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Landlessness and Tenancy in Early National Prince George's County, Maryland

Steven Sarson

THE fledgling United States of America, especially its free sector, is usually depicted as a yeoman republic largely peopled by small-scale, independent landowners. The enduring power of this perception derives from a tendency in the historiography of republicanism to accept the ideal of the independent husbandman as a reality.¹ Yet landlessness and dependence on others for a living were increasingly common in the eighteenth century. Even in slave economies, planters routinely employed large numbers of wage laborers and tenants.² A few

Mr. Sarson is a lecturer in the Department of History at the University of Wales Swansea. He would like to thank Eleanor Breuning, Paul G. E. Clemens, Christine Daniels, David Eastwood, Sylvia Frey, Jack P. Greene, Mike McDonnell, Noel Thompson, Ron Walters, Lorena Walsh, and the reader for the *William and Mary Quarterly* for their thoughts about tenancy as this work has progressed.

¹ See especially Robert E. Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 29 (1972), 49–80; *John Taylor of Caroline: Pastoral Republican* (Columbia, S. C., 1980); and *The Roots of Democracy: American Thought and Culture, 1760–1800* (Boston, 1990); and Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History*, 79 (1992), 11–38. Joyce Appleby, "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic," *ibid.*, 68 (1982), 833–49, remains one of the best warnings against confusing contemporary rhetoric with reality.

² Studies of tenancy and wage labor outside the Chesapeake include Sung Bok Kim, *Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York: Manorial Society, 1664–1775* (Chapel Hill, 1978); Stephen Innes, *Labor in a New Land: Economy and Society in Seventeenth-Century Springfield* (Princeton, 1983); Lucy Simler, "Tenancy in Colonial Pennsylvania: The Case of Chester County," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., 43 (1986), 542–69; Paul G. E. Clemens and Simler, "Rural Labor and the Farm Household in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1750–1820," in Innes, ed., *Work and Labor in Early America* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 106–43; and Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630–1850* (Chapel Hill, 1994). Chesapeake studies include Willard F. Bliss, "The Rise of Tenancy in Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 58 (1950), 427–41; Gregory A. Stiverson, *Poverty in a Land of Plenty: Tenancy in Eighteenth-Century Maryland* (Baltimore, 1977); Lorena S. Walsh, "Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder: Estate Management and Tenant Fortunes in Southern Maryland, 1642–1820," *Agricultural History*, 59 (1985), 373–96; Jean B. Russo, "Free Workers in a Plantation Economy: Talbot County, Maryland, 1690–1759" (Ph. D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1983); and "Self-sufficiency and Local Exchange: Free Craftsmen

historians of the era have found widespread landlessness, although the persistent notion of post-Revolutionary southern society as a triumvirate of planters, slaves, and yeomen shows that they have been insufficiently heeded.³

This article explores the extent of landlessness and the socioeconomic relations of tenancy in early national Prince George's County, in the south-western corner of Maryland, an area committed to tobacco agriculture and slavery.⁴ A county history allows detailed analysis of the distribution of wealth and opportunity from censuses and tax records. More direct evidence of those relations comes from a small scattering of surviving leases and the letters of Rosalie Calvert of Riversdale, the Belgian-born, well-assimilated wife of George Calvert, one of Prince George's wealthiest planters.⁵ These

in the Rural Chesapeake Economy," in Lois Green Carr, Philip D. Morgan, and Russo, eds., *Colonial Chesapeake Society* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 389–432; and Christine Daniels, "Alternative Workers in a Slave Economy: Kent County, Maryland, 1675–1810" (Ph. D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1990), and "Getting his [or her] Livelyhood': Free Workers in Slave Anglo-America, 1675–1810" *Agri. Hist.*, 71 (1997), 125–61.

³ Sarah Shaver Hughes, "Elizabeth City County, Virginia, 1782–1810: The Economic and Social Structure of a Tidewater County in the Early National Years" (Ph. D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1975); Bayly Ellen Marks, "Economics and Society in a Staple Plantation System: St. Mary's County, Maryland, 1790–1840" (Ph. D. diss., University of Maryland, 1979); Lee Soltow, "Land Inequality on the Frontier: The Distribution of Land in East Tennessee at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century," *Social Science History*, 5 (1981), 275–91; "Kentucky Wealth at the End of the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History*, 43 (1983), 617–33; *Distribution of Wealth and Income in the United States in 1798* (Pittsburgh, 1989); Fredrika J. Teute, "Land, Liberty, and Labor in the Post-Revolutionary Era: Kentucky as the Promised Land" (Ph. D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1988).

⁴ Numbers and proportions of slaves in the county population were 11,796 of 21,344 (55.3%) in 1790; 12,291 of 21,175 (58%) in 1800; 13,294 of 20,689 (64.3%) in 1810; and 11,185 of 20,216 (55.3%) in 1820 (these totals are from my own counting from the schedules and are sometimes different from those of census takers). The constantly high slave population of Prince George's compares with a decline of slaves as a proportion of the state population from 32.2% in 1790 to 26.4% in 1820. See Steven Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor in the Tobacco Plantation South: Prince George's County, Maryland, in the Early National Era" (Ph. D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1998), 8, 446.

⁵ Rosalie Stier arrived in Philadelphia in 1794, aged 16, having fled with her family from Napoleon's invasion of her native Belgium. In 1795, the Stiers moved to Annapolis and then to Prince George's County, where Rosalie's father, Henri Jean Stier, began building Riversdale mansion, near Bladensburg. Rosalie married George Calvert, illegitimate but well-provided scion of Maryland's former proprietors, in 1799. The Calverts took over Riversdale after the Stiers returned to Belgium in 1803. Between then and her death in 1821, Rosalie Calvert wrote more than 300 letters to her Belgian family, most of them published in Margaret Law Callcott, ed., *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert, 1795–1821* (Baltimore, 1991). Copies of the originals are kept at the Riversdale Historical Society, Riverdale, Maryland.

There is a question over Rosalie Calvert's representativeness, but she acculturated remarkably easily and successfully into southern Maryland's elite, broadly conforming to the model of plantation mistresses described by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese in *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 35,

sources allow a valuable if oblique insight into tenants' lives and perspectives.

The case-study approach risks privileging the untypical, but my findings parallel evidence of rising landlessness and changing relations of tenancy elsewhere in the Chesapeake and in Kentucky. A large majority of early national free Prince Georgians were permanently landless, working as tenant farmers, artisans, and wage workers, with many perhaps alternating occupations. A few of the landless were wealthy, many were slaveholders, but most were poor. Conditions were probably harder for tenants after the Revolution than before, even for relatively well-off slaveholding tenants. By the early national era, landlords imposed higher rents and increasingly elaborate prescriptions and proscriptions on tenants' economic freedom. Tenants resisted landlords, but a combination of unequal economic power, common commitment to possessive individualist belief and behavior, widely shared interests in slavery, and differentiations among the landless limited their effectiveness.

In the first three quarters of the eighteenth century, the landless component of the free population in the tidewater Chesapeake grew from a third to more than half, and that trend continued after Independence.⁶ In Prince George's County, the proportion of landlessness was almost 70 percent in 1800, 67 percent in 1810, and 75 percent in 1820 (see Tables I, III, and V). The drop in landlessness by 1810 was owing to disproport-

37–145. She was more economically active than most plantation wives, but seems thereby to have assimilated planter economic and social values all the more. Her comments on tenants are remarkably similar to those made by the likes of Robert Carter and George Washington (see notes below). I discuss Rosalie's typicality in more detail in "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 255–57. I thank Robert J. Brugger of Johns Hopkins University Press for permission to use the letters, Ann B. Wass of the Riversdale Historical Society for sending me samples of the originals and for a guided tour of Riversdale, and Nathalie Morello of the University of Wales Swansea for assessing the (excellent) translations from French.

Many tenancies may have been oral arrangements, as in colonial times. There is no way of being certain whether Land Record leases were typical or exceptional arrangements, although a few leases in the court records suggest typicality (see note 55 below). Even if Land Record leases were untypical, they at least show what was possible under tenancy.

⁶ Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton, 1965), 44–67; Lois Green Carr, "County Government in Maryland, 1689–1709" (Ph. D. diss., Harvard University, 1968), 581–97; Edward C. Papenfuss, Jr., "Planter Behavior and Economic Opportunity in a Staple Economy," *Agri. Hist.*, 46 (1972), 301–02; David Curtis Skaggs, *Roots of Maryland Democracy, 1753–1776* (Westport, Conn., 1973), 40–41; Carville V. Earle, *The Evolution of a Tidewater Settlement System: All Hallow's Parish, Maryland, 1650–1783* (Chicago, 1975), 206–12; Stiverson, *Poverty in a Land of Plenty*, xii; Russell R. Menard, *Economy and Society in Early Colonial Maryland* (New York, 1985), 51–77, 155–201, 302–20; Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680–1800* (Chapel Hill, 1986), 131–41, 152–61, 296–97; James Horn, *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake* (Chapel Hill, 1994), 147–60, 253–92, 328–33.

TABLE I
DISTRIBUTION OF LAND AND TOTAL WEALTH IN PRINCE GEORGE'S
COUNTY, 1800 (VALUES IN MARYLAND POUNDS CURRENT).

<i>Group</i>	<i>Householders N</i>	<i>Householders %</i>	<i>Total Acreage Held By</i>	<i>Value of Land Held By</i>	<i>Total Wealth Held By</i>	<i>Mean Wealth Held By</i>	<i>% Total Wealth Held By</i>
Planters	69	4.0	117,789.22	89,259.13	195,886.24	2,838.93	43.1
Yeomen	410	24.0	100,626.29	62,191.40	190,613.01	464.91	41.9
Smallholders	45	2.6	373.00	4,189.88	10,080.78	224.02	2.2
Subtotal	524	30.6	218,788.51	155,640.41	396,580.03	756.83	87.2
Propertied landless	406	23.7	—	—	58,277.83	143.54	12.8
Unpropertied landless	782	45.7	—	—	—	—	—
Subtotal	1,188	69.4	—	—	58,277.83	49.06	12.8
Total	1,712	100.0	218,788.51	155,640.41	454,857.86	265.69	100.0

Sources: Population Schedules of the Second Census of the United States, 1800, Prince George's County, Maryland; Prince George's County Tax Assessments (PGCTA), Real and Personal Property, 1800.

