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Cover Page Footnote

I am grateful to the curators at Winterthur who provided invaluable assistance with the research of Betty Washington's teaspoon, especially Jennifer Mass Bruce, Bruno Pouliot, and Ann Wagner. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation curators Linda Baumgarten and Janine Skerry were instrumental in identifying the tambour hook handle. Heartfelt thanks to my fellow staff at the George Washington Foundation, notably Dave Muraca, Melanie Marquis, and Paul Nasca, who read drafts and provided thoughtful feedback. Tabitha Hilliard digitally enhanced the image of the tambour hook used in this article. I am especially appreciative of the efforts of two outside reviewers who provided crucial guidance and thoughtful comments that truly improved the quality, content, and relevance of this material. The content of this article, including any errors or omissions, are entirely my responsibility.

The Mother of the Father of Our Country: Mary Ball Washington's Genteel Domestic Habits

Laura J. Galke

The year 1743 brought hardship to the Washingtons as their family patriarch, Augustine, passed away unexpectedly. At that time, a young George Washington inherited the family's home plantation in Fredericksburg, known today as Ferry Farm. Augustine's will stipulated that George's mother, Mary Ball Washington, manage the plantations of their four young boys until they came of age. Between 1743 and 1772, Mary enjoyed the personal agency that widowhood allowed her; she was responsible for the management decisions of the Washington household and the surrounding farm. Mary's choices reflect an ambitious woman determined to participate in the genteel society her family had enjoyed before Augustine's death. Focusing upon small finds - unique, personal artifacts - recovered from Ferry Farm, this article considers Mary's investments in fashionable gentry-class domestic activities such as the display of household ornaments, the tea ceremony, and creation of fancy needlework.

L'année 1743 a été difficile pour la famille Washington alors que le patriarche, Augustine, est décédé subitement. À cette époque, un tout jeune George Washington hérite de la plantation familiale, connue aujourd'hui sous le nom de Ferry Farm. Le testament d'Augustine stipulait que la mère de George, Mary Ball Washington, assurerait la gestion des plantations des quatre jeunes garçons jusqu'à ce qu'ils aient atteint la maturité. Entre 1743 et 1772, le veuvage permit à Mary de jouir du sentiment d'être en mesure de prendre charge de sa propre vie. Elle était responsable des décisions liées à la gestion de la maisonnée Washington ainsi que de la ferme. Les choix de Mary étaient le reflet des choix d'une femme ambitieuse déterminée à faire partie de la bonne société tout comme sa famille le pouvait avant le décès d'Augustine. Mettant l'emphase sur des menus objets –des artefacts uniques et personnels– découverts à la plantation de Ferry Farm, cet article étudie l'engagement de Mary à des activités de la haute bourgeoisie telles l'étalage d'ornements à la maison, la cérémonie du thé et la création d'ouvrages à l'aiguille de fantaisie.

Introduction

This article provides material evidence for the strategies that George Washington's mother, Mary Ball Washington, used to participate in popular domestic customs to reinforce her family's gentility during a time of significant financial uncertainty, between the years 1743 and 1772. Initial research, based upon a number of archaeological discoveries at the boyhood home of George Washington (known today as Ferry Farm), suggests that, as a widow, Mary invested in ornamental ceramic figurines, the tea ceremony, and fancy needlework as ways of using elegant domestic performance to compensate for the family's economic difficulties. This financial stress was brought on by the death of the family patriarch, Augustine Washington, and by the restrictions imposed upon Mary as a woman of the 18th-century regional gentry class. These domestic social displays made the Washington family's sophisticated taste and behavior evident to guests who formally visited their home. Furthermore, archaeological discoveries

from Ferry Farm indicate that Mary consciously trained her children in the tea ceremony and fancy needlework, building key social skills of the leisure class that they would exercise as aspiring provincial gentry.

Numerous biographies of George Washington have attempted to understand this famous and multifaceted American hero. The role of his mother, Mary, in his upbringing and development has rarely been neutral. Nineteenth-century biographers (Lossing 1886; Neider 1994), naive in their treatment of the existing historical record, depicted this matron as the epitome of American motherhood (Warren 1999: 5795-5796). With few exceptions (Felder 1998, Knollenberg 1964, Warren 1999), 20th-century biographers have been decidedly less sympathetic toward her (Warren 1999: 5795-5798), and a number of them have been highly critical of her influence on George (Chernow 2010, Flexner 1974, Freeman 1948, Morison 1932). Martha Saxton argues that widows, such as Mary Ball Washington, inspired offense on the

part of male heirs by trying to live financially independent lives, (Saxton 2003: 170). Archaeological investigations at Ferry Farm have provided new data, allowing a fresh perspective on Mary's circumstances and consumer strategies in the years following her husband's death.

Today, Ferry Farm is administered by The George Washington Foundation, a non-profit organization. The foundation also manages "Kenmore," the Georgian mansion of Betty Washington Lewis and Fielding Lewis, George Washington's sister and brother-in-law, respectively. Each of these sites is open to the public. Archaeological investigations are ongoing at Ferry Farm. The goals of these excavations include recreating the 18th-century landscape of Ferry Farm and uncovering material evidence related to this little-known period of the Washington family. Ferry Farm also boasts significant cultural remains from the Archaic and Middle Woodland periods, the antebellum and Civil War eras, as well as an extensive 20th-century occupation.

Archaeology at George's childhood home has uncovered artifacts that reveal his mother's consumer strategies. Her strategies not only reflected her identity within the Virginia planter class but also shaped the way her children thought of themselves and their role within this stratified and class-obsessed society. It is on rare occasion when archaeologists can assign the consumer choices at any given site to a particular individual (Hodge 2009: 188), but given that Mary was the head of her household and its surrounding plantation acreage in the years following her husband's death in 1743, Ferry Farm provides just such an opportunity. As a widow, Mary exercised greater agency and independence in her purchasing decisions than would have been possible for a married woman (Vickery 2009: 218; Todd 1994: 442-443). New archaeological data has yielded a decidedly more complex picture of this influential matron than is possible using the historical record alone. The material record of Ferry Farm reveals that Mary's consumer choices reflect a woman who was fashionable yet judicial and incisive. These data contribute to a richer understanding of the motivations of this formidable matriarch, determined widow, and mother of the father of our country.

Ferry Farm in the 18th Century

Ferry Farm is located in Stafford County, Virginia (FIG. 1). The Washington family, including Augustine and Mary, along with their children George, Betty, Samuel, John Augustine, and Charles, moved to the property in 1738. The 600-acre plantation was situated just below the fall line of the Rappahannock River across from the town of Fredericksburg. Historical documents indicate that the farm included a house, separate kitchen, dairy, and storehouse, as well as dwellings for their enslaved servants. Ferry Farm archaeologists have discovered some of these structures, and the search for additional structures is ongoing (FIG. 1).

The house into which the Washington family moved was originally built by the Strother family in 1727 or 1728 and was a Georgian-style frame structure featuring five rooms on the first floor and two above (Muraca, et al. 2009). Archaeological investigations indicate that the home measured approximately 54 by 28 ft. in size (FIG. 1). With its separate kitchen and hall-and-parlor design, this impressive home permitted multiple scales of public and private interaction (Kross 1999: 386-390). A public ferry ran through the property throughout the colonial and antebellum periods, inspiring the farm's present appellation.

