A Briny Crossroads Salt, Slavery, and Sectionalism in The Kanawha Salines

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A Briny Crossroads
Salt, Slavery, and Sectionalism in The Kanawha Salines

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I. Introduction: The birth and disappearance of the West Virginia salt industry

The Kanawha Salines are a place whose history challenges conventional narratives and popular assumptions about slavery and freedom in the antebellum South. The paradoxical nature of slavery in this locale can be seen in the identity of the first documented people forced to labor in the salt works. A half century before enslaved Africans were imported to this region, European women and their families were kidnapped, enslaved, and marched to the salt mines by Native Americans: “In 1755, the Indians had carried Mary Ingles, her newborn baby, and others as captives...to this spot on the Kanawha to attain a salt supply.”¹ Mary Ingles’ time in slavery was brief; like some of the African-American slaves who would perform similar work a half century later, she fled captivity in the salt mines and followed a river to freedom. While her story of salt slavery is commemorated in a play that is annually performed in the state of West Virginia, a mass-market paperback,² and two³ feature films, the public memory rarely acknowledges the thousands of enslaved people who replaced her as slaves in the Kanawha Valley salt works, the unique economic and social conditions that

created their bondage, and the racially integrated frontier workplace where they labored.

West Virginia’s frontier mythologists are not the only ones to blame for the scanty understanding of this period of its history. Historians of slavery have also devoted very little attention to the thousands of people who faced industrial bondage in The Kanawha Salines. In general histories of American slavery and in specific studies of slave-leasing historians have either ignored or only examined the surface level dynamics of this unique place for American slavery. The only scholars to have focused their attention in a concentrated manner on the role of slavery in The Kanawha Salines are Wilma Dunaway and John Stealey. While Dunaway’s regional history *Slavery in the Antebellum Mountain South* breaks important ground by tackling the unique regional context of slavery and the centrality of slave leasing to industrial, slave-operated industries throughout

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Appalachia, she does not explore the unique social and fiscal conditions that were created in the Kanawha salt industry, nor does her regional approach grapple with how the salt industry and the people it enslaved interacted with the free states of the frontier. Stealey, on the other hand, devotes considerable attention to the topic of slavery, with an entire chapter of his book exploring the role of slavery in the West Virginia salt industry. Unfortunately, Stealey did not ground his study in the modern work that other historians have done on industrial slave leasing, slavery on the frontier, and the geographies of slavery and freedom in antebellum America. While his work is invaluable for understanding the Kanawha salt industry, and its operations, it focuses primarily on the financial and legal aspects of this history, in the process missing many of the implications that slavery in the West Virginia salt industry poses to the overall study of the history of slavery.

This near vacuum of knowledge is an unfortunate development that has led both West Virginians and historians to overlook the importance of local slavery to the history of antebellum America. A closer examination of slavery’s place in the Kanawha salt industry allows one to explore less frequently examined aspects of American slavery, garnering new insights into the scope of work that enslaved laborers performed, the degree to which early American corporate enterprises integrated slave and free labor, the fashion in which enslaved labor was attained and retained, and how industrialization, corporatization, slavery, and westward expansion developed a symbiotic relationship on the Southern frontier.
In the nearly sixty years of continuous industrial slavery in this highly developed and capitalized commodity production industry, complex economic and social linkages were forged in an otherwise unsettled and isolated region of what is today West Virginia.

West Virginia’s history is often told in a fashion that not only minimizes the existence of slavery, but that relegates the birth of extractive industries to the late nineteenth century, when large-scale coal production started to dominate the state economy. This oversight minimizes the continuities that exist between the coal and salt industries and enables observers to overlook how labor practices that began in the salt industry would be transferred from one extractive industry to another. Those historians who have explored the history of salt slavery in The Kanawha Salines, like John Stealey and R. Eugene Harper have either failed to understand the broader significance of salt industry practices or have

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6 A nineteenth century British traveler remarked upon the overgrown wilderness that was found in the rest of the Kanawha Valley, and thought it formed a marked contrast with the industrial landscape of The Kanawha Salines. Marianne Finch, *An Englishwoman's Experience In America* (London, 1853), 332-353.

7 For instance, in his study of the Kanawha Valley coal industry before the Civil War, Otis K. Rice stresses that, “Although promotional literature stressed the advantage of using slave labor in the coal industry, the employment of Negores was not always feasible.” The reason given for the unfeasible nature of slave labor in the early coal mines is that unlike in Richmond, Kanawha mines, “were somewhat remote from any sizable Negro population.” The neighboring Kanawha salt industry had in fact engaged for decades in leasing slaves from considerable distance, often with the express purpose of mining coal to be used in salt boiling furnaces, and despite his own assertion, Rice’s study actually shows evidence that slave leasing was also common in the antebellum coal industry. Otis K. Rice, “Coal Mining in the Kanawha Valley to 1861: A View of Industrialization in the Old South,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (November, 1965), 415.
mechanistically applied models borrowed from other historians\(^8\) to slavery in The Kanawha Salines, rather than examining the geographic, economic, and social factors that made The Kanawha Salines a singular and illuminating place for students of American slavery.

The overwhelming amnesia surrounding salt slavery in the Kanawha Valley can be partially explained by the historical transmutation of the region’s mineral wealth, and the concomitant disappearance of the saltworks. Though the salt industry has been effectively moribund\(^9\) for over a century, the same subterranean brine deposits whose presence created the salt industry are still extracted and processed. The places that were once used for industrial salt production have been recycled and repurposed for a new form of extractive industry, creating a limited level of historical preservation and awareness surrounding their antebellum history. Coal, originally extracted as a necessary input\(^10\) in the salt industry, is now the object of a resource production complex

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\(^9\) One salt producing family, the Dickinsons, have recently revived their saltmaking business, but they use non-industrial techniques and market their product as, “Appalachian Farm Artisanal Salt,” rather than as a bulk commodity salt for meatpacking, like their forbearers. From newspaper accounts it appears that they have both changed the method of production and no longer rely on an enslaved labor force. This modern incarnation helps to mask the reality of the industrial slavery that typified the vast majority of salt produced in the Kanawha Valley. Jim Balow, “Salt of the Earth: Siblings Revive Historic Brine Business in Malden,” *Charleston Gazette* (September 7, 2013).

\(^10\) Stealey describes a transition from salt boilers powered by wood-powered furnaces fueled from
that, though now in decline for decades, still vastly outstrips the Kanawha salt industry in economic value, technical complexity, and manpower utilized. The sites where the salt mines themselves once stood still host drilling and processing industries, but instead of extracting and boiling brine, today’s industrial enterprises harvest and process the chemicals and natural gas which were formerly considered unwelcome and hazardous adjuncts to the salt mining industry, and were regularly discarded as waste by salt drillers. In the absence of active salt mines, The Kanawha Salines have even lost their name, becoming Malden,\textsuperscript{11} albeit a name allegedly\textsuperscript{12} rooted in the commonplace nature of public brutality in the era of salt slavery: "[in] about 1820, the colored people ("negroes") began to call the village of Kanawha Salines Malden, from the fact that a whipping post had been established there to whip the refractory negro slaves. The negroes, when speaking of whipping called it getting mauled. After being whipped they called it Malden."\textsuperscript{13}

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\textsuperscript{11} Immediately after the Civil War the area retained the salt-based name of The Kanawha Salines, but by 1871, official documents, like steamboat captain N.B. Coleman’s appointment as an elections clerk, issued by the WV governor used the new name of Malden. Coleman appointed Commissioner at Poles in Malden in 1871, undated, West Virginia State Archives Manuscript Collections, Nelson B. Coleman Collection, ms 79-8, box 2, item 4. Nelson B. Coleman Collection.

\textsuperscript{12} Local historian Larry Rowe provides an alternative version of the town’s name from the Charleston Gazette claiming it was named by a salt maker from Malden, Massachusetts who “Brought the name with him.” Larry L. Rowe, \textit{History Tour of Old Malden, Virginia and West Virginia and Booker T. Washington’s Formative Years} (Malden, 2013).

\textsuperscript{13} Charles Austin Whiteshot, \textit{The Oil-Well Driller: A History Of The World's Greatest Enterprise, The Oil Industry} (Mannington, West Virginia, 1905), 65.
II: Slavery Comes to The Kanawha Salines

The human beings—the vast majority were leased slaves—whose labor made the salt industry possible were even more transitory and ephemeral than the industry that once extracted and marketed the briny fruits of their toil. Slaves in the Kanawha salt industry tended to be leased on an annual basis, and these leased slaves, whose family and slaveholders likely resided in other parts of the antebellum South, comprised “more than half of [the salt industry’s] slave labor force of nearly fifteen hundred.”\(^{14}\) The predominance of leased slaves and the wide radius from which slave labor was attracted likely fostered a simultaneous sense of displacement and opportunity amongst these enslaved workers in The Kanawha Salines, who would have been torn between the new ties they developed in their workplaces, the cash incentives they were paid in their temporary workplace,\(^{15}\) and the more familiar world of their home and the fraternal and familial bonds that they had developed there. While laboring at The Kanawha Salines, enslaved people would have encountered and conversed with other people in a similar condition of servitude, but with different geographic origins from them.

In order to attain a sufficient labor force to power the salt mines, the slave

\(^{14}\) Wilma A. Dunaway, *Slavery In The American Mountain South* (Cambridge, 2003), 118.

