

"FOR THE STONES WILL CRY OUT":  
AN ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE LANDSCAPE OF ENSLAVEMENT AT  
HISTORIC BRATTONSVILLE, YORK COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

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A THESIS

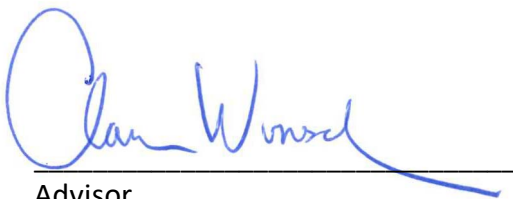
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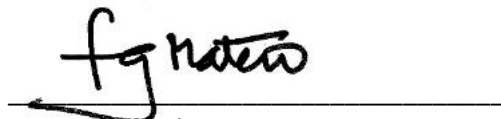
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*For my grandfather Curtis*

*Repairer of the Breach*

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## INTRODUCTION

In order to clarify the purpose of this body of work, it is important to first recognize that it is neither a historic structures report, a detailed study of a particular building's fabric and physical evolution, nor is it a comprehensive landscape study. The intent of this work is to provide insight based on an analysis of scholarship pertaining to landscapes of American slavery and reveal how themes found within the readings are able to further define the landscape of enslavement at the Historic Brattonsville site. Ultimately, it is my hope that the information presented here will contribute to the interpretive plan at Historic Brattonsville and the more general scope of knowledge concerning the relationship of American slavery to the built environment.

Although the most obvious physical remnants of slavery can be found throughout the Southeast, the system itself is comprehensively American at its root. Brattonsville, despite its location in the rural South Carolina Piedmont, was not built and did not operate in isolation. Instead, it functioned within a larger system of social and economic relationships on both a national and international scale. With the introduction of Eli Whitney's cotton gin in 1793, in tandem with the growing demand for cotton in both national and international markets, growing cotton became quite profitable in the Upcountry of South Carolina and in the greater Southeastern region as a whole throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, the demand for land and labor erupted in what historian Sven Beckert describes as a "cotton rush" in which settlers from the upper and coastal South pushed westward into the frontier territories of Piedmont South Carolina and Georgia, intent on becoming the newest generation of southern

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest M. Lander Jr., *The Textile Industry in Antebellum South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 3-12.

gentry.<sup>2</sup> The Brattons were among the first of this early wave of settlement, relocating from western Virginia to land which would later become York County, South Carolina. Colonel William Bratton would become one of the region's first successful planters, purchasing 200 acres of land along the South Fork of Fishing Creek in 1766.<sup>3</sup> By 1790, Bratton owned twelve slaves, granting him elite status within the Upcountry and that of lower gentry in South Carolina as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

In the introduction to *Slavery's Capitalism*, editors Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman attest to the southern plantation's indispensable role in the development of economies outside of the American Southeast. They quote the New England minister Orpheus Lanphear's description of slavery in the 1850s as "a huge serpent menacing Northern Capital, Trade, and Manufactures: its hiss was heard in the Stock-market, and in the Counting-house, making the very Ledgers tremble in their cases. It was audible in the whirl of every spindle, and the vibration of every loo, in the muttering of every waterwheel, and in the whistle of every engine; and rang its menace along the edge of the ship-carpenter's adze."<sup>5</sup> Although archival documentation of the Bratton family's connection to larger markets for their crops is relatively scarce, remaining evidence does suggest that much of the Bratton plantation's cotton as well as that produced within the county at large was eventually sold at the Charleston market. In her 1994 archaeological study of one of the brick ruins at Brattonsville, Rita B. Kenion makes mention of this reality, writing:

Early cotton crops of York County were delivered eventually to Charleston, according to Bratton accounts. An early painting of the plantation shows a road deeply grooved into the red clay which runs parallel to the present Brattonsville Rd. We can follow the cotton on the roads in Mills Atlas from Brattonsville to Chester to Winnsboro, roughly along what is the present U.S. 321. The Brattons hired teamsters to haul their cotton

<sup>2</sup> Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 103.

<sup>3</sup> Michael C. Scoggins, *A Brief History of Historic Brattonsville* (Rock Hill, S.C. York County Culture and Heritage Museums, 2003), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Scoggins, *A Brief History of Historic Brattonsville*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman. eds. *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 2.

and any that was ginned for the local farmers and planters. At Winnsboro we lose specific records, but eventually the cotton went by road, rail or other means to Charleston. Documents relating to Brattonsville provide the names of a couple of dozen teamsters who hauled goods, including cotton, for the Bratton plantation.<sup>6</sup>

While a significant portion of the cotton grown in the South was sent to fuel the growing textile industry of the Northeast, much was sent abroad. Beckert writes, “The entry of the United States into the empire of cotton was so forceful that cotton cultivation in the American South quickly began to reshape the global cotton market...exports to Great Britain increased by a factor of ninety-three between 1791 and 1800, only to multiply another seven times by 1820.”<sup>7</sup> This observation underscores the influence that sites like Brattonsville had on both the American and global economies, an influence that would not have been possible without the mass exploitation of slave labor.

While bearing in mind this broad context, we should also consider the means by which the slave community may have shaped their environment to “lighten their burden of oppression”.<sup>8</sup> In his pivotal work on landscapes of enslavement, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, historian John Michael Vlach suggests that, in addition to creating cultural responses to their enslavement through food, music, and speech, slaves responded to the environments imposed upon them by creating informal spaces over which they presided both communally and individually. Vlach states, “The loose, ad hoc scheme of preferred paths and gathering places was created incrementally by a series of improvisational responses to the given landscape rules of white masters. Because similar improvisational

<sup>6</sup> Study prepared by Rita B. Kenion, *Investigation of a Brick Dependency at Historic Brattonsville District: An Archaeological Study* (Submitted to York County Historical Commission York, SC. 1994), 4.

<sup>7</sup>Sven Beckert. *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, 104.

<sup>8</sup> John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, (Oxford University Press, 1940), 105.

responses by black people to Anglo-American forms of speech, music, dance, it is not too farfetched to suggest a parallel development in their responses to their assigned environments.<sup>9</sup>

By examining the organization of the formal routes taken by members of the Bratton family and their guests within and around the Homestead House, alternative routes solely dominated by slaves begin to emerge. Considered together, the pathways taken by domestic slaves in service of the Bratton family form a series of linked informal spaces, all of which extend from the figurative heart of the slave community within and immediately around the brick domiciles and dependency structures. Artifacts uncovered beneath one of these structures such as tools, toys and the bones of higher quality cuts of meat potentially reveal that those living within Brattonsville's domestic quarter were able to modestly improve their daily routines. While it is possible that the presence of these items can be attributed to the goodwill of the Bratton family, they are more likely the result of initiatives taken by the enslaved themselves in subtle yet meaningful acts of resistance to their enslavement.

In summary, the first chapter of this work will serve to situate the Brattonsville site within the larger context of the development of the plantation system in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and further examine the growth of plantation sites during those times. The findings from this portion of the analysis will then be compared with the Brattonsville site. Special consideration will be taken in analyzing the economic and social forces which may have influenced the development of the Bratton estate and may have also affected the lives of those enslaved at the site. Additionally, this study will examine the possible spatial and cultural reactions the Bratton slaves had to their environment, and the ways which they may have directly or indirectly resisted their enslavement.

<sup>9</sup>John M. Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 13.

The focus of the second chapter is on the sites of Brattonsville directly associated with the landscape of enslavement there: the dairy and the slave dwelling within the domestic quarter. Although there is limited information within the Bratton Family Papers which references the construction of dependency structures on the property, it is still possible to glean a significant amount of information from these structures. By conducting field analyses and consulting past archaeological studies of the site, it is possible to uncover information about the structures' uses and their relationships to the broader working landscape at Brattonsville. Currently, the historians and preservationists employed by the York County Culture and Heritage Museums interpret the two structures as housing slaves whose work both directly and indirectly serviced the Homestead House. There are certainly narratives from other similar plantation sites which can attest to the accuracy of this interpretation, as well as analyses completed deeming the materials used to construct the buildings as well as their orientation to the main house as significant to understanding their roles within the working landscape. The domestic slave dwellings were "usually better constructed than the cabins built for the field hands" and "generally set behind or to the side of the planter's residence, where they would not contend with it visually."<sup>10</sup> Both of these findings are likely true with regard to the slave dwelling and dairy at Brattonsville. Additionally, the extensive use of brick in the construction of these buildings suggests the possibility that the Brattons wished to associate themselves with the Virginia planter class, taking advantage of the ample local clay deposits to do so.

Furthermore, this work will examine the ways that these two structures were assembled. It is my hope that with a thorough analysis of the construction methods, more evidence will be uncovered as to who may have constructed them, with what tools were the

<sup>10</sup> John M. Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, 20-21.



materials harvested, shaped and finished, and how and by whom the buildings may have been used. To summarize, the second chapter of this work will serve to focus the reader on two structures which are directly tied to the landscape of enslavement at the site, and which offer insight into the lives of the Bratton family's slaves.

Finally, the third chapter of this work will focus on the interpretation of the landscape of enslavement at the Brattonsville site. This will be accomplished by briefly reviewing the history of interpretation at former sites of enslavement in the United States and gaining an understanding of where Historic Brattonsville falls within that spectrum. The field of African-American studies is exceptionally broad and interdisciplinary and has built itself on a rich array of equally broad and interdisciplinary literature. Although the study of slavery is only one aspect of this literary foundation, it perhaps represents its core, as the African-American narrative largely began with slavery. Some of the earliest available insights into the world of slavery include the recounting of experiences in the autobiographies of Olaudah Equiano (1794), Frederick Douglass (1845), and Harriet Jacobs (1861). These works were supplemented in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the WPA's Federal Writer's Project, which collected personal accounts from former slaves across the country. Although these primary sources offer invaluable accounts of the tragedy of slavery, when taking into consideration the full breadth of the development of the interpretation of slavery at historic sites it is also important to acknowledge the contributions of those who were indirectly effected by slavery or simply engaged in studying the subject early on. This includes seminal works by authors such as W.E.B. DuBois, George Washington Williams, as well as the documentation of structures associated with slavery by the Historic American Buildings Survey. All such authors and organizations have contributed greatly to the early understanding of the cultural and physical dynamics which the system of slavery imposed on countless people and landscapes throughout its existence.

The practice of interpreting historic sites in the United States and the way in which that practice intersects with the body of slavery-related historical literature developed throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century is rooted in racial bias and selective interpretation. Some of the first sites to be restored and opened to the public were associated with America's colonial history, placing the focus of restoration and preservation efforts on sites affiliated with the founding fathers such as Colonial Williamsburg, Mt. Vernon, and Monticello. Despite sites like these and many others having a direct relationship to slavery, they were initially interpreted with little or no reference to the institution of slavery. It seemed that the glorification of these sites as memorials to a bygone era superseded the telling of truer narratives, ones which included the lives of the enslaved.

Throughout the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and with the advent of the Civil Rights Movement, many authors and historic sites began to engage in a period of self-critique, wherein the narratives told were becoming more inclusive, particularly of the narrative of American slavery. Seminal works such as John Blassingame's *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1940), John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery To Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (1947), and Kenneth Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution* (1956), would begin to dissect the system of slavery and reintroduce this thinking into mainstream scholarship. Historians Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry characterize the national neglect of the history of slavery throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a "collective amnesia".<sup>11</sup> Despite a turn toward realizing truer narratives within the literature, many historic sites with direct ties to slavery would continue to be afflicted by this "amnesia" well into the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>11</sup> Max A. van. Balgooy, Kristin L. Gallas, and James DeWolf Perry, 'Developing a Comprehensive and Conscientious Interpretation of Slavery at Historic Sites and Museums.', in *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 13-23.

Fortunately, this too is changing. Sites such as Mt. Vernon and Monticello, once infamous for their narrow interpretations, have dramatically altered their programs to include the history of slavery and communicate a more honest and complete history of the site to visitors.

In summary, the third chapter of this work will attempt to contextualize the interpretation of the Brattonsville site within the larger scope of how slavery has been addressed both within the literature as well as at historic sites. With this contextualization, the task of improving on the narrative that is currently told to visitors of the site becomes more feasible. Brattonsville offers insight into two evolutionary histories: the evolutionary history of the Bratton family and their rise to local prominence; and the evolutionary history of their slaves and their endurance of an institution which continued to grow and change as their community did. Historic Brattonsville is distinct in that it features structures which are representative of each phase of both developmental histories. Though the inclusion of the Bratton family's transition from settlers to planters is an important part of the complete interpretation of the site and one which sets them apart from many others in the South Carolina Upcountry, it is my intention with this work to illuminate the history of Brattonsville's slaves. From the relatively small group which labored for Colonel Bratton, to the extensive community enslaved by his son John, to the lynching of Captain Jim Williams after the Civil War, Historic Brattonsville's built landscape presents an opportunity for visitors to observe and directly engage with a developmental history of slavery within a single site.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology utilized for the completion of this work includes the collection of data from primary and secondary historical sources in combination with an analysis of the brick dairy and slave dwelling at the Historic Brattonsville site. This work draws inspiration from those authors and practitioners deemed “vernacularists” whose studies seek to shed light on the landscapes and architecture of the ordinary. In the preface of his landmark work, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, folklorist Henry Glassie states, “Architecture studied as an expression of personality and culture may provide us with the best means available for comprehending an authentic history.” It is this strive for the comprehension and communication of an “authentic history” which is the catalyst behind the methodology for this work.

## PART I: CONTEXTUALIZING THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE BRATTON FAMILY

It is possible that the most honest position with which to anchor the Bratton family's origins in the American colonies is one of contradiction, between visions of prosperity, and the harsh, unforgiving reality of the frontier landscape. The Bratton family headed west from Virginia, perhaps aspiring to become the next generation of Southern gentry and found themselves without an established social structure against which they could mark their progress. There were no grand manor houses perched on hills as there had been in Virginia, scarcely even orderly divisions of land.

The Brattons were among many waves of Northern Irish Presbyterians who immigrated to the American colonies in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, predominantly seeking both religious independence from the Church of England and land of their own. Many like the Brattons perhaps saw the most opportunity in the lands of the frontier and followed the Appalachian Mountains southward along the "Great Wagon Road". Historian James Leyburn writes:

For the entire fifty-eight years of the Great Migration, the large majority of Scotch-Irish made their entry to America through Philadelphia or Chester or New Castle. With these towns as their starting point and the western frontier their destination, the immigrants, as they poured in, found their path of progress almost laid out for them by geography. The Great Valley led westward for a hundred miles or more; then when high mountains blocked further easy movement in that direction, the Valley turned southwestward across the Potomac to become the Shenandoah Valley. From the southern terminus of the Valley of Virginia, it was a short trip, by the time the pioneers had reached it, into the Piedmont regions of the Carolinas, where colonists were now warmly welcome.<sup>12</sup>

Historical accounts portray these settlers in romanticized terms, with one going so far as to describe "a God-fearing, Sabbath-keeping, covenant adhering, liberty-loving, and tyrant-hating race" whose dominant traits "were equality and brotherly love".<sup>13</sup> Such portrayals tend to

<sup>12</sup> James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 185.

<sup>13</sup> C.G. Woodson, "Freedom and Slavery in Appalachian America". *Journal of Negro History* 1, no.2. (University of Chicago Press, 1916), 135-150.

underplay or omit the role of slavery as the region's primary labor system. Granted, for the Bratton family, the reality of their early success in the region as exemplified by later generations, was certainly in part rooted in kinship ties and their ability to obtain a substantial parcel of arable land. These, however, were also the realities of other Scotch-Irish settlers. What distinguished the Brattons from the thousands of others settling in the Upcountry in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was their use of slave labor at a time when many did not.

Although the extent to which the Bratton family was exposed to the system of slavery as they traveled throughout the British colonies is unclear, some informed speculation is possible. Historian Michael Scoggins recounts the earliest mentions of the Bratton family in the British colonies writing that:

In early 1740 Robert Bratton settled in the Beverley Manor of old Augusta County, Virginia, in the valley between the Blue Ridge and Appalachian Mountains. Robert was joined there by James Bratton, probably his brother, and both men acquired large tracts of land in the area known as "Bratton's Run" on the Calfpasture River (located in modern Bath County, VA). Here the Brattons became influential landowners and officers in the local militia, and among the neighboring Scotch-Irish families with whom they were closely associated were the Robinsons or Robertsons. Both Brattons and Robinsons served in the militia during the French and Indian War (1754-1763), and in June 1756 we find William Bratton, perhaps a brother of Robert and James, listed among the garrison of Fort Vause in Augusta County (near Christiansburg in modern Montgomery County, VA).<sup>14</sup>

Scoggins later makes it clear to the reader that although there is not much documentation connecting the William Bratton of the French and Indian War with the Colonel Bratton of Brattonsville, "a family connection is certainly implied by the available evidence."<sup>15</sup> This passage potentially offers significant insight into the development of the relationship of the Bratton family with American slavery.

