Dwelling Place
To Nancy, Legare, and Elizabeth
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Dwelling Place is a history of two peoples living together on the Georgia coast from 1805 to 1869. It is a single narrative because their lives were linked and interwoven in innumerable and often intimate ways and because this coastal land shaped all who lived along its rivers, by its swamps, and on its islands and sandy hills, even as those who lived there shaped the land itself. Yet Dwelling Place is also two histories—one of whites and one of blacks, one of owners and one of slaves. For in spite of all of their closeness and all the ways their lives were bound together on this particular part of the Georgia coast, there was a great divide between those who were owned and those who owned. So great was the distance between them and so different was their experience that Dwelling Place is necessarily two histories of one place and one time.

One history centers on the family of Charles Colcock Jones, who came to be known among whites as the Apostle to the Negro Slaves. The other history focuses on the family of Lizzy Jones, the matriarch of one of the most influential and widely connected families of the Gullah-speaking slave community of Liberty County, Georgia. Both families were part of dense networks of relatives and friends who constituted significant parts of each family’s history. Both families, in all their own diversity and peculiarities, saw the landscape of Liberty County and understood the stories of the people who lived on its land from very different places and in very different ways.

Dwelling Place is an attempt to tell these two histories in a single narrative, because each history was dependent on the other and cannot be understood apart from the other. One history is of a white family’s love for one another and of their love for the beauty of a low-country home. Their story is marked by the bitter irony of good intentions gone astray and of benevolent impulses becoming ideological supports for deep oppression. The other history is of a particular African-
American family’s resistance to the degradations of slavery. Their story is marked by the varied strategies of its members—not only open resistance to slavery but also acculturation and relentless negotiations—as they sought to ease the burdens of slavery and to move toward a new future for themselves and their family. Because the study explores the lives of specific individuals and families over an extended period of time, it is a composite biography: the lives of owners and owned are seen overlapping one another and being layered together in complex and interdependent ways, even as they are both located within larger social and cultural contexts.

The narrative begins in 1805 at Liberty Hall plantation, three months after the birth of Charles Colcock Jones and a short time before the birth of Lizzy Jones’s second son, Cato. It ends in 1869, when the entire region appeared strangely and, for the blacks, wonderfully changed. The story follows the histories of these two families, and their dense networks of relatives and friends, through a period of immense social, cultural, and technological transformations. These transformations, and the comings and goings of plantation life for more than sixty years, are seen and experienced from above in *Dwelling Place* through the eyes of ruling whites and are seen and experienced from below through the eyes of resourceful slaves and freed people who struggled first against the bitter burden of slavery and then against its legacy of a powerful racism.

Any history, of course, involves not only intense research and analysis but also an act of imagination as the “facts” of research are arranged and interpreted in the mind of the historian. This is true of a history of the whites of Liberty County who left behind an extensive collection of letters and documents. An act of imagination is required to enter their world even with all the richness of their written record, for their nineteenth-century plantation world is distant from the largely urban world of the twenty-first century. The distance is perhaps most clearly felt at those points when we ask, “How could they believe that?” or “How could they do that?”

If an act of imagination is required to enter the well-documented white world of nineteenth-century Liberty County, much more imagination is needed to enter the world of Liberty County slaves. Their written records are few and their voices have been for generations largely suppressed. Yet their story has its witnesses, and the witnesses tell of slave life, of the work that slaves did, and of the community Liberty County slaves built. Some of these witnesses are found in the land itself, as archaeologists have dug in slave settlements or as dams and dikes of old rice fields have appeared on aerial photographs. Other witnesses come from studies of other slave communities and from the history of the institution of slavery itself. A few critically important witnesses are found in slave letters and in slave narratives from Liberty County. Most of the witnesses, how-
ever, for the family of Lizzy Jones and its network of relations and friends, come in the letters and in the plantation and court documents of white owners. This white testimony must be approached with special care. But with care, and with collaboration from other sources, an imaginative leap can be made to read what James C. Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* calls the “hidden transcripts” of the slave settlements in order to tell the story of a slave family and how they saw and experienced a time and place shared with other slaves and with the whites of Liberty County.

“The final presentation of one’s research,” writes Rhys Isaac in *The Transformation of Virginia*, “should not be primarily a record of the researcher’s labors, but a persuasive reconstruction of the experiences of past actors.” This is the intent of *Dwelling Place*. What was life like for the white Jones family and their white neighbors on low-country plantations during these years? What was life like for the black Jones family and its dense network of neighbors in the slave settlements of Liberty County during these same years? And how were the lives of both whites and blacks linked and interwoven by the power of slavery and by the responses of particular men and women to that power?

I am grateful to many people for their help in the completion of this study — too many people, I am afraid, to name them all. Gratitude, however, demands that I thank publicly those who provided special assistance. Leon C. Miller, manuscripts librarian, Tulane University, and Wilbur E. Meneray, assistant dean for special collections, Tulane, encouraged me through their professional help and many kindnesses. Tim Browning, director of the library, Columbia Theological Seminary, provided the funding for the microfilming of the Charles Colcock Jones Collection at Tulane and thereby saved me many pleasant but time-consuming trips to New Orleans. Gail DeLoach, the senior archivist at the Georgia Department of Archives and History, was helpful in many ways, but especially with the securing of photographs. Mandi Johnson of the Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, provided much appreciated guidance. Bill Bynum of the Presbyterian Historical Society, Montreat, North Carolina, went out of his way to be helpful. Todd Crumley helped find and photocopy materials from the special collections at Duke University. Doug Minnerly, Richard Floyd, Kyle Henderson, Hunter Camp, and Amy Lehr helped to photocopy several thousand documents from microfilm. Richard Blake checked names, edited the genealogical charts, and prepared the indexes of persons with his usual grace and attention to detail. Bonnie Shoemaker provided assistance in securing documents and ordering materials. Her efficient and cheerful ways as an administrative assistant freed me from numerous responsibilities.

