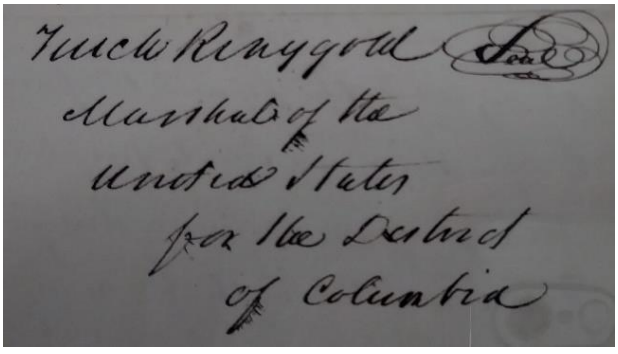
Tench Ringgold, Washington's "Controversial" Marshal, 1818-1831

Terence Walz

Tench Ringgold, marshal of the District of Columbia 1818 to 1831, a major figure in the early decades of the District's history, is little remembered today. There is an entry on him in the Wikipedia, which contains errors, and a good though short biography of him on the internet by the historian of the U.S. Marshal's Service, David Turk.[1] An early residence mistakenly bearing his family name is considered a "lost treasure" of Washington,[2] but a later residence, constructed by his enslaved workers and hired free laborers in 1825, has survived and is now known as the DACOR Bacon House. On the corner of F and 18th Streets, it is in what's known as the President's Neighborhood. As a volunteer historian of the house, I started researching Ringgold's life and his household and came to understand why he became known as a "controversial" person and why he may not have been given the recognition he deserves. I will argue here that Ringgold's management of the old Capitol jail, enforcement of the District's Black Code and debtor's laws, his collection of "poundage" fees, and friends in high places all contributed to his downfall in the nineteenth century and subsequent reputation as a "controversial" marshal.

Background

Although Ringgold was among the most important men in the District and a member of a distinguished family, there is no known portrait of him. He seems not to have sat for any of the Peale family of portraitists nor for Saint-Mémim when he worked in the Washington area 1803 to 1809 and was commissioned by many great men and women to make their profile.[3] If he did so, his portrait has not yet been identified. To illustrate this talk, I have used a variety of images drawn from documents, newspapers and drawings and photographs to highlight aspects of the man and his career. Lacking a portrait, his signature will have to suffice.



In lieu of a portrait, Tench Ringgold's signature,
Marshal of the United States for the District of Columbia

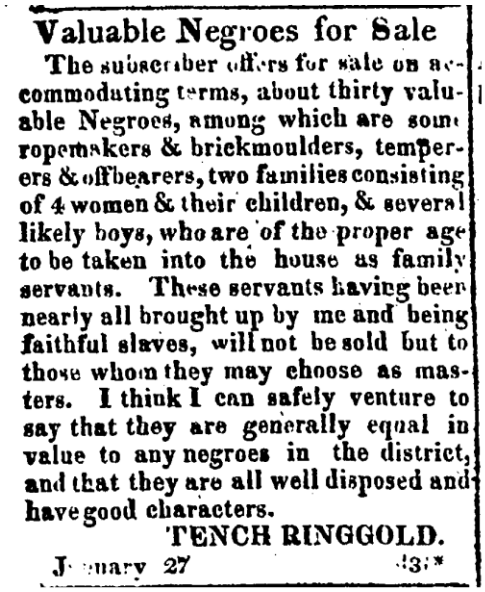
Fountain Rock, name of the Ringgold manor and estate in Washington County, Maryland, built circa 1792-94 for Samuel Ringgold, Tench's older brother. The architect is said to be Benjamin Latrobe but with little evidence.[4]

Tench Ringgold was the youngest son of a wealthy merchant from the eastern shore of Maryland whose six-generation-old Maryland family settled in the 1790s on a vast estate near Hagerstown in western Maryland that had been acquired by his grandfather, Thomas Ringgold.[5] Tench, whose unusual first name is often found among early Eastern Shore families, farmed part of the estate at the end of the eighteenth century with the labor provided by some three dozen Black enslaved workers. Early on, he opted to move to Georgetown, and in 1797 he began to make a life in the new national capital. He was twenty-one. He soon married the oldest daughter of the former governor of Maryland, wealthy planter and slaveowner Thomas Sim Lee, who later built a great house on the corner of M and 30th Streets in Georgetown. Lee left it around 1807 to settle permanently on his estate near Frederick, and Tench and his young family may have lived in part of the house during his early married years.

Thomas Sim Lee's Georgetown home (until 1807).

Ringgold was by nature active and energetic, an entrepreneur with an imaginative business sense that led him to engage in numerous business adventures, all too many of which proved unproductive. He became known in Washington as a man who pushed local industry and farming. By 1810 he was borrowing money from Philip Barton Key, the Washington lawyer, politician and uncle of Francis Scott Key, to pay for some of his schemes, including a ropewalk, a brickmaking factory, a tannery, a fast coach line from Washington to Philadelphia with stops at an inn at Havre de Grace he owned with his brother.

Eighteen of his enslaved workers were mortgaged to Key for one loan, which was later paid off, but further loans were extended so that by 1817 he was thousands of dollars in debt. He offered



Valuable Negroes for Sale

The subscriber offers for sale on accommodating terms, about thirty valuable Negroes, among which are some ropemakers & brickmoulders, temperers & offbearers, two families consisting of 4 women & their children, & several likely boys, who are of the proper age to be taken into the house as family servants. These servants having been nearly all brought up by me and being faithful slaves, will not be sold but to those whom they may choose as masters. I think I can safely venture to say that they are generally equal in value to any negroes in the district, and that they are all well disposed and have good characters.

TENCH RINGGOLD.

