SLAVE HOUSING

Over 200 years ago, four log dwellings stood here. The first, constructed in the 1770s and destroyed by fire ca. 1790, was the "Negro quarter," a large 17 x 34 foot structure intended for multiple enslaved individuals or families. Three identical, single-family 12 x 14 foot "servants houses" replaced it about 1793; buildings r, s, and t were intended for enslaved house servants and artisans. The differences between these two types of dwellings reflected broader changes across Virginia plantations. During the colonial era, enslaved laborers lived together in large multi-family dwellings; by the 1790s, many slaves, who pressed for housing for their families, lived in single-family quarters.

Buildings on Mulberry Row during Jefferson's era.

Sub-floor pits dug into the floors of slave dwellings like the "Negro quarter" protected the valuables of enslaved families. Archaeologists use this evidence to determine how many families may have occupied the site.

WHO LIVED HERE?

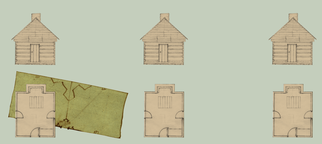
In the 1770s, Jefferson intended several families for the "Negro quarter," including valet Jupiter, his wife Suck, and their children; and foreman George Granger, Sr., his wife Ursula, and their sons. The three log dwellings that replaced the "Negro quarter" in the 1790s likely housed Hemings family members, including chambermaid and seamstress Sally and her children; parlor maid Critta and her son James; and house joiner John and his wife Priscilla. Since Critta Hemings was "oftenest wanted about the house," she may have lived in building r.

From the "Negro quarter" site:
Chinking (mortar) with hand imprint, clay.
Window glass.
Tobacco pipe stems, clay.

From the "servant's house s" site:
Teapot lid fragment, black basalt.
Plate rim fragments, pearlware.
Hand-painted saucer, pearlware.
Iron fork with **bone utensil handle.**
Spoon bowl, copper alloy.

r, which as well as s. and t. are servants houses of wood with wooden chimnies, and earth floors…

Thomas Jefferson, 1796



Jefferson's drawing for a slave quarter, overlaid with modern renderings of "servants houses" r, s, and t. Jefferson's plan for the multi-family "Negro quarter" (green), drawn ca. 1770, contrasts with plans for three single-family dwellings built 20 years later.
Massachusetts Historical Society

LANGUAGE

For historical accuracy and context, we use Jefferson's terms—noted in quotes—for the buildings on Mulberry Row. The word "enslaved" indicates that men, women, and children were held in bondage against their will by their masters.

Thomas Jefferson Foundation/Staples & Charles
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