ABSTRACT

ADAMS, ROBYN ELIZABETH. Detached Kitchens, Detached Memories? The Plantation Landscape and the Challenge of Inclusive Museum Narration. (Under the direction of David Zonderman.)

Visitors to historic plantation house museums may come for tours of grand manor houses, stories of elite white history, and expensive decorative arts; but when they step outside the main house they are confronted with numerous outbuildings which were once the work and living spaces of enslaved men and women. Perhaps the most popular outbuilding with visitors today, the detached kitchen is the focal point of my study into the interpretations of space at historic house museums. More commonly found at historic sites than smokehouses, privies, and dairies, the detached kitchen has become the primary venue for the incorporation of slavery into the master site narratives. As scholars of plantation landscapes have shown, the detachment of the kitchen was a purposeful choice made by white elites in an effort to control the access of enslaved workers. This racial segregation meant a plantation household was really a series of households, and my thesis argues that the architectural legacy of the kitchen’s detachment from the house complicates the ability of a plantation site to incorporate and interpret its historical social structures into one inclusive narrative. This paper focuses on Gunston Hall Plantation in Mason’s Neck, Virginia; Tryon Palace in New Bern, NC; and Mordecai Historic Site in Raleigh, NC to highlight the ways the kitchen is interpreted through both the regular tours and special programming.
Detached Kitchens, Detached Memories?
The Plantation Landscape and the
Challenge of Inclusive
Museum Narration

by
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DEDICATION

To my parents, Brad and Mary Jo, who signed me up for the Young Gunstonians in elementary school, and have forever encouraged and supported my endeavors in the museum world. And to my sister, Lauren, who has seen her Saturdays and family vacations consumed by historical sites and museum, and still loves and humors my academic interests.
BIOGRAPHY

Robyn Elizabeth Adams was born in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to Brad and Mary Jo Adams, and also has one younger sister, Lauren Marie Adams. A proud Army brat, Robyn grew up in Kansas, Michigan, Arizona, South Carolina, and Virginia. She began volunteering at Gunston Hall Plantation in Mason Neck, Virginia at the age of 8, where her love of food and history inspired her chosen professional field. She has also worked at Sully Plantation in Chantilly, Virginia; The National Museum of the Marine Corps in Triangle, Virginia; Fort Hill in Clemson, South Carolina; Historic Oak View County Park in Raleigh, North Carolina; and the Raleigh City Museum in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Robyn completed her undergraduate degree in History with a minor in Anthropology at Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina, where she proudly graduated Phi Beta Kappa and Magna Cum Laude. She will receive her Masters of Arts in Public History from North Carolina State University in May 2010.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Politics of Space: Focusing on the “Detached” in Detached Kitchens</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Create A Space</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Create A Separate Space</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting the Concept of Space</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen Programming: Why Separate is Not Always Equal</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building a Kitchen</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting the Scene</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actors, Please</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

As long as I can remember, I have always loved the kitchen. In the kitchen my mother worked her magic, and as soon as she would teach me I began eagerly absorbing all the techniques and history surrounding the act of cooking. Naturally, when I began volunteering as a Young Gunstonian at Gunston Hall in Mason Neck, Virginia at the age of nine, I unhesitatingly chose food preservation and dairying as my area of focus. I never once perceived that I should value the skill of the spinning wheel over the experience of packing crates of straw and fruit, and the colonial atmosphere of the kitchen yard may well have turned me into another open hearth foodie had not my collegiate studies one day forced me to reconsider the detached kitchen of my youth. As I recalled my memories of Gunston Hall, I saw that I perceived the kitchen as a site of fun, a place to taste new foods, wear a costume, and use quirky tools. Yet, as I recognize, the white owners of plantations such as Gunston Hall often purchased enslaved blacks to cook in the kitchen, and the racial separation of slavery made the kitchen a place where white owners forced labor upon slaves. The daily kitchen labor of the eighteenth century was nothing like the cooking exhibitions I idolized, and my recognition of this disjuncture led to the driving question: How does the way a museum presents the kitchen speak to the way a museum presents work relationships on a plantation, especially when enslaved people performed much of this work?

The plantation site, as a museum genre, holds particular significance in the growth of museums as a whole. Mount Vernon, George Washington’s plantation in Virginia, was the
first historic house museum established in the United States, and its 1858 opening placed the mansion’s narrative deep within the Victorian “cult of domesticity.” Ann Pamela Cunningham, the South Carolinian responsible for Mount Vernon’s preservation, understood that a museum rooted in the domestic would allow women a platform to elevate the importance of the home in the American nation. Women such as Cunningham realized the increase in mechanized industrial work had shifted the economy to jobs outside the home, so by cementing both American history and white middle-class values in the historic home narrative, women could maintain their social status in a changing work climate.¹ The narrative of George Washington tied neatly into American civil religion, as Washington embodied not only the creation of the American nation, but also an identity the white middle class believed underscore the ideas of democracy. For instance, the plantation museum would invoke “‘respect for love of country in its highest form, pure, true, and conscientious,’” while reminding visitors that “‘a public pledge of respect for the Christian home, with all its happy blessings, its sacred restraints’” stood at the successful roots of white, middle class America.²

However, in lifting up the moral ideals of America’s Founding Fathers, the plantation museum also led the way in downplaying the enslaved and waged workers who labored at these sites. Although whites often used racial separation of enslaved labor on their plantations to convey a sense of absolute white societal control, the ease with which plantation museums ignored the controversy of slavery helped entrench the white narrative as

² Ibid., 28.
the sole voice of plantation history. “Prominent plantation heritage sites tell a particular type of story (white- and elite-centric) to a particular tourist (white)” argue scholars Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, and the museum narratives “emphasize the hard work, civility, and ingenuity of plantation owners.”3 The plantation museum became a venue where white visitors could travel to pay tribute to the white elites inscribed in the books of American history, and perhaps gain inspiration and guidance as to what values and actions made these white elites icons of the American nation. These grand residences bespoke the success of their elite owners, and implied to visitors that similar gains were possible for latter-day Washingtons.

The history imparted at the plantation museum has a greater impact on visitors than many may at first recognize. Visitors do not simply view a porcelain vase and move on, but use the vase as a measure of values based in both a national historic narrative as well as a more personal narrative of American history. As Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen discovered, a majority of Americans use museums to personally research the past and gain context for their education. In addition, the sense of authenticity presented by sites provides museums with an academic authority to teach a particular historical narrative to visitors.4 Museums and academics should take seriously what museums do and do not present to

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visitors, because the public relies on the authenticity of history presented at the museum, both at the main house as well as out on the greater landscape of the plantation.

As visitors to the plantation museum most assuredly notice, near many plantation houses stand a series of detached buildings, often called dependencies. Among these buildings may stand a smokehouse, an office, or a dairy, but the detached kitchen takes prominence in the kitchen yard. These separated buildings, although much less ornate than the main house nearby, had just as much importance to the elite whites because of what the separation of these buildings signified to the people of the eighteenth century. On these “showplace plantations,” to borrow Dell Upton’s term, the dependencies signaled a white elite’s ability to organize the landscape to “indicate the centrality of the planters and to keep [white elites] aloof from any [enslaved] visitors behind a series of physical barriers that simultaneously functioned as social barriers.” The dependencies in particular barred enslaved blacks from easily accessing the spaces of the white main house, reinforcing the racial superiority of white men over nature and social inferiors.5

The kitchen became the most valued of these outbuildings because of the enslaved cooks’ role in the preparation of food, which by 1760 had become a key showcase for a planter’s wealth. The first use of the term “dining room” appears in the 1665 inventory of Thomas Keeling of Virginia, and although technically just a new name for the old central hall, the term reveals two important features of racial and social stratification. First, the

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mental and physical division of rooms indicates how planters separated areas of work and leisure within their plantations; and second, the meal itself had become the defining feature for spaces of entertainment. By the mid-eighteenth century, the meal-as-ritualized ceremony had become the paramount expression of a planter’s economic success and domestic mastery, as only the wealthy could have a separate dining room and the enslaved labor necessary to carry out the meal. At the same time, this separation removed the enslaved laborers from the leisurely dining room, becoming invisible persons whose work centered in the kitchen rather than the dining room. The kitchen, above all other dependencies, became crucial to maintaining the status of the white household.

Today, perhaps because its familiarity with audiences makes the kitchen particularly popular, many plantation museums have a detached kitchen at their site. In 1972 Frances Phipps attributed the kitchen’s popularity at museum sites to a visitor’s ability to identify with the domestic act of cooking, as well as the kitchen’s important role as the “heart of the house” in American architectural memory. The idea of the kitchen as a welcoming space within the home gained prominence in the 1960s as kitchen walls that had once kept the kitchen closed off from the house disappeared in favor of pass-throughs and open floor plans. By the 1970s, the American Kitchen had become the gathering place for busy families,

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causing British designer Terence Conran to declare the kitchen “‘really ought to be renamed the living room, because that is what it is.’”

For whatever emotions the detached kitchen arouses in visitors, the detached kitchen holds prime real estate in the interpretation of the plantation landscape because of its role in maintaining the separation of races crucial to the racial and gender ideologies of slavery. Historic house museums, consequently, must place the kitchen within the physical context of the historic plantation landscape as well as the current museum site. What the plantation museum chooses to emphasize about the past meanings of the kitchen’s detachment from the main house reflects more than the simple story of white space versus black space. The narrative is rather part of the museum’s crucial discourse over the role of enslaved or waged workers in the operation of the plantation, and the ways these laborers shaped the meanings of the relationships dictated through the plantation landscape. The kitchen provides a focal point into presentations of slavery because kitchens often exist at museum sites that do not have slave cabins or other places of enslaved domesticity.

My thesis focuses on the interpretation of the detached kitchen at three sites. Gunston Hall in Mason Neck, Virginia was the home of George Mason IV, a Virginia planter and delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787. As a museum, Gunston Hall opened in

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8Steven Gdula, *The Warmest Room in the House: How the Kitchen Became the Heart of the Twentieth-Century American Home* (NY: Bloomsbury, 2008), 131, 157. Gdula notes that the kitchen had slowly become an accepted space within the American home, beginning with the removal of kitchen doors in the 1920s. However, the social issues of the 1960s and 70s, coupled with the Julia Child movement encouraging Americans to cook fresh food rather than microwave prepackaged meals, began the distinct shift of middle class American families into the kitchen. Consequently, kitchens became spaces of entertainment and intimacy within the American home.
1952 under the direction of both the Commonwealth of Virginia as well as the Colonial Dames of America with the mission of “educat[ing] the public about the international significance of George Mason for his unique contribution to the universal cause of human rights,” a testament to American self-identification during both the Cold War and more modern international struggles. Although the kitchen is a reconstructed building, I selected Gunston Hall because of the active Historic Foodways Program at the site. Historic Foodways works with the docents’ association to train interpreters in open hearth cooking. The Historic Foodways Program has trained with interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg and Plymouth Plantation to learn different hearth techniques and recipes.

Tryon Palace Historic Sites and Gardens was built between 1767 and 1770 as the first permanent home for the British Governor of colonial North Carolina. Although the Palace burnt in a 1798 fire, the reconstructed Palace opened to the public in 1959. Tryon Palace is the largest property of the North Carolina Historic Sites system, and the interpretation of the Kitchen Office includes third-person costumed guides who cook on the open hearth six days a week. These interpreters report to the Domestic Skills Program Manager who, much like docents at Gunston Hall, engages in training outside of Tryon Palace to keep updated with trends in culinary history. Although Tryon Palace was not by definition a plantation, and employed several documented white waged laborers, the Palace’s British design, extensive outbuildings, and large farmlands created a landscape comparable to (and exceeding) many estates in colonial North Carolina.

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9 Visitor’s Guide. Gunston Hall, Mason Neck, VA.
Finally, Mordecai Historic Site began in 1785 as a gift from planter Joel Lane to his eldest son and daughter-in-law, Henry and Mary (Hinton) Lane. The house received its name after Moses Mordecai married into the Lane family, and the house remained a residence for several generations of Mordecais until Burke Haywood Little entered a nursing home in 1968. Mr. Little turned the property over to the City of Raleigh for use as a park in exchange for nursing home funds, and when Mr. Little died the same year, the City opened Mordecai Historic Park and moved the Allen Kitchen to the site. The kitchen sits as one of several assorted buildings which the City moved to the Park, and does not have an active interpretation program associated with it, as do the kitchens at Gunston Hall and Tryon Palace. As a site operated by the City of Raleigh, Mordecai is best described as a local house museum, significant predominantly within the Raleigh community. I use Mordecai throughout the paper as insight into the significance of the detached kitchen at smaller plantation museums, where money may limit the active programming of the outbuildings.

As the three case studies reveal, the root of the detached kitchen’s multiple identities springs from the spatial location of the kitchen within the plantation landscape, and the social structure of slave-owning America. Expressing space as an abstract idea to visitors may be difficult for museums, but the ways in which we divide and mark out our social and physical landscapes have direct impact on our definitions of acceptable and unacceptable – as “White Only” and “Colored Only” signs of the Jim Crow South make quite clear. As plantation

10 Historian C. Vann Woodward has argued that the legal codes of Jim Crow were rooted in a legacy of racial subordination developed during slavery. Woodward argues that racial inequality under slavery was not enforced
museums move toward merging narratives of elite whites and their enslaved blacks or wage laborers by inserting names, images, and other evidence of laborers’ lives into tours and text panels, the implications of space will prove crucial in the reorganization of museum narratives. As Henri Lefebvre asserted, the rationality of space “is itself the origin and source – not distantly but immediately, or rather inherently – of the rationality of activity.”

