Cultures of Emotion: Families, Friends, and the Making of the United States

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
History in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

“Cultures of Emotion: Families, Friends, and the Making of the United States” explores the centrality of families to the new republic’s economy and governing institutions in the post-Revolutionary period. In so doing, my work brings the insights of scholarship on the early modern period to the post-Revolutionary United States, where the literature has tended to focus on men and women as individuals, rather than understanding them as members of far-flung family networks. While focusing specifically on several prominent families based in North Carolina and Virginia, the dissertation shows that during this period, wealthy elites during this period had extensive interests in their states and the federal government. They identified so closely with these bodies that they collapsed their interests with the public interest and used their access to them to advance their families’ interests in the name of the public good. By folding the institutions of federal and state government into their family networks, the new republic’s elites organized their own lives and these developing institutions around the metaphor and idea of family. As this dissertation argues, these dynamics were built into the institutional structure of the new nation, creating a governing system intertwined with the familial networks of the elite.

The focus is on two elite families: the Coles of Virginia and the Camerons of North Carolina. Both families were prominent members of the southern elite with
networks centered in the South that extended throughout the country and stretched across the Atlantic. Members of both networks held prominent positions in state and national government, and both networks had extensive and varied business interests.

This dissertation combines the history of the Atlantic World with women’s, women’s, economic, political, and legal history to explore the economic and political implications of the connections between the “private,” domestic world of the family and the “public” world of governance at the federal, state, and local levels. The focus on family and affective labor, combined with the contributions of recent work in legal history, recasts our understanding of economic and political development in this period.

Examining the intersections of politics with family business networks in the antebellum United States reveals the limitations of the power of governing institutions, particularly at the state and federal level, and the interdependent relationship between elite family networks and government. Government was not a unified, monopolizing force. Rather, governing authority lay in different arenas—at the local, state, and federal levels, and elite families used their networks to access government at these levels to support their economic interests.

“Cultures of Emotion” uses affective labor as a lens through which to examine a unique blend of sources: personal, business, and political correspondence, as well as ledgers, bonds, and other business and political documents. The personal correspondence allows me to reconstruct the basic outlines of kinship networks by
revealing the work that men and women did in creating and maintaining familial ties through performances of specific emotional norms. The personal, business, and political correspondence of women and men in the families I study reveals repeated elements in correspondence that served as performances of emotional kinship bonds, as well as conventions to follow. Following the connections established in this correspondence to the ledgers, bonds, and other statements of credit and debt between the network’s members uncovers the webs of credit and debt that sustained elite families. These business and political records underscore the importance of kinship in maintaining these webs of credit and debt and constitute an important link in understanding the way the network’s political and economic power rested on familial bonds and incorporated the institutions of state and federal government as a member, firmly situating the economic and political networks in the domestic realm. Such an approach recasts our understanding of the nineteenth-century United States, centering families in the work of governance and highlighting women’s central role in their families’ economic and political work.
Dedication

To Kyle
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The Coles Family

John Coles (II): Son of John Coles (I) and Mary Ann Winston. Married Rebecca Elizabeth Tucker. Their children were: Walter, John (III), Mary Eliza, Isaac, Tucker, Rebecca, Edward Sarah, Elizabeth, and Emily Ann. Walter married (1) Eliza Fauntleroy Cocke and (2) Sally Thompson Craig. Tucker and John III married sisters, Helen and Selina Skipwith, the daughters of Sir Peyton Skipwith. Mary Eliza married Robert Carter. Elizabeth ("Betsy") never married.

Sarah Coles Stevenson: Married Andrew Stevenson and accompanied him to England where he served as Minister to the Court of St. James.

Andrew Stevenson: U.S. Representative, Speaker of the House, and Minister to the Court of St. James. Presided over the 1848 Democratic National Convention. Married (1) Mary Page White, (2) Sarah Coles Stevenson, and (3) Mary Schaff. His son with Mary White, John White Stevenson, was a U.S. Representative, governor of Kentucky, and U.S. Senator.

Elizabeth “Betsy” Coles: Never married. Loaned large sums of money to relatives.
John Rutherfoord: Married Emily Ann Coles. Governor of Virginia, member of the Virginia House of Delegates, member of Virginia’s state Executive Council. Their children were: John Coles, Emily Ann, Sally, and Helen.


Hodijah Meade: Married to Jane Rutherfoord, sister of John Rutherfoord.

Edward Coles: Private secretary to President James Madison, second governor of Illinois, and anti-slavery advocate. Settled in Philadelphia. Married Sally Logan Roberts whose sister Elizabeth married Dr. William Rush, son of Dr. Benjamin Rush. Their three children were Mary, Edward, Jr., and Roberts.

Roberts Coles: Edward Coles’s youngest son. Moved to Virginia and bought a plantation shortly before the Civil War. Died in 1862 fighting for the Confederate Army.

Isaac A. Coles: President Thomas Jefferson’s private secretary, member of the Virginia House of Delegates, colonel in the regular army. Married (1) Louisa Gertrude Nivison and (2) Juliana Stricker Rankin.
Richard Singleton: South Carolina planter, horse breeder, and racer. Son of John Singleton and Rebecca Richardson. Nephew of James Richardson, the governor of South Carolina. His sisters were Harriet Richardson Singleton Broun Spann and Mary Martha Singleton McRa. Married (1) Charlotte Videau Ashby and had one daughter, Mary Rebecca Singleton, who married George McDuffie and died shortly after the birth of daughter Mary McDuffie. Married (2) Rebecca Coles Singleton. Their children were John Coles, Videau Marion, Sarah Angelica, Richard, and Matthew R.

Marion Singleton Deveaux: Daughter of Richard and Rebecca Singleton. Married (1) Robert Deveaux and (2) Augustus Converse. Managed plantations in trust for her children by Robert after his death. Obtained a legal separation from Converse and returned to using name Deveaux afterwards.

George McDuffie: U.S. Representative from South Carolina, South Carolina governor, U.S. Senator. Married Mary Rebecca Singleton and had one daughter, Mary Singleton McDuffie. Closely allied with the Calhoun family.

Mary McDuffie: Daughter of George McDuffie and Mary Singleton McDuffie. Raised by her grandparents Richard and Rebecca Singleton. Married Wade Hampton III.
Angelica Singleton Van Buren: Daughter of Richard and Rebecca Singleton. Married Abraham Van Buren, whom she was introduced to by her cousin Dolley Madison, and acted as First Lady for her father-in-law, Martin Van Buren.


William Cabell Rives: Member of Virginia House of Delegates, U.S. Senator, two-time U.S. Minister to France, delegate to the 1861 Peace Conference in Washington, delegate from Virginia to the Provisional Confederate Congress, member of the Confederate Congress. Married Judith Page Walker and moved to her plantation, Castle Hill, in Albemarle. Studied law under Thomas Jefferson. His younger brother George married Mary Eliza Carter, the daughter of Robert Carter and Mary Eliza Coles.


Dolley Madison: First Lady of the United States. Married to James Madison. Cousin of Edward Coles and his siblings: her father, John Payne, was Edward’s uncle, and her mother, Mary Coles, was the cousin of John Coles (II).

James Madison: U.S. President. Married to Dolley Madison, relative of Coles family.


Nicholas Biddle: President of the Second Bank of the Unite States. Close friend of Edward Coles.

Thomas Ritchie: Editor of the *Richmond Enquirer*, an influential newspaper.


The Cameron Family

Duncan Cameron: Son of John Cameron and Anne Owen Nash. Married Rebecca Bennehan in 1803. They had eight children, four of whom lived to adulthood—Thomas, Paul, Margaret, and Mildred. President of the State Bank of North Carolina and the Bank of the State of North Carolina after it was re-chartered, Major General of the North Carolina Militia, superior court justice, multi-term state senator and representative.

Rebecca Bennehan Cameron: Daughter of Richard Bennehan and Mary Amis Bennehan. Married Duncan Cameron in 1803.

Thomas Bennehan: brother of Rebecca Bennehan Cameron. Thomas never married.

Paul Cameron: son of Duncan and Rebecca Cameron. Married Anne Ruffin, daughter of Thomas Ruffin. State legislator and railroad promoter. Richest man in North Carolina at the time of the Civil War.

Margaret Cameron Mordecai: daughter of Duncan and Rebecca Cameron. Married George Mordecai after father Duncan’s death in 1853. Railroad investor.

Thomas Ruffin: Married Anne Kirkland, daughter of William Kirkland, in 1809.

Archibald DeBow Murphey: Married Jane Armistead Scott, who was William Kirkland’s sister-in-law. State legislator and advocate of education and internal improvement.


Mary Cameron Anderson: Married to Daniel Anderson, business partner of William Kirkland. Duncan Cameron’s sister. Godmother to Catherine Ruffin.
John A. Cameron: Duncan Cameron’s brother. President of Fayetteville, NC, branch of the U.S. Bank. Member of the North Carolina House of Commons. Editor of the Fayetteville *North Carolina Journal*. Consul to Vera Cruz. Florida district court judge.

William A. Graham: North Carolina governor, U.S. Senator, Secretary of the Navy. Studied law under Thomas Ruffin. His son John W. Graham was the second husband of Paul Cameron’s daughter, Rebecca Bennehan Cameron Anderson.

Willie P. Mangum: U.S. Senator and president pro tempore of the Senate, U.S. Representative from North Carolina, and superior court judge. Studied law under Duncan Cameron, and tutored his sons Thomas and Paul.

1. Introduction

“My affections are my world” Sarah Coles Stevenson penned in an 1841 letter to her sister, “and they centre in my family.”¹ Sarah’s statement signals an underlying truth: the importance of affective family ties in the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War. During this period, the intimate bonds of family were central to economics and politics. Her brother Edward likewise emphasized the importance of affectionate familial ties in a letter to his friend Nicholas Biddle: “you occupy a place in my heart next to that which contains the affections of its own blood.”² It might seem incongruous to begin an examination of business and political networks with statements about affection for family. But, taken together, Sarah’s and Edward’s words highlight not just the importance of emotional work to economic and political ventures but also the profound similarity between women’s and men’s labor in creating and maintaining the relationships that underwrote those endeavors. Family grounded the political and economic worlds of the elite. In fact, it is impossible to understand either women or men in prominent political and economic positions outside the context of their families.

¹ Sarah Coles Stevenson to Emily Coles Rutherfoord, January 27, 1841, Box 1, Folder 7, in the John Rutherfoord Papers Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.)
² Edward Coles to Nicholas Biddle, January 11, 1814, Box 1, Folder 14, in the Edward Coles Papers: 1797-1881, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. (Hereafter cited as Edward Coles Papers, PUL). In Nicholas’s response, he assured Edward that the feelings were reciprocated saying, “Be assured my dear Sir, that the sentiments of regard which you have the goodness to express are perfectly reciprocal & that I shall at all times feel gratified by your remembrance.” Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, January 18, 1814, Box 1, Folder 14, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
This dissertation explores the centrality of families to the new republic’s economy and its governing institutions. Wealthy elites during this period had extensive interests in their states and the federal government. They identified so closely with these bodies that they collapsed their interests with the public interest and used their access to them to advance their families’ interests in the name of the public good. By folding the institutions of federal and state government into their family networks, the new republic’s elites organized their own lives and these developing institutions around the metaphor and idea of family. As this dissertation argues, these dynamics were built into the institutional structure of the new nation, creating a governing system intertwined with the familial networks of the elite.

The dissertation focuses on the networks of two elite families: the Coles of Virginia and the Camerons of North Carolina. The Coles and Cameron families offer particularly apt case studies for examining the relationship between families and the development of government and governing institutions at the federal, state, and local levels in the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War. Both were prominent members of the southern elite with connections to other prominent elite families. While centered in the South, the Coles and Cameron families built selectively inclusive and selectively exclusive family networks that extended throughout the country and stretched across the Atlantic. Both networks included members with prominent
positions in state and national governments and had extensive and varied business interests. As such, they were fairly typical of elite families during this time period.

Duncan Cameron—president of the state bank of North Carolina, Major General of the North Carolina Militia, superior court justice, and multi-term state senator and representative—anchored an extended family network that spread from Durham to Wilmington, North Carolina, and further to Florida, Virginia, and Tennessee. His son Paul Cameron extended the network further into southern Alabama and Mississippi. Both men’s networks depended on the connections made through marriage—for Duncan, with his wife Rebecca’s family, the Bennehans, and for Paul, with his wife Anne’s family, the Ruffins. The Cameron family network included virtually every prominent business and political leader in North Carolina, both on a state and national level, including: Thomas Ruffin, the Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court for almost twenty years; Archibald Murphey, state legislator and advocate for education and internal improvement; Willie P. Mangum, U.S. Senator and president pro tempore of the Senate; William A. Graham, North Carolina governor, U.S. Senator, and Secretary of the Navy; and many others.

Similarly, the network of the Coles family of Virginia had a wide geographic range, from the South Carolina low country to various parts of Virginia, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and New York, and reaching across the Atlantic and into South

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3 Paul Cameron was married to Anne Ruffin Cameron, the daughter of the noted jurist Thomas Ruffin.
America. Included were national political and economic leaders: Presidents Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, and Martin Van Buren; First Ladies Dolley Madison and Angelica Singleton Van Buren; president of the Second Bank of the United States Nicholas Biddle; Minister to England and Speaker of the House Andrew Stevenson; U.S. Senator and two-time Minister to France William C. Rives; Virginia governor John Rutherfoord; and South Carolina statesman George McDuffie.

The affective labor necessary to extend and maintain kinship connections precludes a narrow definition of family as a blood related, nuclear family. Instead, I draw on the ways in which elite families fashioned their own identities, following the real and fictive kinship ties they created, extended, and maintained in their lives. These ties encompassed both individuals related by blood or marriage and individuals who offered beneficial social, economic, or political ties but were otherwise un-related. Both real and fictive kinship ties were portrayed as intimate and affectionate, promoting an image of a united, affectionate family.

In the context of the antebellum South, such an approach raises an additional complication—that of black slaves living within the same household as their white masters. Indeed, historians have acknowledged these ties through discussions of white southerners’ talk of “our family white and black.”

The letters of the Coles and Cameron

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4 See, for example, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); and Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father’s House*
families, however, rarely discuss their slaves outside of the context of business activities—and rarely refer to them as family. Their particular definition of family was goal-oriented and defined through affectionate kinship relationships. Just as the members of these families selectively extended familial ties to non-blood related whites who could form beneficial ties, they excluded any blacks from membership within the family, even if possibly related by blood.

By conceptualizing the enslaved men and women they owned as outside of the family, regardless of actual blood relationship or the importance of their labor in the family business, elite men and women were able to hide the violence they committed against enslaved men and women—particularly those whom they owned. In fact, one of the key economic transactions that men and women handled for family members in the antebellum South reveals just how tightly the lines of family were drawn to exclude enslaved people: buying, selling, and leasing slaves. As the correspondence surrounding such economic transactions shows, enslaved men and women were so far outside of the bounds of the family that purchasing and leasing them was simply an economic transaction. It was an acquisition of goods. The difference in the language elite men and women used to talk about their families and enslaved people is stark, even in the

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instances when they referred to their “black family.” The language surrounding family emphasized intimate and affectionate bonds while the language surrounding enslaved men and women was impersonal, driven by market forces. It also obscured the violence of slavery, which was at odds with the familial ideals, by characterizing the circumstances of the enslaved as a result of their own actions. If there was violence, it was the fault of the enslaved, not of their masters and mistresses. Here, as with the extension of family to include real and fictive ties, I take my cue from the people I study, using their own constructions to explore how families operated in their lives.

Like other elites, the Camerons and Coles did extend their family in other ways—to their friends. Men and women in the years between the Revolution and the Civil War used family and friends interchangeably. The bonds of intimate friendship and family overlapped to the extent that they can be difficult to untangle when reading correspondence. For example, Sarah Coles Stevenson wrote her first two letters after arriving in England to “My Dr. Friends” and “my beloved friends.” Only after reading one of her next letters home—written a month later—does it become clear that the initial letter was actually to her family.5 She regularly used both terms when talking about

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5 In the later letter, Sarah explains to that she had written a letter to the whole family that she had addressed “to my dear friends generally.” See: Sarah Coles Stevenson to “My Dear Emm” [Emily Coles Rutherfoord], July 13, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1, in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU). For the first two letters, see Sarah Coles Stevenson to “My Dr. Friends,” July 1, 1836; and Sarah Coles Stevenson to “My beloved friends [June] 29, 1836; both in Box 1, Folder 1 of the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
family and friends—or, as she put it in one letter—her “loved ones.”

Similarly, when James Madison invited Edward Coles to join his political family in 1810, he was speaking of the ties that bound political friends into political networks, not ties of blood and marriage. In fact, he and Edward were already related by marriage.

In all areas of life—social, economic, and political—the lines between family and friendship blurred, with friends becoming family and family becoming friends. All of these relationships represented intimate emotional bonds of love, affection, respect, and trust. As such, these two seemingly different relationships—family and friends—were treated similarly.

For the Coles and Camerons, affection characterized the bonds of friendship as well as familial relationships. For both, affection established and sustained trust that tied people together. In turn, these relationships came with weighty obligations. Because reciprocity was so critical to economic and political endeavors, families selectively extended kinship bonds only to those people who could provide assistance or support.

Then they aggressively maintained the familial boundaries by continually reinforcing

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6 See: Sarah Coles Stevenson to “My beloved sisters, & friends,” July 4, 1836. Similarly, she addressed one letter to her sister Rebecca Singleton with “My beloved Sister’s and friends.” Sarah Coles Stevenson to Mrs. Singleton, August 4, 1836. For other examples of Sarah using the terms family and friends interchangeably, see Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, July 19, 1836; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, September 1836; Sarah Coles Stevenson to “My beloved Sister, & friends,” September 19, 1838; all in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.

7 Edward Coles to James Madison, January 8, 1810. Edward Coles Papers, PU.

8 Cassandra Good explains that the word “friend” had many different meanings in the early republic; the word “friend” could refer to an acquaintance, a patron, a protector, a business partner, a diplomatic or political ally, a lover, a spouse, or a voluntary relationship based on affection and common interest.” See: Cassandra A. Good, Founding Friendships: Friendships between Men and Women in the Early American Republic, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2. Since men and women used friend and family interchangeably, I argue that in addition to the meanings that Good listed, “friend” could also mean family.
members’ places within it. As family and friends joined together, boundaries blurred to create powerful bonds of alliance, based in affection and trust, which formed the foundations for the vast economic and political networks that held the power to shape the development of state and federal government in the United States. Because the Coles and Camerons so often used the terms “family” and “friend” interchangeably, I do the same, extending familial ties to friends, just as the people I study did.

The networks of the Coles and Camerons were large and varied, encompassing every family member in multiple ways. Separated by distances both great and small, families relied on affective labor in correspondence to preserve relationships and connections. Because a person’s family formed a central component of their identity and was so key in establishing credit and reputation, the affective labor in selectively extending membership within the family was an important task—economically, socially, and politically. These families were extended and maintained through adherence to emotional conventions specific to distinct yet overlapping areas—family, business, and

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9 To list just a few examples of this blurring between family and friend: In 1810, John Rutherfoord’s cousin wrote him a letter hoping that by “commencing a correspondence [...] the foundation will be laid of a friendship and intimacy between us, as permanent and durable as our lives.” [Martin Brownby Rutherfoord] to “My Dear Cousin,” March 27, 1810, Box 1, Folder 2, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. In an 1823 letter about plans for his wedding, Isaac A. Coles asked John Rutherfoord to communicate all of the plans to “all my immediate friends”—after crossing out “to my family.” Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, March 31, 1823, Box 1, Folder 2, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. In an 1839 letter A.H. Rutherfoord refers to John Rutherfoord as a “kind & valued friend” and himself as “an ungrateful friend” before signing the letter with “most affectionate Cousin.” A.H. Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord, January 10, 1839, Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfood Papers, DU. In 1841, John instructed his son to answer the letter written to him by a male cousin, and “endeavor to attach him to you” because “I love his mother so much, that I wish our children to be friends as well as relatives [...]” John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, January 17, 1841, Box 1, Folder 7, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
politics. Each shared a common language of family feeling that inspired trust. Men seemed to form the center of these networks through their business and political activities. But women’s affective labor, which solidified the familial bonds necessary for credit, ensured that the networks stayed connected and bound by bonds of kinship and trust. Men not only benefitted from such labor but also engaged in it themselves.

These relationships then provided the foundations for economic and political ventures. Membership in a family came with reciprocal obligations of support in economic and political endeavors as well as obligations of emotional support. These networks were involved in a wide variety of businesses, including plantations, mills, railroads, canals, and land speculation—among many others. Individual men and women in the family also regularly loaned each other money and entered into different business arrangements together, creating complicated webs of credit and debt.

Failure was an ever-present reality and danger in the nineteenth-century, as the literature dealing most directly with debt and failure highlights. According to historian Bruce Mann, “debt was an inescapable fact of life in early America” that “cut across regional, class, and occupational lines” and existed simultaneously as “entrepreneurial opportunity,” “burdensome necessity,” and “destitution.”¹⁰ Mann’s work, which focuses on legal processes, argues that the social relations that once underlay credit were

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undercut by the more impersonal instruments of notes and bonds. The work of other scholars who focus more directly on the social relations of business, such as Edward Balleisen and Scott Sandage, emphasizes the importance of social relations like family and friendship in establishing credit, holding creditors at bay, and achieving fresh starts after bankruptcy and economic failure. Recent scholarship on the Atlantic World and the North American West also highlights the importance of family ties for credit. Southern historians have recognized the importance of family in the lives of elite whites as well, particularly in the social realm. All this work, however, tends to separate

12 The importance of familial relationships in establishing both personal and economic credit is a theme running through the literature on family networks. Scholarship on the Atlantic World emphasizes the personal relationships behind early modern trade networks and their connections to the growth and expansion of the state.; Sarah M.S. Pearsall, Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Brett Rushforth, Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Sheryllynne Haggerty, The British-Atlantic Trading Community, 1760-1810: Men, Women, and the Distribution of Goods, (Boston: Brill, 2006); Marta V. Vicente, Clothing the Spanish Empire: Families and the Calico Trade in the Early Modern Atlantic World; (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); Alison Games, The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560-1660; (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Susanah Shaw Romney, New Netherland Connections: Intimate Networks and Atlantic Ties in Seventeenth-Century America, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). This emphasis on the connections between families and empire is also evident in work on the North American West. Anne Hyde argues that the extensive trading networks of the North American West that pushed the boundaries of empire, such as that of the Chouteau family, rested on intermarriage and women’s role in linking families together. Hyde further argues that the familial connections formed by individual men and women built the web of connections that united the West. Anne F. Hyde, Empires, Nations, and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800-1860, (New York: Ecco, 2012). Such literature shows that the success of both an individual’s economic interests and the interests of the state were reliant upon the trust and credit based on familial relationships despite the separation of long distances. Other scholars further emphasize the precarity of such networks formed by personal connections, revealing how the entire network could fall because of the actions of one individual. See, for example, Jane Kamensky, The Exchange Artist: A Tale of High-Flying Speculation and America’s First Banking Collapse, (New York: Penguin Group, 2008); Pearsall, Atlantic Families.
women in the family from their families' economic and political work. As I argue, the business activities of large family networks like those of the Coles and Camerons reveal the centrality not just of family in determining credit and conducting business transactions but also of women within the familial systems of credit and debt.

Much like with business networks, political ties in the nineteenth century were largely based on bonds of family and friendship. Like other elites, the Coles and Camerons accessed political power through those ties. Men like Edward Coles and women like Dolley Madison received countless letters that called on these ties in attempts to obtain political appointments. Even letters that focused specifically on legislation, elections, or political policies were written with a singular purpose—benefitting the political family. Taken together, these political activities reveal that, despite casting politicians as public servants, men in positions of political power in fact served their families above all else.

In the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War, families—and not just individual men or even individual women—shaped the development of the institutions of government on the local, state, and federal level. By casting their family’s prospects

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13 For one example of this, see Burton, *In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions*.
as the public good, men in positions of leadership incorporated the institutions,
authority, and power of government into their families. The implications were
particularly apparent in the realm of internal improvements, where well-connected men
used the networks created through affective labor to access state government and shape
public policy around their own interests. In the process, they reinforced a kinship-
centered governing structure, one that could not be disconnected from the affective,
economic, and political work that drove families’ economic ventures and political
fortunes. The dynamics that supported these families collapsed distinctions that the
scholarship has taken for granted, situating the “public” world of the economy and
policy in the domestic realm and highlighting women’s central role in the “male” world
of property and partisan politics.

These dynamics, which linked the relations within families to public endeavors,
characterized the post-Revolutionary United States, where they had wide-reaching
public implications, turning political differences into intimate, potentially volatile
conflicts. The results ultimately exacerbated sectional conflict, where political differences devolved rapidly into the Civil War. That conflict was shaped, in part, by eighteenth-century relations that were built into the structure of the new nation and found institutional purchase in the developing institutions of federal and state government in the nineteenth century. As sectional tensions heightened, familial relationships and metaphors continued to guide the new republic’s elite as they sought to negotiate the ever-increasing conflict that ultimately erupted in war by drawing on the strategies that had worked for them for decades.

**Historiography**

My work combines the history of the Atlantic World with women’s, economic, political, and legal history to explore the economic and political implications of the connections between the “private,” domestic world of the family and the “public” world of governance at the federal, state, and local levels. The focus on family and affective labor, combined with the contributions of recent work in legal history, recasts our understanding of economic and political development in this period. Examining the intersections of politics with family business networks in the antebellum United States

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reveals the limitations of the power of governing institutions, particularly at the state and federal level, and the interdependent relationship between elite family networks and government. Government was not a unified, monopolizing force. Rather, governing authority lay in different arenas—at the local, state, and federal levels, and elite families used their networks to access government at these levels to support their economic interests.

Well-connected men in particular leveraged affective familial connections to access governing institutions and shape them to fit their own interests, all in the name of the public good. These direct ties between family networks and governing institutions were an extension of the dynamics that characterized the early modern Atlantic World. That literature emphasizes the personal relationships behind early modern trade networks and their connections to the growth and expansion of governing institutions, firmly connecting the private, domestic world with the public world of governance. For example, Sarah Pearsall highlights the importance of personal relationships for credit and the way in which the family was tied to the wider market economy in the eighteenth-century Atlantic World. As she argues, the domestic household could not be separated from the society, nation, and empire of which it was a part. Likewise, the market and the family were intertwined, a relationship exemplified by the language of

16 Rushforth, Bonds of Alliance; Haggerty, The British-Atlantic Trading Community, 1760-1810; Vicente, Clothing the Spanish Empire; Games, The Web of Empire; Pearsall, Atlantic Families; Romney, New Netherland Connections.
credit, which slid from business to personal matters without any transition. That conflation signified an underlying truth: the credit or ruin of a family could multiply outward to reinforce or destabilize the wider market economy.¹⁷

I build on recent scholarship in women’s history that uses a gendered analysis to question the characterization of economics, politics, and law as the realms of men—assumptions that continue to frame the historiography of the nineteenth-century United States.¹⁸ The historical literature has emphasized the prominent economic, political, and social role of these family networks. Much of the scholarship, however, places the elite white women of these families firmly within their own households as wives and mothers. By implication, economics, politics, and law are the realms of their fathers, husbands, and brothers.¹⁹ Recognizing that the dynamics that characterized the relationship between families and governing institutions in the early modern Atlantic

¹⁷ Pearsall, Atlantic Families. Similarly, in Marta Vicente’s study of the calico trade in the early modern Atlantic world, she argues that Spanish families involved in the calico trade were central to the advancement and wealth of the Spanish empire. Families sent relatives throughout the Iberian peninsula and Spain’s American colonies, establishing networks for shipping calicoes. It was these family networks, she argues, that were central to the growth of the Spanish empire—and its prosperity. See: Vicente, Clothing the Spanish Empire.


¹⁹ See, for example, Burton, In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions; Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household, and Lorri Glover, All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds among the Early South Carolina Gentry, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). Some recent scholarship is changing this narrative, emphasizing women’s role in economic production. See, for example, Hartigan-O’Connor, Ties that Buy; Alexandra Finley, “‘Cash to Corinna’: Domestic Labor and Sexual Economy in the ‘Fancy Trade,’” Journal of American History (September 2017), 410-30; and Alexandra Jolyn Finley, “Blood Money: Sex, Family, and Finance in the Antebellum Slave Trade,” (PhD diss., The College of William and Mary, 2017).
World continued in the post-Revolutionary United States suggests a much larger role for women in their families’ economic and political networks. These networks and their activities, so often viewed as public simply because of their economic and political work, were firmly ensconced in the private world of the family. Combining that insight with the insights of recent scholarship in women’s history shows that economics, politics, and law were not simply the realms of individual men or women; they were the realms of families.

The scholarship on business and economics in the nineteenth-century United States emphasizes the importance of credit and debt to business ventures in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with personal relationships key in obtaining loans from individuals, private corporations, and banks.20 The literature on merchants and economic networks in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries places a similar emphasis on the importance of personal, familial ties for business enterprises.21 Placing these bodies of literature in conversation with the literature on credit and family in the Atlantic World highlights the continued dominance of family-centered modes of economic action in the post-Revolutionary United States. As the business activities of the


women and men in the Coles and Cameron families show, an individual’s credit could not be separated from that of his or her family, and family ties were instrumental in every type of business enterprise.

The literature on politics in the nineteenth-century United States has recognized the gendered dimensions of politics and political power. This literature emphasizes that women underwrote men’s political power, while also holding some political power in their own right through the social sphere and their connections with men. For example, both Joanne Freeman and Rachel Shelden have highlighted the gendered nature of politics in this period. Freeman focuses on the role of gendered conceptions of honor in the formation of a new political culture while Shelden examines the male-dominated political fraternity of Washington’s social community. Freeman, as well as Catherine Allgor and Cassandra Good, also shed light on women’s role in the political process. In Allgor’s study, women in political families worked within the social sphere to develop political relationships. Freeman likewise acknowledges the work that women did in maintaining their husbands’ political networks. Good’s work focuses on male-female friendships between elite men and women involved in political life and the importance of those relationships for political power in the early republic.²² I build on the groundwork laid by these scholars to show that, in the early republic, the family as a

corporate unit was the bastion of political power. As the lives and actions of women and men in the Coles and Cameron families show, both men and women gained and leveraged political power through their families.

These modes of governance were typically associated with the eighteenth century, wherein private relations in families were linked to public endeavors. Yet, elite families built these eighteenth-century relations directly into the structure of the new nation where they gained institutional purchase in the nineteenth century. Legal authority and government institutions in this period thus had more in common with trends from the early modern period when family was central. Rather than focusing on court cases, statutes, or legal treatises, this dissertation deals with the development of law by examining cultures and modes of governance: the structures and institutions of legal authority that not only described the new constitutional order, but also remained largely unsettled during this period and were shaped by family ties.

Recognizing the direct ties between family networks and governing institutions and the similarity of governing cultures to early modern forms of state-building recasts our understanding of the developing institutions of federal and state government between the Revolution and the Civil War. The growing body of literature that emphasizes the direct role of slavery in the expansion of capitalism on a national and global scale has highlighted the role of individuals and the state in the development of
capitalism as an economic system. Yet, much of the new history of capitalism as it has developed in nineteenth-century U.S. historiography tends to emphasize—and often overstate—the power of state and federal government in shaping economic development. Nineteenth-century legal historians, however, tend to pay more attention to the structures of legal authority, institutions, and government that remained unsettled in this period. Such a perspective is also common in the literature focusing on legal history and economic history in the early modern period, which emphasizes the limits of state sovereignty through examining overlapping legal cultures. As these two bodies of


literature in conversation suggest, the structure and point of institutions of state and federal government in the United States were not yet clear in the decades following the Revolution. In this context, as I show, specific families—like the Camerons in North Carolina—used the developing institutions of state and federal government to shape the direction of economic development in ways that furthered their own interests.

Understanding this historical context changes our view of the nineteenth-century United States. The majority of the literature on the nineteenth-century United States tends to assume a sharp break from such practices after the Revolution, following traditional historiographical frameworks that characterize the Revolution as a watershed in social as well as political terms. In this literature, the nineteenth-century United States is defined by the latter half of the century—by the Civil War, Reconstruction, and assumptions of sectional difference.²⁶ Projecting these characteristics backwards onto the

early years of the nineteenth century has resulted in a literature that obscures both the continuing influence of families on institutions of government at the local, state, and federal levels and the inseparability of the public and domestic worlds. While the literature on the family in the antebellum United States recognizes the importance of family for establishing social, economic, and political ties, the literature fails to recognize the direct connections between families and governing institutions in this period, a situation much more similar to that described in the literature on the early modern Atlantic. Likewise, the emphasis on the American Revolution as a breaking point that created something new and different obscures the continued presence, use, and dominance of older modes of thought and practice, as well as the continued circulation and importance of cosmopolitan cultural forms and ideas described in the literature on the Atlantic World.

Positing immensely different experiences for women in the North and the South because of sectional differences such as labor systems, among other social and economic factors. See, for example, Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household; McCurry, Masters of Small Worlds; Nancy F. Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835, 2nd ed., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); and Linda K. Kerber, Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). Interestingly, the emphasis on the inherent differences throughout the nineteenth-century United States between the North and the South have essentially excluded any discussion of the West in this narrative. The West is largely treated completely separately from the rest of the United States in the historiography of the nineteenth century.

Methodology

“Cultures of Emotion” relies on a unique blend of sources: personal, business, and political correspondence, as well as ledgers, bonds, and other economic and political documents. Separated by distances both great and small, families relied on correspondence to preserve relationships and connections by extending and maintaining kinship ties through adherence to emotional conventions in correspondence. These relationships then provided the foundations for economic and political ventures. The personal correspondence allows me to reconstruct the basic outlines of kinship networks by revealing the work that men and women did in creating and maintaining familial ties through performances of specific emotional norms. Familial bonds were maintained through adherence to emotional conventions specific to distinct yet overlapping areas—family, business, and politics. Each shared a common language of family feeling that inspired trust. The personal, business, and political correspondence of women and men in the families I study reveals repeated elements in correspondence that served as performances of emotional kinship bonds, as well as conventions to follow. My approach reveals how women and men established and maintained kinship identity

through performances of specific emotional conventions, highlighting the work the emotion did simply by its presence.

Following the connections established in this correspondence to the ledgers, bonds, and other statements of credit and debt between the network’s members uncovers the webs of credit and debt that sustained elite families. These business and political records underscore the importance of kinship in maintaining these webs of credit and debt and constitute an important link in understanding the way the network’s political and economic power rested on familial bonds and incorporated the institutions of state and federal government as a member, firmly situating the economic and political networks in the domestic realm. Such an approach recasts our understanding of the nineteenth-century United States, centering families in the work of governance and highlighting women’s central role in their families’ economic and political work.

I use affective labor as a lens through which to examine the relationship between families and the development of federal and state government in the United States between the Revolution and the Civil War. Doing so reveals both the similarities between men’s and women’s work and the inseparability of the work related to the presence and performance of emotion from the work that drove economic ventures and political fortunes in these decades. Historians have recognized and noted the kinship shape-shifting that occurred in the early United States as well as the self-fashioning of kinship identity in correspondence (a person’s decision to refer to themselves or others
by specific familial names and identities, like calling a cousin sister or a grandmother mother). Yet, the majority of the scholarship has naturalized the emotions linking kin and creating (and often managing) kinship identity, thereby leaving them unquestioned.28

Examining family networks through the lens of specific theories of the history of emotion denaturalizes the self-fashioning of affective kinship identity, allowing us both to recognize the structure behind emotional actions and to look specifically at that structure and question it. Denaturalizing this distinction requires understanding what emotion is. As Barbara Rosenwein has noted, emotion is “a constructed term that refers to affective reactions of all sorts, intensities, and durations.”29 William Reddy defines emotions as “goal-relevant activations of thought material that exceed the translating capacity of attention within a short time horizon,” positing a dynamic relationship between emotion and emotional expression.30 Key in Reddy’s definition is that emotions are goal-relevant. Once spoken, emotional expressions act as emotives: a “speech act [...]”

28 For example, in By the Rivers of Water: A Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey, Erskine Clarke discusses the experience of Jane and Martha Bayard, two young girls from a prominent Georgia family who were sent to live with their uncle in Philadelphia after they were orphaned. Clarke states, “For the next five years, Jane and Margaret called their uncle’s home their home, and they began to think of their Bayard cousins as brothers and sisters” (25). Clarke goes on to acknowledge the genuine affection that Jane and Margaret felt for their cousins; however, he, like other historians, does not delve into the emotional meaning and content behind this shape-shifting. Erskine Clarke, By the Rivers of Water: A Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 25. See also, William Merrill Decker, Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), and Sarah Pearsall’s Atlantic Families.
that both describes [...] and changes [...] the world." Consequently, sincerity of emotion is not the question. Instead, the question becomes whether or not the emotive worked—whether the emotion’s goal was achieved. Because emotions are goal-relevant, they can be managed; for example, by expressing a specific emotion in a certain way, a specific goal may be achieved. Though this process may be intentional or unintentional, the expression of emotion in the form of emotives serves to do some type of specific work. Examining emotional conventions, then, means examining less the sincerity of and actual feeling behind the emotion and more the work that the emotional convention did through its presence. In familial correspondence, adherence to specific shared emotional conventions worked to create an image of an affectionate family. As the lives and actions of individual men and women in the Coles and Cameron families show, this image was central to establishing the social, economic, and political credit necessary to succeed.

Establishing and maintaining this image of an affectionate family formed a common goal achieved by adhering to a shared language of intimate and affectionate family ties, creating what Barbara Rosenwein has termed an emotional community. According to Rosenwein’s theory, emotional communities are groups of people who “have a common stake, interests, values, and goals” imbedded in “shared vocabularies and ways of thinking that have a controlling function” and similar to Bourdieu’s idea of

31 Ibid.
habit, or “internalized norms that determine how we think and act and that may be different in different groups.” Rosenwein describes emotional communities as a large circle (the dominant emotional community) with several smaller circles (subordinate emotional communities) distributed unevenly within it. Other larger circles may exist, either isolated or intersecting with the first large circle. Additionally, the smaller circles within a large circle may contain even smaller circles. Thus, people might belong to multiple emotional communities at once, with varying degrees of dominance. Different emotional communities have different emotional conventions (or norms), and people adapt to the different conventions as they move from one community to another.

Men and women in elite families, then, existed in multiple emotional communities, and through passing on the shared interests, values, and vocabularies to other family members through correspondence, they transformed their family networks into emotional communities. These families participated in a larger emotional community with shared conventions that traversed the Atlantic world. Different areas such as business and politics overlapped within this larger community, sharing many common vocabularies and norms while also having some vocabularies, values, or norms that existed solely within their area. Both business and political correspondence, for example, emphasized sentiments of intimate friendship, respect, and esteem in order to

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33 Ibid., 24-5.
maintain necessary ties. Yet, though the phrase “your obedient servant” was common in both business and political correspondence, the phrase had different valences for business and political correspondence. In business correspondence, the phrase, most often used by a factor or another individual contracted to do work, indicated a position of servitude, while in political correspondence, the phrase was an allusion to the politician’s role as public servant.

Emphasizing specific sentiments and adhering to certain emotional norms in correspondence was a form of affective labor—work related to the presence and performance of emotion. Literature scholars have discussed affective labor extensively. In affect theory, scholars studying affective labor (or “the labor of interaction and human contact that can elicit ‘intangible feelings of ease, excitement, or passion’”) focus on the affect economy, examining the affective labor of workers in the economy such as flight attendants, waitresses, or models and typically focus on forms of waged labor. That definition, however, fails to encompass all of the types of emotional labor in correspondence by the men and women that I examine. These men and women were not

workers who physically performed emotion for a wage. Rather, they were brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, and friends expressing specific emotions in written form, usually not for any type of payment. To better include such written forms of unpaid emotional work, I define affective labor in a broader capacity as, quite simply, any type of work related to the presence and performance of emotion. This definition further allows me to highlight the work done by the simple presence of emotion, emphasizing the formation of relationships that would become the foundation of economic and political networks.35

Studying an emotional community through the lens of affective labor and tracing emotional norms and conventions necessarily requires a set of interrelated

correspondence written by a group emotionally tied to each other in some way. Family networks like those of the Coles family of Virginia and the Cameron family of North Carolina are particularly suited to this study. Their large, well-connected, and influential families provide an avenue for looking not only at emotional conventions within the family network but also at the broader influence and effect of the family on the economic and political work of building the governing institutions of the United States.

Chapter one examines affective labor in familial, business, and political correspondence and argues that affective labor extended and maintained the family ties necessary to conduct business and political endeavors. The chapter begins by examining the repeated elements in women’s correspondence with family members that were tied in some way to emotion before turning to an examination of the effects of the presence of these emotional norms. The chapter then examines men’s correspondence, showing that despite a focus on business and political issues, men’s correspondence included emotional elements similar to the norms that marked women’s correspondence. This chapter shows that both men and women performed affective labor in correspondence that created and maintained familial bonds, even as they actively couched this labor in gender-appropriate ways.

The second chapter follows the relationships established in this correspondence to examine the connections between family and business in the nineteenth-century United States. By combining correspondence with notes, bonds, and other economic
documents, the chapter analyzes the economic transactions within the families to reveal the dense webs of credit and debt that sustained elite families. As this chapter shows, these webs of credit and debt involved virtually every member of the extended family network in some way—both men and women. Individual family members relied on specific members of the family to handle the myriad economic transactions of daily life for them: buying land, purchasing goods, investing in specific stocks, handling debts, and providing financial assistance in times of trouble. As the correspondence of women in the Coles and Cameron families reveals, women were active—and knowledgeable—participants in this system, adopting the male conventions of business correspondence to establish their own identity as credit-worthy and relying on specific family members to handle economic transactions, just as the men in their family did.

Chapter three turns to the political networks, arguing that men and women actively conceptualized politicians as public servants who worked for the public good; however, this conceptualization obscured the reality of the actions of these men. Rather than serving the public, as the language would suggest, elite men in fact served their broader political family. Influential men—and some women—in these families regularly leveraged their political positions and influence to obtain political appointments for family members. The dynamics that supported these families collapsed distinctions the scholarship has taken for granted, situating the “public” world of the economy and
policy in the domestic realm and highlighting women’s central role in the “male” world
of property and partisan politics.

The fourth chapter examines the intersections of family networks with
institutions of government, showing how men shaped local, state, and federal
government around their own interests by casting their families’ prospects as the public
good. The chapter argues that in the nineteenth-century United States, family-centered
relationships rooted in the eighteenth century became entrenched in the developing
institutions of federal and state government. This situation meant that legal authority
and government institutions were more similar to trends from the early modern period
when family was central to government. The chapter begins by exploring a single case
study—the incorporation and subsequent actions of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road
(and the Cameron family network’s attempts to make it profitable)—to reveal the deeply
intertwined nature of family business with the institutions of government that shaped
people’s lives. By emphasizing the necessity of internal improvement for the economic
growth of the state, powerful families like the Camerons convinced individual states to
invest directly in corporations. The chapter then turns to banks and other types of
corporations to further underscore the inseparability of family from the authority and
power of governing institutions. These dynamics characterized politics and governance
throughout the United States in the antebellum period, shaping how local and state
governing institutions developed. The result was a governing system controlled by a
tightly bound set of families—a kinship-centered governing structure that this situation both created and undergirded.

The final chapter examines the strategies that the new republic’s elite used to hide conflict and violence and protect the conceptualization of family that they relied on for credit. First, it looks at the Coles and Cameron families’ strategies for handling mental illness. The chapter then examines two different forms of violence: cases of domestic abuse and the system of slavery. Because domestic abuse and other instances of violence within the family posed a threat to the family’s credit and safety, domestic violence was quickly handled. However, white families approached the largest source of conflict and violence in the antebellum South—the enslaved men and women that they owned—much differently than they did instances of violence within the family. Elite families like the Coles and Camerons typically glossed over the violence inherent in the system of slavery, conceptualizing the enslaved men and women they owned as outside of the family—regardless of actual blood relationship or the importance of their labor to the family business. Relegating slaves as outside of the family unit allowed white men and women to protect the image of their own families while hiding the violence done against enslaved families. Although elite white individuals’ use of familial metaphors was goal-driven and relied on the exclusion of the enslaved people they owned, enslaved and free African Americans had a deep and intimate knowledge of these
metaphors and co-opted them, deploying the metaphors and emotional norms to attempt to achieve desired goals such as reuniting with family members.

Familial metaphors and relationships continued to guide elite families as they struggled to negotiate the sectional conflicts that ultimately erupted in war. The conclusion turns to these struggles, examining how men and women constantly called on familial metaphors and ties to explain their actions and choices. By comparing the language used as war broke out to the language used by individuals in the same family in previous decades, we can begin to see a shift from identity with the United States as a whole to identity with individual states—or southern “sister states.” Yet, even as “family” loyalty shifted from country to state, men and women such as John Rutherfoord, Paul Cameron, Sarah Ruffin, and Roberts Coles continued to rely on the familial metaphors that had guided their families’ endeavors since the Revolution.

And so we return to Sarah Coles Stevenson’s statement: “My affections are my world and they centre in my family.” The emotional bonds of family, as Sarah’s statement suggests, were central to women’s lives. However, her statement is indicative of a much larger trend—the absolute centrality of family to the lives of elite whites in the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War. Family, built on emotional bonds solidified by affective labor in correspondence, was the central organizing principle for

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36 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Emily Coles Rutherfoord, January 27, 1841. Box 1, Folder 7, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
the lives of people like Sarah, her brothers and sisters, and other elite whites in this period. Family was a way to order and conduct business affairs, a way to navigate business relationships, and a way to firmly establish credit in times of uncertainty. In the political arena, the concept of family was a way of understanding political alliances and relationships, as well as a way of conceiving of public servants’ relationship to the public. Powerful families like the Coles and Cameron families extended this way of organizing their world to the developing institutions of federal and state government, incorporating the power and authority of government into their broader family networks. By doing so, they undergirded a kinship-centered governing structure in which political differences turned into intimate—and potentially volatile—conflicts. Elite families like the Coles and Camerons managed to largely obscure sources of conflict and violence before the Civil War, and this organizing scheme worked for them in those decades in terms of imagining their places in the business and political worlds, as well as their relationship to institutions of governance. The rising sectional tensions brought to a head by the issue of slavery, the election of Lincoln, and the outbreak of war necessitated a shift in thinking. Yet, even as war seemed more and more likely—and indeed, even after hostilities escalated into open battles—members of elite white families continued to call on familial metaphors as a justification for their actions—and as a continued way to order their world. Family was, and continued to be, the central
organizing principle of elite men and women’s approach to their world—and to the practice of democracy and governance itself.
Chapter One: “Testimonials of Affection:” Gender, Affective Labor, and Family Ties in the Antebellum United States

“Letters are the life of trade, the fuel of love, the pleasure of friendship, the food of the politician, and the entertainment of the curious.”1 The author of the American Fashionable Letter Writer recognized a key fact of life in the 19th century: letters sustained relationships, and it was those relationships that were the life-blood of love, friendship, business, and politics. Letter-writing manuals like this one provided instructions and examples for writing all types of letters for both men and women. Why, then, do most scholars of the nineteenth-century United States treat the form and purpose of men’s and women’s letters differently, if at all?2 Taken together, women’s familial letters and men’s business and political letters reveal the profound similarities between two

2 The majority of the literature on correspondence tends to examine separate forms of correspondence individually, focusing on courtship letters, letters between friends, family letters, business letters. Steven Stowe, for example, examines the social form of letters in three areas: affairs of honor, courtship, and family duty. Steven M. Stowe, Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of Planters, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). Cassandra Good focuses on letters between men and women friends, treating these letters together, while acknowledging the gendered differences between them. Cassandra Good, Founding Friendships: Friendships between Men and Women in the Early American Republic, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). By studying family letters, business letters, and political letters together, I highlight the commonalities of these different forms and interrogate the function of the repeated elements within. Lindsay O’Neill’s study of correspondence networks does much the same in regards to the early modern British world. Examining large letter collections, O’Neill argues that letters formed relationships, providing a way for men and women in the early modern British world to “extend and monitor the fluid social networks on which their livelihoods depended” as they dealt with “a changing geographic and social world.” O’Neill, The Opened Letter: Networking in the Early Modern British World, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 18.
seemingly disparate forms. Women’s correspondence tended to focus overwhelmingly on family and assurances of affection while men’s correspondence focused largely on matters of business and politics. Yet, while these differences catch the reader’s eye first, it is the similarities that are most profound and enlightening. Breaking down the common elements—and their intended purposes—first in women’s correspondence and then in men’s correspondence reveals a common thread: the use of emotional elements and statements to create and maintain intimate, affectionate relationships.