<sup>14</sup> Michael C. Scoggins, *A Brief History of Historic Brattonsville*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Scoggins, 2.

By locating the Bratton family in the colonies of Maryland and Virginia, it can be surmised that they would have interacted with the system of slavery at some level. By the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> century, the plantation system had long become entrenched in the hearts and minds of many in the Upper South. As the Bratton family chafed between their planter ideals and the harsh reality of their new frontier environment, so too did the colonies; caught between the paradox of the freedom-centered idealism espoused by the founding fathers, and the harsh reality of a dependence on slavery. Author Edmund S. Morgan states that in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, “Virginia was the largest of the new United States, in territory, in population, in influence – and in slaveholding. Virginians owned more than 40 percent of the slaves in the new nation.”<sup>16</sup> In fact, slavery had been a part of the foundation of the colony, present amidst the earliest settlements well over a century prior to the Revolution. Historian Rhys Isaac offers a short but effective summary of this complicated history in the introduction of his work titled *The Transformation of Virginia: 1740-1790* writing:

Some of the English, being owners of land and lords of labor, consolidated an eminence above the rest. When, after a time, they found there was a shortage of their own island people who were willing to enter into bondage for a term of years in order to be carried to a continent of supposed opportunity, the would-be masters supplied themselves with captives from Africa instead. Thus, another people came to live and work on the Chesapeake shores.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, author Ira Berlin solidifies the role of slavery as a dominating force in the landscape of colonial Virginia, likening the introduction of slave labor into the colonies to “shot and cannon” writing, “The transformation from a society with slaves to a slave society began when in 1676 planters smashed Nathaniel Bacon’s motley army of small holders and indentured servants.” He continues, citing that, “during the 1680s, some 2,000 Africans were carried into Virginia. This

<sup>16</sup>Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York. London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia: 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), Introduction.

number more than doubled in the 1690's, and it doubled again in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Nearly 8,000 African slaves arrived in the colony between 1700 and 1710, and the Chesapeake briefly replaced Jamaica as the most profitable slave market in British America."<sup>18</sup>

In many ways the establishment of the colony of Maryland parallels that of Virginia. Land there was utilized by English settlers to produce massive amounts of wheat and tobacco largely to be shipped abroad for profit. African slaves were brought to Maryland as early as 1634, less than two decades after those in Virginia.<sup>19</sup> Despite Maryland's introduction in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the already well established African slave trade operating in the Caribbean, the majority of African settlers were considered to be "Atlantic Creoles" because of their origins in the larger Atlantic commercial world. "Most came from the Caribbean islands, while some were born elsewhere in the Americas. Many spoke English, practiced Christianity, and were familiar with English law and trading etiquettes."<sup>20</sup> However, as the colony began to transition from that of a settlement toward a plantation-based economy which more closely resembled that of its neighbor to the south, so too did its reliance on slave labor:

The last decade of the seventeenth century witnessed a profound transformation of Maryland society and, with it, a change in the character of slavery. In 1689, following a revolt against Calvert family rule, Maryland planters took control of the colony, consolidated their grip on political power, expanded their landholdings, and increased their need for laborers. At the same time, economic and political developments in Europe disrupted the supply of indentured servants, prompting planters to turn to African labor, most of it imported directly from the continent.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slave* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 55.

<sup>19</sup> Paul A. Shackel and Barbara J. Little, eds, *Historical Archaeology of the Chesapeake* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 45.

<sup>20</sup> *A Guide to the History of Slavery in Maryland* (The Maryland State Archives: Annapolis Maryland and the University of Maryland: College Park, Maryland, 2007), 3.

<sup>21</sup> *A Guide to the History of Slavery in Maryland*, 3.



In the decades leading up to the Revolutionary War, African slaves were transported to Maryland at a steadily increasing rate. “By 1755, about one third of Maryland’s population—in some places as much as one half—was derived from Africa, mostly from the interior of the continent. The colony became as much an extension of Africa as of Europe.”<sup>22</sup>

It is important to recognize that plantations throughout the Chesapeake region operated at a far different scale from many of those throughout the backcountry and that although the populations of slaves in colonies like Virginia and Maryland were large, the majority of those populations were concentrated on the coasts throughout much of the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is unlikely that these landscapes and systems served as models for their own enterprise as they followed the Appalachian Mountains south. Rather, the plantations and farms which incorporated slave labor in much of western Maryland and Virginia, including old Augusta county where it was documented that the Brattons “acquired large tracts of land” and “became influential landowners”, were involved with slavery at a smaller and therefore more intimate level.<sup>23</sup>

This adaptation of the system of slavery to accommodate the frontier landscape of western Virginia is described by historians J. Susanne Simmons and Nancy T. Sorrells in their work *Slave Hire and the Development of Slavery in Augusta County, Virginia*. They write, “The geography and culture of the Shenandoah Valley helped to define the antebellum agrarian economy and shape the system of slavery within the context of small 100 – to 200-acre family farms that typically dotted the landscape.”<sup>24</sup> This varied greatly from the plantations of families like the Carters, Byrds and Lees, whose massive landholdings dominated the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *A Guide to the History of Slavery in Maryland*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Scoggins, 2.

<sup>24</sup> J.S. Simmons. and Nancy T. Sorrells, “Slave Hire and the Development of Slavery in Augusta County, Virginia” Kenneth E. Koons and Warren R. Hofstra eds. *After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia 1800-1900*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 169.

century Chesapeake landscape. Although the landscape of slavery was perhaps not as visually arresting as the “little towns” described by visitors to larger Eastern Virginian plantations, slavery did have a strong hold on areas like Augusta County throughout much of its 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century life.<sup>25</sup> Historian George Rawick writes that “At various times, slaves accounted for between 14 and 20 percent of Augusta County’s population.”<sup>26</sup> This large portion of the overall county population was relatively dispersed as most slave-holding residents of the county owned five or fewer slaves.<sup>27</sup>

Among many of the documented business transactions from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century in Augusta County are those which involve the process of hiring slaves from other slaveholders to assist in seasons of intense labor such as the annual wheat harvest. One example included in Simmons’ and Sorrells’ work is an entry in the diary of the Reverend Francis McFarland in July 1854 which reads, “Finished cutting wheat. Baily Dunlap & a black man of Mr. Eidson’s and Lewis Cradling & two boys of Mr. Eidson’s one of Mr. Lightner Mr. Argenbright & Major Vines & Robert Raking & Bundling; paid out \$4 ½ Dolls.”<sup>28</sup> This diary entry and its acknowledgement of both whites and blacks working together exists in complete contrast to the almost wholly segregated labor forces of the plantations along the coast. Simmons and Sorrells write that, “In the upper valley, however, freemen and bondsmen continued physically to work together to the end of the Antebellum era, in a labor system that was less strictly defined along class lines. In an 1845 report, the Lexington Presbytery, which encompassed all the Presbyterian churches of the

<sup>25</sup>George P. Rawick, ed, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport, Conn. Greenwood Press, 1972).

<sup>26</sup> Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, (1972).

<sup>27</sup> J.S. Simmons, “They Too Were Here: African Americans in Augusta County, Virginia, 1790-1865.” (Master’s Thesis, James Madison Univ, 1994), 31.

<sup>28</sup> Simmons and Sorrells, “Slave Hire and the Development of Slavery in Augusta County, Virginia” Kenneth E. Koons and Warren R. Hofstra eds., *After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia 1800-1900*, 169.

upper valley (and thus a large percentage of the region's population), observed that 'here yeoman farmers worked alongside their slaves.'"<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, the lack of existing information regarding the Bratton Family's participation in this form of slavery makes it difficult to form a definitive case one way or the other. Although the type of "slave-hire" system that would find its way into the diary of Reverend McFarland or the largely integrated labor systems recounted by the Lexington Presbytery would not be as common when the Bratton Family arrived in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is safe to assume that the foundations for this system had been securely placed and were quite visible in the region at that time.

The Beverly Manor of old Augusta County, Virginia mentioned in Scoggins' account of the Bratton Family's early settlement history provides some additional clarity about the forces which may have drawn the Brattons from Maryland and possibly Pennsylvania in the 1740s. Much of old Augusta County including the land where the Bratton Family would settle was originally deeded to planters William Beverly, John and Richard Randolph, and John Robinson by Sir William Gooch, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet on behalf of the English Crown in 1736.<sup>30</sup> The nearly 119,000 acres of land was then transferred solely to Beverly, who planned to speculate and sell the land in smaller parcels. Beverly soon after commissioned John Patton, a ship captain from Ulster, Northern Ireland, to recruit Irish and Scotch-Irish immigrants to settle on his land.<sup>31</sup> The relatively low cost of the land that would later be deemed "Beverley Manor" was quite appealing to families like the Brattons, looking to establish farmsteads along the Virginian frontier. Although Scoggins mentions that Robert Bratton would settle in this part of Virginia

<sup>29</sup> Simmons and Sorrells, 174.

<sup>30</sup>Turk McCleskey, "Rich Land, Poor Prospects: Real Estate and the Formation of a Social Elite in Augusta County, Virginia, 1738-1770", *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (Richmond, Virginia: Virginia Historical Society, 1990. 98. 3), 449-486.

<sup>31</sup> Emory G. Evans, A *"Topping People": The Rise and Decline of Virginia's Old Political Elite, 1680-1790*. (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

with his brothers James and William (believed to be the father of Colonel William Bratton of Brattonsville), the transition from renters to owners of significant tracts of land would have required more labor than the three men along with any additional family members would have been capable of on their own. This information implies that the Brattons were perhaps among the earlier participants in the slave-hire system in this region of Virginia. Additionally, it stands to reason that as their landholdings grew, so too did their wealth and the Brattons were eventually able to purchase their own slaves. If this were in fact the case, it was these slaves and their descendants who would form the core of the Brattonsville slave community, and whose labor would sow the seeds of wealth and status for future generations of the Bratton family. Future research as to the Bratton family's land ownership and involvement in this system of slavery in Virginia is required to confirm or deny this possibility.

When the Bratton family first arrived in what was then Rowan County, North Carolina, seeking safety from frequent Shawnee raids in Virginia, they perhaps were struck by what author Lacy K. Ford Jr. describes as "a coarse frontier society that was still more frontier than society."<sup>32</sup> Shortly after their arrival, in 1762 the North Carolina Legislature would create Mecklenburg County from the western half of Anson County, offering land grants to those willing to settle in the new territory. The Brattons were among those who would take advantage of this opportunity. In fact, the colonial government had devised initiatives to encourage settlement throughout inland South Carolina for nearly three decades before the Bratton family's arrival in the Upcountry. Author Rachel Klein writes:

In 1731, Governor Robert Johnson was acceptance of a township plan that called for the establishment of eleven inland settlements from the Savannah River to the North Carolina line. The plan provided that bounties and fifty-acre head-right grants be given to white Protestants who settled in the new townships. Governor Johnson hoped

<sup>32</sup> Lacy K. Ford Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry 1800-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5.

thereby to promote the rise of a prosperous inland yeomanry that would serve as protection to coastal settlers in the event of a slave insurrection or Indian War.<sup>33</sup>

Although the earliest attempts to encourage settlement of the Williamsburg, Kingston, and Queensboro townships were largely unsuccessful, the incitements offered by the royal government promising land presented opportunities for financial and social security for many migrants, including the Brattons. Additionally, this proposed head-right system included the granting of additional acreage to families with slaves, perhaps granting the Brattons an advantage over many other settlers in the area.

This was certainly the case for other families, including the prominent Calhouns, who had similarly migrated from Augusta County, Virginia, drawn to the South Carolina Backcountry by the colony's headright plan and "with the advantage of a few inherited slaves."<sup>34</sup> One traveler's account of the area noted that a planter with "one or two hundred acres" and "two or three negroes" might "in no long term of years become a man of handsome fortune."<sup>35</sup> It is worth reiterating that although it is unclear whether the Brattons owned slaves while they migrated from Virginia into the South Carolina backcountry, their status as "influential landholders" in Augusta county strongly suggests that they may have. If this were in fact the case, the Brattons, much like the Calhouns, would have been able to greatly expediate the process of their becoming prominent figures in the county upon their arrival.

Although it is unknown when exactly William Bratton purchased or perhaps inherited his first slave, it is clear that he owned at least two, Watt and Polly, at the start of the Revolutionary War. The story of Watt's involvement in the Battle of Hucks Defeat, fought between Whig

<sup>33</sup> Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 13.

<sup>34</sup> Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> *American Husbandry, Containing an Account of the Soil, Culture, Production, and Agriculture of the British Colonies in North America and the West Indies*, (London: 1775), 431.

militiamen in part under the command of Colonel William Bratton and a force of British provincial soldiers and Tory militia on the morning of July 12, 1780, has been told at the site for generations. Scoggins briefly recounts the narrative writing:

On the afternoon before Huck's Defeat, he was sent out by Mrs. Bratton to find her husband and warn him of Huck's approach. The Brattons placed a fine tombstone to mark the graves of Watt and his wife Polly following their deaths in December 1837 and July 1838, respectively. This tombstone states that both Watt and Polly served the Brattons faithfully during their lives and served their children with the same fidelity.<sup>36</sup>

Five years after Watt's courageous act, the territory of New Acquisition became York County, South Carolina, and Colonel William Bratton remained one of its most prominent figures. His service as one of the county's first Justices of the Peace, Pinkney District Sheriff, and as a member of both the South Carolina House of Representatives and Senate all demonstrate his elevated status within the local community and South Carolina more broadly.

As Colonel Bratton's role as a leader of the York County community continued to diversify, so too did the operations of his plantation. Scoggins writes that, "In 1786 Bratton took advantage of his convenient location at the crossroads and established a tavern and country store at his home."<sup>37</sup> The relative isolation of the backcountry from the larger and well-established markets of the coast perhaps required a degree of diversification in order for settlers to survive. This is certainly reflected in the wide range of cash crops grown in the region in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century largely supplementing basic subsistence farming. Klein writes that, "The colony's extensive river system and the influx of merchants who provided credit and marketing facilities encouraged the early development of staple agriculture in the backcountry."<sup>38</sup> Around the time of the Bratton family's arrival in the 1760s, indigo was a leading

<sup>36</sup> Scoggins, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Scoggins, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Klein, Rachel N. *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry*, 16.

backcountry commodity although only the wealthiest of settlers who could afford the initial investment in the equipment needed for its production could expect profits. Hemp was also grown throughout the backcountry, and some even as far inland as the fall line produced rice for export.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, tobacco production in the region perhaps foreshadowed the impact that staple agriculture would eventually have on the development of the South Carolina backcountry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. "In 1768, a Charlestonian noted 'several large quantities of excellent tobacco, made in the back settlements, have been brought to this market.'"<sup>40</sup> In 1770, Lieutenant Governor Bull informed Lord Hillsborough that, "tobacco, tho' a bulky commodity, is planted from one hundred and fifty to two hundred miles from Charleston, where the Emigrants from Virginia find the weed meliorate as they come south; and they cultivate it now with great advantage notwithstanding the distance of carriage to market."<sup>41</sup>

Wheat production similarly constituted a major portion of the colonial backcountry economy, and "may well have been the most widely cultivated of any inland crop besides corn."<sup>42</sup> In 1753, John Tobler wrote that "the Negroes [in Saxe Gotha] plant much wheat" and that settlers had "good mills and take the flour to Charles-town."<sup>43</sup> By 1769, the *South Carolina Gazette* reported that "the value of flour exported from the colony exceeded that of any backcountry crop except indigo."<sup>44</sup> As the agricultural economy of the frontier continued to grow, planters like Colonel Bratton likewise continued to look for ways to connect with larger markets and seize on opportunities that a budding economy based on commercial farming could provide. Klein writes that, "South Carolina's backcountry settlers exhibited their growing

<sup>39</sup> William Bull to Lord Hillsborough, Dec. 17, 1765, Records of the Province of South Carolina, Sainsbury Transcripts from the British Public Record Office, XXX, 300, SCDAH.

<sup>40</sup> Klein, 16.

<sup>41</sup> Bull to Hillsborough, Nov. 30, 1770, SCDAH., XXXII, 393-396, 402-406.

<sup>42</sup> Klein, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Klein, 18.

