

An Enslaved Residents' Quarter at the Washington-Era Ferry Farm Site
(George Washington's Boyhood Home National Historic Landmark):
Archaeological and Historical Documentation and Evidence
for Proposed Implementation of Phase 1-B of a Landscape
Rehabilitation

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Documentation of Enslaved Residents' Quarter and Landscape Rehabilitation, in Relation to NPS Conservation Easement and Reviews

This report presents archaeological and historical documentation of a quarter, no longer extant, that housed enslaved people at Ferry Farm during the eighteenth century and the Washington family's ownership of the property. The site of this structure, along with others, is today encompassed by George Washington's Boyhood Home National Historic Landmark, Stafford County, Virginia. The George Washington Foundation (Foundation) now proposes, as part of its Phase 1-B implementation of the Preferred Alternative of a Site Treatment Plan, to erect a structure representing a slave quarter in the property's Core Interpretive Landscape. That landscape now includes structures representing the Washington family's dwelling and fencing contemporary to it, structures erected following presentation of archeological and historical documentation and evidence to the National Park Service (NPS) for its National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) review and approval in 2015 of the Foundation's Phase 1-A implementation of the Preferred Alternative.

The preamble of the NPS-held Ferry Farm conservation easement of 2000 includes and acknowledges "...to restore and perpetuate the historic scene" among the goals of the Foundation. In 2014, an NPS National Environmental Policy Act review of an Environmental Assessment of the Foundation's Site Treatment Plan made a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for a Preferred Alternative of that Plan: "a rehabilitated landscape" that will include new buildings for visitor reception and education, maintenance, and utilities; access-infrastructure such as walkways and a road; and "a core interpretive landscape" containing new "features including fences, paths, crops, yards, and structures to demonstrate the 18th century plantation setting as authentically as possible." Those new interpretive-landscape structures proposed by the Foundation for the 18th century setting will include buildings that, in the wording of the FONSI, "capitalize on and communicate what is known--the location and nature of the main residence and the inclusion of outbuildings where their location and function have been determined."

This rehabilitated-landscape concept for Ferry Farm, subject of the NPS's NEPA review and FONSI of 2014 and NHPA review of the Foundation's Phase 1-A plans in 2015, is derived from the Secretary of Interior's Guidelines for rehabilitating cultural landscapes, guidelines that include the concept of replacing missing, interpretively important landscape features "if adequate historical, pictorial, and physical documentation exists so that the feature may be accurately reproduced."

Archaeological Documentation and Evidence: Ferry Farm and Contemporary Sites Elsewhere in Virginia

In 2003, archaeologists from the George Washington Foundation uncovered and excavated a root cellar that once belonged to a structure that stood during the Washington occupation of Ferry Farm¹. The structure was located about 100 ft. upriver (north) of the remains of the Washington house. Analysis of the feature and its contents and artifact distributions from around this root cellar led the archaeologists to the conclusion that this structure had housed enslaved residents of the property.

