COMMERCE AND COMMUNITY: PLANTATION LIFE AT GEORGE WASHINGTON'S MOUNT VERNON, 1754 TO 1799

by

Gwendolyn K. White
A Dissertation
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History

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my parents, Walter and Madelyn Berns, and my husband, Egon Verheyen. I wish you were here, but I feel your pride.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first thanks have to go to my dissertation advisor Cynthia A. Kierner, who has been endlessly helpful, patient, and encouraging.

Thank you also to my dissertation readers Rosemarie Zagarri, Zachary Schrag, and Dennis Pogue for their insightful comments.

I have benefited from the support of the History and Art History Department at George Mason University throughout my doctoral studies in many ways.

I am grateful to the Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington at Mount Vernon and the Mount Vernon Ladies Association for awarding me the inaugural James C. Rees Entrepreneurship Fellowship at the library. My time there was very valuable in allowing me to more fully explore the available literature on George Washington and his times and access to its knowledgeable staff.

I have found the local history collections at several county libraries to be invaluable and their staffs most helpful including the Fairfax City Branch of the Fairfax County Library and Kate Waller Barrett Branch of Alexandria City Library. I would like to especially mention the staff at the Bull Run Branch of the Prince William County Library for always going above and beyond to help me in my research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

NOTE ON QUOTATIONS AND SPELLING

Spelling and punctuation within quotations have been corrected for ease of reading and understanding.

ABSTRACT

COMMERCE AND COMMUNITY: PLANTATION LIFE AT GEORGE WASHINGTON'S MOUNT VERNON, 1754 TO 1799

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George Mason University, 2016

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This dissertation explores Mount Vernon as an example of a large Virginia plantation during the last half of the eighteenth century by examining the part it played in the local economy both before and after the American Revolution. It is a community study of the many people involved in the enterprise: George Washington, his family, his farm managers, both enslaved and white workers, and tenants and neighbors within the seasonal activities that dominated the operation of the plantation. Mount Vernon was a part of the northern Virginia Chesapeake region that was undergoing profound agricultural, economic, and cultural changes throughout the last half of the eighteenth century, which affected all levels of the population. The dissertation examines the impact of these changes on the physical landscape, regional economy, and social relations on Washington's plantation and in the larger community as Virginia transitioned from a colony to a state of a sovereign nation.

The research for this project rests primarily on Washington's personal papers, which include a large number of farm records and account ledgers in addition to much of his correspondence and the diaries he kept throughout his life. Together they provide an almost day-by-day account of the community at Mount Vernon. The records reveal details about the labor of slaves and hired workers and the integral part they played in the local market as well as the national economy. They also show that for George Washington, Mount Vernon represented not only his home and livelihood, but also a passion that endured for the forty-five years he lived there. His letters and diaries reveal that the management and improvement of the farm was never far from his thoughts – not even during the years he was away during the Revolutionary War, his time at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, or his eight year tenure as the first president of the newly formed United States of America. The plantation was not just one facet of Washington's life but was integrated into every part of his private life and his public identity.

Although Washington was a skillful and innovative planter, the many people who lived and worked at Mount Vernon made possible the economic success that he enjoyed. Some individuals profited from being part of the community by earning wages and participating in the local economy. However, the stark contrasts between the lives of those at the upper and lower levels of the Mount Vernon community are evident in the bequests of George Washington's will written shortly before his death at the end of 1799. Washington owned almost 60,000 acres of land in several states and territories and by almost any measure was a wealthy man. On the other hand, the housing, clothing and

food of Washington's three hundred slaves had not changed in any material way between 1754 and 1799. The will freed only the slaves owned by Washington outright. After Martha Washington's death a few years later, much of the community that had lived and worked at Mount Vernon during Washington's lifetime scattered.

INTRODUCTION

Commerce and Community: Plantation Life at George Washington's Mount Vernon, 1754 to 1799

> Morris's Plantation 22 Apl.
> Tuesday women all sewing carrot seed (in the morning) The men cleaning swamp, the women and men sewing Tuesday morning Wednesday and Thursday. Friday doing nothing. This day men employed mortising posts for rails. The women doing nothing. Three common and one drill plow going Tuesday Wednesday and Thursday – stock all well no increase or decrease. *Weekly Reports of Managers, November 18, 1786 - April 28, 1787*

This dissertation explores Mount Vernon as an example of a large Virginia plantation during the last half of the eighteenth century examining the part it played in the local economy both before and after the American Revolution. It is a community study of the many people involved in the enterprise: Washington, his family, his farm managers, both enslaved and white workers, and neighbors; both town and country, within the seasonal activities that dominated the operation of the plantation. The focus will not be on Mount Vernon as an exceptional plantation because of Washington's status, though Mount Vernon was exceptional in many ways. George Washington owned thousands of acres, had the advantage of proximity to a port, and had greater financial resources than many of his peers because of his dedication to agricultural experimentation and willingness to diversify his business interests. Mount Vernon was a part of the northern Virginia Chesapeake region that was undergoing a profound

agricultural, economic, and cultural change throughout the last half of the eighteenth century that affected all levels of the population. These changes will be examined on Washington's plantation and in the larger community, addressing questions about changes in the physical landscape, regional economy, and social relations as Virginia transitioned from a colony to a state of a sovereign nation.

The question is what were the relationships between George Washington, Mount Vernon – both the place and the people that lived and worked there – and the larger community as a whole? The argument is that each of these relationships were interdependent and plantation life in the eighteenth century was not only a black landscape, but was comprised of a complex mix of people and experiences. As much as the record allows, I will try to examine the life of the individual within the group as representative of the larger group to which they belong amidst broader cultural issues of class, race, and gender.

This dissertation is a biography of the Mount Vernon community through the lives of the people that lived on the plantation or visited there for business or pleasure and the landscape in which they worked or socialized. Following the example of a leading social historian of eighteenth-century Virginia, I define a community as " a group of people living together in some identifiable territory and sharing a set of interests embracing their lifeways."[1] In this dissertation, the term community is used to denote a group of people living in a specific time and place – in this case, Mount Vernon and its environs during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Their interactions with each

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[1] Darrett B. and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750* (New York: Norton, 1984), 24.
[2] Darrett B. Rutman, "Assessing the Little Communities of Early America," *William and*

other may – or may not – have been mutually beneficial. An eighteenth-century Virginia plantation represents a specific type of community where not all of the members of the group were willing participants. Masters owned the labor of indentured servants for a set amount of years and slaves had little say over where or how they lived. However, they were contributing members of the community and both influenced and benefited from it. In a sense the dissertation will be a biography of Mount Vernon through the lives of the people that lived on or came to Mount Vernon and the landscape in which they worked. This study of plantation life reflects that reality by including all members of the community. It involves who interacts with whom, in what ways, and to what effect.[2]

For George Washington, Mount Vernon represented not only his home and livelihood, but also a passion that endured for the forty-five years he lived there. His letters and diaries reveal that the management and improvement of the farm was never far from his thoughts – not even during the years he was away during the Revolutionary War, his time at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, or his eight year tenure as the first president of the newly formed United States of America. The plantation was not just one facet of Washington's life but was integrated into every part of his private life and his public identity. Americans associated Washington with the legend of Cincinnatus, the Roman farmer who returned to his plow after saving Rome, even while he was serving during the Revolutionary War. Like Cincinnatus, Washington chose the agrarian life over that of a king for which he was admired by not only his fellow Americans but by

[2] Darrett B. Rutman, "Assessing the Little Communities of Early America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 43:2, (1986), 166.

no less than George III, King of Great Britain and many in Europe as well.[3] Washington seemed never to regret his decision in spite of the great sacrifice he had made to his country. In a 1797 letter to James Anderson of Scotland he wrote, "I am once more seated under my own Vine and fig tree, and hope to spend the remainder of my days…in peaceful retirement, making political pursuits yield to the more rational amusement of cultivating the Earth."[4]

Washington first took up residence at the plantation in 1754 after the death of his brother, Lawrence Washington. He enlarged the mansion and made almost continual changes to the landscape over the next five decades. Tobacco was the main crop and source of income when Washington took over management of the farm and remained so until the mid 1760s when he began to plant more of his fields in wheat and other cash crops. The soil of Mount Vernon was not well suited to tobacco cultivation and Washington could no longer sustain the financial losses endemic to the unstable tobacco economy. Around the same time he elected to move the small plantation mill operation to a site that could sustain a merchant mill that would serve not only Mount Vernon, but also the local community and supply enough flour for sale within the colonies and export abroad.[5] In 1797, he added the distillery to the complex and began producing whiskey for sale; in its time it was the largest producer of whiskey in the United States.

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[3]Garry Wills, Cincinnatus: *George Washington and the Enlightenment* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 13.

[4]George Washington to James Anderson, 7 April 1797, *The Papers of George Washington*, ed. W.W. Abbot, et al. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987-), *Retirement Series*, 1:79.

[5]Alan and Donna Jean Fusonie, *George Washington, Pioneer Farmer* (Mount Vernon, VA: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 1998), 38.

Washington's endeavors linked him to his neighbors and brought a steady stream of people to the plantation to buy and sell a variety of services and commodities. As Rhys Isaac illustrated, connections between the gentry formed at the courthouse, church and other public venues, expanded their networks in their endless search for wealth and power.[6] Plantations can often appear to be isolated self-sufficient villages with little contact with the surrounding inhabitants.[7] Rather, Mount Vernon was central to a web of business and social connections with numerous individuals involved in markets both near and far. The plantation also benefited from its proximity to the port city of Alexandria, which grew from a tobacco warehouse to an important transfer point for goods from the west and imports from the Atlantic trade. There was frequent interaction between Mount Vernon and Alexandria where barrels of fish were taken to market or supplies bought or workmen hired to come and do specialized work at the plantation.

Economic networks operated throughout all levels of the community. Hired workers often received payment in both cash and goods. Contracts included a variety of items in part payment of services rendered such as housing, food, rations of rum, and in some cases the use of cows, horses, and even slaves to act as cooks or house servants. Slaves also received goods: food, shelter, clothing, and when necessary tools to carry out their jobs. There is no question that the "payment" they received did not adequately recompense them for their labor. However, most slaves probably supplemented their meager food rations with the produce from their own small garden, fishing, and hunting.

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[6] Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).
[7] Carole Shammas, "Constructing a Wealth Distribution from Probate Records," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* 9 (1978), 297-307.

Some sold eggs, honey, and poultry back to the Washington's cook for cash. House servants and stablemen could receive tips for carrying out tasks for visitors. Small amounts of disposable income allowed the slaves to purchase items of their own choosing.

In the second quarter of the eighteenth century, tobacco growers in northern Virginia and Maryland began to switch to grains in response to a growing demand, within both the colonies and abroad. They were able to decrease the losses caused by the market volatility of being single crop growers and increase their profitability through diversification. Planters like Washington found that local markets could supplement their income when wars both at home and abroad interrupted transatlantic shipping. Grain agriculture leant itself to such advances as crop rotation, greater yields per acre, and improvements in plow design to increase planting efficiency. It had the added benefit of requiring less labor than tobacco cultivation. In *Tobacco Culture,* T.H. Breen examined tobacco agriculture from the point of view of the planter and illustrated the intensive slave labor it required. Works by Philip Morgan and Alan Kulikoff integrated accounts of tobacco agriculture with its impact on the lives of slaves. The transition to wheat and other grains as primary cash crops, which required less time and labor than tobacco, meant that many more slaves received training in trades as planters like Washington increasingly expanded and diversified their involvement in business interests on their plantations.[8]

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[8] Paul Clemens, *Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); T.H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of the Revolution* (Princeton,

It is possible to see the change over time that occurred in the latter half of the eighteenth-century in the economy of the Chesapeake region through the experience of the Mount Vernon community. The Revolutionary War negatively affected the tobacco trade by interrupting shipments abroad. British markets were lost and British war ships made commerce with other countries difficult if not impossible at times. The elite could no longer live on credit provided by their tobacco factors and many were overwhelmed by the debt they carried when markets for their tobacco vanished. Only planters who were willing to diversify and find new markets for their exports could thrive. Washington found demands for grains and flour in Europe caused by famine and war provided high prices when his shipments could get through. By paying attention to forces affecting local, national and international markets, planters could continue to maintain the lifestyle they had established before the onset of the Revolution.

While Washington is but one character in this study, his importance cannot be underestimated. He was the major force behind all that occurred at Mount Vernon as well as the economic transformation of northern Virginia. His economic success contributed to his continued importance in the community through the services he

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NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Low Country* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Alan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: Development of Southern Culture in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800 (*Published for the Institution of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia by the University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Lorena Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure and Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Carville Earle, *The Evolution of a Tidewater Settlement System: All Hallow's Parish, Maryland, 1650-1783* (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Department of Geography, Research Paper no. 170, 1975).

provided which aided the local economy. He was an avid participant in the new husbandry, the agricultural reform movement that had begun in England. This meant reading the latest treatises and testing techniques and different crops. He promoted the establishment of agricultural societies to better disseminate information to the community and used his role as president to promote a National Board of Agriculture. In his Eighth Annual Address to Congress in December 1796, he called agricultural boards "very cheap Instruments of immense National benefits."[9]

Washington was just one of several influential entrepreneurial planters in the region whose efforts at economic diversification dated to the late colonial era. Laura Kamoie's aptly named recent work, *Irons in the Fire*, examines several generations of the Tayloe family and their diverse economic interests. The Tayloes, like Washington, were not only planters but sought additional sources of income. They invested in iron mines, and also built mills and had blacksmith and cloth-making enterprises. Jean Russo's study of the Lloyd family of Talbot County, Maryland, focused on the changing direction of different generations. During the first half of the eighteenth century, the planters also had diverse merchant interests, but during the last half of the century, they began to concentrate on improving farming methods. In many ways, Washington was a meld of these two different types of planter. He remained the merchant-planter of the earlier generations, but also began to focus on increasing crop yields on existing lands through crop rotation and other new scientific methods.

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[9]Eighth Annual Address to Congress, 7 December 1796, *The Writings of George Washington: From the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1931-1944), 35:315.

However, many elite planters did not survive the changes that resulted after the war with Great Britain. The existence of large plantations in Virginia and Maryland was already threatened before the Revolution but afterward planters found it even more difficult to maintain the same genteel lifestyle they enjoyed during the colonial era. Cynthia Kierner and Emory Evans have documented how their substantial debts to British merchants and consequential loss of wealth and power were a result of poor management. As the population of Virginia shifted, elites no longer had the same regional political influence that they had held during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Randolph family that had long dominated Virginia politics found recovery from the debt they had amassed impossible when they failed to adapt to changes in the economy.[10] Mount Vernon did weather the crisis, but only because its master focused a tremendous amount of time, money, and energy into ensuring it remained profitable.

Although George Washington is one of the most studied figures in American history, few books have focused solely on his plantation. Robert and Lee Dalzell have written about Mount Vernon as Washington's home. Their work focuses on the changes that Washington brought about to the house and plantation with an emphasis on the architecture and landscape design. The Dalzells do cover the work of servants and slaves who were involved in the construction and upkeep of the physical environment. Another important work is the brief but informative, *George Washington Pioneer Farmer* by Alan

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[10]Emory G. Evans, *"A Topping People": The Rise and Decline of Virginia's Old Political Elite, 1680-1790* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Cynthia Kierner "'The Dark and Dense Cloud Perpetually Lowering over Us": Gender and the Decline of the Gentry in Post-revolutionary Virginia, *Journal of the Early Republic* 20 (2000), 185-217.

and Donna Jean Fusonie. They cover Washington's agricultural innovations as well as the diverse economic activities engendered by the mill and distillery, fishery and other businesses on the plantation. A number of articles written on Mount Vernon have covered specific aspects of the plantation's built environment. Dennis Pogue has written about the domestic architecture that formed the housing and workplaces for slaves including the barn and other outbuildings. Mary Thompson has closely researched the family connections and work experiences of Washington's slaves.[11]

Community studies developed from the new social history in the 1960s and 1970s with turned away from "great white men" history to an increased focus on people who had previously lacked a presence in historical studies such as women, slaves, and other less advantaged individuals who did not leave a written record of letters or diaries.[12] Many historians have done similar work with a body of primary sources, although few have focused on the eighteenth-century Chesapeake. One who does is Jean Lee in *Price of Nationhood.* In her study of Charles County, Maryland in the period surrounding the American Revolution, Lee made extensive use of court records, land records, wills, and

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[11] Robert F. Dalzell, Jr. and Lee Baldwin Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon: At Home in Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Alan Fusonie and Donna Jean Fusonie, *George Washington, Pioneer Farmer* (Mount Vernon, VA: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 1998); Dennis Pogue, "The Domestic Architecture of Slavery at George Washington's Mount Vernon," *Winterthur Portfolio* (37:3-22, 2002); Mary Thompson, "They Appear to Live Comfortable Together:" Private Lives of the Mount Vernon Slaves," in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington*, Philip J. Schwarz, ed. (Mount Vernon, Va.: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2009).
[12] Among the many examples are: Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970); Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years, Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1746* (New York, 1970); and Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Norton, 1970).

correspondence to understand how one county responded to and was affected by the Revolutionary War. In *A Place in Time* by Darrett and Anita Rutman used court records to study how the community in Middlesex County, Virginia changed from the mid-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale* examined an entirely different region. Ulrich studied a small community in Maine during the early republic through the lens of one woman's diary. In each case, the authors have taken primary sources that have a story to tell and used them to create a sense of time and place. The farm and financial records of Mount Vernon are especially suited to this type of social history and the dissertation will draw on them as models.[13]

In the 1980s, there was a shift from regional studies to Atlantic world history and even more recently, global history. Led by Bernard Bailyn, Jack P. Greene, and others, Atlantic world studies expanded the range of place to include the influence of international trade on both the old and new worlds. This method of study offers an alternative to studying a single community or region allowing for a greater understanding of the interconnectivity of the world.[14] George Washington not only participated in

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[13] Jean B. Lee, *The Price of Nationhood: The American Revolution in Charles County* (New York: WW Norton, 1994); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Darrett B. and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750* (New York: Norton, 1984).

[14] For examples of Atlantic world and global history, see: Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Elizabeth Mancke and Carole Shammas, ed. *The Creation of the British Atlantic World* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); and Alison Games, "Beyond the Atlantic: Globetrotters and Transoceanic Connections," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser. (63:4, October 2006) among many others.

Atlantic commercial networks, but integrated transatlantic influences in architecture, agriculture, gardening and landscape into his plan for Mount Vernon.

The depth and breadth of the Mount Vernon farm and financial records provide a unique opportunity for an in-depth study of late eighteenth-century plantation life. In combination with Washington's correspondence and diary, they provide an almost day-by-day account of the community at Mount Vernon. The records reveal details about the labor of slaves and hired workers and the integral part they played in the local market as well as the national economy. Mount Vernon survives in a more complete form than most similar plantations in size and range of operation. The farm remained in the hands of the Washington family until its purchase by the nascent Mount Vernon Ladies Association in 1856. Because of Washington's status many of his personal papers have been preserved, including a large number of farm records and account ledgers that survive along with much of his correspondence and diaries he kept throughout his life.

George Washington was a prolific letter writer and kept meticulous records of the running of the plantation and the various business activities that he operated on his lands. The *Papers of George Washington* project at the University of Virginia is publishing the letters and other papers of Washington. This is an ongoing endeavor with many of the letters now included in a digital edition. When Washington was away from home, which he was for years at a time, he wrote extensively detailed instructions to his farm managers as he micro-managed the daily activities on the plantation and his many business ventures that generated the income he derived from his properties. The farm managers replied in kind with reports on progress made and questions regarding specific issues. The weekly

reports, written in narrative form, detail specific tasks completed and how many days were spent that week on each project.

Another group of papers are primarily financial accounts. These provide an almost daily record of events on the plantation. Washington took the art of bookkeeping seriously and began practicing it in 1747 when he was just fifteen years old.[15] Ledgers, cash accounts and household account books contain entries on both income and expenses. These include information on transactions between Washington and other individuals for sales of stock, produce, household goods and even more personal items such as the cost of burial of Martha Washington's daughter, Martha Parke Custis, in 1773. These records show how deeply entrenched Washington's plantation was with the local economy. Washington employed tailors who not only made clothes for the Washington family and for some of Mount Vernon's slaves but also for various neighbors and other hired workers. Similar arrangements were made for the blacksmith's services and for products of the mill, and the sale of fish caught at Washington's fisheries along the Potomac River. Important information on women's roles within the Mount Vernon community can be gleaned from the records. A sense of Martha Washington's role can be inferred from the specific work she ordered done or items purchased at her request. The work of female slaves was diverse. Many worked in the fields but others were involved in the cloth-making industry as spinners, sewers, and knitters as well as duties in the Mansion House.

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[15]Helen Cloyd, "George Washington as Accountant" *The Accounting Historians Journal* (Spring 1979), 88.

The seemingly dry lists of people, items and tasks that appear in the financial accounts reveal rich detail about life at Mount Vernon and the late eighteenth-century Chesapeake as well. They provide a look into the daily lives of slaves; what their work routines included, the clothes they wore and the food they were given or grew for themselves. The records provide similar information for the many hired workers and managers of the farms and the middling planters who were Washington's neighbors and business associates. All participated in the local economy and had an impact on the changing landscape of the region. The records also enlighten the interdependent nature of his relationships with relatives and neighbors. A granular examination of these records can provide a better understanding of plantation life and the web of relationships it supported. They will also add to what we know about middling planters in the region, tenant farmers, hired white workers and the enslaved at Mount Vernon and its environs in an important transitional era in American history.

Washington owned a number of books on agriculture, gardening, and farm related topics, which linked him to the agricultural revolution and highlighted his endless attempts to improve the efficiency of the plantation. Of the approximately 900 books in his library at his death, 176 were on agricultural topics and these books are ones that we can be confident that he actually read and used. Many of them contain information that can be directly connected to methods Washington tested. A copy of *Husbandry and Rural Affairs* by Washington's friend, John Beale Bordley, a planter on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, was a guide to Washington in his own experiments with scientific agriculture. In a letter to Bordley, Washington stressed the influence that "Gentlemen who have

leisure and ability" could have on "the common farmer" as an example to introducing new methods.[16]

Drawing on this wealth of primary sources, this dissertation will focus primarily on the community at Mount Vernon within the framework of Washington's economic enterprises. The agricultural and commercial decisions Washington made had a direct impact on the lives of those who toiled at Mount Vernon. The jobs they performed and the people they interacted with were all dependent on Washington's choices. The records were kept to record the costs and profits of the plantation but they coincidentally recorded important information on the experiences of the many people who worked and lived there.

The years 1754 to 1775, covered in Chapter One, represent George Washington's first decades as the master of Mount Vernon. During these years, he established himself as a planter and involved member and leader of his community. Washington also made an advantageous marriage, which increased his capital, slaveholdings, and social status. Washington transformed Mount Vernon into a thriving agricultural and business center for the surrounding region. He made the switch from predominantly tobacco production to a variety of grains and began to identify himself as farmer, that is one with a diversified roster of agricultural products rather than a plantation with one primary crop. However, Washington did not accomplish all of this on his own. Mount Vernon was supported by a wide diversity of people who lived and worked there: hired workers, indentured servants, slaves and tradespeople. George Washington and the myriad other

[16]George Washington to John Beale Bordley, 17 August 1788, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.*, 6:450.

individuals at Mount Vernon were part of a local economy, which functioned within a larger regional market that was part of the Atlantic world.

Chapter Two examines the years of the Revolutionary War, 1775 to 1783. Washington returned to Philadelphia in early May of 1775 as a delegate to the second Continental Congress where the members voted to appoint him as commander of the Continental Army.[17] The Battles of Lexington and Concord had taken place in April; by June, hostilities between the British and the American colonies had erupted into war at the Battle of Bunker Hill. George Washington left directly from Philadelphia for Boston to take command of the army. George Washington would be away from Mount Vernon for the next eight years. In his absence, farm manager Lund Washington navigated the running of the plantation under the threat of British invasion and amidst a difficult economic environment. The Mount Vernon community, residents of the surrounding neighborhood, and Alexandria had to find new outlets for their cash crops in a complicated marketplace. Lund was in charge of keeping all of Mount Vernon's residents fed and occupied at a time of unrest both locally and in the country at large.

In Chapter Three, the years 1783 to 1789, the period from the end of the Revolutionary War until Washington was elected the first president of the newly formed United States of America was one of recovery for the entire Chesapeake region and improvement at both Mount Vernon and his western landholdings. In spite of the best efforts of farm manager, Lund Washington, Washington's properties needed revitalization after his long absence. Mount Vernon came under the direction of new farm

[17] 4 May 1775, *The Papers of George Washington, Diaries*, ed. Donald Jackson, et al. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1976-1979), 3:327.

managers, George Augustine Washington, the son of Washington's brother Charles and James Bloxham, an English farmer especially recruited to bring the latest agricultural practices to Mount Vernon. Washington's interest in agricultural experimentation grew as he carried out extensive correspondence with others involved in agriculture in both America and England.

Chapter Four looks at the Mount Vernon community during the eight years of George Washington's presidency from April 1789 to March 1797. As Washington faced the challenges of the new nation, he also contemplated changes in his future. Knowing that he would be away from his beloved farm for several years, he began to contemplate the possibility of renting all or part of the plantation. Changes were occurring at Mount Vernon as well. Although the presidency allowed Washington greater latitude and he was able to spend some time in Virginia, there was an almost continual turnover of farm managers and overseers for him to instruct in his absence. Themes of conflict, sickness, and death for the community at Mount Vernon dominate this period.

Chapter Five covers Washington's retirement years, 1797 to 1799. As he retired from the presidency after an eight-year absence from Mount Vernon, Washington once again set out to repair and improve the appearance and operation of his plantation. He hoped to manage the Mansion House Farm for his own "amusement" and lease the outlying farms to provide income while easing his responsibility. An enterprising new farm manager suggested an additional business investment, a whiskey distillery, which would prove to be highly profitable, and further connected Washington and Mount Vernon to the local community. However, Washington died unexpectedly just a few

years into his retirement from public life, which brought an end to his endless improvements to his farms.

CHAPTER 1

FROM PLANTER TO FARMER, 1754-1774: "ENQUIRE ABOUT IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD"

The years 1754 to 1774 represent George Washington's first decades as the master of Mount Vernon. During these years, he established himself as a planter and involved member and leader of his community. Washington transformed Mount Vernon into a thriving agricultural and business center for the surrounding region. He made the switch from predominantly tobacco production to a variety of grains and began to identify himself as farmer, that is one with a diversified roster of agricultural products rather than a planter growing just one primary cash crop.[18] However, Washington did not accomplish all of this on his own. Mount Vernon was supported by a wide diversity of people who lived and worked there: hired workers, indentured servants, slaves and tradespeople. George Washington and the myriad other individuals at Mount Vernon were part of a local economy, which functioned within the Chesapeake region as part of the Atlantic world.

George Washington's relationship with the land along the Potomac at Little Hunting Creek – the land that eventually came to be known as Mount Vernon – began

[18] Thomas Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book: with Commentary and Relevant Extracts from Other Writings*, Edwin Morris Betts, ed. (Charlottesville, Va.: Published for the Thomas Jefferson Foundation by the University Press of Virginia, 1987). Betts differentiates between farmer and planter: a planter concentrated on tobacco or other dominant cash crop as opposed to the farmer who engaged in mixed agriculture.

when his family moved there in 1735, including at that point, his father, mother, George, and siblings Betty and Samuel.[19] When Augustine Washington's first wife, Jane Butler Washington, died he was left with three children: Lawrence, Augustine, Jr., and a daughter, Jane, who died when she was about fourteen years old in 1735. Augustine then married Mary Ball and together they had five children that lived to adulthood.[20] George, born in 1732 at Pope's Creek in Westmoreland County, was the eldest of their children followed by a daughter Elizabeth known as Betty and son Samuel. The next two children, John Augustine, and Charles were born while the family was at Mount Vernon. Augustine's eldest sons, Lawrence and Augustine, Jr., attended the Appleby School in England during this period with Lawrence returning in 1738. The family remained along the Potomac for just three years when Augustine Washington chose to relocate his center of operation to Fredericksburg near his mines at Accokeek and property inherited by his wife, Mary Ball Washington.[21] The childhood home of George Washington at Ferry Farm was described as "lying about two miles below the Falls of the Rappahannock, close on

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[19] Virginia, Northern Neck Land Office, Northern Neck Grants from the Virginia Land Office, Book 5:207, 1 March 1674/5, Library of Virginia. The land that came to be known as Mount Vernon first came into Washington family hands in 1675 when George Washington's great-grandfather, John Washington, patented 5,000 acres with Nicholas Spencer. They had the land surveyed in 1669, but the title to the property was delayed until 1675 when they received it through Lord Culpeper. John Washington died in 1677 and Spencer died in 1689. The land was partitioned with one half going to John Washington's son Lawrence, father of Augustine, George Washington's father.

[20] A daughter, Mildred, was born in 1739, but died the following year. Mary Ball was born in Lancaster County in 1708. She became an orphan at about the age of thirteen and was raised by Col. George Eskridge of Stony Point in Westmoreland County.

[21] Vestry of Pohick Church, *Minutes of the Vestry, Truro Parish, Virginia, 1732-1785* (Annandale, Va.: Baptie Studios, Inc., 1974), 11, 13, 18-19. Augustine Washington served on the vestry of Truro Parish in Fairfax County from 18 November 1735 through at least 3 October 1737.

the River Side, with a very handsome Dwelling house, 3 Store houses, several other convenient Out-houses, and a Ferry belonging to it."[22]

In 1739, when George was seven years old, his half-brother Lawrence turned twenty-one years old and took control of the plantation on the Potomac River that he would eventually inherit. Augustine Washington died in 1743 and Lawrence then inherited both the 2,500 acre share of the Hunting Creek lands and an additional tract on nearby Dogue Run with a mill. Lawrence, a captain of the Virginia militia, served under Edward Vernon, an Admiral of the British Navy during the attack on the Spanish stronghold of Cartagena in 1741, known as the War of Jenkins' Ear, and named the plantation Mount Vernon in his honor.

The geographic scope of the young George Washington's interests ranged widely. He inherited three hundred acres of land in King George County across the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg in addition to three lots in that town and ten slaves from his father. In addition, he received half of a tract on Deep Run and a one fifth share of his father's residual property.[23] Because he was still a minor, his mother had responsibility for his property, including the farm along the Rappahannock where she continued to reside. Until he turned sixteen, Washington spent his time working the farm interspersed with visits to relatives in the area including his half-brother, Lawrence Washington at Mount Vernon with whom he had a close relationship even after Lawrence's marriage to Ann Fairfax, the daughter of Col. William Fairfax of Belvoir, a neighboring plantation.

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[22] *Virginia Gazette* (Parks), 21 April 1738.
[23] Augustine Washington will dated 11 April 1743, King George County, Virginia.

Through Lawrence's connections with the Fairfax family, George traveled to the Shenandoah Valley in 1748 with a party that included Col. Fairfax's son George William Fairfax to survey the lands of Thomas, Lord Fairfax. The following year, he became public surveyor for Culpeper County, an important position that young Washington likely received without having first served as an apprentice or deputy surveyor because of his connection to the influential Fairfax family. The position provided status and income – a promising career for someone not expecting to inherit a large estate.[24]

Washington's work as a surveyor strengthened his ties to the Fairfax family and provided him with knowledge of the location of the best available land in western Virginia. Lord Fairfax took an active part in managing the proprietorship that he had inherited. The office for the proprietorship was managed by his cousin George William Fairfax and operated out of Belvoir until 1761 when Lord Fairfax set up a new office at White Post closer to the center of the western lands. Washington acquired seven parcels of land between 1750 and 1753 that held in excess of two thousand acres on Bullskin Run in Frederick County and two lots in Winchester. He divided the parcels into lots and began leasing them to tenants in the 1760s.[25] His surveying career, although brief,

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[24] William Guthrie Sayen, "George Washington's 'Unmannerly Behavior': The Clash between Civility and Honor," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 107, (Winter 1999), 19; By 1763, Washington owned 2,498 acres in Frederick County, 1,250 in King George County, 275 in Loudoun County, and 240 in Hampshire County, Ledger A: 199, MVLA; Sarah S. Hughes, *Surveyors and Statesmen: Land Measuring in Colonial Virginia* (Richmond, Va.: The Virginia Surveyors Foundation and the Virginia Association of Surveyors, 1979), 93.

[25] The Bullskin Run lands became part of Berkeley County in 1772, now located in West Virginia.

provided him with the means to buy land and secure a means of income for the future through the rent of his property.

When Lawrence contracted tuberculosis and traveled to Barbados in search of a cure in 1751, George accompanied him to the island – his only trip outside of mainland North America. The trip turned out to have no positive effect on Lawrence's health and he died not long after his return to Mount Vernon in 1752.[26] After Lawrence Washington's death, George Washington rented the 2,300 acres, house and gristmill in 1754 from his half-brother's widow. At that point, he had no expectations of becoming the owner of Mount Vernon, but when both Lawrence's widow and his only child died, George Washington inherited the property in 1761.[27]

As Washington prepared to leave Mount Vernon for his military service during the French and Indian War, he made arrangements for the care of his agricultural and commercial interests. Beginning a trend that would last throughout much of his life, Washington asked a relative to manage the plantation for him during his absence. Washington's favorite brother John Augustine Washington acted as agent and manager for his brother. John Augustine owned a plantation in Westmoreland County, but he and his wife lived at Mount Vernon from May of 1755 until Washington's return in 1758.

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[26] James Thomas Flexner, *Washington: The Indispensible Man* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 8; Sayen, "George Washington's 'Unmannerly' Behavior," 19.
[27] Lawrence Washington will dated 20 June 1752, Fairfax County, Virginia, Manuscript, Mount Vernon Ladies Association. Ann Fairfax Washington died in 1761. She had married Col. George Lee of Westmoreland County. Washington's elder brother John had first choice as to whether he would take Mount Vernon or remain at Pope's Creek. He chose to remain at Pope's Creek and George Washington later commented that the Pope's Creek land was better. David Humphreys, *David Humphrey's "Life of George Washington" with George Washington's "Remarks,"* Rosemarie Zagarri, ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 8.

Humphrey Knight, a local farmer, filled in as manager when John Augustine's own affairs took him away from Mount Vernon.[28]

Many planters with large landholdings required the assistance of an estate manager. For instance, the Tayloe family of Richmond County on Virginia's Northern Neck also utilized the services of estate managers for their large and diversified holdings.[29] The manager could act as his employer's agent in running the day-to-day operations as well as negotiating prices on items for sale or purchase. The manager stood in for the master in the eyes of the slaves as well. If the master was absent, slaves could begin to feel that they had no master as John Custis IV found when he took care of the affairs of John Randolph, who voyaged to London to represent the Virginia assembly. During his absence, Custis advised Randolph, "your plantation business goes on tolerably well; only some of your Negros and particularly Simon at Chicohominy has been a little sullen and run away, having a notion he had no master; but upon complaint of the overseer; I went immediately up; and undeceived him to his cost."[30] As this case

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[28] John Augustine and Hannah Washington had at least one child born during the period when he was acting as manager. However, Hannah may have returned to Bushfield to be with other family members for the birth necessitating John Augustine's absence from Mount Vernon. Mary was born about 1757 and another daughter, Jane, was born in 1759. Their other children were Bushrod born 1762, Corbin born 1764, William Augustine born 1767, and Mildred born 1769. Humphrey Knight was overseer from 1757 until his death in the autumn of 1758.

[29] Laura Croghan Kamoie, *Irons in the Fire: The Business History of the Tayloe Family and Virginia's Gentry, 1700-1860* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 23, 43.

[30] John Custis IV, *The Letterbook of John Custis IV of Williamsburg, 1717-1742* (Lanham, Md., 2005), 129; Lorena Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure and Profit*, 476-477. Walsh notes that hiring a neighboring farmer to act as general manager for an absentee landowner might initially appear to be mutually beneficial, but they often had

suggests, the overseer did not represent the same level authority of the master or the master's representative or manager.

Nor was George Washington unusual in choosing a relative to manage his plantation. Connections between kin and business interests were close during the eighteenth century. Since most of one's relatives were in the same line of work, whether agriculture, commerce, or a variety of other business interests, they had common interests. Having a relative stand in as manager did not guarantee a plantation would thrive, but they were more likely than a non-relative to protect the interests of the owner. Through close communication via visits and letters, they created a network to satisfy each other's requirements for slaves, livestock and seeds. While kinship was not the only criteria for social and economic exchange, it did hold primacy in Washington's world.[31]

Lund Washington served as the link between George Washington and the tenants and the army of workers at Mount Vernon. Lund was the first in a long line of full-time farm managers George Washington employed. As Washington had turned to relatives in the 1750s when he hired his brother John Augustine Washington, once again he hired a relative to work for him. Lund was a distant cousin of Washington's, his great-grandfather Lawrence and George's great-grandfather John emigrated from England in

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too many demands on their time and attention at their own property to fully tend to the needs of the other.

[31] Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves,* 7-10, 259-260. Kulikoff argues that social networks were organized around kin relations for eighteenth-century elites in the Chesapeake; Trevor Burnard, "A Tangled Cousinry? Associated Networks of the Maryland Elite, 1691-1776," *The Journal of Southern History* (Vol. 61, No. 1, Feb., 1995). Burnard suggests that for Maryland gentry, kin relations were important mainly for situations that had a direct impact on family affairs such as finances.

the late 1650s.[32] Lund's father was Townsend Washington of Chotank in Stafford County, a place where George Washington spent time when he was a young boy. Lund gained experience as a farm manger Henry Fitzhugh's Ravensworth plantation, also in Fairfax County, for several years before he began working as manager at Mount Vernon in October of 1764. A family member described Lund as "a stout man remarkable for his strength, activity, and industry."[33] Lund was in his late twenties and unmarried when he began work at Mount Vernon. As a younger son, he had to find gainful employment, as he was not first in line to inherit his father's estate. Working as farm manager for large landowners provided Lund with status and the opportunity to mingle with his social peers.

The job of plantation manager involved a complex mix of responsibilities and tasks. As manager of Mount Vernon, Lund Washington interacted with the family, neighbors, and Washington's friends and acquaintances as an equal. Lund participated in social and leisure activities with family and friends including fox hunting with Washington and guests to the estate. His primary responsibility was to set priorities for the overseers of the farms, but he also served as doctor for the slaves; agricultural consultant including worrying about crabgrass; and directed the schedule of the house servants, skilled workers, and Mansion House slave laborers.

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[32] Robert M. Moxham, *The First Hundred Years at Mount Vernon, 1653-1753* (North Springfield, Va.: Colonial Press, 1976), 11. John Washington emigrated in 1657 and his brother Lawrence followed two years later.

[33] Lund Washington's History of His Family assembled by E.D. Sloan, Jr. (MVLA, Washington Family Collection MMC-3363, Box 4, Miscellany, Genealogical Notes, 12.

After resigning from his service with the British army at the end of 1758, Washington turned his full attention back to Mount Vernon with the resolve of making it a profitable plantation. He later remarked, "when I retired from the Publick Service of this Colony . . . I had Provision's of all kinds to buy for the first two or three years; and my Plantation to stock, in short, with every thing."[34] Augustine Washington constructed a small dwelling house overlooking the Potomac River on the site in 1735, about the time he moved the family from Pope's Creek.[35] The one-and-half story frame house was quite substantial for its time. It had four rooms and a hall on the main floor and four rooms above with brick chimneys at each end. Through the first half of the eighteenth century, it was not unusual for even prosperous planters to live in two room dwellings. The typical houses were one-and-one-half-story with one or two rooms on each floor. Service spaces such as kitchens, dairies and housing for slaves or indentured servants were in separate buildings. Even the wealthiest Virginians lived in this type of house through the mid-eighteenth century.[36]

Washington enlarged the dwelling at Mount Vernon in 1758, changing it to two-and-a-half stories by raising the roof and expanded the footprint.[37] He also embellished the central hall with a new staircase that led up to five rooms on the second floor. The

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[34] GW to Robert Stewart, 27 April 1763, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 7:205-207.
[35] Dendrochronology done on the nucleus of the house revealed that it dated to 1735 so it is likely that Augustine Washington built it when he first moved the family to the site, conversation with Thomas Reinhart, Deputy Director of Architecture, MVLA, 11 January 2014.
[36] Dell Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, eds. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 316-17.
[37] Humphrey Knight to GW, 16 June 1758, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 5:217. Knight reported, "the house will be raisd next week."

expanded design more closely resembled the mansions of the wealthiest Virginians, such as the Fairfaxes' at Belvoir.[38] To make the wooden structure look more expensive – and impressive – Washington rusticated the boards to make it appear to be constructed of sandstone.

When George took possession of the property, there were already a number of outbuildings: kitchen, dairy, washhouse, storehouse, blacksmith shop, barn, and a slave quarter in addition to the house. The kitchen and storehouse were to the south end of the mansion; the dairy and washhouse to the north. All were set at a diagonal to the main house. Along the north lane was a blacksmith shop and the barn and slave quarters were situated either along the same side or along the south lane.[39]

Expanding his plantation and renovating the house were only part of Washington's plan to become firmly established in gentry society. Participating in politics and government was a necessary step towards attaining that goal. Washington was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses for Frederick County in 1758, and then for Fairfax County from 1761 to 1775, which took him to Williamsburg several times a year.[40] The visits to the capital put Washington in close proximity to the leaders of the colony and exposed him to the cultural and social events of plays, musicals, and balls.[41] In addition to his duties in connection with the House of Burgesses, Washington also

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[38] Dalzell and Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 48-49.
[39] Lawrence Washington Inventory (Mss. MVLA); Dennis Pogue, "Mount Vernon: Transformation of an Eighteenth-Century Plantation System" in *Historical Archaeology of the Chesapeake*, ed. by Paul A. Shackel and Barbara J. Little (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 104. The inventory of Lawrence's estate lists the outbuildings that stood at the time of his death.
[40] Washington served as a representative to the House of Burgesses from 1759-1775.
[41] Evans, "*A Topping People*," 153.

became involved in politics at the local level as a justice of the Fairfax County court, a member of the Alexandria Town Council, and on the vestry of Truro Parish where his father had also served in the 1730s. Each position further cemented his place in the society of his peers and expanded his network of social equals.

To establish his place in elite society, Washington also needed to make a good marriage, which meant with someone who was a social equal and who possessed property. When he first met the widow Martha Dandridge Custis is not clear, but her husband had owned property in Williamsburg, which she inherited and it is probably here that their first meeting took place. Regardless, it was a brief courtship as they were married on 6 January 1759. Martha was the widow of Daniel Parke Custis, one of the wealthiest of Virginia's elite planters. Martha's dower rights gave her 3,880 acres of land as well as lots in Williamsburg and Jamestown.[42] After their marriage at her home in New Kent County, the couple remained there for the next few months. In preparation for their arrival at Mount Vernon, Washington directed a servant to air out the house, "enquire about in the Neighbourhood, & get some Egg's and Chickens, and prepare in the best manner you can for our coming," set up "two of the best Bedsteads," and clean and polish the staircase and tables and chairs.[43]

George Washington brought his bride to Mount Vernon in early April of 1759. Accompanying Martha were her children: five-year-old John (Jackie) Parke Custis and three-year-old daughter Martha (Patsy) Parke Custis along with about fifty slaves.

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[42] Schedule A: Assignment of the widow's dower, October 1759, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.,* 6:217-218.
[43] GW to John Alton, 5 April 1759, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*., 6:200.

Through his marriage, Washington had more than doubled his land holdings and slaves. Part of the Custis estate went directly to Martha as part of the widow's dower rights and the portion inherited by the children was held in trust under the management of George Washington with careful accounting to track the profit and loss of the children's property.

At Mount Vernon, Washington's days were filled with interactions with his family, friends and neighbors, other business acquaintances, servants and slaves. For example, in the first ten days of January 1760, Washington acquired pork from Daniel French and John West, corn from John Posey, butter from Mr. Dalton and additional butter from Mr. Kilpatrick in Alexandria while accompanying Anna Bassett to town – all food supplies for the inhabitants of Mount Vernon. He asked Dr. Craik of Alexandria to see about finding a gardener for Mount Vernon, contacted his lawyer, George Johnston with the intent of suing John Ballendine of Prince William County for shorting him on an order of iron, and received various items via Burwell Bassett from a Yorktown warehouse where they had been awaiting delivery.

Washington's interactions during those first ten days of 1760 indicate the family and community circles within which he routinely operated. Burwell Bassett was the husband of Anna Maria Dandridge Bassett, Martha's younger sister. Daniel French, John West, and John Posey had property near Mount Vernon and Posey and West were frequent visitors to the plantation. French lived about five miles west of Alexandria but owned over 500 acres on Dogue Creek near Mount Vernon and was a Fairfax County

justice and vestryman of Fairfax Parish.[44] John Dalton and the Kirkpatrick brothers were merchants in Alexandria. John Kirkpatrick also served as Washington's personal secretary from 1755-1757 when Washington assumed command of the Virginia Regiment under Governor Dinwiddie.

As one historian of rural life in eighteenth-century America has argued, exchanges of goods or services among social peers could help to strengthen social bonds by creating reciprocal obligations that each party was bound to honor.[45] On New Year's Day George Washington engaged in a dispute with a neighbor, Daniel French, who displayed a "great Love of Money" changing the previously agreed upon price of some pork.[46] Washington was upset with his neighbor about changing the price of pork because Washington believed he was owed greater consideration from an equal. French, a wealthy Fairfax County planter, lived about five miles west of Alexandria, but also owned a tract of land on Dogue Creek near Mount Vernon of about 550 acres. French was a member of the Fairfax vestry and he and Washington surely had many social intersections.[47]

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[44] Fairfax Parish was formed in 1765. Daniel French is buried in the graveyard at Pohick Church. He had only one child – a daughter Elizabeth who married Benjamin Dulaney in 1773. A wedding announcement in the *Virginia Gazette* stated that Miss French had an income of 20,000 pounds. See *Virginia Gazette* (ed. Rind) 11 March 1773.

[45] Martin Bruegel, "The Social Relations of Farming in the Early American Republic: A Micro-historical Approach," *Journal of the Early Republic* (26, Winter 2006), 531. Bruegel's article focuses on the Hudson Valley during from 1780 to 1840, but it is equally applicable to Mount Vernon during the eighteenth century.

[46] 1 January 1760, *Papers of GW*, *Diaries,* 1:211*,* Washington purchased another 2,473 pounds of pork from French on 22 January 1760 when French went to Mount Vernon to see the hogs weighed and collect his money.

[47] French voted for George Washington and John West in the election for Burgesses for Fairfax County on 16 July 1765. Fairfax County Poll Sheet, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 7:379.

However, transactions between members of unequal groups could also create relationships of trust and comity. At all levels of society in and around Mount Vernon, transactions took place for a variety of reasons. For example, in January of 1760 Washington received payment from tenants for work done by his blacksmiths. The blacksmith's services brought the tenants to Mount Vernon where they might see Washington and further strengthen their social bonds. Relationships could be built through a series of small but necessary ordinary transactions. Large plantations like Mount Vernon that employed artisans with specialized trades provided those with smaller farms and fewer resources with a valuable service.[48]

Barter or direct sale between two individuals were not the only way to acquire goods for Colonial Virginians. Great Britain was the administrative center of the tobacco trade with small trading centers arising around tobacco inspection warehouses in Virginia, but their small populations did not attract much in the way of artisans or other commercial activities.[49] In the absence of a central location to acquire the goods required in the ever-changing world of fashion, eighteenth-century elites turned to their relatives, friends and neighbors to procure items as well as purchasing from local merchants and placing orders to England. Getting goods from Great Britain was a slow and often frustrating process. The quality was often inferior or the size or quantity wrong. After waiting many months to receive an order, it was more than annoying to receive items

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[48] Jean B. Russo, "Self-sufficiency and Local Exchange: Free Craftsmen in the Rural Chesapeake Economy" in *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, edited by Lois Green Carr, Philip D. Morgan, and Jean B. Russo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 391.

[49] Bruce A. Ragsdale, *A Planter's Republic: The Search for Economic Independence in Revolutionary Virginia* (Madison, Wis.: Madison House, 1996), 22.

"that could have only been used by our Forefathers in the days of yore, " as Washington wrote to his merchant in London.[50] However, merchants provided the important service of finding buyers for the tobacco they received from the planters of Virginia for the best price.[51] In return, they acted as personal shoppers for them from long lists of desired merchandise.

Barter was common in the eighteenth century and not just for those without ready cash. Washington traded with neighbors at all levels of society. The items bartered were generally services like smithing; foodstuffs such as meat, grain, livestock, poultry and eggs; and materials such as leather or iron. While barter was not the dominant method of payment, it was one option. Benjamin Harris received four yards of wool from Mount Vernon in exchange for two turkeys and seven chickens.[52] Richard Bushman differentiates between the types of items that people bartered versus those that were purchased in shops. Barter involved the farm and the kitchen; shop goods were more refined – and fashionable.[53] Planters like George Washington still turned to the London

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[50] GW to Robert Cary & Co., 28 September 1760, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*., 6:459-461; Ragsdale, *A Planter's Republic*, 35. The ever-increasing demand for consumer goods in the eighteenth century is a topic that has been covered in depth by many historians. The following is only a partial list: Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), and Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Alberts, ed. *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia for the United States Capitol Historical Society, 1994).
[51] T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of the Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 122.
[52] An Account of Weaving done by Thomas Davis, 1767-1771 (typescript manuscript, Mount Vernon Ladies Association), 3.
[53] Richard L. Bushman, "Shopping and Advertising in Colonial America," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, Cary Carson, Ronald

merchants for the fine goods that were not being manufactured – at least not to any degree – in the colonies.[54] On the most practical level, items like sugar, salt, and spices would have to be imported. Even the most diversified and frugal farm or plantation could not produce everything they needed.[55]

George Washington had greater access to markets and merchants than his predecessors had enjoyed at Mount Vernon because of the development of port towns in the region. Stores rose up along the streets near the wharves with items for sale that Virginians had formerly sent for to England.[56] Through most of the 1740s, Fredericksburg was the northern-most town along the Potomac River. As the population began to expand to the west, a port was needed on the upper Potomac. A tobacco inspection station was established at present day Alexandria at the foot of Oronoco Street in 1732. Hugh West took over the public warehouse by 1739 from where he ran a ferry to Maryland and operated an ordinary near the site of the warehouse. The residents of Fairfax County petitioned the General Assembly to establish a town at West's Point. The town was originally called Bell Haven as is illustrated by a survey done by Washington in 1749 (fig. 1). The bill to create the town of Alexandria was passed April 22, 1749.[57]

Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds. (Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1994242-243.