George Washington's father, Augustine, was a motivated family patriarch. He held a number of minor offices, managed six Virginia plantations, and sought to secure the family fortune through diversification (Muraca, et al. 2009). His manufacturing interests inspired the Washington family's move to Fredericksburg; together with a number of investors, Augustine Washington invested in the Accokeek Creek Iron Furnace, located about six miles from their new home (Muraca, et al. 2009). Despite his ambitions, Augustine never quite made it to the top level of the gentry elite (Felder 1998: 41; Muraca, et al. 2009; Warren 1999: 5786-5787).

The gentry occupied a social position below the nobility, but well above those who worked with their hands, lacked capital, owned no slaves, and were often tenants. Typical lesser gentry owned land, were well educated, held local political positions, owned between two-to-a-few dozen enslaved

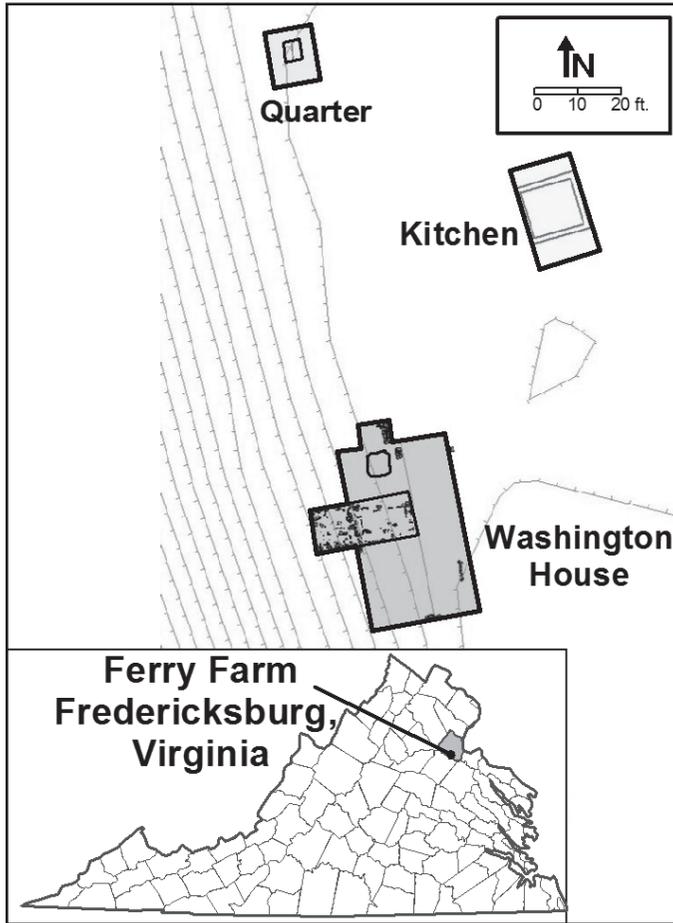


Figure 1. Location of Ferry Farm in Virginia (inset), and Washington family structures identified through archaeology to date. (Courtesy of The George Washington Foundation.)

servants, and, if they were not engaged as full-time planters, held professional positions, such as doctors, surveyors, and lawyers (Vickery 2009: 6, 10; Warren 1999: 5800).

The role of a gentry-class woman in the management of the family was significant. Husbands depended upon their wives to manage the home and family in an orderly manner, even as they trivialized these responsibilities. Despite inferior exposure to education, wives were expected to manage the family business when the family patriarch was away on business trips (Sturtz 2002: 6; Vickery 1998: 64, 2009: 10-12, 194). Augustine's business often took him abroad for months at a time. It was during these times that Mary capably

managed their multiple Virginia plantations in addition to her full-time duties as mother to as many as six children.

In April 1743, Augustine Washington passed away at the age of 49. His probate inventory valued the family's assets among the top ten percent of Virginia families (Warren 1999: 5787), placing the family securely amongst the second tier of gentry, below the colony's royal officials and its governor (Sweeney 1994: 2-3). Augustine's two sons from his first marriage, Lawrence and Augustine Jr., were old enough to take immediate possession of the substantial estates that they inherited. In addition to the property today known as Mount Vernon, Augustine Washington's oldest son Lawrence was awarded possession of the family's interests in the Accokeek Iron Furnace. These inheritances reduced the remaining Washington family's income by approximately 60% (Muraca, et al. 2009) causing a precipitous decline in the family's circumstances. The most straightforward way for Augustine's 35-year-old widow, Mary Ball Washington, to ensure her family's economic security was to remarry. A good

marriage, to someone of similar or greater status, would have improved the financial situation of Mary and her children. As a direct consequence of any new marriage, however, Mary would relinquish her control over her children and their legacy to a new stepfather (Berkin 1996: 13-20; Sturtz 2002: 21-22; Todd 1985: 55, 1994: 428; Warren 1999: 5798).

Mary chose to remain unmarried, a decision not uncommon for widows of her age and middling or higher wealth (Vickery 2009: 218). Given the youth of their four minor-aged sons, in his will, Augustine designated their mother, Mary, as manager of their estates until each reached the age of 21. This arrangement was typical for the time in the Middle Colonies

(Sturtz 2002: 6). George Washington, at age 11, was the oldest of the five children, and he inherited the 600-acre Ferry Farm property upon which the family lived. George's three younger brothers each inherited estates that varied in size from 600-to-700 acres. Betty Washington, the family's only surviving daughter, received two slaves and £400 to be paid to her upon her eighteenth birthday.

When George Washington wrote of his financial circumstances in the years following his father's death, the family's monetary crisis was evident. In a May, 1749 letter to his older half brother Lawrence, a 17-year old George expressed concern over the fact that "...my horse is in very poor order... and is in no likelihood of mending for want of corn sufficient to support him..." (Abbot et al. 1983: 6). His memories of this period were still fresh in his mind at the age of 56, when, in an August 1788 letter to Dr. James Craik, George compares his current economic woes to those of when he was a boy in Fredericksburg: "...with much truth I can say, I never felt the want of money so sensibly since I was a boy of 15 years old..." (Abbot et al 1997a: 423).

Mary Washington managed her sons' plantations over the next 16 years. Though Ferry Farm belonged to George, his mother Mary continued to live at, and to benefit financially from, Ferry Farm until 1772. It was not unusual for a widow to remain in the family home after the heir reached majority. Once married, the heir's wife and growing family would require more space within the home, a situation that might cause familial anxiety should the widow enjoy a long life (Vickery 2009: 219). This potentially tense situation between Mary and George was avoided when, soon after the death of his older half brother Lawrence, he chose to live at the family's estate, Mount Vernon, moving there in 1754 (Warren 1999: 5796).

Nonetheless, George was not satisfied with Mary's continued residence at Ferry Farm. Evidence suggests that George wanted his mother to move from her plantation home as early as 1761. Mary's youngest child, Charles, married and left the farm in the fall of 1757 (Felder 1998: 132-133). In 1761, her son-in-law Fielding Lewis purchased lots within the town of Fredericksburg and built a home for her that was an easy walk from Kenmore, where

Fielding lived with her daughter Betty (Felder 1998: 165). However, despite this ideal location, Mary continued to live on the Ferry Farm property (Felder 1998: 165).

