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**Historic Resource Study:  
Ferry Hill Plantation  
By  
Max L. Grivno**

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# **Historic Resource Study: Ferry Hill Plantation**

**By**

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## **Preface**

This study was undertaken through a cooperative program administered by the University of Maryland at College Park and the National Park Service. As outlined in the contract between these agencies and the author, the object of this Historic Resources Survey is to research and draft a careful, thorough study of Ferry Hill Plantation, which the National Park Service can use as a reference for subsequent efforts to interpret the plantation's history. Furthermore, the contract stipulates that particular attention should be devoted to the Blackford's and Douglas' slaves, and that every effort should be made to integrate the plantation's history into a local economic, political, and social context. Pursuant to these ends, the National Park Service directed that transportation corridors, agricultural practices, industrial development, immigration and settlement, and the plantation's connection with the Chesapeake and Ohio (C & O) Canal receive due consideration.

The staffs of several local libraries and historical societies provided invaluable assistance. The staff at the Western Maryland Room at the Washington County Free Library in Hagerstown, Maryland, guided me to local histories, volumes of the John Blackford Journals, and information on General Henry Kyd Douglas. Likewise, the staff at the Washington County Historical Society in Hagerstown, Maryland, provided me with detailed genealogies of the Blackford-Douglas families, along with photocopies of the Blackford family portraits and unpublished letters written by John Blackford. The librarians at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore, Maryland, provided me with John Blackford's 1829-1831 journals, and, perhaps more importantly, guided me to additional farm journals and account books from northern Maryland. Without the assistance of these dedicated professionals, the task of researching this project would have been much more difficult, if not impossible. At the University of Maryland, Professor James K. Flak provided administrative assistance and support to maintain this project.

A final note, throughout this study the terms Upper Potomac River Valley, lower Shenandoah Valley, northern Maryland, and northern Virginia are frequently used



interchangeably to describe the region encompassing Alleghany, Washington, Frederick, Carroll, and Montgomery Counties, Maryland, and Jefferson, Berkeley, Clarke, and Loudon Counties, Virginia. Although the settlement patterns and political histories of these regions vary, they are united by similar economies and agricultural practices.

## **1. Introduction**

The history of Ferry Hill Plantation is interwoven with several strands of national and state history. Unfortunately, scholars have devoted little attention to the diverse histories of Ferry Hill Place's inhabitants. In 1940, the University of North Carolina Press published the Civil War memoirs of Ferry Hill's most celebrated owner, Colonel Henry Kyd Douglas. Douglas' I Rode with Stonewall became a classic piece of Civil War literature, but the work contains little information on the plantation. The narrative focuses on Douglas' years in the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, with a particular emphasis on his assignment to General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's staff. Douglas mentions Ferry Hill Place and the Reverend Robert Douglas' 1862 imprisonment, but offers little on plantation life before, during, and after the American Civil War. In 1960, historian Fletcher M. Green released an edited volume of Colonel John Blackford's journal (January 4, 1838 - January 15, 1839). Green's edition, which contains an excellent introduction, presents a detailed, often fascinating portrait of family life, slavery, and agriculture on a large, diversified Maryland plantation. Despite this, Green's work contains flaws and omissions. His discussion of Blackford's military and political careers is brief; he does not discuss Blackford's military career after the Battle of Bladensburg, nor does he mention Blackford's campaigns for elected office. More importantly, Green failed to integrate the journal into a larger historical context. Subsequent studies commissioned by the National Park Service uncovered additional primary source material concerning Ferry Hill Plantation. Harlan D. Unrau's 1977 Historic Structure Report includes extensive information from the Maryland State Archives, the Maryland Historical Society, the Library of Congress, the Washington County Historical Society, and the Shepherdstown Library. Unrau's research is impressive. In addition

to discovering several references to Ferry Hill Place in the secondary literature, he located legal documents pertaining to the Blackford and Douglas families. To date, Unrau's study remains the most comprehensive treatment of Ferry Hill Plantation. Indeed, Unrau concluded, that "no further historical research needs to be done on Ferry Hill Place." Still, Unrau's work contains critical flaws. Several important documents, including Franklin Blackford's journal and volumes of John Blackford's journal, have become available since 1977. Unrau also neglected the local newspapers, which contain a wealth of information on the Blackford and Douglas families. In addition to overlooking important sources, Unrau, like previous historians, failed to integrate Ferry Hill Place into a larger historical context. Finally, Unrau's interpretation of the Blackford journals is suspect; several paragraphs from the Historic Structure Report are plagiarized from Fletcher M. Green's introduction to the Blackford journals. Since the publication of Unrau's report, the National Park Service has commissioned a Resource Guide on Ferry Hill Place (1998). Written by Melissa Robinson, an intern from Shepherd College, the report contains an extensive inventory of the Blackford and Douglas family papers held at the Maryland Historical Society, the Ruth Scarborough Library, the Washington County Historical Society and the Washington County Free Library.<sup>1</sup> Robinson's study does not, however, offer any interpretation of the documents cataloged. Because previous studies of Ferry Hill Plantation have failed to provide a comprehensive survey of the relevant primary and secondary sources, and because scholars have not attempted a rigorous, thorough interrogation of those materials, the need for continued research and fresh interpretation remains strong.

The present study, commissioned by the National Park Service and the Chesapeake and

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Kyd Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall: Being Chiefly the War Experiences of the Youngest Member of Jackson's Staff from the John Brown Raid to the Hanging of Mrs. Surratt (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940, Reprint, Marietta, GA: Mockingbird Press, 1993); in addition to the Civil War memoirs, a volume of Douglas' diary (1856-1858) has been published. The diaries, however, contain little information on Ferry Hill Place. Frederic Shiver and John Howard Carrill, eds., The Douglas Diary: Student Days at Franklin and Marshall College, 1856-1858 (Lancaster, PA: Franklin and Marshall College, 1973). Fletcher M. Green, ed., Ferry Hill Plantation Journal, January 4, 1838-January 15, 1839 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Harlan D. Unrau, *Historian, C & O*

Ohio National Historic Park, builds upon earlier histories of Ferry Hill Plantation. Several primary and secondary sources examined by previous historians were consulted for this study, including legal documents from the Maryland Hall of Records, the Blackford journals, and local histories. However, where preceding studies focused narrowly on the plantation, the Blackford family, and Henry Kyd Douglas, this report integrates Ferry Hill Place into an historical context.

To understand the development of Ferry Hill Plantation and the histories of John Blackford's and the Reverend Robert Douglas' families, it is essential to understand the historical forces that shaped the Upper Potomac Valley. Among these were the European settlement of the region during the middle- and late-eighteenth centuries, the growth of diversified agriculture and manufacturing during the early-nineteenth century, and the campaign for internal improvements, especially canals, between 1820 and 1840. The expansion of Washington County's economy and concomitant movement for internal improvements had a special importance for Ferry Hill Place and John Blackford's family. Blackford's Ferry across the Potomac River carried farm products and livestock between Virginia and Maryland. Barges traveling the Potomac River and C & O Canal passed Blackford's plantation, making Ferry Hill Place an important center for commerce and travel.

In addition to placing Ferry Hill Plantation in an historical context, the current study differs from previous reports by focusing on the Blackford's and Douglas' slaves. By consulting the Blackford journals, which contain extensive information on the plantation's slaves, along with fugitive slave advertisements from local newspapers and farm records from other Washington County slaveholders, it is possible to reconstruct the lives of enslaved people living at Ferry Hill Place and gain insights to "the peculiar institution" in western Maryland.

After examining slavery at Ferry Hill Plantation, the report moves to a discussion of the American Civil War's impact on the plantation and the Reverend Robert Douglas' family. The

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Canal Restoration Team, "Historic Structure Report: Ferry Hill Place," August 1977; and Melissa Robinson, Intern, "Ferry Hill Place Resource Guide," September 1998.



American Civil War brought tremendous destruction and upheaval to Ferry Hill Plantation. Early in the war, Confederate soldiers burned the Shepherdstown Bridge and Union troops destroyed the Reverend Robert Douglas' barn. On several occasions, campaigning armies marched past Ferry Hill. Foragers and scavengers pillaged the farm; they tore down fences for firewood, consumed the crops, and stole livestock. Following the battle of Antietam, Federal officers imprisoned the Reverend Douglas for allegedly signaling to Confederate soldiers across the river in Shepherdstown, Virginia. While the Civil War destroyed the Reverend Douglas' fortunes, it vaulted his son Henry Kyd Douglas to national prominence. After enlisting in Company B, 2nd Virginia Infantry, the younger Douglas ascended rapidly through the Confederate ranks, serving on the staffs of General T. J. Jackson and other Confederate generals. When the conflict ended, Douglas had risen to Colonel and brigade commander. In the decades following the Confederate surrender, Douglas became active in Civil War veterans' organizations and commemoration movements. He also established himself as a prominent lawyer and militia officer, and made several unsuccessful bids for public office.

The report concludes with brief discussions of Ferry Hill Plantation's owners after Colonel Henry Kyd Douglas. It should be noted, however, that because the primary source material concerning these owners is sparse, and because their historical significance is marginal, little space will be devoted to Ferry Hill's owners between 1903 and the National Park Service's acquisition of the property in April 1973. Thus, the bulk of the study focuses on the Blackford and Douglas families, their slaves, and the plantation's place in western Maryland's and northern Virginia's larger histories.

### **1. Agriculture, Industry, and Transportation in The Potomac River Valley (ca. 1790-1860)**

The development of the upper Potomac River Valley provides the economic and social context for Ferry Hill Plantation under John Blackford and the Reverend Robert Douglas. Between 1790 and 1860, the farmers and manufacturers of Washington and Frederick Counties, Maryland, and Jefferson County, Virginia, forged a prosperous economy founded on diversified

agriculture, an extensive network of internal improvements, and industrial manufacturing. Farmers concentrated on wheat, rye, and barley, which became the region's primary cash crops, but they also raised considerable quantities of garden crops, tended herds of sheep and cattle, and harvested timber. They embraced agricultural reform and progressive farming, practiced crop rotation, experimented with fertilizers, and purchased modern farm equipment. The robust farm economy spawned local industries geared towards meeting farmers' needs. Businessmen and farmers built gristmills along the Antietam creek, coopers made barrels to transport crops to market, and blacksmiths maintained farm equipment. Industrial development was not, however, limited to the agricultural sector. The region boasted excellent natural resources. Limestone and iron ore were found in abundance, allowing manufacturers to smelt iron and produce finished products. Furnaces, forges, and factories dotted the upper Potomac River Valley, the most famous being the Federal Armory at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. Transporting the region's produce and manufactured products to markets in Tidewater Virginia and Baltimore, Maryland, required a system of canals, turnpikes, and railroads. Farmers and industrialists rallied behind the internal improvements movement, supporting dozens of major construction projects ranging from the Chesapeake and Ohio (C & O) Canal, to local and regional turnpikes, to railroads. The owners of Ferry Hill Place embodied the region's dominant economic characteristics -- they made the plantation a model of progressive agriculture, lent their financial and personal support to canal and turnpike construction schemes, and pursued diverse business opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

Agriculture dominated the Potomac River Valley's economy throughout the antebellum decades. Since the nation's founding, observers had commented on the region's rich soil and favorable climate. George Washington praised the Potomac Valley's abundant resources to an

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion of the relationship between agriculture and industrial development in the region, see Frances Robb, "Industry in the Potomac River Valley, 1760-1860," (PhD. Dissertation, West Virginia University, 1991). For more general works on industry and internal improvements, see George Rogers Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860 (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1951); and Ronald E. Shaw, Canals for a Nation: The Canal Era in the United States, 1790-1860 (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990).

English friend, boasting that:

Potowmac River, then, is the centre of the Union. It is between the extremes of heat and cold . . . . It waters the soil and runs in that climate which is most congenial to English grains, and is most agreeable to the cultivation of them. . . . The lands in the counties of Berkeley, in Virginia, Washington, in Maryland, and Franklin, in Pennsylvania, at the distance of 60 to 100 miles from Columbia, are inferior in their natural state to none in America.<sup>3</sup>

Although some farmers flirted with tobacco during the eighteenth century, farmers in western Maryland and northern Virginia shied away from tobacco cultivation and practiced diversified agriculture. Farm size varied, with some estates rivaling southern Maryland's vast tobacco plantations, but most farms were small, family operations. Describing a typical western Maryland farm, Governor Thomas Johnson wrote, "The land is generally in small farms of 100 to 250 acres." "Wheat is reckoned a cash article," he continued, "and therefore the chief that we cultivate for market." For home consumption, farmers grew Indian Corn, carrots, peas, parsnips, and beans, which, the Governor noted, "succeed very well, as do almost all garden fruits and plants."<sup>4</sup> Maryland geographer Joseph Scott made similar observations in 1807, noting that "wheat, rye, Indian corn, oats, potatoes, hemp, flax, with a great variety of vegetables are chiefly cultivated by the farmers."<sup>5</sup> Not only did Washington County's farmers embrace diversified agriculture, they also experimented with different fertilizers, crop rotation, and mechanization. One gets a sense of the crop diversification and farm management techniques from Frisby Tilgham's description of Rockland, his farm in Washington County, Maryland.

The farm contains by actual measurement two hundred and fifty acres, including wood land, roads, homestead, and waste ground. . . . The clear land on my farm is divided and cultivated in the following manner -- I have seven fields of 27 acres each. Two of the above fields are cultivated annually, in wheat, clover hay, a field in corn, one half a field a rye, and one half oats, this takes four of seven fields and leaves me three fields in clover for pasture. My wood land is inclosed [sic], which makes a fourth pasture field

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<sup>3</sup> Letters to his Excellency George Washington to Arthur Young, Esq., and Sir John Sinclair Containing an Account of his Husbandry with His Opinions on Various Questions in Agriculture and Many Particulars of the Rural Economy of the United States (Alexandria: Cotton and Steward, 1803), 34-35.

<sup>4</sup> Letters to His Excellency George Washington, 36-37.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Scott, A Geographical Description of the State of Maryland and Delaware; also of the Counties, Towns, Rivers, Bays, and Islands (Philadelphia, PA: Kimber, Conrad & Co., 1803), 148-49.

on harvest. My five lots furnish my way. . . . The product of the above farm on an average year is 1,100 bushels wheat, 1,100 do corn, 40 do oats, 300 do rye, 7000 wt pork, 20 head grass fed beef, between 200 and 300 head of sheep, 40 head black cattle, 15 horses. . . . My horses, milch cows, work oxen and sheep have hay and corn fodder; my stock cattle live on wheat, straw, and what they pick from the corn fodder.<sup>6</sup>

To cultivate their crops, the region's farmers purchased an array of modern farm implements, ranging from rollers and millers, to mechanical reapers and threshers. By 1860, the extent of mechanization was remarkable. Writing in 1859, Sharpsburg, Maryland, businessman and farmer Jacob Miller boasted, "The farmers are using the reaper more and more every year, and I think before many years the wheat, rye, oats, and barley will all be cut with reapers."<sup>7</sup> To preserve their farms, growers relied on manure and plaster, which maintained a steady yield of twenty bushels of wheat to the acre.<sup>8</sup> The combined effects of these agricultural innovations was impressive.<sup>9</sup> By 1860, Washington County boasted \$1,056,125 in livestock and a bountiful harvest of 882,814 bushels of wheat, 79,993 bushels of rye, 669,322 bushels of corn, and 3,352 bushels of barley.<sup>10</sup>

Diversified agriculture spawned a local service economy geared towards supporting farmers. Because many farmers marketed their crops as flour, Washington County boasted a large number of mills and coopers. "There are about 50 gristmills in the county," wrote Joseph

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<sup>6</sup> Frisby Tilgham, "Letter to the Editors," The American Farmer, June 18, 1819, 90-91.

<sup>7</sup> Jacob Miller to Catherine Amelia, July 1, 1859, Miller Family Letter Collection, Antietam National Battlefield Archives, Sharpsburg, Maryland.

<sup>8</sup> One of the more popular tracts concerning the use of fertilizers was John A. Binn, Treatise on Practical Farming: Embracing Particularly the use of Plaister [sic] of Paris, with Directions for using it; and General Observations on the use of other Manures (Frederick-Town, MD: John B. Colvin, 1803). Interestingly, the copy of this pamphlet housed in the Maryland Historical Society is inscribed "Van Swearingen" on the cover. Although the pamphlet may have been owned by another family named Van Swearingen, it is possible that the Van Swearingen family of Shepherdstown, Virginia, owned the tract. If so, it is possible that they followed the author's recommendation for using fertilizers and manures on Ferry Hill's fields.

<sup>9</sup> For an account of the various movements to improve farming in Maryland, see Vivian Wiser, "Improving Maryland's Agriculture, 1840-1860," Maryland Historical Magazine 64, no. 2 (1969): 105-32; and Avery O. Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Maryland and Virginia, 1606-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1925), chapters three and four.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph G. Kennedy, Agriculture of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 72-73.



Scott. “The waters on the Antietam turns 14 mills,” he continued, “it is the largest, and most consistent stream in the county, and where the largest quantity of flour is manufactured.” A survey of the lands bordering Antietam Creek undertaken by the Potomac Canal Company revealed a significant amount of industrial activity. According to the surveyor, Antietam Creek boasted two forges, one woolen mill, one powder mill, twelve merchant flour mills, eleven sawmills, one paper mill, and one hemp mill.<sup>11</sup> After processing their crops at local mills, farmers generally transported their crops overland to Baltimore, Maryland, or along the Potomac River and Chesapeake and Ohio Canal to Georgetown and Alexandria.

Unfortunately, the region’s bountiful resources could not guarantee success for farmers and manufacturers without internal improvements. When Washington County planter Thomas E. Buchanan surveyed his fields, he ranked improved transportation alongside disease, insects, and rain as factors determining whether crops would succeed or fail. “Our prospect for rust is very fine, [and] no fly has disturbed us for the past two years,” he wrote. “All things appear to be working together for agricultural good,” he continued, “[and] in consequence of the facility to market and the increased demand for produce occasioned by our internal improvements, the farmer will soon be able to wipe off old scores and begin anew.”<sup>12</sup> Cumberland, Maryland, merchant J.S. Shriver expressed similar hopes to his brother Joseph Shriver in a letter written on January 19, 1849. “The business of this place is much increased, and is improving every year,” he boasted. “The canal,” he continued, “will be finished next fall and a new start will then take place in everything here.”<sup>13</sup>

Anxious farmers and manufacturers launched several campaigns for internal

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<sup>11</sup> Robb, 73.

<sup>12</sup> Letters from his Excellency George Washington to Arthur Young, Esq., and Sir John Sinclair Containing an Account of His Husbandry with His Opinions on Various Questions in Agriculture and Many Particulars or the Rural Economy of the United States (Alexandria, VA: Cotton and Steward, 1803), 20; Thomas E. Buchanan Papers in Kenneth M. Stampp, ed., *Papers of the Antebellum Southern Planters*, Series D, Reel 44, Frame 659.