[54] Ibid., 236-237; 242-244.

[55] Carole Shammas, "How Self-Sufficient was Early America?," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 13:2 (1982), 247-272.

[56] Breen, *Marketplace of the Revolution*, 115.

[57] The town's first trustees included Thomas Lord Fairfax, William Fairfax, George William Fairfax, Lawrence Washington, John Carlyle, Hugh West, and William Ramsay among others.

Figure 1. George Washington, A Plan of Alexandria, now Belhaven, 1749. Library of Congress

The town plan was laid out in a basic grid plan that had been common in Virginia dating to the late seventeenth century when the General Assembly passed acts encouraged by the crown to stimulate economic growth in the colony via the development of towns.[58] The town's planners named the streets of Alexandria King, Queen, Duke, Prince, and Princess to connect the new town's inhabitants with their

[58] John W. Reps, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 95, 97.

parent country.[59] A public space for a market laid out and its deep river access made the site an ideal port for shipping. The Virginia House of Burgesses voted in 1752 to allow Alexandria two fairs a year, in May and October, "for the sale and vending of all manner of cattle, victuals, provisions, goods, wares, and merchandizes." Later the same year the Fairfax County courthouse and jail moved to Alexandria where it met for the first time in May 1752. The courthouse, jail, stocks, pillory, and an open market where livestock and produce were sold were all situated on Market Square, which also served as the site of slave sales.[60] The public wharf at West's Point supported a shipbuilding enterprise. By 1771 Alexandria held twenty stores and shops and a busy waterfront.[61] Ships arrived from Great Britain and the West Indies bringing new consumer goods to the colonies. Merchants, placing advertisements in colonial newspapers, crammed lists of every possible ware they sold to tempt the subscriber to shop at their store.[62] Although Washington and his peers ordered many things directly from London factors or Scottish merchants, increasingly the shops in Alexandria provided a plethora of imported goods via the town's wharves with each carrying a slightly different range of commodities.[63]

The proximity of Alexandria to Mount Vernon provided Washington with a social center and place of worship in addition to the availability of markets and wharves. Furthermore, the formation of Fairfax County from Prince William County in 1742 made access to courts more convenient. All levels of the community came together at church

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[59] Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 154.
[60] Ted Pulliam, *Historic Alexandria: An Illustrated History* (San Antonio, Texas: Historical Publishing Network, 2011), 12.
[61] Ragsdale, *A Planter's Republic,* 150.
[62] Breen, *Marketplace of the Revolution*, 133-136.
[63] Breen, *Marketplace of the Revolution*, 121-124.

and court although with a hierarchy of participation.[64] Only elite citizens served on the court and meted out justice to defendants of all social strata. Although there had been a small chapel in Alexandria since the early 1750s, construction on the more substantial brick Christ Church did not occur until 1767. Washington attended services at Christ Church soon after its completion in 1773 and, as a landowner in the parish was eligible to purchase a pew (fig.2).[65] Both church and courthouse were the sites of social intercourse and business dealings.[66]

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[64] Rhys Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 58-64, 88-94.
[65] Washington joined the Masonic Lodge in Fredericksburg in 1752, but there was no chapter in Alexandria until 1783.
[66] Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia,* 58-70; 88-94. The author thanks Julia Randle, Registrar and Historiographer of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia, for explaining the intricacies of the creation of Fairfax Parish. George Washington never served on its vestry as Mount Vernon remained within Truro parish after the new boundaries were drawn and approved.

Figure 2. Frances Benjamin Johnston, Christ Church, Alexandria, Virginia, 1930, Library of Congress

Manners separated the gentry from the rest of society and knowing how to deport oneself in public was vital to social acceptance.[67] This knowledge was so important that a young George Washington sat down and copied out 110 "rules of civility." The rules provided instruction in how to behave with social betters and those of lesser standing, how to eat and how to yawn.[68] Another necessary trait was the ability to participate in a favorite pastime – dancing. Dancing assemblies were held in Alexandria as early as the 1760s. Washington recorded in his diary that he had attended a ball in town and stayed up all night.[69] The assemblies were held in public spaces that could hold larger numbers of people than a private house, but were still limited to a select group who could only enter if they had a ticket. Not just anyone was welcome.[70] Attendance at events like these further separated Washington and his family from his tenants, hired workers, and slaves. Washington might trade with his tenants, but socializing with them was out of the question.

The refinements of music and dancing connected the community at Mount Vernon with a more cosmopolitan world. The Washington household was enlivened by the presence of a variety of tutors, music teachers, and dancing masters hired to educate young Jacky and Patsy. Scottish immigrant Walter Magowan was tutor to Jack and Patsy from 1761 to 1767. While learning to read and write was important for both sexes of elite children, the skills of singing or playing a musical instrument could take precedence for

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[67] Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 207: Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 77-78.
[68] George Washington, "Rules of Civility," Ms., Library of Congress. The Rules of Civility were originally compiled in France at the end of the sixteenth century and then translated into English by Francis Hawkins ca. 1640.
[69] 6 October 1768, *Papers of GW*, *Diaries,* 2:99.
[70] Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 50-51.

young ladies when the music master was in residence when they might be excused from the classroom to take advantage of his presence.[71]

At least two different dancing masters taught the children that important social grace. Dancing was a vital social skill and perhaps the most important of the "genteel graces."[72] Important for both men and women, dancing was an opportunity to exhibit one's accomplishments, poise, and bearing which set the elite apart from the laboring class. Mr. Mackey was dancing master in the 1760s and Francis Christian was hired to enhance Patsy's skill in 1770. On one occasion, Christian arrived at Mount Vernon with some of his students and stayed over two nights for an extended period of lessons.[73] Christian traveled to across the countryside to the plantations of the elite and would be in residence for two or three days. Often when he arrived he would be accompanied or soon joined by other students from the surrounding area. At times, there would be a formal dance with neighbors invited for the occasion. Philip Fithian, a tutor to the children of Robert Carter of Nomini Hall on the Northern Neck of Virginia, described one such dance where there were eleven young women and seven young men participating in the lessons under the guidance of the "punctual, and rigid in his discipline" dance master.[74]

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[71] Philip Vickers Fithian, *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion, 1773-1774*, Hunter Dickinson Farish, ed. (Charlottesville, Va.: The University Press of Virginia, 1968), 22.
[72] Karin Calvert, "The Function of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America" in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century.* Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds. (Charlottesville, Va.: United States Capitol Historical Society by The University Press of Virginia, 1994), 272-273.
[73] 11 July 1770 and 13 July 1770, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 2:254.
[74] Fithian, *Journal and Letters*, 32-34.

Participation in music and dance provided opportunities for neighboring elites to bring their families together in social situations. John Stadler was a German music teacher who gave singing and music lessons to Martha, her two children and Sarah Carlyle. Fithian described him as a "good German…with much simplicity and goodness of heart," for he also gave music lessons to the children of Robert Carter.[75] It was more common for young ladies to receive instruction in the arts of singing and playing a musical instrument but some men were also talented musicians such as Robert Carter who taught his daughters to play the guitar and Thomas Jefferson who played the fiddle. On at least one occasion, Fithian reported that John the waiting man played while the young ladies "spent the evening merrily in dancing."[76]

A neighbor that Washington especially relied on was Colonel William Fairfax of Belvoir who stood as his model and mentor. The Fairfax family had welcomed Washington to their home since his brother Lawrence married Fairfax's daughter Ann in 1743. Belvoir was located just four miles down the Potomac River from Mount Vernon. The elegant brick Georgian house served as a school for the gentry's culture and manners for the young George Washington. Washington was well aware of the advantages of the friendship with such an important family. In a 1755 letter to his brother, John Augustine Washington, Washington wrote that he, "should be glad to hear that you live in perfect fellowship and harmony with the family at Belvoir, as it is in their power to be very serviceable upon many occasions to us as young beginners: I would advise your visiting there often as one step towards it the rest, if any more is necessary, your own good sense

[75] Ibid., 138. Stadler is spelled as Stadley by Fithian.
[76] Fithian, *Journal and Letters*, 120.

will sufficient dictate; for to that Family I am under many obligations particularly to the old Gentleman."[77] Washington also had close ties with other Fairfax family members. As we have seen, Lord Fairfax had given him the job of working on the survey party that went to the western reaches of the Northern Neck Proprietary. Thomas was a cousin to William Fairfax. William's son, George William Fairfax, inherited Belvoir after his father's death in 1757. George William and his wife Sally Cary Fairfax were close friends of George and Martha. They visited each other often and traveled together to Warm Springs on several occasions.[78]

In addition to socializing at church and the courthouse, gentlemen also spent time solidifying bonds with their peers over cards and gambling, horse races, and hunting. Hunting was a regular part of Washington's life and he rode out with friends and neighbors when they were available or went alone when they were not. David Humphreys' biography of Washington noted, "he keeps a pack of hounds, & in the season indulges himself with hunting once a week, at which diversion the gentlemen of Alexandria often assist." Washington added in his notes to the biography, "Once a week is fixed hunts though sometimes he goes oftener."[79] Included in the "gentlemen of Alexandria" were Bryan Fairfax, Robert Alexander, Thomas Triplett, William Triplet,

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[77] GW to John Augustine Washington, 28 May 1755, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*., 1:289-293.

[78] Cash accounts September 1767, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*., 8:20-22. Warm Springs was in Frederick County, Virginia at this time, but is now known as Berkeley Springs and is situated in Morgan County, West Virginia.

[79] Humphreys, *"Life of Washington,"* Zagarri, ed., 37. David Humphreys served as aide-de-camp to George Washington during the Revolution and later as ministers to Portugal and later Spain. He began writing a biography with Washington's cooperation, but it was never completed.

Harrison Manley, and Humphrey Peake. Fox was the favored quarry, but ducks, deer, and on at least one occasion, a bear was sighted. Hunting often was part of social visiting, but Washington hunted with tenants and fellow landowners alike. George Mason of Gunston Hall was one of Washington's neighbors and the fourth generation of Masons to live at Mason Neck. Washington hunted at Mason's deer park, dined at his home various times, and even occasionally spent the night.[80] Although the time it took to travel distances might seem daunting by today's standards, Washington and his contemporaries regularly traveled for days to visit each other; staying over night was an accepted and expected part of socializing.[81]

As Martha Washington socialized with her friends and relatives she was also an actor in the eighteenth century world of consumption. Women with means could make independent decisions on purchases and had access to stores.[82] Martha corresponded with her sister Anna about their children, planned visits to each other's homes, and discussed ailments.[83] She also wrote to merchants regarding orders and goods received. In a letter to a milliner in London, Martha protested the amount of Brussels lace her daughter Patsy had received. The goods she received did not meet their expectations and Martha stated

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[80] 27 and 28 November 1771, *Papers of GW, Diaries* 3:71; 3 May 1773, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 3:178; 10-11 March 1785, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 4:100.

[81] T.H. Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. Ser. (34:2, April 1977), 239-257.

[82] Linda L. Sturtz, *Within Her Power: Propertied Women in Colonial Virginia* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 138-139.

[83] Anna Maria Dandridge Bassett of Eltham, New Kent County. Most of Martha's family lived in or near New Kent County. Daniel French does not appear to have been a frequent social guest of Washington's, but after his death in 1771 his widow, Penelope Manley French, dined at Mount Vernon and spent the night at least once. See 9 January 1772 *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 3:82.

that she could have acquired them locally for much less. Furthermore, she had shown the items to several "Ladies who are accustomed to such kinds of Importns, & all agree that they are most extravagantly high charged."[84] Martha Washington knew the value of goods and their worth and did not hesitate to insist that she receive what she had ordered.

Although personal connections were undeniably advantageous in Washington's world, close relationships between gentry could turn sour, especially if money was involved, as was the case between Washington and his neighbor John Posey, who had served with him in the French and Indian War. Posey was a close neighbor, living at Rover's Delight just a mile southwest of Mount Vernon. He operated a ferry on his land that ran south of Mount Vernon across the Potomac to the Maryland shore. Posey borrowed money from Washington – £700 pounds, in fact – and asked for an additional loan at some point after June of 1767.[85] Washington sounded sincerely regretful not to be able to help Posey out initially. Posey and his wife had been dinner guests at Mount Vernon and after Posey's wife Martha Price Posey died, his daughter, Amelia, lived with the Washingtons for several years as a companion to young Patsy and remained even after Patsy's death in 1773. Jacky Custis and John Price Posey were childhood companions who continued their relationship into adulthood.

Washington was soon embroiled in Posey's rapidly declining fortunes. Posey also owed money to John West and George Mason. Letters of credit and suits against Posey by other individuals made Washington liable for some of the debt. Posey was forced to

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[84] Martha Washington to Mrs. S. Thorpe, 15 July 1772, *Worthy Partner: The Papers of Martha Washington,* Joseph E. Fields, ed. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994),
[85] GW to John Posey, 24 June 1767, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 8:1-4

sell off his property in Fairfax County at the end of 1769 and Washington acquired 200 acres at the sale in partial payment of the debt. The advertisement that Posey placed in the *Virginia* described the land as "very fit for farming" with a large framed and shingled barn and numerous other dependencies as well as a ferry landing and fishery. All proceeds from the sale of the land, twenty-five slaves, livestock, household furnishings, and "implements of husbandry" were to be paid into the "hands of George Washington, Esq."[86]

Like many Northern Virginia planters, Washington acquired tenants as he acquired acreage. Purchasing land that was already occupied by tenants was generally considered an advantage as the farmers' annual rents provided income. A letter from farm manager Humphrey Knight lists Nathan Williamson, William Gates, Ben Williamson, Will Nation, and Elizabeth Ransom as tenants on Mount Vernon land who were in arrears on their rent.[87] It was the responsibility of the farm manager to collect the rents in the absence of Washington. In an earlier letter, however, Knight implied that he thought that either Washington or John Augustine Washington would have met with more success in collecting the arrears than he had.[88] Washington was not the only planter to have tenants behind on rent payments. Robert Carter included clauses in contracts that would allow him to quickly evict tenants that failed to pay on time. Carter's opinion that he would not be able to make enough money to pay taxes on his land whether it was worked by slaves

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[86] *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), October 19, 1769, page 4, column 2. The details of the sale are a complicated web, but there was a 1772 deed for six-acre fishery tract and there was also a 200-acre Harrison tract – Harrison was the name of Mrs. Posey's first husband.
[87] Humphrey Knight to GW, 23 August 1758, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 5:415-416.
[88] Humphrey Knight to GW, 16 June 1758, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 5:217-218.

or through tenancy suggests that he considered those two options to be similar means of raising income.[89] Nevertheless, landlords were reluctant to evict tenants, especially those with whom they had longstanding relationships. In 1760, two years after Knight reported that their accounts were in arrears, William Gates, William Nation, and Elizabeth Ransom were still tenants.

Some tenants had long-term contracts, others rented for a year at a time. The personal fortunes of tenants could vary greatly as well. They might rent an entire plantation and slaves, or even own other property of their own, but because of a variety of circumstances choose to rent land in another locale. Tenants in Virginia usually rented between 100 and 150 acres and paid their landlords in wheat or tobacco, but some landowners preferred payment in hard currency, gold, or silver.[90] But other tenants were struggling to maintain their financial status or were slipping closer towards poverty. Tenants did not have the advantages that even leaseholders had. They could not vote or serve on juries. Tenants remained on the land at the will of the landowner and could be asked to vacate the premises at any time. Consequently, leases were greatly valued and were recorded at the courthouse.[91] Washington expressed the opinion that leases could lessen the value of the land in case of a sale, as some buyers would prefer land

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[89] Albert H. Tillson, Jr., *Accommodating Revolutions: Virginia's Northern Neck in an Era of Transformations, 1760-1810* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 68-69.
[90] Thomas J. Humphrey, "Conflicting Independence: Land Tenancy and the American Revolution," *Journal of the Early Republic* (28:2, Summer 2008), 164.
[91] Beth Mitchell, *Fairfax County, Virginia in 1760: An Interpretive Historical Map* (Fairfax, Va.: Fairfax County Office of Comprehensive Planning, 1987), 38, 42.

unencumbered by leaseholders.[92] While social mobility was possible, most tenants and even leaseholders found it difficult to improve their situation enough to become landowners.

Many middling men remained tenants because there was little land available for purchase by small farmers in Fairfax County, even if they could afford it. Most land in the county had been granted by 1760 and just ten years later, it had all been granted.[93] Consequently, renting was often the only way for them to find land to work. Like leaseholders, tenants might rent an entire plantation and the slaves to work the land. The advantage for landowners was that having tenants provided a way to get land cleared and increase its productivity without the expense of slave labor and overseers. Tenants were often required to clear a specified amount of land and keep any dwellings, other structures, or fences in good repair. The payment of rent could be in cash, sharecropping or a fixed-crop payment.[94]

Tenants also contributed to the production of tobacco, which Washington first shipped to England in 1755 and which for the next decade remained Mount Vernon's primary cash crop.[95] The Virginia gentry viewed tobacco as not only an income source, but as a way of life. Gentlemen measured their worth and that of their neighbors by their

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[92] Tillson, *Accommodating Revolutions*, 68-69; 26 February 1760, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 1:246.
[93] Mitchell, *Fairfax County, Virginia in 1760*, 5.
[94] Steven Sarson, "Landlessness and Tenancy in Early National Prince George's County, Maryland," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 57:3 (Jul., 2000), 585; Tillson, *Accommodating Revolutions*, 70-73; Ragsdale, *A Planter's Republic*, 81.
[95] Pogue, *Mount Vernon: Transformation*, 103; Bruce Ragsdale, "George Washington, the British Tobacco Trade, and Economic Opportunity in Pre-Revolutionary Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (1989), 132-162. See also, John Carlyle to GW, 12 January 1756, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 2:275-276.

success as tobacco planters.[96] The cultivation of tobacco required many hands and required attention throughout the year. From the time seedlings were planted in late December to early January, it would be fifteen months before that crop would be shipped to markets.[97] The importance of the tobacco crop is emphasized in the detail included in George Washington's agreement with Nelson Kelly. As an added inducement to have his tobacco "managed in the neatest and best manner possible," Washington offered Kelly a bonus of one shilling and six pence per hundredweight over the cash price on Kelly's share of the crop.[98]

But even as Washington began to enter into the tobacco market, things were beginning to change.[99] The tobacco industry had always been volatile. The first heady decades of the mid-seventeenth century were followed by a thirty-year stagnation beginning about 1680, which precipitated some diversification into wheat, rye, beans and peas as well as the home industries of making shoes and clothing. Historians Lois Green Carr and Lorena Walsh argue that "this diversification of economic activities did not imply greatly increased self-sufficiency on plantations rather diversification encouraged local exchange and created a more complex network of local interdependence. This

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[96] Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, 75-80.
[97] Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, 46-53; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 166-168.
[98] Contract with Nelson Kelly, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 7:148-151.
[99] Lorena Walsh, "Slavery and Agriculture at Mount Vernon," in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington*, Philip J. Schwarz, ed. (Mount Vernon, Va.: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2009), 48.

penetrated to all social levels to some degree."[100] By the middle of the eighteenth century, tobacco no longer reigned supreme as a dependable path to wealth.

George Washington made the decision to cease planting tobacco at Mount Vernon in the mid-1760s, but it could not have been made lightly. Leaving tobacco culture was socially risky as the price received for a crop of tobacco was one measure of status. But Washington repeatedly failed to match the price that other planters received – even neighbors along the Potomac. He also observed the anxiety caused by the debt many planters acquired and the ensuing ungentlemanly behavior of entering into litigation against their neighbors and former friends.[101] However, Washington had an advantage over many of his peers. His rational desire for profitability trumped any emotional attachment to tobacco. Compared to many other planters, Washington seems to have had a fair understanding of tobacco markets and its agriculture. He grasped that his land was not suited to tobacco and that his fortunes would dive if he continued to concentrate his time and money towards its growth.[102]

While George Washington ceased to plant tobacco on his Fairfax County lands in the 1760s, many of his neighbors continued to plant it for much longer. Agricultural diversification was a slow process in the Chesapeake region. The usual practice was to plant a field for four years in tobacco and the following two years in corn. After that, the

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[100] Lois Green Carr and Lorena Walsh, "Economic Diversification and Labor Organization in the Chesapeake, 1650-1820," in *Work and Labor in Early America*, Stephen Innes, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 145-146.
[101] Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, 80-83, 161-162.
[102] Ibid., 73-75, 116-18.

field had to lie fallow for twenty years.[103] For landowners like Washington who had thousands of acres, this was sustainable for a longer period, but even they began to run out of cleared land. Finding alternative crops or industries to sustain their life-style was imperative. Even without the volatility of the tobacco market, crop diversification was inevitable. While Washington ceased large-scale tobacco planting in late 1760s, he continued to be willing to return to it on a smaller scale if it looked like it would be profitable.[104] This process of downscaling tobacco production was inevitable because of the amount of land needed and years it took a field to recover from tobacco agriculture.

Washington's emphasis on wheat in particular after 1760 puts him squarely within the trend in the Chesapeake during the pre-Revolutionary period. Washington stopped planting tobacco at Mount Vernon around 1766 although he continued its agriculture at the York County plantations and would return to it on a smaller scale at Mount Vernon in later years.[105] Washington contracted with Alexandria merchants to purchase wheat and flour from his plantations beginning in 1760 and the arrangement stood until 1774. The year 1766 appears to have been a turning point for many farmers in northern Virginia for in that year wheat exports from Alexandria to the West Indies

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[103] Carr and Walsh, "Economic Diversification and Labor Organization in the Chesapeake," in *Work and Labor in Early America*, Innes, ed., 151.
[104] See Paul Clemens, *Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980) and Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure and Profit*.
[105] Pogue, *Mount Vernon: Transformation* 103, 107; Ragsdale, "George Washington, the British Tobacco Trade," 133-136.

exceeded that of tobacco for the first time.[106] Wheat and Indian corn began to be planted in earnest around the mid-point of the eighteenth century with grains constituting about half of gross crop revenues. An increase in corn production is apparent as early as the 1670s with wheat appearing in the mid 1750s.[107] Virginia was an important producer of Indian corn and wheat by the beginning of the Revolution. Corn exports increased during the period 1737-1742 from 122,433 bushels to 566,672 bushels between 1768 and 1772 and for the same periods wheat exports rose from 35,428 bushels to 254,217 bushels.[108]

The diversification of crops grown at Mount Vernon contributed to a corresponding diversification of plantation jobs, which led to an increase in the sexual division of labor. The cultivation of grains and corn required some skill and specialized tasks fell primarily to men. Unskilled field labor tasks – hand hoeing and weeding, building fences, grubbing swamps, cleaning winnowed grain, breaking up new ground, cleaning stables and spreading manure were assigned to enslaved women.[109] In 1760, Washington paid a tithe for forty-nine individuals. Of that number, forty-three were slaves with fifteen of the slaves being women. Of those slaves, fifty-one were women representing an increase of female slaves from 34% to 42% by 1774. The percentage of

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[106] Thomas M. Preisser, "Alexandria and the Evolution of the Northern Virginia Economy, 1749-1776," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 89:3 (1981), 287-288.
[107] Lorena Walsh, "Plantation Management in the Chesapeake, 1620-1820," *The Journal of Economic History,* 49:2 (1989), 396-398.
[108] David Klingaman, "The Significance of Grain in the Development of the Tobacco Colonies," *The Journal of Economic History* 29:2 (1969), 269-272.
[109] Carr and Walsh, "Economic Diversification and Labor Organization in the Chesapeake," in *Work and Labor in Early America*, Innes, ed., 176-177; Carole Shammas, "Black Women's Work and the Evolution of Plantation Society in Virginia," *Labor History*, (1985), 19.

women who served as field labor increased from 39% to 46% during the same period. Female slaves at Mount Vernon received an increasing number of assignments as field workers. There was a steady increase in the numbers of slaves for which Washington paid tax - increasing by thirty to forty percent every five years between 1764 and 1774. As the number of slaves at Mount Vernon increased, it was inevitable that more individuals would be assigned to field labor or sold. There were only so many positions as house servants or tradespeople and the rest became laborers.

Mount Vernon's slave population increased through purchase, renting, and natural increase. In addition to the slaves that Washington inherited from his father, he also inherited five slaves from Lawrence Washington's estate. Martha Washington received one third of Daniel Custis' slaves as her dower share. A portion of these slaves came to Mount Vernon and the rest remained on Custis plantations. Some of Jacky Custis' slaves were at Mount Vernon and rented by Washington as well. Washington purchased several slaves during his first two decades at Mount Vernon including the ferrymen, Jack and Hercules, which he acquired at the same time he bought Posey's land that included the ferry. It is difficult to ascertain exactly how many children were born at Mount Vernon between 1754 and 1774. Children under the age of sixteen were not included on the tithable lists and no comprehensive slave inventory exists for slaves during this period. However, payments to midwives that appear in the financial records show that Washington paid midwives on forty-six occasions during this period.[110]

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[110] Memorandum, 10 December 1754, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 1:231. Washington identified this document as "1st division of part of my decd Brothr Lawrences Negroes

In addition to diversifying his agricultural pursuits, Washington operated a number of small industries that provided supplementary income. Washington recognized early on that he could not depend solely on agricultural income and the idea of having multiple sources of income was not a foreign concept to him. His father had operated an iron mine and attempted wool production in addition to tobacco agriculture. It was not unusual for elite Virginians to attempt to diversify their income sources. In the years before the Revolution, Washington had a new blacksmith shop built, developed fisheries along the Potomac River, sold cloth woven at Mount Vernon, and expanded his mill operations. As early as the first years of the eighteenth century, planters were motivated to diversify their sources of income as a result of a long-term drop in tobacco prices. The Tayloe family of the Northern Neck of Virginia is representative of the wide range of activities planters explored. They operated an extensive iron works, a blacksmith shop, grain and gristmills, and dabbled in horse breeding.[111]

The blacksmith shop was one of the first activities to provide a source of additional income at Mount Vernon. The services of a blacksmith were vital to a community and in the South, with its dispersed population; it was common for a large landowner to secure the services of a smith for his own use and the benefit of his neighbors.[112] There is evidence of a blacksmith shop along the north lane as early as 1755. Washington replaced it with a new structure in 1768 when he noted in his diary

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among myself & younger Brothers." My thanks to Sara Collini for sharing her research into the work of midwives at Mount Vernon.

[111] See Kamoie, *Irons in the Fire*; Dennis J. Pogue, "Entrepreneur" in *A Companion to George Washington*, Edward G. Lengel, ed. (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012).

[112] Dennis J. Pogue, "Blacksmithing at George Washington's Mount Vernon: 1755-1800," *Northern Neck of Virginia Historical Magazine* 46:1 (1996), 5380.

that the carpenter's work was finished at his smith's shop.[113] The Mount Vernon blacksmiths served the neighborhood during the 1760s and 1770s carrying out a variety of tasks. Along with the expected jobs of making and repairing horseshoes and shoeing horses, the smiths also made hoes, plows, axes, keys, hammers, pot hooks, and a fire shovel and tongs. Repairing tools and other implements took up a portion of their time. The smiths also made nails, replacement parts for tools and machinery, and parts for repairs to the gristmill workings.[114]

Slaves were employed as blacksmiths for most of Washington's tenure at Mount Vernon. Peter was the blacksmith during the 1760s assisted by London.[115] However, a new smith, a white man named Dominicus Gubner, arrived at Mount Vernon in 1771 and stayed for three years. While there, he may have trained Nat and George who served as smiths from 1774 until Washington's death. Washington was never completely satisfied with Nat and George's skills and occasionally his managers turned to other blacksmiths in the area. Washington finally requested that his farm manager close the accounts, as he no longer wanted the expense of using outside smiths.[116]

The majority of the customers of the Mount Vernon blacksmith were from within a five-mile radius of the shop. George Mason also operated a smithy operation at Gunston Hall about six miles from Mount Vernon and there were several smiths in Alexandria as well – seven miles in the opposite direction. The network of connections

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[113] 16 January 1768, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 2:32.
[114] John P. Riley, "The Blacksmith Shop," Unpublished manuscript, 1988, Mount Vernon Ladies Association.
[115] Fairfax County Tithables, 1760-1770. Peter is listed as a blacksmith from 1760-1763 and then as a tradesman through 1770 when specific jobs were no longer given.
[116] GW to Anthony Whiting, 14 August 1791, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 8:425-427.

within the community surrounding Mount Vernon is evident from the list of customers to the shop. Washington's close neighbor George William Fairfax was a customer for twenty-five years.[117] Tenant John Sheridine was a regular customer from 1760 through 1772. Other tenants, including William Gates, William Nation, and John Crook all required the skills of the blacksmith at one time or another. John Ward whose wife had done weaving for Washington had two plows repaired. Thadeus McCarty of Loudoun County used the services of the blacksmiths when he was in the area visiting his brother and Washington's neighbor, Daniel McCarty and the two brothers dined at Mount Vernon that afternoon. Landowners comprised 42% of the customers during the period 1755 to 1760; leaseholders at 32.2% and tenants the remaining 25.8%.[118] As Washington's agricultural and other business operations at Mount Vernon grew, the blacksmith's work concentrated more on repairs for the estate. There was a decline in customers during the 1770s, which correlates with the expansion of Mount Vernon. As Washington expanded his holdings, he purchased the land of many of his best customers including John Posey, John West, and Daniel French.[119]

Washington's expansion into other crops and trades served to provide jobs for the excess workers as well as create new revenue sources. Grain agriculture did not need the same amount of intensive care as tobacco nor did it require as many laborers. Crop diversification created new jobs and trades for slaves. Wheat and corn required more tools such as plows and carts. The crops needed to be milled. Specialists like blacksmiths,

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[117] Pogue, "Blacksmithing at George Washington's Mount Vernon," 5388.
[118] Ibid., 5388-5389.
[119] Ibid., 5390-5391.

wheelwrights, and woodworkers were needed to keep the equipment in working order so that they millers could process the grain.[120] Grains required more extensive plowing than tobacco. Livestock required penning and food during the winter months, which led to the cultivation of fodder crops and wider use of manure for fertilizer.

In addition to an ever-increasing enslaved workforce during the years 1754 through 1775, a total of 115 various hired and indentured white workers were at Mount Vernon for some period of time. Some were there for only a season or specific job while others resided there for the rest of their lives. These workers came to Mount Vernon from recommendations to Washington by family or friends or were local artisans who he purposely sought out. They came from such diverse places and nationalities as the Cherokee Nation, Ireland, Scotland, England, and Germany. Two men came to Mount Vernon during this period that integrated into the community and remained loyal employees for the rest of their lives: John Alton and Thomas Bishop. Alton first appears on the tithables list in 1760 and Bishop in 1761. They both worked as overseers at the farms and Bishop often carried out business on Washington's behalf.

Washington's connection to both men came for their shared military service in the French and Indian War. John Alton served as Washington's body servant during the Braddock campaign and left Mount Vernon with him on his initial trip to the west in 1755. Thomas Bishop traveled to America with General Braddock in 1755. He became Washington's personal servant after Washington became a colonel of the Virginia Regiment. Shortly after Washington retired from military service in 1758, Bishop left his

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[120] Carr and Walsh, "Economic Diversification and Labor Organization in the Chesapeake," in *Work and Labor in Early America*, Innes, ed., 148.

employ and returned to the British army. Washington went to considerable trouble to secure Bishop's services from his regiment. Bishop remained in the army after Washington's departure, but indicated his willingness to join Washington at Mount Vernon and Washington was able to help secure his discharge from the 44th Regiment.[121] When he was not overseer at Muddy Hole, Bishop carried out diverse tasks for Washington including securing and distributing the alcohol that the slaves and hired laborers received. He ran errands to Alexandria to sell goods, make purchases and post letters from Mount Vernon. His wife Susanna first appears in records of the plantation around 1766. She served as one of the midwives for the slave women and also received payment for knitting and tailoring.[122]

Other workers brought their wives and families to Mount Vernon as well. The hired workers were usually local residents or came recommended by friends or family. Jonathan Palmer was hired as head harvester during the summer of 1768. Washington apparently liked Palmer because there was soon suggestion that Palmer would become a permanent employee either as a carpenter or cooper or whatever he would like. He was supposed to begin in March or April but arrived sometime in June of the next year with his family including a son referred to as "young Palmer." A Cornelius Palmer was paid for the wheat harvest that year and is likely the son. The family first lived at an old house at Muddy Hole that Washington had repaired for them, but later moved to a house on

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[121] 25 Jan 1760, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 1:228-229; Robert Stewart to GW, 14 April 1760, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*., 6:412; John Mercer to GW, 16 June 1760, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*., 6:436.

[122] Ledger A: 124 (Manuscript Ledger Book 1, 1750-1772, GW Papers, Library of Congress). Bishop's account for February 1776 was credited "10 shillings for your wife for laying Betty."

John Posey's former property. Washington's contract with Palmer stipulated, "I am to pay him £40 pr. Ann. allow him 400 lbs. of Meat & 20 Bushels of Indian Corn. I am also to allow him to keep two Milch Cows (one half of whose Increase I am to have) and to have Wheat for which he is to pay. He is to be allowed a Garden & I am to get the old dwelling House at Muddy Hole repaird for him. I am also to take his Waggon at £17, if he brings it free from damage and it is no older than he says."[123] Mrs. Palmer participated in the local economy by making butter for sale, some of which she sold to Mount Vernon from the milk cows provided by Washington.[124]

Many of the skilled workers who came to Mount Vernon had family connections who also worked for Washington at various times. Going Lanphier, an Irish immigrant carpenter and house builder from Alexandria, worked at Mount Vernon off and on from the 1750s to the 1770s. He first worked on raising the roof of the dwelling house by a full story in 1759. Lanphier returned in 1774 to add Washington's study and the upstairs bedchamber to the south end of the house and the new room to the north end. Washington did not see them completed until the fall of 1781. Lanphier's sister, Susannah, married John Patterson a carpenter/joiner who also worked at Mount Vernon during Washington's first years at the plantation. His son, Robert Lanphier, married Elizabeth, the daughter of William Bernard Sears. Sears and the senior Lanphier had worked together on construction of Pohick Church in 1769 and then on the 1774 to 1775 renovations at Mount Vernon. Lanphier's accounts include payment for "12 barrels of

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[123] 30 July 1768, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 2:77. The contract format was standard, but each side could bargain for items that were especially important to their particular situation.
[124] Cash Accounts, 7 September 1770, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 8:376.

corn delivered to Mrs. Patterson per your order" in both March and July of 1774 indicating he was helping his sister procure supplies. While at Mount Vernon he participated in the local economy by using the services of the blacksmiths and purchasing cloth made by the weaver.[125]

Indentured servitude continued to be a source for laborers in the eighteenth century, but at a slightly different scale and emphasis from the seventeenth century when large numbers of English indentured servants had arrived in Virginia. In addition to individuals from England, there were increasing numbers of Scottish, Irish, and German immigrants.[126] Contracts with indentures were convenient for the colonists as the remaining terms could be bought or sold in response to an individual's labor needs and economic solvency at any given time. During this period, unskilled labor became increasingly confined to black slaves with white indentured servants fulfilling the role of artisans and plantation managers or overseers. The American Revolution temporarily halted the influx of indentured servants. Once it picked up again after the war ended, increasingly German or Irish immigrants were seeking service contracts in the Mid-Atlantic.[127]

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[125] Lund Washington Account Book, Folios 31, 64, 85. The accounts mention "your man Joe" possibly Joe Broad or Brodis and James Tasker as servants that worked for Lanphier. Lanphier paid Fairfax County tithe in 1760 but did not own land in the county. He may have been a tenant, but of whom is not known.
[126] David W. Galenson, "The Rise and Fall of Indentured Servitude in the Americas: An Economic Analysis," *The Journal of Economic History (*Vol. 44, No. 1, March 1984), 10. Convicts from Great Britain were sent to a penal colony in Australia after the American Revolution.
[127] Ibid., 12.

Washington hired a number of indentured servants, usually ones with specific skills. Some successfully finished their contracts like bricklayer and joiner John Knowles who arrived at Mount Vernon in December 1773 after Washington bought the contract of Knowles and his wife Rachel. Knowles received a suit of clothes, two pair of shoes, a waistcoat and breeches during the following year after his arrival at Mount Vernon.[128] Rachel worked as a spinner alongside the slave women in the spinning house at Mount Vernon and later was employed in the house. Knowles received his freedom dues in 1777 but continued his employment at Mount Vernon until 1784.[129]

Washington also occasionally employed convicts from England, as did other large landholders in the region.[130] Generally, the convicts that arrived at America's shores were not violent criminals, but had been found guilty of crimes against property such as poaching or thievery. They, in turn, were victims of difficult economic times in England where there were few jobs and little chance of social mobility. Between 1718 and 1775, some 50,000 convicts arrived in America from London's jails. While indentured servants chose to go to America in search of opportunity, convict indentures opted for the voyage only because they had no other choice.[131] John Askew was an indentured convict who

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[128] Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 12.
[129] Knowles worked at Mount Vernon from 1773-1784 and again from 1786-1790. See Lund Washington Account Book, fols. 12, 74, 111. The 1789 contract stipulated that John Knowles would work as a bricklayer and his wife as a household servant.
[130] Kamoie, *Irons in the Fire*, 83. The Tayloes utilized convict labor as well.
[131] Roger A. Ekirch, *Bound for America: The Transportation of British Convicts to the Colonies, 1718-1775* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 55-59. The British Parliament passed "An act for the further preventing of robbery, burglary, and other felonies, and for the more effectual transportation of felons" in 1717. Virginia and other American colonies protested the importation of convicts as indentured servants, but Parliament prevailed.

worked at Mount Vernon as a joiner. He arrived in America from England in 1754 and was initially indentured to Washington's friend, George Mercer. He began work at Mount Vernon in 1759 and received instructions to "work from sun up to sundown" and "instruct the Negroes working under him in the trade of joinery." Indenture contracts were usually for seven years, but convicts might have to serve for up to fourteen years. A new agreement was made at the end of Askew's indenture service in 1765. It provided him with twenty-five pounds per year, provisions, and free housing. He supervised the work on the schooner built at Mount Vernon in 1765 and launched the following year. According to the initial agreement with Washington, Askew and his wife were to live "at a Plantation adjoining [Mount Vernon] commonly known by the name of North's" where they remained until about 1767.[132]

Nine workers were associated with the house in 1760, another nine worked as carpenters or smiths, two people worked at the mill, and twenty-three names appeared as laborers at the different farms. Of these workers, a total of six were white with the other forty-three being enslaved blacks. A year later Washington paid tax on sixty-three individuals; six white workers and fifty-seven slaves – an increase of fourteen slaves from the year before. Ten individuals were listed as house servants, eleven as skilled workers and the remaining forty-two were associated with one of the five farms either as overseer or laborers. Those appearing on the list of skilled workers were either carpenters or blacksmiths. The carpenters were carrying out the renovations on the house and outbuildings as well as general maintenance across the plantation. The carpenters

[132] Contract with John Askew, 1 Sept 1759, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 6:340-341. See also 1761 agreement re: tools of his trade.

included two white workers – Turner Crump a local resident who acted as leader of the carpenters and joiner John Askew.[133] The two blacksmiths were the slaves Peter and London.

However, job assignments were very fluid and both men and women were regularly pulled from one farm to another and even to work in or around the house. For example, in 1764 both Robin and Judy worked at the Mansion House. The following year Robin was assigned to Dogue Run Farm where he remained until at least 1774 and Judy went to the Mill Farm. Harvest time found artisans and even house servants helping in the fields.[134] Slaves received assignments to work wherever they were needed the most regardless of specialized training.

Only the most well to do planters had as many house servants as George Washington. An average planter's wife might have one or two slaves to help in the house at most.[135] House servants were a luxury and only for those with social status or social pretensions. The house servants at Mount Vernon included Sall, Martha's maid, and Moll who attended to Patsy and Jacky Custis. In addition, there was Doll the cook; Jenny, a laundress; Betty, a seamstress: and Phillis, identified as a spinner, comprised the rest of the female house slaves. Male house servants were Schomberg who was listed as a shirt maker, Breechy as waiter, Jack, described as mulatto, worked as a jobber, and Nat with

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[133] Turner Crump lived on 110 acres in Fairfax County leased from John Barry. Fairfax County, Virginia, Deed Book K, No.1, page 41, 13 December 1771.
[134] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 173.
[135] Shammas, "Black Women's Work and the Evolution of Plantation Society in Virginia," 15.

no specified duties.[136] Slaves at the Mansion House farm who held specialized positions had a very different work routine than those that worked in the fields. The cooks and house servants did not enjoy as much free time. Even after their daily chores were completed, they lived under the watchful eye of the inhabitants of the mansion and might be called upon to wait on house residents or visitors at any time. But they did receive some privileges for their positions. They more than likely had access to more and better food rations and better clothing. As a part of the improvements made to Mount Vernon in about 1760, Washington built a slave quarter at the Mansion House plantation known as the house for families. House servants and craftspeople working in and around the Mansion lived at the quarter. Archaeological excavations have revealed "the diversity and generally high quality of the domestic materials recovered suggests that these slaves benefitted from the proximity to the Washington household by receiving handed down items for their use." Examination of faunal remains also suggested that the inhabitants consumed a wide range of wild and domestic species of animal, fowl and fish.[137]

The labor force at Mount Vernon was spread out over the individual farms. Under Lund Washington's immediate supervision were the overseers of each farm. No one was identified as overseer for the Mansion House plantation on the tithables lists in the years before the Revolution, so presumably, George Washington or the farm manager saw to the day-to-day activities of those workers.[138] In addition to Mansion House

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[136] Fairfax County Tax Rolls, 1760 and 1761.
[137] Dennis Pogue and Esther C. White, "Summary report on the 'House for Families' Slave Quarter Site, Mount Vernon Plantation, Mount Vernon, Virginia," *Archaeological Society of Virginia, Quarterly Bulletin* (46:4, 1991), ii, 1.
[138] Fairfax County Tax Records: Tithables, 1761.

Plantation in 1761, the other plantations were Muddy Hole, Dogue Run, River Plantation and Creek Plantation. Mansion House Plantation encompassed the area around the main house and was where the skilled workers and house servants lived but it also included fields and pastures with ten slave laborers listed as working there in 1761. Muddy Hole was named for a branch of Dogue Run of the same name and was part of the original Mount Vernon tract. Situated on Little Hunting Creek and north of Mansion House Farm, it consisted of almost 500 acres. The land that comprised the nexus of Dogue Run Farm was part of Washington's inheritance from Lawrence Washington and had held his mill. River Plantation was located east of Mount Vernon across Little Hunting Creek. It was formed from part of the 1,806 acres Washington purchased from William Clifton in 1760 and 238 acres from George Brent in the same year. Creek Plantation came into being in 1761. Formerly known as Williamson's Quarter, it began to be known as Mill Plantation in 1765.[139]

Washington's organization of his outlying farms into discrete gangs of laborers was common in tobacco agriculture in the Chesapeake region. The overseer assigned groups of slaves to carry out specific tasks and they worked together until it was completed. They had less time on their own and relied more on their fellow gang members to get the job done.[140] Landon Carter, a planter in the Northern Neck of Virginia, observed the downside of gang labor, noting, "but even with overseers this is a

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[139] Benjamin Williamson was a tenant of Washington's on Little Hunting Creek from 1756 until 1760 when he was turned out of the property for non-payment of rent. Washington turned it into Williamson's Quarter with six slaves and Robert Stephens as overseer. By the next year it was renamed Creek Plantation with Josias Cook as overseer. The newly formed Union Farm subsumed this land in the 1780s.
[140] Ibid., 187-194.

constant excuse, if any one person, the most trifling hand, is ill but a day or a piece of a day, it generally excuses the loss of a whole day's work of the gang."[141] For Carter's slaves at least, the absence of even one member of the gang disrupted the efficiency of the whole.

A group of slaves with an overseer lived at each quarter to eliminate the loss of time in traveling to the fields from the Mansion House farm. Initially, all of the overseers at the farms were white workers, but Washington began to promote some of his slaves to the position of overseer. Morris became the first slave overseer at Mount Vernon in 1766 at Dogue Run farm. Morris was a dower slave, part of the property that Martha Washington had inherited from the Custis estate. He was born about 1730 and was listed as being twenty-nine years old when he arrived at Mount Vernon in the spring of 1759.[142] Before becoming an overseer, Morris worked as a carpenter and then was listed as a tradesman from 1764 to 1765. Morris was married to a slave woman named Hannah in 1765 – about the time they were both moved to Dogue Run.[143] In 1770 Davy became the overseer at the Mill Farm and the following year Michael appears on the tithable list as overseer at Ferry Farm with Morris and Davy continuing in their positions.[144] Will

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[141] Landon Carter, *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778*, Jack P. Greene, ed. (Charlottesville, Va.: The University Press of Virginia, 1965), 9 June 1771.
[142] Appendix C: List of Artisans and Household Slaves in the [Custis] Estate, c. 1759, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*., 6:282.
[143] Hannah and a child had been purchased from William Cloptan, a New Kent County planter; Cash Accounts June 1759, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.,* 6:321; Ledger A, 56.
[144] Fairfax County Tax Records: Tithables, 1761-1771; Ferry Farm was formed in 1770 from 200 acres from John West, Jr. in September 1770, 200 acres from John Posey acquired at his October 1769 sale, and a six acre strip of land that contained Posey's ferry, which George Washington purchased in June 1772.

became overseer at Muddy Hole in 1772 where he had been a laborer since 1762. He was married to another slave, Kate, who had been at Muddy Hole since at least 1760.[145]

The close working and living conditions of white workers and slaves could lead to more complicated relations between the two groups than slave owners like Washington could tolerate. A repeated theme in Washington's correspondence with farm managers, overseers and employment contracts is an attempt to keep hired workers and slaves from becoming too close. Employment contracts contained language that specified the parameters of the relationship between a white overseer and slaves. One such agreement stated, "that he will take all necessary and proper care of the Negroes committed to his management, treating them with humanity and tenderness when Sick, and preventing them when well, from running about and visiting without his consent; as also to forbid strange Negroes frequenting their Quarters without lawful excuses for so doing."[146]

Washington feared that if a manager of slave workers did not exhibit the appropriate level of command over his crew, that the entire system of authority could be compromised. Thomas Green worked at Mount Vernon as a joiner and house-carpenter. He initially came to the attention of Washington for his frequent absences from the weekly reports. Green wrote his employer a letter begging for forgiveness for his lapse by taking "a little Grog" and then going "up to town."[147] Green's tendency to drink a little too much grog was not the only issue that caused Washington concern. He also observed

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[145] Fairfax County Tax Records, Tithables, 1760-1762; 18 February 1786, 1786 Slave List, *Papers of GW, Diaries,* 4:277-283.
[146] Agreement with Nelson Kelly, 1 September 1762, *Papers of GW*; Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-century Virginia* (Princeton University Press, 1987), 46; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 301-310.
[147] Thomas Green to GW, 15 May 1788, *Papers, Confed. Ser.*, 6:274-275.

that Green did not have enough command over the crew of slaves that worked with him as carpenters. In a letter to a farm manager, Washington explained that although "he is a good workman himself, and can be active; but have [sic] little authority (I ought to have said command, for I have given him full authority) over those who are entrusted to him."[148] Washington also expressed his opinion that Thomas Green was "too much upon a level with the Negroes to exert it [authority] from which cause, if no other every one works, or not, as they please and carve out such jobs as they like."[149] If Green, or any other white overseer of slave work, did not maintain command over the slaves the concern was that they would devolve into idleness or worse – downright disrespect.

Such close contact could lead to friendships between white workers and slaves. Lund Washington brought some of his own slaves with him while serving as farm manager at Mount Vernon including two men, Lyfax and Aaron.[150] During Christmas festivities in Alexandria, Aaron and an indentured convict, John Broad, engaged in mock swordplay with disastrous consequences. Aaron pricked John Broad in one of his thighs with an "Old rusty sword." The small and seemingly inconsequential wound became

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[148] GW to William Pearce, 27 October 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 14:292-293.
[149] GW to William Pearce, 18 December 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 14:558-563.
[150] Lund Washington Account Book, fol.16. Judge made two coats for Lyfax and a pair of breeches and a waistcoat for Aaron. There were additional pieces of clothing entered into Lund Washington's account for 1773 and 1774 marked for "your boy" or your Negro boy." Andrew Judge was tailor at Mount Vernon from 1772 to 1780. He had signed a four-year indenture contract with Alexander Coldclough on 8 July 1772 and was to be sent to Baltimore or any port in America, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 9:132 fn. 9. By 1778, Judge owned a horse and paid for four horseshoes to the Mount Vernon smith's account. LWAB, Folio 78.

infected and Broad died a few months later.[151] But what is revealing about this story is that Aaron and Broad were apparently free to go to Alexandria to celebrate the holiday and were together as they enjoyed this infrequent break from their daily toil. These incidents provide a window through which to gain some understanding of the complexity of white and black relations at Mount Vernon during the eighteenth century. Poorer whites and enslaved blacks interacted with relative freedom at Mount Vernon. Whether the white workers employed by Washington ever felt any resentment or discomfort with the similarities in their food rations or living quarters is not clear. A study of the Northern Neck of Virginia suggests that there was "hatred and resentment, directed towards blacks" as well as to the slave owners who gave jobs to slaves that might be done by the white workers for much needed pay and security.[152]

By 1773, George Washington, after nineteen years as the master of Mount Vernon, was universally acknowledged as a successful farmer and a leading citizen in Fairfax County and in the colony of Virginia generally. That year, however, brought changes to the Mansion House community. Patsy Custis died of epilepsy at the age of seventeen. Washington noted in his diary on the nineteenth of June "about five o'clock poor Patsy Custis Died Suddenly." The young woman was buried the next day. Martha Washington was stricken with grief and Washington remained with his wife for the next

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[151] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 412; Lund Washington to GW: 17 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:126-130; 25 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:187-188; 31 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.,* 3:230-233; 8 February 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:269-271; 15 February 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:317-319; 22 February 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:354-355. John Broad was an indentured convict hired by Washington in 1773 for a contract of seven years. See Benedict Calvert to GW, 25 August 1773, *Papers of GW*, *Col. Ser*., 9:313-314.
[152] Tillson, *Accommodating Revolutions*, 143; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 311.

month. They visited their friends at Belvoir together at the end of June. It was not until a full month after Patsy's death that Martha went off with the Misses Calvert to Alexandria – her first outing without George at her side. It also brought the loss of George William and Sarah Fairfax as they left for England in that year and never returned to America. They had been an integral part of the Washington's life since their marriage and even before for George Washington.