Planters held 800 or more acres, yeomen 40–799 acres, and smallholders less than 40 acres.

TABLE II
DISTRIBUTION OF SLAVES, PLATE, AND "OTHER" PROPERTY IN PRINCE
GEORGE'S COUNTY, 1800 (VALUES IN MARYLAND POUNDS CURRENT).

<i>Group</i>	<i>Number of Slaves Held By</i>	<i>Mean Number of Slaves Held By</i>	<i>% of Slaves Held By</i>	<i>Value of Slaves Held By</i>	<i>Ounces of Plate Held By</i>	<i>Value of Plate Held By</i>	<i>Value of "Other" Property Held By</i>
Planters	2,924	42	37.8	64,417.05	6,203.3	2,599.84	39,610.22
Yeomen	3,358	8	43.5	71,614.02	2,923.4	1,221.38	55,586.21
Smallholders	124	3	1.6	2,964.00	240.0	101.26	2,825.64
Subtotal	6,406	12	82.9	138,995.07	9,366.7	3,922.48	98,022.07
Propertied landless	1,320	3	17.1	27,091.25	1,372.6	570.47	30,616.11
Unpropertied landless	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Subtotal	1,320	1	17.1	27,091.25	1,372.6	570.47	30,616.11
Total	7,726	5	100.0	166,086.32	10,739.3	4,492.95	128,638.18

Sources: Population Schedules of the Second Census of the United States, 1800, Prince George's County, Maryland; PGCTA, Personal Property, 1800.

Planters held 800 or more acres, yeomen 40–799 acres, and smallholders less than 40 acres.

TABLE III
DISTRIBUTION OF LAND AND TOTAL WEALTH IN PRINCE GEORGE'S
COUNTY, 1810 (VALUES IN MARYLAND POUNDS CURRENT).

<i>Group</i>	<i>Householders N</i>	<i>Householders %</i>	<i>Total Acreage Held By</i>	<i>Value of Land Held By</i>	<i>Total Wealth Held By</i>	<i>Mean Wealth Held By</i>	<i>% Total Wealth Held By</i>
Planters	60	3.7	105,737.77	185,110.98	267,538.64	4,458.98	43.6
Yeomen	407	25.1	108,183.63	159,333.07	280,989.32	690.39	45.8
Smallholders	64	4.0	659.83	7,999.23	15,208.68	237.64	2.5
Subtotal	531	32.8	214,581.23	352,443.28	563,736.64	1,061.65	91.8
Propertied landless	429	26.5	—	100.00	50,078.60	116.73	8.2
Unpropertied landless	660	40.7	—	—	—	—	—
Subtotal	1089	67.2	—	100.00	50,078.60	45.99	8.2
Total	1620	100.0	214,581.23	352,543.28	613,815.24	378.90	100.0

Sources: Population Schedules of the Third Census of the United States, 1810, Prince George's County, Maryland; PGCTA, Real and Personal Property, 1810.

Planters held 800 or more acres, yeomen 40–799 acres, and smallholders less than 40 acres.

The apparent anomaly that one landless person owns £100 in real property is explained by Catherine Digges's "improvements [a mill] on chillum Castle Manor under lease." Digges was wealthy, with 23 slaves and £1,210.25 in total taxable wealth; PGCTA, Real Property, 1810, 28, Personal Property, 1810, 29.

TABLE IV
DISTRIBUTION OF SLAVES, PLATE, AND "OTHER" PROPERTY IN PRINCE
GEORGE'S COUNTY, 1810 (VALUES IN MARYLAND POUNDS CURRENT).

<i>Group</i>	<i>Number of Slaves Held By</i>	<i>Mean Number of Slaves Held By</i>	<i>% of Slaves Held By</i>	<i>Value of Slaves Held By</i>	<i>Ounces of Plate Held By</i>	<i>Value of Plate Held By</i>	<i>Value of "Other" Property Held By</i>
Planters	2,215	37	32.8	49,882.50	3,665.5	3,503.74	29,041.42
Yeomen	3,323	8	49.1	71,043.55	3,391.8	1,621.76	48,990.94
Smallholders	169	3	2.5	3,658.60	168.0	70.00	3,480.85
Subtotal	5,707	11	84.4	124,584.65	7,225.3	5,195.50	81,513.21
Propertied landless	1,054	2	15.6	22,672.00	717.5	298.95	27,007.65
Unpropertied landless	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Subtotal	1,054	1	15.6	22,672.00	717.5	298.95	27,007.65
Total	6,761	4	100.0	147,256.65	7,942.8	5,494.45	108,520.86

Sources: Population Schedules of the Third Census of the United States, 1810, Prince George's County, Maryland; PGCTA, Personal Property, 1810.

Planters held 800 or more acres, yeomen 40–799 acres, and smallholders less than 40 acres.

TABLE V
DISTRIBUTION OF LAND AND TOTAL WEALTH IN PRINCE
GEORGE'S COUNTY, 1820 (WEALTH VALUES IN DOLLARS).

<i>Group</i>	<i>Householders N</i>	<i>Householders %</i>	<i>Total Acreage Held By</i>	<i>Value of Land Held By</i>	<i>Total Wealth Held By</i>	<i>Mean Wealth Held By</i>	<i>% Total Wealth Held By</i>
Planters	60	3.3	101,550.15	472,795.10	719,299.10	11,988.32	44.5
Yeomen	334	18.6	94,532.88	390,054.03	715,241.53	2,141.44	44.2
Smallholders	68	3.8	495.29	23,364.40	45,492.90	669.01	2.8
Subtotal	462	25.7	196,578.32	886,213.53	1,480,033.53	3,203.54	91.6
Propertied landless	327	18.2	—	—	136,566.00	417.63	8.4
Unpropertied landless	1,006	56.1	—	—	—	—	—
Subtotal	1,333	74.3	—	—	136,566.00	102.45	8.4
Total	1,795	100.0	196,578.32	886,213.53	1,616,599.53	900.61	100.0

Sources: Population Schedules of the Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Prince George's County, Maryland; PGCTA, Real Property, 1819, 1821, Personal Property, 1820. The 1820 real property assessments are lost; the values above are constructed from 1819 and 1821 assessments, using Land Records and the census to determine property owners.

Planters held 800 or more acres, yeomen 40–799 acres, and smallholders less than 40 acres.

TABLE VI
DISTRIBUTION OF SLAVES, PLATE, AND "OTHER" PROPERTY IN PRINCE
GEORGE'S COUNTY, 1820 (WEALTH VALUES IN DOLLARS).

<i>Group</i>	<i>Number of Slaves Held By</i>	<i>Mean Number of Slaves Held By</i>	<i>% of Slaves Held By</i>	<i>Value of Slaves Held By</i>	<i>Ounces of Plate Held By</i>	<i>Value of Plate Held By</i>	<i>Value of "Other" Property Held By</i>
Planters	2,412	40	36.6	151,949.00	5,268.0	5,268.00	89,287.00
Yeomen	2,975	9	45.2	178,112.00	4,277.5	4,277.50	142,798.00
Smallholders	143	2	2.2	8,306.00	446.0	446.00	13,376.50
Subtotal	5,530	12	83.9	338,367.00	9,991.5	9,991.50	245,461.50
Propertied landless	1,059	3	16.1	63,050.00	806.5	806.50	72,709.50
Unpropertied landless	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Subtotal	1,059	1	16.1	63,050.00	806.5	806.50	72,709.50
Total	6,589	4	100.0	401,417.00	10,798.0	10,798.00	318,171.00

Sources: Population Schedules of the Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Prince Georges County, Maryland; PGCTS, Personal Property, 1820.

Planters held 800 or more acres, yeomen 40–799 acres, and smallholders less than 40 acres.

tionate outmigration by the poor (Table VIII), but thereafter the long-term growth of landlessness resumed, compounded by trade embargo, nonintercourse, the War of 1812, and a grain harvest failure in 1816.⁷

It is often impossible to tell how the landless made a living, but probably most were tenants. The 1798 Federal Direct Tax is the most informative available source, identifying 183 tenant farmers, 29 tenant artisans, and 29 overseers. It recorded another 166 landless taxables with no discernible occupation, but did not record every non-owner/occupier of tenant and overseer houses and did not always account for nontaxables. If we assume that the 166 landless without identified occupations were wage workers and that these figures accurately represent occupations among all landless householders, 45 percent of the landless were tenant farmers, 7 percent were tenant artisans, and 48 percent were overseers or otherwise worked for wages. If we then account for districts for which schedules have been lost, there were 535 tenant farmers, 83 tenant artisans, and 570 wage workers among the 1,188 landless and total of 1,712 household heads in 1800. Tenancy was thus common, accounting for more than 36 percent of householders, including artisan renters. This figure probably understates the extent of tenancy, for some of the landless without identified occupations may have been tenants rather than wage workers. Also, a number of people perhaps alternated between tenancy and wage labor. Others possibly worked for wages while young, undertaking tenements later in life when they had families to support and family labor to assist with farm work. Over time, therefore, more of the landless may have rented farms than the 1800 statistics suggest. Wage labor and dual occupations were extensive in staple crop economies where secondary crops were cultivated, as in Maryland's lower Western Shore, but were probably more common in mixed economies, as in much of the rest of the state.⁸

Landlessness did not necessarily equal poverty. A few landless householders were wealthy, including three whose taxable wealth exceeded £1,000. The wealthiest non-landowners had access to land. Mary Wootton, for instance, owned more than £2,000 in personalty in 1800 and controlled more than 1,500 acres of land recorded in the name of "Turner Wootton heirs."⁹ Clement Hill, Jr., owned £493, but probably

⁷ These and all wealth distribution figures in this article are derived from censuses matched with county tax assessments beginning in the 1790s (the 1830 census for Prince George's is lost). Methods are explained in detail in Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 88–90, 167, 220–23.

