
The Plantation Letters: Teaching About Slavery with Primary Sources and Web Tools

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Project Background

- new Web collection with primary source letters written to/from patriarchs of North Carolina plantations, <http://plantationletters.com/>
 - includes correspondence from overseers, wives, and children, with information about the lives of slaves inferred from the context of letters
 - goal is to help users interpret life on antebellum plantations from the perspective of underrepresented persons--slaves, women, and children
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Project Background

- project includes "content" in the form of historic letters
 - it also includes student-centered "lessons" that involve students in extracting and analyzing information in the letters using contemporary web tools
 - old content + new tools/analysis/interaction = higher-level thinking and reflection
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Project Context

- Cameron Family Papers, part of the Southern Historical Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill
 - 35,000 undigitized items available for review at the on-campus Wilson Library
 - letters span a period from 1757-1978
 - we're pulling and digitizing letters from the antebellum period that help to inform users about the life of slaves, women, and children on Cameron plantations (Stagville, Fairtosh, Greene County AL, Tunica County MS)
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Cameron/Bennehan Families

- wealthy planter families in central North Carolina
 - two plantations preserved--Stagville state historic site, and privately held Fairtosh
 - the Camerons held some 30,000 acres of land (47 square miles) and more than 1000 slaves just prior to the Civil War on North Carolina plantations in Orange, Wake, Person, and Granville counties
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Digitization Process

- reading, photographing single pages at library**
 - cropping and combining pages from a letter (PDF)
 - transcribing letters (Word)**
 - tagging letters with series #, box, folder, date, doctype, author, location, subjects, themes, and summary
 - saving letters in digital-friendly format (FlashPaper, .swf); original file, transcribed file, and both
 - uploading letters and tags to sql database to allow for searches by subject/theme
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Access to Primary Sources

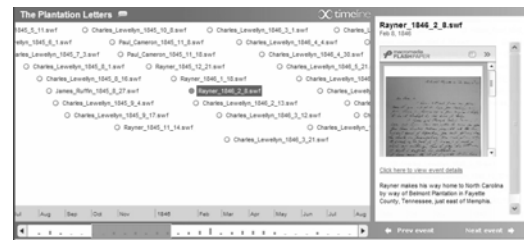
- currently finalizing sql database and search interface that will allow for subject/theme searches
- already online is an index of letters sorted chronologically and by author

Paul Cameron Letters (owner/partner, resident Fairbairn Plantation, North Carolina)

Row	Original Letter	Transcribed Letter	Text	Page
1	1844-11-11	1844-11-11	series: 1.3.3, box: 40, folder: 934, date: 1844-11-11, docType: letter, author: Paul Cameron, location: Stagville, subjects: slaves, general health, supplies, clothing, jobs, slave relocation, land acquisition, plantation, cotton, corn, oats, wheat, potatoes, medicine	1844-11-11
2	1844-11-11	1844-11-11	summary: Paul discusses the health of family and slaves with two medications given to slaves (salmon and opium). Paul begins making plans to relocate slaves to Sliverigi, Alabama, purchasing supplies and clothing.	1844-11-11
3	1844-11-11	1844-11-11	series: 1.3.3, box: 40, folder: 935, date: 1844-11-12, docType: letter, author: Paul Cameron, location: Stagville, subjects: slaves, general health, supplies, clothing, animals, horseback, wagon, leisure activities, overseer	1844-11-12
4	1844-11-11	1844-11-11	summary: Paul makes plans to move some slaves to his new plantation in Greene County, Alabama. An overseer named Walter is mentioned, associated with the Fairbairn plantation adjacent to Stagville.	1844-11-12
5	1844-11-11	1844-11-11	series: 1.3.3, box: 40, folder: 936, date: 1844-11-20, docType: letter, author: Paul Cameron, location: Orange County, subjects: slaves, general health, supplies, carriage, wagon, animals	1844-11-20
6	1844-11-11	1844-11-11	summary: Steve Alden's child dies. Paul makes plans to move some Person County slaves to new plantation in Greene County, Alabama.	1844-11-20

Access to Primary Sources

- also provided is an Xtimeline view of letters for readers interested in an evolving "story"



Existing Theme Tags

- business of a plantation--accidents, animals, machinery, supplies, procedures, modes of transportation
- daily life of residents--leisure activities, food, clothing, housing, jobs, workload, punishment
- health of residents--disease and death, medicine, childbirth, infant mortality
- agriculture--variety of crops grown, growing conditions, pests, harvesting, transporting, markets
- slavery--buying/relocating/traveling with slaves, names and size of slave population, racist remarks, resistance/runaways

Excerpts--Paul Cameron

“ On yesterday as is custom on the plantation, as 12 o'clock Sunday, all appeared inline before the overseer's door for inspection of their clothing and persons. They made a fair show in all respects, as regards clothing and cleanliness of person. The junior members of the family look very well. The elder ones are looking thin and pale. The children as fat as pigs. The elder ones are very tired of their diet pickled pork, and they have made but an indifferent crop of vegetables with the exception of turnips. Our fish have not yet come to hand, and a small quantity of bacon must be purchased as we have not more than a week's provision on hand.

Excerpts--Charles Lewellyn

“ The [rust] is all over the plantation and I don't think I shall make more than half what I ought to of made but I will try and save all that is made if close attention will do it. My hands are not disposed to pick what I know they ought to pick but I think they will pick better next week as we will be picking on the Macon side where the cotton is better. Thomas picked yesterday 147 pounds, Juba 145, John York 124, Biley 143.

Excerpts--Charles Lewellyn

“ It commenced raining here yesterday morning and is now raining, and the ground is completely covered with cotton, washed out by the rain. I have picked no cotton within the last four or five days. 114 bales packed, 95 at the landing. I think I have about 150 bales only. There is no one complaining this morning, as it is raining. Sanday's health is much better than it was when I wrote to you last. Lewis and [Orange] are the ginners. Daniel, Anderson, [Wesby], Jafus are the drivers. [Pat] and Peggy hands up the cotton. In my next letter I will give you a list of the pickers and their weights.

Excerpts--Tuskegee, AL Jailor

“ There was a negro man committed to the jail of our county on the 2nd of February who calls himself Milton and says he belongs to a man living in North Carolina by the name of Cameron. He also states his master has got a plantation in Greene County, Alabama, which he states was his home and that he left there about a month ago and was making his way on to his master in NC when he was apprehended as a runaway slave. He also states his overseer is Charles Lewellyn, and I thought proper to write to you. He is in our jail and you are requested to come and prove your property, pay charges, and take him away.

Excerpts--Frances Cameron

“ A man servant who formerly belonged to mother is about to be sold, and has applied to me to buy him. He is not to be sold for any fault, but because his master wants money. He has been valued at \$700, but to favor him, as he is anxious that I should get him, I am told that I can have him for \$550. I am particularly desirous of purchasing him, as I shall not only get a valuable servant at a price below his real value, lest I have just been deprived of the man whom we have hired for the last 3 years.

Excerpts--Dr. Ring

“ I was called to see your negro man [Limon], a large athletic man, about fifty years of age (I suppose) and found him dying. No blame so far as I could ascertain was to be attached to Mr. Lewellyn. It seems the negro had had two chills, that Lewellyn had given him some medicine, that it had a good effect and he believed him to be doing well. When however he discovered a change, collapse had taken place. He had blistered and stimulated him before my arrival and done everything that could have been expected at his hands. I got there in the night and he died before daybreak the next morning. He had been healthy at your place all this summer. My calls there have been principally to chronic cases. I have made an entire cure of Eaton.

Excerpts--Dr. Moore

“ I address you this to obtain an account of the previous health of your woman Caroline who has been laboring under a chronic disease for some time. She has well marked symptoms of the chronic or secondary forms of [syphilis] although she and her mother deny that she ever had such a disease. Some knowledge of her previous health, and whether she ever had syphilis, would be of service in the treatment of her case. Yet I fear she will not recover as her general health and constitution [seem] to be entirely destroyed. There is another woman Fanny who is also in [unintelligible] health with dropsy both of the lungs and abdomen which makes her case also very critical. She has however improved some since I have had her under treatment.

Other Sources of Information

- in addition to letters, the web collection provides maps of plantations drawn by owners, and Google Maps we've created based on sites represented in the maps



Other Sources of Information

- Stagville site brochures
- images of the Stagville state historic site, and photographs of residents/descendants of Stagville/Fairintosh (NC State Archives)



Teaching Frameworks (strategies)

- **Benchmarks of Historical Thinking**
 - establish historical significance--demonstrate how an event, person or development is significant by showing how it sheds light on an enduring or emerging issue
 - use primary source evidence--use several primary sources to construct an original account of a historical event
 - identify continuity and change--explain how some things continue and others change, in any period of history

Teaching Frameworks (strategies)

- analyze cause and consequence--identify the interplay of intentional human action, and constraints on human actions in causing change
- take a historical perspective--use evidence and understanding of the historical context, to answer questions of why people acted the way they did
- understand the moral dimension--make judgments about actions of people in the past, recognizing the historical context in which they were operating

Teaching Frameworks (strategies)

- **SCIM-C Method**
 - a scaffolded approach to interpreting historical primary sources
 - students examine individual resources and work through four phases of summarizing, contextualizing, inferring, and monitoring
 - after analyzing several individual sources, they complete a fifth corroborating phase to compare evidence in light of historical questions

Lesson Development (media)

- from historians and humanities scholars, we have a good idea what students should be doing with primary sources
- now, can we identify and/or create tools that support elements of the teaching frameworks
- is there a tool that is particularly good at helping students analyze cause and consequence? how about establish historical significance?

