

# Booker T. Washington National Monument: An Assessment and Alternative Interpretation

Willie L. Baber

## Abstract:

*In 1908 Booker T. Washington visited the formerly owned farmland of James and Elizabeth Burroughs, the same persons owning him as a slave until the 1865 emancipation when he gave a highly publicized speech. Many years later Louis R. Harlan and Park historians relied upon part of Washington's speech in Hales Ford, Virginia, to support their interpretations of an ethnographic present, 1850 – 1865, a time frame that includes Washington's years as a boy slave. An alternative interpretation of Booker T. Washington National Monument is presented here. This interpretation is based upon a synthesis of evidence at three levels: material culture represented by an obscure 1847 deed overlooked by Park historians and Booker T. Washington scholars; the analysis of three hypotheses with additional ethnohistorical evidence unknown until uncovered in an ethnographic overview and assessment of the Monument; and known socio-cultural patterns in New World plantation systems.*

## Introduction

Authorized by Congress on April 2, 1956, Booker T. Washington National Monument was created as a “public national memorial to Booker T. Washington, noted Negro educator and apostle of good will” (16 U.S.C. 4511). Since opening in 1957, millions of Americans and international visitors have visited the Monument. Visitors are encouraged to use an Official Map and Guide to better understand the Burroughs landscape and Booker T. Washington's boyhood as a slave. Unfortunately, Monument visitors have been misled.

The traditional interpretation of Booker T. Washington National Monument overlooks information contained in an obscure deed owned in 1847 by Thomas Burroughs. This deed constitutes an important thread of evidence; an examination of it leads to an unraveling of forty-four years of interpretive work at Booker T. Washington National Monument. This paper describes the 1847 deed, its link to additional ethnohistorical data, and its place in the Burroughs-owned landscape. First, I will describe the theoretical orientation and “matrix method” that I used in conducting an ethnographic overview and assessment of the Monument. Then, based on the insights gleaned from the matrix, I will evaluate the evidence associated with the traditional interpretation of Booker T. Washington National Monument. Finally, I will describe ethnohistorical evidence that, heretofore, was unknown. Evidence that supports three ethnohistorical hypotheses tied to the location of seven to eight acres of Burroughs-owned land referenced in the 1847 deed.

The boundary of the Burroughs property is restructured, changing the scholarly evidence on the shape of the landscape as well as the traditional interpretation of it.

## Theoretical Orientation and Method

The current interpretive displays and cultural landscape resources of Booker T. Washington National Monument are defined as a “treatment condition,” put in place in 1995 by Superintendent Bill Gwaltney. I compared all archival and historical sources of data about the Monument to the current treatment condition. The administrative history of Booker T. Washington National Monument, published in 1969 by Barry Mackintosh, served as an important benchmark for all other historical materials available prior to the current treatment condition. Mackintosh's work was completed during an interpretive shift, from cabin birthplace to the living farm concept. Superintendent Gwaltney promoted another interpretive shift, from the living farm concept to a focus on slavery and race relations.

I applied a matrix of comparison in all phases of the research; in other words all sources of information were systematically compared to all other known sources. This procedure reduces the likelihood that any ethnographic resources would be overlooked. In fact, comparisons of data collected in this study immediately began to reveal gaps in the interpretive ethnographic resources, and revealed important ethnographic facts. For example, the major research finding is the existence of a seven to eight-acre tract of land referred to in the 1847 deed. This discovery emerged after study of all

deeds associated with the Monument, and comparing the contents of them with any observable features, visible today, in the landscape.

Cultural patterns are expressions of human-land adaptations. The results reported here assume human-land adaptations in several plantation zones of North America, and through time (e.g., DuBois 1935; Franklin 1980; Linden 1946; Mintz 1959, 1964, 1966, 1974, 1977, 1985a, 1985b; Owsley and Owsley 1940; Russel 1941; Wagley 1960; Wallerstein 1974; Wolf 1959; Wolf and Mintz 1957; Woodman 1966; Williams 1944). Discussion of this literature is beyond the scope of this paper, however, literature on North American and Caribbean plantations helped me to place the ethnographic resources of Booker T. Washington National Monument into a larger and much needed conceptual framework. For example, throughout my analysis of Monument resources I asked one basic question: How do the socio-cultural patterns of plantation systems, defined in their hemispheric dimensions and through time, manifest themselves in what is known about the Burroughs, the Hales Ford community in which they lived, and Booker T. Washington's life as a slave? Consider, as one example, that the Burroughs landscape has been depicted as a "farm" rather than a plantation. This distinction is commonly made; a separation of southern states into "plantation South" and "Upcountry or Piedmont South," sometimes also found to include the "Appalachian South." The Upcountry is a subregion of plantation systems that included an uneasy articulation of yeomen and large-scale plantations. In efforts to minimize regional affiliation with the Deep South and large-scale slavery, early historians of slavery often pulled transitional Upcountry areas into an Appalachian or mountain region. This was accompanied by the soothing notion that slavery was not widely practiced in Upcountry regions; and where it was practiced, such as in a community the size of Hales Ford, the "morality" of slaveholding differed greatly in comparison to the Deep South. In addition, large-scale slavery involved the wealthy few among whites, absolving the common white citizen from effective participation in the evils of slavery, even as slave owners. Fitting into this pattern, it seems to me, was Louis R. Harlan's (1972) yeoman interpretation of James Burroughs, the narrative that is used in the traditional interpretation of Booker T. Washington National Monument.