⁸ Daniels, "Getting his [or her] Livelyhood," 125–35. The occupation figures from the federal tax of 1798 are here projected on to population data from the 1800 census and county levy.

⁹ Prince George's County Tax Assessments [PGCTA], Real Property, 1800, 28, 29, 43; Personal Property, 1800, 3, 31, 44; Prince George's County Register of Wills, Wills, T 1, Apr. 12, 1797, 397.

worked land in New Scotland, Oxen, and Bladensburg hundreds, where he lived and where Clement Hill, Sr., owned 3,000 acres but no personality.¹⁰ In total, the landless owned almost £60,000, close to 13 percent of taxable wealth held by county residents, although after 1800 the proportion fell to just over 8 percent.

Slave property was more evenly distributed than land in Prince George's County (see Tables II, IV, and VI). In 1800, there were 652 slaveholders and 524 landowners among 1,712 householders, or 38 percent slaveownership and 31 percent landownership. The landless comprised more than a third of the county's slaveowning householders and held 1,320 slaves—17 percent of those held by resident householders—and in 1810 and 1820 they still held more than a thousand slaves, or around 16 percent of slave property.

In 1800, 239 non-landowners, more than 20 percent, were slaveholders, some of them substantial. Mary Wootton held 61 slaves, enough to count as a large planter, and Clement Hill, Jr., was among nine other non-landowners with twenty or more slaves, enough to be identified as part of the planter class.¹¹ Among 125 substantial slaveholders with 10–19 slaves were twenty-four non-landowners, as were forty of the 164 owners of 5–9 slaves. Most interesting, perhaps, a substantial majority of small-scale slaveholders were landless. Of 250 owners of 1–4 slaves, 145 (68 percent) were landless. The figures are similar for subsequent years, and the situation was the same in St. Mary's County, suggesting that the early national tobacco South generally was more a slaveholding than a landowning region.¹²

Most of these small slaveholders must have been tenant farmers. A few skilled wage workers may have held slaves, but more tenants would have been able to afford, and perhaps all tenants better able to use, slave labor. Indeed, a tenement must have been essential for most non-

¹⁰ PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 3, 12, 27, 42; Personal Property, 1800, 24, 30, 42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Real Property, 1800, 3, 12, 27, 28, 29, 42, 43; Personal Property, 1800, 3, 24, 30, 31, 42, 44; Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 88.

¹² Of 1,620 householders in 1810, 589 (36.4%) were slaveholders and 531 (32.8%) were landowners. There were 205 non-landowning slaveholders and they held 1,054 slaves (15.6%) of 6,761 resident-held slaves. Non-landownership among slaveholders was zero of 22 with 50 or more slaves; 6 of 80 with 20–49; 19 of 106 with 10–19; 56 of 153 with 5–9; and 124 of 228 with 1–4. Non-landowners composed 34.8% of all slaveholders and 54.4% of small-scale slaveholders. Of 1,795 householders in 1820, 539 (30%) were slaveholders, and 462 (25.7%) were landowners. There were 190 non-landowning slaveholders and they held 1,059 slaves, or 16.1% of 6,589 resident-held slaves. Non-landownership among slaveholders was one of 19 with 50 or more slaves; 6 of 78 with 20–49; 20 of 105 with 10–19; 46 of 129 with 5–9; and 117 of 208 with 1–4. Non-landowners composed 35.3% of all slaveholders and 56.3% of small-scale slaveholders. Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 85–88, 217–18, 243–44; Marks, "Economics and Society in a Staple Plantation System," 402–06.

landowning slaveholders, so that the slaves could cultivate their own food, especially since food prices were rising after the Revolution.¹³ Although we cannot tell for certain how many landless people were tenants rather than wage workers (or how many alternated), we can surmise that, because a fifth of the landless were slaveholders, at least a quarter and probably a third of tenants owned slaves.¹⁴

Despite the evidence that some landless owned other kinds of property, often in significant amounts, most landless householders were poor. Mean wealth for all households in 1800 was £265.69, but it was £756.83 for landowners, £143.54 for landless taxables, and £49.06 for all landless. In 1810 and in 1820, the landed on average owned respectively ten times more and eight times more than the propertied landless, compared to five times more in 1800. Furthermore, only 406 of the landless in 1800 owned taxable wealth, leaving 782 householders, more than 45 percent of all householders, who owned too little property to appear in local assessments. By 1820, nontaxables numbered 1,006 and formed a 56 percent majority of household heads.¹⁵

Identifying particular landlords and tenants offers a fine-grained picture of the standards of living and economic resources available to them. Zachariah Berry, the third wealthiest Prince Georgian householder, owner of 3,123 $\frac{1}{3}$ acres of land in various parts of the county in 1798, is a good example of a rich landlord. On his 1,426-acre home plantation, Berry lived in a "new, very elegant," two-story, 54-by-36-foot brick house with kitchen attached. Nine tobacco houses indicate Berry's

¹³ Donald R. Adams, Jr., "Prices and Wages in Maryland, 1750-1850," *JEH*, 46 (1986), 625-45.

¹⁴ This phenomenon contrasts with pre-Revolutionary tenants, few of whom held indentured or enslaved labor. Lorena Walsh traces the rise of wealthier slaveholding tenants in the 1770s and 1780s in "Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder," 381, 388-90. See also Papenfuse, "Planter Behavior and Economic Opportunity," 306; Stiverson, *Poverty in a Land of Plenty*, 45-53; and Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 136-40. Contrary to general belief among early national historians (though well known to colonialists), the large majority of yeomen were slaveholders. In 1800, 206 of 287 (71.8%) small yeomen with 40-279 acres and 116 of 123 (94.3%) large yeomen with 280-799 acres owned slaves. In 1810 the numbers were 173 of 260 (66.5%) and 125 of 147 (85%). In 1820 they were 128 of 193 (66.3%) and 130 of 141 (92.2%); Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 107, 243, 244.

¹⁵ These figures understate wealth differentiation in several ways: property was assessed at less than market value; property owners frequently failed to inform the Levy Court when they acquired new property (assessors only visited households once every three to five years); up to a third of county property is unaccounted for in these figures because it belonged to non-household heads, nonresidents, or was in the yet undivided estates of the deceased, and most of this property was controlled by the wealthy; and many rich Prince Georgians owned property outside the county. Adjusting the figures to account for these factors risks distortion, and I rely here on solid baselines of wealth distribution. For further discussion see Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 46-48, 109-10, 177-78, 239-42, 437-40.

attachment to this staple, although other buildings—a smokehouse, meat house, cow house “with ten foot sheds for Stables,” and a 30-by-26-foot, two-story, “overshot two pair stone” mill—suggest successful diversification. There was also a 20-by-12-foot miller’s house and a 20-by-16-foot tenant’s house, although assessors recorded no occupants. The assessed value of the land was \$20,357.16, and that of the plantation house and buildings was \$2,250.00.

A number of free people, representing a fair cross-section of poor whites as well as sixty-four slaves, depended on Berry for a living. The tenants’ living conditions and economic resources were meager compared with Berry’s. The size and quality of his tenant housing and the number, function, and quality of tenant farm buildings had changed little since the early eighteenth century.¹⁶ Like many planters, Berry cultivated his home plantation with slaves while renting out some of his land elsewhere. William Brown leased the largest outlying tenement, 514 acres (although it may have contained more than one farm). It is unclear whether Brown lived in the 36-by-36-foot “Framed Dwelling House with Hip Roof,” worth \$20, and used its adjoining 16-by-16-foot kitchen, or in the unvalued 24-by-16-foot “Tenant House” of no specified composition. The property contained a washhouse, stable, and poultry, meat, and corn houses, together worth \$380, and, unvalued, two tobacco houses and a 24-by-16-foot slave cabin. Brown’s tenancy was unusually large and well endowed (if it was a single farm). Verlinda Newman leased 300 acres, lived in a 26-by-20-foot house worth \$60, and used a tobacco house, a slave cabin, and apparently nothing else. Newman Harvey’s living conditions and economic resources were even poorer. He rented 134 acres with a 16-by-16-foot house, tobacco house, and slave quarter, all of which were “old” and unvalued. George Hardy also lived in an “old,” unvalued, 16-by-16-foot house and used an “old” tobacco house, but had no slave cabin on his 108-acre leasehold. In addition to using tenants on his outlying lands, Berry used slaves to operate a 166 1/3-acre farm with two tobacco houses and a corn house under the supervision of George Dausey, who lived in a 20-by-16-foot “overseer’s house” worth \$20.¹⁷

¹⁶ Stiverson, *Poverty in a Land of Plenty*, 56–84; Walsh, “Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder,” 381–84. For detailed analysis of aspects of tenant living standards, see George L. Miller, “A Tenant Farmer’s Tableware: Nineteenth-Century Ceramics from Tabb’s Purchase,” *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 69 (1974), 197–210.