It was over ten years later when her children finally convinced her to move into the Fredericksburg cottage early in 1772 (Felder 1998: 166, 168; Warren 1999: 5793, 5796-5797). During the intervening years, the original lots and cottage had been sold and George and Fielding worked together to reacquire the town property (Felder 1998: 166-169). In 1774, George sold Ferry Farm to Hugh Mercer, but the Mercer family never lived on the property.

Mary's reluctance to leave her Ferry Farm home was not unusual. Vickery's research on Georgian England indicates that widows often exercised independence in terms of consumer decisions and living arrangements (2009: 219-230). Mary's independence was further demonstrated late in her life when, suffering from breast cancer, she insisted on living alone in her Fredericksburg home rather than move into the homes of one of her children, despite their entreaties (Abbot et al. 1997b: 33-36).

Widow Mary Ball Washington's Strategy of Genteel Performance

Artifacts recovered from the boyhood home of George Washington, as well as historical documents, yield significant clues toward understanding Mary's response to the challenges that faced her and her family between the years 1743, when her husband died, and 1772, when she left her plantation home. The archaeological record provides crucial evidence that suggests Mary compensated for her family's financial stress by making calculated investments in luxury items associated with domestic displays that demonstrated her family's discriminating taste to the visiting community. These displays included the purchase of ornamental figurines to grace the family mantle, participation in popular, planter-class social activities such as the tea ceremony, and the production of fancy needlework. These trappings of the well born bolstered her family's position in a patriarchal society that deemed widows and well-managed plantations as incompatible (Brown 1996: 289-290; Todd 1985: 55). Mary's motivations for her consumer decisions become apparent through

understanding the society in which she lived and through an analysis of the material culture in which she invested between the years 1743 and 1772. The gentry of the Georgian period valued sensibility, novelty, restraint, order, and refinement (Hodge 2009: 191; Vickery 2009: 180-181), and Mary's consumer choices reflect these ideals and this identity.

Legal restrictions prevented Mary from increasing the family's property, holding office, voting, or making new investments in manufacturing concerns (Brown 1996: 291; Sturtz 2002: 8-11, 19-21). These were critical strategies needed both to increase the family's wealth and to train her boys in the talents they would need as adults. Because of these limitations, Mary was better able to bequeath gentry-level domestic culture and etiquette to her children. These behaviors can be inferred through the material record. With her commitment to widowhood, the best way that Mary could maintain her family's regional gentry status was by making consumer investments in the domestic realm: adorning her home in fashionable objects and participating in popular gentry-class customs associated with formal visiting. Together, these practices communicated the Washingtons' exceptional taste and sophistication to the Virginia planter-class audience who visited their home on business or on social occasions. By engaging in these fashionable domestic habits, the Washingtons' sophistication was made apparent to any observers, whether they represented visiting members of polite society or the furtive glances of their own servants.

Mary's second-oldest child, Betty, benefited directly from this training in gentry-level domestic social skills; she would follow these guidelines in her home in the future. The consequences of Mary's widowhood were different for her boys: George (aged 11 at his father's death), Samuel (aged 9), John Augustine (aged 7), and Charles (aged 5). While it was also essential for her sons to practice elegant domestic customs such as the tea ceremony (Richards 1999: 97), she could not directly help them gain the experience that they needed to succeed in business or politics (Kowaleski-Wallace 1997: 119-121; Kross 1999; Richards 1999: 111-112; Vickery 1993: 294, 1998: 194, 2009: 273-274).

If they wanted to socialize amongst the best families, graceful manners and polite conversation were crucial for the Washington boys as well as for their sister Betty. George and his three brothers needed to demonstrate their well-groomed etiquette during visits to the homes of prominent Virginia families. In addition, these polite skills reflected well upon them during business and legal transactions (Richards 1999: 112). Evidence indicates that George, Samuel, John Augustine, and Charles Washington exhibited at least some proficiency in this arena. Writing of George Washington's social skills, historian Jack D. Warren noted:

...the Fairfaxes extended their patronage and friendship [to George Washington] because they recognized George as a young man of ability, industry, and determination. He could hardly have attracted their notice if he were clumsy, socially inept, or insecure (Warren 1999: 5809).

Additional evidence for his social skills can be inferred from the fact that in 1759 George married one of the most eligible women in Virginia: the wealthy widow, Martha Dandridge Custis (Chernow 2010: 78-80). The Washington boys clearly benefited from Mary's efforts, but primarily and necessarily, within the domestic arena in which society allowed her the greatest influence.

Domestic Refinement in the Gentry and Middling Georgian Household

Scholars of 18th-century consumerism note that this was a time characterized by a revolution in consumer purchasing power. People from a variety of economic levels, occupations, and social classes increasingly had the ability and inclination to purchase goods and participate in activities previously reserved for the wealthy or for the aristocratic (Bushman 1994: 233, 243-245; Calvert 1994: 257-258; Carson 1994: 616-618, 642, 673-675; Chappell 1994: 167-168; Crowley 2001; Haulman 2002: 7-10; Martin 1991: 166-167; McCracken 1988; McKendrick et al. 1982; Sturtz 2002: 142-143). This change resulted in some considerable social anxiety as traditional methods for communicating status became more fluid. Anxious social commentary and satire were generated against the middling class, laborers, and servants who either dressed too well for their class or engaged in activities that were considered inappropriate to their station

(Beranek 2009: 167-168; Braunschneider 2009: 40-43; Calvert 1994: 257-260; Carson 1994: 675-676, 1990: 27-28; Haulman 2002: 71-78, 109; Kowaleski-Wallace 1997: 31; Mintz 1993: 264; Pennell 1999: 558-559; Richards 1999: 95-96, 101-102, 110, 113; Saxton 2003: 104-105; Shammas 1993: 178; Vickery 2009: 165, 167, 234; White 2006: 255-257).

Privileged consumers searched for new ways to distinguish themselves in a manner that could not be accomplished through mere wealth. What evolved was a culture of refinement measured not by the ability to acquire costly goods, but through a mastery of etiquette and esoteric behavior possible only through extensive practice. This specialized education was exhibited to best advantage during privileged social rituals such as tea drinking. Participants in these occasions required leisure time to master the skills, behavioral conventions, utensils, and fashions associated with such events (Calvert 1994: 260; Carson 1994: 586-619, 638; Chappell 1994: 215-217; Haulman 2002: 64, 68, 71-83; Kirkpatrick 1994: 213-214; Kowalski-Wallace 1997: 29; Richards 1999: 2, 96-101, 153; Vickery 2009: 7, 14-16, 144). For the well-heeled lady, elegant domestic habits such as serving tea demonstrated not only her sophistication, but also her conspicuous leisure time. The exploitation of enslaved laborers made this spare time available to the leisure class.

As the 18th century progressed, social visiting became more popular and formalized, and women assumed a pivotal role in the domestic performances and material ornaments related to these occasions (Hodge 2009: 191; Martin 1993: 154; Vickery 2009: 8-9, 14-16, 198, 228, 291-295). This leisure-class sociability occurred at the juncture between their private and public life, allowing individuals to both express and shape their identity through formalized interaction and a well-propped domestic 'stage.'