\(^{15}\) An examination of the account book of The Kanawha Salt Company suggests that these fees averaged about 1/10 of the price paid to lease an individual for 1 year. *Account Book Of The Kanawha Salt Company, 1820-1842*, West Virginia State Archives Manuscript Collection, MS 79-61.
population was leased from slaveholders that were often distant from the salt mines, even in the earliest years of this industry: “Not only were negroes hired in the vicinity of the Kanawha Valley but they were brought in on such contracts from as far away as Parkersburg.”\textsuperscript{16} That is a distance of around sixty miles of rugged, hilly terrain, and Parkersburg was not the only source of temporary, enslaved labor. In fact, most workers came from Eastern Virginia, a difficult and far longer journey that would require leased slaves to cross mountains and ford rivers\textsuperscript{17} in the dead of winter to reach their homes for the traditional Christmas holiday and return to The Kanawha Salines shortly after the traditional January 1 date on which slave leasing\textsuperscript{18} contracts commenced. As this enslaved labor force passed between their workplace and their putative homes, they not only gained a knowledge of the surrounding terrain, but through their seasonal migrations, they effectively spread what they learned in The Kanawha Salines to their loved ones, serving as a conduit that connected enslaved people confined to a limited geography of captivity to the world outside of their rural bondage.

\textsuperscript{16} John Reuben Sheeler, \textit{The Negro In WV Before 1900} (Morgantown, 1954), 88.
\textsuperscript{17} See the appendix, Figure 1, for a map that shows the path from Eastern Virginia to The Kanawha Salines that these men would have taken.
\textsuperscript{18} White Virginians who hired slaves on an annual basis, rather than for a short term, usually did so within an elaborate system that had developed for that purpose. “For several days around the turn of each year, rural white Virginians converged upon stores, courthouses, taverns, and crossroads for slave hiring.” Zaborney, 23 The Kanawha salt industry appeared to use slave leasing agents in these markets to hire enough slaves to meet their manpower needs while also hiring some slaves from local individuals. An examination of the corporate accounts from the Kanawha Salt Company show this exceedingly well with two entries on the December 1835 page: “Hire of negroes for 1836--$2315. luke wilcox for hire of five negroes: $532.50” Account Book Of The Kanawha Salt Company.
Some of these laborers were facing a journey that not only took them far from their homes and families, but also removed them from the familiar tasks, rhythms, and culture of their regular work environment. Many of the enslaved people employed at the salt mines had formerly been rural slaves, accustomed to agricultural work. Seen as surplus labor in their home environment and in order for their slaveholder to fully profit from their bondage, they were forced to build a new life in the grueling industries of the salt mines. Booker T. Washington’s stepfather, Wash Ferguson, was one such person. According to the recollections of his stepson, he “belonged to this Mr. Ferguson but would never live on his place...so he used to hire him out during slavery to a man at the Salt works in West Virginia.” Ferguson appears to have been sent to The Kanawha Salines as punishment for some act of personal rebellion against his slaveholder. Wash Ferguson was not the only person leased to The Kanawha Salines for disciplinary purposes and surviving records also show reluctance and resistance to displacement amongst slaves separated from their family: “Correspondence among the salt makers reveals that owned and hired slaves from Piedmont Virginia who did not wish to move from their homes to the Kanawha resisted however they could.”

Regardless of the circumstances that led to his initial enslavement in the salt industry, as he was leased to The Kanawha Salines year

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20 Stealey, 148.
after year, Wash Ferguson habituated himself to the social and economic milieu of the salt mines, and as he built a new identity as salt packer and a coal miner, he began to live a double life common to many in his position, laboring in the salt mines for most of the year, while maintaining a long-distance relationship with his loved ones in Hales Ford, which lay over two hundred miles away from The Kanawha Salines.

Strange as it may seem to modern people, slave leasing was an extremely ordinary feature of the economic fabric of the antebellum South and especially the state of Virginia, where, “slave hiring proliferated throughout Virginia’s economy and society to become a fundamental facet of Virginia slavery by the turn of the nineteenth century.”21 Slave leases were paid at the end of the terms of the lease, essentially making this form of slave labor a way of attaining a workforce for an entire year without paying cash up front. This must have been an especially alluring proposition to the cash poor22 saltmaking corporations of The Kanawha Salines whose chronic undercapitalization made the outright purchase of a

21 Zaborney, 3.
22 Stealey’s text shows numerous attempts by the salt manufacturers to avoid making cash payments, including using salt as a medium of exchange, producing and circulating bonds and stock in lieu of currency, issuing private circulating currencies, and paying both free and slave labor in scrip or company store credit. One can also gain a sense of the cash poor nature of the area from perusing local newspapers, where salt is routinely accepted as a form of alternative currency. These newspapers show that you could purchase an enslaved woman or pay your school tuition with salt in the Kanawha Valley. This cash shortage became an especially problematic fact when Andrew Jackson’s bank policy withdrew funds from Western markets, leading Kanawha saltmakers to plead their case in an open letter to congress: “The banks have ceased their accommodations — neither bills nor notes are discounted, and such is the pressure in our own market towns, and the country generally, that it is next to impossible to effect sales for cash at any price “ United States Congress, Congressional Edition (Washington, D.C., January 1, 1834) 196.
resident slave labor force prohibitively costly when compared with the low up-
front cost of an annual lease. Luckily for the salt manufacturers of The Kanawha
Salines, a large supply\textsuperscript{23} of rentable slave labor was available within the state of
Virginia. The maturing and dynamic slave rental market supplied leased slaves to
local individuals, institutions, and corporations as well as to distant salt
companies, but the outsized consumption of leased slaves by Kanawha salt
manufacturers led contemporary analysts of slave leasing to assert that the price
of leased slaves closely tracked the fortunes of the salt industry: “The Ethiopian
Exchange was less active and animated than usual. The Bears had ascendancy
this year. There was a surplus of hands—-and the wages went down.— The Bulls
threatened to make the Bear smart for it next year—-but that will depend on the
prosperity of the salt business.”\textsuperscript{24}

In addition to undercapitalization, Stealey devotes several chapters of his
text to the rampant speculative behavior that was common amongst salt industry
firms. The dizzyingly complex transactions and regular failures, mergers, and
other complicated and opaque financial and legal maneuvers that were an adjunct
to commodity production in the salt industry were a major and well-documented\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} Though this availability fluctuated as it reacted to macroeconomic trends and forces it was
relatively robust. According to clinometric scholars Fogel and Engerman, “For the slave labor
force as a whole about 7.5 percent were on hire at any given time,” (Fogel and Engerman, 56).
Furthermore, Zaborney shows that The Kanawha Salines were located in the state with the most
mature slave leasing industry, which would have improved local availability of leased slave labor.
\textsuperscript{24} “The Ethiopian Market,” \textit{Kanawha Republican}, (January 5, 1852).
\textsuperscript{25} Examination of the records from a lawsuit involving a failed salt company trust reveals a thicket
aspect of The Kanawha Salines. Stealey regards the industrial salt manufacturers as pioneers not just in geographical terms but in the industrial, corporate, and technological spheres in American business life. Among the innovations he identifies as occurring at The Kanawha Salines are many specific mechanical advancements that would be repurposed in the coal, gas, and oil industries, as well as the development of America’s first monopolistic producer’s cartel which regulated salt extraction in this regional industry. Unfortunately, Stealey’s conception of the role of slave leasing in the salt industry does not draw upon his own scholarly portrayal of Kanawhan industrialists as business innovators. Instead, Stealey relies on a hackneyed and long disproven environmentally deterministic understanding of the origins of slave leasing in antebellum Virginia to explain the dominance of leased slaves in the industry he studies: “In the traditional view, the inefficient practices of slave plantations led to soil exhaustion in the states of the “Old South.” Robbed of their fertility, these soils, it was said, could no longer profitably support agriculture based on slave labor. However, the interregional slave trade gave a new lease on life to slavery in the Old South.”

In fact, modern scholarship agrees that in the face of widespread global tobacco

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of agreements and counter-agreements that regulated production and marketing. Reynolds vs. McFarland, Shrewsbury et al (Salt Case), 1845, West Virginia State Archives Manuscript Collections, Ms79-85.

26 Fogel and Engerman, 47
27 Fogel and Engerman were among the first modern scholars to note and explore the widespread nature of slave leasing in the South and to suggest that it actually served to modernize the slave labor market, allowing slaveholders to earn a flexible and consistent return-on-investment while
cultivation that competed with their cash crop, slaveholders in early nineteenth century Virginia abandoned labor intensive tobacco production for the more remunerative and less intensely husbanded grain crops, and that they then diverted surplus slaves to a maturing slave leasing industry that had existed since the early eighteenth century. As industries, public works projects, and individual entrepreneurs began to rely upon this growing slave leasing market, this version of bondage became so profitable and regularized in Virginian society, that many slaveholders chose the greater profits of slave leasing over agriculture, increasing the supply of leased slaves at the expense of their plantations, in order to help supply the demand generated by southern industries like The Kanawha Salines that relied upon a leased, enslaved workforce.  

Despite this historiographical oversight on Stealey’s part, it would seem reasonable to assume that, given salt producers’ eager adoption of modern methods in business, law, and technology, they were equally interested in experimenting with and employing modern methods of workforce management. This assessment provides additional insight into the reason slave-leasing became a dominant feature of the economic landscape of The Kanawha Salines. Slave

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allowing reallocation of slave labor as a reaction to market forces. More recent studies, like Zaborney’s exploration of slaving leasing in Virginia and Martin’s work on slave hiring across the South depict a slave leasing system that was highly diversified, legally codified, and fundamentally well-suited to supply the labor needs of capital intensive work projects and industries like The Kanawha Salines.

