

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

---

Undergraduate Honors Capstone Projects

Honors Program

---

5-1998

## A Silhouette of Society

Gerri Waters Sorenson

*Utah State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/honors>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Sorenson, Gerri Waters, "A Silhouette of Society" (1998). *Undergraduate Honors Capstone Projects*. 889. <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/honors/889>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Program at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usu.edu).



A SILHOUETTE OF SOCIETY

by

Gerri Waters Sorenson

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

UNIVERSITY HONORS  
WITH DEPARTMENT HONORS

in

History

Approved:

---

Thesis/Project Advisor

---

Department Honors Advisor

---

Director of Honors Program

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, UT

1998

## **A Silhouette of Society**

A study of eighteenth century household  
configurations  
in Alexandria, Virginia

Gerri W. Sorenson

With a land survey completed by George Washington, the Virginia Assembly approved an act on May 11, 1749 which established the town of Alexandria. By 1760 a traveler described the burgeoning city as "a small trading place, situated on an arch of a large circular bay... at one extremity of which is a wharf; at the other a dock for building ships."<sup>1</sup> Annexed as part of the District of Columbia in 1791, a young merchant from London commented around this time that "the town was mainly one street, running northeast and southwest... Wooden houses predominated with a few good ones of brick, but no remarkable buildings worthy of a stranger's attention."<sup>2</sup> Yet, by later in the decade another visitor observed the "vast number of buildings under construction," and declared it "beyond all comparison the handsomest town in Virginia."<sup>3</sup> Positioned at the edge of the Potomac River and at the threshold of the nineteenth century, Alexandria, Virginia, in 1799 stood at the brink of becoming...

Many factors contributed to the apparent neatness of the town. As the population started to swell around 1790, the paving of the streets began. Smooth stones gathered from river bottoms surrounding the area helped to tidy the muck and mire. Cobbled together of various size, color and shape, individual rocks were cemented in solidarity. The effect was lovely, neat and clean, producing a surface of uniformed order in a rough-hewn world. And

---

<sup>1</sup>Ethelyn Cox, Historic Alexandria Virginia Street by Street, (McLean, Virginia 1976), x.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., xiv.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

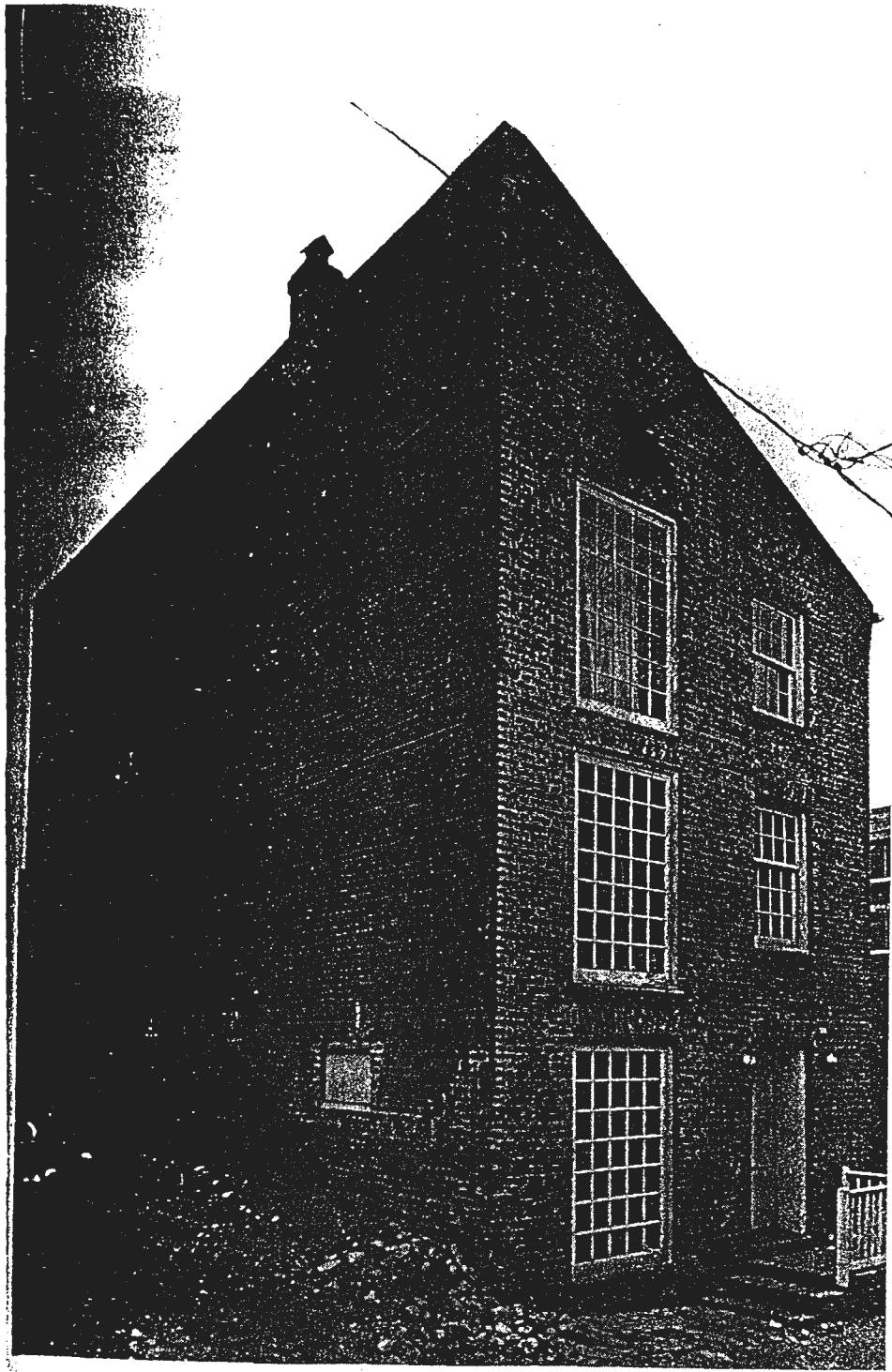
yet, a mere stroll down the street would reveal the uneven slope, the wobbly step, which could be produced by each individual stone.