Ornamenting the Georgian Home

Interest grew in creating a comfortable domestic environment appropriate for the households new and expanding role in socialization (Martin 1993: 145, 153; Richards 1999: 114; Sweeney 1994; Vickery 2009: 53; Wenger 1989). Indeed, purchases associated with displays of gentility had

precedence over items that increased personal comfort (Crowley 2001: 147-149; Martin 1993: 154-156). While investments in items such as mattresses and upholstered furniture improved personal comfort, they were not visible to guests and, therefore, allowed for little in the way of social mobility or enhancement. Decorative embellishments, in contrast, such as linen, wallpaper, window treatments, ceramics, figurines, and needlework, made the home more attractive for visitors and passively but unequivocally broadcasted notions of gentility, refinement, and personal character to a wide audience (Crowley 2001: 290; Vickery 1993: 278, 2009: 230).

The spatial segregation characteristic of the new Georgian homes allowed for the separation of public from private space, creating rooms that facilitated formal visiting and that begged for ornamental curiosities and conversation pieces (Crowley 2001: 291; Kross 1999: 385-396; Sweeney 1994 19-34; Vickery 2009: 254, 302). Prudent homeowners took advantage of such space to communicate their exceptional taste through the exhibition of ceramic chargers, punchbowls, curiosities, and figurines. A number of studies suggest that decorative knickknacks were especially popular purchases by women who were the heads of their households (Vickery 1993: 177, 2009: 289-290; Weatherill 1986).

Household ornaments, such as small effigies representing human or animal figures, were popular investments among women who used such purchases to display their discriminating taste and to entertain visitors (Vickery 2009: 257, 276, 288-290). The popularity of these inexpensive trinkets led manufacturers to produce affordable alternatives to exotic porcelains. Ornamental pieces were typically exhibited where fashion-conscious visitors could best appreciate them (Vickery 2009: 18, 257, 276, 292), such as on the fireplace mantle in the hall or parlor. Figurines made from porcelain were ideal (Carson 1990: 45; Halfpenny 1991: 11, 19; Richards 1999: 114, 132; Vickery 2009: 126, 276-277), as porcelain was the most coveted ceramic of this time amongst men and women (Martin 1991: 176; Richards 1999: 3; Vickery 2009: 276-277). In the first half of the 18th century, tin-glazed earthenwares and durable white salt-glazed ceramics were far more economically priced (Edwards and

Hampson 2005: 159, 176; Richards 1999: 4, 106-107). It was during the 1750s and 1760s that inexpensive white salt-glazed ceramics enjoyed a robust market amongst the middling sorts, who were anxious to put their exceptional taste on exhibit (Richards 1999: 94-95; Skerry and Hood 2009: 153-156).

Household Adornment in the Washington Home

Mary Washington invested in a set of inexpensive ornamental figurines for her home. Archaeologists have recovered evidence for at least three different agatized white salt-glazed stoneware statuettes from Ferry Farm, likely representing a set of human figurines (FIG. 2). Human forms might represent various professions within society, symbolize various social classes, or even present allegorical themes like 'old age' and 'youth', or 'spring' and 'fall' (Richards 1999: 183-184). Manufactured during the 1750s, these objects were unquestionably acquired after Augustine's demise and during a time of intense public scrutiny of the Washington family. Small decorative objects such as these were popular purchases made by wives and by widows, and it therefore seems likely that Mary chose these items herself (Vickery 2009: 228-230; Weatherill 1986).

A number of Staffordshire potters created ornamental pieces from less expensive, non-porcelain materials, and Mary's agatized stoneware figurines were amongst the earliest produced for discriminating, yet parsimonious, consumers (Halfpenny 1991: 11, 19; Skerry and Hood 2009: 152-156). The Washington's agatized salt-glazed stoneware figurines provided excellent and status-appropriate surrogates (Richards 1999: 220; Vickery 2009: 230). "Imitation in one material of other artefacts of its kind, or of those made in a different material, was not disparaged in the 18th century" (Richards 1999: 181).

Novelty was an important consideration in 18th-century consumerism (Richards 1999: 46, 94-95), and the display of these unusual ornaments prominently communicated Mary's fashion acumen to discerning visitors to the Washington household. Further, the use of such surrogates exhibited the family's sensibility and good taste (Richards 1999: 96-97, 220). Mary's figurines were appropriately

unassuming for her widowed state, and their uniqueness appealed to her gentry status.

Ornamental figurines, having no functional purpose for their owners, make rare archaeological discoveries (Skerry and Hood 2009: 153). The few fragments that have been recovered from Colonial Williamsburg represented more popular animal, not human, figures. While such sculpture was popular amongst middling and gentry families beginning in the early 18th century (Richards 1999: 3, 183-184), such figurines remain under-represented or unrecognized in the archaeological record.

Mary's efforts to display the family's sophistication may have intensified during the 1750s, when her ability to manage her home and property were undermined by two incidents that prompted public judicial intervention. In the fall of 1750 Harry, one of the enslaved servants who worked at Ferry Farm, was found guilty of murdering a fellow Washington slave (King George County: 670). After a public trial, Harry was hanged. The second incident occurred in the summer of 1751. According to court papers, while a

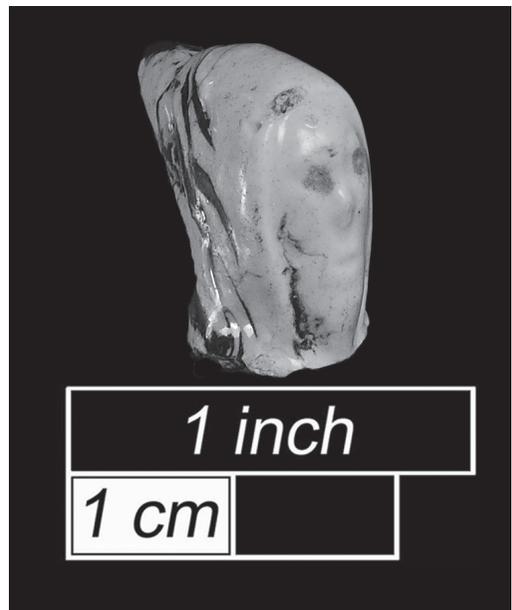


Figure 2. An agate white salt-glazed stoneware figurine, possibly representing a monk. Evidence for at least three different statuettes has been found by Ferry Farm archaeologists. (Photo courtesy of The George Washington Foundation.)

19-year old George Washington was bathing in the Rappahannock River, his clothes, which he left unattended on the adjacent bank, were taken. Two indentured servants, Ann Carroll and Mary McDaniel, were accused. Both were found guilty and McDaniel was sentenced to 15 lashes upon her bare back (Abbot 1983: 48-49).

As a result of these legal proceedings, Mary's ability to keep her plantation in good order was suspect: she was in danger of being cast as the stereotypical widow in evident need of male oversight. The Fredericksburg community likely viewed such tragic events as proof of an unsupervised woman's inability to manage a plantation (Beranek 2009: 168; Brown 1996: 287-290; Hodge 2009: 191-192; Sturtz 2002: 193; Todd 1985: 55). The Washington's agate stoneware set of mantle figurines date securely to the 1750s when a publicly-visible testament to the Mary's competence, good taste, and sensibility was essential.

