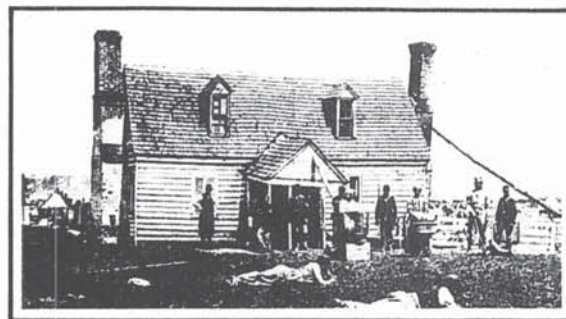
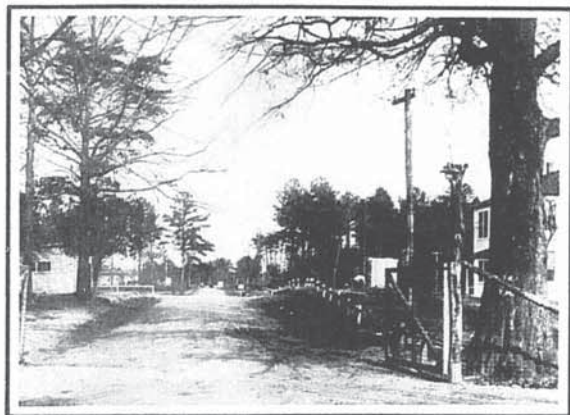
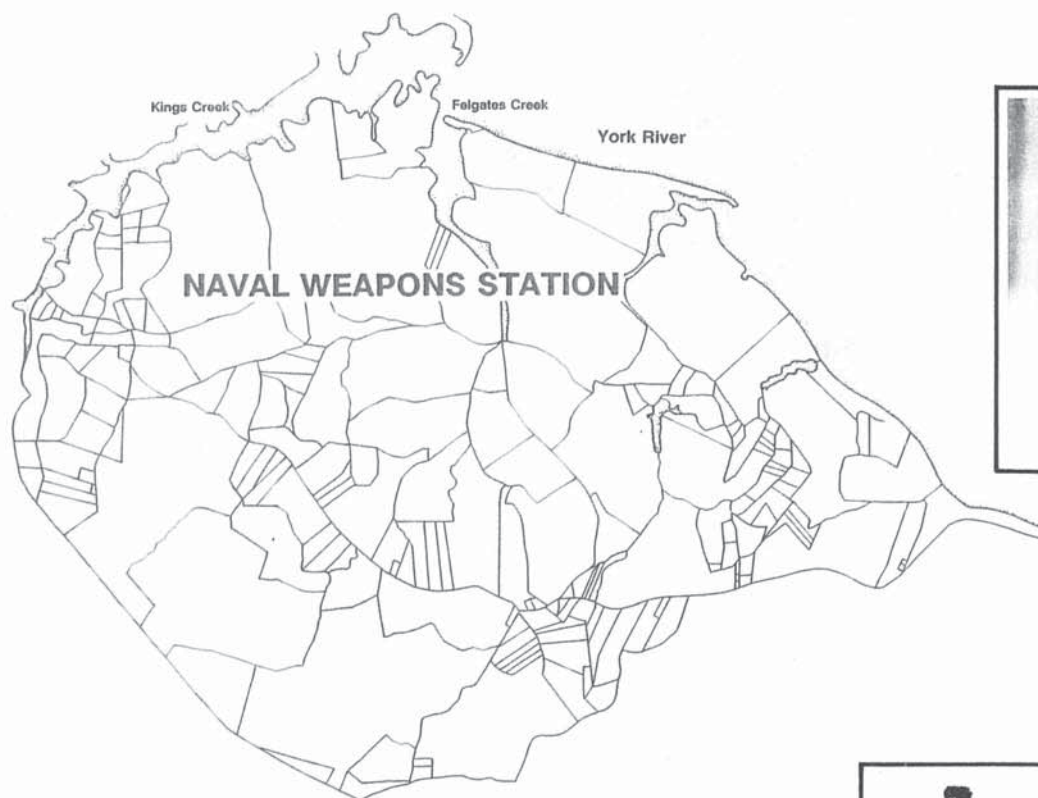


"CAST DOWN YOUR BUCKET WHERE YOU ARE":  
AN ETHNOHISTORICAL STUDY OF THE  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY  
ON THE LANDS OF THE  
YORKTOWN NAVAL WEAPONS STATION, 1865-1918

Legacy 91-92-0067

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To those of my race who depend upon bettering their condition in a foreign land, or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man who is their next-door neighbor, I would say: 'Cast down your bucket where you are. Cast it down in making friends, in every honorable way, of the people of all races by whom you are surrounded. Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions.'

(Booker T. Washington, 1898)

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**Submitted to:**

Atlantic Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command  
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Norfolk, Virginia 23511-6287

**Submitted by:**

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## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

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*"We should learn to see things in a higher light."  
(Booker T. Washington, 1898)*

Upon objective review of the historical documents, it is apparent that African-Americans have been largely ignored in historical studies, even in Virginia, where African-Americans have lived since 1619. This is particularly true of the African-Americans who survived the Civil War and established new lives as freedmen in the Tidewater. This study of the African-American community known as the "reservation," established after the Civil War on the land that is now the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station (Figures 1 and 2) attempts to fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge of African-American history. The "reservation," which had Antebellum roots, will be examined from its origins to the establishment of the Naval Weapons Station in 1918.



Figure 1. Project area location.

Historians of 19th-century African-American life have labeled the research they do on that period "Emancipation studies," which is concerned with how African-Americans adjusted to and lived with their new freedom. This is a new research area with many questions waiting to be answered. Most historians interested in African-Americans have focused previously on slave life or have looked more generally at life in the South after the War.<sup>1</sup> Their

studies have examined African-American economic and social development, family life, education, religion, as well as interracial relations broadly, making generalizations about the character of African-American life based on information taken from widely scattered sources.<sup>2</sup> Studying the history of a specific African-American community and its growth after the War has been less common, although badly needed. The history of freed African-Americans in the community on what came to be called the "reservation" near Yorktown is the first step towards a deeper knowledge of day to day life, a knowledge of African-American history "from the insider's point of view".

Numerous historical sources were consulted in reconstructing the history of the Yorktown "reservation" (see appendix). Records like the United States Census, the census of African-Americans in York County taken by the Union Army in 1865, and the Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands for Tidewater Virginia help to provide a general picture of York County population and settlement patterns from 1865 to 1918 (Figure 3). Local records, such as county deeds of property exchange, tax assessments, and maps, along with oral histories collected from County residents (Figures 4 and 5), provide greater detail about the life of community members. The results of this study, covering as it does only a small percentage of the African-American population of Tidewater Virginia, are none the less crucial to a greater understanding of the history of African-Americans after the Civil War.



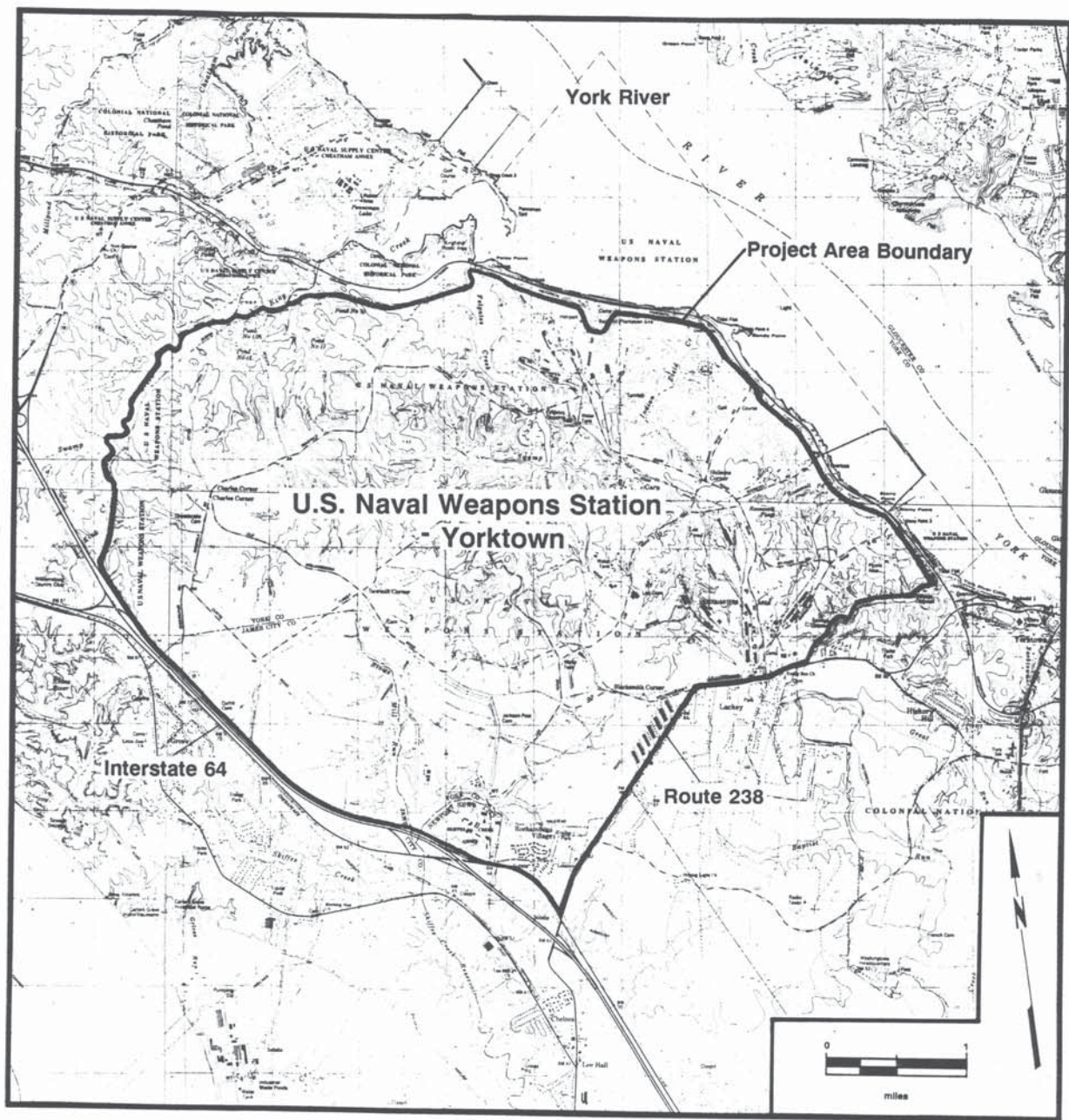


Figure 2. General map of area (U.S.G.S. 7.5-minute Clay Bank, Hog Island, Williamsburg, and Yorktown Quadrangles).









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## CHAPTER 2: The Road To Freedom

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*"My friend, you was once a slave. You are now a freedman."  
(Rev. I. M. Brinkerhoff, 1865)*

### THE BEGINNINGS OF SLAVERY AND THE ANTEBELLUM ERA

One of the many ironies of history is the fact that Africans, so neglected and defamed in historical memory, set foot in the New World before any permanent English settlements were established there and had arrived in Virginia by 1619, one year before the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth. These first Africans, natives of many rich and varied cultures, were brought to the Americas as slaves, but experienced a world much like that of the white indentured servants who also began to arrive in great numbers in the early 17th century.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, instead of a lifetime of service, indentured servants were often released after seven to ten years of work.<sup>2</sup> Historian Allan Kulikoff writes,

Seventeenth century Englishmen perceived Africans as an alien, evil, libidinous, and heathen people, but even they saw that their slaves did not fit this description, and many whites treated blacks as they did the white servants. Some black residents became and remained free, even considering themselves to be like yeoman.<sup>3</sup>

As the seventeenth century progressed however, the lot of African-Americans worsened. Earlier in the century, blacks constituted only about 3 percent of the entire population of the Chesapeake area.<sup>4</sup> During the last several decades however, their ranks began to swell. The number of blacks in the Chesapeake colonies doubled every decade except one from 1650 to 1690. In addition to natural increase, and those slaves who arrived in colonies via Caribbean "factories", slaves began to be directly imported from Africa for the first time in the 1680s.<sup>5</sup> The rapid increase of the black population in Virginia caused disquiet among the English colonists, who instituted tighter restrictions on Africans' freedom.

At the same time, this growth in the African-American population fueled the development of the plantation system. Plantations in the southern colonies focused on the production of rice, indigo, and most importantly, tobacco. All of these crops, particularly tobacco, the staple of the Virginia economy, were extremely labor-intensive and soil depleting. In 1775, the author of *American Husbandry* remarked, "There is no plant in the world that requires richer land or more manure than tobacco. It will grow on poorer fields but not to yield crops that are sufficiently profitable to pay the expenses of the negroes".<sup>6</sup> Because tobacco needed to be rotated so often, planters required tremendous amounts of land, and a large, tractable labor force. Black indentured service seemed increasingly uneconomical.<sup>7</sup> Historian James Olson has argued, "By requiring service for life, the planter eliminated labor turnover and protected their investment. Formal slavery also gave whites the sense of control they needed over blacks because of the unchecked growth of the African-American population".<sup>8</sup>

This process continued into the 18th century. Colonial governments passed laws that gave the colonists absolute control over their black servants. Indentured servitude evolved into lifelong, hereditary slavery.

After the Revolutionary War, Northern agriculture and industry became more oriented towards producing capital. Northern farmers and industrialists began to rely on machinery rather than human labor. With this change in focus, the economic basis for slavery in the North disappeared.<sup>9</sup> As the Industrial Revolution continued however, the demand for cotton spread. In order for the South to meet this demand, white planters needed to put enormous numbers of



workers in the fields each day. Slavery became a way of life, necessary for the survival of the white planter. Commitment to slavery and the plantation system soon set the South apart. As the Northern colonies began to give blacks at least some measure of freedom, the grip of the Southern planters on their slaves only tightened. The control of the master over his slaves pervaded all aspects of their lives. Slaves were dependent on their owners for shelter, clothing, and food (Figure 6). Marriages and the fate of children were determined by the master as well. African-Americans were often forbidden schooling, the free practice of religion, and were frequently prevented from communication or congregation with one another. Slaves often resisted this physical and mental domination, although fear of retribution meant that this resistance was often very subtle.



Figure 6. This photograph of a black servant in Williamsburg, was taken by an anonymous photographer shortly after the Civil War. Images of African-American servants and slaves are rare and some of those which survive are here used to illustrate the sorts of work such people were required to do, in York County and elsewhere in Virginia (Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

It is a testament to the remarkable tenacity of these people that much of their African heritage survived, or was transformed into something

uniquely theirs in the New World. Their rich culture, forged in adversity, was a source of solidarity, and a solace for everyday hardship. Such was particularly true of African-American religion. Historian James Olson argues,

Slave religion made few distinctions between the secular and the spiritual, between this life and the next, and symbolically carried slaves back in history to more glorious times and forward toward a more benign future, linking them with the cosmos and assuring them that there was justice in the universe.<sup>10</sup>

Many slaves adopted the tenants of Protestant Christianity, the religion of their masters, but gave it a meaning all their own. In particular, the belief in spirit possession common to many West African religions was expressed in slave religion through "handclapping, rhythmic body movements, public testimonies, speaking in tongues, and conscious presence of the Holy Ghost".<sup>11</sup> The religion of these slaves enabled them to survive the hardships of their condition, until slavery itself was abolished.

#### FREE BLACKS IN ANTEBELLUM VIRGINIA

Not all African-Americans that lived in the United States before the Civil War were enslaved, however. Free African-Americans made up a significant segment of the population, especially in states such as Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. On the eve of the Civil War in 1860, the white population of Virginia was 1,047,299, the slave population stood at 490,865, while the free black population was 58,042. Although many viewed free blacks as "degraded", others considered free blacks to be "a valuable class of citizens."<sup>12</sup> Slaves could be freed by deed or by will or slaves with special skills could sometimes buy their own freedom.<sup>13</sup> Still others received their freedom after serving as soldiers during the Revolutionary War.

In the decades prior to 1860, free African-Americans migrated to areas such as Tidewater Virginia looking for work, and eeked out a marginal existence there (Figure 7). Among the many problems facing the freed blacks during this period was the depressed economic condition of the region, especially of Yorktown itself. On the Virginia Peninsula, the small hamlet of Yorktown had been





Figure 7. This interior of a cabin occupied by an elderly African-American couple was photographed by Huestis Cook, who recorded hundreds of scenes of rural Virginia life in the late 19th century. Contemporary descriptions indicate that freedmen in York County lived in dwellings similar to this (Courtesy of the Valentine Museum).

transformed from one of the colony's leading ports in the 1740s to a ghost town by the eve of the Civil War.

The hardships and tragedies of slave life have been poignantly described by many eyewitnesses, historians, and novelists<sup>14</sup> but the lives of free African-Americans in the Antebellum period are only now being reconstructed. In 1860, there were 140 free African-American families in York County (Figure 8). Of these, 19 owned the land they farmed, and 49 others are recorded as having owned valuable personal property such as boats, livestock, and tools.<sup>15</sup> Most free blacks worked where they could as skilled and unskilled laborers, but subsisted mainly by farming. Squatting on unclaimed land, granted plots by sympathetic whites, or rarely, purchasing small tracts themselves, free blacks established homesteads, often in small communities with other freed slaves.

A map drawn in 1863 shows property lines and owners from Williamsburg to Yorktown and beyond, stretching from the James River to the York River (Figure 9). One piece of property near Yorktown is labeled "Banks" and below that is written "negroes". This suggests that at least one

freed black community was established in York County by the mid-19th century. The testimony of

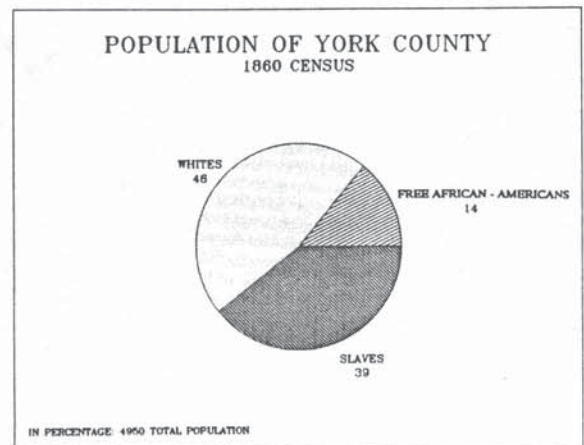


Figure 8. Population of York County in 1860.

Mrs. Fannie Epps, (Figure 10) born in 1895, provides further indirect evidence for the existence of this community as well. Mrs. Epps remembered her great-grandparents who "never were slaves" and

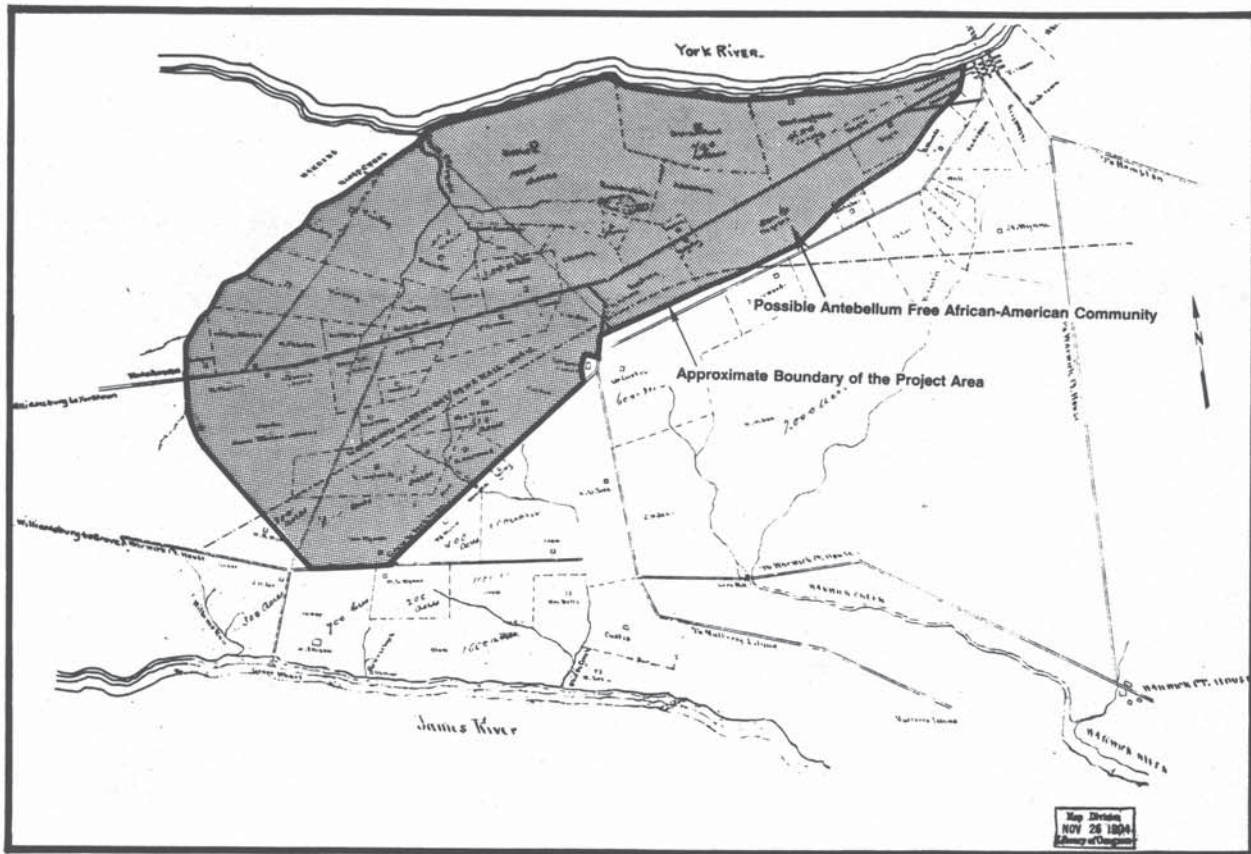


Figure 9. Map of Country Between James and York Rivers, 1863 (Source: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Research Library).

who lived on lands now occupied by the Naval Weapons Station. There they kept livestock and tended gardens, and built a sturdy cabin.

The following lengthy passage from an interview taken by Kathleen Bragdon (KB) with Mrs. Epps (FE) in 1987 provides a fascinating glimpse into the daily lives of free blacks as they may have lived in the early decades of the 19th century:

KB: Can you describe for us again your great-grandparent's cabin which was out in York County?

FE: Yes. You want me to describe it? Well, it was a log cabin...log house, I guess you could call it a cabin... 'cause it had one big room with a big fireplace. And the walls were of clay...because they used to paper them--not with wall paper but with newspaper. And when I was a child--the reason I remember it was newspaper was I had just learned how to read--I was learning how to read. And I'd go around and read





Figure 10. Mrs. Fannie Epps, a life-long resident of Williamsburg, traces her ancestry to members of the tiny free-black settlement which was established in York County prior to the Civil War, from which the "reservation" got its start (Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

the newspapers. And she thought that was just grand.

KB: Did she ever change that paper or was it up there permanently?

FE: It stayed up there...and as far as I knew, they put it up there with a paste made of flour and water...And cooked it or something and spread it on there and put it up on the walls. And they didn't put it in the water. They just put it up on the walls.

