



## ‘For the People’: Clothing Production and Maintenance at Rose Hill Plantation, Cecil County, Maryland

Gloria Seaman Allen, Ph.D.

Textile production was central to the economic life and daily well being of many large plantations in the Chesapeake region during the early antebellum period. Numerous steps were required to produce cloth and clothing for families on plantations where the enslaved numbered fifty or more. These steps included cultivation and harvesting of raw materials, fiber preparation, spinning, dyeing, knitting or weaving, fulling or bleaching, cutting and sewing plain and fine clothing, mending, and textile maintenance.

Between 1814 and 1845 Martha Forman, mistress of Rose Hill in Cecil County, on Maryland’s upper Eastern Shore, kept daily records of the plantation activities that came within her sphere of management.<sup>1</sup> She



Martha Forman (1785–1864), diarist and mistress of Rose Hill Plantation, Cecil County, Maryland.

*Photograph courtesy of the Historical Society of Cecil County, Elkton, Maryland.*

began a diary on the day of her marriage to General Thomas Marsh Forman, a widower, who was more than twenty years her senior. Although the Formans’ marriage was childless, Rose Hill plantation was a center of activity with nearly fifty resident bondsmen and a continuous stream of visitors and itinerant workmen who frequently stayed for periods of weeks or months.<sup>2</sup>

While the General supervised the hired hands and artisans and contributed to the entertainment of their guests, it was Martha Forman who had the ultimate responsibility for their provisioning and maintenance—much of which involved textile work. Her series of diaries provides important insights into the complexity of the cloth making process, the centrality of cloth and clothing to the plantation economy, and the almost continuous employment of bound and free labor in plantation textile production and maintenance.

### Raw Materials and Fiber Preparation

General Thomas Marsh Forman raised sheep and grew flax at his Rose Hill plantation.<sup>3</sup> He also grew a small amount of cotton and experimented briefly, but unsuccessfully, with sericulture or the production of raw silk by raising silk worms. Rose Hill sheep provided more than enough wool for slave clothing and other purposes. General Forman raised Merino sheep and common sheep, and he ranked his one hundred or so sheep by the grade of wool they produced.<sup>4</sup> His 1818 wool inventory indicated that the first quality wool, probably Merino, was intended for flannel, second quality for cassimer, third quality for Negro cloth, and fourth quality for Negro stockings.<sup>5</sup>

General Forman’s sheep were sheared in late May. During June, July, and August enslaved women washed the dirty wool, picked it clean of dirt, straws and burrs, sorted, and greased it.<sup>6</sup> The wool was then sent out to be machine carded and rolled at Garrett’s Mill nearby on the Bohemia River. Hand picking wool was a time consuming job in the hot months of summer. Martha Forman wrote in 1817, “This day sent 179 pounds of

picked wool to be carded, which with 130 sent before, is 327 this season. We shall this day finish picking our wool and I am heartily glad, it is a most tedious job.”<sup>7</sup>

Flax was grown successfully at Rose Hill for most of the period of the Forman diaries. The cultivation of flax required little land, but considerable labor, more than any other natural fiber. Field hands, all of them enslaved, sowed flaxseed in late March and April and pulled the ripe flax in July. They rippled or stripped the seed from the flax and spread the plant out in a field for several weeks to water rot the leaves and soften the fibers. Once the desired degree of decay had been reached, men dried the flax over open fires, pounded the stalks with a flax brake, a toothed instrument, and beat or scutched them with a knife to separate the outer woody fibers from the inner ones. Following this step, women repeatedly pulled the fibers through hackles, or combs with sharp wire teeth, to further separate broken strands, coarse tow, and waste from longer or line fibers.

The cultivation of cotton was not well suited to the northern Chesapeake region of Cecil County where early frosts shortened the growing season.<sup>8</sup> However, between 1814 and 1830, General Forman planted small amounts of cotton to be used for slave clothing. He augmented his production by purchasing cotton balls, cotton thread, and domestic cotton yard goods from Baltimore, Philadelphia, and local merchants and mills. From the 1830s on, cotton cloth supplemented his linen and tow cloth, and cotton fibers replaced flax in the production of linsey. At Rose Hill cottonseed was planted in May; cotton was harvested in late fall and cleaned in February and March. “Servants” or “house girls,” as Martha Forman referred to the enslaved women and girls who worked in the mansion house, picked husks and seeds from the small crop of cotton bolls, which in 1827 yielded only eleven pounds of usable cotton.<sup>9</sup> All seed removal was done by hand rather than in a gin. The clean cotton was then carded, spun, and frequently dyed blue for striped dress goods.

