

7 Plantation Landscapes in Comparative Perspective

The goal of this book has been to evaluate how well a Marxian theoretical framework can be used to interpret the plantation landscapes of colonial Jamaica. In so doing, we have examined a number of material and social realities experienced by those who lived and labored in that colonial context. One danger anyone faces when applying a theoretical framework to a specific case, however, is falling into the trap of tautology. To test the strength of applying Marxist theory to an archaeological study of Jamaica's plantation landscapes, we must see if the concepts explored in this book can be effectively applied in other plantation contexts. Although many such contexts could be considered, I have chosen here to test the strength of this approach by applying it to what would prove to be England's most valuable mainland plantation colony, and the locus of much historical archaeology, seventeenth-century Tidewater Virginia.

The Old Dominion: The Colonial World of Plantation Virginia, 1607–1622

Virginia was, of course, England's first successful colony on mainland North America, and its early history somewhat reflects that of its two most important Caribbean possessions, Barbados and Jamaica. Like Barbados, Virginia was colonized in the opening decades of the seventeenth century with the hope that the poor of the English realms could be transported to a New World to provide a suitable class of servants for those who would make great wealth; like Jamaica by the end of that century, a small oligarchy controlling vast stretches of land held as private property would rule the social world of the colony through the exploitation of enslaved African people. However, the social formations in the Jamaica and Virginia colonies followed different trajectories, both of which can be analyzed through the lens of Marxist landscape archaeology.

Unlike the Caribbean colonies of the later seventeenth century, Virginia was established by what was, in effect, a private corporation. In the late

sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the forerunners of today's venture capitalists, known in their day as "adventurers," experimented with a new type of social organization known as the joint-stock company. Like today's modern, publically traded corporations, a joint-stock company would raise capital by selling shares in the company, but, at least in England, required a royal charter to legally do business. The "adventurers" – that is the investors who ventured their capital – would share in the profits of the joint-stock company based on the number of shares they had purchased. In the belief that quick profits could be made by the exploitation of metallic wealth to be gained through both mining operations on the North American mainland and plundering raids on Spanish treasure fleets, Jamestown was established in 1607 as the New World headquarters of such a privately financed joint stock company, the Virginia Company of London, usually referred to as the London Company (Bailyn 2012; Craven 1957). Unlike its Caribbean counterparts, Virginia was thus established with its entire land base capitalized even before a single English settler landed on its shores (Bailyn 2012; Horn 2006; Kupperman 2007).

In the opening years of its business, the London Company was very successful in attracting investors, including many who chose to pay their own passage to Virginia as part of their investment. As has been well-understood by historians for generations, this arrangement was fateful for the fledgling colony, as these self-styled "gentlemen" did not expect to be engaged in manual labor in the new colony, but instead to live a high life surrounded by retainers and servants, financed by the profits their investment in the London Company would surely return (Craven 1957; Kupperman 2007; Morgan 1975).

The investors and settlers who founded Jamestown did not expect to establish a plantation mode of production in Virginia. The intent was to emulate the Spanish model by creating wealth through the exploitation of the New World's mineral deposits, and the company was better equipped to mine gold than to establish any practical form of agriculture. Not producing or even procuring their own food, the first settlers of Jamestown were dependent on the largesse of the native population to provide them with food, whether purchased, begged, borrowed, or stolen. As the investors in the London Company soon came to learn, the Virginia Tidewater was not made of gold and wealth did not fall from the sky. The form of mercantile capitalism they hoped to establish did not take root, no surplus value was generated, and the opening years of the Jamestown settlement were characterized by a tenuous life of privation (Billings 1968; Kelso 2008).

In its early days, the social organization of Jamestown reflected its corporate nature. Under the charter granted by King James I in 1606, the settlement was to be ruled by a seven-man council appointed by the

crown and responsible to the company. All assets, including land, would be the property of the company; the surplus value produced in Virginia would be distributed to the investors based on the number of shares they held. Those who had come to work would be treated either as employees of the company or the private servants of particular investors, and the products of their labor would be the basis for the production of surplus value (Craven 1957; Morgan 1975). Given this structure, it was perhaps inevitable that the first concern of the council was to determine how best to make a profit for the company, and agriculture was not on top of their list. Although it was assumed that an appropriate working class would be transported to the settlement, the products of their labor, including food, were to be the property of the company, whose officers in the council would be responsible for its redistribution. Given that settlers were not required to work to feed themselves, did not have access to private land to establish farms even if they had wanted to, and were not accumulating any surplus value, this division of labor quickly led to chronic food shortages. It did not take long before the council was beset with the difficulty of feeding a growing population of idle gentlemen investors and their servants. In the attempt to stabilize the critical shortage of food, John Smith, serving as president of the council in late 1608, required all of the settlers, regardless of their presumed station, to work. But poorly provided settlers continued to appear at Jamestown; some 600 arriving between 1608 and 1609. Despite the best efforts put forth by Smith and his fellow council members, many of Jamestown's first wave of settlers died of starvation or nutritional diseases brought on by the company's inability to produce, procure, or purchase food sufficient for the needs of the settlement (Bernhard 1992; Billings 1968; Kelso 2008; Kupperman 2007).

It quickly became clear that the emergent capitalist mode of production was not functioning well in Tidewater Virginia. The failure of the Jamestown settlers to generate surplus value for the Virginia Company of London, not to speak of keeping themselves alive, led to a rapid succession of new royal charters, each of which was designed to improve the fortunes of the company and its investors through a reorganization of the company (Kupperman 2007). In 1609, the company's second charter ceded the king's right to appoint a ruling council for the colony, empowering the company to select a governor from among themselves to manage the company's affairs. The second charter also allowed the company to grant small land allotments to settlers for growing their own food; the company would collect a levy from each of the newly landed settlers in a type of quitrent arrangement (Morgan 1975: 81–82). As settlers dispersed onto private farmsteads, they came into increasingly violent conflict with the indigenous peoples of the tidewater, who the

early governors of Virginia wished to push back rather than incorporate into their colonial social world (Morgan 1975: 81–82).

Despite its lifting of the restrictions on private possession of land, the fortunes of the London Company did not turn with the granting of its second charter, and Virginia's colonists continued to face significant hardships. As news of the "deplored condition" (Billings 1968) of the enterprise trickled back to England, worried investors began to sue the company, which was found to be in significant debt with little hope of profit. In the attempt to ward off bankruptcy, the company once again reorganized under a third charter granted by James I in 1612. Several key provisions of this third charter established the conditions under which Virginia's incipient plantation mode of production would develop, and under which it would begin to transform Virginia from a corporately owned possession of a joint-stock company into a governable colony of privately owned plantations. The 1612 charter allowed the company to establish a legislative body to enact and enforce laws for Virginia. This would lead to the establishment of Virginia's colonial government, including an elected House of Burgesses and a Council of State appointed by the governor, creating the structure through which a local ruling class could develop. Governor George Yeardley called the first assembly of the burgesses and councilors together in 1619 (Bailyn 2012; Kupperman 2007).

Equally important for the development of Virginia's plantation mode of production, the third charter called for the privatization of land in the colony. In part to settle the debts of the company, in part to attract new and wealthier investors, and likely in part because mercantile capitalism had been failing so badly in this context, the third charter allowed for the patenting of land to individual owners. In 1616–1617, the company granted land in fifty-acre lots to settle its debts with its investors (Billings 1968). After 1619, 100 acres was given to each settler who had served a seven-year term of labor for the company, or who had paid their own passage to Virginia; those coming after 1619 were granted 50 acres each under the same conditions. Those settlers who had invested in the company were given an additional 100 acres for each share that they had bought. At the same time, the system known as "headright" was established, granting any investor the right to patent fifty acres for each person they brought to the colony, whether family member, servant, or slave (Morgan 1975: 92). Those settlers without means but sent to Virginia at company expense would be assigned land to work as sharecropping tenants under the direction of a company overseer, with most surplus value being returned to the company. During their seven-year tenancy, these farmers would turn half of their earnings over to the company; at the

end of their service, each would be granted fifty acres and elevated to the status of freeman, theoretically free to control any surplus value they generated (Kupperman 2007; Walsh 2010).

What emerged from this restructuring of land tenure was a new class structure composed of: (1) wealthy landholders who consolidated and capitalized large private holdings through a variety of means; (2) a class of independent freeholders who held legal rights to small 50-, 100-, or 150-acre plots granted to them at the end of their indenture (or who had enough capital to pay for their own transportation to Virginia without being indentured); (3) landless freemen (who may have served their indenture but lost or sold their rights to their allotments); (4) a servant class still on indentures who aspired to acquire property when their term of service was complete; and (5) a small but growing number of enslaved laborers of African descent, bound to work for life (Bailyn 2012: 168ff). This class structure would come to define the social relations of production in colonial Virginia for the subsequent two centuries, based as it was on the coercive extraction of surplus value from laborers, both indentured and enslaved, who during the term of their servitude had no right to the products of their labor.

The transformation of Virginia into a land of privately held plantation estates began in earnest when the London Company expanded this system to allow investors to establish sub-corporations or associations to establish “particular plantations” to be peopled by tenants brought over on terms by these investors; in other words, peopled by indentured tenants who would work for the owners of the “particular plantation” for a term of some seven years. The investors would be given 100 acres for every share of stock they purchased in the company, and 50 acres for each tenant brought over to work. Investors thus simultaneously collected profits (which were few) and acres (which were many). The relationship between privatization and colonial government was also established at this point, as government officers were well-compensated in land and tenants. The governor was granted 3,000 acres and 100 tenants; the treasurer and marshal of the colony were each granted 1,500 acres and 50 tenants; lesser officers received smaller land and tenant grants (Billings 1968; Kupperman 2007; Walsh 2010).