### **An Assessment of the Traditional Interpretation**

As a distinguished American leader of African descent, Booker T. Washington visited Hales Ford, his

birthplace in Franklin County, Virginia. The year was 1908. Forty-eight years before, in 1860, James and Elizabeth Burroughs owned 207 acres of land and ten slaves, including four-year old Booker, his siblings Amanda and John, and their mother, Jane. In his only visit to Hales Ford, Booker T. Washington stood before local dignitaries, descendants of the Burroughs, both white and black folks, and spoke these significant words: "I'm afraid I wouldn't know the place," said Mr. Washington, "Everything is changed. After all, the most remarkable changes that I notice" he continued laughingly, "is the size of things. *It seems incredible to me that the Ferguson place, where I used to go, as a boy, is now only just across the road,*" he remarked. "*The old dining room too, is not near as large now as it used to be, or at least as it seemed to be, once*" (italics only cited in Harlan [1972:6]; Mackintosh [1969:13]). These words constitute the only direct evidence supporting the current interpretation of the Burroughs-owned landscape known today as Booker T. Washington National Monument.

Booker T. Washington's subtle and provocative use of oratory is widely known as an important attribute of his personality (Hawkins 1974). Not as widely known is the observation that Washington's visit to Hales Ford was part of a strategy to improve national race relations. Washington traveled and lectured widely in Southern states. Rooted in his Christian beliefs, he offered public forgiveness of his former owners and their descendants. If conciliation of the races is possible, Washington believed, then absolution of the sinner by victims, and in the name of God, is absolutely necessary. Drawing upon the international success of *Up From Slavery*, Washington's conciliation strategy found its appeal at the time. His strategy could not overcome the failure of reconstruction, the routine lynching of black people, and the 1896 Supreme Court ruling in which "separate but equal" was judged constitutional.

Washington's 1908 speech in Hales Ford was described by Robert E. Park, a noted sociologist, and then reprinted in newspapers throughout the nation, including *The Tuskegee Student* (1908). Washington stood in front of a house on the former Burroughs landscape, Park notes, and from this location delivered a speech. This house, which burned in 1950, is known today as the Burroughs "big house." Two cabins adjacent to the big house have come to be known as a "dining cabin," and the "birthplace and kitchen cabin" of Booker T. Washington. All three structures are depicted visually in three-dimensional drawings in the current Official Map and Guide of Booker T.

Washington National Monument. The Guide (1995) reads, in part: “The original kitchen cabin site, which Booker T. Washington himself pointed out in 1908 as the location of his birthplace, and the site of the Burroughs house have been outlined with stones and are shown as ghost images.”

The words spoken by Booker T. Washington cited above are reinforced by another visit to the former Burroughs property in 1937 by Congressman Mitchell. On this occasion Booker T. Washington’s birthplace cabin was located (see Figure 1). Congressman Mitchell’s visit was described in Miss Joplin’s W.P.A. report on a Burroughs home, dated November 8, 1937. Ms. Joplin’s W.P.A. report is another source documenting the residence of James and Elizabeth Burroughs. I discovered that Joplin’s W.P.A. documentation itself depends upon Booker T. Washington’s words of 1908. Joplin’s W.P.A. report is the first association of Booker T. Washington’s visit and the location of the Burroughs’ residence (see Figure 1).

In the first few pages of *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader*, Harlan writes a brief but now popular narrative that corresponds to Figure 1. “James Burroughs was a raw-boned yeoman,” he writes (1972:6), “a dirt farmer of the Southern uplands.” Harlan refers to the Burroughs “big house” as a farmhouse with five rooms. Harlan repeats Joplin’s WPA description of the house, adding that there are no “white columns,” not even a porch during the ethnographic present of 1860. Three rooms are downstairs and two in the half-story under the roof. “A picket fence surrounded it, two one-room slave cabins, and a yard about fifty by twenty feet” (Harlan 1972:7). The house was originally a log house, later covered with weather boarding.

In using the term “big house,” Harlan cites Booker T. Washington’s *Up From Slavery* where the term is also used. Harlan adds (1972:7) that Washington “fit his early years into the conventional plantation legend, speaking of the Burroughs farm as a plantation, endowing it with an overseer and a ‘Big House.’” The implication is that the Burroughs big house was distorted in Washington’s memory of it, and that the size of the house implied in *Up From Slavery* is a by product of Washington’s “wizardry” and rise to fame. Harlan then uses the often-referenced words of Booker T. Washington, in 1908 and noted above, as if they are words recanting an imagined “plantation legend,” and as if some descriptions in *Up From Slavery*, published in 1901, are totally unreliable by virtue of memory loss

or Washington’s embellishment of fame. Interestingly, other descriptions in *Up From Slavery* are taken as reliable; i.e., descriptions accepted without Harlan’s abridgements. For example, Washington’s description of the cabin in which he lived as a boy wins Harlan’s approval. Figure 1, and Harlan’s narrative, supports the conclusion (1972:7) that the owners of Booker T. Washington, “physically and culturally (...) were closer to their slaves than masters of large plantations. A mutuality developed out of the social and physical closeness.” When compared to Harlan’s narrative, inconsistencies appear in *Up From Slavery*, but these are selectively reshaped and discredited.

Harlan’s narrative is strengthened by Booker T. Washington’s controversial philosophy. *Up From Slavery* contains Washington’s humanistic reasoning about the impact of slavery upon whites as well as himself. Washington’s humanism easily resonates with Harlan’s minimalist distinctions of slave and slave owner. For example, Booker T. Washington states: “Ever since I have been old enough to think for myself, I have entertained the idea that, notwithstanding the cruel wrongs inflicted upon us, the black man got nearly as much out of slavery as the white man did. The hurtful influences of the institution were not by any means confined to the Negro.” Here then is a psychology of mutual suffering in slavery, of slave and master, that may be tied to “physical closeness” as illustrated in Figure 1, mutual poverty of slave and master as contained in Harlan’s narrative, and to social closeness as further described in *Up From Slavery*.