28 This evolution of the Virginian slave leasing market and its effects on the economic behavior of Virginian slaveholders as it evolved to meet the needs of the developing economy of the south is incisively explored throughout Zaborney’s Slaves For Hire.
leasing enjoyed a favorable reputation among Southerners “who envisioned a modern, industrialized, slaveholding South to compete with the mills, mines, and factories of the north,” and it allowed industrialists to meet labor needs while ensuring the maximum economic flexibility in future business cycles, when a smaller or larger workforce may be needed to maximize profits. Slave leasing was a form of human commodification that abstracted the enslaved person into a unit of labor that could be acquired at legally regulated markets. These legal regulations helped the institution of slave leasing navigate and bridge the conflicting expectations of lessor and lessee. The company that leased slave wanted to attain maximum value from their workers during the tenure of their lease, often subjecting them to harsh work environments, while slaveholders wanted to receive the highest rental price they could attain while insuring their enslaved property returned undamaged. This conflict in lessor-lessee expectations was especially evident in a place of hard and dangerous slave labor like The Kanawha Salines, and it was just this risk that led to the development of a life insurance market for leased slaves, which allowed both parties to further financialize and abstract slave labor while accommodating the concerns of

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30 This conflict is examined in-depth in chapters 3 and 4 of Jonathan D. Martin’s text on slave leasing. Martin, 72-137.
31 Sharon Ann Murphy shows how slave life insurance and slave leasing developed side-by-side and how slave leasing agents were often also slave insurance agents. Murphy, 650
slaveholders who place their human capital amongst the hazards of a risky\textsuperscript{32} industrial workplace. While leasing slave labor was undoubtedly more expensive in the long-run for regular and consistent users of leased slave labor, the ability to annually adjust the size of the labor force to match expected market demands and hire individuals who had the skills that were in demand in their industry meant that salt manufacturers who leased enslaved labor would not end up wasting money in the long run by purchasing a surplus number of hands to meet the labor needs generated by one year of high demand for salt.

The geographical heterogeneity and annual flux\textsuperscript{33} amongst the enslaved populace of The Kanawha Salines likely created a more cosmopolitan workforce than one would expect amidst the hardscrabble drudgery of industrial salt mining. Workers at The Kanawha Salines would have shared news and information from their respective hometowns with each other, creating a broader and worldlier knowledge base amongst the slaves who labored there than would have existed on isolated farms or plantations. Despite the presence of the public whipping post, individuals who were enslaved at The Kanawha Salines, “enjoyed considerable freedom to roam at large...[and were] tendered incentives to encourage

\textsuperscript{32}Not only was the enslaved labor force regularly exposed to and died from smallpox and cholera at a higher rate than white workers (See: Register of Cholera deaths, Kanawha County, 1850, West Virginia State Archives Manuscript Collection, Ms80-172.) but they also suffered from industrial accidents which were covered in the newspaper, like ”a negro belonging to George M. Morrison, employed at Mr. J.P. Hale's Furnace, was scalded last week and died from the effects on last tuesday night.” No Author, no Title, Kanawha Valley Star, May 14, 1858.

\textsuperscript{33}Enslaved laborers were rented on an annual basis; therefore, the composition of the workforce changed on an annual basis.
Furthermore, as the years passed and steamboats replaced the previous methods of river transport, the speed and mobility of these craft enhanced the profitability and flexibility of salt manufactures while expanding the geographical range of the markets their manufacturing served. To those enslaved in the Salines these craft were a link to free states in the rapidly developing frontier, carrying news and exposing them to an even more worldly populace:

“The steamboat transported ideas as well as merchandise. Contacts with ‘liberated’ slaves who transferred knowledge of distant Ohio ports could erode discipline.”

The wages and relative liberty that leased slaves enjoyed during their industrial servitude also influenced the loved ones that they left behind in their distant hometown while they labored in the salt mines. Every year leased slaves would return to their slaveholder’s home for the Christmas season, bringing with them the money they had earned and their connections to the broader world:

“Washington Ferguson...saw more of the world than the usual farm slave. Booker sat ‘for hours in rapture hearing him tell of his experiences.’”

The relative freedom and economic opportunity that leased slaves attained in the salt industry was a palliative that made the hard and dangerous labor in this industry more endurable and even desirable for some individuals. This is not to say that the easy and generous terms of service that David Golland describes for

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34 Stealey, 149.
35 Stealey, 146.
36 Harlan, 18.
industrial slaves\textsuperscript{37} prevailed. The work that salt industry workers performed was predicated on long hours and grueling conditions that differed from most antebellum industries and this reality could even be observed by passing aeronauts: “Mr. Clayton on his balloon trip reported having crossed over the Kanawha Salt works, that being at the time the only industry that kept fires and lights by night.”\textsuperscript{38} The fires that Clayton saw were those of the salt boilers, which reportedly were only extinguished during the Christmas season. This ceaseless toil violated sabbatarian laws that forbade all people, free or enslaved to observe Christian customs and forego Sunday work, and it was in recognition of this transgression against law and custom that wages developed in the salt industry for enslaved people. The furnace stokers who labored in twelve hour shifts, feeding coal and wood into the salt furnaces were unskilled laborers, but the work they performed was dangerous and difficult, like that of other laborers whose workplace specialties were not calibrated around a twenty four hour clock, and instead “salt furnaces assigned slaves specific tasks per day.”\textsuperscript{39} It was through this task system that enslaved laborers they performed the various specific undertakings that produced salt, such as salt-packing and transport, coal mining, salt raking, and the maintenance and construction of salt industry infrastructure.

\textsuperscript{37} “These slaves, whether owned by the industrialist or hired from their owners for the year, spent many a "sick day" lounging out in the woods or by a stream,” David Hamilton Golland, \textit{Industrial Intersection: Slavery and Industry in Late Antebellum Virginia} (Charlottesville, 2002), 14.
\textsuperscript{38} C.H. Graham, \textit{History of Clayton Community}, (Morgantown, 1923).
\textsuperscript{39} Dunaway, 119.
In addition to leased slaves, skilled and unskilled transient white laborers from the Ohio frontier and New England also formed a significant component of this integrated workplace. Though most workers of all races shared the sense of displacement from their home, analysts believe that the skilled core of the industry were enslaved and owned by salt companies: “The successful slave-driven concerns maintained a core of owned slaves supplemented by hired workers, both skilled and unskilled.”

The economic and social freedoms that slaves leased to the salt industry were accustomed to was attractive to locally enslaved people, held in non-industrial bondage in local homes and farms in communities close to The Kanawha Salines. Local newspaper advertisements document this friction, and local slaveholders publicly reckoned with the fact that, “persons residing in the town of Charleston and its neighborhood are in the habit of giving my negroes employment without my knowledge and consent.” Local slaves observed the social and work opportunities that were available to leased slaves of the salt industry, and they began emulating leased slaves, obtaining paid work outside of their slaveholder’s direct supervision, engaging in petty trade, and spending some of their earnings at the saloons that sprung up to cater to workers in the salt industry. In the Kanawha Valley, the vast majority of slaves were not domestic

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40 Golland, 32.
41 Catherine Venable, Kanawha Banner, June 4, 1844. John S. Stone, Kanawha Banner, March 19, 1830. J.Y. Quarrier, Kanawha Banner, July 3, 1831. See Appendix Figures 7 and 8 for reproductions.
servants and they were not locally owned, and given this reality it became difficult for local slaveholders to stop their slaves from being absorbed into the culture of relative independence created by salt slavery, where enslaved people could claim freedom of action, movement, and earn the wages that most enslaved people never knew. One can sense the way in which a booming salt industry changed the terms of slavery for local blacks and for local whites in this letter to the editor in an 1842 Charleston newspaper: “Our streets and the roads leading from the town are thronged, at all hours of the night, by Blacks in some instances they are assuming the attitude of mastery--petty thefts are rife, especially in the outskirts of the town.”

Though the salt manufacturers were able to use incentives and force to regulate their workers, the way their enslaved laborers behaved outside of their workplace was a source of conflict for locals accustomed to the traditional practices of American chattel slavery.

As the Kanawha salt industry developed into an interracial industrial workforce that mixed free blacks, locally enslaved people owned by the salt companies, and transient and resident whites with the leased, enslaved majority, the interracial workplace fostered an interracial society: “Near the furnaces along the Kanawha could be seen the little shanties in which the hired workers lived. Among the workers were the white laborers, the hired slaves, and a few free negro

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42 No author, no title, Kanawha Banner, October 4, 1842.
workers.” Slaves and free whites labored in the same positions, lived in the same quarters, and congregated together in their off hours, creating a lively, transracial culture that many in the local elites objected to: “At the salines in Kanawha County, however, slaves, free negroes, and white workers lived together in their shabby quarters. An occasional Saturday night brawl resulted in much disorder and sometimes a murder. They played “spots” (cards) and sometimes disagreed on the result of their game.” Industrial workers of all races in The Kanawha Salines were noted for their strength and endurance and it appears that their gambling involved feats of strength and other risky dares that would have fostered a sense of camaraderie and a collective identity as salt industry laborers that in some instance transcended the formal racial hierarchies of this era. Equally important in creating more equal conditions for workers of all backgrounds in The Kanawha Salines were the, “monetary incentives [paid] to factory slaves...to work

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43 Sheeler, 89.
44 Stealey suggests that most laborers in The Kanawha Salines, either free or enslaved lived in shacks or barracks provided by the salt companies as a supplement to paid wages. These residences would have been directly adjacent to the salt furnaces and would have provided little respite from the industrial conditions of the workplace. For an example of what this may have looked like, see the illustration of the Snow Hill salt mine in the appendix.
45 Sheeler, 139.
46 “The Kanawha salt wells were...a lonely mountain camp where only men of great strength could stand the grueling toil necessary to keep fires going night and day.” Lloyd Lewis, Sherman: Fighting Prophet (New York, 1932), 14.
47 e.g. a transient white worker who worked on an Ohio river keelboat supposedly once, “won a barrel of salt by climbing a very high tree and standing on his head on a limb of the tree nearly 100 feet from the ground.” Opha Moore, History of Franklin County, Ohio (Topeka, 1930), NP.
without days of rest, and these payments began to be recognized by custom.”

These wages, while not unusual under slavery were higher than were available to slaves in most places, and were, “paid to both hired and owned slaves,” further breaking down the barriers that otherwise existed between local slaves and nonresident leased slaves and allowing some enslaved individuals to begin to purchase their freedom and the freedom of their family: “Joel Shrewsbury [a salt manufacturer] sold to Lemon Holmes his own child (Little Lemon) for four hundred dollars in 1856.”