The rationality of space in the museum landscape sits as the foundation of the rationality of kitchen interpretation and programming, which in turn creates the visitor’s perception of the reality of eighteenth-century race relations. Chapter One will highlight the ways in which scholars and museums deal with the reasons for the physical separation, and address how the location of the kitchen impacts the effectiveness of creating one master narrative encapsulating all buildings. Chapter Two discusses how the separation of the kitchen segregates the history of the enslaved workers, and allows museums to create a social hierarchy of interpretation that emphasizes the production value of kitchen laborers over the social importance of the kitchen within the museum site. The kitchen’s position at the intersection of narratives and audiences necessitates a serious consideration beyond spoons, through space, because “the mere policing of slaves required that [slaves] be kept under more or less constant scrutiny” (12). Spatial segregation resulted only after the Constitution abolished slavery, which allowed blacks to move (legally) without restraint within white areas, specifically cities. Jim Crow became the new manifestation of white superiority by making rigid the presumptions of white racial superiority once understood in the laws that made blacks property during slavery. See C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow (NY: Oxford University Press, 1955). Stephanie Camp’s Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004) challenges Woodward’s assumption of the post-Reconstruction timing of spatial segregation, noting that “within this new, distinctly modern form lay some of the spatial worries and investments of the old order: placing black and white people in space and society” (140).

ovens, and syllabubs in the foodways of both the colonial plantation and the plantation museum.
The Politics of Space: Focusing on the “Detached” in Detached Kitchens

At least once a week, in performing my duties as an Educational Programmer at Historic Oak View County Park in Raleigh, North Carolina, I take second graders on a tour of the detached Plank Kitchen on the property. Although I call the small, lopsided building a kitchen, and the furniture inside the building recreates the setting of a kitchen, my clever six and seven year olds often challenge my authority on the use of the cramped dwelling. “Ms. Robyn,” they say, “if the Williams’ were so rich, why didn’t they just build the kitchen inside the house? Did they forget to attach this building or something?” For my second graders, the physical location and layout of the kitchen defines the space as most problematic in their basic understanding of the farm landscape. As I and numerous museum educators discover each day, visitors take every physical space at a historic site into consideration when comprehending the master narrative presented by the site. Visitors often make special note of the detached kitchen because, unlike a smokehouse or dairy house, cooking remains a familiar household activity today. As David Reese, Director of Gunston Hall noted, “People love the kitchen!,” and the kitchen’s popularity renders the interpretation of this space particularly important in the creation of a master historical narrative.

Numerous southern historic sites - including Gunston Hall Plantation, in Lorton, VA, Tryon Palace Historic Sites and Gardens in New Bern, NC, and Mordecai Historic Park in Raleigh, NC - define the reasons for the separation of kitchen and house at some point during either the regular tours or school programming. Tours at these sites typically offer two
predominant reasons for the removal of the kitchen: the increased danger of fire resulting from the enlarged hearth, and the desire to keep the heat and smells of the kitchen out of the main house. Although the sites do not cite sources for their explanations, scholars such as John Michael Vlach, Barbara Mooney, and Michael Olmert all note that occasional letters from white landowners and their visitors discuss local kitchen fires and the unbearable temperatures and odors found in the kitchen.12

Tryon Palace presents all visitors with an opportunity to learn about the separation of the kitchen, incorporating these reasons into the training materials given to regular guides. Yet, because the tour at Tryon Palace relies upon third-person costumed interpreters to interpret the space, the specific information offered varies greatly according to the interests of the visitor. For instance, because I did not specifically inquire, I did not receive a reason for the separation, although the more inquisitive guests behind me heard the standard explanations of fire and odors. The interpreter also emphasized to the guests the solid brick floor of Tryon’s kitchen, arguing that because large dinner parties required cooks to build numerous piles of coals on the floor to facilitate the increased cookware, the kitchen work

12 The evidence of these authors will be addressed throughout this chapter, although each author is careful to note that white perceptions of fire danger do not match the historical probability of a kitchen catching fire. Please see John Michal Vlach’s Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery, Barbara Mooney’s Prodigy Houses of Virginia: Architecture and the Native Elite (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008), and Michael Olmert’s Kitchens, Smokehouses, and Privies: Outbuildings and the Architecture of Daily Life in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009). Although of a later time period, C. Anne Wilson’s The Country House Kitchen Garden, 1600-1950 (London: Sutton Publishing, Limited, 1998) also discusses the placement of different kitchen gardens around the main house as a way for Victorians to limit unpleasant odors.
space was quite hazardous. The use of a working hearth year round adds a physical reminder of eighteenth-century energy sources, pitting the standards of twentieth-century comfort against Tryon Palace’s, allowing visitors to experience the “discomforts,” such as summer heat and odiferous food. By recreating the work environment of the eighteenth-century kitchen, Tryon Palace reinforces the logical argument for physical separation based upon the working conditions of an estate kitchen.

Mordecai Historic Park’s tour guides also offer an interpretation of the detached kitchen primarily based upon the kitchen work environment; in a vein similar to Tryon Palace, the guide readily explained the separation only after I inquired directly. Gunston Hall does not offer a guided tour of the outbuildings; instead, the kitchen yard features a series of panels focusing on the activities of the enslaved workers in these spaces. The kitchen’s panels discussed both clothing and foodways of enslaved Africans, drawing attention to the loft space where the cook may have slept. A recording, played with the press of a button, focused more upon the use of the kitchen, running through the daily activities of the cook who may have occupied the space. In discussing the activities, however, the recording failed to mention why elites had the kitchen separated from the main house, leaving the visitor to speculate upon the reasoning. To their credit, all three sites do clearly address the kitchen’s structure during school programming, as the training manuals for all

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13 I visited the Kitchen Office at Tryon Palace Historic Sites and Gardens, New Bern, NC, on September 30, 2009. I took both the regular tour, as well as a walk-through with Curator of Interpretation Katie Brightman Loveless. When I mention the interpreters, I am referencing my regular tour.
14 I took a guided tour of Mordecai Historic Park, Raleigh, NC, on October 8, 2009.
15 I visited Gunston Hall Plantation, Mason Neck, VA, on October 21, 2009.
three sites contain references to the separation within their narrative. With the spatial separation centered within the school program, children get a chance to compare eighteenth- and twentieth-century cooking methods and envision hazards that supposedly necessitated the removal of the kitchen space.

Interpretive programs and signs often omit explanations of the separation of the kitchen from the main house. The detached kitchen is perhaps one of the most noticeable functional differences between eighteenth- and late twentieth-century homes, literally shifting the cooking of food from within the house to a site distinct and different from the physical location of the family’s dining room. The twentieth-century visitor finds the difference striking, and looks to the museum to explain the difference.\(^\text{16}\) When museum sites do not consistently address the kitchen’s removal within the interpretation, be it a tour or text panels, visitors must use context clues to find an answer. Visitors may opt to look at the objects in a room and assess their functional or aesthetic value, framing the kitchen in terms of foodways production. The standard interpretation of these kitchens also pays little attention to architectural detail. Consequently, museums frame the kitchen’s detachment as the result of the work in the kitchen, rather than considering the ways in which architecture and detached space itself creates meaning for activities in the kitchen.

With little interpretation of spatial and architectural context, visitors’ attention remains focused on the methods used to cook the food, a process easily embraced by visitors.

eager to seek their own connections with the past. Because guided interpretation suggests fire hazard as the only reason behind the kitchen’s removal from the house, visitors come to understand the architectural space as only secondary to the process of cooking. The narrative renders the kitchen’s location inconsequential to the themes of work highlighted in the interpretation. Yet, these particular southern historic sites cannot ignore the evidence of enslaved workers having labored in their kitchens. Thus, the kitchen space becomes a focal point for the existence of slaves in a racialized landscape.

Stephanie H. Camp argues that the spaces of the plantation landscape became the scenes where masters and slaves negotiated the balance of power. “Social relations and social values are constituted and reflected in the design of the built environment and in the distribution of people in space,” posits Camp, because landscape layouts reflect the choices and hierarchies of value held by the occupants of the plantation. The placement of the eighteenth-century kitchen building in the plantation landscape infused the kitchen building with social meaning of racial separation, as white owners maintained their social superiority through their ability to order the landscape and remove people and places that did not equal themselves. In turn, the symbolic removal of the kitchen devalued enslaved laborers by having them labor in a space designed to maintain the white oppression of enslaved blacks.17

As museum sites focus the visitor’s attention on the cooking activities, however, the kitchen becomes important for its support role to the white families in the main house rather than its concurrent role within the eighteenth-century black community. Sites that do not interrogate

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17 Camp, Closer to Freedom, 4.
the meaning of the kitchen’s physical separation in the context of a working plantation create a silence regarding the white and enslaved landscapes of the plantation, and the kitchen space becomes simply a passive space where work was done. All three sites seem content, when pressed by visitors, to offer a standard explanation for the kitchen’s distinctive location – an explanation based on fire and heat and cooking odors, but not on the presence of slavery.

By drawing upon theories of the social meaning of space and a growing historiography of plantation landscapes, this chapter will assess how the current kitchen interpretation at Gunston Hall, Tryon Palace, and Mordecai Historic Site conceptualizes the kitchen’s history as a contested space between white owners and enslaved blacks. The idea of contested space also illuminates how plantation sites navigate the often explosive nature of presenting the history of enslaved workers at sites founded in the ideals of American civil religion but also pushed towards the inclusiveness of social history. In examining the values placed upon the detached kitchen in both the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, I suggest that the separation of the kitchen continues to impact the museum’s ability to teach a more inclusive historical narrative about slavery and the racial ideologies at the core of the plantation’s identity.

To Create A Space

As many historic house museums recognize, beneath the questions of spatial location comes the much larger consideration that construction requires a designer to give physical direction to the enclosure of spaces. In the case of plantations, the white elites, often the male
head of households, held the authority and money to design and arrange a series of buildings upon virgin land. The plantation landscape embraces Hegel’s theory that nature produces Man, but it is Man who produces his world. The kitchen’s separation from the main house, therefore, does not stem solely from the consequences of fire and heat, but also from the world the white elite sought to impose on their landholdings and society. And just as we cannot study the modern kitchen without considering the entire house, so too must any study of the detached kitchen begin with the main house and the household to which the detached kitchen belonged.

The plantation landscape, including the kitchen, revolved around the main house of the planter’s family, and we must start in the main house to fully understand the role of these wealthy white men in the design process of the plantation. Barbara Mooney uses the term “patronage” to describe the process of design, implying that these men did not simply commission construction but actively collaborated with the artisan to oversee the physical embodiment of style and meaning. As she notes, contracts between plantation owners and plan managers did not refer to either clients or architects because these terms imply a hierarchy of professionalization that did not exist and a system of authority which elites and designers did not observe. Men such as George Mason, William Tryon, and Joel Lane intended not only to build a landscape, but also to build a landscape that reflected their desire to locate themselves at the top of the social structure. These men intended their properties to

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18 Ibid., 68.
alter the environment to assert the power of man over nature, man over woman, and white over black, both physically and socially. Lefebvre recognized this power, reflecting that space exists as a social relationship “inherent to property relationships (especially the ownership of land)…its ‘reality’ at once formal and material.” The construction of the spaces of the main house and outbuildings becomes more than the need for shelter, embodying an ideological claim to the land through the visual reassignment of the landscape.

At the time of construction, Mason, Tryon, and Lane understood how space, land, and power related, and they sought to ensure that relationship enhanced their social and political power. Governor Tryon wrote in his report to the English Board of Trade that the new palace would “be built solely under my Orders and Directions,” despite the involvement of the experienced John Hawks. Tryon’s direction of the palace construction allowed him to personally apply his interpretation of British power to the colony of North Carolina, claiming the space in the name of both the King and the Tryons. Likewise, George Mason’s decision to locate his new home in the Northern Neck of Virginia rooted his selection of space in a place settled primarily by families deeply connected and loyal to the British crown. In 1724 Hugh Jones, an Englishman who moved to Williamsburg, described the Northern Neck as different from the rest of the state because the land had been the property of several

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20 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 85.
21 Letter from William Tryon to the Board of Trade, 3 December 1767 in *The Correspondence of William Tryon and Other Selected Papers, 1758-1767*, vol. 1, ed. William S. Powell (Raleigh, NC: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1980), 389.
proprietors prior to the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Although the colonial government of Virginia technically created the laws ruling the land, the proprietors’ prior claims to rents on the land charged the land with a hierarchy of property, power, and access more feudal than democratic in nature. The land chosen by Mason already embraced the traditions and values of the British elite, and Mason’s decision to locate his home on these lands established his intent to draw upon these elite values.

If the choice to dominate a particular landscape began the process of spatial relationships by tying the planter to a specific geography, the choice of house further used space to marry the ideal to the real. The eighteenth century saw a British American society in flux both socially as well as geographically. Men such as Tryon sought to navigate between the traditional English identity to which many wealthy white American colonists still held, and the emerging identities of colonists who saw themselves as American more than British. Mason found himself the wealthy inheritor of his father’s lands, coming of age with a distinct financial advantage in a colony where the lure of tobacco increased the wealth of the few who could own enough land and labor to make the crop profitable. Joel Lane worked to assert his financial dominance on the North Carolina backcountry at a time when larger clusters of prosperous planters located themselves primarily along the coast. Most importantly, all three men operated in a society where social barriers reminiscent of the


British aristocratic hierarchy existed, although these barriers often lacked the solidifying precedent made possible by centuries of rule. With the advantage of access to political office and wealth already at their hands, the transformation of their land took on new urgency. “Architecture,” writes Mooney, “functioned as a prop in their self-invention and their presumptuous claim to social and political authority,” and allowed the white elite to assert their status.24

These elite homes used British architectural patterns to relate back to the grand familial estates in England, and drew upon the aristocratic power conveyed through these estates in Britain. Architectural books such as James Gibbs’ A Book of Architecture (1728) offered resources for understanding British trends in spatial arrangements, specifically the growing desire to keep living spaces on the main floors while relegating work spaces to the basement. The use of British-trained managers at both Tryon Palace and Gunston Hall ensured the successful implementation of these room divisions. Tryon, who sought an “elegant and noble structure” for the colonial seat of North Carolina, chose a Palladian tripartite design considered modest by English models. Yet, in the town of New Bern, the structure stood as a model of grandeur and wealth possible only with British connections. Tryon himself reaffirmed the relationship when he deemed the proposed Palace “a public Ornament and Credit to the Colony, as well as an Honor to British America.”25 To solidify

24 Mooney, Prodigy Houses of Virginia, 10.
the British connection, Tryon had the coat of arms of King George III carved into the pediment on the Palace exterior, marking the space as one belonging specifically to England, and by virtue of the Governor’s relationship, marking all of North Carolina British space.