## Spinning

Rose Hill women spun wool, flax, and cotton fibers into yarn, thread, and candlewick for a variety of end uses. Several free white women, but never the mistress, spun along side enslaved women or in their own houses. Martha Forman also employed young girls, probably daughters of middling farmers, to spin and

sew. They came to Rose Hill to live for short periods of time or until the season’s spinning was completed.<sup>10</sup>

The women spun rolls of carded wool into singles and plied yarn during the fall months starting in September. The wool yarn for linsey and woolen cloth was ready in time to weave for winter clothing for the Rose Hill community. The women started spinning tow or coarse flax in December and January and generally finished by the end of February to be ready for the weaving of summer clothing.<sup>11</sup> Fine tow, linen, and cotton spinning took place at odd times, and as needed.

For the most part, spinning at Rose Hill was handwork that required good coordination, concentration, and endurance. The spinners used wool and flax wheels; the great wool or walking wheel for wool and cotton fibers; the small treadle wheel for wool, flax, and cotton.<sup>12</sup> General Forman experimented briefly with a spinning machine or “jenny.” On July 9, 1816, Martha wrote, “Mr. Garret brought home our carded wool, and at the same time a machine with eight spindles for spinning wool, cost 20\$.”<sup>13</sup> Rachel Antigua, a house servant and one of Martha’s best textile workers, began to spin on the machine at that time. She evidently continued to use the spinning jenny during the next year, for Martha noted in September 1817, “Rachel spins 8 pounds of wool a day on the machine.”<sup>14</sup>

Hand spinning at Rose Hill reached its peak around 1820. Between 1814 and 1825, Martha Forman recorded the activities of seven enslaved spinners and seven free, white spinners. In June 1818, she wrote, “I made one thousand four and a half yards of homespun of different kinds this year.”<sup>15</sup> As was customary in personal documents of the period, the plantation mistress took credit for the work of her slaves and others whose labor she controlled. Rosalie Stier Calvert, mistress of Riversdale plantation in Prince George’s County, Maryland, wrote to a family member in 1805, “Another of my diversions is to make cloth for the negroes,” and in an 1807 letter she wrote, “all my servants are dressed in a very pretty cloth of my own manufacture.”<sup>16</sup> In her earlier correspondence, she added as an afterthought, “much of the manipulation is done by some little girls.”

## Dyeing

Martha Forman closely supervised the dyeing of wool fibers for Rose Hill cloth.<sup>17</sup> She probably did much of the dyeing herself for she rarely noted the involvement

of others in the dyeing process.<sup>18</sup> Each fall Martha used large stoneware crocks, purchased with her butter money, to dye skeins of woolen yarn deep indigo blue. The yarn was intended as the filler, or weft, in linsey used for the women's dresses and needed to be uniformly blue in color to produce a solid blue cloth. Men at Rose Hill dressed in brown linsey or brown cloth, depending on their status and occupation; however, Martha Forman did not mention dyeing fibers brown.

Wool absorbs dye more readily than other fibers, and dyeing wool in skeins, while tricky to produce evenly colored yarn, could be accomplished by a skilled amateur dyer. Other dyeing projects were more difficult and required professional expertise. Martha Forman sent her flax thread to be dyed blue for linsey warp. Dyeing clothing also prolonged its use. Martha's old Canton crape dress, after being dyed black for \$2.50 by a woman in nearby Cecilton, served admirably for frequently occurring funerals in the Formans' Sassafras Neck community.

## Knitting

To annually produce enough pairs of knit woolen stockings for fifty or more enslaved people and itinerant workmen plus stockings and the occasional pairs of garters or gloves for the Forman family required the time and talent of several knitters.<sup>19</sup> House slaves who could work in knitting with their other tasks or who were too young or too old to carry their share of housework, did the bulk of the stocking knitting. Customarily, daughters of house women, who were brought up in the big house, learned to knit at an early age.

When Martha Forman arrived at Rose Hill in 1814, an elderly house woman, Louisa, did all the knitting. That December she finished the last of 31 pairs of stockings for the "black family."<sup>20</sup> The next month Martha started two young house girls on their first knitting. Five-year-old Harriet Batten, Martha's personal slave, "finished knitting her master's garters and began stockings for herself."<sup>21</sup> By age eight, Harriet was proficient enough to knit more than half the pairs of stockings given out to the Rose Hill slaves in 1817.