<sup>44</sup> Export figures on flour, in *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* (Charleston), 1766-1769.

interest in commercial agriculture in a number of ways. They located their farms near rivers and old trading paths that led to the market in Charleston, they called upon coastal leaders to pass tobacco and flour inspection laws, and they inundated the assembly with petitions for ferries and road improvements.”<sup>45</sup>

Among the most valuable information suggesting many settlers’ growing interest in the transition of an economy largely based on subsistence farming to that of commercial agriculture is the growth of the slave population in the region. Klein writes that:

In order to expand production and enter the colony-wide trade, a prosperous few were demanding greater numbers of slaves. During the 1760s, inland residents owned only a small fraction of the colony’s slaves, but the number was growing rapidly. By 1768, about one-twelfth of South Carolina’s slaves lived in the backcountry, where they constituted about one-fifth of the population.<sup>46</sup>

Just prior to the Revolutionary War, wealthy Charlestonian Peter Manigault commented on the growing desire for slave labor in the backcountry stating:

The great Planters have bought few Negroes within these two Years. Upwards of two thirds that have been imported have gone backwards. These people some of them come at the Distance of 300 miles from Chs Town, and will not go back without Negroes, let the Price be what it will. And indeed they can afford it, for it is no uncommon Thing among them to make 150 wt of Indigo to a Hand, and Even at the present price of Indigo and Hemp, as their Lands cost them little they can well afford to pay 450 (pounds) for a Negro.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, the society which the Bratton family had left in western Virginia centered on the “slave-hire” practice, perhaps began to seem inadequate as the 18<sup>th</sup> century came to a close and their plantation continued to grow. “It is significant that the wealthiest fifth of piedmont estates included an average of only eight slaves, while the comparable group from the middlecountry (below the fall line) included an average of nineteen.”<sup>48</sup> When the first census was taken in

<sup>45</sup> Klein, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Klein, 19-20.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Manigault to William Blake, n.d. [Dec. 1772?], in Maurice A. Crouse, ed., “The Letterbook of Peter Manigault, 1763-1773,” SCHM, LXX. (1969), 191.

<sup>48</sup> Klein, 21.



South Carolina in 1790, Colonel William Bratton was listed as owning twelve slaves, placing him amongst the larger slaveholders in the county.<sup>49</sup>

Slavery was certainly amongst York County's earliest and most widely familiar institutions. When the above-mentioned census was taken in 1790, Colonel William Bratton was among at least sixteen others who owned ten or more slaves in the county. It was far more common for slaveholding families in the county to own between one and four slaves. The majority of citizens were non-slave holders. From a developmental perspective, it is perhaps appropriate to imagine much of the population's activity as revolving around the estates of large landholders. Colonel Bratton positioned his plantation strategically at a crossroads, operating a general store and tavern out of his home. It is safe to assume that other slaveholders in the county also diversified their own local economies and likewise offered services to community members as Colonel Bratton had. Klein relays one such account:

William Williamson, a wealthy planter in the western piedmont, grew corn, hemp, flax, cotton, and rice in addition to 'Fruits of all sorts.' In 1766, his peach orchard 'yielded near three Thousand Bushel Baskets', which, according to a traveler, 'proved of great use to the poor young inhabitants of that part of the province'. Planters of Williamson's great wealth were not the only ones to engage in local exchange. That settlers on virtually all levels of backcountry society died with debts due to them in book accounts suggests the extent of interdependency.<sup>50</sup>

The most significant use of slave labor in York County at the time of this first census was that of William Hill's Iron Plantation. Prior to the Revolutionary War in 1776, Hill received 1000 pounds from the South Carolina General Assembly, and another 7000 pounds the following year encouraging the construction of a significant iron manufacturing operation in the region.

Historian Louise Pettus states that, "The York County furnace, named Aera, was the first In the State of South Carolina. In November of 1779, Hayne placed an ad in the Charleston Gazette

<sup>49</sup> First Census of the United States: Heads of Families at the First Census 1790. *Summary of population, by districts, counties, and parishes* (Camden District, York County. Accessed February 2020), 28-31.

<sup>50</sup> Klein, 27-28.

announcing that the Aera Furnace was in operation and ready for both wholesale and retail trade in 'Salt Pans, Pots of all sizes, Kettles...Skellets, Dutch Ovens...Stoves...and 2, 3, or 4 Pounders with Balls to suit...or any other castings in Iron....'"<sup>51</sup>

In the 1790, Hill owned 84 slaves, a decrease in number from the 90 slaves confiscated in June of 1780 by Captain Huck of the British army.<sup>52</sup> This demonstrates that although slave labor was not exploited on a massive scale for the majority of planters in the county at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the precedent for utilizing slavery on an industrial scale was certainly present. Following the Revolutionary War, families in the Upcountry like the Brattons were poised to transition their operations from smaller-scale farms to larger-scale plantations. This transition, one which would dramatically re-shape the landscape of the region, would be made possible with the introduction of short staple cotton and the domestic and global markets which valued it, as well as a more efficient means of processing the cotton crop to farm sites.

Cotton has been grown in the United States since its colonial settling. Author Sven Beckert writes, "As early as 1607, settlers in Jamestown had grown cotton; by the end of the seventeenth century, travelers had introduced cottonseeds from Cyprus and Izmir to American soil. Throughout the eighteenth century, farmers continued to gather knowledge about cotton cultivation from the West Indies and the Mediterranean and planted cottonseeds from these regions, primarily for domestic consumption." Additionally, these channels of knowledge were fostered by the international slave trade. Many slaves bringing knowledge of cotton cultivation from abroad were particularly sought after. For example, one account in 1788 documents the

<sup>51</sup>Louise Pettus, *William Hill's Iron Plantation* (<http://sites.rootsweb.com/~scyork/LouisePettus/whill.htm>. 2003).

<sup>52</sup> First Census of the United States: Heads of Families at the First Census 1790. *Summary of population, by districts, counties, and parishes*. Camden District, York County. 28-31.

advertisement of a slave in the United States who was originally from St. Croix as being “well acquainted with the culture of cotton.”<sup>53</sup>

During the American Revolution, domestic demand for imported cotton products was greatly increased as ties between the colonies and British Empire were temporarily severed. As a result, planters throughout the Southeast began to transition the focus of their crop production from tobacco to cotton, a transition perhaps made easier due to the substantial similarities which exist in the labor- intensive processes of producing the two crops. One early instance which perhaps foreshadowed the introduction of cotton on a grand scale included South Carolina planter Ralph Izard giving an order in 1775 “for a considerable quantity of cotton to be planted for clothing my negroes.”<sup>54</sup>

Following the war in 1786, international trade with British markets commenced, encouraging many planters in the South Carolina and Georgia barrier islands to begin producing sea-island cotton. This variety of cotton was well suited for the production of the “finer yarns and clothes much in demand by Manchester manufacturers” due to its long and silky fiber.<sup>55</sup> As this type of cotton was only suited for the sandy soils of the coast, it was not taken further inland in an attempt to establish a similar type of plantation system there. Instead, a different variety of cotton, one with a shorter staple length with fibers tightly attached to the seeds, was chosen for the clayey soils of the piedmont. Despite the introduction of the potentially profitable crop, farmers producing this upland variety of cotton struggled to be involved much less compete with the highly lucrative markets along the coast as they lacked a means of efficiently separating the short-staple fibers from the seeds.

<sup>53</sup> Beckert, 101.

<sup>54</sup> Beckert, 101.

<sup>55</sup> Beckert, 101.

In 1793, this issue was eradicated with the introduction of Eli Whitney's newly patented version of the cotton gin. The device allowed for the increase in ginning productivity by a factor of fifty. Beckert writes that:

Armed with this new technology, cotton production spread rapidly after 1793 into the interior of South Carolina and Georgia. As a result, in 1795 significant amounts of U.S. cotton arrived in Liverpool for the first time; none, as best we know, was seized by customs. As settlers streamed into the region, many of them migrants from the upper South, the countryside was turned upside down – from a thinly inhabited region of native people and farmers who focused on subsistence crops and tobacco to one in the thrall of cotton.<sup>56</sup>

While Whitney's cotton gin helped many farmers to overcome a bottleneck in short-staple cotton production and in many cases become wildly prosperous, it also exponentially increased the demand for slaves. Between 1793 and the closing of the international slave trade in 1808, traders imported an estimated 170,000 slaves into the United States. Additionally, in the thirty years following the invention of Whitney's cotton gin alone, a quarter of a million slaves were forcefully relocated from the less prosperous tobacco producing regions of the Upper South, to the Deep South, primarily to grow cotton.<sup>57</sup> This regional trend is reflected in the growth of the slave population at the Bratton plantation. At the time of Colonel William Bratton's death in December of 1813, his will accounted for twenty- three enslaved individuals: June, Lydia, Peter, Betsey, Nelson, July, Cloe, Ben, Kitty, Harry, Watt, Polly, Harriott, Butter, Limus, Jack, Winney, Jim, Archey, Patt, Icey, Moses and Lucy.<sup>58</sup> Although it is not possible to locate the exact moment in time when Colonel William Bratton first introduced short-staple cotton farming to the routine of his operation, he would become one of the county's most significant early cotton planters, and thereby one of its most significant slave-holders. As Colonel Bratton had overseen the transition of the Bratton landholdings from settlement to that of a moderately sized farmstead,

<sup>56</sup> Beckert, 101.

<sup>57</sup> Beckert, 101.

<sup>58</sup> Scoggins, 7.

it was his son John Simpson Bratton who would oversee the site's transition from farmstead to major cotton plantation.

As was the case for many other plantation sites across the Southeast, the expansion of the Bratton family plantation under the ownership of John S. Bratton and his wife Harriet coincided with a period of major political and economic change both within South Carolina as well on a national scale. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many of the post-Revolutionary generation had developed assumptions about government, power, liberty, and property. Klein writes that, "They believed that property was essential to individual liberty and that a just government would necessarily protect the independence of its citizens by safeguarding their possessions from arbitrary seizure. Fearful of government corruption, they thought that popular representation, grounded in independent and hence virtuous citizenry, was the best defense against despotism."<sup>59</sup> These principles from which many new Americans drew from as a source of ideological inspiration were inherently fraught as they were only extended to a fraction of the population. Despite the outcome of the Revolutionary War, freedom from an oppressive governance was not the reality for the enslaved of the newly formed nation.

In South Carolina, slavery played an essential role in determining the political climate. Despite a broad commitment to slavery the Upcountry and Lowcountry differed greatly in the form that their new state and national governments should take. "By 1800, slaves in the Lowcountry (excluding the city of Charleston) composed about 84 percent of that region's total population. In the Upcountry, slaves composed 17 percent of the total population." Additionally, less than one percent of all Upcountry households included at least twenty slaves, and two-thirds of all slave-holders held fewer than five slaves.<sup>60</sup> Largely as a result of these demographic

<sup>59</sup> Klein, 149.

<sup>60</sup> Klein, 149.

differences, backcountry leaders who were sensitive to their yeoman majority and intent on shifting the center of state power away from the coast, advocated for democratic reform intended to be more representative of the independent citizenry. In time, political power would shift from the parishes of the coast and toward the inland counties, perhaps paralleling the growth of the state's population and subsequent continuation of settlement in the middle and Upcountry regions. This movement of political influence more than likely benefitted planters like John S. Bratton whose families had established themselves as powerful figures in the region for several decades.

In analyzing the political climate of the South Carolina Piedmont in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it becomes necessary to also examine the economic climate of the region. Often developing in tandem, the political and economic cultures which John S. Bratton entered during the early years of his expansion of the Bratton plantation should not be undervalued. With the growing popularity of cotton in the new nation came dramatic shifts in manufacturing practices in states like South Carolina. Among the earliest ventures in establishing a textile industry was that of the partnership of Hugh Templeton, John McNair, and Benjamin Waring who introduced the English invention of the spinning jenny to a factory setting located at Stateburg, Sumter County, South Carolina.<sup>61</sup> One correspondent for the American Museum wrote in 1790 that, "a gentlemen of great mechanical knowledge and instructed in most of the branches of cotton manufacturing in Europe (Templeton) had completed and put into operation ginning, carding, slugging, and two spinning machines of 84

<sup>61</sup> Ernest M. Lander, *The Textile Industry in Antebellum South Carolina*, 5.

spindles each, all propelled by water power.”<sup>62</sup> Ultimately the enterprise failed due to “new difficulties because of an unstable and costly labor supply.”<sup>63</sup>

It is worth noting that despite having access to slave-labor, as McNair and Waring were both significant slaveholders, according to their accounts they opted to train and employ slaves from other plantations to run the machinery. The system failed as the owners of these slaves withdrew them from the seemingly experimental business venture for unknown reasons. At the same time, Samuel Slater and Moses Brown also launched their first textile mill in Rhode Island which proved to be a success, in part ushering in a period of manufacturing growth in New England. With the introduction of the cotton gin in 1793, many entrepreneurial South Carolinians instead shifted their attention to the far more lucrative business of growing cotton rather than manufacturing it.

Despite this temporary pause in the development of South Carolina’s textile industry, economic pressure brought on by the Napoleonic Wars along with Thomas Jefferson’s Embargo Act of 1807 would dramatically increase New England’s textile production, and again inspire some in South Carolina to attempt to establish a successful enterprise. In 1808, the South Carolina Homespun Company was founded in Charleston, with financial and political support from Charleston’s civic leaders. In his speech to the crowd assembled for the laying of the cornerstone of the company’s new factory, South Carolina Federalist leader and former United States Congressman William Loughton Smith praised the efforts of local businessmen and emphasized the coming of an era of commercial independence stating:

We have long known that we possess, in the bosom of our soil, inexhaustible resources; we now know, and feel, that we have, in our own bosoms, a spirit of patriotism to call forth these resources, and to make them instrumental to the security of our rights and to the avenging of our wrongs. The shuttle and the loom, operating on the products of

<sup>62</sup> Lander, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Lander, 5.

your fields and your flocks, will in this century, emancipate you from commercial thralldom, as the operations of your arsenals and foundries delivered you, in the last, from political slavery.<sup>64</sup>

Despite widespread support for the Homespun Company in its early years of operation, this venture too would succumb to a lack of responsible management, a lack of skilled persons available to operate the machinery, and to competition from English markets. However, the growing potential for developing a successful and localized textile industry brought on by an expanding cotton market in the years that soon followed proved to be too great an opportunity for many South Carolinians as well as entrepreneurs from New England to pass on. Small operations were opened between 1816 and 1839 in the districts of Laurens, Spartanburg, Greenville, and Pendleton, finally securing a foothold for the textile industry in the South Carolina Piedmont. Although many companies like the South Carolina Cotton Manufactory (1816), Hill and Clarke's Industry Cotton Manufacturing Company (1819), The Spartanburg Cotton Manufacturing Company (1835), and the South Tyger Cotton Manufactory at Cedar Hill (1838) would not succeed due in part to poor management and significant fluctuation in cotton prices, others such as William Bate's "Batesville" (1833) and Dr. James Biving's Bivingsville's Cotton Manufacturing Company (1837) would overcome these obstacles and become leaders in the blossoming industry.<sup>65</sup>

The 1820s and 1830s were largely decades of agricultural depression for South Carolina. The price of short-staple cotton had dropped from a high of 32 cents per pound in 1825 to a low of 8 cents per pound in 1826. The market would recover somewhat in the following years, topping out at around 20 cents per pound in 1836, only to once again drop below 10 cents for

<sup>64</sup> George C. Roger Jr., *Evolution of a Federalist: William Loughton Smith of Charleston (1758-1812)* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1962), 378-79, quoting from *Charleston Courier*, October 31, 1808.

<sup>65</sup> Lander, 13-19.



the majority of the 1840s, in part due to the Panic of 1837.<sup>66</sup> This seemingly erratic behavior of the cotton market spurred many planters to begin diversifying the crops that they produced.

Lander writes:

The need for diversification in agriculture and for increased manufacturing was voiced in 1841 by former Congressman James H. Hammond in a speech to the members of the State Agricultural Society. He concluded that South Carolina could no longer compete with the Southwest in growing cotton. The state would have to shift to other crops and develop a live-at-home economy.<sup>67</sup>

Among the leaders who would head the words of Hammond and take up the torch left by others in establishing a successful textile industry was William Gregg. Through prolific publishing efforts in papers like Charleston's *Courier*, often under the pseudonym *South Carolina*, Gregg advocated for an increase in manufacturing sites often proclaiming that the business of manufacturing cotton could prove to be far more beneficial than growing it. He emphasized that the state of South Carolina possessed numerous natural advantages over New England "with respect to raw material, cheap water-power site, and a plentiful labor supply of poor whites and slaves."<sup>68</sup> In 1847, Gregg would oversee the opening of his own textile mill, the Graniteville Manufacturing Company, strategically located in the Horse Creek Valley within one mile of the South Carolina Railroad. With nearly 10,000 spindles and 300 looms operating by 1849, Graniteville was the largest textile mill in the antebellum South. Graniteville also led much of the nation in technological advancements within a mill setting such as the installation of gas lighting in the main plant, a plumbing system for fire protection, and a "specifically designed clock that required the watchman to visit each room at specific intervals."<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Lander, 50.

<sup>67</sup> Lander, 50.

<sup>68</sup> Lander, 52.

<sup>69</sup> Lander, 59.

