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Chapter 6 Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Work

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CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSCIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The three seasons of Field School research were directed at the questions of the extent and integrity of the remains at the W.E.B. Du Bois Homesite. Along the way, a number of issues emerged that should guide future work at the Homesite towards the ends of understanding Northern race, class, and gender formation in the lives of Du Bois's maternal relatives. In addition to these research goals, other issues emerged that may contribute to the continuing commemoration of the Homesite and the legacy of Du Bois and his family.

The site is a National Historic Landmark commemorating William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, one of the country's and the world's renowned scholars of African and African American life and an innovative and thoughtful leader advocating national and global civil rights and social justice. He resided at the Homesite as a youth between the ages of 2 and 6, and, as an adult, owned the Homesite between 1928 and 1954. His maternal family, the Burghardts (which includes the Freeman and Wooster families), resided at the Homesite from at least 1820 until Du Bois sold the property some 130 years later in 1954. A longer occupation, beginning in the 18th century is a likelihood. Thus the Homesite is a remarkable testament to African American life in rural New England over much of the time

The Homesite, as it exists today, was formed in 1967 when Dr. Edmund Gordon and Mr. Walter Wilson purchased two parcels of land from E.B. Bowen to develop a 5 acre memorial to W.E.B. Du Bois. One of the most important results of this study is that the property owned by the Burghardt family, from the 1820s on, was much smaller than today's Homesite. Tax records and deeds indicate no more than 1 acre, and most likely no more than .3 of an acre, in the southwestern portion of today's Homesite immediately around and adjacent to the location of the cellar hole. Whether the Burghardt family owned a larger parcel that encompassed the present Homesite prior to the 1820s is possible but yet to be established. The majority of the today's Homesite (including both the Burghardt parcels and the non-Burghardt parcels) was in agro-pastoral production up until the 1940s for the western half of the site and the 1980s for the eastern half of the site. With the exception of the commemorative boulder placed during the 1969 dedication ceremony, no historical features or remains of archaeological significance have been encountered in studies to the north and east of the House area and the associated middens in the southwestern portion of the Homesite.

The archaeological remains in the southwestern portion of the Homesite are concentrated in two areas: the House area adjacent to Route 23, and the midden area to the north and west of the House area. The House area encompasses a cellar hole lined primarily by dressed limestone blocks (filled in 2006) for preservation and safety purposes) and in-situ footing stones for the House. The House area also has a number of trash pits and an adjacent privy, tested and largely excavated as part of this study. It also has trash pits in a boundary line feature to the north and west of the cellar (known as the Hump), only some of which have been assessed in this study. A garden area adjacent to the west of the House, and a small backyard to the north of the House, complete the features of the House area.

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The midden area consists of a linear smear of artifacts from E11N18 to E45N65. The midden is, at most, about 9m wide. The density of the surface artifacts varied, creating two areas of concentration: what was referred to as Midden A, centered on E14N24 nearer to the House, and Midden B, centered on E39N60, furthest from the House. Approximately 11,600 artifacts were collected from the surface in 1983 to prevent the attraction of potential bottle hunters; approximately 9,700 were from the midden area. Subsequent tests of the midden indicates that it is relatively shallow (c. 20 cm) and relatively densely packed. Using the ratio of surface sherds to subsurface sherds from units excavated in the midden, we arrived at the rough estimate that 194,000 sherds remain beneath the surface of the midden.

The artifacts encountered in the midden area, the House area, and additional assessed areas at the Homesite number approximately 31,000. These are presently curated in Machmer E-17 at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, as described in Chapter 2.

These two areas have yielded artifact assemblages and features indicative of a highly integritous resource. There is no evidence of bottle hunter pits and back fill, or any other sorts of vandalism. The features appear largely intact, with the exception of the pushing of the House off its foundations to form the midden. The footing stones for the House do not appear to have been significantly displaced, closely approximating architect Vance's and Du Bois's dimensions for the House on his 1928 sketches and blueprint. The House area has produced intact privy and trash pit features. The materials we have recovered do not appear to have been selectively collected. The middens and trash pits have produced artifacts from every aspect of daily life, including glass and ceramic tablewares, storage jars and pots, items of personal adornment, toys, window glass, furniture hardware, foodways remains, and architectural fragments. The condition of the remains are such that we have reconstructed over 200 ceramic vessel lots, and very preliminary studies promise the same for the glassware. In short, the integrity of the site is so high that it is already providing insight into the daily lives of the residents of the Homesite.

