

Introduction

Prince George's County possesses a rich cultural history that is deeply rooted in its agricultural economy. The county's rolling topography and network of freshwater drainages, emptying either into the Potomac River to the west or the Patuxent River to the east, provided habitats for a variety of floral and faunal communities and served as a natural infrastructure which rendered the region attractive to human population for the past 10,000 years. Mattawoman Creek forms part of the boundary between Prince George's County and Calvert County to the south. Prince George's County lies below the Fall Line, marking the boundary between upland and coastal environments, and can be characterized as a tidal, estuarine environment.

Prior to the arrival of European emigrants, Native Americans lived across the region taking advantage of its environmental riches. A few short years after the establishment in 1607 of the first permanent English settlement on the North American continent at Jamestown, English colonists discovered a staple crop capable of rendering the Chesapeake region economically viable and exceptionally profitable—tobacco. Perhaps no other factor proved more significant in the historic political, economic, social, and cultural development of Prince George's County than tobacco, which thrived in the sandy soils along the Patuxent drainage and, to a lesser degree, the Potomac River. English colonists steadily dispersed around the Chesapeake Bay in pursuit of fertile agricultural lands on which they could produce tobacco. The seemingly insatiable European appetite for American tobacco fueled this regional expansion and development.

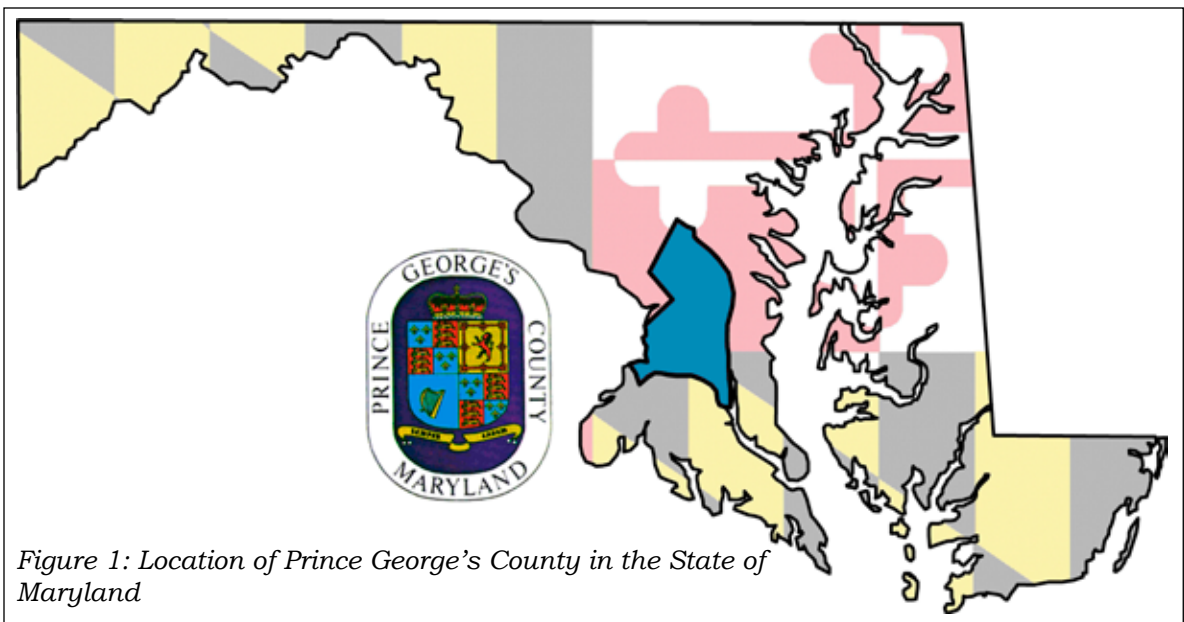


Figure 1: Location of Prince George's County in the State of Maryland

Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, the agricultural potential of what would become Prince George's County attracted European settlement. The first land grant issued for property within the present-day boundaries of Prince George's County, Josias Fendall's Cool Spring Manor in 1649, predates official foundation by a full half century. Names associated with this initial settlement, including Robert Brook (Brook Court in 1650), Thomas Trueman (Trueman's Choice in 1653), and Philip Calvert (Mount Calvert Manor in 1657), would remain prominent in Prince George's County across multiple generations, through the nineteenth century.

