THE DATUM POINT

Newsletter of the
NORTHERN VIRGINIA CHAPTER OF THE
ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA

Chapter Website – www.nvcasv.org

December 2011

FROM THE PRESIDENT – JOHN KELSEY

The first order of business is a reminder of our annual holiday party. It will be at the James Lee Center on Wednesday, December 14th, beginning at 6:30 instead of our normal 7:30 start time for meetings. For those of you who may be new to the Chapter, this is a potluck dinner. Everyone is asked to bring a dish to share; remember that you don't need to feed the entire group – there's always plenty of food. The Chapter will provide soft drinks, water, paper products, and utensils. We don't try to orchestrate what people bring, but last year we seemed to be heavy on desserts, so casseroles or other main dishes, side dishes, and salads are encouraged. I hope that all of you can come.

The only item of business at our holiday party will be to elect officers for next year. I'm happy to tell you that most of the current officers have expressed their willingness to continue to serve, and that two other members have stepped up to volunteer to serve in important positions: **Chris Havlicek** for Vice President and **Isabel Pease** for Treasurer. The officers recommend this slate for nomination for 2012; nominations will also be taken from the floor at the meeting. To recap, the recommended slate is as follows:

President – John Kelsey
Vice President – Chris Havlicek
Recording Secretary – Felicia Glapion
Corresponding Secretary – Maggie Johnson
Treasurer – Isabel Pease
Datum Point Editor – Patrick O'Neill
Webmaster – Diane Schug-O'Neill
Certification Liaison – Ann Wood

NVC CHRISTMAS PARTY

Don't be a mean one, Mr. Grinch!

Come to the NVC's 2011 Christmas Party at the lab at the James Lee Center!
Starts at **6:30 pm** on **December 14th**.

I want especially to thank our out-going officers: **Will Nelson**, our Vice President for the last three years, and **CK Gailey**, Treasurer since the late Archaic. You've both done a great job, and the Chapter is in better shape for your efforts.

November was a busy month. Twenty-three chapter members and guests worked at the Gault site in early November. See later in this issue for photos. Working there has always been an interesting and rewarding experience. It was particularly so this time, as we got a chance to inspect the latest artifacts recovered from the deepest level so far – two sterile levels below Clovis. We were asked not to distribute photos of the artifacts, but they certainly left no doubt, at least in my mind, about

the existence of a pre-Clovis technology. **Mike Johnson** adds the following note:

We have been invited back for a Spring session, which is a true compliment to the Virginia certification program. By that time the entire excavation should be in the Clovis and pre-Clovis levels. An invite to work on such sensitive material would not have been made if our crew was not up to the task.

A tremendous compliment goes to Kay McCarron for initiating the State-wide certification program; to Carole Nash, Mike Barber, and Joel Hardison for shepherding the program throughout its existence; to our own Ann Wood for ensuring the timeliness of avocational technician training in Northern Virginia; and to all of the others who have contributed to that training.

Due to the limited physical space in the pit and the smaller amount of material being processed at any one time, the session will be confined to no more than 10 people at a time. As a result, we are planning a two week session with a maximum of ten crew members each week. The session looks like it will be in late April if the Gault School agrees to the timing.

In June 2011, the Chapter voted to award $900 from the Rubis-Fuller Research Fund to **Paul Inashima** to conduct pollen testing and analysis of soil samples from the Lexington site on Mason Neck. The results of the analysis are now in, and a summary is included later in this issue. Paul plans to include the results in his report on Mason Neck Park, in an article for the ASV Quarterly Bulletin, and in his upcoming talk at Gunston Hall in January. If you are interested in the full report, I have it and will be happy to provide it to you.

At the Fairfax History Conference on November 12th, Sharon Bulova, Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, presented a lifetime achievement award to **Mike Johnson**, with some very flattering comments that highlighted Mike's contributions over the last thirty-three years. Congratulations again, Mike.

