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Wye House Archaeology

By Matthew D. Cochran, Lisa Kraus, and Mark P. Leone*

The University of Maryland's Archaeology in Annapolis Field School continued excavations at Wye House's Long Green, from June through July 2007. Wye House and its Long Green were described by Frederick Douglass in his autobiographies. He lived there and saw the slave environment as a boy. Excavations focused on a large 20 ft. x 40 ft. brick foundation initially located in the 2006 Field School. Preliminary field observations appear to indicate that this structure underwent at least three phases of construction: (1) initial construction post 1820s as a farm/storage structure; (2) post 1830s additions of brick footers and fireplace, structure altered into a slave quarter; and (3) post 1880s removal of fireplace, structure converted into a corn crib, standing as late as the 1940s.



The house built by Edward Lloyd IV during the 1780s and described by Frederick Douglass in the 1820s. The house and much of its acreage is still owned by descendants of the Lloyds, who have given University of Maryland archaeologists permission to excavate.

During the summer of 2006, University of Maryland students excavated a slave quarter that dated very securely to the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This was the "Tulip Poplar Building," a brick foundation and chimney preserved within the roots of a substantial Tulip Poplar tree. Students also uncovered the remains of an 18th century building under the Red Overseer's House made famous in Frederick Douglass' description, perhaps an earlier incarnation of the same building. Excavations in 2005 uncovered the

homes of late 19th and early 20th century tenant farmers, which may have been adapted from earlier structures. Throughout the entire site, archaeological evidence points to consistent reuse and rebuilding of the structures on the Long Green through the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.



Best described by Frederick Douglass, the Long Green is on the right and held well over a dozen buildings and hundreds of enslaved people. The road is the one Douglass walked down as a five year-old when he was brought to the plantation for the first time. The road bisects the formal property with the Great House, which is on the left, and the many slave quarters and shops, where the excavations take place.

With substantive artifact analysis pending, research questions devised in the field will focus on dynamic changes to the Long Green throughout the 19th and early 20th century. Specific questions to be addressed include the re-organization of the plantation landscape in response to changes in demographics and modes of production both pre- and post-emancipation; experiential aspects of a racially segregated plantation landscape; and, detailing the everyday struggles, described by Douglass, endured by the enslaved African American population of the Wye Plantation. Excavations have borne witness to a remarkably intact archaeological record that has the distinct potential to materially illuminate the narrative of Frederick Douglass.



The Long Green undulates because it sits on top of shell middens dating to AD 1. University of Maryland students and staff have spent the last three years, 2005-2007, excavating at least four buildings.

The Discovery Channel presents three videos on the archaeology of Wye House, on Maryland's Eastern Shore, where Frederick Douglass was enslaved as a young boy. These videos can be viewed at the Discovery Channel, <http://dsc.discovery.com>, by following these links: <http://tinyurl.com/27dkv5>, <http://tinyurl.com/2h87wc>, and <http://tinyurl.com/22lqfc>.

Note

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