KB: So it had a big fireplace and one large room downstairs.

FE: Yes. One thing that I remember, too, about it was that it had a bed...and they didn't have mattresses like we have now. It was a quilted mattress. And so we had a little stool and the bed was up high like this. And I being a little child, I had to step up on the stool. And then I'd fall over on the bed. And the bed was made of feathers.

KB: Now was this bedroom the main room?

FE: Well, this was--they just had the one big room downstairs.

KB: And the bed was there?

FE: Yeah. The bed was in that room. Well, this and that was there. The bedroom, the sitting room and everything in that log cabin 'cause that little kitchen was in the back. I don't remember too much about the kitchen because I think she used to go to grandma's house, 'cause it's just a lane down from grandma's house. She used to go up to grandma's house to eat a lot. But she'd eat--she had things down at--she used to keep tea and coffee and--not too much coffee, but more tea in a little chest. It was just by the side of the fireplace, 'cause the fireplace like this on this end. The fireplace was in the center. The bed was over there and the chest was over on this other side of the fireplace. And I used to like to get up on that stool and fall over in that bed because it was all soft and everything. And you used to have to make it up with a broomstick--you know, a broom handle. And take it and beat it up and smooth it out. I thought about that after I had talked with you. I said that was one of the highlights [laughter] of my young life.

KB: [laughter] Now, was there a loft above the main floor?

FE: Yes, but I never went-- I don't remember ever going up in the loft. 'cause great granddaddy used to go up there...a lot. I don't remember anything up in there at all. And I didn't go into the kitchen too much...because the spring was down the hill...from this log cabin. And we used to go down to the



spring...to carry the butter--put in the spring in this tin bucket.<sup>16</sup>

Mrs. Epps' testimony suggests that some free African-Americans settled on lands now occupied by the Naval Weapons Station prior to the Civil War. This free black settlement may have been the foundation of the post war community known as the "reservation".

It is possible that the number of free African-Americans in York County increased during the early years of the Civil War, since the Union army occupied the area after the Peninsula Campaign of 1862. Certainly by March of 1865 when a census was taken of the African-American population in York County, the black population there had almost doubled in size (Figure 11).<sup>17</sup>

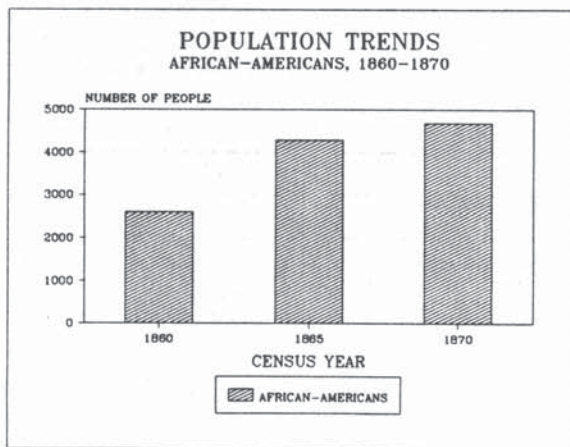


Figure 11. Population Trends, African-Americans, 1860-1870.

## THE CIVIL WAR

When war broke out in 1861, the Union and Confederate armies moved back and forth across the state of Virginia. While the Confederates sought to capture Washington, D.C. during the campaign of First Bull Run, the goal of the Union's Peninsula Campaign was to take Richmond. The Union campaign was led by General George B. McClellan. McClellan's strategy was to approach Richmond from the east, beginning at Fort Monroe.

Early in April 1862, McClellan amassed over 100,000 men at Fort Monroe. McClellan's first objective in the campaign was to lay siege to Yorktown. One month later, Union forces marched into Yorktown as Confederate forces retreated towards Richmond. After the taking of Yorktown, Union forces advanced on Williamsburg and thence up the peninsula at a steady pace until the campaign stalled during the Seven Days' Battles only a few miles outside of Richmond.<sup>18</sup>

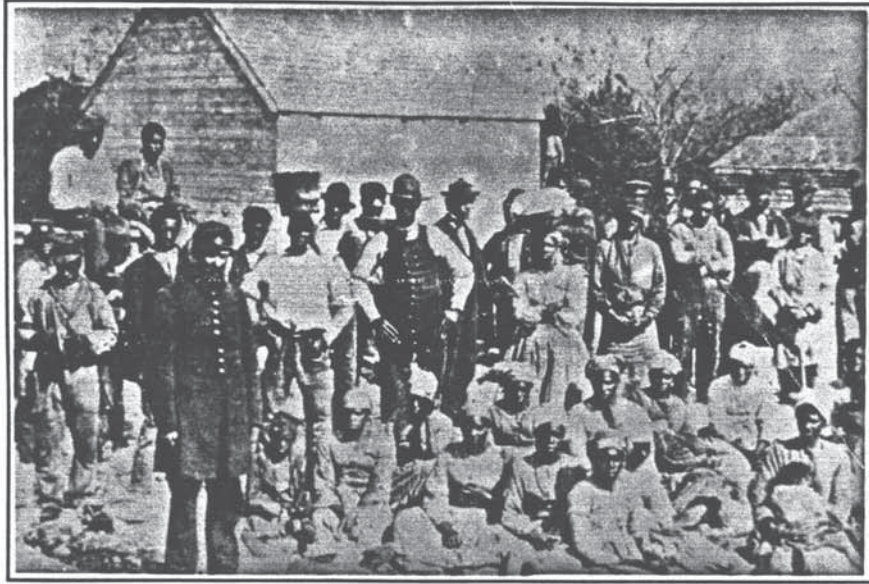
As the Union army passed through the area, it confiscated all property, including slaves (Figure 12).<sup>19</sup> Thus, most slaves in the region were freed at least a year before the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863 (Figure 13). Archie Booker, who was an ex-slave living in Hampton, Virginia during the war, gives an account of what happened when the Union army came through the Williamsburg-Yorktown area:

When de Civil War come, ah foller de army back. It wuz den dat ah saw de battle o' Yawktown. It happen in de evenin' ah wuz follerin de army fum Williamsbu'g to Yawktown. Two battleships come up an' hep de troops. Dey laid round Yawktown a long while. A great numbu' o' slaves follered de army roun. Govu'ment supported em.<sup>20</sup>

In many instances, ex-slaves or runaway slaves labored in Northern cities or Northern-occupied cities in the South, in support of the Union war effort. Some ex-slaves served as spies and guides while many attached themselves directly to the army serving as foot soldiers.<sup>21</sup> At the war's end in 1865 these blacks and four million others like them found themselves free, but with few resources to begin a new life.

## 1865 AND RECONSTRUCTION

An 1865 Freedman's school textbook begins, "My friend, you was once a slave. You are now a freedman. Your experience in this new position has been brief. Your knowledge of what may rightly be expected of you is limited. There is much for you to learn."<sup>22</sup> Indeed, according to some freedmen, the prospect of freedom was much more frightening than slavery had been. One ex-slave remarked,



*Figure 12. Many slaves were emancipated by the Union Army, or escaped during the occupation of the Virginia Peninsula during the years 1862-1865. "Contraband" slaves such as the ones in the photographed above (specific location unknown), congregated in great numbers in York County (Courtesy of the Department of Historic Resources, Richmond).*



*Figure 13. In a rare photograph taken near Yorktown during the Civil War, freed slaves and soldiers pose before a farm dwelling (Courtesy of the Valentine Museum).*



Sometimes ah think slavery wuz bettuh den freedom in one sense. Ef ye wuz sick, ye hadda doctuh. Den ye git food too. But now ef ye git sick an' ye hain' got no money, ye jis die. Dat's all!<sup>23</sup>

Many freedmen moved off the plantations where they had lived and served for fear of re-enslavement.<sup>24</sup> Many feared to accept permanent work for the same reason. A large percentage of the African-American population in the years following the war was in flux, and living a hand-to-mouth existence.

Fortunately for the free African-Americans (and also the many whites impoverished by the war), there were nearly one hundred privately financed freedman's aid organizations, whose work supplemented that of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands.<sup>25</sup> The Freedman's Bureau, as it was popularly known, was established in March of 1865 as a branch of the War Department. Among the many services that were offered by the Freedman's Bureau was a "health program, distributing a total of some twenty-one million rations, establishing forty hospitals, and treating nearly half a million cases of illness over its seven year existence".<sup>26</sup> The Bureau served as a kind of guardian for almost four million freedmen. One of its most successful acts was the establishment of over 4,000 schools which ranged from elementary levels through college.<sup>27</sup>

Soon after the Union army came through the peninsula area, Northern teachers also came South to help out. These teachers were supported by philanthropic and missionary associations throughout the North. One of the most influential organizations in the peninsula area of Virginia was the Friends' Association of Philadelphia and its Vicinity for the Relief of Colored Freedmen.<sup>28</sup> The Association, as it was called, was responsible for bringing staffs of teachers, merchants, and industrial and agricultural community representatives to the Yorktown area with the purpose of setting up schools and shops for the African-Americans. In the Yorktown area alone, there were seven schools set up by the Association while the Freedmen's Bureau was still in its infancy.<sup>29</sup> Through the schools of the Association, cordial relations between the whites and African-Americans developed. These temporary schools gave the area

some sense of stability until a more permanent public school system could be established.

In April 1865, the United States military established a territorial government in Virginia. The government promised civil rights for all regardless of color. By March of 1867, Virginia became Military District Number One. The government sought to attract freedmen to the area with the slogan "forty acres and a mule". Large numbers of African-Americans congregated in communities like Alexandria, Fort Monroe, Hampton, Norfolk, and Yorktown looking for a better life for themselves and their families.<sup>30</sup>

Living conditions for the African-Americans during the Reconstruction varied with their economic and social status. At the end of the war, some rural freedmen were able to buy inexpensive farms, especially in those areas where the soil had been exhausted through over-farming (Figure 14). Some African-Americans became tenant farmers, renting land on old plantations. The tenants built rough cabins and worked for a stake in the crop rather than a straight payment. Often tenants received the right to cut wood on the estate and a small plot of ground next to the house for a garden or to raise a cow or a pig. Farm laborers were those who contracted for a specific wage. The laborers were usually housed in old slave cabins on the property of the person for whom they worked. As laborers, their lot was similar to that of landless whites. A farm laborer received weekly rations for his or her work. These rations usually consisted of three pounds of bacon, a peck and a half of corn meal, and every so often, some vegetables.

The hardships faced by African-Americans and poor whites were also much the same and many of both races died in the years immediately following the war from malnutrition or disease. Census reports indicate that in 1865-1866 the black population lost as many to disease as whites lost during the war.<sup>31</sup> In the "contraband camps" as well as in African-American "colonies" established in several southern cities the sanitary conditions were dangerously bad. Epidemics, of which smallpox was the deadliest, struck large numbers of blacks and poor whites, while the ravages of tuberculosis were also severe.<sup>32</sup> Despite the similarity in their hardships, however African-Americans and poorer



whites did not feel a kinship for one another. Race relations after the war were as strained as ever.<sup>33</sup>



*Figure 14. After the Civil War, many African-American couples such as the one pictured above established small farmsteads in Virginia, where they built log cabins and eked out a living on tobacco-depleted soils (Courtesy of the Valentine Museum).*

In fact, it soon became apparent that white Southerners would not readily accept the new freedom of the African-Americans. The so-called "Black Codes," created mainly for the control of African-American freedmen were passed in the winter of 1865 and 1866 and were designed to replace the now defunct slave codes which were enacted before the war.<sup>34</sup> For example, the South Carolina code stipulated that in the making of contracts, "persons of color shall be known as servants and those with whom they contract shall be known as masters". In South Carolina, too, the African-American farm worker could not leave the premises of his employer without permission.<sup>35</sup> Virginia's codes varied little from those in other Southern states. However, the codes did grant ex-slaves the right to own property, make contracts, sue, and contract legally recognized marriages. Making full use of even these restricted rights,

African-Americans began to forge new opportunities for themselves.

Under the wing of the Freedman's Bureau, African-Americans had more options for employment, with better terms. The Bureau required that all labor agreements be made in writing and that copies be made available to the subcommissioner of the Bureau, whose approval was necessary in order for the contract to become valid. The Freedman's Bureau acted as a watchdog, making sure that employers did not take unlawful advantage of the newly freed African-Americans.

Contracts often provided for rations, shelter, and a set wage. Many freedman preferred to work on cotton, corn, sugar, and rice farms for a share of the crop. Historian Henderson Donald describes the share system, as it was called in Virginia, as follows,

...if the proprietor supplied team, forage, and implements and cabin and fuel for the tenant and his family, he received one-half to three-fourths of the produce, the proportion varying with the fertility of the soil, the character of the crops, and other similar conditions. On the other hand, if the tenant furnished the teams and the implements, which he was rarely able to do, the proprietor was paid from one-fourth to one-third of the products.<sup>36</sup>

In spite of the Bureau's efforts, African-Americans were often treated unfairly. Farmers paid lower wages. In many counties, an African-American could not work without a written recommendation from his or her former master. A system of fines and penalties was set up through which even the most efficient worker's wage was reduced to almost nothing.<sup>37</sup>

Because of the insecurity of the farm labor system, many African-Americans sought other occupations. Some worked in factories, mechanical trades, and business. Ex-slaves were especially attracted to the railroad industry; in 1860 the state of Virginia had over 1,771 miles of track. By 1870, 1,483 additional miles were laid out.<sup>38</sup>

One of the most lucrative of occupations for the African-American was in the oystering and fishing industry. Alrutheus Taylor states that in 1880 over 7,698 African-Americans in Virginia were employed in that business, a large number of whom resided in York County.<sup>39</sup> The oystering industry was especially important in Virginia because sharecropping could be successful only in instances in which "the landlord was honest, the worker was industrious, the strip of land was productive, and the cotton crop brought a good price".<sup>40</sup> York County land had been depleted of many of its nutrients during the 17th- and 18th- century tobacco production. The poor quality of the soil prevented extensive cotton cultivation, and hence robbed the area of a lucrative market crop. Without such a crop, freed slaves were forced to work at a variety of jobs to make a living.

In 1865, the two most important events in the lives of African-Americans were the collapse of the Confederacy and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Despite the deep sadness and sense of loss they felt at the news of the death of the President, there was reason to feel optimistic. As historian Benjamin Quarles has written:

Slavery was dead, and they [the African-Americans] had played a part in bringing this to pass. Taking inventory of the war's four years, the Negroes felt that now they had a stake in America, that their future was here and not in Liberia, Haiti, or elsewhere. The Civil War had deepened the Negro's sense of identity with the land of his birth, giving him the feeling that he mattered, that he belonged.<sup>41</sup>

African-Americans survived this difficult time through hard work, a sense of identity both as individuals and as members of a group, and a strong religious faith. Some found the early years of freedom more trying than their former enslavement. Katie Darling, a former Virginia slave said, "missy whip me after the war just like she did 'fore. She has a hun'erd lashes up for me now".<sup>42</sup>

For many newly freed African-Americans however, life was a series of positive challenges, and most rose to meet them. Their story is brought into sharper focus through a closer look at one particular black community founded in York County

after the Civil War, which came to be known as the "reservation."



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### CHAPTER 3: People on the Land: The Establishment of the "Reservation"

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*"That was the way of the land" (Alice Roache, 10/18/91)*

During the course of the Civil War about 70,000 freedmen gathered in the lower Peninsula of Virginia. Many of these freedmen settled near the village of Yorktown where General Isaac J. Wistar and his troops laid out a village of cabins for the freedmen called Slabtown.<sup>1</sup>

As of 1865, there were 4,283 free African-Americans in York County. Only seven percent of the freedmen living there at that date were government dependents, and most of these lived at Newtown, a government camp established at or near Fort Monroe in the eastern end of the County. The remainder of the African-Americans in York County were self-sufficient, some settling at Slabtown, while others may have been farming the lands of captured plantations such as Tinsley Farm (Landsdowne), Bellfield, and Indian Fields (Figure 15).<sup>2</sup> These farms formed the nucleus of the African-American community which oral history informants have called the "reservation", located on the lands now occupied by the Naval Weapons Station.

"The only history we can get is translated down, we have no written proof" said "reservation" resident Alexander Lee.<sup>3</sup> Yet he and others agree that the "reservation" lands on which African-Americans settled were given to them, along with their freedom.<sup>4</sup> By 1870, nearly 60 African-American families claimed to own some land in the vicinity of the "reservation" (Figure 16), although only two purchases can be confirmed<sup>5</sup>, and even these are incorrectly recorded on a map drawn of the Peninsula in 1871 (Figure 17). Between 1870 and 1879, five sales to African-Americans of land within the reservation have been documented, bringing the total number of such transactions since 1865 to only seven, although 168 African-American families claimed land ownership in 1880.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that during the break-up of the large plantations, illustrated in Figure 17, some land-owners gave the African-Americans pieces of land

to farm within the "reservation" and elsewhere at no cost although no deeds were recorded. The freedmen who settled on the reservation were attracted there by the presence of African-Americans who had settled in the area prior to the Civil War.

What little is known of the early appearance of the "reservation" concerns the distribution of homesteads, and the lay-out of roads. The road system inside of the "reservation" was not extensive and all roads appear to have been unpaved. The longest road was the old Williamsburg to Yorktown road which ran the entire width of the "reservation" from Yorktown to King's Creek. This road divided the area in half. Three other roads split off from the Williamsburg-Yorktown road. In the western part of the "reservation" a road known as the "Cheesecake" road (from the Powhatan Indian placename *Kiskiak*) stretched from Yorktown to Grove. More centrally located on the "reservation" was a road that turned north off the Williamsburg road and proceeded to Felgate's Creek. This road is now called Wolfe Road. A little further east, another road turned off to the north and for the river before turning slightly northwest. This road was known as the Bellfield road. Branching off from this road was the road to Stony Point. A comparison of Figures 18 and 19 illustrates that African-American settlement within the "reservation" was oriented along these major roadways, and clustered into several small neighborhoods. Archaeological information supports this interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

Archaeological excavations conducted on the Naval Weapons Station lands in 1989 provide some information about the layout of a poor-to-middling African-American farmstead in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The farmstead, probably occupied by Thomas Jackson and his family, consisted of a wooden-framed dwelling house set on brick footings, measuring approximately 10 by 16

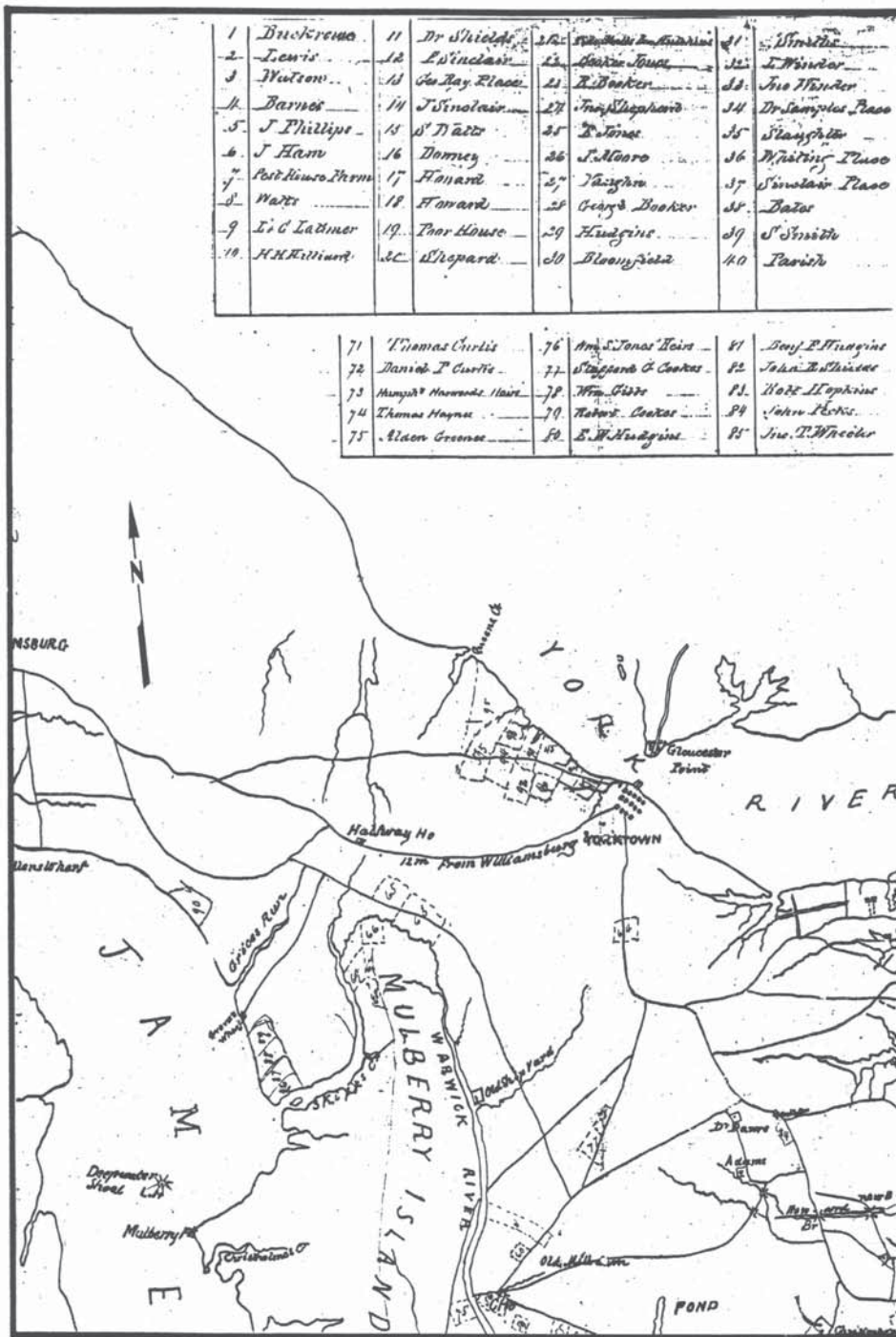


Figure 15. Map of Government-Owned Freedman's Bureau Farms on the Peninsula, 1866 (Source: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Research Library).



Figure 16. African-American Families Holding Personal and Real Estate Values.

