

## The Rev. Edward Dromgoole, Sr., Emancipator and Enslaver

by William B. Bynum

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Thanks to the Foundation and especially to Art Thomas for inviting me to speak this morning. I wrote the brief biographical sketch of Edward Dromgoole, Sr., for the online Dictionary of Virginia Biography,<sup>1</sup> but Art encouraged me to do a little deeper digging into the history of this Methodist pioneer, suggested that I focus on Dromgoole's relationship with slavery, and provided some tips for further reading. A little disclaimer: I am an employee of the Library of Virginia, but the opinions expressed this morning are mine alone, not those of the Library.

The Reverend Edward Dromgoole is well known to members of this group because of his pivotal role in the earliest years of Methodism on the Old Brunswick Circuit, as well as his association with two sites the Foundation preserves, the Dromgoole house, "Canaan," and Ebenezer Academy. Today I want to look at Dromgoole as a man torn between his conscience and the pressures of the culture in which he lived, specifically the conflict about slavery in Methodism and in Virginia politics.

Edward Dromgoole was born in 1751 to Roman Catholic parents in county Sligo, Ireland. He became a Methodist in 1770, was disowned by his family, and immigrated to Maryland, where he worked as a tailor and started preaching in 1772. He was assigned to the Brunswick Circuit in 1775.<sup>2</sup>

In Methodism at that time, John Wesley's first Book of Discipline prohibited members from "the buying or selling of the bodies and souls of men, women, and children." Wesley had become an even more outspoken opponent of slavery with the publication of his *Thoughts upon Slavery* in 1774.<sup>3</sup> As an itinerant preacher, Dromgoole had no property to speak of before his marriage to Rebekah Wallton in 1777. In 1778 Rebekah received 200 acres in southeastern Brunswick County from her father, John Wallton, so Edward now had a farm and needed hands to work it.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that Dromgoole acquired slaves as well as land from his father-in-law, but we may never know, since deeds for slaves did not have to be recorded at the courthouse. In any case, Brunswick County's first personal property tax list in 1782 shows that John Wallton owned 12 slaves and Edward Dromgoole owned 7 slaves. Tax lists in the early 1780s, unlike later ones, often give the names of enslaved people. Dromgoole's slaves in 1782 were named Bob, Boson, Adam, Daniel, Hannah, Austin, and another Bob.<sup>5</sup> By becoming dependent on enslaved labor, Dromgoole was following the example of the majority of his neighbors, for in 1787 sixty percent of Brunswick County taxpayers owned slaves.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the conference of Methodist preachers held in Baltimore in spring 1780 had required itinerant preachers to promise to emancipate their slaves and advised all Methodists to do likewise. In 1783 local preachers were given one year to emancipate their slaves. The spring conference in 1784 allowed Virginia preachers one more year for emancipation.<sup>7</sup> This was not enforced in Dromgoole's case.

At the Christmas Conference of 1784 in Baltimore, which Dromgoole attended, American Methodists officially separated from the Church of England and became the Methodist Episcopal Church. Under the influence of the newly-arrived Thomas Coke, Wesley's emissary to the new nation, the conference took

a hard line against slavery. The new rule gave all Virginia Methodists 24 months to emancipate their slaves over age 45. All those aged 25-40 were to be freed within five years, all those aged 20-25 by age 30, all those under 20 by age 25, and all born in slavery henceforth were to be emancipated at birth. Methodists who bought or sold slaves were “immediately to be expelled: unless they buy them on purpose to free them.”<sup>8</sup>

There was immediate resistance to the new rule, which was suspended in June 1785.<sup>9</sup> As Dromgoole wrote in a later letter to Francis Asbury, “The state of religion was brought very low in our circuit during the years of 1785 and 1786. Some prejudices arose on account of the ... new terms of communion proposed to those who had been long in our membership, chiefly with regard to holding Slaves. A very unpromising prospect presented itself to the minds of Preachers and People. Indeed we were nigh rejection at one Conference, and likely to have no Preacher appointed to ride among us...” Following the death of two of his children while he was out riding the circuit, Dromgoole had planned to leave the itinerant ministry, but in this crisis Asbury and Coke requested him to ride the Brunswick circuit one more time.<sup>10</sup> After his last circuit appointment in 1785, Dromgoole became a local preacher and opened a general store on his property.<sup>11</sup> He continued to preach for the rest of his life, but much of his attention would be devoted to his farm and his successful mercantile business. This eventually included at least four stores in partnership with his son Edward, Jr., who became a local preacher as well as a merchant, farmer, and physician.<sup>12</sup>