The period from September to December was the busiest time of year for the knitters. Occasionally, all the house women joined in knitting in order to finish the requisite number of stockings for the winter clothing distribution. Knitting stockings was a time consuming

task. At age twelve, Harriet could "knit a man's stocking in a day."<sup>22</sup> By contemporary accounts, she was a diligent worker. Landon Carter recorded in his diary in 1776 his wife's calculation of the time it took her to knit their son's stockings. "Mrs. Carter told me her day's work was 150 rounds of 185 stitches on a stocking And it took her 6 days to make one stocking at that rate So that the number of Stitches in one Stockin must be . . . 166,500."<sup>23</sup> Harriet's small fingers must have moved at an incredible rate to complete the task of one stocking in one day—one sixth of the time it took Mrs. Carter.



In this ca. 1840 scene, the woman and children probably are dressed in plantation-made clothing. Her dress of check fabric and her apron signify her status as a house servant. Three of the children, both black and white, are dressed in shirts, trousers, and jackets. The fourth child, possibly a boy, is younger and wearing either a slip dress or a long shirt. *Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.*

## Weaving

White weavers, living both on and off the plantation, wove cloth and textile furnishings for Rose Hill's black and white families. Their products ranged from coarse to fine and included tow linen and linsey for slave clothing, and striped linen and woolen cloth for servant clothing, as well as sheeting, blanketing, carpeting, and coverlets. Several weavers wove fine linen for the General's shirts and nightclothes and for Martha Forman's chemises and aprons, but the majority of woven cloth went to make clothing for the field hands and house servants. In September 1815, Henry Patterson received \$61.30 for weaving 582 yards of cloth between November 1814, and August 1815.<sup>24</sup> Weaver David Falls produced 175 yards of fourteen-ounce tow linen for summer clothing between the end of February and the

beginning of May 1816. William Garrett's textile manufactory took care of the fine woolen and worsted weaving. He wove flannel and mixed cassimer from Merino and second wool. He also wove twilled linsey and twilled woolen cloth for the servants' clothing.

In the early years of Martha's domestic management of Rose Hill, a great deal of weaving was done on the premises by itinerant weavers, but never by slaves. The lower house, located a short distance from the mansion house, contained a spinning and weaving room in addition to a sleeping area.<sup>25</sup> A loom—probably two or four harnesses—was kept in the lower house; a spinning machine and hand wheels made up the rest of the textile equipment. Black and white spinners worked along side the weaver and kept him supplied with fibers for linsey, tow, and other coarse textiles.

Martha Forman protested when weavers did not produce the cloth that she had requested. In October 1821, she rejected cloth from Garrett's mill as not strong enough for the people's clothing. Garrett returned six weeks later with mixed cloth, but it was too narrow by two inches. In January 1824, David Falls was two months late in finishing the linsey, thus causing Martha and her seamstresses to work frantically to make clothing for the winter distribution. Martha faced another sort of problem when fabric was poorly woven. Fiber was too valuable to be discarded. The only solution was to unravel the web of yard goods. In July 1822, David Falls stopped by Rose Hill to get Martha and her house girls started unraveling and rewinding on spools the thread from a length of fabric ruined by a weaver named Vace. On August 5, she wrote, "Monday we finished winding the fine piece that Mr. Vace had spoiled for us, a very tedious job, this is the second piece I have had wound, and I think if I keep my senses it will be the last, it kept five women a week to wind it."<sup>26</sup>

### **Bleaching and Fulling**

The appearance of dyeing and bleaching establishments and fulling mills in a community meant that households could be relieved of some of the most tedious steps of textile processing. Once linen had been woven, it required washing in lye and bleaching to whiten it. Finished linen products were bleached periodically to brighten or renew them. Tow cloth, generally used for slave bedding and clothing, was usually left in its natural or unbleached "brown" state. No bleaching was

carried on at Rose Hill; the Formans sent their sheeting, table linen, shirting, and other fine and coarse linen to a Delaware bleach yard.

