

**Scope of Work: Proposed Archaeological Investigation at George  
Washington's Boyhood Home National Historic Landmark ("Ferry  
Farm"), Stafford County, Virginia,  
2020**

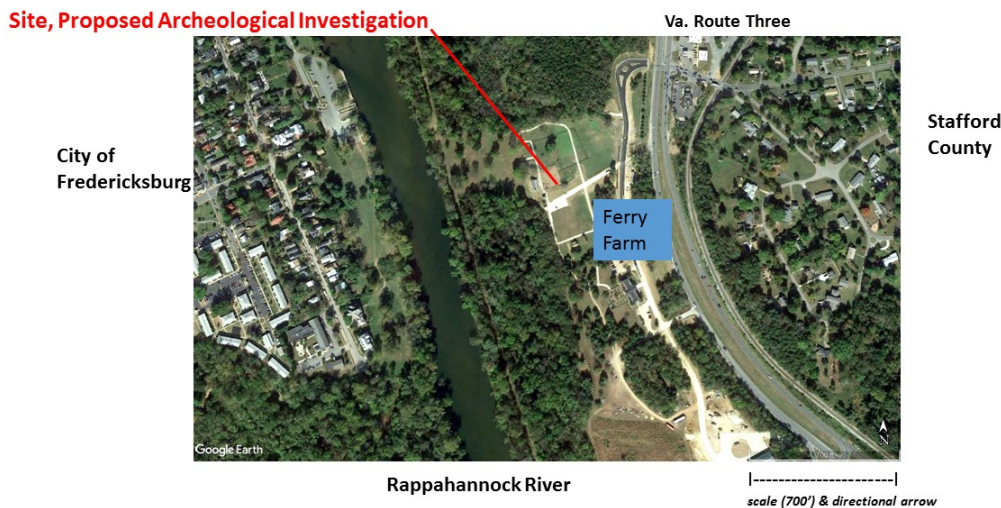
**44ST174**

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## Location, Property Description, National Park Service Review-Background

The conservation easement held by the National Park Service (NPS) at the 75-acre George Washington's Boyhood Home National Historic Landmark ("Ferry Farm") stipulates the use of the property as "historic site and education attraction." Situated at 268 Kings Highway Fredericksburg, VA 22405 (Stafford County), the property's owner, the George Washington Foundation, manages a visitor center, interpretive structures, and other educational facilities where staff and programming share the story of the site's past residents, based upon archival- and archaeological investigation.



**Location: George Washington's Boyhood Home  
National Historic Landmark ("Ferry Farm")**

The easement makes provision for the George Washington Foundation to propose "archaeological investigations" to the NPS for review under the terms of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, investigations that would occur under the direction of a qualified professional archaeologist. The easement incorporates among its provisions pages 44734-44737 of *Archeology and Historic Preservation; Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines* (*Federal Register*, September 29, 1983), which stipulate that archaeological documentation, including "observation, directly, through excavation," may be "undertaken as an aid to various treatment activities, including research, interpretation, reconstruction...." Approved investigations, the easement continues, "shall be documented and reported." The easement also describes the right of the NPS to protect in perpetuity the natural, cultural, archeological, ecological, open space and aesthetic features of Ferry Farm, and describes the restrictions of the easement as intended to prevent uses, which if allowed to occur, would have an individual or cumulative adverse effect.

## Proposal for 2020

The Foundation's Department of Archaeology proposes to revisit the same area that we investigated during field work in 2019. Although our Scope of Work for that year, approved by NPS following four-step Section 106 review, had proposed investigations across *both* halves of block FF-30 (green-bordered area at lower right, or southeast, on map below), Foundation staff investigated only the southern half in 2019.

For 2020, the Foundation proposes an investigation of a portion of the northern half of FF-30, measuring 30 ft. by 15 ft. Within that, we propose to leave unexcavated 4 (four) contiguous five ft. squares in the northwest corner (shaded portion in upper left, or northwest, of green-bordered area on map below). A contiguous configuration would foster permanent protection and stability of the unexcavated squares better than a configuration that separates those. Also, situating the squares at the northwest corner of FF-30 would incorporate into such protection a small tree that occupies part of that corner.

