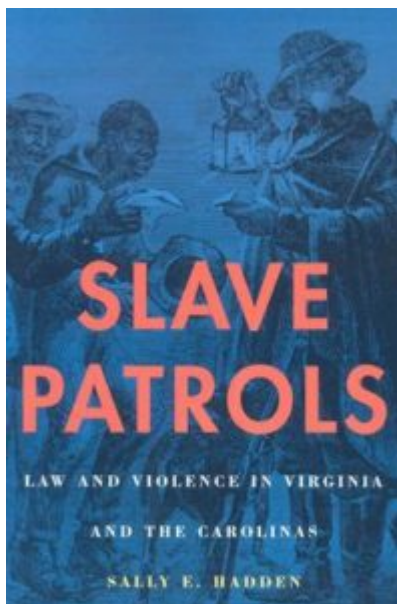
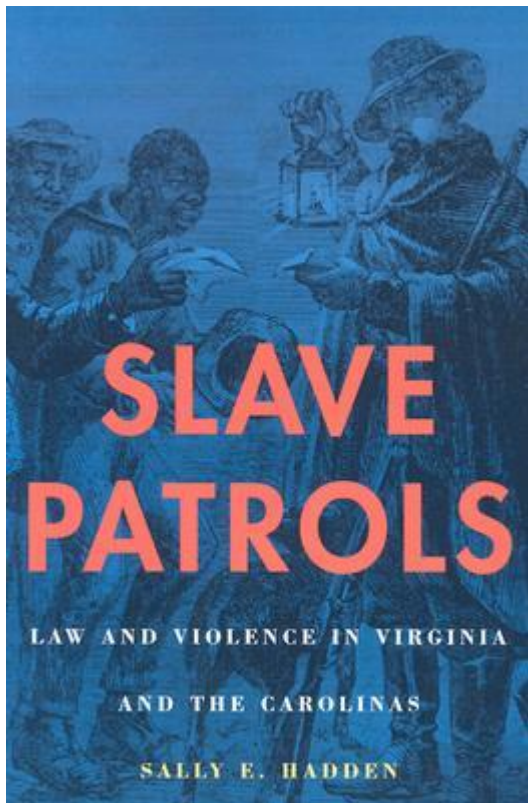


Investigating Patrollers



Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas.

Sally E. Hadden brings sharp eyes and listening ears to the activities, significance, and composition of southern slave patrols in her important and stimulating study. The introduction, six chapters, and an epilogue span the colonial period through Reconstruction, treat Virginia and the Carolinas, and

draw on evidence ranging from legal statutes to slave narratives. Hadden is the first to interrogate precisely and thoroughly those most responsible for surveilling and policing the Old South's slave population.

She begins with an examination of the evolution of patrols in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Fear of slave revolts helped establish the patrols and the process of their formation followed a similar trajectory in the three colonies with private efforts to control the slave population giving way, albeit in sometimes convoluted fashion, to state-sponsored patrols. By the end of the Revolutionary era, "except in urban areas, patrols served as separate groups, apart from militia, constables, and sheriffs" (40). Hadden then turns to the consolidation of the patrols after the Revolution, considers whether or not they were effective, and claims that "[p]atrolling had the same appeal of jury duty in the modern era: it might seem onerous, time-consuming, and people might try to avoid serving, but it was indubitably important" (69). The chapter concludes with a bit of a red herring when

Hadden argues the patrol's obligation to protect the property of others "was repugnant to Southern white ideas of individual freedom and, indirectly, their sense of personal honor" (70). Patrols, contends Hadden, were entirely too communal, too suggestive of white fear of black revolt, and too intrusive on the slave-master relationship to sit comfortably with elite antebellum Southern men. Thus, efforts to "change and strengthen the slave patrols ran directly counter to Southern white notions of honor and self-sufficiency" (70). Hadden's characterization of Southern whites as resolutely individualistic is an exaggeration. Certainly, many were fiercely independent but, as a good deal of work has shown, ties of kinship and economic reciprocity bound fairly disparate groups of white southerners. Perhaps failure to strengthen antebellum patrols indicated that although some found aspects of them unpalatable, many nonetheless considered them effective; or, perhaps men (women never patrolled) found the patrols to bolster their ties to community and notions of masculinity. Hadden herself later points out that members of a patrol were "routinely composed of men who knew their fellow patrollers well" (85). In other words, serving in a patrol may have reaffirmed Southern notions of community, kinship, masculinity, and honor.

Hadden's third chapter is noteworthy for several reasons. Here, she compares patrollers to slave catchers, plantation overseers, and urban constables [no one summarized the difference between the police and the patrollers more poignantly than a former slave: the police "were for white folks. Patteroles were for niggers" (84)]. Most significantly, Hadden shows that that poor whites did not make up the bulk of southern patrollers. Based on her analysis of tax and tithe data for two eighteenth-century Virginia counties (Hadden's use of difficult sources is exemplary), she finds that "slave patrollers were neither wealthy nor at the bottom among the landless and propertyless of their community" (98). Although this began to change after the 1820s, the importance of the patrol to antebellum slaveowning society ensured that patrolling was not left solely to poor whites. Men of some means had to be involved, argues

Hadden, not only to protect their property but also to monitor poor white relations with slaves.

A powerful discussion of the patrol's day-to-day functions and activities, its methods of surveillance, and slaves' tactics of evasion constitutes the fourth chapter. Hadden is rightly sensitive to how patrollers used not only their eyes but also their ears to ferret out illicit slave activity, most frequently betrayed by noise emanating from slave cabins. Conversely, she also shows how slaves used sight and sound to try to evade and confuse the patrol. A discussion of how the patrols responded during times of slave revolt and war is the focus of chapters 5 and 6. Hadden's examination of insurrection scares, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and, in chapter 6, the Civil War, enables her to conclude that wars and rebellions resulted in the desire for tighter surveillance but that wars especially sometimes limited the patrol's effectiveness. An epilogue, which examines the similarities between antebellum patrol and postbellum Klan—unsurprisingly, there were many—concludes the study.

What to make of Hadden's fine survey of Southern surveillance? Beyond the important and immensely helpful data she presents about the nature and working of southern patrols, Hadden's book is refreshing and suggestive for a couple of reasons. First, Hadden's study invites and, indeed, facilitates, comparative work. Future studies of the patrol would do well to compare Hadden's portrait of the old southeast with patrolling practices in the southwest and, in fact, other slaveholding societies. The second is suggested by Hadden herself when she seems to anticipate criticism from scholars interested principally in how slaves perceived the patrols and how they resisted white surveillance. Of course, Hadden is not unmindful of slave perceptions of the patrol, as she demonstrates in chapter 4, but her focus is on the public regulation of slavery. She wants to move "beyond the worlds of slave and master to include a third party—the slave patrols" rather than dwell on strategies of subaltern resistance (2). In this context, there is much to recommend such an emphasis for, above all else, this book is a healthy reminder and exploration of the authority, nature, and power of Southern slaveholding society. For Hadden, slaves had agency, but it was one often hedged by the stifling presence of the patrol. In this respect, her study goes some way toward answering what remains a critical question: why the relative absence of large-scale slave insurrections in the Old South? Hadden's book suggests an answer and much more, besides.

This article originally appeared in issue 2.1 (October, 2001).

Mark M. Smith is associate professor of history at the University of South Carolina and author of *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill, 1997), *Debating Slavery: Economy and Society in*

the Antebellum American South (Cambridge, 1998), and editor of *The Old South* (Oxford, 2000). This fall he will publish *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* with the University of North Carolina Press.