Lemon Holmes was likely able to earn the “fairly high price for a child,” because he was a skilled, company owned slave and not leased annually by the salt companies. Just as resident slaves were differentiated from leased slaves, amongst white workers at the salt mines a hierarchy also existed. The majority of white industrial workers tended to be young and unskilled transients who both worked and lived alongside slaves. These white employees often worked closely with slaves and could sometimes work under the supervision of enslaved foremen and managers. Multiple accounts of the salt industry suggest that the grueling

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48 Stealey, 135.
49 “In slave, as in free society, positive incentives, in the form of material rewards, were a powerful instrument of economic and social control. Although slavery restricted economic and social mobility for Blacks, it did not eliminate it.” Fogel and Engerman, 41.
50 Stealey, 135.
51 Sheeler, 159.
52 ibid
53 Fogel and Engerman describe an enslaved managerial class as a common phenomenon, Fogel and Engerman, 214.
nature of salt mine labor led most non-managerial whites to work in the salt industry for a very brief period, far shorter than that of leased slaves, adding to the transience of the overall salt industry workforce. Though Stealey often presents these white laborers as peripatetic, impoverished, debauched, and working for briefer periods of time than their enslaved co-workers, the role and motivations of white laborers deserves a more intensive examination.

III: Forming an Interracial, Working-Class Culture

Temporary white laborers in the salt industry often appeared to be ambitious but impoverished young men drawn to The Kanawha Salines from near and far away in order to earn money that they used to improve their station in life. These white workers were trading a temporary period of heavy industrial labor and suboptimal living standards for a lifelong improvement in their standard of living. In fact, for at least one generation of rural Ohio men who grew up on the frontier with little access to a paycheck but had dreams of living a life of independence and self-sufficiency, a stint of labor in the cash economy of The Kanawha Salines was an attractive way to earn the income necessary to realize

54 The attractive power of The Kanawha Salines economy reached as far as old New England for John Smith of Vermont, who after failing to save up enough money to buy his own farm from his work as a hired farm hand, “at the age of twenty-two years, he, accept employment in the salt works at Kanawha Salt Licks, W. Va., where he earned from $25 to $30 per month, and to the close of his engagement, had saved a sum of money with which he purchased eighty acres of land in Muskingum County, Ohio.” Smith continued to migrate westward, trading his Ohio holdings for the Indiana frontier later in life. Thomas B. Helm, History of Delaware County, Indiana, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches, Etc (Chicago, 1881), 61.
their ambitions. The transient white workforce had more ability to choose the kind of labor they were to perform, and generally picked work in the relatively less dangerous and hazardous Salines occupations, and so some racial separation took hold in occupational niches, though not in the overall society. The most dangerous work in this industry was coal mining and because of its hazards, “free white labor did not have to accept or endure the hardships of mining,” and instead producers relied on, “cheaper and more dependable slave labor to meet manpower needs.”

One of the most well-known of these itinerant white laborers from the frontier who was drawn eastward as a young man was Ohioan Thomas Ewing, who at the age of nineteen was "induced to go with [an itinerant child who was working with his family as a farmhand] to the Kanawha Salines, in Western Virginia, in order to try his fortunes." This was the start of a migratory cycle that would persist throughout Ewing’s early years, where he progressed through the occupational hierarchy of The Kanawha Salines economy from child laborer to brawny young capitalist, eventually leasing his own salt boiler for a season of strenuous but profitable labor. He used the income he accumulated in The Kanawha Salines to rescue his family’s farm from debts his father had

55 Young men, on coming of age, went to Kanawha to chop wood or tend kettles when they wished to obtain a little money. It was hardly expected to get money at any other place. Stillman Carter Larkin, The Pioneer History of Meigs County (Columbus, 1908), 131.
56 Stealey, 129.
accumulated and to pursue advanced academic studies—he earned the first B.A. awarded by The Ohio University—and eventually became such a prominent member of his community that he was elected to the United States Senate.\textsuperscript{58} Even as he attained an unusually advanced education by frontier standards, classroom culturing could not obscure the visible marks of Ewing’s labors in The Kanawha Salines, as shown when he described the embarrassment his workplace disfigurement caused in the company of a society woman he encountered on a riverboat: “But my hands were chapped and black with toil—soap and water having no effect upon them—so...I took due care to hide them in her presence.”\textsuperscript{59}

In fact, the stained and scarred hands of his early years of hard labor would never leave him, and eventually he came to embrace his hardscrabble origins, so much so, that when he ascended to the presidential cabinet, Treasury Secretary Thomas Ewing was known by the nickname, "The Salt boiler of the Kanawha."\textsuperscript{60} While Ewing walked away from his grueling personal labor in The Kanawha Salines with the capital necessary to secure his family’s finances and his intellectual and professional dreams, other itinerant whites came to The Kanawha Salines and treated its innovative industrial methods as a valuable educational

\textsuperscript{58} As a senator, he would return to The Kanawha Salines, but this time instead of sweating at a salt boiler while cramming for college, he would be the guest of honor at a testimonial dinner where the same salt barons who he worked for as a young man lobbied Senator Ewing to support policies conducive to their interests. Author Unknown, “Dinner to Senator Ewing,” \textit{Kanawha Banner} (August 21, 1834).
\textsuperscript{59} Lewis, 16.
\textsuperscript{60} Benjamin Richard Perley, \textit{Reminiscences of Sixty Years in the National Metropolis} (New York, 1886), 248.
tool. From their labors, they built up a store of expertise and capital that they could take and profit by in other parts of the frontier, like the founder of McKees Saltworks in Ohio: "Silas Thorla from Massachusetts, entered...and began salt-making there in 1814. He had previously been to the Kanawha salt-works, where he had worked long enough to learn the process and earn a little money with which to make a beginning."61

The salt industry’s economy created interlocking and semi-permeable hierarchies of race and skill that presented unique and distinct opportunities for its white and black workforce. Though enslaved laborers could not hope to become senators or city founders like Silas Thorla and Thomas Ewing, from the salt mines they could certainly see paths towards freedom, either by years of hard work and saving or by one well-timed escape. But the question remains, did these ‘itinerant whites’ extract more than intellectual and financial capital from their sojourns in The Kanawha Salines? As workers passed westward from The Kanawha Salines, did the racial leveling that was part of the workplace and social life in this industry pass beyond its borders? As its former white laborers left for new settlements, how did they remember their years of grueling labor in a workforce that integrated free and enslaved laborers? In his financial life, Thomas Ewing developed coal and salt mines in Ohio, in his personal life, Thomas Ewing adopted an orphaned neighbor who grew up to become General William

61 Frank M. Martin, A history of Noble County, Ohio, from the Earliest Day, with Special Chapter on Military Affairs and Special Attention Given to Resources (Chicago, 1887), 94.
Tecumseh Sherman, and in his political life he became an advocate of black citizenship rights in Ohio and an important opponent of slavery’s westward expansion.\(^\text{62}\) How much of his attitude toward slavery was a result of what he saw in his experience in The Kanawha Salines? Did his regular migrations from a free, frontier state to the slave-powered industry of western Virginia play a significant role in shaping his attitudes toward slavery? How did his experience in The Kanawha Salines affect the way he operated the free labor salt mines he helped to develop in Ohio? Did he choose to be remembered as “The Salt Boiler of The Kanawha,” because the name connoted a world of racial egalitarianism and hard labor as well as telegraphing his inspiring up-by-the-bootstraps life story to constituents?

Though elites expressed public disapproval,\(^\text{63}\) towards the racially heterogeneous and socially permissive culture that surrounded the salt industry, surviving records show that they tolerated a level of freedom and nonconformity in their most hardworking employees. One of the best examples of the tolerance is found in a short, handwritten biography of Jeff Bell\(^\text{64}\) who was repeatedly leased by the leading salt companies despite his personal querulousness, religious


\(^{63}\) An example of industrialist opinions of the slaves they leased can be seen in this August 6, 1831 editorial from the local newspaper, The Kanawha Banner: “The slaves in our country are already in a degraded condition...by encouraging them to intemperance they are made worse.” No Author, *No Title*, Kanawha Banner, August 6, 1831.

\(^{64}\) George Clare, *Colored Man in The Kanawha Salines*, ND, West Virginia State Archives Manuscript Collections, Ms 80-87. For a reproduction of Jeff Bell’s workplace and likely home, see Appendix, Figure 9.
idiosyncrasies, and violent outbursts. Though his specific religious beliefs are lost to historians, his nickname, “The Conjure Man,” and the description of how he observed his faith, by “rolling around with facial contortions, making a most hideous appearance,” 65 as well as the fact that he only, “became a Christian five or six years before his death,” 66 suggest that his unusually animated faith was not consistent with local religious norms. Perhaps he was practicing traditional African religion, or an Afro-Christian syncretic religion that drew upon folk traditions from multiple continents and cultures? Bell was leased from eastern Virginia to The Kanawha Salines in 1846, at the peak period for Kanawha salt production and continued working in the salt industry as a leasedslave as the industry declined and even into and beyond the Civil War, with several successive salt companies availing themselves of his leased and free labor. Bell was apparently physically maimed, perhaps from a workplace accident, and is described as both suffering mockery from other slaves for his deformities and regularly meting out violence to those who mocked him, likely injuring other salt company slaves. His violence towards other slaves, physical disabilities, and somewhat frightening religious preferences did not devalue him as an employee, because to his employers his physical strength outweighed his negative behaviors and instead rendered him a sought after worker in an industrial economy, even

65 ibid
66 ibid
earning him a memorable nickname: “He seemed to possess a superhuman strength, for which he was called ‘Tilt-Hammer.’” In the case of Jeff Bell, The Kanawha Salines was a place where the public rhetoric of nineteenth century morality and slave discipline yielded to the profits extracted from personal industriousness.

