

**Interim Technical Report**  
**Archaeological Work**  
**2012**  
**George Washington's Boyhood Home**  
**National Historic**  
**Landmark ("Ferry Farm")**

**David Muraca and Laura Galke**

**Department of Archaeology**

**George Washington Foundation**

This report summarizes the field and laboratory activities of the George Washington Foundation's Department of Archaeology. The report begins with an overview of the 2012 field investigation followed by a summary of the laboratory processing to date. Preliminary interpretations of the prehistoric through the 20<sup>th</sup> century use of the Ferry Farm landscape excavated are present. Detailed percentages of artifact processing, the progress of special materials analyses, and curation projects are provided. Finally there is a summary of public outreach presentations including newsletters, public presentations, and peer-reviewed journals.

***Field Work***

The 2012 field season began on May 7<sup>th</sup> and continued until August 3<sup>rd</sup>. The excavation was directed by Laura Galke, and assisted by James Nyman a PhD. graduate student from University of North Carolina. The field crew consisted of paid excavators, field school students from University of South Florida under the direction of Dr. Phil Levy, field school students from

Virginia Commonwealth University under the direction of Dr. Bernard Means, and volunteers. In addition, the staff was fully engaged in Public Archaeology, interpreting the site to visitors.

### ***Excavation Strategy and Methods***

The excavation employed a grid oriented 10 degrees west of magnetic north. All locations in this text are in reference to grid north. With the help of the National Park Service, Ferry Farm staff established two permanent datum points south and west of the site that were tied into the USGS coordinate system using GPS. Using temporary grid coordinates at first, staff archaeologists later convert the temporary grid coordinates into USGS coordinates.

Using 5 ft. square excavation units, the research design calls for the use of the open-area excavation technique. This technique requires archaeologists to uncover a site layer by layer resulting in a detailed "snapshot" of a particular point in time. This portion of the site had more complex stratigraphy than areas previously excavated, in part because it appears to have avoided being plowed. Using shovels and trowels, excavators removed layers in standard excavation units guided by natural stratigraphy.

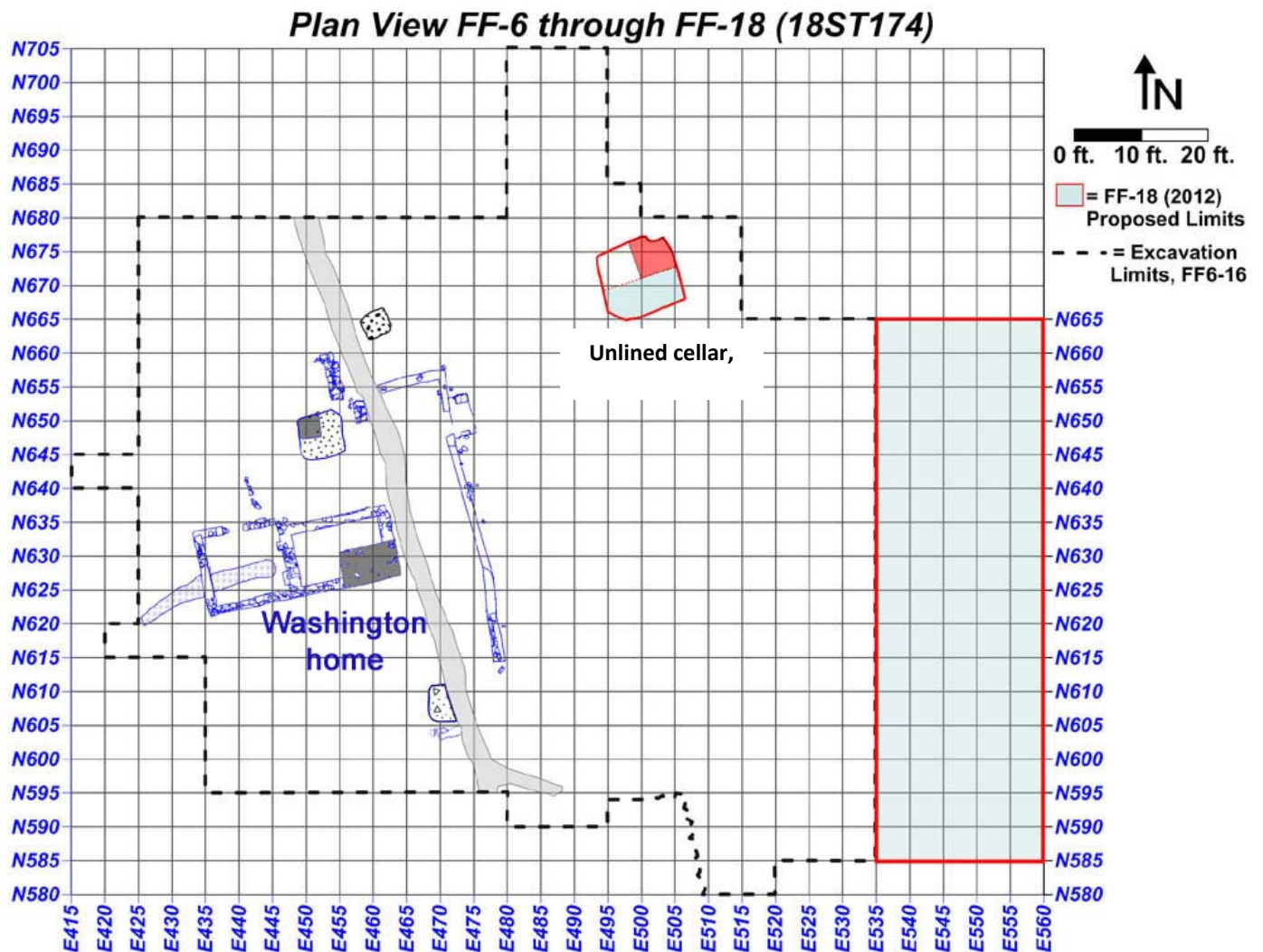
All soils were screened through a ¼-inch hardware cloth mesh. Soil chemistry, phytolith, and floatation samples were collected from both plowed soils and feature fills. Virginia Tech will analyze the soil chemistry, and University of Tennessee will eventually conduct the faunal analysis.

