

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S FOUR MILE RUN TRACT

By

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George Washington is known as a planter, surveyor, soldier and statesman. He is least known as a land speculator. Yet, during his lifetime, he acquired title to over 72,640 acres of land located in the present states of Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and New York.¹ One of the tracts of land owned by Washington was in Arlington County, Virginia. This article will discuss some of the events concerning the purchase and ownership of the Four Mile Run tract with emphasis on Washington's efforts to perfect his title and protect his property.

Two hundred years ago, George Washington purchased two tracts of land along Four Mile Run, a major tributary draining the western part of Arlington County, Virginia. The land acquired by Washington was covered by two patents that had been issued to Stephen Gray and Gabriel Adams. Little is known about Gray except that his wife's name was Ann and he resided in Stafford County.² Gray's patent, dated July 17, 1724, was for 378 acres.³ The eastern boundary of his grant, which had a linear shape, started where Shirley Highway (Interstate 95) today crosses Four Mile Run. The northern boundary of Gray's patent continued along the south side of Four Mile Run almost to where a small tributary, Upper Long Branch, flows into it. The western boundary was the land later granted to Moses Ball in 1748.⁴ The southern boundary of Gray's patent falls inside the present line between Arlington and Fairfax counties. Figure 1 is a copy of an original land survey plat for the Gray patent obtained from the Virginia States Archives in Richmond.⁵ The survey notes below the plat read as follows:

Decr:18th:1723. Survey'd for Mr. Stephen Gray of the County of Stafford by virtue of a Warrt. from the Proprietrs. office bearing date the ——— Day of ———. A Certain Tract or parcell of Land Scituate Lying and being on the Lower Side of the Main Run of four Mile Creek in the County of Stafford aforesed. and is bounded as followeth: Viz. Beginning at a Water Oak Stand-

¹ Lawrence Martin, ed. *The George Washington Atlas*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. George Washington Bicentennial Commission (1932), Plate 48.

² Letter, George Washington to James Mercer, Dec. 12, 1774 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 3, p. 249); John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office (1931), 38 volumes.

³ Northern Neck Land Grant Book A, p. 44.

⁴ Northern Neck Land Grant Book F, p. 288.

⁵ Northern Neck Land Grant folders A-1722-26-44, Stafford County Records.

