Historical Archaeology, Identity Formation, and the Interpretation of Ethnicity

Edited by
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With
Foreword by Robert L. Schuyler
and Comments by Fraser D. Neiman

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This volume was the result of a session on ethnicity held at the 1996 Society for Historical Archaeology conference in Cincinnati.

The original panel included Margot Winer, Minette Church, and Jeff Watts-Roy. We thank these individuals for their participation in the session, and for helping to provide the basic foundation from which this volume grew. Fraser Neiman and Robert L. Schuyler served as discussants on the panel, and we deeply appreciate their initial feedback on all of the papers, and on their willingness to contribute to this volume. It is to the authors—Carl Steen, Audrey Horning, Barbara Heath, Susan Kern, Patricia Samford and John Metz—that we are most grateful. Thank you all for staying committed to this project, for your patience, and for coming through as strongly as you did.
Since 1980 historical archaeology has expanded its subject matter by moving beyond basic culture history to emphasize a number of central research topics. These themes are not limited to the field of historical archaeology and archaeologists, both prehistoric and historical, are merely following the lead of current scholarship, especially the work of historians and some cultural anthropologists. Topics covered, or potential future additions, include ethnicity, class, gender, age cohorts, race, occupations, and a series of categories (such as nationality, religion and political groupings) that may or may not be subsumed under these more generalized types.

One of the first research subjects selected by historical archaeologists was ethnicity, and it continues to occupy the center of topical research, although the study of class, a related subject, is growing in popularity. This set of papers by six younger scholars all approach ethnicity as both a significant factor in human culture history and a difficult problem for archaeologists. Is ethnicity a surface phenomenon, fully active on a conscious level of behavior, purposely manipulated in a fluid environment of power and class—a suit of cultural clothing worn and changed at will and only having meaning relative to other groups otherwise clothed? Or, is ethnicity a deeply rooted, stable phenomenon grounded in enculturation and history—a manifestation of the bedrock of culture itself?

Which end of this spectrum of definitions a researcher selects will have a major impact on how one approaches the topic from fieldwork to synthesis and interpretation, as well as how successful archaeology is in recognizing material manifestations of ethnicity.

Six case studies are offered in this monograph. They range across the formation of “creole” society in colonial Virginia, Native Americans interacting with Anglo-American power centers, the ability or lack of ability of enslaved Africans to preserve or de novo generate their own cultural identity, or more specifically, to maintain their most basic beliefs, to a discussion of ethnic variation internal to Euro-American culture, a theme that has been relatively neglected. This range of essays takes the reader on a quite varied and fascinating exploration, but one unified by the same cultural region in North America. Virginia and South Carolina have both been well explored by both historians and archaeologists. Metz, Kern, Horning, Heath, Samford and Steen are all to be congratulated for an insightful if tentative set of essays. Historical Archaeology, Identity Formation, and the Interpretation of Ethnicity, because of its authors and two organizers-editors, is a solid contribution to the growing literature on the ability of historical archaeologists to explore one of the most basic human categorizations to appear since the rise of complex societies.
Part 1: Introduction

Several years ago while visiting a friend excavating a sugar plantation in the mountains of Jamaica, a middle-aged man approached me at a rural taxi stand. “Who you?” he asked rather threateningly. I was not sure exactly what he wanted to know, so I told him I was an American from the United States. “No, who you?” he said again. I explained I lived in the state of California. “No, no, who you?” he implored while stepping toward me and brandishing his machete. Since I was wearing a Los Angeles Dodgers baseball cap, with some alarm I gestured to it and told him I was from Los Angeles. The man laughed, turned to the twenty or so people gathered around us, and said, “See, this bloody ras don’t know who he is!” Indeed, the joke was on me. Yet, although the man took the opportunity to ridicule an outsider and in doing so, to advance his reputation within his community, in essence, we as historical archaeologists ask that same simple question of the people who formed the archaeological sites we excavate, “Who you?” And all too often, no simple answer materializes and we end up feeling as lost and confused as I did with the man at the taxi stand.

Some seventeen years ago Robert Schuyler compiled and edited fourteen essays in a volume entitled *Archaeological Perspectives on Ethnicity in America: Afro-American and Asian American Culture History* (1980). As its title suggests, the book introduced a variety of historical archaeological treatments of the topic of ethnicity, exclusively focused on African- and Asian-American sites. The book, like this compilation, was in part a product of its time. It was published while Iran held 52 Americans hostage, while Nelson Mandela was just another forgotten prisoner in an entrenched South African system of violent apartheid, and while Dublin, not Beirut or Sarajevo, was the world’s most notorious ethnic battleground. Almost twenty years later, ethnicity remains at the forefront of the social, political, economic, and religious agenda around the globe, although the sites of its turbulence continue to change. Dozens of clashes motivated by ethnic issues occur everyday, resulting in ethnic convergence at its most deadly. It would be comforting to think that the distance between “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia in the 1990s and the expressions of ethnic identity on an eighteenth-century Virginia plantation or in the hollows of Depression-era Appalachia are hardly comparable. Yet the germ of conflict in both locales, separated as they are by time and circumstance, is distinctly ethnic.

The word *ethnicity*, and its attendant terms *ethnic group* and *ethnic identity*, are relatively new idioms still in semantic flux. The term *ethnicity* emerged in the mid-twentieth century, but the exact origin is unknown (see Sollors 1996, footnote 2). The word only first appeared in English dictionaries in 1972 (Glazer and Moynihan 1975:1), while the term *ethnic group* and the adjective *ethnic* first surfaced in the latter nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century (Sollors 1996, footnote 2). The root of ethnicity, *ethnic*, is derived from the Greek word *ethnos* or *ethnikos* which at different times translated to “heathen” or “pagan,” and later as “nation” or “people,” and in more general terms as “others” (Banks 1996:5; Eriksen
1993:3-4; Sollors 1996:x-xi). In the United States during the Second World War, “ethnics” was used “as a polite term referring to Jews, Italians, Irish and other people considered inferior to the dominant group of largely British decent” (Eriksen 1993:4). For social scientists since mid-century, the term has evolved into a referent for groups of people who consider themselves or are labeled by outsiders as culturally distinctive, sometimes conflated with other terms such as “race” or “minority” (Eriksen 1993).

Today there exists as many working definitions of ethnicity as there are groups who claim to possess a distinctive ethnicity (see, for example, Banks 1996:4-5). More than one hundred ethnic groups can be found in the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* compiled in 1980, and since then more surely have surfaced (Thernstrom et al. 1980). The term *ethnicity* has become so malleable and vague, some claim the expression to be virtually drained of its utility (Banks 1996:10). Yet, still the word and its multiple meanings persist, and have become part of the anthropological and archaeological language.

