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# Yeoman Farmers in a Planters' Republic

## Socioeconomic Conditions and Relations in Early National Prince George's County, Maryland

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Ever since Richard Hakluyt first envisioned English New World colonization, the idea of America as a field of economic opportunity has had immense importance. Colonial proprietors, their agents, and promotional writers stressed above all else that by moving to America migrants might obtain land and the economic independence that accompanied its ownership. After the Revolution, agrarian writers such as Thomas Jefferson and John Taylor of Caroline canonized the independent husbandman as the ideal republican citizen. These ideas have subsequently resonated through American historiography, at least among those who have taken agrarian writers at their word, and even today the yeoman farmer, free from markets and the machinations of the will of others, and uncorrupted by slavery, is frequently portrayed as the archetypal American of the early republic.<sup>1</sup>

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Steven Sarson is a lecturer in the Department of History at Swansea University in the United Kingdom. The author would like to thank Jack P. Greene and Ron Walters, who advised on the article's material at its PhD stage; Robin Blackburn, Stanley Engerman, Woody Holton, Mike McDonnell, and Betty Wood, who heard or read earlier draft manuscripts; other friends too numerous to mention at the British Group in Early American History who commented on this piece as a conference paper; and the anonymous referees and the editor of this journal for their invaluable assistance.

1. See especially Jack P. Greene, *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993). Robert E. Shalhope, *John Taylor of Caroline: Pastoral Republican* (Columbia, SC, 1980); Shalhope, *The Roots of Democracy: American Thought and Culture, 1760–1800* (Boston, 1990); J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1978); Lacy K. Ford, Jr., *Origins of South-*

Yet Jefferson, Taylor, and other contemporaries might have known better, coming as they did from the Chesapeake region where, by their day, the extent of landownership had been in palpable decline for quite some time. Historians of the colonial Chesapeake such as Lois Green Carr, Allan Kulikoff, Aubrey Land, Russell Menard, Lorena Walsh, and others have used quantifiable evidence such as censuses, wills, probate inventories, plantation accounts, land records, and tax lists, rather than relying on the word of agrarians, to demonstrate that if there was an “era of the yeoman farmer” in that region it ended in the late seventeenth century. Until then, former indentured servants had a fair expectation, with hard work and a little luck, of obtaining land. From the 1660s, however, as slavery gave larger planters the opportunity to exploit more land more cheaply, and as available realty thus got scarcer and more expensive, landownership fell from encompassing 70 percent of free people to 50 percent by the time of the American Revolution.<sup>2</sup>

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*ern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York, 1988); Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism* (Charlottesville, VA, 1992), 34–59; Kulikoff, *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000). Joyce Appleby, “Commercial Farming and the ‘Agrarian Myth’ in the Early Republic,” *Journal of American History* 68 (Mar. 1982), 833–49 remains a relevant critique of the republican-ideological approach.

2. Aubrey C. Land, “Economic Base and Social Structure: The Northern Chesapeake in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Economic History* 25 (Dec. 1965), 639–54; Russell R. Menard, “From Servant to Freeholder: Status, Mobility and Property Accumulation in Seventeenth-Century Maryland,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 30 (Jan. 1973), 37–64; Menard, P. M. G. Harris, and Lois Green Carr, “Opportunity and Inequality: The Distribution of Wealth on the Lower Western Shore of Maryland, 1638–1705,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 69 (Summer 1974), 169–84; Carr and Menard, “Immigration and Opportunity: The Freedman in Early Colonial Maryland,” in *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society*, ed. Thad W. Tate and David L. Ammerman (Chapel Hill, NC, 1979), 206–42; Carr, “Emigration and the Standard of Living: The Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake,” *Journal of Economic History* 52 (June 1992), 271–91; Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, “The Standard of Living in the Colonial Chesapeake,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 45 (Jan. 1988), 135–59; Walsh, “Servitude and Opportunity in Charles County, Maryland, 1658–1705,” in *Law, Society, and Politics in Early Maryland*, ed. Aubrey C. Land, Lois Green Carr, and Edward C. Papenfuse, Jr. (Baltimore, 1977), 111–33; Walsh, “Urban Amenities and Rural Sufficiency: Living Standards and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1643–1777,” *Journal of Economic History* 43 (Mar. 1983), 109–19; Gloria L. Main, *Tobacco Colony: Life in Early Maryland, 1650–1720*

There is also growing evidence that the American Revolution did nothing to reverse this century-old trend. Notwithstanding the findings of historians such as Ronald Hoffman, Woody Holton, and Michael McDonnell concerning the radical anti-elitist ideology and actions of the “lower sorts” in the revolutionary Chesapeake, others such as Jackson Turner Main, Bayly Marks, Elizabeth Perkins, Lee Soltow, and Fredrika Teute have shown that after independence economic inequality continued to grow and, in particular, nonlandownership continued to increase, in both the older tobacco-growing regions of the Chesapeake and in the newly opening tobacco West.<sup>3</sup>

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(Princeton, NJ, 1982); Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680–1800* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1986), 30–37, 85–92, 131–41, 428–32.

3. Ronald Hoffman, *A Spirit of Dissension: Economics, Politics, and the Revolution in Maryland* (Baltimore, 1973); Michael A. McDonnell, “Popular Mobilization and Political Culture in Revolutionary Virginia: The Failure of the Minutemen and the Revolution from Below,” *Journal of American History* 85 (Dec. 1998), 946–81; McDonnell, “Class War? Class Struggles during the American Revolution in Virginia,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (Apr. 2006), 305–44; McDonnell, *The Politics of War: Race, Class, and Conflict in Revolutionary Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007); Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999). Jackson Turner Main, “The Distribution of Property in Post-Revolutionary Virginia,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 41 (Sept. 1954), 241–58; Sarah Shaver Hughes, “Elizabeth City County, Virginia, 1782–1810: The Economic and Social Structure of a Tidewater County in the Early National Years” (PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1975); Bayly Ellen Marks, “Economics and Society in a Staple Plantation System: St. Mary’s County, Maryland, 1790–1840” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1979); Elizabeth Perkins, “The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky,” *Journal of American History* 78 (Sept. 1991), 486–510; Lee Soltow, “Land Inequality on the Frontier: The Distribution of Land in East Tennessee at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century,” *Social Science History* 5 (Summer 1981), 275–91; Soltow, “Kentucky Wealth at the End of the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Economic History* 43 (Sept. 1983), 617–33; Fredrika J. Teute, “Land, Liberty and Labor in the Post-Revolutionary Era: Kentucky as the Promised Land” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1988); Steven Sarson, “Wealth, Poverty, and Labor in the Tobacco Plantation South: Prince George’s County, Maryland in the Early National Era” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1998); Sarson, “Distribution of Wealth in Prince George’s County, Maryland, 1800–1820,” *Journal of Economic History* 60 (Sept. 2000), 847–55; “Similarities and Continuities: Free Society in the Tobacco South before and after

This article explores the nature and extent of these kinds of inequalities in the level of detail made possible by a local prosopographical study, and further extends our knowledge of yeomen by examining their economic conditions and their social relations with others, especially wealthy planters. Whether the inequalities and the kinds of social relations found in Prince George's County, Maryland, existed in other regions in the early republic will require further research, but since the idea of the yeoman republic emerged in large part from the Chesapeake tobacco-slave-plantation region and the model does not even work there, further research in other regions is certainly worth undertaking.<sup>4</sup>

Prince George's County is located in the southwest corner of Maryland that retained tobacco planting as its primary economic pursuit and was apparently a fairly typical tobacco plantation county, according to scholarship based on census, tax, land, and probate records, and planter correspondence on which this article also draws. Prince George's has an almost complete set of local tax assessment and other public records of private property holdings from the late 1790s to at least the 1820s. Maryland's county levy courts kept accounts of taxable personal and real

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the American Revolution," in *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf (Baltimore, 2005), 136–58, 341–45.

