GILBERT SIMPSON: WASHINGTON'S PARTNER IN SETTLING HIS WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA LANDS

Cecil E. Goode

Gilbert Simpson was George Washington's partner in settling his southwest Pennsylvania lands in the area where Perryopolis now stands. He also built a gristmill for Washington and operated it for some ten years until their partnership was dissolved in 1784. The mill ruins can still be seen at the edge of Perryopolis. A Pennsylvania historical marker today proudly announces that nearby stood Washington's mill amidst 1,643 acres of land that belonged to Washington, including the present site of the town.

Historians who have touched on Washington's partnership with Simpson, basing their research entirely on Washington's correspondence, have concluded that Simpson took advantage of Washington while he was occupied in the prosecution of the Revolution. None, to the author's knowledge, has studied Simpson's side in the matter as can be gleaned from his letters to Washington and a study of the conditions that prevailed on the frontier during the war.

After Simpson had concluded his affairs with Washington, he moved with his family to Kentucky, settling near Lexington on the waters of Cane Run and Town Fork of the Elkhorn. It was here that he died during Washington's second term as president.

How did Simpson's partnership with Washington come about? First of all, during his childhood and early manhood, Simpson had been a neighbor of Washington and his brother Lawrence at Mount Vernon; and, secondly, Simpson had proposed the partnership shortly after Washington had obtained the Western Pennsylvania land by grant from the Pennsylvania colony.

In 1740, Simpson's father, also named Gilbert, leased 150 acres adjacent to what later became Mount Vernon from William Clifton. This plantation was acquired by George Washington after he took over Mount Vernon from his brother's estate. The plantation then

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located in Prince William County was placed in Fairfax County in 1742 when that county was formed. The leasehold was situated near to where Hunting Creek enters the Potomac River at the south edge of present-day Alexandria. The lease was to run during the natural life of Gilbert (Senior), his wife Elizabeth, and son Gilbert, Jr., for an annual rental of 730 pounds of tobacco to be paid by December 25 of each year. In addition, Simpson was required to plant 100 apple trees and keep the tract under good fence.¹

Undoubtedly, Gilbert (Senior) had other land under lease because in 1761 George Washington collected 1,888 pounds of tobacco rent, while the lease described above called for only 730 pounds.²

George Washington's diary provides some additional help in locating Gilbert Simpson's plantation. On June 30, 1772, Washington wrote in his diary: "My Brother and Family set of home, Mr. Tilgham also. After Breakfast I rid with Mr. Byrd in the Forenoon to my meadow at Doeg Run and to the Mill, and in the Afternn. went to Sound the Depth of the sevl. Fishing shores from Posey's to Gilbt. Simpson's." Simpson's landing was above Sheridan's Point upstream from Little Hunting Creek.³

When Gilbert Simpson, Jr., reached manhood, he leased in 1761 a 150-acre plantation from Bryan Fairfax in neighboring Loudoun County. As was usual, this lease was for the natural life of Simpson, his wife Tamar,⁴ and son Thomas. Bryan Fairfax was a member of the Lord Fairfax family and owned much of Loudoun County. The land that Simpson leased was located on Kittotcin (Catoctin) Mountain on or near the drains of South Segotan (Sycoline) Branch. The rent was to be three pounds a year payable on December 1. The lease stipulated that Simpson was to plant 100 apple trees thirty feet apart, build a house at least twenty by sixteen feet, and build other necessary buildings and keep them in good repair.⁵

In the same year that Gilbert, Jr., and his wife and son moved to Loudoun County, Samuel Johnston, Simpson's father-in-law, relinquished two tracts of land to George Washington that he had leased from William Clifton in 1745 and 1752. Washington, who had bought

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³ Ibid., 69.
⁴ Simpson's wife was a daughter of Samuel Johnston and Hannah Clark who were neighbors of the Simpsons near Mount Vernon. (Named in Samuel Johnston's will.) See J. Estelle King, Abstracts of Wills and Inventories, Fairfax, Va., 1742-1801 (1936), 31.
⁵ Loudoun County, Va., Deed Book C: 59-61, June 8, 1761.
the land from Clifton, gave Johnston twenty pounds for breaking the two leases for a total of 146 acres. At the same time, Johnston leased 200 acres from Washington where he, Johnston, was then living. The land was described as being on the Potomac River and bounded by John Sheridan, Gilbert Simpson, Sr., and William Clifton.6

