

1985

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### Recommended Citation

Razek, Joseph R. (1985) "Accounting on the old plantation: A study of the financial records of an ante-bellum Louisiana sugar planter," *Accounting Historians Journal*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

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*The Accounting Historians Journal*  
Vol. 12, No. 1  
Spring 1985

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## **ACCOUNTING ON THE OLD PLANTATION: A Study of the Financial Records of an Ante-bellum Louisiana Sugar Planter**

*Abstract:* Very little information exists on the accounting methods and procedures of the great cotton and sugar plantations in the Southeastern United States during the period preceding the Civil War. Fortunately, one sugar planter, William J. Minor of Natchez, Mississippi and Houma, Louisiana, maintained a detailed set of records, among which are two ledgers. From these we learn that a hybrid accounting system, using elements of cash and accrual and single and double-entry bookkeeping, was in use. While such a system might seem strange today, it appears to have served its purpose in its particular operating environment.

One of the most interesting and glamorous periods in the history of the American South is the decade preceding the Civil War. Although scholars who have researched this period have found a wealth of information about the social fabric and about economic aspects of the period, very little appears to have been written on the financial recordkeeping systems of the various economic units, especially the great cotton and sugar plantations.

Two possible reasons for this dearth of information are:

1. Planters were too busy to bother with bookkeeping, or
2. What records were maintained were, in many cases, destroyed during the Civil War. Certain records in various state archives lend credence to this, as there are often missing pages which might have contained financial statements, lists of assets, or crop information.

Information available on the early plantations comes primarily from diaries and family letters. Such materials contain many details of the social and economic conditions of the time. They also provide a picture of the relationships between the planters and their families, business associates and slaves, and discuss the weather, the condition of the crops, and sickness among the slaves. Little financial information, however, is provided.

Fortunately, one planter, William J. Minor of Natchez, Mississippi and Houma, Louisiana, kept a series of diaries and ledgers which provide a great deal of insight into the operating and financial aspects of large sugar plantations. The purpose of this article is to describe these records and to show that this planter maintained a fairly sophisticated accounting system. First, however, it is necessary to understand something of the environment in which the plantations operated, as well as of the operations of the plantations themselves. Therefore the first part of this article will be devoted to a general description of ante-bellum plantations. The second part will describe the specific plantations owned by Minor, and the diaries and ledgers used to record their operations.

### *Plantation Operations*

The plantations studied in this paper, which were in Southeast Louisiana, grew sugar. They were established during the nineteenth century, in contrast to many Virginia and Carolina plantations, which were over 150 years old by the time of the Civil War.

Each plantation was relatively self-contained. Because of the seasonal nature of the crop, and the need for labor to handle the "peak" season, it was possible to engage in other pursuits during the rest of the year.

One such activity was the production of food. According to one planter, corn and livestock occupied 17% and 15%, respectively, of the total mandays worked on his plantation.<sup>1</sup> Another was the making of clothing. This had the added benefit of providing gainful employment for those who were temporarily or permanently unable to perform field work. According to a plantation guide of the times, a sign of good management was "having all winter clothing spun and woven on the place. By having a room elevated to that purpose, under charge of some one of the old women, where those who may be complaining or convalescent after sickness may be employed in some light work, and where all of the women may be sent in wet weather."<sup>2</sup>

Other activities which aided self-sufficiency included cooperage, shoemaking, carpentry, and roadbuilding. In addition, certain slaves, who were trained as skilled artisans, were often hired out as independent "contractors." Their obligation to their owners was to pay them a predetermined share of their income.

A typical sugar plantation consisted of 2,000 acres of land, only part of which was cultivated, and 100-150 slaves. In addition, it had a sugar house and mill, where the sugar was crushed and the juice

purified and granulated. A large investment was required for oxen and horses, to provide the motive power necessary to operate the mills, move the crops, and assist in plowing.

Slaves were purchased with cash, short-term promissory notes or, most commonly, with drafts on factors. During the 1850s prime field hands sold in New Orleans for around \$1,500 each.<sup>3</sup> Women, children, and cripples were somewhat less costly. In addition to providing a reasonably dependable work force, slaves reproduced themselves at a rate generally more than sufficient to offset depreciation and death of those originally purchased.