### Contributions of Park Historians

Bearss (1969) and Mackintosh (1969a, 1969b), National Park Service Historians, provide additional published accounts involving the landscape of Booker T. Washington National Monument. Nothing in their work disturbs Harlan’s narrative, however. Another Park Historian, Albert J. Benjamin, contributed additional ethnohistorical information. He audio-taped interviews of Grover and Peter Robertson in 1964. Grover and Peter were sons of John D. Robertson, who purchased the Burroughs property in 1894. Interviews with the Robertson brothers indicated that their father’s northern boundary was initially landlocked. The Robertsons did not have direct access to Hales Ford Road until 1917. This information, a landlocked northern boundary, should have drawn some attention to the deeds. It did not, perhaps because the Robertson brothers claimed that their father (John D. Robertson) purchased the real estate, *all tracts of land*, belonging to James and Elizabeth Burroughs. The Robertson

brothers' interviews reinforce Harlan's narrative, and their interviews were used to verify the northern boundary of the Burroughs property.

If John D. Robertson purchased the Burroughs estate, then only two deeds dated 1850 and 1855 are needed to establish the size of the Burroughs property at 207 acres. An 1850 deed conveys 177 acres in two tracts, 7 and 170 acres. An 1855 deed conveys one 30 acres tract. The boundaries of this property are another matter, however. A description of the boundary of the seven acres tract (previously recorded as eight acres in which access to Hales Ford Road can be inferred) is *not* contained in the 1850 deed. Instead, the 1850 deed refers the reader to descriptions in a prior deed, dated 1847. This deed corresponds to eight acres of land "on the south side of Hales Ford Road." Bearss' work came closest to perceiving an important error. Apparently, Bearss interpreted "on the south side of Hales Ford Road" to mean off the road, and south (consistent with the Robertson's northern boundary), rather than *on* Hales Ford Road's south side. Bearss' reading of the 1847 deed is consistent with prior interpretative efforts, including interviews of the Robertson brothers in 1964 and Booker T. Washington's words of 1908. Harlan adds his narrative in 1972.

**Deeds of Booker T. Washington National Monument: A Closer Look**

James Burroughs, the owner of Booker T. Washington, died in 1861, leaving his estate to his wife Elizabeth Burroughs and their fourteen surviving children. Elizabeth Burroughs decided to sell her estate in 1878. The property was finally sold in 1894 to J. D. Robertson. A year later, on December 21, 1895, Elizabeth Burroughs died.

Mackintosh and Bears conclude that the J. D. Robertson's purchase of the Burroughs plantation in 1894 included the known 207 acres of property. This conclusion is based upon the 1850 and 1855 deeds, mentioned above, and a third deed dated 1894. This third deed conveys the Burroughs land from a son of James Burroughs, receiver of the property, to J. D. Robertson. An important observation is that the 1894 deed records 200 acres of land, rather than 207 acres. In addition, the Land Book of Franklin County lists 200 acres as J. D. Robertson's tax liability, beginning in 1895. Mackintosh and Bearss assumed that the 1894 sale of "200 acres, more or less" contained in the deed would have actually included 207 acres. Was a clerical error made? Davis, Davis, and Davis, a law firm, conducted a title search of the former Burroughs land

on behalf of the Booker T. Washington Memorial, organized by Sidney Phillips in 1953. Davis, Davis, and Davis concluded that a clerical error was made in the 1894 deed, and that 207 acres should have been recorded (see table 1). There is another possibility however. Backed by an extensive search of the deeds and land records of the Burroughs property I was forced to consider, as my first hypothesis, that the 1894 deed was correct, and that 7 acres of Burroughs land was not accounted for in any transaction after 1850.

Table 1: Time Line of Deeds

1826	From Dillion to Dillion, splits off 200 acres
1833	From Dillion to Thomas Burroughs, splits off 170 acres (tract one).
1847	From Aguilla Divers to Thomas Burroughs, splits off 8 acres (tract two).
1850	From Thomas Burroughs to James Burroughs, 177 acres. Total size of property: 177 acres (loss of one acre).
1855	From Thomas Burroughs to James Burroughs, 30 acres (tract three). Total size of property 207 acres in three tracts, James and Elizabeth Burroughs.
1894	Elizabeth Burrough's estate to J.D. Robertson, 200 acres recorded in 1894 deed. Corresponds to loss of seven/eight acres tract identified in 1847 and 1850.
1917	Cook to Robertson land exchange, 7 acres. Cook seven acres tract traded to J.D. Robertson is same location as 1847 and 1850 tract.
1953	Title search on behalf of Booker T. Washington Memorial, 214 acres. Assumes that the 1894 deed should have read 207 acres, plus 7 acres tract from 1847 deed.

Before becoming a Federal Monument, the Burroughs property was sold to Booker T. Washington Birthplace Memorial, organized by Sidney Phillips, in 1953. The Abstract of Title prepared on behalf of Phillips by the law offices of Davis, Davis, and Davis (1953) concluded that the Burroughs property contained "in the aggregate Two Hundred and Fourteen (214) Acres, more or less, in Gills Creek Magisterial District, Franklin County, Virginia...." Since all deeds must be accounted in a title search, the 7 acres contained in the

