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December 2011 Newsletter

New Outlets for Old Foundations: Archaeology in Annapolis and Web-based Outreach

By Beth Pruitt, Kathryn Deeley and Mark Leone

Archaeology in Annapolis is excavating two homes lived in by African Americans. One, the James Holliday House, was owned by a free African American family since 1850 and is still in Holliday family hands. This is unique in Annapolis. The other was lived in by African Americans and Filipinos and is our first effort to explore Filipino Americans in Annapolis. How can we share the archaeology?

In the summer of 2011, we extended our findings into the virtual realm. The sites where Archaeology in Annapolis excavators focused this summer -- private properties in Annapolis and on the Eastern Shore -- would otherwise remain inaccessible to the public eye (see SHA Winter 2011 and CHENA Fall 2011 newsletters for more information on the summer field school). In the 2011 field season, the excavations, under the direction of Mark P. Leone, used blogging and social media to connect with a wider audience. Due to the accessibility of the Internet, blogging has become a powerful tool within academia to educate and communicate with students, other academics, and the interested public. Our blog created a space to share experiences and discoveries while allowing feedback from the community in a digital environment, and welcomed exchange not only with the community that is physically local, but also with a dispersed community of shared interests.

Archaeologists generally accept that they cannot leave their work to be used only by academics and that there is a community outside archaeology that has a vested interest in the outcomes of archaeological endeavors (e.g., La Roche and Blakey 1997; Jeppson 1997; Little and Shackel 2007; McDavid 1997). Archaeology in Annapolis (AiA) has been working with the local community since its inception in 1981, using various methods including open public sites, news media, and public displays of artifacts. Public media also allow local communities to

receive updated news of the discoveries being made through archaeology in the City of Annapolis. Public access to sites provides archaeologists the means to demonstrate what we are doing, how we are doing it, and how it leads to our conclusions. However, not every site can be opened up for the public to visit, and newspaper articles and TV news casts are not continuous. Archaeologists interested in engaging communities have to find a way to reach their audiences and not only provide information, but also start and sustain a two-way dialog.

Despite limited access, AiA continued to take advantage of traditional opportunities to reach the local community and inform them of the continuing archaeological successes in both Annapolis and on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Pieces on the research being done on 19th and early 20th century African American communities in Annapolis were published in the [*Washington Post*](#) and in the [*Baltimore Sun*](#). The work being done on the Eastern Shore of Maryland on slave life at Wye House is covered by the University of Maryland's local television show [*TerpVision*](#) (<http://www.terpvision.umd.edu/>). But this outlet has a relatively local audience.

The [*AiA Blog*](#) (<http://blog.umd.edu/aia>) began as a site where graduate and undergraduate students presented regular updates about excavations. Students wrote about their experiences in our field school, the methods they were using, and the artifacts uncovered. This helped our students think about the "big picture" of field work as they connected their work to tours and lectures. Frequent writing is useful in a project such as Archaeology in Annapolis, in which there have been 30 years' worth of research, not continually tied to an individual researcher and in which multiple researchers are able to contribute pieces over time to a comprehensive body of knowledge. To record this research as it happens on the blog creates a collective source for present and future researchers.

Blogging represents for us an experiment in web-based outreach that provides access to a community that stretches the definition of "local" and allows the assemblage of multiple perspectives and interpretations. Our main aim is to engage the local communities connected to our Annapolis and Wye House sites, but the global nature of the Internet means that our project was open to any party with web access. This is especially relevant for our sites because of the known dispersion of the descendant communities associated with these sites across the country. By virtue of making our blog public, we were able to reach descendants who have relocated, as well as local residents, other archaeologists, and any other readers who have an interest in our archaeological work.

Multiple times throughout the summer of 2011, visitors left comments that asked questions, provided insight, or simply encouraged the work that the researchers conducted. Questions and comments provided the opportunity for dialog and directly influenced future posts. This discourse is beneficial because the readers get their questions answered, and because they help demonstrate what community members think are important aspects of the research.

We have used social media to supplement and enhance the use of the blog. By uploading pictures to Flickr and videos to YouTube, we visually demonstrate the process by which archaeological data are recovered. Traditionally, archaeologists take pictures of their excavated units. These are important for recording finds. Frequently not shown is the actual process of digging. Not only are these photographs more interesting than unit profiles or plan views, but they also depict how archaeology is done. By showing archaeologists and students actively engaging the ground, we emphasize the active role the researcher plays in interpreting the past.

In June, Mark Leone gave a lecture in Easton, Maryland as part of the “Douglass Returns,” the dedication of the first statue of Frederick Douglass on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. The talk concerned present research at the Wye House plantation and the data collected by AiA graduate students. For those unable to attend the lecture in person, it was viewable [online](http://youtu.be/Xz6Yru16iPQ) (<http://youtu.be/Xz6Yru16iPQ>). Through the lecture and the online video, Leone highlighted the processes by which we have arrived at our hypotheses. He related how faunal analyses at Wye have illuminated aspects of the origins of Southern cooking. In looking at the pollen remains from the Wye greenhouse, researchers have begun to form a picture of the relationship between Euro-American and African-American gardening in the plantation context. Finally, he explained how archaeologists discovered the ruins of two previously unidentified slave quarters on the plantation with a combination of LiDAR imagery, historic aerial photographs, and a historic map. Through this additional exposure of the online video, we were able to receive feedback from a wider audience than was able to fit in a theater in Easton, Maryland.

Through our blog, we also participated in Claire Smith’s important new idea of World Archaeology Day. AiA has continued to update our blog throughout the laboratory process, demonstrating that archaeology is not just about digging in the dirt, but is primarily concerned with how artifacts can inform our understanding of urban and plantation life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The goal in general and on World Archaeology Day, is to accurately portray the work that archaeologists do each day -- both the exciting days and the mundane --

and to create a virtual space to share and discuss the processes and findings in Annapolis and at Wye House.

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Return to December 2011 Newsletter:
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