

The Finishing of Annapolis

The great houses ... came, then, to be set apart as monuments of a precious continuity of generations to that few of the neighboring small plantations, and perhaps none of the slave quarters, could aspire.

RHYS ISAAC (1982, 118)

The era in Annapolis from 1700 and 1780 is often seen as the height of its historical development. The city grew in population, petty industries were established, and the social life of the city became worthy of commentary throughout the American colonies, but what it took to achieve all of this cost the city its future. This is why this first chapter on the city itself is the story of its finishing. As will be made clear in the rest of this book, the city did not disappear, however, what the city became after 1780 is not representative of the established social and political center it was before. This chapter is a critical study of the social and landscape formations built in Annapolis during this first period that produced what has become its greatest legacy and the primary source of the histories that have been written about it.

The architectural and archaeological remnants of colonial Annapolis reflect attempts by a dominant patriarchal order to create a landscape of absolute power based in absolute truth. Landscape supported the contention that the leading voices in society should be there because of their enlightenment and knowledge of natural beauty, law, and order. In this chapter I show that the basis for this ideology was intimately related to social organization the colonial Chesapeake region. In particular, through the combination of inheritance and slavery, a native-born regional elite class formed for the first time. Gaining rule required that this class sever itself from the customs of the 17th-century Chesapeake's "traditional" society by valuing individual over community interests. Drawing on the exclusionary rhetoric of liberal philosophies (Mehta 1997), colonial elites established the legitimacy of individual sovereignty for those capable. Identifying white property-owning men as the franchise, the structures of power appeared to minimize class difference by promoting instead the necessity for those in authority to guide and control those debilitated by their gender and race. A variety of means to draw threads of similarity among white men were employed including religion, property, race, gender, and exchange. Landscape formations built in the first part of the 18th century mediated these efforts as they materialized a dissolution of cross-class ties in the adoption of new forms of architecture.

Neighborhood landscapes marked the authority of the leading families through the nodes and positions of power they established. The architecture of

this landscape consisted of parish churches, county court houses, cross-road taverns and ordinaries, and the houses of freemen and their servants and slaves. Yet, as the patriarchal class formed, the Chesapeake gentry built new structures that broke the relative fluidity of the 17th-century landscape into distinct plantations emphasizing both the site of property and the seat of power. Power in the commodity-producing Chesapeake arose from the control of labor, and the greatest material expression of this control was found in the manor houses that sat at the heart of structural complexes organized to demonstrate the centrality of the owner in plantation production and the lives of those attached to the plantation.

During this period urban growth was stunted. The economic need for central-place towns was minimized as most wealthy planters could transfer tobacco to ocean-going vessels at their own wharves. This situation allowed the landed gentry to control common exchange by establishing themselves as local merchants. They purchased their poorer neighbor's tobacco in exchange for the credit used for trade goods being brought from Europe on the ships docking at their wharves. The gentry thus made debtors of their neighbors and used the authority this supported to establish themselves at the head of neighborhood patriarchies. The towns that were built typically served social rather than economic purposes. Annapolis and Williamsburg, the two colonial Chesapeake capitals, were among only four towns of greater than five hundred people in the region in 1775 (Papenfuse 1975, 14; Earle and Hoffman 1977; Kulikoff 1986, 126–27). These towns served the interests of the rural elite and actually took on the characteristics of the rural patriarchy. Wealthy townsmen purchased plantations to supplement their incomes as lawyers and bureaucrats and established themselves as leaders in their own neighborhoods by building manorial seats in which to live, debt-relations through which to dominate, and patriarchies over which to rule. In the following I employ archaeological data from the Bordley-Randall site in Annapolis to show how this first urban landscape of the plantation patriarchy was formed.