The opposition to the new rules against slaveholding is illustrated in two letters Dromgoole received from Devereux Jarratt, an Anglican minister in Dinwiddie County who had been a strong ally of Virginia Methodists until they broke away from the Church of England. Jarratt himself owned 24 enslaved people, and was offended by the language Methodist leaders were using against slaveholders. He wrote to Dromgoole on May 31, 1785, speaking of the rule against slaveholding, “I advised against it, & pointed out the destructive & divisive Consequences of it ... which as I foretold, have already done more harm than the united efforts of all the Preachers, I fear, will ever do good.... Virginians may be led, but not drove; and will listen to Scripture and Arguments from thence ... much sooner than to the hard Words of Thief, Villian, unjust &c without any Scripture to support them—This is not the way to convert Men...”<sup>13</sup>

Jarratt wrote in a similar vein to Dromgoole on March 22, 1788, complaining that Bishop Coke and others were destroying Christian unity by their harsh and insulting language against slaveowners. “Even allowing that those who retain their Bondmen are wrong in so doing, yet I should think they ought not to be put upon a level, (as they are now) with horse thieves, & Hogstealers.... I say I think this ought not to be done; especially as they suppose they are warranted in their Practice by the Example of Abraham, Isaac & all the antient People of God; & not only those, but by the writings of the Apostles, whose directions & Exhortations to Bond & free incline them to believe that such Stations & relations were to exist under the Gospel, otherwise 30 or 40 Verses might as well be blotted out of the new [tes]tament, as being of no practical use.” (It may be no coincidence that several anti-emancipation petitions submitted to the Virginia General Assembly in the 1780s used scriptural arguments to justify slavery, including a petition signed by well over 100 Brunswick County residents in 1785.) Jarratt continued in his letter to Dromgoole: “I hope you won’t understand that I am writing to you to prove the innocency or lawfulness of Slavery. No—I know not your opinion in it, nor do I wish to know.... If our sentiments should not be alike in it, I agree to disagree, & never say a word about it.”<sup>14</sup>

Many Virginia Methodist ministers felt that if they spoke strongly against slavery, slaveowners would keep them from preaching to the enslaved, and the requirement to free them became a dead letter as far as the laity were concerned.<sup>15</sup> It took a few years for Dromgoole to try following the new rule in his own life.

On March 7, 1790, circuit rider James Meacham wrote in his diary that the enslaved people belonging to "Brother D." (Dromgoole) displayed "inattention to the things of eternity" because "their Lordly Master is a preacher and has been for this many years and holds them in slavery."<sup>16</sup> Meacham was never shy about criticizing slaveowners to their face, so it is almost certain that he spoke to Dromgoole, pointing out the evil effects of slaveholding. As Meacham wrote in his diary on another occasion, "if ever I get rich through slavery I shall esteem myself a Traitor, and claim a part in Hell with Judas, and the rich glutton." Meacham's diary also records a 1789 encounter with one of Dromgoole's parishioners, Owen Myrick, who, according to Meacham, had "an immense fortune" and was "as Bloody [an] oppressor perhaps as may be found" because of his slaveholding.<sup>17</sup> Meacham was frustrated in this conversation with Myrick over slavery, but the antislavery message bore fruit in 1795 when Myrick at his death not only emancipated all 63 of his slaves but gave them a 650-acre plantation and livestock.<sup>18</sup> This may have been easier for Myrick because he had no children. I should note that Myrick's brother Matthew, an equally devoted Methodist and donor of the land for Olive Branch Church, did not emancipate his own 44 slaves.<sup>19</sup>

Urged on by his Methodist colleagues, Edward Dromgoole wrote a deed of emancipation on June 27, 1791, providing for the freedom of 11 people who were listed by name, age, and date of prospective emancipation. They were to be freed between the years 1792 and 1818 at the age of 21 to 26, except for a woman named Bet who had become Dromgoole's property sometime after 1783. She had several small children and was to be emancipated in 1796 at the age of 42. Any children the women had after the deed was recorded would be considered free at birth. This procedure follows the Methodist rules for emancipation adopted at the Christmas Conference of 1784. The names in this deed include all the people listed as his slaves in 1782, except for the first man named Bob, who seems to have been the oldest in 1782 and may have died between 1783 and 1791. The deed also names four children who had been born after 1782.<sup>20</sup>

The 1796 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church ruled that ministers admitted to the church in future were to emancipate any slaves they owned, "immediately or gradually, as the laws of the state ... and the circumstances of the case will admit. No slave-holder shall be received into society, till the preacher who has the oversight of the circuit, has spoken to him freely and faithfully on the subject of slavery. ... [I]f any member of our society purchase a slave," the quarterly conference must "determine the number of years, in which the slave so purchased would work out the price of his purchase," and the owner must execute a deed of manumission at the end of the term or "be excluded [from] the society." All children born henceforth to enslaved women were to be manumitted at age 21 for females and age 25 for males.<sup>21</sup> These rules were not enforced in Dromgoole's case, as we shall see.