4. On growing inequality in early America more broadly see Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton, NJ, 1965); Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *American Inequality: A Macroeconomic History* (New York, 1980); Lee Soltow, ed., *Six Papers on the Size Distribution of Wealth and Income* (New York, 1969); Soltow, "Economic Inequality in the United States in the Period from 1790–1860," *Journal of Economic History* 31 (Dec. 1971), 822–39; *Distribution of Wealth and Income in the United States in 1798* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1989); Edward Pessen, "The Egalitarian Myth and American Social Reality: Wealth, Mobility and Equality in the 'Era of the Common Man,'" *American Historical Review* 76 (Oct. 1971), 989–1034; Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power before the Civil War* (Lexington, MA, 1973); Carla Gardina Pestana and Sharon V. Salinger, eds., *Inequality in Early America* (Hanover, NH, 1999). For debate about this scholarship see Robert E. Gallman, "Professor Pessen on the 'Egalitarian Myth,'" *Social Science History* 2 (Winter 1978), 194–207; Gallman, "The 'Egalitarian Myth' Once Again," *Social Science History* 5 (Spring 1981), 223–34; Pessen, "The Beleaguered Myth of Antebellum Egalitarianism: Cliometrics and Surmise to the Rescue," *Social Science History* 6 (Winter 1982), 111–28; James D. Smith, ed., *Modeling the Distribution and Intergenerational Transmission of Wealth*, Studies in Income and Wealth, 46 (Chicago, 1980).

estate: slaves, divided by age and sex; gold and silver plate; “other” property (livestock, stills, ready cash, riding carriages, vessels over 20 tons, and, from 1813, some furniture and farm equipment); as well as land, with town lots and built improvements assessed separately. Matching these records against federal censuses (in this case 1800, 1810, and 1820—the 1830 population schedules of Prince George’s and neighboring counties are lost) reveals the taxable wealth owned by every resident household head. Historians thus can not only see who owned land and differentiate between classes of landowners but also assess property ownership among different landed groups, analyze the economic condition of yeomen farmers, and get insights on the nature of social relations between yeomen and planters. The schedules of the Federal Direct Tax of 1798 provide further details of “land, lots, buildings, and wharves,” including quantitative and qualitative information on barns, mills, and other economically productive improvements, while probate inventories detailing farm equipment, crops, and personal belongings can flesh out details of property ownership in individual instances.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Earlier works on Prince George’s include Edward C. Papenfuse, Jr., “Planter Behavior and Economic Opportunity in a Staple Economy,” *Agricultural History* 46 (Apr. 1972), 297–312; Lois Green Carr, “County Government in Maryland, 1689–1709” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1968); Allan Kulikoff, “Tobacco and Slaves: Population, Economy, and Society in Eighteenth-Century Prince George’s County, Maryland” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1976); Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*. William Kilty, *Laws of Maryland, 1776–1818, revised and collected under the authority of the legislature* (Annapolis, MD, 1820), 1784, ch. 4; 1787, ch. 34; 1812, ch. 141. For a full description of the process involved and analysis of wealth see Sarson, “Wealth, Poverty, and Labor,” 35–251. Close to 30 percent of all kinds of property recorded in local assessments was owned by nonhousehold heads: people who either resided elsewhere, lived in someone else’s household, or had died and whose property had not been redistributed at the time assessments were taken. It is most likely that this property in effect increased the gap between rich and poor because larger nonresident property holders would have been unlikely to have been subsumed by census takers in poorer people’s households and because wealthier people were more likely than poorer people to hold property outside the county. The redistribution of estates of the deceased might eventually have lessened inequality, but, as we shall see, inheritance and opportunity made little impact on the small yeoman class. It should also be noted that the county levy assessed property at less than market value, also understating differences between rich and poor. Comparison of tax-assessed wealth and inventoried wealth (closer to market values) may be seen below. Copies of the databases made for the analysis of wealth are kept at the Maryland State Archives, Annapolis.

The attempt to classify landowners here is based on ideal labor–land ratios for tobacco cultivation. Typically, in the eighteenth century, one laborer could produce 1,000 to 1,500 pounds of tobacco in a year, although it was probably closer to 1,000 by the early nineteenth century due to the lower availability of fresh soil. This production required at least 40 acres of land per laborer: three acres in tobacco, the rest in food crops and fallow. Combining ideal labor–land ratios with commonly used classifications of slaveholders, landowners fall into five groups: smallholders with less than the 40-acre minimum for full-scale tobacco production; small yeomen with at least 40 but fewer than 280 acres, farm sizes suited to at least one but no more than seven full-time hands (two family members and five slaves working as full hands, or the equivalent); large yeomen with at least 280 but fewer than 800 acres, which could sustain the equivalent of between seven and 19 full hands (at the higher end of this category probably few, if any, family members worked in the fields alongside slaves except in managerial capacities); small planters with at least 800 but fewer than 2,000 acres, suitable for 20 to 49 full hands (probably all slaves with perhaps the occasional indentured servant); and large planters with 2,000 acres or more, capable of employing 50 full hands or more. Although these figures record total acreages, some large yeomen and planters also had home farms and plantations and quarters elsewhere requiring supervision by overseers.<sup>6</sup>

There are, of course, imperfections in these classifications. As with any division along a continuum, lines fall arbitrarily. In 1800, for instance, John Hilleary held 13 slaves and just under \$1,500 in total wealth, and Thomas Baldwin held 11 slaves and just over \$1,400, but because Hilleary owned 286 acres and Baldwin 275, the former counts here as a large yeoman and the latter as a small one. Meanwhile, assuming the labor of only one extra hand in addition to five slaves would

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6. Aubrey C. Land, “Economic Behavior in a Planting Society: The Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake,” *Journal of Southern History* 33 (Aug. 1967), 473; Papenfuse, “Planter Behavior and Economic Opportunity,” 303–6; Carville V. Earle, *Evolution of a Tidewater Settlement System: All Hollow’s Parish, Maryland, 1650–1783* (Chicago, 1975); 24–30; Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 47–48. Lorena Walsh estimates a lower rate of production in “Slave Life, Slave Society, and Tobacco Production in the Tidewater Chesapeake, 1620–1820,” in *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*, ed. Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan (Charlottesville, VA, 1993), 175.

make 240 acres the cut-off point between large and small yeomen, while with three free laborers it would be 320 acres. Furthermore, in individual cases, factors like soil quality would cause actual labor-land ratios to diverge from the ideal classifications.<sup>7</sup>

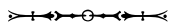
Despite these difficulties, classification has value. Mean statistics reveal significant differences in economic condition between groups of landowners, and general tendencies within groups would not change much by moving the dividing line in either direction. The fact that labor-land ratios were often not ideal reveals a lot about the different economic circumstances of various landowners. And whatever the method, combining slave and land ownership to analyze socioeconomic structure in this tobacco county shows the inapplicability of the idea of the "yeoman republic." Yeomen constituted a minority of householders, and most of them participated in markets and held slaves. Indeed, since large numbers of nonlandowners also held slaves, Prince George's was more a slaveholding than a landowning county. Furthermore, smaller yeomen, including some who owned slaves, were in an economically precarious position and could lose their land. Despite considerable effort and some individual successes in retaining land and a degree of economic independence, the size of the small yeomanry declined in the early nineteenth century, in part because of a long-term process that had begun in the 1660s, but also because embargoes and war between 1807 and 1815 disproportionately hurt smaller farmers. Faced with increasing hardship, growing numbers of small yeomen were forced into landlessness.

The small yeomanry may have struggled to make ends meet and declined in size because they, as distinct from all other groups except smallholders who engaged in extra-agricultural activity, held sufficient numbers of slaves to exhaust their soil, especially if they or their family members worked the land as well. Small yeomen's land could also have been significantly less valuable per acre than that of other groups because they or their forebears could afford only poorer quality land. Whatever the case, poorer soil almost certainly meant lower crop yields, contributing to small yeomen's economic difficulties. As well as having better quality land, larger yeomen and planters had better storage facilities and more diversified economic pursuits. They were thus better positioned to

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7. Prince George's County Tax Assessments (hereafter PGCTA), Personal Property, 1800, 42, 41; Real Property, 42, 25.

prosper and could withstand the hardships of embargoes and war that stultified tobacco trade between 1807 and 1815. When trade reopened at the end of the War of 1812, planters capitalized on suddenly high prices (after years of European nicotine withdrawal) for their own crops and for the tobacco they had bought up from smaller farmers who were unable to store it that long or had needed ready cash. The structure of the economy and intermittent hardship, combined with the ability and proclivity of larger planters to profit from small yeomen's crops and buy up their land, helps explain the latter's difficulties. Indeed, far from being independent from markets or wealthier neighbors, small yeomen were locked into interdependencies within the tobacco economy, where they sometimes exercised agency but where planters held much greater power. Small yeomen owned land and followed the same economic pursuits as large yeomen and planters, but were less able to compete in the tobacco marketplace and often struggled to make ends meet.<sup>8</sup>



Yeomen farmers formed a minority of the population of Prince George's County in the early nineteenth century. Using the classifications defined above, there were 1,712 free household heads in the county in 1800 (Table 1), comprising 15 large planters, 54 smaller planters, 123 large yeomen, 287 small yeomen, 45 smallholders, and 1,188 nonlandowners. Small yeomen thus made up about half the 524 landowners, but only 17 percent of household heads. Large yeomen constituted under a quarter of landowners and 7 percent of all free householders. Even expanding the definition of a yeomanry to combine owners of 40 to 799 acres together, this category accounts for less than a quarter of households, while over two-thirds of the county's free householders were landless. In numerical terms, Prince George's clearly was not yeoman-dominated and became even less so in sequent decades, as landlessness grew from 69 percent in 1800 to almost 75 percent by 1820. Rising from one-third of

