



The Datum Point

NORTHERN VIRGINIA CHAPTER OF THE
ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA

September 2005

From the President – Patrick O’Neill

What a great turnout we had for the summer picnic!! There were over 26 people that came and had steak, chicken, and lots of good treats at the O’Neill household!!!!

Editing is coming along nicely on *Peopling the Past*, by Edith Sprouse, a series of articles published in and for the *Datum Point* on the history of Fairfax County.

The ASV Conference will be in Winchester next month! Plan to attend to see a lot of great talks since it will be relatively close to our chapter location! We are hosting this conference in 2008!

This month’s meeting:
7:30 p.m., Wednesday Sept 14th

Hats and fanny packs are in!!!! And they will be at the meeting!!!

Pre-orders for hats and fanny packs will **still** be accepted during September. The hats have the chapter logo stitched on them and they are silk-screened on the fanny packs. Hats are available in khaki-burgundy, khaki-forest, putty-navy, and putty-red. The pre-order prices are:

Hat - \$9
Fanny pack with water bottle - \$10
Combo (hat/fanny pack) - \$17

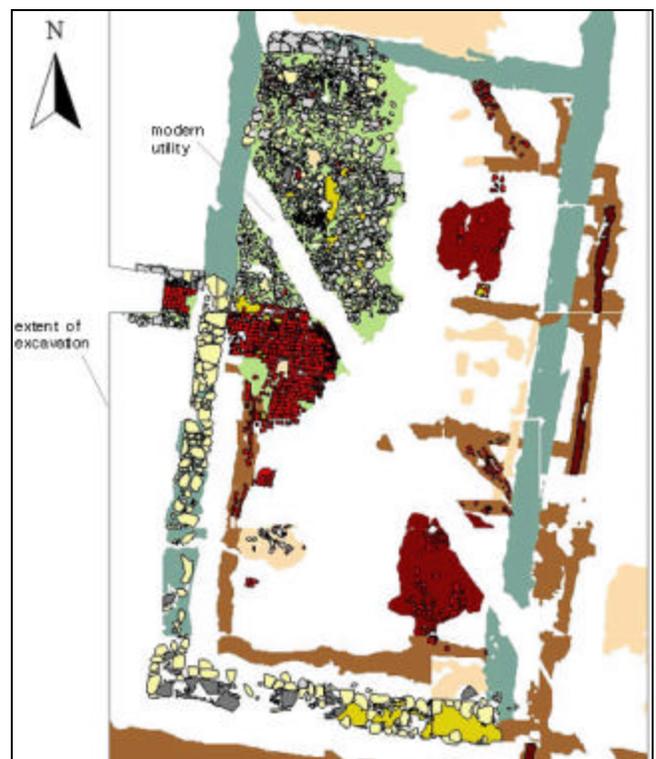
After September 30, the prices will be:

Hat - \$15
Fanny pack with water bottle - \$13
Combo (hat/fanny pack) - \$25

To order, contact Diane Schug-O’Neill at 703-919-8216 (schugoneill@erols.com) or George Monken at 703-393-6775 (gmonken@braemarnet.com).

This month’s Speaker – Eleanor Breen **The History and Archaeology of George Washington’s Whiskey Distillery**

Built in 1797, and operating by the spring of 1798, the distillery size and production volume rank it among the most important early industrial structures of its kind in 18th-century America. Since 1999, excavations have exposed the building’s foundations, locations of the copper pot stills, and an intricate system of drains, showing the process and spatial layout of the distillery. Ms. Breen will provide an update on excavations, which ended this past spring, and the initial reconstruction phases that began in early summer. As one of the best documented plantation sites of the 18th century, Mount Vernon possesses a fascinating archaeological record, and a wealth of documentary research pertaining to the distillery. She will present findings on the social and economic interactions that took place at this complex as seen through the farm ledgers.



County Happenings in Archaeology Mike Johnson

Meadowood Survey - Paul Inashima and Nancy Anthony have finished their grant-funded work on the Bureau of Land Management property on Mason Neck. Paul has continued in a volunteer capacity to clean up final details. Park Authority staff and volunteers are also trying to finish up their parts of the project.