George Mason also used grandeur to establish himself upon the Virginian landscape. Mason selected another popular English pattern to design his Georgian manor overlooking the Potomac River on the Northern Neck. Mason named the main house Gunston Hall in honor of his familial estate in England, also using the space to maintain his ties to his British family. Also smaller than Georgian mansions in England, Mason’s home truly embodied the concept of “prodigy” by breaking with English notions of propriety and embracing elaborate and ostentatious decorative features hearkening to the power of multiple empires and eras.\(^\text{26}\)

Indentured servant William Buckland, already a well-reputed woodworker in several colonies, utilized Palladian, Chippendale, rococo, and baroque designs on the exterior and interior of Gunston Hall to elevate the space above other houses in the colony.\(^\text{27}\)

While much smaller than either Tryon Palace or Gunston Hall, Mordecai Plantation functioned to solidify the Lane’s progeny in central North Carolina society. The main house at Mordecai Plantation was a “hall-parlor” structure with one-and-a-half to two stories, and three or four rooms; and followed in the pattern of Joel Lane’s 1770 house in Wake County. Also the product of British architectural patterns, the hall-parlor house allowed Henry Lane’s family to use the hall as a public space to entertain guests while designating the parlor and


\(^{27}\) Broadwater, *George Mason, Forgotten Founder*, 6.
bedrooms as more exclusive, private space, a luxury not enjoyed by the yeoman farmer in his one-room house. In addition, the house featured an extended piazza, a design element first developed along the North Carolina coast. The piazza added an additional separation of public and private space, and signified the higher social status of the family. The artistic craftsmanship required to build such a dwelling, along with the displays of Chippendale, Hepplewhite, and Sheraton furniture demonstrated not only the Lane’s material wealth, but also a strong connection to international fashions inaccessible to neighboring farmers.

With over 2000 acres of land and sixteen slaves inherited along with the house, Henry Lane’s house testified to one family’s ability to continuously control the landscape and spaces of central North Carolina in an emerging American nation. The later 1826 Greek Revival additions provided for by Moses Mordecai expanded the presence of the house on an ever-prosperous plantation, adding new rooms, columns, pediment, and double-portico to the front of the house. These elements, invocative of Greek temples, recalled the theme of democratic equality popular in the young American republic. Mordecai’s use of these designs updated the family’s image from one of colonial British aristocracy to new, Republican ideals of more democratic leaders. Rather than equality, however, the Mordecai house sought to secure the same social dominance that Lane had created in the late eighteenth century, revealing the importance of these spaces in maintaining class relationships.

29 Ibid., 38.
The elite intentions infused into these three houses by their families did not fade when these sites became museums, but took on political significance based upon the historical and social perspectives of their museum founders in the twentieth century. As Patricia West has shown in her study of house museum, the historic house movement which began with Mount Vernon in the 1850s drew on the language of civic religion, which itself relied upon the theme of republican virtue.\(^3\) This idea of civil religion held that through the use of symbols and rituals derived from the perceived common Christian religious beliefs of white Americans, the American nation sanctified its political authority.\(^4\) In addition, emphasis on the idea of democracy rooted America’s identity in the legacy of Rome, uniting Americans with a proud and storied past.\(^5\) These house museums, therefore, provided “a ‘rootless’ populace with a shared ancestral home and sacred heritage” by centering the narrative on the political contributions of the elite white owners.\(^6\)

This identification through white elite virtues took on particular importance between the 1940s and 1960s, as society and government sought to place American values in opposition to Communism.\(^7\) Patriots and pioneers, symbols of the success of civil religion, dominated historic celebrations which stressed political freedom, service to state, and the

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\(^3\) West, *Domesticating History*, 3.
\(^6\) West, *Domesticating History*, 3.
bravery of ancestors.\textsuperscript{35} For both Gunston Hall and Tryon Palace, where museum sites began in the 1930s and continued through the 50s and 60s, the focus remained on white men whose dedication to government and order reminded visitors of the ideological foundations of Virginia and North Carolina. Both Louis Hertle of Gunston Hall and Mrs. James Edwin Latham of Tryon Palace belonged to women’s societies dedicated to celebrating the memory of America’s colonial roots, and the Colonial Dames of America and the Daughters of the American Revolution assisted with the restoration of these sites. These sites focused on the men who financed the plantations. A memorial in the Maude Moore Latham garden proclaims the buildings as the place where “North Carolinians might know of their heritage.” Mordecai also sought a patriotic lineage, and the tour narrative celebrates the house’s connection to Joel Lane, “the Father of Raleigh” and member of the Colonial Assembly whose bill created Wake County. These historic homes serve as a visual reminder of the idealized historical elite, offering the public a chance to identify with the republican values of a national civil religion.

The use of these historic homes as museums preserves the visual record of elite power, and suggests that twenty-first century society still relies upon the successes of these eighteenth-century families. Yet, these houses did not stand alone, as eighteenth-century elites also built several exterior buildings where activities to support the white household took place. Plantation owners instilled order and design in their outbuildings, creating visible and orderly kitchen yards with work zones, decorative designs, and other architectural elements.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 141.
features that reveal the importance of these buildings to the elite whites.\textsuperscript{36} Because these buildings existed, in a sense, within the same household as the whites in the main house, these buildings must be examined in context of the greater meanings and perspectives embodied in the main houses. The kitchen gains meaning in the total historical and museum landscape as a vital part of the white household, and as a detached building from the white main house. Understanding the significance of the kitchen necessitates examining the meanings of the white mansions.

\textit{To Create a Separate Space}

The growing movement of landscape studies has begun to address the lack of scholarship regarding historical plantations. As part of the landscape of dominance, and as a necessity of rural eighteenth-century life, the elite whites of the British American colonies built entire systems of support structures which served to keep the white family self-sufficient. Spaces for cooking, laundry, food preservation, animals, and crops needed a place in the landscape; in the northern colonies, many of these domestic necessities could be performed in a hearth space, and most farmhouses had one large room containing a large hearth. The hearth provided heat and fuel for the family, and cooking space consequently became the multipurpose space where most family activities centered. Even with the development of two and three room dwellings in the later eighteenth century, many homes

\textsuperscript{36} Michael Olmert, \textit{Kitchens, Smokehouses, and Privies}, 17.
continued to have an internal kitchen space or an attached shed containing the kitchen.\textsuperscript{37} These compact spaces served the needs of the residents, often simple family units who saw no need to remove themselves from the home to carry out chores which supported the household.

Yet, from the Mid-Atlantic southward, the intentional removal of the kitchen and other spaces in larger home sites forces a consideration of landscapes of domination \textit{within} the plantation or estate. White planters argued that they had to remove of the kitchen due to the brutal southern climate, where warm summer temperatures exacerbated the heat and odors emitted from the kitchens. In addition, the danger of fires stood at the forefront of planters’ minds, with many citing fire danger as the drive behind a separate cooking station. Kitchens became the second most insured building, besides the main house, in colonial Virginia, although records show kitchens burnt down less often than assumed.\textsuperscript{38} In 1993, John Michael Vlach’s landmark study of outbuildings, including the kitchen, proposed that these southern kitchens differed from their northern counterparts because of the enslaved Africans who bore the brunt of labor on plantations, both in the fields and in the home. By examining records, archaeological evidence, and standing structures, Vlach painted a plantation picture where outbuildings existed as part of a larger dialogue about status. Vlach located the outbuilding’s close proximity to the main house in the kitchen’s function of


elevating the white family in the “big house,” while demoting the enslaved workers concentrated in the kitchen. Vlach also noted that the kitchen, in particular, stood out in the landscaped power dialogue, as cooking became the first function removed from the main house, making the detached kitchen the most distinctive building on the landscape besides the main house.\(^{39}\) The detached kitchen, therefore, emerges as the outbuilding at the heart of the physical and symbolic separation of space that white planter’s perceived as necessary to secure their power.

Further studies have focused on architectural footprints and spatial analysis of kitchen yards to assess the meanings inscribed upon these outbuildings. One of the newest analysts within the field, Michael Olmert, has argued that “Architecture is often said to be about the ‘presentation of self, but outbuildings, in their shape and arrangement in the historic backyard…tell us who we were.’\(^{40}\) Outbuildings illuminate the dependency of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century white society upon their enslaved blacks, and their spaces speak to the realities of race relations. In the detached kitchen, specifically, dozens of servants and enslaved Africans regularly worked to prepare the elaborate meals that displayed the social status of white men and women. Yet, the removal of the kitchen activities from the main house also removed the workers from the main house, defining one space as desirable and one space as inferior, even as these spaces functioned together to sustain the white household. Architectural space held the power to reinforce this relationship between white

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\(^{39}\) Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 45.

\(^{40}\) Olmert, *Kitchens, Smokehouses, and Privies*, 2.
masters and enslaved blacks, and the British had already taken greater steps to demarcate public and private space through the specialization of room uses.\(^4\) These politics of access limited the privilege of meeting with the white planter, and, more importantly, protected the white elite from socialization with lower classes or interactions with servants and slaves. Slaves became part of the unseen mechanism of service, existing only on the periphery of the white elite.\(^4\) White elites gained standing by having a choice of socialization, while enslaved workers were defined by their lack of personal choice. Work spaces fed the politics of access by removing the unpleasant, labor-intensive activities from the residence, allowing slaves to complete the chores away from the sight of white planters and their visitors. In creating a world free of reminders of exploitation, white planters exhibited their ability to control man and nature.

Cookbooks also show how the removal of the kitchen reinforced the racialized gender ideologies of the eighteenth century. As part of their privilege, elite white women no longer needed to perform household work, instead finding an identity in the ability to direct their enslaved workers. Domestic manuals such as Hannah Glasse’s 1747 *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy* distinguished between director and directed, opening the cookbook by claiming “I dare say, that every Servant who can but read, will be capable of making a tolerable good Cook.”\(^4\) Enslaved cooks who could not read often listened to the recipes

\(^4\) Ibid., 71.
dictated verbally by the white mistress, and the ability to direct slaves into creating domestic order became a high calling for this new class of women. Part of the white woman’s calling involved transforming the black slaves from presumed slovenly animals into productive, “tolerable good Cook[s].” Yet, because whites saw blacks as disorderly, elite white women found themselves forced to reemphasize the social difference through space, and removed the realms of black enslaved labor as much as possible from the realms of white leisure and consumption – far enough for comfort, but close enough to still control.\textsuperscript{44} The detached kitchen allowed for racial separation while still allowing white women the access necessary to perform their duties as directors. Although the oversight of cooking required white women to engage with enslaved cooks in the kitchen, the separation of the kitchen provided the control of intimacy that defined domestic social boundaries. Visual distance displayed to all who owned and who was owned, who was included in the elite household and who was excluded.\textsuperscript{45} In addition, the kitchen yard also created a division between work zones, demarcating the owner’s command of home, field, and the numerous slaves needed to work in both. Masters required the kitchen yards kept neat and clean, and used the maintenance of these buildings to impress visitors with the power and success of the planter over the social


They also showed the personal comfort achieved by the planter, as kitchens spoke of plentiful help located at all times within the supervision and calls of the elite. The kitchen stood in contrast to the peripheral fields, placing more importance on the kitchen activities than on the agricultural work occurring simultaneously. Kitchens displayed the wealth generated from the field work in a clean manner, offering protection to whites from the demeaning work of the laborer.

Interpreting the Concept of Space

No planter explicitly wrote of racial separation as a purposeful exclusion of enslaved blacks, nor as a way to distinguish between white and black women. In fact, few literate whites mentioned the kitchen space at all beyond references to the food being prepared inside. In both the eighteenth century as well as the twenty-first, space remains a rather abstract theory which quietly shapes the world in profound ways. Museum sites face a steep challenge in giving meaning to the concept of space in tours lasting at best an hour or two. In addition, many of these museums revolve around the white male owners and their material culture, and deal with a public expecting to both idealize and connect with the objects and stories at the museum. With the focus of the tour often zoned in on material culture, themes such as social implications of space and the construction of racial boundaries often find themselves in a role secondary to the narrative conveyed through artifacts. However, after visiting Gunston Hall, Tryon Palace, and Mordecai Plantation, one cannot help but notice

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46 Olmert, Kitchens, Smokehouses, and Privies, 17.
47 Vlach, Back of the Big House, 19.
how these sites do address the issue of space in a most indirect manner. Themes reinforcing the ideological separation of race and class have existed in interpretations over the decades, emphasized throughout the kitchen space. This sense of separation allows sites to project the history of enslaved African Americans or white servants into the narrative, even while operating within androcentric power structures laid out over two hundred years ago.

When sites suggest that elites detached the kitchens to minimize the fire or odor hazard, sites also imply the assumption that white occupants benefitted from the kitchen’s removal. The kitchen became a space for the use of servants and slaves, while the house remained the locus of white activity. In her analysis of the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site in White Haven, Missouri, Pamela K. Sanfilippo found that the kitchen space consequently featured the bulk of interpretation about enslaved African Americans who “receded into shadows unless summoned.” Indeed, the historical use of the kitchen space as sleeping quarters for the cook and other slaves on a plantation, under the eye of the white mistress and required at whim, bolsters Sanfilippo’s interpretation. The museum kitchen often pulls double interpretive duty as the symbol of both black oppression by whites and the personal identity of the enslaved. At White Haven as well as many other sites, the narrative naturalizes the kitchen as a black, laboring space by confining slavery discussions to the kitchen.