On November 29, 1797, Dromgoole bought "one Molatto Man Slave named Matthew" from Benjamin Harrison, Jr. of Northampton County, North Carolina, and on January 3, 1799, he bought "one Negroe Man Slave named Robin" from Richard Walpole of Brunswick County. Both enslaved men were "formerly the property of John Walpole deceased" of Brunswick.<sup>22</sup> The fact that these two men had both been owned by John Walpole may indicate that they were related to each other and perhaps to others

enslaved by Dromgoole. He never freed these two men. In the appraisal of Dromgoole's estate in 1835, the elderly Robin was valued at \$20 and Matthew at zero. Both men were at least 60 years old in 1835, for they had been listed in John Walpole's will in 1776.<sup>23</sup>

As Dromgoole continued to use the labor of his own slaves, on at least one occasion he rented people from other enslavers. On May 7, 1800, Dromgoole paid "for the hire of two Negroes (Byrd & Molley) belonging to John Jenkins" until "Christmas next."<sup>24</sup>

It is significant that Francis Asbury, who often visited Dromgoole during his constant travels, commented several times on slavery while he stayed with the Dromgooles and others in Brunswick County during a bout of ill health in the winter of 1797-98. Asbury wrote in his journal on December 22, 1797, "I rose in the morning, in some fear lest I had or should say too much on slavery." On January 9, 1798, he wrote, "[M]y mind is much pained. O! to be dependent on slaveholders is in part to be a slave, and I was free born. I am brought to conclude that slavery will exist in Virginia perhaps for ages; there is not a sufficient sense of religion nor of liberty to destroy it; Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, in the highest flights of rapturous piety, still maintain and defend it."<sup>25</sup>

In 1800 came Gabriel's Conspiracy, which put more stumbling blocks in the narrowing path to emancipation. Enslaved people in central Virginia, led by a man named Gabriel, planned an insurrection in which, according to some participants, all white people were to be slaughtered except for Quakers, Methodists, and the French, who were all seen as favoring emancipation. After executing 26 alleged conspirators, Virginia passed a law requiring free people of color to register with their county.<sup>26</sup> Brunswick County registrations began in 1803, but none of those freed by Dromgoole registered before 1810. This law was not strictly enforced, but the register shows that all but three of the 11 slaves named in Dromgoole's 1791 deed of emancipation lived as free people in Brunswick County.<sup>27</sup> The other three may have died before registering, or moved to another county.

By 1801, Dromgoole was uneasy about life in a slave state and considered moving to Ohio, where a substantial number of Virginians were going.<sup>28</sup> He wrote to several of his Methodist friends who had moved there, asking them about land prices, climate, health, prospects for farmers and merchants there, danger from Native Americans, and asking how they got along without slavery. Here are some excerpts from their replies.

Philip Gatch, a preacher who had moved in 1798 from Buckingham County, Virginia, to Clermont County, Ohio, replied to Dromgoole on February 11, 1802. Gatch wrote, "I could have wish't [wished] to have spent my days [in Virginia] ... but I felt unwilling to lay my Bones there, and leave my Children whom I tenderly loved in a land of slavery not knowing what the Evils there of would amount to in there time.... I heartily wish you where [were] settled here with your Familey and all my old Friends that are out of the Spirit of Slavery.... [A]s to the Indians we feel no more affraid of them than you do there.... We have been more affraid of the Negroes in Virginia ... than I have ever been in this Country of the Poor Indians."<sup>29</sup>

Gatch wrote again on June 1, 1805, "You say you don't like to stay where you are. Indeed my Brother I don't know how you do to stay there atall with your tender connection. You say what can we do in your new country, God will provide, none begg their Bread here.... A Family that is supported in Virginia by a Farm and several Negroes can be supported [here] by a Farm equally as well without a slave, only they must wait on themselves."<sup>30</sup>

A letter Dromgoole received from Dr. James H. Keys of Murfreesboro, North Carolina, dated October 22, 1805, expressed the feelings of a fellow Methodist who was still a slaveowner: "Lord, brother, I wish I never owned, or was master of negroes! They are a hell to us in this world, and I fear they will be so in the next. But what to do with them, I know not. We can't live with them or without them.... unless the whip is forever on the creatures backs they do nothing.... Is this a life for a christian to lead?"<sup>31</sup>

Dromgoole's own feelings show in a letter he wrote to Asbury on December 29, 1805: "As to the things of this world at present, I seem satisfied, and have enough. Yet, I feel some uneasiness, on account of my situation. I feel that if God opens the way, I shall leave old Virginia. Not that I expect the same ease, and conveniency, any where else, but I have some idea, that has lately followed me pretty close, that a State where none of the human race are in captivity, would afford my mind more rest."<sup>32</sup>

John Sale, Virginia-born presiding elder of the Ohio District, wrote to Dromgoole on February 20, 1807: "I have been told you have had thought of coming to this country. We have a fertile soil & Sallubrious Air that is not contaminated with *Slavery*; perhaps you may live as well in Virginia & better as it respects luxuries, But I doubt whether you enjoy more peace & Tranquillity in every respect."<sup>33</sup>

