

Accomac man worked as a slave trader

FROM FRONT

house.

Old-timers insist that as late as the 1950s this cellar was subdivided into smaller brick cells, and that here and elsewhere on the property were still to be found 19th-century chains and shackles. For legend has it that Carter John Bull was a slave trader — not simply a slaveowner, like many other people of that day, but a slave trader, a merchandiser who made his living buying local African-American men and women and selling them wherever he could make a profit.

There are today no cells or chains at the "Bull Place," and no certain evidence of how the cellar was originally used. But that it may have been a temporary holding pen for local people on their way to the slave markets of the South is not at all unlikely, for at least a part of the legend is now known to be fact: Carter John Bull was indeed a slave trader.

The certain evidence that John Bull was a slave trader comes from two newspaper items of 1830.

The first is the ad that he ran in that year in an Eastern Shore of Maryland newspaper, the Snow Hill Messenger. There, typically, his notice began with an eye-catching headline: "Cash." He then went on to explain that he was "ready at all times to give the highest prices for Negroes for the Louisiana market," and that if prospective customers were to write him, "I will receive the letter in one day and will be here (Snow Hill) in two days from the time it arrives in Drummond Town."

The prices Bull offered were good ones, and probably enticing to a number of slaveowners: \$400-\$450 for "first-rate" young men between 18 and 24 years old; \$250-\$280 for women of the same age.

We have no way of knowing how many people answered Bull's ads, or

place she will leave at 9 o'clock the same morning, and proceed up to Salisbury. Returning, she will leave Salisbury every Tuesday afternoon at two o'clock, and proceed on Whitehaven, which place she will leave the same afternoon at 4 o'clock and arrive in Baltimore early on Wednesday morning. Passengers wishing to proceed to Philadelphia can by taking this route, be placed on board the morning lines of Steam Boats from Baltimore to Philadelphia every Wednesday morning, and arrive in Philadelphia early the same Evening.

Passage to or from Baltimore to the Wisconsin, \$3.00

Do. do. Whitehaven to Salisbury 50cts

Children under 12 years of age, half price

Horses to or from Baltimore to the Wisconsin, \$3.00

Four Wheel Carriages, 3 00

Two Wheel Carriages, 1.50

All Baggage at the risk of the Owner or Owners thereof.

JAMES CORNER, & SON, Agents.

Baltimore June, 1830,— [July 5.]

CHAIR FACTORY

Light Street near the wharf, Baltimore.

JOHN SIMONSON,

RESPECTFULLY informs the

citizens of Worcester County

that he has on hand & intends keeping

a general assortment of

FANCY & COMMON

CHAIRS

which he will sell on moderate terms

All orders thankfully received and punctually attended to

Baltimore, June 14, 1830.

CASH.

I am ready at all times to give the highest prices for Negroes for the Louisiana market—namely for young negro men from 18 to 24 years old first rate; from 400 to 450 dollars—Young women same ages; from 250 to 275 dollars; and if first rate; 280, dollars and all others in proportion.

I can be found at any time by applying to Mr. Townsend; or writing to me at Drummond Town Va. I will receive the letter in one day and will be here in two days from the time it arrives at Drummond Town.

JOHN BULL.

Snow-Hill Dec. 29, 1829.

CASH For Negroes.

WE wish to purchase 200 negroes for the New Orleans market, and will give more than any other purchaser that is in the market, for such as suit us:—

One of the firm intends declining the trade after the present year and wishes to purchase, family negroes for his own use. Letters directed to this place to E. Whitlock, to Salisbury or Princess-Anne, to the subscribers will be attended to.

Woolfols, Sanders, & Overley. June 6, 1830.

Magistrates' Blanks

that a lawbreaker be flogged. He seems to have been, then, not a member of the gentry but a successful, independent self-employed man, as befits a man who lived in a small but substantial house.

There is nothing in the record to suggest that John Bull suffered any lack of respect for his being a slave trader, even though that profession was often reviled, and slave traders were often held in low repute even by slave owners.

