

Among His Slaves

George Mason, Slavery at Gunston Hall,
and the Idealism of the American Revolution

Terry K. Dunn

Copyright © 2017 Terry K. Dunn

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations in critical articles or reviews.

Unless otherwise noted, photographs in the text of the book courtesy of the author.

Commonwealth Books of Virginia
www.commonwealthbooks.org
e-mail: info@commonwealthbooks.org
Alexandria, VA 22307
703-307-7715

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015949354
ISBN (Paperback): 978-1-943642-37-3
ISBN (Ebook - EPUB): 978-1-943642-38-0
ISBN (Ebook - PDF): 978-1-943642-39-7
ISBN (Ebook - Mobipocket): 978-1-943642-40-3

American History/Biography

Printed in the United States of America

To Keith

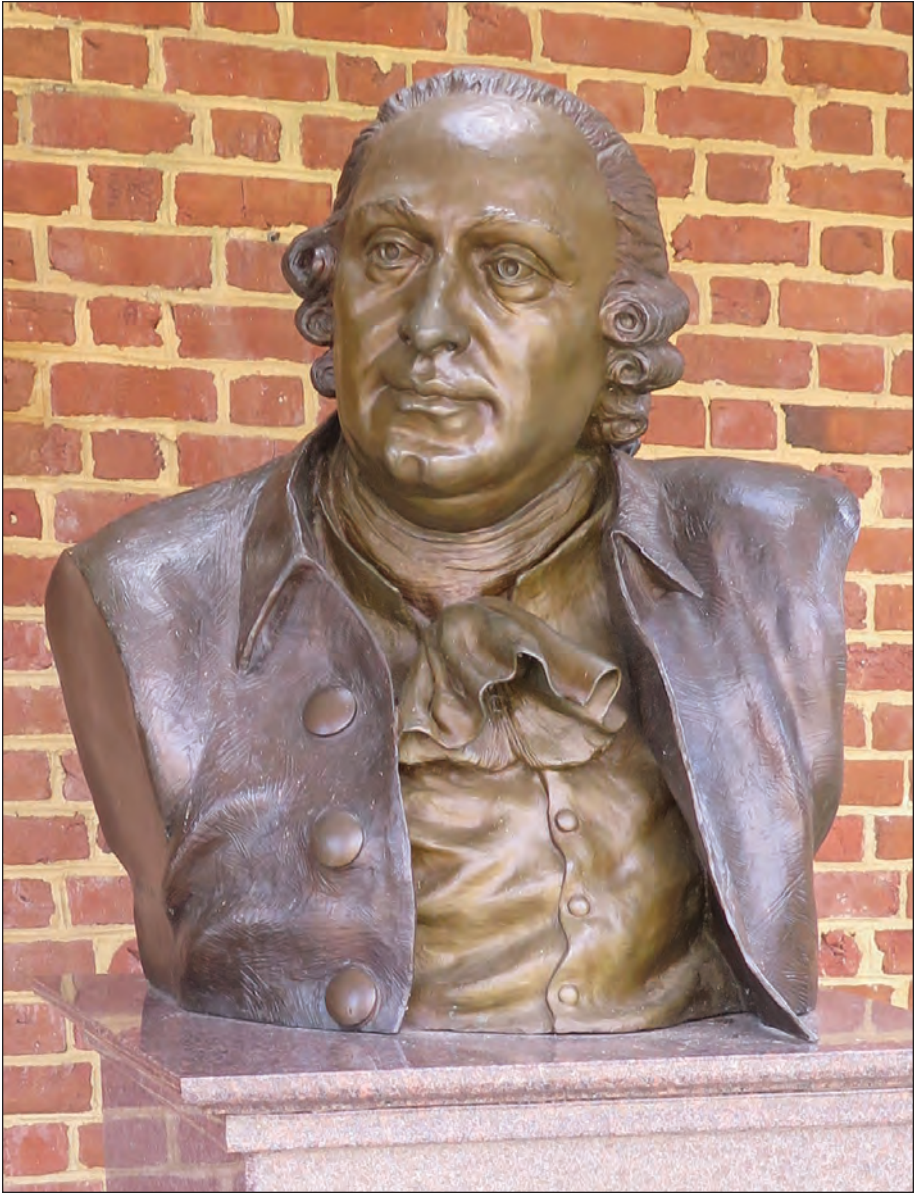
Who understands how important this is to me

Contents

Preface	vii
Introduction	xv
Abbreviated Mason Family Genealogy	1
<i>Chapter One: Beginnings</i>	5
<i>Chapter Two: Chesapeake Plantation Life in the Eighteenth Century</i>	31
<i>Chapter Three: The Slaves of Gunston Hall, 1746-1770</i>	61
<i>Chapter Four: The Slaves of Gunston Hall, 1770-1792</i>	81
<i>Chapter Five: Mason's Growing Idealism and Changing Attitude in the Revolutionary Period</i>	123
Concluding Thoughts	141
Epilogue	151
Acknowledgements	157
<i>Appendix: Mason and Eilbeck Wills and Inventories</i>	163
Tables	191
Index	211

Preface





The bust of George Mason of Gunston Hall done by artist Wendy Ross welcomes guests at the visitor's center.

In the last decade, a serious need for museums to address the difficult subject of slavery in America's history has become a prominent topic among historians. Points of criticism concerning museums and historic sites of many types range from no mention of slavery at all to insufficient or even misrepresentation of enslaved persons at sites where slavery was known to exist. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton's edited volume, *Slavery and Public History, The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, explores this issue in depth and includes studies and perspectives on museum lapses in addressing the sensitive issues of American slavery and how these problems could be and should be better handled in the future. Their book also considers another overwhelming concern – that American history textbooks in public education are severely deficient in discussing American slavery.¹ Are public educators guilty of diluting or eliminating the teaching of the tough subjects of America's slave past? Are America's museums leaving out part of the story because it is too sensitive to discuss with visitors?

In 1998, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan surveyed 1500 people about their interests in learning about the past, their connections with the past, and their sources for learning about the past. The survey revealed that almost 80 percent of the participants said that they had confidence in the information they received at museum sites as truthful, whereas only about one-third in the survey expressed that confidence in high school teachers.² That is high praise and faith in museum education and interpreters! But are museums and historic sites only telling what they are comfortable with in the story-lines? And perhaps, as the Hortons' book reveals, are museums skipping-over the parts of the story that visitors – and interpreters – might find sensitive?

Museums have always played a critical role in supplementing the classroom experience in teaching history. Field trips provide the opportunity of “bringing history to life” or “pulling history out of the pages of a book.” These excursions are real teaching opportunities and chances to encourage interest in history for

¹ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, Eds., *Slavery and Public History, The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (The New Press, New York, 2006), vii-xiv.

² Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 21, 32.

students – and adults as well. Museums must make the opportunity provided to excel in telling stories, providing hands-on experiences, provoking questions, and projecting issues that are relevant to the site; they should not duck sensitive issues that may be part an integral part of their story. As James Oliver Horton says:

The history of slavery and its role in the formation of the American experience is one of the most sensitive and difficult subjects to present in a public setting. At historic plantation sites and historic houses, in museum exhibitions, in film productions, and in historic parks, public historians and historical interpreters are called upon to deal with this unsettling, but critical topic, often under less than ideal teaching conditions. Moreover, they are asked to educate a public generally unprepared and reluctant to deal with a history that, at times, can seem very personal.³

Horton believes the emphasis of telling the stories of America's past falls heavily on two groups: to the public historians – the docents and interpreters on the front lines of museums – as well as to the classroom educators.

Whether or not classroom texts are falling short of telling complete history in America's schools, field trips augment and support the educational experience. Interpreters and Docents, the “public historians,” on the front lines of museums and historic sites, thus become the first, and likely the only, communicators of a specific site's history.

Gunston Hall Plantation is a prime example of a museum that can offer the visitor a panorama of Virginia life in the eighteenth century. Home of George Mason, author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, Gunston Hall was also the center of life to perhaps 100-125 enslaved people. The story for school groups and visitors of all ages who visit this museum focuses on the person of George Mason, his family, and his all important writing of the Virginia Declaration of Rights. But it must also include discussion of those workers who provided Mason with the means of comfort and opportunities in the gentry life style he led – those individuals brought here and held by force and were “among his slaves,” as John Mason so aptly put it. Rich sources from decades of historical research reveal much about

³ Horton and Horton, *Slavery and Public History*, 36-37.

daily life for enslaved Africans and African-Americans in the Chesapeake region. Focusing on the years of George Mason's life as an elite eighteenth century plantation owner, this research provides a background for the more than one hundred enslaved individuals named in surviving Mason documents. Stories of many of these Mason-owned slaves have never been told. Although the whole picture will never be complete, understanding more about their lives enriches our knowledge of American history during a period when our emerging nation struggled with the ideological conflict of freedom in a slave society. Given the high confidence of museum visitors, "Public historians" need to get the story right.

It is challenging to tell this story as clearly and completely as possible. To do so, an understanding of the documented evidence is necessary to discuss objectively the individuals (and in some instances their families) of the enslaved Africans who lived, worked, and struggled to survive on this Chesapeake plantation. The surviving primary sources reveal names, ages, relationships, occupations, and, sometimes, behavior of the enslaved men, women, and children owned by George Mason. Many of these sources also reveal the transfer of ownership within Mason family members; they indicate the monetary values – the "business" of slavery – and, in a few cases, they illuminate the fate of an individual across time.

Sometimes our best understanding of history comes from those individuals who break the rules and get into trouble. In this fashion, several of Mason's slaves tell us important stories about themselves – and about their master. Their difficulties emphasize the omnipresent desire for freedom. The idealism of human rights – the concept of *democratic ideals* – was not lost on the enslaved. The stories of "Runaway Dick" and "Yellow Dick," emphasize the deep rooted desire for freedom; they also reveal George Mason's knowledge and use of a tightly structured legal system designed to punish slaves who broke laws; they show the importance of the monetary value of this form of "property;" and they indicate just what that loss of property meant to the owner.

Gentry women played an important, though sometimes understated, role in dealing with slavery in eighteenth century Virginia. These wives and mothers on plantations influenced decisions not only in the day-to-day activities of slaves' work and behavior, but also in the way in which they projected their values on issues regarding slaves' lives and futures. For George Mason, the influences of his

mother, his mother-in-law, his wife, and his eldest daughter helped modify his changing world view toward the institution of slavery.

Gunston Hall Plantation's history places it squarely into the time line of the elite planter class that scholar and historian Ira Berlin describes as the "Plantation Generation."⁴ By the middle of the eighteenth century a "mature" slave plantation system was clearly established in the Chesapeake. The primary labor source for planters had transitioned from one of indentured white laborers to enslaved black laborers. Slavery was clearly defined and designated by race. The planters, as the elite society and primary participants in the lawmaking bodies of the colony, created a legal structure around this system of racial slavery. Moreover, they molded and structured a farm model to include overseers to enforce the work to be done, punish the laggard, and reduce the amount of unstructured "leisure" time slaves had. In the Chesapeake region, the tobacco, wheat, and corn that were the mainstay crops were shipped to international markets and were highly profitable. A plantation was a business. African or African descended enslaved men, women, and children were the laborers of this business by no choice of their own and with no share of its profit.