The survey has located more than 180 new sites. The list keeps growing as Paul and Mike keep finding new ones while working on the last unsurveyed portions of the property. Professionally, this is known as "cultural interference": we cannot finish the project because the sites and artifacts keep getting in the way.

The Saturday crew has had some success testing the Haislip site (44FX2912) on Meadowood. We laid out a 3X9-foot trench across the cobble lens, located last year during the shovel test phase in the front yard of a 20th century house. The shovel tests also produced some early 19th century artifacts indicating an older occupation.

The dates have been confirmed by the testing. We have recovered refined red earthenware, "Colono" or cottage ware, and pearlware, indicating an early 19th century occupation. We also recovered an 1857 flying eagle penny from the cobble lens and a Model A Ford-like, toy car, game board marker from above the lens.

We did not excavate through the cobble lens during the shovel testing. As a result we thought it might represent a cobble foundation. However, the testing indicated that the lens is only one layer thick. The excavations continue.

We also have found very few wine bottle and pipe stem fragments. This fits the fact that Haislip was a Quaker.

ASV Certification Program

Current participants AND graduates are asked to send your name, address, phone number, and email address to: Bruce Baker, ASV Certification Program Coordinator, Bakerbw@earthlink.net or (804) 271-4718. The ASV Certification Committee wants to know what the needs of the program participants are so they can plan classes for next year. They also would like to enhance the program for the graduates.

Ft. Ethan Allan Mary Green

I thought you might be interested in the Ft. Ethan Allan work that I volunteered for on August 3rd. Four of us showed up at 9 a.m. to help Dr. Rhett Herman, Associate Professor of Physics at Radford University, measure electrical resistivity. There were two women from Arlington Dogs – the Fort is currently home to a dog park - and the President of the neighborhood association and me.



Dr. Herman had just spent two days searching for underground archaeological features at Fort C. F. Smith. At the Arlington County monthly brown bag roundtable on Aug 2nd, he showed us the results at Ft. Smith. They thought they had found the site of a very tall observation mast.

At Fort Ethan Allen we laid out a grid across the dog park; rows one meter apart. Then he dragged the OhmMapper device up each row. He set the equipment for the first pass for about four feet deep. The second pass was to measure resistivity at about 7-8 feet deep. It looked like large rolls of paper towels connected by cables. The computer was on his chest and could process the entire pass in about five minutes and come up with a color diagram. We knew there was a well in there somewhere. I left before the data was processed.

Something different to include in my Certification Training Program. I must say I was impressed by the dog people who came out to help. I testified against the dog park at a County meeting and it will be moved in a few months.

Announcements

NatureFest 2005

We need volunteers for Herndon's NatureFest, on September 18, 2005, from 1 to 5 p.m. at Runnymede Park. It is a great time; we do some digging in sand boxes, talk with kids with hands-on artifacts, and do some face painting!!!! Plus, the group gives the chapter a tidy_* 3-digit*_ stipend for participating!! Contact Patrick O'Neill at patrickoneill@erols.com or 703-244-6275 if you are interested!!!

Usted quiere Chevy's!!

September 20, 2005, 4:00 p.m.- 10:00 p.m.

It's that time again. Come out and show your support for the Park Authority's volunteer program at the annual restaurant fundraising night. Chevy's restaurant in Merrifield will generously donate 20% of total sales to the volunteer program—but only if you tell them to! So come out for dinner or a few drinks, and tell your server you are there to support the Fairfax County Park Authority. Last year, several of us from the Northern Virginia Chapter attended and had a great time!!!!

Volunteer Excellence Awards Ceremony and Brunch Social, October 1, 2005, 9:30 a.m. - Noon

On October 1st we will be celebrating the contribution of volunteers to the Fairfax County Park Authority. The event will include a variety of activities and a complimentary brunch buffet. The brunch will be held at Ellmore Farm Center (7739 West Ox Road, just east of the main Frying Pan Park entrance). Enjoy horseshoes, hayrides, live farm animal displays and much more.



Celebrate Fairfax Award!!!!

Members of the Chapter and other archeology volunteers helped with the Park Authority portion of Celebrate Fairfax back in June. The presentation was awarded a 2nd place for creativity. Congratulations to all who helped!