In May 1837, Sarah Coles Stevenson expressed her great appreciation for the “testimonials of affection” of her family and friends and informed her brother that his latest letter to her made her feel “like a Miser who had suddenly discovered a heap of gold […]”. As Sarah’s statements suggest, for women and men in the United States in the early nineteenth century, familial letters publicly displayed and reinforced affectionate kinship bonds. People during this period began writing letters at a very young age, corresponding primarily with older family members. They modeled their own letters after the letters they received, with letter-writing manuals and other prescriptive literature forming a secondary role in learning the conventions of

3 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Edward Coles, May 18, 1837, Box 1, Folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU).
correspondence. Thus the emotional conventions in correspondence were largely learned by emulating older family members’ letters.

Both men and women performed affective labor in correspondence, but their letters followed slightly different formulas that couched their letters in terms deemed appropriate to their own gender. These conventions and the affective labor involved in following them were heavily gendered, with certain emotional conventions and language emphasized in women’s correspondence and other conventions and language emphasized in men’s correspondence. The majority of women’s correspondence combined long statements of affection with equally long statements of family news and relatively brief discussions of economic or political concerns—even women’s correspondence dealing with their direct investment in the family’s business ventures. Correspondence between men in the same family network, on the other hand, usually remained focused on an economic or political problem or task, with an assurance of some form of intimacy, and short, obligatory references to family news.

Women and men were often quite explicit about the gendered divisions of affective labor in correspondence. For example, in a letter thanking his brother-in-law John Rutherfoord for “the trouble you have taken in calling at the Bank & Enquirer office for me” Edward Coles stated outright that he did not need to add more family

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news to the letter because, "Betsy writes Emily so often & such long letters as to leave me nothing to say in relation to our friends in this County." Their nephew Matthew Singleton was even more explicit about the gendered divisions of affective labor when he told his brother-in-law, "The account of your own family I have not a doubt is fully correct but brief and to the point and entirely satisfactory - men should never exaust themselves upon small and unimportant matters." As Matthew’s statement suggested, relating lengthy portions of family news was the expected domain of women—not men. Thus, familial correspondence and the affective labor involved in it were largely gendered female. Because emotion and affective labor in correspondence has been typically associated with women and the feminine sphere, the similarity of men’s affective labor in business and political correspondence has not been recognized. Examining men’s correspondence in conjunction with women’s letters reveals that the conventions of both gendered forms of affective labor overlapped and worked together to create an image of a united and affectionate family, with reciprocal obligations of support.

The correspondence of elite white women between the Revolution and the Civil War contained repeated elements that included specific conventions of address,

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5 Edward Coles to John Rutherford, October 12, 1830, Box 1, Folder 4, in the John Rutherford Papers Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as John Rutherford Papers, DU.

6 M.R. Singleton to Robert Marion Deveaux, October 15, 1842, Box 1, Folder 8, in the Papers of the Singleton and Deveaux Families, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. (Hereafter cited as Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL).
statements of kinship identity, references to the separations of distance between the writer and recipient, references to the last time of communication or face-to-face contact, information on how the letter would be delivered, long sections of family news, assurances of affection and expressions of hope for being reunited. These elements combined with expectations concerning the regularity of correspondence and the length of letters to serve dual, overlapping purposes. They were especially necessary and critical when the absence of a letter or assurances of good health could mean the illness of family members. More importantly, however, these elements were also performances of emotional kinship bonds as well as conventions to follow. Each of these norms was tied to a performance of emotional kinship bonds, intended to portray an image of an intimate familial relationship.

A typical letter began with a greeting that pointed to the relative intimacy of the relationship between the letter writer and the recipient. For example, “Dear Betsy” implied a less intimate and less affectionate relationship than “My Dear Betsy” while

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7 Steven Stowe discusses many of these expected standards of correspondence for antebellum planters. While Stowe acknowledges the dynamics present between the more formal, social act of family letters and the intimate meanings, his article primarily focuses on the influence of academy life and the language in letters from parents on southern children (boys and girls). Steven M. Stowe, “The Rhetoric of Authority: The Making of Social Values in Planter Family Correspondence,” *Journal of American History* 73, no. 4 (March 1987): 920. Stowe’s book *Intimacy and Power in the Old South* similarly discusses the ritualistic nature of these letters, but focuses on courtship, affairs of honor, and coming of age. Decker’s *Epistolary Practices* similarly interrogates the form of letters. For an in-depth examination of the standards and conventions of correspondence in the early modern era, see O’Neill, *The Opened Letter*.

8 With the sentiments and emotions they were tied to, such norms acted as emotives, describing and changing their world, whether the statement was heartfelt or not. Though William Reddy’s definition of emotives refers to spoken expressions, expressions such as these in correspondence serve the same purpose. For Reddy’s definition see William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 128.
beginning a letter with “My Dear Sister” or some other statement of kinship identity displayed and reinforced the intimacy of family ties. The body of a letter began with an acknowledgement of receiving a letter from the other person, referring to the time of last contact between the individuals. This acknowledgement was usually phrased as a recognition for the other person’s favor of a certain date. This phrasing reinforced the reciprocal nature of correspondence. Following this acknowledgement of the continued reciprocal relationship, women writing to members of their family turned to the main purpose for writing—sharing family news. This section was usually the longest and included myriad details of day-to-day life, travels, health, and more, as well as assurances of the writer’s affection for the recipient. The end of a typical letter contained more references to family and affection. Such references of affectionate kinship ties served as a reminder of the intimate bond between the two—and of the intimacy of the family. The closing salutation combined affirmations of affection with statements of kinship identity, such as “your ever affectionate sister.” Variations of the salutation could include assurances that the recipient should “believe me” to be “your affectionate sister” or simply, “affectionately yours.” These salutations implied intimacy, affection, and trust, which affirmed bonds of kinship while explicitly laying out the relationship of the letter writer and the recipient.

Letters, and particularly familial letters, seem to be private in nature, intended to be solely between the writer and recipient. In the nineteenth century, though, letters
between family members were often shared among various other family members besides the recipient – and even read aloud at times.⁹ Letter-writers knew this and wrote with this in mind, as when Sarah Coles Stevenson informed one of her sisters-in-law, “my letters tho generally addressed to Betsy have been intended for All and many parts particularly addressed to individuals of my family […].” In other instances, she called her letters circulars, explicitly referring to the fact that the letters would be shared throughout the family and even requested that her sister write portions “from my circular” to other family members, being sure to include “whatever you may think will amuse them.” In letter to a different sister-in-law, Sarah said,

I am afraid you will think my letter most unreasonably long, but as it will probably find all my family assembled on the dear old Mountain, you must allow me to write you all I have to say, & divide it with my dear Bett & Ned who will no doubt be with you. & any of my other friends who may find any interest in my long & rambling scrawls.¹⁰

Sarah, like all men and women during the antebellum period, fully expected her letters to be shared amongst family and friends and acknowledged this situation in her letters.

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⁹ For more on the public nature of private correspondence, see, James Daybell and Andrew Gordon, eds. *Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern Britain*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). For a brief discussion of the public nature of correspondence in the Early Republic, see Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*. Cassandra Good also discusses the public nature of correspondence in *Founding Friendships*, see particularly chapter 5. As Sarah Pearsall points out, letters were typically “considered group property.” See, Pearsall, *Atlantic Families*, 37. In fact, as Lindsay O’Neill stated, once letters arrived at their destination, they were both read aloud and “passed from hand to hand within a household.” Moreover, “Letters circulated beyond the family fireside as well; receivers mailed them to others who might be interested in their contents.” O’Neill, *The Opened Letter*, 41 and 42.

¹⁰ Sarah Coles Stevenson to Helen Coles, September 12, 1837, Box 1, Folder 2; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, October 29, [1837], Box 1, Folder 2; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Julia Coles, May 20, 1838, Box 1, Folder 3. All in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
The recipients of letters also understood that letters were intended to be shared with family and friends. Sarah’s sister Betsy, for example, usually either forwarded Sarah’s letters on to various family members or copied portions of them in her own letters.\textsuperscript{11}

As these examples reveal, letters were actually very public, and this norm of sharing letters served as a way of displaying kinship connections and creating a picture of a united, affectionate family. This public display of kinship connections, in turn, served to reinforce those connections. Women, however, often portrayed their letters as private, especially when they did not want anyone other than the person they were writing to read it. Sarah marked the top of one letter to Betsy with “Private & For Thine own dear eye alone, Dearest & Best” and instructed her niece to mark a letter to her “for my Aunts eye alone.”\textsuperscript{12} In this way, men and women in the antebellum United States preserved the fiction about the private nature of family letters through an illusion of intimacy, which further underscored the image of a close and affectionate family.

The act of naming a specific kinship relationship was perhaps the most important of these conventions to follow because it displayed the bond between writer and recipient, creating a specific image of both their relationship and their family. The

\textsuperscript{11} See, for example, John Coles Rutherfoord to Sarah Coles Stevenson, September 30, 1837, Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU, where he informed Sarah that not only had they received and enjoyed her affectionate letter, but they were also expecting “Aunt Betsy” to send them another of her letters. Betsy also alluded to the fact that she would copy portions of letters written by Sarah Stevenson in a letter to Marion Deveaux when she said, “I wish I had health, & a longer sheet of Paper, to give you some extracts from your Aunt Stevenson’s letters. She sent me 30 pages […].” Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, August 22, 1839, Box 1, Folder 6, Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL.

\textsuperscript{12} Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, January 12, 1839, Box 2, Folder 1; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Sarah Rutherfoord, February 27, 1838, Box 1, Folder 3. Both in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
letters of Mary McDuffie are particularly revealing in this regard. “My dear Sister,”
Mary wrote. “I have just this moment received a letter from Grandmother, father, and
brother Matt.” She continued with news and questions about family members and
updates about her life in Philadelphia at Madame Grelaud’s boarding school, with Mary
assuring the recipient, “dear sister I often think of you, at home and wish I could see
you, for it seems such a long long time before I can go home […].”13 The letter appears to
be one of the countless letters between sisters in the antebellum South, with one sister
away at school and the other at home with her family. Mary McDuffie and Marion
Deveaux, however, were not sisters; they were niece and aunt, respectively. Mary was
raised by her grandmother (Marion’s mother), after her own mother died shortly
following her birth in 1830. Yet, when Mary was a young child, Marion spent most of
the year at a boarding school in Philadelphia, only leaving school a couple of years
before her marriage in 1835. Marion and Mary did not spend very long living under the
same roof, and Marion was fifteen years older than Mary. Why, then, did Mary refer to
her aunt as sister?

By using sister and aunt interchangeably in letters to Marion, Mary made a
specific claim about their relationship and about both of their places within the family.14

13 Mary S. McDuffie to Marion Singleton Deveaux. June 26, Box 2, Folder 8, in the Singleton Family Papers,
Library of Congress. (hereafter Singleton Family Papers, LC).
14 Mary S. McDuffie to Marion Deveaux. June 3, 1852, Box 2, Folder 8; Mary S. McDuffie to Marion Deveaux.
Undated, Box 2, Folder 8; Mary S. McDuffie to Marion Converse. (In letter from Richard Singleton to Marion
In addition to niece, Mary claimed the role sister. In changing their relationship from aunt and niece to sisters, Mary created a particular kinship relationship between them: an intimate relationship of equals based on blood, heritage, and strong emotional ties. Claiming the role of sister tightened the connection between Mary and Marion, making it more affectionate, more intimate, and more important. Elevating her role from niece to sister placed her on equal footing with Marion and placed her in a specific space within the family. Mary did not make these relationship claims solely with Marion. In a single letter, she referred to her uncle as “brother Matt,” to her aunt as “sister Angelica,” and to her grandmother as both “Grandmother” and “mamma.”

Throughout her life, Mary would continue to interchangeably use aunt/sister, uncle/brother, and grandmother/mamma in familial correspondence.

Other women also used naming in forms of address to create specific family roles and relationships during the antebellum period. Marion’s sister-in-law, Gabriela Deveaux Huger, often called herself Marion’s sister, signing one letter, “believe me my dear Marion to be ever your affectionate sister.” Similarly, Anne Ruffin Cameron referred to her sisters-in-law, Mildred and Margaret Cameron, as her sisters, talked of

15 Mary S. McDuffie to Marion Singleton Deveaux. June 26, Box 2, Folder 8, Singleton Family Papers, LC.
16 Gabriela Deveaux Huger to Marion Singleton Deveaux. April 9, 1838, Box 2, Folder 4, Singleton Family Papers, LC. See also Gabriela Deveaux Huger to Marion Singleton Deveaux. June 10, 1843, Box 2, Folder 4, Singleton Family Papers, LC.
“sister’s illness,” and signed letters to them, “I am your attached sister” and “believe me your affec. sister.” She also addressed her father-in-law, Duncan Cameron, as “My Dear Father,” and signed letters to him with “your affectionate daughter.”17 While she did not address the letters to Duncan as “My Dear Papa” as she did with her own father, Anne’s decision to name a relationship reaffirmed their family ties, creating a specific familial relationship—regardless of blood. This was not simply a generational trend. Her mother, Anne Kirkland Ruffin, signed a letter to her sister-in-law, “your affectionate Sister.”18 Likewise, throughout Rebecca and Duncan Cameron’s marriage, his two sisters constantly referred to Rebecca as their sister, regularly writing to her and addressing their letters to “My dear sister.”19 Similarly, both Sarah Coles Stevenson and Betsy Coles

17 Anne Ruffin Cameron to Duncan Cameron, January 7, 1839, folder 804; Anne Ruffin Cameron to Margaret Cameron, March 6, 1838, folder 792; Anne Ruffin Cameron to Mildred Cameron, July 4, 1842, folder 881. Anne Ruffin Cameron to Duncan Cameron, January 7, 1839, folder 804. All in the Cameron Family Papers #133, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Hereafter cited as Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC. The abbreviation “affec.” was commonly used in correspondence as a shorthand for affectionate. Similarly, in a letter that Anne’s sister Alice Ruffin wrote to their sister Catherine Ruffin Roulhac after her marriage, she asked her not to show the letter to her husband, “brother Joe.” Alice Ruffin to Catherine Ruffin Roulhac, April 23, 1841, folder 33, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Family Papers #643, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Hereafter cited as Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Family Papers #643, SHC).

18 Anne K. Ruffin to Minerva Ruffin, October 1810, folder 15, Thomas Ruffin Papers #641, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Hereafter cited as Thomas Ruffin Papers #641, SHC).

19 Jean Syme to Rebecca Cameron, February 13, 1818, folder 447, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC. Among others, see also Jean Syme to Rebecca Cameron, November 3, 1841, folder 865; and Mary Anderson to Rebecca Cameron, July 3, 1818, folder 454. Both in the Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
often addressed their brothers-in-law as “My dear Brother” and their sisters-in-law as sister.\(^{20}\)

The simple act of naming a relationship in this way reaffirmed and extended their family connections, regardless of blood. Consequently, the family became a social unit determined not just by birth and marriage but also by choice, with individual men and women selectively including and excluding other people from their family. By explicitly naming familial relationships in correspondence, women ensured that their letters displayed and reinforced the familial bonds that were so important to upholding the family’s image as close, affectionate, and trustworthy. Examples such as these show the importance of naming in creating family relationships and extending family networks while highlighting women’s affective labor in family networks. This practice became especially important in large, influential family networks like those of the Cameron and Coles families.

Even within the actual body of letters, women during this period emphasized their affectionate familial ties. For example, early during their time in England where her husband Andrew was the American minister, Sarah Coles Stevenson informed her sister Betsy that Andrew was redacting her letters and changing things to promote an image

\(^{20}\) See, for example, Sarah Coles Stevenson to John Rutherfoord, April 28, 1837, Box 1, Folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Sally L. Roberts Coles, April 31, 1840, in Box 2, Folder 34 of the Coles Family Papers (Collection 1458), Historical Society of Pennsylvania. (Hereafter cited as Coles Family Papers, HSP. Betsy Coles to Selina Coles, January 10, 1827, Box 1, Folder 1, Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL; Betsy Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 2, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. Both Sarah and Betsy did the same with their other brothers and sisters-in-law.
of an affectionate family. She told Betsy, “I wrote you last week a long account […]” which Mr. Stevenson insisted upon over looking, I soon found that almost every paragraph in the letter was condemned” and that Andrew was “erasing [portions of the letter] with the most indefatigable industry.” In this letter too, Andrew had diligently worked to preserve the picture of a united and affectionate family. As in many of Sarah’s other letters, Andrew replaced names with relationships, crossing out Sarah’s “Bett,” for example, and replacing it with “sister.”21 By crossing out the name “Bett” or “Betsy” in Sarah’s letters to her sister Betsy and inserting the word “Sister” so that the phrase would read something like “my dear sister” rather than “my dear Bett,” Andrew ensured that Sarah’s letter displayed and reinforced the familial bonds, building the family’s image as close, affectionate, and trustworthy.

When using naming and forms of address to create or extend a family relationship in correspondence, women usually also included an affirmation of affection, as with Gabriela Huger’s assurance to Marion Deveaux that she would always be her “affectionate sister.” With the sentiments and emotions behind them, statements such as these effectively worked as emotives, describing and changing their world, whether through convention or heartfelt emotion—or possibly both. When Mary McDuffie called Marion Deveaux sister and Anne Cameron called Duncan Cameron father, they were “changing” their world by creating and extending familial relationships. In this way,

21 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, July 19, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
elite women extended their family networks and firmly tied emotions to their role within them.

Regular affirmations of affection in correspondence served the same purpose: creating and displaying an image of the family as united and affectionate. Such an image created assurances of trust within the family, which bolstered the family’s credit. In one letter to her aunt Marion Singleton Deveaux, Mary McDuffie apologized for not writing more often, assuring Marion that she cared for her and thought of her often saying, “It is not from want of affection, for dear sister I often think of you, at home and wish I could see you, for it seems such a long long time before I can go home […]”22 In this one statement, Mary both established familial relationship and identity and affirmed her affection for Marion in order to preserve and strengthen bonds strained by geographic separation.

Affirmations of love and affection were thus important components of women’s letters to family members—both male and female, often appearing multiple times within a single epistle. Statements like Mary’s not only affirmed affection but also tightened connections and maintained family networks that were spread across sometimes vast geographic distances. Shortly after their sister’s death in June 1830, Rebecca Singleton wrote to her daughters Marion and Angelica, whom she had not seen in quite some time

22 Mary S. McDuffie to Marion Singleton Deveaux. June 26, Box 2, Folder 8, in the Singleton Family Papers, LC.
due Mary’s difficult childbirth. Rebecca despaired that she might not see her daughters for even longer both because of the responsibilities of caring for the baby and because their father had not decided whether the girls would remain at school in Philadelphia, return home, or visit relatives that winter. At a time when all involved were still dealing with the grief from Mary’s death and the long separation, Rebecca assured her daughters of her affection for them saying, “my heart trembles for you, my dear Children, and I long to have you again under your paternal roof.”

Throughout the long separation and emotionally-trying times, it was important for Rebecca to continually affirm and reaffirm her affections for her daughters in order to maintain the bond they shared. This in turn cultivated the connections of the family network that the girls and their mother were a part of—and that the elder Singletons relied on to help care for their daughters during this trying time.

Affirmations of affection were such an important aspect of correspondence that women usually also ended their letters to family members with them. Instead of a closing of “Sincerely Yours,” “Yours Truly,” “Your Daughter,” or “Your Most Obedient Servant,” salutations usually included some form of the phrase “your affectionate […].”

In the letter describing her longing to have her daughters with her again, Rebecca

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23 Mrs. R. T. Singleton to Marion and Angelica Singleton. October 15, [1830], Box 3, Folder 3, Singleton Family Papers, LC.
24 Sarah Coles Stevenson did much the same in letters to her family and friends in the United States while she and her husband were living in England in the late 1830s.
Singleton signed the letter, “your ever affec. mother.”25 Gabriela Deveaux Huger also followed this convention with her statement of “believe me my dear Marion to be ever your affectionate sister.”26 Likewise, Anne Cameron’s letters to her sisters-in-law closed with, “I am your attached sister” and “believe me your affec. sister.”27 Women also followed this convention of affirming their affections at the end of a letter when writing to male relatives, as when Anne Cameron signed a letter to Duncan Cameron “your affectionate daughter” and Betsy Coles signed letters to her brothers and brothers in law with “your attached sister.”28 In all of these closing salutations, affirmations of affection were combined with statements of kinship identity and attachment, which effectively maintained the connection of kinship between the writer and the recipient by emphasizing the emotional, familial bond between them. The fact that these affirmations of affection were combined with patterns of naming and statements of kinship reveals the importance of emotion in extending and maintaining family networks. The sincerity of these affirmations of affection is not as important as whether or not the affirmations

25 Mrs. R. T. Singleton to Marion and Angelica Singleton. October 15, [1830]. Box 3, Folder 3, Singleton Family Papers, LC.
26 Gabriela Deveaux Huger to Marion Singleton Deveaux. April 9, 1838, Box 2, Folder 4, Singleton Family Papers, LC. See also Gabriela Deveaux Huger to Marion Singleton Deveaux. June 10, 1843, Box 2, Folder 4, Singleton Family Papers, LC. Interestingly, the letters from Gabrielle Huger to Marion became more formal in salutation and closing after Marion’s remarriage, though the content was still intensely personal – and often emotional.
27 Anne Ruffin Cameron to Margaret Cameron, March 6, 1838, folder 792; and Anne Ruffin Cameron to Mildred Cameron, July 4, 1842, folder 881. Both in the Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
28 Anne Ruffin Cameron to Duncan Cameron, January 7, 1839, folder 804, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC. Betsy Coles to John Rutherfoord, May 15, 1827, Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. See also Betsy Coles to John Rutherfoord, August 1, 1839, Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
worked. Following the emotional convention of affirming and reaffirming affection in
correspondence renewed the picture of a happy, affectionate family whether the
emotion was completely sincere or not when actually written. These emotional
conventions in correspondence, then, served as emotives, much as did the process of
naming. In making emotional statements such as affirmations of affection and
assurances of health that established (and maintained) kinship ties, women both
described and changed their world.

Exchanging letters with other people implied specific reciprocal obligations—
both in terms of the correspondence itself and the level of affection and detail in the
letters. By beginning letters with an acknowledgement of the recipient’s last letter and
making references to the contents of that letter throughout an epistle, letter writers
emphasized the continual reciprocal exchange of correspondence between friends and
family members. But, the expected reciprocity did not end at the simple pattern of letter
and response. Instead, the expectations extended to returning the favor of
correspondence in a timely manner with a letter of the same level of detail—and, more
importantly, affection. Sarah Coles Stevenson was quite explicit about this expectation
when she complained to her sister that though she had written their niece “two very affc
letters on the birth & death of her child,” the niece “did not reply for many months after,
& then in a cold & formal manner.”29 As this statement shows, regardless of circumstances, women in this period were expected to return the favor of correspondence quickly and with the same level of affection.

The single largest portion of women’s letters to family members in this period contained detailed accounts of family news, and included everything from daily activities to travels, and from family events to health issues. Even when they claimed they had no news worth sharing, this section was often quite long. This practice preserved a sense of closeness despite geographic separation, whether that separation was 30 miles or 3000 miles. When Mary McDuffie wrote to her aunt Marion from boarding school in Philadelphia, she inquired about Marion’s children, asking about each of them by name.30 While her daughters Marion and Angelica attended the same school in the late 1820s and early 1830s, Rebecca Singleton’s letters to them were full of family stories and updates, especially of their siblings. For example, she informed them about their sister Mary’s engagement, wedding, pregnancy, childbirth, and death all in letters.31 Many of their aunt Betsy Coles’s letters to the girls during these years were

29 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Emily Coles Rutherfoord, January 27, 1841. Box 1, Folder 7, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
30 Mary S. McDuffie to Marion Singleton Deveaux, June 29, Box 2, Folder 8, Singleton Family Papers, LC.
31 See, for example, Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton, March 18, 1830, and Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton, May 23, 1833. Both in Box 1, Folder 2, Singleton Family Papers, LC. For Rebecca Singleton’s letters to her daughters while in school in Philadelphia, see, among others, Mrs. R. T. Singleton to Marion and Angelica Singleton, May 5, [1828?], box 3, folder 3, Mrs. R.T. Singleton to Marion and Angelica Singleton, May 11, [1829], box 3, folder 3, Mrs. R.T. Singleton to Marion and Angelica Singleton, May 27, [1829], box 3, folder 3, Mrs. R.T. Singleton to Marion Singleton, June 15, 1830, box 3, folder 3, Mrs. R. T. Singleton to Marion and Angelica Singleton, July 8, [1830?], box 3, folder 3, Mrs. R.T. Singleton to Marion Singleton, July 26, [1830],
similarly informative, giving the girls all of the news and events in the family, from weddings and births to parties and health. Likewise, when Betsy visited family members, she regularly wrote to her other family members to give updates. At one point while visiting the Singletons in South Carolina, she told her brother John that part of her reason for writing was “my Monthly letter is due.” In this letter, she shared anecdotes with her brother and sister-in-law about their niece Mary Singleton’s courtship, saying that despite Mary’s protests to the contrary, she was sure that Mary would end up choosing George McDuffie.32

In addition to maintaining close relationships, sharing family news informed the family of any issues that might affect them and their reputation, as with the prospects of Mary Singleton, whose marriage to someone like George McDuffie could ultimately benefit the family’s political endeavors.33 On the other hand, threats to the family image were also important to share. During a visit to the Singletons in South Carolina, Sarah Coles Stevenson apprised her brother in Virginia about the situation with Richard Singleton’s sister Mary McRa writing,

box 3, folder 3, Mrs. R.T. Singleton to Marion and Angelica Singleton, September 12, [1830], box 3, folder 3, and Mrs. R.T. Singleton to Marion and Angelica Singleton, September 19, [1830], box 3, folder 3. All in the Singleton Family Papers, LC.

32 Betsy Coles to [John Coles], December 19, 1826; Betsy Coles to Selina Coles, January 10, 1827. Both in Box 1, Folder 1, Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL.

33 George McDuffie was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from South Carolina. He was very closely allied with the prominent Calhoun family. At this point, he was a rising political figure in the state.
Mrs. McRae is at Midway, the most miserable of human beings. She has refused of late to see all her brother’s family but himself and she sees him, I believe, to torment him. She has found out his house is filled with his friends and she sends for him 5 or 6 times an hour, and last night, sent for him at midnight. The neighbors say she is the victim of her violent passions and is insane. 

Unlike the potential benefit to the family of Mary Singleton’s marriage to rising political figure George McDuffie, Mary McRa’s increasingly erratic behavior had the potential to harm the family’s image—and damage their credit.

Because of the importance of sharing news with family and friends of events that might affect their reputation, it should come as no surprise that Sarah Coles Stevenson’s letters to her family and friends in the United States while she was in England with her husband Andrew were filled with accounts of virtually every aspect of their lives in England. Her letters included descriptions of dinners and parties attended, places visited, important events such as Queen Victoria’s coronation, trips, clothing, shopping, the people she had met, and information on her and Andrew’s health. She often particularly highlighted the good impressions they were making, emphasizing that they were serving both the family and the United States well by making connections and forming friendships with influential people. In fact, in one letter she informed her sister that during a visit to Diggeswell where Queen Victoria was also visiting, Andrew was asked to lead the Queen to dinner every night and was seated “at her right hand.” Sarah

34 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Tucker Coles, March 15, 1842, Box 1, Folder 7, Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL. Mary McRa would be declared a lunatic and committed to an insane asylum in Philadelphia a year later in 1843. Her son Powell had been committed to a mental institution three years prior. Richard Singleton paid for her care in the asylum. For more on mental illness and family image, see chapter five.
continued her description of Andrew’s experience at the dinner saying, “at first all was etiquette, but soon it took a more easy and conversational turn, and before the dinner was over, she had asked him to take time with her and conversed without the slightest restraint of manner [...].” In this letter and many others, Sarah conveyed the relationships that she and Andrew were forming with influential people and the honors that were bestowed on them. In doing so, she not only informed the family of their lives but also informed them of the work that she and Andrew were doing to present a favorable image of both the family and of the United States, as representatives of both.

Additionally, when family members were visiting England, she included information on them in her letters as well. For example, she wrote to Marion Deveaux in August 1839 to tell her that her sister, newlywed Angelica Van Buren, was not enjoying her visit to England, though their brother Matthew was. Sarah had obviously written a letter filled with a similar discussion of events to Betsy, who wrote Marion a few weeks later that, “I am sorry to hear from both that Angelica was not pleased with her visit to England. I think this was entirely owing to Mr. Fortyth’s unfortunately telling her, she could rank as a Princess in Europe!!!” Sarah always ensured that the family would have

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35 Sarah Coles Stevenson to “My dear Sister,” January 2, 1839, Box 2, Folder 1, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
36 See Sarah Coles Stevenson to Marion Singleton Deveaux, August 12, 1839; and Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton Deveaux, August 22, 1839. Both in Box 1, Folder 6, Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL. Matt Singleton had also written to Betsy to relate Angelica’s dissatisfaction and unhappiness with her visit to England. By August when both Sarah and Matt wrote Betsy, Angelica had been in England for a few months.
news of other family members when they visited England—such as Richard and Rebecca Singleton’s son-in-law, George McDuffie, and Angelica’s (at the time) future brother-in-law, John Van Buren.37

Even the simple regularity of correspondence between two people was an indication of intimacy and affection, with regular letters affirming affection and upholding the intimate relationship between the two. Betsy Coles’s comment that she was writing her monthly letter to her brother hints at this correlation. Thus, elite women in this period were expected to frequently write to their acquaintances—and more importantly (and even more frequently) to their family members, making a public statement of familial affection. The simple presence of letters themselves portrayed the image of an affectionate family that elite families relied on to publicly display and reinforce affectionate kinship bonds. In an 1839 letter to her sister, Sarah Coles Stevenson specifically reminded her that others were paying attention to the arrival—or not—of letters from her family, saying, “Packet after packet arrives, & no letters, not even the scrip of a pen. Mr. Rush seems really to pity me[…].”38

37 See Sarah Coles Stevenson to Miss Coles or Mrs. Selina Coles, September 7, 1838, Box 1, Folder 4; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, January 12, 1839, Box 2, Folder 1; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Mrs. Richard Singleton or Mr. Tucker Coles, June 24, 1838, Box 1, Folder 3; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Tucker Coles, February 1, 1839, Box 2, Folder 1. All in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
38 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Edward Coles, May 18, 1837, Box 1, Folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU. Benjamin Rush was one of the secretaries to the legation, and all of the mail to the Stevensons passed through his hands. See Sarah Coles Stevenson to Miss Coles, December 19, 1838, Box 2, Folder 1, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
Because of the importance of regularly corresponding with family, many letters often contained either apologies for not writing for some time or expressions of worry at the other person's lack of regular correspondence.\textsuperscript{39} Sarah Coles Stevenson even apologized to her sisters for having been in London for three days before writing to anyone, assuring them that she had been thinking about all of her loved ones. Nearly a year later in April 1837, Sarah again wrote to her sisters, this time complaining about their lack of regularity in correspondence and saying “Not one word from you dear Betse for three mortal months. What has become of you all? you complain of me, and yet I write always two and sometimes three letters for every one I receive.”\textsuperscript{40} Sarah’s fear and worry at not having heard from her sisters for three months—and her irritation at writing two or three letters per just one of their letters to her combined—underscores the importance of regular correspondence for establishing an image of an affectionate relationship and maintaining that image once established.

Not only was regular correspondence indicative of an intimate and affectionate relationship, but regular correspondence with family was important in face of the threat and the very reality of illness and death. Health was one of the most important aspects

\textsuperscript{39} Such a situation explains Mary McDuffie’s assurance to her aunt Marion Singleton Deveaux that it was “not from want of affection” that she had not written to her in so long, explaining that not only had she been busy at school but that she also had so many correspondents that she had an obligation to write to that there was often an unavoidable gap between letters. Mary S. McDuffie to Marion Singleton Deveaux, June 29, Box 2, Folder 8, Singleton Family Papers, LC.

\textsuperscript{40} Sarah Coles Stevenson to “My beloved sister, & friends,” July 4, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, April 13, 1837, Box 1, Folder 2. Both in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU
of the family news section and could elicit both fear and hope when no letter arrived to share information. An assurance of health and questions about the recipient’s health were thus two of the most important pieces of information in the section on family news—both to relay news and to portray a sense of caring and affection. In a letter to her daughter Marion Deveaux during her first husband’s illness, Rebecca Singleton expressed her worry over his condition—and at not having heard from Marion recently, saying that she was trusting that no news is good news.41 Anne Cameron also frequently expressed concerns over the health of her sisters-in-law, especially as their various illnesses grew more serious and Duncan and Rebecca Cameron continued to seek treatments that would improve their health.42

Women in the early United States also knew that their own health was an important concern for family members and wrote their letters with this in mind. While in England, Sarah Coles Stevenson told her sister Betsy that “Since my last I have been again ill with the influenza and confined to my room & the house for ten days or a fortnight. This prevented my writing by the last packet. I was afraid it might make you uneasy[…]” Almost two years later, she again expressed her concern that Betsy might

41 Mrs. R. T. Singleton to Marion Singleton Deveaux. December 21, Box 3, Folder 5, Singleton Family Papers, LC. Similarly, while waiting for information regarding Marion’s pregnancy, Betty wrote that though she wanted to congratulate her “on the arrival of the little Stranger!” she had received no word and, like her sister had said regarding Robert Deveaux’s illness, was thus hoping that no news was good news. Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton Deveaux, December 13, 1836, all in Box 1, Folder 2, Singleton Family Papers, LC.
42 See, for example, Anne Ruffin Cameron to Duncan Cameron, January 7, 1839, Folder 804, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC, which expresses her concern over “sister’s illness.”
be worrying about her health, saying that though she had not expected to write prior to her return to London from Diggeswell, since they had decided to extend their visit, she was “obliged to write you a few lines” especially because “I feel the more anxious to write you, dear Sister, lest you should be uneasy about my health […].” Similarly, in 1834, Betsy wrote to her niece to apologize for taking so long to answer her letter, explaining that she had been sick with some type of chronic illness and thus unable to write for a time. She then provided an update on her health saying, “I think my disease exactly the same.”

More than just concerns over a family members health, this part of the family news section was important because early mortality was an ever-present threat that faced people in the antebellum United States, especially infant mortality, childhood mortality, and the threat of dying in pregnancy or childbirth. Both the Coles family and the Cameron family experienced the reality of early mortality during the antebellum period. Only two (Margaret Cameron Mordecai and Paul Cameron) of Duncan and Rebecca Cameron’s eight children were healthy. Four of their six daughters contracted

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43 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, April 13, 1837, Box 1, Folder 2; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, January 2, 1839, Box 2, Folder 1. Both in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
44 Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton, January 5, 1834; Two years later, she wrote Angelica Singleton, explaining that she had been sick again. See: Betsy Coles to Angelica Singleton, March 17, 1836. Box 1, Folder 2, Singleton Family Papers, LC.
45 This threat did not diminish over time. Nationwide mortality rates in the 1860 census reveal an increase in mortality rates from the 1850 census. The southern states as a whole tended to have a higher mortality rate on average than did northern states. Nationwide, the rate of mortality in children under one year old rose from 16.9% in 1850 to 20.74% in 1860, highlighting the precarity of life for young children. Joseph C.G. Kennedy, Preliminary Report on the Eight Census. 1860 (Washington, 1862), 22, 29.
tuberculosis and died at early ages. The remaining two children lived well into adulthood but remained dependent on their family’s care: Mildred whose unknown chronic illness rendered her an invalid and Thomas who had an intellectual disability. Out of Paul and Anne Cameron’s dozen children, five died in infancy or childhood. Marion Singleton Deveaux also faced the realities of illness and death throughout her lifetime. Her older sister died after childbirth while she was in school in Philadelphia away from all of her family except for her sister, Angelica. Two of her sons died in childhood—one of whom died with her father in a railroad accident. Her first husband, Robert Deveaux, was ill for several years before his early death in 1843 at the age of thirty. All three of her brothers died at young ages. Her sister Angelica also lost a child in infancy, while acting as White House hostess for her father-in-law, Martin Van Buren.

The fear of early mortality was so present that when Sarah Coles Stevenson (whose only daughter had died as a young child) wrote to congratulate her brother on the birth of his child, she wrote “May you my loved brother never be tried as I have been, may your treasures be spared to you, to bless you in Manhood, as now, to cheer and minister to you in old age. To weep for you in death […].” Sarah would go on to experience the death of two loved ones in Virginia while she was in England—her brother, Isaac, in 1841 shortly before she and Andrew returned to the United States, and a niece, Mary, in 1837 just a few weeks after the birth of Edward’s child. When Mary

Sarah Coles Stevenson to Edward Coles, May 19, 1837. Box 1, Folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
died, she expressed a great sense of isolation at being away from her family at this time saying, “I cannot express to you what I have felt away from every one who could sympathise with me, except my husband.” Similarly, Angelica Van Buren’s brother Matthew Singleton died suddenly in 1854 at the age of thirty-seven while she was traveling in Europe with her family and niece, prompting feelings of isolation and despair. As these examples illustrate, the threat of illness and death was an ever-present reality for women and men in the antebellum United States. In the face of separation from family members, it became increasingly important to include information on the family’s health within correspondence. Its absence in a letter, as well as the very absence of the letter itself, could create a genuine fear that the letter-writer or one of the family members was ill.

As these examples illustrate, gaps in correspondence could indicate grave issues with family members, whether health concerns or domestic problems. During her marriage to Augustus Converse, Marion Deveaux’s relatives wrote her often asking for news because of their concern over her abusive marriage. Similarly, when Duncan and Rebecca Cameron’s daughters were ill, their correspondence with their family members—especially their son Paul—increased. Much as with the expectation for

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47 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, May 29, 1837. Box 1, Folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.  
48 See particularly, Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, March 11, 1853; Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, March 19, 1853; Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, May 2, 1853; Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, November 26, 1853; all in the Singleton Family Papers, LC. For a more detailed analysis of Marion’s domestic abuse and the family’s response, see chapter five.
including family news and information about family members’ health in letters, worry played a large role in creating the expectation for regular correspondence. Indeed, this worry was often expressed when letters did not arrive as often as some thought they should. Sarah Coles Stevenson expressed her worry to one sister after “Week after week indeed’s months have now passed since I have received what I call a letter from you, […] it has been two months since the date of your last of one sheet not filled.” She worriedly asked, “What can be the matter?”

Beyond simply the expected regularity of correspondence, the length of letters also served as an indicator of affection, with longer letters indicating deeper affection. Four days after Sarah’s letter expressing worry at not receiving a letter from Betsy for two months, she wrote Betsy again saying, “This is my fourth letter since I received a line from you, and your last as I said before, was so short and un–affectionate that it chilled my heart.” Length of a letter, then, could presumably be used to measure a person’s affection (or lack of affection) for another. In fact, a month later Sarah Coles Stevenson explicitly equated the length of letters to a person’s affection when she told her sister Betsy,

And now my precious Sister, is this long letter, not a proof, nay, a convincing proof how fondly how tenderly I love you all. If I had become indifferent would I, could I? take the trouble to write so much at such a time as this, when I require

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49 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, June 14, 1838. Box 1, Folder 3, in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
50 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, June 18, 1838. Box 1, Folder 3, in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
repose & rest whenever I can get it. No it is, or ought to be worth more than a thousand professions [...].

This association of the length of letters and measuring affection between family members included both men and women in the family as Sarah revealed when she told Betsy, “Mr. S.’s mammoth letter will I hope restore him to his vaunted place in your heart.” Sarah again made the connection between lengthy letters and affection explicit when she responded to her brother Edward’s latest letter, writing eight pages and thanking him for the eleven pages he had written, calling such letters “testimonials of affection.”

This correlation between length of a letter and the measure of a person’s affection (and the accompanying expectation for lengthy letters) was made clear to women in the antebellum period from a young age, as when Rebecca Singleton scolded her daughters for the irregularity of their letters “being ‘few, and far between’” and “short, and unsatisfactory” while they were at school in Philadelphia. Even in shorter letters, the writer often apologized for their brevity, offering some excuse for not writing more and often assuring the recipient that the short letter was not because of a lack of affection, as

51 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, July 24, 1838, Box 1, Folder 4; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, August 6, 1838, Box 1, Folder 4; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Edward Coles, May 19, 1837, Box 1, Folder 2. All in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
52 Rebecca Singleton to Misses Singleton, May 16, 1830, Box 1, Folder 1, Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL.
Mary McDuffie did. Following this convention and regularly writing lengthy letters both affirmed affection and maintained (and effectively tightened) family ties.

Sarah’s letters to her family while she was in England are particularly revealing in this regard. Taking advantage of the diplomatic pouches available to her as wife of the American Minister, her letters were regularly fourteen or more pages in length. Indeed, as Betsy revealed to their niece, one of Sarah’s letters to her was thirty pages long. Writing such lengthy letters assured her family that she was thinking of them and that she cared enough to invest a significant amount of time writing to them. It also maintained the image of a united and affectionate family, even when separated by the Atlantic.

Because of the connection between length of a letter and affection, in many letters no blank space remained. All of the blank space, including the front of the paper that was folded to show the address, was taken up by writing. Moreover, many of these letters are difficult to read because the writer has filled up the pages writing horizontally before turning the letter sideways and continuing to write cross-hatch, writing over what had already written. Though this may have begun as a way to save paper or postage, the cost of sending a letter was likely not a real concern in prominent elite families. Instead, it was a convention they followed. Many of Angelica Singleton Van

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53 Mary S. McDuffie to Marion Singleton Deveaux, June 29, Box 2, Folder 8, Singleton Family Papers, LC.
54 Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton Deveaux, August 22, 1839, Box 1, Folder 6, in the Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL.
Buren’s letters followed this pattern. One of Angelica’s letters to her mother is four pages of tiny script that was then turned sideways and written cross-hatch on the first two pages. Because of a combination of this and the light blue ink, on first glance the letter looks instead like a modern sheet of graph paper.\textsuperscript{55} When Mary McDuffie travelled to Europe with Angelica and her family from 1854-1855, virtually every letter from both Mary and Angelica to family members at home was written cross-hatch.\textsuperscript{56}

These common, repeated elements became conventions to follow in correspondence that assured the recipient of the emotional bond between the recipient and the writer. What made these emotions and emotional conventions important was not so much the sincerity of the feeling as the repetitions of its presence. In the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War women shaped themselves to fit the standard, further reinforcing it in the process. Though the effects of following these emotional conventions in correspondence may have been unintentional, the simple fact that people were expected to conform to these norms, continuously followed them, and ensured that others within the family followed them functioned to hold together the family network.

Because these elements of correspondence reinforced family ties, women enforced adherence to them, typically through gentle admonitions, the creation of

\textsuperscript{55} Angelica Singleton to Mrs. R. T. Singleton, September 3, 1843, Box 4, Folder 5, in the Singleton Family Papers, LC.
\textsuperscript{56} Mary McDuffie to Mattie R. Singleton, July 4, 1854; Mary McDuffie to Matthew R. Singleton, July 15, 1854; Angelica Singleton Van Buren to Mattie R. Singleton, July 9, 1854; Angelica Singleton Van Buren to Mattie R. Singleton, July 12, 1854. All in Box 1, Folder 53, in the Singleton Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. (Hereafter cited as Singleton Family Papers, SCL).
feelings of guilt, and publicly calling out family members for their failure to fulfill their obligations in correspondence. Women shamed individuals who threatened the family’s image by failing to adhere to emotional conventions in correspondence; the public nature of correspondence ensured that the recipient (and all others that the letter was shared with) knew of such failures. Many of Sarah Coles Stevenson’s letters to her family, particularly those while she was in London, are premier examples of the strategies used to enforce adherence to these emotional conventions in correspondence. For example, one strategy that women often used was to insert an admonishment for one person in a letter to another, knowing that the letter would be shared and the person’s neglect made public. While Marion and Angelica Singleton were attending school in Philadelphia, Sarah wrote to Marion, thanking her for her “kind & welcome letter” before combining a praise for Marion’s attention and an admonishment for Angelica’s neglect saying, “I feel much gratified that you should think so much of me, & mortified that Angelica cares so little, I must confess I did not expect to be so neglected by her - she has not written me a line since she went to Philadelphia.”57 Just two years later, Sarah again wrote to Marion and Angelica to express her anxiety at not hearing from them, telling them that they had not been writing enough. The following year,

57 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Marion Singleton, November 7, 1828, Box 1, Folder 1, in the Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL.
Sarah wrote to the girls again, this time to admonish them for not having written all winter.58

Perhaps the most common way to ensure adherence, though, were the subtle—and not so subtle—creation of feelings of guilt. Sarah was a master at this strategy telling one of her sisters in January 1839 that she believed that her family’s “silent neglect […] has prayed upon my health and spirits - but I am tired of complaining, besides it does no good. I find if I wish to be remembered as still holding a place in the land of the living I must endeavor to get back among you[…].” In a letter to her sister Betsy a few weeks later, Sarah apologized for her “fretful complaining letter” and claimed that she felt “quite ashamed of having given way so much to low-spirits” before mournfully stating that she had “not been consoled or comforted by receiving a letter from you or any of my family” and believed that her family was “all cruelly hard-hearted to me.” Knowing very well what she was doing by writing such things in her letters, Sarah cheekily ended with, “”Adeiu! Don’t this letter make you ashamed?”59 In this way, Sarah worked to ensure that her family—and particularly her sisters—would adhere to the emotional conventions and write to her.

Similarly, Sarah’s near-constant scolding in her correspondence with Betsy, her sister Emily Coles Rutherfoord, her sister-in-law Helen Coles, and her niece (and

58 Sarah C. Stevenson to Marion and Angelica Singleton. [1830?]; Sarah C. Stevenson to Marion and Angelica Singleton; February 11, 1831. Both in Box 3, Folder 9, in the Singleton Family Papers, LC.
59 Sarah Coles Stevenson to “My dear Sister,” January 2, 1839; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, January 26, 1839. Both in Box 2, Folder 1, in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
namesake) Sarah (Sally) Rutherfoord for only writing short letters, brief notes, and postscripts when they did write her was another strategy many women used. At one point, Sarah instructed her niece to “write me a letter not a note.” In yet another letter, Sarah chided her sister Emily for only writing a postscript to one of Betsy’s letters saying, that she hoped she was “ashamed of your laziness.”

Betsy was also a master at using both of these strategies to ensure adherence to the necessary emotional conventions. She told her niece Marion in 1831 that she “was not only hurt & mortified, but quite angry with you for not noticing me during so many weeks.” Because Marion’s letter was sweet when it finally came, however, Betsy was back in "good humour." In a letter to Marion several years later, Betsy told her how worried she felt at not hearing from her in so long—since before her wedding to Robert Deveaux the year before! In another letter, Betsy apologized for not writing to Marion recently before remarking on Marion’s “touching and most beautiful” letter to a cousin. She then admitted that she was trying to “tempt” Marion into writing her before
finishing with a mention of her prayers for Marion and her “Orphan Children” after
Robert’s recent death. Yet another letter from Betsy to Marion praised Marion’s letters,
praising her "excellent talents God has blessed you with" in writing letters—before
continuing to say, ”indeed you are not true to yourself in biding so little intercourse
with those who love you.” The emotional guilt for not adhering to conventions and
writing her aunt regularly with information on her health, news of the family, and
assurances of affection was astounding—and ensured that Marion would write her aunt
(and adhere to all of the emotional conventions of correspondence) soon.

Similarly, the letters between friends Sarah K. Nash and Catherine Ruffin reveal
the continued practice of such admonishments in correspondence with the younger
generations of these families. In one letter Sarah admonished Catherine for not writing
often enough. Sarah angrily stated that Catherine was “the very shabbiest girl I have
ever seen” because she had been gone for a month and only written a short note.
Compounding that insult was the fact that “in that time however you sent me your love
in your letters to Louisa Jones” causing Sarah to believe that Catherine “thought my

65 Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton Deveaux. March 16, 1843, Box 1, Folder 2, in the Singleton Family Papers, LC
66 Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton Deveaux. March 25, 1846, Box 1, Folder 3, Singleton Family Papers, LC.
67 Sarah and Betsy were not the only older female relatives to ensure that a younger female relative adhered
to emotional conventions of correspondence. Rebecca Singleton also wrote to admonish her daughters for
the irregularity and shortness of their letters, saying, “My dear Children! You little know the Heart of your
Mother, if you suppose she can rest satisfied at such a distance from you, without hearing regularly of your
welfare.” Rebecca Singleton to Misses Singleton, May 16, 1830, Box 1, Folder 1, Singleton-Deveaux Family
Papers, SCL.
letters not worth answering.” In response to Catherine’s own accusation a little over a month later that Sarah no longer cared for her because she had not written, Sarah answered, “it is unkind in you my dear Catharine to suppose my affection for you lessened as you know how we have been afflicted.” In this case, Sarah had not written because her aunt had recently died shortly after childbirth, a situation that she felt Catharine should understand, having herself recently lost an uncle. These letters reveal that these admonishments often involved a back and forth between “injured” parties, in attempts at righting perceived wrongs—and at fixing the damage done to the image of their relationship.

