

Young Person's Guide to the "Behind the Big House" Tour

Welcome to the "Behind the Big House" tour and the Hugh Craft House.

When most people think about slavery, they think of large plantations out in a **rural** area with lots of enslaved people growing crops. While there were plantations in the country, slavery and enslaved people also lived in **urban** areas like Holly Springs. Every owner did not live on a plantation and those who lived in urban areas had enslaved people living with them on their properties.

The **Hugh Craft House** is an example of an urban site of slavery. The house was built nearly 170 years ago. Remember, during the time of slavery, enslaved persons were not considered people, but rather property like a cow or chair. The 1860 Census, a record of those living on this property, showed nine enslaved persons. The old Kitchen served as both the primary cooking area and **quarters** for those persons. This is where they lived and worked. It is thought to have been built before the big Craft House, which is why it is made of different materials.

Who built **antebellum** homes such as the Craft house?

A typical construction crew at that time would have been a combination of different people including; a white builder who supervised the project called an "undertaker", free craftsmen, both white and black, and enslaved workers.

Who lived in the quarters and were they related to each other?

Enslaved people often lived in an area of the property known as the quarters. On rural plantations this might be a group of wooden cabins far from the main house. Enslaved people considered **body servants**, cooks, **blacksmiths**, or **chambermaids** lived closer to the main house, sometimes called the "Big House". In towns, however enslaved people often lived closer to those who owned them. Here on the Craft property the primary quarters for the enslaved people were in the same building that housed the kitchen. There were children enslaved on this property and they would have sometimes had to sleep on pallets by the bedroom doors of the Craft family, in the main house, just in case they needed something during the night.

While it is hard to know for certain, some of the enslaved persons could have been relatives of one another. Though marriages between enslaved people were not legally recognized, and required the permission of their owner(s), they did occur. Many slaveowners believed that marriages kept enslaved people from running away. If the couples had children, they increased the owner's property value overall.

What type of work did the enslaved do for the Craft Family?

Maybe the question should be what work didn't the enslaved people do for the Craft family? Some jobs enslaved people did were the same whether they labored at a property in town or a plantation in the country. They cooked, cleaned, sewed clothing, washed clothes, tended to the Craft children, fed the animals, grew things in the garden and much, much more. At urban sites, many of their chores would have taken place in the side and back yards behind a fence that screened this sort of work from public view. Other tasks were done in the kitchen or the main house.

There was likely a cook and chambermaids to take care of the family in the main house, The cook often prepared food for other enslaved people, especially on small farms and urban sites like this. Children worked too. They ran errands for the family and other enslaved persons alike. They might feed the chickens, keep the fire going or even dump the **chamber pots**. They even began to take care of the white family's children when they were still kids themselves.

Where did they get their food and other household supplies from?

Though there were dry goods stores like Levy's around to purchase skillets and other goods, many items were still produced at home, by enslaved labor. From vegetables and meat, to candles and lye soap, enslaved workers produced most of the goods a household needed whether that was on a rural plantation or in town. There were produce gardens on the property, as well as barns and lots for livestock. Meat was stored in a smokehouse, generally, but the cellar of the Hugh Craft House also had a place to store meat. Other foodstuffs were purchased in town or from men, called peddlers, who drove wagons around with items to sell. Chickens were kept on site – always fresh and ready for the cooking pot!

When did enslaved people work?

Enslaved people worked from early in the morning to late in the evening and were on call for service 24 hours a day and seven days a week. They could be called upon to do work any time of the day or night. Some enslaved persons described it as working from "can see to can't see" or from sunup to sundown. They were usually allowed some time off on Sundays, but during busy times on large plantations, they worked every day, and even through the night until the work was finished.

What did enslaved people do in their free time?

The life of an enslaved person was often firmly controlled by their owner and his or her wishes. That did not mean that enslaved persons never had any time to themselves or did not socialize with each other as they went about their daily lives. They might talk and sing together while doing work, or gather on Sundays in the quarters for religious workshop, dances, and holiday celebrations. They also played games like dominoes (called bones for the material they made them with). Sometimes, they tended to their own crops and found other ways of providing food for themselves, like hunting for small animals like rabbits and squirrels.

On large plantations, it may have been a bit easier to get some privacy from owners or **overseers**, but urban slavery made it more difficult to get some privacy from their owners. If an enslaved person was sent off of the property to run an errand, work or visit a relative at another residence,, he or she must have a written pass. A pass was permission from the owner to travel for a specific purpose. It was often against the law for enslaved people to meet in large groups together in public. There were patrollers, or what they called “paddy rollers,” who went looking for enslaved people in places without permission, and could punish them.

Why were enslaved people not treated the same as free people like their owners?

During slavery, enslaved persons did not have rights to their own bodies. They were considered someone else’s **chattel** property, not independent beings. They were not U.S. citizens and therefore were not thought of as **equal** in a legal or social way. Because they were not free, their owners and other free persons determined how they were treated. Sometimes they challenged this treatment in order to make life a little better for them and their families.

Glossary

Antebellum: before or existing before a war, especially the American Civil War (1861-65), prewar

Body Servant: a valet or personal maid

Chamber maid: a maid who tends to a master or mistresses' needs in a bedroom

Chamber pot: a portable container used for urine or feces in bedrooms before the advent of modern plumbing

Chattel: a movable article of personal property

Overseer: oversaw the actions of field slaves, ensuring they worked to maximum capacity and did not try to escape; most often a white male.

Quarters: housing accommodations as a place of residence or lodging

Rural: of or relating to the country or an unincorporated area

Urban: of or relating to a city or town

Definitions provided with the assistance of <http://dictionary.com/> and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History *Slavery in Mississippi Vocabulary List*.