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8. For the latest word on the utility of the concept of "class" in analyzing pre-industrial American society see Simon Middleton and Billy G. Smith, "Class and Early America: An Introduction," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (Apr. 2006), 211–20 and the accompanying articles in this special issue of the journal, especially McDonnell, "Class War?"

householders in the 1660s to one-half in the 1760s, landlessness reached two-thirds by 1800 and three-quarters by 1820.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, the total number of landowners rose by seven to 531 by 1810, but then fell to 462 by 1820. The initial rise in landownership conceals a steady decline in the absolute and relative size of the small yeomanry and hides the extent of that decline. Planters constituted similar proportions of the population across the decades; large yeomen rose to 8 percent of householders by 1820; smallholders increased to 4 percent of householders; but the small yeomanry declined from 287 in 1800 to 193 in 1820, and just 11 percent of householders. Thus the overall decline in landownership largely reflected the shrinking size of the small yeomanry.<sup>10</sup>

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9. Prince George's total population figures were 1800: 21,175, 57.6 percent enslaved; 1810: 20,589, 46.6 percent enslaved; 1820: 20,216, 55.3 percent enslaved. If we counted slaves, of course, then small yeomen constituted even smaller proportions of the county population. For landownership in the colonial tidewater Chesapeake see Main, *Social Structure of Revolutionary America*, 44–67; Carr, "County Government," 581–597; Papenfuse, "Planter Behavior and Economic Opportunity," 301–2; David Curtis Skaggs, *Roots of Maryland Democracy, 1753–1776* (Westport, CT, 1973), 40–41; Earle, *Evolution of a Tidewater Settlement System*, 206–12; Russell R. Menard, *Economy and Society in Early Colonial Maryland* (New York, 1985), 51–77, 155–201, 302–20; Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 131–41, 152–61, 296–97; James Horn, *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994), 147–60, 253–92, 328–33. For studies of tidewater tenancy and wage labor, see Willard F. Bliss, "The Rise of Tenancy in Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 58 (Oct. 1950), 427–41; Gregory A. Stiverson, *Poverty in a Land of Plenty: Tenancy in Eighteenth-Century Maryland* (Baltimore, 1977); Lorena S. Walsh, "Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder: Estate Management and Tenant Fortunes in Southern Maryland, 1642–1820," *Agricultural History* 59 (July 1985), 373–96; Steven Sarson, "Landlessness and Tenancy in Early National Prince George's County, Maryland," *William and Mary Quarterly* 57 (Jul. 2000), 569–98; Jean B. Russo, "Self-Sufficiency and Rural Exchange: Free Craftsmen in the Rural Chesapeake Economy," in *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, ed. Lois Green Carr, Philip D. Morgan, and Jean B. Russo (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988), 389–432; Christine Daniels, "'Getting his [or her] Livelyhood': Free Workers in Slave Anglo-America, 1675–1810," *Agricultural History* 71 (Spring 1997), 125–61.

10. These figures and the following analysis of wealth distribution among landed groups are based on SPSS databases derived from data from the population schedules of second, third, and fourth federal censuses, and from PGCTA, Real

In terms of total wealth (Table 2), even small yeomen appear modestly prosperous, despite major differences in wealth between landowning groups. Large and small planters together had one-third of total taxable wealth in 1800 and 45 percent by 1820, while large yeomen's share grew from a fifth to almost a third. The total wealth of small yeomen declined with their numbers, however, from almost 20 percent in 1800 to 13 percent in 1820. Their average wealth grew from just over \$800 in 1800 to just over \$1,000 in 1820, and remained just above the mean for all householders of \$709, \$1,010, and \$901 between 1800 and 1820. Indeed, small yeomen were generally better off than most householders. Landless taxables (household heads with no land but more than £40 in personal property) owned 13 percent of the wealth in 1800 and 9 percent by 1820, and on average each possessed less than half the property of the average small yeoman. There were also significant numbers of household heads with less than the £40, or \$106.80, minimum to qualify to pay tax: There were 782 in 1800 and 1,006 in 1820, rising from 45 to 56 percent of householders.<sup>11</sup>

Distributions of plate and "other" property tell the same story of inequality but some measure of well-being even among small yeomen. "Other" property included economically productive capital, cash, and

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Property, 1800, 1810, 1819, 1821 (1820 is missing, and I had to match those for the years immediately before and after); Personal Property, 1800, 1810, 1820. In most cases the assessors' total figures recorded at the end of tax schedules disagree with my own. I have relied on the figures in their schedules but relied on my own computer-generated figures for totals. Prince George's Levy Court assessed in Maryland pounds, shillings, and pence until 1813, although I have converted all figures into dollars (at the contemporary exchange rate of £1 for \$2.67) for easier reading and comparison. Because I originally analyzed wealth in pounds, shillings, and pence, however, some of the analytic categories I have previously used remain in this article. For further detail see Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 88–119, 220–50.

11. Kilty, *Laws of Maryland*, 1812, ch.141; Prince George's County Levy Court (hereafter PGCLC), Proceedings, Oct. 18, 1813, 476. As Bayly Marks says of St. Mary's County, assessors seem to have regarded anyone with less than \$40 of taxable items as a nontaxable, "Economics and Society in a Staple Plantation System," 218–19. For more on inequality and on the very poor, especially nontaxables, see Steven Sarson, "'Objects of Distress': Inequality and Poverty in Early Nineteenth-Century Prince George's County," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 96 (Summer 2001), 141–62.

**Table 1: Landowning groups as proportions of household heads, 1800, 1810, 1820**

<i>Landed group</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>No.</i> <i>1800</i>	<i>% of</i> <i>landowners</i>	<i>% of</i> <i>householders</i>	<i>No.</i> <i>1810</i>	<i>% of</i> <i>landowners</i>	<i>% of</i> <i>householders</i>	<i>No.</i> <i>1820</i>	<i>% of</i> <i>landowners</i>	<i>% of</i> <i>householders</i>
Large planters	2000+	15	2.9	0.9	17	3.2	1.0	12	2.6	0.7
Planters	800-1999	54	10.3	3.2	43	8.1	2.7	48	10.4	2.7
Large yeomen	280-799	123	23.5	7.2	147	27.7	9.1	141	30.5	7.9
Small yeomen	40-279	287	54.8	16.8	260	49.0	16.0	193	41.8	10.8
Smallholders	-40	45	8.6	2.6	64	12.1	4.0	68	14.7	3.8
Subtotal	—	524	100	30.6	531	100	32.8	462	100	25.7
Landless	0	406	—	23.7	429	—	26.5	327	—	18.2
Unpropertied	0	782	—	45.7	660	—	40.7	1006	—	56.0
Subtotal	—	1188	—	69.4	1089	—	67.2	1333	—	74.3
Total	—	1712	—	100	1620	—	100	1795	—	100

**Table 2: Distribution of total wealth among landowning groups (U.S. dollars)**

<i>Landed group</i>	1800			1810			1820		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>
Large planters	180,574.65	12,038.31	14.9	319,370.80	18,786.53	19.5	294,284.79	24,523.73	18.2
Planters	341,789.31	6329.42	28.2	394,066.47	9164.33	24.1	425,014.31	8854.46	26.3
Large yeomen	277,011.81	2252.14	22.8	485,771.17	3304.56	29.7	505,326.63	3583.88	31.3
Small yeomen	231,290.18	805.89	19.1	263,534.62	1013.60	16.1	209,914.90	1087.64	13.0
Small householders	26,882.11	597.39	2.2	40,556.53	633.71	2.5	45,492.90	669.01	2.8
Landless	155,407.74	382.77	12.8	133,543.10	311.28	8.2	136,566.00	417.63	8.5
Unpropertied		0	0	0.00	0.00	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,212,955.81</b>	<b>708.51</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,636,842.69</b>	<b>1010.40</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,616,599.53</b>	<b>900.61</b>	<b>100</b>

consumer goods, while plate comprised items of gold and silver. Large planters consistently owned eight times as much “other” property as small yeomen through the years, while large yeomen’s share of plate rose from under a fifth in 1800 to over a third in 1820. Small yeomen owned means approaching \$300, and their share rose at first from 10 percent in 1800 to 20 percent in 1810, but then fell to 6 percent by 1820. Even so, the countywide average plate-ownership of \$200 or less means small yeomen were wealthier than many.

