“Ties That I Have to Bind Me Here”: Amanda Beardsley Trulock in the Arkansas Delta, 1845-1866

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On Thursday, January 30, 1845, at about two o’clock in the afternoon, Amanda Beardsley Trulock landed near Pine Bluff, in Jefferson County, Arkansas. The next morning at ten, she laid to rest her infant daughter, Mary Eugenia, who had died on New Year’s Day aboard a steamboat on the Mississippi River. The cause of death was an inflammation of the bowels, and the corpse had been preserved in whiskey. The journey from the banks of the Chattahoochee River to the banks of the Arkansas River had also sickened but did not kill the rest of the Trulock household, which consisted of Amanda and her husband, James Hines Trulock, his sister Elizabeth Trulock, the children Victoria, Van Buren Nichols, and Burton Trulock, and forty slaves, including Tim, Ann, Israel, Silas, Jim, George, Ephraim, Mary, Vina, Jinny, Elbert, Jane, Reuben, Eliza, Caroline, Henry, and Orrin.

Over the next five years, the Trulock household endured what Amanda called “a thorough ordeal of climatising” to the malarial Arkansas Delta. In December 1849, Amanda was left a widow, the mistress of fifty slaves, and the administrator of a large, indebted estate. Amanda’s family in Bridgeport, Connecticut urged her to sell the slaves and plantation and return home with her five young children. Amanda refused: “It would be impossible for me to write you, so that you could have any idea of my feelings, as you know nothing about a Plantation, and slaves, even if you were to come here and stay for years, it would be impossible for you to have the same feeling I have or the same ties that I have to bind me here;
Amanda Beardsley Trulock. *Courtesy Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.*
it may seem strange to you, but this is my home, and it is to my interest to remain here for the present at least.”

Amanda remained on the Trulock plantation, downriver from Pine Bluff, until 1866. She managed to pay her husband’s debts within three years of his death and, for most of the decade before the Civil War, to send money to her father in Connecticut for investment. She could have done none of this without the help of Reuben Blackwell, a member of the Trulock slave community since at least 1837, when Amanda first joined James Hines Trulock at his plantation in Early County, Georgia. The importance she assigns Reuben in her letters suggests that their daily working relationship was one of the strongest ties binding her to Arkansas. Amanda had many reasons for remaining in spite of the constant threat of climate-induced illness. The tone of her letters sometimes suggests that she enjoyed directing her own economic affairs. Given that she prospered throughout the 1850s, material self-interest must also have contributed to her resolve to remain in Arkansas. But, if we trust Amanda’s own statements to her family in Connecticut, the main reason was her sense of duty and obligation to the Trulock slaves.

Amanda Trulock was a shrewd and forthright woman, and her steady stream of correspondence to her family in Bridgeport should be read as a reliable account of the life of one plantation mistress in the Arkansas Delta in the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s. Letters written between 1845 and 1858 allow us to form an idea of the ties that bound Amanda to the state, while her letters written between 1863 and 1866 suggest something of how

1Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Nichols Beardsley, March 1850, box 1, folder 3, Trulock Family Papers (MC1160), Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

2Amanda Beardsley Trulock, “Number of Servants this 12th of December, 1859,” box 1, folder 7, Trulock Family Collection (MC 1965), Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. Blackwell, born in Virginia, gave his full name to the federal census-taker in 1870. Because he referred to himself and was referred to simply as “Reuben” (or “Reubin”) throughout the Trulock papers, I refer to him as “Reuben” here. Manuscript census returns, Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, population schedules, Union County, AR. Amanda first mentions “Reubin” in a letter of January 6, 1840. There is no bill of sale for Reuben in the Trulock collection. For more information on the family unit of Reuben, Eliza, Orrin, Henry, and Caroline, see Sarah Brooke Malloy, “‘The Health of Our Family’: The Correspondence of Amanda Beardsley Trulock, 1837–1868” (M.A. thesis, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, 2005), 19-20.

those ties were broken. The survival of this account is the result of good stewardship and generosity. Some member of the Beardsley family in Bridgeport, most likely Amanda’s younger sister, Marcia, saved hundreds of letters from Amanda, beginning with her report of her first journey to Georgia in the fall of 1837, through her consideration of the best time to travel back to Bridgeport for good in the early summer of 1866. Along with letters from Amanda, the papers and letters of several other members of the Beardsley and Trulock families survived in a trunk discovered by Amanda’s granddaughter Clara Davis Hatheway in 1948. Clara’s grandson Burton Hatheway shared copies of a large portion of the contents of the trunk with Trulock cousins in Pine Bluff. James Leslie of Pine Bluff, in turn, shared copies of the copies with several university libraries in Arkansas. A separate, smaller collection of Trulock papers, which includes letters, land deeds, and bills of sale for slaves, was preserved in a strongbox belonging to the Trulock family of Pine Bluff and donated to Special Collections at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, in 2012.

By the time the Trulocks arrived, the Arkansas Delta was home to a rapidly expanding plantation economy, though still very much a part of the frontier. The Trulocks were not alone in their migration there. Jefferson County in 1830 had a slave population of 160 and a free white population of 606. By 1840, only four years after statehood, the population of the county had grown to 1010 slaves and 1551 free whites. By 1850, there were 2621 slaves, 3197 free whites, and 22,245 acres of improved farmland. That year, twenty-eight people in the county owned more than twenty slaves, including two women—Amanda Trulock and her neighbor Catherine Washington.

Six years earlier, James Hines Trulock had bought 555 51/100 acres at six dollars per acre from Col. Terence Farrelly. He settled his household

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4 Trulock wrote to her family steadily from 1837 to 1858, except when she was traveling to or visiting Connecticut. Amanda’s letters resumed on December 7, 1863. Her last letter from Arkansas is dated May 9, 1866.

5 The author viewed the documents now consolidated in the Trulock Family Collection when they were held in the strongbox or as part of the Trulock Family Letters and Papers, microfilm number 1258, Jefferson County Public Library, Pine Bluff, AR. Citations, however, are to the documents’ present location.


8 James Hines Trulock to Nichols Beardsley, August 24, 1844, box 1, folder 5, Trulock Family Papers. Col. Terence Farrelly was born in Ireland about 1795, grew up in Pennsylvania, and settled
in a rented frame house, about eight miles downriver from Pine Bluff. Amanda expected to remain there for about a year while her husband “opened land.” The exact location of the frame house is unknown. Amanda wrote of a view of the Arkansas River and remarked that her nearest neighbors were three-quarters of a mile away and that the house was a short distance from the place where Trulock had “commenced building his black ones houses.”