The debate which has dominated the anthropological discourse on ethnicity for several decades is between two schools of thought, primordialism and instrumentalism. Primordialists tend to acknowledge the core of ethnic attachment to be ineffable, emotional sentiments or psychological bonds between people centered on blood ties (Hutchinson and Smith 1996:8). Instrumentalists counter with a social constructivist view of ethnicity that places ethnic origin as a manifestation solely of culture, which is malleable and interchangeable depending upon common needs and often the sociopolitical setting (Hutchinson and Smith 1996:9). Dyed-in-the-wool primordialists can be criticized for biological deterministic leanings, while hard-core instrumentalists tend to disavow the very real emotional dimensions of ethnicity (see Jones 1997:68-72, 76-79). Somewhere between the two extremes of primordialism and instrumentalism resides a broad-based approach to ethnicity which simultaneously acknowledges both cultural and seemingly unexplainable psychological ethnic ties which bind groups of people together (see Keyes 1976). Most recently, elements of practice theory have been utilized to suggest that “the construction of ethnicity is grounded in the shared subliminal dispositions of social agents which shape, and are shaped by, objective commonalities of practice” (Jones 1997:128).

In this volume we hesitate to become mired in adding another carefully crafted definition of ethnicity that toes the line between the primordial and instrumental camps. Instead, we encourage historical archaeologists to seek their own working definitions, an approach taken by each of the authors in this volume. The multifaceted nature of the issue which is apparent in the six essays here, hopefully illustrates the merit of embracing the paradoxical nature of ethnicity as a means for broadening the inquiry into the issue. Rather than mourn the fact that “the relationship between artifacts and ethnicity or culture is ambiguous and evanescent” (Upton 1996:5), we celebrate the challenge that the complexities of ethnicity and material culture pose.

Like today, ethnicity possessed differing meanings for different people in the past. Each historic archaeological site offers the opportunity to explore the varying ways in which people created, altered, and used ethnicity for themselves and sometimes in contrast to others. Thus, the question to be asked while excavating historic archaeological sites is not how past peoples fit into our rigid contemporary definitions of ethnicity, but rather how people in the past constructed ethnic identities and how the identities worked and for what reasons (e.g. McGuire 1982). The re-
results of such investigations may prove that other social dimensions dominated, or that ethnic identity was enmeshed in complex ways with other forms of identity such as gender or class (Jones 1997:85; McGuire 1983). By questioning the formation, maintenance, and use of ethnic identities, historical archaeologists can at least avoid some of the more damaging trappings of a monolithic, positivistic, and static version of ethnicity that has tended to dominate the historical archaeological treatments of the topic (Upton 1996), including some of the essays in Schuyler’s volume.

Schuyler and his colleagues posed a key question in 1980 that still resonates today: “Is ethnicity . . . recognizable in the archaeological record?” (viii). In the intervening years, a more relevant question has emerged. Rather than framing the issues of ethnicity and ethnic groups as an issue of visibility in the archaeological record, we suggest that a more fruitful path is studying the concept of ethnicity and ethnic affiliation as a tool used by various individuals and groups to facilitate practical ends. Instead of searching for the static patterns and correlates of so-called ethnic identity, we must recognize that ethnicity and ethnic identity served as a dynamic agent of social and cultural negotiation. All peoples and the objects through which they manipulate daily life are imbued with ethnic overtones, whether it be in the meals they consume, the clothing they wear, or the spaces they inhabit.

Some 25 years after writing his celebrated introduction to Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference, Fredrik Barth, the anthropologist largely responsible for placing ethnicity at the forefront of the discipline, encouraged researchers to “attend to the experiences through which [ethnic identity] is formed, it is not enough, as one thought with a simpler concept of culture, to make a homogenizing inventory of its manifestations.” (Barth 1994:14). Given Barth’s encouragement, perhaps the more robust question at hand is: Can the findings of historical archaeologists contribute to a fuller understanding of the social uses of ethnic identity? By framing our focus on the processes of ethnic group formation, maintenance, and dissolution, rather than the end products of ethnic display, we believe historical archaeological contributions to the issue are greatly empowered.

Several recent scholars suggest that historical archaeologists are uniquely poised to investigate ethnicity (e.g. Deetz 1995; Jones 1997:27; McGuire 1982:161; Staski 1990:121-122). Thus far, however, “the existence of historical references to specific ethnic groups has resulted in the perpetuation of the ‘ethnic labeling’ of sites and objects” rather than more in-depth revelations of ethnic uses and abuses (Jones 1997:27). Although we might wish it to be so, simple, one-to-one correlations of ethnic identity do not exist (Jones 1997:140). Jim Deetz recently characterized the search for individual “ethnic” objects as “something of a red herring” (1995:9). Indeed, many have been distracted from the real work of ethnic understanding, entranced by the luster of mere baubles. Instead, Deetz encourages archaeological practitioners to ask how “ethnic groups manage their ethnicity in the face of adversity” and to consider each culture as an integrated whole rather than piecemeal (1995:10).

Unfortunately, the historical archaeological literature on ethnicity tends to be top heavy with assessments of items such as blue beads, cowrie shells, opium pipes, distinctively butchered animal bones, dietary products, quantities of buttons and the like with the inference that these constitute ethnic markers for some groups (e.g. Etter 1980; Kelso 1984:201-202; Klingelhofer 1987; McKee 1987; Pearce 1993; Stine et al. 1996). These objects certainly meant something to
the people using and creating them, and may relate in some way to discrete groups of eth-
nically related individuals. Yet, like most ar-
chaeologists, we steadfastly reject the “artifact=ethnicity” premise, not because many transplanted Africans, Chinese, Ital-
ians, Germans, Mexicans, Irish, etc. did not retain distinctive identities and practices re-
lated to their perceived ethnic affiliation, but because the nature of archaeological evidence of ethnicity is necessarily complex, situ-
tional, historically contingent, and culture-
driven (Verdery 1994). Given this, we sug-
gest that finding so-called "ethnic markers" at a site is not the termination of inquiry, but rather initiates the creation of questions which focus on the meaning, construction, and expression of ethnic identity for a vari-
ety of specific peoples in various settings.

