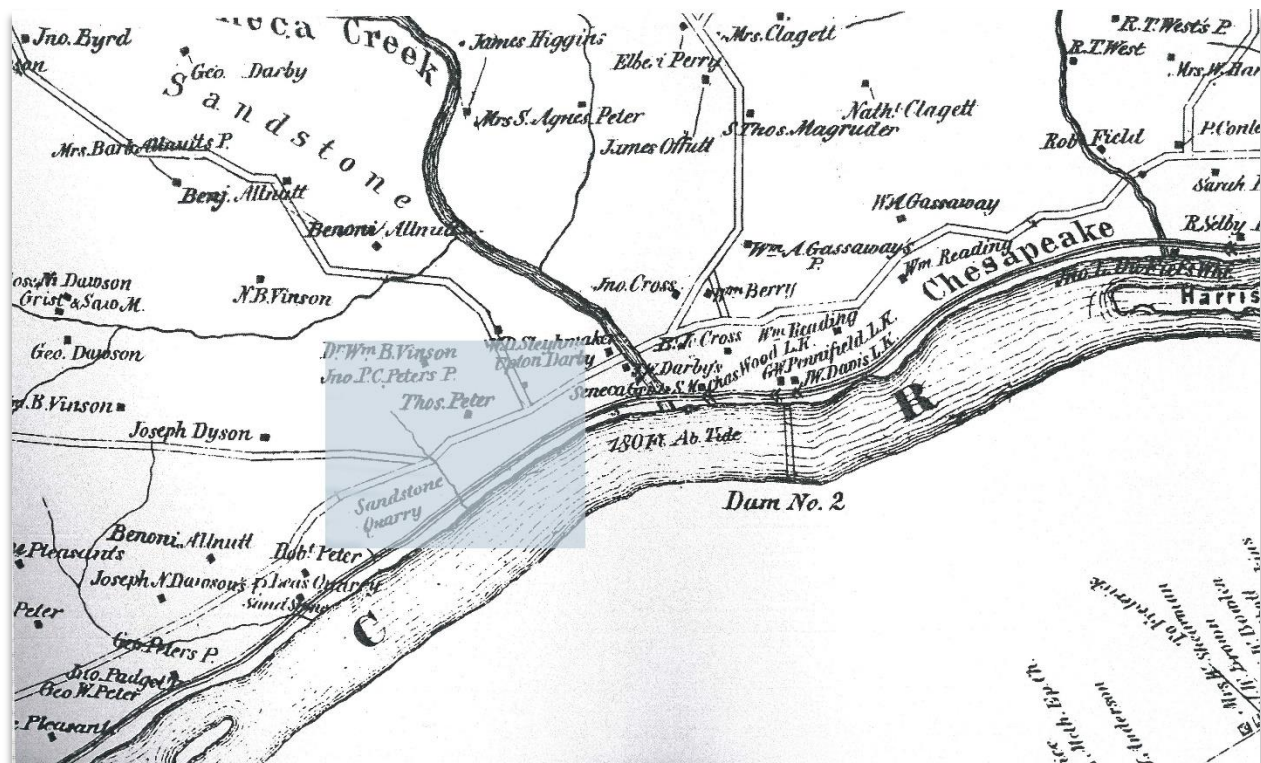


Oakland: Far from the Madding Crowd

by Wendy Kail, Tudor Place Archivist

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Before and during the Revolutionary War, tobacco was the most important American export to European markets. Authorities in Maryland and Virginia managed to ship tobacco from the Chesapeake to France and Spain for credit to purchase arms. While American control of the Chesapeake Bay was intermittent, daring men ran cargoes of tobacco from Georgetown to France and brought back shiploads of manufactured goods that they sold at inflated prices. Georgetown businessmen were among the first to profit from the incoming cash, and many invested in land in Montgomery County, Maryland, which unlike her sister counties, had largely escaped British destruction. In Montgomery County, the invading army had not devastated fields, burned mills and tobacco houses, nor frightened away the enslaved labor force as it had in most of the state.¹



Daniel Dulany's loyalty to the Royalist cause lost him his lands, including the sought-after "Conclusion" tract in Seneca that went to Robert Peter and others.

