

John Carruthers Stanly and the Anomaly of Black Slaveholding

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For many years after his death in the mid-1840s, residents of Craven County, North Carolina, recalled the remarkable career of slave-born John Carruthers Stanly, who had risen from bondage to become one of the most prosperous planters in the area. Stephen F. Miller, a lawyer who arrived in New Bern during the early 1820s and remained there for nearly a half-century, recalled that Stanly "was a man of dignified presence" who lived "in fashionable style." "No citizen of Newbern would hesitate to walk the streets with him," Miller said. "He was uniformly courteous and unobtrusive." Although quite young at the time, the minister of the First Presbyterian Church, Lachlan Cumming Vass, remembered Stanly as a large property owner. His holdings included two plantations on Bachelor's Creek along the Neuse River, several houses and business properties in New Bern, and a large contingent of slaves. "Mrs. J. C. Stanly, his wife, whom he bought and had legally emancipated, was one of the original members of the New Bern Church," Vass explained, "and the family occupied and owned two pews." Other observers, including John D. Whitford and D. W. Hurt, either remembered Stanly themselves or recalled others who had told them stories about the former slave who himself became a slave owner.¹

Historians, too, have shown an interest in Stanly's career. In a 1912 essay titled "Negroes Who Owned Slaves," amateur historian Calvin Dill Wilson, an Ohioan, devoted nearly an entire page

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¹ Stephen F. Miller, "Recollections of Newbern Fifty Years Ago," 56, unpublished manuscript, ca. 1873, typescript copy in Search Room, Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; Petition of John Carruthers Stanly, November 19, 1798, Petitions, Session of 1798, General Assembly Session Records, State Archives, hereinafter cited as General Assembly Session Records with appropriate session; L. C. Vass, *History of the Presbyterian Church in New Bern, N.C.: With a Resume of Early Ecclesiastical Affairs in Eastern North Carolina, and a Sketch of the Early Days of New Bern, N.C.* (Richmond, Va.: Whittett and Shepperson, 1886), 135-136, hereinafter cited as Vass, *History of the Presbyterian Church in New Bern*; *Morning Post* (Raleigh), December 5, 1897, hereinafter cited as *Morning Post*; John Spencer Bassett, *Slavery in the State of North Carolina* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1899), 44-45, hereinafter cited as Bassett, *Slavery in North Carolina*.

of his ten-page essay to "One John Carruthers Stanley, negro [sic]." Booker T. Washington, in *The Story of the Negro: The Rise of the Race from Slavery*, discussed how Stanly "amassed a fortune" both as a barber and the owner of several plantations. He was one of the most successful free blacks in early North Carolina history, Washington noted. In his study of black businessmen, published in 1936, Abram L. Harris explained that Stanly amassed his substantial wealth by discounting bank notes. "His backers were white men in the town," Harris explained, "who shunned the social stigma attached to [such] sharp practices." A few years later John Hope Franklin published his classic study of free Negroes in North Carolina, discussing how Stanly and a few other free blacks, despite restrictive laws and racial oppression, emerged as respected members of their communities.²

But neither contemporary observers nor later historians have done more than provide sketchy biographical information about this emancipated slave who became a southern planter. Indeed, with a few exceptions, most writers have not even accurately presented the basic facts about his life. John Spencer Bassett, for instance, said that Stanly was emancipated by the General Assembly of North Carolina in 1808 (a date subsequently used by several other authors), a full decade after the actual decree, and thirteen years after he had obtained his freedom. Bassett also noted that Stanly "married a moor, a copper colored woman who was not a slave," when in fact he purchased and freed his wife. In her prodigious social and cultural history of antebellum North Carolina, Guion Griffis Johnson discusses three John Stanlys but confuses shipper John Wright Stanly, orator John Stanly, and John Carruthers Stanly. Others misspelled his name—"Stanley"—misdated the year of his birth, failed to estimate correctly the value of his property, and provided other false information.³

This essay seeks to do more than merely correct the numerous factual errors about Stanly's life. It attempts to analyze Stanly's career in broader perspective. For example, what was his life like in bondage? How did he obtain his freedom? What were his family relationships? How did he accumulate his wealth in land and slaves? What were his relationships with whites, free blacks, and bondsmen? What were his attitudes toward the South's "peculiar institution"? How did his

² Calvin Dill Wilson, "Negroes Who Owned Slaves," *Popular Science Monthly*, LXXI (November, 1912), 483-494, hereinafter cited as Wilson, "Negroes Who Owned Slaves"; Booker T. Washington, *The Story of the Negro: The Rise of the Race from Slavery* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 2 volumes, 1909; London: T. Fisher Unwin, 2 volumes, 1909), I, 202; Abram L. Harris, *The Negro as Capitalist: A Study of Banking and Business among American Negroes* (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1936; New York: Arno Press, 1936), 21; John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943), 23, 31-32, 76, 115, 126, 128, 140, 149-150, 158, 160-162, hereinafter cited as Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina*; see also Rosser Howard Taylor, *The Free Negro in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1920), 26; Carter G. Woodson, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830: Together with Absentee Ownership of Slaves in the United States in 1830* (Washington: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1924; Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1968), 24, hereinafter cited as Woodson, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in 1830*; James Blackwell Browning, "The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XVI (January, 1938), 32, hereinafter cited as Browning, "The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum North Carolina"; John Hope Franklin, "The Free Negro in the Economic Life of Ante-Bellum North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XIX (July, 1942), Part I, 239-259, (October, 1942), Part II, 359-375; Alan D. Watson, *A History of New Bern and Craven County* (New Bern: Tryon Palace Commission, 1987), 310, hereinafter cited as Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*.

³ Bassett, *Slavery in North Carolina*, 44; Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 43-44, 931; Wilson, "Negroes Who Owned Slaves," 486; *Morning Post*, December 5, 1897; Browning, "The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum North Carolina," 42.

property holdings compare with the wealth accumulations of whites, or other prosperous free persons of color? Finally, what precipitated his economic decline, and what were the subsequent activities of his children? By answering these questions, historians can perhaps better understand the ambiguous and anomalous condition of southern free blacks who held their brethren in bondage.

Born a slave in 1774, John Carruthers Stanly was the son of an African Ebo woman who had been brought to America on a vessel owned by merchant-shipper John Wright Stanly in the decade before the American Revolution. Described as a dark-skinned mulatto, he was almost surely the son of John Wright Stanly, a man who accumulated a substantial fortune in land and slaves during the 1760s and early 1770s. Unfortunately, as with other persons of mixed racial heritage, his paternal ancestry can only be deduced by circumstantial evidence. The fact that he took the surname Stanly, was considered by contemporaries to be John Wright Stanly's son, and remained inextricably tied to various members of the Stanly family provides some basis for the conclusion that John Wright Stanly was his father. But perhaps more compelling was John C. Stanly's willingness as an adult (as will be shown later) to countersign a "security bond" for John Stanly, John Wright's white son who became a United States congressman, and offer as collateral a large portion of his estate. In addition, during his youth and young manhood, Stanly received a good education, was taught the trade of barbering, and was treated with kindness and affection by his owners, Alexander (who had captained the ship that had brought Stanly's mother to North Carolina) and Lydia Stewart, John W. Stanly's friends and neighbors. None of these facts in themselves provides definitive proof of John C. Stanly's paternity, but taken together they leave little doubt that he was the mulatto son of an African-born black woman and the prosperous white merchant-shipper John Wright Stanly.⁴

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As a young boy, the slave John C. Stanly was hired out as an apprentice barber. Intelligent, quick minded, and hardworking, he quickly learned the trade. As a bondsman, he established his own barbershop in New Bern. Despite periodic economic difficulties that plagued the city following the American Revolution, as well as a drop in Craven County's white population during the 1790s (from 6,474 to 5,756), the town remained an important trading center. Even during hard times, ships loaded with tar, pitch, turpentine, lumber, and corn set sail for islands in the Caribbean, while incoming vessels, carrying manufactured goods, machinery, and slaves, arrived from New England, Europe, and Africa. New Bern was also the center of commercial activity for nearby farmers and planters who frequently visited town to conduct business, or to buy and sell various commodities. At a time when shippers, merchants, businessmen, and planters visited his barbershop on a daily basis for a shave or a trim, Stanly was able to build up a lucrative trade.

⁴ Vass, *History of the Presbyterian Church in New Bern*, 135-136; Samuel A. Ashe and others (eds.), *Biographical History of North Carolina: From Colonial Times to the Present* (Greensboro: Charles L. Van Noppen, 8 volumes, 1905-1917), IV, 402; Archibald Henderson, *North Carolina: The Old North State and the New* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1941), 570; Will of John Wright Stanly, 1789, Craven County Original Wills, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Craven County Original Wills; Second Census of the United States, 1800: Craven County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 241, microfilm of National Archives manuscript copy, State Archives, hereinafter cited as U.S. Census with appropriate year, county, schedule, and page numbers; *North Carolina Sentinel* (New Bern), August 9, 1833, hereinafter cited as *North Carolina Sentinel*.