Deploying such strategies in familial correspondence brought in members of the family network to ensure that the actions of individuals who failed to live up to their obligations were made public. Such strategies guaranteed that the individuals who erred would not continue to pose a threat to the family’s credit by doing so in the future, strengthening familial bonds of trust. Such practices solidified the connections that underlay the vast economic and political family networks centered in the antebellum South and extending both into other parts of the country and across the Atlantic.

Through adherence to emotional conventions in correspondence, elite white women in the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War reinforced bonds of

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68 Sarah K. Nash to Catherine Ruffin, October 4, 1824, folder 4, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Family Papers #643, SHC.
69 Sarah K. Nash to Catherine Ruffin, November 15, 1824, Folder 4, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Family Papers #643, SHC.
kinship in geographically far-flung family networks. Men seemed to form the center of these networks through their business and political activities, but women’s affective labor in familial correspondence ensured that the networks stayed connected and bound by bonds of kinship and trust. By adhering to emotional conventions in correspondence, women continually affirmed familial affection, shared family news, mitigated worry over family members’ health, and much more. In doing so, the trust and familial bonds between family members were continually stated, affirmed, and tightened. Though the effects of following these emotional conventions in correspondence may have been unintentional, the simple fact that women were expected to conform to these conventions, continuously followed them, and ensured that others within the family followed them functioned to hold together the family network. Whether or not the emotions and emotional conventions were sincere and heartfelt, the appearance of an emotional connection through the use of those emotions and conventions served to establish a specific level of trust within the family network. These bonds of trust and affection were essential for establishing the credit necessary for the political and economic endeavors of elite families. Consequently, women’s seemingly private affective labor in correspondence formed a key component in the economic and political work of their families.

Yet, women were not the only ones who performed affective labor in correspondence; men did as well, if in a slightly different (and often somewhat muted)
form. Examining men’s correspondence through the lens of affective labor in the same way as women’s correspondence highlights repeated elements similar to those elements of women’s correspondence. At first glance, these elements might seem completely different from the different elements of women’s correspondence. They are not as outright emotional; they focus on business or politics and not family; they end with assurances of esteem and respect, not affection. Yet, taking a closer look at these forms and the sentiments behind them reveals that these elements served the same purpose as their parallels in women’s correspondence—building and strengthening intimate bonds of kinship and trust. Men performed the same affective labor in correspondence as women did, even as they remained in their spheres of business and politics and acknowledged women as the keepers (and sharers) of family knowledge—the “small and unimportant matters” as one man put it.\[70\]

Both business and political networks relied on correspondence to function, and men adhered to emotional conventions specific to these two overlapping communities in their correspondence. Following these emotional norms established an individual’s place within the business or political network while ensuring credit and trust. Many of the conventions of business and political correspondence overlapped, including assurances of respect and esteem. Others, though similar on the surface, served different

\[70\] M.R. Singleton to Robert Marion Deveaux, October 15, 1842, Box 1, Folder 8, Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL.
purposes—such as the expression “Your Obedient Servant” and other markers of hierarchy and status. Thus, examining men’s letters on business and politics separately offers a useful perspective on the different types of affective labor required by different (but related) emotional communities. Doing so highlights the similar features of affective labor as well, showing parallels not just between men’s affective labor in business and in political correspondence but also the profound similarities between men’s affective labor and women’s affective labor.

Perhaps the most common feature of both business and political correspondence were assurances of friendship, respect, and esteem. While, like women, men also followed the convention of combining naming with affirmations of affection, they typically did so to reaffirm an existing bond—such as the bond between father and son—or to create a bond of political or business friendship.\textsuperscript{71} Fathers often explicitly instructed their sons on the importance of making and maintaining the right connections, particularly when their sons were attending school. For example, while John Coles Rutherfoord was attending Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, his

\textsuperscript{71} The letters between John Rutherfoord and both his father Thomas Rutherfoord and his son John Coles Rutherfoord are prime examples of men combining affirmations of affection and naming to reaffirm an existing bond. See, for example, Thomas Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord, April 27, 1810, Box 1, Folder 2; Thomas Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord, July 22, 1810, Box 1, Folder 2; Thomas Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord, August 15, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4; Thomas Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord, September 7, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4; Thomas Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord, September 12, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4; John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, August 30, 1840, Box 1, Folder 6; John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, September 5, 1840, Box 1, Folder 6; John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, September 9, 1840, Box 1, Folder 6; John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, October 18, 1840, Box 1, Folder 6. All in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
father emphasized the importance of him connecting with the Brockenbroughs and cultivating the familial connections already in place. John Rutherfoord’s own father had similarly emphasized the importance of forming strong bonds of intimate friendship through correspondence thirty years earlier, passing on a letter from a cousin living in Dublin which stated that he hoped that by “commencing a correspondence [...] the foundation will be laid of a friendship and intimacy between us, as permanent and durable as our lives.” Building and emphasizing intimate ties of friendship was thus an essential feature of men’s correspondence.

Correspondence was key in running business through economic networks, over distances both great and small. Business correspondence in the nineteenth-century United States followed specific conventions, including using the language of favors (which implied reciprocity), relying on assurances of friendship and respect, and deploying the metaphor of servitude. Though these conventions seem at odds with the

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72 For John Rutherfoord’s letters to his son while he was attending Washington College, see, among others, John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, August 30, 1840; John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, September 5, 1840; John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, September 9, 1840; John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, October 18, 1840; John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, November 7, 1840; John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, November 15, 1840; John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, November 20, 1840; John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, December 10, 1830; John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, December 30, 1840; all in Box 1, Folder 6 of the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. Suzanne Cooper Guasco has noted a similar situation in the correspondence between Edward Coles and his father while Edward was attending William and Mary. See Guasco, Confronting Slavery: Edward Coles and the Rise of Antislavery Politics in Nineteenth-Century America, (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013), 17-21. For more on this cultivation of political friendships, see chapter three.

73 For Thomas Rutherfoord’s letter to John stating that he was passing on a letter from his cousin Martin Brownby Rutherfoord, the oldest son of “yr Uncle John by his last marriage,” see: Thomas Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord, July 22, 1810. For Martin’s letter, see [Martin Brownby Rutherfoord] to “My Dr Cousin,” March 27, 1810, both in Box 1, Folder 2 of the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
impersonal market relationships that, supposedly, marked capitalism, men and women used familial metaphors in business correspondence to navigate an impersonal world. As with familial correspondence, following these conventions established and maintained the trust that business relationships relied on. Furthermore, adhering to these conventions assured the recipient of the writer’s credit.

Both men and women followed the same conventions in business correspondence, though they typically couched their letters in terms deemed appropriate to their respective gender. Women’s letters, for example, briefly mentioned a business request in a longer letter full of assurances of affection and family news. Men’s letters, on the other hand, were focused on a business issue or request, with a short assurance of some form of intimacy, and with short, obligatory references to family news. Consequently, affective labor in business culture was largely gendered male.

Just as with women’s familial correspondence, business correspondence followed specific patterns with repeated elements—all of which involved family metaphors and ties. A typical letter began with a greeting that pointed to the relative intimacy of the relationship between the letter writer and the recipient. “Dear Sir” for example implied a relative formality and a recognition that the recipient held a higher status whereas “My Dear Sir” implied an intimacy of acquaintance between two individuals of equally high status. Beginning a letter with “My Dear Brother” or some other statement of kinship identity further reinforced the intimacy of family ties. The
body of the letter began with an acknowledgement of receipt of a letter from the other person, referring to the time of last contact between the individuals. Like familial letters, such acknowledgements were usually phrased as a recognition for the other person’s favor of a certain date. Phrasing the acknowledgement in this way reinforced both the reciprocal nature of correspondence and the reciprocity involved in business transactions. Following this acknowledgement of the continued reciprocal relationship, a person writing for business purposes turned to the main reason for writing: the economic request at the heart of the letter. This section was usually the longest and included every possible necessary detail to complete the request (or about the already completed request, depending on the nature of the letter). The end of a typical business letter included a reference to family — often in the form of wishes of good health and affection to the recipient and his family, but also could include brief sections of family news. Such references served as a reminder of the intimate bond between the two, helping to assure trust within the relationship. The closing salutation (whether a variation of “Your affectionate brother,” “Yours affectionately” or “Your Obedient Servant”) served a similar purpose, implying intimacy and affirming trust while explicitly laying out the relationship of the letter writer and the recipient — as well as their relative statuses within the family hierarchy.

Within business correspondence, requests were often framed in the language of a favor with which they hesitated to trouble the recipient. The implication, however, was
that they did so because they trusted the other man to carry out the necessary task. The letters of John Rutherfoord’s brothers-in-law provide an excellent example.\textsuperscript{74} They often wrote to him with various business requests, framing their requests as asking for a favor of him. Usually such requests for favors were also combined with an apology of some sort for the trouble the other person would have to go to on their behalf. Edward Coles, for example, wrote John in October 1830 thanking him for “the trouble you have taken in calling at the Bank & Enquirer office for me.”\textsuperscript{75} In this letter, Edward also followed the convention of combining a request with an apology. Indeed, Edward’s letters to John often deployed these combined languages, as when he explicitly stated in one letter, “I am induced to trouble you so far as to ask the favor of you[…].”\textsuperscript{76} Similarly, when John Coles asked John Rutherfoord in 1830 to call at the lottery office and see if he had “drawn any thing in the lottery of the Union Canal of Pennsylvania” he first made a separate request for information by starting with, ”I ask the favour of you” before moving to the main purpose of the letter: his request to inquire at the lottery office. Coles framed the request in such a way to show that he was not asking that Rutherfoord go to any special trouble on his account only asking, “Will you be so good some day as

\textsuperscript{74} Note: I have chosen to call individual family members by their first name rather than their last name whenever possible, to help alleviate any confusion about which Coles or Cameron I am discussing. In cases where two individuals have the same first name, I will use both first and last names to help differentiate between the two.

\textsuperscript{75} Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, October 12, 1830, Box 1, Folder 4, in the John Rutherfoord Papers Collection, DU.

\textsuperscript{76} Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 20, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
you pass up the street to call at P Chubbs Lottery office [...].” In letters such as these, the language used reflected their status as equals; it was much more egalitarian than when contracting out to do business. Following these conventions tightened their familial connection and reinforced the feelings of respect and friendship that marked them as equals within their relationship.

The language of favors in business correspondence also reinforced the reciprocal obligations in business networks more specifically. Inclusion in these family networks was understood to come with economic and political responsibilities as well as social and emotional elements. While such reminders of the obligations of reciprocity were usually implicit, at times men outright stated that the favor would be returned. In one letter, Richard Singleton first thanked John Rutherfoord for “the trouble you have taken” in purchasing “the Boy John,” before requesting that John handle yet another economic transaction for him: purchasing ten or twelve barrels of the best flour that could be had in Richmond. He then apologized for the trouble and explicitly told John

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77 John Coles to John Rutherfoord, February 4, 1830, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
78 The majority of the letters between John Rutherfoord and his brothers-in-law deployed this language. For more examples, see: Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 27, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4; John Coles to John Rutherfoord, February 15, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5; Richard Singleton to John Rutherfoord, February 29, 1840. Box 1, Folder 6; All in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
79 For examples on the importance of the family in the antebellum South, see Burton, In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions; Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household; Catherine Clinton, The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Laura F. Edwards, Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); and Glover, All Our Relations. The literature on the business, political, and economic importance of family networks in the South is not as extensive. For a brief treatment of this in the antebellum South, see Jane Turner Censer, North Carolina Planters and Their Children. 1800-1860, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984) and Glover’s All Our Relations.
that the nature of such favors was reciprocity at a later date saying, "I am sorry to have
given you so much trouble but as one good turn assures another, I beg that you will in
turn Draw on me, and I will at all times be pleased to Honor your Drafts."\[^{80}\]

Reciprocity could be complicated when more than two people were involved. In
1827, Edward Coles asked John Rutherfoord to sell his (and his sister Betsy’s) shares of
stock in the Farmer’s Bank of Virginia and place them to the credit of James Madison,
emphasizing two facts that John was already familiar with: that James needed the
money and that he was “the ExPresident U.S.” At the end of the letter, Edward explicitly
told John that this favor would not just be for him but also “on Mr. Madison.” The
implication was that James—with all of the social, economic and political power that
came with being the former U.S. president—would owe John Rutherfoord a favor that
would be paid back at a future date.\[^{81}\] Constantly referring to a requested business
transaction as a favor assured the recipient of future reciprocity while ensuring that the
recipient would carry out the requested favor, effectively maintaining trust within the
network and keeping its boundaries tightly closed.

Similarly, assurances of friendship, respect, and intimacy worked to build the
trust necessary for credit and conducting business transactions from afar. As familial
correspondence shows, family and friendship were inextricably intertwined in the

\[^{80}\] Richard Singleton to John Rutherfoord, February 29, 1840. Box 1, Folder 6, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
\[^{81}\] Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, May 15, 1827, Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
antebellum United States. John Rutherfoord’s brothers-in-law and other friends and family members often closed their letters with assurances of friendship, respect, and affection, implying a sense of intimacy and trust. Hodijah Meade, John’s sister Anne’s husband, usually explicitly connected friendship with family (and sincere regard and respect) when writing to John, opening one letter with “My Dear Friend.” In this case, Hodijah’s choice to begin with a statement of intimate friendship highlights the near-constant equation of family and friendship, while in other letters he emphasized the respect and intimacy of their relationship as relative equals by opening with “My Dear Sir” or “My Dear John.” Some of Isaac Coles’s letters to John also reflect the intermingling of family and friendship in business correspondence. Isaac usually included some brief mention of family news before closing with an assurance of either friendship or respect—or a combination of the two. In one 1822 letter asking John to forward some money to their brother-in-law Andrew Stevenson (that he had originally gotten from his brother Tucker), Isaac updated John on his family’s travel plans saying, “Our party will leave this for the Springs on Wednesday the 7th:” where they hoped to

81 For examples, among many others, see Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, March 31, 1823, Box 1, Folder 2; Alexander Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord, June 14, 1834, Box 1, Folder 4; Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, May 3, 1835, Box 1, Folder 4; Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, November 24, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4; John Coles to John Rutherfoord, February 15, 1837, Box 1, Folder 5; all in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.

82 For the letter opening with “My Dear Friend,” see Hodijah Meade to John Rutherfoord, June 14, 1834, Box 1, Folder 4. For other examples of Hodijah Meade connecting family and friendship, see Hodijah Meade to John Rutherfoord, May 1, 1823, Box 1, Folder 2, which he signed, “Yr aff friend” and Hodijah Meade to John Rutherfoord, June 4, 1823, Box 1, Folder 2. For a letter where Meade used “My Dear Sir,” see, among others, Hodijah Meade to John Rutherfoord, October 23, 1822, Box 1, Folder 2. All in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
hurt before asking John for another favor—asking Andrew to bring “a canister of good Powder” for Isaac to use. He then closed the letter with a statement that assured John of his continued respect and friendship while implying a sense of continued trust between the two saying simply, “I am very truly Yr friend.”

Edward Coles, on the other hand, closed one letter to John with the simple reassurance that he was “Sincerely and affectionately yours,” implying not merely his affection but his sincere respect for John.

In a letter mainly dealing with Congress’s position and probable course on the Second Bank of the United States (which was sure to heavily affect the family network, its credit, and its economic actions), John Tyler opened his letter to John Rutherfoord with “My Dear Sir” implying an intimate relationship between equals, before closing with a salutation that assured a sense of trust within their intimate relationship, saying, “I am Dr Sir Truly & faithfully Yrs.” In other letters to Rutherfoord that dealt with the potential implications of national political decisions on the economic prospects of the family network, Tyler signed his letters with further assurances of friendship, respect, and affection, as when he quite literally signed one letter focusing on internal improvement, “I am Dr Sir With Sentiments of respect & friendship Yrs &c.”

The near-constant

84 Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 29, 1822, Box 1, Folder 2, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. Isaac frequently expressed his respect for John while discussing business concerns—and particularly when asking for specific favors, signing one letter, for example, “Yrs with great regard.” See, Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, March 31, 1823, Box 1, Folder 2, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
85 Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, August 17, 1818. Box 1, Folder 2, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
86 For the letter dealing with the situation of the Second Bank of the United States, see, John Tyler to John Rutherfoord, March 14, 1830; For the letter where Tyler focuses on the contentious debates around internal improvement and emphasizes the respect and friendship he feels for Rutherfoord, see John Tyler to John
assurances of friendship and respect in business correspondence such as these did not solely work to build trust but also served to reinforce the ties that bound elite families together.

Not all relationships, however, were egalitarian. Hierarchy was central to the creation and maintenance of family networks, with the older generation teaching the conventions to the younger, just as with the strategies many women used to ensure that younger female relatives adhered to the required emotional conventions in familial correspondence. The subtle nuances of hierarchy and status within a specific relationship could be quite complex within familial business correspondence. Benjamin F. Taylor handled a great deal of business for his uncle Richard Singleton. Many of his letters to Richard reflect the higher status of Richard in the family (and business) hierarchy. When informing Richard of some action or transaction made on his behalf, rather than alluding to favors, Benjamin’s letters were usually straight-forward accountings of his actions on Richard’s behalf. Additionally, though he did reference their family ties in brief sections of the letters, instead of beginning the letter with “My Dear Sir” (as virtually all of the letters written to John Rutherfoord by his brothers-in-

Rutherfoord, December 8, 1827. Both in Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. In other letters, Tyler kept Rutherfoord updated on other potential political decisions that would impact the family, such as the tariff. See, for example, John Tyler to John Rutherfoord, February 7, 1831, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. Interestingly, in this last letter discussing the tariff, Tyler signed the letter “I am D: Sir Y: Fvzł Sevż,” which effectively told Rutherfoord that he could trust him to serve the family’s needs.

# Benjamin was married to Sally Webb Coles, the daughter of Rebecca Singleton’s brother Walter.
law began), his greetings remained a bit more formal, leaving out the intimacy suggested by the “my.” He also generally devoted less space at the end of letters to assurances of intimate friendship. Rather, he usually highlighted the respect he held for Richard, briefly passed on his affections for Richard’s family, and ended the letter by simply signing it “Yours.”

Much as when Mary McDuffie consciously chose to use aunt or sister in different letters to her aunt Marion, Benjamin consciously decided on the emotional conventions necessary both to establish his own place in the familial business network and to change that place when necessary. At other times, Benjamin used more egalitarian language with references to favors and troubling, as when he told Richard that because someone else was acquiring U.S. Bank notes for him, Richard, "need not therefore trouble yourself in procuring the sum I requested you to get for me." Doing so helped to further tie his credit to the family’s credit, ensuring the trust of other members of the family network—in this case, Richard Singleton.

Many business relationships, both familial and otherwise, were even more explicitly hierarchical, as evidenced by the repetitions of phrases such as “Your

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88 See, for example, B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, June 5, 1824; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, December 29, 1824; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, May 28, 1825; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, June 7, 1825; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, June 13, 1825; B.F. Taylor to [Richard Singleton], July 3, 1828; B.F. Taylor, July 3, 1828; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, August 18, 1832; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, September 23, 1832; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, December 20, 1833; all in the Benjamin Franklin Taylor Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. (hereafter Benjamin Franklin Taylor Papers, SCL).

89 For Mary McDuffie’s use of aunt and sister interchangeably, see chapter one.

90 B.F. Taylor to [Richard Singleton], May 19, [1824]. Benjamin Franklin Taylor Papers, SCL.
Obedient Servant” in correspondence that continually reinforced the status of the letter writer and the recipient within their relationship. The use of servant carried very different connotations than employee. Where an employee remained in the seemingly public world outside the home, a servant breached the boundary into the home and consequently into the seemingly private world of the family. Thus, when someone signed a business letter with “Your Obedient Servant,” they effectively established their place within the family. The metaphor of servitude was most commonly deployed by merchants, factors, and others who contracted to handle specific economic transactions. With it, they claimed a place within the domestic bounds of the family—one that was low in the family hierarchy, but one that was nonetheless seen as part of the family. Even the beginning of letters that used this metaphor provided clues as to the letter writer’s status in the hierarchy, usually formally addressed with the recipient’s title before opening with “Dear Sir.” For example, most of Dart & Spears’s letters to Richard Singleton were addressed to Richard Singleton, Esq., before the opening greeting, while the letters that his brothers-in-law and other family and friends wrote to him simply

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91 The multitude of letters between Richard Singleton and his different factors are prime examples of this. For a few examples, see: Dart & Spears to Richard Singleton, Esq. August 23, 1815, Box 1, Folder 10; J.H. Douglas to Richard Singleton, Esq. February 3, 1816, Box 1, Folder 11; J.H. Douglas to Richard Singleton, Esq., February 14, 1816, Box 1, Folder 11; Dart & Spears to Richard Singleton, Esq., February 16, 1816, Box 1, Folder 11; Dart & Spears to Richard Singleton, Esq., June 19, 1816, Box 1, Folder 12; Dart & Spears to Richard Singleton, Esq., December 21, 1816, Box 1, Folder 13; Isaac M. Dart to Richard Singleton, Esq., December 8, 1819, Box 1, Folder 25; Sands, Spooner, & Co. to Richard Singleton, Esq. January 8, 1820, Box 2, Folder 26; James Harvey Merritt to Richard Singleton, Esq., March 24, 1820, Box 1, Box 2, Folder 28; Sands, Spooner, & Co. to Richard Singleton, Esq., February 10, 1821, Box 2, Folder 35; All in the Singleton Family Papers #668, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Hereafter Singleton Family Papers #668, SHC).
opened with the greeting. Many of the men whom Edward Coles engaged to handle his various business affairs in Missouri and Illinois after he moved to Philadelphia in 1832 followed these same conventions, deploying metaphors of servitude, while formally addressing Edward by the highest rank he had achieved (usually addressing him as governor), and emphasizing respectful service to his needs. These conventions accorded individuals the trust and credit necessary to conduct business transactions as members of the family. Crossing the boundaries of public and private placed business matters within the domestic world of the family, solidifying a sense of trust more in keeping with intimate relations among family members than the impersonal ones of business associates.

Correspondence was absolutely central to the politics in political networks as well. Political correspondence in the nineteenth-century United States adhered to specific conventions. Many of these conventions—including the language of favors (which implied reciprocity), assurances of friendship and respect, and the metaphor of

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92 For one example among many, see Dart & Spears to Richard Singleton, Esq., August 23, 1815, Box 1, Folder 10, Singleton Family Papers #668, SHC.
93 Among others, see R. Wash to Edward Coles, Esq., February 5, 1835, Box 2, Folder 28; H. Fellons to Edward Coles, Esq., March 12, 1835, Box 2, Folder 28. The letters that Robert Wash (a judge in St. Louis, according to one of Edward’s notes) wrote to Edward Coles did not always deploy the metaphor of servitude. While he used this metaphor when it suited his purposes, he also regularly emphasized the respectful friendship between himself and Coles, addressing him as “Gov.” or “Coles” (as a friend would) and closing the letter with assurances of friendship and respect. For the note in Edward Coles’s writing that points to Robert Wash’s position as judge, see R. Wash to E. Coles, October 31, 1834, Box 2, Folder 28. For two of the many examples of Robert Wash’s assurances of friendship and respect, see R. Wash to Governor E. Coles, March 25, 1834, Box 2, Folder 28; R. Wash to Edward Coles, November 30, 1835, Box 2, Folder 29; All in the Coles Family Papers, HSP.
servitude—overlapped significantly with the cultural conventions of business correspondence. Though some of these conventions seem at odds with the rise of egalitarian ideals, many friendships (like that of Edward Coles and James Madison) were inherently hierarchical. Because historians tend to see Madison and other political leaders of the time as rejecting hierarchy for an egalitarian ideal, the scholarship does not typically characterize such relationships in this way. Yet, the hierarchy was central to politics at the time, with the older generation both teaching the conventions to the younger in a familial model and helping them to establish relationships with the right people. As with familial and business correspondence, following these conventions established and maintained the trust that political relationships relied upon. Though both men and women adhered to emotional conventions in familial and business correspondence, men’s letters followed a slightly different formula. Men’s letters were centered around a political or business issue or request, with an assurance of intimacy, and short, obligatory references to family news. The conventions of political correspondence were largely followed and performed by men. As a result, affective labor (or, work related to the presence and performance of emotion) in political culture and the conventions of political correspondence were largely gendered male.

Just as with familial correspondence and business correspondence, political correspondence followed specific patterns with repeated elements, many of which were shared with business correspondence. For example, a typical political letter also began
with a greeting pointing to the relative intimacy of the relationship between the recipient
and the letter writer. While “Dear Sir” implied a relative formality and a recognition that
the recipient held a higher status, “My Dear Sir” implied an intimacy of acquaintance
between two individuals of equally high status. The body of the letter also began with
an acknowledgement of receipt of a letter from the other person phrased as a recognition
for the person’s favor of a certain date to reinforce the reciprocal nature not only of
correspondence but also of political favors between friends and family. Following this
acknowledgement, a person writing for political reasons turned to the main reason for
writing—the political request or information at the heart of the letter. This section was
usually the longest and included every possible necessary detail to complete the request,
or about the relevant political news. Like a business letter, the end of a typical political
letter included a reference to family—usually in the form of wishes of good health and
affection to the recipient and his family, but also could include brief sections of family
news. Such references served as a reminder of the intimate bond between the two,
helping to assure trust within the relationship. The closing salutation (whether a
variation of “Your affectionate brother,” “Yours affectionately” or “Your Obedient
Servant”) served a similar purpose, implying intimacy and affirming trust while
explicitly laying out the relationship of the letter writer and the recipient, as well as their
relative statuses within the family—and political hierarchy.
These conventions reveal many of the wider expectations of political friendship. Membership in political networks came with reciprocal obligations of support. These obligations could take many forms including—among many others—support during elections, political appointments, supportive positions on legislation, and simply sharing political news. These reciprocal obligations typically had one thing in common: attention to the family’s concerns. Information was often shared and debated on legislation, elections, and political appointments that could either help or harm the family’s political (and economic) fortunes. One key aspect of these reciprocal obligations was the support of individual members of the political family through granting political appointments, writing or giving speeches on behalf of a family member seeking election, or supporting family members whose political positions were threatened in some way.

Men in the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War began building political friendships at an early age. Certain appearances had to be kept up to build and maintain these friendships that would help them down the road. For example, letters between Edward Coles and his father John Coles while Edward was attending William and Mary reveal an emphasis on building these friendships that would be important for future political careers.\(^{94}\) John Rutherfoord emphasized a similar importance of building

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\(^{94}\) John Coles to Edward Coles, December 14, 1805; Edward Coles to Papa, November 21, 1806; Both in the Coles Family Papers, HSP.
such friendships early when writing to his son, John Coles Rutherfoord, nearly thirty years later.55

In political culture, as in business culture, there were elements of hierarchy, largely centered around age and status. The different forms these hierarchical elements took in political culture can be seen in Edward Coles’s correspondence with members of his political network. On first glance, much of the language appears to be the same in all of his letters to men in political positions. For example, all of the letters mention the friendship between the letter writer and the recipient. Yet, subtle differences point to each person’s position in the political hierarchy. In letters to people like James Madison or James Monroe who were higher in the hierarchy, Edward emphasized his esteem and respect for their friendship. For example, in the original letter that Edward wrote to James Madison about the offered position of private secretary, he first asked that his affections be presented to both Dolley Madison and her sister before finishing his letter with the assurance that, “with high considerations of respect, I am, dear sir, your friend.”66 Similarly, in letters to James Monroe, Edward typically signed letters by emphasizing his high esteem and respect for him, saying in one letter, “I beg you to present my best respects to Mrs. Monroe and believe me to be with great respect and

55 John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, August 30, 1840, Box 1, Folder 6, John Rutherfoord Collection, DU.
66 Edward Coles to James Madison, January 8, 1810. Box 1, Folder 10, Edward Coles Papers, 1797-1881, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. (Hereafter cited as Edward Coles Papers, PUL).
sincere regard your friend.” Likewise, Edward typically emphasized his esteem, respect, and friendship in letters to Thomas Jefferson, as when he assured Thomas of “the very great respect & esteem with which I am, my dear Sir, your very sincere and devoted friend.” Such statements both emphasized the regard Edward had for people like James Madison, James Monroe, or Thomas Jefferson who were higher in the political family hierarchy than he was and reminded the recipient of their familial relationship.

On the other hand, James Madison and James Monroe’s letters to Edward were usually signed more simply—sometimes simply “Your Friend.” James Monroe, for example, regularly signed with a variation of this salutation, whether “your sincere friend” or “yr. friend & servt.” James Madison’s letters to Edward usually ended with an assurance of his “affectionate respects” or regards for Edward. Similarly, Thomas Jefferson’s letters to Edward were straightforward, focused on his request, with very little words of esteem or honor, but emphasizing his respect and friendship. For example, he assured Edward in 1814 of his “great friendship and respect.”

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97 Edward Coles to James Monroe, December 14, 1816. Box 1, Folder 16, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
98 Edward Coles to Thomas Jefferson, July 13, 1814. See also: Edward Coles to Thomas Jefferson, September 26, 1814, in which Edward assures Thomas of “the great respect & regard which makes me most sincerely yours.” Both in Box 1, Folder 14, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
99 See: James Monroe to Edward Coles, May 19, 1811; and James Monroe to Edward Coles, May 25, 1811. Both in Box 1, Folder 11, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
100 See, for example: James Madison to Edward Coles, May 27, 1813; James Madison to Edward Coles, May 17, 1813; and James Madison to Edward Coles, June 10, 1813. All in Box 1, Folder 13, Edward Coles Papers, PUL. See also: James Madison to Edward Coles, June 8, 1814. Box 1, Folder 14, Edward Coles Papers, PUL. James Madison to Edward Coles, March 7, 1815. Box 1, Folder 15, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
101 Thomas Jefferson to Edward Coles, August 25, 1814. Box 1, Folder 14, Edward Coles Papers, PUL. Similarly, in an 1811, letter he signed with “your mother & family were well yesterday. accept the
Correspondence between Edward and people like Nicholas Biddle, on the other hand, comes across as more egalitarian on both sides. The salutations of Nicholas’s first letters to Edward signaled intimate friendship while placing less emphasis on respect and esteem. For example, many of his letters were signed “very sincerely & affect. yrs.” or some variation thereof. After their relationship developed and they knew each other better, the salutations were more intimate—though still reflecting their status as equals. For example, in January 1815, Nicholas addressed a letter to “My Dear Coles” rather than “My dear Sir” as in earlier letters, and signed it with “God bless you. Affy. Yrs.,” a salutation that emphasized their more affectionate relationship. Likewise, Edward’s letters to Nicholas emphasized their egalitarian friendship—and the sincerity of it—as when he signed one letter with, “Your old & truly sincere friend.”

Finally, people who wrote to Edward as supplicants emphasized his higher status in the political hierarchy—whether by virtue of his access to and position with James Madison or, later, through his own status as governor (and then former governor) of Illinois. For example, in a letter that Robert Fulton wrote to Edward in 1815 that assurances of my esteem & respect.” While this salutation does mention his esteem for Edward, it is not a major emphasis like in Edward’s letters to him, James Madison, or James Monroe. See: Thomas Jefferson to Edward Coles, April 24, 1811. Box 1, Folder 11, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.  

102 See: Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, March 8, 1814; Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, June 3, 1814; Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, September 24, 1814; Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, December 5, 1814. All in Box 1, Folder 14, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.  

103 Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, January 17, 1815. Box 1, Folder 15, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.  

104 Edward Coles to Nicholas Biddle, April 22, 1823. Box 1, Folder 21, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
implied a request for Edward to use his access to and influence with James Madison and James Monroe to achieve an outcome in a case regarding his steamboat rights, he signed the letter “Yours with sincere esteem and respect.” ¹⁰⁵ Such a salutation pointed to Edward’s higher status in the political hierarchy, just as Edward’s letters to Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe pointed to their higher statuses.

Other men in political networks followed the same formulas to subtly (or not-so-subtly) show their place in the political family hierarchy within correspondence. Willie P. Mangum, who studied law under Duncan Cameron and became a member of his wider political network, always emphasized his great esteem for Duncan. He signed one 1816 letter with, “I am D. Sir Yrs With great Esteem.” ¹⁰⁶ Willie’s greetings also reflected Duncan’s higher status in the political family hierarchy; he usually started letters simply with “My dear Sir” rather than mentioning Duncan by name. ¹⁰⁷ Duncan’s letters to Willie reflected a similar awareness of their respective places in the hierarchy, usually mentioning his regard for Willie before ending with a simple statement such as “Yrs. mo: truly.” ¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Robert Fulton to Edward Coles, January 17, 1815. Box 1, Folder 15, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
¹⁰⁶ Willie P. Mangum to Duncan Cameron, June 18, 1816; in Henry Thomas Shanks, ed., The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Volume One, 1807-1832, (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1950); 9. (Hereafter referred to as The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 1).
¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Willie P. Mangum to Duncan Cameron, May 24, 1832; in The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 1, 547.
¹⁰⁸ See: Duncan Cameron to Willie P. Mangum, June 3, 1832; in The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 1, 549.
The repeated emotional conventions of correspondence built and sustained intimate and affective bonds of family and friendship. Considering men’s and women’s correspondence together highlights the commonalities of form in letters that are, at least on the surface, extremely different. Family, business, and political letters appear to be different things; yet, they are simply different iterations of the same genre. Despite women’s overwhelming focus on family and men’s overwhelming focus on business and politics, both men and women used similar conventions in their letters. Whether an affirmation of affection in a familial letter or an assurance of respect, esteem, and friendship in a business or political letter, these emotional conventions served the same purpose: creating and maintaining the intimate, emotional relationships that were central to economic and political networks.
3. Chapter Two: “One Good Turn Assures Another:” Family Business in the Nineteenth-Century United States

Men and women in the antebellum United States were in debt. That was particularly true of individuals in elite families such as the Coles family of Virginia and the Cameron family of North Carolina who were in debt in various degrees throughout their lives. In order to buy land, manage plantations, purchase stock, and handle the myriad smaller economic transactions of everyday life, they relied on credit. Credit was more than simply an economic ability to obtain money, goods, or services before payment, though that was certainly a large part of it. Instead, credit encompassed a person’s reputation, social worth, and economic reliability. Family ties were essential for establishing and guaranteeing credit, with an individual’s credit virtually inseparable from his or her family’s credit. Though business was a “male” arena, women often participated in it, adopting the male conventions in order to establish their identity as credit-worthy, just as the men in their family did. As Richard Singleton assured his brother-in-law, “one good turn assures another,” so men and women knew they could

1 In her study of families in the eighteenth-century Atlantic World, Sarah Pearsall describes credit in a similar way saying, “Credit, then, was about more than even reputation or honor; it was about authority, power, and the ‘right to be believed.’” For Pearsall, credit was “primarily a masculine prerogative” tied to ideas of authority and independence, even though it was intimately connected to the family and women could maintain or damage a household’s credit. I argue, though, that because individual credit was inseparable from family credit, both men and women’s reputation and social capital relied on it, especially for conducting business and establishing trust. See Sarah M.S. Pearsall, Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 116.
trust in the reciprocity of family ties to conduct their business affairs. Elite families in the antebellum period relied on the family relationships forged by affective labor in correspondence and strengthened with regular affirmations of respect and assurances of reciprocal favors to create business networks spread over vast geographic areas that encompassed every member of their extended family network in an intricate web of credit and debt in multiple capacities. In order to undergird these precarious systems of credit and debt and advance both their own and their family’s economic interests, when the actions and failures of individual members of the family threatened its credit, other family members discussed the failures in correspondence and worked to support the affected individual.

Kinship ties provided the foundation for vast economic networks. As the literature on business in the nineteenth-century United States has emphasized, credit was absolutely essential for business ventures. The intimacy and trust implied by real

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2 Richard Singleton to John Rutherfoord, February 29, 1840. Box 1, Folder 6, John Rutherfoord Papers Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as John Rutherfoord Papers, DU).

and fictive kinship ties created credit and facilitated its transfer. Men and women relied on family members for virtually every kind of economic transaction: collecting a debt, depositing money, or making purchases—all of which could involve vast outlays of capital. By extending credit to family members, covering debts, and co-signing loans, elite families like the Coles and Camerons created economic webs that involved virtually every member.

Duncan Cameron’s loans and debts show how real and fictive familial relationships were key in determining credit relationships. The ledger he kept from 1804 to 1836 records the majority of the loans he made during this period and the people involved, including Richard Bennehan, Archibald Murphey, Thomas Bennehan, John A. Cameron, William Cameron, Thomas Cameron, Anne Cameron, Mary Anderson, Walker Anderson, John Umstead, Reverend John Cameron, and William Kirkland, among many others. While some of these people were blood-related, many—such as Archibald Murphey and William Kirkland—were not. In 1806, Duncan loaned his father, John Cameron, $1,000 on a draft drawn on his brother-in-law Daniel Anderson’s

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company. By 1810, the bond plus interest was $1,214, of which John paid $350. Four years later in 1814, his son William paid the remaining $864. Similarly, in 1825, Duncan signed a bond to his brother William and John Duffie for $1,544.34 to cover the bond of John Cameron. Similarly, in 1804, Archibald Murphey began amassing large debts to Duncan. From 1804 to 1809, Duncan documented the money he loaned to Archibald for various purposes, including cash loans, shares in navigation companies, penalties and interest on bonds, and the payment of bonds. Individual bonds reveal that in December 1807, Archibald signed two bonds to Duncan, one with William Kirkland for 500£ and one individually for $1000. The relationship between Archibald and Duncan was not solely one of Archibald in debt to Duncan, however. They also co-signed several loans together. From July 1809 through 1819, Archibald and Duncan took out loans from the Bank of New Bern for thousands of dollars. To list just a few of these bonds, in July 1809, they signed a loan for $1,200; in January 1810, they signed another $1,200 loan; and in

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4 Volume 76, in the Cameron Family Papers #133, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Hereafter cited as Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC).
5 It is unclear whether this was the bond of his brother, John A. Cameron, or his father, (Reverend) John Cameron. Bond of Duncan Cameron to William Cameron and John Duffie, December 7, 1825, in Folder 2138 in the Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
6 For example, Duncan recorded a bond of $1,093.30 on July 10, 1805, on which Archibald had paid an installment of $546.65. See: Volume 76, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
7 Bond of Archibald D. Murphey and William Kirkland to Duncan Cameron, December 28, 1807; Bond of Archibald D. Murphey to Duncan Cameron, December 18, 1807; both in Folder 2129. The bond with Kirkland was to Duncan as the guardian of Sarah Moore. Two months later, Archibald signed another bond to Duncan, this time co-signing with John Close for $1000. See: Bond of Archibald D. Murphey and John Close to Duncan Cameron, February 21, 1808, in Folder 2130. All in the Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
July 1810, they signed a loan for $1000. Within the space of a year, Archibald and Duncan had drawn $3,400 on one bank alone. In May of 1822, Duncan and William Haywood signed a bond to the Bank of New Bern for $3,922.27, indicating that the bond was to cover part of Archibald’s debt. Duncan was not the only one to cover part of Archibald’s debts, either. To prevent Archibald from losing his land holdings, William Kirkland and Thomas Ruffin took on part of his debts and held the deed to much of his land, including his plantation the Hermitage. Indeed, upon reading the letters of Thomas and his daughters Catherine and Anne, one would believe that Thomas, not Archibald, owned the Hermitage.

Archibald Murphey’s economic relationship to Duncan Cameron and Thomas Ruffin highlights the importance of fictive kinship ties for the economic endeavors of elite families. Women played a key role in those fictive ties, as a letter from Duncan to Thomas reveals. In August 1814, Duncan asked Thomas to send money collected for a debt with Mary Anderson, Duncan’s sister. At the time, Mary was the only family tie

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8 Bond of Duncan Cameron and Archibald D. Murphey to Bank of New Bern, July 12, 1809; Bond of Archibald D. Murphey and Duncan Cameron to Bank of New Bern, January 1810; Bond of Archibald D. Murphey and Duncan Cameron to Bank of New Bern, July 1810; all in Folder 2131, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC. For more bonds signed by Murphey and Cameron to the Bank of New Bern, see Folder 2131, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
9 Bond of Duncan Cameron and William H. Haywood to Sherwood Haywood as agent of Bank of New Bern, May 1, 1822, in Folder 2135, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
10 In The Kirklands of Ayr Mount (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), Jean Bradley Anderson describes Murphey’s debts involving Ruffin and Kirkland, as well as the transfer of land to Ruffin and Kirkland, including the Hermitage and Lenox Castle, which Murphey had bought from John Lenox. See especially chapter 9. Balleisen’s argument in Navigating Failure that “In the face of impending bankruptcy, antebellum American habitually tried to protect the interests of those close to them, occasionally by fraudulently conveying or concealing assets, more commonly by making preferential payments to favored creditors” helps to explain this action. Balleisen, Navigating Failure, 17.
between the men, as godmother to Thomas’s daughter.\textsuperscript{11} Thomas’s father-in-law, William Kirkland, was Archibald’s brother-in-law and the business partner of Mary’s husband, Daniel Anderson, prior to Daniel’s death. Duncan’s connection to Archibald was thus largely due to Mary’s relationship with the Ruffins and Kirklands.\textsuperscript{12} Though family ties would deepen with the marriages of Paul Cameron and Anne Ruffin and Duncan’s niece, Anna Cameron, and William’s son, Alex Kirkland, those would not occur until after Archibald’s death in 1832. It was the fictive ties binding Archibald to these families ensured that his credit was the same as that of those bound by blood ties.

The modern relative value of the loans reveals that the credit extended within families constituted vast outlays of capital. Men and women in the antebellum period relied on both their own credit and that of their families for business endeavors. In 1813, James Madison wrote to Edward Coles to enclose a “draft on the B. of PA. with a supply of the deficit which prevented its payment.” At this point, Edward was serving as his private secretary. So while this draft could have been money owed for that service, the fact that the draft was covering a deficit that had prevented payment reveals that,

\textsuperscript{11} Duncan Cameron to Thomas Ruffin, August 8, 1814, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Hereafter cited as Thomas Ruffin Papers #641, SHC. For evidence of Mary Anderson’s role as godmother to Catherine Ruffin, see Mary Anderson to Catherine Ruffin, April 23, 1824, in the Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Family Papers #643, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Hereafter cited as Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Papers #643, SHC).
\textsuperscript{12} Anderson, The Kirklands of Ayr Mount, 12.
whatever the cause, James owed Edward money. In fact, the men in the Coles family network regularly loaned each other money—often in quite large sums. As one letter reveals, John Rutherfoord effectively loaned Edward Coles $10,000 at a time, with the possibility that more would be loaned if needed. Indeed, almost twenty years later, Edward still drew (or at least contemplated drawing) on John’s credit if he had no other way to make a payment, this time for $1000 or $1500. John Coles owed his brother Tucker a smaller sum in August 1828—just $1000. These might not seem like overly large sums. But, to put these figures into more modern terms, in 2015, the relative value of $10,000 from 1818 would range from $192,000 to $245,000, revealing that the Coles family often loaned each other large sums of money. These were not the largest loans between family members, either. Betsy Coles loaned one brother-in-law $15,000. Paul Cameron, meanwhile, signed one bond to his father-in-law Thomas Ruffin for just over $5000, and Thomas also signed as surety for a $14,000 bond for Paul.

13 James Madison to Edward Coles, May 17, 1813. In Box 1, Folder 13 of the Edward Coles Papers; 1797-1881, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. (Hereafter Edward Coles Papers, PU).
14 Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, December 7, 1818. Box 1, Folder 2; Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, April 9, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5. Both in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
15 Tucker Coles to John Rutherfoord, August 11, 1828, Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
16 I arrived at these estimates by using a purchasing power calculator on measuringworth.com. The answer was obtained by multiplying the original amount of $10,000 in 1818 by the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Increase in the years between 1818 and 2015. For more on how to measure worth of an item for a particular time period and the difficulties involved in doing so, see Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, “Explaining the Measures of Worth,” MeasuringWorth, 2012. http://www.measuringworth.com/worthmeasures.php, accessed September 29, 2016.
17 For Betsy’s $15,000 loan to a brother-in-law, see Bond between Richard Singleton and Elizabeth Coles, October 1, 1836. Box 1, Folder 34, Singleton Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. (Hereafter cited as Singleton Family Papers, SCL). For Paul’s bond to Thomas of a little over $5000,
At times, the webs of obligation in elite families became so complicated that the individuals involved were not even positive how much they owed each other. In 1818, for example, Edward wrote to his brother John to inform him that he had given John Rutherfoord his power of attorney to draw his dividends and place them at John’s credit “in consequence of my owing you a sum the amount of which I did not know.”¹⁸ To further complicate matters, at times, one person’s debt was often paid by a third person who owed money to the first person. For example, in 1843, Richard Singleton covered Betsy Coles’s debt of $3000 to John Rutherfoord as part of the payment of his $15,000 debt to Betsy.¹⁹ In a similar case, twenty years earlier, Isaac Coles asked John Rutherfoord to deposit a sum to Andrew Stevenson’s credit, explaining that he had just received the money from his brother Tucker.²⁰

Men and women in the antebellum period relied on their families’ credit as well as their own credit to conduct their business. Edward Coles, for example, often drew on familial relationships in order to obtain the funds to conduct his business affairs. In December 1818, he informed John Rutherfoord that he drew $10,000 in total on the New

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see Bond of Paul Cameron to Thomas Ruffin, January 13, 1845, in Folder 2146 in the Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC. For the $14,000 bond that Thomas Ruffin signed as surety, see Bond of Paul Cameron and Thomas Ruffin to Charles Dewey, June 30, 1857, in Folder 2147 in the Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.

¹⁸ Edward Coles to John Coles, February 17, 1818. In Box 1, Folder 18 of the Edward Coles Papers, PUL.

¹⁹ See note signed by Elizabeth Coles on dated March 15, 1843 on the back of the original bond between Elizabeth and Richard stating “The within bond is to be credited by three thousand dollars paid by Mr. Singleton to Coln John Rutherfoord by my order.” Bond between Richard Singleton and Elizabeth Coles, October 1, 1836. Box 1, Folder 34, Singleton Family Papers, SCL.

²⁰ Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 29, 1822, Box 1, Folder 2, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
York firm of Walsh & Gallagher, owned by friends of John. He further informed John that he had authorized his friend Robert Wash of St. Louis to draw up to $5000 on Walsh & Gallagher “and to charge the same to you in the same manner as if drawn by myself.”21 Because of his intimate friendship with Edward, Robert had access to the credit of the Coles family—in this case, John, whom he had never met.

Because individuals like Edward often relied on family members’ credit, their individual credit became inseparable from the family’s credit. Such a situation helps to explain why John Rutherfoord went before the board of a bank for his brother-in-law Hodijah Meade to assure the board that a debt Meade owed would be paid the next time payment was due.22 Consequently, assurances that the family’s credit was being maintained, helped, or simply not harmed were present in many letters. The family’s credit was such an important concern that Sarah Coles Stevenson was quick to inform one of her sisters that her husband Andrew had definitely not harmed the family’s credit in any way while Minister to England, saying, “As to his debts here, if he has any, I do not know of them, and I have great faith in his prudence and discretion. Whatever you may have heard to the contrary we have lived with great economy altho’ Mr. Stevenson

21 In this same letter, he also told John that he had drawn $4000 on another friend’s friend in New York. See: Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, December 7, 1818. Box 1, Folder 2 of the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. A few months prior, Edward had drawn on the credit of John & his father Thomas. See: Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, August 17, 1818. Box 1, Folder 2 of the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
22 Hodijah Meade was married to John Rutherfoord’s sister, Anne. See: H. Meade to John Rutherfoord, October 23, 1822, Box 1, Folder 2 of the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
has endeavoured to preserve his dignity and that of his country[...].” 23 Such assurances were important when one individual’s problems with debt could prove a detriment to the entire family’s credit.

