

THE DATUM POINT

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

Chapter Website – www.nvcasv.org

September 2011

FROM THE PRESIDENT – JOHN KELSEY

Thanks are due to **Diane Schug-O'Neill** for setting up a great visit to the Meadowcroft Rock Shelter in southwestern Pennsylvania, a continuously occupied site from pre-Clovis times (16,000 BPE) to the present. Kudos also to the nineteen chapter members and guests who made the five hour drive. Dr. Dave Clark from Catholic University, who dug there in the 70s when the excavation began, was our knowledgeable and enthusiastic guide. Over the past four years, a lot of work has been done to interpret the site for visitors, and it's well worth the trip. A side attraction was the reconstructed Monongahela Indian village and its excellent docents who enlightened us about village life in the 1500s. We had a lot of fun at the atlant station, but it's a good thing that our dinner didn't depend on it. We ate at the Breezy Heights restaurant in beautiful, downtown Avella, PA. Ask someone who was there about the elephant ear tablecloths.

The Chapter officers will be meeting in September to discuss, among other things, possible candidates for Chapter office. Our officers are the president, vice-president, recording secretary, corresponding secretary, treasurer, webmaster, Datum Point editor, and certification liaison. I would also like to find someone who would like to help with the hospitality and program committees. Some of our officers have been in their current positions for several years, and in fairness, someone else should take over. Besides, new blood is always a good thing. I'm happy to report that **Isabel Pease** has agreed to run for treasurer, to provide **CK Gailey** some relief after at least five years. I can't help but think that there must be other members out there willing to help with one of these positions. Please let me know if you are.



Dr. Dave Clark giving lecture to NVC



CHAPTER PICNIC INSTEAD OF MEETING THIS MONTH!

Our annual Chapter picnic will be held on Saturday September 17th, beginning at noon (the rain date is September 24th). **Mike Johnson** has offered to host us. His address is 2828 Cleave Drive, Falls Church, VA 22042. (1.1 miles from James Lee, according to Mike.) Please bring a side dish (e.g., casserole, veggie, salad, chips and dip, or dessert) and lawn chairs if you have them just in case. The chapter will provide meat and appropriate garnishes, soft drinks and water, paper and plastic ware. If you have not sent me an RSVP, please do, so that we have an idea of how many people to expect.

CHAPTER MEMBER PLACES SECOND IN THE NATIONAL GEOSPATIAL SKILLS COMPETITION

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are currently being used in to identify potential archeology sites, record artifact locations, and model the impacts of human and natural activities on existing archeology sites. Fairfax County and the City of Alexandria are two local jurisdictions currently using GIS as a part of their archeology and/or cultural resource management programs.

The National Geospatial Skills Competition was created to test the skills of individuals enrolled in GIS degree/certificate programs against those set forth by the Department of Labor in the Geospatial Technology Competency Model (GTCM). The GTCM model defines the Geospatial Technology Industry and sets for the competencies required for the sectors within it. The national student competition is sponsored by the GeoTech Center open to students enrolled in two year community and technical colleges and consists of three rounds. Round one consist of a written examination, round two consist of a software based GIS project and video presentation, and round three consists of a formal presentation at the ESRI Education Conference in San Diego California.

Six finalists from across the nation were chosen to compete in round three of the competition. Of those six **Felicia Glapion** of the Northern Virginia Chapter has placed 2nd in the National Competition for 2011. She is ecstatic about her win and looks forward to finding ways to increase her proficiency in all things GIS. She is currently enrolled as a part time student in the GIS Certificate program at Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) and expects to finish the NVCC GIS Certificate program in the summer of 2012. If you have any questions regarding her experience with the competition feel free to ask her about it at the next chapter meeting.

For information on how GIS is being used in the field of archeology check out the projects showcased here:

<http://www.esri.com/industries/archaeology/business/journal.html>

For more information on the GTCM competency model check out the following website:

<http://www.careeronestop.org/competencymodel/pyramid.aspx?GEO=Y>

For more information on the student competition check out the following:

<http://www.geotechcenter.org/Competition>

COLCHESTER UPDATE

Excavations continue at Old Colchester Park and Preserve, and August has been an exciting month, as always. On the Prehistoric Site, the units laid out in a cruciform shape over the hill on the East end have been all-but-completed. Now, units are set up along the River, which makes up the Site's Northwestern boundary. It is the next area identified during the Phase I investigations as having the probability for features. Excavation will begin as soon as the weather allows.



Stefan Woehlke excavating a possible feature on the Prehistoric Site

The Historic Crew, as usual, has been focusing their efforts on the Town Site. Several newer features have been expanded or delineated, while other old favorites were finished and backfilled. As we move into Autumn, the current plans for the Town Site will be to focus on the Morris Pound Foundation, originally identified by GMU in the 1980s. Highlights of the Town excavations are detailed below.