Domestic Social Occasions: The Tea Ceremony

Hospitality was perhaps the most sensitive indicator of refinement during this time (Brown 1996: 269-272; Roth 1961: 63; Sweeny 1994: 8-9; Vickery 1998: 195-197, 2009: 273-274), and serving tea to guests was considered an elegant form of entertaining (Roth 1988: 444, 1961: 63; Vickery 1998: 207-212, 2009: 274-275; Weatherill 1993: 216). The tea ceremony was a supremely domestic occasion in which men and women could suitably mingle over this refined refreshment (Richards 1999: 132). The tea ceremony starkly contrasted with male-dominated public coffee houses and taverns, into which genteel ladies would not venture. In such public places, coffee consumption might occur alongside the consumption of intoxicating beverages and in an environment compromised by tobacco smoke (Richards 1999: 133-141, 146, 181).

Before such socializing could take place, a number of purchases were required. Depending upon their quality, tea, tea pots, tea cups, tea spoons, tongs, sugar, and other specialized equipage could be costly to acquire, especially during the first half of the 18th century (Breen 2004: 304; Crowley 2001: 143; Hodge 2010: 227-228; Martin 1993: 153;

Richards 1999: 4-5, 97, 127-130; Vickery 2009: 227-228). The popularity of the tea ceremony encouraged manufacturers to produce more economical wares and equipment options, making the consumption of tea more popular and affordable during the second half of the 18th century (Breen 2004: 304-305; Hodge 2009: 199; Martin 1991: 167-169, 1993: 154; Richards 1999: 41, 96-99, 177; Roth 1988).

Ceramics were available to consumers at a variety of price points. Porcelain was the most coveted and expensive ceramic of this time (Martin 1991: 176; Richards 1999: 3) while tin-glazed earthenwares and resilient white salt-glazed ceramics were more economically priced (Edwards and Hampson 2005: 159, 176; Richards 1999: 4). In William Allason's store in the adjacent town of Falmouth, Virginia, high-priced porcelains sold sluggishly, while the elegant and economical creamwares of Staffordshire flew off the shelves (Martin 1991: 176). While less fashionable though solidly popular tablewares such as pewter and tin-glazed earthenwares continued to be purchased during the middle decades of the 18th century (Martin 1991: 176; Richards 1999: 109), they lacked the association with formal and genteel tea socializing that elegant Staffordshire ceramics possessed (Martin 1991: 177-178, 1993: 154; Richards 1999: 94). Probate inventories often recorded pewter tablewares in the kitchen where they were far less likely to be seen by visitors. The more elegant, fashionable earthenwares, however, were often recorded as being on display within the parlors and halls of the main home (Richards 1999: 109).

Because making and formally serving tea was time consuming and charged with fastidious behaviors and unspoken messages, the domestic tea party was a sign of civility ideally reserved for those of the leisure class (Carson 1990: 28; Goodwin 1999: 179-181; Hodge 2009: 196-199; Kowaleski-Wallace 1997: 31; Roth 1961: 63). As such, it provided an effective way for the Washingtons to use a convivial social occasion to practice their gentility and to proclaim their membership amongst the gentry class (Goodwin 1999: 180-181; Kross 1999: 397; Martin 1991: 169; Scott 1989: 145-146; Shields 1997: 141-142). During the tea ceremony,

...a family was judged by the taste displayed through their tea equipage and the grace with which the presiding woman served tea and dispensed "chat" (Kross 1999: 397).

The increased variability in tea ware decoration and increasingly inexpensive choices (Martin 1991: 166-167) encouraged the purchase of more than one tea set over the course of a person's lifetime to complement existing sets or to replace those that had become less stylish. Vickery's (2009: 212) research on the account books of married English women of the lesser gentry suggests that tea pots were typically purchased at a rate of one per year to a-year-and-a-half.

The Washington Family at Tea

In Augustine's 1743 probate inventory, a single ceramic tea pot is enumerated along with the associated equipage, including a tea pot stand, two slop bowls, a milk pot, a sugar dish, seven silver tea spoons, and two sets of ceramic tea cups and saucers. Following her husband's death, the archaeological record indicates that Mary regularly expanded the family's collection of tea wares. This in part reflects the increasing popularity of the beverage during the 18th century (Vickery 2009: 273). Mary's frequent purchases of English-made tea wares throughout her life also highlight her determined efforts to communicate her family's refinement and fashionability using sensibly-priced and unassuming ware types (Richards 1999: 110, 132-133). Such elegant props were popular investments for gentry-level widows (Vickery 2009: 229-230). A preliminary, minimal estimate of the tea pots that Mary purchased during her residence at Ferry Farm is seven based upon the variety of tea pot sherds recovered from archaeological excavations. These tea pots include one footed Jackfield-type tea pot (c. 1740-1800), one footed tortoiseware tea pot (c. 1750s), one black basalt tea pot (c. 1750-1850), one engine-turned Astbury-type tea pot (c. 1763-1800), and three hand-painted, overglaze creamware tea pots (c. 1765-1775). Given their English manufacturing origin, these wares represented tasteful and pragmatic choices.

Mary appeared anxious to ensure that the family's tea wares remained trendy due to the teapot's central role in the tea ceremony. Mary's desire to keep current with the latest tea ware styles reveals something significant about the importance that this refined social ritual played in her efforts to exhibit the family's

sophistication. The frequency of Mary's purchases seemed typical for the Georgian-era trend documented by Vickery (2009: 219) in England. Mary was wise to make these investments in this social performance ritual; the tea ceremony engaged an audience of peers and allowed them to witness the family's genteel behavior and their adept use of specialized equipment (Brown 1996: 274; Carson 1994: 638; Goodwin 1999: 127, 179-181; Hodge 2009: 199; Kowaleski-Wallace 1997:25; Kross 1999: 397; Richards 1999: 97; Vickery 2009: 292-295).

While tea consumption was enjoyed by both men and women, serving tea was a gendered activity reserved for women during the 18th century. It was customary for tea to be dispensed by the wife or by the oldest daughter in the house (Hodge 2009: 197; Kowaleski-Wallace 1997: 25; Roth 1961: 63; Vickery 2009: 273). Betty, as the only daughter, was clearly groomed in this ceremony. The archaeological record reveals this unequivocally. A pewter teaspoon fragment recovered from one of the stone-lined cellars of the Washington house (FIG. 1) featured Betty Washington's initials (FIG. 3).

Stamping an owner's initials on pewter objects was popular during the 17th and 18th centuries (Montgomery 1973: 13-14). Pewter was a practical choice as it was far more durable than fragile ceramics. Pewter items could be sold when they were worn or broken, but they were commonly used amongst members of gentility during the mid 1740s. Indeed all but the meanest households had some pewter utensils, vessels, or tableware (Martin 1991: 167, 178; Montgomery 1973: 13). Pewter was an ideal substitute for silver, but the teaspoon's commercial value was of secondary importance to its value as a symbol of refinement and gentility (Haulman 2002: 62-63).

Tea accoutrements featuring initials not only identified their owners in the event of loss (Montgomery 1973:13-14) but also made a clear statement about Betty Washington's affiliation with refined society. Based upon its attributes alone, experts dated this spoon to the early-to-mid 18th century (Wagner, Pouliot, and Mass pers. com. 2009). The initials upon the spoon ("BW" representing Betty Washington) date it from sometime between her birth (in 1733) and her marriage (in 1750), when her name changed to Betty Lewis.