Amanda correctly anticipated that the unhealthful climate of the rich Arkansas bottomlands would be the greatest threat to the survival of the Trulock household, though she quickly embraced her new neighbors: “I fear from accounts that it is more sickly even than Georgia, for everyone tells us that we must expect a great deal of sickness the first year in particular, but I am very much pleased with those that I have got acquainted with, they are the kindest and most hospitable people I ever knew.” She continued: “[H]ere I am in Arkansaw, on the Arkansas river where we can see the Boats as they pass up and down the river. The river is much wider than the Chattahooch[ee] but it is a very crooked river. If we are not sick here I think that we shall be better pleased than in Georgia, for the society is much better and more thickly inhabited.” The Trulocks were immediately taken into the social life of their new neighborhood: “we have had a great deal of respect paid to us. The[re] has several been to see us that was never to this place before, we had in one day three Physicians and several others to dine with us. I am shure that is gettin along pretty well.”

Their plantation operation was slow to get off the ground, for the unhealthful environment affected black as well as white. “It is five weeks to day since we landed in Arkansa I am quite unable to tell you how I like the place, for our Black family have been quite sick and not able to do much . . . which has made us rather low spirrited,” Amanda wrote her father, Nichols Beardsley, in March 1845. The sickness had Amanda and James’ sister Elizabeth Trulock openly questioning the move—the fourth Amanda had endured since marrying in 1837: “I do not think that Mr. T is as well pleased as he thought he should be, although he does not say any thing, for we say as much, tell him that we cannot see what his object was near Arkansas Post in 1819. By the 1840s, he was a wealthy and well-connected landholder. See the biographical sketch in Walter Lee Brown, *A Life of Albert Pike* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 59-60.

9Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Nichols Beardsley, March [no date given] 1845, box 1, folder 2, Trulock Family Papers.
10Ibid.
11Ibid.
in selling out and sacrificing so much, to come to this sickly place. That Elizabeth and myself keep him strait I can assure you.”

While impressed by the hospitality of her neighbors, Amanda coolly appraised the frontier culture of her new surroundings. She described Pine Bluff (without yet having visited) as a place of “two taverns, 5 stores, 1 church, Court House, and I expect a Black Smith Shop, and a landing where the Steam Boats Stop.” She bemoaned the state of roads and education: “I am not altogether pleased in every respect, in the first place I do not like our situation as well as I might, and the[re] is not that attention paid to roads I should like; you have to travel mostly on horseback that I do not like at all, particularly when there is a family of children it is so unpleasant, and the[re] is not that attention paid to schools the[re] is in many places.” Amanda lamented that “[E]very one that is any body, as soon as their children are old enough send them off. Great many have kin in Kentucky and Tennessee, send their children the[re], and I have been sick all summer and my children have not learnt any thing but mischief.”

Amanda later complained that keeping company with the black children had affected her children’s speech, insisting “that [it] is a very great dis-advantag to children in a slave holdin Contry, but you very well know that we all have to take the bitter with the sweet.” Eventually taking the matter into their own hands, the Trulocks hired Ann Kirkwood, “a young lady a Bostonian,” in late 1846, to teach on their plantation.

The first summer in Arkansas brought not only sickness to black and white members of the Trulock household, but also a drought that left the Trulocks’ prospects for corn and cotton looking meager. Amanda asked her family in Connecticut not to mention anything about her coming up north in 1846, for fear that her husband would go further into debt by having all of the white members of the household make the trip: “you ought to know a little of Mr. T’s disposition, for if he gets any thing of that kind into his head he would go if he knew at the same time that it would be greatly against his interest.” With characteristic Yankee shrewdness,

12Ibid.
13Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Bronson Beardsley, May 20, 1845, box 1, folder 2, Trulock Family Papers.
14Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Polly Burton Beardsley, September 3, 1845, ibid.
15Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, May 21, 1846, ibid. [first quotation]; Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, November 23, 1846, ibid. [second quotation]. Amanda thought that a teacher could have been hired from the North for less than what Kirkwood was to be paid, but Kirkwood had been in Arkansas for two years and was already accustomed to the climate. A teacher fresh from the North might become extremely ill and be unable to teach at all. Kirkwood had “the chill” occasionally, but rarely found it necessary to “stop school.” Kirkwood remained with the Trulocks until at least March 1850, the date of Amanda’s last mention of her as their teacher. Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Nichols Beardsley, March 1850.
she explained: “I will tell you a little about our situation. Mr. T is owing at this time about 17 or 18 hundred dollars I think for this place, which is to be paid next January which he has left notes in his brothers hands more than enough to pay but it is most impossible to collect any money in these days.” Amanda estimated that her husband might also owe about $200 on items purchased since the household’s arrival in Arkansas. As for labor, Amanda wrote, “since we have left Georgia it appears as if the fates have been against us. [O]ur black ones have all been sick and nothing doing but a heavy expence on our hands.” Though she speculated that the doctor’s bills might not be too high, she noted that the household would have to buy all of its meat for the next year (about 5000 pounds, presumably mostly cured pork), and that the “black ones” would have to have clothes, hats, and shoes, at unknown cost, “besides the expence of the white family.” Moreover, if the barely established and drought-stricken Trulock plantation did not produce enough corn, then corn would have to be bought to feed the livestock. Amanda worried that the cotton crop would be about half of the size her husband originally anticipated and noted that no buildings on the plantation had been built except for “a few black ones houses (that is not a drop in the bucket.).”

Only later in the year did the Trulocks get around to establishing their own permanent residence. On November 12, 1845, Amanda wrote that “We are trying at this time to build us a dwelling house, laid the foundation to day. It is to be, what we call a hewed Log House, it will be very pleasant if we ever get it done.” The house was to have two large rooms, four smaller ones, a center passage, and three chimneys. Outbuildings including a kitchen, dairy, smokehouse, and storage room were on one side of the house with the garden on the other. The Trulocks had settled in the “hewed Log House” by the end of January 1846, and that house, with improvements, was where Amanda would live for the next twenty years. She would begin to refer to the plantation as Prairie Place in 1847.

