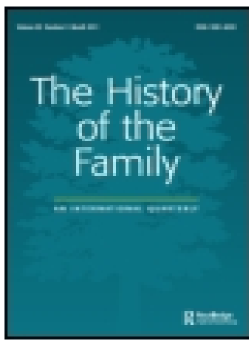

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ISSN: 1081-602X (Print) 1873-5398 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rhof20

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To cite this article: Tim Lockley (2017): The forming and fracturing of families on a South Carolina rice plantation, 1812–1865, The History of the Family, DOI: 10.1080/1081602X.2017.1283529

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2017.1283529

Published online: 10 Feb 2017.

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THE HISTORY OF THE FAMILY, 2017
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2017.1283529

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The forming and fracturing of families on a South Carolina rice plantation, 1812–1865

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ABSTRACT
This case study traces family formation among enslaved people on a South Carolina rice plantation owned by Charles Cotesworth Pinckney in the first half of the nineteenth century. It uses a rare set of documents to show how enslaved people were brought together mainly via inheritance (rather than purchase) to form a new community, and how they responded to frequent mobility within the holdings of a single planter. It also highlights the peculiar challenges to stable family formation that were unique to the South Carolina lowcountry, including individuals being separated from the main body of the community for periods of time while working on other holdings; the presence of a higher percentage of African-born individuals than was usual for the antebellum South; and the devastating impact of the highest mortality experienced by a mainland slave population.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 28 September 2016
Accepted 14 January 2017

KEYWORDS
Slavery; marriage; South Carolina; slave trade; mortality

Enslaved families living on North American plantations in the first half of the nineteenth century faced a constant vortex of competing interests that threatened to disrupt and, at times, obliterate familial ties. At any moment a slave owner could sell any individual to meet a pressing need for ready cash, or as a punishment for misdeeds, or just on a whim. No legal restraints existed on the power of slave owners to dispose of their property as they saw fit: parents could be separated from children, siblings divided, and marriages shattered. This was the stark reality of enslaved family life in much of the American South in the first half of the nineteenth century, but, while true on a macro scale, these generalizations gloss a much more diverse experience for the enslaved. The American South contained very different environments where the enslaved worked to varying seasonal rhythms and crop demands. Slavery was a highly flexible institution, capable of exploiting African Americans in countless ways. Enslaved lives on Alabama cotton plantations, Maryland tobacco farms, and South Carolina rice plantations diverged in numerous critical ways, and enslaved experiences in port cities or in industry were even more different. This article concentrates on the micro-history of a specific group of slaves on the rice plantations of lowcountry South Carolina belonging to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney. The surviving records provide us with a rare opportunity to understand how a plantation workforce was accreted and how it evolved over a period of nearly 50 years. Where did these slaves come from? How important was the internal trade

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in slaves to these plantations? What factors influenced the formation of enslaved familial ties, and what threats existed to destabilize family life and determine plantation demography? Perhaps most significantly, how different were familial experiences in lowcountry South Carolina compared to those of other enslaved people in the antebellum South?

The lowcountry was a unique region of the South where demography, economy and society more closely resembled the Caribbean sugar islands than anywhere else on the North American mainland. The 400-mile-long, 50-mile-wide, coastal strip of land from Wilmington in North Carolina to St Augustine in Florida was characterized by very large plantations, far larger than the rest of the South, where workforces, sometimes numbering up to 1000, toiled to produce rice and Sea Island cotton for export. In Georgetown District, 69% of slaves resided on plantations with more than 100 slaves (Pargas, 2008, p. 332). The small white elite was scattered thinly, only congregating in meaningful numbers in Charleston and Savannah, and 75–90% of the lowcountry population was enslaved. This combination of large plantations populated mainly by enslaved people resulted in the creation and retention of a culture that was more heavily influenced by Africa than was usual in other parts of the South (Joyner, 1984; Morgan, 2011; Wood, 1996).

Wealthy whites dominated society and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney belonged to one of the most prominent elite families in the lowcountry. His father, Thomas Pinckney, had served as Governor of South Carolina between 1787 and 1789 and was a presidential candidate in 1796 while his namesake uncle, with whom he is sometimes confused, was a hero of the Revolutionary War and signed the Constitution. The Pinckney family was wealthy, with much of that wealth being measured in the plantations and large numbers of enslaved people they owned, and well connected by marriage to virtually every other family of note in the state. The marriages of his aunts, uncles and siblings alone connected Charles Cotesworth Pinckney with the Middleton, Izard, Horry, Motte, Huger and Lowndes families. Between 1826 and 1859 Charles Cotesworth Pinckney's average annual profit from his plantations was $2956, after deducting all necessary expenses for the upkeep of himself, his family, and his enslaved property. The capital value of land and slaves was valued at $131,000 in 1860, which would make him a multi-millionaire in modern money.[1] The second Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, usually called Cotesworth by his family – a convention that will be followed here for convenience, did not follow in his father's or his uncle's august footsteps. While they strode the national and international stage, including serving terms as ambassadors to Great Britain and France respectively, the highest office held by Cotesworth was a short term as Lt Governor of South Carolina. Cotesworth was not a self-made man, indeed he owed virtually everything that he achieved as an adult to his familial connections, his parents, his siblings, his wife and his in-laws. Family clearly infused every aspect of Cotesworth's life, and it particularly influenced those he held in bondage. The story of his plantations is therefore of two completely different familial experiences – one white, the other black – that were, nevertheless, deeply intertwined.