Figure 3. Close-up photo of the pewter teaspoon from Ferry Farm that features a young Betty Washington's initials. (Photo courtesy of The George Washington Foundation.)

Spoons were typically sold in sets of six or twelve (Moore 2001: 12) and we can assume that this fragment represented part of such a set.

Betty must have appreciated possessing her very own, personalized set of pewter spoons. Children's tea sets made from pewter were not uncommon during the colonial period in America (Laughlin 1981: 25). This artifact reflected Mary's commitment to schooling young Betty in the appropriate behaviors and skills of a gentry-class lady (Brown 1996: 295). No doubt Betty's brothers benefited as well from the social etiquette and manners that they witnessed and practiced at the tea table (Carson 1994: 648-649; Richards 1999: 94-97; Roth 1988: 440; Saxton 2003: 106). The conduct and manners practiced at the tea table were crucial to the social ambitions of the entire Washington family.

The presence of Betty's initials on her teaspoon provided a highly-visible, unequivocal, and powerful claim about her identity among the provincial elite. Such emblems of refinement played key roles in the unspoken culture of this genteel social ceremony. The rules of the tea ceremony were unspoken, yet widely understood among the fashionably-informed elite (Kowaleski-Wallace 1997: 14-15, 24-31), and the Washingtons made their claim to gentility manifest to this discerning audience through their behavior and personalized tea spoons.

Betty's set of pewter spoons was no doubt quickly forgotten in 1749. In that year, her English Uncle Joseph Ball sent to her a tea chest of her very own (Felder 1998: 68). The chest contained a set of six silver teaspoons, silver tongs, sugar, and two canisters of tea. Silver and silver-plated items were associated with the wealthiest consumers (Martin 1993: 153).

With these tools, Betty could demonstrate to other members of the planter-class community her mastery of the tea ceremony and its unspoken behaviors. If she was typical of her generation, it is almost certain that she dispensed tea to a number of potential suitors in the years leading up to her marriage. The tea table provided one of the few convivial settings over which a woman could preside and at which men and women could socialize appropriately (Kross 1999: 397; Richards 1999: 142; Vickery 2009: 14-16). The tea ceremony swiftly evolved into an appropriate occasion for potential suitors to become acquainted with and to evaluate the elegance and grace of prospective spouses (Braunschneider 2009: 87; Roth 1988: 444). Just a year after receiving her tea chest from her English uncle, 17-year old Betty married the recently widowed, and highly eligible, Fielding Lewis in 1750 (Felder 1998: 69).

Domestic Social Occasions: Fine Needlework

During the 18th century, one way that a woman of privilege could demonstrate competency in elegant domestic skills was through the manufacture of ornamental needlework, such as embroidery, crewelwork, or lacework (Brown 1996: 297; Miller 2006: 96-101; Swan 1977: 81-82). Young women of all backgrounds learned basic sewing skills, but crewelwork and embroidery were reserved for leisure-class women, who assigned the more mundane sewing tasks to their servants (Beaudry 2006: 62,170-171; Brown 1996: 297; Hodge 2009: 193; Miller 2006: 96-101; Pryor 1903: 324-325; Vickery 2009: 236). Fine embroidery was a badge of female gentility and ingenuity. Needlework reflected well upon its creator, and finished works ornamented the home; these items were placed on display in a variety of ways including hangings, samplers, aprons, screens, chair seats, and purses (Herman 2006:

56; Vickery 2009: 231-243, 245, 248). Young gentlemen traveled widely for an opportunity to appreciate these "...ornaments of gentility" and to appraise their talented creators as potential brides (Vickery 2009: 243).

Fancy needlework spotlighted a woman's competency in a privileged domestic skill and highlighted the leisure time available for mastering these important skills (McConnel 1999: 53; Miller 2006: 96-101; Swan 1977: 137; Vickery 2009: 244). Like the tea ceremony, needlework was an appropriate activity in which young ladies could engage when visitors came to the house (Rogers 1983: 189; Swan 1977: 79-83, 150-151; Tauton 1997: 74; Vickery 2009: 238-241, 244-245). Needlework also enabled women to affect alluring postures, attracting attention to her work, her skills, and manifesting her refinement in the exhibition of herself.

The Washingtons' Curious Needlework

Mary and Betty's devotion to fine needlework is apparent from the archaeological record. One of the most extraordinary mid-18th century artifacts recovered from Ferry Farm was a tambour hook, featuring a bone handle and a portion of its steel hook (FIG. 4). This exceptional object was first identified by Linda Baumgarten of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (pers. com. 2009). The handle was recovered from the bottom-most stratum of the Washingtons' root cellar (FIG. 1) where it was deposited sometime between 1741 and 1760. The carved designs that cover the handle feature a parrot, leaves, flowing vines, and numerous flowers (FIG. 4). These motifs represent some of the most popular embroidery themes of the time (Synge 2001: 217).

The handle is thicker at one end, allowing it to be held comfortably in the vertical position necessary for tambouring. One side of the handle is rounded while the other features a chamfered surface. Both sides are heavily decorated. A shallow aperture exists at the top of the handle and permits the hook protector to be stored there when the hook was in use.

Elaborately-decorated tambour hook handles were characteristic of French-manufactured hooks of the early 18th century (Beaudry 2006: 62). Over time, the decoration

upon these handles became less ornamental (Rogers 1983: 191). While the tambour hook from the Washington's root cellar is highly embellished, the nature of its manufacture led historic clothing curator Mary Doering to suggest that it was manufactured in England (pers. comm 2009). The form and use of this tool would have been highly curious and novel, yet its material and manufacturing origin were eminently sensible.

Tambouring originated thousands of years ago in Asia and required a frame around which fabric was stretched (Fukuyama 1987: 7-10; Groves 1966: 97; Rogers 1983: 189-196). The tambour hook pierced the tight fabric from above. Below the frame, the thread was hooked by the tambour needle and it was pulled to the surface of the fabric, forming a chain stitch (Swan 1977: 136-137). Tambour was the precursor to 19th-century crochet (Groves 1966: 97, 100; Leslie 2007: 212; Rogers 1983: 195).

Typically, embroidery was complicated and took a great deal of practice to master (Miller 2006: 98). Tambouring, however, did not demand the level of skill and concentration that other forms of embroidery did (Swan 1977: 137). Tambouring was purely ornamental and consisted of adding embellishment to existing fabric (Groves 1966: 97). It was a wildly popular technique amongst "ladies of gentle birth" in Europe and its colonies during the 18th century (Beaudry 2006: 62; Groves 1966: 99; Leslie 2007: 213; McConnel 1999: 53; Ribeiro 2002: 75; Swan 1977: 81-84, 135-137; Vickery 2009: 245).

The most coveted tambour hooks were made from ivory, precious metals, mother-of-pearl, or tortoiseshell (Groves 1966: 99-100; McConnel 1999: 22, 53; Rogers 1983: 191; Tauton 1997: 74) and featured hollow handles that accommodated additional steel hooks of varying sizes. The bone tambour hook handle recovered from Ferry Farm did not feature the hollow cavity that typical specimens did.

