of color held fully or near-fully spousal status in white slaveholders' households, their quarters—however commodious and however relatively autonomous from the master's space—were marked as architecturally subordinate. Anna Jai's house stood behind Kingsley's main house like a dependency, its ground floor serving as a dependency: the kitchen for the main house.<sup>42</sup> The quarters for Susan Hunt and her children were at the back of Sayre's house, occupying three stories in the space of the main house's two stories (10-ft. vs. 15-ft. ceilings), and was accessible through Sayre's bedroom.<sup>43</sup> Unknowing visitors might, in fact, have taken it to be the servant's quarters.

Mary Lumpkin, by contrast with the "concubine," seems to have had far more freedom of movement and greater status within the houses. First of all, she lived in the main house, and likely not in a garret room or back corner: after all, she was the mother of Lumpkin's cherished children, and by what indications we have, she was cherished by him as well. The fact that the girls trained to be young ladies suggests that Mary was able to create something of a sanctuary within the home. But the fact that they were

---

<sup>42</sup> See images online, Gallery: Kingsley Plantation, "Exploring Florida: A Social Studies Resource for Students and Teachers, Florida Center for Instructional Technology, College of Education, University of South Florida, 2002, <http://fcit.usf.edu/florida/photos/industry/kingsl/kingsl.htm> (accessed 2 June 2003). The website emphasizes the independence Jai may have enjoyed, rather than her still-subordinate position to Kingsley marked in the architecture.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander, *Ambiguous Lives*, p. 67-71, and three photographs of Pomegranite Hall following p. 80.

sent north for school in the winters and stayed in Pennsylvania after completing their education suggests that even Robert Lumpkin did not think the slave pen compound was the best place for them.<sup>44</sup> And Mary Lumpkin also had to share space in the house with this other woman, the “black concubine.” How did she see this? Was it an infringement to share “her” man Lumpkin with this other woman? Was the color difference significant in the way Burns and Stevens thought it was? And therefore, was Mary in the same position as “jealous mistress” that many white slaveholders’ wives were? Or, following the more African model that Anna Jai and Zephaniah Kingsley apparently did, did this pseudo-polygamous situation allow Mary Lumpkin more freedom?

This is in fact a question that has nagged historians of Mormon polygamy, and a recent study of nineteenth-century Mormon vernacular architecture seems helpful in this regard. In his study, Thomas Carter finds it useful “to think of the architecture of polygamy as an architecture of accessibility—an architecture that helped make women available to men.” He is careful to distinguish Mormon polygamous architecture with, say, the architecture of prostitution—and we might add here, with an extra-legal marriage under slavery—where illicitness of the relationships was more central and where force played a more prominent roles.<sup>45</sup> But certainly we can discern different levels of male accessibility among the women who lived in or passes through Lumpkin’s compound.

While he moved the “black concubine” around in (or even without) his house at will, Lumpkin’s demonstrated affections and respect for Mary Lumpkin may have

---

<sup>44</sup> On the children’s remaining in the north, Newman quoted in Corey, *Richmond Theological Seminary*, 48-49. Newman says it was to prevent the children being sold in case of Lumpkin’s death. A deed of manumission or even a will certainly would have solved that, however.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Carter, “Living the Principle: Mormon Polygamous Housing in Nineteenth-Century Utah,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 35 (Winter 2000): 223ff.

