

The Elusive 17th-Century Site in the Lower Delaware Valley

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Many historians have characterized the Delaware Valley as the most culturally diverse in British colonial America. Through the documentary records, we know the Swedes, Dutch, Finns, Lenape, Nanticoke and Africans were in the land that became New Jersey and the State of Delaware, but we have recognized little physical evidence of their presence. In southern New Jersey, few 17th-century sites have been identified and professionally excavated. Most of the knowledge of this period comes from the avocational and collector communities. Across the Bay in the State of Delaware, we have had several decades of admirable archaeological survey, but only a dozen or so 17th-century components have been recognized. The DeVries Fort, once thought to be the evidence of the Zwaanendael Settlement, now appears to have been an 18th century agricultural complex. Clearly, our survey methods have not been oriented to finding these sites.

The recent research by Charles Fithian has demonstrated the paucity of data may be the result of research bias. Prior to 1986, the data base of 17th-century sites in Delaware consisted of only a dozen sites. Fithian examined the archaeological collections curated by the State of Delaware, and estimates about 120 sites did contain a possible 17th-century component.

Of the dozen or so sites with documented 17th-century features, only two sites of this period have been fully excavated. The John Powell Plantation and the Richard Whitehart sites were excavated by UDCAR for the DeIDOT S.R. 1 project. More limited excavation were done at Arnell Creek, Webb's Landing, Bay Vista, Kingston-upon-Hull, and more recently, Avery's Rest and Cemetery Hill.

Most of these components were not observed during the initial archaeological survey or testing. For example, Powell and Whitehart sites were uncovered during a Phase 2 investigation of the prehistoric Pollack Site. The Bay Vista site was uncovered during testing when a road was removed in a quest for the prehistoric components. The

Cemetery Hill site was found during a cemetery delineation study. The features at Webb's Landing were noticed while excavating for a prehistoric site. While we praise these investigators for their alertness and quality of excavations performed, a cloud of doubt haunts our minds as to effectiveness of the methods we employ.

Perhaps the first time the early colonial sites were sought in their own right was the Saint Jones comprehensive survey in the late 1970s'. Several sites were mapped and preserved in place. However, the bias and training of the investigator may not be the main problem, and these sites simply leave a slight signature on the surface.

This is not a new concern. 15 years ago, Dr. Lu Ann De Cunzo set out to find the Dutch community at Appoquinimink and Drawyer's Creek with a survey focused on the early colonial period. As the remains of the community proved to be elusive, she concluded that testing must be more intensive than shovel tests at 25 foot intervals and indication of early artifacts must be pursued by additional testing. For this project, she recommended future efforts should involve additional historical research and public outreach that focused on stewardship.

Fithian's Research on Kent County, DE

Concepts of what a 17th-century site is in other areas along the Atlantic Coast may not be **valid for the lower Delaware Valley**. Previous studies tended to lump Delaware into the patterns of the Chesapeake or Pennsylvania without acknowledging the regional or local development. The English colonists in Kent County did not build large scale plantations, but smaller family oriented farmsteads. They did not situate themselves adjacent to navigable waterway or along fresh springs, but on good fertile and sandy soils. As the bay coast of Delaware is buffered by a ring of marsh, finding fast land adjacent to deep water was rare. Instead, they relied on public and semi-private landings for access to shipping.

While the first generation of English raised the sotweed for export, they also **grew** grains, planted orchards, and became cattle ranchers. It is possible they learned how to forage and hunt for wild game and plants from the Lenape or Nanticoke, unlike the reliance on the three sisters and livestock that became the staple of the English neighbors to the west. Indeed, the harvesting and utilization of wild resources characterized the Delaware Colonists throughout the 18th-century.

The society they constructed in the “**Lower Counties**” was **different** as well. It was not the typical concept of the frontier, inhabited by self-sufficient single males living in a cabin in the woods. People settled near one another and created new communities, such as Dover and Salisbury Town. Farms were worked by established stable families, who employed co-operative labor practices with their neighbors. Extra labor was provided by free laborers, indentured servants, and very few slaves. In contrast, the average lifespan was slightly longer than those living in the Chesapeake, but substantially shorter from their counterparts in New England. .

Scholars from this region have **gathered** at two workshops to improve the detection of early colonial sites at the field survey level. In their discussion, they identified several common problems that occur throughout the Delaware Valley.

Survey

A series of problems are the **methods** we use to find site in general. It appears the artifact assemblages of these early sites are under-represent on the surface and through the plow zone. Our two popular and cost effects methods, shovel test pits and controlled surface collect are designed to sample the upper layers of the soil, and may miss these early colonial sites. The obvious solution is to move more dirt.

In doing this, the archaeologist usually finds themselves in an awkward situation. They need to find the funding and political support to excavate large trenches on the presence of a small handful of unglamorous artifacts. An intermediate step of confirming the

presence of undisturbed deposits beneath the plow zone would be helpful. The use of remote sensing devices has been problematic. Ground Penetrating Radar can work well in clayey soils, and can detect large brick masses. However, their results in sandy soils are not reliable. Many historic period subsurface features contain ferrous or copper alloy metals. It should be possible to find them by a skilled operator with a metal detector. To date, the actual results have not been encouraging.