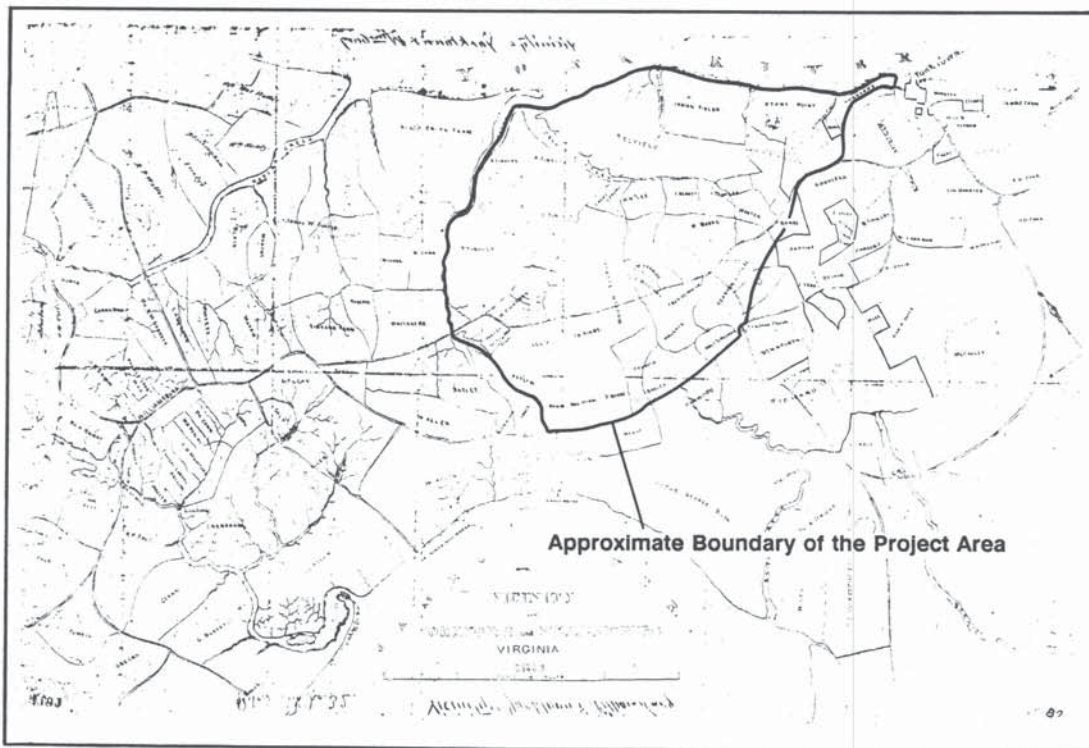
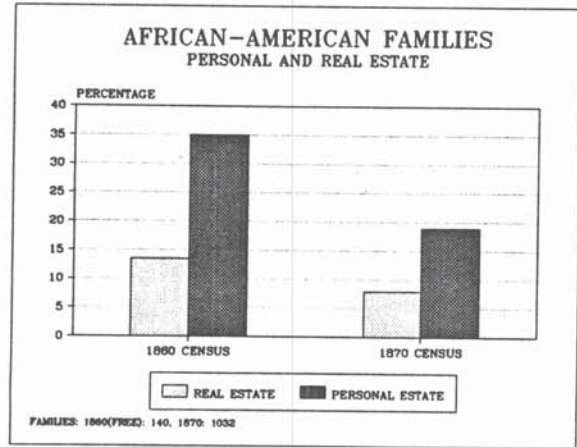


Figure 17. Map of Country Between James and York Rivers, 1871 (Source: Old Dominion Land Company Records, Newport News Public Library).



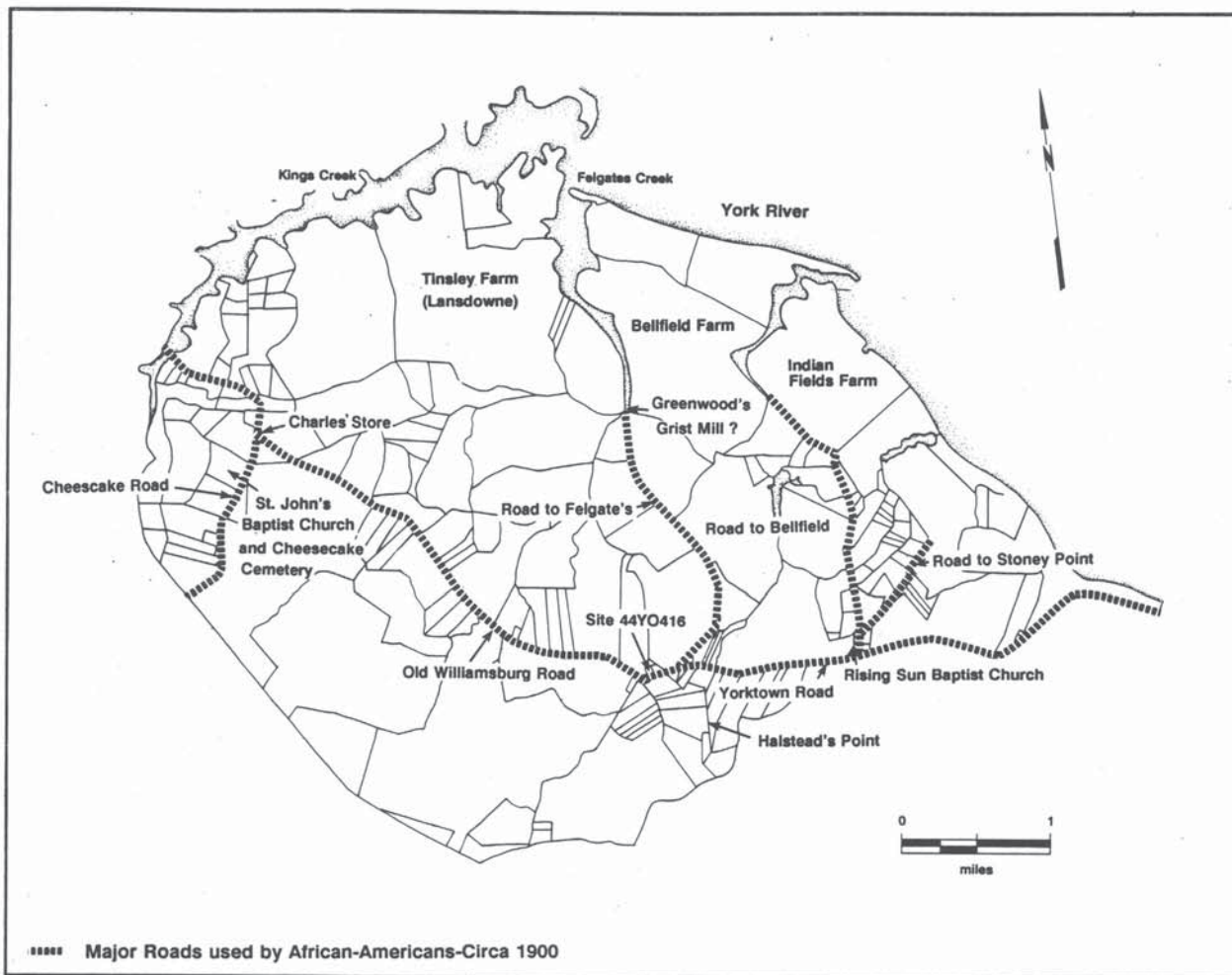


Figure 18. Map of Major Roads and Landmarks Used by African-Americans, ca. 1900.

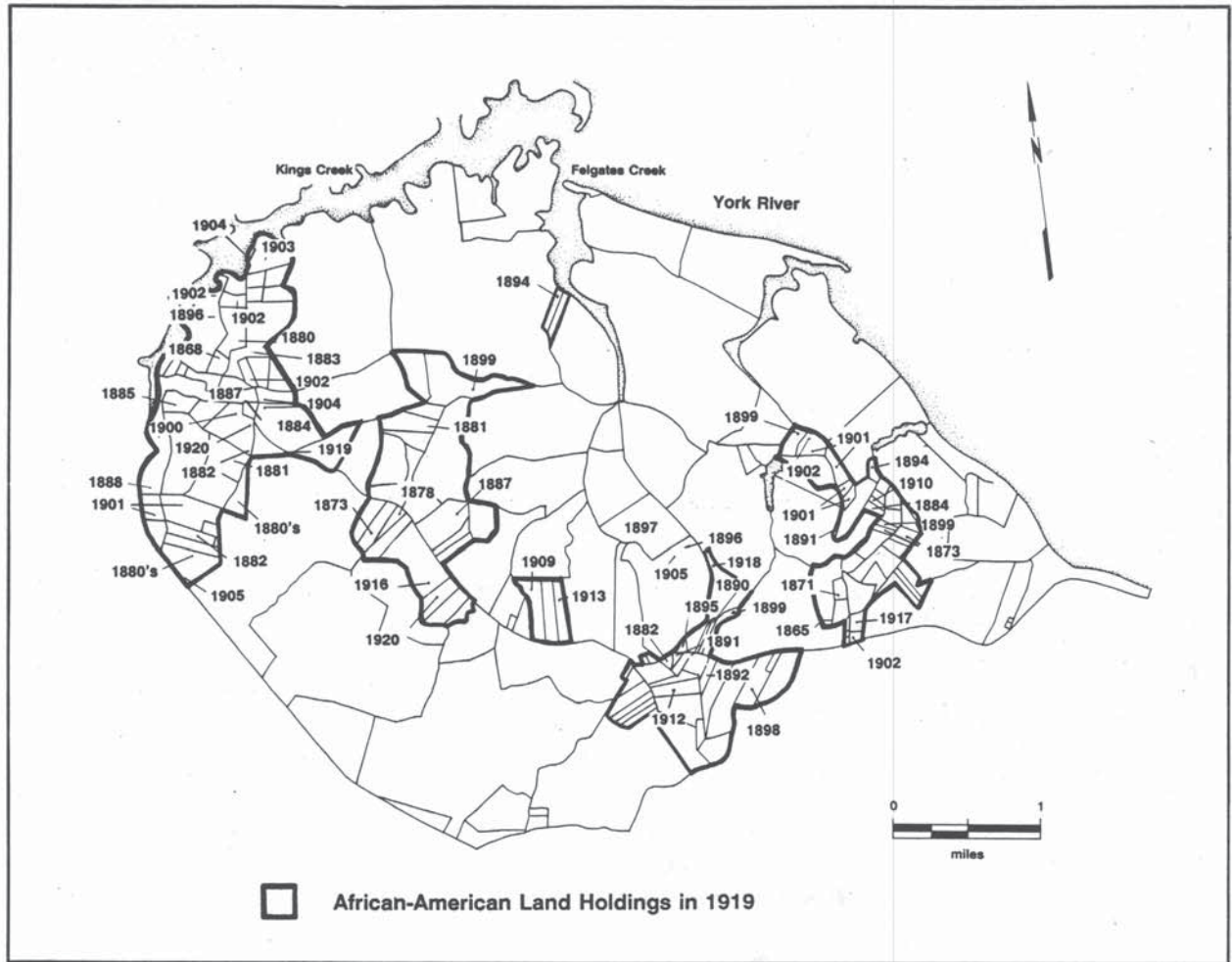


Figure 19. Map of African-American Land Holdings in 1919 and the Year of Acquisition.



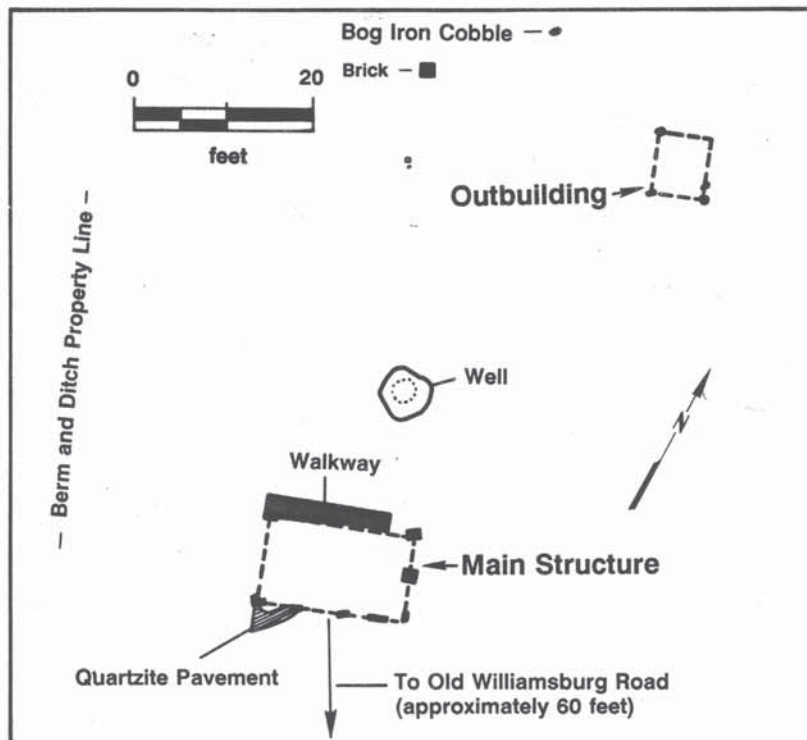


Figure 20. This drawing shows the information discovered about the Thomas Jackson farmstead through the use of archaeology (After Ecology & Environment 1989).

feet with a brick end chimney, a well, and a small shed (Figure 20). This farmstead, like many others, was oriented along a well-traveled road (see Figure 18).<sup>8</sup> The first African-American to own this land was Peter Coles, who purchased it in 1889. As of 1892, Peter Coles is being assessed a tax for a structure worth \$20.00 on his land. This assessment increased to \$30.00 in 1895, but did not increase anymore, even after the property was purchased by Thomas Jackson in 1913.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it is very probable that the structure remains found by archaeological investigation are the remains of the structure built by Peter Coles in 1892.

While not all records can be traced directly to "reservation" residents, we can say a great deal about their experiences by examining records relating to the county as a whole. African-American ownership of land in York County was much more extensive than is commonly thought, but

many were landless, and often made their living as sharecroppers. In York County, a share cropper was usually a tenant farmer, who owned his own equipment, and rented a piece of land and a house for a fixed monetary value.<sup>10</sup> Eighty-nine of the 168 African-American farmers in the Nelson District were tenant farmers in 1880. The more traditional form of sharecropping, where a farmer is supplied with equipment, and required to give a set amount of the harvested crop to the owner of the land was also practiced by a small number of African-Americans in the years following the Civil War.<sup>11</sup>

By 1910 many other African-Americans were able to establish themselves economically and to save enough money to buy tracts of land. The dates and locations of land acquired by African-Americans from 1865 to 1920 can be seen in Figure 19.

It has been estimated that 35,000 African-Americans moved from the South to the Southwest between 1865 and 1867.<sup>12</sup> This early out-migration of African-Americans does not seem to have affected York County. The 1870 census there recorded 4690 African-Americans, who represented the majority of the population of the County until 1910. African-American communities were scattered throughout the four newly created districts of Bruton, Grafton, Nelson, and Poquoson (Figure 21). Two of these, the Bruton and Nelson Districts, contained high concentrations of African-Americans with a ratio of African-Americans to whites of 4 to 1 in Bruton and 7 to 1 in Nelson (Figure 22). By 1880, however, African-Americans began to leave York County, creating a ratio of 1.6 African-Americans to every one white for the county as a whole (Figure 23).<sup>13</sup>

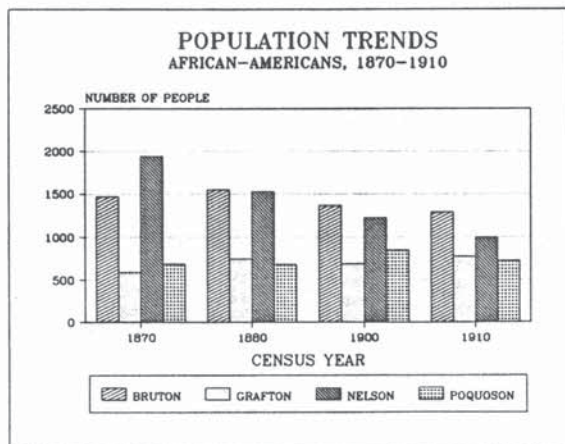


Figure 21. Population Trends, African-American Population by District, 1870-1910.

Many African-Americans continued to reside in the Nelson and Bruton districts, which encompassed a portion of the lands now occupied by the Naval Weapons Station where the "reservation" was established. Although many African-Americans who remained in York County formed an increasingly solid land-owning group, the overall African-American population of the region continued to decline, especially in the Nelson District (see Figure 21). By 1890, it had decreased to 4395 people, a ratio of 1.37 to 1, African-

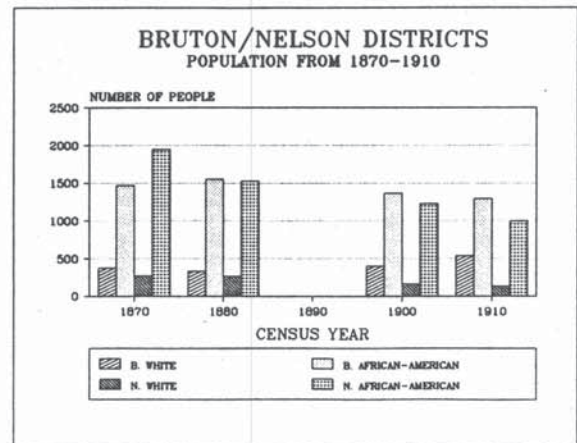


Figure 22. Population of Bruton and Nelson Districts, 1870-1910.

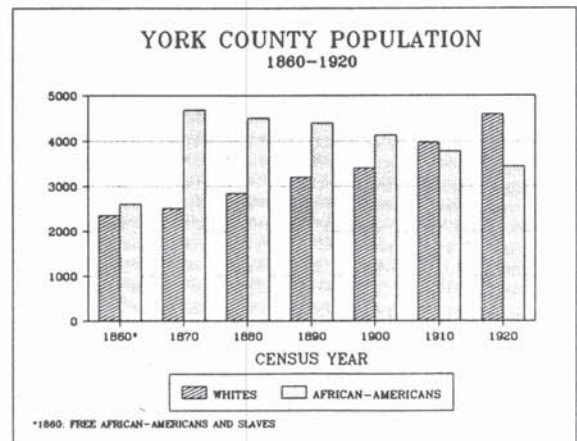


Figure 23. Combined White and African-American Population of York County, 1860-1920.

American to white.<sup>14</sup> Out-migration of African-Americans appears to account for the drop in numbers. This trend continued into the first decade of the 20th century. Although the African-American population of the Bruton District had remained relatively stable, it too suffered its first real decrease in African-American population in 1900.<sup>15</sup>



The 1910 Census is the last that lists population by districts. This is also the first census in which white people outnumber African-Americans county-wide, 3971 to 3783.<sup>16</sup> Most of the white population growth since 1870 took place in the southern district of Poquoson. In Bruton District, the African-American population was 1292, creating a slightly more than 2.5 to 1 ratio of African-Americans to whites. The ratio in 1870 had been closer to 4 to 1. The Nelson District in 1910 saw its African-American population dip below 1000, creating an almost 1000 person decrease since 1870. With its white population below 150, Nelson District in 1910 was, by almost 700 people, the least populated district in York County (see Figures 11, 16, 21-23).

The general picture which emerges from the census data and land records for York County in the period 1865-1910 is one of a slowly declining African-American population overall, balanced by a stable land-holding nucleus centered primarily on the "reservation". Here the dual ties of land and family provided a strong incentive to remain.

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## CHAPTER 4

### Family Ties: Kinship and Social Relationships

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*"I could talk a lot about my family" (Alexander Lee, 1991)*

When residents of the "reservation" are asked to look back at their lives there, most recall with happiness their family and their circle of friends. The following passage from an interview taken with Mrs. Beulah Christian Scott details the intimacy and security of such life:

Well, in the evenings, I remember, . . . This is the time we'd always have dinner. Everybody'd sit around the dinner table and we'd find out "what'd you do today" How was your schooling" and everything, and go over our lessons, and then my father would tell us what kind of day he had. My mother would say, well she was taking care of the children because at that time mothers didn't go out to work, the fathers worked and the children stayed in, the mother home to take care of the children. So she said I had a hard day, you know, naturally she meant hard day, her day was usually harder than anybody's, you know. but, this is what we'd do and we taught poems and we taught the Bible, and this is what we'd do in the evenings because everybody was home.<sup>1</sup>

The picture of family life evoked by Mrs. Scott's reminiscences and by other historical sources contradicts what some scholars have written about black marriage and family life in the South before and after the Civil War.

The nature of slave family relations often depended on the views and practices of their white owners. Some allowed marriages to take place, while others actively forbade them. Ex-slave Minnie Folkes, who was owned by the Belcher family of Chesterfield County, Virginia, was interviewed in 1937. She recalled:

As to marriage, when a slave wanted to marry, why he would jes' ask his master to go over an' ask de tother master could he

take himself dis certain gal for a wife. Mind you now, dat master called all de slaves out o' quarters an' he'd make 'em line up see, stand in a row like soldiers. De slaves man is wid his master when dis linin' up is gwine on, an' he pulls de gal to him he wants. De master make dem both jump over a broom stick an' dey is pronounced man an' wife.<sup>2</sup>

Jumping over an object, usually a broomstick, was common in many West African marriage ceremonies.

Historians interested in the make-up of the African-American family have identified three basic family types.<sup>3</sup> The first type of the family is the so-called "matriarchal" or matri-centered type. In this sort of family, the mother lived separately with her children, and was responsible for their support and upbringing. Many historians have suggested that families of this sort were created due to the conditions of slavery, when married couples were separated, or when marriage was forbidden altogether. Likewise, post-war mobility among black men may have contributed to the continuance of this family type.<sup>4</sup>

Other evidence suggests that male-headed households were equally common among African-Americans both before and after the Civil War. Some slaves were permitted to marry and to raise children together, although in some cases, the father "commuted" from another plantation.<sup>5</sup> In addition, freed black families were usually headed by men.

Some African-Americans also lived in what anthropologists call "extended" families, where married children and their offspring resided with their parents, or where the families of two or more siblings lived together. These arrangements were sometimes found in isolated communities away from the main areas of settlement.<sup>6</sup>



Many students of African-American history have assumed that the matriarchal family was typical of poorer blacks, while male headed households tended to be more affluent, and that slavery and its aftermath contributed to the disintegration of the African American family.<sup>7</sup>

These historical generalizations are not supported by information from York County before or after the Civil War. In Figure 8, it can be seen that there were 140 free African-American families in 1860, of which 64 percent were headed by men.

In addition to oral histories which document male-headed households in York County after the Civil War, census records from the county dating from 1865 to 1910 indicate that the father was almost always present, regardless of the economic status of the family (Figure 24). According to Herbert Gutman, a historian who wrote a landmark study of the African-American family in slavery and freedom, "Black Americans were almost all poor in the period covered by this study, whether they lived in the North or in the South, in cities or on farms. But poverty did not entail household disorganization".<sup>8</sup>

Despite difficult economic conditions, many African-American families also remained in York county for generations. One can see evidence of this in the Fox family genealogy illustrated here. The family tree (Figures 25, 26, and 27) spans a time period from before the Civil War up into the 1930s. The founding couple, John and Mary Fox, were born in 1820 and 1825 respectively. In the 1865 African-American population census taken in York County, John and Mary Fox were listed as a married freed slave couple living on the land that had been part of the Bellfield plantation.

That the Foxes had been married before emancipation is suggested by the ages of their children, one of whom, Henry, was probably born in 1856. After the war, John and Mary had at least three more children. All of these children and their children's children remained in York County, and married there, and some descendants reside nearby to this day. Other African-American families were similarly stable. Mr. J.H. Payne, a former resident of the "reservation" maintains that most of his family still lives in the Williamsburg-York County area.<sup>9</sup>

The Fox family tree also illustrates the extent of local intermarriage. For example, Henry Fox married Charity Ransom, and John Fox, married Nellie Fields, both of York County. These couples lived on former Bellfield lands as well. Of the children that Henry and Charity bore, it is known that Sarah, Henrietta, and Rosa and their respective spouses married locally and remained in the area, as did John and Nellie's daughter Sarah, who settled in the area after her marriage to Henry Thomas.

