Comment [1]: Throughout the manuscript, there are two global issues with endnotes to address:

1) There are extensive cross-references within the endnotes (e.g., See note 3 above), which can be burdensome for the reader. Chicago recommends repeating notes, except for long discursive ones, and using cross-references sparingly. I have flagged cross-references for review (e.g., a comment along the lines of “Repeat or delete?”). Please note that if you choose to keep cross-references, you must indicate the section along with the note number (e.g., note 3 of the preface). The press’s policy is to number notes by section (e.g., Preface notes 1–9, Introduction notes 1–99), so ‘See note 3’ is not sufficient information for the reader to find the right note.

2) Some notes need to be moved to parenthetical citations and vice versa. I have flagged these for insertion/deletion, but have not made the changes until the cross-referencing issue above is addressed. Inserting/deleting endnotes will cause automatic renumbering (and potentially many problems for identifying the cross-references).
As twenty-seven-year-old Peter Randolph boarded the schooner Thomas H. Thompson in Prince George County, Virginia, he might well have recalled vessels loading their “living freight,” bound for markets to the south. As a former slave he wrote about one such instance in his 1855 autobiography, Sketches of Slave Life: “while the vessel was steering off the shore the very waves seemed to speak forth in sorrow and mourning to the dreading slave.” The slaves on board had not been warned and were hastily separated from their astonished family at the whim of their owner George Harrison: “husbands were thrust on board, leaving their wives behind; wives were torn from the arms that should have protected them, and hurried into that living grave; children were torn shrieking from their parents, never to see them more” (Second Edition, 147–8). After a series of appeals to readers to “tarry here, place yourselves here” (148), Randolph writes of the limits of human imagination (and language) in the face of such unimaginable grief and trauma:

Imagination cannot conceive, nor words describe such parting scenes. When all were on board, a dead silence reigned. No sound, except the harsh voice of the captain, as he gave his orders and, the coarse jests of the sailors, was heed [sic]. Slowly the vessel crept along the shore like some guilty thing, trying to hide itself from the light of day. Then pealed forth upon the Sabbath air a cry of wo [sic] that so rent the heavens, and was registered there. (149–50)

If “this scene of separation on the James River” (150) was on Randolph’s mind on September 5, 1847, the presence of the Thomas H. Thompson foretold a different future and a different journey, in its own way unimaginable. Rather than boarding a vessel at Brandon Landing to be
sold south and separated from loved ones, Randolph and sixty-five others, once owned by Carter H. Edloe and freed by his will, were boarding the ship, families intact, as free persons. They were headed for Boston with a printed copy of Edloe’s will, their free papers, and $14.55 for each of what should have been a $50.00 inheritance to start life anew in Massachusetts. Along with Peter were his wife Milly and daughters Susannah and Harriet, his brothers Anthony (Toney), Richard, and James, and aunt Harriet Bailey. His father, enslaved on George Harrison’s plantation, had died when he was ten years old. His mother Lydia, possibly by this time separated from the family, did not make the trip to Boston. The group ranged in age from twelve months to seventy-five years old. Two women, Old Sylvia and Old Jenny, elected to stay behind and in slavery rather than to take the risk of an uncertain future. Harriet Barber, another enslaved woman and her children, had been left $8,000 by Edloe and had gone to Philadelphia.

The trip to freedom had been delayed by more than three years. Randolph, who was the only enslaved person on the plantation who was literate, a fact he carefully hid from whites, learned of Edloe’s will and, with others, continued to seek to secure their freedom despite legal challenges. Levi Cooper in an 1855 deposition, part of the lawsuit through which Randolph and the Edloe ex-slaves would lay claim to the remainder of their fifty-dollar legacies eight years later, recalled working as a seaman aboard the Thomas H. Thompson during that memorable voyage. He stated that I was formerly a seaman and was a seaman on board the Thomas H. Thompson (Capt. Wixson), when as the month of September A.D. 1847, she brought from Brandon, Va., to Boston, a company of sixty-six colored persons, slaves of Carter H. Edloe late of Brandon, Virginia; that I was one of the hands who helped get the colored people on board the vessel; that I visited Mr. Edloe’s plantation; that I saw their free papers.
delivered to them and a small sum—of about fifteen dollars each—paid to them or their dependents. While the group was spared the cries of separation and the fear of being sold further south, the journey would not have been entirely free from anxiety and trepidation. They may have wondered if this were a trick and if the men who had deceitfully kept them an additional three years in bondage were selling them south after all. Further, they had been told horror stories about life in the north in order to intimidate them into staying in bondage, that they would be put to work underground and even devoured (Sketches, 1842). What would they find in freedom? What reception awaited them in Boston? Would they find jobs? Randolph, trained as a blacksmith, would have to leave his tools behind—possessions of his deceased master’s estate—along with memories of the chains and shackles produced by the blacksmith shop in addition to nails, horseshoes, and tools. And then there was the stress of the long journey at sea. It is doubtful that any of them had travelled by ship before and, if so, not so great a distance.

On September 15, 1847, ten days after boarding the vessel in Virginia, they reached Long Wharf in Boston. Long Wharf today is a fashionable retail and tourist area where tour boats along the Boston Harbor and whale watching vessels arrive and depart with rhythmic precision. The old chart house built in the 1830s, now a fashionable restaurant, would have been standing when Randolph arrived. Known as a bastion of abolitionism in the mid-nineteenth century, Boston in the eighteenth century had been the largest slave trading port in New England. Indeed, the poet Phillis Wheatley had landed on the wharf to be sold into bondage in 1761. The arrival of the “sixty-six emancipated slaves,” as they came to be called in the abolitionist papers, created a spectacle that drew the likes of famous abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Samuel May, who walked down from The Liberator office at 21 Cornhill Street to view the...
In his own words, Randolph describes the heady experience of freedom in Boston as a “new birth”:

You may imagine our curiosity and elation as we were introduced and looked upon the new scenes that were about us. Truly we were in a new world. Think of three score and more souls, blind as bats—so far as the letter is concerned... coming fresh, and directly from a Southern plantation, empty-handed and ignorant of their environments, and you will have some idea of myself and company as we made our advent in Boston.

Over the course of his autobiographical narratives, Sketches of Slave Life: or, Illustrations of the “Peculiar Institution” by Peter Randolph, an Emancipated Slave published in 1855, and From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit published in 1893, Randolph provides a rare glimpse into the transformation of identity from “Blacksmith Peter” appraised at $550 on Edloe’s estate in 1845 to “Father Randolph,” a prominent religious and civic leader, a writer and literary editor, orator, and antislavery activist by the time of his death in 1897. Extending geographically from the James River plantation region of Virginia to Boston, Massachusetts, New York, New Haven, Connecticut, and even Canada, Randolph’s writings interrogate the legal, political, and religious complexities of bondage and freedom for African Americans from the mid-nineteenth century to well after Reconstruction.

The story of Peter Randolph first grabbed my attention when I stumbled onto an out-of-print edition of Sketches of Slave Life in the Virginia Authors Room at the Library of Virginia in Richmond in 2003. Having studied slavery and slave narratives for twenty years, I could not believe that I had not heard of Randolph or read his narrative. Later, I discovered that he had written a second autobiography, From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit, which was published in 1893.
Sketches of Slave Life went through two editions within three months in 1855. The first, about thirty-nine pages, was published in May of that year and includes scenes of plantation life. The second “enlarged” edition was published just three months later in August, is eighty-one pages, and includes the text of Carter H. Edloe’s will and the court decree. It also includes a preface by abolitionist Samuel May Jr., who furnished a list of the emancipated slaves who made the voyage to Boston. A sixty-one-page version of Sketches, with chapters greatly reordered, is appended to the end of From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit in which Randolph reflects not only on his time in slavery, but his life in Boston in the heyday of the abolitionist movement, his time in Richmond during Reconstruction, and his later life in Boston as a pastor and civic and community leader. All three texts are included in this volume.

It has been over a decade since I embarked on an archival journey that has extended well beyond corroborating or illuminating Randolph’s writings. That journey began at the Library of Virginia and has meandered through the Virginia Historical Society, Boston Public Library, Boston Athenæum, Massachusetts Historical Society, and the special collections at the College of William and Mary and Virginia Union University. Most of all, it has been a journey through various types of texts—wills, diaries, letters, periodicals, church records, vital records, genealogies—in both print and manuscript, as Randolph’s writings are best understood within a climate of African American archival and print culture. This web of resources—textual and digital—extends to include important databases like Slavery and Anti-Slavery, Documenting the American South, Unknown No Longer, and Black Abolitionist Archives, which have aided in providing access to sources previously difficult to find.

So I’d like to thank all of the librarians, archivists, curators, preservationists, and technicians that make these sources available. Colleagues at Virginia Commonwealth University...
VCU Libraries Special Collections, Library of Virginia, were particularly helpful and enthused about the project. I would also like to thank John Kneebone, chair of the History Department at VCU, for having me present on Randolph at a Year of Emancipation lecture and for allowing me to borrow his discipline from time to time. Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the College of Humanities and Science provided a research-leave semester in the early days of this project. I would also like to thank Dean Jim Coleman of the College of Humanities and Sciences at VCU for travel funds to Boston. I am grateful to Joycelyn Moody and John Ernest for their vision to launch the Regenerations series of editions in African American literature, for their wonderful colleagueship, and for their editorial expertise and guidance. To Lynda Perry, who served as my research assistant during the last three years of this project, thank you for your energy, enthusiasm, and commitment to this project. Also to Gabrielle Foreman, a co-laborer in the vineyard of Early African American literature, for her thorough reading of this manuscript and always cogent and perceptive suggestions for improvement. Most importantly, my loving family—husband, Mark, and children, Angelique and Austin—have endured listening to every twist and turn of the journey, often repetitively, and remained encouraging and uplifting. My thanks to them. In the words of St. Paul, I have been surrounded by “a great cloud of witnesses” throughout this project, who have aided in its successful completion.
Introduction