Martha Forman marked and sent her fine woolen cloth also to Delaware to be fulled, a process for removing grease and other impurities involving shrinking, pounding, and brushing.<sup>27</sup> Fulling determined the thickness, warmth, and finish of the cloth. Too little fulling produced a thin cloth, whereas too much fulling produced an overly heavy cloth and reduced the yardage. Martha complained to her diary in 1816, "Our brown cloth is too much fulled, being reduced from 36 to 24 yards."<sup>28</sup>

### **Cutting and Sewing**

Martha Forman, often with the assistance of a sewing girl or another white woman, cut the cloth for slave clothing.<sup>29</sup> Her diaries are replete with references to hours spent cutting out shirts, gowns, chemises, and slips for her house servants to sew into finished garments.<sup>30</sup> On May 20, 1815, the overseer's wife, Mrs. Thomas, assisted in cutting out 14 pair of tow trousers "for the people."<sup>31</sup> In January 1819, when Martha was overwhelmed with processing pork and lard from the annual pig kill, caring for sick slaves, and entertaining house guests, she enlisted a neighbor to help cut out the people's clothes, so as not to delay the winter clothing distribution.<sup>32</sup>

Cloth was a valuable commodity and not always readily available. To avoid waste and prevent theft, Martha Forman entrusted the cutting to very few. During her first years as mistress of Rose Hill, professional tailors cut and sewed the clothing for men who worked in the mansion house or who held other positions of status. In January 1816, she wrote, "Pearce cut out the peoples Cloths. We had 70 yards, not enough by four suits."<sup>33</sup> Generally, the tailor did the measuring, cutting, and fitting on the premises, and then took the cloth home with him to sew together and add buttons and trim. Unlike clothing made for the field hands, clothing made for the male house servants and coachmen was personally sized to fit. As Martha gained experience, she cut the loose fitting trousers for the hands, leaving the tailor to cut the coats, and her women to stitch them together.<sup>34</sup>

Once the cloth had been cut, the sewing was turned over to skilled enslaved women and itinerant sewing girls who came in periodically to help out.<sup>35</sup> Martha

rarely stitched together the clothing for the hands, but she frequently made and altered garments for her house servants and for the General and herself.

The house girls did a variety of sewing jobs for members of the black and white Rose Hill families and for the hired workmen who stayed for periods of time. Old Louisa sewed together the shirts Martha had cut out for the General and hemmed his new cravats, and “sewing girl” Nancy stitched together white cloth and linsey trousers for the housemen and carriage drivers.<sup>36</sup> Young Harriet was taught to sew by Martha. She started with making tow bibs for herself. Soon she progressed to making her own tow chemises and petticoats. By age fourteen, Harriet was proficient enough at fine sewing to be able to put tucking in her own frocks and to make petticoats for her mistress and shirts for her master. Martha trusted Harriet with expensive fabric as she noted in her diary on April 1, 1825, “Harriet finished a shirt for her master of the very fine piece of linen.” In the later years, one skilled house servant, Martha Burk, did most of the sewing for the Formans and the other servants. She made shirts, chemises, frocks, petticoats, chair cases, bolster and pillowcases, sheets, and bed coverings. Occasionally, Martha Forman would distribute the cut cloth among her women for them to stitch together their own dresses. She wrote in 1836—“I cut out the women’s frocks and gave them all out to sew.”<sup>37</sup> She also gave cloth to mothers of young children so that each would be responsible for making her own child’s clothing.

The clothing made for Rose Hill slaves, especially field hands, probably was not unlike that made on other plantations. Historians Mary Edna Lohrenz and Anita Miller Stamper studied southern women’s diaries and concluded that there were greater similarities than differences in slave clothing from different locations.<sup>38</sup> They found that clothes were generally simply and hastily constructed with little stylistic variation.

The Forman diaries provide a few pieces of information about how Martha and her seamstresses constructed clothing for the slaves. The details seem to belie the simplicity of construction remarked on by Lohrenz and Stamper. For the male field hands, Martha Forman noted that their winter coats and trousers were well lined with tow or cotton. She described the construction of their shirts—“Shirts are a yard long and rather more than three quarters in width, broad stitched



This slave probably is dressed in plantation-made tow trousers and shirt. The clothing of the white man, possibly the overseer, is in better condition, but also could have been plantation-made. He would have received more frequent allotments of better quality clothing. *"Live Stock, Virginia 1830," from Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans, 1832. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.*

shoulderstraps on the outside of the shirt . . . shoulders lined on the inside.”<sup>39</sup> For the female hands and house servants, their homemade linsey frocks were lined in the body and sleeves with domestic cotton or striped cotton. The servants wore aprons of white muslin or brown domestic, made with one or two tucks and a broad hem.<sup>40</sup>

### Mending and Textile Maintenance

Once the clothing had been fabricated, the involvement of Rose Hill women in textile work did not end. Much of women’s labor went into mending, patching, remaking, and marking, but these activities were minor compared with the reoccurring duties of washing and ironing—hard on workers, harder still on textiles.