January 27 13:*

Advertisement in the *Federal Republic*, offering skilled enslaved workers for sale, 1816

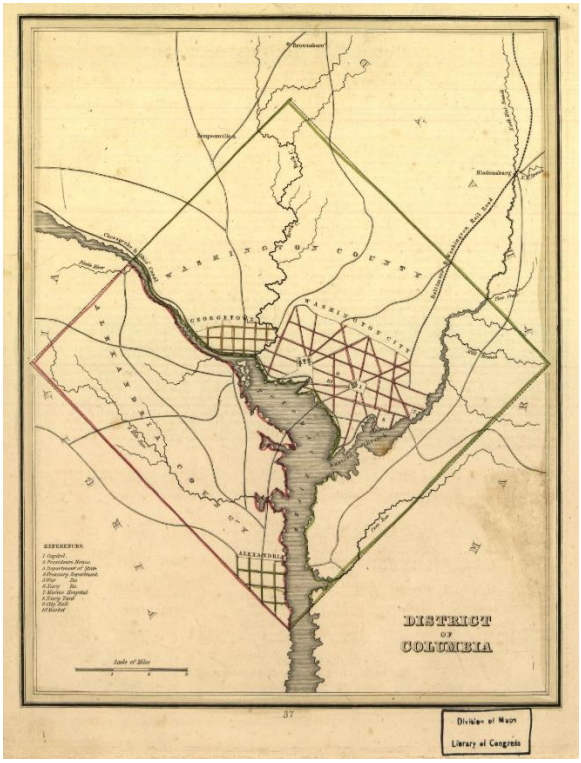
his brick factory and many skilled enslaved workers for sale in 1816. Ringgold was a slaveholder his entire life, advertising if necessary for escaped enslaved men, and retaining five enslaved workers in his retirement years, until his death in 1844.

It hadn't helped his financial situation when, during the British occupation of Washington in 1814 and the burning of public buildings, his own ropewalk, on which he was relying to help his financial situation, was torched. Moreover, at this time he had a growing family to support. After his first wife died in 1813, he married Molly Aylett Lee, a member of the Lee plantocracy of Virginia. Between the two wives, he had six children and, in 1818, another on the way.

For years Ringgold searched for a government job with a steady income. He first wrote to President Madison in 1809[6] and between then and 1818, when he was confirmed by the Senate as marshal, he worked in the Department of War with James Monroe (who became a life-long friend) and then was appointed one of three commissioners for the rebuilding of Washington in 1814-15. The marshal's position, like many government jobs, was not salaried, but it promised through the payment of "poundage fees" incurred in course of carrying out his duties to yield a rewarding income.[7] It later opened him up to public criticism, as we shall see later.

Tench Ringgold as Marshal

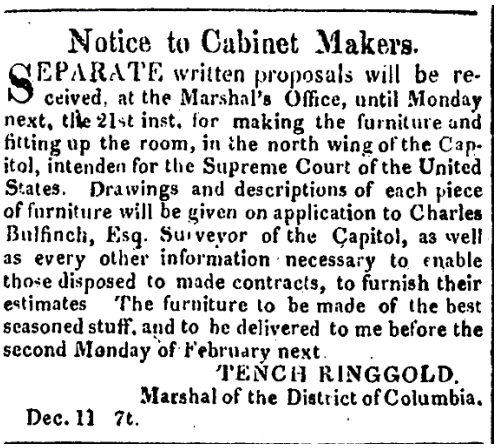
In the early years of the District, the marshal performed a wide range of duties. As chief officer for safety and order in the District, he was, first of all, chief of police. In 1818, the District of



Map of the District of Columbia, 1835 (courtesy Library of Congress).

Columbia consisted of Washington City (the built-up portion of the capital district), Washington County (the outlying area of the District on the Maryland side of the Potomac), the towns of Georgetown and Alexandria, and, across the river, Alexandria County, later known as Arlington County. Washington and Alexandria countries had their own circuit courts, and Ringgold's duties required his attendance at both, obliging him to move around the district fairly often.

Ringgold was also in charge of safety and order at the President's Mansion and the Capitol building itself, where he handed out keys to offices in the building to new officers of the court. In those days, the Supreme Court was housed in the Capitol. The marshal was also asked to see to the Court's proper furnishing, and, in 1818, he advertised a request for furniture, one piece of which was later given to the Supreme Court and is now considered a treasure since it was used by Chief Justice John Marshall.[8]



Notice to Cabinet Makers.

SEPARATE written proposals will be received, at the Marshal's Office, until Monday next, the 21st inst. for making the furniture and fitting up the room, in the north wing of the Capitol, intended for the Supreme Court of the United States. Drawings and descriptions of each piece of furniture will be given on application to Charles Bulfinch, Esq. Surveyor of the Capitol, as well as every other information necessary to enable those disposed to made contracts, to furnish their estimates The furniture to be made of the best seasoned stuff, and to be delivered to me before the second Monday of February next.

TENCH RINGGOLD.
Marshal of the District of Columbia.

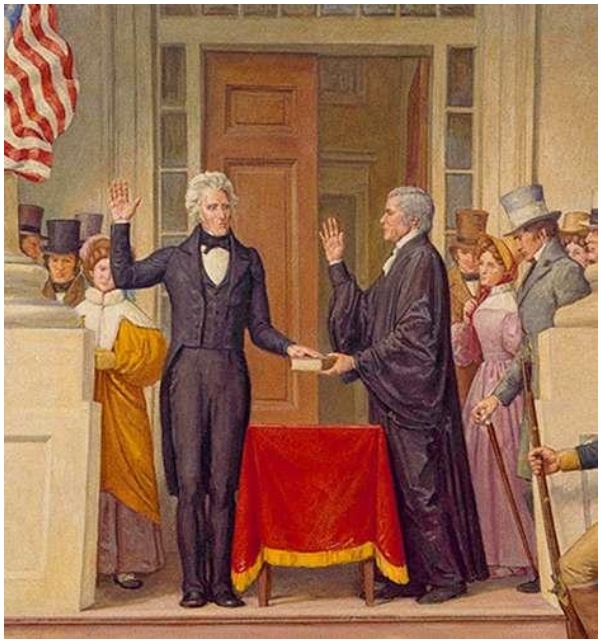
Dec. 11 7t.

Cabinet Makers asked to submit proposals for new furniture for the Supreme Court, 1818

Chair made by Benjamin Belt of Georgetown, used by John Marshall,
now in the Supreme Court and used to swear in new justices on the court.

