



“BURSTING TO SPEAK MY MIND”: HOW MATILDA FULTON CHALLENGED THE  
BOUNDARIES OF WOMANHOOD IN FRONTIER ARKANSAS

by

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## Chapter 1

### A Woman Facing West: Matilda Fulton's Journey to Frontier Arkansas

Matilda Nowland Fulton's journey reflects the westward movement of America during the nineteenth century. Born to a wealthy family, she began her life as part of elite society in Maryland and then spent the majority of her years in frontier Arkansas. In 1815, at the age of twelve, Matilda moved with her mother to Tennessee and then in 1822, at the age of nineteen, she and her family moved to Alabama.<sup>1</sup> Matilda's marriage to her cousin William Fulton in Alabama resulted in her moving to territorial Arkansas in 1829 upon his appointment as secretary of Arkansas Territory.<sup>2</sup> Rarely intimidated by her circumstances, Matilda Fulton embraced the remote frontier environment of Arkansas and accepted the challenges of running Rosewood, the Fulton plantation, from 1839 to 1844 while her husband William Fulton was serving as a United States Senator. In her husband's absence, Matilda cared for their children, plantation, and slaves, and after William's death in 1844 she continued to manage Rosewood successfully until her death in 1879. Refusing to accept the narrow definition of what American society viewed as appropriate actions for a "lady" during her lifetime, Matilda Fulton serves as an example of nineteenth-century American women who did not accept the constricted societal view of women and instead created their own.

Part of the Trans-Mississippi West, Arkansas served as a hybrid of the South and West; its residents and culture reflecting the culture and societal beliefs of both regions. Based on the identity of frontier Arkansas as a combination of the South and the West, a discussion of the

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<sup>1</sup> Peggy Jacoway, *First Ladies of Arkansas* (Kingsport, TN: Southern Publishers, 1941), 47; E. R. Wright, *A Little Sketch of the Nowland and Fulton Families*, 7, William Savin Fulton Papers, 1807-1909, Arkansas History Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas, hereafter WSFP.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Jackson, "Commission of William S. Fulton as Secretary," in *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 21, *The Territory of Arkansas, 1828-1836*, ed. Clarence E. Carter (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954), 13.

historiography of women in both areas is necessary. Matilda's life reflects the lives of southern women as well as western women as Arkansas society expected her to live up to ideals of the proper southern lady while her daily life displayed the rusticity of the western frontier. Some of the major tenets of the field of women's history can be seen in the effect of the separate spheres, "women's culture," and gender on Matilda's life in nineteenth century Arkansas and her response to them.

Women's history has been a complicated field since its inception. Fighting for legitimacy, women's historians sought to develop a field in a profession that had not reached a consensus on the validity of studying women on their own. As women's history came to be accepted, the field became broader and more diverse. The ideologies of the separate spheres, a "women's culture," and gender became mainstays of women's history. Historians interested in the American South quickly began to analyze how these ideas applied to antebellum southern society. Southern historians questioned the origins of these ideas in the South, and many argued that these ideas developed uniquely in the South and were not simply northern exports. The relationship between the system of slavery and the ideals of the private sphere and domesticity in southern society has been one of the major themes of these studies. These ideologies and their impact on antebellum southern society have been a huge part of the historiography of southern women.

Up to the 1960s, the small number of works on women's history fit into the mold of traditional historiography. These works rely on the traditional sources and historical methods popular in other historical fields of the time. Focus on prominent individuals, periodization, and a neglect of factors such as class and race limited the effectiveness of these works. Julia Cherry Spruill's *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* was the first historical work dealing

solely with women in the South. Typically categorized as a recovery work, Spruill offers little analysis on the information in the book. The topics include women's household chores, leisure activities, marriage, education, occupations, and women's status under the law. While the fact that she looks at these aspects of women's lives is revolutionary, Spruill does not look at class or race. She treats all of the women in her book as if they were white and of the same financial circumstances. Mentioned only in their roles as servants, black women and the impact of their presence in the household on the lives of both black and white women are left out of the discussion. While subject to criticism as essentialist, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* and its focus on women during this time period makes it remarkable.<sup>3</sup>

With the social history of the 1960s came a shift in the focus on the study of women and their places in society. Departing from the previous history's focus on women in relation to larger political events, this new history looked at the private lives of women and the social aspects of their lives. The first major concept in women's history was that of patriarchy, defined as "a system of interrelated social structures through which 'men exploit women.'"<sup>4</sup> Mary Beth Norton describes patriarchy in her 1996 book *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society*: "hierarchy was necessary to the operations of the household; the proper director of the family's activities was its husband/father/master; and the subordination of wife to husband was the foundation of the family unit and thus of society itself."<sup>5</sup> The concepts of the "true woman" and "separate spheres" were key aspects of the discussion of patriarchy.<sup>6</sup> The theory of "separate spheres," which gendered public and private

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<sup>3</sup> Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1938): 64-84.

<sup>4</sup> Sue Morgan, "Introduction," in *The Feminist History Reader*, ed. Sue Morgan (London: Routledge, 2006), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1996), 59.

<sup>6</sup> Morgan, "Introduction," *The Feminist History Reader*, 7.

spaces, was the dominant approach of historians from the 1960s to the 1980s when dealing with women's lives under a patriarchal system.<sup>7</sup> Historians used the "separate spheres" paradigm in a variety of ways to discuss the lives of women living in America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In her germinal 1966 article "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," Barbara Welter presents the key virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity as the defining characteristics of the cult of true womanhood and discussed their impact on women.<sup>8</sup> This article set the standard for studying domesticity and the "separate spheres," themes that continue to permeate women's history. Welter goes on to emphasize that their husbands, neighbors, and even the publications they read constantly espoused these virtues to women.<sup>9</sup> The initial negative approach of the 1960s to the concept of the private sphere was that it limited women and kept them prisoners in their homes. Nancy Cott focuses on the idea of a private sphere for women in her 1977 book *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, describing the lives of women under this idea of domesticity as centered on being wives and mothers whose goal was to care for and uphold their families through moral and religious examples in addition to their household duties.<sup>10</sup> Jan Lewis adds to the idea of the private sphere and describes the concept of the republican mother and wife in her article "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic." The image of the republican mother and wife at this time portrayed women as caretakers of their children and saviors of their husbands.<sup>11</sup> Their role was to produce virtuous citizens for the republic so the country itself would remain

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 152.

<sup>9</sup> Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 162-66.

<sup>10</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 64.

<sup>11</sup> Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (October 1987): 689-721.

virtuous.<sup>12</sup> This role took them out of the public, political world, and put them back into the private realm of the home, thereby reinforcing the private sphere.<sup>13</sup>

One of the greatest historical arguments dealing with the separate spheres and southern society has been the origins of these ideas in the south. The majority of early texts focus on the roots of the ideology of separate spheres and its relationship to the north, almost exclusively in relation to Northern middle-class women. Were these ideas simply transferred from the North to the South or were there distinctly southern aspects to separate spheres and domesticity? Some historians claim that the confining of women to the private sphere and the virtues of the true womanhood were a product of southern culture while others argue these ideas came from the North. In his 1980 book, *Inside the Great House: Planter Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society*, Daniel Blake Smith notes the subordinate status of southern women in political, economic, and sexual life and goes on to argue that women lost economic power over the course of the eighteenth century while they gained maternal influence.<sup>14</sup> In Smith's view, as southern girls grew up to be southern ladies, family and society indoctrinated them with these ideals of a perfect wife and mother, an ideology that continued into the early nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Christie Ann Farnham takes the opposite approach in *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South*, arguing that

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> A summarization of the private domestic sphere of the nineteenth century is offered by Joanna L. Stratton: "In the nineteenth century the home was regarded as the proper 'place' for women in society, a sphere where women were expected to serve diligently as wives, mothers, and housekeepers." in *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 57. Rebecca Edwards, describing the society of early nineteenth century America writes, "Like their English counterparts, leaders of American opinion hailed the home as 'woman's sphere,' a place where wives and mothers of the era describe women as 'angels of the home,' in *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 61-65.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

northern-born instructors who worked in southern academies passed on the northern-based doctrine of separate spheres to the daughters of the southern planter class.<sup>16</sup>

Numerous historians have argued the themes of domesticity and the woman's sphere were integral to southern society and supported the patriarchal system that was prevalent among the planter class of the South. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese emphasizes the portrayal of southern women as fragile and deferential as two of the major idealized female characteristics that propped up the patriarchal system in *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*.<sup>17</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown discusses the southern code of honor and its impacts on women in his book *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South*, contending that men and women belonging to two different spheres was a staple of the antebellum South, especially in relation to labor and societal roles.<sup>18</sup> The southern code of honor served to keep women in this place by portraying them as fragile beings in need of protection.<sup>19</sup> Seen as the paragons of racial and sexual purity, these women constituted an essential part of the southern plantation system.<sup>20</sup> The virginal image of the planter wife promoted the racial division that kept the southern planter in power, the major concern of the southern patriarchy.<sup>21</sup> The prevalence of the patriarchal system in the American South and the hierarchy of the southern household is the focus of Catherine Clinton's *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World and the Old South*.

Based on their household chores and taking care of their children, the lives of southern women

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<sup>16</sup> Christie Ann Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 1-3.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 58-59.

<sup>18</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 226-27.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

were lives of confinement and loneliness.<sup>22</sup> Many women traded their subservience to their father for subservience to a husband. While the wives of plantation owners were white and members of the upper class, they were still subject to the rule of men.<sup>23</sup>

One of the major topics related to the impact of the separate spheres on the status of women is how the private sphere affected the nature of their work. Nancy Cott contends in her book *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* that the concept of domesticity that was prevalent during this time period directly shaped women's work.<sup>24</sup> Women's primary duties as wives and mothers kept their contributions to the economy within the family economy and out of the public sphere.<sup>25</sup> The private nature of their lives correlated with the private nature of their work.<sup>26</sup> Jeanne Boydston discusses a similar theme in her book *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic*. Paralleling Cott's idea of the woman's sphere, Boydston portrays women as the "notable housewife," who "were expected to be pious, obedient, and industrious, but scarcely visible . . . the "notable housewife" was something of a contradiction in terms: the worker whose very claim to importance depended in part on the unseen nature of her labor."<sup>27</sup> Boydston notes that while women did a comparable amount of work to men, the work of women went unnoticed for the most part.<sup>28</sup> In *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country*, Stephanie McCurry argues that the labor of southern women was so important to families that men saw it as a threat to be

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<sup>22</sup> Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World and the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 21.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 10-11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

repressed with strict property laws limiting women's rights.<sup>29</sup> Nancy Folbre contends in her article, "The Unproductive Housewife: Her Evolution in Nineteenth-Century Economic Thought," that growing class differences were changing how women were viewed in America.<sup>30</sup> Folbre contends there was a shift in the 1830s as the ideal of the "lady" became the dominant American model for women, pushing out that of the housewife.<sup>31</sup> New economic opportunities for women outside of the home threatened the established patriarchal system and the emergence of the "male breadwinner norm" allowed men to keep control and devalue the contributions of women's labor.<sup>32</sup> Numerous historical works have reached a consensus that women did work and that their labor was valuable even if society chose not to recognize it.

Class has come to be an important factor in women's history over the last few decades as it serves to explain how women had varied life experiences based on their economic circumstances. Many white elite women had little experience with work since they mostly supervised domestic duties done by others, but poor white and free black women had very different experiences and completed taxing physical work on a daily basis. The differing daily work experiences of these women shows how class affected their lives. In *Neither Lady nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South*, numerous essays explore the labor practices of white and black women in the antebellum South. Stephanie McCurry examines yeoman households in which women labored both inside and outside the home in her essay "Producing Dependence: Women, Work, and Yeoman Households in Low-Country South Carolina."<sup>33</sup> In "I Can't Get

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<sup>29</sup> Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 12-17.

<sup>30</sup> Nancy Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife: Her Evolution in Nineteenth Century Economic Thought," *Signs* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1991): 467.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife," 468.

<sup>33</sup> Stephanie McCurry, "Producing Dependence: Women, Work, and Yeoman Households in Low-Country South Carolina" in *Neither Lady nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South*, eds. Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 55-74.

My Bored on Them Old Lomes: Female Textile Workers in the Antebellum South,” Bess Beatty discusses a group of women textile workers in Georgia who bring into question which sections of antebellum southern society felt the need to conform to the proper roles prescribed by society.<sup>34</sup> The labor of slave women has become a prominent theme in recent historical works also. Daina Ramey Berry argues for a unique system of labor for slave women and contends that gender roles existed even in slave labor systems in her book *“Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe”*: *Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia*.<sup>35</sup>

The “separate spheres” model continued into the 1970s, but women’s historians turned the tables on the view that the private sphere was a prison for women and argued the limits of the private sphere resulted in a “women’s culture” which empowered women rather than oppressed them. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s groundbreaking essay, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America,” described this “women’s culture” as a world in which kinship and shared female experiences tied women together.<sup>36</sup> Proponents of a “women’s culture” approach brought women to the center of their own story by changing the focus of historical study from the male public sphere to the domestic realm.<sup>37</sup> Critics of the “women’s culture” model argued that it idealized women’s situation and ignored the fact that these women lived in a world in which men still made the rules.<sup>38</sup> As with the initial historical works on “separate spheres,” the first historians studying “women’s culture” focused

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<sup>34</sup> Bess Beatty, “I Can’t Get Bored on Them Old Lomes: Female Textile Workers in the Antebellum South” in *Neither Lady nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South*, eds. Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 249-60.

<sup>35</sup> Daina Ramey Berry, *“Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe”*: *Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 13-32.

<sup>36</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America,” *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 3.

<sup>37</sup> Morgan, “Introduction,” *The Feminist History Reader*, 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

on women in the North. By the 1980s historians began looking for a “women’s culture” in the antebellum South.

This idea of a “women’s culture” became a prominent theme in works on nineteenth-century southern women, analyzing how women formed relationships with other women and the importance of those relationships. In her book *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80*, Marli F. Weiner argues that while southern women lived in very different circumstances, experiences such as childbirth and subservience to the plantation master united women regardless of their race.<sup>39</sup> Weiner concludes that African American and white women interacted differently with each other than they did with men.<sup>40</sup> She expounds on this idea of shared experiences by claiming that black women learned their idea of womanhood from their white mistresses and therefore held the same moral values.<sup>41</sup> In *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South*, Sally G. McMillen looks at both class and race in relation to southern women. She focuses on black and white women, comparing their experiences and describing their interactions. While the life of a slave woman was obviously different than that of a white woman living on a plantation, McMillen argues that poor white farm women had far more in common with a slave woman than with a plantation mistress.<sup>42</sup> In *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* Suzanne Lebsack studies white women of all economic levels and finds a distinct “women’s culture” in which women were united by their charitable values and attitudes and their willingness to help other women.<sup>43</sup>

Lebsack reasons that these beliefs were unique to women and the men of the town did not hold

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<sup>39</sup> Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 130.

<sup>42</sup> Sally G. McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson Inc., 1992), 128.

<sup>43</sup> Suzanne Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1984), xix.

these same values.<sup>44</sup> Deborah Gray White argues for a gender-stratified system of labor in the slave quarters in *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*.<sup>45</sup> White builds on these ideas, arguing that this stratification resulted in a “women’s culture” within the slave population that affected how free women dealt with freedom during Reconstruction.<sup>46</sup>

Not all historians agree that there was a common female experience in the antebellum South. The most obvious challenges to the idea of a “women’s culture” are race and class. Women of different classes and races would have lived very dissimilar lives. Was the fact that they were all women enough to unite them in a “women’s culture”? Victoria Bynum focuses on free black, poor white, and yeoman women in her book *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South*.<sup>47</sup> She contends that there was an interracial subculture among free black and poor white women who drank, gambled, stole, and had sex with men of either race.<sup>48</sup> These women felt no need to try to live up to the social roles prescribed by the southern elite.<sup>49</sup> Conceding that there was a link between all women in their subordination to white men, she argues that no female bond consistently transcended the barriers of race and class. Martha Saxton denies the existence of a “woman’s culture” in favor of looking at how women of diverse classes and races functioned differently in society in *Being Good: Women’s Moral Values in Early America*.<sup>50</sup> Comparing black, white, and Native American women in the early American South, Saxton claims that elite white women enjoyed the lifestyle that came with the patriarchal system of the plantation system; even at the expense of other women, including

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1985), 119.

<sup>46</sup> White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 121.

<sup>47</sup> Victoria Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>48</sup> Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 110.

<sup>49</sup> Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 87.

<sup>50</sup> Martha Saxton, *Being Good: Women’s Moral Values in Early America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 10.

slaves.<sup>51</sup> While white southern women were dependent on their husbands and the family structure, slave women had to learn to be more autonomous since they lived under the constant possibility of the dissolution of their family by the master.<sup>52</sup> Black women were also not usually subservient to the slave men they had relationships with, often living on different plantations than them.<sup>53</sup> In *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World and the Old South*, Catherine Clinton portrays elite southern women as so isolated geographically that they did not bond even with women of their own race and class. Clinton describes the seclusion of southern women: "Every woman was an island, isolated unto herself."<sup>54</sup> Recent historical works have analyzed the lives of women in the antebellum South and found that a variety of factors prevented the existence of a "women's culture."

The "separate spheres" model began to fall out of favor as historians criticized it as marginalizing women by only telling their story as it related to the home and discouraging any sort of fluidity between the history of women and men. Historians began to suggest that the inclusion of women in history was not achievable simply by studying women on their own. As the focus changed to defining men and women based on their relation to each other, historical studies of men and women needed an analytical approach that reflected this. The use of gender as a historiographical approach allowed historians to look at how women and men's lives impacted each other, taking the story out of just the private sphere and looking at the bigger picture. The introduction of the concept of gender into women's history has had a transformative effect on the field.

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<sup>51</sup> Saxton, *Being Good*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Saxton, *Being Good*, 14.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 179.

In her trend-setting article “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” Joan Scott focuses on gender as the social relations between the sexes.<sup>55</sup> Gender becomes the basis for examining culturally determined roles for men and women.<sup>56</sup> While recognizing certain culturally prescribed roles for women, this methodology rejects the previous historical methodology that focused on women as members of a private sphere, separate from men. In the beginning of gender’s incorporation into the historical field, the term reflected only the study of the places where men and women’s lives intersected. Family relationships and social roles became a major focus. Over time, the history of southern women has become more inclusive as historians have begun to merge categories such as gender, race, and class.

Historians have come to use gender in whole new ways, studying its impact on law, diplomacy, and even the capitalist system. In *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860*, Suzanne Lebsock looks at how the law affected both black and white free women. Lebsock compares the behavior of men and women and finds many differences in their sets of values in relation to leaving property to children and freeing slaves.<sup>57</sup> Recent works have continued this trend, connecting gender to legal and political factors in society. Kathleen Brown attributes a change in gender relations in colonial Virginia to Bacon’s Rebellion.<sup>58</sup> Brown argues in *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* that the rebellion was seen as a threat to the power of elite men and caused those men to seek to solidify their power by imposing stricter gender roles on society.<sup>59</sup> Dealing with the later period of Reconstruction, Laura Edwards

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<sup>55</sup> Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1053-75.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, xix

<sup>58</sup> Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

analyzes the accomplishments and failures of Reconstruction as a product of gender roles in *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction*. Edwards places the household at the center of the discussion and contends that the end of slavery disrupted southern men's place as the head of the household.<sup>60</sup> The attempts of newly freed black men to become heads of their own households pushed white southern men's insecurity even further and in turn white elite women became "cheerful wives" who sought to create a home to assist their husbands with economic and political success.<sup>61</sup> Poor white and black women did not uphold such social roles, often working outside of the home, sometimes as the sole breadwinner of the home.<sup>62</sup> Edwards uses gender relations to analyze the whole social and political structure of a southern town during Reconstruction. As the plethora of recent works show, these previously fringe topics now make up the heart of women's history. Gender has become a huge category of analysis, one now implemented in other historical fields as well as women's history.<sup>63</sup>

The concepts of "separate spheres," a "women's culture," and gender can all be seen in historical works dealing with women migrating to and living on the southern frontier. Once married, many young women migrated with their new husbands due to a desire to find land to build a homestead of their own. The majority of these women left behind their families and friends to settle in an area in which they knew no one. Some new brides excitedly took on the adventure, while others were more hesitant about the journey and their life in a new land.

Julie Roy Jeffrey deals with the motivation of women traveling to the frontier in her book *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*, arguing that "the major impulse

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<sup>60</sup> Laura Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 6-7.

<sup>61</sup> Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion*, 19.

<sup>62</sup> Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion*, 28.

<sup>63</sup> Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 15.

behind emigrating appears to have been economic.”<sup>64</sup> Jeffrey goes on to note that the men usually made the decision to go west. “Men were, of course, expected to ‘make decisions,’ especially about economic matters, and the evidence suggests a pattern in which men brought up the subject of emigrating. Some women were taken by surprise,” Jeffrey contends.<sup>65</sup> Joan Cashin offers economic and personal reasons for moving to the southern frontier in *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier*. “Planters’ sons wanted to be independent of the family rather than submerged in it, and they thought the traditional pact between generations of men had little to offer them in the seaboard,” Cashin writes, adding that “they believed the best way to ensure their independence was to leave for the Southwest.”<sup>66</sup> Lillian Schlissel also attributes the decision to move to the frontier to the decisions of men in *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*: “Women were part of the journey because their fathers, husbands, and brothers had determined to go. They went west because there was no way for them *not* to go once the decision was made.”<sup>67</sup>

Women faced an unpleasant journey for which few knew how to prepare once her husband made the decision to travel to the frontier. Everett Dick writes in *The Dixie Frontier: A Social History of the Southern Frontier from the First Transmontane Beginnings to the Civil War* that “there was no typical line of march or method of transportation. They varied with the wealth and notions of the planter.”<sup>68</sup> In *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*, Julie Roy Jeffrey described the sexist tone of the emigrant guidebooks of the time: “On the most obvious level, the guides all but ignored women as they conveyed a wealth of practical

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Joan Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 57.

<sup>67</sup> Lillian Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 10.

<sup>68</sup> Everett Dick, *The Dixie Frontier: A Social History of the Southern Frontier from the First Transmontane Beginnings to the Civil War* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1948), 59.

information to the men in charge of the undertaking. This neglect suggested that, during the trip at least, women were at best irrelevant and at worst in the way.”<sup>69</sup> Joan Cashin’s assessment of women’s migration to the southern frontier discusses the hardships that women faced along the way. “The presence of kinfolk made the trip less lonely, but women still mourned for those they had left behind. . . . Women also found the natural environment frightening. Many worried about exposure to sickness, and others feared the wildlife in the forest,” Cashin writes.<sup>70</sup> Women faced a variety of obstacles on the journey, the majority attempting to maintain some semblance of normalcy along the way.

Annette Kolodny argues that women carried the ideals of domesticity with them during the journey west in *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*: “Looking toward the frontier not simply as a place to begin anew but, as well, as a realm in which to continue and even hallow the past, women would have transferred many more of the tokens of prior homes and earlier gardens than male migration patterns allowed.”<sup>71</sup> Julie Roy Jeffrey concurs with Kolodny in *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*. “As they catalogued each sign of the passing of civilization, women coped with their sense of desolation by reproducing aspects of the world they had left behind,” Jeffrey writes of the adjustments women made along the trip.<sup>72</sup> She contends gender roles also stayed in place: “Generally men drove the wagons, repaired them, hunted, ferried the cattle and wagons across rivers, and stood guard at night, while women were responsible for the children, meals, and family washing.”<sup>73</sup> In *True Women and Westward Expansion*, Adrienne Caughfield supports the

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<sup>69</sup> Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 29-30.

<sup>70</sup> Cashin, *A Family Venture*, 32.

<sup>71</sup> Annette Kolodny, *The Land before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 11.

<sup>72</sup> Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 38-39.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

idea of women carrying the ideas of domesticity and the “separate spheres” with them on the journey west, arguing women brought their “cultural baggage,” especially the “cult of true womanhood,” along with their luggage.<sup>74</sup> Glenda Riley argues for a “female frontier,” a kind of “women’s culture,” as women migrated west in *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915*. This “female frontier” theory contends that because the focus of women’s lives was domestic and they were bound to other women by shared experiences, a change in their physical environment did not have a dramatic effect on them.<sup>75</sup> The presence of a “women’s culture” on the frontier is described by Lillian Schlissel in *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, “Women continued to perceive themselves as existing primarily in the presence of other women. Women’s daily routine—the baking, washing, the cooking, the caring for the children . . . all of these were performed with women”<sup>76</sup> Cathryn Halverson professes that settling in a new environment actually strengthened domesticity and encouraged both men and women to commit even more to the ideal since they saw the frontier as a threat to the “fragility of domestic life.”<sup>77</sup>

The ideologies of the cult of domesticity did not affect just the journey to the frontier, but also women’s attitudes toward their new environment. Historians have argued over how women responded to their new environment on the frontier, with some claiming women were able to expand the traditional role of protector of the morals of society by helping to build new societies while others claim women were simply overwhelmed by the violence and savagery of the frontier and were forever corrupted. In his book *The Dixie Frontier: A Social History of the Southern Frontier from the First Transmontane Beginnings to the Civil War*, Everett Dick offers

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<sup>74</sup> Adrienne Caughfield, *True Women and Westward Expansion* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>75</sup> Glenda Riley, *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 1.

<sup>76</sup> Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 77.

<sup>77</sup> Cathryn Halverson, *Playing House in the American West* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 6.

an early and now somewhat dated opinion on the different responses of southern frontier women. “Some timid maidens, reared in the midst of plenty and thrown into circumstances of hardship, rose to the occasion and resolutely conquered the savage environment,” Dick writes, adding that “others . . . pined away and were a distinct liability to their husbands and the community in which they lived.”<sup>78</sup> Analyzing the personal memoirs of hundreds of women who settled on the frontier, Joanna Stratton presents a more modern take on gender relations, arguing that the power structure of families changed on the frontier: “the pioneer family existed as a self-sufficient unit. . . . Men and women worked together as partners, combining their strengths and talents to provide food and clothing for themselves and their children. As a result, women found themselves on a far more equal footing with their spouses.” Stratton offers a contemporary take on women and gender roles on the frontier.<sup>79</sup>

While some historians argue for a simple transfer of the concepts of domesticity and the “separate spheres” from homes in the East to the frontier, others claim the new environment challenged these ideas. In *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915*, Sandra L. Myres, examining the diaries, journals, and memoirs of women who traveled west and settled on the frontier during the nineteenth century, discusses the conflict between the ideology of the cult of domesticity and the western migration and frontier environment. “Western migration and frontier conditions seriously threatened to undermine this carefully constructed separation of the sexes. Far from the familiar, stable communities of the East . . . families again had to become self-sufficient, and women had to assume new roles, undertake new tasks outside the proscribed sphere of woman’s place,” Myres writes of women’s new status in the West.<sup>80</sup> Glenda Riley

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<sup>78</sup> Dick, *The Dixie Frontier*, 274.

<sup>79</sup> Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 18, 57.

<sup>80</sup> Sandra L. Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 7.

offers a similar view of this conflict of ideas and environment in *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915*: “Paradoxically, acceptance of the significance of women’s passivity, domesticity, and moral guardianship peaked at about the same time that many American women were radically disrupting their domestic situations to transplant their homes, their families, and themselves to the vast and promising region that lay west of the Mississippi River.”<sup>81</sup> In *Writing the Trail: Five Women’s Frontier Narratives*, Deborah Lawrence asserts that the nineteenth-century frontier environment resulted in a “new understanding of gender roles.”<sup>82</sup> Lawrence believes the journey west and their new surroundings prompted women to think differently and reevaluate their place in society.<sup>83</sup>

Portraying nineteenth-century women in frontier environments as “domestic civilizers,” Laura Woodworth-Ney’s approach to gender roles can be viewed as a compromise between the idea that women clung to domesticity and the opposite thought that they challenged traditional roles in their new environments.<sup>84</sup> In Woodworth-Ney’s interpretation, women took on a new more powerful role as “domestic civilizers,” but within that role they were maintaining the societal values they brought with them.<sup>85</sup> The historiography dealing with women on the frontier offers no final consensus because it is as complex and differing as the lives and experiences of the women who settled on the frontier. The trip west as well as settlement in a new environment changed the lives of all of the women who made the journey, but it changed them all in different ways. Some women continued to live much as they did before their journey, others faced radical transformations in their environment and living situations, and still others fell somewhere in

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<sup>81</sup> Riley, *Women and Indians on the Frontier*, 1.

<sup>82</sup> Deborah Lawrence, *Writing the Trail: Five Women’s Frontier Narratives* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Laura Woodworth-Ney, *Women in the American West* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 107-108.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

between. The different historiographical methodology and views reflect the complexity of the subject.

The frontier may have challenged the concepts of domesticity and the “separate spheres” but for many women those ideas were just as present as they had been in the East. Frontier societies continued the expectations espoused in “the cult of true womanhood,” while the lives of women like Matilda Fulton made it difficult to abide by these ideals. In territorial Arkansas the *Arkansas Gazette* reminded its female citizens of their proper place in society, sounding very much like the newspapers of the East and North.<sup>86</sup> How much attention the women of Arkansas paid to these ideas is debatable as many did whatever they needed to keep their families and businesses going regardless of how this affected their image as “ladies.” Matilda Fulton read Arkansas and Washington, D.C., newspapers to keep up with politics, check prices of crops and goods, and stay updated on what was happening with the Indians.<sup>87</sup> While she read the newspaper to help provide for and protect her family, Matilda also encountered reminders of how she should be acting as a proper nineteenth century southern woman.<sup>88</sup>

Matilda Nowland Fulton’s path to the frontier was a long one as she had been born on September 15, 1803 in Bath, Maryland.<sup>89</sup> Matilda’s father, Perigrine Nowland, was a prosperous merchant on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and her mother, Rebecca Savin Nowland, came from a wealthy planter family that owned three large plantations and many slaves.<sup>90</sup> Perry and Rebecca Nowland first settled near Rebecca’s parents on her father’s land but after the death of

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<sup>86</sup> “Brother Jonathan’s Wife’s Advice to Her Daughter on the Day of Her Marriage,” *Arkansas Gazette*, December 23, 1834.

<sup>87</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 31, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP.

<sup>88</sup> “Ladies, Lend an Ear,” *Arkansas Gazette*, November 9, 1831; “The Philosophy of Marriage,” *Arkansas Gazette*, September 21, 1842.

<sup>89</sup> Jacoway, *First Ladies of Arkansas*, 46.

<sup>90</sup> E. R. Wright, *A Little Sketch of the Nowland and Fulton Families*, 2.

several children moved away from the shore.<sup>91</sup> Perry and Rebecca Nowland invested money she received from her father's estate in a farm in Bath, Maryland, and lived there until Perry Nowland's death in 1810.<sup>92</sup> It was on this farm that Matilda was born into a luxurious life of parties, balls, and dinners.<sup>93</sup> With the death of her husband, Rebecca Nowland faced a great reduction in her financial situation and she sold the plantation to move to Baltimore to be near her sister, Elizabeth Fulton, and her family.<sup>94</sup> When the War of 1812 ended, David and Elizabeth Fulton moved to Gallatin, Tennessee, located in the northern part of the state, to be near their eldest daughter Mary.<sup>95</sup> In 1815 Rebecca Nowland and her children, including twelve-year-old Matilda, traveled with her sister and brother-in-law to Tennessee.<sup>96</sup>

Addressing the issue of domesticity on the Tennessee frontier, Finger contends that the tenets of domesticity were present even in frontier Tennessee, citing the fact that even the frontier society relegated women to the private sphere: "Like the rest of white America, the Tennessee frontier was a man's realm; men dominated in the political, economic, and political spheres."<sup>97</sup> Based on her analysis of newspapers, laws, and personal letters and memoirs, Cynthia Cumfer offers a different perspective on the lives of women in frontier Tennessee, looking at women from a social angle and claiming they wielded power in this area. "As women defended themselves and their children from Native American attacks and engaged in the hard work of settlement, they saw themselves as partners in the wilderness enterprise," Cumfer writes,

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<sup>91</sup> E. R. Wright, *A Little Sketch of the Nowland and Fulton Families*, 3.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid; "Peregrine Nowland," *Maryland, Find a Grave Index, 1637-2012*, accessed August 28, 2013, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=NO&GSpartial=1&GSbyrel=all&GSst=22&GSctry=4&GSsr=4041&GRid=27195606&>.

<sup>93</sup> E. R. Wright, *A Little Sketch of the Nowland and Fulton Families*, 3.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid; Anne McMath, *First Ladies of Arkansas: Women of Their Time* (Little Rock: August House, 1989), 35.

<sup>95</sup> McMath, *First Ladies of Arkansas*, 35; E.R. Wright, *A Little Sketch of the Nowland and Fulton Families*, 5.

<sup>96</sup> Jacoway, *First Ladies of Arkansas*, 47.

<sup>97</sup> Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, 164.

adding that by “acting on this new authority, women crafted networks of community to maintain standards of nonviolence and, for some, morality.”<sup>98</sup> In this description, Cumfer attributes power to women in the traditional ways as mothers caring for their children and the bearers of morality even as she discusses a new power they were gaining through working alongside their husbands. The approaches of Finger and Cumfer to the status of women in frontier Tennessee show two very different views, one that places women in the background of men and another that argues women became equal partners. It was in this environment that Matilda experienced her formative years from twelve to eighteen-years-old. Watching her mother, a single woman, navigate the world on her own may have inspired Matilda to imagine a more expansive role for herself as an adult woman.

After living in Gallatin, Tennessee, for several years, the Fulton and Nowland families relocated to northern Alabama in 1822.<sup>99</sup> The *Florence Gazette* had offered David Fulton a job as editor, and David and Elizabeth’s son, William Fulton, was employed writing editorials for the *Florence Gazette* and practicing law there.<sup>100</sup> By the time she was nineteen Matilda Nowland had moved twice and ended up in a frontier environment very different than the one she had been born into in Maryland. Matilda’s venture west would continue to territorial Arkansas after a courtship and marriage to her cousin William Fulton.

Born in Maryland on June 2, 1795, William Fulton was Matilda’s first cousin and the son of David and Elizabeth Savin Fulton.<sup>101</sup> He graduated from Baltimore College in 1813 and

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<sup>98</sup> Cynthia Cumfer, *Separate Peoples, One Land: The Minds of Cherokees, Blacks, and Whites on the Tennessee Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 156.

<sup>99</sup> E. R. Wright, *A Little Sketch of the Nowland and Fulton Families*, 7.

<sup>100</sup> Jacoway, *First Ladies of Arkansas*, 48; William Fulton, *William Savin Fulton Diary*, May 11, 1822, Transcript in the hand of William Fulton, WSFP.

<sup>101</sup> Jacoway, *First Ladies of Arkansas*, 48. Marriages between first cousins was common in early nineteenth century America. For more information see A. H. Bittles, “Consanguinity, Genetic Drift, and Genetic Diseases in Populations with Reduced Numbers of Founders,” in *Vogel and Motulsky’s Human Genetics: Problems and Approaches*, eds. M. R. Speicher, S. E. Antonarakis, and A. G. Motulsky (New York: Springer, 2010), 507-528.

moved to Tennessee and obtained a license to practice law in 1817.<sup>102</sup> Serving as private secretary to Andrew Jackson during the First Seminole War in 1818, William formed a lifelong friendship with Jackson.<sup>103</sup> He moved to Florence, Alabama, in 1820 to take a position writing editorials for the *Florence Gazette*.<sup>104</sup> Elected to the state legislature and later serving as the judge of Lauderdale County, William made many political connections while in Alabama.<sup>105</sup>

Only founded in 1818, the city of Florence was still being established when the Nowland and Fulton families settled there.<sup>106</sup> Florence grew in popularity due to its location as a port city on the Tennessee River and experienced considerable growth during its first few years of existence.<sup>107</sup> Florence only had around one hundred residents with two log houses, a jail, tavern, and blacksmith in 1820, but by the next year there was an increase in construction with the building of several frame houses and large brick buildings in the town.<sup>108</sup> Farmers made up the majority of Florence's residents, with cotton being the primary crop of the area.<sup>109</sup> As a result of the popularity of cotton Florence had one of the earliest cotton mills in the region, Sweetwater Mill.<sup>110</sup> Also home to a post office, school, female academy, blacksmith shop, hotels, livery stables, and several other businesses, Florence in the 1820s continued to grow and develop as a bustling port town in the 1820s.<sup>111</sup> While traveling through Alabama in 1821, Anne Royall, an aspiring writer and later editor of the *Paul Pry* newspaper, stayed in Florence and commented on

<sup>102</sup> Ibid; "William Savin Fulton," in *Biographical Directory of the United State Congress*, eds. Bruce A. Ragsdale and Kathryn A. Jacob (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1989), 921.

<sup>103</sup> E.R. Wright, *A Little Sketch of the Nowland and Fulton Families*, 7.

<sup>104</sup> Jacoway, *First Ladies of Arkansas*, 47.

<sup>105</sup> Lea Flowers Baker, "William Savin and Matilda Fulton: A Brief Look at a Territorial Arkansas Family," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 48 (Winter 2000): 74.

<sup>106</sup> William Lindsey McDonald, *A Walk through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama* (Florence, AL: Country Lane Printing, 1997), 2.

<sup>107</sup> McDonald, *A Walk through the Past*, 74, 6-7.

<sup>108</sup> McDonald, *A Walk through the Past*, 7.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> McDonald, *A Walk through the Past*, 8, 65.

<sup>111</sup> McDonald, *A Walk through the Past*, 7-8, 78-79.

its location: “It is happily situated for commerce at the head of steamboat navigation.”<sup>112</sup> Royall painted a picture of a prosperous town well connected to the world with “the steamboats pouring every necessary and every luxury into its lap.”<sup>113</sup> Royall noted many large and elegant brick buildings, two large taverns, several mercantile houses, and numerous warehouses, including the longest building she had ever seen.<sup>114</sup> She believed there were around one hundred “dwelling houses and stores,” with the number of frame buildings increasing daily.<sup>115</sup> Many residents, however, were not content with the rustic nature of the town. An 1825 resident of Florence complained of the poor condition of the town’s streets and spring, the low class people living in the town, and the large number of “grog shops.”<sup>116</sup>

When he settled in Florence, William worked as a lawyer and a writer for the *Florence Gazette*.<sup>117</sup> Anne Royall, in her letters from Florence, mentions meeting William during his time as a lawyer: “Mr. Fulton, an eminent lawyer, and a gentlemen of first rate talents. He is from Maryland, and one of the ornaments of society.”<sup>118</sup> William served as the first judge of Lauderdale County from 1822 to 1829 in addition to holding other positions during this time including writing articles for the local newspaper and serving in government positions.<sup>119</sup> In his personal diary William briefly described his courtship with Matilda in Florence in 1822. His early entries frequently note that he dined with his cousins, of which Matilda would have been one. As the months went on, William began to mention Matilda specifically, noting on one

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<sup>112</sup> Sarah Harvey Porter, *The Life and Times of Anne Royall* (Cedar Rapids, IA: The Torch Press, 1906), 14; Anne Royall, *Letters from Alabama on Various Subjects: To Which is Added an Appendix, Containing Various Remarks on Sundry Members of the 20th & 21st Congress, and Other High Characters &c. &c. at the Seat of Government* (Washington: Self-published, 1830), 144.

<sup>113</sup> Royall, *Letters from Alabama on Various Subjects*, 144.

<sup>114</sup> Royall, *Letters from Alabama on Various Subjects*, 144-45.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> McDonald, *A Walk through the Past*, 7.

<sup>117</sup> Jacoway, *First Ladies of Arkansas*, 47; Baker, “William Savin and Matilda Fulton,” 74.

<sup>118</sup> Royall, *Letters from Alabama on Various Subjects*, 151.

<sup>119</sup> Baker, “William Savin and Matilda Fulton,” 74; “Petition 20182705,” February 19, 1827, *Lauderdale County, Alabama African -American Emancipation Papers*, Deed Book 4, p. 115.

occasion that he “had a satisfactory conversation with Cousin Matilda Nowland and was happy.”<sup>120</sup> One month later William writes, “Matilda and I made some promises – on which our mutual happiness hereafter materially depends.”<sup>121</sup> The promises William described were most likely their mutual decision to get married. William, age twenty-seven, and Matilda, age nineteen, were married in Florence, Alabama, on February 9, 1823.<sup>122</sup> Due to William’s close relationship with Andrew Jackson, William and Matilda spent their honeymoon at Hermitage, Andrew Jackson’s home.<sup>123</sup> The couple quickly started a family, having two children within the first three years of their marriage. Matilda gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth Rebecca, named for her mother in 1824 and a son, David Peregrine, named for her father in early 1826.<sup>124</sup>

Throughout their marriage Matilda would have to cope with running a household and managing the children on her own for long periods of time. In 1826 when William and Matilda were living in Florence, William took a job as secretary to the commissioners who were attempting to negotiate a treaty with the Chickasaw Nation to convince them to cede their land in Mississippi.<sup>125</sup> William arrived at the treaty ground in Mississippi on October 15 and the negotiations ended on November 2nd.<sup>126</sup> He notes in his letter to Matilda that after those negotiations concluded he would then be involved in negotiating a treaty with the Choctaw, beginning on November 6, 1826.<sup>127</sup> He believed the negotiations would last around ten days if the Choctaw were as “head strong and obstinate” as the Chickasaw had been in their treaty

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<sup>120</sup> Fulton, *William Savin Fulton Diary*, August 7, 1822, WSFP. Irregular spelling and punctuation from the original sources will be maintained unless otherwise noted.

<sup>121</sup> Fulton, *William Savin Fulton Diary*, September 8, 1822.

<sup>122</sup> Jacoway, *First Ladies of Arkansas*, 48.

<sup>123</sup> McMath, *First Ladies of Arkansas*, 35.

<sup>124</sup> Baker, “William Savin and Matilda Fulton,” 75.

<sup>125</sup> “Refusal of the Chickasaws and Choctaws to Cede Their Lands in Mississippi: 1826,” *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*, accessed November 5, 2012, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/nt007.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/nt007.asp).

<sup>126</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, 28 October 1826, Transcript in the hand of William Fulton, WSFP.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

negotiations.<sup>128</sup> If however, the Choctaw “should be so wise as to consult their own & their childrens interest and welfare, & conclude to sell or exchange this country,” the treaty negotiations would take a great deal longer.<sup>129</sup> William had little hope that the negotiations would be successful and ultimately they were a failure.<sup>130</sup> With the time it would have taken to travel, William would have been gone around two months. In his letters he asks about Matilda and the children and mentions that he often thinks of how they are carrying on at home and is anxious to hear that all things are going well.<sup>131</sup> While she was on her own for around two months with an infant son, David, and a two-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, Matilda had family on which to rely in Florence. She would not have felt as isolated as she would come to once they moved to Arkansas and William was gone for several months at a time. At the age of twenty-three Matilda was already taking on running a household and caring for her children while her husband was gone for months at a time.

Receiving a commission for the position of secretary of the territory of Arkansas from President Andrew Jackson in April 1829, William resigned his position as Lauderdale County judge the week following his commission and prepared his family for the move to Arkansas.<sup>132</sup> While grateful for the opportunity this new position presented their family, William and Matilda were anxious about moving to Little Rock as an acquaintance had described it as “a horrible place.”<sup>133</sup> The Fulton family planned to board a steamboat to take them from Florence to the mouth of the White River on the Mississippi and then another boat to take them on the Arkansas

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> “Refusal of the Chickasaws and Choctaws to Cede Their Lands in Mississippi: 1826.”

<sup>131</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, 28 October 1826, WSPF.

<sup>132</sup> Andrew Jackson, “Commission of William S. Fulton as Secretary,” 13; William Fulton, “William S. Fulton to the Secretary of State,” in *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 21, *The Territory of Arkansas, 1828-1836*, ed. Clarence E. Carter (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954), 23.

<sup>133</sup> John Hallum, *Biographical and Pictorial History of Arkansas, Vol. I* (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons, and Co., 1887), 192.

