Hallowed Ground, Sacred Place:
The Slave Cemetery At George Washington's Mount Vernon
And the Cultural Landscapes of the Enslaved

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Dedication

To my family, and to those unknown who are buried on that small plot of land at Mount Vernon overlooking the Potomac River

Acknowledgments

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Abstract of Thesis

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This thesis focuses on the archaeological study of the Slave Cemetery at George Washington's Mount Vernon. Here, methodological and theoretical principles are utilized to study the area that many enslaved workers call their final resting place. Through the use of this space, it is hypothesized that Mount Vernon's enslaved community practiced distinct traditions, instilling in that spot a sense of place, and reinforcing their individual and communal human identities. This thesis will also investigate the cemetery within its broader regional and cultural contexts, to attain a better understanding of the death rituals and culturally resistant activates that slaves at Mount Vernon used in their day-to-day battle against the system that held them in bondage.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In Director, Steve McQueen's film adaptation of Solomon Northrup's chilling and poignant memoir, *12 Years A Slave*, there is a scene in which Northrup, played by Chiwetel Ejiofor, attends the funeral of a fellow enslaved field hand who dies of exhaustion while working in the cotton fields of Edwin Epps. At twilight, likely following the close of a day's work, Northrup and a group of enslaved African Americans congregate by the small cemetery that bears its most recent tenant. The cemetery is enclosed by a rough-hewn fence, and inside its boundaries can be seen a collection of individual burial mounds aligned in two short rows of no more than four or five graves. At the head of each burial is a crude wooden or metal cross. The only indication of the presence of Edwin Epps, the despotic owner of the plantation on which Solomon Northrup now finds himself illegally enslaved, is the large plantation house visible in the distance. Epps, himself, is nowhere to be seen, nor is any other white person to be found in attendance at the humble funeral.

Led by an elderly woman at the procession, those gathered around the enclosed sacred space begin to sing the spiritual, "Roll, Jordan, Roll." The original version of the song was introduced to members of the enslaved community in the early 19th century, likely in an attempt to help convert those enslaved Africans to Christianity (Calt 2008:34). Like many aspects of European and Anglo American culture, however, the song was adopted and transformed by enslaved African Americans, who instilled in it new meaning and unique themes of hope in the face of oppression, and a longing to be free (Powers 2013).

As the gathering of mourners in McQueen's *12 Years A* Slave continue to sing the refrain of "Roll, Jordan, Roll," focus is turned to Northrup, himself. At first reluctant to join in the singing, Northrup soon becomes enveloped in the impassioned refrain: "Roll, Jordan, roll! Roll, Jordan, roll! My soul arise in Heaven, Lord, for the year when Jordan roll!" Ejiofor's Northrup becomes more fervent with each recitation, looking to the heavens before closing his eyes in an attempt to hold back tears from the swarm of powerful emotions welling up inside of him. For Solomon Northrup, the funeral ceremony is no longer about memorializing the latest victim of a wicked and oppressive system of institutionalized slavery. Instead it has become an outward and communal expression of grief, pain, solidarity, and empowerment, in which Northrup acknowledges his inequitable demotion of status from human being to slave, but refuses to accept it (Powers 2013).

Though this scene from McQueen's *12 Years A Slave* is a fabricated event (Solomon Northrup makes no such mention of a funeral ceremony in his 1853 memoir), it touches upon an important and often overlooked aspect of slave life in the colonial and post-colonial United States. Forced to live out their lives in a world that constantly reminded the enslaved of their subhuman status, the funerals and burial practices of enslaved African Americans offered a small, but powerful opportunity for those communities to express their solidarity with one another, and to observe distinct cultural traditions that reinforced their identities as people, rather than slaves. Indeed, "the significance of proper funerals for the slaves lay…in the extent to which they allowed the participants to feel themselves *a human community unto themselves*" (Genovese 1976:195, emphasis added).

Few documentary records exist that make note of the funerary practices of enslaved communities in the 18th and 19th centuries. Those records that do exist are often produced from outside the community in question by white observers, such as slave owners and overseers. While these accounts are helpful in providing a window through which to view a handful of these deeply personal events, they only allow researchers a biased glimpse into the funerary practices of the enslaved community through the eyes of white outsiders. We are left with a resultant window through which to peer, rather than a door through which to walk through.

Further information has been lost to the ravages of time. Documents recording the passing of individual slaves and the locations of plantation cemeteries on the landscape were rarely kept. As a result, many of these unassuming resting spots have been lost. Poorly marked grave sites in rural, wooded, and even urban areas are soon covered over by brush and foliage if not regularly maintained. A number of these cemeteries, either recently rediscovered or simply inconspicuously marked, have come under threat of encroaching development (Belkin 1990; Hutchins 2013; Blanchard 2014; Cass 2014). Others, like the African Burial Ground in New York City (General Services Administration 2009), and the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery in Alexandria, Virginia (Sipe 2011) have been reclaimed from developed areas after ample public outcry and extensive archaeological survey following their rediscovery. An unknown number other cemeteries have been lost to suburban sprawl and public apathy.

As the number of these burial sites begins to dwindle, the clock is ticking for researchers and preservationists to study these sacred places and implement plans

to ensure their sustained protection. Through archaeological research, many of these sites can not only be identified, but respectfully studied to attain a greater understanding of how enslaved African Americans perceived these spaces on the landscape. Furthermore, these studies can shed light on how enslaved African Americans participated in culturally distinct rituals to remember the dead, and reinforce a sense of community in the face of a system bent on instilling ideas of subhuman inferiority.

Site History

This thesis focuses on the ongoing archaeological survey of site number 44FX116: the Slave Cemetery[1] at George Washington's Mount Vernon (FIGURE1.1). Located on an outcrop of land overlooking the Potomac River, Mount Vernon's Slave Cemetery has been protected from encroaching suburban development by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (MVLA), along with roughly 500 acres of George Washington's extensive 8,000 acre plantation. All burials in the cemetery are unmarked, and prior to initiating archaeological fieldwork, the locations of individual graves was unknown.

Documentary evidence pertaining to the cemetery is scarce. The inscription on a memorial tablet placed at the site in 1929 indicates that the Slave Cemetery was likely to have been in use circa 1760 through circa 1860, however no evidence has been found listing the beginning and end dates of the burial ground (MVLA

[1] The official name for this burial ground, according to the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, is the Slave Cemetery. It is acknowledged, however, that enslaved and free people are potentially buried in this space. Furthermore, the scholarly consensus is that when referring to those in bondage, enslaved is the preferred term (General Services Administration 2009:10).

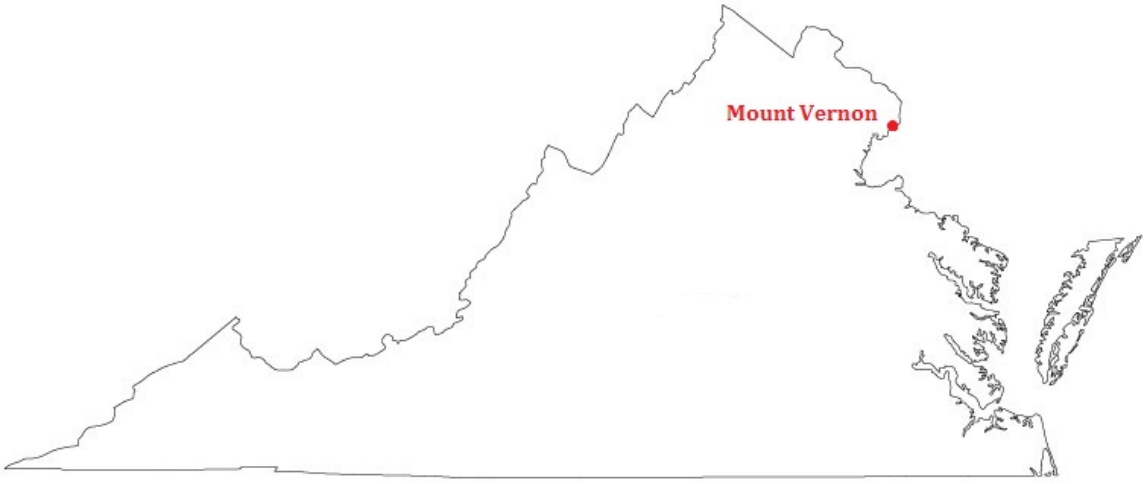

FIGURE 1.1: Location of George Washington's Mount Vernon in Virginia.

1929:46). West Ford (c. 1785-1863), a longtime servant of the Washington family who was freed in 1829 and continued to work for the MVLA after they assumed control of the estate in 1860, is believed to have been the last individual to be buried in the cemetery (Mary Thompson 2014, elec. comm.). It is also believed that William "Billy" Lee, Washington's manservant throughout the Revolutionary War, was interred on the site following his death in c. 1828 (Mary Thompson 2014, elec. comm.; *Western Literary Messenger* 1846). It is likely that burials at Mount Vernon's Slave Cemetery ceased at the end of the Civil War. This is because many communities of formerly enslaved African Americans established their own churches, with burial grounds, after emancipation. Burials soon became associated with those cemeteries rather than longtime plantation slave burial grounds (Scott Casper 2014, elec. comm.).

Several documents record the existence of the cemetery in the years preceding the Civil War, however by the turn of the 20th century most surface

evidence of individual burials appears to have disappeared. In 1928, the MVLA feared that all traces of the cemetery would soon be gone and they placed a simple marker on the site in 1929 to commemorate the unmarked graves of the individuals interred there (MVLA 1928:75; MVLA 1929:46). The memorial read: "In Memory of the Many Faithful Colored Servants of the Washington Family Buried at Mount Vernon from 1760-1860 Their Unidentified Graves Surround This Spot" (FIGURE 1.2). Though the racially tinged language of the memorial was itself a product of its time, the MVLA's decision to commemorate and honor the enslaved individuals who lived and died at Mount Vernon was an incredibly progressive one at a time when racial relations in the United States were at a significant low-point (MVLA 1929:46; Rees 2001:163).

By the 1980s, the cemetery site had become overgrown and the 1929 memorial was lost amongst unchecked vegetation. The discovery of the neglected state of the memorial spurred a 1982 column in *The Washington Post* (Gilliam 1982:B1) that drew attention to the disregard of enslaved Africans at Mount Vernon. In the fall of 1982, a competition was sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Howard University School of Architecture and Planning to design a new, more fitting memorial for the site. In 1983, a new memorial was built, consisting of a brick archway (FIGURE 1.3) heading a brick-enclosed gravel path that led to a sunken ring of three circles (FIGURE 1.4). On each circle were inscribed the words, "Faith," "Hope," and "Love". At the center of the memorial stood an incomplete column baring the inscription, "In Memory of the Afro Americans Who Served as Slaves at Mount Vernon, This Monument Marking

FIGURE 1.2: Memorial tablet placed in the Slave Cemetery by the MVLA in 1929 (Photo by Karen Price).

Their Burial Ground Dedicated September 21, 1983, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association" (Sager 1982:VA11; McCombs 1983:E1-E2; Rees 2001:166-168; Casper 2008:221-223).

The Slave Cemetery site has been maintained ever since the construction of the 1983 slave memorial. However, little work has been done to advance an understanding of the space and the individuals who are buried there. As a result of this short coming, Mount Vernon archaeologists initialed a multiyear archaeological survey in the summer of 2014 to find the locations of grave shafts on the landscape

FIGURE1.3: Brick archway heading contemporaneous brick-enclosed gravel path to 1983 Slave Memorial Circle.

and the better understand this space. This multi-year project hopes to reveal more information about the Slave Cemetery by defining its boundaries and its individual burials in an overall effort to commemorate and honor the people who call that spot their final resting place. In 2014, 20 burials were exposed and identified on the landscape just underneath topsoil. No excavation of burials took place beyond what was necessary to delineate grave shafts from their surrounding contexts.

FIGURE 1.4: 1983 Slave Memorial Circle with brick-lined gravel path to the left (Photo by Karen Price).

Research Goals, Questions, and Methodology

In identifying grave shafts on the landscape, and studying the cemetery more broadly in the plantation context, this project is guided by four research goals. First, how many individuals are buried in the cemetery? Prior to the 2014 archaeological survey, geophysical and historical research has suggested numbers ranging from fifty-one to one-hundred-fifty possible burials in the cemetery. Archaeology is the only way in which determine a true number.

The second desired outcome of this project is to attain a better understanding of the cemetery's spatial organization. What are its boundaries? Are burials aligned in rows, clusters, or some other pattern of organization? Is there any

evidence that graves were marked in some way? Are there any grave decorations associated with burials? By identifying where burials are located within the cemetery and how they are arranged, it is possible to both to mitigate and prevent future impacts to the site was well as begin to draw an understanding of how this space was perceived and used by the enslaved community at Mount Vernon. Grave decorations are also a cultural tradition documented in some African American cemeteries and the burial grounds used by enslaved Africans, particularly in the South. This phenomena has been attributed to certain West African practices and may represent a form of cultural resistance where the customs of the homeland are preserved in spite of forced assimilation by the slave system (Genovese 1976; Vlach 1990; King 2010). Furthermore, grave markers can hold valuable information pertaining to the ways in which communities choose to commemorate, or are able to commemorate their dead (Rainville 2014). This work finds that currently there is no evidence to suggest the usage of grave markers or the practice of decorating graves at the Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery. However, lack of evidence at this stage does not necessarily mean that graves were not marked in some way.

It has been observed in many African American cemeteries that burials are oriented so that the head of the individual is pointed to the west (i.e. facing east) (Bon-Harper et al 2003; Rivanna Archaeological Services 2013; Rainville 2014). This practice has been attributed to both Christian tradition: that individuals should face east towards the rising sun on the day of judgment, and West African traditions: that burials should follow the path of the sun (King 2010). Regarding the cemetery's spatial patterning, some suggest that a cemetery exhibiting a more traditional

organizational pattern, such as burials aligned in rows and columns, may be an indication of a slave owner that was particularly concerned with the spiritual well-being of his or her slaves or the usage of that space. Conversely, if a cemetery is organized in a less traditional pattern, the enslaved community may have had more autonomy with regard to interment styles, and may have chosen a different layout or pattern for the cemetery (Chapman et al 2006).

The third research goal of this project is to determine the efficacy of a 1985 geophysical survey conducted on the site. Using ground penetrating radar (GPR), this survey detected over 51 subsurface anomalies that are likely grave shafts. Archaeology will *ground-truth* the data collected from this survey and a comparison will be made between results.

Another desired outcome of this project is to gain a better understanding of the slave experience on the plantation landscape by identifying where these different cemeteries may be. In its zenith, George Washington's Mount Vernon consisted of five separate but adjoining farms, each with their own work structures, slave quarters, and likely cemeteries (FIGURE 1.5). Many of these cemeteries have since been lost and credibly destroyed by the encroaching suburban sprawl that surrounds the present-day estate. One such cemetery has been located through extensive documentary research, and can now be plotted via Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in relation to the current project area and Washington's outlying farms. This provides an unparalleled look into a small portion of a plantation landscape long since destroyed. Findings from this research are presented in Chapter 3.

The main research question guiding this project involves how the Slave Cemetery fit in to the *perceived* cultural landscapes of Mount Vernon's enslaved and free populations. Landscapes and structures are not static entities in the lives of those who live in them, but are perceived in different ways by different people (Upton 1910; Fesler 2010; Ginsburg 2010). Often times white owners and overseers would fail to notice the intricacies of the constructed black landscape. This failure to understand these nuances gave enslaved individuals and communities power over their oppressors and allowed opportunities to manipulate the slave system. Knowing the landscape in a different way than the white elite meant that slaves could carve out places where they could culturally, and sometimes actively, resist their subjugators (Ginsburg 2010). The cemetery space is one that would likely have held a vastly different meaning for enslaved African Americans than it would have for whites. Without an understanding of these multiple meanings, researchers cannot hope to cross the threshold and truly understand the world the slaves lived and operated in. It is the goal of this work to show that the Slave Cemetery at Mount Vernon was culturally and cognitively constructed in the minds of enslaved African Americans who were able to instill in that area a sense of *place* where enslaved individuals could unite as communities and find strength in one another to *culturally resist* their imposed, subhuman status.

Thesis Organization

The organization of this thesis is as follows. Chapter 2 is a literature review that explores different conceptual elements crucial to an understanding of the uses,

perceptions, and meanings of cemetery sites by the enslaved population and others who resided within the plantation system. The first section of Chapter 2 includes a discussion on plantation landscapes, and how they are perceived by the different people who passed through, and inhabited them. The second section of this chapter discusses the mortuary practices and rituals surrounding death and burial in the slave community. Finally, the third section of this chapter offers three examples of African American cemetery sites in Virginia that have been archaeologically surveyed within the last fifteen years, and that offer contextual, temporal, and regional points of comparison to the Slave Cemetery at Mount Vernon: Monticello's Park Cemetery (Bon Harper et al. 2003), The University of Virginia's African American Burial Ground (Rivanna Archaeological Services 2013), and the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery in the City of Alexandria (Sipe 2011).

Chapter 3 provides contextual information necessary in order to understand the current, ongoing archaeological survey taking place in the Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents the findings of research through both historical sources and oral historical accounts. This section also discusses the possible use of other cemeteries outside the current bounds of the MVLA by Mount Vernon's African American population during the 18th and 19th centuries. The second section of this chapter discusses all previous archaeological projects undertaken in 44FX116, The Slave Cemetery, prior to the commencement of the current survey.

Chapter 4 discusses the archaeological methodology utilized at the Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery, and the use of GIS to aid in planning and implementation of

FIGURE 1.5: "A Map of General Washington's Farm from a Drawing Transmitted by the General. Removed from Letter from His Excellency General George Washington to Arthur Young. London: W.L. & J. Richardson, 1801.

those research methods. Chapter 5 discusses the results and findings of this survey, with a particular focus on the spatial relationships of individual grave shafts. Analysis and discussion are offered to interpret these findings through a phenomenological perspective. The final chapter summarizes the results of this thesis and furnishes suggestions for future research.

Conclusion

This thesis seeks to evaluate and analyze the Slave Cemetery site at Mount Vernon within its broader physical and cultural contexts. Building off previous studies of slave resistance (Mintz 1995; Ginsburg 2010; Weik 2012), and the cultural landscape (Upton 2010; Fesler 2010), this work discusses the ways in which cemeteries utilized by the enslaved fit in to the perceived landscapes of those African Americans in bondage by allowing opportunities for communal gathering and the practice of distinct cultural traditions. As it was for Solomon Northrup in McQueen's *12 Years A Slave*, the cemetery site, and the funerary ceremonies that took place there, were about much more than simply burying the dead. By promoting community bonds and traditions at these places through ceremonies, enslaved African Americans were able to overtly and outwardly deny their enforced social positions as slaves, and reinforce their status as human beings.

Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Works

Introduction

Plantation landscapes were deliberately organized by elites to convey explicit messages of status and power. Enslaved African Americans, however, were not hapless pawns in the face of these clear and directed messages. Many times, enslaved populations were able to adapt and carve out portions of the landscape where they were able to construct their own meanings and reinforce their individual human and communal identities. This chapter begins with a review of plantation landscapes and the mortuary practices of enslaved communities in the United States during the 18th and 19th centuries. Finally, there will be an overview of three comparative cemetery sites that have been studied archaeologically: Monticello's Park Cemetery (Bon Harper et al. 2003), The University of Virginia's African American Burial Ground (Rivanna Archaeological Services 2013), and the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery in the City of Alexandria (Sipe 2011).

Theoretical Basis

The phenomenological approach to the study of landscapes, stemming from post-processual archaeology and Christopher Tilley's *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (1994) is applied here. The phenomenological approach seeks to understand how individuals experienced and perceived their world through their bodily lenses. People are both in the world and separate from it. Encased within their bodies, they must perceive and mentally construct their environments (Pollio et al 1997). Not all

peoples perceive their environments in the same way. Each individual is aided in his or her mental construction by life experiences, memories, emotions, and belief systems (Tilley 1994). Phenomenology, then, as defined by Matthew Johnson, is "the study of the structures of human experience and consciousness" (Johnson 2012:272).

When applied to landscape archaeology, researchers seek to understand how individuals and groups mitigated and manipulated their environments. The study of cemeteries through phenomenological landscape studies is fitting, as "the location of a cemetery and the layout and design of its material culture, such as boundaries, gates, pathways, buildings, graves, and plantings, combine to form a richly constructed cultural landscape" (Muller 2006:19). The dearth of information on the burial grounds, and cultural landscape features of the enslaved provides an opportunity to test the efficacy of phenomenological landscape studies in interpreting these spaces when they are archaeologically explored.

The Plantation Landscape: Physically Constructed, Culturally Perceived

A variety of researchers have employed the basis of phenomenological theory on plantation research (Ellis and Ginsburg 2010:6; Upton 2010; Fesler 2010:29). What is agreed upon in all of these studies is that the plantation landscape was much more than a utilitarian organization of fields, fences, and structures, but that it was viewed and experienced differently by different parties. The constructed landscapes of colonial and post-colonial America, particularly in the South, conveyed nuanced messages of status, power, and inequality to the groups and

individuals that inhabited them. The construction of those landscapes was often directly governed by the ruling elite and planter class in an attempt to structure their world in a way that would bring order to nature, and place themselves at the focal point of historical impetus. James Deetz (1996) defines this viewpoint, "Georgian," a term most often used to describe the popular architectural style utilized by elites in the mid to late-18th century in the construction of their elaborate dwellings. More than simply an architectural trend, this concept of order and control greatly influenced the thinking of the colonial elite, and indeed constituted a new way of viewing the world where individuality and balance were revered. This worldview was quickly reflected not only in the architecture of the elite, but in their material culture and the way in which they structured their landscapes as well (Deetz 1996:62-64).

An important component to the Georgian world-view was the emphasis on a separation of man from nature. This dominant ideal in the 18th century is described by Alan Gowens (1964:116-117) and holds that "the world has a basic immutable order, that men by powers of reason can discover what that order is; and that, discovering it, they can control the environment as they will." These powers of control were reflected in the ways elites structured their world, and by default, the ways in which enslaved African Americans were forced to operate within those structures.

The specific ways in which elites organized their estates and households had meaningful implications in terms of power and control, and were often an expression of an individual owner's tastes and values (Vlach 1993:1). These

structures served as subliminal reminders for both slaves, and those of lower social status, of their social inferiority. According to Dell Upton (1990), space was organized and separated by elites to delineate social barriers expressed in physical barriers. In Mount Airy, Virginia, for example, the siting and architectural decoration of the ostentatious stone dwelling "were manipulated carefully to make use of the principles of procession through distance and elevation to distinguish among users of the complex and to impress upon them John Tayloe's centrality in Mount Airy's microcosm" (Upton 1990:76). The approach to Mount Airy passes a number of physical barriers such as fences, walls, and terraces, each one representing the high watermark of a certain social class. The higher the social standing of a visitor, the further along the approach one was allowed to travel until one ultimately reached the entrance to the mansion itself. For Tayloe, these barriers served to reinforce his importance within society. For the poor planter who would have been unable to travel far through the set of barriers, it would have reinforced his social inferiority (Upton 1990).

In a similar fashion, slave spaces were often separated by fence lines, walls, or gates, and placed out of site of the entertaining spaces and living spaces of elites. In the mansion house, separate, unadorned entrances and stairwells were put in place to allow slaves to work but not be seen. These nuances had psychological implications pertaining to the social roles that slaves filled. They were not in a world defined by their own control, but rather in one defined by subjugation under others (Upton 1990).

This psychological impact can be seen in the ways enslaved individuals perceived the landscape. Though there are virtually no documentary records produced from within the enslaved community that record how those individuals viewed the landscape, a picture can be painted with the help of accounts from white travelers and visitors. Upton (2010) critically analyzes these accounts and notes the frustration of white travelers when asking directions from enslaved workers. Interestingly, he notes that the sense of a larger articulated network of space, as seen in the perceptions of the elite, was missing from the slaves' perception. "The slaves' landscape was described from the point of view as someone surrounded by other people's power, and its landmarks were plantation houses and fields differentiated by ownership" (Upton 2010:135). Though landscapes developed by white elites were perceived by them in a way that represented a connected network, slaves instead viewed them as a series of barriers that limited freedom of movement and autonomy.

Enslaved individuals were not merely cogs in the machine of violence and control that was ubiquitous in the slavery system, however. In order to survive, slaves found was to construct their own perceived landscapes and subvert the ideologies implicit in the white elite's creation (Ginsburg 2010; Fesler 2010). This form of mental resistance gave strength to individuals and communities, who were under constant bombardment of negative messages aimed at dismantling their human identities.

Resistance to Slavery

Slave resistance can take many different forms, ranging from violent revolution to small, day-to-day activities that upon first inspection would not appear to be resistance at all (Scott 1985). Violent resistance is the easiest to define and to see in the historical record. News of dramatic slave uprisings such as the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) and Nat Turner's Rebellion (1831) spread quickly across the United States, sending shockwaves of panic throughout the nation. These climactic events were a direct affront to the slave system, and the notion of slave docility and compliance, severely undercutting the fantasy that was the slave owners' reality.