HOLES

(I know that there is a novel with the same title but it seems appropriate)

by Bob Wharton

The 'Friday Crew' and I had an interesting experience on Friday, August 26, 2005. An email was received asking for assistance in explaining a sink hole in the Ox Hill Battlefield Park. Always a sucker for a hole in the ground, I went to explore the situation on Thursday afternoon. The Park Authority area crew had erected an orange construction fence about 2.5 feet back from the hole. I approached, gingerly. I could see that the hole belled out, but I couldn't tell how far. I did all the 'remote sensing' that I could with a tree limb. I tied a plumb bob to the end of a 300' tape so I could feel when the tape went limp and dropped it down the hole. I was reassured when it hit bottom at only 13 feet. Still, I didn't want to fall down a 13 foot black hole.

The crew was mustered and we met on Friday morning. I had been in touch with the area crew and requested a couple of 2" X 12" planks about 14' long. They went one step better and delivered two aluminum bleacher boards 10" wide by 16' long. I set the boards about 14" apart on both sides of the 12" sink hole and put two ¾" half sheets of plywood on each side of the hole, about 18" back from the edge. The plan was to dig a test between the plywood and the hole, working toward the hole without dropping any more soil than necessary down the hole until we had a better definition. The procedure went "as advertised", but it took several hours picking clay with a trowel. On the west side of the hole, the trench was about 2.5 feet and on the east side, about 1.5 feet. We broke out the edge of the hole and with the improved light a modern well with sections of concrete pipe lining the shaft could be seen. The inside diameter was about 30 inches. On one side, the topmost sections were broken, so it wasn't possible to take accurate measurements. We did, however, take digital photos and dragged a tape to a couple of landmarks so the location could be mapped and tied into the present landscape.

I am reminded of an experience that I had about 25 years ago. I was working in the Lowie Museum of Anthropology at UC Berkeley at the time when Jim Deetz took over the directorship of the Museum. Jim managed to get the requirements for graduation in Anthropology changed to require a field course. And, oh by the way, neither the

Physical Anthropologists nor the Social/Cultural people had a field course. Jim, being a charismatic teacher, filled a large lecture hall and the class size required about a dozen TA's (teaching assistants) to run the Lab Sections.

The TAs were graduate students and lacking in practical field work experience. As luck would have it, there were three of us 'closet' archaeologist that had taken cover and paychecks in the Museum. Gene Prince was the museum photographer and an excellent California prehistorian trained by Bob Heizer and others. Dave Herod had extensive experience in southwestern archaeology. I had dabbled in prehistoric and historical archaeology before going over to the 'light' side doing salvage ethnography under S.A. Barrett (who was Alfred Kroeber's first PhD in Anthropology at Berkeley in 1908.) Jim gave us the honorary title of "Uncle". There was "Uncle Gene", "Uncle Weed" (or Dave, but that is another story) and "Uncle Bob" (aka "Uncle Cowboy Bob, dude"). I thought you might like some background on the players, but I digress.

Jim's lecture hall seated about 250 students. I can't remember now, but the enrollment was either 235 or 238, and we took all of those little darlings out in the field every Friday and brought them back safely during each spring semester. With this cast, where was there a stage adequate to accommodate them? Why, a town, of course. One of the graduate students was a folklorist who had a contact with the East Bay Regional Park District that managed a park on the shoulder of Mt. Diablo some 20 miles east of Berkeley. Coal was discovered there in the late 1850s, mines were opened and the town of "Somersville" was born. The town grew through adolescence, adulthood, old age, and death. By the 1970s there were no remaining buildings although, throughout a robust youth, there were a hotel, stores, numerous dwellings and all the things that a town could boast including a brothel. In addition to a recorded history and the existence of the Black Diamond Coal Company that still had offices and records in San Francisco, there were photographs of Somersville. Now, you would think with photographs of the town (including a panoramic view from a ridge to the south) the archaeology should be like 'shooting fish in a barrel'. Not so.

The field class was filled with frat boys, sorority girls, Geeks, average students and the brilliant of every hue and persuasion imaginable. Not only was this a required course, it was and easy "A". The only common thread in this group was that

every Friday afternoons during the spring semester they did field archaeology. With 5' X 5' units laid out in a line, two students were assigned to a unit. They were taught how to scrape with trowels, bag artifacts, fill out forms and do all the things that field archaeologists do. The "uncles" and grad students were sheep dogs to the flock. We walked back and forth, answered questions, gave encouragement, demonstrated techniques, and watched for symptoms of heat stroke. Jim's role in this fine madness was to sit in the shade with a cold Strohs in one hand and occasionally say something professorial.

