

Excerpt: Biography of Priscilla From the Digital Encyclopedia of George Washington

In early July 1798 at Dogue Run Farm, thirty-five-year-old Priscilla gave birth to Christopher, her sixth living child. She did not resume working in the fields until five weeks later. Priscilla's husband and Christopher's father, Joe, was likely unable to see much of his newborn son. Like many enslaved couples at Mount Vernon, Priscilla and Joe lived separately.

George Washington recognized marriages between slaves but nevertheless dictated that work assignments rather than family units determine their living arrangements. Joe worked at the Mansion House Farm as a ditcher and lived in the greenhouse slave quarter during the week. Priscilla was a field-worker and lived with their children in a cabin on Dogue Run Farm. Joe could visit his wife and children on Sundays or holidays. Sometimes Joe may have walked the four miles to Dogue Run after sunset, returning in time for work the next morning. Washington occasionally complained that his enslaved workers were fatigued from this practice of “nightwalking” to visit their families.

As a result of these living arrangements, Priscilla raised her children largely alone, supported by a community at Dogue Run and, as time went on, her older children. When Christopher was born, Priscilla's older children – Sophia (age thirteen), Savary (twelve), Penny (ten), and Israel (nine) – could help their mother with the newborn and two-year-old Isrias.

To read the full biography of Priscilla, see:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/article/priscilla/>

To learn more about Priscilla's husband, Joe, see:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/education/for-students/meet-people-from-the-past/slammin-joe/>