In addition to encouraging archaeologists to seek the visibility of ethnicity in the ar-
chaeological record, Robert Schuyler in 1980 recognized the connection of ethnicity and issues of political domination and power, suggesting, “Ethnicity has little meaning until complex structures arose based on po-
litical domination” (viii). Indeed, issues of ethnic identity in more recent archaeologies “are often overtly political in nature” (Jones 1997:10) and issues of nationalism are intimately tied to structures of ethnic identity (see Barth 1994; McGuire 1982; Shennan 1989; Verdery 1994; Williams 1989). Thus, as Brackette Williams stated recently, “ethnicity is . . . a matter of power differentials be-
tween two or more groups in contact produc-
ing one or more additional groups, which then confront the originators” (1992:609; see also Jones 1997). Moreover, Adrian Praetzellis et al. remind us that in most contexts ethnicity only emerges in contrast to a dominant cultural tradition that functions as a lens through which we can see emulation or re-

Throughout the literature on ethnicity, both archaeological and anthropological, the issue of what Fredrik Barth (1994) calls “so-
cial dichotomization” or “difference” is para-
mount. Essentially Barth recognizes that eth-
nicity is a method of organizing cultural dif-
fers so as to create the criteria for which to include or exclude members Barth (1969). In our zeal to recognize and understand eth-
nic difference, however, Katerine Verdery warns us of the dangers of accepting difference uncritically. Verdery worries that the po-
tential uses and abuses of the hetero-
genization of society marks a movement to-
ward a “new essentialism” which threatens to diminish multiculturalism. The possible misuses of concepts of ethnic difference are symptoms of the restructuring of world capita-
listsm as it attempts to cope with recent cri-
ses and threats to its hegemony (Verdery 1994:51-55). Thus the concept of ethnic dif-
fERENCE, whether it be at issue on a college application form, in a repatriation dispute, or a fundamental element of social organi-
ZATION on an eighteenth-century plantation,
cannot be divorced from the larger social milieu in which historical archaeologists presently function.

We recognize that the theoretical discus-
sion of ethnicity may well be an exercise in rhetoric unless it can be translated into prac-
tical definitions for archaeological use. There-
fore, like the case studies compiled by Rob-
ert Schuyler almost twenty years ago, we hope the studies herein provide a set of blue-
prints from which to assist historical archae-
ologists as they continue to wrestle with the intertwined issues of identity in the past and the many meanings and uses of ethnicity.

Part II: Six Authors, Six New Insights

The papers presented in this volume under-
score historical archaeology’s sustaining in-
terest in ethnicity and culture. Moreover, they exemplify the move by a growing number of archaeologists towards more thoughtful and critical analyses of what are now more fully appreciated and recognized as inherently complex processes of identity construction. This holds true for the six authors herein, even though they variously differ on points ranging from their working definitions of “ethnicity,” to their interpretations of how and why individuals and groups set themselves apart from others. The following discussion summarizes the diverse perspectives brought to bear on the question of how people in the past devised meaningful ways to negotiate both their sense of individuality, or “self,” and their collective sense of belonging to a group.

To start, on a fundamental level the authors all seem to agree that ethnicity is socially constructed, from both within and without the group. Further, they all variously recognize—although they differentially emphasize—that culture and tradition, place of origin, common ancestry and history (whether real or imagined), and diverse physical attributes all combine to forge one’s ethnic identity. Horning, Metz, and to a lesser extent, Steen, move beyond this basic definition in considering the role of power in the creation of ethnic groups. As Horning posits, “ethnic groups, by definition, only exist because of their relationships with other groups.”

These relationships are often fraught with tension as people with divergent interests coalesce into different factions and compete for what ultimately boils down to dominance or self-determination. For example, Metz asserts in his study of English colonists that their move towards embracing a distinct, Anglo-Virginian ethnicity was largely due to their attempts to vie for control over their limited resources. Similarly, Steen acknowledges that the need to preserve the institution of slavery, and hence maintain control over Africans and blacks, made ethnic group formation pertinent to white colonists. Having each stated their case on what they mean by “ethnicity,” the six authors then move in different directions, guided by varying research questions.

Metz’s article deals with a crucial period in American history, when the system of indentured servitude shifts in centrality, giving way to the rise and establishment of the African slave trade. Metz focuses on the population most responsible for changing the nature of the Chesapeake labor force: Virginia’s native-born, or “creole,” landholders and political leaders. He contends that it is their unwillingness to be completely dependent on England for finished goods, among other things, that impels them to invest in local trades and manufactured goods. His main body of evidence is the archaeology of brick-making technology.

Metz posits that while England’s main interest lay in Virginia’s tobacco economy, Virginia creoles understood that tobacco monoculture was not necessarily in their best interest. Colonists re-envisioned their political and economic goals, and a growing number of native-born English subjects viewed themselves as a different sort from their English-born counterparts. Influenced by Randall McGuire’s work, Metz interprets this growing division, manifest in an alternative social identity (i.e. “creoles”), as evidence of ethnogenesis brought about by group conflict. Through a careful synthesis of archaeological data on Chesapeake brick production, Metz demonstrates that this form of local manufacture is but one example of the attempt by Anglo-Virginians to move towards self-sufficiency, thus challenging England’s dominance. It further attests to their growing resolve to plant themselves permanently in Virginia by building more permanent shelters than were previously common.
Like Metz, Horning takes into account how power relations were key in forging certain aspects of Appalachian identity and group formation. She adds a fascinating dimension to her study by considering how not only emic but etic constructions of ethnicity were variously accepted by hollow residents as, in Fesler’s words, “dynamic agents of social and cultural negotiation.” Horning effectively argues that the imposition of negative, “hillbilly” stereotypes to “hollow folk” from the Blue Ridge Mountains was clearly motivated by deceitful politics aimed at removing longtime residents from their land. Horning strikes a blow to these persistent stereotypes, demonstrating with architectural and archaeological evidence that Appalachian families maintained vibrant and diverse communities that did, in fact, have knowledge of the outside world. Importantly, Horning’s study serves as a prime example of how ethnic identity is situational. Citing oral testimonies, Horning shows how certain members of this group ably adopted the stereotypical, characteristics of “backwoods” ethnicity to their advantage in dealing with outsiders. As she observes: “Clearly, the creation of ethnicities can be a fluid and rapid process, readily able to traverse the boundaries of the emic and the etc.”

A recurring theme in this volume is the caveat against using material culture as “ethnic markers.” It is a message oft-cited, but less often are we given alternative, constructive ways to interpret artifacts that are indeed associated with ethnic groups. Kern does just this, in a similar fashion to Horning, by showing that just as identities are fluid and relational, so are the meanings and values we attach to objects that play a significant role in shaping identities and social relations.

Kern chooses as her focal point an assemblage of Native American artifacts that many historical archaeologists encounter, but are typically hesitant to attempt an explanation for when they are recovered from “non-Indian” sites, such as Shadwell plantation. In contrast, Kern seizes the opportunity to investigate what she perceives as potential evidence for interactions between diverse ethnic groups within the Virginia frontier. Creating a narrative from historical sources, Kern helps us to visualize a series of encounters between enslaved blacks, whites, and Indians. In doing so, she demonstrates the role that material culture played at different scales. On one hand, objects were visible in the social and political arena, as different ethnic groups worked to position themselves via status. On a smaller scale, material goods exchanging hands between individuals may have been central in forging personal relations, as Kern suggests may have been the case with Indians enjoying the hospitality of enslaved blacks at Shadwell.