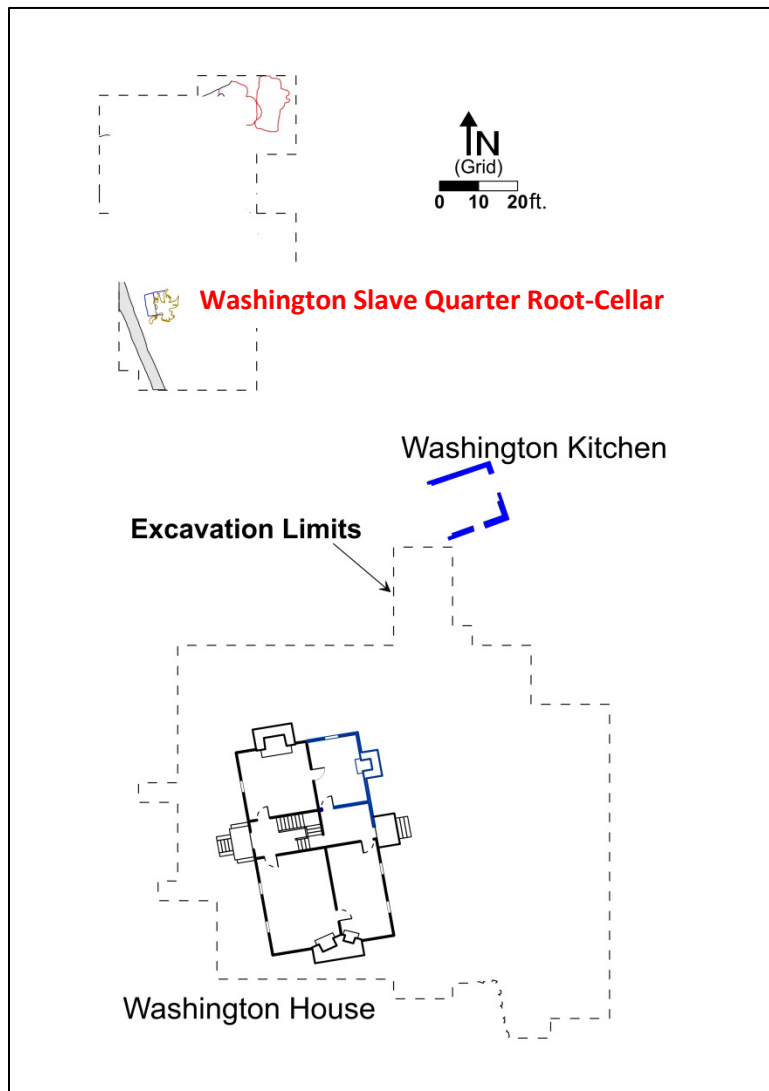


Figure 1. Location of Root Cellar (top/north) in Relationship to the Washington House.

¹ Muraca et al. *Report on the Excavation of the Washington Farm: The 2002 and 2003 Field Seasons, 2011.*

The surviving architectural element of this structure is a medium sized root cellar, also called a subfloor pit, which measured 5.5 ft. by 5.5 ft. The root cellar contained the remains of a large tree stump that allowed for only a little more than half of the feature to be excavated. The tree covered most of the eastern half of the cellar making excavation of this portion impossible. The cellar is square in shape, and was filled in a single event. The cellar had slightly sloping walls and a flat bottom. The fill layer (1.7 feet deep) suggests this cellar was abandoned and filled prior to the destruction of the structure.



Figure 2. Aerial View of Root Cellar intruded by Remains of a Tree.