Negotiating Freedom

Writing the Emancipated Narrative

The Boston arrival of Peter Randolph and sixty-six formerly enslaved men, women, and children in 1847 and the publication of *Sketches of Slave Life* in 1855 coincide with the coming of age of the African American slave narrative and a burgeoning in African American print culture in the 1840s and 1850s. Frederick Douglass, for example, published his best seller, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* in 1845 and second version of his autobiography *My Bondage and My Freedom* in 1855. Like many other antebellum black authors, both Douglass and Randolph published expansive, updated versions of their life stories after the Civil War as gestures of self-revisionism that extended and revised the earlier narratives. However, unlike Douglass’s three autobiographies, which have received extensive historical and literary critical treatment, Randolph’s writings have been virtually ignored by scholars. While he achieved neither the historical nor the literary longevity of Frederick Douglass, in his time Randolph was active and prominent in many of the same abolitionist circles. He recounts one instance of meeting Douglass on a train in his travels. He traveled south two months after the end of the Civil War and was instrumental in efforts to aid refugees through the Freedmen’s Bureau and other agencies. His obituary in the *Boston Evening Transcript* on August 9, 1897, was full of superlatives: “the oldest colored clergyman in New England in age and service,” founder of “the largest [church] in membership of any colored church in New England,” and held “in high esteem” as an abolitionist.
As a formerly enslaved author, Randolph’s texts are generally termed “slave narratives” both of the antebellum variety (the two editions of Sketches) and the postbellum ministerial autobiography (Slave Cabin). Notably these were the forms available to black male and female writers of the nineteenth century that allowed Randolph to fashion himself as hero of his own narrative. As literary forms, both antebellum slave narratives and postwar ministerial autobiographies demanded a public persona, often at the expense of representing private introspection or even personal familial details. Scholars have noted that antebellum narratives tend to prioritize the political demands of representing a collective slave experience rather than a private individual recollection. Similarly, as William L. Andrews observes in postbellum African American autobiography, “to the institutional men, actions literally speak louder than words, which is one reason why they generally write externally directed memoirs of what they accomplished rather than internally focused confessions of how they developed in consciousness” [Andrews, “Politics” 113]. Thus as a “slave narrative after slavery,” Slave Cabin focuses more on the building of postwar African American institutions than on individual self-consciousness. Fortunately, Randolph’s story is corroborated and expanded by a wealth of archival documents (see appendix), which allow for a more textured and multivalent approach to his writings. Due to the availability of various court documents, including manuscript and print copies of Edloe’s will and the decrees that followed it, as well as census records, city directories, vital records, letters, abolitionist newspapers, and church and fraternal organization records and proceedings, Randolph’s three autobiographies are among the most heavily documented and easily corroborated texts in nineteenth-century African American literature. This is due largely to his relatively unhindered social position as the author of Sketches. In fugitive slave narratives written especially after the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, fear of recapture prompted ex-slave
fugitive slave narratives. Because he was not a fugitive, Randolph’s legal status allowed him to name names and pinpoint places with an openness denied the self-emancipated narrator. Moreover, Randolph’s situation was atypical in another sense; virtually the entire Edloe plantation made the journey north with him, leaving no reason to conceal specific and explicit details of life on the plantation. This leaves an unusually vast archival trail for scholars of early African American literature, who are used to working with significant gaps and silences. Yet the importance of Randolph’s writings goes beyond what Stephanie A. Smith calls the “pathologically urgent” demand for “the true, the real and the authentic.” To merely authenticate early African American texts subjects the writings to a twenty-first-century version of misguided antebellum practices. There is much to learn from texts such as Randolph’s that do not conform to the sometimes tightly controlled abolitionist structure. Douglass’s 1845 Narrative established the paradigm for the classic male fugitive slave narrative, summed up in his famous chiasmus: “You have seen how a man was made a slave, you shall see how a slave was made a man.” Randolph’s two editions of Sketches of Slave Life, however, do not center on the physical defeat of an overseer, or on a daring escape, but on an act of manumission by a conscience-stricken slave owner who died and left a dramatic will. While neither running away nor being emancipated by deed or will was a typical experience for enslaved people, the fugitive slave plot has long dominated scholarly inquiry, to the virtual exclusion of tales of manumission. As emancipation narratives, freedom is evidenced in Randolph’s writings as a set of negotiations rather than a final goal or climax of the plot as in fugitive slave narratives. In this way, freedom is interrogated through a variety of intertextual
encounters—legal (wills, deeds, decrees), theological (biblical hermeneutics, religious tradition) and literary (abolitionist journalism, proslavery travel narrative). In this way, the story of Peter Randolph and the Edloe freed people offers us important insights into the transformation of identity from enslaved to free that the fugitive experience often obscures or elides. As Rosemary Brana-Shute and Randy J. Sparks state in Paths to Freedom, manumission is “a process not simply an act, and one laden with meaning and significance for the relatively small number of slaves who managed to achieve it. There were many paths to freedom and many variables that governed the process.” Thus we follow Randolph’s transformation from “blacksmith Peter” valued at $550 in an 1845 estate inventory to Reverend Peter Randolph, activist and elder statesman. While archives are necessarily ambivalent places for African American subjects, extensive archival sources in Virginia and Boston go a long way in helping to piece together the process of freedom for Randolph and the others, as well as in helping to answer important extra-literary questions about this case. What, exactly, were the terms of Edloe’s will? What were the three years like in the interval between the time the slaves learned of the will in 1844 and when they left for Boston in 1847? What was life like for Randolph and the other emancipatees after they arrived in Boston? What happened to the remaining money they were entitled to? Who was the woman named in the will as Harriet Barber and did she ever get her $8,000 legacy? Perhaps the most pressing question of all is who was Peter Randolph and how did such a prolific writer in a time in which literacy was withheld from the overwhelming majority of African Americans fall through the cracks of literary history?

Life in Bondage: “Blacksmith Peter”

[Insert Image 1 here]
Peter Randolph (1820?–1897) was born on one of several plantations owned by William Allen, Carter H. Edloe’s maternal uncle. In 1838, he was transferred to Edloe’s plantation—Upper Brandon—as part of a large estate division, which divvied up one Southampton County plantation of the unmarried Allen’s massive estate into separate “lots” of slaves bequeathed to each of nine nieces and nephews. “Lot no. 8” fell to “Carter H. Edloe one of the nephews of the testator” and lists nineteen slaves, including Peter, Milly (later Randolph’s wife), and Lydia (his mother). Randolph refers to this division of slaves in Sketches:

Allen had freed his colored sons, and about eight others. The rest of his slaves he gave to one of his nephews, named William Allen. He gave one of his farms to be divided among all his relations. Edloe was one, and he drew eighteen of those slaves, who were all freed with myself. (43)

On March 20, 1838, after inheriting the nineteen slaves (including Peter) from his deceased uncle, Edloe wrote his own will with its provision of freedom for all of his slaves. Edloe died on July 29, 1844, at the age of 46. Randolph’s parents, Anthony and Lydia, lived on separate plantations owned by masters who were cousins. Anthony was a “colored driver” on George Harrison’s neighboring Lower Brandon” plantation. He died about 1835 when Peter was ten years old. Lydia died, possibly trying to escape, on September 27, 1847 (Second edition, 20). There is no record of her making the trip to Boston, and in discussing the cruel overseer J. G. Harrison, Randolph writes the following: “He made his dogs tear and bite my mother very badly. She died soon after, and was freed from her tormentors, at rest from her labors, and rejoicing in heaven” (47). Anthony and Lydia had at least five sons, all born in slavery. Although Anthony was allowed to visit Lydia...
every Wednesday, he had no parental rights and his sons would have been the property of their master. The oldest, Benjamin, the focus of considerable attention in Sketches, escaped a brutal overseer and lived for a time in the swamp before being sold south. The other four sons, Peter (b. 1820?), Anthony (b. 1823), Richard (b. 1825), and James (b. 1834), all survived to experience freedom in Boston. Richard and James died either before or shortly after the trip to Boston.

Milly (Mary Amelia) Randolph was born around 1829. Her Massachusetts death certificate lists no mother but lists her father as “Walker,” the name of a black man emancipated by William Allen in 1832, along with a daughter Clara. Milly is listed with Peter in William Allen’s will and was inherited by Carter Edloe along with her future husband. She is listed alone with two daughters Susanna and Harriet in several documents, and it is not until the sixty-six former slaves land in Boston that she is referred to as wife of Peter Randolph. She and Peter had eight children, of whom only one daughter survived to adulthood.

Upper Brandon was one of several large plantations owned by some of the wealthiest and most prominent families of Virginia. Randolph managed to learn to read and write (without anyone’s knowledge), which gave him mobility around the plantation by writing his own passes. Thus, even in the 1855 texts, Randolph shows a remarkably accurate sense of the geography of the area:

Edloe’s farm was what was called Upper Brandon, on James River. It consisted of about fifty-six square miles, and was worked by eighty-one slaves. . . . William B. Harrison owned Middle Brandon. His farm was about one hundred square miles. He owned over two hundred slaves. Of their treatment I shall speak, and also of the numerous overseers he had employed. . . . George B. Harrison, the owner of my father, owned Lower
Brandon. His farm was the same in size as his brother’s, and he owned the same number of slaves.

Randolph’s descriptions of life on Upper Brandon in Prince George County and Claremont in Surry County are in stark contrast to the public representation of these “farms” as the picture of gentile southern manners, known for “princely hospitality.” As John Michael Vlach notes in Back of the Big House, “slaves took a more active role in defining and claiming their territorial domains than their owners suspected” and had “alternative geographies” unbeknownst to their masters. In Randolph’s writings, his detailed descriptions of hush harbors and other clearings imbue these spaces—out of the master’s eye and earshot—with sacred significance. Swamps and woods provided temporary refuge for runaways, food for trapping, and places to meet with and talk with God. The most excerpted section of Sketches is Randolph’s description of slave religious meetings in “hush harbors”:

Not being allowed to hold meetings on the plantation, the slaves assemble in the swamps, out of reach of the patrols. They have an understanding among themselves as to the time and place of getting together. This is often done by the first one arriving breaking boughs from the trees, and bending them in the direction of the selected spot. (Second Edition, 68)

These alternative landscapes, what Anthony E. Kaye calls neighborhood “joining places,” contrast sharply with the limited and enclosed plantations, taverns, formal worship spaces, and auction blocks and whipping posts through which masters enforced obedience.

It is not clear when Randolph began to apprentice as a blacksmith, but it was probably while he was a boy. Abolitionist and once-enslaved pastor James W. C. Pennington in his 1849 narrative, The Fugitive Blacksmith, recalls the apprenticeship process as follows:
They put a bright slave-boy with a tradesman, until he gets such a knowledge of the trade as to be able to do his own work, and then he takes him home. I remained with the stonemason until I was eleven years of age. . . . My master owned an excellent blacksmith, who had obtained his trade in the way I have mentioned above. When I returned home at the age of eleven, I was set about assisting to do the mason-work of a new smith's shop. This being done, I was placed at the business, which I soon learned, so as to be called a “first-rate blacksmith.” I continued to work at this business for nine years, or until I was twenty-one.

Pennington recounts duties in stonemasonry and carpentry as well as “shoeing a horse.”

The 1832 inventory of Allen’s estate notes a slave named Torrington as the blacksmith, with Willis and Sam as “ strikers.” The location of the forge was most likely in or near Cabin Point, an area to which Randolph devotes an entire section in the second edition of Sketches. Cabin Point, which Randolph refers to as largely frequented by “all the lower class of whites and free colored people,” is represented as a virtually male-exclusive domain:

The whites beat the free colored people there, and they dare not raise their hands, lest they should be mobbed. Females were not safe there an instant; nothing could protect them from the violence of those drunken desperados. (Second Edition, 43)

Randolph’s position as a skilled artisan, as well as his literacy, afforded him a relatively empowered vantage point on plantation life. It not only allowed for him to travel to neighboring plantations, but it provided a skill that required responsibility with fire and equipment. Recent scholarship on plantation culture has noted that blacksmiths held relatively empowered positions within enslaved communities, inspiring awe, even fear, among their peers. This in part can be traced back to the power associated with metallurgy in West African cultures where “the smith is
held in high esteem because of his knowledge and he is also feared because of his power.”

As Dona Richards notes, working with elements like metal and fire was equated with knowledge and spiritual power. Moreover, among the Mande, smiths “were believed to control the natural forces intrinsic to all objects, a force the Mande call nyama” (Ross). Some scholars believe that “African ironworkers may have transferred old sacred beliefs associated with iron along with their technology” to the new world (Vlach). Anthropologists have found small wrought-iron “watchmen” buried beneath shops of African American blacksmiths to appease the gods who might be displeased at the “usurpation of their power” to turn ordinary materials into metal (McNaughton). Watchmen have been found in Virginia from the Chesapeake to Alexandria.

Randolph’s duties as a blacksmith, a “maker of fire” would possibly have included making keys and locks, chains, iron, and brass on the plantation. He would use tools like hammers and anvils and possibly carpentry tools as well. Also, in his descriptions of the abuses of Allen’s Claremont, he makes detailed mention of instruments of restraint and torture that, as a blacksmith, he himself probably helped make or witnessed being forged:

[Allen] . . . used what is called the bell and horns on his slaves, to keep them from running away. He used to chain them together with a long chain, with heavy fastenings at the end of the chain. The bell and horns were a harness made so as to fasten on the slave’s neck, to which was attached another band that passed over the top of the head, about three feet perpendicular, then turned with a hook, so as to hook over the limbs of trees, if the slave should attempt running in the swamps, out of sight of the overseer. He always kept a good stock of them on hand, to use as you would use bells for cows, that you might find them easily, if they strayed. (Second Edition, 42)
When William Allen died, Randolph writes that “Edloe immediately went over, and freed all the poor creatures from their harnesses, leg-irons, and handcuffs” (Second Edition, 42).

