

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: While George Washington was away from Mount Vernon, his farm manager sent weekly accounts to Washington reporting on the status of Mount Vernon, the farm, and the enslaved people who lived there.

Farm Report, Weeks of April 7 and 14, 1792

Source Type: Farm Report

Courtesy of Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

- 1 ...a hired carpenter and slave spent six days each on “putting up the births in new Qu[arte]r” and
- 2 “planning plank for the Qur Births,” while one of the bricklayers was “laying brick foundation for
- 3 the sills of the births new Qur.” The following week, one of the hired carpenters was occupied
- 4 another five days “putting up the berth.”

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Polish visitor, Julien Ursyn Niemcewicz was fascinated with American slavery and wrote extensive comments on the enslaved population at Mount Vernon since slavery was not practiced in Poland.

Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Mount Vernon, June 4, 1798

Source Type: Book

Courtesy of Julien Ursyn Niemcewicz. Under Their Vine and Fig Tree: Travels Through America in 1797-1799, 1805, edited and translated by Metchie J. E. Budka (Elizabeth, NJ: Grassman Publishing Company, 1965), 100-101

1 Blacks. We entered one of the huts of the Blacks, for one can not [sic] call them by the name of
2 houses. They are more miserable than the most miserable of the cottages of our peasants. The
3 husband and wife sleep on a mean pallet, the children on the ground; a very bad fireplace, some
4 utensils for cooking, but in the middle of this poverty some cups and a teapot. A boy of 15 was lying
5 on the ground, sick, and in terrible convulsions. The Gl. [General] had sent to Alexandria to fetch a
6 doctor. A very small garden planted with vegetables was close by, with 5 or 6 hens, each one leading
7 ten to fifteen chickens. It is the only comfort that is permitted them; for they may not keep either
8 ducks, geese, or pigs. They sell the poultry in Alexandria and procure for themselves a few
9 amenities. They allot them each *one pack* [peck], one gallon [sic] of maize per week; this makes one
10 quart a day, and half as much for the children, with 20 herrings each per month. At harvest time
11 those who work in the fields have salt meat; in addition, a jacket and a pair of homespun breeches
12 per year. Not counting women and children the Gl. [General] has 300 Negroes of whom a large
13 number belong to Mrs. Washington. Mr. Anderson [the farm manager] told me that there are only a
14 hundred who work in the fields. They work all week, not having a single day for themselves except
15 for holidays. One sees by that that the condition of our peasants is infinitely happier. The mullatoes
16 [sic] are ordinarily chosen for servants. According to the laws of Virginia the child follows the
17 condition of the mother; the son or daughter of a mullato woman and a white is a slave and the issue
18 through the daughter, although white, are still slaves. Gl. Washington treats his slaves far more
19 humanely than do his fellow citizens of Virginia. Most of these gentlemen give to their Blacks only
20 bread, water and blows.

21 Either from habit, or from natural humor disposed to gaiety, I have never seen the Blacks sad. Last
22 Sunday there were about thirty divided into two groups and playing at prisoner's base. There were
23 jumps and gambols as if they had rested all week. I noticed that all spoke very good English. Why

24 then do the Blacks of the French colonies never speak a good French; rather make a jargon of their
25 own? The reason for it is perhaps that the American masters speak and communicate with them
26 more often than the French who depend entirely for the management of their farms on their overseers
27 who are also black.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: George Washington's nephew, George Augustine Washington, managed Mount Vernon while Washington was President. George Augustine Washington frequently wrote to George Washington with updates about Mount Vernon, the farms, and the enslaved community.

George Augustine Washington to George Washington, April 8-9, 1792

Source Type: Letter

Courtesy of www.founders.archives.gov

1 ...The New Quarter will I have no doubt be fully adequate to accomodate conveniently all the
2 Negro's that You would wish or find necessary to be kept at the Mansion House for untill they are all
3 brought together and under proper regulations it is in vain to attempt or at least to protect
4 improvements.
5 I have been promised to have a skillful well digger sent to me that I may have his opinion on the
6 situation for a well and if his reasons are plausible and such as I think can be relied on and favor the
7 probability of coming at water in any reasonable distance—the situation opposite the center of the
8 Green House will certainly be much preferable to any other...