Although his income amounted to less than a shilling (between 12 and 16 cents) per customer, during a busy

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period he could earn as much as a ten pounds sterling (approximately \$50.00) each month. By the mid-1790s, John C. Stanly was a slave of some means.⁵

Confident that their slave could provide for himself, and having themselves taught him to read and write, Alexander and Lydia Stewart petitioned the Craven County court in 1795 to issue a license for Stanly's freedom. They explained that their "mulatto boy slave named John of the age of 21" had from the time of his infancy "faithfully and meritoriously" served them and as a young man had conducted himself "with propriety." Upon hearing the testimony of two such highly regarded members of the community, the court granted the plea. But Stanly was not satisfied with only a local court decision in a matter of such importance. Although legally free, he decided to explain his case to the state's General Assembly with the hope that it would pass a special act confirming his status as a freedman. Describing himself as a "man of mixed blood" who had obtained a license for his freedom, Stanly explained in a 1798 petition that "by honest & preserving industry" he had acquired "a considerable real and personal

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estate." He was fearful that by some accident he might be deprived of his freedom papers and "thereby of the fruits of his honest industry." He humbly prayed that the legislature would take his case into consideration and pass a law to "confirm, establish, and Secure to your petitioner his Freedom, with the rights & privileges attendant thereon." A short time later, the General Assembly passed a special act confirming that Stanly was "hereby emancipated and set free."⁶

By then, Stanly was well known as the "Barber of the town of New Bern." He had expanded his business, hired slave apprentices for his shop, and, following the General Assembly's decree sanctifying his freedom, begun acquiring various parcels of real estate. His first purchase, in 1798, was a small lot on Hanover Street, which he bought from William Berry, a white resident of the town, for only thirty shillings. During the next few years, however, he bought more valuable property, including a lot located at the intersection of Broad and Middle streets worth \$575, and lots on Graves, Johnson, Hancock, and New streets. In 1805, Stanly acquired his first rural acreage, paying \$1,590 to Frederick Fonvielle for 196 acres called Folly Tract on the west side of Neuse Road. The same year he paid Henry Howard 300 pounds for another 130 acres on the south side of the Neuse River. In addition, he attended several auctions to purchase property

⁵ U.S. Census Office, *Return of the Whole Number of Persons within the Several Districts of the United States* [1790] (Philadelphia: Childs and Swaine, 1791), 52, hereinafter cited as *Return of Number of Persons* [1790]; U.S. Census Office, *Second Census of the United States* [1800] (Washington: Duane Co., 1801), passim; Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 132.

⁶ Petition of Alexander and Lydia Stewart to Emancipate a Mulatto Boy Slave Named John, March 12, 1795, Slaves and Free Negroes file, Craven County Miscellaneous Papers, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Craven County Slaves and Free Negroes file; Petition of John Carruthers Stanly, November 19, 1798, Session of 1798, General Assembly Session Records. *Laws of North Carolina, 1798*, c. 112, hereinafter cited as *N.C. Laws*. For a description of the various early laws governing slave emancipations, see Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina*, 20-21.

confiscated by the county for nonpayment of back taxes. Being the highest bidder on at least two occasions, he came into possession of several more lots, including one 214 feet in length for which he paid one pound, sixteen shillings, and six pence. Then in his early thirties, "barber Jack," as he was called, had acquired a reputation as a man of business acumen and significant property holdings.⁷

During this early period, Stanly also started a family. On May 20, 1800, he purchased from Charles G. Reverchon of Craven County a two-year-old "mulatto boy named John," whom he described as his son, and almost exactly a year later, he bought another "mulatto child named John" who was the result of a "matrimonial connection" between himself and a slave named Kitty. Naming his two slave sons John Stewart and John Florence, Stanly successfully petitioned the North Carolina General Assembly in 1802 to pass a law freeing his "mulatto boys" so that they could be "entitled to all the rights and privileges of free persons of mixed blood." A few years later, at the March, 1805, term of the Craven County Superior Court, he freed his wife and three more of his slave children, Kitty (Catherine) Green Stanly, Eunice Carruthers Stanly, and

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Alexander Stewart Stanly. A few days after the judgment, on March 26, 1805, Stanly legally married Kitty in a ceremony in New Bern, with proper witnesses and with Marcus C. Stephen, a white bondsman, posting their legal marriage bond in Raleigh. As he had done for himself and his first two children, he later petitioned the General Assembly for free status for the rest of his family. The assembly passed a special law giving his family "all the rights and privileges of freedom, as though they and each of them had been born free."⁸

Stanly's wife, Kitty, was the slave daughter of Richard and Mary Green, both of whom had spent most of their lives in bondage. Eventually, they had extricated themselves from slavery, or at least obtained quasi-free status by working for themselves, and were able to free some of their children, though others remained slaves. In 1801, Green received two lots and a house in New Bern from John C. Stanly as a gift, but about the same time he had begun farming in an area west of Wilmington along the Cape Fear River. His operation was small, but he did own six head of cattle and a horse. In 1804, Richard Green wrote his last will and testament. It was a strange document in which he referred to his "Dear Master," as if he were still a slave, transferred ownership of one of his slave sons to his son-in-law, and stipulated that his two grandchildren, Catherine and John Stewart Stanly, should eventually receive his house in New Bern. But Green then recanted the last stipulation and returned his Craven County property to Stanly for the use of his "dear wife and mother."⁹

⁷ Craven County Deeds (microfilm), Book 33, pp. 495, 503, Book 34, pp. 206, 222, Book 36, pp. 21, 269, 347, 351, 566, 622, 623, 650, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Craven County Deeds. The name Folly Tract was cited in the *New Bern Spectator*, September 2, 1831. Fortunately, the register of deeds in Craven County was careful to differentiate between the several John Stanly's who registered deeds during the period. The above transactions were listed under the name John C. Stanly.

⁸ Petition of John Carruthers Stanly, 1802, Session of 1802, General Assembly Session Records; *N.C. Laws, 1802*, c. 112; Petition of John C. Stanly to Emancipate Kitty His Wife and Two Children, Namely Eunice Carruthers and Kitty Green Stanly, March, 1805, Craven County Slaves and Free Negroes file; Index to Craven County Marriage Bonds, p. 328, State Archives; *N.C. Laws, 1809*, c. 131.

⁹ Craven County Deeds, Book 36, p. 496; Will of Richard Green, December, 1804, Craven County Original Wills.

Richard Green's mother (Kitty's grandmother) was Amelia Green, a woman of remarkable achievement and perseverance. Securing her freedom during the early 1790s—at a time when she was, in her own words, "advanced in life" and feeling "the infirmities of age growing upon her"—she began an eleven-year struggle to free various members of her slave family. Between 1795 and 1806 she not only purchased or otherwise secured "freedom papers" for all of her children, but she also assisted her daughter Nancy Green Handy in freeing two of her children, Louisa and Betsy. During this time Amelia's children and grandchildren changed owners several times, and being illiterate, she was forced to seek the assistance of white witnesses, lawyers, and court officials. But she overcame those vicissitudes with a dogged persistence. In one petition, she said that she was the "mother of a large family of Children, all of whom, except two daughters, have been enabled [by] the fruits of their own industry and meritorious behavior to acquire their freedom." Determined to put all her children "on the same footing," she had "with much toil and industry" purchased her sixteen-year-old mulatto daughter Princess from Isabella Chapman of New Hanover County. Describing her daughter as "a good girl, a good daughter," with a "mild and peaceful disposition and industrious habits," she petitioned the Craven County court, and later the North Carolina General Assembly, for a deed of manumission. Both pleas were granted.¹⁰

On November 9, 1804, fifteen days after Richard Green had entered his will into probate, John C. Stanly transferred to Amelia Green the same property he had previously given to his father-in-law but had received back in Green's will. She was to have the house and lot on George Street "with all ways, wood, and water thereunto belonging to her, the said Amelia Green, her heirs and assignees forever in fee simple." The property was transferred as a gift "in consideration of the love and good will and affection" Stanly had for Kitty's grandmother. The deed of transfer symbolized the coming together of the Green and Stanly families. By marrying Kitty, John Carruthers Stanly thus stood at the head of a black family and kinship network that included some of the most prominent whites and industrious slaves and free blacks in Craven County.¹¹

In the next decade and a half Stanly enhanced his position as an enterprising free black. In many ways he was very fortunate to have lived during the post-Revolutionary era, when there was a wave of manumissions in the South. Influenced by the ideals of liberty and freedom espoused during the war, a number of slave owners emancipated their human chattel. In Craven County the number of free blacks rose by more than 400 percent between 1790 and 1820 (from 337 to

¹⁰ Petitions of Amelia Green to Emancipate Her Daughters Nancy and Princess, March, 1795, September, 1796, December, 1801, Petition of Amelia Green and Nancy Handy to Emancipate Harriet Green, September, 1806, Petition of Nancy Handy to Emancipate Her Daughters Louisa and Betsy, December, 1799, Craven County Slaves and Free Negroes file; *N.C. Laws, 1798*, c. 112. Although owned by her mother, Nancy Handy was legally a slave when she petitioned the court to free her daughters in 1799.

¹¹ Will of Richard Green, December, 1804, Craven County Original Wills; Craven County Deeds, Book 36, pp. 495-496. Richard Green's relationship to Stanly as his "father-in-law" is noted in the deed noted above. Amelia Green's relationship as Kitty Stanly's grandmother is never explicitly stated in the court records, but Richard Green's original bequest to his mother, his subsequent naming of John C. Stanly as recipient of his New Bern house, Stanly's gift to Amelia Green fifteen days later, and the wording of the transfer deed leave little doubt as to that relationship. Moreover, Stanly made more than 100 land and property transactions over a forty-five-year period, but only rarely, and then only to family members, did he transfer property without payment.