As mistress of a large plantation, Martha Forman was involved with supervising textile maintenance on al-

most a daily basis. She recorded her chores and those of her enslaved house servants and the free white women who worked for periods of time at Rose Hill. They mended the General's shirts, the servants' clothing, tablecloths, and carpeting. They darned dozens of napkins, and turned and mended endless numbers of sheets. To the linens and servants' clothing, they added patches where needed. Some of the better quality male servants' clothing, the women reworked, replacing frayed or soiled areas with the additions of new collars, wristbands, and backs. Martha wrote—"put new collars and ristbands to coachman's three domestick cotton shirts," and "put new backs in his two linsey jackets."<sup>41</sup> Martha also wrote that she mended the General's waistcoats and shirts for use by the servants and she turned the coachmen's great coats.<sup>42</sup> For the house girls, Martha frequently turned their frocks, or altered them to fit smaller girls. She also turned the General's coats and her own frocks of silk and other fine materials, noting that after she "turned my silk coat, it looks as new as it did when new."<sup>43</sup>

Monday was usually washday at Rose Hill, and followed by ironing on Tuesday. The house women made a soft, caustic soap from boiling lye and hog fat or occasionally soap was purchased. The items to be washed were then placed in tubs of boiling water with the soap. Beating with sticks or rubbing on rocks removed more stubborn stains.<sup>44</sup> A mixture of white clay and water spread as a thick paste on both sides of the fabric also helped with greasy stains. After several rinses, the linens and clothing were reasonably clean and sanitary. During the warmer months, washing was done outside near a natural water source. Washtubs were hauled to the site where water was heated over an open fire, and then the clothes were rinsed in cold water, wrung out, and spread out on the grass or brought back to the yard to dry on a line.<sup>45</sup>

The Rose Hill women depended on good weather for drying clothing, linens, and bed coverings. With a breeze and low humidity, and with the exception of blankets and quilts, most items would dry in a day. During the summer months, prolonged periods of rain interrupted the drying process. In early June of 1836, Martha Forman wrote, "rainy and disagreeable. I was obliged to have all our last weeks cloths dried by the fire." In the winter, bitter cold winds blowing off the Chesapeake Bay and up the Sassafras River sometimes made outdoor drying impossible. One January, she

wrote, "It still continues very cold, we could not dry our cloths, they froze the moment they were out of our hands and blew off the line."<sup>46</sup>

Before ironing, certain articles of Martha's fancy clothing items were starched. Starching, she initially entrusted to only one woman, Lydia Bayard. When Lydia died in 1820, Martha lamented "my favorite woman, Lydia, . . . was a servant in whom I had implicate confidence . . . she was my best washer and ironer, my only clear starcher and pleater..."<sup>47</sup> Martha replaced Lydia with another able servant, Rachel Antigua, who "washed and starched all my ruffs," and on a later date, she wrote, "Rachel was busy clearstarching and washing all my muslings [muslins]."<sup>48</sup> Using pairs of heavy flat irons, heated on the kitchen stove, the women ironed the sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths, napkins, towels, bags, the General's shirts, Martha's frocks, and other clothing. At Rose Hill, textile work never ended.

## Conclusion

The Rose Hill diaries provide important insights into the ways the Formans employed enslaved and free labor to produce and maintain the textile goods that were used by black and white members of their plantation community. Martha Forman's daily notations, narrowly mined for information on cloth production, reveal the centrality of cloth and clothing to the plantation economy, the complexity of the cloth making process, and the use of enslaved artisans in household textile production.

*Gloria Seaman Allen received her Ph.D. in American Studies with concentrations in material culture and folk life from The George Washington University. Her dissertation explored the roles of slave women in cloth production on large plantations in the Chesapeake region. She has written and lectured extensively on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century textiles and textile workers from Maryland and Virginia. Recent works include the book, *A Maryland Album: Quiltmaking Traditions, 1634-1934*, the published papers "Slaves As Textile Artisans: Documentary Evidence for the Chesapeake Region," in *Uncoverings 2001*, "Gender Division in Hand-weaving on Chesapeake Plantations," in *Proceedings of the Textile History Forum 2002*, and the article "Needlework Education in Antebellum Alexandria," in *The Magazine Antiques*. From 1980 to 1990 she served as curator and then director of the Daughters of the American Revolution Museum.*