Slave women on Upper Brandon occupied a variety of roles and were not spared whippings and punishment. The first edition of Sketches opens with references to “the Blood of the Slave” condemning “the evil of selling, shipping and killing men, women, and children!” (45). The next section of the first edition is “Slaves on the Auction Block,” which recounts the sale of a slave woman who watches her five children sold to different masters one by one, only to end up “wretched, childless, widowed Jenny” (46). In the section called “Overseers,” Randolph recalls those who were especially brutal to slave women. One example is Henry Hallingwork, whom Randolph calls “a cruel and bad man”: “the [enslaved] men had no comfort with their wives, for any of the latter who pleased him [the overseer] he would take from their husbands, and use himself. If any refused his lewd embraces, he treated them with the utmost barbarity” (62). As the Second Edition elaborates, slave owners, many of them prominent citizens, also raped and treated slave women harshly. Of William Allen, Edloe’s uncle who owned Claremont, Randolph writes unequivocally, “He was not a good man. He was possessed of none of the virtues, but some of the vices, of King Solomon. He was very fond of the young females, yet he was married to no one” (111). It turns out that both William Allen and Carter H. Edloe were unmarried and, according to official records, died “without issue.” Both, however, fathered children by slave women and left them—and their children—sizeable legacies.

Carter H. Edloe’s death ushered in monumental changes in the lives of Peter, Milly, and the other enslaved workers at Upper Brandon. Samuel May, Jr., in a letter to his friend Dr. John Bishop Estlin, wrote that “the slaves say they had a much easier time while he [Edloe] was alive than afterwards in near 4 years since he died.” One major change between the first and second editions elaborates, slave owners, many of them prominent citizens, also raped and treated slave women harshly. This sentence is ambiguous. One reading of “The rape and harsh treatment of slave women extended to the slave owners” is that slave owners were also raped and treated harshly, or that the negative consequences extended to them.

New: As the Second Edition elaborates, slave owners, many of them prominent citizens, also raped and treated slave women harshly. Is the rewrite OK? If not, please provide an alternate rewrite.

Samuel May, Jr., in a letter to his friend Dr. John Bishop Estlin, wrote that “the slaves say they had a much easier time while he [Edloe] was alive than afterwards in near 4 years since he died.”
editions of *Sketches* is that Randolph embeds “Edloe’s Will” along with the court decrees into the text of the second edition. The presence of these legal documents transforms the second edition from a slave narrative and antislavery polemic into an emancipated narrative, a text that interrogates the legal complications of freedom for African American subjects.

As Janine DeLombard notes, during the three decades leading up to the Civil War, “slavery was on trial in the U.S.” Legal cases involving fugitives and those manumitted by will or deed had wide public appeal and public consequences. In this sense, *Sketches* can be read as what DeLombard calls an “alternative tribunal” within which Randolph indicts slavery in print form. *Slavery on Trial* (1). This literary tribunal extended to the abolitionist press that was very active in its campaign against slavery. Thus, it is not surprising that Edloe’s death and last will and testament were celebrated in William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator* as early as October 4, 1844:

> **EMANCIPATION.** A Baltimore paper says that the late Carter Edloe, esq., on Lower James River, has by his last will, left to all his slaves, amounting to 80 in number, the right to be free, if such be their election.”

Back in Virginia the matter turned out not to be so straightforward. After learning of their deceased master’s will, a series of deceptions and disruptions kept Peter, Milly, and the seventy-nine others on Edloe’s plantation until the fall of 1847. The delay resulted, in part, from a major difference of interpretation of the will. John A. Selden, Edloe’s executor, interpreted the will to mean that the freed people would have to work to earn their fifty dollars and computed their earnings after deducting the amount supposedly used to room and board them, including medical...
expenses. In response to an article about their landing in Boston that appeared in The Liberator in 1855, Selden mentions that the amount of their ship passage had also been deducted from the earnings. According to Randolph, there was “thirty-two thousand dollars on hand” (Second Edition, 27) in Edloe’s account in 1844, plenty of money to facilitate the immediate departure from Virginia and pay each freed person fifty dollars. When they tried to hire a lawyer to plead their case, they were cheated out of their money. Randolph accuses Selden of duplicity in no uncertain terms:

We soon found that Seldon [sic] got all our money, and could give him more that we could; so he began to put us off for one court to another, telling us that the court did not have time to attend to us, but the next would certainly settle the matter. We gave him all our earnings, which amounted to twenty-two dollars, but he got no [free] papers. So he kept us for two years and six months. (Second Edition, 27)

During that time they continued to work the farm, supposing that they were earning money toward their freedom. Randolph sums it up: “all our money was taken from us, because we were black people; but glad enough were we of our freedom” (28).

Edloe’s will and similar documents raise important questions on the occurrence, motivation, and lasting effects of manumissions: How common or widespread were slave manumissions in the US South? What were possible motives for slaveholders in manumitting slaves? Did manumissions have an impact on the system of enslavement overall? In Paths to Freedom: Manumission in the Atlantic World, Rosemary Brana-Shute and Randy Sparks define manumission as “the act of freeing individual slaves while the institution of slavery continues.”

The odds of a given slave being manumitted either individually or as part of an entire plantation were very slim. In post-Revolutionary Virginia, only one in every one thousand enslaved people...
was manumitted, and laws strongly discouraged slaveholders from doing so. Overall, throughout the Atlantic world, an annual manumission rate of one per one thousand means an enslaved person would have only a 3.5 percent chance of being manumitted at some point in their lives. These grim statistics “condemned the great majority of slaves to a lifetime of slavery.”

Moreover, scholars agree that there was “a markedly diminished likelihood of manumission after Nat Turner’s 1831 insurrection” and that courts grew more hostile toward awarding manumission as the nineteenth century progressed toward the Civil War. There were several famous large plantation manumissions, such as Robert Carter III’s 1791 “Deed of Gift” in which he intended to free more than 500 slaves. Samuel Gist freed 350 slaves posthumously from Great Britain after the War of 1812. Perhaps the most famous was Thomas Jefferson Randolph (grandson of the third president), whose will freed 383 slaves in 1846 (years after his death in 1833). Abolitionist societies and the northern abolitionist press reported and encouraged such acts, representing them as evidence that their antislavery message was reaching southern slaveholders. Abolitionist societies and newspapers notwithstanding, there is little evidence that slaveholders manumitted slaves as a result of northern “antislavery discussion” (American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Association Report 1848). As Andrew Fede points out in People without Rights, manumission was part of the system of chattel slavery, not in opposition to it. The emancipated slave had no legal claim to freedom in the south, where courts were charged with determining the will of the slave master and not the interest of the enslaved. After all, slave law was “a compact between the slave’s rulers” (People without Rights). Similarly, Orlando Patterson reminds us that manumission was “a private act with immediate social and public consequences.” In other words, the private act of an individual
slaveholder’s manumission was subject to the very public scrutiny of the law and larger slaveholding community.

Possible motives for slaveholder manumissions include religious convictions, dislike of cruelty, paternity, and, on occasion, antislavery sentiments, all of which may have played a role in Edloe’s decision. Randolph invoked the religious rationale when he referred to Edloe’s act of manumission as “truly a Christian act”:

[Edloe] always seemed to have some conscientious scruples in regard to holding slaves, and would not join any church, because “he did not believe he could be a Christian, and yet be a slaveholder.” (Second Edition, 4)

Throughout Sketches he portrays Edloe as compassionate, yet often naïve and ineffective in curtailing abuse, especially by overseers. Edloe also appears to have resorted to successive firing of overseers when he learned of their abuse, and the slaves knew that telling him about mistreatment would probably lead to an overseer’s dismissal. For example, of one overseer Randolph writes, “his cruelty was so great, it came to Mr. Edloe’s ear, and he was discharged” (46). Writing about Robert Carter III’s “Deed of Gift,” Andrew Levy notes that “this kind of triangle between slave, master, and overseer was common in the antebellum South.” Yet Edloe’s method of controlling violence against the enslaved people he owned was ultimately ineffective, as one cruel overseer simply replaced another.

Often in wills of this type, one or more enslaved individuals were singled out for special treatment, sometimes including an attempt to manipulate them to remain on the plantation (and in slavery) after the master’s death. This is the case with Harriet Barber who appears to have benefitted financially more than others in the will:
6th I give and bequeath to my female Slave, Harriet Barber and her children, (all of whom I bought of R.G. Orgain, Esq.) Eight Thousand Dollars, which sum I desire my Executors to take from my estate, and either lay it out in good stock, or put the money out at interest, always taking undoubted security—the stock I should prefer—the interest of which shall be paid to said Harriet yearly... 

7th It is my wish that the said Harriet and children should remain on my estate, or in any situation which they may prefer that the law will allow; and I direct my Executors to furnish Harriet and her children with their Free Papers, whenever they may desire to have them, and assist them to remove to any place they may choose to locate themselves. (Second Edition, 22–23).

Although Harriet had originally been owned by Richard Orgain, another Edloe cousin, she might well have been a Virginia version of Harriet Jacobs in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. As we have seen in Jacobs's Incidents, enslaved women sometimes “chose” to have children by neighboring white male slaveholders for a number of reasons, not least of which was the sense that she might have better odds of securing freedom for herself and her offspring from someone other than her present owner. In any case, Harriet elected to move to Philadelphia with her children in 1847. The US Federal Census in 1850 lists Harriet Barber age forty five mulatto, Caroline age seventeen, William age thirteen, Harriet age ten, and a Virginia Jackson age fifteen also mulatto residing in Philadelphia. Harriet does come into possession of some portion of her $8,000 legacy as early as 1847. A certificate with her signature as an X shows that she elected stock options as opposed to cash and gave oversight of her money to John Selden. When Caroline Barber died in Philadelphia in 1853, her parents were listed as “Carter Barber” and “Harriet Adler [Edloe].” The exchange of surnames here functions as a rewriting of the
patriarchal narrative of ownership, as Harriet renames Carter Edloe while taking for herself her surname forbidden by law.\(^6\)

On the subject of whether emancipating slaveholders held antislavery political views, Andrew Fede in *People without Rights* notes that an individual slaveholder’s decision to free slaves was “not in any real sense libertarian” but more the “whim of the owner” and “another example of the slaveowner’s all-powerful and despotic position in relation to the right-less and powerless slave.” He cautions that “a promanumission viewpoint was consistent with a proslavery mind.”\(^6\) Besides his last will and testament, Carter Edloe left behind no writings that expressed antislavery sentiment. In most ways, including liberating his slaves after he died and his treatment of Harriet, he followed the rule rather than the exception for southern planters. Private manuscript sources like letters and diaries suggest that the relationship was an “open secret,” yet Harriet was unable to read or write and we have no access to her perspective on Edloe or his legacy to her except her choice to leave the plantation and live free in Philadelphia.\(^6\)

[Insert image 5 here]

Edloe’s will is an example of what is often called a “free and send will,” which technically allowed the recipients the “choice” to stay in bondage, as was the case with Old Sylvia and Old Jinny among the Edloe slaves. Moreover, such documents were often ambiguous and subject to misinterpretation on the part of family members, executors, and the courts. For one thing, they created a situation Fede calls “quasi-freedom,” which resulted when probate records “directed an executor to hold the master’s slaves in a free or quasi-free status for a fixed term or until sufficient money was raised to send the slaves out of state”\(^{143}\). This describes accurately the situation in which Randolph and the other slaves found themselves between 1844...
and 1847. On January 28, 1847, after sending a representative to secure their freedom, the Edloe quasi-freed people were gathered before a court-appointed commission led by Commissioner Bernard and asked to make the decision of their lives: whether they wished to stay at Upper Brandon (and in slavery), to go north later, or to go north immediately. Peter, Milly, and her children along with all but two of the eighty-one slaves “elect[ed] to be free, & go now to Boston.” By May 31, 1847, they were still in a quasi-free state on the plantation, but the climate had decidedly changed. A letter of that date by John Armistead of Brandon described the scene:

They appeared to be perfectly satisfied and went to work more cheerfully than usual until the first of the present month, when they became very careless and negligent and when spoken to would reply that they were distressed and had no heart to work or do anything else not having heard what their situation was.

