



## Poplar Street Slave Trading Markets

From 1823 to 1865, slave trading was firmly entrenched in Macon's social and economic fabric. While there were larger slave markets in the southeast, Macon was a well-known slave trading center, and Poplar Street was the principal location for these slave markets. The majority of the enslaved were brought to Macon from Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas by way of the Federal Road crossing into the city over the Fifth Street Bridge (now Otis Redding Bridge). The enslaved marched to the old Bibb County Courthouse (1828-1870) located on Fifth Street (now Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.) where they were auctioned, sold, and transferred on the Courthouse steps. Slave coffles were also marched beyond the Courthouse to the slave market, Noel's Brick Mart, which was located on the corner of Poplar and Second Street, behind where the old Telephone Exchange building stands today.

Erected by G.H. Noel in 1859, Noel's Brick Mart was the first building in Macon constructed for the express purpose of housing the enslaved. Slave traders claimed it was designed "to provide for the security and comfort of the Negroes." A two-story brick building that fronted on Poplar Street, it was surrounded by a high brick wall embedded with broken glass to prevent escapes. The first floor contained two front rooms with iron bars on the windows; one was an office, the other a display room where prospective buyers examined enslaved persons. The second floor contained living quarters for the enslaved. On June 2, 1862, the building was sold to the Confederate States of America (CSA) for the C. S. Central Laboratory - Macon Arsenal under command of Lt. Col. J. W. Mallet. The CSA converted the building to a munitions laboratory that employed white women and children and "hired-out" enslaved men, women, and children to make cartridges and bullets for the Civil War. Stubbs & Hardy slave traders built a wooden replacement mart on the corner of Fifth and Plum, next to the Union Depot train station. A sign that read "Slaves Bought and Sold" greeted passengers. Other traders with marts included the McCommon Brothers and W. Rafe Phillips at the corner of Poplar and Third Street, G. F. Stubbs on the corner of Poplar and Fourth Street, and John Jossey on the corner of Plum and Fifth Street. Slave traders rented space in these marts to house enslaved humans.

After the war, the former Brick Mart building was put to use as a dance hall, a stable, and a carriage repair shop before being partially destroyed by fire on August 30, 1885. Post-war Poplar Street served as a marketplace for the newly freed to set up stalls to sell their own produce and goods along with the cotton markets and the City Market (1884 to 1914). More recently, Poplar Street featured the Avenue of Flags, a city park, and a farmers' market. This marker serves to help future generations remember those who suffered under the horrors of the slave trade in Macon and throughout the United States.

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