

**IDENTITY, SPIRITUALITY, AND COMMUNITY AT THE JOHN  
DICKINSON PLANTATION BASED ON THE COLLECTION FROM BLOCK  
III**

by

Samantha Side

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree in Anthropology with Distinction


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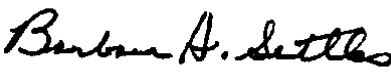
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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis analyzes material culture from the most recent excavation completed in 2000 at the John Dickinson Plantation. This thesis aims to better understand how the enslaved population who lived and worked in this area interacted with and used this material culture to persist, resist, and survive bondage. Specific artifacts such as an amethyst, varying dress items, ceramics, and a rumbler bell that were found in features such as barrel pits, a packed earth floor, a post hole, and a possible hearth were the focus of this analysis in order to consider what artifacts relating to identity, spirituality, and community can tell us about the experience of those who were enslaved at this site during the 1720 to 1820 time range. Through the use of comparative historical and archaeological studies, resources regarding slavery in Delaware and the Mid-Atlantic, and the use of excavation field notes, images, and summaries; it is evident that these artifacts were used to create a separate geography from the dominant white plantation geography. The artifacts from Block III reveal the complex actions and interactions that are important to understanding how the enslaved population was able to imbue not only creativity onto their surroundings but create space for the continuity of African cultural traditions within this environment of bondage.

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyzes archaeological material culture recovered from excavations beneath a ca. 1855 addition to the main plantation house at the John Dickinson Plantation near Dover, Delaware, known as the Block III site. By combining artifact analysis with historical records, and the use of comparative studies, I look into how aspects of personal identity, community, and spirituality could have influenced the experience of enslaved people at the John Dickinson Plantation and how we can see actions of resistance, persistence, and survivance through the materials excavated at this site. Using material culture to understand aspects of social structure that were evident in this context and how it influenced the individual agency of enslaved people at this site will help me to understand how the people here moved about their landscape and interacted with one another and the objects and environment around them in complex and meaningful ways.

The basis of this thesis stems from an internship with the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs that was completed during the summer of 2021. This research was a service project for the Division that involved cleaning and analyzing a collection that was excavated in 2000 and to use the information acquired to improve the public's understanding of the lives of the enslaved people on the John Dickinson Plantation. This research allows for the addition of data on the archaeology of slavery in the Mid-Atlantic and the archaeology of the enslaved experience in Delaware. This research also increases what is known about the lives of the slaves who lived and worked at the John Dickinson Plantation and is a step towards telling their stories within a truer archaeological narrative, applying empathy, and decolonized archaeology to better understand how they imbued complex meaning on the objects

that they used in order to maintain the persistence of cultural values and resist the identity of a slave that was forced upon them.

The approach taken in this thesis to understand the lives of the people studied at this site includes aspects of decolonizing archaeology. This practice aims to make the field more authentic to those who are being studied and have been studied in the past, as well as recognizing the impact of colonization on the field as well as the research done past and present. I will be using terms such as resistance, persistence, and survivance throughout this paper which were defined within a decolonized context by Stephen Silliman in his paper titled, “Colonialism in Historical Archaeology: A review of Issues and Perspectives.” These concepts serve to convey the agency of those studied and illustrate how they took action towards creating their own place within the environment of bondage. Resistance includes an emphasis on agency and a reminder that domination is not final as well as the struggle against odds. Persistence includes cultural or personal changes within continuities as well as continuities within changes. And survivance is defined as, “an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. (Silliman, 2020).” The use of these terms will aid in the understanding of the experiences of those enslaved at this site through the use of decolonizing archaeology.

In *Slavery and Freedom in Delaware, 1639-1865*, William Williams claims that enslaved individuals in Delaware were subjected to cultural cleansing that was successful in “eradicating the celebration of African customs” (Williams, 1996: 20). Through the artifacts and comparative studies presented in this thesis, one can see that this idea of successful cultural cleansing was in fact not the case. The material culture, which includes an amethyst, buttons, varying types of ceramics, a rumbler bell, oyster

shells, and many other items show aspects of identity, creativity, and spirituality; one can come to the conclusion that enslaved people at this site did in fact continue to uphold cultural traditions that stem from West African belief systems. This continuity of cultural traditions, rather than successful cultural cleansing, shows the resistance to the narrative of enslavement and bare-life by those enslaved at the site as well as that there was agency to self-preserve, persist, and survive in the environment of bondage. It is important to note that Enslaved Africans in the United States came from many different ethnic groups, so cultural heritage and traditions from many enslaved people spread north to south and did not come from one ethnic group. They represent a diversity of beliefs and traditions that was then influenced by the new experience and interactions in the United States (Wilkie, 2000: 119). Although we will never know exactly what life was like for the enslaved people at the John Dickinson Plantation, using the archaeological record in Block III, as well as historical and comparative sources, we can begin to better understand how they used materials with deeper meaning than what is visible to the eye and begin to paint a picture of how materials related to identity and spirituality could have held a place for active resistance and survivance within their lives.

## **BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF THE JOHN DICKINSON PLANTATION**

The John Dickinson plantation house is located on the Wharton tract of land north of the St. Jones River, built by Samuel Dickinson in the 1730s after purchasing the land from the Dover area to the St. Jones River (Catts 2002, 1). The first Dickinson to purchase land on the St. Jones Neck had been Walter Dickinson I, John Dickinson's great grandfather, who between 1676 and 1682 bought 3 tracts of land that each contained 400 acres on the northeast side of the St. Jones Neck (Siders and Edwards 1994, 1). Walter I had immigrated from England to Virginia in the 1640s as an indentured servant, and after years of servitude, moved to Talbot County, Maryland around 1654 (Reeder, 2012). Walter I acquired the original Wharton tract, where the mansion house is located, in 1676 from the governor of Delaware (Siders and Edwards, 1994:1). In subsequent years, Walter I also acquired additional lands known as the Merrit and Young's tracts; all of these tracts lay on the northern side of the St. Jones River (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 28). These tracts of land were optimal for agriculture at the time based on their soil and location near major waterways (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 28). Walter I's sons, William and Walter II, gained ownership of these lands after their father's death in 1680 (Siders and Edwards, 1994: 3). After a dispute between the two brothers, William and Walter II, Walter II inherited some of the land on St. Jones Neck, which then passed down to his son, Walter III (Siders and Edwards, 1994: 3). In 1720, the lands on St. Jones Neck then came into the ownership of John Dickinson's father, Samuel Dickinson, who was the cousin of Walter III, due to financial difficulty on the part of Walter III (Siders and Edwards, 1994: 3).

Samuel Dickinson, the great grandson of Walter Dickinson I and the father of John and Philemon Dickinson, was a merchant, tobacco farmer, and slaveholder. He

built the main house which faced the St. Jones River during the 1740's, and then during the 1750s, added a new room as well as a kitchen onto the main house. Once Samuel had expanded the tracts that he owned, the family moved to Poplar Hall around the 1750s (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 29). The plantation house, named Poplar Hall, also referred to as 'the Homestead', was worked by various tenants as well as enslaved men, women, and children who worked and lived on the plantation growing tobacco, wheat, and corn (Catts, 2002: 1). The current standing house was rebuilt after an 1804 fire that destroyed the entire building (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 34). John Dickinson lived at the plantation during his childhood, and after his father's death in 1760 he expanded as well as managed the property, rather than living there. As Dickinson became involved with the politics of the area, the main house became occupied by a variety of carefully selected tenants rather than the Dickinson family from 1767 to 1809 (Catts 2019, 2). The plantation continued to be managed as a tenant farm as John Dickinson became more involved in law and the politics of Delaware and Pennsylvania and therefore spent more time in Philadelphia and Wilmington (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 31).

Enslaved men, women, and children also occupied the main house and plantation; these people who lived and worked here were owned by John Dickinson as well as various tenants (Catts 2002, 2). Prior to John Dickinson's ownership of the property, his father, Samuel, owned 37 slaves which John then inherited upon his father's death in 1760 (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 30). This made John Dickinson the largest slave owner in Kent County at this time, with this number rising to 55 in 1786 (Henry and Lee, 2018: 64). This number includes those who lived and worked on the John Dickinson Plantation as well as the other tracts of land that he owned. The

numbers of enslaved people who lived and worked at the plantation over a long period of time are alluded to in accounts of an enslaved graveyard, which in a source from a Delaware Guide to the First State, states that the graveyard contained the unmarked graves of around 400 enslaved Africans (Delaware Federal Writers' Project 1938:396). This number is potentially larger than it really was. John Dickinson was known to own no more than 60 slaves at one time, so this larger number may indicate the larger amounts of enslaved people who lived and worked, and then passed away, on the plantation over a longer period of time (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 30).

In 1777 John Dickinson enacted a conditional manumission of African Americans who he owned as slaves and then in 1781 and 1786, unconditional manumissions of six men, women, and children (Catts 2002, 2). His beliefs as a Quaker were the basis of his decision (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 34). Similar sentiments from other slave holders in other areas of Delaware reflect the same reasoning for why Dickinson chose to manumit his slaves at this time (Essah, 1996: 36).

After these conditional and unconditional manumissions, some of these African Americans were employed by the Dickinsons, as well as indentured or simply allowed to live on the property (Catts 2002, 2). The manumission agreements by Dickinson also included education for the freed children (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 34). During the 1780s the tenant agreements with Dickinson contained clauses that protected slaves and made provisions for their services as well as their care (Catts 2019, 9). Although Dickinson manumitted his slaves, there were still enslaved people working on the plantation after 1781/86 who were owned by tenants on the property,

as well as formerly enslaved people who lived nearby and were skilled laborers and artisans (Siders and Edwards 1994, 23).

After John Dickinson's death in 1808, his daughter, Sally Norris Dickinson acquired the ownership of the plantation which then remained in the Dickinson family until it passed through various owners in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the ownership of Sally Norris Dickinson, as well as those which followed - her sister Mary Dickinson Logan and Mary's son, Gustavus George Logan - the properties were rented to tenants (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 37). In 1952, the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in Delaware purchased the mansion and completed a restoration of the house in 1956 (Catts 2002, 2).

The newest addition to the main house, Block III, was built sometime between 1838 and 1857 (Catts 2002, 1). This building was likely a summer kitchen or workroom that replaced an 18<sup>th</sup> century pre-existing kitchen or smokehouse area (Catts 2002, 1). It was added onto the Block II addition which was built in 1793. Block III is a one and a half story brick structure with an attached covered passageway (Catts 2002, 1). Excavations in 2000 by John Milner and Associates under the floor of this section revealed a wide variety of artifacts ranging from animal bones to an amethyst crystal to many different types of ceramics as well as 21 cultural features, such as barrel pits, post holes, and a packed earth floor (Catts 2002, 2). There are a few different time periods of use that can be seen from the collections found within the most recent, Block III excavation. These periods include time ranges from pre-1720s, 1720s to 1790s, 1790s to the 1820s, 1820s+, and then a 1950s overburden which is evident in the most recent stratigraphy. Two of the earlier periods of use will be the focus of this thesis, those being the 1720s to 1790s and the 1790s to 1820s.



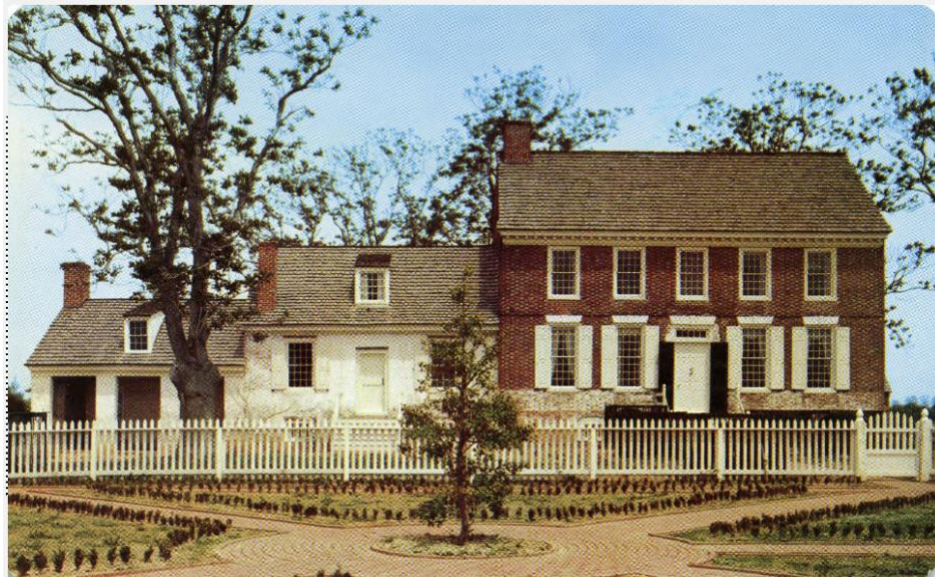


Figure 1: Image of the Main House, taken from the Delaware Public Archives. Block III is the addition to the far left.

