Domestic Management of Woodlawn Plantation: Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis and Her Slaves

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DOMESTIC MANAGEMENT OF WOODLAWN PLANTATION:
ELEANOR PARKE CUSTIS LEWIS AND HER SLAVES

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of American Studies

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Mary Geraghty

1993
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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DOMESTIC MANAGEMENT OF WOODLAWN PLANTATION:
ELEANOR PARKE CUSTIS LEWIS AND HER SLAVES

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to add to the body of evidence regarding domestic management of southern plantations in the early nation building era. Nelly Custis Lewis and Woodlawn plantation are the mistress and property featured. The thesis suggests that with the emergence of republican motherhood at the early part of the nineteenth century elite women, like Nelly, were expected to fulfill a dual role of mistress and Mother with a capital "M." It examines how these roles provided a unique opportunity for acculturation to take place between the black and white inhabitants of the plantation. The thesis also addresses the challenges that forced intimacy created for Nelly in fulfilling her dual role.

A rich source of primary materials, namely, Nelly's correspondence and housekeeping journal were carefully perused for evidence of domestic activities pursued by both the mistress and her slaves. These private papers provide a valuable window on the mentalité of Nelly and the slaves with which she was most intimate, her house slaves. Various anecdotes culled from these writings serve to shed light on the acculturation that took place at Woodlawn as well as challenges that the institution of slavery presented to its mistress. The thesis demonstrates that it was more than just proximity to her slaves when a mistress ordered a dish born of African-American foodways, or sent a letter by her most
trusted servant. There was a web of interconnectedness on the plantation. By the same token, the thesis concludes that Nelly was very much a woman of her region and era. She was a southern republican mother whose life was complicated by the institution of slavery.

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DOMESTIC MANAGEMENT OF WOODLAWN PLANTATION:
ELEANOR PARKE CUSTIS LEWIS AND HER SLAVES
INTRODUCTION

Until fairly recently many scholars writing about women's history have tended to focus on a "New Englandized" approach to feminine studies. Centering their discussions on gender and on what was collectively experienced across lines of class and race, they tended to view the northern woman's experience as a universal one for American women. The history of women of the south was not recognized as distinct even though it did not fit neatly into the "New Englandized" approach.

A decade ago or so new social historians rediscovered works such as Julia Spurill’s *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* and began to redress this dearth of studies by focusing on the southern woman’s experience. Their attempts to "demystify" the southern lady wound up blurring class and race distinctions to focus on gender just as proponents of the "New Englandized" approach had done.¹ Frequently they depicted mistresses of southern plantations as either victims of slavery, "the slave of slaves," or as closet feminists and abolitionists alienated from their society. Those scholars engaged in studying slave women rather than the southern lady tended to minimize the consequences of enslavement for male and female relations, and in stressing the vitality of African-American culture they overstated the slaves’ ability to cling to a nuclear family structure. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese in *Within the Plantation Household*

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reexamines the complexity of household connections between black and white women residing on southern plantations in antebellum society. Of mistresses she notes "life would be easier if we could dismiss them as oppressive tyrants or exonerate them as themselves victims of an oppressive system." They were neither. "By class and race, they were highly privileged ladies who reveled in their privilege, but many were warm and attractive women and by their own lights and the standards of their society, God-fearing, decent women." The following thesis focuses on one of these highly privileged but none the less warm, attractive ladies, namely, Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis. While it contains a brief biographical sketch, it is not a comprehensive recounting of the life of "Nelly" Lewis, granddaughter of Martha Washington. It addresses her years as mistress of a 2030 acre plantation and her domestic management of the slaves on the Woodlawn property.

The years central to this thesis run from 1802 when the young couple, Nelly and Lawrence Lewis, first took up residence in the newly completed wing of their mansion to 1839, the year of their departure from the estate. As these years fall within what historians usually refer to as the nation-building era, the thesis will touch upon changes that social historians have noted in familial relations during this period. While the aim of this thesis is to focus on Nelly’s role as mistress, some mention should be

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made of the changing role of mother at this critical time and the impact it had on being mistress of Woodlawn and vice versa.

In the search for a "national identity" historians have begun to mine materials from the rich cache of records connected to domestic familial relations in the formative years of the new republic. Letters, diaries, journals and books such as Hannah More's advising on the importance of home schooling by the new "republican mother" are all being carefully scrutinized for clues to how this new national identity was forged among its citizenry. Exploration of this material has revealed the centrality of the role that women played in educating and preparing the new generation of citizens. Works such as Catherine Clinton's *Plantation Mistress*, Jan Lewis' *Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* and Daniel Blake Smith's *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in 18th Century* have demonstrated that the nation building era ushered in a gradual but unmistakable reorientation of the southern family. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the southern family was an outward reaching, patriarchal household defined by emotional restraint and evolved by the early nineteenth century into a more intimate, affectionate, private family held together by the new "republican mother." Some historians have contended that the combined impact of the American Revolution, emerging industrialization and developing capitalism encouraged a national trend to confine women and their labor to the household. The household became redefined as home. Nurturing and domesticity were then designated as a woman's special responsibilities. Under these conditions, women
were excluded from the political arena. However, they made gains in literacy and thus embarked on the development of a distinct female discourse. Unlike that of the North, the southern economy of the early nineteenth century continued to be primarily agrarian in which men did not enter a labor force physically located outside the household. The south, therefore, had its own particular brand of the emerging cult of domesticity—in which women saw increasingly to domestic concerns of both the "white and black family" on the plantation and men maintained those aspects of plantation life directly related to the market and crops for profit.

All primary materials examined for this thesis point out that Nelly was an intriguing figure, born at this particularly interesting crossroads in our nation’s history. Raised in the patriarchically dominated, outward-reaching eighteenth-century household of her grandparents, Nelly grew to adulthood and held the keys to her own establishment during this nation building epoch. Examination of samples of Nelly’s texts, namely her correspondence and housekeeping journal, shows that she was a product of both world views. While she extolled the virtues of academy education, somewhat lamented the days of light and gaiety in Philadelphia highlife and sought to entertain in lavish style both friends visiting Woodlawn and visitors pilgrimaging to neighboring Mount Vernon, she also appreciated her rural domestic circle, sought to educate her youngest daughter close to home and thoroughly embraced the exalted role

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3 Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household* 59.
of "amour maternelle." In fact her concern with "mother love" is so well documented in her personal correspondence with friend Elizabeth Bordley Gibson that Pat Brady, editor of Nelly's collected letters, attributes it to an adult obsession reflective of the severity of her psychic wound suffered as a child—namely that of parting with her own mother. While this wound may be part of the explanation, her mother love might also be reflective of her understanding that her definition of self during this period of societal transformation came through her dual role as Mother with a capital "M" and mistress. Her recognition of the duality of her role is expressed in an 1817 missive to her friend Elizabeth where in Nelly muses in the third person "...[She is] now a sedate matron attending domestic duties and providing for a stripling who will call her Mother... instead of saying with Hamlet, But Oh! How fallen--I may say with truth that she is by late circumstance exalted and converted into a rational being."

Just as she believed in her elevated role as mother, Nelly accepted her role as mistress of the estate and all that it entailed, both in terms of limitations and duties. She recognized, without question, that the slave-owning plantation society into which she was born was divided along lines of gender and class as well as race. From time to time she complained about the niggardliness of her husband, "We Virginia wives must

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5 Brady, *George Washington’s Beautiful Nelly* 62.
be satisfied with such small sums as our improvident Farmer Husbands can venture to spare. They always anticipated squally weather, & are very moderate indeed in their disbursements." Even so, she was not about to immerse herself in the male-dominated world of financial transactions as her foreign born Aunt Rosalie Calvert Stier would do. She might make tongue and cheek comments on Lawrence’s penchant to live like Virginia gentry, "...Mr L is not the most energetic of men, of course, cannot be expected to struggle much against these difficulties (small crops, expensive families and high taxes)---loves to be a Virginian, that is to have plenty of servants for every purpose...." Nevertheless, she did not question his prerogative to bequeath Woodlawn solely to their only living son, even though George Washington had given the Dogue Run Farm upon which Woodlawn was built jointly to both herself and Lawrence upon the occasion of their marriage. No comment was made even when the dower slaves she gave to her daughters as gifts in 1835 were mentioned in Lawrence’s will with his seal of approval on the gift, "...I confirm to my said daughter the right and title of the following slaves given to her by her mother...." Like other women of her station, Nelly took for granted both her subordination to her husband in terms of hierarchical rank in society and her representative role as the feminine side of paternalism on the property. Unlike other plantation mistresses, Nelly took control of the sexual relations of the Lewis

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6 Brady, *George Washington's Beautiful Nelly* 137.

7 Brady, *George Washington's Beautiful Nelly* 79.

8 Lawrence Lewis, will 1 March 1839, folder PS-150, Mount Vernon Library, Photocopy.
marriage and ended conjugal intimacy after the birth of her last child Angela. This thesis seeks to go beyond a discussion of gender roles and an understanding of Nelly's position in the social hierarchy of plantation life. Its primary focus is the role of mistress in light of a continuing dialectic that took place on the plantation between Nelly and the Woodlawn slaves. Eugene Genovese argues in Roll, Jordan, Roll that the house servants were in a special position that allowed them to be transmitters of white culture to the black quarters and of African-American culture to the white planter family. He refers to them as "primary agents for that cultural fusion of Africa and Europe." It will be argued that the mistress of the household with her "special responsibilities" of seeing to the intimate needs of both white and black households was placed in a similar strategic position for cultural transmission. A secondary line of inquiry will look at how her role as Mother was facilitated or hampered by her role of mistress. The thesis will suggest some specific points of cultural contact or acculturation between the mistress and her slaves. While this study focuses on cultural sharing as did Michel Sobel in The World They Made Together, it does so fully aware that this sharing was played out within a hierarchically ordered society where forces that ultimately separated the two races predominated.

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9 From the time she was thirty-four in 1813, Nelly shared her bed with her youngest daughter Angela. Her correspondence makes quite clear that their sleeping quarters were separate from those of her husband Lawrence.

This study of domestic management is organized in three sections. The first chapter presents a description of the landscape of Woodlawn, both the physical surrounds of buildings and terrain and the perceived landscape of its inhabitants. The second chapter examines how the mistress met the physical needs of sustenance, clothing and medical care for her family, black and white. Among other points of acculturation, the discussion will look at how foods which graced the Lewis table were profoundly influenced by African-American slave cooks and the manner in which access to planter foodstuffs and equipage gave extensified and intensified meaning to certain constituents of the Woodlawn slave diet.\textsuperscript{11} Clothing will also be examined in terms of the social and cultural meanings it embodied for both Nelly and her black charges. Special attention will be paid to the group activities surrounding textiles from the training of sempstresses\textsuperscript{12}, to sewing in the quarters, to the dyeing and laundering of habiliments. A final section on medicine will round out the section on how the physical needs of Woodlawn's residents were seen to by the mistress. Chapter three, the concluding chapter, will discuss how the more intangible needs of communication with the larger world beyond the plantation and the sacred world were met. In each chapter, the thesis will examine the dialectic between Nelly and her slave charges relative to the

\textsuperscript{11} Sidney Mintz, \textit{Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History} (New York, 1986) see discussion of extensification/intensification in chapter 3 on "Consumption."

\textsuperscript{12} In early nineteenth century parlance seamstresses were known as sempstresses. Nelly repeatedly uses this term throughout her correspondence. This thesis will consistently use sempstress when referring to a seamstress.
domestic concern under discussion. The term "dialectic" here is meant as Rhys Isaac used it in *The Transformation of Virginia*, as a system of reciprocal relationships, "the reciprocal relationship between metaphor and action is such that each is simultaneously producer and product, cause and effect."\(^{13}\) Nelly's writings, her correspondence and housekeeping journal, will be the means by which access may be gained to her mentalité and that of her slaves.

The primary documents mined for this thesis include three hundred and fifteen letters. One hundred and eighty-nine letters were written by Nelly to her girlhood friend Elizabeth Bordley (née Gibson). The letters span nearly sixty years from 1794 to 1851. One hundred and nineteen of them are in published form in Pat Brady Schmidt's *George Washington's Beautiful Nelly*. Transcriptions of all extant one hundred and eighty-nine letters were read at Mount Vernon. In addition, forty-two letters were found in Mount Vernon's Library collection from Nelly to her son-in-law Charles Conrad. Many of these letters were written in conjunction with her daughter Angela while she was affianced to Mr. Conrad during October 1834-May 1835. Well over sixty letters were secured from the Historic New Orleans Collection after their initial selection from a calendar. These letters were largely written by Nelly to her eldest daughter Frances, also known as Parke, after her marriage to Edward George Washington [E.G.W.] Butler and removal of the young couple to the new Butler

plantation in Iberville, Louisiana. Other original correspondence including individual letters to her husband Lawrence, her son Lorenzo and her sister-in-law Betty Carter Lewis were consulted at the Alderman Library at the University of Virginia, the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond and at Woodlawn itself. Census, will and tax documents were consulted at courthouses in Washington, D.C., Fairfax County and Alexandria, Virginia. Special collections in the Fairfax Library and the Lloyd House Archives in Alexandria were consulted extensively as was Nelly Custis Lewis’s *Housekeeping Book* also edited by Pat Brady. While it was a privilege to peruse most of Nelly’s known correspondence, the letters consulted which were not published or transcribed, of which there were over one hundred and twenty, were difficult to read. Nelly’s handwriting was fairly legible in her youth, but deteriorated over time and her concern with the cost of paper and posting contributed to her penchant for writing without indentation and for crosshatching almost all of her letters.\(^{14}\)

As has been noted previously, Nelly’s correspondence and housekeeping journal provide a clear window on her attitude regarding motherhood. She did not hesitate to record her concern for her children’s health, education, marital choices, food preferences, medical cures, and clothing choices. Unfortunately, the same cannot be

\(^{14}\) Postage for letters traveling over 500 miles cost 25 cents in March of 1816. A complete list of postal rates was issued in Alexandria Gazette on 9th of March. It is quoted in Michael Miller, "The Mail Must Go Through: A Short History of Postal Service in Alexandria, Virginia," *Fireside Sentinel* (September, 1992): 104.
said about references to domestic concerns relative to her slaves. Overt references to individual slaves are infrequent. In letters to Elizabeth Bordley Gibson, Nelly alludes only a few times to the institution of slavery. Not once in all one hundred and eighty-nine pieces to Elizabeth does she refer to a slave by name. Most of what can be gleaned about her direction and management of specific slaves is found in the postscripts of letters to her daughter Parke and in the headings she gives individual receipts in her *Housekeeping Book*. The bulk of these letters and the *Housekeeping Book* date from the same period, the twelve years or so between 1823-1835. While it may be natural that these direct slave references would surface in family letters rather than in letters to a friend who only visited Woodlawn once in the thirty-seven years that Nelly was resident mistress, having both sources of information from the same period of time does tend to limit understanding of any change that may have occurred in Nelly’s relations with the Woodlawn slaves in particular. Although Nelly’s generalized references to the institution of slavery are only few in number, they tend to be more revealing concerning change in her attitude. In 1815, Nelly wrote that she would prefer northern destinations for her children when they chose to marry so they could leave behind them the evils connected to the slave property. By the mid 1820s, she more practically realized that her son was destined to be owner of Woodlawn and her daughters were bound to marry southern sons. She berated those who claimed that George Washington referred to his slaves as his "children." She claimed that Washington was a good and kind master, one both feared and respected by his people. By the 1830s, the mistress of Woodlawn referred to slaves as the dark torments of the southern elite. She began
to express concern about the idleness of her son, possibly indicative of a concern that Lawrence was spending too much "social" time at the quarters. Although a lifelong supporter of the idea of gradual emancipation and the colonization of Liberia, Nelly took the issue on in full force as it was debated in the Virginia Legislature in 1832. She wrote the mayor of Boston and thought the editor of "The Liberator," William Lloyd Garrison, as worthy of death because of his incitement of southern slaves. Nelly also blamed those in the Virginia Legislature for inciting passions around the slavery debate.

Some social historians have claimed that the mistress often did not acknowledge or recognize who actually performed the labor on the plantation. These historians depict the mistress as one who invariably laid claim to work done under her direction. Fox-Genovese is one such historian. Fox-Genovese criticizes other historians as being "less quick to recognize the [work] metaphor as invoked by southern women, although it bears heavily on any attempt to understand the relations between mistress and slaves in the household."\textsuperscript{15} She takes issue with the notion of feminist historians and others like Rhys Isaac that statements must be interpreted as actions. Another possibility lies between the two interpretations of statements as metaphor and statements as action. Context is the key to determining the extent to which the mistress actually participated in performing physical labor. As Steven Stowe claims in \textit{Intimacy and Power in the Old South} the nation building era was a period when language in correspondence was fairly

\textsuperscript{15} Fox-Genovese, \textit{Within the Plantation Household} 129.
precise. Rather than claim the labor for herself, Nelly often referred to the completion of various domestic chores without any appellation; she neither claimed them for herself nor attributed them to her slaves. How then do we interpret statements about plantation chores? By examining them in context. As we shall see on the one hand, various anecdotes culled from Nelly’s private letters—the shock of having to open a gate for oneself, or the referral to unsteadiness in her sewing due to failing eyesight, or the use of poplar leaves to bind one’s aching head after cooking a special dessert over an open hearth—speak the truth about the labor which Nelly acknowledges as her own. On the other hand, the common lack of attribution along with Nelly’s clearly expressed outrage regarding what she perceived as inappropriate physical labor for her eldest daughter Parke—“She [Parke] has been a slave to him [Butler]”16—allow us to see just whose effort was usually involved in labor intensive chores performed on a daily basis. There was no doubt that Nelly largely subscribed to the southern nineteenth-century elite perception of the demeaning nature of physical labor.

Steven Stowe states that the overall lack of overt references to slaves, this invisibility of slaves within the context of daily planter family living, proclaims a racism so deeply embedded that it can only be assumed that “proximity does not equal intimacy.”17 We shall see, however, that this is a misinterpretation. While ignoring

16 Brady, George Washington’s Beautiful Nelly 233.

17 Steven Stowe, Intimacy and Power In the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters (Baltimore, 1987) xvii.
slaves and slave labor may well be reflective of profound racism, it does not necessarily preclude intimacy. It is more than just proximity when the daughter of a planter will not send her most intimate loveletters except by a valued servant, it is not only proximity when the mistress orders a dish born of African-American foodways to her table, it is not proximity only when Nelly has a family physician and friend treat her sempstress or when she passes along an "African" talisman of good luck to her grandson. This thesis examines the intimate connections between the mistress of Woodlawn and her slaves and discusses how the process of acculuration between the two races was furthered. It focuses on domestic activities at the plantation as the key to focusing on this web of interconnectedness. It also touches upon the unique dilemma the plantation mistress found herself in when the seamless domestic operation of the plantation both required and was challenged by the very presence of Woodlawn's slaves.
CHAPTER I

PEOPLE AND LANDSCAPES OF WOODLAWN PROPERTY

Profile of the Mistress and Washington/Lewis family

When the widow Martha Dandridge Custis married George Washington in 1759. She brought with her to the marriage a five year old son and a four year old daughter by her first husband Daniel Parke Custis. John Parke Custis, known to the family as Jacky, and Martha Parke Custis, known among the family as Patsy, added childish laughter and spontaneity to the Mount Vernon estate. Remaining childless himself, George Washington treated the Custis children as his own and raised them accordingly. All too soon, however, they were deprived of Patsy’s company as she succumbed to a fatal disease while still in her teens. Impetuous Jacky married Eleanor Calvert on February 3, 1774 at her family’s Mount Airy estate. Seven years of marriage and four children later, Jacky died of camp fever contracted while participating in the battle of Yorktown during the final campaign in the Revolutionary War.