The restored old Supreme Court chambers, U.S. Capitol Building

Ringgold carried out many ceremonial responsibilities, being present at the opening of the Supreme Court at its convening in January of each year,[9] as well as overseeing the inaugural ceremonies of presidents that took place in the Capitol and seeing that order was kept by the throngs who attended the inaugurals and the president's mansion. Inaugural captains, called assistant marshals, were summoned to his home the day before the inaugural to plan for the events the next day.[10] He orchestrated, for example, the second inauguration of Monroe, the inauguration of John Quincy Adams in 1825, and the first inaugural of Andrew Jackson in



John Marshall giving the oath of office to Andrew Jackson, March 1829,
at which Ringgold supplied the Bible.

1829. In these ceremonies he stood next to John Marshall and presented the Bible and other books on which the oath of office was sworn.[11]

But there were many more responsibilities, among them:

- Carry out the censuses in 1820 and 1830 in the District.[12]
- See that men reported for militia duty and if not, see that fees were assessed for missing the rosters.[13]
- Greet special visitors to the capital city, notably General Lafayette when he came in 1824 and stayed for a year.[14]
- Accompany the president to special ceremonies, such as the celebration of Washington's birthday and to provide order during the annual 4th of July celebration.[15]
- Attend the execution by hanging of criminals.[16]

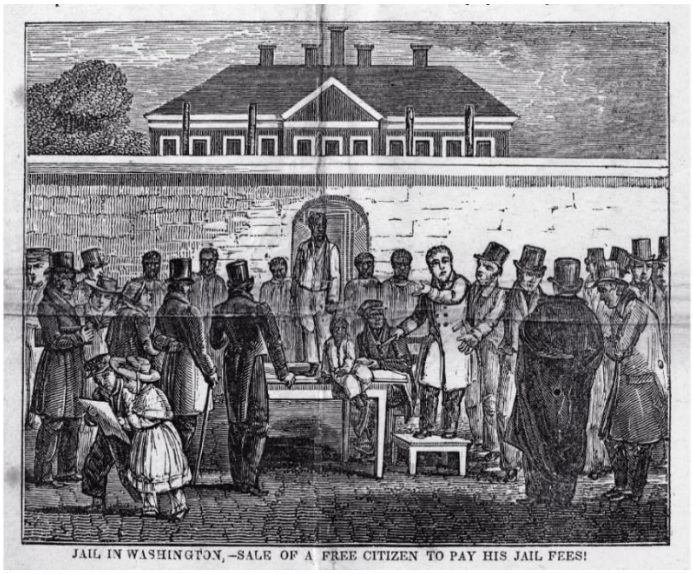
Ringgold's position as marshal allowed him to not only maintain his family but also afford a splashy lifestyle. In 1824, he decided to move out of rented quarters on F and 19th Streets and construct a home of his own at the corner of F and 18th, only two blocks from the President's Mansion, where he was in almost constant attendance. He borrowed money from one of his daughters[17] and, with the help of enslaved workers, he had built a two and a half story building with a large garden to the side and a stable for his horse and carriage.

The new Ringgold house at 18th and F Streets, as originally built.[18]
Later, the dormer floor was replaced by a fourth floor, and the house
was further extended by the addition of a wing to the west and a porch to the north.

The Ringgold House today, now known as DACOR Bacon House.
Image: Wikipedia.

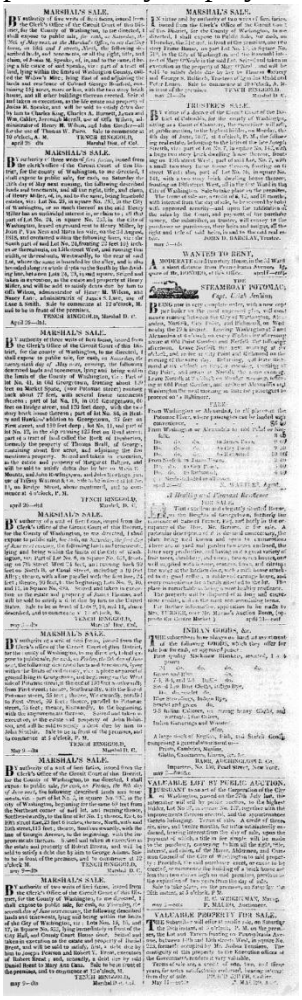
The Capitol Prison and Its Controversies

On the practical side, Ringgold was responsible for the physical condition of the city jail, and a year after he became marshal, he was writing James Hoban, the architect of the White House, to give him an estimate to repair the roof of the jail and install sewers "to lessen the stench."[19] The management of the prison over the dozen years of his tenure in the marshal's office became a hotbed of controversy and contributed to the loss of his position in 1831. There was not only the matter of the upkeep of the building but the management of the variety of prisoners it housed.



An early depiction of the D.C. jail, where enslaved Blacks, debtors and criminals were commonly Held; the Blacks were apart from the Whites, and enslaved men, women and children could be sold if not claimed by their owners. From the engraving "Slave Market of America, 1835," courtesy Library of Congress.

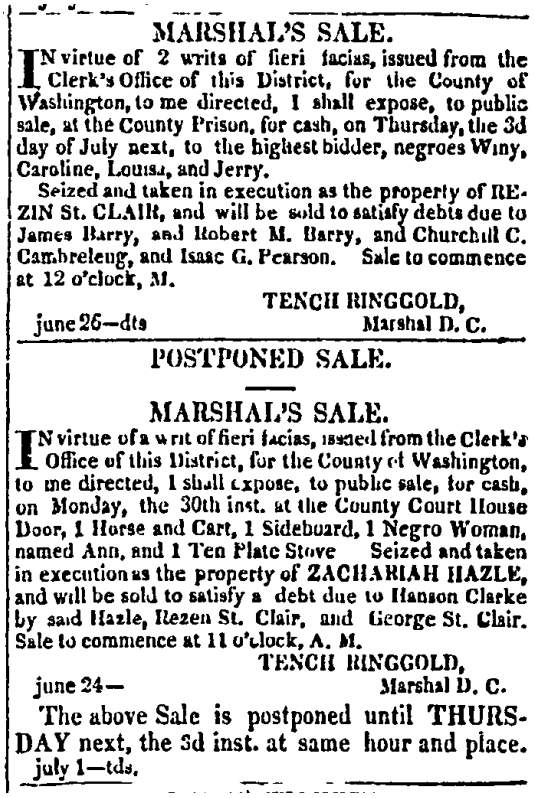
There were three types of prisoners in the jail in the period 1818-1831: criminals, debtors and escaped enslaved men, women, and children. Criminals may have caused the least problems. Debtors, on the other hand, presented multiple difficulties. During the early decades of the city, money was often scarce and credit was what made commerce and industry flow. Nevertheless, if creditors sought payment on a debt and it was not forthcoming, they could go to the court and obtain a writ of *fieri facias*, which authorized the marshal to seize the debtor's property, including slaves, and sell it at what were called "marshal's sales." The local papers were filled almost daily with advertisements of "marshal's sales," sometimes five or more in a day, and both important and unknown men and women were caught in this cycle of events. Ringgold's name, prominently displayed on all of them, must have been well known.