While the smaller plantations were directly managed by their owners, the larger ones tended to be run by general agents or overseers, responsible for all operations. It appears that overseers were difficult to deal with, and often proved unstable or incompetent. A plantation owned by William J. Minor, for example, employed six overseers between 1847 and 1860.

One reason for the turnover of overseers can be gleaned from the following example of the rules and regulations of a cotton plantation:

1. He is to be *personally* responsible to see to the feeding and currying of the horses and mules every day while they are at work, and at such times as may be required, such mules and horses at least once every week.
2. He is to require certain hands to see to the feeding and the currying of the mules and horses, who shall be detailed specially for this purpose.
3. He is to keep accurate account of all plantation implements, tools, etc. and inventory all the same on hand quarterly.
4. . . . to see that each hand performs his appointed task or daily amount of labor, to treat all slaves with kindness and humanity, not to whip cruelly, or unnecessarily, not to beat, bruise, or maim any slave, not to work hard, whip severely or otherwise illtreat woman with child, not to permit one Negro to whip another, to allow no quarreling, fighting, or cursing among the slaves . . . to keep accurate account of the daily-picking of cotton made . . . to carry out the rules for the management of my slaves. . . .<sup>4</sup>

The field slaves were organized in gangs, each under the supervision of a first and a second driver. The drivers were usually slaves themselves. Rations for each field hand at the Minor plantations

consisted of three and a half pounds of pork or bacon per week, as much bread and molasses as he could eat, and "also vegetables of the season—as many as he can eat."<sup>5</sup>

Slaves were also allowed to maintain their own vegetable gardens and to keep chickens and other small animals. On many occasions they sold the chickens and eggs to the plantation, either for cash or for tobacco and sweets. They were provided with clothes, which were usually made on the plantation, along with one pair of shoes per year.

While the lot of the slave was not to be envied, he or she was relatively well treated at most plantations. This humane treatment was not so much a function of morality on the part of the planters as of the fact that each slave represented a sizeable investment. Cruel treatment would not only reduce the productivity of the slaves, but also tend to decrease their resale value.

In addition to their crop-raising functions, many plantations operated general stores. Such stores sold food, shoes, chinaware, and farming utensils. Generally, these items were sold on credit, with payment made after the sale of their customers' crops. Livestock and vegetables were often taken in trade for manufactured goods and clothing.

On some plantations slaves were paid for their labor. Wages usually ranged from \$1.00 to \$10.00 per year, depending on the nature of the work performed. Although most slaves spent their money at the plantation store, a few chose to save up to buy their freedom, or the freedom of a child.

A discussion of plantation life would not be complete without mentioning the role of the factor. This firm, usually located in a major city, received the planter's crop on consignment and sold it for the best possible price. For this service it received a 2½% commission.

The factor also acted as a banker for the planter. Much business was conducted by means of drafts drawn against the factor. These drafts circulated freely and were considered, by some, to be the equivalent of cash. They represented advances against the following year's crop and generally carried an interest rate of 8%.

If the proceeds from the sale of a crop exceeded the funds advanced plus accrued interest, the factor paid the difference to the planter, who usually used it to buy more slaves or land or to repay other debts. If the crop failed, or the proceeds from its sale were insufficient to cover the funds advanced by the factor, a promissory note was given for the difference and the new year began with a

zero balance. In many cases, the planter had to provide collateral in the form of slaves, racehorses or even an entire plantation.

Other services provided by the factor included purchasing supplies and personal items not readily available to the planter locally, purchasing slaves for the plantation, acting as a host to the planter and his family when they visited the city, and helping to educate the planter's sons. The factor also performed financial recordkeeping for many plantations. Exhibit 1 shows Minor's statement from Henry L. Leverich & Co., a factor located in New York City, for 1838-9. It will be seen that this firm charged interest on debit balances and paid interest on credit balances.