Performing this unusual needlework would have encouraged visitors' admiration (Vickery 2009: 243). Tambouring allowed women to assume elegant poses and to display graceful movements (Swan 1977: 84). Betty was the most likely practitioner of the tambouring art. She stood to gain the most from engaging in such a novel pursuit with its



Figure 4. Tambour hook recovered from the Washington family's root cellar. (Photo courtesy of The George Washington Foundation.)

arsenal of specialized and curious tools. During the mid-18th century in Europe and her colonies, this form of needlework was highly distinctive, a 'curiosity' that would have attracted positive attention to Mary's management of the Washington home and to its talented young mistress, Betty.

Tambouring embodied the Georgian ideals of female gentility: elegant display of self, producing ornamentation for the domestic environment, an unusual curiosity, and an exotic Far Eastern talent that required specialized tools. It is clear that tambouring was rare in

Virginia during the 1740s-1750s, as most researchers argue that this practice did not occur in the colonies before the later 18th century (Bridgeman and Drury 1978: 67; Dawson 1987: 225; Synge 2001: 217).

Betty Washington used tambour embroidery as a strategy to demonstrate her fine needlework skills, elegance, and exceptional talents to potential gentry-class suitors (Vickery 2009: 232, 243). As such, fancy needlework provided an ingenious and characteristically genteel technique by which the community of landed elite could witness her exceptional talents. While the family's material world was not ideal, their behavioral performances demonstrated that they were fashionable yet sensible, original, and sophisticated.

By the end of the 18th century, tambouring became commercialized and shops began mass producing tambour work (Dawson 1987: 225; Groves 1966:100). By the second quarter of the 19th century, a tambouring machine was developed (Leslie 2007: 213; Rogers 1983: 189; Swan 1977:137). Once this technique was mass produced, its exclusive association with graceful ladies of leisure fell rapidly.

Two other tambour hooks have been found archaeologically in the eastern United States. Both date from 19th-century contexts, however, an era in which tambouring was no longer associated with the leisure classes. An elegant, ivory-handled tambour hook was discovered in a 19th-century deposit dating prior to 1890 in the Five Points neighborhood of New York (Beaudry 2006: 62). Another tambour hook was discovered at the residence of an enslaved African at The Hermitage in Tennessee (Beaudry 2006: 62-63). It was of simple, lathe-turned decoration.

The Material Culture of Georgian Widows

Any attempt to understand the consumer motivations of a mid-18th century widow must consider the rights and limitations experienced by women under the English Common Law used in the English-settled American colonies. Unlike English men, women's rights and personal agency became more constricted with age and marriage (Berkin 1996: 14; Narrett 1989: 91). Despite the institution's legal restrictions for wives, English colonial society

provided women with limited means of financial support outside of marriage (Saxton 2003: 100; Thaddeus 1994: 114; Vickery 2009: 192-193). Once married, an English woman lost all legal identity; the married couple was legally subsumed by the patriarch (Main 1989: 68-69; Narrett 1989: 106; Saxton 2003: 133; Sturtz 2002: 19-20; Thaddeus 1994: 122; Vickery 2009: 103). Any property that she owned, including personal property, land, and even her clothing, became the property of her husband (Berkin 1996: 14; Kirkpatrick 1994: 204-205; Narrett 1989: 105-106; Shamma 1989: 134, 138-139, 150).

The law recognized a woman only if she was unmarried or widowed, a status that allowed her to retain income, to own land, to take legal action, to negotiate contracts, and to dictate a will (Sturtz 2002: 20; Thaddeus 1994: 114, 122). Widows were able to compose wills, keep their earnings, and manage their property and finances as they saw fit. A wealthy widow enjoyed greater financial freedom, living space, and social options than those who were poor (Vickery 2009: 218-219). Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English texts, including newspapers, plays, and literature, often made sport of widows whose presumed inability to manage property and finances in the absence of a patriarch were exaggerated (Saxton 2003: 99; Todd 1985: 54-55). Many comedies depicted stereotypical widows fervently seeking to remarry, regardless of the consequences. Barbara Todd's (1985, 1994) meticulous research, however, noted that some early modern plays, such as *The Triumphant Widow* (1677), took a different approach, featuring female characters that chose not to remarry and delineating well-reasoned motives why remaining a widow might prove advantageous. Control over land, the ability to participate in legal matters, and personal agency were common themes in these plays (Todd 1985: 55).

Widowhood was a respected social position (Vickery 2009: 218-220) and, barring a society in which women were in acute minority, widows were less likely to hasten to the altar than widowers (Smith 1989: 55). This pattern was especially true for women who were widowed by their early-to-mid 30s (Smith 1989: 56; Todd 1985: 61-63). English Common Law provided that wives should

inherit (typically) a "dower" of 1/3 of her husband's property at the time of his death (Berkin 1996: 15; Carr 1989: 155, 179; Main 1989: 71-72; Narrett 1989: 91, 106-107; Shamma 1989: 141-142; Sturtz 2002: 20, 167), though widows' shares occasionally fell short of this ideal (Carr 1989: 160, 171, 183, 194; Main 1989: 83-84; Shamma 1989: 142-147, 151-153). This dower property was only under her control temporarily – her death returned it to the heir identified in her husband's will (Berkin 1996: 15; Carr 1989: 160, 194; Main 1989: 71-72; Narrett 1989: 92-93; Shamma 1989: 150-151; Sturtz 2002: 20; Vickery 2009: 223).

As heirs came of age, a widow might find herself sharing her home with her son and daughter-in-law, a situation that sometimes proved stressful (Vickery 2009: 219). Occasionally, husbands' detailed qualifications upon or the loss of property should a widow re-marry made the altar even less attractive (Carr 1989: 171, 179; Main 1989: 81; Shamma 1989: 141-144). In addition, some contemporary accounts encouraged widows to remain unmarried, in order that they remain devoted to their duties as mothers and not be distracted by the personal desires and obligations presented by a new husband and family (Saxton 2003: 165; Sturtz 2002: 167; Todd 1994: 428-430). Georgian society expected widows to embrace a life of frugality, austerity, and submission to authority (Saxton 2003: 165-166).

While a widow could keep any profits gained from the property of her minor-aged heirs until they came of age, she could not sell it (Sturtz 2002: 20). If a widow remarried, her new husband would assume the responsibilities of managing any such property, retaining all profits obtained until the heirs reached their majority at age 21 (Carr 1989: 187; Shamma 1989: 154; Sturtz 2002: 53). To prevent minor-aged children from being defrauded, the Virginia House of Burgesses required county courts to host an annual "orphans court" in which mothers and stepfathers had to demonstrate their responsible management of property belonging to their minor children (Sturtz 2002: 22).

Vickery's (2009: 207-230) study of period account books and personal correspondence considered the motivations of "middling and genteel" widows within the context of

Georgian England. She found that widows enjoyed more personal living space than spinsters (Vickery 2009: 209) and that widows continued to invest in the material culture associated with the formal visiting and interior ornamentation that were hallmarks of well-born Georgian-era ladies (Vickery 2009: 228). Domestic ornamentation included the purchase of fashionable wallpapers, embroidery, prints, silverware, and fashionable china in ways that seem to be distinct from households in which there was male oversight (Vickery 2009; Weatherill 1986: 153-156). These ornaments could be purchased quite reasonably, especially when such choices were readily available from English manufacturers (Vickery 2009: 229-230).