Map courtesy of the Montgomery County Historical Society, Rockville, Maryland.
Martenet and Bond's Map of Montgomery County, Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland. Simon J. Martenet, 1865. Detail.

In the aftermath of the war, the Maryland House of Delegates proposed to confiscate property owned by British subjects and companies in the United States. The Confiscation Act passed in October 1780. To evade seizure, factors [agents] for British and Scottish tobacco firms promptly transferred titles to their property to American citizens in their employ. Robert Peter

(1726-1806), father of Tudor Place founder Thomas Peter (1769-1834), was a factor for John Glassford and Company and placed Glassford's extensive landholdings under his own name, as did another factor of Glassford, Andrew Heugh.² Other firms also saw their Montgomery County lands confiscated and then sold to or absorbed by Georgetown merchants acting as their representatives.³

One powerful Maryland political figure and major holder of Loyalist property was Daniel Dulany the Elder (1685-1753). With Major John Bradford (1653-1736), Dulany had speculated in western lands; Bradford would locate property and Dulany patent it. By 1724 they owned 4,500 acres of Potomac River bottom land. Dulany also teamed with James Stoddert (ca. 1667-1726), surveyor of Prince George's County, to patent tracts on the Potomac below Seneca. In 1731, he received an original land grant of 1,930 acres, a tract called "Conclusion."⁴ Upon Dulany's death, much of this land went to his son Daniel Delany, Jr. (1722-1797).

The Confiscation Act empowered commissioners to sell Loyalist property. In October 1781, they acquired 2,525 acres of land in Montgomery County from Daniel Delany.⁵ According to law only a small down payment was required to buy such land, and the purchaser had three years to complete payment. Robert Peter bought 1,171 acres of Dulany's seized land – part of the original Conclusion land grant – for 3,288 pounds.⁶ Other Dulany tracts were sold to Col.

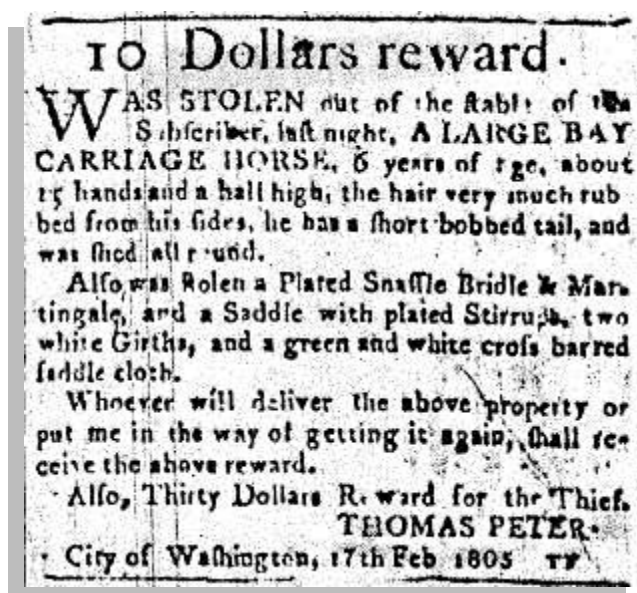
William Deakins, Jr., Leonard Marbury Deakins, Bernard O'Neill, Col. John Murdock, and Simon Nicholls, acting for William Deakins, Jr.⁷

Peter's purchase was just the start of his bid to obtain all of Conclusion. In 1790 James Dunlop, Sr. (1755-1823), Peter's cousin and son-in-law, loaned 125 pounds sterling to Zachariah Ellis and secured a mortgage on 332½ acres of the tract. In April 1794, the mortgage was sold or assigned to Robert Peter for 150 pounds, ten shillings.⁸ On August 30, 1798, Peter purchased an additional 93½ Conclusion acres from Hezekiah Thomas.⁹ Others, too, sought pieces of Conclusion: portions were purchased by Joseph Aud in November 1798, Robert P. Magruder in May 1799, Benjamin Reeder in August 1799, and John Oliver in January 1800.¹⁰

Robert Peter died in 1806, leaving extensive land in Montgomery County to his children, who drew lots for parcels of the estate. Thomas Peter drew the lot for the portion of Conclusion, "... bought from Zachariah Ellis, containing 332 ½ acres" in a deed of partition not legally recorded until June 20, 1812.¹¹ On this property, previously

owned by Daniel Dulany, was a farm that the Peter family called *Oakland*, situated near the Potomac River.