Given these periods of dramatic growth and innovation in South Carolina's political and economic culture in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, it would have been quite difficult for a planter of John S. Bratton's caliber to be unaffected. In fact, it is more likely the case that Bratton was up to date on these events and engaging with them for the purpose of growing his plantation. Although it is unclear the exact extent to which the Bratton family participated in the political divides of the Upcountry and Lowcountry after the Revolutionary War, or if they were aware of the frequent attempts to spark a new textile tradition in the Piedmont throughout the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is more than likely the case that the family would have been influenced by many of these external factors. These factors in turn most likely served to shape the landscape of the Bratton plantation. Again, perhaps among the most useful gauges to measure the Bratton family's level of involvement in the broader political and economic climate of South Carolina is through their investment in the production of cotton and subsequently, in slave labor. If Colonel William Bratton had not been somehow tied to the early network of commerce in the Upcountry, he would not have been able to invest in the expansion of his farm and the population of slaves who worked it. Similarly, if John S. Bratton had not been associated with the growing movement of political power from the coast to the inland counties, or with the demands of the growing cotton economy, he would not have been able to strengthen the family's influence within the region, or greatly increase the population of slaves who lived and worked at the site.

Following the death of his mother and father in 1815 and 1816 respectively and the subsequent settlement of their estate, John S. Bratton inherited four slaves: Watt, Polly, Nelson, and Jim. The remaining nineteen had been left to his seven brothers and sisters.<sup>70</sup> In her

<sup>70</sup> Scoggins, 7.

preliminary study *The African American Community at Historic Brattonsville: 1816-1850*, researcher and author Pat Veasey utilizes both early census information as well as the York County Tax List to document the chronology of the Bratton family's slave ownership. In it, she notes that between 1816 and 1820, John S. Bratton purchased an additional twenty slaves. Seven years later, the population would again increase to forty individuals, paralleling the expansion of the Bratton plantation land holdings to 3,540 acres.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, this phase of plantation growth would coincide with the construction of what would later be deemed the Homestead House Cir. 1823-1826. The Federal turned Greek Revival mansion would serve as the home of John S. Bratton and his wife Harriet and as the nucleus for the plantation's operations until the Civil War. It is from this point in the narrative of the Bratton family that a landscape of slavery, largely associated with the production of cotton at an industrial scale, would begin to take shape. The estate inventory taken in 1843 following the death of John S. Bratton documents his owning 139 slaves, valued at nearly \$42,000 making him one of the largest slaveholders in the region at the time. Throughout much of its life, Brattonsville, as the plantation would come to be known in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, would not only stand as a symbol of the Bratton family's vast wealth, but also as the setting for a community entombed by the hardship of forced labor.

<sup>71</sup> Pat Veasey, *The African American Community at Historic Brattonsville: 1816-1850 Preliminary Research Findings* (York, S.C.: Museum of York County Culture and Heritage Commission, 2004).

## PART II: SLAVERY AT BRATTONSVILLE AND SITES OF PARTICULAR INTEREST

In the opening pages of John Michael Vlach's study *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, he cites several cases where freedmen returned to their former sites of enslavement following the Civil War insisting that they be granted domain over the land they had previously worked, often for generations. Vlach writes that, "One South Carolina freedman, after several years of service in the Union Army, did, in fact, return to take charge of a section of the plantation where he had previously lived and worked. Ignoring protests of Thomas Pinckney, his former owner, he marched back to his old cabin and from its porch, rifle in hand, he declared, 'Yes, I gwi wuk right here. I'd like tuh see any man put me outer dis house.'"<sup>72</sup>

This same desire for land ownership coinciding with emancipation and newly found freedom is again reflected in the collective petition sent to President Andrew Johnson by a group of former slaves from Edisto Island, South Carolina wherein they protest the returning of plantation lands to their former owners. In it they declare, "This is our home. We have made these lands what they are."<sup>73</sup> Generally, the available information on the lives of Brattonsville's slaves is not extensive. However, by analyzing the landscapes of similar sites, and taking into account the narratives of the slaves who lived and worked there, it becomes possible to fill in the gaps as to what the daily lives of the enslaved at Brattonsville may have entailed. Certainly, among the most vital concepts underlying this portion of the overall analysis is that of the duality by which slaves existed on plantations such as Brattonsville. On one hand, they worked within a landscape largely shaped and controlled by their owner. On the other, slaves found ways to "blunt some of the harsher edges of slavery's brutality" by claiming portions of the

<sup>72</sup> Vlach, Preface.

<sup>73</sup> Vlach, Preface.

landscape for themselves through subtle acts of courageous resistance.<sup>74</sup> As was felt by the freedmen and women in the cases relayed by Vlach, it is more than likely the case that many within Brattonsville's slave community developed strong ties to the landscape of their enslavement and subsequently began to develop alternative spaces for their own survival.

The focus of this chapter will be on the period spanning the early development of the Homestead site in the 1820s, the peak of plantation activity in the 1840s, and the decline of Brattonsville roughly a decade before the beginning of the Civil War. Furthermore, this chapter will largely follow the model of study established by Vlach whereby the landscape of enslavement is better understood by first analyzing those aspects of the landscape which are most closely associated with the slaveholder. Vlach supports this tactic stating that, "The creation of a slaves' landscape was a reactive expression, a response to the plans enacted by white landowners. To mark their dominance over both nature and other men, planters acquired acreage, set out boundaries of their holdings, had their fields cleared, selected building sites, and supervised the construction of dwellings and other structures." Vlach continues, asserting that "Ultimately, the slaveholders' world would become the raw material with which slaves would attempt to satisfy some of their own aspirations."<sup>75</sup> Throughout the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Brattonsville exhibited a capacity for expansion which far surpassed many of its regional counterparts. At its operational height under the ownership of John S. Bratton and his wife Harriet, the site's black and white landscapes also reached distinctive levels of sophistication. Despite the former developing largely in response to the latter and relying on a degree of separateness for its survival, it is important to acknowledge that these landscapes also depended heavily on one another for their continuation. The white landscape of the planter

<sup>74</sup> Vlach, Preface.

<sup>75</sup> Vlach, 1.

would not exist without the exploited labor of their slaves, and the black landscape of the slave largely relied on the food and shelter provided, at least in part, by the slaveholder. By better understanding the relationship between the two forms of landscapes which existed at large plantation sites like Brattonsville, it also becomes possible to better understand those landscapes individually. Particularly those which have long succumbed to deterioration or have been lost, as is the case of countless landscapes of enslavement across the nation.

Throughout the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, planters across the Southeast began to solidify their positions as prominent societal figures with the construction of new homesteads. For many like John S. Bratton, these building campaigns would represent the culmination of investments in both land and labor by preceding generations. The transition from the relatively humble dwelling of Colonel William Bratton to the manorial estate of his son was not only supported by inherited wealth but was also accompanied by a shifting regional perception of the *plantation* and *planter* themselves. Author John Michael Vlach reminds us that “For most of the seventeenth century, a southern planter was a poor farmer who held claim to about a hundred acres and owned no slaves.”<sup>76</sup> Many traveler’s accounts of the Southern colonies during this time portrayed planters’ residences as lacking in basic conveniences, often making note of their very basic construction and the seemingly disorganized nature of their surrounding fields. According to a 1696 report by English revenue agent Edward Randolph, the way that Virginia planters would establish their farms was to first:

cut down a few trees and make therewith a little Hut, covering it with the bark and turn two or three hogs into the woods by it: Or else they are to clear one Acre of that land, and to plant and tend it one year: But they fell twenty or thirty trees, and put a little Indian corn in the ground among them where they lye, and sometimes make a beginning to fence it, but take no care of their Crop, nor make and further use of their land.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Vlach, 2.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Edmund S Morgan, *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, 220.

Despite the majority of early planter homesteads falling neatly within the descriptive boundaries of Randolph's report, by the last quarter of the seventeenth century a small class of planter elites began to assemble vast land holdings with stately mansions at their center. Estates such as Bacon's Castle (Cir. 1665) and Middleton Place (Cir. 1740s) are among the earliest examples of the sites which largely served to transform public perceptions of the typical plantation from that of a crude farmstead to a manicured showplace. Vlach addresses this transition by stating that these places were "No longer just a large farm run with supervised labor, from the middle of the eighteenth century onward the ideal plantation was a large, tastefully appointed country estate belonging to a prominent gentleman."<sup>78</sup> Planters in the Chesapeake and Carolinas seeking to fulfill this new ideal often modeled their estates after those found in England. For example, Mann Page found inspiration for the construction of his mansion at Rosewell from Cound Hall in Shropshire and William Byrd II "is believed to have based the design of Westover, the great house overlooking the James that he built in 1735, on Drayton Court, the Northamptonshire seat of the Earl of Peterborough."<sup>79</sup>

In addition to the attempts to emulate the architecture of English manor houses, these sites utilized their surrounding landscapes to establish a visual hierarchy, placing their residences at the center. Historian Dell Upton suggests in his essay *White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* that the "private plantation usurped in many respects the functions of the town, and the planter appropriated to himself the prerogatives and the good of the community." He continues, stating that "In effect, the plantation was a village, with the planter's house as its town hall."<sup>80</sup> As is the case for many important civic buildings such as town

<sup>78</sup> Vlach, 5.

<sup>79</sup> Vlach, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes of Eighteenth-Century Virginia", *Places* 2, no. 2. 1984, 63.

halls or courthouses, the planter often chose the highest point within the site to construct their residence. This strategy however was one among many within a much larger and complexly designed landscape used by planters to reinforce their positions of power. Upton refers to the planter's landscape as being both articulated and processional, stating that, "It was articulated in the sense that it consisted of a network of spaces – rooms in the house, the house itself, the outbuildings, the church with its interior pews and surrounding walled yard – that were linked by roads and that functioned as the settings for public interactions that had their own particular character but that worked together to embody the community as a whole."<sup>81</sup>

#### BRATTONSVILLE'S WHITE LANDSCAPE

When analyzing the Homestead House and its surrounding landscape considering analyses such as those completed by Vlach and Upton, one is able to draw out important comparisons which help to define the planter's landscape at Brattonsville. The Homestead House itself, constructed from 1823 to 1826, stands as both a testimony to shifting stylistic ideals from the older plantations of the coast to the newer plantations of the piedmont as well as the resourcefulness and skill of regional construction practices (Appendix A, fig. 1.1). In his analysis of plantation landscapes across the Southeast, Vlach suggests that the plantation form of the Tidewater was diffused by a second generation of planters seeking their fortunes in the piedmonts of Georgia and South Carolina. He supports this notion by dividing examples of the largest plantation operations into three historically distinct but stylistically interrelated zones. He writes:

<sup>81</sup> Upton, "White and Black Landscapes of Eighteenth-Century Virginia", 64-65.



The oldest and generally most prominent plantations were located in a coastal region extending from the Chesapeake Bay to northern Florida and not more than a hundred miles inland from the Atlantic. A second concentration of large plantation estates occupied a fifty-mile wide arc of cotton lands through the middle portions of South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, terminating in eastern Mississippi. A third plantation zone consisted of the fertile bottomlands of the lower Mississippi Valley, from just above Memphis to below New Orleans.<sup>82</sup>

Brattonsville, located within Vlach's second zone, offers substantial evidence that its stylistic development was directly influenced by the estates of the coastal zone. For example, the estates located in Vlach's first zone likely inspired John S. Bratton to invest in valuable finishes for the interior of his house, specifically, the use of expensive paints (particularly reds and golds) and faux finishes. In the same way that the bright yellows and blues dazzled visitors to Monticello and Mt. Vernon, the interior design choices at the Homestead House would largely serve to emphasize the Bratton family's wealth and their desire to communicate their heightened social standing to all those who entered. The four-over-four layout of the house split by a central hallway along with the later additions of the northern and southern wings (Cir. 1840) and two-story piazza (originally added in 1854) beckon to the symmetry and highly rational formalism of older and more architecturally complex estates such as Westover, Stratford Hall, and Drayton Hall. Likewise, symmetry is expressed in the orderly arrangement of dependency structures as they relate to the Homestead House, a tactic employed by countless other plantation sites to enforce the planter's dominance over the landscape (Appendix A, fig. 1.2). Vlach addresses this point stating, "The World was, in their view, suitably improved only after it was transformed from its chaotic natural condition into a scene marked by strict, hierarchical order. The planters' landscapes were laid out with straight lines, right-angle corners,

<sup>82</sup> Vlach, 6-7.

and axes of symmetry, their mathematical precision being considered as a proof of individual superiority.”<sup>83</sup>

Additionally, the Bratton family sought to exhibit their wealth and perhaps also the breadth of their plantation’s operations with the materials used in the construction of their new estate. The majority of architectural elements featured throughout Brattonsville were crafted from materials harvested from the site itself, including the stone piers beneath the Homestead House, most wooden elements used in both framing and siding, and perhaps most distinctively, the brick used to construct the house’s chimneys, assembly hall, and dependency structures (Appendix A, fig. 1.3). Although many colonial plantations also incorporated sub-industries such as brick making or milling into their larger scope of operations, their connections to both domestic and international markets, largely encouraged by their locations near to the coast, expanded their potential sources for purchasing non-local materials. Given Brattonsville’s relatively isolated location in the Upcountry, options for purchasing building materials was significantly limited and it is most likely the case that the plantation was forced to develop its own sub-industries out of necessity rather than choice. Overtime, these industries more than likely became points of pride for the Bratton family. The use of brick, for example, in the construction of the Bratton family’s dining hall and plethora of service structures flanking the main house, in part communicates to visitors to the site that the family possessed both the natural resources and labor force necessary to successfully oversee a brick-making operation (Appendix A, fig.1.4).

While it is certainly important to consider the potential design and material linkages between Brattonsville and other regional sources in order to understand the formation of the

<sup>83</sup> Vlach, 5.

planter's landscape there, the result is only a partial analysis. Additional factors, apart from possible design influences and material use must also be reflected upon in order to more fully understand the landscape most directly influenced by John S. Bratton and his family. These factors are the substance which both define and differentiate many of the intangible sources of information surrounding the interactions of the planter and the processional landscape. Dell Upton writes that one form of the processional landscape of which the planter placed him/herself at the center was, perhaps most obviously, that of their great plantation. He illustrates this point by describing the route of approach taken by a guest visiting Mount Airy, the home of the prominent Tayloe family in Richmond County, Virginia (Appendix A, fig. 1.5). He writes, "the visitor's route to the house involves passing a series of physical barriers that are also social barriers." Upton continues, citing various landscape and built features of the estate, designed largely to enhance the visitor's experience while approaching the main house such as a "curved drive which shows the visitor the house from a variety of tantalizing prospects", and a series of terraces, one of which "forms a forecourt that is defined by the two advance buildings." He emphasizes this element of the estate stating, "The connection served to heighten the constriction of space that accompanied the passing of social barriers and the ascent of terraces and steps." Upton concludes his description by recounting the transition one might take from the exterior landscape to the house itself writing:

Then one entered a large living hall through the front door. More exclusive, but still public, rooms opened off this hall. If one came to visit the Tayloes, one would pass through the series of seven barriers before reaching one's goal, which might be the dining room table, the ritual center of Virginia hospitality. Each barrier served to reinforce the impression of John Tayloe's centrality, and each in addition affirmed the visitor's status as he or she passed through it.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Upton, 66.

Although perhaps less formulated and intentional, many of the steps taken to gain entry to Mt. Airy are also applicable at Brattonsville. In the place of the extended drive which brought visitors and “middlin’ yeomen” alike through a carefully crafted informal park up to the main house at Mt. Airy, those approaching Brattonsville were perhaps met instead by scene of vast agricultural land, anchored along the road by a cluster of structures teeming with activity. To a non-local this location may have seemed arbitrary. This assumption, however, was far from the truth. Colonel William Bratton had established the farm at the intersection of an important colonial crossroads which, according to local historian Michael Scoggins, “made him an ideal candidate for an appointment as road overseer.”<sup>85</sup> In the Tryon County court session held in July of 1769, Bratton was ordered “to serve as overseer of the Road Leading from Armours Ford on the Cataba [sic] to Charles Town Lying between Jno. Gordons & the South Line [i.e., NC-SC boundary line] and that he enter on his Charge accordingly.” Additionally, in October of that same year, local courts ordered him to “Serve as Overseer of the aforesaid Road from Mic’l Megaritys to the s’d Brattons house & that he Enter on his Charge accordingly.”<sup>86</sup> Those approaching from the north throughout the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century would have first been met by the colonial farmstead and perhaps reminded of the authority long held in the area by the Bratton family. This same sense of authority would have likely been reinforced as the Homestead House came into view, serving in part as a symbol of the Bratton family’s ascension from settlement farmers to wealthy and established planters.

By the 1840s, the Brattonsville landscape would certainly have been likened to that of the “small towns” described by 18<sup>th</sup> century travelers observing the great plantations of the

<sup>85</sup> Scoggins, 4.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Scoggins, 4.