On June 20, 1807, one of Dromgoole's close friends, Peter Pelham, who had been clerk of court of Brunswick County and then of Greensville County, wrote to him. Pelham had freed his 14 slaves and had just recently moved to Greene County, Ohio. Dromgoole's son Edward, Jr., would marry Pelham's daughter Sarah in 1810. Pelham implored Dromgoole to join him in Ohio, writing of "my happy feelings on setting my feet on a Land of Liberty .... My wife, and our children *do wonderfully ... without one black person to wait on us.*"<sup>34</sup>

In 1805 Virginia passed a law that free people of color must leave Virginia within a year of their emancipation.<sup>35</sup> This law was not strictly enforced in Brunswick or in many other counties, but it must have deterred some people from freeing those they held in slavery, and may have influenced Dromgoole's decision not to free the slaves he had bought after 1791.

Frederick Bonner, another Virginia preacher who had moved to Greene County, Ohio, expressed his feelings about this Virginia law in an 1807 letter to Dromgoole: "By your letter I find you wait to be driven from that country of oppression & wrong by some Judgment. Oh! Bro. Drumgole the Lord provided for the Vertuous sons of the Eastern States in the liberty of the State of Ohio—the thing speaks for its self. The CALL IS LOUD. ... when once planted here our children are saved from the harmful practice of trading on their fellow creatures.... When the Legislature of Va. has determined against liberty & our preachers & people will be purchasing Slaves without a prospect of liberating them what can we think will be the condition of the church in the state where slavery is encouraged & liberty supprest...."<sup>36</sup>

On July 27, 1807, Bennet Maxey, a Virginia minister who had been in Greene County, Ohio, for four years, replied to a letter from Dromgoole in the following words: "I find that you are not sattisfide to live in the land where you now are.... is it because you live in a land of Slavery and have your doubts whether it be right in the sight of God for you to die there and live [leave] your children and grand children In that land of oppression.... If this be the cause I say Come in the name of the Lorde, no doubt but your sacrifice there will be great—yet the peace of mind and the smiles of a good providence will reeste on you... and if the good God should bring you to this land you will join your Brethren and say, that you now possess that sattisfaction and peace of soul you ever was a stranger to."<sup>37</sup>

About the same time, James Tawler, who had moved from Petersburg to Greene County, Ohio, in 1804, added to the chorus of voices urging Dromgoole to flee from slavery and its dangers both physical and moral: "I am ... happy more in my present situation than any I ever occupied before . [W]e rest here without the fear of assassination or poison— we have it in our power to bring up our children clear of the company of those, who spend their time in idleness the mother of debauchery, villainy, Gambling & who ride fine horses & spend money at the expense of the blood of the affrican—poor degraded miserable affrican—made intelligent by his Author, degraded to the toil of a brute by oppression.... I hope the time is not very far distant when a general & gradual emancipation will commence."<sup>38</sup>

Dromgoole eventually bought land in seven Ohio counties totaling 8,502 acres, some of which he rented out with the help of his friend Peter Pelham. Dromgoole occasionally traveled and preached there, but never moved north of slavery.<sup>39</sup> He explained to Pelham in 1808 that Rebekah Dromgoole's "almost constant" ill health was standing in the way of their removal to Ohio. He wrote to Philip Gatch in October 1813: "I often think of Ohio, but can get no farther than a wish to be there."<sup>40</sup>

The federal census of 1810 shows that Edward Dromgoole's household then included eleven slaves plus three free people of color, who were likely some of the people emancipated by his 1791 deed. The people still enslaved included at most two of those scheduled to be freed according to the deed; this indicates he had acquired at least nine slaves after 1791. The 1820 census enumerates ten enslaved and two free people of color in the household.<sup>41</sup>

In 1822, Edward Dromgoole, Jr., sold 1,000 acres that his father-in-law, Peter Pelham, had given to him in Greene County, Ohio. This indicates that Edward, Jr., like his father, had given up on moving to a free state. Interestingly, he sold the land to Godfrey Brown, a freedman who had been emancipated in 1814 by John T. Bowdoin of Surry County.<sup>42</sup> Despite all the land the Dromgooles had in Ohio and Virginia, there is no evidence that they sold or gave any of it to the people they themselves had emancipated.

George Coke Dromgoole (youngest son of Edward, Sr.), who was then serving in the Virginia House of Delegates, wrote to his father on February 3, 1824, about one of the family's former slaves: "Our Bob moved into North Carolina a few weeks past and the Sheriff of Northampton County has taken him up and his wife and lodged them in jail."<sup>43</sup> Bob, born in 1781, was freed by Edward, Sr., in 1807, and took the surname Woodlief or Woodliff. He registered as a "free Negro" in Brunswick County in 1821, but this 1824 reference is the last mention of him that I have found.<sup>44</sup> It is a little puzzling why Bob and his wife were thrown in jail; North Carolina did not pass a law prohibiting free Black people from moving there until 1827,<sup>45</sup> but perhaps this was a county policy rather than a state law.