placed a check on that. She exerted a certain mobility at least within the compound, for example, in ministering to Burns in his isolated cell. In this, she stood as a liminal figure, a woman of the trader's household, whose place was in the trader's home and who benefited from her husband's business, yet who as a Christian and likely also as a woman of African descent (not to mention, one hopes, as a human), identified with the suffering of those victims of her husband's business, those people incarcerated in the cells only yards away. In another case, a boy who was sent to Lumpkin's in 1862 to be whipped later recalled that she was present with Lumpkin in the house when he (the boy) arrived, and that "she looked at me rather piteously"; "when I came away that same woman looked at me again, and it seemed to me that she was saying, 'poor child.'" Years later, when they met again, she remembered him and gave a knowing and sympathetic sigh.<sup>46</sup> She was both in a protected position in the household—which, remember, she did in fact inherit—and yet one who was sympathetic at least to this boy, this outsider, this slave sent in to be whipped—sent to the back room, the whipping room, tied down to the rings in the floor (for it is he who has left us with that description of that room), like so many other outsiders. Was she sympathetic to them all? Could she be? Was it the boy's age that gave her pause? Was it his color? We do not know his color, but the visitor Fredericka Bremer, who visited what could well have been Lumpkin's compound, described seeing "a pretty little white boy of about seven years of age sitting among some tall negro girls. The child had light hair, the most lovely light brown eyes, and cheeks as red as roses; he was nevertheless, the child of a slave mother, and was to be sold as a slave."<sup>47</sup> This description could easily have been applied to Mary Lumpkin's children. What was it like to see such children held for sale

---

<sup>46</sup> A. M. Newman, quoted in Corey, *Richmond Theological Seminary*, p. 49-50.

<sup>47</sup> Bremer, quoted in Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, p. 102.

or punishment in the boarding house or jail cells while her own equally white and equally enslaved children slept in her house? And what was it like to live in the trader's house, as his "wife" and yet see equally white women in those slave pens, bound for the "fancy" trade in New Orleans?<sup>48</sup>

The architecture of the place seems to played a clarifying role in distinguishing between equally enslaved women: Mary did live in the house, her own house, or at least the one she did inherit upon her husband's death. And in the case of Corinna Omohundro, Silas's account book suggests that Corinna helped manage the slave-trading household. Silas paid her at least once for some unnamed work she had performed, and on other occasions he gave her money for market or to buy "negro cloth"; whether this was for his other household slave servants or for slaves housed in the jail, we don't know, but in either case, Corinna was acting as the mistress of the house here and not as a fellow servant.<sup>49</sup> I assume Mary Lumpkin acted likewise, mistress of the house within the extended compound—for whatever sympathy she may have expressed towards that little boy being whipped, she could not and did not act to stop it or otherwise intervene in the actions of her husband's business. Her family's well being—presuming she worked to preserve it and to hope for their eventual freedom—depended on her playing her part. And whatever space she made for herself and for the children within the home was still bound up within the market right outside

---

<sup>48</sup> On the indeterminacy of race as frequently experienced in antebellum Virginia, see Joshua Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families Across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787-1861* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003), ch. 6, esp. pp. 212-218. On the market in "white" slave women for sex, see Phillip Troutman, "Slave Trade and Sentiment in Antebellum Virginia," Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Virginia, 2000), ch. 1; Walter Johnson, "The Slave Trader, the White Slave, and the Politics of Racial Determination in the 1850s," *The Journal of American History* (June 2000) <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/87.1/johnson.html>>; and Edward E. Baptist, "Cuffy, Fancy Maids, and One-Eyed Men: Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States," *The American Historical Review* (December 2001) <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/106.5/ah0501001619.html>.

<sup>49</sup>"Market and General Account Book," Omohundro Papers, LVA.

her door. Her family and whatever affection she might have felt for Lumpkin assured her a place in the home but it just as assuredly bound her there, rendering her accessible to him. And not exclusively so, for the black concubine also lived within the Lumpkins' house. Again, whether Lumpkin's multiple partners introduced or relieved tension among those women in the household, we cannot know. But it is clear that the second woman lived there far more provisionally, her lower status and more precarious situation signaled at least for Burns and Stevens by her color: "black" vs. Mary's "yellow." Indeed, Lumpkin moved her within the house at will, or perhaps even removed her to the kitchen or other servant sleeping quarters. Still, she remained accessible to Lumpkin wherever she may have slept within the confines of that twelve-foot fence.