¹⁷ Berry was also converting another 119 acres, worth \$773.50, into a tenancy. Unoccupied, it had a tobacco house and a “not finished,” \$70, 30-by-16-ft. framed house. Another 208 acres, worth \$2,080, may have been leased, but the records are incomplete for the part of the county where they were located. Finally, Berry owned 121 acres of forest, worth \$384, which was available for further exploitation. Maryland State Papers, Federal Direct Tax, 1798, Prince George’s County, Maryland (FDTPG), Collington and Western Branch Hundreds, Particular List of Slaves, 1; Particular List of Dwelling Houses, 1;

We can place this planter and his free dependents in the context of the 1800 wealth figures given earlier. Zachariah Berry had £6,052.16 to his name, comprising 3,183 acres of land, 70 slaves (an increase of six over the 1798 Federal Direct Tax), 57 1/2 ounces of plate, and £1,103.35 in "other" property.¹⁸ George Dausey no longer lived in Prince George's, presumably having left the county to work elsewhere. Two of the tenants, William Brown and Verlinda Newman, were among the county's many nontaxables.¹⁹ Newman Harvey held £140 in taxable property, including six slaves worth £98 altogether. Two of his slaves were children under age eight, one was a child between eight and fourteen, and one of the three women aged fourteen to thirty-six was, in the assessor's parlance, a "cripple."²⁰ George Hardy held no slaves but owned £82.94 in taxable wealth, including 45 acres. He was probably still renting in 1800, though, for the land was just large enough to support tobacco cultivation and was poor quality, worth £0.29 per acre compared to the £0.61 county average. If, like Hardy, many small landowners rented additional land to supplement their incomes, then tenancy was perhaps even more extensive than landlessness figures alone suggest.²¹

Socioeconomic opportunity was limited and, except for George Hardy, Berry's tenants never became landowners in Prince George's, or probably anywhere else. In the early colonial Chesapeake, freed indentured servants commonly obtained land, often with capital accumulated from a few years' renting after their terms had expired. Mobility declined from the late seventeenth century, however, and immobility was common by the early national era.²² Of the 1,188 non-landowners of 1800, 396 still

Particular List of Lands, Lots, Buildings, and Wharves, 2; New Scotland, Oxen, and Bladensburg Hundreds, Particular List of Lands, Lots, Buildings, and Wharves, 1; "Unknown Hundred," [Upper Marlboro, Charlotte, and Mount Calvert Hundreds], Particular List of Lands, Lots, Buildings, and Wharves, 1.

¹⁸ PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 20, 30, 41; Personal Property, 1800, 41. Federal Direct Tax assessors valued property higher than county Levy Court assessors did, although not at full market values. Maryland pounds current converted into dollars at 1:2.67.

¹⁹ Population Schedules of the Second Census of the United States, 1800, Prince George's County, Maryland, 456, 466.

²⁰ PGCTA, Personal Property, 1800, 24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Real Property, 1800, 16; Personal Property, 1800, 25. The rural net average is calculated after the size and value of town lots and improvements is subtracted from the totals for real property; Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 93–99. Lorena Walsh also found landowners renting tracts to utilize slave labor in late 18th- and early 19th-century Charles County, in "Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder," 388–89.

²² Russell R. Menard, "From Servant to Freholder: Status Mobility and Property Accumulation in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., 30 (1973), 37–64; Menard, P.M.G. Harris, and Lois Green Carr, "Opportunity and Inequality: The Distribution of Wealth on the Lower Western Shore of Maryland, 1638–1705," *MHM*, 69 (1974), 169–84; Carr and Menard, "Immigration and Opportunity: The Freedman in Early

lived in the county in 1810 (Table VII), but only seventy-four had become landowners (five were again landless by 1820), and of 158 who survived to 1820 only forty-six (excluding the five temporary landowners of 1810) became landowners. In short, 18.7 percent acquired land over one decade and just under 30 percent over two decades.

These figures overstate the extent of opportunity, though, for the propertied landless were much more likely to become landowners than the unpropertied. More than 25 percent of landless taxables in 1800 obtained land by 1810, compared to just over 10 percent of nontaxables. Almost 40 percent of landless taxables in 1800 obtained land by 1820, compared with fewer than 20 percent of nontaxables. Of the fifteen nontaxables of 1800 who obtained land by 1820, eleven had acquired some property by 1810.²³ The market price for land (distinct from assessed values) was normally £2–£10 per acre in 1800. Thus, even a small farm was well beyond the means of the majority.²⁴

As far as geographic mobility is concerned, 792 landless householders disappeared from Prince George's records between 1800 and 1810, and 1,029 between 1800 and 1820 (Table VIII). Nontaxables disappeared from the census at twice the rate of the wealthiest Prince Georgians and 50 percent more often than poorer property owners during the decade. Although it is impossible to tell how many died or relinquished the position of household head, this disparity also indicates disproportionate outmigration by the poor. Many of those who stayed may have done so because they expected to gain, and thus the upward mobility figures among survivors again overstates the extent of opportunity.

Poor migrants probably did not fare well. Those going to neighboring tobacco counties such as St. Mary's, where landlessness rates were 65 percent in 1800 and 75 percent in 1840, had little chance of buying land, although relocating to western wheat regions might have improved the odds. Most Prince George's migrants, however, were probably Kentucky-bound, as were 72 percent of St. Mary's, but opportunities to obtain land were limited even there.²⁵ Planter and speculator monopoly caused a

Colonial Maryland," in Thad W. Tate and David L. Ammerman, eds., *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society* (Chapel Hill, 1979), 206–42; Walsh, "Servitude and Opportunity in Charles County, Maryland, 1658–1705," in Aubrey C. Land, Lois Green Carr, and Edward C. Papenfuse, Jr., eds., *Law, Society, and Politics in Early Maryland* (Baltimore, 1977), 111–133; Earle, *Evolution of a Tidewater Settlement System*, 210–12; Stiverson, *Poverty in a Land of Plenty*, 45–48, 52–55; Papenfuse, "Planter Behavior and Economic Opportunity," 307–10; Menard, *Economy and Society in Early Colonial Maryland*, 51–77, 155–201, 302–20; Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 131–41, 152–61, 296–97; Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 147–60, 253–92, 328–33.

²³ Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 157–64.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 90, 40. Most landowners (287 of 524) were small yeomen with 40–280 acres, though only 58 owned under 100 acres.

²⁵ The landless figures for St. Mary's come from Marks, "Economics and Society in a Staple Plantation System," 222–29. Marks found that before 1810 about 72% of migrants

TABLE VII
ACQUISITION OF LAND BY LANDLESS TAXABLES AND NONTAXABLES IN
PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, 1810 AND 1820.

<i>Group (1800)</i>	<i>Number Remaining in 1810</i>	<i>Number Who Obtained Land by 1810</i>	<i>% Who Obtained Land by 1810</i>	<i>Number Remaining in 1820</i>	<i>Number Who Obtained Land by 1820</i>	<i>% Who Obtained Land by 1820</i>
Propertied landless	179	48	26.8	80	31	38.8
Unpropertied landless	217	26	12.0	78	15	19.2
Total	396	74	18.7	158	46	29.1

Sources: Population Schedules of the Second, Third, and Fourth Censuses of the United States, 1800, 1810, 1820, Prince George's County, Maryland; PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 1810, 1819, 1821, Personal Property, 1800.

TABLE VIII
DISAPPEARANCE FROM CENSUSES OF LANDOWNING AND NON-LANDOWNING
HOUSEHOLDERS IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, 1800-1820.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Number in 1800</i>	<i>Number Gone by 1810</i>	<i>% Gone by 1810</i>	<i>Number Gone by 1820</i>	<i>% Gone by 1820</i>
Planters	69	32	46.4	57	82.6
Yeomen	410	179	43.7	324	79.0
Smallholders	45	22	48.9	34	75.6
Subtotal	524	233	44.5	415	79.2
Propertied landless	406	227	55.9	325	80.0
Unpropertied landless	782	565	72.3	704	90.0
Subtotal	1,188	792	66.7	1,029	86.6
Total	1,712	1,025	59.9	1,444	84.3

Sources: Population Schedules of the Second, Third, and Fourth Censuses of the United States, 1800, 1810, 1820, Prince George's County, Maryland; PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 1810, 1819, 1821, Personal Property, 1800, 1810, 1820.

landlessness rate of 65 percent—as high as 84 percent in places—in the new state in 1792. With prices starting at £1 per acre for unimproved land, £2 for improved land, and up to £60 for prime, riverbank sites, most early migrants were unable to purchase farms. Speculators encouraged sales with a deferred payment plan in 1797, so that starting prices fell to \$20 (£7.50) per 100 acres by 1800 and landlessness declined to 52 percent by 1802. It rose again, especially when the government discontinued a state-sponsored installment payment program in 1806, leaving new landowners encumbered with debts. In 1820, out-of-state speculators and banks still owned a third of Kentucky realty.²⁶ Most landless Prince Georgians migrating to Kentucky, therefore, probably remained landless.

As wealth differentiation suggests and evidence from leases confirms, power in early national landlord-tenant relations was by no means equal, although there was room for negotiation and compromise. In colonial times, the social relations of tenancy changed in accordance with increases in population and economic inequality. To get land under cultivation in the settlement period, landlords sometimes offered incentives of low rents or no rents for a number of years, long leases, equity and alienation rights in leaseholds, and a good deal of freedom in leasehold use. As land became scarcer and dearer and as planters acquired greater wealth relative to small farmers, landlords gradually transformed tenancy into an institution that favored themselves more and leaseholders less. The process was highly advanced by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when tenancies were characterized by high rents, short durations, and some new and some possibly further elaborated prescriptions and proscriptions on equity, alienation, and leasehold use.²⁷ Many lease provisions put landlords and tenants at odds. Tenants often acted against landlords, perhaps with some success in individual instances and

from St. Mary's County moved to Kentucky, 13% elsewhere in Maryland, 5% to Virginia, and the rest further afield. After 1810, the proportion moving to the Deep South and southwest increased. The same was probably true for Prince Georgians. She also found disproportionate outmigration by the poor, especially the landless, which was also the case in Prince George's. "The Rage for Kentucky: Emigration from St. Mary's County, 1790-1810," *Geographical Perspectives on Maryland's Past*, University of Maryland Occasional Papers in Geography, 4 (Apr. 1979), ed. Robert D. Mitchell and Edward K. Muller, 108-28; Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 124-30.

²⁶ Teute, "Land, Liberty, and Labor in the Post-Revolutionary Era," 184-311; Soltow, "Land Inequality on the Frontier," 275-91; "Kentucky Wealth at the End of the Eighteenth Century," 617-33.

²⁷ Bliss, "Rise of Tenancy in Virginia," 429, 430-33; Earle, *Evolution of a Tidewater Settlement System*, 212-13; Stiverson, *Poverty in a Land of Plenty*, 1-27; Walsh, "Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder," 374-77, 379-80, 386-87; Menard, *Economy and Society in Early Colonial Maryland*, 75-76; Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 132-35.

possibly mitigating potentially worse developments in tenancy. Tenant resistance was, however, limited in scope and effect.

Partly because tenants had some leverage in relations with landlords, planters generally preferred to use slaves. An exception was Samuel Snowden, the county's third largest landowner in 1800, with 5,703 1/2 acres, who freed his seventy-one slaves in the 1780s, presumably for philanthropic reasons, although he left no motive on record. In 1798, at least eight free blacks and four tenants worked his land, the former probably for wages, as they were distinguished from the latter who may have been either black or white. Snowden's real estate was worth an average of only £0.30 per acre, half the county mean, suggesting that it was under used. Of sixty-nine planters with more than 800 acres in 1800 (landholdings that could sustain twenty laborers or more), Snowden was one of only three non-slaveholders.²⁸ More typical was Rosalie Calvert's view of the relative merits of slaves and tenants. In 1804, she wrote her father, Henri Stier, that she and her husband had "too much [land] to give it the attention it requires to be productive. If you rent it out, you have the drawback of not being on the spot, [and] tenants destroy the forest, impoverish the land, and then you can't be sure of being paid."²⁹ By contrast, planters or overseers could supervise slaves directly and literally whip up profits from them. Mastery over slaves was so great, for Rosalie Calvert, that she referred to exploiting land with them as "cultivating it oneself."³⁰ Calvert's view was undoubtedly exaggerated, but planters certainly had greater power over slaves than over tenants.

The Calverts and many other planters had too few slaves fully to exploit their land. The sixty-nine planters with 800 acres or more in 1800 owned close to 118,000 acres of rural land and 3,000 slaves, amounting to an equivalent of 1,631 1/2 full-time laborers (Table IX). Their mean labor-to-land ratio was thus one slave per 72 acres, well short of the ideal of between 1:40 and 1:50 for tobacco cultivation, even without accounting for illness, disability, pregnancy, and employment in nonagricultural or extra-agricultural labor. In 1810 and 1820 the ratios were 1:83 and 1:72.³¹

²⁸ Samuel Snowden to his slaves, Manumission, Prince George's County Land Records (PGCLR), FF 1, June 12, 1781, 135-37; FF 2, Sept. 27, 1785, 431-32; FDTGP, Eastern Branch and Rock Creek Hundreds, Particular List of Dwelling Houses, 4; Particular List of Lands, Lots, Buildings, and Wharves, 7; PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 32; Personal Property, 1800, 38; Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 103-07.

²⁹ Rosalie Eugenia (Stier) Calvert (REC) to Henri Jean Stier (HJS), Dec. 4, 1804, *Mistress of Riversdale*, ed. Callcott, 102.

³⁰ REC to HJS, Dec. 19, 1813, *ibid.*, 260.

³¹ For land and labor requirements in tobacco cultivation see Aubrey C. Land, "Economic Behavior in a Planting Society: The Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake," *Journal of Southern History*, 33 (1967), 473; Papenfuse, "Planter Behavior and Economic Opportunity," 303-06; Earle, *Evolution of a Tidewater Settlement System*, 24-30; Kulikoff,

TABLE IX
LABOR-LAND RATIOS OF PLANTERS IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, 1800-1820.

Year	Rural Acres	Slaves under Age 8	Slaves Ages 8-13	Male Slaves Ages 14-44	Female Slaves Ages 14-35	Slaves 45+ (male), 36+ (female)	Total Slaves	Full Hands	Labor- Land Ratio
1800	117,777.56	836	437	667	508	476	2,924	1,631.5	1:72.19
1810	105,714.53	610	325	552	381	347	2,125	1,269.0	1:83.31
1820	101,537.15	652	357	625	429	349	2,412	1,407.0	1:72.17

Sources: Population Schedules of the Second, Third, and Fourth Censuses of the United States, 1800, 1810, 1820, Prince George's County, Maryland; PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 1810, 1819, 1821, Personal Property, 1800, 1810, 1820.

Planters held 800 acres or more.

Planters had numerous options for dealing with their apparent labor shortage. One was simply to leave large tracts uncultivated, offering the advantages of extra fallow and forest cultivation. If land appreciated in value, it could be sold. Another was to plant more wheat and other food-crops that were less labor-intensive than tobacco. Alternatively, planters could hire slaves and wage laborers. Planters made all these choices at different times depending on prevailing economic conditions and their particular temporary needs. As a result, their land generally remained an economic asset, judging by the way it retained its value. In 1800, 1810, and 1820, planters' land (minus town lots and built improvements) was worth an average of £0.69, £1.68, and \$4.38 per acre respectively, compared with the average value of land owned by yeomen in the same years: £0.52, £1.37, and \$3.81.³²

Yet another way of making land productive without sufficient slaves was to lease it to tenants. In 1798, at least 129 people were renting out land in Prince George's County, thirty-four of them to more than one tenant. William Dudley Digges, owner of 4,253 acres, with fourteen ten-

Tobacco and Slaves, 47-48; and Walsh, "Slave Life, Slave Society, and Tobacco Production in the Tidewater Chesapeake, 1620-1820," in Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville, 1993), 175, and "Summing the Parts: Implications for Estimating Chesapeake Output and Income Subregionally," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., 56 (1999), 55-80, 87-89. To derive labor-land ratios I discounted slaves under the age of 8 years, counted those aged 8-14, men over 45, and women over 36 as half hands, and men aged 14-45 and women aged 14-36 as full hands; "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 99-103, 247-50.

³² Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 97-98, 234-37, and for further discussion of planters' options with land see 258-82.

ants, was the largest multiple renter.³³ Of the sixty-nine planters in 1800, no fewer than twenty-three were landlords between 1798 and 1800, including at least eight of the fifteen largest planters with 2,000 acres or more.³⁴ Mary Wootton leased out some of the more than 1,500 acres she managed as Turner Wootton's widow.³⁵ Other Prince George's planters may have rented but left no leasing records, and still others may have leased land outside the county just as seventeen nonresidents were absentee landlords of Prince George's realty. Some larger yeomen were landlords, too, including Francis Magruder, Tobias Belt, and Thomas Richardson, who owned 798 1/4, 625 1/2, and 578 3/4 acres respectively.³⁶ Even a few small-scale landowners, such as Rezin Beck, with 116 acres, and Richard Ponsonby, with five acres, leased.³⁷

Leasing was attractive to many owners of excess land over labor. It was also considered practical by those who wished to buy land even while owning too few slaves to cultivate it. Proposing "a very valuable acquisition" for her father in 1815, Rosalie Calvert asked whether he preferred "to rent this property and risk the tenant cutting down the fine forest to grow corn each year, thus impoverishing the soil, or on the other hand, lose the interest on a considerable investment." She advised him to buy. Reckoning normally on a "five or six percent return" on the value of land, she believed renting was well worth the risk.³⁸

Tenancies were based on cash renting, sharecropping, or fixed-crop payments. Apparently, cash renting was the least common form of farm tenancy. In a relatively cash-scarce economy it made sense for landlords and tenants to exchange crops or crop notes, especially because tobacco

³³ FDTPG, Particular List of Lands, Lots, Buildings, and Wharves, Eastern Branch and Rock Creek Hundreds, 3-4.

³⁴ Twenty-one planters with 800 acres or more according to the 1800 county assessments were noted in the Federal Direct Tax as renting land to tenants, including 6 of the 15 with more than 2,000 acres. Two others are revealed as renters by leases in the Land Records: Edward Henry Calvert to Henry Harvey, Lease, PGCLR, JRM 8, Nov. 8, 1800, 363-65; Walter Dulany Addison to John Bayne and Ebsworth Bayne, Lease, JRM 6, May 19, 1798, 351-56; to John Davis, Lease, JRM 8, July 7, 1801, 570-74; PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, I, II, 15; Personal Property, 1800, II, 15, 16, 17.

³⁵ FDTPG, Particular List of Lands, Lots, Buildings and Wharves, Collington and Western Branch Hundreds, 13; Horsepen and Patuxent Hundreds, 16; PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 28, 29, 43; Personal Property, 1800, 3, 31, 44.

³⁶ FDTPG, Particular List of Lands, Lots, Buildings and Wharves, Collington and Western Branch Hundreds, 9; Horsepen and Patuxent Hundreds, 2; Eastern Branch and Rock Creek Hundreds, 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, New Scotland, Oxen, and Bladensburg Hundreds, 2; Particular List of Dwelling Houses, New Scotland, Oxen, and Bladensburg Hundreds, 11.

³⁸ REC to HJS, Mar. 20, 1815, to HJS, Aug. 2, 1810, to Charles Jean Stier (CJS), Feb. 18, 1814, *Mistress of Riversdale*, ed. Callcott, 223, quotations on 279, 280, 263. Robert Carter of Nomini Hall, George Washington, and others wrote about the dilemmas of tenancy in these terms during the 1790s; Bliss, "Rise of Tenancy in Virginia," 433-36.

had always represented money in the Chesapeake. When cash renting, landlords used advance payments and rapid repossession as insurance against default. Both measures were included in the single cash-rent farm lease extant for this period. In 1800, for instance, Henry Harvey rented 230 acres from Edward Henry Calvert for “five pounds Current money . . . in hand paid” and “three pounds nine Shillings Sterling Money and two Capons” every Christmas. Calvert could repossess if payment was thirty days late.³⁹

Nevertheless, as Edward Calvert’s sister-in-law discovered, cash renters sometimes defaulted. Rosalie Calvert wrote her father in 1814, regarding land that he owned and she supervised in his absence, that “two tenants who are staying there have not paid their rent so you won’t earn any return this year.” Next year “perhaps some new [tenants] would do better,” or else she could “sell it right away at a good profit”; Stier acted on her advice that “most of this land is wooded and since it is only thirteen miles from Baltimore and on a good road, it will increase in value daily,” even uncultivated. In 1815, “all our poor tenant farmers have been so hard hit by the war that it was impossible to rent this year. . . . [Another property] is in the same predicament. There are two wretched houses on that property, each rented for \$35; one of the tenants defaulted, so for the year 1814, I have only received \$35.” Mrs. Calvert expressed sympathy for the poor tenants, but her husband (who grew up in the county, had ancestral ties to it, and likely had more face-to-face contact with local people of lower class backgrounds) probably felt more personal and community pressure to be lenient with tenants than she did. In this instance, neither Calvert did anything to relieve the admitted wretchedness of tenant housing or the hardship caused by evictions.⁴⁰ But it is possible that these tenants were not locally known and that the Calverts, and most likely George, might have been more generous with tenants with whom they had some personal association or felt some community-based obligation.