At our November meeting, the Chapter voted to grant $650 from the Williams-Mullen Memorial Field Study Scholarship Fund to members of the Colchester Archaeological Research Team to support their participation in the Society for Historical Archaeology Annual Meeting in Baltimore in January 2012. Also at the meeting, Dr. Dave Clark from Catholic University gave an interesting and (literally) bone-rattling talk to the Chapter (see photos below.)

WESTBROOK UPDATE

By Mike Johnson, retired

On December 1, we completed about a year and a half of field excavation at the Westbrook site. As of this writing we were successful in all but one of the preliminary methodological objectives that led us to excavate the site, which has now become two sites: Westbrook (44FX2660) and Westbrook II (state number to be determined).

Our first objective was to test the shovel test pit (STP) sample intervals commonly used by CRM firms during a Phase IIA. In that phase of the government archeology process, which also works very well in pure research, the archeologist does a systematic sampling of the site to refine his/her understanding of its size, internal structure and vertical integrity. Normally CRM firms use 20-25-foot intervals between STPS. We used a 10-foot interval. We also enhanced the sample by 22% by using one-foot square rather than one-foot diameter STP samples.

It does not take a rocket scientist to determine that the ten-foot interval with a larger sample would be more than four times better. With the ten-foot interval we were able to isolate numerous activity areas that were not detected during the preliminary work done by the consultant. We have not yet checked the ten-foot interval against at 20 or 20-foot interval, which will be possible to do.

Our second objective was to compare the effectiveness of dry screen field sorting versus water screen lab sorting. Almost always CRM firms rely on field sorting of the dry screens and then dumping the material left in the screens. By doing both dry screen sorting and then recovering rather than discarding the screen residue for future washing and lab sorting, we were able to demonstrate a 30-40% better overall recovery rate with the wet screen and lab sort.

We also demonstrated that the 30-40% held only for quartz with other materials like quartzite, rhyolite, hornfels and pottery being missed in significant quantities if found at all. We audited three blocks, each of which containing predominantly different mixes of artifact types. These included a predominantly quartz area, a predominantly pitted hornfels area and a pottery concentration.

Another objective was to test the effectiveness of our ten-foot interval with a five-foot interval. This objective appeared at the beginning to be an impossible task. Our ten-foot interval defined a site that was more than 50,000 square feet. A five foot infill sample would have amounted to four times the STP samples or about 2,000 STPs. We did not have time to excavate 1,800 total one-foot square STPs

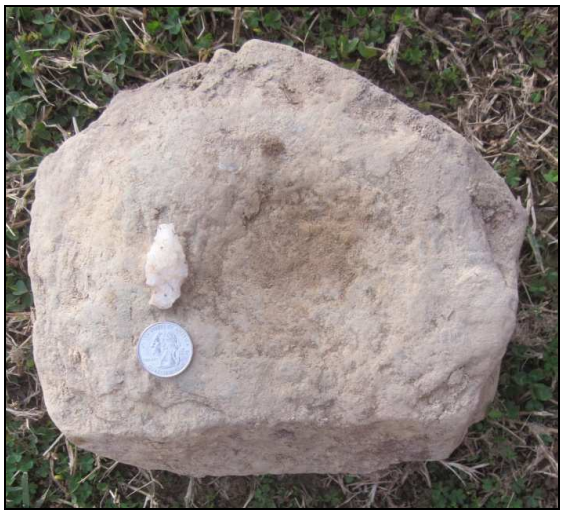
which included four large blocks and the water screen audit. However, our Block D test block failed to recover a significant pottery concentration but merely a general scatter across the block. As a result we put in a five-foot interval STP grid around the block in hopes of locating a concentration around the block. Time pressure did not let us complete this infill grid until November and the samples have not been lab sorted yet. Therefore we have no feedback on the success or failure of the tighter interval sampling.

Thanks to Chris Ramey, we were able to test the small, ephemeral, satellite site (Westbrook II) that thunderbird identified on the adjacent promontory to the north. Chris began with a ten-foot interval, which located at least one positive STP. When we went in and infilled the ten-foot interval grid with a five-foot interval grid, we recovered two chert flakes in the field screens. This led to opening a block excavation, which was not completed as of this writing. However, the discovery of chert artifacts on that site suggests that the preliminary objective to see if government archeology practices of "writing off" all such ephemeral prehistoric sites a the Phase I survey level of investigation is a bad practice.

