Visualizing Objects, Places, and Spaces: A Digital Project Handbook

"Shoemaker Will"

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Team

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Project URL

<https://arcg.is/1CTL5T1>

Project Abstract

In the unpublished Mount Vernon financial ledger from 1794-1796, Washington's former valet, William Lee, appears unexpectedly as "Shoemaker Will." His life as a shoemaker is little-known and researched relative to his years as Washington's valet, so it took me a bit to draw the connection between "Shoemaker Will" and William Lee. By analyzing his representation in financial data, I constructed a narrative of Lee's life after his role as valet to fill archival absences. I used financial documents and existing histories on Lee from the the [Papers of George Washington](#) and [George Washington's Mount Vernon](#). I used [Google Sheets](#) to collect metadata referring to Lee, shoemaking, and the enslaved community at Mount Vernon and to analyze the amount of shoes made, the volume of materials, who received shoes, and the broader financial value of his labor. I used this analysis to explore Lee's quality of life and work, which I then translated through [Canva](#), [Tableau](#), and [StoryMaps](#) to make accessible to not only those who are familiar with archival research, but to the general public as well.

The graph above shows only those transactions that mention the names of enslaved individuals. Lee ("Shoemaker Will") alone accounts for over one-fourth of these mentions: making him the most prominent enslaved person in the one-third of the ledger that is connected to the enslaved community.

As demonstrated by the chart above, from the years 1794 to 1796, Lee made 554 pairs of shoes total. The overwhelming majority of shoes were made in 1794 and 1796, with only 33 pairs of shoes made in 1795, which supports the point that enslaved individuals received a new pair of shoes every other year.

The visual above shows the approximate distribution of shoes per farm in each of the years 1794 and 1796, and thus are rough estimates of the enslaved communities at each farm. 109 of the transaction lines recording completed shoes do not mention locations, and so were not placed within the farm categories.

Time Needed

When did you begin this project? When did you complete this project?

Time Span: October 1, 2019 - September 26, 2020

Length: 1 year

Outcomes

What is the outcome of the project?

This project is published alongside other visualizations on the [Papers of George Washington site](#), resources that have been developed to increase accessibility and readability of digitally published documents.

Resources

What tools, resources, programs, or equipment did you use for this project?

- [Google Sheets](#) for data gathering.
- [ArcGIS Story Maps](#) as a narrative tool.
- [Canva](#) as a graphic editor and for its design tools.
- [Tableau Public](#) for creating information visualizations.

Funding

Please describe any costs incurred for this project, and (if relevant) how you secured funding for these costs.

I used free versions of Canva and Tableau for my project development. ArcGIS StoryMaps is hosted by UVa Libraries. Thus, I used predominantly free resources and tools, and the University supported the server space required to publish this work.

Workflow

Please give an overview of the workflow or process you followed to execute this project, including time estimates where possible.

I began by editing the pre-existing transcription of the Mount Vernon Ledger 1794-1796, by George Washington, which took approximately three months. I checked the transcription for accuracy and added metadata fields to the data. Next, I collected data and general analytics from the ledger itself to begin visual analysis of the ledger's contents, along with beginning to gather external research about the enslaved community at Mount Vernon. This process took roughly another three months; I spent a couple of hours per week adding to my research. During the successive five months, I narrowed my focus to developing the narrative of the StoryMap by designing specific content and visuals, along with writing accompanying prose and analysis.

Challenges & Opportunities

What, if anything, changed between beginning your project and its current/final form?

At the beginning of my project, I was primarily focused on the narrative story of William Lee and how his personal life showed through the data points presented in the financial ledgers. By the end of the project, I found myself much more interested in the

data calculation and representation that clarified specific details and numeric structure of the general life of enslaved individuals at Mount Vernon—I particularly enjoyed creating many graphs for this project.

Is there anything specific you wish you had known when beginning your project that might help other people to know?

Investigating proper platforms of presentation prior to project development is worth the time and energy it takes, and the more meticulous attention to detail given in that stage of developing a certain project carries to future projects as well. I also had to teach myself how to use a majority of the tools I used to create this project, so I will be taking advantage of specific training and skills development as I prepare for future projects.

Next Steps

Do you have any plans to follow up on this project or work on something similar in the future?

Yes: this project inspired my second narrative project based on George Washington's financial documents. It continued the focus on what they revealed about Mount Vernon's enslaved community, [following the story of the family of an enslaved carpenter named Isaac](#). With this first project, I sought to depict the living conditions of the enslaved community of laborers at Mount Vernon through the lens of William Lee's life. Though I used the same style of highlighting one individual's life for my second project, I focused on different themes to reveal more of the emotional connections and experiences of enslaved individuals at Mount Vernon.

Publications & Presentations

Pannell, Madeline. "Introducing Isaac and Kitty, Two Individuals Enslaved at Mount Vernon." *The Washington Papers*, 26 Feb 2021. <https://washingtonpapers.org/introducing-isaac-and-kitty-two-individuals-enslaved-at-mount-vernon/>.

Pannell, Madeline. "Isaac, Enslaved Carpenter." *The Washington Papers*, February 2021. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/10a76a35089f4d8187aef7cb2f34004c>.

Pannell, Madeline. "'Shoemaker Will': William Lee." *The Washington Papers*, August 2020. <https://uvalibrary.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=70f713470e324842a6c9ef4aae82507d>.