Perhaps the most surprising area of yeoman property holding was slave ownership (Tables 3, 4). Majorities of 85 to 94 percent of large yeomen owned slaves between 1800 and 1820, as did significant majorities of small yeomen: almost three quarters in 1800 and two-thirds in 1810 and 1820. Small and large yeomen together held nearly half of all Prince George’s enslaved people from 1800 to 1820. Small yeomen held almost 1,500 slaves in 1800 and 892 by 1820, or 20 percent of taxable slaves falling to 13.5 percent. Large yeomen held a mean of 16 or 17 slaves each; and small yeomen consistently had seven apiece on average. Slaves comprised 37 to 38 percent of the taxable value of all yeoman property in 1800. The assessed value of land relative to other forms of property increased in 1801, so the nominal value of slave property declined relative to land and total wealth, but slaves still formed a quarter or more of yeomen’s total taxable wealth in 1810 and 1820.

The nonslaveholding yeoman, the supposedly archetypal southern farmer, in fact formed a small minority of the population of Prince George’s County. Counting small yeomen alone, they numbered 81 in 1800, falling to 65 by 1820: only 3 to 6 percent of householders. Including large yeomen, the nonslaveholding yeomanry still only numbered 88 in 1800, falling to 77 by 1820, or between 4 and 7 percent of householders. Many of these nonowners may have hired slaves, purchased slaves later on, or had the use of slaves belonging to others who lived with them but who were not heads of household. If so, almost all the yeomanry of Prince George’s County would have been implicated in enslavement. Slaveholding was even common among the nonlandowning majority. Twenty percent of nonlandowners held slaves in 1800, falling to 14 percent by 1820.

The picture of a property owning, slaveholding yeomanry thus far presented in aggregate and average statistics, however, gives a somewhat deceptive impression of small yeoman wealth, for analysis of individuals uncovers considerable variety in property ownership. It is already clear

**Table 3: Frequency of slaveholding among landowning groups (includes all slaves of all ages)**

<i>Landed group</i>	1800			1810			1820		
	<i>Total no.</i>	<i>No./% owners</i>	<i>No./% nonowners</i>	<i>Total no.</i>	<i>No./% owners</i>	<i>No./% nonowners</i>	<i>Total No.</i>	<i>No./% owners</i>	<i>No./% nonowners</i>
Large planters	15	14 / 93.3	1 / 6.7	17	17 / 100	0 / 0	12	12 / 100	0 / 0
Planters	54	52 / 96.3	2 / 3.7	43	38 / 88.4	5 / 11.6	48	44 / 91.7	4 / 8.3
Large yeomenry	123	116 / 94.3	7 / 5.7	147	125 / 85.0	22 / 15.0	141	130 / 92.2	11 / 7.8
Small yeomenry	287	206 / 71.8	81 / 28.2	260	173 / 66.5	87 / 33.5	193	128 / 66.3	65 / 33.7
Smallholders	45	25 / 55.6	20 / 44.4	64	31 / 48.4	33 / 51.6	68	35 / 51.5	33 / 48.5
Landless	1188	239 / 20.1	949 / 79.9	1089	205 / 18.8	884 / 81.2	1333	190 / 14.3	1143 / 85.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,712</b>	<b>652 / 38.1</b>	<b>1060 / 61.9</b>	<b>1620</b>	<b>589 / 36.4</b>	<b>1031 / 63.6</b>	<b>1,795</b>	<b>539 / 30.0</b>	<b>1256 / 70.0</b>

**Table 4: Distribution of slaves among landowning groups (includes all slaves of all ages)**

<i>Landed group</i>	<i>1800</i>		<i>1810</i>		<i>1820</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean all/owners %</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean all/owners %</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean all/owners %</i>
Large planters	886	59 / 63 11.5	814	48 / 48 12.0	911	76 / 76 13.8
Planters	2038	38 / 39 26.4	1401	33 / 37 20.7	1501	31 / 34 22.8
Large yeoman	1861	15 / 16 24.1	2119	14 / 17 31.3	2083	15 / 16 31.6
Small yeoman	1497	5 / 7 19.4	1204	5 / 7 17.8	892	5 / 7 13.5
Smallholders	124	3 / 5 1.6	169	3 / 6 2.5	143	2 / 4 2.2
Landless	1320	1 / 6 17.1	1054	1 / 5 15.6	1059	1 / 6 16.1
Total	7726	5 / 12 100	6761	4 / 12 100	6589	4 / 12 100

that large yeomen were generally better off than small yeomen, and that the former group was growing in size and prosperity while the latter was shrinking, though their share of wealth shrank roughly commensurately with their declining numbers. Even so, some small yeomen were quite well off, most did not prosper as the above wealth figures might suggest, and some struggled to retain and sometimes lost their land.

Among the small yeomanry was Richard Tasker Lowndes, who, in 1800, held almost \$4,000 in total assessed property, including 130 acres of land, a half-lot in the town of Bladensburg, and nine slaves. Lowndes was, in fact, a member of the county elite, a stalwart of the court system, and a close friend of the Calverts, Prince George's grandest family. Others expected to become wealthy through inheritance, including John R. Magruder, Jr., clerk of the Levy Court and owner of over \$1,400 in total taxable wealth, including 100 acres of land and 20 slaves. He stood to gain by inheritance from his father's 2,350 acres of land, 52 slaves, and total wealth of over \$7,000. Including Lowndes, six small yeomen owned over \$2,670 (£1,000) in taxable wealth. Including the younger Magruder, another 39 held more than \$1,335 (£500). Most of these people probably never dirtied their hands in Prince Georgian soil.<sup>12</sup>

Most small yeomen were much poorer than Lowndes and Magruder. Average taxable wealth among all free households in the county in 1800 was \$708.51: 158 out of 287 small yeomen, 55 percent, owned less than that. Average taxable wealth among small yeomen that year was \$805.89: 175 small yeomen, 61 percent, owned less than that. The median small yeoman (in terms of total wealth) was Paul Summers, who owned \$597.65 in total taxable wealth, including 100 acres of land and eight slaves. Fifty-one small yeomen owned less than \$267 (£100), including 11 with less than \$133.50 (£50) and five with less than \$66.75 (£25).

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12. For more on plate and other property, see Steven Sarson, "'One must differentiate oneself a little': Economy, Society and Refinement in Early National Prince George's County, Maryland," *Borderlines: Studies in American Culture* 5, (1998), 253-73. PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 21; Personal Property, 25. PGCLC, Proceedings, Apr. 7, 1795, 1; Prince George's County Judgements, Apr. Session, 1800, 467; Margaret Law Callcott, ed., *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert, 1795-1821* (Baltimore, 1991), 54, 93, 112, 119, 128, 130, 131, 141, 164, 168, 200, 345. PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 2, 3, 17, 42; Personal Property, 1800, 2, 3, 20, 43; PGCLC, Proceedings, Apr. 6, 1795, 1.

The poorest was a woman named Ann Adams, owner of 50 acres of land, worth \$46.16, and no other taxable property at all.<sup>13</sup>

Looking in detail at some typical small yeomen offers a closer insight on modest farmers' economic circumstances. George and Sarah Magruder, probably distant relatives of the Magruders mentioned above, headed an economically average small yeoman family (by 1800 their two children had formed families of their own), with less than the mean but close to the median wealth held by the group. In the late 1790s, they farmed 231 acres on part of a tract named Anchovy Hills with the help of four slaves. They also owned \$136.17 in "other" property and had total taxable wealth of \$595.25 (\$2.40 below the 1800 median).

The Federal Direct Tax of 1798 partly supports an impression of modest prosperity, but also suggests that the Magruders suffered some hardship. The 231 acres, worth \$462 according to the 1798 enumeration (which assessed land at rates much closer to market values), contained two framed dwelling houses, a meat house and a log lumber house (all of unspecified size), and a 28-by-22-foot tobacco house. (The federal tax schedules recorded tobacco houses on most small farms as well as plantations, indicating that few small proprietors exempted themselves from engagement in the market economy.) Yet it must have been hard for the Magruders to make a living, for their land was worth only 61 cents per acre (according to the county assessments), compared with the \$1.25 small-yeoman average and \$1.63 county average (Tables 7-10). Nor could the Magruders rest easy after a hard day in their low-yield fields. Federal assessors noted that the tobacco house was where "the old couple retire in bad weather[,] their dwelling house being neither wind tight nor water tight."<sup>14</sup>

Sleeping among tobacco leaves may or may not have damaged George Magruder's health, but exposure to wind and rain could have hastened his demise. He made a will on November 22, 1799, and died that winter;

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13. PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 18; Personal Property, 1800, 21; Real Property, 1800, 4. I refer here to a woman as a yeoman, and have assumed throughout that women heads of household can be counted as members of that class (and all other classes).

14. PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 6; Personal Property, 1800, 6; Maryland State Papers, Federal Direct Tax, 1798, Prince George's County (hereafter FDTPG), Prince Frederick and Washington Hundreds, Particular List of Lands, Lots, Buildings, and Wharves, 16.

the will was executed on February 18, 1800. George's personal estate totalled \$651.13 (probate officers recorded inventories at estimated auction values), again indicating modest wealth, especially bearing in mind ownership of "One Negro Man London," "One Negro Woman Saly," and "One Negro Boy Horatio," respectively worth \$150, \$100, and \$80. Most of the rest of the estate comprised \$120 in 17 swine, seven head of cattle, five sheep, three horses, and two beehives, plus agricultural produce valued at \$42.75, including "Spun Cotton and Cotton in Seed" and unspecified quantities of meat and corn. The tobacco crop had perhaps already been sold, assuming that the tobacco barn did not just double as a second home. Another \$38.75 comprised implements such as "Six Old Hoes," "2 pair Sheep Shears," a loom and accessories, a "Linen Wheel" and accessories, and numerous other bits and pieces. The remaining \$119.63 was in household items, the bulk of which comprised three beds, bedsteads, and accompanying furniture, worth \$50. Nearly all the rest was also basic functional household goods such as chairs, tables, crockery, cutlery, and other kitchenware (all wooden, earthen, or pewter), although there was plenty of it. The nearest the Magruders came to luxury commodity ownership, or even a degree of comfort, were their two desks (one of them "old"), worth \$7 and \$1, "1 old Looking Glass," worth 25 cents, and "Old Books," worth a dollar.<sup>15</sup>

Creditors sold \$448.35 of George's personal property at public auction to cover his debts shortly after his death, and subsequently Sarah sold small parcels of land to her daughter and son-in-law, Mary and Leonard Kidwell, although she held on to much of the Magruder inheritance and to her economic independence until she died in 1808 or early 1809. The assessments of 1809 recorded 128.25 acres of Anchovy Hills under the name of Isaac Smith, and two slaves and \$80.10 in "other" property in the name of "Sarah Magruders heirs." Her inventory contained \$407.29 in personal property, including five head of cattle, eight swine, and two horses, all worth \$94, corn worth \$15, and a "Small parcell of Tobacco," worth \$6. Her agricultural implements were worth \$17.25, and the rest of her nonhuman property consisted entirely of minor household items to the value of \$30.04, some of them clearly the

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15. Prince George's County Register of Wills (hereafter PGCRW), Wills, Feb. 18, 1800, T1, 450; Inventories [no date], 1800, ST3, 347. A fourth slave noted in the tax records and the will was, for some reason, not recorded in the inventory.

same articles she owned with her husband. What remained was “1 Negro Man named Lonnen to Serve 18 Months,” worth \$20, “1 Woman named Saba to Serve 7 Years,” \$50, and Roy Hanson, Naney, and Priscilla, respectively worth \$75, \$50, and \$50, all to be freed when they reached 31 years of age. In sum, then, the Magruders were small-scale landed farmers and slaveholders, market-oriented producers, although they perhaps grew much of their food, and modest consumers of basic household goods. They were better off than many county residents, therefore, and yet their land was poor quality, their house was unfit for habitation in bad weather, many of their possessions were old and broken, and debts forced Sarah Magruder to sell some property in order to hold on to the rest.<sup>16</sup>

In this last respect, the Magruders again were luckier than the many small yeomen who lost most or all of their land and other property. Of the 287 small yeomen of 1800, 166 were still Prince Georgian household heads in 1810 and 65 survived as such to 1820 (Tables 5 and 6). Of these survivors, 24 were upwardly mobile in the first decade and eight more in the second, at least some through inheritance. Twenty-nine, however, were downwardly mobile in the first decade and 12 in the second. Of the downwardly mobile, some 22 had lost all their land by

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16. The property remained in the name of “George Magruders heirs” through 1803, but in 1804 the assessments recorded Sarah Magruder as owner of 192.45 acres of Part of Anchovy Hills, worth £116.54 (and worth £210.50 from 1806), two slaves, worth £60, and £30 in “other” property. George Kidwell had taken possession of another 38.5 acres, worth £22.28 (and the property was thus reassessed at a quarter acre smaller than before). In 1808, the assessments show that Sarah Magruder’s share of the old farm fell to 128.25 acres and George Kidwell’s grew to 102 acres. PGCTA, Real Property, 1803, 8; 1804, 6; 1806, 6; 1808, 6; PGCRW, Inventories, Dec. 16, 1800, ST4, 59-61; PGCTA, Real Property, 1809, 6; Personal Property, 1809, 6; PGCRW, Inventories, Aug. 4, 1809, TT1, 351. T. Stephen Whitman found that manumission was rare but not unheard of in Prince George’s County, where bills of sale show that 2 percent of county slaves had term limits on their enslavement (compared with 20 percent in Baltimore City and County): *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington, KY, 1997), 115. The number of free African Americans in the county rose from 648 in 1800 to 824 and 1,096 in 1810 and 1820 (the census summary records 4,929 free black people in 1810, but that is an error caused by an enumerator counting the wrong box for several pages in the schedules).

**Table 5: Mobility among landowners and nonlandowners, 1800–1810**

<i>Land-owning group</i>	<i>No. in 1810</i>	<i>No. immobile</i>	<i>% immobile</i>	<i>No. upwardly</i>	<i>% upwardly</i>	<i>No. downwardly</i>	<i>% downwardly</i>
Large planters	7	6	85.7	—	—	1	14.3
Planters	30	18	60.0	5	16.7	7	23.3
Large yeomen	65	51	78.5	7	10.8	7	10.8
Small yeomen	166	113	68.7	24	14.5	29	17.5
Smallholders	23	14	60.7	7	30.4	2	8.7
Nonowners	396	322	81.3	74	18.7	—	—
Total	687	524	76.3	117	17.0	46	6.7

**Table 6: Mobility among landowners and nonlandowners, 1800-1820**

<i>Land-owning group</i>	<i>No. in 1810</i>	<i>immobile</i>		<i>upwardly</i>		<i>downwardly</i>	
		<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Large planters	4	3	75.0	—	—	1	25.0
Planters	9	5	55.6	1	11.1	3	33.3
Large yeomen	21	12	57.1	6	28.6	3	14.3
Small yeomen	65	27	41.5	17	26.2	21	32.3
Smallholders	11	7	63.6	3	27.3	1	9.1
Nonowners	158	112	81.3	46	29.1	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>61.9</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>10.8</b>

1810 and 10 more by 1820, most likely becoming tenants. In addition, three who had been upwardly mobile in the first decade, lost their land in the second, while one who fell into nonlandownership by 1810 returned to the small yeomanry by 1820. In total, then, at least 35 small yeomen of 1800, just over 12 percent of all the small yeomanry, fell into landlessness by 1820. This figure is a minimum, however, as it does not include those who might have been dispossessed after 1800 and left the county or died before 1810, or those who might have been dispossessed after 1810 and left or died before 1820.<sup>17</sup>

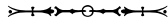
Of those small yeomen who were dispossessed and then left Prince George's, some might have become proprietors elsewhere, although this seems unlikely given that the socioeconomic conditions of Prince George's County were common across the tobacco-plantation South. In next-door St. Mary's County, for instance, landlessness extended to 65 percent of householders in 1800 and 75 percent in 1840. Even on the tobacco frontier, land was expensive and landlessness was extensive. As Fredrika Teute has shown, in Kentucky in 1792 the poorest land cost \$1 per acre, while prime, improved, riverbank plots cost \$60 an acre, and landlessness rates were as high as 65 percent of householders. Prices subsequently fell as speculators tried to encourage settlement, but even in 1802 landlessness still extended to 52 percent of free household heads.<sup>18</sup> Prince George's small yeomanry was partly but not fully replen-

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17. Mobility among landowners is derived from cross-referencing the wealth distribution databases for 1800, 1810, and 1820. Two databases on mobility, for 1800–1810 and 1800–1820, are also deposited at the Maryland State Archives, Annapolis. See also Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 129–30, 157–64; Sarson, "Landlessness and Tenancy."