Tenancy and indentured servitude differed in that tenants were allowed to keep a percentage of the products of their labor, whereas indentured servants and enslaved workers were not. Those settled as tenants on land controlled by the London Company, a particular plantation, or a government official were allowed to keep half the product of their labor, with the other half going to the said company, investors, or official (Outlaw 1990).

The restructured mode of production got off to a fair start, as some 44 individuals and groups received patents for particular plantations, and some 3,500 new settlers, mostly tenants, arrived in Virginia between 1619 and 1622 (Morgan 1975: 98). By 1622, Virginia was composed of an amalgam of private settlements (“particular plantations”), quasi-private lands in the possession of government and company officials (who had the right to exploit the land, tenants, and servants allowed them for personal gain), and company plantations, all worked by a combination of tenants, servants, and slaves (Walsh 2010).

The inpouring of voluntary settlers – whether investor, tenant, or servant – was made feasible by the introduction of tobacco production. Although famous in popular culture as the husband of the Indian “princess” Pocahontas, John Rolfe’s greatest contribution to the history of the Virginia colony was his experiment in cultivating West Indian tobacco in Virginia (Breen 1988). After 1617, tobacco became the life-blood of Virginia, eventually becoming the accepted medium of exchange among colonists. For most of the rest of the colonial history of Virginia, the social relations of production, access to the means of production through rules defining land tenure, and the definition of the value of labor were tied into the production of this commodity; in sum, as the 1610s drew to a close, a plantation mode of production developed in Virginia as tobacco emerged as the staple export product of the colony.

As the lure of tobacco profits attracted large investors and small settlers, it soon became clear that it was one thing to arrive in Virginia; it was something all-together different to survive there. Not only were the swampy lowlands of Tidewater Virginia infested with disease-bearing insects, but the expansion of tobacco settlements led to direct conflict with the Algonquin peoples of eastern Virginia, loosely allied into a tributary organization known as the Powhatan Confederacy (Gleach 1997). In the late 1610s and early 1620s, access to the waterfront was a crucial element of the means of production; particular plantations, hoping to develop into large corporate tobacco producing enterprises, were dispersed along the banks of the James River, often claiming up to ten miles of waterfront (Noël Hume 2001). The patenting of such large particular plantations inevitably led to the establishment of settlements further upriver, deeper into indigenous territory. In 1622, the Powhatan Confederacy, likely quite fed up with their newly arriving English neighbors and hoping to rid themselves of them once and for all, attacked the Virginia settlements, killing nearly 350 English men, women, and children, nearly a quarter of the surviving population (Billings 1968;

Fausz 1977). A cycle of violence ensued, with revenge killings taking place on both sides. Virginia thus plunged into spasms of murder and mayhem, collectively known as the Second Powhatan War. Alarmed by the violence, the investors back in London opened the books of the company, and what they saw was not pretty. Of the 4,270 people that had been sent to Virginia, only 1,240 were alive in 1622 before the outbreak of violence, meaning that two thirds of the embarked settlers had died before the Powhatan attacked (Morgan 1975: 101). Appalled by what was revealed to him, James I appointed a commission to look into the affairs of the Virginia Company of London. The commission reported that despite their reform efforts, the company was bankrupt, people had been sent to Virginia with inadequate supplies to establish themselves, and many would-be settlers arrived in Virginia too weak to do much other than die, as ship captains preferred to fill their holds with fare-paying passengers than the supplies needed to keep said passengers alive and well during the trans-Atlantic crossing (Craven 1957; Morgan 1975: 101). In 1624, James I suspended the charter of the Virginia Company of London, bringing to an end the experiment in privately financed colonialism in the Virginia Tidewater. From this point forward, Virginia was run as a crown colony, with a governor appointed by the king. The Assembly, however, including both the elected House of Burgesses and the appointed Council of State, remained in place (Kupperman 2007).

Several archaeological projects conducted in Tidewater Virginia have revealed the nature of the early-seventeenth-century settlement pattern that emerged from this chaotic colonial genesis. Up until the time of the Second Powhatan War, and the subsequent revocation of the London Company's charter, the colonial landscape was one that featured a single concentrated settlement, at Jamestown, that might be considered a town, flanked at intervals of about five miles both up and downstream by a combination of particular plantations and the fortified homesteads of tenant farmers (Kelso 2008; Noël Hume 2001). Tidewater Virginia would come to be defined by four major river systems (including, from north to south, the Potomac, the Rappahanock, the York, and the James) from the estuaries of the Chesapeake Bay to the point upriver known as the fall line, where the coastal plain rises into the rolling foothills of the Appalachians. In essence, Virginia would be comprised of three peninsulas jutting into the Chesapeake Bay, the lands south of the James River (known as the Southside), and the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake. The particular plantations were distributed, primarily at this time, along the James, resulting in a dispersed settlement pattern of English settlement, lacking any concentration of population outside of Jamestown (Fausz 1971).

The best documented of the pre-1622 particular plantations was an establishment known as Martin's Hundred. Located on a tract of land now called Carter's Grove and owned by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Martin's Hundred has been the subject of numerous archaeological projects dating from the early 1970s through the early twenty-first century (e.g., Malios 2000; Muraca 1993; Noël Hume 1982, 2001).

Martin's Hundred was among the earliest of the particular plantations to be chartered and settled by a joint stock company. Established by a group of investors known as the Society of Martin's Hundred, likely directed by one Sir Richard Martin of London, the company sent some 220 settlers from England in the late winter of 1619 (Noël Hume 1982, 2001). Arriving in Jamestown in April, apparently without a recognized leader, the settlers were put to work for the Governor of the London Company, Samuel Argall. After a year's service working for Governor Argall, the survivors removed some five miles downstream, establishing their particular plantation, likely sometime in 1620. Noël Hume (2001) suggests that one of the leading settlers, John Boyse, established a fortified homestead at Martin's Hundred while the settlers were impressed to work the Governor's Land. Boyse was soon joined by William Harwood, newly sent from England by the Society of Martin's Hundred to be the "governor" of the particular plantation, and some seventy or so of the settlers who survived their time working for the governor (Noël Hume 2001).

The cultural landscape of the particular plantation at Martin's Hundred was centered around a waterfront settlement known as Wolstenholme Town (see Figure 7.1). The "town" was a small cluster of earthfast (post-in-ground) buildings, including the palisaded residence of Governor Harwood, at least one smaller residence (others may have since eroded into the James River), a large barn, and a palisaded "company compound" that consisted of a two- or three-unit domestic "long house," which may have housed recently arriving settlers, officers of the company, or, alternatively, indentured servants working directly for the particular plantation. A small cow shed or byre was attached to one end of this structure. The compound also included the company store, in which goods and supplies for the settlement would have been kept, a shed, and what has been interpreted as a pottery drying shed (Noël Hume 2001). The majority of the settlers would have lived in small earthfast houses fanning out from the central compound. The corporate settlement pattern reflected at Wolstenholme Town would not survive the Second Powhatan War, as this particular plantation, like the corporate model for colonial settlement of which it was a part, was destroyed in the violence.

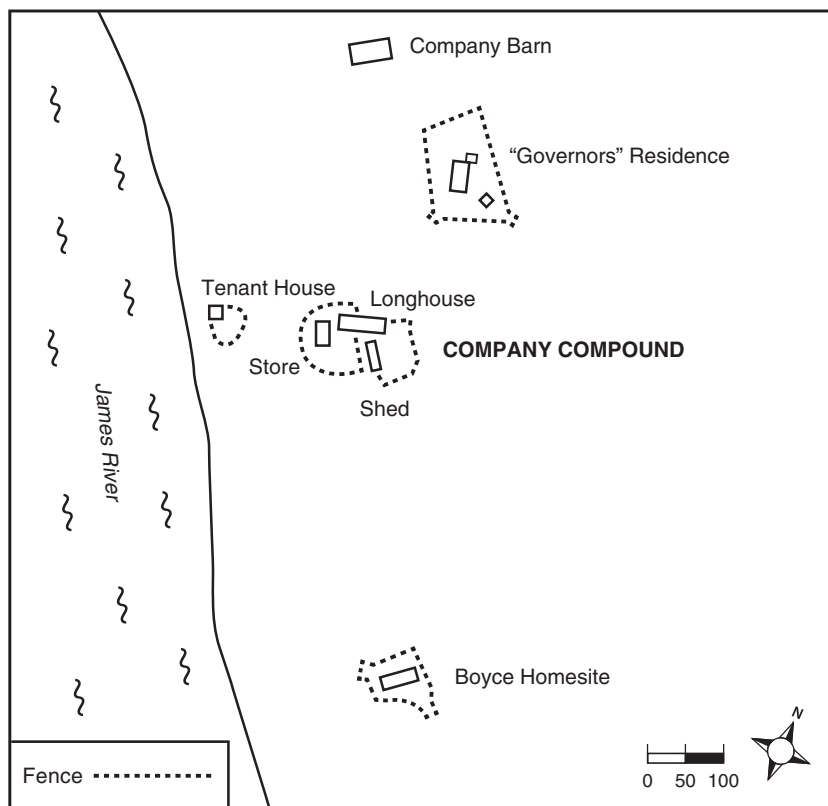


Figure 7.1. Martin's Hundred, c. 1622. One of Virginia's "particular plantations." Illustration courtesy of Nick Stover. *Source:* Noël Hume (1982).

The Rise of Virginia's Plantation Mode of Production, 1624–1652

Virginia's plantation mode of production was restructured, in the absence of corporately capitalized land, following the 1624 suspension of the London Company's charter. Virginia's emergent mode of production had its own idiosyncrasies based on labor relations, rules of land tenure, and – above all – the material and social forces required to produce and export tobacco, which were significantly different from those required in Jamaica for sugar or coffee. As we have discussed, a mode of production is defined by the interrelationship between the forces of production, including the tools, knowledge, land, and labor required to make goods for sale,

and the relations of production, composed of the social structures and rules defining how people interact with each other.

