



Moore House

- Exploring a Plantation -

This beautiful plantation overlooking the York River was the home of merchant Augustine Moore and his wife Lucy during the latter 1700s. The peaceful surroundings were interrupted by the nearby sounds of war during the Siege of Yorktown in 1781. Because of its location, a safe distance outside of town, the house was asked for by Lord Charles Cornwallis to be a meeting place when he decided to surrender his forces. Though neither he nor Washington would meet, four officers of lower rank came here on the afternoon of October 18 to draw up the terms of the British surrender. The Articles of Capitulation were negotiated in this house. Cornwallis signed the document in Yorktown and Washington at Redoubt 10 on the battlefield. At 2:00 p.m. on the 19th, the British forces marched out of Yorktown to an open field, today called Surrender Field, to surrender formally to the Americans and French. This event would mark the final act of the last major battle of the Revolutionary War for Independence.

Explore now the grounds of this historic site. Follow the numbers on the map and discover what each structure or area is. The descriptions below will give you more information on what would have commonly been found on a plantation.

A plantation in early America was like a miniature city, sometimes many miles away from the nearest town. It had to be self-supporting, providing most of its daily supplies and needs.

1. The Manor House - an original structure that has been restored dating back to the early 1700s. This was the home in which the owner of the plantation lived. Plantation families might include the Master, his wife, children, parents, cousins, visiting relatives, and occasionally strangers and travelers passing by who might be invited to stay overnight. The Moores had one son Augustine Jr. However, he died at an early age. The front of the manor house faced the waterfront for a fine view. The waterways were often the fastest means of travel

by small boat in the early days as roads were not the most advanced. The back of the house faced inland where the bumpy and dusty roads came from town. This is a small house compared to some of the other plantations that still exist today, but it is of a comfortable size with a central hallway. Front and back doors are opposite each other to allow cooling breezes through the house in the summer. No screens would have been on the doors or windows back then, so flies, mosquitoes, and other pests would have entered with your guests in the summer.