Leased slaves were not the only members of this community who violated the public societal norms of the time, and the interracial culture of The Kanawha Salines evidently had appeal for some members of the salt producing gentry, such as the white salt manufacturer, Samuel Cabell, who “acquired many slaves in tideland Virginia, crossed over the mountains to the Kanawha Valley, and worked his slaves for a while in the pioneer salt operations here.” Cabell was already different from the majority of salt manufacturers, since he used enslaved laborers that he personally owned and likely worked alongside at the saltworks rather than the conventional practice of utilizing leased, enslaved labor. This was not the only way in which he violated the norms surrounding slavery in The Kanawha Salines. When Cabell retired from saltmaking to purchase land and start a plantation a few miles west of The Kanawha Salines in present day Institute, West Virginia, he, “chose one of his slaves for his lifelong mate, had thirteen children by her.[taking] elaborate legal steps to guarantee that his black

67 ibid
woman and brown children would inherit all his money and land." Cabell must have trusted that the salt manufacturers whose interests dominated the Kanawha County legal system, would honestly and fairly apply legal safeguards for the benefit of his family despite their publicly professed opinions on interracial fraternization. He likely also knew other members of the elites who had engaged in similar violations of racial taboos and hoped that they would defend his family after his demise. Cabell’s story is an exceptional one, but it sheds light on the racial and social fluidity that existed in The Kanawha Salines, where slaves were exposed to a broader world than they would have seen in a rural farm or plantation.

For a certain number of those enslaved at The Kanawha Salines, the taste of freedom that regular wages, displacement from home, and a more racially egalitarian and permissive society presented created an appetite for even more liberty than they could find in the Kanawha Valley. The Kanawha salt industry prospered largely due to its proximity to the bustling pork packing industry of Ohio, whose fortunes influenced those of the salt industry and by extension the

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69 ibid
70 Elite taboos against interracial relationships went beyond personal lives in The Kanawha Salines and extended to political rumor, as an 1870 election circular from salt manufacturer JW Goshorn makes clear: “I understand that Sam Burdette and the bosses of the so-called Republican Party are circulating a report that I wanted to marry a negro wench some ten years ago, and she refused me. It bears a lie on the face of it; but great many people in the county who do not know me personally may give this lie some credence.” Correspondence from J.W. Goshorn to N.B. Coleman, October 20, 1890 regarding election of 1890, West Virginia State Archives Manuscript Collections, Ms 79-8, Box I No. 3- Correspondence 1827-1890.
71 Stealey argues that the Kanawha salt slavery and Ohio markets were so entwined that the price
people who it enslaved. And while Ohio may have signified a market for their product and a source of itinerant white labor to the salt barons, for enslaved people, Ohio was a free state less than one hundred miles away by river. For many, if not most, leased, enslaved laborers in the Kanawha Salines, Ohio and freedom were both closer and easier to reach than their home. Though most fugitives from slavery kept their stories secret, information has survived from several fugitives from slavery who fled into Ohio from The Kanawha Salines.\footnote{Tom Calarco, \textit{Places of the Underground Railroad: A Geographic Guide} (Santa Barbara, 2011).} Freedomseekers who absconded from The Kanawha Salines knew of and ultimately contributed to a systemized escape route for those willing to attempt the short journey to freedom in Ohio: “Underground railroad conductor L.A. Benton is quoted as saying, ‘There were six havens along the Big Kanawha for 50 miles back in Virginia by which fugitives reach a crossing place about the mouth of Leading Creek in the NE corner of Gallia County Ohio.’”\footnote{Wilbur Henry Siebert, \textit{The Mysteries of Ohio’s Underground Railroad} (Columbus, 1951) 108. Quoted in Sheeler,158.}

Underground Railroad operatives appear to have used the racial porousness and speculative operations of the Kanawha salt industry to gain the wherewithal to establish Underground Railroad operations and to reach out to potential freedomseekers. Future underground railroad operative Thomas Ridgeway worked, “as a barrelmaker...at Lewis Ruffner’s saltworks at Malden

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\footnote{paid for annual slave rent in the Salines was directly correlated to the market price of salt in Cincinnati (Stealey, 151-153).}
\end{flushleft}
between 1822 and 1825.” Barrelmaking was a skilled profession that mixed free black, white, and enslaved labor, and Ridgeway would have worked alongside enslaved people and possibly free blacks the entirety of his three year stint in The Kanawha Salines. From his labor as a barrelmaker, he earned the money to purchase a farm that he turned into an underground railroad stop that, “aid[ed] more than 50 escaped slaves.” Did Ridgeway ever provide direct aid to any of his former co-workers in The Kanawha Salines? Did his personal sympathy for their plight influence his decision to join the Underground Railroad?

Knowledge of freedom networks, like the one Ridgeway participated in, proliferated among enslaved people in the salt mines as the nineteenth century progressed, and some well-informed freedomseekers combined this information with their understanding of the salt industry’s business practices to gain freedom. One especially canny fugitive apparently posed as a leased slave in The Kanawha Salines in order to gain the mobility and capital necessary to reach the

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75 One fugitive slave advertisement mentions a free black cooper in Charleston as being suspected of aiding his fugitive slave relative on a bid for freedom. (*Kanawha Republican*, October 30, 1842.) An advertisement in Appendix, Figure 4 shows the high demand for skilled coopers in The Kanawha Saline.
76 McGhee, 23.
77 “In 1855, for example, Jason Adams of Big Kanawha, Va., fled with a cousin through Ohio, along a route used the previous year by 5 other fugitives from his neighborhood.” S.J. Adams, *Know your Ohio: Ohio and The Underground Railway* Cleveland Plain Dealer, n.d.
78 “a notice in the Lexington Valley Star in January of 1847 offered a $50 reward from a runaway slave from Louisa County who “has gone over the mountains...in company with some of the many hirelings, which are traveling in that direction at this season of the year. He will probably hire himself at some of the furnaces for a time and then strike for the Ohio by way of the Salt Works....” From Lexington Valley Star, January 28, 1847, p. 4. c. 3.” quoted from Golland, 21.
underground railroad networks of Ohio. This enslaved man used his knowledge of the particular economic and cultural patterns of life in The Kanawha Salines, like the seasonal migration of gangs of leased slaves, the cash payment of enslaved laborers, and the transportation connections linking The Kanawha Salines to Ohio to mask his own independent bid for freedom. From the evidence at hand, it appears that the workplace relationships forged in the heat of the salt boilers and the friendships built in the rowdy barrooms of The Kanawha Salines could form the basis for nurturing and sustaining bids for freedom. While the transiency of laborers both black and white was created and calibrated to supply a dangerous industry with manpower that could not be attained locally, its prerogatives were capable of helping concealing activities designed to weaken the slave labor system that provided the bulk of its workforce.

Just as the economic traditions and transportation infrastructure of The Kanawha Salines proved pivotal to informed fugitives and the networks that sustained them, it would also prove instrumental in the most spectacular mass escape from slavery in The Kanawha Salines history, led by an interracial team of

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79 “Will be given for the apprehension and delivery to me of a negro man named Orange, belonging to the Estate of the late John Austin: Orange ran away from the Kanawha Salines some time during the summer of 1826 and it is believed that has ever since been lurking in Logan County, harbored as it is said by certain white persons of that county.” The advertisement goes on to mention that he has been missing for six months. It appears that Orange is leveraging his financially abstracted position as a leased slave owned by an unprobated estate and his white allies to gain his freedom. No Author, No Title, *The Kanawha Banner*, (January 22, 1828). See Appendix, Figure 6 for reproduction.
liberators from Ohio. John Fairfield\textsuperscript{80} was a legendary Underground Railroad operative who was raised in the culture of Appalachian slaveholders and who specialized in using confidence schemes, disguises, and occasionally violence to liberate large numbers of people. In Ohio he was contacted by free—or possibly self-emancipated—blacks who had loved ones enslaved in The Kanawha Salines and who wanted his help to bring their relatives to freedom. Fairfield created a plan that carefully utilized the speculative and transitory economics and the permeable and permissive transracial culture of The Kanawha Salines to liberate two boatloads of enslaved people.

Traveling from Ohio to The Kanawha Salines, Fairfield posed as a salt speculator from Kentucky, interested in purchasing salt and manufacturing keelboats to transport this commodity to a western market while two free black allies traveled with him and pretended to be his enslaved boatmen. During the construction of his keelboats, Fairfield ingratiated himself with the salt barons so effectively that it is alleged that they invested money in his speculative salt venture. Meanwhile, his free black allies insinuated themselves into the local transracial working class culture, making contact with the men and women they came to free and gaining their participation in his plan. When his boats were finished, Fairfield’s black confederates loaded them under the cover of night and

\textsuperscript{80} Levi Coffin, \textit{Reminiscences of Levi Coffin: The Reputed President of the Underground Railroad} (Cincinnati, 1880), 428-446 discuss John Fairfield’s entire abolitionist activities. 437-440 discuss his role in the Underground Railroad in The Kanawha Salines.
brought all the people they had come to liberate to freedom in Ohio, using transportation initially constructed for salt commerce as a vessel of liberation. Fairfield’s speculation-based cover story and impersonation of a prospective salt trader was so effective and convincing that even after the massive escape, he was not at all suspected of any involvement and he was instead chosen to lead The Kanawha Salines’ slaveholders as they pursed his confederates into freedom in Ohio, and he used this trust to send the slavehunters in false directions, further ensuring the success of his mission.