One thing that appears to be clear from comparing the testing strategies on Westbrook and Westbrook II is that the nature of the site should determine the testing intervals. A site like Westbrook could possibly be effectively evaluated with a 10-foot interval, whereas one as ephemeral as Westbrook II may require at least four times the rigor to evaluate. Another term for CRM is "cookbook archeology," because so many firms use one method for every site type. That method generally is the minimum sample allowed by the state guidelines.

Although not a preliminary objective, our use of "swizzle-stick archeology" to remove the disturbed topsoil has demonstrated that the common practice of using a grade-all to mechanically remove that layer of a site to get at features is another bad practice. The CRM practice is predicated on the fallacious assumption that features are all that is important in a site.

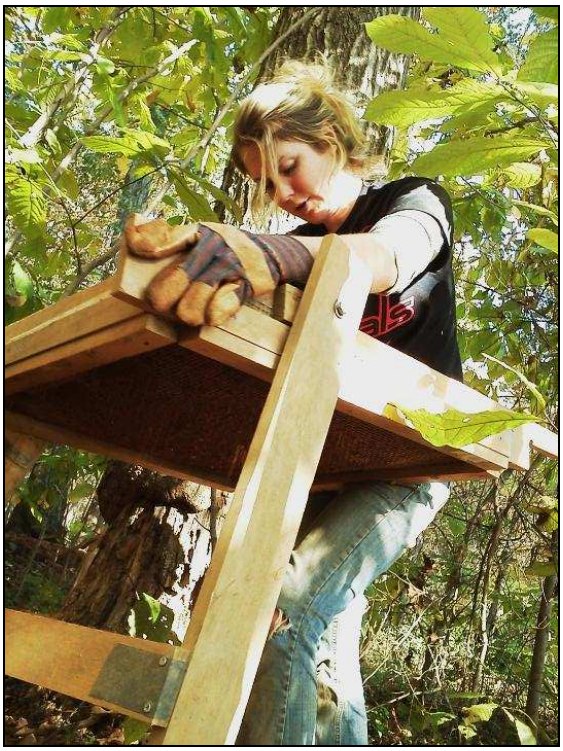
The massive amounts of technologically, functionally and chronologically diagnostic artifacts recovered from the systematic recovery of the disturbed topsoil at Westbrook will prove to be invaluable to our understanding of prehistoric use of that kind of landform and that landform's relationship to other sites in Northern Virginia and the region. This may be one of the most serious failings of government archeology (as it has evolved) and as a result one of the prime reasons that (as currently practiced) it is doing severe damage to our archeological heritage by systematically deleting the data these sites contain. A small taste of site functional data can be seen in the two recently discovered mortar-like artifacts pictured here. They were recovered approximately three feet from each other.



We also had several research objectives, which will be better addressed after the lab and analysis are complete. With that in mind, we will start doing the final artifact cataloguing and analysis in January. With probably more than 50,000 artifacts recovered from more than 1,700 proveniences the cataloguing should be fun and the analysis a huge job.

COLCHESTER UPDATE

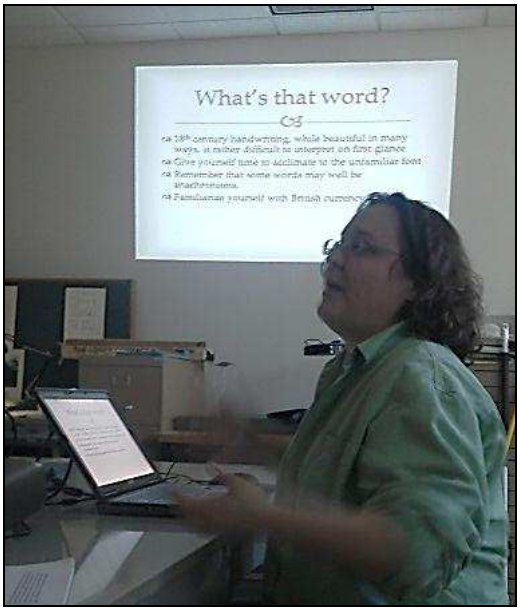
November on the Occoquan is a beautiful time of year. This majority of the leaves held on to the trees right up until the end of the month, and the mild weather made for extremely pleasant field work … when it wasn't raining.