It appears that Edward Dromgoole, Sr., was still buying slaves in the last few years of his life. George Dromgoole wrote to his father on October 6, 1829, "I saw Mr. Bowden in Petersburg and got the bill of sale for Solomon." A man named Solomon is listed in the appraisal of Edward's estate in 1835, valued at \$550.<sup>46</sup> The Virginia Conference in 1817 had made a rule permitting members to buy and sell slaves only when "they are bought and sold for the express purpose of keeping husbands and wives, parents and children together, or from the principles of humanity."<sup>47</sup> We do not know if this was the reason Dromgoole bought Solomon, but it is certain that another slaveowner wanted Dromgoole to buy one of his slaves in order to reunite a family.

Thomas Turner of Halifax, North Carolina, wrote Dromgoole on December 14, 1829, "I have a Negro Woman that has some connections in your family as she states, and wishes you to purchase her (as she

is not willing to go to Alabama where I shall take her if she is not sold)... her age is about 52 years.”<sup>48</sup> The U.S. Census of 1830 does not list any enslaved women in that age group in Dromgoole’s household, so he probably did not buy her. The 1830 census lists Edward Dromgoole, Sr., with 17 slaves plus one young “Free Colored” female. By that year, the share of white households in Brunswick County who held slaves had grown to 73%.<sup>49</sup>

In August 1831 Nat Turner, an enslaved man in Southampton County who was a self-appointed preacher and prophet, led an uprising that killed 57 white people. In turn, white militia and vigilantes killed over 100 Black people, and 19 more were executed later. George C. Dromgoole, as colonel of Brunswick County militia, mobilized troops against the insurrection. In reaction to the uprising, Virginia tightened its laws, making it illegal for Black people to preach, making it illegal to teach groups of Black people to read and write, and making it illegal for anyone to accept payment for teaching a slave to read and write. Free Black people felt even more unwelcome and left Virginia in large numbers.<sup>50</sup>

On October 16, 1831, John L. Wilkins, Jr., a Brunswick County plantation owner with 43 slaves, wrote to George Dromgoole, who was then serving in the Virginia Senate, about “Daniel, a negro, liberated by your father, & now living at my house. I own all his family, & he & they have uniformly conducted themselves in the most exemplary manner.” Daniel was afraid he would be forced to leave the state because of “the late unfortunate insurrection.” Wilkins wanted to “assist in any scheme that will permit him to spend the remainder of his days with his family,” and asked for Senator Dromgoole’s help.<sup>51</sup> The freedman Daniel was born in 1773, emancipated in 1799 in accordance with Edward Dromgoole’s deed of emancipation, and is listed in the Brunswick County Free Negro Register from 1810 through 1833, with the surname James beginning in 1825.<sup>52</sup> He disappears from the records after 1833, and may have made the hard choice of returning to slavery so he could remain with his family.<sup>53</sup>

The last will and testament of Edward Dromgoole, Sr., dated November 2, 1833, left fifteen slaves to George C. Dromgoole and one to grandson Daniel H. Dromgoole’s wife. He also left the substantial sum of \$10,903 in cash to various family members, plus \$2,500 to charitable endowments.<sup>54</sup>

Edward Dromgoole, Sr., died on May 13, 1835.<sup>55</sup> His personal property was appraised in June at \$8,025.17 ½, including 16 slaves valued at \$5,970. When you add in his Brunswick County real estate of 745 acres assessed at \$4,625, slaves made up 74% of his total personal property and 47% of his entire estate both real and personal.<sup>56</sup>

After Congressman George C. Dromgoole died in 1847 with no wife or children and without a will, his 23 slaves were sold at auction, including 12 people inherited from Edward, Sr. Four of the twelve were sold to George’s nephew Edward Dromgoole III, three to R. R. Beasley, two to Elizabeth House, and one each to three other buyers.<sup>57</sup>

In the 1860 census, Edward Dromgoole III, the only slaveowner named Dromgoole in Virginia, was listed with 33 slaves. We can tell from the inventories in his personal papers that five of these people had been property of Edward, Sr.<sup>58</sup>

According to the 1863 personal property tax list, Edward Dromgoole III had 70 slaves, 35 of whom were over age 16. He was the 18<sup>th</sup> largest slaveholder in Brunswick County, out of 728 slaveholding households (51% of white households in the county owned slaves).<sup>59</sup> One of the people emancipated by

Edward Dromgoole, Sr., appears as a free taxpayer in the 1863 personal property tax list: Austin Robins, born in 1777, who had been freed in 1802 according to Dromgoole's deed of emancipation.<sup>60</sup>

At least three of the former slaves of Edward, Sr., appear in the 1880 census of Brunswick County: Joseph Dromgoole, a 77-year-old Black laborer (listed as Josephus or Joe in Dromgoole family documents), his wife Lucinda, a 60-year-old Black housewife,<sup>61</sup> and Burrel (Burwell) Dromgoole, a 48-year-old Black laborer.<sup>62</sup> Burwell died in December 1887, listed as age 60 in the county death register.<sup>63</sup> The decisions or indecisions of the Dromgoole slaveowners affected their community for decades.