It would appear that Simpson was well known to Washington, because he and his family had lived as neighbors and tenants of Washington for many years. Washington was receptive to a proposal Simpson made to him in a letter of October 5, 1772:

Honoured S̄

I am informed you have not purchast Mr. Fairfaxes and [?] Lands the which I was in hopes you had for then I should have expected to have least sum more adjoining to my lot which is quite too small as it is but S̄ I hope these lines will find you in perfect good helth and bee kindly received by your honour it is now I am going to inform you S̄ of what I have been proposeing and thinking of proposeing to you as you have a plenty of good lands lying out at red Stone and unsetled I would undertake to settle it in pardnership with on terms of this kind which is for me to find three or four working hands and as many breeding mairs and the same number or more of cows and other stock in propotion S̄ if you should think proper to join this with the same quantity of hands and stock and could confer the charge of the same to me I should think it my greatest duty to discharge the same with the utmost care and onnesty as the land is so good for indian corn and meadows I make no doubt but it would in a few years add something more to your fortune and a reasonable Com- pency of good liveing to my self S̄ if these lines should have the good sucksess to find you as I hope they will in a little time I pray you would send me answer by the first opertunity so S̄ I remain

Your humble servant
Loudoun
Gilbt. Simpson7

Simpson drew on his acquaintance with the prominent planter and colonial man of affairs to make a business proposition which he felt

6 Fairfax County, Va., Deed Book E: 15-20, Dec. 21, 1761.
would be to Washington's advantage and at the same time would provide a better living to him and his family. Evidently he felt that the 150-acre plantation he had in Loudoun County was inadequate. This proposal was accepted by Washington, and the Simpson family lived in Western Pennsylvania in what was first Westmoreland County and later, Fayette County, for the next twelve years — during the entire period of the American Revolution.

Life on the Pennsylvania frontier, initiated by this letter, would prove to be most trying and full of pioneer and wartime hardships, and it sharply contrasted with the more settled life of Fairfax and Loudoun counties in Virginia. On the edge of civilization, Simpson would settle a wild country, try to represent Washington's interests as best he could, build a mill for Washington, contend with the Indians stirred up by the British, furnish provisions for the Revolutionary forces, and in the end leave Washington, upon his return from the war, unhappy with the financial results of the venture.

As a young surveyor, Washington had an opportunity to buy good land cheaply at an early age. By the time he was eighteen he had acquired 1,500 acres. His fascination with land continued throughout his lifetime. In his time, more than today, land was the measure of success and wealth. He sought it avidly, and his military service during the French and Indian War gave him the opportunity to see and appraise desirable land in Pennsylvania and along the Ohio River; even more important, it afforded the right to thousands of acres of bounty land. In addition, he bought up more thousands of acres from military colleagues who needed the money or did not appreciate land as much as he did.

The land Simpson referred to near Redstone Fort in southwestern Pennsylvania had been acquired by Washington prior to September 15, 1770, because on that day he recorded in his diary his assessment of the land upon visiting it:

Monday 15th. Went to view some Land which Captn. Crawford had taken up for me near the Yaughyaughgane distant about 12 miles. This Tract which contains about 1600 Acres includes some as fine Land as ever I saw, a great deal of Rich Meadow, and in general, is leveller than the Country about it. This Tract is well waterd, and has a valuable Mill Seat (except that the Stream is rather too slight, and it is said not constant more than 7 or 8 months in the Year; but on acct. of the Fall, and other conveniences, no place can exceed it).  

This part of Pennsylvania had been in dispute between Pennsylvania and Virginia, but when surveyors Mason and Dixon had fixed

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the disputed boundaries, lands hitherto in doubt became patentable. Washington was quick to recognize this opportunity and wrote in September 1767 to his old war comrade, William Crawford, who had moved to southwestern Pennsylvania from Virginia, asking him to locate 1,500-2,000 acres of good land. The land he saw in September 1770 was the land that Crawford had surveyed for him. Crawford became a partner with Washington in locating, surveying, and claiming land. Washington furnished the funds, and Crawford shared in the land thus acquired.

Some twenty-one miles south, Crawford also claimed for Washington the Fort Necessity site for which Washington had a sentimental fascination. He had built Fort Necessity during the French and Indian War and had suffered humiliating defeat there at the hands of the French. Defeat, however, did not dim his fondness for the area, which he said reminded him of Loudoun County in Virginia. Crawford also claimed some 2,800 acres for Washington on Miller's Run, near present-day Canonsburg, Pennsylvania.