1,744), and their proportion of the county's total population climbed from 3 to 13 percent. By the latter year, one out of four Negroes in the county was free.¹²

In addition, New Bern grew and expanded as a center of commercial and 'business activity. To be sure there were difficulties at various times—trade embargoes, European wars, several destructive fires, and the War of 1812 with Great Britain—but the river town, the largest urban center in the state, rebounded quickly each time. In 1819 one observer described the town as "thriving." It had three churches, a "handsome" court building, a theater, academy, and two banks. "It owns and employs in a brisk commerce about 5,000 tons of shipping," he continued, "which carries to market lumber, tar, and other naval stores, pork, corn, etc."¹³

If much of his time and energy prior to 1805 was devoted to securing his own and his family's freedom, during the next fifteen years Stanly turned his attention to business matters. First, having already acquired two slaves, Brister and Boston, when they were quite young, he now trained them, as he had been trained, to become apprentice barbers. They too quickly learned the trade and soon became very skillful practitioners of the "tonorial art." Within a few years, Stanly turned the operations of his business over entirely to the two slaves. "During many years the establishment has been under the exclusive management of the aforesaid servants," Stanly explained in a petition to the Craven County court during the 1820s, "and they have faithfully collected and paid over to your Petitioner the money received by them from the Customers to the shop." Brister and Boston were always polite and neatly dressed, one resident recalled, and "kept the shop in good reputation," which was no easy task. On one occasion, a local physician, Hugh Jones, taking a seat for a shave, drew his sword and told Brister if he were to cut or scratch him with the razor he would run him through. The shaving was completed without incident, but Stephen Miller later asked Brister if his hand had not trembled during the ordeal. The slave barber replied that he had remained calm since he "had made up his mind to save his own life by cutting the throat of Dr. Jones, if it became necessary."¹⁴

With the profits from his barbering establishment—for many years the only one in New Bern—Stanly invested heavily in town property, farmland, and slaves. Between 1806 and 1820, he purchased houses and lots in New Bern on Middle, Johnson, Queen, Hancock, New (later

¹² *Return of Number of Persons* [1790], 52; U.S. Census Office, *Census for 1820* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1821), 25-26, hereinafter cited as *Census for 1820*; U.S. Census Office, *The Statistics of the Population of the United States . . . : From the Original Returns of the Ninth Census* [1870] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 52-53, hereinafter cited as *Statistics from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census*. The published census of 1870 recapitulates county populations for the period 1790-1870 according to race and status. For the activities of free and quasi-free blacks in Craven County, see the *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern), December 6, 1794, as quoted in D. L. Corbitt (ed.), "Historical Notes," *North Carolina Historical Review*, VIII (October, 1931), 470-471; Petition of Margaret Moore, a Free Negro Woman, to Free Her Slave Husband Jack Fenner, June, 1797, Petition of Ann G. Daly, et.al., for the Emancipation of Mary, a Mulatto Slave, June, 1798, Craven County Slaves and Free Negroes file.

¹³ *Return of Number of Persons* [1790], 52; *Census for 1820*, 25-26; *Statistics from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census*, 52-53; Vass, *History of the Presbyterian Church in New Bern*, 97. For an analysis of trade and commerce, manufacturing, and agricultural development in Craven County in the period, see Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 132, 138-139, 249, 261-264.

¹⁴ Miller, "Recollection of Newbern Fifty Years Ago," 56; Petition of John C. Stanly to Emancipate the Men Named Boston and Brister and the Women Named Betty and Money, ca. 1829, Craven County Slaves and Free Negroes file; Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 165.

Neuse), Northwood, Bryan, and Drysborough streets. He then rented the houses and sometimes the vacant lots to local residents. Stanly also added to his rural landholdings, purchasing from planter Longfield Cox in 1811 a 450-acre tract on the south side of the Neuse River for \$4,300. Seven years later he acquired an adjacent 100 acres for only a few shillings by applying for a land grant from the state of North Carolina. Those tracts, five miles above New Bern, became the nucleus for Stanly's Cedar Grove Plantation. In 1817 he paid Samuel Wilber, a Craven County farmer, \$7,202 for a "tract, tenement and parcel of land" on the south side of Neuse River and south side of Bachelor's Creek consisting of 602 acres. Calling this land Hope Plantation, he later added 100 acres to the original purchase. Long known for its convenient access to the river systems, the land had been patented as early as 1726 by John Fonvielle, a farmer and gristmill owner. On both of those plantations, Stanly planted cotton and began to manufacture turpentine for export.¹⁵

Although usually a purchaser, when prices rose or he found a good bargain for some of the property he had acquired, Stanly was not adverse to selling some of his holdings. Prior to 1820, he sold houses and lots on Johnson, Middle, Water, Graves, George, Drysborough, and Jones streets. For some unimproved lots he received as little as \$50.00, but for improved property he received much larger sums. In 1813, for example, he sold a house and spacious lot on Johnson Street (which he had purchased in 1809 for less than \$500) to Thomas Holliday for the sum of \$3,500. He also sold some of his rural holdings. In 1817 he relinquished a 300-acre tract on the south side of the Neuse River to the prosperous Craven County landowner Edward Pasteur for \$3,720. In those transactions Stanly showed himself to be an astute businessman in the acquisition and sale of real estate, usually purchasing when prices were low and selling at a profit.¹⁶

At the same time, he acquired increasing numbers of slaves. Using profits from his real estate speculations, house rentals, slave-run barbershop, and income from cotton and turpentine sales, he rapidly expanded his slave labor force. At one sheriff's sale in 1815, he purchased "chattels, lands, & tenements," and at other times he purchased bondsmen and women privately from individual owners. Like his white neighbors, he became a regular bidder at slave auctions and occasionally acquired title to slaves owned by neighbors who were too old or feeble to manage their bondpeople. By 1820, Stanly had thirty-two slaves listed in his household in New Bern, including several who worked in his barbershop and as house servants. Among them were fifteen children under the age of fourteen. On his plantations he controlled another ninety-five blacks, including forty-nine who were at least fourteen years old (thirty-six men and thirteen women) and who labored in the fields or in the turpentine forests. In all, Stanly controlled 127 blacks who were listed in the population census as residing in his household in New Bern or on one of his plantations.¹⁷

¹⁵ Craven County Deeds, Book 36, p. 18, Book 37, p. 684, Book 38, p. 102, Book 39, pp. 28, 178, 514, 582, 815, Book 40, pp. 17, 46, 51, 74, 218, Book 42, pp. 35-36; U.S. Census, 1820: Craven County, Population Schedule, 72.

¹⁶ Craven County Deeds, Book 36, p. 18, Book 37, p. 684, Book 38, p. 102, Book 39, pp. 28, 178, 514, 582, 815, Book 40, pp. 17, 46, 51, 74, 218, Book 42, pp. 35-36; U.S. Census, 1820: Craven County, Population Schedule, 72.

¹⁷ Craven County Deeds, Book 39, p. 582; U.S. Census, 1820: Craven County, Population Schedule, 64, 72. In 1820 Stanly was listed twice in the population census. The second listing, showing his ninety-five slaves in rural Craven County, has been overlooked by historians. While some of that number included hired blacks, Stanly owned the great majority of bondpeople listed as being in his household.

Despite his own slave heritage, Stanly entertained few misgivings about the South's "peculiar institution." While he did emancipate several slaves during his lifetime, including in 1807 his wife's brother, John Merrick—described as a mulatto barber, twenty-one years of age, formerly owned by New Hanover County farmer George Merrick—most of his activities in this area were not to assist his own chattel but blacks owned by various whites in the community. Between 1805 and 1808, Stanly posted a 300-pound sterling good-behavior bond for several slaves freed by his former owner, Lydia Stewart; and he signed additional security bonds for a number of other slaves, including Abram Bryan, owned by a neighbor, Elizabeth Henry, who had obtained permission from the county court to manumit her slaves "at such time as the owner may think proper." Later, when Henry actually did emancipate eleven blacks, Stanly was appointed "guardian of those said negroes as are under age" and requested "to bind or apply to proper authority to bind the said young negroes to suitable persons resident of Craven County until they attain the age of twenty-one years." While the sums of money needed to provide such "security" were not trifling, and Stanly took his responsibilities as a guardian (as will be shown later) seriously, he continued to augment his slave labor force by purchasing a number of blacks.¹⁸

Most of the slaves he had purchased were field hands, unskilled laborers, or children. The need for skilled labor prompted Stanly to hire a number of free Negroes and slaves who could construct slave cabins, outbuildings, residences, repair and renovate his rental properties in New Bern, and build flatboats and river barges. In 1804 he posted bonds for fifteen-year-old free Negro James Willowby, eighteen-year-old black Mackey Gregory, and twenty-year-old black Elisha Gregory, who were to work "as apprentices to the house carpenters trade." Subsequently, he posted similar bonds for nine other blacks, both slave and free, who worked either as carpenters, joiners, and in one case, as a cooper. As a group they were relatively young (average age, fifteen years) and two of them, Jim Bradock, a slave, and Lewis Pettiphor, a free Negro, were only nine years old, but Stanly put them to work for long hours to improve his various holdings. Just like his white neighbors, Stanly rose to a position of wealth and prestige through his ownership and use of slave laborers.¹⁹ In his mid-forties, living in a stylish New Bern home on the corner of Hancock and New streets, the former slave had not only entered the planter class but had become one of the most prosperous residents in Craven County.

Stanly's success and prosperity continued even during the 1820s when New Bern and Craven County experienced a period of gradual economic decline. While the arrival of the steamboat and

¹⁸ Petition of J. C. Stanly to Emancipate a Slave Named James, June, 1800, Petition of John C. Stanly to Emancipate a Mulatto Man Named John, December, 1807, Petition of Lydia Stewart and John C. Stanly to Post Bond for Certain Negro Slaves Named Torey and Bet, June, 1806, Petition of John C. Stanly and John Clark, Jr., to Post Bond for John [Merrick], December 10, 1807, Petition of Elizabeth Henry and John C. Stanly to Post Bond for a Slave Named Rosanna, June 11, 1808, Craven County Slaves and Free Negroes file; Will of Elizabeth Henry, 1825, Craven County Original Wills; "Abram Bryan v. William B. Wadsworth, December, 1835," in *Cases at Law Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of North Carolina: From December Term, 1834, to June Term, 1836, Both Inclusive* (Raleigh: E. M. Uzzell and Co., 1905), 383-385, hereinafter cited as *Cases at Law in the Supreme Court, December, 1834-June, 1836*.

