

Research Design

This chapter describes the various components of this document and provides more detailed information on the approach used to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the history of agriculture and slavery in Prince George's County from 1696 to 1870.

Agricultural Context

The primary focus of this document is to provide a starting point for future research that will address the agricultural character of the county, with a specific focus on the development of slavery. The design for this project is inherently complex because the written record of slavery in Prince George's County is often biased and incomplete. The amount of information and the comprehensiveness of extant historical records, both from primary and secondary sources, vary considerably depending upon the time period. Conclusions about the day-to-day lives of the thousands of slaves who lived, worked, and died in Prince George's County is often conjectural and based on accounts from sources outside of the current study area. One of the goals of this document is to provide a summary of past scholarly research and analysis of primary documentation, in the form of a historical context, for antebellum agriculture in Prince George's County.

Review of Primary Records

Archival research involved both a review of primary and secondary source materials. Because of the availability or scarcity of various types of historic reference materials, methods will vary somewhat for the various time periods discussed within the context.

Previous academic research by Allan Kulikoff (1976) on slavery and agriculture during the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries included an exhaustive review of nearly all records relevant to the colonial history of Prince George's County. As such, the current study involved a review of limited primary records, including runaway slave advertisements, selected inventories, Prince George's County court records, and State Assembly proceedings, that were consulted in preparation of the portion of the context that deals with the Colonial Period of Prince George's history. Further scrutiny of these documents, either for academic pursuit or in the completion of compliance-driven projects, could apply new approaches to interpreting the early Prince George's County records. However, the data provided by secondary sources combined with limited primary research

proved adequate in development of the context for late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century slavery and agriculture.

Considerably less historical attention has been paid to the later periods, specifically the nineteenth century documentary record of Prince George's County. Most available scholarship for this period focuses more broadly on the State of Maryland, especially its particular situation as a slaveholding border state (Fields 1985; Franklin and Sweninger 1999; Wagandt 2004). There is a vast array of primary documentation available for researching specific individuals, properties or plantations, and for the county as a whole. These records include county tax assessments, census records, agricultural schedules, slave schedules, probate inventories, chattel records, wills, and court records. These records are particularly powerful when used in concert with each other in researching various themes in the county.

Review of Secondary Records

Because previously conducted historical research investigated the range of primary documents relevant to the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, much of the research for this period relies on secondary documentation of historical accounts. Allan Kulikoff (1976) compiled and researched most, if not all, documents relevant to the late seventeenth through eighteenth centuries as part of his doctoral dissertation, entitled *Tobacco and Slaves: Population, Economy and Society in 18th Century Prince George's County, Maryland*. The dissertation presents well-developed arguments regarding tobacco agriculture and slave society. Complementing Kulikoff's research is Russell Menard's (1975) work, "The Maryland Slave Population, 1658–1730: A Demographic Profile of Blacks in Four Counties" which addresses slave demographics of early colonial Prince George's County.

Other secondary works also proved valuable sources for researching the middle to late eighteenth century. Very few of these address Prince George's County specifically, but they do discuss broader trends in Maryland and the Chesapeake region. As a result, the context for the middle- to late-eighteenth century relies on a combination of primary and secondary sources. Significant secondary works relevant to this period include *Tobacco Culture* (Breen 1985), *Many Thousands Gone, Generations of Captivity* (Berlin 1998, 2004), *Tobacco Coast* (Middleton 1984), and Edmond Morgan's (1975) seminal work *American Slavery, American Freedom*.

Because an expansive primary record exists, in particular for the entire nineteenth century, this study was able to utilize source material from the extant historic documentation. In addition to extensive primary records for the nineteenth century, secondary literary works such as *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground* (Fields 1985) and *Runaway Slaves* (Franklin and Sweninger 1999) provide valuable information for the mid-nineteenth century. Similarly, Eric Foner's *Short History of Reconstruction* (1990) and Leon

Litwack's *Been in the Storm So Long* (1980) are invaluable to understanding the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War.

Unpublished Papers and Technical Reports

Aspects of slave history in Prince George's County are underrepresented in both the primary and secondary records. Occasionally, previous archeological or architectural investigations supplemented the historical record and published accounts. In particular, very little written information exists for topics such as slave housing during the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries in Prince George's County. However, archeological and historic architectural investigations conducted throughout the Chesapeake Tidewater region offer examples against which the results of future investigations in Prince George's County can be compared and contrasted. Slave burials and burial practices represent other aspects for which there are few, if any, examples within the county. However, excavations in Virginia and in particular for the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries at the African Burial Ground in New York City help with the identification of cultural indicators for the historic African-American burial practices.

Finally, technical reports associated with particularly successful investigations that have been conducted throughout the region provide examples applicable for future studies in Prince George's County. In particular Timothy Riordan's (2000) *Dig a Grave Both Wide and Deep* describes the types of information retrievable from careful grave excavation as well as proper field methods for burial removal.

Definitions

For the purpose of this document, certain terms and organizational features need to be defined. These definitions provide clarity to the narrative. Future investigations in Prince George's County may find these terms and divisions useful or may modify or discard them as more is learned about the nature of slavery in the county.

Much of this investigation focuses on the lives of **Slaves**, people either forcibly transported from Africa, often via the British Caribbean (West Indies), who served for the duration of their lives, as well as those born into slavery. Slaves differ from **Indentured Servants** in several important aspects, not the least of which is race; unless otherwise specified, the term "indentured servant" refers specifically to individuals of European, predominately English, ancestry who voluntarily immigrated to the Americas under terms of indenture.