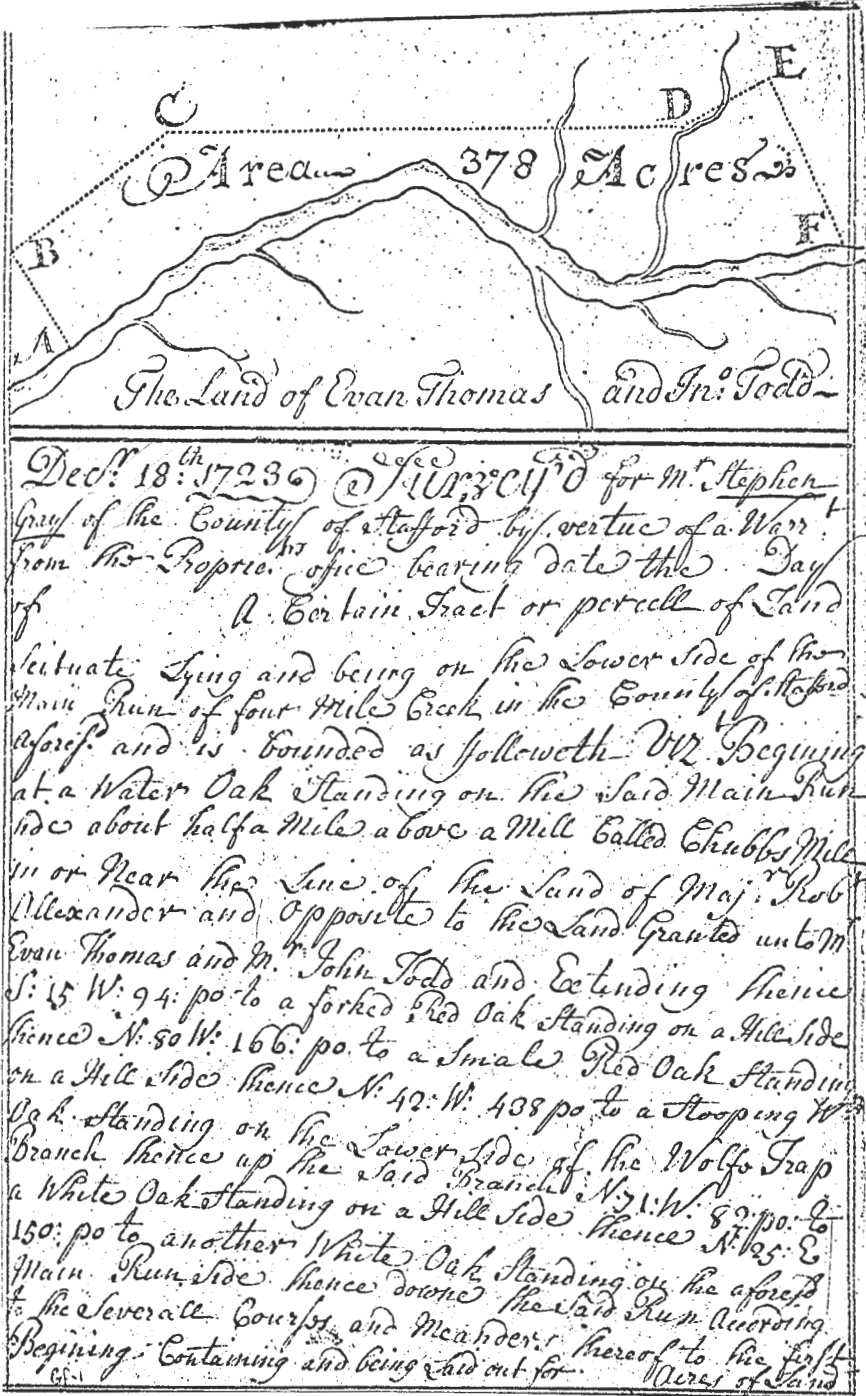


Figure 1

ing on the Said Main Run side about half a Mile above a Mill Called Chubbs Mill in or Near the Line of the Land of Maj. Robt. Alexander and opposite to the Land Granted unto Mr. Evan Thomas and Mr. John Todd and Extending thence S:15 W:94:po to a forked Red Oak Standing on a Hill Side thence N:80 W:166:po to a Smale Red Oak Standing on a Hill Side thence N:42:W:438 po to a Stooing Wt. Oak Standing on the Lower Side of the Wolfs Trap Branch thence up the Said Branch N:71:W:82:po to a White Oak Standing on a Hill Side thence N:25:E:150:po to another White Oak Standing on the aforesed. Main Run Side thence down the Said Run According to the Sevall Courses and Meanders thereof to the first Beginning Containing and Laid out for ——— Acres of Land.

Although this land survey plat is not complete and unsigned, it resembles the handwriting of John Savage, the Surveyor for Stafford County during this time.⁶ Savage would be the logical person to make such a survey.

In obtaining a patent from the Proprietor of the Northern Neck, the applicant selected a tract of ungranted land and then made an application for a warrant to have it surveyed. The warrant and survey were returned to the Proprietor's office. After an initial payment, called a composition, was made, a patent was issued describing the land by metes and bounds. The patent was delivered to the applicant, and a copy recorded in the land grant book. In the Proprietary of the Northern Neck, a patentee agreed to pay two shillings yearly for 100 acres. For every 100 acres in excess of 100 and under 600, a "fine" of five shillings was imposed. Beyond 600 acres, the charge was 10 shillings per 100 acres. No requirement for "seating" was set forth in the Proprietor's patents. All that was demanded of the tenant was that he tender the quit rents. If the rents were not paid for two years, the Proprietor could cancel the patent.⁷

Gabriel Adams, a prominent citizen in what is now Fairfax County, was a member of the original vestry of Truro Parish, organized in 1732. In his will, recorded in Fairfax County Will Book A in 1750, he named his two sons, Gabriel and William, executors.⁸ Adams' patent for 790 acres is dated September 19, 1730.⁹ It adjoined Gray's patent on the south and Captain Simon Pearson's patent¹⁰ on the west. Its eastern boundary line was a small tributary of Four Mile Run called Lucky Run. Adams' patent extended south and west across the Alexandria-Leesburg Road (State Highway 7) bordering on two patents owned by William H. Terrett.¹¹ Figure 2 is a modern map showing the location of Gray's and Adams' patents.

⁶ Northern Neck Land Grant Book A, p. 57, survey plat, January 19, 1722, to Simon Pearson for 1,279 acres, surveyed by John Savage.

⁷ Fairfax Harrison. *Virginia Grants*. Richmond: Old Dominion Press (1925).

⁸ Charles W. Stetson. *Washington and His Neighbors* (1956), p. 232.

⁹ Northern Neck Land Grant Book C, p. 136.

¹⁰ Northern Neck Land Grant Book C, p. 27.

¹¹ Northern Neck Land Grant Book E, p. 412 and Book F, p. 251.