¹⁹ Entries of September 10, 14, 1804, September 17, 1807, September 10, 1810, December 10, 1811, March 9, 1812, December 11, 1817, Minutes of the Craven County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Minutes of Craven County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions; Hire of Jno and James Bryan's Negroes, 1819, Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers, John Herritage Bryan Collection, PC 6, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Bryan Collection, PC 6; Receipt from John C. Stanly to John H. Bryan for Twenty Dollars for Helping Zilphia and Children, February 1, 1820, Accounts, Bills, and Receipts, Bryan Collection, PC 6.

the continued importance of turpentine manufacturing provided some stimulus to the sagging economy, the lack of an adequate transportation network, the failure of local farmers to diversify their crops, and a devastating hurricane in 1827 followed by a severe banking crisis the following year created severe strains on the local economy. Like other eastern seaboard areas, the boom period in land speculation during the early nineteenth century resulted in inflated prices for farm acreage. In the post-1820 period, land prices, especially in rural Craven County, began to move downward, though in the town of New Bern they remained fairly stable. One of the best investments was still in slaves. While the white population of the county remained almost exactly the same in 1820 and 1830, the number of slaves rose from 5,087 to 6,129, or nearly 20 percent. This continued demand for black laborers was reflected by the good prices they brought at auction.²⁰

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The situation confronting free Negroes in the area became precarious. Following the abortive slave insurrection in neighboring South Carolina, led by free black Denmark Vesey, in 1822, and rumors of a similar plot in North Carolina, the General Assembly enacted new restrictions to control this anomalous group. One state statute prohibited free blacks from entering the state; another

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authorized the "binding" of free Negro children to planters and landholders; and a third gave authorities virtually unlimited power in controlling free black vagrants. Those who could not prove that they were gainfully employed, or could not post a bond promising "good behavior and industrious peaceable deportment," were to be arrested, jailed, and then "hired out" for a term of up to three years. As a result of those various restrictions and the tightening of controls, the free Negro population in Craven County dropped precipitously during the decade, from 1,744 to slightly more than 1,000.²¹

To a large extent John C. Stanly was immune from such economic and legal currents. Even during the depression of the early 1820s, his slave-run barber shop maintained its steady stream of customers and its handsome profits. Nor did the restrictive laws seem to have an effect on his activities. He had been free for more than a quarter century and had long since emancipated his wife and children. He had established himself as a respected member of the community and boasted acquaintanceships with some of the most prosperous and well-known whites in Craven County. A number of them would have been more than willing to testify as to his "industrious

²⁰ *Census of 1820*, 25-26; U.S. Office of the Census, *Fifth Census, or Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States, as Corrected at the Department of State* (Washington: Duff Green, 1832), 90-91; *Statistics from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census*, 53-54; Douglas C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 182-187; Lewis C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 2 volumes, 1933), II, 644-645; Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 138, 253-254, 261-262, 264, 267; Archibald D. Murphey to Thomas Ruffin, March 26, 1818, in William Henry Hoyt (ed.), *The Papers of Archibald DeBow Murphey* (Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission, 2 volumes, 1914), I, 105-108, hereinafter cited as Hoyt, *Papers of Archibald D. Murphey*.

²¹ Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina*, 63-64; Browning, "The Free Negro in AnteBellum North Carolina," 27; *Statistics from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census*, 53.

and peaceable deportment." Indeed, in some respects Stanly was on the other side of the law, as suggested by his signing apprenticeship and good behavior bonds for a number of slaves and free blacks.²²

Consequently, during the 1820s he continued to expand his real estate holdings in New Bern and surrounding areas. He became a regular bidder on town property confiscated by the sheriff and sold at auction, paying various sums ranging up to \$800 for lots on Broad, Craven, German, and New streets. He also made several additional purchases of farmland in Craven County, either adjacent to his plantations or for speculative purposes. An inventory of one of his plantations in 1829 included "[a] stock of horses, mules, cattle, hogs, & sheep" as well as "carts, waggons, plantation tools, blacksmith tools, cooper & carpenters tools, flats and boats." By 1828, he had expanded his operations to nearby Jones County, leasing a plantation called Lyon's Pasture complete with "horses, mules, cattle, [and] hogs." In all, besides his town properties, he owned nearly 2,600 acres of improved and unimproved land.²³

To work his various holdings, Stanly continued to purchase slaves, though at a slower pace than in previous years. During the 1820s, he added thirty-six more blacks to his labor force. But most of the newly acquired blacks went to his various plantations. As such, they came under the supervision of his three white overseers-Benjamin Miller, Amos Hadles, and John Mills-who lived with their families on Stanly's rural holdings. Hadles was in charge of eighty-seven slaves on Hope Plantation; Miller oversaw twenty-five slaves on Cedar Grove; and Mills managed nineteen slaves on Folly Tract. Excluding children under ten years of age, Stanly controlled 111 slaves who either worked in New Bern or labored as field hands and in other capacities on one of his plantations.²⁴

Stanly also continued to hire a few slaves when he needed skilled hands or extra labor during the harvesting season. On several occasions during the early 1820s he employed blacks owned by his friend, John H. Bryan, agreeing to "pay their taxes and furnish Every negro, male or female, with two suits of new clothes, one suitable for the winter[,] the other for the summer, one pair of shoes and stockings and one blanket." He also agreed to allow several of Bryan's slaves, including Zilphia, John, Charles, and Becca, to live on one of his plantations, receiving a small sum for that purpose. When the occasion demanded, he hired free blacks, sometimes for prolonged periods. In his New Bern household there were several free blacks who were not members of his own family; and on his plantations in 1830 there were ten free Negro workers

²² Entry of September 14, 1818, Minutes of the Craven County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions.

²³ Craven County Deeds, Book 42, pp. 35-36, 42, 241, 381, 413-414, Book 43, p. 202, Book 44, pp. 182, 190-191, 276-277, 283, 439, Book 45, pp. 219-222, 367-368, Book 46, pp. 232-233, 287-288, 307-308, Book 47, p. 172. An estimate of Stanly's acreage is derived from a mortgage that is signed with the Bank of New Bern. See Craven County Deeds, Book 45, pp. 440-443.

²⁴ U.S. Census, 1830: Craven County, Population Schedule, 109, 139. The census lists Stanly's plantation slaves under the names of Miller, Hadles, and Mills, "overseers for John C. Stanly." Unfortunately, the 1830 census designates slaves according to age categories: under 10 years, between 10 and 23, between 24 and 35, between 36 and 54, between 55 and 99, and over 100. In this article slaves who are ten years old and older are included as part of the labor force.

who were listed as residents. Stanly's slave and free Negro labor force in New Bern and rural Craven County in 1830 totaled about 125 workers.²⁵

Because the population census, from which these figures are derived, does not differentiate between "owned" and "hired" slaves, the question arises as to how many of these bondspeople were actually owned by Stanly? While this question cannot be answered precisely, several local court documents show that Stanly held title to the great majority of those blacks. An 1828 county court inventory, which noted that Stanly was the "absolute and lawful owner of the before mentioned slaves," listed the names and ages of fifty-eight blacks. Several other court documents indicated that he similarly owned an additional thirty blacks. A mortgage deed, signed in September, 1828, listed Charles, age 22, Jim Jordan, age 23, and Mary, age 17; a similar transaction, signed in March, 1829, cited Aaron, age 17, Moses, age 15, Jerry, age 13, Henry, age 12, and Harry Garden; two others noted Stanly's possession of eighteen more slaves. At the same time, in 1829, he purchased "a negro girl" for \$75.00, and petitioned the Craven County court to emancipate four of his most trusted blacks—Brister, Boston, Money, and Betty—who had not been included in any of the above transactions.²⁶

A comparison of the ages of those eighty-eight slaves, most of whom were mortgaged, and the ages of the slaves listed in the 1830 census as living in Stanly's (or his son's) household or on one of his plantations reveals that most of those blacks were owned rather than rented. Among the mortgaged blacks, only nine were under the age of ten, while the great majority were listed as being in their late teens, twenties, and early thirties, with eighteen over the age of thirty-six. The oldest was forty-five. Among the slaves listed in the census, fifty-two were under the age of ten, and forty were thirty-six years of age or older, with six being older than fifty-four. It seems highly improbable that Stanly would have hired children under ten for labor in the fields or pine forests, and very doubtful that he would have hired older slaves for the same purposes. Indeed, by the time they were in their forties and fifties, most slaves were well past their prime. Thus, the age groupings, while not precise, strongly suggest that Stanly actually owned all except a few of the 163 slaves listed in his New Bern household or as living on his rural holdings. He had thus become not only the largest slave owner in Craven County, and one of the largest in North Carolina, but he owned more than twice as many slaves as the second largest free Negro slave owner in the South.²⁷

²⁵ U.S. Census, 1830: Craven County, Population Schedule, 109, 139; "Conditions for hiring the Negroes of John H. and James Bryan," January, 1823, Personal Correspondence, Bryan Collection, PC 6; Receipt from John C. Stanly to John H. Bryan for Twenty Dollars for keeping Zilphia and Children, February 1, 1820, Accounts, Bills, and Receipts, Bryan Collection, PC 6.

²⁶ Craven County Deeds, Book 45, p. 445, Book 46, pp. 92-93, 225-256, 288-290, 296-297, 332333, Book 47, pp. 75, 160-161; Petition of John C. Stanly to Emancipate the Men Named Boston and Brister and the Women Named Betty and Money, ca. 1829, Craven County Slaves and Free Negroes file.

²⁷ The inventory of the fifty-eight slaves owned by Stanly is found in Craven County Deeds, Book 45, p. 445. The other blacks whom he owned are mentioned in Craven County Deeds, Book 46, pp. 255-256, 288-290, 296-297, Book 47, pp. 160-161, Book 48, p. 75. Within eleven months (May, 1828, to April, 1829) Stanly mortgaged the slaves listed above. Most of the mortgaged deeds are quite specific about the names, ages, and in some cases occupations of the mortgaged slaves, but the April 29, 1829, transaction gives the ages only as between "10 to 29 years." Those listed in this group as "young," such as "Young Peter," the author has placed in a category with children—the others with adults. Several blacks including Charles, Aaron, Jerry, Jim, Jordan, and "Young Harry," were mortgaged more than once. The ages of Boston, Brister, Betty, and Money were not given in primary sources, but in 1830 they were over thirty-five years old and included among the eighteen slaves cited in the adult category.