So what do we make of Edward Dromgoole, Sr., and his relationship with slavery? Donald G. Mathews, in his well-regarded book *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845*, uses Dromgoole as an example of a former opponent of slavery who changed his mind and cast his lot with the South's "peculiar institution." "If [Methodists] wanted to prosper easily in the South they could hardly avoid slavery, and many did want to prosper as easily as possible."<sup>64</sup> We see this in Dromgoole's fears that his life would lose some of its "ease and conveniency" if he moved to a free state, and the admission of his Ohio friends that it was easier to acquire the luxuries of life in Virginia.

As Cynthia Lyerly writes in her book *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810*, "As short-lived and ineffectual as the Methodist effort to end slavery was, it still represents an important episode in southern history.... Those who freed their slaves bore witness to the sincerity of their views and forced their neighbors to ask questions about the morality of an institution they had taken for granted. Antislavery Methodists did not realize their vision; at times they compromised it, and eventually the church leadership abandoned it. But.... [e]arly antislavery Methodists remind us that slavery's perpetuation and expansion were the result of conscious choices made by self-interested southerners between clear alternatives."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William B. Bynum, "Edward Dromgoole (1751–1835)," *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, Library of Virginia (1998–), published 2020 ([http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/dvb/bio.asp?b=Dromgoole\\_Edward](http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/dvb/bio.asp?b=Dromgoole_Edward), accessed 15 Nov. 2021).

<sup>2</sup> William B. Bynum, "Edward Dromgoole (1751–1835)," *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, Library of Virginia (1998–), published 2020 ([http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/dvb/bio.asp?b=Dromgoole\\_Edward](http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/dvb/bio.asp?b=Dromgoole_Edward), accessed 15 Nov. 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Brunswick County Deed Book 13 (1777-1780): 191-92. All county records cited in this paper are on microfilm at the Library of Virginia.

<sup>5</sup> Personal Property Tax Books, Reel 56 (Brunswick County, 1782-1798), frames 33 ("John Walton"), 21 ("Edward Drumgold"). All tax records cited are on microfilm at the Library of Virginia.

<sup>6</sup> Calculation based on 1787 Brunswick personal property tax lists, published in Nettie Schreiner-Yantis and Florene Speakman Love, *The 1787 Census of Virginia* (Springfield, VA: Genealogical Books in Print, 1987), 1:233-52.

<sup>7</sup> Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 295-96.

<sup>8</sup> Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 10-11, 296-98.

<sup>9</sup> Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 11-12.



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<sup>10</sup> Dromgoole to Asbury, undated draft letter (1805), Edward Dromgoole Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (microfilm copy at Library of Virginia, Miscellaneous Microfilm Reel 550, frame 9). Hereafter cited as Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel \_\_\_\_.

<sup>11</sup> "Waste Book," 1785-1786, Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel 553, frame 287.

<sup>12</sup> Dromgoole Family Records, Accession 24937, Library of Virginia, finding aid at <https://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=lva/vi01297.xml>, accessed 15 Nov. 2021. These business records name five stores, but no more than four seem to have been active at one time. The last known ledger for the store at "Sligoe," which seems to have been the name of Edward Dromgoole's first Brunswick County farm, ends in September 1797, and the first known ledger for the store at "Canaan," his second farm, begins in October 1798.

<sup>13</sup> Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel 550, frames 191-92;

<sup>14</sup> Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel 550, frame 216; Petition of Inhabitants of Brunswick County, 10 Nov. 1785, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia.

<sup>15</sup> Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 12-13.

<sup>16</sup> Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 61-62.

<sup>17</sup> "A Journal and Travel of James Meacham," *Historical Papers Published by the Trinity College Historical Society*, Ser. 9 (1912): 82 (entry of 1 Aug. 1789), 68 (entry of 30 May 1789).

<sup>18</sup> Will dated 6 Oct. 1793, proved 27 April 1795, Brunswick Will Book 5 (1778-1795):590-92; appraisal of Myrick's estate recorded 23 Feb. 1796, Will Book 6 (1795-1804):17-27. Myrick's connection with Dromgoole is clear, for he named Dromgoole as one of his executors and bequeathed £150 to "Edward Dromgoole and my Br. Matthew Myrick ... for the support of the cause of God among the Methodists."