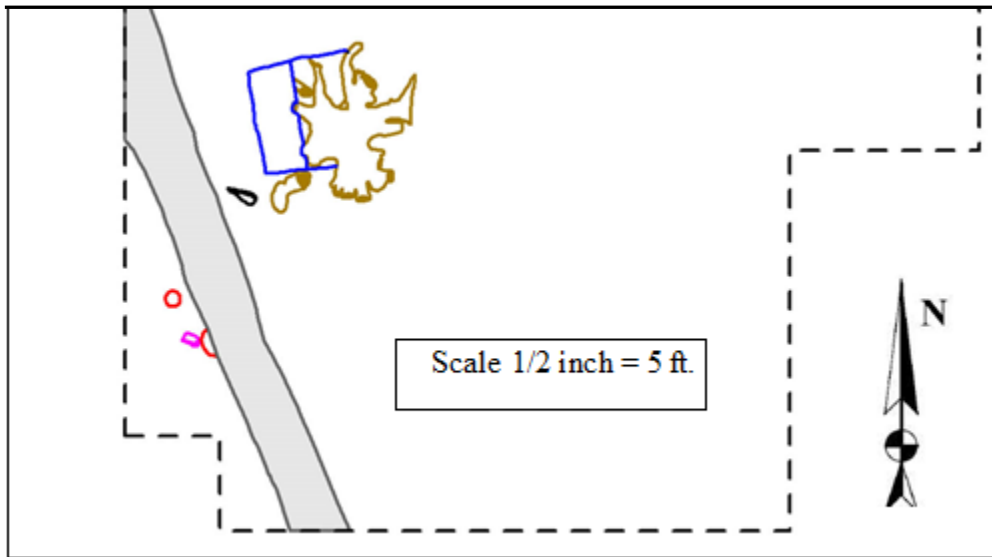


Figure 3. Plan View of Root Cellar Feature

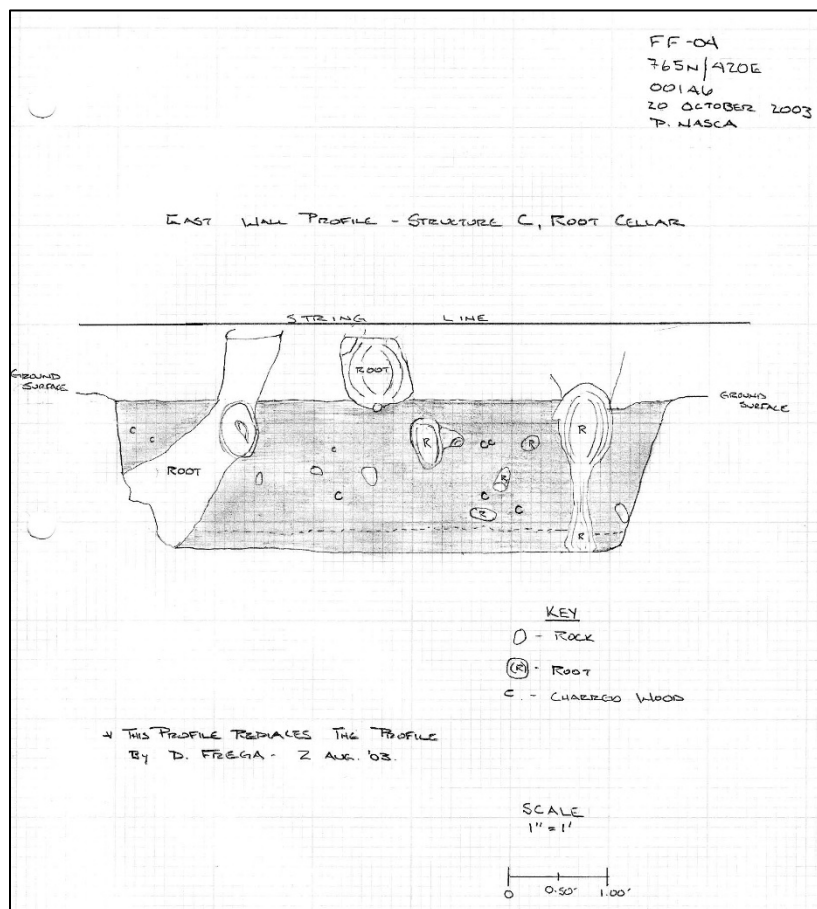


Figure 4. Profile View of Root Cellar.

The fill layer was a dark, ashy, silty loam with large chunks of charred wood. This layer was subdivided into two context numbers – FF04-145 and FF04-190. Both contexts contained a large number of artifacts that ranged in date from the early eighteenth century to 1770. Ten liters of soil from FF04-145 and all of the soil from FF04-190 underwent water screening. No evidence of wood lining or wall supports was visible.

Artifacts from this cellar suggest it was abandoned and filled during the early 1770s. The site underwent three major changes in the 1770s: Mary Washington moved to Fredericksburg, George Washington leased the property, and finally George sold the property to Hugh Mercer. Mercer died in the Revolutionary War, and the farm reverted to his estate.

It is not unusual for root cellars to be the only surviving portion of a structure. Neither log cabins nor ground-laid sill structures leave evidence below plow zones. Examples of slave quarter structures where only the root cellar survives in the archaeological record are extremely common and include in Virginia the Carter's Grove slave quarters,² Kingsmill Plantation,³ a quarter at Poplar Forest,⁴ an eighteenth-century slave quarter at Rich Neck, a nineteenth-century slave quarter at Rich Neck,⁵ and the Palace Lands quarter.⁶

The tables below compare, in particular, the materials found in the Ferry Farm Root Cellar with two of those quarters of enslaved Virginians —Poplar Forest and the Palace Lands site--that date to the about the same time period and use a similar construction technique.

