



FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD'S SLAVE PRISON.

This establishment is in Alexandria. It is a handsome three story brick house, neatly painted, with green blinds, and the sign, FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD over the door. It has attached to it a large yard, perhaps 300 feet square, enclosed by a high close board fence neatly white-washed, and filled with various small buildings. Mr. Leavitt visited it in 1834. One of the partners lives in New-Orleans, and the other in Alexandria. The latter, says Mr. L., "politely invited us to go and see the Slaves. We were first taken out into a paved yard, 40 or 50 feet square, with a very high brick wall and about half of it covered with a roof. This yard is appropriated to the men. He ordered the men to be called out from the cellar where they sleep, and they soon came up, to the number of 50 or 60, and ranged themselves irregularly before us. While they were standing, he ordered the girls to be called out, when the door opened, and about 50 women and small children came in. They were all clothed decently in coarse but apparently comfortable garments. Some three or four had children, so young that they brought them in their arms; and I thought I saw in the faces of these mothers some indications of irrepressible feeling. It seemed to me that they hugged their little ones more closely, and that a cold perspiration stood on their foreheads, and I thought I saw tears too. There were in all about 28 children under 10 years of age."

The standing advertisement of this house in the Washington papers is as follows:—

"CASH FOR 400 NEGROES."

"Including both sexes, from 12 to 25 years of age. Persons having likely servants to dispose of, will find it to their interest to give us a call, as we will give higher prices in cash than any other purchaser who is now, or may hereafter come into this market."

"FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD."

In 1836, the American Anti-Slavery Society targeted Franklin & Armfield and their "private prison" for slaves pending sale in Alexandria. In 1834 alone, the firm stated that they shipped "not less than 1000 slaves" to New Orleans. (Detail from "Slave Market of America," 1836, Library of Congress)

to the original American settlement of the region, as his father James Franklin was part of the 1780 expedition lead by Kasper Mansker that arrived in what became Sumner County.³⁵ The elder Franklin also numbered among the "immortal seventy," named by Nashville founder James Robertson in a 1784 Act passed by the North Carolina General Assembly that granted six

hundred and forty acres of land to those involved in the "defence [sic] and settlement of the said county of Davidson."³⁶ With this grant, James Franklin secured land at Pilot Knob on Station Camp Creek, and began construction of the home and farm that supported the family for many years. Isaac Franklin was born in 1789, just three years after work on this home began, the sixth

of ten children born to James and Mary Lauderdale Franklin.³⁷

Isaac Franklin left no recollections or reminiscences of his youth, but he probably spent those long spring and summer days hunting and fishing with his brothers and assisting his father farming the family's substantial holdings. Mary Franklin would have provided her children with the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, and they may have attended a country day school from time to time. In his teen-age years, Franklin worked with his older brothers in merchandising endeavors—transporting product from the agricultural regions of Tennessee downriver to markets in Natchez and New Orleans, "a pursuit open only at that day to the most adventurous of the people,"³⁸ the *Mississippi Free Trader* declared years later at Franklin's death. The War of 1812 temporarily interrupted Franklin's business endeavors, and he spent at least its latter years as Second Lieutenant, Second Regiment Mounted Gunmen, West Tennessee Volunteers,³⁹ reinforcing Andrew Jackson's troops in their battles with the Creeks in Alabama.⁴⁰

After the war, Franklin returned to Sumner County and established himself on five hundred acres of prime agricultural land, purchased from and gifted by his father.⁴¹ At about the same time, he began to augment his wealth using trading skills honed earlier, this time through the domestic slave trade. Franklin's pre-war years on the river undoubtedly introduced him to the trade and its growth following the 1808

abolition of the international slave trade. As well, Franklin certainly knew the vast, fertile lands brought into the United States with the Louisiana Purchase had created a massive southward movement of agriculturalists in search of a labor force.⁴² Although his involvement may have begun sooner, the Adams County, Mississippi, records from 1819 are the earliest to definitively show Franklin buying and selling slaves in the Natchez market,⁴³ and his increased involvement in the trade is confirmed with the 1823 purchase of a parcel of property located just east of downtown Natchez, at the "Forks of the Road."⁴⁴ As demand for slaves grew, so did Franklin's enterprise, and on February 28, 1828, he formed a partnership with John Armfield, with whom he had worked since 1824.⁴⁵ With operations based in Alexandria, Virginia, where Armfield acquired the slaves Franklin then sold to Louisiana and Mississippi planters, Franklin and Armfield soon became the largest and most profitable slave-trading enterprise in the country.

The image most often painted of the early nineteenth-century slave trader reveals a sinister and dastardly fellow, a pariah, an individual shunned by polite society—unless labor needs necessitated his services. A question to consider here, then: are these "images" appropriate when considering early-nineteenth century society; and if so, why in the world did Oliver B. Hayes allow Adelia, his favored eldest daughter, to marry such an individual? The observations of northern writer Joseph Holt