Let me further describe the stage on the shoulder of Mt. Diablo. Imagine two small valleys sloping toward each other, one from the west and one from the east. At the lowest spot was another valley, approximately perpendicular and sloping down to the north towards the town of Antioch, about 5 miles away. It is situated on the Carquinez strait, which is the confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers and drains the great central valley of California. The east - west valleys were steep sided, both ended in passes. On the east, into wrinkled countryside, and continued to the central valley. On the west, near the crest of the valley, was a charming cemetery surrounded by tall, stately cypress trees.

After several seasons shepherding the 'cast of thousands' every Friday, several of us grew testy and complained that the 'lives of everyday folk' was not being illuminated by excavating on the valley floor. We needed to find and excavate around a dwelling. We needed a deep feature that would relate to a house and grant us insight into the lives of the people that only the archaeological record could provide. Where was such a site? Why of course, up the hillside on the north side of the easternmost valley. How did we know? There was a conical depression in the ground. Surely, this must be a partially silted cellar under a house. We brought the grid up the hill, laid out units and started excavating near the outside edge of the hole. The theory was that people don't throw their trash under their houses, but around the perimeter.

I had recently quit smoking cigarettes and the device I used for replacement was to suck on Velamints, which I carried in my shirt pocket. In leaning over the pit, my Velamints fell in the hole. I climbed down, rescued my Velamints and returned. A short time later, a park ranger, a rescue squad member that were called on to search for youngsters that broke in to the mines, came up to

see what we were doing. I gave him my song and dance about ordinary folk, houses and so forth. He said that we might want to rethink where we were digging. Mines are plagued with two continuing problems. The first is water and the second is air. In order to get fresh air to the bottom tunnels of the mine, airshafts were dug from the lowest levels to the surface. They were capped with a structure to keep wandering wild life and drunks from falling in. He produced a historic photo of one such structure. As it turned out, the depression we were digging was caused by the structure collapsing over the top of the airshaft, boards wedged pick-up stick fashion, and the surrounding soil washed down to close the shaft. Did I mention that the air shaft descended vertically 700 feet?

How did the project sort out? Remember I mentioned a panoramic photo taken from the ridge to the south. Gene Prince (“Uncle Gene”) in a stroke of brilliance, developed a technique that allows one to transcend time. By making a slide of a historic photograph, cutting the slide out of its paper mount and placing it under the pentaprism of a Nikon F camera with a zoom lens, it is possible to zoom in and out to recreate the cameras location when the original photograph was taken. Not only is it possible to place the historic image on the modern landscape, a person can be directed to mark features on the modern landscape that are only visible on the historic photo. After spending thousands of hours doing traditional archaeology at Somersville, “Uncle Gene” was able to lay out the entire town in a single afternoon. In 1984, Ivor Noel-Hume christened this technique as “Prince’s Principle”.

The moral of the story of Wharton’s Folly is “Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread” or sugarless mints can be hazardous to your health (and the ever popular ‘don’t drop the soap’). But for the intervention of my guardian angel, I would have broken through that dirt plug. The sudden stop at the bottom of the 700’ hole would have certainly spoiled my weekend.

This yarn has collected some frequent flyer miles. From Ox Hill Battlefield Park across the continent to a ghost town in Contra Costa County, California. From Berkeley to Flowerdew Hundred in Tidewater Virginia and thence to Fairfax County. It has been quite a ride. And to think, the trigger was a sink hole in the park.

“Uncle Bob”

NVC PICNIC PHOTOS!!! There were discussions, eating, and some were even happy!!!



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Family (\$17) _____

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Renewal _____

Return to:
NVC/Archeological Society of Virginia
2855 Annandale Rd.
Falls Church, VA 22042

Chapter members are encouraged to join our parent organization, the Archeological Society of Virginia.

The Chapter meets at 7:30p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month at the James Lee Center at the above address.

EVERYONE IS WELCOME!!!!

The Datum Point

Northern Virginia Chapter
Archeological Society of Virginia
2855 Annandale Rd.
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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED