May 2005

Updates on Archaeology in Annapolis and the Eastern Shore of Maryland

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Recommended Citation
Leone, Mark P.; Palus, Matthew; Babiarz, Jennifer J.; and Kraus, Lisa (2005) "Updates on Archaeology in Annapolis and the Eastern Shore of Maryland," African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter: Vol. 8 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/adan/vol8/iss1/3
Archaeology in Annapolis has been digging on William Paca's 1790 plantation on Wye Island on Maryland's Eastern Shore for five years. In the summer of 2004, archaeological field school students excavated a domestic area dating from 1790 to 1950. The remains of an early twentieth-century tenant farm still stand on the site, but extensive shovel testing by Dr. James Harmon in 2001 uncovered 18th century artifacts from the tenant farm area. These artifacts indicate that the tenant farm may have been built on the site of an older slave quarter, which would have housed the large population of enslaved Africans held by Paca and his family. In the late 18th century, Paca owned about 100 slaves, a population which grew to 150 by 1860.

Four ruined buildings were discovered through excavation, two of them on shallow brick foundations and without basements. It is unlikely that the buildings were more than one story. We recovered utilitarian ceramics and very little porcelain, and there is a sense that dishes were mixed and matched, and not in sets. In light midden deposits adjacent to these structures, we found domestic materials in substantial quantity such as thimbles, buttons, faunal remains, and enough similar material to identify this without doubt as a living area. We have also found a worked bone ring or tube, a piece of a clockworks, and marbles. Although we are certain that these buildings were domestic and that they were not surrounded by extensive work areas, there is only slender evidence yet of their being a quarter for enslaved Africans and African-Americans. More work in the summer of 2005 will be devoted to exploring for patterns interpretable as evidence for slave domestic life. Suggestions for evidence would be most welcome.

The University of Maryland's archaeological field school will also excavate at Wye House on the mainland of the Eastern Shore, immediately south of Wye Island. Wye House is intact and has been owned by the Lloyd family since the 1660s. Frederick Douglass spent a portion of his childhood on this property as the slave of one of the Lloyd family overseers. The family has invited Archaeology in Annapolis to do a survey of Long Green, where some of the slave quarters once stood and where many of the workshops of the plantation were built. Now this is a grassy stretch between the Great House and modern fields. The survey will involve a pedestrian walk over, magnetometry and soil resistivity surveys, and
excavation. The Lloyd family is keenly interested in historic preservation, particularly for all its holdings. Archaeology in Annapolis will provide appropriate data analysis of the first season of survey work.

In the immediate neighborhood of Wye House are several communities of African Americans, including descendants of Lloyd family slaves. These towns were mainly founded during Emancipation, by Civil War solders and freed slaves. We are organizing the development of long-term working relationships with members of these communities, including understanding their questions of Wye House and its archaeology and how we might design our research around questions that they want answered.

The archaeological field school is directed by Mark Leone. Matthew Palus is Assistant Director. The archaeology and historical context of Wye Hall form the basis of the Ph.D. dissertation of Jennifer Babiarz, of the Department of Anthropology, University of Texas, Austin. Her advisor is Maria Franklin. The materials from Wye House and the associated documents that comment on the Lloyd family slaves will become the Ph.D. dissertation of Lisa Kraus, of the Department of Anthropology, University of Texas, Austin, also working under Maria Franklin’s advisement.

In Annapolis, the Banneker-Douglass Museum, the State of Maryland's Center for African American History and Culture has built a new wing. Its first temporary exhibit will be the archaeology of the block surrounding the museum, which was mostly African-American residences and in places African-American property. The museum's core is an African Methodist Episcopal Church building that was saved from demolition by Historic Annapolis Foundation. During archaeological research on the surrounding block, the museum's staff played a leading role in defining the questions and the possibility for obtaining answers through archaeology for the members of Archaeology in Annapolis beginning in 1990. The archaeology to be exhibited is from middle class houses owned by African-American Annapolitans. The archaeology includes a commentary on life in the tenements hidden from sight by middle class housing. The archaeology clearly shows two classes of wealth in the African American community between the 1830s and the 1970s, when the block was destroyed. Material exhibited comes from dissertations written by Paul Mullins (Ph.D. UMASS Amherst), Mark Warner (Ph.D. University of Virginia), and Eric Larson (Ph.D. SUNY Buffalo). This will be the third Banneker-Douglass exhibit of African-American archaeology from Archaeology in Annapolis. The exhibit will open in the early fall 2005. The exhibit was organized by Dr. Elizabeth Stewart, Curator at the Banneker-Douglass Museum, with assistance Amelia Chisholm, MAA, from the Department of Anthropology, University of Maryland, College Park.

Finally, Archaeology in Annapolis has completed excavations in the Eastport neighborhood of Annapolis, which were carried out by field school students from the University of Maryland College Park from 2001-2004. Eastport was founded as an independent community by land speculators following the American Civil War, and developed into a racially and ethnically diverse, predominantly working-class village with close economic ties to Annapolis. Matthew Palus, who directed this research, is preparing his dissertation for the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University, under the direction of Nan
Rothschild. Unlike the historic core of Annapolis, Eastport presented important opportunities for land ownership among lower- and middle-class families of African-American and European descent. Eastport was annexed into the City of Annapolis in 1951, but was gradually and thoroughly "colonized" with public services and utilities during the first half of the twentieth century. Matthew Palus has used the archaeological remains from eight house lots to look at the acceptance or rejection of this infrastructure, including water, gas, sewer and sanitation service, as well as above-ground utilities like electricity. These relations are still being played out today in the relationships and tensions between development, zoning, and historic preservation in the neighborhood.

Archaeology in Annapolis continues its commitment to understanding African American heritage and to working with community members and interested scholars to define needs and meanings for archaeological work.