We would follow the same research design proposed and followed in 2019 and described more fully on pages 4-5, below. The research design includes the goal of developing a better understanding of the spatial use of the landscape over the thousands of years of occupation at the Ferry Farm site. As per that research design and also the Preferred Alternative for treatment of the overall property, selected through the NPS NEPA/EA-review of 2013-2014 and including research on and creation of an interpretive landscape with missing Washington-era landscape features and structures, the 2020 investigation would include seeking evidence of the Washington-era structures and work yard. Artifact distribution maps of several classes of artifacts have suggested that an activity area and/or structure is located in or near FF-30.

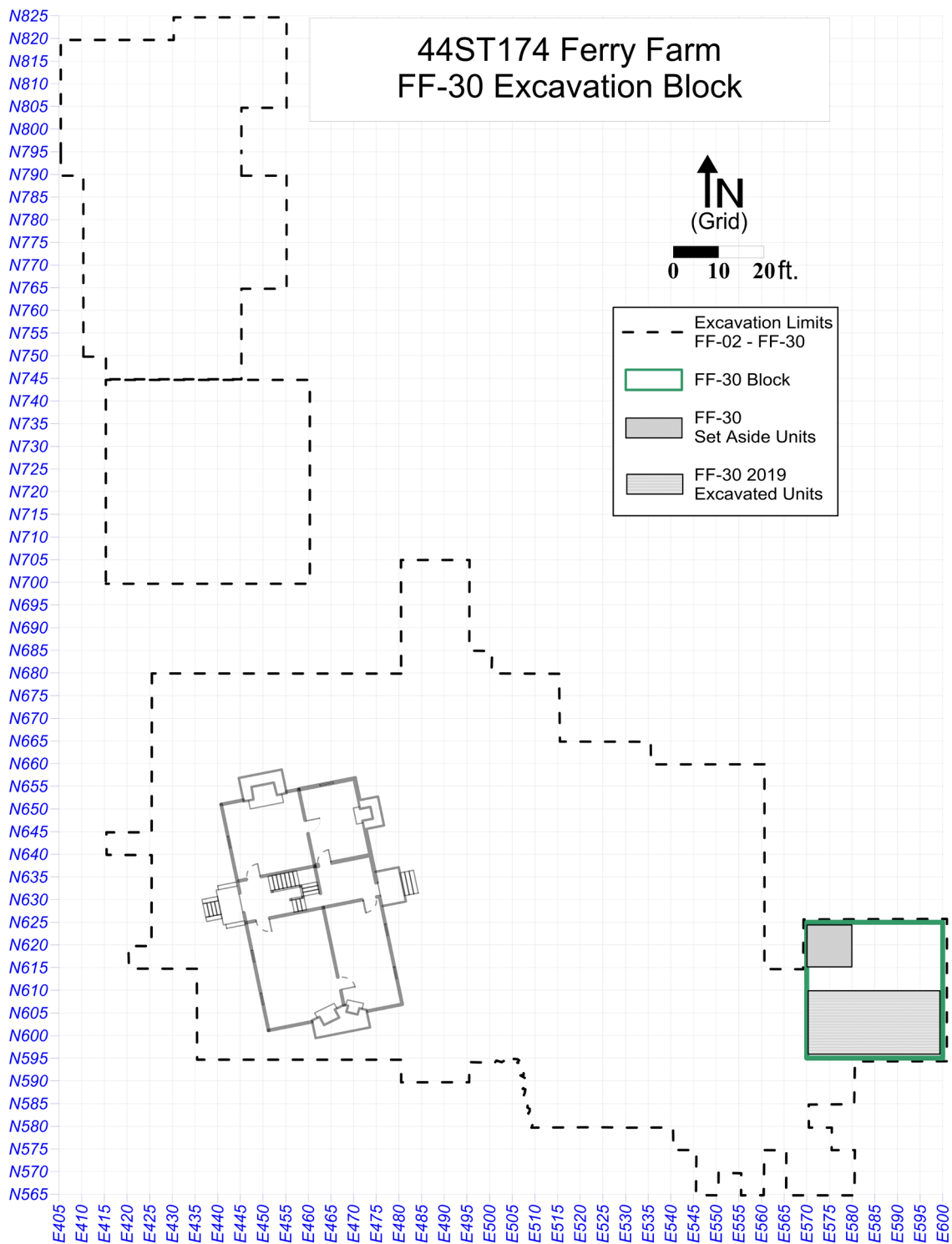
The proposed archaeological investigation would follow the format of past investigations at Ferry Farm. In order for future generations of archaeologists to apply new methods and techniques there, portions of significant, sealed context of all pre-20<sup>th</sup> century architectural remains would be left unexcavated. For sealed context, between one quarter and one half of the fill would be left intact depending on the Foundation's archaeologists' understanding of the feature. For complex features, they would excavate three quarters of the fill. For features that are easy to interpret, half of the fill would be left unexcavated.