He concludes the letter:

I think these Negroes had better go off as early as possible they have become discontent and will not be of any service to the estate or themselves, hereafter, but on the contrary will be a great disadvantage not only to the estate but to all the slave holders, in this part of the country they are rapidly increasing, there has been three births since Christmas and several more expected during the summer, none dies]

The tensions produced by the Edloe slaves’ quasi-free status had begun to erode the tenuous social order of slavery. Thus social, public consequences took precedence over Edloe’s private will or his former slaves’ individual “choices.”

Life in Freedom: Anti-slavery Boston
When the Thomas H. Thompson schooner, piloted by Captain Wixon, arrived in Boston to some fanfare on September 15, 1847, among those on the dock to greet it was Samuel May Jr., the Unitarian minister and staunch antislavery advocate. Boston in the 1840s was a hotbed of antislavery activity, and the arrival of the former Edloe slaves was noised about in the antislavery press. The event was recorded in The Liberator on September 24, 1847, under the title “Emancipated Slaves”:

The schooner Thomas H. Thompson arrived at this port last week, bringing sixty-six colored people, men, women, and children. They were lately slaves of Mr. Carter H. Edloe, near Richmond, Virginia.

This gentleman died about four years since, and by his will provided that his slaves should be set free, to go where they pleased. But not to turn them off utterly penniless, after working for him all their lives, he farther provided that, if they chose, they might remain on the estate as laborers until they had earned the sum equal to fifty-dollars apiece, over and above the cost of their maintenance. This they decided to do.

After working for nearly four years on the estate, they learn from its managers that their earning for that time, average about $14.80 each! The rest has been swallowed up in charges of maintenance, and the commissions on sales of farm-produce! A lawyer, whom they employed to act for them, charged them $150 for services, which we learn by disinterested authority, were not worth more than five.

The end of the article included the following clarification of their financial status and an appeal for employment:

We would add that the statement in the Atlas, that their master left a legacy for their support, is incorrect. No such legacy was left to them. There was one female slave, to
whom and her five children a handsome legacy was left, together with their freedom. These, we understand, have removed into the State of Pennsylvania.

But few of the sixty-six have, as yet, secured places. We call on our friends in the country to aid us in procuring employment for them. They are of all ages,—married and single. Address SAMUEL MAY, JR or ROBERT F. WALLCUT, 21 Cornhill, Boston.

May also refers to employment in his letter to John Estlin in 1847: “it has fallen very much to me to find places for them i.e. for those who wish to go to the country upon farms. I have secured good places for quite a number of them.” As Elizabeth Haflin Pleck found in her study of black migration and poverty in nineteenth-century Boston, most African American migrants “worked in service and menial jobs: porters, laborers, waiters and janitors.” Moreover, the 1840s saw large displacement of African Americans out of even these service jobs by large waves of Irish immigrants. Randolph was one of about half of the newly freed people who found work right away as a janitor for a number of Boston businesses. In the 1855 deposition he listed his occupation as “waiter.”

Although on the plantation he was a blacksmith by trade, it is possible that the Boston guilds were reserved for whites only. Moreover, he would not have been able to transport the tools of his trade to the north since they would belong to his master, and the cost of acquiring new tools would have been prohibitive. His wife, Milly, is listed as “Keeping House” on census records beginning in 1850. Many ex-slave families like the Randolphs prided themselves on conforming to the gender norms of nineteenth-century bourgeois white society in order to draw the sharpest possible contrast to plantation life in slavery. Milly may well have been
supplementing the family income, which was meager and at times dire, by taking in laundry or contracting out other domestic duties.

From 1850–1897, Randolph lists his occupation as “clergyman” on all census documents and city directories, although he was often employed in janitorial work or as a waiter during this period. This was significant because, beginning in 1832, African Americans in Virginia were barred from obtaining licenses to preach or becoming pastors. Churches with African American congregations, whether slave or free, had to be led by white pastors. In telling the census-takers that he was a “clergyman,” Randolph is laying claim to an identity denied him in slavery.

Moreover, to be a black minister in Boston during this time was to experience a great deal of autonomy and empowerment within the black community and beyond. As James Oliver Horton explains,

The activism and political influence of black ministers was common not only in antebellum Boston, but throughout the history of black people in America. Generally these ministers were supported by and responsible to the black community. They were more independent of white society than other blacks who were dependent almost entirely upon white employers for the support of their families. . . . They could speak out on controversial subjects like anti-slavery and civil rights with some immunity from white backlash. In this respect, black ministers in Boston were far more fortunate than those in the South, where white society often curbed their activities with local restrictions and sometimes open hostility. [50]

Black abolitionism was intimately connected to African American Christianity, free black institutions, and civic and fraternal organizations. Indeed, few African Americans were formal members of abolitionist societies, but they were frequently members of churches that carried on
a great deal of antislavery activity, openly and in secret (Levesque, Black Boston 10). Randolph arrived in Boston already called to preach on the plantation, and his religious calling cannot be separated from his previous experience of slavery and desire to see it abolished. Thus it is no surprise that Randolph became a member of Twelfth Baptist Church, which threw him directly into the political ferment over abolition. He describes his first meeting with the fledgling congregation in Slave Cabin:

I found a body of brethren worshiping in a hall on Belknap Street, now Joy Street. They were about fifteen in number, and were being supplied by Leonard A. Grimes. Myself and most of my companions who were professing Christians, joined this small body. Soon after, a council was called and our society was regularly organized and called the Twelfth Baptist Church. Rev. Mr. Grimes was properly ordained, and called to the pastorate of the new church. The history of this church and its distinguished pastor is well known to the older citizens of Boston, because of the prominence of both church and pastor in the early anti-slavery struggle. (24)

Of the African American Boston congregations, Twelfth Baptist was the most radical, led by Grimes, “by far the most aggressive of the black activist ministers in antebellum Boston” (Horton 47). Consisting of “a poor dwindling congregation of only 23 members” in November 1848, Grimes grew the church to 250 members over the next decade. Under Grimes’s leadership, “Twelfth Baptist Church became a center for social protest and an important station of the underground railroad” (47). Grimes’s activities included planned escapes from federal authorities sent to arrest fugitives in Boston and, as a last resort, purchasing the freedom of individuals threatened with the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. Known as “the fugitive church,” it was the church of choice for a number of former slaves both self-emancipated and otherwise. Grimes himself
had been jailed in Virginia for attempting to smuggle fugitives out of the state. In the 1850s, Twelfth Baptist was also involved in a number of prominent challenges to the Fugitive Slave Law, including legal challenges by George Latimer, Shadrach Minkins, and Anthony Burns. Randolph was licensed to preach there and began to make short missions trips, one in 1852 to the community of St. John in New Brunswick, Canada, where he found conditions for black American runaways deplorable. On September 14, 1852, his son William P. Randolph was born. During the births of their children in the 1850s and 1860s, Randolph began his writing career and his career in ministry. The family settled at 26 Webster Street in the Charlestown district of Boston.  

Grimes’ (and Twelfth Street’s) political activism, along with frequent use of the courts to effect racial justice, especially in high profile cases that challenged the Fugitive Slave Act, provided the climate within which Randolph and newly emancipated men and women advocated for legal redress in the claim against Mary and Elizabeth Orgain, Edloe’s nieces who inherited part of his estate. The other motivating factor was financial, as the Edloe freed people found themselves in dire circumstances due to advancing age and increasing racial discrimination in Boston employment. On January 22, 1855, Randolph went to a Boston attorney’s office and gave and signed a deposition for himself and on behalf of the other Edloe former slaves. A likely candidate for the Boston attorney who drew up the documents is Robert Morris, the first African American attorney to argue a trial case in the United States and who was famous later for his role in challenging the segregation of Boston public schools. Randolph had traveled around Boston and surrounding areas to procure signatures for all of the surviving members of the Edloe party. Once again, his literacy made him the natural leader in this legal enterprise: “those who could write, wrote their own name, thereto, those who could not write made their marks and their
names were written for them by me” (Edloe executor vs. Orgain). They had initiated a lawsuit claiming the remainder of their fifty-dollar inheritance. Thus, his first written telling of his life story occurred in a legal document:

I, Peter Randolph of Charlestown in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, but doing business as a waiter &etc. in the city of Boston, on oath depose & say; that I was formerly a slave to Mr. Carter H. Edloe, late of Brandon, in Prince George County, Virginia, whose will & testament, I was, in common with his other slaves, emancipated after his decease; that I left Brandon, on the fifth day of September A.D. 1847, in the vessel called the Thomas H. Thompson, Capt. Wickson—(or as near as I can now give his name by the sound)—bound for Boston, in company with sixty-five others, men, women & children of the freed people, so made free by Mr. said Edloe’s will.72

The document goes on to list the names of all who are participating in the lawsuit, including whether they can read or write. At the very end of the text, we find these words: “I will add that I am the person, was known on the plantation, as Peter, the blacksmith.”73 The group agreed to give power of attorney to David May of Petersburg to represent them in Virginia.74 On May 1, 1855, a commission headed by Bernard had ordered in their favor. Ten days later, Randolph published the first edition of Sketches of Slave Life. On August 3, 1855, he published a second, expanded edition of the text. Randolph’s receipt of $58.55 had to figure into his ability to self-publish his work.75

The years before the Civil War started found Randolph pastoring several churches in New Haven, Connecticut, Williamsburg (now Brooklyn), and Newburgh, New York, near West Point, making frequent changes because of the poverty of the congregations. In New Haven, for example, he earned only $200 per year, although he was able to attend lectures at Yale while he...
lived in town. From 1858 to 1860, he “engaged in a small newspaper business” and preached at a “colored old ladies home.” Between 1856 and 1866, three sons and one daughter were born to Peter and Milly, and they buried two of their infant sons, the younger of these before reaching two months old. Even in freedom, loss loomed large and families faced separation by death.

After Emancipation: Reconstruction Virginia

In heading south after the Civil War, Randolph joined a number of prominent former slaves, such as Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, and freeborn abolitionists like Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. The war years brought tremendous change to the Randolph family as Peter felt compelled to enter the war effort as a chaplain to colored troops. After Lee’s surrender at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865, he returned to Richmond, Virginia, and joined the refugee effort, leaving Milly behind in Boston with nine-year-old Mary Frances and four-year-old Charles August Sumner. On a stop in Baltimore, he learned of President Lincoln’s assassination on April 15, 1865. He met the well-known slave preacher Reverend John Jasper at Brown’s Island, and the two started a makeshift church in an old warehouse, later Sixth Mount Zion Church. Two weeks later, Randolph was called as the first African American pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church on Leigh Street in Richmond. Although he would stay in Richmond another five years, his family remained in Boston throughout his pastorate.