Finally, the slave jail completed the architectural hierarchy of accessibility for Lumpkin. Again, we have Burns as witness. While locked in the garret of the jail, through a crack in the floor, he saw an overseer and a buyer inspecting a slave woman who had been forced to strip naked. She cried and pleaded with them as the overseer swore and made commands.<sup>50</sup> Stevens did not say whether Burns witnessed more than this, but he might well have in his four month detention. These moments of inspection, of course, left enslaved people, especially women, vulnerable to sexual assault, whether or not buyers considered them "fancy girls" or not. And if they were considered so, traders were known to take the women for themselves first, before passing them along to buyers.<sup>51</sup>

Trying to understand the domestic space of these women led me, of course, back to the slave trading men, since they were the ones who largely controlled and dictated

<sup>50</sup> Stevens, *Anthony Burns*, 190-191.

<sup>51</sup> Baptist, "Cuffy, Fancy Maids, and One-Eyed Men." Troutman, "Slave Trade and Sentiment," ch. 1; "Fancy Girls' and a 'Yellow Wife.'"

the layout of the physical property, not to mention the power they held over their human property, those same family members. This was patriarchy at its logical extreme: the man of the house legally owning his wife and children as chattel—and importantly here, the patriarch's house literally in the midst of the slave market.

Let me conclude by trying to work in—somewhat belatedly I must admit—the notion of memory here, in the absence of Emily Landau's paper. First, the memory of Lumpkin's jail is carried on by Virginia Union University in Richmond,<sup>52</sup> which began as a freedman's school in Lumpkin's jail: Mary Lumpkin rented them the place for three months; the jail was sanctified and converted to classrooms; the boarding house became a dormitory, and Lumpkin's house was the headmaster's house.<sup>53</sup> Mary eventually sold the site & it was torn down. It now lies under a parking lot at the old Union station. There's much more to be said here, but let it suffice to say that this site may yet become a controversial site, as all such sites in Richmond are destined to be as the capital of the Confederacy wrestles mightily with its past.

Second, by all indications, the children of Mary Lumpkin and of Corinna Omohundro became white; they passed. Theirs was a double passing, though. As a late nineteenth century witness said of the Lumpkin girls: "The last I heard of them they were residing in one of the Northern States. Whether they pass as colored or whites I do not know. But I presume no trace could be found of them under the name of Lumpkin; for in the very nature of things they would be more than willing that all records and recollections of their birthplace and pedigree should be blotted out forever."<sup>54</sup> He did not know whether they had passed to white, but he knew they had passed out of the Lumpkin genealogy. It was not so much their racial identity that was

---

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.vuu.edu/>

<sup>53</sup> Corey, *Richmond Theological Seminary*, pp. 54-55, and Simmons, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>54</sup> Simmons, quoted in Corey, *Richmond Theological Seminary*, p. 74-75.

to be shed, but their father's birthright. That past—their family life inside their father's slave trading pen—was to be forgotten. This, too, was the fate of the Omohundro children. They passed so successfully that Silas and Corinna's grandchildren either did not know or did not tell the family genealogist, Malvern Omohundro Sr. (descended from Silas's brother)—or he knew (and I know he must have, for he cites documents that cite the will, which names them as slaves to be emancipated) and did not tell them. Or both. The surviving children did know, at least those old enough at emancipation: Alice Morton Omohundro, who was 16; Colan Omohundro, who was 13; Riley Crosby Omohundro was 7 and William Rainey Omohundro was 5, George Nelson Omohundro was only 2; Martha Dabney Lumpkin was married already, Annie E. Lumpkin, close in age; I don't know the ages of Robert Lumpkin, Richard C. Lumpkin, and John Lumpkin. But the ones who did know--did they tell their children? Did they talk to each other about it? And what about their memories—or to take a page from Bachelard, their daydreams—of those homes, those slave pens, those places that they played—as children do? “[T]he house we were born in,” Bachelard writes, “becomes imbued with dream values which remain after the house is gone. Centers of boredom, centers of solitude, centers of daydream group together to constitute the oneiric [or dream] house which is more lasting than the scattered memories of our birthplace. Long phenomenological research would be needed to determine all these dream values, to plumb the depth of this dream ground in which our memories are rooted.”<sup>55</sup> We are outside of history now: What, I wonder, did these people daydream about their childhood home? What had that place, those spaces, done to them?

---

<sup>55</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 17.