River the rest of the way to Little Rock.<sup>134</sup> When William and Matilda set out for Arkansas in May 1829 not only were they undertaking a dangerous journey, but they were doing so with three small children all under the age of five since a daughter, Mary Jane, had joined the family in 1827.<sup>135</sup>

The Fulton family would have been cabin passengers, the top tier of “steamboat society.”<sup>136</sup> Cabin passengers were usually well fed and received treatment comparable to a nice hotel.<sup>137</sup> They would have stayed in a private stateroom that measured around six feet square.<sup>138</sup> Even as cabin passengers, travelers had to endure some inconveniences. The condition of toilet facilities on western steamboats were poor and often contained only a few tin basins on a bench, towels, and a supply of river water of doubtful cleanliness.<sup>139</sup> Steamboat travel had only begun in Arkansas in 1822, but by 1840 it would become the major mode of transportation for immigrants to Arkansas.<sup>140</sup> Settlement in territorial Arkansas was encouraged by the removal of Native Americans from the east to the west bank of the Mississippi and a liberal land policy adopted by Congress which set the minimum price of land at \$1.25 an acre and allowed settlers to buy up to eighty acres of land. The introduction of steamboats on the western rivers allowed for easier travel into Arkansas Territory, and the steamboat register given by the *Arkansas Gazette* shows ten different steamboats running on the Arkansas River from 1820 to 1830.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid; Walter Moffatt, “Transportation in Arkansas, 1819-1840,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1956): 196.

<sup>135</sup> Lea Flowers Baker, “Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (2006): 139.

<sup>136</sup> Erik F. Haites, “Steamboating on the Mississippi, 1810-1860: A Purely Competitive Industry,” *Business History Review* 45, no. 1 (1971): 58.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Louis Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (New York: Dover, 1993): 391, 393-94.

<sup>140</sup> Robert B. Waiz, “Migration into Arkansas: Incentives and Means of Travel,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1958): 317.

<sup>141</sup> Mattie Brown, “Transportation in Arkansas, 1819-1890,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (December 1942): 343-44, 348.

While it became more popular with travelers, steamboat travel could be dangerous. A notice in the August 26, 1829 edition of the *Arkansas Gazette* detailed a recent explosion on the steamboat *Kanawha* that killed all the crew and passengers on board.<sup>142</sup>

William and Matilda had to alter their plan and travel by land for the part of their trip due to difficulty finding a steamboat at the mouth of the White River to take them to Little Rock.<sup>143</sup> William complained to his father about this part of the trip, remarking that he and his family “were constantly in dread of miring or being overturned, from the bad roads.”<sup>144</sup> Upon their arrival in Randolph County in the northeastern part of Arkansas Territory, they were able to book passage on the steamboat *Pocahontas* for Little Rock.<sup>145</sup> After sixteen days of travel, William, Matilda and their children arrived safely in Little Rock on May 20, 1829.<sup>146</sup> A crowd of local citizens greeted them upon their arrival and watched the swearing in of William as secretary of the territory of Arkansas and acting governor, as the newly appointed governor had not yet arrived.<sup>147</sup> In a letter to his father David Fulton, William confirms their safe arrival in Little Rock, noting that the people were very friendly and respectable.<sup>148</sup> He then describes Little Rock as a “pretty little town,” and remarks that Matilda is “highly delighted with her new home” and has “found female society here, every way equal to any she has ever been acquainted with.”<sup>149</sup> William complains that house rent, provisions, and hire were very expensive in Little Rock, while dry goods and groceries were actually cheaper than they were in Florence.<sup>150</sup> Upon

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<sup>142</sup> Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 398.

<sup>143</sup> William Fulton to David Fulton, May 25, 1829, WSFP; John T. Fulton to David Fulton, June 2, 1829, Transcript in the hand of John Fulton, WSFP.

<sup>144</sup> William Fulton to David Fulton, May 25, 1829, WSFP.

<sup>145</sup> John T. Fulton to David Fulton, June 2, 1829, WSFP.

<sup>146</sup> William Fulton, “William S. Fulton to the Secretary of State,” in *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 21, 23; “Untitled,” *Arkansas Gazette*, May 27, 1829.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> Jacoway, *First Ladies of Arkansas*, 49.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

their arrival in Little Rock, William and Matilda Fulton boarded initially with a local family named Henderson.<sup>151</sup> They felt that the rent was too high at ten dollars per week and had already rented a house of their own but were waiting on their furniture and possessions to arrive by steamboat.<sup>152</sup> William's brother, John Fulton, also intended to settle in Little Rock and surprised William with his appearance the day after William, Matilda, and their children's arrival in Little Rock.<sup>153</sup>

When Matilda Fulton moved to Arkansas with her husband, it had only been an established territory for ten years and was hardly a civilized society. Alexis de Tocqueville described Arkansas at this time as "inhabited only by a few wandering hordes of savages."<sup>154</sup> Friedrich Gerstäcker, a German author who traveled through Arkansas during the 1830s and 40s, offered an ominous view of Arkansas as "overrun at this time with a number of bad characters, gamblers, drunkards, thieves, and murderers."<sup>155</sup> Little Rock, the territorial capital, was oriented around the riverfront since steamboat traffic was at the center of travel and trade.<sup>156</sup> The city contained about sixty buildings, six of them made of brick, and eight of frame, and the rest were log cabins including the Little Rock Academy and the territorial capital building.<sup>157</sup> Home to cheap hotels, restaurants, saloons, gambling rooms, and a few dance halls and houses of ill fame, Little Rock also contained many respectable businesses that dealt with plantation and steamboat

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid; John T. Fulton to David Fulton, June 2, 1829, WSFP.

<sup>153</sup> John T. Fulton to David Fulton, June 2, 1829, WSFP; William Fulton to David Fulton, May 25, 1829, WSFP.

<sup>154</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *The World's Great Classics: Democracy in America*, by A. de Tocqueville, eds. Timothy Dwight and Julian Hawthorne (New York: The Colonial Press, 1899), 356.

<sup>155</sup> Friedrich Gerstäcker, *Wild Sports in the Far West: The Narrative of a German Wanderer beyond the Mississippi, 1837-1843*, eds. E. L. and H. R. Steeves (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1968), 171; "Frederich Gerstäcker," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, accessed November 4, 2013, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=1656>

<sup>156</sup> Margaret Smith Ross, "Little Rock's Old Town," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 37, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 63.

<sup>157</sup> John G. Fletcher, *Arkansas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 99.

supplies, the needs of travelers and steamboat crews, and the handling of freight.<sup>158</sup> Isolated and sparsely populated, Arkansas fits the definition of the frontier through the 1840s.<sup>159</sup> In 1820, the territory claimed a population of fourteen thousand people, and by 1830 it had only increased to thirty thousand.<sup>160</sup> William's brother, John Fulton, settled in Little Rock a day after William and Matilda's arrival in the city.<sup>161</sup> In writing to his father David Fulton, John Fulton describes the town of Little Rock as containing "from two hundred and fifty to three hundred inhabitants, the most of who receive their support from means furnished by the government to her officers."<sup>162</sup> "That this country [Little Rock] would increase in population" was John Fulton's greatest hope, since as a doctor he needed patients.<sup>163</sup>

In June 1829, the *Arkansas Gazette* reported that the United States War Department estimated the number of Native Americans living in territorial Arkansas at around seven thousand.<sup>164</sup> While the number of Native American residents was minimal near Little Rock, a constant stream of Native Americans passed through on their way to the Indian Territory.<sup>165</sup> The Native Americans were traveling to the west of territorial Arkansas to land the federal government had carved out of the western portion of the Arkansas Territory in 1819.<sup>166</sup> In late 1831 and early 1832 a large party of Choctaws moved across Arkansas to settle near the western

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<sup>158</sup> Ross, "Little Rock's Old Town," 63.

<sup>159</sup> James E. Davis, *Frontier America, 1800-1840: A Comparative Demographic Analysis of the Settlement Process* (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1977), 33. Davis offers a map of frontier and settled areas. Using population numbers and settlement patterns, he categorizes Arkansas as completely frontier until after 1840.

<sup>160</sup> S. Charles Bolton, "Economic Inequality in the Arkansas Territory," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 14, no.3 (Winter 1984): 621.

<sup>161</sup> John T. Fulton to David Fulton, June 2, 1829, WSFP.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Indians, *Arkansas Gazette*, June 3, 1829.

<sup>165</sup> S. Charles Bolton, *Arkansas 1800-1860: Remote and Restless* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 87; S. Charles Bolton, "Jeffersonian Indian Removal and the Emergence of Arkansas Territory," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 271.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

border of Arkansas territory.<sup>167</sup> Showing little concern over the supposed dangers of the “savages,” many territorial residents saw the arrival of the Choctaw as a business opportunity and attempted to sell them produce.<sup>168</sup>

Several articles from the *Arkansas Gazette*, the territorial newspaper based in Little Rock, show that some residents of Arkansas Territory saw the Native Americans as a concern and threat to their safety. An article titled “Another Indian Murder,” dated February 2, 1830, claimed that a small group of Native Americans shot a farmer in southwestern Arkansas while he was working in his field.<sup>169</sup> When residents began to push for statehood in 1835 the report of a citizen meeting in eastern territorial Arkansas pointed out the dangers of the location of Arkansas Territory as it bordered “Mexican territory, and her western frontier encompassed by numerous and warlike tribes of savages.”<sup>170</sup> One year later the state government issued a call for male volunteers to protect the state since “hostile armies are concentrating upon our borders” and there were only “a mere handful of soldiers upon our western border.”<sup>171</sup> While those living in western Arkansas feared Native American attacks on a daily basis, the concern of the people of Little Rock on the issue was so small the government did not expect any volunteers from that area of the state.<sup>172</sup> William and Matilda, living in the central part of the territory, would have had little worry over the threat of Native American attacks.

There were few women in Little Rock when William and Matilda settled into life in Arkansas. Little Rock was virtually an all-male town, with no women or children until 1821,

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<sup>167</sup> “The Emigrating Indians,” *Arkansas Gazette*, November 23, 1831; “The Emigrating Indians,” *Arkansas Gazette*, January 4, 1832

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> “Another Indian Murder,” *Arkansas Gazette*, February 2, 1830.

<sup>170</sup> “STATE GOVERNMENT MEETING IN CRITTENDEN COUNTY,” *Arkansas Gazette*, July 28, 1835.

<sup>171</sup> “Untitled,” *Arkansas Gazette*, August 9, 1836.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

just eight years before William and Matilda Fulton arrived.<sup>173</sup> While there were more than one hundred men in Little Rock by 1829, there were only approximately eight to ten married women and five or six younger girls.<sup>174</sup> This created a small circle of friends for Matilda Fulton to join. As late as 1840, men still far outnumbered women.<sup>175</sup> Not only were there few women for Matilda to befriend, but like her most of these women would have been busy raising numerous children, with large households being common on the southern frontier.<sup>176</sup> Large families were a benefit since most southern settlers raised the majority of their own food and produced their own household necessities and children provided household labor.<sup>177</sup>

William and Matilda Fulton settled into a small cottage in Little Rock. Judge William F. Pope, nephew of territorial governor John Pope, who also served as his private secretary, described the Fulton's cottage as "a one-story frame cottage on the east side of Scott Street, between Mulberry (Third) and Walnut (Fourth) streets. To the north of the residence and attached to it, and somewhat back from the street, was a smaller building used by Judge Fulton as the office of the Secretary of the Territory."<sup>178</sup> "A stranger would never have imagined this modest looking cottage to be the seat of an elegant hospitality, but such, nevertheless, was the case," Pope noted of his visit to the Fulton's cottage.<sup>179</sup> Near the center of town, the cottage provided the Fulton family with access to all of Little Rock including stores, the post office, and government offices.<sup>180</sup> Adapting to life in territorial Arkansas, William and Matilda became part of the small social and political circle of Little Rock.

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<sup>173</sup> Ross, "Little Rock's Old Town," 62.

<sup>174</sup> Fletcher, *Arkansas*, 99

<sup>175</sup> Bolton, "Economic Inequality in the Arkansas Territory," 622.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> Davis, *Frontier America*, 79.

<sup>178</sup> William F. Pope, *Early Days in Arkansas: Being for the Most Part the Personal Recollections of an Old Settler*, ed. Dunbar H. Pope (Little Rock: Frederick W. Alsopp, 1895), 7, 80.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

Ultimately, the historical sources show that there is no real consensus on the migration of women to the southern frontier. Some women were excited to start a new adventure while others mourned the families they left behind and never really embraced the frontier lifestyle. Every journey was different; some full of peril, others full of drudgery, and the majority with a mixture of the two. Even the frontier environments women settled in varied, since some found established communities and others carved out a homestead. What is clear, however, is that the models of “separate spheres,” a “women’s culture,” and gender can all be seen in frontier society and its impact on the roles of women. For some women life continued much as it had been before they moved as the ideals of domesticity, the private sphere, and gender-defined roles continued to direct how women lived. Other women looked to their families and fellow female settlers to help them build a new kind of society in which they became more partner than helpmate. For each American woman in the nineteenth century, the journey west and settlement in a frontier environment led to a new kind of life, but for many societal standards continued to dictate their life.

In Matilda Fulton’s case, she and her family chose to live their lives on their own terms with little thought for how the people of Arkansas or Washington, DC, felt about it. She took charge of their plantation, slaves, business, and household during the years William was serving as a senator, challenging the idea that it was not appropriate for women to do such things. Even in frontier Arkansas, societal standards dictated that women were to be part of the “private sphere,” while men participated in public activities such as business and politics. Matilda chose to ignore these standards and do what was necessary for her family and plantation to prosper. Her life in nineteenth-century Arkansas shows how much the reality of real southern women’s daily lives could vary from the ideal of the time, and how little Matilda, a woman who came

from a wealthy family, cared about such societal views. Matilda's ability to successfully manage all facets of Rosewood and her children in a frontier location demonstrates what she and other nineteenth-century women could do when they did not concern themselves with being viewed as a "lady" by American society.

## Chapter 2

### Outside Her Circle of Movement: Matilda Fulton Takes on the Management of Rosewood

After being aggravated at having to hold her tongue and act appropriately in a situation with female relatives to avoid offending them, Matilda wrote to her husband William Fulton that the situation left her “afraid to say a word, although I am nearly bursting to speak my mind some times.”<sup>1</sup> Matilda Fulton defied the structure imposed by society while still maintaining her identity as a wife and mother and did often “speak her mind,” as her life so reveals. From 1839 to 1844, Matilda Fulton served as the manager of Rosewood, her and her husband William Fulton’s 240 acre Arkansas plantation. Paying little attention to what society believed to be proper behavior for a lady, Matilda created her own idea of what a woman could be as a wife, mother, and businesswoman. Matilda spent these years supervising slaves, deciding what crops to plant, and making business deals while running a household and caring for her children. While nineteenth-century America had a limited view of women’s capabilities and relegated middle and upper-class to “women’s work” inside the home, Matilda took on a role typically fulfilled by a man in addition to her usual duties and excelled in both positions. Matilda worked hard and made difficult choices to ensure the success of Rosewood even as nineteenth century America saw her as a dependent and offered her no right to ownership of her home or property.

The themes of domesticity and the woman’s sphere supported the patriarchal system prevalent among the planter class of the South to which William and Matilda Fulton belonged.<sup>2</sup> Household chores and taking care of their children dominated the lives of southern women.<sup>3</sup> The idea that men and women belonged to two different spheres was a staple of the antebellum

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<sup>1</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, 23 June 1842, Transcript in the hand of Matilda Fulton, WSFP.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 20-21.

South, especially in relation to labor and societal roles.<sup>4</sup> The Little Rock newspaper *The Arkansas Gazette*, which the Fulton household subscribed to and Matilda read, espoused the ideas of the “separate spheres” and domesticity and frequently lectured the “ladies” of Arkansas on remembering their place in the household and how to behave towards their husbands.<sup>5</sup> In an 1834 article, the newspaper reminded women of their place in society, “It is for the man to provide, and for the wife to take care and see that every thing, within her circle of movement, is done in order and season.”<sup>6</sup> The disgrace of a domineering wife exercising authority over her husband was a constant theme in the *Arkansas Gazette*. “How indecorous, offensive, and sinful is it, to see a woman exercising authority over her husband, and saying ‘I shall have it so. It shall be done as I like,’” opined an 1831 article.<sup>7</sup> A decade later the paper was still maintaining these ideas when it reminded the women of Arkansas that “when the lady rules the roost, and wears the inexpressible look c. tyrannical command, and the gentlemen tacitly yields to her usurping and unnatural sway – it is a pitiable affair.”<sup>8</sup>

The *Arkansas Gazette* did not focus its lectures strictly on women; it also ridiculed the idea of a man who allowed his wife to dominate him. An 1842 article argued that “a tyrant is detestable; but that yielding piece of clay called a ‘soft husband,’ is only ridiculous.”<sup>9</sup> These newspaper articles reminded men and women of their place in southern society. Even as she read these articles, Matilda was living a life very unlike the one recommended by the *Arkansas Gazette*. The newspaper that she was reading to keep up to date on politics and check prices on goods for the farm was telling her that her only role was in the home caring for her husband and

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<sup>4</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>6</sup> “Brother Jonathan’s Wife’s Advice to Her Daughter on the Day of Her Marriage,” *Arkansas Gazette*, December 23, 1834.

<sup>7</sup> “Ladies, Lend an Ear,” *Arkansas Gazette*, November 9, 1831.

<sup>8</sup> “The Philosophy of Marriage,” *Arkansas Gazette*, September 21, 1842.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

children.<sup>10</sup> Her partnership with William, advice on business and child rearing, and general willingness to take charge of a situation met with no resistance from her husband who was happy to see her managing everything in his absence. While Matilda never refers to William as “soft,” the *Arkansas Gazette* would likely have viewed him that way since he went along with his wife’s decisions and let her be in charge in some situations.

While society mandated that women’s lives and labor should be contained within the private sphere, the circumstances of women like Matilda Fulton did not allow them to adhere to this model. Many women were required to act as “deputy husbands” while their husbands were absent from the plantation.<sup>11</sup> Matilda served as a “deputy husband” when William traveled to and lived in Washington for months at a time. Serving as the manager of the plantation during her husband’s absence, the plantation wife was often required to participate in activities not within her accepted realm. These “deputy husbands” took charge of the business affairs of the plantation, including money management, the supervising of the plantation overseer and crops, and the regulation and punishment of slaves, in addition to the usual household duties.<sup>12</sup> Business transactions often resulted in a very public role for the “deputy husband” as she conducted business and bargained with men. Women responded in a variety of ways to this new responsibility, some flourishing and others resentful of their situation.<sup>13</sup> Matilda flourished in her new role, acting as if it was nothing new and she was capable of handling everything at Rosewood from crop planning to slave supervision, all while caring for her family and household

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<sup>10</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP

<sup>11</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Goodwives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 36-37.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

as she usually did. While other women wrote tearfully to husbands of bad experiences with slaves and businessmen, Matilda rarely complained and always stood her ground.<sup>14</sup>

Matilda was not alone in her new endeavors as a “deputy husband,” but she was part of a small minority of such women. Only a few women in early Arkansas managed farm, family, and a small business as Matilda did with very little help from others. While many women had assistance of a male relative in such situations, others were almost solely responsible for the household and plantation.<sup>15</sup> Matilda had the assistance of William’s father, David Fulton, but preferred to handle most of the duties herself. In many cases, such as supervising the slaves, she was more successful than David Fulton in getting the job done.<sup>16</sup> Whatever the circumstances, women were occasionally left in charge of the plantation and required to perform duties that they had been taught were part of the man’s “public sphere.” Even when women engaged in duties usually fulfilled by their husband, society viewed this work as a temporary journey into man’s work. Based on Matilda’s letters to William and her oldest daughter Elizabeth over William’s years away from home, one historian describes Matilda’s strength in her husband’s absence: “Matilda, as tender of hearth and home, might be expected to play only a passively supportive role to her husband who was frequently in Washington, enmeshed in the public, masculine world of politics.”<sup>17</sup> He adds, “Yet Matilda appears to have been the one who more actively provided

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<sup>14</sup> Floride Calhoun, the wife of John C. Calhoun, was left in a situation very similar to Matilda’s and had great difficulties with the new responsibilities expected of her. The frustration of Floride Calhoun with her responsibilities as manager of the plantation was evident in many instances, even with the assistance of John C. Calhoun’s two brothers. She had difficulty maintaining authority over the slaves and wrote to her husband complaining of her situation. In addition, John C. Calhoun’s brothers wrote to him detailing how bad things were going in his absence. John C. Calhoun to John Ewing Calhoun, January 31, 1827, *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, ed., J. Franklin Jameson (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899), 241; John C. Calhoun to John Ewing Calhoun, January 15, 1827, *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, 240.

<sup>15</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics: 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 34.

<sup>16</sup> John T. Fulton to William Fulton, January 3, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>17</sup> Conevery A. Bolton, “‘A Sister’s Consolations’: Women, Health, and Community in Early Arkansas, 1810-1860,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* L (Autumn 1991): 277.

for the family's cohesiveness and well-being as a whole."<sup>18</sup> This assessment supports the idea that Matilda did not stay in her accepted domestic role in the home but served in a position of power in William's absence, caring for the family, household, and farm. Her life shows that there was not one type of life or role for American women in the nineteenth century and unique circumstances sometimes resulted in women doing whatever was necessary to care for their families and homes with little regard for what they were "supposed" to be doing in the eyes of society.

In August 1838 William and Matilda bought eighty acres of land one mile south of Little Rock.<sup>19</sup> It is possible they took advantage of the federal law of 1832 known as the "poor man's friend."<sup>20</sup> This law allowed settlers to buy forty acres or more of land, which at the minimum price of \$1.25 per acre would cost only sixty dollars.<sup>21</sup> William and Matilda built their home, Rosewood, on this land.<sup>22</sup> Eventually Rosewood consisted of a main house with a Greek revival portico, a gig house for storing the carriage, and smokehouse on 240 acres of land, but for several years Matilda and the children lived in a half-finished house while she worked to get it completed.<sup>23</sup> This meant that in addition to all of her other duties during William's absence, Matilda was deciding what needed to be done to the house, hiring workers to finish different

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "Certificate No. 2987," United States General Land Records, <http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed August 6, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Robert B. Waiz, "Migration to Arkansas: Incentives and Means of Travel," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* XVII (Winter 1958): 312.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> William F. Pope, *Early Days in Arkansas: Being for the Most Part the Personal Recollections of an Old Settler*, ed. Dunbar H. Pope (Little Rock: Frederick W. Alsopp, 1895), 80.

<sup>23</sup> Lea Flowers Baker, "William Savin and Matilda Fulton: A Brief Look at a Territorial Arkansas Family," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 48 (Winter 2000): 80; Rachel Silva, "Sandwiching in History," *The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program*, accessed February 18, 2013, [http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/pdf/tour\\_scripts/Fred%20and%20Lucy%20Alexander%20Schaer%20House,%20NLR%20Tour%20Script%202012%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/pdf/tour_scripts/Fred%20and%20Lucy%20Alexander%20Schaer%20House,%20NLR%20Tour%20Script%202012%20(1).pdf). Matilda lived at Rosewood until her death in 1879, upon which William's will dictated that the land be donated to the state of Arkansas. Anne McMath, *First Ladies of Arkansas: Women of Their Time* (Little Rock: August House, 1989), 38. The main house burned in the 1880s before the state could decide what to do with it. John Hallum, *Biographical and Pictorial History of Arkansas, Vol. I* (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons, and Co., 1887), 182.

parts of the house and grounds at Rosewood, and negotiating the contracts to determine how much the work would cost.

Matilda may have often viewed herself and acted as the head of the household at Rosewood, but the Arkansas legal system did not view her this way. When antebellum women married they became legally bound to their husbands based on the precedents of British common law.<sup>24</sup> Stripped of their property rights, women did not own any property they brought to the marriage and could not make any independent contracts.<sup>25</sup> In 1835 Arkansas Territory passed the first law in the nation giving married women the right to keep property in their own names.<sup>26</sup> When Arkansas became a state in 1836 the married woman's property law did not become a state law and the system of common law took over.<sup>27</sup> While parts of English common law defined the rights of women in Arkansas, those in power simply ignored other facets of common law.<sup>28</sup> For example, *feme sole* trading, in which a married woman engages in business independently of her husband, was a part of English common law at the time Arkansas became a state but did not exist in Arkansas until 1875.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Arkansas women were granted *feme sole* status on a case-by-case basis, typically as a shelter from their husband's debts.<sup>30</sup> In 1840 a

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<sup>24</sup> Sally G. McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson Inc., 1992), 48.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> "Arkansas Married Woman's Property Law," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, accessed February 20, 2013, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=4745>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Michael B. Dougan, "The Arkansas Married Woman's Property Law," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 8.

<sup>29</sup> Dougan, "The Arkansas Married Woman's Property Law," 8-10.

<sup>30</sup> Dougan, "The Arkansas Married Woman's Property Law," 9; *Feme sole* status gave women an independent legal identity, with the right to own and operate a business, work for wages, retain her wages, and purchase property. This status typically referred to single women or widows but could also be granted to a married woman by a court. Dorothy A. Mays, *Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival, and Freedom in a New World* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2004), 137.

married woman's property law passed the house but failed in the senate.<sup>31</sup> On December 2, 1846, Arkansas passed a bill to protect the rights of married women and any property that women brought into the marriage from any debts her husband might incur.<sup>32</sup> The bill allowed a gift or bequest in a woman's name as long as it did not come from the husband after their marriage.<sup>33</sup> This meant money or property given to a woman by her family prior to marriage or acquired from a previous marriage remained her property even when she married. The bill regarded any slaves the woman brought into the marriage as her property and prevented the sale or seizure of her slaves to pay off debts incurred by her husband.<sup>34</sup> The bill, however, also gave the husband all control and management of the slaves, direction of their labor, and receipt of their production.<sup>35</sup> This bill shows the limits on women's property rights since the slaves technically belonged to the woman, but her husband was able to do whatever he liked with the slaves, short of selling them, and to retain all of the income that the slaves produced. It was not until 1873 that the Arkansas legislature enacted a statute promising married women full property rights.<sup>36</sup> Matilda came into the marriage with no slaves or land of her own so in the view of the state of Arkansas, Rosewood and everything that made up the estate belonged to William. She could spend her entire life living and working on the land and never legally own a piece of Rosewood. It would be up to William to decide what Matilda's legal relationship to Rosewood would be when he died.

Whatever society's view of her role at Rosewood, in William's absence Matilda was hard at work conducting the family's business of farming, selling produce and dairy, as well as

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> "GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF ARKANSAS," *Arkansas State Democrat*, December 11, 1846.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "Arkansas Married Woman's Property Law," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*.

making and buying the supplies needed for her families and the slaves who lived at Rosewood. Rosewood encompassed 240 acres at its largest and had between twelve and fifteen slaves living and working there, placing William and Matilda Fulton in the category of small planters.<sup>37</sup> In William's absence Matilda was not managing a small farm with a few slaves, she was supervising over 200 acres of land, twelve to fifteen slaves, crops, business, children, and a large house. Having previously filled this role himself, William Fulton knew just how much work there was to do. The fact that William believed Matilda was capable of getting it all done shows the strength of their marriage and his faith in his wife.

Matilda was involved in a variety of business deals in Williams's absence, buying land, slaves, and livestock, and selling crops and other goods. In addition, William often consulted her for advice on his business dealings and asked for her assistance when he was not in Arkansas. In one instance William asked Matilda to try to buy some land in Little Rock that he was interested in and let him know the details.<sup>38</sup> Secure in her abilities to negotiate and buy and sell what she wanted, Matilda often faced frustrations in her business dealings with men. In November 1839 Matilda purchased a new slave, a mulatto man named John, from J. W. Johnson.<sup>39</sup> She does not mention the price she agreed to pay for John, but as the price of the other male slaves purchased

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<sup>37</sup> Slave Bill of Sale, December 26, 1830, Fulton Wright Papers, Arkansas History Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas, hereafter FWP; Slave Bill of Sale, February 1, 1834, FWP; Slave Bill of Sale, October 7, 1834, FWP; Notation for birth of Mintz, November 16, 1840, FWP; Slave Bill of Sale, April 19, 1841, FWP; Notation for birth of Lewis, July 31, 1843, FWP; "Untitled," January 13, 1847, WSFP; Rachel Silva, "Sandwiching in History," *The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program*. Historians have traditionally defined a planter in the antebellum South as a person who owns twenty or more slaves and a large amount of land. Peter Kolchin considers a person owning around ten to twelve slaves a small planter because he believes "the condition and worldview of a slave owner with twelve slaves were not likely to be fundamentally different from those of a slave owner with twenty." In *American Slavery: 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), xiii. In his work on cotton plantations in antebellum plantations in Arkansas, Donald P. McNeilly concurs with Kolchin's definition of a small planter, identifying small planters as "landowning farmers who held from ten to nineteen slaves." In *The Old South Frontier: Cotton Plantations and the Formation of Arkansas Society* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 95. Lewis C. Gray also defines a plantation as having a minimum of ten slaves in his germinal work *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, vol. 2* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1958), 239.

<sup>38</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, February 14, 1837, WSFP.

<sup>39</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, November 17, 1839, WSFP.

by William was around four hundred dollars, John's price would likely have been close to that number.<sup>40</sup> While Matilda intended to complete the entire transaction on her own, a month later she was having a hard time getting the deal done and asked William to write to Johnson to "get the matter fixed."<sup>41</sup> Still not having met with Johnson to complete John's purchase in March 1840, Matilda became frustrated writing to William that she "must insist on keeping him [John]."<sup>42</sup> She then asked William's father to assist her in completing the deal since she was becoming concerned and John believed that Matilda had bought him.<sup>43</sup>

Table 1. William and Matilda Fulton's Time Spent Away from Home

	William Fulton	Matilda Fulton
Chickasaw Nation	October - December 1826	
Fort Gibson, Indian Territory	February - April 1835	February – May 1835
Washington, DC	January - March 1832 January - March 1833 December 1836 - March 1837 October 1838 - March 1839 November 1839 - July 1840 December 1840 - July 1841 November 1841 - July 1842 November 1842 - March 1843 December 1843 - June 1844	October 1838 - March 1839    November 1841 - May 1842  December 1843 - June 1844
Northern Arkansas	August - September 1843	

Sources: *William Savin Fulton Papers, 1807-1909*, Arkansas History Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas; *Fulton Wright Papers*, Arkansas History Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas; "Senate Journal," Library of Congress U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, accessed January 24, 2014, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsj.html>; "To the Editor, Wm. S. Fulton," *Arkansas Gazette*, March 20, 1839.

<sup>40</sup> "Slave Bill of Sale," February 1, 1834, FWP; "Slave Bill of Sale," April 19, 1841, FWP.

<sup>41</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 30, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>42</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 15, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

The next month Matilda had still not reached a settlement with Johnson over John, but Johnson had promised William's father to get it fixed.<sup>44</sup> The drawn out nature of the transaction made Matilda skeptical and unhappy with how Johnson had behaved about the deal.<sup>45</sup> Almost three years later Johnson denied ever selling John to Matilda and tried to get her to take another slave in his place, confirming Matilda's previous concerns over his suspicious behavior.<sup>46</sup> When David Fulton discussed the matter with Johnson the man acted very differently about the situation and did not attempt to claim he had not sold John to Matilda.<sup>47</sup> After the meeting, it appeared to William's father that Johnson had never completed his own purchase of John from the original owner.<sup>48</sup> While Johnson tried to intimidate Matilda into giving John back to him during their meeting, when he met with David Fulton Johnson treated him as an equal and promised to rectify the situation. Eventually John's purchase was completed after William wrote Johnson several letters trying to resolve the issue, but the situation showed Matilda that she could not always conduct business deals on her own as some men would take advantage of a woman in a business situation.<sup>49</sup>

In other cases Matilda had to deal with the consequences of a business deal that William made. In the spring of 1840 William purchased two cows from a local businessman, Mr. Coalter, a purchase that ended up being a very frustrating experience for Matilda.<sup>50</sup> Still waiting to receive the cows several months later, Matilda told William she "would feel like fighting myself if I could get hold of old Coalter, what do you think of his not sending me one cow yet

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<sup>44</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, July 15, 1842, Transcript in the hand of David Fulton, WSFP.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> "Untitled," November 11, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>50</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840, WSFP.

almost the first of May, and I have not seen the old scoundrel.”<sup>51</sup> Confident his wife could remedy the problem on her own, William wrote to Matilda two weeks later assuming she had gotten the cows from Coalter.<sup>52</sup> William wished he had left the matter to Matilda in the first place and believed she was capable of handling the situation on her own, telling her his “over-anxiety to get you a-going in the milk line, has done nothing but harm. If you had the money I gave him, you could have supplied yourself with cows. You will have to work out as well as you can.”<sup>53</sup> Five days later she was still waiting on Coalter to deliver the cows so she had made the decision to buy a cow from a sale that was happening in Little Rock that day.<sup>54</sup> Coalter finally delivered three cows the next week.<sup>55</sup> While this was one more than William had paid for, the cows looked so sickly Matilda was sure they would die any day.<sup>56</sup> Matilda complained to Coalter about the health of the cows and “gave him a good scold.”<sup>57</sup>

By June Matilda was planning to send back one of the cows since she was too sick to stand for milking or nursing her calf.<sup>58</sup> Matilda encountered Coalter in town a few days later and gave the “grand scoundrel” a thorough scolding in which she told him he would bring her three good cows or she would send an officer after him.<sup>59</sup> He promised to bring the best he could get and the next week he brought Matilda four cows to make a total of six.<sup>60</sup> Still not completely satisfied with the condition of the cows, Matilda believed they were the best Coalter had and settled her business with him.<sup>61</sup> Matilda was either a tough bargainer or had thoroughly

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 18, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 23, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>55</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 31, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 6, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>59</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 11, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 18, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>61</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 18, 1840, WSFP.

embarrassed Coalter with her public scolding since she received more cows than she had originally paid for. In this situation not only was Matilda able to hold her own in the male business world and get what she paid for, but she was brave enough to approach a man in public and berate him to the point where he gave in and did what she told him to. This sort of behavior by a woman in public would have been very scandalous and not viewed as appropriate for a woman of Matilda's standing in Arkansas society. It was, however, an action that Matilda thought necessary to force Coalter to fulfill his business obligations, and she had no problem doing whatever was necessary.

In the summer of 1842, Matilda got involved in another difficult business deal. Very unhappy with the condition of the carriage and harness at Rosewood, she described their state to William as "so very bad it will not be safe for us to trust ourselves often, I think when I wish to go to town I will go early in the morning as I will have to walk."<sup>62</sup> Traveling from Rosewood to Little Rock by foot required Matilda and the children to walk a mile to get to town and another mile to get back home.<sup>63</sup> Matilda quickly remedied the situation with the purchase of a new carriage, but she was concerned with William's reaction to her decision. "I am almost affraid to let you know what I have done, fearing it will not meet with your approbation," she hesitantly wrote to William.<sup>64</sup> Matilda had agreed to purchase a carriage owned by Colonel Ambrose Sevier, William's fellow United States senator from Arkansas.<sup>65</sup> Matilda made the deal with Matilda Johnson, her close friend and Colonel Sevier's mother-in-law.<sup>66</sup> Colonel Sevier had

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<sup>62</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>63</sup> Certificate No. 2987, United States General Land Records.

<sup>64</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 3, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid; "Ambrose H. Sevier," *Arkansas State Democrat*, January 12, 1849.

<sup>66</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 3, 1842, WSFP; "Ambrose H. Sevier," *Arkansas State Democrat*, January 12, 1849.

written to Mrs. Johnson's son Robert Johnson, the attorney general of Arkansas and Colonel Sevier's brother-in-law, to sell the carriage.<sup>67</sup>

Matilda, a woman acting on behalf of her family in her husband's absence, and Mrs. Johnson, a widow, negotiated a business deal without the participation of any men during a time when only men were supposed to make business deals. The two women came to a mutually satisfying agreement on the carriage. Matilda believed it to be a very good bargain at the price of seven hundred dollars in Arkansas money or five hundred dollars in "good money" and planned to negotiate to get the price closer to four hundred dollars in "good money."<sup>68</sup> William's father and the rest of the family all believed it to be a good deal for the carriage that Matilda described as "veary neate and pretty."<sup>69</sup> While Matilda was very happy with the deal, she urged William to write her immediately if he did not want her to keep the carriage. "Now my dear husband I dont wish you to say I must keep it, if you think you cannot afford it or if you can do better there," Matilda wrote, adding that "as to myself I could do veary well without one for some time yet, but Elizabeth [the Fulton's oldest daughter] thinks it dread-full to have to walk to town. We all considered this the best chance we would have."<sup>70</sup> While she believed she had the

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<sup>67</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 3, 1842, WSFP; "Death of Ex-Senator Robert W. Johnson," *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, August 6, 1879.

<sup>68</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 3, 1842, WSFP. Michael B. Dougan describes the banking system, "The first, 'to provide long term credit to farmers and planters,' was the Real Estate Bank. The other, the State Bank, was designed for the state's merchant community." In *Arkansas Odyssey: The Saga of Arkansas from Prehistoric Times to the Present* (Little Rock, AR: Rose Publishing Company, 1994), 89. The monetary system in Arkansas was unreliable during the late 1830s and throughout the 1840s. The two state banks of Arkansas suspended the redemption of bank notes in gold and silver coin while continuing to issue new currency to make loans. The bank notes declined in value and by 1844 both banks closed. Arkansas did not have another state bank until 1866. Good money referred to gold and silver coins as opposed to Arkansas paper currency. "Banking," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, accessed February 21, 2013. <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=5000>. In August 1842 the market in New Orleans valued Arkansas money at 30 to 35 cents on the dollar, a higher price than Arkansas money had been commanding on the market. "Small News," *Arkansas Gazette*, August 24, 1842.

<sup>69</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 3, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

right to make business decisions on her own, Matilda preferred to have William's support on those decisions.

Matilda had collected the cash she needed to pay for the carriage on her own from a variety of sources.<sup>71</sup> William and Matilda hired out their slave Charlotte to a man in town; Matilda collected \$36 from the man.<sup>72</sup> Matilda requested that Elias Conway, the state auditor, send \$544 of William's money that he had in his possession.<sup>73</sup> In several instances Matilda sent one of the slaves to sell "good money" in exchange for Arkansas money.<sup>74</sup> William and Matilda also had several houses in Little Rock that they rented out and she had collected \$20 from the women who rented their log house in town.<sup>75</sup> The slaves at Rosewood kept a small number of livestock and gardens of their own and Matilda allowed them to sell the surplus in town but required the slaves to give her a portion of their profits from the sales.<sup>76</sup> The money combined from these sources provided Matilda with enough cash to buy the carriage, and the various sources show how much business Matilda conducted on a regular basis and how comfortable she was making business deals.

Several weeks after Matilda agreed to purchase the carriage, Robert Johnson came to visit her and informed her he could not honor the price his mother had agreed upon for the carriage.<sup>77</sup> Not only did he not support the deal Matilda had previously made, but he also did not tell her what price he would take.<sup>78</sup> Johnson said he would let William and Colonel Sevier settle the

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<sup>71</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>72</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 3, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP; "Auditor's Report," *Arkansas State Democrat*, December 4, 1846.

<sup>74</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 3, 1842, WSFP. See "Banking," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*.

<sup>75</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>76</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 3, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>77</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, July 11, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

matter when they returned home.<sup>79</sup> Robert Johnson's behavior towards his mother and Matilda suggests that he was not comfortable with women being involved in business as he did not approve of the deal his mother struck and refused to negotiate with Matilda.<sup>80</sup> Matilda was not comfortable leaving the matter unsettled and asked William's father to talk with Mr. Johnson since he would not negotiate with her: "I did not feel satisfied to stop there, I went to church yesterday and saw father [William's father David Fulton] and told him what Robert had said he said he would see him today and know all about the thing."<sup>81</sup>

When Mr. Johnson informed David Fulton that he wanted twice the price Matilda and Mrs. Johnson had agreed to, she was shocked and told her father-in-law to tell Johnson she would send the carriage home.<sup>82</sup> Always practical, Matilda found a different use for the money she had saved up and informed William that while she "had the money all ready to pay, we will now stay at home. I will take the money and finish the rooms upstairs, perhaps it will be as well."<sup>83</sup> Unconcerned about the effect not having a carriage would have on herself, Matilda was worried about Elizabeth, her oldest daughter, not being able to go to town. Mentioning her concern over Elizabeth to William, Matilda noted that she regretted the failed carriage purchase "only on Elizabeths account but I know we cant have all things as we wish."<sup>84</sup> Matilda decided not to complete the purchase with the new price and returned the carriage.<sup>85</sup> Matilda's difficulty buying the carriage shows the limits on women in the nineteenth-century business world. Even though Matilda and Mrs. Johnson made a deal, Robert Johnson invalidated the deal and then

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, July 11, 1842, WSFP.

refused to negotiate with Matilda. In the end, Matilda had no recourse but to cancel the transaction.

When William was at home and running Rosewood he was the one to visit these stores and buy the goods needed at Rosewood. In his absence, Matilda took on the role of purchasing agent for her household and braved the rustic, rowdy, and often dirty male-dominated general stores of Little Rock.<sup>86</sup> Matilda only bought from the stores in Little Rock when she desperately needed something due to the high prices. When possible she chose to wait on goods to come from New Orleans or have William send something through the mail. Many planters preferred to deal with merchants in New Orleans rather than have to pay higher prices to local merchants.<sup>87</sup> Numerous general stores in Little Rock sold goods such as liquor, groceries, furniture, tobacco, and anything needed to build a house or run a farm.<sup>88</sup> The majority of these stores expected the male farm population living near Little Rock to be their main customers and the focus of their advertisements on hardware, nails, iron, axes, and other farm equipment reflects this.<sup>89</sup> There were exceptions to the male-centered stores, such as the fancy dry goods and jewelry store that invited the ladies of Little Rock to visit the store and view the inventory, but the majority of the stores focused on male customers first and female customers as more of an afterthought.<sup>90</sup>

In an effort to save money Matilda frequently requested that William buy supplies for the house as he was traveling since the prices were cheaper in places such as New Orleans than they were in Little Rock.<sup>91</sup> She requested basic necessities as well as items she needed for

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<sup>86</sup> Thomas D. Clark, *Pills, Petticoats, and Plows: The Southern Country Store* (Cornwall, NY: The Cornwall Press, 1944), 47-48.

<sup>87</sup> Raleigh A. Suarez, "Bargains, Bills, and Bankruptcies: Business Activity in Rural Antebellum Louisiana," *Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 7, no. 3 (Summer 1966): 190.

<sup>88</sup> "Multiple Classified Advertisements," *Arkansas Gazette*, January 2, 1839.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 23, 1840, WSFP.

entertaining, such as fish, macaroons, fruits, and candies.<sup>92</sup> While she could have bought some of these items in Little Rock, the prices were much higher there than in other areas of the country.<sup>93</sup> When she wanted some hard soap for washing cloth, Matilda encouraged William to buy it in New Orleans since she understood “everything can be had there for almost nothing for good money.”<sup>94</sup>

Considering herself knowledgeable when it came to business, Matilda was not afraid to question choices William made when she did not approve. In the fall of 1842, William had purchased two wild horses before he went back to Washington, believing that the slaves would be able to “break” the horses and use them as carriage horses and for work in the fields.<sup>95</sup> A few months later the horses still had not been broken because Matilda had not received the reigns, collars, and harnesses from the man who sold William the horses.<sup>96</sup> Matilda believed William never should have purchased the horses, telling him she feared “those horses will never be any use to us, I wish I had the money now you gave for them, I could sell it for two and a half.”<sup>97</sup> Two weeks later the slave Joseph had tried to work with the two horses but “found he could do nothing with them,” so Matilda had him put the horses back in the field where they had been.<sup>98</sup> In other instances Matilda was displeased with choices William made when he purchased goods in Washington and sent them to Rosewood. When William sent shoes that were the wrong sizes for several of the slaves Matilda was frustrated that she had to buy an expensive pair at the store in Little Rock for Manual who had worn out his previous pair.<sup>99</sup> In another instance she was unhappy with some flour that William bought and urged him not to get his flour “from the man

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>95</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 1, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 8, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>98</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 22, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>99</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 25, 1842, WSFP.

you did last time, it was the worst we ever had.”<sup>100</sup> Believing herself to be an equal partner in her marriage and in the family business, Matilda felt it was her right to criticize William’s choices when it affected their financial state.