Bull served on juries, was a guardian for orphans, provided financial back-up for friends and neighbors undertaking business ventures, and assisted the court in the administration of the will of his older contemporary John Bull (Church).

He was sufficiently respectable to serve for a number of years as a constable (local peace officer), and he may even have been the John Bull Jr. who in 1810 became a Deputy Sheriff.

And all the while at least a part of his livelihood was the buying and selling of people. Some of those people were obtained at local auctions and estate sales. On May 28, 1827, the slaves of the late William W. Smith were sold at public auction by court order (in order to divide his property among his heirs), and Bull was there to make purchases.

Five slaves were purchased that day, all by local buyers, and chances are that when that day was over three of them remained on the Eastern Shore. But the two bought by Bull — George and Meriah, who were probably teenagers or younger — may well have been destined for the cruel fate of being "sold South." Bull purchased at least three other slaves at public auctions during the same year, perhaps for the same market.

John Bull (Carter) died in early 1837, leaving an estate that included five slaves and the house with its own miniature "slave jail" in the cellar.

But there were a number of other traders on the Shore to carry on the work.

Kegota sale is

MAPP'S Elemental yard sale from 8 a.m.

Spaces. There will and low price Oct. 6. For call 824-474.

All private school PTA tion Fund.

SPCA dog spay-ne

ONLEY Eastern Shore spay-neute Oct. 4 at its

The deadline is Saturday. The pay must be received the deadline. anticipate in

Cats must be carried may be purchased the SPCA.

Drop-off surgery is after surgery 3:30 p.m. The board pets

The clinic 30 pets each and 10 dog surgeries month is an appointment submit appointment in a pointment month.

A copy of the old Snow Hill, Md., Messenger, top right, dated November 14, 1830 shows Accomac's John Bull advertising for slaves.

sold to him. Nor do we know how many enslaved Marylanders or Virginians may have been purchased by him, and held temporarily in his cellar.

But a notice from another paper tells us what happened to at least one of the enslaved people Bull purchased, and probably to many more of them.

In early 1830 a Norfolk slaveowner ran a notice in the Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald offering a \$100 reward for each of three slaves who had run away from him on the night of November 25, 1829. Most such notices give a physical description of the runaways, and the description of one of these fugitives reads: "George Strand, about 28 years old, 5 feet 6 inches high, black, having a scar below the right knee."

Then comes the telling sentence of how Strand ended up in Norfolk: "George was purchased from John Bull of Accomack County, Eastern Shore Va."

It is significant that the man running this notice was Bernard Raux, and that the three slaves made their escape from "the schooner Transport now lying in the harbour at Norfolk." Raux was a well-known slave trader, and the Transport was a "fast-sailing packet schooner" used to ship cargoes of slaves from Norfolk to New Orleans.

By the 1820s the trade in enslaved human beings was thriving between Norfolk and New Orleans, as Virginia, its economy stagnating, found itself with unneeded slaves at the very time that planters in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas were hungry for a labor force to work their ever-expanding cotton

fields.

Many a vessel left Norfolk laden with enslaved Virginians who would command high prices in New Orleans, until in time the Chesapeake region had become the predominant source of slaves needed in the new "southwest," and slaves for that region had become one of Virginia's biggest exports.

John Bull of Drummondtown was a small cog in this very large wheel, one of the regional traders who supplied Raux and other dealers with slaves. Thanks to him, at least some, perhaps many residents of Virginia's Eastern Shore found themselves forcibly relocated to a harsh existence in the deep South.

But—remarkably— one of them managed to escape, at least briefly, before the vessel that was to take him to Louisiana left port. That fact is all we know about George Strand. In that day most Eastern Shore people with his last name spelled it "Stran," and lived in the region of Parksley; perhaps he was from that part of the Shore.

Whether he made good his escape is not known. Though there were countless runaways from slavery, most slaves were recaptured, and for Strand to make a successful escape into the interior of Virginia from Norfolk, or to have re-crossed the Chesapeake Bay back home to the Shore, would have been particularly difficult.