Washington soon began to spend more time with another neighbor, but not for social reasons. George Mason and Washington had known each other for years and consulted frequently about farming techniques, served together as Alexandria trustees, and in 1769, worked together on Virginia's first non-importation agreement. Like Washington, Mason was a wealthy plantation owner, although with greater inherited wealth. While Washington and Mason may not have enjoyed what could be characterized as a friendship, they had a relationship based on shared interests, agricultural and business concerns, and local politics. When Governor Dunmore dissolved the House of Burgesses in May of 1774, a committee was formed to write a response to the events that were rapidly occurring. Washington chaired the committee, but Mason was the primary author of the Fairfax Resolves.[153]

On July 14, 1774, Fairfax County elected Washington and Charles Broadwater as delegates to the Virginia Convention. The night before the instructions were to be presented at Alexandria, Fairfax County resident George Mason stayed at Mount Vernon with Washington. Washington and Broadwater delivered the Fairfax Resolves to the

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[153] Jeff Broadwater, *George Mason: Forgotten Founder* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 65.

Virginia Convention in Williamsburg. It was there that Washington was elected as a delegate to the First Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia in September. Relations with the British government were deteriorating rapidly. The residents of Alexandria and the community at Mount Vernon would soon experience the effects of the war on their lives and livelihoods.

CHAPTER 2

THE REVOLUTION, 1775-1783: "ALEXANDRIA IS MUCH ALARM'D, AND INDEED THE WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD"[154]

George Washington would be away from Mount Vernon for the next eight years as commander of the Continental Army at great personal sacrifice, separated from family, friends, and business interests. He attempted to maintain control over operations on his farms by writing farm manager Lund Washington detailed instructions as to what should be done and when. At the same time, the residents of the Mount Vernon community, as well as the residents of the surrounding neighborhood and Alexandria, faced the threat of British invasion, labor shortages, inflated prices, and the depreciation of currency while dealing with disrupted markets and shortages of supplies. Tensions with enslaved workers intensified as the war presented greater opportunities for them to seek freedom even as their owners fought for their own freedom from Great Britain.

In September 1774, George Washington left for the First Continental Congress believing that he represented the desire of his fellow Virginians to coordinate firm opposition to imperial taxation and other policies, but there was at least one person of his close acquaintance who was uncomfortable with how things were proceeding with the patriot cause. Bryan Fairfax had a close relationship with Washington who had stood as

[154] Lund Washington to GW, 31 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 3:230.

godfather to his third son Ferdinando born in 1769. Fairfax was certainly well connected. A half-brother to George William Fairfax and cousin to Lord Fairfax, he was also a brother-in-law of John Carlyle, an Alexandria merchant and town leader. A few days after the vote on the Fairfax Resolves, which Washington confidently characterized as "unanimous" in rejecting the sovereignty of Parliament in America, he wrote to Bryan Fairfax. He explained that the rest of the committee had not shared the apprehensions Fairfax had expressed in a letter he had written for Washington to read at the meeting about the wording of the resolves.[155] Bryan's lengthy reply a month later revealed the uneasiness he felt with Virginia's belligerence toward Great Britain, but he conceded that he "did not dare go against such eminent men."[156] Fairfax evidently felt pressure to go along with the committee's decision in spite of his own reservations. Washington responded a few weeks later that it would be "a piece of inexcusable arrogance" to try to change Fairfax's opinion since he believed that Fairfax was very informed on the issues at hand.[157]

By 1774, any opposition to colonial resistance that existed in Alexandria had to remain underground, as patriot support was strong and vocal. The many Scots merchants in town were the most likely to harbor pro-British sympathies. However, by the time the Revolution began, Scots merchants such as John Carlyle, William Ramsay, and John Dalton were fully vested in their adopted home. John Carlyle's wife was Sarah Fairfax, a daughter of George William Fairfax and sister to Lawrence's wife, Anne. They were

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[155] GW to Bryan Fairfax, 20 July 1774, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 10:128-131.
[156] Bryan Fairfax to GW, 5 August 1774, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 10:143-150.
[157] GW to Bryan Fairfax, 24 August 1774, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 10:154-156.

involved in the community both socially and politically and most were too old to consider the idea of starting over elsewhere. They were all friends of Washington's and had both social and business transactions. Washington even helped to pay for Ramsay's son, William Ramsay, Jr.'s education at "the Jersey college."[158]

British visitors hostile to the colonists' cause had to keep their true political leanings hidden when they were in Alexandria. The Englishman Nicholas Cresswell arrived in America at the invitation of a friend and with the hopes of possibly finding a place to settle. His trip was poorly timed for he entered Alexandria just as events were coming to a head and was unable to secure safe passage back to England for several years. He noted in his journal in October of 1774 that merchants in Alexandria were closely watched by the patriots and any found guilty of infractions against the Continental Association, the trade boycott with Great Britain initiated by the First Continental Congress, were "tarred and feathered, others had their property burnt and destroyed by the populace."[159] A year later, he observed "the people here are ripe for a revolt, nothing but curses and imprecations against England, her fleets, armies, and friends." He added that the great debt that the planters in Virginia and Maryland owed to the merchants of England was the reason for the rebellion as the people thought a revolt

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[158] Thomas M. Preisser, "Eighteenth-century Alexandria, Virginia Before the Revolution," (dissertation, College of William and Mary, 1977), 298-302; William Ramsay from GW, 29 January 1769, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.,* 8:167; Cash accounts February 1772, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*., 9:213 and Cash accounts May 1773, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*., 9:226. Washington offered to pay £25 per annum for young William Ramsay's education at Princeton.

[159] Nicholas Cresswell, *The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774-1777* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1968 (Reprint of 1924), 43-44 (23 Oct 1774).

would wipe out their debts.[160] He soon realized that he was "suspected of being what they call a Tory (that is a friend to my country)" and was under threat of not only being tarred and feathered but imprisoned as well.[161] On the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot – a day on which colonists usually celebrated the deliverance of Britain's Parliament and its Protestant monarchy from the threat of treasonous Catholics – he watched as the citizens of the town paraded through town with effigies of the Pope, Lord North, and others, including the Devil, with accompanying drums and fifes.[162]

Another visitor from Great Britain discovered that he could not openly associate with the few merchants in the town that remained loyal to the crown or both he and they would risk falling "victims to the lawless intemperance and barbarity of an ignorant frantic mob." John Smyth was an acquaintance of George Mason and while the two dined in Alexandria one evening, Mason pointed out an unfortunate Tory who was at that moment being paraded through the town and warned Smyth to take note of it as he could

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[160] Ibid., 30 Oct 1775, 127-128.
[161] Ibid., 31 Oct 1775, 128.
[162] Ibid., 6 Nov 1775, 128. The Gunpowder Plot, known as also as Guy Fawkes Night or Bonfire Night commemorates 5 November 1605 when Guy Fawkes and fellow conspirators attempted to murder James I of Scotland by planning to blow up the Houses of Parliament. When the plot was foiled, bonfires were lit to celebrate the King's safety. See, Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). McConville tracks the celebration of British holidays in the colonies and how they were employed to tie far-flung subjects to their King; It is unlikely that one would have found George Washington celebrating on Guy Fawkes Day. In General Orders from 1775, he called it "that ridiculous and childish custom of burning the effigy of the Pope." He was especially chagrined to find that some of his officers and soldiers had been planning to celebrate the day in the face of Canadian troops who were allied with the Continental Army. He forcefully stated that "to be insulting their religion, is so monstrous, as not to be suffered, or excused." General Orders, 5 November 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 2:300.

meet the same fate if not careful.[163] Smyth followed Mason's advice to vacate Alexandria, but it was rumored he was rallying Indians in the backcountry to join the loyalist cause.[164]

Washington returned to Philadelphia in early May of 1775 as a delegate to the second Continental Congress where the members voted to appoint him as commander of the Continental Army.[165] The Battles of Lexington and Concord had taken place in April; by June hostilities had erupted into war between the British and the American colonies with the Battle of Bunker Hill. George Washington left directly from Philadelphia for Boston to take command of the army. Mindful of his responsibilities to both his country and his family, he wrote to Martha before leaving for Boston to assume his duties:

> "My Dearest, I am now set down to write to you on a subject which fills me with inexpressible concern – and this concern is greatly aggravated and Increased Congress, that the whole Army raised for the defense of the American Cause shall take upon me the Command of it...If it should be your desire to remove into Alexandria (as you once mentioned upon an occasion of this sort) I am quite pleased that you should put it in practice, & Lund Washington may be directed, by you, to build a Kitchen and other Houses there proper for your reception."[166]

Martha chose to remain at Mount Vernon until the autumn when she first paid a visit to her daughter-in-law's family, the Calverts of Prince George's County, and then traveled south to visit her mother and other relatives, including her sister Anna Bassett at Eltham. After a brief return to Mount Vernon, Martha, accompanied by Jacky Custis and

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[163] John F.D. Smyth, *Tour in the United States*, Volume II, 205-207, quoted in Preisser, "Eighteen-Century Alexandria," 300.
[164] Lee, *Price of Nationhood*, 128.
[165] 4 May 1775, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 3:327.
[166] GW to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 1:3-5. This is one of only two letters from George Washington to Martha Washington that survives; the other is dated 23 June 1775.

his wife, made her way to Philadelphia in mid-November and then on to Cambridge to join her husband.[167] Her passage through Baltimore was noted in an announcement in the newspaper, noting that she and the "Number of Virginia Gentlemen in their Uniforms" escorting her were "elegantly received." The next day as she departed the town "her Ladyship was saluted by the Artillery Company with a Number of Field Pieces."[168]

Dancing assemblies ceased in wartime, but hostilities did not prevent visiting and other less extravagant forms of sociability. Guests did not stop coming to Mount Vernon because George Washington was not in residence. Consequently, Lund Washington played host and housekeeper to a steady stream of visitors, a position for which he felt ill qualified. With Martha Washington spending much of her time with her husband first in Boston and later at various winter encampments, Lund required someone to assist him with the running of the house. Washington's kinswoman Sarah Ball McCarty Barnes filled that position for some period during the Revolution as she had done at other times.[169] Before the war, Sarah Barnes and her son were frequent visitors to Mount Vernon and often spent the night. Washington had suggested Mrs. Barnes act as housekeeper, but Martha had expressed doubts about this plan to Lund, either because she did not consider Mrs. Barnes to be capable or felt she had too many of her own

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[167] GW to Burwell Bassett, 19 June 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 1:12; Lund Washington to GW, 22 October 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.,* 2:218; Lund Washington from GW, 5 November 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.,* 2:304; GW to Lund Washington, 20 August 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 1:334; and Lund Washington to GW, 29 October 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 2:256.
[168] *Maryland Journal* (Baltimore), 22 November 1775.
[169] Barnes was related to George Washington through his mother's family. Denis McCarty, her first husband, died in 1742 and their son, also named Denis, owned 3,000 acres between Belvoir and Mason Neck. After being widowed, Sarah married Abraham Barnes and they lived on McCarty's land.

responsibilities to fill in for any length of time at Mount Vernon is not clear. However, Mrs. Barnes was at the plantation in late November of 1775 when Lund traveled to Stafford County to settle his mother's estate and had promised to stay until his return. Just before Christmas, Lund noted that Mrs. Barnes had left Mount Vernon with Milly Posey who continued to spend much of her time under Mrs. Washington's care even after the death of Patsy Custis.[170] Lund found relief from sole responsibility for running the house as well as the plantation in 1779 when he married Elizabeth Foote and she began to fill the role of hostess in Martha Washington's absence.[171]

As the conflict with Great Britain came to a head in 1775, some indentured servants were waging their own war on Washington's closely controlled world. On the night of 19 April, the same day that the Massachusetts militia engaged the British at Lexington and Concord, Thomas Spears and William Webster slipped away from Mount Vernon in a small boat. Washington placed an advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette* offering a forty-dollar reward for the return of the two men and "masters of vessels [were] cautioned against receiving them."[172] Spears, twenty years old, and Webster, thirty, had formed an alliance during the time they worked at Mount Vernon, Spears, originally from Bristol, as a joiner and Webster a Scottish convict working as a brick

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[170] Lund Washington to GW, 14 November 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 2:373; 24 November 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 2:421; 23 December 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 2:593. Amelia "Milly" Posey was the childhood friend Patsy Custis and the daughter of Washington's former neighbor of John Posey. She continued to live at Mount Vernon throughout the Revolutionary War years.

[171] Elizabeth Foote Washington was the daughter of Richard Foote of Prince William County, Virginia. Elizabeth kept a diary dated 1779-1796, but unfortunately revealed nothing about her experiences at Mount Vernon. See Diary of Elizabeth Foote Washington, November 1779 to December 1796, Library of Congress.

[172] Advertisement for Runaway Servants, *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie) 5 May 1775.

maker. This was a second attempt at escape for Webster who had made a similar attempt a year earlier.[173] In addition to the notice in *The Virginia Gazette*, Washington paid two men to pursue the runaway servants.[174] The hunt for the two men was successful: Webster was back making bricks in the autumn of 1775 and Thomas Spears was returned to Mount Vernon sometime before February of 1776 when the tailor made a new suit of clothes for him.[175]

Although some indentured servants and convicts did run away during the war – taking advantage of distracted masters in the hope of joining British forces, preferably on a ship that would eventually take them home – Spears and Webster were not the first indentured servants to abscond from Mount Vernon.[176] A house painter, John Winter, fled the plantation and took a quantity of paint and other supplies with him in 1759. He was still at large a year later when John Fendall of Charles City, Maryland placed an ad for his recovery in the *Maryland Gazette*. His skills as a painter with the ability to replicate mahogany were praised by his employers but his tendency to flee mid-job were not.[177] Some indentured servants sought better situations with wages, or, in the case of convicts, some wanted to return to Great Britain and the friends and family that they had unwillingly left behind.

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[173] Cash accounts 26 April 1774, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*., 10:20.
[174] Cash accounts April 1775, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*., 10:315-318.
[175] Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 44; PGW. Lund Washington to GW, 15 October 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 2:172.
[176] Michael A. McDonnell, *The Politics of War: Race, Class, and Conflict in Revolutionary Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 86-87.
[177] *The Maryland Gazette*, 3 July 1760.

Of course indentured servants were not the only workers at Mount Vernon with thoughts of freedom or for whom wartime disruption posed rare opportunities to escape. George Washington, like other slave owners, had to guard against the possibility that his slaves might take flight. Patrolling laws had been in effect since 1766, but they rose in importance as white fears of slave insurgencies increased. The patrolling law required each county to appoint a slave patrol consisting of a militia officer and up to four militiamen. The patrol was to visit "all negro quarters and other places suspected of entertaining unlawful assemblies of slaves, servants, or other disorderly persons" monthly and receive twenty pounds of tobacco for every twelve hours of duty as an inducement. The patrollers also received orders to apprehend any slave found "strolling about from one plantation to another, without a pass from his or her master, mistress or overseer."[178] In May 1776, Landon Carter of Richmond County passed on the news to George Washington that, "one of the delegates I heard exclaim ag[ain]st the Patrolling law, because a poor man was made to pay for keeping a rich mans Slaves in order."[179] Before the war at least, Virginia slave owners were less likely to lose slaves through escape than were masters in the other colonies. One reason for this is the high incidence of slave marriages and the opportunity to live in family groups.[180] Virginia slaves, especially those who lived on large plantations or in areas with large slave populations, became

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[178] William W. Hening, *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969. Originally published 1810.), 8:195-97
[179] Landon Carter to GW, 9 May 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 4:234.
[180] Philip D. Morgan and Michael L. Nicholls. "Slave Flight: Mount Vernon and the Wider World" in *George Washington's South*. Tamara Harvey and Greg O'Brien, eds. (University Press of Florida, 2003), 206-210.

vested in their families and communities and remained where they could be close to loved ones.

During the colonial period, unmarried male slaves were the most likely to make a bid for freedom. Four male slaves named Peros, Jack, Neptune, and Cupid made their escape from Mount Vernon in the summer of 1761. At the time of their departure, all had been at Dogue Run Farm except for Neptune who worked at River Farm. Peros had been a slave at one of the Custis plantations in King William County and Jack had been in Middlesex County. The two had only recently arrived at Mount Vernon and may have incited the others to leave. Where they were headed is not known, but it is possible that Peros or Jack may have wanted to return closer to the area of the Custis plantation to be near companions there or simply to be in more familiar territory. According to an advertisement in *The Maryland Gazette,* Cupid and Neptune arrived in America on a ship from Africa in 1759 and had only been in the colonies for two years at this point. Their English in the advertisement was described as being "broken and unintelligible." Jack, described as a "Countryman" of Cupid and Neptune, had been in Virginia longer and spoke "pretty good English." The ad stated that Peros spoke the best English of the quartet and was "esteemed as a sensible judicious Negro."[181] They were all eventually returned to Mount Vernon.

The threat of war mobilized many of Virginia's enslaved men and women to seek freedom, especially when a rumor began circulating in the spring of 1775 that the colony's royal governor, Lord Dunmore planned to call on slaves to leave their masters

[181] *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 20 August 1761.

and win their freedom by joining the British forces. The British attacked Hampton in October bringing the war out of the distant northern colonies to Virginia's shores. The news of the battle turned the colony into a "perfect frenzy" in the words of Thomas Jefferson and helped turn many white Virginians against the king.[182] The crisis worsened in November when a proclamation was published that declared "all indentured Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining His Majesty's Troops as soon as may be…."[183] Slaves responded to Dunmore's call further alienating white Virginians from the crown and heightening their fears that their slaves would rise up against them.[184]

Rumors were rife in the neighborhood. Where were the British troops? When might they attack Alexandria? We now know that Alexandria was spared invasion, but its citizens did not yet have that knowledge. As the reality of war with Great Britain spread over the town there was real fear – and perhaps having George Washington as such a near neighbor made some feel less secure than more so since he would likely be a target for King George's wrath. One of the rumors hit very close to Washington's heart. He expressed his concerns in a letter to Lund Washington: "I can hardly think that Lord Dunmore can act so low, & unmanly a part, as to think of seizing Mrs. Washington by way of revenge upon me; however as I suppose she is, before this time gone over to Mr. Calverts, & will soon after returning, go down to New Kent, she will be out of his reach

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[182] Woody Holton, "'Rebel Against Rebel': Enslaved Virginians and the Coming of the American Revolution" in *Virginia Reconsidered: New Histories of the Old Dominion*, Kevin R. Hardwick and Warren R. Hofstra, eds. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 136-137.
[183] Proclamation of Earl of Dunmore, 7 November 1775.
[184] Holton, "Rebel Against Rebel," 138-139.

for 2 or 3 Months to come, in which time matters may, & probably will, take such a turn as to render her removal either absolutely necessary, or quite useless." This was most likely one of many unfounded rumors swirling through the region, but it is an example of the fear and uncertainty that the outbreak of war brought out in the citizenry – and the level to which the once popular Dunmore was demonized.[185] Washington's main concerns were for a place of safety for Martha and that his papers must be secured.[186]

George Washington was not alone in his apprehension for his Martha Washington's safety. The citizens of Loudoun County offered to send a guard to take Martha to Berkeley County and those of Alexandria promised to come to her aid if she should be endangered. Lund was directed to ready the house Washington owned in Alexandria if it should be necessary for Martha to vacate Mount Vernon to a place where she would have more people available to provide protection. Even George Washington's brother John Augustine Washington weighed in and urged Martha to leave Mount Vernon. Lund advised Washington, "Tis true many people have made a Stir about Mrs. Washington's Continuing at Mt. Vernon but I cannot think her in any Sort of danger…she does not believe herself in danger…I have never Advised her to stay nor indeed to go."[187]

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[185] Ibid, 150. The ever-colorful Landon Carter referred to Dunmore as "Lord Pilferer," quoted in Jack P. Greene, *Landon Carter: An Inquiry into the Personal Values and Social Imperatives of the Eighteenth-Century Virginia Gentry* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1965), 72.
[186] Lund Washington from GW, 20 August 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 1:334; Dalzell and Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 103-104.
[187] Lund Washington to GW, 5 October 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 2:115.

The defense of Alexandria and the Potomac River was also of great concern to George Washington. Any incursion of British troops up the river threatened not only his own property, but Alexandria was largely unprotected and he did not have Continental Army forces to spare to defend it. He wrote to William Ramsay, a merchant and one of the founders of Alexandria concerning the possibility of blockading the Potomac River. Washington suggested that preventing the navigation of enemy ships in the river should be of paramount concern for the "preservation of property."[188] Ramsay's name also appeared as a member of the Fairfax County Committee of Correspondence in a letter to George Mason and Charles Broadwater, delegates to the Fourth Virginia Convention, expressing their outrage that the Northern District including Alexandria remained unguarded in spite of the fact that it was believed that an active threat from Dunmore was expected the following spring. Furthermore, the British officers who had been through Alexandria with Braddock during the French and Indian War would know it as a "safe Harbour for Ships of War & commanding a most material part of the Colony."[189]

Members of gentry families who were placed in leadership roles in colonial militias were usually less interested in the military training than in burnishing their social status, but the deteriorating situation between Great Britain and the colonists gave militia participation a greater sense of urgency.[190] The Virginia Convention, which acted as the

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[188] William Ramsay from GW, 10-16 November 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.,* 2:344.
[189] Robert L. Scribner and Brent Tarter, eds. *Revolutionary Virginia*: *the Road to Independence, a Documentary Record* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia. 1983). Vol. 5: 88-90. Fairfax County Committee of Correspondence to George Mason & Charles Broadwater, 9 December 1775.
[190] McDonnell, *Politics of War*, 37.

colony's de facto government before the adoption of the first state constitution in 1776, authorized the organization of an independent militia that would be outside of the control of the colonial governor. Mason, acting as chairman, Washington, and other Fairfax County "Gentlemen and Freeholders" met in September 1774 and agreed to raise a company of one hundred men from the county who would serve as a front line of defense in case the need arose.[191] Mount Vernon tailor Andrew Judge made a suit of regimentals for Washington in November and for Jacky Custis, Lund Washington, and William Herbert, a son-in-law of John Carlyle in December.[192] By mid-January 1775, Washington was holding drills in Alexandria for the Fairfax Independent Company. After Washington took command of the Continental Army, the militia came under the leadership of William Rumney, a doctor in Alexandria who was both a friend to Washington and physician to the residents of Mount Vernon.[193] Lund Washington was a member of the militia company, but was fined for his absence from musters on several occasions, presumably too busy with the care and defense of Mount Vernon to attend to mobilization efforts in Alexandria.[194]

On the eve of the Revolution, Alexandria was the second largest town in Virginia with a population of 3,000 people. A visitor in 1778 described it as "situated on the

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[191] Broadwater, *George Mason: Forgotten Founder*, 68; "Fairfax County Militia Association," 21 September 1774, *Papers of George Mason*, 1:210-12.
[192] Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 32.
[193] Rumney was especially involved in the treatment of Nelly Custis' epilepsy. Born and raised in England, Rumney had been a surgeon in the British Army during the French and Indian War. He remained in America after the war and settled in Alexandria in 1763. His brother, John Rumney, Jr. worked for an English merchant with a store in Alexandria.
[194] Edith Moore Sprouse, *Some Fairfax County Participants in the American Revolution* (Alexandria, Va., 1991), Lund was absent on 29 September and 20 October 1776.

Potomac, on an elevated plain overlooking the river. The streets are laid out after the plan of Philadelphia, and upon a large scale, in anticipation of a great city."[195] The Anglican Christ Church was completed in 1773 and a substantial population of Scots contributed to the erection of the Presbyterian Meeting House in 1775. The church vestry of nearby Truro parish collected a levy from members for the support of the poor, disabled, and orphaned. The vestry found positions for orphans as indentures to local merchants and tradespeople.[196] The assignment of indentures reveals that the trades in the town included a joiner, saddler, tailor, cooper, carpenter, brewer, ship carpenter, shoemaker, and mantua maker. Alexandria boasted about ten taverns in 1775 including Arell's on Market Square and the Widow Hawkins on Royal Street. Twenty merchants and factors operated in the town, many of which George Washington did business with including Carlyle and Dalton, George Gilpin, and Robert Adam and Company. Most of the merchants purchased wheat to ship to distant ports; a few bought tobacco.[197]

Once hostilities commenced, Alexandria merchants made arrangements with their counterparts in Baltimore and Philadelphia to receive their shipments and then send them to Virginia over land routes, an expensive and time consuming method, but safer than Alexandria's wharves when British ships were on the Potomac.[198] Although Alexandria remained the center of the region's European trade, few merchants were willing to take

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[195] Michael T. Miller, ed., "Men and Times of the Revolution or Memories of Elkanah Watson," *Pen Portraits of Alexandria, Virginia, 1739-1900* (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1987), 31.
[196] Vestry of Pohick Church, *Minutes of the Vestry, Truro Parish, Virginia, 1732-1785* (Annandale, Va.: Baptie Studios, Inc., 1974), 3,11,13,18.
[197] John Stoessel, "Port of Alexandria, Virginia in the Eighteenth Century" (Masters thesis, Catholic University, 1969), 43-45.
[198] Ibid., 50.

the risk of losing their cargoes in an encounter with the British by shipping directly down the Potomac River. Two Alexandria merchants, Richard Conway and Robert Hooe, joined together and sent the vessels they owned simultaneously to provide protection for each ship, which carried ten to twelve cannon for additional security.[199] However, of the ships that dared to deliver their cargo to Alexandria, turn around times of forty-three days from arrival in port until the next departure were better even than before the war. This was partially due to the fact that there were fewer ships entering the port and many workers otherwise unemployed available to load and unload the holds.[200] Alexandria continued its ship building industry during the war with at least six merchant vessels built between the years 1775-1783.[201]

The break with Great Britain presented both difficulties and opportunities for Virginia merchants and consumers. The need to find new merchants and shippers to replace their contacts in London and Glasgow could lead to the development of a more diversified economy. Trade with the West Indies and France continued, provided the ships could get through the British blockade without interference. At the same time, however, inflation began to affect prices for consumer goods as the war progressed. Prices for salt, sugar, rum, and bacon increased rapidly and the demand for goods like salt far exceeded the supply.[202] Salt was necessary for the preservation of fish and meats and

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[199] Ibid., 324-5.
[200] Ibid., 325-6.
[201] Arthur Pierce Middleton, "Ships and Ship Building in the Chesapeake and Tributaries" in *Chesapeake Bay in the American Revolution*, Ernest M. Eller, ed. (Centreville, Maryland: Tidewater Publishers, 1981), 126.
[202] John E. Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775-1783* (Williamsburg, Va.: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988), 227.

livestock received it in their feed as a dietary supplement. In November of 1775, Lund reported that "the people are run[nin]g mad about Salt – you would hardly think it Possible there could be such a Scarcity."[203] Nicholas Cresswell also noted that Leesburg in Loudoun County felt the salt shortage when he witnessed "a mob of about 40 horsemen" heading toward Alexandria in search of salt.[204] The British were well aware of the consequences that shortages of salt would have on all levels of society, but especially for the least privileged who would not be able to afford inflated prices for staples.[205] Patriot leaders were also concerned how people would react to shortages and whether they had the will to support the boycott.[206] A notice placed in the *Maryland Journal* acknowledged the "uneasiness" the people felt over the rising price of salt. In an effort to calm unrest, price limits were instituted and unscrupulous merchants who exceeded the fixed price were threatened with being "published as Enemies to their Country."[207]

By January of 1776, there was near hysteria in Alexandria with the residents expecting the British to burn the town at any moment. There were reports of British ships off Mason Neck, which Lund Washington optimistically predicted would probably turn out to be nothing more threatening than oyster boats. In spite of the inclement weather Lund reported that the women and children were fleeing the town and staying in "every little Hut they can get" and every "wagon, cart & Pack horse that can be got, are

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[203] Lund Washington to GW, 24 November 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 2:421.
[204] McDonnell, *Politics of War*, 263.
[205] McDonnell, *Politics of War,* 121-122.
[206] *The Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 9 December 1775. See article authored by "Virginian."
[207] *Maryland Journal* (Baltimore), 22 November 1775.

employed moving the goods out of town."[208] George Washington expressed concern about his valuables to his farm manager. Neighbor Sarah Barnes had offered to store them – along with the belongings of "every one in Alexandria," according to Lund, but she assured him she had reserved a room upstairs and another in her cellar for Washington's valuables.[209] Lund considered building a strong house at Dogue Run to hold the contents of the Mount Vernon mansion, but it is not clear that ever occurred. By the end of January, Lund had already secured Washington's papers and was busily packing china and glass into barrels. Another neighbor, Daniel McCarty offered his cellar to store Washington's wine and rum.[210]

The citizens of Alexandria were kept informed of the movements of British warships in March of 1776 when the Maryland Council of Safety wrote to inform them of a "Ship of War and two Tenders," apparently destined for Baltimore, but Alexandrians should be prepared in case they made their way up the Potomac.[211] Dunmore left the area and sailed to New York in early August of 1776 relieving some of the concerns about attacks to Alexandria or Mount Vernon. However, British warships continued to appear in the bay from time to time and seized some of the vessels leaving and entering the port

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[208] Lund Washington to GW, 31 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:230.
[209] Lund Washington to GW, 17 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:126 and Lund Washington to GW, 31 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:230.
[210] Lund Washington to GW, 14 November 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 2:375; Lund Washington to GW, 10 December 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 2:526-527; Lund Washington to GW, 31 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:230. Many of George Washington's letters to Lund from this period do not survive so we only have Lund's feedback to know what Washington considered as his "valuables."
[211] Scribner and Tarter. *Revolutionary Virginia*, Vol. VI, p. 191. Letter dated 9 March 1776.

of Alexandria. Their presence kept the citizens on edge and in May of 1776, Cresswell reported there was a "great riot in town about Torys."[212]

The volatility of the market also affected the wages of hired workers at Mount Vernon and throughout Virginia. Washington was especially concerned that the depreciation of money and the corresponding rising cost of goods was decreasing the value of Lund Washington's income. As compensation, Washington offered that he was "willing that you should receive a certain part of the last Crop, to be disposed of by you for your own benefit and so in future; this will give you the reward of your Industry…."[213] Washington further recommended that Lund try to reduce the number of paid wage earners to reduce expenses at Mount Vernon. Lund agreed with this plan in theory, but found it difficult to come up with names of individuals that could be let go. Washington kept Thomas Bishop out of charity, carpenter Caleb Stone was a "good hireling" and the miller who was idle because of the lack of grain to grind had a contract and Lund doubted that he was "so silly to be off his Bargain" and risk not being able to find another position.[214]

The outbreak of war revealed tensions in class relations in Virginia. Elites desired independence from Britain, but wanted to preserve their place in society and the political dominance they had long enjoyed. For tenants and other actual or potential insurgents, the American Revolution presented an opportunity to rid themselves from unfair taxes, economic inequality, and the political oppression they experienced from elites as much as

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[212] Cresswell, *Journal of Nicholas Cresswell*, 24 May 1776.
[213] GW to Lund Washington, 18 December 1778. *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 18:459-463.
[214] Lund Washington to GW, 3 December 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 2:477.

from the British.[215] Unlike most newly formed state governments, Virginia's did not decrease property requirements for voting and office holding and undertook no serious revision of the colonial tax codes, which privileged wealthy land speculators by not taxing unimproved acreage. Believing that they bore a disproportionate amount of sacrifice without receiving significant economic or political benefits, some of the smaller planters refused to aid the militia. They caused unrest and discouraged recruiting efforts by spreading their opinion that the war had been caused by "the wantonness of gentlemen."[216] Landon Carter of Richmond County reported a similar incident of a small planter refusing to give a weapon to the militia and stating that only fools would aid in the protection of "the gentlemen's houses on the riverside."[217]

Virginia's tenants seem to have been reasonably content until they began to feel an economic squeeze as the war began. Christmas of 1775 brought a crisis when many tenants found they could not pay their rents. The outbreak of war had closed many of the markets for their crops as a result of enforcement of the non-exportation clause established by the Continental Association.[218] There were only a few tenants renting Mount Vernon lands during the war period and they appear to have paid their rent with some regularity. Nevertheless, Washington also owned property in Fauquier and Loudoun Counties, areas of greater activism, especially in Loudoun County. Loudoun

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[215] Humphrey, "Conflicting Independence," 174.
[216] John Augustine Washington to Richard Henry Lee, 4 June 1781, *Letters of Richard Henry Lee,* James Curtis Ballagh, ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 2:229-231; McDonnell, *Politics of War*. McDonnell's thesis is that class divisions in pre-revolutionary Virginia made it difficult for patriot leaders to motivate the middling and lower classes to participate in the war.
[217] Quoted in Tillson, *Accommodating Revolutions*, 204.
[218] Breen, *Marketplace of the Revolution*, 325-326.

County had a large proportion of tenant farmers, possibly as many as thirty-eight percent of landholders were tenants. Additionally, most were not slaveholders or owned only one or two slaves.[219] The citizens of Loudoun County petitioned the Fifth Virginia Convention to consider the difficult situation in their region.[220] Loudoun County citizens pointed out the change in the market since the beginning of the war. When their current rent contracts had been signed, there had been a "Flourishing Growing Trade for Grain and Flower at Alexandria and other Ports."[221] Their situation had changed greatly in the meantime and their incomes had suffered. As a result, they believed the actions of the patriots had destroyed any hope they had fostered of improving their economic and social status.

Lund Washington, in his role as agent for George Washington, did not press for rent from tenants during this crisis. Rent collection required him to leave the plantation and he felt he could not be away for long because of the magnitude of his own responsibilities and the uncertainty of the times. He had, however, attempted to procure the services of a Mr. Bailey to collect Washington's rents, but Lund was not very optimistic about the possibility of Bailey or anyone else having much success. He advised Washington that "from the Accounts I have from Loudon, Prince William, &

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[219] McDonnell, *Politics of War*, 10.

[220] The convention was the last of five held between August 1774 and July 1776. Their purpose was to select Virginia delegates to Congress and organize military preparedness. The conventions also formed the Virginia Committee of Safety, which governed from August 1775 until independence was declared in 1776. See, *Revolutionary Virginia: the Road to Independence, a Documentary Record, Vol. 7: Independence and the Fifth Convention, 1776*, Scribner and Tarter, eds.

[221] Humphrey, "Conflicting Independence," 166. James Cleveland, who worked for Washington as an overseer, was one of seventy-three signers of the "Petition of Sundry Inhabitants of Loudoun County" dated 1 June 1776.

some other Counties, there is very little hopes of Collecting money from Tenants, they say it is Cruel in the Land Holders to expect their Rents when there is no market for the produce of the Land…"[222]

Like many Americans elsewhere, many of Washington's tenants did not see any reason or advantage for them to fight in the Revolution. They did not trust the motives of those who were agitating for a rebellion against the crown, although they might agree with the sentiments against taxation with representation.[223] James Cleveland, who had worked for Washington since 1765 as an overseer, and had been sent by Washington to establish his Kanawha lands in 1775, attempted to mount a tenant revolt in neighboring Loudon County in an effort to gain better terms from the landlords. Cleveland saw "no inducement for a poor man to fight, for he has nothing to defense." He also espoused the opinion of his compatriots that soldiers and officers should receive the same pay. This revolt enraged Lund Washington who wrote to Washington, "Cleveland I am told has turned Politician and is setting all Loudoun together by the Ears, the Consequence of which will be I hope the loss of his life for I would wish every Damned Villain who meddles in matters he knows nothing off, may get Hanged."[224] Cleveland and his comrades were not only agitated about rents, but also were concerned about the lack of

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[222] Lund Washington to GW, 30 December 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 2:620. Mr. Bailey may have been Pierce Bailey (1742-1800), a sheriff in Fairfax County. He was an occasional guest at Mount Vernon.
[223] McDonnell, *Politics of War*, 2.
[224] Lund Washington to GW, 29 February 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 3:393. Lund is paraphrasing James Cleveland's statement.

protection they were receiving from patriot leaders.[225] The situation had stabilized by 1778, at least momentarily, when Lund made the trip to Loudoun and Fauquier counties himself to collect Washington's rents and met with some success. Washington's brother, Samuel Washington of Westmoreland County also collected rents in that area for his brother.[226]

Lund Washington, like many other slave owners in the region, lived with the knowledge that slave insurrections could occur, especially after the outbreak of war. He even believed that he knew "the look of a runaway" and attempted to use this to his advantage in his dealings with slaves. Lund Washington made a trip to Maryland to retrieve a slave named Will, a skilled shoemaker, whom George Washington was to receive as part of a debt settlement. The family that owned him did not know or "pretended they could not tell where he was." They informed Lund that they assumed Will was looking for someone to purchase or hire him.[227] Thomas Bishop made another trip to retrieve Will, who told Bishop that "he had much rather be hanged than come to Virginia."[228] Lund eventually met with the shoemaker who promised to go to Mount

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[225] McDonnell, *Politics of War*, 187-188; 192-197. Tenant revolts also took place in other colonies. At Livingston Manor along the Hudson River in New York, tenants had Tory leanings and most refused to join the militia. See Cynthia A. Kierner, *Traders and Gentlefolk: The Livingstons of New York, 1675-1790* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 228-234.

[226] Lund Washington to GW, 1 April 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 14:381.

[227] Lund Washington to GW, 25 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:187; 31 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:230; 8 February 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:269.

[228] Lund Washington to GW, 17 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:126. Lund Washington never reveals the name of the slave in his correspondence, but the cash accounts for January of 1777 lists the sale of a slave named Will for £100 Maryland currency. Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 57, February 1 entry.

Vernon. Lund wrote to Washington that he believed he would come because "he has not the look of a Runaway Negro." The fact was that the shoemaker was reluctant to leave Maryland because his wife and children lived there. Lund found the shoemaker to be very good at his trade and advised Washington to keep him. However, Will the shoemaker's career at Mount Vernon was short lived. He persisted in his desire to be sold in Maryland to be nearer his family. Rather than risk losing the shoemaker – and his investment if he ran away - Washington agreed to sell him.[229] The shoemaker wielded a surprisingly large influence over his destiny. Historian Alan Taylor has noted that the diversity of the slave experience was as varied as the situation of the individual slave and his master.[230] In this instance, the enslaved shoemaker Will stated his desire forcefully and frequently – he wanted to remain in Maryland – and he eventually got his wish.

In spite of the constant threat that servants or slaves might run away, Lund declared that he had no fear of "any of them (servants) running off, & as to the Negroes I have not the least dread of them." Whether these were brave words to convince himself there was no danger or to reassure Washington, is not clear. However, Lund, like many other slave holding Virginians, did have concerns that the indentured servants might run and off and inspire the slave population to follow suit.[231] Lund expressed the opinion that if there were "no white servants in this family" he would be "under no apprehension about the Slaves." He further stated that if any of the white servants caused any trouble,

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[229] Lund Washington to GW, 25 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:187; February 8 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 3:269.
[230] Alan Taylor, *Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 80-82.
[231] Holton, "Rebel Against Rebel," 147-148.

i.e. attempted to run away, he would make an example of them. Bernard Sears, who was working on the interior of the house, informed Lund that "there is not a man of them, but would leave us, if they believed they could make there [sic] Escape – Tom Spears – excepted & yet they have no fault to find[.] Liberty is sweet."[232] As historian Michael McDonnell points out, independence was on everyone's mind, but each group, whether white or black; rich or poor, defined it in a different way.[233]

Another challenge for Lund Washington was completing the renovations initiated at Mount Vernon in 1774, which took years under less than ideal wartime circumstances. The forecourt service buildings that had been in place since George Washington took over the plantation were replaced and their placement reconfigured. A symmetrical arrangement of two service buildings flanking the west side of the mansion replaced the old pattern with the buildings situated at a diagonal to the mansion. These included a kitchen and storehouse on the south side and a servant's house and gardener's house to the north. Work on the southern addition to the mansion which included Washington's office and a bedroom on the second floor began in April of 1774. Going Lanphier, the head carpenter for the work, completed that section by the end of 1775 and began raising the northern addition the following year. However, the interior work dragged on throughout the war years.[234] Plank for the construction had been purchased earlier and set aside and bricks were made on site, but there was a shortage of nails and George

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[232] Lund Washington to GW, 17 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 3:126; 3 December 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 2:477.
[233] McDonnell, *Politics of War*, 213.
[234] Lund Washington to GW, 20 August 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 1:334. Other sources: Lund Washington Account Book.

Washington advised Lund to seek out nails from elsewhere in Virginia or Maryland or even Pennsylvania as he wished "most ardently" that the north end of the house be covered before fall.[235]

Consequently, there were a large number of artisans associated with the building trades at Mount Vernon during the Revolution. Many of the skilled workers who came to work at Mount Vernon had family connections, whom also had worked for Washington at various times. Carpenter and house builder Going Lanphier owned property in Fairfax County and voted for Washington in at least one election for burgesses.[236] Lanphier purchased salt, fish and corn for his own use from Mount Vernon during the war.[237] He was prosperous enough to have clothing made for himself, his sons, and servants at William Carlin's tailor shop in Alexandria where Washington, Mason, and many gentry purchased bespoke clothing.[238]

While working at Mount Vernon, most of the tradesman and artisans became temporary members of the community. A few, like Lanphier, may have lived close enough to make the trip each day. It took about an hour and a half by horseback to travel between Alexandria and Mount Vernon. Those who stayed on the plantation usually received room and board and took advantage of the other industries in operation such as the blacksmith, weaver, and miller. In some cases, they purchased additional foodstuffs

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[235] Dalzell and Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 107; GW to Lund Washington, 26 August 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 6:136.
[236] Fairfax County Poll Sheet, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 7:377-383.
[237] Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 65, April 1775 and June 1776.
[238] Katherine Egner Gruber, "By Measures Taken of Men": Clothing the Classes in William Carlin's Alexandria, 1763-1782, *Early American Studies* (13:4, Fall 2015), 932; Katherine Egner Gruber, transcriber, William Carlin Ledger, 1763-1782, (unpublished manuscript, Mount Vernon Ladies Association), 78, 80.

from Mount Vernon since they might be on the job for weeks or even months at a time. The artisan applying stucco to the parlor was expected to remain at Mount Vernon for three or four weeks.[239] John Hagan, a brick maker who worked at Mount Vernon off and on from 1776 through 1778, used the services of the blacksmith on different occasions and purchased wool cards.[240] John Knowles, an indentured bricklayer and laborer spent the entire Revolutionary War period at Mount Vernon along with his wife, Rachel. John and Rachel received their freedom dues from Washington in December of 1777, which amounted to the sum of £7, but they continued to work at Mount Vernon even after fulfilling the original terms of the indenture.[241] They purchased corn, flour, and salt for their own use from the plantation's supply.[242]

Although there was little military action in Virginia between 1775 and 1780, occasional news of Tory activity must have kept the white community at Mount Vernon and the surrounding area on edge throughout the war. For instance, in 1777, a traveler through Virginia recorded in his diary that "Some Tories lately formed a Plan for burning Alexandria and murdering the Inhabitants." The conspirators had hoped to seize a boat berthed on the Potomac and meet up with the British. Their plot was discovered in time and they were jailed in Alexandria, but were soon moved to Williamsburg to await

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[239] Lund Washington to George Washington, 5 October 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 2:115; Lund Washington to GW, 15 October 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 2:172.
[240] Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 52, September and October 1776.
[241] Ibid., fol. 66, December 1777.
[242] Ibid., fol. 74, September and November 1778.

trial.[243] Servants, and especially slaves, may have found hope in reports of Tory activity and perhaps silently plotted their escape while carrying out the tasks assigned to them. Sightings of British vessels in the Chesapeake throughout the war years kept Virginians in a state of anxiety never knowing if or when the British might land and invade their farms and towns. It also added to the real difficulty of shipping as the British navy periodically seized vessels laden with both imports and exports.[244]

As the economic consequences of war with Great Britain became evident, Washington and his farm manager began to plan how to find additional sources of income. Mount Vernon received some income from selling food supplies and other goods to the Continental Army. The 1st Virginia Regiment received eighteen barrels of corn and the 3rd Virginia Regiment twenty-four barrels of corn in August of 1776. Gunpowder was procured on behalf of the Fairfax County militia and Washington was reimbursed for provisions consumed by the militia while they stayed at Mount Vernon in 1777 during a period when British ships were active on the Potomac River. Washington also received rent for his house in Alexandria for the use of Continental officers.[245] A bit later in the war, the army requisitioned seventy-eight pounds of bacon, over 4,000 pounds of beef, 11,700 pounds of hay, and Washington received reimbursement for pasturing cattle for several months as well.[246]

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[243] Ebenezer Hazard, "The Journal of Ebenezer Hazard in Virginia, 1777," Fred Shelley, ed., *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 62 (1954): 401-402.
[244] Kamoie, *Irons in the Fire*, 90.
[245] Lund Washington Account Book, fols. 54, 57, 76; Lee, *Price of Nationhood*, 148-150.
[246] Janice L. Abercrombie and Richard Slatten, compilers and transcribers, *Virginia Revolutionary Publick Claims* (Athens, Ga.: Iberian Publishing Co., 1992), 340, 344.

Other planters and merchants in the region provided supplies to the Continental Army and local militias. The war proved to be a boon to the Tayloe iron works in Prince William County, which supplied arms and munitions to the American army.[247] Almost every resident of Alexandria and Fairfax County with any means appears to have supplied the army, whether willingly or unwillingly, often in exchange for depreciating paper currency. Some of the beef and other supplies may have supported the smallpox inoculation center located in Alexandria in 1777. Washington ordered that recruits from Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia be inoculated at one of three sites in the area; either Dumfries, Alexandria, or Georgetown.[248] Alexandria merchants Hooe and Harrison advanced funds to put the "town of Alexandria G Battery in a posture of defense" and William Ramsay paid to bring a cannon from Annapolis. Later in the war, Washington put Lafayette in charge of Virginia in the spring before the Battle of Yorktown. Lafayette requisitioned large numbers of horses, saddles and other tack, the use of wagons, and other supplies for his troops.[249]

Economic historian John McCusker characterizes the Revolutionary War era as "a time of severe depression."[250] Depreciation certainly plagued Virginians throughout the

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[247] Kamoie, *Irons in the Fire*, 90.
[248] Jeffrey Weir, "A Challenge to the Cause: Smallpox Inoculation in the Era of American Independence, 1764 to 1781" (dissertation, George Mason University, 2014), 323-324; Colonel Alexander Martin to George Washington, 16 May 1777, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 9:444-445. The inoculations took place in Alexandria from at least April through June 1777.
[249] Abercrombie and Slatten, *Virginia Revolutionary Publick Claims*, 339-344; John E. Ferling, *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 292.
[250] John J. McCusker, "Growth, Stagnation, or Decline?: The Economy of the British West Indies, 1763-1790" in *The Economy of Early America: The Revolutionary Period,*

war. Jack Custis' letters to Washington included many references to the effects of depreciation, significant to him especially as he was trying to sell some of his Tidewater estates in order to purchase property in Fairfax County.[251] The Virginia Assembly declared bills of credit issued by the state or Congress legal tender for all debts in May of 1777 making the certificates issued to citizens in payment of supplies for the troops essentially a donation to the cause of freedom.[252] Custis informed Washington in August of 1779 that people were "taking advantage of the law, to pay debts contracted ten or twelve years ago in gold and silver, in paper money," which was worth far less.[253]

Lund Washington also hoped to earn money by selling fish to the Continental Army. "I was told a day or two past that Congress had ordered a Quantity of Shad, to be cured on this River, I expect as every thing sells high Shad will also, I should be fond of curing about 100 barrels for them, they finding Salt—we have been unfortunate in our Crops, therefore I could wish to make something by fish, or any other way to make up for the loss."[254] A few weeks later, he stated that he expected to make £200 by selling fish to the Continental Army.[255]

Among Washington's most successful diversifications were his fisheries, which had been a source of profit for him since the 1760s. With the Potomac River as one of the boundaries of his land, he had free and convenient access to its bounty. He described the

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1763-1790, Ronald Hoffman, John J. McCusker, Russell R. Menard, and Peter J. Albert, eds. (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1988), 280.

[251] John Parke Custis to GW, 17 June 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 15:417-418; John Parke Custis to GW, 11 August, 1779, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 22:90-91.

[252] Hening, *Hening's Statutes at Large*, 9:297-298.

[253] John Parke Custis to GW, 11 August 1779, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 22:92.

[254] Lund Washington to GW, 11 March 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 14:150.

[255] Lund Washington to GW, 1 April 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 14:381.

river as "well supplied with various kinds of fish at all seasons of the year; and in the Spring with the greatest profusion of Shad, Herring, Bass, Carp, Perch, Sturgeon &ca." He went on to say that the "whole shore in short is one entire fishery."[256] Washington began fishing for the marketplace as early as 1760 when he purchased two fish seines.[257] There were several other fisheries along the Potomac near Mount Vernon including one that had been operated at Belvoir by the Fairfax family and one on John Posey's land, which Washington had purchased.