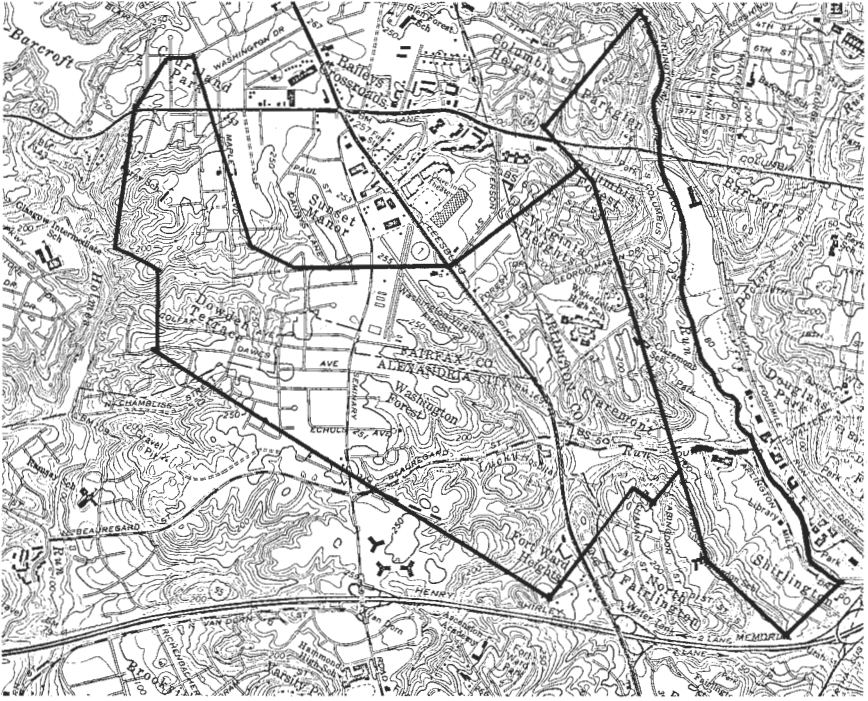


Figure 2 showing Gray's patent on the right and Adams' patent on the left

In 1733, Gabriel Adams conveyed his tract to John Mercer of Stafford County.¹² At the same time, Mercer caused Gray's original patent to be recorded in the Prince William County Court which entered on its record a notation that "the deed was presented into Court by John Mercer and on his motion admitted to record."¹³ The land was then in Prince William County jurisdiction, and Mercer regarded the record of the patent on his motion as evidence of Gray's passing title to him.¹⁴ John Mercer patented 1,000 acres in present-day Fairfax County between the north and south runs of Pohick Creek. This tract was conveyed to his sons George and James Mercer,¹⁵ by a deed recorded in the General Court of the Colony at Williamsburg in 1759. The records of that court were burned long ago, but the fact that such a deed was made and recorded is recited in another deed recorded in Fairfax County in 1774, by James Mercer, conveying his moiety of the Pohick Run tract.¹⁶ As

¹² Prince William County Deed Book B, p. 44.

¹³ Prince William County Deed Book B, p. 49.

¹⁴ Charles W. Stetson. *Four Mile Run Land Grants*. Washington, D.C.: Mimeoform Press (1935), p. 45.

¹⁵ Northern Neck Land Grant Book B, p. 55.

¹⁶ Fairfax County Deed Book L, p. 269.

George and James Mercer were then offering John Mercer's Four Mile Run land for sale, and as there is no existing record of a conveyance from John Mercer to them, it becomes almost certain that the deed recorded in the General Court also included the Four Mile Run tract.¹⁷

George Mason called Washington's attention to Mercer's tract on Four Mile Run as a desirable purchase. In a letter from Gunston Hall, dated December 21, 1773, he wrote:

I have by me Mr. Mercer's title deeds for his lands on Pohick Run and on Four Mile Run in this county, wh. I have hitherto endeavored to sell for him in vain, for as he left the price entirely to me, I could not take less for them than if they had been my own; this difficulty will not be lessened, but the contrary by your becoming the purchaser. . . . Had I sold them to an indifferent purchaser, I should in the common way of business have stretched my demand so far as it would bear, but between you and Mr. Mercer, would fain consider myself as a mutual Friend and arbiter, and from my connections with him, I know he would wish me to act in that manner, which renders it an affair of some delicacy, and takes it out of the common mode of business. . . . The tract upon Four Mile Run is contained in two patents, one granted to Stephen Gray for 378 acres, and the other to Gabriel Adams for 790 acres. They appear by the plat to over-measure considerably, and contain, clear of Struttfield's elder patent (with which they interfere) 1225 acres. I have formerly been upon this land, but its so many years ago that I know very little of it from my own knowledge, but from the best information I have had, that part of it upon Four Mile Run (in Stephen Gray's patent) is tolerable good, and the other mean; but from its vicinity to Alexandria, which now bids fair to be a very considerable town, I think it must be worth £1000 curr'y. . . . Upon the whole, sir, if you will appoint any day after Christmas, I will wait [upon] you & we will ride over the land together, when we shall both be better able to judge of its value.

There was some little difficulty in the title from Stephen Gray wh. Mr. Mercer has been very candid in laying open to me and wh. Mr. Pendleton (whose opinion I have) has cleared up in a very satisfactory manner.¹⁸

* * *

The difficulty in Gray's title must have been the want of a deed from him to John Mercer, and Mr. Pendleton's opinion, we may conjecture, was to the effect that as John Mercer had possession of the original patent and moved its admission to record in the Prince William County Court, that was sufficient evidence of the assignment of the patent to him.¹⁹

If Washington and Mason rode over the land together, the Diaries do not report it. Washington decided to buy the land, and on December 12, 1774, wrote to James Mercer from Mount Vernon:

Dear Sir: Your letter without a date came to hand last post; and inclosed you have my Bond to Messrs. McCoul and Blair for £450 for your Brothers moiety of the four Mile run Land. . . .

¹⁷ Stetson, *Land Grants*, p. 46.

¹⁸ Stanislaw Murray Hamilton, ed. *Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. (1890-1902), Vol. 3, p. 286. Published by Society of the Colonial Dames of America.

¹⁹ Stetson, *Land Grants*, p. 50.

In examining the papers which I got from Colo. Mason, I do not meet with one scrap of information respecting that part of the Land which you hold under Gabriel Adam's Deed of the 19th of September 1730, for seven hundred and ninety acres then in Stafford County, there being no paper relative to it, except an unattested copy of the Courses of the Deed; how you derive Title therefore, I am ignorant; but do not doubt its being good. I confide in you for making it so, and am sure you will not deceive me. As you have made no mention of the want of the other papers, I presume you can do without them; but in case it was an omission, I shall add, that Stephen Gray obtained a warrant from the proprietor's office for the Land (according to Mr. Pendleton's state of the case in December, 1723): by Will, dated the 26th of January following, he devised his whole real and personal Estate to Ann Gray his wife. Mr. Pendleton says in May 1724 the Deed issu'd in the name of Stephen Gray; but he is mistaken, for it appears that the Patent for 378 acres, then in Stafford County, bears date, the 17th of July of that year. On the 20th and 21st days of March 1732, the Land was conveyed by Deeds of Lease and release, to Jno. Mercer Esqr. what followed after that period you know better than I can relate. Thus much I have thought proper to communicate, that you may be enabled to recite the title, if need be. If you have yet come across John Houghs report of the Survey of these two tracts, made in 1770 I should be glad if you would forward it to me, as it will assist me greatly in surveying of it.²⁰

In another letter from Washington to James Mercer on December 26, 1774, he wrote:

I do not pretend either, to be well acquainted with the phrases which constitute a general Warranty, but the words made use of by you, for this purpose, are not so strong and emphatical as I have generally observed upon these occasions; which usually run in some manner as this, "from the claim, or claims of any Person or persons whatsoever the said, his heirs etc. doth warrant, and will forever defend" your Covenant may, for aught I know be Tantamount, although no such expressions are used, and therefore, I shall say nothing further on this head. It was my Intention to have run round the Lines of these Tracts, and tried the Contents of them myself, but I have never been a day well since my return from Frederick, nor a day without Company. If you have Adams conveyance, I should be glad to be furnished with it when you send the Copy of the power of attorney, to McCoul and Blair, as I have no paper relative to this Land, except an unattested Copy of the Proprietors Deed to him.²¹

The following entry appears in Washington Diary: "January 27, 1775 —Went up to four Mile Run to view the Land bought of Mr. Mercer. Looked at part of it and returned home at Night." ²²

The deed from James Mercer and the attorneys and agents of George Mercer to Washington, was dated December 12, 1774, and was proved and admitted to record on October 15, 1775, in the General Court at the Capitol in Williamsburg. The records of that court were destroyed

²⁰ Letter, Washington to James Mercer, Dec. 12, 1774 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 3, p. 249).

²¹ Letter, Washington to James Mercer, Dec. 26, 1774 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 3, p. 253).

²² John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. *The Diaries of George Washington*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co. (1925), Vol. 2, p. 183. Published for the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union.

by fire in 1865 but the facts are recited in a later deed recorded at Fairfax Court House. In October, 1775, Washington was no longer in Virginia. In the preceding June he had set out from Philadelphia to take command of the Continental Army at Cambridge. Running the lines of the tracts and "trying their contents" was deferred until he returned to private life eight years later.²³

The purchase price of the Four Mile Run tract was 892 pounds, or about \$7.00 an acre, but due to difficulties transferring the title of George Mercer's half interest, Washington paid James Mercer his half of the money and gave a bond for the payment of George Mercer's half interest. Washington's letter to Lund Washington on December 17, 1778, written at Middlebrook is related to this bond: "It runs in my head that the first of these bonds was sent to Colo. Lewis to be tendered to a Mr. Blair, of whom I bought Colo. Mercers Land on four Miles run, and that he (Blair) declined receiving it; whether I am right, or wrong in this matter, i cannot be positive. . . ." ²⁴

In 1785 Washington again took up the matter of surveying his Four Mile Run tract.