Lesson Sample 1

- **19th Century Transportation**
 - read and discuss six letters written between 1845-1847 by North Carolina statesman Kenneth Rayner as he travels twice between North Carolina and the Mississippi River Delta to purchase a new plantation in Arkansas and relocate slaves
 - based on details found in the letters, students can produce their own Google Maps to trace stops along Rayner's travel routes

Lesson Sample 1

Google
19th Century U.S. Travel (south)
Major stops in an 14-day journey from Raleigh to Memphis as extracted from a primary source letter written by Kenneth Rayner on November 14th, 1845 (southern route). Best viewed in Firefox. Do NOT use Internet Explorer.
27 views - Public
Created on Dec 1 - Updated Dec 10
By [name]
[name]
See in My Maps
Raleigh, North Carolina
Departed Raleigh for Columbia, South Carolina
Columbia, South Carolina
Arrived Columbia, Wednesday, November 14, 1845
Branchville, South Carolina
Arrived Thursday, November 6th, 1845.

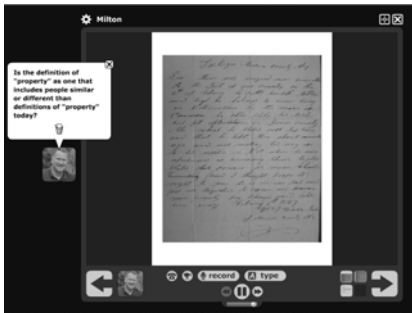
Lesson Sample 1

- N.C. 5th Grade SS Objective 1.07. Analyze the past movement of people, goods, and ideas within and among the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Central America and compare it to movement today.
- N.C. 8th Grade SS Objective 1.05. Describe the factors that led to the founding and settlement of the American colonies including religious persecution, economic opportunity, adventure, and forced migration.
- N.C. 8th Grade SS Objective 3.04. Describe the development of the institution of slavery in the state and nation, and assess its impact on the economic, social, and political conditions.
- N.C. 9th Grade SS Objective 1.02. Analyze and interpret primary and secondary sources to compare views, trace themes, and detect bias.
- N.C. 9th Grade SS Objective 1.03. Relate archaeology, geography, anthropology, political science, sociology, and economics to the study of history.
- N.C. African American Studies Objective 1.02. Analyze the role of geography on the growth and development of slavery.
- N.C. African American Studies Objective 2.01. Analyze the economic, social, religious, and legal justifications for the establishment and continuation of slavery.
- N.C. African American Studies Objective 3.02. Discuss and analyze the black family in antebellum America.

Lesson Sample 2

- **Milton the Runaway**
 - read and discuss four letters written in 1847 by three persons in Alabama regarding a runaway slave named Milton
 - reflect on slavery and resistance to the institution using collaborative document annotation tools such as VoiceThread or Footnote

Lesson Sample 2



Lesson Sample 2

- N.C. 9th grade SS Objective 6.01: Compare the conditions, racial composition, and status of social classes, castes, and slaves in world societies and analyze changes in those elements.
- N.C. African American Studies Objective 2.02: Discuss and evaluate the various ways Africans in America resisted slavery.
- N.C. K-5 ELA Competency Goal 3: The learner will make connections with text through the use of oral language, written language, and media and technology.
- N.C. 6-8 ELA Competency Goal 1: The learner will use language to express individual perspectives in response to personal, social, cultural, and historical issues.
- N.C. 6-8 ELA Competency Goal 5: The learner will respond to various literary genres using interpretive and evaluative processes.
- N.C. 9-12 ELA Competency Goals 1 and 4: reflection/expression to print and interpretation/analysis of texts/communication.

Lesson Sample 3

- **Uprooted**
 - work in teams of 3-4 to prepare a piece of historical fiction based on facts gleaned from selected letters written by Paul Cameron in 1844 describing his relocation of slaves from North Carolina to Alabama
 - letters provide insight into the type of supplies purchased for this long 34-day journey, foods eaten, the condition of the new plantation upon the slaves arrival, and expectations of them
 - clues as to daily distance traveled are included in the letters, allowing students to use maps to estimate the traveling party's location on given days

Lesson Sample 3

- **Uprooted (continued)**
 - teams will divide up letters written by Paul Cameron with each student preparing several entries of a collaboratively edited slave journal
 - the actual names of relocated slaves are peppered throughout the Charles Lewellyn letters, so students can choose real persons on which to base their historical fiction
 - Google Pages and Google Docs each allow students to collaboratively edit a journal

Lesson Sample 3

- The Diary of Juber, by student x, student y, and student z

Saturday, October 22nd, 1844

Today was a very bad day in Person County. Master Cameron came and ordered a small group of us, myself included, to begin packing and saying our goodbyes. We weren't given the choice of staying here. We must go. We are being moved to a new plantation in a place called Alabama a long way from home. We are sad to be leaving our friends and the only home many of us have ever known. Our children will miss their playmates. The women are somewhat panicked at losing their homes and the uncertainty of the new homes that await. Will they be in good condition and keep the children safe? I wonder what type of crops we'll grow in this place called Alabama. I wonder if the weather will be much different from North Carolina.