The excavation of Poplar Forest's North Hill site uncovered a single cabin that stood from c. 1770 to 1785. The case for such a building is based primarily on the presence of a subfloor pit containing large numbers domestic artifacts. Daub and thousands of hand-wrought nails, suggests that the cabin that contained the pit was made of logs with clapboard siding and/or a wood shingle roof. The structure's size and absence of additional subfloor pits indicates that the dwelling was home to a single individual or a family.⁷

The excavation of the Palace Lands site in Williamsburg also uncovered a single subfloor pit in association with a brick fireplace that appears to be the remains of a slave quarter. Based

² 1971 *A Report on Exploratory Excavations at Carter's Grove Plantation. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report Series – 273. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, Williamsburg, Virginia*

³ Kelso, William M. 1984 *Kingsmill Plantations 1619-1800: Archaeology of Country Life in Colonial Virginia. Academic Press, New York.*

⁴ 1994 Heath, Barbara. *An Interim Report on the 1993 Excavations: The Quarter Site at Poplar Forest, Forest, Virginia. Manuscript on file, The Corporation for Jefferson's Poplar Forest, Forest, Virginia.*

⁵ Samford, Patricia M. 1991 *Archaeological Investigations of a Probable Slave Quarter at Rich Neck Plantation. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report Series – 0395. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, Williamsburg, Virginia*

⁶ 2004 Franklin, Maria. *An Archaeological Study of the Rich Neck Slave Quarter and Enslaved Domestic Life. Colonial Williamsburg Research Publication, Deetz Press.*

⁷ 1994 Heath, Barbara. *An Interim Report on the 1993 Excavations: The Quarter Site at Poplar Forest, Forest, Virginia. Manuscript on file, The Corporation for Jefferson's Poplar Forest, Forest, Virginia.*

on the ceramic evidence, this site was occupied during the third quarter of the 18th-century. Since no other architectural features were found, the size of the structure could only be estimated as about 10 ft. wide by 20 ft. The presence of a variety of artifacts, the majority of which were architectural or everyday use items emphasizes the domestic nature of the structure.

While these two sites contain architecturally similar remains to those found at Ferry Farm, a comparison of the ceramics and small finds cements the argument that Ferry Farm's structure was once a slave quarter. Ferry Farm slave quarter's root cellar and Palace Lands quarter's root cellar contain almost identical inventories of ceramics. Palace Lands quarter has a slightly larger number of ceramics and ceramics make up a much larger percentage of the total artifacts when compared with Ferry Farm's root cellar. Poplar Forest's North Hill quarter's root cellar lacks the diversity of ceramics, but still has a higher percentage of ceramics in relationship to the total assemblage than the example from Ferry Farm.

The small finds from all three structures support the contention that the buildings served as homes of enslaved people. Each contained a variety of artifacts associated with domestic occupations. Several different types of artifacts were present at all three including clothing items (shoe buckles and buttons), coins, ammunition, table accoutrements (table glass and knives) and sewing items (straight pins and scissors). Thimbles were recovered from both Palace Lands and Ferry Farm. Of particular note were the coins found at Ferry Farm's root cellar and North Hill quarter. They were quartered and featured a drilled hole, attributes that are frequently ascribed to coins owned by enslaved people.



Figure 5. Quartered and Drilled Spanish Coin, Ferry Farm root cellar.

Table 1. Ceramics Comparison

	Types of Ceramics found	
Palace Lands–Williamsburg 1750-1775	Ferry Farm – Root Cellar 1760-1775	Poplar Forest- North Hill 1770-1785

Buckley coarseware	Locally made coarseware	Creamware - Refined earthenware
Colonoware coarseware	Colonoware coarseware	Pearlware - Refined earthenware
Creamware Refined earth	Creamware - Refined earthenware	Redware - coarseware
Delftware earthenware	Delftware earthenware	
Fulham stoneware	Fulham stoneware	
Jackfield Refined earthenware	Jackfield Refined earthenware	
Porcelain serving	North Devon coarseware	
Redware coarseware	Slipware coarseware	
Slipware coarseware	Staffordshire Iron glazed coarseware	
Renish stoneware	Renish stoneware	
Whieldon refined earth	Nottingham stoneware	
White Salt Glaze stoneware	White Salt glaze stoneware	
	Staffordshire Brown Stoneware	
	Local redware coarseware	