49 Mooney, Prodigy Houses of Virginia, 248.
The staff at Gunston Hall recognized the separation of food preparation and food consumption early in the restoration process, and in 1973 sought evidence of this spatial relationship in the archaeological excavations for the kitchen foundation. The discovery of the brick path to facilitate movement between kitchen and house helped Dr. William Kelso and Alain Outlaw of the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission understand the conversation between serving spaces and consuming spaces that had taken place at the site.\(^{50}\)

In the early 1990s the addition of both a panel titled “Everyday Life of Slaves on Virginia Plantations,” and an audio recording that greets visitors who choose to step into the kitchen, made this spatial differentiation between white and black occupants clear.\(^{51}\) The panel provides a very broad overview of the annual clothing and food allotments given to slaves, strengthening the connection between the kitchen space and the slave community. The audio recording specifically recognizes that the Masons had an enslaved cook, and beckons visitors to notice the staircase leading up to the loft above the cooking space. The recording connects sleeping arrangements to both the prestige of the position, as well as the difficulty of eighteenth-century cooking techniques, once again suggesting the space as a product of function. Although the audio does not specifically highlight the relationship between the slave and the mistress, the creation of the menu and the need for a meal’s completion by 2 pm speaks to the obligation of the slaves to answer to their mistress’ desire. In this

\(^{50}\) “1973 Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, Directors Dr. William Kelso and Alain Outlaw,” in “Report on the Kitchen at Gunston Hall” by Martha Jane Shears, 1984, 5; Gunston Hall Library and Archives, Mason Neck, VA.

\(^{51}\) Denise McHugh, Director of Education at Gunston Hall, interview by author, November 25, 2009, telephone call.
interpretation, visitors see who had power to command the kitchen laborers, even as the
narrative minimizes discussions of power.

Docent tours and events with historical interpreters better emphasize the racial
relationships borne of the kitchen’s spatial location. During Colonial Day, interpreters asked
the children to try and explain why the plantation had a separate kitchen, eliciting the
responses of fire and odor. However, at the end of the rotation, the docent connected the
discussion of white and enslaved food patterns to the location of the kitchen, noting that only
the rich could have separate kitchens. While the deeper equation of wealth and slave
ownership went unexplored, the recognition of the kitchen’s separation being located in class
structures connected the enslaved space back to the white spaces of the plantation. In
addition, the 2008 update in the Docent’s Manual informs docents “the location of plantation
kitchens shielded the enslaved workers from the eyes of visitors,” and recommended “you
may want to pursue this line of questioning with older students.”52 The social meanings
behind the separation of the kitchen can be incorporated when a docent leads a tour, as a
docent can assess and adjust information to match an audience’s ability and interest. The
challenging of longstanding reasons for the kitchen’s detachment adds an additional level of
interpretation for audiences better able to understand abstract concepts of space. Yet, as
demonstrated during Colonial Day, docents can introduce spatial relationships to younger
audiences by emphasizing the relationship behind the separation, introducing the idea that

52 Donna Leigh Butler, “Tips for Interpreting the Kitchen Yard,” 2; Gunston Hall Library and Archives,
Gunston Hall, Mason Neck, Virginia.
white society did not value all people occupying the plantation space as equal, and that the existence of certain outbuildings solidified this inequality. The concept of separation stands in for spatial ordering and challenges the main house’s emphasis on decorative arts and patriotic images of the Masons.

Mordecai Historic Site addresses this same racial division in the interpretation of the Allen Kitchen located behind the main house. Interestingly, docents mention the spatial location of the kitchen in both the inside of the main house as well as the kitchen itself. During the tour of the main dining room, the guide noted the bell pull near the fireplace used by the Mordecais to signal the enslaved cooks in the outdoor kitchen to bring food or additional assistance to the family inside. Ringing the bell allowed the white family to exert their dominance over the kitchen space while still keeping slaves as unseen as possible in the course of daily life and food preparation.

In the kitchen itself, the guide did not provide a reason for the separation, although the space also featured a discussion on the general lives of slaves. The guide used this stop to reinforce the vast land and slave holding of the Mordecais, and to emphasize the intensity of the labor performed by the slaves. The kitchen also contained gourds to reference the African practices continued during slavery, claiming the space as black not only by the choice of the white planter, but also by the chosen identities of the enslaved persons themselves. An unpublished report by Assistant Park Manager Erin Campo notes that guides at times suggest the kitchen’s separation as a method of increasing the social distance between whites and
blacks; Campo recommends that staff incorporate this reasoning into training to consider white justifications for slavery and the methods used to enforce white power over blacks. On my visit, however, I heard and saw no evidence that this suggestion had been effectively incorporated into docent training, as the docent did not mention the space between kitchen and house. The emphasis on the Afro-centric kitchen reinforces the social distance between the Mordecais and their slaves, and offers a theoretical background to launch an extended discussion of the landscape and environment of the plantation.

Tryon Palace also makes clear that their Kitchen Office was the domain of laboring workers, although the interpretation maintains that primarily white wage servants performed the work. This assumption traces its roots back to the planning stages of 1958, when the museum field emphasized the integrity, self-reliance, patriotism, and material wealth of the white occupants. The Tryon’s enslavement of blacks did not fit these ideals, and in a Civil Rights America, stood as a challenge to the moral identity of slaveholding areas. As Gertrude Carraway, one of Tryon Palace’s founders, warned the hostesses, “Unless specific questions are asked, try to avoid controversial subjects” such as slavery and race when speaking with visitors. Despite Governor Tryon’s ownership of slaves both prior to and after his arrival at New Bern, the initial interpretation concluded that “no colored servants were employed by Tryon…expecting to remain here only temporarily, he would not have spent his money to

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53 Erin Callis Campo, “Beyond Mordecai: The Outbuildings at Mordecai Historic Park,” 36, 41; Allen Kitchen Files, Mordecai Historic Site, Raleigh, NC.
54 Kenneth Chorley, “What’s Wrong With Historic Preservation?” excerpted from History News clipping, Kellenberger Archives, Tryon Palace Library and Archives, New Bern, NC.
55 Memo from Getrude S. Carraway to Tryon Palace Hostesses, 19 June 1962, Kellenberger Archives.
buy any slaves. Furthermore, he was used to English servants.”\textsuperscript{56} Although almost ten years later, Ms. Carraway would alert hostesses to evidence of slave ownership, and she recommended guides keep the news “just for your information.” Tryon Palace left the interpretation of the kitchen as a white space centralized around cooking processes and kitchen material culture.\textsuperscript{57} Memos and exams provided to the hostesses never mentioned any explanation for the kitchen’s separation from the mansion, and the resulting emphasis on white labor shaped the space as a place occupied only by lower class whites. While this interpretation does not specifically root itself in the racial realities of Tryon’s colony, the willingness to demarcate the space as a separate location for serving classes conveys the reality of social class stratification that existed among whites. Although a different type of social stratification than racial enslavement, the narrative of wage labor does complicate the perceptions of democratic equality often associated with the Revolutionary era in the British colonies.

The current interpretation at Tryon Palace, provided by living history enactors and docents, continues to emphasize the space as one of white wage laborers, extending the theme of space as a class divider. The kitchen brochure reminds visitors “Servants were nearly invisible in a well-run eighteenth-century household and are sometimes invisible in the historical record as well.”\textsuperscript{58} Visitors may use the Kitchen Office to examine the work areas of Tryon’s servants, once again marking the space as different from the Palace, and

\textsuperscript{56} “Original Plans of Palace were Restoration Aid,” \textit{Sun-Journal}, 19 March 1958, Kellenberger Archives.
\textsuperscript{57} Memo from Gertrude S. Carraway to Tryon Palace Hostesses, 13 September 1969, Kellenberger Archives.
\textsuperscript{58} “A Servant’s Life,” Tryon Palace Historic Site and Gardens, New Bern, NC.
implying an interaction between those who owned the kitchen and those who invisibly performed the tasks. The interpreters do not propose the master-servant relationship as responsible for the removal of the kitchen, as do select docent-led tours at Gunston Hall. However, the new training materials reconceptualize this space, and the Curator of Education directly informed new docents that an architectural choice by Tryon to remove the kitchen activities, not fear of fires, forced the separation of the kitchen. In addition, the Curator asked docents to question the communal bedrooms, saying black slaves most likely would not have been allowed to share the same spaces as white laborers. This new interpretation stops short of announcing the existence of slavery at Tryon Palace, or explaining the social relationship maintained by the discreet removal of the kitchen from the main Palace.

Yet even this willing intent to introduce slavery and servitude into the interpretive narrative often encounters additional challenges in bridging the literal gap between main house and kitchen. Elites so thoroughly crafted the eighteenth-century politics of access that the master narratives of museum sites cannot easily connect with the kitchen visually during tours. Visitors cannot enter the kitchen during the tour in the same manner they can walk from bedroom to bedroom, as the necessity of walking outside creates a visible break from the flow of the house tour, both in the eighteenth century as well as today. Indeed, as Craig Barton realized during his visit to Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello, tricks such as window placements, blinds, and curtains used by white planters to render the black presence invisible

59 I observed a docent training session on my first visit, where Curator of Interpretation Katie Brightman Loveless presented these thoughts to five new docents. The training was held at 3:00pm at Tryon Palace, 30 September 2009.
from the view of the house, also impair the museum’s ability to visually connect white and black spaces during the programming.\textsuperscript{60} With the exception of the aforementioned dining room at Mordecai, at no other point during the three tours of the main houses did the tour guide reference the outbuildings beyond mentioning food being brought in by the servants and slaves, nor did the guide discuss the origins of these meals.

The architecture of Gunston Hall eliminates the possibility for a visual connection on the first floor, as no windows on the first floor face the side yard. Tryon Palace does have many rooms with windows facing the Kitchen Office, but the consolidation of the laundry and kitchen spaces reduces the external visibility of labor. All three tours conclude with visitors being led to the points of entry for servants, reinforcing the break between the white and the black spaces and the architectural features which continue to hide the work of servants and slaves in the house tours.\textsuperscript{61} Guides may exit visitors into the kitchen yard through the servant’s entrance, as docents explain at Gunston Hall, although docents in the main house do not address the reason for separation of these activities.\textsuperscript{62} The visual realities

\textsuperscript{60} Craig Evan Barton, “Duality and Invisibility: Race and Memory in the Urbanism of the American South,” in \textit{Sites of Memory: Perspectives on Architecture and Race}, ed. Craig Evan Barton (NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001), 4. Barton’s example notes how the use of columns on the West Portico limits the landscape visible from the portico, visually and symbolically eliminating the slave presence.

\textsuperscript{61} At Gunston Hall, docents lead visitors out the side access into the kitchen yard, concluding the portion of the tour led by a docent. Tryon Palace takes visitors into the basement rooms of the housekeeper and butler, and guides show visitors where they may choose to continue the tour in the Kitchen Office. Mordecai Historic Park exits visitors through the back doors, where visitors may choose to take a guided tour of the outbuildings or peruse them at leisure.

\textsuperscript{62} At best, because visitors “conveniently” exit into the kitchen yard, the narratives assign these entrances significance because they made the work of carrying food into the house “easier.” Once again, the emphasis is shifted to the process of cooking, rather than social meaning of the separate, hidden entrance.
of these three sites increase the challenge of relating the relationship of kitchens and the main house to the visitor, resulting in the spaces “out of site” remaining “out of mind” to much of the interpretation of white spaces on the plantations.

This visual break between the tours of the main house and the interpretation of the kitchen leads to different interpretive approaches to teaching visitors about these exterior places. In their invaluable study of interpretations of slavery at southern historic house museums, Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small identify a trend where detailed discussions of slave life take place separate from the tour of the main house. The realities of slave life draw on locations of physical artifacts and loci of the slave community, once again differentiating between black and white spaces. These “black history” or “slave life” tours exist independently from the tours of the main house, and focus on the work done in the outbuildings rather than introducing the work carried out daily within the main house. Eichstedt and Small term this practice “segregated knowledge,” a practice with good intentions but which “maintain[s] separate pathways to knowledge, with one subordinate to another.”

In part, this classification results from the regular tours as much as the special-focus tours. Narratives emphasize the beauty of the main house as the achievement of the ideal, while the hazard of fire makes the kitchen dirty, undesirable, and a tolerable ugliness that needs to be controlled by the act of isolation. The slave spaces, devoid of beauty and artifacts in the same way that whites thought black slaves devoid of beauty based on skin color, also become a lower priority for guided tours within museum planning. The museum’s

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63 Eichstedt and Small, Representations of Slavery, 10.
interpretation of these spaces reinforces the power relationship of space without challenging the meanings and understandings held by the visitor.

In terms of highlighting the racial divide of the landscape, Gunston Hall perhaps most clearly defines the identity of the kitchen space as one meant for enslaved Africans. The plaques inside focus on the lives of enslaved Africans who worked in many capacities on the plantation, and specifically connect foodways to the enslaved as well. The kitchen audio discusses the space in terms of the enslaved cook’s use, reminding visitors of the people literally purchased to work in the kitchen. In addition, at Gunston Hall groups may schedule slave life tours which focus on the kitchen and the kitchen yard as the scene of domestic slavery. School groups specifically incorporate the kitchen into each visit, ensuring that all visiting students have an opportunity to focus on slavery and the work required on a plantation. Mordecai Historic Park utilizes their kitchen in much the same way, incorporating the kitchen into a thirty minute school program featuring a detailed discussion of the use of enslaved persons at the plantation.

Tryon Palace, while successfully marking the space as a site of labor, focuses on the hierarchy of servants at the Palace rather than the relationship between the Tryons and the kitchen. The living historian playing the cook made clear that the presence of a scullery and a laundry room showed three different levels of servants, with the cook being the most skilled and valued, and consequently in charge of the Kitchen Office. The cook’s solitary sleeping

64 Denise McHugh, interview by author, 25 November 2009. Discussed more in the next chapter, the popularity of the kitchen program stems partially from a child’s familiarity with food, as well as state Standards of Learning which emphasize slavery.
chamber upstairs reinforces the hierarchy, as only elite servants had their own private space. The laundry maid ranked below the cook, followed by the scullery maid, creating a dynamic of performance reinforced by pay scale and spatial access to privacy. Interpreters mention the Tryons primarily with regards to supplies, as the cook explained that Mrs. Tryon had given the white housekeeper supervised control over the expensive foodstuffs kept in the house. The narrative of the Kitchen Office thus focuses on the lives of the servants, creating a distinct household within the greater Tryon Palace household. Perhaps owing to this success, Tryon Palace offers ticketed access to only the Kitchen Office, or the option of taking a guided tour of the Palace and then self-guiding around the Office. The experience of only the Kitchen Office very much isolates the servant narrative from the greater site, leading to a strong understanding of a servant’s work but a weak conception of the servant-master relationship. In addition, for those guests who choose not to visit the Kitchen Office after the Palace tour, the inclusion of the serving classes is limited to brief explanations given on the Palace tour, rendering these white servants nearly invisible.