<sup>13</sup> J.S. Shriver to Joseph Shriver, January 19, 1849. Shriver Family Papers. MS 2085. Box 8. Maryland Historical Society. Baltimore, Maryland.



improvements. Chief among their concerns was improved navigation of the Potomac River and construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. Residents of Jefferson County, Virginia, and Washington County, Maryland, organized numerous meetings supporting canal construction and sent large, enthusiastic delegations to the various conventions supporting canal construction. They also demanded improved roads and turnpikes to link their region to larger national markets. On May 13, 1825, concerned citizens met at Charles Town, Virginia, to demand an extension of the Cumberland Road to Washington, D.C. Their neighbors in Washington County, Maryland, shared the widespread enthusiasm for internal improvements. On September 1, 1796, several of the county's leading citizens met at Hagerstown, Maryland, to discuss constructing a turnpike from Washington County to the seaboard. There was a flurry of turnpike construction between 1810 and 1830. On January 10, 1810, the General Assembly incorporated the Hagerstown and Westminster Turnpike. Writing in support of the proposed turnpike, a Washington County resident outlined the economic benefits improved roads would bring to the region. "Let this road be once completed to Hagerstown and a good, common, well-graded road be extended thence through Hancock Town to Fort Cumberland to meet the Great Western Road," he predicted, ". . . and then Hagerstown will become . . . the thoroughfare for the whole of the western wagons and travelers, and will without doubt become one of the very first and most flourishing inland towns in Maryland, or perhaps the United States." In 1817, several prominent citizens organized the Hagerstown and Conococheague Turnpike Company. Five years later, Washington County residents began planning the Hagerstown and Boonsboro Turnpike. On April 21, 1828, the Gettysburg and Hagerstown Turnpike began accepting subscriptions. Railroad construction made considerable progress during the antebellum decades. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad completed construction of the line running from Baltimore, Maryland, to Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in 1834. Two years later, the Winchester and Potomac Railroad began operation. The line operated thirty-two miles from Winchester, Virginia, to Harper's Ferry, where it connected with the Baltimore and Ohio. In 1838, construction of the Cumberland Valley Railroad from

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to Hagerstown,, was completed. Thus, by 1860, a series of turnpikes, railroads, and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal had laced the region and connected it markets in Baltimore and Washington, D.C.<sup>14</sup>

## **2. Packhorse Ford and Swearingen's Ferry**

The Potomac River, the roads traversing the Valley of Virginia, and the C & O Canal have shaped Ferry Hill Plantation's history. Before the Swearingen and Blackford families established their ferry across the Potomac River, Packhorse Ford, later known as Swearingen's and Blackford's Ford, played an important role in the Upper Potomac Valley's settlement. European immigrants and traders followed Native American trails and crossed the Potomac River at Packhorse Ford. Traditional accounts state that German immigrants crossed Pack Horse Ford and established New Mecklenburg, Virginia, in 1726 or 1727, although subsequent works suggest that Europeans settled near New Mecklenburg in 1719. The community remained unorganized until 1762, when Thomas Shepherd petitioned Virginia's General Assembly to recognize New Mecklenburg.

Packhorse Ford's importance to regional commerce, communications, and travel increased during the eighteenth century. Early settlers transported farm produce and livestock to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but the distance, combined with high costs, soon proved prohibitive. Frontier farmers and merchants clamored for improved roads and petitioned local courts and Virginia's General Assembly for increased funds. Between 1763 and 1774, county courts allocated monies for hundreds of local roads connecting the Valley of Virginia's settlements, mills, and major highways. The most important trade route, dubbed "The Great Road," crossed the Potomac River at Mecklenburg, then proceeded to Martinsburg, Winchester, Strasburg, New Market, Staunton, and Fincastle. At Fincastle, the road forked into branches leading to the

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<sup>14</sup> J. Thomas Scharf, History of Western Maryland: Being a History of Frederick, Montgomery, Carroll, Washington, Allegany, and Garret Counties from the Earliest Settlement to the Present Day; Including Biographical Sketches of Their Representative Men, Two Volumes (Philadelphia, PA, 1882, reprint, Baltimore, MD, Regional Publishing Company, 1968), 994-1004; Millard Kessler Bushong, A

Carolinas, Tennessee and Kentucky, and the Greenbrier Valley. At some point, the settlers at Mecklenburg, Virginia strengthened their community's trade connections by establishing a ferry across the Potomac River. In October, 1765, the General Assembly granted Thomas Shepherd permission to operate a ferry "from his land in the town of Mecklenburg, in the county of Frederick, over Potowmack [sic] River, to his land opposite thereto in the province of Maryland; the price for a man three pence, and for a horse the same." The following year, however, the General Assembly revoked Shepherd's franchise, noting that his ferry was "a very small distance from a ferry already established from the land of Thomas Swearingen over Potowmack [sic] River to Maryland."<sup>15</sup>

The owner of the ferry, Thomas Swearingen, was among New Mecklenburg's earliest residents and most prominent citizens. The Van Swearingen family settled in northern Virginia in 1734. The patriarch of the family, Van Swearingen, was born on May 22, 1719, in Maryland. Little is known about his early years, except that he married his cousin, Sarah Swearingen. Upon her death, he married Priscilla Metcalf. During the Revolutionary War, Van Swearingen served county lieutenant and adjutant of Berkeley County, Virginia. He died on April 20, 1788. As mentioned above, it was Van Swearingen's son, Thomas, who established the Potomac River

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History of Jefferson County, West Virginia (Charles Town, WV: Jefferson Publishing Co., 1941), 81-84.

<sup>15</sup> The act granting Thomas Shepherd a license to operate a ferry read: An Act for Establishing a Ferry from the Land of Thomas Shepherd at Mecklenburg, in Frederick County, to Maryland, October 1765, Be it enacted, by the Lieutenant Governor, Council, and Burgesses of this General Assembly, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same, That a ferry be established and constantly kept from the land of Thomas Shepherd, in the town of Mecklenburg, in the county of Frederick, over the Potowmack River, to his land opposite thereto in the province of Maryland; the price for a man to be three-pence, and for a horse the same. And for the transportation of wheel carriages, tobacco, cattle, and other beasts, the ferry keeper may demand and take the following rates, to wit: For every coach, chariot, or wagon, and every driver thereof, the same as for six horses; and for every cart, or four wheeled chaise and the driver thereof, the same as for four horses; for every two wheeled chaise, or chair, the same as for two horses; and for every hogshead of tobacco, the same as for one horse; and for every meat cattle, the same as for one horse; and for every sheep, goat, hog, or lamb, one fourth part the ferriage of one horses, according to the price herein before settled at the said ferry. Clifford Musser, Two Hundred Years History of Shepherdstown (Shepherdstown, WV: Published by the Author, 1931), 12-13. See also, Freeman H. Hart, The Valley of Virginia in the American Revolution, 1763-1789 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1942), 20-21; J.E. Norris, ed., History of the Lower Shenandoah Valley Counties of Frederick, Berkeley, Jefferson, and Clarke, Their Early Settlement and Progress to the Present Time; Geological Features; A Description of Their Historic and Interesting Localities; Cities, Towns, and Villages; Portraits of Some of



Ferry. After Thomas Swearingen's death, his son, Major Thomas Swearingen, inherited the ferry. Major Swearingen maintained the ferry until 1780, when he died of tuberculosis contracted during service in the Continental Army. Major Swearingen willed the ferry to Benoni Swearingen, his youngest brother. By all accounts, Benoni Swearingen was an attractive, dashing gentleman. Standing six feet, four inches in height, and with a dark, handsome complexion, Benoni Swearingen volunteered in George M. Bedinger's company during the American Revolution and fought in the Battle of Germantown. After the battle, he was part of the company that marched to Boonsborough, Kentucky, in 1779. Benoni Swearingen married three times, but few of his children survived to adulthood.<sup>16</sup>

Benoni Swearingen employed a local cobbler to operate the ferry, which did a brisk business during the late-eighteenth century. As one local historian wrote, "Old residents of Shepherdstown have told me that their fathers remembered the time when long lines of vehicles extended from the river as far out as what is now Elmwood Cemetery, waiting to be ferried."<sup>17</sup> On May 25, 1786, Swearingen applied to the Washington County Tax Commissioners for permission to construct a tobacco inspection and storage warehouse near the ferry, but the board rejected Swearingen's petition, choosing to erect the warehouse near Williamsport, Maryland.<sup>18</sup>

Benoni Swearingen operated the ferry until his death in 1798. During the years he owned the ferry, Swearingen expanded his family's holdings along the Potomac River. On August 1, 1794, he purchased two tracts, "Ferry Landing Enlarged" and "Resurvey on Antietam Bottom," which increased the Swearingen's lands along the Maryland shore. Upon his death in 1798, Swearingen's willed his widow, Hester, a one-third interest in the ferry. Swearingen divided the

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the Prominent Men, and Biographies of Many of the Representative Citizens (Chicago, IL: A Warner & Co., 1890), 371

<sup>16</sup> For information on the Van Swearingen's family history, see Danske Dandridge, Historic Shepherdstown (Charlottesville, VA: The Michie Co., 1910), 351-52; and A.D. Kenamond, Prominent Men of Shepherdstown during its First Two Hundred Years (Shepherdstown, WV: Jefferson County Historical Society, 1964), 110-11.

<sup>17</sup> Dandridge, Historic Shepherdstown, 263.

<sup>18</sup> John Walter Wayland, The German Element of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia (Charlottesville, VA:

remaining two-thirds between his son, Henry Van Swearingen, and his daughter, Sarah, who had married John Blackford. On February 22, 1813, Blackford purchased Henry Van Swearingen's lands near the ferry land. Throughout 1839, Blackford negotiated for the remaining interests in Van Swearingen's ferry. Thomas Van Swearingen, who had purchased the Van Swearingen's interest in the ferry, deeded the family's shares of the ferry to Franklin Blackford on April 10, 1840.<sup>19</sup>

### **3. The John Blackford Family (ca.1800-1839)**

Through his two marriages, John Blackford became patriarch to a large, prosperous family. Born on July 18, 1771, John Blackford was the only child of Benjamin Blackford, an officer in the Revolutionary War, and Abigail Moore. Little is known about Blackford's early life, although he apparently enjoyed some economic and social standing. On August 19, 1797, John Blackford married Sarah Van Swearingen, the daughter of Benoni Van Swearingen and Elizabeth Good, one of Shepherdstown, Virginia's, leading families. Through this marriage, Blackford acquired interest in Van Swearingen's Ferry and the first parcels of land that eventually became part of Ferry Hill Plantation. John Blackford and Sarah Van Swearingen had three children: the first, Benoni Swearingen, was born on May 19, 1798, and died on September 13, 1816; their second child, Eliza Pinkney, was born on April 19, 1800; the couple's third child, John Washington, was born on June 14, 1803, and died on September 15, 1803. Sarah Van Swearingen died on November 24, 1805. On June 18, 1812, John Blackford married Elizabeth Knode. The couple remained married until Elizabeth's death on October 7, 1838. During the course of their marriage, Elizabeth bore John Blackford nine children: the first child, Mary Abigail, was born on October 10, 1813, and died on September 28, 1818; their first son, Franklin, was born on October 20, 1814; their third child, John Hancock, was born on September 6, 1816, but died on July 3, 1817; a fourth child, Jeanette Yates, was born on October 21, 1817; a fifth

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Michie Company, 1907), 35;

<sup>19</sup> Antietam Furnace Vertical File. Western Maryland Room. Washington County Free Library.



child, Henry Van Swearingen, followed on July 8, 1819; the date of birth for the couple's sixth child, Otho Holland Williams was not recorded, but the child died on June 24, 1825; Helena, who married the Reverend Robert Douglas, was born on December 8, 1820 and died in December, 1882; Virginia Lafayette, the couple's last daughter, was born on June 29, 1825 and died on October 28, 1828; and William Moore, their last child, was born on February 14, 1828, and died on July 25, 1904.<sup>20</sup>

Under John Blackford's management, Ferry Hill Plantation developed into a large, prosperous farm. To preserve the plantation's lands and increase crop yields, Blackford practiced progressive agriculture and implement modern farming techniques. Like many Washington County farmers, Blackford read agricultural journals, such as The American Farmer, and adapted agricultural reforms to his plantation. He rotated crops and experimented with several varieties of seeds, fertilized his fields with manure, ashes, and limestone, and purchased improved farm machinery. Evidence of Blackford's interest in agricultural experimentation and reform appears throughout his Ferry Hill Place journals. For example, on April 16, 1830, Blackford applied mineral and organic fertilizers:

J. Knode brought from Mumma's Mill the balance of two tons plaster. Upton Robenett and Solomon Grove were spreading manure in the mean time. After dinner they resumed hauling manure. Then hauled out two loads of slack ashes.

Blackford used modern drills, harrowers, and rollers to prepare his fields and plant crops. During the harvest, Blackford relied on somewhat outdated hand scythes and cradles. In 1838, however, he rented a mechanical reaper to cut the plantation's rye and wheat crops. He also used horse powered threshing machines to process the wheat crop.

Blackford's business interests extended beyond agriculture. After moving to Ferry Hill Plantation, Blackford entered a partnership to operate an inn and tavern along the Potomac River. The partnership dissolved in 1810, but Blackford continued seeking business opportunities. He

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Hagerstown, Maryland.

<sup>20</sup> Blackford, Douglas, and Beckenbaugh Family Trees, in Blackford Family Vertical File, Washington

supported the internal improvements that brought travelers to Ferry Hill Plantation and attempted to profit from the increased traffic. Blackford also purchased stock in the Boonsboro Turnpike Company and oversaw construction of the road from Boonsboro, Maryland, to Blackford's Ferry. He participated in the conventions inaugurating construction of the C & O Canal, an enterprise he continued supporting during the twenties and thirties. The canal, Swearingen's Ferry, and the Boonsboro Turnpike brought increased traffic to Ferry Hill Place, and Blackford seized the opportunity to board and lodge travelers. He converted the Ferry House into a tavern and boarding house, and scattered references from his journals suggest that the business prospered.<sup>21</sup> The Ferry House, Blackford boasted on September 4, 1837, is "full to overflowing with persons descending the canal in the morning."

Colonel John Blackford's prominence in the local militia and state politics made him a leading citizen of Washington County, Maryland. Blackford launched his military career during the political crisis of 1807, when the British warship *Leopard* attacked the United States frigate *Chesapeake* near Norfolk, Virginia, killing several American seamen, wounding eighteen, and capturing alleged deserters. The British attack outraged Marylanders. Militia companies organized throughout the state, including John Blackford's Sharpsburg Company. Organized on September 19, 1807, Blackford's company of "sixty-four valiant patriots" pledged their "lives and fortunes" to the nation, declaring that, "even dying, we will triumphantly exclaim, when our country called we were for war, and death itself is sweet in her defense." The Governor and General Council approved Captain Blackford's commission on November 20, 1807, along with those of his lieutenants Joseph Smith and Elie Baker. The Governor praised Blackford's

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County Historical Society, Hagerstown, Maryland.

<sup>21</sup> Little is known about Blackford's inn and tavern partnership. The only mention of the business is a brief excerpt in the *Hagerstown Gazette* dated May 22, 1810. For Blackford's involvement in the Boonsboro Turnpike, see J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Western Maryland*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, 1882), 998 and 1003; and Minutes of the Boonsboro Turnpike Company, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland. It is uncertain when Blackford converted the Ferry House into a tavern. Blackford entertained guests and held receptions at the Ferry House in 1829, but it is unclear whether or not he operated the inn and tavern as regular businesses. The earliest references to a formal business operation are on May 5, 1837, and May

company for their “patriotism, courage, and attachment to the government,” and noted that they volunteered when “the war whoop was the loudest, and when each member had no expectation but to be called into immediate service.” Jefferson’s embargo temporarily averted conflict in 1807, but Blackford remained active in the local militia. During the following winter and spring, Blackford occupied himself collecting weapons for the company, now known as the Sharpsburg Independent Blues. On July 4, 1808, Blackford’s company celebrated Independence Day at Joseph Chapline’s house near the Potomac River, where they fired volleys and raised eighteen toasts. Blackford offered the evening’s final toast to Sharpsburg’s ladies: “To the solace of human life, the virtuous fair -- may their hearts be consoled by Federal husbands and their cradles filled with sons of freeman.” When the clouds of war gathered in 1812, Blackford, now a Major in the 10th Regiment, Maryland Militia, helped the regiment prepare the state’s defenses. On August 24, 1813, Blackford’s regiment participated in the disastrous Battle of Bladensburg. Faced with overwhelming British forces, the American militia, under the command of General Levi Winder, became disorganized and retreated towards Washington, D.C. “The militia ran like sheep, chased by dogs,” exclaimed one observer. Blackford’s regiment earned the derogatory title, “The Bladensburg Racers” for their humiliating performance during the battle. Despite the 10th Regiment’s poor performance, Blackford remained in the militia and received a promotion to Colonel. He resigned his commission in 1822.<sup>22</sup>

As was the case with his military career, John Blackford’s political ascendancy began during the War of 1812. On January 22, 1812, the Governor and General Council confirmed Blackford’s appointment as Justice of the Peace, an office he held until his death. Later that year, Blackford, along with Robert Hughes, Thomas Brent, and Otho H. W. Stull, campaigned for the

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5, 1838, when Blackford purchased and renewed his tavern licenses for \$18.50.

<sup>22</sup> Maryland Herald, October 9, 1807; Maryland Herald, December 11, 1807; Maryland Herald, April 8, 1808; Maryland Herald, July 22, 1808; Maryland Herald, May 6, 1812; Maryland Herald, November 5, 1822; for Maryland’s reaction to the political crisis of 1807 and a description of the Battle of Bladensburg, see Robert J. Brugger, Maryland: A Middle Temperament, 1634-1980 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 175-81.

Maryland General Assembly. Appealing to the “Friends of Peace,” Blackford hoped to secure an honorable peace with Great Britain, maintain the Federal Union, and restore free trade with European nations. Despite strong support in the Sharpsburg district, Blackford’s campaign for the General Assembly failed. Undeterred, Blackford remained active in local government during the 1820’s and 1830’s. A tireless advocate of internal improvements, Blackford participated in several conventions to improve Washington County’s roads, canals, and railroads. On October 18, 1823, Blackford chaired a large convention in Hagerstown, Maryland, supporting a canal project along the Potomac River. Noting that “the citizens of Washington County, Maryland, are deeply interested in the free and entire navigation of the Potomac River” and securing “exhaustless treasures” of improved commerce, the convention’s delegates pledged their support. The following November, Blackford, along with several of Washington County’s leading citizens, participated in the convention that inaugurated construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. Once construction began, Blackford supported measures to hasten the canal’s completion. In November, 1834, he represented Washington County at a conference demanding “the continuation of the work in order to gratify the just and anxious expectations of the public whose interests and welfare are deeply involved in its accomplished.” Two years later, Blackford participated in another convention demanding increased funds for canal and railroad construction. Blackford also held several local administrative positions. In 1815, Blackford served on the committee that chose the site for the Hagerstown Court House. Seven years later, he helped reapportion Washington County’s election districts. Blackford also served on Washington County’s Grand Jury and helped oversee the county’s almshouse and prison. Because of his stature, Blackford had opportunities to meet several prominent figures. In 1824, Blackford met General Lafayette, who was touring the United States. Describing the meeting to a friend, Blackford wrote, “I was gratified with an introduction and I hearty shake by the hand. . . . he is a noble looking man, something above the middle size, strong features and masculine form with a mind strong and memory retentive.” On June 7, 1838, he visited the White House and spent



several hours talking with President Martin Van Buren.<sup>23</sup>

Blackford's Ferry Hill mansion reflected his economic success and political importance. It remains unclear when Blackford built Ferry Hill Place, and there are no photographs of the plantation before the American Civil War. It seems clear, however, that Ferry Hill Place was magnificent. Travelers who visited the impressed by Blackford's estate. In 1829, writer Anne Royall described her visit to Shepherdstown, Virginia, and Ferry Hill Plantation in glowing terms.

A ferry is kept here over the Potomac, which yields an immense revenue, as people and wagons are crossing from daylight in the morning to late at night. This is the property of ----- of Maryland.

Seeing a beautiful mansion perched on the summit of a lofty eminence, on the opposite shore, I was told it was -----, and wishing to take a near view of the site, I left my baggage to come with the stage, and crossed the river. After a pretty fatiguing walk up a moderate mount, I found myself on a level plain, where sits the mansion, or palace, rather of ----- . It is built in the form of an L, and is the most splendid building of any country house in the state, and the view from it is equally grand. But the house appears to more advantage when viewed from the Virginia shore. It, however, lacks nothing to render it a paradise; it is well built, of brick, and magnificently finished; the terraces, network, gardens, and shrubbery all correspond. ----- was sitting in his cool portico, which overlooks the whole country, and was watching me, he said, from the time I left Shepherdstown. He is a middle aged man, married to a beautiful young wife, if I remember, his second wife.

It is said he made his fortune from his farm on the Potomac, and the Ferry. After taking a glass of his cool water, and chatting some time, I walked down to the ferry house, in order to be ready for the stage, which did not arrive in some time.<sup>24</sup>

Under John Blackford, Ferry Hill Plantation became an important waypoint for travelers and the center of an active, vibrant social life. In addition to the travelers passing through Ferry Hill Plantation and Shepherdstown, Virginia, the Blackford family entertained large numbers of

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<sup>23</sup> Maryland Herald, January 22, 1812; Maryland Herald, September 23, 1812; Maryland Herald, October 7, 1812; Maryland Herald, October 21, 1823; Hagerstown Mail, November 28, 1834; Hagerstown Mail, April 29, 1836; Maryland Herald, May 21, 1822; Hagerstown Mail, April 7, 1837; Scharf, History of Western Maryland, 1106; Hagerstown Mail, March 29, 1839; John Blackford to Uriah Blue, December 2, 1824, Washington County Historical Society, Hagerstown, Maryland; John Blackford Journals, June 7, 1838.