The effect, nonetheless was charming. Houses lined the edges of the road, as assorted and varied in some instances as the cobblestones. Soon regal Georgian manses emerged, as did humble clapboard and brick row houses. Part of this aggregation was the "flounder House," a two-and-a-half-story dwelling resembling a front-gabled house sliced in half (figure 1). Devoid of windows and doors on their taller sides, they drew comparisons to the flounder, a flatfish whose eyes are situated on its upper side.<sup>4</sup> Irregular in appearance, this form gives rise to speculation. Were these blank, windowless sidewalls an attempt to skirt eighteenth century taxation based on the number of windowpanes a house possessed? Or were the blind sides, which often faced north, perhaps an insulation from the chilling winds. Some argue that the law passed at the time of Alexandria's founding which required landowners to build a structure on a property within two years of its purchase, prompted the hasty construction of these irregular structures.<sup>5</sup> Yet, it is doubtful how formally this law was adhered to or even enforced. Rather, as the bustling port town grew, necessity in many cases would serve as police. Christopher Martin, an architectural historian believes simply, "the Flounder was a common building form that

---

<sup>4</sup>M. H. L., Country Living, Historic Alexandria, March 1995, 45.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



populated urban areas during the 18th and 19th centuries." He contends, "narrow and deep, this freestanding building made maximum use of small, closely spaced lots in densely populated cities such as Alexandria."<sup>6</sup>

Population growth would indeed demand the formation of new structures. In 1790 the total population for Alexandria was 2,748. In less than ten years, by the time the census was taken for 1799, the population had nearly doubled, rising to 5,000 individuals.

By 1799, the buildings and households of Alexandria were as assorted and elaborate as the goods which sustained them. Advertisements in the local newspaper reveal the diversity of both the product and the package. Reading of, "spirits in hogsheads, tobacco in kegs, French brandy in pipes, Jamaica sugar by barrel, castile soap in boxes, raisins in kegs, molasses in barrels, lump sugar in lots, hardware in boxes, and china assorted handsomely in cases,"<sup>7</sup> items juxtapose against imagery. As varied as the commodities bundled, bunched and shipped into Alexandria were the household configurations and the structures which contained them.

An examination of census records for 1799, reveals that households in Alexandria were more than family. Complex arrangements of men and women, free and slave, black and white, combined to form a structure for society. These variegated patterns contained various possibilities. Within this multi-

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Alexandria Advertiser, December 1800.

layered social and economic organization, conditions exist for connection and tension, strength and weakness, vulnerability and power. Even as the cobblestone streets were lined with various sized and shaped buildings, the households within the structures, were diverse, irregular, and complex.

Handwritten census records from the second ward of Alexandria, Virginia taken in 1799, detail the structure of a household by listing: name of head of household, (or housekeeper); companions of housekeeper, (such as wife, co-housekeeper, mother or sister); occupation of housekeeper; number of children; number of boarders; occupation of boarders; number of servants; number of apprentices; number of adult slaves; number of slaves under the age of sixteen; total number of slaves; and the total number of the household. The record also designates blacks and mulattos (figure 2). Though the census of the second Ward records only a section of Alexandria's population in 1799, with 3,066 members of the total population of 5,000 residing in the second ward, 61% of the population is nonetheless a fairly representative portion (see table 1).