Before, during, and after the war, fish provided food for the Washington family and their guests, served as a supplement to the slave's usual diet of pork and corn, and supplied another source of income from a commodity that could be sold in Alexandria's marketplace or shipped to other more distant ports. Washington and other planters of the Chesapeake region shipped salted fish to West Indian plantations as slave provisions.[258] Robert Adam a merchant and ship owner of Alexandria agreed to take all of the fish from Mount Vernon.[259] Shipments of fish also went by land to Frederick County. Edward Snickers sent eighteen barrels of herrings via wagon to sell in Frederick County.[260] An overseer at the Mansion House farm in 1790s was given specific instructions as to his

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[256] GW to Arthur Young, 12 December 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 14:506.
[257] 3 January 1760, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 1:214; 4 April 1760, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 1:261.
[258] Ragsdale, *A Planters' Republic*, 143.
[259] Leach, Donald B. "George Washington: Waterman – Fisherman, 1760-1799" (*Yearbook: The Historical Society of Fairfax County, Virginia* (Vol. 28, 2001-2002), 16. Agreement with Adam dated February 1770. Robert Adam and Co. had formerly been part of Carlyle and Adam. They also had a contract to purchase wheat from Washington as early as 1763.
[260] Cash Memoranda 1772-1775, January 9, 1775 and see fn. 10 from January 1775 cash accounts, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 10:221.

responsibilities during fishing season. During that time he was to "attend constantly day and night on the Negroes that will be employed thereat" and to supervise the hauling, curing, and packing of the fish.[261]

Fish runs occurred in the spring with all available hands on the plantation called to help stretch the seines in the water to catch the plentiful herring and shad. The runs were an intensive five or six weeks of steady work of catching fish, salting the catch, and packing it in barrels for sale. Fishery expenses included the slave's time, wages for other workers be they local men or hired slaves of neighbors, salt for curing the fish, seines, and rum, which no doubt contributed to a festive atmosphere as the slaves escaped their usual routines. Alexandria merchants Robert Adam & Company and Pohick Lynch purchased most of the take from Posey's Ferry. Together they received 897,500 herring and 8,541 shads. Workers packed the herring in barrels with approximately 825 herring in each.[262] The fishery at Johnson's Ferry located on Clifton's Neck also processed a significant catch. Another merchant company, Millner & Herbert, purchased 724,000 herring and 1,321 shads. The fish from the Home House fishery went to a wider variety of individuals – several of them just a few barrels for personal use. Fish were also used as barter in trade. Lund Washington gave the skipper of a vessel 20,160 herrings in partial payment of some plank received, possibly that used in the additions being made to the mansion house.[263]

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[261] Alexander Spotswood to GW, 24 November 1798, *Papers of GW, Retirement Series*, 3:218 Articles of Agreement with Roger Farrell.
[262] Lund Washington Account Book: fols. 27, 28, 29
[263] Ibid., fol. 28

The war also affected agriculture at Mount Vernon, most notably by leading to a temporary resumption of some tobacco cultivation. Prices for both grains and tobacco were mercurial during the war causing some Virginia planters to make yearly decisions as to whether they would grow all of one crop or try to cash in on unexpected rises in the market by growing some of each.[264] The war with Great Britain meant a loss of one of tobacco's major markets. Virginians arranged with the French to ship tobacco through contracts with Farmers General, the French syndicate that managed the royal monopoly on tobacco sales. An increased demand for tobacco on the European continent during the years 1777 to 1779 raised prices from thirty shillings the hundredweight to between five pounds and ten pounds.[265] The slowdown of tobacco trade meant that what could be grown and shipped could bring a higher price. Growing some tobacco at Mount Vernon began to seem like a good idea again around 1778 and Lund began to consider the possibility of planting some fields. In March 1778, Lund wrote to Washington that he was thinking about planting some tobacco, but a few weeks later changed his mind.[266] Lund Washington finally risked a few acres of land in 1781 when eight hogsheads of tobacco were grown at Mount Vernon.[267]

Washington also had hopes that textiles would provide some income during the war and urged Lund Washington that "spinning should go forward with all possible dispatch, as we shall have nothing else to depend upon if these disputes continue another

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[264] Lorena Walsh, "Plantation Management in the Chesapeake," 402-403.
[265]Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 172, 181; Stoessel, "Port of Alexandria," 50-51.
[266] Lund Washington to GW, 4 March 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 14:59; Lund Washington to GW, 18 March 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 14:220.
[267] Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 118.

year."[268] Whether Washington anticipated selling cloth to the army or elsewhere is unclear, but one motive was to make the cloth needed for slave clothing.[269] But Lund Washington was not the only person on the hunt for spinning wheels and he reported that they were scarce since the demand was so great. He purchased one for twenty shillings and tried to get some broken ones repaired. A few months later, he reported that he expected to soon have seven spinning wheels and would attempt to make up for lost time.[270] In fact, all supplies for the manufacture of wool, cotton, linen, and hemp cloth were in great demand. Wool and cotton cards began to be imported in greater numbers than ever before.[271]

Textiles had constituted the single largest category of colonial imports from Great Britain, and trade interruptions had been a part of the colonists' lives since the mid-1760s. Opposition to Parliamentary taxation during the imperial crisis created turmoil and rebellion against continuing to purchase items from Great Britain that could be manufactured at home. Virginians responded by initiating domestic manufactures and reducing consumption of British goods. The Virginia Association resolutions, drafted by George Mason and passed by the House of Burgesses in 1769, supported a non-importation agreement. The members of the association believed this would lead to

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[268] GW to Lund Washington, 20 August 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 1:334.
[269] Lund Washington to GW, 14 November 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev War Ser*.,
[270] Lund Washington to GW, 29 September 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 2:64; Lund Washington to GW, 5 November 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 2:307; In November of 1775, James Kelly was paid for a total of four spinning wheels. Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 50; In May 1777 James Kelly was paid for another spinning wheel and eight pulleys. Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 61; John Samuel Dossey delivered two more spinning wheels in September of 1777, Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 66.
[271] Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 166.

profits through an increase in local manufactures including cloth and wool. George Washington observed the associations for the most part, but still placed some orders with London merchants. For example, Mount Vernon weavers could not produce all of the kinds and amounts of cloth required.[272] The Virginia Association was an attempt to cut off imports from Great Britain, but it was not enforced and did not have the desired effect. It would take stronger measures to stop trade with the mother country.

Washington began to manufacture cloth at Mount Vernon at about the same time that he stopped tobacco production in Fairfax County in 1765. He experimented with a variety of crops including hemp, flax, and different grains. Hemp and flax could only be sold in the West Indies where the same advantages of the London merchants were not offered.[273] However, the tobacco grown at the Custis plantations supported all of these endeavors and continued to provided the all-important link with London merchants and their credit services. Flax, used to make linen, required an enormous outlay of labor. Once the fibers were separated from the dried plant, the more combing they received let to finer fibers and correspondingly finer fabric. It could take as long as sixteen months between the time the flax seed was sown and the cloth was finished and ready to be made into clothing. Consequently, only those farmers or planters with large labor forces could afford the time and effort it took to process flax.[274]

There had been someone employed as a weaver at Mount Vernon since shortly after George and Martha Washington were married. Thomas Davis appears to have been

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[272] Ragsdale, *Planters' Republic*, 103. Enforcement of the Association was weak and it had ceased being effective by 1771.
[273] Ragsdale, *Planters' Republic*, 35.
[274] Shammas, "How Self-Sufficient Was Early America?," 254, 258.

the second long-term weaver. He arrived in 1766 and remained until 1773. It is significant that Davis began in 1766 as it shows that Washington was making a concerted effort to make cloth for slave clothing and decrease his imports from Great Britain. The accounts of the work done by Davis for a period of four years survive. They list a dizzying array of types of woven fabric: fustian, striped silk, wool both striped and plaid, bird-eye cotton, broad cloth, dimity, carpet, herring bone, linen and more. Davis was not only weaving for the Mount Vernon residents, but for individuals in the neighborhood as well. Over sixty local customers purchased the products of Davis' weaving endeavors during four years.[275] After Davis left there were a series of weavers throughout the Revolutionary War period. William Keaton was weaver from 1775 to 1777 until he managed to turn in a deserter from the Army, which gave him exemption from military service. Considering himself a free agent, Keaton demanded double the wages to continue at Mount Vernon and Lund Washington had little choice but to comply.[276] The likelihood of finding another weaver during the war was unlikely, but Keaton appears to have gotten a better offer and left Mount Vernon for most of the war period, not returning until 1782.[277]

The tailor in residence at Mount Vernon then turned the cloth produced by the weaver into apparel. Brian Allison was one of the first, appearing in George Washington's record as early as 1760 and continued until about 1772. He had worked for

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[275] Account of Weaving done by Thomas Davis.
[276] McDonnell, *Politics of War,* 334-335; Lund Washington to GW, 1 April 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 14:381.
[277] Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 45. See also fols. 68-70 for weaving for the years 1777-1779. Other weavers during the war years were Hugh Archer from about 1777-1779 and Mary McMullin from 1777-1780, who may have been Archer's wife.

Augustine Washington when the family was at Mount Vernon in the 1730s.[278] Andrew Judge, an English tailor, whose indenture was purchased by Washington in 1772 for £35, replaced Allison.[279] Judge's initial term of service was for four years, but he stayed on as the tailor at Mount Vernon for four more years. Judge's trade brought him into contact with many of the residents of and visitors to Mount Vernon and he made clothes for individuals of all social strata. His customers included John Parke Custis who ordered a suit of regimentals for himself and a riding dress for his wife. Neighbor Humphrey Peake, overseer Valentine Crawford, indentured servant John Broad, and the slaves Frank and Charlotte all received clothing made by Judge.[280] Judge's place of work was at the Mansion House farm, bringing him into daily contact with the slaves that lived and worked there. He more than likely fathered at least one child while at the plantation. A dower slave named Betty worked at the Mansion House as a seamstress. She may have done some finishing work for Judge, but regardless they would have worked in close proximity to one another. Betty gave birth to a baby girl named Oney in 1774 and another daughter, Delphy, was born in 1780 – the same year Judge left Mount Vernon. It is tempting to think that he may finally have been let go for his relationship with a slave woman, but there is no evidence one way or the other. What is clear is that Oney took the surname Judge and continued to use it for some time even after she became free.[281]

The blacksmith shop continued in operation during the war, but it earned much less income than it had in the past. Andrew McCarty was brought to Mount Vernon for

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[278] Moxham, *First 100 Years at Mount Vernon,* 39.
[279] Cash Accounts, December 1772, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 9:132.
[280] Lund Washington Account Book, fols. 20, 32.
[281] GW to Burwell Bassett, Jr., 11 August 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 4:237.

twelve days to teach the blacksmiths how to burn coal.[282] There were far fewer transactions than there had been before 1775 since Washington had purchased many of the surrounding farms. According to the existing record, only a handful of outside customers used the services of the smiths during the war years; most of what they made was for use at Mount Vernon. Shoeing the plantation's horses, repairing tools for each farm, and making new tools such as hoes, plows, and axes kept the smiths occupied.[283]

George Washington expressed the opinion that "all mill business will probably be at an end for a while" a few months after his departure from Mount Vernon. In spite of Washington's predictions, there was some market for wheat. Both Maryland and Virginia experienced outstanding wheat yields in 1777 when Lund expected to get 100 to 200 barrels of flour from the wheat and hoped to purchase more if possible because he predicted flour should sell well. But the market conditions continued to be unpredictable when 1778 brought devastation to farmers throughout the region in the form of the Hessian fly.[284] The Hessian fly, so called because it was believed Hessian soldiers introduced the pest to America, did arrive by some means during the Revolution and soon became a serious problem for wheat farmers throughout America.[285]

Washington constructed the grist mill at Dogue Run in 1770, but there had been a mill on the property since Lawrence Washington's time, and possibly even during

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[282] Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 121, April 1783.
[283] Pogue, "Blacksmithing at George Washington's Mount Vernon," 5383.
[284] Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 181; Lund Washington to GW, 18 February 1778, *Papers, Rev. War Ser*., 13:587.
[285] Brooke Hunter, "Creative Destruction: The Forgotten Legacy of the Hessian Fly," in *The Economy of Early America: Historical Perspectives and New Directions*, Cathy Matson, ed. (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 242-244.

Augustine Washington's occupation of the land. Miller William Roberts arrived at Mount Vernon when the new mill was built.[286] With the temporary slow down of milling work during the war, Roberts and an apprentice were kept busy for a while repairing the milldams and millrace. Washington suggested that the millers be put to other tasks, such as making casks for flour and working with the carpenters, but Lund decided against making more casks as they would have to remade after sitting unused for long.[287] Roberts had too much time on his hands and turned to drink to pass the time as evidenced by an entry in his account for £13.10 for rum purchased from Hooe and Harrison merchants in Alexandria.[288]

Washington's interest and concern for the condition of his agricultural and other business interests never flagged in spite of the challenges he faced in the struggle against Great Britain as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. Indeed, Washington's absence during this period produced a prodigious correspondence with his farm manager, which provides us with insights about his approach to diversification and plantation management. Washington asked for detailed information about all aspects of the management of the farm and Lund complied, providing Washington with regular updates on everything from crops, progress on house renovations, and work assignments of the slave community.

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[286] GW Agreement with William Roberts, 13 October 1770, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 8:395-396.
[287] Lund Washington to GW, 12 November 1775, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 2:356; Lund Washington to GW, 25 January 1776, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser.*, 3:188.
[288] Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 115, December 1782. See also Mill Account Book, 1776-1785 (Manuscript, MVLA).

By the mid-1770s, many of the slaves of George Washington and Martha Washington's dower slaves had formed permanent relationships and lived in multi-generational families. Stable family connections helped to foster the development of healthy children who would become valuable laborers as adults.[289] How did they create community within the restrictions of slavery? The shared experience of being enslaved at Mount Vernon gave them some common ground. Their immediate community included the people that lived and worked at whichever farm they were assigned to and the ability to form relationships with those assigned to other farms at Mount Vernon as well as from other plantations in the neighborhood. Several of Washington's slaves had relationships with slaves that were owned by neighbors although this may have provided them with even fewer opportunities to see each other. Many also had spouses at other Mount Vernon farms and visited each other on Sunday, their day of rest.

Slaves could be separated from loved ones at the whim of their owners. Washington's mother requested that Silla, or Priscilla, be sent to her in Fredericksburg where she moved in 1772 after leaving the farm on the Rappahannock River. George Washington, who owned the farm, agreed to rent his mother's slaves as part of this new arrangement. Priscilla was evidently one of these slaves as she first appears in the Mount Vernon record in 1773.[290] Lund wrote to Washington that he doubted that Priscilla would want to leave Mount Vernon as she had "Cooper Jack for a Husband, and they appear to

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[289] Cassandra Pybus, "Recovered Lives as a Window into the Enslaved Family," in *Biography and the Black Atlantic*, Lisa A. Lindsay and John Wood Sweet, eds. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 117.
[290] Account with Mary Washington, 27 April 1775; Fairfax County Tithables, 1773 and 1774.

live comfortable together."[291] Lund procrastinated over sending Priscilla to Fredericksburg. He first used Jack's distress over the impending separation as an excuse – Jack begged that his wife be allowed to remain with him and expressed that he "had rather be Hanged then separated." In his next letter to Washington Lund cited the recent bad weather as his reason for not having carried out the request from Mary Washington.[292] Priscilla did eventually make her way south, but about a year later Washington authorized Lund to bring Priscilla back to Mount Vernon and substitute for her one of Mrs. Washington's other slaves that was at Mount Vernon – specifying that it should be "the greatest rogue of the two."[293] Washington expressed his irritation at being dragged into these matters through the caprice of his mother by sending her a troublesome slave.

The situation for slaves was fairly stable at large plantations like Mount Vernon where there was relatively little chance of families being broken up, but many Tidewater planters moved their slaves to the Piedmont to isolate them from the British and Washington himself sold a group of slaves during the Revolutionary War. He and Lund Washington began to discuss the possibility in the autumn of 1778. There appear to have been several motivations for Washington to consider the sale of a group of slaves at this time. He wrote to Lund that he wanted "to get quit of Negroes." For whatever reason, he

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[291] Lund Washington to GW, 18 February 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 13:587.
[292] Lund Washington to GW, 4 March 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 14:60; Lund Washington to GW, 11 March 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 14:151.
[293] GW to Lund Washington, 3 April 1779, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 19:735.

contemplated freeing himself of slave labor.[294] Some of the slaves that were eventually sold had been at his Kanawha property and he did not need them at Mount Vernon. Additionally, Washington wanted to raise some cash. He hoped to secure as much as £1,000 for adult males and proportionally less for women and children. He expressed his preference for selling them privately rather than at a public auction. Washington also offered his justification for the sale in a letter to Lund, "…if these poor wretches are to be held in a state of slavery, I do not see that a change of masters will render it more irksome, provided husband and wife, and Parents and children are not separated from each other, which is not my intention to do." The timing of the letters between Washington and Lund suggest that this letter arrived somewhat after Lund had already made the sale of nine individuals – four men and five women. The profit made from the sale was much less than Washington had anticipated for he received only £2,303.19.[295] No other sales of large groups of slaves by Washington are known, but such a sale must have caused a ripple of fear within the Mount Vernon community.

It seems from a distance of over two hundred years that Washington was being somewhat disingenuous when he said that being held in bondage by one master or

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[294] Washington's changing attitude toward slavery has been traced by several historians, including: Fritz Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery: A Documentary Portrayal* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997); Henry Wiencek, *Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2003) and Philip D. Morgan, "'To Get Quit of Negroes:' George Washington and Slavery," *Journal of American Studies* (39:3, 403-429).

[295] Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 82, January 1779. Lund Washington to GW, 2 September 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 16:496-497; GW to Lund Washington, 24-26 February 1779, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 19:257-258. The slaves that were sold were Abram, Orford, Tom, Jack, Ede, Fattimore, Phillis, Bett, and Jenny. The Kanawha tracts were located in present day West Virginia.

another should make no difference to any individual slave. This completely discounts the important relationships that were formed between slaves and the sense of continuity and comfort they might derive from remaining in familiar circumstances. Of the slaves that were sold in January of 1779 at least one had relatives at Mount Vernon. The money for the sale of Bett had been received in the previous April from a man from Botetourt County, Virginia, but Lund found that "her Mother appeared to be so uneasy about it, and Bett herself made such promises of amendment" that Lund found he could not force her to go with her new owner. In another case at about the same time, Phillis was sold, but her new owner sent her back to Mount Vernon. Phillis did not speak a word after coming into his possession and the buyer believed she could not speak English. That sale fell through, at least partially because Phillis took to her bed and remained there until all the immediate threat of being sold had passed.[296] Washington might have agreed with Thomas Jefferson who said that the slave owner had the wolf by the ears…once embroiled in slave ownership, it was an untenable position unless the owners were willing to set their slaves free.[297]

Like other slave owners, Washington sometimes disrupted community relationships through the removal of a slave that he considered a troublemaker. In one case, Washington asked Captain Thompson of the Schooner Swift to take the "Negro Tom which I beg the favour of you to sell, in any of the islands you may go to, for whatever he will fetch, & bring me in return for him…" molasses, rum, limes, a pot of

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[296] Lund Washington to GW, 8 April 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 14:429-430.
[297] Thomas Jefferson to Lydia Huntley Sigourney 18 July 1824. Jefferson used the phrase on several different occasions.

tamarinds, mixed sweetmeats, "and the residue, much or little, in good old Spirits." Washington admitted to the captain that Tom was a "Rogue and a Runaway," but emphasized his positive attributes as well: good with the hoe, strong, and healthy.[298] Tom's sale to distant shores where he was unlikely to ever have contact with friends or family in the Mount Vernon neighborhood must have had a chilling effect on those that were left behind.

The death of a slave under any circumstances other than old age was a significant event for everyone: a personal loss for his or her family, a financial loss to Washington, and for Lund, who was responsible for their welfare, a blot on his record as a good manager. In 1778, while Washington was with the army at White Plains, New York, one of his slaves drowned of an apparent accident at Mill Pond. One Saturday, the coopers were assisting overseer Davy and a crew at Muddy Hole with making ditches in swampland to draw off the standing water. The men were eating their mid-day meal when James, one of the coopers, walked towards the mill race about fifty yards from where the men had been resting. After the others had finished eating, they called out for James. Receiving no response, Ben, a slave at the mill, went in search of him and found his clothing on the bank. Ben alerted the others and jumped into the water in search of James, assuming that he had gone under the water, and almost drowned in the effort himself. There followed three hours of frantic searching and an attempt to lift the millrace, but by the time the others found James' body it was too late to save him.[299]

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[298] GW to Capt. Joseph Thompson, 2 July 1766, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*. 7:453-454.
[299] Lund Washington to GW, 2 September 1778, *Papers of GW, Rev. War Ser*., 16:497-498.

Lund Washington's narration of these events is remarkably detailed. He begins the lengthy description with the words "this leads me to relate to you the Death of one of the most Valuable Slaves you possessed Cooper James" and ends with "it was [there] that this Valuable slave lost his life." George Washington acquired James from a relative – Robert Washington of Chotank in April of 1773 so he had been at Mount Vernon for a little over five years. In his position as cooper, James was valuable not only for his monetary value but for the trade that he had mastered. The cooper was a vital member of the plantation community constructing the barrels and buckets that were widely used in many capacities. Why James would leave the group that day and enter water that he was reportedly "remarkable fearful of" and never ventured into water above his waist, is unknown. The others that were with him that day stated that James was well acquainted with the area consequently should have known the depth of the water. Lund was equally mystified. He wrote, "to look at the place you would think hardly possible, for the willows grow thick on the Bank hanging over the water, it appears to me the least exertion whatever would save one, for the place where the water is deep is not more than Six feet wide."[300]

Relaying the news of the death of a valuable slave could not have been an easy or pleasant task for the manager of Mount Vernon, but in this particular letter he had even more bad news to share. On the same day that James drowned, another slave seriously wounded himself. Carpenter James "by a stroke from his Broad axe" cut into his own

[300] Ibid.

ankle and heel. Lund predicted that he would be unable to work for many months.[301] Cooper James' death may be considered to be an unfortunate accident, but Carpenter James' self-wounding may be the result of an act of defiance. Running away was not the only way that slaves could resist their situation. By harming themselves or pretending to be ill, they could gain some agency over their day-to-day life and resist their master's will. Carpenter James apparently had a history of this kind of act or was accident-prone. Years later Washington wrote that James was "a very worthless fellow; indeed I have sometimes suspected that he cuts himself on purpose to lay up for something or another of this sort is constantly happening to him."[302]

In revolutionary Virginia, the language of the patriots reached the slave population and they interpreted their masters' cries for liberty as applying to themselves as well.[303] Many slaves believed – or at least hoped – a British win over the colonists would be to their advantage. When a British warship arrived at Mount Vernon in the spring of 1781 some of the slaves took their futures into their own hands. In early April, a flotilla of six ships and some other smaller craft traveled up the Potomac River to the great consternation of the citizens of Alexandria. Captain Richard Graves of the H.M.S. *Savage* had already landed on the Maryland side of the Potomac and burned several houses in view of Mount Vernon. He next turned his attention to Washington's plantation threatening to burn it unless Lund relinquished provisions. Lund initially refused to negotiate with the captain, but in the face of the greater loss of Washington's property,

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[301] Ibid. This letter contains the stories of both Cooper James and Carpenter James.
[302] GW to William Pearce, 20 March 1796, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*,; 5 July 1786, *Papers of GW, Diaries,* 5:3.
[303] Holton, "'Rebel against Rebel,'" 149.

for which he felt great responsibility, he acquiesced and gave the British some sheep, hogs, and other provisions. In the midst of this transfer of goods, seventeen slaves made a bid for freedom by boarding the ship. They included: Peter, Lewis, and Frank all identified as "old;" overseer Frederick; Gunner, a brick maker; Harry, a hostler; Tom and Sambo; Thomas, a house servant; Peter, twenty year old cooper; Stephen; James; Watty, a weaver; Daniel; and Lucy, Esther, and Deborah – all young women.[304] Washington heard about the incident via the Marquis de Lafayette. He expressed to Lund his great disappointment that provisions had been freely given to the enemy stating, "it would have been less painful circumstance to me, to have heard, that in consequence of your non-compliance with their request, they had burnt my House, and laid the Plantation in ruins."[305] Washington must have been chagrined to have received this news from Lafayette and to have it known that Mount Vernon was provisioning the enemy.

Owners tracked the whereabouts of the missing slaves by all means possible, including word of mouth, advertisements, and hiring trackers to retrieve them. When Jacky Custis wrote to his mother informing her of his safe arrival at camp in Yorktown, he added a postscript asking her to pass on the news to Lund Washington that he had inquired after the runaway slaves belonging to Lund, Jacky and "the General." He had, however, heard that "Ned is in York a pioneer, old Joe Rachier is in the Neighborhood

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[304] GW to Lund Washington, 30 April 1781, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1754-1799* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940). Lund Washington added a note to this list later stating that four of the men had been recovered in Philadelphia, Lucy and Esther were found after the siege of Yorktown, and "salvage" was paid to retrieve Tom from Philadelphia.

[305] GW to Lund Washington, 30 April 1781, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, 22:14-15.

tho I have not been able to see him…I fear that most who left Us are not existing, the mortality that has taken place among the Wretches is really incredible. I have seen numbers lying dead in the Woods, and many so exhausted that they cannot walk."[306] Custis' story was a common one. Thomas Jefferson also experienced the flight of a number of slaves from his plantations in 1781. Many were stricken with disease, most likely smallpox, and only a few were returned to their master. Jefferson sold the lucky few that evaded disease a couple of years after their return to Monticello.[307] Perhaps Jefferson could never put their betrayal out of his mind nor the fear they would incite others to run away as well.[308]

After 1779, the southern states became the main military theater, and Washington made a brief stop at Mount Vernon on his way to engage the British at Yorktown in September 1781. It was his first sight of his home in over six years. The next day General Rochambeau, the French commander, arrived and soon Washington and his party headed south. Shortly after Washington's triumph at Yorktown, Jacky Custis was

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[306] Fields, *Worthy Partner*, 187. Letter from John Parke Custis to Martha Washington, 12 October 1781.

[307] Pybus, "Recovered Lives as a Window into the Enslaved Family," 128. Pybus writes that although many of the slaves that fled to Dunmore's camp were inoculated for small pox, the appearance of new recruits kept the contagion alive. It became a much greater problem than Dunmore and his men were prepared to handle.

[308] Lucia Stanton, *"Those Who Labor for My Happiness": Slavery at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 132-133; Tom Costa, *The Geography of Slavery*, http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/. A digital collection of advertisements for runaway slaves and servants in 18th- and 19th-century newspapers.

stricken with camp fever. His mother and wife had time to travel to be with him when he died on November 5 and Washington was there as well.[309]

With the surrender of the British Army under General Cornwallis at Yorktown in October 1781, most of the active fighting of the war was over. Washington remained in command of the Continental Army until after the Treaty of Paris was signed and the last of the British troops left America at the end of 1783. Washington lived up to his republican values as he prepared to return home to his life as a farmer after his long absence. Americans and Europeans alike hailed Washington for choosing to emulate the Roman general Cincinnatus who returned to his plow after his victory on the field of battle rather than remaining in power.[310] This idea was widely dispersed through newspapers that published poems like Philip Freneau's, which memorialized Washington's choice, "Now hurrying from the busy scene, Where thy Potowmack's waters flow, May'st thou enjoy thy rural reign, and every earthly blessing know; Thus He whom Rome's proud legions sway'd Retrun'd, and sought his sylvan shade."[311] Even

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[309] Jacky Custis and his wife had four children born between 1776 and 1781. Elizabeth Parke Custis born in 1776, Martha Parke Custis born at the end of 1777, Eleanor Parke Custis born in 1779, and George Washington Parke Custis in 1781.

[310] William Williams to GW, 2 February 1795, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 17:478-482. For example, Williams, a former colonel of a Connecticut militia regiment, wrote that Washington "wished to retire like the great dictator of Rome to the calm, peaceful and <sweeter> walks of private and domestic life."

[311] Philip Freneau, "Verses Occasioned by General Washington's arrival in Philadelphia, on his way to his seat in Virginia" *Freeman's Journal*, 10 December 1783. http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/38529 Accessed 8 February 2016.

George III of England stated that Washington "would be the greatest man in the world" if he returned to private life after winning the war.[312]

Washington's trip home was described as a celebration by David Humphreys, an aide-de-camp to Washington, and later his biographer, "From his Triumphant Entry into New York, upon the evacuation of that city by the British Army, to his arrival at Mount Vernon," Humphreys declared, "after the resignation of his commission to Congress, festive crowds impeded his passage through all the populous towns."[313] Grateful citizens celebrated Washington's return to Mount Vernon. By the time he reached Alexandria on Christmas Eve, the weather had turned cold and snowy so there were no crowds to greet him. However, on New Year's Day the gentlemen of Alexandria provided an "elegant entertainment" at Mr. Duvall's Tavern for "their illustrious Fellow-Citizen General Washington." Thirteen patriotic toasts were followed by the discharge of thirteen cannons and "Mirth, Harmony, and good Humour" prevailed.[314]

George and Martha Washington were not the same people who had left Virginia eight years before. They had achieved a fame that they had never expected. Even Martha Washington's travels had been celebrated and reported on in the newspapers. At each city she passed through she received recognition such as at Williamsburg in 1777 when her arrival was noted with "the ringing of bells, several discharges of artillery…and the

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[312] Robert C. Alberts, *Benjamin West: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 123. Alberts quotes an account of a conversation between the artist Benjamin West and George III recorded by Joseph Farington.
[313] Humphreys, *"Life of George Washington,"* Zagarri, ed., 33.
[314] *The Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser*, 6 January 1784; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 35. Waldstreicher notes that the number thirteen became highly symbolic in celebrations.

cordial good wishes of all the inhabitants who have the greatest regard for her ladyship's own personal merit."[315] For the rest of their lives they would be living links to the Revolutionary War and even more visitors would make their way to Mount Vernon to pay their respects to and satisfy their curiosity about the hero of the new nation, his wife, and how he lived.[316] Washington was now a "citizen of the world" and was drawn into a larger circle of associates and correspondents than he had previously.[317]

There were many reasons to celebrate independence and the victory over Great Britain, but there were losses and disappointments as well. Some 60,000 former residents of America who had supported the loyalist cause left their homes at the end of the war including thousands of former slaves who had made a bid for freedom. Among them were even some of Washington's former slaves.[318] Mount Vernon had not fared well during Washington's absence and much needed to be done to repair the "deranged situation" of his property.[319] Washington had made a great sacrifice in the role he played in separating the new country from the old.

The Revolutionary War brought great change to Mount Vernon and the surrounding community. Economic and political upheaval revealed deep cracks in society. Gentry planters and farmers like George Washington could no longer expect deference as a matter of course – at least not from the middling or lower classes. The

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[315] *Maryland Gazette*, 21 August 1777.
[316] Jean B. Lee, ed., *Experiencing Mount Vernon: Eyewitness Accounts, 1784-1865* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 2-3.
[317] Robert Middlekauff, *Washington's Revolution: The Making of America's First Leader* (New York: Knopf, 2015), 6.
[318] Pybus, "Recovered Lives as a Window into the Enslaved Family," 108.
[319] GW to Marquis de Lafayette, 1 February 1784, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.*, 1:88-89.

enslaved members of the community remained in bondage, but they like their white neighbors had learned the language of liberty and freedom.

CHAPTER 3

A FIRST RETIREMENT, 1784 TO 1789: "TO TASTE THE FRUITS OF FREEDOM"[320]

As the citizens of the United States of America prepared "to taste the fruits of freedom," George Washington was surveying the state of Mount Vernon after his long absence. An abundance of rebuilding and revitalizing would be necessary to make the plantation the model of efficiency and profitability he envisioned. Washington hired new farm managers including an English farmer especially recruited to bring the latest agricultural practices to Mount Vernon. Washington's interest in agricultural experimentation grew as he carried out extensive correspondence with like-minded individuals in both America and England. Visitors arrived at Mount Vernon in even greater numbers than before the war. In addition to family and community members, there were increasingly individuals from farther afield reflecting Washington's status as a citizen of the world as his interests expanded from the local into national and even international concerns.

Several projects to the west occupied Washington in 1784 and 1785. One involved a scheme to connect Ohio Valley settlements with the Potomac River via a system of canals and Washington was elected president of the Potowmack Company in 1785. The company sought to improve river transportation and extend it above the fall

[320] GW to Marquis de Lafayette, 18 June 1788, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.,* 6: 338.

line in order to have direct water access to trade with the West. Another project had a more immediate impact on Washington's finances. In the autumn of 1784, Washington made a trip to his Western lands to see how the properties had fared during his absence. The trip was undoubtedly inspired, at least in part, by the discouraging news Lund Washington had shared with him in late 1783 with regards to his rent collection efforts. Many people had experienced financial difficulties because of trade interruptions and inflation brought on by the war. Lund reported that he had been unable to collect even one shilling from tenants both "over the ridge" and on this side of the Blue Ridge Mountains.[321]

Washington retained some sense of paternalism for his tenants in spite of the self-consciously expansive economic development of the post-revolutionary era. Washington directed that it was his wish "to obtain justice for myself but not to act with that rigor in effecting it as to bring ruin or even considerable distress upon poor families." However, he felt that letting rents go unpaid from year to year was unsatisfactory.[322] Each tenant had his or her own tale of woe: crops destroyed by rust; others had no cash, but hoped to be able to pay in tobacco or flour after the harvest had been processed. In each case farm manager, Lund Washington had to evaluate the character of the tenant to decide whether they would be able to pay in the future. For example, Lund concluded that the Widow Bartlett, the sister of the acting Sheriff of Berkeley County, reputedly a man of good character, should be able to raise the capital to bring her rent current. At several

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[321] Lund Washington to GW, 1 October 1783, Founders Online, National Archives (http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-11882.
[322] GW to Battaile Muse, 4 December 1786, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.*, 4:436.

properties Lund found that the tenants had sold their leases to get out from under the rent they owed, but still would not be able to pay.[323] Washington then hired Battaile Muse of Berkeley County as his agent in the collection of his rents in Berkeley, Frederick and Fauquier counties. Washington had two connections to Muse. His father, Col. George Muse had served in the Virginia Militia under Washington during the Fort Necessity campaign and Battaile Muse was agent for George William Fairfax's Virginia land after he left for England. In a letter, Washington instructed Muse to sue one of his tenants, David Kennedy, who had served under him during the French and Indian War and had rented a plantation on Bullskin Plantation since that time. In spite of his personal connection with Kennedy, Washington evidently felt that thirty years was a more than adequate grace period for the repayment of debt. Even still, Washington told Muse to stop the suit immediately if Kennedy provided any indication he intended to pay the debt or offered a repayment schedule.[324]

The number of landless individuals in the Chesapeake region overall had grown from about one third of the white population to more than one half after the Revolution and the numbers continued to rise.[325] However, the number of tenants in Fairfax County remained fairly constant in the years after independence. Leaseholders in the upper

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[323] Lund Washington to GW, 1 October 1783, Founders Online, National Archives (http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-11882. Washington left Mount Vernon 1 September and returned 4 October 1784. He reckoned he had traveled 680 miles. See diary entry for 4 October 1784, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 4:57-68.
[324] GW to Battaile Muse, 12 March 1789, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 1:388.
[325] Sarson, "Landlessness and Tenancy in Early National Prince George's County," 571; see also Jackson Turner Main, "The Distribution of Property in Post-Revolutionary Virginia," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Vol. 41, No. 2). Main states that the number of landless rose to between one half to three quarters of adult white males in the 1780s.

district of Fairfax County in 1787 constituted fifteen percent or 23 of 152 householders. By the end of the eighteenth century, the numbers had changed little with the total population of tenants at 14 % or 39 of 279 households. Neighboring Loudoun County had a much higher ratio of tenants with 37 % of householders identified as tenants for the same period.[326] Tenants continued to live on Mount Vernon land, but far fewer than before as Washington either began to farm the land formerly occupied by tenants or installed overseers or other hired workers in the houses. Washington reported that he had no land available for tenancy in 1784 except for 1200 acres of wood covered land that would require a great deal of effort to clear before farming could begin and even more discouraging, the soil was reputedly of poor quality.[327]

Tenants provided income through rents, facilitated the clearing of land, and helped to maintain property under the best of circumstances. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the relationship between landlord and tenant could be contentious. Washington consulted with David Stuart, the husband of Jacky Custis' widow, regarding another tenant Edward Williams. Washington stated that he wanted to punish Williams, or scare him at the very least, as he believed him to be a "bad man." The complaint involved the destruction of fences owned by Washington so that Williams' livestock could graze on his landlord's pasture. Just as serious was the theft and slaughter of at least one of Washington's hogs.[328] Williams, who had been Washington's tenant since 1760 on the

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[326] Humphrey, "Conflicting Independence," 180. These figures were drawn from Fairfax County Land Tax records.
[327] GW to I. Sailly, 20 June 1784, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 1:466.
[328] GW to David Stuart, 6 December 1786, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 4:446.

Clifton's Neck land, which became a part of River Farm, appears at least to have been responsible about paying his rent, if not about respecting Washington's property.

At the end of 1785, long time farm manager Lund Washington indicated his desire to move to his own property and take up farming for himself. Lund and his wife, Elizabeth, had lived at Mount Vernon since their marriage in 1779. Washington gifted a 450-acre tract of land to Lund situated about five miles south of Alexandria in repayment of debts incurred on Washington's behalf during the Revolutionary War and the couple wanted to settle there.[329] Washington at first professed surprise at Lund's request, but soon decided to recruit the services of his nephew, George Augustine Washington, who was already living at Mount Vernon with his new wife. George Augustine had served as a major in the Continental army and as aide to Lafayette during the Revolution. After the war, George Augustine spent a year in the West Indies and then South Carolina seeking relief from what was most likely tuberculosis. He returned to Mount Vernon in the spring of 1785 and married Frances Bassett.[330] Frances or Fanny, as the family knew her, was the daughter of Martha's sister Anna Dandridge Bassett and Col. Burwell Bassett of Eltham plantation in New Kent County, Virginia. Fanny lost her mother when she was

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[329] 25 February 1785, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 4:95. The deed specified that the land was in repayment of money paid to Thomas Hanson Marshall for land on GW's behalf (Fairfax County Deeds, Book P–1, 415–17, Vi Microfilm). The land was formally deeded on 25 Feb 1785. Elizabeth Foote Washington kept a diary for many years, including her time at Mount Vernon, but wrote nothing about her life there except for an entry dated November 1779: "I have lately promised to enter into the holy state of matrimony…as there is a possibility of my living in houses not my own for some time – may the divine goodness assist me so that I may study to live in peace and friendship with the family where I live…"

[330] 13 May 1785, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 4:137-138. George Augustine Washington and Frances Bassett were married on 15 October 1785. They had three children: Anna Maria (1788-1814), George Fayette (1790-1867), and Charles Augustine (b. 1791).

just ten years old, but she visited at Mount Vernon often after her mother's death and came to live with her aunt and uncle permanently in 1784. The marriage of George's favorite nephew and Martha's favorite niece brought the two families even closer together and provided Martha with companionship when Washington was away. George Augustine and Fanny were living at Mount Vernon after their marriage until they decided where to settle permanently when Lund Washington resigned. Hiring George Augustine meant that Washington could keep his favorite nephew nearby as well as have a trustworthy farm manager.

Other additions to the Washington family group were the two youngest of Jacky Custis' children Eleanor (Nelly) and George Washington (Wash). George and Martha began caring for the children as their own after Jacky's death. Nelly was just two years old and Wash only an infant when their father died. A Custis slave named Moll, and Ally, a young girl and the daughter of Kitty, a dairymaid, were, respectively, nurse and companion to the Custis children.[331] Although the children went back and forth between Mount Vernon and Abingdon where their mother lived with her second husband David Stuart, their primary residence was with their grandparents. Their sisters Elizabeth and Martha lived with their mother, but were frequent visitors to Mount Vernon.[332]

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[331] Lund Washington to GW, 1 October 1783, Founders Online, National Archives (http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-11882); 1786 Slave list.
[332] The four children of John Parke Custis and Eleanor Calvert Custis were Elizabeth Parke (1776-1832), Martha Parke (1777-1854), Eleanor Parke (1779-1852), and George Washington Parke Custis (1781-1857). See, "Self-Portrait: Eliza Custis, 1808," William Dana Hoyt, ed., *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 53 (1945): 89-100. Eliza Custis, who lived primarily with her mother, wrote an autobiographical letter that details the travels back and forth between her mother's home and that of her grandparents. She

There were few days that guests were not arriving or departing and often there were groups of four or five people at a time. Most visitors stayed for at least one night except for those who lived nearby and even then family and close friends often stayed for extended periods.[333] Considering that there were already at least seven people in full time residence: George and Martha, George Augustine and Fanny Washington, Nelly and Wash, Washington's secretary, and half a dozen servants in attendance, even a day without company constituted a crowd. For a time it seemed possible that Washington's mother, Mary Ball Washington, might join the family circle at Mount Vernon, but Washington wrote to her to explain why he thought she should consider making other plans. His description of the household, while possibly somewhat exaggerated to make it sound as unappealing as possible to an eighty-year-old woman, nonetheless gives some insight into life in the Mansion House. Washington compared Mount Vernon to "a well resorted tavern" with numerous strangers traveling through and stopping for the night. He continued that his mother, if she were to live there, would be obliged to dress suitably for company as the visitors were of "the first distinction." Her other option was to remain in her room, which would not be peaceful at any rate because of the "sitting up of company, the noise and bustle of servants – and many other things."[334] Washington's reasons for why his mother should not live at Mount Vernon were very likely true.

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emphasizes her trauma at being separated from her nurse, Molly, who accompanied the younger children to Mount Vernon.

[333] 1 January 1785 to 31 March 1785, *Papers of GW, Diaries*. A random survey of Washington's diary for the first the first three months of 1785 (more or less in the middle of the confederation period) revealed at least fifty different individuals visited Mount Vernon with some returning multiple times.

[334] GW to Mary Ball Washington, 15 February 1787, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.*, 5:35.

Some of the new wave of visitors who arrived at Mount Vernon after the Revolution – many previously unknown to Washington – recorded their impressions of Mount Vernon and its occupants. In 1785, Elkanah Watson of Massachusetts, a former courier for Benjamin Franklin during the Revolution, arrived at Mount Vernon with letters of introduction from Nathanael Green, who had served as a general in the Revolution, and John Fitzgerald, a merchant in Alexandria. Watson found Washington, "kind and benignant in the domestic circle…His servants seemed to watch his eye, and to anticipate his every wish; hence a look was equivalent to a command. His servant Billy, the faithful companion of his military career, was always at his side." In the same year, Robert Hunter of Scotland arrived in the company of the same John Fitzgerald who had introduced Watson and Richard Henry Lee and his son. Hunter was impressed with Mount Vernon's "situation…by nature one of the sweetest in the world." He professed to be astonished by the number of service buildings on the estate "for his different workmen and Negroes to live in" and that he had "carpenters, bricklayers, brewers, blacksmiths, bakers, etc., etc. – and even has a well-assorted store for the use of his family and servants." After Washington reportedly drank "a few glasses of champagne got quite merry, and being with his intimate friends laughed and talked a great deal." Hunter was acquainted with Washington's secretary, William Shaw, who told him that packets of letters from all over the world arrived daily at Mount Vernon and Washington answered them each morning.[335]

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[335] Robert Hunter, *Quebec to Carolina in 1785-1786: Being the Travel Diary and Observations of Robert Hunter, Jr., a Young Merchant of London,* Louis B. Wright and

Interest in Washington was so great that some of his visitors were even reported in the newspapers. English historian, Catherine Macaulay Graham and her husband, William Graham, visited with an introduction from James and Mercy Otis Warren of Massachusetts. The unnamed author of an extract of a letter from Alexandria in *The Massachusetts Advertiser* reported that he had the "honour of seeing the meeting between the celebrated Mrs. Macaulay Graham, and our patriotic disinterested and beloved General Washington. Two such congenial minds, animated with the genuine refined sentiments of liberty, soon became acquainted with each other. The General received and welcomed us with all the hospitality and politeness of a country gentleman, distinguished with the amiable affability of a soldier."[336] Graham, the author of *The History of England, 1763 to 1783* was known for her sympathy with the American cause in the Revolution. After Graham's departure, Martha wrote to Mercy Otis Warren to thank her for introducing "a Lady so well known in the literary world" whose company they had enjoyed for a few days. The Grahams were at Mount Vernon for ten days in June 1785.[337]

George Washington presided at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia from May 8 to September 22, 1787, but that did not bring a halt to the activities at Mount Vernon nor Washington's involvement in the day-to-day management of his farms and other industries. While Washington was away from Mount Vernon in the summer of

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Marion Tingling, eds. (San Marino, Calif., 1943), 191-198, quoted in Lee, *Experiencing Mount Vernon*, 28.

[336] *The Massachusetts Advertiser*, 5 July 1785. The witness of the meeting between Washington and Graham may have been Baltimore merchant George Lux, who accompanied the Grahams to Mount Vernon.

[337] Martha Washington to Mercy Otis Warren, 9 June 1785, Fields, ed., *Worthy Partne*r, 196.

1787, a friend visited and left behind a detailed plan of the buildings and landscape surrounding the Mansion House. Samuel Vaughan was a London merchant who had supported the American cause during the war. At the end of the war, he moved to Philadelphia with his family. Although a merchant by profession, Vaughan had a deep interest in the landscape and was involved in plans to improve the green spaces in his adopted city, especially the State House Garden. The plan of Mount Vernon completed by Vaughan in August of 1787 shows the layout of buildings and gardens at that time. Washington approved the work that Vaughan had done and noted only one "departure from the original." Vaughan had neglected to show two earthen mounds planted with weeping willows that allowed the viewing of the vista towards the west gate.[338]

One of Washington's numerous priorities after the war was enhancing the landscape of Mount Vernon. The development of English landscape gardening was a long process beginning in the early seventeenth century and reaching its peak around 1760, influenced by European landscape designers in France and Italy. The characteristics of English landscape design included extensive views, uses of ha-has to enhance the view of agricultural fields and livestock without said livestock being able to graze where they were not wanted, and clumps of trees and shrubbery interspersed throughout the whole.[339] Washington began collecting ornamental trees and shrubs to

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[338] Emily T. Cooperman, "Biography of Samuel Vaughan," *The Cultural Landscape Foundation* (12/10/2008, http://tclf.org/pioneer/samuel-vaughan/biography-samuel-vaughan, accessed 20 April 2015); GW to Samuel Vaughan, 12 November 1787 *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 5:432.

[339] John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, eds., *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620-1820* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1988), 1-42, passim. Washington owned a copy of both Batty Langley's *New Principles of Gardening*

create a "wilderness" around the meandering path that encircled the bowling green even before the Revolution. Since his return home he had changed the landscape on the west side of the house to draw the eye towards house as one entered Mansion House farm and created a deer park on the east side towards the river. His efforts were not always successful and the hard work of the slaves tasked with the job of digging the large holes for the trees often came to naught. Washington recorded in his diary that most of the transplanted trees looked sickly and all of the pines and most of the hollies were dead.[340]

Washington evidently felt that an English gardener was a necessary requirement to carry out his vision of the Mount Vernon landscape. Philip Bateman, an immigrant from Leeds, England, served as gardener from 1773 until at least 1790, began as an indentured servant. His work agreement of 1787 included: "annually, a decent set of clothes befitting a man in his station; to consist of a coat, vest and breeches; a working jacket and breeches, of homespun, besides two white shirts; three check ditto; two pair of yarn stockings; two pair of thread ditto; two linen pocket handkerchiefs; two pair linen overalls; as many pair of shoes as are actually necessary to him." In addition, he would receive "four dollars at Christmas, with which he may be drunk four days and four nights; two dollars at Easter to effect the same purpose; two dollars also at Whitsuntide, to be

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(London: A. Bettesworth and J. Batley, 1728) and William Watts, *The Seats of the Nobility and Gentry, in a Collection of the Most Interesting and Picturesque Views* (Chelsea, England, 1779) by the time he began his re-design of the landscape of Mount Vernon.

[340] 7 May 1785, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 4:134-135.

drunk two days; a dram in the morning and a drink of grog at dinner or at noon."[341] In spite of his drunkenness, Lund was pleased with the gardener's work. He felt sure that Bateman had no intention to ever leave Mount Vernon and that if he was indulged in "getting drunk now and then" he would continue to be satisfied with his position.[342]

Vaughn's plan reveals an arrangement of buildings and grounds that is essentially symmetrical. The bowling green and formal gardens were spaces intended for the enjoyment of family and friends. An arcade connected the mansion to the white servants hall to the north and kitchen to the south. The space on the west front of the house between these buildings created a middle ground – or a space shared by all as guests arrived at the mansion and house slaves went about their business between the house and kitchen. Other support buildings were arranged along two lanes on either side of the circle created by these three buildings. Vaughan's plan illustrates a domestic landscape of workspaces for both artisans and slaves adjacent to the mansion and how near they worked to each other. Along the north lane were the shop of the shoemaker and tailor, the spinning house, and the smith's shop. The south lane was populated with the store house, smoke house, wash house, and then the coach house, stables, and barn with carpenters shop further from the mansion. Each building constituted its own little factory for the production or processing of specialized items.

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[341] Philip Bater and George Washington, 23 April 1787, Articles of Agreement, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4, General Correspondence, 1697-1799.
[342] Lund Washington to GW, 1 October 1783, Founders Online, National Archives (http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-11882).

One of the many support buildings associated with plantation life shown on Vaughn's plan was the storehouse. Its purpose was to provide secure storage space for valuable items not currently in use.[343] A record book for the storehouse at Mount Vernon is extant for the calendar year 1787. The 1787 Store Book is a small bound volume easily held in the hand or kept in a pocket measuring about five by three inches in size. It tracks the day-to-day activities of many of the members of the Mount Vernon community, including the Washington family, overseers, hired workers and slaves. Even if no other documents survived from Washington's farm operations, the store book with its brief entries would still provide insights into the operation of the farm and something about the web of relationships that it supported. Placing the information in the store book within the context of Washington's correspondence, diary entries, and other farm records provides the opportunity for a deeper understanding of commerce and community in the eighteenth century.

The storehouse, situated just off the circle in front of the Mansion House facing the Bowling Green, was in full view of the Washington household and provided a place to store an assortment of items as they arrived at the plantation (fig. 3). It held food, seeds, and clothing and other supplies for the slaves. The storehouse also served as a secure space where valuable tools and other materials could be kept under control and not subject to theft or careless loss. Suspicions of thievery were on planters' minds.

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[343] John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 84-86. Storehouses were usually just that – buildings to store items associated with the running of a plantation – but Robert "King" Carter of Lancaster County maintained an actual store from which he sold items to local farmers. There is no evidence that Washington ran such an operation although on occasion he might sell an item to a neighbor with a particularly urgent need.