<sup>24</sup> Anne Royall, Black Book; or, a Continuation of Travels in the United States, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Printed by the Author, 1828), 294-95.



personal friends and relatives.

#### 4. Slavery in Western Maryland and Northwest Virginia

The history of slavery on the small farms and plantations of western Maryland and northwest Virginia remains unwritten. There are scattered references to slavery in early histories of the lower Shenandoah, but the previous decades' outpouring of studies on "the peculiar institution" have passed over the region. The problem, one suspects, is a severe lack of sources. Unlike the large planters of the Deep South, the slaveholders of the lower Shenandoah left behind few sources; a handful of plantation and farm records, a few slave narratives, and the usual assortment of census records, fugitive slave advertisements, and court proceedings have survived, but the rich collection of diaries, journals, and correspondence left behind by the South's leading families is absent. A relative lack of sources is not, however, the only explanation for historians' inattention to the lower Shenandoah Valley. An equally daunting obstacle is the profession's continuing focus on the antebellum south's large plantations. Scholars have followed the sources to those regions where slavery dominated society, where slavery influenced every economic, political, and social institution, but this focus has distracted them from slavery in the upper-South, the Mid-Atlantic States, and New England. In recent years, scholars have made impressive strides towards correcting this imbalance, but the problem remains. To understand slavery in the lower Shenandoah Valley one must sail into uncharted waters, for while there are studies of slavery in similar regions, none provide a comprehensive methodological model or paradigm for interpreting this region's "peculiar institution."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> To borrow a term coined by historian Ira Berlin, the lower Shenandoah Valley was a "society with slaves," a region where slavery existed alongside several competing labor arrangements and where "the peculiar institution," while not necessarily less oppressive or violent, did not provide a foundation for all economic, political, or social relationships. Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 7-9. The past decade has seen the publication of several excellent studies of societies with slaves. Several of these studies describe regions whose labor arrangements resembled those of the lower Shenandoah. Gary Nash and Jean Soderlund describe slavery in southern Pennsylvania in Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), while Sharon V. Sallinger explores slavery and indentured servitude in colonial and revolutionary Pennsylvania in her excellent "To serve well and faithfully": Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania (New York: Cambridge University Press).

The literature on slavery in Maryland reflects the historical profession's disinterest with societies with slaves. Most studies of slavery in Maryland focus on the Chesapeake Bay's sprawling tobacco estates or the explosive growth of "The Free State's" free black population. Allan Kulikoff's Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800, provides excellent detail on southern Maryland's tobacco plantations. Likewise, Philip D. Morgan's Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth Century Chesapeake and Low country, focuses on the region's tobacco estates, devoting little attention to Maryland's and Virginia's Piedmont and Upcountry. Even Barbara J. Fields' excellent Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century, offers little on the lower Shenandoah. While Fields identified many of the salient features of slavery in western Maryland -- small slaveholdings, diversified agriculture, a heavy reliance on free black and white labor -- her sources are drawn heavily from southern Maryland and the study's focus remains on the counties surrounding Washington, D.C., and the Eastern Shore. None of this is to slight these scholars; their work is, in most regards, of the highest caliber, and was never intended to encompass the lower Shenandoah Valley. It is, rather, to highlight the deficiencies in the literature and suggest, once again, the need for studies of western Maryland and northwest Virginia.<sup>26</sup>

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Monmouth County, New Jersey, is the focus of Graham Russell Hodges recent study, which explores the rise and fall of "the peculiar institution" in a region where African-Americans and slavery remained marginal in the economy and workforce. Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African-Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1665-1865 (New York: Random House, 1997). One of the most imaginative and well-crafted studies of a society with slaves is Shane White's Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York Study (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991). For a study of society with slaves nestled within the larger southern slave society, see John C. Inscoe's Mountain Masters: Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

<sup>26</sup> In recent years, two excellent studies of slavery in Baltimore, Maryland, have emerged, Christopher Phillips, Freedom's Port: The African-American Community in Baltimore, 1790-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1997), traces the rise of the city's free black population and shows how it differed from the free black community of other southern cities. More useful for the purposes of this study is T. Stephen Whitman's The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland (Knoxville: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), which contains an excellent discussion of term slavery, a practice that extended from Baltimore into the lower Shenandoah Valley. Allan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800 (Chapel Hill: University of

The present study of slavery in the lower Shenandoah Valley represents more than an attempt to fill a void in the historiography. Although the research will not, at present, permit a more detailed discussion of the thesis' scope and conclusions, the study is, nonetheless, ripe with opportunities. The lower Shenandoah Valley stood at the crossroads of slavery and freedom. The wave of emancipations that swept New England and the mid-Atlantic lapped against western Maryland and northwest Virginia before receding, and while slavery survived through the American Civil War, it lacked the vitality of the "peculiar institution" spreading across the southeastern states. Several forces dovetailed to rob slavery of its vitality. The farmers of the lower Shenandoah Valley practiced diversified agriculture, devoting most of their acreage to cereals, garden crops, and grazing land for their livestock. Although there has been some debate among historians concerning whether slavery could flourish without the traditional staple crops -- tobacco, cotton, rice, and sugar -- the steady decline of the region's slave population provides compelling evidence that farmers could not, or would not, rely on slave laborers. The valley's slaveholders adapted slavery to economic activities outside of agriculture, most notably the iron industry. Although some entrepreneurs prospered by employing slave laborers at the iron forges and furnaces, slavery continued to languish throughout the antebellum years. Hastening slavery's demise were the valley's white settlers, including a large number of German immigrants, who displayed little interest in slavery.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, representatives from the Shenandoah Valley were among the strongest supporters of abolition at Virginia's 1832 emancipation conference. The purpose here, however, is not necessarily to discuss whether slavery could survive in a diversified agricultural society, but rather to understand how slavery operated in such an environment, to

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North Carolina, 1986); Philip D. Morgan, Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Barbara J. Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland in the Nineteenth Century (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>27</sup> The problem of slavery and diversified agriculture are discussed below. For studies of slavery in the Shenandoah's iron industry Ronald L. Lewis, Coal, Iron, and Slaves: Industrial Slavery in Maryland and Virginia, 1715-1865 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), and Charles B. Dew, Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995). Alison Goodyear Freehling



understand how slavery, despite its marginality, influenced, or was influenced by, prevailing economic, political, racial, and social norms. It is premised upon the assumption that by understanding slavery on the periphery of southern society, we can gain a greater knowledge of how labor, race, and slavery operated not only in the South, but also throughout the nation.

Any study of slavery in the lower Shenandoah must begin with a discussion of the region's agricultural economy, which shaped the size of the region's slaveholdings and provided the material foundations for slave life. As historians Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan recently asserted, the demands of agricultural labor shaped every aspect of slave life; the type of crops grown dictated when slaves worked, how masters disciplined and supported the chattels, and how slaves developed an independent culture and internal economy.<sup>28</sup>

With an agricultural economy founded on diversified, progressive farming, Washington County offered poor soil for the "peculiar institution" to flourish. Writing in 1845, John L. Carey argued that:

Grain growing districts, counties where a scientific agriculture prevails, where the mind of man as well as the hands of labor find employment in the culture of the ground, the rearing of trees, the improvement of breeds of cattle, horses and swine, the refining of the texture of wool, the care of dairy . . . there slavery cannot dwell. It is not congenial with such scenes.<sup>29</sup>

Historians have echoed many of these conclusions. Avery O. Craven, in his pioneering study of upper South agriculture, argued that slavery prevented diversified, scientific agriculture. Farmers who purchased slaves had little money for fertilizers or improved machinery. Crop diversification meant that many fields would lie dormant, which meant that large numbers of slaves could not be profitably employed. Slaveholders who embraced new farming practices had

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explores Virginia's move towards emancipation in Drift Towards Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

<sup>28</sup> "Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas" in Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas, eds. Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 1.

<sup>29</sup> John L. Carey, Slavery in Maryland Briefly Considered (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1845), 25-26.

to provide instruction and close supervision of their slaves, a daunting task on large estates.<sup>30</sup> As George Washington wrote, “Blacks are capable of much labor, but having, I am speaking generally, no ambition to establish a good name, they are too regardless of a bad one, and of course require more of the master’s eye. . . .”<sup>31</sup> Eugene Genovese expanded upon Craven’s conclusions, arguing that the agricultural renaissance in western Maryland and northern Virginia was predicated on slavery’s demise. To implement reform, farmers needed additional capital. In the upper South, farmers generated money for fertilizer and farm machinery by selling surplus slaves to the booming cotton frontier. Abandoning slavery opened new possibilities for Maryland’s and Virginia’s farmers: new machinery could be purchased; fields could lie dormant without the unnecessary expense of supporting idle slaves; and farmers could provide closer supervision of their smaller workforces, thus allowing them to provide instruction on new farming practices.<sup>32</sup>

Although Craven’s and Genovese’s interpretations have not gone unchallenged, their arguments remain compelling. In perhaps the strongest critique of Craven’s and Genovese’s work, John T. Schlotterbeck argued that slavery and agricultural reform were not incompatible, and that farmers in Orange and Greene Counties, Virginia, successfully engaged in diversified, progressive agriculture without abandoning slavery. Adapting slavery to mixed production did, however, require significant alterations in labor management. To successfully implement diversified agriculture, farmers abandoned gang labor, provided close supervision of small groups of slaves, and created an incentive system for their bondsmen and women. While Schotterbeck’s study provides an excellent case study of slaveholders transitioning from staple crop to diversified production, evidence from Washington County suggests that many, if not most, farmers were unable or unwilling to adapt the “peculiar institution” to their region’s agricultural

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<sup>30</sup> Craven, 114.

<sup>31</sup> Letters from His Excellency George Washington, 52.

<sup>32</sup> Eugene Genovese, The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), chapter six.



economy.

A cursory glance at census information from Washington County suggests that slavery stagnated throughout the early republic and antebellum decades.

Washington County, Maryland, Population Figures (Table 1)

	<b>1790</b>	<b>1840</b>	<b>1850</b>
Total Population	15,822	28,850	30,848
White Population (%)	14,472 (91%)	24,711 (86%)	26,930 (87%)
Slave Population (%)	1,286 (8%)	2,545 (9%)	2,090 (7%)
Free Black Population (%)	64 (1%)	1,580 (5%)	1,828 (6%)

Sources: Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States taken in the Year 1790 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1907); Sixth Census or Enumerations of the Inhabitants of the United States in 1840; The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850 (Washington, D.C.: Robert Armstrong, 1853).

As the table indicates, Washington County's slave population increased in absolute numbers between 1790 and 1860, but, as the table indicates, slaves became an increasingly marginal part of the county's population. The slave population's rate of increase pales when compared to the explosive growth of the white population, and the size of slaveholdings, while never large, held constant through 1860. In 1790, for example, only 11 percent of households contained slaves and over 75 percent of slaveholders owned five or fewer slaves. By 1860, almost 80 percent of the county's slaveholders owned five or fewer slaves. Slavery, it appears, survived in Washington County, Maryland, until emancipation, but the county's agricultural economy and farmer's labor demands stunted its growth.

The clearest explanation of slavery's decline in western Maryland is Raymond James' 1827 "Prize Essay on the Comparative Economy of Free and Slave Labor in Agriculture," which illustrates the problems western Maryland's farmers had in maintaining slavery. Although nominally an abolitionist tract, the essay reads more like an indictment against slavery in a region where diversified, progressive farming reigned. Raymond and his colleagues in the Frederick

County, Maryland, agricultural society hoped to convince farmers that “free labor is more convenient and cheaper than the labor slaves.” Unlike a free laborer, “whose living depends upon the industry and fidelity with which he labors,” slaves sought “to do the least work, in the longest time, in the worst matter, and escape punishment.” Not only was slavery inefficient, but purchasing slave laborers consumed inordinate amount of capital, which prevented farmers from purchasing improved machinery or improving their land. If, for example, a farmer planned to rest his lands, then his slaves would be idle. “The soil itself requires frequent changes in the kind of husbandry,” Raymond warned, “and if he cultivates with slave labor, whilst his lands were resting, most of laborers would also be resting at his expense.” “Indeed, Raymond believed that slavery’s inflexibility rendered it unsuitable for western Maryland’s small farms and diversified agriculture. Throughout the year, there were many periods when crops did not demand attention, which meant that farmers’ labor demands changed constantly. “Nothing” Raymond wrote, “is more variable than the quantity of labor which the farmer has occasion to employ upon his farm and under different circumstances.” With free laborers, a farmer could purchase labor “precisely as he purchases any other commodity in the market, in such quantities and at such times as he wants it.” Slaves provided a constant source of labor, but farmers could not respond to seasonal labor demands by purchasing or selling slaves. If the slave is obliged to perform labor for the master,” Raymond concluded, “the master is compelled to find employment and support for the slave, whether he finds him profitable or otherwise.”<sup>33</sup>

After observing North American agriculture, English writer Robert Russell echoed many of Raymond’s conclusions. Russell, who toured Maryland during the 1850s, attributed slavery’s steady decline in the state’s northern counties to the region’s agricultural economy and varied labor demands. Slaveholders, Russell argued, were often compelled to sell their surplus bonds- men and women to Deep South cotton and sugar plantations, where their human property found a

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<sup>33</sup> James Raymond, “Prize Essay on the Comparative Economy of Free and Slave Labor in Agriculture,” (Frederick, MD: John P. Thompson, 1827).

ready market. When “more slaves are kept than were needed to cultivate the land economically,” Russell wrote, “where no crops are raised except maize and wheat, the surplus hands would detract as much from the profits of a plantation as the keeping of extra hands on a farm in the free states. . . .” In addition to being uneconomical, using slaves to cultivate corn and wheat created potential discipline problems. “The management of a slave on property on which nothing but wheat and Indian corn are raised is necessarily attended with great disadvantages, because the operations are diffused over a great area, and the superintendence must be more imperfect.” To support his claims, Russell pointed to three Maryland counties with different agricultural economies. In Prince George’s county, where tobacco reigned, the slave population increased from 10,565 in 1840, to 11,510 in 1850. In Cecil County, where most farmers grew wheat, corn, and grasses, the slave population decreased during the same decade, falling from 812 to 724. Likewise, the farmers in Allegany County, who specialized in cattle grazing and grain production, owned 812 slaves in 1840, and only 724 slaves in 1850. Slavery, Russell believed, could not survive in Maryland’s northern counties, where diversified agriculture favored small, family operations. In these counties, Russell concluded, “free laborers, or, more strictly speaking, small proprietors, have an advantage over slave owners.”<sup>34</sup>

The variable labor demands of wheat production and diversified agriculture forced many western Maryland’s farmers to abandon slave labor, which remained inflexible to seasonal changes, and construct a more pliable, responsive workforce. As Russell suggested, many of the region’s farmers sold their bondsmen and women to the South’s plantation regions. Unfortunately, it is difficult to arrive at precise figures concerning the number of slaves from western Maryland who were transported south, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the interstate slave trade was brisk. Allen Sparrow, who lived near Middletown, Maryland, had vivid memories of slaves being driven south:

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<sup>34</sup> Robert Russell, North America, Its Agriculture and Climate, Containing Observations on the Agriculture and Climate of Canada, the United States, and the Island of Cuba (Edinburgh, Scotland: Adam and Charles

I have seen from 20 to 40 Negros hand cuf together one on each side to a long chain, the Georgeman as they called them then with the whip in his hand driving them. The brought them round through the Country same as a man would Horses and Cows. They paid when the Markets were good high prices, from \$600 to \$1200 per men and five to eight hundred for women, especially if they were young and good looking. There was men that followed it for a living. They took them to Georgia and sold them to work on Cotton Farms. At that time there was very few people but what thought it was all right and I thought if a negro runaway I was in duty bound to catch him as if a horse or anything else had runaway. So much for the part of the country I was raised in.<sup>35</sup>

Farmers developed many strategies to achieve this goal, but their overwhelming concern remained the same, to guarantee the minimum amount of labor necessary for the farm's operation without having to support idle, non-productive laborers during the slack seasons. Central to their calculations were the comparative costs of slave and free labor. Unfortunately, it is difficult to arrive at concrete numbers concerning the relative cost and value of slave, free black, and white labor, as the available evidence is fragmentary and inconclusive. Englishman William Strickland, in his study of American agriculture, believed that maintaining a slave was less expensive than employing a white laborer on an annual contract, but cautioned his readers that slaves were indifferent, often negligent workers.<sup>36</sup> The cost of employing a white laborer varied. When engaged on an annual or monthly contract, laborers generally worked for \$14 to \$15 per month. Laborers hired by the day or to perform specific tasks received around \$1 per day. During harvest, wages soared, with experienced cradlers receiving \$1.25 to \$1.75 per day and other hands receiving a daily wage between \$.75 and \$1.00.<sup>37</sup> Some farmers apparently found the cost of free laborers prohibitive, as evidenced by the large number of farmers who maintained a handful of bondsmen and women on their farms. Farmers choosing this approach to plantation management relied on their slaves to provide constant, steady labor throughout the year, but depended on hired slaves, free blacks, and whites during planting and harvesting. George F.

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Black, 1857), 134-44.

<sup>35</sup> Allen Sparrow Diary. George Brigham Jr. Library, Middletown, Maryland.

<sup>36</sup> Observations on the Agriculture of the United States of America (London: W. Bulmer & Co., 1801), 34-35.

<sup>37</sup> John Palmer, Journal of Travels in the United States of North America and in Lower Canada Performed



Hyser, a prosperous farmer near Hagerstown, Maryland, owned five slaves, but during the wheat harvest he hired upwards of fifteen hands to cut, bind, and store the crop.<sup>38</sup> Still others relied on delayed emancipation or term slavery to satisfy their labor demands. Many Washington County slaveholders held their human chattel until they were in their twenties, thirties, or forties, thus keeping their slaves during their most productive years without the burden of maintaining older slaves incapable of working. Not only did delayed emancipation spare slaveholders the expense of supporting superannuated slaves, it also created a measure of flexibility in the region's labor force; a planter unable or unwilling to purchase a slave for life could purchase the time, or term, of a slave who would be freed at a certain age.

How western Maryland's slaves negotiated the terrain created by the region's labor demands remains uncertain. Census records reveal the broad contours of slave life, but a better understanding of family life, community formation, internal economies and exchange, and resistance will require an examination of plantation records, fugitive slave advertisements, and court records. At present, however, the evidence warrants some tentative conclusions. The first, and perhaps most important, is that diversified agriculture and small slaveholdings did not translate into better treatment for Washington County's bondsmen and women. While some contemporaries claimed that slaves in western Maryland received better treatment than slaves in southern Maryland or the Deep South, those slaves who left behind accounts of their enslavement offered harsh condemnations of the "peculiar institution." James W. C. Pennington, a fugitive slave from western Maryland, scoffed at the notion of "'kind masters,' 'Christian masters,' 'the mildest form of slavery,' or 'well fed and clothed slaves.'" Slavery, he insisted, whether in Maryland, Virginia, Georgia, or Louisiana, operated on "the property system, the bill of sale principle," which "keeps the slaves in the most unpleasant apprehensions, like a prisoner in

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in the Year 1817 (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1818), 39-40;

<sup>38</sup> George F. Heyser, *Harvest Rolls, 1825 through 1855, 1861 through 1865*. Maryland Historical Society. Baltimore, Maryland.

chains awaiting his trial.” George Ross, himself a fugitive from Hagerstown, Maryland, admitted that, “If I had my choice, I would rather live in Maryland than Virginia.” “Slavery is harder down there [Virginia] than in Maryland,” he continued, “they have larger plantations and more servants, and they seem to be more severe.” Furthermore, Ross believed that slaveholders in southern Maryland’s tobacco plantations were more demanding than western and northern Maryland’s farmers. “Down in Prince George’s County, Maryland,” he observed, “they are a little harder than they are in the upper part of the South.” Slaveholders attempted to benefit from their perceived generosity and their reputation for kindness. Fearing that their chattels would flee to Pennsylvania, slaveholders warned slaves that if they fled north “half their labor, no matter how much, would go to the queen,” and that northerners in Pennsylvania and New York “would sell us in a round about way to New Orleans.” They even warned that slaves escaping to Canada would freeze to death. Masters reminded their slaves of the privileges they received, and encouraged to be content. “You are a good boy,” Ross recalled one slaveholder say, “and we will give enough to eat and drink, and clothe you pretty well, and pay your doctor’s bills, and see what little trouble you have, and you should make yourself satisfied.” Regardless of their treatment, however, slaves in western Maryland chafed under bondage. “There was a great desire among the slaves to get free,” Ross Recalled, “all they wanted was the means.” “I would not care what privileges I had, or how well I was treated,” he concluded, “I would not stay there [Maryland] under any consideration, because I know how good freedom is.”<sup>39</sup>

Although slaveholders in the lower Shenandoah Valley wielded considerable power over their chattels, their closeness to free territory may have limited their authority. There is abundant evidence that slaveholders in the upper South brutalized their slaves, but the evidence also suggests that the prospect of losing valuable slaves to free territory may have modified their behavior. Flight was, of course, a threat throughout the South, and regardless of whether a

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<sup>39</sup> James W.C. Pennington, The Fugitive Blacksmith, in Flight From the Devil: Six Slave Narratives, ed. William Loren Katz (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996), 41; Blassingame, 405-08.

slaveholder lived in George, Louisiana, or Maryland, an absent slave meant a loss of labor.