Layers and features were assigned unique context numbers for identification purposes. Information about the physical attributes of these layers and features was recorded using the standard context form developed by the Archaeology Department. Items recorded include Munsell color, soil texture, samples taken, documentation, and a general description. Features were further recorded using plan and profile drawings, photographs, and elevations. All measurements were taken in feet and tenths of feet.

Once inside the laboratory, artifacts were washed, sorted, identified, labeled, and cataloged. They are permanently stored in the Ferry Farm archaeology lab. Artifacts in need of stabilization were conserved by Melanie Marquis and Howard Wellman. Additional information about small finds was recorded in the department's small finds database by Laura Galke.

### ***Results***

A large block was identified for excavation situated to the east of the Washington House on the eastern edge of the portion of the site already excavated. This area was selected because



**Figure 1. Proposed Excavation Area in Relationship to Previous Field Excavations.**

preliminary data suggested that outbuildings related to the Washington house were likely located here. In all 59 5-ft.-by-5-ft. square units were excavated in this block.

The excavation revealed a relatively complex stratigraphic sequence and activities from the eighteenth- through twentieth-centuries. This area also included a number of previously dug shovel tests, test units, and a large excavation trench.

## *Stratigraphy*

### Topsoil-

This dark brown silty clay loam layer measured between 1 and 2 tenths of a foot in thickness. It contained a heavy root mat from grass and weeds and worn pebbles. Artifacts found in this layer are modern. This layer sealed 20<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse features and the layer associated with this occupation.

### Early 20<sup>th</sup> century layer -

This layer was a dark brown to yellowish dark brown silty clay loam. This layer ranged in thickness from 1 to 3 tenths of a foot and contained worn cobbles and pebbles. This layer was characterized by late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century domestic artifacts including plastic and modern glass along with a mix of eighteenth century domestic artifacts including creamware, Chinese porcelain and prehistoric artifacts. This layer was heavily burned in the vicinity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse once located on the north end of the excavation block.. This layer sealed mid-nineteenth century features and their associated layer and was intruded by archaeological excavations from the 1990s and utility features associated with the 20<sup>th</sup> century occupation.

### Antebellum layer -

This dark yellow brown clay silty loam contained concentrations of pebbles and oyster shells. Artifacts recovered from this layer include pipestems, glass, nails, ceramics and prehistoric debitage. The layer measured 0.6 ft. in thickness and sealed the 18<sup>th</sup> century layer and features.

