

Items from *Lives Bound Together*

Instructions: Pick objects from the *Lives Bound Together* exhibition and to make your own exhibition



House Bell

Date: c. 1784-1788

Material: Copper alloy, iron

Geography: Probably made- United States

Description:

This bell may have been among those that the workman Thomas Fenton installed at Mount Vernon in 1788. A series of wires, cranks, and pins connected pulls in the dining room and bedrooms to bells affixed to an outside wall. The bell's "ding" alerted enslaved laborers in the Mansion area that they were wanted. Those who worked in the house were always on call.



Chamber Pot

Date: c. 1790-1840

Material: Porcelain (hard-paste), gilt

Geography: China

Description:

With no indoor toilets in the Mansion, Mount Vernon's residents ventured to one of the hexagonal brick "necessaries," or outhouse, a short distance from the house. When nature called at night, they used ceramic chamber pots like this one (above). Enslaved housemaids were responsible for emptying and cleaning these vessels each morning.

This chamber pot once belonged to Elizabeth Willing Powel, wife of Philadelphia mayor Samuel Powel (who died in 1793) and a close friend of George and Martha Washington.



Sugar Bowl with Cover

Date: c. 1755

Material: Porcelain (hard-paste), enamel, gilt

Geography: China

Description:

The popularity of sugar and sweet beverages inspired a variety of associated tableware. The Washingtons used these fashionable pieces to consume drinks like rum punch, coffee, tea, and chocolate- all sweetened with sugar. Enslaved household staff, like butler Frank Lee, prepared and serves the beverages.

On plantations in the Caribbean, enslaved Africans worked up to 18-hour days in dangerous conditions to harvest and purify sugar cane. In the mills and boiling houses where they processed sugar, laborers often suffered burns, lost limbs, and fatal accidents. Each year, slave traders imported thousands of newly captured African people to expand the operations and replace those who perished.



George Washington's Traveling Razor Case

Date: c. 1775

Material: Mahogany, paint, brass, iron, glass, silk, metallic braid, paper

Geography: Probably made- United States

Description:

George Washington's purchases, while he was attending the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, anticipated his return to military duty. This razor case may be the "Travelling razor case 2" he bought in May 1775. Painted with mahogany graining, the box is outfitted with a mirror, a removable tray for razors, strop, and hone, and compartments for toilet supplies such as cologne and powder. The elegant case enabled the maintenance of a civilized routine amidst the rigors of life on campaign. Although Washington shaved himself, William Lee organized his belongings, laid out his clothes, and combed the general's hair into its trademark queue, or ponytail.

Padlock

Date: c. 1755

Material: Iron

Geography: Mount Vernon

Description:

Padlock, excavated from Mount Vernon Blacksmith Shop.

Enslaved blacksmiths Nat and George made and repaired tools and hardware for use on the plantation, including nails, hinges, hooks, horseshoes, and locks. In 1772, Nat had been apprenticed to a local white craftsman to learn “the Art and Trade of Blacksmiths.” He returned to Mount Vernon after three years of training. Archaeology at the site of the blacksmith’s shop has revealed remnants of the operation, including nails, several types of locks, and a pintle (part of a hinge).





Flax Spinning Wheel

Date: c. 1755-1800

Material: Wood

Geography: unknown

Description:

Enslaved spinners, seamstresses, and knitters produced functional textiles and clothing for use on the plantation. Dolsey, Anna, Judy, and others used spinning wheels to turn flax into linen thread and wool into yarn. Washington sometimes hired white artisans to weave these threads into cloth. Caroline, Charlotte, and Alice sewed the homespun textiles into shifts, breeches, and shirts for enslaved workers to wear. Peter and Sam knit yarn into stockings, part of each slave's annual clothing rations.

Watch Fob with Inlaid Glass Classical Bust

Date: unknown

Material: Glass, metal

Geography: Probably made-
England

Description:

The excavation of the House for Families slave quarter unearthed two fob watches: decorative elements for the end of a watch chain. This fob still features its original glass seal bearing a classical bust. Likely, unable to acquire such a costly watch, enslaved people may have used these fobs as independent decorative objects.





Group of Glass Button Inlays

Date: unknown

Material: Glass

Geography: Probably made-England

Description:

A group of decorative glass button inlays may reveal what enslaved people purchased when they had a choice. These glass discs were originally set into a metal frame and used as linked sleeve buttons or cufflinks. They are stylistically different from anything Washington acquired for himself or as allotments for his slaves. Enslaved people may have bought these buttons at local stores with money earned by selling poultry or produce from their gardens.



**White Salt Glazed
Stoneware Teabowl**

Date: 1759

Material: Stone

Geography: England

Description:

A large number of white salt-glazed stoneware fragments were excavated from the House for Families. They came from a service that George Washington ordered from England in 1759 and later passed on to the enslaved community. A tea bowl suggests that enslaved people drank tea, a popular beverage associated with gentility and refinement.