The way in which John Fairfield eluded Kanawha slaveholders when they entered Ohio’s borders was not atypical, and was part of a spectrum of resistance by Ohio’s whites that ranged from disinformation conveyed by trusted Ohio officials81 to outright armed resistance when West Virginians tried to capture self-emancipated laborers from The Kanawha Salines. “Black Bill,” fled The Kanawha Salines for a new life in Marion County, Ohio, where his skills and personality quickly rendered him a valued member of the community.82 He thought, “that he had traveled so far that his master would not find him. Soon

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81 I was postmaster in the village for a long time. The ignorant squad would come to the post office, supposing I was a government official, and would tell all they knew. By this I could get them off the track. They were all West Virginians, and as low and dirty fellows as you find. (Negro hunters)” Letter from E.T. Holcomb, 15 August, 1894, Wilbur H. Siebert Collection, Ohio Historical Society.

82 “He was a laborer a butcher, a barber, and a fiddler; he was very industrious, lively, and goodnatured and withal so competent that his employers and the people liked him....during the winter at dances his services were indispensable, for he could “call” as well as fiddle....he was so handy indeed, and useful in many ways and amusing that he was a 'favorite darkey’” James House Anderson, Life and letters of Judge Thomas J. Anderson and wife : including a few letters from children and others : mostly written during the Civil War : a history (Columbus,1904), 53.
after, a man passing through Marion saw and knew him, and informed his master of his whereabouts.”

This soon led a group of Kanawha salt producers to come with their lawyer and their weapons to Ohio, where they had “Black Bill,” arrested. At the trial, the Kanawha salt producers presented an overwhelming body of convincing and admissible evidence that proved that Bill was indeed their enslaved property, but after an evening of deliberation the judge chose to use a legal loophole to disregard their evidence, instead issuing a ruling that let Bill regain his freedom. This enraged the Kanawha salt producers who brandished weapons and nearly spilt blood within the courtroom itself, temporarily apprehending Bill in an outburst of armed vigilantism that stunned many of the Ohioans.

Bill had to rush to a swamp and hide from these violent salt manufacturers, before eventually being spirited away to Canada through established Underground Railroad networks. In their outrage at his escape, the slave hunters discharged their pistols in a public place and brutally assaulted a Quaker man, leading the local militia to be called up in order to place them behind bars. The Kanawha salt producers were not only unable to apprehend their fugitive, they themselves were temporarily jailed and fined, and they undoubtedly encouraged Ohioans to think about what it meant to be so close to The Kanawha Salines, where the realities of industrial slavery were infecting and influencing

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84 “Was ever a more disgraceful, not to say infamous scene enacted in Ohio? The violent Seizure in the very presence of the court by unauthorized strangers, of a prisoner who had just been acquitted and discharged!” Anderson, 57.
their community in a putatively free state.

The case of Black Bill shows the many fundamental differences between white elites in The Kanawha Salines and the Ohio population that purchased their salt. While salt producers created their supposedly refined identity in opposition to the interracial and egalitarian culture of their free and enslaved employees, the elites in Ohio had constructed a world where a communitarian local identity trumped racial and economic stratification. Amongst the white populace of Marion, Ohio, “feeling in his behalf ran high”\textsuperscript{85} and Bill “had the sympathy of the majority of the people,” because of his “genial disposition and popularity.” But how had he become such a neighborhood fixture in such a short period? Not only did wealthy people in the community seek out his renowned Virginia-style sausages at the holidays, but people of all backgrounds saw him fiddling, singing, and calling local dances, where he led the community in moments of joy and celebration. Marion was not a haven of anti-slavery activity during Bill’s sojourn there\textsuperscript{86} though some members of the community were secretly involved in the Underground Railroad, but it was a place where an African-American would not just be treated as a unit of labor and a source of cultural pollution by the upper stratum of society. In fact, while Kanawha elites looked down on white laborers and enslaved African-Americans alike, the people of Marion felt exactly the same

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 54.
\textsuperscript{86} “the name abolitionist, far from being pleasing to the ear had become so unpopular that only a few independent, courageous persons openly avowed abolition principles.” Ibid, 87.
way about the salt barons in their midst, uniformly describing the elites who came
to apprehend Black Bill as insalubrious, violent, and uncouth ruffians who
compared unfavorably with the fugitive, Bill, who was a universal object of
sympathy and contributed mightily to the culture of his community. This clash of
nearby cultures would only intensify in the decades after Bill’s 1839 rescue.

IV: A House Divided

The Kanawha Salines straddled the sectarian divide of American slavery;
its consumers were overwhelmingly concentrated in the free states, but its
production methods were rooted in the world of slavery. The salt barons were not
just pro-slavery, but constructed an industry that depended on the use and
availability of slave labor. In their demand for labor, they also imported western
whites who not only may not have shared their ideology, but sometimes went so
far as to become active in radical antislavery movements during and after their
work in The Kanawha Salines. As the two regions that supplied its labor and its
markets moved closer to civil war, The Kanawha Salines found itself in the
middle, caught between societies that were diverging at a rapid rate. Heightening
underground railroad activity and the risk that slaves would escape to Ohio
undoubtedly increased the rental price for slaves brought to The Kanawha Salines,
and lowered the availability of leased slaves\textsuperscript{87} as the nation drew closer to war. The westward expansion of America fueled this divide, while devastating the economy of The Kanawha Salines as, “trade patterns and the population of the West moved northward and westward\textsuperscript{88} from the Ohio River commercial axis.”\textsuperscript{89} This change in the geography of commerce was compounded by international trade developments, because the Kanawha salt’s profitability rested on a protectionist foundation\textsuperscript{90} that was withdrawn by congressional action in favor of free trade in the decade before the war’s outbreak. On the eve of the Civil War, the economy of The Kanawha Salines entered a depression, as a new source of salt that outstripped the Salines’ fecundity was developed in Michigan, closer to the emerging markets of the West: “The production of the Saginaw Valley industry in five years equaled nearly fifty years of Kanawha Valley production,”\textsuperscript{91}

And yet during the Civil War, the importance of salt as a preservative would prove vital to the military forces of both sides and would temporarily reinvigorate and eventually forever change the salt industry in the Kanawha

\textsuperscript{87} Siebert quotes an 1855 newspaper article that claimed, “Indeed many masters have brought their hands from the Kanawha (West Virginia), not being willing to risk the there” Siebert, 195.
\textsuperscript{88} Kanawha salt manufacturers seemed to be keenly aware of this shift, as westward expansion was the most regular topic of scheduled debates at the Kanawha Lyceum. See Appendix, Figure 2 for complete list of the debates held at The Kanawha Lyceum.
\textsuperscript{89} Stealey, 188.
\textsuperscript{90} As early as 1830, newspapers in the Kanawha Valley expressed fear of the effects of the demise of the salt tariff: "DOMESTIC SALT It is high time for the friends of the domestic manufacture of this essential article to be up and adoining otherwise they may be visited by the calamitous consequence of the repeal of the law heretofore enacted for its protection.” Kanawha Banner, October 8, 1830. For a reproduction, see Appendix, Figure 5
\textsuperscript{91} Stealey, 190.
Valley as well as the life of those who produced its salt. Salt was a valuable commodity to both an army on the march and to people on the homefront, and an entire monograph has been devoted to “the transcendent importance which the most insignificant commodity [e.g. salt] can assume in time of war.” Prior to the Civil War, Kanawha salt producers mostly supplied their product to the Ohio Valley and most residents in future Confederate states relied upon cheap, foreign sources of salt that arrived as a byproduct of their foreign trade. “More imported salt arrived at New Orleans as ballast, with the low tariffs and growing increase in cotton exports in the late 1850’s.” They were cut off from these sources by Union blockade, and so, in the midst of the Civil War, the Confederates were forced to tap existing salt supplies within their territory, while devising new transportation networks that could get this vital commodity to consumers across the Confederacy. Ella Lonn’s text recounts a seemingly endless and byzantine series of legislative maneuvers and desperate hunts for salt by Confederate state governments, while conclusively showing the military and civilian value of salt which preserved the food products of the Confederacy, providing meat with both the shelf life and portability necessary for military campaigns and ordinary life.

It was with this pressing need in mind that The Kanawha Salines became a military objective to both sides in the Civil War. West of the Appalachian

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92 Ella Lonn, Salt as a Factor in The Confederacy (New York, 1933), 221.
93 Stealey, 186.
mountains, the state of Virginia splintered on the eve of this conflict, as higher levels of Union loyalty combined with long simmering desires\textsuperscript{94} to separate from the eastern portion of the state, and many slaveholders believed that the contested status of western Virginia made it a dangerous place to send enslaved property and redeployed their leased slaves: “Just before West Virginia seceded from Virginia...Josiah Ferguson brought his slave Wash back from Kanawha Salines and hired him out to a tobacco factory in Lynchburg.”\textsuperscript{95} The Kanawha Salines were initially Confederate territory, but Union forces utilized the Ohio River to seize the Kanawha Valley and other parts of western Virginia early in the war.

Shorn from the rest of Virginia and controlled by unionist forces, residents of the region, who had long felt disenfranchised\textsuperscript{96} by the government in Richmond began the process of creating a new state. As West Virginia inched toward statehood, Confederate guerillas operated throughout Union held territories, and many individual guerillas\textsuperscript{97} were former salt operators or workers. Despite this

\textsuperscript{94} See the appendix to this text for evidence of this separatist movement in the debates held at the Kanawha Lyceum. West Virginia’s antebellum newspapers had also expressed a desire to form a new state in Western Virginia as early as the 1830s, largely as a reaction to changes in the state constitution that were seen as benefitting eastern political interests at the expense of western Virginians.

\textsuperscript{95} Harlan, 25.

\textsuperscript{96} Evidence of this discontent can be seen in Charleston newspapers as early as 1830, when residents of the future West Virginia publicly protested the imbalance of power in the state constitution. The most vigorous debate ever held at The Kanawha Lyceum was, “Shall the state of Virginia be divided along the lines of the Blue Ridge Mountains,” which was held on March 7, 1848, 15 years before West Virginia seceded from Virginia.