Finances were a constant concern for William and Matilda, and they shared anxiety and control over their money equally. On the occasion of William’s marriage to Matilda, Andrew Jackson, a close friend of William’s and future president of the United States, wrote to William of his confidence in Matilda’s responsible nature in relation to finances: “The industry and economy of Mrs. F., in aid of your own exertions, will lead to wealth, or at least to independent competency, which is all that ought to be desired, it being all that is necessary or desirable.”<sup>101</sup> In addition to his compliments to Matilda about her financial responsibility, Jackson offered William some financial advice. “There is but one rule which every one ought to adopt and pursue to make him independent . . . to learn to live within your means,” Jackson recommended, adding that “a man can be as independent on \$100 dollars as on \$5,000. Our real wants are very few, our imaginary wants numerous, which will daily increase if we feed or cherish them.”<sup>102</sup>

Jackson’s characterization of Matilda was accurate as she tried to save money while adding to their income with side businesses throughout their marriage. “I am sure we will have a good supply of everything,” Matilda confidently wrote in June 1842.<sup>103</sup> While she knew that William was worried about their finances, Matilda was not concerned as she believed even though “our expenses have been great . . . I know with your good management & our economy at home, I am sure we will be able to make all ends meet.”<sup>104</sup> Matilda added to the family’s income

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<sup>100</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 8, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>101</sup> Andrew Jackson to William Savin Fulton, April 4, 1823, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1821-1824*, vol. V, eds. Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, and George H. Hoemann (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press), 267.

<sup>102</sup> Jackson, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, vol. V, 267-268.

<sup>103</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

by selling vegetables from the garden and milk and butter from the cows.<sup>105</sup> There were times when she ran low on cash and had to take matters into her own hands. When she needed money to buy pork she tried to sell some gold William had left with her and attempted to collect a debt a man in town owed William.<sup>106</sup>

Not only was Matilda frugal, she was also confident that she could always make ends meet and did not worry when she had little money. “I tell you money is veary scarce here,” Matilda wrote during one instance of paucity, but she believed there was “aplenty to last me until you come home. I have no use for any now.”<sup>107</sup> When worrying about the possibility of losing his job as a Senator, William turned to Matilda for advice on where they stood financially. In response to his question, “Should I be thrown out of the Senate, I will have nothing to begin the world with, and we will both have to go to hard labor. Can our place be made so as to yield a decent support?” Matilda reassuringly responded that she had “not the least fear but that we can always make a genteel support. I assure you my dear husband if a willing and ambitious disposition will do it I am more than ready and willing to do my part, you know my dear husband I never was afraid of work.”<sup>108</sup> She goes on to reassure him by stating that they came into the world with nothing and could easily begin again.<sup>109</sup> When William reminded Matilda they needed to save money when they could, she responded that she was doing everything she could to save: “You say I must economise in every way, I assure you we are living on as little as possible I assure you I have spent but little money this winter, we have had no use for money since we got our pork. I never think of the stores.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 23, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>106</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 1, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>107</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 3, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>109</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>110</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 10, 1843, WSFP.

Assuming that she and William were partners in their financial matters, Matilda was shocked in June 1842 when her sister informed her that William had written his father a letter in which he stated he was “broke altopieces.”<sup>111</sup> Concerned that William had kept something from her about their finances, Matilda wrote to her husband that she had believed that she knew how their financial affairs stood and could not understand why he would keep anything from her.<sup>112</sup> She believed it was her right to know about their finances, telling William she thought “a wife should be the first to know such things, surely no one can feel more interested than I do.”<sup>113</sup> Unable to rest easy until she heard from William, Matilda was especially concerned because she and Mrs. Johnson had just agreed on her ill-fated purchase of Mr. Sevier’s carriage, a transaction that she would not have engaged in if she had known they were having financial problems.<sup>114</sup> She wrote to William that she wished she “had of known all this before I got Mr. Seviars carriage but I thought we could as well afford to get it now as any other time.”<sup>115</sup> While she ended up not buying Sevier’s carriage due to the expensive price, Matilda worried at the time that she had overextended the family budget due to her lack of understanding as to where she and William stood financially.

Matilda believed the story was being spread by William’s political enemies, specifically James Galloway, the husband of William’s niece Margaret Shall Galloway. Sharing her suspicions with William, Matilda wrote to William that she believed “they have been talking about it in town, indeed I expect they would be glad if it was so, misery you know likes company. James Galloway living now on David Shall [William’s nephew] doing nothing.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. See p. 46-50 for a thorough discussion of Matilda’s purchase of the carriage.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

When Matilda talked with William's father the next day she learned the story of William being broke was a rumor that was circulating around town and not something that William had written to David Fulton.<sup>117</sup> William's father also believed that James Galloway was behind the rumor: "I tell you the old Gentleman [David Fulton] was mad, he said if they would all attend and manage their own affairs as well as you do we would have no cause to complain, alluding to Mr Galloway," Matilda remarked to William.<sup>118</sup> William had angered James Galloway in 1840 when he got his brother-in-law Edward Nowland the position of sutler at Fort Gibson, a position that Charles Galloway had been in Washington trying to get for his brother James.<sup>119</sup> The experience had resulted in anxiety over money and made Matilda worry over their general financial state. Her uneasiness caused her to dwell on a small loan that she and William had previously taken out, writing to William that she would be happy "if we were clear of those Banks you know my dear how much I dread them, we have every comfort around us we could desire, and if we only were clear of debt we would be perfectly happy."<sup>120</sup> The debt Matilda was worried about involved a loan that William had taken from Chester Ashley at the Real Estate Bank to buy additional acreage adjoining Rosewood.<sup>121</sup> This situation shows that Matilda was used to being an equal partner in their finances and was unhappy when they debt they could not quickly pay back. While William and Matilda typically knew where their finances stood and how their spouse was spending money, at times the distance between them caused problems.

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<sup>117</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 13, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 6, 1840, WSFP; Most military forts had a general store, and the sutler was the person in charge of this store. W.N. Davis, Jr., "The Sutler at Fort Bridger," *Western Historical Quarterly* 2:1 (Jan 1971), 37. James Galloway had a lengthy feud with Edward Nowland and ended up a financial failure who declared bankruptcy in 1843 before traveling to California in 1849 as a gold speculator. David Fulton to William Fulton, February 6, 1842, WSFP; Rachel Silva, "Sandwiching in History," *The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program*.

<sup>120</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 13, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>121</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 13, 1842, WSFP; "Untitled," December 4, 1854, WSFP;

Considered the duty of the woman of the house, clothing members of her family as well as slaves was an expensive and time-consuming task for women in the nineteenth century and one of Matilda's major concerns.<sup>122</sup> She often asked William to buy clothing and shoes in Washington and mail or bring the items on his return trip home since the market prices were cheaper there than in Little Rock.<sup>123</sup> After requesting that William purchase and bring clothing with him to Rosewood, Matilda explained that she believed "it would be a saving of much money if you could bring everything we require for our family for the year in the way of wareing apparel."<sup>124</sup> In one instance she requested William to buy several pieces of cheap white cotton "such as I gave 12 cents for it is always usefull in the family," as well as three yards of muslin to make aprons, while in another letter she asked William to bring loom cotton yarn for weaving.<sup>125</sup>

Making sure the slaves had the clothes needed to complete their work was important to Matilda as well. Emphasizing the needs of the slaves to William, Matilda hoped "we will not require much for myself nor the children, the servants stand more in need than we do."<sup>126</sup> While Matilda knew the slaves needed proper clothing, she worried over the price of such clothing.<sup>127</sup> Matilda explained the slave clothing situation to William: "I have not made them new clothes this winter I could not get the men any kind of coats for less than 10 dol I told them we cannot afford that, they have maid out with their old ones. You could put up such articles as would suit them for summer and winter let them be strong and cheap."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Elizabeth Jacoway, *Behold, Our Works Were Good: A Handbook of Arkansas Women's History* (Little Rock: Arkansas Women's History Institute in Association with August House Publishers, 1998), 12.

<sup>123</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 8, 1843, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>126</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

Most plantation owners found it cheaper to produce the majority of slave clothing at the plantation rather than purchase the needed clothing.<sup>129</sup> While some plantation women relegated all clothing production to the female slaves, Matilda made much of the clothing for her family and slaves herself.<sup>130</sup> She and the slave women made clothing for everyone at Rosewood when they could. “I must tell you how much work Sister Maria [Fulton] & Minerva [a slave] & myself maid 8 pair of pantaloons and one dress since Tuesday we do the core work and Elizabeth and Sophia do the fine work,” Matilda wrote proudly to William,<sup>131</sup> Matilda detailed spending an entire day making clothing for the male slaves: “I have a plenty of work now, Sister Maria & Minerva and myself are getting the men all cloth, I was up by five o’clock.”<sup>132</sup> Many plantation mistresses considered the clothing of slaves to be one of their most demanding and frustrating tasks even though most did not do the actual labor themselves.<sup>133</sup> Matilda definitely felt this way about clothing everyone at Rosewood since she had the usual plantation mistress duties of deciding how much and what kind of clothing was needed, obtaining the cloth needed to produce the clothing, and also participating in the actual production process herself.

Tending to put herself last when describing the family’s needs, Matilda focused on clothing for the slaves and dresses and shoes for the girls. Writing to William she requested only plain clothing for herself: “I do not wish you to bring me any kind of finery I have more now than I can use for some years to come, all I want is a cheap plain black silk dress and some dark

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<sup>129</sup> Margaret T. Ordonez, “Plantation Self-Sufficiency in Leon County, Florida: 1824-1860,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (April 1982): 429.

<sup>130</sup> Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 32; Shane White and Graham White, “Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Past and Present* 148 (August 1995): 166.

<sup>131</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, July 3, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>132</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 30, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>133</sup> Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 88.

calico for next winter and white and colored cotton stockings.”<sup>134</sup> One year Matilda requested that William buy her a new pair of shoes as she had “to be out so much, one pair will not be enough to last another winter.”<sup>135</sup> This suggests that she had only one pair of shoes suitable for working outdoors during the wintertime and displays her practical attitude about her own clothing.

Matilda tried to balance her desire to be practical with her understanding that her daughters wanted nice things and hoped William could find it in their budget to get a “handsome fashionable” dress for their ten-year-old daughter Sophia.<sup>136</sup> Matilda was always concerned with ensuring their oldest daughter Elizabeth, who was at boarding school in Baltimore, Maryland, had everything she needed for the dinners and parties she attended in the city.<sup>137</sup> Matilda was horrified at the prices in Little Rock, noting that she did not know how the ladies managed to dress as they did.<sup>138</sup> While she wanted Elizabeth to have nice things, she hoped their daughter would understand the family’s limited budget. Matilda believed Elizabeth would “never be able to keep way with them [other girls at school] and I sincerely hope she will never wish to do so.”<sup>139</sup> While Matilda could offer her input when writing to William, she was not there to help with the actual purchases William made before he left Washington. She was bothered at not being with William and Elizabeth as they purchased goods to bring back to Rosewood but hoped that Elizabeth was now old enough to help William with this arduous task.<sup>140</sup> She usually could not resist offering some advice and made many suggestions about what William should purchase,

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<sup>134</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>135</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>136</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP. “Sophie Caroline Fulton Watkins,” *Maryland, Find a Grave Index, 1637-2012*, accessed November 11, 2013, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=7840479>.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 12, 1840, WSFP.

especially when he was buying items for her and their daughters.<sup>141</sup> “I approve of you not having too many dresses made,” Matilda wrote, adding that he should “let them be neat and fashionable, that is all that is necessary.”<sup>142</sup>

The author of the *Arkansas Gazette* articles deploring “soft husbands” and domineering wives would hardly have approved of a situation where the wife offered her approval or disapproval of her husband’s actions.<sup>143</sup> When Matilda needed to take control of everything at Rosewood in William’s absence, she became comfortable holding a position of power and believed her opinion was just as valid as William’s. Matilda’s ability to successfully take on unconventional roles for women was displaying in her ability to make decisions and conduct business as well as managing the household.

“His status, in the eyes of the world, was bound to be higher than that of his wife, whose activities were confined to house, yard, garden, and field work of the type that required no decisions,” Margaret Bolsterli writes of the distinctions between male and female work in early Arkansas.<sup>144</sup> She then goes on to explain the lack of acknowledgment of the work of women, “Women’s work has usually been ephemeral: floors that are scrubbed today must be scrubbed again next week; food is cooked and eaten; clothes that get sewed wear out; children grow up and leave. So the processes in which women are engaged do not frequently become matters of public or any other kind of record.”<sup>145</sup> The gender roles that women were required to adhere to resulted in devaluation of their labor since it remained within the household and out of the public

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> “Ladies, Lend an Ear,” *Arkansas Gazette*, November 9, 1831; “The Philosophy of Marriage,” *Arkansas Gazette*, September 21, 1842.

<sup>144</sup> Margaret J. Bolsterli, “What The Women Told: Memoirs and Diaries from Nineteenth Century Arkansas Women,” *Arkansas Times* X (September 1984): 79.

<sup>145</sup>

economy.<sup>146</sup> A myriad of activities made up women's work. The household was the woman's domain, including the kitchen and all related attachments such as cellars and butteries.<sup>147</sup> The domestic realm of the woman stretched outside as well to the dairy, garden, and smokehouse.<sup>148</sup> The authority of the wife ended there, with the fields and other areas of the plantation making up part of the man's domain.<sup>149</sup>

As slave owners William and Matilda were in the minority in Arkansas, especially in the area around Little Rock.<sup>150</sup> The handful of wealthy planters who owned slaves in Arkansas were mostly located in the cotton rich delta region of the state.<sup>151</sup> While owning slaves kept Matilda from having to work in the fields as yeoman farm women did, she still had a great deal of work to keep her busy.<sup>152</sup> Overseeing the slaves, producing food and dairy for market, and clothing her family and slaves were all part of Matilda's duties. The image of the leisurely southern lady surrounded by servants who do all of the household chores has been refuted by many historians.<sup>153</sup> Women performed functions that contributed to and preserved the economy of the South, but a male-dominated society did not recognize that labor.<sup>154</sup> Far from lives of idleness, southern women like Matilda Fulton had to be familiar with a large variety of work including spinning, weaving, sewing, gardening, caring for the health of the family, in addition to all aspects of food preparation. Matilda's daily schedule showed just how comfortable she was with

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<sup>146</sup> Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 10-11.

<sup>147</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 31.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Jacoway, *Behold, Our Works Were Good*, 12.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie, "Introduction," in *Neither Lady nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South*, ed. Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1-6; Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 63-96.

<sup>154</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 7.

work.<sup>155</sup> In one day she noted that she had not sat down for five minutes.<sup>156</sup> She had been busy laying out the yard and was so tan from being outdoors all week that she feared William would hardly recognize her.<sup>157</sup>

Not only did she work hard, but Matilda also prided herself on keeping everyone else busy “from the cook down to Julia [Matilda’s youngest daughter].”<sup>158</sup> The presence of slaves kept Matilda from having to do strenuous field labor, but she spent her day from sunup to sundown supervising in the kitchen, garden, smokehouse, and fields to make sure all tasks were being done appropriately while also doing her own work.<sup>159</sup> Matilda realized the importance of her supervision in August 1842 when she suffered from a severe fever for three days and was unable to oversee the slaves.<sup>160</sup> Once she recovered Matilda was disappointed to find that the slaves had done very little work in the fields during her illness.<sup>161</sup> Describing the situation to William, Matilda complained to William she did not “know when I ever was more provoke, to see the way they had been working.”<sup>162</sup> The lack of work done by the slaves without Matilda’s presence shows how important her supervision was to getting things done at Rosewood and that the slaves viewed her as a person of authority. This situation displays the complexity of her duties at Rosewood as she tried to balance her work as well as the jobs usually fulfilled by William.

Matilda took charge of finishing and maintaining Rosewood, and she was ambitious in her efforts to get the house in good condition. In March 1839 Matilda and the children moved

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<sup>155</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>159</sup> Jacoway, *Behold, Our Works Were Good*, 12.

<sup>160</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, August 15, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

into the house while William stayed in Washington.<sup>163</sup> More than three years later she was still trying to get the house finished and up to her standards.<sup>164</sup> When the floor in the back parlor became unsteady Matilda hired carpenters to replace the foundation under the room and the flooring: “they have been all under the house and fixt everything there, it dose not shake in the least now you dont know what a difference it makes, all the logs under the parlor was split except one.”<sup>165</sup> She also had the carpenters fix several doors in the house that had become difficult to open and close.<sup>166</sup> Happy with the work done by the carpenters, Matilda reminded William that he “must not feel uneasy about the house, the floor in the back parlour is all secure and solid.”<sup>167</sup> While the process of building and maintaining the main house was lengthy and frustrating, Matilda was able to hire the workers and get the jobs finished, showing that the men she hired viewed her as enough of an authority figure to complete their contracts.

In addition to caring for the house at Rosewood, Matilda was also in charge of four rental houses in Little Rock that she and William rented out to tenants. The rents varied depending on the size and quality of the house. One house rented for \$150 “good money” a year, and another house in town was rented to “some free women at 12 dol a month.”<sup>168</sup> Matilda occasionally had difficulties collecting money. When a tenant skipped out on the rent she had no recourse, writing to William that “Mr Whitfield did not pay all the rent, much less the final.”<sup>169</sup> Matilda did not experience difficulties simply because she was a woman trying to conduct business. Left in charge of collecting rent while Matilda went to stay with William in Washington, William’s

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<sup>163</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, March 23, 1839, FWP.

<sup>164</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 16, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>168</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 16, 1842, WSFP; William Fulton to David Shall, November 16, 1843, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP; “Untitled,” November 11, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>169</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 3, 1843, WSFP.

father, David Fulton, had difficulties of his own. When Matilda returned home she found “nearly all the rents have been paid” to David Fulton.<sup>170</sup> One tenant was ill and had not been able to pay his rent, but Matilda told William she would ensure they were all collected promptly.<sup>171</sup> Wanting to deal with the situation herself, Matilda was frustrated that the poor condition of her carriage prevented her from traveling to town to collect the rent.<sup>172</sup> Instead Matilda had to ask her father-in-law, David Fulton, to collect the rent from the tenants in town.<sup>173</sup> Three weeks later she wrote to William that David Fulton had collected the last of the rent.<sup>174</sup> Her inability to handle the situation with the rent without her father-in-law’s help shows that Matilda had to admit, at least occasionally, that she could not handle everything at Rosewood as well as their other business all on her own.

Not only did Matilda have trouble collecting the rent, at times the tenants left the houses in poor condition. She complained to William when it came time for a tenant to move out that “Mr. Whitfield says he does not know what has become of the fence, it is all gone.”<sup>175</sup> Not only was the fence gone, but the inside was so dirty Matilda had to hire a few women to go in and clean the house once the tenant was gone.<sup>176</sup> Running low on money, Matilda decided not to rebuild the fence until William returned home.<sup>177</sup> Keeping the rental houses looking nice was important to Matilda and she often requested that William bring supplies for the houses. In one instance she asked him to “get paper for our house in town, that looks veary bad now.”<sup>178</sup> Matilda did sometimes tire of dealing with the rental houses. After finishing work on a rental

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<sup>170</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 29, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>175</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton January 1, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton January 16, 1843, WSFP.

house in town she told William she found it to be “so much trouble to get the house in town finished I determined never to have anything of that kind done in your absence.”<sup>179</sup> Not just tasked with the upkeep of Rosewood, Matilda also had to act as a businesswoman ensuring the upkeep of the rental houses, collecting rent from tenants, and securing new tenants once a tenant moved out.

In the winter of 1840 Matilda and the children joined William in Washington and stayed until the spring of 1842. During this time William’s father, David Fulton, took charge of Rosewood and William and Matilda’s business affairs in Little Rock while Matilda’s sisters Maria and Sophia stayed at Rosewood and took care of the household.<sup>180</sup> David Fulton’s descriptions of the tasks he completed on William’s behalf show how much work Matilda took care of in William’s absence.<sup>181</sup> Repairing the roof and fireplace in the main house, collecting rent from tenants in town, supervising the slaves and their work in the gardens and fields and managing contracts for slaves that had been hired out, as well as conducting business such as selling produce and milk made up just part of the tasks that David Fulton mentions completing in William and Matilda’s absence.<sup>182</sup> After one year of David Fulton doing the work that Matilda had been doing, William’s brother wrote to William that their father was finding it to be too much: “the duties devolving upon him are more arduous than his strength of constitution is able to bare, he suggested to me the prospects of joining your force and supplying all able bodied men one gratified to superintend hands and labour himself to take charge and manage affairs with his own super-visor to the best advantage.”<sup>183</sup> William’s brother and father believed it would take at

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<sup>179</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 12, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>180</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 29, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>181</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, January 31, 1841, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>182</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, January 31, 1841, WSFP; David Fulton to William Fulton, July 20, 1841, WSFP; David Fulton to William Fulton, November 6, 1841, WSFP.

<sup>183</sup> John T. Fulton to William Fulton, January 3, 1842, WSFP.

least two men, an overseer and a supervisor of affairs at Rosewood, to fulfill the duties that Matilda had previously handled in addition to her housework and caring for the children.

When Matilda returned home in the spring of 1842 she was happy with the condition of the farm and house and wished William could see “how well and flourishing every thing looks,” but things were not exactly how she wanted them done.<sup>184</sup> She intended to go to town and buy some plants as there had been no winter cabbage planted and she planned to have the road in front of the house cleared of weeds and bushes neglected in her absence.<sup>185</sup> Matilda was also not satisfied with the cleanliness of the house and had Charlotte busy washing everything in the house since her arrival home.<sup>186</sup> Taking back over the management of the slaves, Matilda planned to have the men working out in the corn field after they finished clearing the road.<sup>187</sup> “I feel so delighted to be at home, and can find so much to attend to. I know I will not wish to visit much,” Matilda contentedly pronounced to William, adding, “You know my dear husband I will be just in my glory when I can attend to my butter and milk and fowls.”<sup>188</sup> While she was ready to return to her work, Matilda was receiving daily visits from friends who had missed her and her daughters while they were in Washington: “I hope we will have no company this afternoon, our friends appear veary glad we have come home we have had company every day since we got home, I have scarcely a moment to myself, I am up by time every morning attending to my milk butter & fowls, after breakfast I am all over the plase.”<sup>189</sup> While Matilda was busy with work and getting her house back in order, her friends obviously had more leisure time as they bombarded her with social calls.

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<sup>184</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 29, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP.

Historians have argued for and disputed the idea of a plantation mistress living as a prisoner on an isolated plantation where she saw no one for weeks.<sup>190</sup> While some historians make a case for southern women as prisoners tied to the household with no female companionship and an inability to travel, other historians claim this idea of isolation has been overstated.<sup>191</sup> Somewhere in between these two ideas, Matilda's life was often very busy as she visited friends in Little Rock, received visitors, and hosted dinner parties, while at other times she spent long periods of time at home with no white adult companionship.<sup>192</sup> "Your Aunt Sophia went in last evening to a party, she has not returned yet. I rather expect she will stay tonight and go to the theater. You see I am quite alone with your little sisters," Matilda wrote to Elizabeth in January 1840.<sup>193</sup> She embraced the solitude that her isolated location sometimes caused, telling Elizabeth, "You know I like to be alone some times."<sup>194</sup> At the end of April 1840 she had seen so little company and been to town so few times that she was not even aware of the date and was more than a week off in her calculations.<sup>195</sup> The next day, however, two different groups of friends came to visit at Rosewood and Matilda held an impromptu May Day party.<sup>196</sup> Matilda had a full house of people without any notice but found fruits and candies to share with her company while they had tea.<sup>197</sup>

Two months later Matilda and her youngest daughter Julia spent an entire week at home at Rosewood with the slaves as their only company while Matilda's sister Sophia and daughter

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<sup>190</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 174-176.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid; Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 196.

<sup>192</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>193</sup> Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, January 26, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 3, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

Sophia stayed in town with William's sister Jane Fulton Shall.<sup>198</sup> Matilda prided herself on her courage, writing to William that her "friends are quite astonished by my staying alone. I tell them I do not feel afraid indeed our servants are so good and so near to me I go to bed at night and never think of fear, and in the day time I can find so much to do I never can find time to feel lonely."<sup>199</sup> Matilda attributed her strength to the business of completing her household chores such as putting down the summer carpets and claimed she was so busy she did not have time to miss the girls, but she did admit that the stillness of Rosewood made her feel all alone.<sup>200</sup> It is interesting that many times Matilda discusses being alone at Rosewood without acknowledging the presence of the slaves, but in other instances she notes that it is the nearness of the slaves that makes her feel better about being at Rosewood without her husband, sisters, or daughters. For Matilda the slaves may have been so much a part of the background at Rosewood that she did not even think to mention them to Elizabeth as company. Regardless of her wording, Matilda puts on a brave face and claims she is happy to be on her own at Rosewood in all of her discussions of being alone.

Occasionally complaining about being isolated and far away from town, Matilda felt differently when Colonel Ashley, a prominent lawyer in Little Rock and good friend of William's, told her there were several people who wanted to buy land near Rosewood.<sup>201</sup> He offered her the opportunity to buy the land first and she was considering the purchase of five more acres of land that would extend Rosewood "to the hollow" and provide a buffer between the house and town.<sup>202</sup> "I am so much charmed with the country, I assure you I dislike the towns coming so near to us," Matilda observed. "We can nearly tell every house in town from our

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<sup>198</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 11, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

windows upstairs.”<sup>203</sup> The ability to see the town of Little Rock from Rosewood was apparent on the night of April 26, 1840, when the town had a fire during which the tavern, horse race track, and five or six houses burnt to the ground.<sup>204</sup> The fire was so large the slaves at Rosewood saw it, and Charlotte, a slave, was so terrified she woke Matilda up in the middle of the night.<sup>205</sup> While she enjoyed being able to attend church and visit with friends regularly, Matilda preferred the quiet countryside when at home.

When she was busy with social engagements, trying to balance these with work was a frequent dilemma for Matilda. Matilda liked to attend church every Sunday and her father-in-law, David Fulton, often traveled out to Rosewood to take Matilda and the children to the Methodist Episcopal Church in Little Rock.<sup>206</sup> Her distance from town often caused issues, however, and Matilda occasionally remained at home on many Sundays trying to get all of her work finished or simply to rest from the work she had been doing all week.<sup>207</sup> On May 17, 1840, Matilda had let a slave John take the only available horse to visit his wife, leaving her unable to attend church.<sup>208</sup> The next Sunday rain prevented David Fulton from being able to travel to Rosewood to pick up her and the children.<sup>209</sup> Matilda finally managing to attend church on May 31, 1840, and nice weather allowed her to attend consistently over the rest of the summer.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840, WSFP; “Little Rock Fall Races,” November 21, 1838, *Arkansas State Gazette*.

<sup>205</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>206</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 15, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 12, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 2, 1842, WSFP; “Untitled,” *Arkansas Gazette*, January 19, 1842; “Methodists,” *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, accessed November 12, 2013, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=310>

<sup>207</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>208</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 17, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>209</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 24, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>210</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 31, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 7, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 18, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 25, 1840, WSFP.

In the winter of 1842 Little Rock was having a fair and many of Matilda's female friends were hosting a table to raise money to finish the church they all attended.<sup>211</sup> She told William that she had informed the women that she "would do all I could in the way of giving, but I did not wish to have anything to do with it as I lived in country. I have sent Charlotte & Grand [slaves] in this evening with a large basket of things to Mrs. Creese, such as sugar flour butter wine & other things it is to take place on Wednesday next."<sup>212</sup> She planned to take the children to the fair as long as she did not receive some hogs that she was waiting on, in which case she would "attend to that matter first."<sup>213</sup> Matilda went to Little Rock the day of the fair expecting it to be in progress but found the women from her church organizing tables who promptly put her to work. "They maid me take off my bonnet & shawl & go to work we spent the whole day there and had the fair that night," Matilda wrote.<sup>214</sup> The next day the women were hosting an auction but Matilda did not stay to help because she had to return home as she had a cow to slaughter for meat.<sup>215</sup> A few days later at church the women informed Matilda they had raised \$1,000 to help finish the church.<sup>216</sup> The fair shows the dual nature of Matilda's life as a deputy husband. Viewed as part of the woman's sphere, benevolent activities permitted women to have a public presence in an acceptable manner.<sup>217</sup> In fulfilling her role as a proper "lady," church activities were part of Matilda's duties while as the manager of Rosewood she needed to be present to supervise the butchering of livestock.

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<sup>211</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 16, 1842, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 25, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>212</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 16, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 25, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Adrienne Caughfield, *True Women and Westward Expansion* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 7; Cynthia Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 188.

Having previously fulfilled the role of head of the household, William recognized and valued the job his wife did as in his absence enough to realize not just anyone could do it. When Matilda and the children planned to join William in Washington for the winter of 1843, William decided that without Matilda's presence at Rosewood it would be impossible to continue farming in the usual manner.<sup>218</sup> William made a contract with Horace Allis, a neighbor, to combine their resources and split the profits from the resulting crops.<sup>219</sup> Under this contract William sent four of his slaves to work on Allis' plantation, and he and Allis each provided two horses with harnesses, two oxen with yoke, a wagon, two plows, two axes, two hoes, and one wheelbarrow.<sup>220</sup> In addition William and Allis agreed to pay for half of the food, clothing, and medical care for the slaves, feed for the animals, the blacksmithing expenses, and the bagging rope and twine for the cotton crop.<sup>221</sup> In return for William's contribution, Allis provided the land and supervision of the farm.<sup>222</sup> William and Allis would then split the crop at harvest time.<sup>223</sup> William's choice to stop farming at Rosewood in Matilda's absence shows that he realized the difficulty of supervising the slaves in the field and decided he could not trust anyone else with the job.

With the farming taken care of, William left the management of Rosewood in the hands of his brother-in-law and lawyer, David Shall.<sup>224</sup> Shall's duties included collecting rent from the tenants in the rental house in Little Rock, purchasing cut and salted pork, supervising the slaves who were still at Rosewood in their gardening and selling of produce, fixing shingles on the roof

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<sup>218</sup> "Article of Agreement," November 16, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> William Fulton to David Shall, November 16, 1843, WSFP.

of the house, and buying a piece of land near town.<sup>225</sup> Had Matilda been at Rosewood in the winter of 1843 she would have completed all of the tasks taken on by Allis and Shall. In Matilda's absence, William had to employ two men to do what Matilda would have been doing in addition to caring for the children.

William Fulton died at the age of forty-nine, on August 15, 1844, after a ten-day illness, allegedly from sleeping in a poorly ventilated freshly painted room at Rosewood and asphyxiating on the paint fumes.<sup>226</sup> In his will William directed that his home and property belonged to Matilda for as long as she lived, showing one last time the faith he had in Matilda's ability to manage Rosewood.<sup>227</sup> Only five years earlier a court ruling had confirmed that a widow possessed dower in her husband's personal estate; giving her the right to own all or part of her husband's estate that he willed to her throughout her lifetime.<sup>228</sup> By the 1840s common law ensured that widows received a dower of at least a third of their husband's estate, some states like Arkansas allowed widows to use the property as their own and sell or will it upon her death.<sup>229</sup> Appointed administrator of William's estate, Matilda was in charge of "all and singular the goods and chattels, rights and credits, which were of the said Wm S. Fulton at the time of his death, with full power and authority to secure and dispose of the same property, according to law, and collect all monies due said deceased, and in general to do and perform all other acts and things which are or hereafter may be required of her by law."<sup>230</sup> An appraisal of the inventory of

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> "TRIBUTE OF RESPECT TO THE MEMORY OF THE HON. WM. S. FULTON," *Arkansas Gazette*, August 21, 1844; Margaret Ross, *Arkansas Gazette: The Early Years, 1819-1866* (Little Rock: Arkansas Gazette Foundation, 1969), 205.

<sup>227</sup> McMath, *First Ladies of Arkansas*, 38.

<sup>228</sup> Dougan, "The Arkansas Married Woman's Property Law," 10.

<sup>229</sup> McMillen, *Southern Women*, 48.

<sup>230</sup> "Letters of Administration," October 29, 1844, FWP.

William's estate on November 15, 1843 valued it at \$4,181, including all items in the house, the animals and the slaves.<sup>231</sup>

Matilda had several financial matters to settle with David Shall who had collected rent and paid for items related to the slaves and house during William and Matilda's time in Washington.<sup>232</sup> In January 1845 Matilda paid Shall \$86 to resolve her account with him.<sup>233</sup> Matilda's activities in the years following William's death show the limited income that they operated on even when he was alive.<sup>234</sup> Due to the substantial property William left to her and her rights as the administrator of the estate, Matilda was able to borrow money from the bank based on the value of her property. Women as debtors became more common as the nineteenth century continued and women had collateral to offer the bank for secured debts.<sup>235</sup> One month after William died Matilda took out a note from the Arkansas State Bank for \$900 and a few years later she took out another for \$800.<sup>236</sup> Matilda paid \$230 on her bank notes in January 1847, but this still left her with a \$1,551.96 bank note.<sup>237</sup> In the spring of 1846 the *Arkansas Gazette* advertised the sale of slaves and land in Little Rock in order to pay debts owed by William's estate at the time of his death due to "the personal assets being insufficient for that purpose."<sup>238</sup> Pulaski County land taxes made up the major debt owed by the estate.<sup>239</sup> Matilda

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<sup>231</sup> "Estate of William Fulton," November 15, 1844, WSFP.

<sup>232</sup> "Untitled," January 2, 1845, WSFP; "Untitled," January 17, 1845, WSFP.

<sup>233</sup> "Untitled," January 17, 1845, WSFP.

<sup>234</sup> William and Matilda had little inherited wealth. While her parents lived well before her father's death in 1810, Matilda's father left her mother with many debts. Her mother had little money after all debts were paid. It is unclear how William's mother spent her share of the inheritance from her father, but as his father worked for newspapers and had a small farm it appears they had no money to pass on to William. When they married, William and Matilda started out with very limited financial circumstances. See E. R. Wright, *A Brief Sketch of the Nowland and Fulton Families*, WSFP, for a more detailed description of their backgrounds.

<sup>235</sup> Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1984), 127-28.

<sup>236</sup> "Note to State Bank," September 1, 1844, WSFP; "Amount due State Bank," January 1, 1847, FWP.

<sup>237</sup> "Amount due State Bank," January 1, 1847, FWP.

<sup>238</sup> "NOTICE," *Arkansas Gazette*, February 23, 1846.

<sup>239</sup> "Pulaski County Tax Sale," *Arkansas Gazette*, March 27, 1847.

sold seven slaves for \$3,784 in January 1847.<sup>240</sup> Matilda's plight was common among early Arkansans as many men died financially overextended and left their widows to deal with the situation.<sup>241</sup> The majority of small plantations carried some debt, and this, coupled with taxes and other estate fees, could leave widows in a difficult position.<sup>242</sup> Forced to liquidate their deceased husbands' estates to cover his debts, their situation left many widows penniless and homeless after the process.<sup>243</sup> Matilda managed to avoid this fate by obtaining credit from the bank, selling off land, and keeping some of the slaves at Rosewood so she could continue to bring in income.

In William's absence Matilda cared for the children, managed the slaves, ensured the house and farm ran smoothly, and also sold produce from the garden and milk and butter from the cows to make extra income. While American society did not believe this to be a proper situation for a woman of her standing, Matilda became the head of her family, household, and family business for months at a time and during that time she ensured that everyone at Rosewood had what they needed and all work that needed to get done was completed. Taking on the duties usually designated to men as well as keeping up with her customary obligations, Matilda stepped out of her approved roles in the home and into the public arena of men.<sup>244</sup> After William's death in 1844 Matilda continued to live at and run Rosewood for another thirty-five years. Her ability

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<sup>240</sup> "Untitled," January 13, 1847, WSFP.

<sup>241</sup> Dougan, "The Arkansas Married Woman's Property Law," 10.

<sup>242</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 37.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>244</sup> Abigail Adams took on a similar role. Edith B. Gelles writes of Adams' duties in her husband's absence, "For four years Abigail struggled with farming, and despite inflation, scarcity of labor, and her own lack of experience . . . the farm was maintained." in *Portia: The World of Abigail Adams* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 40. David McCullough writes of Adams' unusual role in her husband's absence, "Yet she managed—scrimped, saved, wove her own wool, made the family's clothes—determined not only to stay free of debt, but to make improvements." in *John Adams* (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 172. McCullough also describes other aspects of Adams' life that parallel Fulton's including education, finances, dealing with servants, and business deals.

to take on “men’s work” successfully show that it was society and not the women of nineteenth century America that determined what women were capable of doing.

### Chapter 3

#### Cornbread and China: Crop Planning and Food Management at Rosewood

“I assure you it looks quite like farming.”<sup>1</sup> Matilda Fulton wrote these words to William in the spring of 1842 as she shared with him the details of the fields and gardens that were under her management while he was serving as a senator in Washington. During William’s six-to-eight-month absences, Matilda took on the completion or supervision of all tasks related to food production and consumption at Rosewood. She bore not only the responsibility of ensuring everyone at Rosewood had enough food to eat and clothes to wear but also chose what crops to grow, animals to keep or slaughter, and what goods to sell at market, and she supervised the work of the slaves, both in the house and in the fields. In addition to the usual strenuous food production tasks completed by most women, Matilda fulfilled duties that William would have typically completed but believed his wife capable of handling in his absence.

In the early 1840s, the governor of South Carolina described the southern diet and its purpose: “Corn bread and bacon, with fresh meat only occasionally and a moderate use of garden vegetables will in this region at least give to the laborer greater strength of muscle and constitution, enable him to undergo more fatigue, and insure him longer life and more enjoyment of it than any other diet.”<sup>2</sup> This describes the diet at Rosewood as well as farms and plantations across the South as southerners grew corn to ensure food for their family, slaves, and livestock, and raised hogs to ensure ready access to pork. The popularity of pork and corn in the South can be at least partially attributed to the simple nature of each. Corn required less maintenance to

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<sup>1</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 29, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>2</sup> J. B. D. De Bow, *The Industrial Resources, Etc., of the Southern and Western States*, vol. III (New Orleans: Office of De Bow’s Review, 1853), 31.

grow and process into food than wheat, and hog raising required little attention on the part of the farmer, and pork was easily turned into food when smoked or salted.

Matilda devoted a great deal of her day to work related to food growing and harvesting, preparation, and cooking. Food was a complicated and arduous part of life for antebellum women that included supervising or being directly involved in the gardens, dairy, smokehouse, orchards, and barnyard, as well as managing the storage and preservation of food.<sup>3</sup> Both her location on the frontier and her duties in William's absence made food production, consumption, and accessibility a complex issue for Matilda. Historian Elizabeth Jacoway details the food production duties of the typical Arkansas pioneer woman of the era:

She salted meat, rendered lard, and cured hams; she dried and ground corn and wheat and shaped them into bread; she gathered the wild strawberries and blackberries for jams and cobblers; she milked the cow and churned the butter, grew the vegetables in the garden patch outside the house, and tended the chicken. And all of these chores were performed in between the hours spent preparing daily meals, meals that were cooked over an uncertain heat using utensils that rusted if not kept oiled with lard.<sup>4</sup>

With William away for such long periods of time, Matilda decided when and what crops to plant in his absence, and William went along with Matilda's opinions on the matter. From 1839 to 1842 Matilda supervised the growing of crops at Rosewood and chose corn as the main crop. The years from 1839 to 1845 were especially poor ones for cotton growers as cotton consistently sold for less than ten cents per pound, causing many farmers to turn to corn.<sup>5</sup> The Arkansas newspapers frequently published the price of corn per bushel as well as demand in

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<sup>3</sup>Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>4</sup>Elizabeth Jacoway, *Behold, Our Works Were Good: A Handbook of Arkansas Women's History* (Little Rock: Arkansas Women's History Institute in Association with August House Publishers, 1998), 12.

<sup>5</sup>John Solomon Otto, *The Southern Frontiers, 1607-1860: The Agricultural Evolution of the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1989), 95.

Arkansas and larger markets such as Cincinnati and New Orleans.<sup>6</sup> As a regular reader of the *Arkansas Gazette*, Matilda was aware of the market price of cotton and corn per bushel, and this would have affected her decision to stay away from cotton and its small profits.<sup>7</sup> Matilda kept William apprised of the planting at Rosewood. “I have had the corn field ploughed this week I hope to have our corn field planted next week,” she wrote to him in April 1840.<sup>8</sup> On most plantations men were in charge of corn and other food crops and hogs, while women managed the production of all other food production such as gardens, barnyard, dairy, smokehouse, and orchards.<sup>9</sup> While saved from the strenuous work in the fields required of women on small farms with no slaves, Matilda was involved in every other aspect of the process from deciding what to plant, and how much to plant, to turning the crop into food for the family.<sup>10</sup>

In an 1834 traveler’s guide to the West, Robert Baird, an explorer who had traveled through the Mississippi River Valley, commented of Arkansas, “Cotton is the staple of this territory. Corn and sweet potatoes grow well here.”<sup>11</sup> While cotton may have been the staple for many Arkansas farmers in the early and mid-1830s, in the long list of items Matilda mentions growing, cotton is never included. Despite having both the land and slave labor necessary to grow cotton, Matilda never devoted even one field to the crop. There could have been a variety of reasons for this, with the most likely motive being growing corn and other foodstuffs allowed Matilda to ensure self-sufficiency with enough food for Rosewood’s human and animal

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<sup>6</sup> “Prices,” *Arkansas Gazette*, February 16, 1842; “Van Buren Prices,” *Arkansas Gazette*, February 16, 1842; “Cincinnati Market,” *Arkansas State Gazette*, June 16, 1835; “Cincinnati Market,” *Arkansas Gazette*, February 14, 1837.

<sup>7</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 31, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP.

<sup>8</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP

<sup>9</sup> Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Sally G. McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson Inc., 1992), 129.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Baird, *View of the Valley of the Mississippi, or, The Emigrants and Traveller’s Guide to the West* (Philadelphia: H. S. Tanner, 1834), 258.

residents.<sup>12</sup> Like Matilda, some farmers in Arkansas and across the South took a different approach to crop growing when cotton prices dropped in the latter part of the decade by turning to safer crops such as corn. A bad year for cotton could leave planters without enough money to buy the food and supplies they needed for the next year whereas a surplus of corn could be stored and used for several years to feed the family, slaves, and animals even if it did not generate much income.<sup>13</sup> While Matilda's goal was to make a profit each year by selling surplus crops, in this case corn, the poor price of cotton combined with the security offered by corn influenced her decision to plant primarily corn. In several instances Matilda brought in income by selling surplus corn, but even if she had not been able to sell the corn it would have provided sustenance for everyone at Rosewood.<sup>14</sup>

In his pioneering work on the topic, Gavin Wright referred to the concept of self-sufficiency farming as "safety-first."<sup>15</sup> Farmers in this model devoted the majority of their land to corn, a crop that could be used to feed themselves, their families, slaves, and livestock, while devoting little or no acreage to market crops such as cotton that could be unreliable.<sup>16</sup> From small farms to large plantations, corn was at the center of southern households in many different forms. The growing of corn ensured there was always food at dinner time, either on its own or as a base for numerous dishes, and feed for the livestock that provided sustenance and survival.<sup>17</sup>

The centrality of corn to life at Rosewood is reflected in Matilda's letters to William as it is a

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<sup>12</sup> John Solomon Otto and Augustus Marion Burns III, "Traditional Agricultural Practices in the Arkansas Highlands," *Journal of American Folklore* 94:372 (Spring 1981): 177.

<sup>13</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 121.

<sup>14</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, November 16, 1841, WSFP.

<sup>15</sup> Gavin Wright and Howard Kunreuther, "Cotton, Corn, and Risk in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History* 35:3 (September 1975): 528. See also Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 62-74.

<sup>16</sup> Wright and Kunreuther, "Cotton, Corn, and Risk in the Nineteenth Century," 529-30.