Cash renting seems to have been more common for tenants whose primary occupation was nonagricultural than it was for farmers. In 1800, Thomas Grafton Addison leased “Daniel Moxley two acres of land situated on the River Potomak” for thirty-eight years for “yearly . . . Eight pounds Maryland currency.” The small acreage and riverside location suggest that Moxley was a fisherman or ferryman. Addison nevertheless minimized the cash-rent risk by asserting that if Moxley failed to pay his

³⁹ Calvert-Harvey Lease, 363.

⁴⁰ REC to HJS, June 10, 1814, to HJS, Mar. 20, 1815, *Mistress of Riversdale*, ed. Callcott, 269, 280. Virginia landlords also felt sympathy but looked after their material interests by evicting anyway; Bliss, “Rise of Tenancy in Virginia,” 435–36.

rent within sixty days of January 1, he could “repossess and re-enjoy as if this Indenture had never been made.” In the same year, the same landlord secured advance payment from an artisan tenant, leasing a mill to Richard Neale for “two hundred dollars to him in hand paid . . . for which the said Neale is to have Credit, untill the whole is exhausted at the rate of forty six dollars a year,” although Addison paid Neale interest on the down payment.⁴¹

Landlords could profit from cash renting to artisans. George Calvert leased a mill and race on land “not exceeding five acres” to Thomas Ewell in 1812 for \$500 per year, plus \$5 daily for exclusive use of millrace water during the dry season. He rented a Bladensburg plot in 1820 to Thomas Ferrall for only \$6 per annum, but this was a developmental lease requiring Ferrall to “build a good and Substantial framed grainery or Store House two Stories high of twenty four feet in width and length to be supported on a sufficient brick or stone foundation” or to pay an extra \$12 annually until he did so.⁴² Even skilled artisan tenants who had resources of their own suffered high rates of exploitation if they were involved in capital-intensive trades. Rosalie Calvert “rented an acre of land near Spa Spring to build a tannery. The man who undertook it is quite industrious and a good manager, but he doesn’t have enough capital. In leasing him the site for a term of 23 years, I planned on lending him half the necessary capital and on taking half of the profits. Being so nearby, it could be easily supervised.” Although the venture was “thwarted by the Emperor of the French,” her expectation of half the tanner’s profits shows that much could be made from the economic dependence of artisans, and the tanner perhaps stood to gain a reasonable living too.⁴³

Sharecroppers, as in the post-Civil War era, rented for thirds and halves. In 1782, Enoch Jenkins leased $33 \frac{1}{3}$ acres from Dorothy Coombes for “the one third part of all the produce of the . . . premises and all the profits thereon Accruing or any wise Appertaining.” In 1800 Nicholas Lowe paid Thomas Addison “one half of the Tobacco, one half of the small Grain & one third of the corn which may be made annually . . . also one third of the fodder and straw.” Lowe also was “to manage the fishing as a compensation for which & his being at one half of the Expense the profits arising therefrom are to be equally divided between” Addison and Lowe.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Addison to Moxley, Lease, PGCLR, JRM 7, Oct. 28, 1799, 477–479; to Richard Neale, Lease, JRM 8, Nov. 2, 1799, 63–64.

⁴² George Calvert to Thomas Ewell, Lease, PGCLR, JRM 15, Feb. 25, 1812, 575–77; to Thomas Ferrall, Lease, AB 1, July 18, 1820, 383–87.

⁴³ REC to HJS, Aug. 30, 1810, *Mistress of Riversdale*, ed. Callcott, 229.

⁴⁴ Dorothy Coombes to Enoch Jenkins, Lease, PGCLR, JRM 1, Apr. 26, 1792, 179–80; Thomas Addison to Nicholas Lowe, Lease, JRM 7, Jan. 21, 1800, 606–07.

Fixed-crop renting was the most common form of tenancy, probably suiting both landlords and tenants. For landlords, sharecropping was speculative. Good harvests could produce larger rewards than fixed rents, but bad weather or pests would leave a share of nearly nothing. In contrast, fixed-crop rents had ceilings, so even after crop failures, losses could be recovered later as rent arrears or labor. Prince Georgian planters wished to maximize profits but also sought to minimize risk.⁴⁵ As all kinds of tenancy were risky, they may have favored the possibly less rewarding but safer and still lucrative fixed-crop rents. At the same time, fixed-crop tenants probably paid less than a third of their income in rent, so this form of renting may have been their preference, too.

Fixed-crop tenancy reduced the chances of default inherent in cash renting, although problems remained. Landlords guarded against paying with trashy produce by stipulating an inspection and collection at one of the county's Levy Court-run warehouses. Thomas Harwood, Jr., for example, in 1792 required William Mayhew to pay "5000 pounds of net inspected Crop Tobacco at Magruder's Warehouse on or before 20 June every year." Three years later, Mayhew agreed to pay Ann Mary Gates 2,000 pounds of "Nett Crop Tobacco at Magruder's Warehouse." Thomas and Barbara Lane preferred to receive their rent in notes issued by warehouses, requiring John Smith to pay 1,800 pounds of "good sound inspected Tobacco clear of Cask in Crop notes . . . to be issued by Nottingham Inspecting warehouse."⁴⁶ The cost to tenants was high, for inspectors may have declared up to a third of a crop unexportable; rejected yields could still be sold locally, albeit more cheaply—an improvement on the period from the Maryland inspecting act of 1748 to the Revolution when substandard tobacco was burned.⁴⁷

It is little wonder that fixed-crop tenants would pay in poor tobacco if they could, for even though renting on such terms was probably the cheapest form of tenancy it was still expensive. Most leases identified farms by name without recording acreage, rendering it impossible to cal-

⁴⁵ Bliss, "Rise of Tenancy in Virginia," 440, found Virginia tenants laboring in lieu of rent arrears. I discuss early national Prince Georgian planters' economic thought and strategies in "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 253–92.

⁴⁶ Harwood to Mayhew, Lease, PGCLR, JRM 2, Dec. 11, 1792, 26–30; Gates to Mayhew, Lease, JRM 4, Oct. 12, 1795, 176–79; Lane and Lane to Smith, Lease, JRM 1, July 15, 1791, 128–29.

⁴⁷ Papenfuss and Kulikoff found inspectors deeming up to a third of tobacco unmarketable, although the latter discovered variations downward too, while Earle estimates that inspectors rejected more than half of poor farmers' tobacco: "Planter Behavior and Economic Opportunity," 303, 305; *Tobacco and Slaves*, 113–15; *Evolution of a Tidewater Settlement System*, 25–26. It is likely that farmers a half century and more after the Maryland inspection act of 1748 had adapted and grew less trashy tobacco, although for small farmers any loss of income remained important.

culate rents as portions of tenant incomes. In a few cases where size was recorded, however, it appears that fixed-crop tenants probably paid between a quarter and a third of their income in rent, although given the small number of cases and large number of unknown variables this conclusion must be highly tentative.⁴⁸

In 1769 Benjamin Brashears leased 100 acres from William Turner Wootton for twenty-one years for "yearly Eight hundred pounds of Crop Tobacco" to be delivered at Queen Anne warehouse but not specifically in net crop after inspection. In the eighteenth century, one laborer could produce 1,000-1,500 pounds of tobacco in a year, although in time production in some areas fell to 700-800 pounds, meaning, in effect, rising rents.⁴⁹ By the upper calculation, Brashears and one full-time or a few part-time hands might have made 2,000-3,000 pounds, and by the lower calculation 1,400-1,600 pounds. He thus paid either as little as two-fifths or as much as one-half of his tobacco in rent, keeping the rest plus all income from food crops, animal husbandry, and any other economic activity, probably amounting to over two-thirds of his total income. In addition, he had to build

a Dwelling House[,] Tobacco House and all the other necessary out Houses fit and Convenient for a Tenant, and also to Plant . . . One hundred & fifty Apple Trees in a regular Orchard each Tree being distant at least Forty feet, One hundred good Peach Trees and fifty good Cherry Trees in regular Orchard each Tree Distant at least Fifteen feet, and the said Different sort of Fruit Trees to trim and keep in good Order and Inclosed by a good fence.⁵⁰

Once the orchards had matured, Brashears might profit from fruit harvests, but these improvements ultimately benefited Wootton and thus represented extra rent.

⁴⁸ Colonial rents varied according to whether they were for tenancies on private, church, or proprietary land. The portion of income tenants paid varied too, depending on land quality, availability of labor, and other sources of wealth. The same may have been true for the post-Revolutionary era. Walsh found that early rents amounted to a quarter, sometimes half, of tenant income, but rose considerably from the mid-18th century. The rise was partly offset later because increasing slaveholding among tenants enabled some to cultivate more tobacco. See "Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder," 374-77, 380-81, 388-89; Earle, *Evolution of a Tidewater Settlement System*, 212-13; and Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 134.

⁴⁹ Land, "Economic Behavior in a Planting Society," 473; Papenfuse, "Planter Behavior and Economic Opportunity," 303-06; Walsh, "Slave Life, Slave Society, and Tobacco Production," 175; "Summing the Parts," 55-80, 87-89.

⁵⁰ Wootton to Brashears, Lease, PGCLR, AA 2, Oct. 28, 1769, 29-30. With a 21-year leasehold, Brashears had an interest in soil conservation and, though not limited by his lease, would probably not have cultivated more tobacco than this.