Although he did not inherit his Conclusion land until 1806, Thomas Peter must have had his eye on the farm before that for his family. On March 18, 1802, he purchased 200 acres of Conclusion from Francis Deakins, executor and devisee for William Deakins.¹² His intention to make or maintain these acres as a working farm was clear: On April 2, 1803, he recorded to the



Thomas Peter's 1805 \$10 reward offer for information to recover a stolen horse underlines their importance for transit and recreation.

IMAGE: *Washington Federalist*, May 15, 1805

Clerk of Montgomery County a list of slaves acquired from his marriage (to Martha Custis Peter of Virginia, a granddaughter of Martha Washington) to work on his farm in Maryland. This list included: “Hugo, yellow man, 20; Ralph, yellow boy, 12; Andrew, yellow boy, 14 on 1st April 1803; John, Negro man, 30; Nat, 23; Sal, 40; Hannah, 7; George, 6; Fender (boy), 5; Burel (boy), 3; Rachael, 34; Beck, 10; Gustavas, 5; Ennis, 3; Nancy, 1; Jim, 28; Celia, 19.”¹³

With very few exceptions there was a big difference between the story-book perception of a Virginia plantation and an upstate Maryland farm, as historians would note nearly two centuries later:

No bewigged aristocrat drove the family in a coach-and-six to a new plantation home after dispatching an army of slaves to clear and grub the broad acres on Rock Creek or the branches of Seneca. The transition from frontier to plantation . . . was woven of much simpler stuff.¹⁴

A “planter” in 18th century western Maryland was simply a farmer, a man who planted crops. The word “plantation” denoted any cleared land, not necessarily the 21st century understanding of the word aggrandized in fiction. Montgomery County, which was carved out of Frederick County in 1776, was different from southern and western Maryland, and the nature of the land was firmly determined by 1750. In the 18th century, travelers riding the Georgetown Pike to Frederick, Maryland, would have found themselves surrounded by dense forest and large meadows. The typical 1700s “plantation house” in Montgomery County was neither a white-pillared dwelling with rolling lawns nor a sturdy brick manor house of the Tidewater region:

. . . [I]t was a low, one or two room cabin with a sharply pitched roof extended to cover a narrow porch. Children or slaves slept in the loft, climbing to their room on a ladder. The planter might add a summer kitchen or an ell [a measure containing a yard and a quarter] for storage. The log house was covered sometimes by plank; less frequently, it was a brick or stone structure.¹⁵

As tax assessments from the era reveal, a log barn of logs and often a log tobacco house adapted for air-drying would be located near the house. A springhouse of stone or brick where water and milk could be kept cool was built nearby, sometimes with a smokehouse to cure meat. Some farms included a distillery, or “still house,” for making brandy from fruit trees. These terms describe holdings of small and large planters and may well have applied to the farm on Conclusion.

The earliest mention of the farm as *Oakland* appears in Thomas Peter’s account book on April 2, 1796, revealing that the Peter family was spending time there even before he inherited it in 1806.¹⁶ On a farm acreage must be improved: As early as April 2, 1796, Thomas Peter purchased for *Oakland* 100 locust trees for 7 pounds 6 shillings. He does not specify what variety he bought, but it is probable that it was the red [or black] locust, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, as opposed to the more ornamental honey locust, *Gleditsia triacanthos*. Red or black locust timber served for fencing, building material, and garden structures.¹⁷ There is no indication that Peter built a dwelling there, although it is probable that he improved upon a building or buildings already in existence. His account book indicates that, on January 1, 1797, he paid at *Oakland* 9 shillings 3 pence for nails for the two Quarters [slave dwellings]; at *Oakland* on April 2, 1796, he bought three turkeys for 5 shillings; on September 19, 1796, he paid 2 pounds 12 pence for

bacon and whiskey; and on December 29, 1796, he purchased an unspecified amount for corn and “oats @ 3/9” and “wheat @ 12/6.”¹⁸