Census records help recreate the quality of African-American family life. For the Nelson District of York County in 1880, the average age of the mother at the birth of her first child was 21.6 years. Most mothers listed in the census continued to have children into the later years of child-bearing. Within the 10 percent collected sample, African-American families seemed to have children about every two and one half years. On the surface, this data would appear to provide evidence for a very large number of children among African-American families. This does not, however, appear to be the case. According to the collected sample, families in the Nelson District had an average of between three and four children.

A possible explanation of this phenomenon could be a high infant mortality rate within the family structure. Health conditions in many African-American communities were dismal.

In April of 1866, Superintendent Vining wrote of the freedmen, "I see nothing but poverty and suffering for them, until they are more distributed over the country. In camps, as they are now, they will undoubtedly be as poor next year as they now are, and more degraded."<sup>10</sup>

Because of this poverty and inadequate medical facilities, diseases such as smallpox and malaria took a constant toll on the African-American population of the area.

This possible rise in the infant mortality rate was paralleled by a drop in overall fertility of African-American women as a whole. Reynolds Farley, author of a book dealing with the historical demography of the African-American population describes a dramatic decrease in the rate at which



Figure 24. Many freed African-Americans and their descendants in rural Virginia established strong communities, each centering around the church, the focus of social and religious life. Here an anonymous black family departs for the weekly service (Courtesy of the Valentine Museum).

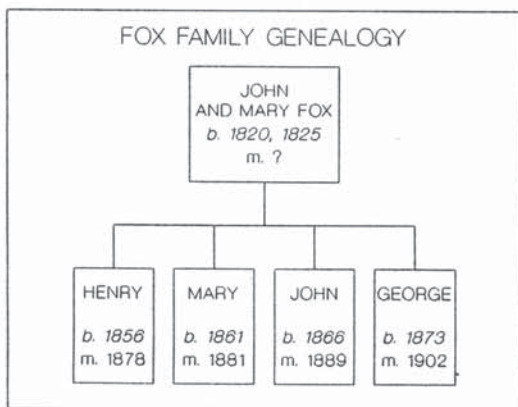


Figure 25. Fox Family Genealogy, John and Mary Fox.

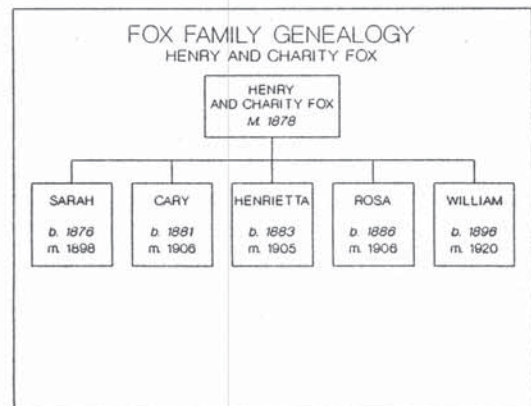


Figure 26. Fox Family Genealogy, Henry and Charity Fox.



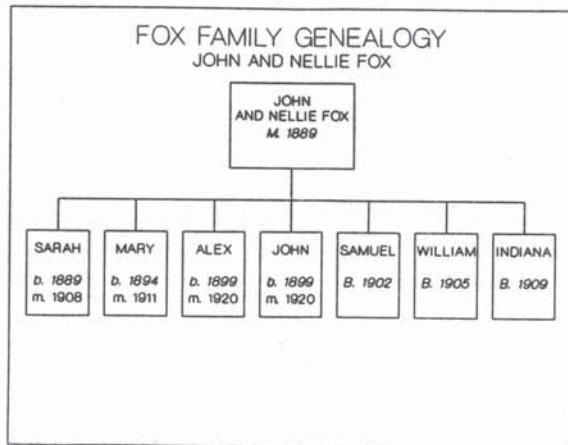


Figure 27. Fox Family Genealogy, John and Nellie Fox.

women had babies. The decrease is long and steady with the pronounced drop occurring from the years 1890 to 1920, but the overall drop began with the end of the Civil War and continued until the eve of World War II.<sup>11</sup> These two demographic phenomena help to explain the structure of the African-American family in the York County area.

Although African-American nuclear families in York County were not large (Figure 28), kinship networks were extensive and mutually supporting. Mr. Payne, a former resident of the "reservation", recalls much cooperation between families:

And most of the people were very close neighbors. They worked together...When the time came to harvest, they would go to each other's farm, and assist them in harvesting, butchering, and things like that.<sup>12</sup>

Mutual support organized through kinship ties was a kind of "insurance" in cases of need, and African-American families were able to survive in part because of this cooperative adaptation. Freedmen received similar support from friends and neighbors, both black and white.

Throughout most of the country, African-American families had to face hardships more

challenging than lack of money or land. Many whites resented and feared the freedmen, as they had before the war, because they owned land and were thought to be in direct economic competition with white landowners and laborers.<sup>13</sup> Once the war ended, white attitudes towards the African-American were clear. In the cities, the white resentment focused on the African-American's political activities. Many whites still believed that ex-slaves should have no voice in the government in spite of (or perhaps because) they outnumbered non-African-Americans in some areas.

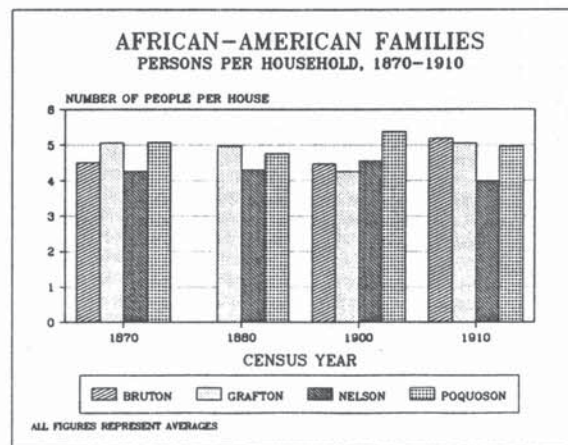


Figure 28. African-American Family, Persons Per Household, 1870-1910.

Despite these problems, which occurred mainly in urban areas throughout the South, relations between African-Americans and whites in the land which was to become the Naval Weapons Station in York County were cordial. Many former residents spoke positively of their white neighbors. Mrs. Beulah Scott of Washington, D.C. was born on the "reservation" land a few years before the Naval Weapons Station was established. Below is an excerpt from her interview:

Yes, there was one other family that was friends of ours, they were the Ripley's. This lady had two children. I can never remember her husband. I imagine the husband died before I could remember him. But there were the Ripley's and she had two girls. They were very close friends of ours.

We just ate together, played together, slept together, and we just couldn't understand why we couldn't go to school together".<sup>14</sup>

While such recollections often emphasize positive experiences at the expense of the negative, community life on the "reservation" appears to have been relatively harmonious, cooperative, and stable. Although perhaps not representative of African-American life in all parts of the South following emancipation, the picture of the "reservation" that emerges from the records and oral testimonies requires a reassessment of historical African-American experience. The stability of the African-American family in York county, as well as their harmonious relations with the white, were important factors in their economic survival and the quality of their lives, which are the subjects of the following chapter.





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**CHAPTER 5:**  
**Subsistence and Material Life**  
**on the "Reservation": 1865-1910**

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*"You did what you had to do" (Alice Roache, 1991)*

While family, kin, and friends bound the African-American communities of York County like the "reservation" together and made them strong, hard work ordered their daily lives. According to the United States Census of 1870, 48 percent of the African-American males in York County called themselves farmers, 36 percent were farm laborers, and 9 percent worked the water as oystermen (Figure 29). By 1910, the percentage of farmers has gone up to 58 percent, while the percentage of farm laborers shrank to 16 percent, and 13 percent called themselves oystermen (Figure 30). Bruton and Nelson, the two districts that encompassed the "reservation" lands, showed a similar distribution of occupations (Figures 31, 32, 33, and 34). A small number of men worked occasionally or full time as barbers, preachers, ferrymen, teamsters, and coopers.

Women also worked outside the home, although no census records document this fact until 1910, when 36 percent reported working as laundresses, 24 percent were listed as domestic servants, and 40 percent were listed as having "other" occupations (Figures 35 and 36).

Much of the livelihoods for African-Americans depended directly or indirectly on ownership or access to land. The Freedman's Bureau promised all manumitted slaves "forty acres and a mule" (Figure 37). This promise, however, was never fulfilled. In August 1865, President Andrew Johnson, as part of his policy of pardoning and granting amnesty to ex-Confederates, began the process of restoring abandoned and confiscated lands to their former rebel owners, land which in some cases had been informally parcelled out to former slaves. In September, Johnson sent General Oliver Howard, head of the Freedman's Bureau, throughout the South to persuade freedmen who had received land from the government to give it up and inform others that the promised lands would not be provided. Instead, he encouraged freedmen

to work for wages, under contract, for their former masters.<sup>1</sup> In some Southern states, such as South Carolina, many African-Americans were able to purchase land either through private exchange or by forming a cooperative among themselves.<sup>2</sup>

While a number of African-Americans in York County were land owners in 1865, the land-owning status of others was less clear. "Reservation" residents occupied parcels carved out of large plantations confiscated during the war, such as Bellfield, Lansdowne, and Stony Point (see Figure 15). Some of this land was returned to its owners, and many African-Americans were left not only landless, but bereft of livelihood as well.<sup>3</sup>

Adding to their problems was the increasingly repressive legislation of the post-war years, particularly the set of laws known as the "Black Codes", which forced many African-Americans into exploitative wage labor situations.<sup>4</sup> Historian Arnold Taylor describes the results of such legislation:

During the Reconstruction period, the freedmen had objected to working under wage labor contracts. Such work often involved laboring in gangs under close supervision, an arrangement reminiscent of slavery. Unable to acquire land of their own, the freedmen sought an arrangement that would allow them to cultivate a plot of land in relative freedom. Planters, often lacking a ready supply of cash, welcomed a system that would enable them to acquire the necessary labor to cultivate their plantations. The result was the emergence of a tenancy system with many variations.<sup>5</sup>

There were two types of tenancy practiced in the Tidewater region, cash tenancy and sharecropping. Under the cash tenancy system, the freedman would rent a piece of land for a fixed sum



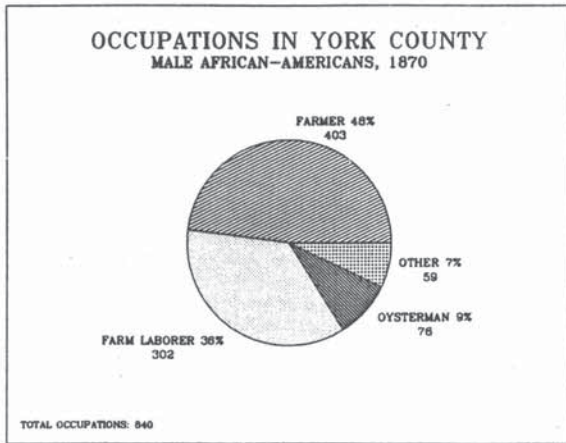


Figure 29. Occupations Among Male African-Americans in York County, 1870.

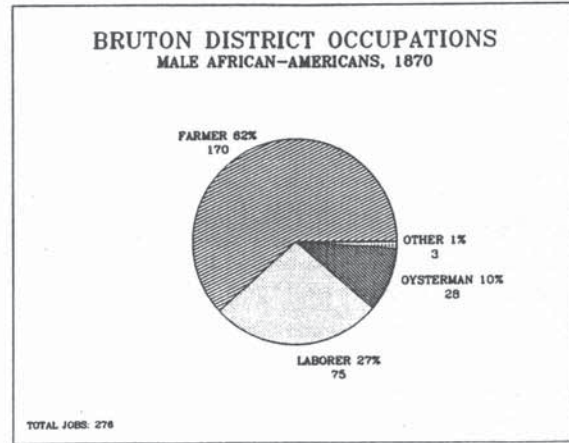


Figure 31. Occupations Among Male African-Americans in the Bruton District, 1870.

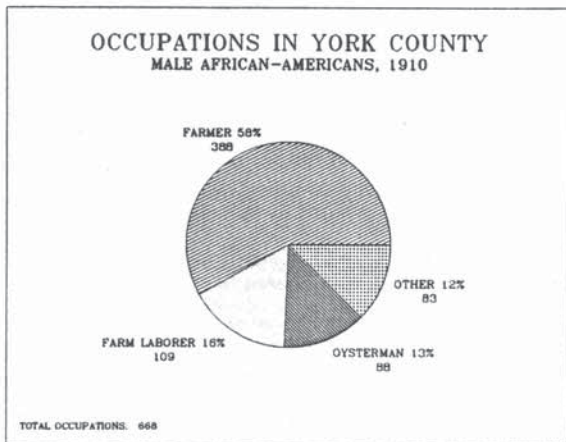


Figure 30. Occupations Among Male African-Americans in York County, 1910.

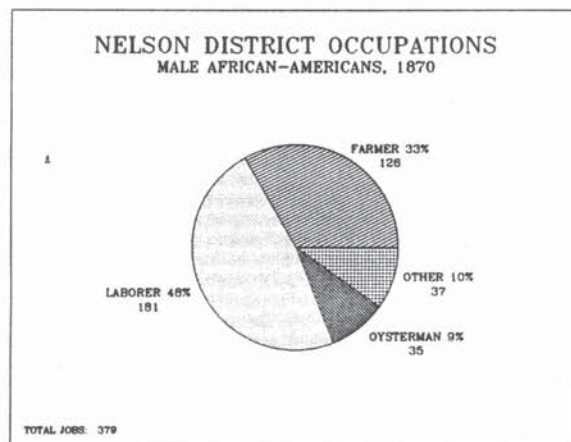


Figure 32. Occupations Among Male African-Americans in the Nelson District, 1870.

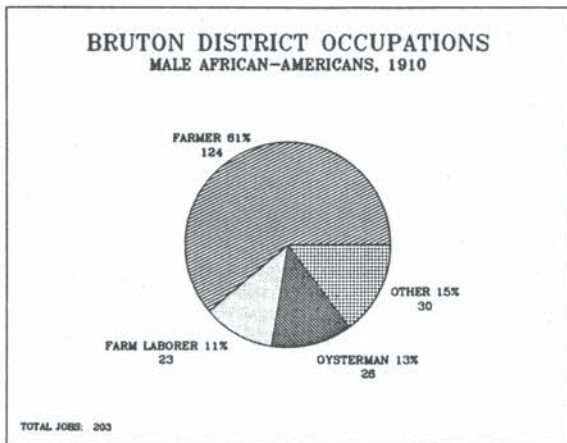


Figure 33. Occupations Among Male African-Americans in the Bruton District, 1910.

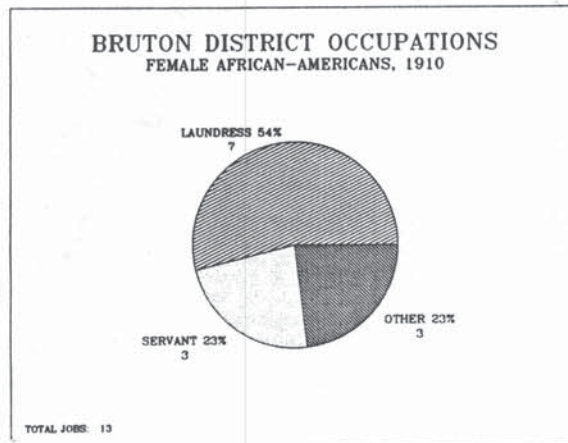


Figure 35. Occupations Among Female African-Americans in the Bruton District, 1910.

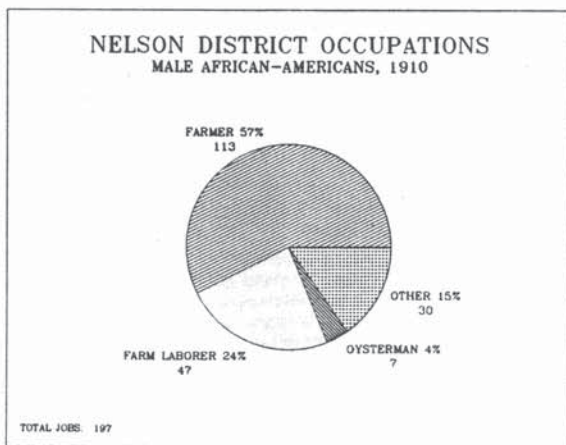


Figure 34. Occupations Among Male African-Americans in the Nelson District, 1910.

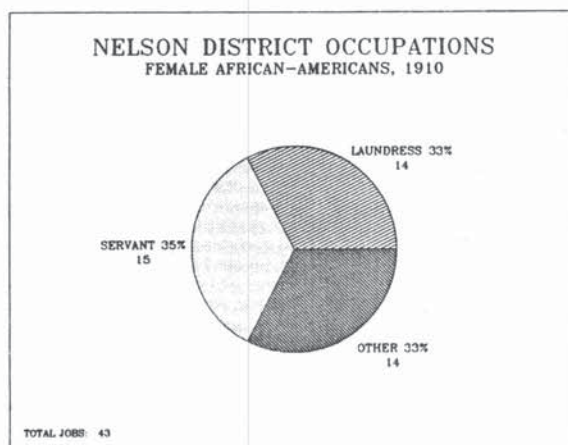


Figure 36. Occupations Among Female African-Americans in the Nelson District, 1910.





Figure 37. Freed African-Americans were limited in the ways they could make a living. This photograph of freed slaves in the tobacco fields near Beaufort, NC, illustrates the difficult work conditions many freedmen had to endure (Courtesy of the Department of Historic Resources, Richmond).

of money which could be paid in cash or by a part of the crop produced on that land. The other option for freedmen was sharecropping. In this case, the crop produced on the land was divided between the tenant and the owner. If the owner provided shelter and equipment, the share was usually one-half to two-thirds of the crop. If the tenant provided his own equipment the share was usually less, about one-third.<sup>6</sup> It is clear that the sharecropping system was open to abuse, pushing the freedmen deeper into debt, and making the chances of acquiring land even less likely.<sup>7</sup> It is easy to imagine how these conditions would be worse where soils were relatively unproductive, as they were in York County. Yet of the 168 African-American households counted in the Nelson District of York County in 1880, 40 percent report themselves as owning the land upon which they live, 54 percent report renting for cash, and only 6 percent report themselves as sharecroppers.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of the decade, more African-Americans were able to purchase land, as illustrated

in Figure 19. Although a large percentage were still tenants, African-Americans in York County, Virginia on the whole fared better than African-Americans in other Southern states. In 1900, for example, only 14 percent of African-American farmers in Georgia owned their farms and in Mississippi just a little over 11 percent of the African-American farmers had been successful in purchasing land. Indeed, for the entire South only 25 percent of African-American farmers were landowners.<sup>9</sup>

By 1900 nearly 60 percent of the state's African-American farm operators owned their farms, which together with their livestock were valued at \$13,000,000.<sup>10</sup> In York County, the high percentage of antebellum free African-Americans in the population and the long period of Union occupation during the War may have contributed to African-American success in land acquisition there.

Although African-Americans did own a high percentage of land in York County and Virginia in general, their lives were not easy. Farms owned by African-Americans in York County were small and rather unproductive. The figures presented in Figure 38 clearly show that African-American farms in the Nelson District of York County in 1880 were much smaller and less productive than surrounding

	AFRICAN-AMERICANS	WHITES
Number of farms	168	56
Number of acres owned	895.5	2781
Number of acres rented	935	1064
Number of acres sharecropped	209	503
Total acres	2039.5	4348
Number of acres under till	1523.5	1991
Total production value in 1879	\$9763	\$11708
Average farm production in 1879	\$58.11	\$209.07

Figure 38. Agricultural Census Figures for the Nelson District, 1880: Average African-American and White Farm Production and Values.

white farms. A glance at Figure 18 will show the reader that most African-Americans living on the land which became the Naval Weapons Station were farming parcels on the perimeters of the old plantations and on marshy lands near creeks or



rivers. The predominant soil types were a fine, sandy loam now called Slagle, and an acidic loam known as Craven-Uchee (Figure 39). Slagle loam, usually found on upland terraces, is characterized by only moderate drainage, and is best suited to fodder crops and pasturage. This soil type also requires amendments such as lime and fertilizer for successful cultivation, and responds best to a regime of crop rotation and an intermixing of grasses and legume crops.<sup>11</sup> Craven-Uchee loam is typically found on sloping ground and in wooded areas. It is poorly drained and easily eroded, and unsuited to cultivated crops or pasturage.<sup>12</sup> The poor quality of the soil, the likelihood that freedmen were offered only lands already exhausted by overgrazing or intensive farming, and the probability that most African-Americans were unable to obtain lime or fertilizer in great quantities meant that their farms were unlikely to be highly productive, regardless of their efforts.

Many residents of the "reservation" recall that people planted a variety of crops to get by. Buela Christian Scott remembered:

My father had the land he had. Where we lived, we could walk out of our backyard, we had a barnyard, then we had like a cornfield, to raise corn, and then we'd go through the woods sort of. Then he had another big field back there that he raised corn, and vegetables, and what have you (Figure 40).<sup>13</sup>

Figure 38 summarizes the number of acres under production for African-American and white farms in York County in 1879.

<sup>1</sup> The 1880 Agricultural Census also listed the products of the farms as well as acreage and production value. According to the Agricultural Census, the average African-American farm was slightly over nine acres, with a production value of \$58.11, or \$6.40 an acre, as compared to thirty-five and a half acres, \$209.07, and \$5.88 for the 56 white farms recorded on the census. African-American farms produced mainly corn and Irish and sweet potatoes growing on average 10.89 bushels, 47.6 bushels, and 71.8 bushels an acre, respectively, as compared to 13.96, 71.0, and 55.9 for white farmers. While neither the African-Americans nor the whites were able to grow much with their land, the figures seem to indicate that the white farmers had the

better land, what little of it there was. Most of the land in the area had been farmed for over 200 years without any fertilizer and was probably farmed out by the 1880s. With little coming from the ground, it must be assumed that the supplementing of the diet must have come from the river and from hunting. Cattle, in the form of milch cows or other cattle, were present on 91 African-American farms, but only six of the farms reported slaughtering any of the cattle, and even then only a total of seven cattle were killed. This also points to working the water and hunting.

Fannie Epps, whose grandparents and great grandparents lived on "reservation" lands, recalls visiting there as a child around 1900. Her grandparents raised corn, and kept guinea hens, chickens, ducks, turkeys, hogs, horses, and cows.<sup>14</sup>

The diversity of crops and animals raised by African-American families on the "reservation" was characteristic of a life lived by "making do." Sharing of labor and food was also a part of this life. Mrs. Epps remembers her parents, who lived in Williamsburg, travelling out to the "reservation" with "town" supplies such as coffee flour, and sugar, to exchange them there for eggs, butter, and fresh vegetables.<sup>15</sup> Mr. Payne tells much the same story of sharing within the community:

Most of the people were very close neighbors. They worked together . . . when the time came to harvest, they would go to each other's farm, and assist them in harvesting, butchering, and things like that (Figure 41).<sup>16</sup>

Everyone in the family was expected to help out as well. Mrs. Roache recalled her daily routine as a child:

You came home from school, you [shelled] corn for the chickens, you did your chores. You brought in the wood, the kindling, the chips, whatever. You did all this before you had supper -- gathered up the wood. And then after supper, you did your homework, and you went to bed.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of these efforts, many families could not survive on the produce of their farms alone, and many supplemented their diets and incomes by



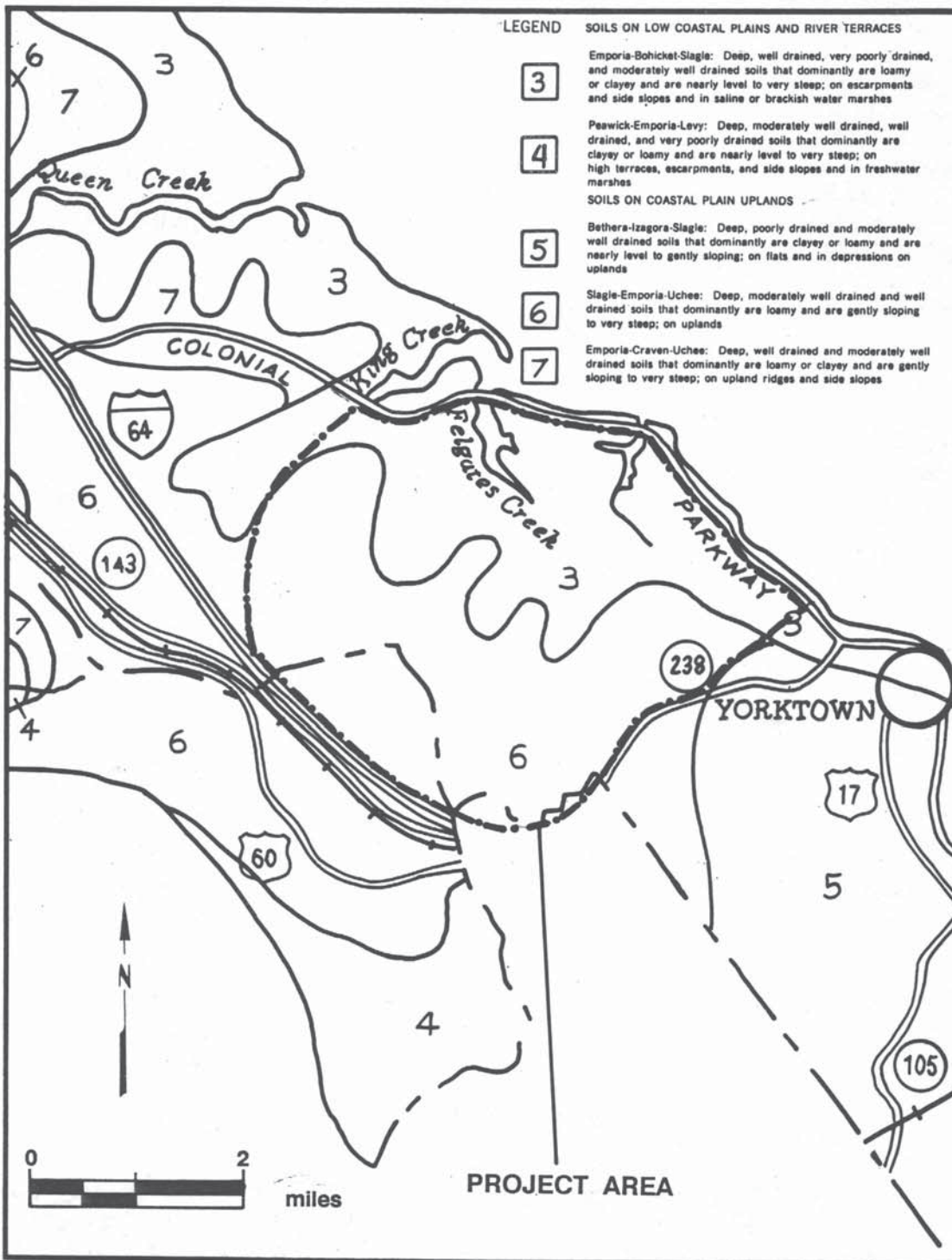


Figure 39. Map of Soil Types in and around the Project Area (Source: Soil Survey of James City and York Counties and City of Williamsburg, Department of Agriculture, State of Virginia, 1985).



*Figure 40. Like all rural residents of the Post-War south, freed slaves worked long hours in the fields (Courtesy of the Valentine Museum).*



*Figure 41. Many farmers prepared grains with hand mills such as the one shown above, others had their corn ground at commercial mills (Courtesy of the Valentine Museum).*



oystering. The 11,443 acres purchased for the Mine Depot in 1918 is bordered on the north by the York River. Feeding into the river are several small tributary creeks, among these are King's Creek, Felgate's Creek, and Indian Field Creek.

African-Americans, using dugout canoes of originally Native American design, with modifications of African and European origins,<sup>18</sup> provided much of the labor for oystering on these waterways throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries. Following the war, oystering was increasingly pursued by blacks, usually as a supplementary, but vital occupation (Figure 42). One former resident, Mr. Caesar Carter, recalled that if one did not work the water, then one did not survive.<sup>19</sup>

Mr. Alexander Lee, who was born in 1914 to John and Martha Lee, lived on Felgate's Creek. Alexander's father, John, had 66 acres of land and 60 fruit trees. But, according to Lee, his main occupation was oystering:

My father was an oysterer, he dealt with oysters, you see. He worked at the James River in the wintertime, at oyster season, he planted oysters. . . he had his own boat; him and his brothers had their own business. . . the majority of the people in the area were farmers and . . . worked the river . . . oysters and fishing.<sup>20</sup>

Of the people interviewed, most spoke fondly of the oystering business. Mr. James Payne recalls,

"Oh yeah, most of my mother's people were living in that vicinity, and they were Hundley's, my mother was a Hundley...her brothers were watermen, too. They had, from what I can remember, they had motorboats. My uncle also worked the river. He was an oysterman. He used to take oysters to Richmond, as far as Richmond. Leave over the weekend, take his produce to Richmond, and sell them there...Humphrey Payne [his uncle], he was self-employed, he had his own oyster-grounds, he worked the water, he made a pretty good living there".<sup>21</sup>

Others spoke of people docking their boats at Felgate's Creek, and the practice of owning one's own oyster ground.<sup>22</sup>

Just as the African-Americans depended on the whites for their economic survival, the whites were reliant on African-American capital. There were only a few examples of industrial development in the area. This development came in the form of flouring and grist mills, all of which were owned by whites. One was George Greenwood, who, according to the 1880 Industrial Census for the Nelson District of York County, owned one of the three flouring and grist mills in the county, and the only one within "reservation" lands, on Felgate's Creek. Greenwood reported a gross income for 1880 of \$1500.00, and employed one assistant, who was paid \$50.00 per year. The mill ground 300,000 pounds of corn meal and 6,000 bushels of other grains.<sup>23</sup> White owners were dependent on the business brought in by African-American farmers.

Although primarily producers, African-Americans on the "reservation" were also consumers. Most shopped at white-owned stores which operated in the area, such as the store at Halstead's Point run by Mr. Knight and J. Clements.<sup>24</sup> Clothing, or more often, cloth, furniture, and household goods and building supplies were purchased there, along with other items which made life more comfortable. Some residents had well-constructed frame houses, probably of the "I" style so common in Tidewater Virginia. Fannie Epps described her Howard grandparent's home on the "reservation" as a spacious one, with two rooms on the first and two above, fronted by a porch. Like white families of the time, the Howards built their kitchen separately.<sup>25</sup>

The people of the "reservation" community survived through hard work, versatility, and a sense of loyalty to one another. Alexander Lee recalled:

The problem was that people had a lot of land, but no money. I praise my great-grandfather, grandfather, and father because they came out of slavery with no knowledge of nothing, but with wisdom and foresight, they planned things. They had to pitch in and do it themselves.<sup>26</sup>



*Figure 42. Oystering canoes such as the ones photographed here in Hampton harbor, were employed by many African-American oystermen in York County (Courtesy of the Hampton Arts Commission).*

It was a hard life, but as former resident Alice Roache put it: "You didn't know any differently so you were satisfied with what you had".<sup>27</sup>





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## CHAPTER 6: African-American Religion and World View

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*"...you were satisfied with what you had" (Alice Roache 1991)*

For the people of the "reservation", work gave structure to the day, but it was religion that gave it meaning. While slaves, many African-Americans became Christians, and adopted many of the of the religious practices of their owners.<sup>1</sup> "As a rule, writes historian Henderson Donald, 'Negro church members were attached to white congregations or were organized into missions, with nearly always a white minister in charge and a black assistant'".<sup>2</sup> An ex-slave from Virginia recalled:

Sundays were days of early hustle and bustle to git white folks off to church. After dey had gone and de house cleared up, de slaves could go to their church, a little log cabin in edge of woods, whar a white preacher would be to overseer. Here we would pray and sing in our own feelings and expressions singin' in long and common meters soundin' high over de hills. We were not allowed to gather in groups for conversation for fear we were plottin' to escape, or cause trouble of some kind. Soon after de close of services we had to rush back and git de white folks' dinner".<sup>3</sup>

It was after the Civil War, when African-Americans were able to express their religion freely that white and African-American styles of worship began to separate. As he remembered back to his days of bondage, Mr. Cornelius Garner, another ex-slave, tells it,

De preaching us got 'twon't nothing much. Dat ole white preacher jest was telling us slaves to be good to our masters. We ain't keer'd a bit 'bout dat stuff he was telling us 'cause we wanted to sing, pray, and serve God in our own way. You see, 'legion needs a little motion-specially if you gwine feel de spirret".<sup>4</sup>

The "spirit" of African-American religion is closely linked with those practices passed down as part of

their African heritage. The central figure in all of African-American religions was the priest. On the plantations, as in many parts of traditional Africa, the priest served as an interpreter of the supernatural, and a comforter of the sorrowing.<sup>5</sup> Religious leaders also expressed for their congregations the anguish of slavery and their hopes for earthly and heavenly redemption.

After the War, many African-Americans turned with increased intensity to religion, as a stable center in a chaotic world. For some years, African-Americans continued to attend white churches for Sunday worship. Others began to form their own churches. Many African-Americans, though not all, were attracted to the principles and practice of Baptist protestantism.<sup>6</sup> Historian Rhys Isaac argues that African-Americans in Virginia, like many of the poorer whites were disenchanted with the rigid hierarchy of the established church in Virginia, and sought a religion which was more personal, emotional, and egalitarian (Figure 43).<sup>7</sup> By 1866, African-American Baptist churches of the South formed many associations and organizations which put themselves in communication with those that already existed in the North.<sup>8</sup>

According to the oral history informants, these African-American churches were not only a places for religious enlightenment, but they were also centers for education, both secular and religious, and social and business gatherings for the community. The 11,433 acres purchased in 1918 was served by three churches at the time the Navy issued its proclamation. These were St. John's Baptist Church (also known as Cheesecake) (Figure 44), Rising Sun Baptist Church, and Little Zion Baptist Church.

According to Alexander Lee, the church buildings themselves were constructed through a collective effort by the members of the community. "My grandfather went into the woods and cut logs for the church. Everybody pitched in, and they



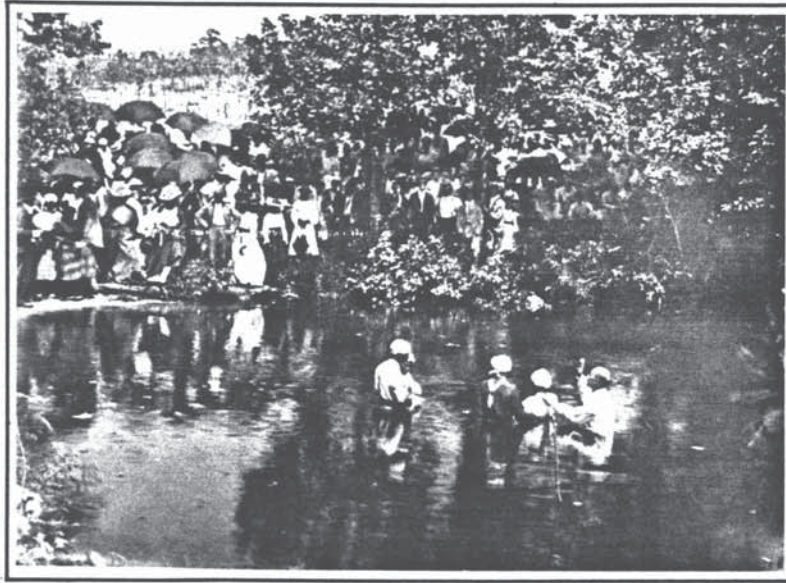


Figure 43. This scene of an African-American baptism, taken somewhere in rural Virginia in 1896, illustrates the strength and importance of religion in many black communities (Courtesy of the Valentine Museum).

building that was important, but the social and community spirit they represented.

Many "reservation" residents went to school in the area's churches. One informant recalled:

Well that was about the only gathering place [the church], at the time, to my remembrance. On weekends, people went to church...school was taught in church. That was the only outlet of gathering for the people, was the church, because everybody was working...parents were working to keep things...<sup>10</sup>

As large and sturdy public buildings, churches were suitable locations for the schooling African-American parents put so much stress upon. But their primary function was, of course, religious.

Alice Roache remembered "Sunday school in the morning; morning worship once a month, on the third Sunday".<sup>11</sup> The church service itself usually began with a song. Songs and spirituals, important to the African-Americans during their days in the fields as slaves, continue to have a key role in the church service. Many churches even had a separate



Figure 44. All that survives of the Cheesecake church, once a center of community activity on the "reservation," are the scattered stones of the graveyard shown here (Photograph by Brad McDonald).

build their homes and churches".<sup>9</sup> But for the members of this community, it was not so much the



song service that took place before the priest even arrived for the day's worship.<sup>12</sup> The songs ended when the priest took his place at the pulpit. The service then began with a prayer and a reading from scripture. This reading was often accompanied by music from an air organ.<sup>13</sup> With the initial prayer and reading completed, the priest then spoke his lesson for the day, which according to Mr. Payne, would be based on the earlier scripture reading and would last anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes. As in the days of slavery, the preacher played an important role as spokesmen for their communities, and were respected for their learning, as well as for their oratorical skills.<sup>14</sup> African-American ministers often related current news to their congregations during the service as well.

Once the preacher has finished with his lesson, then according to Mr. Payne, the doors of the church would be opened so that people from outside could enter the sanctuary, but only by making a confession. With this completed, the preacher would say a closing prayer and the service would end.<sup>15</sup>

People would mill around the church grounds for hours after the service, catching up on news, doing business, or just getting reacquainted with old friends. Often the teenagers would be excused for B.Y.P.U. The meeting of the Baptist Young Persons Union was the highlight of a Sunday for many people. According to Alice Roache, there would be singing and dancing<sup>16</sup>, and socializing with members of the opposite sex.<sup>17</sup>

The weekly church services served many social functions and provided continual reinforcement of community values. Other religious events, although less frequent, were also highly significant in the lives of believers. The most important was the revival meeting, held in late summer.<sup>18</sup> A revival was an all day meeting where people from the church and the entire surrounding area would gather. Sermons would be going on from dawn to dusk, and some were preached past midnight into the next day. A large dinner was also served. This dinner was really a feast consisting of tremendous amounts of "fried chicken, roast pig, a 'mess' of cabbage, potatoes, several kinds of bread, fruit, pies, cakes, and other things to go make up the feast".<sup>19</sup> During this meal and throughout the

course of the day socializing between families and members of the community took place (Figure 45).

The second event which served as an annual focus for the African-American members of the community was "Oddfellows Turnout Day". This day, which always fell on the second Sunday in May, was an occasion for the congregations of all three local Baptist churches, St. John's, Rising Sun, and Little Zion, to gather together at one church. Here, along with commonplace social exchange, the people of the reservation also reaffirmed their commitment to one another, and to the way of life they led, as justified and ordered by religious beliefs and world view.

World view is a term coined by anthropologists and historians to describe how a person or a group of people as a whole understand and interpret the world around them. World view directly affects behavior. World view cannot be investigated by looking at census records and statistics, deeds, or maps, but only from the words and recalled activities of real people. From the testimonies of ex-slaves, and the residents of the "reservation" and their descendants, we can begin to recreate the world view of the "reservation" community in the years following the Civil War.

For these people, the family occupied a central place in their hearts and minds. Mrs. Scott of Washington, D.C., said "the only thing that should matter in life is the happiness of yourself and your family."<sup>20</sup> Families were the focus of social life, and "insurance" against loneliness and want. People felt an obligation to spend hours or days helping others in the construction of a house or harvesting crops.

Alice Roache also spoke of being "satisfied with what you had".<sup>21</sup> She went on to say, "And people worked, they took in laundry, they did the things that were available to them. They were *good* and *decent*. They earned a good living".<sup>22</sup>

Many African-Americans also took conscious pride in having survived the ordeal of slavery and the ongoing privations of racial and economic discrimination. Alexander Lee, like many others of his generation, honored his ancestors for surviving and prospering with little education, financial





*Figure 45. Church was not only a moral force, but a center of recreation as well. Here, in 1885, members of an African-American congregation gather for a picnic, somewhere in rural Virginia (Courtesy of the Valentine Museum).*

security or political influence. It was pride such as this which supported the reservation community during its years of growth and development, and remained a source of strength during its break-up upon the establishment of the Naval Weapons Station.

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## CHAPTER 7: When the Navy Came: Community Reaction to the Establishment of the Yorktown Naval Mine Depot

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*"It was a hurt to the people..." (Alexander Lee, 1991)*

The quality of life in the African-American community in 1918 is best represented by the thoughts and remembrances of the people who were there.

"My uncle also worked the river. He was an oysterman. He used to take oysters to Richmond, and sell them there. Leave over the weekend, take his produce to Richmond, and sell them there. And most of the people were very close neighbors. They worked together. When the time came to harvest, they would go to each other's farm, and assist them in harvesting, and butchering, and things like that. And I had an uncle Payne, Humphrey Payne, he was self-employed, he had his own oyster grounds, he worked the water, he made a pretty good living there. But most of the people were happy or nicely taken care of, but they owned their own property. So everybody fared pretty well, I think."<sup>1</sup>

This remembrance of Mr. J. H. Payne is typical of recollections of the African-American community in the years just before the establishment of the Naval Weapons Station. Most of the people were self-employed, working a variety of jobs, farming, and oystering to make ends meet.<sup>2 3 4</sup> In 1910, these two occupations employed seventy-four percent of the African-American males in the Bruton District in 1910 (see Figure 33) and sixty-one percent in the Nelson District (see Figure 34).

Black families still lived on isolated farmsteads or in small clusters of houses near roads or creeks. The white population was small and scattered. Mr. Lee remembers "...just a few white families..." in the area around Felgate's Creek<sup>5</sup>, and Mr. Payne remembers that "...Most of the white people lived in the place called Halstead's Point."<sup>6</sup>, which is the area now located just inside of the

main gate of the Weapons Station today.

The 1920 census was taken eighteen months after the release of Executive Order #1472, the order that established the Weapons Station. General figures from this census show a white population of 4601 and an African-American population of 3445, yet another decline, which can be attributed in part to Navy purchases in the area.<sup>7</sup>

On July 1, 1918, the U. S. Congress passed a bill that financed the Naval Service for the next year. As part of that bill, Congress gave President Woodrow Wilson the power to immediately seize land for the expansion of seven existing bases and for the creation of a Navy Mine Depot. On August 7, 1918, president Wilson exercised this power and seized the land by eminent domain in a document known as Executive Order #1472. Parcel Seven of the Executive Order was land for a Navy Mine Depot near Yorktown, Virginia. The official boundaries of the land are given, but it is easier to say that the President seized all of the land contained in Figure 46, an area of 11,433 acres. The President ordered everyone who owned land within the boundaries of the new Mine Depot to abandon such land within thirty days; just compensation to be worked out later. The President did give the Secretary of the Navy the power to extend the thirty day time period.<sup>8</sup>

The news of the Executive Order brought much confusion to both the whites and the African-Americans in the community. Some evidently acted quickly, for on August 29, 1918, the *Virginia Gazette* reported the sale by York View Realty of land to the Government. The *Gazette* reported that the Government paid a fair price for the land, but that many people were left wondering whether the Government was actually going to take their land.<sup>9</sup> Despite all the confusion, however, an April 10,



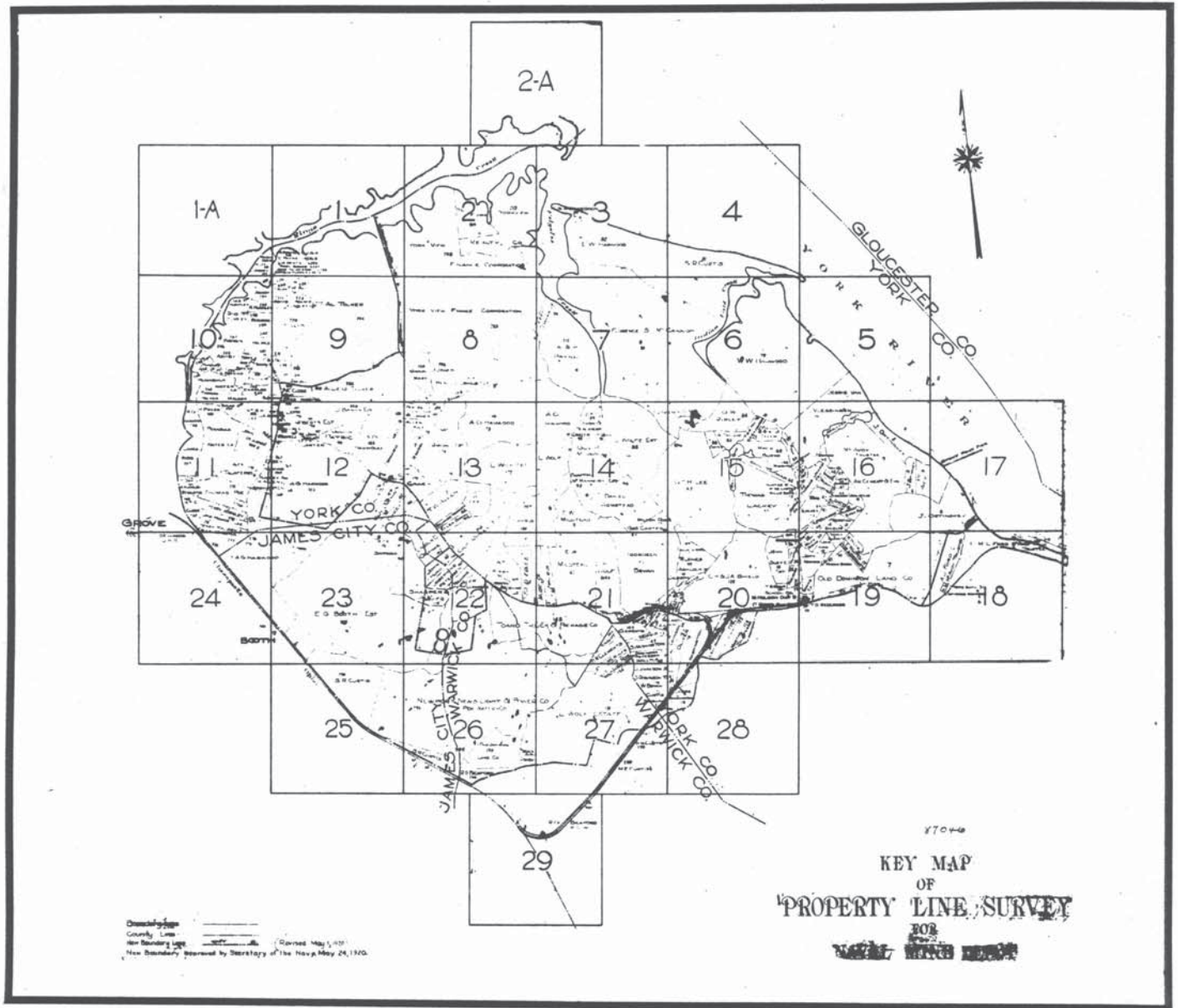


Figure 46. Cover Sheet to 1919 Atlas of the Naval Mine Depot (Source: Yorktown Naval Weapons Station, Department of Public Works).