However, in the lower Shenandoah, especially those counties in Maryland, slaveholders risked losing a slave permanently if their labor demands became unreasonable, or if they applied the lash too vigorously. A fugitive slave from Maryland's eastern shore, for example, claimed that, "I never see anybody tied up and cut and slashed as it was in Virginia and New Orleans."

Maryland, the former slave continued, "was so near the Northern States, they were afraid to whip them, because they know, if they did, they would run away from them."<sup>40</sup> The nature of diversified farming may have discouraged slaveholders from applying threats or coercion; because slaves were often away from the plantation driving wagons or working without supervision, slaveholders may have relied on incentives or rewards to keep slaves on the plantation. Slaves hauling grain became familiar with roads, which only enhanced their opportunities to escape. John Browning noted that fugitive slave Joseph Jett had been hired to masters in Faquier, Culpeper, and surrounding counties, and had become "used to driving a wagon, and is well acquainted with Falmouth and Fredericksburg, Virginia."<sup>41</sup> The frequency of slave escapes from the lower Shenandoah remain unclear. The number of fugitive slave advertisements in Hagerstown, Maryland, does, however, suggest that flight into Pennsylvania, Ohio, or New York was not an uncommon occurrence.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, in 1815, the number of fugitives alarmed the citizens of Washington and Allegany Counties, Maryland, to the point that they petitioned the state legislature for relief.<sup>43</sup> Again, the evidence only permits speculation, but it is, nevertheless, possible that slaveholders found their power somewhat curbed by the prospect of losing runaways.

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<sup>40</sup> Blassingame, 411.

<sup>41</sup> The Hagerstown Mail, July 30, 1832.

<sup>42</sup> The author is currently assembling a database of fugitive slave advertisements from lower Shenandoah Valley newspapers to determine the number of runaways, the age and gender of fugitives, and their destinations. The fugitive slave advertisements are also useful sources of information on slave family life, material culture, and the types of skills slaves possessed.

<sup>43</sup> Jeffrey Richard Brackett, The Negro in Maryland: A Study of the Institution of Slavery (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1889), 85.

Because slaveholdings in western Maryland remained small throughout the antebellum years, slave and free black families tended to be fragile and unstable. Since most slaveholdings consisted of five or fewer slaves, bondsmen and women often found spouses on neighboring plantations. These arrangements limited family visits to weekends and holidays, but longer separations were common. Slaves depended on their masters' permission to visit family members, and there was no guarantee that slaveholders would respect their chattels' family connections. James W.C. Pennington remembered that there were three or four slaves on his plantation with spouses on other plantations. "In such cases," he recalled, "it is the custom in Maryland to allow the men to go on Saturday evening to see their families, stay on the Sabbath, and returns on Monday morning, not later than 'half-an-hour by sun.'" "To overstay their time is a grave fault," he concluded, "for which, especially at busy season, they are punished."<sup>44</sup> Slaves who were married to free blacks faced similar challenges. The widespread practice of delayed or term manumission meant that many of the region's free blacks had relatives in slavery. In many cases, these free relatives facilitated their relatives' escape or attempted to purchase their freedom. Attempting to purchase a relative, however, often proved difficult. Free blacks seldom had enough money to purchase their family members, and slaveholders could raise their prices or sell enslaved relatives to slave traders. The Reverend Thomas W. Henry, for example, spent five years raising money to purchase his wife Catherine Craig and their two children. Henry purchased his wife, but her former owner, Jacob Powles, increased the price for their children and sold them.<sup>45</sup> Fugitive slave advertisements often mention that free blacks had assisted their slaves' escape, either by providing forged passes or harboring runaways. Robert Carter of Jefferson County, Virginia, believed that Fanny's recently freed mothers and brothers had encouraged her escape and were helping her pass as a free black.<sup>46</sup> Isaac Rowland suspected that

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<sup>44</sup> Pennington, 52-53.

<sup>45</sup> From Slaver to Salvation: The Autobiography of Rev. Thomas W. Henry of the A.M.E. Church, ed. Jean Libby (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 94), xxvii.

<sup>46</sup> Maryland Herald and Elizabethtown Weekly, March 31, 1802.



his slave Jim Hinton would flee towards Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where he had relatives.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, Peter Demory believed that his slave Harley “will try to reach Pennsylvania, in the neighborhood of Brownsville, as his father and mother live there.”<sup>48</sup> Despite African-Americans’ determined efforts to maintain their families, the task often proved overwhelming. Perhaps the greatest obstacle confronting black families was the domestic slave trade. Although some masters attempted to protect slave families, it was not uncommon for slaves to lose relatives to the Deep South’s cotton and sugar plantations. James Pennington, for example, lost his mother to the interstate slave trade.<sup>49</sup> Recalling his years at Hagerstown, Maryland, former slaves George Ross noted with disgust that:

I have seen hundreds of cases where families were separated. I have seen them in droves, 150 or 200 together, men, women, and children, linked side by side. . . . I have seen them from eight or nine years old up to 45 or 50; and when the mothers were sold, I have seen young babes, from the cradle in these gangs. I have seen this many and many a time, and heard them cry fit to break their hearts.<sup>50</sup>

The very circumstances that led some observers to the conclusion that slavery on western Maryland’s small farms and plantations was less severe than bondage elsewhere -- the small size of slaveholdings, the less demanding routine of cereal crop production, and the close association between masters and slaves -- undermined African-Americans. Scattered across several plantations, subject to the whims of slaveholders, and under the domestic slave trade’s long shadow, black families struggled to maintain tenuous relationships.<sup>51</sup>

## 5. Slavery at Ferry Hill Plantation

Reconstructing the lives of Colonel John Blackford’s slaves at Ferry Hill Plantation offers an excellent entry into slavery in western Maryland. Blackford recorded the labor performed by slaves, white laborers, and free blacks in his daybooks, which detail how he

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<sup>47</sup> The Hagerstown Mail, July 31, 1829.

<sup>48</sup> The Hagerstown Mail, July 12, 1833.

<sup>49</sup> Pennington, 89.

<sup>50</sup> Blassingame, 405.

<sup>51</sup> Fields, 24-31.

employed his slaves, how slave and free laborers interacted, and how he maintained discipline at Ferry Hill Plantation. The journals do not, however, provide extensive information about the slaves' personal lives. Blackford maintained his journals to keep track of the productive labor performed on his plantation, thus he seldom recorded how his slaves spent their evenings and Sundays, whether or not his slaves engaged in independent production, or how they interacted with the region's larger slave and free black populations. Furthermore, Blackford's journals provide little information on his slaves' ages and family relations.

A final obstacle to understanding slavery at Ferry Hill Plantation is that Blackford's journals offer few clues concerning how and when he acquired his slaves. The only reference to slave purchases is Blackford's journal entry of April 17, 1838. "Negro Charlotte's age, I find from examining a bill of sale, is 84," Blackford wrote. "I bought her on April 28, 1798 from William Thornbury."<sup>52</sup> It appears that Blackford began acquiring slaves during the late-eighteenth century and that Ferry Hill Plantation's slave community grew steadily through the early-nineteenth century. Census records indicate that Blackford owned seven slaves in 1800. By 1810, however, his slaveholding had decreased to five. How Blackford's slaveholding increased to eighteen slaves is, at present, unknown, although the large number of children on Ferry Hill Plantation suggest that natural increase accounted for the slave community's growth. What happened to Blackford's slaves after his death remains unclear. Blackford bequeathed Edmund and Julius to his son Franklin, who later purchased Aaron (\$325) and Murphy (\$450) at the estate sale. Blackford requested in his will that, "care shall be taken to prevent any of my slaves being sold out of the state or to slave traders or their agents unless of grave faults, or to any but humane and good masters," but whether those wishes were honored remains unknown. The bulk of

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<sup>52</sup> It appears that Blackford emancipated Charlotte at some point. An inventory of Blackford's property taken later that does not contain any mention of Charlotte, and Blackford consistently referred to her as a visitor to Ferry Hill Plantation. It is possible that Blackford had hired her, but given her advanced age this seems unlikely. John Blackford Journals, April 17, and April 24, 1839.

Blackford's slaves were sold at his estate sale to unknown parties.<sup>53</sup>

Although Blackford's journals are vague on certain aspects of slave life, they offer sufficient evidence to make informed speculations about the slaves' ages and family connections. Blackford owned six adult male slaves, Murphy (Murf), Edmund (Ned), Julius (Jupe), Isaiah, Enoch, and Will, who performed most of the field labor. In addition to his field hands, Blackford owned four adult slave women named Daphney, Hannah, Biddle, and Caroline, who performed domestic and light agricultural labor. The children Mary, Kate, David, George, Ann, John, Danny, and Warren completed Blackford's slaveholding, which, at the time of his death of 1839, consisted of eighteen slaves.<sup>54</sup> Blackford refers to Hannah and Will as a married couple, but there is no evidence that the other slaves were married.<sup>55</sup> Daphney may have had a free black or slave husband living in Boonsboro or Sharpsburg, Maryland, as she fled to those towns on several occasions. Daphney miscarried two children on March 8, 1838, but Blackford did not record the children's father, which suggests that he did not know who fathered the children, or that the father lived on a neighboring farm. Likewise, Edmund may have been married to a free black woman. On December 21, 1839, Franklin Blackford noted that, Edmund had "gone to his wife's house" for the holidays.<sup>56</sup>

Blackford's slaves had family and social relationships that extended beyond Ferry Hill Plantation and connected them with the region's large slave and free black populations.

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<sup>53</sup> Franklin Blackford Journals, December 13, 1839. Will, John Blackford, November 1, 1839. Wills, Washington County Maryland, Book D, pp. 335-37. Maryland Hall of Records. Annapolis, Maryland.

<sup>54</sup> The total value of Blackford's slaves was \$5,645. Washington County Inventories, 1839-1842, Liber L, Folio 237-39. Maryland Hall of Records. Annapolis, Maryland.

<sup>55</sup> On October 26, 1836, Blackford wrote that "Hannah, Will's wife, was delivered of a fine, large female child. . . . Had an old one-legged negro midwife from Shepherdstown." Similarly, on March 28, 1838, Blackford noted that "Hannah, Will's wife, delivered of a female child about twelve o'clock last night, so reports Mrs. Fry who delivered her." John Blackford Journals.

<sup>56</sup> Franklin Blackford Journals, December 22, 1839. Marriages between slaves on neighboring plantations and between slaves and free blacks were common in Maryland. The small size of slaveholdings meant that slaves had to look outside their home plantation or farm to find a spouse. Marriages between slaves and free blacks occurred frequently due to the size of Maryland's free black population, which, by the outbreak of the Civil War, was the largest in the nation. Slaves and free blacks often worked alongside each other, and it was not uncommon for them to participate in the same religious and social institutions. Fields, 28-

Blackford generally granted his slaves leave during the holidays and the weekend after harvest, which the slaves used to visit family and friends. After completing the 1837 wheat harvest, for example, Blackford noted that, “The negroes are all off in different directions.”<sup>57</sup> On New Years Day, 1838, Blackford wrote, “The negroes are all taking holiday. There is no work carrying on.”<sup>58</sup> Blackford’s slaves occasionally received visits from family members, and he generally granted them permission to visit relatives. Will’s father Gurry, who was apparently a free black, made frequent visits to Ferry Hill Plantation, often staying for several weeks and entering Blackford’s employ.<sup>59</sup> On June 9, 1838, Blackford allowed Will “to see his father, who he has heard is sick at Smithfield.”<sup>60</sup> Similarly, on April 28, 1839, a black man notified Hannah of her father’s death. At Hannah’s request, Blackford “promised to let her go to his funeral on Whitsuntide.”<sup>61</sup> The ties between Blackford’s slaves and those at nearby Antietam Forge may have been particularly strong. The blacks at Antietam Forge had organized an African Methodist Episcopalian (AME) Congregation, and some of Blackford’s slaves attended their revivals and services. On November 8, 1835, Will and Hannah attended a black man’s funeral at Antietam Forge, and on September 3, 1837, Will asked Blackford for permission to “go to the forge to hear a colored man preach.” Slaves at Ferry Hill came into frequent contact with free black laborers and travelers.

Blackford constantly augmented his slaves’ labor with that of free blacks, hired slaves, and white tenants and laborers, but he depended upon his slaves to provide regular labor throughout the year. The seasonal demands of the various crops and livestock raised at Ferry Hill Plantation dictated how Blackford managed his laborers. The number of laborers engaged and tasks performed varied from season to season and could be dramatically changed by weather, illnesses, and economic downturns, but generally followed an annual routine. During January,

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<sup>57</sup> John Blackford Journals, July 16, 1837.

<sup>58</sup> John Blackford Journals, January 1, 1838.

<sup>59</sup> John Blackford Journals, June 25, 1836; December 28, 1836; and November 6, 1838.

<sup>60</sup> John Blackford Journals, June 9, 1839.



February, and March, the slaves, with the assistance of a few white laborers, filled Blackford's ice house, hauled timber to Blackford's tenants and customers in nearby communities, and threshed the previous year's rye and wheat crops. In April and May, Blackford's laborers continued processing the previous year's crops, hauled grain to either Mumma's or Entler's Mills, repaired fences and buildings, began plowing the fields and filling gullies, and planted corn, clover, Timothy, and some garden vegetables. In late-May and early-June, Blackford's hands plowed and weeded the potato and corn patches, finished processing his rye and wheat harvests, and began preparations for harvesting the upcoming harvest. Between mid-June and mid-July, Blackford's slaves and several hired laborers harvested the hay, rye, and wheat crops. After the harvest crew reaped the grains, the crops were raked, bound, and stored in the barn or stacked in the field. During late-July, August, and September, Blackford's laborers performed several tasks, including weeding, maintenance and repairs, hauling manure to the fields, and depending on the weather, harvesting the potato, corn, and pumpkin crops. In the fall, Blackford's slaves brought crops into the barn, plowed the fields, began hauling timber, and, in December, butchered hogs and stored the meat.

Blackford's diversified agricultural and business pursuits translated into numerous small tasks, which made large groups of laborers impractical. Even during harvest, when Blackford pressed large numbers of free laborers and slaves into the field, he retained slaves to manage the ferry, drive wagons, and perform maintenance work. Blackford's journal entry from May 7, 1838, illustrates the variety of work performed at Ferry Hill Plantation:

Murf laying off the lot preparatory to planting it in corn . . . Will and Enoch in the clearing and hauling some chips home . . . Began to plant with the white flint hominy corn and pumpkin seed. Jupe, Daphney, Caroline and Isaiah engaged . . . Enoch reports and two sons came at nine o'clock this morning and are cutting [wood] in the clearing . . . Ned drove Franklin's gig with a man to Boonsboro and returned after night . . . Shellman cutting wood at Franklin's.

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<sup>61</sup> John Blackford ford Journals, April 28, 1839.

Often, laborers performed several chores during the day. During the morning of February 24, 1837, Lewis and Enoch worked in the smith shop, while Franklin and Will hauled three loads of firewood. Blackford reassigned his laborers in the afternoon, sending Will to the barn, where he threshed rye, and ordering Enoch to assist Ned and Julius in the ferry boat. Because Blackford's laborers were scattered across the plantation, he could not supervise them effectively and often relied on slaves for progress reports. The slaves managing Blackford's ferry brought their receipts to the plantation office every evening, and Blackford apparently trusted them to make accurate reports of the ferriages. Blackford became more dependent upon progress reports during 1838 and 1839, when failing health confined him indoors.<sup>62</sup>

Blackford assigned tasks to his slaves according to their age and gender, but the divisions between field hands and domestic servants, males and females, were never absolute. Men performed heavy labor on the farm, including lumber cutting, reaping and scything wheat, and plowing. They also drove Blackford's wagons, hauling grain, fertilizer, feed, and lumber back and forth from nearby grist and lumber mills. When necessary, Blackford pressed enslaved women and children into the field, and it was not uncommon for women, whether free or slaves, to work alongside men. On May 12, 1836, for example, Blackford planted corn with Martin Shellman, a white laborer, plowing, and slaves Julius, Isaiah, and Caroline sowing seeds.<sup>63</sup> At times, female slaves performed a wide variety of tasks. During November, 1837, Daphney nursed Sarah Blackford, assisted Will repairing the fodder house's frame, worked alongside Enoch preparing clover seed, and cleared earth from the straw house's foundation.<sup>64</sup> Blackford's willingness to employ women and children in varied tasks does not, however, mean that he failed to recognize age and gender differences. Blackford tended to employ slave women and children as household laborers. Daphney and Moll washed and ironed clothing, while the slave children

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<sup>62</sup> On July 24, 1839, an ailing Blackford wrote, "I am not able to see the hands." By September 3, 1839, he depended on Will's daily report of the plantation's operations. John Blackford Journals.

<sup>63</sup> John Blackford Journals, May 12, 1836.

<sup>64</sup> John Blackford Journals, November 1, through November 15, 1837.

waited on Blackford's family and tended the stables. These slaves also assisted Sarah Blackford with gardening and gathering fruit in the orchard.<sup>65</sup> Even when they entered the field, women and children tended to perform less demanding labor. During the wheat harvest, women raked and bound the wheat sheaves, but never handled the cradles.<sup>66</sup> Likewise, during planting season women and children scattered seed, while men drilled and plowed.

Blackford had some difficulty finding constant, profitable employment for his slaves, a situation that forced him to occasionally lease his surplus slaves. Blackford's slave hiring was an outgrowth of the region's agricultural economy; he needed a certain number of laborers to perform essential labor on his estate, but he seldom required the services of all eighteen slaves. Blackford's journals suggest that the adult males labored steadily throughout the year, but other servants, especially women, adolescents, and children, appear as laborers irregularly, suggesting that they were performing unimportant chores on the plantation or were idle. Even during spring and summer, the seasons with the heaviest labor demands, Blackford had enough slaves and free laborers to make leasing an attractive option. During the spring and summer of 1829, Blackford leased Murphy to George Entler, who employed Murphy on a barge traveling down the Potomac River. By April 21, 1829, Murphy had completed six trips in Entler's barge, which garnered Blackford \$41.50. It is unclear whether Blackford allowed Murphy to keep his earnings, although he did record a \$3.50 payment from Entler to Murphy. Blackford also leased or loaned slaves to family members and tenants. On November 19, 1837, Blackford sent Daphney to assist his daughter Janette Smith with domestic chores. The following year, Blackford leased Murphy to

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<sup>65</sup> On October 31, 1836, Blackford noted that "Mrs. B. with Daphney and Caroline, Enoch, and the two little boys . . . went out to the orchard to pick apples."