Eleanor Parke Custis, the third child of the couple’s four, was born March 21, 1779, at her father’s Abingdon estate. Just after her birth Nelly, as the baby was called after her mother, was sent to Mount Vernon to be cared for by an overseer’s wife. Her mother, ailing from the delivery, was not up to the care of a newborn. On and off for her first two years the child’s home was divided between Mount Vernon and Abingdon where her mother continued to reside with Nelly’s two elder sisters, Eliza and Martha.
After the untimely death of her husband in 1781, the young widow relinquished the day
to day care of Nelly and her younger brother George Washington Parke Custis to the
erlder Washingtons. Two years later Eleanor Custis married Dr. David Stuart, a union
that produced sixteen step-siblings for Nelly and George Washington Parke Custis.

Under the watchful guidance of her beloved grandparents, Nelly grew to be an
intelligent, artistically talented and admired beauty of the New Republic. Nelly and her
brother were given every advantage— an academy education, tutors for all the fine arts
like music and dancing and opportunities to hobnob with the first families of Boston,
New York and Philadelphia in elite social settings. Nelly was also rigorously instructed
in household management and manners by her grandmother. They were considered by
all to be George Washington’s adopted heirs, a point he did not see to with legal
formality until just before Nelly’s marriage.

During the scintillating Presidential years in Philadelphia Nelly met her lifelong
friend and correspondent Elizabeth Bordley, later Gibson. Elizabeth was the daughter
of John Beale Bordley, a wealthy and eminent Philadelphia jurist with landholdings in
Eastern Shore Maryland and author of several scientific agricultural treatises.

When Washington retired from public life, the family returned to George’s beloved
home, Mount Vernon. There, the nineteen year old Nelly met and gave her heart to
Lawrence Lewis, son of George’s sister Betty Washington Lewis. "Cupid, a small
mischievous Urchin, who has been trying sometime to humble my pride, took me by surprise, when I thought of nothing less than him..."¹⁸ she wrote to Elizabeth Bordley on February 3, 1799. Washington had invited the grave, dignified widower to Mount Vernon to shoulder some of the hospitality burdens of the estate. Seeking some privacy in the evening hours, George was only too glad to turn over the continuous hosting duties, then thought to be under male purview, to his thirty-one year old nephew.

Nelly and Lawrence were married at Mount Vernon on Washington’s last birthday in 1799. They continued to make their home there until Martha Washington’s death in 1802. The couple were to have eight children, four who lived past childhood and only three who made it to adulthood--Frances Parke Lewis [Parke] who married Edward G. W. Butler, Lorenzo Lewis who married Esther Marie Coxe and Mary Eliza Lewis [Angela] who married Charles Conrad. Nelly’s daughter Agnes Freire, named after a beloved Portugese friend, died at the age of fifteen. The bulk of the family correspondence referred to in this thesis was with Nelly’s daughter Frances, commonly known as Parke, and with her daughter Angela, nicknamed M.E.A. or Tiffin, while engaged to Charles Conrad. Occasional letters are referenced relative to her son Lorenzo, his wife Esther and Parke’s husband, Edward Butler. Periodic mention will be made of characters featured in Nelly’s correspondence. Included will be her good friend Dr. H. Daingerfield, her step-sister Anna, Parke’s sister-in-law Caroline Bell and Nelly’s sister-in-law Betty Carter Lewis.

¹⁸ Brady, George Washington’s Beautiful Nelly 58.
Profile of the Woodlawn Slaves

A list of forty-five slave names associated with the Woodlawn property were culled from previously noted primary material, with Lawrence Lewis’s will as the single richest source (See Appendix A). Unfortunately, many of the slaves connected with the property remain unnamed as a comprehensive listing or ledger does not exist. Just how did the Lewis’s acquire the slaves they had in their possession? It seems by the methods of acquisition most commonly practiced—inheritance and purchase. Still others were not acquired at all, they were "hired on" or "hired out" as needed.

Neither Nelly nor Lawrence were willed slaves by either George or Martha Washington as part of their estate. Nelly may have received some slaves as part of her father’s estate. He died intestate and the bulk of his holdings including fifty-seven slaves were held in trust for his son. Numerous attempts to turn up a copy of her mother Eleanor Custis Stuart’s will were to no avail. Although it is known that this Fairfax County resident died at Tudor Place in Washington in 1811, no record of a will exists at either the Washington, D.C. Courthouse or Fairfax County Courthouse. We do know Nelly owned slaves in her own right, however, as she gave a gift of "dower slaves" to her daughters which Lawrence Lewis mentions in his will. Presumably some of these slaves were bequeathed or held in trust for her by her mother.

Lawrence Lewis received one-third of his father’s slaves in 1781. Whatever the exact number, it is apparent by the letter from George Washington to his nephew dated September 20, 1799, that it was considered insufficient to maintain a plantation. Washington suggests a temporary loan of the use of his hands at the Dogue Run farm
to the new couple to start them off.\textsuperscript{19} Washington died, however, before the young couple established themselves at their new home and the terms of his will freed his slaves. Found in the records at Mount Vernon was one bill of sale for a dower slave named young Jack. Lawrence Lewis paid the widow Martha fifty dollars for his purchase in 1802. Although this is the only direct transfer of ownership of slaves between Mount Vernon and Woodlawn found in the records, it may be indicative of other such transactions.\textsuperscript{20} A letter of purchase from the Armistead slave traders in Alexandria surfaced in the Woodlawn files. This transaction was handled for Lawrence by his son-in-law E.G.W. Butler. Marshal was purchased from the Armistead firm for three hundred and fifty dollars March 4, 1826.\textsuperscript{21}

According to available census material, Woodlawn at its height had ninety-three slaves in 1820, forty-seven males and forty-six females.\textsuperscript{22} Of these ninety-three twenty-two were females under the age of fourteen and twenty-nine were males under the age of fourteen. Tax records indicate that Lawrence Lewis paid taxes on forty-two of these slaves with twenty-five listed as engaged in agriculture and four listed as

\textsuperscript{19} George Washington to Lawrence Lewis 20 September 1799, Virginia Historical Society. Photocopy.

\textsuperscript{20} Martha Washington to Lawrence Lewis, bill of sale, 1802 Mount Vernon Library.

\textsuperscript{21} John C. Armistead to EGW Butler (for Lawrence Lewis), bill of sale, 4 March 1826, Woodlawn Plantation, Photocopy.

\textsuperscript{22} U.S. Census of 1820, Fairfax County, Virginia, Lloyd House Archives, Microfilm.
employed in manufacturing.\footnote{Fairfax County, Virginia, Tax Records 1820, Fairfax Library, Alexandria, Microfilm. The tax on slaves was levied regularly but varied year to year. In 1802 a tax of 48 cents per $100.00 of value in land was laid; and for every slave above 12 years, except infirmed, 44 cents. In 1815 the tax on slave children between 9 & 12 was 50 cents. See June Purcell Guild, ed., \textit{Black Laws of Virginia: A Summary of Legislative Acts of Virginia Concerning Negroes from Earliest Times to Present} (Richmond, 1936) 137 and \textit{A Collection of all Such Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia} (Richmond, 1808) 87.} By the 1830 census the number of slaves on the property had diminished to sixty-four. The panic of 1819 and depletion of the land had placed economic stress on many of Northern Virginia plantations. While it is impossible to know exactly how many individuals Nelly supervised on the domestic staff, the total was somewhere between fifteen and twenty. This is not a random number of slaves. Included in this figure are named slaves given as gifts to her daughter, named slaves mentioned in correspondence as employed in domestic activities and slaves noted in the housekeeping journal. Presumably some of these domestic servants were fairly young children in training. Throughout the thesis the most frequent references will be to the named slaves of Nelly's domestic household. From time to time a fieldhand may be mentioned, as the mistress of the plantation would concern herself with their welfare as well. Still, it was the day to day contact with domestic slaves that served to enhance the dialectic between those in bondage and those with authority.

\textit{Shelter for the Mistress and the Lewis family}

Though he did not live to see any of its construction, Washington cast a long shadow at Woodlawn in terms of site selection and positioning of the mansion. The land that he described as "a beautiful Site for a Gentleman’s Seat"\footnote{Dorothy Troth Muir, \textit{Potomac Interlude: The Story of Woodlawn Mansion and the Mount Vernon Neighborhood 1846-1923} (Washington, DC, 1943) 30.} was a
combination of the Dogue Run Farm, one of the five farms of the Mount Vernon estate, and 436 acres of a tract called Gray's Land. The latter was purchased by Washington for the ridge upon which the mansion would later be built. He surveyed the site and bequeathed it to the Lewis' in his will. Although Woodlawn mansion was built in the latest style with all manner of early nineteenth-century conveniences, it was also reflective of the eighteenth-century patriarchal worldview that dictated site selection. Like a true Virginia gentleman's home it had a "commanding view of the river." It was a place to see and be seen.

The charms of the plantation were still evident even after financial difficulties had forced the estate to the auction block in 1846 (See Appendix B for estate maps). On May 2 of that year a notice of auction appeared in a local Alexandria paper. The auction was to be held before Newton's Hotel at the corner of Cameron and Royal Streets, in Alexandria, D.C. on the 25th of May. The property was described as follows:

this tract, once a part of Mount Vernon estate, contains upwards of two thousand acres of land, more than one thousand acres of which are wood, with a quantity of fine ship and other timber, tanner's bark, &. There are upon the estate a large brick barn, farm house, corn houses, sheds, &. Also, a large stone mill upon the creek, with one pair of wheat burrs, and one

\[25\] William Francis Smith and Michael Miller, A Seaport Saga: Portrait of Old Alexandria, Virginia (Norfolk, 1989) 51. From February 27, 1801 to March 13, 1847 Alexandria was part of the District of Columbia.
pair of country runners. The dwelling house is not surpassed by any in Virginia in construction, style of finish, and situation, being on a high hill, in a grove of fine oaks, commanding a beautiful view of the river in front; it is also a healthy situation. The house is built of brick, with freestone sills and lintels to windows and doors, coping of the basement also of stone, slate roof, two stories high, four rooms on a floor, spacious cellars under the house, portico in front, paved with marble and confined by freestone; all of the out-houses of brick, connected with the main building by spacious corridors, namely, kitchen, washhouse, library and servant's hall, which again, by a brick wall, connect with the dairy and meathouse—all built of the best materials and in the best manner.26

The newspaper advertizement went on to claim that nine hundred acres of the tract had been cleared and were under cultivation at one time. The notice stated that the property had a growing crop of corn, oats and wheat at the time of the advertizement.

Though site selection, positioning and construction seem to have been determined by male preference as there is no evidence to suggest that Nelly was consulted, once ensconced in the mansion she lost little time in making the dwelling and surrounding property her own domain. As she noted in her May 9, 1801, letter to Mrs. Charles Pinckney, "...our little dwelling will be finished this week, & the remainder of the walls run up this summer, so that by the next season I hope to be well and comfortably fixed.

26 Alexandria Gazette, 2 May 1846, Lloyd House Archives, Alexandria, Microfilm.
Then I shall expect my good friends will have some curiosity to see me a housekeeper, and if possible, allow me the delight of entertaining them as amongst my most wellcome Guests." Whether she was cooking a special dessert over the open hearth fire in the kitchen, dispensing provisions from the storage areas, seated at the head of a splendidly laden dinner table, providing musical entertainment in the parlor, supervising her slave Nelly pruning roses in the garden or complaining about an inadequately cleaned merino shawl in the laundry, Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis put her stamp on the ordering and use of this built environment.

The Built Environment of the Woodlawn Slaves

Rhys Isaac has noted that by 1790 the average number of residents in the main dwelling on southern plantations was around six while the average number in a quarter grouping was about twenty. This difference in number of inhabitants provided for a separate cultural milieu in the big house and in the quarters. Isaac states that "whatever the varying details of the house occupancy, therefore, we may be sure that the general pattern (of use) was quite different from that prevailing at the plantation house. The quarter was a composite communal living space, encompassing a plurality of married pairs and parent-child combinations as well as unmarried slaves." 

Little, if anything, is known of the physical structures for slaves at Woodlawn. There are only a few specific references to structures on the Dogue Run farm. One is noted in Michel Sobel's *The World They Made Together*. Sobel states that there is

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27 E.P. Lewis to Mrs. Charles Coatsworth Pinckney, 9 May 1801, Mount Vernon Library.

evidence that George Washington reorganized his outlying slave cabins throughout Mount Vernon in 1793. During the time of reorganization it was recorded that the black overseer at the Dogue Run Farm had a dwelling which was 16'x20,' one room up and one room down. Though made of same materials––scantling, plan, and shingles––and similar construction as other white overseer cottages, it was considerably smaller in size.\textsuperscript{29} Such a structure may still have been present on the property when the Lewis' took possession in 1802. This is the only period description of a possible domestic structure inhabited by an African-American on the Woodlawn property. It must be kept in mind that this is a reference to a black overseer's abode, not the accommodation of a Woodlawn houseslave or field hand. A brief, twentieth-century description exists of the plantation's accommodations for houseslaves. This description was from a relative by marriage of Senator Underwood's, a later owner of Woodlawn. When he died in February of 1929, Mildred Martin visited the property for his funeral and remembers seeing quarters that were "small, one room,...one row probably 12-15 of them." She said they were located at a lower level than the house, but close to the main residence off the kitchen side.\textsuperscript{30} Another interesting structural reference exists relative to a sixteen-sided barn known to have been on the property from the time of Washington's ownership until its demise in the latter part of the nineteenth century. An 1885 photo of this structure is in the Mount Vernon Library collection. Little is known about this interesting building, though some current writers have suggested that


its unusual shape and conical roof indicates survival of African building technologies.31

Although Ms. Martin cannot recall now if structures at Woodlawn were of wood or brick, they may well have been brick. Accommodations for house slaves often reflected the architectural choices made for the mansion house. Housing for domestic servants usually fell within sight of the main house, as did the row at Woodlawn, and was therefore considered by the planters to be part of their core landscape. As such it often merited building materials and levels of finish or ornament of the same or compatible nature as those used in the big house. Arlington House, home of Nelly’s brother George Washington Parke Custis, has a lovely exterior of stucco which is repeated like a refrain in the fanciful Greek temple form structures of the house slave quarters. Pending archeological exploration of recently located, likely sites for dwellings for household slaves, it is wise to forego any undue speculation about the specifics of the actual size, construction and location of either household or field hand quarters at Woodlawn.

The Woodlawn Landscape of the Mistress

"As mother came down she had to open the gate at Woodlawn herself."32 This brief observation made by eight year old Angela Lewis was featured in a New Year’s missive written on the last day of 1821 to her brother Lorenzo while he was enrolled

31 Mount Vernon Gazette 20 February 1992, Woodlawn Plantation, Photocopy. Research relative to this farm structure is being conducted at Mount Vernon by Orlando Ridout V.

32 M.E.A. Lewis and E.P. Lewis to Lorenzo Lewis, 31 December 1821, Mount Vernon Library.
at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. That the event was significant enough to comment upon was emphasized by the fact that the entire letter was only a few lines and this was its key introductory statement. In addition, the note was written under the aegis of mother herself, Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis. It is a revealing glimpse of an occurrence outside the normal course of events at Woodlawn Plantation— one which Nelly may not have committed to paper, but one which she did not edit out of her daughter’s text. Taken at face value what does the comment imply? First, it was highly unusual the gate was not opened by a slave attending to the comings and goings of the Lewis family. Second, the mistress of the household fell to her own resources and looked after the gate herself. That Angela uses the phrase "the gate at Woodlawn" it implies that the gate in question was the main gate of their property leading on or off the estate. If this was the case, was Nelly in a carriage or on horseback and not traveling on foot as might first be thought? If traveling by horse or vehicle it would be fairly irregular to be unattended. It also becomes a more strenuous episode when one considers the effort involved in dismounting in full winter garb, opening a gate, remounting, passing through the gate, dismounting again to secure the gate and then remounting to continue one’s journey.

Whatever the sequence of passing through the gate, perhaps taking a solitary stroll or jaunt over to Mount Vernon, the event highlights the expectations of a planter family concerning day to day services performed for them by their slaves. Either a slave (presumably a very young one or a very old one) was expected to be in regular attendance at the main gate or else the leavetakings and arrivals of the family and visitors were to be closely monitored in order to anticipate the need to open or close the
gate. What was not habitual behavior was the mistress of Woodlawn opening her own gate.

Dell Upton argues in "White and Black Landscapes in the 18th Century" that the planter landscape was an extension of the ideological process. The totality of fields, fences, tree lines, buildings and household furniture established an ordered reality or landscape set up for a white audience. Forward procession through this landscape was determined by where one stood on the social hierarchy. Upton goes on to state that blacks in this landscape were controlled by "raw power" and were therefore not part of the intended audience. He further states that as much as the great planters and their impressive houses seemed to dominate the landscape, their hegemony was never total. It was challenged by the role the unintended audience, namely the black slaves, played in the landscape. Moving from point to point, disregarding the intended processional route, and having entree, albeit backdoor entree, into the planter family’s most intimate spaces, slaves checked the planter elites’ complete manipulation of the landscape. Slave presence in intimate spaces, and their lack of presence at key points along the processional route challenged the successful workings of the landscape.33 To borrow a dramaturgical analogy from Isaac, slaves stationed at the main gate, posted at the carriage turnabout to care for equipage and horses, or engaged in lending assistance to passengers disembarking from carriages were all part of a carefully prepared pageant. Each one played a precise role and was an integral part of the whole. To miss one’s cue both physically and metaphorically hampered white movement through the landscape.

Nelly's ability to elegantly proceed through her landscape as befit her station as plantation mistress was stymied. Looking closer at the dialectic, however, one can say that her willingness to open the gate for herself made her a participant, perhaps a reluctant or unhappy one but none the less a participant, in the slave's landscape, if only for a brief point in time. For a moment, she saw the landscape from their vantage point, she felt the weight of the gate, the frustration in having to labor to move the physical obstacle.

