

3-1-2006

Gender and Resistance at North Bend Plantation: The Beginnings of an Interdisciplinary Study of an Enslaved Community

Kelley Deetz
Roanoke College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/adan>

 Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [African History Commons](#), [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [African Studies Commons](#), [American Art and Architecture Commons](#), [American Material Culture Commons](#), [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#), [Biological and Physical Anthropology Commons](#), [Folklore Commons](#), [Other American Studies Commons](#), [Other History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#), [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Deetz, Kelley (2006) "Gender and Resistance at North Bend Plantation: The Beginnings of an Interdisciplinary Study of an Enslaved Community," *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 1 , Article 41.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/adan/vol9/iss1/41>

This Articles, Essays, and Reports is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

Gender and Resistance at North Bend Plantation: The Beginnings of an Interdisciplinary Study of an Enslaved Community

**By Kelley Deetz
Department of African American Studies
University of California at Berkeley**

In April of 1849 an enslaved man named Billy was charged with poisoning his owner Thomas Wilcox, and ten years later a house servant was charged with poisoning Wilcox's son.[1] Although rare, this was one of the many modes of resistance practiced by enslaved African Americans. Thomas Wilcox owned North Bend Plantation, and was one of Charles City County's most elite men.

After the Transatlantic Slave Trade ended in 1808, and the Virginia tobacco industry declined, Virginia became known as the "Negro raising state," as planters began to "breed slaves" for the internal market. The booming cotton and Sugar industries of the 1830s in the southern United States, and Caribbean called for a rapid influx of enslaved labor. Virginia began to export thousands of enslaved African Americans, contributing to what is known as the "second middle passage." North Bend Plantation is located in Charles City County Virginia, roughly 20 miles east of Richmond. It was established in 1819, and by 1830 at least 80 enslaved African Americans lived on the property.[2] During the 1830s close to 17 percent of Charles City County's enslaved population was sold south by way of the Richmond internal slave market, and within a decade the population returned to its 1830 level.[3]

This historic moment invites many unanswered questions. Through my intended dissertation research I hope to answer the following: How did the enslaved community react to this rapid export of their fellow community and family members? Was there resistance or any form of agency within the enslaved community? How did gender play into this equation? What role did Nat Turner's rebellion play in who was exported and who stayed? Lastly, how does the rapid disruption of enslaved households show up in the archeological record? An interdisciplinary study of North Bend Plantations' enslaved community will shed light on these inquiries, and provide a better understanding of enslaved life during the mid 19th century.

North Bend Plantation is located on the historic Weyanoke tract in Charles City County. All of the landowners at North Bend were prominent figures in the Charles City County social circles. The families at North Bend plantation socialized with the elite communities of Sherwood Forrest, Shirley, Belle Aire, Evelynton, and Berkeley Plantations.[4] The Minge family owned this land as early as 1785. Dr. John Minge established North Bend Plantation in 1819, and finished the erection of the main house by 1820. Minge continued to live at North Bend until 1832 when he subdivided the total acreage between his two sons, James and John. John received the house and the surrounding 500 acres, which would be called Kittewan Creek from 1832-1850. Later in 1850, Minge sold the plantation to Mr. Thomas Wilcox who owned the land until his death in 1865, when it was sold to Mr. Joseph Allen of

Richmond.[5] Currently, the land is owned and run by the Copland family, who are the descendants of John Minge.



Current structure of the main house at North Bend Plantation.



Area of the quarter preserved in pastureland.

I have done preliminary historical research on the domestic slave trade and Charles City County, and I am anxious to continue my study. In the summer of 2005 I began the archeological testing at the North Bend Plantation slave quarter, and am in the process of evaluating the artifacts. The site is located in the middle of a horse pasture, where there were multiple cabins, and an overseer's house, all of which were torn down by the current owners in the early 1900s. I also plan to excavate the remains of an external kitchen, located on the far end of the plantation. The original smokehouse (including the saltbox), dairy house, well, and part of the icehouse still stand adjacent to the quarter. Luckily, the quarter was abandoned in the late 19th century, and its footprint has been preserved in the pasture, with no sign of farming, a plow zone, or alternative uses.



Salt box that was located in the smokehouse.

Another aspect I hope to explore is that of the neighboring Black church. It was demolished sometime in the past 30 years. This church, called "Maysico," was located on the neighboring Kittewan Plantation land, just under a mile from the North Bend Quarter. I am unaware of its date range, however, through interviews with the current landowners, I know some of the North Bend enslaved community attended it regularly, and baptized their children there. There are also church records beginning in the 1840s that cite the baptism of some of North Bend Plantation's enslaved community. Ms. Copland also stated that she knows there were many slave marriages in the quarter, and there should be records of them in the family papers.[6]

I intend to provide a thorough interdisciplinary study of this enslaved community. Approaching this site with the multiple perspectives gained from History, African Diaspora Studies, Religion, Gender Studies, Architecture, and Anthropology will provide a distinctive analysis of slavery and resistance in Antebellum Virginia. Much of the

scholarship on the domestic slave trade in Virginia is firmly placed in history, and centers itself in the urban core of Richmond, and I hope to expand this work into the surrounding rural area. In addition, African Diaspora Studies encourages a grass roots approach to historical interpretation. I plan to interview the descendants of the enslaved community at North Bend plantation, and invite them to dig their ancestors' old homes. I believe that history is important for everyone, and should not be held hostage within the academy.

I also received the Gilder Lehrman Short-Term Residential Fellowship, which will enable me to read through the primary and secondary sources to collect information related to the enslaved community at North Bend Plantation. It will provide me with the necessary historical background of Charles City County, and North Bend Plantation before I conduct a thorough archeological study of the enslaved community in the summer of 2007.

In addition to archaeological and historical research, I also plan on examining the lasting memory of enslavement. By interviewing the diverse descendant communities of North Bend Plantation, I hope to expose the vastly different ways that enslavement lives in the residual memory of Charles City county residents. I also plan on exploring the different ways it is remembered through memorials and the tourist industry. The Copland family is extremely supportive of all my research. Ms. Copland had the land blessed by a local African American pastor, in order to gain forgiveness from the sins of her forefathers. This incredible act demonstrates the lasting effects of enslavement on the conscience of the current landowners, and begs for more inquiry.



Jamiko Hercules digging test units in the quarter August 2005

Lastly, I plan to organize a UC Berkeley field school through both the department of Archaeology and African American Studies, which will start in the summer of 2007. Cross listing this course with African American Studies will reach out to a section of the student body that rarely gets the opportunity or invitation to dig. It will also enable African American Studies majors to earn upper division credit within their major, and be exposed to the field of archaeology. In turn, I hope this will help increase the ridiculously low number of African American archaeologist. I plan on returning to North Bend Plantation this summer, and will be digging July through August. If anyone is interested in helping please contact me at Deetz@Berkeley.edu. No experience is necessary.

Notes

[1]. Robert L. Crewdson et al. *Charles City County Virginia, An Official History, Four Centuries of the Southern Experience: Charles City County, Virginia, from the Age of Discovery to the Modern Civil Rights Struggle*, ed. James P. Whittenburg and John M. Coski. (Salem, W. Va.: Don Mills, 1989) 65.

[2]. North Bend Plantation tour, from Unites States Census Records, 1830.

[3]. Crewdson, 61.

[4]. Crewdson, Chapter 8. and conversation with Copland family (August 2005).

[5]. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. *National Register of Historic Places, Registration Form, 1989. From the Copland Family (current owners and descendants of original owners).*

[6]. Interview with Ms. Copland August 2005.