<sup>17</sup> Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2004), 193.

theme woven into her descriptions of daily life. Among discussions of business, family, politics, and slaves, corn is always there in the background as it is being grown, harvested, and eaten at the dinner table.<sup>18</sup>

Gender does not seem to be a major factor in the practice of safety-first agriculture. While it would be easy to assume that in an era focused on masculinity, male power, and success, men would be less likely to practice subsistence agriculture in favor of higher risk crops such as cotton, in reality many male small planters chose to focus on subsistence rather than profit.<sup>19</sup> The motivation for practicing safety-first agriculture seems to be based more on class than gender. While a large plantation owner could afford to take a chance on a cash crop such as cotton, smaller plantation owners had nothing to fall back on if a cash crop had an unprofitable year.<sup>20</sup> Matilda decided to practice safety-first agriculture not because she was a woman but because she was a small planter who wanted to ensure that Rosewood continued to survive. Her general fearlessness in other business matters such as buying and selling slaves shows that if she had managed a larger plantation she likely would have been willing to venture into the high-risk world of cotton planting.<sup>21</sup>

Matilda's choice of corn as the major crop at Rosewood followed the sensible logic of safety-first agriculture. Eaten by both people and animals, corn was the staple crop at Rosewood and had an average yield of twenty bushels per acre.<sup>22</sup> Corn was a major source of nourishment

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<sup>18</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 23, 1842, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 30, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South*, 62-74. For information on nineteenth century views on masculinity see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 149-74.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, November 17, 1839, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 6, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>22</sup> Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 279.

for antebellum southerners, on the frontier specifically.<sup>23</sup> The family, hogs, poultry, cattle, and horses all consumed the corn produced at Rosewood. Yielding four times as much as wheat per acre, corn required only one tenth of the seed and only one third of the time from planting until it was ready for consumption.<sup>24</sup> The preparation of wheat for consumption was also much more strenuous than corn as wheat required threshing, cleaning, gathering, and storing while corn simply required shucking.<sup>25</sup> At Rosewood the slaves harvested, shucked, and then stored the corn in a small building known as a corn crib for drying and storage.<sup>26</sup> Many uses existed for the corn produced at Rosewood including consumption by the Fulton family, slaves, and animals, and sending some of the corn to the Little Rock mill to be turned into corn meal for the family.<sup>27</sup> By the 1840s the cost of one pound of corn meal was 43 percent as expensive as wheat flour and provided more calories and protein.<sup>28</sup>

Historians have long recognized the popularity of corn in the slave-holding South and argue it has been ignored due to how it was used by Southerners.<sup>29</sup> While cotton went to the market and was purchased, the quantity of corn grown in the South has been underestimated

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<sup>23</sup> Joel Gray Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the Old South*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Eugene Clyde Brooks, *The Story of Corn and the Western Migration* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1916), 134.

<sup>25</sup> Brooks, *The Story of Corn*, 135.

<sup>26</sup> William Fulton to David Shall, November 16, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Robert E. Gallman, "Dietary Change in Antebellum America," *Journal of Economic History* 56:1 (March 1996), 198.

<sup>29</sup> Donald L. Kemmerer uses 1839-1859 census numbers from the slave-holding states to argue that corn was grown in larger numbers than cotton in the antebellum South, in "The Pre-Civil War South's Leading Crop, Corn," *Agricultural History* 23:4 (October 1949): 236-39; L. H. Bailey recognizes both corn and cotton as the staple crops of the South in *Cyclopedia of American Agriculture: A Popular Survey of Agricultural Conditions, Practices and Ideals in the United States and Canada: Volume II—Crops* (London: Macmillin & Co., 1910); Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch argue for more acreage devoted to corn than cotton in the South before the Civil War, a trend that reversed itself after the war in their essay "The Trap of Debt Peonage," in *Historical Perspectives on the American Economy: Selected Readings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 260-292. Recent historical works by Walter Johnson, Conevery Bolton Valencius, and Jeannie M. Whyne have noted the prominence of corn and the self-sufficient farmer in the antebellum South before cotton took over as the primary crop in the years leading up to and following the Civil War. For a further discussion of corn and self-sufficient farmers in the antebellum South see Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013; Valencius, *The Health of the Country*; and Whyne, *Delta Empire*.

because the people and animals on the farm or plantation consumed most of the corn at home rather than sending it to market.<sup>30</sup> The consumption and use of corn in the home left no paper trail as the sale of cotton to a customer did. In his safety-first model of agriculture, Gavin Wright supports this idea of corn remaining in the household by arguing that many self-sufficient farmers had little involvement in the market economy.<sup>31</sup> Corn ended up as a side on the dinner table, corn meal, mash, grits, and feed for the livestock, but for these farmers only occasionally did it end up being sold at market. According to the 1840 census Arkansans produced nearly fifty bushels of corn per person, equaling a surplus of about 1.9 million bushels over what Arkansans consumed.<sup>32</sup> While some of the surplus corn was sent to market, a large portion was used to feed livestock or stored for the future in case of a bad season. The identity of the South became wrapped up in cotton in the years leading up to the Civil War, but for many farmers corn defined and sustained their households.

Matilda wrote to William frequently of the progress of the corn crop, detailing where she was in the process from planting to harvesting as well as her view of the quality of the crop. In early May 1840 Matilda wrote to William that the “largest field of corn looks very well indeed,” but she was hoping for dry weather so she could get more corn planted.<sup>33</sup> Two weeks later the slaves had harvested the largest corn field and were busy plowing the soil.<sup>34</sup> “I sincerely hope we will have a good season, the corn looks very fine now, they finished putting and stacking the rye last evening,” Matilda optimistically wrote to William in May 1842.<sup>35</sup> She then glowingly

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<sup>30</sup> Kemmerer, “The Pre-Civil War South’s Leading Crop, Corn,” 238. Walter Johnson writes of the self-sufficient attitude and reasoning of farmers and planters who chose to grow corn, “Planters who valued self-sufficiency used corn to feed the cattle and pigs they hoped would reduce their reliance on imported foodstuffs,” in *River of Dark Dreams*, 176-77.

<sup>31</sup> Wright and Kunreuther, “Cotton, Corn, and Risk in the Nineteenth Century,” 528.

<sup>32</sup> Bolton, *Arkansas, 1800-1860*, 51.

<sup>33</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 3, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>34</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 23, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>35</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 29, 1842, WSFP.

reported that when George Watkins, a Little Rock attorney who married Matilda's daughter Sophia in 1855, visited Rosewood he commented that he "sees no farms in the neighbourhood or county that looks like ours."<sup>36</sup> Such a positive evaluation of the condition of her crops by a prominent man made Matilda proud of her supervisions skills and the work that had been done by the slaves.

William and Matilda's slave Wesley shared Watkins' opinion, telling Matilda he believed they would "have the best corn on all these hills."<sup>37</sup> Matilda agreed and allowed herself to do a little bragging to William: "Indeed I see none that looks so well,--we were all down at Fathers [William's father David Fulton] place a few evenings since. I tell you his things dont look like ours."<sup>38</sup> Matilda's pride in the state of things at Rosewood is obvious and was increased by that fact that Rosewood looked better than David Fulton's farm. As a woman she had been able to supervise the slaves and get them to work hard to produce exemplary crops, while David Fulton, a male supervisor of slaves who society would have believed to be more capable, had produced inferior crops.

Many Southerners preferred the taste of wheat bread, but often had to make due with cornbread as they more commonly grew corn, and cornbread was easier to make.<sup>39</sup> Used to produce a variety of dishes palatable to the frontier family, corn, along with pork made up the major staples of the southern diet. A simple mortar and pestle allowed a woman to pound corn into a coarse meal that she could use as a base for a variety of corn cakes.<sup>40</sup> Frederick Law Olmstead, an antebellum travel writer, referred to the cornbread eaten by southerners as "coarse

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<sup>36</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP; "Claiborne Watkins," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, accessed December 9, 2013, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=2931>

<sup>37</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the Old South*, 21.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the Old South*, 11.

or most indigestible forms of bread.”<sup>41</sup> Several kinds of corn cakes were popular with southerners. Produced by rolling corn meal into small portions and baked in hot ash, ash cake was a simple corn cake.<sup>42</sup> To make a “Johnny Cake” or “Hoe Cake,” cornmeal was mixed with scalded milk and flour or salt, molasses, and shortening.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of the ingredients included in the recipe, the resulting dough baked on a board in front of a fire.<sup>44</sup> Known as corn pone, small cakes or loaves of corn bread were common at the dinner table.<sup>45</sup> Made by rubbing dried mature kernels over the rough side of a piece of tin studded with nails or “gritting,” grits were a coarsely ground corn that was boiled in salt water for several hours.<sup>46</sup> Hominy involved boiling the corn with oak ashes in a bag until the husks came off, rinsing, and then cooking until tender.<sup>47</sup> A regular supper dish, corn-meal mush and pork or bacon were paired together so often that Southerners referred to this diet as “hogs and hominy.”<sup>48</sup>

The guaranteed supply of corn at Rosewood often provided a back-up for the dinner table when there was no wheat flour available in Little Rock. Little Rock’s frontier location often led to a scarcity of resources such as wheat flour, resulting in the Fulton family eating large quantities of cornbread, of which Matilda and the children grew increasingly tired. In February 1832 Matilda wrote to William that flour “is not to be had for love nor money.”<sup>49</sup> Matilda had just given birth to a son and this, coupled with the shortage of flour, resulted in the residents of

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<sup>41</sup> Frederick Law Olmstead, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; With Remarks on Their Economy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001), 626.

<sup>42</sup> Everett Dick, *The Dixie Frontier: A Social History* (New York: Knopf, 1948), 290.

<sup>43</sup> Amelia Simmons, *First American Cookbook: A Facsimile of American Cookery, 1796* (New York: Dover Publications, 1984), 34.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Dick, *The Dixie Frontier*, 290.

<sup>46</sup> Dick, *The Dixie Frontier*, 289; U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Farmer’s Bulletin No. 1236: Corn and Its Uses as Food* (Washington, D. C.: Office of Home Economics, State Relations Service, 1923), 18-19.

<sup>47</sup> Eudora Welty, “Mississippi Food,” in *The Food of a Younger Land: A Portrait of American Food—Before the National Highway System, Before Chain Restaurants, and Before Frozen Food, When the Nation’s Food was Seasonal, Regional, and Traditional—from the Lost WPA Files*, ed. Mark Kurlasny (New York: Penguin Group, 2009), 103.

<sup>48</sup> Dick, *The Dixie Frontier*, 290.

<sup>49</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP.

Rosewood eating only cornbread for several weeks.<sup>50</sup> Complaining to William of her diet, Matilda wrote, “I never was so tiared of corn bread in my life we have had nothing else sence I have bin confined.”<sup>51</sup> Skeptical of her access to wheat flour in Little Rock improving any time soon, Matilda asked William to buy some flour and rye in Ohio or Kentucky on his trip home which would not occur for several months.<sup>52</sup>

The incident in 1832 was not an isolated event as the next year people who relied on the Little Rock market for flour were once again disappointed. Substantiating Matilda’s concerns about the continuing scarcity of flour during the previous year, the *Arkansas Gazette* noted in 1833 that “there has not been a fresh barrel here for several weeks, nor do we think there are a dozen families in town who have a two-weeks’ supply on hand.”<sup>53</sup> The residents who had a low flour supply should have considered themselves lucky as the *Gazette* mentioned many residents had “not had a handful [of flour] for weeks.”<sup>54</sup> When a steamboat arrived a few weeks later with supplies from Cincinnati, including flour, the *Gazette* attributed the delay to the low state of the Ohio River which had kept the boat stranded for twenty-three days.<sup>55</sup>

A similar situation arose in July 1842 when a steamboat from New Orleans attempted to bring goods to Little Rock and, finding the river too low, simply turned around and went back to New Orleans.<sup>56</sup> This again left the people of Little Rock with no shipment of flour for several weeks and no immediate prospect for flour anytime soon, and cornmeal once again became the only option for Little Rock households.<sup>57</sup> “Unless a new stock arrives soon, of which there is not much probability, while the river continues so low, we think corn-bread stands a fair chance of

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> “Flour,” *Arkansas Gazette*, September 11, 1833.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> “Untitled,” *Arkansas Gazette*, September 25, 1833.

<sup>56</sup> “Small News,” *Arkansas Gazette*, July 27, 1842.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

becoming one of the chief articles of subsistence on many fashionable tables, where it is generally a neglected stranger,” an *Arkansas Gazette* article explained.<sup>58</sup> At this point the supply of flour in Little Rock was so low that even the wealthy, who apparently had previously been able to keep a steady supply, could not get access to any, and there was little expectation that a delivery boat would be able to get to Little Rock any time soon. While the fashionable tables of Arkansas may not have been used to cornbread being the main source of subsistence of their tables, at Rosewood the presence of cornbread due to a lack of flour was nothing new.

Not only did those living in and around Little Rock have to deal with constant concerns about the availability of flour, but the price of flour fluctuated several dollars a barrel depending on the supply. During a scarce period in 1831, \$4.45 a barrel was the average price.<sup>59</sup> When a large supply arrived in Little Rock in 1834 the price dropped to \$3.27 a barrel but scarcity in 1835 drove the price back up to \$4.90 a barrel and even higher in 1837 to \$7.87 a barrel.<sup>60</sup> The large fluctuations in price made it difficult for people like Matilda to stick to a budget, and the shortage of flour resulted in households relying on cornmeal to the point where they yearned for bread made from flour.

The expense of having cornmeal ground only worsened Matilda’s feelings about having to eat it at so many meals. There were several public mills that ground grain for the residents of Little Rock at a rate set by the state.<sup>61</sup> The miller took a toll on each bushel of corn ground.<sup>62</sup> Operators of water and steam-powered mills were entitled to one-eighth of the grain brought by

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> “Flour,” *Arkansas Gazette*, April 20, 1831.

<sup>60</sup> “Flour,” *Arkansas Gazette*, January 1, 1834; “Cincinnati Market,” *Arkansas Gazette*, June 16, 1835; “Cincinnati Market,” *Arkansas Gazette*, February 14, 1837.

<sup>61</sup> William Ball and Sam Roane, eds., *Revised Statutes of the State of Arkansas: Adopted at the October Session of the Said State, A. D. 1837, In the Year of Our Independence the Sixty Second, and of the State the Second Year* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan, and Company, 1838), 576-77.

<sup>62</sup> Edward Everett Dale, “The Food of the Frontier,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 40:1 (March 1947), 44.

customers and owners of horse-powered mills were entitled to one-fourth.<sup>63</sup> Matilda complained that the price of cornmeal was enough to break anyone at one dollar a bushel and she planned to get a mill of her own as soon as possible.<sup>64</sup> Ever practical, Matilda realized there would be long periods of time when she would have to make do with cornmeal so she planned to obtain it as cheaply as possible by grinding it at home.

Matilda was not alone in her complaints about the price of cornmeal and many Arkansas households purchased their own corn mills.<sup>65</sup> Early home corn mills used during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries contained a top and bottom millstone with a rod running upward through a hole in the top millstone, turning the stone.<sup>66</sup> By 1832 Arkansans were replacing their stone corn mills with more efficient steel corn mills.<sup>67</sup> The steel home mills became so popular in Little Rock households that the *Arkansas Gazette* featured an article about the growing popularity of the mills “which produce an indifferent kind of meal that answers for family purposes when meal of a better quality cannot be found.”<sup>68</sup> Not only was the quality of the meal produced inferior but the home mill also became known for “the inharmonious tones which proceed from it when put in motion by a sturdy African.”<sup>69</sup> An amusing anecdote in the paper suggested just how noisy these mills were when a local man became convinced his neighbor’s house was haunted after hearing the noises coming from the cellar in which their mill was operating.<sup>70</sup> Regardless of the poor quality cornmeal the mill produced, early Arkansans who had few other options saw it as a useful tool, especially during times of flour scarcity.

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<sup>63</sup> Ball and Roane, *Revised Statutes of the State of Arkansas*, 576.

<sup>64</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP.

<sup>65</sup> “Beau Charley Scared out of His Wits by a Steel Corn Mill,” *Arkansas Gazette*, March 14, 1832.

<sup>66</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Feast or Famine: Food and Drink in American Westward Expansion* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 17.

<sup>67</sup> “Beau Charley Scared out of His Wits by a Steel Corn Mill,” *Arkansas Gazette*, March 14, 1832.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

Even if the food that the Fulton family ate was sometimes lacking in quality or variety, unlike many families on the frontier they ate their meals on nice china with silver utensils at a large dining table with twelve mahogany chairs, a sideboard, and silver-plated and bronze candlesticks.<sup>71</sup> Matilda's mother may well have passed silver and china on to her daughter when she married William, as Matilda did with her daughter Elizabeth when she married.<sup>72</sup> They were in rare company as only the larger plantations had silverware and fine china while those living in more modest accommodations usually ate on wooden dishes with spoons as their only eating tool.<sup>73</sup> For everyday use when company was not visiting, Matilda owned a set of Queen's Ware, cream-colored earthenware dishes with varying colored designs produced in England by Wedgwood pottery.<sup>74</sup> Matilda's large collection of silver cutlery included twelve dessert spoons, eighteen tablespoons, eighteen teaspoons, two ladles, six salt spoons, twenty-three forks, one butter knife and sugar tongs, an assortment of silver spoons and two dozen German silver forks.<sup>75</sup> Complementing the extensive cutlery collection at Rosewood, Matilda also owned an assortment of ivory-handled knives and forks, one dozen nutcrackers, one cork screw, ten silver-plated waiter trays of varying sizes, and a large collection of cut glass pitchers, bowls, and glasses.<sup>76</sup> While Matilda worried over the type of food her family was eating and the price of goods, she still came from a wealthy background and lived in a large plantation house, setting her apart from women that struggled to simply have enough food for their family's dinner.

When Matilda and the children accompanied William to Washington in the winter of 1842 and spring of 1843, William took over the planning for that year's growing season, a job

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<sup>71</sup> Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the Old South*, 19; "Estate of William Fulton," November 15, 1844, WSFP.

<sup>72</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 6, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>73</sup> Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the Old South*, 19.

<sup>74</sup> "By Royal Command: Wedgwood's Queen's Ware," *The Wedgwood Museum Blog*, accessed November 20, 2013, <http://wedgwoodmuseum.wordpress.com/2012/05/02/by-royal-approval-wedgwoods-queens-ware/>

<sup>75</sup> "Estate of William Fulton," November 15, 1844, WSFP.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

that Matilda had done during the three previous years.<sup>77</sup> William pooled his resources with Horace Allis, a fellow planter who lived near Little Rock., and the primary crop mentioned in the contract is cotton.<sup>78</sup> An obvious departure from Matilda's views on planting corn and other food stuffs for security, William's choice to grow cotton at a time when the cotton prices were depressed and to take a chance on the market is a curious one, especially in comparison to Matilda's earlier choice of not growing cotton. His decision fit the overall trend for Arkansas from 1840 to 1860 as corn production dropped 17 percent while cotton production had a per capita increase of more than five times during the same period.<sup>79</sup> William may have also felt more comfortable taking a chance on cotton since he did not have to worry about corn as part of the food supply for his family that year since they were in Washington. Planters in southeastern Arkansas brought thousands of new acres of land into cotton cultivation as cotton prices rose from 1840 to 1860.<sup>80</sup> Matilda did not offer her thoughts on William's actions but based on her consistent choice of growing corn over cotton during the three years that she decided what would be planted at Rosewood, one can speculate that she would not have grown cotton if she had been in charge.

Antebellum households produced a great deal of food including vegetables, pork, beef, lamb, mutton, chickens, and turkey.<sup>81</sup> A typical southern plantation had many separate buildings from the main house that functioned to store or prepare food including corn and pork. A store house, smokehouse, corn house, kitchen, hen coop, and a shed for the corn mill were common on

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<sup>77</sup> "Article of Agreement," November 16, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> S. Charles Bolton, *Arkansas, 1800-1860: Remote and Restless* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 62.

<sup>80</sup> Jeannie M. Whyne, *Delta Empire: Lee Wilson and the Transformation of Agriculture in the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 25-26.

<sup>81</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 103.

southern plantations.<sup>82</sup> Fitting this pattern, Rosewood had a corn crib, smokehouse, corn mill, store house, kitchen, and poultry yard with chicken coop.<sup>83</sup> Matilda managed the resources housed in these buildings, with a special focus on the storeroom. At the center of the household, the storeroom held the supplies needed for the household to survive and women like Matilda decided how to best use them and who had access to important items such as the pork supply.<sup>84</sup> Having the keys to the storerooms and domestic outbuildings and doling out resources as she saw fit was part of the domain of women in the antebellum South.<sup>85</sup> On most plantations the size of Rosewood the mistress did not labor in the kitchen or in the smokehouse, only visiting occasionally to supervise.<sup>86</sup> Matilda frequented both of these areas at Rosewood, preferring to be involved in the activities there. Matilda's control over the food resources, in addition to her authority over the slaves and business of Rosewood, left her in control of virtually every aspect of Rosewood.

After traveling through the South Frederick Law Olmstead noted "Bacon, fat and salt, is the stock article of diet."<sup>87</sup> Pork was so essential to the household at Rosewood that William and Matilda constantly discussed it in their letters to one another, working to ensure the adequacy of the current and future pork supply. Even when trying to save money, Matilda viewed pork as so central to their diet that she did not think of doing without it, telling William that they lived

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<sup>82</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 103; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 18-19.

<sup>83</sup> Lea Flowers Baker, "William Savin and Matilda Fulton: A Brief Look at a Territorial Arkansas Family," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 48 (Winter 2000): 80; Rachel Silva, "Sandwiching in History," *The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program*, accessed February 18, 2013, [http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/pdf/tour\\_scripts/Fred%20and%20Lucy%20Alexander%20Schaer%20House,%20NLR%20Tour%20Script%202012%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/pdf/tour_scripts/Fred%20and%20Lucy%20Alexander%20Schaer%20House,%20NLR%20Tour%20Script%202012%20(1).pdf); Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP; William Fulton to David Shall, November 16, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>84</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 19; William Fulton to David Shall, November 16, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>85</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 110.

<sup>86</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 119, 137.

<sup>87</sup> Olmstead, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 626.

altogether on pork.<sup>88</sup> To ensure all of the residents of Rosewood had pork to eat, Matilda employed a variety of methods including buying and raising hogs to slaughter and buying pork when it was available. Arkansas actually had a higher number of swine per capita than any other state in the 1840s and experienced a surplus of pork from the 1840s to the 1860s.<sup>89</sup> In 1840 the number of hogs equaled four for each human.<sup>90</sup> While many southern states had to look to outside sources for their pork, Arkansas was self-sufficient.<sup>91</sup> Even with the surplus of pork in Arkansas and at Rosewood, Matilda took opportunities to buy pork out of state when possible as it was often cheaper than at the Little Rock market. When unable to purchase pork herself, Matilda often asked William to buy additional pork during his travels to ensure there would be enough for everyone at Rosewood and to take advantage of the cheaper prices at other markets. Antebellum southerners consumed much more pork than beef, choosing only to eat beef when the pork supply was running low or to supplement pork.<sup>92</sup> Beef was much more difficult to preserve, and the slaughter of a cow meant the loss of milk and butter as well as a work animal.<sup>93</sup> In comparison, the only real purpose a hog served was as a food source.

In June 1840 Matilda asked William to buy pork “on the Ohio [river]” on his journey home from Washington, telling him to get more mid loins than ham.<sup>94</sup> The next year she bought

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<sup>88</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP. Matilda uses the terms *pork* and *bacon* interchangeably, not differentiating between cured pork that could include various pieces of the hog such as shoulders, loins, and hams, and bacon which comes from the hog belly. “How to Make Bacon,” *Arkansas Gazette*, February 10, 1841; Janna Preuss, *Seduced by Bacon: Recipes and Lore about America’s Favorite Indulgence* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>89</sup> Sam B. Hilliard, “Pork in the Ante-Bellum South: The Geography of Self-Sufficiency,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59, no. 3 (September 1969): 464, 472.

<sup>90</sup> Bolton, *Arkansas, 1800-1860*, 52.

<sup>91</sup> Hilliard, “Pork in the Ante-Bellum South,” 479.

<sup>92</sup> Joel Gray Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the Old South: An Informal History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 85.

<sup>93</sup> “Meatpacking,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicago.history.org/pages/804.html>; “Hogs,” *The Cambridge World History of Food*, accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.cambridge.org/us/books/kiple/hogs.htm>

<sup>94</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 6, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 11, 1840, WSFP. Mid loins are leaner cuts from the middle of the pig. “Healthy Pork Recipes and Cooking Tips,”

pork from a local man and then the following week she purchased two hogs.<sup>95</sup> David Fulton's purchased pork in 1842 at the price of \$3.50 per 100 pounds, providing an example of what Matilda would have paid when buying pork.<sup>96</sup> In 1843 Matilda purchased pork from New Orleans, informing William she could "only get two thousand [pounds], we have 8 veary fine hogs of our own, to kill. I will have them killd tomorrow, I think that will be enough, with the bacon we have."<sup>97</sup> The hog population at Rosewood averaged around thirty so killing eight would still leave a sizeable number of hogs for future use.<sup>98</sup> With Matilda, her two daughters, and twelve slaves, there were fifteen people at Rosewood. With the average hog weighing around two hundred pounds, one hog only provided around thirteen pounds of meat per person.<sup>99</sup> While Matilda could have slaughtered all of the hogs at Rosewood and avoided purchasing pork, her decision to purchase pork when available allowed her to ensure a future pork supply at home if needed. As with many of the other choices Matilda made in regard to food, her main goal was to ensure food security in the future as well as the present.<sup>100</sup>

While slaughtering hogs at Rosewood provided a large portion of the pork supply and made sure everyone had enough to eat, Matilda still detested the chore. "We will kill hogs tomorrow and I will be up to my eyes in grease," Matilda remarked of the unpleasant process.<sup>101</sup> The most popular time of year for hog killing was winter, chosen both for the cold temperatures which helped to keep the meat from going bad and because pigs born in the spring were large

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*Eating Well*, accessed February 17, 2014, [http://www.eatingwell.com/recipes\\_menus/collections/healthy\\_pork\\_recipes](http://www.eatingwell.com/recipes_menus/collections/healthy_pork_recipes).

<sup>95</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 17, 1841, WSFP.

<sup>96</sup> Dr. John T. Fulton to William Fulton, January 3, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>97</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, Jan 8, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>98</sup> "Estate of William Fulton," November 15, 1844, WSFP.

<sup>99</sup> Collen M. Callahan and William K. Hutchinson, "Antebellum Interregional Trade in Agricultural Goods: Preliminary Results," *Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 1 (March 1980): 29.

<sup>100</sup> Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South*, 62-74.

<sup>101</sup> Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, December 15, 1839, FWP.

enough to be slaughtered.<sup>102</sup> The slaughter of all hogs but those used for breeding allowed southerners to have plenty of meat for the winter while at the same time having fewer hogs to feed.<sup>103</sup> In mid-December 1842 Matilda wrote to William that she planned to have their largest hog as well as a cow killed the week following Christmas.<sup>104</sup> Two weeks later she was preparing to have eight hogs killed.<sup>105</sup> The exhausting and extensive process could go on for several weeks from the slaughter through the salting and smoking.

Matilda likely supervised the process of actually killing the hog and took over once the slaves removed the bristles and disemboweled and halved the carcass.<sup>106</sup> The slaves stuck the hog to let the blood drain out and then gutted and washed out the inside with clean water in preparation for the butchering.<sup>107</sup> While Matilda put the slaves in charge of slaughtering the hogs, she was very hands on when it came time to cut up the meat.<sup>108</sup> During the butchering process Matilda and the slaves cut off the head, cut the ribs from each side of the backbone, and removed the backbone and ribs, and cut off the meat next to the shoulder and hams, leaving the middling, cut off the feet, and separated the jowl from the head.<sup>109</sup> The leaf fat, fat that lines the abdominal cavity and encloses the kidneys, would be set aside for rendering lard.<sup>110</sup> Matilda described her part of the strenuous process to William: “Fisher [a slave] and myself cut up nine hogs I spent the day in the smoke hous without seting down until night.”<sup>111</sup> She placed enough importance on the pork supply at Rosewood to disregard her own health even when she was very

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<sup>102</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 23.

<sup>103</sup> Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the Old South*, 22.

<sup>104</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>105</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 8, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>106</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 23.

<sup>107</sup> “How to Make Bacon,” *Arkansas Gazette*, February 10, 1841.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*; “Leaf Fat,” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, accessed January 14, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/leaf%20fat>

<sup>111</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP.

pregnant, telling William that she did not feel well the entire day she was working on the pork but had disregarded it because she had work to do. “I was in the midst of my pork the day before I was taken sick [went into labor],” Matilda explained, adding that she “was very sick but thought I had fatigued myself and it would wear off I did not say I was sick indeed I had a good deal to do.”<sup>112</sup> Matilda’s mindset on finishing the pork even while she did not feel well shows the extreme importance of pork to the food supply at Rosewood.

Essential to preserving the pork, a ready supply of salt was important to have prior to the winter months and something Matilda had to acquire each year before the slaughtering process began.<sup>113</sup> One to one and a half bushels per one thousand pounds of meat was considered adequate to ensure proper salting and preservation. Each piece of meat was rubbed thoroughly with salt and packed into a box, with the heavier middling pieces at the bottom and the lighter backbone and ribs at the top for first consumption.<sup>114</sup> The meat typically remained in the salt for four weeks to ensure the salt had done its job on all parts of the meat.<sup>115</sup> The meat would then be hung and smoked and stored in the smokehouse.<sup>116</sup>

The fear of pork going bad in warm weather was a constant concern for southerners since the entire supply could be lost as well as the money spent to acquire it. Matilda and the children were in Washington with William in March 1842, and David Fulton, William’s father, was charged with purchasing the pork for Rosewood and supervising the slaves in putting up the meat in the smokehouse.<sup>117</sup> Without Matilda there to supervise the slaves, things did not go well

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. Matilda does not mention how far along her pregnancy was, but it was likely almost full-term as the child was healthy with no mention of him being small or sickly.

<sup>113</sup> Horsman, *Feast or Famine*, 15.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, March 18, 1842, WSFP.

and almost all of the meat spoiled.<sup>118</sup> David Fulton and John Fulton, William's brother, attempted to save the meat by having the slaves wash it with pyroligneous acid, but their attempt was too late and the meat was ruined. The meat never spoiled when Matilda was present at Rosewood, likely because she participated in the process herself and therefore supervised everything much more closely.<sup>119</sup> When the weather in Washington turned warm in January 1843, William worried about how the weather was affecting the putting up of pork at Rosewood.<sup>120</sup> Matilda, in Arkansas, reassured him that she believed even with the unseasonably warm weather she would "be able to save our pork." She added that "the weather was so veary cold when it was salted."<sup>121</sup> William was relieved that the weather had been cold when Matilda put up the pork since he had feared all meat killed would have been lost due to the warm spell, a prospect that would have been costly financially.<sup>122</sup> A few weeks later Matilda continued to be confident in the quality of the pork supply at Rosewood: "You must not be uneasy about our pork, we have not lost one peice yet, we have been living on it for nearly a month."<sup>123</sup>

No less taxing and time consuming than the slaughter of the hogs, the processes that followed made up several days of work for Matilda and the slaves who assisted her. The production of sausage was a long and grueling one in which Matilda took charge of emptying and scraping the small intestine for later use as sausage casing, processing the fat into lard, chopping and seasoning the back meat then funneling it into skins for smoking, and putting the ham shoulders and bacon flanks into a barrel of brine to be corned.<sup>124</sup> Brining recipes varied, but

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid; John Fulton to William Fulton, April 14, 1842, WSFP. Pyroligneous acid is used as an antimicrobial and antifungal preservative. Isabella Beeton, *The Book of Household Management* (United States: S.O. Beeton, 1862), 822.

<sup>119</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP.

<sup>120</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 22, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, January 27, 1843, FWP.

<sup>123</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, Feb 3, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>124</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 23.

one early nineteenth century example called for “six pounds of salt, one pound of sugar, and four ounces of saltpeter.”<sup>125</sup> Boiling and skimming the solution was the final step before the immersion of the meat.<sup>126</sup> After spending two weeks cutting up and preserving pork, Matilda moved on to making sausage and believed after one more day in the kitchen she would be done with the greasy work.<sup>127</sup> Putting all parts of the hog to good use, Matilda spent another day making souse, a process which involved the feet, ears, and nose being soaked in cold water until the blood was drawn away, each piece scraped clean, and then boiled in a mixture of meal, salt and water.<sup>128</sup> Once boiled, each piece was deboned, seasoned, rolled up and sewed into a cloth, and then stored in a mixture of meal, water, salt, and vinegar.<sup>129</sup> The leaf fat, back fat, and fat trimmings were cooked over a low fire and turned into lard.<sup>130</sup> The extensive and painstaking work done by Matilda and the slaves to turn every possible piece of the hog into food ensured there was plenty of food for everyone at Rosewood, serving as an example of food preparation and priorities typical of all southerners.

Even with the sizeable hog population at Rosewood, Matilda constantly worried about her pork supply running out before the end of the year. On her way home from spending the winter with William in Washington, Matilda purchased bacon, hams, and pork shoulders in Cincinnati for a much more reasonable price than she would have paid in Little Rock.<sup>131</sup>

Receiving the bacon later by steamboat in Little Rock, Matilda quickly opened it to check its

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<sup>125</sup> Horsman, *Feast or Famine*, 11-12.

<sup>126</sup> Horsman, *Feast or Famine*, 12.

<sup>127</sup> Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, December 15, 1839, FWP.

<sup>128</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, Jan 22, 1843, WSFP; Mary Randolph, *The Virginia Housewife: Or Methodical Cook* (Baltimore, Plaskitt, Fite, & Co., 1838), 50-51.

<sup>129</sup> “Head Cheese (Souse),” National Center for Home Food Preservation, accessed January 15, 2014, [http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/cure\\_smoke/head\\_cheese.html](http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/cure_smoke/head_cheese.html)

<sup>130</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Farmer’s Bulletin No. 2138: Slaughtering, Cutting, and Processing Food on the Farm* (Washington, D. C.: Office of Home Economics, State Relations Service, 1967), 39.

<sup>131</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, ? 15, 1842, WSFP.

condition and once satisfied decided to have it hung up and smoked.<sup>132</sup> Along with three of the slaves Matilda spent a long morning plastering the bacon with ashes so it would keep through the summer.<sup>133</sup> A 1918 cookbook explained the process of covering bacon with ash: “Bacon may also be kept by placing the pieces on a layer of sifted ashes and covering with a thick layer of the same.”<sup>134</sup> Happy with the state of the bacon after it had been put up and ever enterprising, Matilda believed there would be enough left to sell some in the fall.<sup>135</sup> Making and storing large quantities of bacon was common in the South.<sup>136</sup> She also occasionally ran out of lard and requested William purchase a keg of lard while traveling home from Washington.<sup>137</sup> A constant balancing act, ensuring there was enough of everything for everyone but not so much that anything went to waste, was a difficult task for Matilda, but one she managed efficiently.

The addition of two adult male slaves at Rosewood in 1840 made Matilda more anxious than usual over the bacon supply at Rosewood. “I see by having too more men added to our family makes a great difference in our smokehouse,” she commented. “Indeed, I like to see them eat heartily it shows they are all well and happy.”<sup>138</sup> While on large plantations, those with fifteen or more slaves, overseers distributed the food to slaves, on smaller plantations such as Rosewood women like Matilda often took on this duty.<sup>139</sup> When Matilda accompanied him to Washington, DC, in 1843, William left his lawyer David Shall in charge of Rosewood. This meant that in Matilda’s absence Shall would have “the trouble of riding out once a week, and

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<sup>132</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> William V. Cruess, *Home and Farm Preservation* (New York: The Macmillin Company, 1918), 148.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> “How to Make Bacon,” *Arkansas Gazette*, February 10, 1841.

<sup>137</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>138</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 11, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>139</sup> Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), xiii.

paying to them [the slaves] their rations for the week.”<sup>140</sup> This shows that Matilda had been in charge of the weekly rations and now in her absence Shall would discharge the slave’s rations.

Matilda decided the types and amount of food everyone at Rosewood had access to on a weekly basis. Plantation mistresses typically decided what food to cook, how much, and how to distribute each meal. The “standard” amount of pork given to an adult slave as part of their weekly rations was about three and one-half pounds, but this number varied due to workload and season.<sup>141</sup> The type and amount of food included in rations were life-and-death matters that determined the quality and length of a slave’s life. Frederick Law Olmstead described the rations for slaves on several plantations he visited as “five pounds of good, clean bacon, and one quart of molasses, with as much good bread as they require,” but noted on other plantations the rations were only three or four pounds per week.<sup>142</sup> White Southerners consumed around the same amount of pork as slaves, but also ate beef, mutton, and game which provided them with a more substantial diet than the slaves.<sup>143</sup>

Staples such as pork, corn, and molasses served as the basis of the weekly food provided for slaves on plantations, often supplemented with extras such as fresh and dried fruit, garden produce, fish, and white bread.<sup>144</sup> The slaves at Rosewood were allowed to keep their own turkeys and chickens in small yards near their houses.<sup>145</sup> While Matilda expected the slaves to give her any money they made by selling eggs or poultry at the market, the presence of a food source so close to their own homes ensured the slaves always had food, a freedom and security that many bonds people did not have.<sup>146</sup> Based on her concern for ensuring an adequate food

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<sup>140</sup> William Fulton to David Shall, November 16, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>141</sup> Hilliard, “Pork in the Ante-Bellum South,” 466.

<sup>142</sup> Olmstead, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 693, 432.

<sup>143</sup> Hilliard, “Pork in the Ante-Bellum South,” 467.

<sup>144</sup> Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 33.

<sup>145</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 29, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>146</sup> William Fulton to David Shall, November 16, 1843, WSFP.

supply for the slaves and her willingness to let the slaves keep poultry of their own, Matilda seems to have been a slave mistress who cared for the health and diet of her slaves.

In addition to all of the food preparation and delegation she engaged in, Matilda also had to ensure the livestock that provided Rosewood's food supply was fed and cared for appropriately. Characterized by neglect and near-subsistence feeding levels, typical antebellum southern livestock feeding practices involved letting cattle and swine forage for their own food much of the year until they were brought in for the winter.<sup>147</sup> As a result the average productivity of southern cattle was significantly lower and southern swine weighed around 30 percent less than their northern counterparts.<sup>148</sup> Not subscribing to the method of letting the animals forage on their own for food, Matilda produced feed for the cattle, horses, sheep, and hogs by boiling large amounts of corn, a physically exhausting and time-consuming process.<sup>149</sup> Realizing how much work this was for his wife, William sent her an article from the Washington newspaper which gave directions for "soaking corn to feed horses."<sup>150</sup> This method would have removed the tedious work of supervising the boiling corn for hours. He believed it to be "easier and perhaps a more careful mode of preparing corn to feed cattle than the troublesome one of boiling."<sup>151</sup> The letters between William and Matilda on this subject provide evidence that Matilda involved herself in most of the daily work at Rosewood and was not content to sit around and be a "lady of leisure," even in instances when a slave could have done the job. William's concern shows that he realized how much work Matilda was doing in his absence, and he valued her time enough to try to help her do things more efficiently.

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<sup>147</sup> Raymond C. Battalio and John Kagel, "The Structure of Antebellum Southern Agriculture: South Carolina, a Case Study," *Agricultural History* 44, no. 1 (January 1970): 29.

<sup>148</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 115-117.

<sup>149</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, January 24, 1841, FWP; William Fulton to David Shall, November 16, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

The livestock at Rosewood were important not just for their meat but also for the milk and butter they provided. Dairy operations were considered women's work on most plantations and at Rosewood Matilda managed this in addition to her other work.<sup>152</sup> Describing her role in the dairy production to William, Matilda commented, "I attend to it all myself."<sup>153</sup> Matilda's duties related to food included supervising the management of the poultry yard, with ducks, around thirty turkeys and about the same number of chickens, and a dairy consisting of six to ten milk-producing cows.<sup>154</sup> Matilda had high expectations for the dairy and one summer became frustrated with the small butter supply.<sup>155</sup> Blaming it on the warm weather and hoping it would improve in the fall, the real problem with the butter was Matilda's old churn as the next week she was writing to William about how much she liked her new churn and how quickly the butter came with it.<sup>156</sup> At times the milk supply was so abundant it was more than could be consumed at Rosewood and Matilda made arrangements to sell it in town, sending a slave to the market house in Little Rock on Saturday with the extra milk and other goods.<sup>157</sup> The profit from the sale of extra milk added to the cash income at Rosewood, an important contribution since the Fulton family often felt as though they were just barely making ends meet.<sup>158</sup>

Supplementing the meat, dairy, and crops, Matilda cultivated a large garden and worked hard to ensure the quality and variety of the fruits and vegetables at Rosewood. Often Matilda had to make decisions on what to plant based on availability. Planning on buying and planting clove seed, Matilda decided the price was too high and she would instead have the slave John

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<sup>152</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 23.

<sup>153</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 23, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>154</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 29, 1842, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP; "Estate of William Fulton," November 15, 1844, WSFP.

<sup>155</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 30, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 23, 1842, WSFP; "Proposals for Building a Market-House," *Arkansas Gazette*, July 3, 1839; "Untitled," *Arkansas State Gazette*, June 15, 1842.

<sup>158</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 3, 1843, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP.

plant extra corn instead.<sup>159</sup> In one week Matilda had more than one thousand sweet potato hills and eighteen squares of cabbage planted.<sup>160</sup> Displaying her pride in the garden, she wrote to William she wished he “were with us to eat and enjoy our fine vegetables, we can have seven kinds every day.”<sup>161</sup> The vegetables on the dinner table would have included peas, beans, sweet potatoes, cabbage, and carrots.<sup>162</sup> “We have the finest bed of peas you ever saw,” Matilda bragged to William.<sup>163</sup>

With William in Washington, Matilda had an advantage in ensuring variety in her garden as she often requested that William send her seeds that she had seen advertised in the Washington newspaper.<sup>164</sup> Most slaves on antebellum plantations had an adequate supply of vegetables since owners understood their nutritional value and plants grown on the plantation were much more cost efficient than pork or beef.<sup>165</sup> With the abundance of vegetables at Rosewood, this would have been true for the Fulton slaves as well. Matilda considered the garden so important to the diet of everyone at Rosewood that when she was unable to keep up her usual duties in the garden due to having a baby in January 1832 and the following confinement, she wrote to William that they all expected to starve in Arkansas that summer and she feared there would be no garden in the spring.<sup>166</sup>

Always ambitious, Matilda had big ideas for planting a large orchard. In 1839 she bought fifty apple trees and was very excited to have gotten them for twenty-five cents apiece

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<sup>159</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP. Clove plants produce small flowers buds that can be dried and used whole to flavor foods like ham or the flower buds can be ground and for seasoning when baking. “Clove,” *Food.com Kitchen Dictionary*, accessed January 14, 2014, <http://www.food.com/library/clove-325>

<sup>160</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>161</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 23, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>162</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840; William Fulton to David Shall, November 16, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>163</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 30, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>164</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 25, 1842. Matilda’s requests varied based on what she needed at that specific time. She requested cabbage seed in June 1842 and clove seed in December 1842.

<sup>165</sup> Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the Old South*, 87.

<sup>166</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP.

but wished that she could have gotten even more trees, telling William she wanted “to fill up an orchard.”<sup>167</sup> However, she could not find any more apple trees to buy in Little Rock. By March 1840 she had added peach trees at Rosewood and then orange trees by 1841.<sup>168</sup> While Matilda was away in Washington with William and the children in 1841, her sister-in-law Caroline Fulton visited Rosewood and wrote to Matilda to compliment her “quite large” and “very green and luxuriant” orange trees.<sup>169</sup> Not content with her apple, peach, and orange trees, Matilda was excited to add cherry and pear trees as well as more apple trees to the orchard in February 1843.<sup>170</sup> Three years after she had begun planting fruit trees at Rosewood, Matilda had developed a large and diverse orchard that provided food for the family and slaves and could be sold at the market in Little Rock.