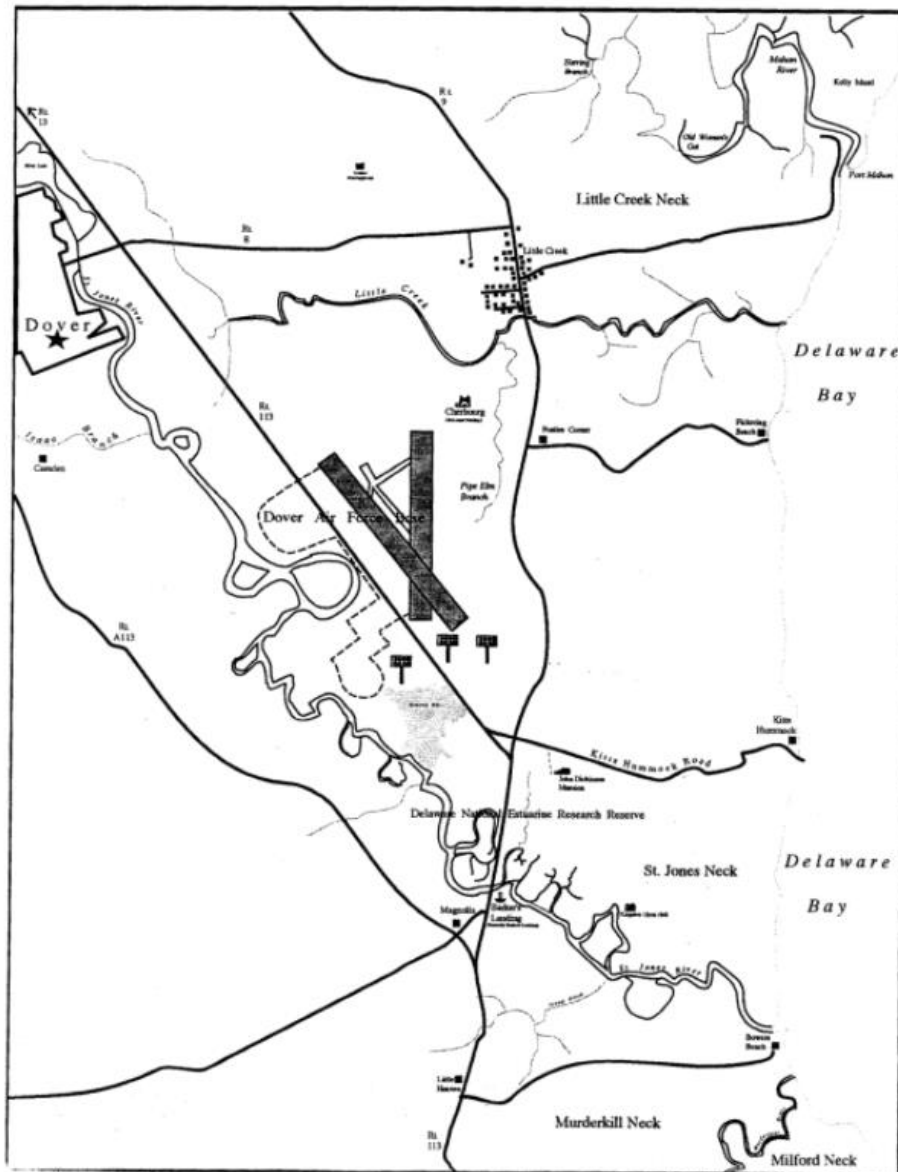


Figure 2: Location of the John Dickinson Plantation in Kent County, Delaware (Siders and Edwards, 1994: vi).

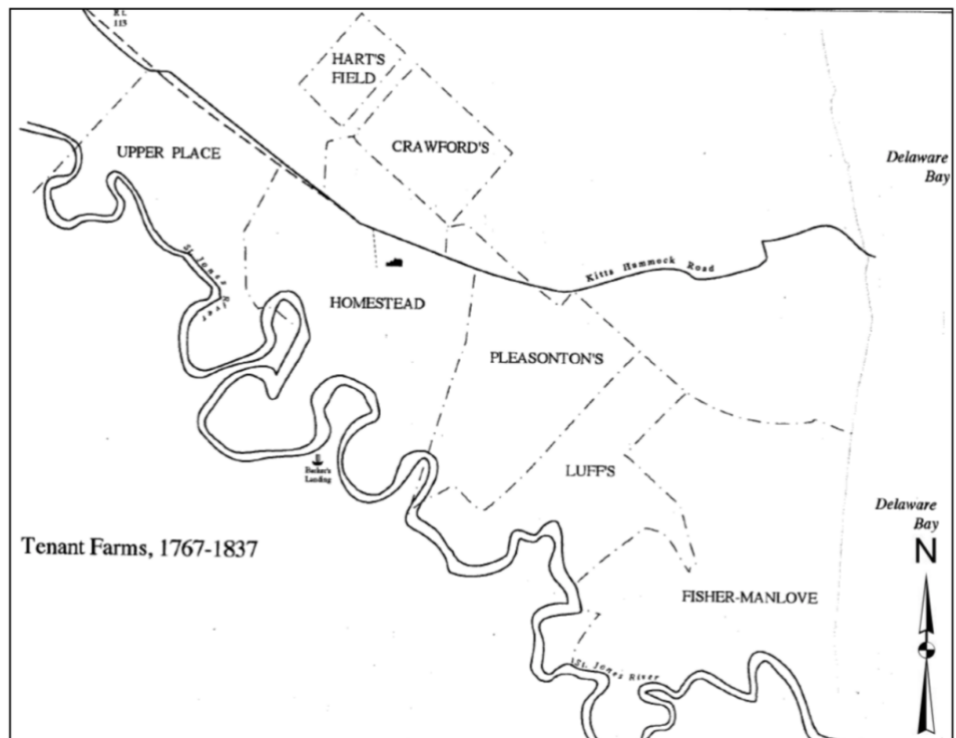


Figure 3: The Division of John Dickinson's land into tenant farms along St. Jones Neck between 1767 and 1837 (Siders and Edwards, 1994: 17).

## **ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY OF SLAVERY IN DELAWARE**

William Williams, in his book, *Slavery and Freedom in Delaware, 1639-1865* states that “Delaware is located on the periphery of the old south.” Delaware was linked to the rest of the south due to “large numbers of enslaved African Americans” present in Sussex county from a very early period (Williams, 1996: 18). Although the small state of Delaware had a limited number of slaveholders in comparison to larger Southern states and therefore fewer record keepers of slavery in this state, there was still a considerable population of enslaved individuals up until the end of the 18th century when many were freed (Williams, 1996: 16). The increasing trend towards manumission at the end of the 18th century was due to religious sentiments mixed with agricultural labor intensity causing a decreased need for enslaved workers (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 34).

The population of slaves in Delaware generally increased from the 17th century on due to increasing settlement and exploitation of land by European settlers starting in the 1630s (Essah, 1996: 21). The first Africans were brought to Delaware by the Swedish in 1639. After the Dutch gained the land in 1655, enslaved Africans became more numerous in this area (Williams 1996, 19). The numbers of enslaved individuals in Delaware then decreased and increased from 1664 to the 18th century through the English gaining control of this area and transporting more enslaved people to Delaware from Maryland and Philadelphia (Williams 1996, 19).

Throughout the history of the United States, Delaware has been a cusp state, being too South to actually be a northern state, but being too North to officially be a southern state. This is the case as well for the intensity of slavery in this state. Prior to the American Revolution, the percentage of Africans in the Delaware colonies was 20-25% which was higher than any northern colony, but lower than any of the southern

colonies (Williams, 1996: 19). The liminal border quality of slavery in the state of Delaware would have contributed to the experiences of slaves during this time since there were two extremes of public ideology which reflected both Northern and Southern white sentiments towards manumission in Delaware. As Patience Essah describes in her book, *A House Divided: Slavery and Emancipation in Delaware*, differing ideologies surrounding slavery in Delaware as well as the creation of two distinct white cultures within the state, contributed to actions towards slavery over the state's history (Essah, 1996: 22). Southern Delaware, attracting settlers from the Chesapeake, also attracted tobacco cultivation and slavery, while Northern Delaware, with its growing population of Quakers and later Scotch-Irish immigrants, had an antislavery mindset, as well as a will for the ability to vote for free black men (Essah, 1996: 22).

The later decades of the 18th century coincided with an increased movement in Delaware of voluntary manumission of slaves (Essah, 1996: 36). During this time, Delaware's slave holders began freeing their slaves due to varying reasons discussed above (Essah, 1996: 36). Religious forces for manumission were due to the increased influence of a Quaker religious impact in the state which motivated their followers to free their souls from sin and free their slaves from bondage. Ideological forces aligned with the start of the American Revolution and greater significance of equality and liberty, beginning in 1775, creating a stronger push for manumission in Delaware than any of the other slave holding states. Economic forces were due to the 18th century switch from tobacco to grain agriculture which decreased the need for slave labor (Essah, 1996: 37). These varying forces can help in our understanding of the different reasons John Dickinson manumitted his slaves in 1777, 1781 and 1786. During the

1780s, Delaware permanently banned the slave trade, restricted domestic slave trade, and repealed antimanumission codes, as well as considered a bill for the abolition of slavery, but the differing views of slavery within the state still blocked full abolition of slavery in Delaware (Essah, 1996: 5).

Following a state law banning the export of slaves for sale in Delaware in 1787, the majority of blacks in Delaware were free by the end of the 18th century (Williams, 1996: 20). After a peak in 1790 of 70% of blacks in Delaware being free, slavery continued to rapidly decline due to the continuity of factors mentioned above. In 1790, Kent County had the largest population of free African Americans in the nation, and there was a substantial community of freed African Americans on the St. Jones Neck who worked for Dickinson and his tenants (Catts, 2019: 9). Dickinson's manumissions would have contributed to this large number of free African Americans in Delaware after 1790, since he manumitted 106 slaves from 1777 to 1786 and had been the largest slave owner in Kent County. Dickinson was one of many farmers who manumitted their slaves during this time for the multiple reasons discussed above, resulting in an increase of freed African Americans in Kent County (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 34). By 1810, 24% of blacks in Delaware were still enslaved, decreasing to 11% in 1850. Following the Civil War, the 13th amendment then ended legal bondage in Delaware in 1865 (Williams, 1996: 20). It wasn't until 1901 though, that Delaware formally abolished slavery in the state, by accepting the 13th amendment, waiting longer than any of the other nonseceded states (Essah, 1996: xi).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The analysis of this collection's materials was done as a service project to the Delaware Division of Historic and Cultural Affairs through a summer internship that was completed over the summer of 2021. This internship was also part of the University of Delaware's anti-racism initiative. The goals of this summer internship were to clean and catalog parts of this collection, as well as gain an understanding of the archaeological research process and create a research question to develop into a senior thesis. The methods used to complete this research began with an analysis of the artifacts within the bags that they had been put into during their original excavation. This was followed by washing, organizing, rehousing, and cataloging specific artifacts such as ceramics and other finds materials in the specified features below. Other finds materials that were deemed important to the research question for this thesis were then cataloged as well. Ceramics from within the features were then further analyzed in order to determine date ranges in which features may have been created or filled. Throughout this process, comparative studies as well as reports from the John Dickinson Plantation and similar sites were referenced in order to gain a holistic understanding of artifact usage during this time period.

Previous archaeological excavations conducted at the John Dickinson Plantation have spanned from the 1950s to 2016 (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 42). These excavations have taken place at different points around the mansion house, including the exterior back door to the main house, along the South wall of Block II (next to Block III), in the west yard, etc (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 44). During the 1950s, the house was restored and transformed into a museum house. During this restoration the original floor of the 1850s Block III building was removed, allowing for more modern items such as plastic and bottle caps to intermix with the soil below

the floor making it more difficult to determine a more exact time range for the most recent layer under the pre-existing 1850s floorboards. The features in focus for study within this thesis were selected because of their estimated time ranges of usage, 1720s to 1820s, which aligns with the period of enslavement at this site.



## FEATURE SUMMARIES

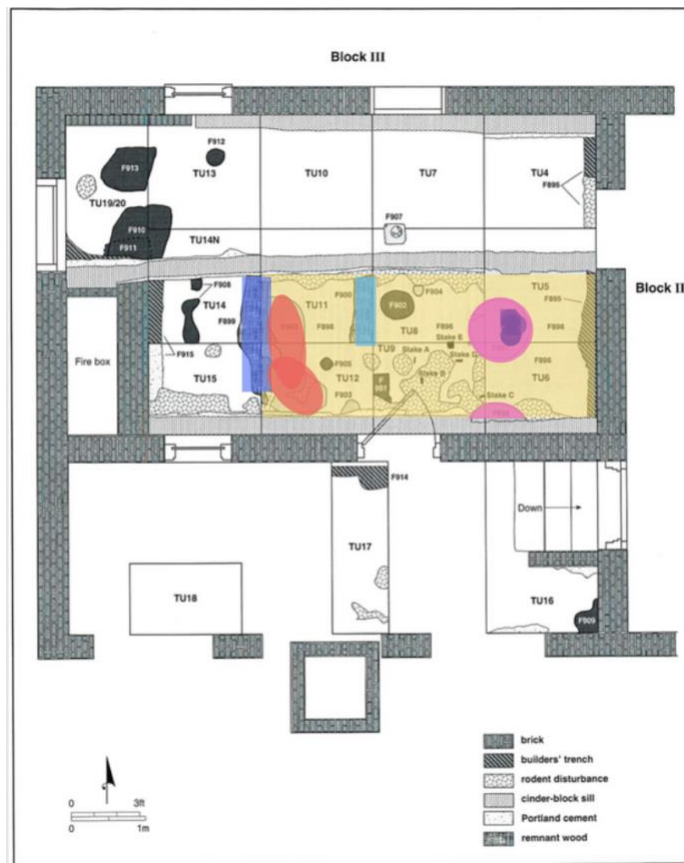


Figure 4: Excavation Plan of Block III, with referenced features highlighted.

### F896: Packed Earth Floor

The packed earth floor is located in the southeastern portion of the excavation site and is approximately 12' by 6' to make up a total area of about 72 square feet. The excavation of this feature began at 4.0' below the surface with a total feature depth of around 4.6'. The feature covers most of this southeastern section but is a bit irregular due to rodent disturbance as well as a builder's trench. The strata and artifacts of this feature are summarized in Tables 1.1 and 1.2 below.

Table 1: Strata, F896

	<b>F896 - Packed Earth Floor</b>					
Level	Test Unit(s)	Opening Depth	Closing Depth	Soils	Inclusions	TPQ
1	9, 11, 12	4.0	4.1	Dark yellowish brown Silty Sand	Red Cap	1819
1b	8					1819
2	5, 6, 8, 11, 12	4.06	4.1	Silty Sand		
2a	5, 8, 9, 12	4.15	4.4	Brown Silty Loam		1819
2b	5, 8, 9, 12	4.15	4.4	Brown Silty Loam	Lime concentration, ash lenses	1819
3	8, 9, 11, 12	4.2	4.3	Brown Sandy Silt	Ash, Charcoal, Brick	1787
4	11, 12	4.25	~4.6	Red Sandy Silt with dark yellowish brown Sandy Silt	Large pieces of brick	1762

Table 2: Artifacts, F896

	<b>F896 - Packed Earth Floor</b>			
Level	Architecture	Ceramics	Glass	Other
1	Mortar	4 porcelain, 2 creamware, 1 pearlware		Pin, bone, small copper piece
1b	Brick, Iron			Wood
2	Brick, Nail	5 creamware, 5 pearlware		Pin, shell, very small bones, peach pit, pumpkin seeds, charcoal
2a	Iron			Very small bones, charcoal, shell
2b	Mortar, Iron	2 redware, 2 creamware, 1 pearlware, 1 astbury type		Shell, bone

3	Brick, Iron	4 colonoware/townsend ware, 1 porcelain, 20 redware, 6 trailed slipware, 8 creamware, 3 pearlware, 5 salt glazed stoneware, 5 astbury type, 1 banded annular whiteware	3 glass wine bottle pieces	Tooth, Shell, Wood, bone
4	Iron, Brick, Nail	8 redware, 1 creamware, 1 salt glazed stoneware, 4 buckley type, 2 manganese mottled	1 glass piece	Shell, Bone, Cut bone, Button, Vertebrae

The summary of the excavation of this feature begins at the surface (present time) and moves deeper stratigraphically and therefore back in time. The strata within this feature consisted of silty sand, sandy silt, and silty loam with the silty loam in levels 2a and 2b similar to that of Barrel Pit 2's level 1 soil. Artifacts within strata 1 through 2b indicate that these layers were created no earlier than about 1820. Artifacts within Strata 3 suggest an estimate of use no earlier than 1787 and artifacts within strata 4 indicate that this feature was created no earlier than 1762. The strata above this feature is made up of a 1950s overburden which was a dirt floor that consisted of 1850s as well as 1950s materials. The feature appears to slope downwards from east to west, based on an increased number of exposed layers in the western portion as well as the presence of earlier artifacts. The matrix of the packed earth floor was fairly hard packed and was found to peel off easily from the underlying surface in layers, possibly

meaning that there could have been separate periods of use for this feature building on top of each other, these layers corresponding with different levels of stratigraphy.

Other features sealed by the packed earth floor include two barrel pits (F897 and F898), in the eastern portion of the floor, and the possible hearth (F903) and wooden sills (F900 and F899) in the farther western portion of this feature. The packed earth floor overlays these features, sealing them beneath what is understood as the entire floor feature.

Towards the western portion of this feature, there are more abundant concentrations of ash, charcoal, and brick in the soil. Large pieces of brick in the western edge of this feature may correlate with the possible hearth feature (F903) and therefore the hypothesis developed by the project archaeologist, Wade Catts et al. that a smokehouse existed in this area prior to the construction of Block III. The packed earth floor may be associated with an earlier structure that stood before Block III was built. The earlier structure would have been smaller than the present building based on the deeper layers of stratigraphy in the area north of the packed earth floor.

The types of artifacts found within the layers of the packed earth floor were primarily a variety of ceramic types as well as bone, shell, and pieces of glass. The presence of so many ceramic sherds as well as the prevalence of bone and shell indicate that this area may have been associated with cooking or preparing/storing food. Other food items such as pumpkin seeds, fish bones, and walnut shells also show food processing activities that may have taken place here. There is a greater density of ceramics in the western half of this feature, in the area that overlies the possible hearth feature. A piece of whiteware within this feature, showing a transfer print image of a woman riding a horse shows the design styles that may have been popular for

ceramics during this time period of the 1820s on. A pipe stem found within this feature also shows how people at this site may have spent their leisure time, smoking and doing other activities, as well as aspects of smoking while working. The pipe stem also shows the connection to the type of agriculture that was most prevalent at this plantation, which was tobacco farming. A possible gun flint or flint flake was also found within this feature, the presence of which may indicate varying usage of technology, from that of flint working to create lithic tools to working with the gun flints that were used within rifles at the time.

The artifacts found within the layers of the packed floor, as well as the spread of different artifacts across the feature, support the hypothesis that this area may be what is left from the floor of a pre-existing structure before the Block III building was constructed. The types of ceramics and other artifacts found in this feature also support the hypothesis that this pre-existing structure may have been a summer kitchen or workroom. The packed earth floor overlays other features such as Barrel Pits 1 and 2 which date to 1760-1790, as well as the possible hearth and the wooden sills. This indicates that there even may have been a pre-pre-existing use of this area before the construction of Block III. Pieces of Colonoware or Townsend ware within this feature may correlate directly with enslaved people at this site or may allude to possible interactions with Native Americans at this time.

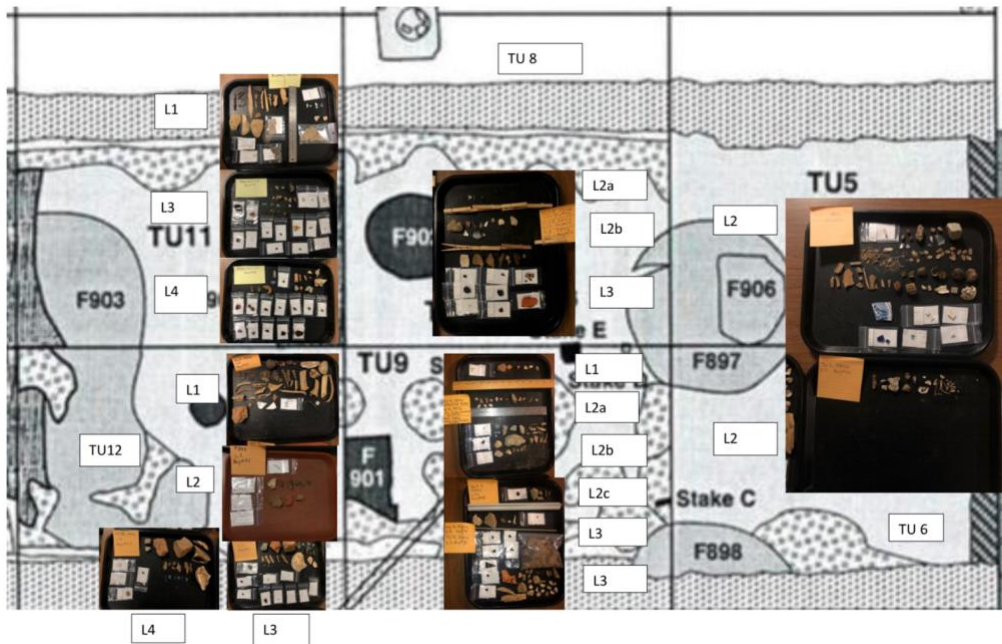


Figure 5: The spread of artifacts throughout the test units of the Packed Earth Floor

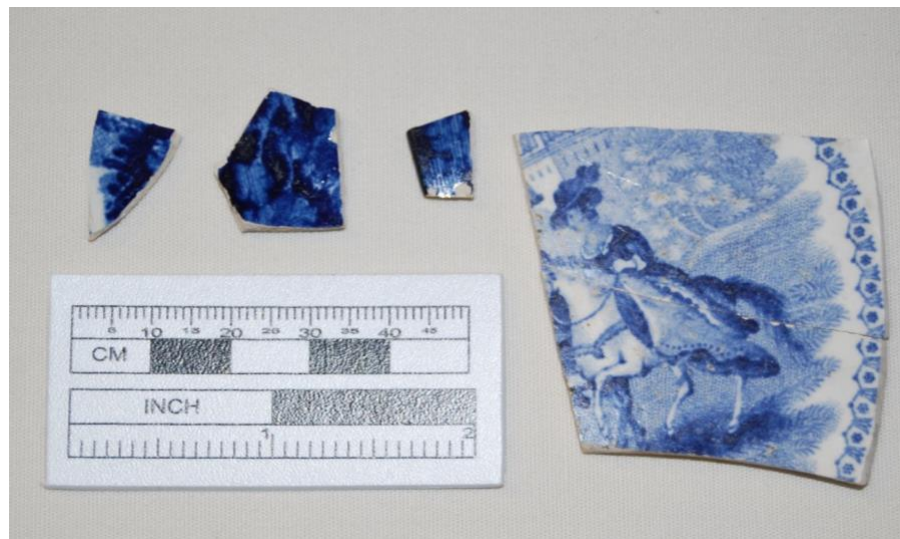


Figure 6: Pieces of whiteware with transfer print from the Packed Earth Floor Feature. The sherds to the far right have a design of a woman riding a horse.



Figure 7: Piece of flint found within the Packed Earth Floor feature.