Kern presents us with multi-layered interpretations of ethnic and social identities in motion, shifting to accommodate different circumstances. She does archaeology a great service in underscoring just how complex and fluid these meetings between different individuals and groups may have been, and therefore, how difficult it must be to discern the meanings of material goods associated with these exchanges.

In her innovative work on the enslaved community of Poplar Forest, Heath deals with an essential aspect of identity formation and maintenance: its outward display in the form of dress and adornment. Her article is a departure from most previous research on the emergence of African-American identity in that she begins with the premise that there did not yet exist a sense of African-American ethnicity during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Heath points out that during these early years, “African-American society” was in fact a heterogeneous mix of blacks and Africans that did not necessarily view themselves as
a group. Her focus is therefore on the events preceding the transformation to a more definitive African-American ethnic group, when a myriad of African-born peoples, along with an American-born population of numerous racial categories, actively sought to forge individualized identities.

By taking this route, Heath does not confine her analysis to “ethnicity” or “culture.” Her study of the relationship between identity and adornment on a personal level pulls in other factors that crosscut cultural values such as occupation, gender, and enslavement. This is perhaps the greatest strength of her interpretation, in that the individuals of her study are not reduced to one-dimensional characters, devoid of multiple subject positions. Although Heath questions whether archaeological analysis can be used to address questions regarding identity and the role of adornment within enslaved communities, she nonetheless effectively demonstrates its potential to do so.

Samford’s provocative article on the use of some subfloor pits as ancestor shrines will undoubtedly encourage a number of us to more closely scrutinize the contents of Chesapeake “root cellars.” Like Heath, Samford’s methodology includes the careful contextualization of all aspects of her case study. She begins with a historical and demographic discussion of the West African groups who were most likely to be present in the Tidewater during the eighteenth century, and who might have been likely to use pits as ritual spaces. Notably, Samford centers her attention on the Igbo, Ibibio, and Yoruba peoples. This is a refreshing departure from other work on early African-American spirituality which has tended to rely heavily on drawing analogies from Kongo-related beliefs.

Samford’s persuasive argument that certain root cellars may indeed have served as ancestral shrines is strengthened by her cautious choice of examples. The two root cellars in question both contained artifacts that Samford argues were left in primary context. Moreover, her rigorous analysis of patterns pertaining to placement, artifact association, and symbolism serves as a prime example of contextual archaeology. In the end, Samford successfully manages to take two of the most popular subjects of study in African-American archaeology, i.e. spirituality and root cellars, and adds a fascinating dimension to the discussion.

Steen is also to be applauded in bringing an air of originality to the interpretation of another well-known topic in historical archaeology: colonoware pottery. Like the other authors in this volume, Steen recognizes a strong association between material culture and ethnicity. Yet Steen’s objective is to demonstrate that establishing specific ties between ethnic groups and archaeological evidence (i.e. defining ethnic markers) is not only difficult at best, but self-defeating and reductionist at worse.

Steen uses the examples of colonoware and clay-walled house remains to argue that the accepted wisdom that these objects are solely the products of enslaved South Carolinians is too simplistic. By combining both regional and site-specific demographic, historical, and archaeological data, Steen explains that other ethnic groups could each potentially have also contributed to their production. His research underscores the fact that the social and cultural boundaries we as archaeologists so fervently draw around different groups often get drawn around their material culture as well, and this does not generally reflect past realities. People of very different backgrounds and circumstances exchanged ideas, transforming themselves and others in the process. As Steen posits, they created a variety of “creole” cultures. Thus, no single, over-arching interpretation could possibly fit every scenario where clay-walled
houses or colonowares were used. Consistent with this thesis, Steen pursues more site-specific explanations. He summarizes his finding as follows: “...the Lowcountry creation of colonoware is not something that is pan-African or even pan-African American. It is a local phenomenon...created and used within particular social and cultural circumstances.”

Steen’s research exemplifies the value of comparative, multi-scalar research, and will hopefully encourage others to “think locally” rather than attempt blanket explanations which tie specific ethnic or racial groups to the creation and use of specific objects.

**Concluding Remarks**

It will come as no surprise that the theoretical insights and interpretive schemes presented in this volume move in different directions. What binds these articles into a coherent, unified volume, however, are the authors’ concerted efforts to discard the die-hard “ethnic marker” exercises, and to engage in more rigorous and sophisticated analyses of the relationship between identity and material culture. Importantly, these authors privilege the archaeological record, and demonstrate that the potential for constructing viable and engaging interpretations based on the physical evidence is great.

Ethnicity remains an important topic in historical archaeology despite the recent, and legitimate, critique that it has tragically managed to displace race and racism from much academic discourse. Historical archaeology is no exception, and since Robert L. Schuyler’s important, edited volume “Archaeological Perspectives on Ethnicity in America” appeared in 1980, ethnicity has remained a central subject in our discipline while race is not and never has been. Perhaps this is because it is seemingly easier to connect “ethnicity” (often interpreted as including “culture” or “tradition”) to the archaeological record than “race.” Whatever the reason, the study of ethnicity and that of race can, and should, co-exist in our study of the American past, for groups and individuals consciously identified themselves and others both along what we today refer to as racial and ethnic lines.

In ending, the authors in this volume have confirmed that researching ethnicity is indeed still a worthwhile endeavor for archaeologists. More importantly, they have demonstrated that as our understanding of the complexity of the individuals we study grows along with our recognition that the material record is far more complicated than we may have realized, this leads not necessarily to utter confusion, but to fuller visions of experiences once lived.

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Industrial Transition and the Rise of a “Creole” Society in the Chesapeake, 1660-1725

John Metz

The first century of settlement in Virginia is best characterized as a period of great social, political, and economic experimentation that ultimately resulted in the development of a distinctive colonial society (Greene 1988; Horn 1994; McCusker and Menard 1991; Shammas 1979). Tobacco became the mainstay of Virginia’s economy early in the seventeenth century virtually to the exclusion of all other economic pursuits. The cultivation of tobacco for export, clearing land for more tobacco, and raising corn and livestock for subsistence dominated the lives of colonists in the Chesapeake (Carr and Walsh 1988; Main 1982). By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, the pattern had changed dramatically. Corn and wheat were grown for export, craft specialization and household manufacture were on the rise, and slaves had nearly replaced indentured servants in the labor force (Galenson 1981; Morgan 1975). The society that developed in the Chesapeake was so unique that British officials often made explicit distinctions between the English-born and the “natives” or “creoles” born in Virginia. A trend developed where native-born whites were increasingly singled out by English writers as “natives,” “Virginians,” and “creoles” as they achieved dominance in a colonial government previously controlled by English-born immigrants (Shammas 1979).

