

SLAVERY IN MARYLAND

Slavery as we have come to know it was not an institution in the colony of Maryland when it was settled in 1634. Although there were some cases of slavery in the colony most Africans and **mulattos** were treated as ***indentured servants*** who could work towards their freedom. As international demand for tobacco increased the need for servants increased as well and the institution of slavery was ***codified*** into the laws of Maryland. In 1664 Maryland passed a law making blacks and their children servants for life. Slaves were considered property, and they were bought and sold just as a house or land would be bought and sold, and they had very little, if any, standing under the law.

Slavery in Prince George's County

Climate and soil conditions made Prince George's and other counties in southern Maryland ideal for tobacco production. Despite ***fluctuations*** in the demand for tobacco, the county's slave population increased steadily during the ***Colonial Era***. By 1800 slaves made up 58% of the population of Prince George's County and most of these slaves worked as field hands. Even though tobacco profits eventually decreased, and in 1783 Maryland outlawed the ***importation*** of slaves. Even so slaves still represented more than 50% of the county's population.

There were several ***plantations*** situated in Prince George's County. George H. Calvert, Lord Baltimore, possessed close to 10,000 acres of land between his plantations Goodwood and Riversdale. His parents Benedict and Elisabeth Calvert owned Mt. Airy plantation in Rosaryville Maryland located in southern Prince George's County. There were other plantations in the county as well; Sarah Ogle Hilleary owned Three Sisters in Lanham; Thomas Spriggs Jr. owned Lake Arbor in Largo, and former Governor Oden Bowie owned Fairview in Collington. Acquiring slaves for these plantations was relatively convenient since the slave marketplace was located in Upper Marlboro, which was in the county also.

Plantation work was grueling and any slave failing to do his work as instructed faced the prospect of severe punishment. Moreover slaves had to contend with being separated from their families. This occurred for a several reasons. If a slave misbehaved or attempted to escape he might be sold to another plantation as a punishment and as a way to prevent further rebellion among other slaves. Sometimes a plantation owner would sell some of his slaves in order to raise



money. Likewise, he might have more slaves than he needed to run his plantation so he would sell some of his slaves to other landowners and merchants. Regardless of the reason, these separations caused tremendous heartache and cut the bonds of the African-American family.

For freed slaves, life off of the plantation was not easy. In Prince George's County Africans and mulattos were considered free only if they were 1. born free, 2. *manumitted*, 3. purchased by a free family member, or 4. freed by order of the law. These men and women had to carry proof that they were indeed free or risk being sold into slavery. In Prince George's County freedmen had to prove they were employed and they had to obtain a license to sell goods that they produced or they would be jailed and/or sold into slavery. Visits by freedmen from other areas to the county were limited to ten days. If a freedman left the state for more than thirty days without first informing the state, he was not allowed to return. The children of a freedman who married a slave were born slaves. If, on the other hand, a child was born to free parents that child had to either work as soon as possible or be actively learning a trade, otherwise the child would be *apprenticed* to the *Orphan's Court*. All of these rules made freedmen less free than their fellow white Marylanders.

Many of these restrictions were placed on freedmen because the state and the county wanted to limit the number of blacks – free or enslaved – in Maryland. Once the demand for tobacco decreased and the state became less agricultural, the demand for slaves also decreased while the demand for *artisans* increased. To contend with these circumstances slave owners and the government sought to apprentice skilled blacks or to *repatriate* them to *Liberia* in West Africa. Some owners sold the labor of slaves who were artisans. If a merchant or landowner needed the skills of a carpenter, ironworker, or other skilled workers slave owners would send a qualified slave to do the work and collect the slave's wages. In some instances slaves were allowed to keep some or all of the wages they earned.

Unlike skilled slaves, unskilled and older slaves were not viewed as *assets*, and as the demand for slave labor decreased, the desire to get rid of these particular slaves increased. This was an especially important issue in the mid 1860s because Maryland and the federal government were on the verge of freeing the slaves. Fearing that the state would be overrun with blacks, the state government asked slave owners to make arrangements to send their manumitted slaves to Africa. *The Maryland Colonization Society* was established to *facilitate* transportation



to Africa. Court clerks provided the names of manumitted slaves to the Society. If a manumitted slave chose not to travel to Africa he was expelled from the state.

Despite the fact that Prince George's County voted against it, *emancipation* was still *ratified* by Maryland in 1864. The state then focused its attention on managing the thousands of freedmen living there.

At the end of the Civil War the United States entered the *Reconstruction* period. The goals of Reconstruction were to rebuild the south and to protect newly freed slaves by helping them understand their rights and by providing them with necessities. After the ratification of the *13th Amendment* in 1865, the federal government created the *Freedmen's Bureau* to help freed slaves adjust to their new lives. The Bureau helped to establish schools, settle contract disputes, and assist in relocating freedmen to the north. With support from the Freedmen's Bureau other state organizations provided further assistance to freed slaves. *The Friends' Association in Aid of Freedmen* helped former slaves obtain food, clothing, and shelter, while the *Maryland Union Commission* focused on transporting freedmen to the south. Despite all of these efforts, freedmen still had difficulties surviving as citizens of America. Intense prejudice made social, political, and economic progress hard to achieve.

