

# David Patrick McKenzie

w o r k s a m p l e s



## Leaf, Land, and People

*Worldwide demand for tobacco encouraged European colonists to grow the crop almost exclusively. Planters sold it to Europe, and bought goods in exchange.*

Life in colonial Prince George's County revolved around growing tobacco. Tobacco brought opportunity for some. Planters saw promise in the county's abundant, fertile land. Tobacco cultivation is labor intensive, and planters forced enslaved Africans and African Americans to produce the cash crop.

Tobacco's growing cycle dictated work on a small farm. Year round, everyone – free and slave, man and woman, young and old – was involved in planting, cultivating, cutting, or curing tobacco.



### SOCIAL LIFE

Each small farm's inhabitants had a great deal of contact with others, at least nearby. Planter men socialized while doing business. Women regularly visited their neighbors. Although their mobility was restricted, slaves ran errands for their masters. Sometimes they visited friends and family.



### TOBACCO AND THE LAND

By 1775, families had subdivided the land over several generations. In most families, farms couldn't be further subdivided and remain profitable. A lack of available fertile land had driven prices too high. White farmers starting out looked elsewhere. After decades of growth, Prince George's County began to lose population.



### WORK ON SMALL FARMS

While large plantations may have had dozens or hundreds of slaves, small farmers typically owned one or two people. Often on small farms, masters and slaves worked side-by-side. During harvest time, especially, people worked long hours. The crop needed to be cut quickly to ensure its quality.



## Crop as Cash

Growing tobacco was colonial Prince George's County's dominant industry. Its success or failure brought prosperity or ruin. Tobacco leaves served as money. Planters had to sell the tobacco they produced to Britain. They exchanged it for manufactured British goods, at least in good years. In bad years, everyone made do with less.



What caused bad years? Sometimes taxation and tobacco inspection laws cost planters their profits. At other times, low demand for tobacco reduced prices. Sometimes weather and pests damaged or destroyed crops.



FROM THEIR HOME TO YOURS  
**WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

Today many farmers rely on corn, soybeans, or wheat as their single main crop. Now, as in colonial times, reliance on a single crop can be bad for the environment and risky for the farmer. Learn more about different kinds of farming at the Ecosystem Farm. Talk to a farmer at a farmers' market.

## COLONIAL-ERA TOBACCO FARMING

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My role: Adaptation of curator's summary into exhibition text, image selection