Although trained as a lawyer, for most of his life Cotesworth managed a number of plantations in his native South Carolina. His plantation journal, now in the Pinckney family papers in the Library of Congress, details his agricultural endeavours between 1812 and the mid-1850s. As well as plantation accounts, the journal also provides a wealth of information on every slave working on his plantations, where they came from, their lineage (where known), what they did, dates of birth and death, and notes as to their 'character'. Such information on the background of enslaved people is rare, indeed no other records from lowcountry

plantations contain this sort of detailed information – most planters simply listed the names of the enslaved and noted births and deaths as they occurred (Scarborough, 2011, pp. 41–42).

Cotesworth's career as a planter did not have an auspicious start. He was given the 1164-acre Aukland plantation on the Ashepoo River by his father in 1812 as a place where the newly married 23-year-old could establish himself as a planter and raise a family. He spent the next nine years trying, and largely failing, to make a viable crop there. The plantation was too far up the river for rice to be viable, and the cotton he planted instead failed to thrive, something Cotesworth attributed to it being on 'old high land'. In late 1821 Thomas Pinckney offered his son 'the use of some land at Fannymead being tide swamp of a superior quality'. Cotesworth readily accepted and, renting out Aukland, moved his planting business north.[2] Fannymead was on the north side of the South Santee River, about two miles downriver from Thomas Pinckney's main plantation residence, Eldorado. After Thomas Pinckney's death in 1828 Cotesworth farmed Eldorado as well, operating the two rice plantations in tandem, though he would not formally own either until his stepmother's death in 1843. In addition he managed land in Pendleton District in the upcountry that was used to grow animal fodder, had a town house in Charleston, a summer vacation home in Flat Rock, North Carolina, and later bought a plantation in Abbeville that was midway between Augusta and Greenville. Being a member of a prominent and wealthy family meant that Cotesworth rarely had to purchase land; it was given to him, and he clearly profited from his famous relations – the land in Pendleton district for instance was originally granted as a 'bounty tract' by the state to his uncle for military services rendered during the Revolutionary War.[3]

No plantation was productive without a labour force to grow crops, and in this too Cotesworth completely relied on his family. His plantation journal contains information on 306 enslaved individuals, though the maximum number owned at any one time was 171 in 1852. Various relations (including his in-laws) provided Cotesworth with 51% of all the enslaved people he ever owned, while natural reproduction contributed a further 39%. Unlike many slaveholders elsewhere in the South, Cotesworth very rarely participated in the open market for slaves, buying just six individuals from non-family members – all before 1820, and selling only 14. Two of the sales were occasioned by Cotesworth's need to offset the losses caused by the hurricane of 1822, but both individuals apparently went voluntarily. The hurricane struck on 28 September 1822, causing considerable loss of life on plantations at the mouth of the Santee, though Cotesworth did not record any deaths on his own plantations from the storm (Fraser, 2006, pp. 81–85). Eighteen-year-old Jane 'was sold at her own & her mother's request for $500', while 75-year-old Cobba was 'sold rather than remove her from town (which we had promised not to do)' for $100. Others, however, were clearly disposed of as a punishment for running away. Bob, Charles, Cuffy and Caliban were all sold between 1816 and 1818 after becoming runaways, Cotesworth noting in his journal: 'I was under the necessity of parting with them as they wd not live with me & were also of very bad character, all sold without character.' Cotesworth was particularly aggrieved about Charles, the coachman, whom he purchased in February 1816 for $650 from Col. Young on a promise of his having the 'highest character'. Fourteen months later he could only get $450 back on his outlay after Charles proved to be a 'thief, runaway & drunkard'.[4]

Cotesworth was clearly willing to use sale as a punishment, breaking whatever family ties these men had. Sale to an inter-state trader was tantamount to bereavement as family members consigned to a new life hundreds of miles away were never seen again (Johnson, 1999; Pargas, 2009, 2015; Rothman, 2005; Tadman, 1989). Cuffy had fathered three daughters with

Rose, but only four-year-old Isabell was still alive when he was sold, while Caliban left his twin brother behind. Yet these sales were very much the exception, rather than the rule – 93.5% of Cotesworth's slaves spent either their entire lives or the remainder of their lives in his ownership, and in this respect the experience of Cotesworth's slaves differed from that of many other enslaved people in the American South. After the ending of the external transatlantic slave trade in 1808, the populous Upper South states of Virginia and Maryland became the main source of enslaved people for the new southwestern states of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana (Rothman, 2005; Tadman, 1989). Slave families in the Upper South were therefore more likely to be fractured by sale than those elsewhere, while counterparts in the southwest were forced to form new family ties. This does not mean that the internal trade in slaves entirely by-passed South Carolina, rather that its effect was confined to the central parts of the state. Census evidence suggests that the counties near Columbia, the state capital, actively imported slaves from the Upper South as the cotton economy became entrenched in the early years of the nineteenth century. The enslaved population of cotton-growing Edgefield County grew fivefold from 5006 in 1800 to 24,060 in 1860, while nearby Newberry County's enslaved population grew even faster (more than sixfold) from 2204 to 13,695 over the same period. By contrast the rice-producing coastal lowcountry saw its enslaved population grow far more slowly from 91,561 in 1800 to 122,595 in 1860 (33.9%), just over 0.5% per year. The white population of the lowcountry grew considerably faster, from 27,022 in 1800 to 48,118 in 1860 (78%).[5] This data, combined with the evidence from Cotesworth's journal, suggests lowcountry planters as a whole were not hugely active participants in the internal slave trade.