# Booker T. Washington National Monument

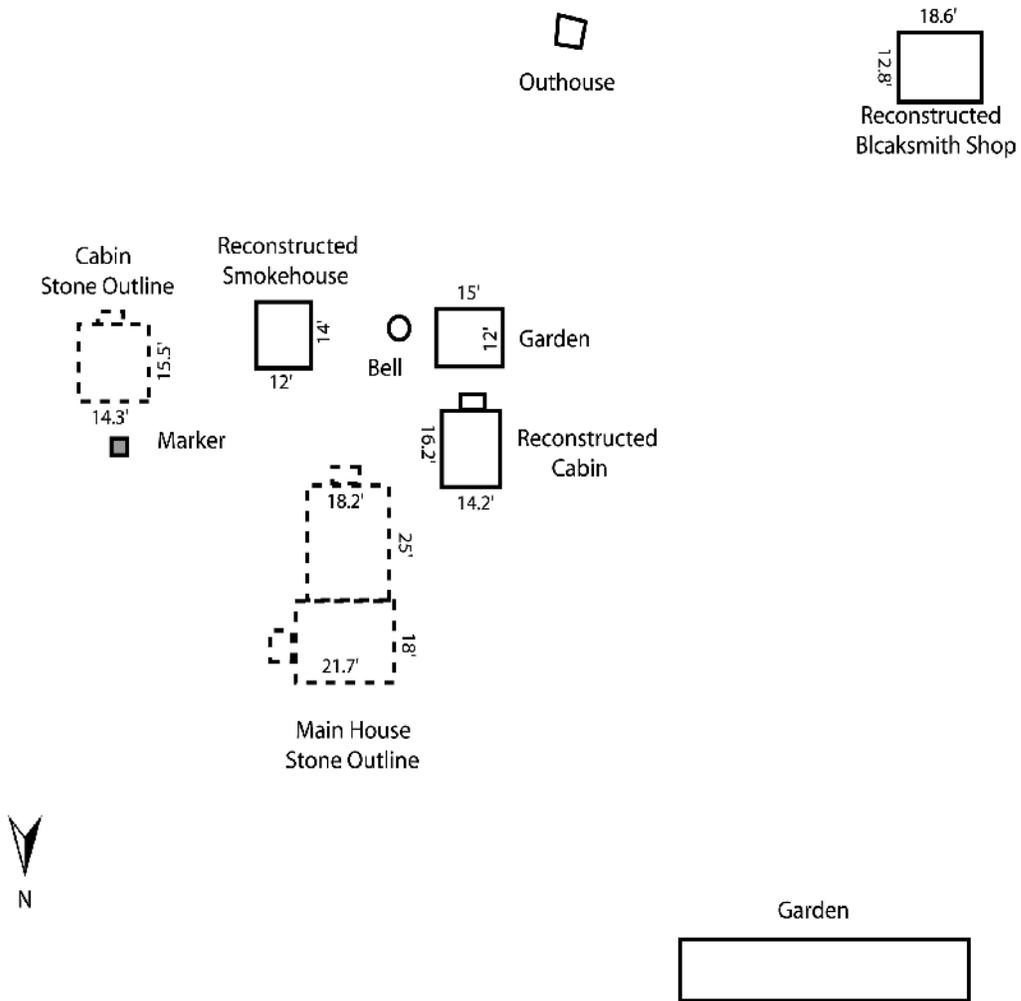


Figure 1

1847 deed was added to the 207 acres believed to have been sold to J. D. Robertson, for a total of 214 acres. One of the Davis attorneys wrote a dissenting opinion, noting the following:

Insofar as the records of the Clerk's Office of the Circuit Court of Franklin County, Virginia, are properly kept and indexed, I am of the opinion that the Booker T. Washington Birthplace Memorial is seized and possessed of a good and marketable fee simple title to the lands described in Caption, however, it is my opinion the acreage should be placed at Two Hundred and Seven (207) Acres instead of Two Hundred and Fourteen (214) Acres....

This dissenting opinion is the correct one if one concludes that J. D. Robertson purchased 200 acres.

Mackintosh and Bearss cite two additional deeds. The Cook to Robertson land exchange of 1917 gave J. D. Robertson access directly to Hales Ford Road. Cook exchanged seven acres of land with seven acres from Robertson's northeastern boundary. The property traded by Cook was the very same property cited in the 1847 deed, but a very extensive search of Franklin County tax records and deeds did not produce conveyance of the 1847 deed beyond 1850 when the land was sold to James Burroughs by his brother, Thomas Burroughs.

### The Big House Hypothesis

The 1847 deed opens up a second hypothesis: The seven to eight acres are spatially ideal to hold a Burroughs residence. To test this hypothesis, I traced improvements on the 170 acre tract from 1833 to 1847. A total increase of 340 dollars in value is noted in separate years within this period, in 1836 and in 1840, improvements were made by Thomas Burroughs (brother to James Burroughs). Thomas Burroughs added an additional tract of land in 1847; eight acres for the price of \$56.00. This land was recorded as eight acres from 1847 until it was sold to James Burroughs in 1850. At that time the eight acres were listed as seven acres. Also, the price paid by James Burroughs to his brother, Thomas Burroughs, was \$401.00 more than the tax value of the two tracts of land, 170 and the 7 (or 8) acres referred to in the 1847 deed. In the subsequent tax year, 1851, James Burroughs paid the same tax value paid by his brother in the previous year. Thus, the \$401.00 paid to Thomas by James was not calculated as part of land improvements. At least three

conclusions are possible. The loss of 1 acre may mean the building of a house because residences were not taxed. Second, housing material may be reflected in the sale price of 177 acres to James Burroughs, who paid \$401.00 more than the tax liability (see Table 2). Finally, a house could have been built between 1847 and 1850. Later, in 1854, Thomas Burroughs sold an additional 30 acres to his brother; hence the 207 acres.

Table 2: Land Values Before and After Burroughs Transaction.

Year	Owner	No. of acres	Value of Bldgs.	Total Value of Land and Bldgs.
1849	T. Burroughs	170 acres 8 acres	300 —	1,190 48
1850		170 acres 8 acres	300 —	1,190 48
1851	T. Burroughs	170 acres 8 acres	300 —	1,190 48 James Burroughs to pay
1852	J. Burroughs	177 acres	300	1,239

The 1847 deed demonstrates that the current northern boundary of the Burroughs property is incorrect. Also, the 1847 deed establishes the fact that the Burroughs had access to Hales Ford Road.