**Woodlawn Landscape for the Slaves**

Aside from hindering or participating in the white landscape, how did the slaves interpret the landscape at Woodlawn and the surrounding vicinity and make it their own? In particular how did Nelly's houseslaves interpret their landscape? It has already been suggested that slave movement tended to be from point to point, non-processional, or fixed at specific physical landmarks. Isaac in *The Transformation of Virginia* makes several suggestions as to how movement through the plantation landscape became specific to the slave:

...[a] slave would most likely slip through the trees. He might set traps in the woods. Whether conducted on his own or his master's behalf, this was a free ranging activity. Frequently [the slave] would go visiting. Although the law forbade him to be off the plantation without carrying a letter of permission from his master, enforcement was infrequent and erratic. Still, at any time he could be called upon to show his 'pass.' The landscape through which his way took him was
marked by the signs that the masters possessed it according to the
same system that classified the slave himself as property: boundary
trees, fenced fields, tobacco houses, carriage roads. However, most
visible to the slaves, was another set of marks, places with signs of
the occupancy of his own people and with associations arising from
the opportunities the slaves seized within a system that denied them
the right to possession. Perhaps the way took him past his own garden
lot or those of others, where he and his fellows were allowed to
supplement their meager rations, easing the master’s provision
expenses.”

While Isaac’s statement provides an excellent window on the mentalite of the male slave
roaming his master’s property and surrounding hinterland, several crucial questions are
raised regarding whether this would have been the plantation landscape experienced
by female slaves in general and by the female houseslaves at Woodlawn in particular.
In Ar’n’t I A Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South Deborah Gray White makes
the case that due to the division of labor on most plantations, greater mobility was
granted the male slave. "Few of the chores performed by bondswomen took them off
the plantation.” House servants in particular, of which the greatest proportion were
women, were often kept in close sight by the mistress of plantation. Eliza Ripley
claimed that Mammy Charlotte "was never beyond the reach of a summons day or

54 Isaac, Transformation 52.

55 Deborah Gray White, Ar’n’t I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South (New York, 1985) 75.
night." More than an exhaustive prospect, this constant claim on Mammy Charlotte's time is an example of the lack of autonomy of the average house servant.

Limited opportunities for travel "abroad" existed for Woodlawn house servants. Woodlawn's mistress appears to have followed the prevailing fashion of the day in restricting the movement and whereabouts of her bondswomen. While female bondswomen would sometimes accompany Nelly or her daughters when they traveled, they were never noted as taking unsupervised weekly or periodic excursions to Washington or Alexandria. Visits to market, the collection of mail, parcels and travelers in town all fell to male slaves at Woodlawn. In particular Sam, Williams and the "post boy" are all noted as repeatedly seeing to these duties. In one well-cited letter in which Nelly ponders taking two female slaves, a valued nurse and sempstress, with her to Philadelphia, she decides against it because "there is no certainty of retaining them by wages, if they fancy they could be happier elsewhere." In this particular case, their lack of travel seems to have had more to do with their status as slaves than their gender, but Nelly's missive provides another example of women having a lack of mobility. Deborah Gray White makes the supposition that artisans and craftsmen usually were male rather than female slaves. This made it more difficult to hire-out a female slave. In addition, Ms. White contends that more often than not in "abroad" marriages it was the male that traveled to visit the female rather than the other way around. Women were forced to "stay put" and thus used intransigent behavior to

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36 White, Ar'n't I A Woman? 47. Should keep in mind that 1912 recollections of Eliza Ripley are of New Orleans in the mid nineteenth century and may or may not reflect treatment of a female house servant in Virginia in early part of the nineteenth century.

37 Brady, George Washington's Beautiful Nelly 79.
subvert the effects of enslavement. Much of Nelly’s correspondence would support this supposition. Of the few overt references she makes to slave behavior, the majority indicate her dissatisfaction with female "servants" and their reluctance to do the work required of them in a competent fashion. There was only one reference to a female fieldhand making active use of the Woodlawn landscape to avoid punishment. It appeared in a July 6 of unknown year letter from Lorenzo to his absentee father:

upon going down to the farm [Woodlawn], one morning, about two weeks since, I found that Liddy had been drinking the whiskey which I sent down for the grass cutters ...I boxed her ears for it, and she went off, and stayed [away illegible] whole days....

[I ordered] him to give her 15 lashes which I thought was enough for her going off, he told me he could not do it--that his former employers had never trusted him to any number of lashes--I told him it was nothing to me what his other employers had done, but that I chose to judge of those things myself-and repeated my order -when he said again he could not do it. I then ordered him to [pick] up immediately, and settle his accounts, and gave him two days clear himself in. He then begged I would consider the situation of his wife who had only been confined four days before and would run great risks if she was moved. I told him if that was the case, he might remain till she was well enough to move, as I had no desire whatever to turn any woman out of her house, in her situation, but that I should

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38 White, Ar’n’t I A Woman? 76.
expect him to do the duties of the place while he remained on it.

Given time to think about it, Lorenzo found the overseer "very humble. "I think [we] will probably come to terms, before his wife is well enough to move. Should he do so and promise implicitly in future to obey my orders I think I shall keep him as it would be very inconvenient to be without an overseer at this time, and besides he is in some respects a very good one...."39 This extraordinary example of an overseer directly confronting the Master shows just how far the gap was between a female field slave and a free overseer. Although there is no way of knowing if the overseer was black or white, the fact that Lorenzo refers to giving him two days to "clear himself in" suggests that he was not held in bondage. Liddy did not dare to adopt such a direct line of confrontation. Instead she used the landscape to her advantage and hid in the woods to avoid the threat of the lash. Interestingly enough, due to the debate over authority between Lorenzo and the overseer, it would appear her stratagem of disappearance may have been successful in avoiding punishment altogether.

An example of "stay put" behavior, also referred to as "playing the lady," which occurred at Woodlawn involving the manipulation of the built environment, was the battle of wills which took place between Sukey, one of the better sempstresses, and Nelly during April to June of 1832. Sukey called upon both a medical malady as well as limitations of her built environment to resist the sewing assignments delegated to her by the mistress. In a series of letters, Nelly refers to Sukey's suffering from "falling of the womb." This condition obliged her to stay in bed or to use a low stool for sitting.

39 Lorenzo Lewis to Lawrence Lewis, 6 July n.y.d., Mount Vernon Library.
Dr. Daingerfield prescribed constant bedrest for Sukey until her June confinement. In a letter dated April 8, 1832, to her daughter Frances, Nelly says "...she is making the little shirts but until the weather is warm enough to have the door and window open in the quarter she cannot see to hemstitch or tuck very neatly." As Upton mentioned in the previously noted article, household furnishings were key parts of the white landscape. So too, a lack of certain amenities becomes key to interpreting the black landscape. Sukey successfully uses her landscape’s inadequate interior lighting to justify her resistance to the sewing tasks. Nelly could have provided an additional source of interior light in order to facilitate quarter sewing work. Instead she accepts that work in the quarters is going slowly because the windows and doors cannot be thrown open. The letter referred to in the sewing debate is one of only two references that Nelly made that has any direct reference to the quarters. In a second letter Nelly simply notes that "the work done in the quarter is not so neat as it might be." The issue of light notwithstanding, sewing work continued in the quarters, relatively unsupervised, due to Sukey’s "being laid up."

Although Nelly and the slaves of Woodlawn shared the spaces of Woodlawn plantation with its winding drive up to the main house, its brick dependencies, its plowed and fenced fields, its woods and riverfront and quarters, they did so in distinctly separate ways. Yet even as their lives were separate, time and again occasions such as the gatekeeping incident arose which placed Nelly in closer contact

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40 E.P. Lewis to Mrs. E.G.W. Butler 8 April 1832, folder 554, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.

41 E.P. Lewis to Mrs. E.G.W. Butler 6 May 1832, folder 556, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.
with her slaves’ world. Her willingness to step into the slave activity of gatekeeping, even on a rare occasion, demonstrated the dialectic at work between their two separate worlds.
CHAPTER II

Seeing to the Physical Comforts: Food, Clothing and Medicine

Domestic activities surrounding food, clothing and medicine mentioned in the Woodlawn texts will be closely examined in this chapter to see what light they shed on the acculturation process. Each activity will be examined in light of the physical role that both mistress and slave played and in light of the cultural understandings they brought to the activity. Foodways, in particular, provided for a unique mix of acculturation and a support system for the new republican mother. This chapter opens with a look at sustenance and the manner in which food preparation served to help or hinder Nelly’s role as republican mother. Differences in the site of food preparation for blacks and whites, nutritional level of their respective diets, manners of serving and timing of meals, as well as shared recipes will all be examined. A section focusing on social importance of clothing, the construction of clothes and maintenance of raiments will follow the foodways discussion. The chapter will close with a look at the differing perspectives of blacks and whites toward medicine, types of care received and experimentation with new "cures."

Sustenance

To be sure the well-provided kitchen of the mistress of Woodlawn had little in common with the food preparation areas in the quarters. At Woodlawn, as was the custom of southern plantations in general, the kitchen was a free-standing structure
separate from the main house. It was made of the same material as the main dwelling had a large open fireplace and was connected to the main dwelling by a brick wall. Cookovens were becoming popular in the early part of the nineteenth century, but no such purchase was made by the Lewises. Cooks at Woodlawn continued to utilize the open fireplace. Although a bit old fashioned, the kitchen was well maintained and stocked with the provisions and implements necessary to create the well-laden main dinner of the day and the smaller breakfasts, teas and suppers. A crane to adjust pots proximity to the heat, a spit to roast meats, a beehive shaped bake oven for breads and pastries were likely part of the kitchen accoutrements. Recipes note the use of specialty items such as waffle irons, molds for creams and cheeses, tin plates for gingerbread and earthenware pots for rouxs in the kitchen premises of Woodlawn. These same recipes required a well stocked larder with flours, sugars, spices, preserves, dairy products, grains, meats, tea, coffee and wine.\footnote{Pat Brady Schmidt, ed., \textit{Nelly Custis Lewis' Housekeeping Book} (New Orleans, 1982) 34-36. See recipes on pages 75, 85, 92 for mention of cooking implements noted above. Recipes throughout the journal make reference to a quick oven, a moderate oven and slow oven which would indicate the presence of a beehive oven for baking. These ovens were usually stoked with coals to fire them to high temperatures and then allowed to cool. All the baking for the week was then done throughout the day, starting with items requiring the most intense heat and finishing with those requiring a slow oven.}

Such was not the case in the quarters where slave women usually had little more than a few rudimentary items, often a pot, a knife, and some coarse earthenware. Her "larder" may have consisted of little more than a carefully concealed root cellar where foraged provisions or food items acquired by stealth were stored for later consumption by her family. Often owners hindered the use of such cellars as a consequence of
raising slave housing off the ground for healthful circulation of air.\textsuperscript{43} That this crawl space underneath the cabins could be easily checked by plantation owner or manager was a fact recognized by slaves, but it was not so intimidating as to eliminate the use of root cellars altogether. Archaeologists have continued to find evidence of such cellars throughout the antebellum period. Having limited implements at hand for food preparation in the quarters, slaves were left to the imaginative use of items that came easily to hand. Tools such as a garden hoe or a wash pot not always associated with cooking, were put to extended use. Moore in her article on African-American foodways quotes eighteenth-century traveler Thomas Anburey as saying, "Hoe-cake is Indian corn ground into meal, kneaded into dough, and baked before a fire; but as the negroes bake theirs on the hoes that they work with, they have the appellation of hoe-cakes."\textsuperscript{44} This ancillary use of the hoe was not lost on Nelly who in a January 7, 1820, note passes on a bread making recipe with mention of the black tradition of using this farm implements, [you] "drop a spoonful at a time on a hoe or griddle as we say in the south...."\textsuperscript{45}

Although plantation records reveal the use of communal cooking sites in the quarters, to date no archaeological evidence has turned up a such a communal kitchen. Evidence has surfaced, however, which indicates that slaves cooked at least some meals

\textsuperscript{43} Theresa Singleton, "Archaeology of Slave Life" in Edward Campbell, Jr. and Kym Rice eds., \textit{Before Freedom Came:African American Life in the Antebellum South} (Richmond, 1991) 167.


\textsuperscript{45} Parke Lewis \& E.P. Lewis to Elizabeth Bordley 7 January 1820, Mount Vernon Library.
at their individual housing sites. Plantation records also suggest that it was common for a designated nursery superintendent to see to slave children’s weekly rations. Rations would be given directly to the supervising granny rather than a child’s parents. The plantation’s children would then all be fed at once, at least during the working hours of their parents. They may have eaten a small meal in the evenings as part of their respective nuclear family. Such an arrangement demonstrates that neither slave owners nor slaves expected the biological mother to provide for all of youngster’s needs. Motherhood among the slaves could be said to be a collective experience based on close female cooperation.

The role of plantation mistress required that Nelly oversee the securing, storage, preparation and serving of food for the household. Provision of a variety of plentiful and unspoiled foods at Woodlawn was critical. Utilizing time worn "tricks of the trade," she stretched the seasons to assure availability of seasonal delectables with limited natural viability. All aspects of the food supply were under her purview, from fruit to fish to pork. Of the fruit crop Nelly wrote "there was a storm of snow and sleet, the fruit was injured but not destroyed."46 Of the delicious abundance of shad roe she urged her son-in-law to come taste as they are "thought to be the finest fish caught in any river...." As an afterthought she noted that was "shocking [for her] to be writing Charles Conrad about fish..."47 Her correspondence also notes her concern for the distribution of meat after hog slaughtering season.

46 Brady, George Washington’s Beautiful Nelly 104.

47 E.P. Lewis to Charles Conrad 17 April 1835, Mount Vernon Library.
Nelly had to be sure that a sufficient supply of meat was stored in the smokehouse, that adequate quantities of flour had been milled and carefully stored to prevent contamination by bugs and mold, that butter was churned and that the yard had enough in the way of laying hens to provide for the egg-rich desserts and sauces fashionable in early nineteenth century. In addition, she saw to it that shellfish, fish, fresh fowl and game were available, that the orchard and garden of Woodlawn were productive and that the cellar was well stocked with preserves, jams, pickles, preserved vegetables, and imported luxuries such as tea, coffee, sugar, spices, salt and wine. On a fairly regular basis she had to see to the smooth presentation of an immense and elegant dinner in the family's dining room for family members and any number of guests. To a large part her reputation as a Virginian housewife of the first order was determined by the successful completion of this regular ritual. It was the central drama performed almost everyday the mistress was in residence at Woodlawn. It was performed with a core cast of characters and changing supporting roles. Its success spoke not only to her abilities as mistress but to her achievements as new republican mother, providing healthful mealtime favorites of her family in a civilizing decorous setting appropriate to their station in life.

Plantation women wrote little about the actual preparation of meals in their letters, presumably because they did not do a lot of the cooking themselves. Food preparation was usually mentioned in the context of putting up preserves and pickles and the making of special pies and cakes. Nelly makes such references when she exhorts her friend Elizabeth in 1817 not to "give up music & painting, for pickling, 

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48 Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household* 118.
preserving, & puddings although I have done so in great measure."49 Five years later she recounts her making of a special dessert for a large wedding dinner party, "yesterday we gave them a large dinner party, I had fatigued myself so much making a dessert over the fire, that when the hour came that I should call my guests to dinner, I was obliged to take Seidlitz powders & bind up my head with poplar leaves however, P (Parke) exerted herself to do the honors, & after dinner I dressed, as soon as my head was bearable, & went out to the company."50 These examples of dessert preparation by the mistress, however, were occasions outside the norm. For the most part, cooking and food preparation activities were the work of slaves.

Typical of most mistresses of elite households in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Nelly kept a housekeeping journal to aid Woodlawn cooks in preparation of favorite family recipes. This document was given to her daughter Frances probably sometime in the late 1830s and has survived in the Butler Family Papers. Often plantation mistresses would add interesting or unusual recipes to their journals as they came across them. Thus, the journals served as memory aids providing a listing of ingredients. Frequently they did not offer comments about techniques or specific preparatory instructions because those would be apparent to the experienced cook. Pat Brady Schmidt contends:

....slave cooks did almost all the cooking. In using either these books or the printed cookbooks which were becoming common, recipes would be read

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49 Brady, George Washington’s Beautiful Nelly 82.

50 E.P. Lewis to Elizabeth Bordley Gibson 25 June 1823, Mount Vernon Library. Transcription.
aloud to illiterate servants. Housekeeping books were also used in training the daughters of the family in household management, and along with published cookbooks were passed down by mothers to their daughters as part of their family heritage.51

Nelly’s journal, like other period samples, was divided into two sections; one intermixing recipes for cooking and housekeeping and the second section containing medicinal cures. The volume contains recipes which were clipped from newspapers, verbatim copies from cookbooks of the day, and favorites passed along by friends. It appears to contain a number of recipes from servants—both black and white. Clements, Mrs. Clements and Ann Bamber are believed to have been white servants at Woodlawn. They are associated with various housekeeping recipes in the journal, not all of them cooking recipes. Old Doll, Old Letty and Dolcey and Hanson were all slaves connected with the property and are mentioned in the journal. Hanson is believed to have been a male cook at the plantation in the mid-1830s. Male cooks, as Parke’s sister-in-law Caroline Bell would later claim, were preferred as they tolerated the hot fire of open fireplaces better than women. How and why were these particular recipes recorded? Were these recipes recorded after observation of the slave cook or mistress? Were they dictated by a slave of Nelly? Were these recipes particular favorites or specialties of the slave cook(s), of the planter family? Or both? Also, if these journals were often used as tools to be read aloud to slaves, who was doing the reading? Was it the mistress? A literate slave? The daughter of the house? Recitation of recipes from these albums may help explain the complimentary notes which Nelly felt compelled to include around

51 Schmidt, Housekeeping Book 18.
certain individual recipes, for example "Hansons Mode of Making Chicken Broth; the Best in the World."52 After all, the true skill of domestic management was the mistress' application of her powers of persuasion, cajolery and influence to maintain order in her landscape. A few editorial compliments might go a long way in making the use of blatant outright authority superfluous.

As Barbara Carson notes in *Ambitious Appetites: Dining Behavior & Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington* the elite household usually contained a pair of rooms immediately identifiable as public rooms by the absence of beds and washstands. "A genteel household or one 'where affluence abounds' needed these two rooms. In 1838 to receive company in a dining room, [was] not allowed stated one etiquette book "except [by] those who cannot bear the expense of furnishing a parlour or drawing-room."53 Woodlawn boasts three rooms on its groundfloor which did not contain bedsteads or washstands. They were the small family parlour for intimate family gatherings, the formal dining room and the elegantly appointed parlour for musical entertainment. This arrangement reflects a typical pattern of formal dining behavior as noted in a letter which one dinner guest wrote to his wife in 1818. He described a dinner with the Lewis family during which Nelly presided at the head of the table in a large candlelighted room. Rich food was borne into the dining room by liveried slaves.54 This was a change from earlier days when elite women were mere silent

52 Schmidt, *Housekeeping Book* 73.


functionaries at their husbands tables. They were now called upon to share the responsibility in a hosting partnership. Women were, however, still expected to withdraw from the table at the end of meal and retire to the nearby parlour to await the men’s company. Men were given the opportunity to linger at table for additional potations. From time to time when this practice was breached, it would appear that excuses had to be made. Angela Lewis confessed to Charles conrad that "Aunt Anna and myself drank your health and safe return in a Bumper, after Mother and Father had left the table. What think you of such practices! As you were the cause you must excuse us.”