Richmond during Reconstruction was a politically volatile and, for African Americans, violent place. Fellow Bostonian John Oliver, who with Randolph and others became prominent in Virginia Reconstruction politics, was arrested and beaten as soon as he arrived in Richmond for not having a pass, although he was born free in Massachusetts. Randolph found himself
the company of a group of black men who were free before the war and were very prominent citizens in Richmond: John Adams, a contractor and plasterer, who donated the land and built what became the Ebenezer Baptist Church; Fields Cook, a prominent barber and property owner and political activist; and John Oliver, who would stay in Virginia after Reconstruction (unlike Randolph) and become headmaster of a school for freed people. These men, who had long been used to leadership positions in the black community, must have encouraged Randolph in his work. This group formed the core of black political activism, established the Shiloh Colored Baptist Association that broke away from white ecclesiastical domination, and served in black state and national conventions. These organizations left behind many documents and records that form the larger context of African American print culture in this era. In his “Appeal” before the Black State Convention in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1865, Fields Cook described “this state of chaos and disorganization”:

We have among the white people of this State many who are our most inveterate enemies; who hate us as a class, and who feel no sympathy with or for us; who despise us simply because we are black, and, more especially, because we have been made free by the power to the United States Government, and that they—the class last mentioned—will not, in our estimation, be willing to accord to us, as freemen, that protection which all freemen must contend for, if they would be worthy of freedom; that, while we confess that the state of things which now exist was not of our making. ([Proceedings . . . Black State Conventions] 262)

Randolph joined the ranks of pre-war, free African Americans who worked for the Freedmen’s Bureau. Among his duties was performing marriages: indeed, he is credited in taking on several thorny cases involving multiple spouses that were common in post-emancipation African
American life.

On November 13, 1865, asked “to obtain license to legalize the marriage of col’d people.”

Ebenezer church records confirm that between 1865 and 1869 Randolph made numerous trips back and forth from Richmond to Boston to attend to family matters, including illnesses. He was elected pastor on May 21, 1865, for three months at a salary of $200. He was later given a regular annual salary of $700. July 9, 1866, he returned to Boston; son Thaddeus Walker Randolph had died on June 25 of that year. His son Peter, who had been born in May of 1866, died just two months later on August 1st, succumbing to an outbreak of cholera. Randolph names neither Milly nor the children specifically in his text, stating succinctly “owing to the ill health of my wife and family, it was necessary for me to make stated visits to the North” (Slave Cabin, 81). Nevertheless, Randolph returned to Richmond to fulfill his pastoral duties on September 10, 1866, meeting none other than Frederick Douglass on the train. Like many Reconstruction-era southern black churches, Ebenezer grew exponentially under its first black pastor. By 1865, the church numbered seven hundred members with three hundred children in Sabbath School. One of Randolph’s accomplishments was to end the gender-segregated seating, a holdover from slavery, in the congregation, although this was his attempt to establish bourgeois social norms more than to promote equality for women. Along with other ministers, Randolph helped form the Shiloh Colored Baptist Association as black churches began to organize in the Richmond area. One of its requirements was that black pastors must be able to read and write in order to be ordained. Despite his successes, he tendered his resignation as pastor on December 13, 1869, which was reluctantly accepted. The congregation gave him a vote of thanks in the official record for “his the faithful manner in which he had discharged his duty during his term.”
While Randolph mentions his wife’s illness as the chief reason he left Richmond at this time, the political climate had changed dramatically with the radical Republicans soundly defeated by the Conservative Party in 1869. One of Randolph’s friends, Fields Cook, had tried to broker a bi-racial compromise to no avail and left Richmond for Alexandria. Despite excitement at the 1867 Republican Convention where three hundred delegates—three-fourths of whom were black—gathered at the First African Church in Richmond, 1869 saw a stunning reversal of a number of political gains for African Americans.

Return to Boston: Father Randolph

A Freedmen’s Bureau document dated January 11, 1870, from Boston, Massachusetts, shows that Randolph applied to the organization for financial assistance:

Randolph, Rev. Peter states that he has resigned as Pastor of the Ebenezer Church at Richmond, Va. and is now a missionary in the temperance cause at a salary of only $20.00 per month which is inadequate to support his family. Asks if some assistance cannot be provided him.

Randolph’s letter of Boston January 11, 1870, addressed to Oliver O. Howard, head of the Freedmen’s Bureau elaborates:

The writer of this letter I had the pleasure of meeting with you once in the Ebenezer Church at Richmond of which I was the pastor. Sir after my labours of four years and eighyt months among the freedmen of the south: I came to the conclusion that I could do them more good by acting as an independent missionary than to be settle over the church as pastor. I could labour in the Temperance cause which is so much need.
id[ sic] among my people so I resigned my post in the church and wish to
[unclear] my name as a missionary for which I have the promis [sic] of $20 per month
but that some [sic] being not enoth [sic] to suppite [sic] me with my family Sir could you
help me in the work that I am trying to do and Sir if you can will you write me here at
Boston and as I have promised to return to return to Richmond on the last of this month I
may call and see you Sir I also send you an extract from the mayor and letter as you may
see some thing of my work in Richmond and the need of it. Yours truly, Peter Randolph

Attached is a clipping from the Boston Transcript giving a character reference for Randolph,
stating “we hope it will induce generous contributions at the present time.” Following is a
statement from the mayor of Richmond attesting to Randolph’s work as a pastor at Ebenezer.

In 1870, Randolph returned to Boston for good and started a church in the South End,
also named Ebenezer. This area of Boston was heavily populated by southern-born blacks after
the Civil War. Randolph notes that the church was started “with a handful of earnest men and
women” (Slave Cabin, #). One of those people was Jefferson Ruffin from Upper Brandon.

Church history credits Martha Jones with originating the prayer meeting in her home that later
became Ebenezer. Massachusetts Statistics of Labor, a source from 1870, describes the living
conditions of what was known as Ottawa Place at Washington and Waltham Streets:

Each tenement will average three rooms, the largest 14x12 feet, with 8 feet posts. . . .

Twenty-six of the families are of colored persons, many of whom were slaves in and
about Petersburg, Va., before the emancipation proclamation. As a class, they are
temperate, religious, civil, clearly and industrious, and present a strong contrast to what
we had seen elsewhere and to what existed there before. One of the apartments is
occupied as a chapel, in which religious services are held on Sundays, and on Tuesday and Friday evenings.\textsuperscript{(180)}

The area was desperately poor as the agent noted parenthetically of some “colored men” who stood around that “(they were out of work)”\textsuperscript{(181)}. The agent concluded that the tenement was not compliant with basic sanitation and safety requirements of the city of Boston. In the 1870s, Randolph also “read law for awhile”\textsuperscript{88} and became a justice of the peace, a position to which he was appointed by three Massachusetts governors.

Although Randolph lists his occupation as “clergyman” on his census records from 1860 to 1890 and on all city directories during this period, there appears to be more to the story. In \textit{From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit}, he records a snippet of conversation that indicates another identity that remains virtually hidden in his writings. After suspecting that a new custodial client would not trust him overnight with the keys to his business, Randolph employs a phrase that he believes will crack open the door: “And I said to him, ‘Sir, I try to act on the square with all mankind.’ He looked sharply at me, and said, ‘Are you a mason?’ I answered in the affirmative. He said nothing more, but gave me the keys to carry day and night” (Slave Cabin, 27).

In his 1897 obituary, he was also touted as “well known to the abolitionists” compared to the stature of Lewis Hayden, then \textit{grand} master of the Prince Hall Masonic lodge in Boston. The obituary made the link to \textit{Freemasonry} explicit at the very end of the notice: “He was a past master of Rising Sun Lodge F. and A. M., and also past grand chaplain of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall grand lodge, F. and A. M. of Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{[Confirmation that Randolph was a Mason also sheds light on his motivation for traveling to Virginia in 1865. In addition to serving in refugee camps and pastoring Ebenezer Baptist Church, Randolph was also sent to form a new lodge in Richmond. Lewis Hayden, \textit{grand} master of the Boston lodge in 1865, broached the...}
subject of southern expansion of black Freemasonry after the Civil War in his annual address:

“To speak more particularly of our labors in that direction, I will here name the Lodges. The Lodge at Richmond is called the ‘James River Lodge.’ Its master is Brother Peter Randolph.”

He went on to say that in comparison to the Petersburg Pocahontas Lodge, which had already secured a four-story building, the Richmond Lodge was struggling and “obtained a room in which to form the Lodge with great difficulty.” This he charges to the relative lack of worthy candidates for the lofty ideals of Freemasonry:

I regret to say that at Richmond they did not present so hopeful an aspect, so intellectual nor so dignified a character, as I found among the people of Petersburg and Charleston; for while at Richmond there seemed to be jealousies and bickerings, so that in the words of the Scriptures, like Ishmael of old, their hands are against every man, and every man’s hand against them;—at Petersburg they had already formed land associations, building companies, &c.; and they appeared to be united and harmonious.

Before going south, Randolph was probably a member of Prince Hall African Lodge #459, chartered in 1775 and again by the English grand lodge [look up date]. As Hackett observes, Masonic membership provided African American males with the tools to negotiate manhood and self-determination as well as an alternative history and genealogy that traced their ancestry back to Solomon. Although “the marriage of church and lodge was not without conflict” [Hackett 797], it provided resources within which to forge an alternative identity to slavery. As a “black counterpublic,” Freemasonry provided the foundations of an empowered identity and opportunities to hone leadership skills denied free African American men. Why Randolph remained silent about his Masonic membership outside of this one case is a matter of speculation. Freemasonry is by nature shrouded in secrecy—rites, rituals, symbolism, and
elaborate processes of initiation and advancement. The fraternal order was, as one researcher stated, “hidden in plain sight.”写道 Dunbar, “that African Americans were rulers of their own affairs and where they planned their own agenda” [623]. In Sketches Randolph had been an astute observer and recorder of the “invisible institution” of antebellum “slave religion” and appears to have found a way to also give voice to “the other invisible institution” of black Freemasonry [Dunbar 625].

Randolph was not alone in serving in leadership roles in both the black church and black Freemasonry simultaneously. Dunbar notes that the black church and black fraternal organizations “complemented each other and have played interrelated roles in the way the black community addressed social, political, and economic problems” [623]. Thus, Freemasonry grew, even flourished, in the postbellum south as a kind of shadow organization of the black church, which became quite visible to southerners newly stinging from emancipation. In fact, such a dual role was commonplace in northern free black communities [Richard Allen, Absalom Jones] and among black carpetbaggers after the Civil War.92

In 1877, Randolph’s last remaining son, Charles, died at sixteen of tuberculosis, leaving only a daughter, Mary Frances, alive. Milly and Peter had buried seven of their eight children. Still, the 1880s and 1890s saw the marriage of Mary Frances to William Vannible93 and the birth of four grandchildren. Moreover, two surviving letters that Randolph wrote to Reverend Samuel May Jr. in 1887 shed further light on the impoverished conditions experienced by the formerly enslaved plantation workers in freedom. The first was written on September 15 of that year, the forty-year anniversary of the arrival of the sixty-six freed people in Boston. In it Randolph recalls his time as a slave in Virginia: “my dear sir I cannot write on this day without reflecting upon the past. I bare on me now some of the scars that I received in the house of Bondage and
must feel and suffer more as age [unclear] upon me. As had been his custom throughout his life, Randolph used the occasion to speak on behalf of those could not write for themselves. After thanking May for his support over the years, he states that “I am happy to say I am still trying to do what I can to make the world better the sixty six that landed here with me 40 years ago today very few of the older are alive I buried Thornton Ruffin 77 years old about two months ago.” Randolph’s plea for assistance is subtle yet unmistakable, “Please let me hear from you. Yours truly, Peter Randolph.” In a follow up to what must have been a request from May for the names of the survivors who were still living, Randolph writes again on September 21, 1887, saying “any little some thing that you please to send will be very thankfully rec’d.” Randolph reiterates his address as “no. 26 Webster street Charlestown” and—in an ironic echo of the list of emancipated slaves that May provided at the beginning of the second edition of Sketches—lists “Names of all the survivors that came with me from the James River.” At age sixty-seven, forty years after their initial arrival in Boston, Randolph was still in the role he served from his time on the plantation as leader, scribe, and spokesperson for the former slaves from the Edloe community.