Men and women in the antebellum South often turned to specific, trusted family members to conduct business for them. John Rutherfoord formed the center for the economic transactions of the Coles family, often handling business transactions for others such as buying stock, depositing money sent from one family member to another, loaning money, collecting debts, and paying taxes, among many other businesses. Because he lived in Richmond, John was centrally located and had easy access to banks, companies, and information. John Coles explicitly mentioned this advantage at one point saying, “Your being upon the State, with an acquaintance with every one, can give me as good, or better information, than I could obtain if I was in Richmond my self.” 24 Similarly, Richard Singleton turned to John Rutherfoord for business dealings in

23 Sarah Coles Stevenson to “My dear Sister,” January 2, 1839, box 2, folder 1, in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU).
24 John Coles wanted to invest $20,000 in stock and wanted John Rutherfoord’s help deciding what to invest in. In this case, John Rutherfoord’s access to up-to-date and accurate information was crucial to ensure the least chance of failure. See John Coles to John Rutherfoord, April 7, 1837, Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. John Rutherfoord was also a principal agent of the Mutual Assurance Society in Richmond. For evidence of this, see John Rutherfoord to William R. Aylett, December 18, 1858; John Rutherfoord to William R. Aylett, November 11, 1859; John Rutherfoord to William R. Aylett, February 4, 1858; all in the Aylett Family Papers, 1776-1945 (Mss1 AY445), Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. Some of these letters seem to say Mutual Association Society rather than Mutual Assurance Society, but records for the Mutual Assurance Society indicate that John Rutherfoord was a principal agent. See: A Guide to the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia General Business Records, 1795-1965; Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia. General Business Records, 1795-1965. Accession 28135, Business Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.
Virginia (and with family who lived in Virginia) and to Benjamin Taylor for many of his business activities in South Carolina.25

The payments and debt collections often involved people both within and outside of the network. Following these requests reveals the multi-layered webs of credit and debt of the family involved. For example, the requests that Isaac A. Coles made of John Rutherfoord reveal one layer of the webs of credit and debt of the Coles family network. In September 1823, Isaac Coles sent John three different notes, asking him to deposit them in the bank for him. A few months later in January 1824, he again asked John to make a deposit; this time the deposit was money owed to him upon the settling of an estate. In March of the same year, he again asked John to handle a note for him—this time one given to Isaac by a member of their wider network of credit. A few weeks later, Isaac again asked John to deposit a note for him; this time, his brother Tucker was involved as well. A few months later, Isaac again wrote to John, asking him to sell his crop of tobacco for him. The crop had been sitting in Richmond for several weeks because Isaac had initially believed his brother John was going to sell it for him, but he had received a letter that said that John might not be able to make it down to Richmond.

25 For one of Richard Singleton’s requests of John Rutherfoord, see: Richard Singleton to John Rutherfoord, February 29, 1840. Box 1, Folder 6, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. For a few of Richard’s requests of B.F. Taylor, see: B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, June 5, 1824; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, December 29, 1824; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, May 28, 1825; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, June 7, 1825; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, June 13, 1825; B.F. Taylor to [Richard Singleton], July 3, 1828; B.F. Taylor, July 3, 1828; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, August 18, 1832; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, September 23, 1832; B.F. Taylor to Richard Singleton, December 20, 1833; all in the Benjamin Franklin Taylor Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. (hereafter Benjamin Franklin Taylor Papers, SCL).
Since his brother was unable to, he explained that he now hoped that John Rutherfoord would do it for him. Then, he continued his letter, asking John to give the money from the sale to his brother John who would then use it to pay Isaac’s accounts at several stores in Richmond.\textsuperscript{26} Similarly, in 1836 and 1837, Isaac wrote John several times concerning a $15,000 debt owed to him by Doctor Stark.\textsuperscript{27} John Rutherfoord’s central location in Richmond enabled him to easily deposit notes and bonds for such debts owed to family members. Continuing to follow requests made of John highlights his centrality in the multi-layered webs of credit and debt of the Coles family network. Isaac was not the only family member who made such requests. In August 1828, Tucker Coles wrote to John asking him to cash “check of John Coles on the Farmers Bank of Virginia for $1000” for him. Andrew Stevenson made similar requests of his brother-in-law.\textsuperscript{28}

Similarly, family members turned to John for help with stock investments. In July 1836, Betsy Coles asked him to invest a sum of money for her in different stocks. Edward Coles made a slightly different request regarding stocks a few weeks later. He had recently purchased fifty shares of stock in the Richmond & Petersburg Rail Road but did not know when the payment installment would be due. He thus wanted John to find

\textsuperscript{26} Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, September 19, 1823; Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, January 8, 1824; Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, March 6, 1824; Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, March 26, 1824; Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 3, 1824. All in Box 1, Folder 2, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
\textsuperscript{27} Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, December 8, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4; and Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, June 23, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5; both in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
\textsuperscript{28} For Tucker’s letter asking John Rutherfoord to cash a check, see: Tucker Coles to John Rutherfoord, August 11, 1828, Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. For one of Andrew’s requests (this one through his wife, Sally), see Sarah Coles Stevenson to John Rutherfoord, November 4, 1834, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
out so that he would know at what point he should be prepared to pay—and how much he would need to pay. A few months later, Edward wrote John again, asking him to pay the subscriptions for more of the same stock along with the next installments “out of the sum of $6000 deposited in the hands of Th: Rutherfoord & Sons on the 9th day of September last.”

Both Isaac and John Coles also made requests for stock investments of John Rutherfoord—both with corporations like the railroad that Edward invested in and in city loans. Individuals like Isaac, Betsy, and the other members of their families often invested in the same stock, whether railroads, canals, banks, or city loans. A memorandum of stocks held by John Coles Rutherfoord (the son of John Rutherfoord and Emily Coles Rutherfoord) included multiple shares of stock in the state of Virginia, including one with a notation indicating that it was held for Ann S. Roy, his eventual wife. Similarly, Betsy, Isaac, and John Coles all invested in Richmond city loan. The entire extended Cameron family network, for example, was involved in various railroad

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29 For Betsy’s request, see Betsy Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 2, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. (In a joint letter from both Betsy to John and S.F. (Sarah) Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord). For Edward’s letters concerning the railroad stock, see Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 20, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4; and Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, January 16, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5; both in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.

30 Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, December 8, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4; Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, June 23, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5; John Coles to John Rutherfoord, February 15, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5; John Coles to John Rutherfoord, April 7, 1837, Box 1, Folder 5; All in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.

31 Memorandum of Stocks held by John C. Rutherfoord, [ca. 1860], Section 16, Rutherfoord Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society. (Hereafter referred to as Rutherfoord Family Papers, VHS.)

32 For evidence of Betsy’s investment, see: Elizabeth Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 2, 1836. (Included in letter from S. F. Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord), Box 1, Folder 4 of the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. For Isaac’s investment, see: Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, December 8, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4, Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, June 23, 1837, Box 1, Folder 5. Both in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. For John Coles’s investment, see: John Coles to John Rutherfoord, February 15, 1837, Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
projects in efforts at internal improvement in North Carolina throughout the antebellum period and continuing through the Civil War and Reconstruction. Virtually every member of the network invested in the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road, the North Carolina Rail Road, and others. Many individuals served in multiple capacities, acting as stockholders, board members, and corporation presidents. Consequently, the credit of

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33 Both Duncan Cameron and George Mordecai served as President for the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road after its charter was approved through the North Carolina General Assembly’s Internal Improvements Committee – of which several members of the network were involved. For evidence of their service as president of the corporation, see, among others, Geo. W. Mordecai, Pres’t., “Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Stockholders of the Raleigh & Gaston Rail Road Company,” Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette, Tuesday, February 28, 1837; Issue 16; and “To the Honorable the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina,” Raleigh, November 27, 1838, Broadsides & Ephemera Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. Duncan Cameron, Thomas Bennehan, George Mordecai and William Boylan all invested in the railroad in different capacities. See, for example, Bond of Duncan Cameron to State of North Carolina for $12,000, March 23, 1841; Bond of Thomas Bennehan to State of North Carolina for $10,000, March 30, 1841; Bond of Duncan Cameron, William Boylan, and George Mordecai to State of North Carolina for $5,000, April 1841, all in Folder 2146, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC. The initial attempt at building the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road failed, with the state effectively bailing the corporation out and reincorporating it a few years later. When it was reincorporated, Duncan Cameron, William Boylan, and George Mordecai (among others), were all formally listed in the charter as authorized to form the company and sell shares. See: An Act to Incorporate the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road Company, ratified Jan. 29, 1851, in Clark, History of the Raleigh & Gaston Rail Road Company. Many of these same individuals were also invested in the North Carolina Rail Road in different capacities. For evidence of this, see: North Carolina Rail Road Company, Proceedings of the General Meeting of Stockholders of the North Carolina Rail Road Company, at Greensboro’, July 10, 1851, with the By-Laws of the Company, as Revised at Said Meeting, (The Patriot Office: Greensboro, NC, 1851), Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002. http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/ncrr1851/ncrr1851.html.. Paul, Duncan, Margaret, and Mildred Cameron likewise invested in the North Carolina Rail Road, among others. For evidence of this, see: Note, Office NC Rail Road Co to Paul Cameron, June 4, 1855; Expenses on Rail Road Contract in which Duncan, Paul, and Margaret Cameron are equally interested, Folder 3663, Volume 125; and “This book exhibits a List of M.C.C. bonds, stocks, &c in the care of C. Dewey Esq.,” Folder 3664, Volume 126; all in the Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC. For an in-depth examination of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road, see chapter four. Robert Richard discusses a similar situation in banking in North Carolina during and following the Panic of 1819 and the ensuing depression. Members of the Cameron family network were involved in banks in multiple capacities—as stockholders, debtors, bank directors, borrowers, and legislators. See: Robert S. Richard, “‘This Monster Feeding Upon Our Vitals’: Bank Wars and Hard Times in North Carolina” (paper presented at the Triangle Early American History Seminar, Durham, NC, September 23, 2016). For a more in-depth
a family network like the Coles family or Cameron family was firmly tied to the credit of
the corporations whose stock they invested in.

One key transaction that men and women in the antebellum South handled for
family members reveals how the lines of family were tightly drawn to exclude enslaved
people: the buying, selling, and leasing of slaves. Both John Rutherfoord and Betsy Coles
leased some of the enslaved people they owned to Isaac Coles. A letter Isaac wrote to
John in November 1830 reveals that John had leased several enslaved men and women
to Isaac the previous year, and Isaac wanted to continue leasing the three enslaved men.
In the same letter, he revealed that he and his wife had decided to buy some slaves to
work in the house, rather than lease any or continue to “tax Betseys goodness farther
though she still kindly tenders us hers such without charge.”\textsuperscript{34} In March of the following
year, Isaac wrote to John to follow up on this earlier letter. He informed John that
instead of continuing to lease the enslaved woman who had been their cook, they
instead “want a good nurse.” He thus told John that they desired to “therefore exchange
her permanent for any one you can offer us of fair reputation [...]” Isaac specified,

\textsuperscript{34} Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, November 16, 1830, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
This was not the only time Betsy let a family member lease or purchase some of the enslaved people she
owned (even if she let Isaac do so at no charge). In 1836, she sold the enslaved people she owned to Richard
Singleton. For this information, see: Bond between Richard Singleton and Elizabeth Coles, October 1, 1836.
Box 1, Folder 34; and Elizabeth Coles Affidavit, April 2, 1853, in Box 1, Folder 52. Both in the Singleton
Family Papers, SCL.
however, that he “would prefer one from Richd as all the servants here have their heads
filled with liberty, and would not be satisfied with the situation they would fill in my
family.” In 1825, Hodijah Meade also called on his family connection to John when he
asked John to join him in a scheme of lending out slaves to a nearby plantation in return
for a share of the crops. With this scheme, Hodijah both called on family ties to help get
a business opportunity off the ground and tied the family’s economic future further to
the enslaved people they owned. Moreover, in one letter, Richard Singleton first
thanked John for “the trouble” of purchasing “the Boy John,” before requesting that he
also buy ten or twelve barrels of the best flour in Richmond for him. Such letters provide
a stark contrast between the intimate bonds of letter writers and the stark, impersonal
market forces involved in selling another human being. Rather than acknowledging
enslaved people as human beings, purchasing and leasing slaves was a transaction
equivalent to the simple acquisition of goods—a situation made explicit by Richard’s
requested purchase of twelve barrels of flour.

Purchasing land in other parts of the country similarly relied on family
connections, credit, and trust. In 1810, Edward Coles told his brother John Coles that he
wanted to sell the farm he had inherited from his father and informed him that another

\[35\] Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, March 4, 1831, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
\[36\] Hodijah Meade to John Rutherfoord, January 2, 1825, Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
one of his brothers was helping with this transaction.37 In November 1818, Walter Coles, Edward Coles, and Mary Eliza Carter purchased 6002.5 acres of land in Missouri together, with Walter’s wife Sarah also signing the deed. The document approving the patent of the land purchased was signed in 1823 by James Monroe, a member of their political family. Similarly, in July 1824, Thomas Rutherfoord signed a power of attorney granting his son John Rutherfoord the authority to buy land in Kentucky and Ohio for him. Isaac Coles had purchased land for plantations in Missouri as well. As he told John Rutherfoord in 1828, he hoped to travel to Missouri to settle the last four years of accounts with his overseer but would not be able to do so unless he was able to make a profit selling his crops. Isaac continued on to say that he regretted this fact even more so because his nephew Walter would be going out in the fall, and he believed that he could be of help to Walter if they traveled together.38 Statements such as Isaac’s highlight the importance of family to land ventures in different parts of the nation.

37 Edward Coles to John Coles, November 30, 1810. In Box 2, Folder 16 in the Coles Family Papers (Collection 1458), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. (Hereafter cited as Coles Family Papers, HSP. Eventually, Edward’s brother Walter purchased the plantation that he had inherited from his father, enabling him to free the slaves he had also inherited and move with them to Missouri. Suzanne Cooper Guasco goes into great detail about these decisions in Confronting Slavery: Edward Coles and the Rise of Antislavery Politics in Nineteenth-Century America, (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), see especially pgs. 33-37 and 60-61.
38 Deed of Land Purchased by Mary Eliza Carter, Walter Coles, and Edward Coles, Nov. 25, 1818. In Box 1, Folder 5 of the Coles Family Papers, HSP; Document Approving Patent of Land Bought by Mary Eliza Carter, Walter Coles, and Edward Coles, December 23, 1823, in Box 1, Folder 6 of the Coles Family Papers, HSP; Power of Attorney Signed by Thomas Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord, July 21, 1824. Box 1, Folder 2, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU; Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 15, 1828. Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
With such large land purchases as these, the measure of trust placed in the individual conducting the actual purchase on behalf of distant family members was immense. Prior to Edward, Walter, and Mary Eliza’s joint purchase of land, Edward updated John Rutherfoord on the situation in Missouri, telling him that the sale of the public land in the district around St. Louis had started, and that though he had “not yet bought any land for Brother Walter or Sister Carter” he “hope[d] to do so soon.” He informed Rutherfoord that he had not yet done so because “There has been as yet but little good land sold – indeed there is not much good in the 30 Townships now selling, but what is covered by old Spanish grants and other private claims.” Not only was there no land that he considered to be good, but he believed that the price (from $4 or $5 to $9 or $10 an acre) was “too high for the kind of land I understood it to be from those who knew it best.” Edward’s comments reveal that family placed an immense amount of trust in other family members to protect their (and the family’s) interests when purchasing land—and, consequently, in participating in the rampant land speculation of the early nineteenth century. Using Edward’s low estimates of $4 or $5 per acre for good land, the 6002.5 acres that he, Walter, and Mary Eliza purchased would have cost from $24,010 to $30,012.50. With his high estimates of $9 and $10 an acre, the land would have cost them between $54,022.50 and $60,225. Although these estimates range broadly, they would be committing to a vast outlay of capital either way. Converting those estimates into relative modern currency values brings those figures into stark relief. In 2015, the
relative value of the low estimate of $24,010 for the land in 1818 would be about $462,000. Applying the same formula to the high estimate of $60,225 in 1818 dollars reveals that its relative value in 2015 would be about $1.16 million. Men and women thus relied on family members like Edward, who were on the ground in the area where the land was being sold—and who had developed the friendships and other relationships that would help to guarantee against being sold sub-par land as “good” land for extraordinarily high prices. Strategies such as this protected not just the individual’s economic interests, but the family’s as well since the person making the purchase would be equally affected if the family network’s credit was harmed.

When he expanded his land holdings into Alabama and Mississippi in the 1840s and 1850s, Paul Cameron similarly relied on family bonds to help conduct his affairs both at home and in Alabama and Mississippi. While in Marengo County, Alabama, in January 1845, Paul signed a bond to Thomas Ruffin for $5,179.89 for “value received.” Thomas’s note at the bottom from March of the same year indicated that the bond was paid in full and “delivered up to Hon. Duncan Cameron.” Though it is not clear for what Paul was repaying Thomas, Paul relied on both Thomas and his father to handle various business affairs while he was away, relying on the bonds of family and family

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39 I arrived at these estimates by using the purchasing power calculator on measuringworth.com. The answer was obtained by multiplying the original amount by the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Increase in the years between 1818 and 2015.
40 Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, August 17, 1818, Box 1, Folder 2, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
41 Bond of Paul Cameron to Thomas Ruffin, January 13, 1845, in Folder 2146 in the Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
credit. Additionally, in need of someone in the area that he could rely on to find land, get his plantations established, and find trustworthy men as overseers, he may have turned to his wife’s uncle, James H. Ruffin, who had lived in Alabama for many years.\textsuperscript{42} Over ten years later and four years after Duncan Cameron’s death, Paul made the final payment of $14,000 for the land he purchased in Tunica County, Mississippi. Thomas signed the bond as surety.\textsuperscript{43}

The economic activities of both the Coles family network and the Cameron family network reveal the active involvement of women in the systems of credit and debt that sustained elite families. Women were often involved in locating and procuring items for family members. While in England, Sarah Coles Stevenson offered to purchase items that could only be found in Europe for family.\textsuperscript{44} Before her niece Angelica

\textsuperscript{42} Paul Cameron and James Ruffin were in the same area in Alabama at the same time in 1845. For evidence of James Ruffin’s presence in Alabama during this period, see Thomas Ruffin to James Ruffin, February 12, 1845, and James Ruffin to James Ruffin, February 14, 1846, both in the Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Family Papers #643, SHC. Sydney Nathans talks about the role that James Ruffin played in Paul’s land purchase in Alabama in \textit{A Mind to Stay: White Plantation, Black Homeland}, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2017), 43-46. According to Nathans, James recommended purchasing a plantation whose current owner owed him money, which meant that he would receive the first payment from Paul as payment of the previous owner’s debt. Though Paul had trusted James to guide him and help him choose good land, he felt that he had been deceived into purchasing sub-par land and had a broke down in front of the overseer (recommended by James) and the enslaved men and women he had brought from North Carolina, ranting about this deception. Nathans states that James wrote to his brother Thomas shortly after the incident and that, “That letter is the only one in the family archive of thousands of letters with a paragraph carefully cut out and discarded.” (46).

\textsuperscript{43} Bond of Paul Cameron and Thomas Ruffin to Charles Dewey, June 30, 1857, in Folder 2147 in the Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.

\textsuperscript{44} For Sarah Coles Stevenson’s offers, see, for example, Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, January 26, 1839, in Box 2, Folder 1; and Sarah Coles Stevenson to Julia Coles, May 20, 1838; Box 1, Folder 3; Both in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU. Edward Coles made a similar request of her husband Andrew, asking him to purchase several items for him in London. See Edward Coles to Andrew Stevenson, June 24, 1838, in Box 2, Folder 32 of the Coles Family Papers, HSP.
Singleton’s marriage to Abraham Van Buren in November 1838, Sarah searched for pearls for Angelica to wear on her wedding day. Emily Rutherfoord’s memorandum book from 1832 records household expenses and family travels for each month on an almanac page. Within those household expenses, she records receiving hams and other items from Betsy Coles and paying “Mrs. Carter” (most likely her sister Mary Eliza) for separate items, revealing the economic reliance of female family members on each other.

Additionally, many families relied on the travels of women within their family network to act as couriers, ferrying notes, bonds, checks, and other payments to various family members. For example, Isaac Coles sent a check for the payment on a stock installment to John Rutherfoord by his sister Betsy, who was traveling to Richmond from Albemarle to visit the Rutherfoords. In fact, he revealed that he was actually doing so earlier than he wanted to because he would not even have the funds in the bank to cover the check until a different check could be deposited on the fifth of December, eleven days later. He explained his reasoning to John saying, “I am induced to send it

45 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Mrs. Richard Singleton, November 26, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU. Sarah acknowledged, however, that the realities of attempting to find suitable jewelry and send it with a reliable courier to Angelica in the United States meant that the jewelry might not arrive before “a certain event” – Angelica’s marriage.
46 Emily Ann (Coles) Rutherfoord Memorandum Book, 1832, in Rutherfoord Family Papers, VHS. Ellen Hartigan O’Connor discusses women’s important role in such transactions in the revolutionary period in The Ties that Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).
now tempted by the safe opportunity which Betsey’s return to you presents.”

Duncan Cameron similarly requested that Thomas Ruffin send the money owed him by his sister, Mary Anderson, if she had not already departed. Sarah Coles Stevenson played a similar role of messenger when she wrote John Rutherfoord on behalf of her husband Andrew to ask him to call at a bank and handle a note that needed to be paid.

Women were not just conduits for credit. Nor was their role in their family’s economic endeavors confined to affective labor. They played an active role in the systems of credit and debt that sustained elite families. In 1818, Mary Eliza Carter, for example, purchased over 6,000 acres of land in Missouri with two of her brothers—Walter and Edward Coles. Women also invested in stock, asking trusted family members to handle the transactions for them, just as the men in their families did. When doing so, they adhered to the emotional conventions of business correspondence, relying on those conventions that were gendered male to establish their place within the economic network and assure the recipient of the same trust and credit that the men in the families commanded. At the same time, women couched their requests within letters that followed gender-appropriate forms, otherwise filling the surrounding paragraphs

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47 Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, November 24, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
48 Duncan Cameron to Thomas Ruffin, August 8, 1814, Thomas Ruffin Papers #641, SHC.
49 Sarah Coles Stevenson to John Rutherfoord, November 4, 1834, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
50 Mary Eliza Carter was one of the three named buyers listed on the deed, with her two brothers. Sarah Coles, the wife of Walter Coles, also signed the deed. See: Deed of Land Purchased by Mary Eliza Carter, Walter Coles, and Edward Coles, Nov. 25, 1818. In Box 1, Folder 5 of the Coles Family Papers, HSP
with family news to show that their economic interests were not at odds with their roles within the family. In one letter to John Rutherfoord, Betsy Coles first chided him for making it known how much money she had before saying, “This I hope will make more than $2500 I suppose I shall want 300 of this to live upon The balance I should like to have invested[.]” She then instructed John, “If I would get it, I prefer the Fredricksburg Railroad stock to any other. But between the Petersburg Stock & city Loan, I have no choice. & I wish you to exercise your own judgement doing the best for me you can or allow your children for they will eventually reap the profit[...]”51 In this letter, she also revealed that she had previously loaned John and his father Thomas 1000£, first asking for the repayment of the loan before requesting that John then “invest [it] provided it suited you & your Father to pay me.” She then proceeded to mention her obligation to him for purchasing the shares of stock for her, reminding him of the reciprocal nature of economic “favors” between family natures.52 In a separate letter to John, she explicitly used the language of favors. First, though, she reminded him of their close and affectionate familial relationship by addressing the letter “Dear Brother,” and updating him on family news before she turned to the purpose of the letter and saying, “I am writing this moment with a small favor [...] to bring me up Money to carry me to the

51 Betsy Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 2, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. (In a joint letter from both Betsy to John Rutherfoord and her niece S.F. (Sarah) Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord). Much as the men in her family did, Betsy often relied on John Rutherfoord to conduct business transactions such as this for her.
52 Betsy Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 2, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. (In a joint letter from both Betsy to John Rutherfoord and her niece S.F. (Sarah) Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord).
Springs. I want about $250.” Betsy then continued with a second economic transaction that she wished John to do for her saying, “I hope you will have time to invest in State Loan, 300, out of Mr. Singleton’s $900.” In this case, by combining the language of family and affection with the language of favors, she was able to once again remind John of the obligations of reciprocity inherent in their familial relationship. In both letters, Betsy’s focus remained on family matters, with her business request filling only a small portion of the letter. By combining a focus on family with a business request that adhered to the conventions of business correspondence in this way, Betsy established herself as a woman worthy of credit.

Ann Miles invested in stock as well, taking an active role in managing her investments by using the language of credit in business correspondence. In 1816, she wrote to Richard Singleton to inquire about an expected payment of $20,000 that he told her he would make soon after Christmas. Because she had the “opportunity of purchasing Public Stock to advantage” which “my friends inform me will very soon be higher, in fact now is rising in Value” she asked Richard to “oblige” her and make the payment to her “as soon as possible.” Furthermore, she informed him that if “an opportunity” arose before he was able to travel to Charleston to make the payment, she

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53 Betsy Coles to John Rutherfoord, August 1, 1839, Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
54 Julia Coles (Betsy and John’s sister-in-law) similarly adhered to these conventions when responding to a letter that John sent to her husband asking for his opinion on “Dr. Seldens proposition.” Julia Coles to John Rutherfoord, November 26, 1839, Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
would “thank you for a payment through your factor.” Informing Richard that he
would “oblige” her by making the payment reminded him of the reciprocal obligations
inherent in business relationships. Mentioning her friends who had knowledge of stock
prices both highlighted her own knowledge of the market and her access to friends who
knew the market. By combining the language of business correspondence with the
mentions of friends, Ann, like Betsy, established herself as a woman of credit.

Margaret Cameron invested in the same railroads as her father, brother, and
eventual husband did. Her sister Mildred similarly invested in railroad stock; a list of
her stocks and bonds in 1853 includes shares in the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road, the
North Carolina Rail Road, and the Wilmington and Raleigh Rail Road. Like Margaret,
Mildred, Betsy, and Ann, women often chose to invest in the same stocks that their
fathers, brothers, husbands, and other male relatives invested in. With the family’s credit
heavily connected to specific corporations (or cities, as Betsy’s letter to John Rutherford

55 Ann B. Miles to Richard Singleton, January 8, 1816, in Box 1, Folder 11 of the Singleton Family Papers
#668, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Hereafter
cited as Singleton Family Papers #668, SHC).
56 Expenses on Rail Road Contract in which Duncan, Paul, and Margaret Cameron are equally interested,
Folder 3663, Volume 125, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC. This contract appears to be for building part
of the North Carolina Rail Road. Interestingly, Margaret Cameron was not just an investor in this contract;
the expenses listed include a $2000 check directly to her from the Bank of North Carolina as an advancement
for the contract. Margaret married George Mordecai in 1853 shortly after her father died. George Mordecai
was heavily involved in the North Carolina Rail Road, the president of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road
from 1836 through 1852, and had succeeded her father in 1849 as the president of the Bank of the State of
North Carolina.
57 “This book exhibits a List of M.C.C. bonds, stocks, &c in the care of C. Dewey Esq.,” Folder 3664, Volume
126, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
reveals), women’s investments formed a key component of the webs of credit that elite families relied on.  

Indeed, many women, such as Betsy Coles loaned money to different male family members. The 1000£ that Betsy loaned to John and Thomas Rutherfoord was not the largest of her transactions. On October 1, 1836, she entered into a bond with Richard Singleton for $15,000 plus interest. Until his death in 1852, Richard regularly made payments on the bond with Betsy, as her notations on the back of the original bond reveal. Even in these payments, John Rutherfoord played a role, with Betsy noting on March 15, 1843 that “The within bond is to be credited by three thousand dollars paid by Mr. Singleton to Col⁰ John Rutherfoord by my order.” No existing documents explain the $3,000 payment from Richard to John. But, given that Betsy loaned and borrowed money from family members, it is likely that she owed John money for a separate transaction, highlighting the deep, multi-layered involvement of women in the systems of credit and debt that sustained elite families. Upon Richard’s death, this debt passed to his son, Matthew, who paid Betsy $8,220 for the remaining principal and interest. An affidavit signed following Richard’s death regarding the status of the bond reveals that

58 See also Memorandum of Stocks held by John C. Rutherfoord, [ca. 1860], Section 16, Rutherfoord Family Papers, VHS, which lists the stocks that John Coles Rutherfoord held in 1860. The memorandum includes shares in the state of Virginia, both in his name and in his wife’s name.
59 Bond between Richard Singleton and Elizabeth Coles, October 1, 1836. Box 1, Folder 34, Singleton Family Papers, SCL.
this was not simply a loan of $15,000. Instead, the $15,000 was the amount Richard owed to Betsy for purchasing slaves from her—a purchase that was made on his credit.60

Women in the antebellum period knew all about their families’ economic endeavors. For example, women were often aware of the debts, loans, and other economic transactions of their family members. Edward Coles discussed his salary as governor of Illinois, the depreciation of currency, and information on his brother’s tobacco crop with his niece Rebecca.61 When Betsy Coles sold the enslaved people she owned to Richard Singleton, she mentioned the sale in a letter to his daughter Marion.62 A letter from Mary McDuffie to Marion Deveaux shows not only that Marion participated in such economic transactions herself, but also that Mary was aware of Marion’s different debts and loans. As Mary wrote, “What has become of old Stuart and his debt? I hope you have made him pay every farthing he owed you the mean man.”63 Marion also ran the plantation that she inherited from her father, despite her second husband Augustus Converse’s disastrous attempts to do so himself. In one letter to her

60 By April 2, 1853, Betsy had received payment for $7000 of the principal along with the regular interest, leaving a balance of $8000 plus interest due. She then received a payment of $8220 to pay the bond in full. See: Elizabeth Coles Affidavit, April 2, 1853, in Box 1, Folder 52 of the Singleton Family Papers, SCL. For more information on this transaction, see Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton Deveaux, October 7, 1836, Box 1, Folder 2, Singleton Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. (Hereafter cited as Singleton Family Papers, LC).
61 Edward Coles to Rebecca E. Coles, September 6, 1823, Box 2, Folder 26, Coles Family Papers, HSP.
62 Betsy wrote mainly with family news (and to chastise Marion for not writing since her marriage the year before), but included a statement that Richard had bought her “Negro’s.” Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton Deveaux, October 7, 1836, Box 1, Folder 2, Singleton Family Papers, LC.
63 Mary McDuffie to Marion Singleton Deveaux, July 22, [1847], Box 1, Folder 10, in the Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL.
brother Matthew Singleton, Marion asked for advice dealing with Augustus’s attempts to sell 130 bales of cotton when she believed that neither Augustus nor herself had the authority to do so, telling her brother, “this is an awkward dilemma to be placed in.”

The statement that she believed that she did not have the authority to sell the cotton was likely deliberate. If Marion did not legally have the authority to sell the cotton either, then Augustus could not do so in her name—or force her to do so. Such a strategy protected Marion from Augustus if she refused to sell the bales for him while also protecting the family’s credit from damage.64

Just four days later, Marion again wrote to Matthew, marshalling her family around her and taking matters into her own hands to protect her property—and consequently the family’s credit—from Augustus’s machinations. By this point, not only had Augustus ordered that all of the cotton they had on hand be given to the railroad for transport to market (around 150 bales ready and 25-30 more that needed to be ginned and packed), he had “notified me at the same time that when the Cotton is sold, he shall place the proceeds in some Bank where it shall only be subject to his order until the expense of the Plantation &c are paid […].” This decision had been made without her

64 For Marion’s initial letter regarding Augustus’s attempts to sell the cotton, see Marion Converse to Matthew R. Singleton, December 21, 1853, in Box 1, Folder 52 of the Singleton Family Papers, SCL. Here, I have chosen to follow (and respect) Marion Deveaux’s own choice in name. After her first husband, Robert Deveaux died, she married Augustus Converse, an Episcopal minister, who abused her. Following her divorce which, as Laura Edwards points out in Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000) was not allowed in South Carolina at the time and was granted largely because of the influence of her family connections, Marion Deveaux Converse began using the name Deveaux again, completely dropping the name associating her with Converse.
consent or even her knowledge. Her statement that Augustus made the decision without her consent reveals that Marion actively pursued different strategies for managing her plantations—and her husband. The seemingly contradictory claims that she did not believe she had the authority to sell cotton grown on her plantation and that Augustus had then sold the cotton without her consent further reveal that Marion managed her plantation and that she knew she had the authority to do so. Consequently, the two contradictory statements together reveal her persistence in that role, despite the efforts of her husband to undermine her. The letter went on to reveal that Marion was effectively working to get help not just from her brother but also from other family members in order to protect the property that she had brought into the marriage, especially since Augustus himself had not brought any property and did not have any experience managing it. In order to protect the property and the family’s credit, Marion had asked her cousin Richard to become the trustee for her property and implored her brother to urge Richard to do so as well. With Richard as her trustee, both Marion and Matthew could be assured that the family’s credit would be protected, even against the wishes of Marion’s husband. Although she was not as involved in running her plantation as was Marion, Betsy Coles reaped the profits from the plantation she

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65 For her second letter, see Marion Converse to Matthew R. Singleton, December 25, 1853, in Box 1, Folder 52 of the Singleton Family Papers, SCL.
inherited upon the death of her father, investing them in order to gain more profit.66

Women like Marion and Betsy took on multiple, central roles in their families’ economic dealings.

Despite the reciprocity involved, the economic family networks that were built on affective family ties could be incredibly precarious, especially in a period where debt and failure were ever-present realities. A single individual’s problems with debt carried the potential to bring down everyone else. Not fulfilling the reciprocal obligations of support that accompanied membership in the network created a legitimate threat to the entire family. Such a situation helps explain why the Cameron family network constantly discussed Archibald Murphey’s problems with debt—and why members always helped him. Similarly, the Coles family regularly discussed money troubles when they occurred, including those of Dolley Madison.

Family members regularly discussed the failures of others in correspondence, publicly shaming those involved. Archibald Murphey’s problematic relationship to the Cameron and Ruffin families of North Carolina provides a particularly dramatic example. Archibald struggled with debt from the early years of the nineteenth century until his death in 1832, even serving time in jail for failure to meet his obligations. Until

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66 See Betsy Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 2, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. (In a joint letter from both Betsy to John and S.F. (Sarah) Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord). In this letter, Betsy asks John Rutherfoord to invest some money for her before telling him that, “Brother John thinks I had better take at least $1000 in the city loan & promises, I shall receive a right smart sum from my wheat[.]” As Betsy told John Rutherfoord, his children were to eventually “reap the prifit” of these investments, since she was unmarried.
his death, virtually all of the correspondence among his friends and relatives involved some discussion of his debt, loans, and credit. It was not simply the credit of one man at stake. It was the credit of the economic network of which he was a part, an interconnected web of debts, loans, and business interests. The economic network of which Archibald was part, however, did not fall. It remained stable because of the real and fictive family ties that were maintained and strengthened by affective labor in correspondence, and ensured that the family fortunes remained intact.

One case, spanning four years, and involving only about six people, forms a miniscule part of the complex economic web based on the ties of family and trust of which Archibald was a part. Thomas Ruffin acted as a debt collector for merchants Freeland and Gillis in Petersburg, Virginia, who asked him to collect the debt of John Lenox in February 1809 and in April 1810. The second time they instructed Thomas to collect from Archibald Murphey whose debt to John would serve as the first installment of John’s debt to Freeland and Gillis. In September 1812, Archibald wrote to James Freeland, asking for an extension on the payment of this debt. He explained that he had arranged to pay it back with notes backed by the state bank, which was not doing business. The following March, James asked Thomas to remind Archibald that his second bond was due and that the deadline could not be extended again. A couple of weeks later, Thomas received a letter stating, “your favor under date the 29th March covering Mr. Murphey’s Draft on Mr. Cameron for $500 came to hand yesterday and we
received the amount from Mr. C. this day.” Part of Archibald’s debt had been paid, covered by Duncan Cameron, and sent to Freeland and Gillis by Thomas Ruffin. By May 18, however, Archibald had still not paid the original amount due in March. Furthermore, James explained to Thomas that he had arranged for his own debts to be due after Archibald’s bond to him because he had been sure that Archibald would pay.67

Like James Freeland, many others during the antebellum era arranged for notes and bonds to fall due after the payment of ones that were due to them. In many cases, this strategy worked. Sometimes, however, it did not. In such situations, the credit of the entire network could fail because of one person’s failure. As a letter to John Rutherfoord in July 1836 revealed, Edward Coles risked losing the stock that he had bought in the Richmond & Petersburg Rail Road Company because of such a situation. He told John that even though he was “led to believe that no injury will result from a delay of a few days in paying an instalment” he was still “fearful that I may be in error.” So, to negate the possibility of losing the stock (and damaging the credit of the network), he told John that he was “induced to ask the favor of you, if it should be convenient to lend me assistance for a few days.” After asking John to advance the necessary $250 for him and pay the installment, he went on to assure him that he would have the money soon—and that he had expected it already, saying “Some time since I wrote to St. Louis to remit me

© Freeland and Gillis to Thomas Ruffin, February 1, 1809; Freeland and Gillis to Thomas Ruffin, April 16, 1810; Archibald D. Murphey to James Freeland, Sept. 26, 1812; James Freeland to Thomas Ruffin, March 25, 1813; [Illegible] to Thomas Ruffin, April 6, 1813; James Freeland to Thomas Ruffin, May 18, 1813. All in the Thomas Ruffin Papers #641, SHC.
some money due me there, & have been expecting it for some time. But it has not been received[.]

To further assure John that he would repay him soon, Edward told him that he had also sold some of his land in Missouri to “Major Clarke of Albemarle” who would be depositing several thousand dollars to Edward’s credit in the Bank of Virginia at Richmond on September 1, just over a month later. While no existing sources show the outcome of these requests, it is likely that John loaned Edward the necessary money in an attempt to ensure the family’s good credit remained.

At the same time, Edward also alluded to Dolley Madison’s problems with money after her husband’s death. He informed John that after visiting Philadelphia for a few days they planned to “hasten on to see Mrs. Madison, who has written me twice since the death of her Husband urging me to come on to see her, as she is desirous of counseling with me about her Husbands papers.” That Dolley had written to Edward twice since James Madison’s death just a month earlier, asking in both for him to come to see her and “counsel” her regarding her husband’s papers reveals that shortly after her husband’s death, Dolley was already looking out for her family’s financial interests. Because of the ongoing debt problems of her son Payne Todd (which she and James had been unsuccessfully dealing with for years already), she had decided to attempt to sell her husband’s papers to Congress, and she wanted Edward’s advice because of his close

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68 Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 27, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
69 Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 27, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
relationship both with her and with her husband. More importantly, Edward could be trusted to help her salvage her financial situation because he was family.

Given the Madisons’ prominence politically and socially, their problems with debt and credit had wide-reaching implications for others. Edward and other family members were rightfully concerned. Indeed, the Madisons’ problems with debt had begun well before James Madison’s death in 1836. In May 1827, Edward wrote to John Rutherfoord, enclosing a power of attorney to sell the ten shares of stock that Edward owned in the Farmer’s Bank of Virginia, informing John,

You will confer a favor on me by doing so as soon as you conveniently can, & placing am of the sale in the Bank of Virginia to the credit of James Madison (the ExPresident U.S). I have also to request that you will sell, under the power left with you the Ten shares belonging to my sister Betsy, and place amount of sale also in the Bank of V to the credit of Mr. Madison.

He then told John that he had procured Betsy’s shares and given the twenty total shares to James before informing John of something that he likely already knew: James was “in want of the mon[ey].’’ Edward concluded the letter by implying future reciprocity, telling John “By attending to this business you will confer a favor on me, as well as on Mr. Madison.” Edward’s mention of Dolley Madison’s request for advice following James Madison’s death, though, shows more than simply the concern of family members over another’s money troubles; it also reveals the extent to which women were involved

70 Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, May 15, 1827, Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
not just in the affective labor and the extensive systems of credit and debt that sustained elite families but also their management of their own and their family’s finances.

When expected support failed to materialize, men and women in the antebellum United States used correspondence to call out members of the network who failed in their obligations. They deployed the same strategies that many women did when family members failed to adhere to emotional conventions in correspondence—working to create feelings of guilt and utilizing the public nature of correspondence to shame the individuals whose failure to fulfill their obligations risked damaging the entire financial edifice. Several letters from Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord in 1836 and 1837 deal with the problems Edward had in paying the taxes on some land that he had jointly inherited with his brothers in Virginia when his father died, culminating in a letter that called out the failures of different family members to fulfill their obligations of support to him. In July 1836, Edward wrote John that “Mr. Stevenson informed me he had spoken to one of the Members of the Assembly from that part of the Country to pay his & my taxes on the Meadows of Dan Land[…].” In January of the following year, he wrote to John again saying, “I have to ask the further favor of you to pay my Taxes on my Meadow of Dan Land. […] The Taxes have not been paid for the last 5, or perhaps 8 or 10 years past, & I am fearful the Land will be lost if the Taxes are not paid soon.”  

71 Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 20, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4; Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, January 16, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5. Both in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
By April, Edward’s frustrations with this tax problem had mounted and finally boiled over in another letter to John. After thanking John for the “the trouble you have been at about my Meadows of Dan Taxes,” Edward vented his frustrations with his other family members over these taxes saying,

Perhaps I am a little sorer about these Meadows of Dan Taxes than I should be from the fact that I cannot prevail on one of the owners of this Land to attend to the paying of the Taxes for me - nor indeed for themselves - altho' all except myself live in the State. I have paid Taxes for Brother Walter & Sister Carter on their Lands in Missouri for the last 18 years - this I have had to do by letter, & it would have been as easy for them to do it as for me - yet I have done it & for no other reason than that they wished me. It seemed hard But I have already said enough and too much too on this subject.\textsuperscript{72}

Because letters were shared publicly with the family (and sometimes with people outside of the family), statements such as this one served to make known family members’ failures to support others—as well as shame them not just for this failure but also for their threat to the family’s credit. Edward made sure that John and all others that the letter would be shared with knew that he had been fulfilling his obligations to those same family members by paying taxes for them on the land in Missouri that they had purchased together. Proving that these strategies were not always successful, three years later, Edward still had not paid the taxes on this land and asked his brother Isaac for help.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{72} Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, April 9, 1837. Box 1, folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.

\textsuperscript{73} In a letter that dealt mainly with politics, Edward wrote, “I wish some day when you have leisure you would stop into the proper office & pay my Taxes on my Meadows of Dan land. it is situated I believe in both Grayson & Patrick. I do not know which county the Taxes are paid in. They are due for several years at
Marion Converse took a similar approach to her husband Augustus Converse’s attempts to sell cotton and deposit the money into an account only accessible by him, bringing attention to his misdeeds (and thus his failure to ensure the family’s good credit) in a letter to her brother Matthew Singleton that she knew would be shared with concerned friends and family. After relating the issue, Marion stated, “I write this to you because I think it right that you should be advised of the proceeding, in time that you may arrest it if you think proper[.]” She then informed Matthew that she was sending the letter to him in Fulton “because I take it for granted, you will see Cousin Richard with whom you will be able to confer.” Deploying strategies such as these in familial business correspondence brought in members of the extended family network to ensure that the actions of the individuals who failed to live up to their obligations were made public. Such strategies guaranteed that the individuals who erred would not continue to pose a threat to the family’s credit by doing so in the future, strengthening the ties that extended business networks relied on and ensuring the success of the family’s economic endeavors.

least. I have not paid them for many years past.” He then also asked Isaac to talk to the “Members of both Houses” from the two counties the land was in to determine the value and quality of the land—and what he could sell it for. Edward Coles to Isaac A. Coles, December 17, 1840, Box 2, Folder 34, Coles Family Papers, HSP.

Marion Converse to Matthew R. Singleton, December 25, 1853, Box 1, Folder 52, Singleton Family Papers, SCL.
Debt was an ever-present reality for men and women in the antebellum United States. To navigate this reality, they relied on family ties to establish and guarantee credit; obtain loans; purchase land, slaves, stocks, and other items; collect and deposit money; and handle daily economic transactions. In the process, elite families like the Coles family of Virginia and the Cameron family of North Carolina created vast economic networks with multi-layered systems of credit and debt that involved virtually every individual member of the family in multiple capacities. In order to maintain the trust that these systems relied on, both men and women adhered to specific conventions common to business correspondence, including using the language of favors, employing the metaphor of servitude, and emphasizing respect within intimate bonds of family and friendship. Following these conventions maintained the strength of the family network; strengthened bonds of affection, family, and trust; guaranteed credit; and ensured the family's success in its business, politics, and other endeavors. The seemingly private, emotional adherence to emotional conventions in correspondence by women and men within these networks had a very public effect. The economic networks, based on familial connections forged and strengthened through the affective labor of women in familial correspondence, brought the seemingly public world of business and economics firmly into the domestic realm of the family, with women playing an active role in the economic endeavors of their families.
4. Chapter Three: “So faithful & able a public servant:”
Politics and Political Culture in the Antebellum United States

In 1810, President James Madison offered Edward Coles the position of private secretary, framed as an invitation to join his family. That proposition might seem odd since Edward was already related to James by marriage. James’s invocation of family did not refer to blood ties, however; instead he was referring to the bonds that solidified political networks. Edward acknowledged those meanings by continuing the familial metaphor in his response, explicitly linking family networks to politics and political culture in the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War.¹ As Edward and James’s exchange suggests, personal relationships were absolutely central to politics and political culture this period. Elite families like the Coles family of Virginia and the Cameron family of North Carolina actively built political networks based on bonds of intimate friendship, kinship, and trust. These bonds ensured that the political family network—and its individual members—would succeed in their political endeavors. Both men and women followed specific conventions common to political correspondence, including sharing political news and emphasizing respect and esteem within intimate bonds of family and friendship. These conventions maintained bonds of kinship and

¹ In this letter, Edward actually declined the position, though as he noted on the outside of the letter, he ended up not sending it because “Col Monroe persuaded on me to accept.” Edward Coles to James Madison, January 8, 1810. Edward Coles Papers; 1797-1881, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library (Hereafter referred to as Edward Coles Papers, PUL).
trust. Men and women actively characterized politicians as public servants who worked for the public good; however, this characterization obscured the reality of the actions of these men. Rather than serving the public, as the language would suggest, these men in fact served their broader political family. Consequently, men in political positions during this period cannot be understood outside of the context of their families, and the women in their lives.

Men in prominent political positions received as many, if not more letters about political appointments as they did policy. Yet political histories of the period between the Revolution and the Civil War have generally focused on the events and controversies surrounding policies—the founding, the War of 1812, the election of Jackson, the bank wars, the Missouri Compromise, and many more. To be sure, these events were crucial in shaping the development of government in the United States. But

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so were the discussion of appointments. Taking a step back and examining both appointments and policies within the letters that circulated in political networks shifts the focus to the affective relationships that undergirded the political relationships necessary to policy. This approach re-centers the families in the lives of individual political leaders and in the broader political realm. Families not only shaped policy; but policy shaped families.

Political ties could often be traced to bonds of blood or marriage. As with the creation of business families, political friends were, for all intents and purposes, family. The same language of intimate affection, trust, and credit permeated political letters between friends and family members. Personal relationships, trust, and credit were central to the creation, maintenance, and continued success of political networks, just as they were with business networks. In the realms of both politics and business, relationships came with obligations of support.

One of the most common requests in political correspondence between members of the same family was for help obtaining political appointments. The early years of the political career of Edward Coles offers a window into the circumstances that surrounded these appointments. James Madison offered Edward Coles the position of private secretary because of familial bonds. Edward’s older brother Isaac had served as James’s private secretary since he was elected as president. In fact, Isaac facilitated communication between James and Edward. In Edward’s initial response to James’s invitation, he wrote, “I received a letter, two or three days ago from Brother Isaac, containing an invitation from you to become a member of your family.” The invitation, along with instructions for traveling to Washington, were sent through Isaac—a trusted family member. In this letter, however, Edward declined the offer saying, “It has been with much reluctance, and regret, that I have been forced to come to the conclusion of declining to accept a place, rendered delightful to me, by being in the bosom of a family, for whom I have the greatest respect, and most friendly attachment.”