With the exception of a small handful of these violent uprisings the majority of these insurrections were quelled with equally intensive fervor, and examples were made of those who perpetuated dissent. Terrance Wiek (2012) notes the diverse and excessively brutal ways in which slavery regimes would respond to this type of violent resistance:

> "Dismemberment, burning alive, whipping, confinement in stocks, hanging, attachment to metal collars, branding, deportment, and sale away from family and friends are among the many types of punishments employed. The spectacles of torture and execution that made examples of conspirators and innocents following revolts greatly reduced open challenges to slavery and escape attempts" (Wiek 2012:22).

The perpetuators of the slave system often took excessively brutal measures to ensure the continuation of that establishment. However, this did not put a stop to resistance activity and ideology.

Resistance does not merely manifest itself in violent uprisings, but can take on many different, less-discernable forms. Sidney Mintz (1995:12) argues that this

overt type of resistance only constituted a small fraction of the subversive activities performed in lives of enslaved individuals and communities. Indeed, *resistance* can be performed at different levels and intensities, and possess different outcomes (Scott 1985). Forms of "passive" resistance, such as the breaking of farm implements, or the setting of a slow work pace, likely abounded within the plantation slave system. The difficultly posed by this form of resistance, according to Mintz (1995:14), "is precisely that we must *infer* the will of the actor…if resistance is not violent, then we must divine intentions, for they are not told to us, and we cannot prove them."

In spite of this challenge, Mintz developed a tentative typology consisting of four types of slave resistance. The first is *violent resistance*, in which the intent of the actor is relatively clear. Striking an overseer or participating in armed revolt exemplifies this form of resistance. The second type is *nonviolent resistance*, in which the intent of the actor is more difficult to ascertain, however the consequences of his or her actions leads us to believe that those actions were resistant in nature. The intentional breaking of implements to avoid work is an example of nonviolent resistance. The third type is *nonviolent nonresistance*, an act or action that may appear to be both accommodative *and* resistant, and furthermore so subtle that it is difficult to tell what the intent of the actor was. It becomes more difficult to detect this form of resistance because it appears from the outside to be the same as nonviolent nonresistance. Accidentally breaking an implement is a form of nonviolent nonresistance. In both cases an implement is broken, however the intent was different. Finally, there is *cultural resistance* (Mintz 1995:14-15). Like

nonviolent resistance and nonviolent nonresistance, cultural resistance is difficult to both define and detect, as the will of the actor or actors is not always clear.

Garret Fesler (2010:45) states that cultural resistance manifested itself any time an enslaved person or group affirmed their identity as someone other than a slave. Maintaining an individual and communal identity through beliefs, customs, and actions exemplify this type of resistance. This was not always outwardly disadvantageous to the plantation owner in the same way a broken tool would interfere with crop cultivation. However, in a system that counted slaves merely as personal property, any belief in the antithesis would not only help those in bondage to find strength in this overwhelmingly oppressive system, but also threaten the underlying fabric of the system itself by rejecting one of its core underlying convictions.

Landscape and Resistance

Despite strict limitations to the sovereignty of enslaved individuals, slaves found numerous ways in which to create their own landscapes within the confines of the plantation. John Vlach (1993:13) notes that the spaces predominantly occupied by enslaved African Americans were "a domain that generally escaped much notice, mainly because [they were] marked in ways that planters either considered insignificant or could not recognize." Though often under the careful observation and domination of overseers and plantation owners, slaves were able to carve out secret places hidden in the landscape, often in secret paths and trails. These spaces facilitated a place for clandestine meetings and rituals, offering

enslaved African Americans an opportunity to resist their status as slaves and reinforce their own distinct cultural practices (Vlach 1993:13; Isaac 1999:52-53; Ginsburg 2010).

Forms of both "active" resistance, such as physical violence or running away, and "passive" resistance, such as setting a slow work pace or breaking equipment necessary to complete a task, abounded within the enslaved community. However, cultural resistance, more than any other type of resistant behavior, offered slaves important opportunities to develop and practice customs that reinforced their individual and communal human identities. This type of culturally resistant behavior could manifest itself in a myriad of ways in which white elites may not have detected or thought relevant. The question of whether or not cultural resistance was intentional is unimportant. Deliberately sneaking off in the night for a secret rendezvous, or unintentionally preserving a cultural custom both have the same effect—one is still reinforcing his or her identity as a human being rather than a slave.

The placement of the slave quarters on the plantation landscape, oftentimes some distance from the big house, isolated the enslaved population from the watchful eye of managers and elites, affording a limited degree of privacy. This privacy, though by no means indefinite, afforded slaves a small semblance of refuge from the oppressive world of plantation slavery where cultural practices could be perpetuated in secret. Though the placement of these structures were oftentimes directed by the plantation owner or farm manager out of convenience or an attempt to maintain a certain aesthetic, slaves were able to manipulate this setting for their

own benefit (Kolchin 2003:149; Wiek 2012:31). Examples can be seen in customs such as yard sweeping and the digging of subfloor pits to store materials, or the preference of corporate, outdoor spaces for social gatherings (Samford 2007; Fesler 2010). By studying these spaces and by "encountering artifact patterns, landscape features, building foundations, and other forms of archaeological evidence…archaeologists can begin to retrace how enslaved people experienced the landscape and how they negotiated, fashioned, and adapted to their setting" (Fesler 2010:30).

Slave funeral ceremonies often provided enslaved individuals with opportunities to express forms of cultural resistance. Great emphasis was placed on these rites, for they "provided occasions for marking key points of transition in the human experience and assumed enormous symbolic importance" (Kolchin 2003:150). The specific locations of plantation slave burial grounds were often chosen by the plantation owner on lands that were ill-suited for agricultural development (Rainville 2014:49). In spite of this, enslaved African Americans frequently "had control over funerary rituals, commemorative devices such as headstones and footstones, the interment style and the layout of individual burials within the cemetery" (Chapman et al. 2006:6). The degree to which these forms of slave autonomy existed varies from place to place. Slave owners who placed a greater emphasis on religious observance may have exerted more control over the spiritual lives of their slaves, resulting in cemetery arrangements and burial traditions more closely resembling European customs (Chapman et al. 2006; Rivanna Archaeological Services 2013:24). More sporadic and seemingly

unorganized spatial distributions of graves may indicate higher levels of slave autonomy and possibly correlate to a form of cultural resistance.

Death and Mortuary Practices

American archaeologists and anthropologists have placed an inordinate amount of attention on mortuary practices. By focusing on the ways in which people in past societies faced death and dying, researchers have been able to better understand cultural and historical phenomena such as social organization (Braun 1979), ideology (Hodder 1984; McGuire 1992), warfare (Ravesloot 1988), and more (Carr 1995:105-106). Clifford Geertz notes that death "provokes in the survivors a duel response of love and loathing, a deep-going emotional ambivalence of fascination and fear which threatens both the psychological and social foundations of human existence" (Geertz 2000:162). In order to mitigate these complex and dualistic emotions, ceremonial practices are implemented that serve to help survivors re-establish their morale (Malinowski, quoted in Geertz 2000:162-163). Here, it is shown that the funerary traditions of enslaved African Americans represented views on death distinct from those of whites. These views, rooted in African traditions and mixed with New World practices, represent a distinctly African American creation.

One major obstacle to the study of African American mortuary practices in the Americas becomes evident when one attempts to find correlating customs on the African continent. Little archaeological research focused on historic-period sites has been conducted in African countries (see DeCorse 1992 for an exception).

Instead, most scholars prefer to focus on Africa's prehistoric cultural heritage. Researchers of African American and slave cultures, then, are forced to make broad generalizations when referring to possible origins for certain customs, a practice that severely undermines the research (Jamieson 1995:41). On occasion, more specific African cultures are mentioned in conjunction with African American mortuary customs. For example, Robert Farris Thompson links the practice of leaving grave decorations atop slave graves in South Carolina and Georgia with the Bakongo of Northern Angola (Thompson 1969:149). This connection is relevant considering that a large number of African slaves from the Angolan region arrived in America through Charleston, South Carolina (Genovese 1976:200).

It becomes more difficult to trace culture groups from Africa that arrived in the Americas, especially when their final destinations are further inland, far from their ports of arrival (Rainville 2014:53). In Virginia, a large amount of slaves that arrived from African were of the Ibo cultural group, though other groups included the Kimbundu and Kikongo (Rainville 2014:53).The eclectic mix of cultures brought across the Atlantic would undergo further shuffling when put on the auction block. Furthermore, it was not long before direct memory of the African continent gave way to a more hazy remembrance, as enslaved native Africans passed away, and their American-born descendants were part of a distinctly new cultural amalgam.

Attitudes towards death and spirituality in the slave community were deeply rooted in existing tradition and folk beliefs. Following the arrival of African slaves to North America, many West African traditions were transmitted and mixed with Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, and American traditions and beliefs through practice and song

(King 2010:125; Gorn 1984:551). This amalgam of traditions, practices, and beliefs allowed enslaved African Americans an opportunity to observe distinct cultural practices in the New World (Jamieson 1995:39). Though variety existed among the many West African customs and religions that came to the New World, most shared a common belief in a spirit life after death, and ancestral worship (King 2010:126; Rainville 2014:53-54). A belief in the survival of the soul after death was the cornerstone of the burial practices and rituals of the enslaved community. It was believed that spirits could influence the world of the living in very direct ways, and many traditional practices were set in place to appease and guide the spirit to the afterlife. Only after the proper ritual requirements were satisfied would the lingering spirit depart for the spirit world (Rainville 2014:54).

Rituals surrounding death would begin shortly after the deceased breathed his or her last breath. Though oftentimes delayed by the workday imposed upon them by overseers and plantation owners, enslaved African Americans began the burial process by preparing, or "settin' up" with the body. This process often took place at nighttime once the workday was completed, and simultaneously served to protect the body from scavenging animals, as well as watch over the deceased and keep his or her spirit company as it departed the body (Genovese 1976:198-199; Thomas 2008:113; Rainville 2014:54-55). This time would often be accompanied by prayer, song, and the consumption of food, and it allowed members of the enslaved community an opportunity to reinforce their distinct cultural and communal bonds (Thomas 2008:113; Rainville 2014:55). Throughout this process, the body would be cleaned and wrapped in cloth before being placed on a cooling board to stave

decomposition. During the warmer months, rapid decomposition would necessitate a quick burial, which often took place the following evening (Thomas 2008:114; Rainville 2014:54-55).

News of the death of a member of the enslaved community would travel quickly through a vast and complex communication network. Enslaved African Americans were often forced to live separate lives from their families on neighboring or distant plantations. News of a recent death would travel from plantation to plantation through slaves on foot or by boat, as well as through the use of drums (Thomas 2008:112; Rainville 2014:55). It sometimes took the enslaved community weeks to assemble for the funeral of a deceased member. A second funeral ceremony would often be held at the burial site after the sun set when others were able to attend from visiting plantations. This further provided the enslaved community a chance to strengthen familial and communal ties that extended beyond the property boundaries of a single plantation. Because of this, funerals were often "celebratory reunions among the living as well as remembrances of the dead" (Rainville 2014:55).

The funeral ceremony itself would often be held after dark. This practice can be traced to certain African mortuary rituals, where burial ceremonies were held at night, but was also likely a practical necessity to allow members from neighboring plantations to attend after the workday was completed (*Journal of American Folklore* 1894:318-319; Genovese 1976:197; Thomas 2008:114; Rainville 2014:57). The body of the deceased would have been carried to the burial ground in a torch-lit procession, with an officiant or minister leading the way (FIGURE 2.1). Genovese

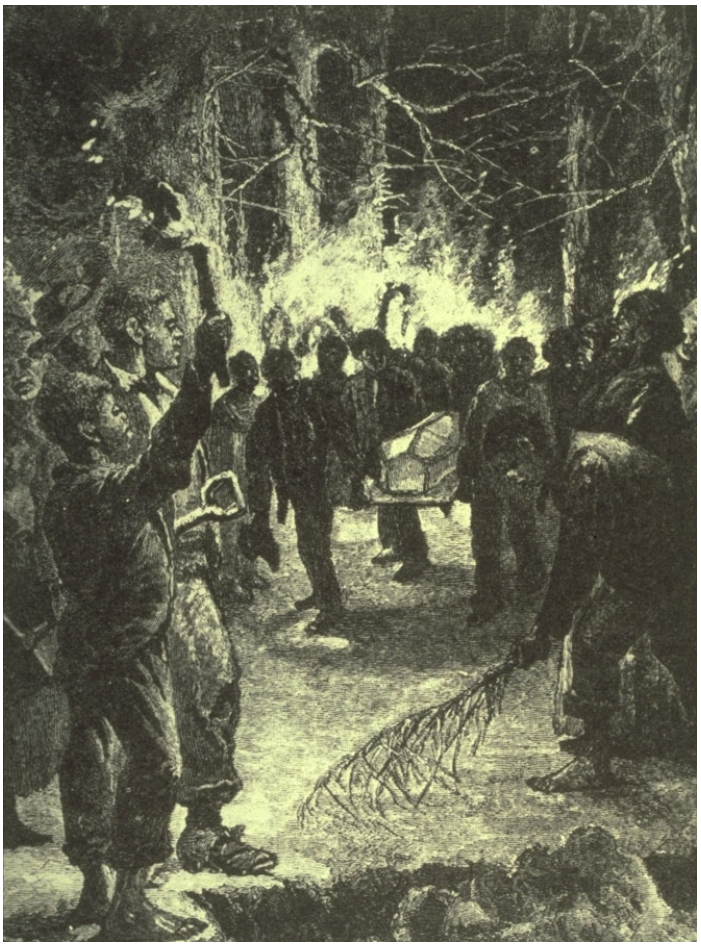

FIGURE 2.1: "Midnight Slave Funeral," Hamilton Pierson, *In the Brush*; or, *Old-time social, political, and religious life in the Southwest* (New York, 1881), facing p. 284. Image Reference NW0177, as shown on www.slaveryimages.org, compiled by Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite, and sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library."

writes that these ministers were often African Americans, and were preferentially favored by the enslaved community. As funerary gatherings were sometimes looked upon with suspicion by the white elite, however, restrictions were often placed on these black ministers, and therefore white preachers were also known to conduct slave funerals. If a minister could not be obtained, a respected member of the enslaved community would have led the procession and ceremony (Genovese 1976:199). During the procession, the remains would likely have been carried in a

coffin constructed specifically for that individual, though if materials were unavailable to build a coffin, a shroud would have been used (Rainville 2014:56).

Following a sermon, the minister would lead the enslaved community in a series of spirituals or songs (FIGURE 2.2). Some have described scenes of African American burials as similar to those of a pageant: "A negro funeral without an uproar, without shouts and groans, without fainting women and shouting men, without pictures of triumphant death beds…was no funeral at all" (Hatcher 1908:38). As the body of the deceased was laid into the ground, those present would sometimes lay hands on the coffin or throw a handful of dirt atop the grave. A dance would sometimes be initiated in a circle around the grave site, guided by spirituals and drums (*The Journal of American Folklore* 1894:318; Thomas 2008:115; Rainville 2014:58, 61). These practices further allowed enslaved African Americans a way in which to remember and preserve distinct cultural traits unique to the enslaved community.

After an individual had been buried, grave offerings and decorations were sometimes placed atop the burial mound to adorn the grave site. Grave offerings and decorations took many different forms. The practice is linked to West and West-Central-African traditions and has been explained as decorative objects that "cryptically honor the spirit in the earth, guide it to the other world, and prevent it from wandering or returning to haunt survivors" (Thompson 1983:132). Oftentimes the last object touched by the deceased individual before expiring was broken and placed on the grave. These objects were believed to hold remnants of the previous owner's power and were broken to prevent the spirit of the dead from returning in

FIGURE 2.2: "Plantation Burial," John Antrobus, ca. 1860, (Historical New Orleans Collection). Image Reference NW0179, as shown on www.slaveryimages.org, compiled by Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite, and sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library."

search of the object (Thompson 1983:134; Vlach 1990:141; Rainville 2014:61). Ceramics, glassware, and utensils have all been used in this capacity as grave decorations, oftentimes being perforated or broken to prevent their use. The intentional breaking of objects is believed to symbolize the destruction of the body by death and can be linked to some North Angolan cultural practices (Genovese 1976:200-201). Some West-African traditions hold that spirits still experience hunger and thirst after death. Families and survivors would often provide food and water offerings during and after burials to satisfy the deceased and prevent their return (Genovese 1976:198; King 2010:132).

The color white also held spiritual significance in some West African traditions, symbolizing purity, the world of spirits, and the dead. White shells were often placed atop graves as they were considered symbols of immortality and water (King 2010:128; Sipe 2011). The use of shells and the representation of water echoes certain beliefs that the spirit world is located underwater, but can also be attributed to a metaphoric crossing over to the spirit world, or even be in reference to the ocean-crossing required to return to Africa (Vlach 1990:143; Rainville 2014:61). The organization of shells on particular grave sites varies: some graves have been recorded as being outlined with shells, others have been completely covered, and others still have depicted designs (King 2010:128).

The spatial layout of cemeteries and the cardinal orientation of individual graves may also speak to various beliefs about the afterlife. Various slave cemeteries have exhibited different patterns of grave orientation, though the majority of burials in cemeteries appear to be aligned east-west (Bon-Harper et al. 2003; Sipe 2011; RAS 2013; Rainville 2009, 2014). The east-west orientation of burials in some African American cemeteries may speak to West African traditions where burial alignments follow the rising and setting of the sun. However, Christian tradition also orients burials east-west in order to witness the coming of Christ on judgment day (King 2010:132). Another explanation for this burial pattern is that individuals were interred facing east towards Africa (Rainville 2014:64). This explanation would seem to be supported by the many instances in which death was perceived as the way in which one returned home to the African continent (Ball 1837:265; Parrinder 1970:107; Genovese 1976:198), though this admittedly seems a farfetched

explanation. Based on these similarities, it is difficult to determine if an east-west pattern of grave orientation in a particular cemetery follow West African tradition, Christian tradition, an amalgam of both traditions, or perhaps neither tradition. Another pattern of burial organization witnessed is group clusters. Burial grounds that exemplify seemingly haphazard organization may in fact be organized in groups based on familial ties, age, sex, or social status (Rainville 2009:69).

Headstones and footstones are another form of grave identification that can convey useful information to researchers about burials and grave sites. Unless commissioned by the slave owner, very rarely were formal inscribed headstones used to denote the burial plots of the enslaved. This is likely a result of high illiteracy among the enslaved population. Even if an enslaved individual was literate and able to carve an epitaph on a fieldstone, it would mean exposing oneself as a slave who had the ability to read and write in a time and place where literacy among those in bondage was a punishable offence (Rainville 2014:2). Many times in slave cemetery sites, rough, uninscribed fieldstones, or simple iron or stone sculptures were used to mark either the head, foot, or both ends of a burial. This has been seen in sites were archaeological surveys have been conducted such as Monticello's Park Cemetery (Bon-Harper et al. 2003), and the University of Virginia's servants' cemetery (RAS 2013), as well as numerous other sites studied through simple surface survey (Rainville 2009, 2014; Chapman et al. 2006; Vlach 1990). Despite the presence of some sort of permanent marker on a handful of grave sites, the majority of African American slave graves were either marked with non-permanent materials, or were not marked at all, resulting in little to no evidence on the surface of the grave's

existence other than possible ground depressions resulting from the deterioration of coffins and the settling of redeposited soils (Chapman et al. 2006).

Review of Pertinent Comparative Archaeological Sites

A handful of slave and freedmen cemeteries have been studied over the years. Many of those sites were analyzed using geophysical methods only (Yerka and Brock 2009; Yerka 2010; Bigman 2014), while others were fully excavated and individuals disinterred in archaeological recovery and mitigation projects (Thomas et al. 1977; Davidson 1999; RAS 2013; Sipe 2011). The most famous archaeological site of this type is the African Burial Ground in New York City, excavated and analyzed from 1991-2006. In this seminal and politically charged project, the remains of more than four hundred African slaves buried in colonial New York were exhumed and studied by scientists at Howard University, providing an unparalleled look into the burial practices and the lives of the enslaved in a northern urban context (Blakey 2010; General Services Administration 2009). Three African American burial ground archaeological projects that share many regional and contextual similarities to Mount Vernon's Slave Cemetery survey are Monticello's Park Cemetery project (Bon Harper et al. 2003), The University of Virginia's Cemetery 'H' Expansion project (RAS 2013), and the City of Alexandria's Contrabands and Freedmen's Cemetery project (Sipe 2014).

Comparative Research: Monticello Park Cemetery, 2000

Thomas Jefferson established his iconic Monticello plantation on 5,000 acres in Albemarle County, Virginia. Documentary evidence indicates that Jefferson chose the location for the Park as a burial place for both his slaves and for members of his own family, however he later revised his plan and established a family cemetery elsewhere on the estate (Bon-Harper et al. 2003:4). Researchers believe the cemetery itself to be a Jefferson-era feature, used from the early 1770s to the time of Jefferson's death in 1826. No evidence of dwellings or structures have been found in close proximity to the cemetery, suggesting its use as a communal burial ground rather than the site of a family cemetery. The location of the Park Cemetery away from dwellings mimics the central locations of slave cemeteries at other Virginia plantations such as Mount Vernon and Kingsmill (Fesler 2000), and adds to the belief that these were communally-used cemeteries rather than family plots (Bon-Harper et al. 2003:9).

Archaeologists at Monticello used remote sensing and surface mapping techniques in 1990 and 2000 to survey the Park Cemetery site. Oblong ground depressions could be discerned on the surface of the site, suggesting the location of individual interments where top soils had sunken following the collapse of coffin lids. Surface mapping recorded these features as well as stones, trees, and tree stumps in the area. GPR detected a number of subsurface anomalies in areas marked by ground depressions as well as areas where surface disturbance was not evident. Likewise, GPR was not successful in detecting subsurface anomalies in some depressed areas (Bon-Harper et al. 2003:11-13).

In 2000, excavations were conducted in the Park Cemetery to determine the presence or absence of graves. No graves were exhumed, and excavations ceased once a delineation between a grave shaft and the surrounding soil could be observed. Twenty-four 5 x 5 ft. test units were excavated to reveal the outlines of grave shafts. Twenty grave shafts were identified, of these, ten were adults, eight were children, and two were insufficiently exposed to make a determination with regards to age. The determination of age was based solely on the size of exposed grave shafts (Bon-Harper et al. 2003:13). The placement of test units was designed to test various surface conditions and areas suspected of containing burials. Archaeologists found that oblong, east-west oriented depressions consistently corresponded with burials. Furthermore, seven graves were discovered that did not correlate to ground depressions, indicating that some graves do not leave surface indications (Bon-Harper et al. 2003:14). It was discovered that five of the burials were marked by fieldstones: three burials were marked by headstones and footstones, one burial was marked by a headstone only, and one burial was marked by a footstone only. All fieldstones discovered were tabular and unmarked (Bon-Harper et al. 2003:17).

Monticello archaeologists utilized two methods to estimate the total number of burials in the Park Cemetery. The first method was to determine a minimum and maximum number of burials. A minimum was reached by adding the total number of confirmed burials (20) to the number of unexcavated oblong ground depressions (17), producing a minimum number of 37. A maximum was determined by multiplying an estimate of the total area of the cemetery by the mean density of

burials known from excavation (Bon-Harper et al. 2003:17). From this method it was determined that the Park Cemetery contained somewhere between 37 and 134 burials. The second method employed by the archaeologists at Monticello was to divide the quadrants within the suspected boundary of the cemetery into two groups: those that contain ground depressions, and those that do not. Two separate estimates were then computed of the mean number of burials per quadrant, one for each of the two categorized quadrant types. These estimates allowed archaeologists to project the expected number of burials associated with unexcavated quadrants both with and without ground depressions. From this method researchers were able to determine that the most likely number of burials in the cemetery was 71, and that there was a 90% chance that the cemetery contained between 42 and 100 burials (Bon-Harper et al. 2003:18).

Comparative Research: University of Virginia Cemetery Expansion Project, 2012

Another meaningful comparative study of a burial ground for enslaved individuals took place just six miles from Monticello at the University of Virginia in 2012. In 2011, the University asked Rivanna Archaeological Services, a Charlottesville-based CRM firm, to assess the impact of a proposed expansion to the university cemetery. The expansion involved the installation of crypts and the construction of a new stone wall in the project area which was located north of and abutting the existing cemetery boundary. Archaeologists conducted a Phase I survey of the project area and supervised the mechanical excavation of fill deposits down to historic grade. Once these layers were removed, the exposed project area measured

roughly 75 x 175 ft. and contained 67 previously unidentified burial shafts (RAS 2013:iii).

The cemetery itself was established in 1828, and the space was formally enclosed a year later by a stone wall. Over the years, the cemetery was expanded several times to provide more burial plots for students, faculty, and staff. In 1862, the university enclosed a 200 x 228 ft. area west of the original 1828 cemetery for the purpose of burying Confederate soldiers who had died at the school while it served as a hospital. The final expansion was added in 1940 with the enclosing of a 100 x 200 ft. space north of the Confederate cemetery expansion (RAS 2013:7-12).

Few records exist pertaining to the deaths, let alone the interments of enslaved African Americans at the University Cemetery. A handful of late nineteenth-century references indicate that deceased slaves were buried north of, and outside the University Cemetery. Other references suggest that slaves were interred in coffins provided by their owners (RAS 2013:22). The practice of secret burials was also often conducted by many African Americans, where false graves would be excavated in known cemeteries, and logs interred in the graves to fool cadaver hunters and grave robbers. The actual burial would take place elsewhere at a secret location, thereby protecting the body of the deceased from desecration (RAS 2013:25-28).