John Smith's case is similar. Beginning in 1791, he leased a farm from Thomas and Barbara Lane for thirteen years for 1,800 pounds of tobacco per annum. The acreage was not recorded, but Smith was allowed to cultivate exactly "fifteen acres in tobacco," permitting him to make, with help, between 3,500 and 7,500 pounds (because the specified land was hitherto uncultivated and fresh, he most likely produced the larger amount). Smith's tobacco first had to pass through an inspection warehouse. If a third of the crop was substandard, his rent represented either almost three quarters of a 2,450-pound exportable yield or, more likely, just over a third of a 5,000-pound exportable yield. Smith may have had more top-notch tobacco than that, sold the rest locally, and profited from food crops, animal husbandry, and other economic activities. But he also had "to put and Keep the Houses in good and tenantable repair . . . plant three hundred Apple trees three hundred Peach Ditto three hundred Cherry Ditto which [illegible] to inclose and keep from being destroyed by Creatures" and clear fifteen acres of forest for tobacco.⁵¹ As with Brashears, improvements added substantially to Smith's rent.

As well as representing extra rent, developmental requirements were among numerous conditions written into leases. Every extant lease from the period required improvements to be made, as was the case in colonial times when uncultivated land needed to be broken. Later specifications may have been more elaborate than earlier ones, although the evidence is not full enough to be certain.

Tenants in the first years of Independence probably earned equity for their efforts and expense less frequently than their colonial counterparts.⁵² Rarely did they obtain financial assistance to make improvements and even then it was usually limited. Ann Mary Gates expected William Mayhew to "repair the dwelling house and build a Tobacco house in the most reasonable manner . . . at the proper cost and charge of the said Ann Mary Gates except the lodging & diet of the workmen to be deducted out of the rent." Walter Dulany Addison obliged John and Ebsworth Bayne "at their and his own proper cost and charge . . . [to] keep up all and singular the houses[,] buildings[,] fences and Improvements of every kind upon the said plantation in good and Tenantable repair."⁵³ These were exceptions, however, and the labor and value added to land through improvements usually benefited landlords.

⁵¹ Lane-Smith Lease, 128-29.

⁵² Bliss, "Rise of Tenancy in Virginia," 431; Walsh, "Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder," 375; Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 134.

⁵³ Gates-Mayhew Lease, 177-78; Addison-Bayne Lease, 355.

Tenants might have gained from improvements as long as they held their leases, except that most tenancies were fairly short. Early colonial leaseholds were frequently for life, three lives, or ninety-nine years, offering security, a saleable asset, and a legacy.⁵⁴ Early national fixed-crop farm tenancies generally lasted seven to ten years. Philip Green even leased from Margaret Conaway for one year only, and there may have been others like him.⁵⁵ Longer-term leases tended to be exceptional in some way: Henry Harvey's life-lease was a cash rental; Enoch Jenkins rented for his landlord's lifetime on a sharecrop basis; Daniel Moxley's thirty-eight-year tenure was for non- or extra-agricultural purposes; and Thomas Ewell's ninety-nine-year leasehold was on a Bladensburg mill.⁵⁶

Short leases precluded subletting and selling leaseholds (which had been sometimes restricted in longer colonial tenancies too). Even in the few longer-term leases that recognized such rights, they were circumscribed. Thomas Ewell transferred his mill leasehold to William Grayson and partners of Washington, D. C., and Thomas Ferrall his Bladensburg granary to Levi Sheriff, seemingly without obstruction by George Calvert. But the later transactions were recorded with Calvert as landlord, indicating his control of procedures. Moxley could sell his lease only if "Thomas G. Addison his heirs & assigns shall have the preference and refusal in any sale . . . he or they giving as high a price as can be obtained from any other person." Henry Harvey faced a fine of "Twelve pounds Sterling money for and upon every letting . . . the premises or any

⁵⁴ Walsh, "Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder," 375-76.

⁵⁵ Jason Jones, administrator of the estate of Margaret Conaway of Anne Arundel County, deceased, versus Philip Green, June 26, 1811, Prince George's County General Court (PGCGC), Box 19, Folder 16. This court case arose because Green defaulted on his rent and the documents include portions of a lease that was not registered in the Land Records. The rent, "Two thousand Pounds of Sound Merchantable Tobacco and Ten barrels of Merchantable Corn," indicates the same means of payment and concern over quality contained in Land Record leases. One-year leases probably required fewer improvements than longer leases, although Green was to "till clear and Cultivate the said Land as above described . . . [and] leave the said Plantation in as Good repair as when he took Possession." The lease, though, is incomplete, and there may have been improvement requirements missing from the record. This case does not indicate that leases not registered in Land Records were all one-year long and that, therefore, Land Record leases were untypical. In a suit brought by Robert Jones and wife against Zadock Duvall for the eviction of a tenant named Rachael Cecil on July 24, 1813 (for which the surviving court records contain only a petition), the leasehold (not recorded in the Land Records) was supposed to last a decade. PGCGC, Box 20, Folder 1. Additional material on period leasing can be found in the Robert Darnall Ledger, 1787-1821; Brooke Beale Ledger, 1790-1798; Digges of Warburton Papers, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore; and Wootton-Brashears Lease, 29.

⁵⁶ Calvert-Harvey Lease, 364; Jenkins-Coombes Lease, 180; Addison-Moxley Lease, 477; Calvert-Ewell Lease, 576.

part thereof without” permission. Thomas Mattingly would have forfeited equity if he either defaulted on his rent or sublet without Frances Edelen’s consent.⁵⁷

On balance, short-term leases benefited landlords more than tenants. Some tenants may have preferred a short tenure, even without equity or alienation rights, because it allowed them to move to other farms or to undertake wage work. Short-term tenants could maximize exploitation of land without suffering long-term diseconomies. In Rosalie Calvert’s words, leased land “would deteriorate in value every year because the tenant isn’t interested in improving it but rather in getting all he can out of it.” Potential problems for landlords were outweighed by the advantage of having tenants who could be removed if and when slaves were available to work the land. As Calvert put it, referring to land she proposed to buy for her father as an inheritance for her children, “our negroes are multiplying and within a few years could cultivate these properties, which in the meantime could be leased out, although they wouldn’t produce that much interest.”⁵⁸

The risk of tenants exhausting the soil and other resources was minimized by various restrictions and requirements. A common way of ensuring that land was not exhausted was to limit the quantity of labor that could be applied to it. Benjamin Brashears was forbidden to “suffer more hands to Work or till the Demised Land than himself his wife and . . . such of his Children that shall be at any time under the age of Eighteen years, and in case he shall have no Children capable to work then only to take in one able hand.” Thomas Harwood, Jr., similarly restricted William Mayhew to “working six hands besides his Children and no more” on his leasehold (this suggests that Mayhew was a better-off slaveholding tenant).⁵⁹ Landlords also required crop rotation—an apparently novel practice in early national tenancy. Thomas Addison allowed Nicholas Lowe “to Cultivate at least twenty Acres annually in Tobacco [and] the remainder of the said Land alternately in Indian Corn and small Grain.” After earmarking land for tobacco cultivation and timber cutting, Harwood ordered his tenant to “sew in small grain each shift of Corn ground every other year except one, the said William Mayhew being allowed the Liberty of tending the whole of the Corn ground in corn any one year he may think proper” and forbade him to

⁵⁷ George Calvert to Grayson, John J. Still, and John Williams, Lease, PGCLR, JRM 15, June 7, 1813, 579–81; to Sheriff, Lease, AB 2, Apr. 1, 1826, 285–87; Addison-Moxley Lease, 478; Calvert-Harvey Lease, 364; Edelen to Mattingly, Lease, AB 2, Sept. 14, 1822, 530–31.

⁵⁸ REC to CJS, Feb. 18, 1814, to HJS, Aug. 2, 1810, *Mistress of Riversdale*, ed. Callcott, 263, 223; Walsh, “Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder,” 392, 394.

⁵⁹ Wootton-Brashears Lease, 30; Harwood-Mayhew Lease, 1792, 29.

“tend any of the Tobacco Ground in Corn which is well for manuring and making Tobacco.”⁶⁰

Lowe and Mayhew were encouraged to cultivate minimum quantities of tobacco, but landlords set maximums for others. John Davis’s twenty-one-year lease from Walter Addison stipulated “that after the first ten years from [1801] he . . . shall confine the Crops issuing from these premises altogether and intirely to Timothy rye grass and clover.” Rent comprised extensive swamp clearing through building a bank, which “is to be solid[,] lasting and permanent and to be completely proof against the wind and tides.” When the lease was up, Davis was supposed to leave a crop of “timothy in complete and perfect order for the Scythe at the ensuing harvest thereafter.” The Calverts also profitably used tenants to cultivate certain crops: “Our wheat, which we leased out in the neighborhood, made us about 500 bushels.”⁶¹

Landlords also regulated use of other resources, especially forest and even fallen timber. Although this tactic was not new, it seems to have been wielded more frequently and restrictively over time as timber became scarcer and more valuable. William Wootton told Brashears that he could not “Sell or Destroy any timber in the said Premises nor suffer it to be done by any Person whatever nor apply any but to the necessary repairs Buildings and use of the Demised Premises.” Mary Franklin forbade Walter Duvall “to sell cut or waste any wood or timber off the said land only for the use of the farm.” Landlords were often specific about where wood could be obtained and how it could be used. Thomas Addison, for instance, would not allow Robert Baillie to cut “growing Woods or timber excepting for Repairing of Houses & ca. The fire wood to be used by the said Baillie to be taken from the dry or lying down wood. . . . Baillie may have fence Rails that may be necessary” for the plantation only. So important was the preservation of timber that even possible kinship did not prevent William Wilson from threatening James Wilson with eviction if he used more wood than necessary for fences, buildings, implements, and fuel or if he cut down, sold, or removed timber or allowed “any waste of any nature.”⁶²

Landlords sometimes reserved portions of tenements for their own uses. Harwood could “at any time . . . plant an orchard of fruit trees” on Mayhew’s leasehold. Edward Calvert required Henry Harvey to “reserve

⁶⁰ Addison-Lowe Lease, 607; Harwood-Mayhew Lease, 28, 29.

⁶¹ Addison-Davis Lease, 570–74; REC to HJS, Aug. 20, 1805, *Mistress of Riversdale*, ed. Callcott, 126.

