

Chapter 3

HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY AND SLAVERY

*We can expect to accurately understand southern plantation landscapes only if the contributions of slaves are acknowledged and included. To study these places without including the slaves' perspectives would not only be inadequate, it would be futile.*¹³⁹

John Michael Vlach

The 1850 J.C. Sidney and P.J. Browne *Map of Baltimore City and County, Maryland*, indicates names and locations of county residents, roads, taverns, mills, meeting houses, waterways, and other miscellaneous geographic features. This map, however, like most maps from that period, fails to present any information about the slaves who worked at these houses, farms, inns, iron forges, and mills. The few indications on this particular map of both the free and the enslaved African-American population include the two “Colored Meeting Houses,” (Mt. Gilboa Chapel, and Piney Grove United Methodist Church), the St. John’s Church in Ruxton, and the homes of several free blacks.¹⁴⁰

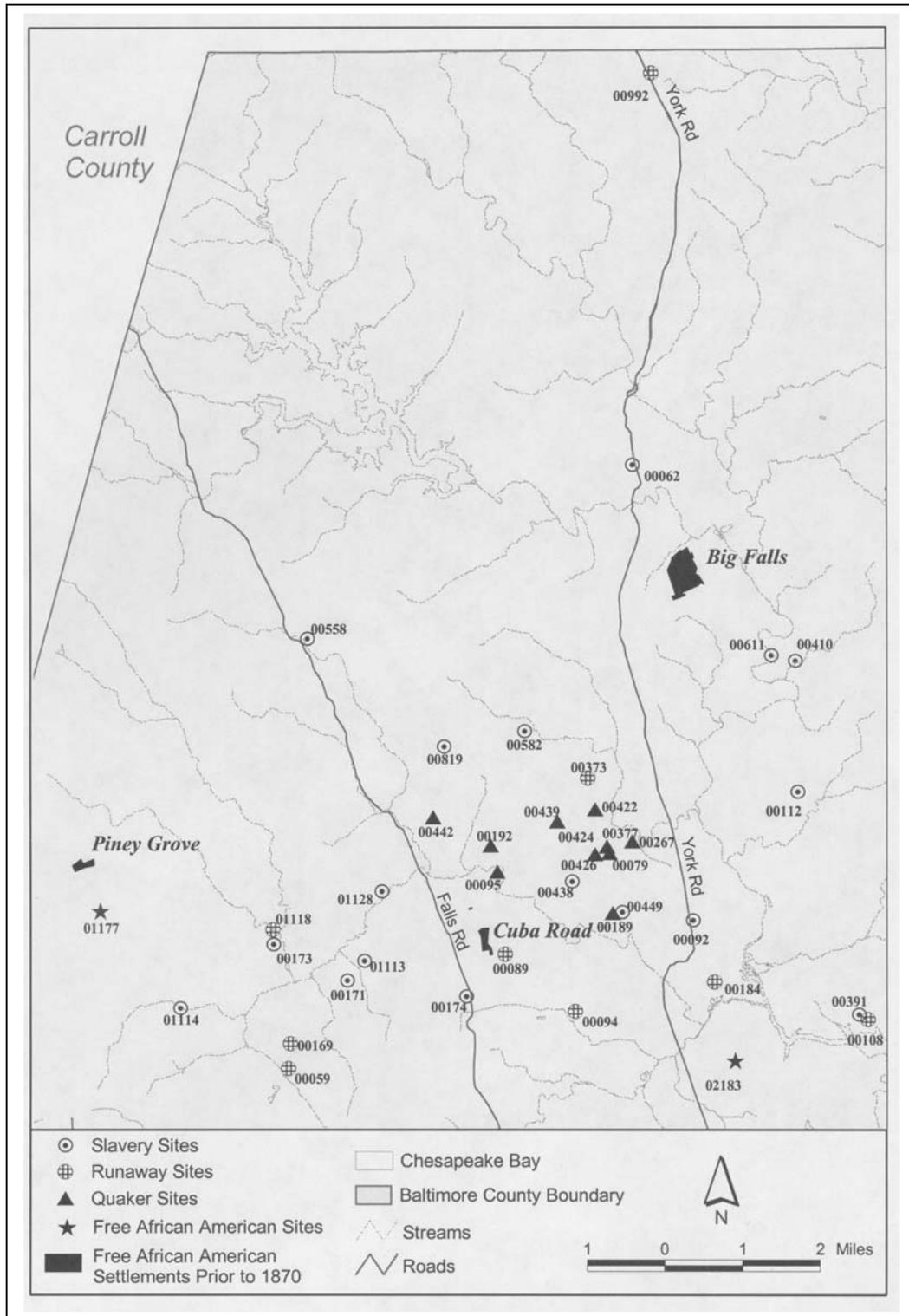
This thesis demonstrates methods for constructing a more complete map of that time period (Figures 11-14) to depict at least a portion of the missing African-American population. This new map accomplishes several goals. It allows the spatial relationships between slave and free African-American sites to be studied, showing how both slavery and freedom were patterned across the county’s landscape. This map also enables researchers to evaluate possible routes that fugitive slaves may have taken through the county, and to consider whether these routes may have been through free black settlements, or perhaps even through Quaker settlements.

These last two chapters present the information regarding the study sites integrated into the composite map of the African-American cultural landscape in

¹³⁹ John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1.