Washington's agreement with overseer Nelson Kelly specified that he was to keep the "key of the corn house, deliver out the corn, and use great frugality therein."[344] Another planter advised his nephew to keep the corn house locked or the slaves would sell whatever they could and "starve themselves" rather than eating the extra rations.[345]

Figure 3. Photo by Gwendolyn K. White, Store House

The storehouse contents reveal that agricultural pursuits were at the heart of Mount Vernon. It held diverse tools and a variety of seeds in season. Generally, slaves

[344] Agreement with Nelson Kelly, [1 September 1762], *Papers of GW*, *Col. Ser.*, 7:148-151.
[345] Tillson, *Accommodating Revolutions*, 131.

received tools directly from the storehouse, which was recorded in the store book as well as a notation when the tool was returned and its condition. A slave laborer at Ferry Plantation named Cupid returned an "old spade" and Tom Davis turned in a broken shovel, a laborer at Mansion House. It was noted that one pruning chisel and staves went to Will, the overseer at Muddy Hole and that they had been returned at a later date.[346] The tracking of tools was at least partially due to slaves using them to trade for food or other items with passing whites or even slaves in an underground economy.[347]

The contents of the store book were divided into four sections. The first is a notation from April listing the "skins put into the vatts" referring to tannery operations on the plantation. The next section enumerates the articles received into the store by date for the year. The articles received into the store range from old items that have been returned to items newly purchased from a variety of sources: seine rope from Alexandria, seed from Muddy Hole, peas from Colonel Lee, scythes from Philadelphia, sole leather from Boston, and nails from Mr. Porter. The third section contains the items delivered from the store. This is a much larger section than the items taken into the store. The items appearing in this section were passed out to individuals as needed all over the plantation. The store book appears to have several different handwritings in it. John Fairfax was the overseer of the Mansion House Farm at this time and would most likely be in charge of the store house, but George Augustine Washington or English farmer James Bloxham

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[346] 1787 Mount Vernon Store book, entries for 3 April, 3 September and 2 January; See Chris Evans, "The Plantation Hoe: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Commodity, 1650-1850," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser. 69:1, 71-100. Evans includes a discussion of the difference between hilling hoes and grubbing hoes.
[347] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 368-370.

may have also kept some of the records. The majority of individuals mentioned in the store book worked at the Mansion House farm. Presumably, each farm had a similar, if less comprehensive, storage place to keep tools and other supplies under the watch of the overseer.

The item in the storehouse that undoubtedly touched the greatest number of lives at Mount Vernon was the rum. By 1770, colonists consumed large amounts of alcohol on a daily basis. Adult males consumed the equivalent of seven shots of rum and women two pints of hard cider.[348] The consumption of alcohol was a part of daily life in the eighteenth century and was often the only beverage they could safely drink due to contamination of water sources from livestock and other contaminants. Hosts served alcohol to their guests, hired workers received part of their pay in alcohol, and slaves also consumed alcohol regularly – some of it sanctioned by their masters.[349]

The rum account portion of the 1787 Store Book begins with a record of the 491 gallons placed in the store during the year, at least some of it purchased from Alexandria merchants.[350] Rum served as payment, as reward, and inducement even though Washington called rum "the bane of morals and the parent of idleness."[351] A notation lists the individuals who were to receive a specified amount of rum each week. Included in

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[348] Sarah Hand Meacham, *Every Home a Distillery: Alcohol, Gender, and Technology in the Colonial Chesapeake* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 2.
[349] See W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).
[350] Gruber, trans., *William Carlin Ledger*. 51, 135. Tailor William Carlin also sold sundry items such as tea, sugar, butter, and rum. Thomas Bishop, who often ran errands for Washington, purchased at least ten gallons of rum from Carlin between 1768 and 1772.
[351] GW to Comte de Moustier, 15 December 1788, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 1:179.

this group were the tailor and the shoemaker; two joiners; the head ditcher, Daniel Overdonck, and carpenter Thomas Green. Some slaves also received regular rum rations. Davy, Morris, and Will, all overseers, received an allotment as did Isaac the leader of the slave carpenters. Presumably, these individuals shared their rum with those that worked under their direction. Also receiving set amounts of rum was Simon Smith, a ship carpenter who was at Mount Vernon for about three months building a fishing boat and the miller.[352]

Almost any event appears to have been a good time for rum. The farm manager or overseers disbursed rum to slaves and hired workers for especially difficult or unpleasant assignments.[353] At Mount Vernon bottles of rum were given to the people making bricks, those burning coal, people going to Georgetown, people going to Alexandria, for the people at the fishery and those who got the fish out of the boat after night. Rum was given to slaves during fish runs, which might last for several weeks or even a month. Lund Washington recorded the delivery of eleven gallons to Posey's fishery and ten to Johnson's ferry during one fish run.[354] Rum was also given to the people who assisted in getting the cow out of the mire, the carpenters raising the green house, to Joe and Tom for cutting the grass, to the farmer for shearing the sheep, and those working on the race of the mill.

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[352] Simon Smith arrived at Mount Vernon 5 January 1787 and left 17 March 1787. He was paid 8 shillings for each foot completed and one pint of rum per day. 5 January 1787, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 5:90; Ledger B: 242; 1787 Store Book.
[353] Meacham, *Every Home a Distillery*, 19.
[354] Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 29.

Harvest time meant that all available hands would be in the fields cutting and shocking the wheat sheaves and raking any remaining pieces from the earth. Even Myrtilla, one of the spinners who ordinarily worked in the spinning house, was enlisted to join the gangs at Dogue Run and Muddy Hole and Sall Brass one of the washers helped out at Ferry Farm. This tremendous undertaking also merited rum rations.[355] The Store book rum accounts for June through August lists gallon after gallon of rum being sent to each farm for harvest activities. Morris at Dogue Run received in excess of fifteen gallons of rum in the month of July with the overseers of the other farms receiving comparable amounts.[356]

Rum was not the only beverage available at Mount Vernon for workers. Cider was also usually an option. It was noted in the rum accounts on January of 1787 that the "white people have one bottle [of rum] per day from this date on acct of the Cyder's being out." Since the apple season lasted only from late summer to early winter, once the year's batch ran out the supply could not be replenished until the next year.[357] Beer was another choice, but was surprisingly rare in the Chesapeake, at least English-style beer, since hops were not widely grown. Only planters like Washington with large acreages grew barley, another ingredient of beer recipes.[358] Bloxham's agreement with Washington included, "as much Bran as is sufficient to brew beer for his family's use."[359]

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[355] Meacham, *Every Home a Distillery*, 19; 5 July 1786, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 5:3.
[356] 1787 Mount Vernon Store Book, Rum accounts. Lucia Stanton notes that Jefferson provided whiskey to slaves during harvest, but otherwise they did not receive any regular rations. Stanton, *"Those Who Labor for My Happiness,"* 63, 74.
[357] Meacham, *Every Home a Distillery*, 41.
[358] Ibid., 36-37.
[359] "Agreement with James Bloxham," 31 May 1786, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 4:86.

Like whites at every level of society, slaves drank alcohol at all of life's major events: births, weddings, illnesses, and funerals.[360] Rum was frequently given to individuals by Martha Washington as both a reward for extra work and as consolation for personal loss. Hercules received three bottles of rum "to bury his wife by Mrs. Washington's order." Hercules, cook for the Washington family, had been married to a slave known as Lame Alice who worked as a seamstress and together they had a son, Richmond, who was about ten years old when his mother died. [361] Rum and other alcohol was present at the birth of children both to ease the mother's labor pains and to pass the long hours for the women who served as her attendants. Slave women regularly received a bottle of rum while "in child bed."[362]

The store book reveals some information on Martha Washington's involvement with plantation activities, specifically the production of cloth and clothing. As Cynthia Kierner has elucidated, the production of clothing was second only to that of food for a typical eighteenth-century white woman, "regardless of her family's social rank."[363] Although many planters as well as middling women appear to have sent their cloth out to be finished by others, at Mount Vernon they were completed on site.[364] Shirts for the male slaves were made under Martha's supervision and in August, twenty-six shirts were delivered to the storehouse. Blankets and stockings were disbursed to slaves at her

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[360] Meacham, *Every Home a Distillery*, 20; 1787 Store Book, Rum Accounts, April and September 1787.
[361] 1787 Store Book, Rum accounts.
[362] Meacham, *Every Home a Distillery*, 17.
[363] Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 14.
[364] Sturtz, *Within Her Power*, 137-138.

direction during a cold snap in the winter.[365] Martha also showed interest in the personal needs of some individuals. Old Frank received a pair of shoes on her order and the tailor was given an old trunk for his use. Martha did not manage the work of the spinners directly, but had the services of Margaret Overdonck to handle that task. However, Martha requested raw cotton for her spinners from her sister-in-law, Hannah Bushrod Washington. She stated that the spinners had completed the work of spinning all of the wool on hand and "had little to do" so she thought she would busy them with spinning cotton, a commodity that was difficult to get in Alexandria shops.[366] Martha also made sure that the spinners had the tools they needed and requested that they receive two hackles from the storehouse, tools used in the laborious steps of processing hemp and flax into cloth.[367]

Most of the items that are listed as coming into or going out of the store house relate to labor on the plantation be it agricultural, trades, or construction. There are, however, a few interesting exceptions that reveal Washington's expanding world. On August 23, 1787 a bust of Revolutionary War naval hero John Paul Jones made its way to the storehouse at Mount Vernon. A month earlier Washington had received a letter from Jones in which he wrote, "The bearer of this Letter, will deliver to your order the Bust you do me the Honor to accept."[368] That Washington admired Jones greatly is evident from the instructions he sent to his nephew, George Augustine regarding the bust. In a

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[365] 22 February 1787, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 5:107-108.
[366] Martha Washington to Hannah Bushrod Washington, 22 June 1784, Fields, *Worthy Partner*, 194-195. Martha specified that it was West India cotton that was not available in "this part of the country."
[367] 1787 Store Book, 25 April 1787.
[368] John Paul Jones to GW, 25 July 1787, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 5:272.

letter written from Philadelphia dated 12 August, he informed his nephew, "I have sent the bust of Commodore John Paul Jones (given to me by himself) which I request may be placed opposite my own, in my study on a similar bracket." The bust subsequently made its way to Mount Vernon about a week later when it was recorded in the store book.[369]

The renovations to the Mansion House and construction of the greenhouse and adjoining slave quarters that Washington had begun planning in 1774 were finally reaching completion in 1787. The dining room or "New Room" was under construction and the store book holds many entries for paint and other building materials going in and out of the storehouse that year to complete that project. There are also references to more specialized items ordered by Washington such as a window blind for the New Room. These items provide some insight to the number of white artisans and indentured workers employed at Mount Vernon. Where all of these workers were housed or what their dining arrangements were during the period of their employment is not entirely clear.

Washington's redesign of Mount Vernon undoubtedly reflected influences he absorbed from seeing other great houses during his travels. While Washington did not own any of the Continental European or English architectural pattern books that guided the design of many houses in America, they were widely available and he or his builders certainly were familiar with them. One of the items listed in the store book's August 23, 1787 entry is "1 blind." The New Room in the mansion was nearing completion and gracing the north wall was a large Venetian window that can be found in Batty Langley's

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[369] GW to George Augustine Washington, 12 August 1787, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.,* 5:286-288.

handbook *The City and Country Builder's and Workingman's Treasury of Designs*.[370] Washington asked George Augustine to have Matthew Baldridge, an English indentured joiner who worked at Mount Vernon from 1785 to 1788, measure the "exact dimension of the Windows…of the dining room…that I may get a Venetian blind, such as draws up & closes."[371] A month later Washington wrote that he had ordered the blind and would be sending it home so that Matthew could copy it and make more from the pattern.[372] Another month later, the arrival of the blind at Mount Vernon appears in the storehouse book. Matthew was one of the few workers whether slave, indentured, or artisan that Washington held in high esteem, calling him a "good workman and a sober well behaved man."[373] By integrating high-style features into his house, Washington was participating in the architectural conversation that was occurring on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and signaling his wealth and status through the details integrated into the house and grounds.[374]

Thomas Green, a carpenter and joiner, did much of the framing work of the new construction. Green received assistance from Thomas Branagan, an indentured joiner

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[370] Joseph Manca, *George Washington's Eye: Landscape, Architecture, and Design at Mount Vernon* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 46-50. See also, Allan Greenberg, *George Washington Architect* (London, England: Andreas Papadakis Publisher, 1999).
[371] GW to GAW, 10 June 1787, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*. 5:224.
[372] GW to GAW, 15 July 1787, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*. 5:260.
[373] Store book entry 23 August 1787; Letter from GW to John Rumney of the British firm Robinson, Sanderson and Rumney, 9 February 1785, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.,* 2:336-338.
[374] Charles E. Brownell, "Laying the Groundwork: The Classical Tradition and Virginia Architecture, 1770-1870" in *The Making of Virginia Architecture* by Charles E. Brownell, Calder Loth, William S. Rasmussen, and Richard Guy Wilson (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1992), 45. See also: Manca, *George Washington's Ey*e and Greenberg, *George Washington Architect*.

from Ireland who was employed from 1784 to 1787, as well as Thomas Mahoney. Brick makers, bricklayers, and masons were given the tasks of repairing the stone steps of the mansion house, laying the flagstone piazza on the east front and building the chimney in the New Room and the greenhouse. Charles Hagan served as superintendent of the brickyard for most of 1788 and John Hagan, a brick maker, also did plastering work and mended chimneys while at Mount Vernon.[375] John Knowles, who had begun his employment as an indentured bricklayer and laborer, in the 1770s continued his work as a bricklayer. Knowles and his wife Rachel returned to Mount Vernon in 1786. Rachael appears to have been trusted by the Washington family and became a house servant. A number of men specialized in stucco and plaster work. Thomas Hammond and John Rawlins came from Baltimore and worked on the decoration in the New Room.[376]

Washington's complaints about Green began while he was at the Constitutional Convention in 1787. He noted that the weekly reports showed that Green was absent at least one day per week. In a letter to his nephew Washington stated, "You may inform Green that if Drunkeness [sic], or idleness constitutes any part of his conduct, that I have directed you to discharge him…In every place where I have been, there are <u>many</u> workmen, & <u>little</u> work, which will bring these people to their Senses again."[377] One of Green's responsibilities was to oversee the slave carpenters. Interestingly, the indenture contract for Green dated 1790 states that in addition to being responsible to be "honest, sober, industrious, and obliging, that neither he nor his family will have any connection

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[375] Lund Washington Account Book, fol. 52.
[376] Letter from GW to John Rawlins, 13 April 1787, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 5:141.
[377] Letter from GW to GAW, 1 July 1787, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.,* 5:242.

or association with any of the Negroes except those immediately under his direction and with those but where it relates to their business." These problems continued and a few years later Washington admonished another farm manager to keep an eye on Green as although "he is a good workman himself…[but has] little authority…over those who are entrusted to him…and he is fond of drink."[378]

Washington admired English landscapes, but perhaps English agriculture even more. In a letter to George William Fairfax, who remained in England after the war, Washington opined that, "no country has carried the improvement of land and the benefits of agriculture to greater perfection than England." He went on to wonder whether the presence of a "practical English farmer" might not be an asset to his own agricultural efforts. He asked Fairfax to inquire whether such a farmer could be found who could be persuaded to take over management of one of Mount Vernon's farms in spite of "the wretched conditions of our lands."[379] The result of Washington's query was the arrival of James Bloxham, who it was hoped would shoulder the majority of the farm management duties in order to save George Augustine from stressing his weakened physical condition. His health remained poor, but Washington wrote his nephew that if Bloxham and Thomas Green did their jobs, "nothing more will be necessary for you to do than would comport with amusement and that exercise which is conclusive to health."[380]

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[378] Letter from GW to William Pearce, 27 October 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 14:292.
[379] GW to George William Fairfax, 30 June 1785, *Papers of GW*, *Confed. Ser.*, 3: 87-91.
[380] GW to George Augustine Washington, 31 March 1789, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 1:475.

Bloxham came highly recommended as an exemplary farmer by the Englishman he had been working for over the past fifteen years and Washington must have thought his hopes had been fulfilled. He supplied a house and annual provisions including livestock for Bloxham's own use, six hundred pounds of pork or beef and 800 pounds of flour per year, a garden plot, firewood, plus 50 guineas a year.[381] Initially, Bloxham expressed disdain for the condition of the fields at Mount Vernon. He wrote to his former employer, William Peacey, in England that, "there is nothing agreeable about the place."[382] Washington defensively gave his side of the story in letters to both Peacey and British agriculturalist Arthur Young. He wrote that Bloxham gave no concession for the eight years of war the country had been through and appears to have "expected that he was coming to well organized farms and that he was to have met plows, harrows, and all the other implements of husbandry in as high taste as the best farming counties in England.…"[383] After changing his mind several times, Bloxham finally determined to stay and his family crossed the Atlantic Ocean to join him the following year. Initially, Washington charged Bloxham with making suggestions for improvements to current practices both in the fields and with the livestock. Washington's admiration for and respect of English agricultural practices led him to believe that Bloxham's knowledge would lead Mount Vernon into a time of bountiful yields and great prosperity.

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[381] George Washington, "Articles of Agreement with James Bloxham", 31 May 1786, *Papers of GW*, *Confed. Ser*., 4:86-87.
[382] James Bloxham to William Peacey, 23 July 1786, *Papers of GW*, *Confed. Ser*., 4:193-194.
[383] George Washington to William Peacey, 5 August 1786, *Papers of GW, Confed*. Ser., 4:192; George Washington to Arthur Young, 6 August 1786, *Papers of GW*, *Confed. Ser*., 4:198. Washington called it a nine years war in his letter to Peacey and eight years to Young.

Beginning in 1789, Bloxham became the overseer of French's and Ferry plantation, but Washington's respect for the farmer appears to have dwindled as time went on. While he still offered some useful agricultural advice, his performance had not lived up to his reputation. One problem with Bloxham that Washington encountered was that he had not had any prior experience with managing slaves, a recurrent theme in Washington's correspondence with farm managers. Washington expressed to farm manager George Augustine Washington his belief that Bloxham "had no capacity for the management of Negroes."[384] Washington expressed the belief that people who had never managed or even been around enslaved people did not understand how to motivate them to work. The bottom line may have been that Washington held the overseer responsible if his directives were not followed rather than blaming the slaves. Overseers' authority was weak since the master could override their decisions. Consequently, overseers had to find a balance between being too harsh and too lenient in their efforts to motivate the slaves.[385]

Much of the information on British agricultural practices came to America in the form of publications. Notable was Jethro Tull's *The New Horse-Houghing Husbandry*. Published first in 1731, Tull's book had a long life and remained popular decades after its initial publication. Washington owned a copy and carefully transcribed portions of it into his daybooks. Exactly when and to what extent an "agricultural revolution" occurred in England is in dispute, but after 1750, there were measurable changes in practices that led

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[384] George Augustine Washington to GW, 5 March 1790, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 5:203.
[385] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 326-329.

to greater yields per acre. A new emphasis on planting high yield crops such as wheat or barley over those with lower yields such as rye was one change. English farmers also began to understand the importance of nitrogen to land fertility using manure as fertilizer and planted legumes, which increased the level of nitrogen in the soil.[386] As early as 1685, William Byrd I of Westover referred to "manured land."[387] In response to the need for manure for the fields and gardens, the carpenters at Mount Vernon built a stercorary in 1787. This remarkable structure was purpose-built for the composting of manure into fertilizer. The narrow rectangular building paved with cobblestones and open sides stood along the south lane close to the livestock pens.[388]

After the Revolution, as one historian observes, "men's thoughts literally turned from swords to plowshares."[389] Gentlemen farmers throughout the country engaged in experimentation and joined agricultural societies. Historian Tamara Thornton argues that Boston's elites sought to establish their place as a "natural aristocracy" through their engagement in scientific farming on both large farms and smaller tracts as gentlemen

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[386] Mark Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy, 1500-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[387] Letter from William Byrd I to Warham Horsmanden, 5 June 1685, Marion Tinling, ed., *The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia, 1684 – 1776* (Charlottesville, Va.: Published for The Virginia Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1977), Vol. 1, 39.
[388] Dennis J. Pogue and Robert Arner, "George Washington, The Revolutionary Farmer: America's First Composter," *Urban Agricultural Notes* (Published by City Farmer, Canada's Office of Urban Agriculture, 1997); Dennis J. Pogue and Esther C. White, *George Washington's Gristmill at Mount Vernon* (Mount Vernon, Va.: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2005), 10.
[389] Rodney C. Loehr, "Arthur Young and American Agriculture," *Agricultural History* (43:1, January 1969), 46; see also, Andrea Wulf, *Founding Gardeners: The Revolutionary Generation, Nature, and the Shaping of the American Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012). Wulf explores the interest of the Founding Fathers in gardening and agriculture in the post-revolutionary period and their influences.

farmers, which some saw as a contradiction of Republican values.[390] A proliferation of British agricultural literature became available although there was consensus that the differences in soil and climate rendered much of the information moot to American farmers. However, details on tillage, crop rotation, machinery, manure, fencing and drainage could be applied to individual circumstance.

One of the most influential – and prolific – of the English agricultural writers was Arthur Young. *Rural Economy; or, Essays on the Practical Parts of Husbandry* was first published in 1770, but his most important work was the periodical, *Annals of Agriculture and other Useful Arts*, which began publication in 1784. In January 1786, Young was emboldened to express his admiration of Washington: "the spectacle of a great commander retiring in the manner you have done from the head of a victorious army to the amusements of agriculture, calls the feelings of my bosom into play."[391] Washington responded later that year thanking Young for "opening a correspondence" and revealed "agriculture has ever been amongst the most favorite amusements of my life."[392]

The correspondence between Young and Washington reflected the topics covered in the *Annals of Agriculture*. They shared recommendations on types of seeds, plant yields, tools and livestock. Young offered to procure workers, materials and farm animals for Washington who complied with requests for items such as grass and grain seeds and

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[390] Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989).
[391] Arthur Young to George Washington, 7 January 1786, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.*, 1:498-499.
[392] GW to Arthur Young, 6 August 1786, *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*, ed. Theodore J. Crackel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2007. The correspondence between Washington and Young lasted from at least 1786 to 1794.

an example of a plow designed by Young. In the late eighteenth century, more efficient plows were introduced for harvesting crops. In 1787, because of his reading and correspondence, Washington requested the construction of an exact copy of "Mr. Young's Iron Plow" from Philadelphia. By July, Washington was writing to farm manger George Augustine to express his pleasure on hearing that the plow was in use and that farmer James Bloxham approved of it.[393] Washington displayed the plow to visitors and no doubt hoped to inspire others to improve their agricultural practices. Washington had devised an improvement to an existing barrel plow year before. He tracked its efficacy throughout the rest of the season and was satisfied with the results, but was still eager to try Young's plow design in hopes of even greater efficiency.[394]

Young submitted a questionnaire to Washington to find out about all aspects of agriculture in the nascent United States, which Washington passed on to a number of people including Thomas Jefferson and John Beale Bordley of Talbot County, Maryland.[395] Washington's correspondence soon expanded to include other prominent figures in British agricultural circles, including Dr. James Anderson and Sir John Sinclair.[396]

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[393] GW to George Augustine Washington, 29 July 1787, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.*, 5:276-277.
[394] Fusonie and Fusonie, *George Washington: Pioneer Farmer*, 18.
[395] John Beale Bordley authored several agricultural pieces owned by Washington including *Sketches on the Rotation of Crops* published in Philadelphia in 1792 and 1797.
[396] GW to Arthur Young, 6 August 1786, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.*, 4:196-198 and 15 November 1786, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.*, 4:371. James Anderson (1739-1808) was a Scottish agriculturalist and inventor of the Scots plow. Sinclair (1754-1835) was a Scottish politician who wrote widely on the new agricultural methods including the *Code of Agriculture*, 1819. Both corresponded with Washington from 1792 to 1799.

Washington also carried on a lively correspondence with a community of Americans interested in agricultural improvements. To William Drayton, a member of the South Carolina Society for promoting and improving agriculture, Washington expressed his frustration with Virginia's farmers and their destructive practices. Too many farmers continued to mainly plant tobacco and Indian corn and ignored the benefits of manure as fertilizer and planting grasses to rejuvenate the soil. Clement Biddle and John Beale Bordley sent the books and seeds Washington requested and he engaged in an in depth analysis of types of crops and crop rotation with each of them.[397] These friendships provided Washington with the opportunity to disperse his ideas and opinions and learn from the experiences of others. The term "experiment" appears with increasing frequency in Washington's diary, correspondence, and farm reports after the war as he worked to increase agricultural profits through new crops and methods.[398]

Washington sought Young's advice for the most convenient plan of a farmyard. Always looking for ways to streamline work routines, Washington modified the design to suit his own needs and constructed a large rectangular barn between the Ferry and

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[397] GW to William Drayton, 25 March 1786, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 3:605-606; David Stuart, "Dr. David Stuart's Report to President Washington on Agricultural Conditions in Northern Virginia," R. B. Richards, ed., *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (61:3, July 1953), 286; GW to Clement Biddle, 10 February 1786, *Papers of GW*, *Confed. Ser.,* 3:553-554; to John Beale Bordley, 17 August 1788, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 6:450-453.

[398] A search in the index of the online Papers of George Washington showed the appearance of the word experiment thirteen times in the 1760s, 110 times in the 1770s, 147 times in the 1780s and 164 in the 1790s.

French's Farms beginning in 1786.[399] Washington situated the barn and other support buildings at the center of the two farms at the intersection of lanes connecting the farms with the access road.[400] Initially, the two farms were under the direction of two overseers but by 1788, they were under the care of just one. The immense covered structure allowed the threshing of wheat to take place regardless of the weather. Previously, the wheat had been scattered on the ground and threshed with flails where it fell leaving it vulnerable to damp ground and rain. However, Washington found it difficult to change the habits of the slaves charged with this task and evidently with their overseer as well. He returned to Mount Vernon from a trip to find that an ad hoc treading ground had been established thirty feet from the barn defeating the purpose of the covered threshing floor.[401]

Wheat remained the primary crop at Mount Vernon and processing the grain on site was both economical for Washington and a good source of income. He could have his own wheat ground into flour for sale and he could buy grain from his neighbors and make a profit by processing it into flour for resale when prices were high.[402] A gristmill was a vital part of the agricultural community since a good crop of grain in the field was

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[399] John P. Riley, "To Build a Barn," *Mount Vernon Ladies Association Annual Report* (1992), 32. Washington finally purchased the last of the land that he had been renting from Penelope French in October 1786.

[400] Hezekiah Fairfax served as overseer at Ferry Farm in the 1780s. He was the older half-brother of John Fairfax who also worked as overseer at Mount Vernon. They were distantly related to the Fairfax family formerly of Belvoir plantation.

[401] GW to Henry Lee, 16 October 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 14:224-225.

[402] Fusonie and Fusonie, *George Washington, Pioneer Farmer*, 39. Damian Pargas, *The Quarters and the Fields: Slave Families in the Non-Cotton South* (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 2010), 16. Pargas notes that the French Revolution caused a scarcity of grain in both Europe and the West Indies that raised prices on exports to the benefit of Virginia farmers.

worthless without a place to process it or find a buyer. The gristmill complex was situated within the bounds of Dogue Run Farm. A mill had been on the land since 1754, possibly since the 1730s and built by Augustine Washington. In 1770, Washington constructed a new mill on a site just a half-mile from the original and it continued to be an important source of revenue for the plantation. In addition to the mill, a miller's cottage and cooper's shop to construct the many barrels needed for storage and shipment of flour were on the site.[403] When Lund Washington gave notice that he would no longer be able to act as farm manager, Washington asked him to continue managing the mill until George Augustine could get up to speed on the operation as it was too important to stand idle. William Roberts, who served as miller from 1770 to 1785, kept an account book to record transactions at the mill. During this period three types of flour could be produced: the highest quality was identified as "flour" followed by "middling" and "shipstuff." In a one-year period from September of 1776 to October of 1777 the accounts record the sale of 2,016 bushels of flour, 10,968 bushels of middling quality, and 3,034 bushels of shipstuff.[404] During its season of operation, the mill must have been an active place with wagons arriving with wheat or corn to be ground and leaving with barrels of flour for consumption or sale. It was also apparently a gathering spot for a group of people, which Washington referred to as a "worthless set."[405]

Like many other hired workers, the miller presented problems. Roberts was a good miller and Washington thought highly of his abilities. However, Washington

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[403] Pogue and White, *George Washington's Gristmill at Mount Vernon*, 26.
[404] Ibid., 38; Mill Account Book, manuscript, MVLA.
[405] GW to William Pearce, 14 December 1794, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, 34:58.

worried that the miller was "fond of drinking too much." Washington finally fired Roberts in 1785 before his contract had ended although he professed his reluctance to let go of a servant who had been with him for fifteen years, but Roberts had become "an intolerable sot, and when drunk so great a madman" that he had to be removed from his position at the mill.[406] Joseph Davenport followed Roberts' tenure as miller. Farrell Slattery, one of the Irishmen who arrived with Cornelius Roe and Thomas Mahoney served a two-year indenture as a millwright during this period. Slaves worked at the mill as well, including Ben who worked as a miller and coopers Jack, Tom, and Davy constructed barrels in various sizes to hold flour.

Washington recorded a list of "all my Negroes which are as follows at Mount Vernon and the plantations around it" in his diary in early 1786. This inventory identifies which slaves were assigned to which plantation and provides information on the familial relationships that had developed by the mid-1780s and is a valuable snapshot of the slave population at Mount Vernon in that year. The list is divided by plantation: Home House, River Plantation, etc. Each adult slave is named along with his or her job and children living at each farm are listed with their age and the name of their mother.

Washington carefully recorded whether each slave belonged to him or was a dower slave. This was mainly a record-keeping exercise as dower slaves were not a part of Washington's personal estate but would go to Martha's heirs at her death. In the meantime, Washington was essentially hiring the labor of Martha's slaves. The day-to-day significance of these differences may have been greater to the slaves for two reasons.

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[406] Lund Washington to GW, 2 September 1778, (manuscript, MVLA, A-238 typescript); GW to Robert Lewis & Sons, 1 February 1785, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.*, 2:317.

The first is that the death of George or Martha could lead to the sale of some or all of the slaves with the potential for the separation of families. The second is that most slaves carried a strong taboo against marriage between kin with them from their countries in Africa.[407] When Martha Washington moved to Mount Vernon she brought her slaves from the Tidewater of Virginia. The Custis slaves who had been together for generations undoubtedly had kin relationships. The slaves already owned by Washington and those that he purchased in the coming years were from different places, which merged two non-related groups. Many of the slaves working at the Mansion House had spouses assigned to one of the other farms. There were also several Mount Vernon slaves who had spouses living at neighboring plantations.

The growth of Washington's slaveholdings during the 1770s and 1780s was largely due to natural increase, which also accounted for the rise of Virginia's slave population overall during this period.[408] In 1774, Washington paid tax for 121 slaves; by the time he drew up his list in 1786 there were 214 slaves owned by either George or Martha living at Mount Vernon – 104 owned by George and 110 by Martha.[409] Of the 214 slaves listed only 124 were adults. However, four individuals were listed as "old;" two as "almost past service;" and one as "ruptured." Next to a slave named Adam was the

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[407] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 88-89.
[408] Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 264.
[409] Research through the records identified payments to midwives for seventy-three births between the beginning of 1775 and the end of 1783. There may be other instances that do not appear in extant records. This number also does not take into account any infants that may have been stillborn or died soon after birth.

notation, "dead." With these exceptions, the total number of fully working slaves was 116.

All of the renovations and improvements at Mount Vernon meant changes in work assignments for slaves. Ira Berlin states that as masters increasingly assigned men to skilled trades, women were assigned to fill the vacancies in the field and taking on some of the most difficult tasks of "collecting manure, grubbing stumps, and breaking ground that a plow could not penetrate."[410] Both laboring men and women also comprised the field workers at Washington's other plantations. In each instance, there were more female laborers than male laborers. At River Farm seventeen of the twenty-six laborers were women; at Dogue Run ten of eighteen; at Ferry Farm ten of fifteen, and at Muddy Hole nine of thirteen.[411] Before the Revolution, the highest percentage of women as a percentage of the total number of laborers was fifty-five percent in 1771. The number had risen to sixty-four percent by 1786. Men and women laborers carried out many of the same tasks from plowing to clearing new ground.[412]

The greatest number of slaves lived and worked at Mansion House Farm. These included tradespeople, carpenters, blacksmiths, gardeners, and those who tended horses and livestock. There were also a half-dozen laborers with a variety of tasks to carry out from chopping wood, heavy gardening work, and other physically demanding tasks. Women with skilled positions at the Mansion House farm included seamstresses, spinners, knitters, and laundresses.

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[410] Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 270-271.
[411] 18 February 1786, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 4:277-283.
[412] Carr and Walsh. "Economic Diversification and Labor Organization," in *Work and Labor in Early America*, Innes, ed., 185-188.

Slaves at the Mansion House were most likely to have contact with George and Martha Washington and other family members as well as the numerous white workers and other visitors to Mount Vernon. Assigned to positions in the house were Washington's body servant, maids and waiters and the cooks in the kitchen. Some of them likely slept in the house – and the kitchen housed the cook and other kitchen staff in sleeping quarters above the kitchen. Billy Lee, Washington's valet; Frank and Austin, waiters in the house, and maids Sal and Caroline worked in close proximity of the people within the house and probably slept somewhere within the house near their master and mistress. These slaves had greater access to the house than many of the hired white workers who may have never entered the house unless directly involved in building trades on the additions to the house. Billy, who had been with his master throughout the war, had an especially privileged position. An accomplished horseman, Lee served as an aid to Washington, carrying a telescope, keeping track of Washington's papers and other belongings, and as the general's body servant. Described as a mulatto of stout build, William Lee was purchased by Washington from the estate of John Lee.[413] He first appears in Mount Vernon records in 1768 as a house servant when he would have been about sixteen years old.[414]

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[413] Cash Accounts, May 1768, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser*., 8:82-83, fn. 2.
[414] Fairfax County Tithables, 1768 to 1774; Cash Accounts, May 1768, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 8:82-83; Before the war, Billy had a wife and child according to a letter written by Lund Washington 30 December 1775 wherein he passed on the news, "if it will give Will any pleasure he may be told that his wife and child are both very well." William Lee was referred to as both Billy and Will. Lee apparently also formed a relationship with a free black woman from Philadelphia named Margaret Thomas who worked in the Washington household during the Revolution as seamstress and laundress

Some Mount Vernon slaves lived in the large building that stood not far from the mansion, which was known as the House for Families. Built by at least 1760, it stood two and one half stories with brick end chimneys. Although it appears to have been constructed of brick in a painting by artist Edward Savage, it was most likely of frame construction.[415] This house provided shelter for the women with children and their spouses if the spouse worked at the mansion house.[416]

In the late 1780s, there were ninety children living on the five farms of Mount Vernon ranging in age from newborn to fourteen years old. Boys may have started working earlier than girls. None of the children listed in the slave inventories were boys aged fourteen, but there were two girls, Sarah and Molly, who were still being identified as children. Infants stayed with their mothers, possibly even going to the fields or other work assignment, for the first year or until the child was no longer willing to be carried or held for long periods of time.[417] Just because a slave was identified as a child on the slave list it did not mean that they were without any responsibilities. The older children ran errands, helped their family with child care and cooking, gathering kindling and tending the small garden plot. Sinah, a fourteen-year-old slave girl is listed in the store book as delivering nails to the people building a fence around the deer park.[418] Some of the older boys and girls served as cooks to the overseers. The agreement George Augustine

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[415] The House for Families may have been constructed by Lawrence Washington before his death in 1752. Pogue and White, "House for Families," 3.
[416] Stanton, *"Those Who Labor form My Happiness,"* 84. Stanton notes that Monticello also had large multifamily structures for slave housing through at least the 1770s.
[417] Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 372-373.
[418] 1787 Store Book, 16 May 1787, unpublished manuscript, MVLA.

Washington made with overseer Ignatius Dodson stated he would receive the assistance of "a Boy or Girl which can be most conveniently spared to cook &ca. for him…"[419]

The largest number of children were at Mansion House Farm where there were twenty-four children followed closely by River Farm with twenty-three children. Having the house for families so close to the Mansion was not without its downside for its master. The young children naturally considered the surrounding area their playground. Washington complained to his farm manager about the "Quarter Negro Children" playing in the kitchen or the yard around the Mansion House because they damaged the shrubs, some of which he had had propagated "at a considerable expense."[420] There might have been other reasons that Washington would not want a crowd of noisy children around the front of the mansion house, including disturbing him while he was at work in his office. Additionally, Washington appears to have become more sensitive about slavery and his status as a slaveholder during the Revolution. With visitors coming to the plantation from places where slavery was not the norm, he might have wished to keep the sight of enslaved children hidden.[421]

A number of white women acted as midwives for the slaves. They were usually wives of hired workers at Mount Vernon or tenants of Washington's. Susanna Bishop, wife of Washington's long time employee Thomas Bishop, attended at the birth of dozens of children over two decades, the last in November of 1785 shortly before her death. Elizabeth Simpson was the wife of Gilbert Simpson, a tenant at Mount Vernon dating

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[419] Letter from GAW to GW, 20 August 1790, *Papers, Pres. Ser*., 6:312-313.
[420] Letter from GW to William Pearce, 23 December 1793, *Papers, Pres. Ser*., 14:610.
[421] See, Wiencek, *Imperfect God*. Wiencek traces the evolution of Washington's attitude toward slavery.

back to the 1760s, delivered several babies. Dorcas Parker also helped numerous slave women during their labor over a fifteen-year period. Her husband Lawson Parker was a long time Fairfax County resident and neighbor to Mount Vernon.[422] There are only a few entries in the records to indicate that slave women acted as midwives at Mount Vernon. Jane, a slave owned by Mrs. French, delivered a few babies from 1776 to 1783. It is possible that there were more instances of slave women acting as midwife that are not obvious in the record or they may not have received any payment and consequently were not noted in the financial record.[423]

Food rations provided by masters throughout the Chesapeake region were fairly consistent: unprocessed corn and cornbread as well as some pork. The slaves at Mount Vernon consumed a slightly more diverse diet than the average Chesapeake slaves, whose food rations usually consisted of unprocessed corn and cornbread as well as some pork.[424] At Mount Vernon, adults received eleven pounds of corn, two pounds of fish, one half pound of meat, most likely pork, per week. The fisheries provided slaves with a portion of their food rations. Slaves also supplemented their rations through their own initiative. In a letter to Arthur Young, Washington listed the diet of blacks as consisting of corn bread, buttermilk, pickled herrings and "meat now and then." He added that they often had a small plot for growing vegetables and were allowed to raise chickens.[425]

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[422] Payments to midwives appear in cash accounts, cash memoranda, general ledgers and the Lund Washington account book. Susanna Bishop died on 4 December 1785, according to an entry in Washington's diary for that date.
[423] It was not until 1796 that a slave named Nell appears to have become the primary midwife for Mount Vernon.
[424] Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 392.
[425] Letter from GW to Arthur Young, 18 June 1792, *Papers, Pres. Ser.*, 10: 460.

Archaeologists found large numbers of bones in the cellar of the house for families including catfish, bass, and perch. Slaves also enjoyed numerous types of game such as quail, duck, goose, and turkey and wild animals such as deer, squirrel, rabbit, and opossum, as well as non-schooling fish: pickerel, gar, and bluegill. An entry from the store book shows Hercules getting powder from the storehouse at Martha Washington's request, probably to retrieve some animal or fowl for the dining table.[426] Some slaves had ready access to guns for hunting and small animals could have been trapped as well – a privilege that allowed them to provide food for the master's table and procure diversity in their own diet at the same time.[427]

Some young men from Alexandria found that Mount Vernon's slaves took their jobs as gamekeepers quite seriously. They traveled down the river until they found a landing spot at Johnson's Spring situated on River Farm. As they disembarked, they took the guns they had borrowed from friends with them to keep them from being stolen by "Negroes or others" and were soon approached by three Mount Vernon slaves, one of whom carried a gun. The slaves encouraged the gentlemen to shoot a squirrel and once they did seized their guns and ran off exclaiming they would take them to Washington and expose them as trespassers. Joseph Lewis, Jr. had the humiliating task of writing to Washington to beg forgiveness and ask that he might have the guns returned as he would

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[426] Mount Vernon 1787 Store Book, 16 February 1787.
[427] Pogue and White, "House for Families," 40-41. The cellar archeology was done in 1989-1990. No other remains of the building are extant. See also John T. Schlotterbeck, "The Internal Economy of Slavery in Rural Piedmont Virginia," *Slavery and Abolition* (12:1, April 1991) 170-181. Schlotterbeck states that slaves agitated for concessions from their masters, including hunting and foraging privileges, which helped to improve their living conditions.

be "ashamed" to admit to the guns' owners "that we suffered Negroes to take them from us."[428]

Like many planters, Washington respected the relationship of slave families and made an effort to keep them together, at least as long as it was economically feasible. In one case, Washington, in discussion with John Mercer concerning money that Mercer owed him, considered the option of receiving some slaves from Mercer as part payment of that debt. He specified his preference for three or four male slaves that could work as ditchers and the same number as artificers. He further stipulated that they be healthy and "none of them addicted to running away," which he "abominated." Mercer's response does not survive, but we can get some sense of in Washington's next letter. In it, Washington replied that he was unwilling "to hurt the feelings of those unhappy people by a separation of man and wife, or families." However, Washington continued that he might be interested in "Bob (who has only a father without a wife) Tom the baker, Nessey & David & James & Valentine (if of sufficient size to go to trades) could be separated without much uneasiness.…"[429] While Washington was sensitive to the emotional ties between members of slave families, economic demands could get in the way of following his principles.

Washington's conflicted feelings regarding the selling of slaves were typical of many of his peers. Paternalism dictated that they care for the health and well being of their slaves and they recognized the strength of slave family ties. They spent most of their

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[428] Joseph Lewis, Jr. to GW, 12 November 1787, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.*, 5:431-432.
[429] Letters from GW to John Francis Mercer 6 November 1786 and 24 November 1786, *Papers, Confed. Ser*., 4:336, 341.

lives, in many cases, in close quarters with their slaves and felt a level of responsibility for them. There was also the concern about their reputation. Slave masters wanted to be known as being able to effectively manage the slaves under their management and not as excessively harsh or lenient masters, which would reflect poorly on them.[430] Washington had always been sensitive to how he appeared to others and became even more so after the Revolution where he was exposed to the opinions of others who believed slavery was wrong.[431] Washington also had two advantages that allowed him to appear to be a "good master." His personal wealth meant that he did not have urgent economic concerns that would cause him to consider breaking up the slave community at Mount Vernon. Washington also did not have any direct heirs and consequently did not have the same pressure of responsibility to his children that other planters, such as Thomas Jefferson, experienced.

According to historian Allan Kulikoff, Chesapeake masters allowed slaves some privileges and the opportunity to live within their own community as a way to defuse hostility between the races.[432] Slaves living on quarters were generally more insulated from interaction with whites other than the overseer and perhaps during harvest when additional workers were often hired. This theoretically kept slaves and whites from fraternizing, a topic Washington frequently referred to with distaste and something that he actively tried to keep from occurring.[433] It is difficult to measure how much community existed between whites and slaves. Washington's comment that his carpenter

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[430] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 284-298 passim.
[431] Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 51.
[432] Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves,* 394.
[433] Ibid., 395.

Thomas Green was too much like the slaves and consequently not able to maintain the necessary authority over the slaves who worked under him suggests that Green and his family may have conversed with, socialized with, and even shared a drink with some slaves.[434]

Plantation overseers had to navigate between the worlds of masters and slaves. They changed jobs frequently and masters often accused them of either being too harsh or too lenient with their charges. They could be perceived as having little real authority over the slaves and because they worked in such close proximity were in danger of becoming too sympathetic to the plight of the slaves and allowing them to work at their own pace rather than pushing them to do more as the master no doubt desired.[435]

At Mount Vernon, the Washington family, hired workers, and slaves lived and worked in close proximity. Some slaves spent their days in the house with the family and even slept there. Hired workers and slaves worked next door to each other in the buildings along the north and south lanes. There is a paradox to this intimacy. It was necessary for these close conditions for work to be done, but there was clearly a preference for clearly divided living quarters. White men had sexual relations with slave

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[434] Letter from GW to William Pearce, 18 December 1793, *Papers of GW*, Pres. Ser., 14: 558-564; see also, Jeff Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Countryside* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006). Although Forret focuses on nineteenth-century relationships between poor whites and slaves, many of his conclusions ring true for what was occurring in eighteenth-century Virginia. He describes some instances of the complicated relationships that existed between the two groups based on both economic advantages and even genuine bonds of friendship.

[435] Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 410-411.

women, but just how frequently it occurred and how it was viewed is difficult to gauge.[436]

For example, the spinning house and tailor's shop were both located on the north lane. Andrew Judge worked at Mount Vernon as tailor in the 1770s and a dower slave named Betty worked as a seamstress. In 1773, Betty gave birth to a daughter named Oney, but who later called herself Oney Judge. It is probable that Andrew Judge was her father. Judge and Betty worked in close proximity and saw each other every day. It was impossible to keep slaves and hired workers from interacting. Whether Oney's birth was the result of coercion or a relationship is unknown.

Nothing survives in the record that tells us what Washington or anyone at Mount Vernon thought about sexual relations between white and black workers, but the Englishman Nicholas Cresswell observed such a relationship while staying in Alexandria and commented on it in his diary. Cresswell dined at the home of a merchant of the town, John Muir, who was known for his "hospitality and generosity." However, Cresswell had gained the knowledge that Muir had fathered five children with the slave of one of the town's gentlemen. According to Cresswell, Muir saw the dire condition of his enslaved children on a daily basis, but did not show "the least pity or compassion on their wretched condition." To Cresswell, anyone who could tolerate the sight of his own children in need and do nothing was "lost to every feeling of humanity and is to a degree worse than a brute."[437]

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[436] Ibid., 395.
[437] Cresswell, *The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell*, 18 October 1776.

In addition to the house slaves, a number of hired white workers also carried out their duties in the Mansion House. Martha Washington hired Richard Burnet to serve as housekeeper or steward in the spring of 1783. Burnet's work ethic and demeanor pleased the family. His talents extended to cooking, preserving and pickling. However, Burnet made plans to marry and gave notice that he would leave Mount Vernon in the autumn of 1785. He married Ann Alton, daughter of Washington's long time servant John Alton. The advertisement that Washington placed to find a replacement for Burnet lists the requirements for the position of housekeeper or steward, including someone who is "competent to the charge of a large family, and attending on a good deal of company. One who has been in the practice of these, and can produce testimonials of his (for a man is preferred) or her abilities, sobriety, honesty, and industry will receive good wages…"[438] About a year after Burnet's departure, Washington found Burnet and his wife living on the land of William Barry a neighbor to Mount Vernon near Dogue Run. Washington evidently persuaded Burnet to return to work at Mount Vernon in 1786 where he remained until shortly before Washington left for New York in 1789.

Indentured servants continued to play a role in the community after the war, which had interrupted the influx of immigrants, but now most immigrants came from Germany, Scotland, and Ireland rather than England. The white population of Virginia in 1790 was comprised of 68.5% English, 11.7% Irish, 10.2% Scots, 6.3% German and

[438] Letter from GW to Clement Biddle, 17 August 1785, *Papers of GW*, *Confed. Ser*., 3:185.

3.3% emigrating from other regions.[439] Most Germans embarked at either Amsterdam or Rotterdam in the post-revolutionary era. Two modes of indenture were in operation, which allowed the immigrant to trade their labor for the cost of passage to America. In the first case, the ship captain or his agent sold the indenture upon arrival in American ports as they bore the transportation cost. In the other case, the emigrant took responsibility for contracting their labor upon arrival, which gave them the advantage of selecting their own master. Individuals who entered on this method were known as redemptioners. However, once the contract was signed, the difference between the contracts no longer mattered. The existing laws that applied to servants equally covered both types of contracts.[440]

Washington stated that he had no preference over where a worker was from – he only cared that they be productive. He wrote a letter to Tench Tilghman, a trusted aide-de-camp throughout the war and agent for Washington's business matters in Baltimore, after learning that a ship with German "Palatines" had arrived in Baltimore. Washington required the skills of a house joiner and a bricklayer, but clarified that those whose work he purchased did not have to be Palatines. In fact, if they were good workmen "they may be of Asia, Africa, or Europe. They may be Mahometans, Jews, or Christian of any Sect – or they may be Atheists – I would however prefer middle-aged, to young men and those to have good countenances & good characters on ship board, to others who have neither

[439] Farley Grubb, *German Immigration and Servitude in America, 1709-1920* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2.
[440] Ibid., 220-221.

to recommend them."[441] Tilghman replied that there were no carpenters or bricklayers available who fulfilled Washington's requirements and furthermore, the costs of paying for their voyage made them unaffordable.[442]

One can sense Washington's frustration with acquiring hard-working, reliable employees. Migration to Western Virginia and beyond had begun before the Revolution and continued after the war had ended.[443] That may partially explain why there were fewer hired white artisans working at Mount Vernon in the 1780s. Most who were employed for some period of time were involved in the building trades working on special construction projects. Gardeners, millers, and ditchers continued to be primarily white workers. The same is true for shoemakers, tailors and weavers. Shoemakers appear to have had itinerant careers; few were employed at Mount Vernon for more than a year or two. At least one shoemaker was certainly kept occupied in 1787. The store book is full of references to shoemaking supplies such as sides of leather and balls of shoe thread coming into or being delivered to the shoemaker from the storehouse. From June through September the shoemaker delivered 137 pairs of shoes to the storehouse for distribution to the slaves.[444]

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[441] Letter from GW to Tench Tilghman, 24 March 1784, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 1:232. The term Palatines originally denoted individuals who immigrated to the American colonies from the Electorate of the Palatinate region of Germany in the early eighteenth century. By the time of the American Revolution, it was used to describe any German speaker.
[442] Letter from Tench Tilghman, 29 March 1784, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 1:41.
[443] Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 265.
[444] 1787 Store book, "Into the Store," entries dated 3 June to 22 September. During the 1780s workers identified as shoemaker include: James Glasgow, 1782-1785; William Boyd, 1784-1785; William Armstrong, 1785; James Gloster, 1785; Jacob Rice, 1785; Baptist Hamilton, 1785-1786; Thomas Ryan – Indentured Irish shoemaker, 1786.

