



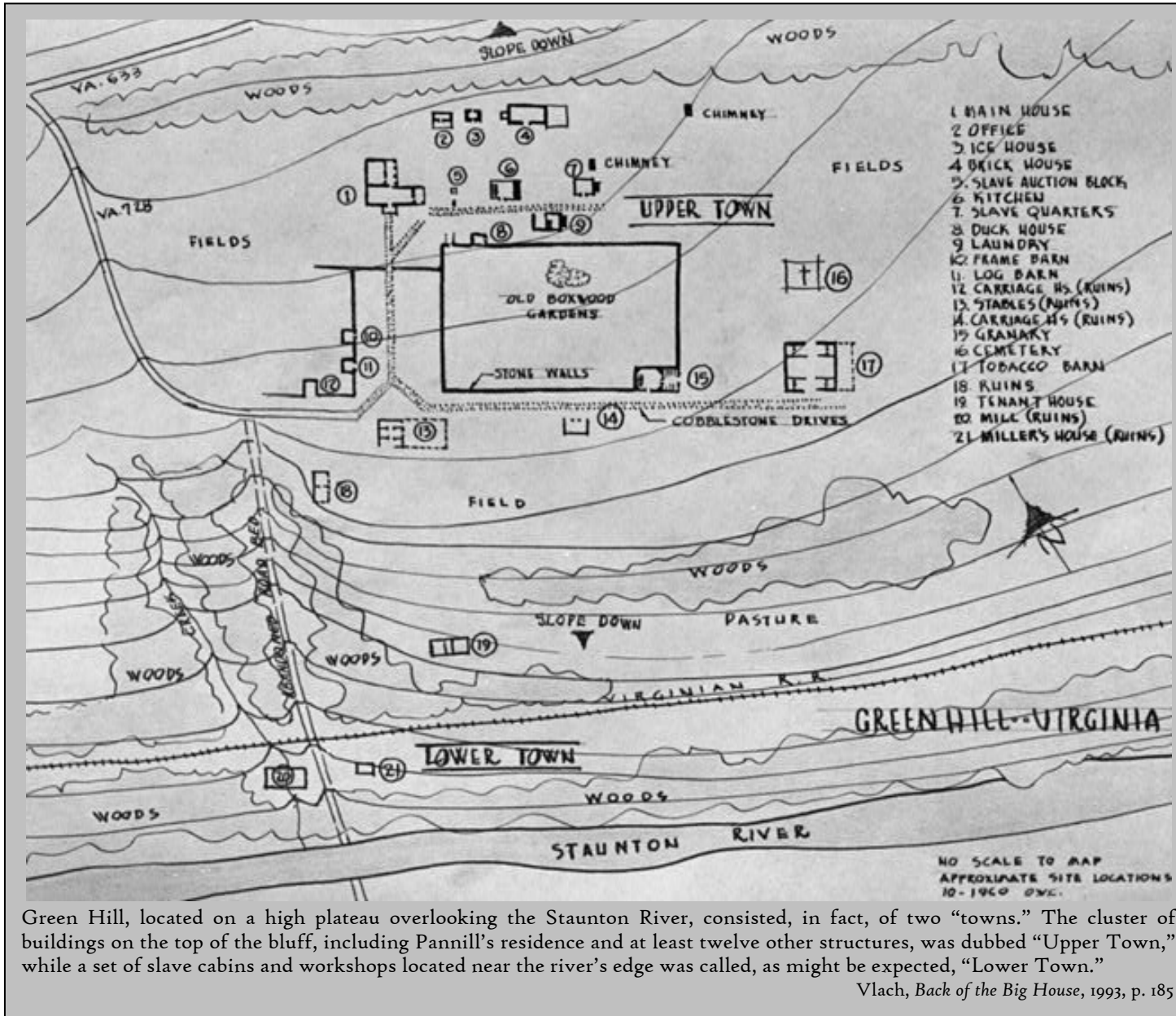
## Green Hill Plantation, Virginia



Upper Town, Green Hill Plantation, Campbell County, Virginia, 1960

Beyond the white master's residence, back of and beyond the Big House, was a world of work dominated by black people. The inhabitants of this world knew it intimately, and they gave to it, by thought and deed, their own definition of place.

John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*  
University of North Carolina Press, 1993, p. 1



### Upper Town

Main house (1) and its dependencies:

- office (2)
- ice house (3)
- brick house (4)
- slave auction block (5)
- kitchen (6)
- slave quarters (7)\*
- duck house (8)
- laundry (9)
- frame barn (10)
- log barn (11)
- carrriage house (12)
- stables (13)
- carrriage house (14)
- granary (15)
- cemetery (16)
- tobacco barn (17)

\*most slave quarters in Lower Town

### Lower Town

(only portions of walls and foundations remaining in 1960)

- slave quarters
- tenant house (19)
- grist mill (20)
- miller's house (21)
- store (not on plan)
- chapel (not on plan)

It is presumed that Pannill built a stone chapel for his slaves on the opposite side of the Staunton River.

Pannill operated a ferry on the river, which he later replaced with a toll bridge.

Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey, HABS No. VA-419, Data Pages 1-3.

Green Hill, located on a high plateau overlooking the Staunton River, consisted, in fact, of two "towns." The cluster of buildings on the top of the bluff, including Pannill's residence and at least twelve other structures, was dubbed "Upper Town," while a set of slave cabins and workshops located near the river's edge was called, as might be expected, "Lower Town."

Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1993, p. 185



[Green Hill] plantation was developed by Samuel Pannill, who purchased an initial six hundred acres in 1797 and by the time of his death in 1864 had increased his holdings to almost five thousand acres. . . Dominating Upper Town was a rectangular boxwood garden surrounded by a low stone wall; all of the buildings were arranged around the edges of this enclosure. The main residence was located at the northwest corner of the garden and flanked by an office, icehouse, servants' house, loom house, laundry, and duck house . . . These structures defined a rectangular space that served as a workyard for activities related to the domestic routines of Pannill's residence. Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1993, p. 185.

I-House: A one-room-deep house with a distinctive tall, narrow profile; floor plans include central hallway, hall-parlor, double-pen, and saddlebag; often with rear shed or porch. *New Georgia Encyclopedia*



Main House, Green Hill plantation, Virginia, construction on rear wing begun in 1797; two-story front section erected later (photographs, 1960).

. . . Pannill's Big House, although built of brick, was only an I-house, the commonplace residence of a middle-class yeoman.

*Vlach, Back of the Big House, 1993, p. 186.*



Green Hill plantation, Virginia, outbuildings as seen from the main house, 1960. "Upper Town" was positioned on a high bluff overlooking the Staunton River.

In addition to raising tobacco and wheat, Pannill also developed something of an industrial village. He not only milled grain but operated a fleet of keelboats that carried the flour downriver to markets in North Carolina. Among his slaves were carpenters, coopers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, weavers, and sawyers. Their workshops and dwellings were all located in Lower Town . . . The 1860 federal census indicates that Pannill owned eighty-one slaves, who were kept in seventeen houses. Most of these buildings [no longer extant] were probably in Lower Town.

Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1993, pp. 185-186.



View from Upper Town toward Lower Town and the Staunton River, Green Hill Plantation, Virginia, 1960

Rhys Isaac has suggested that paths and trails into the countryside were the central elements of the slave landscape in Virginia. Some of these secret tracks led to clandestine meeting places in the woods, used sometimes for ritual purposes and at other times for festive parties at which fiddles were played and stolen pigs barbecued. . . A shortcut through the woods or marshlands that surrounded the fields may have allowed slaves from different plantations to rendezvous more conveniently and to return to their assigned tasks with less chances of detection.

Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1993, p. 13, citing Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (UNC Press, 1982), p. 53.



Kitchen, Green Hill Plantation, Virginia, 1960

Look at the pictures. Pore over the drawings. Check their details. Do it carefully, and you can develop almost a tangible sense of the buildings that once sheltered the everyday routines of slaves.

Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1993, p. xiii.



Laundry, Green Hill Plantation, Virginia, 1960

The slaves' agenda is the hidden dimension of a southern plantation. Looking over these places, one sees most clearly the pattern of well-known, European-derived fashions. The ordered surfaces of building facades and well-tended grounds, however, were underpinned by a slave community whose labor provided the wealth with which planters created their impressive estates. Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1993, p. 16.





Granary, Green Hill Plantation, Virginia, 1960

Some slaves clearly recognized that their masters' fortunes were unquestionably dependent on their labor and their achievements, as revealed in the testimony of a South Carolina woman known as Aunt Phyllis. Although she was confined to her bed by illness at the time that she was interviewed, one question provoked her to sit up suddenly with great indignation. When asked where her former owner got the money to build his new house, she pushed up her sleeve, pointed to her arm and exclaimed, "You see dat . . . ? Dat's whar he got he money — out o' dat black skin he got he money."

Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1993, pp.230-231, citing Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (Knopf, 1979), p. 387.



Tobacco barn, 75'x 60', including shed additions, Green Hill Plantation, Virginia, 1960

A feeling of autonomy was usually more pronounced on plantations worked by large groups of slaves, groups large enough to foster a sense of community. This feeling was so strong among the 174 slaves at Silver Bluff plantation in South Carolina that even at the conclusion of the Civil War they preferred to remain on the estate as a group rather than go their separate ways as individuals; in fact they refused to leave.

Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1993, p. 230, citing Drew Gilpin Faust, "Culture, Conflict, and Community: The Meaning of Power on an Antebellum Plantation," *Journal of Social History* 14:1 (1980), p. 83.



Slave quarter, Upper Town, Green Hill Plantation, Virginia, 1960. Most slave quarters (no longer extant) were located in Lower Town.

What the enslaved occupants of these buildings and spaces thought and felt remains hidden in the images, but their feelings and attitudes, fortunately, were preserved elsewhere.

Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1993, p. xiii.



Slave auction area: auctioneer's stand and table for displaying slaves, Green Hill Plantation, Virginia, 1960



Frame Barn



Log Barn, Green Hill Plantation, Virginia, 1960

By 1860 over 800,000 slaves were living mostly in the company of other slaves, in groups of fifty or more. On almost 11,000 plantations, consequently, slave settlements were big enough to resemble, in the words of former slaves occupants, "little towns." Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1993, p. 12.



Ice House, Green Hill Plantation, Virginia, 1960



Stable (ruins), Green Hill Plantation, Virginia, 1960

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1996 photographs of Green Hill Plantation by Patricia B. Mitchell at <http://www.victorianvilla.com/sims-mitchell/local/pannill/recent/index.htm>.