A number of people in Liberty County offered me generous assistance. Over
many years the staff in the superior court and in the probate court helped me sort through documents and solve troubling mysteries. Bill Cox, president of the Liberty County Historical Society, shared with me his knowledge of Liberty County history and provided microfilm of the Lambert Foundation documents. Molene Herbert Chambless Burke helped me unravel some of the history of the Baptist Churches in the county. Tom Mueller of the First Presbyterian Church, Hinesville, introduced me to people familiar with the history of the region. Colonel George Rogers of Colonel’s Island spent an afternoon with me discussing the island and its history. Joann Clark of the Midway Museum showed me a number of documents in the museum’s collection and introduced me to people who helped with specific questions. In adjacent Bryan County, David Long showed me every kindness and shared with me his enthusiasm for low-country history.

I am particularly grateful to those who traveled with me over parts of the low country. Buddy Smith, a crabber, spent a day with me in his boat as we explored the North Newport River. He has an amazing knowledge of the river’s life and moods and of hunting, fishing, and crabbing in the low country. Townsend Warren provided much lore about shrimping and crabbing. Chris Hartbarger kayaked with me through the Medway marshes and walked with me around the remaining ruins of Maybank plantation. Ezekiel Walthour drove me around parts of the county, pointed out the locations of a number of plantations, and arranged for me to interview members of the African-American community in the county, including Mrs. LeCounte Baggs, who knew as a child Gilbert Lawson, Jr. My conversation with her was an unexpected gift. An unknown driver of a pickup truck pointed out the way through the woods to the cemetery of the Retreat plantation. Ken Speir walked with me over much of the former South Hampton plantation, showed me where the old plantation house was located, and introduced me to Kip Kirby, plantation manager, Hampton Island, who kindly showed other areas of the former Roswell King plantation. Laura Devendorf talked with me about the history and geography of the area around Sunbury and showed me over the grounds of Palmyra and Springfield plantations. Van Martin recalled what he remembered as a boy horseback riding over the lands of Montevideo plantation.

Ed Loring, whose dissertation in 1976 was on Charles Colcock Jones, was a frequent conversation partner as I labored over nine years on the work of this book. Walter Brueggemann, Dan Carter, and Joe Harvard read substantial parts of the narrative and gave me their welcomed judgments. Marcia Riggs, as a womanist and ethicist, was of particular help as I attempted to understand the struggles of African-American women. She read a number of chapters and provided important bibliographic resources. Griselda Lartey spoke with me about older people as storytellers in her native Ghana. All who know Robert Manson Myers’s monu-
mental. The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War will immediately recognize my indebtedness to his astonishing scholarship. Peggy Hargis shared her research on the freed people of Liberty County and helped me identify the family names of former slaves.

The Griffith Foundation provided generous financial support for my many trips to Liberty County and assistance in the publication for which I am most grateful. Columbia Theological Seminary provided generous sabbatical leaves for my work on this project and much encouragement through Presidents Doug Oldenburg and Laura Mendenhall and Deans James Hudnut-Beumler and Cameron Murchison. Larisa Heimert, publisher, Yale University Press, has the remarkable gift of encouraging authors while easing anxieties. Dan Heaton, senior manuscript editor, dealt gracefully with my errors while delighting me with his humor.

Constant and sustaining encouragement came from my wife, Nancy, and our daughters, Legare and Elizabeth. They, even more than friends, listened to my relentless telling and retelling of parts of this narrative. Dwelling Place is gratefully dedicated to them.
Georgia
Based on Wm. G. Bonner’s Pocket Map of the State of Georgia (1848)
Early on a March morning in 1805, as the first hints of dawn touched the Sea Islands and the marshlands south of Savannah, Old Jupiter rose, went out of his cabin, and with a blast from his conch-shell horn announced a new day. The sound filled the early-morning silence of the slave quarters at Liberty Hall plantation and called out the men and women who lived there. Lizzy threw off her blanket and slipped her Osnaburg dress over her shift. Lifting her two-year-old son Lymus to her hip, she hurried toward the kitchen, an outbuilding behind the plantation house. Quickly she stirred into flame the banked coals in the fireplace and began the preparation of a simple breakfast for John Jones. Neither she, nor Jupiter, nor John Jones, nor anyone else on the plantation knew that this day was to bring a crisis for all whose lives were so closely intertwined at Liberty Hall.¹

Jones was up by the time Lizzy reached the kitchen. He too had heard the sound of Jupiter’s horn in the slave quarters, and he had slipped out of bed, leaving his young wife, Susannah, and their three-month-old son, Charles Cock, sleeping quietly. Jones dressed in his hunting clothes, moved down the hall past the rooms of his other children—daughters Betsy and Susan and son John—and descended the wide plantation stairs. Going into his study, he removed from a cabinet an expensive English-made gun. It had been his first, a gift when he was only twelve. “Old Mrs. Goldsmith,” his mother had written from Governor Houstoun’s home in Savannah, “has made you a present of a handsome silver mounted Gun, which she begs you’ll keep for her sake.”² Over the years he had used it to hunt the ducks that flew into rice fields at dawn and, loading it with buckshot, to hunt the deer that lived in the woods and swamps that surrounded his plantation home.

Making his way toward the kitchen, Jones could see the slave settlement and fires glowing through the mist of the low-country morning. Sixty-two men,
women, and children lived in the cabins that lined both sides of a sandy ribbon of a road. Those who were preparing to go to the fields stood outside around fires warming themselves. Here in the open, in communal yards, they spent most of their time when they were not working or sleeping. In earlier years most low-country slaves had lived in dormitories or mud-walled huts, but gradually rude cabins clustered in quarters or settlements such as those at Liberty Hall had become the norm. They provided some privacy and the possibility for the development of some family life, but they were smoky and dark, had little or no furniture, and were poor places to visit and talk. Except when it was raining or unusually cold, the better place to gather in the mornings and evenings was outside around the fires.³