Table 2. Small Finds Comparison

	Small finds	
Palace Lands-Williamsburg 1750-1775	Ferry Farm – Structure C 1760-1775	Poplar Forest- North Hill 1770-1785
Barrel Hoop	Barrel Hoop	
Bead	Bead	
Harness Bit		
Shoe buckle	Shoe Buckle	Shoe Buckle
		Clothing Buckle
Shot	Shot	Shot
Button	Button	Button
Coin	Coin	Coin
	Cutlery	
		Crystal
Doll part		
	Deadeye	
		Daub
	Drawer pull	
Fan blade		
Gunflint		
	Hinge	

	Book/box hinge	
	Horseshoe	
Knife	Knife	Knife
Jewelry		
Lockplate	Lockplate	
Marble		
Medical instrument		
Needle		
Straight pin	Straight pin	Straight pin
Scissors	Scissors	Scissors
Table Glass	Table Glass	Table Glass
Tack	Tack	
Thimble	Thimble	
Window glass	Window glass	
Window lead		

Other lines of evidence that help determine the nature of the structure constructed over the Ferry Farm root cellar include distribution maps of artifacts associated with structures. Below is the distribution of clinched nails used mainly to hold together boards for the production of doors and furniture.

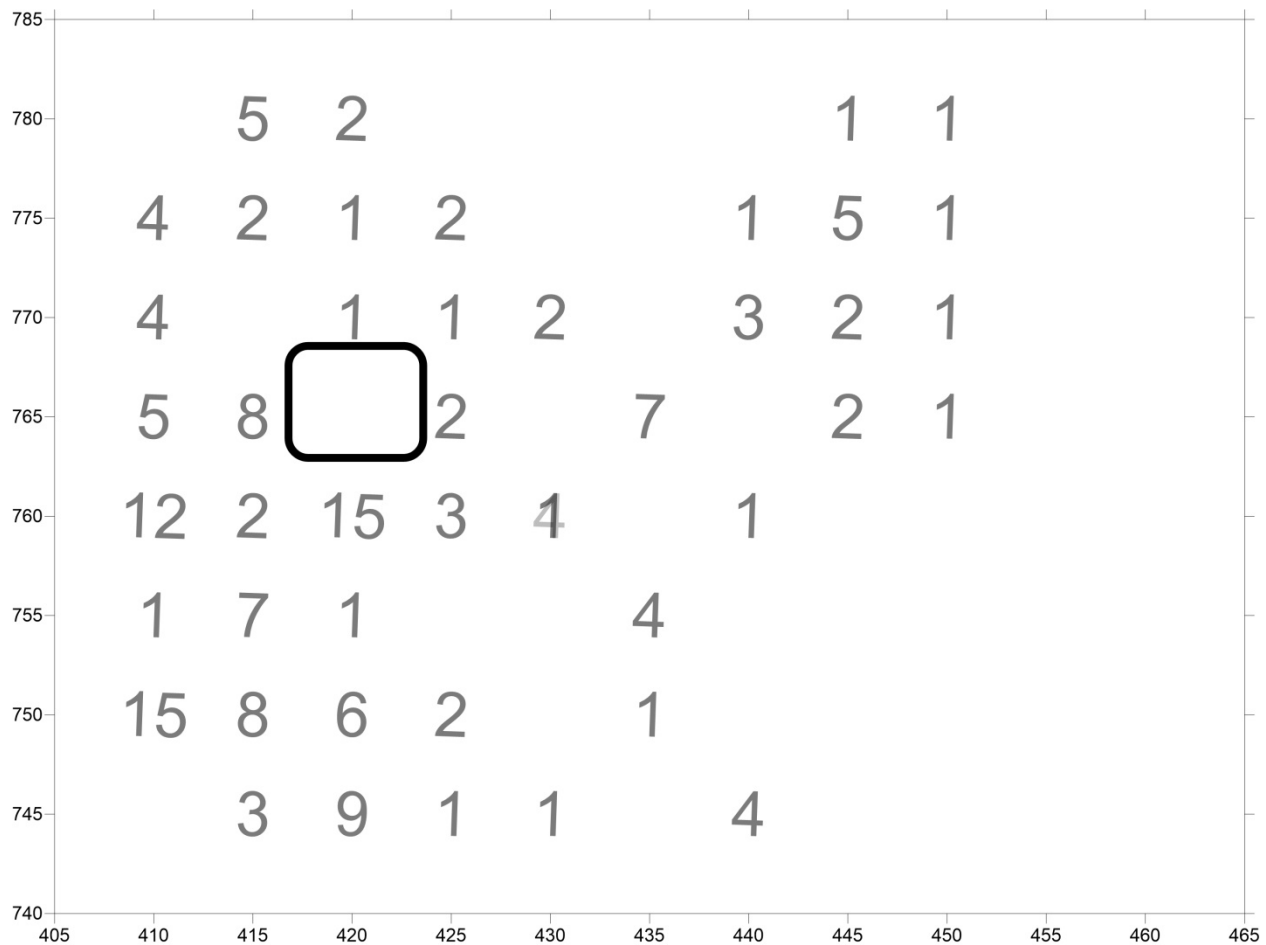


Figure 6. Distribution Displaying the Number of Clinched Nails Found Around the Slave Quarter.

Summary of Archeological Documentation and Evidence

This data, when combined, show that the root cellar unearthed by George Washington Foundation archaeologists was part of a structure that was home to enslaved individuals during the Washington family occupation of the site.

The Washington-era enslaved residents' quarter was identified by its sub-floor storage pit, a feature prominently associated with slave quarters of the period. The contents of this pit indicated domestic use, at a location somewhat removed from the main house. Moreover, the high proportion of wild species in the faunal materials was consistent with assemblages recovered from other sites of enslavement. These pits were often situated in front of the hearth. The building was associated with the Washington era by its occupation at the end of the creamware period.

Summary, Including Historical Documentation and Evidence