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4 Edward Coles to James Madison, January 8, 1810. Box 1, Folder 10, Edward Coles Papers, PUL. In a letter to James’s brother William Madison, Edward described his relationship with James as “an unlimited and unbounded friendship” and told William, “Language fails when I attempt to describe my attachment for
between family ties and political appointments is a constant presence in the
correspondence. When Edward did finally accept the position, he did so upon the
urging of another member of their political family—James Monroe.⁵

Once Edward had accepted the position of private secretary, he had the job of
informing political appointees of their new positions. Appointees, in turn, responded to
Edward, expressing their appreciation and reinforcing existing ties of family and
friendship. Richard Rush told Edward in November 1811 that his letter was “the first
information of the appointment with which the President has seen fit to honor me”
before thanking him for his “friendly interest.” Although Richard was not sure that his
existing “publick duties” would permit him to accept the position, he would respond
soon with an answer. In closing, he emphasized intimacy and respect, while
acknowledging that he was also a public servant, saying “I am, with great truth and
respect, your friend and servt.”⁶

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⁵ See Edward’s note on the letter that states, “This letter was not Sent – Col Monroe persuaded on me to
accept.” Edward Coles to James Madison, January 8, 1810, Edward Coles Papers, PUL. For more on James
Monroe’s friendship with Edward Coles at this stage and his influence in Edward’s decision to accept James
Madison’s offer, see Suzanne Cooper Guasco, Confronting Slavery: Edward Coles and the Rise of Antislavery
Edward resigned as the President’s private secretary, he continued the familial metaphor, telling his friend
Nicholas Biddle, “I have left the Pt. with no intention of again returning to reside in his family.” See:
Edward Coles to Nicholas Biddle, April 6, 1815, Box 1, Folder 15, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
⁶ Richard Rush to Edward Coles, November 25, 1811. Box 1, Folder 11, Edward Coles Papers, PUL
Other political friends wrote specifically to Edward in hopes of obtaining an appointment for themselves or some other friend or relative. In November 1812, Nicholas Biddle wrote his close friend Edward in regards to an office for which his father was applying—and for which the president would be appointing a replacement. After assuring Edward that his father’s friends would bring his father to the president’s attention, Nicholas asked if Edward would also mention his father’s name. Similarly, another friend wrote to Edward in February of the following year asking him to “present my claims (if I have any) to Executive patronage” to become an officer in the army and to promote a friend to captain. In this letter, he specifically played upon his existing friendship with Edward, addressing the letter to “Dear Coles,” and apologizing for the way he had “most shamefully neglected” him before assuring him of his “sincere faithfulness.”

Even after resigning his position as private secretary, Edward continued to benefit from having such strong political friendships. In July 1816, James Madison appointed Edward as a special envoy from the President to Russia in order to help solve a diplomatic crisis saying, “Circumstances have arisin which make it expedient to forward communications to St. Petersburg by a special hand.” James Monroe echoed

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7 Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, November 6, 1812. Box 1, Folder 12, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
8 Jo. H. Hankins to Edward Coles, February 10, 1813. Box 1, Folder 13, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
9 James Madison to Edward Coles, July 7, 1816, Folder 6, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
this trust in a letter shortly following Edward’s acceptance of the position. Once Edward had returned from the diplomatic mission and moved to Illinois, James Monroe offered to nominate him for an appointment in an unspecified office in the town of Kaskaskia, then the capital of Illinois. When Edward was appointed register of the land office in Edwardsville just two months later, Monroe signed the certificate in his capacity as president.

Of course, Edward Coles was just one of many people who made and received such requests for political appointments from friends and family. In May 1837, one family member reminded John Rutherfoord that “In a few days the Executive of the State [of Virginia] will be engaged in the appointment of directors of the New Bank” before informing him that “I have taken the liberty of recommending as a proper person, George H. Jones esq.” After he assured John of the candidate’s character and impartiality, Francis alluded to John’s influence over such appointments, saying that they should “endeavour to guard against” “a few large dealers” in favor of “many smaller applicants.” For this reason, Francis took the liberty to address John on the issue. The implication in such statements was that John should approve his nominee for the

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10 James Monroe to Edward Coles, July 21, 1816, Folder 6, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
11 James Monroe to Edward Coles, January 31, 1819. Box 1, folder 19, Edward Coles Papers, PUL. I believe this appointment was for a land office. He told Edward that “It will give me sincere satisfaction” to help him “in any way, that I may be able, taking most interest in your welfare.” He continued, “If this situation is not desirable, […] and there is any other, in any town, I wish [you] to communicate it, that I may have it in view.”
Similarly, in North Carolina, U.S. Representative Willie Mangum wrote to North Carolina state treasurer John Haywood in 1826 to inform him of the prospects of Duncan Cameron’s younger brother John in achieving a political appointment if a specific bill passed Congress. Willie mentioned his efforts to help achieve this end, including using his connections to other men with more influence to help. He explicitly stated that he wanted John Cameron to succeed because “If he shall succeed it will be highly gratifying to me, not only upon his own account, but upon that also of his excellent brother Judge Cameron to whose wishes upon any subject, I can never feel indifferent.” In making this statement, Willie highlighted the continued influence of Duncan in his political career—as well as the broader implications of political friendship and family for obtaining appointments. In 1832, Willie again discussed obtaining a specific appointment for John A. Cameron. In May, he wrote Duncan to tell him that he “suppose[d] it will be agreeable to you” that his brother had been “unanimously confirmed by the Senate as Judge of the Western district of Florida, that is to say Pensacola.” He gave Duncan all of the details about the position (such as its salary) to explain why this position was infinitely better than John’s current position in the consul in Vera Cruz, Mexico. In doing so, he emphasized the service he had done for John

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13 Francis E. Rives to John Rutherfoord, May 2, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscripts Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as John Rutherfoord Papers, DU).

14 Willie P. Mangum to John Haywood, April 6, 1826; in The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Volume 1, ed. by Henry Thomas Shanks, (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History: 1950): 266-267. (Hereafter cited as The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 1).
personally, the Cameron family specifically, and the wider political family.15 Duncan’s response indicated his appreciation for Willie’s efforts on his brother’s behalf saying, “I am much gratified by […] my Brother’s appointment to the office of a Judge in the Territory of Florida – and am greatly obliged by your friendly agency in the attainment of an object so important to, and desirable by himself his family and friends.”16 Such a statement highlights the importance of political family and friendship for obtaining political appointments.

Such applications were not always successful, though. For example, in 1823, Edward Coles submitted the name of a man as Indian agent to John C. Calhoun. In his response, however, John informed Edward that the number of Indian agents was fixed and there were no vacancies. He then signed with sentiments of respect and esteem for Edward.17 Similarly, the outcome of Willie Mangum’s 1826 efforts on behalf of John A. Cameron (and, of course, Duncan Cameron) were unclear, although Willie ultimately succeeded in obtaining an appointment for John a few years later, as the 1832 letters show.

Those writing to secure political appointments for family members were not all men. Women did as well, although they typically wrote to other women with such requests. Near the end of Andrew Stevenson’s term as Minister to England in 1839, his

15 Willie P. Mangum to Duncan Cameron, May 24, 1832; in The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 1, 548-549.
16 Duncan Cameron to Willie P. Mangum, June 3, 1832; in The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 1, 549.
17 John C. Calhoun to Edward Coles, September 1, 1823. Box 1, Folder 21, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
wife Sarah Coles Stevenson wrote to her sister Betsy Coles about his future. Her statements in the letter revealed the clear expectations both men and women had concerning political appointments within the family network. Sarah told Betsy, “I have been looking forward for some time past with the hope that my husband’s friends would have made some moves for him at home that the good people of America would have found out ere this that they wanted the services of so faithful & able a public servant at home[.]” Indeed, as she continued, she revealed that she had written Betsy previously on this very same subject, saying “In my last I enquired of you whether their was any chance of his being made - ‘Governor - Senator - Vice P----t or of being called to the Cabinet?’” The assumption was that following dutiful service in one appointed post, a man’s political friends and family would rally around him and get him another political appointment—or, help with elections, as the case may be. Sarah continued the letter and informed Betsy, “all he wants is honourable employment” before giving an account of Andrew’s praises from prominent friends made in England, Scotland, France, Austria, Russia, and Ireland. Sarah knew that the letter—and Andrew’s qualifications for a new political appointment—would be shared widely with family and friends. Consequently, it would serve as a reminder to those family members with the power to do so of the reciprocal obligations of support that came with membership in a political

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Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, January 12, 1839. Box 2, Folder 1, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU).
family. By representing his family and his country well in a diplomatic post, Andrew was owed a new political position upon his return.

Sarah also alluded to the connection between family and political appointments in a letter that discussed the vacant position of secretary to the legation in London shortly after she and Andrew arrived. She informed her sisters in May 1837 that Richard Vaux, a friend of her brother Edward, “has taken the place of Mr. Fay, until Mr. Van Buren sends us another Secy of Legation.” In need of someone whom he could trust to fill the position because of the incompetence of the previous secretary, Andrew had temporarily turned to his brother-in-law’s friend who was simply visiting London at the time. Because Edward was friends with Richard Vaux, Andrew knew that he could trust him to fill the position and carry out its duties to his good credit as minister. As Sarah related, however, “of all men living Mr. Stevenson & myself would prefer W. Ritchie[,]” the son of close friend and prominent newspaper editor Thomas Ritchie (whose paper supported Van Buren and others of his party). The importance of personal ties for obtaining political appointments was paramount, as Sarah showed when she said, “our personal attachment to his Father as well as to himself would have rendered it particularly acceptable to us, we could then have shown to the son some little of the affection & gratitude we feel for his excellent and noble minded Father.” Indeed, Sarah further stated, there “ought to be perfect friendship & confidence between the Minister & his Secy[,]” Both men and women during this period recognized the importance of
friendship and personal bonds to inspire trust and confidence in individuals in political positions. Sarah’s emphasis on her and Andrew’s gratitude to his father highlights the fact that women, as well as men, recognized the importance of reciprocal obligations and the repayment of favors in political networks. Alas, W. Ritchie was likely not a candidate for the position because he was traveling in Vicksburg.  

In late August of the same year, Sarah updated her family on the situation with the secretary, saying, “We are daily expecting Ben Rush the secretary of Legation” but that they “most sincerely regret that the appointment has not been given to our dear and excellent young friend Richard Vaux, who is as a son to us.” Over the space of a single summer, Richard had moved from being a close friend of her brother to a true member of the family.

Women, particularly those married to men in positions of political power, were asked frequently to help obtain appointments. The language used in such letters usually emphasized affection and family more than in requests directed at men. Dolley Madison regularly fielded requests, both while James Madison was alive and following his death in June 1836. According to historian Cassandra Good, Dolley Madison’s friend Anthony Morris asked for an appointment, reminding Dolley that “his obtaining an appointment

19 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles or Emily Ann Coles Rutherford, [May 1837]. Box 1, Folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU. And, as Sarah revealed in a letter in August of that year, W. Ritchie actually turned the position down. See Sarah Coles Stevenson to Eliza Coles, August 30, 1837, Box 1, Folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU. Sarah stated that she and Andrew would “never cease to regret W. Ritchie’s not accepting the situation unless indeed it is better for him that he should not.”

20 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Eliza Coles, August 30, 1837. Box 1, Folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU. It’s important to note here that Ben Rush was also a member of their extended political family through his family’s relationship with Edward Coles.
‘involves in its consequences… so much the fate of our darling Phoebe,’ invoking the good of his daughter (who referred to Dolley in correspondence as ‘Mother’) to play on Dolley’s affections.” Good notes that Anthony also wrote to James Madison on the same date, but the appeal to him was less emotional.21

Requests continued after James’s death, particularly when Dolley removed from their Virginia plantation Montpelier to Washington D.C. in 1837. The move was significant, revealing that Dolley’s power in the political sphere, though tied to that of her husband, was not solely reliant upon it. In fact, one correspondent stated outright that he wrote to her for help procuring an appointment in a consulate because “your influence is great.”22 Her correspondence after this point was filled with men and women writing to obtain some sort of political position or appointment for themselves, a friend, or a family member.23

21 Good, Founding Friendships, 175. Good explains that Dolley wrote back, apologizing for the fact that James was unable to get the appointment Anthony wished to have approved by Congress; but, James did get him another appointment soon afterwards—this time as a secret envoy to Spain.

22 In this letter, after providing updates on his family (including the birth of a second son) the writer stated, “To gain my office I can think of no such plan than by requesting you my dear friend to assist me, as your influence is great & I feel sure your will good towards us. We understand that there will be a vacancy in one, or all of the consulates of Liverpool, London & Glasgow, now if it were possible for us to get one of these it would be the best possible thing for us.” L.A. R. Mickleham to Dolley Madison, January 25, 1841, Dolley Madison Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (Hereafter cited as Dolley Madison Papers, LC). The writer also included the fact that “General Harrison” was a cousin of his, along with a postscript that mentioned another connection, W.C. Rives, “who I believe considers himself under some obligations to my family, on account of kindness shown him by my Grandfather, in his youth.”

23 For example, see: Tho. L. McKinney to Dolley Madison, March 9, 1841; Dolley P. Madison to Mrs. M.W. Van Zandt, October 1, 1841. One correspondent called her, “the consort of the best and wisest of Presidents” and referenced the reciprocal affections of friendship in Washington before he then asked her to “say a word upon my claim [to Congress] with that sweet and insinuating manner of yours.” See: Thos. L.L. Brent to Mrs. Madison, January 6, 1842. Brent wrote a few months later to ask for her help obtaining an appointment,
Letters themselves held a particular place of importance within political families and political culture between the Revolution and the Civil War. Not only was political culture bound up in the emotional conventions of correspondence, but letters also served as introduction into specific political families. As a result, people attached great significance to the act of entrusting an individual to carry a letter with sensitive political information.

In February 1810, Thomas Jefferson wrote directly to Edward Coles to ask him to pass a letter to “Mr. Treat” while Treat was in Washington. Thomas began the letter by “present[ing] his friendly respects” to Edward before explaining that he did not know where to send the letter but expected that Treat’s current address would be known either to the president or to the War Office, he was “taking the liberty of putting it under cover to Mr. Coles[.]” He then alluded to the reciprocal nature of the obligations of political friendship by asking “the favor” of Edward to deliver it if possible.24 A little over a year later, James Monroe entrusted five separate letters to Edward for delivery in asking her to present an enclosed letter to the president and “say a word in your kind winning manner” on his behalf. Thomas L.L. Brent to Mrs. Madison, April 24, 1842. He wrote another letter two days later with an updated letter to the president enclosed—and the same request. Thomas L. L. Brent to Mrs. Madison, April 26, 1842. For Dolley’s response, see Dolley P. Madison to Thomas L.L. Brent, May 1842. Another correspondent—this time a woman—asked for help obtaining a commission in the Marine Corps for her brother. See Theodosia B. Davis to Mrs. Madison, May 15, 1842. All in the Dolley Madison Papers, LC. 24 Thomas Jefferson to Edward Coles, February 16, 1810. Box 1, Folder 10, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
Philadelphia, New York, and Boston during his travels. Similarly, in North Carolina, Archibald Murphey wrote to Willie Mangum with several requests for political information in 1826—as well as a request for Willie to deliver an enclosed letter to Edward Everett. These three men chose a person with whom they shared bonds of friendship and family to deliver letters for them, highlighting the trust needed to send “private” letters in such a way.

Of course, even “private” letters were inherently public, shared between family and friends. In 1824, Jno. J. Carrington wrote to Willie Mangum about establishing a mail route in their county, a situation they had discussed before Willie left for Washington, D.C. Yet, at least half of the letter dealt with another matter. Carrington told Willie, “Sir I saw & read a letter From You to Judge Cameron written in some time after You reach’d the Federal City.” Carrington continued to discuss all of the details of Willie’s letter to Duncan Cameron (which had shared Willie’s initial impressions of the political climate in Washington) before he stated that the letter made it seem like Willie did not know what side to take on the presidential election. His detailed comments on the matter revealed a close read of Willie’s original letter to Duncan, highlighting the very public nature of correspondence between political family and friends.

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25 James Monroe to Edward Coles, May 19, 1811. Box 1, Folder 11, Edward Coles Papers, PUL. One of these letters was to “Mr. Biddle”—likely either Nicholas Biddle or his father.
himself also told Willie that he had read one of his letters to someone else, saying in March 1835 that their “mutual and esteemed friend” Governor Swain had called on him to show him Willie’s letter and that they had discussed its contents. Duncan’s statement highlights not only the norm of sharing letters between family and friends but also an awareness of the public nature of correspondence. Duncan told Willie that he and the governor hoped that Willie would be able to come and meet with them to discuss the issues saying, “Your visit here, would not only be gratifying to your friends personally, – but would afford an opportunity of free and unreserved conversation on various important topics connected with the present, and probable future condition of the country.” Duncan’s statement that meeting with political friends in person would provide an “opportunity of free and unreserved conversation” revealed his awareness that letters would be shared—as the letters that Willie wrote to North Carolina Governor Swain were shared with him. Such a statement also reminded Willie of this fact, and of the need to speak more privately than through letters.28

On some occasions individuals even gave permission for letters to be read by the go-between. For example, in June 1837, Virginian William Cabell Rives wrote to his relative and friend John Rutherford, enclosing a letter to “Mr. Fontain of the Senate.” William, who was then in Washington D.C. as a Senator, needed someone he could trust

28 Duncan Cameron to Willie P. Mangum, March 26, 1835, in The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Volume Two, 1833-1838, edited by Henry Thomas Shanks, (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1952), 327. (Hereafter Referred to as The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 2).
to hand the letter to Mr. Fontain “as it relates to some matters of public concern[.]” Thus, he asked the “favour” of John to deliver the letter “as soon as you may meet him.” In this case, though, whatever the issue in the letter, William also was “anxious to interchange thoughts with” John on the matter and left the letter open so that John could read it and provide his opinion to William as well.29 Sending letters of import under cover of letters to a third party provided the opportunity both of a trustworthy delivery-person and of receiving double the feedback on whatever issue needed to be addressed.

Letters of introduction served an important function in political culture between the Revolution and the Civil War. They offered a testament of the bearer’s credit and were necessary to obtain access to new political circles. For example, in August 1809, James Monroe wrote Edward Coles, with an enclosed letter to “Major Morrison.” This time, though, the enclosed letter was an introduction for Edward to a “very worthy and respectable man” who will “be an agreeable acquaintance & attentive to you.”30 Two years later, Edward travelled with his brother to New York and James again enclosed a letter of introduction. This time, the letter was to someone who would “present you & your brother to our connections in N. York.”31 These letters were not simply introductions to prominent political men. They were also the beginnings of establishing personal ties between men who had never met each other. Recommending one person to

29 William Cabell Rives to John Rutherfoord, June 10, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Collection, DU.
30 James Monroe to Edward Coles, August 13, 1809. Box 1, Folder 9, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
31 James Monroe to Edward Coles, May 25, 1811. Box 1, Folder 11, Edward Coles Papers, PUL
another in such a way fostered the personal bonds necessary for politics during this period.

This practice became even more important in diplomatic arenas. When Edward Coles accepted the mission of special envoy to Russia, James Monroe wrote a letter of introduction for him to the various U.S. consuls in Europe that would guarantee him access to the right political circles. The letter was brief and simply stated: “The bearer, Mr. Coles, is sent to Russia on business of importance with our minister there. He was lately the private secretary of the President & is a very respectable & amiable young man. This is to introduce him to your acquaintance, & request your attention to him, while at the post where you reside.” However brief, this letter is a good example of the format that letters of introduction followed. The beginning introduced the bearer and stated the reason for his travel. The next portion of the letter assured all recipients of the bearer’s qualifications and credit. The statement that Edward was “lately the private secretary of the President” emphasized the intimate ties between Edward and the president (and James Monroe himself). This emphasis tied Edward’s credit to that of the political family he belonged to—that of James Madison and all of the resulting ties. All letters of introduction such as this included an assurance of the respectability of the bearer in some fashion, such as James Monroe’s statement that Edward was “a very

32 James Monroe to the consul of the U States at St. Petersburg, & at other ports in Europe, August 6, 1816. Box 1, Folder 16, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
respectable & amiable young man.” Finally, letters of introduction such as this ended with a statement of the respect held for the recipient and usually included some form of statement of servitude, such as James Monroe’s conclusion of “with great respect I am […] yr very obt servant.” This type of statement (from the Secretary of State, no less) was not necessarily a statement of hierarchy. Rather, such statements of servitude were a reminder of the reciprocity of such introductions. Signing with a variation of “I am your servant” reminded the recipient that the writer would return the favor if the recipient wrote with a similar letter of introduction.

Furthermore, such statements from an individual higher in the political hierarchy of the country served as a reminder of the duties of a public servant—one of which, if in diplomatic posts, was to introduce visiting countrymen of good standing to the relevant political networks and provide them with every hospitality possible. While Andrew Stevenson was serving as Minister to England, he was barraged with letters of introduction for young men traveling to England for different reasons. Indeed, Sarah Coles Stevenson wrote in April 1837 that “Mr. S. comes to me with both hands full of letters of introduction[.]” Edward Everett, who would succeed Andrew in his post as Minister to England, wrote in November of the same year to introduce Charles Sumner

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33 Sarah Coles Stevenson to John Rutherford, esq., April 28, 1837. Box 1, Folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
to Andrew, signing the letter, “Your faithful humble Servant.”

Friend and fellow Virginian John Brockenbrough wrote a year later to introduce North Carolinian George Mordecai to Andrew. According to John, George was in “London on business of importance to that State, as well as to our own.” John requested that Andrew show George “Such civilities as you are accustomed to show to your countrymen” to “this very respectable gentleman.” Of all of the letters of introduction sent to Andrew Stevenson during his time as minister, apparently Martin Van Buren wrote “more letters of introduction than any man in America,” at least according to Sarah Coles Stevenson. The president’s letters seemed to carry a special weight, though, and “his letters Mr. S. never fails, to distinguish the person’s by a dinner.”

It was not just the connection to prominent men that mattered in letters of introduction; women who had strong political friendships in their own right also were often mentioned in such letters. When John Coles Rutherfoord travelled to Europe in 1851, his uncle Andrew Stevenson wrote numerous letters of introduction to him. While several of these letters were to men, one letter was written to Catherine Marryat. In all of the letters, Andrew mentioned his friendship with the recipients while introducing his

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34 Edward Everett to Andrew Stevenson, November 4, 1837. Box 6/Book 6, Andrew Stevenson and J.W. Stevenson Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress. (Hereafter cited as Andrew and JW Stevenson Papers, LC). Charles Sumner would have been 26 years old at this point, several years from beginning his political career.
35 John Brockenbrough to Andrew Stevenson, October 24, 1838. Box 9/Book 9, Andrew and JW Stevenson Papers, LC. This was likely the same George Mordecai of the Cameron family network in North Carolina. Both George Mordecai and John Brockenbrough were heavily involved in their respective state banks.
36 Sarah Coles Stevenson to John Rutherford, esq., April 28, 1837. Box 1, Folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
nephew. While he did call Catherine “one of my dearest & most esteemed English friends,” he chose to emphasize another relationship in describing John’s intimate ties—John’s relationship with Sarah Coles Stevenson who had died just a few years before. According to Andrew, John was “the favorite nephew of our sainted friend.” He repeated that statement in his letter of introduction to the Earl of Zetland. In this case, it was John’s connection to Sarah that would make both Catherine and the Earl of Zetland accept him and introduce him to the right circles.\textsuperscript{37}

One of the main functions of political correspondence—and one of the main responsibilities of membership in political networks—was sharing political news and information and lending support on legislation, elections, and other political issues. Willie Mangum hinted at the importance of this function in an 1841 letter to Duncan Cameron that contained “a few items of intelligence, that do not usually find a place in the public prints[.].”\textsuperscript{38} Typically, political letters remained focused on one of these issues, revealing information to which the letter writer had access by virtue of his position and relationships. For example, a letter might simply contain a request that information on

\textsuperscript{37} Andrew Stevenson to Catherine Marryat, May 3, [1851]; Andrew Stevenson to Earl of Zetland, April 28, [1851]; For some of Andrew’s other letters of introduction, see Andrew Stevenson to Earl of Carlisle, May 4, [1851]; and Andrew Stevenson to Lord Sherborne, April 28, [1851]. All in the Rutherfoord Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society. Others who wrote letters of introduction for John included Frederick Ralston, John Rutherfoord, Thomas Rutherfoord, and Andrew Rutherfoord. See: Frederick Ralston to Mrs. Elizabeth Ralston, May 5, 1851; John Rutherfoord to A.H. Rutherfoord, May 1, 1851; Thomas Rutherfoord to J.R. Callender, May 1, 1851; Andrew Rutherfoord to William Henry Playfair, October 18, [1851]. All in the Rutherfoord Family Papers, VHS.

\textsuperscript{38} Willie P. Mangum to Duncan Cameron, June 26, 1841, in \textit{The Papers of Willie Person Mangum}, Volume Three, 1839-1843, edited by Henry Thomas Shanks, (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1953), 181. (Hereafter referred to as \textit{The Papers of Willie Person Mangum}, Vol. 3).
some political issue or legislation be shared. Similarly, a letter might ask for a friend’s support during an election. On the other hand, a letter could be filled with information and updates on legislation, elections, and diplomatic concerns.

In August 1812, Vice President Elbridge Gerry wrote to Edward Coles to thank him for “an early communication of the important event, referred to in the message of the President” and to ask for more information. The War of 1812 had begun in June, and Elbridge told Edward that he “never doubted” that “our political divisions were promoted by Gr. Britain.” Because of the political (and diplomatic) situation, he told Edward, “I should be highly gratified by confidential information in regard to some events relative to the Count de Crillon, since his arrival at Washington.” He continued with the statement “That he is the person whom he professes to be, I have no doubt” before he signed the letter with sentiments of esteem, respect, and friendship. Requests for information like this one were always accompanied by reminders of the intimate friendship between the letter writer and recipient. For example, when Nicholas Biddle asked Edward Coles for “a copy of the loan bill” if Edward could “put your hands on a

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39 This statement likely referred to the political divisions between Federalists, who opposed the war, and the Democratic-Republicans, who supported it. Elbridge Gerry to Edward Coles, August 11, 1812. Box 1, Folder 12, Edward Coles Papers, PUL. For an overview of these divisions, see chapter 3, “Federalists, Republicans, and Slavery during the War of 1812,” in Mason, Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic. For an examination of these divisions along with the broader borderland tensions in the United States during the war, see Alan Taylor, The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies, (New York: Knopf, 2010). On the rhetoric of the War of 1812 and the emotions surrounding it, see Nicole Eustace, 1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

40 Elbridge Gerry to Edward Coles, August 11, 1812. Box 1, Folder 12, Edward Coles Papers, PUL. Elbridge Gerry was wrong, and the Count de Crillon was actually a con man.
Similarly, a few months later, Nicholas again reminded Edward of his sincere affections for him when he asked for confidential information about how many New England natives were in Congress.42

Sharing political news—regardless of the existence of an actual request for such news—was an important aspect of membership in a political family. Personal relationships were essential for accessing political knowledge, as revealed by Nicholas Biddle’s 1818 statement to Edward Coles that because he was a stranger in Washington, he was unable to obtain much information about political happenings there.43 In January 1815, Edward Coles wrote to his cousin Payne Todd (the troubled son of Dolley Madison from her first marriage), who was the private secretary of Albert Gallatin in Ghent, to update him on news, congressional reports, the destruction of Washington by the British, and attempts at suing for peace.44 William M. Rives wrote to John Rutherfoord several times in 1828 to discuss politics, congressional districts, John Quincy Adams’ re-election, and the tariff.45 Similarly, John Tyler informed John Rutherfoord in February 1829 that he did not want to serve in the upcoming convention and feared that the struggle between the upper and lower country of Virginia might become violent. At the end of the letter, he shared an update on President Jackson’s

41 Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, March 8, 1814. Box 1, Folder 14, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
42 Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, November 16, 1814. Box 1, Folder 14, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
43 Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, January 26, 1818. Box 1, Folder 18, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
44 Edward Coles to Payne Todd, January 3, 1815. Box 1, Folder 15, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
45 William M. Rives to John Rutherfoord, August 10, 1828; William M. Rives to John Rutherfoord, September 7, 1828. Both in Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
Cabinet. Isaac Coles likewise shared his thoughts on a prominent political issue with John Rutherfoord, this time on the subject of the Bank of the United States. Similarly, in March 1815, Nicholas Biddle wrote to Edward with “a report on the subject of the Hartford amendments,” which dealt with grievances about the War of 1812, the increasing power of the federal government, the Louisiana Purchase, and the Embargo of 1807.

Personal relationships were especially important for finding out political news in other places. John Tyler kept John Rutherfoord updated on the political climate in Washington while he was a senator. Indeed, his first letter after arriving in Washington began by informing John that he wrote “In compliance with my promises to write you after reaching this and making myself somewhat acquainted with the grounds occupied by the republican party and the views entertained, and relied on by those who agree with Virginia in political doctrine.” As his statement reveals, keeping family members informed on the current national political climate was an important duty of men and women living in the capital. Once they had established the necessary relationships, their access to the differing viewpoints on various political issues was invaluable for the

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46 John Tyler to John Rutherfoord, February 23, 1829. Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
47 Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, January 10, 1834. Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. Isaac believed that a compromise should be made on the subject of the national bank: restoring deposits, not rechartering the current bank, and incorporating a new one that would only exist for 20-50 years and that would not be unionable.
48 Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, March 11, 1815. Box 1, Folder 15, Edward Coles Papers, PUL. For more an analysis of the Hartford Convention, and the role that slavery played in the political debates, see Mason, Slavery and Politics.
49 John Tyler to John Rutherfoord, December 8, 1827. Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
broader family network. In this case, Tyler updated Rutherfoord on the current fraught political climate during the end of John Quincy Adams’s presidency and the rise of the party of Jackson. He informed Rutherfoord that “The election of our friend Stevenson to the chair of the House of R. has manifested a decided majority in that body, while that in the Senate is equally well ascertained.” Thus, in Tyler’s words, “The opposition party constitute in fact the administration.” As this statement demonstrated, the power rested with the opposition party, with the party of Jackson—and of Rutherfoord, Stevenson, and Tyler. This fact, he assured Rutherfoord meant that “The fate of the President is considered as seal’d.” Tyler continued the letter with information on Andrew Jackson’s views on the tariff and internal improvement before he shifted to a discussion of the necessary makeup of his future Cabinet.50

John Tyler continued his correspondence with John Rutherfoord throughout his years in Washington, keeping Rutherfoord and other members of their political family in Virginia informed on the changing political climate and tensions in Washington. Three years later, Tyler again wrote to Rutherfoord to update him on a tense political situation. This time, he shared news of the discussions and actions in Congress surrounding the fate of the Bank of the United States, as well as his thoughts on Andrew Jackson’s run for re-election. He informed Rutherfoord that “the fate of the Bank will be decided not

50 “Our friend Stevenson” referred to Andrew Stevenson, John Rutherfoord’s brother-in-law through his wife Emily (Coles) Rutherfoord and her sister Sarah Coles Stevenson. John Tyler to John Rutherfoord, December 8, 1827. Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
so much upon its merits, as with the view to the political advancement of some aspiring politician.” Of Andrew Jackson, Tyler said that he was an “old fashioned republican” who “laid aside the affectation of high life” and that “if ruin awaits him, the true cause thereof will be found in the circumstance of his having lean’d too much on favorites.”

Almost a year later, Tyler penned a short letter to Rutherfoord to let him know that he would grant him the favor he had asked for of a delay in the appointment of a successor to “Mr. Steward.” The brief letter continued with Tyler lamenting that “The tariff like the shirt of Nessus, is upon us, and all efforts to relieve us from its unfortunate influences will prove abortive.”

For Duncan Cameron’s political network, Willie Mangum was an important source of information on national politics and the political climate in Washington. Indeed, Duncan instructed Willie to “Write me frequently and fully - Your letters at this interesting crisis will be highly acceptable[.]” Shortly after Willie was elected to Congress in 1823, he wrote to Duncan from Washington. He filled the letter with information about the presidential election, opinions in Washington as to the candidates, and the relationship between those opinions and what he had heard (from Cameron and

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51 John Tyler to John Rutherfoord, March 14, 1830, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
52 John Tyler to John Rutherfoord, February 7, 1831. Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. In Greek mythology, the shirt of Nessus was the poisoned shirt that killed Heracles.
other political family members) about the opinions of the people of North Carolina.\textsuperscript{54} As this letter revealed, members of the political network still in North Carolina also kept Willie up to date with political news from the state, as when William H. Haywood, Jr. wrote to Willie in April 1824 both to thank him for the update Willie had sent and update him in return on sentiments in North Carolina regarding the presidential election and Andrew Jackson.\textsuperscript{55} Such letters emphasized the reciprocity of sharing such political news among members of a political family.

Much like John Tyler, Willie continued to update the members of the political network in North Carolina of sentiments in Washington throughout his tenure in Congress. In January 1825, he wrote Duncan Cameron about the presidential election, noting that “public sentiment” in Washington had been favorable to Jackson but that

\begin{quote}
Time & reflection have, however, I think materially diminished his chances of success.– The election I think will depend upon the course that Mr. Clay may take. Of this I entertain scarcely any doubt. Mr. Clay & his friends have until very recently, maintained the utmost reserve, and the slight departure from that course, is still quite equivocal.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

Even in a letter that simply shared political news, the importance of political friendship in determining the outcome of elections was undeniable: the election would depend on “Mr. Clay & his friends.” In subsequent letters to Duncan—including the letter informing him of his brother’s appointment as judge—Willie included information on

\textsuperscript{54} W.P. Mangum to Duncan Cameron, Dec. 10, 1823; in The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 1, 82-84.
\textsuperscript{55} William H. Haywood, Jr. to Willie P. Mangum, April 17, 1824; in The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 1, 135-138.
\textsuperscript{56} Willie P. Mangum to Duncan Cameron, January 10, 1825; in The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 1, 173.
debates over the Bank of the United States, the tariff, presidential elections, and more.\textsuperscript{57} Duncan’s responses usually gave his opinion of the issues in Willie’s letters. For example, Duncan told Willie that he was in favor of the Bank of the United States because he believed that “the best Interests of the U. States demand a prompt renewal of the Charter” and that delaying or vetoing the bill after it passed Congress would “produce pecuniary embarrassments exceeding in extent and degree all that can now be anticipated.” In his view, the bank was a matter that “so deeply affect[ed] the general welfare” that political parties and other political considerations should fall by the wayside when considering its approval.\textsuperscript{58}

Both men and women shared political news with family members, young and old. Edward Coles informed his brother Isaac in 1840 that he had been much gratified to read of Isaac’s successful nomination of “Southall as Speaker” of the Virginia House of Delegates both because it was Isaac’s first movement in the House” and because Southall “like ourselves has flowing in his veins the kindred blood of Patrick Henry, & be cause he comes from our dear native county, the county of Jefferson, & the county of distinguished statesmen.” In other words, Edward was glad to hear that Isaac had

\textsuperscript{57} See, for example, Willie P. Mangum to Duncan Cameron, May 24, 1832; in \textit{The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 1}, 547-548. See also: Willie P. Mangum to Duncan Cameron, February 7, 1834; in \textit{The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 2}, 71-75; Willie P. Mangum to Duncan Cameron, February 9, 1834; in \textit{The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 2}, 75-79; and Willie P. Mangum to Duncan Cameron, June 26, 1841; in \textit{The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 3}, 181-187.

\textsuperscript{58} Duncan Cameron to Willie P. Mangum, June 3, 1832; in \textit{The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 1}, 549. See also: Duncan Cameron to Willie P. Mangum, February 15, 1835; in \textit{The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol 2}, 312-314; and Duncan Cameron to Willie P. Mangum, March 26, 1835; in \textit{The Papers of Willie Person Mangum, Vol. 2}, 327.
successfully helped another member of their political family. He then shared his own news with Isaac: he had spoken with a man who had recently returned from England “who says Stevenson was very sanguine of the re-election of V.B.” Although Edward did not quite believe this to be true, he told his brother that if it was, Andrew’s “astonishment must have been prodigious when he heard the result.” In 1839, thirteen-year-old John Coles Rutherfoord wrote to his aunt Sarah Coles Stevenson, then living in England, and updated her about the current political situation in Virginia, where the elections had just finished. He informed her that they “caused greater excitement than usual” both among politicians and the broader public. After he shared his predictions for the outcome, he told his aunt that “it is thought that the Whigs and Conservatives together will carry the day.” John then updated his aunt on the results of the elections that involved people within their family network. He shared that “Uncle Tucker who ran for the Senate was beaten in the Albemarle District by an overwhelming majority.” He further stated that his father believed that Tucker’s loss was largely due to William C. Rives’s influence and informed his aunt that “It is said that William C. Rives was very

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59 Edward Coles to Isaac A. Coles, December 17, 1840, Box 2, Folder 34, Coles Family Papers, HSP. Edward did not seem too thrilled with the outcome of the election; nor did he seem to have a high regard for the president-elect’s (William Henry Harrison’s) character. He disapprovingly told Isaac, “I see it announced the P. elect is to be with you soon. What can be his object? Not I hope to get up parades & show for the gratification of his vanity. It would have been best for him to have remained quietly at home till near the time for entering in the duties of his high office, & then to have come on in a plain unostentatious manner, after the fashion of Jefferson & Madison, to the seat of govt.”
active in electioneering against him.” John’s letter reveals that even members of the same political family did not always agree, could belong to different political parties, and sometimes campaigned against each other.

Members of the same political family had other disagreements over politics as well. Following the 1836 presidential election, Hodijah Meade wrote to his brother-in-law John Rutherfoord about their profound disagreement over voting choices. John, like fellow political family members Andrew Stevenson and Thomas Ritchie, favored Martin Van Buren as president. Hodijah, on the other hand, lamented the election results and told John, “Your friend Mr. Van Buren is now elected and I have not drowned myself as you feared I would.” He believed that Martin Van Buren’s election would lead “to the overthrow of our government” because the newly elected government was “administered by low and paltry rogues.” He argued that either “a miracle of reform must take place or the present incumbents must be displaced.” Yet, Hodijah also revealed a certain level of arrogance and surety available to members of the economic and political elite despite the problems he saw with the government by saying, “you and I […] may live quietly […] and therefore need not be uneasy” with Martin as president.  

Even on legislative and constitutional issues, members of the same political family did not always agree with each other. In June 1841, shortly after John Tyler

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60 John Coles Rutherfoord to Sarah Coles Stevenson, June 1, 1839. Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
61 Hodijah Meade to John Rutherfoord, November 29, 1836. Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
assumed the presidency, John Rutherfoord wrote to him concerning the ongoing question of banks. Rutherfoord first emphasized his esteem, respect, and friendship for Tyler before asking that he “pause and ponder before you sanction any Bill incorporating a bank within District of Columbia with branches out of the District of Colombia in the States” even if the states involved gave their agreement. Rutherfoord continued to plead his case arguing, “For surely, if a National Bank be unconstitutional, (call it by what name you will) the assent of every state in the Union given in the mode proposed, would not amend the constitution.” Furthermore, he argued that “the great body of the people” was increasingly hostile to the very idea of a national bank in any form. He then reminded Tyler that “Your old democratic friends in Virginia, are looking with intense interest at the course of events in Washington, and to the part you are to act in the approaching crisis.” Rutherfoord then proceeded to offer Tyler the support of his political friends and family in Virginia before he again reminded him of their long friendship by excusing his trespass on the president’s time because he was simply doing it “as a friend.”62 His statements in this letter were all intended to remind Tyler of the reciprocal obligations of support that came with membership in a political family. Essentially, he argued that Tyler should oppose the bank not just on constitutional grounds but also because his political friends and family asked him too.

62 John Rutherfoord to John Tyler, June 21, 1841. Box 1, Folder 7, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
Tyler, however, felt differently. In a letter marked “Confidential” Tyler in a very different tone than his earlier letters to Rutherfoord while a Senator. He began by assuring Rutherfoord that he understood and appreciated his motives in writing the initial letter before indicating that his own opinions “remain[ed] wholly unchang’d” on the subject. He then stated,

I am put upon trial by those with whom you have appointed yourself. no confidence given or declared. The observation of my course for twenty five years is not enough. My late message is not enough. I am placed upon trial and left to infer from the past, that even after trial and a full indication of my consistency, those who have all along oppos’d me will still call out for further trials.

Such a statement reprimanded Rutherfoord and those he was allied with for not supporting his position, which was made especially untenable because he had no party support or support in his Cabinet (which he had inherited upon the death of his predecessor, William Henry Harrison). Indeed, he asked what exactly Rutherfoord would have him do other than ask his Cabinet to frame a bill that did not violate the Constitution, which he would approve if it passed Congress. Moreover, Tyler informed Rutherfoord that he saw no sustainable objection to the idea upon constitutional grounds before listing the prominent men within their political family who agreed with him: “John W. Eppes, Wm. M. Burrwell, Hugh Lawson White, John C. Calhoun, […] Genl Jackson, [and] Martin Van Buren.” He ended the letter with a plea for Rutherfoord to think for himself on the issue before assuring him of his continued friendship and
The letter is a masterful example of how disagreements among political family members were handled.

Providing updates on the political careers of family members was as important as sharing political news—especially to those other family members who could help in some way. In April 1823 when governor of Illinois, Edward Coles wrote to Nicholas Biddle to discuss in depth the attempts by some people in Illinois to alter the state constitution to make Illinois a slave-holding state. Just three days later, he wrote to James Madison about the same issue and informed him, “A case of some difficulty has occurred here, as to the proper construction which should be given to the Constitution, which from your knowledge and experience on such subjects, I am induced to take the liberty to state to you, and to ask the favor of you to give me your opinion on it.” In closing the letter, Edward sent his “kind and affectionate regards to Mrs. M” and called her his “fair and sweet cousin” before signing the letter with sentiments of sincere, affectionate friendship. In this letter, Edward both updated James on his political career and called on the affective ties of friendship and family to marshal his resources—in this

63 John Tyler to John Rutherfoord, June 23, 1841. Box 1, Folder 7, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
64 Edward Coles to Nicholas Biddle, April 22, 1823. Box 1, Folder 21, Edward Coles Papers, PUL. For an in-depth discussion of Edward’s time as governor and his anti-slavery attempts, see Guasco, Confronting Slavery.

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case, James’s expertise on the Constitution. The strategy worked. A month later, James responded, giving Edward his opinion (and expert advice) on the subject.

Such requests for help from political friends and family members were common. While in Trenton to defend his steamboat rights in 1815, Robert Fulton wrote to Edward Coles for help on the case. After he related the issue, Robert stated his actual request, “You will please to communicate this complaint and reasonable correction for a great abuse to the president. I rely on his and Mr. Monroes Justice.” Robert called on Edward not just because of their friendship but because of Edward’s friendship with and access to James Madison and James Monroe. Similarly, Hodijah Meade wrote to his brother-in-law John Rutherfoord for help with a memorial on a Revolutionary claim that he planned to present to the Senate through their mutual friend and relative, William Cabell Rives. He asked that both John and his father look it over and then send it to William “with my respects and request him to pay such attention to it as his good will may suggest & as is compatible with his duties.” Hodijah called on every resource at his disposal in order to ensure that his memorial was both presented to the Senate and was ultimately successful. Less than a month later, William told John to “Be so good as to say to Meade that it will give me pleasure to render him all the service in my power, towards procuring a fair decision on the merits of the claim presented by himself &

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65 Edward Coles to James Madison, April 25, 1823, Box 1, Folder 21, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
66 James Madison to Edward Coles, May 23, 1823. Box 1, Folder 21, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
67 Robert Fulton to Edward Coles, January 17, 1815. Box 1, Folder 15, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
68 Hodijah Meade to John Rutherfoord, November 29, 1836. Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
brother. I have this day had it referred to the committee on Revolutionary claims.”

Because the committee’s chairman, “Mr. Brown of N.C., boards at the same house with me,” William declared, “I shall, therefore, have an opportunity of conferring with him freely on the subject.”69 William continued, however, with a caution that it would likely be difficult to obtain “from the Senate a recognition of the principle of allowing interest on commutation.” Before closing the letter with sentiments of sincere friendship, he assured John (and Hodijah) that he would “endeavour to have a full & fair hearing of the claim” and would also see about presenting it to the House of Representatives as well. Highlighting the reciprocity of political favors, William added a postscript to the letter that asked John for “the favour” of obtaining “a list of the members of the H. of D. & Senate of Va., & send it to me by mail as soon as you may find it convenient, as I stand in need of it in addressing Documents to them.” He continued by highlighting the further reciprocity that this would encourage stating, “When we have any of interest, I will furnish you such as are likely to engage your attention.”70

Members of the Cameron family political network made similar requests of their friends and family serving in political positions in Washington. Jno. J. Carrington, for example, wrote to Willie Mangum about establishing a mail route in their county—

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70 William Cabell Rives to John Rutherfoord, December 19, 1836. Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
something that he and Willie had discussed previously. He explained that he wrote to
Willie because he could “point out to the post master General, the necessity of the
rout[..]”71 Willie knew the necessity of the road and had influence with the Postmaster
General, making him the ideal person to contact for this favor. In February 1841, Paul
Cameron also wrote to Willie with a request that concerned the post office at his father’s
plantation Stagville, where he was currently postmaster. He inquired about having the
mail forwarded to him at his residence, rather than Stagville, to make it easier for him to
carry out his duties as postmaster and asked Willie to speak to the Postmaster General
about the issue. Paul explicitly told Willie why he wrote him with this request (and not
someone else) saying,

I address you, because at this time, but little attention would be given to a
request of this sort, unless some influential friends, would press the matter a
little. I do not know that I should trouble a Senator with it, but my
Representative Dr. Montgomery is under no sort of obligation to serve me, nor
do I believe, that he would give himself the least trouble to do so. I beg you will
give it your attention at once, and let me hear from you.72

As Paul’s statement revealed, the ties that bound political friends and family came with
obligations—which meant honoring requests for help, even trivial ones.

Other requests involved writing or speaking in support of a particular political
position or family member. William C. Rives asked John Rutherfoord to do just that in

June 1837. Apparently, an issue had arisen that “is now abroad, & countenanced by too many of our friends” and William feared that “if not checked by more sober-minded views” it would “not only do great mischief to the country, but must terminate in the complete overthrow of the Republican party.” William asked John to read the account of these ideas in the letter he had enclosed for a separate friend on the same issue and, if he agreed with him on the issue, to “take up your pen, & expose the dangerous extravagance of them on the same arena, (the public press), in which they are now sought to be commended to the public favour.”73 Similarly, in July 1825, James Mebane wrote to Thomas Bennehan to request his vocal support during an election. He informed Thomas that although he had lost the previous year he was again running for election and asked that Thomas “attend as many of the meetings as will take place in your part of the county for collecting taxes or other purposes, previous to the election as you conveniently can, and stimulate such active influential men as you can” to speak—and vote—for him. He reiterated his trust in Thomas with this matter by telling him that he would not be writing to anyone else for help.74 Many of Duncan Cameron’s letters to Willie Mangum were, in essence, requests to advance a specific political position. For example, in several of his letters Duncan mentioned the “necessity” of a national bank. Such references (along with Duncan’s long and detailed explanations for its necessity)

73 William Cabell Rives to John Rutherfoord, June 10, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
74 James Mebane to Thomas Bennehan, July 18, 1825. Folder 572, Cameron Family Papers, SHC.
reminded Willie of the political views and needs of his family and friends.\textsuperscript{75} Of course, these requests for public support were not always explicitly made. When an editorial was published against Andrew Stevenson in the \textit{Globe}, his friends and family members rallied around him to support him in public—without him actually requesting that they do so.\textsuperscript{76} The assumption in such circumstances was that political friends and family would do so \textit{without question}. After all, their own reputations also hung in the balance, as members of the same political family.

Family members exposed those who failed to uphold their obligations through the public nature of correspondence. Doing so ensured that those who failed would not continue to do so in the future. When the editorial was published about Andrew Stevenson and his family and friends immediately wrote in support of him, they also called out the failures of other political friends to support him. Edward Coles told John Rutherford outright that “Ritchie is the only Editor who has acted like an honorable man & a true friend.” He continued, “His conduct has been high [&] honorable to him – the more so contrasted with that of his Editorial associates.”\textsuperscript{77} Editors of other newspapers aligned with Andrew Stevenson’s political network largely failed to come to

\textsuperscript{75} See, for example, Duncan Cameron to Willie P. Mangum, June 7, 1841, p. 192; and Duncan Cameron to Willie P. Mangum, June 3, 1832, p. 549. Both in \textit{The Papers of Willie Person Mangum}, Vol. 1

\textsuperscript{76} For evidence of this, see: Sarah Coles Stevenson to [Betsy], April 14, 1837. Box 1, folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU. Sarah Coles Stevenson to John Rutherford, esq., April 28, 1837. Box 1, Folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles or Emily Ann Coles Rutherford, [May 1837]. Box 1, folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU. Edward Coles to John Rutherford, April 9, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherford Collection, DU. For a more in-depth examination of this situation, see chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{77} Edward Coles to John Rutherford, April 9, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherford Papers, DU.
his support. Once news reached England of the editorial in the *Globe* in mid-April 1837, Sarah Coles Stevenson told her sister Betsy that “I do not recollect ever having seen Mr. Stevenson so overwhelmed, he was like one striped by a severe blow, the flagrant injustice, & that too from one he deemed his friend_ but you will have seen & heard all about it in the papers.” The worst injustice of the attack, as Sarah called it, was that it had been “from one he deemed his friend.” The editor of the Globe, F.P. Blair, not only failed to support a political friend, but also publicly maligned him, potentially harming the reputation of the entire political family. Andrew (who had not yet seen the response published by Thomas Ritchie in the Richmond *Enquirer*) feared that he also might lose the support of another friend—Thomas, whom he called “my dear familiar friend, […] whom I love as a brother, & respect as a man.”[79] Andrew need not have feared on that front. Thomas leapt to his defense in the *Enquirer*, as did John Rutherfoord. Sarah expressed their gratitude for this (expected) defense, and for Thomas’s admonishment of the editor of the *Globe*, in a letter written April 28 saying, “I need not say to you how deeply we feel the tenderness & affection these letters breathe nor our gratitude to you

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[78] And Andrew’s friends and family were watching. Edward Coles told John Rutherfoord in the above letter that he had “been anxiously looking to Washington, Richd, Albany, & indeed to all the Admn: Editorial corps, to see if they concurred with the Globe; or what they would say on the subject[.]” Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, April 9, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.