Some of the new immigrants made their way to Mount Vernon. Daniel Overdonck and his wife Margaret were contracted through Philip Marsteller, an Alexandria merchant in 1786 when they arrived from Germany with their daughter Anna.[445] Overdonck worked as a ditcher and mower and his wife had skills as spinner, washer, and milker.[446] A group of twenty-four Irish servants arrived in Alexandria in August of 1784. Among them were at least two men hired by George Washington. Cornelius McDermott Roe was hired to work as a stonemason and bricklayer and Thomas Mahoney as house carpenter and joiner. A few years later two of McDermott Roe's brothers arrived in Virginia and were recommended by their brother. Washington was reasonably satisfied with Cornelius' work, but when one of his brothers was suggested for a job as an overseer of slaves, Washington wrote from Philadelphia expressing his doubt that a "raw Irishman can be well qualified to manage Negroes."[447] Like Farmer Bloxham, an immigrant fresh from Ireland had had little or no contact with slaves. Brothers Edward and Timothy were hired as ditchers later that year, a position often filled by hired white workers although slaves also worked as ditchers. Cornelius fulfilled his two-year indenture and contracted for an additional year. While he was at Mount Vernon he was sometimes assisted by one of his brothers with masonry work.

However, it is not clear which of these or if someone else served as shoemaker during 1787.

[445] The surname also appeared as Overdunk, Ourdhaush, Overdouch, Overdouchs, or Overduach. George Washington and other record keepers at Mount Vernon referred to Overdonck as both "the German" and the "Dutchman." While the name is Dutch, their nationality is unclear.

[446] 25 November 1786, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 5:70. Ditchers performed the important and backbreaking job of digging ditches to provide drainage for fields and along roadways to prevent animals from getting in or out of the property.

[447] Letter from GW to GAW 29 July 1787, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser.*, 5:276-278.

Cornelius also worked as ditcher with his brothers when the weather was not agreeable to stone work.[448]

Another Irish servant, who arrived at the same time as Cornelius McDermott Roe, was Thomas Mahoney. He contracted for a two-year period as a house carpenter and joiner. His contract stated that when not employed in working as carpenter or joinery he would perform any "other jobs which he may be set about; and will during the said term, behave himself quietly, soberly, and orderly in the family, pursuing the business about which he may be employed with diligence and fidelity." Mahoney worked closely with Thomas Green on the various construction projects and shared Green's love of drink. The two men got into trouble for going into Alexandria and overindulging. Green wrote Washington a letter promising that it would never happen again while placing the blame squarely on Mahoney. When he wrote the next contract, Washington held back one quarter of Mahoney's pay to keep him from spending it all on alcohol.[449]

In the spring of 1789, Washington prepared for another extended absence from Mount Vernon. His election as the first president of the United States of America insured that he would once again have pressing concerns that would keep him from putting all of his efforts into the development of his plantation. The citizens of Alexandria felt a special connection with the new leader of their country and feted him at a dinner at Wise's tavern before his departure for New York. Numerous toasts were proposed at the dinner

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[448] 7 September 1785, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 4:190; *Papers of GW*, *Diaries*, 5:227.
[449] Agreement between George Washington and Thomas Mahoney, 1 August 1786, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 4:519, fn. 4; Letter from Thomas Green to GW, 15 May 1788, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 6:274; Articles of agreement between George Washington and Thomas Mahoney, 7 May 1789, *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress*, 1741-1799: Series 4. Mahoney continued to work at Mount Vernon until 1792.

including one to the "commonwealth of Virginia," and another to "the town of Alexandria, and the trade of the Potowmack."

The mayor of Alexandria, Dennis Ramsay, presented an address from the people of Alexandria. While the text extolls Washington's many virtues as a leader of the country, it emphasizes the special relationship of Alexandrians with the president and also the new president's achievements as a leader in the related fields of agriculture and commerce: "The first and best of Citizens must leave us! Our Aged must lose their Ornament! Our Youth their Model! Our Agriculture its Improver! Our Commerce its Friend! Our infant Academy its Patron! Our poor their Benefactor! And the interior Navigation of the Potowmack, an event replete with the most extensive utility, already, by your unremitted exertions, brought into partial use – its Institutor and Promoter!"[450] The attributes that Ramsay highlighted are indicative of the importance of Washington to the community. As Washington tirelessly both practiced and preached improvements in agriculture he strongly urged his fellow citizens to modernize their farming methods. As a friend of commerce and promoter of the Potowmack Company and its efforts to open trade to the west he helped to make Alexandria an important port, which would benefit the neighboring region as well as the town itself.

Washington's reply to the address of Mayor Ramsay also stressed his affection for his "Fellow-Citizens," "affectionate Friends, and kind Neighbours" numbering them among those who knew him best and understood his distress at leaving "the enjoyments of private life." Washington emphasized that it was only the "unanimity in the choice, the

[450] *The Pennsylvania Packet*, 28 April 1789 and 30 April 1789. Wise's Tavern was built in 1777 and stood at 201 N. Fairfax Street in Alexandria.

opinion of my friends, communicated from different parts of Europe as well as America" that persuaded him to accept the presidency. As Washington's carriage left Alexandria it was met outside of the town "by a numerous escort of his friends and neighbours, whose attachment to him was such, that not satisfied with attending him to the verge of their own state, they crossed over in numerous crowds to George-Town…"[451]

[451] Ibid.

CHAPTER 4
THE PRESIDENCY, APRIL 1789 TO MARCH 1797: "THE IMPROVEMENT AND NEATNESS OF MY FARMS"[452]

Washington's departure from Mount Vernon to assume the presidency in April 1789 signified another lengthy absence from his plantation. However, unlike during the Revolutionary War, he would have more opportunities to return to the management of his agricultural and other economic pursuits during Congressional recesses. In spite of his intermittent presence at Mount Vernon, however, there was a lack of continuity in farm management because of the frequent turnover of managers and overseers. Some left for personal reasons, others were asked to leave the plantation because of poor performance, and several fell victim to small pox and tuberculosis, diseases that had long threatened the health of North Americans. Knowing that he would most likely reside in the capital – first New York and then Philadelphia – for long periods, Washington considered the possibility of renting part of his Mount Vernon farms. During these years, the Washingtons and the slaves that accompanied them northward experienced the novelties of city life, which included new shopping opportunities for Martha Washington and also exposure to Philadelphia's free black community.

During Washington's eight-year presidency, his immediate family divided their time between Mount Vernon and the president's residence in the national capital.

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[452] GW to William Pearce, 6 October 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 14:173.

Washington returned to Virginia as often as he could during breaks between Congressional sessions.[453] When away from Mount Vernon, they initially lived in New York City, the nation's first capital, from the spring of 1789 until November of 1790 and then they moved to Philadelphia, where they remained for the duration of Washington's presidency. Grandchildren Wash and Nelly accompanied George and Martha, as did a series of secretaries and several slaves (fig. 4).

[453] Ferling, *First of Men: A Life of George Washington*, 392, 447; Flexner, *Washington: The Indispensible Man*, 229.

Figure 4. Edward Savage, The Washington Family – George Washington, his lady, and her grandchildren by the name of Custis, 1798, Library of Congress

Washington depended heavily on Tobias Lear to minimize the disruption caused by moving his family back and forth between Mount Vernon and the capital. A Harvard graduate, Lear began working as secretary for Washington at Mount Vernon in 1786. His wide-ranging duties included acting as tutor to Nelly and Wash Custis. Washington began thinking about the education of Martha's grandchildren even before the move to

Philadelphia.[454] Before the eighteenth century, a wealthy Virginia planter might send his sons to England or Scotland to be educated. Another option was to hire a tutor from Great Britain. A third possibility was to hire a recent graduate of one of the American colleges. Native-born tutors became more likely after the revolution. As early as 1785 Washington hoped that his newly hired secretary William Shaw would begin to teach them, but Shaw's tenure at Mount Vernon lasted only a year, likely because he was frequently absent from his duties, either visiting friends in the area or spending extended periods of time in Alexandria.[455]

Once Washington became president, Lear no longer served as tutor to the children, but he took charge of keeping track of their education at schools in Philadelphia. Washington enrolled young Wash at the Academy of the College of Philadelphia and Nelly attended Mr. Wigden's school for girls in the same city.[456] The city had a long held tradition of emphasizing education for both sexes and supported a number of schools, which proliferated in Philadelphia and other American cities and towns in the post-

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[454] Tobias Lear to GW, 3 April 1791, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 8:50-51; Tobias Lear to GW, 1 May 1791, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 8:147.

[455] Shaw was born and educated in Great Britain and had been employed in business in Canada for several years before being recommended to Washington by Thomas Montgomerie, a merchant of Dumfries. Shaw was frequently absent from his duties, either visiting friends in the area or spending extended periods in Alexandria. According to the memoirs of George Washington Parke Custis, his first tutor was Gideon Snow. George Washington Parke Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington, by his Adopted Son* (Philadelphia: J.W. Bradley, 1861), 39. By 1786, Snow was employed by merchants Porter and Ingraham in Alexandria.

[456] Tobias Lear to GW, 3 April 1791, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 8:50-51; Tobias Lear to GW, 1 May 1791, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 8:147.

revolutionary era.[457] Lear soon had the unenviable task of informing his employer that young George Washington Parke Custis was making little progress in his schooling. He appeared to even be regressing at the academy he was attending, echoing the concerns of many parents of sons at the school who were unsatisfied with the education their children were receiving and the lack of discipline it provided. Privately, Lear had little hope for Wash making much progress. He vented his opinions to another of Washington's aides in a letter, "I apprehend the worst consequences, particularly to the boy, from the unbounded indulgence of his grandmamma and the impressions which he daily receives from that quarter of his being born to such noble prospects both in estate and otherways – it has already tainted his manners, and I fear has too deeply insinuated itself into his mind to be easily driven out." Lear acknowledged, "The President sees it with pain," but Washington was not willing to interfere with his wife's decisions regarding her grandchildren.[458]

In addition to Lear, Washington employed a series of young men as secretaries, whom he treated as members of the family. Three of these young men were indeed relatives and others had been members of Washington's military family during the Revolution. Nephews Robert Lewis and Howell Lewis, sons of Washington's only sister, Betty Lewis, and her husband Fielding Lewis of Fredericksburg, both served as secretary

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[457] Keith Pacholl, "Let Both Sexes Be Carefully Instructed: Educating Youth in Colonial Philadelphia," in *Children in Colonial America*, ed. James Marten (New York University Press, 2007), 191-202.

[458] Tobias Lear to David Humphreys, 12 April 1791, Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia, Pa. Historical Manuscripts Collection. George Washington Parke Custis was a student at Princeton College as of November 1796. Letter from Martha Washington to Elizabeth Dandridge Henley, 20 August 1797, Fields, *Worthy Partner*.

for Washington during the first few years of his presidency. In addition, Martha's nephew, Bartholomew Dandridge, Jr., also performed secretarial duties for Washington. William Jackson served as Washington's secretary after the Revolution. In a letter of recommendation, Washington confirmed, "In [the] autumn of 1789 he became a member of my family, and remained therein until the beginning of the year 1792."[459] Jackson had an illustrious career in his own right; he served as an officer during the Revolutionary War, was secretary to the Federal Convention of 1787, and was a member of the Society of the Cincinnati. David Humphreys, a former aide-de-camp to Washington during the revolution, worked as secretary from 1789 to 1790. Humphreys lived at Mount Vernon periodically after the war, enjoyed a close friendship with the president, and later authored a biography of Washington.[460]

Like these free employees, a number of slaves left their familiar surroundings to make the trip from Mount Vernon to the president's residence in New York and Philadelphia. Washington chose for his cook, Hercules, who successfully asked that his twelve-year-old son, Richmond, be allowed to accompany him as an assistant.[461] Billy Lee served as Washington's valet as usual, Giles and Paris attended to the horses, another young slave, Christopher, may have been postilion. Christopher was the son of dower slave Alice, a spinner. In addition to his mother, he left behind at Mount Vernon an older sister, Anna, and two younger sisters, Judy and Vina. Martha Washington was accompanied by Oney Judge, the daughter of seamstress Betty and tailor, Andrew Judge,

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[459] Certificate for William Jackson, 12 June 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 13:65.
[460] Humphreys. "*Life of General Washington,"* Zagarri, ed. Humphreys never completed the biography.
[461] GW to Tobias Lear, 17 September 1790, *Papers, Pres. Ser.*, 6:465-467.

who was then about fifteen years old. It is impossible to know how the slaves selected to travel with the Washington's felt about leaving Mount Vernon. Were they excited about the prospect of seeing new places or fearful to leave their families and familiar surroundings behind? Did they anticipate the possibility of freedom once they left the confines of the plantation?

Although the state of New York passed no legislation to curtail slavery until 1799, taking slaves to Philadelphia in 1790 presented a problem Washington had not previously encountered. In 1780, the Pennsylvania legislature passed "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery," which prohibited any more slaves from being brought into the state and an amendment in 1788 that attempted to close some of the loopholes in the original statute. The 1780 law defined any adult slave who came to Pennsylvania from another state and who remained there for longer than six months as legally free. The amendment sought to stop non-resident owners from taking slaves in and out of the state to re-start the clock, so to speak. A concerned Washington consulted Lear, who noted that the Pennsylvania Abolition Society "had determined to give no advice and take no measures for liberating those Slaves which belonged to the Officers of the general Government or members of Congress. But notwithstanding this, there were not wanting persons who would not only give them (the Slaves) advise, but would use all means to entice them from their masters."[462] In other words, the society would look the other way as Washington and other slave owners associated with the national government moved their slaves in and out of the state, but this would not stop some anti-slavery advocates

[462] Tobias Lear to GW, 24 April 1791, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.,* 8:129-132. New York State did not begin gradual abolition until 1799.

from helping any of these slaves escape if the opportunity arose. Washington chose to err on the side of caution, but Thomas Jefferson was evidently not concerned with the law in Pennsylvania. He and some of his slaves spent as much as ten months of the year in Philadelphia without incident. Unlike Washington, Jefferson believed that as a member of the national government, Pennsylvania's existing slavery laws did not apply to his slaves.[463]

Washington's preparations for both the security of his slaves and the improvement of Mount Vernon became more consequential as he became resigned to remaining in office for a long period. Initially, Washington thought he might only serve as president for a year or so, and then just for one term, but after his election to a second term as president in 1792, he initiated a plan that he hoped would relieve him from the responsibility of running a large plantation.[464] The "improvements and neatness" of Washington's farms is illustrated in the map he drew of Mount Vernon in 1793 (fig. 5).[465] Washington included this map in a letter to the agricultural reformer Arthur Young. The fact that this letter to Young veered from their usual topics of seeds, tools, and agricultural methodology suggests that in 1793 Washington was seriously considering freeing himself of some of the care of his large plantation. Washington created the plan of his farms as a kind of advertisement for his land and described each of his five farms in detail. The boundaries of each of the five farms are shown with the acreage of each field

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[463] Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 458-459.
[464] Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 75, 157.
[465] GW to Arthur Young, 12 December 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 14:504-511; GW to William Pearce, 6 October 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 14:172-173.

and how much land was in pasture, orchard, clover, or meadow. Washington revealed to Young that up to this point he had rented out all of his "landed property east of the Appalachian Mountains…except the estate called Mount Vernon." He was now contemplating renting all but the Mansion House Farm of Mount Vernon so that he might "live free from care" while still dabbling in agriculture for his own "occupation – and amusement."[466]

Figure 5. George Washington, map of Mount Vernon, 1793, Library of Congress

[466] GW to Arthur Young, 12 December 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 14:504-511.

Washington remained convinced that English farmers had the knowledge and experience to make Mount Vernon's land agriculturally rich and profitable. He hoped that Young might know of some "substantial [English] farmers, of wealth and strength sufficient to cultivate them." If individual farmers did not find this plan attractive, he would "have no insuperable objection against dividing each into as many small ones as a society of them, formed for the purpose, could agree upon among themselves." Washington described his property along the Potomac to Young in superlatives – "no estate in United America is more pleasantly situated than this…on one of the finest Rivers in the world." Furthermore, he emphasized the convenient location of the farms near the established ports of Georgetown and Alexandria and close to the Federal City, which would soon become the seat of the "general Government" and "the emporium of the United States."[467]

Even as Washington pondered the best way to make the land productive and profitable in his absence, he continued to make improvements to the grounds at the Mansion House Farm. As we have seen, Washington expected to be gone for only a few years and anticipated returning from the seat of government periodically with his family and guests. During his presidency, Washington usually returned to Mount Vernon for a short time each June and again later in the summer for a longer period. Martha Washington and the children usually returned only for the longer trip.[468] Nephew George Augustine and his wife Fanny resided at Mount Vernon in their absence and Fanny often

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[467] Ibid.
[468] GW to T. Lear, 17 September 1790, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 6:465-467; GW to Anthony Whitting, 26 May 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 12:631-636.

acted as housekeeper when the Washingtons returned as well as hostess to any guests that might visit the plantation, since Washington's absence did not necessarily stop the arrival of curious visitors.[469]

The carefully designed landscape of Mount Vernon made a statement of Washington's elevated social status. The broad fields that stretched along the winding road that visitors traveled on their way to the plantation proclaimed the extensiveness of his land holdings. The subsequent appearance of the house standing behind a large bowling green with a profusion of native shrubs and trees framing it demonstrated his mastery of nature. As historian Andrea Wulf observed, "Mount Vernon was his private statement of independence and republican simplicity…."[470] A scene painted by artist Edward Savage during Washington's presidency depicts the family during one of their return trips to Mount Vernon in 1793 enjoying the pleasure grounds. In the foreground, Nelly Custis strolls with George and Martha Washington. George Washington Parke Custis stands in the center with hunting dogs and another man, possibly one of Washington's secretaries. In the background, from left to right, gardeners head in the direction of the flower garden, three slaves enter the north lane, a slave woman walks in the direction of the kitchen, and a carriage enters the circle in the front of the Mansion House.[471] The artist included several different members of the Mount Vernon community in his rendering of the Washington family, including an aide to George Washington,

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[469] Martha Washington to Fanny Bassett Washington, 29 August 1791, *Worthy Partner*, Fields, ed. 233.
[470] Wulf, *Founding Gardeners*, 33.
[471] Carol Borchert Cadou, *The George Washington Collection: Fine and Decorative Arts at Mount Vernon* (Manchester, Vt.: Hudson Hills Press for the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2006), 206. The artist is believed to be Edward Savage.

hired workers and slaves with a variety of jobs, and visitors to the plantation. The painting also portrays the space in front of the mansion as one primarily belonging to the Washington family, shared only with invited guests. Savage exhibited the paintings in the northeast, providing the country with a domestic view of their president at Mount Vernon.[472]

The influence of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism and ideals of scientific inquiry at Mount Vernon is evident in Washington's greenhouse in the upper garden, completed in 1787. When constructed, it was one of only a few substantial greenhouses in America. Washington received advice from Margaret Tilghman Carroll, who had a similar greenhouse at her family's Mount Clare estate outside of Baltimore, as to the proper fittings needed for the space, the height of doors and placement of windows and flues for the fires that would heat the interior during the winter.[473] For the contents of the greenhouse as the rest of his gardens, Washington employed science by consulting reference books on gardening and experimenting with growing exotic items like citrus and coffee trees for the amazement and amusement of his guests. In the winter, the greenhouse was "a great source of pleasure" to visitors to Mount Vernon.[474]

By the 1790s, Mount Vernon's pleasure grounds combined new and old features. Along with the innovative greenhouse, a visitor to the gardens at Mount Vernon observed the presence of a parterre shaped into a fleur-de-lis, which he had not seen since a visit to

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[472] Ibid.
[473] Manca, *George Washington's Eye*, 29.
[474] Wulf, *Founding Gardeners*, 23; "A Visit to Mount Vernon – A Letter of Mrs. Edward Carrington to Her Sister, Mrs. George Fisher," *William and Mary Quarterly*, (18:2, April 1938), 201.

Germany years earlier, and which he hoped represented "the expiring groans…of our grandfather's pedantry."[475] In other words, he considered it terribly old-fashioned. Washington did employ three different German gardeners during the 1790s. The first, Johann Christian Ehlers arrived at Mount Vernon in the autumn of 1789 with an impressive resume. George III signed his apprenticeship papers for his work at the royal gardens at Montbrillant Castle, a summer palace of the Royal House of Hanover in Germany. Ehlers went on to do further gardening for the British monarch as well as for the King of Prussia. Ehlers could not speak any English when he arrived at Mount Vernon and asked for a German-English dictionary. Washington was initially pleased with his German gardener, but soon had complaints about the slowness at which progress on projects occurred.[476]

Ehlers remained at Mount Vernon until 1797 when Washington declined to extend his contract, though he continued to prefer German to English gardeners. Two more gardeners arrived at Mount Vernon from Germany in 1793: Johann Lotz and assistant gardener John Gottlieb Richter. Richter was among a group of redemptioners who arrived in Philadelphia in the summer of 1793. He agreed to serve three years in exchange for the payment of his passage. Richter was evidently young and unmarried as he was to dine with the Ehlers "of the victuals that went from my table (in the Cellar)" on food provided by the cook Lucy.[477] In spite of his youth, Richter evidently had strong

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[475] Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *The Virginia Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1795-1798* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1977),165.
[476] GW to Anthony Whiting, 23 December 1792, " Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, 32:275.
[477] GW to William Pearce, 22 December 1793.

opinions about gardening methods and tools. Washington rebuked Richter's impudence in a letter to head gardener Ehlers, expressing his displeasure and that "this is neither the way to make me his friend, or get better things. The way to obtain them is to ask for what he wants modestly, without which he will not get them at all.…"[478]

All of the changes and improvements Washington desired required diligent oversight, but there was a period of instability in farm management during the years of his presidency. James Bloxham, the English farmer hired by Washington, in 1786, continued to give advice on agricultural matters, but mainly acted as overseer of Ferry and French's Farms. Washington essentially demoted Bloxham to overseer from farm manager and he was finally let go. Bloxham's drinking left him an ineffective manager and he was not able to manage the slaves under his care.[479] Washington's nephew George Augustine Washington remained at Mount Vernon as farm manager with Washington's departure for the presidency, but his health continued to decline as the tuberculosis took its course.[480]

In 1790, a new master farmer, presumably one with more experience managing enslaved laborers, arrived to replace Bloxham and take much of the management responsibility from George Augustine. Anthony Whitting, a native of England who had been working in Maryland, presented himself to George Augustine as an applicant for the

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[478] GW to Johann Christian Ehlers, 23 December 1793; GW to William Pearce, 20 July 1794.
[479] Bloxham left Mount Vernon in 1790. Bloxham, who may have been an alcoholic, returned to England where he died in 1793. See G. Terry Sharrer, "'An Undebauched Mind:' Farmer Washington at Mount Vernon, 1759-1799," *Magnolia: Bulletin of the Southern Garden History Society* (Vol. XV, No. 3, Winter 1999-2000), 6.
[480] GW to Anthony Whitting, 6 January 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 11:594-599.

position of farm manager or overseer. Whitting came with recommendation from Lambert Cadwalader, a congressman from New Jersey and brother to Whitting's former employer who had died.[481] Washington expected Whitting's expertise to deliver high crop yields through the latest and best agricultural techniques.[482] Washington appears to have respected Whitting's management, but this valued employee unexpectedly fell ill and died of tuberculosis in June of 1793. The loss of a farm manager at the beginning of the harvest season sent Washington into a tailspin. He hurried home to Mount Vernon to try and gain control over his plantation as Whitting's death so soon after that of his nephew George Augustine in February had left it "as a body without a head."[483]

Washington's nephew Robert Lewis, who worked mainly as his secretary, also filled in as farm manager during George Augustine's absences or when he was too ill to carry out his duties. To recruit his nephew's services, Washington described the position in a letter to his sister, Betty Lewis: "I may have occasion for a young person in my family of a good disposition, who writes a good hand, and who can confine himself a certain reasonable number of hours in the 24 to the recording of letters in books…."[484] Robert Lewis responded almost immediately with "a thousand obligations for the proffered post, and think the confinement you speak off [*sic*] rather a pleasure and hope

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[481] George Augustine Washington to GW, 26 March 1790, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 5:280-281.
[482] GW Articles of Agreement with Anthony Whitting, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 5:332-333. Whitting had gained experienced at the estate of General Cadwallader's in Maryland near the estate of Washington's associate William Tilghman.
[483] GW to Henry Lee, 21 July 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 13:260.
[484] GW to Betty Lewis, 15 March 1789, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 1:397.

from my assiduous attention to merit that station."[485] Lewis escorted Martha Washington and her grandchildren as they followed Washington to New York in May 1789. Lewis recorded in his journal the scene he observed as Martha departed Mount Vernon, "the servants of the house, and a number of the field negroes made there appearance – to take leave of their mistress – numbers of the poor wretches seemed greatly agitated, much affected – My Aunt equally so."[486]

Robert Lewis does not explain the source of the agitation experienced by Mount Vernon slaves as Martha Washington departed the plantation, but perhaps they were concerned that her absence would adversely affect the usual routines of plantation life. Historian Philip Morgan states, "Close and regular contact between masters and slaves was a fact of life in the Chesapeake."[487] It is difficult to know what their day-to-day interactions consisted of and what kinds of relationships they might have developed. The slaves weeping as the carriage drove away may have been close to the servants that were accompanying the Washingtons to New York City and their visible emotion may have had nothing to do with Martha Washington at all. It is also possible that any change brought out feelings of insecurity and fear that the plantation community might be broken up further. Slaves certainly knew that their master's permanent departure or death typically resulted in the break-up of their own families and communities.[488]

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[485] Robert Lewis to GW, 18 March 1789, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 1:404.
[486] Robert Lewis's Diary, 1789 July 4 – September 1, bound manuscript, MVLA; Excerpt from Robert Lewis' Journal, 13 to 20 May 1789, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 2:205n.
[487] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoin*t, 296.
[488] Ibid., 512.

While serving as president, Washington needed even greater reliability and skill in a farm manager than when he was home, so he turned to his extensive contacts to help him procure a new one. William Tilghman, a member of a prominent Eastern Shore family, received a letter from Washington in the summer of 1793, wherein he requested advice on finding a new farm manager. Tilghman quickly responded that he would immediately write to some of his friends in Maryland who would make inquiries on Washington's behalf.[489] Farmers on Maryland's Eastern Shore enjoyed a good reputation and in the autumn of 1793, Washington procured the services of William Pearce from Kent County. Washington described him as "a man of property; of great integrity; and much experience in the superintendence of a large concern; having been the manager for a gentleman on the Easter Shore fifteen or eighteen years before he came to me."[490] The agreement Washington wrote with Pearce demonstrates the respect he had for him. It stated, "the said George Washington will always, and with pleasure listen to any suggested alterations which may be offered by him [Pearce] with a view to the advancement of the Crops, increase of the Stocks, and for the general improvement of the Estate."[491] Washington expected to learn new farming techniques from Pearce.

The illness of Pearce's eldest daughter delayed the family's arrival. They finally reached Mount Vernon by the spring of 1794. In addition to the use of milk cows, poultry, and up to two horses, Pearce and his family were to have a "negro woman to

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[489] GW to William Tilghman, 21 July 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.,* 13:262-264; William Tilghman to GW, 25 July 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 13:286.
[490] GW to James Anderson, 18 August 1796, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*
[491] GW Agreement with William Pearce, 23 September 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 14:120-123.

wash and cook" and "a boy and girl to aid and attend in the House and garden; the first not to exceed fourteen or fifteen years of age, and the other twelve."[492] Because of Washington's absence from Mount Vernon, Pearce initially lived in the Mansion House until his family arrived and then moved with them to the adjacent Servants Hall.[493]

George Washington invited Pearce to live in the house, but Martha Washington appears to have been uncomfortable with the situation. She confided to Fanny Washington that she was reluctant to come home from Philadelphia because of Pearce's, "living in the family would make it very inconvenient, as we should be obliged to bring servants with us we could not find room for them when the Servants Hall is occupied with a large family…"[494] When George Washington planned to return to Mount Vernon Martha reiterated, "I should not like to have any thing to do with Mr. Pearce's family in the house. The President will bring two white men with him – one of them may sleep in Whitting's room the other in the garret…"[495] The excerpts from these two letters are revealing. They show that Martha Washington felt there was a difference in class between herself and the Pearce family and she preferred not to have to treat them as social equals. The letters also show the extent to which Martha was involved in the management of the house. Even though she would not be home with her husband for his next visit, she knew where each member of his entourage would stay.

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[492] Ibid.
[493] GW to William Pearce, 6 October 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.,* 14:172; Martha Washington to Fanny Bassett Washington, 13 April 1794, Fields, *Worthy Partner*, 264.
[494] Martha Washington to Frances Bassett Washington, 2 June 1794, Fields, *Worthy Partner*, 267.
[495] Martha Washington to Frances Bassett Washington, 15 June 1794, Fields, *Worthy Partner*, 268-269.

While Washington may not have been more egalitarian than his wife when it came to social contacts, he had greater experience interacting with people from many levels of society. Although a member of the gentry, Washington interacted with all levels of society during elections when he wanted the support of all eligible voters and in militia participation where elites held the positions of officers in the militia, but membership included other members of the community as well. Through his farm businesses, public life in his own neighborhood and beyond, and army leadership, he was used to interacting with many different types of people.[496] Washington also retained a great deal of respect for someone he considered a good farmer and Pearce was evidently such a person.

Washington also turned to his friends, neighbors, and business acquaintances in northern Virginia to find overseers for his farms. Some of the overseers recommended to him may have been younger sons of prosperous middling farmers who needed to support themselves. Some were local men, who tended to be described as of questionable reputation or family, but it may just be that Washington knew more about the background of these men than he did of the overseers from Maryland who he prized so highly. Thomas Jefferson appears to have had a similarly low opinion of most free white overseers, who he described as being hard on the land and the slaves in their charge.[497] He also began to look outside of Virginia for overseers and like Washington looked to Maryland where farmers used both hired white workers and slaves and would, he believed, "understand the management of negroes on a rational and humane plan." This

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[496] Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 104-114.
[497] Stanton, *"Those Who Labor for my Happiness,"* 75.

experiment failed for Jefferson, however, and he returned to hiring local Virginia men as overseers.[498]

The frequent change in management at the farms must have been disruptive for the slaves. A new overseer meant learning his work routines and the possible loss of hard won freedoms or privileges. William Stuart who worked as overseer from 1794 to 1797 appears to have lived in relative comity with the slaves at River Farm. Washington found Stuart an effective manager, in general, stating, [he] "appears to understand the business of a farm very well...He is I believe a sober man, and according to his own account a very honest one…He is talkative, has a high opinion of his own skill and management, and seems to live in peace and harmony with the Negroes who are confided to his care. He speaks extremely well of them, and I have never heard any complaint of him…Upon the whole, if he stirs early, and works late, I have no other faults to find than the one I have just mentioned. His talkativeness and vanity may be humoured."[499]

Members of the Washington household were more familiar with the overseers in charge of the Mansion House farm than the overseers on the outlying farms, because of their proximity to the house. While the Washingtons might treat farm or estate managers as social equals depending on their individual circumstances, they generally saw overseers as belonging to an inferior class. Washington hired James Butler as the overseer of Mansion House farm while in Philadelphia at the end of 1792. Butler emigrated from Ireland and had little, if any, experience with the management of slaves.

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[498] Ibid., 61, 122.
[499] GW to William Pearce, 18 December 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 14:558-563. Stuart's name also appears as Stewart.

Washington expressed doubts about Butler's fitness for the position from the outset, suspecting "that he will be at a loss in the management of Negros."[500] Washington's prediction regarding Butler's performance as an overseer proved to be correct and his contract was not renewed at the end of 1794. Butler found a few other positions in the area, including as a teacher at the Alexandria Academy, which some of Washington's nephews attended. Butler eventually ended up in the poor house in Alexandria with no hope of ever improving his situation. A charitable Washington sent him periodic support through at least 1798.[501]

Washington had a tendency to blame his hired workers and slaves when things did not turn out the way he desired.[502] He held overseers especially responsible for any failures in execution of his plans and heaped the greatest amount of complaints on local men who worked for him as overseers. This may be because local men were easier to obtain than the more experienced and qualified overseers from Maryland that Washington preferred and were easier to replace when dismissed. He called Henry McCoy a "sickly, slothful and stupid fellow…."[503] Another Fairfax County resident, John Allison was, according to Washington, from "a family of very little respectability, and closely connected with a set of people about my Mill…a more worthless set are no where

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[500] GW to Anthony Whitting, 6 January 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 11:594-597.
[501] Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 113; James Butler to GW, 24 May 1798, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 2:294-295.
[502] Walsh, "Slavery and Agriculture at Mount Vernon," in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington*, Schwarz, ed., 49.
[503] GW to William Pearce, 18, December 1793, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, 33:193.

[sic] to be found."[504] Allison was a local man and undoubtedly knew many of the hired workers as well as the slaves at Mount Vernon as he traveled around the neighborhood even before his employment. Many years after his departure, Nelly Custis expressed her opinion of Allison calling him "a very common laboring man, who can just read and write sufficiently to be understood…He lives on the road between Mount Vernon and Alexandria….whose family are knowing in horse flesh and very apt to romance or quiz, or tell fibs – when occasion serves."[505]

One measure of the comparatively low status of overseers is the fact that there were still a few enslaved overseers at Mount Vernon in the 1790s. An enslaved man named Davy managed Muddy Hole and another, Morris, who had been an overseer since the 1770s, remained in that position until 1794. In addition, Will, one of the slaves Washington had leased from the French family since 1786, was overseer of the rest of the leased slaves at French's until 1792 when it became a part of Union Farm. While Washington appears to have been mainly satisfied with the work of his slave overseers, he did not promote any other slaves to lead as overseer at any of the other farms when openings occurred. It is difficult to ascertain whether no other slave at Mount Vernon had the authority or skills to work as overseer or whether Washington turned away from this idea after the Revolution. The fact that a number of slaves had run away from him during

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[504] GW to William Pearce, 14 December 1794, Ibid., 34:58.
[505] Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis to Elizabeth Bordley Gibson, 29 April 1823, in *George Washington's Beautiful Nelly: The Letters of Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis to Elizabeth Bordley Gibson, 1794-1851*, Patricia Brady, ed. (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 133-134.

the war may have made him more watchful of the slave population as a whole and more trusting of white overseers.[506]

While agricultural tasks and laborers were dispersed throughout Washington's Mount Vernon farms, the storehouse at the Mansion House farm remained an administrative center of plantation activity, as it had been since the 1760s. When Washington insisted that William Pearce live at the Mansion House, he explained that he needed his manager to be near "the center of the business, ease you of much trouble, for otherwise, the frequent calls from the farms, from workmen of different descriptions for tools, nails, iron, etc. from the store…would have occasioned you many an inconvenient ride here."[507] Pearce kept an account book that included the storehouse activity. On one occasion, Howell Lewis was instructed by his uncle to have the storehouse cleaned and "take every thing out of the Store that requires to be aired…and when thoroughly cleaned and dried, returned and put away again…with that regularity and order that whatever is wanted from thence may be seen and got at without difficulty." Lewis then was to take a complete inventory of the contents and send it to Washington. Items that Washington was particularly concerned about included his marquis and trunks with camp equipment from the Revolutionary War.[508]

There was also continuity in the types of artisans employed at Mount Vernon and the hierarchies among them. Layers of authority existed among the tradesmen as well as within the laboring class. James Donaldson, a Scottish craftsman, supervised the slave

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[506] 1799 Slave List, June 1799, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 4:527-542.
[507] GW to William Pearce, 6 October 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 14:172.
[508] GW to Howell Lewis, 3 November 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 14:334-336.

carpenters for several years. Under his immediate direction was Isaac, the head slave carpenter. Isaac and his crew of fellow carpenters made implements, built simple structures, and made the ever-necessary repairs to wood structures exposed to the heat and humidity of a Virginia summer. Isaac received a new hand saw in early February 1794 and over the next six months built wheel barrows, mended hen coops, and a cart, and nailed hoops to a hogshead which would ship meat to the president's residence in Philadelphia.[509]

Isaac first appeared in the record at Mount Vernon in 1773 when George Washington purchased him and another slave, James, from Robert Washington of Chotank, a childhood friend and cousin for £180.[510] Isaac's age does not appear on either of the slave lists, but James was born about 1759, and, given the men's eventual career paths at Washington's estate, presumably Isaac was about the same age. The two slaves may have already had some training as carpenters when they arrived at Mount Vernon. Slave owners usually selected children to be trained as craftsmen from an early age and they would be apprenticed to a master of their craft for several years.[511] Training could even last well into their career. Washington intended James Donaldson to instruct Isaac in the art of making plows and other farm implements when Isaac had already been a carpenter for twenty years.[512] For the next twenty-six years Isaac and James labored side by side as carpenters at the Mansion House Farm.

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[509] Ibid, 1 February to 18 July 1794.
[510] Cash accounts, May 1773 and November 1773; Ledger B, 86.
[511] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 214.
[512] GW to William Pearce, 29 March 1795, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*

The Mansion House carpenters worked in a shop located on the south lane behind the horse stables. At one, point, a fire occurred in the shop and Washington held Isaac responsible for the loss of the structure, tools and seasoned wood it contained. Washington was irate about the destruction and threatened to punish Isaac, but nothing appears to have come of his threats. Instead, farm manager Whitting was to "inform him, that I sustain injury enough by their idleness – they need not add to it by their carelessness."[513] There were however, privileges provided to Isaac as head carpenter. He received weekly rations of rum, and before one Christmas was given eighty-four pounds of pork, and on another occasion Washington paid him four dollars to purchase a gun with which he could hunt for wild fowl and small game animals to supplement his diet.[514] These items put Isaac into a privileged category above the average field laborer. What we cannot know is how Isaac used these items. Did he keep the items for his own and his family's use or was he expected to share with the carpenters working for him?

During the latter half of the eighteenth century, large plantation owners like Washington began to recognize the importance of slave families, which contributed to stability in their slave populations and a corresponding increase in productivity.[515] The family situations of Isaac and James illustrate the range of experience of enslaved artisans and their families at Mount Vernon. Isaac and dower slave Kitty raised a large family of children. Kitty worked as a spinner for a time, but then became the dairymaid. Kitty was

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[513] GW to Anthony Whitting, 16 December 1792, *Papers GW, Pres. Ser.*, 11:521.
[514] Mount Vernon Store Book 1787; Weekly Reports, 23 December 1786; Mount Vernon Distillery and Fishery Ledger, 1799-1801 (Ms. MVLA), 2; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 139. Morgan also notes that although a law was enacted in Virginia banning guns to slaves, many slave owners gave guns to their slaves.
[515] Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 129.

mother to nine girls. The eldest of these, Sinah, was born before Isaac arrived at Mount Vernon, her father is unknown. The rest of the girls were born between 1774 and 1793. Almost all of Kitty's and Isaac's daughters had jobs at the Mansion House; consequently Isaac and Kitty were among the lucky few slave families to be living close together. By contrast, James' spouse Darcus worked as a laborer at Muddy Hole Farm. They had four children born between 1780 and 1797. The eldest two children, boys Moses and Townshend were laborers at Muddy Hole as well. The youngest two, girls Alce and Nancy were with their mother, but too young to be part of the labor force yet. James' family situation was more common among slaved people in eighteenth-century Virginia. With his family at another farm, James would probably travel to spend Sunday and any other time off with them.[516]

While the Washington family was in Philadelphia, slaves working in the house had fewer duties, but job assignments were still at the whim of the master or his representative, even for skilled workers like Isaac. An overseer pulled him away from his carpentry duties to work as a cradler at harvest on at least one occasion. Even Hercules, with the status of cook for the Washington family, also worked in the gardens and fields if the need arose and Pearce sent Frank, a waiter in the house, to paint several outbuildings.[517] Washington gave Pearce permission to make changes to job assignments as he saw fit with the caveat that slaves Thomas Davis and Muclus must be considered

[516] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 512-519.
[517] GW to Anthony Whitting, 5 May 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 12:527.

tradesmen and if not "employed in the making and laying of bricks" should assist the carpenters.[518]

At Mount Vernon, slave labor became increasingly dominant in the post-revolutionary era. As the slave population increased at Mount Vernon, Washington hired fewer white workers with the exception of a few skilled tradesmen. Whites held mainly managerial positions and far fewer worked as laborers. After the Revolution, there may have simply been fewer white laborers available for hire. Historian Jean Lee found that the "millions of acres of virgin land secured to the states and nation in the 1783 peace treaty with England" drew many people away from the Chesapeake region in search of economic opportunity.[519] Washington wrote to Arthur Young that hired white agricultural laborers were not common south of Pennsylvania "except it be at harvest, and sometimes for cutting grass. The wealthier farmers perform it with their own black Servants, whilst the poorer sort are obliged to do it themselves." He went on to say that slaves were capable of hard work but had little "ambition to establish a *good* name."[520] Washington might have added that the slaves had little incentive to work any harder when their circumstances remained the same no matter how much effort they put into their labor.

Another reason for the comparative scarcity of white workers was the fact that far fewer people were arriving in America as indentured servants as the eighteenth century came to a close and that those who did come received much shorter labor contracts. Before 1785, the average contract was for four years, but by 1820 it had shrunk to just

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[518] GW to William Pearce, 23 December 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 14:609.
[519] Jean Lee, *Price of Nationhood*, 259.
[520] GW to Arthur Young, 18 [21] June 1792, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 10:460-461.

two and a half years.[521] Historian Farley Grubb states that the reason for the collapse of the indentured servant market was that the supply of servants declined rather than that there was a decline in demand for them. Great Britain could no longer ship convicts to America during the Revolution and although they hoped to resume the practice after the war was over, they instead began sending convicts to Australia in 1786.[522]

Washington did, however, employ some indentured servants in the post-revolutionary era, some of whom remained at Mount Vernon for several years after their contracts had expired and they had paid back their debt with their labor. Thomas Mahoney, an Irish indentured house carpenter and joiner arrived at the plantation in 1784 and remained through 1792. Mahoney worked on many of the improvements to the built environment during his tenure. Most of the time he worked closely alongside the erratic head carpenter, Thomas Green.

It was only Washington's sense of obligation to Thomas Bishop who had been with him since the French and Indian War that Green, married to Bishop's daughter, remained on the work force. The situation with Green came to a head in 1793. Farm manager Whitting reported that Green had pestered him for money to buy supplies for his wife's forthcoming confinement, but he believed the cash was used to buy rum instead as he was seen being "very Merry several days after."[523] Less than a month later Green begged Whitting for money to buy corn, but Whitting thought it better to simply give him

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[521] Grubb. *German Immigration and Servitude in America*, 323.
[522] Ekirch, *Bound for America*, 235-236.
[523] Anthony Whitting to GW, 16 January 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 12:5.

the corn and charge Green's account to make the money was not spent frivolously.[524] Green's drinking problem meant he needed a great deal of managing to ensure that he had the necessary food and supplies for himself and his family and would not purchase liquor instead.[525]

Green finally left Mount Vernon and abandoned his family and, while Washington was not sorry to lose all of the aggravation that Green had brought, his departure presented the new problem of how to deal with his destitute wife and children. Green's wife Sarah Bishop Green needed support. Sarah and her children moved to Alexandria where she hoped to earn income by taking in washing and sewing or opening a small shop. Because of his longstanding relationship with her father, Washington felt more than the usual responsibility toward Sarah. Bishop remained living at Mount Vernon even after he was no longer able to work and passed away in 1795, just a few months before Thomas Green absconded from the plantation. Sarah remained in tenuous circumstances and Washington instructed Pearce to give her assistance, but suggested that if she was not capable of supporting her children she should "bind them to good masters and mistresses, who will learn them trades…"[526]

While supporting Sarah Bishop Green was a choice that Washington made on the basis of a longstanding personal relationship and his own ideals of benevolence, he was

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[524] GW to Anthony Whitting, 10 February 1793, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, 128.
[525] GW to Anthony Whitting, 3 March 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 12:257-258; GW to William Pearce, 23 December 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 14:615.
[526] GW to William Pearce, 4 April 1796, Founders Online, National Archives (http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-00405 [last update: 2015-06-29]).

undeniably responsible for the subsistence of Mount Vernon's slave community. The record suggests that, like most masters, he gave them the bare minimum they needed to work effectively on the plantation. Indeed without his presence and continual oversight, Washington had to face the fact that some slaves might be stealing from him because of real need. The grain rations supplied to Mount Vernon slaves was in keeping with those of other slave masters in the Chesapeake as was the scanty allowance of meat. Slaves did receive pork, but whether this was regularly supplied is unclear. Masters often allowed those with the space around their living quarters to grow vegetables and keep a few chickens for eggs as well as meat and many Mount Vernon slaves did so. They could hunt or fish as well, but with their work schedule it would normally only leave Sunday for such activities.[527] As he scrutinized the weekly reports of each farm, Washington noted that the farm manager had increased the allowances of ground corn meal. Washington questioned Whitting's actions and explained that the smaller allowances were intended to "prevent waste or embezzlement" and that he would not begrudge them whatever amount of food would satisfy them – within reason.[528]

Washington's extended absences from Mount Vernon made it difficult for him to retain complete control over his plantation, therefore, he had to rely on individuals he trusted for information. Davy, the enslaved overseer at Muddy Hole, assured Washington that the rations at the quarters were not sufficient. Not only were they not enough, but Davy also contended that many would go several days without food before receiving the

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[527] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 136. Informational signage along Mulberry Row at Monticello states "The weekly ration for an adult at Monticello was a peck (8 qts.) of cornmeal and a half pound to a pound of pork." Site visit 6/25/15.
[528] GW to Anthony Whitting, 28 April 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 12:488-492.

next ration. Washington explained to Whitting, "formerly, every working Negro used to receive a heaping and squeezed peck at top of unsifted meal, all others (except suckling children) had half a peck." Children and any slaves that were too old to work received just half what the others received. Hearing the news that his slaves did not have enough to eat was shocking to Washington, especially as he claimed not to have heard any complaints heretofore.[529]

Davy knew the amount of food the slaves at the farm where he was overseer had to eat, but he was in a difficult position with regards to his fellow slaves. It was important for him to retain his authority over the other slaves, but it was also to his benefit to treat them fairly as he lived among them.[530] As a slave overseer, he received a personal weekly allowance of meat that was presumably comparable to that of the white overseers and was certainly more than the laborers received.[531] Did he share his rations freely or did he feel pressured to do so by the hungry faces of those around him? When Washington noted, "a Weekly allowance of Meat to the Negro Overseers is preferable to an Annual one-because the Annual one is not taken care of but either profusely used or stolen" did he mean that it was stolen from the overseer by slaves under his management?[532]

Historian Ira Berlin has pointed to a change in the way masters characterized their slaves during the eighteenth century as black society evolved. Over time it became less African and more creolized as the slaves living in the Chesapeake became assimilated

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[529] GW to Anthony Whitting, 26 May 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 12:634-635.
[530] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 224-225.
[531] Washington's Agricultural Notes, Notes and Observations, January 1785-December 1786.
[532] Ibid.

and gained greater control of the world around them. As a consequence, the initial "notions of blacks as a dull, brutish people fell away. In their place reappeared the stereotype of the artful, sensible charlatan."[533] Muddy Hole had a reputation for being the most difficult farm to manage with a population of "sly, cunning and roguish negroes."[534] The slaves under overseer Davy's charge, although reportedly rowdy, were a remarkably stable group. Ten of them had worked together for over a decade and among the laborers near the end of the eighteenth century, at least nine of the younger laborers had been born at Muddy Hole. Such stability may have made for especially strong ties of loyalty and self-confidence forged from hard work and difficult living conditions. The land at Muddy Hole was low and swampy – a breeding ground for mosquitos in the summer. Overseer Davy and his wife were the only married couple living together at Muddy Hole. Gabriel had a spouse, Judy, at Dogue Run and four of the women had spouses at the Mansion House farm. The work force was also mostly comprised of women. There were five male laborers and nine female laborers in 1786; by 1799, there were six men and fourteen women.[535]

Living and working in close proximity could lead to petty annoyances building into violence against each other.[536] Mount Vernon's slave community was typical in this regard. Historian Jeff Forret found that "slaves…sometimes lashed out at their friends and family and beat or killed one another" in his study of South Carolina slaves'

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[533] Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 128.
[534] GW to William Pearce, 5 July 1795, Ms., Mount Vernon Ladies Association.
[535] 1786 Slave List *Papers of GW, Diaries*; 1799 Slave List, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 4:531-533.
[536] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 471-472.

violence.[537] To prevent such situations, which diminished the efficiency of his labor force, required careful management as well as knowledge of the personalities of individual slaves and their relationships with each other. Washington reminded his managers and overseers on several occasions that dower slaves Tom Davis and his uncle, overseer Will, not be assigned to work at the same place. In one case, Washington debated whether to place Will or Tom in charge of the boat. He leaned toward giving the assignment to Will as he found him responsible, but did not want to offend him if he perceived the job as a demotion from overseer. Tom was described as "high spirited" and disobedient to Will whom he should have treated with respect on two counts according to Washington: because Will was his uncle and an overseer. Washington cautioned Whitting, "as they do not agree, to let them interfere as little as can be avoided, with each other."[538] A few weeks later, Washington reiterated his instructions to keep the two men separated, writing, "Davis ought not to be placed among the hands at the fishery if (overseer) Will is there…."[539] The cause of the discordance between uncle and nephew is not revealed, but it was evidently an ongoing situation and not the result of a single disagreement between the two men.

Another altercation between slaves took on a more physical aspect when fifteen-year-old Ben assaulted Sambo who worked as a carpenter at the Mansion House. In a letter to Whitting Washington affirmed "the correction you gave Ben, for his assault on Sambo, was just and proper." This type of incident appears not to have been unusual, for

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[537] Forret, "Conflict and the 'Slave Community': Violence among Slaves in Upcountry South Carolina," *The Journal of Southern History* (74:3, August 2008), 554.
[538] GW to Anthony Whitting, 3 February 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 12:98.
[539] GW to Anthony Whitting, 24 February 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 12:212-214.