As on other plantations in the area, most of Stanly's slaves toiled in the fields from dawn to dusk, planting, cultivating, and harvesting the staple crops of cotton and corn. The slaves also grew vegetables, especially potatoes, for their own use and for the market. In addition, along with a number of hired free blacks and some hired slaves, gangs of Stanly's slaves worked in the pine forests producing turpentine.²⁸

To do those various jobs, Stanly acquired a preponderance of male slaves. On New Hope Plantation, the proportion of men age ten and above was 67 percent greater than that of women in the same age category. There men outnumbered women thirty-five to twenty-one. On his other rural holdings men outnumbered women nineteen to thirteen. Most of his skilled slaves were men, including Tom Battle, a thirty-five-year-old cooper, John Donnell, a forty-year-old cooper, and barbers Brister and Boston. Most of his field hands and turpentine laborers, including several born in Africa, were also men. Among all of Stanly's blacks the males age ten and older outnumbered the females by a three to two margin (sixty-six compared with forty-five).²⁹

In his treatment of his bondpeople, Stanly differed little from his white neighbors. One New Bern resident, Colonel John D. Whitford, recalled that he was a "hard task-master" who demanded long hours in the fields and "fed and clothed indifferently." The fact that most of his hired hands were skilled free blacks or skilled slaves, while most of the slaves he owned were field hands, usually young men, lends credence to Whitford's recollection. Stanly also seems to have been less concerned about the sanctity of the black family than expanding his operations and accruing profits. Among the children listed in the mortgage deeds only a few were designated as being the "son" or "daughter" of a slave on one of Stanly's plantations. In the age group ten to twenty-four, men outnumbered women on New Hope Plantation by more than two to one.

As suggested by this male-female ratio, normal family life would have been difficult for most of Stanly's blacks. In one newspaper advertisement, Mary Palmer, who lived fourteen miles from New Bern, noted that her "negro boy name Pollock," described as "jet black" and about nineteen years old, had recently run away. "He is probably lurking about J. C. Stanly's plantation on the Washington Road," she said, "where his parents reside." Another slaveholder, Hardy O. Newton of Jones County, pointed authorities to the same location for one of his runaways. "FIFTY DOLLARS Reward. RAN AWAY from the subscriber on the 5th of June last, a Negro Boy

In April, 1829, Stanly mentioned that he had "Negroes mortgaged to" James E. Bettner and John Snead. Unfortunately, those transactions do not appear in the Craven County deed records. Such notices, however, do corroborate the general assumption that Stanly owned most of the slaves listed under his name. See Craven County Deeds, Book 46, pp. 332-333; U.S. Census, 1830: Craven County, Population Schedule, 109, 139; Woodson, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in 1830*, passim. Woodson failed to note Stanly's plantation slave labor force. The Craven County census of 1830 lists only one white as having more than 100 slaves—Dr. Alexander F. Gaston with 122. He was followed by Samuel Simpson with 87, Alfred Hatch with 75, Nathaniel Smith with 71, and Richard Dobbs Spaight, Jr., with 71. U.S. Census, 1830: Craven County, Population Schedule, 107 and passim.

²⁸ Craven County Deeds, Book 47, p. 179, Book 48, pp. 86-87; Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 45-46, hereinafter cited as Stampp, *Peculiar Institution*; Rosser Howard Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina: An Economic View* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), 38-39; Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 254.

²⁹ U.S. Census, 1830: Craven County, Population Schedule, 109, 139.

named Jerry—about 19 years old, of dark complexion, spare made,—has a small scare across his nose, and is 5 feet 4 or 5 inches high," announced Newton's notice in a New Bern newspaper. Jerry was no doubt "concealed in New Bern and at the plantation of J. C. Stanly, near that place" where he had family connections.³⁰

Stanly's attitude toward his black workers was revealed in two petitions presented by Negroes to the Craven County court. In one, offered in 1828, Edmond Pasteur, a free man of color, explained that he had been born the slave of Dr. Charles Pasteur of Halifax, North Carolina, and after being sold or transferred four times, had been purchased by Stanly "from whom your petitioner bought, or bargained himself for the sum of five hundred dollars & was duly emancipated according to law." Pasteur then saved his earnings for six years, and in 1820 he purchased (for \$765) his wife Dinah and his child Sarah "then an infant at breast." But he did not have enough to buy his slave son Richard, who was then fourteen years old. In January, 1828, his son was sold "for the purpose of being carried of in speculation beyond the limits of this state," Pasteur explained, and "feeling the pangs of a father for his eldest son, who was about to be separated from him forever & consigned to slavery in remote counties, by great exertions was enabled to redeem this child, and accordingly bought him for the sum of four hundred and fifty dollars."³¹

The record does not show whether by the time Pasteur presented his petition Richard was still owned by Stanly, but a second petition, presented four years later by Kelly Davis, also called Kelso Mabeth, suggests that Stanly would have had few pangs of conscience about selling a slave away from his parents. In a one-page deposition, Davis explained that his mother, Amy, had been legally freed by Stanly's former owner, Lydia Stewart, early in the nineteenth century. That emancipation had occurred before Davis had been born, but despite his status as a freeman (following the condition of his mother) he was being illegally detained in slavery. "To the Honourable the Judge of the Superior Court of Law,

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for the County of Craven, The petition of Negro Man Kelso, most respectfully Sh[o]with unto your Honor, that he is unjustly detained in Slavery by John C. Stanly," Davis asserted. "Your Petitioner, being Exceedingly poor, and feeling himself much aggrieved, is compelled to resort to a court of law to assert his just rights." His lawyer, James W. Bryan (John H. Bryan's brother), argued that the black man had "good cause" for bringing such action against the free Negro slave owner. After hearing the arguments, the court granted Davis the status of freeman.³²

Given such attitudes it is not surprising that Stanly was able to accumulate significant amounts of property. Although ascertaining the market value of his assets at a given moment presents difficulties (slave and real estate prices fluctuated and the value of his property holdings can only be approximated), even the most conservative estimate of his net worth showed him to be a per-

³⁰ *Morning Post*, December 5, 1897; Bassett, *Slavery in North Carolina*, 44; *North Carolina Sentinel*, February 24, November 2, 1836.

³¹ Petition of Edmond Pasteur, a Free Man of Colour, to Emancipate His Wife Dinah and Children, spring, 1827, Court Records, Bryan Collection, PC 6.

³² Petition of a Negro Man Kelso, March 3, 1832, Craven County Slaves and Free Negroes file.

son of substantial wealth. During the early nineteenth century, he had paid what were then impressive sums for several houses and lots in New Bern, ranging from \$575 to \$1,200, the latter for his residence; he had at the same time purchased plantation acreage for between \$8.00 and \$12.00 an acre. Several contemporary observers noted that between 1815 and 1836, the value of farmland in Craven County dropped by one third, and some town property values similarly declined, but even adjusting for this downward trend (with perhaps half the decline coming before the mid-1820s) a conservative estimate of the value of Stanly's real estate holdings would be at least \$5,600 for his town property (approximately \$700, on average, for each of his eight properties), at least \$15,600 for his rural land holdings (2,600 acres at approximately \$6.00 an acre), and perhaps another \$4,000 for his livestock, equipment, wagons, boats, and machinery.³³

Because he could not have sold his barbering business-few if any free blacks would have had the means to purchase it, and it was too much of a personal enterprise to be put on the market-the barbershop, despite its value, would not have been listed among his net assets. Such was not true for his slave property, however. With prices for young male slaves standing at between \$400 and \$450, young women, between \$250 and \$280, and children ranging downward to less than \$100; Stanly's blacks were worth no less than \$42,850. This included \$26,400 for the 66 boys and men over the age of ten; \$11,250 for the 45 girls and women in the same age grouping; and approximately \$5,200 for the 52 children under the age of ten. Thus, at the height of his financial career, Stanly's net worth exceeded \$68,050, a truly remarkable sum for the average white man much less a former slave.³⁴

This amount can be put in better perspective by comparing it with the property accumulations of other free Negroes in various parts of the South. Not only was Stanly the most prosperous free person of color in North Carolina by a substantial margin, but he also was among the half dozen wealthiest free blacks in the entire South. In 1825, for example, the richest black in the District of Columbia, Charles King, owned real estate assessed at only \$4,088, while other members of what was called the city's "colored upper class," including William Costen and Francis Datcher, owned city lots assessed at between \$784 and \$1,348. In the same year, the wealthiest free blacks in Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri controlled only a small fraction of Stanly's total wealth. Even among the tiny, highly skilled free colored population in the lower South and Gulf regions, only a handful of South Carolina planters and Louisiana farmers, merchants, and brokers could boast of estates as large as Stanly's. The next two largest free black slave owners, at least among those whose holdings can be verified in local records, were

³³ Craven County Deeds, Book 33, p. 495, Book 36, p. 622, Book 39, p. 503, Book 45, pp. 439-447, Book 46, pp. 273-277; Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 267; *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of North Carolina, Called to Amend the Constitution of the State, Which Assembled at Raleigh, June 4, 1835* (Raleigh: Joseph Gales and Son, 1836), 161; "Statement of the value of Lands and Slaves in North-Carolina, as assessed for the Direct Tax of 1815," in Hoyt, *Papers of Archibald D. Murphy*, II, 165. The average value of land in Craven County in 1815 was \$3.81 per acre.

³⁴ Craven County Deeds, Book 33, p. 495, Book 36, pp. 566, 622, Book 39, p. 503, Book 40, p. 46, Book 45, pp. 439-446. The author has estimated Stanly's total acreage from a May 8, 1828, mortgage deed that Stanly signed with the Bank of New Bern. For prices of slaves in the area during the period, see Frederick Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore: J. H. Furst Co., 1931; New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1959), 30; Inventory of the Slaves in the Estate of James Bryan, June 11, 1818, Legal Papers, Bryan Family Papers, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham. Most secondary sources roughly estimate Stanly's total wealth at \$40,000.