Matilda extended the growing season by adding fall and winter vegetables to the garden to ensure fresh produce for the family as long as possible.<sup>171</sup> Setting out a large square of strawberries and putting away eight bushels of Irish potatoes from the garden in late November would help to provide food for the family when the weather turned cold.<sup>172</sup> In addition to growing winter vegetables, Matilda preserved fruits and vegetables from other growing seasons by drying, pickling, or canning the produce for later use during the winter months.<sup>173</sup> During summer and fall, plantation women added to their usual duties with preserving and pickling

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<sup>167</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 30, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>168</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 17, 1841, WSFP; Caroline Fulton to Matilda Fulton, November 7, 1841, WSFP.

<sup>169</sup> Caroline Fulton to Matilda Fulton, November 7, 1841, WSFP. Orange trees bloom within the first two years of being planted. If Matilda purchased a fully grown orange tree, as she had done with her apple trees, her orange trees would bloom and bear fruit the first year she planted it at Rosewood. This makes it difficult to determine what year she purchased the orange tree for the orchard at Rosewood. “Orange,” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed January 14, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/430873/orange>

<sup>170</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 10, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>171</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>172</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, November 17, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>173</sup> Boyd W. Johnson, *The Arkansas Frontier* (St. Charles, AR: Perdue Printing Co., 1957), 49.

vegetables and fruits from the garden and orchard for use in the winter.<sup>174</sup> In August 1842 Matilda spent several days making preserves to store for the winter.<sup>175</sup> The drying of beans, peas, pumpkins, apples, and peaches and the hilling of Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, turnips, and cabbage ensured a variety of foods would be available for consumption even through the winter months.<sup>176</sup>

Matilda planned her garden and maintained her livestock well enough that there was often extra produce and meat at Rosewood. Not only did she have enough meat and fruits and vegetables for everyone at Rosewood, Matilda also sent food to relatives in need. This shows that she had more than enough to supply her own household. When William's brother John fell ill in June 1842, Matilda sent him several chickens, telling William she sent "all that were large enough to eat."<sup>177</sup> Two weeks later after the death of Matilda's brother Edward Nowland, she sent a barrel of flour, a box of bacon, and many other necessities to her widowed sister-in-law.<sup>178</sup> For all of her complaints about having to do without certain things, Matilda obviously realized that there were people who had less than she did and felt it was her duty to share with less fortunate family members.

At Rosewood weather determined the course of things as it did on all farms. Matilda praised and cursed the weather, sometimes praying for rain and at other times fearing flood. Her most detailed discussions of weather deal with the spring of 1840 since the weather was especially uncooperative for farming and gardening during that time period, alternating between punishing rains and drought that caused Matilda a great deal of frustration. In mid-March she complained to William of spending a day planting seeds only to have the rain set in that evening

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<sup>174</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 23.

<sup>175</sup> Matilda to William Fulton, August 15, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>176</sup> Johnson, *The Arkansas Frontier*, 49.

<sup>177</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>178</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 23, 1842, WSFP.

causing her to fear all of the seed had washed away.<sup>179</sup> Writing to William the next month that she “had never seen so much rain,” Matilda continued to be concerned about the effect all of the rain was having on the farm as it had kept the slaves from doing anything in the gardens or fields, including getting in the last of the corn.<sup>180</sup> Growing weary of the wet weather and frustrated that she could not plant any seeds or get all of the corn planted and the garden organized, Matilda wrote to William that it had been raining for two solid weeks and that even when the rain let up it was still windy and cloudy.<sup>181</sup> The rain had swollen the Arkansas River, damaging farms near the river with standing flood water and washing away livestock.<sup>182</sup>

The overly rainy weather kept Matilda from planting a garden, but while she worried about her inability to plant a garden, William had enough confidence in his wife to believe that she would still manage everything. He encouraged her to “work along as usual, and as you have been fortunate in getting seed, you can keep trying.”<sup>183</sup> William encouraged Matilda to try to salvage some sort of a garden, but he worried she would push herself too hard to get a garden going. “My greatest fear is that you will try to have more done than is required . . . in your anxiety to push all things in complete order,” he reminded his headstrong wife.<sup>184</sup> William’s comments show that even with the presence of slaves at Rosewood, Matilda insisted on working constantly and being involved in most tasks, so much so that he worried about her health.

The weather continued to be unkind as spring turned to summer in 1840. The flooding rains of early May were long gone by the end of the month and the weather had turned so dry that Matilda worried everything would burn up.<sup>185</sup> There had been no rain for three weeks and

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<sup>179</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 15, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>180</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>181</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 3, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 18, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 31, 1840, WSFP.

Matilda worried she was going to lose everything in the garden: “indeed the garden looks nearly burnt up.”<sup>186</sup> A thunderstorm in early June could have served as a respite from the drought, but it became so severe it knocked down two of the largest apple trees at Rosewood.<sup>187</sup> Describing the storm to William, Matilda wrote she had “never heard any-thing like it.”<sup>188</sup> Happy that the storm only damaged two trees, Matilda was also disappointed that they were two of the largest apple trees at Rosewood and had been full of apples.<sup>189</sup> She believed she had lost more than a bushel of apples to storm damage.<sup>190</sup> After the thunderstorm, several more dry weeks passed before four straight days of rain at the end of June.<sup>191</sup> Thrilled with the “delightful rains,” Matilda was happy to see the moisture had “made a great change in the looks of our garden and fields, everything looks charming.”<sup>192</sup>

A few weeks later drought had returned, and David Fulton worried about the fields and garden at Rosewood. “Yours without rain in a few days will be burned up entirely and seems almost irrecoverable,” Fulton wrote to William, adding that “the last ploughing as rain did not follow did harm instead of good your garden as are most others is completely destroyed.”<sup>193</sup> Discussing the impact of the drought on the cornfields at Rosewood, David Fulton painted a dismal picture. He gloomily wrote, “We have had a long spell of extreme warm and dry weather which it is allowed will shorten the Corn crop one third.”<sup>194</sup> Matilda traveled to Washington in the fall with William, leaving no explanation for how the harvest for 1840 turned out. The

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<sup>186</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 6, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 25, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, July 20, 1841, WSFP.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

unpredictable nature of weather made life difficult for farmers like Matilda as all of their hard work could end up washing away or drying up, while there was nothing to be done about it.

Not only did the weather often not cooperate, but Matilda also had to contend with other factors such as pests. After receiving some cabbage seed from William in the mail Matilda hoped to get the seed going, remarking that “if we can have dry weather and if the worms will not destroy them perhaps we will get the seed.”<sup>195</sup> One week later Matilda continued to worry about the impact of worms at Rosewood and shared her frustrations with William: “I fear after all my exertions & efforts to have everything in abundance, and looking well when you get home, you will find nothing to eat, the worms are dreadful I assure you, in town they are destroying everything before them.”<sup>196</sup> While happy with the state of the largest corn field at Rosewood, Matilda worried that the worms would destroy it any day.<sup>197</sup> Pesticides such as pyrethrum, an insecticidal powder, and inorganic poisons such as sulfur, arsenic, and mercury existed in the early nineteenth century, but Matilda never mentions using them.<sup>198</sup> Losing fruits and vegetables would deplete the food supply for everyone at Rosewood and make it difficult for Matilda to have any extra to sell at market. She bore the responsibility and concern over these issues in William’s absence and worked her hardest to keep the weather from destroying everyone’s hard work.

The gardens, fields, and livestock at Rosewood produced not only enough extra food to share with family but also sometimes enough to sell at market and supplement the family income. Matilda attempted to sell her surplus food at the market in Little Rock anytime she had

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<sup>195</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>196</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 3, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> G. H. Walter, *Insect Pest Management and Ecological Research* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 48.

extra and often made a nice profit.<sup>199</sup> Little Rock had just recently built a market house for the purpose of allowing farmers to sell their goods. Each Saturday Matilda sent a slave with surplus items such as bacon, milk, butter, eggs, and vegetables such as corn, cabbage, and peas.<sup>200</sup> The new market house was so popular that it overflowed with goods and made it difficult for farmers to sell their extra goods. At times frustrated at her inability to sell produce in town, Matilda explained to William that she “could not sell anything the times is so hard everybody has made gardens, and the season has been so good there is no one to buy, however, I think I will try again in a day or two.”<sup>201</sup> As with the profit from selling the extra milk from her dairy, a surplus of produce, meat, and dairy allowed Matilda to contribute to the family income at a time when she and William needed the money.

Matilda did her best to ensure as much food as possible was grown or raised at Rosewood, but there were still items the household needed that could not be produced there. In these situations she requested that William purchase these things on his way home from Washington, DC due to the lower prices there. Occasionally Matilda ran out of items like wheat flour, not because she refused to pay the high prices in Little Rock, but because there was simply none to be had in town. Little Rock stores experienced a scarcity of numerous goods in December 1842 when the Arkansas River was too low for boats to travel on.<sup>202</sup> Matilda had run out of brown sugar but was making do with Havana sugar, higher-quality white sugar that was typically twice as expensive as the brown sugar Matilda usually purchased, telling William that Rosewood was “much better off than our neighbours, the town is nearly run out of everything no

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 23, 1842, WSFP; “Proposals for Building a Market-House,” *Arkansas Gazette*, July 3, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>201</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 23, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>202</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 5, 1842, WSFP.

sugar no coffee or anything else in the town.”<sup>203</sup> When she received a shipment of goods from William a few weeks later she was happy to find that he had sent wine, clove seed, lime, and sugar, solving her sugar dilemma.<sup>204</sup> While lucky that William was able to purchase and ship goods to her, Matilda often faced shortages or a complete lack of certain items in Little Rock and had to learn how to survive without them.

Matilda had access to many non-alcoholic beverages, including a well that provided plenty of clean water, milk from the cows, and coffee and tea she purchased in Little Rock or William purchased while traveling.<sup>205</sup> Common drinks on the frontier, whiskey and wine frequently accompanied dinner at Rosewood or were offered to a visitor.<sup>206</sup> A typical supply of liquor at Rosewood included six demijohns of old whiskey; two demijohns of cherry bounce, a popular drink made with whiskey, cherry juice, and sugar; and one barrel of whiskey.<sup>207</sup> Lighter alcoholic fare included three baskets of champagne, one barrel of wine, five boxes of sherry and Muscat wine, three dozen bottles of claret wine, and three dozen bottles and six demijohns of Madeira wine.<sup>208</sup> Common among the planter class, Madeira, a fortified Portuguese wine, and claret wine, a light-colored Bordeaux wine, were the most popular wines owing to their greater alcohol content.<sup>209</sup> William typically purchased the liquor, wine, and champagne in Washington,

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid. For more details on the various types of sugar available to nineteenth century Americans see William Woys Weaver, *Sauerkraut Yankees: Pennsylvania Foods and Foodways* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002), 152-54.

<sup>204</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 19, 1842, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 25, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>205</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 23, 1842, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 3, 1842, WSFP

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> “Estate of William Fulton,” November 15, 1844, WSFP; Houston Gwynne Jones, *Scoundrels, Rogues, and Heroes of the Old North State*, eds. K. Randell and Caitlin D. Jones (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2007), 31.

<sup>208</sup> “Estate of William Fulton,” November 15, 1844, WSFP.

<sup>209</sup> Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the Old South*, 59; James Tuten, “Have Some Madeira, M’dear: The Unique History of Madeira Wine and its Consumption in the Atlantic World,” (presentation, Juniata College Bookend Seminar Lecture Series, Huntingdon, PA, April 2, 2008), “Bordeaux Wine,” *Encyclopedia*

DC, or during his travels and had it shipped to Rosewood.<sup>210</sup> Shipping occasionally resulted in the liquor and wine arriving destroyed or empty due to lack of sealing.<sup>211</sup> Matilda had this problem in December 1842 when a shipment from William arrived and she found the wine was not packaged or sealed properly and one dozen bottles were broken.<sup>212</sup> When desperate, Matilda purchased needed wine in Little Rock, but this was not her preference due to the Little Rock markets' higher prices.<sup>213</sup>

Matilda had seven decanters in which to store liquor and would have served her guests using wine glasses or tumblers.<sup>214</sup> Her descriptions of dinners and impromptu parties at Rosewood depicts a household that was always prepared to entertain guests who often dropped by without notice with beverages, candies, cookies, and fruit.<sup>215</sup> The inventory from Rosewood shows that while a hard worker and a constant worrier about money, Matilda lived on a plantation with nice things that many other southerners would work their entire lives to own. The incorporation of these luxury items into a rustic frontier household serves as an example of the duality of Matilda Fulton's life: the daughter of an elite family living and working on a frontier plantation for the majority of her life.

As in households across the South, the fruits of Matilda's labor added to the family's income both by producing what the family ate and wore and in supplementing the family income

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*Britannica Online*, accessed November 20, 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/73905/Bordeaux-wine>

<sup>210</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 24, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>211</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 25, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>212</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 19, 1842, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 25, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>213</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>214</sup> "Estate of William Fulton," November 15, 1844, WSFP.

<sup>215</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 3, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 17, 1841, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP.

with cash brought by selling surplus goods in town.<sup>216</sup> Often not acknowledged by society since she worked in a household with a male head, Matilda's contributions kept the household going and money coming in.<sup>217</sup> The lack of acknowledgment of women's economic contributions by American society in the 1830s resulted from a shift in how society viewed women.<sup>218</sup> The practical view of hard-working women as productive housewives that had been common in American society had been abandoned in favor of the idealized "lady."<sup>219</sup> A reaction to changing economic opportunities that threatened the position of men in a patriarchal system, categorizing women as "dependents" allowed American society to ignore the domestic labor and market income of women like Matilda and deny their position as equal economic partners. Her informal status as the head of the household made it even easier to ignore her contributions.<sup>220</sup> Since Matilda's position was always viewed as temporary and society simply saw her as a stand-in for her husband, the credit for her contributions and success running Rosewood still went to William. As evidenced by all of her hard work and importance to Rosewood and her family, Matilda in no way fit into the category of a dependent although this is how nineteenth century classified her.

Further blurring the line, it was difficult to definitively categorize the products of households like Rosewood as domestic or market products.<sup>221</sup> Vegetables from the garden, milk from the dairy, and eggs from the poultry yard were as likely to be consumed at the dinner table as to be taken to market to sell. The informal nature of women's positions as the head of household for months at a time and the emphasis on women as "ladies" combined in the 1830s to

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<sup>216</sup> Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 75.

<sup>217</sup> McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 75.

<sup>218</sup> Nancy Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife: Her Evolution in Nineteenth Century Economic Thought," *Signs* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1991): 467-68.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife," 465-66.

<sup>221</sup> McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 76.

cause American society to ignore the fact that many women created a large portion of their family's income. Even if society did not recognize Matilda's economic contributions, it is obvious through his letters that William valued and appreciated Matilda's role in the household. He acknowledged the amount of work she did in his absence and realized he would not have been able to do his job as senator without her ability to manage everything and keep income coming in at Rosewood.

While Matilda's letters are full of details of her constant work caring for the family and slaves and managing Rosewood, she never mentioned how she viewed herself in her new role and if she believed she was a productive housewife or a "lady." It is remarkable that she was so unconcerned with the notion of being a lady that she never even mentioned it. Matilda may have never worried about her own status as a lady, but on numerous occasions she encouraged her eldest daughter Elizabeth to behave like a lady in society, improve her manners, and become pleasing and agreeable.<sup>222</sup> This shows that Matilda was aware of how American society defined a lady and the appropriate behavior for ladies. She, however, did not seem to care if her own behavior fit that mold as she was too busy making sure there was food on the table and crops in the field.

Regardless of their size or age, most plantations related to the market primarily through one individual, the head of the household.<sup>223</sup> This individual was characteristically the male head of the household who expected to know every detail of agricultural operations.<sup>224</sup> Typically defined as requiring the presences of an adult man and an adult woman, the southern household shared boundaries with the plantation through the residents that lived and worked in both areas

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<sup>222</sup> Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, January 26, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>223</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Antebellum Southern Households: A New Perspective on a Familiar Question," *Review* 7, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 233.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

and the food that came from the garden, fields, and buildings such as the smokehouse, that the mistress and slaves turned into meals.<sup>225</sup> This meant the planting activity of the white male planter defined both areas and therefore the income from all components of the household were viewed as a product of the planter's work.<sup>226</sup> In William's absence Matilda took over the decision-making and supervision of the planting activities, giving her power over all areas of the plantation. Matilda managed Rosewood on her own for many years, but society continued to view her as a temporary stand-in for her absent husband and not as the head of the household that she truly was.<sup>227</sup>

Living on the Arkansas frontier during the 1830s and 40s, Matilda Fulton managed Rosewood plantation on her own and ensured that her family, slaves, and animals had the resources needed to survive. Her choice of crops, management of the dairy and garden, and enterprising nature to turn these items into profit allowed Rosewood to run successfully and profitably in William Fulton's absence. While society might not have valued the job she did or seen her as the head of the household at Rosewood, her husband and family realized that without her contributions William would not have been able to serve as a senator in Washington while the plantation continued to run smoothly and their lives would have been very different. Matilda's acceptance and fulfillment of her role as head of household shows that while American society tried to create a specific image of what women were capable of in the nineteenth century, women took on whatever challenges were necessary to ensure the livelihood of their homes and families.

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<sup>225</sup> Fox-Genovese, "Antebellum Southern Households," 236-37.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> The 1840 United States Census lists William as the head of household even when he was spending the majority of the year in Washington, D.C., and Matilda was managing the plantation. *1840 United States Census*, Pulaski County, Arkansas, Population Schedule 4 Whole Number of Persons, Page 113, William S Fulton Household, National Archives Microform Publication (National Archives and Records Service: Washington, D.C., 1967), M704, Roll 19.

## Chapter 4

“Arkansas is no Home for Angels”:  
Family, Friendship, and Health on the Frontier

Throughout William and Matilda Fulton’s letters their love, affection, and attachment to one another is obvious and very unlike the lack of emotion that some historians have claimed existed in marriages at this time.<sup>1</sup> Both grew weary of their long separations, worried about the health of each other and their children, and longed for the day when they would be together. William and Matilda’s marriage existed within a broader network of friends and relatives who helped them both through trials in the other’s absence, but they still managed to grow closer and more reliant on one another. As parents they made decisions together and supported the choices the other made for their children. Their marriage of twenty years dissuades any notion that such relationships in the early nineteenth century lacked love and affection.

As Matilda sat writing a letter to William, her husband of seventeen years, on May 24, 1840, another rainy day spent at home, the dreary weather and loneliness led to the sad tone of her letter: “Oh my dear husband, what would I give if you were only with us now, it cannot be two more months before you are with us, surly [surely] the months are longer than they ever were before, it will be dreadfull indeed.”<sup>2</sup> William had left in October 1839 to travel to Washington, DC, and serve as a United States senator, a separation that Matilda would grow accustomed to over the next few years.<sup>3</sup> The thought that she would not see William for another two months caused Matilda to complain, but she reminded herself that all she could do was bear

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<sup>1</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 273.

<sup>2</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 24, 1840, attached to Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 23, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, November 9, 1839, FWP.

the time the best way she could and try to keep their children happy.<sup>4</sup> At church a few weeks later her friend Matilda Johnson claimed that Congress would adjourn the first of July, and Matilda was excited to hear her husband and eldest daughter Elizabeth would be returning home so soon.<sup>5</sup> She woke the next day in fine spirits and set all the hands to work getting everything ready for their arrival.<sup>6</sup> Her relief was brief as the next day she received two letters from William stating that Congress would not adjourn before the middle of July.<sup>7</sup> Matilda was heartbroken that it would be another month before she saw her husband and oldest daughter and grew despondent at the continued separation.<sup>8</sup> “Your wife is with you every night in my dreams, but oh when I wake I find it is nothing but a dream,” Matilda wrote. “I suppose we should not complain if we are only permitted all to meet again in perfect health and spirits at our dear and happy home, it is all I desire in this world.”<sup>9</sup>

American views on marriage in the nineteenth century were complicated with many diverse ideas of what an appropriate relationship between a man and woman should be. During the American Revolution and in the early Republic era, a growing number of Americans applied their republican views to the institution of marriage and rejected patriarchal standards in which the man ruled over his family.<sup>10</sup> While some clung to older traditions and believed patriarchal structure necessary for stable families others began to define marriage as a companionate union of equals based on friendship.<sup>11</sup> Even in this symmetrical view of marriage, however, when an

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<sup>4</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 24, 1840, attached to Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 23, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>5</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, June 11, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>6</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, June 25, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Jan Lewis, “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (October 1987): 696.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Beth Stevens, *Stray Wives: Marital Conflict in Early National New England* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 14.

issue arose, the wife was the one expected to bend or defer to her husband.<sup>12</sup> The expectation of deference in women shows the limitations of the idea of republican marriage; the wife had only as much power as her husband and society allowed.<sup>13</sup> Beginning in the 1820s, the republican wife gave way to the Victorian mother.<sup>14</sup> Victorian ideals of stricter gender roles and separate spheres that were taking hold in the 1820s and 1830s clashed with the idea of companionate marriage or “companionship in marriage which promised a loving partnership of equals.”<sup>15</sup> The patriarchal nature of antebellum southern society shaped marriage and most women expected unconfiding private husbands.<sup>16</sup> William Fulton did not fit this image of the uninterested and cold husband, viewing Matilda as his friend and sharing his thoughts and feelings with her.

The opposing views of companionate marriage and stricter gender roles and their effect on the status of men and women in society explain a great deal about William and Matilda Fulton’s marriage. While their letters display a companionate marriage built on friendship, affection, and mutual respect, nineteenth century America did not view Matilda as William’s equal when it came to her management of Rosewood, conducting of business, or views on politics. William Fulton may have seen his wife as an equal, whom he trusted to run the plantation, give him opinions on politics, and raise their children, but antebellum America did not see her in this way.

Viewing his wife as his main confidante, William wrote frequent and detailed letters to Matilda. While fulfilling his duties as secretary of Arkansas Territory in January 1833, William was in Washington assisting United States Attorney General Roger B. Taney and expected to be

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 712.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 720.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 721.

<sup>15</sup> Anya Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic: Elizabeth and William Wirt and the Companionate Ideal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 273-77.

there until after the adjournment of Congress since Taney planned to address numerous causes before he got to the Arkansas issues.<sup>17</sup> William had taken up residence in a boarding house with several friends as he assumed his stay was going to be a long one. He promised Matilda that he would not stay a moment longer than he was compelled to. William did not seem to be enjoying Washington and displayed his tender side, writing to Matilda: “This life of parade and continued wrangling is most irksome indeed. I am kept in constant stirring that mind is unhinged, and I absolutely feel unable to sit down to anything. . . . I have partially withdrawn myself from the gay world,” he explained, “but still I am not what I am when at home. I am happy with my family, my wife & children are every thing to me.”<sup>18</sup>

William’s letters to Matilda display his affection for his wife and the closeness of their relationship. He often confided in her things he would not admit to anyone else. After his reception in Washington as a new senator, William was excited to inform Matilda that he had “gained here the entire confidence of our political friends, and am taken with such council, by the leaders of our party . . . no new member stands fairer or better with all of the friends of the administration than I do.” “This I may be permitted to say to you,” William commented, “but, not to others.”<sup>19</sup> While he was comfortable with his new political associations, William still showed some lack of confidence when writing to his wife. “I have not been much of a speaker this winter,” William confided. “Indeed I did not desire to make myself conspicuous until I felt myself better prepared. I speak however, whenever it is really necessary.”<sup>20</sup> These remarks by William show his willingness to open up to Matilda and make himself vulnerable by discussing both his best and worst moments as well as admitting his weaknesses and insecurities. At a time

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<sup>17</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, January 15, 1833, WSFP.

<sup>18</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, February 14, 1837, WSFP.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

when society expected men to be strong and masculine William chose to share everything about himself with Matilda, even things that would have made him appear lesser in the eyes of everyone else.<sup>21</sup> His desire to share every detail of his experiences with Matilda also differs greatly from the common view at the time that men who were physically distant from their wives were also emotionally distant and aloof.<sup>22</sup> William treated Matilda as his partner and wanted her opinions and support on his life in Washington.

In December 1840 William had once again arrived in Washington, after “travelling in the midst of the greatest snow storm I have ever witnessed.”<sup>23</sup> Anxious to let Matilda know he had made it to Washington after a long journey, William wrote her a letter while still in the Senate chamber after the call to order and before he had even arranged for a place to stay in Washington.<sup>24</sup> Describing his journey from Arkansas to Washington, he noted it had snowed for three days and nights straight including the day he crossed over the mountains and it took seventeen hours just to get from Baltimore to Washington.<sup>25</sup> William believed that the snow was about two feet thick and had kept him from visiting with any friends and family in Baltimore.<sup>26</sup> Two days later he had made arrangements to stay in a boarding house with his colleagues.<sup>27</sup> Not wanting to leave out any detail, he noted to Matilda that he had seen President Van Buren that day and that “he looks remarkably well and bears his defeat like a man.”<sup>28</sup> Matilda must have been comforted when William, who like herself was a Jacksonian Democrat, wrote that all of her old friends were anxious to see her again and amused when he reminded her “they are all terrible

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<sup>21</sup> Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 273-274.

<sup>22</sup> Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 275.

<sup>23</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, December 7, 1840, FWP.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, December 9, 1840, FWP.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

and openmouthed Whigs.”<sup>29</sup> The thoroughness and tone of William’s letters demonstrate the friendship that existed between him and Matilda in their marriage.

Already dealing with difficult and long separations, William and Matilda often had to wait over a month to receive letters and learn what was going on with the other.<sup>30</sup> William expressed amazement in February 1837 when he received a letter from Matilda that had traveled from New Orleans to Washington in six days, only thirteen days after Matilda mailed it.<sup>31</sup> The fact that the letter had reached him so quickly shocked William since all winter the letters he received were forty to fifty days old before he received them.<sup>32</sup> William’s praise of the mail in 1837 was a rare exception as his attitude was usually frustration with its slowness. In December 1840 William worried since he had only received one letter from Matilda since his arrival in Washington.<sup>33</sup> His only reassurance was a letter he received from his friend Archibald Yell, the governor of Arkansas, in which Yell told him that he seen Matilda and she was doing well.<sup>34</sup> William was very bothered by the lack of communication from Matilda and asked her why she did “not arrange it so as to give me a letter every day or two.”<sup>35</sup> In another instance Matilda was frustrated that she had written numerous letters to both William and Elizabeth and they had only received two.<sup>36</sup> Amongst all of the many duties she completed in a day, Matilda also had to find time to read William’s letters and write to him as well.

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<sup>29</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, December 17, 1840, FWP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 24, 1840, WSFP; “William Fulton,” *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2653>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, February 25, 1837, WSFP.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid; William and Matilda being able to afford to send letters so frequently to each other was actually quite rare since many people found the high postal rates for letters prohibitive. Prior to the Congressional Act of 1845, which changed the law to postage rates based on weight rather than the number of sheets of paper being mailed, the cost of mailing a letter could be quite expensive. David Henkin, *The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 20, 34.

<sup>33</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, December 17, 1840, FWP.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, January 26, 1840, WSFP.

The *Arkansas Gazette* noted constant disruptions in the mail, especially in the mail coming on the stagecoach from Memphis, which was often delayed over a month.<sup>37</sup> The postmaster general recommended a new mail system for Little Rock in early 1837 in which the mail arrived in Helena, a city in eastern Arkansas with a port of the Mississippi River, by steamboat and then traveled to Little Rock by stagecoach.<sup>38</sup> One week later the *Arkansas Gazette* reported no mail had arrived from Helena since no person had been employed to drive the coach.<sup>39</sup> The *Arkansas Gazette* believed the situation with the mail route from Helena had finally improved in 1838 with a regular daily mail route to Little Rock, but the newspaper continued to note the lateness or lack of arrival of mail from various places throughout the late 1830s and early 1840s.<sup>40</sup> The reasons varied from the boiler of a steamboat exploding to the seizure of the horses and stagecoach carrying the mail for unpaid debts.<sup>41</sup>

With William away for months at a time, Matilda's children and friends sustained her. As territorial Arkansas grew and more settlers arrived, Matilda's group of friends expanded as well. Her experience varied greatly from the isolation that some historians have claimed was normal for a southern woman; Matilda spent the majority of her time in the company of female relatives and friends.<sup>42</sup> Rosewood's distance of only one mile from Little Rock was close enough to encourage Matilda's friends to visit her frequently.<sup>43</sup> Her large group of female friends and relatives supports the idea that women in frontier societies created a community

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<sup>37</sup> "Editorial," *Arkansas Gazette*, April 13, 1831; "To the Editor of the Gazette," *Arkansas Gazette*, May 25, 1831; "News," *Arkansas Gazette*, December 14, 1831.

<sup>38</sup> "News," *Arkansas Gazette*, May 23, 1837.

<sup>39</sup> "Editorial," *Arkansas Gazette*, May 30, 1837.

<sup>40</sup> "Editorial," *Arkansas Gazette*, August 8, 1838.

<sup>41</sup> "The Eastern Mail," *Arkansas Gazette*, September 12, 1838; "The Eastern Mail," *Arkansas Gazette*, March 13, 1839.

<sup>42</sup> Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World and the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 164-65.

<sup>43</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 30, 1839, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, December 15, 1839, FWP.

together using friendship and family.<sup>44</sup> These relationships provided reassurance and stability for women who had moved to an unknown remote area and were trying to build a new society.<sup>45</sup> Matilda's female circle contained the wives of her husband's fellow politicians, wealthy white women with similar backgrounds. Elizabeth Randolph, Andrew Jackson's great-niece and wife of Meriwether Lewis Randolph, Thomas Jefferson's grandson, and Matilda were close friends during Randolph's time in Arkansas.<sup>46</sup> William was grateful that Matilda had companions to cheer her in his absence and mentioned them in his letters to his wife. "I expressed to you the satisfaction this circumstance afforded me in my last letter," William wrote of Matilda's friendship with Randolph. "Well aware as I am that you needed some such a friend to cheer you, I would not but rejoice at your having found so delightful a friend and companion."<sup>47</sup> A few weeks later William emphasized his appreciation of Matilda's friends and their companionship during his absence: "I cannot express how much I feel indebted to Mrs. Randolph and all your friends for their kindness to you."<sup>48</sup>

After spending the winter of 1838 in Washington with her husband, Matilda would not travel to Washington with William again until 1841. This meant she was often away from William and Elizabeth during holidays. In the winter of 1839 she and the other children spent Christmas and New Year's without William and Elizabeth, but her friends Laura Elliot Cross, the wife of Congressman Edward Cross, and Henrietta Carroll, the mother of local lawyer and later

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<sup>44</sup> Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 77-78.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, February 14, 1837, WSFP; Elizabeth A. Randolph to Matilda Fulton, October 26, 1838, "Meriwether Lewis Randolph," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, accessed November 29, 2013, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=1316>

<sup>47</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, February 14, 1837, WSFP.

<sup>48</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, February 25, 1837, WSFP.

Congressman David Carroll, came to visit and spend the holidays at Rosewood.<sup>49</sup> Henrietta Carroll stayed for several days with her, and Carroll's son, David Carroll, visited Rosewood frequently to dine with the women.<sup>50</sup> Matilda and Henrietta Carroll enjoyed their visit so much that a few days turned into several weeks.<sup>51</sup> She wrote to Elizabeth of being very busy and constantly having company throughout the holiday season.<sup>52</sup> After their long visit Matilda was sad to see Henrietta Carroll go, telling Elizabeth that she felt like a relation.<sup>53</sup> While she obviously missed her husband and daughter, Matilda took comfort in the fact that they were at least able to spend the holiday together and in spending hers with friends and her other children.<sup>54</sup>

During the many years that William traveled away from home as he served in various government positions, Matilda and the children accompanied him only three times. Traveling to Washington with several small children proved difficult. The trip from Little Rock to Washington for the Fulton family involved traveling by steamboat as well as overland by wagon.<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth, who had made the grueling trip herself, inquired of her mother about her return trip from Washington to Little Rock in 1839: "How did they all stand the ruff travelling over the mountains poor little Julia I expect she did not like it much but dear little thing she could not complain."<sup>56</sup> In addition, William and Matilda's decision had to take into account the

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<sup>49</sup> "Death of Hon. Edward Cross' Wife," *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, November 11, 1879; Sons of the American Revolution, *A National Register of the Society, Sons of the American Revolution* (New York: Louis H. Cornish, 1902), 114.

<sup>50</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 30, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>51</sup> Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, December 15, 1839, FWP.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 30, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, March 23, 1839, FWP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, March 23, 1839, FWP.

expense of boarding the entire family in Washington.<sup>57</sup> Matilda usually handled the long separations from William with patience, but some of the most difficult times for her were when her friends accompanied their husbands and she remained at home. In early 1837 William mentioned that Matilda's friend Juliette Sevier, the wife of William's fellow senator from Arkansas, Ambrose Sevier, was in Washington with her husband and inquired constantly about Matilda, insisting that she must accompany William to Washington the next year.<sup>58</sup> The difficulty of William and Matilda's situation is obvious in their letters to one another, and they agreed that Matilda should accompany William when he returned to Washington for the next session of the Senate.<sup>59</sup> William insisted that if they could find the money he would prefer that the entire family go to Washington, confident that the presence of his family would make him "a much more valuable public servant."<sup>60</sup> Being together was important enough to William and Matilda that he and Matilda managed to afford it, and she and the children accompanied him to Washington in the winter of 1838.<sup>61</sup>

In 1840 Matilda's friends Laura Cross and Henrietta Carroll traveled to Washington to be with their husbands while she remained at Rosewood.<sup>62</sup> Cross and her husband were planning to stay at the same boarding house as William and Ambrose and Juliette Sevier. William believed the group would all try to stay together for some time, but they were planning to all move up to Capitol Hill as the location of their current house became too dusty during the spring and summer.<sup>63</sup> Seeing people fresh from their journey from Rosewood brightened William's spirits

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<sup>57</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, January 12, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>58</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, February 14, 1837, WSFP; "Ambrose Hundley Sevier," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, accessed July 25, 2013, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=1760>

<sup>59</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, February 14, 1837, WSFP.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth A. Randolph to Matilda Fulton, October 26, 1838, WSFP.

<sup>62</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, January 27, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

and as he said to Matilda “brought you all at least for a few moments around me.”<sup>64</sup> For Matilda it was just a reminder that her friends had been able to make a journey that she could not and they would now be in the presence of her husband for many months to come while she stayed at home.<sup>65</sup> William noted Laura Cross and her children’s ability to travel back to Washington to stay with her husband, Edward Cross, and showed that he too was having a difficult time with the situation. William inquired of Matilda, “Is it not hard that our means do not enable us to do as others do?” “This however is a subject I dislike to write about,” he explained, “as I cannot permit myself to dwell upon it.”<sup>66</sup> Missing Matilda and their daughters, William was frustrated that his income did not allow his wife and children to travel to Washington to stay with him as Judge Cross’s did.<sup>67</sup> As the man of the family, William viewed income as his responsibility and felt he was letting his family down when he could not afford for them to accompany him to Washington.

Matilda’s friends offered her vital support when she gave birth while William was in Washington. No matter how many times a woman had given birth, childbirth was dangerous during the nineteenth century, and giving birth was more dangerous in frontier Arkansas than in more established parts of the United States.<sup>68</sup> In 1850, almost twenty years after Matilda’s childbirth experience, and in a more modernized Arkansas, maternal mortality rates in Arkansas were still twice those of the North.<sup>69</sup> An anxious and dangerous time in a nineteenth century woman’s life, pregnancy and childbirth could be both exhilarating and terrifying. The possibility of complications during childbirth that could result in death marred the joy that came from

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, January 12, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. For more on William and Matilda’s finances see page 72.

<sup>68</sup> Coneverey A. Bolton, “‘A Sister’s Consolations’: Women, Health, and Community in Early Arkansas, 1810-1860,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 284.

<sup>69</sup> Bolton, “A Sister’s Consolations,” 284.

expecting a child.<sup>70</sup> In January 1832 Matilda gave birth to a son, her fifth child.<sup>71</sup> During the early part of 1832 William spent several months in Washington. In his capacity as secretary of Arkansas Territory, William assisted the United States attorney general in cases dealing with people in Arkansas territory making fraudulent claims of land grants from the Spanish authorities.<sup>72</sup> He brought with him the papers needed for a trial before the Supreme Court and ended up detained in Washington from January to March, more than four months.<sup>73</sup> Adding in the time it would have taken William to travel to Washington from Little Rock, Matilda would have been without him for around six months. William left a month before Matilda expected to have the baby so both husband and wife knew that he would be away when the time came.

Even with Matilda's planning, the baby came sooner than she expected and caught her in the middle of some chores she was hoping to complete. She spent the day before she went into labor preparing meat for the smokehouse. "I was in the mist of my pork the day before I was taken sick Fisher and myself cut up nine hogs," Matilda explained, adding that she "spent the day in the smoke house without setting down until night."<sup>74</sup> Matilda did not realize she was going into labor so she did not mention to anyone how tired she felt and continued working throughout the next day. As evening approached she recognized what was happening and sent for her neighbor Mrs. Fields to come stay the night with her.<sup>75</sup> The next morning she sent for her friends Rebecca Collins, the wife of Captain Richard Collins, a land surveyor working for the United States

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<sup>70</sup> Judith Walzer Leavitt and Whitney Walton, "'Down to Death's Door': Women's Perceptions of Childbirth in America," in *Women and Health in America: Historical Readings*, ed. Judith Walzer Leavitt (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 156.

<sup>71</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP.

<sup>72</sup> R. B. Taney, "Certificate by the Attorney General [March 19, 1832]," in *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 21, ed. Clarence E. Carter (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954), 477.

<sup>73</sup> Taney, "Certificate by the Attorney General," 478.

<sup>74</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

Army, and Francis Pope, the wife of John Pope, William's predecessor as territorial governor.<sup>76</sup> As was the custom of the time, Matilda's friends stayed with her through the birth of her son and for two weeks after.<sup>77</sup>

Female friends and family members coming to be with a woman during childbirth and for a period of time after was a common occurrence in nineteenth century America.<sup>78</sup> The presence of female friends and relatives at the laboring mother's side displays the "women's culture," in which women bonded over similar experiences based on their sex, that historians have argued existed during the nineteenth century.<sup>79</sup> These women provided some comfort for the expectant mother at this stressful time since these women would have already been through the experience of childbirth. Although Matilda was an old hand at childbirth since this was her fifth, the presence of experienced friends and family would have been reassuring, especially in William's absence. Even if William had been home at Rosewood, Matilda would have still desired the company of other women as American society's gender-defined roles categorized birthing as strictly the domain of women and kept men out of the birthing room.<sup>80</sup> These women also could help Matilda care for her other children while she recovered from childbirth, which is most likely why they stayed for two weeks after the birth of the baby.<sup>81</sup> Matilda's friends and neighbors returned to their homes, leaving her at home with the slaves to help her with a new baby and four

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid; "Road from Washington to Jackson in the Arkansas Territory," *Arkansas Gazette*, July 20, 1831; *1840 United States Census*, Pulaski County, Arkansas, Population Schedule 4 Whole Number of Persons, Page 108, R D C Collins Household, National Archives Microform Publication (National Archives and Records Service: Washington, D.C., 1967), M704, Roll 19; "John Pope," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, accessed November 21, 2013, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-etail.aspx?search=1&entryID=318>

<sup>77</sup> Judith Walzer Leavitt and Whitney Walton discuss the common practice of women attending each other during births: "Trained midwives or experienced friends and relatives came to help before or during labor, and many of them stayed for days or weeks afterward, participating in the transition to motherhood. Birthing women, accompanied by their friends and relatives, dominated home birthing rooms throughout the nineteenth century regardless of the sex or training of their birth attendants." In "Down to Death's Door," 155-65.

<sup>78</sup> Judith Walzer Leavitt and Whitney Walton, "Down to Death's Door," 155.

<sup>79</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America," *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 3.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP.

small children. Her loneliness would not last long as her sister Sophia came to stay within days of the other women leaving.<sup>82</sup>

Having lost her only son, Peregrine, to scarlet fever six months before, Matilda was excited to bring a new son into her family.<sup>83</sup> “Oh my dear husband when I found we were blest with another dear little son you can well imagine how delighted I was,” Matilda excitedly wrote. “He is indeed the sweetest and the most perfect little Creature and the best child I ever had,” she enthused.<sup>84</sup> Matilda was also happy to report that the baby had not “been sick yet he never cries sleeps all the time.”<sup>85</sup> She was anxious for William to return home so they could name their son and William could meet him. Matilda was feeling better since having the baby than she had in six months and told William he would barely recognize her since she looked so much younger. She was pleased to tell him her friends claimed she looked “at least ten years younger than I did.” “I laugh and say I will be a beauty when you come home,” she remarked.<sup>86</sup> The presence of female friends and relatives helped ease the precarious nature of pregnancy and childbirth during the nineteenth century, especially for Matilda in William’s absence.

Early nineteenth-century American medicine was a confused combination of new theories and old habits practiced by well-meaning honest physicians as well as dishonest individuals with suspect backgrounds.<sup>87</sup> The seemingly endless list of medicines presented to patients promised to cure whatever ailed them but often resulted in little change or even a worsening of their condition.<sup>88</sup> “Oh my constant prayer is for your health and safety, indeed my

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Brother E. B. Nowland to Matilda Fulton, August 5, 1831, WSFP.

<sup>84</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 9, 1832, WSFP.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> John S. Haller, *American Medicine in Transition, 1840-1910* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1981), vii.

<sup>88</sup> Haller, *American Medicine in Transition*, viii.

thoughts are always with you,” Matilda wrote to William in January 1843.<sup>89</sup> During their separations Matilda worried constantly about William’s health, and he frequently inquired about how she was feeling as well. When Little Rock experienced a cold front in the middle of May 1840 Matilda complained to William of its effect on everyone’s health, especially her own. “I have not felt very well for some time,” she explained.<sup>90</sup> Describing her illness, Matilda wrote: “Yesterday I had a chill before dinner then a fever that lasted until late in the night, I took five pills and feel much better today. I will take something to keep it off tomorrow.”<sup>91</sup> After Matilda’s chills persisted into the next week accompanied by a high fever, the combination of a doctor’s visit, a dose of calomel and a cup of tea with William’s sister Jane finally improved her condition.<sup>92</sup> William continued to worry about his wife’s wellbeing even after she had recovered, reminding her that she should not “expose yourself and overwork yourself.”<sup>93</sup> Matilda assured him that she was feeling much better and he should not give himself “any uneasiness about our health here.”<sup>94</sup> “I think this one of the healthier places in the country,” she commented, adding that her “health is very good indeed, I will use every means in my power to prevent anyone from exposing themselves, you know no one dreads sickness more than I do.”<sup>95</sup>

At the same time she was telling William of her full recovery, Matilda worried about him as he had mentioned his frequent use of salts.<sup>96</sup> “I feel truly sorry to hear you are obliged to take

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<sup>89</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 1, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>90</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 12, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. The pills Matilda took were likely Sappington’s pills as she took them several other times. In 1832 John Sappington manufactured and distributed a pill containing quinine sulfate, licorice, myrrh, and oil of sassafras that claimed to remedy a fever. The initial dosage recommended one pill every two hours until symptoms began to subside. T. Findley, “Sappington’s Anti-Fever Pills and Westward Migration,” *Transactions of the American Clinical and Climatological Association* 79 (1968): 39.

<sup>92</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 17, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>93</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, May 18, 1840, FWP.

<sup>94</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 25, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. Epsom salts were used during the nineteenth century to treat fevers, inflammatory disorders, colic, and constipation. “Patients’ Voices in Early 19th Century Virginia,” *Historical Collections at the Claude Moore*

medicine so often, I fear my dear your health is not good, I know the confinement is dreadfull this warm weather,” Matilda sympathetically commented, noting that she was miserable that he had “to take so much medicine so often.”<sup>97</sup> Matilda especially worried about William’s health when he was traveling to Washington and was always relieved to know he had arrived in good health. Having learned of his safe arrival in Washington after one such trip, Matilda told William how thankful she was “to know you are well and comfortable is your wives happiness.”<sup>98</sup> Feeling helpless when headaches struck William in Washington, Matilda advised him that “you cant be too cautious of your health.”<sup>99</sup> “What would I give to be with you, to attend to you when you have those distressing spells,” she wistfully commented.<sup>100</sup> In the spring of 1840 Matilda was concerned about William’s health as he had been very ill and unable to leave his bed.<sup>101</sup> “You know Elizabeth he is our all in this world, without him what would become of us,” she observed to her daughter, adding that “he is indeed the best of Fathers. I assure you my child he is our prop, our comforts our hopes our all comes through him.”<sup>102</sup> While Matilda usually appeared strong and independent, her remarks here show that she did depend on William and was comfortable doing so.