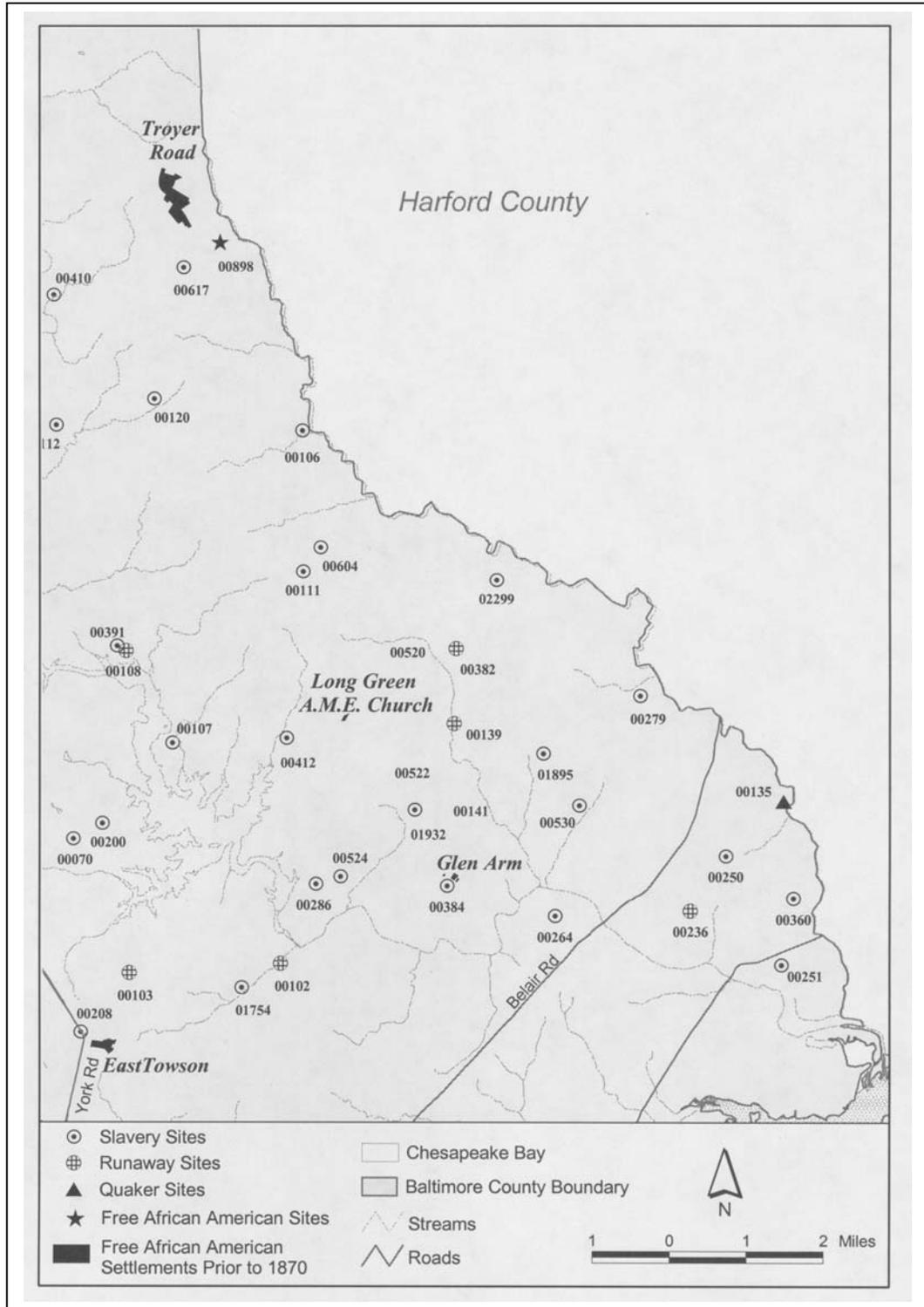
¹⁴⁰ J.C. Sidney and P.J. Browne, *Map of the City and County of Baltimore, Maryland, from Original Surveys* (Baltimore, MD: James M. Stephens, 1850).

Figure 11: African-American Cultural Atlas (Northwest Baltimore County)