### **F897: Barrel Pit 1**

Barrel Pit 1 is located in the southeast region of the Block III site and is about 3' NS by 2.6' EW in total area. The feature was first identified 4.3' below the surface. Excavation of this feature was stopped at the depth of 7.5', although this feature continues to an unknown depth. This creates limitations in the ability to determine the original function of the Barrel Pit. The center of Barrel Pit 1 was collapsed by a rodent burrow, and the possible D-shaped post hole (F906) is located within the northeast section of this feature. The strata and artifacts of this feature are summarized in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 below. Barrel pits like this one were created in the ground by digging a hole and placing a hollow barrel inside, then continuing to dig deeper and place more barrels as needed on top of one another in order to store items in a colder place underground. It is possible that this type of pit may have been used as a privy, but there was no human waste material found to support this.



Table 3: Strata, F897

	<b>F897 - Barrel Pit 1</b>					
Level	Test Unit(s)	Opening Depth	Closing Depth	Soils	Inclusions	TPQ
1	5,6	4.3	4.65		Brick and Mortar chunks mixed with burrow backfill	1790
1a	5, 6, 8, 9	4.65	4.7	Dark grayish brown Silty Loam		1790
1b	5, 6, 8, 9	4.7	5.2	Brown Sandy Loam		1790
2	5, 6, 8, 9	5.2	7.5	Brownish yellow and yellowish brown Silty Loam	Brick and Mortar chunks mixed with burrow backfill	1790

3	5, 6, 9	n/a	n/a	Brownish yellow and yellowish brown Silty Loam		1720
4	8, 9 ? (W1/2)	n/a	n/a			1630
5	8, 9 ? (W1/2)	n/a	n/a			

Table 4: Artifacts, F897

	<b>F897 - Barrel Pit 1</b>			
Level	Architecture	Ceramics	Glass	Other
1	Large pieces of brick, mortar, Iron	1 Staffordshire, 4 porcelain, 1 redware, 2 creamware, 2 pearlware	champagne/olive oil bottle pieces	Bone, shell, fish scale
1a	Brick, mortar	4 redware, 3 creamware		Shell,
1b		1 porcelain, 2 trailed slip, 2 unidentifiable redware, 1		

		creamware, 2 salt glazed stoneware		
2	Brick, iron	1 porcelain, 2 redware, 2 colonoware/Townsend ware		Shell, Bone, fish scale, charcoal,
3	Brick, Mortar, Nails	2 redware, 1 salt glazed stoneware		Shell, charcoal
4	Brick	1 colonoware/Townsend ware, 1 redware		Shell, charcoal, bone
5	Brick			Shell, bone

The summary of the excavation of this feature begins at the surface (present time) and moves deeper stratigraphically and therefore back in time. The strata of this feature consist of silty and sandy loam, with the silty loam soil in strata 2 and 3 correlating with the soil found in Barrel Pit 2's level 2 and 3. Barrel Pit 1 is located two and a half feet north of Barrel Pit 2. Since neither of these features were fully excavated, ceramics and soil type were used to compare the stratigraphy of both features. The ceramics and the similar soil types indicate that these features may have been filled around the same time. The full depth and extent of both barrel pits remains unknown, since neither were fully excavated and possible ceramic TPQ in earlier layers are not accessible. Barrel Pit 1 is sealed by the packed earth floor. Artifacts in

strata 1 through 2 indicate that these layers were filled no earlier than 1790, while strata 3 indicates a fill time no earlier than 1720, and strata 4 indicates no earlier than 1640.

Artifacts found within Barrel Pit 1 range from a variety of ceramic types, to brick, shell, bone, and pieces of iron. The different types of artifacts, as well as the spread of the artifacts vertically throughout the layers of the Barrel Pit, indicates that this may have been a storage or trash pit within the possible time range of 1760-1790 that may have built up over time. The incomplete excavation of this feature creates limitations in knowing for certain what this feature was used for. Barrel Pit 1 was also very disturbed by rodents, so the large amount of brick may have been moved by rodents from the builder's trench of Block II. The existence of multiple fragments of Colonoware or Townsend ware may have a direct correlation with enslaved people at this site, if Colonoware; or a possible Native American presence or interaction, if Townsend ware (Griffiths, 2011: 12).



Figure 8 (Left): The interior side of a piece of possible Colonoware or Townsend ware.

Figure 9 (Right): The exterior side of a piece of possible Colonoware or Townsend ware.

### **F906: Post hole in Barrel Pit**

The D-Shaped post hole feature is located within Barrel Pit 1 in the northeast portion of the pit feature. This feature measures 1.4' NS by 0.55' EW. Level 1 of the post hole aligns with level 2 of Barrel Pit 1; the opening depth of this feature is uncertain due to lots of rodent disturbance above the depth of 5.75'. Excavation reached a total of 7.4' below the surface, showing a total depth of 1.75' for the post hole. The strata and artifacts of this feature are summarized in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 below.

Table 5: Strata, F906

	<b>F906 - Post Hole</b>					
Level	Test Unit(s)	Opening Depth	Closing Depth	Soils	Inclusions	TPQ
1	5	4.7	5.75	Very dark brown (10 YRR) Silty Loam	Mortar	1762
2	5	5.75	6.5			
3	5	6.5	7.4			1762

Table 6: Artifacts, F906

	<b>F906 - Post Hole</b>			
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Level	Architecture	Ceramics	Glass	Other
1				
2	Mortar, Brick			Rumbler Bell, Shell, Bone
3	Brick	3 redware, 2 creamware	Glass pieces	Bone

The summary of the excavation of this feature begins at the surface (present time) and moves deeper stratigraphically and therefore back in time. The strata of this feature consists of silty loam. Barrel Pit 1 is intact below the post hole at 7.5' below the surface. Artifacts found throughout strata 1-3 of this post hole feature indicate that it was filled no later than 1790 based on the Barrel Pit 1 feature that overlays the Post hole. The post hole may have been inserted into the filled Barrel Pit 1, so it may postdate the filling of the Barrel pit 1 by at least a few hours. Mortar fragments were found within this feature, which may have been created to hold a wooden post which was later removed or decomposed and filled with soil and mortar.

There were few artifacts recovered from this feature, including a small amount of redware and whiteware, a large iron piece, bone, shell, brick and mortar, glass pieces, and a single rumbler bell. The rumbler bell is one of the more striking artifacts found within this feature.



Figure 10: Rumbler Bell found in the Post Hole feature.

### **F898: Barrel Pit 2**

Barrel Pit 2 is located along the southernmost wall of the Block III site, in the eastern corner. The feature measures 2.5' EW, with the NS measurements unknown due to this feature being cut off by a cinder block sill. Excavation of this feature opened at a depth of 5' below the surface with a total excavated feature depth of 7.6' below the surface. The full depth of this feature is unknown due to not being fully excavated. The strata and artifacts of this feature are summarized in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 below.

Table 7: Strata, F898

<b>F898 - Barrel Pit 2</b>						
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Level	Test Unit(s)	Opening Depth	Closing Depth	Soils	Inclusions	TPQ
1	9	5	n/a	Brown Silty Loam		1762+
2	9	n/a	7.6	Brownish yellow and yellowish brown Silty Loam	Severely disturbed by rodent burrows	1762+
3	6, 9	n/a	n/a	Brownish yellow and yellowish brown Silty Loam		1762

Table 8: Artifacts, F898

	<b>F898 - Barrel Pit 2</b>			
Level	Architecture	Ceramics	Glass	Other
1	Brick		Glass bottle	Charcoal
2	Nail			Bone
3	Brick, Mortar	1 creamware, 1 Astbury type		Charcoal, Bone



The summary of the excavation of this feature begins at the surface (present time) and moves deeper stratigraphically and therefore back in time. The strata of this feature consist of silty loam, with soil in strata 2 and 3 similar to that found in Barrel Pit 1's strata 2 and 3. Similar ceramic types in correlating stratigraphy along with similar soil types indicates that the Barrel Pits 1 and 2 may have been filled at around the same time. Barrel Pit 2 was found below rodent tunnels as well as severely disturbed by rodent tunnels. The bottom profile of this feature indicates that this feature is made up of 2 barrels, side by side and overlapping each other, which are smaller than Barrel Pit 1. Artifacts found in strata 1 through 3 indicate that this feature could have been filled no earlier than 1762.

Artifacts found within Barrel Pit 2 were few, but include small pieces of glass, ceramic sherds such as creamware and Astbury type redware, charcoal, iron, and bone. The creamware and Astbury type redware indicate that this feature was created or filled no earlier than 1762.

### **F903: Possible Hearth**

The possible hearth feature is located in the middle of the southern portion of the Block III site. The feature measures about 5.7' NS and 5.7' EW with an irregular shape. This feature is relatively shallow, identified at 4.6' below the surface with a total depth for this feature of about 5.0'; the depth fluctuates within a few tenths of feet throughout the feature. The strata and artifacts of this feature are summarized in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 below.

Table 9: Strata, F903

	<b>F903 - Possible Hearth</b>					
Level	Test Unit(s)	Opening Depth	Closing Depth	Soils	Inclusions	TPQ
1	12	4.7	5	Sandy Silt	Brick and mortar rubble	
2	11, 12	4.5	5	Dark yellowish brown Sandy Silt	Brick and mortar rubble	1820

Table 10: Artifacts, F903

	<b>F903 - Possible Hearth</b>			
Level	Architecture	Ceramics	Glass	Other
1	Iron Nail, Glass	1 piece of Redware		Shell, Knuckle bone, Flake
2	Mortar	3 pieces of Redware, 1 Redware with ribbed design, 1 piece of whiteware		Very small piece of shell

The summary of the excavation of this feature begins at the surface (present time) and moves deeper stratigraphically and therefore back in time. The possible hearth was a relatively shallow feature with soil composition made up of primarily sandy silt. This feature is located underneath the packed earth floor in its western region. Based on the rubble deposits within this feature as well as its location related to the remnant wooden sills and a smoke stain that was uncovered southeast to this feature, it is hypothesized that this is a hearth which may have existed in a pre-existing smokehouse structure in this location. The TPQs correlating with overlying features indicate that this feature was not created or filled before 1790.

Artifacts include pieces of shell, charcoal, mammal knuckle bone, an iron nail, redware and whiteware sherds, as well as a piece of a pipe stem and pipe bowl. This feature was originally believed to be a rubble deposit. The artifacts support the idea of a kitchen or smokehouse in this area and the pipe stem and bowl show aspects of leisure as well as a connection to the farming of tobacco that was done at the plantation.

## **CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CERAMICS, FEATURE TPQ'S, AND PEOPLE**

Through the features and artifacts outlined above, one can begin to understand the main time periods represented in the excavations. A feature's fill could not have been created before the date that the most recent artifact in the stratum was in production. The main time periods discussed in this section are 1720 to 1760, 1760 to 1790, 1790 to 1820, and 1820+. Although there is some overlap in the presence of people at this site within these time periods, this section will be broken into these time periods, in order to more clearly discuss the relevant features, artifacts, and people who would have been present at the site at these times.

It is important to point out though, that features were used during an extended period of time, ranging overall from 1720 to 1790 for the Barrel Pits 1 and 2, post hole, wooden sills, and possible hearth and then 1790 to 1820s on for the Packed earth floor. The earlier period, starting at 1720 may be earlier or later by 20 or so years, based on the small number of artifacts in these layers. This section is broken up into smaller portions of this larger period of time in order to better understand the flow of people in and out of this site in correlation with the stratigraphy of these features. These time periods were determined based on the ceramic TPQs (Terminus Post Quem) for ceramic items excavated within these features. In the case of the possible hearth feature which did not contain any ceramic pieces, the estimated date range of this feature was determined based on the field drawings of the stratigraphy. Based on these drawings, the possible hearth was determined to be in the same stratigraphic locus as the Barrel pits, post hole, and wooden sills; therefore, most likely having a similar time range of usage of 1720 to 1790. Together these time ranges overlap to create an estimated overall period between 1720 and 1790 for the Barrel Pits 1 and 2, as well as the post hole, wooden sills, and possible hearth. The packed earth floor,

which overlies these features and contained later ceramics, is estimated to have been created and used between the 1790s to 1820s.

The 1777, 1781, and 1786 manumissions, as well as documented slaves owned by Samuel and John Dickinson, and William White, demonstrate that enslaved individuals were working/living in the Block III area. The time periods for the existence of known enslaved people living and working at this site align and overlap with the time dating for the features.