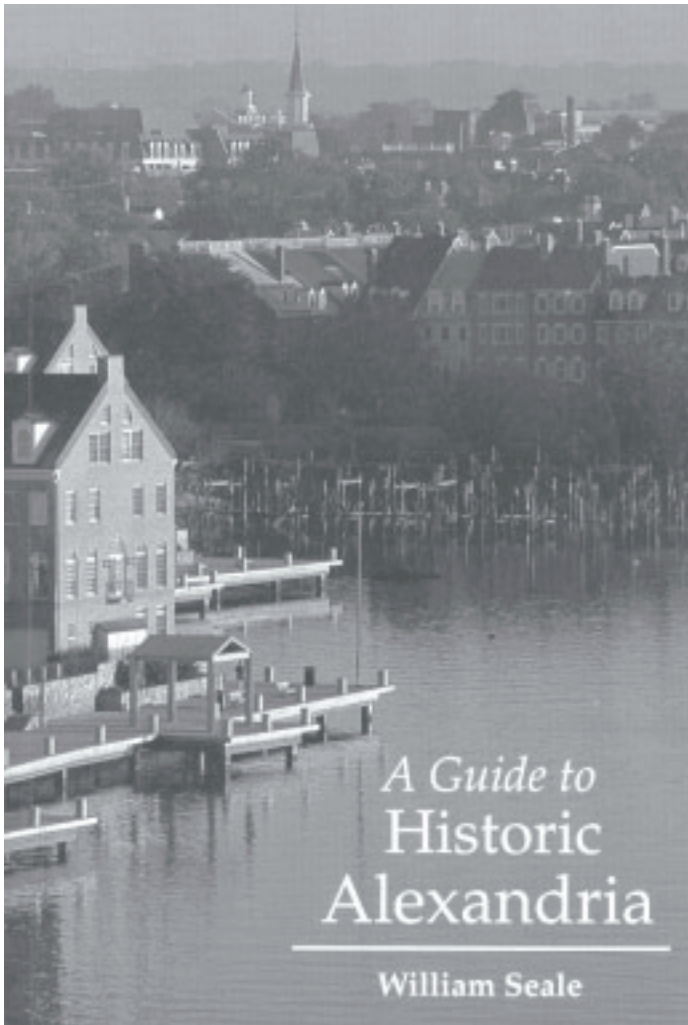
## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The following Rose Hill materials have been cited: Forman Papers, Maryland Historical Society, MS 1779, including a typed copy of Martha Forman's Rose Hill diaries, loose typed documents regarding linen and other household inventories, and the published, edited and abridged version of the diaries, W. Emerson Wilson, ed., *Plantation Life at Rose Hill: The Diaries of Martha Ogle Forman 1814-1845* (Wilmington: The Historical Society of Delaware, 1976). Hereafter, citations will refer to the typed transcription of the diaries.
- <sup>2</sup> The mansion house at Rose Hill, which Martha Forman came to as a bride, was a modest three-bay, one-and-a-half story eighteenth-century building with a detached kitchen. Two bed chambers on the second floor somehow accommodated numerous house guests. In 1837-1838, General Forman added a two-and-a-half story brick wing that more than doubled the size of the house. Hired workmen, house slaves, and coachmen slept in the kitchen building, the "lower house," and other out buildings. Field hands resided in family units in the quarters located at an undetermined distance from the mansion house.
- <sup>3</sup> Forman owned other property in Cecil County and in nearby Delaware where he raised sheep. Martha Forman's diaries, however, focus on the activities at Rose Hill.
- <sup>4</sup> The diaries do not specify other breeds of sheep. Thomas Jefferson, for example, experimented with different breeds to produce one good for both meat and a workable fleece for the manufacture of coarse cloth. He lost interest in Merino sheep when he found their wool too fine for his needs. Edwin Morris Betts, ed., *Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 111. Rosalie Stier Calvert, mistress of a Prince George's County plantation, desired the wool from Merino sheep for household manufacturing. She was disappointed when Jefferson's trade embargo prevented her father from shipping sheep from Europe. Margaret Law Callcott, ed., *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert 1795-1821* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 206.
- <sup>5</sup> *Forman Diaries*, November 13, 1818.
- <sup>6</sup> Paula Mitchell Marks, *Hands to the Spindle: Texas Women and Home Textile Production, 1822-1880* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), 6.
- <sup>7</sup> *Forman Diaries*, September 9, 1817.
- <sup>8</sup> Tench Coxe had concluded as early as 1786 that cotton could be grown in parts of Maryland, but the region south of the thirty-ninth parallel was better suited to producing abundant cotton crops. William R. Bagnall, *The Textile Industries of the United States, Including Sketches and Notices of Cotton, Woolen, Silk and Linen Manufactures in the Colonial Period*, vol. I (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1893), 76.
- Cecil County is located at 39.6 degrees of latitude. Prince George's County, Maryland is further south. In 1805 Rosalie Calvert noted in her correspondence to her father that cotton grew well on her land, and it was useful for servants' clothing. Callcott, 128.
- <sup>9</sup> Martha Forman never used the word "slave" in her diaries. She referred to enslaved women who worked around the mansion house as "servants," "house girls," "women." She also referred to male house slaves as "servants" and to the other male status slaves by their profession, "coachmen." Since a number of house slaves slept in the kitchen building, she occasionally called them "kitchen people." She called enslaved males and females who worked in the fields "hands" or "out people." Collectively, slaves at Rose Hill were "the people."
- <sup>10</sup> Joan Jensen, in her study of mid-Atlantic farm women, observed that farmers' daughters, age twelve to fourteen, frequently went to other households during the winter months to spin, sew, and weave. Spinning girls were the most common, coming to spend several weeks working, visiting, bringing news of neighbors and community. Joan Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 38.
- <sup>11</sup> In 1818, the winter spinning of Minty and Susan, field hands, was seventy-seven pounds. *Forman Diaries*, March 2, 1818.
- <sup>12</sup> The flax or treadle wheel is controlled by the foot of the spinner, who sits beside the wheel, leaving both hands free to feed the fibers to the spindle. While the work on the treadle wheel is less strenuous, it requires greater concentration as treadling and spinning are done at different speeds. Marilyn Kluger, *The Joy of Spinning* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1991), 14. A day at the flax wheel could yield a mile of linen thread from an experienced spinner. Marks, 7.
- <sup>13</sup> The jenny represents a transitional stage between the pre-industrial spinning wheel and the spinning frame and mule of the industrial revolution. It employed no new principles of spinning, nor could it be mechanized, yet it greatly increased production and spun a more uniform yarn. The jenny was constructed entirely of wood, frequently by makers of spinning wheels. Its small scale, portability, and low cost made it ideal for home use. Merrimack Valley Textile Museum, *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876* (North Andover, MA: Merrimack Valley Textile Museum, 1977), 50.
- <sup>14</sup> *Forman Diaries*, September 15, 1817. As a hand spinner at Rose Hill, Minty Gilmore spun unsupervised in the quarters about seven pounds of coarse wool per six-day week, or about twenty-one ounces per day. Around 1813, Jefferson estimated that his spinners could each spin twelve to eighteen and two-thirds ounces of wool or fifteen to twenty-three and one-half ounces of linen per day depending on the number of hours of daylight. Jefferson did not specify, but he probably was referring to hand spinning. Betts, 116.