For years Jupiter had been the driver on the Jones plantation, and as he stood by the fire warming his old bones, he knew he was the boss, the master’s right-hand man. When John Jones had been away in the 1790s tending to business in the state legislature, his letters to his first wife, Elizabeth, had been full of instructions to his driver: “Jupiter, my dear wife, will be obliged to give the Negroes some corn before Saturday.” “Tell Jupiter I expect to see great matters done, as I have left everything to himself.” Elizabeth had replied: “Jupiter told me he had finished thrashing that stack of rice, but could not tell me how much it would turn out.” And John had written: “Do, my dear, speed Old Jupiter on, and tell him if he wishes to drive for me he must task away and let me see a heap of work done when I return, or I never will trust him again.”⁴

Over the following years Jupiter had kept the trust of his master and also of the men and women he lived among in the settlement. His position as driver had required a kind of tightrope performance—he had to convince his master that the work of the plantation was proceeding smoothly and efficiently, and he had to demonstrate to the other slaves on the plantation that he was a buffer between them and the master. He used many strategies to walk this narrow line. No strategy, however, was more important than his cultivation within Jones of a sense of dependence. For Jones knew that without a skilled driver, Liberty Hall would be both unprofitable and also difficult to manage.⁵

No one knew the settlement better than Jupiter. Born around 1740, he had come to the old Jones place, nearby Rice Hope plantation, as a young man, and there he had learned not only the skills of survival in the Georgia low country but also the ways of organizing and managing the work of a rice and Sea Island cotton plantation. With him by the fireside was his wife, Silvey, blind and feeble, who had made her way out of their cabin. They had been together many years and had with them in the settlement their sons Jupiter and Hamlet, their daughter Hannah, and their grandsons Little Jupiter, Augustus, and Prince. A few years
earlier, before Silvey was blind, John Jones had rented her to his cousin to work in a neighboring plantation kitchen. Jupiter had used all his skills to get her back to Liberty Hall, and finally Jones had consented. “Make Old Jupiter go to Mr. Dowses and bring old Silvey home and set her to work,” Jones had written Elizabeth Jones. Later Jones had sent a message to Jupiter: “Tell him that as he has now got his wife I shall expect he will do his best for me.”

As Jupiter looked at the others gathered around the fires, he saw many faces that he had known all his life. Old Monday and Sunbury were here, as were March, April, and May, July and September, November and December. They had all been slaves of the first John Jones and of his widow, Mary, and their names reflected practices from an African homeland. Lizzy, who had hurried off to the kitchen, had come to Liberty Hall in 1801 with her mistress Susannah. With her brother Cassius and sister Willoughby, Lizzy had belonged to Susannah only a year when their mistress married John Jones and they had all moved to Liberty Hall. Susannah’s brother, John Girardeau, had willed them to his sister on his deathbed in 1800—with Dick, Paul, Sina, Sary, and little Rosetta, together with land and seven cows and calves.

Jupiter could see even more recent arrivals as he looked at others warming themselves before the fires, eating sweet potatoes cooked in fireplace ashes, or some hominy prepared the night before, or johnnycakes cooked on a long clean board before the morning fires. Abram, Ben, and Jim had come three seasons earlier when Jones had bought them from Captain Forester. Flora, Ishmael, and David had come the next season from Mrs. West’s place. But Lucy, July, and Sanco, bought the same year, had already been sold off the plantation and had been little more than temporary laborers for a season and pawns to be moved around in the business of buying and selling slaves.

Of all those in the settlement, however, none were more distinctive than Fanny and her son Marcus and her handsome young daughter Elvira. Only a few seasons earlier, they had been living in Africa. Captured and brought to the coast of their native continent, they had endured the terrors of the passage to Savannah and its slave market. Carried to Liberty Hall by Jones, they were beginning the long process of learning the ways of a slave community that had for generations been creating out of bitter toils a distinct African-American culture known as Gullah. Already Marcus and Elvira were learning the Gullah dialect of the low country and its Sea Islands. In the evenings around the fires they could talk of African ways and memories, and, like so many before them, add their part to the folkways and culture of the low country. Fanny, however, was difficult to understand. She spoke one of the languages of Africa, lacked the linguistic agility of the young, and was learning only slowly a kind of Pidgin English. She did not know it
yet, but for the next half-century she would bear as one of the burdens of slavery a kind of isolation as she struggled to listen to and speak a foreign language.⁹

Jupiter began to assign tasks. Late March was the time to begin planting provision crops of corn and peas and, as time allowed, for tilling gardens of potatoes and arrowroot, turnips and onions. Later would come the onerous work of rice and cotton fields, but for now each full hand, whether man or woman, received the familiar task of working a quarter of an acre of provisions, while half-hands and quarter-hands were given proportionally less. As Jupiter assigned these tasks, naming the fields and the sections to be worked, he was performing a central task of a driver that had been slowly evolving in the rice-growing region of South Carolina and Georgia. Already by 1805 several generations of slave drivers had played a key role in the struggle between low-country masters and slaves to name the negotiated boundaries of a task. Masters had used the weapons of the powerful—an organized military, the threats of whip, auction block, and gallows, the claims of superiority, and the styles of speech and dress that intimidate. All these they had used to push out the boundaries of a task, to demand as much work from slaves as could be squeezed out of them. Jupiter and other drivers and field hands had used the weapons of the weak—foot-dragging and playing dumb, gossip that threatened the reputations of owners, and secret scorn for the pretensions of masters; and when the work was heavy and needed to get done, some had run away. All these weapons they had used to limit the boundaries of a task and to reduce the work required of a slave.¹⁰

The quarter-acre task that Jupiter assigned to full hands on this March morning in 1805 was the outcome of this struggle between low-country masters and slaves. John Jones still liked to think that he possessed some discretionary power, that if he wished he could walk down through the morning mists into the settlement and demand a third of an acre for a task. But for Jupiter and those who stood with him, the quarter-acre task had become a right to be guarded and claimed. Indeed, low-country slaves had extended the task beyond the original rice fields to the cultivation of Sea Island cotton and provisions and to other activities. For full hands, when pounding rice, the daily task was seven mortars. When laying fencing, it was one hundred 12-foot poles. And for a pair of sawyers, the weekly task had finally been settled at 600 feet of pine or 780 feet of cypress.¹¹

The landscape of Liberty Hall, like that of other low-country plantations, had encouraged this task system that Jupiter managed. On large areas of the plantation the dark waters of swamps quietly and slowly swirled through forests of giant cypress and black gum and thickets of sweet bay and palmetto. These dark waters provided in cleared areas the means for rice production through an elaborate system of dams, gates, and canals. On higher ground, where the hardwoods and pine had been cut and burned, and where Jupiter and his crews had grubbed
out the stumps, Sea Island cotton grew. The task system (unlike the spreading
gang system of up-country cotton plantations, with its largely sunup-to-sundown
hours) meant that once a task was completed, a slave had the remaining hours
of the day for working a garden or raising a pig, for fishing in the river or hunting
in the swamp.