As was the case in Jamaica, the most important elements of the forces of production for tobacco were land and a labor system that allowed planters to accrue as much surplus value as possible. By the time the Virginia Company of London lost its charter, tobacco production was already beginning to boom. For most of the ensuing seventeenth century, although slavery was not absent, the relations of production for tobacco agriculture in Virginia emerged from a system of coerced labor known as indentured servitude. As we have already seen, by the late 1610s, the “headright” system, in which settlers were granted fifty-acre allotments for each servant brought to Virginia, encouraged a boom in settlement for tobacco production. Theoretically, at least, these servants would be given fifty acres of their own at the end of their period of indenture, which was typically set at seven years.

As we have also seen, the demographic realities of the seventeenth-century tidewater created what one noted historian has called a “charnel house” in the colony (Morgan 1975: 110). Many servants brought over to Virginia did not survive the terms of their indenture; even by mid-century as many as 30 percent of children in some Virginia counties were orphaned before their eighteenth birthday (Bailyn 2012: 170). Enterprising planters used the legal system in place to expand their holdings by claiming the lands that would have gone to their deceased servants or their children, and by claiming rights to the labor power of servants and tenants whose master had died. After the violence of 1622, many freeholders who had tried to establish small farms were obliged to work for a large landholder; according to Edmund Morgan, large planters were finding ways to gather such men to themselves, either by claiming rights to servants after the death of their previous master, or by providing shelter to those who could not claim nor keep their fifty acres as they did not have the means to meet the requirement to improve their land grant through the construction of houses and outbuildings (Morgan 1975: 116–117).

By the middle of the 1620s, business-minded settlers recognized that the economy of scale for tobacco was directly related to the number of servants employed; the greater the number of servants working, the greater the amount of tobacco produced, and thus the greater the profit (Breen 1988; Kupperman 2007; Morgan 1975). During their terms of service, these workers were considered a form of chattel that could be exchanged between planters. So valuable was their labor to the rising planter class that the emerging ruling class of Virginia used the legislative power of the Assembly to enact a variety of pieces of legislation to extend the terms of service for indentures. Servants who attempted to run away,

who killed cattle or swine roaming free in the bush, or who were impudent when addressing their “superiors,” could have their terms of service extended by years. Women who became pregnant during the period of their indenture had their terms of service extended by two years (Brown 1996; Morgan 1975). Given the high mortality rates, it seemed a better investment to extend the terms of those who were already proven capable of surviving the harsh conditions of Virginia’s plantations than to invest in new laborers, who might very well die quickly.

In contrast to the tropical products of the Caribbean, the means of production for tobacco required a relatively simple set of tools, buildings, and techniques. The primary techniques used to produce exportable tobacco were generally similar throughout the Chesapeake tidewater. As was the case with Jamaican coffee production, the first step for Virginia tobacco farmers was the acquisition and clearance of land suitable for agricultural production. Once a tract of land was patented, the best agricultural land was cleared of trees and scrub. Seedbeds would then be established in which the tobacco seeds were planted. After about two months of growth, the seedlings would be transplanted from the seedbeds into small hills, about eighteen inches high, spaced about three feet apart. During the next few weeks of growth, the tobacco fields would be constantly hoed, to prevent the young plants from being choked by weeds or attacked by cutworms (caterpillars that hide in the soil by day and attack the stems of tobacco plants by night). After about two months of additional growth, the tobacco plants would be primed and topped; these processes involved harvesting the bottom leaves of the stem, which are the first to mature, and trimming the top of the plant to prevent it from flowering and going to seed. In mid-summer, the plants needed constant care to prune unproductive suckers growing from the top of the stem, and to remove potentially harmful pests from the leaves, particularly the tobacco hornworm (a moth caterpillar that can grow to seven centimeters in length and devours tobacco plants). In late summer, harvest would begin. This process involved cutting the stems of the plants with a sharp tool, and transporting the leaves for curing. In the early days, the plants would be allowed to sit on the ground to cure; by the 1620s, the leaves were hung either from posts or on lines in tobacco barns or sheds to cure for four to six weeks (Breen 1988; Kulikof 1986).

Once cured, the tobacco leaves would be struck (removed from the posts or lines in which they were hung) and prepared for market. This usually involved laying the tobacco leaves on the ground or on the floor of a barn to sweat – that is, absorb moisture from the humid tidewater air. Once sweated, the tobacco leaves would be pliant enough to be twisted together and rolled into ropes. The ropes of tobacco would be wound into

balls weighing about 100 pounds, then placed into large barrels known as hogsheads that would be rolled to riverside wharves to await shipment. Like coffee, properly packed tobacco was relatively stable, and could be stored in the hogsheads for weeks until sold or consigned for shipment to England. In the first half of the seventeenth century, as Tidewater Virginia had nothing that resembled a port, merchant ships would sail up the primary rivers, collecting hogsheads of tobacco from individual wharves scattered along the banks of the navigable rivers. Riverfront wharves were thus a crucial element of the means of production (Breen 1988; Kulikof 1986).

The tools required for tobacco production were thus very simple, even though they needed to be imported: felling axes, saws, chains, and ox teams to clear forest land; hoes and knives to cultivate and harvest crops; drawknives and chisels to make hogsheads. In contrast to the mills, aqueducts, cisterns, barbecues, and boiling houses required to produce sugar and coffee in the Caribbean, very little in the way of permanent plantation infrastructure was required for tobacco beyond housing for the workers and sheds to dry tobacco and store hand tools. Seventeenth-century Virginia plantation buildings – whether houses, barns, or sheds – tended to be inexpensively built, with posts sunk directly into the ground, with walls made of wattle and daub, and with roofs made of thatch or locally made redware tile and earthen floors. Such structures have been typically characterized as “impermanent” and “earthfast” buildings by historical archaeologists (e.g., Carson et al. 1981). But for a few notable examples, such as Governor William Berkeley’s mansion at Green Spring Plantation, even the houses of the planter elites were constructed this way (Neiman 1978, 1980). Requiring little permanent infrastructure, suffering from the impermanence of labor brought on by high mortality rates and the finite indentures of those who managed to survive, and taking a terrible toll on the fertility of the soil, the plantation mode of production of seventeenth-century Virginia created a near nomadic settlement pattern, with houses and farmsteads frequently being abandoned every five years or so (Morgan 1975). Such a system required plenty of suitable agricultural land, and those with the means to acquire vast estates eagerly did so.

Virginia’s plantation mode of production thus encouraged the private capitalization of large tracts of land. Tobacco production was notoriously hard on the soil; yields could begin declining after a single crop. Virginia planters thus preferred to plant tobacco in virgin soil, making the acquisition of land a central concern for those involved in this mode of production. By the middle of the 1630s, the seeds of class conflict, tied directly to the acquisition and improvement of tobacco lands, were already

beginning to sprout. Even those servants who managed to survive to claim their fifty acres had a very limited patrimony. Within a few short years, the soils on these small farms would be stressed to the point at which yields would be in significant decline. As the wealthier planter class continued to aggrandize their landholdings in the tidewater, it became extremely difficult for small freeholders to acquire new tobacco lands, forcing many former servants back into tenancy on lands owned by the grandes. For those unwilling to resume such a dependent social relationship, the only option was to move upriver, to try to claim and plant as yet unpatented lands. Although at first blush the seventeenth-century planters saw a virtually unlimited supply of land stretching before them, it did not take much further inspection to realize that the vast interior of North America was not an unoccupied wilderness at their immediate disposal. The first requirement for expanding tobacco production was thus the removal of the Indian population from the tidewater (Fausz 1987; Gleach 1997).

Much of the history of early Virginia revolved around negotiation and warfare with the various Algonquian-speaking nations that inhabited the tidewater. After the violence of 1622, it became clear to many settlers that the native population of Virginia needed to be pushed back, eliminated, or enslaved. Virginians showed few scruples in dealing with the Indians. One favorite strategy was to settle a treaty with a group of Indians, and once they were settled peaceable down, to mount a surprise attack on unarmed men, women, and children. One particularly notorious event occurred in 1623 when Dr. John Pott allegedly served poisoned wine to a number of Native Americans with whom the Virginians had just concluded a peace treaty. As many as 200 people died as a result of this infamous poisoning (Billings 2004: 43; Morgan 1975: 100). Pott went on to become acting governor of the colony, the patentee of land in what would be known as Middle Plantation (today's Williamsburg), and the primary beneficiary of the raising, at public expense, of a defensive palisade between tributaries of the James and York Rivers. A second uprising of the native peoples in 1644 resulted in the remnants of Powhatan's confederacy having their territory further reduced. The 1646 treaty, ending what is sometimes referred to as the Third Powhatan War, created a legal boundary between Indian territory and the English colony defined on the north by the York River to its falls, southwesterly from there to the Falls of the James River near modern-day Richmond, and then southeasterly to the Blackwater River, which flows southerly to Albemarle Sound in modern North Carolina. The treaty required the leaders of each of the remaining tribal groups to accept tributary status as vassals of the King of England, and crucial for the development of the plantation mode of production, opened hundreds of thousands of acres of land on the Virginia Peninsula, and

what would become known as the Southside (land south of the James River), for tobacco production and settlement (Bailyn 2012; Gleach 1997; Morgan 1975).

The native population was thus removed from the Virginia Peninsula, the narrow stretch of land between the James and York Rivers, the southernmost of the tidewater's three peninsulas. In a fortuitous turn of events, the disbanding of the London Company had opened the way for the Virginia planters to distribute the newly acquired land among themselves. After 1636, most land grants were made by county courts, pending approval of the Council of State and the governor, who had appointed the officials to the county courts in the first place (Billings 1968, 2004a).

