

WHO ARE WE

GILES

George Washington purchased Giles from his distant cousin, Lund Washington, in 1771. Giles worked as a house servant and as a coachman. He accompanied George Washington on several high profile trips. He drove the baggage wagon on the president's tour of the southern states. He was injured on this trip and ceases to be mentioned after a letter in June of 1791.

FRANK LEE

George Washington purchased Frank Lee with his brother William in 1768 from Mary Lee for £50. Frank Lee worked in Mansion as a waiter, and later as a butler. Frank Lee married Lucy, who was Doll's daughter. He had three children with Lucy: Mike, Philip, and Patty. Frank Lee was freed in 1801, but his family remained the property of the Custis Estate. He died in 1821, close to Mount Vernon where he lived to remain close to his wife and two children who were inherited by Nelly Custis Lewis in 1802.

PRISCILLA

Priscilla was born around 1763. She lived and worked at Dogue Run Farm with her six children. She was married to Joe who worked as a ditcher at Mansion Farm, which means she largely raised her six children on her own with the Dogue Run community. Records show that Priscilla attempted to run away twice. In 1801, Priscilla and her children received their freedom from the provision in George Washington's will, but her husband remained the property of the Custis estate.

SAMBO

Sambo was one of the few enslaved people at Mount Vernon born and captured in Africa. He was purchased by George Washington sometime in the 1750's. Sambo worked as a carpenter at the Mansion House Farm building and repairing plows, carts, wheels, tools, as well as structures. He was emancipated by the terms of Washington's will in 1801. He earned money hunting and fishing and eventually purchased the freedom of several of his enslaved family members.

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KATE

Kate was an enslaved worker at Muddy Hole Farm. Her husband, Will, worked as an enslaved overseer. He forwarded Kate's request to be appointed midwife for enslaved births. In 1799 she was given 25 cents to purchase scissors for this occupation. Also that year, she was described as "old" in the list of enslaved people. According to Washington's will, she would have been emancipated and then provided for by the estate for the rest of her life.

DAVY GRAY

Davy Gray arrived at the age of about 16 at Mount Vernon in 1759 as part of Martha Washington's dower property. Beginning as a field hand, he was eventually promoted to overseer. In 1793 Washington noted that "Davy at Muddy hole carries on his business as well as the white Overseers, and with more quietness than any of them." As an overseer he advocated for his fellow workers. As dower property, he may have been inherited by Mrs. Washington's granddaughter, Nelly Parke Custis Lewis.

TOM

Tom was inherited by George Washington from his half-brother, Lawrence, in 1754. Tom was described as a "rogue and a runaway" in a George Washington letter to Joseph Thompson, a ship's captain in 1766. He was sold for 40 pounds on the Island of Saint Kitts. He is one of three enslaved men sold away to the Caribbean. Threats to be shipped off were used as part of corrections at Mount Vernon.

EDMUND PARKER

Edmund Parker arrived at Mount Vernon in 1841 at age 14, as the property of George Washington's great-grandnephew John Augustine Washington III. Having run away during the Civil War, he returned to Mount Vernon where beginning in 1882 he worked for the Mount Vernon Ladies' Assn as the tomb guard. He resided in the Wash House until he retired. The MVLA paid his funeral expenses when he died in 1898. His obituary was titled, "A Faithful Guardian of Washington's Tomb."

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CAESAR

Caesar ran away from Mount Vernon at least four times but returned or was recaptured each time. Some of his flights were apparently to see family members who lived on other plantations in the surrounding area. Besides being a field worker at Union Farm, Caesar was also a minister who preached to the local African American community. Unlike most enslaved people, he could read and write, which would have provided an advantage in running away. Caesar, a dower slave, was inherited by Martha Washington's granddaughter, Martha Parke Custis Peter.

CAROLINE BRANHAM

As a seamstress and housemaid, Caroline Branham made clothes for enslaved field hands, cleaned rooms in the Mansion, and lit the fire in the Washingtons' bedchamber each morning at dawn. She was married to Peter Hardiman, a groom who managed the stables at Mansion House Farm. The couple had six children who were dower slaves like their mother. After Martha Washington's death, Branham and her children were inherited by George Washington Parke Custis and moved to his home, Arlington House. Peter Hardiman eventually joined them there.