Chesapeake as they made their way upriver.<sup>87</sup> This was largely the result of John S. Bratton's investment in various undertakings such as the conversion of his parents' former residence into a school for girls which opened in 1840 as the Brattonsville Female Seminary under the tutelage of Catherine and George Ladd.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, Bratton oversaw the operation of a general store and post office on the property, which in conjunction with various sub-industries such as a sawmill, blacksmith shop, and brick-making operation, surely drew considerable amounts of use from the surrounding community.<sup>89</sup> In this way, the Homestead House became the nucleus of an exceptionally diversified enterprise with John S. Bratton taking on the roles of educator, businessman, community leader, physician, and planter. As in the case described by Upton, to be granted an audience with the Bratton family within the Homestead House would have required the navigation of various physical and social barriers, each serving to reinforce the centrality of Bratton himself. Among the earliest of these barriers, immediately following the initial impression given the extent of the estate and its workings, was the position of the Homestead House itself. Although subtle, the structure's placement at the highest point in the immediate landscape forces those on the road to observe it from a lower and perhaps humbling position. Likewise, the topographical change between the road and the entrance to the house would most likely slow the approach of visitors, again encouraging them to take in the view of the main house and its flanking dependencies as they crossed the informal park-like greenspace to the front door (Appendix A, fig. 1.6).

Upon entering the Homestead House, a guest is met with many of the same social and physical barriers recounted by Upton in his description of the interior of Mt. Airy. At its core, the

<sup>87</sup> Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia: 1740-1790*, 35.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Scoggins, 8.

<sup>89</sup> Scoggins, 8.

Homestead House's four-over-four plan, divided by a central hallway and stair is indicative of a building tradition widely utilized throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Whereas in other examples with this plan type the first-floor rooms are often divided into a parlor and dining room, the Bratton residence differs, divided instead between John S. Bratton's role as the proprietor of Brattonsville, and his role as host. Like that of Mt. Airy, the central hallway of the Homestead House serves largely as a public space whereby visitors are greeted and depending on the purpose of their visit, separated accordingly. If one were seeking to discuss business with Bratton they would be ushered into his private office, immediately to the right of the central hallway. If, however, one was a formal guest of the family, they would be shown into the parlor immediately to the left of the hallway. The northern and southern wings, products of an extensive renovation campaign around 1840 which also resulted in the construction of the brick assembly hall, serve to enhance the overall grandiosity of the house by showcasing a degree of stylish Palladian symmetry while simultaneously adding supplementary levels to the experience of guests within the house. Although the purpose of the wing attached to John S. Bratton's office is unclear, it can be inferred that this space was likewise used in a semi-private manner, perhaps as an extension of his office space. Contrastingly, the purpose of the wing attached to the original parlor room is quite clear. This space was utilized as the new formal parlor, leaving the older parlor to perhaps serve multiple functions: as an informal dining and living space for the family and also as a formal gathering space for guests of the family.

Once again resonating with the articulated route taken by guests within the main house at Mt. Airy, guests within the Homestead House were intentionally brought into contact with all the trappings which might associate the Brattons with the pinnacle of wealth in the Upcountry. For example, in the public rooms of the house, the wainscoting is completed with the use of actual paneling, whereas in more private rooms such as the "informal dining room" or

“breakfast room”, this same finish is imitated with paint. Additionally, the most valuable furniture pieces are kept within the public rooms and are meant to be admired by guests as they are moved throughout the house. Ultimately it was likely the aspiration of the guest to be invited to the assembly hall, a room which had replaced the second floor gathering space as the most formal room in the house after its completion (the second floor space soon after was remodeled to be used as Bratton’s bedroom). It was here that various social events such as dances, dinner parties, and recitals took place, further emphasizing John S. Bratton’s position at the center of this particular processional landscape.

Despite the importance of the physical and social barriers applied to the great plantation, they represent only a piece of the overall landscape most directly influenced and experienced by the planter. Dell Upton writes that the, “largest meanings of the articulated processional landscape, however, were perceived in the continual dissolutions and reformulations of social groups that occurred as many planters moved from one place to another within the public landscape of which the great plantation was a part.”<sup>90</sup> For John S. Bratton, the public landscape of which he was an important figure extended well beyond the boundaries of Brattonsville. Many of the social groups which the Brattons were a part of had been originally developed by the preceding generation. Colonel William Bratton and his wife Martha had been founding members of Bethesda Presbyterian Church in 1769. The site would eventually become associated with the Protestant religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening, hosting large gatherings throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century of which John S. Bratton and his family would certainly have played a vital part. In addition to his participation in the life of the church, Bratton also invested both his growing wealth and influence into a variety of

<sup>90</sup> Upton, 66.

business-related undertakings. According to local historian Michael Scoggins, “Bratton also entered into a mercantile partnership with another of his brothers-in-law, Samuel Rainey Jr., with whom he operated his store and other business enterprises. He and Rainey also purchased town lots in nearby Yorkville (now York), some of which they rented out to tenants.”<sup>91</sup>

In these ways and perhaps others not mentioned in this work, the landscape most closely utilized and molded by John S. Bratton was far more extensive than Brattonsville alone. While this landscape was organized in such a way that the emphasis of all social and business-related relationships revolved around Bratton and his various roles, the landscape of enslavement took on a very different form. Generally, the level of available primary resources recounting the slave’s perception of their landscape is minuscule compared to that of the planter. Despite this issue, it is still possible to develop a sense of what the lives were like for the slaves of Brattonsville both from surviving material evidence and through the collection of information from similar sights.

#### BRATTONSVILLE’S BLACK LANDSCAPE

Although the Brattonsville plantation was distinctive in the Upcountry in part because of its large size, the circumstances of the slaves who lived and worked there were quite typical of the Southeastern region. Historian John B. Boles characterizes this relationship writing, “Imagine a universe of ten slaveholders, eight owning two slaves apiece, one owning twenty-four, and the tenth possessing sixty.”<sup>92</sup> The majority of slaves lived and worked within substantial communities and in the words of Vlach, these large scale plantations “unintentionally served as

<sup>91</sup> Scoggins, 8.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Vlach, 12.



the primary sites at which distinctive black American culture matured.”<sup>93</sup> This cultural development was often fostered by these communities through the use of what historian and author Rhys Isaac calls “an alternative territorial system.” Writing in reference to landscapes of enslavement in Virginia he suggests that “paths and trails into the countryside were the central elements of the slave landscape in Virginia. Some of these secret tracks led to clandestine meeting places in the woods, used sometimes for ritual purposes and at other times for festive parties at which fiddles were played and stolen pigs were barbequed.”<sup>94</sup> This same understanding can be translated widely to slave communities throughout the Southeast.

The slave’s alternative landscape was often created in response to the planter’s landscape, serving ultimately to reclaim a small degree of their humanity while within the oppressive confines of the plantation. This act of reclaiming, though frequently invisible to the planter by manifesting itself through the creation of the informal “paths and trails into the countryside” referenced by Isaac, did at times exhibit itself in more formal settings such as the main house. In this way, the slave’s landscape altered and frequently undercut the intention of the planter’s processional landscape. Dell Upton addresses this relationship by suggesting that within the formal landscape of the plantation, “blacks could pass almost at will, while all whites from outside had to observe the formalities” as they and not the slaves were the intended audience of such a landscape. Upton continues, expanding the parameters of this relationship beyond the boundaries of the plantation, writing:

The slave also faced an absence of clear barriers in public, once he or she had passed the major one – permission to be off the master’s property. At church, for instance, there was no definite seating arrangement for those few slaves who chose to attend or who were permitted to do so. The ‘slave gallery’ of the nineteenth century was a rarity in the eighteenth. The colonial church gallery was usually reserved for private seating or, less often, for ‘the public’ – those whites who did not have their own pews. Slaves might

<sup>93</sup> Vlach, 12.

<sup>94</sup> Vlach, 13.

sit in or adjacent to their master's pews, or they might share a section at the rear set aside for them.<sup>95</sup>

It can be inferred that given the size of the slave community at Brattonsville the "alternative territorial system" described by Isaac would have existed. In comparison to the vast landholdings of the Bratton plantation dedicated to agricultural use, the formal landscape surrounding the Homestead House is relatively small. This means that the majority of Brattonsville's slaves lived and worked a considerable distance away from the watchful eye of the main house and were perhaps more inclined to claim aspects of their immediate landscape for their own benefit.

While the Bratton family did employ several overseers to manage the daily tasks of the plantation's field slaves, it is unlikely that they would have lived immediately within the slave quarter itself, further supporting the possibility that this portion of Brattonsville's slave community would have created some degree of an alternative territorial system. In addressing this likelihood at similar sites, Vlach cites several examples of slaves who "countered the geometrically circumscribed order imposed by their master's logic with what seemed like chaos."<sup>96</sup> This perceived "chaos" was oftentimes found in the spatial arrangement of dwellings within the quarter. For example, slaves assigned to the Muddy Hole Farm on the northern boundary of Washington's Mount Vernon "located their cabins randomly among the trees at the edge of cleared fields." Similarly, one of the slave villages located "far from the central processing area" of J.J. Smith's cotton plantation in Beaufort, South Carolina consisted of a "row of boxy frame buildings, all were set at odd, irregular angles to one another."<sup>97</sup> The majority of instances where the slave community was able to control their surroundings through the

<sup>95</sup> Upton, 69.

<sup>96</sup> Vlach, 14.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Vlach, 14.

arrangement of their dwellings within the quarter occurred on portions of plantations supervised by black overseers.<sup>98</sup> As the two documented overseers at the Bratton plantation were both white (Elijah Clarke and Charles Curry) it is unlikely that the dwellings for field slaves would have been arranged organically. More than likely the spatial arrangement of the field quarter would have resembled the domestic quarter flanking the Homestead House, while the materials and methods used for the construction of the dwellings themselves would have been cruder by comparison. Given the presence of white overseers, those slaves living and working separately from the formal Homestead House complex would have likely been compelled to develop their alternative territorial system in more subtle and hidden ways. Addressing this possibility within the context of Virginia and helping to visualize what these subtle alternatives may have resembled, Isaac writes, “Beyond the storehouses and granaries, but well-marked in the memory, were the places deep in the woods where slaves might slaughter and barbecue the semi-wild hogs that bore on their ears and rumps the marks of a master’s claim to possession. The scattering settlement through a wooded countryside that enabled the Anglo-Virginian masters to space their property boundaries widely also allowed the covert activities of blacks to maintain an alternative territorial system.”<sup>99</sup>

Also among the nuances of alternative territorial systems within large plantations like Brattonsville are the routes which domestic slaves took in order to accomplish daily tasks within the main house. Unlike many of the desired paths or meeting places within the landscape which without documentation cannot be uncovered at this site, these routes can be traced with relative accuracy. Often these pathways loosely resembled those taken by the plantation owner’s family or white guests who were held within the strict intended boundaries of the

<sup>98</sup> Vlach, 14.

<sup>99</sup> Isaac, 53.

processional landscape. Describing a common route of a domestic slave within Mt. Airy, Dell Upton supports this likelihood writing that they often “mirrored the private routes” of family intimates.<sup>100</sup> Although similar in many ways, the pathways taken by domestic slaves fulfilling their daily work throughout the house frequently required the use of back doors and secondary entrances. In this way, slaves formed an alternative territorial system which was centered within the main house, but also encompassed the service structures within the work yard and domestic quarter. While there is not much documented evidence of the routes which domestic slaves utilized to serve the Bratton family and their guests, probable routes can be deduced by analyzing the Homestead House and its immediate surrounding landscape.

Beginning in the domestic quarter on either side of the Homestead House, it is unlikely that the domestic slave’s route would have made frequent use of the front door unaccompanied or without first being tasked by a member of the Bratton family. Rather, the route would have progressed to include one of several secondary entrances into the house. Among the entryways within the Homestead House and the assembly hall addition which would have likely been exclusively used by domestic slaves is that of the doorway leading to the cellar below the assembly hall. While it is believed that the current doorway is a post-bellum replacement of what were likely bulkhead doors originally, this particular location is distinctive in that it is likely the only point within the Homestead House and assembly hall to be solely utilized by slaves. The exact purpose of the cellar is unclear, though given its location beneath the formal hall and taking into consideration precedents set by other plantation sites, it may have served as a storage space for food or other items which would have been brought up for use during social events.

<sup>100</sup> Upton, 68.

The dissimilar uses and subsequent groups which controlled this cellar space versus that of the formal hall above it make the assembly hall structure distinct within the Brattonsville landscape. Following its completion in the 1840s, the hall was likely used by the Bratton family as their premier entertainment space (Appendix A, fig. 1.7). As such, it likely also served as the zenith of the formal route taken by members of the Bratton family and their guests through the house and as a space in which domestic slaves were expected to serve family members and guests with the least amount of visibility as was possible. Social events whereby stringent societal postures were to be maintained likely made this room among those least controlled by domestic slaves within the house, contrasting sharply with that of the cellar space below it. Without the supervision which was likely a reality within the house or assembly hall, it is probable that those working within and around this cellar space would have felt more at liberty to speak freely amongst themselves or to take unpermitted breaks from their demanding work. Though there is no direct evidence which reinforces this occurring at Brattonsville, it is probable that it did. It was certainly these presumed opportunities for small gatherings and rest which allowed domestic slaves at Brattonsville and elsewhere to not only claim portions of the highly regulated landscape outside of the quarter, but also to temporarily reclaim control over their own persons.

Although spaces like the Bratton's assembly hall were relatively common on large plantations throughout the Southeast, the clear divide between races within individual spaces was a rarity. The remaining routes taken by domestic slaves within and around the Homestead House more accurately reflect the day to day life of the Brattons as well as other slaveholding families by including points of intersection and varying degrees of overlap. Among the secondary doorways which punctuate these routes are the two entryways located on the northern and southern wings of the Homestead House. The northern entrance corresponds to a

room which purpose is currently unknown, although one theory posits that the wing provided additional space for John S. Bratton's medical practice. Additional research is required to either confirm or deny this possibility. If this were in fact the case, this doorway may have provided slaves with access to John S. Bratton's workspace, the implication being that they may have been able to serve him in this part of the house without first entering through the front or rear doorways. While it is somewhat of a stretch to imagine this doorway being used frequently by domestic slaves, the corresponding doorway in the southern wing was surely used quite often.

The southern wing of the Homestead House was constructed to accommodate an upgraded formal parlor space, exhibiting much of the Bratton family's most treasured furniture pieces and serving as one of the principle rooms in the house for entertaining guests. The doorway in the south facing wall of the parlor leads directly to the domestic quarter outside, further reinforcing the notion that this doorway was used primarily by domestic slaves (Appendix A, fig. 1.8). This mode of ingress and egress represents an important contact point between the traditional routes taken through the house by the Bratton family and their guests, and the routes taken by slaves. Whereas most whites would be limited to abide by the customs of moving through the house put in place by the Bratton family, the domestic slaves were able to circumvent this formality, discreetly moving between the two landscapes with relative freedom.

The entryway / exit which perhaps exhibits the highest degree of overlap between the routes of domestic slaves and those of the Bratton family is the central doorway at the rear of the Homestead House. A significant point along the formal route through the house, crossing this threshold onto the covered walkway leading to the assembly hall would have meant that guests had been welcomed into the highest levels of hospitality that the Bratton family could offer them. For domestic slaves, this doorway was likely often used as an entrance into the

house from the domestic quarter. From this point it would have been more convenient for them to service semi-private rooms of the house such as the informal dining room / breakfast room immediately to the right of the doorway or pass down the hallway to the main stair without making use of the front door.

As the Homestead House was constructed using bilateral symmetry, the central hallway can be interpreted as the axis over which all rooms within the house are mirrored. If this same axis were to be extended through the back doorway, and across the covered walkway at the rear of the house, it would ultimately bisect the adjoining assembly hall. As with Brattonsville and many other plantations constructed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, this symmetry is expanded to determine the spatial relationship of dependency structures to the main house. Additionally, symmetry plays a direct role in determining the routes taken by domestic slaves as they passed between the main house and the quarter. Upon close examination of the spatial relationship of the Homestead House and its flanking dependency structures, potential routes utilized by domestic slaves can be inferred. For example, the center line which bisects the Homestead House is intersected perpendicularly by an axis which runs from the dairy, across the covered walkway, and on to the reconstructed kitchen structure located at the northern end of the quarter. The dairy and kitchen's strategic positioning in relation to the covered walkway allows the two structures to be virtually equidistant from the doorway leading to informal dining room / breakfast room as they are from the doorway leading into the assembly hall. This allowed for the relatively easy transportation of meals as well as products such as cream, butter and cheese to either of the two dining rooms.

Though subtle, the alternative routes utilized by both domestic and field slaves lend themselves to a partial claiming of the landscape and ultimately as a form resistance to their bondage. While these routes certainly existed and, in some cases have been documented often

through first-hand accounts, tangible evidence is difficult to uncover. For the slave community, life was not concentrated along these paths, though they certainly contributed greatly to their routine and in some instances to the lessening of their daily burden. For many of the alternative routes which catered to the community's ability to engage in potentially punishable activities such as visiting loved ones off of the plantation grounds without a pass from their master, their inherent secrecy meant that evidence of their existence would seldomly be left behind. Where life was concentrated for the slave community and subsequently where evidence of life has often been left behind, is within the quarters. Brattonsville's remaining antebellum dwelling and dairy offer insight into the narratives of those individuals who were enslaved by the Bratton family and furthermore serve to add great value in developing an understanding of plantation landscapes which in some cases support and in others challenge intuitive judgement of how these sites functioned.