⁶² Wootton-Brashears Lease, 30; Mary Franklin to Duvall, Lease, Oct. 22, 1822, PGCLR, AB 2, 367–68; Thomas Addison to Baillie, Lease, JRM 8, Jan. 23, 1800, 220–21; William Wilson to James Wilson, Lease, JRM 15, Apr. 5, 1812, 352–54.

ten Acres . . . which Shall never be cleared” and on request “relinquish his right and title and interest in and to . . . the aforementioned land . . . now occupied by the said Henry Harvey so as to include a convenient distillery which the said Edward Henry Calvert now wishes to erect.” Walter Addison kept from John Davis “exclusive right priviledge and power to and Over all and every fishing landing . . . houses most generally used for the convenience of the fishing landing . . . so much land as may be necessary for the Road next adjoining the River so as to make the Road twenty feet wide and also so much land . . . [for] fishing houses.”⁶³ None of these leases offered compensation or remission if the landlords took up their options, although rents may have been lower to allow for such provisions.

Landlords reserved inspection rights to deter tenants from exploiting leaseholds illicitly. Mayhew’s lease, typically, allowed Harwood “from time to time and at all times . . . to enter upon and view the State of the demised premises.” This policy is not surprising, but the vagueness of many of the qualitative aspects of lease provisions offered potential legal advantages to landlords. Those wishing to evict a tenant might easily have decided that a farm was not “in good order and Tenantable repair” or that fences were not mended “well and Sufficiently.” No less a person than George Washington at least considered such possibilities. He once told his agent, Battaile Muse, to “set aside every old lease where the covenants, with respect to orchards and buildings, . . . are not complied with—if there [is] reason to suppose the lotts [will] let for more than their present rent.”⁶⁴ There is no evidence of Prince Georgian landlords taking such action, but the threat no doubt encouraged tenants to make sure that their improvements were well made.

Although leases reflected the imbalance of economic power between landlords and tenants, landlords did not get everything their own way. Rosalie Calvert was “unable to rent out [her father’s Oatland estate in 1817] since it had no houses, etc. And [tenants] who have sufficient funds to undertake so large a farm prefer to buy a smaller one where they are their own master—or else they are off to Kentucky.”⁶⁵ Thus, at least better-off non-landowners had some negotiating power in landlord-tenant relations. This bargaining position may explain why, for example, fixed-crop renting was common even though it was probably cheapest for ten-

⁶³ Harwood-Mayhew Lease, 30; Calvert-Harvey Lease, 365; Addison-Davis Lease, 573–74.

⁶⁴ Harwood-Mayhew Lease, 29, 30; Addison-Bayne Lease, 352. Washington cited in Bliss, “Rise of Tenancy in Virginia,” 438–39.

⁶⁵ REC to HJS, May 12, 1817, *Mistress of Riversdale*, ed. Callcott, 318.

ants. Also, lease prescriptions and proscriptions might have been greater still had tenants not had some leverage with landlords.

Leasehold was a highly contentious issue, judging by the frequency, variety, and preciseness of instructions and limitations. Court records contain no direct evidence of tenant resistance, such as instances of litigation by landlords for lease breaking (except one case of rent default).⁶⁶ This apparent absence of conflict, however, may merely reflect the record's incompleteness or the possibility that lease-breaking tenants evaded the law by absconding. Alternatively, landlords perhaps simply did not bother, as Washington put it, to "sue a beggar and catch a louse."⁶⁷ Rosalie Calvert's complaints about tenants exhausting the land and cutting down forests strongly suggest tenant resistance to restrictive leaseholding. Although Calvert was given to general condemnation of working people, actual experience may explain the specificity of her allegations that "the tenant ruins your land, never fertilizing it, and cuts your woods without the slightest regard—if he does not take it to market!"⁶⁸ Of course, what she saw as tenants' offenses against her property rights may have been regarded as principled defenses of their property rights by her tenants. Perhaps they felt that, because they paid the rent, the trees belonged to them. Or they may have possessed a more generalized notion that, as hard-working people, they deserved a little more reward for their efforts and their landlords a little less.

The early eighteenth-century tobacco-cutting riots and warehouse arson by poor farmers protesting invidious tobacco regulation practices that Allan Kulikoff describes are absent after the Revolution.⁶⁹ Tenants may have acted individually against individual landlords, but apparently not collectively. An individualistic form of resistance may have reflected a possessive-individualist ideological content. Tenants appear to have contested where their own property rights began and those of their landlords ended, but no evidence exists of radical assault on private property rights per se. In fact, in claiming unrestricted use of leaseholds by exploiting land and other resources just as they pleased, and especially in marketing the proceeds, tenants were affirming notions of private property rights by asserting their own over their landlords'. As well as selling timber, numerous enterprising Virginia tenants illicitly sold their leaseholds and ran off with the money.⁷⁰ Some Prince Georgians may have done the same.

⁶⁶ Jason Jones, administrator of the estate of Margaret Conaway, deceased, versus Philip Green, June 26, 1811, PGCGC, Box 19, Folder 16.

⁶⁷ Cited in Bliss, "Rise of Tenancy in Virginia," 434.

⁶⁸ REC to HJS, Mar. 17, 1812, *Mistress of Riversdale*, ed. Callcott, 251. This was also the experience of some Virginia landlords; Bliss, "Rise of Tenancy in Virginia," 436.

⁶⁹ Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 107–16.

⁷⁰ Bliss, "Rise of Tenancy," 436, 437, found evidence of Virginia tenants absconding, including George Washington's complaint on returning from defeating the British in 1783

It would be surprising if Chesapeake tenants had thought and acted otherwise. Aside from Kulikoff, most historians portray tobacco society and culture as highly capitalistic and, though not without community bonds, individualistic. Commercial production and exchange and their congeries of accompanying values penetrated even poorer free households from early colonial times.⁷¹ Later landlord-tenant relations, then, are unlikely to have taken the form of a class conflict of capitalist planters against household producers augured by burgeoning markets—a popular interpretation in the current historiography of early national rural economy and society. Rather, those relations entailed individual battles over issues of self-interest. The issues were important, and tenants may have viewed their rights to more reward for their rent and labor as compelling matters of principle, but conflict was nevertheless confined within the ideological boundaries of possessive individualism.

A meeting of minds between early national planters and some landless whites is further suggested by shared commitments to slavery, at least among the substantial minority of slaveholding tenants. Despite wealth inequality and inequities in landlord-tenant relations, a significant number of poor whites had a stake in slave society. In a sense, the interest of landless slaveholders in slavery was greater than that of large planters, for even one slave or two likely represented the principal property and only major capital they possessed. Ownership of slaves may thus have blunted any resentment of landlords that tenants may have felt. At the same time, slavery probably divided tenants fortunate enough to own slaves from others who were not and were never likely to be slaveholders. Slaveholding rates and general wealth distribution figures do not suggest a united class of tenants. Even if tenants shared many economic interests in opposition to landlords, the tenantry was probably as diversified in socioeconomic perspectives as it was in material conditions. Such differentiated and divided conditions and perspectives were not

that many of his tenants had disappeared “into the Western country” owing him rents and other obligations.

⁷¹ For a summary of Chesapeake scholarship see Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 8-18, 81-100; for syntheses by specialists see Lois Green Carr, Russell R. Menard, and Lorena S. Walsh, *Robert Cole's World: Agriculture and Society in Early Maryland* (Chapel Hill, 1991) and Horn, *Adapting to a New World*; for a different view see Kulikoff, “The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America,” *WMQ*, 3d Ser., 46 (1989), 120-44; “Households and Markets: Toward a New Synthesis of American Agrarian History,” *ibid.*, 50 (1993), 342-55; and *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism* (Charlottesville, 1992); and for a recent account of the debate about markets see Richard Lyman Bushman, “Markets and Composite Farms in Early America,” *WMQ*, 3d Ser., 55 (1998), 351-74.

likely to provide a basis for concerted resistance to the growing power of landlords.

Free society in the early national Prince George's County was more complex than is usually imagined. It consisted of a wealthy and powerful planter elite, a minority of yeoman landowners, and a permanently landless majority. The landless divided into those who owned substantial numbers of slaves and other property and who could certainly have bought land if they wished, those who were poor but who had small slaveholdings or other personalty, and a large number of poor nontaxables who eventually formed a majority of free householders.

Most landless householders were probably tenant farmers much or all of their adult working lives. Tenants were subject to high rents, short leases, limited, if any, equity and alienation rights in the land they cultivated, extensive farm development requirements, and highly circumscribed freedoms in leasehold use. These conditions resulted from a century-old process in which landlords sought greater control over and profits from tenancy. Tenant resistance might have slowed the process but was limited by individualistic beliefs and behavior, widespread commitment to slavery, and divisions in wealth and economic interest among the landless.

Much remains to be learned about early national tenants and tenancy. Better data from other localities might identify exactly how many landless people were tenants, how many were wage earners, how many people alternated between the two and why. More complete information might also provide a more definitive analysis of wealth differentiation among the landless and of tenant rental payment, productivity, income, standards of living, geographic and socioeconomic mobility, and inheritance and family fortunes across the generations. Greater knowledge of particular lessors and lessees is essential for a fuller understanding of landlord-tenant relations, whether those relations were sometimes mediated by personal and community bonds, and of tenant aspirations, mentality, and cultural and political belief and behavior.

Once we know more about landlessness and the landless, we might start to question our understanding of early national society and politics. Prince George's society was more than a triumvirate of planters, yeomen, and slaves, and it was more a slaveholding than a landowning society. The extent of landlessness in this part of the Chesapeake certainly justifies further enquiry into tenancy and wage labor. Was landlessness as extensive and were social and economic relations as complex

in other parts of the plantation South and elsewhere? If so, what does this mean for our understanding of contemporary agrarianism and

⁷² These questions were first raised by Teute, "Land, Liberty, and Labor in the Post-Revolutionary Era," 7–54, and William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. 1: *Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York, 1990), 41, 573, though they bear raising again.