<sup>66</sup> Farmers and planters throughout the region created similar gender and age divisions. George F. Heyser, who farmed outside Hagerstown, Maryland, employed female rakers and binders, but reserved cradling (cutting) for men. George F. Heyser Harvest Roll, 1831. MS 2191. Maryland Historical Society. Baltimore, Maryland. Bacchus White, a slave on a Virginia wheat plantation, recalled "Dey w'uld rake de wheat jes as clean, an' den de 'omen w'uld bind it up in shocks." Similarly, Frank Bell, who was also a slave on a Virginia wheat plantation, recalled, "Growed mostly wheat on the plantation, an' de men would scythe and cradle while de women folks would rake and bind. Den us little chillun, boys an' girls, would come along an' stack." Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds., Weevils in

tenant farmer Joseph Knode. Knode assumed responsibility for feeding and clothing Murphy, and agreed to pay Blackford \$70 over twelve months. Blackford also leased his domestic servants. On January 15, 1839, he sent Daphney to live with Samuel Bentz. Under the agreement, Blackford agreed to furnish Daphney's clothing, while Bentz agreed to provide her food, lodging, and pay Blackford \$50.<sup>67</sup>

It is difficult to determine whether Blackford's slaves had any opportunities to work for themselves, either by marketing their garden crops or hiring themselves to neighboring farmers. There is some evidence that slaves in Washington County, Maryland, sold manufactured items and produce, although the extent of the trade remains unclear. James W.C. Pennington recalled that each slave family received a "small 'patch' of ground . . . from this he was expected to furnish himself and his boys hats, etc." "These gardens," he continued, "they had to work by night; from these also, they had to raise their own provisions, as no potatoes, cabbage, etc., were allowed them." In addition to raising produce, the slaves manufactured brooms, which they marketed in nearby towns. Although the trade was once prevalent, Pennington believed that opportunities for slaves to engage in independent production were declining because "scrubbing brushes, wooden trays, mats, baskets, and straw hats which the slaves made, are furnished by the shakers and other small manufacturers, from the free states of the north."<sup>68</sup> Slaves and free blacks living near Ferry Hill Plantation apparently engaged in small production to augment their incomes. On October 8, 1837, John Blackford purchased two baskets from Mrs. P. Richard's slave Armsted. Several months later, he sent Will to Shepherdstown, Virginia, to purchase five brooms from "an old negro."<sup>69</sup> Other free blacks sold game and produce to Blackford. Joe Corban, a free black who occasionally worked at Ferry Hill, sold Blackford squirrels and turnips

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the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), 26; 304.

<sup>67</sup> John Blackford Journals, March 8, 1829; April 21, 1829; November 19, 1837; October 24, 1838; January 15, 1839.

<sup>68</sup> Pennington, 91-92.

<sup>69</sup> John Blackford Journals, March 10, 1838.



on August 28, 1839. There is no evidence, however, that Blackford allowed his slaves to maintain gardens or sell manufactured items. Nor does it appear that Blackford permitted his bondsmen and women to hire themselves on evenings and weekends. Indeed, there is only reference to a Ferry Hill slave hiring himself. On Christmas Day, 1838, Will asked permission to “haul some hoop poles for Mr. Austin to Sharpsburg as a perquisite. He says one dollar was offered him.”

Maintaining discipline on Ferry Hill Plantation often proved difficult. In addition to discipline problems that plagued slaveholders throughout Maryland, most notably the possibility of escape and the presence a large free black population, Blackford faced additional difficulties because his plantation sat alongside the Potomac River, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, and Blackford’s ferry. Fugitive slaves often followed the rivers and canals north.<sup>70</sup> On at least two occasions, members of the Blackford captured fugitive slaves along the Potomac River. On July 29, 1829, John Blackford captured a fugitive slave woman belonging to Malone, a slave trader. The woman was committed to the Hagerstown, Maryland, jail and presumably returned to Malone. On June 1, 1839, Franklin Blackford found five slaves hiding near the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. Describing the incident, Blackford wrote:

We went down to the canal a short distance and we discovered five--one woman and a child, two girls, and one man. We arrested them and brought them to the the house. Joe Knode came up and we hitched the wagon to take them to town to have them committed to jail. We did so, the woman being pregnant and complained very much.

Later that month, Blackford collected \$200.00 from the slaves’ owner, who had taken them from the Hagerstown jail.<sup>71</sup> Maryland’s large free black population further undermined slaveholders’

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<sup>70</sup> Fugitive slave James Curry described his flight through northern Virginia and Maryland: “At Alexandria, I crossed the Potomac river and came to Washington, where I made friends with a colored family. . . . I then took to the Montgomery road, but, wish to escape and it being cloudy, I lost my course, and fell back again along the Potomac river, and traveled on the tow path of the canal . . . . I soon entered a colored person’s house on the side of the canal, where they gave me breakfast and treated me very kindly. I traveled on through Williamsport and Hagerstown, in Maryland, and, on the nineteenth day of July . . . I crossed the line into Pennsylvania. . . .” Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 143.

<sup>71</sup> Franklin Blackford Journals, June 3, and June 14, 1839.

control of their human property. Slaves, especially those in western Maryland, often worked alongside free blacks, developed family connections with freedmen and women, and, occasionally, relied upon the assistance of free blacks to escape. Moreover, as historian Barbara J. Fields observed, free blacks, by their very presence, weakened slavery by demonstrating that bondage was not the natural condition of African-Americans, and that emancipation and escape were possible.<sup>72</sup>

Blackford confronted a variety of discipline problems, most of which stemmed from alcohol. Indeed, excessive drinking and quarreling were almost constant sources of trouble. Blackford's slaves came into frequent contact with travelers, both on Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and the Potomac River, who supplied them whiskey. Blackford often complained about Ned, Murphy, and Julius drinking excessively. "Murf has been hanging about the packet boats all day," Blackford grumbled, "and has obtained liquor sufficient to make him fool."<sup>73</sup> "Julius," Blackford noted angrily, "has been drunk and behaved so bad that I tied and whipped him severely in the office."<sup>74</sup> Occasionally, Blackford's slaves obtained whiskey from white laborers. On August 20, 1838, Blackford's slave Caroline "discovered and brought in a bottle of whiskey which Murf and James Moore hid in the carriage house."<sup>75</sup> Petty theft and property destruction occurred rarely, but remained a nuisance to Blackford and his family. In November, 1836, Blackford wrote that, "It has been proven that Daphney stole stocking yarn and put it in Mrs. [ineligible] hands to knit."<sup>76</sup> Several months later, Blackford "corrected little negroes John, Dave, and Ann for stealing."<sup>77</sup> In addition to stealing household items and money, Blackford's slaves occasionally stole themselves by remaining away from work, taking extended visits to family members, or attempting to escape. Most slaves' absences were short, generally not more than one

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<sup>72</sup> Fields, 38-39.

<sup>73</sup> John Blackford Journals, April 30, 1837.

<sup>74</sup> John Blackford Journals, August 15, 1837.

<sup>75</sup> John Blackford Journals, August 20, 1838.

<sup>76</sup> John Blackford Journals, November 25, 1836.

or two days. On March 8, 1837, Franklin Blackford went to Shepherds-town, Virginia, to retrieve Julius, who, Blackford complained, “frequently leaves his business at the boat.”<sup>78</sup> A year later, Blackford sent his slave Will to Sharpsburg, Maryland, to find Murphy, who had wandered into town while drunk.<sup>79</sup>

Blackford tolerated some indiscretions, especially the slaves’ drunkenness, which he seldom punished. Likewise, Blackford often complained that slaves “piddled about the barn” or “piddled about their business,” but he rarely punished these offenses. Blackford did not automatically resort to physical punishment when disciplining his slaves. On January 11, 1837, Blackford lectured Murphy about his excessive drinking. Two months later, Lewis, whom Blackford had hired from his stepfather, became drunk and stumbled into the Potomac River. Instead of flogging the slave, Blackford provided a stern lecture on drunkenness.<sup>80</sup> On other occasions, Blackford punished drunken slaves by locking them in the blacksmith shop or sending them into the barn to shovel manure.<sup>81</sup> That said, Blackford did resort to physical punishment and it was not uncommon for slaves to receive severe floggings. “I gave Moll a pretty severe whipping for bad conduct,” Blackford wrote on May 14, 1829. On Christmas Day, 1836, Aaron, a young slave at Ferry Hill, received a flogging for absenting himself. When Enoch damaged a cart and allowed a horse to escape, Blackford “corrected” the slave “by giving him a few lashes.”<sup>82</sup>

Blackford provided his slaves with adequate clothing, food, and medical attention. When clothing and feeding his slaves, Blackford alternated between individual expenditures for specific slaves and large purchases for his entire slaveholding. On November 28, 1836, for example,

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<sup>77</sup> John Blackford Journals, May 11, 1837.

<sup>78</sup> John Blackford Journals, March 7, 1837. See also May 14, 1837.

<sup>79</sup> John Blackford Journals, March 31, 1838.

<sup>80</sup> John Blackford Journals, March 5, 1837.

<sup>81</sup> John Blackford Journals, April 19, and June 1, 1839.

<sup>82</sup> John Blackford Journals, January 5, 1838.

Blackford had “Old Negro Bachus,” a free black, measure eleven pairs of boots for his adult slaves. A year later, however, he purchased “a pair of strong shoes” for Will. Blackford often hired seamstresses and tailors to produce bulk clothing for slaves, but he also contracted for individual items. On November 29, 1837, he hired “Deloney the tailor” to make jackets for his adult slaves. The following summer, he purchased twilled cotton for “negro pantaloons.” Blackford supplemented these orders with special purchases throughout the year. On January 26, 1838, he purchased coats for Murphy and Ned. Occasionally, Blackford allowed his slaves to purchase items with money he provided. On January 15, 1838, he gave Edmund \$1.50 to buy a blanket at Lane and Webb’s store. Blackford did not keep extensive records on the food he provided his slaves. There are no records of special food purchased for slaves, which suggests that the slaves ate meat and produce from Blackford’s estates. If that were the case, the slaves’ diet probably consisted of corn bread, various fruits and vegetables from the gardens, and salted pork. The slaves may have supplemented their diets with fish from the Potomac River or produce from their own gardens, but Blackford’s journals offer no direct evidence in this regard. Blackford’s journals do, however, provide excellent information on the medical treatment his slaves received. Blackford took an active interest in his slaves’ health, and he summoned physicians to treat injured and sick slaves. “Murf complaining,” Blackford recorded on September 6, 1838, “[he] has been over to the Doct. who gave him calomel. I gave him salts in the morning.” When Caroline injured herself in the barnyard, Blackford called his family’s physician, who prescribed salts and treated her joints with Indian pepper and warm wraps.<sup>83</sup>

Although Blackford owned eighteen slaves, he could not have operated Ferry Hill Plantation without the assistance of tenants, itinerant laborers, both free black and white, artisans, and slaves hired from neighboring farmers and planters. Indeed, there were times, especially during planting and harvesting, when free laborers outnumbered slaves. In 1829, for example,

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<sup>83</sup> John Blackford Journals, January 21, 1839; November 28, 1836; December 8, 1837; June 26, 1838; November 29, 1837; January 26, 1838; January 15, 1838.



Blackford employed three white men and a free black to cut his wheat. The remainder of the harvest crew consisted of four white binders, one of Blackford's slaves, who also bound, two hired slaves, a free black man and his wife, and two white children who carried sheaves.<sup>84</sup>

During the 1830s, Blackford appears to have relied more heavily on slave labor, due, in part, to several adolescent slaves entering the plantation work force. Nevertheless, Blackford could not complete his harvest without hired laborers. In 1838, Blackford ordered Will and Murphy, both slaves at Ferry Hill Plantation, to reap the harvest, while slaves Julius, Caroline, and Enoch bound the wheat. Complimenting the slaves were three white laborers, who assisted binding the crop, and four whites who helped Blackford's tenant Joseph Knode harvest his crop.<sup>85</sup> After the harvest, when Blackford discharged most of his laborers, he still depended on white artisans and itinerant laborers to operate his plantation. None of Blackford's slaves appear to have had mechanical skills, which forced Blackford to rely on hired blacksmiths, coopers, carpenters, seamstresses, and occasionally domestic servants. During 1829 and 1830, for example, Blackford employed John Mostaler in his blacksmith shop, Mary Ann Bowers to do housework, Catharine Thomas to spin wool, and two seamstresses to sew for his family and slaves.<sup>86</sup> Unskilled laborers were also necessary during autumn and winter, when Blackford concentrated on threshing grains, repairing the plantation, and harvesting timber.

When hiring free black, slave, or white workers, Blackford adjusted terms of service and wages to meet seasonal labor demands. Blackford seldom engaged laborers to annual contracts, preferring instead to make informal arrangements for short periods. When Blackford entered into annual agreements, he set wages according to the laborer's age, skill, and made adjustments for food, clothing, and rent.

### **Franklin, Henry Van Swearingen, and Helen Blackford (1839-1840)**

In his last will and testament, John Blackford directed his executors to divide Ferry Hill

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<sup>84</sup> John Blackford Journals, June 29 and 30, 1829.

<sup>85</sup> John Blackford Journals, July 7, 8, and 10, 1838.

Plantation among his children. Franklin Blackford, John Blackford's eldest son, received the ferry franchise, the ferry landing, the boats, the ferry house, the slaves Edmund and Julius, ten acres of land contiguous to the ferry, and Blackford's house and lots in Shepherdstown, Virginia. Henry Van Swearinger Blackford received his father's mansion. Blackford's gold watch went to William Moore, then aged eleven. He placed William Moore under the guardianship of his friend Joseph Merrick. Blackford also willed the lower farm, consisting of three parcels purchased from Thomas Shepherd, Dr. Hays, and Jacob Bedinger, to William Moore. Blackford allowed tenant Joseph Knode to remain on the lower farm for two years, provided that continued "paying a share rent as at present, committing no waste cultivating it in a farmer like manner and seeding down no more land that the guardian of my said son shall prescribe and mowing no straw from the premise." Blackford granted his daughters and sisters-in-law large annuity payments. Janet Smith and Helen Blackford each received \$2,500 dollars, which would be dispersed in ten annual payments. Following the estate sale, the daughters would receive an additional \$9,500. Blackford's sister-in-law, Catherine Knode, received a \$500 annuity "in consideration of the respect and affection I bear her as of her long, continued kindness and attention in my family."<sup>87</sup>

The strongest primary source material for Ferry Hill Place in the decade between John Blackford's death and the Reverend Robert Douglas' acquisition of the plantation are the Franklin Blackford Journals of 1838 through 1846. Henry Van Swearingen, Helen, William, and Janet Blackford apparently lived at Ferry Hill Place during these years, but they left no surviving diaries or letters. Thus, this chapter will focus on Franklin Blackford, his business ventures, his family and social life, and the ferry.

Born on October 14, 1820, Franklin Blackford was the eldest son of John and Elizabeth Blackford. The Blackford family journals offer no clues concerning his education, but the fact

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<sup>86</sup> John Blackford Journals, 1829-1831.

<sup>87</sup> John Blackford Will, November 1, 1839. Washington County Historical Society, Hagerstown, Maryland

that John Blackford sent William and Henry Van Swearinger to private schools and college, it seems fair to assume that Franklin received some formal education. As a young man, Franklin labored on his father's estate, working alongside the family's slaves, receiving ferriages, and collecting John Blackford's debts. On October 19, 1836, Franklin married Elizabeth Miller, daughter of Jacob Miller, Esq., in a service performed by the Reverend I. Rebaugh. The couple had six children: Laura, Helen, Mary, William Henry, John Frank, and Jeanette. After his marriage, Franklin Blackford moved into the Ferry House, which his father had provided as a home and source of income.

The relationship between Franklin and John Blackford was often strained. The source of their quarrels remains uncertain, but it seems that most disputes revolved around Franklin's desire to assume control of a larger share of the plantation's operations and his father's refusal to surrender his authority. "I then asked father if his farm was for rent," Franklin wrote on February 4, 1839, "he told me it was not." Angered, Franklin concluded, "I am now satisfied that he is determined not to do anything for me." Two weeks later, Franklin went to neighboring farms, hoping to leave his father's plantation and become a tenant elsewhere. "I met Miller on the road and I asked him about his place," Franklin noted on February 19, 1839, "but he says it is too small to do for anything." Still chafing under his father's authority, Franklin became increasingly dissatisfied with his situation. Franklin's anger became apparent on April 7, 1839, when a business discussion with John Blackford degenerated into an argument. "I found him in his office and I told him about some business I had attended to for him," Franklin wrote. "He got out of temper and made rude and unjust remarks," Franklin continued. "I made him several appropriate answers and left." As John Blackford's health deteriorated during the summer of 1839, friends of the family attempted to reconcile the Blackford's dispute. On August 10, 1839, John Merrick visited Ferry Hill Place. "Mr. Merrick came down to see me early this morning," Franklin wrote, ". . . he says he knows about father's concerns and mine and that he was about bringing us to reconciliation." It is unclear whether Franklin and John Blackford resolved their differences

before the colonel's death.

Franklin Blackford's journals suggest that he devoted much of his leisure time to gambling, horse racing, and fox hunting. The following represents a mere handful of the recreational activities recorded in Franklin Blackford's journals. Franklin constructed a race track near the canal and often hosted races. On September 23, 1843, Franklin wrote:

. . .we had a trial between Little Bit and Alice Gray. Little Bit won the first race, but she not able to repeat with Alice Gray. . . . I have been working all day at the track. Tyler and Reel are fixing up the judge's stand.

When not racing horses, Blackford engaged in other sports. On Christmas Day, 1843, Blackford and several friends had several cockfights. On January 1, 1845, he attended another cockfight in Sharpsburg. Blackford was also an avid hunter. "Joe Piper and others came out," he wrote on December 26, 1843. "We turned out the fox and caught him in about 15 minutes."

In many ways, Franklin Blackford's business activities mirrored his father's. As was the case with the elder Blackford, Franklin concentrated his efforts on the plantation's fields and Van Swearingen's Ferry. Entries in Franklin Blackford's diaries suggest that he oversaw farm operations on Ferry Hill Place in the years following his father's death. Blackford's journals indicate that he directed the harvest, hired additional hands, and negotiated with tenant farmers. Given the size of his own inheritance, Blackford was most, in all probability, managing the land owned by his brothers Henry Van Swearingen and William Blackford, whose age and relative inexperience may have unsuited them farm management. Blackford derived additional income from Ferry Hill lands by harvesting timber, selling livestock in local markets, and, perhaps most importantly, by trading horses. Blackford seems to have had a passion for horses, as indicated by the frequent references to horse trading in his journals. In addition to overseeing operations on Ferry Hill Place and operating Van Swearingen's Ferry, Franklin Blackford dabbled in the mercantile business. He occasionally purchased fish and assorted dry goods from passing canal boats and barges, which he then sold on commission in Shepherdstown and Sharpsburg. He also entered into a partnership to run a flatboat, which ran intermittently. Blackford augmented his



income by leasing properties in Shepherdstown and along the Maryland shore. For example, Blackford's journals record that he rented a small property called "the stone house," whose location remains unclear, to the Hughes family in 1839 and 1840. Despite his diverse activities, Franklin Blackford was racked with financial problems. He often borrowed from neighbors and, in 1843, his creditors forced him to liquidate part of his personal property at a sheriff's sale.<sup>88</sup>

Like his father, Franklin Blackford was active in local political and military organizations, but where his father achieved a measure of prominence, the younger Blackford lacked either the ambition or talent to succeed. A staunch member of the Whig Party, Franklin attended barbeques and rallies, but there is no evidence that he ever appeared on the party's ticket. Indeed, the highlight of his political career seems to have come in 1840, when the Washington County Whigs selected Blackford to represent their organization at the state convention in Baltimore. In many ways, Blackford's military career paralleled his political involvement. He served in a volunteer cavalry company raised in Shepherdstown, but his participation seems to have been irregular. Furthermore, it seems that Blackford never rose to rank of non-commissioned or commissioned officer.<sup>89</sup>

### **The Reverend Robert Douglas (1850-1861)**

Born in October, 1807, in northern Ireland, Robert Douglas was the second of nine children born to Henry Douglas and Nancy Cowan. His first wife, Mary Robertson, was the daughter of Colonel John Robertson, a prominent Hagerstown merchant. On September 29, 1840, the couple's only child, Henry Kyd Douglas, was born at Shepherdstown, Virginia. Shortly

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<sup>88</sup> Information on timber cutting and livestock raising can be found in Franklin Blackford's journal entries for January 18, 1839, January 25, 1841, November 27, 1844, and January 26, 1846. Horse trading is discussed throughout the journals. For representative entries, see February 2, 1844 and February 27, 1845. Blackford's mercantile activities are discussed in the journal entries for April 19 and July 7, 1839. On Blackford's debts and the sheriff's sale, see the journal entries for November 1, 1843, November 23, 1844, January 11, 1845, and February 6, 1846.