#### SITES OF PARTICULAR INTEREST: BRATTONSVILLE'S ANTEBELLUM DAIRY AND SLAVE DWELLING

##### Initial Observations

While extensive analysis paired with existing archival information has led to the accurate interpretation of structures such as the Homestead House, information regarding the purpose and use of the dairy structure is less attainable. Similarly, although interpreters and historians of the Brattonsville site are confident that the slave dwelling was in fact used as such, a lack of documentation regarding who its residents were and what they did partially obscures the building's narrative. All existing evidence is encapsulated within the structures themselves, making their interpretation more difficult. By examining the contexts in which these structures were built, as well as architectural elements which imply their use, it is possible to garner



valuable information regarding the landscape they were a part of and of the individuals who used them. The site's current interpretation of these two structures as a slave dwelling and dairy is consistent with the opinion of this thesis, though additional architectural elements within each building distinguish them from other regional examples.

Examined from a distance, the brick structures located at the southern end of the Homestead House serve in part as design elements which are integral to completing the symmetry of the formal landscape laid out by the Bratton family. The red color of the brick stands in sharp contrast to the painted mansion, and in conjunction with their small size and the simplicity of their architectural elements relative to the Bratton residence, they communicate to those on the plantation grounds their purpose as dependency structures. Without closer inspection, it is difficult to ascertain the purposes of these individual outbuildings. It is likely the case that the visual uniformity displayed by the materiality, positioning, and size of the outbuildings relative to the main house was an intentional design choice (Appendix A, fig. 1.9). Whereas a domestic slave or member of the Bratton family would be able to distinguish the specific uses of each of the flanking structures, visitors to the site would naturally observe the scene in two general sections: the centerpiece of the Homestead House followed by the secondary structures on either end. Furthermore, the likelihood that the Bratton family sought to achieve visual legibility and coherence within the landscape is reinforced by the dimensions of the dependency structures themselves. Both buildings measure approximately 16' x 22'. The dimensions of slave dwellings vary greatly across the United States, making the larger size of this example not unusual. Vlach suggests that quite the opposite was true for the dairy building noting that they were most often square in plan, seldomly exceeding 14'x14'. Its larger size suggests the probability of multiple uses, a theory which is reinforced by the presence of a loft and windows (Appendix A, fig.1.10). He continues, writing that "These structures were

distinguished particularly by their extended overhanging eaves and louvered ventilators, two features designed to keep the interior of the building – and hence its contents – cool.”<sup>101</sup> While the architectural elements listed by Vlach are not present within the Brattonsville dairy, the building’s proximity to the main house’s dining rooms and well opening in addition to its basement and grilled ventilators strongly suggests its foremost use as a dairy (Appendix A, fig. 1.11). The aesthetic deviation from more typical examples (matching the characteristics described by Vlach) is perhaps yet another indication of the Brattons’ desire for visual unity.

Unfortunately, there is little surviving archival evidence which clarifies when the dairy and other brick dependency structures were completed. The first mention of a dairy or other potential dependency buildings at the site is in a bill of settlement for work completed by local contractor and builder of the Homestead House Henry Alexander in January of 1828, which addresses compensation for work done “to dwelling house and outhouses”. The document makes mention specifically of “The laying of a floor on the brick house” and “work at the dairy”.<sup>102</sup> It is unknown if Alexander’s references to a dairy and “brick house” corresponded with the two structures examined in this study. However, if this were the case, then it is safe to assume that the two buildings date to 1828 or were at least under construction at the time.

Considering the construction process generally, the initial clearing of land would have provided the material needed for the construction of the Bratton residence, temporary and permanent housing for domestic and field slaves, and quite possibly for fuel used in the early development of Brattonsville’s brick making operation. The manufacturing and use of brick to expand the estate was most likely the result of several converging factors to achieve a singular goal, namely, the Bratton family’s elevation of their status within the community through the

<sup>101</sup> Vlach, 78.

<sup>102</sup> *Bratton Family Papers Collection*, Folder 8, Box 1. SCL.

seizing of an opportunity brought on by access to plentiful raw material and slave labor.

Additionally, the use of brick to construct the assembly hall at the rear of the Homestead House suggests that its construction was a part of an extensive campaign which also included the building of the dependency structures. As it is likely that the Bratton family would have prioritized the use of better-quality brick for their grand addition, it is possible that structures such as the slave dwelling and dairy served as assemblages for lesser quality hand pressed brick and wood materials. Taking these factors into account, as well as the possibility that their construction coincided with the assembly hall, the dairy and dwelling were likely built between 1828 and 1840.

### *Building in Brick*

The use of brick for the construction of the dependency structures was likely, in part, a status symbol for the Bratton family. Building in brick reflected a degree of stately permanence that was rare in the South Carolina Upcountry in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. While the Homestead House's frame construction better reflects the building practices of the region and time period, its use in concert with that of brick to construct buildings such as the site's dairy and dwelling is distinctive in the Upcountry. This decision suggests that the Brattons were possibly drawing on a tradition of brick construction within the plantation setting which had been established by colonial planters throughout the Virginia Tidewater region. Emblematic sites such as the Hill-Carter family's Shirley Plantation, and the Byrd family's Westover Plantation feature brick dependency structures. These architectural trends in turn served to heavily influence the next

generation of planters pushing west into the piedmonts of Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia; a generation which included the Brattons.

One such example of these “pioneering” sites includes the Keswick Plantation, built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and located on the edge of the Virginia piedmont in Chesterfield and Powhatan counties. This site was constructed with many of the same architectural standards set by the manorial estates of the previous generation. Specifically, the H-shaped plan of the main house was modeled directly after that of Tuckahoe Plantation in nearby Goochland and Henrico counties and dependency structures at the site such as the kitchen were most likely influenced by these same colonial building trends (Appendix A, figs. 1.12, 1.13). Though there is no existing evidence that directly ties Brattonsville to a specific colonial plantation like that of Keswick to Tuckahoe, the architectural decisions made in the expansion of the Brattonsville plantation largely reflect those made by the builders of Keswick; most notably, the construction of a wood framed main house accentuated by brick dependency buildings.

In addition to equating themselves with that of the colonial planter class, building in brick was also likely an economic decision for the Brattons. In her 1994 investigation of a brick dependency ruin at the Brattonsville site, archaeologist Rita B. Kenion contests the notion that the use of brick in the region was a significant investment for the Bratton family. She writes that, “While Drucker and Anthony represent brick to be a costly commodity in the Carolina ‘backcountry’ previous to 1900, local evidence suggests that quite the contrary was true.” Kenion posits that access to good quality clay was widespread in the region, particularly in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as cotton lay claim to the landscape. Kenion states that, “When cotton became part of the economic scene, because of its destructive quality to the soil nutrients, a great many more acres were cleared. Cotton needed to be rotated every three to five years, so it could take as much as five times the cleared land as was planted each year.” She concludes

that, "If you combine the super abundance of suitable clay for brickmaking and extreme deforestation in the area, then brick is actually a cheaper building material than wood."<sup>103</sup> With the raw material for brickmaking readily available in the region thereby giving the Brattons a resourceful advantage, the focus is then transferred to the whether or not the Brattons had access to the labor needed to sustain the operation. Archival data suggests that they did.

In the four years between the settlement of Colonel William Bratton's estate in 1816 and the family's participation in the 1820 census, John S. Bratton purchased twenty additional slaves perhaps alluding to plans for the expansion of the plantation that would begin to take shape in 1823. This theory is again supported by the information recorded in the 1827 York Co. Tax List which documents the Bratton family as owning 40 slaves, suggesting that the initial clearing of land as well as the construction of the Homestead House required additional unskilled and skilled labor. The greatest increase in the Bratton slave population occurred between 1830 and 1840 wherein the Bratton family is listed in the census as owning 39 slaves at the beginning of the decade and 112 at the end.<sup>104</sup> This significant increase in the labor force in part implies that John S. Bratton had access to the capital necessary to invest in slaves, meaning many of the income generating operations both on the plantation as well as in neighboring York had been established and proven profitable by the end of the decade. Brickmaking and the subsequent construction of the brick dependency structures would have therefore been a financially accessible goal for the Bratton family. By taking advantage of the abundance of clay available to him and growing the number of slaves at the site, John S. Bratton would have been

<sup>103</sup> Study prepared by Rita B. Kenion, *Investigation of a Brick Dependency at Historic Brattonsville District: An Archaeological Study*, 31-33.

<sup>104</sup> Pat Veasey, *The African American Community at Historic Brattonsville: 1816-1850 Preliminary Research Findings*. "Chronology of Bratton slave ownership at Brattonsville beginning with the first generation, Col. William and Martha Bratton", 2004.

able to ultimately equate himself with that of the Virginia gentry and elevate his status within the community.

### Construction Methods

Both the slave dwelling and dairy were constructed utilizing locally harvested sun-dried clay brick and lime-based mortar. Kenion writes that “the most notable characteristic of the Brattonsville brick was the inconsistent quality. Some bricks were overheated, some half-baked, and some well fired.”<sup>105</sup> Past studies of the brick making process carried out at plantation sites surrounding Charleston offer glimpses into what the process may have resembled at Brattonsville. Frances Pinto’s work engaging with surviving evidence of brick clamps at the Grove Creek Plantation, as well as David Palmer and Carolyn Dillian’s investigation of brick clay sources at the Brookgreen Plantation provide insights into the localized and informal process of brickmaking. While the clay material certainly differs between the piedmont and the coast, the steps taken to create usable brick are generally consistent. The clay material is mined, rid of impurities through extensive sifting, shaped most often with the use of wooden molds first struck with either sand or water, dried, and then fired.<sup>106</sup> As evidence has not yet been found at the Brattonsville site which supports the utilization of a specific method of firing brick, it is likely that this task was accomplished using a stacked temporary kiln or brick clamp. This traditional method entails the stacking of unfired bricks above a fuel source, often overfiring the bricks

<sup>105</sup> Kenion, 32.

<sup>106</sup> David Palmer and Carolyn Dillian, "Preliminary Investigations into the Source of Brick Clay, Brookgreen Plantation, Georgetown County, South Carolina." *North American Archaeologist* 29, no. 3 (January 4, 2018). Accessed June 20, 2020. doi:10.2190/na.29.3-4. m.

closest to the fire source resulting in “clinkers” and under firing those furthest away. The inconsistent quality of the brick uncovered in Kenion’s archaeological study can most likely be attested to the use of this method. Ultimately, additional research is required to confirm the origin of the brick used at Brattonsville as well as the method of its formation.

Both the dwelling and dairy utilize a common bond, three wythes deep with a header course every sixth course (1:5 bond), locking the masonry together. This bond was considered to be cheaper as it was far easier to lay than other regularly used bonding patterns in the region at the time, such as the Flemish or English bond. The choice made by the Bratton family to utilize this specific bond perhaps reflects their reliance on a largely untrained workforce to construct these buildings. However, even though this approach was at one time considered cheaper due to the relative simplicity of its execution and more so with the exploitation of slave labor, a significant amount of skill was still required in the building process itself. This skill is particularly noticeable with the presence of the jack arches spanning the door and window openings of both structures (Appendix A, fig. 1.14). Though they are not ornate, they are an indicator of the broad array of craftsmanship which was present within the Brattonsville slave community.

Among the most pronounced characteristics which differentiates these structures from other similar examples is the presence of visible putlog holes, one wythe deep from their exterior faces (Appendix A, figs. 1.15, 1.16). These are holes which are left in the masonry during assembly in order to provide support for the horizontal framing members of scaffolding known as putlogs. It is on top of these putlogs that boards are subsequently laid to provide a platform for the masonry work to continue. In most cases, these openings are filled with matching masonry units following the completion of the building.<sup>107</sup> In the case of Brattonsville’s dairy and

<sup>107</sup> Carl Lounsbury and Elizabeth V. Patrick, *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1999).

dwelling, it is unclear why these were left unfilled. As the use of this method was commonplace at the time of their construction, the exterior would have likely been recognized by many as unfinished. Given the high probability that this method of scaffolding assembly was also used to construct the assembly hall and kitchen where putlog holes were filled, it can be speculated that the unfinished exteriors of the dependency structures were left that way intentionally. This would have provided an immediate visual cue signifying to visitors that these were dependency structures, occupying a lesser station within the hierarchy of the built landscape.

In addition to similarities between the two structures regarding the type of masonry used in their construction, so too do they exhibit similar wooden elements and joinery. More generally, both structures rely on typical timber framing elements to support their roofs: ceiling joists, rafters, collar ties, and plates. As the loft is no longer in place within the dwelling, this framing system is completely exposed, allowing for a clear understanding of the framing elements with the use of basic observation from inside the main room of the structure (Appendix A, fig. 1.17). Conversely, the loft is in place within the dairy allowing for only partial visibility of the ceiling joists from inside the main room. A small opening in the southwest corner of the dairy's ceiling enables one to gain access to the loft above with the use of a ladder (Appendix A, fig. 1.18). It is likely that this was also once the case in the dwelling, permitting its occupants access to additional sleeping or storage space. From this point the remaining roofing elements can be observed within the dairy.

Apart from the replacement of the shake roof and roof battens carried out in recent years by the preservation specialists at the site, much of the timber frame elements along with the window and door frames within the dairy and dwelling are likely original to the structures. Both the age of the timbers as well as the skill of the slaves who shaped them are evident with close inspection. For example, the ceiling joists in both the dairy and dwelling display vertical



marks consistent with the process of hewing the logs by hand (Appendix A, fig. 1.19). These marks provide evidence that Brattonsville's slaves had access to a variety of woodworking tools needed to work large timbers such as the adze and broad axe. As the Bratton family's wealth grew into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so too did their access to technology that greatly increased the efficiency of the woodworking that occurred on the plantation grounds. Michael Scoggins makes mention of the Bratton family's sawmill, listed among other smaller industries once operating at the site. Henry Alexander makes mention of his use of the sawmill as early as 1828.<sup>108</sup> It is likely that the beginnings of this operation coincide with the construction of the Homestead House, a project which required a considerable amount of sawn lumber.

Additional evidence of artisanship that can be attributed to Brattonsville's slave community is found in the joinery of the timber members as well as window and door jams of the structures. The ridges where the rafters meet within both buildings are connected with the use of mortise and tenon joints. This same joinery is also utilized in the assembly of all window and door jams within the two structures. The presence of this relatively complex but effective joint reinforces the notion that the work was completed by skilled slave craftsmen rather than novice laborers.

<sup>108</sup> *Bratton Family Papers Collection*, Folder 8, Box 1. SCL.

## Uses

While the two structures are remarkably similar in their construction, it is their subtle yet important differences which indicate their potential historical uses. These distinguishing factors would have likely only been familiar to members of the Bratton family and their slaves as the intention of presenting a visually unified built landscape largely disabled a guest's ability to ascertain the uses of each dependency structure.

Several architectural and locational factors suggest that the dairy structure was used both for the processing and storage of dairy products as well as a dwelling for domestic slaves. Along with the assembly hall addition at the rear of the Homestead House and the neighboring Brick House (Cir. 1841-1843), the dairy is among the few surviving structures original to the site which includes a cellar. Addressing the tendency of dairies to include a below-grade level, author Michael Olmert writes, "Plainly, it was cooler down there, hence, the tradition of the sunken floor in dairies. Cool air falls; heat rises. Earth even a few feet underground is naturally colder than at ground level."<sup>109</sup> Additionally, planters tended to utilize materials such as marble, brick, and plaster in order to successfully keep the interiors of the structures cool; a tradition which is likewise exhibited at Brattonsville.<sup>110</sup> Apart from the existence of a cellar, perhaps the greatest indication that this structure was originally used as a dairy by the Bratton family is the presence of grilled vents just above grade within the northern, western and southern walls of the building. These openings allow for cross ventilation to occur within the structure, which is particularly useful during the hot summer months when there is little natural air flow and pans of fresh milk require cooling (Appendix A, fig. 1.20). Addressing the issue of pests, Olmert writes

<sup>109</sup> Michael Olmert, *Kitchens, Smokehouses, And Privies: Outbuildings and the Architecture of Daily Life in the Eighteenth-Century Mid Atlantic* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), 98

<sup>110</sup> Olmert, *Kitchens, Smokehouses, And Privies: Outbuildings and the Architecture of Daily Life in the Eighteenth-Century Mid Atlantic*, 99.

that “A loosely woven fabric, even then called cheesecloth or gauze, was tacked up on grilles to keep out flies.”<sup>111</sup> Evidence of these cloths is linked to puncture holes often found within the interior surrounds of dairies, caused by years of tacking up the material against the openings. Though these puncture marks are not present within the interior of the Brattonsville dairy, it is possible that this tactic for keeping out pests while allowing for the promotion of breezes across milk pans was once also used there. Small traces of lime wash have also been found on the brick walls of the cellar indicating that this finish was likely used to sterilize the interior space.