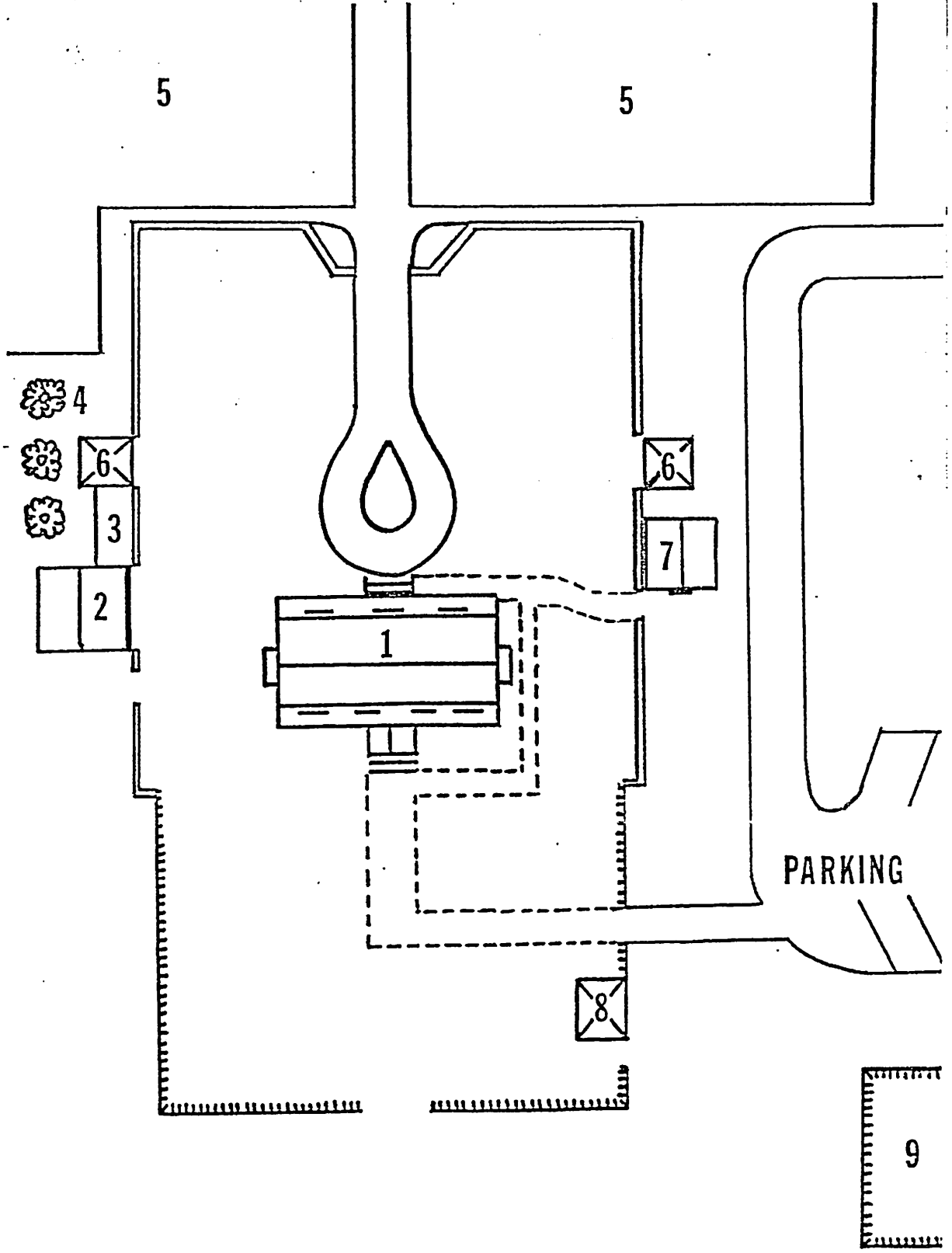
2. The Kitchen - a reconstructed building where the cooking would have been done. It is a private residence today. Having a separate kitchen was a good idea back in those days, as it kept the smoke, odor, and heat out of the main house, especially during the hot summer. It was also a fire trap with all the cooking and grease. If it did catch on fire, you might have lost that building and had to reconstruct it. Things would have been much worse, though, if it had been attached to the main house or built in it. With a fire there, you could have lost all of your possessions and the roof over your head before you could put it out (no fire insurance back then). The fire department in those days would have been your family, servants, and slaves. You would have had to run to the well, get buckets of water, and throw the water on the fire.
3. The Kitchen Garden - usually found near the kitchen would be a small garden where fruits, vegetables, spices, and herbs were grown. This would provide fresh produce for the Master's table.
4. The Orchard - found near the kitchen provided fresh fruit like apples, pears, and figs for the enjoyment of the family.
5. The Fields - behind the manor house would be large fields planted in corn, wheat, and perhaps tobacco. About 500 acres of land made up this plantation. Not all of the land on the plantation would be cultivated. This property extended back to the pond area where a grist mill had been constructed to grind corn and wheat to make corn meal and flour.
6. The Necessaries - restrooms or bathrooms of those days (though not used for bathing). Back then they would not have labeled them as we have today, nor would they have had indoor plumbing as we have. You would have made sure they were far enough away from the main house as they could be most noticeable in the summer.

7. The Ice House - an early answer to the problem of refrigeration. Ice was cut from the nearby Wormley Pond during the winter. It was placed in the recessed pit, covered with straw or sawdust to keep it from melting too quickly. Butter, eggs, cheese, and milk were placed in here to keep them from spoiling too quickly. They would have chilled a beverage container on the outside rather than put ice in the beverage as we would today because of the frozen twigs and leaves that might still be in the ice.
8. The Well - the source of fresh drinking water. The depth of the well depended on the level of the water table. It was usually covered by some structure such as this well house. The roof and doors made for an interesting looking structure. More importantly, they prevented leaves, branches, small animals, pets, and children from falling into the well.
9. The Cemetary - many families had their own burial plot on the plantation. When someone died in the family, it might be too far away to have the burial take place in a town or at a church cemetary. The Moores are not buried in this cemetary plot. The visible graves date from the 19th century.

These are only a few of the many outbuildings that would have been found on a plantation. Closer to the kitchen building you would have found a smokehouse for curing meat, a laundry for cleaning and washing clothes, perhaps a dairy for storage of milk products, and a spinning house where cloth and clothing would be made. Further back you may have found servant and slave quarters for those who served the house or labored in the fields. There would have been stables for the horses and various other structures for animals, perhaps a chicken coop and a dovecote. There may also have been barns for storage of crops and curing of tobacco, and perhaps a corn crib.

The plantation manor house was indeed like a "mother hen" surrounded by her many "chicks," the supportive service buildings.

We hope you've enjoyed exploring the Moore House grounds and now know more about what an early plantation was like.



YORK RIVER