Louisiana's Pointe Coupee Parish planter Antoine Decuir and St. Landry Parish slaveholder Martin Donatto. In 1830 they owned seventy-five and seventy slaves respectively.³⁵

Unfortunately, the first accurate comparison with white property owners cannot be made until the decade before the Civil War, some years after Stanly's death. But such a comparison still holds some validity because even along the southeastern coast, despite a severe depression between 1837 and 1843 as well as a recession during the late 1850s, property values had generally regained their 1820s levels by the 1850s. Including the propertyless, the average white real estate owner in the nation in 1850 owned only \$1,001 worth of land or city property, while a decade later the average total estate—including land, cash, gold, bonds, mortgages, notes, livestock, jewels, furniture, and slaves—for whites in the South was less than \$4,000. Stanly's \$21,200 worth of real property would have placed him in the top one half of one percent among white men in the nation at midcentury; and his 1820s total estate was seventeen times the average for southern whites, including the propertyless, on the eve of the Civil War. By that time the prices of slaves had risen appreciably. At the height of his financial career Stanly had thus entered a select group of truly wealthy men not only in Craven County and North Carolina but in the South and the nation.³⁶

He had achieved this ascendancy in large measure through his amicable and close relations with Craven County whites. In one of his early petitions, Stanly explained to the members of the North Carolina General Assembly that several prominent whites, including "Edward Harris Esquire of the Town of New Bern, and William Blackledge and William Bryan Esquires of the County of Craven," would be more than willing to vouch for his reputation as a "peaceable citizen, and industrious by every laudable endeavour in the acquisition of wealth, fame and reputation." His own mixed racial background, his continued relations with his former owner Lydia Stewart (following the death of Alexander Stewart in the early nineteenth century), and his ties to his white half-brother John Stanly surely gave him certain advantages, but his ability to achieve such success in a white-dominated society went beyond those personal relationships. Warm, friendly, knowledgeable, astute, and gracious, Stanly felt at ease dealing with whites in various matters. He knew many of the most prominent citizens from his years as a slave and a

³⁵ Letitia Woods Brown, *Free Negroes in the District of Columbia, 1790-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 139, 152-155; Luther Porter Jackson, *Free Negro Labor and Property Holding in Virginia, 1830-1860* (Washington: American Historical Association, 1942), 122, 127-129, 144-147; J. Merton England, "The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Tennessee" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, 1941), 378; Larry Koger, *Black Slaveholders: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland Publishing Co., 1985), 117-123; Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1984), 77-78; William Ransom Hogan and Edwin Adams Davis (eds.), *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 20-27; Herbert E. Sterkx, *The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972), 204-209; Gary B. Mills, *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), chapter 5; David O. Whitten, *Andrew Durnford: A Black Sugar Planter in Antebellum Louisiana* (Natchitoches, La.: Northwestern State University Press, 1981), 16-17; Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 37-48; Woodson, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830*, 1-78. Several of Woodson's listings are almost surely in error. The above comparison includes only the slave owners who were unquestionably free Negroes. See Loren Schweninger, "Antebellum Free Persons of Color in Postbellum Louisiana," *Louisiana History*, XXX (Fall, 1989), 345-364.

³⁶ Lee Soltow, *Men and Wealth in the United States, 1850-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 64-65, 186; Stamp, *Peculiar Institution*, 201-202, 388, 402, 414-417.

free Negro barber, but in later years, as he expanded his economic activities, he continued to maintain cordial relations with farmers, planters, store owners, merchants, and professional people. He could often be found at the courthouse, at auctions, in mercantile stores, at the bank, or simply walking along the streets of New Bern, discussing various matters with prominent white citizens.³⁷

Whether or not Stanly was a distributor of discounted bank notes, in effect a money broker, as claimed by several historians, is not clear from the contemporary evidence. What is clear is that he dealt constantly with whites in buying, selling, leasing, renting, and mortgaging various pieces of property in New Bern and Craven County. During his early years as a freedman, Stanly bought, sold, leased, or rented property to and from such well-known town residents as William Hancock, John Donnell, and Elijah Scott, and such prosperous local planters as Frederick Fonvielle, James Dickson, Samuel Wilber, Alexander Torrans, and Thomas Holliday. Some of these dealings involved substantial sums of money and were consummated only after long and at times difficult negotiations. Yet Stanly continued to acquire and sell property over a period of several decades. He dealt with a number of white residents in these matters and only rarely encountered problems or difficulties.³⁸

When conflicts did arise, he solved them with grace and equanimity. In 1819 he signed an agreement with a neighboring planter, Edward Pasteur, concerning the line dividing their properties running along Bachelor's Creek. Pasteur had been a close friend of North Carolina congressman and governor Richard Dobbs Spaight, who had been mortally wounded in an 1802 duel with Stanly's white half-brother, but seventeen years later John C. Stanly and Pasteur surveyed the land in question and created a "well established" line. Since the division was now undisputed, they were both anxious to establish a new demarcation line so that "neither dispute [n]or doubt may hereafter arise respecting the same."

On another occasion, following disagreements "in relation to the line which seperates [sic] their lands, and in order to settle their controversies," he signed agreement with another neighbor, Isaac Taylor, to settle a similar boundary dispute.³⁹

But if he felt he were being treated unfairly, Stanly was not adverse to using the court system to defend his rights as a property owner. In 1821 he was sued by the heirs of James and Catherine Mitchell who claimed that Stanly had acquired some farmland—part of an original tract of 550 acres owned by Jeremiah Vail on the south side of the Neuse River—without duly registering the conveyance in the land deeds office. The suit dragged on for a number of years, with Stanly claiming he had indeed purchased the land, first by securing a quit claim deed from Richard B. and Frances Jones, and later a transfer deed. His accusers admitted that the Jones family had probably "sold" its share of the land to Stanly but continued to question whether "they have made a legal conveyance thereof." Even after the death of the Mitchells, and the renewal of the suit by

³⁷ Petition of John Carruthers Stanly, 1802, Session of 1802, General Assembly Session Records; Miller, "Recollection of Newbern Fifty Years Ago," 56.

³⁸ Bassett, *Slavery in North Carolina*, 44; Craven County Deeds, Book 36, pp. 549, 551-552, 622, 662, Book 37, p. 18, Book 38, pp. 455-456, Book 39, pp. 449-450, Book 40, pp. 17, 157-158.

³⁹ Craven County Deeds, Book 42, p. 7, Book 46, pp. 492-493; *Raleigh Register*, September 14, 1802; Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 110-111.

a relative in 1825-1826, Stanly stood his ground and maintained control over the property. Such matters were extremely delicate, and considering the prevailing racial attitudes and mores, they had to be handled with tact, humility, and adroitness as well as firmness. But Stanly had a reputation among whites for his honesty, good judgment, fairness, and integrity, and when conflicts did arise, he was able to settle them with dignity and aplomb.⁴⁰

Not only did he deal with whites in land disputes, but on several occasions he was asked to serve as an executor, administrator, or trustee of a white neighbor's estate. Most often that involved the disposition of slaves, but sometimes it involved land and other property. As previously noted, Stanly had worked closely with Elizabeth Henry to emancipate her slaves. In 1823 he served as the executor of a will written by another slave owner, Mary Marshall, who, being "in low health," bequeathed her entire estate to Stanly, directing him to free several of her slaves and if this were not possible to "keep them as his own property." A few years later, to assist an elderly white couple, the Reverend Rufus Wiley and his wife, Stanly became a trustee for three blacks owned by the couple's son, Philip B. Wiley, who lived in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. He was to hold the slaves "in trust" so that the couple could "command the services use or hire of said slaves." And on January 9, 1830, Stanly announced through the columns of the *North Carolina Sentinel* that, as trustee of another estate, he would "sell at the Court House in Newbern, for cash, on the 18th instant, all the lands purchased from Silas S. Stevenson by Andrew H. Richardson, lying at the Fork of Neuse and Dover Roads, 11 miles from Newbern." The improvements included "a good Dwelling House and other convenient outhouses."⁴¹

While those various associations would appear, at least in some measure, to go beyond purely economic matters, Stanly maintained close personal ties with only a few whites. One of his closest friends over the years was his former owner Lydia Stewart, who not only took a strong interest in the Stanly children but also was instrumental in arranging for her former slave to purchase two of the original pews at the New Bern First Presbyterian Church. Another close friend was the distinguished lawyer and politician John H. Bryan, who not only served as Stanly's legal counsel but maintained personal relations with the Stanly family over a number of years. Stanly greatly valued Bryan's professional and personal friendship. At the end of a letter involving a legal matter, he apologized to Bryan for being so "particular," and signed the correspondence "With Great Respect, Yours, Jno C. Stanly." And lastly, his relationship with his famous white half-brother John Stanly, a slaveholder, political leader, congressman, president of the Bank of New Bern, and Speaker of the North Carolina House of Commons, was one of personal loyalty, trust, and commiseration. Both had been born in 1774; both had achieved a large measure of importance; and both had acquired substantial amounts of property.⁴²

⁴⁰ Thomas C. Hooper vs. Richard Jones and wife, and John C. Stanly . . . April 10th, 1826," in Elizabeth Moore (comp.), *Records of Craven County, North Carolina* (Bladensburg, Maryland: Genealogical Recorders, 1960), 135-136.

⁴¹ Will of Mary Marshall, 1823, Craven County Original Wills; Craven County Deeds, Book 49, pp. 182-184; *North Carolina Sentinel*, January 9, 1830.