Following a Phase I survey of the project area, and the mechanical removal of topsoil and fill deposits, archaeologists could identify 67 burial shafts. A total of 160 artifacts were recovered during mechanical excavation, however due to the nature of this method, the artifacts were stripped of their contextual information (RAS

2003:36). Fifty-six percent of recovered artifacts were ceramics. The use of ceramics as grave decorations can be speculated, but without contextual information it is impossible to make a determination one way or another. One piece of slate and one piece of white quartzite sandstone were discovered that appeared to show signs of modification. These have been interpreted as fragments of grave markers, however no writing or inscription could be identified on either piece (RAS 2003:37).

Sixty-four of the 67 identified grave shafts were oriented east-west, while three grave shafts were oriented northeast-southwest. The two distinct patterns of spatial organization that could be discerned were rows and small clusters. Eight rows consisting of anywhere between three to eleven burials, and six clusters consisting of two to three burials each made up the identified interments. Eight grave shafts contained an *in situ* stone marker; six of these markers were fieldstones, likely procured locally. Two of the markers were made of white quartzite sandstone and were placed at the head or western end of each grave. One grave shaft was overlain by a number of vertically set fieldstones. This phenomena is likely an indication of cultural activity, however archaeologists are uncertain if these stones were placed in the fill of a legitimate grave or if they represent a "fake" burial meant to fool potential grave robbers (RAS 2003:58). Based on their size, 21 burial features have been interpreted as adult burials, while 15 have been interpreted as child/youth graves. The age-range of the remaining 31 burials were inconclusive either because the grave shafts were only partially exposed or their relative size produced an ambiguous indication of age.

RAS was able to determine that the previously unknown graves were most likely from the enslaved population at the University of Virginia by analyzing documentary sources and by the fact that these burials were placed outside the historical boundaries of the university cemetery. The arrangement of graves in organized rows facing east-west suggests that burials were conducted in accordance with Christian tradition. By this time, many African Americans practiced Christian beliefs, however it is unclear how much autonomy slaves had in the burial of their dead or the mortuary practices they used. One account of a slave owner burying a recently deceased slave in a nearby cemetery insisted that his servant receive a proper Christian burial (RAS 2003:24). This seems to indicate that, in this particular case, the way in which the enslaved person was interred was the decision of the master rather than that of the enslaved African American community. On the other hand, the practice of secret and "fake" burials seems to indicate that some slaves did in fact have a degree of autonomy in the burial of their dead. There was likely a large degree of variability depending on the beliefs of the owner and the enslaved community in question.

Comparative Research: City of Alexandria Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery, 2007

The City of Alexandria in northern Virginia is located nine miles from George Washington's home at Mount Vernon. During the Civil War, the town was held under Union control and became a safe haven for runaway slaves vying for their freedom. These individuals were dispassionately referred to as "contrabands," and it was not long before the city became inundated with people seeking freedom from

slavery. Cramped quarters and unsanitary conditions led to rampant spread of disease among the contraband and freedmen community, resulting in numerous deaths and the need for a segregated space to bury the dead. Property confiscated from a Confederate sympathizer became the resting place for over 1,500 of these individuals in a cemetery that would soon fall into disrepair, be sold, paved over, and forgotten (Sipe 2011).

By 2000, the cemetery site had been developed with a gas station and office building standing on the lot at the corner of South Washington St and Church St. A remote sensing investigation was conducted in 1996 with the goal of assessing the potential for grave shafts beneath the gas station property. Surveyors used GPR and electro-magnetic studies to maximize the amount of data that could be gleaned under the conditions of surface disturbance at the site. Remote sensing detected numerous anomalies related to the infrastructure of the gas station, however, of particular interest were the areas in the back of the station that contained columns of undisturbed soil in a series of eight to ten rows. The regularity of these anomalies suggested the presence of burial shafts (Sipe 2011).

In 1998, a geophysical survey was conducted on land owned by the Virginia Department of Transportation, just south of the previously surveyed area. This survey detected one anomaly in a grassy area in the western portion of the property. Though the geophysical survey in the eastern portion of the property did not reveal any anomalies, observation of intact soils via surface inspection along with the GPR results from the previous geophysical survey suggested that this area may contain graves (Sipe 2011:192). Excavations were conducted in this area in

1999 to discern the western and southern boundaries of the cemetery. Forty-nine grave shafts were identified in the area south of the gas station. The dimensions of these grave shafts ranged in size approximately one to two feet by three to seven feet, suggesting the interment of both children and adults (Sipe 2011:196). Archaeologists uncovered a handful of artifacts associated with burials. Though no human remains were disturbed, nails and small white buttons were among the artifacts likely associated with graves that were recovered. Some of these artifacts were left in situ, while others were reburied where they were found after they had been recorded and documented. Possible coffin remains were identified in another grave shaft where grading from the construction of I-495 in 1960 had stripped a large amount of topsoil from the site (Sipe 2011:197). Twenty-nine more grave shafts were identified just east of this area on land owned by the City of Alexandria, a total of 78 grave shafts in all.

Further excavations were conducted by the City of Alexandria in 2004 to explore the subsurface integrity of the site and to define the extent of burials. Fourteen trenches were placed across the site, first opened mechanically before being completed by hand. Forty-five additional grave shafts were found as a result of the 2004 excavation. No evidence of grave shafts could be found in five of the fourteen trenches. Instead, these areas seemed to indicate that a large amount of graves had been obliterated by grading in preparation for the construction of the gas station, office building, and installation of utilities (Sipe 2011:222).

In 2007 the gas station and office building were demolished to make way for subsequent archaeological excavation and commemoration of the site. The goals of

this investigation were to monitor the removal of paved surfaces across the site, to identify grave shafts, and to ensure that a buffer layer of fill no less than two feet in thickness be deposited on top of identified grave shafts to protect those features (Sipe 2011:225). As a result of the 2007 excavations, 534 new graves were discovered, bringing the total number of graves located in the Contraband and Freedmen Cemetery to 612. Most of these burials were oriented east-west forming neat, north-south lines down the site. Portions of at least forty rows were identified across the site (Sipe 2011:479).

Due to extensive grading in portions of the site from the construction and development on the gas station and office building, many graves were destroyed and others were nearly unearthed. As a result, once fill deposits had been removed, coffin shapes could sometimes be clearly discerned and additional coffin hardware could be seen. Of the discernable coffin outlines, most coffins appeared to be hexagonal in shape, however a handful of rectangular coffins were also found. Fragments of coffin wood could be seen in twenty interments and coffin hardware including nails, coffin screws or tacks, decorative lid hinges and/or coffin handles could be found in forty grave shaft features (Sipe 2011:479-80). All coffin materials and hardware that could be associated with particular grave shaft features were photographed, recorded, and left in situ.

Grave decorations at the site could only be positively associated with one burial feature, however evidence of potential grave adornment may have been found elsewhere. It is possible that the significant grading of the site may have destroyed any evidence of grave decorations in other portions of the project area.

During the 2004 excavations, archaeologists uncovered fragments of an aqua-colored glass canning jar at the base of a buried surface stratum. Though these artifacts could not be associated with a specific grave, they may indicate the practice of grave decoration at the site. More suggestive evidence was found in 2007 when archaeologists discovered a total of 78 oyster shells spread across multiple graves (Sipe 2011:501-02). No more than three or four oyster shells were found across the remainder of the site. This heavy and localized concentration of shells may indicate cultural activity related to the leaving of grave decorations atop burials. The use of oyster shells as grave decorations in African American cemeteries is a practice seen at other sites across Virginia and the southeastern United States that may reflect the survival of certain West African burial traditions (Rainville 2009:73 Vlach 1990:143).

In September of 2014, the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery Memorial was officially dedicated, and the names of each person known to be buried there read aloud to gathered descendants, researchers, and community members (Samuels 2014). This project serves as an example of the important and meaningful results attained through extensive multi-disciplinary research in the recognition and preservation of these African American cemetery sites. All too often destroyed by suburban development, the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery is a reminder of the need to continue this line of research so that these important stories are not forgotten, but are preserved for generations to come.

Summary

The plantation landscape was carefully tailored by its owner to convey messages of domination over nature, and display the owner's social importance. Though enslaved African Americans were forced to operate within these landscapes, they were able to perceive and manipulate them in such a way as to make them their own. These perceived landscapes presented enslaved African Americans with places that were often unrecognizable to their white overseers and elites, where practices and traditions distinct to the enslaved community could be fostered and maintained. The cemeteries used by these bondsmen and women were places where the enslaved community could reinforce their individual and corporate identities as human beings, rather than as property, by observing an amalgam of distinct burial practices and customs in commemorating their dead. The following chapter discusses the Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery, and analyzes its cultural, spatial, and temporal contexts in an effort to understand how this space was integrated into the enslaved plantation landscape.

Chapter 3: Contexts of the Slave Cemetery at Mount Vernon

Introduction

This chapter will assess and analyze the historical, oral historical, and previous archaeological data concerning the Slave Cemetery at Mount Vernon in an effort to understand how this space fit into the perceived landscapes of Mount Vernon's African American population. Furthermore, the possibility of additional burial grounds utilized by enslaved African Americans across Washington's extensive 8,000 acre plantation will be explored. One of these potential burial grounds, the Wessynton Cemetery, will be analyzed in detail with the use of geospatial analysis, aerial photography, and historic-period maps. In so doing, it is possible to begin to reconstruct these portions of Mount Vernon's eighteenth and nineteenth century plantation landscapes that went unobserved or unrecorded by the Washington family and their white overseers. This chapter will conclude with a summary of the geophysical and archaeological work that has been completed in the Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery as of 2012, prior to the start of the 2014 full-scale archaeological survey.

Historical Research: Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery

Little historical documentation of Mount Vernon's Slave Cemetery exists. Slave life, beyond the labor those individuals provided, was rarely considered worth recording by plantation owners and managers; the writings of Washington, his overseers, and the subsequent executors of the estate prove no different. Though

Washington was meticulous in recording the work and progress of his estate, no list of slave deaths or slave burials at Mount Vernon appears to have ever been made, or has ever been found. Likewise, the subsequent owners of the estate were even less rigorous in recording pertinent details to the estate's operation, let alone the details of slave life and death. Though it seems that slave burials at Mount Vernon were never explicitly recorded, it is still possible to paint a very fragmentary picture of the cemetery and the deaths of slaves from a number of sources.

Mount Vernon's overseers and managers from the five farms were required to produce reports that would be compiled into a weekly summary by the plantation manager. These reports detailed the overall workings of the plantation, as well as served to log the work and activities performed by enslaved African Americans. In so doing, managers inadvertently recorded a number of deaths by documenting the work of carpenters on the plantation as they built coffins for the recently deceased (The Tomb black notebook:n.d). Though these brief accounts go no further in providing details of the subsequent burials of these individuals, they do show that some individuals were interred in coffins rather than shrouds and that coffins were being produced on site. Research done to date suggests that the earliest documented instance of a coffin being made for a slave (Jenny at Dogue Run Farm) was in December of 1790 (Whitting 1790). One instance each occurs in 1792 and 1794 (Whitting 1792; Pearce 1794). Five coffins were made in 1797 to bury children and adults (Anderson 1797).

A handful of visitor accounts from some of the many guests that spent time at Mount Vernon mention the cemetery space in more detail. In an 1833 journal

account, Caroline Moore, a visitor to Mount Vernon, noted seeing the burying place of Washington's slaves (Lee 2006:139):

> "Our guide first took us to the tomb where the remains of General Washington are now interred. They were removed from the old tomb about 3 years since… Near his Tomb, you see the burying place of his slaves, containing 150 graves. We then walked to the Old tomb, which is situated on the Bank of the Potomac; it is in a very ruinous condition."

It is unclear if the 150 graves was an estimate based on brief observation or a more reliable, calculated number. However, this account shows that graves in the cemetery could be discerned from the surrounding landscape in 1833.

An anonymous visitor in 1838, just five years later, also mentions the cemetery space just south of Washington's new tomb (*The Rhetorical Reader* 1838:162):

> "As we were standing upon this spot, a couple of spaniels came bounding along, and following close, was an old servant of the family, and formerly a slave of Washington. On examining him, we found he was born on the place, and recollected his master, and all he said with great distinctness. He was a very aged negro, and quite gray.
>
> "I found there was something to be gathered from this ancient of the family--and accordingly, as I stood leaning upon the broken gate, which swung before the door of the old tomb, put him in the train, by a few questions. "In front of the new grave--place, yonder," said he, lie buried a hundred people of colour." These it seemed, were slaves of the plantation, who from time to time had died here. He spoke of the great kindness of Washington, and his emancipating a hundred of his people . . . . Passing from one thing to another without much connexion [sic], he went on to say, referring to Washington--"I never see that man laugh to show his teeth--he done all his laughing inside. This I thought worth a page of description."

Unlike the account of Caroline Moore, who documents viewing the cemetery herself, this account notes the cemetery second hand through an interview of a former enslaved individual. Of particular interest is the mention of how many individuals

are interred in the burial ground: "a hundred people of colour" (*The Rhetorical Reader* 1838:162). Though it is likely that this number was merely a generalization, it is interesting to note in comparison to Moore's stated number of 150 graves just five years prior. Both of these numbers indicate that there exists a large amount of burials in the Slave Cemetery. Archaeological and geophysical research conducted on the site, which will be discussed later in this thesis, suggests that this number range of 100-150 burials may in fact be accurate.

An undisclosed visitor account published in the *Western Literary Messenger* in 1846 provides a more intimate description of the cemetery, and notes the completion of a recent burial there:

> "Observing some servants busy in a little grove, in front of the new tomb, we went thither.
>
> They were enclosing with a paling a grave very neatly sodded, and some sweet briar was still clinging to its native turf upon it. It was the grave of a favorite servant, an aged colored woman, whose good and amiable character had won respect and regard.—"When did she die?" we enquired. "She parted from us last Sunday," was the reply.
>
> There are many graves in the grove, and one of the servants pointed out that of Washington's favorite servant, who was with him in his campaigns, fulfilling his simple duties faithfully and affectionately. The spot is not forgotten, though the tramp of passing years has leveled the little mound. Nor was the humble cemetery a mournful spot: the birds were singing merrily in the trees, and the hand of Spring was molding the wild flower, and training vines over the graves" (Western Literary Messenger 1846:201).

These brief paragraphs provide a fascinating, albeit rosy-colored, insight into the cemetery space in 1846. First, a recently enclosed grave is described as being surrounded with a paling, or a small fence. Additionally, the cemetery is depicted as a humble grove containing many graves, suggesting either that surface evidence of the purported 150 graves seen in 1833 had diminished in 13 years' time, or perhaps

Caroline Moore's previous recollection was merely hyperbolic. This is supported by the condition of the grave of "Washington's favorite servant" whose burial mound had been leveled with "the tramp of passing years". The slaves who drew attention to this grave may have been referring to William "Billy" Lee, who accompanied Washington throughout the Revolutionary War and is believed to have died circa 1828. If this is the case, then the grave itself is roughly only 18 years old by the time of this account, suggesting a fairly rapid deterioration of surface evidence since the time it was enclosed. However, the slaves who drew attention to this grave may have been catering to white romanticized versions of the past and the idea of the doting faithful and noble servant. This trend can be seen in the roles other enslaved African Americans and employees at Mount Vernon played as it grew to become a national shrine, and a romanticized white perception of the past became ever more engrained (Casper 2009).

The only historic map identifying the cemetery was published by Currier and Ives in 1855 (FIGURE 3.1). The "Negro Burying Ground," as it is labeled, can be seen just southwest of Washington's New Tomb, built in 1831, in a section of woodland. The image shows the cemetery to be enclosed, presumably with a fence, and containing 12 burials divided into two neat rows running east-west. The individual burials appear to be oriented north-south. It is likely that the image used by Currier and Ives is merely a representation of the site rather than a true depiction of the area, as evidence from other sources and previous research seem to indicate that a much larger number of individuals are interred in the cemetery.

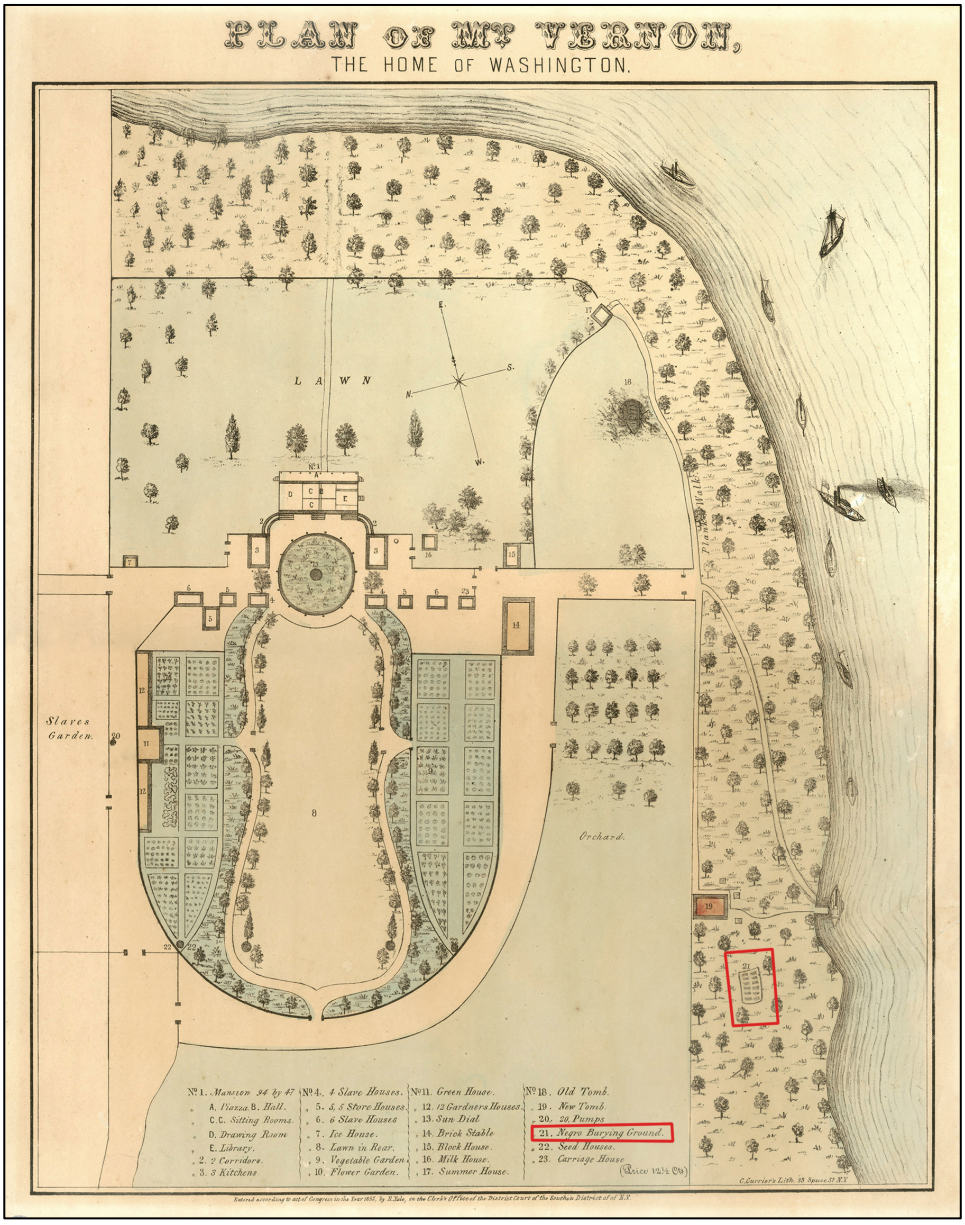

FIGURE 3.1: "Plan of Mount Vernon, The Home of Washington," Published by Currier and Ives, 1855. First known map documenting the Slave Cemetery". Red outlines added. (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association).

Oral History: Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery

Oral history accounts can provide another level of insight into the use and appearance of the cemetery. In a 1947 interview, Wilford Neitzey, Artie Petit, and Jessie Duvall, Mount Vernon employees who installed the 1929 memorial tablet on

the ridge containing the cemetery, recalled "seeing mounds of dirt about and rough stones that might be markers for slave graves." In addition, Petit remembered a man named George Ford who was working at Mount Vernon around the time the memorial tablet was being installed. Ford explained how he had been born in the room above the spinning house and that both his mother and father were buried on the hill where the memorial was being placed. Ford also related that there had once been a rail fence enclosing the burying ground before Harrison Dodge, Superintendent of Mount Vernon from 1885-1937, had it taken down (Slave and Slave Quarters black notebook:n.d.). This evidence gives credence to the Currier and Ives depiction of the cemetery as being enclosed with a fence.

Further oral histories speak to the potential bounds of the Slave Cemetery, as well as the other burial grounds likely used across Washington's five farms for the interment of Mount Vernon's African American population before and after his death in 1799. The exact bounds of the Slave Cemetery located on the Mansion House Farm are unknown, but it is generally accepted that African American burials are located solely on the ridge southwest of Washington's New Tomb. Dr. Judith Burton, however, notes that the boundaries of the cemetery may extend northeast in the direction of Washington's Old Tomb, which was in use for the interment of Washington family members until 1831 (Mary Thompson 2014, elec. comm). Dr. Burton's memories raise the possibility that burials may surround the Old Tomb, In a similar fashion to how several Washington family members and the Slave Cemetery are located in proximity to the New Tomb. The locating of slave burial grounds in propinquity to the family cemetery or vault is not uncommon. Thomas

Jefferson originally intended the Park Cemetery utilized by several members of the enslaved population at Monticello to be the resting place for his family as well, though he later established his family cemetery elsewhere on the estate (Bon-Harper et al. 2003:2). Other plantation owners would sometimes incorporate the slave burial ground with the family cemetery, though slave graves were often segregated and relegated to a corner of the cemetery (Rainville 2014:14).

It is likely that this cemetery located near the New Tomb was only one of a number of burial grounds associated with Mount Vernon's African American population during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is hypothesized that Washington's outlying farms might all have contained burial plots, although there is little evidence to support this. The black notebooks found in the Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington, at Mount Vernon, compile references and oral accounts regarding several areas surrounding Mount Vernon where African Americans were believed to be buried, though none of these locations were explicitly stated (The Tomb black notebook:n.d.; Slaves and Slave Quarters black notebook:n.d.).

The Tomb black notebook references a "Burial ground of servants," a half mile from Mount Vernon on land adjacent to MVLA property owned by the Tucker heirs (Mrs. Tucker was a daughter of John Augustine Washington III and inherited land along Route 235 North). The Tucker estate is shown on "Plat Showing Property of Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, August 1931," (FIGURE 3.2) although there is no indication of a cemetery.

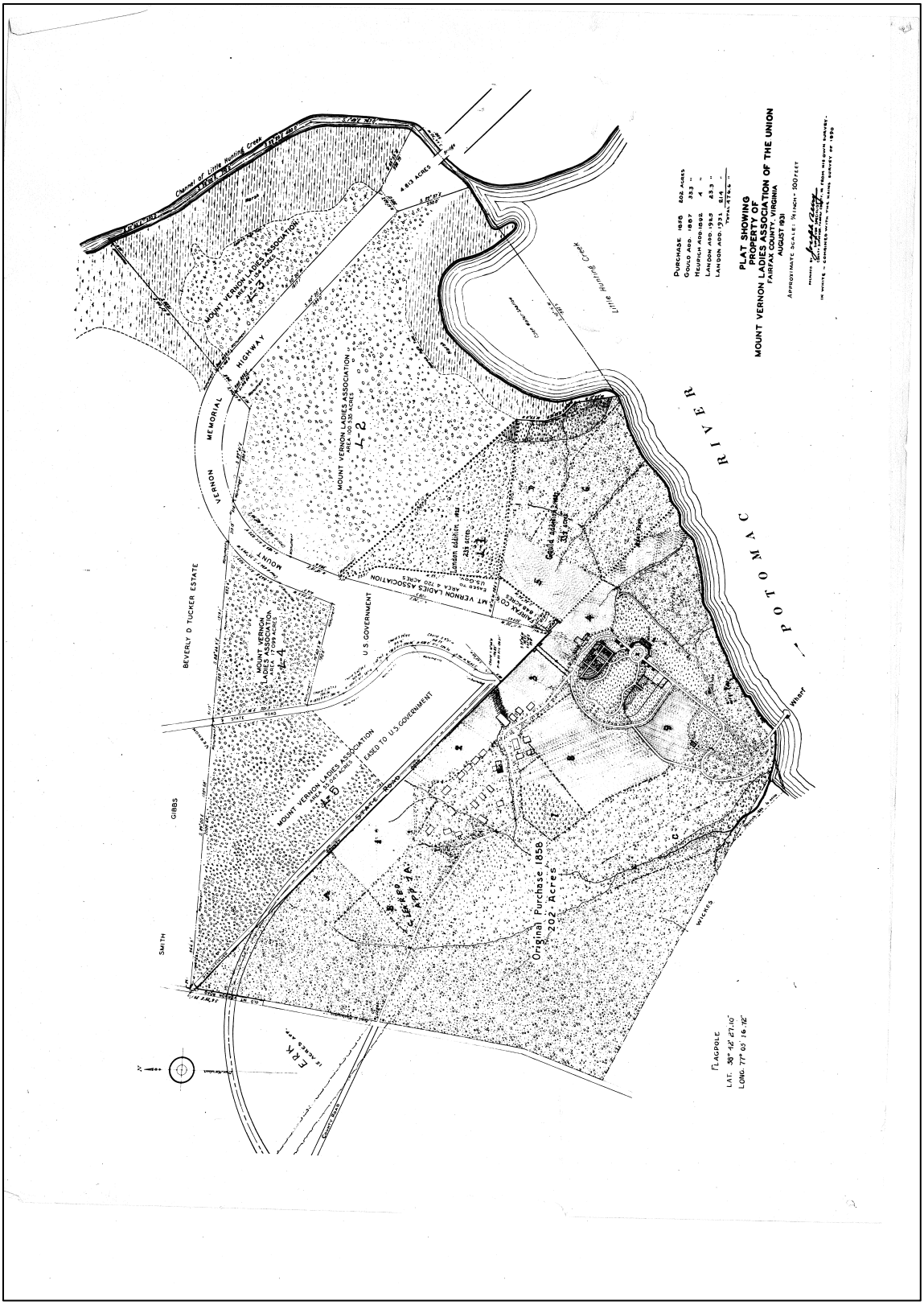

FIGURE 3.2: Plat Showing Property of Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, August 1931. Note the Beverly Tucker Estate north of the MVLA land holdings (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association).