The finding that the site has integrity is significant because three processes could easily have disrupted the contexts and assemblages needed to tell the story of the Burghardt families' uses of the Homesite. For one, the demolition of the House in 1954 pushed it off its foundations to the rear of the site. This was accomplished without significantly disturbing the surface and sub-surface features of the House area, including the location of the footing stones. For another, the surface midden could have attracted bottle hunters, but the lack of evidence of looter pits and the representativeness of the sample of artifacts are not reflective of targeted collection activities. And most importantly, some members of the Great Barrington community advocated vandalizing the Homesite in the heated debates about Du Bois at the time of the 1969 dedication of the Homesite. Again, there are no overt signs of political vandalism, no pits, no random strewing of artifacts, and very few late 20th century artifacts. Rather, the features and the assemblages most easily make sense in light of the people following their daily lives for at least 130 years, followed by the demolition and pushing of the House off its foundation.

In sum, the W.E.B. Du Bois Homesite is rich in archaeological potential about life in rural New England, about African American life in the North, and about the family

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that nurtured the development of W.E.B Du Bois, supporting his growth to become the person who had a major effect on the peoples and thought of the 19th and 20th century. It is a suitable place to continue to inform us as we move into the 21st century.

Future Research Issues

The work in the previous three field seasons also poses questions that could guide future investigations at the W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite. The overarching question would be to gain insights into the daily lives of the residents of this property owned by members of the Burghardt family from the early 19th (and possibly late 18th) centuries until the mid-20th century. These would include studies to understand: how they provided for, and conducted, their meals; how they warded off and recovered from physical ailments; what their house looked like at various periods and how its spaces were used; the shifting contribution of on- and off-homesite activities to the reproduction of daily life; the shifting divisions of labor between men and women, young and old, fit and disabled; the role of nearby Burghardt family members in life at the Homesite; the cultural frameworks that gave meanings to maintaining this Homesite; and the way that all of this was carried out in spite of, and at odds with, the shifting sense of White supremacy exhibited by too many of their neighbors and fellow townspeople.

A full research design to accomplish these goals is beyond the scope of this report. But this report can present lines of investigation provoked by the archaeological work to date.

A key finding is that the Homesite of the Burghardts was much smaller during much of the 19th and 20th centuries than the 5-acre Homesite of today, much too small to provide for a self-sufficient farm. More needs to be learned from documentary study about the relationship, if any, between the landholdings of James and Lucinda Freeman in the 18th century, and the Homelot they owned from 1820 into the mid-19th century. Muller has suggested that their initial holding was much larger than the smaller size of the property on the1820 deed. Was Du Bois's memory of a larger Homesite in the 1870s accurate, with illegal encroachment during the late 19th and early 20th centuries diminishing its size (even more)? This question of the small size of the Burghardt Homelot can be advanced by further archaeological study of the Hump. Working with the hypothesis that people were digging trash pits along the property line demarcated by the Hump, archaeological study of the Hump could assess how prevalent such dumping was, what was being dumped, and when such dumping first occurred. The small size of the property also directs attention to the area to the west of the House, which we hypothesize to have been a garden. This hypothesis should be further evaluated, and along with it, studies to determine what was grown in the garden. This latter information bears directly on what food was on the tables of the Burghardts, and perhaps to the families' medicinal practices.

The extensive midden for the demolished House is a tremendous source of information on many of these topics, and especially so for the young Wooster family with their 4 children. The thousands of artifacts from their daily lives are important evidence about the relative contributions of on and off-homesite production, about the role of mass consumption in constructing daily lives, and about the conceptions of the world that influenced this consumption. These conceptions, along with the conditions of Great

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Barrington's racialized labor market and mass consumption markets directly affected the Wooster's senses of self, and guided their acquisition of market and home-produced material objects, which contributed to their sense of family and fostered the development and education of the children. We have begun some of this study by creating over 200 ceramic vessel lots, principally from the midden area. The glassware from the midden is in the initial stages of constructing such lots. These, along with studies of unique artifacts and evocative assemblages, such as those recovered from PI 10 under the Great Room, the potential minkisi bundle from the cellar builder's trench, and whatever processes are responsible for the assemblage from PIs 5 and 9 from the west end of the House, have already begun to provide insights into the lives of the Woosters, and other Burghardt residents.