Alisa Pettitt screens amongst the Paw Paw during some beautiful Fall weather.

When not in the field, the crew spent a lot of time at their new home away from home: the James Lee Community Center. All of the washed and re-bagged artifacts were moved to the JLC earlier this month, and now every Tuesday is a cataloging day. Lab volunteer opportunities have been expanded to JLC, too; Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays are all available. Since all the dirty artifacts stay down at the OCPP, JLC lab volunteer opportunities focus on data entry and even cataloging.

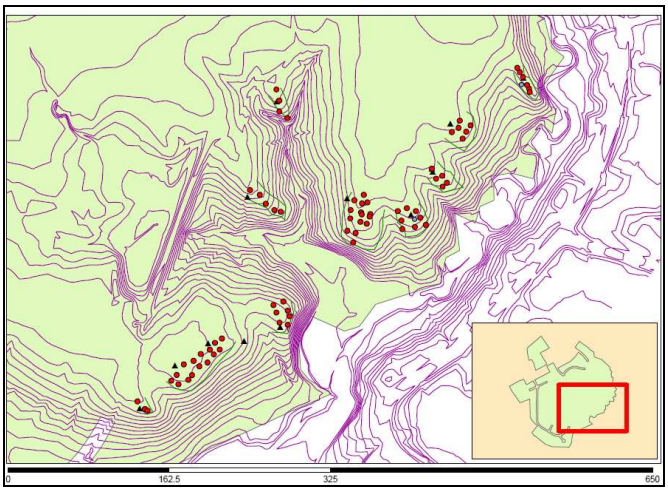
Kathleen's dog, Dawson, joined the Prehistoric Crew for a few days this last month. Here he is next to a test unit, laying a little too close for comfort.



Also at the JLC this past month, two orientations were conducted for our historical transcription project. This initiative, which is in collaboration with the archaeologists of Mount Vernon, focuses on the ledgers of John Glassford, who owned several stores throughout Virginia including one at Colchester. The potential of these documents is enormous; they will provide researchers with a more complete understanding of daily life in what Esther White termed the "World of Washington."

The Prehistoric Crew finished their line of units along the riverside, and had been planning to return to the various sites identified this past spring on the Finger Ridges. However, the persistence of fall has stalled that plan for the next week or so due to the leaves still clinging on the trees. The Finger Ridges

are interesting because aerial photography from 1937 shows a healthy forest in these areas, whereas the big prehistoric site is completely plowed. The MTUs already excavated confirm the ridges indeed possess intact stratigraphy. Early pottery and a bifurcate point base have been found, and it is likely more cultural material will be unearthed as excavations continue.



This map shows the area of Old Colchester Park and Preserve known as the Finger Ridges. The red dots are MTUs, either planned or already excavated.

The Historic Team has moved into the site in the woods (44FX0704) which was land owned by William Bailey. There is evidence of at least one structure, and other features. Specifics about the structure that once stood remain elusive; at present excavations are over two feet deep still no bottom. Historic artifacts recovered include large pieces of bottle glass and ceramic vessels, as well as large amounts of oyster shell, which indicates a period of habitation. With the help of our volunteer force, we have expanded more units to the west and north of our initial testing.

Further to the east, we have opened a block of units to expose a dark stain which has yielded an impressive amount of dateable artifacts. Many mammal bones, fish bones and domestic goods have been excavated, including a wine bottle seal with the initials "P.W.", presumably indicative of Peter Wagner. This artifact is particularly intriguing as Mr. Wagner owned all the land that later became the historic town of Colchester. Especially interesting is that this site was not contained within Wagner's property. Artifacts such as these are going to be integral to understanding the development of the region and the relationships between the Town of Colchester and its surroundings.