[79] The *Globe* was a major newspaper in Washington D.C. that was, to say the very least, aligned with the Democratic Party—Andrew Stevenson’s party. During Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren’s tenure, the *Globe* was essentially the mouthpiece of the Democratic Party, and the paper and its editor had enormous influence politically. Thus, Andrew’s outrage was, as Sarah pointed out to Betsy, compounded by the fact that the editorial was written by “one he deemed his friend.” Sarah Coles Stevenson to [Betsy], April 14, 1837. Box 1, folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
& our dear & excellent friend Mr. Ritchie for your kind & judicious defence of your absent & calumniated friend.” Despite this expression of gratitude, and her own defense of her husband, Sarah ultimately also used this letter to again publicly shame the “ruthless” editor of the Globe who was “as willing to tomahawk his friends as his foes.”

The editorial against Andrew Stevenson in the Globe and the subsequent responses and reprimands by his family are perhaps the most public example of that type of shaming. It usually happened in the private—but still public—form of unpublished correspondence. In the previous example after John Rutherfoord asked John Tyler to “pause and ponder” before approving the charter of a bank in the District of Columbia with branches in other states, Tyler used subtle cues reminiscent of women’s admonitions in familial correspondence in his response. These cues helped him express his dissatisfaction with Rutherfoord and other family members for failing to support him or trust in his integrity. He first noted that Rutherfoord’s “friendly letter” had reached him and that he “properly appreciate[d] the motives which prompted you

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80 Sarah Coles Stevenson to John Rutherford, esq., April 28, 1837. Box 1, Folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU. Sarah continued to express her and Andrew’s gratitude for Thomas Ritchie, telling her sisters in May of the same year, “as to Mr. Ritchie, both Mr. to Stevenson & myself regard him next to our own immediate family, and he may rest assured, that whether we are silent, or whether we write to him, or of him, our hearts must ever be most deeply grateful for the noble & generous stand he has made for Mr. Stevenson in his time of need. May Heaven bless him and his is the prayer of my heart.” See: Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles or Emily Ann Coles Rutherford, [May 1837]. Box 1, folder 2, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.

81 For the letter from Rutherfoord to Tyler, see: John Rutherfoord to John Tyler, June 21, 1841, in Box 1, Folder 7, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
to write it.” He then informed him that his “opinions on all subjects remain wholly unchang’d. and so they have been through all time,” which assured Rutherfoord of his unchanging integrity. After this statement, he angrily told Rutherfoord, “I am put upon trial by those with whom you have appointed yourself.” With this statement, he shamed Rutherfoord for allying himself against his longtime friend before he stated that because of this situation, he was left “impotent and powerless.” At the end of the letter, Tyler signed with “assurances of my friendship and esteem,” which reminded Rutherfoord of their intimate bond, and assured that he would remember their friendship in the future—and support Tyler politically.82

Similarly, in a letter aimed at securing a political appointment for Andrew Stevenson once his term as Minister to England was finished, Sarah Coles Stevenson explicitly called out the failure of President Martin Van Buren to support him. After she repeated her inquiry of Andrew’s chances at different political appointments and emphasized that he wanted “honourable employment,” she rather snidely stated, “As to Mr. V.B. we know he has never yet shown much disposition to serve one who stood by him so gallantly in his hour of need. But we shall see.” What is particularly interesting about this quote is not simply Sarah’s choice to call out Martin’s previous failure to support Andrew but also the fact that Andrew left this critique in the letter. The vast majority of Sarah’s letters to her family while in England were censored by Andrew.

82 John Tyler to John Rutherfood, June 23, 1841, in Box 1, Folder 7, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
While she was quite frank with her appraisal of people, places, and culture, Andrew would at times soften her critiques. At other times, he would mask the identity of people she was talking about, especially if it was family or someone well-known. For example, he regularly changed her sisters’ names to simply “Sister.” In other cases, Andrew would censor the names of individuals to be simply “Mr. R.” or “Lord P,” hiding their identities to people who were not familiar with them. While Sarah herself was the one to write “Mr. V.B.,” it would have been quite apparent to anyone reading who she was talking about.83

Political correspondence from the years between the Revolution and the Civil War regularly emphasized the idea of the politician as a public servant. This claim stressed the importance of relationships for politics and political culture at the time. Such language cast politicians as following the public interest, not defining it. But elite white men consciously used this phrasing to claim a specific role and place within society: they worked for the good of the “public,” the people of the country. Indeed, when William Cabell Rives wrote to John Rutherfoord to congratulate him on his

83 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles. January 12, 1839, Box 2, Folder 1. For other examples of redacting names, see, among many others, Sarah Coles Stevenson to Edward Coles, May 19, 1837, Box 1, Folder 2; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, May 29, 1837, Box 1, Folder 2; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, July 19, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Mrs. Singleton, August 4, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, August 23, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1; all in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU. For evidence that Andrew was the one censoring Sarah’s letters, see her statement to her sister Betsy that “I wrote you last week a long account […] which Mr. Stevenson insisted upon over looking, I soon found that almost every paragraph in the letter was condemned” and that Andrew was “erasing [portions of the letter] with the most indefategable industry.” Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, July 19, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
election to the Governor’s council of Virginia he said, “I am happy to see you again brought into the public service” with “perfect harmony of opinion between you & your constituents.” Women in these families used the same language, as did Sarah Coles Stevenson when she emphasized her husband’s qualities as a public servant in her efforts to secure him a political appointment. This language, however, completely obscured the efforts of these family members to leverage specific legislation, projects, and even elections for their own benefit.

This phrasing indicated a key difference in the political process and in politicians’ role post-Revolution. Politicians no longer served the king. Rather, they now served the public. To the broader public, this particular conceptualization meant that the people had a claim on the politicians. This claim, along with the popular vote, implied a possibility of mobilizing opposition to those politicians who failed to live up to their obligations to the public. Even members of the same political family would remind others in the family of their obligations as a public servant. For example, when Jno. J. Carrington wrote Willie Mangum in January 1824 after he read Willie’s recent letter to Duncan Cameron, he told Willie that the letter made it seem like Willie did not know what side to take on the presidential election before he reminded him of his campaign

84 William Cabell Rives to John Rutherfoord, December 19, 1836. Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
85 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, January 12, 1839. Box 2, Folder 1, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
promises to vote for Crawford, no matter what.86 Such statements served as a reminder of politicians’ accountability to their constituency. Similarly, a report from an 1836 meeting of the Orange County Whigs stated that they had decided to choose “a public servant […] who is identified with us in interest.” They did so because a public servant who was in their own political network would not be able “in the administration of his high office” to “injure us without injuring himself” whereas “one who is not bound to us by such ties” could, essentially, do as he pleased.87 Rather than being a servant to the interests of the public as the language would have people believe, statements such as this reveal that men in political positions were, instead, servants to the interests of the people to whom they were bound by bonds of affectionate friendship and kinship.

William A. Graham was very explicit about the demands of public service. In a “Speech on Instruction to Mangum” in December 1834, he argued that by the very nature of public servants, men in political positions were accountable to the public—to the interests of their constituents. He qualified this accountability, however, by admonishing the public to “Beware then, how you reprove the independence of your representatives, lest you encourage them to prefer their own ease and advancement to their country’s good.” In other words, the accountability of “public servants” to the

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broader public was really limited, because admonishing representatives for their “independence,” or, for not following the wishes of their constituents, ran the risk of encouraging them to completely choose the side that would advance themselves—and not “their country’s good.”  

Men in political positions worked to create the impression that they were good, public servants. While he served in the General Assembly, Duncan Cameron, for example, published public addresses to constituents in his district. These addresses typically contained summaries of the acts passed during the last session of the General Assembly and acted as a public accounting for his actions on behalf of his constituents. Other politicians regularly published addresses as well. Archibald Murphey, for example, published one that lamented the effects of elections on “party dessentions” and told his constituents (“the freeholders of Orange County”) that “genuine republicanism […] has its foundation in the best affections of the human heart.” Furthermore, the object of “genuine republicanism” was “the good of mankind at large.” He thus asked his constituents why political divisions and political parties remained. Only then did he reveal his true purpose: he was running for office again. “In the discharge of my public duty in the General Assembly,” he told his constituents, “I endeavoured to consult the

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88 As you might guess, this speech was given to Willie P. Mangum. William A. Graham, Speech on Instruction to Mangum, December 1834, in The Papers of William Alexander Graham, Vol. 1, 1836.
89 See, for example, Duncan Cameron, “To the freemen of Orange County” (Raleigh, NC, 1807); Duncan Cameron, “To the freemen of the district composed of the counties of Wake, Orange and Chatham” (Orange County, NC, 1803); Duncan Cameron, “To the freemen of Orange County,” (Raleigh: T. Henderson, 1813).
great interests of North Carolina and not the interests of any faction or party.” He ended with an appeal: “If, fellow citi[zens] you think proper again to elect me to a seat in the senate, I shall accept the appointment [with] pride and with gratitude; and it shall be my endeavour, as it heretofore has been to serve you and the state of North Carolina; but not to serve a party.” By accounting for their actions while in office, they created an image of themselves as accountable to the broader public—to any of the “freemen” who read the paper and voted for them.

Letters to the editor, editorials, speeches and even articles in newspapers functioned as a reminder of those obligations. One example was the editorial against Andrew Stevenson in The Globe and the subsequent published responses of his friends and family written in his support. These functioned similarly to women’s admonitions in familial correspondence, admonitions in business correspondence, and admonitions in political correspondence—all of which used public forms to shame individuals who failed in their obligations, whether not adhering to emotional conventions, not fulfilling reciprocal obligations of support in business endeavors, or not fulfilling obligations to political family members. In this case, such admonitions served to publicly shame

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*Archibald D. Murphey, “To the Freeholders of Orange County,” June 3, 1812, Broadsides and Ephemera Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

*For some of these letters written in Andrew’s support, see W.B. Lewis to Andrew Stevenson, Esq., December 13, 1838; Geo. M. Dallas to Andrew Stevenson, December 23, 1838; Richard Vaux to Andrew Stevenson, December 25, 1838; Edward Coles to “My dearly beloved Sister” [Sarah Coles Stevenson, envelope addressed to Andrew Stevenson, Esq.], December 30, 1838. All in Box 10/Book 10 of the Andrew and J.W. Stevenson Papers, LC. For one of the articles published in his support, see: [No Headline]; Richmond Enquirer, December 7, 1838, page 3.
politicians who failed in their duty of serving the public. Such practices in newspapers were simply even more “public” than their counterparts in correspondence.

As the correspondence of members of the broader political networks of the Coles family of the Virginia and the Cameron family of North Carolina shows, personal relationships were absolutely central to politics and political culture in the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War. Families like the Coles and Cameron families actively built political networks based on bonds of intimate friendship, kinship, and trust. These bonds ensured that the political family network—and its individual members—would succeed in their political endeavors. In order to maintain the trust that these bonds relied on, both men and women adhered to specific conventions common to political correspondence, including sharing political news and emphasizing respect and esteem within intimate bonds of family and friendship. Though men and women during this period conceptualized politicians as public servants who worked for the public good, this conceptualization tended to obscure the reality of the actions of these men. Rather than explicitly working to serve the public, as the language would suggest, elite men worked to serve their broader political family.
5. Chapter Four: The Family State: Family Credit and the Public Good in the Antebellum United States

Men within elite families like the Coles family of Virginia and the Cameron family of North Carolina implicated the state and federal government in their business ventures. Family networks joined the economic interests of particular families to the government’s authority at the local, state, and federal levels, creating an interdependent relationship between what historians have labeled the “private” interests of families and the “public” policies of the government. Rather than a monopolizing force, state and federal governments emerge as entities whose power should be utilized to organize these families’ economic interests—and whose credit could be integrated into the family network.

Building on work that examines individual men using the resources and power of government, this chapter examines how elite families incorporated government institutions into their networks by casting their families’ prospects as the embodiment of the public good. While women were central to the continued existence and success of these networks, it was the men’s labor— and the men’s political positions—that firmly connected their family’s interests to that of institutions of government at the local, state, and federal levels. The construction of railroads in antebellum North Carolina is a prime example of the ways in which familial business and political networks could not be separated from governing institutions. While these railroads provide perhaps the most
stark example of this interdependency, the construction of railroads and canals in Virginia and the construction of canals in other states that required federal support followed similar pathways and reveal similar connections. Examining the involvement of elite families with state banks and the Bank of the United States reveals the same interdependency, with members involved in banks in multiple capacities—as lenders, investors, directors, politicians, and borrowers. Similarly, these families’ involvement in debates over the constitutionality of the Bank of the United States and the correct interpretation of the Constitution on federal authority to issue corporate charters reveals the centrality of family and personal relationships to interpreting the Constitution in the antebellum era.

Both the men and women in elite families, moreover, extended their familial network to the nation, representing it in similar terms, as a united and affectionate family, the members of which were bound together through reciprocal obligations of support. This image of the nation as family with mutual obligations of support would help to guarantee the credit of the young United States at home and abroad. Rather than existing as separate entities, the family and government were conflated—even to the very image of the United States itself. Consequently, they must be understood as one world.

During the antebellum period, legal authority and government in the United States were structured differently, and the structure and point of institutions in the state
and federal government was not yet clear. Because social, economic, and political networks relied on intimate family bonds—dynamics that characterized the early modern period—the family was directly connected to the interests and development of the institutions of government at the local, state, and federal levels. Elite families took this connection a step further, merging their interests with the public interest. To these elites, government was not just something to use; it was their own. Throughout the antebellum period, these practices became entrenched in the developing institutions of federal and state government, where they gained institutional purchase and legitimacy.

In antebellum North Carolina, the men in the Cameron family leveraged the necessity of internal improvement for the state’s economic advancement, along with economic competition with neighboring states, to further their own economic interests. Transportation was crucial during this period. Better, faster, and cheaper transportation facilitated access to goods and markets, promoting economic growth, development, and prosperity.¹ Unlike other states (including the far more prosperous neighboring states of

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Virginia and South Carolina), North Carolina did not have good ocean ports or a
navigable river system. The most promising river, the Cape Fear River, was only
navigable from Wilmington (on the coast) to Fayetteville, in the south-central portion of
the state—about one-third of the way into the state. Other navigable rivers flowed out of
the state into South Carolina or Virginia. Consequently, railroads were absolutely crucial
for transportation. The state of North Carolina was poor, struggling, and losing people
to emigration. Yet, as former governor William Graham said in 1851, North Carolina
“possesses elements of opulence and power which require but the general extension of a
system of improvement to enable her to vie with the proudest members of the Union.”
Transportation held the promise to solve these issues, and elite men like William,
Duncan Cameron, and George Mordecai recognized this and formed corporations to
attempt to do so. These men relied on their own political positions and those of other


2 For an overview of North Carolina during this period, see Hugh Talmadge Lefler and Albert Ray
Carolina Press, 1973. See also Harry Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the
Second American Party System in Cumberland County North Carolina*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University

3 William A. Graham to Hon. J.M. Morehead, Pres’t. N.C.R.R.Co., in North Carolina Rail Road Company,
*Proceedings of the General Meeting of Stockholders of the North Carolina Rail Road Company, at Greensboro’, July 10,
1851, with the By-Laws of the Company, as Revised at Said Meeting*, (The Patriot Office: Greensboro, NC, 1851),
internal improvement during the same period in different parts of the United States. The majority of such
scholarship, however, has not paid attention to the role of families and familial economic networks. See, for
example, Murphy, *Building the Empire State*; Larson, *Internal Improvement*. 

members of their extended family network to do so. In this way, their interests became so closely identified with those of the state that *their* interests became (at least in their minds) the *public* interest.

During this period, the government promoted ventures and corporations for the public good, and corporations in particular relied upon the state government for legal authority. State legislatures issued corporate charters, incorporating companies for the public good into a body politic with the legal status of a person and legal authority and power derived from the government over such things as eminent domain. Corporations, then, were creatures of the public that were formed for the specific purpose of benefitting the public. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the question was not whether corporations were public or private; rather, the question was how much control state governments had over them.4

Gaining the support (and approval) of the state in building and managing different railroads served the interests of businessmen like Duncan Cameron and their

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family network’s corporations—and, they hoped, ensured the success of the railroad itself. The affective familial bonds of economic and political networks allowed access to corporate charters and connected personal financial interests to the interests of the government. By building on their reputation as public servants and on their family ties to influential men in politics, men in the Cameron family network were able to leverage specific projects of internal improvement like railroads and canals as necessary for the public good. The success of one man’s business meant the success of the others involved in the web of debts. When one member of the network supported the passage of a bill to authorize the incorporation of a railroad company run by another member, his purposes were twofold—for the improvement of the state through infrastructure building and facilitating access to economic markets and for the advancement of the family’s economic interests. Connecting those projects to the specific corporations and business interests of the family business networks allowed men within those overlapping familial, business, and political networks to further their own economic interests while simultaneously spearheading projects aimed at improving the economic prospects of the state.

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5 By casting themselves as public servants, such men both placed themselves in a position of servitude, alluding to the work that they were doing for the public (for the state and/or nation), and reinforced the broader conceptualization of the nation/state as members of a large family, with reciprocal obligations of support. Both men and women actively conceptualized politicians as public servants who worked for the public good, with political correspondence in the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War emphasizing the idea of the politician as a public servant. This conceptualization, however, obscured the reality of the actions of these men. Rather than serving the public, as the language would suggest, such men in fact served their broader political family. For more on the work that conceptualizing themselves as public servants did for such men, see chapter three.
This situation was similar to the role of corporations in the early modern period, when corporations were special favors handed out to particular individuals by the state through charters that “provided exclusive purview over particular areas of operation.”

For example, as historian Christine Desan reveals, during the early modern period, the English government passed off authority for making money to private, specially chartered banks. In the context of the early national United States, Brian Phillips Murphy follows a community of entrepreneurs in New York to demonstrate that personal relationships were instrumental in the decision to issue corporate charters (particularly those for banks or improvement companies) to particular companies by state legislatures.

Richard White’s *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* provides a key touchstone for understanding this dichotomy in relation to railroads, albeit in a little later period. He argues that the transcontinentals show that railroads, money, empires, and nation-building were interconnected and cannot be easily disconnected from each other. White also highlights how speculation on railroads

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8 For an examination of the relationships of particular individuals in receiving corporate charters from the state government in the early national period (and the subsequent passing of authority to “private” corporations), see Murphy, *Building the Empire State*.
in the later nineteenth century ran wild and failure was rampant. For White, the entrepreneurs who controlled the transcontinentals were primarily interested in profit, exploited the markets for their own benefit, and gained success at the expense of their companies. Like White’s entrepreneurs, elite families like the Camerons used the government to further their own economic interests, while having a profound effect on the development of public policy and economic development within the state. In the case of North Carolina in particular, however, men such as Duncan Cameron and the others involved truly believed they were working for the public good. And, although they also stood to gain immense profits from the railroads, improved transportation would serve the public good.

The men in the Cameron family turned their attention to internal improvements in the 1810s. In 1819, increased efforts at internal improvement in North Carolina began when the General Assembly’s Committee on Internal Improvement, chaired by Archibald Murphey, submitted a report detailing plans to create a system of canals to make rivers within North Carolina navigable for the transportation of goods and people.

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This report set the precedent for the state of North Carolina overseeing efforts at internal improvement through rivers, canals, roads, and railroads. The report argued that “Individual Capital is insufficient” for such projects, which “require the resources of the State […].”

The dual interests and goals of members of this committee began with the state’s earliest efforts to support internal improvement. A report sent to the committee by the Cape Fear Navigation Company contained a list of the company’s proprietors. Included in this list was Archibald himself, along with Duncan Cameron (who would succeed Archibald as chair of the committee) and his brother John A. Cameron.

North Carolina did subscribe to stock in several of these companies, providing funding to improve navigation on important rivers and their tributaries, whether by clearing the river, widening the river, or digging canals. The efforts to make the Cape Fear River (and its tributaries) navigable from the interior part of the state to the coast are emblematic of the work—and challenges—of these companies. After Archibald’s report, the state subscribed to $15,000 in stock in the Cape Fear Navigation Company with the goal of clearing from the mouth of the river to as far as possible inland. They then offered $25,000 more if the company agreed to be placed under the authority of the Board of Internal Improvements. With these funds, the Cape Fear Navigation Company

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10 A View of the Internal Improvements Contemplated by the Legislature of North Carolina, August 10, 1819, Cameron Family Papers #133, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Hereafter cited as Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC).

11 Report, The Treasurer of the Cape Fear Navigation Company, To the Committee on Internal Improvement, Legislature of North Carolina, December 1, 1819, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
cleared the river from Wilmington to Fayetteville, opening it for steamboat travel. Past Fayetteville, however, the company stalled, unable to successfully complete construction on the multiple canals necessary to work around the falls on the upper portion of the river. By the mid-1830s, only the Roanoke and Cape Fear Companies were still active and successful. But, like the Cape Fear, the Roanoke only completed a portion of its intended improvements: the upper portion of the river linking the town of Weldon to Virginia.

The canal companies were unable to fully meet the need for improved transportation for the same reasons they were necessary: North Carolina had neither good port cities nor navigable rivers. Beginning in the 1830s, men in positions of power increasingly viewed railroads as the best choice for creating infrastructure to enhance the transportation of people and goods to markets and increase the profits and exports of North Carolina itself. Internal Improvements Conventions held in 1833

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12 Alan D. Watson, “Battling ‘Old Rip;” Internal Improvements and the Role of State Government in Antebellum North Carolina,” The North Carolina Historical Review 77, no. 2, (April 2000), 192. Watson explains that efforts to improve navigation on other rivers were largely unsuccessful. In fact he states that by the mid-1830s, only the Roanoke (which had successfully cooperated with the state of Virginia to improve river navigation between the two states) and the Cape Fear remained active. In The Wilmington & Raleigh Rail Road Company, James C. Burke highlights a problem with the Roanoke Navigation Company: though a successful investment, it most benefitted Norfolk, not commercial towns in North Carolina. Burke, The Wilmington & Raleigh Rail Road Company, 23.
15 The turn to railroads in North Carolina was part of a larger project of railroad building in the United States. For the southern context, see: Aaron W. Marris, Railroads in the Old South: Pursuing Progress in a Slave Society, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). On New England, see: John Lauritz Larson, Bonds of Enterprise: John Murray Forbes and Western Development in America’s Railway Age, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Michael J. Connolly, Capitalism, Politics, and Railroads in Jacksonian New
recommended to the General Assembly that two railroad systems should be built in order to better serve the transportation of people and goods, one running north-south and one running east-west.\textsuperscript{16} Bills in the General Assembly to grant charters of incorporation to railroads were sent through the Committee on Internal Improvement. The directors of the chartered railroad companies also submitted reports to the General Assembly (and sometimes directly to the committee) detailing the company’s accounts and expenses for the year—a requirement written into many charters.

After forming the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road Company, family members’ positions in the General Assembly, and on the Internal Improvement Committee in particular, helped obtain an act of incorporation to officially charter the corporation and allow them to begin selling shares. In the following years, there was a constant push and pull between familial and public control of the company.

On December 21, 1835, the General Assembly ratified \textit{An Act to Incorporate the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road Company}, authorizing the company’s commissioners to open books and sell shares in the company in order to raise the necessary capital to build a

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\textsuperscript{16} Burke, \textit{The Wilmington & Raleigh Rail Road Company}, 9.
railroad between Raleigh and Gaston, a town on the Roanoke River near North Carolina’s border with Virginia. Taking the railroad to Gaston provided the possibility of connecting with markets in Virginia and elsewhere. The commissioners of the company included George Mordecai, Duncan Cameron (who was then the president of the Bank of the State of North Carolina), and William Haywood, Jr. The act, authored and signed by William, detailed the duties and rights of the company to sell a certain number of shares, buy land, and build the railroad. Additionally, the company’s president was required to submit a report of the company’s annual receipts and expenses to the General Assembly each year during the first week of December. The General Assembly specifically retained the right to revoke the company’s charter if the Assembly decided it had been violated. Although the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road received no funding from the state government, the state retained a measure of control, even if it appeared to be an illusion, with men like William serving both as commissioner of the railroad and in the state legislature in positions of power over the railroad.

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17 Will H. Haywood, Jun. S.H.C.; W.D. Moseley, S.S., “An Act to Incorporate the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road Company,” Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette, Tuesday, January 12, 1836; Issue 9. This requirement and the authority to revoke the charter were common elements of the corporate charters authorized by state legislatures at this time.

18 Robert Richard discusses a similar situation in banking in North Carolina during and following the Panic of 1819 and the ensuing depression. Members of the Cameron family network were involved in banks in multiple capacities—as stockholders, debtors, bank directors, borrowers, and legislators. See: Robert S. Richard, “‘This Monster Feeding Upon Our Vitals’: Bank Wars and Hard Times in North Carolina” (paper presented at the Triangle Early American History Seminar, Durham, NC, September 23, 2016).
Connections to other institutions of government helped as well. One of the most prominent figures in the Cameron family network, state Supreme Court Justice Thomas Ruffin, wrote an opinion in a case that determined the right of railroads—and the Raleigh and Gaston in particular—to obtain land through eminent domain in North Carolina. Thomas’s business interests were firmly tied to the interests of the other men involved, even if he was not directly invested in the company. His opinion in the 1837 case *Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road v. Davis* argued for the railroad’s right of eminent domain, stating that the railroad corporation was “constituted to effect a public benefit, by means of a road” with “The land needed for its construction […] taken by the public for the public use, and not merely for the private advantage of individuals.”

These men continued to call upon the state government for assistance as financial needs arose, threatening their economic network with the danger of failure. During the first several years, the corporation relied on the credit of the family behind it. When that credit (and the corporation itself) was in danger of failing, family members mobilized the state of North Carolina, incorporating its credit and financial support into their own while retaining a large measure of control over the corporation. In the report of the president and board of directors of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road to the first annual

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stockholders’ meeting in 1837, the president, George Mordecai, stated “An effort was made during the last Session of our Legislature, to procure a subscription of $200,000 on the part of the State, to our Rail-Road, which was unsuccessful.”

Statements such as George’s followed specific cultural forms—which were common in familial, business, and political correspondence—to call out both the state and specific family members in the General Assembly for failing to fulfill their obligations of reciprocal support. This approach reminded them that inaction on their behalf endangered the credit of the network as a whole. These statements were ever present in familial, business, and political correspondence, with family members often admonishing others for not fulfilling the different obligations and expectations of their relationship, endangering the family’s credit and reputation. Reports such as this one followed similar conventions—emphasizing the reciprocal obligations that came with membership within a family and making failures to fulfill those obligations publicly known.

The company continued to lobby to maximize support from North Carolina—while remaining under the family’s control. A year later, with Duncan Cameron as

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21 For a detailed examination of such statements in familial correspondence, see chapter one. For the presence and use of such statements in business correspondence, see chapter two. For such statements in political correspondence, see chapter three. Because such correspondence was shared with other family members, friends, and other individuals, such statements were public declarations of individual family members’ failures to support others within their family, ensuring that they would not do so in the future.
president, the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road Company updated the General Assembly on the progress made on constructing the railroad—and asked for more money to complete construction. Duncan argued that the completion of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road was essential for the benefit of the capital city of Raleigh, reminding the state of the economic necessity of internal improvement. He stated that after the Assembly chartered the Raleigh and Gaston in 1835, they granted charters for other railroads in which “the State engaged by law to subscribe and pay for two-fifths of the stock in the several corporations, provided three-fifths of the stock in such corporations should be subscribed and paid for by individuals.” The company’s directors and president felt that, as “pioneers in this great branch of Internal Improvement,” the Assembly should give them the same consideration and become major stockholders—particularly since at this point, the Raleigh and Gaston was entirely funded by private sources. Because many of the same men involved in the Raleigh and Gaston backed these other railroads as well, their success in obtaining some sort of financial support in those cases made asking for financial support for the Raleigh and Gaston a reasonable expectation—something that they both could and should do.22

Duncan’s letter reveals the ways in which public policy and private interests blended together in antebellum North Carolina, resulting in a constant ebb and flow of

22 “To the Honorable the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina,” Raleigh, November 27, 1838, Broadsides & Ephemera Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
public control over corporations. Like all corporations during this period, the state legislature chartered the Raleigh and Gaston for the public good and retained the power to revoke said charter upon its violation. Men like Duncan called upon their political (and business) family members in the legislature to receive the charter and form the company as a private corporation—limiting state control while maximizing state support. Yet, as Duncan’s letter shows, not quite three years after receiving its charter, the company requested that the state of North Carolina either become a two-fifths shareholder; let the company use its credit through issuing state bonds in the amount of $500,000, with six percent annual interest; or guarantee the payment of bonds issued by the company for the same amount.\textsuperscript{23} With this request, the Raleigh and Gaston was, as Duncan mentioned, simply following the precedent set by other railroad companies in the three years since their charter was issued. The Raleigh and Gaston had been established to be entirely privately funded, while railroad companies chartered after the Raleigh and Gaston had the benefit of funds from the state of North Carolina—and North Carolina’s credit backing them.

Even after North Carolina endorsed the company’s bonds as Duncan and the company requested, the Raleigh and Gaston continued to lobby for increased financial support from the state. Just two years later, on December 4, 1840, the Raleigh and Gaston published a memorial to the General Assembly that asked for direct financial aid

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.

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from the state of North Carolina. This memorial revealed that the state had endorsed
$500,000 of the company’s bonds, and the company’s property had been mortgaged to
the state to complete the railroad. Although the railroad was completed and running,
profits were not sufficient for the company to pay back the state. Because the Raleigh
and Gaston still had not received direct financial aid from the state government through
subscription as had other companies, the company appealed to the Assembly for more
aid. As with the 1838 open letter from the company to the Assembly, the company
emphasized the railroad’s benefit to the state and asked for $300,000 in public funding to
make necessary improvements to the railroad.24 This time, the state succumbed to the
pressure. In January 1841, the Assembly passed an act that funded the Raleigh and
Gaston in the sum of $300,000. This act entitled the state to as much of the profits of the
railroad “as shall be sufficient to pay semi-annually the interest which may accrue on
said Bonds, until the final redemption and payment of the principal of said Bonds.”25
The act also ordered the state treasurer to cover the debt if the company failed to pay,
stating that this was necessary “in order to protect the honor and faith of the State, and
to preserve the credit of North Carolina.”26 This statement echoed the reciprocal
obligations of support—and trust—that defined relationships in family economic

24 S.F. Patterson, Pres’t., “Memorial of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road Company,” Raleigh Register and
North Carolina Gazette, Tuesday, December 8, 1840; Issue 99, col C.
25 An Act to Secure the State Against Any and Every Liability Incurred for the Raleigh & Gaston Rail Road Company,
and for the Relief of the Same, January 12, 1841, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
26 Ibid.
networks. The investment of North Carolina in this company (and others like it) was clear, as was the influence of the economic network—and the importance of ensuring its credit.

The economic networks of the men behind the railroad corporations overlapped with the men in the General Assembly and other governmental positions. Because these networks involved virtually every prominent businessman and politician in North Carolina in some way, their success or failure became important to the very economy of the state. The state’s economy would either be well-served by the success or potentially fatally harmed by the failure of the economic networks supporting projects like the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road. After all, in the webs of credit and debt that elite families built, if one person failed, the entire network could go down. The overlap meant that specific interests could influence the Assembly to financially support the corporations through funding and guaranteeing the corporation’s bonds in order to serve the internal improvement and best interests of North Carolina. The Raleigh and Gaston, however, remained heavily funded by private individuals within the network. In March 1841, both Duncan Cameron and Thomas Bennehan signed individual bonds of $12,000 and $10,000, respectively, to the state of North Carolina for the Raleigh and Gaston. In April,
Duncan, William Boylan, and George Mordecai jointly signed a $5,000 bond to North Carolina for the company.27

These economic networks began to challenge the dichotomy between public and private interests through the inclusion of North Carolina’s institutions of government as a member. In light of the potential damage to the network’s credit if the railroad failed, the inclusion of the state of North Carolina served as a guarantee for individual members’ credit—and to shore up their network. Whether or not this was due to the political work of network members within state government, the result was the same.

The subsequent appeals by the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road for public funding reveal how the men behind these corporations capitalized on this blurring of boundaries, emphasizing the railroad’s benefit to North Carolina to obtain funding and the backing of the state’s credit. The state’s credit was absolutely crucial, given the precariousness and pervasiveness of the economic networks of those men involved with the railroad. The failure of these networks and the corporations they backed had the potential to harm the state’s economy. This situation explains why the General

27 Bond of Duncan Cameron to State of North Carolina for $12,000, March 23, 1841; Bond of Thomas Bennehan to State of North Carolina for $10,000, March 30, 1841; Bond of Duncan Cameron, William Boylan, and George Mordecai to State of North Carolina for $5,000, April 1841, all in Folder 2146, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC. To put these figures into modern terms, in 2015, the relative value of $12,000 from 1841 would be $336,000. I arrived at these estimates by using a purchasing power calculator on measuringworth.com which multiplied the original amount by the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Increase between 1841 and 2015. For more on how to measure worth of an item for a particular time period and the difficulties involved in doing so, see Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, “Explaining the Measures of Worth,” MeasuringWorth, 2012. http://www.measuringworth.com/worthmeasures.php, accessed September 29, 2016.
Assembly ordered the state treasurer to cover the debts of the Raleigh and Gaston if the company failed to pay. It also helps to explain why the purchase of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road by North Carolina was authorized in 1845—and how a private corporation came to be fully subsumed under public authority and control. While during the first few years, the family network maintained a majority of power over the corporation by limiting state control while maximizing state support, this arrangement stopped working when the continued failures of the company began to reflect badly on the state, who had granted its charter to better the public good.

Because of these failures, the state of North Carolina took full control of the corporation to better serve the public good, working to stabilize the corporation and make it profitable, ensuring its own credit in the process. In 1845, the General Assembly approved the foreclosure of the mortgage of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road Company and authorized the governor, on behalf of the state, to bid $300,000 on the road and other property of the company. As several letters to the editor at the Weekly Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette in May 1846 attest, Governor William Graham


purchased the Raleigh and Gaston on behalf of North Carolina. The private railroad corporation was now a public entity, fully owned by the state. The report of the commissioners of the Raleigh and Gaston to the General Assembly in March 1847 reveals the extent of the state’s control of the railroad. The board of commissioners which took control on January 1, 1846, was organized by the governor, treasurer, and the comptroller, and the railroad’s profits went directly to the state’s coffers, at least for a few years.31 Even as the state of North Carolina legally took control of the corporation, the families continued to have a measure of influence. William, after all, was a prominent member of the Cameron family’s political network.

Just a short time later, the General Assembly again ensured a greater measure of state control over a private corporation through the charter of a different railroad—the North Carolina Rail Road. Three years after William Graham bought the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road on behalf of North Carolina, the General Assembly passed an act incorporating the North Carolina Rail Road Company. Commissioners included George Mordecai and three previous governors—John Morehead, William Graham, and

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31 Wesley Hollister, Pres’t., “Legislative Documents: Report of the Commissioners of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road,” Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette, Tuesday, March 16, 1847, Issue 22, col A. Interestingly, at least Hollister, who was chosen as president of the railroad, does not seem to have been previously connected to the railroad.
Edward Dudley. After a third of the necessary stock subscriptions were raised and at least $500,000 actually received, the charter authorized and required the Board of Internal Improvement of North Carolina to buy $2 million of stock in the company on the state’s behalf. After this purchase, the board would “appoint the number of directors in said company in proportion to the stock subscribed, who shall be appointed by the Governor, by and with the advice and consent of his council, and removed in like manner.” By ensuring the charter was written in this way, the individual members of the network were also able to exert a measure of control—this time over their own economic futures. At this point, Charles Manly, the brother-in-law of William H. Haywood, Jr. (who had authored the original charter and served as one of the initial commissioners for the Raleigh and Gaston), was the governor. The control over some of the directors of the North Carolina Rail Road by the governing institutions of the state was largely an illusion. The family still had power—and would likely continue to do so.

The charter of the North Carolina Rail Road also addressed the goal of re-establishing the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road, then fully owned by North Carolina, as a private corporation. Section forty-five of the act stated that “for the purpose of putting

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33 “An Act to Incorporate the North Carolina Rail Road Company,” *The Weekly Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette*, Wednesday, March 21, 1849; Issue 34, col A.
the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road in good and complete order […] and for the further purpose of reviving the late Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road Company,” the former stockholders of the company (with George Mordecai specifically listed) were formed into a “body politic and corporate” upon the passage of an act by the General Assembly to incorporate the company.34 The Assembly retained “the power and authority at any future session to establish, regulate, and control the intercourse between the North Carolina Rail Road and the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road, so as best to secure to the public an easy and convenient passage of persons and property.”35 As with state control of railroads in efforts of internal improvement, state authority was asserted to ensure the transportation of people, property, and goods. Safeguarding the convenient transportation of goods to markets both within North Carolina and to markets outside the state would help improve the state’s economy (especially in terms of exports) and the credit and economic situation of major economic networks within North Carolina.

Two years later in 1851, the General Assembly ratified an act incorporating the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road Company as a private corporation once again—with continued state involvement. The charter explicitly stated that this company was “wholly unconnected with the company lately existing by the same name.”36 But, many of the men authorized to form the company and sell shares, including Duncan Cameron,

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 An Act to Incorporate the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road Company, ratified Jan. 29, 1851, in Clark, History of the Raleigh & Gaston Rail Road Company, 76.
William Boylan, and George Mordecai (who by that time had succeeded Duncan as president of the State Bank) were the same men involved in the previous Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road. For the first ninety days, stockholders of the original Raleigh and Gaston received preference for buying stock in the company. The company’s profits would be split: half to the stockholders and half to the state of North Carolina.\(^\text{37}\) The following year, the Assembly passed an amended charter entitling the state of North Carolina to control over three directors of the company, appointed annually by the board of internal improvements.\(^\text{38}\) This amendment marked a departure from the previous charters of the Raleigh and Gaston; this time, the state government insured that it would maintain more control over the company, much as it had just a few years previously with the North Carolina Rail Road.

The legal documents surrounding the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road reveal that family members successfully worked both as individual stockholders and as agents of the state to utilize the state’s credit to restore both the network’s credit and its control over the railroad corporation. The connection of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road and the North Carolina Rail Road in Raleigh during the 1850s fostered commercial expansion, just as the original efforts at internal improvements within the state had

\(^\text{37}\) Ibid., 75-84.
\(^\text{38}\) *Amended Charter of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road Company: Passed by the General Assembly, At the Session of 1852*, (Raleigh: Office of the “Southern Weekly Post,” 1853), North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
intended. Families furthered economic development while building the infrastructure of the state, stabilizing their economic network in the process.

While the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road and the family network involved in it is simply one example of the work of elite families in the project of state/nation building through internal improvement—and one of the most explicit in terms of the connections between the family and institutions of state government because of the eventual state buyout, other railroads followed similar processes. The Cameron family network heavily invested in a number of similar corporations, all of which were aimed at internal improvement and furthering the economic well-being of the state. Every railroad and canal corporation had to follow the same process as the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road did to obtain a charter of incorporation from the state legislature. Families’ joint investment in such corporations highlights the tendency in the antebellum United States to connect the family’s economic interests with the public good.

After Duncan Cameron’s death in 1853, members of his family continued their involvement in state politics, efforts at internal improvement, and other business ventures through the antebellum period. John Morehead served as president of the North Carolina Rail Road—the railroad whose charter had included the plan to re-incorporate the Raleigh and Gaston. Others such as John Kirkland and George Mordecai

were also stockholders in the North Carolina Rail Road. Individuals such as John Kirkland, George Mordecai, and John Morehead, and others involved learned from the successes, mistakes, and outright failures of the Raleigh and Gaston. In fact, William Graham stated outright that the failures of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road had not been to the extent of those in other states, saying:

I cannot here forbear to mention, for the consolation of those among us who take so much to heart the misfortunes and blunders of the old Raleigh and Gaston Railroad, that the New York and Erie Railroad, from inexperience and bad management in its early history, proved a dead failure, at a loss of more than six millions of dollars, one-half of which fell upon the State and has never been repaid: or rather, has been relinquished as a bounty to a new company, who took it in hand under better auspices for carrying it through to completion. But that it has now been finished and equipped at a cost of seventeen millions more, and promises to be paying stock at the whole sum of twenty-three millions.

William’s statement highlights how these men justified state involvement in railroad corporations through internal improvement. By emphasizing the eventual recuperation and success of the New York and Erie Railroad under the auspices of a new corporation despite its early failure and loss of more than six million dollars, William drew an explicit analogy to the experiences of the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road. Despite its failures, the Raleigh and Gaston would succeed under the newly incorporated company


(of the same name) just as the New York and Erie did, paying back the state and making significant profits for all those invested.

This interdependent relationship continued throughout the antebellum period. In 1855 Paul Cameron invested $2000 in the North Carolina Rail Road Company. A year later, the governor commissioned Paul as director of the North Carolina Rail Road on the state’s behalf for twelve months. Much as with business correspondence, this commission emphasized the trust the Board had in Paul to do the job—and do it without harming the credit or reputation of the state. His commission was extended for another twelve months in July 1857. During this period, Paul also served in the North Carolina Senate. In 1861, he was elected president of the North Carolina Rail Road, and his involvement in railroads and efforts at internal improvement in North Carolina continued through the Civil War and Reconstruction. Throughout this period, both of Paul’s sisters—Margaret and Mildred—heavily invested in railroad stocks, including the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road, the North Carolina Rail Road, and the Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad.

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42 Note, Office NC Rail Road Co to Paul Cameron, June 4, 1855, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
43 Commission of Paul Cameron as Director on behalf of the State of North Carolina in the North Carolina Rail Road Company, June 15, 1856, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
44 Commission of Paul Cameron as Director on behalf of the State of North Carolina in the North Carolina Rail Road Company, July 7, 1857, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
45 For evidence of Margaret’s investments, see: Expenses on Rail Road Contract in which Duncan, Paul, and Margaret Cameron are equally interested, Folder 3663, Volume 125, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC. This contract appears to be for building part of the North Carolina Rail Road. Interestingly, Margaret Cameron was not just an investor in this contract; the expenses listed include a $2000 check directly to her from the Bank of North Carolina as an advancement for the contract. For Mildred’s investments, see: “This
The men and women in the Coles family heavily invested in railroads and canals on the state level in Virginia, just as the men and women in the Cameron family did in North Carolina. Betsy Coles, for example, informed John Rutherfoord in 1836 that with the $2,500 she wanted him to invest for her, “If I would get it, I prefer the Fredricksburg Railroad stock to any other.” Even Edward Coles heavily invested in Virginia railroads, although he lived in Pennsylvania (and not Virginia) at the time. In 1836, he wrote to John Rutherfoord several times about paying the installments on stock he had purchased in the Richmond and Petersburg Rail Road Company. Like with railroads, canals provided the opportunity to facilitate the transportation of goods to markets. Many members of the Coles family chose to invest in those opportunities, particularly as canals provided a more efficient means of transporting goods to and from their home in Albemarle County on Green Mountain. For example, Isaac Coles twice asked John Rutherfoord to pay installments on “the James & Kanawha stock” for him. The James book exhibits a List of M.C.C. bonds, stocks, &c in the care of C. Dewey Esq.,” Folder 3664, Volume 126, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.

46 Elizabeth Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 2, 1836. (Included in letter from S. F. Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord), Box 1, Folder 4 of the John Rutherfoord Papers Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as John Rutherfoord Papers, DU).

47 For one example among many, see Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 27, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4 of the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.

48 See, for example, Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, November 24, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4, and Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, June 23, 1837, Box 1, Folder 5, both in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. John Coles made a similar request of John Rutherfoord, asking him to “pay my quota to the I&K Co that fell due on the 25th of Jany last.” John Coles’s handwriting leaves something to be desired, and the “I” in “I&K Co” may well be a “J,” which would refer to the James and Kanawha Company. See John Coles to John
and Kanawha Company was a canal begun in the late eighteenth century that was intended to run from the Kanawha River in the western counties of Virginia, connect with the James River in Richmond, and continue to the coast, making transportation of goods and people quicker, easier, and cheaper. Because the Kanawha was a tributary of the Ohio River, a canal that connected the James with the Kanawha would offer access to the Mississippi River and its markets.

Multiple letters from different family members to John Rutherfoord reveal that men and women in the Coles family looking to make a profit also invested significant sums in city loans. Such decisions were not always solely aimed at making a profit. Rather, men like John Rutherfoord were also invested in the ideological project that the city loans represented—bettering the city itself. Even on a local level, family and government were intertwined. John, who was incredibly active in both state and local politics in Richmond, served as a center for these familial investments, furthering both his (and his families’) economic interests while investing in the growth and development of his city. Isaac Coles desired to invest in Richmond city loan, as “a permanent investment for my little Girl” and asked for John’s advice in December 1836. Then, in

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Rutherfoord, February 15, 1837, Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. John Majewski states in *A House Dividing* that Isaac, John, and Tucker Coles were three of the company’s top five stockholders in Albemarle County. Majewski, *A House Dividing*, 34. Given that fact, it seems likely that John Coles was, in fact, talking about the James and Kanawha Company.

* For more on the James and Kanawha Company and other projects of internal improvement in Virginia, see Majewski, *A House Dividing*. 

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June of the following year, he informed John that a debt of $5,450 owed to him had been deposited in the Farmers Bank of Virginia and that “This money is intended for your city soon, if I hear from you that there will be any certainty of making the investment in any short time [...].”

John Coles similarly wrote to John Rutherfoord for advice regarding his desire to invest in Richmond city loans. He had heard through his brother Isaac “that $15000 of your corporation loan of Richmond could be bought for 1000 $” and was “tempted to run the risk” because “I can not possibly conceive it is worth so little.” He asked for John Rutherfoord’s advice, however, because he was hesitant to “add so largely to my present investment of $6000 if your city is becoming bankrupt.” In fact, the Coles family often left it up to John Rutherfoord to decide in which city or corporation to invest (and tie the family’s interests to). For example, Betsy Coles told John, “between the Petersburg Stock & city Loan [...] I wish you to exercise your own judgement doing the best for me you can,” although her brother John Coles had advised her to “take at least $1000 in the city loan.” Much as with investments in corporations like railroads, individuals chose to invest in the same stock as members of their family did. In this case, investing in city loans revealed an interest in the improvement and development of a city that was vital to the family’s economic (and political) networks.

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50 Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, December 8, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4, Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, June 23, 1837, Box 1, Folder 5. Both in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
51 John Coles to John Rutherfoord, February 15, 1837, Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
52 Elizabeth Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 2, 1836. (Included in letter from S. F. Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord), Box 1, Folder 4 of the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
As the state capital and an economic center in Virginia, Richmond was a key location for economic transactions and political connections. When the city needed money, families like the Coles family chose to invest in the city—both for the hope of an eventual profit (as Isaac’s comment that his investment would be “a permanent investment for my little Girl” reveals) and for the continued success of the city itself.

Both the Cameron and Coles families also invested heavily in state banks and the Bank of the United States. State banks were chartered through the state legislature in a process extremely similar to the acts required to pass corporate charters. The Bank of the United States underwent a similar process on the federal level. Like with railroad corporations, members of the family network were investors, on the board of directors, and in important positions of power in the government that gave them a measure of control over these banks. At different points in the antebellum period, for example, Thomas Ruffin, Duncan Cameron, and George Mordecai all served as president of North Carolina’s state bank. Other members of the network served in similar positions in different branches of the state bank, while also serving in some capacity in the state government. As historian Naomi Lamoreaux has shown, personal relationships were central to obtaining loans from banks. Similarly, personal relationships became a crucial part not only of obtaining a charter for a bank but also of the ultimate success of a bank. Men leveraged their political connections for the benefit of banks in which they

53 Lamoreaux, *Insider Lending*. 

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were involved. By casting these banks as in the public good, men in elite families were able to ensure public support of the banks—at least in good economic times.