Another important discovery is the role of women in maintaining and reproducing daily life at the Homesite. Du Bois's maternal relatives seem to have organized the control and transfer of property moreso than the men, and were likely managing and organizing daily life in the house and in the yardspace. This is somewhat counter-indicated by Du Bois' emphasis in his autobiography on his male relatives (particularly his grandfather Othello) and their management of the property. Little is known about the relationship between the gendered nature of labor and property at the homesite and the artifact assemblage that remains. Future research could draw theoretical emphasis from Black Feminist scholarship that looks at the complicated roles and meanings of homes and households to African-American women (Battle-Baptiste, 2011).

We estimate there are 194,000 artifact sherds yet to be recovered from the midden, a major reason this is such an archaeologically compelling place. And it is also a major logistical problem. How many of these artifacts are needed to build a picture of life on the Homesite? How might the recovery of these artifacts be strategically approached? Sampling the midden makes a priori sense, and a stratified random strategy is commonly used to maximize the recovery of useful information. To develop sampling strata the midden needs to be better understood. Some steps in this direction can take place with the presently collected materials. For instance, this report presents a model of a relatively shallow (to 25cm) but dense midden for the areas of the site where artifacts were recovered from the surface in 1983. Studying the spatial patterning of both the surface artifact densities and predicted subsurface artifact densities would be one way to stratify the midden, identifying areas of greater and lesser densities. An additional source of useful strata would be to study the process by which the midden was created. We were told it was created by bulldozing the House off its foundation to the midden's present location. Did the pushing randomly mix artifacts from the various parts of the House together, as might happen with repeated "sweeps" across the area? Or was some of the artifact patterning of the use areas of the House retained by, for instance, pushing the west end of the House – the garage and shed -- to the southwest portion of the midden, the central portion of the House – the kitchen and entrance halls – to the central part of the midden, and the east end – the sitting room – to the northeast portion? If the latter, then the sampling could be designed to take study the activities associated with these different spaces in the House into consideration. These, and other, analyses could be conducted with presently existing information and lay the basis for informative future excavations of the midden.

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Finally there is the House itself. Du Bois evocatively provided a description of the House as having "the great room of the fireplace, the flagged kitchen, half a step below, and the lower woodshed beyond" (Du Bois 1928). These areas should be identified within the footprint of the House footing stones. One reason would be to guide future study of the House area. But as importantly, identifying these areas would provide visitors to the Homesite a way to map Du Bois's words onto this place, today, and maybe travel a bit in time, themselves. There is also the question raised by James and Lucinda Freeman's tax records and the enigmatic stone features in PIs 5 and 9 about whether earlier versions of the House had the same footprint as seen in the photographs, sketches, blueprints, and surface features at the Homesite today. Clearly the areas around PIs 5 and 9 need to be opened to determine the extent of the stone features, the relationship between them and the artifact-bearing fills, and the pit below these stones. There is also the matter of the cellar. When and by whom was the limestone laid to make today's cellar? Are the stones in the northeast corner indicative of an earlier cellar? And is there other evidence in the builder's trench of protective practices calling on the world of spirits that were disrupted by those ignorant of the import of these protective practices? Finally, though the west side of the House has received attention, the area between the House and the Hump, which would have constituted the outdoor and play areas, should be more systematically studied. Initial work on these exterior spaces should begin by restudying previously collected materials. But since the northern boundary line has only been known since 2003, the area north of the House has yet to be systematically studied as the defined space of the backyard.

All this additional work will take place recognizing that the W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite has been for years a site of commemoration. It was first commemorated by Du Bois to celebrate his family's efforts to create a life in Great Barrington, then by the Dubois Memorial Committee of the 1960s and 1970s who faced down prejudice and fear to create the 5-acre space recognized today as a National Historic Landmark, and most recently by people from Great Barrington and from the University of Massachusetts Amherst who have joined together to create at the Homesite, and other locations in Great Barrington, a place on the national and international historic landscape that both celebrates Du Bois but more importantly fosters an interest in engaging with his thought to bring about a more socially just world. Future archaeology should develop information that especially informs museum designers and stewards of the Homesite about the history of Du Bois's family's life in Berkshire County and the nature of the archaeological resource at the Homesite. Beyond this the archaeology should be conducted to engage the present community, as visitors to our excavations and the Homesite, as well as participants in the research processes that brings a useful past to light. Doing so would be a splendid addition to the work done by many people throughout the Upper Housatonic Valley to create the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail, with its astonishing companion book (Levinson 2006) and its numerous guides and pamphlets. Doing so would realize archaeology's promise to contribute to a more inclusive and even democratic understanding of our past, and help us all understand what needs to be done to follow in Du Bois's footsteps and create a better future for all.

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