Excavation was completed on Feature 36, a linear feature comprised of very red soils bisecting the yellow subsoil. The feature exhibited multiple fill stages, potentially representing original construction and repair or improvement. Artifacts strongly indicate a colonial period for its use and fill. The obvious interpretation, given the high water table on the town site is drainage. However, the red soils suggest a high iron content. It is possible that this trench served to drain a specific runoff, other than rain water, such as a bi-product of some town activity that created an iron-rich runoff.



F36 in profile

Feature 52 is a cellar feature. It contains intact stone masonry, though buckling, along the east wall. Artifacts recovered from the feature fill include some of the largest pieces of ceramic yet recovered and indicate a ca. 1830 period of destruction. Creamwares and pearlwares recovered suggest occupation from the heyday of the town through its decline. We are currently attempting to ascertain dimensions.



Chris in F52. Below: Close-up view of F52



Feature 67 is a wall feature constructed in an attractive blue slate. No cellar fill has appeared on either side. We are also trying to get dimensions. Although we cannot rule out a structure, it already appears to measure over 5 meters long with no turn yet identified. Interestingly, it comes very close to what GMU interpreted as the Morris Pound House. If the feature continued, it would pass immediately to the west of that foundation/cellar. If it represents a lot boundary, it would place the GMU identified feature just outside the Pound lot. Regardless, it is providing new insights into the cultural townscape.



As for Baby Sperling, he is doing well and had already gotten back up to his original birth weight, and then some. He has a voracious appetite interrupted only by the need to sleep. His grip is strong so as soon as we can find a Marshalltown 45 - 0.5, we can get him into the field.



Prehistoric Field Director Kathleen Lowe informing little Sam about all the good things that can be found below the "historic overburden"



Christopher and Sam

ASV ANNUAL MEETING, STAUNTON, VA **OCTOBER 13-16**

It's time to make arrangements for this year's Annual Meeting at the Frontier Cultural Museum in Staunton. The registration form is now posted on the ASV website. The Sleep Inn is the designated meeting hotel, and a rate of \$89 per night per room has been negotiated. The phone number for reservations is 540-887-6500. A "behind the scenes" tour of Monticello is being planned for Thursday afternoon.

MIKE JOHNSON (RET) REPORTS

Westbrook (44FX2660) – As many are aware already, we have gotten permission to resume work at the site until December. We began work several weeks ago.

The new schedule means that there is time to answer several of the remaining audit-related questions, among which are the presence or absence of distinct features, such as hearths, post-molds and/or pit features. Already, we were able to trowel down the surface of Block D, where the sandstone-tempered, net-marked, Culpeper pottery was recovered in quantity, and open new Block E.



In the earlier lab sorting of the wet screened material from Block D we identified a distinct concentration of quartz fire cracked rocks (FCR) along the west edge of the block. The troweling exposed additional FCR immediately under the 1x1-foot shovel test sample that produced the lab sorted FCR (attached). We plan to expand the block to the west to fully expose the possible hearth. If the FCR concentration proves to be a hearth, it answers one of the fundamental questions we hoped to address about government archeology as currently practiced.

Currently, consultant firms routinely make significance assessments of sites based on minimal samples specifically designed merely to locate sites - not to evaluate them. One of the rationales used is that the sites that are "written off" are disturbed by natural (deflation/erosion) or modern cultural (plowing) processes and, therefore have little or no potential for features. It has become almost axiomatic in government archeology that a site is written off if it potentially lacks features. Of course there is usually no testing to ensure that those assessments are true. With Westbrook (and several other sites) it has been demonstrated repeatedly that even plowed or deflated sites without recognizable features often retain sufficient integrity and significant cultural information necessary to answer National Register eligible questions. Second, plowing and deflation do not erase features that extend below the bottom of the disturbance, i.e. pits, postmolds, foundations, etc. The discovery of Feature 1 at Westbrook, if valid, would answer the last remaining audit-related question.



The other audit-related questions have been answered and have left government archeology's methods seriously wanting. The 10-foot interval sample, which should normally be used as the first step in an assessment of any prehistoric site that has been discovered during an initial Phase I survey, has discovered significant archeological material and raised important, unanswered questions that are of National Register stature. The data illuminating these questions were contained in the deflated surface soils of the site, which are often considered devoid of significance. These include the Culpeper pottery, pitted hornfels, and internal site structure questions.

The water screening and lab sorting parts of the audit have conclusively demonstrated the differences between it and dry screen, field sorting. The distortion of the database in favor of more visible materials like quartz is striking. Pottery and coarser grained stone are dramatically reduced if not totally eliminated from the recovery process by dry screening and field sorting.