In the advertisement shown to the left, dating from 1827, there are multiple Marshal's sales advertised, in this one, seven. They deal with county and city property foreclosures as creditors stepped forward to request payment for debts. Some of the foreclosures were of prominent men, such as Daniel Brent, a brother of deceased Robert Brent, former mayor of Washington and member of the patrician Brent Virginia family (Ringgold, incidentally, was an in-law of one of them). In this case, it is a debt due to the heirs of the deceased and involved several of many properties owned by him. It was not uncommon for prominent men, including Ringgold himself, to be indebted to brothers and in-laws. But most of the foreclosures were of ordinary Washingtonians.

A group of "Marshal's Sales," advertised in *The Daily National Intelligencer*, May 24, 1827.

Other foreclosures involved the removal of moveable belongings of debtors, including furnishings, pottery, linens, and people. Many examples of such sales were posted in the local papers, and they are often shocking to read. In two ads posted in July 1823, one announced the exposing of the property of Rezin St. Clair for cash sale: four Blacks – Winy, Caroline, Louisa and Jerry for sale at the County prison (i.e. the Capitol Prison). In another, the property of Zachariah Hazle was be sold at the County courthouse door, including a horse and cart, a sideboard, a Black woman named Ann, and a "ten plate" stove.



MARSHAL'S SALE.

IN virtue of 2 writs of fieri facias, issued from the Clerk's Office of this District, for the County of Washington, to me directed, I shall expose, to public sale, at the County Prison, for cash, on Thursday, the 3d day of July next, to the highest bidder, negroes Winy, Caroline, Louisa, and Jerry.

Seized and taken in execution as the property of REZIN St. CLAIR, and will be sold to satisfy debts due to James Barry, and Robert M. Barry, and Churchill C. Cambreleng, and Isaac G. Pearson. Sale to commence at 12 o'clock, M.

TENCH RINGGOLD,
june 26—dts Marshal D. C.

POSTPONED SALE.

MARSHAL'S SALE.

IN virtue of a writ of fieri facias, issued from the Clerk's Office of this District, for the County of Washington, to me directed, I shall expose, to public sale, for cash, on Monday, the 30th inst. at the County Court House Door, 1 Horse and Cart, 1 Sideboard, 1 Negro Woman, named Ann, and 1 Ten Plate Stove Seized and taken in execution as the property of ZACHARIAH HAZLE, and will be sold to satisfy a debt due to Hanson Clarke by said Hazle, Rezen St. Clair, and George St. Clair. Sale to commence at 11 o'clock, A. M.

TENCH RINGGOLD,
june 24— Marshal D. C.

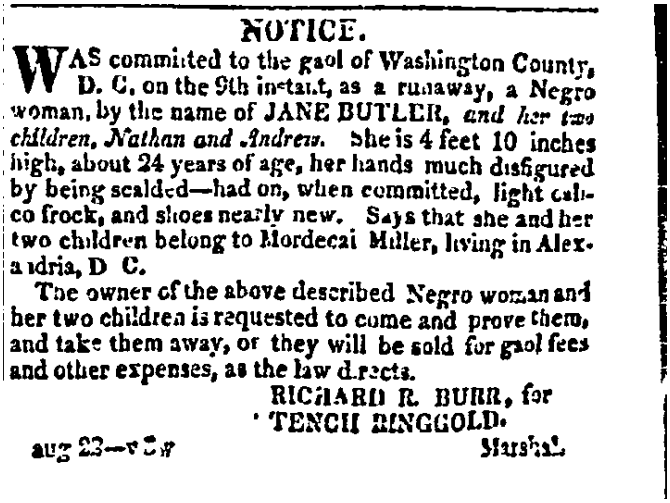
The above Sale is postponed until THURSDAY next, the 3d inst. at same hour and place.
july 1—tds.

Marshal's sales including people, posted in the *Daily National Intelligencer* July 3, 1823.

In an especially noteworthy case, the enslaved household of John Threlkeld, once an alderman of Georgetown and prominent member of the community, was sold off in 1826 because of the failure of the Bank of Columbia, of which he was a director. His estate included 296 acres of land in Washington County and a household of 24 enslaved individuals, including men, women, children. They included two families, a mother and her five children and another mother with eight children.[20] As Mary Ann Corrigan, a historian of slavery and community in pre-Civil War Washington and currently Curator of Collections on Slavery, Memory and Reconciliation at Georgetown University, has pointed out, enslaved men and women had great fear of "marshal's sales" once they realized their owners were in debt. "They recognized all too clearly and with dread that their families could be torn apart by being sold to states to the south or west and dispersed forever."[21]

Debtors could end up in prison, sharing quarters or near quarters with common criminals. This brought Ringgold, as head of the prison, to the attention of the president of the United States when constituents complained about the situation to him. One debtor wrote to Andrew Jackson six months after he had been sworn in as president in March 1829, and Jackson then wrote Ringgold asking him to make sure that the two types of prisoners were physically separated in the jail.[22] This was not the only time that Ringgold's performance as chief jailor was brought to Jackson's attention. In May 1829, Elizabeth Williams wrote Jackson about money that should have been paid her deceased husband for work at the jail in 1818. It had been carried out and payment made in lieu of a bond to someone else who then fled, putting Ringgold effectively out of pocket. President Monroe granted Mrs. William's husband remittance of the forfeiture, but when presented to Ringgold, he refused to accept it. (Later Congress reimbursed the widow). It may have been one of the reasons why Jackson asked the vice president, Martin van Buren, to look into Ringgold's conduct as marshal.[23]

As chief law enforcer, Ringgold was also responsible for enforcing the Black Code in the District. Between 1820 and 1830, Blacks, both free and enslaved constituted about 30% of the population of the District.[24] As is well known, they were not allowed to walk in the streets after a certain hours; even during daylight hours they could be stopped and asked for papers indicating their status – i.e. documents showing that they were free individuals. If they did not have the papers on them, they were assumed to be vagrants and were sent to the District jail until their owners retrieved them. "Notices" were placed in the local papers but also in papers outside the District where the owner might reside stating who they were, what characteristic marks they might bear, what clothes they wore, and who they stated their owners were. If they were not retrieved from the jail and their food and other costs paid, they could be sold by the marshal for the post of keeping them in the jail.