Based on the overall feature TPQs that will be discussed below, the now standing building, Block III, was built towards the later end of the 1838 to 1850s time range. The basis of this conclusion is the TPQs of the earlier features, which are all overlain by one or two layers of soil, as well as the stratigraphy outlined in the field notes, ceramic pieces dating to the mid 19th century, and registration marks showing an 1852 ceramic creation (Makers' Mark Type Collection). The later construction of the Block III building, along with the existence of the features that predate the current building's construction, indicate that there may have been two separate earlier uses for this area before the construction of the Block III building: one usage before the hypothesized possible smokehouse, correlating with the Barrel Pits, sills, post hole, and hearth; the smokehouse usage, correlating with the packed earth floor; and then Block III. In addition, the existence of known enslaved individuals whose time in and around Homestead correlates with the creation and usage of these features, shows that these specific people would have been working in this area and using the materials that were excavated.

### **1720-1760:**

The period of usage from 1720 to 1760 is associated primarily with the creation of layer 3 of Barrel Pit 1. The 1720 TPQ for layer 3 was based on white salt glazed stoneware that began to become popular around the 1720s (Majewski and Michael, 1987: 139). The beginning of this window of time, 1720-1760, is associated with the transfer of ownership of the property from Walter Dickinson III to Samuel Dickinson, as well as the construction of the main house in 1740 (Liebeknecht, William and Adriana Moss, 2019: 29). During this period, Samuel Dickinson owned around 37 slaves, with known individuals; Pompey, his wife, and his daughter Violet (Liebeknecht, William and Adriana Moss, 2019: 29). Pompey and his family lived in an outbuilding near the main house. Accounts by Pompey's daughter, Violet, tell that the family lived and worked on the plantation while Samuel was the owner, and after Samuel's death, Violet remained on the plantation from approximately the 1740s to 1760s as a nurse to John Dickinson's children (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 91).

The span of 1740-1760 is associated with John Dickinson's return to his childhood home as his father's health declined, as well as the inheritance of Samuel's land by John and Philemon after his death in 1760 (Liebeknecht, William and Adriana Moss, 2019: 30). After Samuel Dickinson's death in 1760, the property was jointly managed by John and Philemon for almost 12 years and was then split between the brothers after a dispute in 1772 (Liebeknecht, William and Adriana Moss, 2019: 31). Since Samuel Dickinson owned slaves, there is an enslaved presence at this site during this time, of the known enslaved people mentioned above. Another known enslaved woman who lived on the plantation at this time (1760-1786) is Dinah Patten, as well as her children Nancy, James, and Cecelia; and her mother Flora (*Dinah Patten, Enslaved Woman at Poplar Hall*).

Dinah Patten was enslaved at the site from before 1760, owned by Samuel Dickenson, to around 1766 when she was sold by Philemon to David Durborow (*1772 Bill of Sale, David Durborow to John Dickinson, HSP*). Other individuals who may have lived and worked at the plantation are those who are listed under the 1777, 1781, and 1786 manumissions of those enslaved by John Dickinson. The dates of these manumissions indicate that the people listed under these would have been on the plantation for a considerable number of years before being manumitted, so they may have been working at the site during the 1720 to 1760 time period, as well as the 1760 to 1790 time period. Although some of those whose names are listed may have lived and worked on the homestead plantation, there is a chance that many of the people listed were living and working at other plantations owned by Dickinson as well.

#### **1760-1790:**

Feature layers dating to within the 1760 to 1790 range include Barrel Pit 2, levels 1 and 2, the possible hearth, and the post hole level 2. Barrel Pit 2's range of 1762 was also based on a sherd of creamware (Miller, 2000: 14). The post hole's level 2 range was determined using a sherd of creamware as well (Milner, 2000: 14). The enslaved people present during this period overlaps with those mentioned above. During this time, in 1772, John Dickinson bought Dinah and her daughter Nan back as per Dinah's request from David Durborow (*1772 Bill of Sale, David Durborow to John Dickinson, HSP*). Dinah was then leased to William Thompson from 1772 to 1777, living and working off of the plantation. In 1777, Dinah returned to the John Dickinson Plantation and was then freed in 1786. From 1786 to 1799, she then lived free on the plantation with her children, Nancy, James, Cecelia, and her mother Flora.

Dinah's children and mother were also manumitted in 1786, but her children were indentured for 15 years after manumission (*Dinah Patten, Enslaved Woman at Poplar Hall*).

During the span of 1760 to the 1830s this land was primarily a tenant farm. This section only focuses on the 1760 to 1790s time range since this aligns with the ranges of the features. The plantation house and farm were leased to varying tenants throughout these years, such as William Howell (1767), Robert Johnson (1775), Abraham Underwood (1778), Moses Beard (1780-81), William White (1781-1793), John Dickinson Jr. (1781), and Margaret Dickinson (1785) (Siders and Edwards, 1994: 18-19).

The presence of enslaved people is also evident throughout this time span based on gazette ads for tenancy placed by John and Philemon Dickenson at the Homestead which states, "There will be let with the Plantation, as Negroes, of either Sex, and of any Age, as the Person taking it shall desire; among them are Taylors, Shoemakers, Tanners, and Carpenters, who can do rough common work, besides being acquainted with farming and planting (The Pennsylvania Gazette, 1764: 3)." William Howell, a tenant from 1767 to around 1775, was also associated with known enslaved people; Abraham, Betty, Flora, Hannibal, and Ned, whose names were all included in the lease agreement for Howell's tenancy (Liebeknecht, William and Adriana Moss, 2019: 91).

The most notable tenant who owned slaves was present on the plantation during the 1760 to 1790 time period. William White had a tenancy on the Homestead plantation from 1781 to 1793 and throughout this time owned approximately 8 slaves (Teaff, 1984). The time periods of the White's tenancy align with the period of the use



of the Barrel Pits, post hole, wooden sills, and possible hearth. This means that the slaves that William White owned - Bob, Gustus, Caro, Palmaged, and Joshua, as well as one unnamed woman and two unnamed boys - would have interacted with the features in the Block III area as well as the artifacts excavated from here. During this time there was another enslaved man named Jerry who is likely to have lived on the plantation; he sought freedom in 1784 (Liebeknecht and Moss, 2019: 91). There was definitely an enslaved community working and living around the Homestead during this time, meaning that these features, containing contemporary artifacts, may have been used by enslaved people working here.

#### **1790-1820:**

Feature layers related to the 1790 to 1820 time range include layers 1a, 1b, and 2 of Barrel Pit 1; the post hole within Barrel Pit 1; the remnant wooden sills, and layers 1, 2a, 2b, and 3 of the packed earth floor. The time range for the later layers of Barrel Pit 1 of 1790, was based on polychrome hand painted porcelain (Majewski and Michael, 1987: 139). The post hole within Barrel Pit 1 has an estimated date of 1790+ based on its position within the Barrel Pit 1 (Miller, 2000: 14). The remnant wooden sills have an estimated date of 1790 based on pieces of porcelain decorated with a Chinese design (Majewski and Michael, 1987: 141). Lastly, the packed earth floor has an estimated overall range of 1762 to 1819 based on creamware (1762) and transfer printed pearlware-white ware (1819). The field notes associated with the packed earth floor showed that it overlays all of the other features. The packed earth floor has a more likely range of 1790 and later for layers 3 and 4; to 1819 for layers 1 and 2.

In addition to William White, subsequent tenants of Charles Ryan and Joseph Kimmey who had leases starting at 1798 and 1800, also owned slaves. Under Charles Ryan's 1798 lease with John Dickinson, the enslaved man Liverpool was mentioned to be living on the property (Siders and Edwards, 1994: 15). Joseph Kimmey, who was a tenant from 1800 to 1803, also owned slaves (Siders and Edwards, 1994:15). In Joseph Kimmey's 1803 inventory, 2 enslaved men were listed, as well as other names such as George Paterson, Philip Jones, Barden Coredright, and Rachel Dankoy. These names are not specified though as to whether these people were enslaved or not, they are only listed under, "miscellaneous items" in the same location as the statement about slaves in the Kimmey Inventory (Inventory Summary of Joseph Kimmey, 1803).

### **1820+**

The Packed Earth Floor, which was created no earlier than 1790 and later for layers 3 and 4; after 1819 for layers 1 and 2, overlays the barrel pits, sills, and possible hearth. This, as well as the feature TPQs, indicates that the earlier features were created before the packed earth floor was in place. The packed earth floor, based on artifact TPQs, aligns with a time period starting in 1790 to the 1820s. This period is associated with notable different tenant usages of the property and aligns with the tenants mentioned above as well as the tenancies of Joseph Kimmey in 1800 up to Thomas Canday in 1822 (Siders and Edwards, 1994: 18-19). The existence of the packed earth floor, overlying other earlier features, indicates that there may have been a need to create a new building or use at this location after 1790, predating the construction of Block III, and possibly correlating with the 1804 fire.

Through the known individuals, tenant and enslaved, who worked and lived on the John Dickinson Plantation, there is overlap with the time periods of the features and artifacts. What is important to consider is what the varying uses of these materials could have meant to the people using them, especially in the case of enslaved people using the materials and how they may have used them to self-preserve and persist in an environment of bondage.

## **ARTIFACTS (1760-1820)**

### **Amethyst**

The 1.5” by 1.25” Amethyst crystal was excavated from the Northwest corner of the site, within level 5. In addition to the amethyst, other artifacts excavated within the same context were: 9 <1/1.5” pieces of redware, 1 piece of creamware (1762-1820), delftware (1730-1890), and north devon ceramic pieces (1650-1775), as well as 5 <1/1.5” pieces of borderware, and 3 pieces of Staffordshire ceramics (Miller, 2000: 14). Other artifacts than ceramics were 21 pieces of iron nails, pieces of charcoal, very small pieces of glass, animal bones, and 30 oyster shells. Based on estimated time usages for the ceramic types, the date range of this context is 1760s to 1820, and more specifically 1760 to 1770’s. This date is based on ceramics such as creamware, delftware, and north devon ware. This time period correlates with the period of enslavement. The amethyst crystal may be associated with religious or spiritual practices of enslaved individuals at this site. Similar burials, of quartz crystals among other items such as small pieces of ceramics, shells, and bone have been found at other plantation kitchens, and have been interpreted as spirit caches (Leone and Fry, 1999: 1).

The materials in these spirit caches align with West African spiritual beliefs and meanings of nkisi (minkisi plural) (Galke, 2000: 19). Minkisi were groups of items which were believed to have powerful protective qualities and were used in African BaKongo practices (Galke, 2000:24). Similar types of cultural traditions are found within Obeah and Yoruba practices such as conjuring (K. Golden, Personal Communication. 2022). This connection indicates that they would have been used only by enslaved African Americans because of these links to African cultural

traditions and suggests the possibility of a conjurer at this site as well (Leone and Fry, 1999:1; Wilkie, 2000: 197). The similarities between caches such as these, found at similar sites within the contexts of slavery in colonial America, indicate the continuity of spiritual beliefs and practices that were originally derived from Africa (Galke, 2000: 20).

The existence of varying types of materials in these caches also indicate that with a changing environment due to slavery in America, these African folk practices were changed and became entangled with aspects and materials from the new environment and setting (Galke, 2000: 20). Each component of a nkisi is deliberate and has a specific purpose. With the inclusion of so many oyster shells in the particular cache at this site; the color white is dominant here. White is an important color within BaKongo religion, representing the supernatural (Galke, 2000: 26). The oyster shells could also represent water, which was important in BaKongo beliefs as well, as it was another very important component of these religious beliefs. Water is viewed as what is between the worlds of the living and the dead in BaKongo religion, so objects that are connected to water, or have qualities that mirror water, would have been meaningful in the powerful purpose of the cache (Galke, 2000: 28). In other spirit caches, the inclusion of quartz crystals have also been interpreted as symbolizing water because of their reflective properties (Galke, 2000: 26). Although the amethyst is a type of quartz crystal, the color is starkly a translucent purple with a rounded shape caused possibly by water erosion, the form of the amethyst contrasts with the general makeup of clear quartz crystals that are predominantly found in other caches. The color of the Amethyst may present a case for how different materials can become entangled with new uses in new environments. The possession of the amethyst in this

context, with this cache, may speak to the different types of materials that were available in the Americas rather than in Africa. The continuity of these spiritual practices shows that enslaved people in these contexts adapted to this new environment in order to allow for the persistence of important spiritual beliefs and practices. The burial of these objects shows how resistance to enslavement and bondage can be seen even in the hidden dimensions of enslaved spiritual practices and how people may have been using these materials to form their own reality (Deetz, 2017: 138).