⁴² Vass, *History of the Presbyterian Church in New Bern*, 136-137; John C. Stanly to John H. Bryan, January 2, 1835, Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers, Volume III, p. 286, Bryan Collection, PC 6; U.S. Census, 1800: Craven County, Population Schedule, 125, 241; U.S. Census, 1820: Craven County, Population Schedule, 69; *North Carolina Sentinel*, August 9, 1833; Promissory Note of John Bryan to John C. Stanly, June 2, 1822, Bills of Sale, Promissory Notes ... Agreements, Bryan Collection, PC 6; Craven County Deeds, Book 36, pp. 542-543, Book 45, pp. 429-447; Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 109-112, 114-115, 117, 120, 123-124.

Some later writers claimed that Stanly and his family were sometimes invited to the homes of leading white residents for various social functions, but this seems highly unlikely. The Stanlys did, however, join and become active members of the white First Presbyterian Church; and for many years they attended Sunday services with Lydia Stewart. "Mrs Stewart lived until 1822, and when old and feeble she could be seen on the streets of Newbern, when the weather would permit," one longtime New Bern resident said, "hanging on her old servant John for support, and so they also went to church together, though he would leave his old mistress at the pew door and take a seat elsewhere with his family." When Lydia died in 1822, at the age of seventy-eight, Stanly's daughter, Catherine, grieved at the loss of such an affectionate, gentle, loving, and compassionate friend.⁴³

Such close personal ties between free blacks and whites were rare in the South, but they did occur, especially between a few sympathetic and benevolent whites and free persons of color who had achieved a degree of affluence. Stanly, however, realized the fragile nature of race relations. While dealing with whites in various economic matters, and sustaining a few close friendships, he was primarily concerned about caring for his own family. By the 1820s only two of his children—John Stewart Stanly, born in 1800, and Catherine Green Stanly, born five years later—were living in Craven County. John had begun to follow in his father's footsteps by taking over the management of Hope Plantation and starting a family of his own. He had married a mulatto woman, Frances, and by 1830 they had two children, Kitty and John, ages one and two. By then he oversaw eighteen of his father's slaves. Catherine never married, but she was well educated and evangelical.⁴⁴

Despite such seeming contentment, the 1820s was a decade of personal tragedy for the Stanly family. Though the exact nature of her illness was never disclosed, Stanly's wife Kitty became incapacitated and suffered grievously for a number of years. In a petition to emancipate the two slave nurses who cared for her during this period, Stanly lamented that "during her last illness, which continued uninterrupted for ten years," Kitty had required daily, almost hourly care. She was "unable to render to herself any assistance and was dependant during all said time on the kindness of [nurses Nancy and Money]." The care she required was "arduous and menial" and continued around the clock. No amount of money could have purchased such treatment, Stanly

⁴³ Wilson, "Negroes Who Owned Slaves," 486; *Morning Post*, December 5, 1897; Diary of Catherine Stanly, 1822, as quoted in Vass, *History of the Presbyterian Church in New Bern*, 136138; Donald R. Taylor, *A History of the First Presbyterian Church, 1817-1842, New Bern, North Carolina* (New Bern: First Presbyterian Church [1971]), 2-22.

⁴⁴ U.S. Census, 1830: Craven County, Population Schedule, 139. The ages of John Stewart Stanly's wife and children are taken from the U.S. Census, 1850: Craven County, Population Schedule, 291, and Zoe Hargett Gwynn (comp.), *The 1850 Census of Craven County, North Carolina* (Kingsport, Tenn.: Kingsport Press, 1961), 30-31, 38, hereinafter cited as Gwynn, *The 1850 Census of Craven County*; Diary of Catherine Stanly, June 16, 1822, as quoted in Vass, *History of the Presbyterian Church in New Bern*, 140. Although Vass noted that the Catherine Stanly diary was in his possession when he wrote his history in 1886, it regrettably was not deposited with the Vass family papers at the Presbyterian Study Center, Montreat, North Carolina. For a definition of evangelicals, see Robert M. Calhoun, *Evangelicals and Conservatives in the Early South, 1740-1861* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 20, 140-147.

said; they nursed his wife with "cheerfulness and alacrity and kindness." In the end, however, after being bedridden many months, Kitty died.⁴⁵

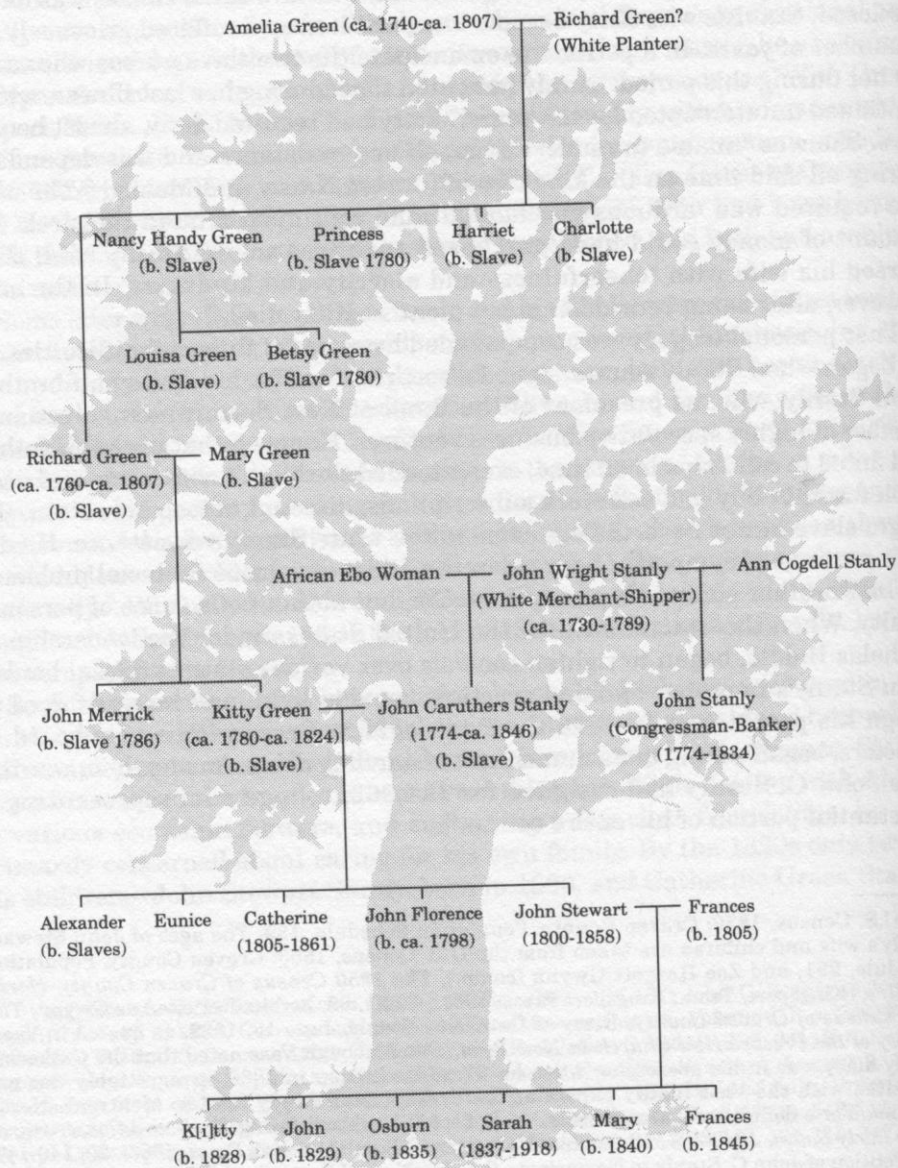
That personal tragedy was compounded by series of financial difficulties. It (all began when Stanly countersigned a security note for his white half-brother John Stanly, who, as president of the Bank of New Bern, was involved in a number of highly speculative business ventures. Knowing that his half-brother had failed to call loans in on time, overextended the bank's note issue, and used bank funds to buy and sell stock subscriptions, discount notes, and cotton, the Negro slave owner nevertheless came to the white Stanly's assistance. He did so in part out of sympathy, because in the midst of various financial problems his half-brother suffered a paralytic stroke, but also out of a sense of personal loyalty. When the Second Bank of the United States, under the leadership of Nicholas Biddle, began to tighten controls over various state and local banks, John Stanly's improper banking practices came to light, and he was forced to resign his presidency. In 1828 the Bank of New Bern, with a new board of directors, began calling in its numerous outstanding debts. Among them was the note John C. Stanly had cosigned for \$14,962, a huge sum representing a substantial portion of his entire estate.⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ Petition of John C. Stanly to Emancipate the Men Named Boston and Brister and the Women Named Betty and Money, ca. 1829, Craven County Slaves and Free Negroes file; U.S. Census, 1820: Craven County, Population Schedule, 72, 139.

⁴⁶ Craven County Deeds, Book 45, pp. 429-447; Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 264.