For these three sites, the challenge of consistently reaching a wide audience often limits any benefits achievable through the growing use of the kitchen space in interpretation. At both Gunston Hall and Mordecai, the purposeful inclusion of the kitchen on school and special tours to invoke a visual of slave life at a site without existing slave cabins certainly does make the presence of enslaved African Americans known. However, Gunston Hall offers these tours as specialized tours, given only to groups that request them prior to
visitation. Regular tours minimize the possibility of understanding the full implication of these racial relationships as embodied by the kitchen, where visitors at Gunston Hall may or may not read text panels; guides at Mordecai allot only five minutes in the kitchen on regular tours. Gunston Hall’s ability to create racialized landscapes becomes even more difficult because the docents do not actively interpret the kitchen yard as they do the rooms of the house, minimizing the number of concepts which museum staff can discuss. At the same time, the eagerness with which Tryon Palace attacks the hierarchy of servants limits the site’s effectiveness at molding the Kitchen Office with the narrative formed in the Palace.

The critical discontinuity between tours of the main houses and the nature of the kitchen interpretation forces visitors to explicitly seek the kitchen space in the landscape. The possibility of choice creates delineation between the “regular” Eurocentric tour and the interpretations concerning “other” spaces and peoples on the landscape, suggesting that the exterior buildings are of secondary importance to the plantation’s history. White history becomes the normal narrative for the museum, and people outside of the elite whites become devalued “others” whose contributions appear superfluous to the importance of the site. In addition, this division assumes that white spaces, centered on displays wealth, measure identifiable success. Once again, the normalization of the white narrative implies that economic inequalities shaped the plantation landscape, rather than the racial categorization underlying the system.\footnote{Eichstedt and Small, \textit{Representations of Slavery}, 172.} More specifically, the segregation of presentation emphasizes the paradigm of white males as creators of “real history,” effectively marginalizing all other
groups in the narrative of these landscapes of power. This marginalization of populations undermines the ability of these sites to tell the stories even of elite white women, much less enslaved blacks and white servants.\textsuperscript{66} Because each site does offer a version of a more inclusive labor narrative through special tours, sites easily could begin to rework the narrative simply by integrating these tours into the master narrative. If guides led these kitchen tours along with tours of the main house, visitors would be exposed to the history of the enslaved workers and their relationship with the white elites. The kitchen has become a space for the interpretation of the laborers of the plantation, but denied its proper inclusion within the “master” narrative of the entire landscape, the site fails to fully understand the forces at work in the creation of the eighteenth-century worldview.

The eighteenth century was a time of social definitions for British colonists, as a society in transition sought to create and solidify social constructions that would secure the elite enormous power. The architecture of these three sites reveals that each closet, room, and carving followed in the tradition of British mansions creating spatial separation and physical access favoring the white elite. Power relations depended upon the rigid delineations made between races and classes, and the separation of the kitchen made a bold statement in demonstrating white control over these subservient spaces. “The ability to render the world visible and invisible is a concrete form of power,” writes Craig Barton; this concrete power shaped the landscape of eighteenth-century mansions and palaces by rendering the lower

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 264.
classes invisible in the social structure of the eighteenth-century white elites, as well as in the continuing memory presented today to visitors at these sites.

Almost as a testament to the power of the white elite, museum sites today face a challenge in verbalizing and visualizing this social construction of race. With institutions founded around the promotion of democratic ideals projected onto the memory of the white elite, the kitchen space becomes a key site in both confirming and disrupting the tidy public memory of these eighteenth-century plantations. Each site fully acknowledges the presence of enslaved or hired workers, and dedicates a specific moment in the tour to a deeper understanding of these marginalized populations. The movement for social history has certainly cemented the kitchen as a locus for the telling of these stories, offering a glimpse of a more complex image of the white elites than those celebrated in androcentric museum narratives. The discussion of marginalized groups defeats the intentions of the elite who sought to make their workers invisible, even while continuing to segregate these two populations in popular memory. Interestingly, while the sites do recognizes the populations, each site seemingly overlooks the relationships of dependency symbolized by the kitchen. These sites infuse the kitchen space with life, but space is often devoid of the interconnected meanings which dictated the movements of eighteenth-century society, both white and black. This continual separation of narratives, even as the stories on both sides become more historically balanced, deeply impacts the ability of a site to fully challenge the visitor’s often
limited understanding about slave-master relationships and the functional reasons behind the kitchen’s removal from the main house.
Even the most successful tour of a historic house cannot change the reality that the house sits silent, with scenes static across time and empty of life. Even when filled with furniture, pictures, and clothes of the inhabitants, historic house museums invoke the stillness of a tomb. The kitchen suffers doubly from being removed from the main house. The distance and location of the kitchen remove it visually and topically from the stories of the main house; the historical record, as well as in the traditional, white narratives still present at Tryon Palace, Mordecai, and Gunston Hall, have silenced the voices of the enslaved inhabitants of the kitchen. While some sites, such as Tryon Palace, do use historical interpreters on a daily basis to inject a sense of life into the kitchen, the kitchen building during the daily tour more often tends to reflect the silent, staid nature of the site.

Programming, on the other hand, injects activity into the kitchen spaces, opening up new avenues of interpretation for museum sites. Unlike regular tours, designed to address any audience who visits the site, programming focuses on specific audiences or specific themes, and uses multiple tools to engage audiences. In addition, state curriculum standards for school groups, or financial resources, often drive the focus of a program. The number of visitors who partake of the program often distinguishes regular tours from programming. Smaller sites, such as Mordecai, which may see only a few hundred visitors a week, will often draw several thousand visitors in a few hours for a special event. The open access and wide appeal of programming requires greater resources for the historic site, as programs need
more money and staff time to engage these larger crowds. Yet, a site that has more staff also has more opportunities for direct, human interaction between museum and visitor, meaning that sites no longer rely on brief glances out a window at the kitchen or single text panels to speak with the audience. Programs necessitate the use of multiple, more focused moments of education for the visitor, and open avenues of discussion for the museum.

Because most sites, including Tryon Palace and Gunston Hall, have reconstructed their kitchens, museum staff see the kitchen as functional in a way different from the main house or other outbuildings. Even sites such as Mordecai cook and conduct programming in their historic kitchens if at all possible. This use of the kitchen implies a perception among sites that the kitchen’s history is one of utility and life, and so the history of the kitchen can be best explained through animation, rather than guided stories and fancy artifacts. As a result, sites with plentiful resources may invest in separate foodways programs that train volunteers for work in the detached kitchen during programming, while other sites may hire independent hearth cooks in the kitchen during events. Both methods ensure activity in the kitchen, and the willingness of a site to use a cook not affiliated with the site elevates the importance of human activity over the need for site-specific history. During programming, the kitchen becomes a locus of human activity at a historic site often seen only through tour guides and panels.

Building upon the notions of space and meaning discussed in Chapter One, this chapter proposes to illuminate the interpretation that museum programs create in the
detached kitchen. By first understanding the brief histories of museum programming in these kitchens, I intend to trace what I find to be a positive growth in public presentations of the complex social relationships that defined kitchen work for both white and enslaved or hired households. Yet, just because kitchen programming allows a museum to include the history of enslaved and wage laborers at the site does not always mean sites successfully include these histories within the overall narrative. The architectural politics of space keep the kitchen separate from the house, and the created dichotomy between black space and white space extends into how a museum justifies presentations of artifact collections, labor, and the multiple social groups whose lives were entwined on the plantation. In this regard, I will also highlight the critical junctures at which kitchen programming continues to reinforce the idea of a singular household or downplays the tensions of rival geographies. The kitchen, because of the familiarity offered by the act of cooking, offers the possibility of presenting the private, internal households of the plantation to the public while transforming common kitchen activities into a commentary on the racialized boundaries of the plantation that often remain silent during normal tours.

First and foremost, because the kitchen often uses human interpreters, the kitchen becomes a site where the visitor sees the social structures of the plantation household made visible. Interpreters cook food, decorate cakes, scour pots, and plate dishes, using historical and newly made tools to perform tasks and create foods that evoke both the past and present at once. As Kerri Barile and Jamie Brandon remind us, household activities produce both
tangible material goods as well as intangible social boundaries that “along with such things as gender constructions and power relations…are shared with a larger community.” Kitchen work has always created social boundaries; kitchen interpreters differentiate themselves from interpreters of the white household through linen clothing, clay bowls, and even the presence of dirt and sweat. The kitchen interpreters work and do not visually resemble the clean, silk-and-ribbon dressed interpreters in the main house. Indeed, because staff keep the main house pristinely swept and filled with decorative objects, the museums impress to visitors that the laborers and elite did not interact.

More importantly, by having visitors see an important area of activity outside the main house, kitchen programming forces a consideration of the very meanings of plantation household. Third person tours often betray the anachronistic notion of “separate spheres” ideology, which assumes that nature intended women for a different world than men. Propagated strongly by the Victorians, separate spheres ideology held that women managed the private sphere of the home while men engaged the public, political world. Codified by the Victorians into the “Cult of True Womanhood,” the idea of the private feminine found affirmation in twentieth-century studies highlighting physical, psychological, and social differences between men and women. Historian Thavolia Glymph highlights the damaging impact separate spheres has had on the study of the household, as the privacy inflicted upon the household masked the idea that power relations were an inherent part of the female

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67 Barile and Brandon, Household Chores and Household Choices, 8.
world. Glymph argues that because the household is a workplace, power is very much at the core of the relationships within a household, even if women predominantly make up the household.\footnote{Thyvolia Glymph, \textit{Out of the House of Bondage}, 2-3. Suzanne Spencer-Wood uses a similar logic to argue against large-scale analyses which tend to obscure the “private” lives of women and children. Spencer-Wood instead favors analysis on the “household-scale,” which she discusses in her article “What Difference Does Feminist Theory Make in Researching Households?” in Barile and Brandon, eds., \textit{Household Chores and Household Choices}.} Separate spheres, therefore, suggests that women’s work in the kitchen is a natural result of power relationships between men and women. The relationships between elite and enslaved women, therefore, disappear into one lump category of female space, as visitors fail to question if intra-gendered power relationships existed in the kitchen. Rather than marking the kitchen as an area to discuss the inequality among women on a plantation, the kitchen becomes a symbol for all women in colonial society. Consequently, the kitchen becomes a focal point in the narration of women’s labor for both white and enslaved black women.

At the same time, in making the private sphere public, kitchen programming also casts doubt upon the notion of one singular household. Suzanne Spencer-Wood finds that the notion of a household has become ahistorical in popular and academic culture; much like the Cult of True Womanhood, modern versions of household get thrust back onto the plantations of the colonial and antebellum era by historians and the public.\footnote{Spencer-Wood, “What Difference Does Feminist Theory Make,” 235.} However, visitors to the kitchen witness work carried out seemingly unrelated to narratives of white elites or field workers found elsewhere on the historic site. The separation designed by eighteenth-century
white elites to keep races separate succeeds in keeping narratives separate in the museum, and for this reason invites consideration of multiple households. Spencer-Wood defines a household as distinct from home, house, and family, emphasizing the multiplicity of each that can exist in one physical location. Robert C. Ellickson goes further in saying a household “is a set of institutional arrangements, formal or informal, that govern relations among the owner and occupants of a particular dwelling space where the occupants usually sleep and share meals.”

Much as programming politicizes the privacy of the household, so too does the destruction of household solidarity illuminate the power inherent in the very idea of a household.

However tentative, demands of labor and requirements for survival bound each sub-household into the singular plantation household. Ellickson reminds us that one of the fundamental rights of property ownership is the right to exclude, meaning that one household may forcefully include a people who themselves do not choose to identify with the household. The enslaved people living at Tryon Palace, Gunston Hall, and Mordecai found themselves bound into the economic household of the plantation, purchased to perform the work necessary to elevate the social status of their white owners. At the same time, their enslavement placed personal survival in the hands of the white family with the legal and social power to harm or heal their slaves. The power of ownership forged one household out of all peoples on a plantation. Today, this economic interdependence mirrors that of the

72 Ibid., 13, 15.
nuclear family, and allows the visitor to easily accept narratives of “the happy negro” or Mammy working out of affection for, and identification with, the white family. Because sites often present a plantation as fully functional, narratives imply that “one big happy family” existed at these sites, which also fits with the positive, humanitarian images assigned to the white family. However, as Spencer-Wood cautions, the ability of a person to carry multiple identities mirrors the ability of a person to self-identify with multiple households.

Enslaved workers may therefore have also identified with smaller sub-households within the plantation, focusing their identity on characteristics such as level of personal freedom, jobs, job location, gender, and so forth. Indeed, enslaved persons may not have self-identified with the white household at all, or even with a monolithic black community.

Although much debated by academics, evidence suggests the labor divisions between field slaves and slaves serving in a domestic capacity extended into the greater slave community. Programming in the detached kitchen can make sub-households become visible to audiences, especially at sites without slave cabins or other extensive functional outbuildings.

