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The Quarterpath Road Site, an Antebellum Quarter and Tenant Residence near Williamsburg, Virginia

**By Ywone Edwards-Ingram
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation**

The Department of Archaeological Research of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation is studying the remains of an antebellum quarter and tenant house site near Williamsburg, Virginia. During the summer of 2004, Jason Boroughs, a doctoral student at the College William and Mary, directed a full-scale excavation of this site, with the help of the joint CWF/College of William and Mary field school. Excavations have revealed the remains of a 15ft x 19ft dwelling with a substantial brick hearth as well as the residual evidence, in the form of a 6.5 ft square cellar, of another. The structures were bounded by a fence line enclosing a common space between. Structure 1, erected circa 1840-1850, represents a hybrid building tradition between earthfast and pier construction. It was occupied until its incineration circa 1905. Structure 2 was most likely of log construction, with ground laid sills eradicated by the decades of plowing that accompanied the agricultural use of the property after its abandonment. Also recovered were a variety of domestic artifacts including buttons, coins, glass fragments (predominately representing medicinal bottles), and imported and domestic ceramic sherds. Although the site had been extensively plow damaged, careful and extensive sampling of the plowzone, combined with thorough cross-mending across the entire site, has resulted in a large and diverse assemblage of cultural material.



Field school students excavating near a brick chimney foundation at the Quarterpath Road site.

The occupants of the site appear to have been enslaved field workers who continued to live there after emancipation. They were likely engaged in agricultural tasks close to the quarter or at other jobs in Williamsburg itself. It is possible that different groups of African Americans resided at the site over time. The artifacts and the architectural evidence indicate that the site was occupied from the 1840s or 1850s until the incineration of one of the dwellings circa 1905.



Fragments are from a nineteenth-century, yellow ware vessel with Bennington-type glaze and "Rebecca-at-the-Well" ornamentation. Photograph by Grace Turner.

The Quarterpath Road site promises more information about the flow of commercial goods in Williamsburg in the early nineteenth century, especially in the context of a marginal household residing on the fringe of this urban center. A better understanding of the material lives of this segment of the population will come from the studies of Boroughs and those of Grace Turner, also a doctoral student in anthropology at the College. These students, working in collaboration with Ywone Edwards-Ingram, the Department's coordinator of African-American Archaeology, are now interpreting a variety of domestic artifacts from the site. Preliminary results of this work were presented at the 2005 meeting of the Council for Northeastern Historical Archaeology in Trenton, New Jersey. The site is significant for it represents a period of time that has been largely overlooked by archaeological investigations in the lower Chesapeake region. It is the only example of an emancipation-era field quarter/tenant residence excavated by the Foundation.