Within this slice of society were found: 454 male heads of households; 57 female heads of households; 422 wives; 987 children; 319 boarders; 177 apprentices; 273 servants; 190 adult slaves, (over the age of 16); 177 young slaves, (under the age of 16). Yet, what can these numbers tell us about households in Alexandria? Statistically, this record creates a mere silhouette of society. But with examination and questioning, distinguishing connections and contradictions, patterns emerge which give mass



John Gould & Wife	Store keeper	3							7
Wm. Cleaver & Wife	Hickster	1							3
Karah Barber	d.	3							5
Francis P. & Wife	Metaller	2							6
John Boyer & Wife	Cooper	7	John White	Cooper					12
Thos. Crandell & Wife	Baker	6	Frederick Kirkman	Carpenter					
			Saml. Crandell	Baker	2	1	1	2	13
			Mary Brown						
James Brown & Wife	Boarding House	1	Wm. Pomeroy	retailer					3
John Walkom & Wife	Retailer	4	E. Pomeroy	d.	2				10
Wm. Throun & Wife	Cooper	3	Alex. Shaw & Wife	Carpenter					7
Polly Smith (Mulletts)	Washer Woman		Minnie Buckner	Washerwoman					2
Narnaby Davis & Wife	Carpenter								2
Jacob Beutzell & Wife	Blacksmith	3							6
Benj. Langston & Wife	Painter	5							8
John Craddock & Wife	Hairdreyer	1	Ann Horwell						4
Card	Boarding house		L. G. M. Adair Stevens	Physician	1	1			5
			Pasil Mager	d.	1	1			5
Morris Hurley & Wife	Bricklayer	2							5
Geo. Nutter & Wife	Boarding house								5
Thos. Mezany & Wife	Retailer	1							4
Wm. Maxwell & Wife	d.								2
Wm. Lowe & Wife	Tavern Keeper	2							4
Andrew Wales									2
Thos. Locke & Wife	Measurer of Lumber	1	Wm. Loabel	Retailer		1			5
Wm. Toller & Wife	Watter	2	Washington	Watter	1				10
Thos. Sims & Wife	Retailer	1	John		2				

and weight to the form.

Clearly, the experience of heading a household was primarily a male experience in Alexandria with 87% of the heads of households being male. Yet, not so easily distinguished, was how this experience varied from individual to individual, household to household, shaping the complexities of the whole. Replete with variables, wealth, health, age, and race---many factors overlapped and crisscrossed adding strength and tension to the system. And what of a woman's experience? Of this world dominated by men, 93% of all male household heads would be paired with a woman. Designated within the census records simply as *wife*, was this existence, this identity, this sphere for a woman truly so clear? And what of the community forged by race, defined through color? This world delineated to appear as black and white, bonded and free, was too filled with distinctions in which gradations emerge as *congianti*.<sup>8</sup>

The very conditions which defined a community and created networks, so too inhibited and prevented unity as well. Though cobbled together in an effort to create an orderly structure, this was a world not nearly so neat, an uneven surface on which to tread.

Taking a stroll through the 1799 census reveals that the average household in Alexandria contained 6 souls. Yet even this figure is deceiving. Complicated by slavery, those households which held no slaves averaged 5 persons; while within the household structures containing slavery, the average household

---

<sup>8</sup>The substitution of a change in hue for a change in value.

Table 1  
 Population Profile  
 The Second Ward of Alexandria, VA, ca. 1799

Sub-groups	Total	Percent
Male heads of household	454	14.81
Female heads of household	57	1.86
Wives	422	13.77
Children	987	32.20
Boarders	319	10.41
Apprentices	177	5.77
Servants	273	8.91
Adult slaves (over age 16)	190	6.20
Young slaves (under age 16)	177	5.77
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3065</b>	

Source:

size was 10. Double the size of a household not embracing slavery, these figures suggest that households existed within households. And yet, how complete was the whole within the system? Very likely households within the condition of slavery were highly fragmented. Perhaps husband and wife would live together with children, yet more likely they did not. Conditions of wealth and race often precluded kinship. Even within free black households, the figures seem to suggest the splintering of slavery. Whereas white households were overwhelmingly headed by men; with only 11% headed by women, in free black households, women however, headed 43% of all free black households (see table 2). Were these women acquainted with slavery, pre-conditioned for a matrilineal role affording them more independence in a free white society? Or were these women still bound by slavery? Of the free black women heading households in Alexandria, 75% had children. Did some of these women likewise have husbands, who were yet bound out to another household? White women likewise headed households without a husband present, yet in comparison less of these households (45%) had children. Perhaps the disproportionate number of free black women who headed households, is not evidence of matrilineal ordering at all, but of the fissures and disruptions imposed by conditions of slavery on patriarchal families.

Similarly, of all free black households headed by men, only one of these households did not have a wife. James Nutt, a laborer, was the only single free black male household head listed in the second ward census. How did the experience of James

Table 2  
 Population Profile  
 The Second Ward of Alexandria, VA, ca. 1799

	Head of Household	With Wives	Single	W/ Children Only
White				
Male	426	414 (97.18)	9 (2.11)	98 (23.00)
Female	46	0 (0.00)	7 (15.22)	15 (32.61)
Combined	472	414 (87.71)	16 (3.39)	113 (23.94)
Black/Mulatto				
Male	28	27 (96.43)	1 (3.57)	13 (46.43)
Female	12	0 (0.00)	✓ 1 (8.33)	5 (41.67)
Combined	40	27 (67.50)	2 (5.00)	18 (45.00)
Total	512	441 (86.13)	18 (3.52)	131 (25.59)

Source:

Nutt compare to other male household heads in

Alexandria in 1799, and relate to the experience of free black females? How was his singular experience nonetheless similar to other individuals, male and female, at the margin of society?