If an additional residence existed as hypothesized, then the typical space versus social status commonly noted in agricultural landscapes of this era, including smaller ones, becomes apparent at Booker T. Washington National Monument. This possibility eases another important ethnohistorical difficulty: One can assume a "big house" capable of housing up to 14 Burroughs known to have lived at the site and, at the same time, give due consideration to viewshed and watershed as one may observe in the landscape today. A house of sufficient size, and in a space appropriate for it, would force redefinition of the three known structures depicted in the Official Map and Guide of Booker T. Washington National Monument (figure 1). This observation forces a third hypothesis: The three structures depicted in figure 1 were the living quarters of slaves. This third hypothesis eases the difficulty of determining where, in the Burroughs landscape, did the majority of their ten slaves live.

## An Alternative Interpretation

In *Up From Slavery* Booker T. Washington describes conditions much closer to a “big house” located some distance from slave quarters, and he notes the veranda of the “big house.” This information is not taken at face value, however. Instead, Harlan selectively edits descriptions in *Up From Slavery* that would otherwise confound his narrative, attributing any inconsistencies to Washington’s wizardry. I recognized Booker T. Washington’s humanism as a form of resistance (cf. Patterson 1982), interpreted *Up From Slavery* accordingly, and asked the following question: What kind of cultural response would account for Washington’s humanism as a form of resistance to slavery and racism, find compatibility with his 1908 speech in Hales Ford, and support the three hypotheses noted above?

Given Washington’s widely acknowledged religious convictions, I propose comparing his skills as an orator to a passage in the Book of Mark 12:1-12 (1990) “And he began to speak to them in parables. ‘A man planted a vineyard (...).’” Surrounded by enemies and friends, without the ability to distinguish them, Jesus spoke in parables. The Book of Mark, chapter 12, documents Jesus’s teaching in places where he was not well received. Washington’s strong Christian beliefs and Biblical knowledge influenced the strategies he used to address audiences composed of blacks and whites. He spoke in parables. Parables must be experienced. It is possible to “hear” or “know” the surface form of a parable without perceiving the deeper meaning buried in its words. To understand the deeper meanings in a parable, the listener must have, or acquire, cultural competency in the experiences implied by the words. While parables imply widely shared experiences or meanings in relationship to a surface story, deeper meanings surface for those fewer persons with the experience to perceive them. Is it wise to ascribe literal accuracy to Booker T. Washington’s words, in his 1908 context, even if the words appear to support the initial and overall interpretation of the Monument built in honor of him?

In order to address this question, I started with models of plantation systems widely noted in classic literature, i.e., known historical patterns in New World plantation systems – both spatially and culturally – and applied these patterns to the landscape of Hales Ford and to the Burroughs landscape. Hales Ford’s spatial properties are visible today; the post office was located on the Holland place. Holland’s house is located several miles from the Monument just off highway 122,

known then as Hales Ford Road. Hales Ford Baptist Church is still functioning. The home of Ferguson, who married a daughter of the Burroughs, and of Thomas Burroughs (a son of James and Elizabeth Burroughs) are also standing today. Several additional homes of Hales Ford have been renovated.

With a broader landscape in mind, I stood about where Washington would have been standing in 1908, i.e. in front of stones placed in positions outlining the foundation of the so-called Burroughs big house. I observed the surrounding landscape. I noted in particular how the land slopes upward, gradually, toward highway 122 to the north, and how the area in which I was standing is higher ground still compared to a slight decline to the south. I looked northeast, toward the burned ruins of the Ferguson house not visible from where I was standing; I noted a branch of Gills Creek to the east and moving south to north. Then I imagined a “big house” upon a knoll just above the Burroughs cemetery, well above the watershed of Gills Creek, and more than one hundred yards from where I was standing. A big house “up there” would fit perfectly, I thought, into various patterns – watershed, viewshed, spatial status in slave systems, and frontage along Hales Ford Road similar to other Hales Ford homes still standing.

I repeated Booker T. Washington’s words as noted in his 1908 speech, and immediately perceived them to mean just the opposite of how others have understood them. A Burroughs residence similar to the Ferguson house existed just off Hales Ford Road and within the area described in the 1847 deed. It would be “incredible” to believe otherwise. Standing where Washington stood, in front of what would have been the slave quarter – and viewing the landscape as he would have experienced it in 1865 as a slave of the Burroughs – I perceived Booker T. Washington’s words of 1908 as parables similar to those spoken by him on similar uneasy occasions. I imagine now that Park historians were misled by Booker T. Washington’s words while heavily dependent upon them as the only direct evidence of the traditional interpretation. Also in the back of my mind were the words of a National Park archaeologist who had informed me that land upon which I had imagined a Burroughs residence, the same land later revealed in my study of the 1847 deed, did not at any time belong to the Burroughs. Referring to the 1908 landscape in a manner known only to a select few in his audience, Washington would have known the approximate location of the house and the relative size of it.

