

Enslaved of Liberia



Eliza and Phillip. Frances and Nathaniel. Susan and George. These and more than 70 others, their names lost to history, were enslaved to the Weir Family of Liberia. Decade after decade, two generations of men, women and children, regarded as personal property, lived and toiled on this land. Planting and harvesting. Feeding and grooming. Cooking and sewing. Their labor, and mere presence as tangible assets, underpinned the success of the plantation. Most are unknown to us today, though their descendants live among us.

While the silence of history robs us of their stories we do know a little bit about one family, the Naylor. When the Weirs moved to Fluvanna County in 1862 they left Liberia in the care of enslaved house servants, some members of the Naylor family among them. Nelly Naylor was given 12.5 acres of land by the Weirs in 1865 *in consideration of the love and affection to their former servant*. The Naylor continued to live in the area after the war, running a successful farm and managing a local mill.



This image, made sometime after the Civil War, is believed to be Nelly Naylor, who was enslaved by the Weir family.

— Courtesy of the Naylor Family

These census documents show that William Weir went from enslaving 17 to over 80 people in a thirty year period. What accounts for this startling growth? Were the Weirs actively purchasing people to work on their farm? Was there a large number of births among the population that lived there? Could it have been a combination of both? The documents do not provide the answer, but do prove that Weir owned the largest number of enslaved people in Prince William County on the eve of the Civil War.

— Courtesy of the National Archives



This pitcher is thought to be a wedding gift to Harriet Weir from her mother. It is the only thing owned by the Manassas Museum with a direct connection to Liberia. Weir family history states that after it was broken the pitcher was glued back together by a member of the Naylor Family.

— Manassas Museum Collection

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