<sup>19</sup> Deed, Matthew and Mary Myrick to Edward Dromgoole et al., 9 Feb. 1801, Brunswick Deed Book 18 (1800-1803):185-86; Will of Matthew Myrick dated 19 Mar 1812, proved 26 Oct 1818, Brunswick Will Book 8 (1812-1818):465; Inventory of Matthew Myrick's estate dated 16 Dec. 1818, recorded 23 Oct. 1826, Brunswick Will Book 10 (1824-1828):268-70.

<sup>20</sup> Brunswick Deed Book 15 (1790-1794): 93-94; details of the Christmas Conference instructions for emancipation by age group in Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 296-97.

<sup>21</sup> Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 298-99.

<sup>22</sup> Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel 550, frames 59 (1797 deed), 53 (1799 deed).

<sup>23</sup> Estate appraisal dated June 1835, Brunswick Will Book 13 (1836-1843) :67-68; will of John Walpole dated 7 Nov 1776, Brunswick Will Book 4 (1761-1777) :517.

<sup>24</sup> Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel 550, frame 338.

<sup>25</sup> *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark et al., (London and Nashville: Epworth Press and Abingdon Press, 1958), 2:144, 151.

<sup>26</sup> For a summary of the events, see <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/gabriels-conspiracy-1800/>

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<sup>27</sup> Frances Holloway Wynne, compiler, *Register of Free Negroes and Also of Dower Slaves, Brunswick County, Virginia, 1803-1850* (Fairfax, VA: [the author], 1983, *passim*). I have also checked the Brunswick County Register of Free Negroes, 1850-1864, but found none of the people freed by Dromgoole listed there.

<sup>28</sup> Philip Gatch's 1802 letter to Dromgoole, quoted below, states that it is a reply to a letter from Dromgoole dated 26 Aug. 1801 (William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840, Vol. IV: The Methodists* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946], 150-52, cited hereafter as Sweet, *The Methodists*).

<sup>29</sup> Sweet, *The Methodists*, 150-54. All letters to Dromgoole quoted by Sweet are in the Dromgoole Papers UNC.

<sup>30</sup> Sweet, *The Methodists*, 157.

<sup>31</sup> Sweet, *The Methodists*, 159. Sweet mistakenly describes this letter as being from Murfreesboro, TN, but the 1800 U.S. Census shows that James Henry Keys lived in Hertford County, NC, where the North Carolina town of Murfreesboro is located (1800 Census, Hertford County, Capt. Wiggins's Captaincy, image 3, accessed 17 Nov. 2021 on Ancestry.com).

<sup>32</sup> Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel 550, frame 24.

<sup>33</sup> Sweet, *The Methodists*, 160.

<sup>34</sup> Deeds of Emancipation, Greenville County Deed Book 2: 223 (16 Dec. 1795) , 368-69 (7 Nov. 1796); Sweet, *The Methodists*, 165.

<sup>35</sup> *The Statutes at Large of Virginia ... (New Series)* (Richmond: S. Shepherd, 1835-36), 3:252.

<sup>36</sup> Letter dated 19 July 1807, Sweet, *The Methodists*, 170-171.

<sup>37</sup> Sweet, *The Methodists*, 174-75.

<sup>38</sup> Undated letter (appears from context to be written in 1807), Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel 553, frame 108.

<sup>39</sup> Undated list, Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel 553, frame 190. Dromgoole sold 7,833.33 acres of this land to his sons Edward Dromgoole, Jr., and George C. Dromgoole for \$5,000 on 10 July 1832 (Brunswick Deed Book 29 [1830-1833]: 294, 474.) References to rental of Dromgoole's land are found in letters from Peter Pelham to Dromgoole dated 1807-1810 in Sweet, *The Methodists*, 177-78, 181, 188. Asbury mentions in his journal for 3 July 1808 that he met Dromgoole "on his return from a visit westward ... preaching at the camp meetings beyond the Ohio." (Clark, ed., *Journal and Letters of Asbury*, 2:573).

<sup>40</sup> Letter, Pelham to Dromgoole, 22 Oct 1808, in Sweet, *The Methodists*, 179-80; John M'Lean, *Sketch of Rev. Philip Gatch* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt & Poe, 1854), 151.

<sup>41</sup> 1810 U.S. Federal Census, Meherrin Parish, Brunswick County, Virginia, image 5; 1820 U.S. Census, Meherrin Parish, Brunswick County, Virginia, image 4 ("Edward Drumgole Senr."); both accessed on Ancestry.com, 17 Nov. 2021 .

<sup>42</sup> Deed dated 23 Mar. 1822, Brunswick Deed Book 25 (1820-1823): 276; Wynne, *Register of Free Negroes ... Brunswick County*, 31; Petition of "Godfree," 21 Oct. 1814, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia. Edward Dromgoole (Sr.) and his son Thomas were two of the signers of the petition to allow Godfrey to remain in Brunswick County as a free man. John T. Bowdoin lived in Surry County, but owned two plantations in Brunswick, with a total of 163 slaves in the two counties (1820 U.S. Census).