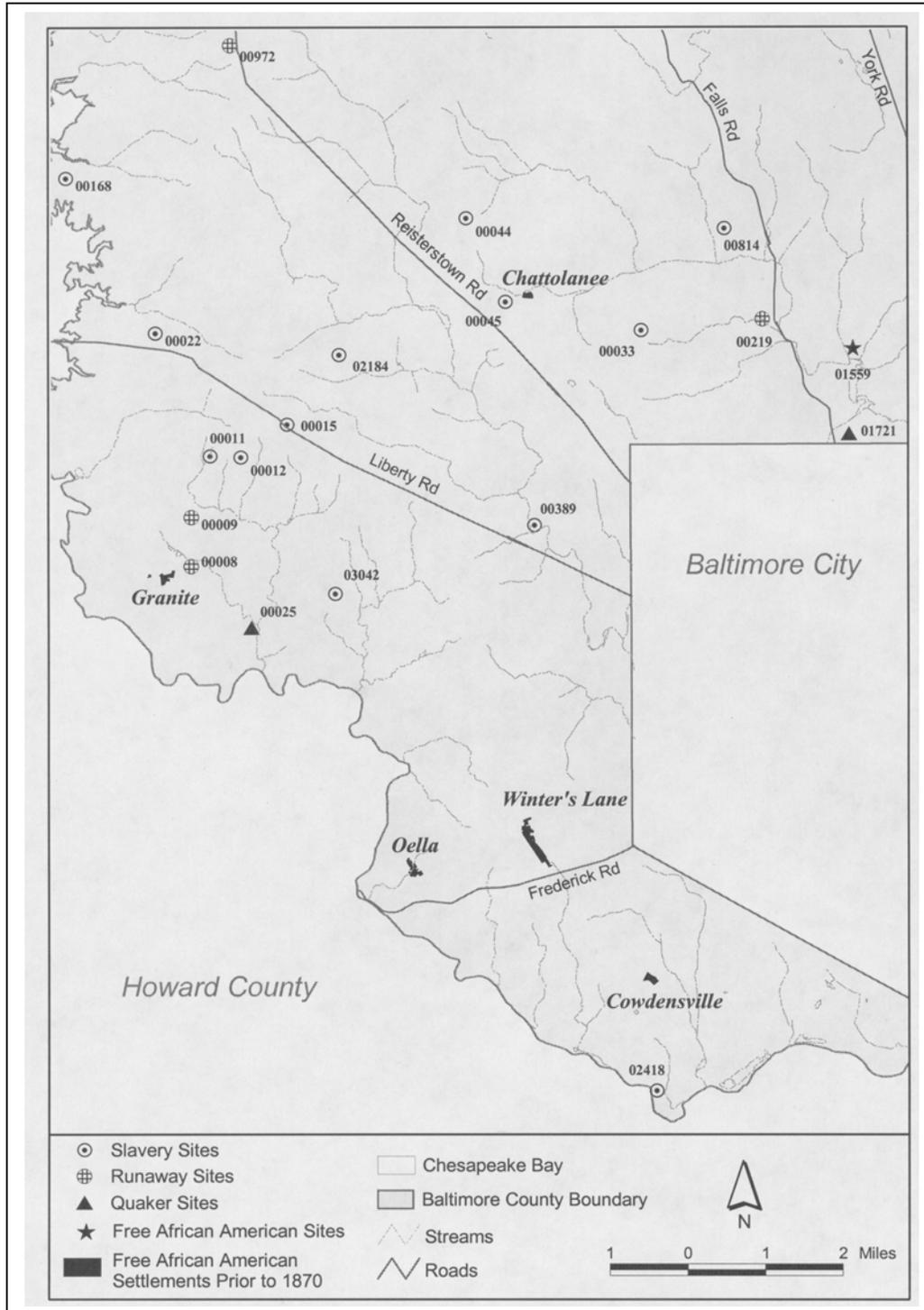
Source: Office of Planning, Baltimore County, Maryland, 2004

Figure 12: African-American Cultural Atlas (Northeast Baltimore County)



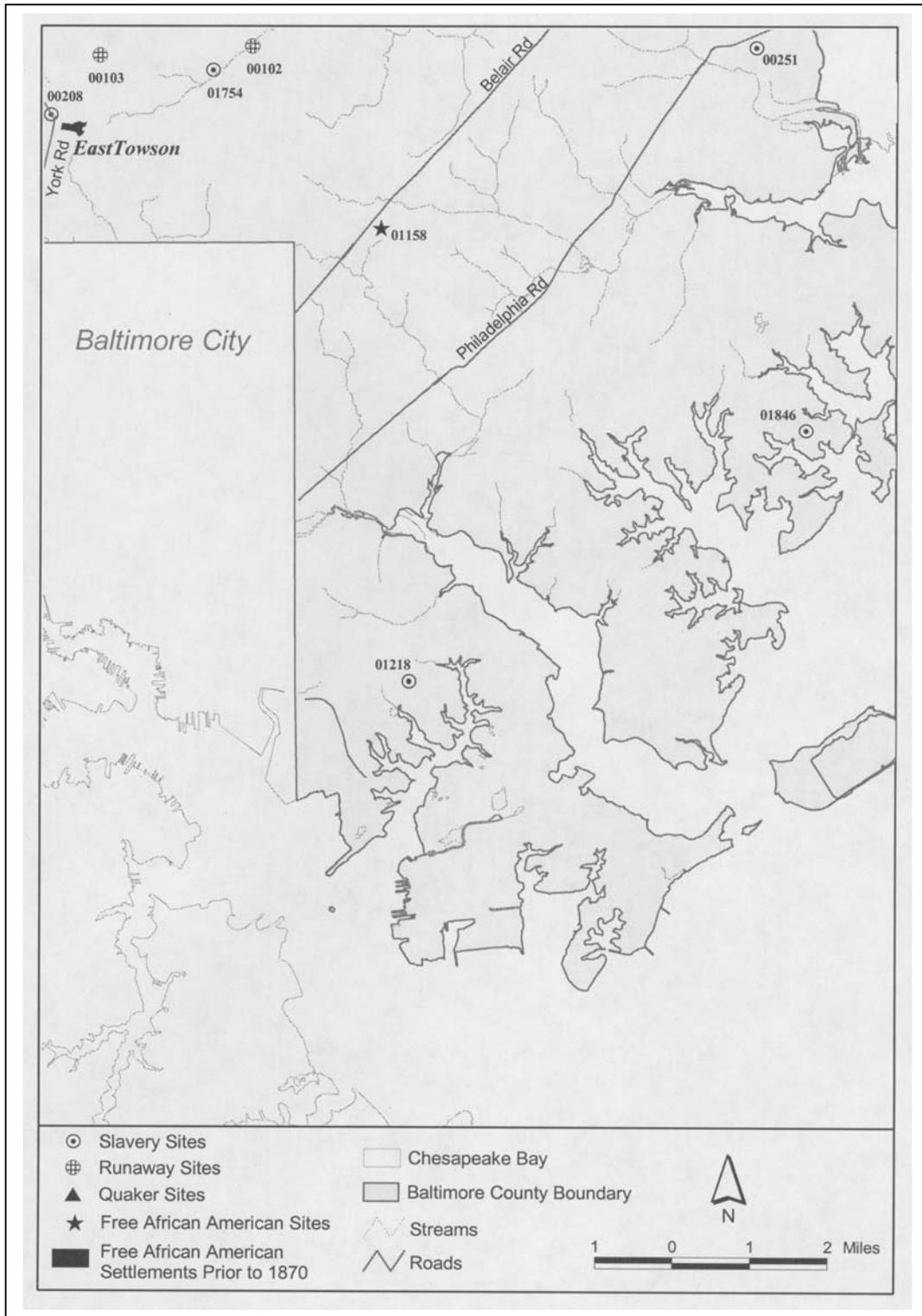
Source: Office of Planning, Baltimore County, Maryland, 2004