Discussions of multiple households during kitchen programming also delve more deeply into the politics of access (see Chapter One). Because the white family owned the kitchen, but slaves and servants did much of the cooking, the kitchen itself becomes a liminal space between households. Stephanie Camp’s analysis of enslaved person’s resistance hinges

73 Spencer-Wood, “What Difference Does Feminist Theory Make,” 245. Perhaps one of the most studied internal divisions within enslaved households is the classification of house or field slave. Eugene D. Genovese and his wife Elizabeth Fox-Genovese both discuss the dichotomy in their respective classics, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made and Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South.
upon the idea of “rival geography,” which she defines as “alternative ways of knowing and using plantation and southern space that conflicted with planters’ ideals and demands.” 74

The concept works well in describing the ways modern kitchen programs interpret space for visitors. Kitchen programming often attempts to reconcile the meanings the kitchen held for two different populations, and reconcile the history of enslaved persons with the modern programmers charged with the presentation. The kitchen programming becomes crucial in the creation of memory by defining the history of a slave society as well as the role of the historic house museum in modern collective memory.

Building a Kitchen

Tryon Palace

The reconstruction of the Kitchen Office at Tryon Palace was part of the main reconstruction of the Palace in the early 1950s. The strict Palladian architecture of the Palace rested on the two flanking dependencies, and made the Kitchen Office an aesthetic requirement of the eighteenth-century Palace. From the beginning, Tryon Palace relied upon the system of hostesses wherein elite women guided visitors through the house, focusing on the material culture of the famous white family who paid for the house. Tryon Palace modeled its hostesses on both Gunston Hall and Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, employing

74 Camp, Closer to Freedom, 7. Camp looks at the physical layout of the entire plantation, including outbuildings, slave cabins, gardens, and fields, and reveals how slave women managed to claim these areas for their own purposes through clothing, religion, communication, etc. In effect, this created a landscape as defined by enslaved women that overlapped and challenged the autonomy of the white landscape.
women from New Bern to take primary duty in daily tours and special programming. Initial training divided audiences into adults and children, suggesting that hostesses highlight furniture, architecture, politics, art and other symbols of “high culture” within the main Palace to adults, while children might better appreciate “‘Way of Life’” activities such as cooking. This reasoning appears to fit with the way staff incorporated the kitchen into the regular tours; numerous memos from Gertrude Carraway, a site founder, reminded hostesses of their primary duty in the kitchen, handing out garden leaflets and guiding visitors outside into the gardens. Because the unabashed mission of Tryon Palace promoted the history of the Tryons and the patriotic beginnings of North Carolina, the early directors of Tryon Palace did not view the workspaces of the Kitchen Office as essential in this mission. Perhaps the kitchen’s association with labor rather than culture made the founding women wary of highlighting the space. Save for the occasional programming, staff used the Kitchen Office more a funnel to the gardens than a legitimate part of Mrs. Carraway’s perceived Tryon household.

In 1963, Donald Taylor, the first true curator of education at Tryon Palace, began to advertise school tours of Tryon Palace by suggesting that students of science and home economics might use the kitchen as “a study of the 18th-century counterparts of today’s

75 Letter from Gertrude S. Carraway to May Gordon, 20 February 1957. Mrs. Carraway mentions in this letter of a visit from the directors of Gunston Hall and Woodlawn Plantation in Alexandria, Virginia to Tryon Palace, with the express mission of offering advice on interpretation. Also on file is a copy of “Historic Housekeeping Summary: A Paper Given By Miss VA Horne” on 3 November 1955, Kellenberger Archives.

76 Tryon Palace Hostess Class Examination, 10 June 1958, Kellenberger Archives. One hostess noted in her answer that her daughter particularly enjoyed “watching in the kitchen,” implying that some type of activity was carried out, although we cannot be sure of the regularity or actual activities.
utensils,” selling the kitchen’s value as a study of domestic productivity.  

Ten years later, in 1974, Taylor further introduced the idea of using hostesses to perform eighteenth-century crafts such as candle making, spinning, and quilting in the Kitchen Office. Noting the “kitchen could be livened up,” Taylor began sending hostesses to Savannah, Charleston, and Williamsburg to observe the craftwork popular at these sites.  

By 1990, visitors to the Kitchen Office saw a scripted tour that included daily cooking and crafts demonstrations as well as the interpretation of Surry, the runaway slave. However, in 1997 the focus of the Kitchen Office shifted even more towards crafts, and the tour became unscripted with areas of activity instead found throughout the Office. This unscripted, crafts-focused tour remains the main venue of interpretation in the Kitchen Office at Tryon Palace today.

**Gunston Hall**

The staff at Gunston Hall did not initially expect the reconstructed kitchen to ever contain an open flame. An undated report from the architect in charge of the 1970s rebuilding of the kitchen yard proposed ways in which the kitchen could be rebuilt in a manner suitable for live demonstrations, but ultimately concluded the Dames preferred “the reconstructed buildings would constitute only rather static visual appendages to the visual structure.”

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79 Email from Hilarie Hicks to author, January 26, 2010. Hilarie Hicks was Curator of Interpretation from March 1990 to May 2000.
However, in 1983 Gunston Hall found itself searching for revenue, hosting events such as a mock fox hunt and antique car show to raise money for the site. B.L. Trahos, a docent in the house, had recently moved to a colonial house south of Gunston Hall that included a detached kitchen. Through her own personal experimentation, Trahos and several other docents learned enough of heath cooking to cook at a few of Gunston Hall’s special events, and quickly found the kitchen one of the more popular locations for visitors to the events. The first formal training classes began in 1986, and soon Mount Vernon asked the docents to come cook at a special event. Mount Vernon also helped fund the first purchases of reproduction equipment for the Gunston Hall docents.\textsuperscript{81}

Initially, the cooking demonstrations focused on preparing meals for programs aimed at adult audiences. Training for docents became much more specialized, as docents traveled to sites such as Williamsburg and Plymouth to observe and train under experienced open hearth cooks. However, with the subsequent growth in school visitation, the Foodways program became an increasing presence in special events aimed at families and children. As part of this growth, the Young Gunstonians, a group of youth interpreters ranging from the fifth through twelfth grades, began assisting in the kitchen during camps, as well as demonstrating food preservation and dairying to complement the cooking inside the kitchen.\textsuperscript{82} Today, interpreters cook inside the kitchen one to three times a week as part of every school tour to the site, as well as at five special events each year. The twenty-five

\textsuperscript{81} Brenda Hall, member of Gunston Hall Historic Foodways Program, interview by author, 29 January 2010, telephone call.
\textsuperscript{82} Brenda Hall, interview by author, 29 January 2010.
participants in the Historic Foodways Program also help teach open-hearth classes through the Fairfax County Park Authority, and the revenue from these programs supplements funds from the Gunston Hall Docent’s Association for the expansion of third-person kitchen interpretation.  

Mordecai Historic Site

Mordecai owns a detached kitchen building which dates from 1842, although the kitchen did not originally belong to either the Lanes or the Mordecais. The kitchen, when originally donated by Mrs. Mary Allen Huntley to the North Carolina Department of Archives and History in 1954, had been in use by Mrs. Huntley on her home property as a space for entertainment. The Huntley’s cook often brought the Huntley children into the kitchen for birthdays, sleepovers, and other special occasions. Mrs. Huntley’s personal association of this space with cooking and entertainment carried through into her terms of donation; she asked that the state use the kitchen for the “purpose of teaching thousands of school children who visit the Hall of History something of the development of home life in North Carolina.” The kitchen entered the museum context with a proscription for teaching modern values of family unity, and became a venue of entertainment for children at the North Carolina State Museum.

83 Denise McHugh, interview by author, 25 November 2009.
84 Raleigh News and Observer, 29 April 1987, Section E.; Allen Kitchen File.
Once the kitchen was moved to Mordecai, the kitchen held on to its identity as a center of activity, as amateur open hearth cooks periodically cooked on the kitchen during programming. The staff valued the interactive aspect of the kitchen more than the preservation of the space, using the artifact kitchen utensils during demonstrations so often that accession numbers rubbed away. School and scouting groups also routinely used the kitchen for special events. The kitchen of the 1970s and 80s further reflected modern values in its decorations of checkered curtains and other elements reminiscent of the farm themes prevalent during these decades. In 1996, many of these modern elements were removed as part of a larger restructuring of the interpretation to reflect the building’s use during the Civil War. Pre-war artifacts were removed, along with the tableware to indicate that the kitchen was a site of work and not a family dining space for the Mordecais.

In 2005, Sarah Rice, a master’s student in Public History at North Carolina State University, revised the tour to effectively introduce slavery into both the house and outbuildings of the property. The kitchen became a focal point for discussions of slavery, as guides discussed the influence of African foodways and culture on white Southern culture, as well as the methods of escape used by slaves. Gary Roth, president of Capital Area Preservation, noted that as the site moved from using volunteers to hiring paid docents with advanced degrees, the “professionalization” of the park staff made the inclusion of slavery

87 Campo, “Beyond Mordecai,” 40; Allen Kitchen Files.
88 Sara E. Rice, “The Plantation Tour at Mordecai Historic Park,” 2005, 8-9. The tour was provided to author in an email from Gary Roth to author, 18 November 2009.
within the narrative possible. These younger, more highly educated staff members were not as uncomfortable or reluctant to discuss slavery, as were older volunteers.\footnote{Email from Gary Roth to author, 18 November 2009.} Today, the programming in the Allen kitchen continues to center on the enslaved workers at Mordecai. School children in the kitchen discuss the work slaves performed all over the plantation site, and then focus of the labor-intensive work of making beaten-biscuits in the kitchen. Special events also employ kitchen activities, although the activities range from open hearth cooking to apple bobbing, and reflect a perception of the kitchen as a place for both historical discussion as well as modern entertainment.

Ultimately, Mordecai’s use of the detached kitchen speaks to the general trend of using the kitchen as a site of activity. From open hearth cooking to making cornhusk dolls, sites and visitors have come to associate the kitchen with action, forcing the ultimate debate of kitchen interpretation to concern not \textit{if} there will be live interpretation, but \textit{how} and \textit{what} will be performed in this space. Not surprisingly, then, sites face the challenge of interpreting the kitchen as a space worthy of historical analysis on par with the main house, and the cultural values placed on the kitchen as a space of family and entertainment. To best understand the implications of the decision by these sites to focus on the technical work of kitchen laborers, let us examine the detached kitchen as a space for performance. And, as with any performance, we must begin by considering the scene.
Setting the Scene

We know what we will see when we enter the main plantation house: rooms filled with artifacts belonging to the family, or artifacts of the time period purchased to emulate the wealth the families would have displayed. The main house very rarely displays reproduction items beyond fake food and clothing. In fact, at each of the three sites in this study, tour guides proudly noted the authenticity of the artifacts and highlighted items that once assuredly belonged the occupants. The emphasis on originality of artifacts serves a distinct purpose in the main house, as these artifacts convey to visitors the elite status and wealth of the white occupants, while also reinforcing the authenticity of the history presented at the site. However, the value of these objects does not reflect solely upon the elite status of the white family. “Symbols of status have become increasingly complex,” writes Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “and now one can show superiority by collecting art (or almost anything that is rare) or by owning things that are tasteful, ancient, or just ahead of the times.”

Display becomes the first action through which visitors approach museums, and a visitor’s “visual literacy” defines the experience of the patron. People use their visual literacy to discern categories in the everyday world, and when they step into a museum they face preset categories intended to create a preset context. “Just looking is not a simple act,” writes Danielle Rice, as the act of observation assigns increased importance to the performance a

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site offers through objects. Museums that can collect and display these expensive and rare artifacts follow in the footsteps of colonial white elites, who bolstered their elite status and command simply through the act of owning; and both the elites and the museum use the main house to display artifacts they, and visitors, associate with power and value.

The detached kitchen, in contrast, does not present material culture in the same manner as in the main house. Some sites do permanently display period artifacts in the kitchen. Tryon Palace, for example, fills the shelves of the scullery room with dozens of candle molds, butter molds, candle sticks, grinders, bread pans, and other tools of the Kitchen Office. Mordecai’s detached kitchen also boasts an impressive collection of artifacts such as a punch-tin pie safe, a beaten biscuit board, and waffle iron, which are on display during all tours. However, sites do not protect these artifacts in the same manner as the china and samplers in the main house (I could have easily touched any of these artifacts during my tours). The scenes created in the kitchen are not blocked off by tapes, or placed behind glass, or even, despite a museum’s best efforts, maintained in a climate-controlled environment. Where the presentation of objects of George Mason’s dining room invites visitors to observe, the presentation of objects in his kitchen invites visitors to insert themselves into the scene as participants. At the same time, this open presentation impresses to visitors that the objects found in the kitchen hold different value than those in the main house, because the objects in the kitchen do not need nor deserve extensive preservation practices. When visitors recognize differences in collections presentation, Jennifer Pustz argues “the spaces themselves become

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critical to telling the servant’s story” because the separate nature of the kitchen provides both the historical and modern context for these artifacts. As the artifacts of the kitchen become separate from their counterparts in the main house, the museums once again enforce the naturalization of distinct privileged, white households and devalued, enslaved households.92

The differences in presentation do not necessarily imply callousness towards these artifacts, as sites do recognize that even utilitarian tools hold value. Whether derived from an object’s age or the money invested in the reproduction, the ownership of kitchen tools also speaks to the greater power of both the white elite and the museum site. In the summer of 2005, Director Troy Burton of Mordecai Historic Park engaged in heated debate with the North Carolina Museum of History over a proposed plan to remove several items from the Allen Kitchen for temporary study at the Museum of History. Distrustful that the Museum of History would return the contested items to Mordecai, Burton argued for Mordecai’s control of the artifacts by saying “Right or wrong, interpretively pure or not, these items have been with the kitchen intact for over 31 years at Mordecai…They are now an integral part of the Mordecai story and are part and parcel to the kitchen.”93 The willingness of Burton to assert ownership of these artifacts, “interpretively pure or not,” reflects Burton’s recognition that ownership of the kitchen artifacts instills a certain power in the museum site, especially in the relationship between Mordecai and the Museum of History. For Burton, the kitchen is also the artifacts, and removing the artifacts of labor erases much of the perceivable identity of the

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kitchen. Yet, the fact that Burton finds historical inaccuracy tolerable within the kitchen also reflects a disjointed view about the kitchen’s role within the site.

