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Slave Quarters Discovered at Monocacy National Battlefield

By Karen Mudar, National Park Service
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NPS archeologists have uncovered the site of the largest known slave habitation site in the mid-Atlantic region at Monocacy NB near Frederick, Maryland. The remains of several dwelling houses have been uncovered, as well as artifacts associated with enslaved occupations of the site from 1794 until 1827. Surface penetrating radar was used to locate two additional house sites, bringing the total to at least six individual structures.

The site is part of the L'Hermitage plantation, established in 1794 by the Vincendières, a family of French planters who came to Maryland from Haiti. By 1800, L'Hermitage was home to 90 enslaved laborers, approximately ten times the number of slaves that would be expected for the size of the plantation, 748 acres. This was the second largest slave population in Frederick County at the time and among the largest in Maryland. There are some indications that the Vincendières tried to rent the slaves to other farms.

The plantation house for the L'Hermitage still exists, and is known by the name of subsequent owners, the Bests. The Best farmhouse provides orientation for locating the quarters of enslaved persons. Historical documents indicate that their homes were located between the plantation house and the public road. The stone foundations of four cabins have been unearthed. Associated artifacts, such as buttons, beads, and pieces of pottery, provide insight into the lives of the enslaved on this plantation. Information from the surface penetrating radar survey will also help focus the excavations, which are expected to continue until October.

Funding for the project has been provided by the NPS Cultural Resource Preservation Program, Monocacy National Battlefield, and the Secretary of the Interior's Youth Intake Program. Undergraduate and graduate students from the University of Maryland, American University, Howard University, and Hood
College are assisting with this project. For more information about Monocacy NB and the L'Hermitage, go to www.nps.gov/ncr/mono/.

[A related article, entitled "Brutal slave history unearthed at Frederick County's L'Hermitage," by Michael E. Ruane, was published online August 26, 2010, by the Washington Post.]