Another way to approach an understanding of the meaning of this buried amethyst and other items in this context deals with the agency of the enslaved Africans shown through art and creativity (L. Gayles, Personal Communication: 2022). The burial of this amethyst may represent the creative expression of the enslaved community at this site outside of the forced labor that they were subjected to. It is possible that this Amethyst was found somewhere near the site and brought back as someone's possession because of its beauty. There are also inclusions located on the amethyst that may indicate creative elements being imbued onto the amethyst through being struck on the ground (Gayles, Personal Communication, 2022). The possession of this amethyst at this site may allude to hidden acts of resistance within the enslaved population not just through spirituality, but through acts of world building, creativity, and expression that rivals the plantation geography that they were forced into (K. Golden, Personal Communication. 2022)(Camp, 2004).

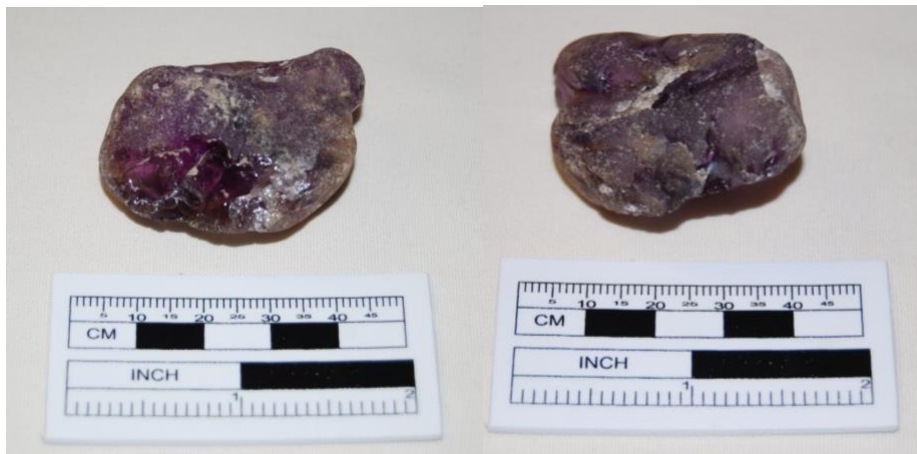


Figure 11 (Right): The back side of the Amethyst, excavated from Test Unit 13, Level 5.

Figure 12 (Left): The front side of the Amethyst, excavated from Test Unit 13, Level 5.



Figure 13: The assemblage of artifacts found in the same context as the amethyst.

## Dress Items

A variety of different types of materials found throughout the Block III collection are associated with laundering. Within the Packed Earth Floor feature, in the top layer, there was a shell button excavated. This button was found with pieces of creamware (Miller, 2000: 14). String and leather were found within the same context. In many cases, the kitchen was also a place where clothes were washed or mended (Deetz, 2017: 48). In the case of the Block III site, the existence of varying types of buttons, pins, and textiles indicates that aspects of laundry may have been in use here as well, although most of the laundry evidence dates to the early-mid 1850's. Another significance that these items of laundry have is within aspects of identity. In some contexts, buttons have been found to be worn as pendants, as well as used in spirit caches (Deetz, 2017: 48). Buckles and thimbles, which have been found within the Block III collection, are also known to have been worn by enslaved people as jewelry. These are examples of how common or discarded items allowed enslaved people to create meaningful adornment for themselves (Deetz, 2017: 48). This is significant to the experience of the enslaved people at this site because of the use of these buttons and other dress items as adornment to create separate identities from the dominant white culture on the plantation (Delle, 2019).

In Laurie Wilkie's book, *Creating Freedom: Material Culture and the African American Identity*, Wilkie discusses what different artifacts can reveal to us about the people who were using them and what they meant to their ideas of identity and *habitus*, which she describes as "a sense of cultural order" that is used by individuals to establish order on new experiences and territories and that this understanding is situated in the individual's own cultural and historical experiences. An important aspect of *habitus* involves how normal, everyday objects, can hold deeper meanings to



their user, which are embedded in specific cultural structures (Wilkie, 2000: 11-12). In terms of clothing, jewelry, and dress items, Wilkie provides analysis of items from the Oakley Plantation in Virginia, where she found a predominance of dress items in sites associated with the houses of enslaved families (Wilkie, 2000: 154). Among these sites, buttons, beads, jewelry, and other dress items were found. Wilkie describes how the number of buttons at the African American sites are greater than those found at European colonial sites (Wilkie, 2000: 154). Such high numbers of buttons in these contexts, similar to that of Block III, have multiple proposed interpretations. They could have been used as counters, may have accumulated during the production of clothing, or were used in spirit caches (Wilkie, 2000: 156). Buttons, as well as beads, found at sites associated with enslavement were likely used as items of personal adornment, used to decorate cloth as a common way of ornamentation (Wilkie, 2000: 157). Wilkie provides the argument here that if women were most likely acquiring the materials to make clothing, they were likely to also be creating the social and identity ornamentations on the clothing (Wilkie, 2000: 160). In this case, by sewing and crafting their own clothing, enslaved women would have been able to control the clothing of the family and meet the cultural ideals of the community (Wilkie, 2000: 160). Wilkie suggests that through changing the activities of another, one is able to possibly alter their identity and that through being able to control the activities within an enslaved household, in comparison to the planter controlling the activities of the enslaved while working, African Americans were able to create a separate identity through household activities such as production of clothing or cooking (Wilkie, 2000: 164).

Similarly, in “Buttons, Beads, and Buckles: Contextualizing Adornment Within the Bounds of Slavery,” Barbara Heath analyses the over one hundred artifacts associated with adornment that were found within excavations at Thomas Jefferson’s Poplar Forest and tells how these items may have been used in meaningful and identity creating ways by the slaves who lived and worked here (Heath, 1999: 49). Heath illustrates how dress items were used to convey cultural messages within and beyond enslaved communities, describing how items such as buttons, beads, and buckles were multifaceted in the ways that they could indicate social markers (Heath, 1999: 50). The multifaceted and varying specific uses of these dress items associated with enslaved individuals shows the continuity of different African cultural traditions that persisted in the plantation environment and assisted in the creation of separate identities. This sense of identity that maintained a sense of cultural traditions and values may have provided a form of resistance to the dominant white culture and lifestyle interference on a plantation.



Figure 14: : Example of the varying types of dress items found within the features mentioned above.

## **Ceramics**

The different types of ceramics within the designated features are able to tell about the relative time periods of usage for features in this site. The most common ceramic that was excavated from within the designated features was red earthenware, known as redware.

Ceramics which were found within features during the earlier period of use at the Block III site (1720- 1790), were found within the Barrel Pit 1 and 2 features, as well as the Post Hole and Sill features. The types of ceramics within these features include: redware, creamware, pearlware-whiteware, polychrome hand-painted porcelain, white salt-glazed stoneware, and porcelain with a Chinese design. Redware, being the most abundant type of ceramic within the collection, was most commonly used every day by people in the house and kitchen for cooking and storage purposes when there were no guests (Viet and Orr, 2014 :156). These types of wares would have been manufactured locally in places such as Philadelphia, unlike other ceramics which were imported (Viet and Orr, 2014 :156). Redwares were also associated with cooking and containing food and liquids. The majority of the types of redwares within the Block III collection were general redware sherds, but there were also more specific types of redware which reveal the movement of materials from one place to another as well as varying methods of design which were popular at different times.

These other varying types of redwares include astbury-type, buckley-type, manganese-mottled, and trailed-slipware. The location and names within the labeling of these ceramics tell us where these designs may have originated from and who may have first created them. Astbury and Buckley type ceramics indicate the origin such as Buckley in Wales, as well as tell who first made these types of ceramic, for example, John Astbury (Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland). The different design types such as

Manganese-mottled and Trailed-Slipware also indicate movement from places such as Staffordshire, England for Manganese- Mottled; as well as varying movements of different designs, such as slipware, from Pennsylvania to Delaware (Florida Museum).

The most common types of ceramic sherds that were excavated from this site, other than general types of redware, were sherds white-bodied earthenware known as creamware, pearlware, and whiteware (Majewski and O'Brien, 1987: 117). These types of ceramics, made originally in England and then the U.S., were most popular during the late 18th century and early 19th century and displaced other types of ceramics in popularity (Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland). The development of these more refined types of earthenware were most likely in competition with Chinese porcelain.

Creamware, which grew in popularity starting in the 1760s, is a type of ceramic that ranges from ivory/white colored to tan or cream colored (Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland). Pearlware, which was introduced in 1779, improved the paste type and glaze of creamware that had been popular in the 1760s. Whitewares were a continuation of the development of refined white-bodied earthenware, having an almost completely white color (Majewski and O'Brien, 1987: 24). Transfer printing was a common technique of transferring designs onto whitewares, floral, line, and abstract designs as well as agricultural landscapes can be found on sherds within this collection. These types of white-bodied earthenwares were most commonly used for special occasions in the form of table wares or tea sets. The presence of mismatched or incomplete sets of pearlware, creamware, and whiteware can also indicate the availability of different types of wares in this geographic area as well as the transfer of

ceramic items from white tenants to enslaved individuals who worked and lived in this area (Majewski and O'Brien, 1987: 184).

Other types of earthenwares that were found within the specified features at the Block III site are types such as Staffordshire ware and Delftware. Staffordshire wares, manufactured in Staffordshire county, England, were popular starting in the 1670s to the end of the 18th century, being exported to America up until the 1770s (Miller, 1993, *Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland*). Depending on the trailed, marbled, or dotted design on these ceramics, the usage could vary. These ceramics are found in the form of flatwares as well as hollow vessels such as cups, pots, bowls, baking dishes, decorative dishes, or even chamber pots (*Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland*). Both earthenware and stonewares were purchased by the upper class at this time but can also be found in the home of middle class citizens (Viet and Orr, 2014: 156). Tin-glazed ceramics known as Delftware is another type of ceramic found within these features. This type of ceramic is commonly found decorated with an underglaze blue and white design that mimicked porcelain from China (Viet and Orr, 2014: 156). This type of ceramic was popular from the 1630s to the late 18th century when more durable earthenwares became more popular (*Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland*). The most common forms of Delftware were in decorative plates, as well as ointment jars, and chamber pots (*Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland*).

Sherds of porcelain with varying under or over glazed designs were also present within the Block III collection. Chinese export porcelain, which became popular in America starting in the 18th century, was a symbol of social and economic status and was only affordable to the wealthiest citizens (Viet and Orr, 2014: 156).

Most of the porcelain ceramic use was associated with table wares and tea service and would've been used on guests (Viet and Orr, 2014: 156)

All of these ceramics, being excavated from features used within the time of 1720 to 1790 would have been used by enslaved people working within this area during their day to day lives of preparing as well as transporting food to tenants and guests in the main house. During this time, as mentioned above, there were known enslaved people living and working at this site. These people include Pompey, his wife, and his daughter Violet, as well as Dinah Patten and her children and mother; William Howels slaves: Abraham, Betty, Flora, Hannibal, and Ned, whose names were all included in the lease agreement for Howell's tenancy, and potentially other unnamed individuals who were owned by John Dickenson during this time (Liebeknecht, William and Adriana Moss, 2019: 29, 91).

The packed earth floor, which dates to 1790-1820s, contains less pieces of redware than the features above and has more refined wares such as porcelain, pearlware-whiteware, and creamware. This feature also contains ceramics that have painted and transfer-printed styles that date to more recent manufacturing times (Majewski and Orr, 1987: 115). The people associated with this period are William White and subsequent tenants, as well as the enslaved people who were owned by these tenants as well as John Dickinson (Siders and Edwards, 1994: 15). The enslaved people would have directly interacted with these more refined ceramic types through the acts of food production and preparation carried out at a kitchen site. The known enslaved people working here during this time include Those mentioned in Joseph Kimmeys 1803 inventory (Inventory Summary of Joseph Kimmey, 1803), William

Whites slaves, Nathan and Abigail Philips as well as their four children, and a man named Liverpool (Teaff, 1984: 4).