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<sup>43</sup> Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel 551, frame 146.

<sup>44</sup> Deed of Emancipation, Brunswick Deed Book 15: 93-94; Wynne, *Register of Free Negroes ... Brunswick County*, 43. Bob appears as a "Free Negro" single head of household under the name Robert Woodliff in the 1820 U.S. Census, Meherrin Parish, Brunswick County, image 19, accessed on Ancestry.com, 17 Nov. 2021

<sup>45</sup> John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1943), 193.

<sup>46</sup> Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel 551, frame 253; Appraisal, Brunswick County Will Book 13: 67.

<sup>47</sup> William Warren Sweet, *Virginia Methodism: A History* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1955), 200.

<sup>48</sup> Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel 551, frame 270.

<sup>49</sup> 1830 U.S. Census, Meherrin Parish, Brunswick County, image 5, household of "Drumgold, Edwd. Senr.," accessed 17 Nov. 2021 on Ancestry.com; author's calculation of slaveholding households based on Personal Property Tax, 1830, Reel 58.

<sup>50</sup> For a summary of the revolt and its aftermath, see <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/turners-revolt-nat-1831/>. For George C. Dromgoole's role, see Gay Neale, *Brunswick County, Virginia, 1720-1975*, rev. ed. (Brunswick County Bicentennial Committee, 1999), 204-5.

<sup>51</sup> Dromgoole Papers UNC, Reel 550, frame 86.

<sup>52</sup> Deed of Emancipation, Brunswick Deed Book 15: 93-94; Wynne, *Register of Free Negroes ... Brunswick County*, 9, 78, 124.

<sup>53</sup> 1830 census for John L. Wilkins, Jr. (Meherrin Parish, Brunswick County, image 27) lists no "free colored" persons, but 43 slaves, including 3 males over age 55. 1840 census for the younger John L. Wilkins in Brunswick (Brunswick County image 45) lists no "free colored" persons, but 106 slaves, including 4 males over age 55. Accessed on Ancestry.com, 17 Nov. 2021.

<sup>54</sup> Brunswick Will Book 12 (1832-1836): 311-13. The endowments were \$2,000 for "instruction of the poor children of the neighborhood in the Rudiments of a plain English Education" and \$500 for "relief of poor and destitute persons in the neighborhood."

<sup>55</sup> Obituary in *Richmond Enquirer*, 19 June 1835.

<sup>56</sup> Appraisal, Brunswick Will Book 13: 67-70; Land Tax, Reel 49, Brunswick County List 1835-B, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Sale of George C. Dromgoole's estate, 24 Jan. 1848, Brunswick Will Book 15 (1846-1853) :159.

<sup>58</sup> 1860 census slave schedule for Edward Dromgoole, Meherrin Parish, Brunswick County, image 33, accessed on Ancestry.com, 18 Nov. 2021; compare ages with 1854 slave inventory by Edward Dromgoole III in George Dromgoole and Richard B. Robinson Papers, Duke University (*Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations... Series F* [Frederick, MD: University Publications of America microfilm], Library of Virginia Miscellaneous Reel 2603, frame 735).

<sup>59</sup> 1863 Brunswick Personal Property Tax, Reel 436, frames 13-14, line 27 (District of J. W. Rawlings). Author's calculations of number and percentage of slaveowners in the county are based on the two 1863 Brunswick Personal Property Tax lists on this reel.

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<sup>60</sup> 1863 Brunswick Personal Property Tax, frame 36, line 29; Deed of Emancipation, Brunswick Deed Book 15: 93-94; Wynne, *Register of Free Negroes ... Brunswick County*, 138 (listed as Austin Robbins).

<sup>61</sup> 1880 census, Powellton District, Brunswick County, image 58, dwelling 539, accessed 22 Nov. 2021 on Ancestry.com. Josephus and Lucinda appear in the estate appraisal of Edward Dromgoole, Sr. (Will Book 13:67-68), and were bought at George C. Dromgoole's estate sale in 1848 by Edward Dromgoole III (Will Book 15:159, listed as age 44 for Josephus and 28 for Lucinda).

<sup>62</sup> 1880 census, Powellton District, Brunswick County, image 50, dwelling 465, accessed 22 Nov. 2021 on Ancestry.com. Burwell appears in the estate appraisal of Edward Dromgoole, Sr. (Will Book 13:67-68), and was bought at age 18 in George C. Dromgoole's 1848 estate sale (Will Book 15:159) by I. F. House.

<sup>63</sup> Register of Deaths, Brunswick County, 2<sup>nd</sup> District, 1887, line 15 (Dromgoole, Burwell), Bureau of Vital Statistics Deaths, Reel 5, Library of Virginia microfilm.

<sup>64</sup> Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 44-45.

<sup>65</sup> Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 144.