Three years later William’s constant shoulder pain alarmed Matilda and she wrote to him in a state of frustration over their separation: “Oh how much I wish I was with you now to rub your shoulder and attend to you.”<sup>103</sup> “My dear husband never expose yourself, if you was to get sick I should go crazy,” Matilda recommended to her ailing husband who was also suffering

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*Health Sciences Library*, University of Virginia, accessed January 16, 2014, <http://carmichael.lib.virginia.edu/story/pharmacy.html>

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 30, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>99</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>100</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>101</sup> Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, April 11, 1840, FWP.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 1, 1843, WSFP.

from a cold.<sup>104</sup> William's shoulder pain continued to the point that he called a bone setter whose techniques did not prove effective.<sup>105</sup> Matilda had no faith in the abilities of the bone setter, telling William that only time would heal his shoulder.<sup>106</sup> Matilda found the separation from William during times of illness incredibly frustrating due to her inability to help him get better. Matilda fretted about William's overuse of medicine, but did not hesitate to take pills herself when she was ill. During another bout of chills and fever in January 1843 that lasted ten days, Matilda wrote to William of her attempt to rid herself of the chills: "I have had a visit from my old friends the chills & fevers I think I am entirely cleared of them now. I have taken one dozen and five of Sappington's pills."<sup>107</sup>

While she typically dismissed her own illnesses as unimportant, Matilda worried greatly about the health of her family and did everything in her power to help them recover. Even with all of her precautions, Matilda had to face the death of several children during her life. "These are trials my dear sister which we all have to encounter in this life."<sup>108</sup> Edward Nowland wrote these words to his sister Matilda after learning of the death of her five-year-old son David Peregrine in 1831, the first of six children she would lose to "fevers" during her life.<sup>109</sup> An infant, Matilda Frances, and her eight-year-old sister Mary Jane died in 1835; three-year-old Maria Eller and seven-year-old Hickory died in 1839, and four-year-old Julia died in 1843.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 8, 1843, WSFP. Bone setters practiced joint manipulation, reducing dislocations and resetting bones. Many physicians were skeptical of the abilities of bone setters and passed on their skepticism to their patients. Erland Pettman, "A History of Manipulative Therapy," *Journal of Manual and Manipulative Therapy* 15, no. 3 (2007): 165-66.

<sup>106</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 8, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>107</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 22, 1843, WSFP; Findley, "Sappington's Anti-Fever Pills and Westward Migration," 39.

<sup>108</sup> Brother E. B. Nowland to Matilda Fulton, August 5, 1831, WSFP.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> "DIED," *Arkansas Gazette*, February 24, 1835; "DIED," *Arkansas Gazette*, May 19, 1835; "Died," *Arkansas State Gazette*, April 10, 1839; "Died," *Arkansas State Gazette*, May 1, 1839; "Julia Fulton," *Maryland, Find a Grave Index*, 1637-2012, accessed November 30, 2013, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=FU&GSpartial=1&GSbyrel=all&GSst=4&GSctry=4&GSsr=2481&GRid=92074479&>

Offering his condolences after Julia's death, William's brother David Fulton commented to William of "the high estimation in which Rebecca & myself held that child & the shock her death occasioned us may in measure tell how great was your loss."<sup>111</sup> Fulton continued on, noting that he could not imagine "your [William] & Matildas feelings at the happening of the melancholy. When I reflect upon the death of your Julia I am forcibly impressed that Arkansas is no home for Angels."<sup>112</sup>

Table 2. Births and Deaths of Fulton Children

	Year of Birth	Year of Death
Elizabeth Rebecca	1824	1894
David Peregrine	1826	1831
Mary Jane	1827	1835
Sophia Caroline	1830	1879
Hickory	1832	1839
Maria Eller	1836	1839
Julia	1838	1843
Ida	1845	1886

Sources: *William Savin Fulton Papers, 1807-1909*, Arkansas History Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas; *Fulton Wright Papers*, Arkansas History Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas; Margaret Ross, "An Original Letter of Governor William Savin Fulton," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (Autumn 1963): 273-277; *Maryland, Find a Grave Index, 1637-2012*. (<http://www.findagrave.com/index.html>).

Child and infant mortality rates were high in the antebellum South, with 38 percent of all deaths among whites occurring among children five and under.<sup>113</sup> The illness or death of a child was a constant worry for southern mothers and often something they had very little control over. The discovery of the germ theory of disease did not occur until the late nineteenth century, which left southern families in the earlier part of the century with little understanding of the cause of

<sup>111</sup> David Fulton (Brother) to William Fulton, August 4, 1844, WSFP.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Sally G. McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson Inc., 1992), 79.

the illness.<sup>114</sup> When cholera threatened to spread through Little Rock in 1837 William remarked hopefully to Matilda: “If our dear children can only escape that terrible disease [cholera] you mention, we shall have cause to be more than thankful to a kind Providence for the blessings he is bestowing on us.”<sup>115</sup>

Diseases such as yellow fever spread and turned into epidemics in cities because people did not know about its contagious nature.<sup>116</sup> The southern climate of heavy rainfall and long, hot summers only served to exacerbate the possibility of illness, and fever became known as the “great frontier curse.”<sup>117</sup> In November 1840 the weather in Arkansas had turned unseasonably warm after two solid days of snow that had accumulated up to one foot.<sup>118</sup> Matilda complained to William that everyone in the house was sick and she was suffering from the worst cold she had ever had. She had been concerned that Julia was suffering from croup, but the child had almost completely recovered. Matilda was hopeful that if the warm weather continued everyone in the house would be well soon.<sup>119</sup> Common diseases of the nineteenth century, scarlet fever and measles were continuous threats to Southerners.<sup>120</sup> At least four of Matilda’s children died of a fever thought to be scarlet fever and in two instances Matilda lost two children within weeks of the other due to contagious diseases that affected both children at the same time.<sup>121</sup> Little Rock was home to several doctors, including William’s brother John Fulton, and William and

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<sup>114</sup> David R. Goldfield, “The Business of Health Planning: Disease Prevention in the Old South,” *Journal of Southern History* 42, no. 2 (November 1976): 559.

<sup>115</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, February 25, 1837, WSFP: “Multiple News Items,” *Arkansas Gazette*, October 4, 1836.

<sup>116</sup> Goldfield, “The Business of Health Planning,” 559.

<sup>117</sup> Martha Carolyn Mitchell, “Health and the Medical Profession in the South,” *Journal of Southern History* 10, no. 4 (November 1944): 425.

<sup>118</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, Winter 1840, WSFP.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Mitchell, “Health and the Medical Profession in the South,” 432.

<sup>121</sup> “DIED,” *Arkansas Gazette*, February 24, 1835; “DIED,” *Arkansas Gazette*, May 19, 1835; “Died,” *Arkansas State Gazette*, April 10, 1839; “Died,” *Arkansas State Gazette*, May 1, 1839; Sybil Crawford and Mary Fletcher Worthen, *Mount Holly Cemetery: Little Rock, Arkansas: Burial Index: 1843-1993* (Little Rock: August House, 1993), 89.

Matilda likely sought professional treatment for their children based on their choices in other cases of illness, but the treatment was not enough to save the children.<sup>122</sup>

In February 1835 William and Matilda traveled to Fort Gibson in Indian Territory with their infant daughter Matilda Frances, eight-year-old daughter Mary Jane, and their son Hickory to visit Matilda's brother, Edward Nowland.<sup>123</sup> They had left their other children, Elizabeth, eleven years old, and Sophia, five years old, with their grandfather David Fulton and their aunt Jane Fulton Shall in Little Rock.<sup>124</sup> On the way to Fort Gibson, the baby died at Fort Smith, Arkansas, on February 16, 1835.<sup>125</sup> While at Fort Gibson low water held up William and Matilda's return as the steamboat was not able to return to Little Rock.<sup>126</sup> During their unexpectedly lengthened stay at Fort Gibson, the adult Matilda suffered from a "severe indisposition which rendered it imprudent to remove her."<sup>127</sup> The serious nature of Matilda's illness delayed William's return to Little Rock until early April, a trip he ultimately had to make over land.<sup>128</sup> Begrudgingly, William left his sick wife and children and returned to Little Rock to take on his duties as governor, arriving in Little Rock on April 20.<sup>129</sup> Matilda planned to return to Little Rock by steamboat when she and the children had fully recovered.<sup>130</sup> Matilda and Matilda Frances' unexpected illnesses and the subsequent death of Matilda Frances show how sudden sickness could escalate during the nineteenth century.

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<sup>122</sup> Dr. John T. Fulton to William Fulton, December 31, 1841, WSFP; "Multiple Classified Advertisements," *Arkansas Gazette*, March 10, 1835; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 17, 1840, FWP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 22, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>123</sup> Margaret Ross, *Arkansas Gazette: The Early Years, 1819-1866* (Little Rock: Arkansas Gazette Foundation, 1969), 126.

<sup>124</sup> Margaret Ross, "An Original Letter of Governor William Savin Fulton," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (Autumn 1963): 273.

<sup>125</sup> "DIED," *Arkansas Gazette*, February 24, 1835.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> "Untitled," *Arkansas Gazette*, March 24, 1835.

<sup>128</sup> "Gov. Fulton," *Arkansas Gazette*, April 14, 1835.

<sup>129</sup> "Untitled," *Arkansas Gazette*, April 21, 1835.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

Writing to a colleague, William described the unfortunate situation: “I have been some weeks absent from Little Rock,” he wrote, “having been detained away by the extreme illness of Mrs. Fulton, who I have been at last, compelled to leave.”<sup>131</sup> After William left for Little Rock, Mary Jane, William and Matilda’s eight year old, died at Fort Gibson on May 5 after suffering for only two to three days of scarlet fever.<sup>132</sup> It was an unimaginable situation for Matilda to be so far away from her home and husband while ill herself and trying to cope with the tragedy of losing two children. William was likewise in a terrible position as he had to return to Arkansas to fulfill his duties as governor but at the same time neglected his role as husband and father in leaving Fort Gibson.<sup>133</sup>

Matilda had to deal with another tragedy in the spring of 1839 after her time in Washington. When she and her three small children headed back to Arkansas William stayed behind in the capital. By late March 1839 Matilda, seven-year-old Hickory, three-year-old Maria Eller, and an infant, Julia, were at their new home in the country.<sup>134</sup> Rosewood was in rough condition when Matilda and the children arrived home, with much of the house still unfinished.<sup>135</sup> As she adjusted to organizing a new home and dealing with all of the children on her own again, Matilda could never have expected the impending tragedy she would soon have to deal with. On April 9 she lost her three-year-old daughter Maria Eller and then her son Hickory, age seven, on April 29.<sup>136</sup> The newspapers stated that both children died of an

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<sup>131</sup> William Fulton, “Governor Fulton to the Secretary of State,” in *Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 21, 1037.

<sup>132</sup> “DIED,” *Arkansas Gazette*, May 19, 1835.

<sup>133</sup> Waddy William Moore, *Territorial Arkansas, 1819-1836* (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 1963), 354.

<sup>134</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, March 23, 1839, FWP; “Julia Fulton,” *Maryland, Find a Grave Index*.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> “Died,” *Arkansas State Gazette*, April 10, 1839; “Died,” *Arkansas State Gazette*, May 1, 1839.

undisclosed disease, but the family believed that scarlet fever was the culprit.<sup>137</sup> To make matters worse, Elizabeth was in Georgetown and William was in Washington, and neither could travel home to console Matilda.<sup>138</sup> The experience of having to mourn for two children without the company of her husband or eldest daughter added to the difficulty of the situation.

Matilda's sisters Harriet and Sophia and several other female relatives came to stay.<sup>139</sup> It was customary for relatives to come for the funeral and then remain for a lengthy period of time after to offer comfort to the bereaved family.<sup>140</sup> It was such a common practice for female relatives to visit during times of mourning that Matilda's sister-in-law, Harriet Nowland, had been upset in 1831 when an illness prevented her from traveling to comfort Matilda after the loss of her son David Peregrine. Matilda's brother, Edward Nowland, described Harriet's frustration, saying, "She feels deeply for you and regrets she is not with you to offer a sisters consolations."<sup>141</sup> During the mourning period, Matilda limited activities outside of her home and did not attend parties and other social functions. While Matilda did not discuss her private feelings about the deaths of her children in letters, her sister, Sophia Nowland, who came to stay with Matilda while she was in mourning, painted a sad picture of Matilda to Elizabeth Fulton: "I have been with your death-afflicted Mother."<sup>142</sup> This description of Matilda shows the impact the deaths of her children had on her. Sophia Nowland also wrote to Elizabeth that they had

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid; Miss L. S. English to Matilda Fulton, September 11, 1839, FWP. Note added by family member reads "Written after the death of two dear little children – Hickory and Maria Eller—both died of scarlet fever within a week."

<sup>138</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, June 11, 1839, FWP.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Joan Cashin, "The Structure of Antebellum Planter Families: 'The Ties that Bound us Was Strong,'" *Journal of Southern History* 56, no. 1 (February 1990): 58.

<sup>141</sup> Brother E. B. Nowland to Matilda Fulton, August 5, 1831, WSFP.

<sup>142</sup> Sophia Nowland to Elizabeth Fulton, May 6, 1839, FWP.

“been most sadly employed in making up her mournings [clothing].”<sup>143</sup> Shocked at the deaths of the children, Sophia described her feelings to Elizabeth when she learned of Hickory’s death as “almost too much for me to bear.”<sup>144</sup> Observing rituals that helped them to cope, Matilda and the other female members of her family would have worn only black or white clothing for the first few days after the burial, known as first mourning.<sup>145</sup> The color black stood for the sadness of mourning while white represented the belief that the children went to a different world. After the initial few days, the women would then transition to second mourning, in which they mixed lighter colors such as gray or violet with their black clothing.<sup>146</sup> Matilda and Elizabeth wore second mourning for at least six months.<sup>147</sup> As the mother Matilda had specific customs to keep. She carried black-edged handkerchiefs and wore jewelry made from Hickory and Maria Eller’s hair.<sup>148</sup> In addition, any letters that Matilda wrote to friends would have been on paper with a black border.<sup>149</sup>

While there are no letters in which Matilda describes her feelings at the loss of her two children, Elizabeth’s letters to her mother show her feelings. Heartbroken, Elizabeth told her mother she could not make herself “believe [Maria and Hickory] would be taken from us.”<sup>150</sup> “It will be some time before I can become reconciled to the loss of my only brother and dear little sister,” Elizabeth sadly observed to her mother several weeks after the deaths of her siblings.<sup>151</sup> Since she was not able to be with her mother, Elizabeth was glad that her aunts had come to stay

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid. Matilda was making her mourning clothes as she would be expected to wear black dresses and accessories for several months after the death of her children. Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 103-110.

<sup>144</sup> Sophia Nowland to Elizabeth Fulton, May 6, 1839, FWP.

<sup>145</sup> Taylor, *Mourning Dress*, 103-110.

<sup>146</sup> “Died,” *Arkansas State Gazette*, May 1, 1839.

<sup>147</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, October 25, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>148</sup> “The Arkansas News,” *Old Statehouse Museum Website*, accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.oldstatehouse.com/pdf/96Spring.pdf>

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, May 11, 1839, FWP.

<sup>151</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, May 31, 1839, FWP.

with her mother and tried to stay strong in her letters to her mother. “How much changed is everything since she [Sophia Fulton] was at the Rock last and oh what sad changes for our family,” Elizabeth lamented.<sup>152</sup> She then tried to remind herself and her mother that “we must not murmur.”<sup>153</sup> By the middle of June, William was back at Rosewood with Matilda, but Elizabeth was upset that she was stuck at boarding school in Georgetown and was not been able to see her mother during the loss of Hickory and Maria Eller.<sup>154</sup>

Lydia English, the principal of the female seminary that Elizabeth Fulton attended in Georgetown, offered her condolences on the deaths of Hickory and Maria Eller to Matilda in a letter discussing Elizabeth’s education: “Your little Maria was a sweet, interesting child, and it must have occasioned you a severe pang to part with her, but still heavier was the blow that deprived you of an only son—so beautiful—so noble—so promising a boy.”<sup>155</sup> It had been six months since Matilda had suffered the deaths of her two children, and these words would have been difficult to read as they reminded her of that loss.<sup>156</sup> One year after the deaths of Hickory and Maria Eller, Matilda was still having a difficult time dealing with the loss.<sup>157</sup> “I wish you could see our dear Julia sitting up to the table, I know she would remind you so much of our dear Maria Eller, oh this time last year was she and our beloved Hickory taken from us, oh my thoughts are always with my dear Angels,” Matilda, sadly recalling the anniversary, remarked to

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<sup>152</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, June 11, 1839, FWP.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid; Lea Flowers Baker, “William Savin and Matilda Fulton: A Brief Look at a Territorial Arkansas Family,” *Pulaski County Historical Review* 48 (Winter 2000): 80; “Died,” *Arkansas State Gazette*, April 10, 1839.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. From 1821 to 1859 Lydia English ran the female seminary, which employed nine teachers and was home to over 130 students. The three story building housed 19 bedrooms, a library, and several parlors. Many pupils were daughters of well-known men in the political world, including Andrew Johnson’s and Thomas Hart Benton’s daughters. Grace Dunlop Peter, *A Portrait of Old George Town* (Richmond, VA: The Dietz Press, 1951), 183-85; “Now and a Long Time Ago: Washington and Gay St.,” *The Georgetown Metropolitan Website*, accessed January 18, 2014, <http://georgetownmetropolitan.com/2012/08/20 /now-and-a-long-time-ago-washington-and-gay-st/>

<sup>156</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, October 25, 1839, FWP.

<sup>157</sup> Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, April 11, 1840, FWP.

Elizabeth.<sup>158</sup> All too common an occurrence during the nineteenth century, the loss of a child was a devastating experience that William and Matilda often had to handle without the other's company.

With William in Washington for months at a time, William and Matilda had to manage raising their children while separated from each other. William's absence often hit Matilda the hardest when he missed out on milestones related to their children. Matilda's friend Henrietta Carroll gave accounts of the children to William when she arrived in Washington in 1840, noting that his youngest daughter Julia was beginning to walk and ten-year-old Sophia was an attentive and obedient girl.<sup>159</sup> As Julia, William and Matilda's one-year-old daughter, began to talk, Matilda was saddened that William was not there to hear Julia's first words.<sup>160</sup> The thought that William was missing the children's daily lives continued to bother Matilda. "I only wish you would hear our sweet little Julia laughing," she longingly wrote. "She is the greatest girl you ever saw."<sup>161</sup> William was thankful that his ten-year-old daughter Sophia was able to write him letters and keep him apprised of her daily life.<sup>162</sup> Matilda updated William frequently on what the children were doing and reminded him of how they missed him. Approaching the age of five in June 1843, Julia began to understand that her father was not at home and talk to her mother about him. Since William had not seen Julia since the previous fall, Matilda tried to share these experiences with her husband. "Our children are well talk all the time about Pa," she explained. "I only wish you could have seen dear Julia eating corn at dinner today, she said she wished Pa had some, whenever we have anything good she wish Pa was at home to get some, she is indeed

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, January 27, 1840, WSFP; "Sophie Caroline Fulton Watkins," *Maryland, Find a Grave Index, 1637-2012*, accessed November 11, 2013, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=7840479>

<sup>160</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 15, 1840, WSFP; "Julia Fulton," *Maryland, Find a Grave Index*.

<sup>161</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 31, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>162</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 3, 1840, WSFP.

the life of us all.”<sup>163</sup> William and Matilda would be struck by tragedy again when Julia died in 1843.<sup>164</sup>

Showing his affection for his children, William often sent presents. After he sent dolls for Sophia and Julia, Matilda lamented that he could not see them playing with what Julia called “the prettiest thing [her doll] she ever saw.”<sup>165</sup> In another instance William sent dresses for Sophia and Julia as well as three pairs of shoes but was frustrated because he believed the sizes were wrong.<sup>166</sup> Afraid his youngest child Julia would not like him after his long absence, William told Matilda “As to your charming little pet Julia, you must teach her to love me, and run after me when I reach home.”<sup>167</sup> He need not have worried as a month later Matilda wrote to him that “Julia has just given me a kiss to send to pa and sister.”<sup>168</sup>

William was not alone in experiencing long separations from his children, as Matilda faced lengthy separations from her oldest daughter Elizabeth when she attended boarding school in Georgetown from 1836 to 1840. Matilda had a difficult time with her daughter being gone for such long periods of time and often felt that she was missing important parts of Elizabeth’s life. Elizabeth was away from Matilda from the ages of fifteen to nineteen, pivotal years in a young woman’s life.<sup>169</sup> Matilda frequently asked William about their daughter and how she was doing, inquiring “Is Elizabeth changed much? How does she look? I hope she is improved in every way.”<sup>170</sup> At one point Matilda and Elizabeth did not see each other for over a year.<sup>171</sup> Feeling as though she and Elizabeth were missing out by being separated during typical mother-daughter

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<sup>163</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 23, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>164</sup> No letters survive that explain the cause of Julia’s death.

<sup>165</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>166</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, January 27, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>167</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, May 18, 1840, FWP.

<sup>168</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 11, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>169</sup> Lea Flowers Baker, “Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* vol. 65, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 139.

<sup>170</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 30, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>171</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, June 11, 1839, FWP.

experiences like shopping or packing for a trip, Matilda put on a brave face to William: “I know she feels the want of me at this time more than ever, but she must act as a woman, and have her things well and carefully packed and not leave half behind.”<sup>172</sup> Both William and Matilda display a great deal of affection for their children and found it difficult to be separated from them for so long.

William and Matilda both thought the education of their oldest daughter to be extremely important. While other antebellum men saw no benefit in educating a daughter since they believed their daughters to be mentally inferior, William was very supportive of Elizabeth receiving a high-quality education.<sup>173</sup> Arkansas had no public system of schools until after the Civil War so her mother and aunts provided Elizabeth’s early education.<sup>174</sup> When William took his position as senator in Washington, DC, in 1836 his eldest daughter accompanied him and began school at Miss Lydia English’s Academy.<sup>175</sup> Elizabeth brought Minerva, one of the family’s female slaves, to care for her needs while at school.<sup>176</sup> Popular among the planter class, antebellum female education was meant to prepare young women for their future roles as wife and mother while improving their minds and manners.<sup>177</sup> English’s academy brochure explained that the goal of her educational program was to offer the girls “that amount of mental and more culture necessary to render them amiable, intelligent, and useful members of society.”<sup>178</sup> These improvements would make them more appealing to prospective suitors. This view of female education embraced femininity while arguing that the education of women did not threaten their

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<sup>172</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 12, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>173</sup> Anne Firor Scott, “Education of Women: The Ambiguous Reform,” in *Making the Invisible Woman Visible*, ed. Anne Firor Scott (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1984): 302-3.

<sup>174</sup> Baker, “Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman,” 139-40.

<sup>175</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, March 29, 1836, FWP. For more information of Lydia English’s academy see page 134.

<sup>176</sup> Baker, “Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman,” 144.

<sup>177</sup> Anya Jabour, “‘Grown Girls, Highly Cultivated’: Female Education in an Antebellum Southern Family,” *The Journal of Southern History* 64, no. 1 (February 1998): 24.

<sup>178</sup> “Now and a Long Time Ago: Washington and Gay St.,” *The Georgetown Metropolitan Website*.

status as dependents of their future husbands but provided them with knowledge and skills that would make them better wives and mothers.<sup>179</sup>

From Elizabeth's letters, it seems that William and Matilda planned her education together. "If there is any particular study, Father or yourself wish me to attend to, you had better write to Miss English," Elizabeth recommended to her mother, adding that "she [English] will pay more attention to a request that comes from you, than from me."<sup>180</sup> Elizabeth did offer some input on her own education, noting that she would like to take piano lessons if possible.<sup>181</sup> She asked Matilda for confirmation on this idea from both of her parents: "If Father and yourself agree to the plan I propose, please write me word, I know you are very anxious about my French, and I will try my best to learn to speak it well."<sup>182</sup> Lydia English, the principal of the female seminary that Elizabeth attended in Georgetown, also kept Matilda apprised of how Elizabeth's education was progressing.<sup>183</sup> "With regard to your daughter I have the most favorable accounts to give," the educator noted. "She entered the A section at the commencement of the present Term."<sup>184</sup> English also acknowledged a request William had made, asking Matilda to "Please say to Governor Fulton I have attended to his request with regard to Music and will also do all in my power to facilitate her progress in French."<sup>185</sup>

Feeling in no way that her coursework was easy or geared simply towards making her a cultured young lady, Elizabeth fretted over and despised the examinations she completed at the end of each semester, telling her mother the tests were "dreadful."<sup>186</sup> She described the

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<sup>179</sup> Susan Phinney Conrad, *Perish the Thought: Intellectual Women in Romantic America, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 26.

<sup>180</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, July 17, 1839, FWP.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Miss L. S. English to Matilda Fulton, September 11, 1839, FWP.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, July 17, 1839, FWP

experience of reciting lessons before a room full of people to Matilda and being crowded in a warm room with the other girls “from morning until night.”<sup>187</sup> Matilda encouraged her daughter in painting and writing as well as her school exams. Elizabeth’s last school examination was at the end of February, and Matilda encouraged her to “exert herself, and get through with flying colors.”<sup>188</sup> Occasionally Elizabeth felt that her parents were putting too much pressure on her. “You all expect so much from me; I dread to go home you will surely be disappointed. As to being all you wish is impossible as it is not in my power to alter human nature,” Elizabeth complained. “I am now far from being anything you could wish and I do not think in one year more I can be everything you could desire. It is entirely too much to expect of me.”<sup>189</sup> Based on Elizabeth’s feelings that her parents were putting too much pressure of her, William and Matilda believed Elizabeth’s education to be very significant and wanted her to make good use of her time at English’s school. Their concern with her classes and grades display the importance they placed on her education and does not indicate that they viewed English’s academy as just a finishing school where Elizabeth could learn how to be a lady.<sup>190</sup>

William and Matilda’s letters to their daughter display an attempt on their part to balance their concern for Elizabeth’s education with advice on social development. While her letters to Elizabeth often focused on school and how to improve herself, Matilda also liked to gossip and share the frivolous details of Little Rock society with her daughter. The town of Little Rock had begun having bi-weekly assembly balls in Little Rock and Matilda believed that Elizabeth would find Little Rock’s attempt at fine society humorous compared to the balls she attended in

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, January 26, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>189</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, October 25, 1839, FWP.

<sup>190</sup> Jabour, “Grown Girls, Highly Cultivated,” 23-26.

Washington.<sup>191</sup> Amused when Elizabeth informed that she had an “egg nogg” at a party, Matilda told her daughter there was nothing wrong with having the drink as long as she did not drink too much.<sup>192</sup> She worried constantly about her daughter’s social development and reminded her frequently that she should behave like a lady.<sup>193</sup> Wanting her daughter to become a well-rounded young lady, Matilda advised Elizabeth to take care to get rest and be watchful of her health but also to travel and meet new people.<sup>194</sup> She was very happy that Elizabeth had been to see President Martin Van Buren and remarked to her daughter, “You can now say you have seen a number of great folks.”<sup>195</sup> Matilda reminded her daughter that her mother’s greatest desire was to see her improve her manners and for Elizabeth to become pleasing and agreeable.<sup>196</sup> Matilda was delighted when William described their daughter as “sprightly and animated” but suggested that she should be more confident when in company.<sup>197</sup> To help remedy Elizabeth’s occasional shyness, Matilda recommended for William “to let her see as much company as she can this winter.”<sup>198</sup>

Between the slave Minerva’s presence and the close proximity of her father, Elizabeth did not face the same isolation as some of her classmates but still often complained of homesickness to her mother. In the fall of 1839 Elizabeth had held out hope that Matilda would

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<sup>191</sup> Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, January 26, 1840, WSFP. Invitation only assembly balls limited their membership to elite upper class residents. Lee L. Schreiber, “Bluebloods and Local Societies: A Philadelphia Microcosm,” *Pennsylvania History* 48, no. 3 (July 1981): 262.

<sup>192</sup> Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, January 26, 1840, WSFP. Having no problem with moderate alcohol consumption and often serving liquor at Rosewood, Matilda was not a member of The Little Rock Temperance Society that was formed in 1831. Her choice is worth noting since the majority of the society’s membership was made up of members of local Methodist churches, one of which Matilda attended, and the society encouraged women to become members. “Prohibition,” *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, accessed January 19, 2014, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=3002>

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

accompany her father when he returned to Washington.<sup>199</sup> “Oh Ma do come, I would be too much delighted if I could get a letter saying you had determined to come,” a lonely Elizabeth excitedly wrote to Matilda.<sup>200</sup> Elizabeth consoled herself with the thought that time would pass quickly and when July came she would be home with her family.<sup>201</sup> She needed to get new clothes for the winter and wished to have her mother with her to pick them out, noting that “Father will say he does not know what I ought to get.”<sup>202</sup> In the end it was not within their budget for the whole family to spend the winter in Washington and Elizabeth was disappointed.<sup>203</sup> Having a difficult time being away from her mother in December 1839 and facing the coming holidays without her family, Elizabeth almost decided to leave school and travel home with the Beebe family, an Arkansas family traveling home from Washington.<sup>204</sup> Matilda wrote to her daughter that she would have been very delighted to see her but it benefited Elizabeth more to stay where she was.<sup>205</sup> Even as Matilda missed her daughter she emphasized to her the importance of her education and how vital it was for her to complete her time at the school.

As the end of Elizabeth’s education approached, William met with Miss English and requested that Elizabeth devote the last of her time at school to reading, writing, and French.<sup>206</sup> William’s request shows the major priorities Elizabeth’s parents had for her education, which lined up with the beliefs of the planter class on women’s education. Southern society had long viewed these subjects along with music such as Elizabeth’s piano lessons as acceptable training

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<sup>199</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, October 25, 1839, FWP.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> Matilda Fulton to Elizabeth Fulton, December 15, 1839, FWP.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, May 18, 1840, FWP.

for young southern women.<sup>207</sup> This view of appropriate female learning was evident in Elizabeth's letter to her mother when she explained Miss English's reaction to girls arguing over whether they were Whigs or Democrats: "Miss English walks in upon them when they are in the heat of discussion to inform them, they came here not to talk politics, but to learn politeness."<sup>208</sup> Quite fond of talking about politics herself, Matilda could not have approved of Miss English's views on women and politics.

Matilda had a passion for politics and constantly read the newspaper and discussed politics with anyone who would listen.<sup>209</sup> Matilda subscribed to and frequently read the *Globe*, a Washington newspaper, and enjoyed when it mentioned William and his political activities.<sup>210</sup> The *Globe* devoted much of its bi-weekly newspaper to discussions of the activities of the Senate, showing Matilda's interest in keeping up with the work William was doing. In March 12, 1840 the *Globe* printed a speech given by William in the Senate in which he spoke against the assumption of state debts and the creation of a national debt.<sup>211</sup> Matilda was very complimentary of William's speech, writing to her husband that she was "highly delighted with your very excellent speech, so soon as I opened the paper, I put down my work and read it attentively every word, I assure you it read very well indeed."<sup>212</sup> She had discussed the speech with David Fulton, William's father, and Mr. Coles, a friend of David Fulton, who both agreed

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<sup>207</sup> Scott, "Education of Women," 302.

<sup>208</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, October 27, 1840, FWP.

<sup>209</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. It was common to subscribe to newspapers from major cities like Washington, DC, during this time. Newspapers relied on subscription fees from their readers to keep the paper going. Gerald J. Baldasty discusses the importance of subscribers: "For editors, the subsidies often provided financial stability in a notoriously unstable business." In Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 19. David Fulton, William's father, encouraged fellow residents of Little Rock to subscribe to the *Globe* to help ensure its success. Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 18, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

with her that it was an excellent speech.<sup>213</sup> Matilda was excited that the *Arkansas Gazette* was going to reprint the speech and their friends would be able to read it as well.<sup>214</sup> Wanting to keep up-to-date with what was happening in Congress, Matilda sought news from William. In one letter she requested information, telling her husband she was “on tip toe to hear what you are all doing in Congress, who is speaker, and Chaplain? We have not received the message yet.”<sup>215</sup>

While she took great interest in her husband’s political career, Matilda kept up with politics in general and viewed herself as a political thinker and actor in her own right. Her attention to the 1840 presidential campaign serves as an example of this. A passionate Jacksonian Democrat, Matilda described the Whig party campaign in Baltimore in a letter to William as “the grand, but disgusting exhibition, with their log cabins and hard cider.”<sup>216</sup> Considering herself a member of the Democratic party even though she could not vote, Matilda commented on the 1840 election “Oh what a triumph it will be, if we can only defeat them after all their efforts, how cheape they will feel. I sincerely hope the Democrats will make them all wish their log cabins were in the woods.”<sup>217</sup> The Whigs had been hard at work campaigning with a log cabin and flag in Little Rock also, but Matilda was confident that the Democrats would prevail: “The Whigs are carrying things to great lengths here too, they have a log cabin and flag flowing all the time, but I think it wont do the democrats you know are the true and right side.”<sup>218</sup> The town of Little Rock was getting ready for their Fourth of July celebration and Matilda was very excited about the preparations which included a speaker, a dinner, and a Sunday school activity.<sup>219</sup> When rumors began circulating that the Whigs were planning to give

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 24, 1840, WSFP

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 18, 1840, WSFP.

speeches on the first Monday in July to gain publicity, Matilda was so skeptical that they would be successful in Little Rock that she commented to William “in the way of fights I am sure that is all they can do.”<sup>220</sup> William and Matilda’s discussion of political news continued throughout their marriage. Informing Matilda of the many government officials who had attended the wedding of the infamous Mrs. Peggy Eaton’s daughter, William commented “So you see Mrs. Eaton is situated in good society again. Her worst enemies are now her friends. What a world is this we live in! I wonder what my old friend Genl. Jackson would say now if he was here.”<sup>221</sup>

The Democratic Party enjoyed strong support in Arkansas, with candidates getting 11 percent more votes in Arkansas than in the rest of the nation.<sup>222</sup> The most closely contested election between the two parties was the 1840 campaign in which the Whigs used numerous campaign tactics such as the ones Matilda mentions to William in her letter.<sup>223</sup> Sad to learn that Martin Van Buren had lost the 1840 presidential election, Matilda commented to William that she was “so sorry to hear Mr. Van is beaten I assure I was quite agreaved this morning when I read your note to Father, but old Harrison’s rain cant be long.”<sup>224</sup> Continuing to display her contempt for the Whigs, three years later when she heard William Woodruff sold the Little Rock paper *The Arkansas Gazette* to a Whig owner, Matilda was appalled, asking William “what is the world coming too?”<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, January 19, 1843, FWP. Washington society viewed Peggy Eaton, the wife of John Henry Eaton, the Secretary of War under Andrew Jackson as a woman of questionable morals, accused of having a relationship with Eaton before her previous husband was dead. For a more detailed discussion see John F. Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair: Manners, Mutiny, and Sex in Andrew Jackson’s White House* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

<sup>222</sup> S. Charles Bolton, *Arkansas, 1800-1860: Remote and Restless* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 169.

<sup>223</sup> Bolton, *Arkansas, 1800-1860*, 169.

<sup>224</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, Winter 1840, WSFP.

<sup>225</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 8, 1843, WSFP.

Matilda's strong support for the Democrats and opposition to the Whigs is intriguing since the Whigs believed themselves to be the party of women in antebellum America and actively sought the support of women.<sup>226</sup> The Whigs hoped women would influence their men's political views and encouraged women's participation in rallies and parades during the 1840 election season, which one historian has referred to as "Whig womanhood."<sup>227</sup> The majority of Democrats did not approve of the Whig's encouragement of women's participation, believing this involvement damaged the virtue of women.<sup>228</sup> In the Democrats' and much of American society's view the only acceptable women's political activity included involvement in religious and benevolent societies.<sup>229</sup> Unable to directly participate in politics by voting during the first half of the nineteenth century, many women chose to participate in these societies.<sup>230</sup> Women used the moral superiority accorded them by domesticity and the idea of the republican mother to their own advantage to take what political power they could outside of electoral channels.<sup>231</sup> While involved in church activities, Matilda's distance from town and need to be at Rosewood to work and supervise the slaves limited her ability to participate.<sup>232</sup> The Whig campaigns were meant to appeal to women and encourage them to get their husbands to the polls to vote, but Matilda ridiculed the Whig campaign activities and clung to her strong support for the Democrats.<sup>233</sup> In nineteenth-century America politics were reserved for men and many women

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<sup>226</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 606.

<sup>227</sup> Elizabeth R. Varon, "Tippecanoe and the Ladies, Too: White Women and Party Politics in Antebellum Virginia," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (September 1995): 495.

<sup>228</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 607.

<sup>229</sup> Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984): 620.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Baker, "The Domestication of Politics," 621.

<sup>232</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 16, 1842, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 25, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>233</sup> Elizabeth Varon, *We Mean to be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 75-76.

believed it was not their place nor another woman's to give their thoughts on such matters.<sup>234</sup> Ignoring the idea that political discussion was unsuitable for women, Matilda frequently brought up the topic with anyone willing to discuss it and freely offered her opinions on the events and politicians of the time. It seems that Elizabeth may not have shared her mother's interest in politics. When discussing the situation of her classmates being advised not to talk about politics by Miss English, she did not include herself as one of the girls in the discussion.<sup>235</sup> In another letter Elizabeth tells her mother that she has not managed to read a newspaper containing a speech given by William, even though her father had sent over several weeks earlier.<sup>236</sup> It is possible that in the first situation Elizabeth simply didn't want to include herself in a group of girls getting scolded by Miss English in a letter to her mother.<sup>237</sup> In addition, her strenuous coursework may have been the major factor in her choice not to read the newspaper with her father's speech.<sup>238</sup> Regardless of her daughter's interest, Matilda attempted to pass on her love of politics to Elizabeth by sending her newspapers and mentioning political issues in her letters.

During her last year at Miss English's academy, Elizabeth grew increasingly anxious to see her family.<sup>239</sup> She had never seen Rosewood and tried to picture her family there. The last home Elizabeth had shared with her family was the house in town, and she was very curious about her new home.<sup>240</sup> "What kind of garden have you?" Elizabeth inquired. "Full of elegant vegetables I suppose, I think of it almost every day when I go down to the dinner table. Have you much fruit? From what I hear I expect to see a delightful place."<sup>241</sup> While Elizabeth

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<sup>234</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 10.

<sup>235</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, October 27, 1840, FWP.

<sup>236</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to William Fulton, October 15, 1839, FWP.

<sup>237</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, October 27, 1840, FWP.

<sup>238</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to William Fulton, October 15, 1839, FWP.

<sup>239</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, July 17, 1839, FWP.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

considered Rosewood her home, she knew that once she finished school and returned home she would feel out of place.<sup>242</sup> She described the feelings she and a classmate were having about returning home: “I expect we will feel like fish out of water, but I know we will soon get use to it, and like it very much too.”<sup>243</sup> While Matilda thought that William would be happy to get away from the business of Washington, she worried that Elizabeth would have to adjust to the quietness of Rosewood.<sup>244</sup>

Elizabeth’s ability to tutor her younger sisters when she returned home was a major benefit of sending her to school. Excited to have her oldest daughter back at home in the winter of 1840, Matilda praised sixteen-year-old Elizabeth’s efforts to improve Sophia’s education to William. “Elizabeth has taken little Sophia [William and Matilda’s ten-year-old daughter] constantly in hands both in musick and books,” she told William, adding that “I think she will improve very much this winter you may be sure we will try and do all we can with her she is anxious herself to learn.”<sup>245</sup> William and Matilda planned to send their daughter Sophia to Miss English’s boarding school once they felt that Elizabeth’s tutoring had properly prepared her younger sister.<sup>246</sup> William encouraged Matilda to “tell Sophia she will never be able to go into Miss English’s school respectably, unless she studies as diligently as possible” and that he hoped Elizabeth would teach Sophia music as well.<sup>247</sup> Believing the arrangement would benefit Elizabeth as well, William reminded Matilda that “nothing will improve Elizabeth herself, more than the reviewing her old studies in teaching her sister.”<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 12, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>245</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, Winter 1840, WSFP; Lea Flowers Baker, “William Savin and Matilda Fulton: A Brief Look at a Territorial Arkansas Family,” *Pulaski County Historical Review* 48 (Winter 2000): 75.

<sup>246</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, December 27, 1840, FWP.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

When Matilda joined William in Washington in 1841, it was Sophia's turn to attend Miss English's academy.<sup>249</sup> She did not, however, stay in Washington without her mother as Elizabeth had done. Sophia accompanied her mother when she returned home to Rosewood in May 1842, but the day after their arrival at home Matilda expected Sophia to "return to her books."<sup>250</sup> Matilda may have not wanted to be separated from another daughter for such long periods of time, and Elizabeth tutoring Sophia made this an easier decision. One month after their return home, Matilda was pleased with the interest Sophia was showing in her studies: "Elizabeth has taken Sophia in charge she get her lessons very well she is upstairs all the morning studying her lessons, I think she is determined to study."<sup>251</sup>

Once Elizabeth returned to Rosewood, the girls and all of their visitors kept Matilda busy. Many suitors began visiting upon Elizabeth's return home. Responding to her father's inquiring of suitors, Elizabeth complained of the laziness of the local young men when they told her that they "certainly feel an inclination to visit you often but I cannot get a horse' I remind them that we are only a mile from town, and they seem in perfect health, but they say it is warm and dusty."<sup>252</sup> "Do not understand me, no complaining of want of attention, which is by no means the case I assure you," Elizabeth confidently remarked to her father, adding that "I receive my share, and am well satisfied."<sup>253</sup> "We have had visitors every day since it cleared weather and Elizabeth and Sophia are now in the parlour with fore young gentlemen and last evening we had Mr. Right to see the girls," Matilda wrote to William, describing the hectic social life of their daughters. "I expect we will have a lively house next week Elizabeth and Jane Juliet [Shall] and

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<sup>249</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 29, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 23, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>252</sup> Elizabeth Fulton to William Fulton, July 31, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

Mary Eliza [Ashley] intend to spend the week with us.”<sup>254</sup> Mothers in the antebellum South closely supervised their daughters when suitors visited, overseeing the visit themselves or arranging to have aunts or sisters in the room to ensure the young couple was not left alone.<sup>255</sup> Custom dictated that after a young man visited a young lady on his own, rather than with a party of friends, more than three times a marriage proposal would soon be coming.<sup>256</sup>

Moorhead Wright, Elizabeth’s most persistent suitor, was a wealthy cotton planter who lived in southern Arkansas and was a relative of Elizabeth’s classmate at Lydia English’s academy.<sup>257</sup> Wright proposed marriage to sixteen-year-old Elizabeth when she returned to Arkansas in late 1840, an offer which she turned down.<sup>258</sup> Embarrassed at the situation, William hoped Elizabeth had handled the situation tactfully and that Elizabeth “in the explanation of her feelings to Mr. Wright may have so managed as not to have planted a sting in his breast.”<sup>259</sup> “It requires much delicacy to conduct affairs to a happy conclusion,” he added. “Most ladies are unfortunate in giving offence in their rejections.”<sup>260</sup> William obviously approved of Wright, referring to him as “so worthy a man, as I believe him to be.”<sup>261</sup> Hoping Elizabeth would keep the incident a secret, William told Matilda he did “not advise her in this respect—because I have full confidence in her discretion judgment and sensibility.”<sup>262</sup> Allowing Elizabeth to make her

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<sup>254</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, Winter 1840, WSFP. Shall was Matilda’s niece, the daughter of William’s sister Jane Fulton Shall. David Fulton to William Fulton, August 4, 1844, WSFP. Mary Eliza Ashley was the daughter of Chester Ashley, a prominent Little Rock lawyer. Ashley also attended Lydia English’s school in Georgetown. Baker, “Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman,” 153; Elizabeth Fulton to Matilda Fulton, July 17, 1839, FWP.