CHRISTOPHER SHEELS

Christopher Sheels was born at Mount Vernon in 1775 to Alice, who worked as a spinner. His father was likely a man named Christian or Christopher Sheldes or Shade, who was a hired wagon driver at Mansion House Farm. As a young boy, Sheels was trained as a carpenter. When George Washington returned to Mount Vernon after the presidency, Sheels became his valet. Sheels and his wife made arrangements to run away in 1799, but their plan was discovered before they could escape. Sheels stood at Washington's bedside throughout his final illness and death. After Martha Washington's death, Sheels became the property of George Washington Parke Custis.

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DOLL

Doll arrived at Mount Vernon in 1759 as part of Martha Washington's share of her first husband's estate. She served as the estate's cook for nearly 30 years and taught others her culinary skills. Doll was the matriarch of a large extended family at Mount Vernon. In 1799 she had five children, fourteen grandchildren, and at least four great-grandchildren living on the estate. Doll was inherited by Martha Washington's grandson, George Washington Parke Custis.

GEORGE

George worked on Mount Vernon's gardens and landscapes under head gardeners whom Washington usually hired from Europe. He probably lived in the greenhouse slave quarter with other skilled laborers. George's wife, Sall Twine, and their seven children lived apart from him on Dogue Run Farm. George was likely inherited by Washington from his mother. Following George Washington's death, George, the enslaved gardener, was emancipated, but his family eventually became the property of Martha Washington's grandchildren.

HERCULES

Hercules, an enslaved cook who was known for his superior culinary skills, went to Philadelphia with the Washingtons to produce elaborate meals for the presidential household. Described as a "celebrated artiste," he became a well known figure in the city. Hercules accrued one to two hundred dollars a year by selling "slops" or by-products of food production from the presidential kitchen. Although he had privileges not given to most of Washington's enslaved workers, Hercules longed for freedom and successfully escaped from Mount Vernon on February 22, 1797, which was George Washington's 65th birthday. Three of his children—Richmond, Eve, and Delia—remained at Mount Vernon.

KITTY

Kitty, a dairy maid and spinner, was married to Isaac, a carpenter. Both worked at Mansion House Farm. Their family was deeply affected when George Washington freed his slaves through his will. Isaac was emancipated on January 1, 1801, but Kitty and their nine daughters were owned by the Custis estate. Kitty and her two youngest daughters were inherited by Eliza Parke Custis Law. The family's six older daughters were dispersed among Martha Washington's other three grandchildren.

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NANCY CARTER

Nancy Carter lived and worked at River Farm. At age 16, she was among the enslaved people emancipated in George Washington's will. Carter eventually married Charles Quander, a free black man from Maryland, and a member of one of the oldest African American families in America. Nancy Carter Quander returned to Mount Vernon in 1835 to cook for the former slaves and their relatives who landscaped around Washington's New Tomb. Descendants of the Quander family continue to live in the local area today.

ONEY JUDGE

Born at Mount Vernon around 1774, Oney Judge began serving as Martha Washington's personal maid at age 10. Like her mother, Betty, Judge was a skilled seamstress. Her father was likely Andrew Judge, an indentured English tailor who worked at Mansion House Farm. In 1796, Judge escaped to New Hampshire from the presidential mansion in Philadelphia. She married, had three children, learned to read, and evaded Washington's efforts to recapture her. Judge lived the rest of her life as a fugitive, but free.

PENNY

Penny lived in a cabin on Dogue Run Farm with her mother, Priscilla, and five siblings. Her father, Joe, lived and worked on Mansion House Farm and visited his family on Saturday nights and Sundays. In 1799, the year George Washington died, Penny was 11 years old. She probably did chores such as fetching water and gathering sticks, and watched her three younger brothers while her mother and two older sisters labored in the fields. Penny, her mother, and her siblings were all Washington slaves and were freed on January 1, 1801, through Washington's will. Her father, Joe, was a dower slave and was not emancipated.

WILLIAM LEE

George Washington purchased William Lee and his brother, Frank, in 1768. Lee served as Washington's valet for over 20 years, accompanying him everywhere. He rode beside the general throughout the Revolution and was responsible for many of the objects Washington used during his military service. After knee injuries limited his mobility, Lee worked as the estate's cobbler. In 1799, Lee became the only enslaved person freed directly in Washington's will. It is possible that William Lee is buried here in the Slave Cemetery.