Within the formal layout of the Homestead House’s domestic quarter, the dairy’s location near to the well and therefor to the property’s closest natural water source potentially reveals additional historical uses for the structure. Namely, that fresh water could be easily transported into the cellar and used to fill one or several small trough(s) into which crocks of milk could be placed to keep cool for extended periods of time. John Michael Vlach notes that this tactic was employed by the Gough family writing, “At Perry Hall plantation in Talbot County, Maryland, water was carried from a nearby well and poured into a trough that ran around the perimeter of the dairy floor. The crocks of milk placed in this trough were kept cool by changing the water two or three times a day.”<sup>112</sup> To confirm or deny this possibility would require the excavation of the current concrete floor of the cellar and extensive analysis of the layers beneath it (Appendix A, figs. 1.21, 1.22).

While the location of the dairy next to the well suggests that water could have been taken into the cellar and used to cool crocks of milk, other more subtle indicators within the building’s construction suggest the possibility that the dairy also acted as a spring house, housing a natural stream of water in its cellar without the aid of domestic slaves. Two arches are

<sup>111</sup> Olmert, 99.

<sup>112</sup> Vlach, 79.

present in the cellar, visible just above grade in the base of the northern wall (Appendix A, figs. 1.23, 1.24). It is possible that these arches spanned openings which allowed a source of groundwater to enter the structure, fill a single trough around the perimeter of the cellar floor, and drain out when necessary. This method of natural refrigeration would require subtle gradation of the cellar floor, encouraging water to move through the trough if levels became excessive while maintaining a calm enough pool to store crocks of raw milk or other perishable products. Facing the northern wall of the cellar, the arch to the right is approximately one brick row higher than the arch to its left, suggesting that water entered the structure to the right and exited the structure to the left when drainage was necessary. Significant buildup of biomaterial on the brick face surrounding these arches indicates that groundwater is still actively impacting the structure on its northern wall (Appendix A, fig. 1.25). Further archaeological examination is required to determine if the cellar of the dairy was or was not used in this way historically.

Apart from its capacity to refrigerate and store dairy products, this structure also likely served as a working and living space. This probability is reinforced by the incorporation of windows, a fireplace, and loft within the structure. The inclusion of a specialized workroom within dairies was not uncommon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century although many large plantations separated the storage of dairy products from their processing. Vlach writes, "A dairy was basically a clean room where milk sat undisturbed in shallow dishes or 'pans' for about ten hours, until the cream rose to the surface. After the cream was collected, it was usually taken by the slave cook or her assistant to the kitchen to be churned into butter."<sup>113</sup>

By storing the raw milk in the same structure as its processing, it is likely that the task became more efficient. With all the equipment and material housed at a single location,

<sup>113</sup> Vlach, 78.

transporting heavy and fragile products to a separate location for further processing was no longer necessary. Vlach cites the words of former slave Mary Fowler, who recalled that in the dairy on the Shepard plantation in Lowndes County, Alabama, “there was a stove there too, to heat plenty of water for the milk things – vessels and strainers an’ clothes. . . . The dairy was big an’ cool an’ we strained up the milk and churned an’ worked up the butter here.”<sup>114</sup>

Tasks such as those mentioned by Mary Fowler require ample natural light. The Brattonsville dairy appeases this need with the inclusion of windows in the northern, eastern, and southern walls. Likewise, daily tasks such as cooking, and eating would have been made easier with the presence of natural light throughout the day. Additionally, the presence of a loft and upper story window, reflecting the interior arrangement of the nearby slave dwelling, strongly suggests that this space was used domestically. It is likely that given the main room of the building was used in part as a specialized workroom, a large portion of family activities took place in the loft space. The placement of the loft window on the eastern face of both this structure as well as the slave dwelling was most likely an intentional design choice, allowing even the slightest amount of morning sun to enter the building and those inside to carry out personal tasks before the start of their workday.

Whereas Brattonsville’s dairy contains several distinct architectural features which suggest its possible historical uses, the slave dwelling is relatively simple in its design and exists largely as a paradigm for housing within Brattonsville’s domestic quarter. Though only one dwelling survives today, the slave schedule taken in York County, South Carolina on July 7, 1860 lists twenty slave houses on the property of Harriet Bratton.<sup>115</sup> The remnants of other brick dependency structures within proximity of the surviving dairy and dwelling suggest the probable

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Vlach, 79.

<sup>115</sup> *1860 U.S. Federal Census – Slave Schedules*. (York County, S.C.), 21.

layout and number of structures within the domestic quarter. The even spacing and alignment between the dairy and dwelling was likely repeated between two additional structures immediately to the west, forming a quadrangle. This was likely reflected at the northern end of the Homestead House, bringing the total of dependency structures within the quarter to eight. Visualization of these two quadrangles is assisted greatly by the reconstruction of three of these structures at their original locations, currently interpreted as a loom house, kitchen, and dwelling by the site. It is probable that the remaining twelve dwellings housed field slaves and were located elsewhere on the property.

The lack of existing archival information makes accurately determining the number of slaves who may have resided in the surviving dwelling a difficult task. Vlach writes, “Only a small percentage of plantation slaves was employed as domestic servants; from a group of fifty slaves, only six or so would be assigned to work at the main house. Even if a plantation’s labor force included hundreds of slaves, the domestic staff would usually not number more than half a dozen.”<sup>116</sup>

Based on the estate inventory following the death of John S. Bratton in 1843, the slave population at Brattonsville peaked at a total of 139 peoples.<sup>117</sup> In her archaeological study of the site, Rita B. Kenion posits that “If each house had six or seven people living in it, which would not have been unusual for a structure this size, the courtyard would have had 30 to 35 inhabitants in domiciles...”. She continues, noting that if additional domiciles had been present where footings had been uncovered, that number was likely even higher.<sup>118</sup> Taking both Vlach’s work as well Kenion’s study into consideration, it is likely that a single family of upwards of

<sup>116</sup> Vlach, 18.

<sup>117</sup> Veasey, (2004).

<sup>118</sup> Kenion, 39.

seven people lived in each structure, most of whom would not have been involved with the day to day work of serving the Bratton family directly. Rather, the majority of individuals likely engaged in specialty tasks within the quarter and yard which indirectly benefitted the Brattons. These tasks may have included cooking meals, washing laundry, or processing meat while a smaller staff of between eight and twelve individuals engaged in the work of personal service within the Homestead House.

The likelihood that the work which occurred within the domestic quarter was separated into two general categories is further supported by the potential organizational pattern of dependency structures suggested by the spatial relationship of the surviving dairy and dwelling. The dairy accommodates multiple uses, while the building to its south is believed to have only served as a dwelling. If this relationship were in fact a part of a larger arrangement whereby multi-use “specialty structures” were intentionally located closest to the house and single use dwellings further away, it stands to reason that the remaining three structures on the most extreme northern and southern ends of the quarter were also used as dwellings while the remaining inner structures served several uses. This theory aligns with that of the arrangement of the built landscape on other large plantations by which a hierarchical scheme of building uses was imposed over the cluster of dependency structures closest to the main house. This meant that structures which suggested wealth and / or provided items and services known only to the elite such as a dairy or laundry were reserved a position closest to the family. Given the care which the Bratton family placed on the design of their estate’s built and unbuilt landscape, the possibility that this hierarchical scheme overshadowed simple practicality is quite high. Further research is required to either confirm or deny this theory.

Evidence provided by Kenion’s study assists in further understanding the type of work which occurred within the quarter and subsequently begins to illustrate the lives of

Brattonsville's domestic slaves. While there is a general consensus amongst the scholarship pertaining to the social dynamics of plantations which supports the likelihood that domestic slaves occupied a higher station than field slaves, the extent to which these two groups' daily lives differed changes from site to site. On many large plantations, this higher station often came with an elevated quality of life, made possible in part by having access to better quality housing and food. Grounding these perceptions however in the harsher reality of their routines, Vlach indicates that the work carried out by domestic slaves was in fact quite demanding writing:

Although it is usually imagined that work in the Big House was considerably easier than toiling in the fields, domestic labor could be equally onerous...Work in the Big House – unlike field labor, which would usually end at sunset – had a perpetual quality because house slaves were always on call. At any time of the day or night – even if they had completed their assigned tasks – they were still expected to anticipate and tend to their owners' personal needs. Field slaves were at least given the day off on Sundays and certain holidays.<sup>119</sup>

While it is likely that the domestic quarter dwellings were of a better quality than those which housed the field slaves, the difficult nature of the work described by Vlach was certainly a reality for Brattonsville's domestic slaves, making their servitude all the more arduous by comparison.

Artifacts recovered in Kenion's work indicate that the families who lived within Brattonsville's domestic quarter were able to acquire items which modestly improved their lives. They do, in part, represent the slight advantage that domestic slaves had over those who worked in the fields. By living near to the main house, domestic slaves were sometimes given the opportunity to either be rewarded for their work, or as was more common, to acquire items without the explicit permission of the master. Whether their possession of the items listed in

<sup>119</sup> Vlach, 19.



Kenion's study was the result of the Bratton family's generosity or stolen in small acts of defiance is unclear.

Among the items mentioned in Kenion's report were glass and clay marbles along with a cast iron toy train. These are indicators that children were present within the quarter. Historically, children would have played minor roles in the daily work of the domestic quarter, frequently assisting adults with their tasks. Given that John S. and Harriet had fourteen children of their own, it is possible that these toys were used and passed on to the child of an enslaved family although without additional evidence it is impossible to know for certain. A plow was also uncovered which suggests that slaves likely engaged in gardening for their own personal use at the site. This was a common practice on plantations as it allowed slaves to augment their often-inadequate diet with produce and at times, small livestock. Vlach writes that, "Among the many tangible signs of black initiative and autonomy, the foremost spatial statements were the extensive vegetable gardens, sometimes as big as half an acre per person, in which slaves raised much of their own food."<sup>120</sup> The bones of both wild and domestic species were found along with several gun flints, suggesting that hunting supplemented their diets as well. Additionally, the bones of higher quality cuts of meat were found within the footprint of the structure, possibly indicating that the meat had been stolen and that attempts were made to hide any evidence of the meal by discarding the bones underneath the house. In her essay titled "Escaping Through A Black Landscape", architectural historian Rebecca Ginsburg writes that, "Learning to exploit whatever opportunities their environment affords is often a necessity for those who lack

<sup>120</sup> Vlach, 14-15.

political and economic power or any means of asserting their interests except through what James Scott calls the 'weapons of the weak: everyday, routine, often subversive practices.'<sup>121</sup>

It was these acts that required the use of so called "weapons of the weak" which often sustained enslaved families and would frequently be used throughout the Southeast to claim items from a world which had claimed them. The gestures by which slaves attempted to maintain a degree of their dignity and humanity are perhaps best exemplified at Brattonsville with the uncovering of two lead crystal perfume bottles along with a trunk lock and key. Though it is possible that these bottles were given to the resident of the dwelling by a member of the Bratton family, there is also a possibility that they were taken from the house and stored safely inside a trunk. Vlach writes that "Frederick Law Olmsted noted that at one particularly large slave village, again in Georgia, the slaves daily secured their homes and possessions under lock and key, asserting their right to personal space and property." The presence of these items within the dwelling are potential sources of evidence that at least some of the Brattonsville slave community made attempts at overturning the "declared order of the plantation."<sup>122</sup>

While the uncovering of toys, food bones, and more precious items like perfume bottles serves to partially uncover the hidden personal lives of Brattonsville's domestic slaves, the recovering of other items such as carpentry and sewing tools reinforces the notion that many within the quarter were skilled artisans and craftspeople. Kenion writes:

Several clusters of artifacts were recovered which suggested work tasks which were carried by the people who lived in the domicile. Clearly a good deal of sewing was going (on). A full tool kit including a needle threader, thimble, buttons, scissors was present. Carpenter's tools were present, as well. Several gauges of saw blade fragments were found along with hammerheads.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg, Rebecca Ginsburg, "Escaping Through A Black Landscape." Essay. In *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery*, (New Haven, C.T: Yale University Press, 2010), 54.

<sup>122</sup> Vlach, 15.

<sup>123</sup> Kenion, 35.

While it is unclear who may have resided in the surviving slave dwelling, given the uncovering of evidence of craftspeople in the ruin studied by Rita B. Kenion and the likelihood that the structure immediately to its north was used in part for dairying, it is possible that this remaining structure housed one or several skilled artisan(s) along with a member of the domestic staff.

Analyzed on its own, the surviving slave dwelling offers valuable insight on the possible design intentions of the Bratton family. Most notably, its use of brick as a means of equating themselves with building traditions established a generation before them by the planter class of Tidewater Virginia. Like that of the dairy, its frame construction and joinery pay homage to the skilled slave craftsmen who participated in its construction and likely lived either within the building itself or elsewhere within the domestic quarter (Appendix A, fig. 1.26). Examined within the greater context of the quarter, the dwelling gains additional meaning. It was likely built originally as a part of a larger hierarchical layout, imposed onto the landscape by the Bratton family in an attempt to organize the uses of each dependency structure in such a way that best emphasized their dominion. Ultimately, these structures were refuges, places of safety into which treasures could be hidden and rest could be found. They were places for raising children, teaching crafts, and telling stories. They existed outside of the regular domain of the Bratton family, and served as the hearth of the black community within which the heavy yoke of slavery could be temporarily lifted.

### PART III: TOWARD AN INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK FOR HISTORIC BRATTONSVILLE

#### HISTORIC BRATTONSVILLE AND NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE INTERPRETATION

In the collection of essays titled *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museum and Historic Sites*, editor Max van Balgooy addresses the important position which history occupies in our lives writing that “History serves as our personal and community memory, helping us analyze and understand the world around us.”<sup>124</sup> This history is shaped by our own personal experiences and is carried with us daily. The history of slavery in the United States has long been interpreted delicately, if at all, largely because it contends with a historical narrative of this country which is trapped by what Amanda G. Seymour refers to as a “false nostalgia”, fostering patriotism without criticism, and insisting, falsely, that prosperity in this country has and continues to be a possibility for all.

Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our collective memory regarding our understanding of slavery continued to be infected by the disease of ignorance and in turn disabled our ability to interpret and communicate an accurate narrative at historic sites. Plantation sites often neglected the horrors of slavery outright and at times espoused the more comfortable fabrication of the benevolent enslaver, and his ignorant, happy, and faithful slave. Brattonsville does not exist outside of this history. Like many similar sites, its neglect of the history of slavery until recent decades has left its landscape nearly barren of evidence of the vibrant community that once existed there. The purpose of this section is to recognize how this country’s history of neglect or denial of the realities of slavery proved harmful to the site and to attempt to

<sup>124</sup> Lonnie G. Bunch and Max A. Balgooy, “Introduction.” In *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), xiii.

reconcile these shortcomings by providing recommendations for the improvement of how the history of slavery at Brattonsville is communicated to its visitors.

The neglect of the narrative of slavery at many early designated historic sites across the country is largely rooted in those site's choosing to embrace a sense of false nostalgia rather than accurately interpret their history. This sense of nostalgia took root at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and reflected a spirit of national pride centered on the American Founding Era. Subsequently, large campaigns to preserve, reconstruct and interpret sites like Colonial Williamsburg and the homes of the Founding Fathers were carried out. This "colonial revival" marked an important time for some in our nation's history while for others, particularly the descendants of slaves in the Jim Crow south, this era denoted a revival of white supremacy and ensuing terror. The whitewashing of narratives at sites like George Washington's Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello would continue to set the standard for historic interpretation until the middle of century. Amanda G. Seymour writes, "Traditionally, at the historic homes of these men, the interpretive information presented revolves around the associated Founder, making it seem as though the Founders were the most important, sometimes even the only agents in shaping the fledgling nation."<sup>125</sup> Seymour later reminds us however, that the prominence and wealth of these historic figures would not have come to fruition without the forced labor of hundreds of men, women and children for generations.

Among the earliest efforts to redirect the work occurring within historic sites away from the glorification of the nation's colonial and antebellum past and toward that of both extraordinary as well as vernacular structures was the Historic American Buildings Survey.

<sup>125</sup> Amanda G. Seymour, "Pride and Prejudice: Interpreting Slavery at the Homes of Five Founding Fathers." In *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 3.

Established in 1933 by the National Parks Service as a constructive make-work program for architects, drafters, and photographers, the organization sought to create an archive of the nation's built heritage. This program would later inspire the formation of the Historic American Engineering Record (H.A.E.R.) in 1969 and most recently the Historic American Landscapes Survey (H.A.L.S.) in 2000. From 1936 to 1938, the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration would likewise engage in the work of documenting an alternative narrative of American history from that of the colonial revival by engaging in the work of amassing the narratives of surviving slaves from across the United States. This *Slave Narrative Collection* in combination with the documentation completed by H.A.B.S. would form the backbone of surviving primary archival information regarding the study of slave landscapes in the United States. The middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a period of social and cultural revolution. A desire to question previous narratives of slavery, and demand that a more truthful one be told was subsequently ignited in the hearts of many Americans. The following decades would lead to the publishing of landmark works on the subject such as John Blassingame's *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1940), John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery To Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (1947), and Kenneth Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution* (1956). These works attempted to place the life of the slave at the forefront of the work, rather than cast it aside or veil it in misinformation as had been done previously.