That *Oakland* was a working farm is further confirmed by his purchases of livestock: On September 19, 1796, Peter paid Benjamin Edwards 13 pounds 15 shillings for two cows and calves; on May 2, 1797, he paid 2 pounds 5 shillings [\$5] to Mrs. Soil for a cow and calf, 3 pounds 15 shillings for a cow calf [\$10], and 9 pounds 15 shillings for a cow and calf; on May 24, 1797, he paid 3 pounds 15 shillings for a bull calf bought of J. [I?] Templeman.¹⁹ The farm supplied food for the Peter family and the enslaved population on their property there and at *Tudor Place*, their home in Georgetown. Britannia Peter Kennon (1815-1911), Thomas and Martha Peter’s youngest daughter, recalled in 1899:

There were twenty hogs brought down from *Oakland* every fall and put up in the meat house here [at *Tudor Place*].- There were hams, middlings, jowl, spare-ribs . . . sausage and lard. That was food worth eating! . . . Every thing (sic) was fried with pork in those days and a delicious flavor it gave to things too.- The hogs were cut up, salted, and packed in barrels for six weeks, after which they were hung up with white oak splits in the meat house and smoked.- Poor old Will Johnson used to start his fire in the smoke house and keep it smoking but he never let the fire burn up to heat the meat- kept it smothered and smoking continually. . . there were more than twenty hogs raised at the farms! There were the negroes (sic) to be fed. Pork and corn meal were the principle articles of food for them. Besides, there were always hogs sent to market and sold . . . We raised our own beef, mutton, hogs, poultry – and fine fowls we had.- We had our own dairy where the butter was made. Then, there was the garden where the vegetables were raised- the orchard, from which we had an abundance of fruit trees. The fruit was put up for winter use- either preserved, canned or dried- vegetables were stored away and herbs were dried for seasoning. And where was there a place in those days without its herb garden!²⁰

In addition to *Oakland*, the Peters owned another, smaller farm, *Effingham*, comprised of 136 acres between present-day Seventh and Sixth Streets, Washington, D.C.²¹ Supplementary provisions were brought from *Effingham* to *Tudor Place*; its proximity to Georgetown enabled the Peters to visit and return to *Tudor Place* in one day. Anna Maria Thornton (ca. 1775-1865), a close friend of Martha and Thomas Peter, noted in her diary that on June 30, 1811, she rode on horseback with Mr. and Mrs. Peter to *Effingham* and returned the same day to her house for tea; she recorded on September 7 of the same year visiting *Effingham* again.²² On May 20, 1813, Martha Peter called for her to ride to *Effingham*, but she was not home to receive the invitation. While the duration of the Peters’

Washington Races.

ON Tuesday the 29th of October next, will be run for over the Washington Course, a JOCKEY CLUB PURSE, the 4 Mile Heats, free for any Horse, Mare, or Gelding, agreeably to the Rules of the Club.

Wednesday

A Jockey Club Purse, the three mile heats, free as aforesaid, the winning horse of the preceding day excepted.

Thursday

An elegant FIFTY GUINEA SILVER CUP, Ten Subscribers, a single four miles.

And a handsome city and town Purse, the two mile heats, free as aforesaid, the winning horses of the preceding days excepted.

Weights as follow:

Aged Horses	126 lb.
6 years old,	120
5 do do	118
4 do do	100
3 do do	86

Mares and Geldings allowed three lbs.

The Members of the Club will meet at the Club Room on the Evening before the Races, in order to make proper arrangements for the same. Those who cannot attend, are particularly requested to forward their dues to the subscriber.

CHARLES McLAUGHLIN,
Secretary and Treasurer W. J. Club.
September 4, 1805.