Washington had taken a survey party in 1770 to the Great Kanawha area of present-day West Virginia for the purpose of searching out and claiming his grant from Virginia for his service during the French and Indian War. His grant as a colonel was for 15,000 acres, but he added to this the claims of other soldiers that he bought up. On November 7, 1771, he wrote to his friend George Mercer asking him to buy up claims of soldiers for bounty land “provided they will take a trifle for them.” Washington even expressed an interest in acquiring land at the mouth of the Scioto in Ohio and in joining the rush to Kentucky down “to the Falls, or even below.”

By the close of the Revolution, he had acquired a vast amount of land: 4,695 acres in southwest Pennsylvania; 9,744 acres along the Ohio River; and 43,466 acres in the Great Kanawha Valley. Later, he owned 3,051 acres on the Little Miami River in Ohio and 5,000 acres on the Rough River in Kentucky, a total of more than 65,000 acres.

14 Ibid., 204.
Throughout the remainder of his life, Washington cherished his western lands and resisted selling any of them. Instead, he wanted to lease them at a profitable rental, with the tenants doing the necessary clearing, building of houses and farm buildings, fencing, and planting of fruit trees. But he had difficulty in realizing his aims. The land was too remote from Mount Vernon; he was too busy with carving out a new nation; prospective tenants were too imbued with the spirit of independence and individual rights encouraged by the vast new land and the process of breaking the yoke from Britain; and the Indians were resisting with their lives the giving up of their hunting grounds.

Simpson, in a letter to Washington on December 26, 1772, referred to a reply from Washington accepting his proposal of a partnership in settling some of Washington's Pennsylvania land.\(^\text{15}\) In typical Washington fashion, Simpson was asked to proceed to Redstone and plant an early crop of corn. Washington's business instructions were usually quite detailed and urged immediate action. Simpson proposed that he go with one "negro fellow" and that Washington provide "one fellow and one wench." He said that his own labor would stand for one of Washington's "hands" because he would want to supervise the project close at hand. He said he would need a wagon to carry tools and would take two of his own horses, two cows and calves, and other necessaries.

In preparation for the joint venture with Simpson, Washington wrote to Craven Peyton in Loudoun County on February 23, 1773, asking Peyton to represent him in having appraised the slaves, horses, and other items furnished by him and Simpson. At the same time, Washington wrote Simpson asking for the appraisal and giving instructions for the enterprise. These letters follow:

\textbf{To CRAVEN PEYTON}

Mount Vernon, February 23, 1773.

Sir: Mr. Gilbert Simpson of your County and I, are upon a Scheme of settling some Lands of mine upon Youghioyany in Partnership; and as it is more convenient for each of us to lay in Sundry Articles which we are already possessed off than to make a joint purchase of them it becomes necessary to have these Appraizd; for this Reason, and, inasmuch as the Appraisement will either be at Mr. Simpson's own House or in Leesburg I

\(^{15}\) All of the Simpson letters referred to in this article were obtained from the Washington Papers, Letter Files (microfilm, reel no. 4), LCMD.
have taken the liberty to request the favour of you to Act in my behalf and with Mr. Simpson to make choice of Appraisers to value two Negroes which I have sent up; one of his, a Waggon, some Horses, and such other things as Mr. Simpson may furnish having no fixed and determinate value to them in order that each may know he stands indebted to the other on acct. of the joint Concern. I am sorry to give you any trouble in this Affair but if it should ever lay in my power to make you a return, I shall not be unmindful of the favour you will hereby confer on Sir, Yr., etc.

G. Washington

To GILBERT SIMPSON

Mount Vernon, February 23, 1773.

Mr. Simpson: As the Negro Fellow I bought in Alexandria will by no means consent to leave this Neighbourhood and as you did not seem Inclind to take him without I have sent a young Fellow which I bought last Spring in his room. In coming from Boston here he got Frost Bit and lost part of his Toes which prevents his Walk'g with as much activity as he otherwise would but as they are quite well, and he a good temper'd quiet Fellow I dare say he will answer the purpose very well. I also send you a fine, healthy, likely young Girl which in a year or two more will be fit for any business, her principal employment hitherto has been House Work but is able, or soon will be to do any thing else.