The term creole is a word born of the European colonial experience. It is derived from the Spanish word criollo, meaning native to the locality. The first use of the word is in a Spanish chronicle written in 1604 which refers to those born in the colonies of Spanish parents as criollos (Oxford English Dictionary 1971(I):1163). Criollo was quickly incorporated into the English language where it was Anglicized to creole by the late seventeenth century. Like the Spanish, the English used the term to distinguish its colonial-born citizens from those born in the homeland. The need to differentiate between colonial and English-born was based on the perception that the exposure to new climates, cultures, and surroundings influenced socio-cultural modifications within colonial society (Shammas 1979:284-286).

Just as the English began to identify the citizens born in the colonies as “creoles,” the identity of any group depends upon how others perceive that group and how the members of the group, in turn, see themselves. This affiliation becomes “ethnic” when “it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin or his background” (Barth 1969:13). This identity often poses a threat to dominant groups in society and results in some form of discrimination, whether it be prohibited access to resources or outright exclusion from mainstream society. In the 1980s, Randall McGuire explored group formation and boundary maintenance among ethnic groups. He argued that “competition provides motivation for group formation, ethnocentrism channels it along ethnic lines, and the differential distribution of power determines the nature of the relationship” (McGuire 1982:160). These three variables are usually focused in the political or economic arenas of society. This model is applicable to the relationship between England and her colony in Virginia, especially after the political and economic aims of the Crown and of...
the colonists had begun to diverge from one another.

“Creole consciousness” developed in the 1680s as native-born politicians began to replace their English-born predecessors in the colonial government. The English-born leaders were part of a second generation of colonists who arrived in the 1630s and 1640s. Many came with money, while others were minor gentry who maintained their ties with England even as they pursued wealth through the sale of tobacco and land speculation (Bailyn 1959:91). Although native-born colonials lacked the English connections of their forebears, they worked to achieve their goals by developing vital social, political, and economic institutions within the colony. As a result, the agendas of native leaders often ran counter to homeland interests. In 1693, for example, Governor Nicholson complained to the Board of Trade that “the country consists now mostly of Natives, few of which either have read much or been abroad in the world, so that they cannot form to themselves any Idea or Notion of these things.” However, in terms of trade and economy he added simply that “they are knowing” (Nicholson 1692/1693 in Shammas 1979:286).

The tobacco culture that took hold of the economy beginning in the second quarter of the seventeenth century inspired colonists to amass land and focus all of their labor and capital on the cultivation of tobacco for the export market. At first, profits were high enough to discourage the development of local manufactures. Artisans who immigrated to Virginia during this period often abandoned their trades to enter the more lucrative tobacco market (Galenson 1981:127; Morgan 1975:140-141). As a result, a pattern of dependency developed where planters grew tobacco for export in return for finished goods from England. Total reliance on an outside market stagnated Virginia’s economy. Anthony Langston painted a dire picture of the colony in 1657 when he wrote “wee suffer for want of Markets, Trades, and Manufactures” (Langston 1921:103). While colonial leaders continually worked to promote economic diversification, their efforts met with failure until prolonged slumps in the tobacco market gave local industry the push it needed to become a permanent element of the economy. A survey of seventeenth-century industrial sites identified in York County, James City County, and the City of Williamsburg in the Virginia Tidewater documents the diversification of the economy, an increase in craft specialization, and the emergence of new patterns of local exchange between 1660 and 1725 (Figure 1). An archaeological consideration of these sites reveals an increase in local manufactures associated with the trend towards greater self-sufficiency.

**Industrial Development in Seventeenth-Century Virginia**

Virginia was initially settled by the Virginia Company of London as a speculative venture designed to furnish England with staple commodities and provide dividends for investors. The Virginia Company envisioned a mixed economy of commerce, manufacturing, and farming. Virginia offered a seemingly endless supply of resources like lumber and hides which the English were formerly “enforced to buy, and receive at the curtesie of other Princes” (Billings 1975:15). The first settlers also explored the commercial viability of a wide range of crops and industries. Glass, silk, pitch, tar, and soap ash were tried with mixed success (Billings 1975:7-9; Middleton 1992:25). Likewise, many varieties of seeds were planted to test their efficacy. In 1612, John Rolfe began testing a new variety of tobacco from the West Indies in an effort to improve upon the bitter, North
Figure 1. James City County, York County, and the City of Williamsburg. Map by the author and Heather Harvey.

American leaf that Sir Francis Drake had introduced to England in 1586 (Billings 1975:175-176; Middleton 1992:28-29). After two years of experimentation, John Rolfe shipped four hogsheads of the West Indian strain of tobacco to London, touching off a craze that would shape the direction of the colony over the next century and a half.

Despite the insatiable demand for tobacco after 1614, Virginia remained little more than a struggling military outpost. In 1618, the Virginia Company attempted to reorganize the colony under the Charter of 1618 which established four municipalities to serve as “focal points” for the Virginia colony (Craven 1970:129). James City, Charles City, Henrico, and Kecoughtan (later Elizabeth City) were incorporated to promote trade and commerce and provide settlers protection from Indian attack. The municipalities each consisted of 3000 acres worked by the company’s tenants at half shares to pay salaries of colonial officers. An extra 3000 acres were set aside in James City County for the Governor’s salary (Craven 1970:130). Likewise, 100 acres of glebe land were also set aside to provide the salary for a minister. The charter even included a provision offering
four acres of land in a town for a nominal rent of four pence per year to craftsmen as an inducement to immigrate (Craven 1970:130). In 1619, colonial officials initiated shipbuilding, glassmaking, and ironworking ventures, yet each failed within a few years (Horning 1995:135-136).

Efforts to promote the development of other industries and commodities continued after the demise of the Virginia Company in 1624. John Harvey, who served as governor between 1630 and 1635, and again between 1637 and 1639, attempted to create a thriving economic center in Virginia by promoting an act making Jamestown the sole port of entry for the colony (Horning 1995:146). The Crown bristled at this attempt to control trade and promptly called on Virginia’s government to revoke the legislation. Although the colonial officials refused, the Crown’s lack of support made it difficult to enforce the Act, thereby rendering it ineffective (Horning 1995:147-149; Middleton 1992:43).

Harvey also worked to promote economic development by privately funding industrial ventures in the 1630s. He established an industrial compound consisting of several different crafts on property he owned located near the middle of New Towne on Jamestown Island (Horning 1995:169). Two rectangular kilns (Structures 111-A and 111-B) and a circular pit possibly used as an iron bloomery (Structure 111-C) represent the first crafts to be established in this area (Cotter 1958:110-111). While the exact function of the kilns remains unclear, burned oyster shell discovered on the floors of both kilns suggests that they were used at least once to slake lime. The pit used for smelting iron was dug into one of the adjacent kilns (Structure 111-B). This bloomery consists of a circular pit measuring ten feet in diameter by one foot in depth where bog iron was smelted to produce bar iron (Cotter 1958:110). A large, brick structure (Structure 110) discovered twenty feet east of the kilns and the bloomery appears to have been another component of Harvey’s industrial enclave. Analysis of this structure and the recovered assemblage suggests it functioned as a brewhouse and an apothecary (Cotter 1958:102-109; Horning 1995:169). Enthusiasm was not enough to spark industry at Jamestown, however. Despite Harvey’s efforts, all of these ventures disappeared by mid-century.