Figure 13: African-American Cultural Atlas (Southwest Baltimore County)



Source: Office of Planning, Baltimore County, Maryland, 2004)

Figure 14: African-American Cultural Atlas (Southeast Baltimore County)



Source: Office of Planning, Baltimore County, Maryland, 2004

antebellum Baltimore County (Figures 11-14). Chapter III focuses on the elements of slavery in the county's landscape; Chapter IV deals with the free African-Americans. Chapter III begins with a brief analysis of Baltimore County runaway slave advertisements and slave narratives. This leads to a discussion of the slavery study sites and an analysis of geographical issues related to their location within the county. Chapter IV focuses on the fugitive slave advertisements as records of slave resistance, as well as other elements of the free African-American landscape.

Slaveholding Patterns in the Regions

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the number of slaves as a percentage of the state's and the county's total population declined as the state steadily moved towards an economy based on wheat and industry, and away from a slave-based tobacco economy. Oddly enough, however, as shown by the examination of Census data (see footnote 9), the county's and the state's overall slave populations each remained relatively constant between 1790 and 1860. Each county in Maryland seemed to have its own set of slaveholders who did not completely divest themselves of slaves until all the slaves were freed by the Maryland Constitution of 1864. No published information has been found on whether the same individuals and same families continued in this set, or whether others moved in and out of this slaveholding set, but this issue certainly warrants additional study.

The Baltimore County Historian, John McGrain, coined the term the "convinced practitioners" to describe this slaveholding population. This persistent set of Baltimore County practitioners held between 6,000 and 7,000 African-Americans in bondage from about 1790 through 1850. By 1860 that total only dropped to 3,182. Researchers at the Maryland Archives confirm this finding, noting that "Baltimore County was a cross-roads of Maryland with large numbers of both free and enslaved blacks. The proportion of enslaved blacks in Baltimore County did not shrink as quickly as in other central Maryland counties."¹⁴¹ Even as slavery declined in the central counties, however, it must have increased slightly in other counties, since the statewide figures from the same time period indicate that between 90,000 and 110,000 African-Americans were held in bondage, and this total also dropped only slightly, to 87,189 in 1860.

Interestingly enough, both the county and city slave-owners displayed some consistent slaveholding patterns during this period. This regional slaveholding pattern may partially explain why slavery remained at relatively constant levels even though the region had already moved away from the slave-based production of tobacco. In short, it appears that some households regarded a slave as an investment, like a long-term bond that would not have been affected by the decline in local demand for slaves for tobacco production.

¹⁴¹ Maryland State Archives, "Beneath the Underground."

A notable portion of both Baltimore City and Baltimore County slaveholders held only one slave. In 1790, approximately thirty percent of the county's 1,029 slave-holding families had only one slave. In the city, approximately forty percent of the 388 slave-holding families held one slave. Seventy years later, in 1860, approximately one-third of the county's slaveholders, and almost seventy percent of the city's slaveholders, had only one slave.

In 1850, approximately 80 of the 306 slaves in the one-slave county households were between the ages of six and fourteen. Without additional research, it is unclear how widespread this phenomenon was in the state or elsewhere in the South. T. Stephen Whitman, author of *The Price of Freedom*, states that the narrative of a Washington County slave called "Fugitive Blacksmith" provides a possible explanation for this child slavery.¹⁴² Washington County, Maryland, is generally similar to rural Baltimore County in terms of its local economy and demography. The fugitive blacksmith, named J.W.C. Pennington, noted that both he and his brother "lived in a family where there was no other negro." He explained this situation as follows:

The slaveholders...often hire the children of their slaves out to non-slaveholders, not only because they save themselves the expense of taking care of them, but in this way they get among their slaves useful trades.... I remained with the stonemason until I was eleven years of age: at this time I was taken home. This was another serious period in my childhood; I was separated from my older brother, to whom I was much attached.... My master owned an excellent blacksmith, who had obtained his trade in the way I have mentioned above.¹⁴³

This type of slavery may have characterized a sizable fraction of the slavery in the state of Maryland. Further South, no less a perceptive observer than Frederick Law Olmsted reported that "It appears to me evident ... that the cash value of a slave for sale, above the cost of raising it from infancy to the age at which it commands the highest price, is generally considered among the surest elements of a planter's wealth"¹⁴⁴

Additional research is necessary before any conclusions can be drawn firmly, but this pattern of slavery can partially explain why the total number of slaves remained relatively constant in Baltimore County, well after the local decline in tobacco production.

¹⁴² T. Stephen Whitman, email to author, March 11, 2004.

¹⁴³ James W.C. Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington, Pastor of a Presbyterian Church, New York, Formerly a Slave in the State of Maryland, United States*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries, "Documenting the American South, 2001, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/penning49/menu.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Frederick Law Olmsted, quoted in Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower; A History of the Negro in America, 1619-1964, Revised Edition* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1966), 83.