Lesson Sample 3

- N.C. 8th Grade SS Objective 3.04: Describe the development of the institution of slavery in the state and nation, and assess its impact on the economic, social, and political conditions.
- N.C. 9th Grade SS Objective 6.01: Compare the conditions, racial composition, and status of social classes, castes, and slaves in world societies and analyze changes in those elements.
- N.C. African American Studies Objective 1.02: Analyze the role of geography on the growth and development of slavery.
- N.C. African American Studies Objective 2.01: Analyze the economic, social, religious, and legal justifications for the establishment and continuation of slavery.
- N.C. K-5 ELA Competency Goal 3: The learner will make connections with text through the use of oral language, written language, and media and technology.
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- N.C. 6-8 ELA Competency Goal 5: The learner will respond to various literary genres using interpretive and evaluative processes.
- N.C. 9-12 ELA Competency Goals 1 and 4: reflection/expression to print and interpretation/analysis of texts/communication

Lesson Sample 4

- Research Assistants Jigsaw
 - students play the role of research assistants helping a famous author gather historical facts for their next novel
 - based on the jigsaw cooperative learning strategy, each student is assigned one subtopic to research--slaves' clothing, food, housing, and workload, as well as their poor health and disease that likely resulted from the former
 - students use the search engine to find letters tagged with recommended themes, and extract facts about their subtopic

Lesson Sample 4

- Research Assistants Jigsaw (continued)
 - students come to consensus on gathered facts with their subtopic team, then meet with a home team to teach other students about their subtopic
 - given the intersection of subtopics in this lesson, students are encouraged to discuss how the different subtopics may have been related
 - a worksheet is provided to help students search for subtopics and gather facts

Lesson Sample 4

Instructions:

1. Open the Plantation Letters search page: <http://plantationletters.com/letters.html>
2. Search for letters tagged with the subject 'slaves' and the keywords 'health,' 'disease,' 'death,' and 'infant mortality'
3. Read the letters and look for details on slaves' health. What did you discover (be sure to cite the letters and dates your facts came from so the author can locate the letters later):

health:	sources (letters/dates):
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
4. When instructed by your teacher, meet with your Subtopic Team to discuss your research findings. Did your team members find the same information as you? Did they find anything you didn't find? If so, add their information to your list of facts above. Make sure everyone on your Subtopic Team agrees on the gathered facts.
5. When instructed by your teacher, meet with your Home Team to discuss your subtopics. Share the

Lesson Sample 4

- N.C. 8th Grade SS Objective 3.04: Describe the development of the institution of slavery in the state and nation, and assess its impact on the economic, social, and political conditions.
- N.C. 9th Grade SS Objective 6.01: Compare the conditions, racial composition, and status of social classes, castes, and slaves in world societies and analyze changes in those elements.
- N.C. African American Studies Objective 3.02: Discuss and analyze the black family in antebellum America.

Please Join Our Ning

- social networking site for educators interested in teaching with the Plantation Letters resources
- identify and suggest lesson ideas for teaching with the resources
- share with the community how a particular lesson or tool worked with your classes
- can create school-specific groups if desired, private forums

<http://plantation.ning.com/>



The screenshot shows the Ning website for 'The Plantation Letters'. The header includes the Ning logo, a search bar, and the site title 'The Plantation Letters' with the subtitle 'Interpreting Antebellum Plantation Life'. Below the header is a navigation menu with options: Main, My Page, Members, Forum, Groups, Photos, Invite, and Manage. The main content area is divided into several sections: a welcome message, a 'Reviewing and Sharing Lessons' section, a 'Frameworks for Teaching with Historical Documents' section, and a 'Historical context for Plantation Letters' section. Each section contains brief introductory text and instructions for users.

Future Steps

- two grants pending to speed up the development work (NEH, UNC System)
- continued involvement of Stagville state historic site director Frachele Scott, and project advisory board: Cheryl Bolick (UNC), Chris Dede (Harvard), David Hicks (Virginia Tech), Caryn Koplik (National Humanities Center), Peter Seixas (UNC), Lee Smith (author), and Bill Tally (EDC)
- continued involvement of our own graduate students in development work, both in terms of transcribing/tagging letters and developing lessons that leverage new tools

Your Lesson Ideas/Tools?



- web site, <http://plantationletters.com/>
- group ning, <http://plantation.ning.com/>