On April 26, 1893, Peter Randolph delivered an address at the Danvers Historical Society meeting commemorating “old anti-slavery days.” On the program, he joined the giants of the antislavery movement, including William Lloyd Garrison, Samuel May, and Henry Ward Beecher, among many others. That Peter Randolph’s brief remarks were saved for last and that he—one of only two African American men on the program—was seated in the very back row of the proceedings gives us pause. Peter Randolph died on August 7, 1897, of nephritis. He was survived by his wife, Milly, and one daughter, Mary Frances Vannible. Milly is listed as living
with her granddaughter in 1900. Suffering from “acute bronchitis” and “senility,” she died ten years later in 1907.

Texts and Editions

Sketches of Slave Life

Randolph’s motives for writing Sketches were economic, ideological, theological, and personal, coming on the heels of the death of his two-year-old son William of “consumption” in 1854. Financially, neither his work as a janitor nor his attempts at ministry were generating much income. Ironically, his labor in janitorial work provided more than the economic motive for his writing. It generated his subject and approach to his life story and put him in the path of an editor for his two self-published 1855 texts. 97 In his custodial work, Randolph cleaned the offices of the Boston Transcript, and it was there that he met Daniel Haskell, the editor of the Transcript from 1852–1874, 98 whom he lists in From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit as one of his “friends”:

Mr. Daniel Haskell, of the Transcript, was a great help to me in getting my little book—“Sketches of Slave Life”—before the public. He gave publicity to it through the columns of his paper, and said in his editorial, that he “had seen more in the little pamphlet, than he had read in volumes on the subject of slavery.” From this announcement there was a great demand for my little book, and I was compelled to issue a second edition. [21?]

Abolitionist papers also ran announcements for the publication of both editions of Sketches. The first was The Liberator on Friday, May 18, 1855:

"SKETCHES OF SLAVE LIFE.” A neat little pamphlet, entitled ‘Sketches of Slave Life: or, Illustrations of the Peculiar Institution, by Peter Randolph, an
Emancipated Slave,’ had just been published in this city for the benefit of the author, who was one of the sixty-six slaves emancipated by C. H. Edloe, of Prince George’s [sic] County, Virginia, in 1847—men, women, and children, from twelve months to seventy-five years old—all of whom came to Boston, and, as Peter says with laudable pride, ‘are proving to the world, by their conduct, that slaves, when liberated, can take care of themselves, and need no master or overseer to drive them to their toil.’ Peter is a very worthy man, and we hope he will meet with a kind welcome and find ready purchasers wherever he presents himself.”

In November of 1855, The Liberator announced the publication of the second edition:

“\textit{A new edition of the little work, entitled, ‘Sketches of Slave Life: or, Illustrations of the Peculiar Institution; by Peter Randolph, an emancipated slave,’ has just been published by its author, and more than doubled in its size. It contains an introduction by Samuel May, Jr., General Agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, giving the particulars of the emancipation and disposal of the sixty-six slaves, set free by the will of Carter H. Edloe, of Prince George County, Virginia, and brought to Boston in 1847. We hope it will find many purchasers.”

While Randolph doesn’t name the printer of his books, a likely candidate is Benjamin F. Roberts, an African American who started the Anti-Slavery Herald in 1838 [check date] and in 1843 opened a printing shop on Beacon Hill. Roberts’ shop specialized in pamphlets, books, and Masonic tracts. He also prided himself on being the only printing press “conducted by Colored persons.” [source this]

From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit
In his 1893 address at the Danvers Historical Society, Randolph mentioned that he was writing yet another installment of his autobiography: “I am now writing up a history of my work in the north and south, and I called upon an editor the other day and was repeating to him some of the topics I had written upon—and some of them about the race problem—and he said to me, ‘If you could solve those problems, you would be Moses.’” (“Address of Rev. Peter Randolph” 56).

Several themes that are key to Randolph’s motivation in writing Slave Cabin appear in this passage. First is his desire to insert himself into the key debates about race and the future of African Americans in the United States. Second is his desire to organize his experience regionally due to his “work north and south.” It is not clear when Randolph decided to append a version of Sketches of Slave Life to the end of Slave Cabin but the commemorative exercise at Danvers’ Old Anti-Slavery Days must have reminded him of how much of the lived experience of slavery was getting lost. He writes in the Preface to his 1893 text: “I have added for preservation, a pamphlet of sketches issued by me in 1855 on the ‘Peculiar Institution’... this little work... I desire to keep in print” [# my emphasis].

We do not know who the unnamed editor was for Slave Cabin, however, Randolph found a publisher for the book, James H. Earle Publishers, located first on 11 Cornhill Street and then at 178 Washington Street in Boston. They published twenty-one books from 1870–1900 and, among other periodicals, the Boston Contributor, a monthly evangelical magazine that sold for one dollar and advertised itself as “A large, Wide-Awake, Undenominational, Religious, Family Paper.” Earle was notable for publishing Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s 1892 novel Iola Leroy, or, Shadows Uplifted and Emma Dunham Kelley’s Megda in the same year. In 1874, Earle had published The History of the Twelfth Baptist Church to which Randolph had belonged when he
arrived in Boston in the late 1840s. In the 1880s, James H. Earle published a series of volumes by William Makepeace Thayer, a minister who wrote two books with titles similar to *Slave Cabin: From Log Cabin to the White House: Life of James A. Garfield* (1881) and *From Pioneer Home to the White House: Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1887). Thayer had been secretary of the Massachusetts Temperance Alliance from 1860–1876, an organization that Randolph worked for after returning from the south in 1870. The two may have met there, and Thayer is a likely prospect for the editor of *Slave Cabin*.

Variants

Both editions of *Sketches* were published “for the author” and as such have some, but relatively few, inconsistencies of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. I have retained original spelling and usage where possible but have edited for clarity and consistency (for example Anti-Slavery and Anti-slavery). “Negroes” and “neggers” have been retained as Randolph’s own usages. Where any change has been made, it has been noted in the endnotes.
Notes to Preface

1 Sketches of Slave Life, or Illustrations of the “Peculiar Institution” by Peter Randolph, An Emancipated Slave, Second Edition Enlarged (Boston: Published for the Author, 1855), 147. Sketches of Slave Life, or Illustrations of the “Peculiar Institution” by Peter Randolph, An Emancipated Slave (Boston: Published for the Author) was published in May 1855 (hereafter referred to as Sketches). The second edition, cited here, was published just three months later in August 1855 (hereafter referred to as Second Edition). From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit: The Autobiography of Rev. Peter Randolph. The Southern Question Illustrated and Sketches of Slave Life, (Boston: James H. Earle) was published in 1893 (referred to as Slave Cabin). Subsequent references to these works are provided in the text with abbreviated titles and page numbers.

2 In 1806, Virginia state law mandated that slaves manumitted by the wills of deceased masters had to be transported out of the commonwealth at the expense of the estate. Two copies of the emancipated slaves’ free papers have survived. Each consists of a printed copy of Edloe’s will including a statement that “the bearer hereof . . . is one of the Slaves emancipated by the Will aforesaid.” A handwritten description of the emancipated individual is included at the bottom. On the copy given to Anthony Randolph, Peter’s brother, he is described as “a dark mulatto man, Twenty five years old, five feet, nine and a half inches high, has a small scar under the right eye, a scar in the forehead, and a mole on the inside of each hand near the thumb.” Athenæum, Robert Morris Papers. On a copy that belonged to Maria Clark, she is described as “of light brown complexion; aged twenty years; five feet one inch high; she has a small mark on the upper joint of right forefinger.” Boston Athenæum, Robert Morris Papers. On a copy that belonged to Maria Clark, she is described as “of light brown complexion; aged twenty years; five feet one inch high; she has a small mark on the upper joint of right forefinger.” Boston Athenæum, Robert Morris Papers.
Edloe’s further gift of fifty dollars to each was unusual as was his legacy of $8,000 to one particular slave, Harriet Barber, who went to Philadelphia with their four children.

3 In his writings, Randolph never names his wife or children. Milly “and two children;” brothers Anthony, James, and Richard; and his aunt Harriet Bailey, are all listed with the settlement of the Edloe estate in the 1855 Virginia Chancery record, Carter H. Edloe executor v. Martha Orgain, etc, Petersburg City 1855-020, Randolph’s death certificate in 1897 lists his parents as “Anthony” and “Lindia” (sometimes spelled Lidia or Lydia) of “Brandon Virginia.”

Massachusetts Death Records, 1841–1915, 120.


5 Sometimes spelled Wixon or Wickson. See ship notices for the Boston Daily Atlas, June 27, 1845; August 14, 1845, and November 21, 1850.

6 Levi Cooper, deposition, Virginia Chancery, Carter H. Edloe executor v. Martha Orgain, etc, Petersburg City 1855-020.

7 Randolph mentions his occupation on the plantation in only one place, at the end of a deposition dated January 27, 1855. In an 1845 document appraising Edloe’s estate, Randolph is listed as “Blacksmith Peter” and is appraised for $550. Virginia Chancery, Carter H. Edloe executor v.
Martha Orgain, etc, Petersburg City 1855-020. He is referred to as “Father Randolph” in his obituary, “Recent Deaths: Rev. Peter Randolph, New England’s Oldest Colored Preacher,” Boston Evening Transcript, August 9, 1897.

8 Randolph does not write about the journey to Boston, but a letter from Jonathan Walker in The Liberator on October 21, 1847, gives details about a stop before arriving in Boston due to a storm:

While Capt. Wixon was on his passage from James River to Boston, with the liberated slaves, he met with a head wind in passing the Cape, near where he lived, and consequently stopped a day or two, went on shore, (and as I am informed by his neighbors and one of the slaves,) called a meeting in their behalf, and collected for them clothing, provision, and money, to the amount of upwards of twenty dollars, whilst a part of the neighborhood was making a hue-and-cry about his bringing the emancipated slaves away from their prison-house to breathe, if possible a little free air in Massachusetts.

Another account of the stopover says that Wixon “had nothing to do with the collection” but apparently confirms that the boat made a stop because of the storm. See “The Sixty-Six Slaves at West Harwich,” The Liberator, November 5, 1847.

9 Randolph reported that they had been given William Lloyd Garrison’s name by William T. Joynes, a Petersburg, Virginia, attorney “who was interested in us,” Slave Cabin, 180.

10 See Note 7 above.

Notes to Introduction

11 William L. Andrews notes that “the autobiographies of former slaves dominated the African American literary landscape through out the nineteenth century, not just up to 1865.” William L.

12 Several pages of Sketches are excerpted in Maurice Duke’s multi-author edition, Don’t Carry Me Back!: Narratives by Former Virginia Slaves (The Dietz Press, 1995). Douglass’s three autobiographies are: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself (1845), My Bondage and My Freedom (1855), and The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (1881). For the only full length critical treatment of Sketches, see my “Crossing Over: Free Space, Sacred Place and Intertextual Geographies in Peter Randolph’s Sketches of Slave Life,” Journal of Religion and Literature 35, no. 2–3 (2003): 113–41.


16 Andrews, Slave Narratives after Slavery.
A notable case is Jean Fagan Yellin’s 1987 edition of Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Frederick Douglass made a point of chiding those former slaves, like Henry Box Brown and William and Ellen Craft, for divulging too much information on their escape methods in his 1845 *Narrative*. In *History of Mary Prince* (1831), Mary Prince often used initials when referring to former slave owners. Perhaps the most famous case is Harriet Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) who, writing after the Fugitive Slave Law, fictionalized the names of both slaves and slaveholders.

An interesting case in this regard is *Narrative of James Williams, An American Slave* (1838), long thought to have been an abolitionist hoax based on an investigation by an Alabama newspaper. Recently, Hank Trent has proven that James Williams (whose real name was Shadrach Wilkins) was an actual slave who altered some details about his life story to avoid recapture. See Hank Trent, ed., *Narrative of James Williams, an American Slave, annotated ed.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2013).