In order to explore these questions, the census record will be used as a map of sorts of Alexandria. Conducted systematically, census takers walked up one street and down another as they recorded the household population in 1799. Though we have no idea of street names within this survey, or what exact system they followed, with scrutiny some of this mystery unfolds. Step by step, though wobbly, we can follow the path of the census.

With use of materials, such as Historic Alexandria, Virginia. Street by Street, compiled by Evelelyn Cox, this survey of existing early buildings can give a sense of where the census taker may have been. With the help of the database, each household was entered into the computer in order and given a number helpful for tracking patterns and clusters. For instance, household #235 lists John Korn, baker, as housekeeper, living with his wife, six children, one boarder, Jacob Wisemiller (occupation baker), four apprentices, one servant, three adult slaves, and three young slaves. Just the sheer numbers within this household would suggest a measure of wealth that this household enjoyed, or at least the size of a structure required to accommodate twenty individuals. Within the architectural survey, a four-story brick building is pictured (figure 3).

Located at the corner of St. Asaph and Prince, this edifice was built before 1796 by John Korn and Jacob Wisemiller, biscuit bakers.<sup>9</sup> Deed records indicate that this building did not change ownership until 1832. With this information a sense of place begins to be established with the help of the census.

Yet this data also reveals an indication of the importance that boarders had in eighteenth century households. Though John Korn is listed as the household head in the census records, and Jacob Wisemiller as boarder, if these two individuals purchased this manufacturing building together, beyond the definitions prescribed by the term, boarder, Jacob Wisemiller was likewise a business partner. It is not known whether he was an equal partner, yet he would certainly be a significant figure involved in a large baking industry. This raises the question of the significance of boarders in Alexandria households. Who were they? In what ways did boarders form connections within society? Economically? Socially? In what areas did they create tensions, rather than unity in the system?

Men and women, married and single, boarders intriguingly appear by name and by occupation in Alexandria. This simple difference, seems to imply a level of importance of its own. Aside from children, boarders are the only category in the census records experienced within every free household structure; black and white, male and female (see table 3). Though boarders did not exist in every household, one in three households had boarders. Whereas in free black households, no servants, apprentices, or

---

<sup>9</sup>Cox, Street by Street, 130.





slaves are listed for any household headed by men or women. A form begins to appear, suggesting that in a system which exploited labor of an enslaved black population, in which indentured servitude and apprenticeship were a form of poor relief, boarding may have been an inversion of this system. Turned around, boarders were not owned themselves, nor did they assume the risks of ownership. Sheltered and fed, household owners held the responsibility for maintaining the household. Boarders certainly benefitted from the labor of the household in many ways, through wives, servants, slaves and others.

Yet the interplay exists, did the existence of the household serve to benefit the boarder, or did the boarder exist for the good of the household? Within this cobbled world, it seems likely that both conditions were likely to apply. Yet undoubtedly problems were also created in households intermingled with men and women not related to one another. Though it appears from the census records that boarders were crucial in Alexandria society in the late eighteenth century and critical to the economy of the household as well. Of all occupations listed in the second ward census, from butcher, to baker, to candlestick maker, of all households with boarders, 54% of all boarders held occupations identical to or related directly to the household head's occupation (see table 4). Logically the most common occupation for boarders in Alexandria corresponds directly to the most common occupation for household heads as well. Seventy five household heads in the second ward were merchants, nearly one fifth of the total white male headed households. Of this

predominate group, 64% also had boarders. Of those merchants with boarders, 67% of those boarders were either merchants or clerks. These percentages indicate that boarders enjoyed the benefits of a household as did a household benefit from boarders. Networks and clustering often emerged within households for economic benefit.

This clustering of occupation was also manifest house by house, street by street. Within one series of the census record, listed numerically from #37 to #54, thirteen of these eighteen household heads were merchants. Of these thirteen merchants, nine had boarders which were clerks. Intertwined and connected, these merchants and clerks, property owners and boarders, forged an identity of community which has become somewhat of a legacy. It seems likely that these eighteen households are part of the contingency which even to the present day is referred to as Merchant's Row (figure 4).

Yet, Merchant's Row was certainly comprised of much more than merchants. These households were recorded in the census records directly after E.C. Dick, physician, and Aaron Hewes, hatter. A 1795 insurance policy covered a two-story building owned by Aaron Hewes, with a sign reading *Hatter's Shop built of wood* on the front.<sup>10</sup> This structure is located on the 200 block section of Prince street. The beautiful brick townhouses which adjoin Aaron Hewes Hatter's Shop built of wood, are believed by some to still be the finest 18th century street facade which exists in Alexandria. More than handsome brick townhouses gracing

---

<sup>10</sup>Cox, Street by Street, 124.