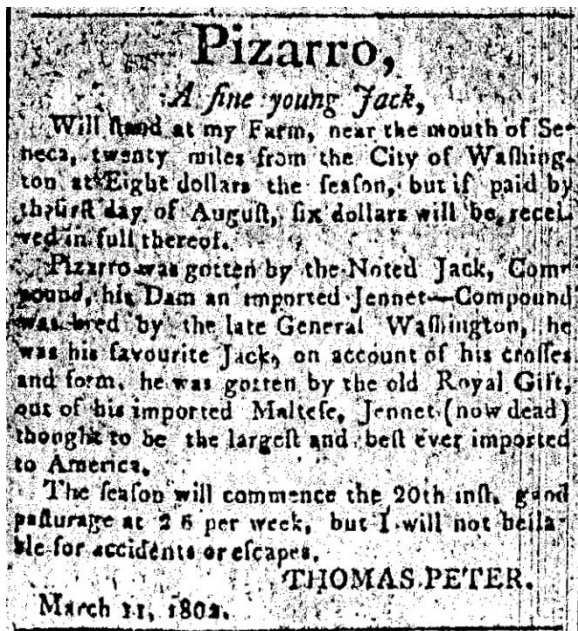
N B, The amount of the Purse cannot at this time be ascertained, as they are in part to be raised from Toll at the gates, and Rent of Booths.

C. McL.

An avid horseman, Thomas Peter kept horses at *Oakland* that [he raced](#) in D.C.

IMAGE: *Washington Federalist*, May 5, 1805

visits to *Oakland* cannot be determined, distance and poor roads would have prevented traveling to and fro in one day. It was common at the time for families of means to own one or two farms to provide subsistence for their households; William and Anna Maria Thornton also owned a farm in Bethesda, Maryland.²³



Evidence that Peter kept horses at his “farm, near the mouth of Seneca” appears in this advertisement he ran for the horse, Pizarro.

IMAGE: *Washington Federalist*, March 11, 1802

An [avid horseman](#), Thomas Peter kept racehorses at *Oakland*: on June 22, 1796, he paid 10 pounds 15 shillings for unspecified attention to his mount “the Duchess”; on May 2, 1797, he paid 3 shillings 9 pence for two horse collars; on August 17, 1797, he paid 4 pounds 10 shillings “for two Mares to his horse” and 9 shillings “in full receipt for smithwork”; on January 1, 1797, he paid 75 pounds “To a dark bay horse” [unidentified].²⁴ No evidence indicates exactly when the Peters visited *Oakland*; Anna Maria Thornton’s diary suggests the fall or winter months. On December 4, 1807, her entry noted that Thomas Peter had just returned from *Oakland*; she wrote in 1812 that her friends went to *Oakland* on November 23. On November 16, 1829, Martha Peter was at *Oakland*, but returned to Georgetown by December 21. On October 26, 1830, Thornton observed that the Peters were going out of town for a month or more; possibly *Oakland* was the destination.²⁵ As the racing season in Washington usually occurred in late October or early November, it appears that the Peters planned their trips after the racing season. Yet years later, their daughter Britannia Peter Kennon remembered *Oakland* as a summer retreat:

We used to spend the summers at *Oakland*. The house was small and I often think now, when we left there late in the fall and came down to *Tudor*, what a change it was to come from that house —so simple— to this large house. Father kept his hounds and so did Uncle George [Peter]; later when Brother John [Parke Custis Peter] built *Montevideo*, he also kept hounds, and they would put them together in the fall and go out for a fox hunt. Mother used to go too, with father, and Cousin Henry Dunlop would come up to stay with us and join them. In the evening after the day’s hunt, we would sit around the fire and they would sing hunting songs, tell stories, roast apples, and play “Hull-gull, [hands full, parcel], how many?” with chestnuts. . .²⁶