Settlement began along the Patuxent River. It is no accident that these early frontier settlers chose the best tobacco-yielding lands in the county. Agriculture, in particular cultivation of tobacco, attracted newcomers willing to brave frontier conditions for the profit potential offered by this cash crop.

Tobacco is a labor-intensive crop that required a workforce that at first comprised mostly white servants arriving from England as indentures, bound by a term of servitude. As the seventeenth century progressed, the demand for labor along the Chesapeake's tobacco coast outpaced England's ability to supply indentured workers, thus providing the impetus for the beginning of the African slave trade. The official founding of Prince George's County in 1696 corresponded with the transition from indentured white to enslaved black labor. As a result, a slave-maintained tobacco culture characterized Prince George's County for nearly two centuries, from its first days through the mid-nineteenth century when the Civil War culminated with universal emancipation.

In November 2005, the Prince George's County Council amended Subtitle 24 (Subdivision Regulations) to clarify the Prince George's County Planning Board's authority to protect significant archeological sites in accordance with the Planning Board's Guidelines for Archeological Review. The regulations require a Phase I investigation as part of the subdivision review process in order to identify any archeological sites that may be significant to the understanding of history of human settlement in Prince George's County, including the possible existence of slave quarters and slave graves.

Project Description

To provide a research foundation for locating slave quarters and slave graves, The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) Planning Department issued a request for proposals (RFP) in January 2006 for the development of an antebellum plantation research guide for Prince George's County, Maryland. The Antebellum Period is defined as the period extending from the founding of the county in 1696 to the end of the Civil War in 1865. The RFP described a project comprising three distinct tasks including the development of an antebellum agricultural context of Prince George's County, a review and analysis of known Prince George's County antebellum plantations, and the development of model layouts for typical

Prince George's County antebellum plantations. An additional task was added to compile a list of free black and mulatto persons in Prince George's County from the 1790-1860 federal census records. These lists can help to identify where antebellum free black and mulatto communities developed and assist in determining if any of these early community sites will be affected by future development.

Agricultural Context for Prince George's County

The first part of this document is the development of a countywide historic agricultural context based on extensive research of primary and secondary sources related specifically to the agricultural history of Prince George's County. The development of an agricultural context requires not only an examination of technological and economic modes of agricultural production, but also a consideration of the constantly evolving social and cultural character of the county through time. Slaves played an integral and defining role in Prince George's County agriculture, in particular tobacco production, from the formation of the county in 1696 through the end of the American Civil War in 1865.

The context was conceived to include elements such as the changing cultural composition of slaves throughout county history and an analysis of physical resources likely to be encountered across the landscape. Similarly, governmental actions such as legal definitions of social status and the establishment of limited conditions for manumission are significant factors in how slavery was shaped and perceived during the antebellum period.

Review and Analysis of Known Antebellum Plantations

The second component of this document consists of a written summary of the information regarding known antebellum plantation layouts in Prince George's County, including an analysis of the known and probable distributions of slave quarters and slave burials. This analysis is organized within the thematic and temporal divisions identified as part of the context development.

These plantations include recorded, standing "Big Houses" as well as all associated structures. Likewise, this effort examines plantation settings identified through previous archeological investigations. These known plantations are characterized according to the appropriate temporal and thematic division(s) and subdivision(s).

Development of a Model for Antebellum Plantations

The final component involves the development of a model for plantation layouts during each of the thematic temporal divisions and integrates the context and the data collected and analyzed in order to generate model plantation plans. One of the primary goals of this effort is to understand the similarities and differences among antebellum plantations of different sizes in the county.

Organization

This document is organized by chapters that detail specific components of this project. Following this introductory chapter, “Research Design” discusses the methods utilized in the development of the context, the research of known Prince George’s County plantations, and the creation of model plantation layouts. The “Literature Review” chapter consists of a literature review of primary and secondary sources. This review is not intended to be a comprehensive listing of all relevant materials, but rather provides some basic background for studies in Prince George’s County.

“Agriculture and Slavery: A Context for Prince George’s County, Maryland” was developed through a review of primary and secondary sources with particular attention to agricultural trends and slaveholdings. The chapters “Plantation Analysis” and “Spatial Organization” constitute the review of a sample of documented Prince George’s County antebellum plantations and the model plantation layouts, respectively. Areas of future research and archeological implications are detailed in “Research Topics.” The last chapter is a bibliography of all references cited.