

**THE NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES OF LOCATING  
PROFESSIONAL  
BASEBALL IN RICHMOND'S SHOCKHOE BOTTOM**

**By Sa'ad El-Amin, M.A., J.D., Incorporator**

**Society for Preservation of African-American History and Antiquities**

**May 29, 2009**

Recently, the Richmond *Times-Dispatch* sponsored a debate on the pros and cons of building a new minor-league baseball stadium in Shockoe Bottom. I was surprised and somewhat disappointed that few if any of the speakers, at least as reported by the *Times-Dispatch*, directly addressed the impact of this proposed project on the unique slave-era history of the Bottom. It appears that no one at the debate put forward the concern that the project was incompatible with the Bottom's history and would therefore destroy, disturb or denigrate this unique history.

The questions of whether professional baseball will be coming to Richmond and where the team's home games will be played continue to dominate the news. As the pressure mounts on both of these questions, I fear that the curious silence regarding the slave history of the Bottom strongly suggests that this consideration will not be a serious factor in site selection. It is for this reason that I decided to add my voice to the public debate and speak to the critical importance of eliminating Shockoe Slip and Bottom as suitable and appropriate sites for professional baseball.

Although it may be a surprise to some, I am not only a community activist, but I am also a committed and passionate preservationist. With regard to preservation, this is not my first foray into this arena. A number of years ago, I successfully represented a small group of former residents of Fulton Bottom who were trying to save four houses in the Fulton redevelopment area which were scheduled for immediate demolition. In

fact, when I filed the lawsuit, bulldozers were already on-site ready to begin demolition.

We were able to get the late D. Dortch Warriner, a federal judge sitting in Richmond, to grant a temporary delay. We used the time to establish that the houses, which consisted of three or four rooms in a row, with forward-slanting roofs over their front porches, were "Shotgun Houses" which originated in West Africa.

We presented this evidence to Judge Warriner who ruled that the houses were unique and historically significant. He entered a permanent injunction prohibiting the demolition of the structures. Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority agreed to set up a fund to maintain the structures.

I confess that I had no idea when I took on the case that the structures were historically significant. The reason I signed on as attorney for the plaintiffs was because of their zeal, commitment and concern about their former neighborhood which by then had been completely demolished save for the four houses. Once I got into the meat of the case and began to do the detective work, I was hooked on preserving African-American artifacts and antiques.

I was able to put this newfound interest into a more sustained effort after I was elected to Richmond City Council in 1998. Early in my first term, I revived the defunct Slave Trail Commission and served as its chair. It was

through the Commission that I really got involved in preservation issues especially related to slave-era architecture and artifacts during my five years on council.

In my current preservationist role, I incorporated the Society for Preservation of African-American History and Antiquities (SPAAHA), a nonprofit corporation organized under the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia. SPAAHA's purpose is to serve as a local and regional advocate for historic preservation of endangered or little-known African American historical sites and antiquities and to where appropriate rescue these them from owners who have allowed Mother Nature and Father Time to endanger their existence and to restore and renovate them.

SPAAHA has already identified the following sites which are in dire need of immediate rescue because of their fragile and steadily declining condition: Evergreen Cemetery where Reverend John Jasper and Arthur Ashe are buried; the Hippodrome Theatre and the Elks Lodge on Second Street; and the Armory on West Leigh Street. The Negro Burial Ground adjacent to Interstate 95 off West Broad Street and Lumpkins Jail at 15<sup>th</sup> and Franklin Streets are also on our radar scope.

SPAAHA's battle cry is: "Remember the Eggleston Hotel" which recently collapsed and was demolished because of shared neglect by public and private entities.

In challenging the proposal to site minor league baseball along with extensive commercial infrastructure connected with this activity in Richmond's Shockoe Bottom, I speak for the dead, the unborn and the silent majority.

The dead are the thousands, if not millions of African descended people who were brutalized, victimized and dehumanized by their forced enslavement in Richmond, the Commonwealth of Virginia and the United States of America.

The unborn are those who will never have the opportunity to experience or even understand the cruel history of this area of the city if minor league baseball or for that matter any frivolous sport or activity occupies and dominates this landscape.

The silent majority consists of those who understand and feel that any proposed development of Shockoe Bottom which by either design or activity desecrates, destroys or diminishes the historical integrity of this area of the City, is inappropriate, unwelcomed, and incompatible and therefore should not be seriously considered. Their silence does not mean that they either approve or have no position on the proposed development. However, without them speaking out, their silence may well be interpreted in this manner because in politics, vocal engagement and physical presence most often trumps silence and invisibility.