Colonoware

Date: 1759

Material: Clay

Geography: United States

Description:

Colonoware was a type of unglazed ceramic made by enslaved people in the Chesapeake region and South Carolina. It is unknown whether any colonoware production occurred at Mount Vernon. Enslaved people may have purchased these types of bowls locally.





Pig Skull

Description:

Date: 18th century

Material: bone

Geography: United States

These fragmented and mended portions of the left maxilla, frontal, temporal, and occipital bones from a pig's skull show evidence of butchery (on the maxilla), that is, killing the animal and chopping into cuts of meat. They also indicate possible burning (black marks on the temporal portions of the bone), all of which could be associated with cooking. Pigs' heads were a common and popular dish in the colonial period, finding their way onto the tables of the elite boiled, hashed, or roasted. Below is a recipe for roast pig head from Hannah Glasse's *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy*, one of the most popular and best-selling cookbooks of the eighteenth century and owned by Martha Washington.

Various Ways of dressing a Pig

...Save the head whole with the skin on, and roast it by itself: when it is enough, cut it in two and lay it in your dish: have ready some good gravy and dried sage rubbed in it, thicken it with a piece of butter rolled in flour, take out the brains, beat them up with the gravy, and pour them into the dish...

Persimmon Seed

Date: 18th century

Material: organic

Geography: United States

Description:



The persimmon is sticky, sweet, and slightly tangy, and is edible only after fully ripening – usually following a hard frost in November. Unripe persimmons contain a tannin that is disagreeable to taste. Persimmons dry easily – like prune or fig – for storage, and were widely used during colonial times. Persimmon seeds were recovered from the South Grove Midden and from the House for Families, which suggests that the fruits contributed to the table of both slaves and plantation owners at Mount Vernon.

In their limited personal time, enslaved people kept fruit and vegetable gardens, raised poultry, and foraged for wild plants. Some of these produce and meat supplemented their rations of cornmeal and salted fish. Washington believed that he provided his workforce an adequate amount of food (“as much as they can eat without waste and no more”). Enslaved people did not always agree, and the rations lacked essential nutrients and were not sufficient for the demands of daily work.

They also sold items at the weekly market in Alexandria to earn small amounts of money, walking 20 miles round trip each Sunday. Washington himself purchased melons, honey, chickens, ducks, and other items from them.

Candlesticks

Date: 1796

Material: Fused silver-plate on copper

Geography: England

Description:

These candlesticks were inherited by Elizabeth (Eliza) Parke Custis Law after Martha Washington's death in 1802. Upon her death, Martha's items were divided between her four grandchildren- Eliza, Martha (Patty) Parke Custis Peter, Elanor (Nelly) Parke Custis Lewis, and George Washington Park Custis. They also divided up Martha's 150 enslaved people in a set of four lists that also assigned each enslaved person with a monetary value.

Enslaved dairy maid Kitty was inherited by Eliza Law, along with Kitty's two youngest daughters, Barbara (age 13) and Levina (age 9). Her six older daughters were dispersed among the other grandchildren. Kitty and her children had already been separated from her husband, Isaac, a carpenter who was emancipated by Washington's will.





Bowls

Date: 18th and 19th century

Material: Ceramics

Geography: unknown

Description:

These bowls were passed down in the family of Loretta Carter Hanes, a descendant of Suckey Bay and her daughter Rose Carter- both enslaved field workers at Mount Vernon's River Farm who were emancipated by George Washington's will. Family members have long used blue-and-white tableware, a tradition they trace to their ancestors at Mount Vernon. Although these bowls date to the 19th century, many fragments of blue-and-white ceramics have been unearthed in an archaeological excavation of an 18th century Mount Vernon slave quarter.



Scythe

Description:

Date: 18th century

Material: bone

Geography: United States

To cut grass, laborers swung a scythe, a long curved blade with a wooden handle. Washington records male laborers called Scythemen cutting the meadows in his outlying farms, usually employing 4-6 scythemen a day. Found during a Mount Vernon archaeological dig, this broken agricultural scythe is slightly thicker than those used for cutting lawn grass. Other scythes have been recorded in Washington's diaries, such as grain and corn scythes.

Grub Hoe

Date: 18th century

Material: Wood, Iron

Geography: Unknown

Description:

Field workers used hoes of various shapes and sizes to ready the soil for planting, remove weeds, uproot stumps, and harvest root crops like potatoes. A grub hoe was specifically used to cut and clear roots, stumps, and weeds from the soil. At Mount Vernon, enslaved women were typically assigned to wield hoes, while men plowed. Both tasks were physically demanding and occurred in all seasons.





Garden Roller

Description:

Date: Unknown

Material: Iron, stone

Geography: Unknown

Enslaved workers at Mansion House Farm used this heavy stone garden roller to firm and flatten the soil of the bowling green, making the grass easier to cut. They also rolled the gravel in the serpentine paths, crushing any weeds and maintaining a uniform surface.