

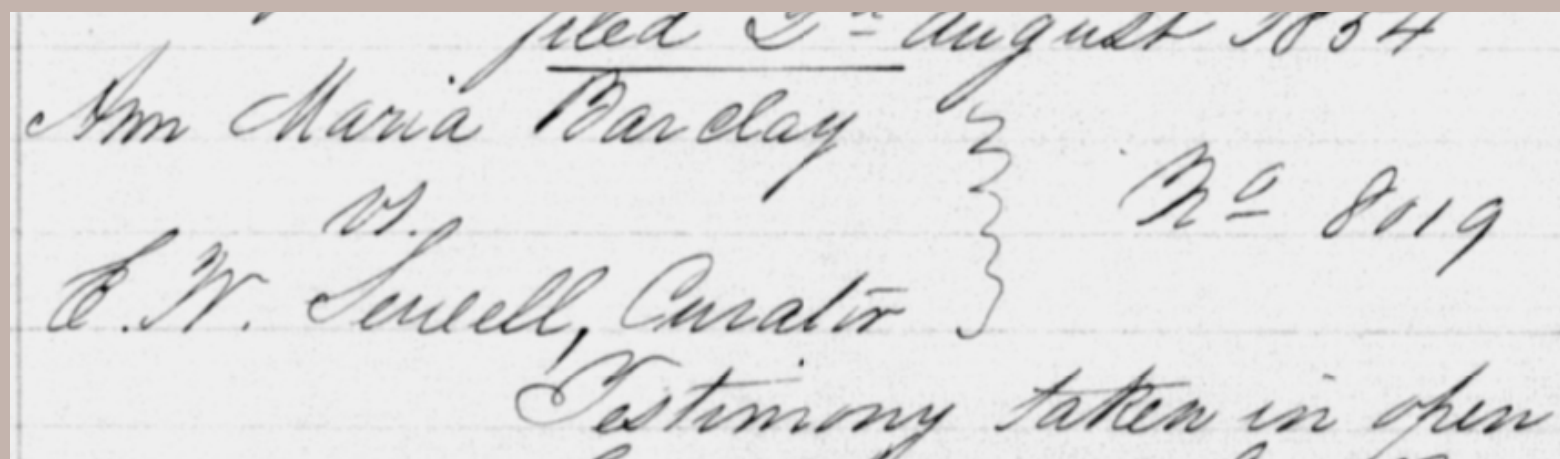
On the Tails of the Trade: Enslaved Women, Slave Traders, and the Households they Shared

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Background & Thesis

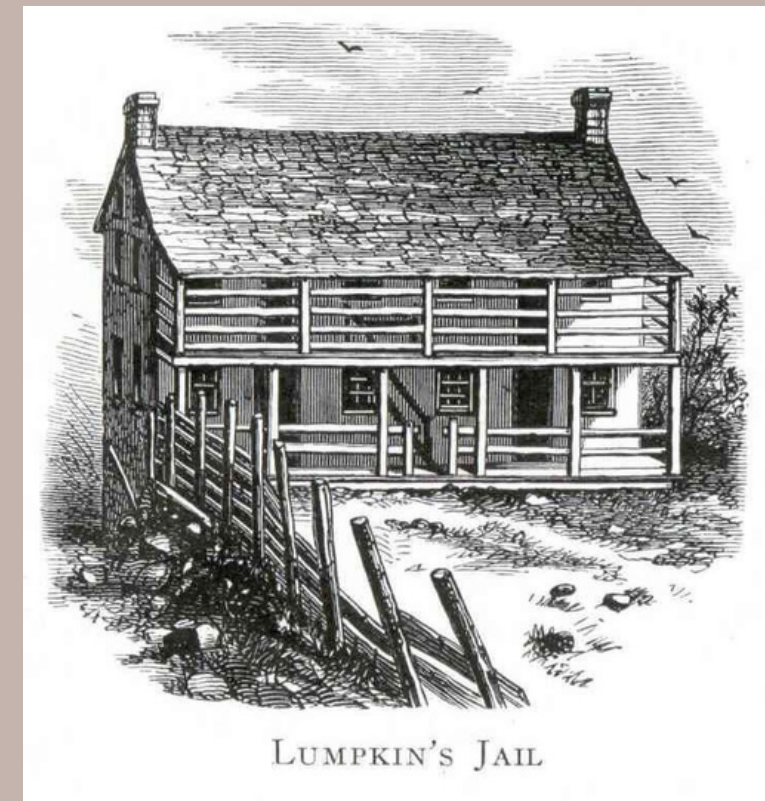
Slavery in the Antebellum United States was facilitated by an elaborate network of slave traders. Over the course of their dealings, some traders engaged in long-term intimate relationships and even started families with enslaved women. The purpose of this research is to identify these women and understand their experience living with those upholding the institution that kept them in bondage. This project explored how these women interacted with the slave trade in their daily lives, their motivations for engaging in these relationships, and their possible attitudes towards the slave trade. This project draws from primary sources, such as census records, court cases, financial papers, and letters, and secondary sources that cover topics like the slave trade and enslaved women's sexuality and agency. While each individual's experience varied, the origins and subsequent circumstances of these women emerged from white notions of enslaved and black women's sexuality and the widespread sexual exploitation of enslaved women, particularly through the "fancy trade," the trade of enslaved women specifically for their sexual labor. As the companions of slave traders, these women dealt intimately with the quintessential facets of the slave trade firsthand, living and even working around slave pens, auctions, and more. Though these women often resented the slave trade, they were likely compelled by two realities – that they lacked the agency to reject traders' advances and a relationship could result in some stability and power. Indeed, for many women it did, as these women's partners gave them access to expanded resources and enabled them to build lives without fearing sale.

Excerpt from a court case involving Anna Maria Barclay, a formerly enslaved woman in New Orleans



filed August 1854
Anna Maria Barclay }
C. W. Swell, Curator } No 8119
Testimony taken in open

Images of Slave Pens Located in Two major cities in Richmond and Alexandria, Virginia



Summary of Research Conducted

I spent the first part of my summer, reading about the slave trade in general and then doing archival deep dives into widely known cases of specific traders and enslaved women. I then conducted research into major slave traders to understand both the structure of their slave pens as well as their possible relationships with enslaved women. This research too was more archival in nature, and I found myself piecing together census records, wills, newspaper clippings, and more. I also was able to use images and descriptions of slave pens from narratives to understand the physicality of pens and what these women would have seen and experienced in their daily life. Due to Covid, I was unable to visit the archives I had hoped but was fortunate to have material digitally sent to me from a variety of sources, including Tulane and the Library of Virginia. Moreover, I found that many of the collections I needed were digitized. Moreover, many of the secondary sources I consulted that cover similar topics had key excerpts from primary sources I needed but couldn't access.