### *The Minor Plantations*

The plantations whose records are the subject of the remainder of this article were owned by William J. Minor, the son of a governor of the Natchez district when it was still under Spanish control. Minor's early life was spent near Natchez, but, in the 1820s, he was sent to Philadelphia, where he studied Latin, French, and English under a tutor and attended science and philosophy lectures at the University of Pennsylvania.

In the 1830s, Minor returned to Natchez with his wife, Rebecca Gustine of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, entered the banking business, and fathered eight children. By the 1850s he had acquired three sugar plantations in Louisiana—Waterloo, a 1,900 acre holding on the Mississippi River about 25 miles below Baton Rouge, and South-down and Hollywood, 6,000 and 1,400 acres, respectively, in Terrebonne Parish, near Houma.<sup>6</sup> Although Minor directed these plantations from his residence near Natchez, he retained control of management policies at all times. He visited the plantations frequently and kept in constant touch with them by mail. Day-to-day operations were taken care of by his sons and by overseers.

Minor's factors were H. L. Leverich & Co. in New York and W. P. Leverich & Co. in New Orleans. Occasionally, however, he sold his crops directly to customers. The use of the Leverich firms was no accident; two of the Leverich brothers were married to sisters of Minor's wife. The use of a New York factor offered greater access to capital markets and, in many cases, higher prices for sugar and molasses.

Politically, Minor, like most other large slaveholders in the deep south, was a Whig. He was interested in the preservation of slavery, not on moral grounds, but because of his tremendous investment in human resources. He was firmly opposed to secession because he



was convinced that it would lead to a war which would destroy the plantation system and result in the emancipation of the slaves.

During the Civil War and the Reconstruction, Minor suffered greatly. He spent the remainder of his life pressing his claims against the U. S. Government for compensation for his losses.<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, he was able to keep the plantations and they stayed in the Minor family until 1932. William Minor died, in 1869, of a stroke of apoplexy brought on, no doubt, by events following the "unfortunate confrontation."

The Minor family papers are extremely interesting from the standpoint of the accounting historian. In addition to over one hundred letters, the collection contains diaries (journals) covering the period 1847-1869, five notebooks containing observations on scientific topics, a list of family births and deaths for 1846-1860, a family genealogy, a list of Negroes (1852), with data on births, weights and deaths, a post-bellum freedman's contract and a great deal of other material (including a complete book on steam engines) not relevant to the financial aspects of plantation life. For purposes of accounting research, however, this collection also contains two ledgers. The first covers all of Minor's holdings from 1834 through 1883. The second appears to be from a general store or commissary and covers the period 1857-1869.

### *The Diaries*

The diaries have hard covers and are much like diaries in use today. William Minor kept one for each plantation. In it he (or the person keeping it) recorded information about the weather and various daily activities. He also made notes on the size of different fields and lists of "weights of sugar." An example of this last is located at the end of the 1850 Southdown diary. It is probably a list of weights of hogsheads of sugar produced that year (e.g., 1,350, 1,110, 1,180, etc.).<sup>8</sup> The same diary also contains an inventory of livestock made every three months (e.g., work oxen—37, bulls—1, cows—24, etc.).

From it we can obtain an idea of the level of self-sufficiency of the plantations and of outside purchases. Typical entries include:<sup>9</sup>

- Sept. 25, 1849 — Making bricks—Davis gang cutting cane stalks—no rain.
- Sept. 26, 1849 — Making bricks—cutting out weeds—gathering corn, putting in pea vines—no rain.
- Sept. 1, 1850 — A day of great weather changes yesterday. Today it is clear and quite cool. Wind



- northerly—John (?) landed 20 bottles of liniment from Leverich & Co. New Orleans.
- Mar. 11, 1852 — Bot (& hauled home) 1,850 barrels of corn @ 75¢ a barrel & 8 barrels @ \$4—Corn planted on the 27th & 28th Sept. coming up all along the rows—as it is very dry, the peanuts do not look very vigorous—Very slight rain last night—no rain today.
- Oct. 18, 1852 — Men cutting cane—Davis gang digging ditches—no rain.

Some entries in the plantation diary give insights into other aspects of the organization, such as the health of the slaves, and the quantity of sugar refined.

