

# Report Describes Life On Plantation

## Cotton Was King, Slaves Did The Work

In the decade before the Civil War, the leading men of this area were likely to be plantation owners. Cotton was the money crop and difficult to grow in a time before the development of commercial fertilizers. To increase their knowledge of the best farm practices of the day, the leadership formed groups dedicated to sharing information.

The Indian Land Agricultural Society usually met in Ebenezer in York County. The society included members from all over the Indian Land, the same 15 square miles of eastern York County and upper Lancaster County that is in the current Catawba Indian lawsuit.

Col. Joel W. Rawlinson (1822-1888), president of the Indian Land Agricultural Society, was one of the most respected of the area's agriculturalists. (Rawlinson Acres in Rock Hill bears Rawlinson's name and is his original plantation.)

In 1858, at the request of the society, Rawlinson wrote a paper to explain his success. Mulch was made from corn stalks, leaves and litter interspersed with manure from the cow lots. For the far fields he prepared compost heaps with dirt, rotted logs, ashes and lime. He had his workers (he never used the term slave in the paper) begin distributing the mulch to the fields in January.

Spring plowing had its own method. Rawlinson described in detail how he guarded against the soil washing by gradeditching. He also rotated his crops.

Besides cotton, grain was planted. In the fall, his best plowman would break up a field that had been kept out of production for a year of "rest." Using a three-horse plow, the field would be prepared for corn, a notorious robber of soil fertility but necessary to feed the horses. The following year, grain was planted where the corn had been and the next year the land lay fallow. Rawlinson recommended deep plowing — up to 10 inches.

Rawlinson assigned tasks to his workers according to their skills. Two men looked

after the cattle, which were individually stabled, and another cared for the hogs. Pork was a staple on a plantation because it could be salted and preserved better than other meats. A pasture planted in rye was reserved for the hogs.

Someone checked the horse and cow stables every night. Each was situated so that the animals had access to a running branch of water.

Rawlinson described the housing of his workers. Each framed house was 18 by 20 feet and built 2 feet off the ground. Each house had a "good brick chimney" and a vegetable plot. One man was assigned the duty of furnishing every house with wood for heat and cooking.

Rawlinson required that the houses be kept clean and allowed the women time to "scald, scour, wash, and mend." The sick were kept isolated in a house near his own. He made the rule that parents must report the illness of children.

After a lengthy dissertation on how to keep the workers healthy, Rawlinson stated that he gave "a week's allowance — peck of meal, 3 lbs. of bacon, with vegetables, to the field hands, with milk and molasses for the children."

Children old enough to work were assigned to trusted workers who had the authority to use a switch "if necessary," but Rawlinson believed that words of encouragement were more effective than a switching. Still, he was not indulgent when it came to fighting, stealing or leaving the plantation without a permit. "Every master should do his own patrol."

Rawlinson ended his paper with these words: "Proud you may be with your comfortable dwellings, your cribs full of corn, your fields and orchards blooming with grain and fruit. Who is rich and who can be contented if you are not? To you is given the empire of the earth, and your sovereignty may be as bright, as strong, as you shall choose to make it."

Only a short time later the Civil War broke out and shattered Rawlinson's world.

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