- <sup>15</sup> *Forman Diaries*, June 22, 1818.
- <sup>16</sup> Callcott, 147, 177.
- <sup>17</sup> Plantation mistresses usually did not trust slaves to do the dyeing. Deborah White noted that on the Mississippi plantation of W. J. Snow, “the mistress made dye to color the thread before she wove the cloth.” Deborah Gray White, *Aren't I A Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 52.
- <sup>18</sup> Entries like “Began to Colour the yarn for my Linsey,” are ambiguous as to whom was doing the dyeing. *Forman Diaries*, September 25, 1816.
- <sup>19</sup> Knitting with homespun yarn is, like weaving, a form of cloth production. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, its major purpose was to produce stockings. Marks, xv.
- <sup>20</sup> *Forman Diaries*, December 4, 1814.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, January 27, 1815.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, November 7, 1821.
- <sup>23</sup> Jack P. Greene, ed., *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1965), 1067.
- <sup>24</sup> *Forman Diaries*, September 2, 1815.
- <sup>25</sup> The lower house at Rose Hill has not survived, and its location is unknown. From comments made by Martha Forman in her diaries, the distance between the mansion house and lower house was not great and could be walked easily. By comparison, she rode when she visited the quarters. The lower house came under Martha’s supervision whereas the quarters did not. It may have been located in the mansion house yard along with the kitchen, dairy, smokehouse, chicken house, and icehouse.
- <sup>26</sup> *Forman Diaries*, August 5, 1822.
- <sup>27</sup> According to the *Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Manufactures*, there were four fulling mills operating along waterways in Cecil County at that time. Lynda Fuller Clendenning, “The Early Textile Industry in Maryland, 1810-1850,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 87 (Fall 1992): 254. One earlier fulling mill, located on Little Elk Creek in Cecil County, was described in the annual valuation of the estate of Henry Hollingsworth. “The fulling mill is a small two story stone house covered with oak shingles the walls much cracked and the end next to the water wheel ready to tumble down—the roof in good repair—water wheel and works all good for nothing.” *Annual Valuations for Cecil County Orphans Court 1797-1801*, vol. 8i/407, MSA C592-2, Estate of Henry Hollingsworth, June 20, 1805.
- <sup>28</sup> *Forman Diaries*, July 4, 1816.
- <sup>29</sup> In addition to cutting cloth for clothing the slaves, the General, and herself, Martha Forman also cut out bed coverings, sheets and pillowcases, table linen, towels, and blankets, as well as bagging for numerous household and farm uses.
- <sup>30</sup> The great majority of references are to clothing for the house servants. Often the recipient is named and the type of garment and fabric mentioned. For the field hands, Forman usually referred simply to the “people’s clothing.”
- <sup>31</sup> Julia Spruill, in her early study of women’s work in the South, noted that, “Wives of overseers, white gardeners, and carpenters were sometimes expected to supervise the cutting and help Negro women make clothes for the slaves on the plantations where their husbands worked.” Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938), 75.
- <sup>32</sup> *Forman Diaries*, January 1, 1819.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, January 8, 1816.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, March 2, 1818.
- <sup>35</sup> Martha Forman hired a number of different girls to help with sewing. Most appear to have lived nearby. She never remarked on the character of her “sewing girls,” but Frederick Law Olmsted had formed the opinion that these girls were of low character. “Poor white girls never hired out to do servant’s work, but they would come and help another white woman about her sewing and quilting, and take wages for it. But these girls were not very respectable generally, and it was not agreeable to have them in your house, though there were some very respectable ladies that would go out to sew.” Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveler’s Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 64.
- <sup>36</sup> *Forman Diaries*, March 3, 1819.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, May 3, 1836. It is unclear from the diary entry whether all slave women were responsible for sewing their own dresses or just the house women.
- <sup>38</sup> Mary Edna Lohrenz and Anita Miller Stamper, *Mississippi Homespun: Nineteenth-century Textiles and the Women Who Made Them* (Jackson, MS: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1989). Linda Baumgarten has noted that the general perception of the times was of “the common dress of field slaves.” Linda Baumgarten, “Clothes for the People’ Slave Clothing in Early Virginia,” *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 14, no. 2 (November 1988): 40. Mullin, in his analysis of runaway slave advertisements, observed that Virginia slaves wore Virginia plains, country linen, and osnaburg during the 1760s. After 1770, clothing for field hands was more uniform. Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 51.