In antebellum North Carolina in particular, family money was firmly tied to the state of North Carolina’s credit.\(^{54}\) Exemplifying these connections, as chairman of the Committee on Internal Improvements in 1817, Archibald Murphey submitted a report to the General Assembly regarding the state bank. The report requested that the state of North Carolina make additional subscriptions of stock in the state banks, enlarge the capital stock of the banks, and create a fund for internal improvements that would consist of this bank stock and stock in companies like those that his family network would later spearhead.\(^{55}\) Further highlighting the entrenchment of family ties within banking, Duncan Cameron had been influential in the establishment of the State Bank of North Carolina just a few years prior. Thomas Ruffin would become president of the State Bank in 1828, immediately followed by Duncan in 1829. During this period, Thomas, Duncan, his brother-in-law Thomas Bennehan, William Boylan, and John Haywood were all directors of the Raleigh branch of the State Bank. When the bank was re-chartered as the Bank of the State of North Carolina in 1834, Duncan was again

\(^{54}\) As Robert Richard has shown, the Bank Wars in North Carolina revealed a situation in which the same men borrowed from the bank, held stock in the bank, and served in positions of power within the bank. See: Robert S. Richard, “‘This Monster Feeding Upon Our Vitals’: Bank Wars and Hard Times in North Carolina” (paper presented at the Triangle Early American History Seminar, Durham, NC, September 23, 2016).

chosen as president, to be followed in 1849 by George Mordecai, his business associate and future son-in-law.

Members of the Coles family’s business and political networks were similarly strategically placed in positions of power in banks. While John Coles Rutherfoord attended school, he stayed with a family member, and his father informed him that, "You may inform Mr. Brockenbrough that his Uncle has been reelected President of the Bank of Virginia." His reelection was despite some “excitement” against him in the state legislature. Members of the Coles family, like other elites during this period, had money in different banks, including the Farmers Bank of Virginia, the Bank of Virginia at Richmond, the Bank of Virginia at Norfolk, and the Bank of Baltimore. They also borrowed money from these same banks, as a letter from Sarah Coles Stevenson to John Rutherfoord regarding Andrew Stevenson’s loan from the Farmers Bank reveals. Different family members also invested in many of these same banks. Betsy Coles, for example, mentioned a dividend from the Farmers Bank in a letter to John Rutherfoord while her brother Edward asked that John sell twenty total shares in the Farmers Bank for him—ten of his own and ten that he had obtained from Betsy. Similarly, in April

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56 John Rutherfoord to John Coles Rutherfoord, January 17, 1841, Box 1, Folder 7, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
57 Sarah Coles Stevenson to John Rutherfoord, November 4, 1834, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
58 Elizabeth Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 2, 1836. (Included in letter from S. F. Rutherfoord to John Rutherfoord), Box 1, Folder 4 of the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, May 15, 1827, Box 1, folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
1837, John Coles wrote a long letter to John Rutherfoord to ask for advice and information on the different banks that he could invest in. He wanted to invest $20,000 in stock in the “new Exchange Bank at Norfolk.”\(^{59}\) As these examples show, the Coles family heavily invested in the same banks from which they obtained loans. As John Rutherfoord’s letter to his son on the re-election of Brockenbrough as president of the Bank of Virginia showed, this overlap did not end at simple investments and loans. Family members held prominent positions of power within the banks, along with their prominent positions within state politics.

The investment the Coles and Camerons in the Bank of the United States reveals a similar situation on the national level. As with the state banks, members of the Cameron family invested in, borrowed from, and served in positions of power in the Bank of the United States. Duncan Cameron’s brother John A. Cameron (who later served as a consul in Vera Cruz, Mexico) was the President of the Fayetteville, North Carolina, branch of the Bank of the United States during the state’s bank wars following the Panic of 1819.\(^{60}\) The Coles family similarly invested in the Bank of the United States. Their connections, however, were more prominent. One of Edward Coles’s close friends—and a member of his political family—was Nicholas Biddle, the President of the Bank of the United States from 1822 to 1836. They regularly corresponded on a

\(^{59}\) John Coles to John Rutherfoord, April 7, 1837, Box 1, Folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.

\(^{60}\) Not all of the members of the wider Cameron family network supported the Bank of the United States. See: Richard, “‘This Monster Feeding Upon Our Vitals.’”
multitude of subjects, personal, business, and political. John Tyler also wrote to John Rutherfoord regarding the national bank while serving as a United States senator. In March 1830, he responded to John Rutherfoord’s inquiry about the future of the national bank. He told him, “as to the course which Congress will pursue in relation to the U. States Bank during its present session, I have to say, that I have not heard a single intimation, so far, thrown out of any intention to intermeddle with the subject. nor do I believe that it is intended by any one to introduce any such measure.” He further informed Rutherfoord that, in his view, once a bill was introduced, “the fate of the Bank will be decided not so much upon its merits, as with the view to the political advancement of some aspiring politician.” The fate of the national bank was a prominent concern for the Coles and Camerons, given the dual nature of their relationship to it.

61 For just a few examples among the voluminous correspondence between Nicholas Biddle and Edward Coles, see Edward Coles to Nicholas Biddle, April 22, 1823; Edward Coles to Nicholas Biddle, September 18, 1823; Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, May 20, 1823; and Nicholas Biddle to Edward Coles, May 26, 1823; All in Series 2: Correspondence; 1807-1875; Edward Coles Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. (Hereafter referred to as Edward Coles Papers, PUL).

62 John Tyler to John Rutherfoord, March 14, 1830, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.

Shortly after John Tyler assumed the presidency in 1841, Rutherfoord and Tyler again corresponded about a national bank, this time focusing on the constitutionality of federally granted charters for corporations. This time, Rutherfoord asked Tyler to think before he sanctioned a bill that would incorporate a bank in the District of Columbia that would have branches in the different states. Rutherfoord argued that “surely, if a National Bank be unconstitutional, (call it by what name you will) the assent of every state in the Union given in the mode proposed, would not amend the constitution.” He told Tyler that he believed that “a bold effort is about to be made to revive the system and principles of Hamilton, - and that it becomes all who would regard themselves as the disciples of the Jeffersonian school, & would defend State Rights against consolidation, to take a decided stand against the encroachments of Federalism, in whatever guise it may assail us.” By mentioning Thomas Jefferson, Rutherfoord attempted to call upon ties of political loyalty to the larger political family of which he and Tyler were a part.\(^4\) Tyler, however, did not agree with Rutherfoord and informed him that he did not see any sustainable objection on constitutional grounds to the incorporation of a bank in the District of Columbia with branches in different states. He then proceeded to list all of the prominent men within their political family who agreed with him: “John W. Eppes, Wm. M. Burrwell, Hugh Lawson White, John C. Calhoun,

\(^4\) John Rutherfoord to John Tyler, June 21, 1841. Box 1, Folder 7, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. Chapter three discusses the familial dynamics of these discussions in greater detail.
[…] Genl Jackson, [and] Martin Van Buren.” He continued, “but I might have stopped with the first name, the son in law of Mr. Jefferson and the rigid and uncompromising advocate of his principles.” This last statement was a direct rebuttal of Rutherfoord’s attempt to influence Tyler’s decision by calling upon the expertise and legacy of Thomas Jefferson in constitutional matters. Although Tyler also called upon kinship ties to Thomas Jefferson to determine the authority to determine questions of constitutional authority, he did so to argue the exact opposite position of Rutherfoord. As Rutherfoord and Tyler’s statements show, family even entered into discussions of constitutional interpretation.

Members of the Coles family also discussed internal improvements on a national level. John Tyler kept John Rutherfoord informed about debates and discussions on internal improvement in Congress while he was a senator during the 1820s and 1830s. In one letter written in December 1827, Tyler discussed the various sentiments of members of Congress and the President on the tariff and projects of internal improvement. He informed Rutherfoord that he found “the prospects before us, bright and cheering” on both regards. Tyler related that

General Jackson himself […] voted for surveys. but I have it from the best authority, next to having receivd it from himself, that he regards the mere employment of the Engineer corps, as essentially different from the using of the

65 John Tyler to John Rutherfoord, June 23, 1841. Box 1, Folder 7, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. For more on Tyler’s presidency, and particularly his stance on a national bank, see Daniel Walker Howe, What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 589-595.
pick-axe and the spade _ and from all that I can learn he is decided indisposed to mess the Tariff further than it has been carried.

Within Congress, even “his ardent advocates” were “in favour of a limited construction of the constitution.” Indeed, “Some, I learn, disdain altogether to road-making however while all, I believe, are oppos’d to an augmentation of the Tariff.”66 Tyler thus informed Rutherfoord that, despite fears about the tariff and federal control over internal improvement, Andrew Jackson (the current president) supported surveys by the Corps of Engineers for projects of internal improvement. His sources within Washington assured him that the President believed that there was a difference between employing the engineers to conduct surveys and federally funding and handling the construction of different projects of internal improvement. As Tyler’s letter reveals, their political family was firmly opposed to the tariff—and to federal control of projects of internal improvement. They believed that such projects should be undertaken on the state level, as with the James and Kanawha Company or the various railroads in which they invested.67

In a more concrete example of involvement in internal improvement on a federal level, Edward Coles was heavily involved in the construction of the Illinois and Michigan Canal. In 1825, when the state legislature approved the initial act to incorporate the Illinois and Michigan Canal Company, Edward, who was then the

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66 John Tyler to John Rutherfoord, December 8, 1827, Box 1, Folder 3. John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
67 Of course, as the 1841 letters regarding the bank showed, Tyler’s position on this matter would seem to shift, while John Rutherfoord’s stayed the same.
governor of Illinois, was named in the act as one of the company’s directors. In 1834, Isaac Coles informed John Rutherfoord that “Edward has joined a Eng Party for Quebec & proposes on his return to take Boston & New York in his way, & to proceed by the lakes Homeward making a survey of the contemplated canal uniting the Illinois with Lake Michigan at Chicago.” The construction of this canal—and Edward’s involvement in it—provides a nice parallel to Duncan Cameron’s involvement in the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road in North Carolina just a few years later. As a former governor of Illinois, Edward still held a certain amount of political power in Illinois, despite no longer living in the state. When the Illinois legislature approved An Act for the Construction of the Illinois and Michigan Canal in February 1835, Edward played a part. The Illinois and Michigan Canal also received a certain amount of support from the United States; Congress granted tracts of land to the state of Illinois to construct the canal. On the surface, this support appears to be a key difference in the constructions of the Illinois and Michigan Canal and the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road. While in both cases the individual state was heavily invested in the company, the Illinois and Michigan Canal necessitated federal involvement. Taken together, the two cases reveal

69 Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, August 18, 1828, Box 1, Folder 3, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
that men like Edward and Duncan, as well as their families, approached states and the federal government similarly.

Elite families identified with municipal, state, and federal governments, incorporating them into their own families in immediate ways. In the post-Revolutionary era, this relationship extended to creating and projecting a specific image of the United States at home and abroad. Families such as the Coles family and the Cameron family tied their vision of the nation to the image of the family that they created in correspondence. By conceptualizing the nation as family, they implied both a sense of trust and of reciprocal obligation of support between its members. Men and women in elite families worked to build an image of the United States at home and abroad that rested upon this conceptualization and would ensure the nation’s own credit.

Family and diplomacy were inextricably intertwined, with elected officials relying on members of their political family for diplomatic missions and posts. In July 1816, James Madison asked Edward Coles to travel to Russia as a special envoy from the President to help solve a diplomatic crisis. James informed Edward, “Circumstances have arisen which make it expedient to forward communications to St. Petersburg by a special hand.” He did not choose Edward solely because they were part of the same political family. Instead, he knew that he could trust Edward to uphold the credit and

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71 James Madison to Edward Coles, July 7, 1816, Folder 6, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
image of the United States because he was family. James Monroe echoed this trust in Edward in a letter that contained the details of his trip to St. Petersburg.\textsuperscript{72} As the third chapter argued, despite their existing familial relationship through James’s marriage to Dolley, James had previously asked Edward to be his private secretary, with the request framed as an invitation to join his family. Edward’s response, while continuing the familial metaphor, revealed the importance of trust within political networks while conflating their family networks with the developing governmental institutions.\textsuperscript{73} After all, who better to trust than a family member, bound to you through reciprocal obligations of support. This trust extended to the realm of diplomacy. When a crisis occurred that threatened the credit of the country, sending a family member to handle the situation ensured that the required image of a united, affectionate—and, more importantly, credit-worthy—family was presented. Projecting this image built a similar reputation for the young nation abroad—a reputation as a country that upholds its obligations, could be trusted to do so, and was worthy of political, economic, and social credit.

Families like the Coles upheld the credit-worthy image of the United States abroad by emphasizing their own affectionate family in letters while serving in diplomatic posts, as when Andrew Stevenson replaced relatives’ names with

\textsuperscript{72} James Monroe to Edward Coles, July 21, 1816, Folder 6, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.  
\textsuperscript{73} Edward Coles to James Madison, January 8, 1810. Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
relationships, changing his wife’s “Bett” into “my dear sister.” Men and women who served in diplomatic posts wrote letters with full recognition that they would be used to publicly establish and maintain their family’s reputation as affectionate, united, and credit-worthy. Because diplomats, their wives, and their families represented the United States, this strategy painted a picture of a family who supported each other emotionally, socially, politically, and economically. As a representative of the United States, the image projected was not just of one’s own family but also of the nation itself.

All these people worked to create an image of the United States as an affectionate family that fulfilled its obligations of support. Given Andrew’s position as Minister to England, it might seem as if his redaction of names was nothing more than routine censoring of diplomatic mail—or at least of mail sent via diplomatic pouch. Yet, Andrew’s censoring of Sarah’s letters to her family reveals something deeper going on. Just as making “my dear Bett” into “my dear sister” created an image of a happy, affectionate family, so he and others created a picture of the United States as a united and affectionate family. For this reason, his decision to leave Sarah’s criticism of President Van Buren in a letter from January 1839, even as she herself explicitly named

24 For one example among many, see: Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, July 19, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1, Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU). Sarah told her sister that in a letter she had written the previous week, Andrew “condemned” “almost every paragraph […] even in the most harmless communications.” For other letters with redacted names, see, Sarah Coles Stevenson to Edward Coles, May 19, 1837, Box 1, Folder 2; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, May 29, 1837, Box 1, Folder 2; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, July 19, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Mrs. Singleton, August 4, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, August 23, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1; all in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.

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him as “Mr. V.B.,” is even more significant than it would seem. In effect, Andrew used his wife’s correspondence with her sister to publicly admonish Martin Van Buren for failing to uphold the reciprocal obligations of family and friendship—and for threatening the reputation not just of the family itself but also of the United States as a whole. In leaving this criticism in, Andrew deployed a similar strategy to the one that women used to ensure adherence to emotional conventions. With the nation conceptualized as family, Andrew used the public nature of familial letters to call out President Van Buren for not supporting him as was his obligation. In the process, he ensured that the president would fulfill his obligations in the future.

This attention to sustaining the image of a united and affectionate family while abroad extended to the family’s image as credit-worthy. Sarah Coles Stevenson answered her sister’s query regarding their financial situation in England saying,

As to his debts here, if he has any, I do not know of them, and I have great faith in his prudence and discretion. Whatever you may have heard to the contrary we have lived with great economy altho’ Mr. Stevenson has endeavoured to preserve his dignity and that of his country; but the salary is totally inadequate, and no one can without ruin remain here long.

With this statement, Sarah assured her sister that they were not going into debt (indeed, they were living “with great economy”). She further assured her sister—and anyone else

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75 For examples of “Betsy” or “Bett” being changed to “Sister,” see Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, July 19, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1, and Sarah Coles Stevenson to Sarah F. Rutherfoord, October 28, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1. For Sarah Stevenson’s critique of Van Buren, see Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, January 12, 1839, Box 2, Folder 1. All in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.

76 Sarah Coles Stevenson to “My dear Sister,” January 2, 1839, box 2, folder 1, in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
who read the letter—that despite living with great economy and care, Andrew Stevenson had continued to “preserve his dignity and that of his country.” This last statement firmly equated the individual’s dignity and credit with the nation’s. Since an individual’s credit could also not be separated from that of his or her family during this period, a statement like Sarah’s reveals the active conceptualization of the nation as family. Additionally, Sarah’s statement that “no one can without ruin remain here long” served as a warning to members of their political family that the salary that Andrew received as Minister was inadequate and could harm the family’s—and, more importantly, the United States’s—credit. Statements like Sarah’s assured anyone who might read the letter that not only was the individual person (in this case, Andrew Stevenson) a man of credit, but also that the family and the nation were similarly credit-worthy.

William Cabell Rives similarly emphasized familial ties in a letter written to lifelong friend and family member John Rutherfoord while serving as Ambassador to France in 1832. He opened by expressing his “grateful assurance” for John’s letter which had assured him that “one of my earliest & most cherished friends” remembered him. He continued, saying that despite their enjoyment of Paris in spring and summer, he and his family still “ardently desire[d] a restoration to our friends & country.” He further assured John that “To see Europe, with every sound-thinking & right-feeling american, is to be better satisfied with his own country, to be more & more proud of it,
to have a loftier conception of its destinies, & to cling to them with a more entric & thorough devotion.” William’s assurances to John about his continued devotion to his country echo the assurances of devotion and affection in familial correspondence. Such assurances of devotion in familial correspondence served to reinforce the intimate ties binding family together, further entrenching the image of a happy, affectionate, and united family that was worthy of credit. By describing his devotion to the United States in such terms, William firmly equated family with nation, conceptualizing the nation as family in order to make sense of the world and ensure continued credit both for himself, his family, and the United States. Similarly, William’s mention of his “grateful assurance” for John’s previous letter alluded to the fulfillment of reciprocal obligations in correspondence—reciprocal obligations that extended to economic and political support, as well as emotional. By showing that he was fulfilling his reciprocal obligations to his family (at least in terms of returning correspondence) in the same letter where he expressed multiple assurances of devotion to and pride in his nation, William slipped between metaphors of family and nation, equating one with the other. This slippage built a specific image of a united and affectionate family and nation whose members were bound together by reciprocal obligations of support. By creating this image, he assured all who read the letter that his credit—and that of his family and nation—could be trusted.

77 William Cabell Rives to John Rutherfoord, February 8, 1822, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
Examining the interdependent relationship between family business and political networks and institutions of government in the nineteenth-century United States reveals the limitations of governing authority. Men in elite families used their images as public servants to cast their families’ interests as the public good, shaping government at the state and federal levels to their own interests while physically building the infrastructure that supported the country. By emphasizing the necessity of internal improvement for economic growth, elite men convinced governing institutions to invest directly in their corporations, incorporating the institutions of government at the local, state, and federal levels as an active member of their family network and making their corporations too big to fail. In turn, like with the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road, the government’s investment shored up the credit of the corporation and the network as a whole, stabilizing the economic network and creating an interdependent relationship between the family and the government. When constitutional issues concerning corporations arose, men and women in elite families reached to connections with prominent political family members to support their positions—positions that would ultimately benefit both the family’s business and political endeavors. Similarly, the heavy investments of members of the Coles family in city represented both the potential for profit and the potential to better the cities in which they lived and conducted business. During this period, elite families identified so closely with their states and the federal government that they folded the institutions of government into their families.

The image of family that grounded elite whites in their economic and political networks could not accommodate conflict of any sort. Problems could signal to outsiders that the family could not be trusted. When cracks began to appear, families stepped in immediately to mend or obscure those faults. Faced with such situations as mental health issues, illegitimacy, marital separation, domestic abuse, duels, and the violence of slavery, elite families worked to hide or deny the threats that conflicts posed to their happy, affectionate image. Whether by separating from the offending family member, justifying dueling as a defense of honor, or rationalizing the violence of slavery, elite families consistently strategized to deny conflict when it appeared. Because families consistently hid any type of conflict, they never actually confronted or addressed it when it arose.

It happened so often that elite families developed strategies to address common problems. One of those problems was mental health, which was common but highly stigmatized. Faced with family members suffering from mental health issues, families closed ranks, making sure those people received the treatment they needed, while trying to remove them from public view. Elite families were particularly well-situated for this strategy. Not only did they have the financial resources necessary for extended care, but their widespread networks also allowed them access to reliable care in other locales.
Domestic violence posed a similar threat. Families could not possibly be understood as united and affectionate if one member was physically abusing another. When it happened, they physically separated the offender from the victim, sometimes obtaining a separation if necessary. The point was to expel the offender from the family. By doing so, they indicated publicly that they could—and more importantly would—take care of members of their family to ensure the happiness and well-being of all.

Responses to the violence of slavery and domestic violence reveal just how aggressively these families maintained their boundaries, denying violence against the people they enslaved and denying those enslaved men and women any type of familial relationship. Whites violently punished enslaved men and women, re-captured and re-enslaved runaways, and separated them from their own families by sale or lease. The language that elite white men and women used to describe these instances of violence projected an illusion of choice on the part of enslaved men and women. This illusion both denied the legitimacy of enslaved families and positioned the white men and women as “good” masters who took care of these enslaved men and women despite their bad decisions.

Families rallied to support relations with mental health issues. Both the Coles and the Camerons had family members who were committed to insane asylums during the antebellum era: Duncan Cameron’s niece Anna Cameron Kirkland, Richard Singleton’s sister Mary McRa, and Richard’s nephew (and Mary’s son) Powell McRa. In
the early 1840s, Mary McRa’s behavior elicited comment not just from family members but also from neighbors. Sarah Coles Stevenson informed one of her brothers in 1842 that Mary was “the most miserable of human beings.” She went on to say that Mary refused to see any of her brother’s family except for him, something that Sarah believed was only “to torment him.” Furthermore, when Mary found out that Sarah, and others of the Singletons’ family and friends, were visiting Richard and Rebecca Singleton in South Carolina, she began to send for Richard “5 or 6 times an hour, and last night, sent for him at midnight.” This behavior drew attention to Mary’s mental health both among their family and among their neighbors. In fact, Sarah explained to her brother that “The neighbors say she is the victim of her violent passions and is insane.”

When the issues deepened and institutionalization became the best option, family members mobilized to maintain their families' image. Richard Singleton committed Mary to an asylum in Philadelphia where Edward Coles lived and could help watch out for her. Edward fulfilled his duties. He regularly paid her expenses at the asylum with the assumption that Richard would reimburse him. In turn, Richard could visit his sister when seeing Edward in Philadelphia. In September 1852, for example, Richard planned a visit to Philadelphia to see his “unfortunate Sister, Mrs. McRa” and “thank Mr. Edward Coles in Person for his kind care and attention to her, and for the very many services he has been pleased to render me, on her account[…].” But, he wrote his son Matthew from Flat Rock, North Carolina, to tell him that he found himself unable to take on a journey of that distance, “in addition to the Journey from there Home” because of his health. Two years after Richard’s sudden death in a train accident in 1852, Edward wrote to Matthew to inquire who he should draw on in order to pay Mary’s expenses at the asylum for the quarter, revealing that the family—and extended family—continued to provide for Mary’s care. Providing for Mary’s needs by sending her to an asylum in Philadelphia kept her under wraps. At the same time, this strategy

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2 Richard Singleton to Matthew R. Singleton, September 10, 1852, Folder 51 of the Singleton Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. (Hereafter cited as Singleton Family Papers, SCL). Richard informed his son that he could not make the journey “prostrated as I am.”

3 Edward Coles to Matthew R. Singleton, June 16, 1854, in Folder 53 of the Singleton Family Papers, SCL. Throughout these years, different Coles family members continued to discuss Mary McRa’s situation. In December 1846, Sarah Coles Stevenson discussed Mary’s situation in a letter to Marion (Singleton) Deveaux, revealing an intimate knowledge of Mary’s situation, despite living in Virginia. See: Sarah Coles Stevenson to Marion Deveaux, December 26, 1846, Box 3, Folder 9, Singleton Family Papers, Manuscript Division Library of Congress. (Hereafter cited as Singleton Family Papers, LC).
completely separated her from the support system of her family and friends—all of whom remained in South Carolina, 600 miles away.\(^4\)

The Cameron family—and Duncan Cameron in particular—also sent a family member to an asylum for treatment. Anna Cameron Kirkland was committed to the Western State Hospital in Staunton, Virginia, twice: first in 1846 and again in 1850.\(^5\) After her husband Alexander Kirkland’s death in 1843, Anna’s behavior grew increasingly erratic. According to Jean Bradley Anderson, the family eventually asked Duncan Cameron for advice, who recommended that she go to an institution for treatment.\(^6\)

While she was in the asylum in Virginia receiving treatment, Anna regularly wrote to her uncle Duncan. In one letter, she informed Duncan that his “prophecy” that she would recover was “at length fulfilled as this day I rise from a bed of sickness & suffering shorn of much physical strength but able I hope humbly to indulge a hope of salvation.” She continued to tell him of her mental and emotional state, saying, “I can sometimes rejoice with joy unspeakable & full of glory tho at others I confess I am harassed with gloomy doubts & fears” but she believed that the day was near that she

\(^4\) Her son, Powell, who had been committed to an asylum in Boston, died around the same time that Mary entered the asylum in Philadelphia. Her daughter Arabella died in childhood. Both of her parents were dead at this point, as was her sister Harriet. Many of her sister’s children had left South Carolina for Alabama in the intervening years. Richard Singleton and his family were the only family she had left.

\(^5\) For evidence of this, see: Admission Register, Western State Hospital, in the Records of Western State Hospital, 1825-2000. Accession number 41253, Box v0247, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. Anna was patient number 504 and 807 in the register.

would be able to leave the asylum, just as Duncan had promised her. Later in the letter, she expressed her appreciation that he had sent her to the asylum and informed him, “I understand that patients sometimes blame their friends for bringing them here, but I have no feeling of the kind, on the contrary shall favor bless the day that brought me to this ‘house of refuge.’” Perhaps the most interesting part of the letter, however, is Anna’s confession that she knew that although “some regard it as disgraceful to have been an inmate of an asylum,” she did not believe that “a mental malady is more disgraceful than a physical one” because both came from God. While she did not believe that mental health issues were disgraceful, she did have “one shadow of regret” about being in the asylum—she worried that “it should eventually injure my children.” In this case, Anna was talking specifically about the fear of her institutionalization weakening her authority over her children. Her statement, however, also revealed her knowledge that mental illness could stigmatize the entire family, harming their image and credit. Unfortunately, while Anna was able to leave the asylum, she was recommitted in 1850,
and after Duncan Cameron’s death in 1853, Anna’s sons moved her to the asylum in Raleigh, where she eventually died in 1890.9

While families cared for members who fell ill, they also hid them. Anna, Mary, and Powell all were sent to institutions outside of their own states. Although her sons eventually brought Anna to the Raleigh asylum, the family initially committed her to the asylum in Staunton, Virginia. The Singletons sent both Powell and Mary further away—to Boston and Philadelphia, respectively. While multiple factors including the quality of care and treatment played a role in all of these decisions, one fact remained true: to obtain treatment, the family separated the individual suffering from a mental health problem from the rest of the family.

The life of Duncan Cameron’s oldest son Thomas represents a second strategy that families used to care for individuals with mental health issues. Although Thomas suffered from an intellectual disability, he remained with the family, with the best education and opportunities available to him. In fact, historian Penny L. Richards has argued that Thomas Cameron’s life “highlights the functional aspects of extended regional networks based on kinship, profession, and religious affiliation.”10 Duncan arranged tutors for Thomas, including Willie Mangum and Rev. John Cameron

9 Anderson, The Kirklands of Ayr Mount, 104-5. Anna was able to leave the asylum in Raleigh at least once, although she was eventually recommitted there as well.
(Duncan’s father). Then, as with his other children, Duncan relied on family members to help find schools that would provide Thomas with a suitable education. Even when Duncan enrolled Thomas in schools in the North, he was always cared for and surrounded by family and friends, with Paul Cameron joining him at school in 1825.

Once he left school, he lived a fairly independent life. Thomas rode between the different homes and plantations of the Cameron family, worked on the plantations with his uncle Thomas Bennehan, participated in all of the social activities of the wider family network, and even voted. His intellectual disability prevented him from taking on the duties and role of eldest son (which instead fell to his younger brother Paul). Thomas did, however, inherit lands, money, and enslaved people upon his father’s death—all of which were managed by Paul, his sister Margaret, and his sister-in-law Anne. Rather than being hidden away or committed to an asylum for treatment, Thomas remained fully visible his entire life, surrounded by family and friends and living a relatively independent life.\textsuperscript{11}

Despite his intellectual disabilities and physical differences, Thomas maintained a relatively normal life, although he remained shielded within the family network and rarely truly ventured outside of it. Unlike Mary or Anna, whose behavior drew comment and concern for their well-being and that of other members of the family,

\textsuperscript{11} For an in-depth examination of all of these events, see Richards, “Thomas Cameron’s ’Pure and Guileless Life.’”
Thomas simply needed relatively small accommodations in order to live a fairly independent life. Once he reached adulthood, he performed a specific role in the family: that of bachelor uncle who acted as messenger and chaperone, while also performing specific tasks for the business and political side of the family. Thomas was not a threat to the family’s image; he was a much-beloved brother and uncle that simply needed a few adjustments to live the life of a bachelor. These adjustments tightened the family circle around him, constraining him to a specific role firmly inside the family network so that they could shield him.

Illegitimate children also could pose a threat both to the family’s image and to their credit (and actual financial situation). While illegitimate children rarely seem to appear as a concern to elite families, the threat such children posed to the family’s image and credit did surface occasionally. Five months after George McDuffie’s death in March 1851, a woman calling herself Louisa McDuffie wrote to his daughter Mary McDuffie to ask about her “intentions regarding your Brother,” Thomas McDuffie. George McDuffie, however, was only married once—to Mary Singleton McDuffie—and Mary was their

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12 For more on Thomas as bachelor uncle, see Richards, “Thomas Cameron’s ‘Pure and Guileless Life.'” Richards compares Thomas’s role in the family to that of his uncle Thomas Bennehan. The role that Thomas filled was a role available to him by virtue of his race, sex, and class.

13 In this case, I am talking about white children born outside of marriage. Mixed-race children born by enslaved women were a different situation; such children did not pose a threat to the family’s economic well-being.
only child. Who, then, was Louisa McDuffie? Furthermore, who was Thomas McDuffie?\textsuperscript{14}

Thomas McDuffie was the illegitimate son of George McDuffie.\textsuperscript{15} As Louisa revealed in the letter, she and George had been in a relationship while George served in Congress before he met and married Mary Singleton. According to Louisa, she and her son “were happy in the love and protection of your Father, when your Mother first crossed his path.” She also claimed that he had always loved his son, even if his love for her “may have been checked for a while:” “every member and senator of the US Congress, from your state, knows how much he doated on his son, and proud he was of him.” Thomas, she continued, was always with his father, who even took him to the Senate. Louisa believed that George had always intended to divide his possessions between his two children. He had not done so. But, Louisa believed that “it was not for want of inclination but of courage to do so.” Why would a man who had fought multiple duels lack courage? The key, as with George’s duels, was honor—in this case not just his own but that of his family. Louisa stated that he “dreaded the sensure of his

\textsuperscript{14} Louisa McDuffie to Mary S. McDuffie, September 15, 1851, Mary Singleton McDuffie Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as Mary Singleton McDuffie Papers, DU).

\textsuperscript{15} Other than this letter, no sources exist that prove this claim. But, in \textit{In My Father’s House are Many Mansions}, Vernon Burton describes Francis Pickens’s letter to his protégé concerning his own possible illegitimate son, asking his protégé to give the child a certain amount of money, at his own discretion. Burton states that Pickens then told his protégé that “when I succeeded McDuffie I did the same and more for him[...].” The (potential) illegitimate child of George McDuffie that Pickens helped could have been Thomas. See: Burton, \textit{In My Father’s House are Many Mansions}, 139. Burton is quoting from Francis W. Pickens to M.L. Bonham, 14 Oct., 21 and 31 Dec. 1859, in the Milledge Luke Bonham Papers, South Caroliniana Library. (See footnote 99 on page 377).
Relatives.” Even though he had taken his son with him to Congress and all of the congressmen from South Carolina knew of his existence and George’s affections for him, George did not want his immediate family to know of Thomas’s existence. The illegitimate son that George “doated on” threatened the credit and image of the family to which he had tied himself—and his own place of honor and esteem within that family.

Indeed, Louisa’s letter revealed that George’s political family and friends took steps to cover up the existence of his illegitimate son and his relationship with Louisa outside of the bonds of marriage. For example, one friend gave Thomas two hundred dollars, with “the last hundred [...] accompanied with some most unfeeling remarks. which determined the Boy to throw up his profession and seek some employment by which he could live without accepting support through the hand of Mr. Burt.” Louisa

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16 Louisa McDuffie to Mary S. McDuffie, September 15, 1851, Mary Singleton McDuffie Papers, DU. Based on Louisa’s timeline, Thomas would have been roughly between the ages of twenty-two and thirty at this point. One of Louisa’s facts was a bit off, however. George McDuffie was a member of the House of Representatives before he met and married Mary Singleton—not a Senator.

17 Joshua Rothman describes a similar situation in Notorious in the Neighborhood. As Rothman shows, Thomas Jefferson’s relationship with Sally Hemings—and his children with her—was common knowledge in Albemarle. Everyone who visited Monticello at least suspected the connection. But, because this relationship and his mixed-race children with Sally could hurt his reputation and honor if openly discussed, no one was supposed to talk about it. Joshua D. Rothman, Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families Across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787-1861, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). George McDuffie’s illegitimate son Thomas represented a similar threat. In this case, all of his friends in Congress knew but were not supposed to talk about it—and his immediate family was not supposed to ever know. George (and his friends) must have done a good job at hiding Thomas’s existence after his marriage to Mary. Tracing a Thomas McDuffie (if he even chose to use the last name, since his parents were not married) who was born during the correct eight year period and lived in the few places his mother mentioned in her letter is not easy. A few different individuals come up as possibilities, but the archival record is slim, and there is no way to know for certain which—if any—of them are the correct Thomas.
was insistent that Mary give Thomas enough money to at least set himself up in business. This threat to the family’s finances was not something to be taken lightly, as Louisa informed Mary that if Thomas did not receive a portion of George’s estate, “I will never submit to it, while life remains in me I will be a millstone about your neck and the neck of your children, unless you make some effort towards doing something bordering on justice to my Child.” She would “never cease to demand it” until the courts decided against her.\textsuperscript{18} Such a case would be high-profile and threaten the family’s image. By giving him some money and refusing to give him more while ignoring the letters his mother penned on his behalf, both Armistead Burt and Mary McDuffie worked to deny the existence of an illegitimate child that could prove detrimental to the family’s finances, credit, and image—regardless of the affection between father and son. Louisa’s request would be a step in the direction of making her a part of the family network, if granted. If Louisa was a part of the family network, her son would be as well, and the rest of the family would owe both of them support. Neither Armistead nor Mary were willing to let that happen. Instead of addressing the problem and bothering to fight with Louisa and Thomas, they just ignored them, letting Louisa’s resentment and anger continue to fester. This choice was a relatively easy one to make because Louisa had no

\textsuperscript{18} Louisa McDuffie to Mary S. McDuffie, September 15, 1851, Mary Singleton McDuffie Papers, DU.
connections in the area and no legal right to any of George’s estate, since she had never been legally married to him.  

Marital discord also threatened the family’s image as happy and affectionate, and elite families developed particular strategies for addressing these issues. When marital problems arose that the individuals involved were not able to overcome, elite families stepped in to handle the situation and protect the family’s image, typically by obtaining a legal separation. Mary McRa’s marital problems led her to separate from her husband, Powell McRa, in 1817. Divorce was not a legal possibility in South Carolina. So, Mary, like other South Carolina women in her situation, obtained a legal separation through a petition in equity court. The judge who determined custody of their son and daughter wrote to her father John Singleton in May 1817 after the case was brought before him. He informed John that it was his “duty to try such cases as are brought & not to pick & chuse such as may be agreeable to me.” He warned John that “When a husband & wife sepearate the law gives the husband a right to take the children unless he can be shewn to be entirely unfit to have the charge of them. But to deprive a father of his right the charges against him must be of a very gross & serious nature.” He then

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19 Armistead Burt was a lawyer who handled George McDuffie’s estate for Mary after her father died. 
20 The existing family correspondence does not explain why the couple separated. 
advised John that if he had any such charges against Powell that he had “the power
upon reasonable cause shewn upon oath to extend the time” needed to gather and
present such evidence, with the caveat that “No evidence of the quarrels or the cause of
them between husband & wife (generally speaking) can be admitted.”22 The entire letter
reads as if it is advice from one friend to another, not a disinterested jurist—and it likely
was. In this case, John obtained custody of both of Mary’s children, and she and the
children lived with her parents afterwards. Family ties enabled the Singletons to shape
legal separations in their favor, just as they facilitated other kinds of business.

Because violence within the family posed a concrete and legitimate threat to the
family, elite families handled domestic violence quickly. When it occurred, family
members rallied around the individual involved. They did whatever possible to protect
both the individual from violence and the family’s credit from the threat posed by such
violence. Marion Singleton Deveaux Converse thus called on family ties to escape the
domestic abuse of her second husband. The violence threatened both her physically and
the family’s credit by damaging their image as a happy, affectionate family. Her
husband’s mismanagement of the property that Marion inherited on her father’s death
was an additional threat. Marion’s family discussed Augustus and all of his failings

22 Wm. D. James to John Singleton, May 13, 1817, in Box 1, Folder 15 of the Singleton Family Papers #688,
Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Hereafter cited
as Singleton Family Papers #688, SHC). In a postscript, William informed John that Powell McRa had only
applied to have custody of his son—not his daughter.
constantly in their correspondence, while also trying to extract Marion from the violent situation and ensure the family’s good credit.²³

When the family discussed the domestic abuse that Marion was suffering, they typically discussed it in terms that would not be obvious to someone who was unaware of the situation. Rather than stating that she was the victim of violent abuse, they mentioned her “situation” in correspondence with other family members. In other letters, the writer would mention that Marion and her daughters were visiting different relatives. In letters directly to Marion herself, her relations urged her to take longer visits and offered counsel. Yet, her family very rarely mentioned Augustus Converse’s abuse of Marion in these letters. For example, in March 1853, Betsy Coles told Marion, who was visiting relatives in Virginia for the summer, that she should stay longer and try the mineral springs.²⁴ In November of the same year, Betsy wrote Marion with advice on her situation, telling her that “Your Bible will undoubtedly be your best advisor” and instructing her to “‘Commit it to the Lord’ & trust in Him who has brought you through

²³ See, for example, Marion Converse to Matthew R. Singleton, December 21, 1853; Marion Converse to Matthew R. Singleton, December 25, 1853. Both in Box 1, Folder 52 of the Singleton Family Papers, SCL; Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton Deveaux Converse, March 11, 1853; Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton Deveaux Converse, November 26, 1853; Betsy Coles to Marion Singleton Deveaux Converse, December 20, 1853; all in Box 1, Folder 3, of the Singleton Family Papers, LC. For more on Marion’s separation from Augustus Converse, and the role of her family in the process, see: Laura F. Edwards, Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), particularly chapter one. See also, Edwards, The People and Their Peace, 175-176. After Marion’s separation from Augustus Converse, she returned to using the name Deveaux, as if the marriage never existed.

²⁴ For this initial letter about going to the springs and spending longer in Virginia, see: Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, March 11, 1853. For subsequent letters encouraging the same strategy, see: Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, March 19, 1853; Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, May 2, 1853; all in the Singleton Family Papers, LC.
a much more severe trial.” Betsy’s advice in this letter seems to be for Christian
fortitude, something she also offered when Marion’s father and son were killed in a train
accident the previous year. Yet, she then stated that she had thanked God herself for
giving Marion the strength to deal with her ordeals and for providing her with “so
many Earthly friends to aid you.” Just a month later, Betsy was a little more explicit in
her letter to Marion, telling her that Marion’s brother Matthew had spoken to her about
the situation with Marion and her children. Intimate friends also wrote to Marion,
urging her to remove herself from her husband’s reach. One man held up his intimate
friendship with her first husband, Robert Deveaux, to justify his involvement in her
personal affairs. After expressing concern for her, he asked her, “Are the features and
exalted virtues of my valued friend the good Deveaux obliterated from your generous
soul? They cannot be! I know you must yet be the same Marion Singleton in feeling, you
were 20 years ago and your present alliance one only accident.” “My dear friend,” he

25 Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, November 26, 1853, Singleton Family Papers, LC.
26 For Betsy’s letters upon the death of Richard Singleton and Robert Deveaux, see: Betsy Coles to Marion
Deveaux, December 2, 1852; Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, December 20, 1852. Betsy also counseled
Marion to turn to God for support when a different son died in 1848 telling her that she “must be a favourite
child of God!” because he tries those he loves, revealing that such statements would not be thought odd in
family letters during times of trial. See: Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, September 7, 1848. All in the
Singleton Family Papers, LC.
27 Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, November 26, 1853, Singleton Family Papers, LC.
28 Betsy Coles to Marion Deveaux, December 20, 1853, Singleton Family Papers, LC.

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concluded, “let me insist upon your taking such steps as to exonerate you from a false position.”

On the surface, these discussions of Marion’s visits to different family members, and even references to her “situation” or “position,” appear to be the kind of routine discussion of family news that characterized most correspondence, particularly when the letters were written by women in the family like Betsy. But they were not, for those in the know. The references, simultaneously oblique and direct, allowed Marion’s relatives to preserve the image of happy and affectionate family. They hid domestic violence away prying eyes, while still handling it.

Marion did not sit idly by as her family worked to separate her from her husband. She mobilized her family, gathering them around her. When Augustus’s attempts to run her plantation proved disastrous, Marion wrote to her brother and cousin for advice on handling the situation. Her letters were about more than just the business decisions of her husband and the potential harm to the family’s credit: Marion used the problem she was having with Augustus attempting to sell her cotton without consent to alert her family to her problems. Although Augustus keeping the profits from 130 bales of cotton would definitely have harmed Marion financially, her family would have had the means to pick up the slack. But Marion was not just concerned about the

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29 J. Hamilton to Marion Converse, November 22, 1853, Box 1, Folder 11, Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL.
lost profits. She wanted to let her family know that something more was going on. As other members of her family were able to pass off her situation as just another tidbit of family news, Marion hid her marital problems in discussions of property, namely Augustus’s attempts to sell cotton without her knowledge or consent.30

Marion’s second letter to her brother about the cotton sale reveals another strategy that she used to protect herself from her husband. She kept her daughters close to her. In a postscript to the letter, she asked her brother to bring her daughter back with him if he saw her in Clarendon before informing him that she would then “try and join her” at a friend’s house.31 As Laura Edwards has shown, one way that Marion protected herself from her husband was sleeping in her daughter’s room with her because he was less likely to do anything when she was with others.32

Ultimately, the abuse combined with the mismanagement of resources became too much to ignore, and Marion’s family rallied around her, helping her to initiate and obtain a legal separation from Augustus in 1854.33 For the second time in the antebellum period, the Singleton family helped a woman in the family obtain a legal separation from her husband and ultimately frame the settlement in the family’s favor. Such a

30 For Marion’s initial letter regarding Augustus’s attempts to sell the cotton, see Marion Converse to Matthew R. Singleton, December 21, 1853. For her second letter, see Marion Converse to Matthew R. Singleton, December 25, 1853. Both in Box 1, Folder 52 of the Singleton Family Papers, SCL.
31 Marion Converse to Matthew R. Singleton, December 25, 1853, Box 1, Folder 52, Singleton Family Papers, SCL.
33 For an in-depth examination of the abuse and Marion’s separation from Augustus, see Edwards, Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore, chapter 1.
move protected both Marion herself and the family’s finances and credit. The family had
discovered that violence in the home, while unacceptable and threatening to the safety
and credit of the family, could be handled by separating the offender from the victim
and the rest of the family.

Augustus was easy to separate from the family because he was an outsider. An
Episcopal minister who had moved to South Carolina just a few years before his
marriage to Marion, Augustus was not part of the wider network of interconnected
families and friends that made up Marion’s world. He had no resources of his own and
had no experience managing plantations, but he insisted on control of Marion’s
resources in his capacity as her husband. The family was loath to trust him with what
they considered to be their resources, particularly since those resources had been left to
Marion in trust for her children and Augustus had no legal right to control over them.
Despite his marriage to Marion, Augustus was unequivocally not a part of the family
network—and no one wanted to fold him in. Had he been a part of the family, he could
have taken more control. His status as an outsider in addition to his mismanagement of
resources and abuse of one of their own, however, meant that he had to go. The family’s
financial resources and influential connections meant that they could rid themselves of
the interloper by helping Marion obtain a legal separation through the equity courts. Of
course, Augustus refused to go quietly. In order to get rid of him for good, Marion (and
the rest of the family by extension) paid him $25,250 to relinquish all claims by him or
his heirs to Marion’s property. This payment helped Marion and her relatives avoid a long, public scandal. The family thus used the courts and a hefty payment to separate themselves from a threat that they could no longer hide or control because of the escalating violence. Like with the situation with Louisa and Thomas McDuffie, the family avoided a fight—this time by paying off Augustus, someone they could not just ignore but wanted gone.

Violence in public, however, was acceptable—and even desirable—when elite white men acted to protect the family honor and credit. As scholars, such as Joanne Freeman, have shown, political culture in the antebellum era was centered around ideas of personal honor. Perceived assaults against an individual man’s honor could result in a duel—in an “affair of honor.” The Coles family in particular was no stranger to these violent outbursts. While Andrew Stevenson was the Minister to the Court of St. James in the late 1830s, he was involved in a near-duel because of his status as a slaveholder and the reported accusation of being a slave-breeder. The conflict was quickly met by a mixture of condemnation and support in the local and national press in the United States. His family and friends rushed to his defense. In fact, Sarah Coles Stevenson informed her sister Betsy in January 1839 that “all his countrymen on this side of the

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34 Agreement, February 20, 1857, Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, SCL.
36 For more on the near-duel and the American press’s reaction to it, see Patrick M. Geoghegan, Liberator: The Life and Death of Daniel O’Connell, 1830-1847, (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 2010), particularly chapter 12.
water” approved of Andrew’s actions, and that he had “received letters of congratulation & approval from France _ Austria _ Russia, [illegible], and even in Ireland. […] and as to Scotland Mr. Cleland writes me, no stranger ever was so popular there that there is no known in their gift they would not bestow upon him.”

One friend wrote to report that some prominent figures believed that “‘Mr. Stevenson ought not to have taken any notice of O’Connell_ but since he has, he has not gone far enough.’”

Even staunch abolitionist Edward Coles defended his brother-in-law’s actions and condemned the actions of those who sought to condemn Andrew for defending his honor. Edward heard of the incident and learned of John Quincy Adams’s plans to investigate Andrew’s actions and possibly impeach him. He informed his sister that while “Mr. S. will have seen the course pursued in Congress by that eccentric turbulent

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37 Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, January 12, 1839, Box 2, Folder 1 in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU). Sarah wrote of the incident to Betsy hoping to discover what Thomas Ritchie’s views of the affair were, believing that “from the manner in which he notices Mr. Adams’ attack I infer he does.” According to Geoghegan, John Quincy Adams publicly stated his disapproval of Andrew Stevenson’s actions but Ritchie’s newspaper, the Richmond Enquirer, ultimately supported Andrew and denounced Daniel O’Connell. Sarah may have been talking about this article in the Enquirer, which simply gave a report of the different legislative acts and legal proceedings taken by that session of Congress: [No Headline], *Richmond Enquirer*, December 7, 1838, page 3. A separate article from the same day was more supportive of Andrew, talking about Adams’s “eccentric movements” about the “unofficial Speech of Daniel O’Connell” who, although he may have been a member of Parliament, was not acting as one at the time he made the accusation. See: [No Headline], *Richmond Enquirer*, December 7, 1838, page 3. For a friends’ report of Adams’s actions to Andrew, see: W.B. Lewis to Andrew Stevenson, Esq., December 13, 1838, in Box 10/Book 10 of the Andrew Stevenson and J.W. Stevenson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Lewis informed Andrew of the actions of his “quarrelsome friend” John Adams in Congress against him. A letter from Geo. M. Dallas to Andrew Stevenson dated December 23, 1838 from St. Petersburg included a newspaper clipping that detailed Adams’s actions. See: Geo. M. Dallas to Andrew Stevenson, December 23, 1838, in Box 10/Book 10 of the Andrew and J.W. Stevenson Papers, LC.