At Mordecai, the stories of the kitchen can be told through any object, while the stories of the house require artifacts that belonged to the Lanes and Mordecais. Mordecai considers it important that the kitchen holds something, even if the space acts almost as a storage site for generic, low-valued artifacts. The Lanes and Mordecais, along with many large slave-owners, saw enslaved workers as necessary parts of the functional success of the plantation, and measured these workers against their economic production. The flexibility of kitchen material culture sends a modern message that museums find value in the symbols of a kitchen’s function, and consequently museums tell generic stories of cooking rather than focusing on the deeper social meaning of the enslaved workers who gave life to these spaces.  

Tryon Palace has also struggled with the value placed on the kitchen, as evidenced by a 1997 memo circulated among the executive director and curators of Tryon Palace. Joanna Ruth Harris expressed concern that “several guides and staff members refer to the Kitchen Office as ‘expendable,’” an attitude also noted by a staff member who deemed the Kitchen Office a “sacrificial building.” As Harris noted, the decision to cook in the hearth each day made the preservation of kitchen artifacts difficult, so much so that visitors had begun to comment on the poor collection standards employed in the kitchen. Harris noted the effect

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94 For a more thorough examination of white elites and their perceptions of their slaves, see Walter Johnson’s *Sould by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
that grease, soot, and other food particles could potentially have on the artifacts; although she ultimately concluded “I believe these activities are important and can be accomplished without damaging collection objects.”\textsuperscript{95} When I visited in 2009, interpreters told me the artifacts had been sorted by rarity, presumably by the Curator of Collections, with rarer, more valuable, objects placed on shelves out of the reach of visitors, while artifacts deemed less valuable remained within reaching distance. Ultimately, all objects remain in the open air without many barriers, still vulnerable to the conditions produced by daily open hearth cooking.

Much as Mordecai’s attachment to period and site inappropriate artifacts reflects a sense that sites can easily replace kitchen history, so too does Tryon’s willingness to expose the artifacts of the Kitchen Office create a public acknowledgement of the expendability of the kitchen’s history. The kitchen, and the enslaved and wage laborers who occupied the space, are not subjected to the same level of homage attended the artifacts of Governor Tryon or Joel Lane. The material culture of the kitchen, and the people who used it, become “sacrificial” elements in the museum narrative, mere victims of the work of the kitchen.

Reproduction tools garner much attention in the living history programs conducted at Tryon Palace and Gunston Hall. Unlike Mordecai’s unfortunate use of period artifacts in cooking, most open hearth demonstration groups today rely on reproductions of eighteenth-century utensils during programming. Much of Gunston Hall’s reproduction kitchen material

\textsuperscript{95} Memo from Joanna Ruth Harris to Hilarie Hicks, 16 June 1997. “Results of Interviews Regarding Kitchen Office, Interviewed 13 Staff Members,” undated, 6. Kellenberger Archives. Harris does not go on to detail how preservation and cooking could be reconciled.
culture stays on daily display, allowing the active Foodways group to easily access the kitchen for cooking. Gunston Hall places as much emphasis on historical accuracy of reproductions as some sites may on collecting period pieces. Director of Education Denise McHugh described the intense challenge of finding acceptable materials, a process which forces her to look at sites and companies nationwide for parts, including a reproduction knife that sent her to three different companies just for assembly.¹⁶ For Gunston Hall, these artifacts provide a visual reminder of the kitchen environment, and Mason family provenance comes second only to period appropriateness. Reproductions allow for a more period-focused interpretation of the material culture of the enslaved household whose work centered in the kitchen, and emphasizes the utilitarian nature of kitchen work without signifying that the work or workers were static and interchangeable across time.

At the same time, the use of reproductions facilitates public involvement, as visitors can handle this material culture without fear of destruction. Tryon Palace in particular stresses this benefit of reproductions, allowing visitors to handle tea blocks, snip sugar off a cone, grind spices in a mortar and pestle, and feel other tools used by kitchen interpreters. The tactile experience belongs solely to the Kitchen Office, a product of the view that “the Kitchen Office needs to be less ‘stagy’ and more a working building.”⁹⁷ Brenda Hall at Gunston Hall also detailed the growing inclusion of hands-on experiences during interpreted events, noting that such experiences connect the visitor to the work and attract people to the

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¹⁶ Denise McHugh, interview by author, 25 November 2009.
⁹⁷ “Results of Interviews Regarding Kitchen Office, Interviewed 13 Staff Members,” undated, 6. Kellenberger Archives.
kitchen. This method works particularly well with children, who, on Colonial Day at Gunston Hall, got to help make beaten biscuits and preserve apples during their kitchen programming. The tactile experience, in both the kitchen as in the main house, allows visitors to gain a semblance of the actions and objects that entailed daily living for both white and black households. At the same time, by limiting the experience to cooking procedures, the objects risk becoming tools of nostalgia as they invoke assumptions of simpler tools, simpler chores, and simpler responsibilities for the enslaved cooks.

Ideas of ease, simplicity, and personal industry place the kitchen firmly within the myth of the “Old South,” and allow visitors to imagine kitchen work as romantic and desirable. Interpretation reinforces these ideas when discussing the role of the white mistress within the kitchen, the one foray into gendered relations between white and enslaved women that appears during programming. At both Tryon Palace and Gunston Hall, visitors questioned the interpreters on the level of involvement the white elite women had with cooking. The interpreters at Tryon Palace informed the visitor that Mrs. Tryon would not have cooked in the kitchen, and the documented presence of a white housekeeper most likely meant that Mrs. Tryon exerted control over menus and ingredients through the housekeeper. At Gunston Hall, however, the interpreters quickly noted Mrs. Mason would not have done the cooking, proceeding to give a lengthy discussion on how Mrs. Mason could have cooked in the kitchen to prepare a single dish for special events.

98 Brenda Hall, interview by author, 29 January 2010.
Both interpretations speak to the supervisory relationship of the elite women and their cooks, and make clear how social class required white women to distance themselves from labor. However, Gunston Hall’s emphasis on Mason’s personal labor confuses these proscriptions of class behavior, making Mason appear as a companion of the enslaved cooks, rather than a manager and owner of enslaved workers. When programming invokes nostalgia of kitchen partnerships, sites inhibit the ability of the visitor to acknowledge the ways in which elite women excluded enslaved women from the social definitions of womanhood. Visitors instead blend the activities of the main house with the activities of the kitchen, and claim these experiences for their own memories, binding white identities to black realities. Once again, the world created by the white slave-owners succeeds in presenting the kitchen as a space devoid of its enslaved identity, removing the enslaved presence from the plantation landscape.

Ultimately, the separation of collection practices and the increased reliance on reproductions in the kitchen space serves to reinforce the meanings behind the kitchen’s separation from the house. Museum sites do not value the artifacts of the kitchen as much as the artifacts belonging to the white family and displayed in the main house, and consequently sites devalue the history of the kitchen workers to docents and visitors who recognize the difference. White elites purchased enslaved workers, much like the tools of cooking, for their utility; unlike a Wedgewood vase, the wealthy did not intend to publically display these tools and workers. The kitchen became a center for human expendability on the plantation.
landscape, with the production of work the valued commodity. Today, work remains the valued narrative of the kitchen, and sites tend to collect objects that convey the theme of general productivity rather than the social meaning of separated work. The willingness to teach this work as a process accessible by all visitors also obscures the original intention of excluding work and workers defined as undesirable, even as visitors acknowledge the differences between the kitchen and the main house. One solution, therefore, lies in a site’s ability to reconceptualize the significance of the space. Rather than eliminate programming or discussions of food, sites need to use the material culture of the kitchen to help visitors understand the labor-intensive process of domestic work, and then discuss who did the work and the relationships that dictated everything from food access to food consumption. In this way, sites illuminate the lives of enslaved workers in a way meaningful and comprehensible to modern audiences.

_Actors Please_

The increased chance of having the public interact with human guides remains the most valuable benefit of programming. Tryon Palace incorporates third-person costumed interpreters into their daily kitchen programming, while Mordecai allows a docent to briefly interpret the kitchen space for the visitor. Gunston Hall, however, does not have a human guide in the kitchen at most times. During programming, however, each of these sites increases the numbers of personnel present at the site, allowing for more activity in the kitchen space. Activity remains the narrative focus for this space, and Richard Handler and
Eric Gable find the use of living history essential to what they call “total authenticity.” Performers must be present for the plantation spaces to exist as believable living spaces, and visitors expect buildings where the narrative focuses on work to employ human interpreters. Handler and Gable note that “the goal of total authenticity merges easily with the desire of the social historians…to make the museum inclusive of all levels of colonial society.” In this regard, living history works particularly well in interpreting the households once forced to work in the kitchen, as interpreters can bring to light the presence of laborers specifically in the kitchen. Sites may offer simultaneous presentations of the kitchen’s history as well as the main house. Visitors cannot view both areas at once, and thus different areas of programming also succeed at presenting the reality of the distinct separateness of black and white spaces on the plantation.

The tradition, however, of emphasizing the roles of only the white residents also claims the kitchen as a primarily white space. Partially a product of the appeal of the eurocentric focus of the museum, and partially a consequence of the lack of minority representation among public historians, programmers in the kitchen are almost exclusively white. When several white interpreters gather in the kitchen during one program, the group hearkens to images of white wage laborers rather than enslaved workers. The programmers often appear cheerful and friendly towards the visitors, welcoming the visitor into the kitchen and focusing attention on the visitor rather than the work. In addition, the programmers often

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tell visitors that the white family will eat these prepared foods inside the main house, but also allow visitors to sample the foods in the kitchen. The food becomes destined for the table of the main house, to be enjoyed by the white family not too different from the cooks and visitors themselves. Although rules do not allow real food in any of these three main houses, the implication as to otherwise by the kitchen interpreters seems welcoming and inclusive, mimicking the myth of the New England colonial hearth more than the hearth designed only as a work space for enslaved or indentured laborers. Interestingly, the inability of kitchen staff to carry the food into the dining room not only reinforces the higher value ascribed to artifacts of the white family, but also contributes to the continued separation of elite and laboring spaces in the museum narrative, even while verbally suggesting a fluid household. This presentation muddies the visual signs of the split household, best connecting the modern white kitchen interpreters to the white elites who once owned the plantation.

Though many visitors walk away remembering the kitchen as a space of industry and frivolity, other visitors question the authenticity of the actors and challenge these neat interpretations. The surveys of staff members at Tryon Palace drew comments in favor of

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101 In his 1972 Colonial Kitchens, Their Furnishings, and Their Gardens, Frances Phipps strings a history of American kitchens into a narrative in which the kitchen-regardless of its location within or outside the household-must be preserved for its position as the “heart of the house” (xi). This book, which played loosely between New England nuclear family homes and Southern plantations, became essential to historic properties in the interpretation of their kitchens. Nearly thirty years later, Laurel Ulrich uses her The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth (NY: Vintage Books, 2001) to trace the Victorian obsession with homespun as part of the creation of the self-made, industrial American myth. She notes the “New England kitchen” that was displayed by the US Sanitary Commission during the 1864 World’ Fair as one of the first public enshriment of white female domestic economy. The kitchen, therefore, was from the beginning linked in social memory to notions of the strong, white American family (26).
including African-American history in the Kitchen Office, and the revised research on the Kitchen Office made note of the slaves documented during Tryon’s time in Fort George, New York. With the dialogue of enslaved Surry a regular part of the Palace tour, the programming at Tryon Palace in the late 1990s moved toward integrating slavery at the site by first keeping the topic in the “black spaces” of the Palace. Katie Brightman Loveless also noted that African-American programmers who had volunteered during specially-themed programming interpreted slave history in the servants’ bedchambers in the upstairs of the Office.102

With the increase in public awareness of slavery, the kitchen has become the one space in the plantation landscape where visitors specifically expect a degree of authenticity in the portrayal of enslaved workers. In 1994, historian Peter Wallenstein began his public critique of slavery at Gunston Hall by calling for a full recognition of Mason’s slave-owning practices.103 At Gunston Hall, a female visitor in my group asked the costumed interpreter “Aren’t you supposed to be black?” Because tours often introduce discussions of labor first in the kitchen, visitors may mentally shift their attention to considering the work of the slaves in the kitchen, and museums follow suit and place any available African-American interpreters in the kitchen first. Still, a challenge of first person interpretation remains the

102 Katie Brightman Loveless, interview by author, 28 October 2009, Tryon Palace Historic Site and Gardens, New Bern, NC.
103 Peter Wallenstein, “Flawed Keepers of the Flame: The Interpreters of George Mason,” Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 102 (April, 1994), 229-260. As archivist Michelle Lee explained, the initial appearance of the article created a great deal of hard feelings and resistance among the staff at first, but since has helped Gunston Hall to openly address its slave-owning identity in tours, exhibits, and public programming.
lack of African-Americans who willingly volunteer to portray their enslaved ancestors, especially during programs that may border on entertainment as much as history. Most interpreters who portray work done by enslaved workers are white, and sites that wish to do programs in areas primarily used by slaves have little choice but to use the available white volunteers.

Sites must program in such a way as to keep African-American social history the focus of the kitchen interpretation. Staff must train interpreters working in the kitchen space to deal not only with questions about the white family, or the task at hand, but also why modern white interpreters work in spaces commonly associated with enslaved blacks. Sites address training in different ways, but separate foodways programs discuss questions of technique as well as issues of race often brought up in the kitchen. Brenda Hall noted how Gunston Hall’s increasing interpretation of slavery began with the kitchen because “food is a common thing that everyone understands.” Emphasizing comfort, Hall explained how visitors felt most comfortable discussing slavery in a room where both visitors and interpreters could begin with a positive experience such as cooking. Hall noted that as visitors and docents became more aware and open about slavery over time, the foodways program has worked to particularly focus their interpretation on slavery so that the kitchen becomes a central, safe location for discussing slavery at the site.  