By then, Amanda was determined to stick it out. When her father chastised James for subjecting his wife and children to the “sickley southern climate surrounded by a dense forest and every other abominable I dare not say what,” and urged him to sell out and resettle his white family in Bridgeport, James replied that he was willing to leave Amanda and the children in Bridgeport, but that she refused because “she thinks it will take

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16Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Polly Burton Beardsley, September 3, 1845.
17Amanda Beardsley Trulock to “One and All,” November 12, 1845, box 1, folder 2, Trulock Family Papers.
18Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Polly Burton Beardsley, January 28, 1846, ibid.
19Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Bronson Beardsley, June 14, 1847, ibid.
mony.” In her own reply, however, she offered both her responsibility to the slaves and consideration of long-term economic stability as primary reasons for remaining in Arkansas:

Father wishes to know what wealth is, in comparison to health in any climate. It is not wealth that I am aspiring after it is the happiness and prosperity of my family. As Mr. Trulock thought that it would be for the best to move to Arkansas I think that it is my duty to remain, at least, until our family has all gone through a thorough ordeal of climatising and Mr. T. has gotten a plantation open, and his building done, for you must recollect that it is no small thing, to have 40 souls intrusted in our charge, and that we must naturally have a great many trials to under-go.21

A few months later, Amanda acknowledged that her father seemed “anxious” for a visit, but maintained: “I do not think that it would be right, neither do I think that it would be treating our black family with justice, after bringing them here, to leave them, before they were climatised to take care of themselves, or to go to distraction for our own interest as if we had no regard for them at all.”22

“Our black family” was a term Amanda used to refer to the group of people that her husband, and then she, held in bondage; “our black ones,” “our blacks,” “our Negroes,” and “our servants,” were others. A few times she wrote of “slaves,” but never of “our slaves.” When Amanda had first arrived at James Hines Trulock’s plantation in Early County, Georgia, in October 1837, she declared: “I must say that I have a very different opinion with regard to the Negroes than I had when in B. Port for certainly they are the happiest people in the world, for they have no cares, and are not either aspiring after wealth nor fame.” Though we have no record of Amanda’s opinion “with regard to the Negroes” before her arrival in the South, we may surmise that, along with the rest of her family in Bridgeport, Amanda objected to the institution of slavery. Amanda’s initial understanding of the “thirty Negroes that are consined to our care, which have souls” was simplistic and probably shaped by things she heard from

20 Nichols Beardsley to James Hines Trulock, September 3, 1845, collection of Burton Hattheway, Fairfield, CT; James Hines Trulock to Nichols Beardsley, September 29, 1845, box 1, folder 5, Trulock Family Papers.
21 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Polly Burton Beardsley, September 29, 1845, box 1, folder 5, Trulock Family Papers. Once she began to prosper (after her husband’s death), she ceased to mention the “prosperity” of her family as a reason to stay.
22 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to “One and All,” November 12, 1845.
her husband and other white southerners. Close, daily contact with the people her husband owned caused Amanda to shed this simplistic first impression of their happiness. But she appears to have held on to her belief, stated in that first letter home from Georgia, that slaves had souls.

Amanda was well aware of the physical and emotional anguish the move to Arkansas had caused the Trulock slaves. In early 1846, she reported that they had resumed holding religious meetings as they had in Georgia, noting: “When we first came to the country they did not for some time. They were so dissatisfied that they lost all ambition for almost anything. But since we have got our place improved, it begins to look a little more like live, and they have resumed their former [habits] and the young ones begin to look more cheerfull.” By the summer of 1846, some of the slaves may have expressed interest in joining a local congregation in Arkansas, as James received a letter from a representative (probably the pastor) of Macedonia Church in Georgia, containing a “letter of dismission for several of your servants from Membership in Macedonia Church.” He wrote that he had withheld the letter to be certain that the slaves’ conduct was acceptable. That the transfer of church membership could be withheld as punishment suggests that membership in a local congregation was very important, at least to some of the Trulock slaves.

As devoted as she believed herself to be to her slaves’ interests, Amanda’s letters make clear the limits of any slaveholder’s benevolence. While the move to Arkansas and the consequent subjection of the Trulock slaves to the “thorough ordeal of climatising” does not constitute direct physical abuse, the ordeal’s manifestations—sickness, enfeeblement, and death—place it among the forms of “legitimized violence” of interest to contemporary scholars of plantation slavery. At least four of the Trulock slaves died between their arrival in Arkansas in 1845 and 1849—Ann, Jinny, Jinny’s infant, and Mary. James Hines Trulock’s bond to at least one of his slaves was strong enough that he ordered an autopsy and grieved openly. In April 1848, Mary, who had been “not very well but not strictly confined to her bed,” was “taken suddenly ill” at eight one morning and died before midnight. An autopsy by Doctors Brunson and Robinson (both neighbors)

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23Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Polly, Nichols, Marcia, and Bronson Beardsley, October 24, 1837, box 1, folder 1, Trulock Family Papers.
24Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, March 16, 1846, box 1, folder 2, ibid.
25Joel N. [Simy?] to James Hines Trulock, July 3, 1846, box 1, folder 2, Trulock Family Collection. Sadly, the enclosed letter was not preserved, so the names of the slaves who had belonged to Macedonia Church are not known.
26See, for example, Thavolia Glymph, Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.
revealed the cause of death to be “internal Hemorrhage.”

James had purchased Mary in December 1832, when she was thirteen. Amanda remarked to her brother, “Mr T felt her loss very much as she was one that he could put every dependance in.”

James, though still in debt for land, bought ten more slaves between 1845 and his own death in 1849. In February 1846, he purchased “a certain negro boy named Peter about twenty three years old” from Moses D. Echols for $500. Trulock’s cousin, Uriah Trulock, mentioned occasionally by Amanda as a member of her household, traveled to South Carolina and Virginia and returned to Arkansas with slaves for sale in 1847. It is unknown whether Uriah was a professional slave-trader or only procured them for his cousin. On March 2, 1847, in Chester District, South Carolina, Uriah Trulock paid Robert L. Miller $612 for “a negro boy named Charles eighteen years old.” Uriah sold Charles to James for $800 on June 14, 1847. On September 22, 1848, Uriah paid $2350 to James G. Taliaferro of King George County, Virginia, for Maria and her four children, Martha, Jim, Sam, and Nancy, and also Tom, Philip, and Carter. Uriah must have sold all eight of the Taliaferro slaves to James, and all must have survived, for a list of Trulock slaves made in May 1854 includes each of those names. How the slaves newly arrived from back east integrated into the existing Trulock slave community, and what family they might have left behind, is not remarked upon in any of the Trulock correspondence. Amanda noted that in order to pay Uriah, “Mr. T. drewed on his present crop of Cotton, so if he gets any thing for it I think that he will be able to make all ends meet, for he has a prospect of making as fine a Crop of Cotton as any man in the Country.”