Washington continued, "it is my earnest desire that quarrels may be stopped, or punishment of both parties follow; unless it shall appear, *clearly*, that one only is to blame: and the other forced into it from self-defense."[540] Washington expressed disappointment that "so likely a young fellow as Matilda's Ben should addict himself to such courses as he is pursuing." Ben was the son of Matilda and Boatswain who both worked at the Mansion House farm; Matilda as a spinner and Boatswain as a laborer. Washington had clearly expected more self-control from Ben, but he expressed his willingness to take extreme measures if the situation warranted. Washington told Whitting to appeal to Ben's parents to put a stop to "his rogueries and other villainies…" or he would meet the same fate as Waggoner Jack and be shipped off to the West Indies, "where he will have no opportunity of playing such pranks."[541]

It is not clear exactly what type of "correction" Ben received for assaulting Sambo, but whipping as punishment did occur at Mount Vernon. It is impossible to know just how often slaves were whipped, but Washington, like other slave masters, expected obedience and there would be consequences if their orders were ignored.[542] It was usually the lot of the overseer to mete out punishment to the slaves. Charlotte received a whipping from Whitting with a hickory switch he used as a crop for his riding horse. The incident leading to the whipping appears to have been just one of many occurrences of "impudence" that Whitting observed in Charlotte, a slave seamstress at the Mansion House. Some hogs had been slaughtered and Charlotte requested a "Spear rib as she

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[540] Ibid. Emphasis on the word "clearly" is Washington's.
[541] GW to Anthony Whitting, 3 March 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 12:259. Washington sent Jack to the West Indies in 1791. See Ledger B, 336.
[542] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 276.

long'd for it," but Whitting refused her request. A few days later, he sent spare ribs to all of the women at the quarter including Charlotte, but she followed Whitting back to his dwelling and threw the meat on his porch telling him "she wanted none.…" It was this action that spurred Whitting into whipping her. He expected she would undoubtedly report sick for the week as an act of resistance for receiving punishment.[543]

Masters often suspected slaves of feigning illness to avoid work. It was one way they could control their daily life. Washington evidently studied the weekly reports in great detail, noting that their overseers had marked slaves Ruth, Hannah, and Peg as sick on the reports for several weeks. He expressed his opinion that Ruth, for one, was "extremely deceitful; she has been aiming for some time past to get into the house, exempt from work; but if they are not made to do what their age & strength will enable them, it will be a very bad example to others—none of whom would work if by pretexts they can avoid it."[544] All three of the women worked at River Farm. Ruth was about sixty-five years old by this time, and it is perhaps understandable why she might want to avoid the rigors of working in the field at her age.

Historian Ira Berlin has observed that, "resistance required guile…"[545] Slaves had many ways to exhibit resistance to their situation that would not be obvious to the master. They might steal items for their own use or resale; or not exhibit the same frugality with goods and supplies as someone with a personal investment might. Although Caroline had been a seamstress for a long time, Washington suggested in a letter to Whitting that it

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[543] Anthony Whitting to GW, 16 January 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 12:11.
[544] GW to William Pearce, 27 July 1794, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 16:444.
[545] Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Ma.: Belknap Press, 2003), 65.

might have been a better choice to have Catherine Ehlers, the gardener's wife and supervisor of the seamstresses, placed in charge of cutting pieces of linen to make into clothing rather than Caroline "who, was never celebrated for her honesty; and who, it is believed, would not be restrained by scruples of conscience, from taking a large toll, if she thought it could be done with impunity."[546]

There was a difference of opinion between master and slave as to what qualified as theft. Masters often allowed slaves to earn small amounts of money and barter within the plantation economy, but drew the line at more established attempts at trade.[547] The list of complaints about thefts at Mount Vernon was long and took many different forms. Cyrus was suspected of stealing horse feed; unnamed persons were taking horses out at "unseasonable hours in the night"; and the carters and wagoners left their horses in the clover lot near their quarter so as to easily get them again the next morning rather than taking them to the pasture.[548] Each offense a relatively small crime, but in the aggregate they violated one of Washington's favorite maxims, "A penny saved, is a penny got.[549] He regarded any careless act as a theft that harmed the entire community.

Theft occurred at all levels of Mount Vernon's laboring community. Carpenter Thomas Green approached Washington with a tale regarding William Stuart, the overseer of River Farm. Green stated that Stuart's wife was selling butter to McKnight's Tavern in

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[546] GW to Anthony Whitting, 17 February 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 12:163-165.
[547] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 366, 370-371; see also, Jeff Forret, "Slaves, Poor Whites, and the Underground Economy of the Rural Carolinas," *The Journal of Southern History*, 70:4 (Nov. 2004), 783-824.
[548] GW to William Pearce, 23 December 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.,* 14:606-615; GW to Howell Lewis, 3 November 1793, *Papers of GW*, *Pres. Ser*., 14:334.
[549] GW to Anthony Whitting, 5 May 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 12:523-528.

Alexandria to her own profit. Washington asked Pearce to make sure that all butter, less the amount that was allowed for the use of Stuart's family, be forwarded to the Mansion House from where it would be sent to the market in Alexandria. There was also a suspicion that overseers were selling Washington's lambs contrary to their contractual agreements, which forbade them from selling anything from Mount Vernon for their own advantage.[550]

In spite of the many levels of authority that existed at Mount Vernon, some hired workers and slaves brought their complaints directly to its master, even when Washington was not at home. In 1794, overseer James Butler bypassed the authority of farm manager Pearce and wrote directly to Washington with his suspicions of the activities of Hiland Crow, another overseer. Washington forwarded the letter to Pearce, writing "I do not see that it is in my power, or yours, to interfere in the matter otherwise than in an amicable manner. If this fails, the Courts of Justice are equally open to both…" Evidently, Butler suspected Crow of stealing and selling fish that was stored at Mount Vernon as part of the slaves' food rations. Washington told Pearce that during his last visit home, he had received "numerous complaints from my Negroes of their not having been supplied as usual with fish" and hints that a supposed break-in to the fish house had in fact been a cover to the theft of the fish by Crow. Washington's solution to this issue was to put forth the plan that plenty of fish should be set aside for the slaves this season,

[550] GW to William Pearce, 8 June 1794, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 16:201-203.

strengthen the security of the building housing the fish, and have only one person in charge of the dispersal of the fish rations to the overseers of each farm.[551]

While Mount Vernon was mainly supported by proceeds received from the sale of wheat, fish, and other produce, another type of economy, in which women were the dominant actors, also operated within the plantation community. Historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has shown how men and women could have parallel economies within a community in *A Midwife's Tale: The Diary of Martha Ballard*. While the worlds within which New Englander Martha Ballard and the white and black women of Mount Vernon moved were very different, there were similarities in their economic transactions. Martha Ballard and her family and neighbors traded yarn, cloth, and foodstuffs. These items in addition to Martha Ballard's income from her midwifery practice made an important contribution to the family.[552] The women in the Mount Vernon community supported their own profitable local economy that all helped to provide its members with the items they needed.

Martha Washington and the women, both hired and enslaved, who worked at Mount Vernon as spinners and sewers and in other non-agricultural work were a vital part of the plantation economy. Catherine Ehlers, the wife of the gardener, managed, under Martha's direction, the work of the spinners who made the cloth and the seamstresses who sewed the clothing for the slaves. On different occasions she received twenty yards of linen to make clothing for the "Negro infants," 282 yards of osnaburg for the field workers shirts and pants, and more linen that may have been used to make clothing for

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[551] GW to William Pearce, 20 April 1794, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 15:626.
[552] Ulrich, *Midwife's Tale*.

the house servants, who wore better quality clothes than the field hands.[553] The gardener's wife and neighbors Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Pool kept poultry, which they all sold to the Mansion House kitchen on several occasions. Slave men also participated in the plantation marketplace. Carpenter Isaac appears regularly in the cash accounts for the sale of honey and chickens.[554] Slaves Sambo and Breechy were also in the business of supplying honey and chickens for the Mansion House table.[555] There were many ways for slaves to spend money earned in this way including better clothing, food and drink, and other household items.[556]

Each woman in the plantation economy with her own household had the responsibility to keep her family fed and clothed, although slave women received a bare minimum of necessities. For the mistress of a large plantation, such as Martha Washington, there were the additional duties of acting as hostess to numerous guests and making sure the guests had a place to sleep and food to eat. Much of the actual work that

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[553] William Pearce Account Book, Store accounts, 1 August 1794, 26 February 1796, 24 April 1796. Catherine Kerrison describes similar treatment of clothing for house servants and field workers at Monticello. Catherine Kerrison, "Daughter of the President's Slave," in *Virginia Women: Their Lives and Times, Vol. I,* ed. by Cynthia A. Kierner and Sandra Gioia Treadway (Athens, Ga.:The University of Georgia Press, 2015), 227.
[554] Mount Vernon Farm Ledger Jan. 1794-Dec. 1796, cash accounts, 25 April 1795; Ledger B, f. 322, 9 November 1790; Isaac: in 1791; sold 12 chickens in1796, honey 7/16/1797 cash memoranda, 34; 8 gallons of honey and chickens in summer of 1799 for which he was paid $11.25 – 8/21/1799 cash memoranda, Sept. 1794-Dec. 1799.
[555] Ledger B, f. 306, 320.
[556] Thompson, "They Appear to Live Comfortable Together: Private Lives of the Mount Vernon Slaves," in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington*, Schwarz, Philip J. Schwarz, ed. (Mount Vernon, Va.: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2009), 91.

made it possible for Martha Washington to entertain so many guests, was of course done by slaves, but it was all done at her command and with her oversight.[557]

Martha Washington was also a member of a network of gentry women who purchased fabrics and other personal goods such as shoes, watches, and other items repaired or made to order. Residing first in New York City and then Philadelphia gave Martha even greater access to a wider variety of goods and services than she might find in Alexandria. Shopping was skilled work. As historian Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor emphasizes that consumer "choice was an accumulation of advice, information, and purchasing power."[558]

Many of the transactions Martha Washington took part in were for her niece, Fanny Washington. Fanny would give Martha a set amount of money and a list of desired goods and Martha in turn would, "lay the money out in the best way" possible.[559] The items Martha procured for Fanny ranged from "chocolate in cakes or shells," a bespoke cloak and bonnet, a locket, and shoes. All of this is not to suggest that Martha Washington did all of the legwork necessary to carry out these transactions. She may very well have been sending her maid, Oney Judge, to shops to scout out items and compare price and quality.[560] The correspondence between Martha and Fanny also illustrates the complexity of shipping items between towns. Nephew Robert Lewis had

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[557] Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 20-25.
[558] Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 130.
[559] Martha Washington to Frances Bassett Washington, 5 June 1791, Fields, *Worthy Partner*, 231-232.
[560] Hartigan-O'Connor, *Ties That Buy*, 129-130.

picked up a parcel of silk to deliver for Fanny but neglected to give Martha the invoice, therefore Fanny would have to pay for the silk upon receipt. In one case, Martha had sent jewelry via an unnamed gentleman traveling to Alexandria and on another occasion shoes went on board a ship to Alexandria directed to the merchant Mr. Porter. Once the item reached Alexandria, Fanny would have to pick it up or have it delivered.[561]

Just as it increased opportunities to shop for a wider range of goods, residing in Philadelphia also expanded the Washingtons' connections to those who offered specialized services, including doctors and purveyors of medicine. For example, they had an account with Dr. Bass, a druggist in the town and Elizabeth Willing Powell, a long time friend, sent Martha Washington a medicine for colic.[562] Agues, fevers, pox, and countless other illnesses were a constant threat in the eighteenth century and in many cases the medical profession was ill equipped to provide cures. In the 1790s, a number of books were published that illustrated the interest of Americans in learning more about diseases and epidemics. Among them were Noah Webster's *Brief History of Epidemic and Pestilential Diseases* and James Tytler's *Treatise on the Plague and Yellow Fever*.[563]

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[561] Martha Washington to Frances Bassett Washington, 22 April 1792; 10 February 1793; 4 August 1793, Fields, *Worthy Partner*. See also, Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth Century America*. Haulman states that once the war was over imports flooded back into the ports, especially fabrics; and Sturtz, *Within Her Power*, especially Chapter 5: "'A Little Purse to Herself': Cash, Credit, and Shopping."

[562] Stephen Decatur, Jr., *Private Affairs of George Washington from the Records and Accounts of Tobias Lear, Esquire, His Secretary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933), 270; Elizabeth Willing Powel to Martha Washington, 7 December 1796, *Worthy Partner*, 294. Powel was the wife of Philadelphia merchant, Samuel Powel (1738-1793), and their home was a site of social and political discourse in the city.

[563] Thomas Apel, "The Thucydidean Moment: History, Science, and the Yellow-Fever Controversy, 1793-1805," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 34:3, 315-317.

Health and disease were pervasive concerns, as shown by the many personal letters that contained inquiries as to the health of the recipient and his or her family and friends and information regarding the health of the same of the writer. Few families did not suffer the loss of a young child or other premature death of a loved one. Martha Washington expressed sympathy for a mother that lost her little boy, but felt that "as she has several good children left she should endeavor to reconcile herself to the loss of one however hard it may be…"[564] Martha Washington spoke out of personal experience having lost all four of her own children.[565]

Small pox had been a threat in the colonies since the first white man landed on its shores. George Washington himself had been afflicted with the dreaded disease when he traveled to Barbados in 1751. Inoculations became available in the years before the American Revolution and Washington employed them in an attempt to stem the spread of the disease to his troops.[566] The disease was still widespread in Philadelphia in 1791 when Lear advised it would not be safe to be in the city "for a single day" without being

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[564] Martha Washington to Frances Bassett Washington, 3 August 1794, Fields, *Worthy Partner*, 272.
[565] Daniel Parke Custis and Martha lost two children in infancy. Patsy Custis died from what is presumed to be epilepsy in 1773 and Jacky Custis died of camp fever shortly after the Battle of Yorktown in 1781.
[566] Ann M. Becker, "Smallpox in Washington's Army: Strategic Implications of the Disease during the American Revolutionary War," *The Journal of Military History*, 68:2.

inoculated from the small pox.[567] It remained a threat, as Martha Washington refers to over two hundred deaths ascribed to the small pox in Richmond, Virginia in 1794.[568]

Yellow fever arrived in America in July 1793 with the arrival of the *Hankey* from Africa, a ship that carried the deadly disease in its water supply. Spread by mosquitos, it caused jaundiced skin and internal bleeding. It quickly spread to other port cities including Alexandria and continued to be a threat until 1805.[569] Tobias Lear lost his wife in the summer of 1793, during the first yellow fever epidemic, after an illness of just eight days. The following winter, Martha Washington wrote from Philadelphia there was "not the least fear of the yellow fever while the weather is cold some people seems to anticipate its return again in the summer." Martha went on to say "almost every family has lost some of their friends – and black seems to be general dress in the city.[570] In the spring of 1794, Martha was still optimistic as yellow fever had not yet returned and hoped that the measures taken in the town, namely "to clean and air the houses and clean the streets" would prevent further outbreaks if it should be carried back to Philadelphia via ships arriving the port from "all quarters."[571] The epidemic greatly affected trade in

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[567] Tobias Lear to GW, 5 June 1791, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 8:232-233; See also, Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Pox America: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-1782* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).
[568] Martha Washington to Fanny Bassett Washington, 16 March 1794, Fields, ed., *Worthy Partner*, 262..
[569] Apel, "Thucydidean Moment," 321.
[570] Fields, *Worthy Partner*, 254, Letter from Martha Washington to Fanny Bassett Washington, 14 January 1794.
[571] Martha Washington to Fanny Bassett Washington, 16 March 1794, Fields, ed., *Worthy Partner*, 262.

the port cities where it appeared, with quarantines closing stores and bringing commerce to a halt.[572]

A more common, but equally deadly affliction was tuberculosis, known as consumption during the eighteenth century. It generally affects the lungs and coughing can produce spots of blood. This is followed by low-grade fever and night sweats as well as a loss of appetite. The infected individual appears to be wasting away. Anthony Whitting wrote to Washington with concern about George Augustine's health. He expressed the opinion that "Poor Major Washington I believe has never contemplated his disorder as fatal…but according to every account I hear of him it seems almost impossible he can recover."[573] George Augustine passed away in early February of that year. Ironically, Whitting died of the same illness only a few months later in June of 1793.

Washington encouraged Fanny to continue to live at Mount Vernon after his nephew's death, telling her that there was nowhere that she would be more welcome. Fanny's grief over the loss of her husband is evident in her indecisiveness and peripatetic life in the months after his death.[574] By April 1794, she had apparently abandoned her plan to join her brother Burwell Bassett's household because William Pearce was overseeing repairs to Washington's house in Alexandria for her use. Somewhere along

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[572] Brooke Hunter, "Wheat, War, and the American Economy During the Age of Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, (62:3), 523-524.
[573] Anthony Whitting to GW, 16 January 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 12: 8.
[574] GW to Frances Bassett Washington, 24 February 1793; Letter from GW to Frances Bassett Washington, 28 July 1793; Letter from GW to William Pearce, 6 October 1793. The property at River Farm was later known as Walnut Tree Farm and is now a part of the American Horticultural Society's headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia.

the way, Fanny and the recently widowed Tobias Lear formed an attachment. By mid-October, she accepted Lear's proposal of marriage.[575] They joined their two families; Lear had a son and Fanny three children. Their marriage was short – Fanny died in May 1796 of tuberculosis just as her first husband had. Lear took on the raising of her children along with his own son.[576]

Other illnesses and injuries also afflicted the Mount Vernon community during these years. Scabies infected Daphne's family at River Farm. Daphne had at least five children, but by 1793, only Hannah, aged twelve years, was not yet working. However, Daphne may have been caring for the grandchildren of her older children. Scabies, also known as "the itch" was transmitted through close contact between individuals and was treated with an ointment.[577] Charles, a ditcher at the Mansion House Farm, injured his toe while working. Whitting sent for Dr. James Craik of Alexandria to see to it. Whitting was not optimistic and wrote that he was "fearful it will yet to be taken off. The bone very much cut and I expect rotten."[578] On another occasion, Thomas Davis hurt his shoulder although Washington was skeptical of Davis' explanation for how the injury had occurred. Washington encouraged Whitting to get him to at least paint, or if he was

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[575] Fields, *Worthy Partner*, Martha Washington to Frances Bassett Washington, 18 October 1794.
[576] 13 August 1797, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 6:251-252, fn.
[577] GW to Anthony Whitting, 17 February 1793, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, 164. Daphne died sometime between 1793 and 1799.
[578] Anthony Whitting to GW, 20 February 1793, Ibid., 197. Charles had been reported as "lame" on some weekly reports since the end of October 1792.

unable to do this relatively easy task, at least instruct another slave how to correctly mix and apply the paint.[579]

Deaths affected other members of the Mount Vernon community during the 1790s. John Knowles, who first came to Mount Vernon in 1773 as an indentured bricklayer, died in 1790. His wife Rachael worked in the Mansion House for a time and worked as a spinner. Rachael Knowles received the wages of her late husband, but left Mount Vernon shortly after his death.[580] Overseer William Stuart evidently had his family with him at Mount Vernon as a daughter died in February 1794 and the daughter of William Pearce, who had been ill for several years, died that autumn.[581] The overseer of Union Farm, John Groves, died only eight months after beginning his employment at Mount Vernon in July 1795.[582]

Members of the Washington family were buried in a vault overlooking the Potomac River. A little farther down the south lane was a slave cemetery for the Mansion House Farm slaves. The site was probably chosen by George Washington or may even have been in existence dating back to Lawrence Washington's ownership of the plantation. Very little written evidence relates what slave burial practices were or in what way the master may have played a part in the burial service. The 1787 Store Book contains an entry that Hercules received three bottles of rum "to bury his wife." What is known is that many of the West African slaves that were brought to the New World held

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[579] GW to Anthony Whitting, 10 February 1793, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, 128.
[580] Ledger B, Folio 321, 8 May 1790.
[581] William Pearce to GW, 11 Feb 1792, typescript at MVLA.
[582] William Pearce to GW, 31 August 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 16:621-622. The cause of Groves' death does not appear in the record.

a belief in a "spirit life after death."[583] After the body was cleansed and prepared for burial, the slave community would gather at the gravesite, most likely after dark or when the work day was through.[584]

Death also came often to Mount Vernon's slave community. Eight slave deaths were noted in the store book section of the account book kept by William Pearce from the end of 1794 to mid-1795. They ranged in age from a newborn baby to Old Morris and Old Jupiter. The slave carpenters made the coffins for the members of their community in preparation for their burial. Between November 1794 and June 1795, Isaac and Jim made at least seven coffins. One of the coffins Isaac made was for fourteen-year-old Boatswain. Boatswain was the son of Boson and Myrtilla and was working at Dogue Run Farm when he died. Children were especially fragile and susceptible to many illnesses. In addition to Boatswain, coffins were made for a child at River Farm; for Lucy's twelve-year-old son Daniel at Dogue Run; and Annie's infant, only about ten days old.[585]

Mount Vernon also lost two especially valued and trusted slaves who fled to freedom in the 1790s, and whose escapes were arguably direct consequences of Washington's leaving Mount Vernon to serve as president. Spending so much time in Philadelphia provided Oney Judge and Hercules with the opportunity to become acquainted with its thriving free black community. As historian Annette Gordon-Reed

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[583] 1787 Store Book; Joseph Downer. "Hallowed Ground, Sacred Place; The Slave Cemetery at George Washington's Mount Vernon and the Cultural Landscapes of the Enslaved" (Masters Thesis, Department of Anthropology, George Washington University, 2015), 26.
[584] Ibid, 28.
[585] William Pearce Account Book, Store Account, 7 October 1794 to 3 June 1795. There were most likely burying grounds at each of the farms but no archaeology has been done.

notes, "there was no easy place for blacks in the United States during these years, merely places that were less hard than others. Philadelphia was 'less hard' than Virginia."[586] Martha Washington's maid Oney Judge ran away in May 1796, "without provocation," as Washington described it.[587] In fact, Oney walked away from the presidential mansion while the Washington's were eating dinner and shortly before they were to return to Mount Vernon for the summer.[588] Washington made a concerted effort to retrieve his wife's maid including placing an advertisement in a Philadelphia newspaper just two days after her absence was discovered. He was still attempting to get Oney back in 1799. Her whereabouts became known and Burwell Bassett, Jr., a nephew of Martha's, was entreated to contact Oney to see if she would return willingly. If she came back willingly, she would "escape punishment."[589]

Lear planned to send Hercules back to Mount Vernon in May of 1791 before Washington himself would leave Philadelphia for a break from government business. Hercules perceived that the reason for his early return to Virginia was to "prevent his taking the advantage of a six months residence in this place" according to Lear; Hercules was most likely correct. Lear also informed Washington that Hercules exhibited

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[586] Gordon-Reed, *The Hemings of Monticello*, 456-457.
[587] GW to Joseph Whipple, 28 November 1796, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 4:238, fn. 1.
[588] Mary V. Thompson, "She Did Not Want to be a Slave Always:" Slave Women and Resistance at Mount Vernon (talk presented at the Northern Virginia Studies Conference, 1996), 12; Rev. T.H. Adams, "Washington's Runaway Slave and How Portsmouth Freed Her," *The Granite Freeman*, Concord, New Hampshire, 22 May 1845. Oney was interviewed in 1845, just a few years before her death in 1848. She had settled in New Hampshire and married a free black man, John Staines. Although Oney was never officially freed by Martha Washington or the Custis estate, she lived the life of a free woman and as mistress of her own household.
[589] GW to Burwell Bassett, Jr., 11 August 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 4:237.

unhappiness and "said he was mortified to the last degree to think that a suspicion could be entertained of his fidelity or attachment" to his master. Martha Washington intervened and informed Hercules that he could remain until a few days before their departure to prepare for their arrival at Mount Vernon.[590] Despite Hercules' earlier protestations against having any interest in taking advantage of Philadelphia's slave laws, he did leave Mount Vernon near the end of Washington's presidency. Before the Washingtons made the final trip home from Philadelphia there were few visitors to the estate and little work for the cook, consequently, Hercules was put to work with the bricklayers and gardeners. Sometime during February of 1797, Hercules walked away from Mount Vernon.

The loss of these two slaves hit George and Martha Washington particularly hard. Washington acquired Hercules around 1770 from his old neighbor John Posey.[591] A member of the community at Mount Vernon for almost thirty years, he appeared loyal and devoted to the family. How could he want to leave them? Oney Judge's role as Martha Washington's personal maid gave her access to the most intimate parts of Martha's life and her departure felt like a betrayal. Philip Morgan observed, "No slave knew his or her master better than a personal attendant."[592] There may have also been a concern that unscrupulous individuals might attempt to get information from Hercules or Oney regarding the president and his family.

The Fugitive Slave Act passed into law in 1793 and George Washington made a concerted effort to retrieve both slaves, as was his right under the law. Its official title

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[590] Tobias Lear to GW, 5 June 1791, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 8:232.
[591] Memorandum List of Tithables, 1770, *Papers of GW, Col. Ser.*, 356-357.
[592] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint,* 353-356.

was "An Act respecting fugitives from justice, and persons escaping from the service of their masters."[593] The law allowed slave owners to retrieve their slaves even if they had fled to a place where slavery was outlawed and additionally prohibited anyone from aiding or hiding runaway slaves. From the Washingtons' perspective, both Hercules and Oney were not only valuable bonds people; they were also like members of the family. The continual contact between slave and master could create a feeling of closeness, but true friendship was not possible in such an unequal relationship. Neither Hercules nor Oney ever returned to their master and mistress. Henry Wiencek states that the Washington's mistook obedience for loyalty.[594] However, George and Martha Washington made an even greater error in underestimating the value of freedom to their slaves. Obedience and loyalty were nothing when compared to the ability to shape one's own life. Running away from a master was not so much an act against the master as an act for their right to make their own choices.

George Washington issued his final address to Congress on 7 December 1796. In the spring of the following year he would return to Mount Vernon for a true retirement and an opportunity to enjoy life under his "vine and fig tree."[595] However, retirement did not mean idleness. The community along the Potomac River would remain hard at work as Washington continued to make plans for improvements to his farms. He must have felt

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[593] "An Act respecting fugitives from justice, and persons escaping from the service of their masters," Second United States Congress, Statutes at Large, 302, 12 February 1793.
[594] Wiencek, *Imperfect God*, 321.
[595] GW to Landon Carter, 17 October 1796, Fitzpatrick, ed. *Writings of George Washington*, 245. Washington refers to "the vine and fig tree" in several letters. Several source for this phrase are found in the Bible including Micah 4:4, Zechariah 3:10, and I Kings 4:24.

some gratification that at last he would be there to ensure that all would again be under his watchful eye.

CHAPTER 5
FINAL RETIREMENT, 1797-1799:
"SYSTEM IN ALL THINGS IS THE SOUL OF BUSINESS"[596]

George Washington returned to Mount Vernon after a long absence once again in March 1797, but this time his priorities were slightly different. He still wanted his farms to be agriculturally productive, but he wanted to manage them himself, after releasing some of his acreage to tenants, and to sell some of his Western land to finance the improvements he desired for his estate. There was also a new industry at Mount Vernon, a whiskey distillery that proved to be far more successful than he ever imagined. After vesting so much of his time and energy to the service of his country, Washington still thought it possible that his country might require his service, which, indeed, proved to be the case though for only a short time. After his retirement from the presidency, Washington recognized that he was no longer a young man and referred to his age as a matter of fact rather than one of regret. The organization of his presidential papers weighed on his mind and he hired a new secretary to help him complete that task. Washington's death in December 1799 brought the promise of freedom for some of Mount Vernon's enslaved people and a period of mourning and uncertainty for others in the community.

[596] GW to James Anderson, 21 December 1797, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 1:523-526.

The citizens of Alexandria hoped to fete their native son upon his arrival home from the presidency by meeting him at the ferry as he crossed over the Potomac River at Georgetown and escorting him to Mount Vernon. Washington evidently asked them not to carry out their plan. He noted that "the attentions we met with on our journey were very flattering, and to some whose minds are differently formed from mine would have been highly relished," but he stopped "all parades or escorts" if he knew about them in advance.[597] However, Washington was not able to intercede at every stop along the way so he had to endure some celebrations on the trip home and as he passed through Alexandria, he accepted "an invitation to a public dinner" for the following week.[598]

Martha's granddaughter Nelly accompanied her grandparents from Philadelphia at the end of Washington's term as president on their week long journey to Mount Vernon. Nelly reported to a friend that the group, had encountered "no adventures of any kind and saw nothing uncommon, except the light Horse of Delaware and Maryland, who insisted upon attending us through their states, all the Inhabitants of Baltimore who came out to *see* and *be seen* and to Welcome My Dear Grandpapa – some in carriages, some on Horseback, the others on foot." Nelly expressed her delight at being home and joy that "Grandpapa is no longer in office" for no place exceeded the appeal of Mount Vernon, which provided "the Beauties of Nature" and the companionship of her family. The family also savored the respite from the ferocious partisanship that prevailed in the later

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[597] John Fitzgerald and James Craik to GW, 13 March 1797, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 1:33; GW to James McHenry, 3 April 1797, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 1:71.
[598] *Columbian Mirror*, 16 March 1797.

years of Washington's presidency.[599] Now Martha Washington was suffering from a bad cold, but Nelly reported that "Grandpapa" had already "turned Farmer again (fig. 6)." Nelly planned to begin gardening and her grandmother had appointed her "deputy housekeeper." She would turn eighteen years old at the end of March and it was time for her to begin to learn the responsibilities of a young woman who might soon have her own household to run. Nelly instructed her friend to send her letters "under cover to General Washington, Mount Vernon, Virginia."[600]

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[599] Rosemarie Zagarri, "George Washington and the Emergence of Party Politics in the New Nation," in *A Companion to George Washington*, Edward G. Lengel, ed. (Maiden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 490-505; Flexner, *Washington: The Indispensible Man*, 338-346; Ferling, *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington*, 465-468.

[600] Eleanor Parke Custis to Elizabeth Beale Bordley, 18 March 1797, *George Washington's Beautiful Nelly*, 30-33. The emphasis in the quote is Nelly's. Also accompanying the family on their trip were the marquis de Lafayette's son, George Washington Motier Lafayette and Felix Frestal, his tutor.

Figure 6. Junius Stearns, Life of George Washington, the Farmer, 1853, Library of Congress

Washington's retirement from the presidency began with a new business venture that would prove to be one of his most profitable. He signed an agreement with James Anderson in October 1796 to become the sole manager of the plantation after the departure of William Pearce because of poor health. Anderson had a great deal of experience and success in Scotland as a farmer, mainly growing grain, which he sold to Scottish whiskey distilleries. However, in 1788, Parliament banned the sale of Scottish whiskey in England and Wales for the year in order to reduce competition for the English

whiskey industry. Many Scottish firms went bankrupt because of the loss of revenue and left Scotland's grain farmers without one of their major markets.[601]

Anderson left Scotland for America in 1791 and first rented a farm in Fairfax County, then managed a plantation in Prince William County, before ending up managing a 1,700-acre farm near Fredericksburg where he also operated a distillery.[602] In 1796, Anderson approached Washington about the position of manager at Mount Vernon through a network of connections between the two men. David Stuart had written to his relative, Mr. Fitzhugh of Stafford who passed on the information to John Fitzgerald of Alexandria that Anderson was interested in the position of farm manager. Washington wrote to Anderson, in response to this roundabout application for the position, through his network of friends and associates, in August 1796, informing Anderson of his high expectations and that he would have large shoes to fill as Pearce's performance had been most satisfactory.[603]

Anderson approached Washington with the idea of starting a distillery just a few months after arriving at Mount Vernon. Washington consented to the idea and authorized the purchase of the necessary equipment. He also approved the idea of starting the distillery in the cooper's shop at the mill as Anderson wished. However, Washington feared that "at the Mill, idlers (of which, & bad people there are many around it) under

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[601] Pogue, *Founding Spirits: George Washington and the Beginnings of the American Whiskey Industry* (Buena Vista, Va.: Harbour Books, 2011), 113.
[602] James Anderson to George Washington, 11 September 1796, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 1:21.
[603] From George Washington to James Anderson, 18 August 1796, Founders Online, National Archives (http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-00862 [last update: 2015-12-30]). David Stuart married John Parke Custis' widow, Eleanor Calvert Custis, and was stepfather to Martha Washington's grandchildren.

pretense of coming there with grist could not be restrained from visiting the Distillery nor probably from tempting the Distiller nay more robbing the Still; as the Mill would always afford a pretext for coming to that place."[604] Nevertheless, the mill was the best site for the distillery because that location was adjacent to the grain needed for the distilling process, the cooperage for the barrels needed for shipping the finished product, and the roads and navigable stream to move the whiskey to market. For all these reasons, Washington acquiesced to the idea of building the distillery near the mill, just as Anderson wanted.[605]

Washington understood that further diversification would not only profit him but would be a boon to Alexandria and the region's prosperity. The distillery represented yet another example of the symbiotic relationship that existed between Mount Vernon and Alexandria and the surrounding region. The town provided Washington with a place to sell the produce of his plantation with low transportation costs and the merchants of the town benefitted from the steady flow of wheat, fish, and now whiskey that Washington sent them for sale in their stores and taverns. The fishery remained a lucrative income source as well. Washington's fisheries had remained consistently profitable since he began them shortly after arriving at Mount Vernon.[606] During his visit in 1798,

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[604] From George Washington to James Anderson, 8 January 1797, Founders Online, National Archives (http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-00159 [last update: 2015-12-30]).
[605] Pogue and White, *George Washington's Gristmill at Mount Vernon*, 46.
[606] Fusonie and Fusonie, *George Washington, Pioneer Farmer*, 49.

Niemcewicz observed that the slave fishermen had caught as many as 100,000 fish "with a single draw of the net."[607]

Anderson set up the first distillery in the cooper's shop under the management of his son John Anderson.[608] In addition, four slave men and one boy worked at the distillery and three more slave men worked as coopers.[609] During the week of Washington's birthday in February 1797, the first eighty gallons of whiskey were produced. The first year brought a profit of £83 with a total of 600 gallons of whiskey sold. Alexandria had a population of almost five thousand citizens at the end of the eighteenth century – almost double what it had been just ten years earlier (fig. 7). In a letter to his old friend, Sally Fairfax, who had lived in England since before the Revolution, Washington described how the town, "…has increased in buildings, in population, in the improvement of its streets by well-executed pavements, and in the extension of its wharves. This show of prosperity…is owing to its commerce," which Washington explained was largely due to the "opening of the inland navigation of the Potomac River, now cleared to Fort Cumberland, upwards of two hundred miles.…"[610]

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[607] Pogue, "Entrepreneur," 74; Julian Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree: Travels Through America 1797-1799, 1805, with Some Further Account of Life in New Jersey*, Metchie Budka, ed. (Elizabeth, New Jersey: Grossman Publishing Co., 1965), 103.
[608] Pogue, *Founding Spirits*, 207.
[609] Washington's Slave List, June 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 4:527-540.
[610] GW to Sarah Cary Fairfax, 16 May 1798, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 2:273. Martha Washington's letter to Sally Fairfax, sent at the same time as her husband's in 1798 added the information that Alexandria and the neighborhood were much changed. No one that the Fairfax family had associated with remained in the town and many of their old friends had died including, George Mason, Daniel McCarty and his wife, and Lund Washington. Martha Washington to Sally Cary Fairfax, 17 May 1798, *Worthy Partner*, 314-315.

Figure 7. George Gilpin. Plan of the town of Alexandria in the District of Columbia, 1798, Library of Congress

Anderson persuaded Washington to invest even more money into the business and construct a separate distillery building, but not before Washington consulted with friend John Fitzgerald who owned a rum distillery in Alexandria. Fitzgerald endorsed the plan for a larger whiskey distillery enthusiastically as he was convinced that the expanding Alexandria market could bear even more than Anderson would be able to produce. As historian W.J. Rorabaugh has observed, "Americans drank on all occasions. Every social event demanded a drink."[611] Consequently, Washington's whiskey surely would attract many buyers.

Fitzgerald also pointed out "that the Grain will be chiefly if not entirely raised on your land and the amazing benefit to your Stock of Cattle and Hogs" made the plan of expanding the distillery operation a wise decision for Washington.[612] Fitzgerald was evidently correct about the benefit it supplied to the livestock, which were fed mash, a by-product of the distilling process. A visitor noted that the distillery offered "the most succulent feed for pigs" and that they became so "excessively bulky that they can hardly drag their big bellies on the ground."[613] However, Mount Vernon was soon unable to keep up with the demand for enough grain for the industry and Washington had to purchase the balance from the Alexandria market. Cash was always welcome, but many of the customers to the distillery bartered their grain in exchange for whiskey.[614]

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[611] Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*, 19.
[612] John Fitzgerald to GW, 12 June 1797, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 1:181. Fitzgerald had been an aide-de-camp to Washington during the Revolution, was one of the initial directors of the Potwomack Company, and served as a mayor of Alexandria.
[613] Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree*, 100.
[614] Pogue and White, *George Washington's Gristmill*, 48-49.

John Fitzgerald was also correct that whiskey would find many willing buyers. Merchants in Alexandria purchased over 4,000 gallons of whiskey from Mount Vernon's distillery in 1799. They resold it at their shops and in taverns in the city. For example, merchant George Gilpin was a friend of Washington who had served in the Revolution as a colonel in the Fairfax County militia as well as a wheat merchant in Alexandria and Washington's fellow trustee of the Potowmack Company. Gilpin sold Washington's whiskey in his Alexandria store in the late 1790s. Another Alexandria merchant purchased the fattened livestock that Niemcewicz had observed near the distillery and sold the meat in his store.[615]

The mill remained in operation and the addition of the distillery to the complex made it even more of a center of Mount Vernon's business community. One visitor described the mill's neatness as "an indication of the owner to his private concerns…good fences, clear grounds, and extensive cultivation strike the eye as something uncommon in this part of the world but the road is bad enough."[616] Washington had upgraded the mill in 1791 with a newly patented system for milling designed by inventor and millwright Oliver Evans. Evans' system employed the power of the water wheel to move the grain and meal throughout the mill, which made it possible for a load of wheat to go from a wagon to a barrel at the end without any human intervention. Consequently, the process required less labor and became more efficient and economical.[617] Washington was one of the first people in the country to have the new

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[615] Pogue, *Founding Spirits*, 121-122.
[616] Latrobe. *The Virginia Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, 162-163.
[617] Pogue and White, *George Washington's Gristmill at Mount Vernon*, 30-31.

system installed. He may have learned of Evans' innovations by reading the patent application the inventor filed with the U.S. government early in his presidency.[618]

Washington likely sought to enhance the profitability of the mill and distillery in part because he began to offer more financial support to his nieces and nephews as they tried to make their way in Virginia's troubled post-revolutionary economy. Many of Virginia's leading families found themselves in extreme financial straits because of overspending and land speculation, and Washington's siblings and their children were no different.[619] His elder stepbrothers, Lawrence Washington died in 1752 and Augustine Washington in 1762. Among his other siblings, only his brother Charles Washington was still living when Washington retired from the presidency.[620] Charles' son Samuel wrote to his uncle asking for financial assistance. Washington replied that, "I perceive by your letter of the 7th Instant that you are under the same mistake that many are, in supposing that I have money always at Command." In spite of his protests, Washington loaned his nephew one thousand dollars in 1797 and an additional two thousand dollars in the next two years.[621]

Washington was also supporting his brother Samuel's sons, George Steptoe Washington and Lawrence Augustine Washington, by paying for their education and room and board at school. Although he usually indicated to his nephews that he expected them to repay him when he loaned them money or paid for their education, there is little

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[618] James B. Pleasants to GW, 5 May 1790, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser.*, 5:384-385.
[619] See: Evans, *"A Topping People."*
[620] Betty Washington Lewis died shortly after Washington returned to Mount Vernon in 1797 and Charles Washington died in September 1799.
[621] GW to Samuel Washington, 12 July 1797, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 1:247.

indication that he ever received any remuneration. Samuel Washington had died in 1781, just four years after the death of his wife in 1777, and his estate was in a precarious state. In addition, for a number of years, George and Martha had taken in Samuel's daughter Harriot Washington, who was only about four years old when her father died.[622]

Washington's aid to other family members came in the form of employment on his Mount Vernon estate. Lawrence Lewis, a brother to Howell Lewis and Robert Lewis, both of whom had worked as Washington's secretaries during the Revolutionary War, arrived at Mount Vernon at the invitation of his uncle in 1793, although Washington seemed to know very little about this nephew whom he may not have seen in many years.[623] Washington probably felt sympathy for Lawrence who had lost a wife and both his parents and had inherited little in the way of fortune.[624] Lawrence was to assist with the copying and organization of Washington's papers, perhaps serve as an understudy to James Anderson to gain "a better insight into husbandry than your opportunities have, Hitherto, presented to you." However, Washington made clear to his nephew that there would be no pay. Washington had another motive for inviting Lawrence to live with him. As he informed his nephew, "both your Aunt and I are in the decline of life" and they required someone to help them with their guests, especially in the evening when George

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[622] Patricia Brady, "George Washington and His Family," in *A Companion to George Washington*, Edward G. Lengel, ed. (Maiden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 100; Betty Washington Lewis to GW, 8 April 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 12:438; GW to Betty Washington Lewis, 7 October 1792, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 11:201-202. Harriot Washington married Andrew Parks in 1796.
[623] GW to Burgess Ball, 4 August 1793, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 13:257-258.
[624] Betty Washington Lewis, George Washington's only sister, died shortly before 31 March 1797. Lawrence Lewis' father had died in 1781 and his first wife, Susannah Edmundson, whom he married in 1789, had died by this time.

and Martha wished to retire early.[625] Thirty-year-old Lewis assured Washington that although he was "untutored in almost every branch of business," he was grateful to be of service to his uncle and perhaps learn something useful at the same time.[626]

In addition to the assistance provided by Lawrence Lewis with entertaining the guests, a housekeeper was also required to assist Martha Washington with the responsibilities of feeding and housing guests. On one occasion when Martha excused herself for being so long in responding to her sister's letter, it was because she was "obliged to be my own housekeeper which takes up the greatest part of my time." In addition, since their cook Hercules' departure earlier in the year, they had found no good replacement, although an enslaved man named Nathan who also worked in the kitchen was filling in during the interim.[627]

The arrival of both Lawrence Lewis and housekeeper Eleanor Forbes speak to the need for help that both George and Martha Washington found they needed as they returned to life at Mount Vernon. Because of Washington's immense fame and the vast expansion of his network of friends and acquaintances during his years in public service, there were simply more visitors than they could manage on their own. The Washingtons had hired housekeepers and even stewards before, but they took such steps generally only when they were away from Mount Vernon for long periods as Martha Washington preferred to be in charge when she was in residence. However, now the combined factors of Martha's age and health with the amount of visitors to entertain made additional help

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[625] GW to Lawrence Lewis, 4 August 1797, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 1:288.
[626] Lawrence Lewis to GW, 24 July 1797, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 1:270.
[627] Martha Washington to Elizabeth Dandridge Henley, 20 August 1797, *Worthy Partner*, Fields, ed., 307; Washington's Slave List, June 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 4:529.

necessary. During his visit in 1798, Niemcewicz reported that after a leisurely day spent fishing on the Potomac River, he returned to Mount Vernon to find unexpected company and that "the table in the great hall was set out with a Sevres porcelain service with places for twenty."[628] Forbes had been housekeeper for Virginia governor Robert Brooke, and he gave her a strong recommendation. Her attributes, in addition to honesty and sobriety, included knowledge of cookery and the ability to set a table properly. Bushrod Washington also reported to his uncle that Eleanor Forbes knew her place within the household and, in an era of increasingly truculent white domestics, would not expect to dine with the family "having never been accustomed to it."[629]

Nelly Custis viewed family life at Mount Vernon as one of tranquility. In a letter to a friend she explained that, "we have spent our Summer & Autumn very happily here, have in general been blessed with health – have many very agreeable visitors, and are now contentedly seated round our Winter fireside…My grandparents, Brother, a nephew of the General, and your servant, compose the family at present." The nephew that Nelly referred to is Lawrence Lewis who had arrived at Mount Vernon at the end of August. She continued that she never had "a dull or lonesome hour…I am not very industrious, but I work a little, read, play on the Harpsichord, write; & walk, & find my time fully

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[628] Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree*, 106; See also, Stephen A. McLeod, ed., *Dining with the Washingtons: Historic Recipes, Entertaining, and Hospitality from Mount Vernon* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011)
[629] Bushrod Washington to GW, 8 November 1797, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 1:466-467; Debra M. Oneal, "Elizabeth Drinker and Her "lone" Women: Domestic Service, Debilities and (In)dependence Through the Eyes of a Philadelphia Gentlewoman." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 68 (4, 2001), 435–64.

taken up with these several employments."[630] Nelly did not mention of all of the people who worked to make the "winter fireside" so pleasant. As one historian succinctly put it, "there is a temptation to believe that life at Mount Vernon was idyllic. So it was, to a degree, for the Washingtons and their guests, but not for the blacks who waited upon them."[631] Winter chores for slaves included cutting and hauling firewood for the Mansion fires as well as for the kitchen, the servants' hall, and dozens of other shops and dwellings across the plantation.[632]

The seasonal calendar dictated the agricultural calendar and the rhythm of the slaves' work days. As a leading historian of plantation life in early Virginia has observed planting and harvest were times of intense effort, but there were also "periods of greater ease, demanding lesser or greater inputs of judgment and skill, and impacting on daily work conditions and the way work was organized."[633] As planters began to shift from tobacco to grains and other crops in the late eighteenth century the rhythm of work routines also shifted for the slaves who worked the land and in the artisanal trades that supported agricultural production and marketing. Tobacco's growing calendar began in January and continued through to the following December when the dried leaves were packed and readied for shipment. Grain agriculture differed in that there could be two

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[630] Judith S. Britt, *Nothing More Agreeable: Music in George Washington's Family* (Mount Vernon, Va.: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 1984), 57. The quote is from a letter written by Nelly Custis to Mrs. Oliver Wolcott, Jr. sometime after Christmas 1797. George Washington appointed Oliver Wolcott, Jr. as Secretary of the Treasury in 1795.
[631] John R. Alden, *George Washington: A Biography* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 212.
[632] Carr and Walsh, "Economic Diversification and Labor Organization," *Work and Labor in Early America*, Innes, ed., 185-186.
[633] Walsh, "Slavery and Agriculture at Mount Vernon," in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington*, Schwarz, ed., 48.

growing cycles within the year as winter wheat was planted in late summer and harvested the following June. Other crops were planted in the spring and harvested in late fall including corn, wheat, and rye. In the winter, the slaves threshed the wheat and since little agricultural work took place during the coldest months, other tasks such as repairing the dozens of wooden buildings and fences that were in need of constant repair.[634] Crop diversification and smaller farms required slaves to become adept at more than one type of work. According to historian Lorena Walsh, Mount Vernon's slaves were much more than field hands and "became some of the most skilled mixed-crop farmers, fishermen, and stock breeders in the region."[635]

Chesapeake planters, like Washington, generally used a gang labor system for tobacco and continued it even after the switch to grains, which required workers to be at work all day for six days a week. Sunday was the only day during which they could decide how to spend their time, although house servants and cooks probably did not have the same relative freedom.[636] Those with spouses on other plantations might leave Saturday night after their workday was through and walk for miles to see their families. The slaves in the quarters probably cheered on rainy days when many tasks were impossible to complete in muddy ground. Washington noted in his diary on one occasion "no out door work done this day on account of the rain."[637] Slaves were also free from

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[634] Pargas, *The Quarters and the Fields*, 40-42.
[635] Walsh, "Slavery and Agriculture at Mount Vernon," in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington*, Schwarz, ed., 49-50.
[636] Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 170-171; and see also Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit*, 261-262; Thompson, "They Appear to Live Comfortable Together," in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington*, Schwarz, ed., 83.
[637] Diary 10 October 1787, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 5:252.

their work for both Easter Sunday and Easter Monday and received four days to do as they wished at Christmas.[638]

Tobacco did not completely disappear as a crop in the region, Fairfax County farmers continued to cultivate it in small amounts, although Washington did not.[639] Washington asked Francis Deakins, who helped him manage land he had acquired in Maryland, to convert "the value of the tobacco due from Mrs. Beall to me in money."[640] Even those farmers who might grow some tobacco usually grew corn and oats as food for their families, slaves, and livestock in addition to wheat, which they grew almost exclusively for sale. Other marketable items were meat and dairy products.[641] Most farmers tried to produce a variety of products that would provide them with varied markets and provide protection from the vagaries of the market.

