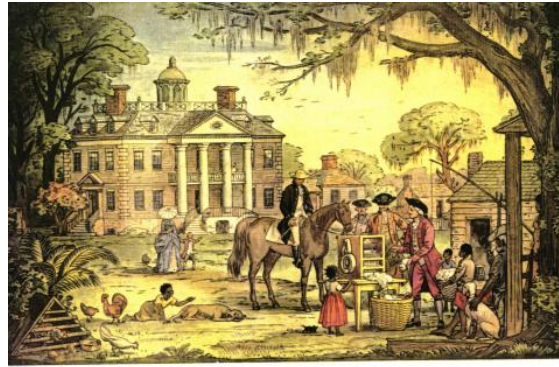




MULBERRY GROVE IN 1794

When James Oglethorpe started his colony in the New World—the last of the original thirteen American Colonies—he had several objectives. One of his agricultural objectives was to support England's growing demand for silk.

Lacking the knowledge to determine what crops would support a new silk culture, in the new colony, Oglethorpe and his fellow "Trustees for the Establishment of the Colony of Georgia in America" decided to create an experimental garden. One of their experimental plantings was the mulberry tree.

As it happens, silk worms absolutely LOVE mulberry leaves. It's amazing to watch how quickly those small creatures can make mulberry leaves disappear!

With the knowledge that mulberry trees could potentially support a silk culture in Georgia, colonists formed new plantations which included mulberry trees. One of those plantations, located near the Savannah River, was known as Mulberry Grove.

Around 1740, eight years into Georgia's life as a British colony, Mulberry Grove's owners were growing and selling mulberry saplings. Ann Cuthbert (who had inherited the plantation) and her husband, Dr. Patrick Graham, also cultivated rice crops.

Growing rice crops, however, required more laborers than the Grahams—and other plantation owners—had in Georgia. (The original plan, in addition to settlers, was to "import yearly...a Number of English or Welch Servants, such as are used to hard Labour in the Country").

Addressing the growing labor shortage, Georgia's Trustees were persuaded that it was time for a change.

Named for George II, a British King, Georgia began its life as a new colony in 1732. At the time, the colony's charter did not permit slaves to work as laborers. That situation changed, however, when Georgia's Trustees asked Parliament to change the law.

Deciding to grant the Trustee's request, members of Parliament overturned the prohibition against slaves in the thirteenth colony. A new law—allowing slavery in Georgia—became effective on January 1, 1751.

With slave labor, it became more profitable for plantation owners to produce rice instead of growing and selling mulberry saplings. Although Mulberry Grove kept its name, its owners also focused on rice production.

By 1774, after Mulberry Grove had changed ownership several times, it became the possession of Georgia's Royal Governor. He increased the number of slaves who worked and lived at Mulberry Grove.

When America's Revolutionary War was finally over, the Royal Governor—clearly a British loyalist—had to forfeit his property. Mulberry Grove was given to a war hero, Nathanael Greene, who wanted to live out his days in peace as a plantation owner growing cotton, among other crops.

Greene's days at Mulberry Grove were numbered, however. He died of sunstroke, in 1791, leaving his wife—Catherine Greene—with five young children (and no easy way of harvesting her cotton crops).

The Greene children needed a tutor and, as it happened, a young man called Eli Whitney was available (because another tutoring position, which had brought him to Georgia, fell through). Catherine Greene hired Eli Whitney to teach her children and—so the story goes—to help her solve the cotton-harvesting problem.

Eli solved Catherine Greene's cotton-harvesting problem when he invented the cotton gin. His new invention provided an easier way for cotton harvesters to separate the cotton seeds from the cotton bolls.

Whitney's invention did something else. It caused cotton to become *the* most-profitable plantation crop—not just at Mulberry Grove, but all over the South. And when *that* occurred, the demand for slaves, to work those cotton fields, exploded.

The image, at the top of this page, is an artist's interpretation of how things appeared at Mulberry Grove in 1794, the year after Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin. Seventy-one years later, at the end of America's Civil War, about 4 million African-Americans were enslaved.

Credits:

Artistic interpretation of Mulberry Grove Plantation, circa 1794, online via Mulberry Grove website. Public Domain image.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Mulberry-Grove-Plantation-and-the-Cotton-Gin>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Mulberry-Grove-Plantation-and-the-Cotton-Gin>

Media Stream



Silkworms Gobbling Mulberry Leaves

Video online, courtesy YouTube.

View this asset at:

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