When I was elected to Richmond City Council in 1998, I vowed that I would take on the responsibility of locating and identifying important sites in the city that were intricately involved in the purchase and sale of African descended people and to give vital historical information on these sites and activities to the public at large.

My self-imposed mandate to do this was based upon my lifelong interest in this devastating period of our history and its negative impact on past and present values and attitudes. I also wanted to change the fact that far too many of us were unfamiliar, indifferent and misinformed about this history.

After moving to Richmond in 1969, I was astonished to learn the intensity and extensiveness of the commercial activities involved with African descended people and the fact that virtually all of this activity was in the Bottom and Slip, both of which are in the 6th District, the council district I represented.

I recommended to my council colleagues that we revive the Richmond Slave Trail Commission which had been defunct for several years and that we give the Commission sufficient resources and recognition to carry out its stated mission of developing a community consciousness; preserving heritage and historical fact; and, promoting acknowledgment of our communities ancestors. I became the chairman of the newly revived Commission and served in this capacity until I left the Council in July 2003.

It is important at this juncture that I recite a brief history of Shockoe Slip and Shockoe Bottom. As an initial observation, it should be understood that a lot of slave-era history has been lost, forgotten, unrecorded or intentionally sanitized which compounds the problem of getting complete and accurate information. The following history will hopefully remedy this with regard to the Slip and Bottom.

From approximately 1650 through the end of the Civil War, the purchase and sale of enslaved Africans and African-Americans was concentrated and focused in Shockoe Slip and Shockoe Bottom. Even today, too few local residents understand and appreciate the extensiveness of this human tragedy.

From 1690-1770, approximately 100,000 Africans were imported into Virginia. Most, if not all, of these men, women and children were purchased and sold in auction houses located in Richmond's Shockoe Slip and Bottom. In order for the reader to visualize the extensiveness of this commercial infrastructure, I have appended a map showing the locations of these auction houses along with a listing of these businesses that trafficked in human flesh, despair and agony.

The concentration of auction houses in the Slip and Bottom was in part due to the growth of railroads. By 1830 Richmond moved ahead of Alexandria as a depot for the enslaved. The national census for 1830 established that Richmond was third among southern cities with large

enslaved populations, e.g., 15,354 in Charleston, South Carolina; 9,397 in New Orleans, Louisiana and 6,349 in Richmond, Virginia.



A slave auction in Richmond, Virginia, from the London Times

Edition of September 27, 1856. An African-American woman is auctioned off before a crowd.

By 1857, Richmond dominated the purchase and sale of enslaved Africans and African-Americans. According to a news article in the Richmond Enquirer, it was estimated in only one year, 1857, the proceeds from the sale of human beings in Richmond auction houses totaled more than \$3,500,000, in 1857 currency. Calculated in today's dollars this result in sales' receipts of **\$127,572,000.**<sup>1</sup>

Between 1852 and 1863, a total of fifty-nine (59) auctioneers and "general and collecting agents" devoted solely to the purchase and sale of human beings operated in Richmond. All were located in a fairly

---

<sup>1</sup> Conversion from "Tom's Inflation Calculator" (<http://www.halfhill.com/inflation.html>)

concentrated area in the city, bounded east and west by 15<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets and north and south by Clay and Canal Streets.

Recognized historians have documented that during the period 1690 to the beginning of the Civil War, more than 500,000 African descended human beings were trafficked in the City of Richmond, thus making Richmond the second largest slave market in the United States. The dubious distinction of being number one belongs to New Orleans, Louisiana. To put this in clear perspective, the 500,000 human beings are two and one-half times greater than the current population of Richmond City.

In March 2007, Richmond witnessed the unveiling of the Richmond Slavery Reconciliation Statue which depicts two people melded in an embrace. The site chosen for this statue is at the intersection of 15<sup>th</sup> and Main Streets which is inside of the boundaries of the old Slave Market.

There are identical statues sited in Liverpool, England and in the Republic of Benin, West Africa. The three statues memorialize the British, African and American triangle trade, which is why these statues are know and identified as the Reconciliation Triangle. The "triangle" extended between Liverpool and other large British cities, Benin and other West African Kingdoms, and Virginia and other North American colonies and states. Profits from the sale of enslaved Africans financed major British and North American economic development.