- Dec. 14, 1850 — Some impurities in the 1st strike—rest clear—Produced 27 Hogsheads of sugar
- June 9, 1851 — Lost 40 men, women and children by cholera
- Sept. 10, 1851 — A great deal of sickness on the place—for the last six weeks have averaged 25 in the hospital—Intermittent and Dingué fever, influenza and grippe—heavy rain
- Sept. 17, 1851 — Seventy in hospital here—most with mumps, boils and fever—All the nurses broke down
- May 5, 1856 — Gave the Negroes their summer clothes—The day has been very humid—Afraid it will rain in a few days
- Mar. 10, 1860 — Clear. Started plowing in #42 field—Some of children sick, hear Mr. Glass has lost 9 negroes in last 2 weeks and 17 since July—“pneumonia”
- Mar. 24, 1860 — Beverly (Hannah’s child) died at 15 past 6 P.M. aged near one year

The plantation diaries give us little or no information as to the revenues or expenses of the plantation. Fortunately, William Minor also kept a personal diary for the same period. It is here that we find more financial information. Sales were sometimes recorded in this diary, as were major purchases and other expenses. Among the entries are the following:

- Mar. 5, 1849 — Mr. William F. Gray took job of overseer at Southdown at a salary of 1,000 per annum

- Mar. 11, 1849 — Shipped to A. S. Brigman 1 Hogshead Sugar—1253 gross  
 Shipped to Jas. Ligit 1 Hhds Sugar—1305 gross  
 Shipped to R. McCullin 1 Hhds Sugar—1300 gross
- Apr. 10, 1849 — Shipped this day from Southdown on schooner Col. Fanning—Wm. Custheant, master—145 hogshead sugar, 3 barrels cistern bottoms, 198 barrels molasses—The Fanning lay 20 days at mouth of bayou—including 2 Sundays
- Feb. 26, 1856 — J. H. Ilgler paid yesterday to Leverich—N.O.—\$550 but still owes for 53 days interest at 8%—\$6.47

This plantation also manufactured parts for cisterns. Evidently, it employed an in-house cooper to make barrels for the sugar and in his spare time, the cooper must have made the cistern bottoms—another source of income for the plantation and, perhaps, himself.

### *The Ledgers*

While the personal diaries of William J. Minor provide us with some financial information, they do so in a sporadic manner, shedding little light on the records maintained for the plantations. Fortunately, this collection, unlike most, contains two complete ledgers. The first one covers Minor's business enterprises between 1834 and 1883, and the second one appears to be from a general store or plantation commissary for the period 1857-1869. Both are in remarkably good condition, considering their age.

The ledger used to record Minor's business activities is leather bound and contains about 200 pages. It measures 8½ inches by 11 inches, and opens flat, exposing a page for debits on the left and one for credits on the right. In the beginning of this book is a separate index section, with tabs for each letter of the alphabet. Under each letter is listed one or more accounts and the page on which each is found (e.g. Leverich & Co.—150), making it easy to find any account in the ledger.

This ledger contains accounts for the three plantations and a breeding farm Minor also owned. In addition, it contains a rather sizeable account for Mrs. Katherine Minor, his mother, which appears to cover her household expenses. Finally, the ledger contains

