

Slave Patrol Contract, 1856

Introduction

In the 1800s, particularly after Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831, the legislatures of slave states passed increasingly strict laws governing the activities of enslaved and free African Americans and the interactions between whites and blacks. Known as slave codes, the laws generally restricted the right of enslaved African Americans to travel, assemble, marry, practice religion, and learn to read and write. Those free blacks who were allowed to stay in a slave state also saw their rights curtailed.

It was left up to local communities to enforce those laws. White men (both slaveholders and non-slaveholders) were assigned to patrols and charged with ensuring compliance with the slave codes.

This contract appoints Horace L. Robards captain of a slave patrol in Salisbury, North Carolina, for the month of January 1856, and outlines the responsibilities of the patrol. The men had to patrol two nights each week from 9 p.m. to midnight and on Sunday. The instructions also address some of the specific problems they might encounter and the punishment they could assign.

On all slaves found off their owner's premises, without written permission from some person legally authorized to give such permission, you will inflict not more than fifteen lashes; no slave to be whipped except in presence of the Captain. You will arrest and carry before the Intendant of Police, all free colored men found associating with slaves in the night, or on the Sabbath day, in any kitchen, out-house, or place other than his own premises.

Questions for Discussion

1. Who has authorized the contract? What is a contract and why is a contract important?
2. Why is some of the contract handwritten? Why might that be important?
3. What is the purpose of the patrol?
4. What types of punishments can the patrol dispense?
5. What can't free blacks and slaves do?
6. What kind of responsibility does the captain of the patrol have?

Slave Patrol Contract, 1856

Image

PATROL FOR *January*, **1856**

Horace L. Roberts

William Rouse

Julius D. Ramsey

B. B. Roberts

Richard B. Pendleton

Class No. *1* for *January, 1856*

To *Horace L. Roberts* and in his absence, to *William Rouse*.....

SIR: You are hereby appointed Captain of the *1st* Class of Patrol for the month of *January, 1856*. It is your duty to summon your company to meet at such time and place as you may direct, and perform Patrol duty at least two nights in each week; and on the Sabbath day to disperse all collections of negroes or boys violating the Ordinances of the Town. On all slaves found off their owner's premises, without written permission from some person legally authorized to give such permission, you will inflict not more than fifteen lashes; no slave to be whipped except in presence of the Captain. You will arrest and carry before the Intendant of Police, all free colored men found associating with slaves in the night, or on the Sabbath day, in any kitchen, out-house, or place other than his own premises.

The usual hours for Patrolling shall be from 9 to 12 o'clock, at night; but these hours may be varied by special order of the Intendant of Police, to whom you will report within five days after the expiration of your month, the manner in which you have performed this service; and the names and times any of your company have failed to discharge their duty.

For a neglect of your duty as Captain, you are liable to a Fine of Ten Dollars.

By Order of the Commissioners of Salisbury.

Ortrush Woodson, CLERK.

CAPTAIN'S REPORT.

The weather during the last month has been so rainy that we have not discharging the duty of patrol (though regularly) not as long as we would otherwise have done. There has been no absences without excuse.

B. B. Roberts 2 nights absent from town
R. B. Pendleton 2 nights absent from town
H. L. Roberts 2 nights absent from work place
 respectfully submitted
William Rouse
 July 1st 1856

[Slave Patrol Contract], Salisbury, North Carolina, 1856.
 (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09122)

Slave Patrol Contract, 1856

Transcript

[Slave Patrol Contract], Salisbury, North Carolina, 1856. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09122) Note: Handwritten text appears in *bold and italics*.

PATROL FOR *January*, 1856

Horace L. Robards,

William Rouzee,

Julius D. Ramsey,

Class No. *1* for *January*, 1856

B.B. Roberts,

Richard B. Pendleton,

To *Horace L. Robards* and in his absence, to *William Rouzee*,

SIR: You are hereby appointed Captain of the *Ist* Class of Patrol for the month of *January*, 1856. It is your duty to summon your company to meet at such time and place as you may direct, and perform Patrol duty at least two nights in each week; and on the Sabbath day to disperse all collections of negroes or boys violating the Ordinances of the Town. On all slaves found off their owner's premises, without written permission from some person legally authorized to give such permission, you will inflict not more than fifteen lashes; no slave to be whipped except in presence of the Captain. You will arrest and carry before the Intendant of Police, all free colored men found associating with slaves in the night, or on the Sabbath day, in any kitchen, out-house, or place other than his own premises.

The usual hours for Patrolling shall be from 9 to 12 o'clock, at night; but these hours may be varied by special order of the Intendant of Police, to whom you will report within five days after the expiration of your month, the manner in which you have performed this service; and the names and times any of your company have failed to discharge their duty.

For a neglect of your duty as Captain, you are liable to a Fine of Ten Dollars.

By Order of the Commissioners of Salisbury.

Obadiah Woodson, CLERK.

Slave Patrol Contract, 1856

CAPTAIN'S REPORT.

The weather during the last month has been so intensely cold that we have not discharged the duty as patrol (though regularly) as long on duty as we would otherwise have done. There has been no absentees without good excuses.

B B Roberts 2 nights absent frozen [illegible]

R B Pendleton 2 nights fiercely sick –

H L Robards 2 nights absent [illegible]

Respectfully submitted HL Robards

Feby 4th 1856