Land tenure was somewhat complicated by the questionable status of both privately held and corporately owned land originally distributed by the defunct Virginia Company of London. Although their charter was suspended by James I in 1624, there was no indication if and when the Company might be reestablished. For some twenty years there were occasional hints about, and active lobbying in Parliament for, the establishment of a successor to the London Company, which could potentially reclaim all of Virginia's developed land as corporate property, or at least to channel its profits back into a joint-stock company. The question was not settled until 1641 when Sir William Berkeley was dispatched by James I's successor, King Charles I, to serve as the royal governor of Virginia. After this point, the formation of a new company was all but out of the question, and Virginia remained a dominion of privatized land, dominated by the plantation production of tobacco (Billings 2004b).

Between 1624 and 1651, the plantation landscape of Virginia emerged, although alternate visions of how the means of production would be organized persisted. One of these visions, favored by those wealthier settlers hoping to create large estates in the wake of the Second Powhatan War, resulted in the establishment of fortified plantation compounds inhabited by plantation proprietors and their servants. These fortified settlements could be flanked by a series of smaller homesteads inhabited by tenants on their land. Several archaeological projects have been conducted on such fortified plantation sites dating to the post-company era of Plantation Virginia, including a component at Martin's Hundred that post-dates the Second Powhatan War, and one at a site on the Southside of the James known as Jordan's Journey.

In both cases, a palisade surrounded the domestic quarters of a planter's family and those of their indentured servants. Notably, the houses of both master and servant in both contexts were of earthfast construction, and there appears to be little physical or material distance between the proprietors and the servants. In the late 1620s, Jordan's Journey contained

four earthfast longhouses, each of which contained two or three rooms. Three of the longhouses measured sixteen feet wide by about fifty-five feet long, with the fourth measuring sixteen feet by thirty-six feet. At Jordan's Journey, it is difficult to distinguish which of the several longhouses served as the planter's home, although it is likely the central Structure 10, given that Structure 4 was thought to have been dismantled before 1635, Structure 5 is the smallest of the dwellings on the site, and Structure 1 is attached to what was likely a farm yard. No more than twenty feet separate any of the houses (see Figure 7.2). The clustered settlement suggests that

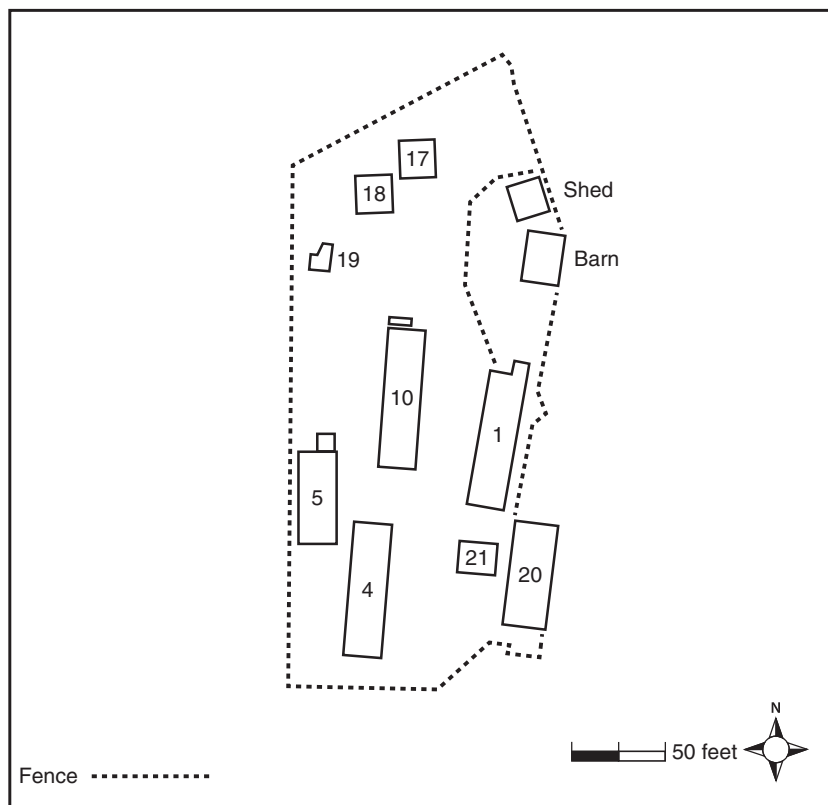


Figure 7.2. Jordan's Journey, c. 1630. Like the Harwood Plantation, Jordan's Journey contained the planter's house (probably Structure 10), several houses for indentured servants (Structures 1, 4, and 5), and a number of agricultural outbuildings. The servants' houses were of a form known as longhouses, each one room deep by two or three rooms long, and each of which likely housed a number of servants. Illustration courtesy of Nick Stover. *Source:* Morgan et al. (1995)

masters and servants were living in quite close contact, in houses of about equal size and quality, though it is probable that each of the servants' dwellings were divided into a series of two or three rooms, and each was likely occupied by more people than would have lived in the main house (McCartney 2011; Morgan et al. 1995).

A similar settlement structure developed when Martin's Hundred was re-inhabited after the Second Powhatan War, when what Ivor Noël Hume called "Site A" at the abandoned "particular plantation" was claimed by William Harwood as a privately owned property. After taking possession of the plantation, Harwood constructed a fortified domestic settlement at "Site A" (see Figures 7.3 and 7.4). Like Jordan's Journey, "Site A" was surrounded by a palisade, and both the master's family and their indentured servants lived inside the walls. All of the houses were, again, of similar dimension and of earthfast construction, and placed quite near each other. The main house consisted of two ground-floor rooms, each measuring approximately 16 feet square, whereas the two servants' quarters were 16 feet square. As was the case at Jordan's Journey, the compound included a buttery/kitchen and several outbuildings, which were likely used for curing and storing tobacco. "Site A" was flanked by at least four tenant houses, each of which stood outside the palisade walls of the fortified compound of the Harwood Plantation (Noël Hume 1982, 2001).

The plantation landscape in the second quarter of the seventeenth century was characterized not only by fortified private plantations like these, but by scattered tenant and freeholder farmsteads. Because the land records for most of Virginia's counties were destroyed during the Civil War of 1861–1865, it is difficult at times to distinguish whether a specific small homestead was located on land leased through tenancy or freely held by a former servant who had claimed his headright. Nevertheless, it is likely that most of the small homesteads, whether of a tenant or freeman, were similarly constructed.

Three presumed tenant houses, dating between 1625 and 1650, have been excavated at Martin's Hundred. Each of these homesteads consisted of a single, small earthfast building. Excavations at one of these ("Site E") revealed no additional features, whereas the other two (44JC647 and "Site B") featured what was known as a slot fence. Such a fence was constructed by excavating a narrow ditch, standing hewn or split boards vertically in the ditch, and then backfilling the ditch; this would create a solid fence that could be used to keep animals penned in a yard, or to prevent roaming animals from getting into a yard (Edwards 2004; Noël Hume 1982).

Another tenant/freeman homesite was excavated near Martin's Hundred. Dating between 1630 and 1650, this homesite may represent

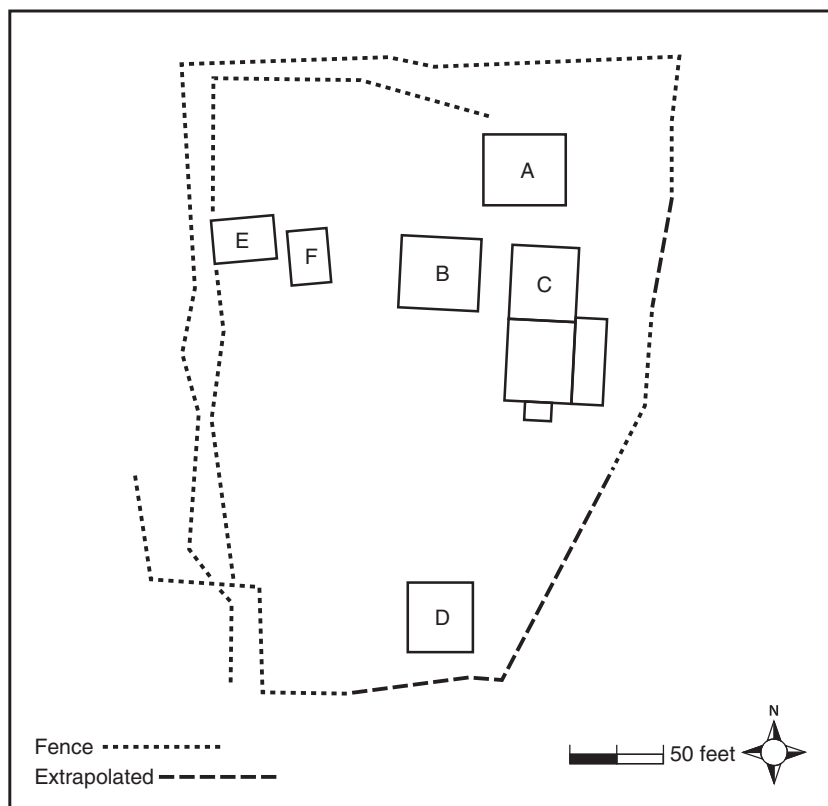


Figure 7.3. The fortified homestead within the Harwood Plantation, c. 1630. Structure C is the earthfast house of the planter; Structures A and B are quarters for indentured servants; Structures D, E, and F are agricultural outbuildings. The entire complex was surrounded by a defensive fence. Illustration courtesy of Nick Stover. *Source:* Noël Hume (2001, 1982).

an early freeman's house in the post-London Company era. Like the tenant houses at Martin's Hundred (or more specifically, at the William Harwood Plantation), this site likely featured a small earthfast house (see Figure 7.5). Although the location of the house has been obscured by a modern intrusive feature, the presence of two wells and a fence line indicate the location of the house. This site, known as the Buck Site (44JC568), was surrounded by a slot fence, creating an enclosed house yard. Within that yard were the house and three wells, four small sheds likely used for curing tobacco and storing agricultural implements, and a small graveyard containing nine burials (Mallios 1999).