1919 article in the *Gazette* indicates that most of the residents did abandon their land as ordered. The *Gazette* reported, in fact, that many people who had left were returning to their land because the Government had failed, at that point, to send a land appraiser to actually begin buying the land.<sup>10</sup>

The actual consolidation of the land by the Navy took several years to complete. A map drawn in 1919 illustrates the large number of property owners the Navy had to negotiate with (see Figure 46). Oral histories indicate that as many as 600 African-American families were displaced by the Navy, and many of these were said to own their land.<sup>11 12</sup> Yet deeds of sale can only be found for seventy-five parcels, and other surviving official documentation does not support such dense African-American settlement on the "reservation" (see Figure 19). In fact, large parcels of land indicated on the 1919 map (see Figure 46) were labeled as white-owned. But strong indirect evidence in the form of oral histories suggests that people believed they owned the land they farmed. Perhaps "ownership" of land on the "reservation" was rarely formalized by deed of sale or perhaps the rights of those freedmen to the land they had cultivated since 1862, and even earlier (see Chapter 2) were not questioned by tax assessors, and went unchallenged by the descendants of the "legitimate" owners.

The monetary amounts paid by the Navy for the people's land was also a source of disappointment, according to the oral histories. The Executive Order had promised just compensation for the land, but most people felt that they did not receive it. Mr. Lee remembers that his father complained of not being paid enough. "And they only gave people 200 dollars for your house, regardless...The Government only offered 50 dollars for three acres of oysters and he didn't accept this, so he didn't get anything."<sup>13</sup> Mr. Lee's father received only 50 dollars an acre for his 66 acres of land, which allowed him to buy only twenty acres near Williamsburg. Mr. Lee's father received nothing for his oysters because he refused the Government's price.<sup>14</sup> This seems to have occurred more than once. Mrs. Scott remembers that her father was not even paid for his land. "They didn't pay him anything for it. So many people they didn't pay anything for, they just moved them out..."<sup>15</sup> There is no deed of sale in Mrs. Scott's father's

name in the York County Deed Records, confirming her story. It appears that the Government did not compensate those owners who could not document their title to the land.

Some of these displaced people suffered great hardships. Mrs. Scott recalled:

So many people they didn't pay anything for, they just moved them out and they had to just cut branches off the trees and make, they used to call them "brush hoven" and live there. They just moved them out. Of course my grandfather on my father's side, they had two houses there, but they did move one of the, the smaller house, they moved that out across the road. But they weren't interested in what they did, they just moved us out (Figure 47).<sup>16</sup>

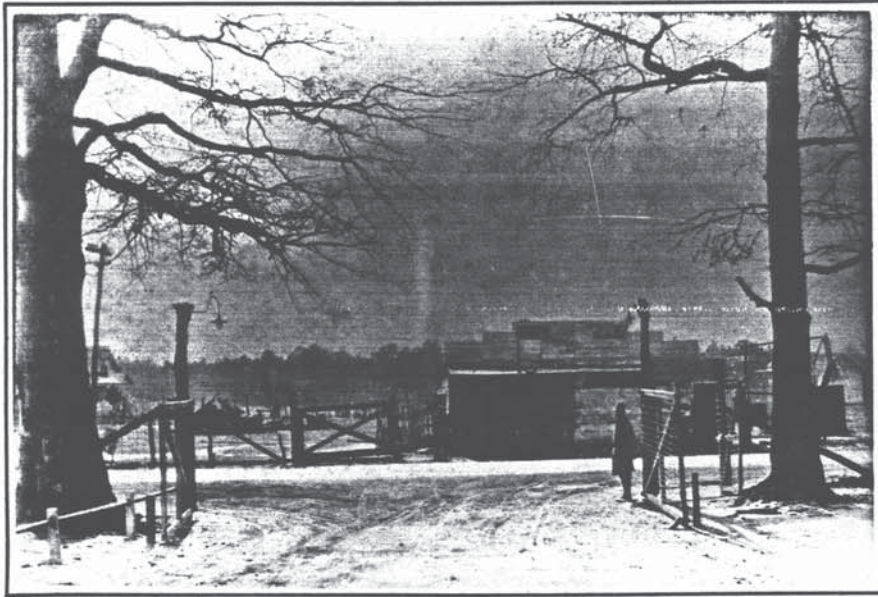
Those people who were compensated for their land received about five times the amount of its assessed value.<sup>17</sup> Since their lands were assessed at low values, however, the price they received did not allow them to buy equal amounts of land in Williamsburg, Yorktown, Grove, or Lackey. Mr. Lee remembers his father receiving "...50 dollars an acre. He bought this place up here [Williamsburg] at 125 dollars an acre."<sup>18</sup>

Smaller acreage made subsistence farming more difficult, and fewer blacks could rely on oystering since access to many of the oyster grounds on King's Creek, Felgate's Creek and Indian Fields Creek was cut off after the Weapons station was established. Many oystermen suffered the loss of newly "planted" oysters which had not reached maturity when the Depot was established.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to concerns about livelihood, many former residents of the reservation expressed unhappiness in having to leave their hard-won homesteads. No amount of money could be considered "just compensation" for such a loss.

Many efforts were made to resettle residents of the "reservation", however, though none were Government-sponsored. Two of the three churches, St. John's and Little Zion were moved to their present locations, and their congregations continued to worship there. Oystermen were permitted to





*Figure 47. The Yorktown Naval Weapons Station was established on lands where the "reservation" was once located. All "reservation" residents were resettled elsewhere in York and James City Counties. (Courtesy of the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station Photography Lab).*



*Figure 48. The buildings erected by the Navy replaced the dwellings, churches, and other landmarks of the "reservation" which now exists only in the memories of former residents and their descendants (Courtesy of the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station Photography Lab).*

return to their grounds until the Depot was fully operational (Figure 48).<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Roache also recalled construction of new houses, and the reestablishment of a close-knit community:

...when the people came out of the Weapons Station, or the Naval Mine Depot, as it was then, they made houses. They were sturdy houses, they weren't log cabins, they were frame buildings, and they had porches, and flowers-- they made it *good*. . . . You had a well. A lot of people had horses, you know, to do the farming with. Some had cows, and those people that had cows sold milk to those that didn't have it. And everybody raised a garden. You raised hogs - and your close friends- when one person would kill, they would send a certain portion of meat to all of their friends. When the next person killed, then they would send fresh - they called it 'fresh'- they would send it to all of their friends.<sup>21</sup>

African-American children were sent to elementary schools in Lackey<sup>22</sup> and Williamsburg, and to high school in Yorktown, Hampton, Petersburg, or Richmond.<sup>23</sup> Even schooling remained a matter of community cooperation, however. Alexander Lee remembers,

The beauty part of it was those that had a chance to away for school came back and helped and taught the others. They made a great contribution. They didn't look for money.<sup>24</sup>

Families worked hard to support one another and placed heavy emphasis on education. Mrs. Roache recalled that after the 7th grade: "You had to pay tuition which made a lot of people drop out....They had to go out and work to bring in money for the younger one...."<sup>25</sup>

Some residents of the "reservation" moved to Hampton, others to Newport News, and still others to Williamsburg. J.H. Payne's family purchased five acres of land in Williamsburg, along what is now Payne's road. He and his siblings divided up the parcel amongst themselves, where they and several of their children and grandchildren still live.<sup>26</sup>

The tenacity and pride which were hallmarks of the African-American community on the "reservation" served them well in the new lives they made for themselves after the Navy came. Alexander Lee expressed it best:

"It was a hurt to the people, but after all, it was fortunate, something...happened that really in the long run, helped. It made people own homes they probably never would have owned...because the land was transferred down through the families, but with the change, people spread it out, we had better schools and everything else".<sup>27</sup>

This community pride survives today in the areas where the refugees of 1919 settled; Lackey, Grove, Lee Hall. The African-American community once known as the "reservation" has scattered and reformed, but its spirit lives on in the new communities created by its descendants.





## NOTES

### CHAPTER 1

- 1 Eugene D. Genovese. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. (New York, Vintage Books, 1976); Edward D. C. Campbell, Jr. with Kym S. Rice (Eds.). *Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South*. (Richmond and Charlottesville, The Museum of the Confederacy and The University of Virginia Press, 1991); and Henderson H. Donald. *The Negro Freedman: Life Conditions of the American Negro in the Early Years After Emancipation*. (New York, Henry Schuman, 1952).
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### CHAPTER 2

- 1 James S. Olson. *Slave Life in America: A Historiography and Selected Bibliography*. (New York: University Press of America), 1983, p. 7. and Allan Kulikoff. *Tobacco and Slaves*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1986, p. 319.
- 2 Olson, p. 7.
- 3 Kulikoff, p. 319.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid., p. 320.
- 6 Kulikoff, p. 47.
- 7 Olson, p. 7.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Olson, p. 10.
- 10 Olson, p. 15.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Rayford W. Logan. *The Negro in the United States, Volume 1: A History to 1945, From Slavery to Second-Class Citizenship*. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company), 1970, p. 19.
- 13 Benjamin Quarles. *The Negro in the Making of America*. (New York: Collier Books), 1964, p. 84.
- 14 Eugene D. Genovese. *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. (New York: Pantheon Books), 1974; and Norman Coombs, *The Black Experience in America*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc.), 1972.
- 15 Of the 19 heads of house, 3 are listed in the 1859 Land Book but have no estate value listed. The other 16 are listed with estates that contain mainly cattle, sheep, or pigs, and a small monetary value for other possessions. Of the total values listed, only 2 exceed the values recorded in the 1860 census. The other 14 have values that are considerably less than the 1860 values. The 1859 Land Book does help establish the fact that some African-Americans did have estate values before the War. The 1859 values, however, do not support land-ownership by free African-Americans, unless land value is part of the "other" category. Certainly, if the 1860 census records African-Americans owning land then some of them did; it just cannot be proven beyond a doubt. 1859 Land Book. York County Courthouse, Yorktown, Virginia.
- 16 *The Reminiscences of Mrs. Fannie Epps*. Compiled by Kathleen Bragdon, 1987. p. 49-51.
- 17 *Census of African-Americans in York County, March, 1865*. Microfilm Copy, York County Public Library.



- 18 John S. Bowman (ed.). *The Civil War Almanac*. (New York: Facts on File, Inc.), 1982, p. 95-105.
- 19 James MacPherson. *The Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. (New York: Oxford University Press), 1988, p. 489.
- 20 Charles L. Perdue, Jr. et.al. (eds.). *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1976, p. 53.
- 21 Herbert Aptheker. *Essays in the History of the American Negro*. (New York: International Publishers), 1945, p. 192-193.
- 22 William Jay and James Freeman Clarke. *The Free People of Color*. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times), 1969, p. 1.
- 23 Perdue et.al., p. 54.
- 24 Henderson H. Donald. *The Negro Freedman: Life Conditions of the American Negro in the Early Years After Emancipation*. (New York: Henry Schuman), 1952, p. 1-2.
- 25 Quarles, p. 127.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 128.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Richard L. Morton. "'Contrabands' and Quakers in the Virginia Peninsula, 1862-1869", *Virginia Historical Magazine*. Vol 61, p. 419.
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- 30 Alrtheus Ambush Taylor. *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia*. (Lancaster: Lancaster Press, Inc.), 1926, p. 255-258, 269-274.
- 31 Donald, p. 154.
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- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 Donald, p. 14.
- 36 Taylor, p. 348-349.
- 37 Donald, p. 28.
- 38 Taylor, p. 370.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 Donald, p. 154.
- 41 Quarles, p. 124-125.
- 42 Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr. with Kym S. Rice (eds.) *Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South*. (Charlottesville: The Museum of the Confederacy and University Press of Virginia), 1991, p. 99.

### CHAPTER 3

- 1 Richard L. Morton. "Contrabands' and Quakers in the Virginia Peninsula, 1862-1869." *Virginia Historical Magazine*. Vol. 61, p. 419.
- 2 The 1865 African-American census listed the place of residence of the people. Since many of the residences listed are the names of pre-Civil War farms in the area, it is assumed that the African-Americans are farming the land of the old plantations.
- 3 Quote from transcript of oral history interview with Mr. Alexander Lee of Williamsburg, Virginia. Interviewed at his home, October 17, 1991.
- 4 From the transcripts of oral history interviews with Mr. Lee and with Mrs. Beulah Christian Scott of Washington, D.C.. Interviewed at her home, November 6, 1991, by Brad McDonald and Ken Stuck.
- 5 York County Deed Book Number 17, pages 123 and 271. York County Courthouse, Yorktown, Virginia.
- 6 1880 Agricultural Schedule: Nelson District. United States Census Office, 1880. Virginia State Library, Richmond.
- 7 For further information, see Greenhorne and O'Mara, Inc. Archaeological Evaluations at the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station, York County, Virginia. Greenbelt, Maryland. 1989.
- 8 Ecology and Environment, Inc. Additional Phase II Cultural Resource Investigations at Site 44YO416 Naval Weapons Station, Yorktown, Virginia. Lancaster, New York. 1989.
- 9 This information was collected from several sources, the most important of which were Ecology and Environment, Inc. Additional Phase II Cultural Resource Investigations at Site 44YO416 Naval Weapons Station, Yorktown, Virginia. Lancaster, New York. 1989; and York County Land Books 1890 to 1921. York County Courthouse, York County, Virginia.
- 10 Maurice R. Davie. *Negroes in American Society*. (New York, McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc. 1949)
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Henderson H. Donald, "The Negro Migration of 1916-1918." in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. VI, No. 4. Another good description of the post-Civil War years in Virginia comes from A. A. Taylor, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia*. (Lancaster, Lancaster Press, Inc., 1926).
- 13 Population Schedule of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870. United States Census Office, 9th Census, 1870, Microfilm Reel 1682; and Population Schedule of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. United States Census Office, 10th Census, 1880, Microfilm Reel 1394.
- 14 Report on the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1895.
- 15 Population Schedule of the United States at the Twelfth Census: 1900. United States Census Office, 12th Census, 1900, Microfilm Reel 1732.
- 16 Population Schedule of the United States at the Thirteenth Census: 1910. United States Census Office, 13th Census, 1910, Microfilm Reel 1652.

### CHAPTER 4

- 1 Quote from transcript of oral history interview with Mrs. Beulah Christian Scott, interviewed at her home November 6, 1991, Washington, D.C. Interviewed by Brad McDonald and Ken Stuck.
- 2 Charles L. Perdue, Jr. *Weevils in the Wheat*. (Bloomington:Indiana University Press), 1976, p. 94.
- 3 Maurice R. Davie. *Negroes in American Society*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company), 1949, p. 206.
- 4 Davie, p. 206-212.
- 5 Arnold H. Taylor. *Travail and Triumph*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 1976, 161.



- 6 Davie, p. 206-212.
- 7 Taylor, p. 170-175 and Davie, p. 206-212.
- 8 Herbert Gutman. *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*. (New York: Pantheon Books), 1976, p. 432.
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- 13 James Johnston. *Race Relations in Virginia and Miscegenation in the South, 1776-1860*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), 1970, p. 57.
- 14 Quote from transcript of interview with Mrs. Scott.

## CHAPTER 5

- 1 Arnold H. Taylor. *Travail and Triumph*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), p. 161.
- 2 Taylor, p. 71.
- 3 Map Showing the Position of Government Farms 1st District Negro Affairs, Department of Virginia and North Carolina. 1866-1870. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Research Library, Williamsburg, VA.
- 4 Benjamin Quarles. *The Negro in the Making of America*. (New York, Collier Books, 1964), p. 129-131.
- 5 Taylor, p. 75.
- 6 Taylor, p. 75-76.
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- 8 Agricultural Census of 1880, Nelson District, York County. United States Census Office, 1880.
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- 12 Ibid., p. 58-59.
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- 16 From the transcript of oral history interview with Mr. J.H. Payne of Williamsburg. Interviewed at his home October 23, 1991 by Brad McDonald and Ken Stuck.
- 17 From the Transcript of oral history interview with Mrs. Alice Roache of Lackey. Interviewed at her home October 18, 1991 by Brad McDonald and Ken Stuck.

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- 21 From transcript of interview with Mr. Payne.
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- 23 *Industrial Census of 1880, Nelson District, York County, Virginia*. United States Census Office, 1880.
- 24 From notes of interview with Mr. and Mrs. Carter.
- 25 Fannie Epps., interview.
- 26 From transcript of interview with Mr. Lee.
- 27 From transcript of interview with Mrs. Roache.

#### CHAPTER 6

- 1 Henderson H. Donald. *The Negro Freedman: Life Conditions of the American Negro in the Early Years After Emancipation*. (New York: Henry Schuman), 1952, p. 110.
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- 16 From transcript of interview with Mrs. Roache.
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- 18 From transcript of interview with Mr. Payne.
- 19 Earnest, p. 166.
- 20 From interview with Mrs. Beulah Christian Scott of Washington, D.C., interviewed at her home November 6, 1991. Interviewed by Brad McDonald and Ken Stuck.
- 21 From transcript of interview with Mrs. Roache.
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- 1 Quote from transcript of oral history interview with Mr. J. H. Payne of Williamsburg, Virginia. Interviewed at his home on October 23, 1991 by Brad McDonald and Ken Stuck.
- 2 Quote from transcript of oral history interview with Mr. Alexander Lee of Williamsburg, Virginia. Interviewed at his home, October 17, 1991 by Brad McDonald.
- 3 Quote from transcript of oral history interview with Mrs. Alice Roache of Lackey, Virginia. Interviewed at her home, October 18, 1991 by Brad McDonald and Ken Stuck.
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- 9 "Eleven Thousand Acres Taken by 'Uncle Sam'", The Virginia Gazette, August 29, 1918. Vol. XXVI (New Series), No. 18.
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- 12 From the interview with Mr. Alexander Lee.
- 13 Quote from the interview with Mr. Alexander Lee.
- 14 From the interview with Mr. Alexander Lee.
- 15 Quote from the interview with Mrs. Beulah Scott.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 After speaking with the Office of the Commissioner of Revenue, the assessment office in York County, it is believed that the assessments done in the late 1910s were done at twenty percent of the actual land value. Therefore, if you multiply the assessment by five, you arrive at or near the amount paid by the Navy for the land. This indicates that the Navy assessed the land at one hundred percent of its value and paid around that for the land.

- 18 From the interview with Mr. Lee.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 From the interview with Mrs. Roache.
- 22 From the interview with Mrs. Scott.
- 23 From the Interviews with Mr. Lee and Mrs. Roache.
- 24 From the interview with Mr. Lee.
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**APPENDIX A**





## FUTURE RESEARCH TOPICS

Throughout the course of this study, the writers have discussed the African-American and his or her life on 11,443 acres of land in York County, 10,500 of which would become the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station. The difficulties, comforts, and triumphs African-American experienced from emancipation to the government purchase of "reservation" land starting in 1918 and continuing through the 1920s have been investigated.

Based on this study of the "reservation", the picture of Reconstruction and the role of African-Americans within it painted by some history texts, does not appear to be valid for York County, Virginia in a number of respects. First, male-headed households appear to have been the norm for the county, from the earliest years of the Reconstruction. Secondly, the idea that most African-American farmers in the Reconstruction South did not own their land, but instead were tenants or sharecroppers seems to have been disproved. With the help of 1880 Agricultural Census records, it has been shown that 40 percent of African-Americans listed on that census owned their land, and by 1918, according to oral history informants, nearly everybody owned their property.

These findings are provocative, but there is still much to be learned. The representativeness of York County should be tested against other counties during the Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction era. Another area of research may also be right in York County itself. The study focuses mainly on the history of the 11,443 acres of land purchased by the Navy in 1918. Data concerning the rest of York County would be extremely helpful in broadening the horizons of this study.

Further research will continue to demonstrate the varied and significant contributions of African-Americans to the society and culture of the region, and serve as well to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of their lives, gaps which have only begun to be breached in this study.





**APPENDIX B**





## ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPTS

The following are the transcripts of the four recorded oral history interviews conducted for this report. As accurately as possible, the transcripts have been reproduced from the tapes of the interviews in order to provide a visual reference source. The actual tape recorded interviews are owned by the United States Navy and are part of the catalog of research the Navy has on file for this project.

### MR. ALEXANDER LEE INTERVIEW, WILLIAMSBURG, VA, OCTOBER 17, 1991

**Interviewer:** The first thing I wanted to ask you was - do you have any relatives, or anybody that you know personally, who lived on the Weapons Station property before it was built by the Navy?

**A. LEE:** Yeah...

**Interviewer:** You do? Who can you trace back? Was it somebody in your family, or friends that you knew?

**A. LEE:** Friends that I know...yeah, some family people, but there not in this area...Raymond [Redcross]...he lived around the base. [Betty-Lynn Asheby Orange]...she lived there...two people is all I can think of now, I know many more...we get together sometimes and talk...any other questions?

**Interviewer:** Yes...from what your friends used to say, and what you can remember personally...what do you remember about living in the area?

**A. LEE:** Well I remember I was seven years old when we moved out of the area...Around 1919, right after World War I, the notice went up that they were going to take the homes down in that area...I lived down on the York River...what is known as [Fellgates] Creek...that's where I was from...then the news went out...they issued a warning to everybody that they were going to take the place...people began to get around place to place looking for places to go...Everybody knew that they had mines and explosives that they brought back from Germany and they wanted to use that area as storage...In 1921 I moved out of [Fellgates]...January, 1921, my family moved. There were more than 800 families affected by this, so I was told by this woman...They took...from [Fellgates] Creek all the way down to what is known as [Lackey]...where the Naval Weapons Station is now...All that used to be...living quarters. The government foreclosed and took all of that for mines and T.N.T that was brought back from over there.

**Interviewer:** And where did you and your friends go after you were told that you had to move out?

**A. LEE:** Well, my family - my father brought me to this area; the majority of these people in this area, especially the older people, came out of the Weapons Station. Some went to Newport News, some went to York, to Hampton, some scattered to Williamsburg...That's when the little town known as [Lackey] was formed...people just moved across the road and formed a little town...[Lackey].

**Interviewer:** If you can remember...when you were living on the Naval Weapons Station Property, what types of jobs were available? What did your father do, or your mother do for a living?