<sup>255</sup> Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 210.

<sup>256</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 62.

<sup>257</sup> Baker, “Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman,” 153.

<sup>258</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, January 17, 1841, WSFP; Baker, “Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman,” 139.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

own choice in her marriage partner, William and Matilda followed the trend of the nineteenth century as parents began to move away from the idea of arranged marriages.<sup>263</sup>

Elizabeth was only sixteen when Wright proposed in 1840, well below the average age of twenty for brides in the antebellum South.<sup>264</sup> Her young age may have influenced Elizabeth's decision to turn down Wright's initial proposal. In addition, young women sometimes turned down marriage proposals because they desired a longer courtship or to simply ensure there were no other offers from other young men.<sup>265</sup> This may have been the case with Elizabeth's rejection of Wright's proposal as she entertained other male suitors upon her return home to Little Rock from Washington in May 1842.<sup>266</sup> Matilda described the frequent visits by young men to William: "Elizabeth has had several visits from young gentlemen, David Shall & John Reardon came out the other evening after tea, we spent a veary pleasant evening,--indeed we have scarcely had time to unpack our trunks and arrange our things."<sup>267</sup> The following week Mr. Wright had returned to Rosewood to renew his courtship of Elizabeth, two years after his first proposal and rejection. "Mr. Wright is in the parlor. He arrived in town yesterday," Matilda observed to William. "Elizabeth is crazy about him."<sup>268</sup> William's previous fears that Elizabeth had offended Wright with her rejection of his proposal turned out to be unfounded. Elizabeth had handled the situation delicately enough that Wright proposed again.<sup>269</sup> Elizabeth's initial hesitation to accept Wright's proposal, coupled with the fact that she reached a decision only after entertaining other suitors, gives the impression that she did not share the same strong emotional bond with Wright that her parent's marriage displayed.

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<sup>263</sup> Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 207.

<sup>264</sup> Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 203.

<sup>265</sup> Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 63-64.

<sup>266</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 29, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 2, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

Elizabeth married Wright on November 22, 1842 in a small ceremony at Rosewood.<sup>270</sup> Matilda enjoyed the occasion, detailing the dinner party she held for the bridesmaids and groomsmen to William and remarking that all that was missing was his presence.<sup>271</sup> After she assisted Elizabeth in packing her trunks and getting ready for her journey, Matilda realized that her oldest daughter was leaving this time and would not ever return to live at Rosewood again.<sup>272</sup> “Oh my husband,” she exclaimed to William, “I had no idea it would be such a trial it was almost too much for me to bare, indeed if it had not of been for her own happy & cheerful face and that of her husband I know not what I should have done.”<sup>273</sup> The fact that Matilda found the first experience of sending off a child off to live as an adult so difficult shows how attached she was to Elizabeth and the strength of their relationship.

Elizabeth and her new husband were traveling over one hundred miles to Montelise, Wright’s plantation at Washington in southwestern Arkansas, and stopped to visit friends along the way.<sup>274</sup> Upon arriving at Washington, Moorhead and Elizabeth stayed several days with General Thomas Williamson and his wife Mary, with whom Elizabeth immediately became great friends, telling her mother that Mary Williamson was one of the finest ladies she had ever met and that General Williamson treated her like a member of the family.<sup>275</sup> Elizabeth enjoyed her

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<sup>270</sup> “Marriage Announcements,” *Arkansas Gazette*, November 23, 1842; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 2, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>271</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 2, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 5, 1842, WSFP; Baker, “Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman,” 156; *Historic Washington State Park*, accessed February 18, 2014, <http://www.historicwashingtonstatepark.com/map/default.aspx>.

<sup>275</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 16, 1842, WSFP; *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas: Comprising a Condensed History of the State, a Number of Biographies of its Distinguished Citizens, a Brief Descriptive History of Each of the Counties Mentioned, and Numerous Biographical Sketches of the Citizens of Such County* (Chicago: Goodspeed’s Publishing Company, 1890), 237.

new role of mistress of Montelise, telling her mother of her delight with her new home and neighbors whom she described as “kindly and socially disposed.”<sup>276</sup>

With Elizabeth marrying and moving away in December 1842, Sophia was left to study on her own.<sup>277</sup> Matilda commented to William that Sophia continued to study very hard and she planned to enroll Sophia in music lessons given by a man in Little Rock.<sup>278</sup> In January 1843 Sophia continued to study hard but Matilda shared her disappointment over the situation with William, lamenting, “Oh how much I regret she is not at school.”<sup>279</sup> William, however, responded to Matilda’s concerns over Sophia not being at school by declaring, “I am delighted to learn that our dear Sophia learns so well. I cannot but believe that she can improve nearly as well at home as she could do at school. She must do all she can, and then if her progress is not as good as her old classmate Ann Sevier, she will at least leave us no ground to complain of herself.”<sup>280</sup> Despite his apparent confidence, William nonetheless knew that their decision might turn out to be wrong. “It will be our fault or rather misfortune,” he admitted, “if in her return here, she fails to get into the section with her [Ann Sevier].”<sup>281</sup> This comment implies that William and Matilda expected Sophia to return to Lydia English’s school in Georgetown at some point, most likely when William returned to Washington for the next session of the Senate, and were concerned that Sophia would be behind her classmates after being tutored at home. It may have been Elizabeth’s departure that resulted in William and Matilda’s later decision to send Sophia back to school in Washington. Julia was only four-years-old at this point, and William and Matilda were not yet planning for her education but they believed education was vital for

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 2, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>278</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 16, 1842, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>279</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 8, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>280</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, January 24, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

their daughters and wanted to ensure Sophia received a proper education if Elizabeth could no longer tutor her.

William and Matilda's concern over family extended beyond their children, as both had siblings who caused them constant worry. Being part of a broad kin network was normal for families at this time, especially on the frontier where families moved to be near one another and depended on each other in times of need or illness.<sup>282</sup> Many antebellum southerners did not view their families as only the immediate members of their traditional nuclear families, but included other relatives such as aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and cousins.<sup>283</sup>

Matilda had five siblings: Harriet Nowland, who died while the family was living in Florence, Alabama; Maria Nowland and Sophia Nowland, who never married and moved to Rosewood when Matilda became a widow; Eliza Nowland Stark, who married and remained in Maryland when the rest of the family ventured west; and Edward Nowland, who was married to Harriet Berryhill Nowland and lived in Arkansas and the Indian Territory.<sup>284</sup> Edward Nowland, the youngest of the Nowland children, was known as the lazy member of the family and was a constant worry for Matilda because of the difficulty he had in obtaining and keeping a job. William had managed to get Edward a position as sutler, or general store manager, at Fort Gibson in the Indian Territory.<sup>285</sup> While it was a good job, Matilda worried about Edward's safety. The situation on the border was still uncertain and people in Arkansas and on the border

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<sup>282</sup> Joan Cashin, *Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4, 13.

<sup>283</sup> Cashin, "The Structure of Antebellum Planter Families, 56-57.

<sup>284</sup> E. R. Wright, *A Little Sketch of the Nowland and Fulton Families*, WSFP, 1, 4-6; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 23, 1840, WSFP; Harriet Nowland to Rebecca Nowland, July 18, 1831, WSFP.

<sup>285</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 30, 1839, WSFP. Most military forts had a general store, and the sutler was the person in charge of this store. W. N. Davis, Jr., "The Sutler at Fort Bridger," *Western Historical Quarterly* 2:1 (Jan 1971), 37. Fort Gibson was established in 1824 to protect the border and maintain peace on the frontier. In the 1830s the fort focused on assisting in the removal of eastern tribes to the Indian Territory and maintaining peace between the tribes, "Fort Gibson," *Oklahoma Historical Society's Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, accessed November 14, 2012, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/F/FO033.html>

worried about Indian raids and attacks.<sup>286</sup> “We have not heard from Gibson since I wrote last, however we have nothing from the Indians,” Matilda explained to William.<sup>287</sup> Without any news, Matilda could only take comfort in the fact that there had been no recent reports of Native American attacks at Fort Gibson.

In mid-January 1840 William informed Matilda that William Armstrong, superintendent of Indian affairs in the western territory, had tried to induce the secretary of war to remove Edward from his position at Fort Gibson and replace him with Armstrong’s friend Carey A. Harris, who had lost his position as commissioner of Indian affairs.<sup>288</sup> William described the situation to Matilda, explaining that “Edward has gone through a fiery ordeal here, as well as at Fort Gibson.”<sup>289</sup> In the end, William used his relationship with the secretary of war to keep Edward in the position.<sup>290</sup> Concern for Matilda’s brother was William’s major motivation to help, but it is likely that personal concerns played a part as well since he had loaned Edward some money and was hoping Edward would be able to pay him back as he had now secured his position for three years. William was hopeful that due to his recent ordeal Edward would be motivated to work harder in the future. “I now most anxiously hope and trust that he will devote himself to business,” William wrote. “I cannot but be confident that his difficulties have roused his energies, and that he will now go seriously to work for his wife, children, and sisters.”<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> “Fort Gibson,” *Oklahoma Historical Society’s Encyclopedia of History and Culture*.

<sup>287</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 31, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>288</sup> Carolyn Thomas Foreman, “The Armstrongs of Indian Territory,” in *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, vol. 30, no. 4, ed. Charles Evans (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1952), 420; “The Commissioners of Indian Affairs,” *U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs*, accessed November 30, 2013, <http://www.bia.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/text/idc-001881.pdf>

<sup>289</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, January 12, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

Matilda appreciated William's efforts and acknowledged that if he had not been in Washington Edward would likely have lost his position.<sup>292</sup>

Even after William had helped him to retain his job as sutler, Edward Nowland continued to worry his sister. Edward's financial difficulties continued later in the year and the bank auctioned off his property in Van Buren to pay his debts.<sup>293</sup> He was also having health issues and Matilda's friend Mrs. Harrison had written to her that Edward looked miserable and had changed so much that Matilda would not have recognized him. Matilda wrote to William that Edward "has had the rheumatism all winter, and is nothing but skeleton, poor fellow I dont know what is to become of him."<sup>294</sup> Struggling themselves with money while trying to ensure their children had everything they needed, it was frustrating for William and Matilda to know that Edward would not be paying back their loan any time soon.<sup>295</sup> Nowland's health continued to worsen until it became impossible for him to continue his position as sutler at Fort Gibson. William had asked Matilda to write to Edward to encourage him in his situation, but she believed it would accomplish nothing. "I understand all of his property is taken and he has nothing left; he is all the time in bed, indeed I expect every day to hear of his death," Matilda sadly remarked, adding that "they say he will go to the grave yard by himself and then make long spechs over the graves, when he is able to walk."<sup>296</sup>

While she sympathized with Edward, Matilda felt as though he had brought his present circumstances upon himself. "I suppose he knows it is brought on by his own imprudence," she surmised, "and it has driven him to despair, they say he never thinks of business, I fear he will never answer your letter. Poor fellow I know he is miserable but he can blame no one but

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<sup>292</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 1, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>293</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 15, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 3, 1840, WSFP.

himself, if all were to give up in this way what would become of the world, now is the time for him to redouble all his efforts and all would be right with him yet.”<sup>297</sup> As a hard worker herself who expected all members of her family to be productive and contributing to the household, Matilda believed if Edward would just focus on providing for his family he could improve his situation.

William recommended that Edward settle in Little Rock and study law and was very hopeful about Edward’s future prospects. “Many men at his age have done so after having being unfortunate in business, and have made good fortunes at the bar,” William opined. He recommended that Edward “devote himself for one year to study and give up all his grand schemes,” and believed that if Edward followed this course he “could in a very short time qualify himself for business and would soon begin to make money as a lawyer.”<sup>298</sup> William offered any possible aid to Edward that he could provide and believed with Edward’s youth and intelligence he could become very successful. Matilda responded that Edward had not written to her, and she did not think he would as he would not know what to say about his situation.<sup>299</sup> By the next year Edward had improved his financial situation, and Matilda’s sister-in-law Caroline Fulton, John’s Fulton’s wife, was happy to report of Edward: “he is quite a reformed man, he is now an industrious domestic as any in the country we heard but the other day that [Edward’s family] they were all well.”<sup>300</sup> The improvements in Nowland’s fortunes were short lived as less than two weeks after Matilda’s letter William received one from his father informing him of a man shooting Nowland at the race course in Van Buren, Arkansas, where Edward was serving as a

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, June 2, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Caroline Fulton to Matilda Fulton, November 7, 1841, WSFP.

judge.<sup>301</sup> A man participating in the race disagreed with Nowland's decision and chose to shoot him in retaliation, leading to his death a few days later.<sup>302</sup>

William's Brother John Fulton, who had moved to Little Rock shortly after William and Matilda, likewise caused the couple grief. William had three other siblings: Jane Fulton Shall, who moved to Little Rock and married local lawyer David Shall; Mary Ann Fulton Crockett, who lived in Tennessee, and David Fulton, Jr., who lived in Mississippi.<sup>303</sup> John Fulton suffered from pains throughout his life and often complained to William of his suffering and torment caused by his discomfort.<sup>304</sup> While he complained constantly of debilitating pain, John assured William that if he could manage to secure him a clerk position in Washington, "I feel assured that my strength is sufficient to enable me to discharge the duties of a clerkship in Washington, and the climate at that place would prove to be favourable to my health."<sup>305</sup> John Fulton apparently had no problem asking any of his family members for a favor. After requesting that David Fulton, William and John's father who also lived in Little Rock, pay for him to visit a spring to heal his body, Fulton was upset that his father had refused. "From the observations made to me by Father yesterday I infer he is going to withhold the means of my visiting the hot springs this season," John complained. "The times were such now that money could not be expended only in extreme calls of necessity, so there is an end to all my hopes & prospects."<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, November 16, 1841, WSFP.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Wright, *A Little Sketch of the Nowland and Fulton Families*, 8.

<sup>304</sup> John T. Fulton to William Fulton, January 22, 1842, WSFP; John T. Fulton to William Fulton, January 26, 1842, WSFP; John T. Fulton to William Fulton, January 30, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>305</sup> John T. Fulton to William Fulton, March 18, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>306</sup> John T. Fulton to William Fulton, March 24, 1842, WSFP. Nineteenth-century Americans believed that hot springs cured a variety of chronic diseases. By the end of the 1830s Hot Springs, Arkansas, had become a popular destination for those hoping the springs would restore them. John C. Paige and Laura Soulliere Harrison, *Out of the Vapors: A Social and Architectural History of Bathhouse Row, Hot Springs National Park* (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1987), 33-34.

Fulton's claims of ill health were substantiated when Matilda returned from spending the winter and spring in Washington with William. She was shocked at John Fulton's appearance, telling William, "I never was so much shocked in my life as I was the first time I saw him. He was not with the family the day after we arrived, but oh it would of made your hear ake to see him, he is nothing but skin & bones, poor fellow. I feare if there is not something done for him he will not be with us long."<sup>307</sup> Matilda began sending John and his family food, including all of her chickens that were large enough to eat.<sup>308</sup> She and Elizabeth traveled to town with the intention of bringing John Fulton back to Rosewood with them, but they found him too ill to move and a week later his illness still kept him confined to his bed.<sup>309</sup> John's condition worsened and resulted in his death in 1843. William and Matilda's concern for their brothers-in-law shows that they viewed these men as important members of their families.

"When they do harmonize, and one is the echo—the veritable reflection of the other's thoughts, smiles, and feelings—anticipating every whim and desire, it is a very pleasant affair," opined the *Arkansas Gazette* in 1842.<sup>310</sup> William and Matilda Fulton's relationship serves as an example of a happy marriage between two friends filled with mutual love, respect, and admiration. Their ability to communicate and support one another even while separated for long periods of time shows the strength of their bond. While each relied on other friends and relatives in the other's absence, they always considered their spouse to be their ultimate confidante and friend. Through the loss of children, hard financial times, and long separations, William and Matilda Fulton clung to one another and longed for the day they would be together permanently.

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<sup>307</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 29, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>308</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>309</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 23, 1842, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 30, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>310</sup> "The Philosophy of Marriage," *Arkansas Gazette*, September 21, 1842.

## Chapter 5

“Keeping all Hands Moving”:  
Matilda Fulton’s Life as a Slave Mistress

“See that all things go right in the kitchen. Let everything be done according to order. Never dispute with a servant in what way a thing shall be done. Let your commands be promptly obeyed.”<sup>1</sup> These directions to slave mistresses from an 1834 article in the *Arkansas Gazette* make slave management sound easy, but as Matilda Fulton and many other women, found the day-to-day business of organizing slaves and getting them to work was much more complicated and often resulted in disputes. When William Fulton left Arkansas for Washington, DC, in 1836 to serve as a United States senator, Matilda became not just the manager of Rosewood for months at a time, but also the one in charge of directly supervising and disciplining the slaves. Matilda found the position of slave supervisor to be a difficult one. At times the slaves showed her respect and did exactly as she asked, while in other instances they disobeyed her and showed little concern for her directions. Serving as more than just a placeholder for William, Matilda was able with his support and her own willingness to ignore the societal standards that existed even in frontier society and embrace her position, making the hard decisions required of a slaveholder when necessary.

Rosewood fit the classification of a small plantation, with twelve to fifteen slaves living and working on the 240 acres of land.<sup>2</sup> At the age of thirty-three Matilda took on the responsibility of running Rosewood and overseeing the slaves on her own. When William left

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<sup>1</sup> “Brother Jonathan’s Wife’s Advice to Her Daughter on the Day of Her Marriage,” *Arkansas Gazette*, December 23, 1834.

<sup>2</sup> Slave Bill of Sale, December 26, 1830, Fulton Wright Papers, Arkansas History Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas, hereafter FWP; Slave Bill of Sale, February 1, 1834, FWP; Slave Bill of Sale, October 7, 1834, FWP; Notation for birth of Minty, November 16, 1840, FWP; Slave Bill of Sale, April 19, 1841, FWP; Notation for birth of Lewis, July 31, 1843, FWP; “Untitled,” January 13, 1847, WSFP; Rachel Silva, “Sandwiching in History,” *The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program*, accessed February 18, 2013, [http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/pdf/tour\\_scripts/Fred%20and%20Lucy%20Alexander%20Schaer%20House,%20NLR%20Tour%20Script%202012%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/pdf/tour_scripts/Fred%20and%20Lucy%20Alexander%20Schaer%20House,%20NLR%20Tour%20Script%202012%20(1).pdf). For more information on the categorization of plantations see page 42.

for Washington, he believed Matilda completely capable of managing Rosewood and the more than 200 acres of land, twelve to fifteen slaves, crops, business, children, and household. Like Matilda, he never seemed concerned that the job would overwhelm her or that she would not be able to handle it. This faith speaks to the confidence he had in her and his belief that she was capable of doing the job as well as if not better than himself or any other man.

By 1840, slaves made up 20 percent of the population of Arkansas, and one in five taxpayers owned slaves.<sup>3</sup> Since the majority of Arkansas slave owners between 1840 and 1860 were small slaveholders who only owned one to four slaves, William and Matilda's ownership of twelve to fifteen slaves made them part of a small minority of planters.<sup>4</sup> They were also above the national average, as 72 percent of American slaveholders owned fewer than ten slaves during the antebellum period.<sup>5</sup> While Arkansas led the nation in an increase in the percentage of slaves to total population from 1820 to 1850, in Pulaski County, where William and Matilda lived, the white population still made up a larger percentage of the total population than slaves did.<sup>6</sup> Rosewood's slave population, which varied from twelve to fifteen over the years, was above the average for Little Rock of six or fewer slaves per owner.<sup>7</sup>

While some white female slave owners served as reluctant participants in the slavery system and even viewed themselves as oppressed victims of a male-controlled system, others were active contributors to the system and saw slavery as a joint product of both men and women

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<sup>3</sup> S. Charles Bolton, *Arkansas, 1800-1860: Remote and Restless* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 127.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 198.

<sup>6</sup> "From 1820 to 1830 the percentage of increase was 182; from 1830 to 1840, 335; from 1840 to 1850, 136; and from 1850 to 1860, 135." Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Arkansas*, 478.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Arkansas*, 54.

not just the result of a patriarchal male society.<sup>8</sup> As part of the latter group, Matilda had no problem buying a slave, establishing her authority, threatening to sell a slave as punishment, or separating a mother from her children, and she had little pity for a male slave whose wife had been forced to move away with her family.<sup>9</sup> That Matilda could somehow view her slaves almost as family members while also treating them as property when the situation called for it speaks to the complexity of slavery. Being too soft on the slaves could result in them not respecting her, while being too harsh could lead to mutiny. Matilda managed to be an effective manager of her slaves and walk the line between these two extremes.

On a small plantation like Rosewood, each slave performed a variety of jobs, unlike larger plantations where slaves might specialize in a specific skill or only work in the fields.<sup>10</sup> While the slaves who worked outside of the main house spent the majority of their time working in the fields, they were also responsible for improving the grounds, gardening, managing the livestock, repairing the main house and rental houses in Little Rock, and other jobs such as driving Matilda to Little Rock in the carriage or going to town to pick up the mail.<sup>11</sup> Domestic

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<sup>8</sup> Catherine Clinton writes: “Blacks achieved some measure of autonomy through the creation of their own subculture within plantation society. The plantation mistress, however, had no comparable sense of community. Even if a husband was in constant residence, men were not an obvious source of sympathetic identity within such an oppressively patriarchal society.” In *The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World and the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 165. Bertram Wyatt-Brown offers a similar perspective on white southern women: “Southern white mothers, rich or poor, had reason for dissatisfaction with their fate . . . these matrons had little conscious awareness of what should take the place of their rounds of drudgery and their subservience first to father, then to husband.” In *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 126. Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 16.

<sup>9</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, November 17, 1839, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, August 15, 1842, WSFP; Lea Flowers Baker, “Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* vol. 65, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 144; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 6, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>10</sup> Orville W. Taylor writes of the duties of a typical slave in Arkansas, “The variety of tasks which slaves performed on Arkansas plantations in addition to actual cultivation of crops was almost endless. On smaller establishments, tasks were apportioned among the slave force as circumstances dictated, a given slave becoming a field hand, a cotton ginner, or a fence-repairer at different times.” Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Arkansas*, 100.

<sup>11</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, November 17, 1839, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March

slaves fulfilled duties that were just as varied as those of slaves working outdoors. Minerva, a domestic slave at Rosewood, might care for a sick child, prepare a meal, work in the smokehouse, sew clothes alongside Matilda, and serve dinner to guests all within the course of one day.<sup>12</sup> Matilda chose the daily work assignments for each slave and gave them detailed directions on how she wanted the job done. The tasks varied each day, and the slave could work alone or in a group. While designating these duties, Matilda might direct one slave to work in the garden, two others to clear tall grass in front of the house, another to travel Little Rock in the morning for the mail, and yet another to drive her to town in the carriage later in the day.<sup>13</sup> Organizing and supervising the work of the slaves, a time-consuming and often difficult endeavor, added to Matilda's other household work, overseeing of business matters, and childcare to make for long, draining days. This workload, while obviously nothing compared to the life and work of a slave, is why some southern women referred to themselves as a "slave of slaves."<sup>14</sup>

Matilda's duties as slave mistress only increased during the years that William was in Washington as the number of slaves at Rosewood continued to grow. Matilda purchased a slave named John in November 1839 from J. W. Johnson.<sup>15</sup> At the time of John's purchase, William and Matilda owned Charlotte, age forty-five; Manual, age fifty; Minerva, age thirty, and her two children Legrand, age ten, and Ann, age eight.<sup>16</sup> Matilda described John in her letter to William, "I like him very much so far he appears to be very anxious to please and is indeed very handy

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31, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 1, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>12</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 15, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, Winter 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, July 20, 1841, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>13</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 17, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>14</sup> For more information see Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 17-35.

<sup>15</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, November 17, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>16</sup> Slave Bill of Sale, December 26, 1830, FWP; Slave Bill of Sale, February 1, 1834, FWP; Slave Bill of Sale, October 7, 1834, FWP.

and sturdy and industrious.”<sup>17</sup> This brought the total number of slaves at Rosewood to at least six, but this was the first slave that Matilda had selected and purchased on her own.<sup>18</sup> William had completed the purchases of the previous slaves, paying \$400 for Charlotte in 1830, \$750 for Minerva and her two children in 1834, and \$350 for Manual in 1834, bargains for the time as the average price of a slave during the 1830s in Arkansas was \$485.<sup>19</sup> William purchased Joseph, an adult male slave, in 1840 and Wesley, a male slave who they believed to be “about 45 years of age and sound in body and mind and a slave for life,” for \$400 in 1841.<sup>20</sup> The birth of Minty in 1840 and Lewis in 1843 added to the slave population at Rosewood.<sup>21</sup>

With her purchase of John in November 1839, Matilda was not alone in her choice to make a decision without discussion as William did the same thing a few months later. In late April 1840 William, in Washington, surprised Matilda by purchasing a new slave and sending him to Rosewood without giving her any advance notice. The new slave, Joseph, arrived at Rosewood in the afternoon with a letter explaining that William had purchased him.<sup>22</sup> When he arrived, Matilda had the slaves cutting pea and bean sticks and she quickly put him to work with the others.<sup>23</sup> She described Joseph’s arrival to William: “I suppose you wished to surprise me. I assure you my dear husband, it was a very agreeable surprise. He could not have come at a more acceptable time. He is a very fine looking servant, I sincerely hope he will prove a good one, he

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<sup>17</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, November 17, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>18</sup> Slave Bill of Sale, December 26, 1830, FWP; Slave Bill of Sale, February 1, 1834, FWP; Slave Bill of Sale, October 7, 1834, FWP. Other slaves are listed in a later inventory of Rosewood, but there is no indication of when they were purchased. An inventory of William’s estate after his death lists Henry, Francis, and Milly and her children as part of William’s property. “Untitled,” January 13, 1847, WSFP.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid; Bolton, *Arkansas, 1800-1860*, 129.

<sup>20</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840, WSFP; Slave Bill of Sale, April 19, 1841, FWP.

<sup>21</sup> Notation for birth of Minty, November 16, 1840, FWP; Notation for birth of Lewis, July 31, 1843, FWP.

<sup>22</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Pea and bean sticks are stakes or branches use to support the plant as it grows vertically. “Pea Sticks: The Best Support for Your Plants,” *The Telegraph Online*, accessed January 24, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardeningadvice/7803592/Pea-sticks-the-best-support-for-your-plants.html>

promises very fair.”<sup>24</sup> On the day he arrived Joseph and the other slaves made and planted 1,195 sweet potato hills and set out six squares of cabbages, with a dozen more planned for the next week.<sup>25</sup>

Having a very high opinion of Joseph, William wrote: “I am sure from what I think of him, that you could not have pleased him more, than by making him believe that he is useful to you. I am quite confident you will be pleased with him.”<sup>26</sup> Happy to learn that Matilda liked Joseph and found him to be a hard worker, William felt no need to explain his decision to purchase Joseph without consulting Matilda. “I can only say that I hope our servants do well, and relieve you from superintending the business,” William wrote, adding that he felt “satisfied that they will rival each other in doing all that you may require to be done.”<sup>27</sup> In Matilda’s response to William’s purchase of Joseph without any discussion with her there is no anger or complaint over her lack of involvement in the decision, just as William did not complain when she purchased John without his approval. Their ability to make decisions together and separately and support each other in those opinions shows the strength of their relationship and the respect they had for each other.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, May 18, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Table 3. Background Information and Duties of Slaves at Rosewood

	Sex	Approximate Year of Birth	Acquisition Method	Primary Tasks
Charlotte	F	1794	Purchase (Dec 1830)	Fieldwork, hired out for income
Manual	M	1789	Purchase (Feb 1834)	Fieldwork, garden, maintenance of main house and grounds
Minerva	F	1809	Purchase (Oct 1834)	Domestic work, garden
Legrand	M	1829	Purchase (Oct 1834)	Garden, mail trips to town, light work outdoors
Ann	F	1831	Purchase (Oct 1834)	Domestic work, food preparation
John	M	Unknown	Purchase (Nov 1839)	Fieldwork, garden, maintenance of main house and grounds, hired out for income
Joseph	M	Unknown	Purchase (April 1840)	Fieldwork, garden, maintenance of main house and grounds, hired out for income, carriage driver for family
Minty	F	1840	Born at Rosewood	Unknown
Lewis	M	1843	Born at Rosewood	Unknown
Wesley	M	1796	Purchase (April 1841)	Fieldwork, garden, maintenance of main house and grounds, hired out for income, carriage driver for family
Frank	M	Unknown	Unknown (First mentioned in 1841)	Outdoor chores, mail trips to Little Rock
Lewis	M	1811	Unknown (First mentioned in 1841)	Outdoor chores
Henry	M	Unknown	Part of David Fulton's Estate (August 1843)	Unknown
Milly	F	Unknown	Part of David Fulton's Estate (August 1843)	Hired out for income

Sources: *William Savin Fulton Papers, 1807-1909*, Arkansas History Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas; *Fulton Wright Papers*, Arkansas History Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas.

In Matilda's view gender did not play a part in many tasks such as fieldwork, gardening, or food preparation. Charlotte worked alongside the male slaves in the field every day. Her work in the fields was common as most female slaves worked in the field just as often as the male slaves.<sup>28</sup> John often fulfilled domestic duties, serving as a waiter at a dinner party or assisting Matilda, Minerva, and Ann with bacon preservation in the smokehouse.<sup>29</sup> Matilda did, however, seem to believe there were some tasks more suited for the male slaves, allowing only the male slaves to drive her to town in the carriage and typically charging the men with cutting wood and carpentry projects.<sup>30</sup> Many slaveholders did not see tasks as gender-defined but assigned slaves to jobs based on their skill level, although some did hold a general view of male slaves as "skilled" and female slaves as "unskilled."<sup>31</sup>

The bulk of the work Matilda assigned to John, Manual, Joseph, and Charlotte involved laboring outdoors in the field, garden, yard, or outer buildings. In the course of one day, John was busy setting out bushels of strawberries and potatoes and fixing windows and leaks in the upstairs of the house.<sup>32</sup> After Joseph's arrival, Matilda appreciated the amount of work the slaves were now able to accomplish together. Ten acres of overgrown land in front of the house had bothered Matilda for some time, and she now planned to set Joseph, Manual, and John to work clearing it as soon as they finished getting crops planted.<sup>33</sup> In May 1840 she described her determination to get the job finished before William's return home: "I will set all hands at that, and I know with three hands they can have it all cleared by the time you get home, I told Manual

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<sup>28</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, August 15, 1842, WSFP; Daina Ramey Berry, *"Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe": Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>29</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>30</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 6, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>31</sup> Berry, *"Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe,"* 14.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 26, 1840, WSFP.

& John I wish very much to have it done before you get home and now with three I am sure to have it done.”<sup>34</sup> With so many things needing to be done at Rosewood Matilda ended up having to divide the men and put John to work in the garden while Joseph and Manual worked on clearing the land in front of the main house.<sup>35</sup>

She wrote to William three weeks later offering a glowing review of the work the slaves had been doing since the weather had improved. “They have been very smart indeed, this week. I only wish you could see what an improvement it is to our place,” she remarked. Matilda was impressed with the speed of the work and commented to William that the slaves were “very anxious to have it done by the time you get home, I think they will finish it in two more weeks, if they work as they have this week.”<sup>36</sup> Things were going so well Matilda also planned to finish her garden the next week and then she would “feel at ease” about the place.<sup>37</sup> The motivation of the slaves to get their work completed before William returned to Rosewood displays their concern with pleasing him as well as Matilda. “John is in the Garden and everywhere we call on him for everything. I am sure you will like him very much,” Matilda happily reported, adding that whatever she wished “done, all I have to do is tell him how it is to be done, I have no more trouble, he is so very handy, and understands everything.”<sup>38</sup> The slaves worked well together, plowing a corn field in preparation for planting, cutting up timber in the woods at Rosewood to sell, and using the wood to make a door for the gig house which housed the carriage, a gate for the stable yard, and walkways “to keep a little of the mud out of the house.”<sup>39</sup> The amount of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 17, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, Winter 1840, WSFP.

work completed by the slaves shows Matilda's ability to give direction and motivate them to work as well as their respect for her authority.

Matilda never mentions any problems getting John to take direction from her, but Manual proved to be a constant worry for her even as she prepared herself to put him to work the next day. "Manual must clear the land. I know he will not like it much however I will set him to work tomorrow morning," she explained to William.<sup>40</sup> In 1839 Matilda had given the slaves the week off for the holiday and allowed them to leave the plantation to visit friends and family.<sup>41</sup> Manual disappeared for the entire week, while John spent the majority of his time at Rosewood. Matilda complained to William that she had "not seen Manual since Wednesday, if it was not for John, we would have no man on the place, but he is always at home."<sup>42</sup> Manual's behavior improved in the spring of 1840 since Matilda now had John and Joseph, who were willing to work hard and follow her directions. Matilda believed Manual's improved demeanor was a result of his fear that she would sell him since she now had more dependable workers.<sup>43</sup>

With Manual's behavior improving, Matilda still constantly worried that it was only a matter of time before he went back to his old ways. She was happy with the hard work of the slaves but braced herself for trouble with Manual, telling William: "I think they will all behave very well. I hope Manual will not give me any trouble you maby sure I will try and keep them all employed."<sup>44</sup> Her many problems with Manual over the years had resulted in a wariness of trouble brewing all the time even after months of having no issues with him. Manual's behavior was likely not a reflection of the fact that Matilda, a woman, was in charge of supervising him. When David Fulton, William's father, took over the supervision duties while William and

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 30, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 15, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Matilda were in Washington, Fulton had constant problems with Manual's behavior and work as well.<sup>45</sup>

Matilda's happiness with her decision to purchase John increased as she found him to be a useful domestic worker as well as a good gardener and farmer. She praised his work both in and outdoors, noting that he had done an excellent job when she had him serve as a waiter at a large dinner party the week before. "I had John in the house that day to assist Minerva, he is indeed a most excellent waiter," Matilda mentioned, adding that she believed John to be "the very servant we want."<sup>46</sup> It is important to note that Matilda chose Minerva and John, both mulattos, to serve her guests in the house.<sup>47</sup> The bill of sale for Minerva refers to her as "a mulatto woman," while Matilda wrote to William upon John's purchase of John being a mulatto.<sup>48</sup> "[He] is the smallest man you ever saw and almost white indeed the children thought he was a poor white man," she remarked to William.<sup>49</sup> Matilda's preference of using mulatto slaves for domestic work and those with darker complexions as field workers represented the typical attitude of slave owners in the antebellum South that lighter-skinned slaves were superior and more appropriate for interacting with guests.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, February 2, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>46</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 15, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>47</sup> The term mulatto referred to any person whose exact ancestry was not known in colonial times, but in the antebellum South typically indicated an individual who had both African American and white parents or ancestors. Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 210; Stephan Talty, *Mulatto America: At the Crossroads of Black and White Culture: A Social History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 20. Mulatto slaves, typically a product of a white male slaveholder and a female slave, were common in nineteenth century southern society. Marli F. Weiner offers an argument for why the mulatto slave population, a result of interracial sexual activity, became so abundant in the antebellum South: "It reinforced white male domination over black men and women by separating slave women from slave men . . . reinforced the subordination of white women by demonstrating their inability to impose their own moral values on men . . . sex with black women allowed white men to maintain their authority over all other groups in southern society." In Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 135.

<sup>48</sup> Slave Bill of Sale, October 7, 1834, FWP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, November 17, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>49</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, November 17, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>50</sup> John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 215.

The close proximity of mistresses and domestic servants to each other made a difficult relationship even more complicated. Minerva, the Fulton's primary domestic servant, spent every day living and working alongside Matilda and her children. While Charlotte and the other slaves lived in their own houses on the grounds of Rosewood, Minerva had a room in the main house.<sup>51</sup> Minerva, in her early thirties, was likely the mother of two infants born in 1840 and 1843, and her position in the house doing domestic work represented the "lighter" work that slaveholders often offered to pregnant slaves.<sup>52</sup> Charlotte and Minerva's lives were separated by their duties and living arrangements, allowing the only two adult slave women at Rosewood very little time to interact with each other. Based on their limited social opportunities, Minerva and Charlotte did not develop a "women's culture" based on shared backgrounds and experiences as female slaves on larger plantations often did.<sup>53</sup> Minerva at least had the possibility of forming a bond with Matilda based on their gender, while Charlotte only had the male slaves she worked alongside for company. Mistresses and domestic female slaves often became companions as two adult women spending every day in close proximity to one another.<sup>54</sup> For years Matilda and Minerva worked side by side on a daily basis, making clothes for the family and the other slaves, caring for the children, and preparing and preserving food.<sup>55</sup> If Matilda became ill or needed a confidante, she likely would have turned to Minerva.<sup>56</sup> The two women, while obviously divided by their very different positions in life, would still have developed a relationship based on familiarity if nothing else. Creating an underlying tension in every interaction between the

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<sup>51</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 6, 1840, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, Winter 1840, WSFP.

<sup>52</sup> Notation for birth of Minty, November 16, 1840, FWP; Notation for birth of Lewis, July 31, 1843, FWP; Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 108-14.

<sup>53</sup> White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 121.

<sup>54</sup> Berry, "Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe," 37.

<sup>55</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 30, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>56</sup> Berry, "Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe," 37.

two women, the fact that one was the property of the other and the mistress always held the power limited how close a female slave would feel to her owner.

On southern plantations domestic female slaves typically dealt with childcare as part of their daily household chores.<sup>57</sup> Matilda especially relied on Minerva to care for the Fulton children when one of them was ill. When Julia, an infant, suffered from croup in 1840, Matilda reported to William that Julia was in Minerva's room and had nearly recovered.<sup>58</sup> As the slave who was in the house doing domestic work, Minerva spent time with and cared for Matilda's children every day. For all of the closeness and companionship between Matilda and Minerva, Matilda, however, did not hesitate to treat Minerva as a slave when she believed it was necessary. When Elizabeth, William and Matilda's oldest daughter, went away to boarding school in Georgetown in 1836, Elizabeth wanted to take Minerva with her.<sup>59</sup> Minerva had cared for Elizabeth for two years and would serve as a comforting presence for her in a new environment.<sup>60</sup> For Minerva, however, the situation was not ideal, as it would mean being away from her own children for long periods of time.<sup>61</sup> Matilda does not note the length of Minerva's stay in Georgetown and Minerva had returned to Rosewood by 1840, but she had still been removed from her home and children for a period of time with no choice in the matter.<sup>62</sup> As a mother herself, Matilda sympathized with Minerva when she was pregnant in the early 1840s and allowed her to perform "lighter" work in the house to protect her health. Matilda did not

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<sup>57</sup> Sally G. McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson Inc., 1992), 78.

<sup>58</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, Winter 1840, WSFP. "Croup is a nonspecific term denoting a respiratory tract infection that causes inflammation and narrowing of the larynx and trachea." For more information see "Croup: What It is and How to Treat It," *U.S. Pharmacist Online*, accessed January 14, 2014, <http://www.uspharmacist.com/content/c/41766/?t=respiratory%2Fpulmonary>. Croup, whooping cough, and pneumonia made up the three common causes of death of small children during the first half of the nineteenth century. In Rebecca Fraser, *Gender, Race, and Family in Nineteenth Century America: From Northern Woman to Plantation Mistress* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 88.

<sup>59</sup> Baker, "Elizabeth Fulton Wright," 144.

<sup>60</sup> Slave Bill of Sale, October 7, 1834, FWP.

<sup>61</sup> "Estate of William Fulton," November 15, 1844, WSFP.

<sup>62</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 15, 1840, WSFP.

always treat Minerva's role as a mother with respect, however, as she expected Minerva to concern herself with the Fulton children's welfare more than that of her own children. For some historians, the power white slaves mistresses held over female slaves in situations such as this proves there was no "women's culture" among elite white and slave women in antebellum America as one group profited at the expense of the other.<sup>63</sup>

Even when Minerva was at Rosewood, she still faced constant separation from her young son Legrand. Matilda typically assigned Legrand, eleven-years-old in 1842, to light work outside alongside Charlotte. "Next week I will set her [Charlotte] and Grand out in front of the house to cut down the weeds," Matilda wrote to William.<sup>64</sup> In another instance she sent Charlotte and Legrand to town together to take a basket of goods to women from Matilda's church who were holding an auction to raise money for the church.<sup>65</sup> William and Matilda chose to separate Minerva and Legrand in November 1844 when they sent several of the slaves to work for Horace Allis in the winter of 1843 and spring of 1844.<sup>66</sup> While Legrand was sent to work for Allis, Minerva was left at Rosewood.<sup>67</sup> Minerva did get to spend more time with her daughter Ann, however, who at around the age of ten in 1840 was too young to work in the fields and mostly worked in the house alongside Minerva.<sup>68</sup> The contract with Allis does not mention Ann, who was either hired out elsewhere or stayed at Rosewood with Minerva to care for the house in the absence of Matilda.<sup>69</sup> While she made choices over the years that separated Minerva from her children, Matilda chose not to sell Minerva and her children when she was forced to sell

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<sup>63</sup> Martha Saxton, *Being Good: Women's Moral Values in Early America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 10.

<sup>64</sup> Slave Bill of Sale, December 26, 1830; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 29, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>65</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 16, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>66</sup> "Article of Agreement," November 16, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Slave Bill of Sale, December 26, 1830; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 3, 1842; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>69</sup> "Article of Agreement," November 16, 1843, WSFP.

some of the slaves to pay off debts owed by William's estate after his death in 1844.<sup>70</sup> It may have been that Matilda, a mother herself, could not bring herself to separate Minerva from her children forever if she had a choice in the matter.

Matilda often had a difficult time balancing her own work and the time she spent supervising the slaves. In mid-March 1840 she had spent a busy day outside planting seeds in the garden and supervising the slaves in their duties. "Things go on very well with us, I am going all the time, from sun up until sun down," she wrote to William, adding that she spent a large part of her day just "keeping all hands moving."<sup>71</sup> After another hectic day where she tried to do household work while overseeing the slaves, Matilda was frustrated at how difficult it was to do both. "I find the more we have the worse it is, when they are in my sight they all do well enough, but so soon as my back is turned, they are all like children," she remarked to William, and complained that "the old ones want more looking after than the young ones."<sup>72</sup>

In August 1842 Matilda spent several days in the house putting up preserves and was very unhappy with the amount of work the slaves did in her absence.<sup>73</sup> When she found the slaves had let the livestock fodder ruin in the rain rather than putting it away, Matilda became extremely upset with them for wasting resources.<sup>74</sup> Matilda complained to the slaves about their work and threatened to hire out Charlotte to another master if she did not behave better.<sup>75</sup> The possibility of being sent to work somewhere else terrified Charlotte, who had been hired out previously to a family that she believed overworked her, and she promised to behave better.<sup>76</sup> Believing her harsh words and threats had scared the slaves into acting appropriately, Matilda

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<sup>70</sup> "Untitled," January 13, 1847, WSFP.

<sup>71</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 15, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>72</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, August 15, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

wrote to William: “Charlotte & Wesley appear to be sorry for ther behavior and I hope I will not have any more difficulty at least until you come home, I was in hopes I would have no cause to complain of any of the servants but you know my dear husband I keep nothing from you, you must know all my grievances.”<sup>77</sup> Matilda had no problem sharing the details with William when things went poorly, but she was typically confident that she could remedy the situation on her own.

Matilda’s threats did not scare the slaves for long as her problems with the lack of work done by the slaves continued in December 1842. Sharing her frustration with how the slaves had been behaving, Matilda warned William that she was afraid he would “find nothing done when you come home, I believe they would do better without me, Wesley has no idea of being controid, let him have his own way and all will be well.”<sup>78</sup> Matilda’s issues with Wesley may have been related to the fact that this was the first time Matilda supervised Wesley. William purchased him in April 1841 and he was then hired out until January 1842, when David Fulton was serving as supervisor at Rosewood.<sup>79</sup> It is also possible that David and John Fulton had let Wesley take control of the other slaves in William and Matilda’s absence even though they had never agreed to that suggestion.<sup>80</sup> If Wesley had gotten used to being the supervisor of the other slaves, he would have resented Matilda coming back and trying to take charge again.