Well before the time of the American Revolution, a complete legal structure for black slavery was in effect in Virginia. As planters expanded exports of multiple crops they became self-sufficient in food production for their families and enslaved workers. Skills among the slaves enhanced a level of plantation autonomy. Mason, like many planters, capitalized on diversified means to provide and increase his revenue. He rented land to tenant farmers, ran ferries at strategic river points, and utilized fishing rights to augment his income. But slaves, who provided the underlying labor source for his farms, were his true wealth. However, at the same time, George Mason realized that this fact undercut the idealism of the American Revolution.

This book is an attempt to do two things: First, to provide information for all who want to know more about the enslaved people of Gunston Hall. This work is based on extant primary sources and supported by secondary sources. Although many

⁴ Ira Berlin, "Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First-Century America" in Horton and Horton, *Slavery and Public History* 19-34. Berlin argues that in the Plantation Generation, "Biographies of individual men and women, to the extent that they can be reconstructed, are thin to the point of invisibility. Less is known about these men and women than about any other generation of American slaves." (p. 11) See also: Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1998), 95-105.

Mason family documents – plantation records and correspondence – have undoubtedly been lost, the surviving documents reveal much about the individual slaves in Mason family ownership. Additionally, a broad body of scholarship on Chesapeake slavery life enlightens our understanding of the eighteenth century plantations. On this basis we can build a strong picture of slavery at Gunston Hall. *The story is overdue.* It is time to tell the story of enslaved Africans and African-Virginians who lived on George Mason’s plantation as completely as possible.

Today, many Americans of African descent have oral history traditions in their families relating to slave roots and connections. By examining the story of the *people* who were enslaved in the Mason family, there is the hope and possibility that those who have an oral history connecting them with slaves held in the Mason family in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries may be able to support those traditions with facts.

Second, Gunston Hall’s story cannot be told without addressing how George Mason’s vision for human rights was paradoxically intertwined with his lifelong ownership of slaves. This paradox surrounds and overshadows his idealism, set down in writing when he drafted the Virginia Declaration of Rights which began with the words, “That all Men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent natural Rights....” George Mason, arguing against the slave trade at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, called “every master of slaves a Petty Tyrant.” Mason, a slave master – himself a “Petty Tyrant” – manumitted none of his. The idealism of the American Revolutionary period and the expression of human rights in the Revolutionary documents stopped short of acknowledging that enslaved people of African descent were worthy of those rights, too. The paradox imbedded in the story at Gunston Hall must not be left out.

Mason’s words stretched far beyond Virginia and today those words reflect the global importance of this story. As a historic site now owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia, Gunston Hall’s mission states in part that it is “to stimulate continuing public exploration of *democratic ideals* as first presented by George Mason in the 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights.”⁵ The exploration of our “democratic ideals” must go on.

⁵ Author’s emphasis.

Introduction





The English boxwood on the river front of Gunston Hall were planted in the 1770s and formed the original outlines for the parterres of Mason's formal garden. Today only a portion of these boxwood survive.

The Past is a Foreign Country.

Anonymous

Among His Slaves focuses on slavery at Gunston Hall, the eighteenth century home of George Mason. It brings to light a larger body of work that paints a stronger portrait of Mason's enslaved people than has been done in the past. Using the extant documents of more than eight decades of Mason and Eilbeck family members and tracing individual slaves they owned reveals much about the people who have remained anonymous through the past two centuries. We learn when many of these slaves came under ownership by the Masons, where they lived, where they worked, and what skills some had. We can identify family relationships of many slaves through inspection of these documents. And, very importantly, we can see how George Mason's attitude toward slavery changed and how it evolved. His change in attitude and his experiences with slaves is particularly critical to the discussion and evaluation of George Mason's growing abhorrence of slavery in the last years of his life. *Among His Slaves* seeks not only to bring to light Mason's slaves, but also to reveal his changing attitude toward the institution of slavery. Both provide insight as to why the author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, freed none of the bondsmen or bondswomen that he owned.

Mason, an important, but often slighted, founding father of our nation, drafted the Virginia Declaration of Rights in late May, 1776, which he began with the statement:

That all Men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent natural Rights, of which they can not [sic] by any Compact, deprive or divest their Posterity; among which are, the Enjoyment of Life and Liberty, with the Means of acquiring and possessing Property, and pursuing and obtaining Happiness and Safety.

His subsequent statements reflected the rights that so many argued were in jeopardy as Englishmen, including freedom of the press; the right of suffrage (by men who had "attachment" to the community); and the "fullest toleration in the exercise of religion."⁶

⁶ Robert A. Rutland, Ed., *The Papers of George Mason, 1725-1792* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 276-282. Mason's draft was presented and read to the committee on 27 May 1776.

The Committee at the Virginia Convention of Delegates in Williamsburg discussed his draft over the course of two weeks and effectively made minor changes. The exception was in the first statement which was rewritten after great debate to say:

That all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.⁷

The underlined words were the changes that the Committee made to allay the concerns and fears of Virginia's slave holders. In this modification, slaves (who were legally considered property) were excluded from society. Thus, only members of "society" reaped the benefits of these stated rights.

Eleven years later, as a Virginia delegate and an important contributor at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, Mason became fearful that the lack of an inclusion of a similar human rights declaration in the national document was a serious omission. He voiced this concern, then, seconded a motion to write a statement which "might be prepared in a few hours," but the motion was unanimously rejected by the delegates.⁸ Just before the close of the Convention, Mason wrote a long list of his "Objections" to the document. His first of sixteen objections stated that

There is no Declaration of Rights, and the laws of the general government being paramount to the laws and constitution of the several States, the Declaration of Rights in the separate States are no security. Nor are the people secured even in the enjoyment of the benefit of the common law.⁹

On 17 September, 1787, the Constitution was signed by the delegates. George Mason declined placing his signature on the document.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 287-291. The Virginia Declaration of Rights was approved sometime before 14 June 1776 when it appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie) on that date. The underlined words are those added or modified by the committee and were not in Mason's original draft.

⁸ Ibid., 981.

⁹ Ibid., 991.

¹⁰ Helen Hill Miller, *George Mason, Gentleman Revolutionary* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 257-269. Three delegates did not sign on 17 September, 1787: George Mason and Edmund Randolph from Virginia and Elbridge Gerry from Massachusetts.

George Mason argued strenuously for the inclusion of rights for the next two years, especially during the Ratification Convention in Virginia in June 1788. Although the Constitution of the United States of America was ratified without a human rights declaration, the long, uphill battle for it concluded successfully before the end of his life. Our “Bill of Rights,” the first ten amendments as they are known, was appended to the Constitution of the United States of America, in December 1791.¹¹

George Mason, born into Virginia’s slave-holding society in 1725, became a slave owner when he reached his majority (the age of twenty-one) and remained one all of his life. His attitude toward the institution of slavery initially fell in line with those of the early eighteenth century slave owners in what has become called the “Golden Age” of prosperous Chesapeake planters. The decades of the 1730s, 1740s, and 1750s brought established gentry families an accumulation of wealth from tobacco production. Slave populations grew from “natural increase” and the threats of insurrection of newly imported slaves declined. Political stability within the British realm carried over to its colonies. Horizons for slave-holding planters in the Chesapeake appeared secure.¹²

But over time, George Mason’s own experiences as a slave master, the influences of women within the Mason and Eilbeck families (his mother, his mother-in-law, his wife Ann, and his oldest daughter), and the upheaval of events that culminated in the American Revolution, changed his attitude from one of acceptance of slave labor to one of abhorrence. In the later decades of his life, he argued for change and the curtailment of the slave trade in the new nation.

To understand this story, Mason’s slaves – the people themselves – are vital. Although the surviving documents are finite in number, they nonetheless reveal much about the enslaved. Each document recorded different sets of information, but compiled they reveal: slaves’ names, ages, or values; occupations or characteristics, if any; where they lived; and family connections (direct relationships in some cases and inferred by names in others.) We also learn what happened to a

¹¹ Miller, *Gentleman Revolutionary*, 285-300. George Mason died on 7 October 1792.

¹² Lorena S. Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, & Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607-1763* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 624-628.

few of these slaves over time. Some documents suggest clues about how his slaves influenced him. His experiences among his “people” helped to change and modify his view of the institution over his lifetime. We cannot fully understand George Mason, the “Forgotten Founder,” as one historian has called him, without carefully studying his slaves.¹³

How many slaves did George Mason own? His 1773 will included thirty-six slaves by name and referred to eleven others in mother-child relationships. This is not a complete accounting, by any means. Local tithable (or tax) lists taken in the 1780s survive. In 1782, Martin Cockburn’s district census recorded that George Mason had nine white and ninety black inhabitants on his property. That year in Charles Little’s district where George Mason had property at Little Hunting Creek, there were six white and thirty-eight black inhabitants. Mason’s total of black inhabitants for 1782 was one hundred twenty-eight. The taxable lists for 1787 recorded that George Mason held thirty six blacks over the age of sixteen and forty two blacks under the age of sixteen; George Mason, Jr., the oldest son, held twenty-one over the age of sixteen and twenty under sixteen; Thomson Mason held two blacks over the age of sixteen and three under sixteen. The total number of slaves is one hundred twenty-four with fifty-nine over the age of sixteen and sixty-five under that age.¹⁴ Therefore, estimates of approximately one hundred twenty-five slaves who worked in the fields and supported Gunston Hall by the time of the Revolution seem consistent with existing records.

Slave’s names become a critical part of identifying individuals and relationships. Although slave owners applied names with classical characterization to many newly arrived Africans, some retained their native names. Traditional naming

¹³ Jeff Broadwater, *George Mason, Forgotten Founder* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Nan Netherton, Donald Sweig, Janice Artemel, Patrick Hickin, and Patrick Reed, *Fairfax County, Virginia, a History* (Fairfax, Virginia: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, 1992), 35. Thomson Mason and his wife, Sarah McCarty Chichester Mason were living at Gunston Hall in 1787. Their slaves included Sally (daughter of Lucy), Joe (son of Mrs. Eilbeck’s Bess), and Cupid (given by Grandfather Eilbeck) as listed in George Mason’s 1773 will. The numbers reflect that Thomson’s wife Sarah likely brought two slaves with her at the time of her marriage. See Appendix G. George Mason, Jr. married in 1784. Slaves counted for him in the 1787 census reflect those he received from his father (and slaves through his marriage), but provide for an overall estimate of Gunston Hall’s black population in this window of time. See Appendix G. See also, Pamela C. Copeland and Richard K. Mac Master, *The Five George Masons, Patriots and Planters of Virginia and Maryland* (Lorton, Virginia: The Board of Regents of Gunston Hall, 1989), 237.

patterns in Africa reflected something about when a child's birth took place: the day of the week, the season of the year, or an event of significance that occurred. But as natural increase among slaves grew in North America, naming patterns changed to reflect kinship among the enslaved individuals. In short, slave parents chose the names for their children that reflected family members. Both male and female children were likely to have the name of a grandparent (first born children) or that of an uncle or an aunt. A parent naming a child for one of his or her own siblings had two effects for the slave community. First, it recognized the importance of kinship and extended family. Second, it may have reflected what one historian has called "functional reciprocity," that is, the binding of the family unit's responsibilities to each other. In the event of the loss of the child's parent (through death or sale), namesakes insured a level of continuity of care and concern for that child. Slave families highly valued their children. Patterns of naming them for kin not only extended family ties, it preserved memories within the fragile structure of the slave community.¹⁵

Slave masters recognized "marriages" and families among their slaves. But their view of family structure was different from the slave community's perspective. Virginia law defined the status of a child after the status of the mother, not the father.¹⁶ For example, if a black woman was free, her child was free; but if the black woman was a slave, her child was also a slave. Thus, when masters "preserved" slave families, they were likely to keep slave women together with their children or their daughters, emphasizing matrilineal descent. Sons were very likely to be separated by the ages of ten or twelve. Fathers rarely fit into this picture of the slave family structure at all. To counter this, slaves used kinship names from both paternal and maternal sides of a child's family, to preserve broader family relationships.