NOTICE.

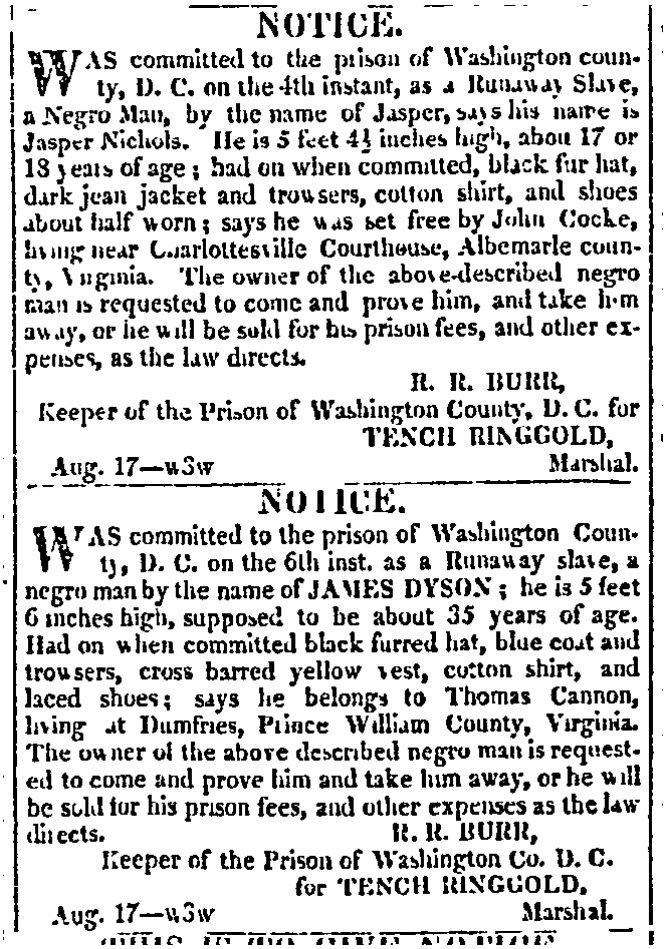
WAS committed to the gaol of Washington County, D. C. on the 9th instant, as a runaway, a Negro woman, by the name of JANE BUTLER, *and her two children, Nathan and Andrew.* She is 4 feet 10 inches high, about 24 years of age, her hands much disfigured by being scalded—had on, when committed, light calico frock, and shoes nearly new. Says that she and her two children belong to Mordecai Miller, living in Alexandria, D C.

The owner of the above described Negro woman and her two children is requested to come and prove them, and take them away, or they will be sold for gaol fees and other expenses, as the law directs.

RICHARD R. BURR, for
TENCH RINGGOLD.
Marshal.

aug 23—w3w

Notice re Jane Butler and her two children,
Daily National Intelligencer, August 22, 1828, p. 2.



NOTICE.

WAS committed to the prison of Washington county, D. C. on the 4th instant, as a Runaway Slave, a Negro Man, by the name of Jasper, says his name is Jasper Nichols. He is 5 feet 4½ inches high, about 17 or 18 years of age; had on when committed, black fur hat, dark jean jacket and trowsers, cotton shirt, and shoes about half worn; says he was set free by John Cocke, living near Charlottesville Courthouse, Albemarle county, Virginia. The owner of the above-described negro man is requested to come and prove him, and take him away, or he will be sold for his prison fees, and other expenses, as the law directs.

R. R. BURR,
Keeper of the Prison of Washington County, D. C. for
TENCH RINGGOLD,
Aug. 17—w3w Marshal.

NOTICE.

WAS committed to the prison of Washington County, D. C. on the 6th inst. as a Runaway slave, a negro man by the name of JAMES DYSON; he is 5 feet 6 inches high, supposed to be about 35 years of age. Had on when committed black furred hat, blue coat and trowsers, cross barred yellow vest, cotton shirt, and laced shoes; says he belongs to Thomas Cannon, living at Dumfries, Prince William County, Virginia. The owner of the above described negro man is requested to come and prove him and take him away, or he will be sold for his prison fees, and other expenses as the law directs.

R. R. BURR,
Keeper of the Prison of Washington Co. D. C.
for TENCH RINGGOLD,
Aug. 17—w3w Marshal.

Notice regarding Jasper Nichols and James Dyson,
Daily National Intelligencer, September 10, 1830, p. 1.

During Ringgold's thirteen years as marshal, 1818-1831, I found 133 "notices" of "runaway" enslaved men, women, and children, placed in the local newspapers, with 1828 being a year in which the largest number of Blacks were arrested for lack of papers (20). Many more were no doubt accosted and not arrested.