This statement begs to be placed in comparative context. First, I make this claim in comparison with the vast majority of millions of African Americans whose stories may possibly never be reclaimed. Secondly, it is also important to note that compared to the information on the wealthy slaveholding families connected to Randolph’s writings, information on the enslaved individuals is still woefully incomplete.

Stephanie A. Smith, “Harriet Jacobs: A Case History of Authentication,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey Fisch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 194. Smith’s problematizing of the insistence on authentication is well taken. I would add my discomfort with approaching archival work as a solution or “the answer”
to what “really” happened, since archives are themselves socially constructed and politically motivated. For poststructuralist critiques of the archives, see Jacques Derrida, “Archive Fever” and Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge. See also Leon Jackson, “The Talking Book and the Talking Book Historian” and the essays in Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein, ed., Early African American Print Culture (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

22 A case in point is how the abolitionist fear of claims of “inauthenticity” caused James Williams’s 1836 narrative to be disqualified by scholars from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century. See note 18 below.


25 For example, see Davis and Gates, eds., The Slave’s Narrative, and more recently Fisch, Cambridge Companion to African American Slave Narrative. For one thing, Randolph’s texts address an issue virtually silenced in abolition-sponsored slave narratives—northern proslavery sentiment, taking on by name the notorious A South-Side View of Slavery, written by Boston clergyman Nehemiah Adams (1806–1878) and recounting three months’ journey in the South in 1854. The book’s conclusions are conciliatory towards slavery and based on what Randolph viewed as propaganda on the part of the slaveholders to make slavery appear favorable to gullible northern and international visitors. In these ways, Randolph calls into question many of the familiar
paradigms of politics and geography—north versus south—that underwrote the fugitive slave narrative.

26 Often the terms “manumission” and “emancipation” are used interchangeably. Some scholars use “manumission” to refer to single acts, with “emancipation” signifying large-scale manumissions. Howard Bodenhorn, “Manumission in Nineteenth-Century Virginia,” Cliometrica 5 (2011): 145–64. Others distinguish between manumissions as acts of individual slaveholders that occurred throughout the span of slavery versus emancipation as state or federal legislative acts that freed large numbers of slaves. Andrew Fede, People without Rights (New York: Garland Press, 1992). In the sense that I am using them here, “emancipation” is a more general term that can stand for both the Edloe plantation manumissions and the later emancipation of all enslaved people in 1863, encompassed by Randolph’s From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit.

“Emancipation narratives,” by my definition, center the emancipatory act with all of its legal, political, and psychological ramifications rather than the fugitive experience.


28 Most sources list Randolph’s birth date as 1825. He was listed as twenty-seven years old by Samuel May, Jr. when he arrived in Boston, so 1820 is another possible year of his birth. He is listed in the inventory of Allen’s estate on Wakefield plantation in 1832.

29 John A. Selden etc. Griffin Orgain and Wife, Surry County, Virginia Chancery 1838-012-0014.

30 According to Sketches, Edloe died July 29, 1844. This is consistent with estate appraisal documents dated August 3, 1844, just five days after his death. An earlier date is inscribed on
Edloe’s tombstone at Claremont: “In memory of Carter H. Edloe who was born August 28, 1798 and died August 26, 1843 of apoplexy. This stone erected by his nieces E.C. and M.M. Orgain.”

This tombstone was erected sometime after his death. William and Mary Quarterly 8, no. 2 (1899): 114. A similar tombstone of Richard Griffin Orgain lists his death as 1830 when he actually died in 1837.

31 See note number 3 of the preface.


33 The swamp is probably the thousand-acre Kennon Marsh which lies adjacent to Upper Brandon.

34 In the settlement of the legal claim against the Orgains for the Edloe estate, Peter is given five and a half shares, including shares for two brothers—James and Richard—“dec’d without issue.” Anthony survived the trip to Boston. I want to thank Lynda Perry, my graduate research assistant, for discovering a copy of Edloe’s will belonging to “Anthony Randolph” and his free papers in special collections at the Boston Athenæum.

35 The 1836 Will of Richard Hubert Cocke mentions leaving “one other female child to William Allen which was held in dower the child of Palina who died, for the above purpose and to be carried off by Walker her Father a free man for the sum of eighty dollars.” Surry County 1836-041. A further document “List of Negroes belonging to the estate of R. H. Cocke” includes the names “Palina” (sometimes spelled “Paulina”) and “Milly.” The “one other female child” sent to William Allen was probably Milly. A James Walker “and his daughter Clara” is listed as having been emancipated by Allen in 1832.

36 An appraisal list of Edloe’s estate in 1845 lists “Milly and her children” valued at $300 and Randolph as “Blacksmith Peter” separately. A January 28, 1847 document “List of Negroes of
Carter H. Edloe, dec’d” records the decision of each of the slaves, and on line four, “Milly & 2 children” “Elect to be free, & to go now to Boston.” Line thirteen lists “Peter Randolph To be free & go now to Boston” separately. John A. Selden etc. v. Griffin Orgain and Wife, Surry County, Virginia Chancery 1838-012-0028 and 0029. It is customary in these types of documents to list males and females/children separately, as the system of slavery did not legally recognize African American marriages and family units.

37 The historical records often refer to the entire general area as “Brandon,” a peninsula of some 5,000. Robert Hilldrup, Upper Brandon (Richmond, VA: James River Corporation, 1987), 3. In 1803, the Brandon estate was divided into two equal parts between two sons, George Evelyn Harrison and William Byrd Harrison. Randolph would have lived on the property after the Brandon lands were divided between the two Harrison brothers. What he refers to in Sketches as Upper, Middle, and Lower Brandon are three properties on the same massive plot of land. A local historian states that Carter H. Edloe inherited “Little Brandon” from John and Ann Edloe: “By the time John Edloe died in 1816 he owned 980 acres on the James River just upstream from the present ‘Upper Brandon,’” Eve S. Gregory, Claremont: A History (Richmond, VA: Plummer Printing Co., 1990), 50. This appears to be a third large estate that Randolph refers to as “Upper Brandon” due to its position “upstream.” See Prince George County Land Tax records for the years 1826-1850 (Deed Book 18, Reel #4).

38 Hilldrup, Upper Brandon, 29. See also Gregory, Claremont Manor.


Surry County Will Book 1830-1834, 362. Torrington Ruffin, his wife Harriet, and three children made the trip to Boston with Randolph and the others in 1847. He was born around 1811 and died in Massachusetts in 1887; Massachusetts Death Records, 1841–1915. A “striker” is a blacksmith’s assistant or apprentice who swings a large sledgehammer during forging operations. Randolph may have apprenticed as a blacksmith on Allen’s plantation in Southampton County and joined Torrington at the forge in Cabin Point after 1838 when he was transferred to Edloe’s plantation.


Sources on blacksmiths


This section, which opens the first edition, is moved to the end of Second Edition and Slave Cabin.

The strategy of recounting the atrocities of slavery by focusing on the unique suffering of slave women, especially mothers, is one used by both Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs.

Carter H. Edloe, was born into two prominent Virginia families on August 28, 1798, to John and Ann (Allen) Edloe. He was second offspring in a line of sisters: Anne, Mary, and Martha. Their father John died without a will in 1816, leaving his estate to their mother, who died in 1833. In 1817, Carter Edloe is listed in a “catalogue of alumni” of the College of William and Mary as an attorney. Sometime prior to 1837, he met Harriet Barber, an enslaved mulatto
woman, and purchased her “and the children” from his brother-in-law Richard Orgain. Edloe fathered her five children: Elizabeth born 1832, Caroline born 1833, Sarah born 1834, William born 1837, and Harriet born 1840. In 1838, shortly after inheriting a “lot” of slaves from his uncle, Edloe wrote his will freeing all of his slaves and leaving Harriet and the children $8,000.

He died on July 29, 1844, at the age of forty-six.

48 May to Estlin, 31 October 1847, Boston Public Library.


50 John A. Selden (1802–?) was Carter H. Edloe’s first cousin and inherited “Lot no. 9” according to his uncle William Allen’s will. He owned neighboring Westover plantation from 1829–1862. See John Spencer Basset and Sidney Bradshaw Fay, eds., The Westover Journal of John A. Selden, Esqr., 1858–1862 (Northampton, MA: PUBLISHER, 1921), 257–330. This edition is highly abridged, leaving out, for example, a list of blacks who escaped behind northern lines in 1862. The original journal in its entirety is available at the Virginia Historical Society.

51 Brana-Shute and Sparks, Paths to Freedom, 3.

52 Bodenhorn, “Manumission,” 145. See also Fede, People without Rights, 141–42.


54 A year after the Edloe ex-slaves arrived in Boston, for example, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society reported that “the number of acts of emancipation by individual slave-
holders has considerably increased during the past year, evincing that the consciences of slaveholders have been affected in an unusual degree by anti-slavery discussion.” The report cited manumissions by Colonel James Epes of Dinwiddie County, Virginia, who emancipated “over forty slaves who were sent to Ohio” (34). The report also included an account of Captain John Warwick of Amherst County, Virginia, who “had manumitted by his will all his slaves, numbering between 70 and 80” (34). Warwick’s will was probated on March 23, 1848, and, like the news of Edloe’s death, his act of emancipation was reported in both The National Anti-Slavery Standard (April 20, 1848) and Douglass’s The North Star (April 28, 1848). Although Warwick’s will stipulated a preference for his emancipated slaves to settle in Indiana, by the time the will was proved, Indiana had instituted anti-fugitive slave legislation. The will’s executor, David Patterson, purchased land in Ohio and settled the eleven families there. Unfortunately, and perhaps by design, the land was found to be swamp land, and many of the liberated party died of disease. The remainder left, many returning to Virginia. History of Logan County and of Ohio.

Orlando Patterson, Freedom in the Making of Western Culture (New York: Basic Books, 1991), #.


See John Warwick will, Virginia Historical Society, Unknown No Longer, digital database.

Warwick singles out several slaves for special provision in his will:

3rd. I wish my faithful and confidential servant Frederick, and his wife Lucy, and her eight children; also my cook Nicey and her three youngest children, as well as any others hereafter born in either family to remain upon that part of [the] [sic] plantation now occupied by the said Frederick and his family, during the natural life of the said Frederick, should they not in the meantime elect to remove and become absolutely free.
This offer came with a small plot of land and minimal financial legacy. Frederick, Lucy and Nicey were all listed with those who opted for their free papers.

58 For a parallel case, however, we need look no further than the 1832 will of Edloe’s uncle William Allen:

9thly. I hereby emancipate and set free my slaves Emanuel Jones, Sylvia and her six children, Maurice, James, Manuel, Katy, Indiana and Mary Eliza, James Walker and his daughter Clara, and my woman slave Jane called Jane Tabb. (my emphasis)

In the will, Emanuel Jones was left a legacy of $6,000, a thousand dollars more than Allen left to his grandnieces. Sylvia and her children received $1,000, James Walker and his daughter, $2,500, and Jane Tabb $250 “so as to furnish them the means of leaving the state of Virginia and settling themselves elsewhere.” While this gesture appears to follow the letter of the law concerning slave manumissions and deportation, the amounts of the legacies are somewhat excessive. According to Randolph, this list would have included Allen’s “colored sons,” meaning that he had fathered some or all of Sylvia’s six children. Unlike Edloe’s emancipated slaves, Sylvia, Emanuel Jones, and the others stayed in Surry County, listed in the Free Negro Register until 1845. At least one, Emanuel, chose to become a paid free black overseer on his “father’s” Claremont plantation. See Gregory, Claremont Manor, 127 and 130.