Thursday April 21, 1785—After an early dinner I went up in my Barge to Abingdon, in order to bring Mr. John Lewis (who had lain there sick for more than two months) down. Took my Instruments, with intent to Survey the Land I hold by purchase on 4 Mile Run of Geo. and Jas. Mercer, Esqrs. Called at Alexandria and staid an hour or two. Wednesday April 22, 1785—Took and early breakfast at Abingdon; and accompanied by Doctr. Stewart and Lund Washington, had having sent for Mr. Moses Ball (who Attended), I went to a Corner of the above Land, within about 3 poles of the Run (4 Miles Run) a White Oak, 18 Inches in diameter, on the side of a hill, abt. 150 yards below a small Branch which comes in on the No.Et. side. And after having run one course and part of another, my Servant William (one of the Chain Carriers) fell, and broke the pan of his knee, wch. put a stop to my Surveying; and with much difficulty I was able to get a sled to carry him on, as he could neither Walk, stand, or ride. At Mr. Adam's Mill I took Lund Washington's horse and came home.²⁵

Washington's first attempt to survey his Four Mile Run tract was aborted by his servant's accident. It was not until the following year that he finished his survey.

May 4, 1786—Doctr. Craik came here in the forenoon, and crossed the river after Dinner on his return home, at wch. time I set out for Abingdon in order (tomorrow) to Survey my 4 Mile Run Tract; or which I had cause to apprehend trespasses had been committed . . . May 5, 1786—Set out early from Abingdon, and beginning at the Upper corner my Land (on 4 Miles run)

²³ Charles W. Stetson. "Washington's Woods on Four Mile Run." Records of the Columbia Historical Society (1935), Vols. 35-36, p. 169.

²⁴ Letter, Washington to Lund Washington, Dec. 17, 1778 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 13, p. 409).

²⁵ Washington's Diary (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 2, p. 366).

a little below the old Mill; I ran the Tract agreeable to the courses and distances of a Plat made thereof by John Hough, in the year 1766 (Novr) in presence of Colo. Carlyle and Mr. James Mercer. Not having Hough's field notes, and no corner trees being noted in this Plat, I did not attempt to look for lines; but allowing one degree for the variation of the Compass since the survey above mentioned was made, I ran the courses and distances only, and was unable for want of time, to do more than run the lines that brought me to the run again; the Meanders of wch. must be run at some other time, in order to ascertain with precision the quantity of Land which is contained. Upon the whole I found this tract fully equal to my expectations. The whole of it is well wooded, some part is pretty well timbered, and generally speaking, it is level. About the main road at the South of the tract, trespasses (on the wood) had been made but in a degree was less than I expected to find; and as I run the lines set down, with the variation, I run into the field lately Colo. Carlyle's (now Whiting's) so as to cut off 12 or 15 acres of his enclosure, and made the plat close very well to the run.

Returned at night to Abingdon being attended in the labors of the day by Doctr. Stuart.²⁶

Washington continued to correspond with James Mercer regarding his Four Mile Run tract. On March 15, 1787, he sent the "original Deed for the Lands on four miles run" to Mercer to use as reference.²⁷ Two years later Washington was still trying to get the deed of confirmation for the land purchased from George Mercer.²⁸ In another letter to James Mercer dated April 4, 1789, Washington requested: "The deed which you mention to have delivered to Major Washington was by him it seems put into the Clerks' Office, but why it has not been sent to me (as I lately requested the Clerk to send all my deeds in his office) I do not know. I will thank you to get the deed for the Land bought of your brothers Estate from the Clerk of the General Court, which you was so obliging as to offer to do, and to send it to my Nephew Major George A. Washington (who will transact my business in my absence). With very great esteem etc."²⁹

While Washington was fighting in the French and Indian and American Revolutionary Wars and serving two terms as U. S. President, first in New York City and then in Philadelphia, several men managed the Mount Vernon estate. They were: John Augustine Washington, 1753-1759; Lund Washington, 1775-1785; James Bloxham, 1785-1789; Anthony Whiting, 1789-1793; William Pearce, 1793-1796; and James Anderson, 1796-1799.

²⁶ Washington Diary (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 3, p. 55).

²⁷ Letter, Washington to James Mercer, Mar. 15, 1787 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 29, p. 180).

²⁸ Letter, Washington to James Mercer, Mar. 18, 1789 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 30, p. 233).

²⁹ Letter, Washington to James Mercer, Apr. 4, 1789 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 30, p. 271).

Washington wrote his nephew Bushrod Washington * from Philadelphia on January 8, 1792, requesting legal action against trespassers on his land:

Dear Bushrod: I have long suspected but, such has been my situation for some years back, that I have not been able to ascertain the fact, that a tract of about 1200 acres wch. I hold on four mile-run near Alexandria has had the Wood thereon dealt pretty freely with by unauthorised persons in its vicinity. The enclosed from Mr. Whiting gives information of a particular act. He is directed in a letter of this date, to wait upon Colo. Little, and with such proofs of the trespass as he can obtain, to call upon you therewith. If they shall appear to you indubitable, I am resolved, as an example, to punish, the aggressors; and pray you to issue a process against them, and to prosecute the same in the name of Auge. Washington, as my Attorney, who I think has been announced as such in the Gazettes of Alexandria and Richmond; and I presume, has a power from me to that effect.