While the threat of arbitrary sale might not have hung over the heads of most of Cotesworth's slaves, they were liable to suffer dislocation of a different form. The 82 slaves given to Cotesworth in 1812 were clustered into several groups, the largest being 28 individuals previously owned by his father-in-law, William Elliott II, who had died in 1808, and inherited by Cotesworth's wife, Phoebe Caroline Elliott. Some of these slaves came from Newberry plantation on the Combahee River about 20 miles from Aukland, owned jointly by Phoebe and her brother George. Others were probably drawn from William Elliott's Myrtle Bank plantation on Hilton Head Island and had remained there after their owner's death until needed by their new mistress elsewhere. Phoebe's marriage to Cotesworth in 1811 and their settlement together at Aukland in 1812 proved to be the catalyst for the removal of her slaves. As the crow flies Aukland is about 35 miles from Myrtle Bank, but the journey would have been more like 50 miles, either by boat to Beaufort and then by road, or by boat around St Helena's Island to St Helena's Sound and then up the meandering Ashepoo River. Smaller groups of enslaved people who made up Aukland's first workforce came from deceased close relatives of Phoebe Caroline Pinckney: her mother Phoebe Elliott, her grandmother Phoebe Waight, and her uncle Ralph Emms Elliott; all of these enslaved people quite possibly came from Myrtle Bank. The other large group taken to Aukland in 1812 came from Thomas Pinckney's Fairfield plantation on the Santee, a couple of miles upriver from his main plantation residence at Eldorado. Twenty-seven enslaved people made this journey of nearly 100 miles, most probably by sea.

All 82 slaves brought to Aukland were therefore forcibly dislocated individuals and would almost certainly have been forced to sever family ties to move there. At least 11 adults, including three noted by Cotesworth as 'African', travelled without discernible family connections. Other slaves undertook this journey in pre-formed family groups: Hagar and

Caliborn brought their four sons aged between 10 and 20 with them from Newberry plantation; Rose and Cuffy came with their two young daughters while Bicah came with six of her children and the man who had fathered four of them. Carpenter Sam, his wife Rinah and their seven children aged between 19 and three, were taken from Fairfield plantation on the Santee, their home since before the American Revolution, to labour nearly 100 miles away at Aukland.[6] Rinah's sister, Molly, also made the journey from Fairfield to Aukland with her husband January, their five children, and their first grandchild. Even those in family groups, however, conceivably left behind parents, siblings and children with no surety of ever seeing them again.

The relocation to Aukland was not the last move these slaves made. In late 1821, as noted earlier, Cotesworth moved his entire workforce to Fannymead on the north side of the South Santee River. For some, the return to the Santee to labour at Fannymead, just five miles from Fairfield, would have been the chance to renew old acquaintances, but for Jeanette whose three children, including twins born in November 1817, were fathered by an unnamed 'negro from Hilton Head' the move ended her marriage. According to surviving records she did not remarry or have further children. For the 23 enslaved children born at Aukland between 1812 and the end of 1821 the move meant leaving all they had ever known.

For a small number of Cotesworth's slaves further disruption came over the ensuing decades as they traversed the state between their owner's various properties. Fourteen slaves left the Santee for Pendleton, a journey of nearly 300 miles, while a further five journeyed to Abbeville, about 220 miles away. Eleven slaves made the journey in the opposite direction from Pendleton or Abbeville to the Santee and three more were dispatched from the Santee to the town house in Charleston. These 33 slaves represent 28% of the mean number of enslaved people owned by Cotesworth between 1817 and 1857.[7] The most extensively travelled were Tom, born at Fairfield on the Santee in 1809, and Betty, born at Myrtle Bank on Hilton Head in 1806. Both were taken to Aukland as children in 1812 and then to Fannymead on the Santee in 1821. Tom left for Pendleton in 1830, Betty followed in 1832, and both returned to the Santee in 1845. The possible disruption to enslaved family ties is obvious – Tom never married or fathered children, though Betty took at least some of her children with her to Pendleton in 1832. In a letter to his son Cotesworth explained that this regular rotation of his 'idle' slaves was simply to make them 'more productive'.[8] Moreover, every summer Cotesworth took some of his enslaved property with him to Flat Rock, North Carolina: 13 of them (seven men and six women) were resident there when the federal census enumerator visited in the summer of 1860. The final move for all of Cotesworth's slaves came during the Civil War when, to avoid the Union troops occupying part of the lowcountry, he 'removed his negroes away from the seaboard to a plantation which he purchased in Abbeville' (Pinckney, 1895, p. 233).