### 18<sup>th</sup> century layer-

Under the 19<sup>th</sup> century layer was a thin layer dating from the eighteenth century. This dark yellow brown silty sandy clay layer sealed subsoil and measured 0.1 to 0.2 ft. in thickness. Artifacts included colonial domestic artifacts and prehistoric materials. This layer sealed subsoil.

## *Features*

### 20<sup>th</sup> century features -

The excavation revealed a number of utilities related to the 1900s farmhouse that burned down in 1994. Utilities included abandoned gas lines, water lines, and sewer lines. A driveway associated with the farmhouse was also discovered. A small pit containing ceramics dating to the twentieth century was excavated completely. The remains of a cup bearing a “Made In Prussia” mark support an early 20<sup>th</sup> century fill date. The function of this small pit is currently unknown.

### 19<sup>th</sup> century features -

In addition, a number of features dating from the mid-to-late 1800s were encountered, recorded, and photographed. Time limitations prevented excavation of these features, but their excavation is scheduled for the next field season.

### 18<sup>th</sup> century features -

At least two colonial-era features were encountered including a shallow pit (partially exposed in 2008, FF-14) in the southwest portion of the block. This large, roughly circular feature intruded the 18<sup>th</sup> century layer. This feature was drawn and photographed. The size, date of fill, and function of this feature is currently unknown.

Also unearthed was a possible colonial era cellar in the central western portion of the excavation block. The feature was impacted by the 1999 archaeological trenching also conducted under the direction of Paul Schuster. This feature was visible in the east wall profile of the 1999 archaeological trench. It intrudes subsoil and is considerable in size, though its exact size cannot be determined at this time. It was not in the scope of the 2012 investigations to excavate colonial features. They will be examined during the next field season.

## *Artifacts recovered and Preliminary Analysis*

While there were no intact layers that dated to the Native American occupation there were artifacts that once created and used by local Native Americans. American Indian material culture was recovered including stone tools, projectile points, and 2,500-3,000 year-old Middle Woodland Accokeek pottery. This is the most commonly recovered prehistoric pottery found at this site. In the southwest portion of the excavation block, several sherds from the base of an Accokeek vessel were recovered, and likely indicate the location of an activity area or possibly

evidence of an ancient domestic structure. The recovery of Accokeek pottery was high compared to other excavation years.

### Unlined Cellar

The excavation of the c. 1710s-1730s root cellar originally tested during the 2010 season (FF-16) was postponed until 2013 due to time constraints. Analysis of the artifacts recovered from the ¼ of the cellar began in August 2012. This initial and on-going study of the materials recovered in 2010 suggests that this cellar was part of an outbuilding related to the pre-Washington occupation of the site sometime during 1710s-1720s. Analysis of this cellar will continue throughout the fall of 2012 and into 2013. Faunal material from this feature is now being analyzed.

### Layers

Preliminary analysis, based upon field observations, indicates that colonial artifacts from the east yard reflect a functional use of this space throughout the 1700s that included food processing and wig hair maintenance. Preliminary spatial analysis of several small finds suggested this area would contain some sort of structure(s) used to support these activities. Large amounts of architectural material, including plaster and brick, were recovered in this area suggesting that a building once stood near here and was torn down. The shell-based mortar was similar to that found associated with the Washington house.

Coarse earthenwares related to food processing tasks, including vessels related to processing dairy products, occurred with some frequency in this area. Large quantities of wig hair curlers were found throughout the space, suggesting that some of the weekly maintenance for the Washington men's powdered wigs was performed near here.

Colonial artifacts from the 2012 excavation block reflect utilitarian use of this space throughout the 1700s. This is based upon an impression formed in the field of the coarse earthenwares found, including lead-glazed earthenwares, Buckley milk pan fragments (c. 1720-1770), Staffordshire slipwares (c 1660-1780), English Brown stonewares (c. 1671-1775), and a minor amount of North Devon coarse earthenware (c. 1675-1760). Refined ceramics from this period were encountered as well, including Rhenish stoneware mug or tankard fragments (c 1620-1775), whieldonware, and creamware. However, these refined wares did not seem to occur with the same frequency as the coarse utilitarian earthenwares. The presence of these coarse earthenwares in forms such as milk pans suggest that this portion of the yard may have been used for kitchen or dairy activities. Definitive conclusions must await complete artifact processing and spatial analysis.