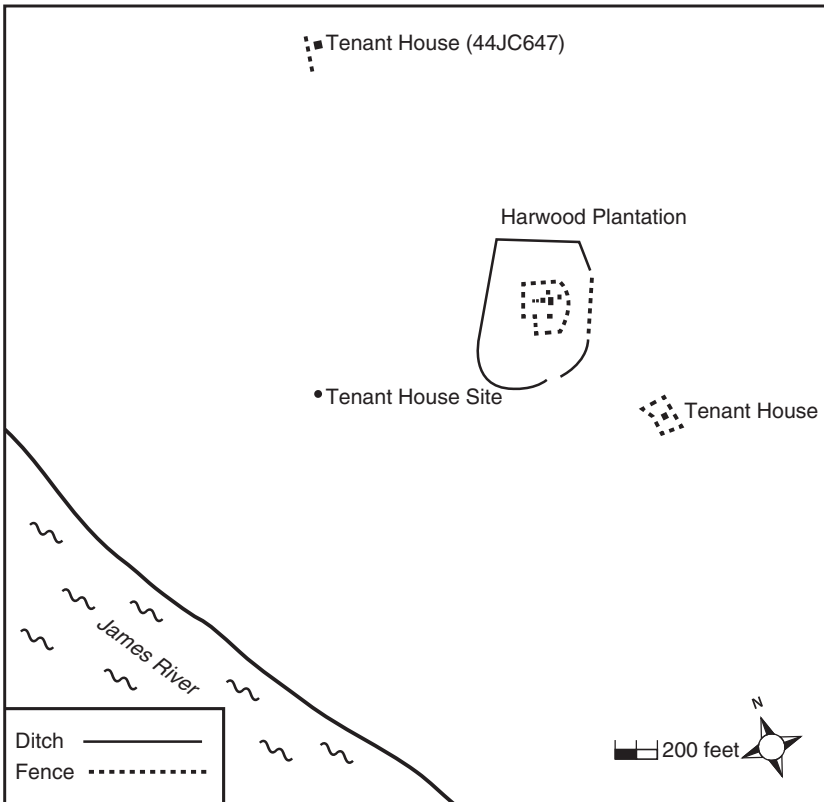


Figure 7.4. The Harwood Plantation, c. 1630. A privately owned plantation that post-dates the destruction of Wolstoneholme Town. Illustration courtesy of Nick Stover. *Source:* Noël Hume (2001, 1982).

The Rise of the Planter Class, 1652–1676

The late 1640s were a time of great conflict and civil war in Britain, culminating in the 1649 execution of King Charles I, and the subsequent establishment of a Puritan-controlled Republican government known as the Commonwealth. In 1652, nearly three years after the beheading of his patron Charles I, Governor William Berkeley was met by an armed deputation from the Commonwealth government, which politely asked him to vacate his office. Having politely met the deputation with an armed force of his own, Berkeley agreed to retire to private life, under a series of conditions that would ensure that the freedoms and privileges enjoyed by the people of Virginia would not be challenged, and that no

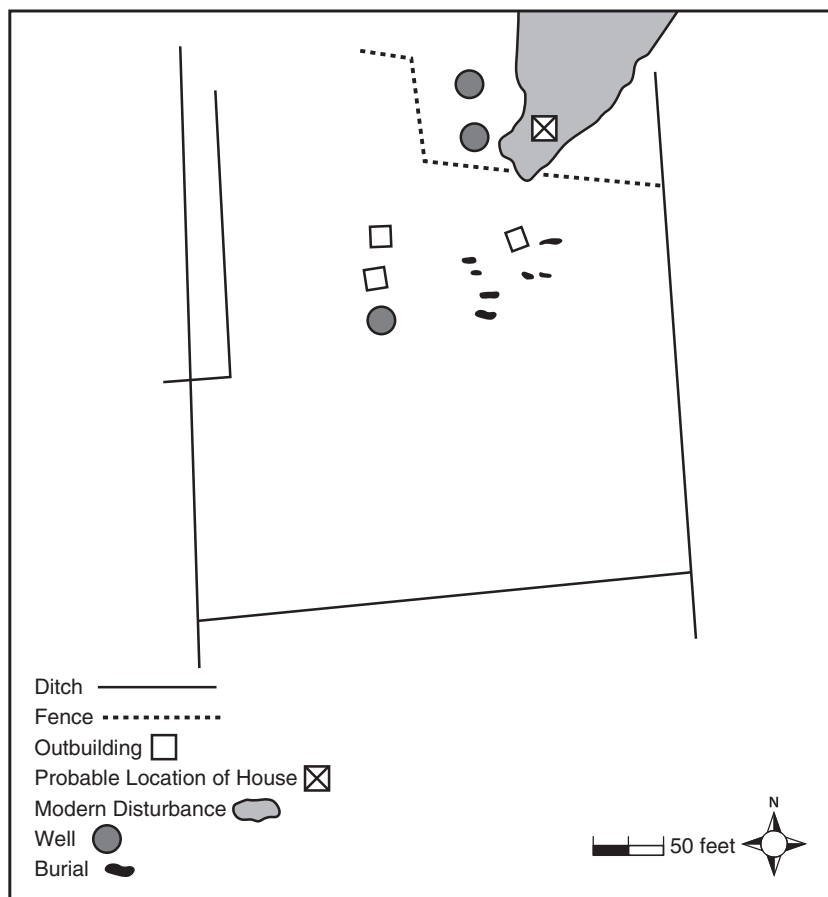


Figure 7.5. The Buck Site, c. 1630. This was the fortified homestead of an independent freeman or tenant. Unlike the larger plantation settlements at places like Jordan's Journey or the Harwood Plantation, small settlers would establish modest homesteads like this, with a single house, small agricultural sheds, and, inevitably, the graves of the many victims of the demographic crisis of the early seventeenth century. Illustration courtesy of Nick Stover. *Source*: Malios (1999).

Virginian would be prosecuted for having taken the (losing) Royalist side in the late Civil War. Although the Commonwealth delegation did see to it that Governor Berkeley was replaced with Richard Bennett, one of the few prominent Puritans in Virginia, the negotiated settlement ensured that the trajectory of Virginia's social and political developments would

not be disturbed by any unfortunate change of government at home (Billings 2004: 110–111; Morgan 1975: 147).

As Virginia's elites consolidated their control over the means of production during the ensuing two decades, the social relations of production that would define the emergent plantation mode of production congealed. In the years following the 1646 capitulation of the remnants of the Powhatan confederacy, the rising elite of Virginia had rewarded themselves with massive land grants in the newly opening territories to the south and west of Jamestown, and – in the succeeding decades – they sought to profit from their good fortune. It had been clear for some time that the tobacco road to great fortune required control over land and labor, both of which were quickly exhausted by the rigors of the mode of production in use. The headright system, which had been initiated to attract settlers to Virginia, remained in place, and was an active component of land and wealth consolidation by mid-century. Not only could wealthy investors who could afford to import servants gain claim to thousands of acres of land, but headrights became valuable commodities, exchangeable for land at one of the colony's county courts. Given the governing structure of the colony, it was up to the officers of the colonial government to decide how these headrights would be translated into land patents. Perhaps not surprisingly, it was often the officers and their immediate circles that wound up in possession of the land best suited for tobacco production (Morgan 1975).

The 1650s and 1660s witnessed both a rapid increase in the number of people emigrating to Virginia and the amount of land claimed as private property through the instrument of the land patent, two phenomena that were directly related through the custom of headright. Between 1650 and 1675, more than 2,350,000 acres were patented in Virginia, much of it in large parcels concentrated in the hands of a few men, many of whom were new arrivals in Virginia and allied with the still resident Sir William Berkeley (Bailyn 2012). For example, Morgan reports that the clerk of the court for Charles City County purchased headrights amounting to 38,500 acres, which he subsequently sold to land speculators who used the rights to patent land along the Potomac River on the Northern Neck (the northernmost of Virginia's three peninsulas). By 1660, some 100,000 acres along the Potomac were owned by only thirty men (Bailyn 2012; Morgan 1975: 219). Thus the colonial officers of Virginia were profiting by land transactions, tied directly to labor importation, while simultaneously ensuring that the freshest tobacco lands were consolidated into great land holdings that could be kept out of the hands of small settlers and their petty 50-acre farms.

Despite this continuous consolidation and aggrandizement of land, thousands of new settlers arrived in Virginia, some indentured servants,

others small investors who came with their families and a few servants, and who hoped to rise in prominence by working their 150- or 200-acre headrights into profitable operations. Some came against their will; by 1660, headrights for enslaved Africans had reached nearly 700 claims (Coombs 2011), and Governor Berkeley had estimated that, by 1671, the population of Virginia included some 2,000 “black slaves” (Coombs 2011). It was not only Africans who were brought to Virginia against their will. Beggars, vagrants, and convicts were routinely rounded up from the English countryside and towns and transported to Virginia where they were sold as servants; orphans were sold out by parish officials, and the kidnapping of children to be sold into servitude was common enough to invoke government action (Bailyn 2012: 166–167). Of the approximately 100,000 Britons known to have immigrated to the tobacco coast of the Virginia and Maryland tidewater, as many as 85 percent were bonded servants; as late as 1668, 45 percent of the population of Virginia’s Middlesex County consisted of indentured servants (Bailyn 2012: 165). The strategies employed to coerce children, the indigent, and other powerless members of English society to Virginia underscores the point that entry into labor relations was not voluntary for many, perhaps even for most (Brass and Bernstein 1992).