Field Scatter?

Sometimes, when the historic artifacts are found dispersed in a farmer's field, the investigator disregards them as "field scatter". However, the agricultural practice of "**manuring**" that created these scatters only began in the 1820's and lasted to the First World War. Any artifact that predated this period may not have been transported by this agricultural practice. It follows, then, if pre-1820 artifacts are present in a field, we have a site. In general, domestic artifacts, not architectural artifacts, were the subject of manuring. The notable presence of **architectural artifacts**, such as hand made brick and wrought nails, may indicate the presence of a colonial period structure. In addition to these, two classes of architectural artifacts can be very useful in identifying 17th-century sites.

Daub, or burned clay and window leads or "comes" are diagnostics of the early colonial period. Their presence indicates an early structure, and therefore, a substantial occupation.

Artifact Identification

There have been some problems with determining the presence of early colonial sites with the **identification** of the appropriate artifacts. First, some artifacts are routinely miss-identified by less experienced personnel. Occasionally, early Staffordshire slipware can pass for Yellow ware. Also, Black Glazed Earthenware can be confused with Jackfield ware, altering the date by at least half a century. Our lack of knowledge regarding the local ceramic types has created some confusion with regional utilitarian

European wares. To date, we only have a vague understanding of earthenwares such as Liverpool Spotted and the slipwares from Deventer, in the Netherlands.

Next, many ceramics have a long **period of production**, and the bulk of artifacts may be interpreted to belong to a later time. For example, the Westerwald stone ware was produced for more than 200 years, and the exact dates of production for the local redwares are unknown. If the archaeologist were to dismiss the few, tightly dated sherds of an earlier type as heirlooms, then the evidence of an earlier component may disappear. With these complications, the use of any formula designed to weigh the mean dates of production in order to describe the period of occupation is meaningless

Although most ceramic sherds identified on the 17th-century sites were imported from Europe to the entire eastern seaboard of North America, some variations in **the trade networks** can be seen. Chuck Fithian and Alice Guerrant observed that North Devon products, such as gravel tempered ware, and Sgraffito ware are relatively common in the Chesapeake, but they are extremely rare in Delaware. While there are 5 or 6 known examples of Gravel Temper Earthenware, there are no known examples of Sgraffito in Delaware.

This situation surprises us as these North Devon products would have been exported from Bristol, and William Penn had close ties to Bristol. As a group, we are unfamiliar with the diagnostic artifacts that would indicate a Dutch or Swedish occupation. We could learn more on which Dutch kitchen ceramics would here.

In contrast, Bristol was the primary source for tobacco pipes. We find pipe fragment with maker marks of Robert Tippet, William Evans, William Manby, Edward Reed and Edward Randall. All of these are from Bristol.

Surface Signature

From reviewing the collections, Fithian has developed a profile for the early colonial site. As the overall quantities of artifacts are lower than other components, the surface visibility must be excellent in order to detect these. The Delaware assemblage would be

composed largely of red colonial earthenware, either with or a clear or black glaze. There would be smaller amount of salt glazed stoneware, followed by Staffordshire slipware and tin-glazed earthenware (delft). Sprinkled among these, we would find fragments of Pipe stems, daub, and brick.

Future Possibilities

The appearance of forward momentum is not needed; but several coordinated and concurrent actions may address these problems.

We could assemble an artifact guide similar to the one produced by Jefferson Patterson Park. Presenting images of the artifacts with their contexts to all researchers via the web will establish a critical step. Dr. Rich Veit suggested that an annotated site list would be helpful. Perhaps we could assemble one for our entire region, with digital images of the notable diagnostic artifacts and a bibliography.

These sessions are coalescing into a regular informal symposia series. The New Castle Courthouse Museum will host the first event on May 10, as an event in Delaware's Archaeology Month. Depending on the success and the demand, a following one could be held next autumn or the following spring.

All are welcome to join.

Notes:

Bay Vista:	found cellar and features
Webb's Landing:	found well while excavating prehistoric site
Arnold's Creek:	Found well while excavating prehistoric site
Townsend Site:	Found feature while excavating prehistoric site
Avery's Rest:	Located 17th century feature during survey and pursued it.
Fort Casmir:	Ned heite tested the area and found a ditch with a Dutch TGE sherd
Kingston upon Hull:	17th century component tested.
Whitehart Site:	Discover by Phase 2 on a prehistoric site. Fully excavated
Powell Site:	Discover by Phase 2 on a prehistoric site. Fully excavated
DeVries Fort:	Appears to be an 18th century agricultural complex
Cranehook	No report
Price's Cabin	?

Pipe stem diameters: 7/64 is the most common, followed by 6/64, then 5/64.