Already by 1805 the slaves of Liberty County and the surrounding low country
had taken advantage of “after task” time to develop a remarkable if limited in-
formal economy of buying and selling. The pigs and chickens, the marsh ponies
and horses, the wagons and cows that low-country slaves owned—they were all
the result of this task system. The Gullah culture of Jupiter and Lizzy, of Ish-
mael and David, of Marcus and Elvira, and of all the other descendants from
the nations and tribes of Africa who gathered around low-country fires, was built
upon this hard-won system and its informal economy.12

While Jupiter was assigning tasks for the day, his son Hamlet was at the stable
saddling a handsome English horse. John Jones fancied himself a kind of low-
country Cavalier, a gentleman after the English fashion. He was, his grandson
later wrote, “Very fond of everything English, importing his horses, hounds, gun,
watch, dueling pistols, wines, etc.” His English hunting horse was a roan, an ani-
mal of large size and spirit that cost as much as a healthy young slave. Jones
thought just such a horse was needed for a man of his ancestry and status.13

His father, Major John Jones of Liberty County, had been a young South Caro-
lina aristocrat when he came to Georgia to make his fortune. He had an indigo
plantation on one of the Sea Islands, and with an expanding slave force he had
seen nearby Rice Hope become a prosperous plantation. This first John Jones had
been in business with his uncle, Miles Brewton of Charleston, one of the wealthi-
est men in all the British North American colonies. With a Brewton cousin, the
first John Jones had owned warehouses and a wharf in Sunbury, the little port
for the growing colony south of Savannah. And there had been other Carolina
blueblood relatives: Pinckneys and Hugers, Legares and Swintons, Colcocks and
Hutsons. To add to his distinction, Major Jones had become a hero of the Revolu-
tion. In the battle for Savannah in 1779, when Patriot forces were trying to retake
the city from the British, he had led a charge against the Spring Hill battery, and
there, wrote a historian of the state, “in the fiercest and most desperate part of
the contest, he was struck by a cannon-ball in the breast, and instantly killed.”14

Hamlet brought the roan to the plantation house. Jones mounted, took his
silver-mounted gun, and rode down the plantation avenue that led to the gate
and the sandy road that cut through Liberty County on its way from Savan-
nah down the coast to Darien. At the gate he met his two hunting companions,
Colonel Daniel Stewart and James Smith. Stewart, famous for his exploits during
the Revolution and the Indian wars that had raged of late in central and south Georgia, was the brother of Jones’s first wife, Elizabeth. Smith was a wealthy neighbor whose plantation had been raided only a few years earlier by the Creeks whom Stewart and his cavalry had chased south to the marshes of the Altamaha River. The three men were friends and had often hunted together in the surrounding woods and swamps.\textsuperscript{15}

If Jones thought himself a kind of Cavalier figure, with his love for English ways and English goods, his two friends were part of a Puritan tradition that had found its way to the Georgia coast and established itself deep in Liberty County soil. Their ancestors had left Dorchester, England, in 1630 for Massachusetts, settling there for five years before moving on to Connecticut, where they had remained for sixty years. In 1695 a colony had left for South Carolina. There beneath great oaks and beside the black waters of the Ashley River, they had laid out their village and built their meetinghouse. As with most good Puritans, they had prospered—in spite of a sickly climate—so that within two generations there had been a need for new land. Commissioners had been sent to Georgia and, after some negotiations, a grant of more than thirty-one thousand acres had been secured. In this way a colony of 350 whites accompanied by their 1,500 slaves had begun in 1752 a southward trek to what would become Liberty County.\textsuperscript{16}

These Puritans were the ancestors not only of Jones’s hunting companions Stewart and Smith but also of most of the white planting families of the county. They had found the Georgia coast a good place to settle and at last to put down deep roots. With adequate slave labor the rich soils had offered ample opportunity for the cultivation of rice and Sea Island cotton. Yet as God-fearing Calvinists, they had been aware of the seductions of such a wilderness, and they had immediately set about establishing an organized community. They had declared that they had a “greater regard to a compact Settlement and Religious Society than future temporal advantages.” “We are sensible,” they had written in their Articles of Incorporation, “to the advantages of good order and social agreement, among any people, both for their Civil and Religious Benefit.” At the time of the Revolution the patriotism of these Georgia Puritans had been so ardent that after the war their county had been renamed Liberty.\textsuperscript{17}

At the center of this Puritan community stood the church. Almost as soon as they had arrived in Georgia, the settlers had built a meetinghouse in the most central location—halfway between Savannah and Darien. They named it Midway Congregational Church, although it was Presbyterian in everything but name. (All but two of their ministers were to be Presbyterians, and commissioners were sent to Presbyterian courts.) In 1792 a permanent church building had been erected. A handsome meetinghouse with cypress siding, it reflected in its elegant simplicity an ethic that would produce in this rural community a re-
markable record of governors and senators, of clergymen and professors, doctors and scientists, judges and soldiers.\textsuperscript{18}