Notes were made from a visit to a slave burial ground on December 8, 1947 by two Mount Vernon employees identified by the initials WB and IW. These employees are believed to be Worth Bailey and Irene Warren, Mount Vernon library researchers at the time (Mary Thompson 2014 pers. comm). During their visit to the cemetery, Bailey and Warren interviewed a Park policeman by the name of Mr. Freeman. They noted seeing 25 – 30 graves including one standing tombstone, "Nathan Johnson 1885," and a flat tombstone, "Margaretta Johnson 1820," as well as numerous broken and flat stones covered with leaves. Bailey records having stepped in a hole "nearly up to his knee" dug by neighborhood boys to see what was there. Mr. Freeman recalled seeing a funeral there attended by African Americans for a man named Johnson, and suggested that the stones may have come from the Alexandria-based, Chauncey stone cutting firm. He
further remembered seeing another stone bearing the name, "Blackburn," and mentioned that the cemetery had been enclosed with a fence not long ago (MVLA 1947).

Another note in this file references a "colored burying ground where colored people named Johnson are buried," located near, "where Dick Napier lives," and mentions the presence of stones there dating before 1792 (MVLA 1947). Census records note a Richard Napper living in proximity to Route 235, and lists his occupation as a gardener at Mount Vernon in 1940 (U.S. Census 1940). A 1944 tactical map of Fort Belvoir and the surrounding vicinity records a "Naper" living in the area of Gum Springs near the intersection of Route 235 and Route 1, roughly two

FIGURE 3.3: Map showing the location of the Wessynton Cemetery in relation to the Mansion House and Archaeological Site 44FX116 Slave Cemetery (Map by author).

miles north of Mount Vernon. This may suggests that another African American cemetery related to Mount Vernon exists in the vicinity of Gum Springs.

During the summer of 1967, The U.S. Plywood Corporation, in partnership with Miller & Smith Associates as the Wessynton Joint Venture, asked the Fairfax County Circuit Court for permission to remove bodies from a cemetery located just

northeast of the present-day intersection of Cunningham Drive and Mansion Farm Place, in advance of logging and the construction of the Wessynton housing development (Circuit Court of Fairfax County 1967a) (FIGURE 3.3). Articles in *The Washington Post* (1967:A9), *The Fairfax Herald* (1967:4) and *Fairfax City Times* (1967:23) advertised the intent to remove the bodies. On October 13, 1967 permission was granted to the Wessynton Joint Venture by the Circuit Court of Fairfax County to remove any remains found in the cemetery to a plot in the Fairfax City Public Cemetery (Circuit Court of Fairfax County 1967b). On October 17, a permit for the disinterment, transit, and reinterment of three unknown graves was granted to the Everly Funeral Home in Fairfax City to remove any existing remains from the Wessynton tract (Commonwealth of Virginia 1967). The following month, the remains from this cemetery were reinterred in a plot in the Fairfax City Public Cemetery, purchased by the Wessynton Joint Venture (Fairfax Cemetery Records 1967).[2] The original location of the Wessynton Cemetery prior to its removal corresponds with the likely location for the cemetery referenced by the Tucker heirs and also the one visited by MVLA staff and Mr. Freeman in 1947.

Mount Vernon archaeologists visited a home on Woodland Lane in a neighborhood near the estate on September 23, 2000, and January 9, 2003 (FIGURE 3.4). A resident contacted Mount Vernon regarding the alleged discovery of burials many years earlier by his elderly neighbor when she was a child, who believed the remains to have been relocated and reinterred at a memorial site at Mount Vernon. A stand of bamboo to the west of the home is where oral history suggests the bodies

[2] Disinterred remains from the cemetery located on the Wessynton tract were reburied in Lot #352A, Section 2, Site #1, in the Fairfax City Public Cemetery (Fairfax Cemetery Records 1967).

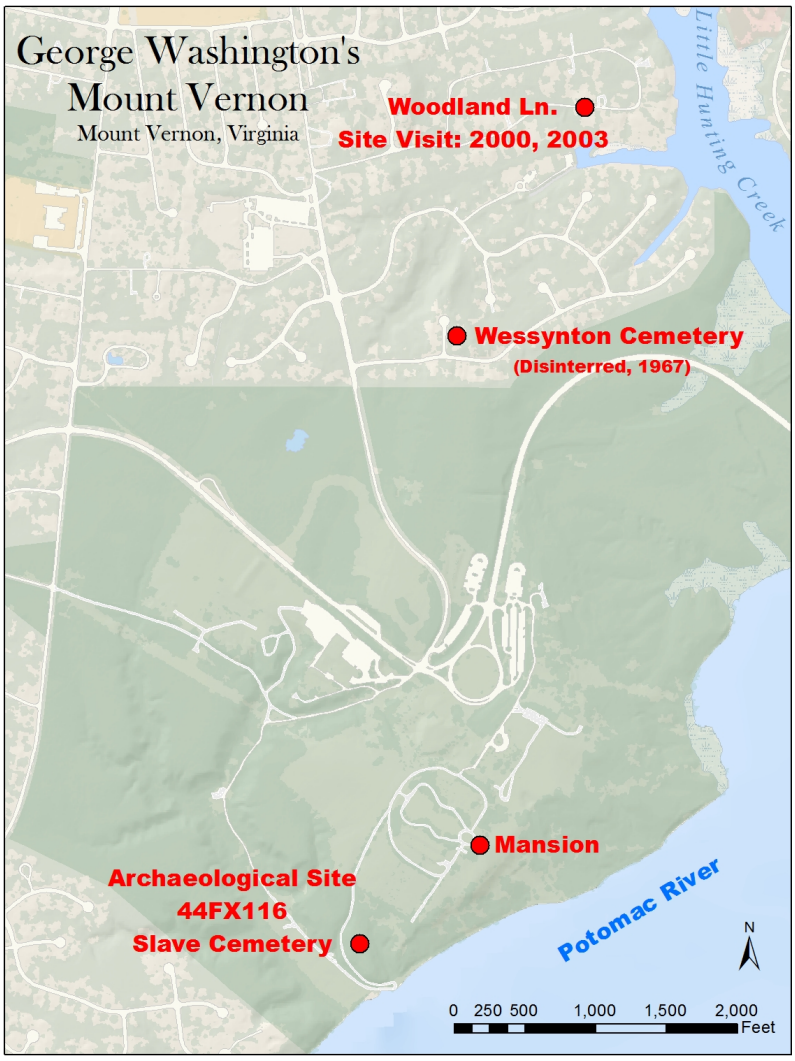

FIGURE 3.4: Map showing location of 2000 and 2003 Woodland Lane site visit in relation to the Wessynton Cemetery, the Mount Vernon Mansion House, and Archaeological Site 44FX116 Slave Cemetery (Map by author).

were originally buried (MVLA 2000). There are no known records of any human remains being removed and reburied at Mount Vernon. An article in *The Washington Post* (Diggins 1965:B6) reports the Smithsonian Institution removed several African American graves from property associated with the Mason family along Telegraph Rd. prior to construction and development. This story may have been a source for

the information given regarding graves linked with Mount Vernon's African American population.

These notes suggest that there is strong evidence for a cemetery associated with Mount Vernon's African American population in the Wessynton development, which was removed in November 1967. Furthermore, the proximity of the cemetery to MVLA property as well as property owned by the National Park Service make this burial ground a likely location for the 1947 site visit and interview with Park policeman, Mr. Freeman, by Worth Baily and Irene Warren. Evidence is much weaker for the presence of another cemetery on Woodland Lane. The story reported by the Washington Post regarding burials related to the Mason family (Diggins 1965:B6) may have been intermingled with oral history concerning the Wessynton Cemetery, especially since the informant for this story was relaying information secondhand from another resident.

Exploring the Wessynton Cemetery through the use of Geospatial Information Systems

Disinterred in the Fall of 1967 ahead of a major housing development project, the Wessynton Cemetery was located on a prominent hill on what was once the northern boundary of George Washington's Mansion House Farm. The *Washington Post* (1967:A9) and the *Fairfax City Times* (1967:23) ran articles announcing the intent to relocate the graves to another location if relatives of the deceased did not claim the remains within ten days. Walter Densmore, assistant director of Mount Vernon at the time, is cited as indicating the remains to likely be those of Washington's slaves. In their Bill of Complaint to the Circuit Court of Fairfax

County, Virginia, the Wessynton Joint Venture included a description of the cemetery to be moved, as well as a survey of the tract that delineated the burial ground. It goes on to record that there were visible signs of the burial ground on the surface in the form of ground depressions, however no headstones or markers were present (Circuit Court of Fairfax County 1967a).

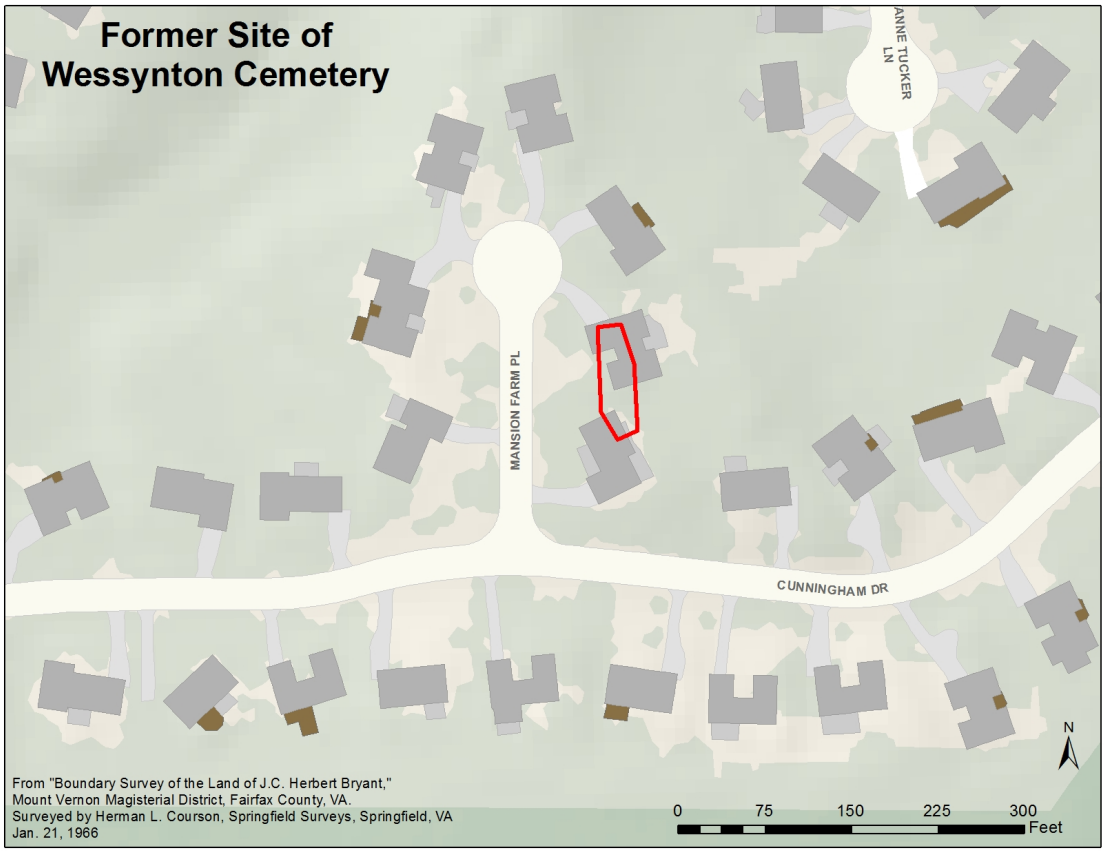

FIGURE 3.5: Map showing former location of Wessynton Cemetery near the present day intersection of Cunningham Dr. and Mansion Farm Pl. (Map by author).

By integrating the provided land survey delineating the burial ground into GIS, it was possible to locate the former position of the cemetery on the modern day landscape (FIGURE 3.5). Furthermore, by applying historic period maps to this new information, it is possible to reconstruct a portion of Mount Vernon's African

American landscape that had been lost to neglect, development, and the ravages of time. After georeferencing the land survey showing the cemetery that was included in the Wessynton Joint Venture's Bill of Complaint, it was possible to overlay this information on to an historic period map of George Washington's five farms, published in 1801 (FIGURE 3.6). The portion of the map that is focused on in this thesis depicts the Mansion House Farm, with the locations of the Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery, the Mansion House, and the Wessynton Cemetery clearly marked. Northwest of the Mansion, a dotted line indicating a lesser road comes to a fork, with the eastern split leading towards Little Hunting Creek. This road passes directly by the Wessynton Cemetery, which was located in a wooded section at the northern boundary of the Mansion House Farm. Much further removed from the core of Mount Vernon, this space would have provided an extended level of privacy for the practice of rituals and evening burials where enslaved African Americans could commune together and honor their dead.

Through GIS, historic maps, and aerial photography, it was possible to examine the site of the Wessynton Cemetery as it existed before it was relocated in 1967. Figure 3.7 shows the Wessynton Cemetery overlain by a digital contour map of the area. Just to the east of the given boundaries of the cemetery, the land falls away dramatically in a steep decline. This is in accordance with the 1947 site visit in which stones were described as being uprooted and thrown down a hill. Figure 3.8 depicts an aerial photograph of the site from 1937. The natural drop-off can be seen to the east of the cemetery by the shadows of vegetation. In addition to this drop off, two minor roads can be seen in proximity to the site immediately adjacent to the

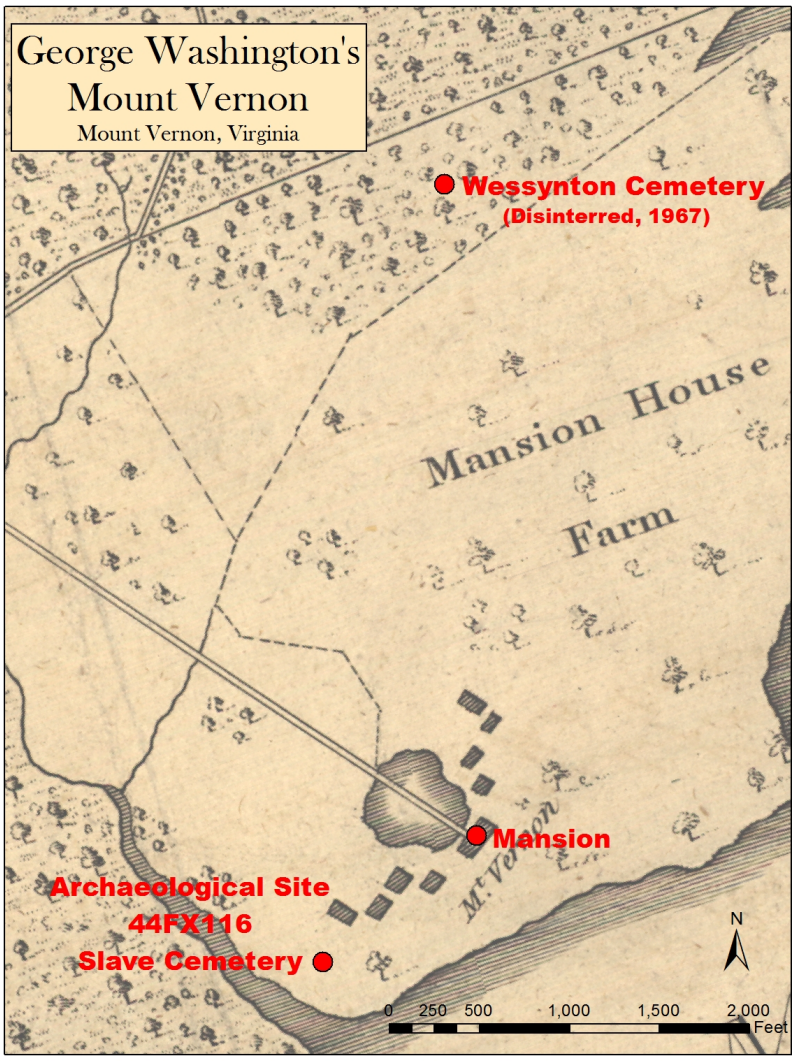

FIGURE 3.6: Map showing location of Wessynton Cemetery in relation to the Mansion House and Archaeological Site 44FX116 Slave Cemetery overlain on 1801 map of Mount Vernon's five farms.

cemetery. The two roads come together to form a single road before intersecting with Route 235 to the west. Upon splitting, the first road continues in the direction of the George Washington Memorial Parkway before abruptly cutting off. The second of the two roads veers north and runs just north and west of the Wessynton Cemetery, less than 100 feet away, following the crest of the hill before coming to a

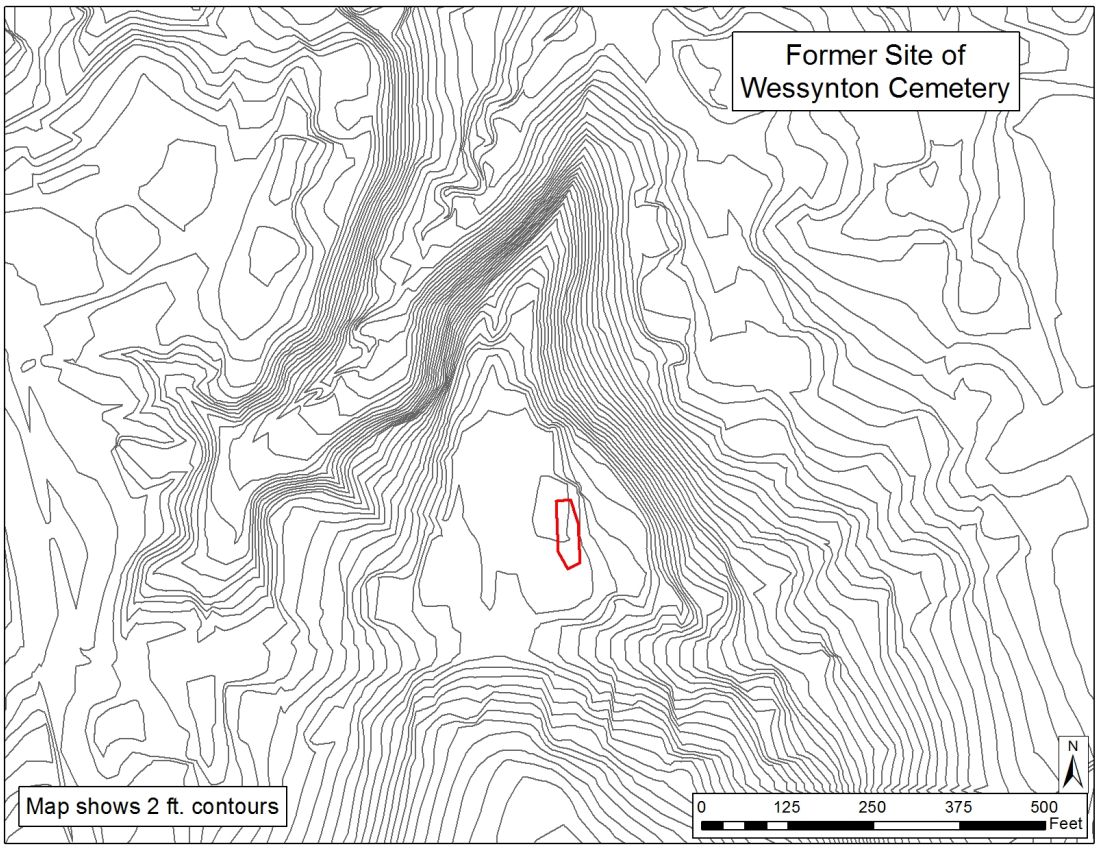

FIGURE 3.7: Contour Map showing former location of Wessynton Cemetery. Note the steep drop-off to the east of the cemetery (map by author).

dead end at the hill's point. These roads were prominent enough to be included in a 1944 tactical map of the area by the Army Corp of Engineers, where they can be seen in more clarity (FIGURE 3.9), though the cemetery remains unidentified.

The proximity of these dirt roads to the cemetery suggests that the burial ground itself was likely a known landmark in the community. Furthermore, that these roads are included on the 1944 tactical map suggests that the area was traversed well enough to warrant their inclusion. If indeed this was the site of the 1947 visit and interview with Park Policeman, Mr. Freeman, then physical evidence of the cemetery, including stone markers, were in existence at this time.

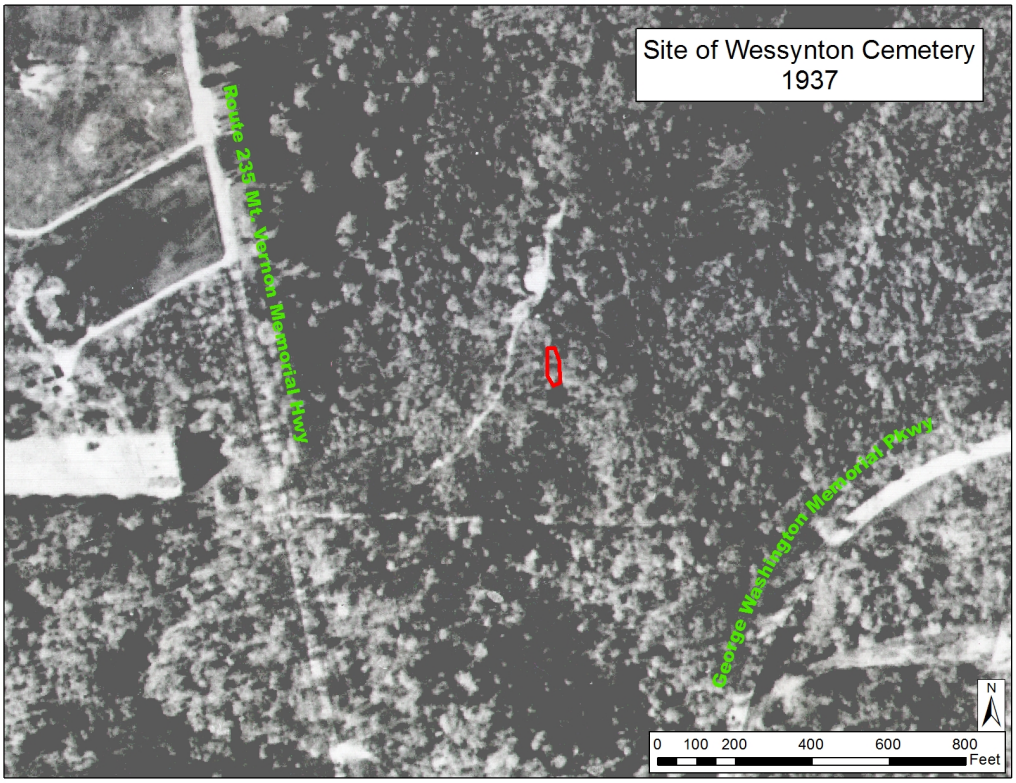

FIGURE 3.8: 1937 areal photograph overlain with the location of the Wessynton Cemetery.