## Angles and Land Markers of 1847 Deed

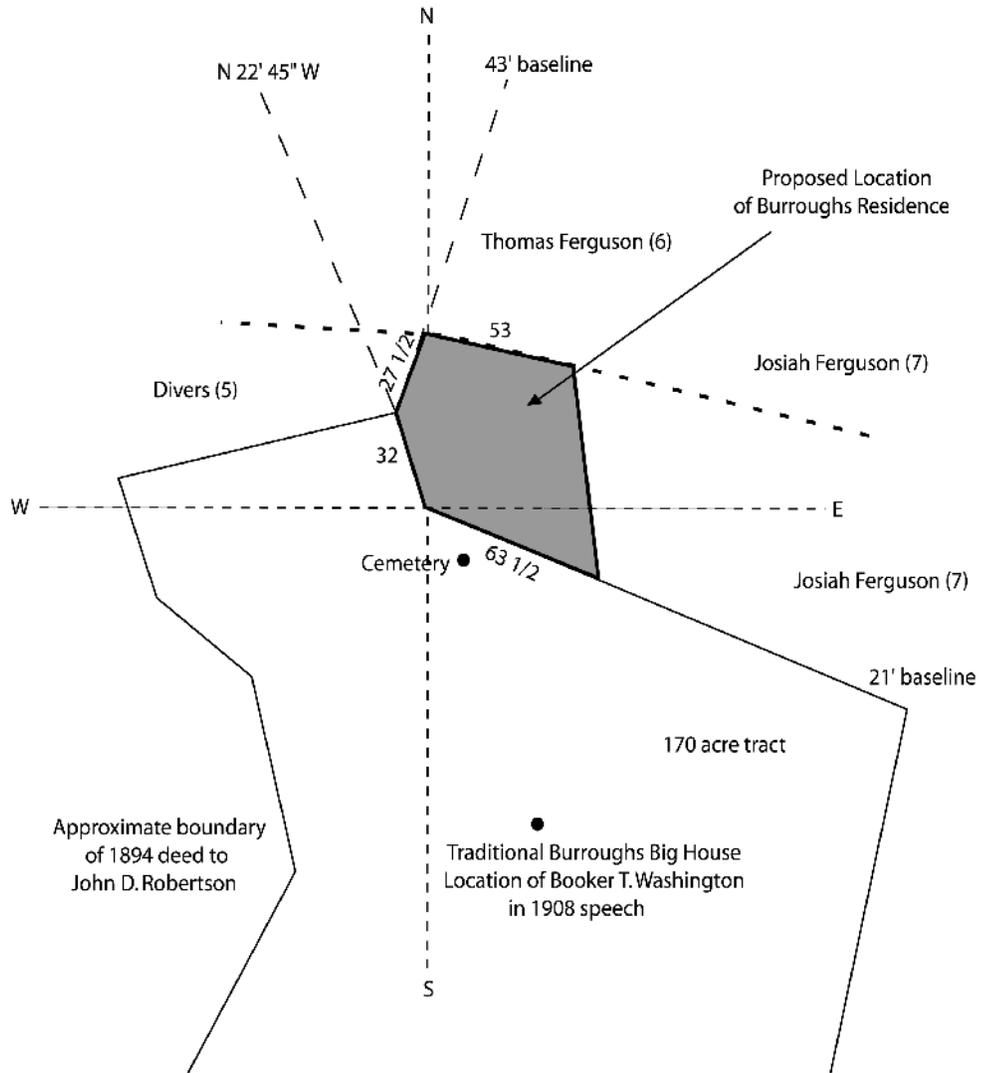


Figure 2

Figure 3: Reprint of 1847 Deed.

This Indenture made and entered into this 27<sup>th</sup> day of May 1847 Between Aquilla Divers & his wife Nancy of Franklin County and Thomas Burroughs of Bedford County & state of Virginia: Witnesseth, that whereas the said Aquilla Divers & Nancy his wife do this day covenant and agree with said Thomas Burroughs by which said Aquilla Divers & Nancy his wife in pursuance of a bargain and sale then entered into between them and Thomas Burroughs, sell unto said Thomas Burroughs a certain parcel or lot of land containing by survey [1] Eight acres for and in consideration of the sum of Fifty six Dollars, paid unto Aquilla Divers & Nancy his wife of the first part, have this day bargained sold and coveffed and confirmed, and by these presents do bargain, sold and coveff, and confirm unto the said Thomas Burroughs the lot or tract of land aforesaid [2] embracing the following boundary & lying in Franklin County on the south side of Hales ford road. Beginning at pointers in Josiah Ferguson's line hence with his line and Thomas Burrough's line so 21 bl 63 ½ po to a Spanish Oak [3] on a road thence a new line no 22 45 w 32 po to pointers [4] on said road no 43 bl 27 ½ po to a Spanish Oak in the old line or Thomas Ferguson's line and thence with it so 78 E 53 po to the beginning. The said land is part of the tract on which said Aquilla Drivers lives, [5] it being the north east corner, and bounded by [6] Thomas Ferguson, [7] Josiah Ferguson & [8] Thomas Burroughs; To have and to hold the lot or tract of land aforesaid, together with all its appurtenances in any wise belonging or appertaining unto said Thomas Burroughs and his heirs forever, and the said Aquilla Divers & his wife Nancy do by these presents covenant and agree to and with the said Thomas Burroughs warrant and forever, grant and forever defend unto the said Thomas Burroughs and his heirs and assigns the right and title in and to the lot or tract of land aforesaid, against the said Aquilla Divers & Nancy his wife their Heirs or assigns free from any claim or claims whatever, give under our hand & seal this day and year above written.

Aquilla Divers

### The 1847 Deed

Figures 2 (map) and Figure 3 (text of deed) are reproductions of the 1847 deed (Deed Book 20, p. 66, Franklin County Courthouse, Rocky Mount, Va). The shaded area only is drawn to scale in Figure 2. The first two features are Hales Ford Road (item 2), and plantation road (items 3, 4). In addition, the 21 degree angle of the 170 acres tract, thought to be the original boundary of the Burroughs property, is an inference based upon other available maps and the location of the cemetery (the third visible landmark).