These Negroes along with the one you carry out had better be valued by the same Appraisers; for the Cost of them is nothing to the purpose as I bought them with my own Money and for ready Cash noways Connected till apprais'd with our joint Interest I have wrote to Mr. Craven Peyton to act in my behalf, you and he therefore may agree on proper Persons to appraise these Negroes but your Waggon-Horses, and other things which have not a regular and fix'd value of themselves.

Inc1lose you have a List of such Articles as are furnish'd from my own Store and Smiths Shop; the prices affix'd are as low as I could buy at in any of the Stores for ready Cash. Lund Washington who is now going up to Alexandria will Inclose you an Acct. of what things he will get there with the prices of each

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respective Article all of which I hope will not only get safe to your hands but safe to the Land of Promise; for which the Sooner you Imbark After the Weather will permit the Better as you will have more of the Spring before you to prepare for the Summers Crop.

I have wrote to Captn. Crawford to assist you with any thing you may want and I will see him paid. Vale. Crawford I am perswaded will also aid you in any matters in his power and I would advise you to lay in your Provision of Corn &ca. upon your first getting out as it is more than probable the prices of them will Increase as the Spring advances.

Let me have a List of all the Articles you furnish with the sev'l Prices annexed that I may be acquainted with our respective Advances and be enabled thereby to State the Accounts. I do not recollect any thing more at present to add except in general to advise you to look beyond a year or two and not suffer any present or immediate convenience in clearing Land or doing other things to break in upon any regular or settled Plan which may be beneficial hereafter; for this reason it is I would recommend it to you to examine the Land well and begin to Build and clear in that part of it which is most likely to answer the general end and design of your going there; so in like manner concerning your Houses letting those you do Build be good of their kind and in the end you will find them Cheapest. I heartily wish you your health, and Success and am Yr. Friend, etc.

G. Washington

Apparently, Washington was a little parsimonious in the provision of man- and womanpower. One of the slaves had lost some of his toes, and the other would not be sufficiently mature for a year or two. Interestingly, a slave could refuse to go to the back country, and out of 200 or so slaves Washington owned he had to send one who was handicapped.

With the letter to Simpson was enclosed an accounting of the items furnished by Washington:

"A list of sundries furnished by George Washington for his and Gilbert Simpson's joint concern upon Youghiogany — with the prices thereof out of his own store and smith's shop, etc."

17 Ibid., 117-18.
The inventory included such items as:

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\begin{align*}
\text{A negro man—Landon} & \quad \text{To be appraised} \\
\text{A negro girl—Nancy} & \\
\text{One gun—to be valued when repaired} & \quad 55 \\
& \quad 47 \\
& \quad 10s \\
& \quad 1 \\
& \quad 16
\end{align*}
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The list included various tools including hoes, chisel, auger, hammer, drawing knife, gimlets, saw files, cross-cut saw, wedges, and clevises. Also listed were various items of equipment such as harness, grindstone, cooking utensils, and blankets for slaves, and supply items such as three gross nails, four pounds best “F” gunpowder, thirty yards brown robs [?], two bushels of salt, six yards of bagging, and sixteen pounds of drop shot. The total value shown was £ 116 2s 11p. 18

On April 11, 1773, Simpson had reached the Youghiogheny country, but the trials and tribulations of the trip had seriously dampened his eagerness for the undertaking. He had become sick from exposure and was now proposing to quit the venture. A part of his disaffection was that his wife was unwilling to move out to the frontier.

Two months later, on June 14, he again wrote Washington but this time from his plantation in Loudoun County. He still wanted to pull out of the partnership and asked Washington how he wanted to dispose of the supplies, equipment, and hands that both had provided. He reported that he had left affairs in good shape; his “fellow” was in general charge; and a neighbor would keep an eye on everything.

Six weeks later, in another letter to Washington, the problems relative to continuing in the venture had apparently been resolved because Simpson said he would move his family to Pennsylvania in the fall. He also mentioned having found a millwright who would be willing to construct Washington’s mill. He suggested that Washington check on the prospect’s competency by conferring with his own miller at Mount Vernon. He also requested “one good stanch negrow fellow that understands how to work with horses and other plantation business and one youngish negro woman and money to carry on your mill. . . .” He said he hoped to see Washington before the latter went to Williamsburg, presumably to attend a session of the House of Burgesses. The construction of a mill had not been mentioned earlier, but evidently Washington had requested that Simpson supervise its erection.