Genealogy of the Green-Stanly Family



To meet this obligation, as well as several other debts he had incurred with } the bank, the former slave was forced to mortgage a large portion of his estate—, "[D]esirous to secure unto the said President and Directors the payment of what he owes them," Stanly said, he would put up as

collateral nineteen separate pieces of real estate, including Hope Plantation on Bachelor's Creek, as well as fifty-eight slaves. It had taken him nearly thirty years to accumulate the properties he listed in an eight-page document as security for a ninety-day note: the lot on the east side of Hancock Street conveyed to him by William G. Berry in 1798; the lot on Middle Street that he had purchased in 1800; the 196-acre tract on the west side of Neuse Road near Bachelor's Creek that he had acquired in 1805; the half-acre lot at the corner of Hancock and New streets (his residence) that he had bought in 1815, 1816, and 1817; and a 200-acre tract on the east side of Bachelor's Creek that he had obtained in 1827. Now, with a few strokes of the pen, he was forced to jeopardize the acquisitions of a lifetime.⁴⁷

By refinancing his mortgages, and mortgaging or selling other pieces of real estate and slaves, Stanly was able to meet his financial obligations during the following months. In the late summer of 1828 he mortgaged three slaves to Michael Lente for \$609; in the winter of 1829 he mortgaged six more blacks to Edward Pasteur for \$800 and sold his house on Middle Street to James Davis for \$1,500; in the spring of 1829 he mortgaged or remortgaged twenty-three slaves and lots on Middle and Drysborough streets with the Bank of New Bern for \$3,300 and \$5,700. By that time, however, he saw that there was a good possibility that he might lose substantial portions of his holdings. He therefore deeded to his son John Stewart Stanly, in consideration of one dollar, the "right of redemption" in a long list of properties, including slaves mortgaged to various individuals and the bank, stocks of horses, mules, cattle, hogs, and sheep, his tools and machinery, even "the whole of my house hold and Kitchen furniture and my Barber's shop." In short, if he were unable to pay his creditors he hoped his son would be able to redeem some of the property that he had been forced to mortgage so heavily.⁴⁸

But in October, 1830, the Bank of New Bern foreclosed and received judgments from the Craven County Court of Equity to sell some of the mortgaged property. It was little consolation to Stanly that his white half-brother had been forced to dispose of most of his assets to pay off his debts__, VALUABLE PROPERTY FOR SALE, an entry in New Bern's North Carolina Sentinel read on September 14, 1831. "The president and Directors of the Bank of Newbern have determined to sell all real estate . . . they have taken in payment of debts [from] J. C. Stanly." By this time Stanly had mortgaged many slaves, a number of his houses and lots in New Bern, and most of his plantation acreage. In 1830-1831, he even mortgaged his turpentine crop, his cotton and corn crop, and his "potatoes on said tracts [and] shingles in hand [and] lightwood stacked." By then he had been forced to close his barbershop (which had been in continuous operation for nearly forty years), sell off most of his town property, and liquidate or refinance a substantial portion of his plantation land.⁴⁹

Yet, even with such losses, Stanly had been able to preserve some of his holdings. With a reduced slave force, he continued to manage his Cedar Grove and Hope plantations. But with the steady source of income from his barbershop now gone, he found that it was virtually impossible to recoup his losses. During the depression of the late 1830s, he was once again forced to

⁴⁷ Craven County Deeds, Book 45, pp. 413-416, 439-447.

⁴⁸ Craven County Deeds, Book 46, pp. 255-256, 260-261, 273-275, 288-289, 292-293, 296-297, 332-333.

⁴⁹ *North Carolina Sentinel*, September 14, 23, 1831; Craven County Deeds, Book 47, pp. 160-161, 194, 279, Book 48, pp. 29, 75, 86-87, 164-165, 176, 390-391, Book 49, pp. 141-142, 381-382. For the legal proceedings against Stanly, see Craven County Deeds, Book 48, pp. 92, 521, Book 49, p. 3; *Newbern Spectator*, September 2, 1831.

mortgage his property, including his two plantations. Increasingly, he turned the day-to-day operations of his plantations over to his son John Stewart Stanly. By 1840 they owned only a few tracts of land, and those were heavily mortgaged. In the federal census of that year, John Stewart Stanly was listed as the head of a household in rural Craven County. Among the twenty-five persons in his household were seventeen slaves, and eight free blacks. Most of the adults—including John Stewart, his wife, his eldest son, and seven adult slaves—were "engaged in agriculture." At the same time, John Carruthers Stanly, then in his sixty-sixth year, lived in New Bern and had seven slaves listed in his household.⁵⁰

Considering his own continued ownership of blacks, there was some irony in his concerted efforts during the 1830s to secure freedom for slaves owned by his white neighbors and his former mistress Lydia Stewart. "The case of Mine and Mrs Stewart's Negroes has been sent up to the Supreme Court by consent of the parties," Stanly wrote his lawyer John H. Bryan in 1835, "it is all important to us to have it decided [sic] [in] this Court if possible." Stanly had not only paid Bryan's legal fee but had made arrangements for George E. Badger, later a United States senator and secretary of the navy, to assist in the proceedings. "My claim is this," he explained. Among Stewart's papers following her death, he had found several manumission deeds. They had been duly registered in the Craven County court some years before, but when discovered they could not be probated since the county court's power to emancipate had expired. As executor of Stewart's estate, he had relinquished his right to the blacks and had simply allowed them to go free. In effect, he said, he had given them "to themselves." He was then anxious that they should remain in that condition and that "if they are not free that I may know how to act."⁵¹

The North Carolina Supreme Court did not hear the case involving Stewart's slaves, but it did consent to hear a similar case involving Abram Bryan, a slave owned by Elizabeth Henry, the white neighbor who had designated Stanly as executor of her estate. In March, 1808, Henry had obtained a court order to free a group of slaves "at such time as [she] may think proper." She and Stanly had then posted good behavior bonds for the bondsmen, including Abram Bryan. But in fact, Henry never actually freed Bryan, and late in her life, with very little income, she had sold him for \$450 to a man named Thomas Wadsworth, who had in turn sold him to William Wadsworth. Again, Stanly was involved with John H. Bryan, who argued the case. In a precedent-setting decision, the state supreme court ruled: "In the conditions of these bonds the plaintiff is mentioned, not as freed, but (cautiously) as a slave whom Elizabeth Henry is permitted to emancipate. The other facts stated are all in opposition to the plaintiff's claim. They show that his owner never did assent to abandon her dominion over him as owner. And it has been decreed by our highest judicial tribunal that even the legislature can not emancipate a slave without the assent of his master." Abram Bryan was therefore to remain chattel property.⁵²

Three years later, Stanly wrote the American Colonization Society in behalf of Lott Holton, an elderly man "possessing a handsome property in Real Estate & in Money and Seventeen young

⁵⁰ Craven County Deeds, Book 52, pp. 75-76, 215-216, 303-304, Book 53, pp. 170-171, 175; U.S. Census, 1840: Craven County, Population Schedule, 56, 75.

⁵¹ John C. Stanly to John H. Bryan, January 2, 1835, Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers, Volume III, p. 286, Bryan Collection, PC 6.

⁵² *Cases at Law in the Supreme Court, December, 1834-June, 1836*, 383-387; *Abram Bryan vs. William Wadsworth*, December, 1835, Case No. 2,299, Supreme Court Original Cases, 1800-1909, State Archives.

Slaves aged from thirty years downward." Stanly explained that Holton was anxious to emancipate his blacks and send them to Liberia but was not sure how to begin the process. In addition, Holton was fearful that some of his heirs might have more interest in selling off his slaves than respecting his wish to free them after his death. Because the laws of the state would not permit him simply to free his bondpeople, "He request me to make the inquiries of you & to state the above facts." Stanly continued: "You will please let me Know if [a] contract can be entered into immediately with the Society in such a manner that his wishes can be carried into effect and if so the mode by which it may be don[e]." For example, could the society pay for the transportation to West Africa and provide Holton's slaves with food and lodging after their arrival? "Your answer as soon as convenient," Stanly concluded, "will be thankfully received."⁵³

Whatever happened to the seventeen slaves was not revealed in the record, but the paradox of a free Negro slaveholder who continued to hold his own slaves seeking to assist a white slaveholder in "returning" his slaves to Africa symbolized the ambiguous nature of blacks holding their brethren in bondage. As suggested by these various involvements, Stanly had by this time become one of the most prominent and trusted free Negroes in the state. His renown was illustrated by an article written by a Fayetteville newspaperman covering the North Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1835. When a proposal to deny free blacks the right to vote was introduced, the reporter pointed out that such a stricture would be highly unfair to the most successful and respectable members of this class, men like John C. Stanly of New Bern.⁵⁴

By the early 1840s Stanly could look back on a life of economic success matched by few of his contemporaries. He had achieved his ascendancy by exploiting the labor of blacks. Now, nearing seventy, having lost most of his holdings, he still clung to a small rural tract of land. But in 1843, in the final entry under his name in the Craven County deed books, the sheriff confiscated Stanly's last 160 acres and sold them at public auction for slightly more than a dollar an acre. At the end of his life, about three years later, Stanly still possessed seven slaves. Indeed, at the time of his death, few of his white neighbors considered him much different from themselves in their feeling that the South's "peculiar institution" was the capstone of unique and advanced civilization.⁵⁵

⁵³ John C. Stanly to Ralph R. Gurley, May 12, 1838, microfilm reel 29, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁴ Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina*, 115.

⁵⁵ Craven County Deeds, Book 57, pp. 11-12. Every effort has been made to ascertain the exact date of Stanly's death. But he left no will, and there is no mention of him in cemetery records, nor does his death notice appear in any contemporary newspaper. Stanly's slaveholding legacy continued for fifteen years after his death. By 1850 Stanly's son, then fifty years old, had moved to New Bern and become a schoolteacher. Although he owned no real estate, he possessed three of his father's slaves. In 1860 Stanly's daughter Catherine, who ran a dressmaking shop, possessed \$1,000 worth of real estate and \$3,000 of personal property. When she died a few months before the firing on Fort Sumter, at the age of fifty-six, she owned seven slaves, ages one to forty. She had held them, one later observer said, "rigidly to account." With the death of Catherine Stanly, the remarkable activities of the Stanly family in New Bern came to an end. U.S. Census, 1850: Craven County, Population Schedule, 291, Slave Schedule, 615, 621; U.S. Census, 1860: Craven County, Population Schedule, 43, Slave Schedule, 486; Gwynn, *The 1850 Census of Craven County*, 30-31, 38; Craven County Deeds, Book 64, pp. 519-520; Inventory of Estate of Catherine Stanly, 1861, Estates Records of Craven County, State Archives; Wilson, "Negroes Who Owned Slaves," 486. The interesting story of one of John Stanly's grandchildren, Sarah Stanly (who changed her name to Sara Stanley), is recounted in Ellen Nickenzie Lawson and Marlene D. Merrill (eds.), *The Three Sarahs: Documents of Antebellum Black College Women* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 47-148. Although she never returned to New Bern, Sara Stanley attended Oberlin College and had a career as an antislavery activist and teacher.