These processes resulted in the reinforcement of a sharply hierarchical class structure, dominated by a small land and office-holding class, under whom sat the so-called middling farmers and freemen with small land claims and perhaps one or two servants, the servant class itself, and enslaved Africans. Class consciousness had developed among the great planters of Virginia by mid-century. As was true in Jamaica, those who rose to economic prominence through the exploitation of land and labor used the power of the colonial government to secure and extend their collective interest. Those who had emerged out of the tumultuous opening decades as “grandees,” that is the heads of those families who had exchanged headrights, consolidated land holdings, and controlled the labor of large numbers of servants, created and then used the mechanisms of government to forward their interests. Chief among these was the perpetual control of labor. It was recognized by mid-century that servants were “more advantageous . . . than any other commodities” for importation from England (quoted in Morgan 1975: 175), and that the best way to make a profit from tobacco production was to control the labor of those servants for as long as they were productive.

By statute and custom, indentured servants could only be bound for a fixed term of years; the colonial government, however, took it on itself to fix and extend those terms. Although people who had voluntarily agreed to indentures were typically bound for between five and seven years, those

without clear indenture (including those kidnapped or transported to Virginia) arrived with ambiguous status. By the end of the 1640s, the Assembly had resolved this issue by determining that conscripts and others would be bound for four years if older than the age of 20 (later reduced to 19); five years between the ages of 12 and 20, and seven if younger than the age of 12. It was the county courts that would determine the age of the servants in a time where dates of birth were not always known. There is reason to believe that the court officials intentionally underestimated the age of servants to ensure they would be bound for the longest possible term. For example, between 1662 and 1680, the Lancaster County Court judged only 32 of 296 newly arrived servants to be older than 19; in Norfolk, only 1 of 72 was older than 19 in those same years (Morgan 1975: 217).

As we have seen, the social relations of production are defined by the social and legal rules that define how people relate to each other, and how they relate to both the forces of production and the products of labor. It is clear that class relations between land owners and their workers were materially based on the former's ability to extract surplus value from their indentured servants, tenants, and slaves; this was largely done by their directly assuming the product of labor in the form of tobacco. Relationships between the planter class and the freeholders were similarly based on the former's ability to extract value expressed as tobacco, but in a less direct manner.

One of the primary mechanisms used by the planter class in Virginia to accumulate tobacco capital from independent farmers was the use of public office to levy taxes and collect fees. Every government post, from county clerk to governor, came attached with a means to collect revenue, paid in pounds of tobacco, as a privilege of office. Office holders used their positions for private profit as governors, collectors, auditors, sheriffs, and secretaries began collecting and keeping fees for marriage licenses, departures from the colony, liquor licenses, naturalization of foreigners, issuing and recording of documents, writs of elections, warrants served, arrests made, hearing civil suits. Just about any official action carried a fee that was paid directly to the colonial official responsible for the office (Morgan 1975: 206–208). Burgesses and councilors were paid handsomely for the time they spent in Jamestown; hundreds of pounds of tobacco were added to the county levies for each day the Assembly met in session, increasing the already heavy tax burden of the small farmers.

By mid-century, Virginia was divided into a series of counties, which became the primary political division for the colony. Between 1636 and 1642, the Assembly had empowered each county to organize and hold monthly court sessions, eventually devolving all local governance to the

county courts; this new system replaced the “haphazard system of particular plantations which had previously served as the units of local government” (Billings 1968: 39–40). By 1660, the county courts had become the most powerful units in the colony’s government and a mechanism through which local elites were able to extract wealth from smaller planters in their counties (Billings 1968: 41).

Each county court consisted of a number of Justices of the Peace, a sheriff, constables, a clerk, and a variety of lesser officers, each of which enriched the office holder through the collection of fees. Having wide-ranging powers, county courts decided local judicial matters, dealt with a wide variety of administrative and ecclesiastical functions, and served as the court of record for the recording of wills, probate inventories, and property transactions. Among the most important of its duties, the county court levied county poll taxes, and then supervised the collection of these levies. As officers of the court, individual justices took depositions and settled petty cases, even when they were parties to these cases, and met monthly to collectively act on more important criminal and civil matters (Billings 1968: 43), collecting tobacco from their constituents at every opportunity.

The governor had great power in manning the social hierarchy of Virginia. Not only did the governor appoint the members of the Council, but he also appointed the commissioners (justices) of the county courts, who in turn appointed the lower officers. By the time that Berkeley politely left the governorship in 1652, appointments to county government and the Council of State, and election to the House of Burgesses, were reserved for the wealthy and powerful; no servant arriving after 1640 rose to serve in the House of Burgesses. In 1691, Thomas Milner, speaker of the House of Burgesses, was denied a position on the Council because he did not have “[e]state enough to be a Counsellor” (quoted in Morgan 1975: 209). Power was increasingly consolidated into an ever-tightening circle of families, as individuals were commonly appointed to multiple offices simultaneously, and the long-standing custom of consolidating the wealth of families by the marriage of widows continued (Morgan 1975: 210).

Although, as was the case in Jamaica, factionalism and dissent developed among the members of Virginia’s elite class (Bailyn 2012: 87), the local and colonial governments served as arenas in which members of the planter class defined and consolidated their common interests, and thus established class consciousness. Among these common interests were mechanisms by which burgesses, county commissioners, and other officials maximized their incomes by increasing the tax burden imposed on freeholders. Sessions of the Assembly, which met in Jamestown, were particularly expensive for the freeholders, as their burgesses would rack

up expenses in a few weeks' time that outpaced the annual income of an ordinary freeholder. For example, on top of their usual allowance, the Norfolk County burgesses charged their constituents 150 pounds of tobacco for a fiddler in 1653 and 500 pounds for a trumpeter in 1660 (Morgan 1975: 148–149). Certain members of the Council were empowered to collect duties on cargos entering and leaving one of the rivers, receiving a 10 percent commission on the value of the duties collected. When a planter named Benjamin Harrison brought abuses of this system to the attention of the colonial government, he noted that “taking it to be their Common Interest to agree among themselves, do generally let such things sleep” (quoted in Morgan 1975: 202).

The year 1660 saw the restoration of both Charles II as King of England and William Berkeley as Governor of Virginia, a post the latter would hold for another seventeen years. During his second term in office, tensions between the classes mounted, and Berkeley, although he recognized the rising class conflict, did little to stem it. Describing Virginia's ruling class to the king, Berkeley suggested that they were a people “press'd at our backs with Indians, in our Bowills with servants . . . and invaded from without by the Dutch” (quoted in Webb 1984: 6). In the years following his restoration, Berkeley championed a series of reforms that sought to diversify Virginia's economy. A generous evaluation of his motives would contend that the old governor envisioned a Virginia that was not dependent solely on tobacco production, and that provided more avenues of opportunity for the poorer classes; a more cynical view would hold that his intention was to further concentrate wealth into the hands of a small oligarchy of planters. Although his plans met with only a tepid response by the Crown and his contemporaries in Virginia, both of whom were profiting by the tobacco trade, Berkeley proposed a series of comprehensive reforms that would have dramatically changed the plantation mode of production, by cutting the freemen out of plantation production. His plan would have required European settlers to gather in towns rather than live on dispersed small farms. He envisioned a situation in which artisans, surrounded by customers, would not abandon their trades to plant tobacco; ships would be built; iron would be mined and smelted; wool would be harvested, spun, and woven; and corn and wheat would be produced for export to the West Indies (Billings 2004b; Morgan 1975).

The key element of his plan, and the only way to truly “encourage” the small farmers to abandon tobacco cultivation, was his controversial attempt to prohibit tobacco planting throughout Virginia, Maryland, and Carolina for a year from February 1667. His plan may have succeeded had not the proprietor of the Maryland colony, Lord Baltimore, balked at

the plan, revealing a concern for the freemen and small planters who would not have had a means of livelihood during the intervening time it would take to establish a diversified economy (Morgan 1975). Apparently this was of lesser concern to Berkeley, who likely saw that the primary tensions emerging in his colony were between that very class of small farmers who needed land but could not get it and the great planters who owned more and more land and would not let it go. One of the not too subtle goals of the diversification policy would have been a great, if temporary reduction in the supply of tobacco to the English market, which likely would have considerably driven up the price of the addictive leaf. The suspension of production would have meant a great increase in profit for the great planters, but likely the ruin of many small freeholders and tenants, who would have been unable to pay their annual levy in tobacco, and were dependent on the meager income their small farms provided.

By the 1670s, the accumulation of wealth was ultimately tied to the mass production of tobacco. For most of the seventeenth century, Virginia's economy was based on the ownership of the products of labor, measured in hundred-weights of tobacco, based in a semi-feudal labor system in which individuals were bound as servants to a master for a number of years, but with few rights. The lot of the indentured servant was particularly difficult; during the years of their indenture, the masters of land controlled both the labor of the servant and the products of that labor. Following their set term, the servants theoretically ascended to the status of freeman, and were no longer bound to a master. Unfortunately for many, by the early 1670s, there remained little arable tobacco land available along the drainages of the great tidewater rivers, and an increasing number of former servants merged into a growing class of landless tenants, dependent on the great landowners for access to land, who in return would claim increasing proportions of the products of their labor. Recognizing their contradictory class interests, the political elite of Virginia passed laws blocking the landless from voting for their burgesses, one of the few avenues the ordinary people of Virginia had to participate in the governance of the colony. Such a move was clearly designed to protect the class interests of the planters (Bailyn 2012: 522 ff.).

The material manifestation of the impending crisis can be seen in the layout of Clifts Plantation. Established in about 1670 on the Potomac River in the Northern Neck, Clifts Plantation was the home of an unidentified well-to-do planter. Reflecting the growing land shortages of the third quarter of the century, like many settlers in what would have been Virginia's frontier, the resident planter of Clifts was a tenant, leasing land and a manor house from the wealthy Pope family (Neiman 1980). When

established for tobacco production, Clifts included a sizeable earthfast house and a detached servants' quarter; both were flanked to the west by a series of smaller structures, likely tobacco sheds and other agricultural outbuildings (Figure 7.6). A few years after the construction of the house, a defensive palisade, featuring bastions on two corners, was built around the manor house. This latter feature was likely constructed as tensions on the frontiers were mounting, and newly arrived planters felt it necessary to defend their homes against the native population. Unlike the fortified settlements

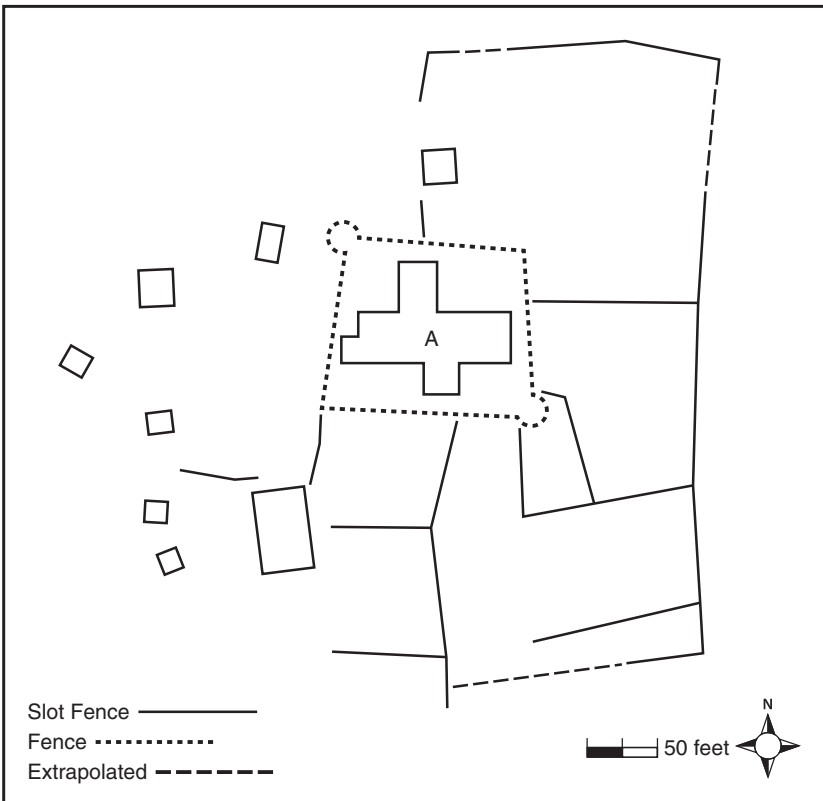


Figure 7.6. The Clifts Plantation, c. 1675. Occupied immediately before Bacon's Rebellion, the Clifts house was a high-status domicile, yet was inhabited by a wealthy tenant who likely could not gain access to his own plantation land. When a defensive palisade was constructed at the site, it encircled only the manor house (A), and not the servants' quarters or the agricultural outbuildings. Illustration courtesy of Nick Stover. *Source:* Neiman (1980).

of earlier years, the defensive works at Clifts did not surround the servants' quarters, but it is possible that the servants would have been brought into the main house should there have been any sign of trouble.

Dialectical class conflict was developing in Virginia, and Berkeley clearly knew it. When gathering a force to defend Virginia against a possible landing by the enemy Dutch in the late 1660s, Berkeley noted that "at least one third are Single freemen (whose Labor will hardly maintaine them) or men much in debt, both which wee may reasonably expect . . . wold revolt to [the enemy] in hopes of bettering their Condicion" (quoted in Morgan 1975: 241–242). More poignantly perhaps, Berkeley understood that the long-standing requirement that freemen hold and maintain firearms was potentially dangerous to the planter class. In July 1676, he commented on his own position in the rising crisis in a letter to William Ludwell: "[h]ow miserable that man is that Governes a People where six parts of seaven at least are Poore Endebted Discontented and Armed" (quoted in Washburn 1957: vi). The resolution to this emerging crisis, in the minds of wealthy planters like Berkeley, would be the replacement of servants, tenants, and small freeholders with the labor of enslaved Africans, a process already well underway by the 1660s (Bailyn 2012; Coombs 2011). The ultimate shift in the relations of production, through which slavery replaced tenancy and servitude throughout Virginia, would only be realized, however, in the wake of a violent dialectical crisis.

Contradictions and Dialectics: The Revolution of 1676

In 1676, the tensions that had been mounting between the ascendant planter class and the increasingly disenfranchised freemen and servants exploded into civil war. By the time the smoke had cleared from the tide-water, Jamestown lay as a smoldering ruin, the once popular William Berkeley was ignominiously recalled by the king, dozens of plantation houses had been sacked, and an untold number of settlers had been hanged, shot, or otherwise brought to an untimely end. The origins of this conflict, generally now known as Bacon's Rebellion, have been debated nearly since the first shot was fired in anger. Some have argued that the rebellion was a precursor to the American Revolution in its attempt to overthrow royal authority and replace it with local representative government (e.g., Wertenbaker 1940), others blame it on factionalism between wealthy newcomers and the old Virginia elite (e.g., Bailyn 2012), some suggest it was a conflict between two ambitious and headstrong men (e.g., Washburn 1957), others have thought that unmarried frontiersmen needed an outlet to relieve their pent-up frustration and so turned to war (e.g., Rice 2012),

and still others see the rebellion as part of a more wide-spread though failed political and social revolution (e.g., Webb 1984). Despite the range of interpretations, most agree that the spark that began the fire was a dispute over how to deal with the native population on Virginia's northern and western frontiers.

A Marxist analysis would hold that each of these seemingly distinct explanations for the rebellion do not explain the situation fully, and that to develop a deeper understanding of why so many Virginians were willing to make war on each other, despite the real and threatening presence of angry native neighbors and Dutch adversaries, we must examine the conflict dialectically.

Seventeenth-century Virginia was characterized by labor conflict. Value was created and even measured by the production of tobacco. It thus followed that the creation of wealth in the colony was dependent on controlling the means of production for tobacco, particularly land and labor. To control both, the planters had used the headright system to their advantage, both in importing and then exchanging as many servants as could be found, and in patenting and otherwise acquiring as much river-side tobacco land as could be had. However, the system required that once free of their indentures, the former servants had the right to claim fifty acres for themselves, which they would own freely once they had improved the land by erecting a house, clearing forest, and establishing tobacco production. After 1660, it became increasingly difficult to find suitable land in the tidewater region, and more and more freemen, and even newly arrived wealthy planters who were not well-enough connected to receive land with good river frontage, had little choice but to work interior lands, and to take out patents near the fall line of the tidewater rivers. Herein lay a dialectical contradiction within the mode of production. The freemen had a legal right to receive tobacco lands at the end of their indentures, but it was not in the interest of the large planters to allow them to have free access to that land. More and more of the former servants and their adult children were among the "Poor Endebted Discontented" residents of Virginia that so troubled William Berkeley (Rice 2012; Tarter 2011).

That the rebellion began as a conflict between Virginians living near the fall line and the native population of Virginia is not surprising. The continual capitalization of the tidewater through the consolidation of large estates by the old elite pushed new settlers, both those newly freed from indenture and those well-to-do settlers, like Nathaniel Bacon, newly arrived in Virginia, to the borderlands of the colony. Their ambitions were checked by the alliances that the old elite, under Berkeley's leadership, had made with what were referred to as the tributary nations, those native

groups who had pledged subservience to the English king, and who contributed to the accumulation of wealth by Berkeley and the old elite through their control of the fur trade. Virginia's official Indian policy reveals another aspect of the dialectical conflict emerging in Virginia. It was in the best interests of the ruling class to trade with the Indians – often exchanging guns for furs. The Indians then used those guns to defend themselves against the new settlers, who hoped to capture Indian land for their own use. When the Assembly resolved to settle the Indian question by increasing taxes to pay for the construction of what were said to be defensive works (but everyone knew really to be trading forts), class interest was once again exposed. The new forts were to be constructed on lands belonging to members of the old Virginia elite and their newly arriving friends and garrisoned by men from their downriver plantations, but would be paid for by a tax levied on the settlers in the frontier districts, who thought the forts would only attract the Indians rather than remove them (Rice 2012; Tartar 2011).

Bacon's Rebellion is often said to have begun when one of the wealthy young newcomers to Virginia, Nathaniel Bacon, incensed by a recent Indian attack at his plantation near the Falls of the James, organized an army of volunteers to make war against the Indians. Berkeley, favoring the trade solution at the soon to be constructed forts, and thus not having sanctioned such action, labeled Bacon a mutinous rebel. The governor led a force to the Falls of the James to arrest Bacon and stamp out the mutiny, but to no immediate avail, as Bacon and his forces remained in the field and did not give the governor the satisfaction of an arrest. Instead, on his return from the expedition, Bacon was elected as a burgess and proceeded to Jamestown accompanied by an armed guard of some forty men. At first allowing Bacon to take his seat in the Assembly, Berkeley bided his time and soon signed an arrest warrant, by which time Bacon had discerned the governor's intentions and had fled Jamestown. Within two weeks, Bacon had returned to the capital at the head of a rebel army of 500 men, demanding that the governor sign a commission elevating him to the rank of general. Refusing to bend, Berkeley stormed into his private quarters, at which point Bacon's men aimed their weapons at the burgesses assembled in the state house. Without much of a delay, the frightened burgesses acceded to Bacon's demands. The final step in this coup came when Bacon, echoing the actions of Oliver Cromwell a generation earlier, entered the state house at the head of an armed bodyguard. The captive Assembly had little choice but to prevail upon Berkeley to grant Bacon his commission, which he did. The Revolution had begun.