Lest any misconception of Whiting's should lead me or you into error, I beg you will, when an opportunity shall present itself, inquire of Colo. Little whether the Hoop poles were, incontestibly, taken from my land; who the persons are that did it; who to prove it; and whether there can be any demur to the propriety (legality I mean) of bringing the Suit in the name of G. A. Washington as my Attorney, not being willing to have my own name called in Court, on this occasion.³⁰

Intruders continued to pillage Washington's woodland on Four Mile Run. On April 13, 1794, Washington wrote from Philadelphia to his manager, William Pearce, at Mount Vernon:

I have a tract of Woodland of 1200 acres about 4 miles from Alexandria, on the great Road to Leesburgh, whose principal value is on acct. of the Timber, wood and Hoop poles, and of all these, I am informed it has been most shamefully pillaged. I have by this days Post, by the advice of, and under cover to, Doctr. Stuart, wrote to a Gentleman of the name of Minor (who lives near to it requesting the favor of him to have an eye to the land. Whenever you may see Mr. Minor (wch. may be at the Courts in Alexa.) spk. to, and concert measures with him, for putting a stop to the continued depredations which I am told a parcel of trespassers are making on the land, by absolute Sales of the articles beforementioned, to the very great injury of the property. I remain, etc.³¹

On the same day he wrote a letter to Dr. David Stuart:

Dear sir: I have been favored with your letter of the 4th. instt., and thank you for the information respecting the depredations on my land, lying on four miles run. Mr. Bushrod Washington a year or two ago, was desired to commence a suit or suits against some of the Trespassers; but whether he did, or not, or

* Ed. Note: In 1798 Bushrod Washington was appointed associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court by President John Adams. On Mrs. Washington's death in 1802, he inherited Mount Vernon.

³⁰ Letter, Washington to Bushrod Washington, Jan. 8, 1792 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 31, p. 455).

³¹ Letter, Washington to William Pearce, Apr. 13, 1794 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 33, p. 326).

what the result was, I do not recollect ever to have heard. The growth of the land, is more valuable than the land itself; to protect it therefore, is important.

Not knowing the christian name of Mr. Minor, or whether there may not be more than one of that name I am at a loss how to direct to him; and therefore take the liberty of putting the enclosed under cover to you, with a request (after putting a wafer in it) that you would be so good as to have it safely conveyed to the right person.³²

The enclosure letter to [George] Minor granting him authority to watch his land and prosecute violators read:

Sir: From a letter which I have lately received from Doctr. Stuart, I learn that depredations continue to be made upon my land on four mile run, in the County of Fairfax; and that you were so obliging as to inform him, that you would use your endeavours to rescue it from further injury if I should request it.

The offer is kind, and I thank you for having had the goodness to make it; and do hereby vest you with power to watchover, and punish in any manner the laws will authorise, any, and every person whatsoever who shall be found trespassing thereon.

The growth on the land, I always considered as the most valuable part of the property; stripped of this, as there appears to be a strong disposition to do by lawless people, and the value of it is reduced in the ratio of the Trespasses.

Sometime since, perhaps two or three years, I desired my Nephew Mr. Bushrod Washington to bring suits against those who had been detected in taking off Wood, Hoop poles &ca., but what, or whether anything resulted from it, is unknown to me at this moment. Nothing short of vigorous measures, I am now persuaded, will stop the injustice I am sustaining, and these I am resolv'd to pursue. any reasonable expence therefore which may be incurred in carrying this resolution into effect, and for your trouble, will be cheerfully paid by Sir etc.

PS. I have directed Mr. Wm. Pearce my Manager to converse with you on this business when he shall see you in Alexandria.³³

Washington turned his attention to the task of surveying his property. He wrote on May 18, 1794, this letter to William Pearce:

It is not a good Season for surveying, otherwise I would have my four mile run tract run round; but this shall be done in the Fall; or even sooner if it is found indispensably necessary: in the meanwhile, if you, with the aid of Mr. Minor, could prevent further depredations it would be proper, and desirable.³⁴

In another letter to Pearce, on February 15, 1795, he considered having his land surveyed:

Mr. Pearce: Your letter and the reports of the preceeding Week, came duly to hand.

It is my earnest wish to have my land on four mile run resurveyed, and the bounds thereof ascertained; that the pretence of not knowing the lines may, no

³² Letter, Washington to David Stuart, Apr. 13, 1794 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 33, p. 328).

³³ Letter, Washington to George Minor, Apr. 13, 1794 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 33, p. 327).