59 May to Estlin, 31 October 1847, Boston Public Library.

60 See John A. Selden etc. vs. Griffin Orgain and Wife, Surry County, Virginia Chancery 1838-0017.

61 Cite death certificate for Caroline Barber.
Of course census records are notoriously unreliable, especially where African American subjects who could not read or write are concerned. It is interesting to note, for example, that Harriet’s children all used the surname Barber, not Edloe.

Fede, *People without Rights*, 139. While I appreciate Fede’s analysis, cautioning against prematurely reading manumissions as gestures of slaveholder largesse, I am concerned that in the process he seems to strip agency and intentionality away from enslaved people, painting a picture of enslavement as a totalizing regime.

In a letter from Samuel May Jr. to John Estlin dated October 31, 1847, *Boston Public Library*. May tells Estlin that Edloe was “a slaveholder of a different stamp from the many most.” May describes Edloe as “a pretty easy, good-natured man” and characterizes his relationship with Harriet as consensual. He refers to Harriet as “the only wife he had, and she of course not legally such.” May reports what he must have heard from the emancipated slaves that Edloe fathered Harriet’s children, calling them parenthetically “(his own also).” This sense is corroborated in John Selden’s diary entry of August 3, 1844: “I found in C. H. Edloe’s house in silver 16.80 which I paid to Harriet—and $19 in notes.” John A. Selden Diary, 1841–1848, On the complications of “consensual” relationships between male slaveholders and female slaves, see Annette Gordon Reed’s analysis of the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings in her brilliant history *The Hemingses of Monticello* (New York: Norton, 2008).

John A. Selden etc. v. Griffin Orgain and Wife, Surry County, Virginia Chancery 1838—12 and 0013.

“Emancipated Slaves,” *The Liberator*, September 24, 1847, issue 39, 158. A similar article ran in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 7, 1847, issue 19, 75. There were follow-ups in a number of papers, including “The Sixty-Six Emancipated Slaves,” *The Liberator*, October 15,
1847, issue 42, 167; The National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 21, 1847, issue 21, 82; The Pennsylvania Freeman, October 21, 1847, issue 43; and “The Sixty-Six Slaves at West Harwich,” The Liberator November 5, 1847, issue 45.

67 May to Estlin, 31 October 1847, Boston Public Library.

68 This class ambiguity is illustrated by the classification of occupations that categorizes janitors and waiters as “unskilled or semi-skilled” and ministers as “professional” class. See Appendix A “Occupational Classifications” in James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979).

69 Notes on Shadrach, Latimer and Anthony Burns cases.

70 Webster Street was renamed Sackville Street in 1892.

71 Robert Morris (1832–1882), one of the first African Americans to pass the state bar in Massachusetts, had a law office in Boston. Copies of documents written by Morris are similar in handwriting to the documents found in the Virginia Chancery file on the Randolph case. Morris was also known for being the only attorney in Boston who would represent Irish immigrants. A copy of Anthony Randolph’s free papers is housed in the Robert Morris Papers in the Boston Athenæum.

72 Compare with Frederick Douglass, who honed the telling of his story on the antislavery lecture circuit long before its publication in 1845.

73 Some of the hesitation here could stem from his role in forging the shackles and other instruments that caused the suffering of his fellow slaves.

74 David May (1796–1870) was the much younger brother of John F. May, a judge, who returned to the practice of law in 1850 in partnership with his son-in-law, William T. Joynes. Claiborne
writes that the brothers were not “eloquent advocates, but counselors—safe, just, and conscientious.” Claiborne, Seventy-Five Years in Old Virginia, 107. See also S. Bassett French Biographical Sketches, LVA, 453–454. I thank John Kneebone for this information.

75 Peter received “his own Share, his wife Milly’s share & those of her two infant children, ½ of James and Rich’d Randolph’s shares (his brothers) who was [sic] deceased without issue, & ½ of Fanny Bailey’s share who is also dead without issue (his aunt)- Making in all 5 1/2 shares=$58.55.”

76 It was not uncommon in the nineteenth-century for African Americans, especially black ministers, to publish periodicals. The “fugitive blacksmith” James W. C. Pennington, for example, published The Clarksonian in Hartford Connecticut in 1843, Samuel Ringgold Ward published The Impartial Citizen in 1850, and Benjamin F. Roberts published The Anti-Slavery Herald for five months in 1838 and The Self-Elevator in 1850. In 1843, Roberts opened a print shop that “specialized in printing pamphlets, books, and Masonic tracts” known to be “the only printing establishment in the country that is conducted by Colored Persons.” It is likely that Roberts printed Randolph’s Sketches of Slave Life.

77 According to the Freedmen’s Bureau, Randolph “served four years in the Massachusetts 26th volunteers. See Records of the Field Offices for the State of Virginia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872, publication no. M1913, film no. 2413571, digital folder no. 4150371, image no. 0781.

78 The Randolphs’ son is named after Charles A. Sumner (1811–1874), Massachusetts senator and Radical Republican opposed to slavery and its aftereffects during Reconstruction. Randolph recounts a lengthy meeting with Sumner on pages 87–88 of Slave Cabin.

80 Always A Minority [pp. ##]


82 See Note 77 above.


84 See Note 77 above.

85 *Slave Cabin*, 81.

86 *Proceedings of the Shiloh Colored Baptist Association*, 4.
Oliver O. Howard (1830–1909) was Union general given charge of the Freedmen’s Bureau after the Civil War in mid-1865. He became the founder of Howard University and served as its president from 1867–1873.

Randolph “read law for a while” under Edwin Garrison Walker, son of David Walker who wrote the Appeal.

Lewis Hayden, Caste among Masons: Address before Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Massachusetts at the Festival of St. John the Evangelist, December 27, 1865, 2nd ed. (Boston: Printed by Edward S. Coombs and Co., 1866), 7.


Alternately spelled in census and other records as Vannible, Venable, and Vanderbilt.

Randolph to Samuel May, 15 September 1887, Boston Public Library.

Randolph’s list provided the following names in this order: “Mrs. Mary Mosson [Mason], John Harris, Maria Carter, Marria [sic] Clark, Edwin Seldon, Anthony Randolph my Brother, Sally Seldon, Mary Seldon, Fannie Clark + Lottice [?], Jef [sic] Ruffin, George Masson [Mason], Peter Randolph and wife.” He added: “Many of these was [sic] very Young at the time. . . . some infants.”

On Randolph's refutation of northern proslavery views in Sketches, especially Nehemiah Adams's notorious A South-Side View of Slavery, see my "Crossing Over."

Joseph Edgar Chamberlin, The Boston Transcript: A History of Its First Hundred Years (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930). The Transcript was in no ways a radical paper and often opposed the more radical forms of abolition. Once Haskill's editorship began in 1852, the paper "now constantly advance[d] toward a stronger antislavery position" (63).

A similar ad ran in Frederick Douglass's Paper (Rochester, New York) on Friday June 11, 1855:

F. DOUGLASS, ESQ.: DEAR SIR:--Peter Randolph, formerly owned as a slave, by C. H. Edloe, of Prince George County, Virginia, and emancipated in 1847, has published a neat little book, entitled "Sketches of Slave Life: or, Illustrations of the Peculiar Institution." Every man who says that the blacks are incapable of intellectual advancement, had here another [unclear] in accounting for this freed slave being able to write a book. It is an interesting little volume. It can be had in this city at John P. Jewett's book store, and the antislavery office: the price is only twenty cents. We are personally acquainted with Mr. Randolph, and know him to be a worthy man, and hope every lover of freedom will buy his book and read it.
Note 22: A case in point is how the abolitionist fear of claims of “inauthenticity” caused James William’s 1836 narrative to be disqualified by scholars from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century. See note 18 below.

First, in Note 19, the date for Williams’s narrative is given as 1838. Is 1836 or 1838 correct?

Second, do you mean ‘See note 19 above’ instead of ‘See note 18 below’?

Note 25: . . . For one thing, Randolph’s texts address an issue virtually silenced in abolition-sponsored slave narratives—northern proslavery sentiment, taking on by name Boston clergymen Nehemiah Adams’s notorious A South-Side View of Slavery. In these ways, Randolph calls into question many of the familiar paradigms of politics and geography—north versus south—that underwrote the fugitive slave narrative. Nehemiah Adams (1806–1878) was a Boston clergyman who published A South-Side View of Slavery recounting three months’ journey in the south in 1854. The book’s conclusions are conciliatory towards slavery and based on what Randolph viewed as propaganda on the part of the slaveholders who made slavery appear favorable to gullible northern and international visitors.

The information presented in the note (e.g., Boston clergyman and name of book) is redundant. I have rewritten as follows: . . . For example, see Davis and Gates Jr., Slave’s Narrative, and more recently Fisch, Cambridge Companion to African American Slave Narrative. For one thing, Randolph’s texts address an issue virtually silenced in abolition-sponsored slave narratives—northern proslavery sentiment, taking on by name the notorious A South-Side View of Slavery, written by Boston clergyman Nehemiah Adams (1806–1878) and recounting three months’ journey in the South in 1854. The book’s conclusions are conciliatory towards slavery and based on what Randolph viewed as propaganda on the part of the slaveholders to make slavery appear favorable to gullible northern and international visitors. In these ways, Randolph calls into question many of the familiar paradigms of politics and geography—north versus south—that underwrote the fugitive slave narrative.

OK?

Note 53: There were several famous plantation manumissions in Virginia, beginning with Samuel Gist who freed 350 slaves after the War of 1812 posthumously from Great Britain. Perhaps the most famous was Thomas Jefferson Randolph (grandson of the third president) whose 383 slaves were freed in 1846, some years after his death in 1833…

The information at the beginning of Note 53 is redundant with the original first sentence of this paragraph:
Famous large plantation manumissions included Robert Carter III’s 1791 “Deed of Gift” in which he intended to free more than 500 slaves, Samuel Gist whose will freed 350 slaves after the war of 1812 posthumously from Great Britain, and Thomas Jefferson Randolph (grandson of the third president) whose will manumitted 383 slaves in 1846 (years after his death in 1833).

I have rewritten the sentence and deleted the redundant info in the note. OK?


Please provide the volume and issue number for Levy’s article.

Note 54: A year after the Edloe ex-slaves arrived in Boston, for example, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society reported that “the number of acts of emancipation by individual slave-holders has considerably increased during the past year, evincing that the consciences of slave-holders have been affected in an unusual degree by anti-slavery discussion.” The report cited manumissions by Colonel James Epes of Dinwiddie County, Virginia, who emancipated “over forty slaves who were sent to Ohio” (34). The report also included an account of Captain John Warwick of Amherst County, Virginia, who “had manumitted by his will all his slaves, numbering between 70 and 80” (34). Warwick’s will was probated on March 23, 1848, and, like the news of Edloe’s death, his act of emancipation was reported in both The National Anti-Slavery Standard (April 20, 1848) and Douglass’s The North Star (April 28, 1848). Although Warwick’s will stipulated a preference for his emancipated slaves to settle in Indiana, by the time the will was proved, Indiana had instituted anti-fugitive slave legislation. The will’s executor, David Patterson, purchased land in Ohio and settled the eleven families there. Unfortunately, and perhaps by design, the land was found to be swampland, and many of the liberated party died of disease. The remainder left, many returning to Virginia. History of Logan County and of Ohio.

1) Please provide complete citation information for the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society report.

2) I'm not sure I follow the sentence about Indiana's anti-fugitive slave legislation. I read 'anti-fugitive slave legislation' as legislation going against fugitive slave laws (and, consequently, legislation that was perhaps more favorable to runaway and ex-slaves).

3) Please provide complete citation information for the History of Logan County and Ohio source.

Delete this and replace with an endnote containing a shortened citation form based on the complete citation provided in note 54.
Fede, People without Rights, 153.


Please provide the page number for the direct quotation.

Petersburg City, Edloe, executor versus Mary Orgain, etc. 1855-020.