With patriarchy established, the effort of the mid-18th-century gentry moved towards maintenance and expansion. This was especially the case as two threats to their authority arose in the 1740s. Independent factors financed by large Scottish merchant houses undermined the exclusive economic authority of wealthy planters in the countryside by competing for poorer planters' tobacco. The Great Awakening, an evangelical revolt in the Chesapeake back-country, threatened the authority of the Church of England, a key pillar of the rural patriarchy. Evangelicals in particular charged that elite influence had tainted religious experience. These threats to their dominance led the gentry to reassert their authority in the local scene. One way they did so was to grant more power to lesser planters through legislation and patronage affirming the allegiance of their fellow freemen in the continuing struggle with the colonial authorities. They also relied again on their power as the educated minority in society to assert their role as social leaders. In newspapers they outlined their arguments, in court houses they demonstrated their articulate nature, and on the landscape they established a lineal connection with the orders of the

universe that they argued guided nature and natural law. These rules of harmony and proportion in particular were widely believed to represent cosmic truths and be related to the manner that people should conduct their lives. The cosmos was to be known through balanced and harmonic proportions that were found, for example, in bodily humours and the abstractions of geometry and music. As they could be traced to the origins of history, meaning the classical roots of Western civilization, and beyond into the essence of nature, they were presented as absolute truths that guided law, society, and politics.

Returning to the Bordley-Randall site I present evidence of the way in which this sort of landscape was created. I also show that this property was one among many that were built or altered in the third-quarter of the 18th century in Annapolis that articulated on the landscape the universal ideals of the cosmos. In fact, moving from the 1750s alterations at the Bordley-Randall site to later landscape incarnations built in the 1760s and 1770s, I show how refinements and improvements were made to enforce even more clearly the alignment of the architecture with the absolute truths that guided the universe.

To conclude this chapter I show that these landscape features and their correlates helped to affirm the appropriateness of the Revolutionary activities of the Chesapeake gentry in the 1770s. This appeal to absolutes and universals seemed to reach beyond the political machinations of the British monarchy and their loyalist supporters. The rights of men, so it was argued, were to be determined by the truths of nature not by any arbitrary political order. When the gentry appealed to lesser freemen to support the Revolution as voters, activists, and soldiers, they based their arguments on the validity of these truths. That they had already expressed them on the landscape only made it seem even more evident that the gentry were knowledgeable and in the right to protect these virtues through revolt. However, the cost of these machinations removed from Annapolis a labor base that would allow the city to keep pace with later progress. Instead, the city was left to languish as a small and increasing local town while the rest of the world moved towards a global modernity.

PLANTATION CULTURE AND CLASS FORMATION IN THE CHESAPEAKE

To understand the origins of the Chesapeake patriarchy I wish to begin by defining the social order they climbed to the top of during the last years of the 17th century. Though the Chesapeake colonies were home to commodity-producing plantations from very early in their existence, the development of the patriarchal rule that came to typify such plantation economies only slowly emerged. The reasons for this slow maturation are found in the nature of production and the struggles of social reproduction on plantations.

The primary focus of the early settlers' interests was tobacco, a commodity that promised riches and led many people to plant it to the exclusion of other activities. Tobacco cultivation, however, was harsh labor requiring the attention

of as many hands as could be had. At first, the majority of planters used indentured servants from Europe as opposed to African slaves to work with them in the fields. The influx of new people allowed tobacco cultivation to take hold, but the limited ability of these people to survive and plants to endure stunted the growth of the Chesapeake colonies and occasionally threatened their very viability (Middleton 1953; Tate and Ammerman 1979; Main 1982; Morgan 1975; Kulikoff 1986). Seventeenth-century Chesapeake society thus adopted traditions and social customs that limited class formation in favor of community development. This is not to overlook the fact that some were consumed by the accumulation of wealth; no one would have remained in the region had not some succeeded at planting. Rather, this is to say that the wealthy remained bound through customary social relations to the rest of society as they served on councils, oversaw the distribution of estates, and maintained relations of production with skilled laborers.