The three friends began their hunt. Trails were followed that had brought results on earlier occasions. A buck had been killed between Smith’s plantation and Rice Hope. Jones and Stewart had killed two large bucks down toward the North Newport River on the William Peacock place. With several other companions they had jumped and killed a doe and two small bucks nearby. Jones had noted in his daybook that with “two Darkies” to beat the brush and flush the deer, a small buck and doe had been killed as they hunted the deep woods on Colonel Stewart’s Cedar Hill plantation. They had no hesitation to kill a doe and thought no more about shooting a fawn than they did about having a lamb slaughtered for a stew. On one occasion, two years earlier, Jones, while hunting alone, had killed one fawn and had captured another and brought it back to Liberty Hall as a pet. He had written it all down in his daybook: the dates of the hunts, his hunting companions, and the places they had found and killed their quarry.\textsuperscript{19}

Hunting on horseback in these southern woods and swamps gave them several advantages. They could see over low brush, and the deer were not frightened by the sound of the horses moving through the woods. And when a deer was jumped, the hunters could give chase, which was part of the thrill of the sport. At some point on this March morning, they jumped a deer, and Jones on his roan raced after the fleeting animal. The horse hit a hole or perhaps an obstruction it could not leap, and Jones was thrown violently from his saddle. Carried back to Liberty Hall by his companions, he lay in critical condition with internal injuries. A doctor who was summoned immediately bled him to reduce his racing pulse. Later, as Jones grew worse, mustard plaster was applied to his chest to raise a blister and to revive his vital signs. These familiar medical practices were of no help, and on 28 March, John Jones died.\textsuperscript{20}

Joseph Jones, John’s younger brother, who had been by his dying bedside, summoned Jacob and Sandy, the slave carpenters at Liberty Hall, and instructed them to build a casket. Using cypress cut from the nearby swamp, they completed the long, narrow box. Friends padded it with cotton and lined it with cloth, while grieving family members dressed the battered body and prepared it for its silent home.\textsuperscript{21}

After a night’s wake, the coffin was placed in a Jersey wagon for its slow ride to the church. Family and friends rode in carriages, and Jupiter and Lizzy and all those from the settlement walked behind. The road they all traveled was sandy and straight as it headed north. William Bartram, the naturalist, had traveled this stretch of road earlier and had described it as “straight, spacious, and kept in excellent repair by the industrious inhabitants.” Large “fruitful rice plantations”
could be seen on each side of the road, and light groves had been left, said Bar-
tram, “by the virtuous inhabitants, to shade the road, and perfume the sultry
air.”

As the meetinghouse was approached, its white steeple could be seen in the
distance and its tolling bell heard. A congregation had gathered, and waiting
on the front steps for the cortege were the pastor, the Reverend Cyrus Gilders-
sleeve, as well as Dr. William McWhir, a family friend, renowned teacher, and
Irish Presbyterian preacher. The funeral service was long. Scripture was read, a
few hymns sung, and an extended funeral discourse given. While not particu-
larly pious, John Jones had had some religious experience during his life that
had convinced him and the congregation that he could be numbered among
the saints of Midway as a full communing member. A few years earlier, after re-
ceiving communion, he had written a prayer he had tucked away in his daybook:

O Lord, I humbly thank thee for giving me another opportunity of commemo-
rating my Dear Saviour’s dying Love, this 23rd of April. O my Heavenly Father
pardon for Christ’s sake, what thou saw amiss in me at thy Heavenly Table. O
my blessed God evermore feed me with this bread of life, and receive me into
that blessed place where there will be no more sorrow and all tears cease, and
everlasting Joy forever more.

After the service, the coffin was carried to the waiting cemetery. Already in
1805 the Midway graveyard had received the bodies of many who had succumbed
to the fevers and miasmas of a swampy and mosquito-infested land. White monu-
ments to the dead caught the sunlight beneath great oaks with thick, heavy
branches reaching down toward the ground. Among the most recently erected
monuments was one over the body of Gildersleeve’s wife, with an inscription
that read in part:

She, who in Jesus sleeps beneath this tomb,
Had Rachel’s face and Leah’s fruitful womb.
Abigail’s wisdom, Lydia’s faithful heart,
And Martha’s care, with Mary’s better part.

Close by, a grave had been opened toward the central part of the cemetery and
into it the casket was lowered. After a brief prayer, the grave was filled—perhaps
by Jupiter and a few of the men from Liberty Hall. Joseph Jones ordered a white
marble slab to mark the spot and had inscribed upon it

Sacred to the memory of John Jones Esquire
He was Born in Sunbury, Georgia November 25, 1772 and departed this life
the 28th March 1805 aged 32 years 4 months and 3 days.
He was a Dutiful son, an affectionate Husband, a Tender Parent, a fond Brother, a Sincere Friend, a Humane Master, a true Respecer of Religion, and a generous Benefactor to the Poor—

Yes we must follow soon, we’ll glad obey
When a few Suns have Roll’d their cares away
Tir’d with Vain life we’ll close the willing Eye
’Tis the great birthright of mankind to die
Blest be the bark that wafts us to that Shore
Where death’s divided Friends shall part no more.25

For Jupiter and Lizzy and those who lived in the settlement at Liberty Hall, the sorrows of “death’s divided Friends” were to come before the grave, as they soon faced a dividing of another sort at a slave sale.
Already before the long walk back from Midway to Liberty Hall, there had been, no doubt, talk in the settlement. Lizzy and the others knew only too well that when a master died, trouble was waiting. Lizzy’s previous experience was a familiar part of life in the low country for the black men and women who tilled the fields and harvested the crops and who did the cooking and washing at the plantation house. When her owner John Girardeau had died, not only were Lizzy, her brother Cassius, her sister Willoughby, and five others willed to Girardeau’s sister Susannah, but other slaves, together with land and livestock, were willed to other relatives. Tom, Fanny, Abram, Solomon, Jain, and Old Flora had gone to sister Elizabeth Maybank, while Girardeau’s niece and nephew had received Harry, Nancy, July, Tenah, Clara, Alphonso, and a young child of Nancy’s. Girardeau’s wife, Elizabeth, had been left, in addition to lands, all twenty-five of Girardeau’s “remaining negroes and stock of horses and cattle, sheep and hogs.” John Girardeau’s death had thus spelled the breakup of the settlement at his Cedar Grove plantation, and if he had been careful not to divide parents and children, he had arbitrarily divided a network of family and friends who had been living and working together.