It is indeed appropriate that Richmond was chosen as the third leg of the triangle of reconciliation to partner with the Republic of Benin, West Africa and Liverpool, England in the Reconciliation Triangle Project. It is not without a certain irony that Richmond was selected to represent the Western Hemisphere in this international reconciliation effort given that Richmond was the former capital of the Confederacy.

In June 2001, the Lord Mayor of the City of Liverpool, England. Councillor Gerard Scott JP KHS, sent to Richmond's mayor a letter regarding this statue. He said, in part, "Our two great cities have had links spanning four centuries, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries through the Slave Trade...The Reconciliation Triangle Project, which will link Africa, the Americas and Europe, through Benin, Richmond and Liverpool seeks to heal past wounds through the symbolism of sculpture and the work of young people."

The Reconciliation Sculpture is intended to assist a community and a nation in developing a consciousness, to preserve heritage and historical fact and to promote acknowledgment and celebration of African descended people who were unwilling and often unwitting victims of the "Peculiar Institution" of human bondage.

It was and continues to be the hope that this memorial to the degradation and dehumanization of a people will serve as a catalyst to open a dialogue among Richmond's citizens and visitors, to promote the value of

sharing the sites that were integral in the trade of enslaved Africans and connect this aspect of Richmond's history to West Africa, the Caribbean and Europe.

Given the significant history of the Slip and Bottom, it is important that I return briefly to the recent debate because it sets up the current positions and arguments which now dominate the discussion as well as the shocking omission of slave-era history in the debate.

There were four main presenters at the debate, two who had major business interests in seeing the project materialize and spoke in favor of the Shockoe Bottom location. One proponent was Richmond Baseball Club LC which is currently trying to buy a minor league baseball franchise. The other was Highwoods Properties, a real estate investment trust that provides leasing, management, development, construction of major development projects in Richmond and several other cities east of the Rocky Mountains. Highwoods has proposed Shockoe Center, which includes the construction of a \$70 million ballpark surrounded by office, retail, hotel and restaurant space.

One of the opponents identified herself as a resident of Churchill; an attorney; and a historic preservation activist who claimed she was representing herself. She expressed a number of reasons for her opposition including the argument that the project would give nothing back to help the Churchill neighborhood; and that the project would allow the developer to

get “prime real estate... on the cheap” She likened the project to “a land grab [and] a tremendous boondoggle...”.

The other main opponent was a local real estate developer who claimed no economic interest in having baseball in the Bottom. He favored continuing baseball at its present site, the Diamond, owned by the Richmond Metropolitan Authority (RMA) a public body consisting of representatives from the City of Richmond and Henrico and Chesterfield counties.

Several other persons expressed positions for and against locating baseball in the Bottom. Their themes and arguments generally mirrored those of the four main debaters. As I previously in this paper, no one at the debate directly addressed the unique history of the area and the incompatibility of baseball dominating the area.

The question of future land use in the Slip and Bottom is complicated and controversial and presents a tremendous challenge given the area’s unique history. As human beings, we must understand that there is a global responsibility for slavery in the Americas. The past becomes the present and will become the future if we fail to understand and appreciate the fact that history does repeat itself. We accomplish nothing by shrugging off this human tragedy.

This is a message for both the children of the owners and of the owned. The sale and labor of enslaved Africans financed British and North American societies. The damaged lives of many of the descendants of

enslaved Africans are daily reminders of the social, economic and spiritual impact on our global village.

What is distressing to me is the fact that the debate over minor league baseball in Shockoe Bottom has not featured what I consider to be the main reason to question and oppose sitting of minor league baseball, the incompatibility of this or any commercial activity in the Bottom which has a negative impact on preserving the historical significance of this area with regard to the institution of slavery.

Interestingly, this telling omission confirms the thought-provoking observation by Eric Holder, the nation's first African-American Attorney General, who said the United States is "a nation of cowards" on matters of race, because most Americans avoid frank discussions of racial issues.

Unfortunately, this omission strongly suggests that the unveiling of the Reconciliation Statue may well have been premature because there can be no genuine reconciliation without first the acknowledgement of and acceptance of responsibility for this human tragedy. An African Proverb says, "Where there is no shame, there is no honor."

For those who outright reject the proposition that the Bottom should be preserved as a memorial to the victims of enforced slavery, I share with you and ask you to reflect on another attempt to preserve an unfortunate time in the history of man, which is taking place as we speak.