In the meantime, Amanda carried on in another essential role of the plantation mistress—production of heirs. Amanda gave birth to Marshall Trulock on March 27, 1848. Though she “missed the milk fever,” James Hines Trulock wrote that they would have to “feed with spoon and suck-

27James Hines Trulock to Polly Burton Beardsley, April 3, 1848, box 1, folder 5, Trulock Family Papers.
28Bill of sale, William C. Lester to James Hines Trulock, December 24, 1832, box 1, folder 8, Trulock Family Collection.
29Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Brunson Beardsley, April 17, 1848, box 1, folder 2, Trulock Family Papers.
30Bill of sale, Moses D. Echols to James Hines Trulock, February [no date] 1846, box 1, folder 8, Trulock Family Collection.
31Bill of sale, Robert L. Miller to Uriah Trulock, March 2, 1847, ibid.
32Bill of sale, James G. Taliaferro to Uriah Trulock, September 22, 1848, ibid.
33Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, October 30, 1848, box 1, folder 2, Trulock Family Papers; slave inventory, 1854, box 1, folder 7, Trulock Family Collection.
ing bottle as usual.”34 Amanda followed the advice of Ann Kirkwood and fed the boy a mixture of cream, water, and loaf sugar. Marshall had gained no weight by the end of June, when Amanda turned him over for nursing to a slave woman who had just given birth.35 On August 16, 1849, Amanda gave birth to a fourth son, whom she named James Hines Trulock.36 She had given no hint of her pregnancy in her correspondence.

Shortly after her fourth son’s birth, Amanda would become head of the Trulock household. James suffered a “very severe attack of Inflammatory rheumatism,” followed by a severe headache and a thirty-four-hour period during which he was “insensible,” and his doctors bled him at the temple. He died on the morning of December 18, 1849.37

In the letter informing her parents of her husband’s death, Amanda wrote that she intended to carry out his wish to “have the farm carried on as usual.”38 In March 1850, after receiving a letter from her brother advising her to have her business settled as soon as possible, and come on [to Bridgeport] next summer,” Amanda wrote her father that “it would be almost impossible for me to come on next summer with my family, and in fact I do not think that the[re] is any thing that you could do that would have any influence, or change my mind in the least.” Amanda had “just sent and got my supplies for the year,” and had “a plenty of every thing around me.” She acknowledged that she and the children “may be more liable to be sick here than in the East,” but insisted, “under the present state of affairs, I could not think of leaving.” Amanda wrote that she did intend to bring her children to Bridgeport “for it was their father[’s] wish that they should be educated at the East.”39

34 James Hines Trulock to Polly Burton Beardsley, April 3, 1848. In his remark about Amanda’s having “missed the milk fever,” Trulock is probably referring to Amanda’s difficulties with breast feeding after earlier pregnancies. See Malloy, “Health of Our Family,” 45-46, 50, 64.

35 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Polly Burton Beardsley, June 30, 1848, box 1, folder 2, Trulock Family Papers. Amanda’s account of her difficulty with breastfeeding and her reliance upon wet nurses would make a fine contribution to any treatment of the subject. One recent study maintains that wet nursing “is a uniquely gendered kind of exploitation, and under slavery it represented the point at which the exploitation of enslaved women as workers and as reproducers literally intersected”; Emily West with R. J. Knight, “Mother’s Milk: Slavery, Wet-Nursing, and Black and White Women in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of Southern History* 83 (February 2017): 37.

36 Tombstone of James H. Trulock (August 16, 1849-November 12, 1907), Bellwood Cemetery, Pine Bluff, AR. The child was called Hines until he went to live in Bridgeport in 1857; thereafter, he was called James.

37 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Nichols Beardsley and Polly Beardsley, December 23, 1849, box 1, folder 2, Trulock Family Papers. No letters from Amanda dated between July 1849 and December 23, 1849, survive, and there is no mention in subsequent correspondence of the death of James’s sister, Elizabeth, during this period.

38 Ibid.

39 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Nichols Beardsley, March 1850.
Amanda rarely mentioned James in her correspondence after these letters of December 1849 and March 1850. In later letters, when defending her decision to stay in Arkansas, Amanda wrote of her duty to the slaves, rather than carrying out James’s wishes.

Historian Kirsten Wood observes that slaveholding widows “leaned particularly heavily on their extended kinship networks to cope with their expansive responsibilities.”\(^{40}\) Though her natal family resided in Connecticut, Amanda was no exception. Her father directed the investment of money that she began sending to Connecticut after she paid off her husband’s debts. Winter visits from her sister and some female cousins in the late 1850s provided Amanda with company. Bronson Burton Beardsley, a Congregational minister, came south in autumn 1850 to help Amanda with her business, to promote religion, particularly among the slaves, and in hopes that his wife, Louisa, who suffered from consumption, would benefit from the warmer climate. However, Louisa, terribly ill on the steamboat, died at the Trulock plantation on November 20, 1850.\(^{41}\)

In February 1851, Bronson offered a scorching indictment of the society he encountered in Arkansas. The ladies, he said, were “far preferable to the men,” though some were “very passionate & beat their servants in a very savage manner with ropes, whips, sticks of wood.” The women partook “considerably in the spirit of the men in regard to their opinions about fighting for honor.” Furthermore, “the almost universal licentiousness of the men with the black woman is looked upon by most of the white woman as a matter of course,” though the white women themselves were “generally free from licentiousness” and “particular about their daughters, not allowing them to be alone in the company of males.” He added, “the blk woman are worse than the blk men; probably on account of their intercourse with the white men, who of course are most to blame.”\(^{42}\) Bronson may have allowed antislavery commentary he had read or heard to shape what he “saw” in Arkansas. On the other hand, his account of Arkansas society could have been perfectly straightforward. His observations do align strikingly well with those of historian Thavolia Glymph, who writes that while slavery “made possible lives of privilege, comfort, and leisure for slaveholding women,” it also “made large demands of them—from


\(^{41}\)Bronson Burton Beardsley to Nichols, Polly, and Marcia Beardsley, November 21, 1850, collection of Burton Hatheway. The business of assuming management of her late husband’s plantation may have prevented Amanda from writing her family in Bridgeport, for there are no letters from Amanda dated between March 1850 and April 1852; Burton Hatheway, interview with author, December 26, 2004, Fairfield, CT.

\(^{42}\)Bronson Burton Beardsley to Nichols, Polly, and Marcia Beardsley, February 12, 1851, collection of Burton Hatheway.
managing households in which they were largely responsible for making inequality visible to the enslaved women with whom they shared intimacies and intimate quarters, to abiding the moral transgressions of their menfolk—that taxed their capacity to adhere in either demeanor or tongue to their society’s mandates to delicacy.\textsuperscript{43}

Amanda’s letters make clear that in widowhood her strongest support came not from kin but from one of the people she owned. Reuben had acted as the overseer for the Trulock plantation for years. His key role in the operation of the plantation becomes evident in Amanda’s letters as early as 1846. Marcia Beardsley had asked Amanda if Reuben was “as faithfull a servant as formaly.” Amanda replied, “He is, it sometimes appears to me that we could not be able to carry on a farm without him and in fine I thinks that he does better than most any white man that Mr T could hire which would cost him not less that 400$ board and all considered.”\textsuperscript{44} Reuben, then, was acting as the sole overseer no later than March 1846. In fact, Amanda never mentioned her husband’s hiring a white overseer in Arkansas, which may well mean that Reuben probably had been the sole overseer since the Trulocks’ arrival in the state, and might have even held the position back in Georgia.

Because the field hands under Reuben’s direction could leave no written accounts of their own, we can only guess as to their opinions of him. They might have preferred him to a white overseer, found him sympathetic, and trusted him as a leader of their community and representative of their interests to the master and mistress. Or they might have resented his status and his carrying out the master’s interests (primarily, increased production) at the expense of their own, such as their need for adequate rest and leisure. “Occupying a precarious position within the southern labor system,” historian William Van Deburg says of enslaved men such as Reuben, “black supervisory personnel were forced to maintain their own status by keeping the slaves working at a pace which would satisfy the master, but at the same time they were not allowed to forget that they too were considered chattels.”\textsuperscript{45} Reuben may well have found himself in just such a position. According to Walter Trulock, Amanda’s grandson, by the first years of the Civil War, Reuben was “so demanding of the other slaves that he would sometimes knock one on the head with a hoe because he was not working to suit him.” Nichols Trulock witnessed Reuben’s violence when he came back to Arkansas from Connecticut during the Civil

\textsuperscript{43}Glymph, \textit{Out of the House of Bondage}, 49.
\textsuperscript{44}Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, March 16, 1846.
War. According to Walter, “[a]fter one or two such occasions my father [Nichols] forbade him to administer any punishment.”

Following James’s death, Reuben took charge of cotton production on the place. After one cold and rainy spring, Amanda wrote that the “planters have been very much troubled (Reuben not excepted).” The designation might have been wry, or Amanda might have sincerely regarded her slave as the equal of other cotton producers. The crop of 1850-1851 was much larger than the crops James had reported in the late 1840s. The output of the plantation would have increased naturally from the 1840s, when the Trulocks and their slaves were busy clearing the land and fighting disease, to the 1850s. No longer moving about and disrupting household production, the Trulocks could finally enjoy the economic advantages brought by greater stability. Some of the plantation’s increased productivity, however, might well be attributable to an improvement in management. A report cited by historian Kelly Houston Jones indicates that Reuben was well aware of his own skill and considered his management to be the source of the Trulocks’ improved circumstances. An official of what would become the Freedmen’s Bureau met Reuben in 1864 and repeated Reuben’s account of the early 1850s: “In three years after old Master died, he [Reuben] had paid off $20,000 of debts of the estate, beside supporting the family.”

Amanda handled money more shrewdly than her husband had, while Reuben may have been a better farmer than his master. Family correspondence seems to support Reuben’s claims. By February 12, 1851, Amanda had shipped 145 bales of cotton to New Orleans and was getting thirteen cents per pound for it. The gross income from the bales would have been $7540. Bronson wrote that he had “in behalf of Amanda paid Mr Richardson $3350. which is for land and was the largest debt against the estate ___ paid him by a draft on order on the Merchants

47 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, March 30, 1853, box 1, folder 3, Trulock Family Papers.
48 In March 1847, James Hines Trulock reported to Nichols Beardsley, “I sold my little crop of cotton for some 1900 dollars at 10 ¾ but had to pay high for every thing I had to purchase which makes it about even.” James Hines Trulock to Nichols Beardsley, March 29, 1847, box 1, folder 5, Trulock Family Papers. $1900 at 10.75 cts/lb would mean that Trulock sold roughly 17,647 pounds of cotton, or 44 bales at 400lbs/bale. In April 1848, Trulock reported that he had shipped fifty bales of cotton to New Orleans but had quit ginning because he was behind on other aspects of farm production. James Hines Trulock to Nichols Beardsley, April 3, 1848, ibid. Trulock’s correspondence in 1849 does not mention the quantity of cotton sold.
49 W. G. Sargent to Col. John Eaton, Jr., July 1, 1864, Records of United States Army Continental Commands (Record Group 393), Part I, Geographical Divisions, Departments, and Military ( Reconstruction) Districts, file G-103, series “Letters Received, 1864-67” (entry 269), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC; Jones, “Peculiar Institution on the Periphery,” 208.
to whom the Cotton is shipped.” The lawyer, Bronson wrote, had “given another draft of $1250 to pay another debt.” 50 Two years later, in early March 1853, when Reuben finished gathering the crop, he had made 258 bales in all, and by late March, Amanda had sent a total of $4286.53 to her father for investment, indicating that the estate was entirely out of debt. 51 Further evidence of the plantation’s prosperity came in May 1854, when Amanda’s dower was set off; meaning that one-third of the estate of her late husband was designated as hers. She received $6732.35 from the net proceeds of cotton sales that year, sixteen slaves, one third of the land, and “every thing on the place.” 52 Amanda also had herself appointed guardian of her children. Because they were all minors, the entire plantation, in fact, remained under her legal control until the late 1860s, when Amanda, according to Walter Trulock, “took her share” of the estate in “liquid assets” and allowed her five children to “divide the land between them by lot.” 53

The combined efforts of Marcia Beardsley and Reuben have left us a very rare text: a letter written in the voice, at least in part, of an enslaved person in Arkansas. In April 1852, during Marcia’s stay in Arkansas, she wrote a letter to her brother, Bronson, on behalf of Reuben purporting to transcribe his remarks. Reuben said, “we have preaching on our place every other Sunday” and “all our people attend & appear to be interested; we still keep up our prayer meetings.” Reuben spoke of being in competition with “Mr. P[eighton] Atkins,” a neighbor, and of his concern about the spread of measles in the neighborhood: “I fear that we shall yet get them on our place; they are at Mr Greene Atkins, his fathers [Peyton’s], Mr Wadkins, and Mr, and I do not know at how many more places.” Peyton Atkins vexed Reuben: “Mr P. Atkins said to me Sunday (at the chapel) that if we get them, we had no business in the field for twelve days, and laughed, and said he guessed this would be a grassy crop.” Atkins also suggested that Reuben drove the other slaves at the Trulock plantation too hard. The neighbor, according to Reuben, “told before a dozen people, what time I blowed my horn in the morning and said that I was gaining two days in every week.” Reuben had stopped “our own people” from going to the religious classes that Peyton Atkins conducted, in order to avoid the measles. Reuben also noted that, while the Atkins did not allow their slaves to conduct religious meetings by themselves, they did allow them.