Enslaved Residents of Washington-Era Ferry Farm

Slavery had arrived at Ferry Farm by 1728, when William Strother III acquired the plantation and built a new dwelling. His probate lists five enslaved workers at the house site and six enslaved agricultural workers at a satellite quarter, called the Cales, and his will listed 20 enslaved individuals.⁸ The Washingtons continued and expanded the practice of using enslaved workers at Ferry Farm. Augustine Washington and his wife, Mary Ball Washington, brought slaves with them into their marriage. Several documents dating to different times provide information about the number and nature of enslaved workers and some details about the work they undertook. Documents that specifically mention the names and other general information about the Washingtons' enslaved workforce include Augustine Washington's will⁹ and probate inventory¹⁰, distribution lists¹¹, and property inventories¹². Court cases¹³ and newspaper articles¹⁴ provide additional details about the lives of specific enslaved individuals. Finally, George Washington Foundation archaeologists have interpreted archaeological and historical data to help better understand the daily lives of some of the enslaved individuals that made up the domestic workforce at Ferry Farm.¹⁵

Document type	Date	Male	Female
Augustine Washington will, to Mary Washington	April 11, 1743	Ned, Jack, Bob	Sue, Lucy
Augustine Washington probate inventory at Home House	July 1, 1743	Jack, Bob, Ned, Dick, Ned, Toney, London, George, Steven, Jo, Jerimy, Jack	Lucy, Sue, Judy, Nan, Betty, Jenny, Phillis, Hannah
Augustine Washington estate partition, to Mary Washington*	October 31, 1750	Ned, Jack, Bob, Ned, Jack (a child), Prince, Will	Sue, Jane, Phillis, Judy
Valuation of sundry belongings to Mrs. Washington at Home House†	October 15, 1771	Toney, Ben, Dundee	Bett, Priscilla
Mary Washington will, to various heirs	May 20, 1788	George, Tom, Frederick	Old Bet, Lydia, Little Bet

*During this partition Toney was set aside for John Augustine Washington.