18. Marks, "Economics and Society in a Staple Plantation System," 222–29. Marks shows that 72 percent of southern Maryland out-migrants went to Kentucky: "The Rage for Kentucky: Emigration from St. Mary's County, 1790–1810," *Geographical Perspectives on Maryland's Past*, University of Maryland Occasional Papers in Geography 4 (Apr. 1979), ed. Robert D. Mitchell and Edward K. Muller, 108–30. For western landlessness, see Teute, "Land, Liberty, and Labor in the Post-Revolutionary Era," 275–91; Soltow, "Land Inequality on the Frontier," 275–91; "Kentucky Wealth at the End of the Eighteenth Century," 617–33. Prince George's slightly declining but fairly stable population of 21,275 in 1800, 20,589 in 1810, and 20,216 in 1820 suggests that migration was having only a small effect on the county. The slave population dipped markedly in 1810 but then recovered, from 12,291 to 9,189 and 11,185. There is no evidence of systematic selling of slaves for western markets, but there were no doubt cases of

ished by new members rising from among the landless. Forty-five non-landowners of 1800 became small yeomen by 1810, some no doubt through inheritance. Yet the small yeomanry still declined in size from 287 in 1800 to 260 in 1810 and 193 in 1820. From forming 17 percent of householders in 1800, small yeomen comprised 11 percent of householders in 1820, which raises the question of why so many small yeomen were downwardly mobile and why the small yeomanry was shrinking.



The distribution of town lots and built improvements such as taxable barns and mills among different landed groups suggests less economic diversity among small yeomen than among others. Also, the relatively low and declining value of small yeomen's agricultural land, combined with an excess of slaves per acre of land for optimum tobacco production, raises the possibility of soil exhaustion.

Planters' share of the county's total taxable real estate, including town lots and built improvements, fell slightly from 57 percent in 1800 to 53 percent in 1820, while large yeomen's share grew from just under a quarter to almost a third and smallholders' stayed at a little under 3 percent. Yet small yeomen's share declined from 17 percent to 12 percent (Table 7). Planters held large proportions of Prince George's small towns, either as residences or as artisanal establishments that they rented out. Roughly half of the smallholders held approximately half of town real estate through the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Yet only a few large and small yeomen owned town lots, and those who did tended to be wealthy people like Richard Tasker Lowndes, while others were perhaps working small farmers who practiced supplemental artisanal occupations such as clothes making, blacksmithing, and milling (Table 8).<sup>19</sup>

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slaves sold away from families and communities as well as those who migrated with their masters. Unfortunately, it is impossible to account with any precision for rates of migration among different socioeconomic groups, for one can rarely tell which individuals moved west and which died. However, relative demographic continuity among propertied groups at least suggests disproportionate migration among poorer groups seeking opportunity (whether successful or not) further west. See also Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 120-66; Whitman, *The Price of Freedom*, 9-10.

19. For examples of town-lot renting, see George Calvert to Thomas Ewell, to William Grayson and others, to Thomas Ferrall, and to Levi Sheriff, Prince

Similarly, most planters owned taxable improvements, as did a growing number of smallholders, suggesting that rural as well as small-town artisanship was on the rise. Between a quarter and a half of large yeomen owned taxable improvements through the years (Table 9). The number of small yeomen who did so remained stable, although that means that the proportion of small yeomen owning taxable improvements rose from 12 to 17 percent. Small yeomen's improvements were worth considerably less, however, than those of wealthier agriculturalists, falling from 19 percent in 1800 to 12.5 percent in 1820. Even so, the stable and in some respects growing ownership of town lots and built improvements suggest that economic diversification allowed some small yeomen to survive and even prosper and that economic hardship was concentrated among those small yeomen who made their livings mainly or exclusively through farming.<sup>20</sup>

Subtracting the values and acreages of town lots and built improvements from total real estate figures reveals the net values of rural land each group held (Tables 10–12), and that small yeomen were yet again disadvantaged compared to others. Rural smallholders' land was worth an average \$4.32 per acre in 1800; by far the most valuable of all land-owning groups, indicating that many of those even without taxable built improvements made livings in artisanship or other nonagricultural or extra-agricultural pursuits. In the same year, large planters' land was worth an average \$1.65 per acre; other planters' \$2; large yeomen's \$1.47; and small yeomen's \$1.25. Small yeomen's land remained the least valuable through 1820. Also, small yeomen's average net values per acre declined slightly over time, while those of all other groups increased.

Given Edward Papenfuse's demolition of Lewis Cecil Gray's soil-exhaustion thesis for the tobacco South, the most likely explanation for

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George's County Land Records (hereafter PGCLR), Feb. 25, 1812, JRM, 15, 575–77; June 7, 1813, JRM, 15, 579–81; July 18, 1820, AB1, 383–87; Apr. 1, 1826, AB 2, 285–87.

20. For the growth of rural artisanship from the colonial and into the early national era in the Chesapeake see Jean B. Russo, "Free Workers in a Plantation Economy: Talbot County, Maryland, 1690–1759" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1983); Russo, "Self-Sufficiency and Local Exchange," 389–432; Christine Daniels, "Alternative Workers in a Slave Economy: Kent County, Maryland, 1675–1810" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1990); and Daniels, "Getting his [or her] Livelyhood," 125–61.

**Table 7: Total real estate values among landowning groups (rural and town land, plus built improvements)**

<i>Landed group</i>	1800		1810		1820	
	<i>Value</i>	%	<i>Value</i>	%	<i>Value</i>	%
Large planters	94,949.55	22.8	232,633.78	24.7	202,028.79	22.8
Planters	144,208.87	34.6	261,021.44	27.8	270,766.31	30.6
Large yeomen	96,580.07	23.2	292,978.89	31.2	286,414.63	32.3
Small yeomen	69,298.14	16.7	131,947.34	14.0	103,639.40	11.7
Smallholders	11,185.11	2.7	21,353.74	2.3	23,364.40	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>416,221.73</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>939,935.19</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>886,213.53</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 8: Town lots among landowning groups**

<i>Landed group</i>	1800			1810			1820		
	<i>No. with town lots</i>	<i>No. of lots</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>No. with town lots</i>	<i>No. of lots</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>No. with town lots</i>	<i>No. of lots</i>	<i>Value</i>
Large planters	1/15	1	40.05	3/17	4.25	3631.20	2/12	3	548.89
Planters	8/54	10.75	5327.99	4/43	19	3054.16	2/48	10	4533.34
Large yeomen	5/123	7	4900.12	10/147	20.25	7849.80	7/141	14	5532.79
Small yeomen	14/287	16.75	8330.27	12/260	18.5	3893.87	7/193	12	6686.03
Smallholders	22/45	27.5	9157.43	27/64	41.25	16,929.27	36/68	56	18,633.08
Total	50/524	63	27,755.86	56/531	93.25	35,358.30	54/462	95	35,934.13

**Table 9: Built improvements among landowning groups**

<i>Landed group</i>	<i>1800</i>		<i>1810</i>		<i>1820</i>	
	<i>No. with improvements</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>No. with improvements</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>No. with improvements</i>	<i>Value</i>
Large planters	10/15	4701.87	8/17	7769.80	10/12	13,560.36
Planters	30/54	11,662.56	17/43	5765.87	23/48	9005.34
Large yeomen	33/123	8270.33	47/147	12,213.92	43/141	12,608.32
Small yeomen	34/287	5887.35	33/260	6116.97	32/193	5324.14
Smallholders	4/45	534.00	8/64	1053.32	14/68	2186.65
Total	121/524	31,056.11	113/531	32,919.88	122/462	42,684.81

**Table 10: Net rural acres, values, and labor-land ratios among landowners, 1800 (counting full hands or equivalents only)**

<i>Landed group</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Labor hands</i>	<i>Labor-land ratio</i>	<i>Value per acre</i>
Large planters	54,922.39	3661.49	25.1	90,207.63	6,013.85	25.3	487.5	1 : 112.66	1.65
Planters	62,855.17	1163.99	28.7	126,218.32	2337.39	35.4	1144	1 : 54.94	2.00
Large yeomen	56,684.40	460.85	25.9	83,409.52	678.13	23.4	1006	1 : 56.35	1.47
Small yeomen	43,918.07	153.03	20.1	55,080.52	191.92	15.5	1381.5	1 : 31.79	1.25
Smallholders	345.50	7.68	0.2	1493.68	34.53	0.4	78	1 : 4.43	4.32
Total	218,725.53	417.42	100	356,409.67	680.16	100	4,097	1 : 53.39	1.63

The small yeomen labor-land figures include the assumed two free family members per household

**Table 11: Net rural acres, values, and labor-land ratios among landowners, 1810 (counting full hands or equivalents only)**