<sup>89</sup> On Franklin Blackford's political activities, see the journal entries for April 4, 1840, September 16, 1840, and September 25, 1844. For information on his involvement in the militia, see the November 6, 1841, February 22, 1842, and May 7, 1842, journal entries.

after the child's birth, Mary Robertson died. The Reverend Douglas soon remarried. On November 16, 1841, he married Helen Blackford, daughter of Colonel John Blackford. The couple had three children, John Blackford, Robert, and Nannie Cowan, and remained married until Robert Douglas' death on August 20, 1867.

Robert Douglas emigrated to the United States in 1823. Douglas worked as a steward, clerk, and merchant, before deciding to study law. Douglas read with his uncle, the Honorable Samuel Douglas, then Attorney General of Pennsylvania. Despite showing great promise, Douglas decided against a legal career and entered the ministry. He enrolled at the German Reformed Church's seminary at York, Pennsylvania, and, in 1833, he received his license from the Easton, Pennsylvania, Synod. Douglas then received his ordination and assumed charge of congregations at Shepherdstown, Martinsburg, and Smithfield, Virginia. Douglas served these churches through 1846, when he moved to Jefferson, Maryland, and accepted calls from area congregations. In 1850, the Reverend Douglas and his wife, Helena Douglas (Blackford), moved to Ferry Hill Plantation. Douglas soon became pastor of the Boonsboro Congregation, a position he held until 1856. Between 1856 and 1865, Douglas was without a regular call, although he often accepted invitations to preach and perform services at local congregations. In 1865, Douglas accepted the pastorate of the Mount Moriah charge, which served congregations at Sharpsburg, Keadysville, and Mount Moriah. Douglas served these congregations until his death in 1867. In addition to preaching, Douglas pursued various economic and farming ventures. He held stock in the Shepherdstown Bridge and managed Ferry Hill Plantation. By the outbreak of the American Civil War, Douglas had amassed a considerable fortune and placed his family in comfortable circumstances. In 1860, Douglas owned real estate valued at 26,000 dollars and 8,000 dollars of personal property. He held stock in the Shepherdstown Bridge, owned eleven slaves, employed an overseer to manage the plantation, and had placed his eldest son, Henry Kyd Douglas, through college.

Henry Kyd Douglas, who became the plantation's most famous owner, spent his young

adult years at Ferry Hill Place playing along the Potomac River, working in his father's fields, and studying. Excerpts from Douglas' 1853 diary suggest that he was an active, energetic youth. "Was swimming in the canal," he wrote, "got my neck sunburned." Later, Douglas noted, "we went to the river and sunk Clark's skiff by dipping it fully of water." When not playing, Douglas worked alongside slaves and free laborers in his father's fields. In the summer of 1854, Douglas wrote, "I helped Enoch to haul post rails today." During the summer harvest, Douglas joined his father's laborers in the wheat fields. On June 28, 1853, he wrote:

Mr. Rench finished harvesting a little before sundown. Then all hands to the house and made several shouts, blew the horns . . . then went to the dinner table and made the lemonade, beer, and cake disappear immediately! We then went to the river and washed ourselves.

During the autumn and winter, Douglas attended John S. Pierce's classical school in Shepherdstown, Virginia, where he studied Greek, Latin, composition, and recitation. Douglas excelled at his studies. In 1856, he was named editor of his school's literary magazine, The Mirror.

On September 18, 1856, Douglas enrolled in the junior class of Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Frederick Shriver Klein and John Howard Carrill have edited and published Douglas' college diaries, which contain a wealth of information concerning his years at Franklin and Marshall College. Thus, only a brief description of Douglas' college studies will be included in this report. The college's faculty offered a diverse liberal arts curriculum, and Douglas pursued a variety of academic subjects, ranging from chemistry, to German, French, and the classics. Douglas impressed Franklin and Marshall's faculty and students, who appointed him to various committees and welcomed him to the college's fraternities. Shortly after enrolling, Douglas was named to the "Student Escort" accompanying President James Buchanan to Washington, D.C. In May, 1857, Douglas served on the committee preparing for Franklin and Marshall's anniversary celebration. Describing the preparations, Douglas wrote:

Commenced fixing the greens for the trimming of the Hall for exhibition. Got four ladies at 8 o'clock and went to the Hall and commenced work. . . . Met again at night with about a dozen couples and had a very pleasant time. Laughed, talked, and worked until about 9 and 1/2 o'clock, when we adjourned to Madame Gruel's ice cream saloon where we spent another 1/2 hour in eating and chatting. . . . I look forward with anxiety to the close of tomorrow, which I hope will be as satisfactory as today. Read a proof-sheet of the program, corrected errors and returned it. . . .

Outside the classroom, Douglas became an active member of the Phi Kappa Sigma fraternity and befriended several local families. Indeed, Douglas enjoyed spending hours at oyster bars, reading popular novels, visiting young ladies, and carousing with his friends. At times, Douglas displayed a talent for mischief. On Sunday, November 1, 1857, Douglas five friends "started out for college on an expedition of fun and mischief. . . ."

We first got into the building the building through Prof. Porters window. We then went into the bellfry and took the clapper out of the bell and hid it in the President's desk. We then went to the Prayer Hall and carried the pulpit rostrum to the bottom of the campus and hid it in the bushes . . . before that having hidden all the hymn books. . . . [T]hen started for a wheat field and got a small calf, which we carried to the prayer hall. Yundt and I then carried in corn-fodder from an adjoining field, while the rest took Prof. Apple's desk and threw it over the fence behind the college.

Douglas graduated from Franklin and Marshall College in July, 1858. Reflecting on his studies, Douglas questioned the value of his liberal arts education. "This piece of parchment," he wrote, "will probably be about as much real value in life as stock in the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal!"<sup>90</sup>

After graduating, Douglas planned to study law at Lexington, Virginia, under Judge Brockenbaugh, but his former teacher John Pierce, who had been recently appointed principal at the Hagerstown Academy, offered Douglas a position as assistant principal and instructor. Douglas accepted Pierce's offer. In addition to teaching, Douglas continued his legal education under Judge Daniel Weisel, then president of Hagerstown Academy's Board of Trustees. When Pierce resigned, the Board of Trustees named Douglas principal. Despite gnawing concerns about his age and inexperience, Douglas accepted the position and appointed Theodore Fisher, a friend from Franklin and Marshall College, his assistant. Douglas held the position for a little

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<sup>90</sup> Klein and Carrill, eds., The Douglas Diary, xvii-xx, 1-5, 14-15, 75; Doug Bast Address.



over a year, when he decided to continue his legal career. He moved to Lexington, Virginia, to continue his legal education and, in November or December 1860, Douglas moved to St. Louis, Missouri, to practice law.

The sectional crisis, John Brown's raid, and Virginia's secession disrupted Henry Kyd Douglas' budding legal career. Ironically, Douglas was an unwitting participant in John Brown's attack on the Federal Arsenal at Harper's Ferry. In the months preceding the attack, Brown and his supporters lived on the Kennedy Farm, about three miles from Ferry Hill Place. Living under the alias Isaac Smith, Brown claimed to be prospecting for minerals and lived a quiet, unassuming life. Shortly before the attack, Douglas and his father's driver, Enoch, helped Brown transport a wagonload of weapons across the river. As Douglas remembered the incident:

I was crossing from Shepherdstown, when I found him [Brown] at the foot of the hill which rises from the river, with an overloaded two-horse wagon. He told me he was hauling miner's tools for prospecting and needed help. I went home, got my father's carriage horses and their driver, Enoch, and with their and Mr. Smith's wagon was taken a mile over the hills toward Sharpsburg. . . . [I]t was not very long until I found out that the rickety wagon contained boxes of "John Brown's Pikes" and that I was an innocent *particeps criminis* in their introduction into Maryland.

In his memoirs, Douglas spared few insults in condemning John Brown. "With a previous record as a horse thief and murderer, he was now playing a new role as conspirator," he sneered. Belittling Brown's foiled uprising, Douglas quipped that "'Osawatomie" was "full of cunning, with much experience and no little intelligence, cruel, bloodthirsty," but was "singularly ignorant not only of the white people among whom he had camped, but of the characteristics of the race for whom he was about to raise the standard of insurrection."<sup>91</sup>

As Douglas launched his legal career, he watched national political developments with growing unease. A staunch supporter of states rights and popular sovereignty, Douglas believed that southern states had the constitutional right to secede, but hoped that politicians could maintain the federal union and avert secession. "I had no more doubt of the right of a state to

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<sup>91</sup> Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, 14-15.

secede than I had of the truth of my catechism,” he remembered, “yet I could not make myself believe that there could be a dissolution of the Union; perhaps because I was so much opposed to it.” In November, 1860, Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party defeated the fractured Democratic Party, prompting the secession of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and Arkansas. Nevertheless, Douglas remained optimistic. “I was too young and hopeful to give much attention to gloomy forebodings and prophecies,” he wrote. Indeed, Douglas doubted that northerners and southerners would fight their former neighbors. Having attended college in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and law school in Lexington, Virginia, Douglas had become “equally intimate with fellow students on both sides of Mason’s and Dixon’s Line,” and “did not believe that our people would even take up arms against each other.” Nevertheless, when Virginia enacted the Ordinance of Secession on April 17, 1860, Douglas abandoned his legal career and returned home. “I had no doubt of my duty,” he recalled. “In a few days I was at Harper’s Ferry, a private in the Shepherdstown Company, Company B, Second Virginia Infantry.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, 15-17.

## The Civil War Years (1861-1865)

The American Civil War engulfed Ferry Hill Plantation and the Reverend Robert Douglas' family. Northern and Southern armies crossed the Potomac River at Blackford's Ford during the Antietam, Gettysburg, and Monocacy campaigns, causing considerable damage to the plantation. In addition to loosing livestock, grain, farm buildings, and their valuable slaves, the Douglas family endured tremendous personal hardships. Northern officers, suspicious of the Reverend Douglas, placed the Reformed Church minister under arrest during the Antietam campaign and confined the Douglas family to their home. Henry Kyd Douglas, who gained considerable fame during the conflict, served in the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia from Manassas through the surrender at Appomattox.<sup>93</sup>

Ferry Hill Plantation and Blackford's Ford assumed strategic importance during the American Civil War. The plantation overlooked vital crossings between Confederate Virginia and Union Maryland, which beckoned armies throughout the conflict and brought considerable suffering to Robert Douglas' family. The bridge spanning the Potomac River at Shepherdstown, Virginia, posed a serious threat to Northern and Southern forces. Northern officers feared that marauding rebels would cross the Potomac River at the Shepherdstown Bridge or Blackford's Ford before striking at western Maryland, southern Pennsylvania, or Washington, D.C., while Confederate strategists worried about Northern thrusts towards Harper's Ferry and the Shenandoah Valley. These concerns led to the bridge's destruction during the conflict's opening months. In 1861, northern General Robert Patterson demonstrated from Hagerstown, Maryland, towards Williamsport, Maryland, and Shepherdstown. General Joseph E. Johnston, fearing that Patterson's invasion would threaten his garrison at Harper's Ferry, ordered the Second Virginia Infantry to destroy the Shepherdstown Bridge. Henry Kyd Douglas had vivid memories of the bridge's burning. "I was with the company the company that set fire to it," he wrote, "and when,

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<sup>93</sup> For a general discussion of the war's impact on western Maryland's civilian population, see Kathleen A. Ernst, Too Afraid to Cry: Maryland Civilians in the Antietam Campaign (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole

in the glare of the burning timbers, I saw the glowing windows in my home on the hill beyond the river and knew my father was a stockholder in the property I was helping to destroy, I realized that the war had begun.” Shortly after Confederates burned the Shepherdstown Bridge, Northern soldiers destroyed Douglas’ barn.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately, the destruction of the Shepherdstown Bridge did not lessen Ferry Hill Plantation’s military significance. Throughout the Civil War, Federal and Confederate forces crossed the Potomac River at Blackford’s Ford.

During the 1862 Antietam Campaign, Ferry Hill Plantation became critical to Northern and Southern commanders. The road leading from Sharpsburg to Blackford’s Ford, Shepherdstown, and Harper’s Ferry was especially important for the Confederates. General Robert E. Lee had dispatched General Jackson’s forces to capture the Federal garrison at Harper’s Ferry, which left the Army of Northern Virginia dangerously divided. When General George B. McClellan’s Army of the Potomac crossed South Mountain and threatened Lee near Sharpsburg, Confederate officers scrambled to concentrate their forces. The shortest route between Jackson’s and Lee’s commands crossed the Potomac River at Blackford’s or Boteler’s Ford.

The ford’s strategic importance attracted columns of soldiers, who crossed and recrossed Blackford’s Ford in the days immediately preceding and following the Battle of Antietam. When General Jackson’s command laid siege to Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, Captain Charles Russell and several men from the First Maryland (USA) slipped through the Confederate lines at Blackford’s Ford and delivered dispatches from Colonel Dixon Miles to General George B. McClellan. At the height of the fighting on September 17, 1862, General A. P. Hill’s “Light Division” crossed the Potomac River at Blackford’s Ford and helped repulse Burnside’s assault against the Confederate right. The following night, retreating Confederate forces traversed Blackford’s Ford and housed their wounded at Shepherdstown. Describing the deplorable conditions in Shepherdstown field hospitals, a southern reporter wrote, “There is a smell of death in the air, and

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Books, 1999).

<sup>94</sup> Douglas, I Rode With Stonewall, 13.



the laboring surgeons are literally covered from head to foot with the blood of sufferers.” The number of wounded overwhelmed the people of Shepherdstown. “They filled every building and overflowed into the country round, into farm houses, barns, corn cribs, cabins, wherever four walls and a roof could be found together.”<sup>95</sup>

The greatest damage to Ferry Hill Place and the Douglas family occurred after the Battle of Antietam, when the Army of the Potomac occupied the plantation. On the night of September 18, 1862, General Lee ordered the Army of Northern Virginia to retreat across the Potomac River at Blackford’s Ford. The following day, the Army of the Potomac marched through Sharpsburg and occupied Ferry Hill Plantation. Northern soldiers swarmed over the plantation, ransacking Douglas’ fields and outbuildings. Describing the scene, Henry Kyd Douglas wrote:

... a beautiful farm was laid waste, its fences disappeared up to the doors of the mansion house, artillery parks filled the wheat fields; corn and fodder and hay soon became contraband of war. In front of the house, which from its high eminence looked into Virginia, were rifle pits; and several rifled cannon, with their angry muzzles pointing across the Potomac decorated the lawn.

Federal officers became suspicious of the Douglas family’s loyalties and ordered them confined to their home. During the occupation, Union soldiers rummaged through the mansion and hurled insults at the Reverend Douglas. In addition to restricting the Douglas’ movements, northern officers ordered the plantation’s shutters closed to prevent them from signaling Confederates soldiers occupying Shepherdstown. In October 1862, a violent storm blew open a shutter. A Federal sentry spotted the shutter and noticed Helena Douglas carrying a candle through an upstairs hallway. He raised the alarm, and the following morning Federal soldiers arrested the Reverend Douglas.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> James V. Murfin, The Glean of Bayonets: The Battle of Antietam and Robert E. Lee’s Maryland Campaign, September 1862 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 154; Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, 177; Stephen W. Sears, Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), 285, 305.

<sup>96</sup> Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, 177-79. The Reverend Douglas did not conceal his Confederate sympathies. On October 30, 1862, the Reverend Jacob Engelbrecht wrote, “Rev. Robert Douglas was arrested at his home near Sharpsburg, Maryland, on the 28th Inst. for signaling to the rebels. He was taken to Harper’s Ferry to General McClellan. Mr. Douglas has always been a notorious rebel or secessionist.

Federal soldiers marched Reverend Douglas to General Fitz John Porter's headquarters. Douglas protested his innocence and requested an interview with General Porter. Porter refused to hear Douglas' plea. That evening, Douglas' captors marched him to Berlin, Maryland, where he spent three nights sleeping outdoors. The federals brought Douglas before General Ambrose Burnside, who demanded that he take an oath of allegiance. Douglas refused and demanded that Burnside investigate the circumstances surrounding his arrest. Unimpressed with Douglas' protests, Burnside ordered the aging minister to the Federal prison at Fort McHenry.

At Fort McHenry, Douglas was imprisoned in the stables with common criminals and deserters. During his imprisonment, Douglas maintained his innocence and preached to other prisoners. "They may put me in prison, they may confine my body," Douglas boasted to a fellow prisoner, "but they cannot imprison my spirit and my soul." "I have plenty of work in here for my master, and, by his grace, I intend to do it." After being imprisoned for six weeks, Douglas was brought before Fort McHenry's Provost Marshall, who examined the prisoner and determined that the charges against Douglas were groundless, and that the officer who ordered his arrest had never preferred written charges.<sup>97</sup>

Douglas' imprisonment shocked his family, who were unaware of the charges against the Reformed minister and were uncertain where he was imprisoned. Helen Douglas, her children Nannie and Robert, and an unknown female relative searched for the Reverend Douglas in Harper's Ferry, but found no information. They requested an interview with the Federal commander, General Henry W. Slocum, who was sympathetic to the family's plight. Slocum offered the Douglas' his personal quarters while he searched for their husband and father. Slocum soon discovered that Robert Douglas had been imprisoned at Fort McHenry, but was unable to secure his release. Slocum's concern made an impression with the Douglas family.

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William R. Qwynn, ed., The Diary of Jacob Engelbrecht, vol. 3 (Frederick, MD: The Historical Society of Frederick County, 1976).

<sup>97</sup> John A. Marshall, American Bastille: A History of the Illegal Arrests and Imprisonment of American Citizens During the Late Civil War (Philadelphia, PA: Thomas W. Hartley, 1870), 159-64.

When Henry Kyd Douglas met General Slocum, he “had the pleasure of telling him of our grateful remembrance of his kindness; and when he died his passing cast a deep shadow over this household.”<sup>98</sup>

Southern forces returned to Blackford’s Ford during the Gettysburg Campaign. The bulk of General Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia crossed the Potomac River at Blackford’s Ford. Between June 18 and 22, 1863, General Edward Johnson’s and General Jubal Early’s divisions of the Army of Northern Virginia’s second corps crossed Blackford’s Ford. As the second corps crossed the Potomac River, Major Jed Hotchkiss, a topographical engineer, lodged at Ferry Hill Place and worked on detailed maps of Maryland and Pennsylvania. Once the second corps passed, General A. P. Hill’s third corps traversed Blackford’s Ford.<sup>99</sup>

There are few sources discussing family and social life at Ferry Hill Plantation during the American Civil War. The Reverend Douglas’ imprisonment received considerable attention in Henry Kyd Douglas’ memoirs and subsequent Robert Douglas biographies, but there is little information on how the Douglas family coped with wartime disruptions. It is, however, possible to glean some insights from the Civil War diaries of Katherine Susannah Markell, the daughter of a prominent secessionist and a friend of the Douglas family living in Frederick, Maryland. Although Markell does not mention the considerable damage northern soldiers inflicted on Ferry Hill Plantation, her diaries suggest that Federal officers did not restrict the family’s movement between invasions. Indeed, Markell recorded frequent meetings with members of the Douglas family during 1862 and 1863. For example, on January 1, 1862, Nannie Douglas and Helen Blackford visited Markell’s family and attended Catholic Mass. Five months later, Markell attended a Lutheran Church in Frederick, where she heard Robert Douglas preach. Unfortunately, the Douglas family could not escape the conflict. When Markell visited Ferry Hill Plantation during the summer of 1862, she witnessed how the Civil War invaded the Douglas’

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<sup>98</sup> Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall*, 178-79.

<sup>99</sup> John W. Schildt, *Roads to Gettysburg* (Parsons, WV: McClain Publishing Company, 1978), 125; 132-35.

lives. Scavenging deserters disrupted a tea party at William Moore Blackford's farm. Events once considered part of the family's routine, such as crossing the Potomac River to visit friends in Shepherdstown, Virginia, now became an opportunity for political defiance. On June 27, 1862, Markell wrote, "Mrs. Blackford and Miss Julia Grove went with us to Dixie!" "As we were about stepping into the boat," she continued, "Jacob gave Hurrahs for Jeff. Davis and fired a pistol in the middle of the river."<sup>100</sup>

As slaveholders with strong family and personal connections to Virginia, the Douglas's were ardent secessionists. On several occasions, the Reverend Robert and Helen Douglas had opportunities to meet prominent Confederate officers and support campaigning southern soldiers. During the Antietam Campaign, the Douglas family visited Katherine Markell at Frederick, Maryland, where they dined with General William Barksdale and his staff officers, were introduced to Generals Lee, Longstreet, and Jackson, and fed several hundred Confederate soldiers. After the war, a resident of Frederick recalled:

Mrs. Markell and her friends fed over three hundred Confederates as they marched westward. Mr. Markell was a storekeeper, and the family lived in a nice house on West Patrick Street. Some of the soldiers apparently mistook the home for a hotel. According to Mrs. Markell, the mother of Henry Kyd Douglas was with her. In fact, Mrs. Douglas was displaying a pretty rebel flag. A young lady took the flag and gave it to Henry Douglas when he rode past the Markell home. Mrs. Markell also pinned a small Confederate flag to the hat of a South Carolina soldier as he marched by.<sup>101</sup>

Because Henry Kyd Douglas wrote a detailed narrative of his Civil War service in his memoirs, the subject will not receive extensive treatment in this study. When the war began, Douglas was an attorney at St. Louis, Missouri. He returned to Ferry Hill Plantation when Virginia seceded and enlisted in Company B, 2nd Virginia Infantry. Shortly before the First Battle of Manassas Douglas became the company's orderly sergeant. Following the battle, he received successive promotions to second lieutenant, first lieutenant, and captain of his company.