This internal movement of slaves between different plantations owned by one individual is an obscure and generally overlooked aspect of slave mobility. No money changed hands and thus few records exist, only the notes made by planters who wished to retain an accurate record of the whereabouts of their property. The internal slave trade largely by-passed the lowcountry, since the large plantations that characterized the coastal plain had substantial numbers of slaves and little need for imports from the Upper South. But at the same time, high death rates among the enslaved meant there were few excess slaves that could be moved west. Cotesworth was surely not the only lowcountry slaveholder to be periodically shifting the enslaved around the state to suit personal needs. Wealthy lowcountry families

such as the Allstons, the Elliotts, the Hugers, the Fords, the Pringles, the Horrys and the Middletons all owned multiple plantations in South Carolina and would have moved slaves on a temporary or permanent basis between locations as best suited them. Counterparts in Virginia did the same, but they also sold significant numbers of surplus slaves (Dunn, 2014, pp. 54–55; Easterby, 2004, pp. 19–23). Just because slaves retained the same master it does not follow that they remained geographically fixed.

Within two years of arriving at Fannymead on the Santee, Cotesworth augmented his workforce by hiring 13 further slaves from Hannah and Sarah Motte Drayton, his mother's first cousins. The spinster sisters lived in Charleston and had limited use for slaves, thus the hiring arrangement suited both parties very well. For $700 per annum, Cotesworth secured the labour of 13 slaves, roughly what it would have cost to purchase one of them. The Drayton sisters obtained a secure and steady income and all parties entered into the agreement knowing it to be long term. Cotesworth noted in his journal that the hired slaves were to become his property on the death of the sisters, which they did when Sarah Motte Drayton died in 1843.

These 13 men and women were not surplus slaves that the sisters had inherited from their father, Judge William Drayton, rather they seem to have been purchased as an investment. All 13 were African-born, and had been purchased during the period between the end of 1803 and 1 January 1808 when the state of South Carolina had reopened the external slave trade. Many of the c.70,000 Africans imported during those four years were destined for re-export to Louisiana, but evidently some were purchased for local use (McMillin, 2004, pp. 19–27; Shugerman, 2002, p. 280). We have no way of knowing from which part of Africa these 13 slaves originated, though vessels arrived in Charleston bringing human cargo most commonly from Congo (41%), Sierra Leone (18%), Ghana (17%), and Senegal (11%) (McMillin, 2004, p. 70). These 13 Africans joined nine other African-born slaves resident on the plantations managed by Cotesworth. Six were in their 50s, almost certainly arriving in North America before the Revolutionary War, but three were men in their early 20s given by Thomas Pinckney to his son in 1812. Like those belonging to the Drayton sisters, these three men had been purchased during the four years when slave ships were legally able to dock in Charleston. At a time when the African influence among American slaves more generally was waning, Cotesworth had increased the number of African-born individuals on his plantations so that they amounted to more than a fifth of his enslaved workforce.

For nearly 20 years after 1824 Cotesworth relied on natural increase to sustain his enslaved population but in 1843 he inherited an additional 42 enslaved people on the death of his stepmother, and in 1851 purchased from his sister, Elizabeth Brewton Lowndes, a further 24 slaves who had originally belonged to his stepmother. However, these 66 enslaved people had all been working at Eldorado and Fannymead before the death of Mrs Frances Pinckney, so the transfer of ownership did not involve physical relocation and the formal change of ownership meant very little in practical terms for the enslaved. Gradual accretion of property like this was common in coastal South Carolina when elite white families were so intertwined. Thus lowcountry slaves could both move location without changing owners, as noted above, and change owners without moving geographically.

Ignoring the small number of individuals purchased before 1817, or later given to him by relatives, Cotesworth's slaves therefore came from four distinct sources. First a block given to him by his father in 1812; secondly a larger block given to his wife by her relatives the same year; thirdly a block hired from Hannah and Sarah Drayton in 1824; and finally, the

largest group of all came from Cotesworth's stepmother (either directly or indirectly via his sister) after 1843. The surviving plantation records permit us to reconstruct the familial structures within these groups, and how far they intermingled once resident in the same place. Cotesworth paid very close attention to the family ties of his enslaved property: males and females were listed separately in his plantation journal, but sons usually followed fathers and daughters usually followed mothers in order. Maternity was scrupulously recorded for all but 17 of the 306 enslaved people listed in the journal, even if sometimes it was simply to note, for the African-born for instance, that the parents were 'unknown to me'. Records of paternity are generally good but less so for the slaves inherited or purchased after 1843.

At the heart of the group of 26 slaves given to Cotesworth by his father were sisters Rinah (born in 1770) and Molly (born in 1775). Their extended families of husbands, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and associated spouses, over time accounted for more than a quarter of all the slaves Cotesworth ever owned.[9] Rinah, a 'tolerable field hand' and her husband Sam, a 'Jobbing carpenter' were both described in Cotesworth's plantation journal as having 'indifferent' characters; Molly, by contrast, had an 'excellent' character, while her husband, ploughman January, had a 'good character'. Cotesworth's terms were of course highly subjective and might reflect nothing more than the fact that Sam was already in his 50s in 1812 while January was 20 years younger and in his prime. The 14 children that Sam fathered with Rinah between 1789 and 1820 probably made far more of a contribution to Cotesworth's overall wealth and his annual profits than either of them made individually. The slaves from Phoebe Caroline Pinckney's relatives also contained several keystone family groupings. The marriages of Jupiter and Lizy, Tony and Mina, and Neller and Bicah might not have been quite so fecund as those of Rinah or Molly, but together their children and grandchildren accounted for a fifth of the slaves owned by Cotesworth between 1812 and 1860.