The very different types of ceramics presented above give a glimpse into the activities associated with cooking and food/beverage consumption in this environment, as well as the incorporation of newer styles of ceramics throughout the progression of time. The range of ceramic uses from common, everyday wares, to expensive porcelain sherds, shows that there was definitely cooking going on in this environment, as well as food storage, preparation, and dish cleaning. The more refined and expensive ceramics also indicate serving for guests and tenants in the house. In the Barrel Pits, the sherds indicate that this feature could have been used as a trash pit; and the small sherds spread throughout the packed earth floor may also indicate that ceramic items may have broken and been trampled over continuous use and time. The quantity of general redware within the features indicates the predominance of cooking, food preparation, and storage in this area, showing that those working here would have interacted with these items the most.



Figure 15: Example of sherds of redware excavated from the specific features.



Figure 16: Example of sherds of whiteware and saltglazed stoneware excavated from the specified features.

### **Colonoware–Townsend Ware**

There were a few pieces of colonoware or possible Townsend plain ceramic types, which were excavated from the packed earth floor, Barrell Pit 1, and one of the remnant wooden sills. Colonoware as a ceramic type is contested based on the production and different groups who may have used it, as well as varying understandings from different researchers on the makeup and identity of the manufacturer and ceramic type (Cooper, 1998: 8). It is unclear exactly what type of ceramic the colonoware or Townsend plain pieces are within this collection because the pieces resemble both types of ceramics.

If these ceramics are colonoware, a ceramic associated with African Americans as well as Native Americans, the exact group who was making this ceramic is not clear. Colonoware, dating from 1630 to the 1800s, is an unglazed earthenware that is hand-built and can include crushed shell, sand, or stone with a smoothed



surface (Galke, 2009: 304). Colonoware is commonly found in the form of bowls, jugs, or even pipes (Galke, 2009: 304). There is evidence of Indigenous creation of colonoware as well as African American production, the group who may have produced varying pieces depends on the site and time period (Galke, 2009: 305). Although it may be difficult to determine the producers of colonoware at some sites, in the contexts within plantation sites, it is most likely that those using colonoware vessels were enslaved (Galke, 2009: 305).

Support for this type of usage can be seen in Laura Galke's article, "Colonowhen, Colonowho, Colonowhere, Colonowhy: Exploring the Meaning behind the Use of Colonoware Ceramics in Nineteenth-Century Manassas, Virginia". In her study, Galke discusses the uses, production, and possible social connotations of colonoware from sites in Manassas, Virginia (Galke, 2009: 303). Galke's study shows that the use of colonoware, at least in these Virginia contexts, may have carried social connotations related to the status of enslaved or free African Americans. Galke found that the colonoware was much more likely to be found at sites connected to enslaved individuals than at sites associated with free African Americans (Galke, 2009: 320). This led to the conclusion that colonoware was a social symbol connected to enslavement within this context (Galke, 2009: 321).

There is also evidence of colonoware being transported from the Caribbean to the east coast of North America, where it is more abundant in the South (Gall and Viet, 2017: 38). The presence of colonoware at the Block III site would indicate that enslaved people living and working here may have been producing colonoware or may have traded for or brought colonoware with them to the plantation. North of the Chesapeake, at sites such as the John Dickinson Plantation, Keri Sansavere argues that

it is less likely that colonoware would have been produced here, but more likely that it was transported from the South or the Caribbean (Gall and Viet, 2017: 51). In her chapter of *Archaeologies of African American life in the Upper Mid-Atlantic*, titled “Colonoware in the Upper Mid-Atlantic,” Sansavere discusses the presence of colonoware at other sites in Delaware such as Thompson’s Loss and Gain Site in Rehoboth, the McKean-Cochran site in Odessa, and the Cedar Creek Road Site in Milford (Gall and Viet, 2017: 38). Colonoware in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast may have different social, cultural, and economic uses than in the South, where it is more abundantly found. In the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast, the scarcity of colonoware sherds may show that colonoware production was rarer than in the South, and that it came to the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast more through means of trade and other economic means (Gall and Viet, 2017: 51).

The colonoware at the Block III site may have come from market trade by Native or African American people and could show the interactions between different ethnic groups (Gall and Viet, 2017: 53). Colonoware may have served as a cultural or economic marker, but its presence in the Block III context indicates that enslaved individuals may have used it for their own food storage or meal preparation outside of solely cooking within the plantation’s white landscape.

Another possibility for these contested sherds is that they are Townsend ware. Townsend ware ceramics date from around 950 A.D to 1600 A.D. (Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland). These types of ceramics were made and used during the Late woodland and contact periods by Native American cultures in Delaware. The Indigenous groups who have lived in Delaware for centuries include the Lenni Lenape and the Nanticoke tribes. The Townsend ware type of ceramics are characterized by a

shell tempered surface with fabric impressed surfaces and varying decorative designs. These types of ceramics are found not only in southern Delaware, but also in Maryland and Virginia (Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland). The existence of Townsend ceramics at this site would indicate either early usage of this area by Lenni Lenape or Nanticoke people, or a possibility of trade between these indigenous groups and the people living at the John Dickinson Plantation.



Figure 17: Sherds of colonoware excavated from within the specified features.

### **Rumbler Bell**

The rumbler bell was excavated from within the D-shaped post hole in Barrel Pit 1. There are multiple interpretations for this artifact; it may have been part of horse apparel or decoration, part of a bell system within a kitchen, or part of a slave collar worn to deter escape or as punishment. It is more likely part of horse apparel or a bell system based on its location in a possible kitchen or workroom. Large pieces of redware as well as pieces of bone, glass, and metal support the existence of a

workroom in this area. Bell systems, such as the one used at Berry Hill Plantation in Virginia were used by the inhabitants of the main house to signal a need for assistance to the workers (Deetz, 2017: 34). The rumbler bell within this collection may have been used in this context. If so, it shows the intersection between the spaces of the main house and the kitchen and how the work of those in the kitchen may have overlapped at times with duties in the main house. The rumbler bell in the context of enslavement also raises questions about how sounds may have impacted the lives of enslaved workers in this environment. In a bell system, the sound would indicate the need for assistance or work; if the rumbler bell is interpreted as having a use on a slave collar, there would have been no escape from the bell sound following the wearer wherever they went. This is a powerful artifact because it allows for the opportunity to understand how an unseen aspect, such as sound, may have been incorporated into the everyday working life of those enslaved here, or may have followed someone wherever they went.

## **DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS**

From the analysis of this site, its artifacts, features, the historical records, and people associated with this site, I have come to three conclusions. The first is that the Packed Earth floor, Barrel Pits 1 and 2, the Post hole, and the possible hearth all align with the period of enslavement between 1720 and the 1820's. Indicating that the area where these features are located was used by enslaved people in their day to day lives and can reveal information about what they were doing and when based on artifact and soil deposits. These features span a long period of time when many different people moved in and out of tenancy at this house, all of whom held enslaved people.

The second conclusion is that the enslaved people living and working in and around this site between 1720 and 1820 include Violet Brown, Dinah Patten, Nancy, James, Cecelia, Flora, Nathan and Abigail Phillips, Jerry, Abraham, Betty, Hannibal, Ned, and Liverpool. These enslaved individuals would have interacted with and used the materials that I studied within this collection. The amount of enslaved individuals who are listed in different reports, inventories, and site histories indicates that there was in fact an enslaved community at this site for a long period of time who would have interacted with the material culture excavated, as well as used it in meaningful and complex ways.

My third conclusion is that artifacts such as the amethyst, button, ceramics, and rumbler bell can help us to understand the complex interactions between people and objects that was going on at the site, as well as the meanings and uses of these items in an environment of bondage. The amethyst reveals aspects of possible African religious or spiritual elements in regard to possible spirit caches, as well as the possibility of a conjurer, and the definite continuity of African cultural traditions. The amethyst also reveals possible meaning and purpose of these caches to the people who buried them,

what they believed was important to bury, as well as what they may have just thought was beautiful. The button reveals aspects of textile usage, as well as choices of personal adornment for people who worked in this area, what these choices could have meant, as well as the possibility of making or mending clothes. The use of buttons and other dress items also correlates with the continuity of African cultural traditions including the use of dress items as social markers, providing ways for the enslaved population at the John Dickinson Plantation to convey cultural messages within and beyond their communities. The pipe stems indicate smoking, though within the specified features there is limited evidence compared to the rest of the site. The various ceramics can give us a better idea about the ceramic usage pertaining to cooking or food preparation that was taking place at this site, as well as possible trade between indigenous groups and people on the plantation. These different materials reveal aspects of day to day life of the enslaved people who lived and worked in this area and give the beginning of an understanding of how they may have interacted with these items.

### **Comparative Studies**

This thesis expands on the archaeology of the enslaved experience at plantations in the Mid-Atlantic and more specifically on the enslaved experience at the John Dickinson Plantation. Aside from contributing more data of the archaeology of spirit caches, dress items, and ceramics present at a kitchen/workroom site associated with slavery in the colonial period, this thesis also contributes to the history of the experience of slavery in Delaware. There is more opportunity within this topic for scholarship regarding spirit caches and the connections between spirituality and identity and how this influenced the day to day social and personal experience of

slaves working and living on plantations. We will never be able to know exactly what the enslaved experience was like or what complex personal and cultural meanings people may have imbued objects and caches with, but using the material culture, historic accounts, and comparative studies, more of the stories of slaves like those who lived in the John Dickinson Plantation will be able to be told with a truer archaeological narrative. There is extensive literature on the archaeology of the African diaspora and the experience of enslavement in connection with material culture on plantations. Below, I will draw on some of the existing literature to show comparisons between similar studies and the material culture excavated at the John Dickinson Plantation. I chose these specific comparative studies because the topics discussed by the authors can help to broaden the understanding of life at the Block III site, by using examples from similar sites to illuminate any continuities or differences between the materials. These comparative studies will help to better understand how the items described above may have been used and what meanings they could hold for their users.

In *Archaeologies of African American life in the Upper Mid-Atlantic*, edited by Michael Gall and Richard Viet, Gall and Viet as well as contributing authors discuss what plantation life was like for enslaved people in the Mid-Atlantic region located between the north and south extremes of slavery and freedom and how this placement within the transition from slavery to freedom could have impacted the experience of enslaved individuals in this region (Gall and Viet, 2017). This book's authors discuss how those who were enslaved at plantations along the mid-Atlantic as well as north and south, had a great impact on how the plantation functioned, possibly more than the actual tenant farmers (Gall and Viet, 2017).

In the book, *Bound to the Fire*, Kelly Fanto Deetz focuses on the enslaved cooks who worked in Virginia's plantation kitchens in the 18th and 19th centuries and what archaeology can reveal about aspects of social and cultural history and transmission throughout the African Diaspora (Fanto Deetz, 2017: 12). On smaller plantations, of less than twenty enslaved people, the cook would normally serve as the laundress or maid; on larger plantations there would have been a designated cook (Fanto Deetz, 2017: 12). At this time, open-hearth cooking was standard, with these types of hearths seen at Poplar Forest and Monticello (Fanto Deetz, 2017: 12). This source also discusses an enslaved cook named Sookey at a Surry County Plantation in Virginia who slept in a room above the kitchen, above the hearth, in the winter; moving outside in the summer (Fanto Deetz, 2017: 15). Similar to the Block III site, where it is hypothesized that there is a remnant hearth feature, this reality may have been the case for an enslaved person who was living and working within the kitchen area here. If there was a fire going at all times in the kitchen, there most likely would have been someone to tend to it at all hours, leaving less room for a separation of the working environment and the non-working environment.

At the Flowerdew plantation in Virginia, there is also evidence within the kitchen of laundry work (Fanto Deetz, 2017: 48). Artifacts that allude to the possibility of laundry work are pins, thimbles, buttons, and buckles, similar to those found at the Block III site. These items may have fallen off of clothes that were being washed, as well as clothes that were being made (Fanto Deetz, 2017: 48). These items had other possible uses as well that relate to personal identification. Buttons may have been worn as pendants, as communal and identity markers, buckles and thimbles may have also been worn by enslaved people as jewelry. The reuse of these discarded or lost



items allowed enslaved people at the Flowerdew Plantation to create distinctive adornment for themselves (Fanto Deetz, 2017: 48).