In the days that followed John Jones’s death, the knowledge of such divisions—and even more bitter ones—must have been discussed around evening fires as they were poked and stirred in the settlement at Liberty Hall. What partings would follow their master’s death? Would families be divided? Would friends be sold away? Would those who had lived out their lives as John Jones’s slaves have to move from familiar places and answer to other, perhaps more difficult, masters? A new, more intense uncertainty about the future must have entered the world of the settlement and no doubt could be felt up and down the little road with its smoky cabins.
In spite of such uncertainties, life followed its familiar patterns at Liberty Hall. Days began with Old Jupiter blowing his conch-shell horn and assigning tasks, and days ended with supper and talk around evening fires. And every morning Lizzy left the settlement and went to the kitchen of the plantation house. There she prepared meals and, with the house servants Adam, Molly, and Brutus, she swept and cleaned and washed when there was time between her labors in the kitchen.3

Joseph Jones took over the management of Liberty Hall as the administrator of his brother’s estate. His own plantation, the Retreat, was not far away—it had been a part of Rice Hope—and Joseph was in the process of building it into one of the great plantations of the Georgia coast. If his brother John had thought of himself as something of an English gentleman, a southern Cavalier with expensive tastes for imported goods, Joseph had no such illusions. To be sure, he knew himself to be a gentleman, even an aristocrat, but he was all business. His grandson, decades later, remembered him as “a gentleman of large wealth, and a most successful planter. Just, honorable, charitable to the widow and orphan, he was a man of imperious will, of great personal courage, quick in quarrel, impatient of restraint, intolerant of opposition, and of mark in the community.” Born a few months after his father had been struck down by the British cannonball to his chest, Joseph had had his own share of sorrows. The year before his brother died, Joseph had lost his wife, Mary Maybank, and had buried her beside three of their four children: Mary Eliza had lived eleven months, Susanna Maria had lived fourteen months, and Martha Eliza had succumbed to the miasmas of the low country after only eleven months. These little ones and their mother lay in the family cemetery that could be seen from his bedroom window at the Retreat. Such great losses had left him with a tender heart toward the “widow and orphan” and for his own surviving child, Joseph, but his was a tenderness set within the austere code of a patriarch. He expected obedience and discipline even as he offered protection and guardianship to Susannah Jones and her fatherless children.4

Joseph hired an overseer for Liberty Hall, a Mr. Warnock, a small farmer from the piney woods section of the county, where the soil was poor and the harvests were small. Warnock visited the plantation every few days, and for the first time in his life Jupiter had to work with a stranger, with someone other than a member of the Jones family. Warnock would review with him the assignment of tasks and the schedule of plantation work, and when someone in the settlement was sick, he would prescribe the treatment—concoctions of various sorts from barks and roots gathered in the woods and swamps and from powders and pills purchased in Savannah. But Joseph Jones was not a planter who would leave an overseer completely to his own judgments and ways—especially an overseer from the
piney woods. So on a regular basis Joseph visited Liberty Hall, keeping careful notes in a neat hand of all the expenses, and turning his great energy toward the management of his brother’s estate. Yet in spite of the managerial skill of Joseph, the work of Warnock and Jupiter, and the labors of those in the settlement, all was not well at Liberty Hall. By the winter of 1807, Jupiter and Lizzy and the others who lived in the settlement knew that trouble was brewing. The plantation had not yet recovered from a great hurricane that had come sweeping up from the Caribbean in August 1804. A deadly storm, it had sent a wall of water with a tidal surge over a nearby plantation on Moss Island. The Ashmores, friends of the Joneses, had lost three children, one swept from Mrs. Ashmore’s arms, and only the parents and one slave had been washed ashore alive on the banks of the South Newport River. Liberty Hall had not been spared as the storm lashed inland, ruining the rice and the cotton and destroying most of the year’s labor. Such destruction had meant that provisions were scarce throughout 1805 and even into 1806 and 1807. Joseph Jones had to order expensive supplies—including wagonloads of corn—to be sent to the people in the settlement. In addition, plantation houses and buildings had to be repaired, and the summer home in Sunbury on the coast had to be largely rebuilt by the plantation carpenter Jacob and his apprentice Sandy. All of these expenses, together with the loss of the crops and income in 1805, had put great strains on the estate and on the plantation’s ability to sustain itself. Those who ate their suppers in the settlement knew that times were difficult, for they could hear the wagons rumbling down the plantation avenue to unload at the corn house, and the provisions available for their own cook pots were limited. But what was not clearly known in the settlement was the extent of John Jones’s indebtedness. While they had been laboring in the fields, he had been speculating in land and slaves.

As the son of a Revolutionary War hero, John Jones had served in the state legislature and then had followed his friend and brother-in-law Colonel Daniel Stewart in the more lucrative office of county sheriff. Both offices had provided him with opportunities to learn a business that was a passion for many Georgians—the buying and selling of land and slaves. A young Liberty County woman later wrote of planters in the county, “Here generally speaking, it really appears as if to ‘make cotton to buy Negroes, and buy Negroes to make cotton’ is the dearest wish of their hearts, the sole employment of their noblest faculties. But this is human nature!”

Jones had been elected to the legislature in 1796 as a part of a reform effort in response to the great Yazoo fraud that had involved millions of acres of land in the central and western part of the state. What he had seen in the legislature
was what he knew from Liberty County: that fortunes could be made from the buying and selling of land. When he was elected sheriff in 1798, his work had been not so much to apprehend criminals as to oversee the auction of property for back taxes, for the settlement of debts, or for the division of estates. In Liberty County, such property included slaves as well as real estate. The Savannah papers carried his advertisements for the auctions. Typical was one from July 1798:

**SHERIFF’S SALES**

*On the first Tuesday in August next will be sold, at Riceboro, between the hours of X and III o’clock, by public outcry,*

The following **PROPERTY, viz.**

All that valuable and well known Rice Plantation, or Tract of Land, in the county of Liberty, in three separate tracts. . . .