Wig curlers occur with great frequency in this block. Prior to 2012, all investigations at Ferry Farm produced a total of 99 curler fragments. In 2012, no less than 30 were recovered and processing continues. Research on these mid-18<sup>th</sup> century objects indicates that they were used to freshen the curls of wigs, an essential component of male gentry attire. Such maintenance was ideally performed weekly, and a task for a skilled enslaved hair dresser.

Two major colonial-era features were encountered during the 2012 season, but not excavated. One of these, located in the southwest portion of the excavation block, contained large pieces of bone (likely cow) and colonial-era ceramics and appears to be a large pit. This pit was originally encountered in 2008 (FF-14), but could not be fully exposed because the east half of it existed outside of the 2008 excavation block. In 2012, the eastern portion of this pit was completely revealed and was recognized at a stratigraphically higher level than was recognized in 2008. This feature was photographed and drawn, the large pieces of bone collected, and the stratigraphy left intact for future excavation.

A second colonial feature, what appears to be a possible cellar, was impacted by the 1999 archaeology associated with the removal of a concrete sidewalk that cut through this area. During the 1999 investigations, a small section of this colonial feature was removed. The 1999 trench fill was removed as part of the 2012 field excavations. Evidence of this feature was visible in the east wall profile of the exposed 1999 trench, and an unknown portion of the cellar remains intact, awaiting exposure and excavation in the course of future field investigations. The depth of the cellar can be inferred from the extra depth to which the 1999 trench extended in this localized area, and from the profile revealed in the east wall of the 1999 archaeological trench.

Mid 1800s use of this area was evidenced by the presence of Civil War ammunition in the mid portion of the excavation block. After a period of low activity following the Civil War, a number of late-nineteenth-century and twentieth-century activities resulted in the creation of several artifact-rich features and 20<sup>th</sup>-century utility trenches that crosscut this space (Figure 1). Due to the intensive activity represented by this complex of features, the mid portion of the excavation block was excavated only to the top of the feature filled antebellum stratum. This is because documenting these 20<sup>th</sup>-century features (including drawings in plan, photographing, bisecting, and profiling) took time. Additional excavation will be necessary in order to reveal the colonial strata below.



***Figure 2. Mid portion of the FF18 excavation block looking west.***



## ***Standard Laboratory Work***

The archaeology laboratory made significant progress in the following areas:

Artifact Washing – Completed washing all of the artifacts recovered in 2010 field season

- Completed washing of 28% of the 2012 artifacts

Artifact Sorting – Completed 100% of the sorting and identifying of artifacts recovered in the 2010 field season

Completed 28% of the sorting and identifying of artifacts recovered in the 2012 field season

Artifact Identification and Digital Cataloging – Completed 100% of the basic identification and Re:Discovery cataloging from the 2010 archaeological field season

Completed 25% of the basic identification and Re:Discovery cataloging from the 2012 archaeological field season

Artifact labeling – Completed 100% of the 2010 field season artifacts

- Completed 5% of the 2012 field season's artifacts

## ***Archival***

Artifact bagging and permanent storage – Completed % of the bagging and permanent storage of artifacts recovered from the 2010 field season

Field notes and drawings from the 2010 field season were duplicated and entered into an Access database

Field notes and drawings from the 2012 field season were duplicated and context information are being entered into an Access database

Digital photographs were downloaded.

Field maps were scanned and duplicated.

## ***Artifact Conservation***

Artifacts in need of conservation were treated in-house from various field seasons including the 2012 season.

Artifacts in need of special conservation were sent out from various field seasons, but none from the 2012 field season.

### ***Specialist Analysis***

Brad Hatch analyzed all of the faunal material from the 2002 and 2004 field seasons. A draft report was generated this year.

Laura Galke conducted small finds analysis of several objects from all seasons of excavation with a focus on wig curlers, thimbles, tea accoutrements, and dining artifacts.

The department consulted with Andrew Wilkins, PhD. student of the University of Tennessee, about analyzing the soil samples from areas around the 19<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse and outbuildings.

### ***Crossmending Project***

In accordance with Federal Curation Standards, the department continued developing its crossmending protocols in anticipation of crossmending both ceramics and glass. Several creamware teawares were mended as a case study.

### ***3D Artifact Scanning***

Virginia Commonwealth University continued their effort of making 3D digital scans of artifacts recovered at Ferry Farm.