\textsuperscript{97} The memorial to Confederate veterans in Charleston, West Virginia bears the name of many salt barons, as well as one enslaved person, “William Armistead, Colored Cook who was faithful during the war.” See Appendix for reproduction and detail.
instability, slavery and salt production continued to function and the Union army protected the salt industry and the industrial slavery that fueled it. Ironically, it would take a Confederate invasion to decisively end the decades of industrial slavery that had defined the economy and life of the Kanawha Valley.

To the eyes of Confederate strategists, increasingly desperate for salt as the war dragged on, The Kanawha Salines provided, “an ample supply for the entire population of the Confederacy, and an object adequate to the maintenance of an army of 50,000 in the valley.”\(^98\) Consequently, the Confederates mounted a military invasion of The Kanawha Salines designed to provide this commodity to Confederate citizens and soldiers alike. Though the Confederates were able to successfully seize The Kanawha Salines in September of 1862 with very little resistance, the retreating Union army offered protection and de facto emancipation to those enslaved in the salt industry and its surroundings, as this account from a Confederate occupation newspaper published in Kanawha County shows: “The Negroes have absconded in hundreds, and few less than a thousand have left their disloyal masters to inquire as to their whereabouts and wonder at the answer. The darkies have constructed the most ingenious kind of sailing craft and in the effort to elude the rebel advent, which they have learned to dread greatly, have entrusted themselves to the most fragile of home-made vessels.

heard an escaped contraband say, today, that he came down the Kanawha fifty miles on a log, but that he would rather drown than remain with his master."99 Another observer stressed the unprecedented scope of this world-changing exodus: "Such a sight I never saw before or expect to see again. The river as far as you could see up and down was full of boats of all kinds and when I say the river was full of boats, I mean just what I say. A person could almost have crossed the river by jumping from one boat to the other."100

The retreat from The Kanawha Salines was a strategic victory for the Union forces. Though the Confederacy could and did obtain stored salt in The Kanawha Salines, without slave labor production would require the diversion of considerable amounts of Confederate manpower from other aspects of the war effort. The same geographical features that tied The Kanawha Salines to the Ohio markets hindered the ability of the Confederacy to hold this territory against a possible returning Union army and of slaveholders to maintain the servile institution amidst the Civil War: “All over West Virginia a large number of the already declining Negro group, slave and free, were leaving the area. Some of them were leaving because of the opportunity afforded by war conditions, while others were doing so out of fear....Many from the Kanawha Valley went into

Ohio.” Many of those once enslaved in the salt industry began a life of freedom, albeit in the perilous conditions of war refugees: “Last night the advance guard of the retreating army entered town and all day long they have been coming...The baggage train is said to be 16 miles long. Such an army, I suppose was never seen, composed of negro men, women, and children, refugees of all ages, sex, and condition. We have been feeding the troops all day until late at night....The negroes and the ambulances with their sick and wounded are sent first. Before night the valuable darkies are over the line, hence bid adieu to ‘Dixie.'”

V: Conclusion

When the Union army regrouped from its retreat and returned a mere six weeks later, The Kanawha Salines were retaken without any serious combat and free labor replaced that of slave labor forever. The conditions of the Civil War fundamentally reordered life for many in the Salines. The shift in this society and its power structure can be observed in the way the Civil War affected one notable interracial family. In the antebellum period, slaveholder Samuel Cabell had worked scrupulously to maintain the freedom of his biracial family, producing numerous legal documents intended to legitimize his marriage with a woman he

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once enslaved and providing legacies for his dozen biracial children, and through the assistance of the legal community that serviced the salt industry. But the Civil War divided the local elites and it divided Samuel Cabell’s home as well; Cabell sided with the Confederacy while some of his sons joined the Union army during their retreat from The Kanawha Salines, leading Cabell to attempt re-enslavement of the family whose freedom he once zealously safeguarded: “I hereby revoke this testament and will as to the slave portion. Those that have absconded and those taken away by the Federal Army shall not receive anything and they shall never be released from bondage during their lives.” Despite Samuel Cabell’s explicitly expressed intentions, his children were not re-enslaved and they were granted equal inheritances by the federal government against his wishes, a reminder that federal power trumped the dictats of slaveholders in the newly reordered Kanawha Salines. Ultimately Cabell’s wife would donate the bulk of his land to the first black land grant college built in the new state of West Virginia, and Cabell’s family legacy would endure as West Virginia State University.

Though Cabell’s family was sundered by the Civil War, for some enslaved in The Kanawha Salines, the end of slavery meant the opportunity to reunite

102 Haught, np.
103 ibid.
104 Interestingly, the federal government recognized Cabell’s children as legitimate but refused to acknowledge the legality of his marriage, making his wife liable for seven times the tax burden of her children. Case of Samuel J. Cabell’s estate, April 11, 1866, West Virginia State Archives Manuscript Collections, NB Coleman Collection Ms 79-8, Box I No. 2—Legal Papers.
families divided by slave leasing and build permanent, African-American institutions. Though removed from The Kanawha Salines by his slaveholder, Wash Ferguson was freed by another invading Union army in another part of the state of Virginia which his slaveholder falsely thought was more secure. With the Civil War still raging, he made his way to The Kanawha Salines, where he resumed his old job as a salt packer, this time in freedom amidst a temporarily reinvigorated salt industry that drew many other migrants like him: “The Malden community was the most rapid growing one in Kanawha County at the close of the Civil War. The salt works there afforded employment to many of the Negroes at that time. There were many negroes who came from Virginia after the war to work in the salines...gambling, immorality, drunken brawls, ignorance, and poverty were common. All Malden worked at the production of Salt.”

When the war ended, he would not return to Hales Ford, his nominal home in the days of his enslavement, but would instead reunite his family amidst the salt mines, choosing to start their lives in freedom in the same place where he had been a leased slave: “As soon as freedom was declared, he sent for my mother to come to the Kanawha Valley, in West Virginia.” The wages of freedom were not enough to maintain his entire family and Ferguson soon found himself forced to send his stepchildren into the salt mines.

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105 Sheeler, 225.
106 Washington, 32.
The Kanawha Salines remained an anomaly as the salt industry declined into irrelevance after the Civil War, partially due to the unusual and unprecedented status of the state of West Virginia. As an officially loyal state, it was not subject to the same Reconstruction acts\textsuperscript{107} which governed areas that seceded from the union, like the rest of the antebellum state of Virginia. Formed in 1863 as the only American state ever to successfully secede from another state, many of the legacies of its ambiguous past would remain with it in the future. As a new state, the political capital that might have been spent on the concerns and needs of freedmen or rebuilding war torn areas was overshadowed by the pressing concerns of forging the new institutions of a new political entity. In this atmosphere, citizens were often left to their own devices and political Reconstruction was often carried out by private means. Samuel Cabell did not abandon his Confederate loyalties and was a victim of post-war vigilantism: “The community here was thrown into considerable excitement on last Thursday evening, by the report of the death of Samuel I. Cabell, a bitter and open rebel.”\textsuperscript{108} His murderers, though apparently known to the public, escaped retribution in the anarchic atmosphere of post-war West Virginia. Meanwhile, African-Americans

\textsuperscript{107} After the Civil War, states that had seceded from the Union were occupied militarily by the American army, and ex-Confederates were disfranchised until they swore loyalty to the Union, or were re-enfranchised by later laws. This process empowered Black voters to claim power in many Southern states and was augmented by investments in infrastructure and other programs to help newly liberated slaves under the auspices of the Freedmen’s Bureau. West Virginia’s anomalous state as a new and officially loyal state meant most Reconstruction acts did not apply in this former slave state. For a thorough discussion of the fate of African-Americans in Reconstruction, see: W.E.B. Du Bois, \textit{Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880} (New York, 1935).

\textsuperscript{108} Haught, NP.
in The Kanawha Salines, no longer subject to the impermanence and uncertainty of slave leasing, built the first African-American church and school in the new state, improvising the infrastructure of freedom without government assistance: “[the] school appears to have been a self-help enterprise by the poor black people of the village, without assistance from the local whites, the county or township board of education, or the newly established Freedmen’s Bureau in Washington.”¹⁰⁹

The freedom and independence that enslaved people developed through their brutal toils in The Kanawha Salines continued well into the Reconstruction era. The sawbuck equality of this industrial labor developed as salt barons struggled to retain laborers in a frontier environment while modernizing the institution of slavery. It would remain a facet of West Virginia’s economy even after slavery fell, the frontier closed, and the salt trade of The Kanawha Salines lacked the employment opportunities to attract new migrants to the Kanawha Valley. As coal and chemical extraction took salt’s place, white laborers—many fresh immigrants from Europe—became the majority in West Virginia’s industrial workforce. These newly arrived workers knew little about the complicated intersection of slavery and industry that defined life for prior generations of West Virginia workers, who were also taken far from their place of origin in order to work in a heavy, extractive industry.

¹⁰⁹ Harlan, 35.
Even as the memory of slavery and the salt industry disappeared from the public memory and the face of industrial West Virginia changed, a residuum of the culture of The Kanawha Salines persisted for black migrant laborers in West Virginia. It was in this changing postwar atmosphere that Booker T. Washington developed his belief in the virtue of personal industriousness and skilled labor, that John Henry allegedly worked himself to death as part of an interracial team of migrant railroad workers, and that the Union Carbide corporation, born in the Kanawha Valley, would knowingly expose an integrated workforce made up predominantly\(^{110}\) of African-Americans seeking relief from the great depression, to deadly silica dust. Industrial work in West Virginia was better paid and offered more personal autonomy than the opportunities available to laborers in the deep south of the Jim Crow era, but the risks that accompanied these exertions were numerous and well-known. For free black workers in the new state of West Virginia’s extractive industries, like the slaves of the salt industry, the independence they gained in the workplace was paid for through heavy and hazardous toil.

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Appendix

Figure 1: Map of the antebellum state of Virginia, with alterations by author.