Fugitive Slave Advertisements as Slave Narratives

In 1926 the local Baltimore County *Jeffersonian* newspaper published an editorial entitled “Old time Negro of Slave Days Now Only a Memory, But Pleasant One: They Were A Loyal Lot, Full of Sympathy, Having No Cares Or Responsibilities, For Their Master Supplied Them With Necessities of Life.”¹⁴⁵ Among its naïve assertion was the following:

Harriet Beecher Stowe and her “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” had much to do with creating a sentiment against slavery and finally its abolition. The characters in the book were much overdrawn... “Uncle Tom” was a loveable character, and it was inconceivable that he could have been treated with the brutality described in the book.¹⁴⁶

Sixty-two years after Emancipation in Maryland, the editor’s myopic hindsight that the slaves were always well taken care of by their owners, contrasts with the often-brutal nature of slavery as revealed in the county’s fugitive slave advertisements and slave narratives.

Arguably, the advertisements were actually the first “slave narratives since they were the first published stories about slaves and their seizure of freedom.”¹⁴⁷ Both types of documents comprise some of the few written records of this largely undocumented past. Carl O. Sauer notes that “The first step in reconstruction of the past stages of a cultural area is mastery of its written documents.”¹⁴⁸ These records give meaning to the sites on the reconstructed map of the African-American existence.

The advertisements inform us about the attitudes of the slave-owners who offered financial rewards to try to reclaim their property, or as they noted, so that “I get him back again,” or “so that I get him again,” or “so that I can get her.”¹⁴⁹ The owners described the slaves’ physical characteristics, as well as their attire, in great detail. Clothing was scarce in early America, so a person, particularly a slave, was easily recognized because

¹⁴⁵ *The Jeffersonian* (Towson, MD), August 7, 1926.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ David Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth Century Mid Atlantic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 56, no. 2 (April 1999): 247.

¹⁴⁸ Carl O. Sauer, “Forward to Historical Geography.”

¹⁴⁹ A notable number of the runaway advertisements compiled by Julie DeMattias of the Catonsville Library, as well as those in Latham A. Windley’s book, *Runaway Slaves: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790, 4 Vols.* (Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983) contain similar phrases.

what the runaway slave wore probably constituted what little clothing the slave possessed.

These advertisements and the narratives reveal the harsh nature of slavery at the site from which the fugitive originated. The physical descriptions abound with images of the slaves' distinctive scars and disabilities, possibly inflicted by their owners or by the hazardous working conditions. In 1742, a thirty-year-old slave named Charles, who had lost part of his toes from frost-bite, ran away from the Fork neighborhood in the Gunpowder District. The owner was uncertain about Charles' apparel but supposed he was almost naked.¹⁵⁰ Stephen Brown, a slave who fled from Daniel B. Banks in 1857 was noted for his stoop.¹⁵¹ Negro Dan had a scar on his left temple when he fled from William M. Risteau in the Cromwell Valley area in 1850.¹⁵² Jack, a fugitive from Samuel Worthington's estate, Bloomfield, had a scar under his throat where he was burnt, as well as a scar over his right eye-brow.¹⁵³ Solomon, one of three runaway slaves advertised by Thomas Cockey in July, 1782, had some marks on one of his cheeks and had lost part of the side of one of his thumbs.¹⁵⁴

The written first-person accounts of slavery in Baltimore County, called slave narratives, also attest to the physical and emotional harshness of slavery. In 1859, William Johnson decided to run away from John Bosley near the Gunpowder Neck after what he called a "terrible cowhiding."¹⁵⁵ George made up his mind to escape from Eijah J. Johnson after being beaten by his young mistress' husband, Dr. Franklin Rodgers, for taking some corn from the cornfield.¹⁵⁶ Elijah Shaw left Dr. Ephraim Bell's house in New Market (now Maryland Line) at the Pennsylvania border because Dr. Bell's wife frequently beat the heads of slaves with a broomstick.¹⁵⁷ Alfred Hollon, at the age 28, did not recount beatings, simply the sad remembrance of his mother being sold away from the farm when he was three, and the continued denial of the fruits of his own labor by his owner, Elijah J. Johnson.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁰ Latham A. Windley, *Runaway Slaves*, 215.

¹⁵¹ *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), November 14, 1857.

¹⁵² *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), June 30, 1850.

¹⁵³ Latham A. Windley, *Runaway Slaves*, 274.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁵⁵ William Still, *Underground Rail Road*, 523.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 445-6.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 471.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 445.

Not all fugitive slaves were successful. The odds were strongly against them. The financial rewards offered by the owners made slave-catchers out of thousands of otherwise neutral citizens. Of course, it was also true that some individuals specialized in this business. For instance, James Watkins writes that on the third day of his first attempt to escape, he was hiding in the woods at Deer Creek when he was overtaken by John Nelson and Bill Foster, two “Negro-catchers, who resided a few miles from Mr. Ensor.”¹⁵⁹

Fugitives worked against almost insurmountable forces. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Acts in 1793 and 1850 made it increasingly risky for citizens to provide assistance to runaways. Pennsylvania was just as hostile as the land south of the Mason-Dixon Line. The 1780 Pennsylvania law that began the abolition of slavery there specified that its terms did not apply to runaway slaves.¹⁶⁰ The Archives and Records Department of Chester County, Pennsylvania (bordering the slave state of Delaware) retains a list of captured fugitive slaves from 1820 through 1839. This list includes at least six Baltimore County slaves: Elijah owned by William Anderson; Isaac Chace and Elijah Collins, both owned by Joshua Bosley; Isaac Johnson, owned by Rebecca Gorshuch; and Sam, owned by William Spears.¹⁶¹ The capture of a runaway frequently made the news. The *Baltimore County Advocate*, on July 6, 1850, reported that slaves who had run away from R. M. Dorsey Esq., and Dr. S. Rogers of neighboring Howard County, were captured along the Northern Central Railroad at Parkton in central Baltimore County.¹⁶²

The runaway advertisements are also a record of the networks and communities formed by slaves across the landscape. The advertisements frequently noted that the individual might visit a family member, sometimes far off in another county. William C. Gent noted in his runaway advertisement for Edward Buller that his mother lived on a farm in Anne Arundel County.¹⁶³ An advertisement in June 18, 1781, noted that two runaways were brothers, that both had on iron collars since they had ran away several times before, and that “they might be about Mr. Thomas Worthington’s since their father and mother live there.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ James Watkins, *Narrative of the Life of James Watkins*.