As Carson notes, "people in the past could size up social performance because they perceived differences in the range of behavior and recognized the social messages encoded in the actions of others." In one of her letters to her daughter Parke, Nelly discusses at great length her disgust at an extended family member’s lack of table manners. Brother to her daughter-in-law this child "lived to eat." He would start eyeing the chicken from the moment he came to table. He was not satisfied unless he consumed all, leaving nothing for his fellow dining companions. This break in etiquette ruined the landscape of an elite family consuming their dinner under a strict code of appropriate behavior. What was particularly shocking to Nelly was that his behavior

55 Carson, *Ambitious Appetites* viii.
56 Angela Lewis & E.P. Lewis to Charles Conrad 5 November 1834, Mount Vernon Library.
wents unchecked by either Esther or her mother. They were failing in their duties both as Mother, sister and female keepers of decorum.\textsuperscript{58}

Just as Nelly was concerned that family and guests maintain the social order of her dinner table landscape, so too was she concerned with slave behavior in and around the dining room. Their presence in this grand space was to legitimize the white landscape. They were there to deliver from the detached kitchen all the edibles to be consumed, to serve individual portions, to take care of dishes known as "removes," to top glasses and to clear the table between courses. Nelly seems to have kept to the traditional English practice of placing all the dishes for a course on the table at once and having the host participate in the serving of portions. Typical of her dinners were two courses, the first course of hot meats, vegetables and seafood, the second a large dessert course and a finish of wine, fruit and nuts. Representative Hubbard dined at Woodlawn in 1817 and reported to his wife that "... the table was spread with double table cloths, and the first course consisted of beef, mutton, oysters, soup, etc. The first cloth was removed with these viands and the clean one below was covered with pies, puddings, tarts, jellies, whips, floating island, sweetmeats, etc. and after these we came to the plain mahogany table."\textsuperscript{59} Nelly did not adopt what her Aunt Rosalie referred to as the "American mode" of one course dining.\textsuperscript{60} There is some evidence to suggest that upon occasion she made use of the French mode of service, which placed dishes on a

\textsuperscript{58} E.P. Lewis to Mrs. E.G.W. Butler 1 June 1832, folder 559, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.

\textsuperscript{59} Rep. Thomas Hubbard of New York to Mrs. Hubbard 29 December 1817, Paul Kester Papers, Fairfax Library, Microfilm.

\textsuperscript{60} Margaret Law Callcott, ed., \textit{Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stiers Calvert} (Baltimore, 1991) 153.
sideboard rather than down the center of the table. This latter mode of service relied heavily on servant participation in dispensing servings of food. It required a particularly well trained staff. It also required a discreet staff. Knowledge acquired by their access to private spaces like the dining room was not to be commented upon, at least not within white hearing. In *Weevils in the Wheat* one slave noted that her owners had "...done plenty of things for people that nobody didn't know nothing 'bout me--on account of me hearing 'em talk while they wuz eating."\(^{61}\)

According to Carson the early nineteenth century was a time that saw "the increasing homogeneity of objects...[which] seems to have encouraged a zeal for distinguishing status by greater demand for objects of specialized design and by closer attention to the fine points of using them."\(^{62}\) Dining at Woodlawn, members of the elite class would come into contact with such specialized items as Representative Hubbard notes in his reminiscences of an evening spent at the Lewis plantation. "The service of plate was very rich-the large tea waiters and smaller servers being of massive silver, probably the same which was once owned by the Father of his Country."\(^{63}\) It was essential for houseslaves to gain knowledge of the correct use of material items. They were initiated into the mysteries of using various dining utensils and the massive silver tea equipage. With such knowledge came a limited power, a certain understanding of the dominant culture. However, the equipment reaffirmed social

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\(^{62}\) Carson, *Ambitious Appetites* 57.

\(^{63}\) Rep. Thomas Hubbard of New York to Mrs. Hubbard 29 December 1817, Paul Kester Papers, Fairfax Library, Microfilm.
distance as the ownership of such luxurious items was outside the slave experience. Archaeological evidence at Mount Vernon suggests that teawares were a part of the material culture of the slave quarters.\textsuperscript{64} Tea equipage probably ended up at slave sites as gifts from the planter family, as purchases made by the slaves and as examples of theft from the main house. While fine samples of ceramics have been culled from the slave site of main house at Mt. Vernon, the Polish visitor Julien Nemcewicz's mention of teawares at a Mount Vernon field quarter in 1797 does not mention any particular fabric or style for the observed tea-kettle and cups.\textsuperscript{65} This may indicate that field slaves had tea equipage made of cruder fabric than the house slaves.

As Nelly's correspondence is silent regarding faux pas committed by "servants" in the dining room and laudatory accounts exist which recall the splendid meals and hospitality given and received at Woodlawn, it is probably safe to conjecture that as mistress and hostess of Woodlawn, Eleanor Parke Custis was highly successful at maintaining the presentation of order in her dining room landscape. Her only acknowledgment of specific black and white interaction while in the dining room surrounds the issue of the offensive smell of "servers." She appears to have shared the belief of Thomas Jefferson and others of the day that blacks had a greater number of glands under the skin surface secreting odiferous perspiration. Concerned at how white table manners and decorum could be broken, by "mortification," Nelly included in her housekeeping book a recipe for Chloride of Soda. This concoction "in relieving persons


\textsuperscript{65} Pogue, "Slave Lifeways at Mount Vernon" 38.
affected by bad air from offensive servers & a napkin moistend'd with Chloride of Soda placed under the nostrils and repeated restored several from apparent death...."66

Timing of the family meal is another matter of note. Although correspondence of individuals outside the domestic circle who attended meals at Woodlawn indicates that dinner was served at 4 o'clock, one could speculate whether or not the Lewis' adopted the early Sunday meal convention which was common practice at Mount Vernon under Nelly's adopted parents. This measure was admired by Nelly and noted in her letter to Elizabeth Bordley Gibson regarding Washington's management of Mount Vernon. "The Gen'l roade every day to his Farm & returned at 2 oclock generally--dressed & dined at 3 every day, except sunday--2 oclock was the hour that day, to accommodate his servants with a long afternoon."67 Did she see this as the action of an enlightened owner allowing slaves a little personal time, or the response to slaves asking for some time to worship, tend gardens and care for children, etc.?

Due to their availability, low cost and supposed nutritional value, pork and corn constituted the primary foods for most Virginia slaves. Both could be raised on the farm. Many historians agree that the usual amount of rations for a male fieldhand varied between a peck and a peck and half of corn per week and about 3.5 pounds of bacon or salt pork per week. Female bondswomen were lucky to see a weekly figure sinking below one peck of corn and two pounds of bacon, less if househands. As Savitt points out in Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases & Health Care of Blacks in

66 Schmidt, Housekeeping Book 111.

67 Brady, George Washington's Beautiful Nelly 134.
Antebellum Virginia, slaves fed on this diet alone would soon have become emaciated and sickly and would have shown symptoms of several nutrient deficiencies.68

Often plantation masters would distribute additional provisions such as molasses, honey, milk and wheat. Molasses, unbeknownst to slaves and masters alike, was not merely a sweetener and food flavoring—though this probably contributed to its popularity. Five tablespoons could represent as much as half of an adult male’s, and nearly one-quarter of a female’s, minimum daily iron requirement, as well as 250 much needed calories.69 Honey, although not a major sweetener, was also popular. Woodlawn had its own hives and Nelly incorporated a recipe to kill a common hive pest in her housekeeping journal. Of these added provisions, milk was probably only given in small amounts to the slaves as the South had an overall low milk production capacity. When it was more readily available, during the spring and summer months, spoilage was a premier problem. The unspoiled milk mostly arrived at the big house table rather than at slave meals. Various slave accounts, however, from WPA interviews note that from time to time a bit of buttermilk was part of the regular slave diet. From a nutritional and disease standpoint it is probably just as well that milk was not consumed in great quantity by black slaves. Both Moore and Savitt point out that “much of the region’s population could not with comfort drink milk. Many, but especially blacks, were lactose intolerant.”70 The enzyme lactase, needed to convert


69 Savitt, Medicine and Slavery 94.

70 Moore, "Established and Well Cultivated" 77. See also Savitt, Medicine and Slavery 45-46. Should be noted that many of the WPA accounts of milk product consumption date from the mid-nineteenth century throughout the South.
lactose into absorbable sugars is an enzyme which the body ceases to produce as it moves out of infancy and into childhood. Wheat, though eaten by slaves in the form of bread, cakes and pancakes, was consumed in far less quantities than the ubiquitous maize. This too, Savitt points out was probably fortunate as unenriched bolted flour without germ or bran, the kind most whites used, had far less food value than cornmeal.71

The greatest additions to the slave diet came from the slaves themselves augmenting their rations by maintaining gardens, fishing, hunting and by stealing. Niemcewicz described "...a very small garden planted with vegetables was close by [the quarter], with 5 or 6 hens, each one leading ten to fifteen chickens... they sell the poultry in Alexandria and procure for themselves a few amenities."72 Dennis Pogue, archaeologist at Mount Vernon postulates that the number and variety of bones found at the mansion house quarter site speak to the ability of the slave to augment his or her rations. "It may imply more free time and more choice as to how they could spend that time."73 In Roll, Jordan, Roll Eugene Genovese claims that slave men were responsible for nutritionally adding to their families’ fare. He claims learning to hunt was a threshold for a boy’s passage into manhood and that slave men "accumulated a supply of their favorite foods for their families and gave their women the wherewithal and the occasion to demonstrate their culinary skills."74 White argues that evidence

71 Savitt, Medicine and Slavery 94.
72 Quoted in Pogue, "Slave Lifeways" 36.
73 Pogue, "Slave Lifeways" 40.
74 Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll 489.
indicates female slaves were also involved in the process of securing additional provisions for their families. They did not sit back and wait for men to supply extra meat, fish and poultry. In addition, like white women, they frequently took responsibility for kitchen gardens.

Bones recovered at the Mount Vernon houseslave site suggest Washington’s house slaves consumed a number of fresh-water fish, primarily catfish, bass and herring. Many may have come from George Washington’s Potomac River fishery. Others show evidence of having been caught by lines. Washington notes in his diaries that he would often utilize a portion of his spring catch as rations for his slave community. Nelly corroborates this in her letter to her friend Mrs. Gibson, "frequently 100,000 herrings and sometimes more are caught in one draught. Many were annually fed and clothed from his and Grandmama’s land...." In addition to the ever present pig bone, bones of wild fowl such as quail, duck, goose, and turkey; wild animals such as raccoon, deer, squirrel, rabbit and opossum; pond fish such as sunfish, and bluegill; young chicken and chicken egg shells were all found during the excavation.

While Nelly’s correspondence does not directly mention slaves tending their own garden plots and hunting to sustain themselves, one need not look further than the 1846 auction advertisement description of Woodlawn to see that woodland animals were plentiful on the property and access to the river was easy, "deer are abundant on the lands, and Dogue creek and the Potomac river afford the finest fish and wild fowl,

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75 White, Ar'n't I A Woman? 155-156.

76 Brady, George Washington’s Beautiful Nelly 134.
among which the famous canvass-back duck abounds." Every slave site where food remains have been recovered and analyzed has produced some evidence that African-Americans consumed at least some wild foods. Given Woodlawn's advantageous proximity to river, creeks, woods and fields it would appear fair to conjecture that Woodlawn slaves were probably fairly well fed. Delicacies like deer, wild birds and ducks may not have constituted an integral part of the slave diet, as guns --to which slaves had limited access--were required to procure them. Nevertheless, the means for generally augmenting the slaves' diet were close at hand. Woodlawn slaves may also have had the opportunity to add to their food staples by utilizing simple traps and hunting dogs and by sustaining garden plots. The practice of night raids on sheep and hogs with "hunting" dogs was a long standing tradition about which Washington often complained in his letters. Nelly's correspondence and housekeeping book also make frequent reference to roaming dogs and her fear of mad dog bites. The practice of keeping and hunting with dogs may be an African survival, as dogs were kept in the kingdom of Messina along the Niger River and were domestic animals raised by the Ijebu on the Guinea Coast.78 Allowing slave garden plots would not have been alien to either former resident of Mount Vernon, Nelly or Lawrence. As Niemcewicz recorded, Mount Vernon slaves were accustomed to supplementing their diets with such produce. Beyond subsistance these gardens may well have represented an extension of the living quarters, providing a setting for domestic chores, entertainment, and

77 Alexandria Gazette, 2 May 1846, Lloyd House Library, Alexandria, Microfilm.

Although display items such as flowers may not have been heavily represented in slave gardens, the manner in which the garden was laid out, swept, and worked is evidence of its extended function for the slave community. As part of the landscape of the slave the yard provided an area for communal cooking and washing of clothes in large kettles. It also provided an area for the attending of children too young to work in the fields and a gathering place for dancing, singing and the playing of musical instruments. This communal yard of the quarters, lacking clear boundary delinations, served to engender a sense of community among the slave population.

Just as the yard served a multiplicity of purposes so too did implements of the yard like large kettles used both for boiling clothes on wash days and as cook pots for specialties like soup and lye corn

We do soup in the yard. And we make lye corn in a pot in the wintertime. You take the corn and shell it, put in the wash pot, and put yourself some water in there and put some cooking soda in there. then you cook that corn until it gets done, Then you take it out of that lye and wash it and put it back, in the pot and cook it until its completely done. They call that lye corn. It’s real good. some people call it lye homely. Used to put ashes in there drop water throught it to make the lye. It’s

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healthy. It’ll clean your system out.80

This idea of cooking with ashes shows up repeatedly in the slave diet. Ash cakes were a favorite of slaves as were sweet potatoes cooked in ashes. In the forward to The First American Cookbook: a facsimile of "American Cookery" 1796 by Amelia Simmons the use of pearlash-- or refined potash which was achieved from making homemade soap-- in baking was a particularly American innovation. The introduction of chemical leaven into doughs, a practice which was to result in the compounding of modern baking powders, would revolutionize European cookery as well. "By 1796, someone-and the evidence seems to point to an anonymous American women-had dared to introduce a chemical into her dough to produce carbon dioxide in a hurry."81 Was this American cook a slave carrying with her cooking traditions of her ancestral past and forging new methods with the plentiful items at hand, namely, ashes?

House slaves, kept close at hand and always in demand may not have benefitted from the opportunity to tend a personal garden and may have had limited time to hunt and fish. They did, however, have something which fieldhands lacked--access to prepared food and provisions from the big house. They were closer to the kitchen and store rooms and better known by the mistress of the household and the cook. Generally white mistresses, not black mammies as some have asserted, had charge of the keys to the cupboards. At Woodlawn in June of 1827, Nelly makes it clear that she was loathe to part with this functional symbol of authority when her son Lorenzo


married Esther Marie Coxe. "Dr. and Mrs. C are expected next Thursday & I hope they will be pleased with the home of their child. I yet keep the keys to assist E until she feels at home..." she wrote Elizabeth Bordley Gibson from Woodlawn. Although Nelly's relations with her daughter-in-law were warm and cordial, Esther probably appreciated the move to Clarke County, Virginia. At the Lewis family property known as Audley, Esther could carry her own keys and not vie for position at Woodlawn with her mother-in-law.

Female house servants enjoyed special advantages. Sarah Fukke remembered that whenever the whites left the West Virginia plantation where she grew up, the cook "had a habit of making cookies and handing them out to the slaves before the folks returned." Any of the four known cooks on the plantation Hanson, Old Letty, Clements or Mrs. Clements would have had the same opportunity. In particular Hanson, known for his "thin biscuits" or cookies, may have treated the Woodlawn houseslaves and children. Ample time to snitch a roll or some meat or fruit while delivering food to and from the kitchen and dining room also existed for the enterprising house servant. As the odd cookie or biscuit was often not looked at as "thieving", Nelly does not make reference to missing food. Her carrying of the keys and her comments on locking up the airing clothes of her son-in-law in a room and "sealing the key," however, testifies to her overall concern with domestic pilfering in general.

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82 Brady, *George Washington's Beautiful Nelly* 190. Nelly noted in her correspondence that her son Lorenzo was to inherit Woodlawn when he attained the age of 23 in 1826. The language of Lawrence’s will in 1839 sounds as if he was reconfirming property already distributed to his children. This may account for why Nelly thought she should turn the keys over to Esther in 1827, just after her son was married.

83 White, *Ar’n’t I A Woman?* 156.
Although access to the elite household’s kitchen may have provided welcome supplementary provisions for the houseslaves’ diet and exposure to planter food preferences, the bulk of what the slaves consumed and how it was prepared relied largely upon African ancestral influence. As several of the cooks at Woodlawn were slaves, it can be seen how these influences wound up at Nelly’s table, in her *Housekeeping Book*, as well as in the slaves quarters. One example of this shared taste preference at Woodlawn was for the tomato. Helen Mendes in *The African Heritage Cookbook* claims that blacks in Africa had been cooking with tomatoes since the seventeenth century. She attributes use of this vegetable in their native cuisine as a contribution of the Portuguese, who had been in Western Africa since the fifteenth century. The Portuguese, long time culinary proponents of the tomato, first encountered it in Mexico where it originated and conveyed their enthusiasm for the vegetable to the West Africans. Given the path this vegetable may have taken from the New World to Africa and back via slave foodways, the Lewis family embrace of the tomato becomes particularly noteworthy. No less than five recipes appear in Nelly’s housekeeping book: two "tomata catsup," one "tomato soup," and one "tomato fig" recipe and a receipt for preserving "tomata’s during winter." The sheer number of recipes is striking given the fact that the tomato was just beginning to be eaten in Virginia during the late eighteenth century and was slow gaining acclaim. Well into 1830s the tomato was still considered unusual in Virginia households.