In addition to these items of adornment, Fanto Deetz describes how artifacts were also found buried underneath the kitchen at the Flowerdew Plantation and how there were significant deposits of artifacts in and around the hearth as well as an amethyst within a subfloor pit of the northeast hearth (Fanto Deetz, 2017: 138). The locations of these pits suggest that these items were intentionally placed. The oyster shells found to be surrounding the amethyst in the Flowerdew context provide additional evidence of traditional West African belief systems and can shed light on the hidden spiritual dimensions of the cook's possible religious practices (Fanto Deetz, 2017: 138). Fanto Deetz explains how the kitchen was a complex social space that cooks worked in and represented the liminal aspects of their lives. Working in the kitchen meant being surrounded by work for 24 hours of the day, toiling in the kitchen during working hours, and then still being surrounded by the work environment even during the off-hours since these cooks lived within the same building that was occupied by the kitchen. Some of the experiences of these enslaved cooks may have been similar to the enslaved people who worked at the Block III site based on the similar types of artifacts relating to adornment and spiritual practices.

In Lynn Jones's article in the *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter*, "Crystals and Conjuring at the Charles Carroll House, Annapolis, Maryland," she discusses collections of quartz crystals and other items found buried in caches at the Charles Carroll house and examines similar types of artifacts assemblages found at other sites that are associated with the working and living spaces of slaves (Jones, 2000: 4). Jones discusses how African belief systems that were

brought over by enslaved people from many different ethnic groups may have interacted and been adapted to fit the new environment, with an example of this being people's ability to control spirits using spirit caches (Jones, 2000: 4). The use of conjure by enslaved people would have been a way for them to practice controlling or counteracting evil, as well as taking control of their own environment and reality (Jones, 2000: 5). Jones also describes a practice from healing arts of the Kongo, one called nkisi, defined above, in which a group of objects has its own soul-life and can contain medicines which direct the power of the spirit to whatever problem needs solving (Jones, 2000: 5). The nkisi could contain a variety of materials from white clay, iron, crab claws, to porcelain, or quartz crystals (Jones, 2000: 5). Jones found that the items found in the caches of the Carroll house were very similar to what is included in minkisis (plural of nkisi), although with the many different cultural backgrounds of enslaved people throughout the US, these objects could have been used and adapted in different ways. The existence of these objects in this context indicates that one or more of the slaves living and working in the Charles Carroll house was a conjurer or diviner (Jones, 2000: 6).

Several of these caches date to between 1790 and 1820. Assemblages similar to these are also found at other sites in Maryland and Virginia. In a study of Manassas National park sites, Laura Galke found that there were two sites that had caches of objects as well as quartz crystals which were buried near the remains of chimneys, representing intentional deposits (Galke, 1992: 137). These artifacts show the continuity of African beliefs and cultural traditions within enslaved communities and how enslaved people resisted enslavement through spiritual practices.

The article, “Archaeology of African American slavery and Material Culture,” in *The William and Mary Quarterly* by Patricia Samford discusses what seems to be a West African conjurer’s kit that was excavated from the former slave quarter at the Jordan Plantation in Houston, Texas and what this can reveal about slave resistance to bondage through the cultural continuity of West African belief systems in a plantation environment (Samford, 1996: 87). This article considers how the objects found in this believed conjurer’s kit would have been used in culturally significant actions (Samford, 1996: 88). This article also discusses the varying types of artifacts that were found in slave quarters, either buried in pits for personal storage, or amongst the general stratigraphy. These include many different types of ceramics such as earthenware to porcelain, these ceramics could have been acquired through different means. Either handed down by the owners, purchased for them, or purchased themselves (Samford, 1996: 95). Other items include faunal remains and artifacts associated with hunting and fishing (Samford, 1996: 96). The use of storage pits in enslaved contexts, similar to Barrel Pits 1 and 2 at the Block III site, is also a possible form of “resistance to new and potentially oppressive social orders” (Samford, 1996: 100). Samford then discusses how the believed conjurer’s kit found at the Jordan Plantation’s slave quarter would then hold objects that were given West-African cultural meaning by the people using them (Samford, 1996: 104). The small ceramic pieces could have been used in the African game of Mancala (Samford, 1996: 104). Similar pieces used in gaming have been found at other plantation sites, and small pieces of ceramic were found in the same context with the amethyst at the Block III site (Samford, 1996: 104). Similar to the conjurer’s kit in Texas, at the Carroll house in Annapolis a quartz crystal, polished stone, and bone disks were found in the

basement of the house, showing that enslaved people were also able to practice and use these types of spiritual markers in urban settings as well (Samford, 1996: 107).

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SLAVERY

Existing perspectives on the archaeology of slavery allow researchers to better understand the complex dynamics that contributed to the resistance of enslavement, creation of autonomy in enslaved spaces, as well as the creation of new and shared identities among enslaved populations at plantations. As Terrance Weik describes in his book, *The Archaeology of Antislavery Resistance*, that the resistance of enslavement and bondage was not just made up of individual events but was built through the complexities of dynamic actors (Weik, 2012: 2). Not only were these factors and actions in alignment with aspects of resistance, but they also presented methods of persistence, survival, and ethnogenesis within populations of enslaved Africans on plantations throughout the United States.

Methods of persistence and survival within enslaved populations on plantations are evident in the ways that those who were enslaved resisted the identity of a slave that was forced upon them. Through the creation of separate identities using materials such as buttons, beads, and pierced coins, enslaved people were able to differentiate themselves from this forced identity, aiding in their survivance in a horrific situation. Not only did the use of these identification materials aid in personal survivance, but also in the survivance of the community as well. Persistence of cultural values can also be seen through the continuity of West African spiritual practices and cultural traditions. The combination of these aspects of persistence and survivance, further exemplifying covert methods of resistance, influenced the ethnogenesis of different West African cultural ideologies, and impacted the gradual creation of the African American identity.

An important lens to use while comparing this research and other research done on the archaeology of slavery is that of a decolonizing stance to the archaeology.

In order to tell a truer story about those who have lived in the past, we must first recognize that every person and group acts through their own agency and that colonial ideologies were not just a complex where one group was shoved into a sort of “victim” position versus that of the oppressor, but that there was active agency of the ‘colonized’ through resistance, persistence, and survivance of people as well as cultural traditions and beliefs, and that through these actions, new identities were created and cultural traditions intermixed (Silliman, 2004: 43). Through analyzing existing perspectives regarding the actions through which enslaved people actively resisted bondage, I hope to illustrate how research is considering the complexity and interwovenness of actions and events in their impact on slavery resistance.

One very important way to decolonize the study of slavery in the United States, is the importance of engaging the descendant community of the people who you are studying. As done during the examination of the African Burial Ground in New York City, the team from Howard University heavily engaged the descendant community in the area and were able to try and answer the questions that the descendants of those buried specifically wanted to know (Mack & Blakey, 2004: 13). Through engaging the descendant community in archaeological research, more of an emic or insider’s perspective is attainable to studying the artifacts, their uses, and what these uses may have meant in daily life. There is also the ability to present a more authentic analysis based on what the descendant community can contribute to the knowledge of the research and give the public a more engaged process of obtaining knowledge as well as empowerment (Mack & Blakey, 2004: 14).

In order to better understand agency and autonomy within the resistance of slavery, we must also understand how aspects of persistence and survival influence

acts of resistance. Persistence, as a continuity within a change or a change within a continuity, could be applied to the survival of African cultural traditions seen at many sites associated with enslavement. Through the continuity of cultural traditions at the John Dickinson Plantation Block III site, such as the burial of the amethyst and possible spirit cache, as well as the use of buttons as items of adornment; these acts can be understood as the persistence and survivance of cultural traditions even through the horrific experience that was slavery.

Acts of agency through the creation and construction of a rival geography and reality are covert acts of resistance to the oppression of slavery and bondage (Camp, 2004). Survivance of aspects of African heritage and cultural identity are also active modes of resistance due to the creation of rival geographies (Camp, 2004). The rejection of the dominant white landscape by those enslaved allows for greater autonomy to construct their own world through the active resistance of the landscape imposed on them. This world building would also be an active form of resistance to the world and identity of a slave that was forced upon those enslaved at these sites (Silliman, 2020: 47). Actions of persistence and survivance flow into aspects of resistance because they represent active ways that those who were enslaved are preserving their cultural traditions and establishing the continuity of their personal and communal identities in the face of forced movement to a completely new environment where they are faced with the atrocities of slavery and oppression. At the Block III site specifically, the creation of a rival geography to the dominant white plantation geography is evident through the everyday modes of resistance mentioned above (Camp, 2004). These include use of personal identification items on clothing, possible use of Colonoware, and the application of creative or spiritual aspects into the space in

which they were enslaved. By including items that they imbued as meaningful or even powerful into the environment where they were enslaved, the people working at the Block III site took some control of their environment, therefore creating methods to resist and creating their own rival geography through self-expression.



## CONCLUSION

“In addition to identities that people create for themselves, still other identities are imposed on them.”

(Laura Galke, 1992)

Within the Barrel Pits 1 and 2, the post hole, the packed earth floor, and the possible hearth, as well as the artifacts found in these areas, one can see the beginning of a deeper understanding into what daily life was like for the enslaved people who lived and worked within the Block III building at the John Dickinson Plantation. Within this understanding of daily life, we can also start to paint a picture of what survival, self-preservation, and resistance may have looked like to those who were enslaved at this site.

The ceramics within the specified features not only show us what types of activities may have been going on within the site, but also give a look into the movement of materials and the possible cohesion of cultural ceramic traditions which held specific social markers and meanings. The existence of a great amount of dress items such as buttons, beads, pins, and fabric indicate that there were also aspects of laundry at this site. In addition to aspects of laundry, these items represent a small portion of artifacts that can show the complex understandings of choices by enslaved people on how they used and interpreted dress items for themselves as well as within the community in order to create a separate identity. The existence of buttons in this

collection may indicate the use of materials such as these to display specific social markers in a way to resist the identity of a slave that was forced upon these people.

The existence of the amethyst, oyster shells, small ceramic pieces, iron, and bone; all together in the same context is possibly the most powerful assemblage among this collection. This assemblage of artifacts indicates that there may have been a possible conjurer among the enslaved population at the John Dickinson Plantation. Aside from a conjurer, the existence of this cache of materials indicates that at least, there was a continuity of African cultural traditions regarding specific spiritual beliefs within the enslaved population and even show creativity through the use of alternate materials to create rivaling geographies to the dominant white geography of plantation life, since these types of artifacts are not found at sites primarily associated with European Americans. The burial of these objects together purposefully indicates that this may have been an act of resistance or survivance, certainly the survivance of cultural traditions, but also the survivance and persistence of a group of people within an environment of bondage.

This research into how we can better understand aspects of identity and community formation based on a collection associated with enslaved individuals is important because it can help us to better understand how people in a situation of extreme hardship and chattel slavery may have interacted with their environment, materials, and each other in order to persist, self- preserve, and survive in a situation of extreme hardship such as bondage. This research is also important because it can begin to bring to light the stories about enslaved Africans at the John Dickinson Plantation and their experiences. An important aspect of this research is the use of empathy in order to provide a truer archaeological narrative to the experience of the

slaves who lived and worked at the John Dickinson Plantation. Using the materials that were excavated at this site, we can begin to better understand what different items meant to people and helped them to connect with themselves, each other, and the environment on deeper levels while also ensuring the continuity of cultural practices through active resistance to the bondage that they experienced.

To return to the claim that William Williams made, that there was efficient cultural cleansing of enslaved populations within Delaware, this collection shows us that that was indeed not the case. The material culture from within this collection, together with historical records and comparative resources, connects us directly to the enslaved people who lived and worked at the Block III site through the range of 1720 to 1820. These materials show us that although these people were within an environment of chattel slavery and subjected to a bare life status within society; they created ways to resist the dominant white culture and rival the environment of bondage through the persistence of cultural traditions and the creation of separate identities, allowing for methods of self-preservation and survival. We can never fully know what daily life at this site was like for those who were enslaved here, but through the analysis of the materials that they used and that were meaningful to them, we can begin to tell their stories and better understand what their experiences here may have really been like.

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