The town site (44FX3197) is winding down for now, while we focus our efforts on the new site. We will be expanding on the large stone foundation originally excavated by George Mason University in the 1980's. We are attempting to determine if there is a relationship between the stone foundation and the linear stone feature running north/south (possible boundary wall) unearthed earlier this summer.

Please remember that there is a comprehensive variety of volunteer opportunities available on the Colchester project, both on site and now at the James Lee Community Center in Falls Church. Lab volunteers are welcome Wednesdays through Fridays, Prehistoric field volunteers may join the crew Thursdays and Fridays, and Historic field volunteers are welcome Thursdays through Saturdays . We also have our transcription project for those who would rather not leave the comfort of their own homes, especially in the coming winter months. For more information, please contact us at cart.volunteers@gmail.com

Finally, as many of you know, all the members of the CART are participating in a symposium at this year's Society of Historical Archaeology's annual meeting in January. The CART/ASV members would like to thank you, the Northern Virginia Chapter of the Archaeological Society of Virginia, for financially supporting us in this initiative through the Williams-Mullen Scholarship fund. For those who were not able to attend the meeting where our grant request was discussed, please be assured that we are committed to following through

with the requirements of the Scholarship, including presenting at future chapter meetings. Thanks again!

GAULT, FALL 2011

The braintrust – Dr. Mike Collins, Mike Johnson, and Nancy Littlefield (plus one straphanger)

Diggin' a hole

Rich Eilers has a "eureka!" moment

Mike Collins mentoring a new generation of archaeologists

Nancy Anthony – just another satisfied volunteer

And a good time was had by all

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS OF LEXINGTON POLLEN ANALYSIS STUDY
Submitted by Paul Inashima

Pollen analysis of samples from the second and third terraces at the Lexington Home Seat site (44FX736) in Virginia indicates that preservation was sufficiently good to obtain a record of local vegetation and address the question of what was grown in the garden.

Concentric rings are terraces at Huntley Meadows, another Mason family home in Fairfax County

The second (middle) terrace, from which sample 2 was collected, appears to have been planted in trees that included at least tulip trees, gum, walnut, hickory, and oak. The paucity of pollen representing herbaceous or shrubby plants in this sample suggests a relatively closed canopy of trees, although a few flowers appear to have been planted in the occasional sunny opening. It is interesting that none of the pollen suggests the presence of fruit trees or an orchard on this terrace. Instead, all of these trees would have been native to the area, and might have been thinned to produce a pleasant, shady area or intentionally planted to provide a specific ambience.

Factors that probably influenced the selection of trees for this terrace could have included the shape of the tree, its fall color, and the fragrance of its flowers. Tulip tree, in particular, is noted to have a sweet fragrance. It is a fast-growing tree that matures in about 8 years and has a symmetrical pyramid shape. Even though it is native to the area, it probably was planted on the terraces or protected by cutting other trees so that the tulip trees could be seen and appreciated. A few flowering plants growing in occasional sunny spots would have included phlox-type plants and wild buckwheat, both of which grow as low, mounded forms, usually with showy pink or white flowers.

Sample 1 represents the third or lowest terrace, which had more open, sunny areas that were planted in a formal garden that included a variety of flowers. Wormwood, represented by *Artemisia* pollen, might have been used as an edging plant, since it has showy gray-green foliage, or it might have been interspersed between other plants to provide a variety in the color and texture of the plot. Plants in the mustard and sunflower families might have been planted inside the plots, since both families include annuals with showy flowers. Other flowering plants that could have been planted in plots on this terrace include phlox, wild buckwheat, and knotweed, since all have a relatively low, mounded growth habit, with showy flowers. *Persicaria* pollen, representing knotweed, would have preferred partial shade and moist sediments.