18 Washington Papers, Letter Files (microfilm, reel no. 4), LCMD.
In a letter to Washington on October 1, 1773, Simpson said he was afraid he would not get to see Washington before the latter set out for Williamsburg. He reported that he was having difficulty finding wagons to move his family and belongings to Pennsylvania. He observed that the cost of the project was great but he hoped that the income would justify the cost. Again he asked for money to start construction of the mill and for 5,000 nails and eight bushels of salt.

By May 1774, Simpson had become settled on the Youghiogheny and had started construction of Washington’s mill, but the country was in turmoil because of an Indian uprising, undoubtedly at the urging of the British. He said that at least 500 families had fled within the past week. With the help of neighbors he intended to build a fort where his house stood. He had bought a rifle and needed more weapons. Further, he asked Washington, if he could, to send some reinforcements.

Other sources also reported trouble with the Indians in 1774. A history of Fayette County said that many settlers sought refuge in hastily constructed forts and many others retreated over the mountains to the more settled east. A letter to Washington from his agent Valentine Crawford, dated May 25, 1774, said that the Shawnees were determined on war. He added that Simpson and his neighbors were building a fort at the place where the mill was being built. In a later letter, dated June 8, he reported that Simpson’s fort had been completed. Although Crawford had offered Simpson all of Washington’s servants and carpenters which were at Crawford’s disposal, Simpson had refused because there was so much revelry at the fort that he was afraid he could not control them.19

In August, Simpson reported to Washington that the mill could be completed by Christmas if he could get some structural iron, but he did not see how that would be possible. Completion of the mill had been delayed by the war. Again, he asked for more money to build the mill and was sending his son for the money. The mill had cost 250 pounds thus far, and he asked for 250 pounds more. The total cost for completion he estimated at 700 pounds. Apparently, the fort had been completed, because Simpson signed the letter as coming from “Fort Triall.”

A month later, in a letter to Washington, Simpson reported that his son had made it back safely to the frontier. Washington seemed exercised at the cost of the mill, so Simpson tried to assure him that

it would be worth the cost. However, he reminded Washington that the mill was being built according to Washington’s own specifications which dictated the cost. By November, Simpson needed still more money for the mill, so he sent his son to Mount Vernon again for 300 pounds. He proudly reported that his corn crop had yielded 300 bushels.

In February 1775, Simpson suggested to Washington that a new county court which was being set up be placed on Washington’s land near the site of the mill. Whether such action was taken is not known, but the town of Perryopolis now stands on the site of Washington’s land and mill. Oddly, the town is named for Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry rather than for its probable founders, Washington and Simpson.

In his February 1775 letter to Washington, Simpson recognized that Washington was involved in larger affairs than the enterprise on the Youghiogheny. Simpson hoped Washington could come out early in the summer but realized he probably could not: “For if you cant come out yourself early in the summer which I don’t imagine you can as I expect your business is ergently upon other affairs concerning the good of Americay.”

By Simpson’s letter to Washington in April 1775, we learn that Washington continued to be concerned about the cost of his mill. Simpson was hurt by Washington’s dissatisfaction and at least implied feeling that Simpson’s poor management was at fault. He said that his concentration on building the mill had been to the detriment of his plantation; and the necessity of providing quarters for the workmen had damaged his furniture and bedding. Washington had also found fault with the millwright who was directly supervising the construction, although Simpson attested to the millwright’s capability and said that the mill was solidly built and would be standing long after other mills had fallen down. In retrospect, his assessment was correct because the mill stood until after 1900 and was in continuous operation except for a few years following Simpson’s proprietorship.20

We have nothing outside the correspondence with Washington to describe the life of the Simpson family in Pennsylvania. At least one or two of his ten children were born there. Initially, Simpson built a log house as his home and headquarters for the joint enterprise.21 In 1774, as defense against the Indian uprising, we know he built, with the help of neighbors, a fort adjacent to the log house and mill. One

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20 Ibid., 709.
21 Ibid.
son was old enough in 1774 to make the near-300-mile journey to Mount Vernon for money to continue construction of the mill. The plantation that the family cleared and operated must have been quite productive because in several of his letters to Washington he commented on the productivity of the crops and stock. When Washington was settling his affairs after his long absence during the war he spoke favorably of the condition of Simpson's plantation. Nevertheless, the twelve years in Pennsylvania must have been years of hardship and danger; the Indians were a constant threat, and these were the years of the Revolution.