Efforts to diversify Virginia’s economy continued to fail throughout the first half of the seventeenth century precisely because tobacco was so profitable. The lucrative tobacco market encouraged planters to concentrate on a single commodity for the export market while virtually all goods and services were purchased from abroad. Planters even continued to turn a profit in the 1630s when tobacco prices tumbled nearly 90 percent from three shillings to three pence a pound (Middleton 1992:42). The conditions necessary to promote diversification were absent in the Chesapeake until after 1660. By this time, declining profits and a limited market necessitated the development of a local economy and alternative economic ventures appeared more attractive relative to tobacco.

Virginia’s social and economic climate was in the midst of change early in the 1660s when William Berkeley returned to serve as governor of the colony for a second time following the death of Oliver Cromwell and the restoration of the monarchy. By the time Berkeley arrived in Virginia, England passed the first of the Navigation Acts declaring exclusive rights over Virginia’s market. While these acts benefited English merchants, they did so at the expense of the colonial economy. The acts, declared “mighty and destructive” by Governor Berkeley, constricted the slump- ing tobacco market and prohibited cheaper Dutch goods and services (Middleton 1992:113). The volatile cycle of boom and bust that resulted made it impossible for planters
to rely solely on tobacco as they had in the past. Continued instability in the tobacco market prompted farmers to diversify their agricultural strategies to include corn and grain and engage in animal husbandry on a larger scale (Carr and Walsh 1988:145-146). A more diverse planting regimen diminished the reliance on English markets by allowing planters to exchange surplus produce and meat for locally available goods and services. Moreover, increased exchange encouraged the development of a host of crafts to meet the demand for services and finished goods. Ultimately, alternative sources of income, or “import replacement activities,” resulted in the growth of a “complex network of local interdependence” that helped buffer Chesapeake planters against fluctuations in crop prices (Carr and Walsh 1988:145-146).

Occupational data from York County, Virginia (Table 1) reflects an increase in the number and variety of trades corresponding to agricultural diversification during the second half of the seventeenth century. The York County records are unique for their volume and consistent coverage from the 1630s through the eighteenth century. Historians with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation compiled a database representing a 10 percent sample of the York County records providing scholars with a valuable research tool. A total of twenty-one trades are represented in the York County records database for the period between 1640 and 1740 (Table 1). Between 1640 and 1669, sixteen individuals identified were engaged in seven trades, including a sawyer, a builder, an ordinary keeper, two planters, two cooper, two gunpowder makers, and seven carpenters (York County Records [hereafter YCR]). With the exception of the ordinary keeper and the gunpowder makers, all of the individuals represented during this period were involved in trades associated with growing tobacco or preparing it for export. Planters grew tobacco, sawyers cut the wood needed for barrels and buildings, coopers made the hogsheads that would carry tobacco to England, while builders and carpenters constructed houses and tobacco barns.

Ten trades are represented in the sample between 1670 and 1699 (YCR). While a majority (75%) of the 43 York County residents counted were involved in tobacco-related occupations during this period, the number of trades not associated with tobacco cultivation increased from two to five. Ordinary keepers (two) and gunpowder makers (three) continued to be represented between 1670 and 1699, while new occupations included a brickmaker, a joiner, and a millwright (YCR). While carpenters, sawyers, coopers, and gunpowder makers were still present, the appearance of a joiner suggests that finished goods that could only be obtained from abroad earlier in the century were being produced in York County after 1690. Likewise, the presence of brickmakers and millwrights may indicate that more services were available locally. Moreover, the appearance of a millwright in 1698 suggests that planters were growing enough corn and grain to support a local mill.

The trend towards greater diversification continues after 1700 when the number of craft-related trades represented in the York County record database outnumber those associated with tobacco and agriculture for the first time (YCR). Over half (57%) of the 44 individuals identified in the records between 1700 and 1729 were artisans as compared to only 11 artisans out of 43 (25%) recorded between 1670 and 1699. Twelve trades were identified for the period between 1700 and 1729, including six trades which are represented for the first time in the York County. The occupations which appear in the records after 1700 are all craft-related, including an armorer, a brazier, ten bricklayers, three glaziers, a silversmith, a clock/watchmaker, and
The Archaeology of Seventeenth-Century Industrial Sites

The growth of local Chesapeake industry is also reflected in the archaeological record. In Virginia, nineteen industrial sites dating between 1640 and 1725 have been identified in York County, James City County, and the City of Williamsburg (Figure 2). Fourteen of the sites are located in James City County, reflecting the sustained research on Jamestown Island as well as archaeology conducted as part of development along the James River. Four industrial sites were identified in the City of Williamsburg while only one has been found in York County. The sites include a glass furnace, the remains of a bloomery, three potteries, and fourteen brick-producing sites (Table 2). With the exception of a brick kiln

| Table 1. Trades in York County, Virginia, listed by decade. |
|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Trade             | 1640| 1650| 1660| 1670| 1680| 1690| 1700| 1710| 1720| 1730| 1740| Total |
| Armorers          |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1   |     |     |     |     | 1    |
| Braziers          |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1   |     |     |     |     | 1    |
| Brickmakers       |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1   |     |     | 2   |     | 3    |
| Bricklayers       |     |     |     | 3   | 3   | 4   |     |     |     |     |     | 10   |
| Builders          |     | 4   |     | 1   |     | 1   |     |     |     |     |     | 9    |
| Joiners           |     |     |     |     |     | 1   |     |     |     |     |     | 1    |
| Carpenters        | 2   | 3   | 2   | 7   | 2   | 14  | 2   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5    | 45   |
| Cooper            | 1   | 1   | 4   | 1   | 1   | 1   |     |     |     |     |     | 9    |
| Cutters           |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1    | 1    |
| Founders          |     |     |     | 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1    |
| Glaziers          |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1    | 1    |
| Gunpowder makers  | 2   | 1   | 1   | 1   | 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     | 3    |
| Gunsmiths         |     |     |     |     |     | 1   |     |     |     |     |     | 1    |
| Joiners           |     | 1   | 1   | 1   | 3   | 2   | 2   |     |     | 10  |     | 6    |
| Millwrights       |     |     |     | 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1    |
| Ordinary keepers  | 1   | 2   |     | 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 3    |
| Painters          |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1    |
| Planters          | 1   | 1   | 3   | 1   | 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     | 7    |
| Sawyers           | 1   |     |     | 2   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 3    |
| Silversmiths      |     | 1   |     | 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 2    |
| Clock/watchmakers |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1   | 2   |     |     | 3    |
| Whitesmiths       |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1    | 1    |

Table 2: Summary of trades in York County, Virginia, listed by decade.