The Foundation has conveyed its approval of a new draft of a replacement for the now-expired Programmatic Agreement (PA) guiding Section 106 compliance at Ferry Farm. We assume that a final draft is in the offing and would provide preliminary analysis of this 2020 investigation in an interim technical report and, then, final analysis in a monograph technical report, in keeping with the requirements of the now-expired PA.

For the 2020 investigation, the Foundation would also follow the provision of the now-expired PA regarding unanticipated discoveries and also, in the language of that PA:

*The Foundation shall make all reasonable efforts to avoid disturbing gravesites, including those containing Native American human remains and associated funerary artifacts. The shall treat all human remains in a manner consistent with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's Policy Statement Regarding Treatment of Burial Sites, Human Remains and Funerary Objects (February 23, 2007; <http://www.achp.gov/docs/hrpolicy0207.pdf>).*

*If the remains are determined to be of Native American origin, the Foundation shall comply with the provisions of NAGPRA and the accompanying regulations at 43 CFR Part 10. If the remains are determined not to be of Native American origin, the Foundation shall comply with the Virginia Antiquities Act, Section 10.1-2305 of the Code of Virginia, final regulations adopted by the Virginia Board of Historic Resources published in the Virginia Register on September 20, 2016, 17VAC5-and found in the Code of Virginia 10.1-2305 et seq, or subsequent revisions.*



## Area of Potential Effect (yellow-bordered area below)

directional arrow (north at top) at lower right:



The Area of Potential Effect would be defined by the footprint of the proposed investigation (but only *northern* half of red area above) and also the zone, within the existing fenced enclosure (yellow area above), from which it would be visible. The activity and equipment of the archaeological investigators would thus be screened from the Washington House interpretive structure and most of the area approaching and surrounding it, and the activity would only be temporary, mainly the months of June and July 2020.

## *Archaeological Documentation*

The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Archaeological Documentation require a Statement of Objectives, and a discussion of the methods and the techniques required to accomplish these objectives.

## *Research Design*

Archaeological interpretations usually start by addressing some very basic questions that over time give way to more nuanced questions. Initial research questions include: When was the structure built? How long was it in use? Which pieces were original to the

structure? Which pieces were added and when? When were some of the pieces abandoned or replaced? A second set of questions deal with the notion of function. How was the structure used? Is it a domestic, agricultural, or support building? If domestic, who used it – master, overseer, servant, or tenant? Did the occupants change over time? Does the social standing of new occupants differ from the original owners as the land and buildings become rundown?

A large percentage of the artifacts recovered at Ferry Farm are situated in the plowzone. The rest are situated in sheet refuse and in feature fill. By understanding the distribution of these finds in association with the physical remnants of structures, fences, and work areas, and in conjunction with the local context provided mostly by the historical record, researchers are able to tease out meaning from these data sets.

Once the basic questions are answered, more sophisticated research questions can be addressed, including:

**1. Develop a better understanding of the spatial organization of eighteenth-century plantations.** The spatial organization of plantations from this period is poorly understood in part because few of these sites have undergone large-scale excavation. Of particular interest are the changing relationships between the planters, indentured servants, and the enslaved. Archaeology is well positioned to help delineate the spatial aspects of the systems put into place to insure that these groups could co-exist even though they pursued vastly different goals in life.