†At the quarter: Jack, Will, Frederick, Phillis, and Jenny.

Table 3. Examples of Various Documents that Mention Enslaved Individuals¹⁶

⁸ King George County Virginia Court Records

⁹ Inventory Book (1721-1744) PG 291, King George Co VA, Clerk's Book

¹⁰ Order Book 2, part 1, pg. 333, King George County VA, Clerk's Office

¹¹ Deed Book 3 (1743-1752) pg. 373, King George County, Clerk's Office

¹² 1771 Appraisal of Mary Ball Washington belongings at Ferry Farm

¹³ Order Book 2 (1735-1751) pg. 670, King George County VA; Clerk's office

¹⁴ VA Gazette 4/13-4/21 1738

¹⁵ Tressed for Success: Male Hair Care and Wig Hair Curlers at George Washington's Childhood Home
Laura J. Galke. Winterthur Portfolio Volume 52, Number 2-3 Summer/Autumn 2018;

¹⁶ Ibid.

Sizing up the Enslaved Residents' Quarter

Because the site was previously plowed, no post holes or other supports survived at the building perimeter to suggest its size. However, quarters tended to have at least one storage pit in every space. There is only one pit on this site, so the quarter is likely to have been a single-room structure.

Its proximity to the main house probably means that the occupants were in daily contact with the Washington family. This indicates a family unit *versus* a large group of field laborers who worked every day in some remote part of the property. Typically, people in this situation enjoyed better accommodation than those who labored out of the slaveholder's sight.

Excavated slave quarters (documented in the Digital Archaeological Archive Cataloging System database) and house sizes of whites recorded in the 1797 direct tax for the poorer, upland portion of Spotsylvania County indicate that a dwelling 16 feet long and 14 feet deep would have stood in the middle of the one-room distribution--for blacks and whites.

Construction

Across this building site, the plow zone is approximately 12 inches deep. So, most architectural post holes would have survived, but there are none in the vicinity of the cellar. Their absence rules out an "earthfast" structure.

At the same time, the recovery of daub in modest quantities and in small-sized pieces *seems* to rule out a log structure. Perhaps these small clods came instead from the parged interior of an earthfast chimney, belonging to an "English-framed" house—one with sills seated on a rubble foundation (to judge from the small pieces of Aquia stone spread across the site). The frames of such chimneys sometime extended no more than 6" in the ground, and so would have disappeared in the plowing.

Framing

By the middle of the 18th century, a standard system of carpentry had emerged in the Chesapeake region. Typically, it incorporated hewn and pit-sawn members of white oak or poplar. Their ends were often secured with lapped joinery as a labor-saving strategy for smaller members like studs and collars, but occasionally for larger braces as well. Square corner posts were typical in simpler buildings where the framing was not held behind the plaster. A structural spacing of 30" was common before 1750; by the time the Washington quarter was built, a 22" to 24" module had emerged. This would have set the spacing of joists, studs and rafters.

Windows

In the 1730s landowner Joseph Ball, brother and advisor to his sister Mary Ball Washington, owned and remotely operated a quarter just down river from Ferry Farm objected to having sash windows in his overseer's house, so it is reasonable to suppose that shutters, probably sliding, were provided in this house for the Washington slaves. (Similar examples have been observed in

several standing quarters). Clinched nails have defined combined board/batten thickness for these shutters.

Doors

Clinched nails have defined board/batten thickness for doors as well. Joseph Ball called for locks on the house of favored slaves, but Ball wrote from England and may have been atypical in his prescriptions. No components from stock locks or Banbury locks were recovered in the archaeology, and no hinges. Thus, the door swings on wooden hinges and is secured by a wooden string latch.¹⁷

Covering

Approximately 500 nails were recovered in this building site. There can be little doubt that the building had a wooden covering. A 10' x 10' area of roof covered with wooden clapboards would have required about 150 nails; a shingle roof would have required nearly four times that number to cover the same area. The walls would have needed cladding as well. The building was likely covered, roof and walls, with riven wooden clapboards.

¹⁷ *The Chesapeake House*. p. 161.