EXHIBIT 2

LEDGER ACCOUNT OF WATERLOO PLANTATION, 1837-38

Debit		Credit	
1837			1838
Jan 1	Balance forward		11000
Jan 11	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jan 24	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jan 27	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jan 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jan 31	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Feb 3	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Feb 6	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Feb 9	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Feb 12	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Feb 15	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Feb 18	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Feb 21	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Feb 24	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Feb 27	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Feb 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Mar 3	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Mar 6	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Mar 9	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Mar 12	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Mar 15	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Mar 18	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Mar 21	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Mar 24	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Mar 27	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Mar 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Apr 3	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Apr 6	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Apr 9	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Apr 12	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Apr 15	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Apr 18	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Apr 21	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Apr 24	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Apr 27	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Apr 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
May 3	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
May 6	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
May 9	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
May 12	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
May 15	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
May 18	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
May 21	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
May 24	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
May 27	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
May 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jun 3	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jun 6	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jun 9	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jun 12	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jun 15	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jun 18	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jun 21	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jun 24	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jun 27	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jun 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jul 3	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jul 6	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jul 9	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jul 12	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jul 15	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jul 18	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jul 21	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jul 24	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jul 27	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jul 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Aug 3	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Aug 6	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Aug 9	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Aug 12	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Aug 15	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Aug 18	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Aug 21	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Aug 24	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Aug 27	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Aug 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Sep 3	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Sep 6	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Sep 9	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Sep 12	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Sep 15	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Sep 18	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Sep 21	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Sep 24	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Sep 27	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Sep 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Oct 3	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Oct 6	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Oct 9	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Oct 12	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Oct 15	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Oct 18	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Oct 21	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Oct 24	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Oct 27	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Oct 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Nov 3	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Nov 6	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Nov 9	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Nov 12	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Nov 15	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Nov 18	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Nov 21	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Nov 24	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Nov 27	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Nov 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Dec 3	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Dec 6	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Dec 9	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Dec 12	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Dec 15	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Dec 18	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Dec 21	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Dec 24	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Dec 27	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Dec 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
1838			
Jan 1	Balance forward		11000
Jan 31	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Feb 28	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Mar 31	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Apr 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
May 31	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jun 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Jul 31	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Aug 31	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Sep 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Oct 31	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Nov 30	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Dec 31	By cash for 100 lbs of sugar		1000
Total			11000

accounts for Minor's factors, merchants with whom he traded, his physician, and other persons from whom he purchased goods or services, or borrowed money, or to whom he lent money.

Each group of accounts covers a three to five year period, after which come several blank pages, and then the same accounts for another similar period. This process repeats itself, with a few changes in the individual accounts, through the 1860s. A sample account for the Waterloo plantation is illustrated in Exhibit 2.

The plantation accounts are, generally speaking, operating accounts. When Minor incurred an expense, he made a debit entry. Expenses were usually paid in cash or by the factor. Credit entries were made to record sales of sugar, molasses, cisterns, and miscellaneous items, such as horses and guns. In the accounts of the factors, debits represent the sales of crops while credits represent items purchased through, and interest on funds borrowed from, the factor.

Many entries can be traced from the plantation to the factor, indicating double entries. For example, on November 15, 1849, Minor made a credit to the Southdown account for \$12,901.46. The description in the ledger reads "By new proceeds 285 Hugs (hogsheads) Sugar, 3 bls. Cisterns & 329 lbs. Molasses sold in New York by C. P. Leverich." On the same date, in the C. P. Leverich & Co. account, Minor made the following debit entry:

1849

November 15

To net proceeds

140 Hoghs Sugar		
130 Bls Molasses	\$6,493.88	
145 Hoghs Sugar		
3 Bls Cisterns		
199 Bls Molasses	<u>6,407.58</u>	\$12,901.46

Minor's expenses can also be traced to his factors' accounts, although he would sometimes record his balance with each factor as a single entry to a plantation account. Notice, for example, in Exhibit 3 the Leverich & Co. debit dated July 1, 1847. In this year Minor went into debt to his factor, as the expenses he incurred were not covered by the proceeds from his crops. Minor probably paid this difference in cash or signed a note for it.

An example of an expense that can be traced to Minor's factor (C. P. Leverich, again) was dated October 1, 1848. On the debit of the Southdown account is the following entry:

EXHIBIT 3

LEDGER ACCOUNT OF SOUTHDOWN PLANTATION 1846-47

1847	July	1 By note for cash on hand	400 7/8	
		2 By note for cash on hand	796 10	
		3 By note for cash on hand	5190 10	
		4 By note for cash on hand	4088 06 11-27 91	
		5 By note for cash on hand	52	
		6 By note for cash on hand	70	
		7 By note for cash on hand	15	
		8 By note for cash on hand	195 10	
		9 By note for cash on hand	100 00	
		10 By note for cash on hand	257 00	
		11 By note for cash on hand	750 00	
		12 By note for cash on hand	156 40	
		13 By note for cash on hand	915 00	
		14 By note for cash on hand	500 00	
		15 By note for cash on hand	622 00	
		16 By note for cash on hand	1415 00	
		17 By note for cash on hand	10 00	
		18 By note for cash on hand	57 20	
		19 By note for cash on hand	235 00	
		20 By note for cash on hand	264 00	
		21 By note for cash on hand	25 10	
		22 By note for cash on hand	32 11	
		23 By note for cash on hand	52 10	
		24 By note for cash on hand	15 00	
		25 By note for cash on hand	26 50	
		26 By note for cash on hand	22 42	
		27 By note for cash on hand	154 00	
		28 By note for cash on hand	70 00	
		29 By note for cash on hand	60 00	
		30 By note for cash on hand	524 25	
		31 By note for cash on hand	27 61 64 75	
		32 By note for cash on hand	79 84	
		33 By note for cash on hand	122 26	
		34 By note for cash on hand	412 72	
		35 By note for cash on hand	1255 40	
		36 By note for cash on hand	22,407 70	



October 1	Cash paid for 142½ gals oil		
	@52½¢ per gallon	\$72.80	
	5 lbs. Indigo	5.31	
	Cartage & Insurance	2.45	\$80.56
		<u>          </u>	

In the C. P. Leverich account is the following credit entry:

October 1	By Sundries for Southdown	\$80.56
-----------	---------------------------	---------

Why he referred to "cash" when Leverich & Co. probably purchased the materials is open to speculation. Perhaps he was careless when making the debit entry, and put a ditto mark under the word "cash" in the previous entry, which really was for cash purchases.

Generally speaking, Minor was not interested in a balance sheet. The only attempt at capital valuation is found in the 1837 account of Waterloo plantation. At the time he purchased it, he made the following debit entry:

1837			
August 1	To cash valuation 2200 acres land at \$50 per acre	\$110,000	
	To cash valuation of 183 Negroes at \$500 each	91,500	
	To cash valuation of work(?) Stock, farming utensiles, etc.	10,000	\$211,500.00 <sup>10</sup>
		<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>

Minor apparently did not carry this balance forward or revalue his assets, nor did he record depreciation. All other debits from this entry forward were for expenses. They include such items as medical bills for the slaves (\$300), taxes (\$277), and pork, corn and general operating expenses (\$1,000). In addition to the overseer (\$1,250), Minor hired an engineer (\$250) and a sugar maker (\$450) to operate his processing plant during the grinding season.

### *The System*

A study of the ledgers reveals that Minor was primarily interested in the operating statement, and that he used a variant of the cash basis. Revenues received and expenses paid directly in cash were recognized when the cash was received or paid, whereas revenues and expenses incurred through his factors were generally recorded

when Minor received notification of a sale or a purchase from the factors, rather than when cash settlement was made. Thus, when dealing with factors he used the accrual basis.

Minor apparently maintained one account for each plantation. When an expense was incurred, the account was debited, and when crops were sold, it was credited.

One other expense that appears occasionally in the ledger, and is also mentioned in Minor's personal diaries, is rental of slaves. In 1840, he hired an undisclosed number of Negroes from F. L. Claiborne for \$200. He also rented a number of slaves from R. R. Wilkins, at rates of \$7.50 and \$10.00 per month, for several years.

The accounts of Minor's factors were kept in the same manner as the plantation accounts. At the end of each year, the factor would generally send a draft to Minor for the difference between the debits and credits, or occasionally Minor would send funds to the factor, or sign a note for the difference. Interest was paid on amounts owed by both Minor and the factor. The account illustrated in Exhibit 4 is interesting because Minor received settlement drafts in favor of several other parties, including his principal factor Leverich. No further entries are found for this particular account.

William Minor did not use the calendar year as his accounting period, but had a June 30 fiscal year. This was probably because June was a slow time in the sugar business and, by the end of that month, all revenues from the previous year's crop should have been collected. All expenses incurred after the end of June could reasonably be charged against the next year's crop. Unfortunately, Minor sometimes continued to record revenues after he had finished recording the expenses of a given fiscal year. He would often close out August credits to the prior year while he closed out July debits to the current year. He probably did this when the late credits represented revenues from the prior year's crops. Most of the time, however, his debit and credit entries to revenue and expense accounts matched, and closing was completed after the last credit entry was made.