The 82 slaves thrust together at Aukland, even though drawn from different locations in South Carolina, began to forge new family ties. Seven new marriages occurred among Cotesworth's slaves during the nine years they were at Aukland. Four marriages involved couples drawn from within the same group, but three united couples from different groups. Violet, who had come with her parents Sam and Rinah from the Santee, married Jacob who had come with his mother Bicah from Hilton Head. Their first child, Maurice, was born in 1815, another unnamed child died in infancy in 1819. This blurring of the boundaries between the initial groups of slaves accelerated as time passed, and particularly after the relocation to the Santee in 1821. Of six known new marriages among Cotesworth's slaves after 1821, all but one were between individuals from different groups.

There is also evidence that the number of abroad marriages, where individuals took partners on a different plantation, was increasing. Jeanette was the solitary example of a cross-plantation marriage before 1822, but in the year after the move to Santee two of Cotesworth's bondwomen had children with slaves belonging to a Mrs Higgs and three bondwomen in the 1830s and 1840s seemed to have made longer-term commitments as evidenced by their having multiple children with the same abroad partner. We do not know how many of Cotesworth's male slaves took a wife on a different plantation. Overall, however, the number of abroad marriages among Cotesworth's slaves appears to have been below the average for South Carolina plantations (West, 2004, p. 44).

Other studies of enslaved families have established that the enslaved favoured exogamous marriage, and this is not surprising when many slaves lived on farms or plantations where the number of potential marriage partners was small (Gutman, 1976, p. 431). Once

close relatives, the elderly, the very young, and the already married were excluded, it was perfectly possible for there to be no viable husband or wife on a plantation, without personal preference ever being a factor. This does not hold true for the large plantations characteristic of the lowcountry. Cotesworth owned on average more than 100 slaves at any one time, and some neighbours owned upwards of 1000, meaning there was far less need to seek a marriage partner off the plantation. But the records of the Cotesworth plantations demonstrate that exogamy was actually an evolving and developing state. Slaves that started out in distinct groups initially tended to choose partners within that group until the family groupings became too intertwined. Then, in the case of the Cotesworth slaves, the merging of several previously distinct groups into one meant that new partnerships could be formed that were exogamous, yet still on the same plantation. A generation later these families had also become intertwined, and so abroad marriages became more common. While it is accurate to state that the very large plantations of the lowcountry in general saw a reduced need for cross-plantations marriages (Pargas, 2008), ultimately even these large plantations would see a trend towards abroad relationships. Exogamy was more than a fact of southern enslaved families, it was also a trend that accelerated over time.

For one group of Cotesworth's slaves, however, these observations do not apply. The African-born slaves who, of course, had endured the middle passage and the separation from their homeland and their loved ones, seem not to have integrated very well with the American-born slaves. The 13 Africans that Cotesworth hired from the Drayton sisters in 1824, for example, tended to inter-marry, if they married at all. Betty had two children with fellow African Abraham, and following his death in 1827, she had a further five children with another African-born slave, Ned. Indeed only one African-born slave, Simon, had children with an American-born female slave and no African-born woman took an American-born man for a husband.

There is cause to doubt the nature of Simon's romantic relationships. He had a child with Sylvia in 1837, two years after Sylvia's first husband had died. But in 1840 another American-born slave woman, Eliza, gave birth to a child fathered by Simon. The fact that Sylvia was still alive when Eliza gave birth suggests that Simon's relationships were more casual than was normal for Cotesworth's slaves. Of 24 relationships that resulted in offspring, 20 involved long-term monogamous marriages lasting an average of 22.3 years. The average length of marriage for those partners who remarried after the death of a spouse was 15.6 years. Just four were casual relationships where individuals had children with other people while their first spouse still lived. This largely concords with what other historians have suggested was the prevailing norm for the South Carolina lowcountry – that where other factors did not intervene, the enslaved formed stable and long-lasting family units (Gutman, 1976; Pargas, 2008). It stands in complete contrast, however, with Cotesworth's own perception of the sexual morality of his slaves. In 1829 he deplored 'the state of morals on plantations' where all practised 'falsehood and deception' and 'Their advance in years is but a progression to the higher grades of iniquity. The violation of the seventh commandment [against adultery] is viewed in a more venial light than in fashionable European circles.' Cotesworth's opinion was shaped by his desire to encourage Christianity in the hope that 'moral improvement would follow the introduction of religion among the blacks', but the evidence from his own plantations tends to undermine his case (Pinckney, 1829, pp. 246–247).

Cotesworth's plantations retained an eighteenth-century structure well into the nineteenth century. African-born individuals, who did not speak English and who were not

Christian, were thrust into a totally alien environment. This situation would have been the norm before the American Revolution in South Carolina and Georgia when the importation of Africans peaked (Minchinton, 1994, p. 52). It is not surprising that newly arrived Africans seemed to have kept themselves apart from Creole slaves for a long period of time. Similar sustained separation between Africans and Creoles has been noted on plantations in Jamaica (Higman, 1984, p. 368). It is possible, perhaps even likely, that the Africans were disconnected individuals rather than the cohesive group that the label 'African' tends to imply, since they could easily have been drawn from vastly different parts of West and West-Central Africa that are separated by thousands of miles. It is over 3000 miles by sea from Dakar in Senegal to Luanda in Angola, for example. Just because they were described as 'African' by Cotesworth in his journal does not mean they spoke similar languages or shared similar cultural traits. The presence of newly arrived Africans muddies our understanding of slave families in the nineteenth-century South Carolina lowcountry since they evidently had experiences that were far from the norm.