50 Bronson Burton Beardsley to Nichols, Polly, and Marcia Beardsley, February 12, 1851.
51 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, March 7, 1853, box 1, folder 3, Trulock Family Papers; Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, March 30, 1853.
52 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, May 1, 1854, ibid.
53 Trulock, “Family Memoir,” 32.
to play marbles on Sunday and “pass the day as they choose.”

It is hard to know how accurately the letter Marcia wrote for Reuben reflects his real concerns. Thavolia Glymph argues that while the interracial intimacies of the plantation household “fostered sentiment and personal attachment,” those relationships “of necessity canted toward falsehood.” But Reuben’s ambition for greater cotton and corn yields and for the success of the plantation generally is mentioned so often it seems unlikely that it was a mere act Reuben put on to fool the white woman who held him in bondage.

During the spring of 1853, for example, Amanda reported “we have had so much unpleasant weather that [Reuben] has been quite low spirited, and says that he is behind; the same old song over, and over.” His troubles persisted into April, for Amanda wrote to Bronson, “I think that Reuben gets more sensitive every year if possible, for he seemes to be in trouble a most all the time, about something, if it aint one thing it is an other.”

Nevertheless, cotton production at the Trulock plantation was great enough to support vertical expansion, as Amanda and Reuben decided to have their own gin built. “We have changed our minds with regard to the manner of building our Gin house,” Amanda wrote. Not given to the “royal we,” she seems to have been referring to herself and Reuben. “[I]nstead of horse power,” Amanda wrote, “we are a going to have it go by Steam.” Though a steam-powered gin would cost more initially, Amanda and Reuben reasoned, “we think it will be cheapest in the end,” for a steam-powered gin would gin faster and “we can gin our cotton then [o]n rainy day[s], and have all the hands a picking cotton in the pleasant weather.”

“Reuben said last night that he is a going to try to take things easy next year,” Amanda continued, adding, “I suppose he will as long as every thing goes right on the place. The most trying time with him is the spring of the year, particularly if he is not ahead of his neighbours.” While it seems most reasonable to take Amanda’s representations of Reuben at face value, it is possible that his anxieties about production masked other troubles, for surely it was not easy to live suspended between the plan-

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54Reuben [Blackwell] to Bronson Burton Beardsley, April 2, 1852, collection of Burton Hatheway, Fairfield, CT.
56Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, March 7, 1853.
57Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Bronson Burton Beardsley, April 14, 1853, box 1, folder 3, Trulock Family Papers.
58Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, December 15, 1853, ibid.
59Ibid.
Amanda’s account of the death of a slave on the Trulock plantation provides a glimpse into the religious life of the slave community, as well as her strong (and probably sincere) interest in the souls of the human beings she held in bondage. Ephraim died in February 1853, at the age of thirty-six or thirty-seven years old. He had been bought by James in 1832, when he was sixteen. Ephraim was “only confined to the house two days,” and “not thought dangerous until a few hours before his death.” The doctor concluded that the cause was probably “inflammation of the bowels.” In contrast to the detailed physical account Amanda gave of her husband’s death, she dwelt on the state of Ephraim’s soul and the effect of his death upon those who knew him. Reportedly, he spent his last hours in prayer and just before he died, “he requested that all should be called” to his deathbed. Ephraim “said that he hoped the Lord would have mercy on him, that he was willing to die, and that he hoped heaven would be his home, and just as the breath left his body he pointed upwards, and folded his arms on his breast and died without a struggle or a groan.” “Reuben,” according to Amanda, “says that he cannot help thinking, but that he is happy, and that he felt rejoiced when he breathed his last because he thought he was better off.” Amanda added that she intended to have a local preacher “preach a funeral discourse, hoping that it may be sanctified to all on the place, for certainly it is a loud call to us all, to prepare to meet thy God, for in such an hour as ye think not the son of man cometh.”

While she may have been concerned for the well-being of their souls, Amanda did not necessarily hold her slaves to all the strictures of Christian morality. A few lines written to Marcia just after Christmas 1855 indicate that Amanda did not expect slaves to go through the motions of marriage before attempting to have children. “You wished to know who was C. [Caroline’s] favored one, it was one of the workmen, I do not know however as any thing will ever come to light.” Caroline, daughter of Reuben and Eliza, was twenty-nine years old at the time. “She seems now, much better, and more cheerful than at one, time,” Amanda wrote, adding “there has been various kinds of medicines seen about, procured

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60 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Bronson Burton Beardsley, February 10, 1853, ibid.; bill of sale, William C. Lester to James Hines Trulock, December 24, 1832.
61 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Bronson Burton Beardsley, February 10, 1853.
62 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Bronson Burton Beardsley, April 14, 1853.
by him no doubt, perhaps it has had the desired affect, time however will decide the case.”\(^{63}\) If the desired effect was pregnancy, it was obtained. In November 1858, Amanda wrote that Caroline “is like myself accomplish-es but very little.” She added, “I fear that she is not agoing to be able to do much at present but attend to that little Mary of hers, which is certainly quite a pretty baby and as white as any child for anything I can see at present—quite to bad! Dont you think so?”\(^{64}\) The remark about the baby’s being white is the closest thing found in Amanda’s letters to an acknowledgedgment of the reality of sexual relations between free and enslaved men and women.\(^{65}\)

As late as 1857, Amanda did not anticipate the end of plantation slavery in general or of her own “peculiar situation.” The rumored offer she describes in a letter to Bronson suggests in another way that while she was profiting handsomely from the labor of her slaves, Amanda was bound to the plantation by more than economic self-interest. Moreover, her account of Reuben’s words and behavior also suggests that his concern for the plantation was, in turn, more than dissimulation:

I am very sorry that I am the cause of giving you so many painful reflections, but I expect I always shall be, if I spend my life, as now seems probable, on a plantation. You your self advised me years ago, when you were here, after seeing my peculiar situation, always to keep this people with me, and you even went so far as to say that you thought it would be wrong for me to part with them, and that you should never give your consent to it as long as you lived. Don’t be frightened now. Reuben came to me in great trouble, with the tears almost starting to his eyes, a few days since, telling me that some one or other is continually troubling him, by telling him that all his Mistress wants of the place is the money that is made on it, and as soon as she has made money enough, she would sell them all, and pocketing them, not having any farther use for them, and that now Mr. Trueheart had come with an offer from Mr. Shepperd of one hundred thousand dollars

\(^{63}\)Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, December 17, 1855, box 1 folder 3, Trulock Family Papers.

\(^{64}\)Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, November 16, 1858, ibid. W. G. Sargent also found the color of Caroline’s and her child’s skin worthy of remark: “Reuben has two Sons and one Daughter grown up, by some unaccountable freak of nature or practical miscegenation, the young lady is nearly white, while her child the paternity of which dates prior to the rebellion, is almost entirely so.” Sargent to Eaton, July 1, 1864.