The three examples shown here concern enslaved men and women, one of whom is from the District (Alexandria), the other two from further away, Prince William County and Albemarle County near Charlottesville, both in Virginia. Most of those accosted by the police were from Maryland and Virginia. Jane Butler, who was arrested with her two sons, is an interesting case since she claimed to be enslaved by Mordecai Miller, a well-known silversmith, then wealthy merchant and Quaker in Alexandria Virginia. It should be noted he was also known to purchase slaves in order to free them.[25]

In another "Notice," Jasper Nichols, eighteen years old, had left his family in Albemarle County, Virginia, saying that he had been freed by his owner, John [Hartwell] Cocke. Cocke, a planter, slaveowner, was a well-known and even notorious figure in pre-Civil War pro-slavery Virginia who believed in training and educating his enslaved work force and allowing them to worship in

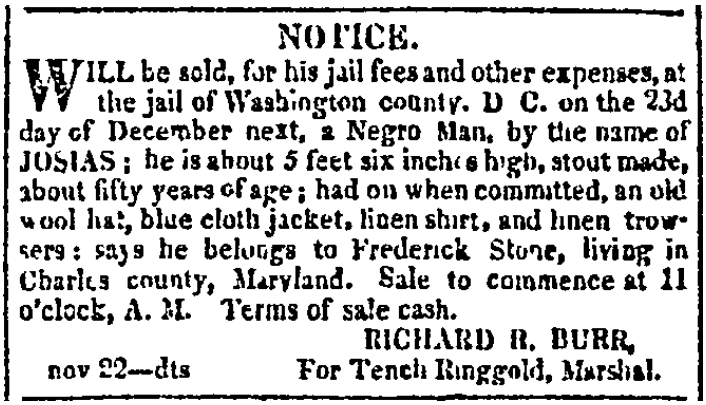
a church contrary to views held by most slaveowners and even Virginia laws. However, he did not believe in abolition except under strict circumstances, that, once freed, the enslaved person would depart for Liberia. At least one of his enslaved workers did so. Jasper may not have been freed, but his family is mentioned in a book on the enslaved people of Bremo plantation. It is not known what happened to Jasper. [26]

I mention these examples because in some cases and by further research, the stories of the jailed Blacks can be found and light shed on their lives.

Blacks arrested in the streets during Ringgold's time not only included enslaved people with proper papers but also free-born Black sailors from merchant ships that docked in Georgetown or Alexandria who may have been unaware of the need to carry freedom papers when they walked around the nation's capital. In some cases, congressmen from their home districts in northern states were alerted and agitated for their release.[27] Abolitionist voices in Congress raised a cry about the conduct of the marshal, and he was asked to submit a report to Congressman Mark Alexander describing the condition of "runaways" and "negroes committed for safe keeping" in the District.[28] Ringgold's report bears witness to the inhuman treatment of Blacks by the District police but also reveals that Ringgold kept careful accounts of the expenses he incurred housing and feeding those incarcerated in accordance with the Black Code and debtors laws.

The report reveals another peculiarity of the system of those times. Slaveowners visiting the city who were unable to accommodate the enslaved people they brought with them to the city could house them for periods of time in the city jail. Ringgold states that during a two-year period, 1826-28, 40 enslaved people from "the South" and "the West" were housed at his expense in the jail. Black men, women and children who were part of seized property of debtors were also housed for various periods of time in the jail, for which period the marshal was required to provide food. These poor people numbered 55 during the 1826-28 period. Finally, his report shows the expenses incurred in maintaining arrested individuals from the time the "notices" were posted in newspapers until the time their owners came to retrieve them or until the time they were sold by the marshal's office. According to the data I collected from the "Notices" I found, the marshal ran on average five different notices and the waiting time in jail for arrested Blacks was around a month.

Ringgold stated in his report that only five enslaved men and were sold by him to cover their maintenance costs. The enslaved were sold for between $40 and $250; their expenses ran between $30 and $50, and in one instance, Ringgold bought an older man named Josias for $84.82,[29] and then resold him for $20, losing $64.82 which was then added to the total expense he incurred in maintaining prisoners.[30]



NOTICE.

WILL be sold, for his jail fees and other expenses, at the jail of Washington county, D C. on the 23d day of December next, a Negro Man, by the name of JOSIAS; he is about 5 feet six inches high, stout made, about fifty years of age; had on when committed, an old wool hat, blue cloth jacket, linen shirt, and linen trowsers: says he belongs to Frederick Stone, living in Charles county, Maryland. Sale to commence at 11 o'clock, A. M. Terms of sale cash.

RICHARD R. BURR,
nov 22—dts For Tench Ringgold, Marshal.

Notice of fifty-year-old Josias to be sold; he was then purchased by Ringgold for $84.82, and then resold for $20. He had been jailed for appropriately a month.
Daily National Intelligencer, November 25, 1826, p. 4.

What is not stated in his report is the fact that any sale of property presided over by the marshal allowed him to legally collect a three percent "poundage" fee. Thus, the top law enforcement officer in the local government benefited from the sale of seized property, some of which involved human beings. The existing District of Columbia laws, prominent abolitionists asserted, made the federal government implicated in the slave trade.[31]

Ringgold and Jackson: Controversy Comes to a Head

Ringgold's report on "runaways" and Blacks, enslaved or free, in the city jail was published by the *National Journal* in 1829, the year that Andrew Jackson was elected president. The new president may or may not have read it, but he may have heard about it. By this time, Jackson may already have had more than one reason to feel uneasy about the marshal. As far back as the latter part of the War of 1812 when Jackson was readying for the celebrated battle in New Orleans, he appealed to James Monroe for money for his troops. It was late in arriving, and Ringgold, as a key man in Monroe's War Department, was rumored to have been at fault. Later this was strenuously denied.[32] But over the years, Jackson and Monroe continued not to see eye to eye, and Jackson and his populist supporters came to resent Ringgold for his ties to the East Coast aristocracy that had heretofore run the affairs in Washington. Ringgold may have been unaware of this simmering discontent and, while he was marshal, hoped to reconcile Jackson and Monroe and he even attempted to broker a meeting between them, although it is unclear it ever happened.[33]

Monroe remained one of Ringgold's closest allies and supporters until his death in 1831, but during the presidency of John Quincy Adams (1825-29), it appears Ringgold gained a new friend. He managed Adams's inaugural well and appears often in Adams's diary as being at the White House, either conferring with the president or attending a meeting or a dinner. Ringgold was an old-style Democrat, a supporter of Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe and owed his career to them. However, Adams, who was not, nonetheless warmed to him, and it is said that Ringgold acted as one of his campaign organizers when he ran for president in 1824.[34]

None of these friendships would have endeared him to Jackson, though Ringgold believed that his credentials as a Democrat would have served him in good stead. So, when his third term as marshal was nearing an end in 1831 and he confidently expected to be reappointed, he must have been shocked to hear rumors that Jackson favored someone else. Letters had poured into Jackson's office recommending one candidate or another to replace him.[35] In late February/early March, Jackson let it be known that he would not renew Ringgold as marshal. After he was let go in March, the subject became a Washington scandal and widely discussed. Many opinions were ventured, including by retired president John Quincy Adams,[36] Chief Justice John Marshall,[37] and Washington notable Benjamin Ogle Tayloe.[38] Three years later, the *Alexandria Gazette* could still publish a column that lamented the way Ringgold had been treated –