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While the connection between slave and white food cultures may be somewhat tenuous concerning cooking with a hoe or using baking ashes and the tomato, it can more securely be demonstrated by examining other recipes like Hanson's chicken broth, rinds of ripe watermelon, turnip broth, and a Lewis specialty called cressi, a vegetable puree served over a complex carbohydrate like rice. The latter in particular, which will be discussed in greater length later in the paper, recalls the starch and complementary vegetable "stew" which formed the essence of a typical West African meal. Sobel suggests that the process of acculturation was aided when the patterns of construction of housing or meals had roots recognizable to both cultures. Among other things she claims that the big house landscape with surrounding smaller dependencies was not a foreign spatial arrangement for slaves but rather a familiar layout similar the African chieftain main house surrounded by wives quarters.85 So too, with food the premier starch with "slippery" fringe was a recognizable construction of a meal to both those of European and African ancestry. Mintz in *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern Society* states that "this fitting together of core...and fringe...is a fundamental feature of the human diet."86 Characteristic of the British and indeed the American diet, however, was the gradual switch of flavor-fringe to core with complex carbohydrates moving to secondary importance as accompaniments. While this fundamental change in diet did not happen for plain folk until the industrial revolution, the well-to-do were eating sugar in larger and larger quantities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One need only look at Nelly's housekeeping book, where well over fifty recipes are dedicated to sweets, to see the importance of sugar in the Lewis

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86 Mintz, *Sweetness and Power* 9
household. To what extent did sugar play a role in slave diet? The vital importance of molasses has already been noted, but what of refined white sugar? As was mentioned previously, Hanson the male slave cook at Woodlawn in the 1830s, became proficient, even skillful, at making "thin biscuits" for the Lewis family. Presumably he mastered other sweet confections noted in the housekeeping journal as well. Yet it is his mastery of biscuits, a delectable with Anglo-American roots, rich in butter and sugar, and relatively easy to "smuggle" or distribute that makes the best example of the dialectic at work. Cookies requiring no special serving devices were easy to pop into one's mouth, or hide in one's hand or one's shoe. They may have served as an excellent vehicle for developing a planter elite sweet tooth in the African-American slave community. To a limited extent a liking for sugar is determined by accessibility to it. To what extent slaves had the opportunity to consume sugar and sweetened cakes and cookies, we can only speculate. To what extent they may have wanted to is even less clear since "sugar-eating habits... are not biological imperatives." It is not a matter of once exposed, endless craving. Many slave accounts rave about ash cakes as a much sought after dessert, even though its recipe calls for little more than corn, lard and ashes.

Moore suggests that in West Africa grains and legumes were boiled into porridgelike dishes and served with breads made from doughs of corn, rice or peas. These starchy preparations were bland by design to accompany a spicy vegetable stew

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87 The term biscuit here is used in the English sense, it refers to cookies.
88 Mintz, *Sweetness and Power* 15.
89 Moore, "Established and Well Cultivated" 79.
flavored with bits of meat. In America slaves duplicated this one pot meal in a variety of ways. WPA interviews indicate that one such favorite was commonly called "pot liquor," essentially the bits of vegetables and the liquid that remained after boiling vegetables. A cook often crumbled bread "in dat good and greasy liquer, put a lot of black pepper in hit and let her stem a little while."\(^{90}\) Pot liquor from leafy vegetables and greens—such as wild "creasy (cress) an poke sallet," turnip greens and cabbage were especially popular.\(^{91}\) May Satterfield, a mid-nineteenth century slave from Lynchburg, Virginia, interviewed during the WPA project specifically referred to the pot liquor or vegetable puree her mother made as creasy. This basic slave staple made an appearance at the Lewis dining table from time to time, albeit in a slightly amended fashion. Cressi was sometimes served over vermicelli at the Lewis dining table rather than over traditional rice. Cooks also experimented with a greater diversity in the type of vegetables used in the cressi mixture. A favorite of the Lewis family, no less than three of Nelly's receipts refer to the preparation and use of "cressi." Basic preparation was as follows:

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\begin{align*}
\text{take the red part of 8 carrots, 2 turnips, the white of 4 leeks,} \\
\text{2 onions, 3 heads of Celery, all washed very clean, mince the whole} \\
\text{small, put a bit of fresh butter at the bottom of stew pan, & the} \\
\text{roots over it; put it on a low fire. Let it sweat a long while, &} \\
\text{stir it frequently; when fried enough to be rubbed through a tammy,} \\
\text{add a small crust of bread, moistened with some broth; let the whole}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{90}\) Perdue, \textit{Weevils} 163-164. This account was from 1858 in Petersburg, Virginia.

\(^{91}\) Perdue, \textit{Weevils} 245.
boil gently. When done, skim all the fat off, & rub the whole through a Tammy. put it to boil on the corner of the stove in order to skim off all the grease & the oil of the vegetables; then cut some crumbs of bread into dice, fry it in butter 'till of a good colour, & put it into the soup when you serve up. This puree may be used with rice, vermicelli, Italian paste, small macaroni.92

One cressi recipe stresses that it should be "seasoned well." Pat Brady attributes Nelly's cressi recipe to a particular region in France known as Crecey in the Seine-et-Marne, long known for the excellent quality of its carrots, one of the suggested ingredients for cressi. This may well be, however, the manner of preparation and the ingredients involved suggest more than a passing African-American influence. In fact, its inclusion in the housekeeping journal can be interpreted as an example of Nelly acting as a conduit of black culture. Not only did she actively order or request its preparation for her own table, but she also added the recipe to her housekeeping journal to insure it would be passed along to her daughter and read aloud to white and black cooks. As Sobel has observed "sometimes African culture was given back to the slaves through the whites."93

Other journal recipes, such as chicken broth, soupe a la conde and turnip broth, call for a knuckle of veal or ham and/ or the back of a roasted fowl to be boiled with

92 Schmidt, *Housekeeping Book* 89.

vegetables such as turnip or red beans. These ingredients recall Moore’s claim that meat allotted to the slaves was often fatty and of poor quality, mostly suitable for flavoring vegetable stews or "cressis."\textsuperscript{94} Archaeologists at both Monticello and Mount Vernon have found highly fragmented animal bones with little evidence of burning, such as would occur from roasting, indicating that meat was chopped up into small pieces and cooked in a vessel placed over the fire—probably a pot—thus supporting the contention that one pot stews and pot liquors were part of standard slave dining experience.

Moore states that Mrs Randolph’s recognition in \textit{The Virginia Housewife} of the superiority of turnip greens "boiled with bacon in the Virginia style" went against popular advice from all other eighteenth-century English cookbooks on the subject. These standard works claimed that boiling meat with greens would cause discoluration. Moore postulates that Mrs. Randolph’s divergence from conventional wisdom may have been due to her exposure to slave cooks and their preference for seasoning vegetables with meat, especially pork.\textsuperscript{95} Another native African foodstuff which the planter elite assimilated into their own food culture was the melon, in particular the watermelon. Known in this country in 1705, this African fruit, thrived in southern colonies and made its way into Anglicized recipes for watermelon pickles, jellies, marmalades, etc. Nelly’s journal bears out the American adoption of the melon. In Entry 90 "Rinds of Ripe Water Melons" appears as a preserve.

\textsuperscript{94} Moore, "Established and Well Cultivated" 79.

\textsuperscript{95} Moore, "Established and Well Cultivated" 81.
When Sukey sat down to cornbread, vegetable soup or stew seasoned with spices and bits of meat, she was consuming a meal with West African roots. This was no mere coincidence—slaves took what they were given and fashioned from it what they knew. By the same token, however, when she ate a bit of bacon from her rations, caught a thin biscuit from Hanson or consumed an evening cup of tea from the old teapot the mistress gave her she was partaking in an African-American diet born of acculturation.

When Nelly sat down with her family to consume a dinner of a staggering number of viands meticulously laid out in a grand formal interior space of the dining room, they were consuming food in a familiar pattern known to their British ancestors. However, when as mistress she ordered dishes made by African-American cooks, such as cressi or vegetable stew served over vermicelli or rice, pickled watermelon rind, hoe-cakes and gingerbread made with pearlash, she too was consuming dishes born of an acculturation neither wholly European nor African in nature, but an unprecedented blend of both.

Clothing

"The mistress of the family," Jefferson pointed out," must be able to sew if she expects to direct the servants' work."\(^{96}\) At the very least, an accomplished mistress backed up her authority with evidence of expertise, even when she did not perform the work herself. Evidence of Nelly's expertise in wielding a needle may be seen at Woodlawn in the fine needlepoint items she made for family members such as piano covers, footstools and firescreens. In addition, her correspondence with family and

friends certainly suggests a greater degree of personal involvement in the day to day
collection and care of Lewis family clothing than with any other domestic chore. The largest number of specific references to named slaves involved in particular
domestic chores revolved around activities related to clothing. These references ran
the gamut, emphasizing the exorbitant expense and importance of habiliments and
textiles. Requests for fashionable frocks for herself and her daughters by "Madame.
Peto...my favorite" of Philadelphia were periodically made to friend Elizabeth. The
overseeing of sempstresses of the household as they hemstitched and tucked ruffles on
her grandchildren's clothing was commented upon repeatedly in Nelly's missives to
daughter Parke. Even incidents like the airing of her son-in-laws' clothing behind
closed doors "...I took a list and kept the door locked when they were airing to avoid
losing anything..." and the storing of his clothes in camphor and pepper were not too
mundane to comment upon. Dresses requested and sent from Philadelphia were
items to be anxious about. She cautioned Elizabeth to put the garments "inside of the
stage, if possible, as they [would] be less liable to injury then they would be behind" the
vehicle. Clothing was a subject of interest right down to its washing instructions.
Nelly often fretted over the washing of delicate merino shawls, scarfs and veils which
she intermittently asked Elizabeth Gibson to oversee in Philadelphia: "...the shawl I

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97 Brady, George Washington's Beautiful Nelly 142.

98 E.P. Lewis to Mrs. E.G.W. Butler 6 May 1827, folder 362, Butler Family
Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.

99 E.P. Lewis to Elizabeth Bordley Gibson 1 January 1824, Mount Vernon
Library, Transcription.
Clothing for the Lewis family and indeed for early nineteenth-century planter society was much more than just external covering. It went beyond warmth and protection from the elements and indicated gender and status. It was a non-verbal signal to all that the individual smartly garbed was a man or woman of the privileged class. Though Nelly might offhandedly comment to Elizabeth that in her youth she was "...always too restless to take time and pains in dressing. If cover'd modestly and clean, I cared for nothing else..."¹⁰¹ she goes on to brag that her Tiffen [Angela] was always neat in her appearance. Nelly recognized the importance of fashion in her world. Though situated in rural domestic retirement, she did not hesitate to impose upon her Philadelphia friend to secure the latest items, "... I prefer everything from Phia in preference to the works of the district because they understand, & execute, matters of taste, far better in your City."¹⁰² "For women, the contradictions between the fashionable and the retired life had special meaning, for they embodied the contradictions between personal glory and duty, between excitement and safety. The convention of the lady captured something of each without entirely resolving the tension between them. But whether in the world or in retirement, the lady relied upon fashion, upon dress, to demarcate her class position."¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Brady, *George Washington's Beautiful Nelly* 142.

¹⁰¹ Brady, *George Washington's Beautiful Nelly* 205.

¹⁰² E.P.Lewis to Elizabeth Bordley Gibson 9 March 1822, Mount Vernon Library, Transcription.

¹⁰³ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household* 216.
Slave women, especially those who worked in the big house, shared their white mistress’s appreciation of dress as a badge of class or quality. "Certainly, the house servants had a much better sense of the latest fashions than the yeoman women did." Often the mistress would use the inducement of clothing and food in an effort to have house slaves identify with her. A wise mistress, however, knew there were limits to these bribes. Nelly was just such a wise mistress. When she considered taking her valued sempstress and nurse out of the slaveholding states to Philadelphia she ultimately opted against it, because she knew that she may have faced losing them to the lure of freedom. Slaves were not solely dependent upon castoffs from the mistress for a sense of style. Often women would fashion hoops of grapevines for their skirts, use sweet smelling herbs and grasses for storing their "Sunday best" and craft shells or home-made beads into necklaces. A recipe for making red beads out of stale rye bread and vermillion exists in the housekeeping journal. While the primary use for beads prepared may have been decorative art work of Nelly’s, the beads may also have received an extended use by slave women for adornment purposes.

This knowledge of the connection between status and fashion led to periodic discussions of restrictive clothing laws for blacks throughout the south. With an expanding free population in urban centers like Charleston this contentious issue kept rearing its head. Charleston actually had an unenforced measure on the books from the seventeenth century when after the Vesey conspiracy a grand jury tried to mandate

104 Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household* 219.
"blacks to dress only in coarse stuff."\textsuperscript{105} Nelly may have shared this concern about slaves dressing "above" their station. In a passage from her 1852 will she bequeathes "...my silk dress to ACN Stuart--I leave a warm dress worth giving, to Miss Betty Roots, my old clothes to the servants."\textsuperscript{106} It is worth noting that dresses worth giving, in Nelly's estimation, were given to individuals of the appropriate station in life, while old clothes were given to slaves. Though out of date by the time these bondswomen inherited them, these old dresses still carried with them the badge of ownership by the fashionable elite. These garments retained some semblence of their original construction techniques and fabric of more superior quality than average slave clothing.

Another way of limiting slaves opportunity to wear elite finery was the provision of livery for house servants. Nelly never refers to the use of livery among her slaves. A brief mention of livery on Woodlawn's dining room slaves appears in a 1943 book by a descendent of Jacob Troth, one of the owners of Woodlawn after its 1846 sale. Though this citation is far from conclusive, livery may well have been used as references to liveried slaves appear in connection with both Arlington House her brother's property and Mount Vernon her childhood home. While livery did make a non-verbal statement about servitude, it also tended to be finer garb than standard slave garments worn on other parts of the plantation. Thus livery both set the slave apart from the elite landscape as a servant and included the slave as the appropriate character for the social setting of the dining room.

\textsuperscript{105} David Goldfield, "Black Life in Old South Cities" in Edward Campbell, Jr. & Kym Rice, eds., Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South (Richmond,1991) 142.

\textsuperscript{106} E.P.Lewis, will 9 August 1850, from Clarke County 23 August 1852 will book C:63 &64, Mount Vernon Library, Photocopy.
In all, five bondswomen were mentioned as sempstresses at Woodlawn, Sukey, Eliza, Polly, Nelly and Lucinda. Sukey, previously mentioned as the recalcitrant sempstress, seems to have been both the most proficient and the most difficult to manage. Eliza was trained by Nelly after Sukey was diagnosed as having a "fallen womb." Polly, was a sempstress touted for her ability to tuck. Nelly was a "recruit," armed with needle and thread only in times of dire need. Lucinda, a later gift of Nelly to her daughter Parke, was also taught the principles of sewing. In her later years at Parke's Iberville plantation, Lucinda appears to have been the much beloved "Mammy" or nurse for the Butler grandchildren. Edward George Washington Butler, Nelly's grandson, lauds Lucinda as one who would do his bidding whenever he had "occasion to ask her to do some little mending for [him]." Each reference in Nelly's correspondence to slave involvement with cloth concerns elite planter clothing.

Nelly frequently refers to training individual sempstresses at Woodlawn. Was this once again a case of the mistress not seeing the labor done by others? Was a more experienced slave actually overseeing the training? Looking at the context of the series of letters involving Sukey's resistant behavior, one can see that Nelly's statement is one of action. She was indeed involved in the actual training process. "I have made Eliza try her hand at tucking and shall persevere until I make something of her, She has tucked and untucked one ruffle five times already. I hope to get her right in time, Poor Nelly is as faithful and attentive as ever, I shall set her about [the] aprons." While

107 E.G.W. Butler, Jr. to E.G.W. Butler, Sr. 21 November 1853, folder 638, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.

108 E.P. Lewis to Mrs. E.G.W. Butler 8 April 1832, folder 554, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.
Nelly seems to have trained Eliza to the point where she was able to "tolerably" tuck bibs, she preferred that the ornery but talented Sukey complete the ruffles on the shirts. Talented or not, Nelly still chose to see her supervision of the sempstresses as an absolute necessity in terms of quality control. In a letter to Parke, Nelly said of Sukey "she has never been out since I told you of her being laid up, & the work done in the quarter is not so neat as it might be." Sukey knew her own worth as a competent sempstress. She realized that her skill made her valuable, and she used this knowledge to resist Nelly’s claim to absolute authority over her. That Nelly permitted this challenge to her authority to go unpunished speaks to the value of a well-trained sempstress. When Nelly’s eldest daughter Parke left home for her own domestic situation in Iberville Parish, Louisiana, her sister-in-law Caroline Bell wrote "you ask me if there is a sempstress among those women purchased of Col Poval--not one I assure you--capable of making the coarsest garment without assistance and instruction--so you had better supply yourself with one ere you leave Virginia."

While Nelly appears to have involved herself in giving sewing lessons, to what extent she became involved in actual physical labor of wholesale sewing projects and textile production can be debated. Fox-Genovese states that slaveholding women’s private writings abound with accounts of sewing--of mending their own clothes and of the endless hours spent "cutting and sewing of clothes for the slaves." She contends that it "offered the mistress an occasion to make explicit her sense of being burdened by the

109 E.P. Lewis To Mrs. E.G.W. Butler, folder 556, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.

110 Caroline (Bell) to Mrs. E.G.W. Butler 10 July 1831, folder 545, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.
care of her slaves." While Eleanor Parke Lewis refers to needlework accomplishments, piecing small sewing projects and the management of domestic slaves engaged in family sewing projects she never mentions large wholesale sewing projects, such as the preparation of spring or fall clothing traditionally given to slave populations on large plantations. Activities of spinning, weaving, carding, such as would take place in a large textile operation, are not mentioned in any of her correspondence. Her one reference to slave clothing concerned Mount Vernon "...Before the Genl was Pres-all the linen & woolen cloth & stockings worn by the negroes were made at Mt Vn-spun, woven and made up-towels too." That Nelly saw to adequate provision of slave clothing we can surmise from several oblique references. She informs Parke that she will keep Lucinda at Woodlawn until she is ready to receive her in Louisiana "...If you keep her [Ann Bamber-a white servant] & do not want to pay board for Lucinda, she can stay here as long as you wish. & be fed & clothed till you wish to have her again...." There is also the matter of a runaway advertisement in the *Alexandria Gazette* of October 19, 1803, for Peter, a Woodlawn slave, who was last seen wearing "common negro jacket and trousers." In addition, references in the housekeeping book to dyes sufficient for 20 lbs. of cloth and the washing of large quantities of homedied common cloth indicate that even if textiles for slave clothing were not produced on the plantation, large scale dyeing and maintenance projects did

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111 Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household* 129.

112 Brady, *George Washington's Beautiful Nelly* 134.

113 E.P.Lewis to Mrs. E.G.W. Butler 6 May 1827, folder 362, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.

take place. Nelly probably purchased bolts of undyed coarse linen and wool for slaves to dye and sew their own garments.

Many plantations with a hundred or more slaves found it economically expedient to have a full time cobbler making shoes. While no mention is made of a designated cobbler at Woodlawn, Parke is credited by her sister-in-law as having a detailed knowledge of the construction of slave footwear. Just after Parke and Edward Butler's nuptials Caroline Bell refers to her new sister-in-law's expertise in a letter to her brother Edward. As the note was written before Parke set eyes on her new home in Iberville, the skill may well have been acquired by Parke while under her mother's housekeeping tutelage at Woodlawn.