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<sup>100</sup> Katherine Susannah Markell Diaries, January 1, 1862; January 12, 1862; June 12-June 27, 1862. C. Burr Artz Public Library, Frederick, Maryland.



In March, 1862, General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson assigned Douglas to carry important dispatches to General Richard Ewell. The ride, which covered 103 miles, began at Mount Jackson Valley, passed south to Massanutton, then over the Blue Ridge Mountains, and onward to Stanardsville, Orange Courthouse, Elizabeth City, Culpepper Courthouse, and finally to Ewell’s headquarters at Brandy Station. Douglas exhausted five horses, traversed dangerous mountain roads at night, and rode through heavy rains to deliver the messages. The dispatches, which directed Ewell to reunite with Jackson’s command, launched the Confederate Army’s famous Shenandoah Valley Campaign. In recognition of Douglas’ courage, Jackson appointed Douglas aide-de-camp and inspector general, a position he held through the Battle of Chancellorsville. After Jackson’s death, Douglas was promoted to major and adjutant-general and chief of staff to Major General Edward Johnson, Major General John B. Gordon, Lieutenant General Jubal Early, and Generals Remseur, Pegram, and Walker. At Gettysburg, Douglas was seriously wounded and captured. He was imprisoned at the hospital on Johnson’s Island, Lake Erie, for eight months, before being transferred to Point Lookout, Maryland. In March, 1864, Major General Benjamin F. Butler, then commander of Fortress Monroe, ordered Douglas’ parole. Douglas returned to Richmond, Virginia, where he assumed command of the consolidated Thirteenth and Forty-ninth Virginia Infantry. In February, 1865, Douglas was appointed commander of the light brigade, which he led until the Army of Northern Virginia’s surrender. Douglas led the light brigade’s assault on Fort Stedman during the Battle of Petersburg and directed a series of delaying actions during the Confederate flight towards Appomattox. Generals Lee and Breckinridge has authorized Douglas’ promotion to Brigadier General, but Lee surrendered before Douglas received his advancement. He ended the war as a colonel.

During the war, Colonel Douglas found opportunities to visit his family at Ferry Hill Place. These visits, which Douglas described in his memoirs, reveal the damage campaigning

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<sup>101</sup> John W. Schildt, Roads to Antietam (Shippensburg, PA: Burd Street Press, 1997), 54.

armies caused to Ferry Hill and illustrate the personal hardships that Reverend Robert and Helen Douglas endured. On the night of September 14, 1862, as General Jackson's division marched towards Shepherdstown, Douglas galloped ahead of the main column, crossed the Potomac River at Blackford's or Boteler's Ford, and spent several hours with his parents and sister. After the Confederate retreat from Antietam, Douglas received a brief leave to see his family. Describing the view from Shepherdstown, Douglas wrote:

It was a bright and quiet morning when I reached Shepherdstown and I immediately rode to the river cliffs opposite my father's residence. From there just over the Potomac on an equal eminence I saw rifle pits on the lawn and a piece or two of light artillery, and soldiers in blue lying sunning themselves on the stone wall and in possession generally. I saw my father come out of the house and walk down to the burned barn. It was not a cheerful sight. . . .

Douglas and his courier rode down to the Potomac River, where they hailed Federal pickets. The northern soldiers invited them to cross, but Douglas refused, fearing that the northern soldiers would imprison them. Still, the northern soldiers insisted that they would allow Douglas to visit his family. Douglas relented and crossed to the Maryland shore, where he waited for the Yankee cavalrymen to bring his mother.

Very soon my mother was seen descending the hill, but father, being under parole not to leave the premises, could not come without permission. My mother came to me, pale, trembling, breathless -- thinking that I was a prisoner and she the victim of a cruel joke. As she came across the canal and over the towpath, the hilarious cavalrymen were almost hushed and taking my courier with them they passed her with uncovered heads and went and sat on the banks of the canal out of hearing. Marvelous delicacy; a strange family meeting. My mother's alarm and anxiety were too great for long endurance. . . . She seem ashamed of her impatience to have me go and yet she could not help it. She left and as she went up the bank the boys came streaming down, and still she could not believe, for she tarried on the towpath.

Douglas returned to Ferry Hill Plantation during the Gettysburg campaign. On June 17, 1863, Douglas, then a staff officer under General Edward Johnson, crossed the Potomac River with Johnson's division and encamped near Ferry Hill. That night, Johnson made his headquarters at Ferry Hill Place before leading his division towards Hagerstown, Maryland, on June 18, 1863. Describing the plantation's condition, Douglas angrily wrote, "My beautiful home was a barren

waste and a common, and the blackened walls of the burnt barn stood upon against the sky as a monument of useless and barbarous destruction.” “It was hard for me,” he continued, “going into Pennsylvania, to put aside all ideas of retaliation.” Douglas’ final wartime visit to Ferry Hill Place occurred during General Jubal Early’s Monocacy campaign. On July 5 and 6, 1864, as Early’s army crossed the Potomac River at Shepherdstown, Douglas, along with Generals Early, Gordon, Breckinridge, and Ramseur called on Robert and Helen Douglas.<sup>102</sup>

The Army of Northern Virginia’s surrender did, however, mark the end of Colonel Henry Kyd Douglas’ Civil War experience. When he reached Shepherdstown, Federal officers informed him that he could not return home. “For some reason I never understood -- pure cussedness I think it was,” Douglas remembered, “I was told that my parole would not permit me to go to my home across the Potomac and that I must stop south of that river.” Shepherdstown’s unionists remained suspicious of Douglas, whose service in General Jackson’s staff made him a “dangerous character.” Douglas soon ran afoul of the local military authorities. When Douglas posed for a photograph in his Confederate uniform, a loyal citizen notified the Federal commander at Martinsburg, Virginia, who dispatched a cavalry squadron to arrest the former Confederate staff officer.

After the Lincoln trial, Douglas returned home to Ferry Hill Place. In the weeks following his return, Federal authorities ordered Douglas’ arrest. Northern soldiers transported Douglas to Harper’s Ferry, where General Egan ordered his release.

### **Henry Kyd Douglas (1865-1903)**

Little is known about Ferry Hill Place in the decades following the American Civil War. Land records suggest that Helen Blackford lived on the plantation until her death in 1888, but it remains unclear whether she operated Ferry Hill as a farm, leased the plantation’s lands to tenant farmers, or allowed the fields to remain dormant.

Following his final release from prison, Henry Kyd Douglas practiced law at Winchester,

Virginia, until 1868, when he returned to Hagerstown, Maryland. There, Douglas established himself as one of the county's leading jurists, became active in Civil War veteran's organization, and assumed command of several local and state militia organizations.

In the years immediately following the American Civil War, Colonel Douglas became involved in several commemorative organizations.

Having established himself as a prominent and successful attorney, Douglas launched his political career with the Democratic Party. Unfortunately, Douglas chose an inauspicious moment to enter politics. Under the administration of Governor Oden Bowie (1868-1872), Washington County's Democratic Party had fractured into competing factions. James C. Clark, who Governor Bowie had appointed president of the C & O Canal, controlled the leading faction. Clark's political machine wielded considerable power. The canal president exerted his economic power and political influence over canal managers, boatmen, lockkeepers, and warehouse workers, which allowed him to control communities bordering the canal. His opponent, United States Senator William T. Hamilton, controlled towns north of the canal, including Hagerstown, Boonsboro, Rohersville, and Keedysville. Douglas allied himself with Clark's faction and, in 1871, campaigned for the Democratic Party's nomination for the Maryland Senate. The campaign pitted Colonel Douglas against Zachariah S. Claggett, a prominent lawyer who enjoyed Senator Hamilton's support. Douglas lost the party's nomination, but continued his political career.<sup>103</sup>

In 1888, Douglas entered Maryland's sixth district congressional race, attempting to unseat Republican incumbent Louis E. McComas. As the campaign unfolded, it became apparent that Democratic President Grover Cleveland's demands for lowered tariffs would become the central issue. Douglas championed low tariffs, which he believed would benefit farmers and laborers. The Hagerstown Mail proudly declared that Colonel Douglas:

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<sup>102</sup> Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, 185-85; 235; 281.

<sup>103</sup> Dana Shadel, "Henry Kyd Douglas, Reconstructed Rebel," Maryland Historical Magazine, Vol. 88, No.



. . . is for the protection of the people and not of a class; for a reduction of taxation to the needs of the government, not an increase to satisfy the inordinate greed of manufacturers. He is for free raw material, whereby the laborer shall be able to be kept more consistently at work; he is for trade by which we shall have free intercourse with all nations and thus gain a market for our surplus, both in manufactured goods and agricultural production.

Republican newspapers countered with vicious attacks against the Democratic platform and Colonel Douglas. The Hagerstown Herald and Torchlight argued, “The real beneficiary of our protective tariff is the nation, and of no class of its citizens.” When Douglas mistakenly claimed, “The people of the United States pay \$1,212,000,000 a year as tariff tax,” the newspaper’s editors mocked, “The colonel has missed his vocation.” “The rapidity with which he figures,” they continued, “suggests the idea that he would fairly coin money and advance the cause of science by becoming a college professor and calculating the speed of comets in their orbits.” When Douglas argued that tariffs served “Yankee manufacturers,” the Herald and Torchlight chided, “Colonel Douglas . . . had his fling at ‘Yankee manufacturers, not his first fling, by the way, at Yankee institutions.”<sup>104</sup>

Despite his political failures, Douglas achieved great success as a militia officer. Douglas became a trusted military advisor to Democratic Governor John Lee Carroll, who included the former Confederate in his official delegation to the 1876 Centennial observations. When violent strikes erupted along the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in 1877, Governor Carroll placed Douglas in command of militia forces in Western Maryland. When Douglas arrived at Cumberland, Maryland, in July 1877, the strikers responded with mass demonstrations and sporadic violence. A crowd of miners, unemployed workers, and women gathered around the Queen City Hotel, while disgruntled at the railroad yards detonated an explosive charge near a locomotive and beat one of the train’s firemen. Douglas reported that the strikers had captured a large number of freight cars, including 150 oil tankers, that the community supported the striking workers, and that local authorities were powerless. Governor

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2 (Summer, 1993), 295.

Carroll dispatched additional soldiers under command of General French to Cumberland, but the condition continued to worsen. The strikers moved massed 20,000 barrels of oil and threatened to destroy the railroad's machine shops if Governor Carroll resorted to force. Undeterred, Carroll ordered 130 United States soldiers to quell the strike. The soldiers moved quickly, capturing the railroad yards and seizing the oil. In 1880, members of Hagerstown Light Infantry unanimously elected Douglas their captain. In 1881, he received a promotion to lieutenant colonel of the 1st Maryland Infantry, which included militia companies from Baltimore, Frederick, and Washington Counties. Later that year, Colonel Douglas commanded the Southern soldiers at the Yorktown Centennial celebration.

In 1892, Governor Frank Brown appointed Douglas Adjutant General, a position he held until 1896. During Douglas' tenure as Adjutant General, violent labor unrest struck Western Maryland. Unable to suppress the strikers, Maryland's Attorney General and Allegany County's sheriff demanded additional forces to restore order. Governor Brown dispatched Generals Douglas and Stewart Brown, along with the 1,170 officers and men of the Fourth and Fifth Maryland Regiments to Frostburg, Maryland. Describing the soldiers' rapid movement to Western Maryland, a reporter for the Frederick Daily Mail reported, "The troops are ready for business." Tensions heightened when Douglas' regiments arrived in Frostburg. Strikers dynamited a scab miners home, and rumors spread throughout the city that a large, violent mob were preparing to attack Douglas' command. Douglas stationed large detachments at local mines and dispatched patrols throughout Frostburg. Douglas' soldiers soon restored order, and, by June 12, 1894, local papers reported that strikers were returning to work.

In 1898, President McKinley nominated Douglas as a major and adjutant general of United States Volunteers during the Spanish War. Douglas, whose health was already declining, refused to accept the commission. Writing to a friend, Douglas scoffed at the "subordinate

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<sup>104</sup> Herald and Torchlight, September 27, 1888;

commission“ offered him, “especially from the north.”<sup>105</sup>

In actuality, Douglas would have been unfit for field command during the Spanish American War, as he had contracted tuberculosis and his health was deteriorating. Douglas made several trips to North and South to recover his health, but his condition continued to worsen. By the summer of 1902, he was confined to his residence on Potomac Avenue. Douglas passed away on December 18, 1903. Douglas’ funeral was held on December 25, 1903, at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Hagerstown. Services were conducted by the Reverend H. E. Cotton, and several prominent citizens were in attendance. Former Governor Frank Brown, Captain I. Becker, General Lawrence Riggs, and Reverend C. R. Page were present, while Judge M. L. Keedy, George W. Smith, Jr., Colonel Bunchanan Schley and Alexander Armstrong were honorary pallbearers. Company B of the Fifth Maryland and the Henry Kyd Douglas camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans marched in the procession. After the funeral, Douglas’ remains were carried on a special train to Shepherdstown, Virginia, where he was interred at the Elmwood Cemetery.<sup>106</sup>

### **Ferry Hill Place, 1903-1973**

Little is known about Ferry Hill Place during the twentieth-century. Outside of land records, there are few documents concerning the plantation, making it difficult to reconstruct Ferry Hill Place’s recent history. Harlan D. Unrau’s historic structure report contains some information from census and land records, along with oral history interviews. Likewise, the National Park Service’s archeological survey includes some information with now-deceased owners. Given the lack of primary source documents, and the fact that other studies include discussions of Ferry Hill Plantation’s modern history, the present report will include a brief,

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<sup>105</sup> “General Henry Kyd Douglas,” *The Confederate Veteran* 10 (1904), 125; *Hagerstown Mail*, July 27, 1877; *Frederick Daily Mail*, June 6, 1894; *Frederick Daily Mail*, June 7, 1894; *Frederick Daily Mail*, June 12, 1894; “Henry Kyd Douglas, An In Memoriam,” Henry Kyd Douglas vertical file, Western Maryland Room, Washington County Free Library, Hagerstown, Maryland.

<sup>106</sup> *The Hagerstown Mail*, December 25, 1803.

somewhat truncated discussion of the subject. The reader is referred to the historic structure and archeological reports for more detailed treatments.

After Henry Kyd Douglas' death, Ferry Hill Plantation passed to the Beckenbaugh family. In 1903, Douglas bequeathed his home in Hagerstown and his two-thirds in Ferry Hill Place to Nannie Cowen Beckenbaugh. As Douglas stipulated in his will, Beckenbaugh received:

all my interest and estate (being two thirds) in the Ferry Hill Farm . . . in fee simple, charged however with the payment of two thousand dollars to Cornelia, wife of her John B. Douglas for her sole and separate use, which said sum shall be a charge and lien upon my said interest in said farm until it is paid, and if not paid within one year after my death, it shall bear interest from the end of that one year.

Beckenbaugh soon received a release from John and Cornelia Douglas renouncing their claims to Ferry Hill Place, making her the property's sole owner. Beckenbaugh owned the property until her death. She bequeathed the plantation to her children Helen Cotton and John Kyd Beckenbaugh, who held the property until Cotton's death in 1911. John Kyd Beckenbaugh purchased his sister's share in Ferry Place from his nephews Douglas and Dudley Cotton and moved unto the property.

John Kyd Beckenbaugh and his wife, Harriet, lived on Ferry Hill Place for 29 years. The Beckenbaughs attempted to research and preserve the plantation's history. Beckenbaugh had inherited Henry Kyd Douglas' papers and had discovered the John Blackford journals, which were stored in Ferry Hill Place's attic. In 1938, they assisted Joseph McCord with his historical novel Redhouse on the Hill, a fictional Civil War piece set at Ferry Hill Place. The Beckenbaugh family held Ferry Hill Place until 1958, when they sold the property to Fred Morrison.

Fred Morrison owned Ferry Hill Place from 1958 until April 1973, when he sold the property to the National Park Service for use as the Chesapeake and Ohio National Historical Park's headquarters. During his years at Ferry Hill Place Morrison operated a restaurant on the ground floor and lived in the upstairs rooms.



## **Appendix A. Ferry Hill Land Records**

### **Liber N Folios 383-84**

At the request of John Blackford, and others, the following agreement was recorded the 23rd Day of March, 1801, to wit -- Memorandum of agreement made, done, and concluded this 19th day of March, 1801, between John Good and Esther, his wife, of Washington County, Maryland, of the one part, and John Blackford, of the same county, and Joseph Swearingen and Henry Beddinger, or Berkeley County, Virginia, of the other -- Whereas Benoni Van Swearingen, late of the said county of Washington, deceased, did by his last will bequeath unto Esther, his wife, now the wife of the above named John Good, a certain lot or parcel of land described in his last will, aforesaid, with its improvements during her natural life and also named Sarah Blackford, wife of the said John Blackford, one of his (illegible) and by other clauses in his said last will appointed the above named Joseph Swearingen one of his executors, who is in fact that acting executor, and the above named Henry Beddinger and Joseph Swearingen testamentary guardians of his Henry Thomas Swearingen and whereas it is (several words illegible) that it will be (illegible) for all concerned and more advantageous for the estate of the said John and Esther should relinquish their exclusive right in and to the said lot or parcel of land and improvements thereby placing that property in the same situation with respect to all the parties as the rest of the estate. Now, this indenture agreement witnesseth that the said John Good for the consideration for the sum of two-hundred dollars this day (illegible) paid to the said John Good on or before the fifteenth day of April 1902 have agreed and hereby do agree to relinquish their exclusive right as above mentioned in full and ample firm as shall be deemed (illegible) by counsel learned in the law reserving for themselves no more (several words illegible). . . . It is further expressly agreed by the parties that the piece of new ground adjoining the field now in wheat and whereon the said John Blackford has cut the timber and made rails shall be by the executors put in cultivation as far as may be that it may with the rest of the farm be (illegible) or worked to mutual advantages and that no more orchard or fruit trees shall be planted or any part of said lot that is within the present fencing of the new ground mentioned above but the hill side between Mr. Blackford's garden and Mr. Good's present enclosure, may be put in grass or orchard at the discretion of the executors. Possession is to be given to the executor on or before the 15th day of April next, but the grain now growing on the premises is reserved to the said John Good and is to be removed as soon as possible after harvest that his ground may be prepared to receive a winter crop. In testimony whereof the parties have hereunto set their hands and souls the day and year first herein mentioned hereby consenting that this agreement shall be of record. . . .

### **Liber Y Folios 598-600 March 20, 1813**

At the request of John Blackford, the following deed was recorded the 20th day of March, 1813. This indenture made and concluded this twenty-second day of February in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and thirteen between Henry Thomas Van Swearingen of the county of Jefferson and Commonwealth of Virginia of the one part and John Blackford of the county of Washington and the State of Maryland of the other part. Whereas the said Henry Thomas Van Swearingen under the last will and testament of his father Benoni Swearingen late of Washington County, deceased, is seized in fee of a part or portion of tracts or parcels of land situated and lying in the county aforesaid and holds the same as tenants in (illegible) with Benoni Blackford to whom the same deceased from his mother Sarah Blackford wife of the aforementioned John Blackford and daughter of the said Benoni Swearingen deceased and whereas the said Henry Thomas Van

Swearingen is willing and desirous for a good and valuable consideration to convey and sell to the said John Blackford and his the said Henry Thomas Van Swearingen right, title, claim, interest and estate held by and under the last will and testament of his deceased father Benoni Swearingen, except as the same hereafter (illegible) and excepted and subject to the several stipulations and covenants hereinafter expressed. Now this indenture witssest that the said Henry Thomas Van Swearingen for and in consideration of the sum of thirty five dollars for each and every acre of land hereby bargained and sold to him in hand paid by the said John Blackford or secured to be paid the receipt of which is by these presents duly acknowledged hath granted, bargained, and sold and by these presents doth grant, bargain, and sell unto him the said John Blackford his heirs and assigns, forever, all the rights, title, interest, and estate of him the said Henry Thomas Van Swearingen of, in, and to all and singular the lands and appurtenances hereinafter mentioned subject . . .