³⁴ Letter, Washington to William Pearce, May 18, 1794 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 33, p. 368).

longer, be an excuse for the trespasses which are committed thereon, to the great diminution of its value; the wood being the more important, as the land is of mean quality. For the purpose of surveying, it was, that I left the papers with you; and more than once have called your attention to this business. It might be well to agree upon some day with Mr. Washington and others, (amongst whom a Mr. Terret joins) that are knowing to the lines, and interested in the business; that it may be effectually done if every thing is clear, and no difficulties shd. arise with respect to title, or bounds. If these, or either of them, should happen, enter into no agreement that will be obligatory on me. I attempted, as will appear by some notes amongst the papers I left with you, to Survey this land myself; but having no person with me who was acquainted with the lines, I was unable to find more than two or three of the Corners. A Moses Ball, if living, must have some knowledge of the lines; Mr. Terret also, but as he is interested in this business, and is accused of being a pretty considerable trespasser on the part which joins him, it would not be strange if corner and line trees both are cut down; nor *very* strange, if it has not happened from *entire* ignorance, if he should not endeavor to perplex, and mislead thereabouts. As the Survey is not in consequence of a law suit, and made by order of the Court, there is no necessity of employing the County Surveyor, unless he possesses more skill than any other who can readily be got; and will do it upon as moderate terms, as any other. Do not let my papers go out of your hands, or any copies be taken from them. The Surveyor, if he is a man of Science, will know what the variation of the compass is, and what allowance to make for it, if any difficulty should arise from the want of the Corner, and line trees.³⁵

Again in March, he discussed the survey:

I do not know for what purpose an order of the Court is to be obtained (by Mr. Washington) for the purpose of Surveying the land which he, for himself, or others, hold on four mile run. If all the parties concerned agree to Survey, and mark their boundaries, it may be done without the interference of the Court. If they do not (as there is no suit pending) I should not like to have any line market that it so establish my boundary without being present myself, to see that I had justice done me. As far as I am able, at the present moment, and under probable events, to form an opinion I expect to be at Mount Vernon about the 15th. or 20th. of April. If therefore the parties interested, will endeavor to accommodate matters to that time, I will endeavor to be present at the Survey of the Lands adjoining to mine. It is to be observed however, that public business will not put it so much in my power to accommodate myself to their convenience, as it may be in their power to yield to mine; which obliges me to speak more in general terms of being at Mount Vernon, than definitely.³⁶

Washington considered keeping a tenant on the Four Mile Run tract to protect his property. On April 3, 1796, he asked Pearce to negotiate an agreement:

Mr. Minor has recommended a Mr. Darnes, as a Tenant, whom he thinks would preserve my land near Alexandria from the Trespasses it undergoes; and I have

³⁵ Letter, Washington to William Pearce, Feb. 15, 1795 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 34, p. 114).

³⁶ Letter, Washington to William Pearce, Mar. 1, 1795 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 34, p. 126).

in the enclosed letter left open for your perusal) requested him to put the said Darnes on. Let the letter be sent to him that he may certainly get it. (And let Mr. Darnes have the field you speak of, and more ground if necessary, to put a house on. But make your agreement with him in writing; that there may be no mistakes. I should not incline to give him a surety of the place for more than 5, 6 or 7 yrs, for the rest I care not.)³⁷

Washington's letter of May 15, 1796, to Pearce presented the terms for the tenant, Mr. Darnes:

If Mr. Darnes is a man in whose integrity and activity full reliance can be placed, and he will agree to watch, diligently, in order to prevent the depradations which are aimed at my land on four mile run, I will give him a surety of living thereon Rent free during *his* life; and the privilege of clearing a small, but defined quantity there-of: and an agreement conformably to these ideas, you may enter into with him as soon as you please; and the sooner the better.³⁸

Washington was finally able to survey his Four Mile Run tract in April, 1799.

April 3d, 1799—Extreme cold (but forgot to see what the Mercury was). Wind very high from No. Wt. and continued so all day. Went up to Four Mile Run to Run round my land there. Got on the grd. about 10 o'clock, and in Company with Captn. Terret and Mr. Luke commenced to Survey on 4 Mile Run and ran agreeably to the Notes taken. In the evening went to Alexa. and lodged myself at Mr. Fitzhugh's.

April 4th, 1799—Recommenced to Survey at the upper end where we left of, in company with Colo. Little, Captn. Terret and Mr. Willm. Adams, and contd. it agreeably to the Notes until we came to 4 Mile run again, which employed us until dark. Returned to Alexa. and again lodged at Mr. Fitzhugh's.³⁹

Washington wrote a letter on April 7, 1799, to the Secretary of War:

My dear Sir: When your letters of the 30th and 31st. Ulto. were brought here, I was on a Survey of some land I hold in the vicinity of Alexandria; on which, as I was informed, and as the fact proved, considerable trespass had been committed. To complete this business I was employed near three days; and now, company will allow me to do but little more than to acknowledge the receipt of those letters.⁴⁰

Washington's letter of April 26, 1799, to Ludwell Lee read:

Dear Sir: Your occupation on Wednesday last, put it out of my power to speak to you with out giving interruption to more important business than I am now about to communicate.

Having good information that some land which I hold on four mile run was much depredated on, I went up some short time ago to run round the Lines, and

³⁷ Letter, Washington to William Pearce, Apr. 3, 1796 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 35, p. 11).

³⁸ Letter, Washington to William Pearce, May 15, 1796 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 35, p. 47).

³⁹ Washington Diary (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 4, p. 301).