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104 Brenda Hall, interview by author, 29 January 2010. Today, Gunston Hall also has a footprint of a slave cabin near the kitchen yard, and the foodways and interpretation staff has introduced a program called “The Hands That Built Gunston Hall.” Interpreters cook hoecakes near the footprint, and use the food to discuss field work and African-American foodways in an entirely Afro-centric space.
Tryon Palace also has a separate Domestic Skills Program Manager who works alongside the Curator of Interpretation to manage and train the interpreters in the Kitchen Office, Blacksmith Shop, and Stables. However, as Hilarie Hicks explained, with the move towards unscripted tours in the Kitchen Office, slavery became much less of a focus in the interpretation. During my visit, the interpreters did not mention slavery at all, instead emphasizing the existence of only white indentured or wage laborers at the Palace. In this regard, the separation of training required for craftspeople focuses only upon the tasks and not upon the people who did the work. Interpreters downplayed questions about slaves by citing “lack of evidence,” yet because interpreters cannot identify the historical workers of the kitchen, interpreters only hesitantly and defensively discussed workers at all.\(^{105}\) Unfortunately, because the kitchen has become a space to focus on performance rather than personnel, the detached kitchen has also created an easy opportunity for sites to escape the discussion of slavery simply by investing so much effort into the labor process of the kitchen space.

Children’s programming often appears to most successfully address the implications of the separate households. Unlike programming developed for site-specific special events, school programming must cater to requirements set by state boards of education as part of curriculum standards. As school districts have faced increasing budget cuts, many schools find field trips easy targets for elimination. Sites must develop their programs to match

\[^{105}\text{When I asked if the Tryons had used an enslaved cook, the interpreter informed me that they weren’t sure, but that prior to the Tryon’s arrival in New Bern they had had a French cook, Pierre LeBlanc. They then briskly concluded that they must have had the same at Tryon Palace, since no record existed of an enslaved cook.}\]
curriculum requirements so that classes may justify the money necessary for buses, lunches, and student field trip fees. Both Gunston Hall and Mordecai count student programming as a significant part of visitation, and have designed their kitchen programs to reflect statewide themes. While North Carolina’s Competency Objectives for the second through fourth grades do not specifically mention slavery, the Objectives do emphasize studies of ethnicities, changes in communities, and interdependence between parts of a community. Virginia’s Standards of Learning teach United States and Virginia history in the fourth and fifth grade, and more specifically require discussions of slavery and plantation structure. At these historic sites, slavery fulfills the requirements of cultural and social diversity, making programming which focuses on enslaved workers a widely sought option for schools and sites alike. In addition, because children cannot opt out of individual programs, sites can guarantee these children will learn about the white household as well as the black household presented in the kitchen. The kitchen becomes the lens through which sites include African-American history, and the kitchen stands as the focal point of a child’s experience with the enslaved household.

106 Standard Course of Study, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/curriculum/socialstudies/scos/. Mordecai’s “Educational Tour Teacher Packet,” mailed to each school prior to the date of visitation, lists the NC DPI Competency Objectives for each program. Gunston Hall prepares programming according to the Virginia Department of Education’s Standards of Learning, located at http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/history_socialscience/index.shtml. Tryon Palace does primarily eighth-grade programming focused on government, but because the entrance fee is fifteen dollars per child, school visitation is negligible.

107 Brenda Hall, interview by author, 29 January 2010.
Gunston Hall specifically focuses its kitchen programming on slavery, using the medium of food to discuss social divisions among the whites and blacks on a plantation. The Historic Foodways Program Handbook from which docents train begins the children’s tours with the question of the kitchen’s detachment from the main house, and suggests that older audiences may better understand how the distance removed the black presence from the white main house. During the program I observed, interpreters led fourth graders to this conclusion through the experience of making a beaten biscuit. As the interpreters had the children take turns beating the dough, they asked if the white family would allow the enslaved children who beat the biscuits to eat the biscuits. The guides further explained that the foods slaves prepared in the kitchen—meats, cakes, and side dishes all—were not consumed by the slaves, but rather taken to the main house for the enjoyment of white family. With one group, the interpreter further questioned the children what the consequences for eating the food would have been, leading the children to uneasily conclude that punishment would have included loss of food or physical punishment. The interpreters then compared the beaten biscuit to food typically consumed by slaves, pulling a pot of greens, potatoes, and ham hocks off the hearth. Ultimately, the program concluded with the lesson that enslaved cooks prepared meals for wealthy white families in the kitchen, and thus enslaved cooks saw the kitchen as a site of forced labor.

108 In an age without baking soda and powder, beating the biscuit dough for hours by hand produced a light biscuit. The necessity of having one person with the luxury to spend hours hitting dough made beaten biscuits a status symbol; the white family who served the biscuits had the money to purchase or hire a person to do the work.
Mordecai, the other site which does extensive school programming, uses the kitchen to introduce all types of plantation work, beginning with an overview of enslaved labor in the fields and specialized crafts. Interestingly, Mordecai also introduces the labor of the kitchen through the beaten biscuit, emphasizing the hours of labor slaves focused on the production of biscuits for the white family. Mordecai’s programming does not highlight African-American foodways specifically through prepared dishes, but through the gourds found under the table. Interpreters explain that slaves used gourds for utensils and storage, and emphasize the gourd as a way enslaved cooks brought their African culture into the space in which they were forced to work. The gourd, much like Gunston Hall’s ham and greens soup, becomes the vehicle through which interpreters claim the kitchen as an enslaved space.

By focusing on the enslaved nature of kitchen workers, the programming these sites provide for school children helps integrate the history of the plantation households. The beaten biscuit links both white and black household together in a narrative highlighting the dependence of the white household on the labor of the enslaved household. The beaten biscuit is also an easily reproducible food that provides a tactile experience for children while also illuminating the central tenet of slavery, that a slave’s economic product does not belong to the enslaved. The opportunity of having multiple foods at hand, such as Gunston Hall’s use of biscuits and ham hocks, also allows a site to compare the white and black households in a common medium easily accessible to the mind of both the adult and child. Through special programming and the use of interpreters, the kitchen can teach the abstract concepts
of social relationships and spatial landscapes embedded in the plantation layout, simply by referencing visual cues that resonate with modern audiences.

At the same time, the dependence of the site on the kitchen space alone to interpret slavery across the plantation reinforces the naturalness of the kitchen as an enslaved space. Because the narratives so heavily focus on labor, slaves often remain simply the performers of this labor; so the kitchen-as-labor space automatically equals black space, keeping the kitchen separate thematically from the narrative of the white house. When sites maintain this divide, or do not address it fully, audiences once again must draw their own conclusions. Some visitors may question the authenticity of a site without an African-American presence, while other visitors assume that the presence of white programmers equates the kitchen as a work space for the white family. Further, modern perceptions as the kitchen as the heart of the home, when combined with the museum’s efforts to make the kitchen a space of activity, inevitably lead to the conclusion whites perceived the slaves who worked in these spaces as part of the white family. The separate focus of the kitchen programming often implies the differences between households on a plantation, while at the same time providing just enough visual clues to perpetuate a positive narrative of one household bound by work. Because programming remains a central venue through which visitors engage with the kitchen, the presentations of labor and laborers in the kitchen testify to the ways in which sites have reconsidered the narrative in terms of enslaved and laboring households, while also challenging the plantation site to deeply consider how fully they recognize that plantations
were based upon forced labor which shaped the lives and identities of both the white and enslaved households.

The detached kitchen, built to shield white elites from their black slaves and to establish the boundaries of a racialized society on their own plantations, has today drawn both strength and weakness from its isolated position in the museum narrative. Museums, and visitors, perceive the kitchen today as a site of work, and the kitchen’s removal from the main house allows for programmers to still work in these spaces without disturbing the serenity of the main house. Without activity, the narrative of the main house remains focused on the people of the white family; while programmers in the kitchen must tread between articulating the process of kitchen work, and incorporating the enslaved workers who utilized the kitchen into the consciousness of visitors. In valuing the utility of kitchen work, museums further expand the space between house and kitchen in the way museums manage and display kitchen collections, and the apparently lower value placed by museums on these artifacts of labor. Too often, the detachment of the kitchen implies that the laborers of the kitchen exist as outside additions to the narrative of the main house, normalizing the association of slaves as the “other” people on a plantation. While the kitchen finds favor with audiences, the kitchen remains distinguished from the house by both its space and purpose, ultimately reflecting the eighteenth-century devaluation of the enslaved kitchen workers.
In other ways, the detachment of the kitchen has allowed museums to begin teaching African-American history to both staff and audiences in a venue that highlights some of the foundations of slavery. Programming provides audiences with tactile entry points into the abstracts of slavery, highlighting how racial separation played out in the reality of biscuits and gourds. As Gunston Hall has shown, the strong tie people have with food also has possibilities for interpretation outside the kitchen as sites expand the landscape of the plantation periphery into slave cabins, fields, and other areas occupied by enslaved laborers. Most importantly, kitchen programming challenges the narrative focus on the white family by replacing distant homage with hands-on engagement, reinforcing the presence of two different populations with different social realities, even as they coexisted in one landscape. The kitchen programming occupies a juncture between the Eurocentric narrative and the total inclusion narrative, and reveals that sites both challenge and reinforce the white elites’ status cemented in both the space and the story of the plantation museum narrative.
Conclusion

When friends, family, and fellow students hear my thesis concerns the detached kitchen at plantation museums, many assume that I have filled my research time with stories of cakes, okra, and a multitude of tasty free samples. When I gently skewer their images by speaking of spatial relationships and the contested meaning of kitchen work, they somehow seem disappointed and confused as to what my work even means. While I do lament the lack of offers of sweetmeats and roasted chickens, I have found myself struggling to answer the “so what?” for my companions. When the plantation landscape held so many spaces designed by whites to control and exclude enslaved blacks, why focus only on the removal of the one room? If kitchen programming can teach audiences even one small fact about slavery, why continue to push the issue of inclusivity? Why care about the kitchen?

I found my affirmation in Louisville. At the Southern Historical Association’s Annual Meeting, Carol Ely, Executive Director of Historic Locust Grove in Louisville, Kentucky, began her discussion about the presentation of slavery with a story. Locust Grove, like the sites in my study, relies almost exclusively on white interpreters during special events, and often puts one or two cooks into the detached kitchen as a vignette of servants preparing the Christmas feast for the white family. A few years ago, two African-American ladies volunteered to portray enslaved cooks, and Locust Grove gave them the roles without hesitation. That Christmas, guests began the tour in the house, witnessing the festivities enjoyed by the interpreters of the white family, and then exited into the kitchen yard, as in
years past. However, Ely soon heard from visitors unhappy with the two black female interpreters. The main complaint? There were slaves in the kitchen. Worse, the “enslaved” women were speaking to the white visitors in the deference required of slaves, and yet seemed to be enjoying the work. The existence of slaves in a kitchen caught visitors by surprise, upending their usual carefree Christmas kitchen experience with a visual reminder of the reality of kitchen work. At the same time, friendly interpreters did not fit the image of oppression associated with the work slave, leading visitors to question the authenticity of the scene. Most importantly, because slavery was now associated with the kitchen, visitors no longer saw the “heart of the home” kitchen as fun.

Ely’s story tells of more than a public caught unaware of the presence of slavery in antebellum society, but rather of how museums and their publics work to create and teach a historical narrative. Because people assign so much authority to the museum, museums become spaces where visitors can enter not only the present but the past. In 1963 anthropologist H. Stuart Hughes described the study of history as “retrospective culture anthropology” based on the assumption that he who studies the past can claim to know the past as if he had himself experienced the events. When museums embrace the notion that visitors can perform themselves into the past, museums deal with a new historical narrative each time a new visitor walks through the door. Visitors who insert themselves into

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narratives of groups marginalized in society, however, do more than simply participate alongside the people of the past, instead literally reshaping and taking ownership of the narratives of these peoples. The surprise of Ely’s visitors, therefore, reveals how successfully visitors have repurposed the history of enslaved peoples for their own nostalgia, and how deep the disjuncture between academic history and public memory sometimes remains.

As museums seek to bridge the interpretations offered by academics and the public, museums must more critically analyze the history they present. Plantation museums, in particular, need to view their landscapes as more than a congregation of places on a map. Boundaries exist in the placement of walls as much as in the placement of Plexis; spaces provide silent contexts that can, and will, be used by visitors to interpret the site. Museums miss a vital moment of interpretation when buildings are left as random placements upon the landscape, and the stories that exist in the spaces between continue to suppress the histories of enslaved peoples whose very lives were framed by spatial relationships.

Silent spaces allow presentations of an altered historical memory to remain the benchmark for a visitor’s entrance into history. Although food production connects well with the experiences and interests of visitors, a museum’s willingness to feature process over people plays into the racial ideologies embraced during slavery. Visitors to the kitchen who place themselves into the narrative reorganize the kitchen’s hierarchy of values to privilege only the visitor’s understanding of kitchen space, much as white elites once sought to define
and control the social value of the kitchen.\textsuperscript{111} As a result, where museums perceive kitchens as spaces for the interpretation of slavery, visitors claim the space as a place of fraternity, function, and entertainment. When the past intrudes into the present, as it did at Locust Grove, museums find themselves suddenly aware that the existence of slavery’s history at a plantation site does not mean that staff or visitors fully understand or accept that plantations were based upon forced labor in the domestic sphere, as well as the field.\textsuperscript{112} Locust Grove suggests that visitors need more social history of slaves, looking at why slaves worked certain jobs on the plantation, what power they had in shaping the environment of the kitchen, and how and why the white elite continued to exert power over the kitchen space.

Much as Gunston Hall uses one cooking demonstration to examine the social implications of cooking, so too must museum sites as a whole focus more heavily on social relationships in the kitchen, and greater plantation, narrative.

The kitchen remains a primary site for the performance of the histories of enslaved blacks and wage-labor classes at plantation museums. Plantation landscapes varied in accordance with the needs of the plantation, but every plantation counted a kitchen among its spaces. Today, kitchens remain an identifiable space to visitors, and in the push for total social inclusion, the kitchen pulls extra duty as a space to introduce the long-forgotten stories of the peoples whose very presence defined the plantation. Museum sites that wish to take


seriously the task of presenting slavery, as understood by those who created and suffered the system, must also understand that the process of inclusive social history begins in the kitchen.
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