The ultimate fate of *Oakland* remains obscure, but a few pieces of evidence give hints to its fate. On February 23, 1826, Thomas Peter conveyed a tract of approximately 500 acres “. . . known as my ‘Seneca Farm’ ” to his son John Parke Custis Peter (1799-1848) for \$5.00.²⁷ Seneca Farm had been part of Conclusion; on this property not far from *Oakland*, John Parke Custis built a new home, *Montevideo*, ca. 1828-1830. One source sites *Oakland* about a mile or two beyond *Montevideo*, near the Potomac River.²⁸ Thomas Peter died on April 16, 1834. The next day, Anna Maria Thornton recorded that he was to be taken to *Oakland* for burial.²⁹ His grave and the graves of his son, John Parke Custis Peter, who died in 1848, and his wife Martha Peter,

who died in 1854, remain clustered together to this day at *Montevideo*, which still stands. The farm *Oakland* was likely incorporated into Seneca Farm, John Parke Custis Peter's \$5.00 gift from his father.

From Farm to Memory

It has not been substantiated, but after the untimely death of John Parke Custis Peter in 1848, the property was held in trust for his heirs by a trustee, Dr. William B. Vinson (ca. 1795-ND). Vinson eventually sold the property to Joseph Dyson (1827-1898) in December 1878. A brief note left by Armistead Peter, Jr. (1870-1960), third owner of Tudor Place and Thomas's great-grandson, confirms Dyson's purchase and the fate of the Peter farmhouse: "*Oakland* – near Seneca – belonged to Mr. Joe Dyson . . . the original house had burned down and (probably) he had built the house in which he was living."³⁰

But whether the Peters enjoyed extended stays at *Oakland* in the summer, as Britannia Peter remembered, or in the late fall as Anna Maria Thornton noted, or both seasons, is of little consequence. A remark by Britannia sheds light on what the farm meant to the family: "Those were happy days! No formality, no ostentation, but just happy."³¹ To the Peter family, *Oakland* was where the burdens of heritage and obligation were momentarily cast to the breeze of summer or the wind of winter.

Afterword

In 1913 Armistead Peter, Jr., and his brother tramped the road so often travelled by their great-grandparents Martha and Thomas Peter and their grandmother Britannia Peter Kennon:

[George] Freeland [Peter] and I took the car to Tenley Town. From there, we walked out the River Road about four miles. Grandmother said they traveled this road in going to and from "Oakland," her father's farm, beyond Seneca. There were 100 hills, and it was often so muddy that they had to use three horses, with a man as the leader, to get through. It has changed but little.³²

¹ Richard K. MacMaster and Ray Eldon Hiebert, A Grateful Remembrance: The Story of Montgomery County, Maryland 1776-1976 (Rockville, Maryland: Montgomery County Government and the Montgomery County Historical Society, 1976), 52-53.

² *Ibid.*, 53, fn 37: Montgomery County Deeds, Liber A, folio 408, Montgomery County Court House. These deeds have been transferred to the Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Maryland, since MacMaster's writing: Maryland State Archives, Montgomery County Court (Land Records) 1777-1781, C1126.

³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴ Roger Brooke Farquar, Old Homes and History of Montgomery County, Maryland (Brookeville, Maryland: American History Research Associates, 1952, reprint 1962), 4. In records the spelling of the name varies from "Dulany" to "Dulaney."

⁵ MacMaster, 53, fn. 39: Commissioners of Confiscated Property, Sale Book, 1781-1785, folio 2, Maryland Hall of Records. Maryland State Archives, Commissioners to Preserve Confiscated British Property (Sale Book) 1781-1785, S134.

⁶ Macmaster, 53.

⁷ Macmaster, 53, fn. 39: Commissioners of Confiscated Property, Sale Book, 1781-1785, folio 22, Maryland Hall of Records. Maryland State Archives, Commissioners to Preserve Confiscated British Property (Sale Book) 1781-1785, S134.

⁸ Farquar, 219.

⁹ Patricia Abelard Andersen, Montgomery County, Maryland Land Record Abstracts 1797-1803 from Libers H, I/J, and K (Millsboro, Delaware: Colonial Roots, 2014), entry no. 250-252, 16.