⁴⁰ Letter, Washington to the Secretary of War, Apr. 7, 1799 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 37, p. 174).

found the fact to be as reported; but not being able to ascertain all the Corners, and those holding the adjacent Lands not being present, I forbore to re-mark any of the lines; but being desirous of doing this, and meeting with all the parties at the Election, Monday next is fixed for this purpose; who have engaged to meet me at the beginning Corner of Adam's Patent (under which I hold) by nine o'clock on that morning; where, and when, being informed that you have Land adjoining mine, I should be glad to meet you. As you may not know where this Corner is, I shall pass a little house at the junction of the Leesburgh Road (a widows) half an hour before nine on my way. With great esteem etc.⁴¹

During the last of April, Washington was again involved in surveying his Four Mile Run tract:

April 29, 1799—Went up to run around my land on 4 Mile run. Lodged at Colo. Little's.

April 30, 1799—Engaged in the same business as yesterday and returned home in the Afternoon. Morning clear and fine. Wind Easterly. Afterwards fresh from the Southward clouded up and between 2 and 3 began to Rain contd. to do so steadily until I went to bed. Mer. then at 50.⁴²

George Washington surveyed his Four Mile Run tract on four different occasions: April 21, 1785; May 5, 1786; April 3-4, 1799; and April 29-30, 1799. The exterior lines of the tract were about eight miles long, and ran through heavily wooded country, and along the banks of a run with few or no paths. Surveying the tract in 1799 was difficult work for a man of sixty-seven years. In his *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, George Washington Parke Custis reproduced a facsimile of Washington's survey of the tract showing its outlines.⁴³ Figure 3 is a copy of the Four Mile Run tract survey. A transcription of the survey notes is as follows: "Allow—4 variation—Adam's patent in 1730—and 4½ Ditto—for Gray's Patent—in 1724."

Starting in the lower right hand corner of the plat and moving in a clockwise direction, the following notes appear:

- 1) Four Mile Run. 2) A. A white Oak on 4 Mile Run—Known corner of Gray's Patent. 3) C. Four Mile Run. 4) Red Oak Marked for a corner. 5) A fallen & dead hicy. Said to have been established corner. 6) A chestnut Oak. anciently marked. 7) I. (Survey line parallel with D to E). 8) D. No corner tree found. 9) Road to Alexandria. 10) Road to Cameron. 11) A stump said to have been a line tree in this course. 12) E. A Pine but not marked as a corner & short of the distance from the ? section and about 9½ poles. 13) No corner tree found. a scrubby hiccory had some appearances of marks. 14) No corner tree found. 15) an old white oak marked. 16) In Mr. W. Adam's old field. 17) A red oak anciently marked. 18) F. No corner found. 19) B. A white or box oak anciently marked. 20) A line tree hicy. 21) Road to Leesburgh. 22) White

⁴¹ Letter, Washington to Ludwell Lee, Apr. 26, 1799 (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 37, p. 195).

⁴² Washington Diary (Fitzpatrick, Vol. 4, p. 303).

⁴³ George Washington Parke Custis. *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*. Philadelphia: J. W. Bradley (1861), facing page 445. Location of the original not known.

Oak—Adams's beginning corner. 23) Intersection for the corner of Adams in Gray's line. 24) A white or box oak Gray's corner.

The notes appearing beneath the survey plat are as follows:

So far as the black lines of the above Plat extend from A to B—and from C to D from the Run there can be no difficulty nor dispute.— Nor can there be any elsewhere if ancient corners, or marked lines are to be found, because these must govern & decide but if These are wanting some difficulty may occur—but even in this and with reasonable men difficulties may be easily overcome.— From the Intersection at D, supposing the Pine at E to be a corner tree, (which by thereby is more like a line tree) and the stump by the Log house at the Fork of the Road to have been a line tree, & the course between these to be the true one, the distance from the said intersection will end $9\frac{1}{2}$ poles short of what the Patent Ne Patent requires.—and pursuing the courses and distances as by John Houghs Survey, allowing for variation. They will end at F. On the other hand—to proceed from B reversing the courses & distances of Houghs Survey allowing for variation as above—The last course will end at G—But neither of these will give me more than about 1150 or 1160 acres where I ought to have 1225 a. 3 r. 27 p.

The previous citations in letters, diaries, and survey notes, give a valuable insight into Washington's character. As a land owner, he was concerned about acquiring a good title to his Four Mile Run tract. Using the Northern Neck Proprietor's warrants for Gray's and Adams' patents, Washington tried to establish more precise boundaries for his tract. The heavily wooded land and the previous surveys based on metes and bounds made his task difficult. Some of the original survey landmarks were missing or in question when Washington attempted to reestablish the survey made seventy-five years earlier. Even John Hough's more recent survey of 1770 did not help Washington that much. Washington was also concerned about trespassors who reportedly removed wood and hoop poles without his permission. Perhaps this was the reason he asked Captain Terret and Mr. Luke, who owned adjacent tracts, to assist in the April 3-4, 1799, survey of his property lines. Washington's survey notes on his Four Mile Run tract indicate that instead of the 1225 acres of land which he thought he owned, he actually had only 1150 to 1160 acres.