It is very noticeable that five of the seven African women hired from the Drayton sisters remained childless, unable or unwilling to form attachments with men from widely disparate backgrounds and the same phenomenon occurred in Jamaica (Dunn, 2014, p. 170). African-born women were by no means the only bondwomen who did not have children. Daphne, who was aged about 20 when she made the journey from Santee to Aukland in 1812, died 10 years later without having had children. In total there were 54 adult women listed in Cotesworth's plantation journal who, so far as we know, never married or had children, compared to 57 who became mothers. It is possible that some of the childless women were post-menopausal since ages were not recorded for all women. Another possibility is that some women were practising birth control, either via abstinence or by the use of abortifacients. Abstinence, either total or practised cyclically to avoid intercourse when a woman was at her most fertile, is hard to prove but there is evidence from elsewhere in the South that enslaved women sometimes chewed the root of the cotton plant, or took other herbal medicines, to induce miscarriage in the first weeks of pregnancy (Morgan, 2004, p. 113; Perrin, 2001). One problem with this suggestion is that Fannymead and Eldorado were rice plantations, and while some rice plantations also grew Sea Island cotton, Cotesworth's only income came from the sale of rice.

If abstinence was occurring on Cotesworth's plantations, perhaps as an act of resistance, then it was being done selectively (Camp, 2002). Fifty-seven bondwomen became mothers, collectively bringing 180 children into the world, a little over three each. Across the entire South, enslaved mothers had, on average, six or seven children each (Fogel, 1989, pp. 126–149), and accounting for this discrepancy is not straightforward. Miscarriage and stillbirth may have been more common on rice plantations than elsewhere in the South, caused by the strenuous nature of the work and a diet deficient in key vitamins and minerals (Dusinberre, 1996, p. 52), though no direct evidence in Cotesworth's papers exists to support the conclusion. Like most planters he did not record such events. Another possibility is that lingering African natal practices, such as prolonged breast-feeding, increased the gap between pregnancies. This has been posited as one reason for the lower fertility among enslaved women in the Caribbean compared to their North American counterparts. The average gap between pregnancies was under three years in North America but between three and four years in the Caribbean. On Cotesworth's plantations the average gap was three and a half years (Higman, 1984, pp. 353–354; Klein & Engerman, 1978, pp. 358–368). The lower number of

births per mother on Cotesworth's plantations matches almost exactly those recorded on the Mesopotamia plantation in Jamaica (Dunn, 2014, p. 159).

The harshness of enslaved life in the lowcountry quickly became apparent for women and men who became parents. Of 119 children born on Cotesworth's plantations between 1812 and 1855, a quarter failed to reach their fifth birthday; a third had died before the age of 10; and only just over half reached adulthood. Cotesworth was not a physician, and only occasionally noted a possible cause of death of his slaves, but the fact that so many children died in the first year of life indicates that neo-natal tetanus was probably responsible. This fast-acting bacterial neurotoxin usually entered the bloodstream via the umbilical stump and killed within a week of birth. Gastro-intestinal illnesses, often around the time of weaning, also contributed towards high childhood mortality (Kiple & Kiple, 1977; Lockley, 2013; Steckel, 1986a, 1986b). Some families were repeatedly struck by tragedy. Sylvia and Accabee lost three of their four children at the ages of one, two, and four, and only their fourth child, a son named after his father, outlived them. Only three of Patty's nine children lived beyond the age of 26.

The mortality experienced by enslaved adults was also higher than average for slave plantations, and mean life expectancy for those who reached the age of 16 was just 47. Working long hours in tropical heat was common for enslaved people throughout the South, but those in the rice swamps were exposed to a disease environment that took a particularly heavy toll. Not only were swamps natural breeding grounds for mosquitoes that carried malaria and other tropical fevers, the clustering of plantations along slow-moving rivers facilitated the transmission of water-borne infections such as typhoid, cholera and dysentery from upstream to downstream properties (McCandless, 2011, pp. 128–130; Patterson, 1989). An epidemic of cholera in 1836 claimed the lives of six slaves on Cotesworth's plantations and a dysentery outbreak in 1853 a further nine. Dietary deficiencies may have played a part in making slaves more vulnerable than whites to a variety of illnesses. Cotesworth claimed that no visitor to the South 'ever saw a famished slave' since it was clearly in the interest of owners to feed the enslaved (Pinckney, 1829, p. 241). In general slaves were provided with sufficient food to survive but they sometimes lacked key nutrients (Savitt, 1988). There is very little direct evidence as to the diet of Cotesworth's slaves but, as with many other lowcountry slaves, in their time away from their fields, either in the afternoons once their tasks were complete or on Sundays, slaves tended garden patches where they grew foodstuffs that could supplement their diet. Cotesworth kept a detailed record of the items he purchased from his slaves, most commonly corn and hay, but on occasion chickens and guinea fowl, eggs and pumpkins. One might imagine that if slaves were selling these items then they were also consuming them but it is also possible that they preferred the opportunity to purchase luxuries such as cloth, soap, coffee, molasses and sugar rather than consume what they had produced.[10]