From 1775 to 1784 — nine years — there was only one communication from Simpson to Washington, then the commander-in-chief of the American forces. Undoubtedly, Simpson continued to operate during these years as best he could. His place, called Simpson's, was a convenient stopping place for soldiers and travelers. It is a matter of record that he furnished provisions for the American forces, because after the war Washington attempted to collect on a certificate from the Continental Congress to Simpson in the amount of 339 dollars and 53/90ths of a dollar, with interest at 6 percent from November 4, 1780. As Simpson's partner, Washington was due half of the amount.

The one letter between 1775 and 1784 was written on May 7, 1781. It was short and seemed to respect Washington's exalted but burdensome responsibility as commanding general of the Revolutionary forces; yet, he seemed to feel the need to assure his partner that the enterprise was going well. The letter is quoted below in its entirety:

To

His
Excelency jeneral
George Washington

These

Washingtons Bottom May 7th 1781
Honoured Sr: This is to inform you that throu Gods mercy I and all my family are in good helth and the negros and stock of every kind sems to increas fast I have maid it my indevor to make what meadow and pasturage I could possable from the first of my settleing and I now begin to find the benefit as our range are got [?] out

I should be glad to wright more particular to your onner but your family [?] will not permit I beg you would not think hard of my not setling [?] oftener than I doe as times are very precarious with us but still I shall give you or yours a just account of all I hope I have settled five tenants on the land according to your instruction I shall have a considerable parasel of young horses to sell in one yeare more your mill has made you good profit within this year past Sr I am yours who prays Gods blessings to attend you thru all your undertaking

Gilb Simpson

The letter quoted above either did not reach Washington or he was not satisfied with it, for on June 9 he wrote to his agent Colonel Crawford, asking among other things: "I pray you also to be so kind as to let me know how Simpson employs his time, his force, and my Mill. He has not that I can hear of rendered any acct. or paid one farthing for the profits of my Mill or share of the Plantation since he has been on the Land, which is poor encouragement for me to leave my property in his hands." 24

Washington arrived home at Mount Vernon on Christmas Eve, 1783, after tendering his commission to the president of the Continental Congress. He had been away from his beloved Mount Vernon for more than eight years attending to the public business — his private affairs were left in others' hands. Ever a stickler for detail and a firm businessman, his affairs had suffered seriously during the war. Now he set about putting them in order. His partnership with Gilbert Simpson was one that he felt uneasy about, as he did about his other Pennsylvania lands which had been taken over by squatters during the war. But first he had to put Mount Vernon in order. 25

For the purpose of settling his accounts with Simpson, Washington wrote to him on February 13, 1784. The letter was sharp and accusatory in tone as his letters often were when concerned with business matters. He said he expected a full accounting and some handsome profit from their partnership. 26

Washington's letter wounded Simpson, who with his family had been down with the smallpox. For this reason or others, it was more than two months before Simpson answered Washington's letter. He said he would visit Washington as soon as he could get his planting

done, feeling that he could convince Washington that he had done well with his stewardship. He had "from a wild opened a beautiful farm of one hundred and fifty acres of clear land under good fences. . . ."

He had planted 120 apple trees and 120 peach trees. He reported his stock included thirty cattle, twelve horses, fifty sheep, thirty hogs, six young slaves, "and one more expected in a short time." Simpson had leased five plantations — four of 150 acres each and one of 100 acres. He asked Washington to send an attorney to settle the partnership by the middle of July if he was unable to come to see Washington.

In June and July, preparatory to settling his accounts in Fayette County, Pennsylvania, Washington advertised in the Alexandria, Baltimore, and Philadelphia newspapers as follows: "To be Let to the highest Bidder for the Term of Ten Years, on Wednesday the 15th of September next, on the Premises, to be entered upon at Christmas, or sooner if the Crops can be disposed of, The Plantation or Farm on which Mr. Gilbert Simpson, the Co-partner, now lives, lying in the county of Fayette, state of Pennsylvania, commonly called and known by the name of Washington Bottom. . . ." 27 The advertisement included a description of the livestock and mill, as well as two paragraphs offering to let tracts at the Great Meadows (Fort Necessity) and at Bath on the Potomac in Virginia.

Washington wrote to Simpson on July 10, 1784, enclosing copies of the advertisement. His instructions in the letter included:

My part of the Stock (except Negroes, which may be necessary to finish the crop) will certainly be disposed of. Your half may also be sold, and you to purchase in what you like on your own account; or set apart by a fair and equal division before the sale, as may be agreed upon when I come up. The Land and Mill will also be let in the manner described; for I cannot in justice to myself, any longer submit to such management, waste of property, and leases, as I have hitherto sustained by my partnership with you. 28

He added that he did not expect to be fully compensated for his losses but he did expect as full and satisfactory account of his property as possible.