**A. LEE:** My family were oysterers. My father was an oysterer, he dealt with oysters, you see. He worked at the James River in the wintertime, at oyster season, he planted oysters...he had his own boat; him and his brothers had their own business...The majority of the people in the area were farmers and...worked the river...oysters and fishing...Some worked the shipyard in Newport News - a few of them; they lived in Newport News and worked the shipyard, but farming and oystering was the biggest business.



**Interviewer:** In addition to work, how did you spend most of your free time? Was the church an important factor?

**A. LEE:** Well, the church was moved out too, that whole community was taken out...Two churches were affected by that, one was St. Johns Baptist, and the other was known as [Little Zion], which is down on route 60...[Little Zion] was for people that lived over in what is known as the 'reservation'; the Naval Weapons Station is what we call it; but the people, at that time, called it the 'reservation'.

**Interviewer:** Did you and your family spend a lot of time at church? Was that a place where people could usually gather?

**A. LEE:** Well that was about the only gathering place, at that time, to my remembrance. On weekends, people went to church...school was taught in church. That was the only outlet of gathering for people, was the church, because everybody was working...parents were working to keep things...

**Interviewer:** Now lets see...how did you feel about the Navy coming in and taking away the land? Did they compensate you for that? What types of feelings did you have?

**A. LEE:** Well, it was quite a setback because the Navy didn't give anybody enough...Heck, I could talk a lot about my family, because we were the first, my family, and 6 families down in that area, were the first to move out. That was where the first...what was known as 'kitch', they called it 'kitch' at that time...in other words, that's where they stored the first explosives, and mines they brought in. But they never compensated people enough...My father owned about 66 acres, and they took all the 66 acres, and he bought 20 acres which includes where I'm living now...And they only gave people 200 dollars for your house, regardless...which was a great setback to the people...Oysters - you plant them and wait 3 years for them to mature...my father was caught in the middle, because the oysters weren't old enough to catch. The government only offered 50 dollars...for 3 acres of oysters and he didn't accept this, so he didn't get anything. It was a great setback for the people...Penniman, which is known as Cheatham Annex now, but known as Penniman then, was the place that was set up...during World War I. That's where a lot of people came in and worked - at Penniman during World War I. As soon as the war was over, they closed that up...It was quite a hurt to the people, it set them back quite a bit, it caused them to form new communities.

**Interviewer:** The place that you lived on the Weapons Station up by [Fellgates] Creek...What was it like? Do you have happy memories there?

**A. LEE:** Yeah...about 6 families lived right in that area. We were right on the water - right on the York River...a lot I remember about me going back...They allowed us to go back down there until they really established a place for the explosives. We could go back there to...boat. We used to go back and boat down on [Fellgates] Creek...The majority of the people farmed and worked the river...and in the wintertime, planted oysters.

**Interviewer:** Did the 6 families that you said lived in that area...was your family close to them?

**A. LEE:** We weren't all relatives, but we all lived in that area.

**Interviewer:** In terms of daily life, what kind of food did you eat, and where did you get it? Did you get it from the oysters?

**A. LEE:** Well, we bought food...You only eat oysters, at that time, nine weeks a year...People worked, and they farmed, they raised hogs, cows, and horses...People lived good according to that day...so, as far as food is concerned, there wasn't whole lot of money, but you had no need for a whole lot of money since everything was cheap...You would come to Williamsburg, that's where we would come to shop...People down on the lower end went to Yorktown to shop; people on the upper end would go to Williamsburg. We'd go there to buy groceries.



We had what was known as 'country store', but the majority of the groceries that we bought, were bought in Williamsburg, which is about 8 miles.

**Interviewer:** A lot of your friends that were farmers, were they tenants or did they have -

**A. LEE:** No, no, no!

**Interviewer:** Everybody owned their own land?

**A. LEE:** Their own land.

**Interviewer:** How do you remember relations with the whites in the area?

**A. LEE:** Up in the area where I lived, there were just a few white families. Down in Yorktown, next to [Lackey]...approximately...from what I can understand...only affected 150 -200 white families, of the 800 families...There weren't too many whites in that area, but they got the same...thing...as the blacks. The government, at that time, said "I wanted it." They took it. (laugh) You couldn't set a price...they only allowed you 200 dollars for your home, regardless. Everybody got 200 dollars...

**Interviewer:** Now was the 200 dollars for the house only, and you could get more depending on how much land you owned?

**A. LEE:** Well, your land was different...You weren't getting a profit. Like I said, my father got 50 dollars an acre. He bought this place up here at 125 dollars an acre. Now land didn't jump to 125 dollars, but he was only allowed 50 dollars for land down there, so he took all he had...to get another home...and he got less land...from 66 to 20...

**Interviewer:** That's about all I have to ask. Do you have anything else that you would like to add? Is there anybody in the area that you know of...that we could possibly talk to?

**A. LEE:** Well, you could talk to Raymond [Redcross] right up here on Oak Drive. He was one of the men that came out of the 'reservation'. He remembers a little more than I because he's a little older than I...

(At this point, something is whispered to Mr. Lee. He then refers to an interview that took place 4 or 5 years ago. Apparently, he has a transcript of the interview, which he hands to the interviewer. He then returns to his earlier train of thought.)

I think you could find a lot of information!...up in the 'reservation' where...[Cheesecake] Graveyard...is located...Where I lived out on [Fellgates] Creek, where I was born, it was about 3 miles up the road where [Cheesecake] was, and the church...the biggest group of families lived in that area.

**Interviewer:** Now did you go to church there?

**A. LEE:** Yes. The church was moved. Both churches were moved...St. John's was moved down on Penniman Road, [Little Zion] is down in [?????]. So both churches were moved.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember, at [Cheesecake], how many people were buried there?

**A. LEE:** Nobody knows. [Cheesecake] was a graveyard, from what I can understand, people just buried there...it was an Indian graveyard, that's where it gets its name...All my family that died up to 1922 was buried there, in 1923 that's when they moved the church. All the families...white, Indians, whatever you are, were buried there...Who does it belong to? (laugh) I know the government still keeps it...

**Interviewer:** Yeah, we were just out there a couple days ago as a matter of fact...

**A. LEE:** ...some of the tombstones...after all these years...were still visible.

**Interviewer:** One more question, what types of houses did you all live in? Were they mostly a wood frame?

**A. LEE:** Frame houses, yeah. I don't know of any brick houses in that area...frame was the style.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, the only brick house I remember out there is the Lee House, were you familiar that one?

**A. LEE:** Yeah...the Lee's can be traced back. That's when my father was born down in that area...in the slavery times, my grandfather, not my father, but my grandfather...where they got the name, I don't know. You can never find any record about that. At that time, for blacks, there was no record. Before the war, whenever a slave was sold, he carried the name of the buyer, so the name changes. There were only a few families, from my understanding, that could stick together, you see. I do have some history, some remembrance of the area you're talking about...there were only two boys - David Lee, and Monroe Lee...and those two Lee boys...were taught trades. My grandfather was a carpenter. His brother was a painter, and a sailor. He could build boats, and sail boats. My grandfather...built houses, and he carpented until his death in 1917. I just slightly remember his image...I was too young to remember...the only things I can remember is what I was told by my parents, and brothers, and sisters. He was born down in that area, that's why we lived down in...[Fellgates]...I guess we talked about the oyster grounds that my father had and how they only offered 50 dollars for them.

**Interviewer:** Well, that's all the questions I have, if you had anything else to add, you're more than welcome.

**A. LEE:** Well...since the Weapons Station...I worked and retired from the Weapons Station...

**Interviewer:** Oh, you worked for the Weapons Station?

**A. LEE:** Yeah...I've been retired 21 years...I retired in 1970...what I remember from when I was working there...I used to go around to a lot of places, I could spot where people lived...I think if you get a chance to read through that paper, there's a lot of information in there, so much I have just forgotten, but when I hear these things, it will come back...(long pause)...Schools...they had but one school down there for the blacks, that's why most of the children went to school at church. When we moved up here to the upper part of York county...this is James City...some of the people moved to James City. Like my family, many of the families found problems getting into the upper part of York county. We had to go to school in Williamsburg, because they had no schools for blacks in the area.

**Interviewer:** Did the majority of people go to school?

**A. LEE:** Yeah, the majority in that area was in school, at least Elementary. We didn't have any high schools. We had to go away for high school...to Hampton, Petersburg, or Richmond. The beauty part of it was those that had a chance to go away to school came back and helped and taught the others. They made a great contribution. They didn't look for the money...One of the greatest misfortunes was when during the slavery times, they taught many of the black people trades, but they didn't teach them to read and write...one of the shortcomings. Therefore, the only history we can get is translated down, we have no written proof - just tie two and two together - what you get from this one and what you get from that one.

**Interviewer:** Were you always told stories about...your ancestors? Was that how things were passed on?

**A. LEE:** Yeah, that's one of the greatest things that was passed on. Even in the court house we have no records...(long pause)...It was 11000 acres that was taken - people lived there - to build the Weapons



Station...when I worked there, it was known by the name of [??????] in 1938, and when I retired, they named it the Weapons Station...I understand there's talk they may change the name again.

**Interviewer:** That's what I hear...

**A. LEE:** It was a hurt to the people, but after all, it was fortunate, something...happened that, really in the long run, helped. It made people own homes they probably never would have owned...because the land was transferred down through the families, but with the change, people spread it out, we had better schools and everything else...(long pause)...Do you have any other questions?

**Interviewer:** I think that's about it.

**A. LEE:** I'll tell you, Ray [Redcross]...he lived off the section where I was born, and raised...the [Fellgates] section. They lived up in what was known as Charles [Corner]. That was the place where they had a little store and a post office...everything that people would come to buy was...in the stores...in Charles [Corner]...The church...and [Cheesecake] Graveyard...were in that area.

**Interviewer:** Ok, well I think that's about it.

#### END OF INTERVIEW

**MRS. ALICE ROACHE**

**INTERVIEW, LACKEY, VA, OCTOBER 18, 1991**

**Interviewer:** What can you remember about the time before the government came to the Fort Eustis area and Mulberry Island?

**A. ROACHE:** I don't remember too much about Mulberry Island. It just had a funny name to me. But my grandfather was a storekeeper, so he must have had a store over there, too. To have brought one over this way and establish a store on this side. And farming was a way of life - hunting, fishing. And there had to be some water down that way - that they could fish - but that was the way of the land - fishing, hunting, gardening, whatever.

**Interviewer:** So most people were farmers, or they worked as oystermen?

**A. ROACHE:** Farmers or oystermen...the ladies probably did days work - housekeeping, and things of that nature. There had to be one or two teachers - a few teachers - because my mother was one. But the requirements for a teacher then were much less than they are now. If you finished 5th or 6th grade, you could teach the younger students who came up. And there was a [??] Memorial College in Richmond that my mother attended. And that entitled her to become a school teacher...I can remember that much. My father was a barber. He had a barbershop of his own, probably right at that corner, right there where the people next door live. All of that was a part of the same plot of land. He was a barber. I can remember them saying they worked on the Baltimore Steamer. There was a Baltimore Steamer. They got jobs on the Steamer, going up and down the river - cooks and bakers, and what have you. You did what you had to do. You did what was available to do, and you made it.

**Interviewer:** In addition to the jobs that people had, how did you spend your free time, your leisure time? What did you do during those times?

**A. ROACHE:** You came home from school, you [shelled] corn for the chicken, you did your chores. You brought in the wood, the kindling, the chips, whatever. You did all of this before you had supper - gathered up



the wood. And then after supper, you did your homework, and you went to bed. You went to church on Sunday, you went to Sunday School, you stayed for church service. And that was it. You played in your own backyard -because - you didn't venture out too far - because neighbors - everybody was doing the same thing you were doing, doing your chores in the afternoon. And you met on Sunday, and that was it.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned the church, was that an important factor in your family's life?

**A. ROACHE:** Yes, of course it was. We lived right next door to it after we came on this side, and they moved the church from there to where the present church is right over there. That was it. Sunday school in the morning; morning worship once a month, on the third Sunday; but there was a B.Y.P.U in the afternoon, and that was where you met all your friends...They had programs and singing - that was the highlight of the day. When it was time to come home, you closed up, fed the chickens, put them up for the night. You did your chores, and you went to bed...And you didn't know any differently so you were satisfied with what you had.

**Interviewer:** You can even do this for your children, as well as what happened to you and your parents...children that grew up at that time, did they try to stay in the area after the government came, or did they go somewhere else, or what did they try to do?

**A. ROACHE:** I am trying to think what I can remember...A lot of people went away to work. You would meet someone who knew someone that needed someone to work for them, perhaps on these trips back and forth up the river, on the Baltimore Steamer. And you went away to work. You went to New Jersey, you went to Philadelphia, and places along the Steamer's line, and you worked in private service.

**Interviewer:** And what were the schools like? Any personal recollections you have? I know you were telling me about what it took to become a teacher. Did a lot of people go to school?

**A. ROACHE:** When I went to school, we had a nice high school because it moved down to Yorktown. It was a one story, and there were nine rooms. And I never went to a one-room school. There were people who did, because in the lower end of the county, they had one-room schools down there. And I never went to a one-room school. I always wondered how they functioned. But York County Training School was a large school, and as we grew older, they assigned teachers at the ratio of thirty to one. There were at least thirty students in the classroom, and when the enrollment increased, you would get another teacher. You went to the 10th grade, but before I got into high school, they had an 11th grade, and that was as high as it went. And you went from 11th grade - You had to pay tuition which made a lot of people drop out. Once they went passed 7th grade to go into high school, they dropped out because their parents were unable to make the tuition. They had to go out and work to bring in money for the younger one. And before my sister entered high school, the tuition would drop, so she finished high school and she got a scholarship. She went to Virginia State. But it all depended on the scholarship. And people worked, they took in laundry, they did the things that were available to them. They were good and decent. They earned a good living.

**Interviewer:** What do you remember your parents telling you about the time when the government came, to take the land? Did the government compensate your family for that?

**A. ROACHE:** Yes...and you're speaking mainly of the Weapons Station...

**Interviewer:** But also your experience at Fort Eustis...

**A. ROACHE:** Oh, Fort Eustis wasn't a pleasant one. My grandmother always thought that more was coming to her. But from the article that you read when the people came out of the Weapons Station, or Naval Mine Depot, as it was then, they made houses. They were sturdy houses, they weren't log cabins, they were frame buildings, and they had porches, and flowers - they made it good. And some of the houses lasted a long time, but as with anything else, unless it's kept up, as people grew up and moved away, the old buildings deteriorated



to a degree to where they were taken down. But they built nice houses. Of course you had a well, because there was no water. Took a long time for water to come through. You had a well. A lot of people had horses, you know, to do there farming with. Some had cows, and those people that had cows sold milk to those that didn't have it. And everybody raised a garden. You raised hogs - and your close friends - when one person would kill, they would send a certain portion of meat to all of their friends. When the next person killed, then they would send fresh - they called it 'fresh' - they would send it to all of their friends. And it just went around like that.

And by 1939, when the CC Camp came in, they made a great deal of difference, because a lot of the young men who had no jobs - they played at the golf course, they were caddies at the golf course, which is now the Park Service - and they got 45 cents a round. But that wouldn't take care of a whole lot. But you'd see them going by early in the morning, going down to the golf course to put their numbers down, so when Bobby Cruikshank, and people of that sort, Norm Snead, came down and played, they would get to caddie for those people. And when CC Camp came in, people came from everywhere. They had several companies down there in Yorktown, and our boys, young men, went to the CC Camp, and you can see where they worked on parkways. You know they developed that Park Service back across there. And when the CC Camp broke up...oh, hundreds of men were employed on the Naval Mine Depot. And the people on this side provided homes for them. Anybody that had a room, like you saw in that article, if it was a [silo] or a closet, could rent it, because there were over a hundred young men right in this area. And that added to a lot. And getting the Naval Mine paycheck, oh, they got like \$14.77...\$16.77...14...16, and when you had been there a long time, you got 18 and some dollars, a week. That was a tremendous amount of money. And it flourished, the area flourished.

They were still doing things in little dance halls, a couple of dance halls opened up. Because these young men were used to going somewhere, doing things. Because we used to go to the CC Camp to dances that were sponsored down there. And then a couple of dance halls opened up here. That was your evening. You had to be out of the house by seven, if you were going, and in the house by nine. And that was it.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember other family names that lived around you that you were friends with?

**A. ROACHE:** Sure...the Morris's; the Dixons; the Brights; the Fox's; another group of Dixons; the Wiggins'; the Edwards' - that was my schoolteacher, Miss Edwards; the Allens; the Brights - another set of Brights;...the Roberts; the Wyatts;...the Stubbs;...the Johnsons;...Redcross;...Wright; and Wallace; and that took you all the way up to the county line. And then it developed from the back...the Claytons; the Robinsons; the Reeds;...Brookins; [Sigger] - a number of families named [Sigger]; Fox; Anderson;...Burks, a large number of Burks's; a large number of Fox's; Edwards;...Taylor;...another set of Edwards's; some more Burks's; Fields - Fields was a large family, you know it just branched off, Fields; only one set of Harpers, though. (laugh) That was about it. Only one set of Harpers. Yeah...there was a lot of names.

**Interviewer:** Now everybody that you mentioned, did they own their own land?

**A. ROACHE:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Were there many tenant farmers in the area?

**A. ROACHE:** No.

**Interviewer:** No? That's interesting.

**A. ROACHE:** Everybody bought a little piece of land.

**Interviewer:** And how do you remember, and also maybe from what your parents told you, how do you remember race relations being? How did you get along with the whites that were in the area?



A. ROACHE: There weren't any.

Interviewer: There weren't any?

A. ROACHE: There weren't any.

Interviewer: Really?

A. ROACHE: They came later...There weren't any...They were in Yorktown, but not in this area. ...Maybe twenty or thirty years ago; maybe fifty years ago, I guess they began to come in, but there weren't any. And that man that wrote that article about the store on the corner, Herman Smith, had maybe 5 or 6 children, and there were some boys. Well, those boys played with the boys in the community just as though they were white, because they had no choice. They didn't have anybody else to play with, so they played together, they fought together. But the fights didn't last, fifteen or twenty minutes, then they were back doing the same thing, playing again. The race problem didn't come in until way later. There just weren't any...There was maybe one white family on this side of the road that were white. And the Smiths, they were poor people that came over here from Gloucester. My sister was always an accomplished dressmaker and she made clothes...[?????????]...just like we did. They got along well. It wasn't until later that the race relationship deterred. (laugh) But it wasn't bad...

You went to the store, you got your groceries, and you came home. You stopped and played with the little girls up at the store, if they were out there playing. Their parents were getting groceries. You played with them, and after a certain period of time, you came home. No, race didn't get into it until much, much later. And it was a normal country life. Of course we're bound now, there's only one way in, because there's a huge development down there in Baptist. During the war, houses were built on the station to house the military people. And after the war was over, those houses - well there were apartment houses all along here, all down this way - they destroyed those houses. And the ones that were on the station were bought by one of the merchants up here, and they were sold to the people back down on the [????]. And those people took those houses, and improved them, and they're nice houses. And as the younger generation came along, they took those houses - they were cottage-type houses - they would raise them up, put in another floor, put a deck on them, brick them, they did everything. All that was in there. Because he rented them to white people, at first, until a certain time. And then he just sold them, as he grew older and his health began to fail. Hornsby was the name, I know you've run into that name, he sold them to the people of color. And they made good homes out of them, and they're still down there. They came from right over there on the Station. And there was maybe ten long apartment buildings right across there called Cook Terrace, and as the need for more developed - down the highway about a mile and a half - they had the Cook Terrace Annex. And after the war ceased, and people were, you know - money flourished more after that, and they were able to do things on their own, and they...that's what those townhouses are probably made out of. And the Park Service took over [Rentforce] Monument Lodge in Yorktown, and for that piece of land he was given Cook Terrace Annex. And that's where that place got built up so those townhouses and things are down there.

But during that time that I went to school as a child, our house and the church was the last house on this side until you got at least three miles down the highway. And there were two houses down there, and what is [Gously] Road now, there was nothing until you got to the point where [Gously] Road met Crawford Road. Of course, we didn't know it as [Gously] Road, then it was just a back road. That point down there, there was a couple of houses right on the end, and then further back. But everywhere now, development is taking place, and it's filled with houses. But there weren't any then...If you had to go to Yorktown, you had your choice of going this way down the back road and coming up through Yorktown, or you could go through the woods and come out way down at that point where the Park Service put a log cabin for the ranger that would stand there on guard. You would come out right at that point. And, at first, everybody had to walk to school. And finally, a man from Seaford bought a bus. It was a green wooden bus. And he brought the children from Seaford and down there, all up to the York County Training School. And then he considered the children in this area. You



could ride the school bus for three cents a day. And my mama, being a widow at that time, she would start us riding with one of the teachers for our first two years, and then you'd have to get out and walk. But fortunately, the bus came along before it was my turn to get out to walk. (laugh) I didn't have to walk. But that's the way it was - I can remember that - three cents a day. And they called that bus the 'Coffee Can'. Then the county, you know, put buses on. We had two busloads of children up here every day going to school. He'd bring these children up here - two loads - and then go back to Grafton with the other children. And he drove a bus for a number of years.

#### END OF INTERVIEW

**MR. JAMES H. PAYNE**

**INTERVIEW, WILLIAMSBURG, VA, OCTOBER 23, 1991**

**Interviewer:** Mr. Payne, if you can remember, where did your parents live on the Weapons Station property before the Navy came?

**J. PAYNE:** Charles' Corner. My parents lived on Charles' Corner. There were two stores. One store was called Waterstone - Jim Waterstone and Henry Charles. We lived there when I was about the age of twelve. Then we moved to the present site.

**Interviewer:** What do you remember your parents telling you about what life was like in the area before the Navy came in 1918?

**J. PAYNE:** Well, the Navy didn't have much effect on my parents because they were...self-employed...in the water and farming at the time. In fact, my dad never worked at the Weapons Station, but he worked at Cheatham Annex which is right across the river from -it was called 'Penniman' at that time. He used to work for [Duport], that was a powder magazine, or powder factory...

**Interviewer:** What do you remember about living in the area? What were working conditions like? Now you said your father was a waterman and also a farmer. Were most of the other people in that area - did they have the same occupations or...?

**J. PAYNE:** Well, the community was not very thickly settled. There wasn't too many people there. As I remember, there wasn't much work going on - it would have to be farming, or working in the river. I don't know of any industrial, or whatever.

**Interviewer:** If you can remember, or remember what your parents told you, could you just give us some names of other families that lived in your area? You said it wasn't that thickly settled, but do you remember other family names?

**J. PAYNE:** Oh yeah, most of my mother's people were living in that vicinity, and they were Hundley's, my mother was a Hundley...her brothers were watermen, too. They had, from what I can remember, they had motorboats. My uncle also worked in the river. He was an oysterman. He used to take oysters to Richmond, as far as Richmond. Leave over the weekend, take his produce to Richmond, and sell them there. And most of the people were very close neighbors. They worked together...When the time came to harvest, they would go to each other's farm, and assist them in harvesting, and butchering, and things like that. And I had an uncle Payne, Humphrey Payne, he was self-employed, he had his own oyster grounds, he worked the water, he made a pretty good living there. But most people were happy or nicely taken care of, but they owned their own property. So everybody fared pretty well, I think.