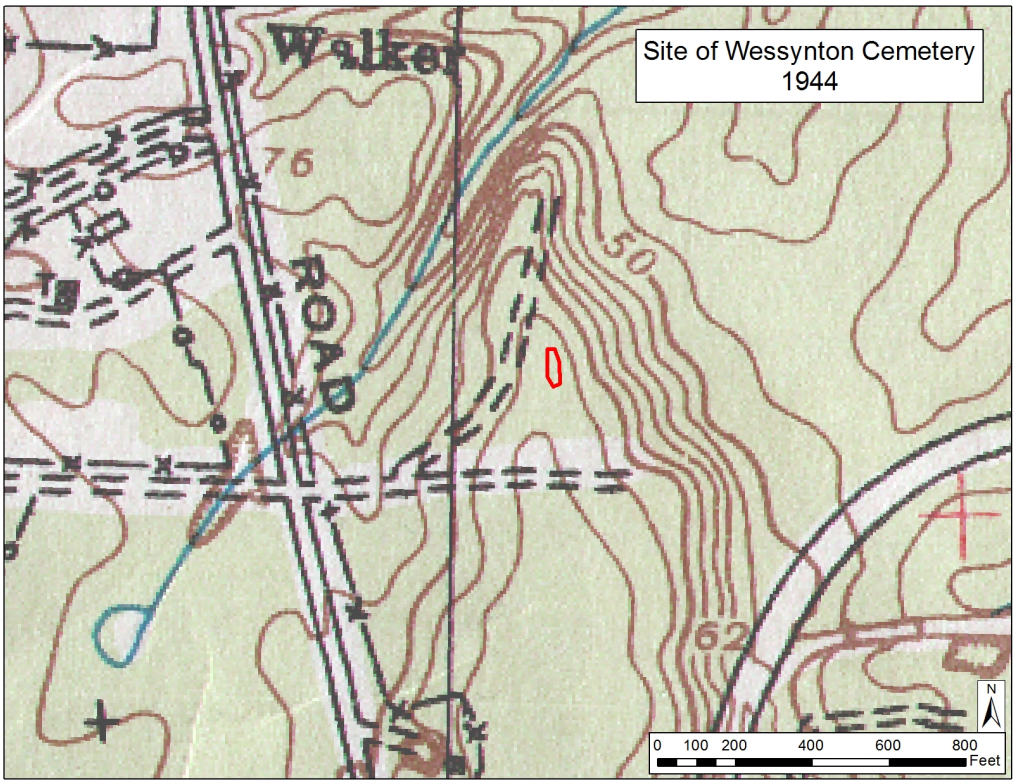

FIGURE 3.9: 1944 tactical map overlain with the location of the Wessynton Cemetery

More work needs to be done concerning the history and use of the Wessynton Cemetery. Both oral history and documentary research can aid in uncovering more information on this space. However, through the use of GIS, researchers have the ability to peel back the layers of time that have long obscured disenfranchised spaces such as these (Armstrong et. al. 2009; Thomas and Ayers 2003). Incorporating geospatial resources with historic maps and photographs allows us to see the landscape as it once was, and helps to provoke thought on how these spaces were used and perceived by the people who utilized them.

Geophysical Research: Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery

A geophysical survey of the Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery was conducted in January of 1985 by Bruce Bevan that revealed the possible locations of at least 51 potential graves. Due to time and equipment limitations, the survey covered only two portions of the project area: a 70 x 100 ft. area just west of the 1983 slave memorial pathway (north section) (FIGURE 3.10), and a 120 x 80 ft. area just south of the memorial itself (south section) (FIGURE 3.11). Areas east of the 1983 Slave Memorial pathway, and further north towards the memorial archway were not surveyed. The entire survey area was explored using GPR, while additional tests were made over portions of these areas with a magnetometer and resistivity meter (Bevan 1985).

Numerous subsurface anomalies were detected with GPR in both survey sections. While some anomalies may be refilled pits dating to the Native American

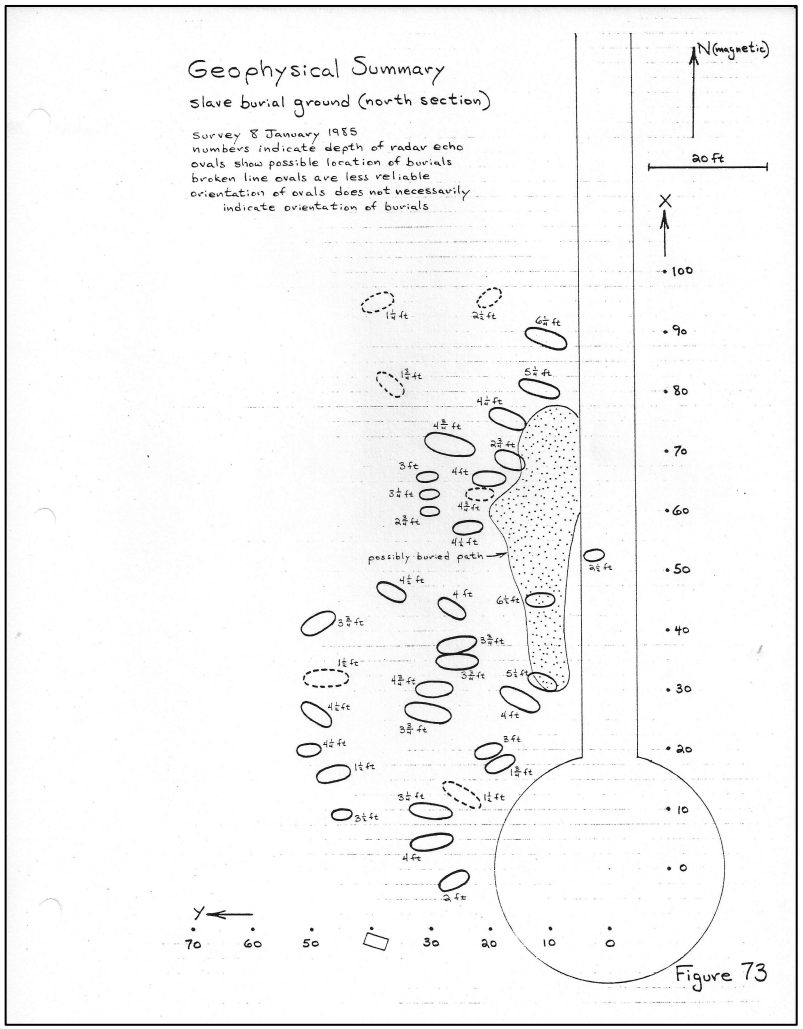

FIGURE 3.10: North section of 1985 geophysical survey depicting the locations and depths of possible grave shafts (Bevan 1985:Figure 73).

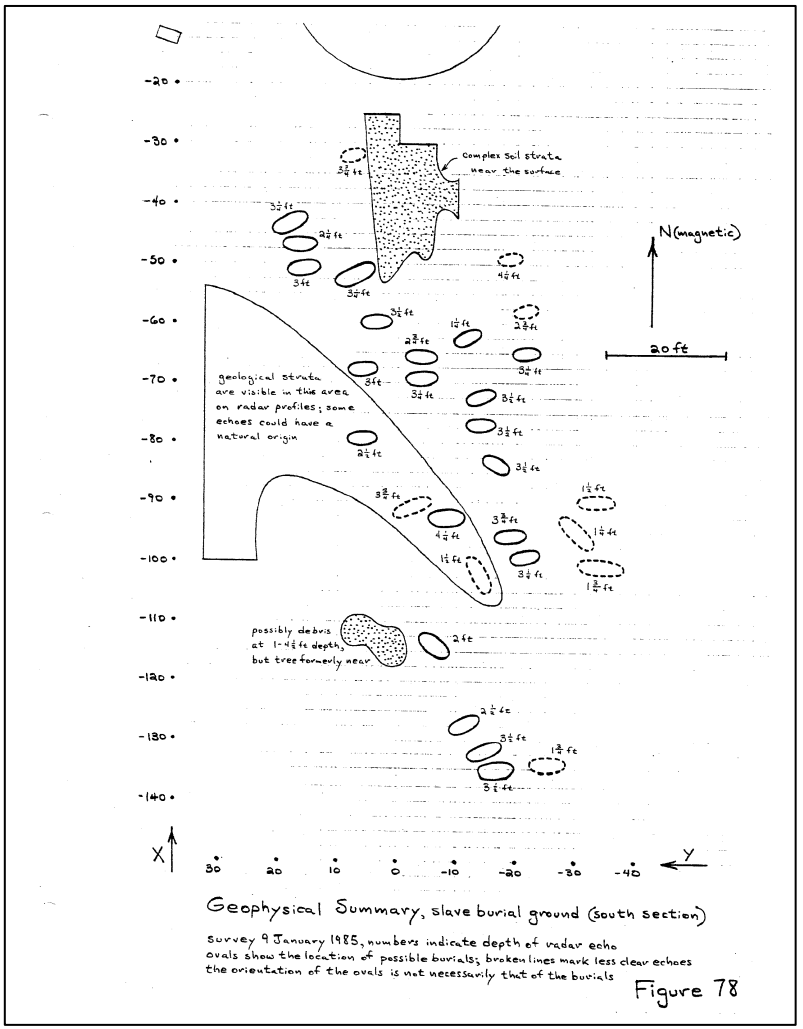

FIGURE 3.11: South section of 1985 geophysical survey depicting the locations and depths of possible grave shafts (Bevan 1985:Figure78).

occupation of the site, or other kinds of ground disturbances, Bevan interpreted many of these readings to be grave excavations due to their suggested sizes and shapes. Radar echoes were recorded at depths ranging from as little as 1.25 feet deep to as much as 6.25 feet deep with varying degrees of reliability. GPR in the north section of the survey area produced 30 reliable readings and six less-reliable readings, suggesting the presence of at least 30 potential burials in this area. One of these echoes, with a depth of 2.5 feet, is located underneath the 1983 memorial pathway. Likewise, GPR in the south section of the survey area produced 21 reliable readings and nine less reliable readings. Geological strata in this section of the project area were evident, according to Bevan, which may have affected the reliability of some readings. While the spatial orientation of these features cannot be determined for certain until they are ground-truthed, the results of the radar survey suggest that a number of potential burials are aligned east-west (Bevan 1985).

The geophysical survey also detected a number of other surface and subsurface features. In both survey areas, an extensive tree survey was conducted which documented the precise locations and sizes of all trees on the site over two inches in diameter. In the north survey section, an anomaly that Bevan interpreted as a buried former pathway was detected running parallel to a portion of the 1983 memorial pathway. Bits of iron from flower memorial stands were also found superficially and at shallow depths by an audio-indicating magnetometer. Those bits that were below the surface were left in place and accounted for. In the south section of the survey area, an unusually complex soil strata was detected near the surface that Bevan interpreted as a possible grave or debris-filled pit. Ground-

truthing these anomalies and revisiting their interpretations is one goal for this archaeological investigation (Bevan 1985).

Previous Archaeological Research: Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery

There have been four previous archaeological investigations in various portions of the cemetery (FIGURE 3.12) (FIGURE 3.13). All excavations were conducted in order to mitigate future maintenance and development of the site. In all, eight potential grave shafts have been discovered as a result of these excavations (TABLE 3.1). No grave shafts were excavated and no human remains were disinterred. All grave shafts were recorded at their highest possible elevation before being reburied (Appendix A).

Year	Number of Grave Shafts Identified
1994	3
2007	1
2008	2
2012	2
Total	8

TABLE 3.1: Number of Grave Shafts identified through Small Projects at 44FX116.

In August of 1994, Mount Vernon planned the installation of a post-and-rail fence to enclose the cemetery and to prevent visitors from accessing the steep hill on the southern end of the site. The intended locations of fence posts were marked with pin flags and archaeologists tested those areas for subsurface features, specifically grave shafts. A total of 43 shovel test pits (STPs) were excavated and three possible grave shafts were identified just south of the 1983 memorial in STPs

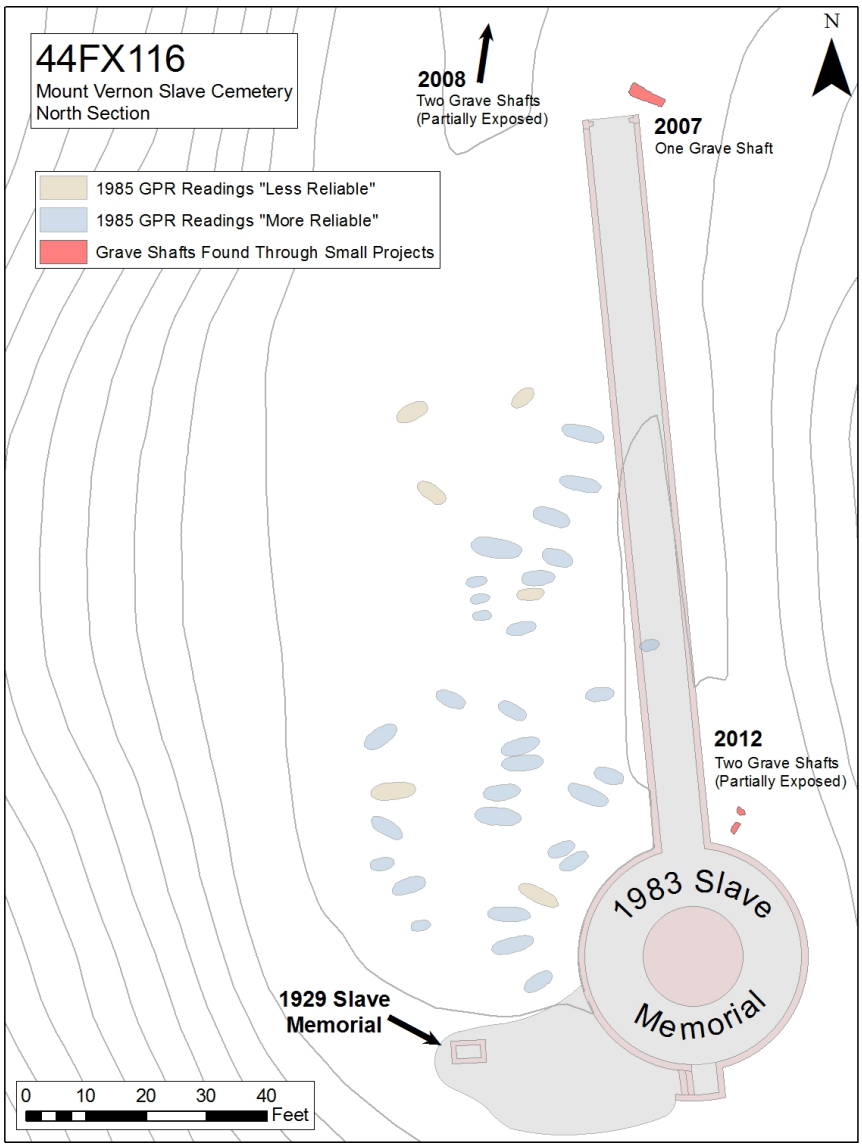

FIGURE 3.12: North Section of Survey area showing grave shafts discovered through small projects in relation to 1985 GPR readings (map by author).

19, 21, and 22. STPs 19 and 21 were excavated further to reveal the horizontal extent of the graves which were subsequently mapped and photographed. The grave shaft in STP 22 was identified without further excavation and was documented before being reburied. The decision was made to alter the fence design by installing

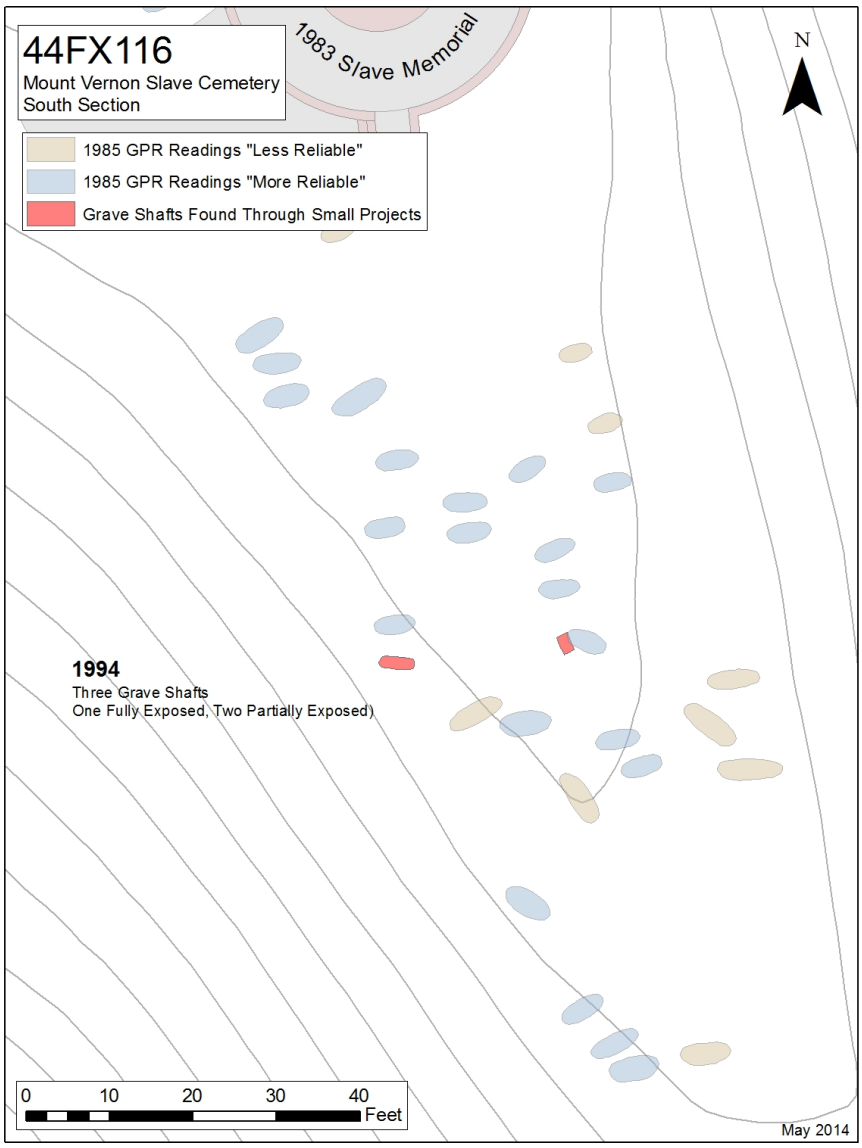

FIGURE 3.13: South Section of Survey area showing grave shafts discovered through small projects in relation to 1985 GPR readings (map by author).

post-and-rail fence segments in STPs 1-14 and 27-41. Two new fence posts were excavated (14A, and 27A) in order to accommodate a stacked fence that would span the gap south of the 1983 memorial. STPs 15-26, were backfilled as they did not

contain any cultural features. Artifacts from this excavation consisted of a small assemblage of prehistoric material (White 1994).

In June of 2007, the brick archway located at the entrance of the 1983 slave memorial pathway was failing. Archaeologists were asked to expose the foundations of the archway to explore the problem in detail. A total of two, 3 x 5 ft. test units (100 and 101) were excavated to expose the foundations on the eastern side of each arch footer. The majority of test unit 101 was comprised of soils related to the construction of the archway and contained a few prehistoric lithic materials. Test unit 100 contained a substantial amount of lithic material (including flakes, debitage, and broken projectile points) as well as a feature comprised of similar mottled soils to the grave shafts discovered in 1994 (Breen 2007a).

This unit was expanded in July of 2007, exposing a potential grave shaft measuring six feet long and two feet wide (FIGURE 3.14). The wider end of the grave shaft is oriented to the northwest, suggesting that the head of the burial is in this direction and feet are to the southeast. The burial has been hypothesized as a shroud-style burial of a smaller or skinnier individual. At the conclusion of excavation, the burial was re-covered with soil and four nails were placed in the ground to show the outline of the feature. A significant quantity of lithic materials were found scattered in the expanded test unit around the burial, suggesting the presence of a camp or worksite of Native American occupation (Breen 2007b).

In January of 2008 Mount Vernon proposed to plant five trees in two clusters, one located near the New Tomb, the other located roughly 30-40 feet from the slave memorial archway. Archaeologists excavated holes for the proposed trees to

FIGURE 3.14: Exposed grave shaft from 2007 excavations of the 1983 memorial archway, facing northwest (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association).

determine if any grave shafts were present in those locations. A mottled soil was identified in Tree Hole 4 that resembled the mottled soil found in grave shafts from the 1994 and 2007 excavations. This hole was expanded and a very straight line could be traced between the mottled and natural soils, indicating a potential grave shaft (FIGURE 3.15). Further expansion of the unit revealed a suspected corner of the shaft. The potential grave shaft was covered with plastic and reburied, and the extent of the excavated area was marked with pink pin flags. The Grounds crew was directed not to plant at that location. A similar feature was discovered in Tree Hole 5 but this unit was not extensively expanded. A line could be drawn between mottled and natural soils in the unit, but was much less clear than the line drawn in Tree

FIGURE 3.15: Tree Hole #5, portion of exposed grave shaft from 2008 proposed tree hole excavations (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association).

Hole 4. A portion of the feature appeared to be previously impacted, probably from the planting of a tree. This feature was interpreted as a potential grave shaft and was covered with plastic, backfilled, and marked with pink pin flags (Breckenridge 2008).

In March of 2012, poor water drainage in the slave memorial pathway prompted Mount Vernon to explore the possibility of installing a new drainage system. Archaeologists excavated one 10 x 10 ft. test unit (102) to determine the depth of the gravel in the pathway, if any features were present, and the feasibility of adding a new drain. The upper layers of unit 102 consisted mostly of deposits

related to the construction of the 1983 slave memorial. Underneath these upper layers archaeologists discovered a prehistoric occupation layer that, when cleaned off, revealed two potential burials (102G and 102H) protruding from the North and East walls of the test unit (FIGURE 3.16)(Pecoraro 2012).

FIGURE 3.16: Test Unit 102 from 2012 excavation, facing southwest, revealing two grave shafts protruding from northeast and southeast walls (102G, 102H) (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association).

Summary

Through a use of documentary sources, historic maps, oral histories, and archaeology, we have been able to attain an increased level of insight into the usage and appearance of the Slave Cemetery at Mount Vernon. Furthermore, when these resources are combined and integrated with GIS, new perspectives can be ascertained regarding the landscapes of the past. By placing the lost Wessynton Cemetery back onto the landscape, researchers are better able to understand the

components of the terrain, and begin to see the historic plantation landscape through the eyes of those enslaved individuals who inhabited it. Mount Vernon, like many other 18th and 19th century plantations, contained nuanced and obscured spaces on the landscape that often went unobserved by the white elite, but were integral in the lives of enslaved African Americans. The Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery and the Wessynton Cemetery where just such spaces, and an understanding of those areas and their integration into the greater plantation landscape will aid in furthering our understanding of plantation life for the enslaved.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Goals: Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery Survey

Introduction

Archaeological site 44FX116, the Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery, is located on a natural ridge southwest of George Washington's New Tomb, overlooking the Potomac River (Figure 4.1) Washington was originally buried in the family vault at Mount Vernon, a small tomb built into a hillside overlooking the Potomac. In 1831, his body was relocated to its current spot in the New Tomb, a structure that was built to Washington's the specifications made before his death in 1799. Previous archaeological research, combined with documentary and oral historical research strongly suggests that the area just south of this New Tomb was the location of a burial ground used by enslaved African Americans at Mount Vernon during the Washington family tenure (1735-1860). This chapter outlines the research questions and methodologies used for the archaeological survey of this area and the subsequent analysis of results.

Research Questions and Goals

The primary goal of this field season was to document features associated with the Slave Cemetery, with a particular focus on determining the number of extant burials. Further research questions pertained to the spatial layout of the cemetery, with an emphasis on ascertaining the orientations of, and spatial relationships between the graves themselves, as well as identifying the boundaries of the cemetery and any evidence of a fence that enclosed the burial ground space.

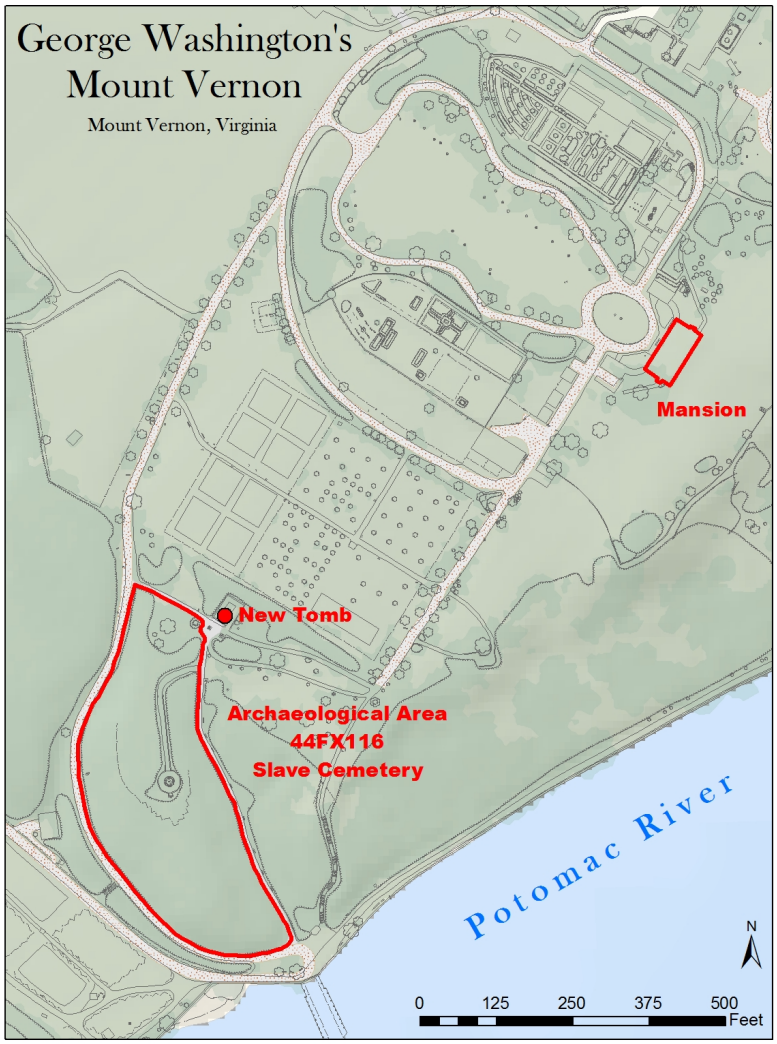

FIGURE 4.1: Map showing the location of Archaeological site 44FX116 in relation to the Mansion House at George Washington's Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon, Virginia (Map by author).