This pattern of domestic performance investment differs markedly from the personal property of spinsters, or unmarried older women, whose low status and boarding within the household of close family members made entertainment unseemly (Vickery 2009: 193, 228). A spinster was financially dependent upon various family members, had little personal space within her relatives' household, and typically moved often (Vickery 2009: 188-193, 208-215, 227-229). Spinsters had perhaps the most unenviable social position for middling- and lesser-gentry women.

The Archaeology of Widows

The archaeology of Elizabeth Pratt's home (Hodge 2009, 2010) offers a recently-published comparative archaeological example of the material culture of an early-to-mid-18th-century widow in Newport Rhode Island. While a widow like Mary Washington, Mrs. Pratt differs in that she ran a store that sold cloth, clothing, accessories, and popular foodstuffs such as chocolate, coffee, tea, sugar, and butter (Hodge 2009: 185). This situation ranks Elizabeth Pratt amongst the "middling sorts" (Hodge 2009: 191; 2010: 218), perhaps comparable to Mary Washington financially, though Mary would have enjoyed greater social status as a manager of multiple plantations than Elizabeth did as a shopkeeper. Pratt's 24-by-16-foot home was modest, even for her time (Hodge 2010: 224).

Pratt's enthusiasm for tea was reflected in the archaeological record as tea wares were the most common form of refined ceramics recovered

(Hodge 2009: 196, 2010: 227). With an assemblage dating from the first half of the 18th century, Pratt's investment in tea was an indulgence but one which was appropriate not because it imitated wealthy consumers but because of its social dimensions and association with genteel behavior (Hodge 2009: 196, 2010: 228).

Using archaeological data and primary documents, Hodge asserts that the Pratt family was purchasing this luxury product by the second quarter of the 18th century, ambitious for a family of their social standing at the time. Hodge's discoveries also indicate, however, that Pratt did not invest in matching dining sets and fashionable utensils, which were important elements of the developing Georgian preoccupation with complex and specialized dining presentation paraphernalia (Hodge 2009: 195). It seems that the refreshment and sociability offered by consuming tea was more suitable to the widow Pratt's routine than formal entertaining over a meal.

Shammas (1990: 299) suggests that tea drinking was a popular indulgence in pre-industrial England and America, even among consumers who endured meager existences in single-room hovels. The powerful dimensions of gender, gentility, opportunity, and social ambition inspired this determined widow/merchant's tea ware investments (Hodge 2009: 197-201). Hodge (2010: 219) asserts that Pratt had no interest in emulating either her social superiors or her equals. The archaeological record suggests that Pratt's consumer choices were influenced by the evolving standards of gentility of her time and her desire to engage in the sociability of the tea ceremony over and above other material indicators.

Conclusion

The archaeological data from Ferry Farm provide a unique collection of materials from which to understand a crucial, but poorly-documented, period for the Washington family. In the preceding pages, I have made a basic assertion that, as the only adult in the household, Mary Ball Washington was responsible for the mid-18th century acquisitions that comprise the archaeological record from Ferry Farm. The careful analysis of small finds, such as figurines, tea wares, and needlework tools, demonstrates that she took deliberate measures

to engage in fashionable, social customs of the time and, furthermore, to train her children in the skills and behaviors associated with these customs. Such training equipped them for their adult roles in the refined society to which they aspired. Mary was determined to maintain her family's position amongst the regional planter class without relinquishing the independence and agency (Dornan 2002) that widowhood provided to her (Todd 1994: 442-443).

As a widow with five children, Mary invested in materials that allowed her family to participate in the evolving gentry-class culture of formal visiting. This approach allowed her to showcase her capacity to manage her home, plantations, and family in the absence of a male head of household. Mary realized that the path to retaining control over her family and its resources was by manifesting good taste, appropriate social skills, and entertaining. Modest investments in materials such as English-made figurines, tea wares produced in Staffordshire, and elegant needlework permitted the family to display their taste, sensibility, and fashionability (Carson 1990: 54-57; Saxton 2003: 106; Vickery 2009: 53). The surrounding, planter-class community was surely scrutinizing the widow Washington's household in the years following her husband's death (Beranek 2009: 168; Brown 1996: 287; Hodge 2009: 191-192; Sturtz 2002: 193; Todd 1985: 55). Mary embraced arcane performance over capital power, implementing it in her home to compensate for her family's economic distress. She was not willing to allow her economic situation to compromise her social status nor the aspirations of her young wards.

Domestic social performances made the Washington family's sophisticated taste and gracious behavior evident to the genteel visitors to their home (Saxton 2003: 106; Vickery 2009: 53, 144, 292). These traditions no doubt made an impression on their enslaved domestic servants as well (Goodwin 1999: 143). Mary trained her children in the tea ceremony and fancy embroidery, practicing the social skills of the leisure class that they would fully exercise as adult members of the landed gentry. Her purchases represent socially strategic yet economically conscientious choices that maximized the family's ability to demonstrate their knowledge of genteel, domestic customs to an audience of appraising peers.

Small finds artifacts demonstrate Mary's identity construction for herself and her family as members of the social elite (Beranek 2009:

168; Bushman 1994: 235). Her investments in select material emblems of gentility reinforced this planter class identity and reveal the aspirations that she had for her children as well as her confrontation with the prevailing social conventions regarding women, marriage, and widowhood. These investments occur in the domestic social arena (Bushman 1994: 243; Vickery 2009: 276, 292) where the mid-18th-century society allowed her the greatest influence. The Washington family's participation in sophisticated domestic performances disguised the family's economic anxieties behind the decorousness of their genteel social performances.

As detailed by Vickery, the purchases of the prosperous Martha Dodson, widow of British Navy tin man John Dodson (d. 1730), are worth citing in some detail, given how closely her consumer motives seem to match the archaeology of Mary Washington's plantation home:

Mrs. Dodson had a weakness for porcelain knick-knacks, which could be had for shillings. [In 1754]... she indulged herself with a 'china nun and one frier.' Her most consistent purchases... were tea wares. She bought a teapot nearly every year.... None of them cost more than 4s., and most cost around 1s. 6d. Dodson bought none of the exquisite Chelsea china, associated with the fashionable nobility, but confined herself to the less expensive brands like Worcester and Bow, while her red teapots may have been sturdy Staffordshire stoneware (Vickery 2009: 222).

The purchase of reasonably-priced ceramic ornaments, tea wares, and an unassuming yet novel bone-handled tambour hook reflect a pragmatism, sensibility, and genteel identity that Mary Washington celebrated (Richards 1999: 95-97, 110, 114). Given the precarious financial hold the family had upon their gentry-class status, performing such domestic social rituals to bolster the family's profile was inspired (Bushman 1994: 243-245, 248-251, Carson 1990: 54-73). Social displays of the family's elegance demonstrated their adeptness at popular behaviors and sanctioned their membership amongst the regional elite. Mary Ball Washington managed to maintain control over her family, their properties, and their regional gentry status by making clever investments in ornate social practices that allowed the community to witness firsthand the family's indisputable taste and sophistication.

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