

Research Topics

This document has been constructed as a tool for researchers of the antebellum past of Prince George's County. Throughout the document, many broad themes emerge relating to agricultural economy, labor, wealth, plantation architecture, and the slave community. Over the course of conducting this research, it became evident that deficiencies existed in our understanding of the important topics. Accordingly, several thematically organized research topics are presented below. Although by no means the only avenues of potential research, these research topics nonetheless represent apparent gaps in the antebellum record of Prince George's County.

Economy

The context portion of this document focuses on agriculture as the most significant economic pursuit in antebellum Prince George's County. Although much is known regarding the agricultural history of the Middle Atlantic region, significant gaps remain. Although central, agriculture represents only one of several economic activities. The following research topics represent identified deficiencies in the understanding of the economic history of Prince George's County.

- The role of subsistence crops, such as corn and wheat, relative to the tobacco cash crop, and how this changed over time.
- The role of nonagricultural pursuits, such as milling, smithing, coopering, distillation, etc., within the plantation landscape.
- The development of increasingly complex social and economic classes based on economic specialization.
- The emergence of towns and their role in the agricultural as well as skilled labor, mercantile, and manufacturing/industrial sectors.
- The development and role of the merchant class and its relationship to the planter class over time.
- The relationship between economic activity and the specific tasks, living conditions, diet, of free, indentured, and enslaved populations.

- Plantation self-sufficiency and the role of the intracounty economy with particular attention to the relationship between plantations of varied social status and between plantations and towns.
- The role of tobacco in emerging and changing markets and the significance of this to towns, infrastructure, and plantations.

Labor

This document emphasizes the role of plantations and the agricultural economy of Prince George's County. As a result, slavery is the primary labor model investigated. Consequently, the following topics for potential research consider free and indentured labor as well as under-represented aspects of enslaved labor.

The use of slave labor in nonagricultural activities.

- The commonality and nature of mixed, free and slave, labor forces.
- Gender-specific labor roles.
- Labor status and access to the means and modes of agricultural, commercial, and industrial production.

Wealth

In this document, wealth is often tied to the production of a cash crop utilizing an enslaved labor force. Alternate means of attaining and defining wealth remain under-researched.

- The profitability of agricultural versus nonagricultural pursuits.
- Social mobility among free white and free black communities.
- The social and economic correlation between kinship and wealth.
- The geographic and social consolidation/distribution of wealth.
- Quantitative and qualitative measures of wealth in the archeological record.
- The relationship between wealth and social status.

Plantation Architecture

Plantation architecture encompasses not only the plantation house, but also includes structures utilized for the range of economic pursuits within a given plantation as well as the organization of the plantation landscape. Research topics within this theme explore the broader social and economic influence on plantation architecture.

- The relationship between wealth and plantation architecture, including stylistic choices for the plantation house, agricultural outbuildings, and slave quarters.
- The influence of non-European, in particular African and Afro-Caribbean, cultural traditions on the spatial organization of the plantation landscape, architectural stylistic characteristics, and construction techniques.
- The organization of racially defined spaces within the plantation landscape over time.
- The division and consolidation of plantations over time and the resulting alterations to the plantation landscape.

Slave Community

Slavery remains a topic central to the understanding of antebellum society and economy and a wealth of research has been dedicated to its study. Nonetheless, slavery, in particular the nature of the slave community and its change over time, warrant further research.

- The characteristics of artifact assemblages associated with slave, rather than free black, free white, or indentured, occupation.
- African, Afro-Caribbean, and/or Atlantic Creole cultural traditions in the slave community and the development of an African-American culture.
- Expressions of autonomy among the enslaved population.
- Historical and archeological evidence for social stratification within the slave community.
- Archeological and historical evidence for the development of the slave family over time.
- The nature of slave burial customs and their change over time; the positive identification of slave interments.
- Slave religion and the rise of Christianity in the slave population.
- The organization of racially defined and gendered spaces change over time.

Free Black Community

The document entitled *List of Free Blacks in Prince George's County, 1790–1860* contains a transcription of names of free black individuals listed in United States federal census records between the years 1790 and 1860 for Prince George's County, Maryland. It consists of the entries for free blacks in the United States censuses for Prince George's County, starting with the first

federal census in 1790, and continuing every ten years until the 1860 census, the last census before universal emancipation. The transcriptions were taken from sets of federal census records, which are held at the Maryland Archives in Annapolis, Maryland. Complete sets of census records are also available through on-line subscription websites such as www.ancestry.com.

The free black census should be viewed in the context of slavery in Prince George's County during the antebellum period, when the labor requirement for tobacco production was sustained by intensive slave labor. The free black community in the county remained relatively small during the antebellum period. With the exception of an increase in free blacks represented in the 1810 census, the population of freedmen in Prince George's County never exceeded six percent of the county's black population, or ten percent of the total population. Although the State of Maryland possessed one of the highest percentages of free blacks of any slaveholding state, Prince George's County's black population remained largely enslaved. The rural tobacco economy of Prince George's County proved less conducive to the development of a large free black population than in Maryland's urban centers, such as Baltimore and Annapolis, or in areas with more diversified agriculture.

The document entitled *List of Free Blacks in Prince George's County, 1790–1860* may assist with the geographic placement of free black households within Prince George's County between 1790 and 1860. Used in concert with other historic documents, the census rolls of free black Prince Georgians offer a resource for the better understanding of the relationships between the free black, free white, and enslaved populations in the pre-Civil War period.

Methodology

Archeological methods and historiographic trends develop and change over time. Regular introspection and the modification of research methods and approaches better serve continuing research.

- The efficacy of archeological sampling strategies in the identification, evaluation, and interpretation of slave quarters.
- The ability to apply primary sources, such as inventories and comprehensive tax records, to the understanding of the plantation landscape.
- Integration of locally based investigations with the larger, regional and national historic narratives; variability of localities within broader geographic regions.
- Development of research models based on economic and social similarities rather than geographic proximity.