Prince Street, these elegant structures, owned by merchants, contained vast and varied contents in the eighteenth century.

Incredibly, this community encompassed the lives of 208 individuals. The average sized household residing within this span, was 11 people per household. None of the households within this clustering would be considered "nuclear" or comprised of only blood kin, and over half of these households also had slaves. Within these eighteen households, containing an amalgamation of merchants and clerks, every household, except one, had a wife. Listed simply, recorded without names, here a community of women also existed. How integral were these women to the economy of the merchant community?

Merchants, boarders, clerks, children, apprentices, servants, and slaves... some were related by marriage, others by economy. Within this complex network, very likely the management of many of these 205 individuals was under the supervision of a woman listed plainly as, wife. Of these 205 souls, only two women's names appear. One, Catherine Whitcroft, occupation not listed, was a boarder in the household of Alexander Kerr. The other name is the only household head listed within this row of merchants without a wife, Hannah Griffith, a boardinghouse proprietor. The census records detail Hannah Griffith's own household as containing 4 children, 1 apprentice, 2 servants, and 22 boarders. The presence of this lone woman may at first glance appear to add confusion within this clustering and arranging of economics and gender, yet upon examination, even this departure applies to the pattern. Each of the 22 boarders in Hannah

Griffith's boardinghouse were merchants. Thus, Merchant's Row was likely a community of at least eighteen households, containing some 43 merchants, 51 children, 49 slaves, 25 servants, 11 other boarders, 8 apprentices, 17 wives and one lone female household head, Hannah Griffith.

The household configurations which comprised this community were similarly shaped and molded in some areas, assorted and uneven in others. Households were complex networks, often clustered by economy, and cluttered with boarders, apprentices, servants and augmented with fractured slave families. These augmented families presented a means of accommodation to urban life, a solution for limited space within a rapidly growing area. In some instances, extended households were a means of ordering society, a welfare system for poor relief, a place for poor dependents. John Modell and Tamara K Hareven in their study of urbanization propose that malleable households were an adaptation to chaotic housing circumstances, confusion, economic considerations, and a means of socialization in which people settled together within groups sharing commonalty of ethnicity and occupation.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, the opportunity for extended households could also be effected by wealth and life cycle of the housekeeper. Households in Alexandria which do not extended to include slaves, apprentices, boarder or servants, are prevalent among the

---

<sup>11</sup>John Modell and Tamara K. Hareven, *Urbanization and the Malleable Household: An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families*.

marginalized section of society, blacks and females. While only 23% of free white male headed households would be considered a nuclear unit, or comprised only of parents and children, this percentage rises to 38% in female headed households, then climbs to 45% in free black households (table 5). Though the census does not record ages of housekeepers, this factor may also be a consideration for some households which have a nuclear structure.

When households in Alexandria are comprised solely of family members, networks of economic support still emerge. Though this clustering may not be quite as apparent as in Merchant's Row, neighborhoods nonetheless appear in the second ward which were comprised solely of nuclear families. Smaller groups typify these bundles as do the occupations of the housekeeper. One example is of three laborers, Lyndon Cattleton, Josiah Ward, Nathaniel Wallace, which appear in a row in the census. Each have a wife, each have two children. No clear pattern emerges, but these communities are often packaged into groups of three or four families, comprised solely of parents and children, occupations of household heads varies from grocers to blacksmiths and shoemakers. Which side of the street these households were on become increasingly difficult to trace. Perhaps the street itself is not fully formed. Emerging in alleys, in sheds, crude tenements were constructed in the margins of society. Often wedged in the census between prominent names, the record lists, P. L. Marsteller, vendue master, his advertisements frequent the Alexandria Gazette auctioning everything from boats to buildings. Near by and next on the census is listed Colonel George Gilpin.

	Head of Household	With Wives	Single	With Children Only
White				
Male	426	414 (97.18)	9 (2.11)	98 (23.00)
Female	46	0 (0.00)	7 (15.22)	15 (32.61)
Combined	472	414 (87.71)	16 (3.39)	113 (23.94)
Black/Mulatto				
Male	28	27 (96.43)	1 (3.57)	13 (46.43)
Female	12	0 (0.00)	1 (8.33)	5 (41.67)
Combined	40	27 (67.50)	2 (5.00)	18 (45.00)
Total	512	441 (86.13)	18 (3.52)	131 (25.59)

Gilpin served with the Revolutionary troops, and as a pall bearer at George Washington's funeral. His obituary praised his "personal exertion towards the improvement of the

town."<sup>12</sup> The engraved map of Alexandria which he created as the town's leading surveyor in 1799 promotes this desire (figure 6). Yet no map or chart can quite explain where the census leads to next. The record veers abruptly to Sarah. No more. The bare essence of her name implies much. Two children. A mulatto, her occupation is listed as 'washerwoman.' Legacies and categories. What of the household experiences of George Gilpin and Peter Marsteller. Friends? Associates? Did they exist to support one another, or did they have wealth enough to support themselves? What of Sarah?