Employing block excavation of deflated or plowed areas that would often have been mechanically removed and discarded (as was done by a consultant at Jones Point in Alexandria) to get at the subsurface tops of features, demonstrated the value of systematically recovering those areas. Chronological (points and pottery), functional (e.g. the attached meta-quartzite hoe blade from Block C), integrity (locating Feature 1), and internal site structural questions have been addressed at Westbrook. These answers would have been destroyed by mechanical stripping.

Future work will be directed toward locating other features; recovering more data on the nature of various Datum Point

internal activity areas; addressing the pottery and pitted hornfels questions; and testing an area on a separate landform to the northwest of the main part of the site. This area was located during Thunderbird's Phase I survey. We will be testing this location fairly intensely. Another problem with government archeological practices is that the practitioners tend to "write off" all small upland sites as not offering potential National Register information. Of course, if this is routinely done there will be no information on a whole class of archeological sites. The added time on the site has enabled us to audit this problem, too.

A VISIT TO MOUNT CALVERT HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK

By John Kelsey

Gay and I recently drove out to Mount Calvert, a site in Maryland I found while kayaking from Pig Point on the Patuxent River. The park is the 1680s site of the first county seat of Prince Georges County. Like Colchester, it was a tobacco port, and it gradually disappeared after the county seat moved to Upper Marlboro in 1721. The site contains an extant plantation house from the 1780s with a very good exhibit of historic and prehistoric artifacts found at the site. Archaeology is on-going around the foundation of a post-in-ground building in the old town, and an interesting mix of historic and prehistoric artifacts is being uncovered. I had a chance to talk to the archaeologist at the site, and he expects that work will continue on Saturdays into the fall. I believe the house is only open on Saturdays, so that is definitely the day to visit. If you want to get involved with the dig there, call 301-627-1286. The park has a website with more information.



Mount Calvert

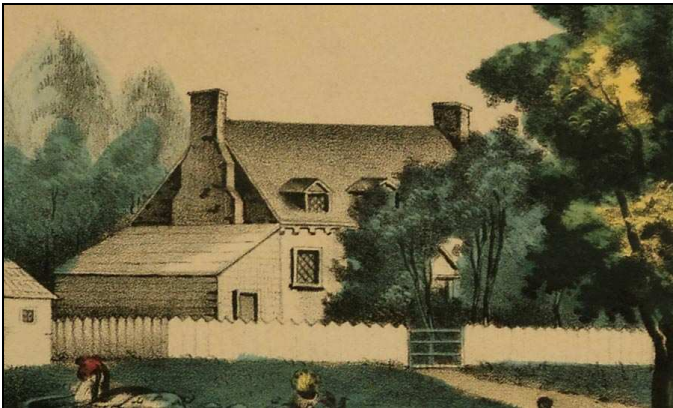


Mount Calvert

HENRY CLAY BIRTHPLACE

By Patrick O'Neill

Famous Henry Clay was born in Hanover Courthouse area in 1777. His birthplace was depicted in an 1840s-era lithograph, showing a shed addition and two gable-end chimneys. Other depictions show basically the same configuration, with the exception of interior or exterior chimneys and the shed being the width or narrower than the side.



Lithograph of Henry Clay Birthplace

Members of the ASV, at the bequest of the Central Virginia Historic Preservation Foundation, Inc., conducted archaeological investigations at the site early this past year, to determine the validity of the structure as being of 18th century origin, including Dave Brown and Dave Hazzard.

Concluding the building was probably of 18th century origin, ASV members excavated on the site in early September under the guidance of Patrick O'Neill, Carl Fischer, and Bruce Baker, with many volunteers from

the COL. Howard MacCord Chapter and Northern Virginia Chapter.

Almost half of one wall had been exposed by the landowner, trying to remove bricks they thought were displaced from another location on the property. As such, he exposed the interior northwest corner of the basement.



Excavations revealed a 4 foot opening, probable a walkway/entrance into the basement, on the west side of the building. The corner bricks were worn and smoothed by use.



Rubble filled entrance to basement



Smoothed and worn entrance corner

The walls were 18 inches thick, with salmon rubble interiors bounded by solid hand molded bricks. Two units were placed where probing suggested other corners of the building may be located, revealing the southwest and northeast corners.



Bridget O'Neill showing off a nail she found!



Carl Fischer (r) and Bill Bjork



Diane and I cannot tell you how relieved we are that Bridget can carry buckets now!!!



Diane Schug-O'Neill and Bill Bjork



Local volunteer on left is over 90! Jealous, CD?

Additional work is planned to determine the location of the chimneys.

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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!!!!

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