

4.10 - Background on the Houses at St. Inigoes and Ridge

Father Andrew White, S.J. first purchased St. Inigoes from the chieftain of the Yaocomico nation in 1632. Thereafter, Jesuit missionaries successfully defended ownership of this property from challenges posed by both colonial authorities and Indian nations. By 1641, the Jesuits had added land to the estate and established a manor House and a church. Eventually, the St. Inigoes plantation grew to encompass 2,000 acres on the peninsula where the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay meet (now called Point Lookout, Maryland). The Jesuits also owned 1,000 acres of St. George's Island, which was directly across from St. Inigoes on the western side of the peninsula. Within twenty years of their arrival, Jesuit missionaries (and fellow Anglo-Irish planters) began to cultivate tobacco. Although they set aside land on the periphery of the plantation to rent to tenant farmers, they quickly became dependent upon the labor of indentured servants and enslaved Africans.

The earliest documentation of Jesuit dependence on enslaved labor at St. Inigoes dates to 1717, in a deed of gift designed to help protect Jesuit ownership of their properties at St. Inigoes and St. George's Island. In this deed of gift, Thomas Hunter, S.J. transferred ownership of seventeen enslaved people to Thomas Jameson, who in turn held the enslaved individuals in trust for the Jesuit community. Records also indicate that enslaved people constructed St. Nicholas Church on the Patuxent River, completed in 1795.

The management of the plantation of St. Inigoes was fraught with tensions. Jesuits hoped that profits from the plantation would help finance their operations - most notably Georgetown College - but St. Inigoes never met these expectations. Brother Joseph Mobberly, S.J., argued that St. Inigoes' reliance on enslaved laborers diminished its profits (see the Joseph P. Mobberly, S.J. Papers). In addition, the Jesuits struggled to secure the boundaries of their properties, complaining that fishermen, oysterers, and other watermen routinely trespassed on the properties.

Of the 272 enslaved individuals sold by the Maryland Jesuits in 1838, 104 came from St. Inigoes, and the sale tore many families apart. Although the Jesuits turned away from its operation as a plantation after the sale - and transformed the land into farms rented by tenants - enslaved people remained at St. Inigoes until emancipation.

The location of St. Inigoes at the confluence of the Potomac and St. Mary's River placed it at the center of several military conflicts, including the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Civil War. Its location also attracted students and faculty from Georgetown College, and Woodstock Theological College established a villa there in 1876, providing students a place to stay during their summers.

In 1942, the Maryland Province sold St. Inigoes and St. George's Island to the U.S. Navy, which established the Patuxent Naval Base at the site.

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