Based on the lengths of exposed grave shafts, it was also possible to conjecture if an interment held a child or an adult burial. This information was helpful when interpreting the demographic make-up of the cemetery. Excavations also had the potential to reveal if fieldstones or any kind of semi-permanent grave markers were used to demarcate burials, though it is possible such markers have since been removed. Furthermore, excavations could also produce evidence of grave

decorations or offerings. This information could hold implications pertaining to cultural attitudes towards death and behavior associated with grave visitation and commemoration by Mount Vernon's enslaved population.

The data from this survey has been utilized in two ways. First, it serves as the basis of archaeological and landscape analysis to better understand how enslaved African Americans at Mount Vernon used and perceived this space. Second, a knowledge of grave locations allows Mount Vernon to become better stewards of the site, ensuring the protection of those grave features from unnecessary destruction in the event that Operations and Maintenance and/or Horticulture crews are required to perform any excavations in preparation for the instillation of utility lines or tree plantings. The identification and mapping of grave shaft features also allows researchers to direct those departments where they may, and may not, impact the subsurface integrity of the site.

Research during the 2014 field season was focused on the area just south of the 1983 Slave Memorial circle, beyond the stacked fence, constructed in 1994. This area encompassed a portion of the south section of Bruce Bevan's 1985 geophysical survey that detected 30 subsurface anomalies, interpreted by Bevan to be potential grave shafts. Twenty-one of these readings were considered "reliable," while nine readings were considered "less reliable." (Bevan 1985). This area was prioritized for the 2014 field season as it is believed to be the southernmost point of the cemetery where the natural ridge comes to a narrow drop-off on its eastern, southern, and western sides. Subsequent field seasons intend to explore other areas of the ridge, further north towards, alongside, and beyond the 1929 and 1983 Slave Memorials.

Depositional History

The depositional history of Site 44FX116 is believed to be quite uniform due to minimal man-made build-up of soil on the site. As a result of the site's location away from much of the underground infrastructure located throughout the Mount Vernon estate, non-burial related cultural intrusions are believed to be nominal. However, areas immediately adjacent to the 1983 memorial are likely to have been heavily impacted by its construction. In the 2012 Slave Memorial Path Project, roughly one foot of topsoil and fill material related to the memorial's construction overlaid the occupation layer containing burial shafts 102G and 102H (Pecoraro 2012).

All artifacts uncovered from the four previous small archaeological projects that have taken place in the cemetery have either been modern (20th century) or prehistoric in nature. No artifacts that can be interpreted as grave decorations have been found, and nothing diagnostic has been discovered that could help identify the relative dates of individual interments. It is hypothesized that a large number of modern artifacts will be found in areas near both the 1929 and 1983 memorial. These artifacts will likely be related to the construction of the memorials or items dropped by visitors and covered over time. Judging by the large quantity of prehistoric material found thus far at the site it was deemed likely that more would be found as the survey proceeded. The apparent heavy distribution of prehistoric artifacts found at the cemetery site likely indicate frequent use and occupation by prehistoric and Native American populations.

Excavation Strategy and Methodology

The author served as Crew Chief of excavations throughout the 2014 field season at Site 44FX116. Fieldwork took place from May 30th to October 31st on each Friday and Saturday, and was conducted largely with the assistance of volunteer excavators, whom the Crew Chief was in charge of organizing, scheduling, coordinating, and leading throughout the project. Such an extensive project cannot be undertaken by one individual alone, however, and the author was assisted in leadership, excavation, and mapping efforts by Mount Vernon staff members, Dr. Eleanor Breen, Deputy Director of Archaeology, Luke Pecoraro, Assistant Director of Archaeological Research, Karen Price, Archaeological Laboratory Manager, Leah Stricker, Laboratory and Field Technician, and Eric Benson, GIS Manager.

Prior to the removal of any topsoil from the site, the geophysical map produced by Bruce Bevan in 1985 was georeferenced into ESRI's ArcGIS. The suspected locations and orientations of potential graves indicated on the geophysical map were traced into GIS to create a digital reading of the 1985 survey results. All previous archaeological small projects that have taken place at Site 44FX116 were also analyzed and georeferenced (see FIGURE 3.12 and FIGURE 3.13 in the previous chapter). The small projects completed in 2007 and 2012 were easily integrated into a digital site map in relation to the 1985 GPR readings. However, due to the nature of the small projects completed in 1994 and 2008 (STPs were excavated instead of full test units, and four of the five graves identified between these two projects were not expanded to reveal the full extent of the grave

shaft), these results could not be georeferenced in as great of detail as the grave shafts identified in 2007 and 2012.

In addition to georeferencing previous archaeological small projects and the 1985 GPR results in GIS, a new surface survey was conducted on the site, where each tree, tree stump, fencepost, and above-ground utility in the archaeological survey area was charted and measured to be integrated into a new digital site map. The internal and external outlines of both the 1929 and 1983 Slave Memorials were also incorporated in this survey. All of these elements were combined into a survey planning map, where a grid consisting of randomly selected 5 x 5 ft. test units was overlain onto the overarching archaeological grid used across the estate (FIGURE 4.2).

Following the production of this site map, nine of the random 5 x 5 ft. test units atop the ridge believed to contain the cemetery were established on the landscape via the use of a total station. Each 5 x 5 ft. square was located in one corner of a larger 10 x 10 ft. test unit, though only the quadrant containing the 5 x 5 ft. unit was initially excavated (FIGURE 4.3). The main archaeological grid used across the Mount Vernon estate consists of 10 x 10 ft. squares that are based on the southeast corner of the Mansion House. This grid runs parallel and in line with many of Mount Vernon's structures and above-ground features, and was established so as to best analyze the symmetry of Washington's Georgian landscape design across the estate.

The excavation strategy utilized in the 2014 Slave Cemetery survey was designed to cover a large area in small segments with the hopes of identifying

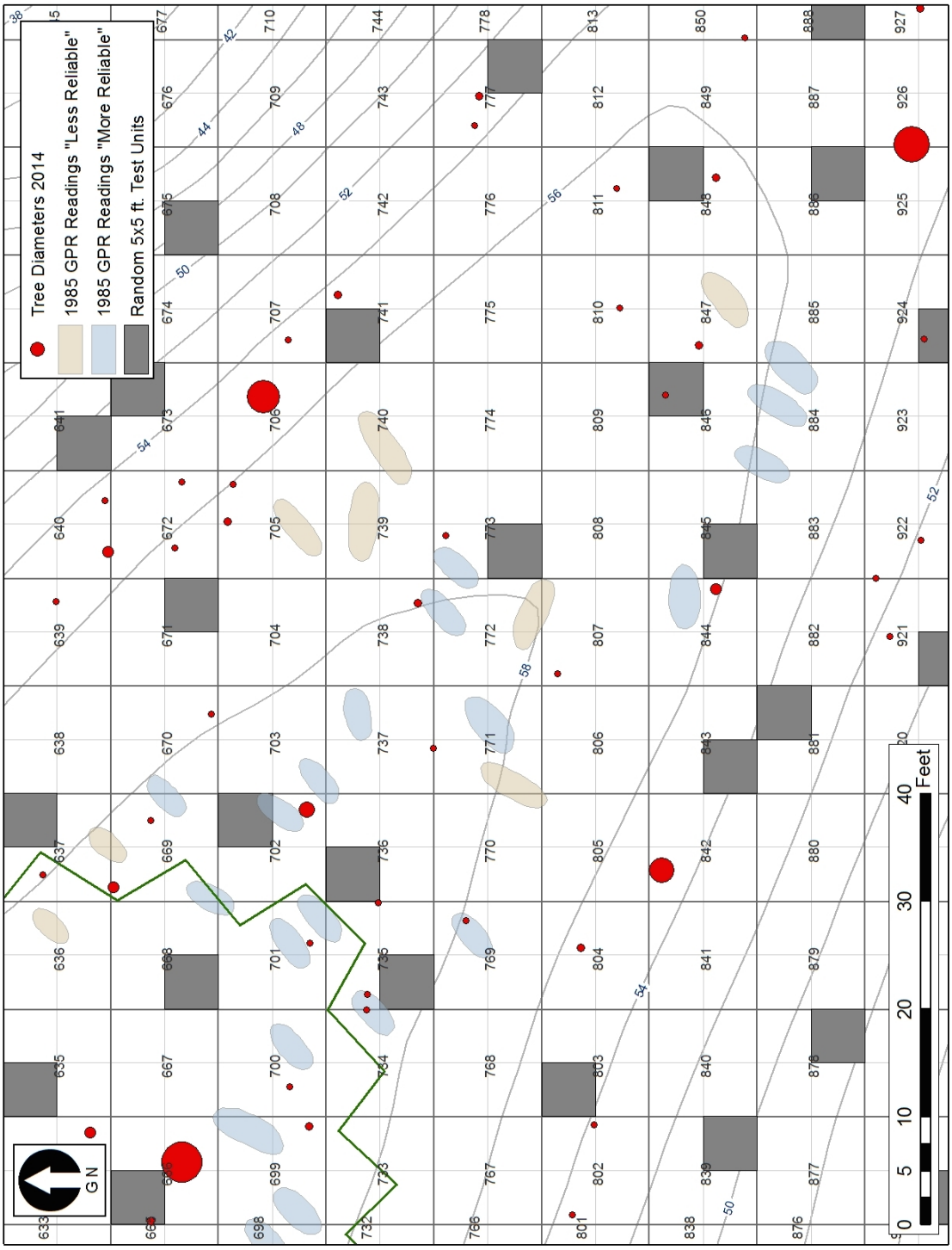

FIGURE 4.2: Planning map showing survey area prior to excavations.

individual grave shafts and structural patterns. This method was chosen to test the efficacy of the 1985 geophysical survey results as well as other areas were readings were not detected, or areas that were not surveyed. Furthermore, the lack of ground depressions and above-ground evidence of graves at the site precluded the designing of a test unit placement strategy that could test those features.

The methodology employed at the cemetery consisted of block excavations of these 5 x 5 ft. test units, excavated stratigraphically until the existence of grave shafts could be either confirmed or denied, or subsoil was reached. Excavations ceased once grave shafts had been identified and recorded, and no individual remains or related burial material was disturbed. All strata and features were recorded on provenience cards that contain the following information: Site number, test unit number, grid coordinates, short title, stratigraphic description using the Munsell Soil Color Charts (2000 revised edition), stratigraphic relationships, screening method and mesh size, location plan view maps at 1"=2' scale, opening and closing elevations, artifacts recovered and quantity of bags, and narrative notes. Additional field records included: a test unit stratum register, a survey log for elevation data, plan view drawings (1"=2'), profile drawings (1"=1'), photographic logs, and a daily field journal.

All non-burial features were thoroughly documented before being removed. Archaeological recovery procedures for this survey were performed in accordance with the guidelines set by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR), which state that a burial permit is not required so long as individual grave shafts are not excavated (See Appendix B). In order to gain an understanding of the

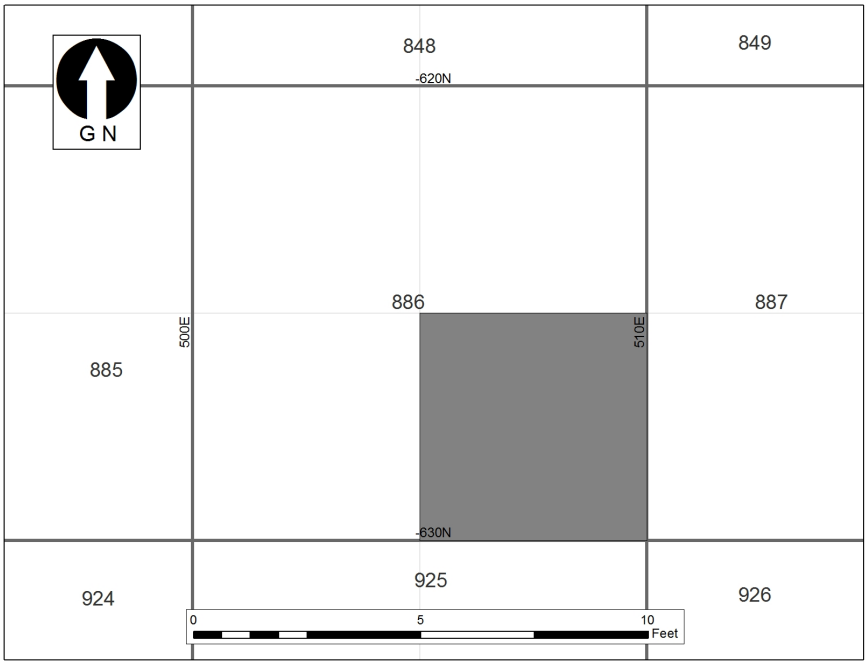

FIGURE 4.3: Random 5x5 ft. test unit placed within unit 886. These random test units served as the starting point for excavations (Map by author).

organization of the cemetery and the spatial relationships of the graves themselves, it was necessary to expose the full horizontal dimensions of the graves that were identified. Therefore, if a grave shaft was partially located within a 5 x 5 ft. test unit, adjacent 5 x 5 ft. squares were excavated to reveal the overall dimensions of that grave shaft. All recordation to include hand-drawn plan view maps of test units, profiles and elevations, soil color identification, etc. followed the guidelines laid out in the Mount Vernon Archaeology Field Manuel, last revised in May, 2013 (Pogue and Jobrack 1988).

Identified grave shafts were assigned a provenience according to the test unit in which they were first located. For example, if a grave shaft was found in test unit 802, and overlain by that unit's B layer, then the grave shaft would be assigned the Provenience 802C. Provenience cards were completed for grave shafts as if they

were ordinary archaeological features, however no soil samples were taken, and no excavation of grave shafts took place.

Because no diagnostic materials had been discovered in previous archaeological small projects in the cemetery, all strata were fine screened with a 1/4" mesh screen. Stratigraphic relationships were also recorded in detail. In addition, soil samples from all strata below topsoil excavated on the site were taken for soil chemical analysis.

Summary

The goals of this archaeological survey were multifold: 1) to document features associated with the Slave Cemetery at Mount Vernon. In recording these features, the spatial layout of graves within the cemetery were studied to answer questions pertaining to the cemetery's organization. Are graves arranged in clusters, rows, or some other form of arrangement? 2) To determine how many individuals are buried in the cemetery, and 3) to determine the limits of the cemetery. All of these questions will take multiple field seasons to answer. However, findings from fieldwork completed in 2014, the survey's inaugural year, have already given researchers a considerable amount of new data from which to begin answering some of these questions.

Through this survey, a better understanding of the spatial organization of the burial ground has been attained, and preliminary interpretation can take place. The results from the 2014 field season in the Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery are found in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Results of 2014 Fieldwork (44FX116)

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the 2014 field season of the Mount Vernon Slave Cemetery archaeological survey. First, an excavation summary is offered prior to an exploration of archaeological results and a more in-depth focus on the burial features themselves. The second section of this chapter compares the archaeological findings from 2014 to the results of Bruce Bevan's 1985 geophysical survey. A section on selected artifacts is also included. Finally, an analysis and discussion of these archaeological findings is provided, detailing why it is believed these results suggest that the enslaved community at Mount Vernon possessed a larger degree of autonomy when it came to the funerary rites they practiced.

Excavation Summary

A total of 28 test units (66 5 x 5 ft. test units), covering 1, 649 square feet, were opened during the 2014 field season (FIGURE 5.1). Unit numbers were assigned following the incorporation of the currently defined limits of Archaeological Area 44FX116.

The 2014 field season underwent three phases of excavation (FIGURE 5.2). Phase I involved excavating the randomly generated 5 x 5 ft. squares to test for the presence of grave features. Of the nine random 5 x 5 ft. squares that were excavated, grave shafts were identified within five of those test units (702, 735, 773, 846, and 848). These units were then expanded in order to reveal the full horizontal

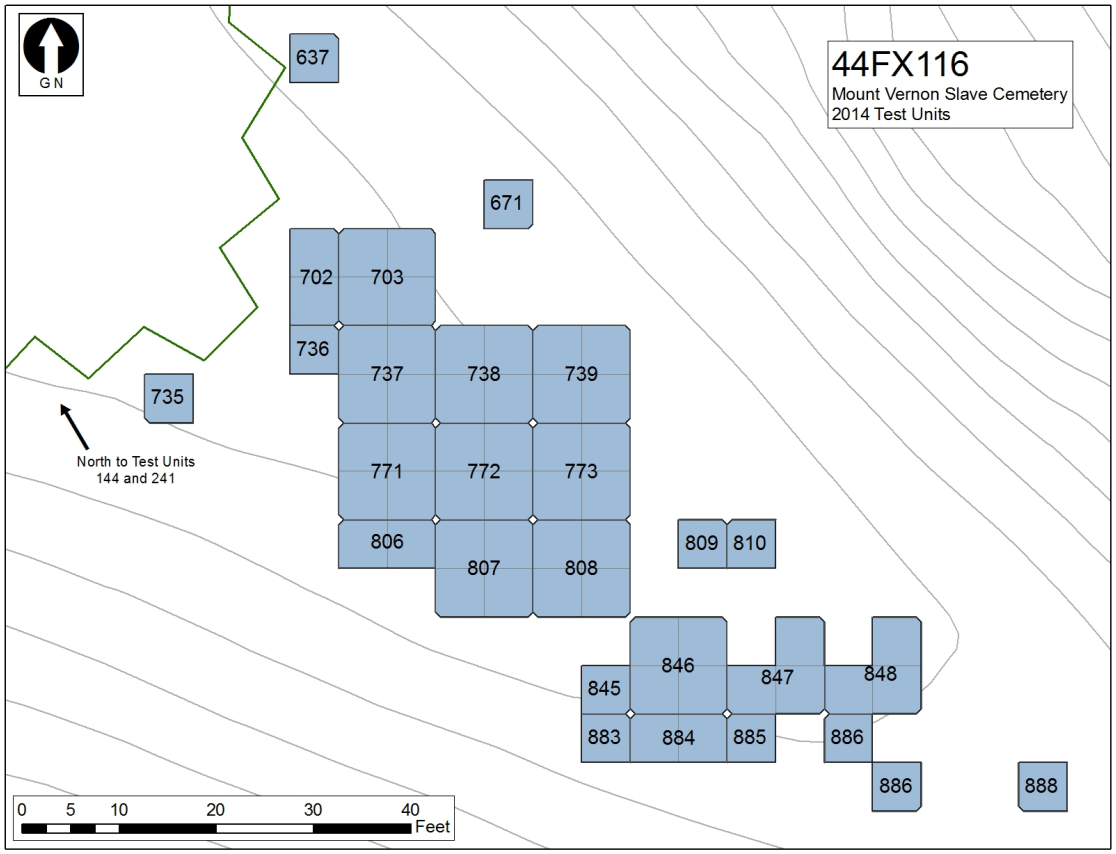

FIGURE 5.1: Map showing main portion of the project area with excavated test units (Map by author).

dimensions of those features. In many cases, an expanded unit would reveal a subsequent grave shaft, necessitating further expansion. Once it became apparent that a row of burials existed along the center ridgeline, the second phase of the project was designed to test for additional rows east and west of that line. The remainder of Test Units 703 and 738, the northern half of unit 806, and the entirety of units 739 and 807 were excavated, however no subsequent lines of burials were identified. Phase III of the excavation was designed to selectively test unexplored areas of the ridge. The southern half of Test Unit 846 was excavated, along with Test Units 847 and 884 in order to test a series of reliable GPR readings from the 1985

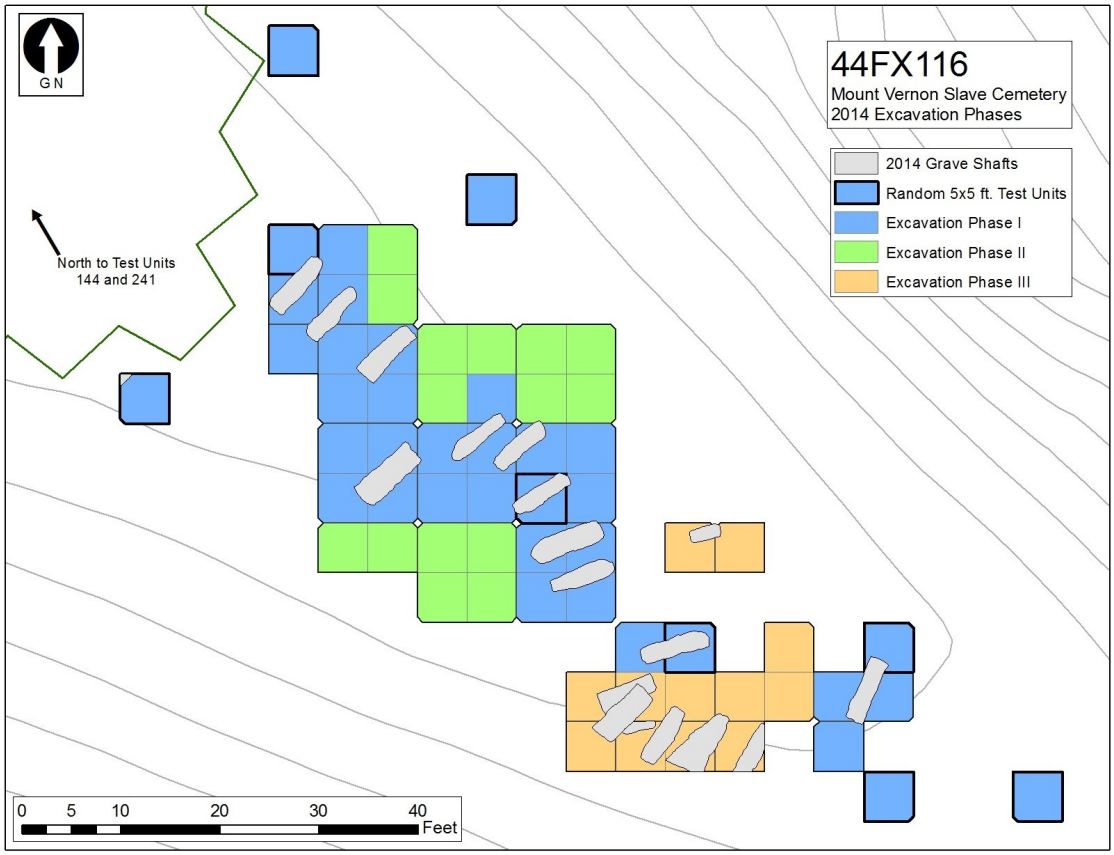

FIGURE 5.2: Map showing 2014 excavation phases in main portion of project area (Map by author).

geophysical survey. Test unit 809 was also placed in order to test a central flat expanse on the center of the ridge that was void of GPR readings.

Results

Twenty burial features were recorded in addition to a handful of non-burial features, both natural and man-made (FIGURE 5.3). Two of these burials, 737D and 241C, were originally partially exposed in 1994 and 2008, respectively, and were revisited as a part of this survey in order to fully expose and map their dimensions. Three lithic reduction zones dating to the Mid-Archaic period (6,000-2,500 B.C.)