**Interviewer:** Were there any tenant farmers that you knew of?



**J. PAYNE:** No...any tenant farmers in that...we didn't have any plantations nearby. There wasn't a plantation.

**Interviewer:** And how would you say, you know, in addition to what everybody did for a job and everything like that, how did you and your family spend your leisure time? What did you do?

**J. PAYNE:** Well, there wasn't but one thing to do, and that was go to church on Sundays. I don't remember...well, the first of the year, we would come to Williamsburg. They would have Emancipation Day. And they used to have blacks parading the streets. Some of them were riding in wagons, and the band would be...the children, all, would be riding in wagons drawn by mules. And the name of the bandleader, if I remember correctly, was - they used to call him Chink Green. I don't know whether that was his real name - the 'Chink' part, but he was known as Chink Green. And they had services on Sunday...and Christmas was a big time for us. We used to go to church and have Christmas trees, and exchange gifts quite a bit. I don't remember any other outstanding affairs that went on...And they used to have at the church - Christmas boxes - you'd sell boxes. The men, the young men especially, they seemed to enjoy buying their girlfriends boxes. They would say "that's so-and-so's box. I'm going to bid on that." They would raffle them off. There wasn't very much to do in those days.

**Interviewer:** Where did your family go to church?

**J. PAYNE:** St. John's Baptist Church, the same church that we're attending now was in the reservation on - the property was called 'Black Swamp'. It's still in the reservation, or the Weapons Station, now. And our school was a one-room school, and that was located on Mill Hill. I don't know why the name was called Mill Hill, or Black Swamp Hill. But as you know, a part of the Weapons Station is quite hilly, so I imagine they got the school name from - Mill Hill - because there used to be a watermill there...I don't know that to be a fact. I was quite young, I was twelve years old when we moved from the reservation.

**Interviewer:** What do you remember about going to school?

**J. PAYNE:** Well, I remember we used to have to start the fire, cut the - well, they brought the wood - but we had to get kindling to get the fire started. One stove would heat the building. We used to have one hour for lunch, we'd go out and play. I think the children learned more in those days than they do nowadays. It was a fine school. I don't say I learned so much. (laugh) I know my parents were pretty good students. My dad could write and read; my mother, too - both of them.

**Interviewer:** Were most of the people in the area literate? Did most people go to school?

**J. PAYNE:** Oh yeah, yeah, sure

**Interviewer:** Let's see...after the Navy came, where did your family go? Did you move to where we are now?

**J. PAYNE:** Well, let me tell you some more about the Weapons Station...we had one Justice of the Peace, and his name was...Roberts. That's where we get this 'Roberts District' here in James City now. He used to sign birth certificates. I remember we used to refer to ourselves as 'black' a few years ago, but in 1912, he was using the same word on my birth certificate - it says 'black', it didn't say 'colored'. He was a Justice of the Peace. We had one sheriff, Henry Charles. He was white. And all of our laws were transacted at Yorktown. We had a judge that would come from Williamsburg - Judge [Armistead]. That building still stands - the [Armistead] building still stands on Duke of Gloucester Street, now, if I remember...what was your question about schooling?

**Interviewer:** Well, the first thing I asked you was - did a lot of people in your area go to school?

**J. PAYNE:** In my days, everybody went to school.



**Interviewer:** Everybody went to school?

**J. PAYNE:** Everybody went to school. Evidently, as I forestated,...they must have been doing some kind of teaching during my parents' age, because my dad could read and write real good, my mother, too.

**Interviewer:** Were there other schools in the area? Did some people go to school in the church?

**J. PAYNE:** Yeah. That's where I went to school in my early days, in the church. I didn't go to this one-room school. That was just about deteriorated when I went to school. Most of my schooling in the Weapons Station was in the church. When I left the church, we came here, and we used to go to Springfield School. That was a one-room school - a little larger than the one we had on the Weapons Station.

**Interviewer:** Well, that leads into my next question...where did most people go after the Navy came and bought land?

**J. PAYNE:** Oh yeah. Most of the people - my relatives on my mother's side went to Hampton. A place called Lincoln Park, in Hampton, now. That's on Queen Street, somewhere. Some settled in Newport News, and the majority of the people came up here to Williamsburg - in this vicinity. The land was selling for 100 dollars an acre, here, at that time. And my daddy - he bought 5 acres, and all of us settled...right here. Most of us lived here. We have a street out here - Payne's Road. It was seven of us, each one of us has his or her property. Some of the children didn't build here, but the grandchildren are here.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember your mother or father saying anything about what kind of compensation your family got from the navy?

**J. PAYNE:** For the land?

**Interviewer:** For your land, yeah, that was on the reservation.

**J. PAYNE:** I don't remember how much they got, but it wasn't very much. It wasn't enough to rebuild, and buy the property. We got by somehow.

**Interviewer:** Were there a lot of whites in the area?

**J. PAYNE:** The only whites that I remember were the two men that ran the stores - Jim Waterstone, and Henry Charles. Henry Charles was the sheriff. Most of the white people lived in the place called [Horace's] Point. I don't know if there were too many blacks' on the reservation, we call it the 'reservation', but the Weapons Station. The first I remember of the Weapons Station - when working in the river, we used to come out of the creek - [Fellgates] Creek - and we could see the airplanes up on the, let's see, what was the name of the.....Bell Field, it was Bell Field, that's where they used to land the planes in the Weapons Station. But I really didn't know what was going on back then. I wasn't too interested in government. As a matter of fact, I didn't know much about government at that age, you know. So, I can't tell you too much - what's your next question?

\* Mr. Payne may have meant to say 'whites'...

**Interviewer:** Let's see, I think that's about it, really.

(At this point, the tape was turned off, only to be turned back on again in mid-sentence of a second interviewer who is letting Mr. Payne know that anything he would like to share would be listened to with interest. The first interviewer then returns to his line of questioning...)

**Interviewer:** A question I was personally interested in...were things passed on through storytelling; or your mother and father telling you the way things used to be; or did you read to each other a lot? What did you do when you got together as a family?

**J. PAYNE:** The Payne family is kind of small. I didn't know my grandparents on my father's side. They died before I remembered. No, they didn't pass us much history. History wasn't too valuable in those days. They didn't keep much of a record.

**Interviewer #2:** A question that I have - When family members got married, did they usually stay around in the same area with the family?...While you were you on the Weapons Station, or even after you all moved out here to Penniman {road}. When a family member would get married, would they still stay in the general area where the family was?

**J. PAYNE:** Most of them did. Now, in my family, those that moved to Hampton, they stayed in Hampton. Some of them went to Richmond. My immediate family - only one out of the seven is not in Williamsburg today, the other one is in New Jersey. My wife - she wasn't born in this vicinity. She was born in Lynchburg. Most of her people - the immediate family moved here, and they spread all over. Some in New York, some in New Jersey, some here in Williamsburg. My two daughters - they're in northern Virginia. They're up in the Washington area. They work for the Fairfax county school system. My son-in-law is there, working for the government...He's from North Carolina. He's planning on going back to North Carolina.

#### END OF INTERVIEW

**MRS. BEULAH CHRISTIAN SCOTT**  
INTERVIEW, WASHINGTON, D.C., NOVEMBER 11, 1991

**Interviewer:** You and your parents lived on the Weapons Station before the Navy bought the land?

**B. SCOTT:** Yes. At the time we lived there it wasn't called the Weapon Station, It was the reservation. This is a portion of land that was given to the slaves after being free, it was called the reservation. My mother, my grandmother, and her children was born there, not my grandmother wasn't born there, but her children were born there and there's a house in there called Lee's old brick house. Do you know anything about that?

**Interviewer:** Yes, we've seen that.

**B. SCOTT:** Uh-hum, Robert E. Lee. That's where my mother and her brothers and sisters were born. That's where they lived. I was born there, me and my brothers and sisters, not in Lee's old brick house but in the, in the reservation, or on the reservation, this is what they called at that time. So, my sister, there was five of us, two brothers and three sisters. Let's see, as I (cough) as I say my grandmother was a slave, my mother's mother, but she didn't live at any time, other than on the reservation then later she moved, across the street when the government, you know, took the land. Then we moved across the road, that's what we called it at that time. My grandmother was born right in Lee Hall, there's a, I think they once said they were going to make a shopping center. Lets see its Old Williamsburg Road, now its known. There's a farm there this is where my grandmother was born as a slave. She was 16 years old when the Civil War ended. So it was the Curtises that owned her.

**Interviewer:** And what was her name?

**B. SCOTT:** My Grandmother's name was Sarah Waller, she was a Sarah (Armstead?) Waller, she never did take the slave name. This was the lady that hum, and they taught her to read and to write. She stayed in and took care of the children in the big house.



**Interviewer:** So she was a Curtis then?

**B. SCOTT:** Yea a Curtis, of the Curtises. I think it was two houses there but I think this is the smaller house that remains there now.

**Interviewer:** Well, do you remember some of the other family names that lived around you?

**B. SCOTT:** Hum, It was Thomases, they're all passed, there was the Foxes, they're all passed, there was Curtises, they're all passed, there was, gosh, cause I was rather young, I was six or seven, but I remember. I always liked history, you know. My little world was smaller there, at that time, but I liked to here about things, you know, my grandmother she used to tell me about a lot of things. She passed in 1948. So she was something like 104 when she died. So she told me about a lot of things that happened and told me about the war and everything, you know, that she could remember. But umm, lets see there was uhh, Carters, the Wiggins, all these people passed, I can't remember the rest of the names. And there was a white family that lived, but I can't remember his name, but I remember that he had a horse, and today I'm afraid of horses because I was just that little, and he would go down the highway, you know, on this horse and he would say, "little girl, do you want a ride?" and he put me up on this horse and it seemed so tall, you know, so far up from the ground, but he'd take up on this horse and, he's probably an englishman or something cause he dressed in all these, like you see in, like riding when they go fox hunting. This was the way he would dress and with his top had and everything, and he would come by and he would put me up on this horse, which was frightening and then he would get up it seemed, but anyway, I'm afraid of horses today. Which is rather stupid. I can't think of right off-hand of anymore of their families, the names of the families that lived there.

It was during the, the epidemic of some kind of disease. I think it was flu, something like that. It just wiped out a lot of families and then a lot of families that either older children passed on or the mother or the father of you know, I remember that. I remember we being ill with it, but my father was the only one that wasn't ill. So he put us all in bed with my mother in the same room, you know, he'd go for...remember that. The Pointers, some Pointers lived there. They were first cousins. Siggers, did I say the Siggers? I probably should have all this together. But I just can't think. I've been running ever since you called me. I mean, going to the doctor, having some work done.

**Interviewer:** You said that when the Navy came to buy the land that you moved across the road. Did you move to Lackey or did you move to Grove?

**B. SCOTT:** I moved to Lackey.

**Interviewer:** And do you remember how your father felt about that? Did he feel that he was compensated fairly from the Government?

**B. SCOTT:** No he wasn't. They didn't pay him anything for it. So many people they didn't pay anything for, they just moved them out and they had to just cut branches off the trees and make, they used to call them "brush hoven" and live there. They just moved them out. Of course my grandmother on my father's side, they had two houses in there, but they did move one of the, the smaller house, they moved that out across the road. But they weren't interested in what they did, they just moved us out. And my father wasn't compensated at all.

**Interviewer:** What types of jobs were available in the area? Like what did your father do for a living?

**B. SCOTT:** My father had the land he had. Where we lived, we could walk out of our backyard, we had a barnyard, then we had like a cornfield, to raise corn, and then we'd go through the woods sort of. Then he had another big field back there that he raised corn, and vegetables, and what-have-you. He had some men working for him. And he, I don't know if he went around gathering up men or whether he had other lands that he would take care of doing this or not, but I remember my brother and I used to take the men their lunches at noon time



in one of the fields by the river, and then we would walk down to the river and sit there and eat a little of the sandwiches that my mother had fixed, which was biscuits or whatever with, because that was before sliced bread. So she would have biscuits, cake, or whatever she had, a vegetable and a meat, you know, and we would take a little bit of this and then we would walk down to the river bank and we would sit there and eat it, now naturally we weren't supposed to have tea, because at that time they didn't give kids tea or coffee. So we had a Prince Albert tobacco box that we always saved and we would put a tiny bit in there, enough for him and I to taste it, and this is how we (laugh), we were very young, but those were the little smart things that we got away with.

**Interviewer:** Well how did you and your family spend what leisure time you had. What did you do in the evenings or on weekends?

**B. SCOTT:** Well, in the evenings, I remember, always as if we're going to school. I started school at 12, at 5 I mean, instead of 6, which was early for me. This is the time we'd always have dinner. Everybody'd sit around the dinner table and we'd find out "what'd you do today? How was your schooling? and everything, and go over our lessons, and then my father would tell us what kind of day he had. My mother would say, well she was taking care of the children because at that time mothers didn't go out to work, the fathers worked and the children stayed in, the mother home to take care of the children. So she said I had a hard day, you know, naturally she meant hard day, her day was usually harder than anybody's, you know. But, this is what we'd do and we taught poems and we taught the Bible, and this is what we'd do in the evenings because everybody was home. Then on the weekends, and naturally we would, everybody had a job to do, everyone at their assigned job, and then they could play, you know. They could visit the neighbors and go play with the other kids, whatever. This is what we did. And then we went to church and we'd go to different church socials or whatever they had programs in and things like that.

**Interviewer:** Which church did you go to?

**B. SCOTT:** My grandfather founded the Rising Sun Baptist Church. His name was Chelson (spelling?) Warrell. I don't know anything about my grandfather and his people. After the war my grandmother went to Chester, PA, and that's where she was raised but I don't know how they correspond, but what they did, they did correspond and when she came to VA she married him, she'd never seen him before. Married him and had 10 children. That was true love.

**Interviewer:** When children in the area grew up, did they more-or-less stay in the area or did they go, did they leave the area, and if they did, where did they go? Did they stay close?

**B. SCOTT:** At that time, when we were on the reservation, we stayed in that area because there were little outgroves that were so small, because see there weren't cars, people couldn't have cars and things like that. They weren't plentiful like now. So you really stayed, you went to Newport News and Williamsburg, and the other little, but you know, that was really just to visit. But you stayed in that area. But since they moved across, you know, but of course they're all older now, from your point.

**Interviewer:** Now you say you remember one white family in the area. Were there any other whites on the reservation land that you know of?

**B. SCOTT:** Yes, there was one other family that was friends of ours, they were Ripply's. This lady had two children. I can never remember her husband. I imagine the husband died before I could remember him. But there were Ripply's and she had two girls. They were very close friends of ours. We just ate together, played together, slept together and we just couldn't understand why we couldn't go to school together. But we did everything together and just, Rippley's and then another friend of my mothers, that lady's name I can't remember her. Her first name was Russel. That's who my sister is named after. But I can't remember her last name because we just called her Russel and she had one son. They were very good friends. They stayed with us a lot, you know. She and her. Her husband was killed that I know, by a car. I think he was on a wagon or



something, and a car ran into him, into the wagon. I remember those. But there's some more white families in there but I can't remember those. They were farther, you know, farther away from us. I would see them at the post office and store but I can't remember their names.

**Interviewer:** Were there any problems between the two groups, at all?

**B. SCOTT:** Oh no, no, no, no indeed! We played, like I said we did everything together, other than going to school and this is what we couldn't understand. But we had our schools on the reservation and I don't know where their schools at, I think it was at Yorktown. So even after we moved across the street, it was the same thing, we went to this little school, let me show you my old school. Reunion last year. That's the little school we went to (obviously showing Interviewer picture of school) after we moved to... That was from first grade or, we used to call them primary at that time, until the 11th grade, and then the next 2 years they put in the 12th grade.

**Interviewer:** What type of house did your family live in? Was it just a frame house or did everybody live in the same type of house?

**B. SCOTT:** Uh hum, yea, they'd all have their own homes built.

**Interviewer:** Did everyone own their own land?

**B. SCOTT:** Yea, everyone own their own land. Yea, because like I said, after slavery, this land was given to them. It was handed down from generation to generation.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember, like as far as the reservation goes, do you remember the boundaries of how far that went out? Were there defined boundaries to it or...

**B. SCOTT:** It was from that road. Have you been down there? (Yes.) Okay, it was from that road, when you go in that gate, that goes all the way back to the York River and that's what... A lot of those people lived from fishing and hunting, you know. This is what they did. And trapping, you know, they trapped. Do you know what trapping is? (Yes.) Okay, they'd trap and sell the skins, and things like that. And some of them had their own boats and what have you.

**Interviewer:** That's about it for the questions that I have on my list. Do you have anything else that you wanted to ask (Speaking to other Interviewer)? Not that I can think of. If there is anything else you would like to add...

**B. SCOTT:** No, I can't think of anything, yet. This fell apart, you see I put the little bands around it to save it. That's why it was down here. You know my grandmother kept this for years.

**Interviewer:** That's an incredible picture.

**B. SCOTT:** Isn't that something.

**Interviewer:** This is your grandmother?

**B. SCOTT:** No, no. That is the lady that owned her.

**Interviewer:** That was the lady that owned her, she was the Curtis.

**B. SCOTT:** My grandmother's mother's name, she must, my great grandmother also, she was an Armstead. My grandmother's maiden name was Armstead. So after the war my grandmother and my great grandmother and one other sister went to West Chester, PA. So that's where they stayed. My grandmother came back, she

was a Quaker. She had to get out of the old place and this is where she was raised up. And so I went away from home to school, I went to school in Philadelphia, so when I went to PA, at that time they used to, you could put an ad in the paper for free, it would run for as long as a month or so and I tried to find my grandma's son or her people or her daughters but I never could, I never got any answer.

**Interviewer:** What were your parents names?

**B. SCOTT:** My parents name was, my mother's name was Sarah Waller Christian, WALLER and my father was Edgar E. Christian.

**END OF INTERVIEW**



**APPENDIX C**





## METHODOLOGY

This appendix is offered as an explanation of the research methodology employed for this project. In this section, the authors will explain the methods that they have used during the researching of this report.

Before beginning an in-depth study of the post-Civil War African-American community that developed on the land that the Navy took over in 1918, the creation of an historical overview was needed. An historical overview explores some of the social and cultural developments that have been discussed in this report. This historical overview needed a factual base to bring the past community into focus, and this base was established by using population figures and land ownership records. The population figures gathered from the United States Census Records from 1860 to 1920 helped to show the growth or decline of the population in the area. The use of secondary sources helped show the reasons for any population changes discovered in the census records. Once the population of the area had been established, the land ownership records contained in the York County deeds showed how the community settled on the land and in what kind of pattern. The deeds also gave the dates of African-American land purchases, which was helpful in determining the economic development of the African-American community. All of this information on population trends and land ownership began to bring alive the African-American community under study, and served as a reference point for the remainder of this report.

The population figures used in this report came directly from the United States Census Records from 1860 to 1920. By taking the figures directly from the Census Records, the figures are at the mercy of certain biases in the records. For example, the 1860 and 1870 census listed the people by family unit and dwelling, with the possibility of more than one family unit residing in each dwelling. The 1860 and 1870 census did not, however, list the relationship of each member of the dwelling to the person listed as the head of house, thereby making it more difficult to determine family patterns. Family relationships to the head of house were not listed until the 1880 census.

Another bias of the records is the fact that some of them are missing. The 1890 census was destroyed in a fire in 1921 and all that remains are the general figures published by the Census Bureau in the late 1890's. The general figures for the 1920 census are also the only figures available because the actual census for that year is not scheduled for release until March, 1992. Because the general figures are available, the lack of the actual census schedules was not as serious a problem as it might have been.

There are numerous other biases and inaccuracies that could be present in census records. Because of this, many researchers have said that census records should not be used when trying to recreate a past society. For this report, the census records were the best, and often the only, information available. Therefore, the authors acknowledge that the population figures presented in this report are taken directly from the census records and any bias contained in the records is more than likely reflected in the report.

When dealing with the census materials, it was necessary to create a system of copying the records that would be inexpensive and give the authors the information needed. The system created involved the use of columnar pads similar to those used by accountants and bookkeepers. The columns were used to organize the information hand-copied from the microfilmed census records. The information included the dwelling number and family number for each family recorded, the name of the head of house, their spouse, sex of the individuals, race, and occupation. After the name of the head of house and spouse were written down, the number of remaining members of the household was recorded. The 1860 and 1870 census also included information on real estate and personal estate values. This methodology allowed for the investigation of household size, family size, and allowed the head of house to be tracked through the deed and tax records at the York County Courthouse, as well as through the later census records.

The previously described methodology was used in reverse to discover land ownership and acquisition patterns by African-Americans. The cover map of the 1919 Official Atlas of the Navy Mine Depot (see Figure 45) shows the property lines and owners of the land in 1919. Using the names of the property owners in 1919 and the names of African-Americans listed in the Bruton District and Nelson District divisions of the 1910 York



County census, matches between persons of the same name were made. Not all of the African-American property owners were matched up, but more than enough to create a large sample. Once the African-American landowners were known, the Grantee index of deeds for the time period was consulted. A Grantee Index is an alphabetical index listing buyers of land, who the land was bought from, and in which deed book the record of sale can be found. A deed of property exchange is a written document which legally records the sale of a piece of land from one party to another. A deed records who was buying the land, who was selling it, the price for which the land was sold, and how much land in terms of acres was exchanged. By looking under "United States of America" in the Grantee Index, all of the transactions that took place between the Navy and the community were found, in the form of deeds. Then, the names of the African-American landowners were matched to the names in the Grantor, or seller, column. When each African-American landowner was found, a form in his or her name was created by the researchers. This form allowed the researchers to record information concerning the buyer, seller, acres of land, boundaries, and other data. The form also allowed the researchers to record the number of the deed book that contained the deed showing the transaction from the seller in question to the United States. Then, the deed was consulted to see if it referenced the land back to a previous deed to show how the land was purchased by the 1919 seller. All sellers were traced in this manner until the trail stopped and there were no more references, or until the Civil War was reached. The result of this research is called a chain-of-title and it allowed the researchers to pinpoint the date African-Americans first bought a specific piece of land.

Three other types of census records were also used. The 1865 Census of African-Americans in York County listed the number of African-Americans in the county at the end of the Civil War. It also listed their place of residence and if they were dependent on the United States government for their livelihood. The 1880 Agricultural Census for the Nelson District of York County was also helpful. The Agricultural Census listed information such as the name of the landowner, whether this person owned or rented their land, the value of the farm, how many acres comprised the farm, and what each farm was producing in terms of crops and monetary value. Similar information was listed for the 1880 Industrial Census as well.

Another type of record which was used is tax information. Tax records show the value of the land and property. If one is interested in the value of a particular piece of property in 1870, all the researcher has to know is the 1870 landowner's name and this can then be traced in the 1870 tax assessment book. Again, the landowner's name may be ascertained through deed research. The last, and perhaps the most telling, sources were the oral histories. The observations and remembrances of real people helped to give life to the numbers and names provided by the previously mentioned records.

The Fox family genealogy that is contained in this report was constructed through the use of the York County marriage records. Marriage Book 1, 1856-1954 provided the information necessary to create the family tree. The Fox family genealogy, therefore, contains only the married members of the family. For example, John and Mary Fox could have had more than four children, but it is known that Henry, Mary, John, and George were married. It is very possible that some members of the Fox family are not represented.