When Nelly ordered fine silk gowns and merino shawls from the finest mantuamakers in Philadelphia for the women of Woodlawn, gave homemade gifts of needlepoint to family members and bequeathed a gown worth giving she was calling upon her Anglo-American traditions to both reaffirm her position as mistress and mother. Keeping daughters outfitted in the latest style as each made her debut into fashionable society was an avidly pursued goal. Strengthened kinship ties were achieved with gifts of elegant needlework which would make the receiver think of the maker and vice versa. When Nelly cast approval on homemade methods of dyeing and admired Polly's and Sukey's ability to take small tucks rather than the going fashion of big tucks as she did in the following letter she was once again giving us a window

116 Caroline Bell to Mrs. Frances Butler 7 March 1827, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.
on the acculturation process. "Anna [Nelly's half sister] says the only trimmings worn are large tucks and broad hems...it is a convenient fashion but no one will take the large tucks when they can get such small ones as Sukey and Polly can make...."\textsuperscript{116}

Her inclusion of Dolcey's washing mode for doing up muslin, silk and cambric in her book of housekeeping tips for Parke, went beyond prefunctory recognition of the clothing skills displayed by slaves at Woodlawn. It served to extend the ongoing acculturation dialectic between future Lewis mistresses and their respective slaves.

While the slaves' use of headwraps, tignons, shell necklaces or blue glass beads (as will be discussed later) at Woodlawn may have signified African survivals, certainly the use of grapevine hoops for skirts and wearing of castoff clothing was something else entirely. Hoops and castoffs speak more to the emulation and modification of dress that took place in the quarters. Their use signifies acculturation in matters of taste.

**Medicine**

Illness was the constant companion of all Virginians prior to the middle of the twentieth century. It did not discriminate on the basis of sex, age, race or status. Parents worried about their offspring contracting intestinal parasites, severe diarrheas, and respiratory problems such as scarlet fevers, measles and bacterial infections. If children survived the common diseases, parents then contended with fears of typhoid, typhus, yellow fever, malaria, smallpox, diphtheria and pneumonia to name the most prominent ailments of the Virginia tidewater region. Letters and diaries of most planter families are filled with discussions of sickness and health, the latest known

\textsuperscript{116} E.P. Lewis to [unknown], portion of undated letter, Woodlawn Plantation, Photocopy.
treatment and approaching epidemics sweeping in from Europe and Asia. Nelly's correspondence repeatedly expressed concern for herself, her children, her husband, her extended white kinship network of family and friends and for the Woodlawn slaves.

To some extent Virginians of the early nation building era were captive of a medical tradition their ancestors brought with from England in the seventeenth century. It was known as a humoral system of medicine. The basis of this tradition was expounded by Hippocrates (460-377 B.C.) and Galen (A.D. 130-200?), physicians of the ancient world. They believed in a system of humors based on the natural world which stated that all things were comprised of four elements air, earth, fire and water, and possessed differing proportions of two pairs of basic qualities, warmth or coolness and wetness or dryness. Fire and summer, for example, are hot and dry, while water and winter are cold and wet. Corresponding to these four elements in the external world were four humors within the body: yellow bile produced in the liver, blood in the heart, phlegm in the brain and black bile in the spleen. In a healthy body all should be present in appropriate proportions. Tied to the season, each element predominated at a given time in the year. Thus in winter, phlegm usually predominated over its sister humors and the acquisition of respiratory diseases by household members was looked for by the mistress. Treatment would usually involve qualities of heat and dryness. Measles were viewed as a phlegm disease. In one missive Nelly warned her future son-in-law Charles not to treat measles as a trifle, "do not wash in cold water or
expose yourself to damp or cold air—nor night air."¹¹⁷ She instead advocated warm sassafras tea for eruptions.

Though treatment for ailments under the humoral system bears no resemblance to standards practiced in modern medicine, it did serve, as Todd Savitt claims in *Fevers, Agues and Cures*, to remove medicine from the realm of the supernatural to allow for empirical study. Native American and West African medical traditions also emphasized harmony and balance and need for restoring balance when the body was out of sorts. These medical practices, however, relied heavily on involvement of the shaman or medicine religious man to restore balance through sacrificial offerings, incantations and potions. While early colonists did invoke the "Almighty" and seek divine intercession in times of grave illness, they also saw the natural world as an "it" to be objectively analyzed rather than worshipped and appeased as a living thing.¹¹⁸ In other words, the Anglo-American interpretation of balance left room for empirical study. The Anglo-American tradition proved adaptable and lent itself to fit the local availability of various roots and weeds necessary for medicinal potions. Common ailments of wounds, sore throats, bleeding noses, tooth aches and bites would often be "doctored" by the mistress, while physicians were called in for more exacting or persistent maladies. Mistresses, relied on old medical books from England, domestic medical guides, physician friends and housekeeping journals with pasted recipes from newspapers. These journals also included trial by experience "cures."

¹¹⁷ M.E.A. Lewis and E.P. Lewis to Charles Conrad 17 May 1835, Mount Vernon Library.

Nelly was not shy about commenting upon and sharing new cures with her family and friends. Her letters are laced with home "remedies." She "prescribes" restorative cordials for all manner of ailments, like goose grease or deer suet for chilblains, pepper gargle for sore throats, well aired rooms and warmed sheets as cold preventatives and doses of ipecac to remove intestinal worms. The apothecary shop in Alexandria known as the Stabler Leadbeater establishment was the source of ingredients for many of her home-brewed purgatives and restoratives. Although the extant correspondence of this shop is off limits to scholarly review until it has received the benefit of conservation, the finding aid indicates that there are over forty requests made by Mrs. Lewis in the collection. Not a verbatim transcription of everything in the collection, the finding aid gives some helpful clues as to types of items Nelly purchased from Mr. Edward Stabler. Requests for mint lozenges, bladders for covering articles to be shipped by sea, china pots for lip salve, spirit of camphor, pale bark and a roll of blistering slave were among the items ordered by the mistress of Woodlawn.\footnote{Finding Aid for Apothecary Shop Papers, box 83 k&\#9, Lloyd House Library, Alexandria.} Her indebtedness to her supplier of medicinal supplies led her to credit Edward Stabler with a hive syrup purgative recipe recorded in her 1830s housekeeping book.\footnote{Brady Schmidt, \textit{Housekeeping Book} 109.} The following letter to the London firm of Allen and Howard as among the Stabler correspondence: please send "...one medium chest, complete with weights, scales, bolus, knives, etc. I want this to be of mahogany of good quality, as it is for the granddaughter of the widow of General Washington, the cost to be about twelve guineas." A year later a response from the London firm billed the apothecary for a "mahogany, folding door, medicine chest
complete at 11 pounds, 11 shillings & shipped it on the sailing vessel Union, Thomas Woodhouse master."\textsuperscript{121} If this is indeed Nelly's medicine chest, the timing of the order is particularly significant. An order placed in 1801 would make this one of the very first purchases made by the mistress of Woodlawn for her new establishment. It shows the importance Nelly placed on her role as first line of defense and primary caretaker prior to seeking professional assistance. Requests, in Nelly's hand, for medicinal products and for a plantation medicine chest would seem to confirm that it was indeed the mistress, and not the master as some have suggested, who saw to the health of plantation residents.

Many times disease went beyond what the mistress saw as her "medical knowledge." When this happened, Nelly did not hesitate to recommend that professional advice be sought. She advocated a visit to a physician when her son-in-law Conrad needed an eye operation.\textsuperscript{122} Nelly's letters abound with mention of her dear friend Dr. Henry Daingerfield being in attendance at Woodlawn. "My darling Parke is in very low health, she was seized with a bilious fever and has never been well since & Dr. H. Daingerfield fears she is in a decline"\textsuperscript{123} and "Sukey has falling of the womb

\textsuperscript{121} Eleanor Leadbeater in collaboration with the late Edward Stabler Leadbeater, "The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop 1792-1933" \textit{Journal of American Pharmaceutical Association} 23 (1934): 1138. This article surfaced in the Lloyd House files on the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop.

\textsuperscript{122} M.E.A. Lewis and E.P.Lewis to Charles Conrad 17 October 1834, Mount Vernon Library.

\textsuperscript{123} Brady, \textit{George Washington's Beautiful Nelly} 111.
which obliges her to lie on the Bed constantly. Dr. H. says it will continue till her confinement in June."\(^{124}\)

On the whole, Virginia's early nineteenth-century physicians resided in towns and were summoned to neighboring plantations when needed. When called out for a specific ailment they tended to stay a few days to see to all of the medical needs on the property. Dr. Daingerfiled fit just such a pattern. Residing in Alexandria, he was called upon to attend both black and white patients. Specific mention, in Nelly's correspondence, of his doctoring slaves at Woodlawn revolves primarily around the gynecological problems of female houseslaves Sukey and Sally. It is interesting to note that gynecological health concerns are never mentioned in reference to the white females at Woodlawn. While Dr. H. saw to Nelly's and her daughters' complaints of bilious attacks and decline, Nelly never recorded his treating gynecological disorders for any of the Lewis women. It may be that Nelly and her daughters never suffered such health problems. It is more likely, however, that the recording of such treatment for Woodlawn slaves had more to do with the importance placed on a female slaves' reproductive capacity and Nelly's inability to see them as individual women worthy of discretion when discussing details of intimate female concerns. As demonstrated earlier, gynecological problems or pregnancy could be used by female slaves to their advantage. Sukey certainly used her condition of a "fallen womb" to lighten her work load for several months. Common practice in the south also dictated that owners give extra food rations to female slaves known to be with child. An incentive like this may

\(^{124}\) E.P.Lewis to Mrs. E.G.W.Butler 8 April 1832, folder 554, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.
have contributed to the large numbers of children born of Woodlawn slaves. Of ninety-three slaves at Woodlawn in 1820, fifty-one were under the age of fourteen.

Nelly does not seem to have subscribed to the suspicion with which local doctors were often perceived during this period. Todd Savitt notes that people in early nineteenth-century America revolted against the harsh, expensive and often unreliable treatments of regular physicians. One of the most successful alternatives in Virginia was called the Thomasonian theory. Thomason based his system on medicines derived from plants, rather than the metals (such as the mercury in calomel) and salts liberally used by "proper" medics. He believed all disease resulted from a loss of internal body heat. Replacement of that heat through the use of lobelia, cayenne pepper, teas, brandies, wines and steam baths restored the body's natural balance and health. While Nelly, may have been influenced by this theory as she often advocated the use of wine, teas, bark & root remedies and cayenne pepper in croup and sore throat gargle recipes. Nevertheless, she also held her physician friends in great esteem, so much so that she was willing to purchase a $32 tea service with 86+ pieces from Philadelphia as a gift for Dr. Daingerfield.¹²⁵ Unlike the Thomasons, she did not take umbrage at the application of metal based remedies such as calomel. In fact, it is the failure to prescribe it for her dying teenage daughter that she believes contributed to Agnus's death: "Mdme Grelaud employed a stupid french Physician in whom she had confidence. he would not give Calomel and always said there was no danger...."¹²⁶ Nelly wrote

¹²⁵ Brady, George Washington's Beautiful Nelly 136-137. "I am anxious to bestow the China, as soon as possible, on the best of physicians & most disinterested of friends...He saved our lives by his unwearied care & attention...."

¹²⁶ E.P.Lewis to Betty Lewis Carter 23 November 1820, Harrison-Tucker-Smith Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.
to her sister-in-law Betty Lewis just after Agnus Friere's demise. As was noted in the Introduction, Nelly is sometimes accused of "excessive motherlove." Nowhere is this more evident than in her expressed concerns relative to her family's health. It must be remembered, however, that she was a mother who outlived all but one of her eight children. She was also wife to an infirmed man who constantly suffered from bouts of flying gout.127 She lived during an era when family health was the responsibility of the new republican mother. To be charged with this responsibility when periodic deadly epidemics of yellow fever, cholera and smallpox swept through communities with a vengeance helps to put her "obsession" in context.

Most planter women "doctored their slaves both as humane plantation mistresses, seeing to the needs of their black charges, and in their capacity as slave owners' wives, looking out for their husbands' property interests."128 While Nelly might comment on William's thin appearance and Moll's deteriorated condition, references to her administering care to the slaves never reflects the intimacy of care given to her daughter: "...I cannot give up nursing her myself, I should suffer more from anxiety than fatigue."129 Her letters to Parke throughout the mid 1820s and early 1830s reveal only a limited measure of concern for Woodlawn slaves and their exposure to epidemics, poisonous snakes and mad dogs or hogs. This concern was tempered by the reality of slavery. Since slaves were property it was considered acceptable to try out

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127 Brady Schmidt, George Washington's Beautiful Nelly 11. "Flying Gout, [was] a mysterious ailment that painfully attacked various parts of his [Lawrence's] body." It was a recurring problem requiring lengthy confinements resulting in his frequent consumption of opium pills.


129 Brady, George Washington's Beautiful Nelly 88.
experimental "cures" on them before advocating remedies for white family members. It was an attitude commonly shared by slave owners. At the end of the seventeenth century a technique known as inoculation or variolation had been imported from African and Asian cultures.\textsuperscript{130} A bit of the live smallpox virus was injected under the skin of a healthy person. Then a period of strict quarantine was enforced until the person had developed and recovered from a mild case of the disease. It was a dangerous and unpredictable procedure. In 1801 Thomas Jefferson added a new twist to inoculation experiments. He introduced a new smallpox vaccine devised by Mr. Edward Jenner in England to the Monticello residents, beginning with the black household members. The gamble involved in injecting this new strain from cowpox in order to gain immunity from smallpox paid off for both whites and blacks by helping to ward off this disfiguring and sometimes deadly malady. Other risky experiments performed on the slave population, however, did not have such salutary endings as the Jenner vaccine.\textsuperscript{131}

It became standard practice in Virginia after the success of Jefferson's experiments to vaccinate whole households to prevent the spread of smallpox. As evidence exists for

\textsuperscript{130} Savitt, \textit{Medicine and Slavery} 294.

\textsuperscript{131} Savitt, \textit{Medicine and Slavery} 293-299. "Medical experimentation in Virginia was not as cruel as Dr. Thomas Hamilton's tests upon the slave John Brown in a makeshift open pit oven in rural Georgia to discover the best remedies for heat stroke." Still remedies such as pouring near boiling water on the spinal column of those suffering from typhoid pneumonia was one tested "cure" inflicted upon slaves by Dr. Walter Jones of Petersburg, Virginia. See chapter 9 of Savitt's book \textit{"Blacks as Specimens"} for other examples of experimentation by both doctors and slaveowners.
the vaccination of white occupants of Woodlawn--Nelly’s grandson is noted as having received the vaccine in 1830 at the hands of Dr. Daingerfield\textsuperscript{132} -- it seems reasonable to conjecture that the entire Woodlawn household, both black and white were given the benefit of the Jenner smallpox vaccine.

In August of 1833 Nelly related what appears to be a fairly innocuous experimental application of medicinal care on her part. The miracle cure which she rhapsodized about was made with a local plant known as snakeweeds. It "grow[s] in our woods and generally in poor soil... about three and a half feet high."\textsuperscript{133} Nelly attributed knowledge of its healing properties to the Daingerfield "family," but she did not indicate whether she was referring to white or black members of their household. Nelly claimed that although its healing properties were known by the family for some sixty years, it had traditionally been thought of as a cure for bites of poisonous snakes and insects. She credited Mrs. Daingerfield with experimenting by giving it to one of her male slaves believed to be suffering from hydrophobia after being bitten on the instep by a wild hog. The pulverized weed was added to cows milk and strained through cloth before being administered. Three pints of the mixture were then consumed by the ailing slave. Nelly claimed that after a second dose the "fits" or convulsions of the slave were stopped. She credited use of this mixture, three times a day, for the next fifteen days with effecting a complete cure. Unable to let such a find go, Nelly spread the good news. "Upon my arrival home I made it known to all my neighbors, & I am fully persuaded through its agency I have been the means of saving several persons from Hydrophobia." Her first

\textsuperscript{132} W.H.Foote to George W.E.Butler 25 March 1830, folder 507, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.

\textsuperscript{133} E.P.Lewis to "Dear Sir" 24 August 1833, Mount Vernon Library.
application of this new cure was to a negro man from Alexandria, possibly a temporary laborer residing at Woodlawn. He had a blister plaster applied to a wound, but with "what effect I cannot say--on the ninth or tenth day he came to me complained of pains all his limbs with a nervous contraction of his features and eyes, fearful of an approaching attack of the Hydrophobia." Nelly had the weed prepared and administered for the "usual time" and he was cured. The cure occurred in 1809 or 1810 to the best of her recollection. Over twenty years later, in 1832, she met her patient in Alexandria at which time he approached her unrecognized and reminded her of having cured him.\textsuperscript{134} Once again Nelly’s worldview was reinforced. She entered town as mistress of Woodlawn, most probably on horseback or in a carriage. She was approached by this negro man, probably on foot, and lauded by the grateful slave for saving his life. Her position as both "maternal" healer and as mistress of the estate was reaffirmed in this exchange.

Though Nelly positively raved about its properties in an 1830s letter, she did not mention snakeweed in the \textit{Housekeeping Book} which she kept in this same decade. Given Nelly’s enthusiasm for its application for poisonous bites, it seemed strange that neither the "mad dog" nor snake bite "cures" mentioned in the journal contained snakeweed. Its absence, however, was most probably due to the indigenous nature of the Virginia weed. Nelly undoubtedly assumed that Parke would be unable to secure local seneca or Virginia snakeweed. Its local attribution is confirmed in \textit{A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on Her Diary 1785-1812}. Among other things,

\textsuperscript{134} E.P.Lewis to "Dear Sir" 24 August 1833, Mount Vernon Library. Hydrophobia refers to the disease contracted if individual is bitten by a rabid animal. See Brady, \textit{Housekeeping Book} 47.
Martha Ballard notes that seneca or Virginia snakeweed, sometimes known as Virginia snakerooot, when combined with marigolds and "water" was given to a woman to deliver a dead child.\[^{135}\]

This willingness to experiment may have made many blacks fearful of acting the guinea pig to white mistresses and physicians. Slaves often preferred to make do with their own resources: "when slaves was sick, dey went to de woods and got roots an' herbs ter doctor 'em wid." Old slave women made "teas" for various ailments and served as midwives for slave women. This knowledge of roots and herbs led many whites to fear poisoning by their slaves. Although this fear does not rear its head in Nelly's correspondence, it is alluded to in Parke's letter to her husband when she praises his personal servant Dennis, a former resident of Woodlawn, for discovering and getting rid of some poisoned cakes while on military manoeuvres with Edward. Fear of poisoning led to restrictive laws by the colonial legislature. As early as 1748 all blacks were prohibited, on pain of death, from dabbling in medicine without consent of the owners of the "doctor" and owners of the patient. This law was modified in 1792 to permit acquittal of those slaves administering medicines with good intention and with no harm to the patient. States and localities tried to discourage whites from seeking the aid of black doctors. They also tried to eliminate blacks doctoring each other. Among blacks, to a large extent, their efforts failed. Even among white owners like Nelly knowledge of medicinal properties of plants such as snakeweed was admired. Although Nelly never mentioned seeking aid from a black doctor at Woodlawn, she did send a blue glass hat

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from one her slaves to her grandson after his near drowning. This will be discussed further in the next chapter on spirituality, but it is worth noting as a possible example of "conjuring" medicine. In some African countries blue glass beads sewn on clothing were seen as talismans to ward off evil spirits. Was Sukey, who passed along the hat, acting out of a commonly held superstition among the slaves at Woodlawn? Or was she a recognized "conjuring doctor?" In passing it along, did Nelly recognize its significance? Did Sukey achieve an elevated status at Woodlawn because of conjuring knowledge? If so, maybe this is why her intransigent behavior was more or less tolerated.