**Liber Z**

**Folio 286**

**November 27, 1813**

At the request of John Blackford, the following deed was recorded March 23, 1814, to wit -- This indenture made this twenty-seventh day of November in the year of our Lord 1813 between Abraham Shepherd of Jefferson County in the State of Virginia and John Blackford of Washington County in the State of Maryland . . . that for and in consideration of the sum of two thousand one hundred and twenty-two dollars fifty cents of the current money of the United States of America to the said Abraham Shepherd in hand paid by the said John Blackford at or before the sealing and delivery of these presents, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged and therefore do release, acquit, and discharge, the said John Blackford, his executors, and administrators by these presents, he the said Abraham Shepherd hath granted, bargained, and sold, and by these presents, doth grant, bargain, and sell unto the said John Blackford and his heirs and assigns forever all that part of a tract of land called Pell Mell situated, lying, and being in Washington County and the State of Maryland, beginning for the part to be hereby conveyed at the end of one hundred perches on the second line of the whole tract called Pell Mell and running with the second line South eighty-eight degrees east twelve perches to the end of said line then with the third line north twenty-four degrees west thirty-four perches to intersect with the sixty-fourth line of the resurvey of the addition to Pikes Delight then with said line north seventy-two degrees west seven perches to a stone planted as a division between the part of Pell Mell which is conveyed to Adam Myers by Abraham Shepherd and running with said deed North twenty-eight degrees west one-hundred and eleven perches to intersect the fifth line of the whole tract called Pell Mell then running with the line South eighty-three degrees west ninety-one and one-half perches to intersect Potomac River then down and with the meanders of said river until it intersects a line drawn north sixty-two and one-half degrees west from the beginning then with said line reversed to the beginning containing seventy and three-quarters acres of land, more or less, and all houses, buildings, orchards, ways, water courses, profits, commodities, servants, and appurtenances whatsoever to the said premises hereby granted or any part thereof belonging or in any wise appertaining and the revision and revisions, remainder and remainders, rents, issues, and profits, thereof, and also all the estate, right, title, interest, use, trust, property, and (illegible) whatsoever of him the said Abraham Shepherd of, in and to the said premises and concerning the law: To have and to hold, the said land hereby conveyed, and all and singular others the premises hereby granted and every part and parcel thereof, with their and every of their appurtenances unto the said John Blackford, his heirs and assigns forever -- To the only proper use and (illegible) him the said John Blackford and of his heirs and assigns forever and the said Abraham Shepherd for



himself, his heirs, executors, and administrators doth hereby covenant, grant, promise, and agree to and with the said John Blackford his heirs, executors, administrators or assigns, that he the said Abraham Shepherd and his heirs the said tract of land and premises hereby granted, bargained, and sold, and every part and parcel thereof . . . belonging to him, the said John Blackford, his heirs and assigns, against him the said Abraham Shepherd and his heirs, deed against all and every person or persons whatsoever, claiming by from or under him and his heirs shall and will warrant and forever defend the said Abraham Shepherd for himself, his heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, doth hereby covenant, grant, promise and agree to and with the said John Blackford etc., that he the said Abraham Shepherd and his heirs shall and will at all times hereafter whenever request thereto by the said John Blackford, his heirs or assigns, make, do execute and acknowledge all and every such issuance or issuances, deed or deeds, conveyance or conveyances, devise or devises, in the law as he the said John Blackford his heirs or assigns, or his or their counsel learned in the law, may or shall advise, devise, or require for the more certain and effectual assuring, conveying, and (illegible) the possession of the said John Blackford, his heirs and assigns, of, in and to the said tract of land and premises with the appurtenances forever.

**Liber EE**

**Folio 142-44**

**September 4, 1819**

At the request of John Beard the following deed was recorded September 4, 1819, to wit -- This indenture made the fifth day of April in the year of our Lord 1819 between John Blackford and Adam Myers, executors of the last will and testament of Thomas Shepherd, and John Shepherd, Joseph Shepherd, David Shepherd, Mathias Spong, and Sarah, who is his wife, who is the daughter of Thomas Shepherd, deceased, who are the heirs and (illegible) of Thomas Shepherd, all of Washington County and the State of Maryland of the one part, and John Blackford of the county and state aforesaid of the other part. Whereas the said Thomas Shepherd, late of Washington County, deceased, by his last will and testament bearing the date of the twenty-first day of May, eighteen hundred and seventeen, duly proved in the Orphan's Court of Washington County, appointed John Blackford and Adam Myers his executors and directed said executors that in case his personal estate not devised in said will should not be sufficient to pay his debts, his said executors should sell the land the land purchased of Philip Grounds' heirs and whereas the personal estate of said Thomas Shepherd not devised as aforesaid was not sufficient to pay the debts of said Thomas Shepherd, the said John Blackford and Adam Myers as executors of the power vested in them by said will did sell to John Shepherd the son of Thomas Shepherd the that said land according to the deep that Thomas Shepherd had received from Ground for the sum of eight thousand and forty-five dollars and twenty-five cents. And the said Thomas Shepherd's will not authorizing his executors in particular to convey the aforesaid lands to the purchaser, there were doubts whether the executors deed was sufficient upon which the said Joseph Shepherd, David Shepherd, Matthias Shepherd, and Sarah, his wife, the aforesaid heirs of Thomas Shepherd, did on the twelfth day of May, 1818, by deed did convey all their interest to John Shepherd of the aforesaid land. And the said John Blackford and Adam Myers did on the fifteenth day of June, 1818, by deed convey the aforesaid land as executors to the said John Shepherd and the said John Shepherd, having as he supposed complete title to the land, did sometime in the month of February last sell the above named John Beard thirty-five and a half acres of land being part of a tract of land called Grounds Dwelling for the consideration of fifty dollars per acre and when John Shepherd was about conveying the aforesaid lands to John Beard it was discovered that he had neglected to have his two deeds recorded within the time limited by law which prevented him making a deed to the said John Beard. Now, this indenture, witnesseth that for the consideration of the sum of money paid by John Beard to John Shepherd and for the purpose of completing the title of the aforesaid thirty-five and a half acres, they the said John

Blackford and Adam Myers as executors of Thomas Shepherd and John Shepherd, David Shepherd, Joseph Shepherd, David Shepherd, Joseph Shepherd, Matthias Spong and Sarah, his wife, as the heirs of Thomas Shepherd doth grant, bargain, sell, and convey and doth by these presents absolutely doth grant, sell, and make over unto him the said John Beard, his heirs and assigns forever all that part and parcel of land, to wit, a part of a tract of land called Grounds Dwelling, situated, lying, and being in Washington County and the state of Maryland, Beginning for the part to be hereby conveyed at a stone planted by the side of a large oak tree, said stone is planted at the end of the 19th line of the whole tract of land called Grounds Dwelling and running from thence with the 19th line reversed a long lane north eighty-five degrees and one-half degree west 185 perches and three-quarters of a perch to a stone set up and planted as a division between the said John Shepherd and John Beard and running the division line from thence between them North seven degrees and one-half degree east sixty-three perches and three-quarters of a perch intersecting the twentieth line of the aforesaid Grounds Dwelling and with the said line reversed to the beginning containing and laid out for thirty-five and one-half acres of land, together with all and singular the land and premises with the (illegible), rights, profits, privileges, water, and water courses, orchards, fields, and woods, under woods, ways, and every advantage belonging to the aforesaid land and premises. . . .

**Liber TT**

**Folios 774**

**January 17, 1839**

At the request of John Hanson Thomas, the following assignment was recorded January 17, 1839. This indenture made this tenth day of January in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty-nine between John Blackford of Washington in the State of Maryland, of the one part, and Dr. John Hanson Thomas, of the city of Baltimore, of the other part, witnesseth -- whereas Abraham Barnes and Melchion B. Mason of the county aforesaid on the fifteenth day of January, 1836 (being indebted to the said John Blackford by note bearing date the 14th day of January 1835, in the sum of ten thousand dollars with interest from the date last mentioned, on which note a judgment was entered by confession in Washington County Court on the 15th day of January, 1836, for debt, interest, and costs), by their indenture or deed of mortgage of that date for the considerations therein mentioned and particularly to secure the payment of the debt aforesaid, did grant, bargain, sell, and convey unto him the said John Blackford, his executors, administrators, or assigns, a large amount of goods, furniture, household stuff, slaves, stock, plantation utensils and other property particularly set forth and described in the said indenture or deed of mortgage, which is recorded in folios 469, 470, and 471, or Liber RR, one of the land record books of Washington County, aforesaid. To have and to hold the same to the said John Blackford or his legal representatives as aforesaid forever, upon the terms and conditions to the said John Hanson Thomas, for a valuable consideration, it is reasonable and right and the said John Blackford is willing that the aforesaid mortgage should also be assigned to the said John Hanson Thomas. Now this indenture witnesseth that the said John Blackford, in consideration of the premises and in consideration of the sum one dollar to him in hand paid by the said John Hanson Thomas, before the sealing and delivery hereof, hath granted, bargained, sold, and transferred, and by these presents doth grant, bargain, sell, transfer, and assign to the said John Hanson Thomas, his executors, administrators, or assigns forever, all and singular the goods furniture, household stuff, slaves, stock, plantation utensils, and other property mentioned in and conveyed by the said indenture or deed of mortgages. To have to hold the same to him the said John Hanson Thomas, his executors, administrators, and assigns, as fully and in as ample a manner as the said John Blackford or his representatives might hold and enjoy the same, by virtue of the mortgage deed aforesaid, which reference is here made, and not otherwise, and the said John Blackford doth hereby authorize and empower the said John Hanson Thomas, his executors, administrators, and



assigns to receive the money secured by said judgment and mortgage, to his or their own use, and to use whatever means he might lawfully use, for the recovery thereof and to discharge the said mortgage as fully and effectually as he the original grantee might do or might hereto have done. In witness whereof the said John Blackford hath hereunto set his hand and seal, the day and year first before written. John Blackford.

## **Liber YY**

### **Folio 422**

At the request of John Miller and Otho J. Smith the following mortgage was recorded June 26, 1841:

This indenture made the second day of June 1841 between Franklin Blackford of Washington County and the State of Maryland on the one part, and John Miller and Otho J. Smith, Executors of John Blackford, late of said county and state, deceased, on the other part, witness, whereas the last will and testament of John Blackford, late of Washington County, deceased, he did among other things direct his executors to pay Catherine Knode during her natural life the sum of two hundred dollars annually and for the better securing the said sum of two hundred dollars annually to the said Catherine Knode, the said executors have set apart on interest the sum of three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three cents in the hands of Franklin Blackford, of aforesaid county and state, for which said sum of three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three cents, the said Franklin Blackford has executed bond of even date herewith to the said John Miller and Otho J. Smith executors as aforesaid to be paid on the second day of June 1844 with interest payable on the second day of June annually. Now, this indentured witness that the said Franklin Blackford in consideration of the said sum three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three cents, and for the better securing thereof to the said John Miller and Otho J. Smith, executors, as aforesaid, and their executors, administrators, or assigns, according to the conditions of the said bond and also in further consideration of the sum of five dollars to him the Franklin Blackford by the said Jno. Miller and Otho J. Smith, executors as aforesaid in hand paid at or before the sealing and delivery of these presents, whereof the said Franklin Blackford doth hereby acknowledge, hath granted, bargained and sold, and by these presents doth grant, bargain, and sell unto the said Jno. Miller and Otho J. Smith, executors aforesaid, all my interest in and to the ferry commonly known as Swearingen's Ferry with the landing in Virginia and the ground thereto attached with the improvements thereon, and also the Ferry House, landing, and lot on the Maryland side and also ten acres of land contiguous to the ferry and adjoining the canal. . . .

## **Liber IN 1**

### **Folio 738**

At the request of Henry Van Swearingen Blackford the following deed was recorded and duly stamped June 18, 1846: This indenture made this seventeenth day of June 1846, between Franklin Blackford and Elizabeth Blackford, his wife, of Washington County and the State of Maryland, on the one part, and Henry V.S. Blackford, of Shepherdstown, Jefferson County and the State of Virginia, on the other part, to wit -- that this said Franklin Blackford and Elizabeth Blackford, his wife, for and in consideration of the sum of \$13,000 current money to them in hand paid by the said Henry V.S. Blackford at and before the sealing and delivery of these presents, the receipt thereof they do hereby acknowledge and thereof release, acquit and forever discharge the said Henry V.S. Blackford, his heirs, executors, and administrators by these presents have granted, bargained, sold, (illegible) and confirmed and by these presents do grant, (illegible) release and (illegible) unto the said Henry V.S. Blackford, his heirs and assigns, all that Ferry across the

Potomac River at or near Shepherdstown, Jefferson County, Virginia, at the one side and the termination of the great road leading from Sharpsburg to the said river in Washington County, Maryland, on the other, generally known by the name of Swearingen's Ferry, comprehending the lands, landings, and appurtenances on both sides of the said river that is to say about four or five acres of land heretofore laid off and attached to the said ferry on the Maryland shore, with all the Ferry House buildings, improvements, wills, waters, and appurtenances to the same, and about one-half to three-quarters of an acre of land laid off and attached to the Ferry on the Virginia shore, in Jefferson County, aforesaid, (illegible) the warehouse, buildings, improvements, wharfs, and appurtenances to the same, together with all the boats, apparatus, and tackle thereunto belonging. Also, all that lot of ground and parcel of land situated in Washington County, aforesaid, contiguous to the said ferry property containing ten acres as laid off by John Miller and Otho J. Smith, executors of the last will and testament of Col. John Blackford, deceased. . . .

## **Liber IN 5**

### **Folio 654**

At the request of the Virginia and Maryland Bridge Company the following deed was recorded April 28, 1851: This indenture made the second day of July 1849 between Henry Van Swearingen Blackford and Eliza M. Blackford, his wife, of Washington County and the State of Maryland of the one part and the Virginia and Maryland Bridge Company at Shepherdstown, Virginia, on the other part, to wit -- that the said Henry V.S. Blackford, Eliza M. Blackford, his wife, and in consideration of the sum of \$2,000 unto them in hand paid by the said company at and before the sealing and delivery of these presents, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, have granted, bargained, (illegible) and do by these presents grant, bargain, and sell unto the said company all that Ferry at or across the Potomac River at or near Shepherdstown, Jefferson County, Virginia, on the one side, and the termination of the great road leading from Sharpsburg to said river in Washington County, Maryland, on the other, generally known by the name of Swearingen's Ferry, containing the land, landings, and appurtenances on both sides of said river, that is to say for or five acres heretofore laid off and attached to said ferry on the Maryland shore, with all the ferry house, buildings, improvements and appurtenances and about one-half or three-quarters of an acre of land heretofore laid off and attached to the ferry on the Virginia shore with all the warehouses, buildings, improvements, appurtenances, together with all the boats, apparatus and tackle thereunto belonging. Also, all the lot of ground and parcel of land, situated in Washington County, contiguous to the said ferry property containing ten acres as laid off by John Miller and Otho J. Smith, executors, of Colonel John Blackford, deceased, and the stone cottage on the side of the hill near the Ferry House. . . .

## **Appendix B**

### **John Blackford Will**

**November 1, 1839**

### **Washington County Historical Society**

In the name of God, Amen. I John Blackford of Washington County in the State of Maryland, being of sound and disposing mind, memory, and understanding, though sick and weak in body, do (illegible) onto publish and declare these my last will and testament revoking hereby and annulling all other and former wills at any time by me heretofore made.

I commit my soul to the mercy of the all merciful and my body to the earth to be decently interred at the discretion of my executors hereinafter named.

Secondly, I order and direct that my debts and funeral charges shall be paid and the maintenance



of my unmarried children reasonably provided for during one year after my decease first applying thereto the income of any of the property hereinbefore specifically devised to them.

Thirdly, I hereby release and discharge each and every one of my children from any responsibility to account for anything advanced to or charged against them respectively by me.

Fourthly, to my eldest beloved son Franklin Blackford I give, devise, and bequeath the ferry property, formerly known as Swearingen's Ferry, including the undivided moiety or half part which I have lately purchased from the widow and heirs of Thomas Van Swearingen, the purchase money of which is to be hereafter paid of my estate at large and I devise to him and his heirs therewith the landing in Virginia and the ground thereto attached and the ferry house landing and lot on the Maryland side together with all the rights, easements, franchises, privileges, thereto or to any part thereof annexed and all the boats, apparatus, appurtenances hereto belonging and also the slaves Edmund and Julius engaged as foremen.

I also devise and bequeath to my said son Franklin ten acres of land contiguous to the ferry and adjoining the canal (illegible) chiefly part of the orchard field to be laid out according to the judgment and discretion of my executors so as to throw what is called the cottage to the home farm.

I also give, devise, and bequeath to my said son the house and lot in Shepherdstown now owned by me and an out lot near said town on the Potomac River to have and hold the said property and every part thereof to him and his heirs forever in fee simple.

Fifthly, to me dear son Henry V.S. Blackford and his heirs I give, devise, and bequeath the home or farm whereon I reside excepting only the land hereinbefore devised to my son Franklin and the land hereinafter devised to my son William and my will is that my said son Henry and his heirs shall hold the said land subject to and expressly charged with the payment to each of my daughters Janet Smith and Helen Blackford of the sum of two thousand, five hundred dollars with interest, the interest payable annually and the principle in ten equal payment reckoning from the date of my decease.

Sixthly, I give, devise, and bequeath to my dear son William Moore Blackford and his heirs my lower farm whereon Joseph Knode now lives with the three parcels of land at different times acquired and purchased from the heirs of Thomas Shepherd, Dr. Hays, and the trustees appointed to sell the real estate of Jacob Bedinger. I also give to my said son William my gold watch and appurtenances and I do hereby request my friend Joseph I. Merrick to act as the guardian of my son William during his minority and it is my wish that Joseph Knode shall have a lease of said farm for two years from and after the expiration of the present year paying a share rent as at present, committing no waste, cultivating it in a farmer like manner and seeding down more land than the guardian of my said son shall prescribe and moving no straw from the premise.

Sevently, I give to my daughter Janet Smith her mother's gold watch and miniature and to my daughter my family portraits.

Eighthly, I authorize, empower, and direct my executors to dispose of, sell, and convey all the rest and residue of my estate, real and personal and mixed whatsoever and wherever the same may be and from the proceeds of said sale to pay the sister of my deceased wife Miss Catharine Knode during the term of her natural life the annuity or yearly sum of two hundred dollars, the same being given as well in consideration of the respect and affection I bear her as of her long, continued kindness and attention in my family.

Ninthly, I will and order and direct that my said executors shall pay also out of the said proceeds to each of my daughters Janet Smith and Helen Blackford the sum of nine thousand, five hundred dollars over and above the sum of two thousands five hundred dollars each hereinbefore charged upon the land devised to my son Henry and I further direct that the said legacies shall bear interest until paid after the expiration of one year from of my decease.

Tenthly, after the payment of all and sundry the legacies hereinbefore bequeathed and the debts charges, costs, and expenses, I direct and require my said executors to divide and distribute the fund which shall be divided equally among all my said five children, Franklin, Henry, Janet, and Helen, or their legal representatives.

Eleventhly [sic], It is my will and desire that care shall be taken to prevent any of my slaves being sold out of the state or to slave traders or their agents unless for gross faults or to any but humane and good masters and I authorize my executors to sell at private sale to any of my children any part of my personal property but not at less than the appraised value hereof nor without care that the price be adequately secured for the payment of the various legacies given in and by this will.

Lastly, I constitute and appoint my friend Colonel John Miller and my son-in-law Otho J. Smith executors of this my last will and testament.

In testimony whereof I hereunto set my hand and (illegible) my seal this first day of November in the year eighteen hundred and thirty-nine. John Blackford.



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