<i>Landed group</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Labor hands</i>	<i>Labor-land ratio</i>	<i>Value per acre</i>
Large planters	53,478.01	3145.77	24.9	221,232.78	13,013.70	25.4	468	1 : 114.27	4.13
Planters	52,236.52	1214.80	24.4	252,201.41	5865.15	28.9	801	1 : 65.21	4.83
Large yeomen	70,622.00	480.42	32.9	272,915.17	1856.56	31.3	1160	1 : 60.88	3.87
Small yeomen	37,522.80	144.32	17.5	121,936.50	468.99	14.0	1185.5	1 : 31.65	3.25
Smallholders	618.58	9.67	0.3	3371.15	52.67	0.4	94	1 : 6.58	5.44
Total	214,477.91	403.91	100	871,657.01	1641.55	100	3708 <sup>1/2</sup>	1 : 57.83	4.05

**Table 12: Net rural acres, values, and labor-land ratios among landowners, 1820 (counting full hands or equivalents only)**

<i>Landed group</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Labor Hands</i>	<i>Labor-land ratio</i>	<i>Value per acre</i>
Large planters	44,762.38	3730.20	22.8	187,919.54	15,659.96	23.3	518	1 : 86.41	4.20
Planters	56,774.77	1182.81	28.9	257,227.63	5358.91	31.9	889	1 : 63.86	4.53
Large yeomen	66,008.45	468.15	33.6	268,273.52	1902.65	33.2	1213.5	1 : 54.40	4.06
Small yeomen	28,498.43	147.66	14.5	91,629.23	474.76	11.4	871.5	1 : 32.70	3.22
Smallholders	439.21	6.46	0.2	2544.65	37.42	0.3	78.5	1 : 5.60	5.79
Total	196,483.24	425.29	100	807,594.57	1748.04	100	3578.5	1 : 54.91	4.11

small yeomen's low land values was that poorer people could not afford to buy high-quality soil and riverbank land in the first place, and that this legacy passed through the generations by inheritance. There is evidence, however, that soil exhaustion was a contributing factor to some small yeomen's hardship, since tax assessments indicate that small yeomen held more slaves than was good for the amount of land they owned. The following analysis of labor-land ratios has discounted slaves under the age of 8 years, counted men aged 14 to 45 and women aged 14 to 36 as full hands, slaves aged 8 to 14 and men over 45 and women over 36 as half-hands, in accord with values given in the county assessments.<sup>21</sup>

By these measures, planters held labor-land ratios short of the optimum of between 1 laborer per 40 acres and 1 laborer per 50 acres. Also, a high proportion of planters' slaves probably worked as artisans, drivers, and domestic servants, so that their labor-land ratio was probably even further from the optimum than these figures in Tables 10-12 suggest. Given that planters could invest in more slaves if they wanted to, they clearly exercised choices about how to exploit their land, including maintaining valuable tracts of forest. Owning larger numbers of families also meant potential growth of planters' labor pools. Indeed, by 1820 large planters had comparatively less land and more labor, apparently opting for more intensive cultivation. Labor-land ratios among large yeomen were 1 : 54 to 1 : 61, closer to the optimal, especially as more of their slaves would probably have been employed in field labor. As large yeomen's labor-land ratios did not suggest soil exhaustion and indeed were closest to the ideal for maximum tobacco production, their land was less valuable than that of planters because planters or their ancestors purchased better quality soil or more riverbank land. Small yeomen's labor-land ratios, on the other hand, at least suggest a problem with soil exhaustion. Small yeomen possessed the equivalent of 807 enslaved full hands in 1800, 666 in 1810, and 486 in 1820, relatively few of whom would have been employed outside of agricultural work, judging by the comparative lack of town lots and taxable improvements. Furthermore, the classification of small yeomen as a landowning group assumes the

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21. Papenfuse, "Planter Behavior and Economic Opportunity"; Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (1932; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Gloucester, MA, 1958). See also Lorena Walsh, "Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder" and Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 88-109, 220-50, for evidence of overuse of soil by tenants.

equivalent of two free members of each household also laboring in the fields. If that is correct, then small yeomen employed 1,381, 1,186, and 872 full hands in each of the years considered, meaning labor–land ratios of 1 : 32 and 1 : 33. These figures, combined with declining rural land values, suggest that small yeomen overworked their land.

Soil exhaustion, however, may not explain why small yeomen generally had relatively low-quality land. If, for example, only slaves count as working hands, then small yeomen’s labor–land ratios would range between 1 : 54 and 1 : 59. Alternatively, many small yeomen may have leased surplus slaves to others with surplus land. Furthermore, as Lorena Walsh has said, productivity was sometimes lower than some historians have estimated, requiring fewer acres per laborer. It is also possible that small yeomen rented extra acres from larger landowners. County land records do not indicate that these arrangements occurred on the scale required to balance labor–land ratios throughout the landowning classes, although such arrangements may have been made privately or orally.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, whatever the reason, small yeomen’s rural land was worth 15 to 40 percent less per acre than that of large yeomen and planters in the early nineteenth century, and was perhaps, therefore, that much less productive, which certainly helps explain many small yeomen’s relative economic weakness and apparent vulnerability to dispossession. Furthermore, small yeomen’s problems were compounded by the acquisitiveness of their planter neighbors. The Calverts of Riversdale, for example, made a policy of buying up small yeomen’s and others’ crops and lands. Rosalie Calvert wrote her Belgian father, Henri Jean Stier, in 1805, of planters making “a safe and extremely profitable speculation by buying” tobacco “from small farmers in the country.” Such speculation was indeed profitable, with net gains of over 400 percent. Writing about the last crop exported before President Jefferson’s embargo took effect, Mrs. Calvert noted that

At present the way to make a huge fortune, easily and without risk, is through buying tobacco. It can be bought for \$4 and \$3—even for \$2.50 a hundred for ready cash. Our last, which we sent to Murdoch [the Calverts’ European agent], brought an average of \$12 a hundred net, after all expenses, etc. were paid. There

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22. Walsh, “Slave Life, Slave Society, and Tobacco Production,” 175.

hasn't been a year [recently] when you could fail to make a good speculation by buying tobacco from the small farmers at the beginning of the season.<sup>23</sup>

Rosalie Calvert made these comments during relatively prosperous times, suggesting that large planters' superior access to international markets and small yeomen's need for ready cash was endemic. The disruption of trade through embargoes, nonintercourse, and war between 1807 and 1815, however, seems to have further compounded some small yeomen's problems. Although Calvert frequently expressed irritation at trade disruption, she and her husband anticipated huge rewards when commerce resumed. During these years the Calverts and other large planters purchased tobacco from farmers who did not have the means to stockpile crops and await resumption of trade, either because they had insufficient storage space or because they needed cash to survive. As Rosalie wrote in 1809, "[e]veryone was waiting for another change [in tobacco prices], so I was only able to buy 100 hogsheads at \$5 and \$3—and this sometimes one or two [hogsheads] at a time from people who had the sheriff at their heels."<sup>24</sup>

The Calverts continued growing their own and purchasing others' tobacco up to the Treaty of Ghent of 1816, at which point they made a gross profit of around \$85,000 from 410 hogsheads exported to nicotine-craving Europeans. Even so, Rosalie was furious because "if

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23. Rosalie Eugenia Calvert [REC] to Henri Jean Stier [HJS], May 19, 1805, Callcott, *Mistress of Riversdale*, 117; REC to HJS, Sept. 10, 1808, *ibid.*, 191–92. The Stiers arrived in Philadelphia in 1794, when Rosalie was 16, as aristocratic refugees from Napoleon's invasion of Belgium. They moved to Maryland the following year and in 1799 Rosalie married George Calvert, a descendant of the Lords Baltimore and eventually Prince George's wealthiest resident. After the Stiers returned to Belgium in 1803, leaving George and Rosalie as proprietors of Riversdale, the mansion built by Henri Jean Stier, Rosalie wrote them over 300 letters, most of them published in Callcott's *Mistress of Riversdale*. In many ways, Mrs. Calvert was atypical, although she was fairly well assimilated to southern Maryland life and offers many interesting insights. For a discussion of problems and benefits of reading Rosalie's letters, see Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 255–57. My thanks to Robert J. Brugger of Johns Hopkins University Press for permission to use the letters, Ann Wass of Riversdale Historical Society for copies of the originals, and Nathalie Morello of Swansea University for reading for me some of the (excellent) translations from the original French.