Slaveholding refers to the number of slaves owned by an individual. For the purpose of this context, slaveholdings are characterized as either small, medium, or large.

- *Small Slaveholdings* consist of between one and five individuals
- *Medium Slaveholdings* consist of between 6 and 19 individuals
- *Large Slaveholdings* contain a minimum of 20 individuals

Typical slaveholdings varied dramatically throughout the Antebellum South. Holdings of 20 slaves may not have been considered “large” in locations such as coastal South Carolina or parts of the Cotton Belt. Conversely, in other locations in the South slave holdings in excess of 20 slaves were virtually unknown. Despite geographic variation, differentiation based on the number of slaves held can provide a useful means of examining slavery (Kolchin 1993:xiii).

Specifically, these divisions seem appropriate for Prince George’s County as historic conditions that favored small and large slaveholdings coexisted. Tobacco, a cash crop for which fairly large numbers of slaves could be utilized, dominated agriculture in portions of Prince George’s County. However, other areas of the county were ill-suited for tobacco and, especially toward the end of the Antebellum Period, agricultural production in these areas focused primarily on grain, dairy, and livestock.

Prince George’s County contained no large urban centers; smaller towns, such as Upper Marlboro, Piscataway, Queen Anne, and Bladensburg dotted the otherwise agrarian landscape. However, Washington, D.C., borders Prince George’s County to the west, and Baltimore, one of the nation’s most significant nineteenth-century ports, is located to the north. Within this setting, the distinctions established for small, medium, and large slaveholders provide a valuable framework for the agricultural and social history of the county.

The term **Planter** should not be confused with **Farmer**. While the term “farmer” generally describes a nonslaveholder engaged in agriculture, a “planter” specifically denotes membership in a particular social or economic class. Although large slaveholdings are not prerequisite to membership in the planter class, the use of each term to reflect similar meanings is common. The “small,” “medium,” and “large” modifiers provide clarity in specific application. Planters normally engaged in the production of a **Cash Crop** rather than a **Subsistence Crop**. Tobacco served as the main cash crop in Prince George’s County, while large amounts of subsistence crops of corn, wheat, and potatoes were also grown in the county.

Temporal Divisions

The first temporal division, the Early Period, spans from the late-seventeenth century, the period of the founding of the county and the period in which the first slaves were brought into Prince George’s County, through to circa 1730. The end date of this period is significant for two reasons. First, this represents the time at which the slave population became self-sustaining. Although slave importation remained significant and continued to contribute to the cultural

make-up of the county's slave community, the reproducing slave population allowed for the development of uniquely African-American culture. Secondly, the period around 1730 corresponds with the rise of a Prince George's County elite, in which relatively few families comprised a social, political, and economic ruling class.

The second temporal division, the Colonial Period, spans from circa 1730 through 1783. This period represents a solidification of the institution of slavery as the defining aspect of wealth and social status. The date of 1783 is used as the terminus of the Colonial Period because it is the date associated with the acceptance of the current United States Constitution, marking an end to colonial rule and replacement of the Articles of Confederation.

The National Period, which refers to the period 1783 through circa 1870, is defined by the decline of the tobacco economy and a shift toward diversified agriculture in certain portions of the Upper South, of which Prince George's County is part. The opening of the Deep South to American settlement and the spread of slavery to new territories factors significantly during this period. The end of the Civil War and subsequent amendment of the American Constitution brought an end to legal slavery, but the institution remained a vital factor in the lives of the emancipated. Therefore, the context ends with a brief discussion of the years immediately following emancipation.

Additional consideration is given to the political and spatial divisions within the county, beginning with the use of the term "hundreds," and followed by the use of the term "district." A hundred represents a political, military, and judicial division adopted from England and utilized in colonial and early national Maryland; districts refer to the congressional election districts that largely replaced the earlier hundreds designations for political and taxation purposes. Although hundreds and districts were politically, rather than ecologically determined, they nonetheless provide some indication of the various agricultural strategies employed throughout the county over time. Furthermore, these divisions, to a certain extent, do reflect the agricultural capacities within the county.

Known Antebellum Plantations in Prince George's County

The majority of the data regarding known antebellum plantations in Prince George's County comes from earlier architectural studies. Extensive information on specific plantations is available from the Historic American Building Survey (HABS), the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties (MIHP), as well as available county-level architectural and site-specific archeological investigations.

Several of these plantation houses and complexes have been destroyed or altered since initial recordation. In other cases where the primary plantation house remains, modern development has altered the surrounding landscape,

with many secondary agricultural structures having been destroyed or altered. As a result, older surveys are especially useful in determining spatial layouts and relationships. Minimal archeological evidence exists for slave quarters and burials for Prince George's County. Nonetheless, the few examples for the county are useful in discussing the place of slavery within the plantation layout.

Model Plantation Layouts for Prince George's County

The development of model plantations draws almost exclusively from the review of known plantations. However, it is noteworthy that the residences of economically prominent National Period planters are disproportionately represented in architectural surveys; few examples dating from county settlement through the Early Colonial Period remain standing. Likewise small- and medium-sized slaveholders are underrepresented. Although a small number of early sites have been identified archeologically, to date the research conducted has provided little information regarding the spatial distribution of people and architecture across the plantation landscape. Therefore, models for the earlier periods necessarily rely more on historical accounts than on information from extant plantations. When necessary, architectural examples or archeological findings from neighboring counties may aid in reconstructing probable spatial organization on Prince George's County plantations.