38 Richard Vaux to Andrew Stevenson, December 25, 1838, in Box 10/Book 10 of the Andrew and J.W. Stevenson Papers, LC.
& mischiefmaking old man Adams with respect to his & O Connels affair,” he
unfortunately knew nothing more about Congress’s plans. He did, however, assure
them that Richard Vaux, who had been witness to the whole event, had publicly written
in support of Andrew.\(^\text{39}\)

To Andrew’s family and friends, the near-violence of a duel was an
understandable—and completely justified—reaction to an insult that impugned both his
own personal honor and that of the nation as a whole. One article in the \textit{Richmond Enquirer} stated that the acts “involve[d] the dignity of a representative of the people,”
explicitly tying Andrew Stevenson’s honor to that of the country that he represented.\(^\text{40}\)
Families both supported and expected white men placed in situations like this one to
defend the family honor and credit at all costs. Dueling, then, was not a conflict that was
a threat to the family because it was justified as a defense of honor and credit, whether
individual, familial, or national. However, family members’ and political friends’
reactions to this near-violence suggest that the \textit{justification} of the duel was an important
part of the process of ensuring the family’s good credit and honor remained intact.

\(^{39}\) Edward Coles to “My dearly beloved Sister” [Sarah Coles Stevenson, envelope addressed to Andrew Stevenson, Esq.], December 30, 1838, in Box 10/Book 10 of the Andrew and J.W. Stevenson Papers, LC.

\(^{40}\) The article continued to say that “if any Minister has ever deserved the thanks of his country for filling the whole character of an ‘ambassador of peace,’ Andrew Stevenson is that man. – No one could have done more to knit the two countries together in the bonds of peace and good will.” See: [No Headline]; \textit{Richmond Enquirer}, December 7, 1838, page 3.
In the early 1820s George McDuffie, another member of the Coles family, participated in two duels with a political rival. In both cases, he believed that his rival, William Cumming, had insulted his honor. In fact, seven different meetings had been arranged over six months, even though only two actually turned violent. In the first of the duels, George was injured, shot in his lower back. The affair did not end there, however, and George and William continued to insult each other in the press and plan meetings. The conflict ended in a second duel, in which George was again injured. If such violence was a problem for the family, George would likely have been shunned. Instead, his political career and social ties continued to boom: he remained a member of the House of Representatives, married Mary Singleton in 1829, became a major general of the South Carolina militia, Governor of South Carolina, and eventually a U.S. Senator.

Because George acted in defense of his own honor—and, consequently, that of his extended political family—his violent actions were legitimate and completely justified because they helped to maintain the image and credit of the family.

Other types of overt violence remained unnamed. The most obvious example is the way elite families denied the presence of violence in slavery. Historians such as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese have emphasized white slaveholders’ characterizations of the

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41 According to Vernon Burton, in one case, “McDuffie, spotting a placard where Cumming had posted him, slowly approached the placard, carefully read the words impugning his honor, stepped back and covered it with a wad of tobacco and juice.” See: Burton, *In My Father’s House are Many Mansions*, 91.
43 For an in-depth examination of the duels, see Cumming, “The Cumming-McDuffie Duels.”
people they enslaved as part of their family, as “my family, white and black.”

Historians have interpreted the language of family in such cases to mean paternalism on the part of slaveholders. Such descriptions, however, fail to account for the actual conditions of slavery. Nor do they account for the goal-driven definition of family that individuals in elite families like the Coles family and the Cameron family used to create vast economic and political networks. By defining family through affectionate kinship relationships, elite families would not—and did not—see a connection between their family and the enslaved people they owned. Regardless of blood relationship or their labor as part of the family business, enslaved men and women were categorically not a part of the family, a situation that allowed men and women in elite families to effectively hide violence against them.

Buying, selling, and leasing slaves for family members highlights the active exclusion of enslaved men and women from the confines of the white family. As the second chapter showed, this type of transaction was one of the key business matters that men and women handled for their family members during the antebellum period. Letters between family members that discuss the exchange of slaves were impersonal discussions of market forces. These letters starkly contrast with the language of affectionate family that emphasized the intimate bonds between letter writers.

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44 Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household, 100. See also, Burton, In My Father’s House are Many Mansions.
Families like the Coles and Cameron families often glossed over the violence inherent in the system of slavery—including the separation of families. To members of these elite families, enslaved families were not even seen as legitimate; thus, they did not recognize the violent separations of enslaved families as acts of violence. For example, in 1824 Isaac Coles wrote to John Rutherfoord concerning an enslaved woman named Lenah whom he had loaned to John as a cook and expressed “some reluctance to go and leave her children & family.” Isaac had assured her that she was “only lent” and that he would not separate the family by sale. In fact, he told John that he had assured Lenah that if he sold her children he would also sell her and that if he took her children to his plantation in the mountains that her “present situation” meant that “it was probable that she would have an opportunity of seeing them every summer when her mistress would go up to visit her mother.”

By claiming that they were only lending them to relatives and not selling them, men and women in elite families justified separating enslaved families, as Isaac’s assurance to Lenah that she was “only lent” shows. Men and women like Isaac further justified these separations by claiming that they were not completely separated because of the possibility of future opportunities for the individuals involved to see their families. By using such reasoning, men like Isaac attempted to convince both the

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45 Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, December 4, 1824, Box 1, Folder 2, John Rutherfoord Papers Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as John Rutherfoord Papers, DU).
enslaved families they were separating and other elite whites that they were attentive to family concerns among the enslaved people they owned. Further down in the letter, Isaac stated that a man in the area who also owned Lenah’s husband had asked to purchase her. Isaac declared that since her husband “is on the Eastern shore & would not leave it to come over to his place here to be near her” he believed that the enslaved woman would not want to be sold to this man and separated from her children, since, in his view, her husband had abandoned her. In this case, Isaac covered the violent separation of an enslaved family by an illusion of choice.46

At other times, white men and women combined this illusion of choice with a comment about the deficient character of a particular enslaved person to justify their actions. For example, in 1834, Isaac Coles informed John Rutherfoord that Phill, an enslaved man that he owned, “has his orders to go on to Richmond in the morning.” He warned John that Phill was “in rather a curious state of mind” that he believed John should know about and proceeded to give him all of the details. Isaac’s brother Tucker had offered to buy Phill from Isaac in order “to keep him near his family” but Phill “manifested great impatience under it” claiming that “there was no occasion for any such thing” because “he was not married to his liking.” Again in the case of Phill, as with the case of Lenah and her husband, Isaac projected an illusion of choice in the separation of enslaved families. According to Isaac, both Phill and Lenah’s husband

46 Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, December 4, 1824, Box 1, Folder 2, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
chose to remain separated from their families. (Thus, if any violence was done in separating the families, it was their own fault and not the fault of the white masters). As Isaac continued his letter to John, however, he told him that after Phill received his orders to go to Richmond, “he is, or affects to be, dissatisfied, & again, I hear, talks about his family.” Isaac’s qualified his statement that Phill was unhappy to be sent away from his family with the comment “or affects to be.” By including this comment, Isaac signaled to John his own innocence in the separation of an enslaved family because Phill might only be “affect[ing]” sadness and dissatisfaction. In fact, Isaac’s next words heavily implied that Phill was being manipulative, telling John that he believed Phill would “make it a pretense to be troublesome” before reminding John of Phill’s “infirmity as to drink.”47 By arguing that Phill chose not to be with his family when presented with the opportunity and connecting that choice with his troublesome character, Isaac justified his separation of Phill’s family.

Duncan Cameron’s brother-in-law Andrew Syme took a similar strategy when notifying Duncan of the resistance of “the negro Joe” to being sent from the plantation he lived on as Duncan had requested. One of Duncan’s brothers had sent a man to take Joe but when he arrived, Joe “was not to be found.” He told Duncan, “Joe has no wish nor intention to leave this at all,” a statement which alluded to a choice on Joe’s behalf, before warning Duncan that “unless you take measures to secure him and carry him

47 Isaac A. Coles to John Rutherfoord, January 19, 1834. Box 1, Folder 4 in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
away, you will never get him from here at all.” Andrew further informed Duncan that neither he nor “Mrs. Anderson” (Duncan’s sister) could do so themselves because of Joe’s active resistance. He also stated that Joe had “trifled away the whole of last year […], and his mistress did not receive a cent for his services.”

This picture of resistance presented the image of a troublesome individual who created problems for the people who owned him and who needed to be taken in hand to quell such conduct.

Elite whites used similar logic to justify re-capturing and punishing enslaved men and women who ran away. James Usher informed Richard Singleton that “your Boy Davis” was in New York City and “married to a free Woman there.” Therefore, James believed it to be “advisable for you to forward a power of attorney to some friend in that City and have him apprehended.” Although Davis had married a free woman in New York City and presumably started a family with her, apprehending him and separating him from his wife was a legitimate, necessary, and justifiable action because, as James told Richard, he was “your Boy.” In another case, a friend of Mary Singleton McRa casually informed her in 1815 that Mai, an enslaved woman, “came home on Monday Morning” and that Mary’s father had “taken her in hand.” Again in this letter, the phrasing offered an illusion of choice—Mai “came home” and was not captured and forced to return. The justification for re-capturing and subsequently punishing Mai was

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48 Andrew Syme to Duncan Cameron, January 11, 1820. Folder 477, Box 23, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.

49 James Usher to Richard Singleton, April 19, 1822, in Box 1, Folder 12 of the Singleton Family Papers, SCL.
very simple: both slavery and punishment were “necessary eviles” but “there is no
doing with or without them no more than that your dear Mother can not do without
you, unless you mean to shorten her days.” In other words, enslaving men and
women—and ultimately separating them from their families—was a necessary evil in
order to ensure the long, healthy life of the white families who owned them.

Edward Coles, who detested slavery and wanted it abolished, often used
arguments about slavery’s detrimental effects to whites to attempt to convince members
of his family to believe the same. In a letter asking then-retired Thomas Jefferson to lead
an effort to start a plan for gradual emancipation, Edward danced around the violence
of the system, even as he alluded to it by calling it an “unfortunate evil.” More
important was his qualifier that slavery was “an evil most injurious both to the
oppressed and to the oppressor.” Just as other elites framed the necessity of slavery
around the benefits of whites, Edward framed the necessity to eliminate slavery around
its detriments to whites. In both cases, the emphasis was the same—what mattered was
the well-being of white men and women.

50 M. Whalley to Mary Singleton McRa, June 8, 1815, Box 1, Folder 9, in the Singleton Family Papers #688,
SHC. Mary’s older sister, Harriet Singleton Broun Spann mentioned either this or a similar incident in a
letter written the same month, informing Mary that one of her maids had been flogged. See: Harriet
(Singleton) Broun Spann to Mary Singleton McRa, June 1815, Box 1, Folder 9, Singleton Family Papers #688,
SHC.
51 Edward Coles to Thomas Jefferson, July 31, 1814, Box 1, Folder 14, Edward Coles Papers. 1797-1881,
Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
(Hereafter cited as Edward Coles Papers, PUL).
Even wills where individuals specified that a certain enslaved man or woman (or family) be freed or that enslaved families be kept together or taken care of were largely attempts to hide the violence done against enslaved families while preserving the image of the white family. Duncan Cameron, for example, instructed that the enslaved people he owned be split into four lots to be bequeathed to his heirs, with “respect being had to families as far as practicable.” The implication, of course, was that the white family’s needs came first, as always. In his bequests to his nephew Paul Cameron, Thomas Bennehan included a condition that he free a specific family of slaves, who had been “faithful servants” and give the man Virgil $500. Even then, Thomas instructed Paul to ensure that the enslaved family be “removed to some of our free states or to Africa, as my Executors may think most to their interest and happiness.”

This was not the first time that the Cameron family had faced such a condition in a will. Richard Bennehan’s brother-in-law freed two of the slaves he owned in his will. Dr. John Umstead had left instructions in his will that Thomas and another man manumit an enslaved woman and her two daughters. Yet, both Thomas’s and Duncan’s wills reveal that the two daughters were still enslaved and owned by Thomas (and then

52 Will of Duncan Cameron, Folder 2179, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
53 Will of Thomas D. Bennehan, Folder 2178a, Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.
What, then, explains Thomas’s decision to free Virgil and his family when he had not followed similar instructions left for him in a friend’s will? While they could have simply been “faithful servants” as Thomas indicated in his will, historian Jean Anderson provides a clue for another possible reason. Virgil was “the son of Mary (his father unknown) who was the daughter of Phil and Esther, slaves whom Mary Amis had brought with her when she married Richard Bennehan.” His wife and her niece and nephew were all enslaved people that Thomas had inherited from John Umstead. Furthermore, “All were mulattoes.” While there is no way of knowing for sure, it is a possibility that at least one of these individuals was blood-related to a member of the Bennehan or Cameron families, perhaps even Thomas himself. Whether or not this was the case, the fact that Thomas mandated that the family both be freed and set up somewhere outside of the state shows that when members of families like the Camerons took pains in their wills to appear as if they were doing everything possible to help “faithful servants” they still did not want those “faithful servants” around as a reminder of the violence perpetrated against enslaved families.

Will of Thomas D. Bennehan, Folder 2178a; Will of Duncan Cameron, Folder 2179, Both in the Cameron Family Papers #133, SHC.

For Anderson’s discussion of Thomas’s will and Virgil’s background, see Piedmont Plantation, 103.

When Edward Coles freed the enslaved men and women that he had inherited from his father, he took them to Illinois, where he gave each man and woman “passed the age of 23 or 24 years, one Quarter section, containing 160 acres of land, as some equivalent for their past services.” He did not, however, tell any of them his plans prior to leaving Virginia, although it was likely they knew at least part of his plans. See: Edward Coles to Mrs. R.E. Coles, April 24, 1819, Box 2, Folder 24, Coles Family Papers (Collection 1458), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
Women in elite families also actively denied the violence inherent in slavery, as an undated letter from Rebecca Singleton to her daughter Marion Deveaux reveals. Marion had “borrowed” an enslaved seamstress named Nelly from her parents and apparently wanted to send her back. After telling her daughter to keep Nelly because she had so many seamstresses already, Rebecca asked Marion to “tell Nelly her Husband has asked to go down, but Mr. Singleton said it was all nonsense, and that we would go down some time this Spring, and be time enough.” Similarly, Emily Ann Rutherfoord Aylett informed her mother-in-law Judith that she should bring “little Anna” with her when she visited them. Emily emphasized the benefits of bringing Anna to help Judith during the visit, saying that Anna was “essential to your comfort” and that “without her you will have no pleasure.” Emily assured her mother-in-law that “Mammy will of course” do all of the household chores but that if she brought Anna with her, Anna would “be ever ready to attend your slightest beck and call.” Finally, she assured her mother-in-law that they had “plenty of room for her” because “her Mother has a room and Anna could sleep with her if you did not care to have her to sleep in

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88 Rebecca Singleton to Marion Singleton Deveaux, undated, Box 1, Folder 14 of the Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. This sentiment that the husband’s desire to be with his wife was “nonsense” projected an utter lack of understanding (and disregard) for the familial relationships of enslaved people. Richard Singleton’s sister expressed a similarly willful lack of understanding when she told their sister, “my man daniel has taken himself of while I was at midway Sunday - for what I cannot tell.” See: Harriet (Singleton) Broun Spann to Mary Singleton McRa, June 1815, Box 1, Folder 9, Singleton Family Papers #688, UNC.
your own room.”\(^{59}\) Throughout the letter, Emily’s emphasis was on the help that Anna would provide for her mother-in-law. Only at the end of the letter was there any clue about the separation and potential reunion of an enslaved family. Anna, presumably still a child since Emily referred to her as “little Anna,” had been separated from her mother, with the enslaved family split between members of the white family, whether by sale, lease, or loan. Although it appears that Anna regularly attended to Judith Aylett, Judith had no intention of bringing her along on her visit to Emily’s family, despite the chance for Anna to see her mother. Emily’s plea with her mother-in-law to bring Anna with her had nothing to do with the emotional well-being of Anna or her mother. Instead, she remained focused on Judith’s comfort and pleasure.

Even when elite men and women were directly confronted with their culpability in the institution of slavery, they shifted responsibility and blame. Edward Coles and Thomas Jefferson’s 1814 exchange over Edward’s request that Thomas use his “knowledge and influence” to lead a movement to abolish slavery exemplifies this approach. Edward approached the subject rather cautiously at first, saying that he “never took up my pen with more hesitation or felt more embarrassment than I do now in addressing you on the subject of this letter.” He did so, however, because of “the highest opinion” of Thomas’s “goodness and liberality.” Throughout the letter, Edward

\(^{59}\) Emily Ann Rutherfoord Aylett to “My dear Mother,” January 14, [?], in the Aylett Family Papers, 1776-1945 (Mss1 AY445), Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. While the letter is addressed to “My dear Mother,” it is in a folder in which all of the letters are to Judith Page Aylett, Emily’s mother-in-law. In these other letters, she regularly addressed her mother-in-law as mother.
emphasized his respect for Thomas and his greater philosophical knowledge on morality and individual rights. In fact, he even told Thomas that he would not talk about “the right which man has to enslave his Brother man, nor upon the moral and political effects of Slavery on individuals or on Society; because these things are better understood by you than by me.” With this statement, Edward firmly placed the ball in Thomas’s court—Thomas fully understood the problems of slavery. More importantly, the “difficult task” of “devising, and getting into operation, some plan for the gradual emancipation of Slavery” would be most successful if “performed by the revered Fathers of all our political and social blessings.” In fact, Edward thought that a plan for gradual emancipation was “a duty […] that devolves particularly on you” because of the principles of rights that Thomas had so long professed (and had been “foremost in establishing on the broadest basis”). Thomas’s status as a former president and author of the Declaration of Independence had a further advantage in Edward’s mind: even if Thomas’s attempt failed, his opinions would be more influential after his death. Edward believed that if Thomas agreed to spearhead a movement to abolish slavery and his attempt failed, the “influence, irresistible influence” of his opinions on “the rights of man” would remain and become “the creed of your disciples.”60

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60 Edward Coles to Thomas Jefferson, July 31, 1814, Box 1, Folder 14, Edward Coles Papers, PUL. Edward was not completely wrong about the influence Thomas would command even in death, as John Tyler and John Rutherfoord’s discussion (discussed in chapter four) about the constitutionality of a new national bank shows. Both Tyler and Rutherfoord invoked Thomas to claim that their position was the right one.
Despite Edward’s fervent entreaty that Thomas was the best possible person to use his “knowledge and influence” to help bring about the end of slavery, Thomas demurred. It was not his responsibility. Instead, “this enterprise is for the young; for those who can follow it up, and bear it through to its consummation.” With this statement, Thomas firmly washed his hands of the matter, shifting responsibility to others. He—and others of his generation—had done their duty already. Additionally, while he sympathized, Edward’s “solitary but welcome voice is the first which has brought this sound to my ear,” leading him to believe that the younger generation did not care.\footnote{Thomas Jefferson to Edward Coles, August 25, 1814, Box 1, Folder 14, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.} Edward pushed back in his response. He stated that he disagreed that “the difficult work of cleansing […] the foul stain of slavery” would be done best by the younger generation. In his view, a young man could not have the “great and extensive powers both of mind and influence” that would be required to do so.\footnote{Edward Coles to Thomas Jefferson, September 26, 1814, Box 1, Folder 14, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.}

Other statements in Thomas’s letter suggest that he had a different reason for declining Edward’s request. After stating that, of the plans available, he believed the most expedient to be “emancipation of those born after a given day,” he dismissed the idea of immediate emancipation of all enslaved men and women. In his view, immediate emancipation was “the idea […] of those only who have not the guide of either knowledge or experience of the subject.” He argued that immediate full emancipation would not

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work because enslaved men were “brought up from their infancy without necessity for thought or forecast” and were “rendered as incapable as children of taking care of themselves.” If freed, they would be “pests in society by their idleness” whose “amalgamation with the other colour” would lead to “a degradation to which no lover of his country, no lover of excellence in the human character can innocently consent.”

Even though earlier in the letter Thomas placed the blame for “the degraded condition” of slavery on the generation that came before him, this statement shifted at least a portion of the blame to enslaved people themselves. Because they were brought up “without necessity for thought or forecast” freedom would only lead to them being idle “pests” who would then mix with whites and lead to even further degradation. To these elite whites, keeping enslaved men and women in bondage was for their own good, and elite whites like Thomas (despite his professed sympathies with emancipation) should “be led by no repugnancies to abdicate them, and our duties to them.”

Elite white men and women would still separate enslaved families if necessary for their economic well-being, even when they acknowledged the violence and pain inherent in the action. For example, Mary McDuffie decided to sell the plantation she inherited upon the death of her father and the enslaved people who lived and worked on it. After being informed that the plantation had been sold, she wrote to a friend to ask for advice about selling the enslaved families. Mary did not want to sell them to

63 Thomas Jefferson to Edward Coles, August 25, 1814, Box 1, Folder 14, Edward Coles Papers, PUL.
strangers, but she also did not think that her uncle, Matthew Singleton, would be able to (or want to) buy them. She stated, “I am a good deal worried about those families I did not wish to fall in the hands of strangers.” Such a statement recognized the violence of selling enslaved men and women while projecting a sense of caring on the behalf of the white owner. Mary stated, however, that if “Bossy and Sarah” were sold, she “would wish them to choose their owner, and not to be sold far away from their children.”

Mary’s final statement suggests an illusion of choice on the behalf of enslaved men and women. She wanted Bossy and Sarah to choose who they would be sold to, something that, if actually possible, would mean that their choice of new owner would also be an implied choice to be separated from their children. In this situation, Mary positioned herself as a “good” and caring mistress who allowed enslaved women the choice of new owner, effectively covering over the violence inherent in such a “choice.”

To women and men in elite families, the enslaved people they owned were little more than commodities and vessels for labor, and the families that mattered were their families, not other families. They did not care about the families of enslaved people and saw a husband wanting to join his wife as “nonsense.” The violent separations of enslaved families did not register as a conflict that required resolution. In fact, it did not register as violence at all. These white men and women had to carefully police the

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64 Mary S. McDuffie to [Martha Burt], undated, in the Mary Singleton McDuffie Papers, DU. Given the contents of the letter and the fact that it is written after Mary inherited her father’s plantation, this letter is likely from her trip to Europe with Angelica Singleton Van Buren in 1854.
boundaries of their familial networks so that their overall credit was not damaged. They had to appear like a “good master” while also not letting the enslaved families appear as legitimate because doing so would change the enslaved men and women’s relationship with the white family: they would no longer be simply commodities. By covering the violent separation of enslaved families with an illusion of choice on the part of the enslaved or referring to the enslaved family’s desire to be together as nonsense, elite men and women actively hid the violence of the system of slavery and denied the legitimacy of enslaved families.

Re-examining those same letters reveals that enslaved families actively endeavored to maintain family relationships. Enslaved men and women worked to determine the course of their families in different ways, whether by expressing desires to be near or with their family or by running away to be with their family. The enslaved woman that Isaac Coles wanted to send from his Albemarle plantation to John Rutherfoord in Richmond epitomizes the resistance of men and women to being separated from their families. When faced with the threat of separation, many enslaved men and women actively expressed their desire to remain with their family in hopes of influencing their master to allow them to remain (an action that would legitimize their family ties).

At times, these expressions were even more overt, with enslaved men and women writing to current and former masters and mistresses in hopes of being reunited
with their family. While no such letters to members of the Coles or Cameron families exist, a letter written by an enslaved woman to her former mistress in 1857 is a prime example of this strategy. Vilet Lester wrote to her former mistress to ask about the family members she had been forced to leave behind when sold away. Throughout the letter, she used the same emotional conventions of correspondence that white women did when writing to family members to make certain requests. Vilet addressed the letter to “My Loving Miss Patsy,” using emotional language to establish her place as a former member of the family and to establish credibility, which would help her achieve her desired outcome. She first emphasized her affectionate relationship with Patsy by talking of being forced to leave her “Long Loved home and friends” and telling Patsy that she “cannot tell my feelings nor how bad I wish to see you and old Boss and Mss Rahol.” Only then did she mention that she wished to see her mother. Following this same pattern in the next sentence, Vilet asked that Patsy give her “love” to the white family that had owned her before asking her to give her “manifold love” to her family—her mother, brothers, and sister. Only near the end of the letter does Vilet’s true purpose for writing her old mistress—and for adhering to all of the emotional conventions of correspondence while doing so—come up. She wanted to know “what has Ever become of my Presus little girl” because the man who now owned her was willing to buy her daughter so they would be reunited. Vilet ended the letter by again emphasizing her intimate, familial relationship with Patsy, signing it “you long loved and well wishing
play mate as a Servant until death.” Even in the post-script that gave the name and contact information of her new master, Vilet re-emphasized her and Patsy’s intimate relationship, saying “I do beg the favor of you as a Servant” before closing with “So fare you well in love.” Throughout the letter, Vilet placed the emphasis on her intimate and affectionate relationship with her former mistress and the white family that had owned her in order to establish her own credibility when making her request. The violent separation of her enslaved family was covered with references to affection and intimacy with the white family in hopes of reuniting with her daughter, if not other members of her family.

Throughout the antebellum period, elite families like the Coles and Camerons worked to temper any source of conflict that threatened the image of a happy family that they relied on. No matter the type of conflict, elite families’ strategies contained similar elements. They first attempted to mitigate the harm done to their image in some way. This step could involve alerting family members to mental health issues in the family, concealing domestic abuse while simultaneously protecting the victim, or projecting an illusion of choice on the behalf of enslaved men and women and consequently casting themselves as good and caring masters. If that strategy stopped working, they then separated the offender from the rest of the family. This separation could entail

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65 Vilet Lester to Patsey Patterson, August 29, 1857, in the Joseph Allred Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
institutionalizing an individual in a different city to ensure they received the mental health care they needed, obtaining a legal separation for a woman abused by her husband, or selling an enslaved person that they deemed problematic by refusing to recognize the legitimacy of their familial ties. Yet, as Vilet Lester’s letter to her former mistress highlights, enslaved men and women developed their own strategies to maintain family relationships. They used the emotional conventions of familial correspondence to emphasize their affections for the men and women who enslaved them and remind them of their responsibilities to care for their “long loved” servants. The strategies used by elite whites to deny and hide conflict and violence meant that, throughout the antebellum period, their families never confronted or addressed the underlying issues, no matter what those issues were.
7. Conclusion

Although elite families successfully hid the majority of conflict when it occurred during the antebellum period, the violence of war could not be so easily handled or hidden. As sectional tensions heightened and the Civil War began, men and women in elite families were forced to rethink their image of government and redefine their relationship to it. As they did so, they continued to be guided by the same familial metaphors that had shaped their lives in the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War. This redefinition led to a firm identification of family with individual states rather than the country. As tensions escalated with the election of 1860, elite men and women in the Coles and Cameron families drew on familial metaphors to validate their own position. Casting themselves as a wronged family member, they cried for justice and warned that the solution to the problem might come down to separation. Their imagery drew on the ways they had handled domestic violence in the antebellum period—removing the offender from the wronged party. Throughout the rising sectional tensions—even as it became increasingly clear that the nation was headed to civil war—men and women in elite families continued to rely on familial metaphors to navigate the tensions and conflict, continually casting themselves as part of a nation of sibling states.

Once the Civil War began, even the reasoning and metaphors that individuals like Paul Cameron, Thomas Ruffin, John Rutherfoord, and John Coles Rutherfoord used in 1860 and early 1861 to attempt to preserve the union ceased to work. The violence of
war tore apart their image of the nation as a happy, affectionate family. The maligned “sister states” of the South that had been threatened and injured by their “Northern brethren” had seceded from the union that these individuals claimed to want to preserve. Men and women in elite families were forced to completely reconceptualize their relationship to the nation, casting their lots instead with their individual states. One individual in the Coles family exemplifies the ways that elite families re-imagined their relationship with government at the state and federal levels—Edward Coles’s youngest son, Roberts.

As the fourth chapter showed, the Coles and Camerons tied their vision of the country to the family, essentially equating country with family while building the credit of the young nation at home and abroad. Individuals like Andrew and Sarah Stevenson and William Cabell Rives used multiple strategies in correspondence to build this image. For example, they emphasized their own affectionate family in letters while serving in diplomatic posts, recognizing that their letters would be publicly shared and that the contents would represent both their family and the United States as a whole. As a representative of the United States, the image of an affectionate family that they created in letters was not just of their own family but also of the country itself. Consequently,

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1 For a detailed discussion of this, see chapter 4. For examples of this strategy in letters, see: Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, July 19, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, July 19, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1, and Sarah Coles Stevenson to Sarah F. Rutherfoord, October 28, 1836, Box 1, Folder 1; Sarah Coles Stevenson to Betsy Coles, January 12, 1839, Box 2, Folder 1; Sarah Coles Stevenson to “My dear Sister,”
men and women in elite families slipped between metaphors of family and country, equating one with the other. While serving as the ambassador to France, William Cabell Rives, for example, assured his relative John Rutherfoord of his continued devotion to his country, echoing the assurances of devotion and affection in familial correspondence that reinforced the intimate ties binding families together.2 Sarah Coles Stevenson similarly slipped between metaphors of family and country when she assured her sister that in his position as ambassador to England, her husband Andrew had “preserve[d] his dignity and that of his country,” firmly equating his dignity and credit with the country’s credit.3 Because an individual’s credit could not be separated from his or her family’s credit, Sarah’s statement reveals the active conceptualization of the United States as a family. In this way, William, Sarah, and others like them firmly equated family with nation. The familial metaphors that guided these families in the early years of the nineteenth century would continue to guide them through the sectional crises of the late antebellum period and into the Civil War.

January 2, 1839, Box 2, Folder 1. All in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU).

2 William Cabell Rives to John Rutherfoord, February 8, 1822, Box 1, Folder 4, John Rutherfoord Papers Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter cited as John Rutherfoord Papers, DU).

3 Sarah Coles Stevenson to “My dear Sister,” January 2, 1839, box 2, folder 1, in the Sarah Coles Stevenson Papers, DU.
In 1850 as sectional tensions heightened, Mary McDuffie asked her friend Martha Burt what she thought of the situation in the United States, while also asking for her husband (Mary’s lawyer) Armistead Burt’s opinion. She “confess[ed]” to Martha that she was “in favor of union It would be so dreadful for those who have friends and relations at the North, to be prevented from seeing them or holding any intercourse with our enemies as the Northern people are called.” In the rest of the letter, Mary related all of the details from a letter she had recently received from her aunt Angelica Van Buren. Saying that she was “in favor of union” in order to see and talk to “friends and relations at the North” before discussing a letter from her aunt Angelica who lived in New York made a direct connection between the state of the union and family.⁴

Although Paul Cameron’s wife and son burned the majority of his Civil War era correspondence and papers after the war to protect his pardon, some surviving letters indicate his views on the war—and the continued use of familial metaphors to guide his actions as sectional tensions escalated. In late January 1861, he informed his father-in-law Thomas Ruffin that his mind was “occupied with the State of the Country” and that he “love[d] the Union” and “love[d] peace.” At that point, however, Paul believed that “the Union is gone and we shall have war,” and he was convinced that “the United

⁴ Mary S. McDuffie to Martha Burt, December 11, 1850, Mary Singleton McDuffie Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
voice of all slave states would be listened to.” Just a week later, he again wrote to Thomas to advise him about his role as a delegate to the peace conference to be held in Washington D.C. the next month—a measure that was meant to help preserve the union. Paul’s words in this letter revealed a slight shift in his loyalties: rather than worrying about the “State of the Country” and the Union which he “love[d]” he now believed that North Carolina “must take our place with our Sister States of the South.” Paul’s loyalties to the state of North Carolina were clear—as was his firm identification of North Carolina as part of a larger family of “Sister States of the South.” By calling the other southern states “Sister States,” Paul explicitly compared the country to a family.

As states began to secede, men and women in elite families continued to use familial metaphors to guide their actions. In late January 1861, James Campbell, a judge in Louisiana, wrote to Paul Cameron to discuss the “unfortunate condition of public affairs, & the fear that the country may ere long be involved in civil war.” After addressing the letter to “My dear Cameron,” James told Paul that he was concerned about his son, who was in school in North Carolina. He told Paul that, although many in Louisiana were bringing their children home from schools in states on the east coast, he felt that his son was safe where he was. He asked, however, that if the “imposing calamities” came to North Carolina and if “the only son of one of your ea[r]liest & truest

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friends needs protection or counsel” that “he will find in you a protector & friend
advisor.” Indeed, he asked Paul to “act for him, as for your own son” if such an event
arose. Throughout the beginning of the letter, James called on ties of intimate friendship
and family to keep his son safe if war did break out, using the same language and
emphases on intimate friendship as other business and political letters did throughout
the antebellum period. James then updated Paul on the political situation in Louisiana in
regards to secession, telling him that the convention to vote on the question would
assemble just three days later. He informed Paul that “The result can be hardly doubted:
for those favoring immediate separate secession, are said to be largely in the majority.”
He, however, had “battled stoutly for co-operation between all the slave states” but was
unsuccessful. Ultimately, to James secession was not “a rightful or constitutional
remedy” but simply “another name for revolution.” James’s calls for “co-operation
between all the slave states” echoed the efforts of large family networks to work
together to achieve their desired goals. While he knew that the majority favored the
immediate secession of the state of Louisiana, his experiences in extended family
business and political networks shaped his desire for “united resistance” among all of
the slave states as a better option for success.7

7 J.H. Campbell to Paul Cameron, January 20, 1861, in Folder 1214 of the Cameron Family Papers #133,
Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
The connections of specific families to different levels of government and the continued presence and dominance of familial metaphors were also clear in a letter from Sarah B. Ruffin to her relative Thomas Ruffin. Written while Thomas was attending the peace conference in Washington, Sarah informed him that she was “pained” and “deeply regret[ted], that so many of my relations, particularly my Brothers should be such strong secessionists.” She was delighted that “one member of the Ruffin family, and that one, the oldest and most esteemed representative of the family, should be a Unionist and a delegate to the peace convention.” Sarah clearly equated family in this case with three things: her blood family, the South, and the United States as a whole. Moreover, she informed Thomas that “a good many Northerners agree […] that a few more men like Judge Ruffin would redeem the Ruffin family; and the South generally.”

Sarah’s choice of phrase hints at a shift, however. Even as she equated her family with the United States, her statement that more men like Thomas “would redeem the Ruffin family; and the South generally” reveals that specific families—and hers in particular—were becoming identified with a region or state rather than the country as a whole.

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8 Sarah B. Ruffin to Thomas Ruffin, February 18, 1861, in The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, Vol. 3, 128-129.
9 Sarah further told Thomas, “I regret to perceive, from the News-papers, that our distinguished cousin Edmund Ruffin, of Va, has set such an example for the younger Ruffin’s; as, to exert his influence, in the opposite direction: he has made a fatal mistake. I would beg of you to convert my brother Thomas, while you are at Washington City, to your political creed; but, I know any attempt to change him would only be a waste of your time and eloquence; as he has forsaken the faith of his Father and Forefathers, who adhered to the Government under all circumstances.” At the end of her letter, she directed that a response be sent care of her physician, Dr. Thomas Kirkbride. Kirkbride was the superintendent of the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane in Philadelphia. See: Sarah B. Ruffin to Thomas Ruffin, February 18, 1861, in The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, Vol. 3, 128-129.
As secession and violent conflict seemed more and more likely, the Coles family also continued to draw on the familial metaphors that had guided their lives for so long. John Coles Rutherfoord used familial language in a speech given to the Virginia House of Delegates on February 21, 1860, several months before Lincoln’s election. John stated that the northern states were at fault in the current conflict and that there were two solutions: “first, to secure our rights in the Union; and next, failing in this, to prepare for the exigencies of an independent existence.”\textsuperscript{10} He argued that the purpose of the conference of southern states was not disunion but to “save the Republic.”\textsuperscript{11} In his view, it was not simply the northern states that were at fault; rather, a “sectional political party” in those states was responsible.\textsuperscript{12} Because of the growth of this sectional political party’s power, John argued that “the first thing to be done is to ward off the immediate danger” and “defeat the Black Republicans.”\textsuperscript{13} Throughout the speech, John argued that defeating “the Black Republicans” was necessary in order to preserve the Union—for “the safety of our whole country.”\textsuperscript{14} Near the end of his speech, John declared, “For weal or for woe, our fortunes are cast with our sister States of the South.”\textsuperscript{15} Like Paul Cameron, John’s statement explicitly compared the country to a family. According to

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 25.
John, this family was threatened by the actions of a single, sectional faction within some of the sister states. This threat required that the southern sister states band together, much as families like his own had banded together around victims of domestic violence. Indeed, the experience of separating a victim of domestic violence from the perpetrator was very similar to what John and others suggested—secession if “driven from the Union by wrong and oppression.”\textsuperscript{16} Both familial metaphors and elite families’ experiences with resolving violence and conflict within the family guided the actions of men like John as sectional tensions came to a head.

William Cabell Rives also drew on familial metaphors when delivering a speech in Richmond to inform his fellow Virginians of the peace conference’s proceedings. In his mind, it was the actions of a different set of sister states that threatened the union, however. William also very explicitly cast the United States as a family, stating that Virginia started the convention when “animated by her well-known loyalty to the Union,” she “invited her sister States to meet her.”\textsuperscript{17} He continued to use a familial metaphor as he called upon his fellow Virginians to accept the terms proposed in the convention and rebuild the strong family of the union. In one case, he resoundingly declared, “Shall Virginia, when she has a fair prospect of ultimately winning back to the

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 26.
bosom of the Union her disaffected sisters, bolt out herself, and thus render the breach complete and irreparable?"\(^\text{18}\) Instead of seceding like South Carolina, he urged Virginians to compromise with their sister states in the North—and work with “her sister border slave States” to bring the states that had seceded back into the fold of the family.\(^\text{19}\) William beseeched his fellow Virginians to “Let Virginia, in family council with her sister border slave States, agree upon such constitutional guarantees […] for the security of the South.” In his mind, Virginians should call on “the double ties of justice and fraternity” to get the other states to agree to these guarantees.\(^\text{20}\) This statement echoed the ties of reciprocal obligation that sustained family business and political networks. William continually cast Virginia as a leader in this national family—a leader who had the responsibility to mediate problems between other family members.

William’s speech combined a familial metaphor with the long tradition of elite Virginians playing important roles in the national government. This combination, he hoped would rally Virginians to act to remedy the rift and support all of their sister states, whether the already seceded cotton states of the South, the border slave states, or the free states of the North.

The elder John Rutherfoord used similar language when he answered his cousin Alexander Hawksley Rutherfoord’s query regarding the election of Lincoln. In mid-

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 366.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 368.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 369.
December 1861, John confessed to Hawksley, who lived in England, that he “deplore[d] it most deeply as a great national calamity.” Furthermore, John believed that the election “seriously threatens the dissolution of the American Union at no distant day, - an event which may be attended with a disastrous civil war unless a separation of the States can be peaceably arranged.” The language John used in this sentence, as well as in the rest of the letter, reveals that John (and others like him) continued to use familial metaphors to guide them as the Civil War fast approached. He recognized that Abraham Lincoln’s election heralded a change and “threaten[ed] the dissolution of the American Union at no distant day” which could lead to a civil war. But, he believed that the war could be averted if “a separation of the States can be peaceably arranged.” John’s statement recalled the way that families like his own dealt with conflicts that threatened the family’s image and stability: separating the offender from the family.21

Throughout the letter, in fact, John’s choice of language suggests that he continued to draw on familial metaphors to guide him as sectional tensions reached a crescendo. Some of this language was much more overt, like his reference to his “Northern brethren.” In other areas, the metaphors become apparent when compared to previous situations in the family. For example, as John explained to his cousin about the abolition plans of the different wings of the Republican party, he stated that Lincoln’s branch of the party aimed to accomplish this goal “by prohibiting the public lands,(the

21 John Rutherfoord to A.H. Rutherfoord, December 19, 1860, Box 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
joint property of the North & South, acquired by the blood and treasure of the South as well as of the North,)” from being settled by slaveholders. Calling the public land “joint property,” sounds incredibly similar to property jointly held by a husband and wife, jointly inherited by members of the same family, or jointly purchased by multiple family members. In this case, he argued that because the South also fought and paid for the land, the northern states had wronged the southern states with this prohibition.22 John’s reasoning in this letter is extremely similar to Edward Coles’s letters to John in the late 1830s about the taxes on the land he had jointly inherited with his siblings. In Edward’s case, as the second chapter showed, his frustrations spilled over in a letter explaining that he had not only jointly inherited this land in Virginia with his siblings, who would not pay the taxes for him, but that he had also been paying the taxes for them on the land that he jointly purchased in Missouri with them.23

John’s statements in this letter about national politics reveal a similar familial dynamic. As with Edward’s letters where his frustration finally burst forth, John’s frustration with the sectional divisions and tensions in the country boiled over in this letter to his cousin Hawksley. For John, the boiling point was Lincoln’s election after years of slavery being curtailed and contained within its current borders. The threat to

22 Ibid.
23 For a detailed discussion of this situation, see chapter two. For Edward’s final letter about the taxes on the Meadows of Dan land, see: Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, April 9, 1837. Box 1, folder 5, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU. For his previous letters on the land and taxes, see: Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, July 20, 1836, Box 1, Folder 4; Edward Coles to John Rutherfoord, January 16, 1837. Box 1, Folder 5. Both in the John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
the system of slavery and the economic and political power of the slave states was too much for him to handle. As with similar statements in familial, business, and political correspondence, John’s statement made known the failure of members of a family, in this case, the South’s “Northern brethren,” and shamed the North (and particularly the Republican party) for their failures and threats to the family’s stability and safety. John’s decision to share all of these thoughts and frustrations in a letter to his cousin in the United Kingdom is analogous to Edward’s decision to share his frustrations with John, who lived in Virginia. Both choices ensured that not only were the failures of the relevant parties made public, but also that these failures were made known to the correct people. In John’s case, sending word to Hawksley helped to spread John’s version of the situation in the United States across the Atlantic to Europe, where Hawksley would then spread the story amongst John’s (and his) friends and family there.

John further emphasized a familial metaphor when he discussed abolitionists’ attempts to block the implementation of the Fugitive Slave Act. He informed Hawksley that the “Abolition Societies” of the “Black Republican programme” had sent “secret emissaries” among the South’s slaves for years. He claimed that the legislatures of Northern states had “nullified the laws of Congress providing, under the federal Constitutions, for the prompt surrender of fugitive slaves, so as to make it not only useless & expensive but personally hazardous to attempt to recover a servant who has escaped into a Northern State.” John’s choice of words here is telling. Throughout the
letter, he referred to the South’s “slaves,” casting the enslaved population as simple objects to be owned. Yet, when he argued that the northern legislatures had made it “useless & expensive” and “personally hazardous” to capture and bring back a fugitive slave, he used the term “servant.” A servant was accorded a place within the family—one low in the family hierarchy and subservient to other family members, but family nonetheless. Recovering a servant was similar to simply recovering a family member and bringing that individual back into the family circle. In the following sentence, John returned to using the word slave and complained that “The actual recover of a slave now would cost more than his value.”24 Using the word servant emphasized family ties (and legitimated the action of capturing and returning an enslaved person to their master), while discussing the value of a slave in relation to the fugitive slave law emphasized the property rights of an enslaved person’s owner (and the white family as a whole).

Throughout the letter, John argued that the “Northern brethren” were at fault in the situation, enumerating a list of grievances going back years. Near the end of the letter, John informed his cousin that “we have reached a crisis when it becomes us of the South to withdraw from the Confederacy unless we can speedily obtain such guarantees as will make it safe for us to remain in it.”25 This statement is similar to discussions of

24 John Rutherfoord to A.H. Rutherfoord, December 19, 1860, Box 4, John Rutherfoord Papers, DU.
25 Ibid.
domestic violence within the family itself: separating the injured party from the offender unless there were guarantees that the injured party would be safe. As sectional tensions intensified and civil war seemed all but certain, these familial metaphors, along with the experiences of dealing with domestic violence and other conflict within the family, continued to guide the family’s actions, choices, and reasoning.

In October 1861, Roberts Coles wrote his uncle John Rutherfoord to explain why the Philadelphia born son of avowedly antislavery Virginian Edward Coles chose to fight for the Confederacy. Roberts’s letter reveals a key change wrought by the violence of the Civil War. Instead of identifying with the United States as family, he equated family with Virginia, declaring that “The name of Coles has always seemed to me to belong to Virginia.” Family remained tied to the government, but his conceptualization of family and state shifted obligations of support from the country to the individual state. Roberts proclaimed that “Although born in Phila I have always regarded myself as a Virginian. Va is the land of my father.” He further stated that he could not “account for the […] veneration & love I have always felt for the old state.”26 Roberts’s reference to the “veneration & love” that he felt for Virginia was reminiscent both of individuals’ assurances of devotion and affection to their family members and of the assurances of devotion to the United States that members of his extended family like William Cabell

26 Roberts Coles to John Rutherfoord, October 13, [1861], Rutherfoord Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society. (Hereafter cited as Rutherfoord Family Papers, VHS).
Rives and Andrew and Sarah Stevenson had used in the antebellum period. Roberts’s statement firmly equated family with the state of Virginia—not the United States.

For Roberts, the violent conflict of sectionalism brought to a head with the outbreak of war could be resolved by “an adjusted separation.” Such language recalled the ways families like his own dealt with violence and conflict within the family: separating the offender from the family and redefining who was a part of the family. Even as he redrew the relationship between family and institutions of government, Roberts drew on previous responses to violence within the family, relying on familial metaphors to deal with the rapid changes wrought by the violent conflict of the Civil War.27

By identifying more with the individual state, Roberts and others like him very explicitly allied with the South. This was an easy adjustment to make because these families were just as heavily invested in the state government as they were in the national government. In fact, some were even more invested on the state level than others: the Cameron family, though with ties to the national government, was already much more invested on the state and local level. The Coles family, on the other hand, had people that were both heavily involved and highly prominent in all levels of government. By creating stronger familial ties to their individual state as Roberts did

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27 Roberts Coles to John Rutherfoord, October 13, [1861], Rutherfoord Family Papers, VHS. Some of these previous responses included Marion Deveaux’s divorce from second husband Augustus Converse, and Mary Singleton McRa’s legal separation from her husband Powell McRa.
when saying that the name of Coles belonged to Virginia, their greater loyalty and obligation shifted to their individual state and not the country as a whole.

As Roberts’s letter indicates, the realities of a war that it was becoming increasingly clear would not end quickly challenged the system that elite families had successfully relied on in the decades since the Revolution. After so firmly tying their interests to that of the state and federal governments, they struggled to deal with a federal government that threatened everything they held dear. To these elite southerners, the federal government, led by the corrupt sectional Republican Party, no longer upheld its side of the reciprocal obligations inherent in membership in a family. Individuals like Paul Cameron, William C. Rives, John Coles Rutherfoord, and John Rutherfoord thus condemned their northern brethren for failing to support the economic interests of the southern sister states and threatening the end of the system of slavery. In doing so, they justified their separation from the union as a protection of the much-maligned sister states’ interests. Because they had already folded the institutions of state government into their familial networks, this separation only necessitated a relatively simple shift in perspective. Much like Roberts Coles, men and women in elite families shifted their allegiance from the United States as a whole to more firmly and fully identify with their individual states.

Even as the Civil War violently tore apart both the country and the idea that the United States was one large, happy family, individuals in elite families like the Coles
family of Virginia and the Cameron family of North Carolina continued to use familial metaphors to organize their interests. Because, in their view, the federal government had failed them, they turned to their state governments, whose institutions they were already deeply embedded in. The centrality of families to the institutions and power of government remained, if in a slightly altered form.

In the context of the Civil War and its aftermath, these familial metaphors failed families like the Camerons and Coles. The southern sister states were unable to successfully separate from the union, and the United States forcibly brought them back into the fold. These families’ attempts to cast the southern states as the wronged party proved disastrous. Their experiences with family conflict in the antebellum years led them to believe they could peacefully separate the offender (the North) from the victim (the South) by following the same strategies that had proved successful for decades. But, they could not simply ignore the conflict leading to this separation. Nor could they pay for the conflict to disappear. Secession only escalated the conflict, and these families could no longer hope for a peaceful separation. Instead, they were faced with a long and bloody civil war.

After the South surrendered, these elite families once again had to reorganize the way they understood their relationship to government. The men and women in these families watched as the federal government enfranchised African Americans after the war while they themselves lost their privileged access to government at all levels. In this
context, local, state, and federal institutions of government clearly became something
that was no longer *theirs*—at least for a while.
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Biography

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