¹⁶⁰ Pennsylvania General Assembly, “An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, 1780,” Yale Law School, “Project Avalon at Yale Law School,” 1996, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/statutes/pennst01.htm>.

¹⁶¹ Chester County [PA] Archives and Records, “Chester County Archives: Fugitive Slave Records: 1820-1839,” http://www.chesco.org/archives/fugitive_slave_listall.asp

¹⁶² *Baltimore County Advocate* (Towson, MD), July 6, 1850.

¹⁶³ *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), August 31, 1840.

¹⁶⁴ Latham A. Windley, *Runaway Slaves*, 248.

One advertisement in Baltimore County is particularly revealing about the slaves' extended bonds and friendships that transcended property ownership lines. In 1849, an advertisement identified Charles Gassaway, Henry Gassaway the elder, Henry Gassaway, Ben Bordley, Harry Bordley, and Caleb Rollins as escapees from John Baldwin, Thomas Gorsuch, J. Hillen Jenkins, and James Gittings, all farmers in Long Green Valley.¹⁶⁵

These communities and families that African-Americans were able to form despite the rigid controls of slavery were under constant threat of destruction. Harriet Beecher Stowe's work, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in book form in 1852, brought the harsh reality of slavery, particularly the separation of family members, compellingly to the attention of the American public. The sale of a loved one out of the region was an oft-repeated, tragic event. Many slaves in Maryland and Virginia were sold to slaveholders in the Deep South after the invention of the cotton gin increased the demand for slave labor in that region. The boom in the cotton industry coincided with reduced demand for slave labor in Maryland and Virginia as the region moved away from tobacco towards wheat farming, requiring fewer field hands. Sadly, it is likely that the decline in demand for slaves in Maryland and Virginia translated into a higher likelihood that families were separated even more frequently and across greater distances.

The name "Woolfolk" probably inspired terror in many slave households in Baltimore County. Woolfolk was a slave dealer in the City of Baltimore. One of his advertisements read, "100 negroes wanted. Cash and liberal prices will be given for NEGROES of good character by applying at A. WOOLFOLK's dwelling, PRATT street, near the Upper Depot."¹⁶⁶ Woolfolk's name was also known among the county's slaveholding set. For instance, in 1832, Mrs. Stephen Marsh, a member of the Marsh family that had vast land holdings in the central region of the county, testified that her husband had been speculating in corn and had even sold his wife's personal maid to Woolfolk.¹⁶⁷

A number of slaves may have been compelled to flee because of their fear of being sold to another owner in the deep South. Benjamin Piney, age twenty, ran away from Mary Hawkins who lived along Old Harford Road for fear of being sold to Georgia, and he successfully made his way to Canada in about 1856.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), August 18, 1849.

¹⁶⁶ *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), January 1, 1839.

¹⁶⁷ John W. McGrain, "Connemara," (Maryland Historical Trust Inventory Form, No. BA 00640, July, 1985).

¹⁶⁸ William Still, *Underground Railroad*, 540-541.

The Geography of Slavery

The Runaway Slave Sites Map (Figure 15) produced by the Baltimore County Office of Planning in 2000 shows points of origins of runaway slaves. This map is the first broad-scale map of slavery in the county, showing approximately 110 slaveholder sites linked to the ownership names on the J.C. Sidney 1850 Map.¹⁶⁹ The County Historian, John McGrain, notes:

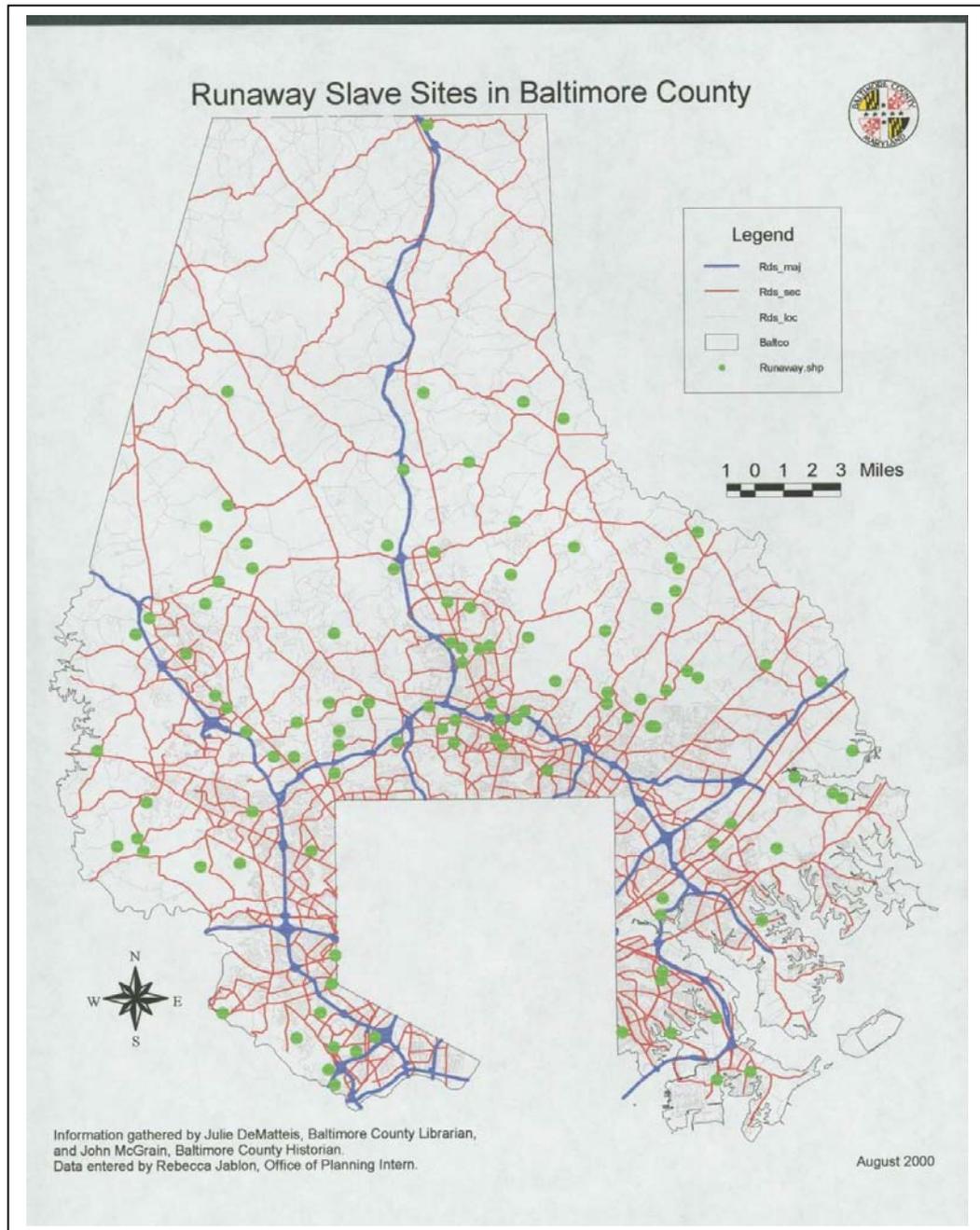
The farms of slave holders all cluster in the center of the county, many in the area north of Towson, very few in the north end of the county and fairly few out Hanover Pike. The pattern almost confirms what historians suspected by instinct: that areas settled by Germans in the north had very few slaves, as was also the case of areas of very hilly ground broken up by streams that were more suitable for mills and industries.¹⁷⁰

This thesis study confirms the findings of the earlier study in terms of the geographic pattern of slavery within the county. The thesis' study sites (Appendix I), cluster in the central region of the county, as portrayed in Figures 11-14. The study sites associated with slavery were selected from the county's inventory of approximately 5,000 historic properties. The sites, mostly all farmsteads, were all developed before 1850, still exist today, and have some record of slavery. This list includes a disproportionate number of stone and brick buildings rather than frame and log buildings if only because high-style masonry buildings have been more extensively researched to date. Reliance on the research, specifically the property ownership record, is necessary for this study because slaves were identified as property and listed as such under their owners' names. This study referenced slave data from the "1798 Tax List," the "1823 Tax List," or the 1850 Census Slave Schedule. Slave ownership information for all three of these years is available for ten of the locations, providing insight into slavery, over time, at these particular farms. Appendix III provides a more in-depth explanation of the methodology used to create the cultural atlas.

¹⁶⁹ The data for Figure 15, the Runaway Slave Sites Map in Baltimore County, was compiled by Julie DiMatteis of the Catonsville Branch, Baltimore County Public Libraries, from the classified advertising columns of the Baltimore *Sun*. Many of the advertisements gave addresses of the slave holders that were specific enough to match landowners' names on the one-mile-scale county map published in 1850 by J.C. Sidney and P.J. Browne. Approximately 110 farms were identified for transfer of the site location into the county's geographic information system (electronic mapping) database. The transfer was performed by Rebecca Jablon with oversight from John McGrain the County Historian.

¹⁷⁰ John W. McGrain, "Underground Railroad Research Data," Vertical File, Baltimore County Office of Planning.

Figure 15: Runaway Slave Sites Map



Source: Office of Planning, 2000

Besides strengthening existing theories about the distribution of slavery within Baltimore County, this study also finds an interesting correlation between slavery and

prime soil areas in the county. The Worthington Valley region has one of the county's largest concentrations of prime and productive agricultural soils as documented by Baltimore County's Prime and Productive Soils Map.¹⁷¹ Significantly, the Worthingtons were some of the county's largest slaveholding families as well as some of the largest landowners. Samuel Worthington, and his brother William, were descendants of Captain John Worthington of Anne Arundel County. These brothers bought the patent for "Welshes Cradle," in the area now known as Worthington Valley, as early as 1740. Samuel had twenty-two children, and many of them also settled in the same area.¹⁷² In 1798 Samuel Worthington owned a brick house called Bloomfield (BA 00059) with its multitude of associated outbuildings, 2,200 acres, and thirty-one slaves.¹⁷³ Bloomfield, and several other Worthington estates are illustrated in the context of the prime agricultural soil areas in Worthington Valley in Figure 16.