We know simply that Sarah was a washerwoman, as were 9 of the 57 female heads of households in Alexandria (see table 6). Black or white, this was the most common occupation listed for women . Washing dirty linens. Often producing a situation referred to as *Washerwoman's hand*, a condition characteristic of cholera which was produced in the hands of washerwomen by the combination of the soap and soda. Other occupations listed for women were: Boardinghouse (3), Milliner (2), Grocer (1), Tayloress (1), Huckster (1), Cookshop (1), Midwife (1). Yet by far the most common designation for women in the Alexandria second ward census was no occupation at all. Of the 57 women listed as the heads of households in the records, 67% have no

---

<sup>12</sup>Cox, Street by Street, 65.



occupation listed. Implications for women without occupations in Alexandria are varied. Census takers may have simply been careless in their records, or the woman could have been widowed and independently wealthy, though if this were the situation there would likely be servants or slaves in the household as a signpost. Perhaps she was in poverty, without worn and barely scrapping by. Often in these circumstances, women would hawk various items on the streets, muffins, tarts, etc., yet without a formal license. Or perhaps this woman on the street might be selling herself.

This world of washerwomen and merchants does not seem so tidy. Clustered together at the top of one page appear ship captains and merchants, the clerk of the county, and minister of the gospel: John Harper, James Lawrason, Benjamin Shreve, William Paton, and James Muir. Then surely and surprisingly, the next twenty-two household heads are bundled into a vastly different category. All but 2 of the 22 are either female or free black, or both. Ten of these household heads (45%) are listed as free black male laborers. Nine of the twenty two (41%) are households headed by females, 3 black, 6 white. None of the female headed households designate an occupation. This grouping of individuals and households was likely at the perimeters of society economically. Bunched together they could foster somewhat of an identity, a community, linking a support system of their own. Yet, within these links of support, tension was likewise produced.

Interspersed sporadically throughout the census can be found

**REMARKS.**

ALEXANDRIA lays in *Latitude 38. 50.* North East & West of the City of Washington.

The *Arms Union is Water* 50 feet Washington 15 Franklin 100 all the rest are 66 feet Wide.

The Squares are 333 feet 2 In. North is South is 456 feet 10 In. East is West except the Square between Union is Water Street which is 300 East and West of the River.

The Channel at Alexandria is 1800 1564 to 7 Fathoms at Low Water.

1. *M. Fairfax's House.*

2. *Cameron's Mills.*

3. *M. Lee's House & Episcopal Church.*

4. *the Market Square 6.7. Presbyterian & Methodist Meeting Houses.*

8. *Portes for a Catholic & a Dutch Lutheran Church.*

10. *the Quaker Meeting House.*

**PLAN.**

of the TOWN of  
**ALEXANDRIA.**  
in the District of Columbia.