Great Virginia planters such as Washington also took on ambitious diversification projects in the post-revolutionary era. Like Washington, Thomas Jefferson retired to his farm between resigning as Secretary of State in 1794 and his election as vice president in 1797, where he remodeled Monticello and began the commercial manufacture of nails. Although their relationship was never close and politically they clashed, Washington and Jefferson found common ground in their agricultural interests and shared the common goal of improving farming methods.[642] Both promoted crop rotation, although generally

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[638] Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 116; Farm Manager Reports, 22 April, 1797, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 1:98-102; Farm Manager Reports 30 December 1797.
[639] Ibid., 16.
[640] GW to Francis Deakins, 15 January 1798, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 2:23-25
[641] Pargas, *The Quarters and the Fields*, 17.
[642] Barbara McEwan, *Thomas Jefferson: Farmer*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., Publishers, 1991), 90.

only sophisticated farmers like Washington and Jefferson with large landholdings who developed or carried out crop rotation plans. The two men also shared information regarding the development of a "moveable threshing machine" and went together to a farm in Pennsylvania to view one in use.[643] Jefferson admired Washington's agricultural skills. He had acquired some wheat seed from Washington, which he passed on to his son-in-law, Thomas Mann Randolph, writing, "I enclose you some of the wheat which the President assures me from many years experience to be the best kind he has ever seen…the President is so excellent a farmer that I place full confidence in his recommendations."[644]

In spite of the efforts of innovators like Washington and Jefferson, the state of agriculture in Virginia remained tenuous. "Decline has pervaded all the states," observed Yorkshire farmer Edward Strickland, who toured the United States from New England to the Chesapeake in 1794. Strickland reserved his grimmest commentary for Virginia where he found that "agriculture had already there arrived to its lowest state of degradation…The land owners in this are, with a few exceptions, in low circumstances; the inferior rank of them wretched in the extreme."[645] Consequently, those with the means to do so began to move south or west in search of better land rather than continue to rent unproductive farms. In spite of Washington's promotion of crop rotation and

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[643] Ibid., 25, 96.
[644] Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, 1790, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress, quoted in Barbara McEwan, *Thomas Jefferson: Farmer* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., Publishers, 1991), 55.
[645] Edward Strickland, *Observations on the Agriculture of the United States* (London, 1801) quoted in Jack Temple Kirby, *Mockingbird Song: Ecological Landscapes of the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 79-80.

fertilization, much of Virginia's land had been overused without any steps to renew it. A first wave of migration occurred in the eighteenth century with settlers moving to the Carolinas and Georgia. In the early nineteenth century, fertile land in Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee attracted Virginians.[646]

Washington had hired James Anderson to manage all aspects of Mount Vernon, not only to start a distillery, although he appreciated the income the new enterprise provided. Agriculture remained Washington's focus and according to one visitor, "his favorite subject." Niemcewicz reported that Washington left for a ride to his fields immediately after breakfast and often held "a council of war with Mr. Anderson" in the middle of a field.[647] The fields did not yield any more under Anderson's management than they had before, much to Washington's disappointment. According to his employer, Anderson's faults were a lack of organization and planning, shifting from one project to another without finishing any, and a lack of economy – in other words, his temperament and conduct were the direct opposite of Washington's.[648]

By the latter half of the eighteenth century, Fairfax County land, including Mount Vernon, was no longer prime soil, but had suffered from constant use. Washington mitigated these circumstances as best as he could with crop rotation, the use of fertilizer and nitrogen rich crops.[649] English farmer Richard Parkinson made the trip to Virginia to investigate the possibility of renting one of Mount Vernon's farms. After a close

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[646] David Hackett Fischer and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 137, 202-203.
[647] Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree*, 102-103.
[648] Ferling, *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington*, 488; GW to William Fitzhugh, 30 May 1798, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 2:306-307.
[649] Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Profit, Pleasure and Profit*, 357-359, 419.

examination of the condition of the crops and land, Parkinson confided to Washington that his land was simply "indifferent."[650] Parkinson's negative reaction to Mount Vernon's land may have been a result of its decline because of Washington's long absence during the presidency. Alternatively, Parkinson may have been comparing Mount Vernon's land to what he had farmed in his home county in England. Regardless, most Fairfax County land suffered from the neglect and overuse at the hands of its owners or tenants. When Daniel McCarty of Mount Air, one of Washington's neighbors, inherited the estate of his grandfather, he found it "worn out and worthless." He planned to sell the property and move out of the area, but died before he made the sale.[651]

In the midst of improving his land and all of his other priorities, Washington's country did call for his service again in the summer of 1798. Washington's successor to the presidency, John Adams, asked him to return as commander-in-chief of the army for what he believed would soon be a war with the French Republic.[652] Early in his administration, amidst the United States' attempts to maintain neutrality during the ongoing war in Europe, the confrontation that had been brewing between the United States and the French Republic became serious. Soon Washington was planning who would serve under him as leaders of the troops and designing a new uniform for them. Washington set out for Philadelphia from Mount Vernon in early November 1798 and then returned home a week before Christmas to await news of the impending war.[653]

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[650] Ferling, *First of Men: A Life of George Washington*, 488.
[651] Pargas, *Quarters and the Fields*, 15-16.
[652] GW to John Adams, 4 July 1798, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 2:368-370.
[653] Flexner, *Washington: The Indispensible Man*, 379-380; Ferling, *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington*, 495-501.

While waiting to receive his orders, Washington began to organize his papers, hiring Albin Rawlins of Hanover County Courthouse upon the recommendation of Alexander Spotswood to enter the presidential correspondence in letter books and planning to build a "house for the accommodation and security of my Military, Civil and private Papers, which are voluminous and may be interesting."[654] By the spring of 1799, however, the tensions between the United States and France had eased and Washington was relieved of the thought of another lengthy absence from his farm and interruption to his improvements to Mount Vernon. Once again, he was able to immerse himself in his local community.

Post-revolutionary Alexandria was large enough to merit a tavern with a large assembly hall. Like Samuel Fraunces' Tavern in New York City, the City Tavern in Alexandria included a large room for assemblies, banquets, theatrical and musical performances and meetings of local organizations.[655] There had always been different of levels taverns, but now tavern owners who wanted to attract polite society situated their businesses in fine buildings.[656] John Gadsby operated the City Tavern, which was comprised of two buildings, the old City Tavern and a new three-story addition erected in 1792, which enjoyed a good reputation.[657]

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[654] GW to James McHenry, 3 April 1797, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 1:71.
[655] Kym S. Rice, *Early American Taverns: For the Entertainment of Friends and Strangers* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1983), 108; See also, Johann N. Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) for a discussion of the debate over voluntary associations during the early republic.
[656] Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 161-163.
[657] 11 February 1799, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 6:333-334, fn.

Washington and his family were sometimes at the center of social events in Alexandria. In 1798, George and Martha Washington and Nelly Custis attended the birthnight ball hosted by the Alexandria Assembly at City Tavern and held in Washington's honor on Monday the twelfth of February. Nelly relayed the events of the evening in a letter to a friend, reporting that "the room was crowded, there were twenty-five or thirty couples in the two first sets" and the company danced until two in the morning. The festivities lasted for several days with Nelly attending a play, dining out, and being the guest of honor at a ball given by William Hodgson, an Alexandria merchant.[658] However, George and Martha Washington returned home on the afternoon of the next day and did not participate in the rest of the social season.[659] Washington had been born on 11 February Old Style, but considered 22 February as his birthday. Alexandria elected to celebrate his birth on the earlier date, which meant that local residents could attend one ball in Alexandria on the eleventh of the month and another in Georgetown on the twenty-second as Nelly Custis planned to do in 1798, but was stopped by the bad weather and resulting bad roads.[660]

Washington attended the Alexandria Assembly at the City Tavern to celebrate his birthday again in 1799 when he noted in his diary, "Went up to Alexandria to the

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[658] Nelly Custis to Elizabeth Beale Bordley, 20 March 1798, *George Washington's Beautiful Nelly*, Brady, ed., 47-49.
[659] 12 February 1798, *Papers of GW, Diaries* 6:282.
[660] Nelly Custis to Elizabeth Beale Bordley, 20 March 1798, Brady, ed. *George Washington's Beautiful Nelly*, 46-49. The birthnight celebrations in honor of Washington's birthday were not in favor of everyone. The Republican press in Philadelphia called it a "monarchical farce of the birthday." *The National Gazette*, 6 March 1793, quoted in James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington: Anguish and Farewell, 1793-1799* (Boston, Ma.: Little, Brown, and Co., 1972), 15.

celebration of my birth day. Many maneuvers were performed by the Uniform Corps and an elegant Ball and Supper at Night."[661] This was probably one of the last assemblies Washington attended. In November 1799 wrote a letter of regret to the organizers of the Alexandria, to inform them that he and Martha would not be able to attend any more events as "our dancing days are no more. We wish, however, all those who have relish for so agreeable and innocent an amusement all the pleasure the season will afford them."[662]

The celebrations held in honor of George Washington's birthday derived from the English custom of honoring the King's birthday. Initiated to foster a deeper connection between the colonists to the mother country, these events became widespread by the 1730s. Whether the revelers were indeed honoring their ruler or enjoying yet another excuse for drunkenness is difficult to tease out from the distance of so many years.[663] After the Revolution, public displays of homage to Washington occurred on his birthday each 22 February – often with birthnight balls. *The Virginia Gazette* contained a report of a ball for Washington's Birthday in February 1779, where an "elegant entertainment was given at the Raleigh Tavern" to celebrate the birthday of "General George Washington, Commander in Chief of the armies of the United States, the savior of his country, and the

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[661] 11 February 1799, *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 6:333.
[662] GW to Alexandria General Assemblies Managers, 12 November 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 4:402; Britt, *Nothing More Agreeable: Music in George Washington's Family*, 61. Britt notes that after Washington's death, Alexandrians posted the notice in a newspaper that "in consequence of the late melancholy event, for which our country mourns, it has been thought proper to put off the Alexandria [dancing] Assemblies for this season."
[663] McConville, *King's Three Faces*, 64-65, 77.

brave asserter of the rights and liberties of mankind."[664] However, the manner of celebrating Washington's birthday became controversial after 1793 as the divisions between Federalists and Republicans grew wider and as the latter came to criticize the practice as quasi-monarchical.[665]

Washington had many other things on his mind besides celebrations in 1799, not the least of which was taking stock of his enslaved workforce and how they fit into his plans for Mount Vernon and his other landholdings. During the summer of that year, Washington completed a list of all of the slaves who worked on Mount Vernon land entitled "Negros Belonging to George Washington in his own right and by Marriage." The names of 316 individuals were enumerated including, in addition to those belonging to George and Martha Washington, slaves whom Washington had been renting from Penelope French, the widow of Daniel French and a neighbor, since late 1786. The list is remarkable for its detail and organization. Beginning with the tradesmen he owned and then the dower tradesmen, Washington moved through each farm making the same distinction at each and listing the individuals in each category by name, job assignment, age, and whether they were married, and if so, to whom. Children of non-working age appear separately under each farm with their age and the name of their mother.

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[664] *Virginia Gazette*, Dixon and Nicolson, 26 February 1779; Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 661. The United States appears to have reserved the celebration of birthnights to George Washington. On February 22, 1802, Gouverneur Morris hosted a dinner in honor of Washington's birthday during Thomas Jefferson's administration.

[665] David Walstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1777-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 118-120.

It is worth considering why it mattered to Washington whether his slaves had formed permanent bonds with another slave and where each slave resided. One reason may be that it was simply another means of keeping control of his enslaved people. Washington wanted to know everything about his slaves. For example, Washington instructed James Anderson to inspect the slaves rooms and cabins, "for the purpose of detecting improper conduct in them, as to see if they are kept clean (being conducive to their health)—to provide for the sick when they are really so, & to drive out those who are not so."[666] The information on slave marriages might also have been useful in finding a slave who disappeared from the plantation. Washington recognized slave marriages although Virginia law did not protect them in any way. Approximately two-thirds of all of the slaves living at Mount Vernon in 1799 were married. The unions provided them with some amount of personal agency and the opportunity to share the joys and travails of their lives.[667] Thomas Jefferson encouraged his slaves at Monticello to form "enduring unions" with other slaves living on the same plantation rather than making "abroad" marriages with slaves living in nearby towns or on other plantations. These relatively long distance marriages could cause lengthy absences from Monticello, and consequently their work, and discontent because of slaves experiencing separation by distance from loved ones.[668]

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[666] GW to James Anderson, 11 June 1798, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 2:322-323
[667] Thompson, "They Appear to Live Comfortable Together," in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington*, Schwarz, ed., 79-80.
[668] Stanton, *"Those Who Labor for My Happiness: Slavery at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello*, 67-68.

Washington was aware that the mood of his slaves had changed since the Revolution and he observed that they were "growing more and more insolent and difficult to govern." One consequence of this realization was that he decided not to let one of the slaves continue as overseer at Dogue Run Farm.[669] When Lawrence Lewis' arrival at Mount Vernon was delayed because his slave had run away, his uncle replied that, "it is my opinion these elopements will be *much more,* before they are *less* frequent; and that the persons making them should never be retained, if they are recovered, as they are sure to contaminate and discontent the others. I wish from my Soul that the Legislature of this State could see the policy of a gradual abolition of Slavery: It might prevent much future mischief."[670]

Influenced by Enlightenment ideals, planters like Washington sought to make their plantations models of efficiency by attempting to get the most labor out of their enslaved workforce as possible to increase profitability. The paradox of these ideals as applied to American agriculture in the slave states was the juxtaposition of scientific advancement versus the moral rightness of the humane treatment of slaves.[671] Historian Philip Morgan traced the evolution of patriarchy into a less harsh paternalism over the course of the eighteenth century in which planters stressed the care their slaves received and all that they did for them, but at the same time their need to make a profit.[672]

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[669] GW to Alexander Spotswood, 14 September 1798, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*.,
[670] GW to Lawrence Lewis, 4 August 1797, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 1:288.
[671] See Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750-1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[672] Morgan, "Three Planters and Their Slaves: Perspectives on Slavery in Virginia, South Carolina, and Jamaica, 1750-1790," in *Race and Family in the Colonial South*, Winthrop

Washington's comment to farm manager James Anderson that "system in all things is the soul of business" illustrates his commitment to making each part of Mount Vernon perform efficiently as part of a machine.[673]

Washington changed the arrangement of slave housing in the 1790s from scattered cabins across the landscape to a straight row along paths or roadways and often situated out of sight of the casual visitor.[674] At the Mansion House Farm, one-story brick wings added to each end of the greenhouse housed the slaves that had previously lived in the old house for families. The wings held four rooms of 35 x 20 feet with one doorway in each room and their size suggests a communal living situation. Most likely slaves without families lived in the dorm-like new wings. George Augustine Washington wrote to his uncle that, "The New Quarter will I have no doubt be fully adequate to accommodate conveniently all the Negro's that You would wish."[675] The doors faced a service lane on the side opposite the garden that probably also held small cabins for other slaves.[676]

By the end of the eighteenth century, the owners of large plantations followed a trend that emphasized order and regularity for outbuildings, specifically, slave housing.[677]

D. Jordan and Sheila L. Skemp, eds. (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 38-40.

[673] GW to James Anderson, 21 December 1797, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 1:523-526.

[674] Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, Robert Blair St. George, ed. (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1988), 361.

[675] George Augustine Washington to GW, 8 April 1792, *Papers of GW, Pres. Ser*., 10:230-234.

[676] Pogue and White, "House for Families," 46.

[677] Sobel, *The World They Made Together*, 105; See also, Dell Upton, "Slave Housing in 18th-century Virginia: A Report to the Department of Social and Cultural History,

Perhaps because he was aware of – and to some extent even shared – the growing criticism of slavery in post-revolutionary America, Washington made the new slave quarters less prominent on his estate, Indeed, as guests to Mount Vernon strolled in the garden, they saw only brick walls on either side of the greenhouse where espaliered fruit trees grew. The private lives of the slaves remained hidden from view. Washington also changed the arrangement of slave housing at the outlying farms. Although they may not have been of any better quality than before, Washington had the slave cabins placed in regular rows along a farm lane and no longer randomly scattered across the landscape as is evident in the map he drew of the farms.[678]

The slave population at Mount Vernon continued to increase and children as young as eleven years old usually received job assignments. Historian Mary Thompson notes that children between the ages of 11 and 14 years old "became part of a transitional group to assist on the farms." They carried out a number of tasks including carrying water, hauling rails and making fences, helping in the fields with picking up corn stalks and carrying shocks of wheat and rye at harvest time.[679] Generally, Washington included children aged eleven years and older with laborers on the list he wrote in 1799, but there were some exceptions. Twelve-year old Rachel, daughter of the housemaid Caroline, was still named among the children. She may have been in training under her mother and not yet considered to be working. During a visit to Mount Vernon in 1799, a visitor observed

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National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution" (Washington, D.C., 1982), 35.

[678] George Washington, 1793 Map of Mount Vernon. The map shows slave cabins placed in a single line along the farm lane.

[679] Thompson, "They Appear to Live Comfortable Together," in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington*, Schwarz, ed., 88.

a domestic scene in Martha Washington's chamber where, "on one side sits the chambermaid with her knitting on the other a little colored pet, learning to sew, an old, decent woman with her table and shears cutting out the negroes winter clothes" all under the direction of their mistress.[680] The young girl referred to as Martha Washington's "pet" may have been Rachel, learning to be a lady's maid to replace the runaway Oney Judge.

Visitors to Mount Vernon who neither owned slaves nor approved of the practice were most likely to record their view of Washington and his relationship to his slave community. According to Lincolnshire farmer Richard Parkinson, Washington's neighbors held the opinion that he treated his slaves more harshly than any other slave owner did and that he was miserly with their food rations.[681] Parkinson professed to be startled by the terse manner in which Washington spoke to his slaves, "as if he had been quite another man, or had been in anger." Historian Peter Henriques states that "Washington was not a cruel man, but his actions often seemed cruel" and that a recalcitrant slave must be compelled to follow orders – "that was what the patriarchal compact was all about." [682] The slaves' living conditions also received comment from Polish visitor Niemcewicz, who toured one of the slave cabins as he made his way around Washington's farms. He wrote that, "we entered one of the huts of the Blacks, for one

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[680] Eliza Ambler Carrington, "A Visit to Mount Vernon--a Letter of Mrs. Edward Carrington to Her Sister, Mrs. George Fisher," *William and Mary Quarterly* 18 (2), 201.
[681] Walsh, "Slavery and Agriculture at Mount Vernon," in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington*, Schwarz, ed., 71.
[682] Richard Parkinson, *A Tour in America in 1798, 1799 and 1800*, quoted in Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 58; Henriques, *Realistic Visionary*, 150-151.

can not call them by the name of houses. They are more miserable than the most miserable of the cottages of our peasants."[683]

Louis-Philippe, the future King of France, who arrived at Mount Vernon in 1797, went further, reporting that Virginians did not consider slaves human beings. Furthermore, when the slaves met a white man, "they greet him from a distance and with a low bow, and they often seem amazed that we return their greeting, for no one here does so." Louis-Philippe also observed that the slaves that worked in the house were "mulattoes, some of whom have kinky hair still but skins as light as ours." Louis-Philippe's servant, Beaudoin, had the opportunity to spend more time with the enslaved community than his master and gleaned the information that Washington's slaves "had clubs in Alexandria and Georgetown, that Quakers came to visit, and that they hoped they would no longer be slaves in ten years…" When Beaudoin spoke to Hercules' daughter about her father's absence from her life, she replied that she was glad he was gone as "he is free now."[684]

Washington discovered that another slave was planning an escape, but this time he found out about the plan in advance. A slave named Christopher had served as Washington's body servant since 1789 when William Lee became too crippled to act in that role anymore. Christopher had asked Washington's permission to marry "a Mulatto girl" belonging to Roger West, who lived south of Great Hunting Creek, near Alexandria,

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[683] Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree*, 100.
[684] Louis-Philippe, *Diary of My Travels in America: Louis-Philippe, King of France, 1830-1848*, Stephen Becker, trans. (New York: Dell Publishing, 1977), quoted in Lee, *Experiencing Mount Vernon*, 67-68. Louis Philippe was in exile from France from 1793 to 1815. He became King of France in 1830.

some time in the summer of 1799. That September, Washington learned that Christopher was plotting to run away with his wife. A letter written to Christopher was found on the drive in which a plan was detailed to escape on board a ship leaving from Alexandria. The letter came into Washington's hands but he had not revealed that fact to Christopher at the time of writing to West. Washington stated that he did not know whether the young woman could write or not, or indeed, whether or not she was enslaved or free, but there was no doubt the letter had been sent from her to Christopher. Washington hoped that West's proximity to Alexandria would enable him to put a stop to the escape plan. Roger West evidently interrupted the execution of the young couple's plan, because Christopher was still at Mount Vernon in December 1799.[685]

Washington remained determined to carry out the objectives he had outlined to Arthur Young in 1793 wherein he would retain the Mansion House Farm and rent the balance of his property in Fairfax County. However, although a few prospective tenants initially showed interest, none of them followed through and took up leases on his property.[686] He approached farm manager Anderson with an offer to rent the mill, distillery, and Dogue Run Farm. Washington told Anderson that he also had the possibility of renting one of his other farms, and then "…the others would be no more than amusement for me, to superintend, if I should not be drawn again into public life."[687] However, Anderson declined Washington's offer because of ill health. Washington

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[685] GW to Roger West, 19 September 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 4:310-311. Christopher had been born at the Mansion House ca. 1776 and was the son of a slave spinner named Alce or Alice. He had three sisters, Anna, Judy, and Vina.
[686] Ferling, *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington*, 489.
[687] GW to James Anderson, 10 September 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 4:291-293.

wasted no time after Anderson's refusal of his offer to inform Lawrence Lewis that he and Nelly would inherit the mill, distillery and Dogue Run Farm upon his death and that it was his desire for Lewis to rent the properties in the interim. Washington and Lewis reached an agreement that Lewis would begin renting them in January 1800.[688]

Since Lawrence Lewis had come to live in the household, he and Nelly had formed an attachment and the couple surprised Washington by the announcement of their engagement at the end of 1798. George and Martha Washington had taken Nelly Custis into their home shortly after her birth and in 1798 she turned nineteen years old. In a letter to Lewis at the end of January 1799, Washington informed him that he had been to Alexandria to "become the Guardian of Nelly – thereby to authorize a license, for your Nuptials."[689] Virginia law required a license for marriage and the banns may have been posted at Christ Church in Alexandria for three Sundays in advance of the wedding day.[690] The couple was married at Mount Vernon on Washington's birthday. By the end of the year, Nelly Custis Lewis gave birth to their first child, a girl named Frances Parke Lewis. George and Martha Washington now had a third generation of Custis children and grandchildren living at Mount Vernon.

Less than a month after the birth of Nelly and Lawrence Lewis' child, Washington died unexpectedly in mid-December 1799. On a cold and windy Thursday in mid-December, Washington made a five-hour circuit on horseback to check on his outlying farms. The next day he had a sore throat, but appeared "remarkably cheerful all

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[688] GW to Lawrence Lewis, 20 September 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 4:311-315.
[689] GW to Lawrence Lewis, 23 January 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 3:332.
[690] Emory G. Evans, "*A Topping People,"* 127.

the evening." Early in the morning of 14 December, Washington woke up Martha and told her he was unwell, but would not let her get out of bed into the cold until the fire had been lit in the room. When housemaid Caroline entered the room in the early hours of the morning to light the fire, Washington asked her to bring George Rawlins, overseer of Union Farm and brother to secretary Albin Rawlins, to bleed him. Caroline then woke up Tobias Lear who would be in the room with Washington throughout his last day. Lear had been with Washington since 1786, serving in many capacities and had become a family member with his marriage to Martha's widowed niece Fanny Bassett Washington. Lear's great affection for Washington is evident in his detailed but emotional account of Washington's last hours.[691]

Representatives of each part of the Mount Vernon community were present at Washington's death: family, friends and neighbors, hired white workers, and slaves. Martha Washington was the only family member present according to Lear's account, but Nelly was also in the house and during the evening, "Mrs. W. went up into Mrs. Lewis' room, who was confined in Child Bed." Both Lawrence Lewis and George Washington Parke Custis were away from Mount Vernon on a trip to New Kent County.[692] At one

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[691] Tobias Lear, The Diary Account, 14 December 1799, Papers of GW, Ret. Ser., 4:547-548; Meredith Eliassen, "George Washington, Death and Mourning," in *A Companion to George Washington*, Edward G. Lengel, ed. (Maiden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 577; See also, Peter Henriques, *Realistic Visionary: A Portrait of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006) for an account of Washington's death.
[692] 9 December 1799, *Papers of GW*, *Diaries*, 6:378.

point, during the evening, Washington asked when they would return and Lear told him they were not expected until later in the month.[693]

A trio of doctors attended to Washington providing him with the best care available at the time.[694] Washington's long time friend James Craik, who had known him since 1754 when Craik joined the Virginia Regiment as a surgeon, was one of the doctors called to attend Washington. The other physicians who consulted with Craik in the care of Washington were Gustavus Richard Brown of Port Tobacco, Maryland and Elisha Cullen Dick.[695] Housekeeper Eleanor Forbes was also present during the day and Lear's account of the day names several slaves who were present in the room during Washington's last hours. Caroline and Charlotte, who both worked in the house, and Washington's valet Christopher, who had plotted an escape just a few months earlier, spent hours standing at Washington's bedside.[696]

In the last hours before his death, Washington asked his wife to retrieve two wills from his desk. After examining them, he instructed her to burn one, which she did immediately, and put the other one away for safekeeping. Washington wrote the will on paper, "the watermark showing a goddess of agriculture seated upon a plow, holding a staff surmounted by a liberty cap…"[697] Under the terms of Washington's surviving will, Martha received rights to his "whole Estate, real and personal, for the term of her natural

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[693] Lear, The Diary Account, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 4:550.
[694] Peter Henriques, "The Final Struggle Between Washington and the Grim King: Washington's Attitude toward Death and an Afterlife," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 107:1, 80-81.
[695] Eliassen, "George Washington, Death and Mourning," in *A Companion to George Washington*, Lengel, ed., 578.
[696] Lear, The Journal Account, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 4:542-546.
[697] Flexner, *Washington: The Indispensable Man*, 395.

life" except for the items that were specifically given to others. Theoretically, until Martha's death, the community at Mount Vernon would remain the same, at least in terms of its make-up and operation. Martha did receive one lot in Alexandria that was hers to use or sell as she wished.[698]

As he had already promised, Washington gave the mill, distillery, and Dogue Run Farm to Lawrence and Nelly Lewis. George Washington Parke Custis received a twelve hundred acre tract of land near Alexandria in addition to an "entire Square, number twenty-one, in the City of Washington." Other Mount Vernon land went to Washington's great-nephews George Fayette Washington and Charles Augustine Washington, sons of George Augustine Washington, who received in excess of twenty-four hundred acres of River Farm.[699]

Bushrod Washington, the son of Washington's deceased brother John Augustine, who had acted as manager for his brother during the French and Indian War, would inherit the balance of Mount Vernon land, about four thousand acres, of land and all of the buildings and other improvements that it included after Martha Washington's death. Washington also bequeathed to Bushrod Washington another possession that he highly valued: "all the Papers in my possession, which relate to my Civil and Military Administration of the affairs of this Country" and his library of books and pamphlets.[700]

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[698] Fairfax County, Will Book H-1, 1-23; Quoted text is from George Washington's Last Will and Testament, 9 July 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 4:479.
[699] Ibid., 489.
[700] Henriques, "The Final Struggle between George Washington and the Grim King," 83; WW. Abbot, "An Uncommon Awareness of Self: The Papers of George Washington," *Prologue*, 21 (1989), 7-19.

Washington's papers were a material representation of his public life just as Mount Vernon represented his personal life.[701]

Three individuals who were not relatives to either George or Martha Washington, but had been part of the Mount Vernon community received bequests. Washington made provisions to further support Sarah Bishop Green, the daughter of Thomas Bishop, and Ann Walker, the daughter of John Alton, each of whom received one hundred dollars "in consideration of the attachment of their fathers to me, each of whom having lived nearly forty years with my family." Both Sarah's and Ann's fathers had been with Washington at Mount Vernon since the mid-1750s and had rendered numerous services to him over the years.[702] The other individual to receive special recognition in the will was William Lee. Lee, Washington's former enslaved valet and companion during the Revolution, was to receive "immediate freedom" or, since, several accidents wherein he broke both knees had left him severely disabled, he could remain at Mount Vernon if he so chose. In either case, Lee would receive thirty dollars per annum for the rest of his life in addition to clothing and food. Washington further stated that Lee was receiving the bequest "as a testimony of my sense of his attachment to me, and for his faithful services during the Revolutionary War."[703]

Lee was not the only slave to receive mention in the will. Second only to his bequest to Martha in the order of the items in his will, was the expression of his desire that "all of the slaves that I hold in my *own right,* shall receive their freedom" after the

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[701] George Washington's Last Will and Testament, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 4:485.
[702] Ibid., 487.
[703] Ibid., 480-481.

death of Martha Washington. The number of slaves that Washington owned at the time of his death was 124: forty men, thirty-seven women, seven working boys and girls, and forty children.[704] The slaves lived at all of the farms of Mount Vernon so their absence would create a void in each work force in addition to the more important impact on families.[705]

The dower slaves were not his property so he could not free them, however Washington explained in his will that his reason for waiting to free his slaves until Martha's death was because to free them immediately would "excite the most painful sensations" in the two groups because of the many intermarriages that had occurred between his slaves and Martha's. This presupposes that Martha intended to free her slaves; otherwise, Washington is simply postponing the difficult separation for Mount Vernon's slaves that would surely come, until after his wife's death.[706]

Historians give many different explanations for why Washington freed his slaves, but as Peter Henriques points out, "Tracing the process and progress of Washington's developing convictions that will ultimately end in the manumission of his slaves is extremely difficult."[707] James Flexner believes that, "Pity and guilt made Washington determined to free his slaves, but did not induce him to attempt radical alterations in their

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[704] Appraisers' Inventory of the Contents of Mount Vernon 1810, (Mount Vernon Library), 60.
[705] George Washington's Last Will and Testament, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 4:480.
[706] Henriques, *Realistic Visionary*, 163. Henriques suggests that Washington postponed the freeing of his slaves until after Martha's death so that she would not have to witness the separations.
[707] Ibid., 159.

lot while they remained in bondage."[708] Fritz Hirschfeld traces Washington's change of attitude towards slavery, to the Revolutionary War when he eventually allowed the recruitment of black men in the North for military service, which may have been due to the influence of Lafayette and others that he grew close to during the war.[709] Lafayette suggested to Washington that they purchase a "small estate where we may try the experiment to free the Negroes, and use them only as tenants." In another letter to Washington the following year, the marquis wrote that he had purchased a plantation in the Colony of Cayenne where he was "going to free my Negroes in order to make that experiment which you know is my hobby horse."[710] Hirschfeld states that because of these events and his high regard for Lafayette, Washington returned from the war determined not to buy or sell any more slaves.[711]

According to Henry Wiencek, Washington experienced a "moral epiphany" that completely changed his attitude toward slavery. One example of this change was a plan Washington briefly considered in 1796 to emancipate all of the slaves at Mount Vernon, including the Custis dower slaves and have them work the land as tenants. However, the dower slaves were held in trust to the heirs of Daniel Parke Custis. In order to free those slaves, Washington would have to pay the Custis estate compensation, an amount of about £6,000, which Washington could not afford.[712] Washington could probably have

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[708] James Flexner, *George Washington and the New Nation, 1783-1793* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1970), 444.
[709] Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 225, 232.
[710] Ibid., 124; Lafayette to GW, 14 July 1785, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 3:120, note; Lafayette to GW, 6 February 1786, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 3:544.
[711] Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery,* 228.
[712] Wiencek, *Imperfect God*, 275, 339-341; Dennis J. Pogue, "Entrepreneur," 83.

found the money if he was truly motivated to free the slaves at that time. His conflicted feelings on the topic are evidenced by the aggressive way that he sought to have Hercules and Oney Judge returned to Mount Vernon.[713]

Historian Peter Henriques has emphasized "the approbation of the people – properly earned through disinterested service for the common good – lay very close to the core of Washington's being."[714] It seems most likely that some of the people Washington met during the Revolution opened his eyes to the opinions that others held towards slavery. Before the war, Washington mainly associated with other slaveholders and lived in a world where slavery was the norm. Once the thinking of people he admired, such as Lafayette, influenced him, he realized that slaveholding reflected badly on his character. He was already a national figure and hero by the end of the war, after becoming president his attitudes were even more scrutinized by the public. For all of his power, Washington cared what other people thought of him, but he was in a dilemma. Anti-slavery sentiment was increasing in America, but Washington's reputation within his family and the rest of slaveholding Virginia would likely have suffered if he freed his slaves.[715] Remaining a slaveholder became untenable, but Washington could not see a way out during his lifetime.

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[713] Henriques, *Realistic Visionary*, 159-160; GW to Frederick Kitt, 29 January 1798, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 2:60; GW to Burwell Bassett, Jr., 11 August 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 4:237.

[714] Peter Henriques, "The Final Struggle Between George Washington and the Grim King: Washington's Attitude Toward Death and an Afterlife, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (107:1, Winter 1999), 76.

[715] A contemporary of Washington's, Robert Carter III, did free a large number of slaves gradually and received a great deal of resistance from his family and other Virginians. See, Andrew Levy, *The First Emancipator: The Forgotten Story of Robert Carter, the Founding Father Who Freed His Slaves* (New York: Random House, 2005).

Other arrangements for the slaves named in his will who would eventually be free included care for those who were either too old or infirm or too young to care for their selves would be "comfortably clothed and fed by my heirs while they live." Washington desired that slaves under the age of twenty-five years should be bound by the Court until they reached that age and be taught to read, write, and learn a useful occupation by their masters or mistresses. Furthermore, Washington "expressly forbid the Sale, or transportation out of the said Commonwealth, of any Slave I may die possessed of, under any pretense whatsoever."[716] Washington made similar stipulations regarding slaves that he owned, but was renting to the estate of Martha's brother, Bartholomew Dandridge. In this case, all slaves aged forty years or older were to received their freedom; those between sixteen and forty years of age were to serve seven additional years in slavery, but no longer; and all under the age of sixteen were to remain enslaved until the age of twenty-five when they would be freed.[717]

Washington's will also revealed his expansive life and interests, which now stretched far beyond his cherished community at Mount Vernon and its environs. Included with Washington's will was a list of all of the real estate, bonds, and livestock that he owned, except for the property that was otherwise disposed of under individual bequests. This included tracts of land such that he began acquiring by grant or purchase as early as 1750 when he was a young surveyor for Lord Fairfax. Other properties he

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[716] George Washington's Last Will and Testament, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 4:480.
[717] Ibid., 484-485. Washington absolved the estate of his brother Samuel Washington from money owed him and likewise absolved Samuel's sons, George Steptoe Washington and Lawrence Augustine Washington, from repaying his estate for the amount of approximately five thousand dollars that he advanced them for their education.

either purchased, received as payment of debt, or as military warrants. The real estate included almost 60,000 acres in several Virginia counties, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, and the Northwest Territory. In addition, it included the 23,000 acres of land along the Great Kanawha River in the western section of Virginia, which Washington valued at $200,000.00.[718] Washington owned a number of lots in Winchester, Berkeley Springs, Alexandria, and had invested in two lots "near the Capital" and several other lots along the Eastern Branch in Washington, D.C.[719] The rest of the items on the list were of bank shares and investments in the James River Company and the Potomac River Company. At the very end of this inventory, Washington enumerated the horses, mules, cattle, sheep, and hogs that he owned. The "aggregate amount" for all of the property on the list was $530,000.00.[720]

The executors were to sell this property after Martha Washington's death and the proceeds divided between twenty-three heirs. In addition to Nelly Custis Lewis and George Washington Parke Custis, included in the heirs were their sisters Eliza Law and Martha Peters, now married women. The rest of the heirs were Washington's nieces and nephews, or their heirs in turn, if they were already deceased, as was the case with George Augustine Washington. Washington named seven executors to his estate: his wife, Martha Washington; nephews, William Augustine Washington, Bushrod Washington, George Steptoe Washington, Samuel Washington, and Lawrence Lewis; and

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[718] George Washington, "Schedule of Property," 9 July 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.,* 4:512-516.
[719] Ibid., 4:517-518.
[720] Enclosure: Schedule of Property, 9 July 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser.*, 4:512-519.

in addition his ward, George Washington Parke Custis, when he turned twenty years old.[721]

Perhaps because he believed that an educated citizenry was essential to the future of the republic, Washington made a number of bequests for the education of the children of the United States. His first gift went to his local community. Washington had supported the Alexandria Academy since its establishment in 1785, as he believed "nothing is more important than the education of youth." One of the first free schools in Virginia it received four thousand dollars in shares of Bank of Alexandria stock.[722] Washington had long lobbied for the establishment of a national university. In his will, he gave one hundred shares in the James River Company and fifty shares of the Potomac Company made out to him in 1785 by the Commonwealth of Virginia for his services in the Revolutionary War towards the establishment of the national university.[723] Another 100 shares of Potomac River Company stock were bequeathed to Liberty Hall Academy in Rockbridge County, Virginia. Soon after Washington's death the school was renamed Washington Academy and later became Washington and Lee University.[724]

Washington left specific instructions for his burial in his will. Like many of his peers, such as George Mason, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson, Washington was

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[721] George Washington's Last Will and Testament, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 4:491. George Washington Parke Custis was born in 1781 so he was about eighteen years old when Washington died.
[722] Ibid., 481; GW to William Brown, 24 November 1785, *Papers of GW, Confed. Ser*., 3:382. Brown was a trustee of the Alexandria Academy.
[723] George Washington's Last Will and Testament, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 4:482-483; Eugene E. Prussing, *The Estate of George Washington, Deceased* (Boston, Ma.: Little, Brown, and Company, 1927), 28.
[724] Ibid., 29; George Washington's Last Will and Testament, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 4:483.

buried on his on his own estate. Although he would be buried in the family vault sited along the Potomac River that had long been the final resting place for his close relatives, Washington had been planning to construct a new mausoleum. He indicated in the will that he wanted "a new one of Brick, and upon a larger Scale…built at the foot of what is commonly called the Vineyard Enclosure, on the ground which is marked out." Upon its completion, his remains and those of the rest of his family were to be entombed in the new vault. Washington continued with the instructions that he wanted the internment carried out "in a private manner, without parade, or funeral Oration."[725]

For once, Washington's orders were not followed and over two hundred members of the community gathered on the afternoon of 18 December to attend his funeral.[726] After lying in state in the New Room of the Mansion House, members of the Alexandria Masons and some military officers serving as pall bears moved Washington's coffin to the portico.[727] The Reverend Mr. Thomas Davis of Christ Church was one of four ministers to give funeral orations. The group participating in the ceremony included troops on both horseback and on foot, a military band, and George Washington's riderless horse led by enslaved grooms Cyrus and Wilson and neighbors, many with Revolutionary War connections to Washington carried the bier from the house to the tomb.[728] Mourning clothes were ordered for family members, "family domestics and

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[725] George Washington's Last Will and Testament, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 4:491.
[726] Scott Casper, *Sarah Johnson's Mount Vernon: The Forgotten History of an American Shrine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 4
[727] Helen Bryan, *Martha Washington: First Lady of Liberty* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 373-373.
[728] *Papers of GW, Diaries*, 4:349 and 349n.; Mary G. Powell, *The History of Old Alexandria, Virginia, From July 13, 1749 to May 24, 1861* (Richmond, Va.: The William

overseers" including the enslaved overseer Davy who received a suit of mourning clothes as well.[729]

Pamphleteers published the contents of Washington's will in Alexandria shortly after the executors had presented it to the courthouse on 10 January 1800 and the news swiftly circulated throughout the country.[730] Many reacted to the news of the freeing of Washington's slaves with jubilation. A New York City newspaper reported, "Mrs. Washington has announced, that after this year all the Negroes are to be emancipated. According to the General's wishes, the spirit of freedom has progressed."[731] Martha Washington, however, had a difficult time dealing with the aftermath of her husband's death and the contents of his will. Abigail Adams visited Martha Washington at Mount Vernon in December 1800. Adams found the house "going to decay" and Martha "did not feel as tho her Life was safe in their [the slaves] Hands, many of whom would be told that it was [in] their interest to get rid of her – She was therefore advised to set them all free at the close of the year."[732] Martha Washington did not have to live long with the responsibility of Mount Vernon. She died in May of 1802.

The word of Washington's death spread quickly throughout the country. It is unknown when or how the Washington's slaves first learned the news that the result of

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Byrd Press, Inc., 1928), 208; Ethelyn Cox, *Historic Alexandria Virginia Street by Street* (Alexandria, Va.: Historic Alexandria Virginia Foundation, 1976), 20.

[729] Tobias Lear, *Letters and Recollections of George Washington* (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1906), 138; Eliassen, "George Washington, Death and Mourning," in *A Companion to George Washington*, Lengel, ed., 579.

[730] Prussing, *The Estate of George Washington, Deceased*, 401-418; Eliassen, "George Washington, Death and Mourning," in A Companion to George Washington, Lengel, ed., 579-580.

[731] Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 213.

[732] Ibid., 214.

his death might mean their freedom. There may have been talk even before the executors' presented the will to the probate court, but once it appeared in print, the news would have reached them with great speed. Anecdotal information suggests that some slaves left Mount Vernon almost immediately.[733] A newspaper article reproduced part of the sermon given by Rev. Richard Allen of the African Methodist Episcopal Church of Philadelphia gave just two weeks after the death of George Washington. It is evident from the text that the news of Washington's freeing of his slaves has already reached Philadelphia. Rev. Allen stated that Washington, in spite of "the popular opinions of the state in which is the memorable Mount Vernon – he dared to do his duty, and wipe of[f] the only stain with which man could ever reproach him…And it is now said by an authority on which I rely, that he…let the oppressed go free – he undid every burden." Allen continued that "Your observance of these short and comprehensive expressions will make you good citizens – and greatly promote the cause of the oppressed and show to the world that you hold dear the name of George Washington."[734] Allen and others undoubtedly hoped that the news that Washington had freed his slaves would inspire great numbers of others to do the same – but that did not occur.

Throughout the nearly five decades that George Washington was master of Mount Vernon, it was a home to his extended family, a refuge for friends, and a meeting place for his political and business associates. It was also a temporary home and workplace for hundreds of hired workers and indentured servants. It was also a place of enslavement for hundreds of individuals who lived, worked, and in some cases, were born and died at

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[733] Prussing, *The Estate of George Washington*, *Deceased*, 98.
[734] *The Courier* (Norwich, Connecticut), 22 January 1800.

Mount Vernon. The brevity of Washington's retirement precluded him from attaining many of his objectives for the estate. But if one of his intentions for his retirement years was to free his slaves, he achieved that – at least to some degree – in the end.

Washington had returned to Mount Vernon from the presidency in early 1797 with renewed resolved to repair buildings, continue to make the soil of his farms more fertile, try a new plan for crop rotation, and sell some of his Western lands to raise the money for all of these improvements. He planned to take over the personal management of his farms, as he said, "not only to supersede the necessity of a Manager, but to make the management of what I retain in my own hands, an agreeable and healthy amusement to look after myself; if I should not be again called into the Public service of the Country."[735] At almost any point during the forty-five years that Washington lived at Mount Vernon, one could say that he was rebuilding, renovating, and redesigning some or all parts of the built environment and landscape. His vision for how it should appear and operate drove the business of the plantation. However, Washington needed the cooperation and labor of a large community of family, friends, neighbors, hired workers and slaves to carry out his plans.

[735] GW to Lawrence Lewis, 28 September 1799, *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 324-326.

CONCLUSION

Historian Darrett Rutman states that "every place studied has its own particular history; no place is an exact duplicate of another."[736] To what extent was Mount Vernon exceptional and in which ways was it representative of other Virginia plantations in the eighteenth century? Mount Vernon was exceptional because of Washington's status and the part he played in the history of his time. Washington's roles in the Revolution and as the first president of the new nation expanded his connections exponentially. Nevertheless, Washington was a remarkable manager of his business interests. He succeeded where many of his peers failed. His successes at Mount Vernon derived at least in part from his skillful use of relationships and connections within the larger local community.

Even so, Mount Vernon experienced many of the same changes that occurred in Virginia during the eighteenth century. After the Revolution, Virginians were increasingly attracted to new opportunities and richer agricultural land to the west. Washington no longer hired local white workers as ditchers or for help with the harvest. Only the most skilled white artisans continued to work at Mount Vernon. Washington tried to find tenants to take over some of his farms, but there was little interest in the prospect because they believed there were better opportunities elsewhere.

[736] Rutman, "Assessing the Little Communities of Early America," 165.

This dissertation expands the borders of Mount Vernon and situates it within the larger community. Proximity to Alexandria provided George Washington with a market for the tobacco and wheat he grew at Mount Vernon, the fish from his fisheries and the whiskey from the distillery in later years. Washington's social, political and economic network in the community strengthened the ties between his plantation and the neighborhood. He participated in the social life of his local community and served on the vestry of Christ Church. Politically, Washington participated in the administration of Alexandria as a trustee, served as county justice of the peace, led the local militia and was elected by his peers to the House of Burgesses. Through each of these roles, Washington further strengthened his standing and his connections to the local community.

In turn, Alexandria and the surrounding area reaped the benefits of its connection with the Mount Vernon community. Washington's fisheries provided fresh and salted fish for purchase and the distillery provided Alexandria merchants with whiskey for resale in its shops and taverns. The agricultural products from Mount Vernon helped to support merchants and shippers. Washington's mill supplied farmers with both large and small landholdings with a location to sell their grain or process their wheat into flour. Washington viewed Alexandria as an important link to developing the western frontier and encouraging trade between the two regions. His initiation of the Potomack River Company in which he was joined by "Gentlemen of the first property and respectability

in the neighbourhood" to open the river from its source to the tidewater was advantageous to the town and its merchants.[737]

There was a downside to having George Washington in the neighborhood for some members of the community and not everyone approved his treatment of his slaves. Living in such close proximity to Mount Vernon during the Revolution must have engendered some anxiety since Washington's planation could be a major draw for British warships bringing them uncomfortably close to Alexandria. Additionally, not everyone in the larger community admired Washington as English farmer Richard Parkinson learned as he talked to some of Washington's neighbors. In addition to having a reputation for treating his slaves "with more severity than any other man," Washington's neighbors held the opinion that he probably knew how much it cost to maintain each slave "to a fraction."[738]

Having access to the relatively large commercial and population center of Alexandria shaped the lives of all members of the Mount Vernon community. Hired white workers and slaves also found opportunities to meet with friends, make purchases, and sell items for their own benefit. Slaves had the opportunity to be free of the watchful eye of Washington or one of his managers or overseers and a chance to meet with friends at clubs where they could engage in gambling or other games. It was also in Alexandria where slaves met with Quakers and other anti-slavery adherents who provided them with

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[737] Tobias Lear. *Observations on the River Potomack, the Country Adjacent, and the City of Washington* (New York, 1793).
[738] Walsh, "Slavery and Agriculture at Mount Vernon" in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington*, Schwarz, ed., 71.

the knowledge that there were many people who desired an end to slavery in the United States and that there were places they could go seek freedom.

We know more about Mount Vernon during George Washington's lifetime than possibly any other eighteenth-century Virginia plantation because of the many extant letters and papers concerning its master's activities and oversight of operations on his estate. However, there is still much we do not know about life among the community of people that lived and worked there. Almost all of our information about the hired workers, indentured servants, and slaves comes from the hand of Washington or his farm managers. Their thoughts, feelings, opinions are unrecorded and can only be surmised through someone else's account of an event. Consequently, in many cases, we can only speculate about the relationships they had with each other.

We do know that family ties were important within the larger Mount Vernon community and that many of the hired white workers at Mount Vernon had other family members that worked for Washington at one time or another. William Fairfax was overseer at Mount Vernon in the late 1750s and two of his sons John and Hezekiah were overseers in the 1780s. Irish indentured bricklayers Cornelius and Timothy McDermott Roe arrived on board ship at Alexandria in 1784 and asked Washington to hire their brother Timothy as an overseer. Thomas Bishop lived at Mount Vernon and worked for Washington from the late 1750s. His wife, Susanna was midwife for the community until her death in 1785. Bishop's daughter Susan married Thomas Green, a joiner and carpenter at Mount Vernon for over a dozen years. These individuals did not just work at Washington's plantation; they were a part of the larger community as well.

Many of the slaves at Mount Vernon lived within multi-generational family units. We have already seen that the carpenters, Isaac and James, had families on the plantation, but Isaac had the advantage of having his wife and most of his children with him at the Mansion House Farm. Another couple at the same farm, Boatswain, a laborer, and his wife Matilda, who worked as a spinner, had five children. Their son Ben was a carter and son Lawrence was a laborer at Dogue Run. Boatswain and Matilda lost their young son Boatswain in 1794 to illness. Slaves Nat and Doll both worked at River Farm where they raised three children: two young sons, Jack and Peter, who were not yet working in 1799, and a daughter Betty who was married to Tobias Lear's slave Reuben and the mother of a one year old daughter.[739]

Washington's attitude toward slavery may have evolved over time, but the historical record suggests that his treatment of his slaves overall did not. Their housing remained basic at best, their food rations although standard for the time and place, still meager and clothing and blankets minimal. Slaves at Mount Vernon had some control over their lives. They were able to choose their own mates, even from off of the plantation as long as Washington approved their choice. They voiced their complaints to Washington about managers and other aspects of their living conditions such as their food rations and punishment they received. Some of the slaves had privileges such as hunting with guns and traveled away from Mount Vernon land to visit their families or friends at other plantations or in Alexandria on their day off from work. But the fact that slaves' access to such modest privileges changed little over time suggests that, however

[739] 18 February 1786, Slave List, *Papers of GW, Diaries, 4:277-327*; June 1799, Slave List *Papers of GW, Ret. Ser*., 4:527-540.

much the Revolution inspired Washington to free his slaves after his death, it did nothing to weaken his authority over the enslaved during his life.

The war also brought greater exposure to anti-slavery advocates to the slave population at Mount Vernon. The news that Great Britain would free the slaves of any slave owner who defied the country, brought hope to the slave community and freedom for some. Life in New York City and Philadelphia further exposed some members of the slave community to the opportunities that life in the north might offer. Hercules and Oney Judge took advantage of the awakening they experienced in the cities by leaving Mount Vernon for freedom. Washington recognized that slaves had become more dissatisfied with their situation since the Revolution.

Historian Edwin Betts suggested that Mount Vernon might not have remained as profitable if Washington had lived into the nineteenth century when bread from America was no longer needed to feed the Atlantic fleets and armies of Europe and left many grain farmers with no market in which to sell their crops.[740] At the end of the eighteenth century, Fairfax County had one of the largest slave populations in the United States. In 1810, there were 235 slave owners with 200 or more slaves constituting 4% of the slaveholding population. From 1800 through 1860, the population of Fairfax County declined. The number of whites and free blacks increased slightly but the number of slaves decreased from 45% of the total population to just 26% as slave traders purchased

[740] Jefferson, *Farm Book*, Betts, ed., xix.

slaves for cotton, rice and sugar plantations in the lower south.[741] By 1860, the largest number of slaves owned by any individual did not exceed 60 slaves and they constituted only one percent of the slaveholders and fifty-eight percent of the slave owning population possessed between just one and ten slaves.[742] Alexandria became a major part of the slave trade and the headquarters of Franklin and Armfield in 1828, one of the largest slave trading operations in the south.[743]

Mount Vernon was supported by a wide diversity of people who lived and worked there: hired workers, indentured servants, and slaves. George Washington and the myriad other individuals at the plantation were part of a local economy, which functioned within the Chesapeake region as a part of the Atlantic world. The events of the latter half of the eighteenth century brought change to the plantation as tobacco agriculture gave way to wheat and other grains, social and political change as a result of the American Revolution and the formation of a new government. Through all of these events, Mount Vernon remained financially viable because of Washington's diligence, ingenuity and willingness to invest in diverse business ventures. However, for all of Washington's agricultural and economic accomplishments, it is his decision to free his slaves that is his greatest legacy to Mount Vernon.

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[741] Pargas, *Quarters and the Fields*, 20; Mary Beth Corrigan, "Imaginary Cruelties? A History of the Slave Trade in Washington, D.C., *Washington History* 13:2, (Fall/Winter, 2001/2002), 6.
[742] Ibid., 118-119.
[743] Robert H. Gudmestad, "The Troubled Legacy of Isaac Franklin: The Enterprise of Slave Trading," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 62:3 (Fall 2003), 193.

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