The basic military history of the subsequent conflict is well-known. Within a few months of Bacon's coup, Berkeley attempted to raise an

army of his own against Bacon, but failing to attract enough men to face Bacon's force, the governor fled Jamestown for the safety of the Eastern Shore. A botched rebel effort to arrest Berkeley there led to the capture of the few ships that Bacon's men had hoped to use to control the Chesapeake Bay (Webb 1984). Once in control of the waterways, Berkeley returned to Jamestown in the attempt to regain control over the colonial government, only to face a siege by the Baconians. After a failed attempt to break the rebel siege line, the loyalists slipped out at night by boat; Bacon's force proceeded to enter the town and burn it to prevent a similar retaking of the colonial capital. Pitched battles between the loyalists and rebels continued for several months, as both sides waited for the arrival of regular troops from England.

The rebel general did not live to see the end of the contest. Plagued by lice, Nathaniel Bacon contracted typhus and died in October 1676. Despite the death of their leader, the Baconians carried on their revolution until December, when the last sizeable rebel force surrendered to the loyalists at a place in Virginia called West Point. Notably, of the last 100 men to surrender, 80 were black slaves, and 20 white indentured servants (Rice 2012; Webb 1984).

Dialectics and Social Change: The Rise of Slavery, 1677–1700

The mode of production that had prevailed before 1676 fomented a constant demand for labor. From its beginnings in the aftermath of the 1622 violence, that mode of production had been based primarily on extractive relationships between the planter class and those who worked on their land. As the demand for labor increased after mid-century, many landless wanderers were apprehended in England and transported to the colonies as indentured servants. Whether transported voluntarily or against their will, the system in place promised a new beginning for these men; if they were lucky enough to survive their indenture, they were supposed to become free men of property.

Yet at the end of their indenture, the freemen could be kept landless, be barred from participation in government, pilloried for libeling court officials, and burdened with taxes that could amount to as much as half of their annual production. The local tax rate was astronomical; annual levies were collected by the local elites, which included expenses accrued, often fraudulently, by the wealthy families who controlled the county courts. The local justices and their fellow county officers, including elected burgesses, found more ways to tax the freemen, collecting in tobacco or promissory notes to be exchanged for future production. These men were economically pressed; little productive land could be

had even by the wealthy, except in the far frontier, and the numbers of disenfranchised, landless men, continued to grow. As Morgan described them, “frustrated by the engrossers of land, by the collectors of customs, by their elected representatives, by the council, and, above all, by the king himself” (Morgan 1975: 292), they were a constant worry to the local and imperial government, pressing at the bowels of Virginia’s gentry (in the colorful language of Governor William Berkeley). And yet bound laborers were still the most valuable form of property for the wealthy planters of Virginia; and indentured servants kept pouring in.

In the years leading up to Bacon’s Rebellion, the political and economic elite of Virginia did all they could, as Morgan portrays it, to hold laborers still for the fleecing, whether through taxation, tenancy, or indenture. Although the local and imperial ruling classes were developing increasingly intricate and burdensome ways to separate the freemen from their tobacco, a new social order was already emerging, in which servants need not be freed after an indenture, and which made it possible for the Virginians to have “unlimited exploitation of labor” (Morgan 1975: 292). Bacon’s Rebellion made it clear that, under the right circumstances, the working class, both black and white, could be incited to rise up against Virginia’s elite. In the aftermath of the Rebellion, the planter class took steps to ensure that there would be no repetition of such an uprising. To prevent any new rising of frustrated freemen, the social relations of production needed to change. The planters needed to free themselves of the cycle of indenture through the development of a new system of labor. The proliferation of slavery as the primary relation of labor can thus be seen as emerging from the dialectical conflict that had emerged between the once symbiotically linked freeman and planter.

Slavery was not unknown before Bacon’s Rebellion. Recent scholarship on late-seventeenth-century Virginia has suggested that the wealthiest planter families were already deeply invested in slavery by 1670 (e.g., Coombs 2011); as early as 1669, an act of the Assembly had decriminalized the killing of a slave if lethal force had been exerted during punishment (Morgan 1975: 312). Nevertheless, the decades following the Rebellion witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number of enslaved Africans working the tobacco fields. By 1700, the number of slaves reached the number of white servants employed, and the House of Burgesses noted that white servants were mostly employed by poorer planters who could not buy African slaves (Morgan 1975: 305). By 1708, Edmund Jennings could write that virtually no white indentured servants had been imported into Virginia for years, in contrast to the thousands of Africans that were brought to the tidewater (Morgan 1975: 308).

Plantation landscapes in Virginia changed as slavery replaced indentured servitude. In much of Virginia, some numbers of indentured servants lived in the main house with their master's family; after 1680, however, the number of large houses decrease in number, reflecting removal of servants from the main house (Deetz 1977; Upton 1982). White and black servants were spatially segregated, and planters began to designate "a Separate House for the Christian Slaves, One for the Negro Slaves" (Epperson 2001). In time, on most large plantations, enslaved Africans and their descendants, bound for life in servitude, replaced white indentured servants altogether.

Several Virginia plantations dating to the last quarter of the seventeenth century demonstrate how landscapes were transformed when the mode of production shifted as the new social relations of production engendered by slavery emerged (see Figure 7.7). A telling example is Rich Neck Plantation. Rich Neck was established in the 1640s, at which time the plantation consisted of two brick buildings. The first of these was a two-room house with a central chimney inhabited by the planter family. The second building served as a kitchen and the residence of indentured servants. By 1665, the main house had been expanded to include four rooms on the first floor, and end chimneys replaced the central chimney. The kitchen was expanded to three rooms at this time, likely to accommodate an increased number of servants working on the plantation and living in the kitchen quarter. In the wake of Bacon's Rebellion, the plantation landscape was restructured again. The main house was further expanded, and although it is likely that some servants remained quartered in the kitchen, a small complex of earthfast buildings was constructed to house the enslaved workers on the plantation. Notably, the fencelines that defined spaces changed during these three phases. In the 1640s, the house and kitchen shared a bounded yard space, which was expanded in the 1660s. After the introduction of slavery to the plantation, the fence lines were changed, placing the exterior spaces of the kitchen outside the yard space of the main house. The new slave quarters were also spatially segregated by fence lines. This increased fragmentation of spaces, of black and white landscapes (Upton 1984), would prevail for the remainder of Virginia's colonial history (Vlach 1993).

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the Marxian framework used to explore plantation landscapes in this book is applicable in a variety of contexts. As was the case in Jamaica, the Virginia plantation landscape was simultaneously a product of the plantation mode of production, and an active

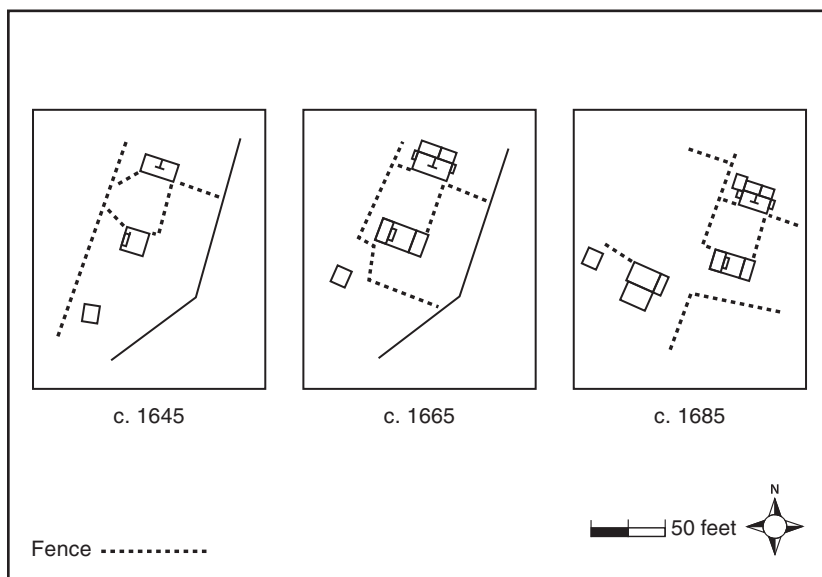


Figure 7.7. Three phases of construction at Rich Neck Plantation, showing the development of plantation settlement forms as the mode of production developed and changed. In its first phase, c. 1645 (left), there was little social or physical space separating the main house from the servants' quarters, and it is possible that some servants lived in the main house. By 1665 (center), both structures had expanded, likely reflecting the accumulation of servants to increase tobacco production. In the third phase, c. 1685 (right), fencing had been erected to separate the main house from the kitchen, and quarters for field workers had been built. By this time, enslaved Africans had replaced the indentured servants on this plantation. Illustration courtesy of Nick Stover. *Source*: McFadden et al. (1999).

agent in the spatial negotiation of the social relations of production. Like nineteenth-century Jamaica, seventeenth-century Virginia experienced a dialectical crisis in its mode of production. The product of that crisis was the transformation of the social relations of production, as systems of temporary indentured servitude were replaced with life-long bondage, reified, as in the Caribbean, by race. By the close of the seventeenth century, the aspirations of the working class to emerge as propertied freemen descended into a world dominated by slavery, racism, and the quotidian violence that set of social relations engendered.