Study of this particular ledger leaves the reader puzzled in respect of accounting for cash. Minor would, for example, debit an account "To cash for 252 lbs. corn at \$1.12½—\$283.50," but where was the credit to cash? The accounting records do not show the receipt of cash from Minor's factors, or from the sale of crops. Where were such receipts recorded?

Minor might have maintained a separate cash book, which has been lost. As he was a banker, however, it is more likely that Minor





put his cash in the bank and used his bank statements to keep track of it. This idea is especially plausible as he would occasionally give the overseer some cash for operating expenses, rather than maintain a separate cash account in the ledger for each plantation. Thus it appears that, in the case of cash transactions, Minor was using a single entry system but, in the case of transactions on credit, he was using double entry. As he apparently did not prepare financial statements, and was interested primarily in the profit of each plantation and how much he owed or was owed, this system probably met his needs.

The second ledger, that of a store or commissary, is smaller than the first (about 80 pages) and has accounts for shoes (which were given to the slaves and cost \$1.00 per pair), merchandise, and for various people, most of whom are recognizable as employees of the plantation, slaves or neighbors. In these accounts, the person was debited for purchases and wages or cash (or in-kind) payments were credited. Every so often the account was settled, and Minor made a note of this at the bottom of the page.

The account of Andrew Dugas, an overseer at Southdown, is illustrated in Exhibit 5. Mr. Dugas purchased sugar, oil and molasses, as well as provisions from another merchant. His wage for the calendar year was \$1,000. Minor deducted the commissary bill from this amount and paid him the difference in cash. The other accounts in the ledger are similar to this one, most of the purchases being pork, provisions, and sugar.

Since there is no goods account, it is difficult to ascertain if this ledger was merely used to keep track of how much was owed (an accounts receivable subsidiary ledger) or whether it was also used to determine the profitability of the store.

### *Conclusion*

On the basis of the Minor ledger, it appears that a fairly sophisticated accounting system was in use on at least three sugar plantations in the ante-bellum south. The accounting records studied, of William J. Minor, reveal the use of a "hybrid" system. Although essentially on the cash basis, receivables and payables were also recorded. In large part, this resulted from the use of factors who handled most crop sales and many purchases for the plantations.

The system appears to be double entry when transactions were made through factors, but single entry when purchases or sales were made directly by the plantations. Finally, there was no provi-