600 Acres, in the said county of Liberty, in two surveys, lying on Goshen swamp. . . .

That handsome Situation on Colonel’s Island where John Mitchel, Sen., Esq. now resides. . . .

Also the following Negroes, viz. Sambo, Saul, Wally, Pegg, Rose, and Jacob; the fellow Jacob is a carpenter, and has been run away upwards of two years, is still out, and will be sold as he runs. . . .

Two Negroes, viz. Nelly, a young wench, and Prince, a small boy, seized and taken under and by virtue of an execution as the property of the Estate of William Bacon.

John Jones, S.L.C.

And so the ads had run, three or four times a year with different real estate and different slaves all listed over the name of John Jones as sheriff of Liberty County.

In the midst of his work as sheriff and his managing of Liberty Hall, Jones had plunged into his own buying and selling of real estate and slaves. During the decade before his death, he had bought all over Liberty County small tracts of several hundred acres and large tracts of several thousands. Some land had been secured from the state through claims of headrights. Other land had been purchased directly from owners. Sometimes, when a parcel was being auctioned at a sheriff’s sale, Jones had had a friend purchase it, and then he would buy it from the friend. And he sold land: three large tracts in 1799 to Charles Ash for $2,500, and in 1803 a nineteen hundred–acre plantation to James Heath for $2,800.

Jones had not been so vigorous in his buying and selling of slaves. To be sure, he had bought Abram, Ben, and Jim from Captain Forester; and Lucy, July, and Sanco had been bought and sold within one year; and Fanny and her children Elvira and Marcus had been purchased in the slave market in Savannah. But the
settlement at Liberty Hall had been fairly stable, with most of those who lived there going back, like Jupiter, to slave purchases Jones’s father had made before the Revolution.

But the stability of the slave community at Liberty Hall had become increasingly vulnerable. To maintain his cavalier ways and to finance his speculations, Jones had borrowed money from other planters and from merchants in Sunbury and Savannah. Security was demanded, and Jones had begun to mortgage, in addition to his lands, those who lived in the settlement. As pressures increased, he had mortgaged not only those men and women he had bought but also those whom he had inherited from his father and mother: Sunbury, October, November, December, May, and April had been mortgaged. Jacob and Sandy, the valuable plantation carpenters, had been mortgaged. Even Old Jupiter and his son Hamlet had been mortgaged. Jones had paid back many of the debts, and the mortgages had been canceled, but it had all been a juggling act that collapsed when he was no longer there to keep all the buying, selling, and borrowing in the air.

By the spring of 1808, Joseph Jones’s business acumen was no longer able to keep the creditors away. As more debts became due and as taxes on the estate mounted, it became clear to him that some dramatic action was needed to satisfy the debts, to preserve Liberty Hall, and to provide some security for the young widow and her children. The answer to the crisis was in the settlement—the men, women, and children who daily heard Jupiter blow his conch-shell horn calling them out of their cabins to the work of the plantation.

The village of Riceboro, the county seat, was located on the main road between Savannah and Darien, several miles south of the Midway meetinghouse and just south of the bridge over the North Newport River. Another road left the village and ran west along the edge of the swamps and marshes that marked the headwaters of the North Newport and from there to the sand hills in the interior of the county. These roads provided ready access to the village and along them came wagons and carts, buggies and carriages, and at night, not a few slaves. A wharf had been built on the river’s edge, and to it came a variety of ships that sailed the inland waters along the South Carolina and Georgia coast—schooners with their two masts rigged fore-and-aft; square-stern sloops with single sails; and an occasional brig with its square-sail rig—all of them weaving their way slowly up the river. They carried to the village the products of a wider world bought and sold in Savannah—crockery from England, coarse Osnaburg cloth from Germany, tobacco from Virginia, and rum from the West Indies. The ships took with them as they headed back downstream the products of the plantations: barrels
of rice, tightly packed bales of cotton, some timber, and when they were available, butter and eggs, smoked hams and cured beef. So the little boro, isolated as it was along the swampy waters of the North Newport, was nevertheless part of an interdependent transatlantic economy that was largely fueled by slaves like Lizzy and Old Jupiter.  

The Riceboro Inn accommodated travelers on the stagecoach and those who had business at the little courthouse. Several stores were also here. They sold hardware and cloth, seeds and medicines, lard and candles, and whatever the owners thought might be needed in a hurry on the surrounding plantations. Their products were generally more expensive than what was offered in Savannah, but they had the advantage of being close to their markets and ready when needed.

Of all the products the shopkeepers sold, none invited more attention than their barrels of rum. Like his neighbors, John Jones had bought rum here to give out in the settlement during seasons of hard labor and on special occasions such as Christmas and the Fourth of July. Rum had the advantage, it was believed by planters, of being both a reward for weary laborers and a tonic for their health. The problem was that rum was also an invitation to trouble, to laziness, to dissipated behavior, and, on occasion, to flight. What infuriated planters was the willingness of the village shopkeepers to sell rum directly to slaves.

The boro, as it was called by those who lived nearby, was like a magnet set in the midst of plantations, irresistibly drawing to it the inhabitants of scattered slave settlements. On Saturday afternoons, after tasks were completed, those slaves with passes from their owners could go to the boro to buy a little tobacco for their pipes, to sell a bushel of corn or some eggs, or to trade a shoat for a basket woven from palmetto fronds and sweet grass during evening hours. The boro was a place to visit, and except for church, it was the primary place in the county where slaves from different plantations could gather without arousing too much suspicion. But nighttime visits were another matter. Those who were bold could slip out of the settlements and make their way to the boro for some rum and illicit pleasures. Patrols of armed planters tried to stop them, but they were employed only sporadically, and planters frequently complained of their inefficiency. What was worse, the shopkeepers, travelers, and sailors all too often aided and abetted those who had stolen away—indeed, complained the planters, sometimes joined with them in drinking and carousing—thereby corrupting the slaves and undermining discipline by being too familiar with them.