It was probably a combination of low fertility, inadequate food, hard labour and a hostile environment which meant that between 1812 and 1857 more of Cotesworth's slaves died (128) than were born (119), and this stands in stark contrast to slave plantations elsewhere in the South where rates of natural increase reached as high as 2.5% per year (Higman, 1984, p. 314; Klein, 2012, p. 75). Cotesworth started in 1812 with 82 slaves, and by 1857 he had 153, but this includes 32 slaves he purchased and 47 he inherited over those 45 years. Without them, the slave population would actually have fallen. Such high mortality rates were common on lowcountry plantations, making them again reminiscent of Caribbean islands such

as Jamaica where enslaved populations were also not self-sustaining, instead existing 'in a state of permanent crisis' (Dunn, 2014, p. 2; Eltis & Lachance, 2008, pp. 335–338; Higman, 1984, p. 305).

Cotesworth was perfectly aware that his enslaved property was a valuable asset and he was willing to provide medical care, noting in 1828 that 'Careful females are appointed to nurse the sick, and medical assistance [is] generally procured' (Pinckney, 1829, p. 242). His plantation accounts periodically contained small sums for 'medicines', most likely administered by the overseer or by one of the three enslaved nurses listed in his plantation records. In October 1836 in the midst of a cholera outbreak Pinckney paid $8.55 for unspecified 'cholera medics' and a further $10 for five gallons of rum, probably for medicinal use. Very occasionally he paid for a physician to tend to his slaves but since it was common for slaves to treat each other with a variety of folk and herbal remedies, white physicians were not a regular presence on Cotesworth's plantations. Of course there was a strong motive of self-interest for Cotesworth to preserve the life of his property that not only held monetary value per se, but also comprised the only means he had of making money from his plantations.

In an 1829 speech before the South Carolina Agricultural Society, Cotesworth claimed 'From diseases of climate' slaves were 'generally exempt; they thrive and increase, where the white man sickens and dies' (Pinckney, 1829, p. 241). Cotesworth might have based this statement on an understanding of the mortality of Charleston where the heavy toll of yellow fever among immigrant populations probably made it seem like the disease environment was particularly unfavourable to whites. Modern medicine has shown that West Africans possess a degree of immunity to both malaria and yellow fever, but from the records Cotesworth kept for his own plantations it should have been perfectly evident that the enslaved did not 'thrive' on his rice plantations (Savitt, 1981).

Charles Cotesworth Pinckney died in Abbeville aged 76 on 19 June 1865. His son recorded that the black people Cotesworth had transported to Abbeville 'could be heard chanting a requiem in their characteristic spirituals over the grave of their old master' long after the white people had left.[11] It is not known whether Cotesworth personally informed his enslaved workforce they were now free after the defeat of the Confederacy, or whether one of his children undertook the task. His daughter reported his condition had worsened over a four-month period during which he 'lost appetite & strength, took to his room, & then his bed' (Taylor, Matthews, & Power, 2000, p. 397). Despite their new freedom, most of the former slaves returned to the Santee plantations after the war. On arrival they ransacked the main house at Eldorado and decided to divide up the old plantation between them. When Cotesworth's eldest son, Thomas Pinckney, arrived shortly afterwards and attempted to assert control he was coolly informed 'we all going to work, we going to work right here, but we ain't going to work for any white people any more'. In the end Union troops were dispatched from Charleston to restore the plantation to the Pinckney family. Some freedmen stayed to work under the new regime, but others left, embarking on yet another chapter of dislocation. Chlorinda and Leah Pinckney were living together in Beaufort District according to the 1870 census, while one African-born man not only retained the Pinckney surname but also appropriated a military title, Colonel, in memory of the fact that he had been given to Cotesworth by his father Col. Thomas Pinckney in 1825. In 1870 'Colonel' Pinckney was being cared for in Caw Caw, Orangeburg District, by another former Pinckney slave, Clarissa, and was aged 105.[12] Freedmen and women who chose not to retain the Pinckney surname are untraceable.

The study of Cotesworth's plantations therefore lays bare the often fractured nature of enslaved family life in the lowcountry, reminding us that the rice plantations of South Carolina demand careful scrutiny from historians as a special sub-region within the American South. Admittedly only about 4% of American slaves resided in the lowcountry in 1860, and their experiences can hardly be described as typical for all enslaved people, but this does not mean they should be overlooked. Historians of enslaved families have often relied on the c.2300 memories of former slaves captured by interviews conducted by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s. These elderly former slaves often recalled important details about growing up under slavery, and how their parents and siblings were affected by the institution. Valuable as these are, significant problems with the WPA interviews remain, one of the most serious being the very small sample size. In the case of South Carolina there are just 334 extant interviews in the WPA collection, 0.08% of those who were recorded as enslaved in the state in the 1860 census. This obviously raises concerns about how representative this sample of people can be for the other 99.92%. An additional problem for South Carolina is that just under a third of slaves in 1860 resided in the lowcountry, but only 43 (12%) of the surviving WPA interviews are with slaves who worked in the coastal area. Any use of the WPA interviews to discuss enslaved families is inevitably light on lowcountry evidence. Cotesworth's plantation journal helps to fill that gap. When they had the chance, Cotesworth's enslaved people clearly wanted stable and long-lasting family relationships; unfortunately circumstances often made that impossible.