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The growth in the number of artisans and trades in York County demonstrates the increasing complexity in the local exchange networks as Virginians became less dependent on English goods and services. The appearance of bricklayers and glaziers or glassworkers suggests an increase in construction in York County while the arrival of a silversmith and clockmaker may indicate that local residents had enough expendable income by 1700 to support businesses involved in the production and repair of luxury items. Likewise, braziers produced brass items while whitesmiths provided finished tin products for local residents. The presence of an armorer in addition to a gunpowder maker and a gunsmith may relate to Williamsburg’s new role as the colonial capital after 1699.
(Structure 127) located on Jamestown Island, all of the industrial sites postdate 1660.

The excavation of the Drummond site in James City County produced evidence of a primitive bloomery operation dating to the 1680s (Outlaw 1975a). The evidence is unusual given the fact that large-scale bloomeries and foundries were not established in Virginia until the 1720s (Harvey 1988). William Drummond was a gentleman planter who leased land on the 2000-acre Governor’s Land tract. Although Drummond was executed in 1676 for joining Nathaniel Bacon in an attempt to overthrow the colonial government under William Berkeley, his family and servants remained on
the plantation until the early eighteenth century (Outlaw 1975a). Six large pits filled with charcoal, slag, brick, oyster shell, and iron discovered near the site of the Drummond house may represent the remains of a small-scale plantation forge or bloomery. Artifacts excavated from the pits suggest the operation was active between 1680 and 1720 (Outlaw 1975a). Bloomeries were used to produce iron from locally available bog iron, a low grade iron ore. The bog iron was roasted in shallow pits with charcoal and lime. The lime acted as a flux to cause the iron to separate at a low temperature. James Deetz argues that this technology which was “small in scale, and simple in execution, is ideally suited for modest production to meet immediate needs” (Deetz 1993:68). Evidence for the production of domestic tobacco pipes was also found. Although the pipe kiln was never identified, the substantial amount of waster material recovered from the site suggests the presence of a small cottage industry (Harvey 1988; Outlaw 1975a).

Archaeological evidence indicates that William Berkeley established a glasshouse and a pottery on his Green Spring Plantation in James City County. Berkeley acquired the Green Spring property in 1641 and lived there until his death in 1677 (Caywood 1955:3). Always working to promote new industries in the Virginia colony, he raised tobacco, rice, and flax, experimented with silk, made wine, and harvested timber for export. A small glass furnace was identified east of Berkeley’s residence on Powhatan Creek during the first archaeological investigation of the plantation in 1928. The furnace was reported to be of brick construction, and included a brick marked “Aug., 1666” (Carson 1954:12). Although little is known about this site, it very well may have been part of Berkeley’s efforts

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<td>Pottery</td>
<td>Ca.1680-1725</td>
<td>JCC</td>
<td>Noël Hume 1963; Pittman 1995</td>
</tr>
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<td>Bloomery/tobacco pipe manufactory</td>
<td>Ca.1680-1730</td>
<td>JCC</td>
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<td>Brick clamp</td>
<td>1695</td>
<td>Wmsbg</td>
<td>Dearytne 1951</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Pottery</td>
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<td>York Co.</td>
<td>Barks 1973; Barks et al. 1984</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Brick clamp</td>
<td>1720s?</td>
<td>JCC</td>
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<td>1720s?</td>
<td>JCC</td>
<td>Horning and Edwards 1998</td>
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</table>
to encourage the development of colonial industry.

The pottery at Green Spring Plantation was identified near the house during archaeological investigation of the site conducted in the early 1950s. Descriptions and photographs indicate that the kiln was a rectangular updraft-type kiln with a firebox beneath a firing chamber (Caywood 1955:12-13). Excavation of the kiln produced utilitarian earthenwares in a variety of forms including lead-glazed and bisque vessels, flat roofing tiles, and pan tiles (Caywood 1955:13; Smith 1980:63). Datable artifacts excavated from the kiln indicates that the site was active between 1665 and 1680. The paucity of Green Spring pottery on other sites in the region suggests that either the manufactory was short-lived or that it produced items for use on Green Spring Plantation (Smith 1980:96).

Other potteries in the region include the Challis site in James City County and the William Rogers Pottery in Yorktown. Ivor Noël Hume excavated the Challis site in the 1960s. Although a kiln was never identified, the salvage excavation of a large pit eroding out of the bank into the Chickahominy River produced enough waster material to suggest a ceramic production site that began sometime around 1680 and remained in operation until 1730 (William Pittman, personal communication, 1995). Products from the site consist primarily of lead-glazed and bisque utilitarian earthenwares. Like the ceramics produced on Green Spring Plantation, pottery from the Challis site does not appear on many sites, suggesting that it was for use on a single plantation or for very limited distribution.

The William Rogers pottery, on the other hand, was a far more ambitious undertaking. Although the name of William Rogers is historically linked to the site, he appears to have been an entrepreneur who funded the pottery and may not have been involved in the actual production of ceramics (Barka 1973, 1984). The pottery might have been in operation as early as 1711 when Rogers purchased the property, although a dated cup buried ceremoniously behind the kiln indicates that it was started in 1720. An archaeological investigation of the site conducted in the early 1970s revealed a sophisticated kiln as well as the remains of an associated factory building. The distribution of material across the site suggests that this production site may have included additional structures and possibly another kiln located on privately-owned property adjacent to the kiln site (Barka et al. 1984). Production continued into the 1740s and included a range of distribution that spanned the Chesapeake (Barka 1984; Pittman, personal communication, 1995). Despite the archaeological evidence for a successful pottery, Governor William Gooch referred to the artisan as the “poor potter” of Yorktown in a report on manufactures to the English Board of Trade in 1730 (Gooch in Barka 1973:292). Norman Barka suggests that this dismissive reference reflected the royal governor’s sympathy for local industrial development at a time when English officials were trying to keep colonial trades from competing with homeland industries (Barka 1973:292).

While an increase in the number and variety of industrial sites in the Virginia Tidewater indicates growing economic diversity, the archaeological record suggests that the technology employed in some crafts may have changed within the context of a plantation economy. The development of Chesapeake brickmaking in particular reflects both the technological shifts that appear to correlate with the trend towards greater economic diversification and increased self-sufficiency on farms, as well as the transition from indentured servitude to slave labor. Brick kilns are often the most common type of indus-
trial feature found on seventeenth and early eighteenth-century sites. To date, fourteen brick kilns dating between 1650 and 1729 have been identified in James City County, York County, and the City of Williamsburg.