\(^{65}\)That Amanda expected Caroline to “attend to that little Mary of hers” indicates that Caroline, as a favored house slave, would not have to leave her child in the care of other children, as field hands commonly had to do.
for the whole place, lands, Blacks, &c &c. He wanted me to write to Master Brunson and see what he thought about it for if he was to be sold he wanted to know it. Also that no one had ever offered so much before, and that he wanted to know what you thought of it before I went yonder in the summer. Thinking I suppose that you would try to influence me to accept the proposal, at the same time added that no one need ever pay their money for him for he should not ever do them any good, also said that he could not help letting it trouble him, and at times he felt a shrinking in his flesh. Although he did not think that Mistress would ever sell him, if she did that would be one time he would be deceived. There is no doubt but with that amount of money I could place myself in a situation where I would not have quite so many things to trouble and annoy me.66

Reuben’s course in the coming years might indicate, however, his devotion was more to his work and the land than to the Trulocks per se.

Because there are no known letters from Amanda from 1858 until the Union occupation of Pine Bluff in 1863, we have no record of Amanda’s immediate reactions to Arkansas’s secession and the Civil War.67 Whatever her thoughts on the durability of the institution of slavery, it is hard to imagine that the pragmatic Yankee, whose parents, children (four out of five), and siblings lived “at the north,” and who invested her earnings in the North, would have been enthusiastic about secession.68 The war certainly brought her hardship, while the passage of time, the end of slavery, and perhaps her accumulation of resources up north seem to have dissolved what she earlier called the “ties I have to bind me here.”

Conscription, flight from plundering troops, and, ultimately, emancipation scattered the society around Amanda’s household and neighbor-

66Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Bronson Beardsley, February 4, 1857, box 1, folder 3, Trulock Family Papers. It is unclear whether or not Amanda ever had a direct exchange with James Sheppard or his apparent agent, Mr. Trueheart, about the offer. Amanda saw both Sheppard and members of the Trueheart family socially later in 1857, but there is no further mention of the offer in her correspondence.

67As there was no major hindrance to the postal service between 1858 and 1860, the absence of letters from Amanda during those years is strange. Arkansas seceded from the Union on May 6, 1861; mail service was disrupted no later than that fall, for Victoria wrote during the autumn of 1863 of not having heard from her mother in two years. Mail service must have returned to Pine Bluff within weeks of the Federal occupation in September 1863, as Victoria replied to a letter from her mother on October 18, 1863. Victoria Beardsley Trulock to Amanda Beardsley Trulock, October 18, 1863, box 1, folder 4, Trulock Family Papers.

68Amanda mentioned that it had been “four years since I have seen all the dear ones” in November 1864. Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Victoria Beardsley Trulock and Nichols Trulock, November 13, 1864, ibid.
hood. An undated fragment of a letter from Amanda, perhaps from late September or early October 1863, indicates that her son Nichols Trulock was with her and wished to have his brother Burton home to help him, but feared “there is [too] great a risk for him to venture to come as there is not much doubt but what they will soon be conscripting all in this vicinity.” Amanda noted that she had paid $3000 Confederate “to get a substitute for N.” She added, “I do not suppose we have got three hundred dollars in Green backs.” Amanda had not left home since “some time last summer,” and had no way of traveling “as all of our Carriages bridles come up among the missing.”

Amanda reacted to raids by bushwhackers with calm and calculation, carefully documenting the goods they took from her. In December 1863, Amanda wrote to Victoria that a few nights before, someone had broken into the home and stolen two of her winter dresses, three pairs of Nichols’ pants, sheets, pillow cases, and blankets. A night or two after that, twenty-five or thirty men came to the plantation on horseback, dismounted, and raided the kitchen and the “servants houses,” stealing all of the forks and knives. “Unless things change for the better,” Amanda wrote, “N. does not think it will be best for me to remain here any longer than until next summer.”

Amanda also wrote of her neighbors’ circumstances. Mrs. Peyton Atkins, along with “a part of her servants,” remained on her place. George Atkins and all of his family had moved to Texas, and Greene Atkins had “mooved out in the hills.” Mrs. Garland Hardwick was in her house, but her sons, Garland and Epps, twice went to the hills, presumably to avoid conscription. Numerous other neighbors of Amanda and residents of Pine Bluff fled the city or the state, as there were “but very few families on their plantations from the Bluff to Napoleon.” Most of the abandoned plantations had been “confiscated,” and the federal troops had “the crops gathered for the benefit of the government.”

The Trulock slaves also left. Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, and Federal troops occupied Pine Bluff in September of that year. It is not clear when the first freedmen left Prairie Place. Reuben claimed, in the words of W. G. Sargent, to have been “the first slave owned by his Master, and the last to leave his mis-

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69 Amanda Beardsley Trulock, undated fragment, probably September 1863, ibid.
70 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Victoria Beardsley Trulock, December 7, 1863, ibid.
72 Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Victoria Beardsley, December 7, 1863. For more on federal administration of local plantations, see Kelly Houston Jones’s research note in this issue.
tress, this being in October last [1863].” But several evidently remained on the place. Amanda wrote in August 1864, “Not a very pleasant state of affairs I do not think to be cut off from hearing from any of my children—and then to have every mule and horse taken from me and every Nigger but America and her children.” In writing of her slaves being “taken,” Amanda seemed unwilling to acknowledge that they might have left of their own volition. But, in the same letter, she wrote, “C. P. and some others have gone on the Paine place where Henry [one of Reuben’s sons] is.” In September, she reported that she had heard that Henry was dead and that Reuben had “not got entirely well yet.” By late November, Reuben and “many others” were “still on the Roan place,” “O. E. and Big George” were at Little Rock, and “Elbert, E. P. and three boys went to Fort Smith.” The picket lines were tight at Pine Bluff, but “a few of the coloured gentry are permitted to go in occasionly.” America went to the “Roan place . . . to get some of Harry’s things and the little children all cried to come home with her, she brought Walter, and he is here and perfectly delighted to be back.” Amanda did not lose all her slaves to emancipation, however. On June 23, Confederates “took off some of the servants and all of their horses.” Confederate soldiers returned the next day and took Burton Trulock and “some more of the servants.”