After observing Burroughs' northeastern boundary at an angle of 21 degrees from due East (i.e., 21 degrees south), I assumed the surveyor's position and established an east and west line off the side of a right triangle. Starting here, I took the position referenced in the deed, "Beginning at pointers in Josiah Ferguson's line hence with his line and Thomas Burrough's line so 21 bl 63 ½ po to a Spanish Oak on a road." This reads "south 21 degrees baseline 63 ½ poles to a Spanish Oak on a road," and contains the first reference to the plantation road that is visible in the site today. Although I did not know Josiah Ferguson's line, nor the exact location of Burroughs eastern marker, I did know that Josiah Ferguson lived directly across Hales Ford Road, and opposite the Burroughs. The next line established a north to south line because of the switch to the terms "no 22 45 w 32 po to pointers on said

road." This reads "north 22.45 degrees West 32 poles to pointers on said road." This line contains a second reference to the plantation road. Thomas Ferguson's property is referred to next (and thus is to the left of Josiah Ferguson); "no 43 bl 27 ½ po to a Spanish Oak in the old line or Thomas Ferguson's line" (Josiah was Thomas's son). This establishes a baseline angle of 43 degrees in reference to the previous line. The final line is in a southern direction, hence the terms "so 78 E 53 po" to the beginning, which means "south 78 degrees east 53 poles to the beginning point." Finally, I note that the surveyor starts by saying that this tract of land is "lying in Franklin County on the south side of Hales Ford Road." The preposition "on" is modifying "Hales Ford Road," meaning *on* Hales Ford Road (its south side). The above angles are bounded by the location of all owners: "The said land is part of the tract on which said Aquilla Divers lives, it being the north east corner, and bounded by Thomas Ferguson, Josiah Ferguson, and Thomas Burroughs."

Since the first angle is 21 degrees south of East, I assume that the next direction would intersect coordinates because of the wording "N 22 degrees 45 W to pointers" (second line). The third line is a base line of 43 degrees from the second line (of N 22 degrees 45 W). The reference for the final and fourth line requires another set of coordinates at the end of the third line (43 degrees baseline and 27 ½ poles); then South 78 degrees East. The cemetery's edge, also

visible today, may be viewed at an angle of 21 degrees along the 170 acres northern boundary (from due East). I have not reproduced the 1850 deed that conveys 177 acres to James Burroughs, and refers the reader to an 1841 deed.

Using five contiguous right triangles fitted to Figure 2, and calculating the unknown length in Figure 2 by the ratio of  $63.5 / 1.4375$  inches =  $X / 1.5625$  inches = 69.021 poles, and given eight acres of land, the length of a pole is determined:  $471.22$  poles = acre =  $43,560$  sq ft or 1 pole =  $43,560 / 471 = 9.25$  feet, or 10 feet minus a measurement error of less than .04 percent. One (1) pole as 10 feet had, by the 1800s, become widely accepted as a standard unit of measure. Applied here, and working backward from the area of the land to determine the unit of measure used by the surveyor's dimensions, provides an independent means that confirms the spatial properties drawn in Figure 2 as correct; and revealing, moreover, a shape that is observed unmistakably on numerous Park maps.

## Conclusion

The search for an appropriate interpretation of Booker T. Washington National Monument has focused narrowly on the Burroughs landscape, a search for the proverbial needle in stacks of hay – taking the larger context as given. Two periods of human-land adaptations are alluded to without a proper understanding of their relationship, or a proper understanding of how people adjust to changing circumstances. One adaptation is defined by “frontier” settlement of Franklin County; this corresponds to Harlan's (1972) narrative. The other adaptation involves Tidewater or East Piedmont descendants of a later period, and their attempt to readjust to regional and world change.

I reasoned that James and Elizabeth, as new-come yeomen or as Tidewater descendants, would not place their permanent living quarters well off Hales Ford Road to which they had access, and next to a small slave cabin in a landscape containing 207 acres. Also, the relative size of the traditional Burroughs house is ill fitted to Tidewater readjustments. So, were James and Elizabeth Burroughs yeoman, “dirt farmers” of the frontier as Harlan (1972) concludes? There are many additional problems with this interpretation. By 1850, the year that James Burroughs purchased his 207 acres, the frontier had moved to Missouri, Texas, New Mexico, and California (with ensuing debates about slaves and free states). Homes located in the Hales Ford landscape today, and from the 1850 period, are not

comparable to the Burroughs traditional big house. However, Franklin county documents routinely refer to the Burroughs as if they possessed social status in line with their neighbors, in assigning road duties, for example. Finally, the size of the Burroughs' brood would require a much larger but still modest structure, to fit them all, spatially, into their marginal but “middle class” positions.

Finally, I find in *Up From Slavery* several passages from which expected spatial properties can be inferred, placing a slave quarter at some perceivable distance from a Burroughs residence:

- The earliest impressions I can now recall are of the plantation and the slave quarters – the latter being the part of the plantation where the slaves had their cabins (1948:2)
- The night before the eventful day, word was sent to the slave quarters to the effect that something unusual was going to take place at the “big house” the next morning (...). Early the next morning word was sent to all the slaves, old and young, to gather at the house. In company with my mother, brother, and sister, and a large number of other slaves, I went to the master's house (1948:20).
- All of our master's family were either standing or seated on the veranda of the house, where they could see what was to take place and hear what was said (1948:21).
- Was it any wonder that within a few hours the wild rejoicing ceased and a feeling of deep gloom seemed to pervade the slave quarters (1948:22).
- Gradually, one by one, stealthily at first, the older slaves began to wander from the slave quarters back to the “big house” to have a whispered conversation with their former owners as to the future (1948:22).
- Our usual diet on the plantation was corn bread and pork, but on Sunday morning my mother was permitted to bring down a little molasses from the “big house” for her three children... (1948:245).

As noted, Harlan accounts for the above words by stating that Washington fit his early years into the conventional plantation legend, speaking of the Burroughs landscape as a “plantation,” with an overseer and a “big house.”

Profound disbelief in Washington's political motives as other than self-serving is evident in Harlan's other work on Booker T. Washington, including the 15 volume work, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* (1972). The data and analysis presented here, combined with the magnitude of Harlan's disbelief in particular, led me to consider the following, and final set of questions. How does one understand such a significant error and oversight, the 1847 deed itself, in properly interpreting a National Monument in honor of Booker T. Washington? We cannot hold Booker T. Washington responsible for this error, in all his wizardry; and what other errors of interpretation might there be? For example, how does anyone assess the written words of Booker T. Washington, or his spoken words of 1908 in Hales Ford, with full awareness of Washington's motives, as distinguished from the disbelief of persons living seven decades later? Or, as another example, when does anyone give accuracy to Booker T. Washington's words in *Up From Slavery*, and when do his words fail him? Who makes this decision? In other words, by what independent standard does anyone assess the accuracy of ethnohistorical evidence that is, itself, subject to interpretation? I know of no such standard.