¹⁵ Cheryll Ann Cody, "Naming, Kinship, and Estate Dispersal: Notes on Slave Family Life on a South Carolina Plantation, 1786 to 1833," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Series Three, 39 (January 1982): 192-211. Cody also noted "almost a complete absence of necronymic naming" among slaves (naming a child for a deceased child) as was frequently done in white families. Although this study was conducted on a South Carolina plantation, kinship ties and naming patterns were even more significant in the Chesapeake. Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint, Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 550-558. The importance of slave naming patterns is the basis for identification of relationships among George Mason's slaves in this book.

¹⁶ William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, From the First Session of the Legislature, in 1619*. 13 vols. (Richmond, 1819-1823), 2:170. Virginia law did not recognize marriages among enslaved people.

Among His Slaves is set on the backdrop of the eighteenth century Chesapeake landscape. Virginia, first settled in 1607 by Englishmen who struggled to survive in Jamestown, became the largest and wealthiest of the North American colonies by the mid-eighteenth century when George Mason IV came of age. African slave labor constituted the largest portion of Virginia's wealth and that wealth was concentrated in the hands of the uppermost levels of Virginia society, its gentry and upper-middling classes. George Mason of Gunston Hall in Fairfax County, a fourth generation of Virginians, fits squarely into the gentry class. He was a Gentleman, a planter, and owner of about a hundred and twenty-five slaves.

Three generations of Mason family members preceded George Mason IV of Gunston Hall in Virginia. His great-grandfather George Mason I (1629-1686) immigrated to the Chesapeake region at the close of the English Civil War, acquired land and laborers, and established himself within the colony's government. His grandfather, George Mason II (1660-1716), built on that status, increased land holdings, and invested in African slave labor. His father, George Mason III (c.1690-1735), added to the family's holdings of land and slaves. As the oldest son, George Mason IV (1725-1792), inherited all of the accumulated family land and distinguished himself during the American Revolution as a "pure patriot" and authored the Virginia Declaration of Rights in 1776.¹⁷

George Mason IV was nine when his father drowned in a boating accident during a Chesapeake squall. As his father died intestate (without a will), the English laws of primogeniture passed all land to him as the eldest son.¹⁸ He would also inherit personal property and slaves, all of which was held in trust for him by his guardians, his mother Ann Thomson Mason and his uncle John Mercer. His mother ably managed his assets until he reached twenty-one, the age of his majority.¹⁹

By 1750, as a young planter stepping onto the Chesapeake scene, George Mason IV held a world view that was similar to his contemporaries. Coming from a family with generational roots in Virginia, he held a place in gentry society, had wealth

¹⁷ Because of the many family members named George Mason, historians have used Roman numerals to distinguish the different generations. Where clarification is necessary, that format will be used here. John Mason referred to his father as a "pure patriot" in his *Recollections*. Terry K. Dunn, ed., *The Recollections of John Mason* (Mason Neck, Virginia: The Board of Regents of Gunston Hall, 2012), 55.

¹⁸ Copeland and MacMaster, *The Five George Masons*, 73.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 73-76.

beyond the vast majority of the colony's population, and received the education of a "proper" gentleman.²⁰ His position also granted him power. He held positions of authority in the local Anglican church, the Fairfax County Court, the Virginia militia, and the House of Burgesses. His education and his understanding of law provided him with the tools to control the labor of others – in short, to control his world and his environment. Thus, George Mason's world view was one of power, prestige, and promise for his future success.

The decades that ensued altered his world view considerably. George Mason, dealing with his enslaved laborers, sometimes found it difficult to make them perform to his desires. Punishments were not always successful in changing behavior. He learned that some slaves were "faithful" to his wishes or "trustworthy" when unattended. He learned – often through the women in his family – that sometimes rewards to slaves (and their children) were justified humane acts in an inhumane system of slavery.

Great Britain forced dramatic change on Virginia's planters in 1765. Faced with threats of "taxation without representation" and fearing "enslavement" to the mother country, Mason and others throughout all the British colonies rebelled against such treatment. The parallels of African slavery in British North America juxtaposed against Britain's treatment of its subjects were not overlooked as the colonists considered "revolution" against England. It was at this time that George Mason wrote his first criticisms of the institution of slavery.

The events of the American Revolution radically changed Mason's world view by the 1780s. He saw Virginia – and ultimately the United States – on a bigger, global stage, one based on the "Principles of Liberty, & the sacred Rights of human Nature."²¹ Seeing the rise of this new nation full of the promise of democratic ideals, George Mason also wanted to see the United States begin to dissolve the institution of slavery.

Chapter One of *Among His Slaves* begins by tracing the earliest generations of Mason family members in the Chesapeake. These generations lived in the region

²⁰ Walsh, *Motives of Honor*, 394-395.

²¹ Rutland, *Papers of George Mason*, 1199.

at a time when both slavery and indentured servitude provided labor sources for land owners who saw tobacco as a means to wealth. Historian Ira Berlin calls this the time of the “Charter Generation”²² in slavery where servants, both black and white, moved across somewhat flexible boundaries. Freedom from servitude was possible. With less regard for color, some individuals gained free status, mostly through good fortune and survival long enough to reap its benefits. But it was also during these decades that the laws of Virginia began closing in; a legal structure gradually evolved to create the status of “servitude for life” that would be applied along the color line – to those with African heritage. This chapter examines the development of this legal slave system, looks at the Mason family slaves, and postulates how their lives may have been affected by these laws.

Chapter Two moves to broader resources to examine in greater detail the lives of plantation slaves in the Chesapeake region in the eighteenth century to better visualize the material world of this time and place. Surviving Mason family documents provide scant understanding of day-to-day life, but studies of dozens of other plantations using various sources (such as archeology) and greater numbers of extant records help to fill in the gap in understanding daily and seasonal plantation life in this region. A close look at available food, clothing allotments, housing types, and material culture provided for by the masters and obtained by the slaves themselves in various ways, paints a vivid picture of daily life in what Berlin calls the “Plantation Generation.”²³ Through these studies we can better envision how slaves lived – and how they found ways to cope with oppression of slavery. Close scrutiny of extant Mason family documents then allows us to see George Mason’s enslaved people against this backdrop.

Chapter Three explains Ann Thomson Mason’s management of George Mason IV’s inheritance and then focuses on his early years as a planter. His mother’s attitude toward the enslaved laborers she both owned and managed in trust for her children and her careful use of “human resources,” reveals some personal family attitudes that carried over to the next generation of Mason slave owners. George Mason saw how his mother gave (and passed down in her will) favored slaves to her daughter Mary Mason Seldon, only to have Mary’s sudden death

²² Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 12.

²³ *Ibid.*

cause her to repurchase gifted slaves and add codicils to her will. He watched as his mother carefully reexamined and reevaluated these slaves' futures. Ann Thomson Mason now entrusted George Mason with one very particular slave woman.

From 1746 until 1770 when George Mason IV came into his inheritance and established his own plantation, he faced some difficult challenges as a slave master. Unexpected events taught Mason more about the people who worked and lived around him in slavery. These events challenged him to view slavery through a new lens in the decades before the Revolutionary period.

Chapter Four begins with the 1770s. Plantation life for George Mason was jolted by the sudden and unexpected death of his wife Ann Eilbeck Mason in 1773. It caused him quickly to focus on the future of his children and write an extensive will that would fill twenty-four pages in the Fairfax County Will Book. So well thought out that he never revised it, this document creates a basis for understanding more about some of the slaves of Gunston Hall and their familial connections. Additional Mason and Eilbeck family documents add to that knowledge. A subtle picture of how Mason ran his farms or quarters comes to light and many slaves' interconnections appear. Problems continued to plague him, however, and run-aways frustrated him. These years provide us with stories of his slaves' strong desire for freedom. The enslaved, too, heard the words of idealism in the American Revolution period that resounded with "all men are created equal."

Chapter Five explores – in depth – George Mason's changing attitude about slavery. He stated his growing "detestation" of slavery as early as 1765, more than a decade before he became the draftsman for the Virginia Declaration of Rights. His written words grew ever more emphatic as time went on. Across more than two decades – from 1765 to 1788 – as Mason's distain for slavery in his writing increased, he emphasized that "the author of them conscious of his own good Intentions, cares not whom they please or offend."²⁴

The Virginia gentry realized their words arguing that the colonists were slaves to Great Britain chafed against the reality of holding African *slaves* in America.

²⁴ Rutland, *Papers of George Mason*, 173.

Many others called it to public attention, too, Thomas Paine especially. Referring to the Enlightenment philosophies that spurred the Revolution, Paine criticized slavery as “contrary to the light of nature” in his first pamphlet distributed in America.²⁵ Acknowledgement of this contradiction and its moral conflict did not go unnoticed. As the Revolution ended, the Virginia Assembly voted to pass laws closing the slave trade and allowing owners the ability to free slaves. With new laws written in 1782, the power of manumission was now returned to the slave masters and taken back from the government. It was a good start: In two successive steps, Virginia closed the external slave trade and made possible the freedom of thousands of blacks by the turn of the nineteenth century.

George Mason’s own words, however, do not match actions that he could have taken to legally manumit his own slaves. Calling all masters of slaves “Petty Tyrants,” he does not free any of the approximately 125 individuals he owns. How do we reconcile this paradox? Can we do so at all? How do we understand George Mason as a patriotic Virginian, founding father of the United States of America, draftsman of documents putting forth democratic ideals and human rights – and slave master until the end of his life? This chapter dissects this paradox and offers insight.