Evidently, Burton quickly found himself in the Confederate Army. “I heard from one of your gentlemen acquaintance, that he was quite well, and that he was appointed one of Gen. [James] Fagans escort, so I suppose that his position will not be as laborious as a private soldier.” She added, “I have not ascertained yet where the Gen. [General’s] headquarters are, but I suppose some few miles below.” Amanda advised Nichols to stay in Bridgeport, where he had gone in June, unless he, too, wanted to be taken into the army. Burton went to Missouri with his company in Sep-

73Sargent to Eaton, July 1, 1864.
74Amanda Beardsley Trulock to “all the dear ones and N. in particular,” August 1, 1864, box 1, folder 4, Trulock Family Papers.
75Amanda Beardsley Trulock to “all the dear ones,” September 20, 1864, ibid. The Sargent report would suggest that Henry had been alive as recently as July 1864; Sargent to Eaton, July 1, 1864.
77Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Victoria Beardsley Trulock and Nichols Trulock, November 13, 1864.
78Amanda Beardsley Trulock, undated scrap, June 1864, box 1, folder 4, Trulock Family Papers.
79Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Victoria Beardsley Trulock and Nichols Trulock, July 10, 1864, ibid.
80Amanda Beardsley Trulock to “all the dear ones and N. in particular,” August 1, 1864.
By November 13, Amanda had heard that Burton’s unit was at Camden. Once free, Reuben carried on his managerial work—but not for Amanda. In July 1864, W. G. Sargent reported that he was “head man or boss-workman” on the “large plantation of Messrs. Patrick Benjamin & Co. opposite Pine Bluffs,” which was being operated, on government lease, on a free labor basis. But only seven months later, Reuben, Amanda wrote, was “cutting boat wood like an[y] other Nigger.” Whether Reuben’s status had slipped or this remark was more an expression of Amanda’s bitterness and bewilderment that Reuben had abandoned his elevated position at her plantation is unclear. While Reuben considered the fact that he was “the last to leave his mistress” important enough to report to Sargent in 1864, there is no evidence he ever attempted to return to her employ. In this letter, Amanda also noted an often overlooked aspect of emancipation—the high mortality among freedpeople. She wrote that she had heard that “eighteen of our servants died since they left this place, . . . that is more than have died in twenty years before, so you see they are freeing them very fast.”

Somehow, the plantation carried on without Reuben. Amanda wrote to Marshall or James Hines in March 1864 that Nichols was busy “trying to get the cotton gined and ready for market.” A letter of June 9, 1864, indicates that Amanda must have sold her crop, for she had just sent $15,000 to her father to “have divided equally among my children.” Exhausted, no doubt, by the war, however, Amanda lost interest in the active management of the plantation. In June 1865, Amanda wrote that she expected her sons Nichols and Burton to “manage the affairs of the Trulock place together.” Amanda thought of returning to Bridgeport, for “you must recollect that I am not quite as young as I was twenty years ago, then I never tired in doing for you all, now the scene has changed I expect you all to wait on me as I have on you.” Later that summer, she indicated her displeasure that Nichols and Victoria had been spending money freely

81Amanda Beardsley Trulock to “all the dear ones,” September 20, 1864.
82Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Victoria Beardsley Trulock and Nichols Trulock, November 13, 1864.
83Sargent to Eaton, July 1, 1864.
85Amanda Beardsley Trulock to “My dear son,” March 7, 1864, box 1, folder 4, Trulock Family Papers.
86Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Nichols Beardsley, June 9, 1864, ibid.
87Amanda Beardsley Trulock to “my dear children,” June 18, 1865, ibid.
in Bridgeport while Amanda and Burton suffered in Arkansas in order to keep the plantation.\textsuperscript{88}

By early the next year, she had decided to leave. In May 1866, Amanda wrote to Marcia, “I sometimes feel as though it would be an advantage to me if I could leave home, and home cares and have a little rest, then again I feel as though I was needed on the place. . . . but notwithstanding I had made up my mind to go to B Port this summer if a good opportunity presented itself.” Some people were traveling from Pine Bluff to Maine, and Amanda was willing to go with them as far as Bridgeport, though she had heard that an outbreak of cholera was expected in New York and wished to avoid it.\textsuperscript{89} Her brother replied that she stood no more chance of getting cholera in New York than anywhere else, and should come north immediately. Amanda went on to Bridgeport and lived there until her death in 1891.\textsuperscript{90}

Amanda’s last extant letter is dated January 18, 1868. At the time, all of Amanda’s children except Marshall were living in Jefferson County. Victoria, her husband, Guernsey Davis, and their daughter, Clara, lived in the house at Prairie Place. Victoria evidently sought a cook. Amanda remarked:

\begin{quote}
I fear you will not be able to get another servant as good as Elisa, but from the accounts we receive from all parts of the south, I should think the blacks were in a terrible condition, and before long would be glad to work, to get something to eat if nothing more, but then they are naturally so lazy I do not know if some of them would almost rather starve than to go to work and get a good living.\textsuperscript{91}
\end{quote}

This might seem an odd conclusion for a woman who had depended on the hard work of her slaves. Still, it seems fitting that Amanda’s final remark about “blacks” in the South contains a mixture of nostalgia and appreciation for an enslaved individual and derogation of the people as a whole, for Amanda’s whole time in the South was beset by ambivalence and contradiction. The black people Amanda knew she held dear and held by coercion. For almost thirty years, Amanda participated in an

\textsuperscript{88}Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Nichols Trulock and Victoria Beardsley Trulock, July 20, 1865, ibid.
\textsuperscript{89}Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, May 9, 1866, ibid.
\textsuperscript{90}Bronson Burton Beardsley to Amanda Beardsley Trulock, May 23, 1866, box 1, folder 2, Trulock Family Collection.
\textsuperscript{91}Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Victoria Beardsley Trulock Davis, January 18, 1868, box 1, folder 4, Trulock Family Papers.
institution, slavery, that her family and friends in Bridgeport believed to be wrong, though by the 1850s, they had conceded that she had a duty to her slaves. Only when she was no longer able to avail herself of slave labor did Amanda finally resettle in the North, something she had refused to do for over twenty years.

Eliza, the servant whose good work she invoked in that final letter, was probably dead by then. In 1864, W. G. Sargent said of Reuben, who was then fifty-three: “He was married but once—he will [not] subscribe to the rules of marrying at this stage of the game, as he says ‘pears like mighty foolish.’” Apparent foolishness of a second marriage aside, Reuben Blackwell took another wife, Harriet, and was living with her in Mount Holly Township in Union County, in south-central Arkansas, in 1870, when he was sixty years old. Harriet, from Georgia, was forty. Reuben and Harriet must have begun to have children together before they were freed (assuming Harriet had been a slave), or Harriet may have brought offspring into the marriage. Their children were Jane, age fourteen, Perrie, age twelve, Victoria, age six, another, younger Caroline, age five—and an eight-year-old named Amanda.92

92Manuscript census returns, Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, population schedules, Union County, AR.