The area in the red box was the region where most leased, enslaved people came from. The blue star shows The Kanawha Salines. Note the mountains and
rivers in between the two areas. (MGorrhard, A; Meyer, Joseph, Meyer's Hand Atlas (Hildburghausen: 1852))

Figure 2: Debate topics at the Kanawha Lyceum, 1841-1853

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Lyceum Meeting</th>
<th>Debate Topic</th>
<th>Debate Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 16, 1841</td>
<td>“in case the Texan nation apply for admission into the union, might they be admitted?</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 23, 1841</td>
<td>“Ought Virginia appropriate her share of the proceeds of the Public Lands to common schools.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 13, 1842</td>
<td>“Ought the government of the United States enter into treaty with the powers of Europe, conceding the right to search suspected slavers on the coast of Africa?”</td>
<td>Unresolved, carried over to next meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 8, 1842</td>
<td>“Ought the government of the United States enter into treaty with the powers of Europe, conceding the right to search suspected slavers on the coast of Africa?”</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 15, 1842</td>
<td>Is it expedient of the part of the southern delegation in congress to oppose the reception of petitions on the subject of abolitionist</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 23, 1842</td>
<td>“Have the invention and use of labor-saving machines been conducive to the general happiness of mankind?”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 6, 1842</td>
<td>Is there any reason to apprehend an ultimate failure of the salt water in the Kanawha Valley?</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 20, 1842</td>
<td>“Ought the American government to take immediate possession of the Oregon territory, treaty or no treaty?”</td>
<td>Carried over to next meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 27, 1842</td>
<td>“Ought the American government to take immediate possession of the Oregon territory, treaty or no treaty?”</td>
<td>affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 3, 1843</td>
<td>Can the congress of the U. States of right receive and consider propositions looking to the dissolution of the union? And if so, is it expedient at the present time to receive and consider such propositions, coming from any source?</td>
<td>Unanimously negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 24, 1843</td>
<td>“Would it be expedient to remove the capital of the U.S. to a more central position--say some point on the Ohio river?”</td>
<td>“After a warm debate the subject was decided in the negative”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 12, 1843</td>
<td>“Is it good policy to admit Texas into the American union?”</td>
<td>“Decided in the negative (CROSSED OUT) Affirmative. More erasures! No definitive answer to that question?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 16, 1844</td>
<td>“is it expedient and in accordance with the spirit of our civil institutions to form voluntary associations of individuals to carry into effect the laws for the suppression of vice”</td>
<td>tabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 30, 1844</td>
<td>“is it expedient and in accordance with the spirit of our civil institutions to form voluntary associations of individuals to carry into effect the laws for the suppression of vice”</td>
<td>tabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 6, 1844</td>
<td>“is it expedient and in accordance with the spirit of our civil institutions to form voluntary associations of individuals to carry into effect the laws for the suppression of vice?”</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 13, 1844</td>
<td>“Ought the government of the US. To aid in the formation or protection of a colony on the continent of Africa composed of colored people from the US?”</td>
<td>affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 20, 1844</td>
<td>“Ought the government of the US to take possession of the Oregon territory?&quot; on colonization?&quot;</td>
<td>tabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 27, 1844</td>
<td>“Ought the government of the US to take possession of the Oregon territory?&quot; on colonization</td>
<td>affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 9, 1844</td>
<td>“Ought the naturalization laws of the U.S. to be amended as to require a residence of at least 15 years in the union to entitle a foreigner to a vote?&quot;</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2, 1845</td>
<td>“Would the prosperity of that portion of Virginia lying west of the Alleghany mountains have been promoted by a political union of the adjacent western states at the time of their formation?&quot;</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 9, 1845</td>
<td>“Ought the ladies to exercise the right of suffrage?&quot;</td>
<td>“Decided in the overwhelming negative”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 16, 1845</td>
<td>“Ought the United States to extend their jurisdiction over the colony of Liberia?&quot;</td>
<td>affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 11, 1843</td>
<td>“Ought the people of Western Virginia, in the event of a convention insist upon the extension of the right of suffrage to every free white male citizen of 21 years?&quot;</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 17, 1843</td>
<td>“Is it good policy for the people of Kanawha valley to apply their capital in other ways than the manufacture of salt?&quot;</td>
<td>tabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 23, 1843</td>
<td>“Is it good policy for the people of Kanawha valley to apply their capital in other ways than the manufacture of salt?&quot;</td>
<td>“The debate was protracted till a late hour when…&quot; debate unresolved&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2, 1845</td>
<td>“Is it good policy for the people of Kanawha valley to apply their capital in other ways than the manufacture of salt?&quot;</td>
<td>“Mr. Brooks then arose and after refuting certain&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 16, 1845</td>
<td>“Would it be expedient to attempt a revision of the ‘black code’ of Virginia with a new and more equitable and liberal system of laws in reference to blacks?”</td>
<td>“produced a very warm debate...the question was then taken and decided in the negative”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2, 1846</td>
<td>A lecture by Dr. Parker Subject anatomical surgery infant schools inclusive with an episode on negro craniology.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 16, 1846</td>
<td>“Would an extension of territory benefit the union?”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 23, 1846</td>
<td>“Ought Kanawha County so adopt the public district school system passed by the general assembly of Va at its last session?”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 21, 1846</td>
<td>“Was Mohammed an enthusiast or an impostor?”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 29, 1846</td>
<td>“Should an international copyright law be passed by the congress of the United States?”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 4, 1847</td>
<td>Should Kanawha County raise a volunteer company for the Mexican War?</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 8, 1847</td>
<td>“Would it promote the interests of Kanawha County for the salt-makers to form a company after the plan of Hewitt, Ruffner, and Co?”</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 15, 1847</td>
<td>Do the present wrongs under which western Virginia suffers justify in advocating a division of the state by the line of the Blue Ridges?</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 9, 1847</td>
<td>“Has the influence of the feudal system had a tendency beneficial to society or otherwise?”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 17, 1848</td>
<td>Ought capital punishment be abolished?</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 31, 1848</td>
<td>“Is it consistent with the spirit and genius of our government to acquire territory by conquest?”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| March 7, 1848      | “Do the present wrongs under which western Virginia suffered justify her in advocating a division of the state by the line of the Blue Ridge?” | Original notes crossed out followed by “a debate followed by much confusion and disorder and at last decided somehow the secretary is unable to determine…. ” A second note in different handwriting then appears with a resolution
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 17, 1848</td>
<td>“Did the government of the United States act wisely in acquiring the territory of new mexico and california by the late treaty with mexico?”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 4, 1850</td>
<td>“Ought the white population of Virginia to be made the sole basis of representation in the state legislature?”</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 8, 1850</td>
<td>“Is the acquisition of California and the discovery of its mineral resources likely to do more good than harm?”</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 23, 1850</td>
<td>“Would a palpable and willful violation by the north of the compromise measures adopted at the last session of congress justify the secession of the southern states from the union?”</td>
<td>N.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 13, 1851</td>
<td>Who were the truer friends of liberty the puritans or the roundheads?</td>
<td>Tabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 20, 1851</td>
<td>Who were the truer friends of liberty the puritans or the roundheads?</td>
<td>Tabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 27, 1851</td>
<td>Who were the truer friends of liberty the puritans or the roundheads?</td>
<td>Not noted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 30, 1851</td>
<td>“Has a single state of the American union the right to secede from the union without the consent of the other states?”</td>
<td>Debate details indecipherable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 9, 1853</td>
<td>“Is the present influx of foreign emigration dangerous to American institutions?”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 14, 1853</td>
<td>“Is it advisable to annex cuba to the us provided it can be done by treaty with spain?”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| July 1874 | A handwritten note ends the minutes
“What became of the minutes of subsequent meetings? in 1860 many meetings were held in Brooks Hall--on late in 60-61 most interesting held on topics of the day looking to secession from the union arising under the question which was more favorable to liberty… from a member who participated July 1874” |

This advertisement from a Kanawha Salines newspaper shows the need for workers in professions that commingled free and enslaved labor.

(*Kanawha Republican*, no date, no page)
Editorials endorsing protective tariffs for the salt industry were common in Kanawha newspapers and showed the local understanding of the macro-economic conditions that allowed the salt industry to flourish.

(Kanawha Banner, September 24, 1830, no page)

Figure 6: Fugitive slave advertisement from Kanawha Salines.
This advertisement shows interracial solidarity that probably developed in the industrial workplace helping to protect a fugitive from The Kanawha Salines.

(Kanawha Banner, no date, no page)

Figure 7: Warning against employing or trading with a local slave.
This newspaper advertisement from a local slaveholder with land adjacent to both the salt mines and the small town of Charleston warns local whites against allowing her personal slaves the freedom that leased slaves enjoyed.

(Catherine Venable, *Kanawha Banner*, June 4, 1844., no page)

Figure 8: Warning against employing or serving liquor to a local slave.
An advertisement from a local slaveholder warns against allowing his slaves the social and workplace freedoms that leased slaves enjoyed.

(John S. Stone, Kanawha Banner, March 19, 1830, no page)

Figure 9: Snow Hill Salt Works
This engraving shows the saltworks, where Jeff Bell, ‘the conjure-man’ lived and worked at the time of his death. He is reported as having lived in a cabin adjacent to the salt mines. Is his home one of the ones pictured in this engraving? (Edward King and James Wells Champney, *The Great South; A Record of Journeys in Louisiana, Texas, the Indian Territory, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland*, (Hartford, 1875), 690)

Figure 10: Charleston, West Virginia Confederate veterans memorial
This memorial to the Confederates of the Kanawha Valley is in a city park very near the West Virginia state capitol. (Photo by author)

Figure 11: Detail from Charleston, West Virginia Confederate veterans memorial
This detail from the bottom of memorial shows the area commemorating the enslaved man who was forced to serve this group of local Confederates.

(Photo by author)