The Worthington Valley soils have an underlying layer of limestone. Lime, which weathers naturally from the bedrock, improves soil structure because it neutralizes the acid from the decomposed plants in the soil. The lime also adds calcium and magnesium to the soil, restoring nutrients needed for bountiful crops. It was not until about 1800, however, that agricultural lime was recognized in the county for its restorative powers. This means that the Worthington Valley farmers had the advantages of lime as an inherent fertilizer well before other farmers. These were "far-sighted men, many from southern Maryland, who appreciated the possibilities for cultivation of grain as opposed to tobacco, and the convenience of ample water power for mills with a nearby port for shipment."¹⁷⁴

These Worthingtons were also some of Maryland's "persistent practitioners" of slavery. Samuel's son, Charles, owned four slaves in 1798 and nineteen slaves by 1823. Charles' son, Richard Johns Worthington, owned twenty slaves in 1850. Samuel Worthington placed at least two advertisements for fugitive slaves during the Revolutionary War, a period that had inspired other slaveholders to manumit their slaves as a result of the colonists' heightened awareness of natural individual rights. Samuel Worthington obviously understood the opportunities that fugitive slaves might have to escape to the welcoming arms of the British. Samuel Worthington's advertisement for Saucy, a thirty-six year old man, noted that "All masters of vessels and others are

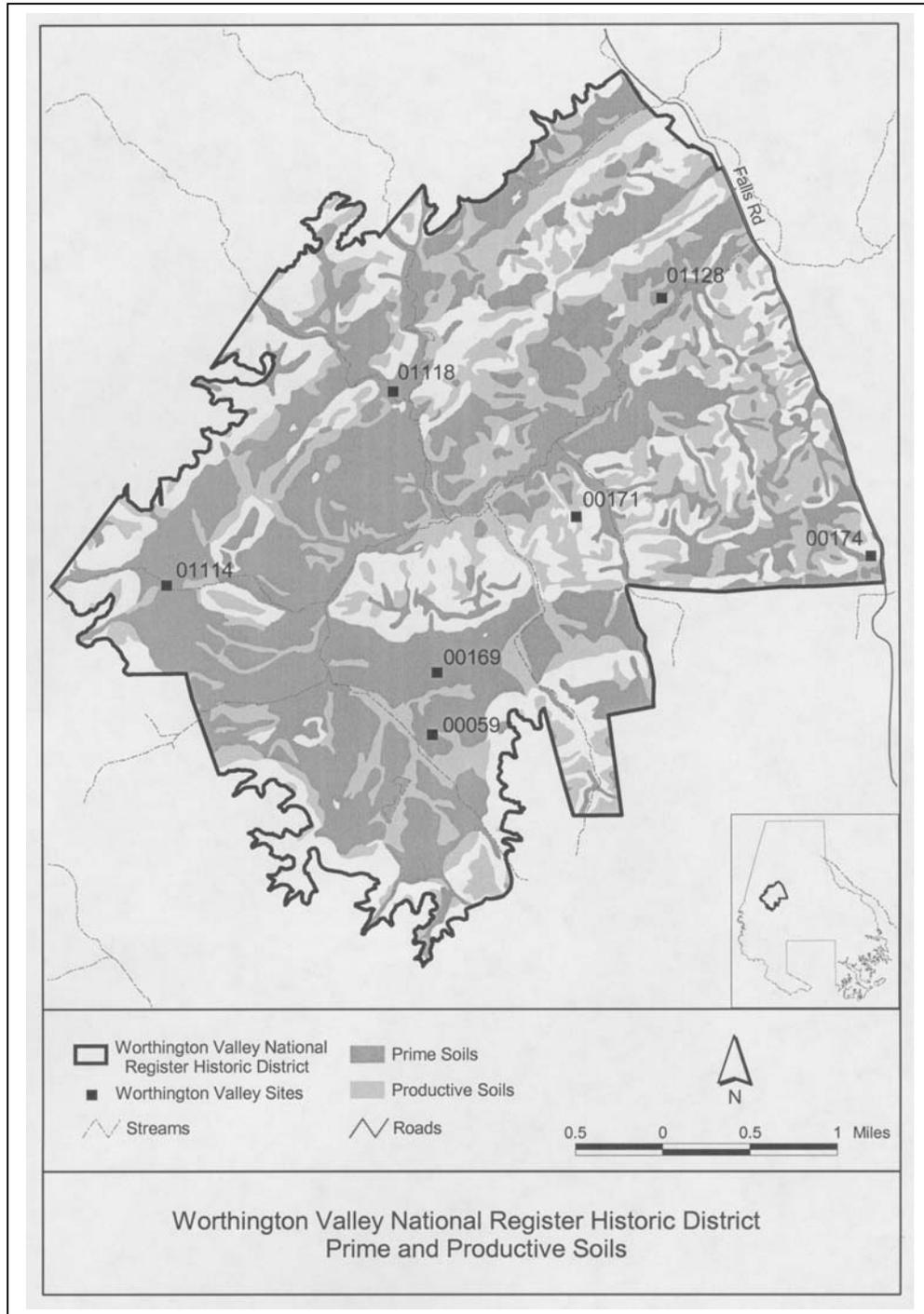
¹⁷¹ Baltimore County's Prime and Productive Soils Map was produced by Baltimore County Department of Environmental Protection and Resource Management and derived from William U. Reynold, III and Earle D. Matthews, *Soil Survey of Baltimore County, Maryland* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, 1976).

¹⁷² Catharine Black and Jim Wollon, Jr., AIA, "Worthington Valley National Register Historic District" (Maryland Historical Trust Inventory Form, January, 1976).

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Figure 16: Worthington Valley National Register Historic District Prime and Productive Soils



Source: Office of Planning, Baltimore County, Maryland, 2004

forbid carrying off, or harbouring, said Negro, at their peril."¹⁷⁵ In another fugitive slave advertisement, Samuel Worthington noted that the fugitive, Jack, was a "remarkable smart boy" who had "knowledge of most parts of the State of Maryland," and that he stole a horse, a bridle, and a saddle, as well as some clothing.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps Jack joined the British army. Perhaps another chapter of Jack's story will one day be uncovered through archaeological excavations at the Bloomfield estate. Hopefully, Jack remained free, forming part of the free black community discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁷⁵ Latham A. Windley, *Runaway Slaves*, 250-251.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 274.