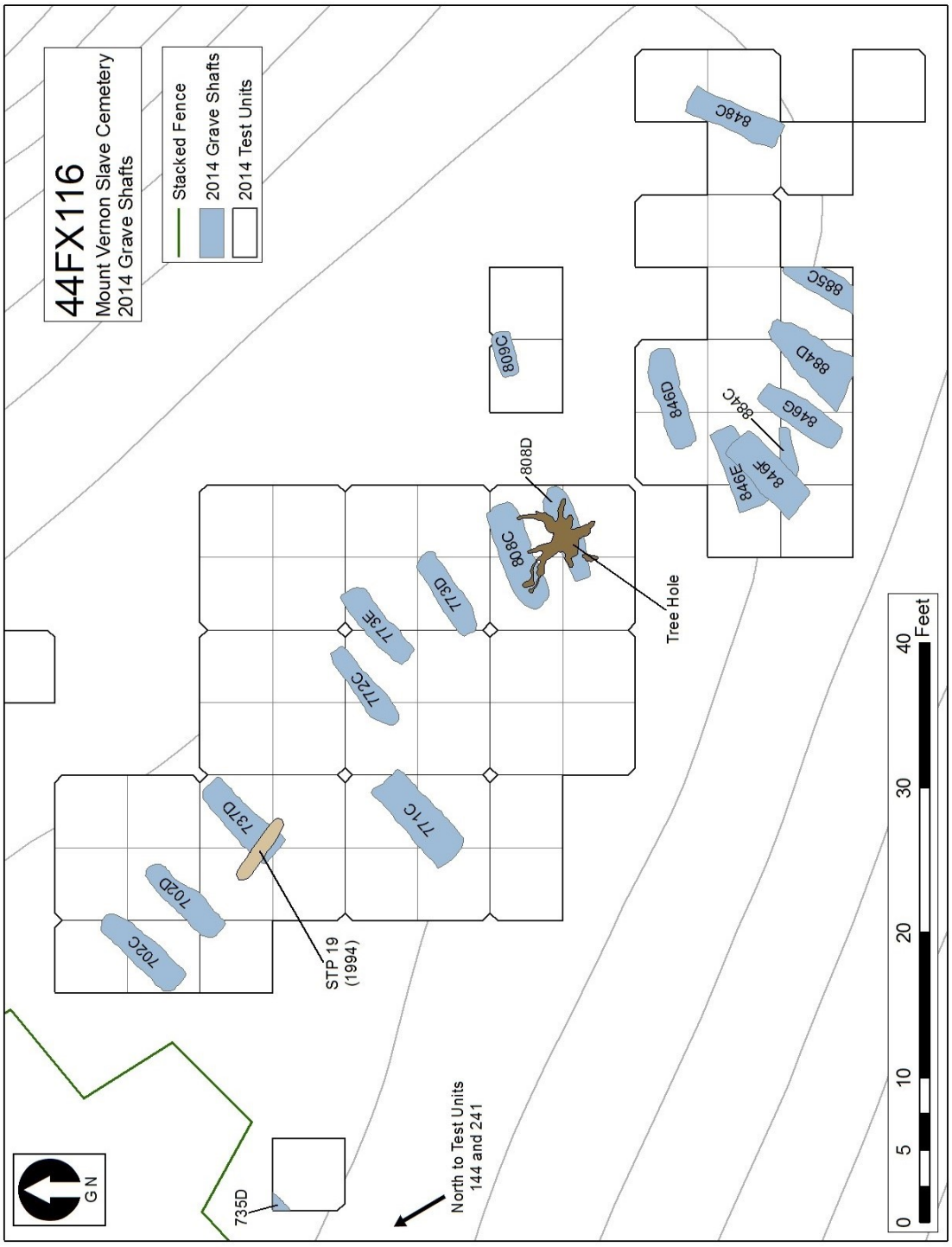

FIGURE 5.3: Map showing extent of 2014 project area with grave shafts and other features (Map by author).

were also identified and recorded. Furthermore, a prolific amount of prehistoric artifacts were recovered throughout the project area in each test unit. These artifacts included large quantities of fire-cracked rock (FCR), lithic debitage, and various projectile points. Only a handful of historic-period artifacts were found at the site, and nothing that was found could be associated with a particular burial or positively identified as a grave decoration.

In addition to the 64 5 x 5 ft. test units that were excavated in the main portion of the project area just south of the 1983 Slave Memorial, Tree Hole 4, excavated in 2008 for the proposed planting of trees near George Washington's New Tomb, was un-backfilled and mapped with a total station. Test unit 241 was laid in adjacent to this STP in order to expose the remainder of the grave shaft found in that unit (241C). Test unit 144 was excavated 70 feet northeast of this unit to make way for a new tree planting in that area. This unit did not contain any burial features, and produced only a handful of 20th century artifacts.

Burial Features

The eighteen burial features[3] discovered during the 2014 field season were identified largely by their oblong east-west oriented soil discolorations. Though each grave shaft exhibited a unique composition of soils that comprised their grave fill, most could be identified by their predominantly reddish-orange color. The pale, light-brown silty clay soil surrounding each grave shaft was relatively uniform

[3] This number includes all previously undiscovered burial features found through archaeological survey in 2014 and does not include grave shaft 241C, which was originally discovered in 2008, and grave shaft 737D, identified as grave shaft #2 found in STP 19 in 1994. Dimensions of these two grave shafts are included in TABLE 5.1.

across the project area. The color differentiation between these two soil types made for a marked distinction between grave shafts and the surrounding, undisturbed soil (FIGURE 5.4). Tree root intrusions were also helpful when identifying the bounds of individual grave shafts as these roots would often seek the looser soils that comprised the grave fill. This resulted in an often darker, thin line of organic soil that outlined portions of the grave shafts themselves.

FIGURE 5.4: Image of main block in project area. Grave shafts from left to right: 808D, 808C, 773D, 773E, 772C, 771C, 737D, 702D, and 702C (Photo by Karen Price).

All grave shafts exhibited an east-west orientation, or a close variation thereof. Two patterns of spatial organization could be discerned: 1) rows[4], and 2) small clusters[5]. Two distinct rows, and one small cluster, could be identified within the project area (FIGURE 5.5). Row 1 runs from north to south along the crest of the natural ridge, while Row 2 lies slightly southwest of these burial features.

[4] For the purposes of this study, a row is defined as three or more individual burials aligned side by side, generally in a straight line (RAS 2013:41).

[5] For the purposes of this study, a cluster is defined as two or more individual burials concentrated in a general area, not necessarily in a row or immediately adjacent to one another (RAS 2013:41).

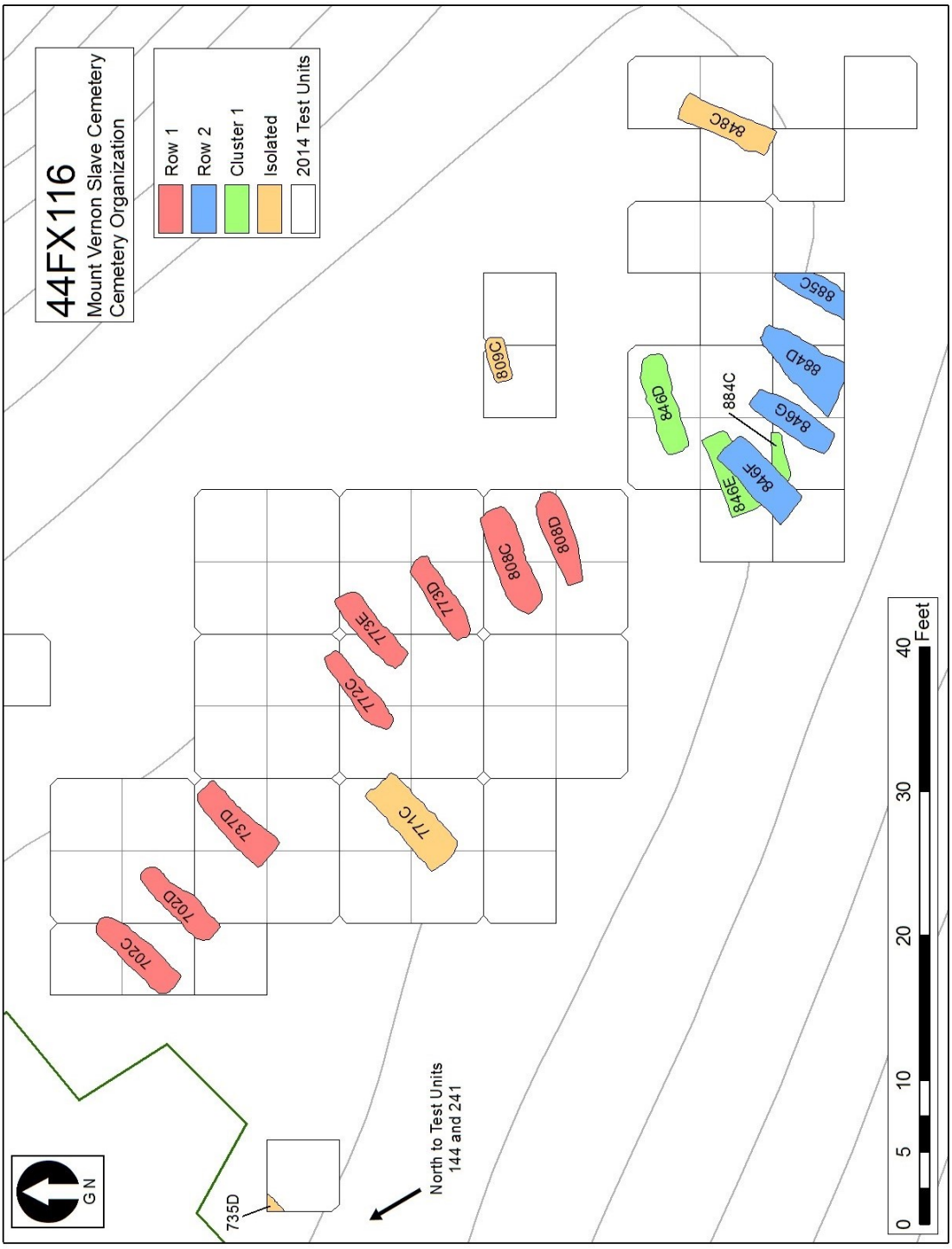

FIGURE 5.5: Map showing spatial layout and organization of graves in the 2014 project area (Map by author).

Row 1 consists of eight burials. The northern section of this row includes three grave shafts: 702C, 702D, and 737D. Each interment exhibited an east-west orientation with the head pointing to the west, thereby facing east.[6] Grave Shaft 737D was cut by a shallow, linear intrusion (737E) near the top of the burial, measuring roughly five feet long and one foot wide (FIGURE 5.6). Based on the intrusion's size and shape, and its orientation to Burial 737D, this feature was identified as STP 19 from the 1994 mitigation work.

FIGURE 5.6: Grave Shaft 737D, looking west. Note intrusion cutting upper portion of grave shaft (STP 19 from 1994 mitigation work) (Photo by Karen Price).

The southern section of Row 1 contains five grave shafts: 772C, 773D, 773E, 808C, and 808D. Grave Shafts 772C and 773E are both aligned east-west, while 773D, 808C, and 808D shift slightly in orientation, pointing northwest-southeast. As a result, the bottom section of Row 1 arcs slightly towards the southwest. Burial 772C exhibits a more "coffin-shaped" appearance than do the other grave shafts across the

[6] All determinations regarding the placement of the head and foot of a burial were made based upon the width at various points of each grave shaft. The wider end of a burial was determined to be head, while the narrower end of a burial was determined to be the foot.

FIGURE 5.7: Grave Shaft 808D, looking northeast. Note unique orientation of burial with the head point east, and the extensive impact of the tree root intrusion (Photo by Karen Price).

FIGURE 5.8: Grave Shaft 846F overlying Grave Shafts 846E (left) and 884C (right). Black outlines added. Grave Shaft 846D (top of image impacted by tree) and 846G (far right of image) are also visible (Photo by Karen Price).

site, although it is difficult to infer if a grave shaft contains a coffin burial or a shroud burial based solely on shape alone, and excavations ceased high enough above interments that coffin material or hardware would not likely have been found. All burials in this section, with the exception of 808D, appear to be oriented with the head pointing to the west or northwest. Burial 808D, however, is aligned opposite to this pattern, with the head of the burial pointing to the southeast and feet pointing to the northwest. Burial 808D has also been heavily impacted by the root system of a tree that formerly stood atop the grave (FIGURE 5.7). Row 2 consists of four

graves: 846F, 846G, 884D, and 885C. Grave Shaft 846F overlies two burials from Cluster 1: 846E, and 884C, indicating that this burial post-dates those interments (FIGURE 5.8). This is the only case seen in the project area where burials were intruding upon one another, and suggests that enough time had passed following the interments in 846E and 884C that surface evidence and memory of their location had been lost by the time 846F was placed on the landscape. Grave Shaft 846G possessed a distinct, oblong tan soil stain centered inside of, and at the head of the burial. Although no evidence suggesting the use of grave markers has been found in the project area to date, the location of this soil stain within the grave fill of 846G is intriguing. Grave Shaft 884D exhibited a conical shape unique among the grave shafts found in the project area. This grave shaft was also significantly impacted by a root on its southern end, possibly distorting its shape (FIGURE 5.9).

FIGURE 5.9: Grave shafts found in southern section of project area. From left to right: 846E, 846F, 884C, 846D, 846G, 884D, 885C, and 848C) (Photo by Karen Price).

Cluster 1 consists of three burials: 846D, 846E, and 884C. Grave Shafts 846E and 884C appear to be aligned parallel to one another, while Grave Shaft 846D is offset and to the northeast. Burial 846D is also heavily impacted by a younger holly tree. Grave Shaft 884C, though intruded upon by a later burial (846F), is clearly the grave of a young child based on the burial's size and shape. This burial also exhibits a "coffin" shape, similar to that of 77C.

Only one other child-sized grave was discovered in the project area: 809C. Test Unit 809 was selectively placed, rather than randomly generated, during Phase III of the excavation to test the large flat expanse along the center ridgeline. Though 809C was not detected on Bevan's 1985 GPR survey, likely because of its small size, its outline is quite distinct. Burial 809C differs from the other child-sized burial (884C) in its shape, exhibiting a more uniform rectangular shape rather than that of a coffin. Furthermore, this burial is not in a row or cluster of any kind, but is rather isolated on the ridgeline.

Burial 809C is one of four burials discovered in the project area that does not conform to either a row or cluster pattern of organization. Burial 771C, located just west of Row 1, Burial 848C, located south of Test Unit 809 on the center ridge line, and Burial 735, located 15 feet west of Burial 702C, are isolated from the other burials in the project area. There remains a significant level expanse grid north of Test Units 809 and 810 that has not yet been archaeologically explored.

Grave Shaft 241C, originally discovered in 2008, was further exposed in the 2014 field season in an effort to fully document that burial. Test Unit 241 was place adjacent to Tree Hole 4, which was un-backfilled. Excavations revealed the western

TABLE 5.1: Dimensions of all grave shafts exposed in 2014 survey

#	*Grave Shaft*	*Length*	*Width Top*	*Width Max.*	*Width Bottom*	*Orientation*	*Child/Youth / Adult*
1	241C*	7.80 ft.	1.56 ft.	2.91 ft.	1.78 ft.	E/W	Adult
2	702C‡	6.92 ft.	1.69 ft.	2.07 ft.	1.25 ft.	E/W	Adult
3	702D‡	6.58 ft.	1.56 ft.	1.98 ft.	1.07 ft.	E/W	Adult
4	735D†‡	-	-	-	-	E/W	-
5	737D*‡	6.58 ft.	2.28 ft.	2.28 ft.	1.50 ft.	E/W	Adult
6	771C‡	7.08 ft.	2.53 ft.	2.69 ft.	2.44 ft.	E/W	Adult
7	772C‡	6.55 ft.	0.87 ft.	1.79 ft.	0.88 ft.	E/W	Adult
8	773D	6.28 ft.	1.23 ft.	1.81 ft.	1.57 ft.	NW/SE	Adult/Youth
9	773E‡	6.25 ft.	1.34 ft.	1.87 ft.	1.32 ft.	E/W	Adult/Youth
10	808C	7.62 ft.	1.82 ft.	2.33 ft.	1.82 ft.	NW/SE	Adult
11	808D*	6.66 ft.	1.39 ft.	2.04 ft.	1.02 ft.	NW/SE	Adult
12	809C	3.13 ft.	0.99 ft.	1.41 ft.	1.05 ft.	NW/SE	Child
13	846D	7.04 ft.	1.54 ft.	1.94 ft.	1.35 ft.	NW/SE	Adult
14	846E‡	5.84 ft.	2.22 ft.	2.22 ft.	1.55 ft.	NW/SE	Adult/Youth
15	846F‡	6.32 ft.	2.35 ft.	2.48 ft.	2.17 ft.	E/W	Adult
16	846G‡	6.25 ft.	1.46 ft.	2.08 ft.	1.24 ft.	E/W	Adult/Youth
17	848C	6.74 ft.	1.80 ft.	2.05 ft.	1.99 ft.	NE/SW	Adult
18	884C‡	3.43 ft.	0.73 ft.	1.18 ft.	0.53 ft.	NW/SE	Child
19	884D‡	6.87 ft.	3.79 ft.	3.79 ft.	1.02 ft.	E/W	Adult
20	885C†	-	-	1.89 ft.	-	E/W	Adult/Youth

* Grave shaft originally exposed prior to 2014 survey
† Grave shaft only partially exposed
‡ Grave shaft aligns with 1985 GPR reading

portion of Burial 241C, alongside a handful of both modern and prehistoric artifacts. A utility trench running roughly north-south intruded the burial, though it is uncertain how deep this trench cut into the grave shaft as it was left unexcavated.

The full dimensions of each grave shaft exposed in the 2014 field season can be found in Table 5.1. A single measurement was made noting the length of each burial, and three measurements were made documenting the width: these measurements were taken at the top of the grave shaft, the widest point of the grave shaft, and the bottom of the grave shaft.

2014 Burial Features in Comparison to 1985 GPR Readings

One component of the 2014 summer and fall field season was to test the results of Bevan's 1985 geophysical survey. Ground-truthing these results both tested the efficacy of the 1985 geophysical study in detecting the number and locations of graves in the cemetery, and will also influence the development and refinement of the archaeological research design for the area. Further geophysical research will be undertaken in the coming years and results will be compared to the 1985 results. This future GPR survey will also test areas outside the bounds of the 1985 geophysical survey area to aid in answering questions pertaining to the burial ground's overall size and layout. Figure 5.10 shows the locations of grave shafts found archaeologically in 2014 overlain with the 1985 GPR readings.

Test units in the 2014 project area covered an area containing 15 subsurface readings detected in the 1985 geophysical survey. Ten of these readings were

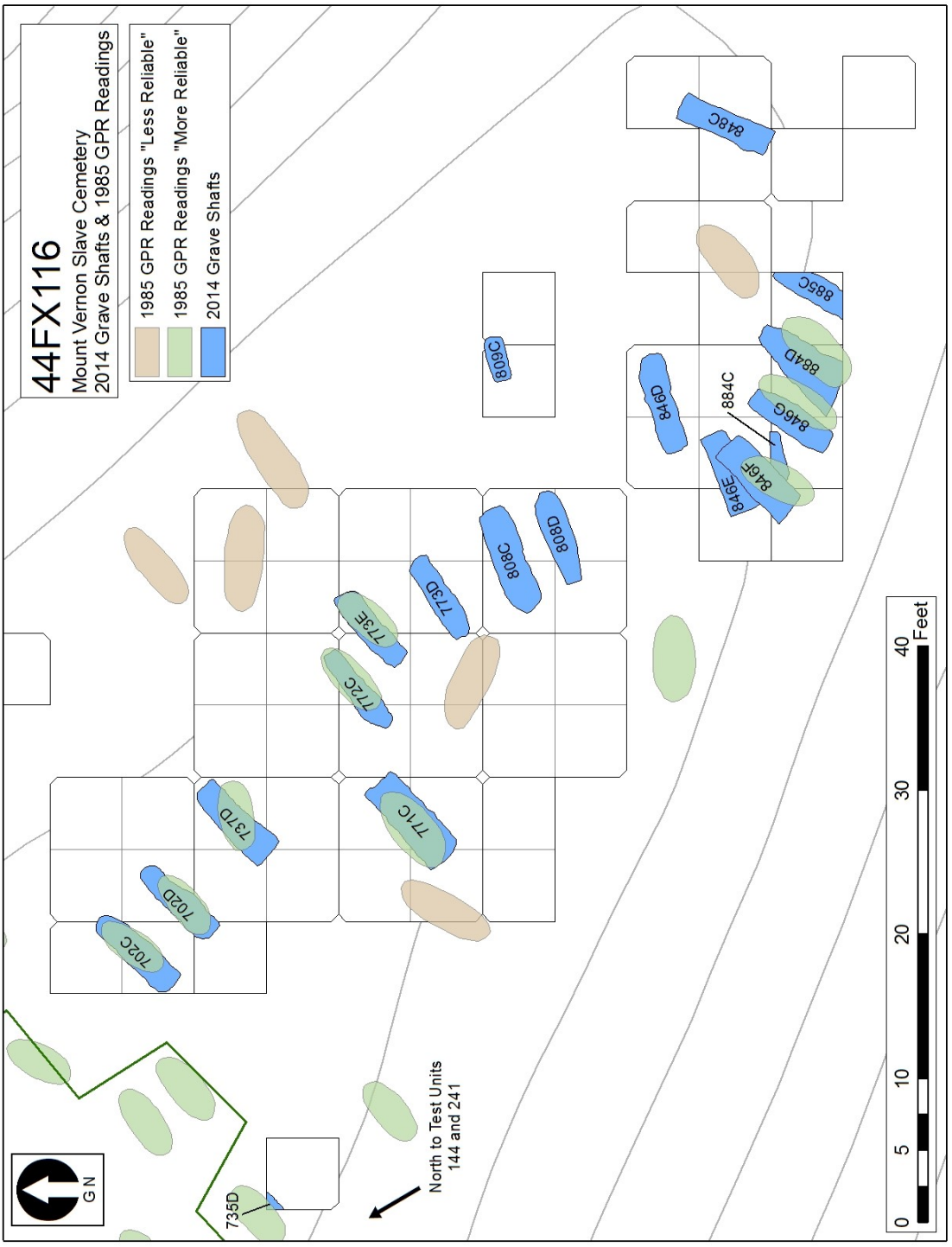

FIGURE 5.10: Map showing 2014 grave shafts in relation to 1985 GPR readings (Map by author).

considered “more reliable” and the remaining five readings were considered “less reliable” in Bevan’s interpretation (Bevan 1985:15). All ten “more reliable readings” detected by Bevan that were covered by the project area were confirmed through this archaeological survey. Grave Shafts 735D, 702C, 702D, 737D, 771C, 772C, 773E, 846G, and 884D aligned precisely with Bevan’s more reliable GPR readings. Grave Shafts 846E, 846F, and 884C were also detected, however since these burials were stacked upon each other, GPR detected a single, large subsurface disturbance. Bevan in turn interpreted this as a single grave shaft. All five of Bevan’s “less reliable” readings that were explored in the project area did not turn out to be grave shafts, but instead reflected minor subsurface depositional anomalies such as more loosely

FIGURE 5.11: Grave Shaft 846D, looking southeast. Note significant disturbance by the extant holly tree (Photo by Karen Price).

FIGURE 5.12: Grave Shaft 809C, looking west (Photo by Karen Price).

compacted soils or tree roots.

Six grave shafts were found in the project area that were not detected in the 1985 geophysical survey. These grave shafts are 808C, 808D, 809C, 846D, and 848C. Grave Shaft 808D was heavily impacted by the root system of a no longer extant large tree. This root system, which also intruded upon 808C but to a lesser extent, likely distorted any radar readings that were made in the area. Burial 773D lies in-between Burials 773E and 808C in an area largely un-impacted by any anomalies other than the burial itself. It is unclear why this grave was not detected in the 1985 survey, however Bevan made clear in his report that sometimes graves simply cannot be detected by GPR (Bevan 1985:15-16).

Grave Shaft 846D was heavily impacted by an extent holly tree and tree root system (FIGURE 5.11). This would have made a clear radar reading virtually impossible to attain. Grave Shaft 809C, a child-sized grave measuring only 3.13 feet in length was likely undetected on account of its small size (FIGURE 5.12). Often times child graves are not large enough to be reliably detected through the use of GPR (Bevan 1985:15).

Selected Artifacts: Intaglio Glass Disk

FIGURE 5.13: Intaglio glass disk found in Slave Cemetery (left) compared with similar disk found in House for Families slave quarter (right) (Photo by Karen Price).

A small intaglio glass disk, molded with what appears to be a branch of coral, was found in a mottled silty clay layer (807B) barren of any notable archaeological features (FIGURE 5.13). The disk measuring 0.4 inches in diameter, 0.12 inches in thickness, and weighing 0.6 grams, was originally set in a brass button used as a cufflink. An almost identical glass disk was excavated from the cellar underneath the House for Families slave quarter site from 1984-1985 (Pogue and White 1991:30-33). Seriation analysis of ceramic artifacts found in the cellar produced a relative depositional chronology. This chronology indicates that the glass disk comes from a stratum likely deposited after 1769 (Pogue and White 1991:11-12). The connection between these two similar artifacts, both found in contexts associated with Mount Vernon's enslaved population, is intriguing.

Selected Artifacts: Copper Alloy Button

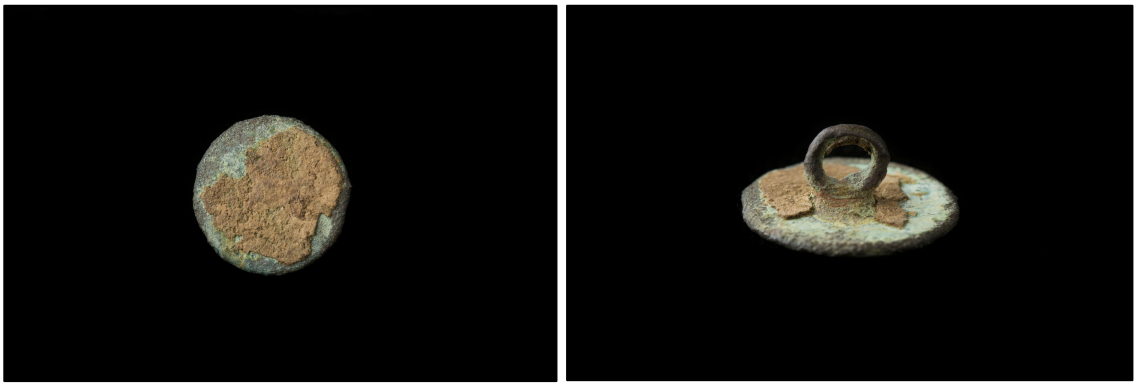

FIGURE 5.14: Front and reverse image of copper alloy button (Photo by Karen Price).