1798  
Scale 100 to an Inch.

Magnetic Variation 0. 15 East

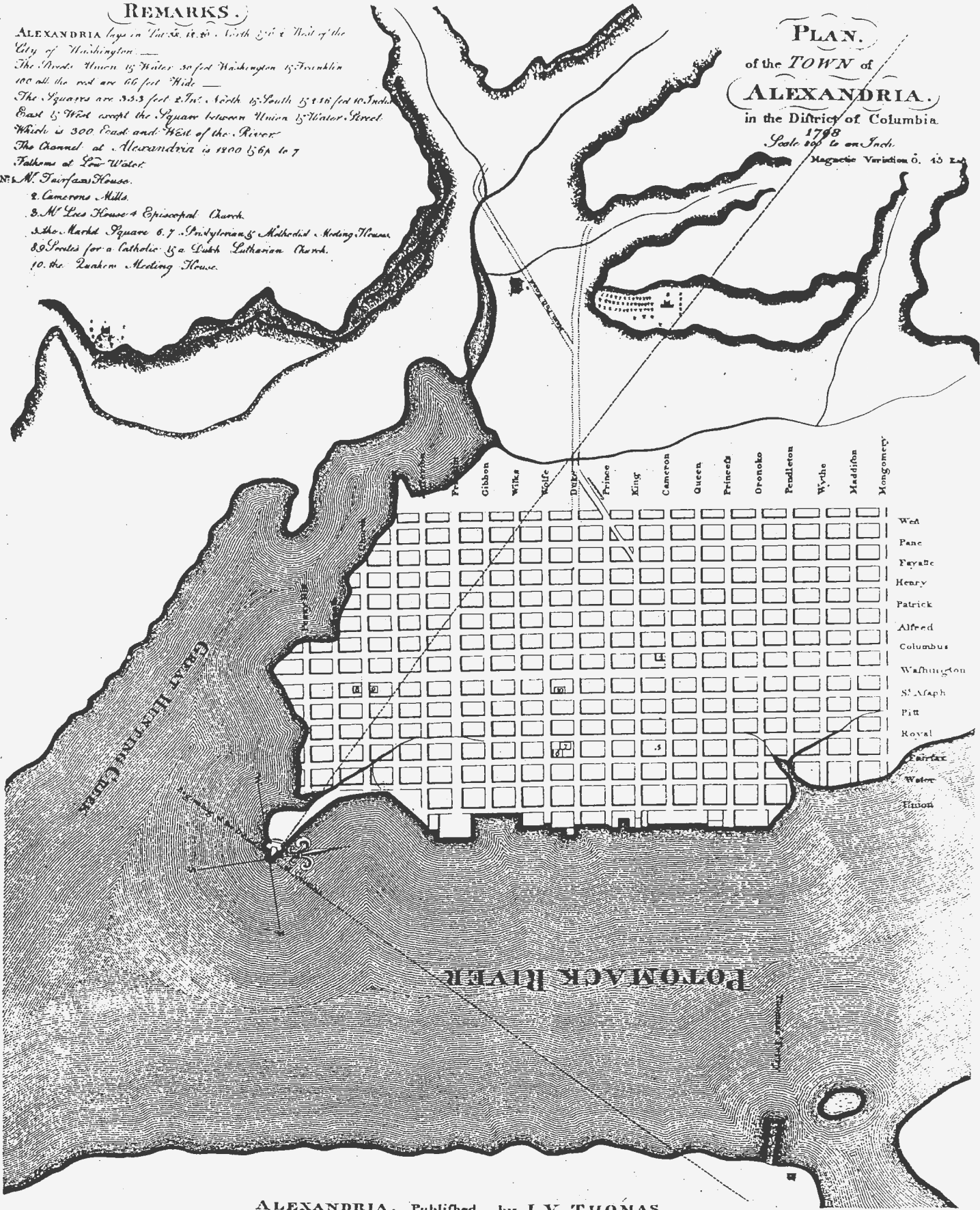


Table 6  
 Women's Occupations  
 The Second Ward of Alexandria, VA, ca. 1799

Occupation	Black	White	Total
Washer woman	4	5	9
Grocer		1	1
Milliner		2	2
Tayloress		1	1
Huckster		1	1
Boardinghouse		3	3
Cookshop		1	1
Midwife		1	1
Not Listed	8	30	38

anomalies, a single individual with no apparent connections. Most single white males are listed nearby other males with a similar occupation. Single women, however, often had no occupation listed in the census which help to draw connections. These individuals at the margins of society were often those most vulnerable, and viewed as dangerous. Women overwhelmingly were wives in this society. Alone, they were deviant. They threatened the orderly arrangement. Due to this variance from the norm, they too, often clustered in groups in the census records. Occasionally a names emerges apart from other women, such as Elizabeth Kelly. She is listed as single, without children, slaves, servants or boarders. There is no listing for an occupation. A woman isolated, she is surrounded in the census by laborers, one, a white male, the other a free black. Looking farther in the record reveals nearby, a shoemaker, blockmaker, mariner, merchant, carpenter... each of these male household heads also had wives. What was the experience of living alone for Elizabeth Kelly? Surrounded by wives, was she drawn into this woman's world of connections and identity? Did these complex household structures which formed networks of support and identity also create tension and prevent unity at the same time? The only record which hints at the connections of Elizabeth Kelly appear in the court abstracts on September 2, 1799, which charge Allen Davis with "living in adultery with E. Kelly."<sup>13</sup>

Household structures formed supporting links within

---

<sup>13</sup>Alexandria court abstracts, 2 September 1799, provided by Michael L. Nicholls.

communities, and yet create unresolved tensions at the same time. Patterns and clusters emerge to allow for an opening into the portal of late eighteenth century households, Yet, as the deviant figure emerges, where the system overlaps and the lines are not so neat, form begins to take shape within the silhouette of the statistics. Perhaps this tension too is part of a pattern. Was Elizabeth Kelly, a single female woman living alone, a deviant, dangerous member of society, or was this system dangerous for her? AB these networks of community were forged within and between households, perhaps fissures and fragmenting occurred as well. Though complex systems were constructed to impose order on an irregular world, this attempt at ordering and connecting was nonetheless incomplete, replete with unresolved tensions.

Examining the household configurations of Alexandria exposes the possible unity and fractures within this eighteenth century society. Through analysis of the composition of these households in 1799, we can begin to explore the possibilities of what influenced and effected how these structures varied in size and shape, where connections were formed and also where the arrangement was not so neat. The experiences within this society varied from individual to individual, from household to household, shaping the many complexities of the whole. Replete with variables, wealth, health age, gender and race, many factors shaped the experience of individuals in Alexandria.

This paper has explored many possibilities within the pages of the second ward census, but what of James Nutt, laborer, this the only single free black household head listed in the record?