Recently, Polish Premier Donald Tusk appealed to leaders of European Union (EU) countries for help raising \$150 million for badly needed restoration work at the former Nazi death camp of Auschwitz, where at least 1.1 million people, 90 per cent of whom were Jews, were killed. Tusk said, "[s]aving Auschwitz-Birkenau means saving the memory of the millions who suffered and were bestially murdered."

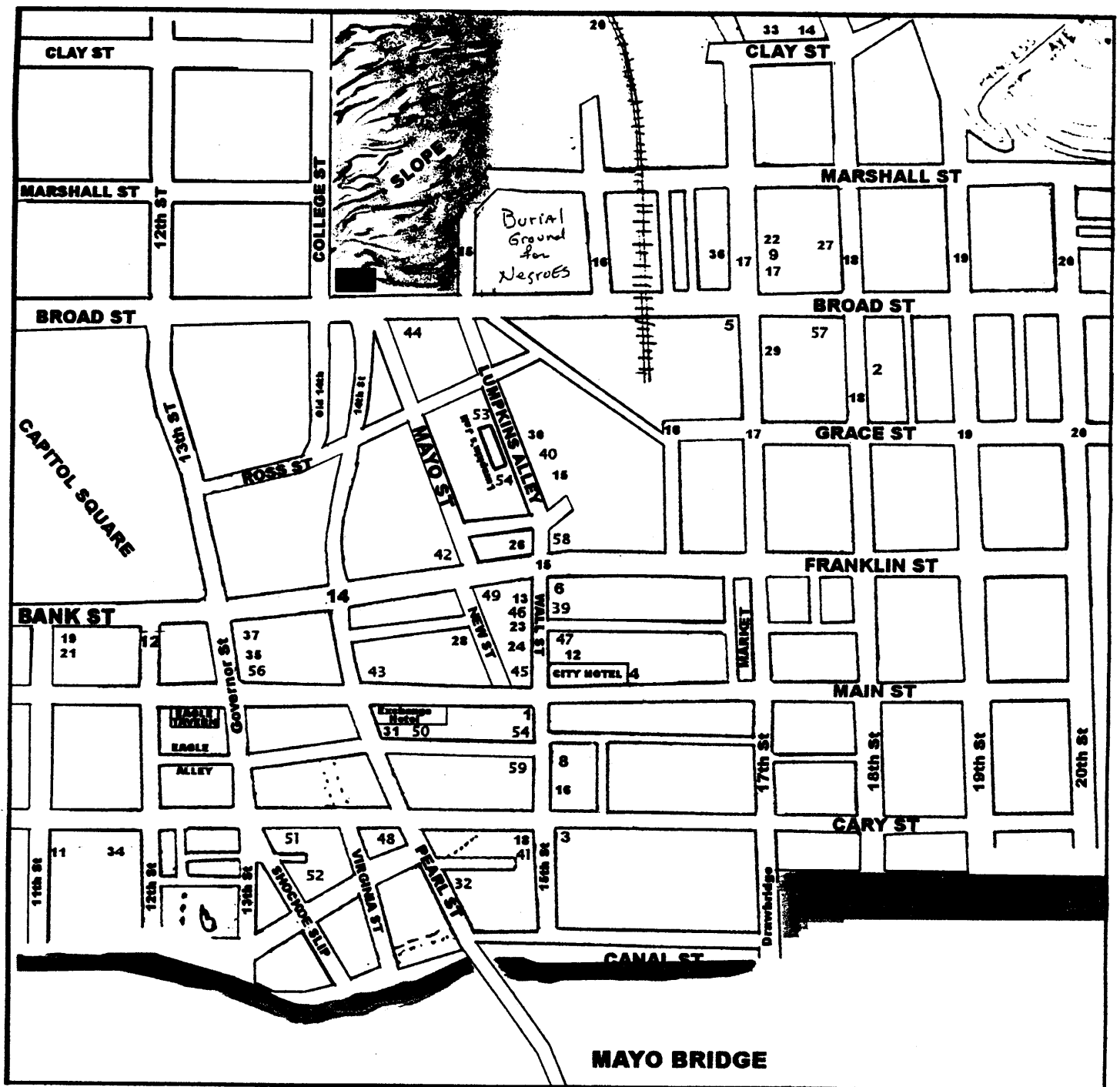
Tusk's comments were shared by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown who said during his visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau, that the death camp is a "reminder of all the darkness" in the world. Mr. Brown wrote the following passage in the visitors' book after his visit: ""What I have seen this afternoon is a harrowing testament to the murder of so many who suffered here the extremes of terror. What's happened here is a shared human story, a perpetual reminder of all the darkness of which the world is capable but also a story of what the world can endure and survive."