As the slaves had been blaming their slowness on the poor quality of their shoes in late 1842, Matilda had William send new shoes for them and hoped that would encourage them to work harder.<sup>81</sup> Matilda thanked William for sending the shoes and shared her hope that they would motivate the slaves: “The servants have done but little yet, I hope they will do something

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, February 2, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>80</sup> Slave Bill of Sale, April 19, 1841, FWP; John Fulton to William Fulton, Feb 14, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>81</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 19, 1842, WSFP.

they have their shoes, that was the excuse whenever I spoke to them.”<sup>82</sup> William had written a statement for Matilda to read to the slaves instructing them to work hard and listen to Matilda.<sup>83</sup> Showing her feelings of futility in her dealings with the slaves, Matilda told William she would “read what you say to them in the morning, perhaps that will spur them up, I will manage and plan for them, & tell them what we wish done.”<sup>84</sup> She then remarked that “if they dont do it you must not blame me I can do nothing more.”<sup>85</sup> Matilda had handled the poor behavior of Manual in the past well because it was isolated to only him, but she was finding the disobedience of a larger number of slaves to be temporarily overwhelming and had little hope that she would be able to make them all obey her.<sup>86</sup>

Her feelings of futility were short lived as Matilda was back on better terms with all of the slaves except Manual by the beginning of 1843. As he had done previously, Manual disappeared for the entire week from Christmas to New Year’s Day.<sup>87</sup> Obviously frustrated, Matilda commented to William that Manual “is indeed his own man.”<sup>88</sup> William and Matilda typically gave the slaves a break from work during the week from Christmas to New Year’s, allowing them to leave Rosewood and visit family and friends. The slaves grew accustomed to this vacation and expected it to happen on an annual basis. In December 1841, John Fulton, described the slaves activities over the holiday, “I believe from what I can learn that your boys John and Manual have claimed the week of Christmas as their own and acted accordingly. The negroes have engaged in and carried out frolicking to its fullest latitude, having nightly

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, November 17, 1839, WSFP.

<sup>87</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 1, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

revels.”<sup>89</sup> The average southern slaveholder gave their slaves a five-day vacation for the Christmas holiday.<sup>90</sup> Many like Matilda, however, used the opportunity to show their benevolence and gave their slaves an entire week or even more.<sup>91</sup> In addition to the week of Christmas, Matilda also gave the slaves every Sunday off.<sup>92</sup> Describing a typical Sunday at Rosewood to William, Matilda observed that since it was Sunday afternoon “the servants all have gone to town all day but Ann.”<sup>93</sup> Sunday was customarily a day of rest for slaves as masters gave them the day off to visit family and friends and attend to their own domestic matters.<sup>94</sup> Many masters used the Sunday holiday as a gesture of good will to their slaves and hoped it would encourage them to work harder during the week.<sup>95</sup> By providing free time for the slaves, Matilda likely built rapport with the slaves and hoped to increase their respect for her.

A constant concern for Matilda, especially during the holiday week, drunkenness among the slaves is frequently mentioned in her letters as she discusses who had managed to stay sober and who had been drinking.<sup>96</sup> On New Year’s Day 1843, she wrote to William that she was happy to be able to tell him that “Joseph behaves veary well. I have no fault to find with him, he keeps entirely sober.”<sup>97</sup> Joseph’s sobriety was short lived, however, and his drunkenness caused an unfortunate situation the next month.<sup>98</sup> Matilda and the children went to Little Rock in February 1843, and Matilda had Joseph drive the carriage to town.<sup>99</sup> While Matilda and the

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<sup>89</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, December 31, 1841, WSFP.

<sup>90</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1974), 337, 573.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 5, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>93</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, April 5, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>94</sup> Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 567; Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 22.

<sup>95</sup> Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 567.

<sup>96</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 1, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 6, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* It seems as though Matilda was not comfortable driving the carriage rather than avoiding it due to societal standards, given her lack of concern for propriety in other aspects of her life. Many women during the nineteenth century chose to assign a slave to drive their carriage, even if they were able to drive it themselves. For

children were visiting with friends Joseph managed to get so drunk that he could not drive the carriage home, and Matilda had to send for Wesley to drive them back to Rosewood.<sup>100</sup> When Joseph complained of being sick the next morning, Matilda had no sympathy for him and told him to get to work.<sup>101</sup> This was not the first time that Joseph had gotten drunk as Matilda mentioned to William, “This is the first time he [Joseph] has been drunk since you left.”<sup>102</sup> Her remark shows the incident was not a result of her serving as the supervisor instead of William, since Joseph had acted in a similar fashion when William was in charge. After the incident Matilda worried that she would not be able to trust Joseph in the future and told William that she did not think she would let Joseph drive her to town again.<sup>103</sup> David Fulton came over to talk to Joseph about his behavior, but Matilda was skeptical that it would make any difference.<sup>104</sup> Four days after Joseph’s drunken episode, Matilda sounded more optimistic. “I am glad to tell you Joseph has joined the temperance, I sincerely hope he will stick to it, he is veary much ashamed of his conduct on Sunday, he has been hard at work all this week,” Matilda commented to William.<sup>105</sup> Matilda once again does not mention doling out any sort of punishment to Joseph other than the conversation David Fulton had with him, but Joseph corrected his behavior quickly after the incident so the lecture must have been effective.

Able to view the slaves as property when necessary, Matilda still could not bring herself to see them as lesser beings to the point where she was comfortable whipping or imposing other physical punishment on them. Slavery was a complex system and owners operated within it in

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many slaveholders, the ability to arrive in town in a carriage driven by a slave signified their status as a person of means and power. Federal Writers’ Project, *Oklahoma Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in Oklahoma from Interviews with Former Slaves* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2006), 49; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 92.

<sup>100</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 6, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

many different ways. Slaveholders across the South were divided on the issue of corporal punishment, some enjoying whipping their slaves and bragging about it while others denied it ever happened.<sup>106</sup> Many slaveholders preferred other punishments to whipping because scarred slaves brought less money at auction.<sup>107</sup> Other options for punishing slaves included prohibiting a slave from visiting a spouse, adding extra work, or putting a slave in solitary confinement.<sup>108</sup> Southern women serving as slave mistresses were just as varied in their views of punishment as southern men. While some slave mistresses seemed to be more than willing to punish a slave by whipping, others took the opposite approach and intervened when they believed their husband or overseer's punishment leaned toward abuse.<sup>109</sup> The Arkansas Constitution did offer some protection to slaves at least on paper, giving the general assembly the right "to oblige the owner of any slave or slaves to treat them with humanity" and giving those slaves charged with crimes the right to a trial by jury.<sup>110</sup> Even with the constitution attempting to guard the slaves of Arkansas from inhumane treatment, this was not the case for all slaves. Many slave owners defined humanity in their own way, and slaves in Arkansas were subjected to horrific physical punishment there just as others were across the antebellum South.

Matilda never mentions physical punishment of the slaves at Rosewood by herself, William, or David Fulton, only mentioning that she or David Fulton had given a slave a talking to or that she had threatened to sell one who misbehaved.<sup>111</sup> While her silence on the punishment inflicted by William and his father may have simply been due to the fact that she felt no need to mention such matters to William in letters, her letters support the idea that she never

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<sup>106</sup> Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 65-66.

<sup>107</sup> Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 67.

<sup>108</sup> Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 66.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*; Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 75.

<sup>110</sup> Bolton, *Arkansas, 1800-1860*, 138-39.

<sup>111</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, August 15, 1842, WSFP.

physically punished the slaves. In several instances when she was unhappy with the work of the slaves, Matilda commented to William that she had talked to and threatened them as well as reading a statement William had included in a letter, but after that she saw no more options for punishment.<sup>112</sup> Matilda's feeling of powerlessness after trying the methods she was comfortable with show that she did not see any kind of physical punishment as an option.

When Matilda traveled to Washington to stay with William in November 1841, David Fulton, William's father, took over supervision of the slaves. Matilda would obviously have appreciated Fulton being willing to take on the management of the slaves at Rosewood to enable her to stay with William in Washington, but it must have been difficult for her to leave her slaves in his hands since she did not approve of his approach to supervising slaves.<sup>113</sup> David Fulton took a very different approach to the management of his own slaves and Matilda did not like his methods, believing him to be too relaxed in his supervision.<sup>114</sup> Fulton's residence was in Little Rock while his farm was located in the countryside outside of town, which resulted in him often only checking on his slaves a few times a week.<sup>115</sup> "Father has a veary comfortable home indeed but he has nothing done around the house, he talks of coming out this fall to live, it would be the best thing he could do, he will never get any thing carried on until he is on the place," opined Matilda, adding that his "servants all do as they please."<sup>116</sup> Matilda obviously felt comfortable enough with her own style of managing slaves to criticize her father-in-law's way of doing things.

Whatever fears Matilda may have had about the situation, things at Rosewood got off to a positive start under David Fulton's management. In November 1841 David Fulton

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, December 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>113</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, January 6, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>116</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP.

complimented the work being done by the slaves at Rosewood in his letter to William: “Lewis has sold nearly all the wood that was cut at 3 dol per cord. The Rye is nearly put in and your servants at home appear to be careful. John has got a fine large Asparagus bed made and seem to take pains and attend carefully to everything about the House & Garden.”<sup>117</sup> The happy reports David Fulton offered to William in November 1841 represented a brief period before Fulton began to have problems with the slaves at Rosewood. William’s father found it increasingly difficult to keep the slaves under control as 1841 neared its end. In December 1841 David Fulton sent Lewis and Frank into the woods to chop and haul wood up to the house.<sup>118</sup> Lewis completed his work in the field, but Frank snuck off to his girlfriend’s house and “sank into the arms of Morpheus [sleep],” staying there until late afternoon.<sup>119</sup> When Lewis returned at dusk and reported Frank’s absence to David and John Fulton, William’s brother, the two men began to panic. The dwindling wood supply due to Lewis working alone worried them as well since “the ground [was] covered with snow and the atmosphere freezing by cold.”<sup>120</sup> David Fulton believed Frank had either run away or had a serious accident, and Frank’s return at eight that night with an armload of wood he had chopped brought him relief.<sup>121</sup> There was no mention of David Fulton punishing Frank for the long disappearance, only a suggestion that the job of supervising the slaves at Rosewood might be too much for William’s seventy-year-old father to handle much longer.<sup>122</sup>

Wesley proved to be the exception to David Fulton’s frustration with the slaves as he expressed “great pleasure at the change which Wesley has effected for the better at the

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<sup>117</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, November 16, 1841, WSFP.

<sup>118</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, December 31, 1841, WSFP.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> “David Fulton,” *Maryland, Find a Grave Index, 1637-2012*, accessed January 4, 2014, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=7550824>

Homestead.”<sup>123</sup> Agreeing with Matilda’s many negative assessments of Manual, David Fulton found him to be the most difficult slave to deal with, telling William that he regretted “most sincerely the distress and uneasiness you all must suffer on account of Manuals misconduct and it is confined to him alone.”<sup>124</sup> While dealing with the frustration caused by Manual, David Fulton continued to be encouraged by Wesley’s behavior.<sup>125</sup> “Since Wesley came home business is carried on much better and for the last three weeks all are going on well they are employed clearing up the ground to be added to our field on the south along the road,” Fulton gratefully remarked.<sup>126</sup> David Fulton’s assessment of the slaves at Rosewood continued to be more positive as he wrote to William in May 1842: “Wesley is doing his best with your farm he had his corn all planted in good time before mine and it is growing finely.”<sup>127</sup>

In March 1842, William’s friend William Woodruff had stopped by to check on Rosewood and wrote to William confirming David Fulton’s positive assessment of the work being done at Rosewood.<sup>128</sup> “John, took me over the garden & yard, to see what he has done & I must in justice to him, say, that I think he is doing much better than I expected.—He appears to have been industrious, kept every thing in order, New straw-berry & ornamental plants & vines are neatly trimmed,” Woodruff explained to William.<sup>129</sup> Woodruff found everything to look so wonderful that he commented he “would have supposed her [Matilda] at home, & that everything had been attended to under her immediate inspection.”<sup>130</sup> After reporting that John had also made some improvements including fencing and preparing land to be planted, Woodruff summed up his view of the situation to William: “I think you have reason to thank your stars that

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<sup>123</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, January 9, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>124</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, February 2, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, May 16, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>128</sup> William Woodruff to William Fulton, March 10, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

you left the home & farm in so good hands.”<sup>131</sup> George Watkins, a Little Rock attorney who later married Matilda and William’s daughter Sophia, agreed with Woodruff’s view of the state of Rosewood during William and Matilda’s absence.<sup>132</sup> Watkins stopped by Rosewood while William and Matilda were in Washington and was so impressed with the quality of the corn fields, gardens, and grounds that he told Matilda later he had not seen a better looking farm in the county.<sup>133</sup> The glowing reviews of the situation at Rosewood offered by Woodruff and Watkins must have relieved William and Matilda after so many months of negative reports from David and John Fulton.

Even as things were getting better at Rosewood, the constant misbehavior by several of the slaves convinced William and Matilda’s family members in Arkansas that the job of supervisor at Rosewood had proven to be too much of a challenge for David Fulton.<sup>134</sup> “The boys hardly regard Father with respect I feel confident from observation that they have no fears whatever,” John Fulton wrote to William, adding that “regarding his commands the fact is they are wholly bey-ond his control & management, some one should have them in charge they feared loved and obeyed the former and latter at all events.”<sup>135</sup> John Fulton suggested that William and Matilda’s slave Wesley could be trusted to serve as overseer at Rosewood if David Fulton decided he could no longer be in charge of the slaves. “Should Wesley continue to regard your interest and can exercise the control that he can at present I presume it would be altogether unnecessary to employ any other to act as superintendent of your hands,” Fulton recommended

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 19, 1842, WSFP; “Claiborne Watkins,” *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, accessed December 9, 2013, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=2931>

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, January 3, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

to his brother and sister-in-law.<sup>136</sup> Slaves who served as supervisors were common on Arkansas plantations, although most did not serve as the sole authority over other slaves but worked along with a white overseer.<sup>137</sup> William and Matilda never chose to appoint Wesley as supervisor of the other slaves, and Matilda returned from Washington in June 1842 and took back over the management of the slaves.

Matilda spent years fulfilling the role of slave supervisor at Rosewood and dealing with issues such as slave disappearances and misbehavior. She often complained of difficulties with the slaves but never suggested that the job was more than she could handle or that she would like someone else to take over. In nineteenth-century American society's view David Fulton should have been the better slave manager, but Matilda managed to garner respect and keep control of the slaves on her own for years while Fulton felt he had no control and wanted to give up the job after one month.

When she arrived home in June 1842, Matilda expressed dissatisfaction with the behavior of slaves.<sup>138</sup> She believed they had been allowed to do as they pleased under David Fulton's supervision and needed discipline.<sup>139</sup> "I find I have to manag [sic] & arrange the work for all hands, they have had their own way so long I find I must be veary industrious to get all hands in the old track," Matilda complained to William.<sup>140</sup> While unhappy with their behavior immediately upon her arrival, Matilda believed that her presence at Rosewood would quickly get them back in line.<sup>141</sup> Sounding confident in her ability to manage the slaves, Matilda wrote to

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<sup>136</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, Feb 14, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>137</sup> William L. Van Deburg, "The Slave Drivers of Arkansas: A New View from the Narratives," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (Autumn 1976): 239.

<sup>138</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 12, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

William that the slaves were “all are veary anxious and willing to do everything in their power to please me, I am sure we will have no trouble to get them all strait again.”<sup>142</sup>

While she treated slaves as property, Matilda never used the term *slave* in any of her letters over the years, always referring to them as *servants*. Other slave owners referred to their slaves as *slaves*, *servants*, or *Negroes*.<sup>143</sup> While most slaveholders used these terms interchangeably, Matilda never broke from the term *servant*. The fact that she could never, in almost ten years of letters, bring herself to use the word *slave* possibly speaks to underlying feelings she had about slavery and also supports the idea that she saw her slaves more as family than just property. Coupled with her refusal to consider any sort of physical punishment, the avoidance of the word *slave* suggests that she felt at least a little uneasy about the institution and what it represented. Like many slaveholders who may have privately not fully supported slavery, however, Matilda did not let any personal views on the institution detract from her management of the slaves.

It appears, at least on the surface, that the slaves also saw William and Matilda as their family. In May 1840 Matilda informed William their slave Charlotte wanted him to know that she prayed every day for his safe return from Washington, and that all of the servants sent their love and were anxious to see him.<sup>144</sup> Well wishes from the slaves continued in June 1840 as Matilda mentioned: “indeed I think we are blest with good servants, they all appear very anxious to see you, we get along very well.”<sup>145</sup> David Fulton expressed similar sentiments from the slaves to William in his letters to William, who was in Washington with Matilda and the children

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> An overseer at Waterford Plantation in Jefferson County, Arkansas, uses the terms *Negroes* and *slaves* interchangeably while John Brown, the owner of a plantation near Princeton, Arkansas, typically referred to his slaves as *Negroes*. In Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Arkansas*, 104; Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 32-34.

<sup>144</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, May 26, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>145</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, June 11, 1840, WSFP.

at this time. In February 1842 David mentioned to William, “Your kind servants Charlotte & Joseph at present express great anxiety for your return home.”<sup>146</sup> The next year Matilda had returned home to Rosewood and noted the slaves’ response to a statement for them that William had included in a previous letter to Matilda asking them to work hard: “I read them what you said in your letter. They were all pleased and said they would do their best, they wish to be remembered to you.”<sup>147</sup> These offerings of well wishes, prayers, and love from the slaves to William were most likely motivated by a desire to be well treated, but to William and Matilda it served as confirmation that their slaves loved them and saw them as family also.

While William and Matilda and their slaves may have viewed each other as family, a few of the slaves at Rosewood had families of their own. John was married when Matilda purchased him, and his wife lived on a plantation twelve miles away from Little Rock. Matilda found John’s happiness at Rosewood puzzling as it was such a distance from his wife. “I have never understood how he likes to live with us; he appears to be pleased and happy. He goes every two weeks to see his wife, 12 miles from town,” Matilda commented to William.<sup>148</sup> Illegal under Arkansas law, slave marriages were still common and many owners allowed their slaves to spend time with spouses on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.<sup>149</sup> Slave men used this time to visit with their wives while helping with any needed chores such as chopping wood and often bringing food as well.<sup>150</sup> John’s situation may have been acceptable to him since Matilda allowed him to go visit his wife on a regular basis.<sup>151</sup> Slaveholders encouraged such relationships as they believed it lent

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<sup>146</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, February 2, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>147</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 8, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>148</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, March 15, 1840, WSFP.

<sup>149</sup> “Slavery,” *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, accessed January 4, 2014, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=1275>

<sup>150</sup> Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 22.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

stability to a slave's life and deterred slaves from attempting to run away.<sup>152</sup> Co-residential slave marriages, a marriage between two slaves living on the same plantation, made up only 59.5 percent of slave marriages in Arkansas and were less common in Arkansas than they were in older slave states.<sup>153</sup> Non-nuclear marriages, with a husband and wife living on separate plantations, were most common on smaller plantations like Rosewood since the slaves had few potential spouses on their own plantation and looked for mates on neighboring plantations.<sup>154</sup> Even if they faced constant separation broken up only by weekly or bi-weekly visits, slaves experienced strong emotional bonds with their spouses and viewed their marriages to be just as legitimate as the marriages of whites.

Like Joseph, Manual had a wife from whom he lived separately, as she resided with the Ames family in Little Rock.<sup>155</sup> He became upset when her owners planned to move to Mississippi in February 1843.<sup>156</sup> Matilda woke on the morning of February 6 to Manual crying at her door that his wife was “going away and he wanted to go with her.”<sup>157</sup> He claimed Mrs. Ames, his wife's owner, wanted to buy him if Matilda would agree to sell him.<sup>158</sup> Matilda believed Manual should be with his wife. “I told him at once if Mrs. Ames wish to buy him, she should have him,” she explained to William.<sup>159</sup> Matilda most likely felt some sympathy for Manual and his situation; however, she likely also saw an opportunity to get rid of the slave that caused her the most problems. David Fulton went to meet with Ames as Matilda was busy at

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<sup>152</sup> Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 201.

<sup>153</sup> Carl H. Moneyhon, “The Slave Family in Arkansas,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 35-36.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

Rosewood.<sup>160</sup> Ames said she would like to buy Manual but she could not afford to purchase him.<sup>161</sup> Matilda's willingness to sell Manual without discussing it with William shows that she saw herself as the person in charge of such matters, not needing an opinion to make a decision.

Manual had believed there would be no problem with the sale and had hopefully packed his bags and gone to the Ames home.<sup>162</sup> When David Fulton returned to Rosewood to tell Matilda that Ames had no money to complete the transaction he had left Manual packing up his things to bring them back to Rosewood.<sup>163</sup> Manual watched as his wife left on a boat in the afternoon, and while Matilda pitied him and his situation, she commented to William that she hoped "he will stay at home as he has no wife."<sup>164</sup> Matilda's sympathy for Manual may have been dulled by all of the issues he had caused her in the past, but this incident displays her ability to treat slaves as property. When discussing the fact that Manual had just lost his wife and would likely never see her again, Matilda's major concern was her hope that the lack of a wife would motivate Manual to stay at Rosewood and work harder. This ability to separate herself from the emotions of her slaves in situations such as Manual's loss of his wife shows that Matilda was able to treat the slaves as possessions when she deemed it necessary.

None of the slaves at Rosewood had a co-residential marriage, most likely because they had spouses at other plantations when William and Matilda bought them. Matilda, however, only mentions John and Manual having spouses at a separate plantation. It is possible that she never mentions Minerva or Charlotte being married because their husbands had died, moved away with their owners, or neither woman had ever married. As she occasionally omitted details about the slaves in her letters, Matilda may have just not thought to mention the visits of Minerva

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

or Charlotte's husbands. Another possibility is that the father of Minerva's children had been a white master or overseer as this was a common occurrence that often left slave women with children and no husband.<sup>165</sup> Jealous wives of slave owners who had sexual relationships with female slaves often forced the sale of the slave woman as well as any children who were a product of the relationship, allowing them to rid themselves of any reminder of their husband's extramarital relationship.<sup>166</sup>

The births of two slave children, Minty in 1840 and Lewis in 1843, prove that at least one of the female slaves was in a sexual relationship.<sup>167</sup> Matilda, however, does not mention which of the slaves gave birth to the children or the name of the father or fathers of the children. It is more likely that Minerva at the age of thirty-one in 1840, still of child bearing age, gave birth to Minty and Lewis since Charlotte, the only other adult female slave at Rosewood, had reached the age of forty-six in 1840 and was likely past her childbearing years.<sup>168</sup> Matilda's choice to put Minerva to work in the main house while Charlotte did fieldwork also supports the idea that Minerva is the one who gave birth to Minty and Lewis.

Since she had invested money in the slaves but also needed them to produce goods for income, Matilda had to find a balance between being mindful of a slave's health and ensuring he or she did as much work as possible. In January 1843 Joseph hurt his foot and while Matilda believed that his foot was nearly well she planned to let him rest it a few days to be sure,

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 35. Many male slave owners believed that slave women were naturally lustful, what has been referred to as the Jezebel myth, and desired a sexual relationship with their master. Using this belief to justify their behavior toward female slaves, male slave owners often initiated sexual relationships with slave women, who had few options but to submit, and who were then often subjected to hatred, punishment, or sale by the slave mistress. For more information see White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 27-46.

<sup>167</sup> Notation for birth of Minty, November 16, 1840, FWP; Notation for birth of Lewis, July 31, 1843, FWP.

<sup>168</sup> Slave Bill of Sale, December 26, 1830, FWP; Slave Bill of Sale, October 7, 1834, FWP; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 114.

eventually allowing him another six days before putting him back to work.<sup>169</sup> The lengthy recovery Matilda allowed Joseph shows that she was more concerned with ensuring his health than getting a few extra days of work from him. As soon as he was well she had him working hard putting manure on the garden and trying to break some wild horses that William bought several months earlier.<sup>170</sup> When Minerva suffered from a severe fever that continued throughout a day and night, John was sent to Little Rock to bring Doctor Walkins to Rosewood to care for her.<sup>171</sup> The doctor was not available and Minerva's fever broke on its own, but this incident shows the value Matilda placed on the health of a slave in the willingness to consult and pay for a doctor.<sup>172</sup> As some of the slaves began to age they complained of the work expected of them. In 1843 Manual had reached the age of fifty-three and complained to Matilda that "he wont last long, he think his health is so bad."<sup>173</sup>

An especially perilous time for a slave's health was when he or she was hired out by their owner. William and Matilda often rented slaves out to work for other families near Little Rock, especially when they were away in Washington and needed less help at Rosewood. A common activity when southern slaveholders were involved in other activities and preferred not to hire an overseer, hiring out slaves provided guaranteed income from their slaves while William and Matilda were in Washington and could not supervise them.<sup>174</sup> For slaveholders, one of the most difficult aspects of sending their slaves to work for others was worrying over the treatment of their slave and their condition at the end of the contract.<sup>175</sup> Abuse or overworking of a hired slave was not uncommon since the person who had hired the slave had less concern for their

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<sup>169</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 16, 1843, WSFP; Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, January 22, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, July 21, 1841, WSFP.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, February 10, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>174</sup> Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Arkansas*, 83.

<sup>175</sup> Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 391.

wellbeing than their owner, who had a large investment in the slave.<sup>176</sup> The stakes were higher for the slave since he or she was the one who actually had to live and work for strangers who could be harsh and uncaring toward impermanent slaves.<sup>177</sup>

William and Matilda hired Charlotte out to Mr. Dunn, a neighboring farmer, in the winter of 1841.<sup>178</sup> Charlotte's contract paid William and Matilda nine dollars a month for her work at the Dunn farm.<sup>179</sup> As Charlotte's contract operated on a month-to-month basis she held no real value to Dunn and he had little interest in caring for her as if she were his own slave.<sup>180</sup> William and Matilda had expected Dunn to provide Charlotte with clothing during her contract and were surprised to learn that was not his intention.<sup>181</sup> David Fulton reported Dunn's response to William on the issue of clothes for Charlotte, "Mrs Dunn says it was not mention-ed nor did she understand that they were to find Charlotte in clothes and that they have never found any of their hired servants in clothes."<sup>182</sup> While William and Matilda were irritated by the situation, for Charlotte to find herself in a situation where no one was willing to provide her with adequate clothing must have been terrible. Hiring out slaves could be complicated and slaveholders were always taking a risk that the slave would not be taken care of in their temporary home.

Often unhappy with their new situations, the slaves frequently complained of the treatment they were receiving during their contracts. In January 1842, Charlotte and Joseph were both discontented with their treatment by the people that had hired them.<sup>183</sup> After Charlotte's contract with Dunn expired, William and Matilda gave David Fulton instructions to rent her out

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<sup>176</sup> Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Arkansas*, 86.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, February 14, 1842; David Fulton to William Fulton, November 16, 1841, WSFP.

<sup>179</sup> "Untitled," November 11, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, January 9, 1842, WSFP.

to Mr. Chase, who lived in Little Rock.<sup>184</sup> Charlotte complained that Chase expected more work from her than was possible of a forty-eight-year-old woman.<sup>185</sup> Describing the situation to William and Matilda, John Fulton remarked that he believed “Charlotte has a just right to complain, exacting more labour from her, than a woman of her age can possibly accomplish.”<sup>186</sup> “She [Charlotte] washes & cooks packs the wood into the house and even sets the table,” Fulton noted to William, adding that “the old woman can scarcely refrain from tears when speaking on the subject.”<sup>187</sup>

Charlotte’s protests about the strenuous work expected of her by Chase seems strange since she did fieldwork as well as domestic chores at Rosewood, and the chores John Fulton mentions are all domestic chores.<sup>188</sup> As John Fulton did not own slaves himself his perspective of how hard a slave should work likely differed greatly from what William and Matilda would have thought of such chores. While she obviously missed how she was treated at Rosewood, Charlotte also may have been missing the companionship of her fellow slaves and Matilda as she had been with the Fultons since 1830. It seems Charlotte was lonely at the Chase house and may have felt isolated from the other women since she mentioned to John Fulton that Mrs. Chase had a servant girl who she always kept close to her.<sup>189</sup> Charlotte put on a brave face and told John Fulton to inform William and Matilda that “as she has born the arduous duties this long she will do her best to continue until you return.”<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, January 9, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Matilda Fulton to William Fulton, August 15, 1842, WSFP. Many middle-aged female slaves claimed to be overworked or to not feel well in order to avoid field work in favor of domestic chores. Typically the period of hardest work for a slave women proved to be the years after she was no longer able to have children. During this period in their lives slave women usually did fieldwork. For more information see White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*, 108-14.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

Joseph had been hired out to work at the Anthony House, a hotel in Little Rock.<sup>191</sup> Joseph claimed that he was being abused at his new home, but John Fulton could not establish the accuracy of this, telling William: “Joes complaint is that he is abused which from information or otherwise I cannot say any thing.”<sup>192</sup> In January 1842 Major James C. Anthony, the owner of the hotel, called in a doctor to see Joseph after he was ill for several days.<sup>193</sup> Unhappy since he would be the one to pay the doctor in William’s absence, David Fulton he believed he should be the one to determine the necessity of a doctor’s visit.<sup>194</sup>

Joseph and Charlotte both asked John Fulton to explain their situations to William and Matilda, showing that they believed their masters would be concerned. “Your kind servants Charlotte & Joseph at present express great anxiety for your return home. They seem to have become discontented with their situation,” David Fulton commented to William in February 1842.<sup>195</sup> Joseph’s contract at Anthony House was not a long one as William and Matilda, in Washington, asked David Fulton to find someone else to hire Joseph out to in July 1842.<sup>196</sup> The low wages being offered for slave hires disappointed them as they were looking for a new situation for Joseph. David Fulton wrote of this issue to William: “You speak of Josephs wages corresponding with the state of the economy as far as I know the depreceation seems to be the same or nearly so in both cases as also of rents more than twenty Dollars in Ark [Arkansas money] is not given for servants hire.”<sup>197</sup> The experiences of Charlotte and Joseph show that both

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<sup>191</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, January 26, 1842, WSFP; “Anthony House,” *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, accessed January 3, 2014, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=3037>

<sup>192</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, January 9, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>193</sup> John Fulton to William Fulton, January 26, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, February 2, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>196</sup> David Fulton to William Fulton, July 15, 1842, WSFP.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

slaves preferred to be at Rosewood with Matilda, implying that they were treated well and taken care of when she was supervising them.

In November 1843 Matilda and the children again accompanied William to Washington, leaving them with a decision to make on what to do with the slaves in their absence. William's father, who had previously overseen the slaves in their absence, had died in August 1843.<sup>198</sup> Finding no one willing to manage the slaves in their absence, William and Matilda decided to hire out the majority of slaves. William signed an agreement with Horace B. Allis, a neighboring planter, to provide slaves, supplies, and equipment in exchange for half of the cotton crop produced by Allis in 1844.<sup>199</sup> John, Wesley, Charlotte, and Legrand were all sent to work for Allis through the next year, with the cost of their food, medical aid, and clothing split by William and Allis.<sup>200</sup> William and Allis also agreed to each pay half of the hire for John, a slave who belonged to David Fulton's estate "at six 6 66/100 dollars per month for one year from the first day of Jan. 1844."<sup>201</sup> The other slaves were hired out as well, with only Lewis and Minerva remaining at Rosewood.<sup>202</sup>

William tasked his lawyer David Shall with making weekly visits to Rosewood to check on Lewis and Minerva and ensure all was well and to deliver pork for the two slaves' consumption.<sup>203</sup> William planned for Lewis and Minerva to take on all of the tasks at Rosewood not related to crops, including feeding the livestock, milking the cows, smoking meat for their own consumption, and providing wood for themselves.<sup>204</sup> William and Matilda obviously had a great deal of trust in Lewis and Minerva as they were willing to leave them in charge of

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<sup>198</sup> William Fulton to Matilda Fulton, August 17, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>199</sup> "Article of Agreement," November 16, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> David Fulton (brother) to William Fulton, August 4, 1844, WSFP.

<sup>203</sup> William Fulton to David Shall, November 16, 1843, WSFP.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

Rosewood with only a weekly check by David Shall to ensure things going smoothly. In William and Matilda's absence, Lewis was charged with taking the garden produce as well as eggs, milk, and butter to sell at the Little Rock market.<sup>205</sup> While he trusted Lewis to stay at Rosewood and take care of things, William did not trust him with money and asked David Shall to collect the market money from Lewis.<sup>206</sup> William instructed Shall to remind Lewis that they would need a large amount of corn the next fall for "both man and horse," so everything should be used as economically as possible.<sup>207</sup> Without Matilda at Rosewood to manage everything, William did not believe that things could continue on in her absence, essentially leaving the plantation dormant in their absence.

As displayed by his decision to rent out the majority of the slaves at Rosewood in 1843 when Matilda accompanied him to Washington, William always had a great deal of faith in Matilda's abilities to handle everything at Rosewood on her own and saw her as vital to the success of the plantation. With William's untimely death at the age of forty-nine in August 1844, he stated in his will that upon his death Rosewood and all other property he owned belonged to Matilda for her lifetime, one last show of faith on his part.<sup>208</sup> The will also appointed Matilda administrator of William's estate, giving her full power and authority to do what she believed necessary with all "goods and chattels, rights and credits, which were of the said Wm S. Fulton at the time of his death."<sup>209</sup> The slaves owned by William and Matilda were

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> His death is believed to have been a result of sleeping in a poorly ventilated freshly painted room at Rosewood and asphyxiating on the paint fumes. "TRIBUTE OF RESPECT TO THE MEMORY OF THE HON. WM. S. FULTON," *Arkansas Gazette*, August 21, 1844; Margaret Ross, *Arkansas Gazette: The Early Years, 1819-1866* (Little Rock: Arkansas Gazette Foundation, 1969), 205; Anne McMath, *First Ladies of Arkansas: Women of Their Time* (Little Rock: August House, 1989), 38.

<sup>209</sup> "Letters of Administration," October 29, 1844, FWP.

now Matilda's property, and it fell to her to decide how to handle the debts owed by the estate.<sup>210</sup> To pay debts owed by William's estate, the majority of which were Pulaski County land taxes, Matilda sold several slaves for \$3784. Three slaves from Rosewood were part of the sale, and Matilda sold Lewis for \$500, Frank for \$660, and John for \$600. Several slaves that David Fulton had left William when he died were also included in the transaction, including Henry, who brought \$450, and Milly and her children, who went for \$1,000.<sup>211</sup> The money from the sale allowed Matilda to preserve Rosewood and keep everything running. Matilda was charged with making a difficult choice in order to protect Rosewood, and she did what was needed to ensure her future and the future of her children and home.

By 1850 Maria and Sophie Nowland, Matilda's sisters, had joined Matilda at Rosewood, helping her manage household duties and most likely contributing money to the budget.<sup>212</sup> At the age of forty-seven Matilda continued to run the farm and business at Rosewood along with seven slaves, two adult males, three adult females, one female child, and one male child.<sup>213</sup> Matilda still owned at least two slaves in 1859, and received income by hiring out Minerva and Ann.<sup>214</sup> In February 1859 Matilda sold Minerva, now around fifty years old, to C. Watkins for \$500 and chose to keep Minerva's daughter Ann, who would have been around twenty-eight.<sup>215</sup> While Matilda likely needed the money brought by the sale of Minerva, and selling Minerva, the older slave, and keeping the younger Ann made sense financially, we are left to wonder if it was difficult for her to say goodbye to Minerva, a woman with whom she had lived and worked for

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> "NOTICE," *Arkansas Gazette*, February 23, 1846; "Untitled," January 13, 1847, WSFP.

<sup>212</sup> *1850 United States Census*, Pulaski County, Arkansas, Population Schedule I Free, Township of Big Rock, Page 342A, Dwelling 380, Family 380, Matilda F Fulton Household, National Archives Microform Publication (National Archives and Records Service: Washington, D.C., 1964), M432, Roll 29.

<sup>213</sup> *1850 United States Census*, Pulaski County, Arkansas, Population Schedule II Slave, Township of Big Rock, Page 342A, Dwelling 380, Family 380, Matilda F Fulton Household, National Archives Microform Publication (National Archives and Records Service: Washington, D.C., 1964), M432, Roll 32.

<sup>214</sup> "Untitled," February 26, 1859, WSFP.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

twenty-five years. The sale of Minerva also meant that Matilda was separating Minerva from her daughter Ann, something she had tried to avoid when William was alive but was now forced to do after his death.<sup>216</sup>

While many histories of slaves mistresses have focused on either the isolated woman on a large plantation or the yeoman wife working alongside a few slaves in the field, Matilda's story falls somewhere in the middle. She lived with and supervised her slaves on a daily basis but did not work out in the fields with them. The small number of slaves at Rosewood resulted in her forming personal relationships with each of the slaves, while she attempted to keep emotion out of that relationship. Rosewood stands as an example of a frontier Arkansas plantation in the antebellum South where a woman took control and managed the slaves for over twenty-five years, the majority of those without a husband. In a time where men participated in the business world and women were meant to take power only in temporary situations, Matilda grasped onto her position as slave mistress and did not let it go until the South itself was forced to change its very structure.

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<sup>216</sup> "Untitled," January 13, 1847, WSFP; "Untitled," February 26, 1859, WSFP.

Making the Hard Choices:  
Living through Loss and a War as a Widow

When William died in August 1844, only Matilda and fourteen-year-old Sophia remained at Rosewood.<sup>1</sup> With no adult sons to take control of the estate, William left Matilda in sole control of Rosewood and all other property and debts. This had become legal only five years earlier when an Arkansas court ruled that widows had the right to own all or part of their husband's estate.<sup>2</sup> Matilda's years of supervising Rosewood and its business during William's absences provided her with the skills needed to continue to manage the estate after his death. While many other widows were overwhelmed by debt in the wake of their husband's death, Matilda took on the situation and sold slaves to pay off debts and taxes owed by the estate to ensure Rosewood's survival. At the age of forty-one with no surviving male relatives, Matilda did what she needed to do to take care of herself and her young daughter. Matilda's skill at handling business matters helped her to manage the farm and business at Rosewood even as her whole world changed with the Civil War.

In 1857 at the age of thirty-three, Elizabeth became a widow.<sup>3</sup> In his will Moorhead Wright named her sole executor of his will and left her more than two hundred slaves on three plantations and land worth around thirty thousand dollars.<sup>4</sup> She chose to take a different route than her mother had when left with slaves and a plantation to manage. In 1857 Elizabeth and her three children, twelve-year-old William Fulton, eight-year-old Elizabeth Matilda, and five-year-old Imogene, moved to Little Rock to be near Elizabeth's family, leaving an overseer to care for

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<sup>1</sup> "TRIBUTE OF RESPECT TO THE MEMORY OF THE HON. WM. S. FULTON," *Arkansas Gazette*, August 21, 1844; "Sophie Caroline Fulton Watkins," *Maryland, Find a Grave Index, 1637-2012*, accessed November 11, 2013, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=7840479>

<sup>2</sup> Michael B. Dougan, "The Arkansas Married Woman's Property Law," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 10.

<sup>3</sup> Baker, "Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman," 157.

<sup>4</sup> "Moorhead Wright," *Maryland, Find a Grave Index, 1637-2012*, accessed December 1, 2013, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=7550821>; Baker, "Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman," 157-58.

her plantation at Washington.<sup>5</sup> After witnessing how much work it was for Matilda to run Rosewood, Elizabeth chose to have no part in the day-to-day management of her own plantation. Her experience would have been different as Montelise was a much larger plantation than Rosewood, with many more slaves to manage. Elizabeth did conduct business, buying and selling land and making decisions related to the plantation, but she never took on the daily management as her mother had at Rosewood in her father's absence and after his death.

The Civil War obviously brought change to Rosewood, though no letters from that time period remain. Matilda did manage to hold on to the plantation through the war years and supported the Confederacy by donating items for the soldiers from Arkansas.<sup>6</sup> Her contribution of fifteen blankets and three pairs of socks, a much larger amount of goods than most other women donated, shows that she was still doing well enough financially to donate such goods.<sup>7</sup> While many southern women were devastated when their husbands went off to fight in the war and left them to manage everything on their own, this was nothing new to her as she had lived on her own with no husband for two decades.<sup>8</sup> Since Matilda had few slaves left at Rosewood at the onset of the Civil War, she would have been less affected by their departure. Elizabeth Fulton Wright, Matilda's oldest daughter, had owned 150 slaves and lost much more due to the emancipation of slaves that came with the Civil War than her mother did.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps to offset the cost of lost slaves and bring in new income, Matilda sold seven acres of land in 1868 to the state of Arkansas, which planned to build an institute for the blind.<sup>10</sup> Twenty years later Matilda died

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<sup>5</sup> Baker, "Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman," 158.

<sup>6</sup> "Contributions for the Soldiers," *Arkansas State Gazette*, October 25, 1862.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 32-35.

<sup>9</sup> Lea Flowers Baker, "Elizabeth Fulton Wright: A Capital Woman," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* vol. 65, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 159.

<sup>10</sup> "Blind Institute," *Morning Republican*, January 9, 1869.

at Rosewood at the age of seventy-five, never remarrying and having lived at and managed Rosewood for over four decades.<sup>11</sup>

In her will Matilda Fulton donated Rosewood to the state and today the Arkansas Governor's Mansion stands on the land where she lived a life on her own terms for almost forty years, surviving economic depressions, the deaths of her children and husband, and the Civil War.<sup>12</sup> When he left Rosewood to Matilda in his will, William Fulton showed his confidence in her ability to care for the land and house and his approval of the job she did during the years he was absent from home. Matilda spent her whole life challenging others views of what was appropriate for a woman. While she was running a plantation and business, managing slaves, talking politics, and giving her opinions to people whether they asked for them or not, Matilda was also challenging society's views of women. The twelve-year-old girl who left a life of luxury in Maryland did not set out to spend her life testing the boundaries of what a woman in nineteenth century America could be on a plantation in frontier Arkansas, but in the end that is just what she did.

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<sup>11</sup> "Mrs. Matilda Fulton," *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, January 15, 1879.

<sup>12</sup> Lea Flowers Baker, "William Savin and Matilda Fulton: A Brief Look at a Territorial Arkansas Family," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 48 (Winter 2000): 82.

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## ABSTRACT

### “BURSTING TO SPEAK MY MIND”: HOW MATILDA FULTON CHALLENGED THE BOUNDARIES OF WOMANHOOD IN FRONTIER ARKANSAS

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Matilda Fulton (1803-1879), an elite woman from Maryland, moved to the Arkansas frontier with her husband William Fulton in 1826. William Fulton served as the last territorial governor and became a senator in the first election after Arkansas reached statehood. During the absence of her husband, Matilda Fulton's letters to friends and family members documented her fascinating and extraordinary experience as a woman running a household and plantation in early Arkansas. Nineteenth century American society had very specific ideas about the appropriate behavior of women and their place in society. Magazines and pamphlets described the virtues to which women should aspire, and the idea of separate spheres relegated women to the private sphere of the home because they were too pure to be tainted by the public world of men. The themes of domesticity and separate spheres restricted the lives of women and the behavior they could engage in.

As a member of the upper class in Maryland, Matilda had been raised in a society that believed a woman's appropriate place was in the home as a member of the private sphere. When she and her family settled in territorial Arkansas, Matilda became part of a frontier society that, despite its rustic nature, still embraced a limited view of appropriate behavior for "ladies." While society dictated acceptable activities for women, Matilda Fulton was left in the absence of her husband to step out of those acceptable roles and take on new ones. Since William Fulton

was away from Rosewood, the Fulton plantation, for months at a time, Matilda Fulton found herself taking care of the children, finances, farm, slaves, and business deals. Very few married women in Arkansas at this time lived apart from their husbands, and even fewer faced the responsibilities taken on by Matilda Fulton. Fulton became part of the public sphere as she negotiated purchases of livestock and slaves and sales of crops and produce, discussed politics, and gave financial advice to her husband. At the same time she took on jobs such as slave supervisor and crop planner that were traditionally done by men, Matilda continued to serve in her domestic role, caring for the children and running the household. Her ability to fulfill duties that society viewed as the work of men and successfully manage a plantation challenged the idea of the women's sphere and what society deemed as acceptable for women at this time.