Material culture provides important evidence that limits possible interpretations. The material culture of this analysis is the Burroughs landscape, now and in the past, and the contents of the 1847 deed heretofore unknown. With this deed in place, hypotheses appear and, with appropriate ethnohistorical evidence, support Booker T. Washington's memory of the Burroughs landscape. If we view *Up From Slavery* as a model of resistance that also functions as part of Washington's Christian beliefs, then the words spoken on his visit to Hales Ford are placed within a different perspective. It may be impossible to forgive the non-repenting sinner, as the victim, and *resist* at the same time those social forces that makes the sinner's sins all the more possible; except, perhaps, through the use of clever oratory, parables, and Washington's faith in God.

## Notes

1. This paper is based upon an ethnographic overview and assessment of Booker T. Washington National Monument, funded by Cooperative Agreement 1443CA4210-97-001, Department of Interior and the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, completed in December 1999. An earlier version of this paper was presented in a session entitled "Plantations and Historic Sites: Cultural Interpretations of National Landscapes," at the 58<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the SfAA, San Juan,

Puerto Rico. I am indebted to: Eric Gable, Anna Lawson, Helan Page, Tony Whitehead, Bernadette Williams, Jerry Moles, and Ted Downing for their insightful commentary on earlier drafts of this paper; Becky Joseph, Senior Ethnographer, National Park Service, for encouraging this work; Rebecca Harriet, Superintendent, and her staff at the Booker T. Washington National Monument, Franklin County, Va., for support of this research project; Brian Lee of Bedford County, for his knowledge of Bedford County ethnohistorical sources; and third and fourth generation descendants of Booker T. Washington, who have shown great interest in this research project.

## References Cited

- Act, Senate and House of Representatives  
1956 *Booker T. Washington National Monument Establishment*. Washington D.C., April 2.
- Booker T. Washington National Monument  
1995 *Official Map and Guide*. National Park Service.
- Bearss, Edwin C.  
1969 *The Burroughs Plantation as a Living Historical Farm*. National Park Service.
- Davis, Davis, and Davis  
1953 *Abstract of Title*. Franklin County, VA: Booker T. Washington National Monument Archives.
- Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs  
1956 *Hearings, U.S. House of Representatives*, 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, on H.R. 6904. Washington D.C.
- DuBois, W.E.B.  
1935 *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. New York: Atheneum.
- Franklin, John Hope  
1980 *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Harlan, Louis R.  
1969 Booker T. Washington in Biographical Perspective. *The American Historical Review* 75(6):1581-1599.  
1972 *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Harlan, Louis R., editor.  
 1972 Booker T. Washington, 1856-1915. *The Booker T. Washington Papers*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Linden, Fabian  
 1946 Economic Democracy in the Slave South: An Appraisal of some Recent Views. *Journal of Negro History* 31:140-142.
- Mackintosh, Barry  
 1968a *Agriculture on the Burroughs Plantation*. National Park Service, Booker T. Washington National Monument.  
 1968b *The Hales Ford Community*. National Park Service, Booker T. Washington National Monument.  
 1969a *Booker T. Washington National Monument: An Administrative History*. National Park Service, Booker T. Washington National Monument.  
 1969b *The Burroughs Family: Owners of Booker T. Washington*. National Park Service, Booker T. Washington National Monument.
- Mintz, Sidney W.  
 1958 The Plantation as a Socio-cultural Type. *Plantation Systems of the New World*. Washington D.C.: Pan-American Union.  
 1964 Peasant Market Places and Economic Development in Latin America. *Occasional Paper No. 4. Nashville: The Graduate Center for Latin American Studies*, Vanderbilt University.  
 1966 The Caribbean as a Socio-cultural Area. *Cahiers d'Historie Mondiale* 9:912-937.  
 1974 *Caribbean Transformations*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing.  
 1977 The So-called World System: Local Initiative and Local Response. *Dialectical Anthropology* 2:253-270.  
 1985a *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking Press.  
 1985b From Plantations to Peasantries in the Caribbean. In *Caribbean Contours*, Sidney W. Mintz and Sally Price, editors. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Mintz, Sidney W. editor  
 1974 *Slavery, Colonialism, and Racism*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Owsley, Frank L., and Harriet C. Owsley  
 1940 The Economic Basis of Society in the Late Ante-Bellum South. *Journal of Southern History* 6:24-45.
- Patterson, Orlando  
 1980 *Slavery and Social Death*. Harvard University Press.
- Russel, Robert R.  
 1908 Special Correspondence: To the New York Evening Post. Tuskegee's Principal at His Old House, *The Tuskegee Student*, Oct. 3.  
 1941 The Effects of Slavery upon Nonslaveholders in the Ante-Bellum South. *Agriculture History* 15:112-126.
- Wagley, Charles  
 1960 *The Modern World System: Capitalistic Agriculture and the Origin of the European World Economy in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*. New York: Academic Press.
- Williams, Eric  
 1944 *Capitalism and Slavery*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Wolf, Eric  
 1959 Specific Aspects of Plantation Systems in the New World: Community Sub-cultures and Social Class. In *Plantation Systems of the New World*. Social Science Monograph 7:136-146. Pan American Union.
- Wolf, Eric and Sidney Mintz  
 1957 Haciendas and Plantations in Middle America and the Caribbean. *Social and Economic Studies* 6:380-412.
- Woodman, Harold D.  
 1996 *Slavery and the Southern Economy*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Washington, Booker T.  
 1948[1901] *Up From Slavery*. New York: Airmont.