During the next three weeks, Simpson journeyed to see Washington at Mount Vernon and upon his return to Pennsylvania wrote to Washington on July 31 informing him of his safe arrival. The tone of the letter was much different from the preceding exchange of correspondence. Simpson evidently had been able to placate Washington and to convince him of his sincerity and honesty. Apparently Wash-

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27 From the copy in the Letter Book, Washington Papers (microfilm, reel no. 4), LCMD, attached to letter to Simpson, July 10, 1784.
ington had heard a number of derogatory rumors about Simpson's management of their joint affairs; another possibility was that Washington was using the shock technique to elicit the facts of the situation. Washington's records at the end of the war, after his long absence, were in bad shape, and he really did not know where he stood in many of his business affairs.

Simpson told of some plundering robbers who had gone through the countryside but had not touched his place. He referred to a dizziness or faintness which must have happened to him when he was in Washington's presence: "... I have never felt much of that faintness only onct in my meadow when on a sudden I had nearly falen of the top of the fens as I was setting on it looking at my wheat. . . ." His letter also spoke of plans for a boat and provisions for Washington and his party in their projected journey into the back country to visit Washington's lands.

On September 1, 1784, Washington set out for the west. He had three main purposes for the journey: to settle his partnership with Simpson and check on some squatters on his land in the vicinity of Simpson's place; to revisit his lands on the Kanawha River (present-day West Virginia) — some 33,000 acres; and to find a point where a navigable headwater of the Potomac closely approached a navigable headwater of the Ohio. His dream in the latter objective was to develop a shipping route to the west.29 His nephew, Bushrod Washington, Dr. James Craik, and William Craik, along with three servants and ten horses, three of the horses carrying his baggage, were in the party. Quite a party it was, but Washington's intention was to push on into the back country if the reports on the Indians would permit it.

On the way, Washington stopped at Berkeley (now West Virginia) in the interest of some of his property there. Also, he observed and inquired along the way in pursuit of his hope to open a trade route to the west. He arrived at Simpson's at about 5:00 p.m. on September 12. By this time he had decided to abandon his trip to the Kanawha because the Indians were hostile. Some travelers from Kentucky had reported that the Indians were generally in arms because of encroachment on what they considered their territory.30

Washington's party put up at Simpson's where he made his headquarters until his departure on September 18 — a stay of five days and six nights. The day after their arrival, September 13, was spent inspecting the mill and the tenements in the Simpson tract. He found

the mill to be less than satisfactory — not enough water, the works and buildings in disrepair — so he concluded it would be difficult to rent it.31

On September 14, Colonel William Butler and Captain David Luckett, commander of Fort Pitt, visited Washington and advised against the intended trip to the Kanawha. Washington was also visited by the squatters on his land at Miller’s Run. These people were Scotch-Irish religious immigrants and believed that they had as much right to the land as Washington did. To avoid contention, when Washington visited their land a few days later, they offered to buy the land. Washington’s price was satisfactory, but they wanted longer than three years to pay it. When Washington refused, they said they would stand suit. Washington did bring suit and the squatters lost.32

The results of the sale are best described by Washington himself in his diary for September 15:

15th. This being the day appointed for the Sale of my moiety of the Co-partnership Stock — many People were gathered (more out of curiosity I believe than from other motives) but no great Sale made. My Mill I could obtain no bid for, altho I offered an exemption from the payment of Rent 15 Months. The Plantation on which Mr. Simpson lives rented well — viz for 500 Bushels of Wheat, payable at any place within the County that I or my Agent might direct. — the little chance of getting a good offer in money, for Rent, induced me to set up to be bid for in Wheat.