Several important and challenging conclusions emerge from this case study. First, despite the solidity of a slave community that was largely free from the fear of sale, families were relocated at will within a rich planter's separate holdings. This was more common in the lowcountry than elsewhere in the antebellum South because the wealthiest planters owned several plantations. Enslaved people could find themselves dispatched for months, sometimes years, to a distant part of the state, thus loosening any family ties that might have been formed. Unlike permanent sale, however, relocated slaves could return to their friends and family at some point in the future, and abandoned parents, siblings or spouses could at least take comfort that they knew where their loved ones were and could send them gifts or messages if they wished. Of course, the removal and relocation of enslaved people remained solely at the whim of the master.

The preference among planters for endogamous marriages, often between cousins, meant that lowcountry slave holdings stayed within extended families and were often accreted in distinct blocks (via marriage and inheritance), that gradually merged, rather than being diluted or dispersed, over a period of time. Since lowcountry plantations were usually much larger than elsewhere, the numbers of enslaved people affected by marriage or inheritance were correspondingly large, and entire populations of 30, 50, or 100 enslaved people could be shifted en bloc from one owner or one location to another. The existence of large plantations in the South Carolina lowcountry containing hundreds of slaves gives the superficial appearance of continuity, but in reality the slave community was a fluid body.

Secondly, the late reopening of the transatlantic slave trade in the first years of the nineteenth century brought an influx of Africans into the lowcountry who found it difficult to form family ties. Cotesworth was far from being the only planter in the lowcountry to own newly arrived Africans. John Ball was another who purchased 35 recently imported Africans

for his Cooper River plantations within a short time of the trade reopening (Ball, 1998, p. 260). While it is not possible to know with certainty how many of the more than 70,000 imported Africans remained in South Carolina, instead of being sent west, the 1870 census records more than 200 African-born individuals still resident in the state 62 years after the legal transatlantic slave trade ended. The number of African-born people resident in South Carolina in 1810 or 1820 must surely have numbered in the thousands. The presence of newly arrived Africans well into the nineteenth century reminds us that historians speak of a single slave community at their peril. In lowcountry South Carolina, where slave populations were more African in the nineteenth century than their counterparts elsewhere in the South, there were multiple and overlapping slave communities, often in conflict (Forret, 2015). In this respect the lowcountry had more in common with West Indian islands than it did with the rest of the American South.

Thirdly, the highest mortality rates experienced by any North American enslaved community constantly disrupted and undermined stable family life in the lowcountry. A very small number of slaves lived into their 80s, but terrible infant mortality, as well as the toxic disease environment prevalent in the lowcountry, meant that the mean age of death for all Cotesworth's slaves was just 29. Only around half of Cotesworth's enslaved women ever had children, and they had considerably fewer than comparable women elsewhere in the South. Considering that roughly half of those children then did not reach adulthood, it is obvious that a form of slow demographic collapse was underway on Cotesworth's plantations. The similarity with West Indian plantations is undeniable.

Data from Cotesworth's plantations thus challenges several of the most common assumptions about enslaved family life in the antebellum South: that birth rates were high enough and mortality low enough to ensure rapid population growth; that the trend from an African to an African-American community was inexorable; and that larger plantations were havens of demographic stability. In the South Carolina lowcountry none of those were true.

Notes

1. Library of Congress, MSS division, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney family papers, 1703–1947. Plantation Journal (microfilm 21,048-1P). 1860 census for Henderson County, NC. (Retrieved from ancestry.com)
2. Account of Aukland, Plantation Journal, pp. 20–22. Aukland was finally sold in 1843.
3. Plantation Journal, p. 19.
4. Plantation Journal, p. 50.
5. All data taken from the historical census browser (http://www.socialexplorer.com/).
6. The Fairfield Plantation Book [unpaginated]. Microfilm, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Sam, born around 1760, and Rinah born around 1770, were already a married couple in 1789.
7. All data taken from the Plantation Journal, pp. 1–11, 110–118.
8. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney to Thomas Pinckney dated Aiken 3 November 1845. Pinckney Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society [#495 Folder 5: Correspondence 1832–1845].
9. Throughout I am using the term 'marriage' to refer to long-term relationships between enslaved couples that produced children. Southern slave laws gave no formal recognition to enslaved marriages, though some owners accorded them an informal status.
10. Accounts with slaves. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney Papers, South Carolina Historical Society.
11. Thomas Pinckney, 'My Reminiscences of the War and Reconstruction Times', galley proofs of an unpublished book in the Pinckney Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, [#495/15], 69.
12. 1870 census for Caw Caw, Orangeburg District, South Carolina. (Retrieved from ancestry.com)

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, The Fairfield Plantation Book.
South Carolina Historical Society, Pinckney Family Papers, #495 Folder 5: Correspondence 1832–1845, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney to Thomas Pinckney dated Aiken 3 November 1845; Accounts with slaves; Thomas Pinckney, 'My Reminiscences of the War and Reconstruction Times', galley proofs of an unpublished book [#495/15].

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