24. REC to HJS, Apr. 1, 1809, *ibid.*, 201.

Murdoch had followed our instructions” to wait for a better price because supply would nowhere near meet demand, “we would have had \$20,000 more.” The Calverts also “sold 39 hogsheads here,” in Maryland in March 1816, “at \$13 and \$15 [a hundredweight], including five of yours which were stored in the warehouse; the sixth is still here and will be sold with the rest of ours if we can get \$20 for it before May. If not, we will ship it all to Amsterdam.” There is no record that they sold the remainder at such a good price, although Mrs. Calvert was confident about being able to do so. As she told her brother, Charles Jean Stier, in April, “[w]e just turned down \$16 [a hundredweight] for our last year’s crop (which is not even completely packed), and I am sure we will easily obtain \$20.” Henri Stier did well too, for in addition to the above, Rosalie shipped 174 hogsheads to Amsterdam for him in the winter of 1815. Certainly, the Calverts and Stiers did better out of their speculations than those who were so much in need during the years of privation that they had to sell to planters at knockdown prices.<sup>25</sup>

Planters coveted smaller farmers’ land as well as their crops. George Calvert’s landholdings increased from 2,000 acres in 1788, when he took control of Mount Albion plantation at the death of his father, to almost 14,000 acres in 1835, the year before he began redistributing property amongst his children. The most dramatic leaps in large planters’ landholdings came from inheritances, dowries, and purchases from other planters who had either encountered financial difficulties or who liquidated some or all their assets for easy distribution among heirs. But smaller increments to landholdings were more frequent and, cumulatively, highly significant.<sup>26</sup>

Small farmers fought hard to retain their property, but the persistence of the rich often paid off. The Calverts had short-term difficulties but long-term success, for example, in acquiring the land of a widow named Margaret Adams. According to the 1800 assessments, “Peggy” Adams owned 102 acres, called Copenhagen, 20 slaves, and near \$2,000 in total

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25. This is Margaret Law Callcott’s calculation, *ibid.*, 293, n1.REC to Charles Jean Stier [CJS], Apr. 8, 1816, *ibid.*, 295–96. See also REC to HJS, Mar. 20, 1816, *ibid.*, 291–92; REC to HJS, Mar. 20, 1816, *ibid.*, 292; REC to CJS, Apr. 8, 1816, *ibid.*, 296; REC to HJS, Nov. 11, 1815, *ibid.*, 285.

26. *ibid.*, 20, 384–86, 393; PGCTA, Real Property, 1835, 9, 17; PGCRW, Wills, June 8, 1835, executed Feb. 3, 1838, PC1, 89–90; Inventories, Apr. 3, 1838, PC3, 410–17.

wealth. By 1804, however, she either had debt problems or else wished to settle her affairs before she died. On November 9 that year, she sold her land in Prince George's County and a lot in Washington, DC, to Benjamin Armitage of New York city for a dollar, leasing it all back from him "for her natural life" for "the yearly rent . . . of One Cent Current Money." A month later she deeded her now 21 slaves to Benjamin Lowndes also for \$1 and similarly retained lifelong use of them and even the right to sell and manumit them, provided she reimbursed him. She later sold a slave named Peale to Leonard M. Deakins for \$300, and another named Stanley to Thomas Claxton of Washington for \$450, and manumitted a woman named Caroline and her two children in May 1807, indicating that her immediate debt problems were solved or that she had settled her affairs to her own satisfaction.<sup>27</sup>

Peggy Adams thus lost full ownership of almost all her property, and her children, if she had any, would not have benefited from any inheritance, but she retained a good deal of economic freedom for herself even in circumstances not of her own choosing. Though her deed to Benjamin Armitage did not say so, she must have retained the right to sell her leasehold (provided she reimbursed him, presumably), because the Calverts tried to buy her out. They particularly wanted her land because it was situated between their own Riversdale and Buck Lodge plantations. Rosalie expressed the hope of obtaining it as early as 1806. "Peggy Adams' small plantation," she wrote her father,

which you recall is in the middle of ours, is going to be sold shortly. If it goes at a reasonable price, we ought to buy it because it is completely surrounded by our land. Besides, it is a continual source of problems from the cattle and negroes of its tenants, which frequently cause us a great deal of damage. . . .<sup>28</sup>

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27. PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 30; Personal Property, 1800, 33; PGCLR, Margaret Adams to Benjamin Lowndes, Deed, Dec. 8, 1804, JRM, 10, 438-39; to Benjamin Armitage, Deed, Nov. 9, 1804, JRM, 10, 449-50; from Benjamin Armitage, Lease, Nov. 9, 1804, 451-53; to Leonard M. Deakins, Deed, Apr. 30, 1805, JRM, 10, 490-92; to Thomas Claxton, Deed, July 20, 1808, JRM, 12, 645-46; to Caroline and others, Manumission, May 5, 1807, JRM, 12, 242-43. In the Land Records her property is referred to as Attention of the Faithful Steward, rather than Copenhagen.

28. REC to HJS, Sept. 26, 1806, Callcott, ed., *Mistress of Riversdale*, 149, 65.

Peggy Adams, however, refused to budge despite considerable pressure. “You ask whether we have bought the land,” Rosalie Calvert wrote her father the following year,

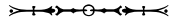
of Peggy [Adams] and the late Mr. Cramphin. We have not yet made these acquisitions. Of course, we ought to have Peggy Adams’ [land] some day, but there is no dealing with that ill-natured shrew. I had a four-page letter from her the other day complaining to me that Mr. Calvert had offered her too low a price, and would you believe that he offered her \$16 *cash* an acre—which is much more than any other land in the neighborhood.<sup>29</sup>

It is a pity that Peggy Adams’s letter is lost, as its contents would have provided insights on how a poor farmer, once a small yeoman and then a freeholding tenant, related to an imperious planter family who felt they “ought” to have her land. Did Mrs. Adams assert a kind of republican equality despite her social and economic circumstances and despite the pretensions of Rosalie Calvert? Mrs. Calvert’s offended reaction to her letter suggests that she did. What is certain is that Peggy Adams felt her land was worth more than \$16 an acre and she was not willing to settle for such a low offer, even from people with the clout of the Calverts. In other words, she had a sense of her economic rights, and she stood her ground.

Nevertheless, the Calverts eventually gained possession of Copenhagen. “This year,” Rosalie wrote her father in 1811, “my husband bought the best part of Thomas Dick’s plantation which adjoins ours. Peggy Adams’ little farm is going to be sold; if it is cheap enough that we could make some interest, we will buy it and cover it with fruit trees.” Rosalie Calvert proposed planting an orchard because “the soil is too worn out and poor to continue cultivating it,” further indicating a problem of soil exhaustion in the small yeomanry. The Calverts bought the 100 acres from Benjamin Armitage on April 2, 1814, for \$1,000, presumably after Peggy Adams died. “We have bought a piece of Cramphin’s land which lay between us and the road going to Baltimore,” Rosalie told her father four years later, “and also the small plantation of Peggy Adams which our property surrounded.”<sup>30</sup>

29. REC to HJS, Dec. 7, 1807, *ibid.*, 175.

30. REC to HJS, June 1, 1811, *ibid.*, 237; REC to HJS, June 5, 1820, *ibid.*, 360, 361, *nI*. Benjamin Armitage to George Calvert, Deed, Apr. 2, 1814, PGCLR, JRM, 16, 126–27. There was no inventory for Peggy Adams, presumably



The traditional yeoman republic paradigm does not work in Prince George's County, neighboring counties, or in the western tobacco-slave-plantation regions of Kentucky and Tennessee. Landlessness was extensive in all these places, and few nonlandowners could expect to become landowners. In Prince George's County, yeomen fell from 24 percent of free householders to less than 18 percent between 1800 and 1820. Furthermore, there seem to have been two distinct classes of yeomen. Large yeomen with over 280 and up to 800 acres were wealthy farmers whose numbers and fortunes grew over time. By contrast, the numbers and fortunes of small yeomen with 40 to 280 acres declined between 1800 and 1820, or in fact continued to decline as they had since the 1660s.

Yeomen also failed to fit the property-holding profile historians commonly associate with them. First, in contrast the image of yeomen as nonslaveholders, large majorities of them held slaves. Contemporaries and historians alike have also portrayed yeomen as independent from markets and from the will of others. In fact, they grew tobacco commercially and were involved in complex interdependencies with others. Indeed, small yeomen seem to have been more dependent on the tobacco cash crop than others, judging by the relative absence of town lots and built improvements among their taxable assets. Furthermore, large planters had better access to international markets and bought tobacco from small farmers who needed ready cash to sell on at huge mark-ups, sometimes four times the price. This problem hurt small yeomen particularly badly during the times of embargo, nonintercourse, and war when they sold crops for lower prices than they would otherwise have received because they had less room to store them and perhaps even greater need of ready cash. Economic survival was therefore a struggle for many small yeomen, and many lost some or all their land. It was a common story: When the Calverts bought Peggy Adams's property in 1814, another large planter got a little richer, and another small farm disappeared.

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because her property had already been ceded to Benjamin Lowndes and Benjamin Armitage. The Attention of the Faithful Steward appeared in George Calvert's possession in local assessments from 1815, renamed Copenhagen from 1818; PGCTA, Real Property, 1815, 29; 1818, 29.