The letter about snakeweeds and the discussion of inoculation exemplify the ongoing dialectic at work between mistresses and slaves. Snakeweeds and the process of variolation, a forerunner to inoculation, were respectively a plant material and a process familiar to Virginia blacks. The experimental use of this familiar plant and the alteration of a familiar process were tested in the enslaved community with what appears to have been minimal objection. The "success" of these experimental measures then led to their common use in the white community. An extension of meaning for both the plant material and the inoculation process had taken place. Snakeweeds moved beyond remedy for insect bites to become a possible cure for deadly hydrophobia. The introduction of the new smallpox vaccine called upon the familiar African tradition of variolation and then added the new cowpox strain to Anglo-American medical knowledge. The integral roles played by both blacks and whites in forging new medical knowledge were part of the continuing dialectic.
The physical activities of work linked both white women owners and slave women in a palpable sense. If they were not toiling side by side, the work of the slave woman was under the close scrutiny and management of the mistress. This style of household labor and the domestic management produced a great deal of acculturation. It did not, however, serve to eliminate social barriers between the women. Nelly did not consciously identify with her slaves. If anything the mistress’s management of domestic labor tended to emphasize social distance in a physical landscape which necessitated intimacy. She truly subscribed to the notion of the demeaning nature of physical labor. While the ongoing process of acculturation in terms of movement through the Woodlawn property, comestibles consumed, clothing worn and medicines subscribed to challenged the mistress of Woodlawn’s world, it did not pose anywhere near the "threat" that the issues of communication and spirituality did.
CHAPTER III

The Intangible Needs: Communication and Spirituality

Unlike patterns of acculturation born out of domestic chores, practices of communication and spirituality presented what could be termed more "invasive" challenges to the mistress's world. More invasive because they subtly altered her belief systems, her very ideas about internment, life after death and her most intimate forms of self expression, her letters. This chapter on the intangible needs focuses on the discreet but powerful forms of acculturation that altered the mistress's interior world. In spite of a world view that looked upon slaves as the lowest of social inferiors, Nelly would frequently pass along greetings and messages from Woodlawn slaves to family members, black and white in her letters. Not only would she pass these messages along, but often placed them in the sacrosanct section of the letter known as the postscript. Despite a world view that reaffirmed itself in the ordered interior of the Anglican church, often with women on one side, men on the other and slaves left to balconies and outside areas, Nelly would buy into some of the superstitious "religious" practices of the quarters, such as the "protection" offered by blue glass beads.

A great deal of a slave’s time for communication or worship amongst his or her own people happened in the evening hours, away from immediate supervision of the mistress. Sobel notes that blacks were considered "at leisure" in the nighttime. All through the slave period night traveling and celebration were noted and patrols were
in part created to control it. It remained, however, a widely followed pattern and wherever possible blacks met together after work. They made time for hunting, dancing, and religious meetings, using the nights for their own purposes."\textsuperscript{136} This use of evening for sharing folktales, visiting kinfolk or participating in ecstatic religious celebration provided episodes of relative "freedom" in a system that enslaved them.

\textbf{Communication}

With the lengthening of lifespans in the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century saw an enlargement of the kinship network. The truncated families of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century became a thing of the past and a new, warm, protective kin environment became a social phenomenon. At the helm was the new republican mother. She took seriously this role of guardian of the extended kinship web. She called upon an intergenerational world of relatives to help socialize her children. Daughters in particular were from infancy embedded in a network of relationships with other women, from female servants to grandmothers, aunts, cousins and sisters, learning their appropriate female identity in the planter household. Daniel Blake Smith states that mothers increasingly focused their attention on their children and extended their maternal protection and concern to the wider kin network because "they had little mobility or significant economic authority in the household."\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{136} Sobel, \textit{World They Made Together} 33.

\textsuperscript{137} Smith, \textit{Inside the Great House} 226-227.
As isolating as life could become on the plantation, it came under the elite female's purview to defy this separateness and sustain close connection with kith and kin. She played an integral role in communication between and amongst the extended family and close family friends, and facilitated communication between the members of the plantation household and the greater outside world. Familial relations were bound tightly by the mistress with an incessant round of reciprocated visits to neighboring kin and friends. Intimate suppers and an unceasing flow of missives were the means for reinforcing these kinship ties. Communication with the broader world and with individuals of the appropriate station or class was kept up through letter writing and acquiring reading material for the household, such as newspapers and novels, through social visits to town for balls and shopping, and through formal dinners and handed teas.

Typical of other women of her class, Nelly called upon her familial network for a wide variety of reasons. In her early years at Woodlawn as a young mother she frequently wrote to her Philadelphia friend Elizabeth Bordley for material goods of "taste and style" better executed in urban high style centers. Over time, however, other issues arose which also required kith and kin involvement. The academy education of her daughters in the former capital city in 1815 (Parke) and 1820 (Agnus) led Nelly to ask Elizabeth to act as a surrogate mother:

....I cannot suppress my anxiety about her. She is ever in my
thoughts, at the most trying period of her life, to make so great a change, from retirement to a splendid City. Unaccustomed to the voice of flattery which has turned wiser heads than hers, will she now be able to resist its syren voice. You my Beloved must assist me in guarding our Daughter against those shoals & quicksands which she will encounter in the perilous voyage of life.  

Until they reached the age of thirteen or so, children would often be taught at home by their mothers. Steven Stowe claims in Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters that "the glimpses we have of home schooling reveals it to have been indeed a slow business directed by family routine rather than intellectual goals. Often "classes" were just a brief hour or two a day--relegated to the evening, disturbed by slaves..." and housekeeping matters. Catherine Clinton agrees with this assessment saying that even when they wanted to teach their children themselves, the increasing demands of household and plantation management denied mistresses the necessary time." Nelly complains of lack of time for Angela’s studies due to "interruption by domestic duties & company." Lack of time was not always the enemy. As a successful domestic manager Nelly found ample free time for

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138 Brady, George Washington’s Beautiful Nelly 75.

139 Clinton, Plantation Mistress 126.

140 Brady, George Washington’s Beautiful Nelly 168.
needlework, writing and reading. Nelly herself was honest enough to claim that her attempts to teach Parke how to read were hampered by Parke’s "ill health" that prevented her from attending as she ought and from Nelly’s own deficiencies as a teacher "....I believe I am not well calculated for an instructress...."141 Given the popularity of Hannah More’s book on education in the mother-centered home, Nelly may have felt compelled as a new republican mother to school her children.142

Although fathers were often actively involved in the formal education of their daughters, Nelly seems to have been the one to champion selection of Madame Grelaud’s academy in Philadelphia for Parke and Agnes. It reminded her of her own happy years of academy education where she first met her friend Elizabeth. Her daughters traveled to and from the academy with fellow classmates and second cousins, Caroline and Julia Calvert. Angela, the youngest daughter, was schooled closer to home in Alexandria. After Agnes died while attending the Grelaud academy, Nelly could not bear to part with her youngest. Madame Grelaud’s establishment served as a model for

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141 Brady, George Washington’s Beautiful Nelly 69.

142 Clinton, Plantation Mistress 125. Referred to Hannah More, Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (1799) which emphasized that the education of children was a woman’s acknowledged power.
smaller academies south of the Mason-Dixon line. By the late 1830s one third of the students were southerners.

The purpose of these academies was to "strengthen a young woman's sense of family ties, including social position and responsibility..." Though Nelly expressed maternal worry about the "syren voice," she understood the benefits of an academy experience in Philadelphia. It provided opportunities for lifelong female friendships and exposure to what was au courant style. Above all, being in a "splendid city" meant opportunities to see and be seen in the right circle of people. It meant learning to take one's place in fashionable society, something quite necessary because an academy education usually ended with a girl's formal presentation to society and a season of parties and courtship. "Marriage and matchmaking provided social drama in southern culture...most certainly, women were obsessed with the small segment of their lives--courtship--which put them in the lime light." It was almost a unique opportunity to exercise power---the feminine power to accept or reject a swain's advances. In a

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143 Stowe, *Intimacy & Power* 134. See also Callcott, *Mistress of Riversdale* 254 regarding the expense of academy education. She notes that it took $1000 to keep two children in Philadelphia academies for the year. This money was spent on a son and a daughter.

144 Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household* 257.

145 Clinton, *Plantation Mistress* 58.
society in which women remained distinctly subordinate to men throughout most of their lives, one can easily understand this obsession. 146

Although the actual choice of a marriage partner was increasingly becoming a female prerogative in the early nineteenth century, the drama of the courtship process itself was played out in the context of the extended kinship web. Despite conflict, family members could not appropriately be excluded for "meddling" or otherwise being interested. 147 Just how interested can be seen in the following exchange which took place in 1840 between Nelly and her son-in-law Edward Butler

He says "Mother" & is all attention, but he has hated me ever since my Darling [Angela] married Conrad. His advice & consent were not required before her engagement, & he tried to prejudice Mr. L.[Lawrence] against C[harles] & me because he thought I had influenced my darling & Mr L to consent, but much as I like C, I did not, he was my child's own unbiased choice... 148

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146 Callcott, Mistress of Riversdale 332-333.

147 Stowe, Intimacy and Power 66.

148 Brady, George Washington's Beautiful Nelly 233.
Although Nelly might claim that Charles was Angela’s free and unbiased choice, it is clear that marital choice was a matter which reached beyond lovers’ preference. The courtship ritual of the early 1800’s taught the female participant to see a close relationship between personal desires and a general well-being as defined by class. The southern elite safeguarded its particular interests by making romantic love inextricable from social order. While women might have the feminine power to accept or reject an offer, her kin saw to it that she only entertained offers from persons of appropriate standing. In fostering an appropriate alliance, Nelly felt it was her prerogative to review her daughter Angela’s love letters to her fiance Charles Conrad throughout their engagement in 1834-1835. Not only was it her prerogative but it was her duty as a republican mother to check them for form and content and to comment on their appearance. Nelly usually did the latter in the postscripts—considered the most important part of a letter in the nineteenth century— which she amended to each and every one of Angela’s letters to Charles.

Letters, particularly courtship letters, were an integral part of the writer’s reputation. Words were chosen with care, handwriting exhibited academy standards and attention was given to the choice of writing implements and paper. When a billet doux did not measure up, excuses were offered "...my dear son-in-law although a desperate scrawler myself, I really am ashamed of our Tiffin’s [Angela] writing—however

149 Stowe, *Intimacy and Power* 105.
I suppose her nervous system must bear the blame...." By the same token pride was expressed when the letter fit the approved standards, as Nelly notes in a postscript to Charles, "every now and then comes a particularly neat letter in a particularly neat writing, which seems to inspire you all with one congenial feeling." 

Beyond facilitating courtship, the writing of correspondence constituted Nelly's late night activity. Sitting up at night "when all eyes save mine are closed in sleep," she assiduously maintained communication with her kinship sphere. Free from prying eyes she reaffirmed her social landscape. It happened every time she played mistress requesting her good friends the Gibsons to come for a long "Virginia visit," or healer by chiding her young son-in-law to care for his health or maternal instructress by guiding her daughters in the choice of a lifelong companion.

Slaves were usually not given the opportunity to master elite forms of written expression like letters, newspapers or novels. They lived, however, a life rich in

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150 M.E.A.Lewis and E.P.Lewis to Charles Conrad 30 May 1835, Mount Vernon Library.

151 M.E.A. Lewis and E.P.Lewis to Charles Conrad 4 January 1835, Mount Vernon Library.

152 Brady, George Washington's Beautiful Nelly 80.

153 Randal Miller, ed., "Dear Master: Letters of a Slave Family (New York, 1978) contains notable exceptions. This is a collection of letters between slave family members living in Liberia and in Virginia. All were once slaves of John Hartwell Cocke. Cocke, a progressive thinking planter, educated his slaves for
oral communication. Vestiges of their ancestor's culture were handed down verbally in recipes, spirituals, trickster tales and knowledge of healing and poisoning herbs. Unlike the isolated mistress striving to maintain outward ties, female house servants were often engaged in tasks of a communal nature and were therefore provided ample time for communicative encounters that contributed to much needed female bonding. As has been discussed, activities that centered around clothing, such as sewing, quilting, laundering and ironing increased, this access to other female houseslaves. Few bondswomen "lacked female companions to share escapades and courtship or older women to consult about the vicissitudes of life and marriage." Indeed, "female slaves were sustained by their group activities."154

From time to time, mistresses did ignore laws prohibiting the teaching of slaves to read or write. Among the Butler papers is a note from a slave named Sally at Iberville Parish to her Dennis when he was away on a military campaign with Edward Butler.155 Dennis obviously was able to read. He was a dower slave of Nelly's given as a gift to her daughter in 1835. The questions are did he learn to read while at

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154 White, Ar’n’t I A Woman? 141.

Woodlawn and was the mistress part of this instruction? Nelly's letters do not give us a clue to her views on instructing the slaves.

The issue of trust and the movement of correspondence is returned to time and again in Nelly's and her daughters' letters. Mail delivery was not always reliable, roads to the post office were often unpassable and letters could often be scrutinized by eyes for which they were not intended. A careful mistress choose with care the slave charged with such a mission. Nelly often combatted the odds by numbering letters and requesting her correspondents to number their's in order to keep track of missing letters. She also perused the newspaper for stray letters, "had I not seen it advertized in an Alexandria paper, as a dead letter--then I sent and got it."\textsuperscript{156} The engaged Angela best sums up this issue of trust when she writes her beloved Charles:

\begin{quote}
\textit{as I shall be in the midst of a crowd and bustle and could not write to you so well as at home, and inquisitive people would inquire who my letter was for, I thought I would write today and leave the letter at home, and when mother returned she would finish it and tell you about the supper, and how we passed the evening. You must not be disappointed, My dear Charles, if I do not write so regularly as at home. I shall not be in a room to myself and I never like anyone to see me writing to you}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{156} Brady, \textit{George Washington's Beautiful Nelly} 21.
or to send my letters by any but my own servants."\textsuperscript{157}

As we have seen, mail meant more to a mistress like Nelly than just pleasant light correspondence and a way to spend one's leisure time. It was a reassurance that all was right with her world, that kinship lines were in order, that courtship was proceeding as it should, that news of sickness and death had been properly passed along. Nelly eagerly awaited the arrival of letters. The slave charged with their delivery was a trusted and valued servant. At Woodlawn the "honors" seem to have fallen most frequently to a slave named Sam. Noted by Nelly in a postscript to Charles Conrad, "Sam did not go to the Post Office until yesterday, since last Tuesday, & of course we were not disappointed, I shall only fear silences, or harm in your eyes when we dont hear regularly or faults in the P office..."\textsuperscript{158} Other male servants were charged with collection of the mail from time to time as in the case of William or the "post boy," but it was Sam who was turned to on a regular weekly basis, "the road has been so bad this week, the weather so severe that Sam has not been to Alexandria since Wednesday, therefore, we have not had our weekly letter."\textsuperscript{159} Sam, the carriage driver on the

\textsuperscript{157} M.E.A. Lewis and E.P.Lewis to Charles Conrad 26 February 1835, Mount Vernon Library.

\textsuperscript{158} M.E.A. Lewis and E.P.Lewis to Charles Conrad 29 November 1834, Mount Vernon Library.

\textsuperscript{159} M.E.A. Lewis and E.P.Lewis to Charles Conrad 4 January 1835, Mount Vernon Library.
plantation, was not a dower slave. He was owned by Lawrence and bequeathed to his wife in his will. He is the only slave Nelly freed upon her death and she also left him fifty dollars for faithful service.160

In safely delivering the mail, Sam played an integral role in sustaining Nelly's kinship web. When he hitched up the horses and braved his way to Arlington House "althou' the roads were very bad," arriving in "good time, good health and with whole bones"161 and then returned home with a letter for Nelly, Sam provided more than just a simple delivery service. He reaffirmed his position as the one entrusted with this personal mission. He facilitated a connection between the elite planter household and the outside world. Nelly often felt the isolation that a bad winter and spring roads could impose upon a plantation. Her sense of isolation magnified after her children married and settled away from Woodlawn: Parke to Iberville, Louisiana in 1827 after her 1826 marriage to Edward, Lorenzo to Clarke County, Virginia in about 1830 after his 1827 marriage to Esther and Angela to New Orleans in 1836 after her 1835 marriage to Charles. Sam provided a lifeline to the outside world and to her social world, an important service which should not be underestimated. It is this importance of mail that made slave involvement in its delivery and its contents so significant.

160 E.P. Lewis, will 9 August 1850, from Clarke County 23 August 1852 will book C:63&64, Mount Vernon Library, Photocopy.

161 E.P.Lewis to Charles Conrad 18 March 1835, Mount Vernon Library.
Delivery of the mail served as a conduit to grand entertaining spaces in the mansion. Upon receiving an amusing note from Elizabeth, Nelly comments "I have not laughed at your letter because I was in company when I received it, & they might have asked 'why do you laugh?'"\textsuperscript{162} Mail was brought right to the mistress for her immediate perusal, even in the midst of entertaining. It was not just set aside for a free moment. Without announcement the slave was free to enter this elite space and actually "interrupt" the ongoing entertainment. Nelly makes it clear that though laughter may have been ill advised, she took time from what she was doing to read her letter.

In addition, slaves often had an impact, albeit a limited one, on the content of the letter or the timing of the letter writing experience. "I am so much hurried as the Post Boy waits, that I can only add..."\textsuperscript{163} and "As the servant goes to the office tomorrow, I will write a day sooner than I generally do as it is uncertain when he will go again, not until the middle of next week..."\textsuperscript{164} are just two examples of letter writing alterations made by the mistress of Woodlawn and her daughter due to slave participation in the process. Most of the routine references to individual Woodlawn slaves are found in the closing lines of Nelly's letters to Parke where she indicates that

\textsuperscript{162} Brady, \textit{George Washington's Beautiful Nelly} 99.