The effect of high mortality was most pronounced on the formation of families and on the ability of the immigrant population to reproduce itself. Gloria Main (1982, 13–14) describes these social problems:

a young man of twenty-one who survived the rigors of 'the seasoning' in early Maryland could expect to live another twenty or twenty-five years—no more. The average age of death among white adults ... was close to forty for immigrants, significantly less than fifty for the native born. ... If a man had to serve four years as a servant and then delay marriage for four or five more years while saving his wages, any children he might eventually sire would be orphaned before the eldest could reach maturity. This assumes that a man succeeded in finding a wife when he sought one, and that she was young enough, and healthy enough, to give him children in the first place.

Unlike in the New England colonies where leading families were entering their second and third native generations at the end of the 17th century, the Chesapeake social structure remained majority immigrant. It was only after 1700 that the populations of Virginia and Maryland consisted of a native-born majority (Jordan 1979).

The slow formation of families limited the accumulation of family wealth. With parents dying young, native-born children failed to inherit the capital needed to advance beyond the baseline economic status of immigrants. Having little in the way of an established local social structure, immigrants found they stood on the same political ground as the native born (Jordan 1979). It was the rare exception when a family survived with both parents living long enough and being productive enough that they had something of value to pass along as inheritance. Inheritance, nevertheless, proved to be the key to social advancement and the creation of structured authority. Probate records show that in six Maryland counties at the end of the 17th century, the average wealth of the decedent correlated directly with the status of their family so that those men who were married with adult children held more than seven times the wealth of single men at death (Main 1982, 268).

The beneficiaries of this wealth were distinct in three ways. First, as natives they could claim a deeper connection to the Chesapeake than immigrants. Second, because they had inherited wealth, they began adult life

with the capital equal to most established planters in the region. This position was markedly different from not only immigrants but also their parents who turned meager beginnings into fortunes. And, thirdly, while their parents had labored in the fields alongside servants and slaves, in many cases, the native sons of inherited wealth knew little of the toil of tobacco cultivation. The most prosperous among them, freed from the worries of everyday survival, were educated as children and focused their attention on law, politics, commerce, and establishing in the Chesapeake what they believed was an adequate representation of English gentry culture.

The elaboration of the advantages of inheritance allowed the new gentry to establish their power in many arenas. Marriages that followed class lines created alliances among wealthy families and formed localized cadres of authority that turned formerly more fluid social orders into webbed familial relations of siblings, cousins, and in-laws (Jordan 1979, 267–70; Kulikoff 1986, 240–59). These alliances supported the persistence of elite men in local assemblies, a continuity that made their way of legislating standard and their re-election secure (Jordan 1979, 253–63).

The Chesapeake gentry also used inherited wealth to purchase enslaved labor. One estimate shows slaves, as the percentage of tithables in independent households, more than doubled from 1674 to 1700 (Morgan 1975, 326). Slavery was socially important because the cost of slaves was higher than all but the very wealthy could afford. This advantage was seized by the native elite who found the extra cost of a slave more than compensated in the lifetime of labor compared to the typical four-year commitment of indentured servants. This allowed the wealthy to purchase more slaves adding to their capacity to outperform their neighbors. This pattern is illustrated in the fact that estates with ten or more slaves steadily rose to claim two-thirds of all slaves in the one Maryland study by 1719. The same study also found that even though the number of slaves grew, the percentage of households without servants at all rose through time (Main 1982, 260). The privileges of slaveowning not only advanced the wealthy but indirectly affected the ability of others to afford servant labor and, thus, compete at all.

In addition to slaveowning and political authority, the new native elite also used their resources to consolidate power by creating debt relations with their neighbors. Having superior resources in the Chesapeake largely meant having farther-reaching credit in England. With credit acting as currency, planters obtained the goods they desired to make the colony seem more like the homeland. Because this was a common desire among settlers, wealthy planters were able to become local merchants brokering their poorer neighbors' tobacco in exchange for marked-up material goods (Morgan 1975, 366).

Through marriage, political authority, slaveholding, and exchange, the Chesapeake's new native elite consolidated and expanded their wealth and privilege. These processes, however, worked at multiple levels within the social discourse that need to be better understood to fully appreciate how the rising class established its authority and legitimacy. In particular, the shift to slavery by wealthy planters effected a change in the order of things through the dual

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