What happened in the Bottom and Slip over the many years of buying and selling human beings is no less tragic and no less "a shared human story" than what happened at Auschwitz-Birkenau and all other death camps throughout the history of the world. The intent to preserve and hopefully restore the Bottom is no less worthy or important than preserving and restoring World War II death camps.

No one would ever think it appropriate or even seriously consider sitting a sports or other entertainment complex in the middle of or even

adjacent to a death camp. So why then is the seriously being considered in Shockoe Bottom?

# Richmond's Slave Market 1852 - 1863



**Numbers in red represent slave dealers  
and their locations between  
1852 & 1863**

# Richmond Slave Dealers 1852 to 1863

- 1) Nott, Alexander: & Co.: Auctioneer and Commission Merchants. Southwest corner Main and 15th Sts. [1853.p.94] Nott, Alexander: Auctioneer and Commission Merchant. Residence on westside of 10th between Main & Cary Sts. [1853.p.94] Shine, James Nott: Auctioneer. (Alexander & Nott & Co.). Corner of Main and 15th Sts. [1853.p.112]
- 2) Levy, Ash: Locust Alley Negro Trader. [1859-60 Dir]
- 3) Tait, Bacon: Private jail, southeast corner of Cary and 15th Sts. [see J.J. Dornin, above] [1853.p.120]
- 4) Davis, Benjamin: Auctioneer, Wall St. under City Hotel. Residence on southside of Broad St. between 14th & Mayo Sts. [1853.p.42] Davis, Solomon: Auctioneer with Benjamin Davis. Residence on northside of Broad between 12th and College St. [1853.p.42] Davis, Benjamin: Locust Alley Negro Trader. [1859-60 Dir] Davis, Solomon: Locust Alley Negro Trader. [1859-60 Dir]
- 5) Omohundro: Betts & Omohundro: Traders, southwest corner of Broad & 17th Sts. [1853.p.22]
- 6) Browning & Moore: Auctioneer. Franklin and Wall Sts. [nhds.97]
- 7) City Hotel: Northeast corner of Main & 15th Streets.
- 8) Dabney & Cauthorn: Commission Merchants. Eastside of 15th Street between Main and Cary. R. Cauthorn.
- 9) Price, Dabney: Trader. Eastside of 17th St. between Broad & Marshall Sts. [1853.p.101]
- 10) Dunlop, Moncure & Co.: Auctioneer and Commission Merchants, corner of Cary & 11th Sts. [1853.p.46] Dunlop, Moncure & Co: commission merchants and auctioneers; Cary Street.[Richmond Whig, 4/15/1865]
- 11) Eagle Tavern: Southside of Main Street between 12th and 13th Streets.
- 12) Walker, Edwin: Trader, City Hotel. [1853.p.128]
- 13) Pulliam & Davis: Auctioneers & Commission Merchants - Richmond, VA. Continue to offer their Services in the Selling of Negroes. They will also attend to Plantation Sales to the selling of Real Estate, Produce, etc., to the hiring of Negroes, Collection of Debts, Renting of Houses, etc. Office on Wall St. opposite City Hotel. [1853.p.86 &p.54adv] Hector Davis. Pulliam &

Davis: Auctioneers and Commission Merchants. Westside of Wall St. Near Franklin St.  
[1853.p.102]

- 14) Tucker, Fleming: Trader. Northwest corner of Clay & 18th Sts. [1853.p.125]
- 15) Apperson, George W: Trader, private jail in Birch alley. [1853.p.16]
- 16) Sumner, George J.: Auctioneer & Commission Merchant. East side of 15<sup>th</sup>  
between Main & Cary Sts. [1853.p.119]
- 17) Hagan, Hugh: Trader. Eastside of 17th between Broad & Marshall Sts. [1853.p.62]
- 18) Davenport, J& G.B: Auctioneer. Corner of 15th and Carty Streets.
- 19) Taylor, James M.: real estate agent & auctioneer.
- 20) Toler, John J.: Trader. Westside Central Railroad between Clay and Leigh Sts. [1853.p.123]
- 21) Payne, John R.D.: Auctioneer. Eastside of 11th St. between Main and Bank Sts. [1853.p.97]
- 22) Slater, Leonard T.: Trader. Eastside of 17th between Broad and Marshall Sts. [1853.p.113]
- 23) Pulliam, Peter: Trader. Westside of Locust Alley between Main & Franklin Sts. [1853.p.102]
- 24) Davis, Hector: Trader, Locust Alley between Main and Franklin St. (Pulliam & Davis)  
[1853.p.42]
- 25) Tyler, R.B: Commission Merchants. Basin, north of Warwicks Stone Warehouse. [nhds.24]
- 26) Dickinson, R.H. & Bro.: Auctioneer. Northwest corner of Franklin and 15th Sts. [1853.p.44]  
Dickinson, R.H.: Auctioneer. Residence on Mayo between Franklin and Broad Sts.  
[1853.p.44]
- 27) Alvis, Robert: Trader. West side of 18th, between Broad and Marshall Sts. [1853.p. 15]
- 28) Omohundro, S.: Trader. Southest corner of 17th and Broad Sts. and Alley west of Wall and  
Main and Franklin Sts. [1853.p.95]
- 29) Reese, Sam: Birch Alley Negro Trader. [1859-60 Dir] Reese, Samuel: Trader. Eastside of  
17th St. between Grace & Broad Sts. [1853.p.104]
- 30) Lumpkin, Thomas: Trader, private jail. Birch Alley. [1852.95]
- 31) Johnston, Thomas M: Trader. Alley near Exchange Hotel (southeast orner of 14th and Main).  
[185.p.73]

- 32) Toler and Cook: General Agents & Collectors. Pearl St., Lisle Row. John R. Cook and George W. Toler. [1852.97, 101]
- 33) Abrahams, W: Trader. Northside of Clay St. between 17th & 18th Sts. [1853.p.2]
- 34) Staples, W.T. & Co: commission merchants; 12<sup>th</sup> St. between Cary and Byrd Street.[1852.102 & Richmond Whig, 4/15/1865]
- 35) Gouldin, William - General Agent & Collector. 13th & Governor St. between Main and Franklin Streets. Rents out houses, Hires out Negroes, and will attend to any other business in his line with fidelity & promptness. [1853.p. 53adv]
- 36) Martin, William: Trader. Westside of 17th between Broad and Marshall Sts. [1853.p.86]
- 37) Wortham: General Agent and Collector. Governor St. between Main & Franklin Streets. [1852.113]
- 38) Atkinson, G.W: Trader, private jail in Birch Alley. [1853.17]
- 39) Bagby, Thomas J: 8 Wall St. Agents, General and Collecting Agents. [1860dir]
- 40) Blackburn, E.W: Birch Alley, Negro Trader. [1859-60dir]
- 41) Davenport, Allen & Co.: Auctioneers and contract merchants, corner of Cary and 5th Streets. Isaac Davenport residence on southwest corner of main and Foushee Streets. [1853.41]
- 42) Deupree, William; Mayo Street near Franklin. Negro Trader [ 1859-60]
- 43) Eacho, E.D: 14th between Main and Franklin. Agents, General and Collecting Agents. [1860]
- 44) Frazier, John: Broad and mayo Sts. Negro Trader. [1859-60]
- 45) Hall, John: Locust Alley. Negro Trader. [1859-60]
- 46) Hill, C.B. & N.B: Auctioneers. Southwest corner of Franklin and 15th. [1853.66]
- 47) Hill, Robert: Wall between Main and Franklin. Agents, General and Collecting. [1860]
- 48) James and Williams, Commission Merchants. Virginia St. [R Whig, 4/15/1865]
- 49) Jones & Slater: Locust Alley. Negro Trader. [185-60]
- 50) Jones, George Harris: 14th, Exchange Building. Agents, General and collecting. [1860]

- 51) Keesee, T.W.: 13th St. [R. Whig, 4/15/65]
- 52) Kent, Paine & Co. Commission Merchants. [R. whig, 4/15/65]
- 53) Lumpkin, Robert: Birch Alley. Negro Trader. Also private jail. [1853. P.82 & 1859-60]
- 54) McDaniel, David: Birch Alley, negro Trader. [1859-60]
- 55) Omenhiser, John: Exchange near Locust Alley. Negro Trader. [1859-60]
- 56) Phillips, William S: 12th St. between main and Bank. Agents, General and Collecting. 1860]
- 57) Smith, A: 18th and Braod Streets. Negrio Trader. [1859-60]
- 58) Tabb, P.M. & Son: Corner of 14th and Franklin. General and Collecting Agent. [1860]
- 59) Templeton, H.N: Locust Alley. Negro Trader. [1859-60]