Was his experience shaped by the same influences of single white males, or of single females? It does not appear that his pattern fits the form. Whereas single white males in Alexandria were often grouped together with other male boarders, or clustered in communities by common occupations, due perhaps to age, life cycle and economics. James Nutt does not seem to fit with these possibilities. Rather, it appears that his experience may be in some ways more similar to that of single black females. His name appears noticeably isolated on the census record wedged between William Wilson and John and Thomas Vowell, prominent names and figures in Alexandria in 1799. The connection which James Nutt may have had to this upper level of society appears in court records from April 1801, over a year after the 1799 census record was taken. The court record states simply, "Violette Nutt, manumitted April 1801 by Ellis Price."<sup>14</sup>

The variables and factors effecting household configurations in eighteenth century Alexandria were filled with complexities. An examination of census records for 1799 reveals that households in Alexandria were more than family. Complex arrangements of men and women, free and slave, black and white, combined to form a structure of society. Even as the cobblestone streets were lined with various sized and shaped buildings, the households within these structures were likewise diverse and irregular. Brick and wooden houses rising along the streets gave form to this emerging urbanization, yet the structure of this burgeoning town took shape beyond buildings. Statistics within the second ward census

---

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, April 1801.

records reveal a silhouette of this society. Forms and values begin to take shape by examining both the connections and tensions, where the patterns emerge, and where lines are not so neat.

Table 4  
Occupational Profile  
The Second Ward of Alexandria, VA, ca. 1799

Househead Occupation	Total	With Boarders	Boarders w/ related occupation	With apprentice	With servants	With slaves	With 1-2 slaves	Over two slaves
Apothecary	2				2	1		1
Attorney at Law	2	2	2		2	1		1
Baker	11	5	2	4	7	4	2	2
Beerhouse	1	1	1		1			
Blacksmith	12	1	1	2	1			
Blockmaker	2			1	2			
Boardinghouse	7	4		2	4	1	1	
Bookseller/ Stationer	1	1				1	1	
Brassfounder	1							
Brewer	1				1			
Bricklayer	13	2	1	5	5	1		1
Brickmaker	3	1	1	1	3			
Broker	1	1	1		1			
Butcher	3							
Cabinet Maker	2			2	2	1	1	
Calico Printer	1	1						
Carpenter	40	11	5	15	7	3	2	1
Carter	1	1						
Cashier of Bank	1	1			1	1	1	
Chairmaker	2	1	1	1		1	1	
Clerk of County	1	1	1			1		
Combmaker	2			1	1			1
Counciller	1					1		1
Cookshop	1							
Cooper	14	5	4	5	5	3	3	
Coppersmith	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Cryer	1				1			
Currier	1							
Drayman	11	2	2		2	1	1	
Druggist/ Apothecary	1	1			1			
Farmer	2					1	1	
Flour Inspector	1	1	1			1		1
Goldsmith	1				1			
Grocer	21	4	4	1	6	6	5	1
Hairdresser	2	1		1				
Hatter	10	4	4	5	2			
House and Ship Joiner	1	1		1	1	1	1	
Huckster	4				2			
Innkeeper	1				1			
Ironmonger	3	2	2	1	2			
Labourer	38	8						
Lumber Merchant	1	1			1	1	1	
Mariner	7	1			1			
Measurer of Lumber	1				1			
Merchant	75	48	32	15	51	41	16	25
Midwife	1				1			
Milliner	2	1			2			
Millstone Maker	1				1			
Minister of the Gospel	1	1			1			
Musician	2	1						
Nailmaker	2	2	2		1	1		1
Notary Publick	1					1		1
Notitised	60	18	**	5	7	13	7	6



Office of the Customs	1					1	1	
Painter	2			2				
Physician	4	4	2	1	2	4		4
Plasterer	4	1		1		1		1
Postmaster	1	1			1			
Potter	1	1			1			
Printer	1	1		1	1			
Retailer	9	3	2	2	3	1	1	
Saddler	4	1	1	2	1			
Sailmaker	4	1		2	1			
Sausage Maker	1							
Schribner	1			1	1			
Sea Captain	10	1		1	7	2		2
Ship Carpenter	2							
Sexton	1							
Shipbuilder	13	1		3	3	2		2
Shoemaker	16	3	1	1	1			
Shoestore	2	1		2	2	1	1	
Silversmith	3	1	1	2	2	1	1	
Store Keeper	1				1			
Tallow Chandler	1				1	1		1
Tanner	1	1	1	1	1			
Tavernkeeper	1							
Taylor	15	4	4	4	3	2	1	1
Taylororess	1	1						
Taylor/Habitmaker	1			1	1			
Teacher	2	1			2			
Teastore	1	1			1	1	1	
Tobacconist	1							
Town Sergeant	1	1				1		1
Tuner	2			2	2			
Vendue Master	1				1	1	1	
Washerwoman	9	3	1		1			
Watchmaker	2			2	2			
Waterman	3	1		1		1		1
Wharfbuilder	1							
Wheelwright	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Wholesale Merchant	1	1				1	1	
Total	512	172	93	102	175	110	54	56