If he was captured and returned to Raux, he faced permanent separation from all he had ever known. It is not unlikely that he became one of the countless Eastern Shore residents who

ended up on the auction block in New Orleans; the overwhelming number of those who did were never heard from again back home in the Chesapeake region.

That "Carter John" Bull was a slave trader is, then, no longer in the realm of legend. What is not so easy to determine is which of the several John Bulls he was.

There were at least three or four men named John Bull who lived in the region of Drummondtown (Accomac) in the early 19th century, so many of them that the local records often distinguish them by giving them nicknames.

There was "John Bull (Church)," a prominent figure who died in 1815. There was "John Bull (Constable)" and "John Bull (Coroner)," who may have been the same person.

To further confuse things, the practice of that day was to label two men of the same name as "Senior" and "Junior," even if they were not related; thus it is not always possible to determine whether "John Bull Sr." might also be, say, "John Bull (Church)."

In all this confusion of names "John Bull (Carter)" appears frequently, and he is sometimes also called "Carter John." His nickname was not a family name, but is explained by the fact that in 1802 and again in 1807 the local authorities paid him for "carting dirt before the court house door."

The records reveal that John Bull the carter could also be hired to clear a new road, supply timber for construction projects, stand guard at the local jail, and even carry out the court's order

Most of them are little more than names to us — Thomas Leals, Daniel McKenzie, Jacob Hull, P. T. Redding, Joseph Givan. Some of them operated out of Snow Hill and included the Eastern Shore of Virginia in their territory, although there was at one point a slave trader's office in Belle Haven. A number of them were at various times agents of the giant family firm established by Austin Woolfolk out of Baltimore, whose name among the slaves of the peninsula was "synonymous with banishment to the nether ends of the earth."

Northampton County had its own native slave trader in Elijah Brittingham, and Worcester County, Maryland, in Elisha Whitelock of Snow Hill. Neither of them was considered less than respectable for dealing in the trade; Brittingham is buried at Christ Church in Eastville, where he attended, and Whitelock even served in the Maryland legislature.

The Eastern Shore of Virginia has been settled by English-speaking people for almost 400 years, and for more than half that time it was legal for some of our residents to own others of us, to buy and sell them, and to exploit them for personal profit.

What we know about John Bull is just the tip of the iceberg of this largely unstudied subject — and beginning with him, we know that the ugly picture of slave-trading on our peninsula was not legend, but fact.

The writer is an author, historian and retired United Methodist minister living in Onancock. Copyright 2007 by Kirk Mariner.



ND1112/2

EASTERN SHORE HISTORY

Local man was merchant in ugliest of businesses

■ 'Carter John' Bull was known slave trader

BY KIRK MARINER

When "Carter John" Bull (1760?-1837) enlarged his house, in or around 1800, he added a cellar which is unlike any other on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

The house is still there, handsomely restored at 22401 Accomac Road (between Accomac and Greenbush). The older part of the house is the brick section with the two front doors, the newer part the two-

story frame section added by Carter John.

Because it has a cellar beneath it, the new section sits noticeably higher than the older one.

Bull's cellar is not a deep one — between four and five feet high, not high enough for most people to stand in. It consists of one room and still has an earthen floor. There are two small windows at the back and, on the outside front, a small crawl-through door which is the only way in and out. It is completely inaccessible from inside the main

SEE ACCOMACK ON PAGE A2



The Bull House on Accomac Road was thought to have in its cellar a holding area for slaves.

TED SHOCKLEY PHOTO

CHIN Chess to has spir

BY STEPHEN FURNE

CHINCOTEAGUE... pating your partner... nual Chincoteague... sponsored by the... liance.

Bob Behr, chairm... turnout for the fest... tournament room to

"I would say we... got, because it's the... said Behr. "But over... the turnout. People v

The games began... ginia chess champio... opponents at the sa... managed a tie.

Saturday's events... chess presentation, v... how to play were g... game.

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EVERY WEDNESDAY AND SATURDAY

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