

settlers began moving into the western reaches of Goochland County in the late 1720s and 1730s.²⁰ By the mid-eighteenth-century, most portions of Albemarle County had been settled by European American landowners or their agents to some degree or another. Albemarle County however was still a predominantly rural area with no large towns and few good roads. Roughly one quarter of the nearly 200 land grants made in the region between 1727 and 1745 were greater than 1,000 acres.²¹

In eighteenth century Albemarle County, agriculture drove the economy and tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*) was the principal crop.²² Tobacco cultivation, especially in the hilly Piedmont, had a significant effect upon the landscape and the fertility of the region's soils. Tobacco cultivation entailed the deliberate depletion of soil fertility to lower the plant's nicotine content to consumable levels. The relevant cultivation techniques also resulted in significant erosion and, typically, after a mere five years the soil no longer supported a productive crop. Tobacco was the dominant export of colonial Virginia with tobacco and tobacco notes serving as legal tender used to settle debts and pay taxes throughout the colonial period. White landowners who aspired to enter the socio-economic elite became 'planters.' As in other Piedmont counties, in Albemarle County tobacco production drove early settlement and development of the landscape.

By the mid-eighteenth-century, tobacco cultivation in the central Piedmont required enslaved labor. The clearing, planting and processing of tobacco in large landholdings depended on the significant capital of wealthy planters. Small-scale farmers and planters too could also establish a residence and modest farm with relatively little capital using family labor and basic tools. Philip Morgan and other scholars have argued persuasively that tobacco cultivation could be initiated with a minimum capital requirement. Land could be purchased or leased and a quarter established with a small number of slaves and relatively inexpensive tools. Resources on the surrounding land would provide for shelter, and a garden and small number of livestock would support the quarter. Images of tobacco culture activities depict enslaved African American laborers at work.²³

C7. European and African American Settlement and James Monroe's Lower Plantation, 1735 to 1817

The land that is now the Academical Village was originally contained in two 400-acre patents issued to Abraham Lewis in 1735, and located on either side of Meadow Creek (Figure 2.5).²⁴ Abraham Lewis resided in Hanover County, Virginia and it is likely he never actually lived in Albemarle County.²⁵ Lewis' lands in what would become Albemarle County were likely tended by his brother David, an early settler of lands west of the University of Virginia, or an appointed agent or overseer.

In colonial Virginia, patent holders were required to 'seat and plant' every 50 acres within three years of acquiring their land. Specifically patent holders were required to erect a residence, commonly called a 'claim house,' minimally a 16 x 20 foot structure. It is not clear if Abraham Lewis actually fulfilled his patent by building a house and planting his land. If he did, a portion of the land was likely planted in tobacco, with a small homestead and gardens sufficient to support an overseer and laborers. Land was likely cleared gradually, planted in tobacco, and then abandoned after several years. Abraham Lewis died in 1767.

By about 1736 onwards, the 'Mountain' or 'Three Notch'd Road' was being cleared and maintained from the Southwest Mountains east of what would become Charlottesville to the vicinity of Lickinghole Creek near the east face of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The Three Notched Road is believed to have followed, to a greater or lesser degree, the route of Main Street and University Avenue bounding the northern