\textsuperscript{163} Brady, \textit{George Washington's Beautiful Nelly} 50.

\textsuperscript{164} M.E.A. Lewis and E.P.Lewis to Charles Conrad 5 December 1834, Mount Vernon Library.
various slaves send their love to Parke and her babies or that they send their love to
their own family members now residing on Parke’s or Angela’s deep south plantations.

Letter writing also provided an opportunity for the mistress to interject herself
into the management of slaves normally outside her sphere of influence. While the
following missive does not note whether the slaves asked her to act the part of
intercessor, Nelly took it upon herself to become enmeshed in a problem at the Iberville
plantation of her daughter. While Nelly was visiting the Iberville plantation a death of
a slave occurred. It was not only a death of a slave, but the death of a former Woodlawn
slave. Nelly immediately wrote to her son Lorenzo, blaming the incident on an
overzealous overseer. Lorenzo then took it upon himself to write his father about his
mother’s account "I have just received a letter from Mother since I saw you--she...tells
me that another of the Negroes (Randal) is dead owing she says, to ill treatment in a
great measure by that infernal overseer, of Dogles--Mother says, that Dogles was
actually so much afraid of him [Randal], that he came and begged Buttin & William
Vinson to go down and turn him off--he must be a poor shoot indeed...."165 Whether
or not any action was taken or could be taken on the part of the Lewis males, Nelly
probably did not refrain from comment herself while at the estate. She had notoriously
bad relations with her son-in-law E.G.W. Butler. One can only imagine that any
comments made about slave management by her or by the Lewis men would have only

165 Lorenzo Lewis to Lawrence Lewis 30 November 1836, Mount Vernon
Library.
exacerbated the already ill feelings between her son-in-law and herself. Nelly was to have a complete falling out with Butler in 1840. Whether or not Randal’s demise and Nelly’s recounting of the incident may very well have added to her son-in-law’s list of grievances against her.

Delivery of the Lewis mail also served as an opportunity for the carrier to acquire information of a more personal nature. Sam and the others charged with delivery acquired special knowledge of the white planter elite world and of their own black community. Visiting nearby plantations with invitations, they no doubt carried messages between separated family members and friends. Traveling into urban centers like Alexandria and Washington, whether to mail a letter, transport a passenger or forward a package, all provided ample opportunity for a carrier slave to exchange information. Sam often took boxes of woodbine from Woodlawn to the docks in Alexandria for delivery to Nelly’s Philadelphia friend, Elizabeth Gibson. Williams traveled in to town from time to time with family members when they awaited the arrival of guests: "she [Esther] went several times with Williams to Gadsbys to meet her mother & only heard on Friday that she was not yet well enough to come. She felt very badly at leaving Lolen [Lorenzo] confined & nothing but her mother’s request to meet her in Washington would have carried her away after all poor thing she was disappointed."166 Nelly and other Lewis family members were not alone in

166 E.P.Lewis to Mrs. E.G.W.Butler 13 May 1832, folder 558, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.
anticipating the mail. Woodlawn slaves were probably just as eager for the mistress or the master to receive mail from the Lewis children’s plantations. News of their loved ones living at these respective plantations was well received. "Nelly sends much love to dennis and rejoices that he behaves so well to Miss Frances....Folby, Edison and Ben who is Sally's son rejoice to here of their kin."\footnote{E.P.Lewis to Mrs. E.G.W. Butler 15 April 1832, folder 555, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.} Although some historians make much of the fact that mention of slaves was so rare in the elite's writings,\footnote{Stowe, 	extit{Intimacy and Power} xvii.} what should be noted is how often they did appear and where. At the closing or postscript of almost every letter to her daughter Parke, Nelly made some mention of a Woodlawn slave and this in an era when social inferiors were largely ignored. One would expect that the same mistress of Woodlawn, who expected to sail unhampered down the processional drive of her estate with discreetly recognized slaves there to open a gate, would not undermine such an intimate tool of social control as a letter---but she did. Time and again she unconsciously challenged her own worldview by indicating the presence of Woodlawn slaves in her correspondence.

**Spirituality**

Raised by her grandmother and General Washington as an Episcopalian, Nelly attended church periodically in their company during her maturing years. General Washington had purchased family pews at both Pohick church in Truro Parish and the
newer Fairfax Parish church in Alexandria, which later came to be known as Christ Church. When in attendance, the family would sit in their respective pews, the males on one side of the church and the females on the other. Although once a month church attendance may have been required prior to divestiture,\textsuperscript{169} Washington was not one to subscribe to this mandate. "Between 1769 to 1773, his attendance ranged from seven to ten times a year. Often he preferred to remain at home while his family and guests attended."\textsuperscript{170} Much of Nelly's religious training was at the hand of her grandmother. Tenets learned at Martha's behest appear to have helped sustain Nelly throughout the various trials of her life-- personal illness, the loss of children and financial distress. Although she acknowledged a "proper sense of my obligations to the giver of all good for his unmerited favors,"\textsuperscript{171} her church attendance habits may have been more closely aligned to her father figure, Washington. Specific attendance records do not exist, but her letters frequently refer to her daughters or daughter-in-law attending church in Alexandria with her step sister Anna in tow. The context establishes that she was not often a part of their party. "Anna and E[sther] have just returned--the church was very full and warm. Mr. Muir preached an excellent Sermon your poor Aunt

\textsuperscript{169} After the Revolution, the Virginia Legislature approved a bill to "abolished forever the salaries of the parish rectors,along with all tax levies for the support of the former established church." See Isaac, \textit{Transformation} 283.


\textsuperscript{171} Brady, \textit{George Washington's Beautiful Nelly} 16.
and little Mol were there." In one letter, when her housekeeping duties and church attendance come into conflict, Nelly acknowledges the precedence of the former:

I fear I shall hear but little of the preaching in Alexandria.
Ped & Anna will go to Ed Daingerfields I expect. If Mrs Coxe comes, E & Mrs Coxe will be at H Daingerfields. If I go I must hurry home to dinner, because I cannot leave two almost helpless mortals here alone, & I do not like to prevent the others going because I feel myself most effective where no gentleman can act.

Apparently some of the socially prescribed behavior which attended the colonial Anglican church, such as requisite dining with friends after service, continued to be practiced after divestiture. Although the Anglican church in the state of Virginia came close to its demise after the Revolution, it remained fairly intact in the Northern Virginia area. In other parts of the state the "evangelical outlook introduced by early colonial dissenters" came to dominate early nineteenth-century religious life in Virginia.

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172 E.P.Lewis to Mrs. E.G.W. Butler 8 April 1832, folder 554, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.

173 E.P. Lewis to Mrs.E.G.W.Butler 13 May 1832, folder 558, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.
Many Anglican parishes were taken over and architecturally modified by these new evangelical congregations.

The moral and religious guidance of the slaves was often under the purview of the mistress. Clinton claims that "it was under the auspices of religious duty that plantation mistresses became involved in the tutoring of slaves."\textsuperscript{174} Mistresses often read aloud Biblical passages, playing the part of instructress to their slaves. For their religious edification mistresses taught slaves to read the Bible and saw to it that the planter provided the necessary "time off" from strenuous work on the Sabbath, so that the slaves might keep holy "His" day. Nelly's correspondence gives very little information relative to her interest in or guidance of religious fervor of the Woodlawn slaves. She does refer to "little Mol"\textsuperscript{175} attending Christ Church, with Lorenzo's wife and her half-sister Anna. She also notes George Washington's practice of dining early on Sunday to provide "a long afternoon" for his servants, but she does not explicitly suggest the time was used for slave worship.\textsuperscript{176} Of religious holiday practices at Woodlawn, Christmas marked a special time for the slaves. "At this season of the year they have twelve days vacation & rest & they are everywhere to be found scattered over

\textsuperscript{174} Clinton, \textit{Plantation Mistress} 161.

\textsuperscript{175} E.P.Lewis to Mrs. E.G.W.Butler 8 April 1832, folder 554, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.

\textsuperscript{176} Brady, \textit{George Washington's Beautiful Nelly} 134.
Nothing is mentioned in any of the surviving documentation, however, as to whether or not slaves attended Christmas services. While little is known about specific religions practiced by the slaves, planters generally encouraged Christianity as a form of social control. By the nineteenth century preachers used sermons to inculcate appropriate codes of social behavior supportive of the class structure of southern society. They extolled the virtue of carrying out the wishes of the master and mistress. They condemned insubordinate behavior and equated it to sinfulness.

The evangelical outlook, with its emphasis on emotion and a heartfelt religion, proved particularly attractive to slaves throughout the south. Its message was subversive, providing a direct threat to the established world of social order which Anglican parishes had so carefully shored up. Initially, the evangelical religions challenged the established Anglican church by preaching individual responsibility. They challenged the ordered architectural interiors of the Episcopalian churches and provided to some extent a bully pulpit for anti-slavery rhetoric. This changed, however, as the century moved on. Most evangelical churches, with time, moved well within the pro-slavery discourse equating obedience to the master as next to godliness. Written records of slaves at Woodlawn do not exist to note whether they too were swept up in the evangelical spirit. Some may, however, have managed to make it to the weekend camp

meetings known to have been held in Fairfax City in the early part of the nineteenth century.

There is evidence that some Woodlawn slaves may have held onto vestiges of their African or Islamic beliefs. Conjuring or voodoo was a religious practice subscribed to by southern slaves. It still is in existence today. A series of letters between Nelly and her daughter Parke reveal that Parke's much beloved child Sonny almost died in a near drowning accident. Nelly praised Parke repeatedly for having acted quickly to save her son's life. She then went on to note that "Sukey [gave]....me a hat of blue glass for my darling Sonny with her love." William H. Adams, an archaeologist at Oregon State University, has posited that "predominance of blue beads in the antebellum South may well be a vestige of the widespread belief within the Muslim world, including many parts of Africa, that a blue bead worn or sewn on clothing protected the bearer against "the evil eye." Blue beads, in fact, often comprise as much as a third of all the beads found at excavated slave sites." Did the beads indeed have a religious or superstitious meaning for Sukey? If so, did she continue to subscribe to Muslim practices? Was the use of more than one blue glass bead a modification she made because of the danger Sonny had just survived? If they were


179 E.P.Lewis to Mrs. E.G.W.Butler 22 April n.y.d., folder 916, Butler Family Papers, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Photocopy.

180 Singleton, "The Archaeology of Slave Life" 164.
intended as a talisman of sorts, was Nelly one of the initiated in terms of the significance of the blue beads? Had she learned to share the superstition or Islamic belief as a child at Mount Vernon? Or, was it gleaned from the women of the quarters? That voodoo and conjuring was practiced at Mount Vernon is evidenced by the archaeological find of a raccoon penis bone found in a trash midden. It was pierced at one end indicating that it had been suspended on a string or chain and worn in some ritualistic practice. It would appear that Nelly did recognize "value" in the gift of the blue glass hat. The fact that she took the time and expense to forward the gift on to her grandson is an indication not only of approval, but of her active participation in the gift-giving process. On some level, consciously or unconsciously, she approved of it and passed it along.
CONCLUSIONS

The early nation building era was a time of societal transformation. A new national identity was being forged and all of its citizens were being called upon to contribute to this new country. A special role was reserved for women of the nation, that of the new republican mother. She was to create a warm, intensely private atmosphere in the home. She was to nurture her children by providing home schooling, medical care, and above all, moral guidance. Her role was to create model citizens for the new nation. In the south a particularly unique brand of the cult of domesticity was emerging. Not only did a southern plantation mother look out for the welfare of her children, she needed to see to the care of her slaves as well. This extended domestic role created a paradox for southern plantation mistresses like Nelly. Her success as mistress of a plantation was measured by the orderliness of domestic plantation life. Her success at republican motherhood also relied on the extent to which domestic concerns of the plantation ran smoothly, freeing her to worry about such maternal issues as the choice of appropriate reading material for her daughters. This clocklike order of the plantation’s domestic concerns, however, required the presence of slaves. In fact, it required the presence of a vast number of slaves. Yet even as their presence sustained Nelly’s dual role of mistress and mother, their very existence at Woodlawn served to challenge her world and her landscape. If minute management was required of a task, it often interfered with her role as maternal instructress. If the required level of supervision was not given for some reason, the elite woman often felt that her role
as mistress was undermined. She was convinced that without the proper level of oversight, inferior workmanship would occur and it would reflect poorly on her skills as a domestic manager. As was mentioned in the Introduction, the existence of slave women often gave the mother of many a southern son some anxious moments as to the "moral" threat they posed for male offspring. Nelly herself hints at some of these concerns with respect to Lorenzo. In particular, houseslaves supported and challenged the mistress's landscape in unique ways. Living as they did in intimate surroundings with the Lewis family, houseslaves such as Sukey, Sam or Hanson were privy to the most intimate details of the mistress' life. They knew of her estranged living arrangement with her husband, they knew of her daughter Angela's initially private engagement, they knew of personal food preferences, clothing choices and particular treatment details of all manner of Lewis family illnesses. Access to this information was frequently gleaned through the mistress. Afterall, she was the one who ordered the food prepared, the clothes sewn, the medicinal cures mixed and the letters delivered.

In addition, female slaves of Woodlawn presented a challenge to their mistresses' world with their alternative understanding to the institution of motherhood itself. The collective reality of slave motherhood served to undermine the planters understanding of the individual female centered sphere. While the planter mother was encouraged to reach beyond the confines of her plantation to reaffirm kinship lines, she essentially lived a fairly isolated existence on her estate, blaming or lauding herself as she met the needs of her family. Slave women, on the other hand, were bound in a communal
maternal enterprise. Working long hours for the mistress, they depended on older female slaves for care of their toddlers and younger children. They also often relied on communal efforts to secure additional foodstuffs and medicines for their families through gardening, thieving, hunting or foraging the woods for herbs. To the extent that mistresses like Nelly recognized and aided the collective nature of slave motherhood, the validity of the singular mother-centered family was challenged.

As was noted in the Introduction, historian Steven Stowe felt proximity precluded intimacy because of the infrequent occurrence of slave activity in planter elite correspondence. Rather than mark the absence of slaves, one must look to the number of times that they actually are mentioned by name. In a society that was strictly hierarchically arranged, where the elite did not publically recognize their social inferiors, the number of postscripts in which Nelly passed along well wishes to and from slaves for both white and black family members is remarkable. The appearance of Sally, Ben, Folby, Edison or Mol in the mistress of Woodlawn’s private papers speaks to the extent the slaves crept into the most intimate exchanges in the mistress’s world. Despite the number of restrictive laws and practices which served to deny the individuality of slaves and metamorphosize them into an illiterate, humbly clothed, ill fed mass of social inferiors, their individual names and characters tended to surface in the correspondence of the plantation mistress. Thanks to careful reading of Nelly’s epistolary musings and other primary source material, Woodlawn plantation is no longer the home of ninety-three nameless slaves as recorded in the census of 1820.
Using Rhys Isaac's understanding of the dialectic, treating statements of actions in context, it is possible to view Nelly's writings as a window on the mentalité of a plantation mistress and the slaves with whom she was most intimate. Woodlawn is now the home of Hanson the cook well versed in preparing delicious cookies, Sam the dependable link to the outer world, the recalcitrant sempstress Sukey and the scared runaway Peter. By the same token Nelly's texts have revealed that she was neither an abolitionist nor "the slave of slaves." She was a southern republican mother whose life was complicated by the institution of slavery.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names Known</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Second Source</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nelly</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>b.1805? given to Parke in 1835 mentioned as sewing</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>b.1819? given to Parke officially in 1835 but there by 1832 (literate travels with Butler Sally his wife? Nelly his mother?)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td></td>
<td>b.1824 or 27? given to Parke in 1835</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>b.1826? given to Parke in 1835</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>b.1831? given to Parke in 1835 possibly daughter of Nelly's (Mary-ellen)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>b.1834? given to Parke in 1835</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>b.1821? given to Parke in 1835 (aka Button or Buttin--connected with Lucinda--helps turn Randal off overseer Dogles in Iberville, La.) (John Williams)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calvert</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>b.1825? given to Parke in 1835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>b.1812? given to Parke officially in 1835 (but was actually there by 1827--connected with John aka Button--&quot;Mammy&quot; to Butler children--called &quot;Johnson's angel&quot; Parke's precious gift)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lucinda</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>b.1812? given to Parke officially in 1835 (but was actually there by 1827--connected with John aka Button--&quot;Mammy&quot; to Butler children--called &quot;Johnson's angel&quot; Parke's precious gift)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sukey</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Murray</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcellus</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thornton</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurence</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letters</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marthalinda</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martha Ann</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>N.O. letter</td>
<td>given to Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>LL will</td>
<td>EPL letters</td>
<td>given by LL to his wife--(mentioned as carriage driver, opening gates, delivering mail, packages and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jack (young)  Mt. Vern  passengers--freed by Nelly on death with $50--possibly brother of Letty & Nanny

Absalom  Woodlawn  purchased by LL from Martha Washington for $50 in 1802--possibly son of Dolly dower slave of Martha's--if so had one brother Natt b.1782, two sisters Dolly b.1783 and Bett b.1779--would have been b.1785)

Marshall  Woodlawn  mentioned as carriage driver

Hanson  NCLHB  Woodlawn  cook possibly in 1830s
30 Ap 1837

Old Doll  NCLHB  Woodlawn  mentioned in reference to laundry possibly in 1830s--sister of Letty & Sam
20 Dec 1836

Dolcey  NCLHB  laundress in 1830s

Old Letty  NCLHB  cook in 1830s

Joe  EPL letters  hired out first quarter of 1841 for 40 pounds

Liddy  Lorenzo letter to father  mentioned as drunk in need of whipping

Jem  N.O. letter  mentioned old & sick
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moll</td>
<td>N.O. letter mentioned as sick (on loan to Bushrod Washington given one bag of meal per month 1819-1823)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mol</td>
<td>N.O. letter mentioned as going to church (&quot;in caps&quot; after cutting hair--always in family way)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creton</td>
<td>Acct John Parke Custis with Dr David Stuart --guardian acct. sold 1803 by LL to GWP Custis for 40 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>N.O. Sally's son b.1832?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edison</td>
<td>N.O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folby</td>
<td>N.O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polly</td>
<td>Woodlawn (undated) good sempstress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison</td>
<td>Woodlawn (20 Dec 1836)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td>N.O. feared Butler child drowning which was almost fatal 1832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Woodlawn 7 Nov 1803 mention as runaway Oct. 19th Friday-- (described as 22--5'8&quot; or 5'10&quot;--slender &amp; dark complexion scar from scythe last harvest--clothes common negro jacket &amp; trousers--seen in Alex. last Sat. $10 reward)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanny</td>
<td>N.O. Sam &amp; Letty's sister</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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VITA

Mary P. Geraghty