As a trusted driver, Jupiter went to Riceboro regularly with a pass, sometimes to get the mail and often to buy something needed on the plantation. He was aware that the village was more than simply a place for slaves to sell their goods
on a Saturday afternoon or for some to visit under cover of darkness. He had seen the whipping post by the courthouse and heard the cries of those being punished by order of the court. Indeed, his master, John Jones, during his tenure as sheriff had been responsible for seeing that the orders of the court were carried out and that the jailer used the whip as instructed by the judges, so that many a slave bore the long, thick scars of the whipping post.17

Jupiter was also inescapably aware that Riceboro was a slave market. The little boro had no grand marketplace for such a business but simply two unremarkable spots that served as the places for the selling and buying of slaves. One was by the bridge, near the wharf, where traders could stand and offer the sons and daughters of Africa for purchase. The other was in front of the courthouse in the sandy yard shaded by live oaks and their long grieving wisps of Spanish moss. Here the sheriff would gather those to be auctioned, and so it was to this spot, under the oaks and before the courthouse, that Old Jupiter and the others from Liberty Hall were brought in April 1808.18

Early on the morning of 4 April, Jupiter gathered a few possessions he had packed, and with old Silvey by his side, went out of his cabin on his way to the boro. With them went their sons Jupiter and Hamlet; their daughter Hannah with her son Little Jupiter; Hamlet’s wife, Phillis, and her children Augustus and Prince. They were all part of the first group from the settlement to be sold in front of the courthouse. The sale was not scheduled until the next day, but they had to be there early in order to be inspected by prospective buyers. When they arrived in the boro, they were taken to the gaol, where they were to be kept for the night. Planters from throughout the county who were interested in purchasing “more Negroes to raise more cotton and rice” arrived as well. Some knew the Jones slaves already. Others inspected them carefully. Old Jupiter had to watch their inspection and listen to their questions. Were there signs on their backs or buttocks of whipings, indications that they were troublesome to owners? Were they healthy and strong? “Show me your teeth,” they were told. “Let’s see your feet and hands.” “What about your arms and legs?” “Do you have a hernia?” “Any bulge in your belly?” “Woman, are your children wormy?” “How old are you, boy?” “You know how to hoe in a rice field?” “You good at threshing?” “You know how to guide a plow?” “How old are you, Old Daddy?”19 Some such slave market questions, now swirling around the gray head of Jupiter, were part of the deep and bitter humiliation of slavery. What could he do to protect his family and those who had for so long been under his care? Jupiter who had spent his life seeing that the Jones plantations flourished, who had announced the beginning of each new day with his conch-shell horn, assigning tasks and seeing that they were done, who had been a buffer between master and slave, using his wit to
ease the tasks and the burden of the work, was now powerless to protect even his own children and grandchildren from the degradations and terrors of this sandy place before the courthouse. But the bitter experience into which he was now plunging deeply was the common sorrow of the Gullah people, from whose collective voice was to arise the low-country lament:

I got to weep at Zion’s Court House
I got to weep there fo’ myself
My dear mother can’t weep there fo’ me
I got to weep there fo’ myself.20

The bidding began the next day at ten in the morning. They were to be sold in lots. The first up were Toney, Betty, August, Jack, and Abby. Joseph Bacon, a neighboring planter, made the highest bid of $1,176 for the five of them. Next came Hannah—not the daughter of Jupiter and Silvey but another young Hannah—and her children Molly and Dick. This Hannah also came from one of the oldest of the Joneses’ slave families. She had been born at Rice Hope, her children at Liberty Hall. Captain P. H. Wilkins, with an offer of $380, was the highest bidder and left with mother and children for his plantation near Sunbury.21

Next came the largest lot, seventeen in all, and among them stood Old Jupiter and Old Silvey, their grandsons Augustus and Prince, the children’s mother, Phillis, but not the children’s father, Hamlet, or their Uncle Jupiter or Aunt Hannah. Colonel Joseph Law was a surprising early bidder and ended with the highest bid. His plantation was east of Riceboro, downriver from the village, and was not far from Liberty Hall. Next and last came a lot of eight that included the brothers Jupiter and Hamlet, their sister Hannah, her son Little Jupiter, and Sary, who had belonged to the first John Jones. Once again, Colonel Law was the high bidder. While he was a respectable member of the community of Liberty County planters, and a leader of the Midway congregation, no one had expected Colonel Law to be expanding his workforce with a purchase of twenty-five slaves. What Law knew, however, was that the real purchaser, hiding his identity, perhaps to keep the price from going up, was none other than Joseph Jones himself.22

During the following days, as others were brought from the settlement to be sold, Joseph bought openly, no longer using his friend as a front. Included among those purchased was Fanny from Africa and many who had long been owned by the Jones family. But at the end of the purchasing, he had an additional surprise: the twenty-five bought by Colonel Law were to be a gift for Susannah Jones and for the children of his deceased brother. A bill of sale was made over to his sister-in-law and the children. As the patriarch of the family, Joseph Jones was their protector, and these purchases of slaves seemed a wise and prudent way to secure
their future and to maintain the family status in the community. A new start could now be made at Liberty Hall, freed from the debts of John Jones and under the careful direction and vigorous management of the hardworking Joseph.\textsuperscript{23}

In this way, Old Jupiter and his family were returned with the others in their lots to the settlement at Liberty Hall. Lizzy greeted them, for she—together with all those owned personally by Susannah Jones—had not been subject to the debts of John Jones. Fanny’s children Marcus and the handsome young Elvira were there as well, for in 1804 John Jones had given them as a gift to his year-old daughter, Susan. But the settlement was almost half-empty. The cabins of those who had been sold away were reminders that a slave community had been divided and that those who remained were but a remnant of those who had lived there. This remnant—the men, women, and children who were reunited in the settlement in April 1808—did not know it at the time, but they were to form the core of a Gullah-speaking African-American community whose lives would be interwoven with the lives of John Jones’s children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren until a mighty army shook the land.\textsuperscript{24}