**2. Develop an understanding of how George Washington came to exhibit certain unique attributes that served him well in his adult life.** Washington developed these characteristics as a boy at Ferry Farm. For example, George developed a fascination with the western portion of Virginia early in life, through his exposure to travelers heading west along the Ferry road beside his home. This interest stayed with him throughout his adult life. His boyhood home promoted genteel English behaviors such as surveying, the tea ceremony, and proper plantation management. By exploring the material circumstances of his situation and those of his family we may be able to trace the origins of these character traits, traits which form the basis of the nascent American cultural psyche, an identity which Washington adopted and which ultimately led to his enthusiastic support for, and participation in, the American Revolution.

**3. Develop an understanding of the economic and social circumstances of the Washingtons before and after Augustine's death.** While the death of a patriarch is a shattering experience for most families, Augustine's family suffered more than most. At his death Augustine Washington, following the practices of the day, provided a parcel of land to each of his sons, leaving the home farm and ten slaves to George, to be inherited when he turned 21. As tradition dictated, George's mother, Mary, managed the farm until he came of age. Mary remained a widow for the remainder of her long life. Lost revenues from the two expansive plantations given to Augustine's oldest sons greatly reduced the income of those family members that remained at the home farm.

A lack of resources prevented George from going to England for a formal, classical education, as his planter-class peers did. Money was so tight that George did not even attend a colonial college, instead becoming a surveyor. In a letter to Lawrence, George cancelled a planned visit for fear that his poorly-fed horse was not up to the task. Archaeology will shed light on the material aspects of their lives during this difficult period. How did these hardships influence George Washington as he grew to manhood and became a proponent of the American Revolution? What was daily life like for the Washington families and the domestic enslaved workers who performed much of the work around the plantation house.

**4. *Develop a better understanding of the spatial use of the landscape over the thousands of years of occupation at the Ferry Farm site.*** The site was in use before and after the Washington Family occupation. Several thousand years earlier, American Indians used this area repeatedly as a temporary campsite. Excavations have unearthed numerous projectile points, tools, flakes and for the first time a concentration of Middle Woodland pottery was recovered in 2012. The 2014 excavation uncovered two prehistoric features. A number of prehistoric features have been subsequently recovered along with an intermittently present American Indian layer. In the nineteenth century, Ferry Farm operated as an absentee owned farm, and was impacted heavily by the Battle of Fredericksburg.

The recovery of the land and its continued agricultural use during the post bellum period is an important, yet poorly understood and underappreciated aspect of Virginia history. Archaeological investigations will contribute significantly to an analysis of this era. A successful and expansive farming occupation was established here in the twentieth century. The Colbert Family appreciated the history of their property. In addition, popular movements to preserve the site began here in the twentieth century, well after such efforts were underway at Mount Vernon but in conjunction with the Wakefield National Memorial Association efforts at the birthplace of George Washington.

### *Excavation Strategy*

The excavation employs 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 for excavation units in the field, 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. For a large portion of the site machine plowing created only two layers of stratigraphy (topsoil and plowzone). The areas directly north and east of the house are unplowed and several natural layers and associated features have been encountered. Using trowels and shovels, excavators remove these layers in standard excavation units.



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

All soils are screened. Plowzone and features containing light concentrations of artifacts were passed through a 1/4-inch mesh hardware cloth. Artifact rich-features are water-screened using 1/16<sup>th</sup> inch mesh.

Soil chemistry samples are collected from both soil layers and feature fills. Virginia Tech has agreed to analyze the soil chemistry and report the results back to the GWF.

Once inside the laboratory, artifacts are washed, sorted, identified, labeled, and cataloged in an Access database. Ceramics and glass are cross-mended and are analyzed as objects instead of sherds. Artifacts are permanently stored in the Ferry Farm Visitor Center. Small finds in need of stabilization are conserved by an outside contractor. Additional details about small find artifacts, including photographs and metric attributes, are recorded in the department's object catalog database.



Proposed investigation area looking east.



Proposed investigation area looking southwest.