Simpson bought a cow for £ 2/10s. The total proceeds from the sale paid to Washington amounted to £ 146 18s 7 3/4d.33 In Washington’s Ledger Book B under date of September 1784 is a note under Simpson’s account, “Settled by a payment in depreciated paper Money.”34 Some authors have considered that Simpson took advantage of Washington by paying him in depreciated currency, but that is not necessarily so. The payment was in Virginia currency; each colony issued its own, and this was the end of a long war. Surely, this was the same currency with which Simpson had been paid by his mill customers and others. Washington never cashed the Virginia notes, for more than a century later, “In December 1890, a package of 79 pieces of Virginia paper money, of various denominations, was sold at auction in Philadelphia, with a wrapper bearing an endorsement in Washington’s writing: ‘Given in by Gilb. Simpson 19 June, 1784 to G. Washington.’”35

31 Entry for Sept. 13, 1784, ibid., 291.
33 Washington’s Cash Memorandum Book A, under date of Sept. 16, 1784, Washington Papers (microfilm, reel no. 6), LCMD.
34 Ledger Book B, under date of Sept. 1784, ibid.
Simpson must have been the one who bid on his plantation at the September 15 sale, for he was still in that area in October 1785 when Washington wrote to his new agent, Thomas Freeman. Simpson, according to the letter, was considering leaving and wanted to lease the property for only one year, but Washington concluded that a deal was a deal. Besides, he did not want to find a tenant every year. Further indication that Simpson was still on the plantation was that Washington gave Freeman instructions for returning the slaves that he had provided in the partnership and the baggage that he had left at Simpson's the previous year. He asked also that twenty-eight gallon kegs of West Indian rum that he had left be sold.  

Simpson probably moved to Kentucky early in 1786 after surrendering his Youghiogheny plantation to Washington. His sons Thomas, Samuel, and John could have gone to Kentucky a year or two earlier. Many frontier people were moving to Kentucky from Western Pennsylvania at that time. The area had been in dispute between Virginia and Pennsylvania, but when it was definitely awarded to Pennsylvania many Virginians moved to Kentucky because Pennsylvania had passed a law in 1780 for the gradual abolition of slaves. That this was a motivation for Simpson is illustrated by Pennsylvania tax rolls which showed that Simpson had five slaves in 1783.  

Probably early in 1786 after turning over the Youghiogheny plantation to Washington, Simpson moved his family and slaves to Fayette County, Kentucky. Fothergill's compilation of Virginia taxpayers lists him as living in Fayette County during the five-year period 1782-1787, with three adults polled and eight slaves. A Gilbert Simpson is also shown in Heinemann's reconstituted First Census of Kentucky as living in Fayette County in 1789.  

A petition to the Virginia legislature to separate the Limestone Settlement into a separate county from Bourbon was signed by Gilbert, Samuel, and John Simpson on August 25, 1786. Another event that would place Simpson in Kentucky in 1786 is that he gave consent for his daughter Anne to marry Zachariah Masterson on July 5 of that
year. In another petition dated November 14, 1779, Gilbert Simpson was one of the signers asking that the northwest part of a lot in Lexington reserved for a courthouse and prison be authorized for the building of a church by the Lexington Presbyterian Society.

Simpson bought land in at least two tracts from Samuel McDowell and his wife in 1789. One corner of the land abutted property owned by George Taylor, and another touched Samuel Simpson’s. There was a second land purchase by Simpson from Samuel McDowell in 1789, but the acreage involved is indeterminate because the records are fragmentary, having been partially burned. In the same year, Samuel and James Simpson and George Taylor also bought land from McDowell. The deeds indicate that they all lived adjacent to each other.

Unclear is where Gilbert Simpson lived between 1786 and 1789 when he appeared in Fayette County. One bit of evidence suggests that he was in Fayette County by 1787 — Fothergill’s compilation of the First Census puts him there by 1787 — but there is also a possibility that he settled first in Bourbon County, adjacent to Fayette.

Simpson died eight years after he came to Kentucky. His death occurred early in Washington’s second term as president of the United States. One wonders, as he lived in the new state of Kentucky, how he felt in retrospect about his relationship with the “Father of His Country,” what he told his neighbors about it, and what his family discussions were like.

It appears that he might have had a better life in Kentucky than he had had on the Pennsylvania frontier, was able at last to own his own piece of God’s earth and not have to pay tribute to an absentee landlord, and could see all his children well established. Church life must have been important to him because he participated in establishing the first Presbyterian church in Lexington. His health probably was not good, even though he was still in his fifties. He had warnings of trouble when he had periods of faintness ten years earlier while he was winding up his affairs with Washington. He died in 1794, and his will was probated in May of that year. He left his wife and ten children who probably have hundreds of descendants today in Kentucky and elsewhere.

43 Ibid. 10 (July 1968) : 111.
44 Fayette County Burnt Records, 3 : 261, 8 : 263.