> "… the President [Jackson] exhibited towards Mr. Ringgold, up to the hour of his removal, the most unremitting kindness and attention, professing friendship for, and a desire to serve him. So 'warm, and so cordial' were these professions, that forty-eight hours before he was dismissed, neither he nor his friend believed that he would be thus unceremoniously thrust from office; and the more especially, as the late President Monroe had asked of General Jackson, as a personal favor, that he would continue Mr. Ringgold as marshal."[39]

In a belated effort to retain his office, Ringgold garnered recommendations from former presidents, all the Supreme Court justices, and leading law figures in the city – but to no avail. To clear his name after he had lost his position, the most prominent of the recommendations were published in the local papers.[40] The chief justice called on him with Associate Justice Joseph Story to console him, and in the following year, Marshall and five justices of the Supreme Court boarded at Ringgold's residence on F Street in an effort to rally his spirits and allay his expenditures.[41]

Yet, the loss of the marshal's fees undermined Ringgold's income and financial credibility and left him vulnerable to creditors. He had by then relinquished his various industrial projects (the brickyard, the tannery), becoming totally dependent on his government-sanctioned poundage fees. For two years he fended off creditors but was forced to leave his home on F Street in the middle of 1833. He purchased a farm in Alexandria County, across the river, and ended his days in considerably reduced circumstances.

A Controversial Character?

Tench Ringgold was remembered a century later as "a famous, some say notorious, character in the District of Columbia," by Charles Henry Butler, a lawyer and Reporter for the Supreme Court (1902-1916) in his book of reminiscences.[42] Is this audacious assessment, based on his grandfather's recollection, fair? His understanding of "notorious" may relate to the fact that the court overturned a decision of his grandfather, Benjamin F. Butler, a famous lawyer and later U. S. Attorney General under Andrew Jackson, in favor of Ringgold's right to poundage fees. Was

Ringgold's behavior or "lifestyle" resented by court members and passed on to the generations that followed? Or was there some other reason for his "notoriety"?

The poundage fee, on which Ringgold relied, was a subject of dispute by white citizens (debtors) who were obliged to pay it, and John Gates, a citizen of Albany, New York (where Butler practiced law) and an officer in charge of the light artillery was jailed in 1819 because he lacked to funds to pay Ringgold $1,112 due in poundage fees. President Monroe arranged to have him released from jail, but the issue of fees remaining with Ringgold caused the government to sue him. In the judgment that followed, which was settled in the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia, the right of the marshal to poundage fees was confirmed.[43] Benjamin Butler must have bitterly resented this decision and passed his feelings on to family members.

On the other hand, being an officer of the court in charge of enforcing the city's Black Code that so highly and so unjustly regulated the lives of both free and enslaved Blacks demonstrates how closely Ringgold was tied to the city's white and enslaver establishment. Although his personal viewpoint is unknown, Ringgold undoubtedly opposed abolitionist ideas. He may have favored the scheme of the American Colonization Society, which many of his friends and relations supported.[44] But racial tensions in the city ran high in the years immediately after he left his position, bursting out in 1835 during the Snow Riot during which many Blacks were attacked and their homes and institutions burned or plundered. That period left a terrible imprint in the hearts of its Black citizens and the sentiments may indeed date of Ringgold's time as marshal.

Ringgold was marshal at an early period in the District's history, when institutions were evolving and when laws governing the city – left over from the precolonial times in Virginia and Maryland, from which the District was carved – had not yet been modified. Given the enormous array of duties the marshal was then expected to carry out, Ringgold faithfully carried them out, including the worst aspects of the Black Code and the debtor laws. As the published testimonials show, he remained highly respected by the legal and political authorities of the city. That he aided and abetted laws that ruined the lives of many ordinary Black and white people would not have carried weight with them, though, today, in retrospect, we fully understand why might may be remembered as "controversial."

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[1] https://dcchs.org/firebrand-u-s-marshal-tench-ringgold-and-early-american-politics/

[2] Mistakenly associated with the Ringgold family by James Goode, *Capital Losses* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 20-21; Stephen Hansen identifies it as belonging to John Mason who also had a summer home on Analostan Island (now Roosevelt Island): https://www.washingtonchronicles.com/2021/11/Analostan.html.

[3] https://smithsonianeducation.org/migrations/portrait/essay.html.

[4] Image taken from George Hay Ringgold, *Fountain Rock, Amy Wier, and other Metrical Pastimes* (New York: W. A. Townsend, 1860).

[5] The estate was purchase by Thomas Ringgold, father of Tench, in 1770 from John Morton Jordon for $10,150 pounds sterling: Provincial Court Land Records, Maryland State Archives, vol. 726, p, 87, https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000726/html/am726--

87.html. On the estate: Edith Rossiter Bevan, "Fountain Rock, the Ringgold Home in Washington County," *Maryland Historical Society Magazine* 52 (1952), 19-28.

[6] https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/99-01-02-4037

[7] The fee amount to 3% of the total amount involved. The assessment of "poundage fees" was enshrined in Maryland law, which the District inherited when it was created.

[8] Said to be made by Benjamin Belt: https://www.supremecourt.gov/about/oath/johnmarshallchairinfo.aspx. On him and early furniture making in the District, https://www.chipstone.org/article.php/610/American-Furniture-2010/Seating-Furniture-from-the-District-of-Columbia,-1795%E2%80%931820

[9] Continued until 1867 when a separate marshal's office was created for the Court.

[10] *Daily National Journal*, March 4, 1825; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, March 7, 1825, p. 2.

[11] Margaret Bayard Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society in the Family Letters of Margaret Bayard Smith*, Gaillard Hunt, ed., (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 290-298. Adams was not sworn in on a Bible.

[12] *City of Washington Gazette*, August 18, 1820, p. 2.

