

May 5, 2003

Ms. Izola Shaw

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Washington, D.C. 20011

Dear Ms. Shaw,

I was very pleased to meet you at Great Falls on April 29<sup>th</sup>. I was particularly pleased that you were interested in pursuing African American History/Women's History/Social History during your internship at Great Falls Park. These histories are hard to do as there are few comprehensive repositories of written information that an historian may readily tap. On the other hand, these areas have been greatly neglected and I believe that they represent an excellent area to make a substantial contribution to our understanding and knowledge of the Potomac Company and Great Falls.

I wanted to make a few suggestions for your study. As always, you need to check these with your supervisor so as to make sure that I am recommending avenues of research that he/she does not approve.

***Newspaper Research*** The problem with doing historical research on an eighteenth century subject such as the Potomac Company at Great Falls is that the participants that you are most interested in (slaves, women, children) have left very few written records. Therefore you must historically approach these subjects through other means. Newspapers is one possible means. As we saw when I was at Great Falls, the park has a few examples of advertisements for runaway slaves. These articles are interesting as they locate the slave's owner (in the one example we saw, from Dumfries, Virginia, over 60 miles south of Great Falls), the slave's dress, the slave's name and other aspects. The Alexandria Public Library may be very helpful in locating additional such advertisements. In addition, newspapers can also assist in identifying other industries at Great Falls, such as the brickmaking advertisement which I included in my article which I sent you, "The Untold Story of Blacks in the White House," ([American Visions](#),

February/March 1995, pp. 8-15). I did most of my newspaper research in the Library of Congress Newspaper Reading Room.

***Manumission*** The issue of manumission is crucial to ante-bellum African American studies. For example, it is very possible that Captain Pointer had to buy his wife's freedom, perhaps his children's too. The center for African American studies in Alexandria, which you mentioned, may have records of manumission at Great Falls.

***White-Black Relationships at Great Falls*** The Ramsey letter which I sent you indicates that there were severe problems in the small Great Falls village. The Sheriff had to arrest sixteen (16) people. Unfortunately Ramsey's letter doesn't tell us the nature of those problems. You might be able to approach this from the Fairfax County Records – although you might want to check first with the Fairfax County Historical Society. There are other suggestions that there were black-white problems at Great Falls. Take, for example, the following instructions issued by the Board of Directors:

Resolved that Mr. Harbaugh (Leonard Harbaugh, the Superintendent at Great Falls at that time) be instructed to pay particular attention to the conduct of the Black people on the works and prevent as far as possible any disturbance from taking place between them and the people in the Neighborhood and see that there be no obstruction to a proper execution of the civil law among them if found necessary for such to be exercised, & that no white people be permitted to associate with the Blacks on the work or in their quarters. (Proceedings, 4 October 1797, Record Group 79, Entry 160).

What is this all about? There is little or no other mention of this situation in the Proceedings. Both this entry and the Ramsey letter suggest that there was a problem between the local landowners and the workers at Great Falls. Perhaps your research at Fairfax County Library or Fairfax County Historical Society can shed some light on this entry.

I'll be back to you with some additional suggestions. Probably we should meet again in the next several weeks to see how you are doing.

In the meantime, please don't hesitate to call me (202-619-6370) if you have a question.

With best wishes,

Robert J. Kapsch