The Col. William Bratton House passed from private hands to the management of the York County Historical Commission in 1963. Nearly a decade later in 1971, the Brattonsville Historic District was created and placed on the National Register for Historic Places the same year. The district included the Col. Bratton House, the Homestead House, the Brick House, and Forrest Hall. No mention of the two surviving brick dependency structures is made within the statement of significance and the Homestead House is even referred to as a part of a large

“agricultural complex” rather than the more accurate term of “plantation”. Additionally, the history that is given of the site is centered primarily on the military exploits of the Bratton family, while again no mention is made of the expansive slave community which once resided there.<sup>126</sup> The bias found in the nomination which illuminates the significance of monumental structures such as the Homestead House while at the same time disregarding the two surviving dependency structures propounds that those initially seeking to protect Brattonsville’s built heritage were unconcerned with addressing the harsh reality of slavery imbedded in the site. This nomination suggests that the earliest interpretation of Brattonsville as a historic site was similar to the pattern of site interpretation exhibited at the height of the colonial revival era in the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, rather than the more progressive and accurate trend of interpretation inspired by the middle of century.

#### CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE INTERPRETATION

Currently, the site faces several challenges in bettering its interpretation of the narrative of slavery there. Addressing the broad variety of interpretation which is found at many historic sites Amanda G. Seymour cites a study conducted by Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small from 1996 to 2001 wherein they found that the narrative of slavery told by docents of 122 individual sites in Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana were separated into four defining categories. They included (1) symbolic annihilation and erasure, (2) trivialization and deflection, (3) segregation

<sup>126</sup> Nancy R. Ruhf, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Brattonsville Historic District, York County, South Carolina* (McConellsville, SC. South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1971).

and marginalization of knowledge, and (4) relative incorporation.<sup>127</sup> Seymour clarifies these groups, writing:

Symbolic annihilation and erasure occurs in interpretations that suggest 'that slavery and people of African descent literally were not present or were not important enough to be acknowledged'... Trivialization and deflection comes in a variety of forms: portraying slavery as a benevolent institution; promoting the tropes of the happy or grateful slave, loyalty after emancipation, and untrustworthy slaves; and valorizing whiteness by advancing narratives of the good owner, whites as hard workers, and contemporary whites as 'slaves'...When sites have separate tours or exhibit areas where slavery is the focus Eichstedt and Small consider it a display of segregated knowledge, which 'limits the exposure that the public has to this knowledge and reinforces the importance and normalcy of learning only a white-centric view of history'...Finally, sites that employ relative incorporation 'demonstrate that there has been an obvious effort to incorporate issues regarding slavery and those enslaved throughout the interpretive locations that a visitor might attend at a given site.'<sup>128</sup>

Brattonsville's current interpretation falls within the category of segregated knowledge and in some specific instances exhibits trivialization and deflection. While the site operates daily as an open-air museum whereby visitors are permitted to explore the grounds and buildings at their own leisure and occasionally engage with knowledgeable period actors, guided tours for groups are expected to be scheduled in advance. This inherently separates the information communicated to guests of the site. For example, if one were interested in learning more about the narrative of slavery at Brattonsville, they would take a specialty tour, focused exclusively on the subject and centered around the surviving brick dependency structures. Efforts taken in recent years to shed light on the history of enslavement at the site have resulted in the creation of specialty events such as *By the Sweat of Our Brow*, an annual program which features the reunion of descendants of Brattonsville's slaves, referred to as the "Seven Sacred Families". Together, they share stories and relics passed down to them from previous generations.

<sup>127</sup> Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*, (2002).

<sup>128</sup> Seymour, "Pride and Prejudice: Interpreting Slavery at the Homes of Five Founding Fathers." In *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*, 5-6.



Additionally, *By Way of the Back Door* is a program held every Saturday in February which offers specialty tours of Brattonsville and emphasizes the daily lives of the slaves who once lived and worked there. While immensely powerful, the information included within these programs is not included in the daily program of the site's interpretation. This in part suggests that the white-centric narrative of Brattonsville established at the beginning of its history as a museum site remains at the forefront. Addressing this pattern of white-centric histories told by historic sites, Lonnie Bunch III notes, "Rather than being viewed as a separate but equal presentation, the interpretation of this history, this culture must be seen as the quintessential American story: a history that profoundly shapes us all regardless of race or region."<sup>129</sup>

Among the factors which potentially mislead visitors to Brattonsville, trivializing and at times deflecting the reality of the history of enslavement there, are the site's incorporation of the current iteration of the story of Watt within its daily programming, its association with the 2000 film *The Patriot*, and the belief that the presence of brick slave quarters is evidence that the Brattons were benevolent enslavers. Watt's legend in which he delivered a message to Col. William Bratton and the troops under his command warning them of the imminent threat of Capt. Christian Huck implies that Watt viewed himself as a member of the Bratton family, rather than as their legal property. Additionally, the belief and even perhaps the likelihood that as a gesture of thankfulness, the Brattons had a headstone carved for Watt and his wife Polly following their deaths serves to further bolster the image of the Brattons as enlightened slaveholders. The language inscribed on the stone, however, exclusively denotes Watt and Polly's service with the words, "During the War he served his master Col. W. Bratton Faithfully and his children With the same fidelity Until his death. Also Polly his wife who died July 1838

<sup>129</sup> Lonnie G. Bunch III, "Forward", In *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), ix.

Who served the same family With equal faithfulness.” While it is impossible to know with certainty the events of that day, this particular narrative, reinforced by the language carved on the couple’s grave marker, sanitizes their roles in the Bratton family’s life and furthermore condemns them to the position of slave in both life and in death.

Although to no fault of the site, the use of a number of its structures for the filming of the 2000 film, *The Patriot*, could prove potentially harmful for future interpretation of slavery at the site. The movie, starring Mel Gibson and Heath Ledger portrays the story of the fictitious Capt. Benjamin Martin, loosely based on several historical figures including Francis Marion. Taking place in colonial South Carolina, a number of scenes feature actors playing both domestic and field slaves, mostly portrayed as quiet, helpful background characters. One character in particular, a slave named Occam, overcomes racism within Martin’s unit and chooses to continue to fight for the patriot cause. These portrayals of slaves present a false sense of nostalgia for the time period and neglect the brutality which African-Americans faced throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in states with large slave populations like South Carolina. By continually associating the Brattonsville site with the historical inaccuracy of this film, the potential for communicating an inaccurate message to visitors of the site is increased substantially.

While the structures within Brattonsville’s domestic quarter are of a higher quality than many other examples throughout the country, there is no evidence to support the possibility that this is the result of the Bratton family’s consideration for the comfort of their slaves. A small movement toward the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century encouraged slaveholders to construct better quality dwellings for their slaves though there is little to no evidence to support the possibility that this movement resulted in the adjustment of plantation landscapes. It is more likely that the Bratton family was capitalizing on the plentiful deposits of clay on their land and the

availability of slave labor in order to equate themselves with the planter class of Tidewater Virginia and the coast of South Carolina. Though they are distinctive in the Upcountry both for their size and for the material with which they were constructed, the foremost purpose of their design was to elevate the social status of the Bratton family within the community.

It is the recommendation of this work that Historic Brattonsville fully integrate the history of slavery into every aspect of the site. This includes the positioning of information regarding the lives of the enslaved within all extant structures and including the reality of their oppression at the forefront of all guided tours. Events such as the Bratton's estate settlement in 1849, which undoubtedly uprooted and shocked the slave community there through the selling of slaves to new masters, should be emphasized to guests of the site. This dramatic reconfiguration of Brattonsville's slave community represents the common tragedy of separation which countless enslaved families experienced throughout American history.

Additionally, it is the recommendation of this work that Historic Brattonsville's primary history be shifted away from that of the Bratton family and toward that of the generations of slaves who lived and worked at the site. Brattonsville has the potential to be a revolutionary teaching tool, exhibiting the evolution of the institution of slavery within this country. Beginning with the small group slaves who settled the land with Col. William Bratton in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the narrative should progress to include those who toiled in the expansive cotton fields of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and overcame immense hardship to develop a thriving community of artisans and craftspeople alongside the Homestead House. The story should continue to include the terror experienced by the county's black community in the 20<sup>th</sup> century following the resurgence of white supremacy, making specific mention of James Rufus Bratton's leadership in the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan and his probable participation in the lynching of Captain Jim Williams. It is widely believed that James Rufus Bratton's activities with the Klan served as the

inspiration for Thomas Dixon Jr.'s novel *The Clansman*, which in turn served as the basis for D.W. Griffith's 1915 film, *The Birth of a Nation*. All three phases of this historical narrative are grounded in structures onsite. A history of colonial slavery should be told at the Col. Bratton House, a history of plantation slavery should be expounded upon at the brick dwelling and dairy, and a history of the hardships which former slaves faced during the Reconstruction Era should be told at the brick house. To conclude, the narrative conveyed to visitors of the site should end on a note of hope, making mention of the Seven Sacred Families and the stories and relics of their heritage.

In closing, the telling of an alternative narrative at Historic Brattonsville is an essential part of reconciling with this country's original sin of slavery. It is our duty as historians and caretakers of historic sites to relay information accurately with the hope that our society's collective memory will shift toward that which is just. Otherwise, we stand the risk of experiencing a type of amnesia whereby the stories of those who have been excluded and oppressed throughout history will crumble and be permanently lost. We must honor the fingerprints they have left behind (Appendix A, fig. 1.27).

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## APPENDIX A: FIGURES



*Fig. 1.1: A view of the Homestead House facing west. (Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.2: A partial view of the original slave dwelling (left), dairy (center), Homestead House (right) and reconstructed kitchen (seen through the covered walkway) illustrating the symmetry of the domestic quarter. (Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.3: Stone “piedmont piers” beneath the Homestead House. (Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.4: A view of the original dairy and reconstructed loom house within the domestic quarter illustrating the extensive use of brick at the site. (Harper, 2019)*



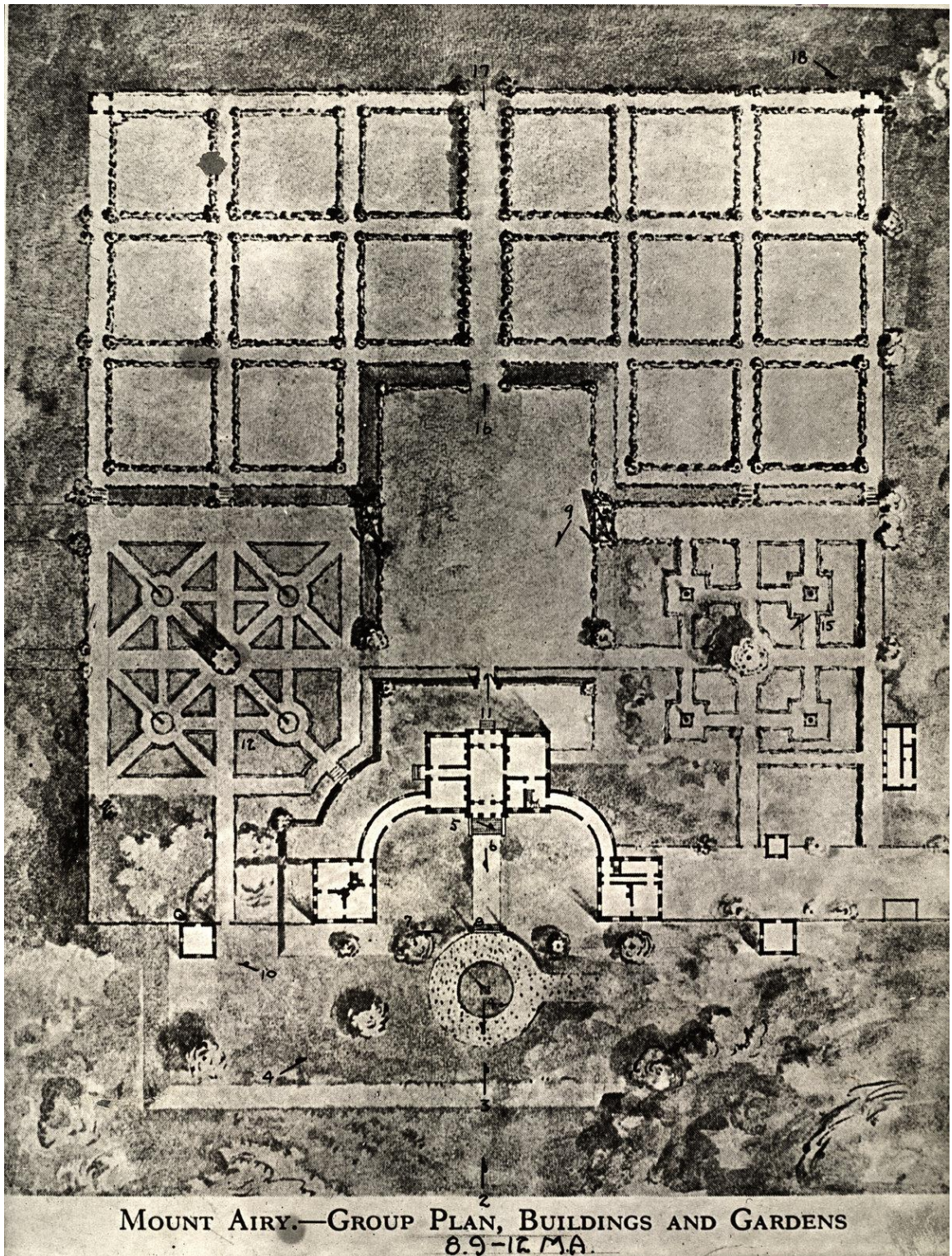


Fig. 1.5: Illustration of Mount Airy's Buildings and Gardens. (Cornell University Library Collection)





*Fig. 1.6: View of the Homestead House while approaching from the road below. (Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.7: View of the assembly hall from the doorway of the dairy. (Harper, 2019)*



*Fig. 1.8: View of the doorway in the southern wing of the Homestead House (left of the chimney) likely used by domestic slaves to access the parlor. (Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.9: View of the domestic quarter at the southern end of the Homestead House illustrating the architectural uniformity of Brattonsville's dependency structures. The reconstructed loom house is seen in the foreground and the original dairy and slave dwelling are in the background. (Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.10: Perspective view of the original dairy alluding to the structure's multiple uses. The reconstructed bulkhead doors (bottom left) lead to the cellar for milk cooling and storage, the main floor was likely used as both a living space and work room, and the window opening within the gable end allows for light to enter the loft. (Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.11: Perspective view of the original dairy emphasizing two of the three grilled vents at the base of the structure. (Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.12: View of the main house at the Tuckahoe Plantation in Henrico and Goochland Counties, Virginia. (Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*



*Fig. 1.13: View of the main house at Keswick Plantation in Powhatan County, Virginia. (Virginia Department of Historic Resources)*



*Fig. 1.14: View of the jack arch spanning the doorway of the original slave dwelling.  
(Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.15: View of the eastern wall of the original slave dwelling with visible putlog holes.  
(Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.16: Putlog holes in the northern wall of the original dairy. (Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.17: View of both the 19<sup>th</sup> century and replacement framing members of the roof structure of the original slave dwelling. (Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.18: View of the opening in the ceiling of the dairy's main room leading to the loft above.  
(Harper, 2019)*



*Fig. 1.19: View of the ceiling joists within the original dairy. (Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.20: Perspective view of the original dairy illustrating the grilled vents in the base of the southern and western walls. (Harper, 2019)*





*Fig. 1.21: View of the reconstructed bulkhead doors leading to the cellar of the original dairy.  
(Photograph taken by Sara Johnson of Historic Brattonsville)*



*Fig. 1.22: View of the dairy's cellar. (Photograph taken by Sara Johnson of Historic Brattonsville)*





*Fig. 1.23: View of the northern wall of the original dairy's cellar. The arches can be seen at the base of the wall. (Photograph taken by Sara Johnson of Historic Brattonsville)*



*Fig. 1.24: View of the rightmost arch at the base of the northern wall of the cellar. (Photograph taken by Sara Johnson of Historic Brattonsville)*



*Fig. 1.25: View of biomaterial above the leftmost arch in the northern wall of the cellar.  
(Photograph taken by Sara Johnson of Historic Brattonsville)*





*Fig. 1.26: View of the mortise and tenon joint of one of three original window frames in the original slave dwelling illustrating the craftsmanship of the slaves who lived within the domestic quarter. (Harper, 2019)*



*Fig. 1.27: Fingerprints in the original dwelling left by the slaves who pressed the clay into the brick mold. Seen at the center and top of the image. (Harper, 2019)*

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