¹⁰ Ibid. See Joseph Aud, Liber H, 1 November 1798, entry no. 305-308, 20; Robert P. Magruder, Liber H, 24 May 1799, entry no. 490, 31; Benjamin Reeder [Reider], 6 August 1799, Liber H, entries no. 539-541, 541-542, 542-543, 543-545, 35; John Oliver, 8 January 1800, Liber I/J, entry no. 84-85, 47. It should be noted that there was a tract called "Owen's Conclusion," Liber I/J, entry. no. 88-89, 47, and a tract called "Final Conclusion," Liber H, entry no. 385-386, 24. Whether these two tracts were part of Dulany's "Conclusion" has not been determined.

¹¹ Farquar, 219: Liber P, Folio 674, et. seq., Montgomery County Land Records. These Land records have been transferred to Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Maryland, since Farquar's writing: Maryland State Archives, Montgomery County Court (Land Records) 1810-1912, CE148.

¹² Andersen, Liber K, entry no. 193-194, 86.

¹³ Andersen, Liber K, entry no. 460, 101.

¹⁴ MacMaster, 17-18.

¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶ Tudor Place Historic House & Garden Archive, Papers of Thomas and Martha Custis Peter, MS 2, Box 1, F 19.

¹⁷ For example, Thomas Jefferson left directions for Mr. Watkins (unidentified) on September 27, 1808:" His first work is to pale [a narrow piece of wood joined above and below to a rail to enclose ground 540] in the garden, with a paling 10. feet high. the posts are to be of locust, sufficiently stout, barked but not bowed, 12 f. long of which 2 ½ f. are to go in the ground . . ." Edwin Morris Betts, ed., Thomas Jefferson's Garden Book 1766-1824 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1944, reprint 1985), 377. Massachusetts Historical Society, Jefferson Papers.

¹⁸ Tudor Place Archive, Papers of Thomas and Martha Peter, MS 2, Box 1, F 19.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., Papers of Armistead Peter, Jr., MS 14, Box 69, F 25, *Britannia's Reminiscences*.

²¹ Beulah H. Melchor, *The Land Possessions of Howard University: A Study of the Original Ownership and Extent of the Holdings of Howard University in the District of Columbia*, Howard University Master's Degree Dissertation, 1945, 19.

²² Library of Congress, Anna Maria Brodeau Thornton Papers, 1793-1861, ID No. MSS51862. Diary of Anna Maria Thornton, entries of June 30 and September 7, 1811, May 20, 1813.

²³ W.B Bryan, "Diary of Mrs. William Thornton, Capture of Washington by the British." Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C. Volume 19 (Washington, D.C.: The Columbia Historical Society, 1916), 172.

²⁴ Tudor Place Archive, Papers of Thomas and Martha Peter, MS 2, Box 1, F 19.

²⁵ Library of Congress, Anna Maria Brodeau Thornton Papers, 1793-1861, ID No. MSS51862. Diary of Anna Maria Thornton, entries of December 4, 1807, November 23, 1812, November 16, December 14, and December 21, 1829, October 26, 1830.

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- ²⁶ Ibid., Papers of Armistead Peter, Jr., MS 14, Box 69, F 25, *Britannia's Reminiscences*. Henry Dunlop (1799-1877) was a cousin, the son of Thomas Peter's sister Elizabeth and James Dunlop.
- ²⁷ Patricia Abelard Andersen, Montgomery County Land Record of Abstracts. Volume II, Liber M to Liber EBP1: 1805-1865, S20, 1826-1827, page 31 [unpublished].
- ²⁸ Farquar, 219.
- ²⁹ Library of Congress, Anna Maria Brodeau Thornton Papers, 1793-1861, ID No. MSS51862. Diary of Anna Maria Thornton, entry of April 17, 1834.
- ³⁰ Tudor Place Archive, Papers of Armistead Peter, Jr., MS 14, Box 69, F 23.
- ³¹ Ibid., Papers of Armistead Peter, Jr., MS 14, Box 69, F 25, *Britannia's Reminiscences*.
- ³² Ibid., Papers of Armistead Peter, Jr., MS 14, Box 72, F 11, Diary entry January 22, 1913.

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