The flower colors probably were primarily white, pink, and yellow, since these are the most common colors for this group of plants. In summary, it is likely that the flowers planted in formal beds on this terrace included annuals from the mustard and sunflower families, phlox, wild buckwheat, knotweed, and possibly amaranth, and that they grew interspersed with or lined with wormwood, which was used for its gray-green, lacy foliage. Hazel shrubs appear to have been incorporated into the garden. No boxwood pollen was noted, suggesting either that boxwood, which is a common hedge shrub since it may be trimmed to form garden boundaries, was not used or that it was kept trimmed, thus preventing these shrubs from flowering.

The latter is a distinct possibility. Night soil or the remains from chamber pots appears to have been used to enrich or amend the soils in this garden area, since *Ascaris* parasite eggs were recovered from these deposits. The absence of *Ascaris* parasite eggs from sample 2 further underscores the difference in the use of these two terraces. It is interesting that the upper or third terrace was planted as a formal garden while the lower second terrace appears to have been planted or maintained as a woodland or shady garden that probably also served as a barrier or to provide privacy for the upper or third terrace.

The pollen record for the third terrace also provides evidence of growth of Virginia creeper. Although it is possible Virginia creeper grew as part of untamed vegetation outside the garden, it is also possible that Virginia creeper grew on a trellis, arch, or arbor in the garden. It is likely that poison ivy was at least an occasional weed near the garden.

Given the richness of the record from these two terraces, further pollen analysis is recommended if it becomes important to determine plantings in specific areas of the terraces. Similar pollen recovery and preservation is expected for the first terrace, as well.

Future pollen analysis of samples collected from specific areas of one or more of the terraces might be very informative concerning the plants grown across the terraces. The placement of arbors, arches, and other structures that provided a framework for vining plants could be identified. The spatial distribution of pollen across this terrace could provide information on planting beds for future reconstruction, if this becomes important.

WAR OF 1812 PRESENTATION

Patrick O'Neill will give a presentation on the Battle of the White House from the perspective of Fort Washington, Maryland on:

Sunday December 4, 2011 at 1:30pm

Wesley Gant, National Park Service Ranger, will give an introduction of the events regarding the fort.

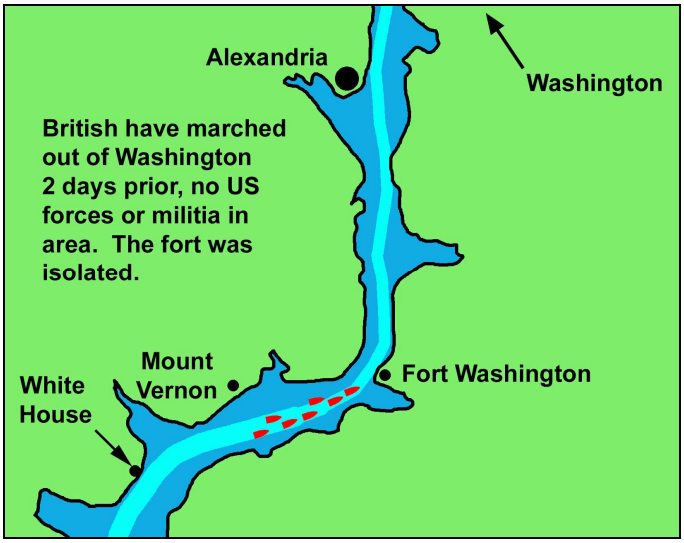
After the presentation Ranger Gant will give a tour around the fort to show sites of interest regarding the 1814 conflict!

Come and see this presentation in a rare and wonderful location!!

Send this on to your friends and colleagues!

You can also contact Ranger Gant at:

Park Ranger
Wesley Gant
Fort Washington
13551 Fort Washington Dr
Fort Washington, MD 20744
Wesley_Gant@nps.gov



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

Chapter members should join our parent organization, the Archeological Society of Virginia. asv-archeology.org

The Chapter meets at 7:30p.m. on the 2nd Wed. of each month at the James Lee Center at the above address.

EVERYONE IS WELCOME!!!!

THE DATUM POINT
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