The final chapter, Concluding Thoughts, is complex. Mason’s words on both human rights and slavery are profound. “That all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain rights...,” resonated in the Virginia Declaration of Rights, the document he drafted in May 1776. In the ensuing months of that year, each of the thirteen colonies adapted a variation of human rights statements into their new state governments.²⁶ Mason continued to argue against the institution of slavery. He vigorously supported Virginia’s closure of the external slave trade and argued strenuously for total closure of the external trade for all states at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787. But at the Convention, Mason and other supporters of national closure were defeated. The slave trade into the United States would continue for twenty more years.²⁷ Mason, refusing to

²⁵ Douglas R. Egerton, *Death or Liberty, African Americans and Revolutionary America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009), 99.

²⁶ Robert A. Rutland, *The Birth of the Bill of Rights* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983), 41-77.

²⁷ The term “external slave trade” referred to newly imported slaves from outside the United States. The “internal slave trade” between the States themselves was not altered by the Constitution.

sign the Constitution, listed among his sixteen objections: “The general legislature is restrained from prohibiting the further importation of slaves for twenty odd years....”

The influences that modified George Mason’s attitude toward the institution of slavery – and the enslaved people themselves – came from the political changes and ideological thinking taking place in America, to be sure. But influences from the women in the Mason and Eilbeck families stressed their desire and means to treat some slaves in a protective manner under a legal system that defined them merely as property. This legal system remained virtually unchanged all of George Mason’s life, but the women in his family showed sensitivity to their slaves’ plight. Within the confines of this legal system, Mason and Eilbeck women – and George Mason himself – attempted to secure a structured future for some of their slaves.

Only George Mason’s words on human rights outlived him. His anger and disapproval of slavery fell away into the footnotes of history. Even the brief spurt of idealism that reinstated a master’s legal ability to free his slaves after 1782 by will or deed and generated thousands of manumissions in the Chesapeake region, soon withered. Discussion of abolition in Virginia’s legislature rose in the 1790s – and then peaked in the early nineteenth century. Mason died in 1792 before his sentiments could be added to those debates. Ultimately such talk ended in Virginia.²⁸ Tragically, slavery in the Commonwealth of Virginia would continue until its dissolution at the end of the Civil War.

²⁸ St. George Tucker, lawyer, professor of law at the College of William and Mary, and justice on the United States District Court, published *A Dissertation on Slavery: With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of It, in the State of Virginia* in 1796. He presented his plan to the Virginia General Assembly; it was given little discussion. The enthusiasm of the Revolution was already in jeopardy. The manumission law of 1782 would be restricted in 1806 and anti-slavery societies faced increasing opposition in the south at the turn of the nineteenth century. See: St. George Tucker, *View of the Constitution of the United States with Selected Writings* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1999), 402-446. Also: Egerton, *Death or Liberty*, 141-146.

*Abbreviated Mason
Family Genealogy*





Built for George Mason IV, construction on Gunston Hall began in 1755 and was completed in 1759. The Mason family lived here until 1792.

Abbreviated Mason Family Genealogy

This genealogy chart does not include children who died before their majority.

George Mason I (1629-1686)

Married 1. Mary French
George Mason II
Married 2. Frances (Maddocks) Norgrave
no issue

George Mason II (1660-1716)

Married 1. Mary Fowke
George Mason III
French Mason
Nicholson Mason
Ann Fowke Mason
Mary Mason
Elizabeth Mason
Simpha Rosa Ann Field Mason
Married 2. Elizabeth Waugh
Catherine Mason
Married 3. Sarah Taliaferro
Sarah Mason

George Mason III (c. 1690-1735)

Married Ann Thomson
George Mason IV
Mary Thomson Mason
Thomson Mason

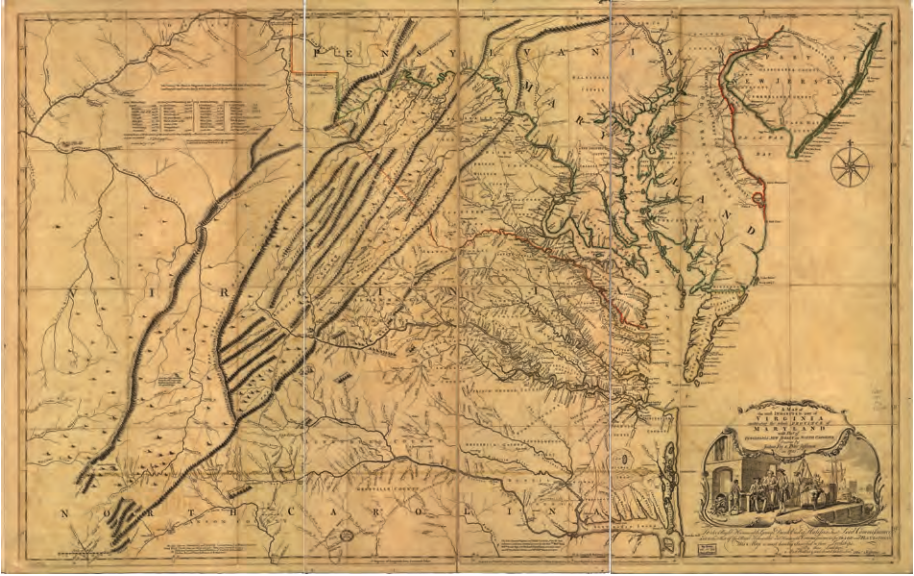
George Mason IV (1725-1792)

Married Ann Eilbeck
George Mason V
Ann "Nancy" Eilbeck Mason*
William Mason
Thomson Mason
Sarah Eilbeck Mason
Mary Thomson Mason
John Mason
Elizabeth Mason
Thomas Mason

* George Mason IV's oldest daughter will be referred to as Nancy Mason throughout this work in order to eliminate confusion between Ann Eilbeck Mason, his wife.

*Chapter One:
Beginnings*





Created by surveyors Joshua Fry and Peter Jefferson, this highly accurate map of Virginia was first published in 1753. Revised two years later, it was in its sixth edition by 1775 and proved to be one of the most important maps during the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. Courtesy, Library of Congress.

Many English immigrants who came to Virginia at the beginning of the seventeenth century sought wealth. They found it – not in the form of silver or gold as the Spaniards did in Central and South America – but in the cultivation of tobacco. By mid-century, England’s civil wars forced some landowners and nobility to come to the new world to begin their lives anew; those loyal to the crown found themselves in great peril or suffering great material loss when Charles Cromwell as “Lord Protectorate” took over England’s government. The Mason family of Worcestershire, England had been loyalists. George Mason (the first of that name in America) left for the Chesapeake in 1650 or 1651. He arrived at an expanding, but challenging, time in Virginia. The colony’s labor force, critical to the tobacco planters, was being shaped by its laws to create two systems: one of white indentured servitude and the other of African slave labor. George Mason I arrived in Virginia at a time of opportunity; he prospered, acquired social status, and gained political power. He established the beginning of what would become a eminent gentry family spanning many generations in Virginia. Over time, his family acquired thousands of acres of land and became prominent slave owners. This is where the story of George Mason IV, gentry planter, slave owners, and author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights begins.



Virginia, the first permanent English settlement in North America, initially brought fortune seekers hoping to find the treasured gold and silver that the Spanish found in South and Central America. They were very quickly disappointed. But an unexpected crop, tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*) – grown by Native Americans – soon became an agricultural reprieve as the Europeans learned to cultivate and export it to a ready and eager European market. As a cash crop, however, tobacco demanded consistent care and attention to grow from seed to maturity and to process from drying, packing, and shipping.²⁹ Because many early white settlers saw themselves as entrepreneurs and not farmers, they sought laborers to tend

²⁹ Lois Green Carr, Russell R. Menard, and Lorena S. Walsh, *Robert Cole’s World, Agriculture & Society in Early Maryland* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 55-71. This provides a comprehensive discussion on tobacco cultivation in the Chesapeake.

their fields; such “unskilled” workers were always in short supply. The English attempted to coerce natives into labor, but indigenous peoples balked at servitude to white men. They held a distinct advantage living in familiar territory and could easily run away. Consequently, English men seeking a new start in Virginia gradually began to fill the need for agricultural labor. In an attempt to encourage impoverished men and women to come to Virginia, indentures (or contracts) were offered where a person could give four to seven years of their labor in exchange for passage to Virginia. Persons with financial means who paid the passage held the indenture and, according to the headright system, were granted 50 acres of land by the crown.³⁰ Thus, those with wealth had the opportunity to acquire land and labor simultaneously.

The African slave trade to the new world had begun in the sixteenth century and flourished. The Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, Danish – and soon English – traders made large profits from cargoes of enslaved African men and women sold in South and Central America and the West Indies. Captured in war-like fashion in their homelands, these people were transported on a “middle passage” across thousands of miles of ocean and forced to labor in mines, on farms or plantations, or serve as domestics in homes.³¹ Increasingly, the process of enslavement became ever more “business like” as sea captains sought to crowd more Africans as cargo into smaller, sleeker, faster ships. For these Africans, the passage carried fear, danger from disease, near starvation, and cruelty by ships’ crews. Once landed, these people faced uncertain lives as planters examined the “cargo” and made their purchases.³²

³⁰ A “headright” was a grant of fifty acres of land for each immigrant to Virginia. Originally intended to attract white settlers, it was extended to transported slaves in 1635. Headrights could be bought and sold, thus someone with the financial means could acquire hundreds of acres of land by buying up headrights. Intertwined with the indenture system, a planter could buy the indenture of a person for his labor, obtain 50 acres of land, and have the indentured servant work the land. See Warren M. Billings, *A Little Parliament, The Virginia General Assembly in the Seventeenth Century* (Richmond: The Library of Virginia, 2004), 204-206.

³¹ Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 17-19.

³² *Ibid.*, 100-105. Also, the presence of factors or “Guinea factors” in the new world is an interesting addition to understanding the slave trade and middle passage that Africans endured. These factors profited well in the multi-step business of this trade. See Nicholas Radburn, “Guinea Factors, Slave Sales, and the Profits of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Late Eighteenth-Century Jamaica: The Case of John Tailyour,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 72, No. 2, April 2015.

In the first half of the seventeenth century Virginia's colony saw growth in the population of whites, in large part because of this system using indentures and headrights. But by about 1660, changes occurred in Great Britain that reduced white emigration. Population declines and rising wages in England made greater opportunities for livelihood possible and made indentured servitude looked less inviting. Virginia planters, needing more laborers as tobacco sales boomed, now turned toward the African slave trade, already supplying thousands of African men, women, and children to the West Indies and South America. Virginia planters ultimately began purchasing slaves in increasing numbers, making slavery Virginia's most important labor source by the end of the seventeenth century.³³

In the Chesapeake region of North America, an early record of the arrival of Africans dates to the summer of 1619 when a ship, a "Dutch man of Warr," carrying "20. and Odd Negroes" [sic] arrived in the James River. These slaves, taken off a Portuguese slave ship originally bound for Brazil, arrived on the lower James River at Point Comfort in Virginia. The ship's cargo was disembarked and sold.³⁴

Great Britain gave legal status to the condition of indentured servitude, but it had no laws defining slavery. Although these Africans who arrived in the Chesapeake (and many others who followed) were taken initially as "slaves" by the Portuguese, their status in Virginia was undefined. Were they slaves or "servants?" Did the purchaser of this labor own the person or "rent" his time and muscle? Because no clear laws defined these people from Africa, some found their way to a free status, although some, like so many white indentured servants, never survived long enough to enjoy that possibility. Stories of a few of the Africans who arrived in

³³ Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves, The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 37-44. Historian Lorena Walsh takes exception to the theory that slavery was a second-hand alternative to Virginia's labor needs. "Shortages of indentured servants...could not have forced elite planters to turn to slaves had they preferred indentured servants and been willing to pay higher prices for them, for it was the elite who had first choice of any laborers offered for sale in the colony...Those at the pinnacle of wealth and power, the councilors, took the lead in buying slaves, followed by burgesses and other county-level officeholders." Walsh, *Motives of Honor*, 141, 200-201.

³⁴ Engel Sluiter, "New Light on the '20.and Odd Negroes' Arriving in Virginia, August 1619," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, Vol. LIV, No. 2, April 1997: 395-398. These Africans came from the Portuguese colony of Angola. However, an earlier record of 32 Negroes (15 men and 17 women) in Virginia is listed in a March 1619 (muster) census. See: William Thorndale, "The Virginia Census of 1619," *Magazine of Virginia Genealogy*, 33 (1995), 155-170.

Virginia in the first half of the seventeenth century are known. One tale of survival and better fortune is the story of Anthony Johnson.

Anthony Johnson, or “Antonio a Negro” came to Virginia in 1621 aboard the ship *James*.³⁵ He was purchased to work the tobacco fields on Richard Bennett’s plantation on the south side of the James River. “Mary a Negro Woman” arrived a year later and also was sold to Bennett. Both Mary and Antonio were among the survivors of the Powhatan Indian uprising and massacre of March 22, 1622 that killed English settlers on both sides of the James River; fifty-two people were killed at the Bennett Plantation alone. Luck was a prerequisite to survival for blacks and whites alike.³⁶

It is not known when Antonio adopted the name Anthony Johnson, but he and Mary married³⁷ and lived together for over forty years and had four children that survived. Virginia Councilman Richard Bennett appears to have been Anthony’s benefactor as well as owner and at some unknown point gave Anthony his freedom (or assisted him in obtaining it).³⁸ Bennett’s family ties to Virginia’s Eastern Shore may also explain why the Johnsons settled there in Northampton County in later years.³⁹ Freeman Anthony Johnson became a landowner; in 1651 he claimed 250

³⁵ T.H. Breen and Stephen Innes, “Myne Own Ground,” *Race and Freedom on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, 1640-1676* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 7-18. See also: John Thornton, “The African Experience of the ‘20 and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia in 1619,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, Vol. LV, No. 3, July 1998: 421-434.

³⁶ Warren M. Billings, ed., *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century*, 207-209, 220-224. Also: David A. Price, *Love & Hate in Jamestown, John Smith, Pocahontas, and the Start of a New Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 200-222. For another perspective see: Helen C. Rountree, *Pocahontas’s People, The Powhatan Indians of Four Centuries* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 66-81.

³⁷ Marriage is a tenuous and ambiguous term for those of African descent in this time. That the Johnson’s children were recognized in certain legal transactions lends support to the possibility they had a recognized marriage. In general, however, slaves were not allowed to legally marry under Virginia law.

³⁸ Billings, *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century, A Documentary History of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 148-150. The Virginia County court system was formed in 1634, after which wills, inventories, and deeds were recorded. Early documents indicate instances of Africans who were freed after a period of “service.” Walsh, *Motives of Honor*, 115-117.

³⁹ Billings, *A Little Parliament*, 35, 90-91. Richard Bennett was a member of the Governor’s Council, but served as one of several elected Virginia Governors during England’s Interregnum period. Bennett served from 1652-1655, the immediate years following the arrival of the first George Mason about 1651. Bennett’s daughter Elizabeth married a Puritan, Charles Scarburgh, from the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

acres of land on the Pungoteague Creek.⁴⁰ Court documents also show that Johnson became a slave owner himself of at least one slave, “[h]o[no][than] Casor[,] Negro.”⁴¹ In the 1660s the Johnson family moved to Somerset County, Maryland after selling 200 acres of their Eastern Virginia land and giving 50 acres to one of their sons, Richard. All of the family members ultimately resettled in Maryland.

Anthony died before Mary, but she and her sons continued as landholders and farmers. In her will in 1672, Mary bequeathed a cow with a calf to each of her three grandchildren. This free African family of three generations lived on their own land, defended actions in court cases (and won them), and passed property on by will and gift. Their story is not only one of survival, but also reflects the early, flexible legal status of Africans who, against their will, found themselves on the opposite shores of the Atlantic Ocean in the seventeenth century.

There is an interesting codicil to the story of the Johnson family. In 1677, Anthony Johnson’s son John purchased a Maryland tract of land that he named “Angola.” As so many of the early seventeenth century slaves were taken from Angola, John – a first generation black man born on North American soil – likely wanted to retain the memory of his family’s homeland.⁴²

As Virginia’s population increased in the seventeenth century, the numbers of upper-class white males grew; these men disproportionately held offices in a variety of governing positions. The total estimated population in Virginia in 1640 was 8,000 and rose to about 55,600 by 1680. The African population nonetheless remained small; Governor William Berkeley estimated that there were about 2000 Africans in Virginia in 1671.⁴³ However, beginning with the last quarter of the seventeenth century, as the demand for slave laborers began to boom, the black population rose rapidly. Thousands of slaves arrived in the Chesapeake, most now coming from the African Gold Coast and Bight of Biafra. Of about 100,000 people in Maryland and Virginia in 1700, 13 per cent were from Africa. By 1720, the percentage of Africans in Virginia’s population alone rose to 25 per cent.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Breen and Innes, “*Myne Owne Ground*,” 11. Johnson claimed this acreage under the headright system.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 7-18. John Thornton, “The African Experience,” 421-434.

⁴³ Walsh, *Motives of Honor*, 140.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 142, 200-204.

As more and more Africans arrived in Virginia, problems surfaced. Cultural and language differences disrupted the English mindset. Slaves' challenged their status by claiming Christian baptism or declaring promises of emancipation by owners. A few won their freedom; most did not.⁴⁵ Virginia's legislators, the Burgesses who were elected from each county, began to modify the legal structure to mold and define the status of Africans, put restraints on their activities, and mete out punishments for infringement of laws. They began to make a clear legal distinction between black and white; between enslaved and indentured. As a result, they developed an institution of racial slavery.

Across the seventeenth century in Virginia, the primary labor source evolved from one of white indentured servants to one of black slavery. In the decades between 1640 and 1690, structured, legalized, racial slavery developed. The transformation of this labor system can easily be seen in reading Virginia's legal statutes in these decades. Frequently begun by stating, "Whereas some doubts have arisen..."⁴⁶ law after law was adopted by Virginia's elected Burgesses to create a separate code that applied to Africans. These laws gradually created servitude for life. They forbade Africans' freedom based on baptism or Christianizing;⁴⁷ they defined a mulatto;⁴⁸ and laws decreed that the condition of a child followed the condition of the mother.⁴⁹ Punishments also reflected the division between white servants and black slaves. Africans could be whipped more or dismembered as punishment. They could be bought, sold, and willed to others, separating family and loved ones. The Burgesses passed these laws and so many more.

In 1640, one case presented to the General Court of Virginia indicates one of the early turning points in the legal code. Three servant men – two white men and one black man – ran away from their master, Hugh Gwen. All three runaways were caught and punished. The two white men ("Victor, a dutchman," and James Gregory, a "Scotchman") were each given an additional year of servitude to their terms to Gwen and also three years of service to the colony as punishment;

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 116-118.

⁴⁶ Hening, ed., *Statutes*. See for example: 2:170.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:260.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3: 250-252. The definition of a mulatto was given as a "child, grandchild, or great grandchild of a negro."

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:170.

John Punch, “a negro,” was given servitude for “the time of his natural life” to his master or his assigns.⁵⁰ The three men committed the same offence, but the black man was singled out for the harshest punishment. John Punch became a slave for the remainder of his life.

Another legal challenge also shows how the Virginia Burgesses determined what laws needed to be enacted. Elizabeth Key sued for her freedom in 1656 – and won. She was a mulatto woman, the daughter of a slave woman and a white father, Thomas Key. Key, now deceased, had specified before his death that his daughter Elizabeth was to have her freedom. Depositions taken supporting her case convinced the court

“...That by the Comon [sic] Law the Child of Woman slave begott by a freeman ought to be free [and] That she hath bin long since Christened... [and] For these Reasons wee conceive the said Elizabeth ought to bee [sic] free....”⁵¹

Two English precedents supported this decision: (1) *the status of the child followed the status of the father* and (2) *Christians should not be slaves for life*. Elizabeth Key was given her freedom, but these ideas would be overturned in Virginia law in the following decade. Among a cascade of laws that came on the Virginia books between 1640 and 1690, two would be a direct reflection on the case of Elizabeth Key. In December 1662 it was enacted “that all children borne in this country [Virginia] shalbe [sic] held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother....” And in September 1667,

“Whereas some doubts have risen whether children that are slaves by birth, and by the charity and piety of their owners made pertakers of the blessed sacrament of baptisme, should by vertue of their baptisme be made ffree [sic]...*It is enacted...* that the conferring of baptisme doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or ffreedom....”⁵²

⁵⁰ H.R. McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Virginia* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1924), 466.

⁵¹ Billings, *The Old Dominion*, 165-169.

⁵² Hening, *Statutes*, 2:170 and 2:260.

The court case of Elizabeth Key certainly helped precipitate the passage of these laws. The legal status of a child now followed the *mother* and not the father in Virginia. And, Christian baptism did *not* give an exemption to slavery for an African or child of African descent.

Other laws quickly followed in succession. Of the many, one stipulated that the death of a slave during punishment was not a felony on the part of the master. (It was presumed he would not deliberately destroy his own property.) It was not illegal to wound or kill a runaway slave or one resisting arrest. It was unlawful for a slave to be armed with any weapon. It was unlawful for a slave “to presume to lift up his hand in opposition against any Christian.”⁵³ Laws filled gaps in the system of slavery as the situations called for them. Still, a master had the legal right to manumit a slave, but growing numbers of free blacks in the Virginia population became worrisome. Could they encourage other slaves to seek freedom? Might freed blacks insight an insurrection? Thus in 1691, it was enacted that any emancipated slave was to leave Virginia within six months.⁵⁴ Free blacks were not wanted in the colony.

Historian Lorena Walsh describes the decades of 1640 to 1680 – the mid-seventeenth century – as the “Age of the Small Planter;” it was a critical time in the colony’s development. Virginia planters began to invest substantially in an African work force. The lawmaking body in Virginia, the elected Burgesses, molded a system of laws that defined racial slavery that was separate from white indentured servitude. They developed this system of laws to protect their investment – and they defined their investment as *property*.⁵⁵

The geographical differences in the North American colonies, however, largely defined labor needs and, as a result, created three distinctly different forms of slavery in these colonies. A non-plantation system dominated in the north where extensive farming did not take place, but domestic and skilled workers were desired. A plantation system developed in the Chesapeake colonies that required large numbers of unskilled laborers to tend tobacco plants and grow grain such as

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2:270, 299-30, and 481-482.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:86-88.

⁵⁵ Walsh, *Motives of Honor*, 122-144.

corn and wheat. Low-country planters in South Carolina and Georgia grew rice and indigo; they needed slave laborers to tend and harvest crops, but they also depended on domestic and skilled slaves in cities such as Charleston where many planters maintained principle residences. These three different forms of slavery systems can be clearly identified by mid-eighteenth century.⁵⁶

In the Chesapeake region, Maryland and Virginia depended on slave labor at middling and large plantations where planters lived on their home “seat,” overseeing outlying “quarters” or farms where tobacco and grain were grown as cash crops and animals were tended for consumption. Skilled slaves (such as blacksmiths, carpenters, and coopers) often lived near the planter’s home seat; domestic slaves cooked, and tended the needs of the big house; and some slaves, selected as personal body slaves, waited on the master or other family members.⁵⁷ Throughout the colonial period, slavery existed as a legal institution and a “normal” feature of everyday life. All levels of society understood the system. The gentry and many middling planters and tradesmen generally owned slaves. They knew the laws and enforced them; the gentry in fact were the ones who wrote them. To a certain degree, lower white farmers and tenants were elevated in this caste system, although they mingled among slaves in daily life. Society defined the place of the “lesser sort” of the white population, and laws protected them from the harshest punishments that were reserved for slaves. Blacks knew their place at the bottom of the heap.

Somehow – despite all the oppression that a legal system and social divide created – enslaved people in North America survived. Moreover, the culture they created within these constraints developed a remarkable and unique blend of African traditions, European customs, and survival techniques. It is this creolized culture that has drawn historians, archeologists, sociologists, linguists, and many others into research and greater understanding of this African-American culture in recent decades.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1983), xvii.

⁵⁷ John Michael Vlach, *The Planter's Prospect: Privilege & Slavery in Plantation Paintings* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 5-26. Vlach gives an interesting overview of plantations through paintings.

⁵⁸ Mechel Sobel, *The World They Made Together* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 3-11; 233-242.

The relocation of Virginia's Capitol from Jamestown to the newly created city of Williamsburg in 1699 brought a comprehensive review of the colony's legal code in 1705. Slavery, with its restrictions and punishments placed on those of African descent, remained firmly in place. This judicial review clearly maintained the two legal tracks defined under law – one for the white population as indentured servants and the other for the black population as enslaved. The 1705 review of laws continued to allow a master his authority to free a slave, but in 1723, this power was transferred to the Royal Governor and his Council. Thereafter, any petition considered for a slave's manumission had to include recognition of "meritorious service" in order to consider his freedom.⁵⁹ Thus, the system of racially based slavery was now complete. The last loophole to freedom was closed. There was almost literally no way out slavery in Virginia. (See Table One.)

In the beginning, George Mason I, great-grandfather to George Mason of Gunston Hall, emigrated from England about 1651. He arrived in the Chesapeake in the period just as laws were beginning to shape the structure of slavery in Virginia. Over the remainder of his life, he purchased the labor he needed, probably both African slaves and white indentured servants. He quickly moved into the ranks of the gentry and as a legislator helped to mold and enact laws defining racial slavery across the next three decades of his life.

George Mason I (1629-1686)

George Mason I left Pershore in Worcestershire, England at the close of the English Civil War when the loyal supporters of King Charles II were defeated in Worcester.⁶⁰ Oliver Cromwell's newly formed government confiscated land and

⁵⁹ H.R. McIlwaine, et.al., eds., *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*. 6 Vols. (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1927-1966), 4:199; 5:18; 5:55, 56, 60; 5: 140, 141; 5: 191, 193; 5:195, 196; 5:214,215; 5:295, 298; 6:200; 6:290,291; 6:320; 6:334, 335; 6:450,451; 6:509; 6:526. Fewer than twenty slaves received their freedom under this process across a half century of time (1729-1773). It is interesting to note that in 1778 George Mason IV drew up the legislation to free a slave named Kitt for revealing a counterfeiting ring in Brunswick County. Kitt was freed; his owner, Hinchie Mabry, was compensated for his loss of property. Virginia Legislators would pass a law allowing owners to manumit slaves in 1782.

⁶⁰ As there are many generations of Mason family members with the first name George, many historians have given Roman numerals to the earliest six generations in Virginia to distinguish each. This method will be used here beginning with George Mason who immigrated from Pershore.

property of many Royalists. Some who had been loyal to the king simply fled England. Among many who emigrated from Worcestershire and Staffordshire to the Chesapeake region of North America were George Mason, the brothers Thomas and Gerard Fowke, and Giles Brent. These men's lives remained connected as they re-established life in the New World. George Mason I was about 22 years old when he arrived in the Chesapeake region.⁶¹

The first recorded document that refers to George Mason I in Virginia is in 1652 in Northumberland County where he was listed as a juryman. By 1656, now a Virginia militiaman, Captain George Mason, presented a certificate to the government stating that he had imported eighteen persons into the colony. This entitled him to patent 900 acres of land (50 acres for each person imported, including himself) in the recently formed county of Westmoreland.⁶²

During these early decades of Virginia's settlement, those with financial means acquired land, accepted positions of authority in the community, purchased indentures for the labor of others, and (with luck) began to establish themselves as English country gentlemen. It was a chance for a new beginning. George Mason I ultimately established his residence or family seat on land along Accokeek Creek in Stafford County; his neighbor, Colonel Giles Brent, lived on the adjacent property. George Mason I married Mary French, another family with Pershore ties, and they had one surviving child, George Mason II. After Mary French Mason's death, George Mason I married the widow, Frances (Maddocks) Norgrave, but this couple had no children.

George Mason I served as a Stafford County sheriff and a justice of the peace and was elected a member of the House of Burgesses in the Virginia Assembly; he advanced to the rank of colonel in the Stafford County Militia during Bacon's Rebellion in 1676.⁶³

⁶¹ Copeland and MacMaster, *Five George Masons*, 1-10. Thomas Fowke returned to England after the restoration of the monarchy. Also: Miller, *Gentleman Revolutionary*, 4.

⁶² Miller, *Gentleman Revolutionary*, 4,5. Helen Hill Miller says this is in Westmoreland County. Northumberland County was formed in 1645; Westmoreland County was formed from the western area of Northumberland in 1653; Lancaster County was formed in 1653; Stafford County was laid out in 1664; Prince William County was laid out in 1730; and Fairfax County was laid out in 1742.

⁶³ Copeland and MacMaster, *Five George Masons*, 13,14. Also Miller, *Gentleman Revolutionary*, 4. As a leader in the Stafford County Militia, George Mason and Giles Brent, and Gerard Fowke were fined and deprived of their offices in an incident that preceded Bacon's Rebellion.

His cash crop of tobacco brought fluctuating profits, but land leased to tenant farmers and ferry rights across the Occoquan River brought George Mason I a diversified financial base and local prestige. This status and wealth was passed down to his son, George Mason II, following his death in 1686. George Mason II was his father's only heir.⁶⁴

During the years that George Mason I served as a Burgess, from about 1675 to his death in 1686, a number of laws building the structure of Virginia's slavery were passed. Of note were two laws: One determined the ages at which children should be considered working hands and become tithable, or taxable. It declared that "negro children" at the age of twelve and "christian servants," or white children, at the age of fourteen became tithable. A second law concerning fears of slave insurrection was written that stated

...it shall not be lawfull for any negro...to carry or arme himself with any club, staffe, gunn, sword or any other weapon of defense or offence, nor to goe or depart from off[f] his masters ground without a certificate from his master...[and] that if any negroe...shall presume to lift up his hand in opposition against any christian...[will] receive thirty lashes on his bare back well laid on.⁶⁵

George Mason I may or may not have participated in the direct passage of these laws, but as a land holder it can be presumed that he held some indentured servants and slaves as laborers on his plantation. Thus he would have had more than a passing interest in protecting his assets and would have looked favorably on such laws. It is also presumed that George Mason II inherited laborers - indentured servants or African slaves - upon his father's death, although no will or inventory has come to light.

⁶⁴ Copeland and MacMaster, *The Five George Masons*, 1-18, 38. Also: Kate Mason Rowland, *The Life of George Mason, 1725-1792, 2 Volumes* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1964), 1:16. No will or inventory survives to reveal the specifics of the wealth.

⁶⁵ Hening, *Statutes*, 2:479-480, 481-482.

George Mason II (c. 1660-1716)

George Mason II was born on the family's Accokeek plantation in Stafford County according to family tradition. The family's seat was located near the proposed town of Marlborough on the Potomac River.⁶⁶ As a second generation of landed Chesapeake planters, he utilized opportunities for acquiring additional property and his wealth increased primarily through raising tobacco. The crop was highly desirable in the European markets, but it posed problems for the planter in that it was both "land hungry," that is, it depleted the soil of nutrients, and was labor intensive throughout the 12 to 15 month cycle from seed to shipping.⁶⁷ As decreasing numbers of indentured servants arrived from England in the later part of the seventeenth century, planters turned increasingly to the importation of African slaves as laborers. In his lifetime, George Mason II became an established slave owner.

He also continued along the paths forged by his father solidifying his gentry status by serving in high positions in government including the House of Burgesses. With the desire for more land, he and others continued to push into the Indian territories. Rising to the rank of colonel, George Mason II fought in native uprisings on both Maryland and Virginia shores of the Potomac River. He eventually settled on land that today is known as Mason Neck after the Dogue Indians were forced from the peninsula.

George Mason II married three times. His first wife, Mary Fowke Mason, had seven surviving children: George, French, Nicholson, Ann, Mary, Elizabeth, and Simpha Rosa.⁶⁸ He had a daughter Catherine by his second wife Elizabeth Waugh Mason,

⁶⁶ Copeland and MacMaster, *Five George Masons*, 42-43. Also: John W. Reys, *Tidewater Towns, City Planning in Colonial Virginia and Maryland* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1972), 77-78. The House of Burgesses designated Marlborough, a proposed town on the Potomac Creek, to be a port of entry for Stafford County. George Mason II was a trustee for the town and owned its only tavern. The town failed to develop, however.

⁶⁷ As a "land hungry" crop, tobacco cultivation rapidly depleted soil nutrients (within 3-5 years) and then necessitated leaving it fallow for years before it could be cultivated again. This meant that planters required vast acreage in order to consistently plant a significant, saleable crop for export.

⁶⁸ Copeland and MacMaster, *Five George Masons*, 21. Mary Fowke was the daughter of Gerard Fowke who immigrated in the time of George Mason I. This family also owned a Maryland property known as Gunston Hall.

who died in childbirth. Only a daughter, Sarah, survived among four children born to his third wife, Sarah Taliaferro Mason.⁶⁹

George Mason II died in 1716 during an epidemic that also took the lives of his son Nicholson and wife Sarah. In that year, his two surviving sons, George and French were already living on their own plantations on Pohick Creek. French Mason lived on the northern side of Pohick Creek and George Mason III lived at “Newtown” on the southern side. Twenty-two slaves were listed by name in his will, but did not include those he had already given to George Mason III, who received his share of the estate in an earlier deed of gift. It is not known how many slaves George Mason III acquired through deed of gift and inheritance, but it is likely that he received at least seven slaves as did his brothers, French and Nicholson. Nicholson Mason died before his father. George Mason III may have received some of the seven slaves designated for his brother. His seven slaves included: Charles, Maul, Billy, Nancy, Lucy, Nelly, and Jigg.⁷⁰

George Mason III (c. 1690-1735)

George Mason III was about 26 or 27 years old at the time his father died. The family resided on the south of Pohick Creek in Virginia, but he had acquired additional land in Prince William County and Stafford County, Virginia and Charles County, Maryland. As in the generations before him, George Mason III served in government positions in Stafford County as sheriff, a colonel in the militia, and a representative to the House of Burgesses. He was also one of the men who accompanied Virginia Governor Alexander Spotswood on a noted expedition and exploration of the land beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains; George Mason III became known as one of the famous “Knights of the Golden Horseshoe.”⁷¹

George Mason III married Ann Thomson in 1721. She was the daughter of Stevens Thomson, the attorney general for the colony of Virginia under Governor Francis Nicholson. The Mason family initially lived in Virginia on Doegs’ Neck on the

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁷⁰ Fairfax County, Virginia Land Causes 2, 13-15. *Last Will of George Mason II*, Jan. 29, 1715.

⁷¹ Miller, *Gentleman Revolutionary*, 23. Copeland and MacMaster, *Five George Masons*, 51-54.

property known as Newtown, but later relocated to Charles County, Maryland to the Stump Neck Plantation on the Chicamuxen Creek. George Mason IV was born at the Doegs' Neck home of Newtown on 11 December, 1725, Mary Thomson Mason was born in Charles County, Maryland in 1731, and Thomson Mason was born in Virginia in August, 1733.⁷²

On an early March day in 1735 as George Mason III prepared to sail from his property in Virginia to return to his Maryland plantation, storm clouds gathered unexpectedly. By the time the ferry set off across the Potomac, a squall engulfed and capsized his vessel. Its principle occupant, George Mason III, drowned.⁷³ He was buried at Newtown on Doegs' Neck in Virginia. No other occupants of the lost vessel were recorded from this accident. How many were on board? Very likely one or more enslaved persons manned the ferry; others may have traveled with Mason that day. Did they drown as well, leaving their names – and those of their mourners – silent in the historical record?

George Mason III died intestate; that is, he left no will. According to prevailing English law, all of his property passed to his oldest son, young George Mason IV, about nine years old. His mother, Ann Thompson Mason, and his uncle, John Mercer, were named guardians of the three minor children.⁷⁴ George Mason IV's inheritance included all of his father's land in both Maryland and Virginia, or over five thousand acres. Ann Thomson Mason chose as her dower, land on the Virginia side of the Potomac and relocated her family there before the end of 1735.⁷⁵

⁷² Copeland and MacMaster, *Five George Masons*, 56.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 51. Miller, *Gentleman Revolutionary*, 25. Miller says he was sailing eastbound.

⁷⁴ The English laws of primogeniture stated that all real property went to the oldest son in such cases. George Mason III's sister Catherine married John Mercer of Marlborough Plantation. John Mercer was a lawyer and merchant. Mercer purchased lots in the town of Marlborough, an early planned community that was struggling to develop. He built his mansion, a mill, brewery, glass factory, and wharf there among other structures. After Mercer's death in 1768, the town plan dwindled. See Reys, *Tidewater Towns*, 77-78.

⁷⁵ Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 151-156. Dower was a widow's life portion of her husband's land and property. In Virginia at the time of George Mason III's death, Ann Thomson Mason was entitled to life use of her choice of one-third of her husband's real property (land) and one-third of his slaves. Also, I am appreciative for comments and discussion in email communication with Lorena S. Walsh, 6 July 2015: "The usual practice was for the personal property (slaves, livestock, etc.) to be kept and worked undivided under the control of the administrator until the first child came of age, at which time that child would gain control of those slaves which he/she had been allotted, as well as a proportional share of other personal property."

Stump Neck Plantation

The Stump Neck Plantation in Charles County, Maryland had been the principal seat of the Mason family at the time of George Mason III's accidental drowning. Left behind were his wife, Ann Thomson Mason, and three young children: George (9), Mary (4), and Thomson (2). When the inventory to settle this Maryland estate was taken in August, the total value of all property there was in excess of £721 with the value of the slaves and indentured laborers alone at about half that amount or £353.⁷⁶ The family's primary home had sufficient furniture, linens, tableware, and cook ware to provide comfortable surroundings; more than 150 yards of various fabrics were listed that provided a substantial supply for clothing for the family and for the slaves and servants as well. Also inventoried was £75 worth of silver (listed as "336 Ozs [ounces] old plate.")

Twenty-two enslaved people made up the largest part of the plantation's value – and its work force. Included were: five men, **Rush, Dublin, Dick, Gambor,** and **Will** (all aged 30 except Gambor, 26) and five women, **Frank** ("a woman," 30), **Judith** (30), **Nan** (26), **Virgin** (40), and **Jo** (50), and three teenage girls: **Peg** (16), **Bridget** (14) and **Kit** (14). There were also young children among the slaves. Nan had just given birth the day before the inventory was taken and was listed with "her Child 1 day old." Additionally, eight more children ranged in age from 1 to 8 years old: **Sue** (8), **Dick** (4), **Jenny** (2 1/2), **Priscilla** (1 3/4), **Beck** (1), **Frank** (10), **Isaac** (7), and **Sarah** (8). Rush and Dublin were skilled men, listed as ship carpenters; Dick was a shoemaker. The other men and women probably tended the fields or did domestic chores. One was likely designated as the cook. The children may have had various jobs according to their ages and abilities.⁷⁷ Overall, the total population of enslaved adults was

⁷⁶ Maryland Hall of Records, Charles County Inventories 1735-1752, 13-15. Copeland and MacMaster, *Five George Masons*, 73. Inventories varied as to the amount of information taken. Many inventories provided ages, skills, and sometimes relationships among the slaves. The purpose was to give a monetary value to the decedent's property.

⁷⁷ See Appendix A. Peg, age 16, was tithable (taxable) according to the law and would be counted as a full working hand, thus an adult in this enumeration. Both African men and women were counted as tithable laborers, whereas white women were not considered tithable. Children often started work in the fields at a young age (3 or 4) to pull worms off tobacco plants or at small tasks requiring little knowledge of the cultivation process. They worked interspersed with adults or older children, possibly for only part of the day. Until a child could work a "full share" at the age of 16, they were provided half rations of food and clothing by the master. Nan's one day old child was the youngest child at the time the inventory was taken. See: Walsh, *Motives of Honor*, 22-24.

young – between the ages of 16 and 35, with the exception of Virgin, age 40, and Jo, age 50. The inventory gave no information as to the relationship of any of these slaves to each other.

It is possible that some – or all – of the men and the women listed in the inventory were slaves that George Mason III inherited from his father's estate when he died in 1716. If so, the youngest two adults, Gambor and Nan, would have been about ten years old that year. Nan might have been born in the Chesapeake, but Gambor was perhaps a newly purchased slave who endured the “middle passage” from Africa to North America.⁷⁸ George Mason III's brother, Nicholson Mason, was to have inherited a slave named Nancy, but he died before receiving his inheritance. George or his other surviving brother, French, likely became her owner. Thus, it is possible that this slave Nancy is the same person listed as “Nan” with “her child 1 day old” in the Stump Neck Inventory.

The inventory at Stump Neck also included six indentured male servants with their time left to serve: Daniel Davey (30) had six years remaining to serve; Charles Dougherty (21) had four years; James Codey (24) had six years; Richard Wote (no age given) had six years; Alexander Young, a carpenter, (35) had one and three-fourths years; and John Davis (24) had three months remaining to serve.

With the sudden death of a master, the slaves' circumstances were put into jeopardy. A man's unresolved debts required the liquidation of property for settlement of his estate – and the most easily sold property was often the slaves themselves. Laborers, both enslaved and indentured, were bought and sold on a regular basis and brought relatively consistent prices and ready capital. The biggest fear for any slave was the threat of separation from family, especially the separation of a child from his mother. Although far from complete, the surviving Mason family documents do not indicate that slaves were sold following the death of George Mason III.

Stump Neck was a working tobacco plantation and the residence of the Mason family. As such, domestic labor (cooking, dairying, laundry, sewing, child care, etc.)

⁷⁸ Walsh, *Motives of Honor*, 201-203. Between 1698 and 1729 Britain became the leading provider of slave laborers in the Chesapeake with more than half of the Africans coming from the Bight of Biafra. These decades were the turning point in the region to slave labor from indentured servitude. Gambor's name may be a reference to the African region of Gambia.

as well as agricultural work (tending the cash crop of tobacco, growing corn, and vegetables, and raising animals) kept the enslaved and indentured workers occupied. Rush and Dublin as ship carpenters, most likely spent much of their time building or maintaining vessels for the transport of goods and persons to and from the Maryland and Virginia shores of the Potomac River. The indentured servant Alexander Young was referred to only as a “carpenter;” perhaps his skills were primarily used in the construction and maintenance of buildings or fences. Slave Dick was a shoemaker, supplying shoes for the slaves and possibly the white family.

This community of workers – both black and white – probably lived in a few separate structures allotted to them. When their work day ended, they spent what little time remaining eating meals and attending to their own lives and those of their children. They struggled daily to survive. As a slave grew older and was unable to work a full day, he or she often watched the youngest children during work time. Among the adult slaves at Stump Neck, Jo (50), was the “elder” in the community; she may have been relieved from some of the daily work load and thus became responsible for minding the very youngest slave children. She could have also tended the slaves’ garden and prepared food. As the oldest in the slave community, Jo held a place of esteem. She maintained the memory or history of the slave community and possibly knew stories of the “Middle Passage” or African homeland to pass on to the generations below her.

What were the relationships of these people to each other? The inventory lists individuals in seemingly random order and only Nan with her one-day old (unnamed) child provides a family connection. Naming patterns, however, allow for speculation that Frank (10) was the child of the woman Frank (30) and Dick (4) was the son of Dick (30, the shoemaker), but no other links are apparent.⁷⁹ English, or pidgin English, may have been the main (or at least encouraged) language spoken at Stump Neck. Almost all of the slaves’ names on the inventory reflect Anglican names, likely imposed on the slaves by the owner. Only Gambor’s name – perhaps

⁷⁹ Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint, Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 451-452. Sobel, *The World They Made Together*, 158-159.

an African name - was an exception. Names like London, Parus [Paris], or Dublin reflect a master's choice of a classical name imposed on a newly purchased African.⁸⁰

Prince William County, Virginia

The second inventory taken after the death of George Mason III in 1735 was on his Virginia property in Prince William County and reflects a smaller farming operation with fewer workers. Limited furnishings and cooking utensils, hoes, axes, grind stones, a "Musket" and a "long Gun," cattle, horses, sheep, and hogs, as well as an array of fabric and clothing items made up the principle list of itemized goods. Only thirteen names of slaves and indentured servants were listed there.⁸¹ This inventory unfortunately provides less information describing the people than the one at Stump Neck: no ages and no skills for the individuals are given. They were designated only as "man," "woman," "boy," or "girl," but monetary values were listed for each.

London, **Winsor**, and **Matt** each held a value of £22; **Parus**, [meaning Paris?] was valued at £20. **Nan Wilson**, a "Mulatto woman" was valued at £19.⁸² The boys, **Jack**, **Stephen** and **Job**, were valued at £14, 12, and 10 respectively; the girls, **Lucy**, and **Jenny**, a "Mulatto girl," were valued at £6 and 4 respectively; the decreasing values probably reflected younger ages among the children. The combined value of all the slaves was £141 or approximately half of the total inventory value of almost £304. There were three male indentured servants, but no ages or time left in service was listed for them. They included James (no last name), John Webb, and Morgan Carpenter. James and Morgan Carpenter perhaps had longer to serve with values of £7 each; John Webb's value was £5.

⁸⁰ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 159-170. Lorena S. Walsh, *From Calibar to Carter's Grove* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 546-547. Sobel, *The Word They Made Together*, 154-160. Many times slaves retained another name in the slave community as well as the one recognized by the owner thus rejecting the classical or geographic names.

⁸¹ Prince William County, Virginia Will Book C, 1734-1744, 49-50. See also Appendix B.

⁸² It is presumed that Nan Wilson was enslaved. It is interesting that she had a surname noted in the inventory.

Nan Wilson was a “Mulatto woman.” Jenny, the “Mulatto girl,” was possibly Nan’s daughter. No other ties are evident, but it is of note that only one woman was living on this plantation.⁸³ The inventory reveals little else about the people on this Virginia property. Was there an overseer who directed the work? Or did George Mason III direct the work himself before his death, crossing the Potomac River at regular intervals to give orders, evaluate progress, and take corrective measures if needed? If so, these slaves were working somewhat autonomously at their agricultural duties. During the years following her husband’s untimely death, Ann Thomson Mason filed disbursement documents in the county to show the management of the assets (the slaves) she used to support her three children as well as to preserve her son George Mason IV’s inheritance.

Before the end of the year in 1735, Ann Thomson Mason moved her family from Maryland to the property on Chopawamsic Creek in Prince William County, Virginia.⁸⁴ The relocation brought her into closer proximity to John Mercer’s Marlborough home. He was her brother-in-law and joint guardian to her children and as a prominent lawyer he could provide her with legal advice and guidance about the children’s education. The Disbursement Records filed in Prince William County, Virginia for the years 1735 to 1742 of Ann Thomson Mason list the expenses that were incurred for her children and the income for that property that was divided into thirds for the support for George, Mary, and Thomson. As part of the income, these records list the value of the tobacco grown, or “shares made,” by individual slaves during these years. Additionally, rents from tenants on other Virginia land held in trust contributed to the financial support of the children. Rents (usually paid in tobacco) provided the larger part of the income.⁸⁵

Of the twelve slaves who made up the work force on the Virginia plantation, London seems to be the most capable and reliable worker. In the years from 1735 to 1742 he provided a “full share” in every year although he was continually sent to work lands in Maryland. Parus was also a dependable worker. In 1736, he and London were the only two slaves listed in the disbursements as bringing in their “shares;” Parus worked land in Virginia. From 1737 on, Matt and Windsor were

⁸³ See Appendix B.

⁸⁴ Copeland and MacMaster, *The Five George Masons*, 74.

⁸⁵ Prince William County Will Book C, 1734-1744, 275-290.

reported making their “shares” in the work force. Jack, probably a boy approaching 10 or 12 joined the men in 1737; Stephen, another boy, joined them in 1738. Nan Wilson, the mulatto woman, remained the only woman at the Virginia property. She was “sick” in 1737 and “mostly sick” in 1738. The disbursements show that both Drs. Tenant and Brown were paid for medicine or medical attention for Nan in those years. The reason for her illness may have been pregnancy; a notation in 1740 indicated that she now had two children, Will and Johnny.⁸⁶ The other slaves on the Virginia property were all children apparently too young to contribute to “full shares.” (See Table Two.)

In addition to growing tobacco for income, the slaves also grew corn, wheat, and beans – and probably myriad other vegetables for consumption. A specific notation was made that these additional crops were not monetarily evaluated for the disbursements. The documents filed also consistently remarked that “there is no charge of Cloathing or maintaining the Negroes or for their Bedding” to the estate. These charges would have put the estate in debt. That implies that the costs of housing, clothing, and feeding these enslaved men, women, and children was more than the value of the “shares” they made. It is probable that Ann Thomson Mason supplied the slaves’ needs from her dower property profits. One other major source of income was leased property. Rent was collected in tobacco and or in cash and recorded in the disbursement records. (See Table Three.)

The years 1740 and 1741 were the most productive in the disbursement documents as two of the boys apparently were now old enough to tend the fields of tobacco and Nan Wilson worked both of those years as well. Now however, both London and Matt consistently worked in Maryland at Stump Neck making their “full shares” there.

By about 1740, construction and repair began on both the Virginia and Maryland properties. Expenses for carpenters, nails, and tools at another Virginia property, Dogue’s Neck (in Fairfax County), were enumerated in the disbursement papers. In 1742, two tobacco houses were constructed there, one 52 feet long and the other 30 feet long indicating increased development of the quarter on Dogue’s Neck. That same year also saw the construction of two smaller tobacco houses, one 40

⁸⁶ Ibid. Copeland and MacMaster, *The Five George Masons*, 78.

feet long and one 30 feet long, at Stump Neck in Maryland. The slaves were probably the primary labor source for construction; Rush and Dublin at Stump Neck (the ships' carpenters) were probably tasked to work on these buildings. The indentured servant, Alexander Young, also a carpenter, had been released from his contract by this time. However, white carpenters could have been hired if needed.

The disbursement documents specifically indicate the yearly profit made on the Maryland and Virginia properties. Ann Thomson Mason carefully recorded the profit on the Maryland property her son George Mason IV inherited under the laws of primogeniture. (See Table Four.) She divided profit from the Virginia property equally among the three children for their upkeep. One thing is apparent from the disbursement records that were filed: Ann Thomson Mason learned quickly how to be a plantation manager and an accountant. She capably utilized and recorded the assets that supported her three "orphaned" children after the unexpected death of George Mason III.⁸⁷ John Mercer, her brother-in-law, co-guardian to the children, lawyer, and planter, provided support and assistance to her, but Ann Thomson Mason appears capable in performing the task of guardian.

Court documents for disbursement after 1742 apparently have not survived. George Mason IV reached the age of 21 in 1746 and took control of his inheritance. Undoubtedly, he watched the management styles of both his guardians as he became an adult. His mother provided a strong role model, monitoring details of the family's assets, carefully recording purchases for each of her children, and making decisions regarding plantation management. John Mercer, his uncle, may have provided guidance for the children's education and certainly would have given a young man with an eager desire to learn access to his own considerable library with books on law, science, history, literature, and architecture.⁸⁸ Mercer, a prominent and prosperous attorney, was also an avid land speculator and member of the Ohio Company, which may have given George Mason IV an advantage in that organization. Mason was appointed the Company's treasurer in 1750, a position which he held for the remainder of his life. However, Mercer provided a poor role model as a slave master. His management style proved highly detrimental to his work force. Historian Lorena Walsh writes:

⁸⁷ At this time, orphans were defined as children who had lost their father, not both parents.

⁸⁸ Rutland, *Papers of George Mason*, cxii-cxiii. C. Malcolm Watkins, *The Cultural History of Marlborough, Virginia* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), 146-188.

By 1753, [John Mercer] had purchased a total of 112 slaves, most of them newly imported Africans, including a number from the Bight of Biafra, at a cost of more than thirty-two hundred pounds sterling....Between 1731 and 1750, 46 of the 89 slaves he had purchased by [1753] had died, and an additional 3 had been sold....Mercer's mostly imported slaves were not only sickly but also desperately unhappy. One hanged himself, and several were chronic runaways. Another sign of trouble was frequent turnover among Mercer's overseers.⁸⁹

By the time George Mason IV reached his majority in 1746 he had watched and learned much about plantation management from his guardians. As a positive role model, his mother, Ann Thomson Mason, skillfully managed assets to provide for the needs and education for her three children. She kept separate records for the slaves' work on the lands that George Mason would inherit. She moved slaves to provide the most profitable work outcome. She dealt with the all of the laborers' needs on a daily basis and provided medical attention when necessary to the slaves. The number of slaves remained constant (or grew through natural increase) during the years that records are available. She filed her records with court officials on a regular, yearly basis.

His uncle, John Mercer, provided young Mason with a somewhat different role model in his management of land and slaves. Mercer actively speculated on and acquired new land for his plantation through the Ohio Company and likely assisted his nephew in obtaining the position of Treasurer in that company in 1749. Mercer also purchased large numbers of new slaves for his plantation at a high cost. But Mercer saw exceptionally high mortality rates among these new slaves. Young George Mason may have been aware of problems and practices at Marlborough that led to the runaways and slave deaths there.

Then, in 1746, young George Mason IV stepped onto the Virginia landscape as a land-owning, gentry gentleman and slave master. Ready to take his place in the upper level of the colony's society, the "rules" were already formed for him. Commerce and trade supported the demand for his tobacco crop and provided a means of acquisition of slave laborers from Africa. The legal structure encompassed

⁸⁹ Walsh, *Motives of Honor*, 514-518.

a thorough system to ensure that his slave labor force maintained its place and it upheld the punishment of his slaves if they did not comply. But – as Mason would learn more directly – slaves were human beings.

Just *how* did slaves live day-to-day and endure the oppression circumscribed on them in this tightly bound system that classified them as property and not as persons? That story is told by the enslaved people themselves. Patched together in the last half-century by archeologists, researchers, and historians, it is a remarkable story of survival.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Studies of the forced migration of Africans have calculated that approximately eleven million people were brought to the Americas in the transatlantic slave trade. For every African brought into North America, twelve or thirteen were brought into the Caribbean Islands. (Numerically, the calculations are 388,747 into North America and 4,371,000 into the Caribbean according to the figures in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Data Base). Heavy mortality in the West Indies accounted for the continual need to replace laborers, whereas natural increase among slaves in North America occurred. Richard S. Dunn, *A Tale of Two Plantations, Slave Life and Labor in Jamaica and Virginia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1-2. See also: www.slavevoyages.org.