- <sup>39</sup> *Forman Diaries*, February 13, 1830.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, March 30, 1830, November 5, 1833, and December 22, 1836.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, February 28 and March 7, 1821.
- <sup>42</sup> According to *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd edition, unabridged, “to turn” means “to reverse or remake (a garment, shirt collar, etc.) so that the inner side becomes the outer.” Mary Edna Lohrenz and Anita Miller Stamper, from reading diaries kept by Mississippi women, concluded that turning fabric wrong side out and using the relatively unsoiled side was fairly common practice. Lohrenz and Stamper, 73.
- <sup>43</sup> *Forman Diaries*, October 23, 1816.
- <sup>44</sup> Martha Forman doesn’t go into detail about the laundry process, but undoubtedly it was hard on textiles. A former Louisiana slave described washday on the Bayou Teche. “It run close by and the women do all the clothes with a big paddle with holes in it to clean them in the bayou. They paddle them clean on the rocks and then wash them in the water.” Quoted in Helen Bradley Foster, *“New Raiments of Self:” African American Clothing in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 127.
- <sup>45</sup> Washing was hard work. Wilma King calculated that one weekly wash and rinse for an average size family required at least fifty gallons or 400 pounds of water. Water had to be hauled, wood hauled, fires built, clothes soaked first then boiled, lifted from wash water to rinse water, wrung out, and finally dried. King described the “total weight lifted in one day” as “monumental.” At Rose Hill, weekly laundry for the white family and their numerous guests and for the dozen or so slaves working in and around the mansion house [servants and coachmen], was more than “monumental.” Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 28.
- <sup>46</sup> *Forman Diaries*, June 6, 1836 and January 17, 1831.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, February 16, 1820.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, May 3, 1820 and June 23, 1825. Clothing to be starched was immersed in liquid starch after the final rinse, dried, and then wetted again before ironing. Lohrenz and Stamper, 75.



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