[13] Frederick P. Todd, "The Militia and Volunteers of the District of Columbia 1783-1820," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Washington, D.C. vol. 50 (1948/1950), 379-439. Ringgold had been head of a military company during the War of 1812 and had played a role in trying to defend the capital during the British invasion in 1814 (Turk). For the appointment of deputies: *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 4, 1825, p. 1; *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 5, 1826, p. 2. He also warned in other advertisements that "indulgences" relating to overdue fines would no longer be tolerated: *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 11, 1827, p. 3.

[14] He "introduced" the general after he arrived in the White House to the president: *National Gazette*, October 16, 1824, p. 2 and https://www.whitehousehistory.org/the-nations-guest; he also accompanied President Adams and other guests from Washington on a visit to James Monroe's retirement home in Loudoun County, Virginia in 1825: John Quincy Adams Diary, http://www.masshist.org/publications/jqadiaries/index.php/document/jqadiaries-v49-1825-08-06-p891#sn=9; he also accompanied Lafayette on his final departure from the District, sailing with him down to Potomac to the mouth of the river where his ship to France was waiting: *Alexandria Gazette*, September 6, 1825, p. 2; *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 7, 1825, p. 2.

[15] *Washington Gazette*, July 2, 1821, p. 3; he also accompanied President Adams to review the parade: John Quincy Adams Digital Diary, entry dated July 4, 1826: http://www.masshist.org/publications/jqadiaries/index.php/document/jqadiaries-v35-1826-07-04-p323#sn=55

[16] Wilhelmus B. Bryan, *A History of the National Capital from its Foundation through the Period of the Adoption of the Organic Act*, 2 vols. (New York: MacMillan, 1914-1916), 2: 58.

[17] His five children by his first wife had all been given property by their wealthy grandfather, Thomas Sim Lee.

[18] Image from *Dacor Bacon House: Historic Structure Report* (Washington, DC: Beyer, Blinder, Belle, 2021), 51.

[19] Washington Historical Society, Kiplinger Library, Tench Ringgold Paper, MS0059, letter dated 1 September 1819. Ringgold asks for the repair of the roof and install sewers to "lessen the stench." Hoban submitted an estimate of $2,500.

[20] https://gloverparkhistory.com/population/slaves-population/slaves-of-john-threlkeld/

[21] "Another Type of Passage: African American Community in the Slave-Exporting Center of Georgetown," paper presented at a conference honoring Ira Berlin, 2015, p. 7. I am indebted to Dr. Corrigan for sending me her paper and allowing me to quote from it.

[22] Daniel Feller et al., eds., *Papers of Andrew Jackson*, vol. 7 (1829) (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 495-96: https://www.loc.gov/resource/maj.01074_0003_0004/?st=gallery.

[23] Feller, *Papers of Andrew Jackson*, vol. 7 (1829) (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 134, 202.A

[24] Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* (Chapel Hill., NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), Table 1, p. 45; on the Black Code and its administration, Constance McLaughlin Green: *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 18-19, and elsewhere,

[25] On him and some of the enslaved he helped free: Slave manumissions in Alexandria, Virginia: http://www.freedmenscemetery.org/resources/documents/manumissions.shtml; Ethelyn Cox, *Historic Alexandria, Virginia Street by Street* (Alexandria, VA: Historic Alexandria Foundation, 1976), 42, 48, 122, 123, 194, 196; see also https://www.chipstone.org/article.php/415/Ceramics-in-America-2008/Robert-H.-Miller,-Importer:-Alexandria-and-St.-Louis.

[26] Andi Cumbo-Floyd, *The Slaves Have Names* (South Carolina: 2013), 35 ff. He was probably the son of Lucy Nicholas, born 1782, who was the mother of nine, including a son named Jasper.
[27] A celebrated case involved Gilbert Horton, who was jailed in 1826: *Daily National Intelligencer* June 20, 1826. On the case, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilbert_Horton. Congressman William Jay of New York wrote to Ringgold to have him freed.
[28] His testimony on the expenses of maintaining slaves in the city jail in 1829 was published in the series of House Committee reports and also published in the newspapers of account: *National Journal*, April 4, 1829, p.4.
[29] *Daily National Intelligencer*, November 25, 1826, p. 4.
[30] On the oddity of Ringgold buying one of the enslaved men he had arrested, see S. Gilhooley, *The Antebellum Origins of the Modern Constitution: Slavery and the Spirit of the American Founding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 139-40.
[31] The argument made by S. Gilhooley, citation above.
[32] See the McGrath, J*ames Monroe*, 565; Jackson's correspondence dwells at length on this incidence during the 1830 year: Feller, et. al, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, vol. 8 (1830) (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 351, 434, 504, 623-24.
[33] Daniel Preston, editor, *A Comprehensive Catalogue of the Correspondence and Papers of James Monroe*, vol. 2 (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001,) 982; McGrath, 570.
[34] Paul C. Nagel, *John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, A Private Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 319-20.
[35] Many letters of recommendation sent to Jackson during the period: Feller, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, vol. 9 (1831), 804ff.
[36] John Quincy Adams and Charles Francis Adams. *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams: Comprising Portions of His Diary From 1795 to 1848* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1874-77), entry for February 16, 1831, vol. 8, 317-319.
[37] Charles E Hobson, editor, *The Papers of John Marshall*, vol. 12 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 17.
[38] Winslow Marston Watson and Benjamin Ogle Tayloe, *In Memoriam: Benjamin Ogle Tayloe* (Washington: Sherman & Company, printers, 1872), 104.
[39] Unsigned column, "Letter from Washington," dated January 4, 1834, sent to the *N. Y. Courier and Enquirer* published in the *Alexandria Gazette*, January 11, 1834.
[40] *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 22, 1831, p. 4. *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 27, 1831.
[41] I discussed this in "If Walls Could Talk: The Supreme Court and DACOR Bacon House: Two Centuries of Connections," *Journal of Supreme Court History* 47:1 (2022), 20-26.
[42] Charles Henry Butler, *A Century at the Bar of the Supreme Court of the United States* (New York: Putnam's, 1942), 14.
[43] United States v. Ringgold, 33 U.S. 150 (1834): https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/33/150/.
[44] James Monroe favored it, as did his son-in-law, Dr. Henry Huntt, medical doctor to several presidents, who was an officer in the local branch.