A small circular stamped button weighing 1.4 grams, and made of copper alloy was found in the topsoil layer of Test Unit 637 (637A) (FIGURE 5.14). This complete, one piece flat disk button has a single shank that appears to be made of either copper alloy or iron. The shank is both substantially bent and corroded. Corrosion is most significant around the base of the shank where it meets the back face of the button. The circular face of the button measures 0.51 inches in diameter, and its thickness measures 0.07 inches. The button height from the top of the shank to the top of the button face measures 0.25 inches.

Selected Artifacts: Multi-faceted Glass Bead

FIGURE 5.15: Multi-faceted glass bead found at Site 44FX116 (Photo by Karen Price).

A small black glass bead measuring 0.28 inches in length, 0.3 inches in width, and weighing 0.4 grams was found in the topsoil layer of Test Unit 737 (737A) (FIGURE 5.15). The bead appears to be drawn with a straight polyhedral form and is of simple structure, in that only a single layer of glass was used in its production. The bead is faceted, exhibiting five rows of eight facets each, forty facets total in a cornerless octagonal shape. It appears as though the facets were created by grinding the bead before being heat-treated to smooth the facet edges. This non-tubular bead resembles a Class IIf drawn bead (a bead whose surface has been modified by the application of ground facets) in Kidd and Kidd's (1970:67-83) system of bead classification, updated by Karklins (1985:89-94).

This was the only example of a bead found throughout the project area. Neither its provenience nor its characteristics aid in determining a reliable date for the artifact. A handful of recent artifacts, such as a modern broken hairclip, and a number of prehistoric artifacts, including flakes and lithic debitage, were also found in 737A.

Prehistoric Artifacts

FIGURE 5.16: Three prehistoric artifacts found in the project area in 2014.

Prehistoric artifacts were found throughout the project area in copious amounts. The majority of these artifacts consisted of flakes and lithic debitage from the production of various stone tools on the site, and were found in various amounts in each of the 66 test units excavated in the 2014 field season. A number of projectile points were found, some complete, others incomplete, exhibiting the various stages of the lithic reduction process (FIGURE 5.16). The density of lithic material found throughout the cemetery site gives credence to the supposition made in previous excavations that the ridge that contains the cemetery was likely used as a prehistoric work camp for the production of stone tools (White 1994; Breen 2007a, 2007b; Pecoraro 2012). While no evidence of structures was found in the project area, four lithic reduction zones were recorded in Test Units 671, 702, 703

and 739. A fifth lithic reduction zone may have been found in Test Unit 886, however this unit was heavily impacted by the root system of a large extant oak tree, which could have disturbed the provenience of that deposit. All of these areas contained large amounts of worked stone cobbles and lithic debitage.

Analysis

What can these findings from the 2014 field season reveal about the enslaved population at Mount Vernon? By respectfully leaving grave shafts unexcavated beyond the point of identification, much information has not been recovered, nor was it intended to be recovered in the scope of this project. Questions pertaining to what sort of grave goods, if any, were individuals buried with, and what information could be attained through skeletal analysis of remains cannot be addressed. However, an understanding of the spatial arrangement of burials within the cemetery can begin to take shape.

The lack of evidence of any sort of grave markers indicating either the head or foot of individual burials is revealing. No stone markers or field stones appear to have been used to mark burials that were found in the project area, neither was there any evidence of wooden markers, such as small post holes and post molds. This does not preclude the possibility that markers may once have existed but have since been removed or deteriorated. However if this were the case, one would expect to see the refilled cavity of where a stone had once been or a soil stain indicating the place of a marker. Of course if markers were too small or thin, or were shallowly placed, they may not have left any archaeological signature.

Findings from 2014 indicate that two rows of burials are extant in relation to a single cluster of graves, and four isolated interments that do not align with either a linear, or cluster pattern on the southern portion of the ridge that contains the Slave Cemetery. The existence of two rows of burials suggests that some method of linear organization was being employed in the cemetery. Without any sort of markers, however, how might this have been achieved?

If no form of grave marker was used to demarcate individual graves on the landscape, then another method of keeping track of the cemetery's organization may have been present. A recently completed burial can often be recognized by a distinct mound of soil overlying the grave. This is a result of excess backfill material created when a coffin or shrouded body takes the place of soil that had been excavated for the burial. Burial mounds will typically flatten and weather over time, on the surface resulting in a grave site that cannot be discerned from the surrounding landscape. However, it is possible that burial mounds were prominent enough at the time of subsequent interments that those excavating a new grave were able to align additional burials based off of the discernable mounds from previous interments. The presence of burial mounds, combined with collective memory among the enslaved community at Mount Vernon may account for the existence of these rows.

It is also interesting to note the successes and failures of this method. The southern section of Row 1 (Burials 773E, 773D, 808C, and 808D) clearly begins to veer to the west, heading down slope rather than staying on the centerline of the ridge. Burials 846E and 884C of Cluster 1 may very well be a continuation of this

row as their northwest-southeast alignment is quite similar. It is also evident that above-surface evidence and memory of past burials was not always enough to ensure continuity in the cemetery. Row 2 (Burials 846F, 846G, 884D, and 885C) partially overlies Cluster 1. It is evident that burial 846F post-dates burials 846E and 884C. Furthermore, its similar orientation and spacing with burials 846G, 884D, and 885C strongly suggest that these burials are spatially and likely temporally related.

Another row of graves is hypothesized to exist just west of Row 1. Grave Shaft 735D aligns with one reliable GPR reading seven feet to the north and another eight feet to the south. The positive confirmation of all reliable GPR readings explored in the project area in 2014 make it likely that the locations of these additional readings are accurate. Another grave shaft was found and fully exposed in 1994 that aligns with grave shaft 735D and the two reliable GPR readings as well (FIGURE 5.17). Both Grave Shaft 2 from the 1994 mitigation excavations and Grave Shaft 735D exhibit an east-west orientation and when viewed in relation to the two addition GPR readings appear to comprise a single row running north-south down the ridge roughly parallel to Row 1.

Of the four isolated burials (735D, 771C, 809C, and 848C), grave shaft 771C is perhaps the most unique. As mentioned above, 735D may in fact be associated with an as of yet undefined row of graves running west of Row 1. Grave Shaft 771C was very rectangular in shape, and was by far the widest grave shaft found throughout the project area, measuring over 2.5 feet in width the length of the burial. Its isolated location in relation to Row 1 is also a mystery. In Row 1, there exists a ten-

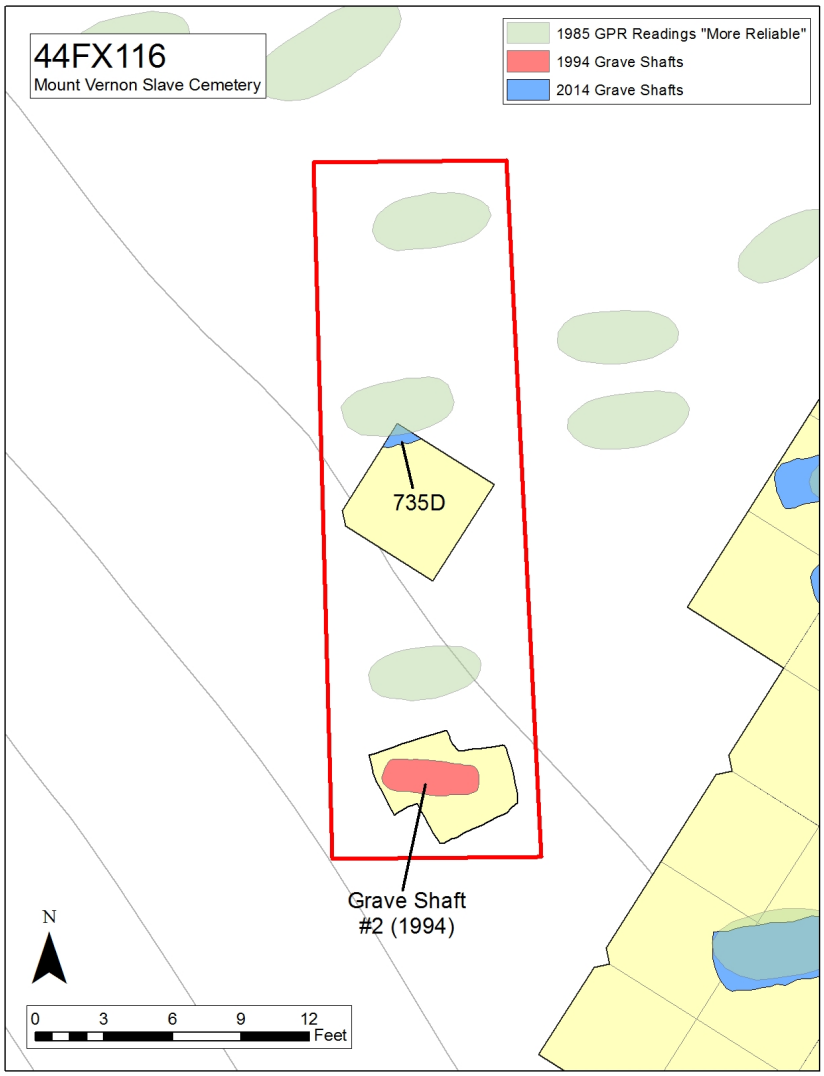

FIGURE 5.17: Map showing conjectured location of addition row of burials through a combination of grave shafts confirmed through archaeology and reliable GPR readings (Map by author).

foot gap in-between Burials 737D and 772C. Grave Shaft 771C is positioned just above this gap. It is unclear if this burial was originally meant to be a part of Row 1, and was simply placed in error seven feet to the west, or if this individual was set apart intentionally.

Burial 808D was also unique in that its orientation was opposite that of the standardly observed pattern of orienting burials with the head pointing to the west.

Though heavily impacted by the root system of a no longer extant tree, it was still possible to discern the width of the burial at both ends. Instead of the wider end of the burial pointing to the west, indicating the direction of the head, it was clearly pointing to the east. The width of Grave Shafts 771C, 773E, 773D, and 846E were largely uniform in width all along the shaft, making it more difficult to discern if those burials were also aligned backward. It is assumed, however, that they are not.

Discussion

Does the information gathered through research and analysis at Site 44FX116, the Slave Cemetery point to or indicate cultural resistance among the enslaved population that lived at Mount Vernon? The problem with identifying this type of resistance, that we must "infer the will of the actor" for their intentions are not told to us, persists, or as succinctly put by archaeologist, Garrett Fesler, "cultural resistance is a state of mind that defies quantification" (Mintz 1995:14; Fesler 2010:45). Archaeology is inherently limited in its ability to enter into the minds of past individuals and truly grasp their thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Nevertheless, it is not an unworthy aspiration.

In order to answer this question, an application of theory must be made. The plantation landscape is both physically structured and culturally perceived. Just because certain structures may have been implemented by one group of people with a certain intent does not mean that another group would have fully grasped the intended meaning of that structure, or wouldn't have subverted it with another set

of meanings. The phenomenological perspective of landscapes, stemming from post-processual archaeology, is applied here.

The cemetery space covered in the project area in 2014 is located on an isolated finger of land overlooking the Potomac River and dropping in elevation suddenly on either side. Even today, the area exudes an air of tranquility. Back in Washington's time, and before the construction of the New Tomb in 1831, the site would have been even more isolated from the hustle and bustle of the utilitarian plantation space located just up the south lane. Though burials sometimes occurred during the daylight, as one visitor to Mount Vernon observed in 1846, a review of pertinent literature reveals that many funerary rites and ceremonies occurred at nighttime (Rainville 2014:57; Thomas 2008; Genovese 1979:195). Though the plot of land that contains the cemetery was typically chosen by plantation owners, these spaces would have been transformed by the enslaved community performing funerary rites into sacred places where slaves could come together to honor the dead, appease the spirits, and reaffirm their identities as human beings, with rituals, memories, and histories (Rainville 2014:57; Thomas 2008; Genovese 1979:195).

The location of the cemetery so far from the utilitarian and social structure of Mount Vernon is also revealing. The nearest building to the cemetery, excluding the new and old tomb, is the carriage house/stable, located over 800 feet to the north and obscured from view by numerous tree groves and over a fifty-foot climb in elevation. The placement of the cemetery space on such an isolated spot off the beaten track means that visitors approaching Mount Vernon from the Mansion House Farm entrance road would not have seen or noticed the cemetery as they

took in the grand view of the Mansion. Though no records from Washington or any other executor of the estate mention the founding of the cemetery, it is likely that the General, his older half-brother Lawrence Washington, or his father Augustine Washington, chose the location of the cemetery far from the working and entertaining spaces of the main house on land ill-suited for development (Rainville 2014:49; Chapman et al. 2006:11).

Though two roughly aligned rows of burials were found in the project area in 2014, the mixture of organizational patterns (rows, clusters, and isolated individuals) suggests that enslaved individuals were given a higher degree of sovereignty when conducting their funerary rites at Mount Vernon. It has been shown by Chapman et al (2006) that the organization and arrangement of slave burial grounds may correlate to the level of involvement slave owners had in the spiritual lives of their slaves. In a comparative study of the Monticello and Bremo plantation slave cemeteries in central Virginia, Chapman et al. note that General John Hartwell Cocke, the proprietor of Bremo plantation, made sure his slaves received a proper Christian upbringing. The General constructed a chapel, with accompanying cemetery, for his slaves. Burials in the cemetery, which was enclosed by a stone wall, were aligned in very neat rows and were adorned with inscribed headstones. Contrast this with the Monticello slave cemetery, which exhibits more roughly defined rows and isolated burial plots, some adorned with rough field stones (Chapman et al. 2006). Furthermore, if a master is concerned with ordering and structuring his plantation in ways that reinforce his social dominance and order over chaos, it stands to reason that if he was involved in his slaves' funerary

practices, the slave cemetery would also exhibit the highly regimented signs of the Georgian Order.

Instead, at Mount Vernon we see a less-regimented structuring of the burial ground, suggesting a larger degree of autonomy on the part of the enslaved community in the funerary rites that were practiced and in the design of the cemetery itself. In many cases (Sipe 2011; Vlach 1990) the items and grave decorations found within or overlying enslaved African American burials "highlight cultural persistence in the face of extreme pressure to assimilate" (Perry et al. 2009; Baugher and Veit 2014:14). Though no grave decorations were found at Site 44FX116 in 2014, possibly because excavation of burials ceased once clear outlines could be discerned, the unique structuring of the cemetery may point to an amalgam of "survivals," or remembered African traditions, intermingled with English and American traditions regarding religion and mortuary customs. The acculturation process is never ending; in the slave-owning Americas, and to this day, "African America" represents the culmination of shared history, experiences, memories, and beliefs (Mullin 1994). Another factor to consider is the highly restricted space atop the ridge containing the cemetery. With a steep drop in elevation to the east, south, and west, functional burial space was limited. This would have played an important role in the structuring of the burial ground and the use of space atop that ridge. Undoubtedly these two factors were influential on each other and on the enslaved African Americans who instilled in that space deep and sacred meaning.

This mortuary context was a small part of the enslaved African American existence in which freedom was allowed, at least to some degree (Jamieson

1995:41). The freedom to conduct funerary rituals that reinforced one's individual and communal human identity helped, in a very small way, to combat that vulgar and horrendous affront to justice that is slavery. This autonomy in no way undercuts the fact that slavery was a physically, emotionally, and spiritually demoralizing system that permeated every aspect of social and political life. However, to revisit Garrett Fesler's definition of cultural resistance, that is, to affirm one's identity as someone other than a slave, the funerals and mortuary rituals of the enslaved community did undercut the foundation of the slave system that asserted black inferiority, docility, and compliance (Fesler 2010:45). In Fesler's research on the practice of yard sweeping as a discrete form of cultural resistance, he states that "yard sweeping allowed the residents to establish a semblance of stability and personal satisfaction, to groom their environment in a way that fit their cultural aesthetic. Yard sweeping did not threaten the institution of slavery, but it may have helped people living under unimaginable stress to find comfort" (Fesler 2010:45). In very much the same way, the friends, relatives, and loved ones who gathered on that small ridge overlooking the Potomac River, not only honored those whom they came to bury, but they found strength to survive in each other.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Discussion

The goal of this thesis was to show that the Slave Cemetery (44FX116) at Mount Vernon was an important physical space and culturally perceived place in the lives of the enslaved individuals who lived here. This sacred place was one of many major and integral components to Mount Vernon's plantation landscape, and it facilitated acts of cultural resistance among the enslaved community. In order to show how the cemetery fit into the perceived cultural landscapes of the enslaved, a phenomenological approach to the study of landscapes has been taken. This approach, championed by Tilley (1994), espouses that landscapes are not mere props to be used by actors in the great play of life, but rather they synchronously influence, and are influenced, by those actors. Environments and bodies are both physically real, and cognitively constructed.

This approach has not come without its fair share of criticism (Brück 2005; Fleming 2006). Matthew Johnson states that "practical applications of phenomenology to archaeology have to assume some kind of empathetic unity to human experience, an assumption that 'our' experience now has a direct link to 'their' experience in the past, in order to be convincing" (Johnson 2010:118). This critique is not uncalled for. Phenomenology's application to prehistoric sites (Tilley 1994; Commings & Whittle 2003) often requires researchers to make inferences that simply cannot be proven or disproven. Fleming, critiquing Tilly (1994) and Commings & Whittle (2003) "points out that claims for ambiguity and multiple

meanings in this context make claimed references almost impossible to disprove" (Johnson 2012:276).

Where phenomenology's application to prehistoric interpretations falls short, in historical archaeology, it is kept in check by historical documentation (Mytum 2004:179). The interpretations of the plantation landscape and the perceived cultural landscapes of the enslaved made via phenomenological perspectives can corroborated or contradicted by the journals, letters, ledgers, and first-hand accounts of the individuals who were there. The works of Rainville (2009, 2014), Ginsburg (2010), Isaac (1999), Fesler (2010), Upton (2010), and an array of others has shown that documentary sources support the supposition that landscapes were perceived and experienced by enslaved African Americans in very different way than whites. The simple act of perceiving one's world in a different manner than that of the dominating class *is* resistant. *Intent* has nothing to do with it.

The cemetery was one such place within the greater plantation landscape in which enslaved African Americans could maintain a differing perception from that of the master class. In spite of the economic, social, and ideological subversion, physical domination, and emotional assailment of enslaved African Americans by the system of slavery and those who maintained it, African American individuals and plantation communities never lost sight of the truth, they were human beings, born equally free, independent, and governed by the same natural laws as anyone else.

Not all resistant behavior directly threatened the slave system. However this does not mean that that system wasn't being quietly and subversively undercut by those whom it tried to break. Stephan Palmié wisely asserts that:

> "in forming stable personal relationships, founding families, planting gardens, acquiring property, *burying the dead*, or enacting ritual relationships with the divine, slaves did not break the bonds of slavery. Rather they bent them in ways that allowed them to carve out a meaningful existence in the face of a regime often geared—at least theoretically—towards denying them just that (Palmié 1995:xviii, italics added).

Future Research

Archaeological work in the Slave Cemetery (44FX116) at George Washington's Mount Vernon has contributed immensely to our understanding of that sacred place. Combined, small projects in 1994, 2007, 2008, and 2012, and full-scale survey in 2014 have revealed a total of 26 grave shafts in the Slave Cemetery. These burials represent a mere fraction of the enslaved population that lived, worked, and died on the Mount Vernon plantation. More archaeological research will be required in the coming years in order to definitively answer the research questions developed at the outset of this project: How many individuals are buried in the cemetery? What are the boundaries of the cemetery? And what can information gathered from the burial ground tell us about the enslaved population at Mount Vernon? Still, we have found preliminary answers to a number of these questions this field season.

Large areas of the cemetery remain unexplored. Test units along the edges of the ridge where it begins to turn to a slope will help identify the southern boundaries of the burial ground. Further testing of the northern section of the

project area near the 1983 memorial pathway and archway is also a priority. While Bevan's geophysical survey stopped short of covering the area surrounding the archway, excavations in 2007 and 2008, and the confirmed presence of previously unknown burial in those areas, indicate that the northern boundary of the cemetery remains undefined. Both further geophysical research and archaeological research in these areas will help to determine the number of individuals interred in the cemetery as well as define the boundaries of the burial ground.

Furthermore, additional research needs to be done regarding the locations of additional slave cemetery sites that were once associated with Washington's five farms. It is likely that these burial grounds have been lost due to suburban development of the lands surrounding the Mansion House farm, however it is possible that remnants of these cemeteries may still exists. Multiple avenues of research can be pursued to help answer this question. In 2015, Mount Vernon will undergo an extensive Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey covering the entirety of Washington's 8,000 acres. Optical remote sensing technology will be installed in a single-engine aircraft and flown in a grid pattern over Washington's original five farms tract. This technology has the ability to penetrate the forest canopy and collect surface data including subtle deviations in elevation throughout the landscape. This extremely advanced basemap will allow researchers to locate features virtually invisible to the naked eye such as old roadbeds, ditches, and even ground depressions, possibly associated with cemeteries long since forgotten. This relatively new technology has already been applied to archaeological studies with great success (Chase et al. 2011; Johnson 2014). Further research can be conducted

in the various archival institutions that service Northern Virginia and Washington D.C. for any references to burial grounds associated with George Washington's Mount Vernon. Finally, oral histories and neighborhood interviews can assist archaeologists in the search for these lost cemeteries by tapping into the collective neighborhood and regional memory of the area.

One of the weakest elements of all studies surrounding slave cemetery sites, including this one, is the collective lack of research that has been done on comparative colonial-era African cemeteries. So often researchers are forced to make broad generalizations, identifying culture groups and labeling them "Central African," or, "West African," simply because so little is known of the diverse culture groups and burial customs in these regions (Jamieson 1995). One must not forget that Central and West Africa span a territory larger than the continental United States, and these regions are filled with culture groups distinct from one another. Future research must focus on a more balanced and holistic study of colonial-era African cemetery landscapes.

Extensive research has been conducted and literature written concerning the slave experience in America. All of this allied research has benefited society greatly by opening its collective, and often stubborn eyes to challenge and question traditional ways of thinking about the past and about contemporary groups of people. This research is, and should be, a never-ending endeavor, of which this thesis is proud to be a part.

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Appendix A: *Grave Shafts Found through Small Projects at 44FX116 Slave Cemetery*

As of May 2014, there have been eight grave shafts identified in the Slave Cemetery as a result of small archaeological projects. Only two of these grave shafts were fully exposed to reveal the exact dimensions of each burial. The remainder were identified before being fully uncovered, and excavations ceased once that ID had been made. The table below gives the dimensions of each grave shaft found in the cemetery as of May 2014. One measurement is made to determine the overall length of the grave shaft, and three measurements are taken at the head, midpoint, and foot of each grave to determine the width of the grave shaft at those points. The head and foot of a grave is identified based on the width of the grave shaft at both ends. The wider end is considered to be the head of the grave. Because many grave shafts were not fully exposed to reveal their overall dimensions, some information is unavailable, however as much metric information as possible is given.

The 1994 excavations consisted of digging shovel test pits (STPs), while the 2008 excavations consisted of exploring proposed tree holes (THs). Each grave shaft was given an identifier according to the STP or TH in which it was discovered. This is reflected in the identification of each grave shaft in the table below. The grave shaft found in 2007 was discovered when Test Unit (TU) 100, placed to explore the foundation of the east arch footer, was expanded. The grave shafts found in 2012 were labeled as archaeological features in TU 102.

TABLE A.1: Dimensions of all grave shafts exposed prior to 2014 field season

Year	Grave Shaft	Length (ft.)	Width 1 (ft.)	Width 2 (ft.)	Width 3 (ft.)
1994	1 (STP 21)	4.25	1.40	1.50	1.30
1994	2 (STP 19)*	x	x	2.25	x
1994	3 (STP 22)	x	x	x	x
2007	4 (TU 100)	6.10	2.00	1.65	1.40
2008	5 (TH 4) †	x	x	x	x
2008	6 (TH 5)	x	x	x	x
2012	7 (102G)	x	x	1.95	x
2012	8 (102 H)	x	x	x	x

* Grave shaft 737D
† Grave shaft 241C

Appendix B: *Letter from Department of Historic Resources*

COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Historic Resources

Douglas W. Domenech
Secretary of Natural Resources

2801 Kensington Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23221

Kathleen S. Kilpatrick
Director

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TDD: (804) 367-2386
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December 18, 2013

Ms. Eleanor Breen
Deputy Director for Archaeology
George Washington's Mount Vernon
PO Box 110
Mount Vernon, VA 22121

RE: Delineation of slave cemetery (44FX0116)

Dear Ms. Breen,

Thank you for contacting the DHR regarding our burial permitting process. We understand that you plan to remove topsoil in order to expose and map any visible shaft features associated with a slave cemetery, but that no disturbance of the grave shafts or fill is proposed at this time. Based upon this understanding, and as we discussed by email earlier this week, you will not require a burial permit from DHR in order to archaeologically delineate the cemetery.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I may be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Joanna Wilson Green

Joanna Wilson Green, Archaeologist
Easements and Archaeology Stewardship
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