EXHIBIT 5

ACCOUNT FROM STORE LEDGER—ANDREW DUGAS

<p>1989          Andrew Dugas in a book          April 1 1/2 sack log 20.00          April 10 " 1 sack log 1.00          April 15 " 1 sack log 1.00          April 20 " 1 sack log 1.00          April 25 " 1 sack log 1.00          May 1 " 1 sack log 1.00          May 8 " 1 sack log 1.00          May 15 " 1 sack log 1.00          May 22 " 1 sack log 1.00          May 29 " 1 sack log 1.00          June 5 " 1 sack log 1.00          June 12 " 1 sack log 1.00          June 19 " 1 sack log 1.00          June 26 " 1 sack log 1.00          July 3 " 1 sack log 1.00          July 10 " 1 sack log 1.00          July 17 " 1 sack log 1.00          July 24 " 1 sack log 1.00          July 31 " 1 sack log 1.00          Total 100.00</p>	<p>W. J. Minner          Paid 12 by 12 month wages ending 1/1/89          131st Decem. br. 1987          Andrew this 12 to April 1988          P.R. Minner</p>
<p>1980          Jan 9 20 lbs sugar purchased 2.00          - Minner's year 20.00          Feb 1 " 1 Balance of April 1.15          March 16 " <del>Balance</del> Balance Brought 5.60          on 12 18th 1.15          " 1 " 1 log 5.60          " 15 " 1 sack log 5.00          " 18 " 1 sack log 5.00          " 21 " 2 Ribs 100.00          " 24 " 1 " 1.00          " 27 " 1 " 1.00          " 30 " 1 " 1.00          " 31 " 1 " 1.00          Total 22.15          1981          April 12 1/2 sack log 1.00          " 19 " 1 " 1.00          " 26 " 1 " 1.00          " 3 " 1 " 1.00          " 10 " 1 " 1.00          " 17 " 1 " 1.00          " 24 " 1 " 1.00          " 31 " 1 " 1.00          Total 10.00</p>	<p>1982          Jan 9 20 lbs sugar purchased 2.00          - Minner's year 20.00          Feb 1 " 1 Balance of April 1.15          March 16 " <del>Balance</del> Balance Brought 5.60          on 12 18th 1.15          " 1 " 1 log 5.60          " 15 " 1 sack log 5.00          " 18 " 1 sack log 5.00          " 21 " 2 Ribs 100.00          " 24 " 1 " 1.00          " 27 " 1 " 1.00          " 30 " 1 " 1.00          " 31 " 1 " 1.00          Total 22.15          1981          April 12 1/2 sack log 1.00          " 19 " 1 " 1.00          " 26 " 1 " 1.00          " 3 " 1 " 1.00          " 10 " 1 " 1.00          " 17 " 1 " 1.00          " 24 " 1 " 1.00          " 31 " 1 " 1.00          Total 10.00</p>
<p>1981          April 12 1/2 sack log 1.00          " 19 " 1 " 1.00          " 26 " 1 " 1.00          " 3 " 1 " 1.00          " 10 " 1 " 1.00          " 17 " 1 " 1.00          " 24 " 1 " 1.00          " 31 " 1 " 1.00          Total 10.00          Andrew this 12 to April 1981          P.R. Minner</p>	<p>1982          Jan 9 20 lbs sugar purchased 2.00          - Minner's year 20.00          Feb 1 " 1 Balance of April 1.15          March 16 " <del>Balance</del> Balance Brought 5.60          on 12 18th 1.15          " 1 " 1 log 5.60          " 15 " 1 sack log 5.00          " 18 " 1 sack log 5.00          " 21 " 2 Ribs 100.00          " 24 " 1 " 1.00          " 27 " 1 " 1.00          " 30 " 1 " 1.00          " 31 " 1 " 1.00          Total 22.15          1981          April 12 1/2 sack log 1.00          " 19 " 1 " 1.00          " 26 " 1 " 1.00          " 3 " 1 " 1.00          " 10 " 1 " 1.00          " 17 " 1 " 1.00          " 24 " 1 " 1.00          " 31 " 1 " 1.00          Total 10.00</p>

sion for depreciation or accounts for fixed assets, other than the entries at the beginning of the Waterloo Plantation account.

It must be remembered that most plantations were family-owned and, since there were no income taxes and few regulatory bodies, governmental interference in the affairs of businesses was rare. In addition, the planters' factors often maintained records of the plantations' revenues and many of the plantations' expenses. Minor was probably atypical in that he paid so many expenses in cash, rather than with drafts drawn against his factors. Being a banker, he was probably less willing to place his fortune in the hands of outside parties than were his fellow planters.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kollock.

<sup>2</sup> Affleck.

<sup>3</sup> Phillips, p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> Eaton, p. 246.

<sup>5</sup> McKnight.

<sup>6</sup> The land on which Southdown Plantation was located once belonged to the legendary "Jim" Bowie.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed account of his tribulations after the Civil War, see J. Carlyle Sitterson, "The Transition from Slave to Free Economy on the William J. Minor Plantations," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 18 (1944), pp. 216-24.

<sup>8</sup> A Hogshead of sugar is 63 gallons and weighs between 1000 and 1300 lbs., depending on moisture content.

<sup>9</sup> Minor, "Plantation Diaries," 1847-1869. The remainder of the entries discussed herein are found in this collection, which is part of the Minor (William J. and Family) Papers, and which is found at the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

<sup>10</sup> The original copy of this ledger page is shown in Exhibit #2.

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