The archaeological remains of brickmaking appear to be so common because of their role in the building industry. Indeed, after the Great Fire of London in 1666, contractor and land speculator Nicholas Barbon declared building to be the “chiefest promoter of trade [because] it employs a greater number of trades and people than feeding and clothing, [including] those that make materials for building, such as brick, lime, tile, etc.” (Barbon in Sella 1977:372). Despite the prevalence of earthfast or post-in-ground construction in Virginia during the seventeenth century, bricks were commonly used to construct hearths and foundations, as well as to line cellars. As demand for bricks increased over the seventeenth century, it was more cost effective to burn the bricks needed for the project on the construction site. In Bedfordshire, England, during the early nineteenth century, for example, the price of 1000 bricks increased two percent for every mile they were shipped, while the cost increased 45% for every mile beyond a five mile radius of the brickyard (Cox 1979:11). The cost of transporting brick in colonial Virginia must have been prohibitive given the sprawling nature of settlement.

Bricks were fired in “clamps” and “kilns” throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The construction and preparation of clamps and kilns for firing varied little over time. The brickmaker and his crew stacked green bricks in rows called benches two or three bricks wide. A space measuring a finger’s width was left between each brick to allow for the circulation of heat throughout the kiln. Benches alternated with channels or flues which held the wood fuel. Benches were stacked five or six courses high before bricks were staggered in towards the channels to create corbelled arches. Kilns were typically stacked to a height of 14 or 15 feet (Barka 1984:271). An average-sized kiln could hold between 3000 and 5000 bricks per channel, or a total of 20,000 to 30,000 bricks per kiln (Dobson 1971(I):141; Goldthwaite 1980:179). The structure of green bricks was encased in a shell of fired bricks and plastered over with mud to insulate the kiln. A plug of green brick called a shinlog was placed at the openings of the flues and allowed the brickmaker to control the intensity and distribution of the heat within the kiln by raising or lowering the shinlogs over the eyes of the channels.

The difference between clamps and kilns lies in the permanence of the structures. Edward Dobson, an expert on the industry in the early nineteenth century, defined a clamp as “a pile of bricks arranged for burning in the ordinary way, and covered with a temporary casing of burnt brick to retain heat” (Dobson 1971(I):38). Quite simply, “clamps” were temporary kilns constructed of the material they were producing. Once firing was complete, the clamp was dismantled, leaving only a footprint of burned soil and perhaps a few brick wasters. Clamps were generally built on a construction site to provide brick for a single project. Itinerant brickmakers often fired brick in clamps because they required less labor and expense to construct and burn than larger, more permanent kilns (Cox 1979:11). The major drawback of this kiln type was the inability to control the firing process. Unlike the more permanent structures, the heat could not be redistributed to other areas of the kiln. Consequently, clamp-fired material included a greater percentage of under- and over-burned wasters. Analysis of the brick making industry in Europe has shown that
clamps remained popular in areas where fuel was cheap despite their inefficiency (Goldthwaite 1980:186-187).

Kilns, on the other hand, were permanent or semi-permanent structures built of brick or stone and consisted of a distinct firebox and stoking pit (Figure 3). Dobson defined a kiln as “a chamber in which the bricks are loosely stacked, with spaces between them for the passage of heat” (Dobson 1971(I):38). A common kiln type consisted of a walled chamber above vaulted firing chambers, similar to the “Roman pit-type kiln” (Goldthwaite 1980:178). Kilns were often lined with highly refractory material such as under-fired brick for use on brickyards or for extremely large projects involving many firings. Unlined pit-type kilns considered to be semi-permanent were built to provide brick and tile for large projects or specialty items (Eams 1961:167). Burning times were also shorter with the permanent and semi-permanent updraft kilns due to heavier construction and increased insulation which resulted from burying the firebox (Barka 1984:192). Better insulation also allowed kilns to achieve higher firing temperatures than clamps.

Five substantially constructed rectangular updraft kilns have been identified within a five-mile radius of Williamsburg. Three of these have been excavated, including one at Bruton Heights and two at Jamestown. Another exposed on Jamestown Island was partially excavated in the 1950s (Cotter 1958:80-81). The remains of a fifth kiln recently identified at the Rich Neck Plantation site in Williamsburg appear to match this configuration as well (Metz 1994). All of the local kilns date to a period between 1640 and 1675.

The brickyard on the Bruton Heights school property represents the most intact brick manufactory of the period (Metz 1995; Metz et al. 1997:51-67). John Page acquired the Bruton Heights property in 1655, five years after he arrived in the colony. Like many immigrants who arrived in Virginia during the 1640s and 1650s, Page was an educated man from a prosperous English family (Metz et al. 1997:43). These qualities allowed him to move freely in the upper strata of Virginia society and politics. Page was elected to the House of Burgesses by 1655, and became Sheriff of York County and the head of the county militia in the 1670s. His political career culminated in 1680 with an appointment to Virginia’s Council of State. John Page swore out patents to over 7000 acres of land in southeastern Virginia and owned several plantations (Bruce 1935:253). His Middle Plantation holdings included much of what was to become the City of Williamsburg in 1699.

The archaeological evidence from the site includes an irrigation ditch, three clay tempering areas, several pugmills and water barrel stations for mixing, and an earthfast structure, probably used as a molding or drying shed, all symmetrically organized around a single kiln (Figure 4). The symmetrical placement of the activity areas reflects the different stations involved in the brick and tilemaking process. A carved brick cartouche bearing Page’s initials and the date 1662 (when the construction of his manor house was likely completed) indicates that the brickyard was active during the early 1660s. Judging from the elaborate kiln and complex brickyard, Page commissioned an English-trained brickmaker for the construction of a manor house, a large brick dependency and, perhaps, several other brick structures at Middle Plantation. The Bruton Heights kiln measured 12 x 11.5 feet and was excavated to a depth of three feet (Metz et al. 1997:57-59). Three channels extended to the rear wall of the kiln. Although a kiln with three “eyes,” or openings, would have had four benches, only portions of the two outermost benches survived in the Bruton Heights kiln. The
Figure 3. Plan of the Page kiln at Bruton Heights. Drawing by Kimberly Wagner and Heather Harvey.
walls and the floor were unlined, indicating that the kiln was of the semi-permanent type with an estimated life-span of three to four years (Cherry 1991:192; Eams 1961:167). The firebox is unlined, suggesting it was semi-permanent, while artifacts recovered from the site indicate that flat roofing tile, molded and carved brick, and pavers were produced at the site (Metz et al. 1997:63-67).

The other rectangular updraft kilns are similar to the example at Bruton Heights in both form and product. Structure 127 at Jamestown consisted of a subterranean firebox measuring 11 x 9 feet, and excavated to a depth of five and a half feet (Cotter 1958:145). Three benches measuring two bricks wide and two channels were identified within the firebox. The firebox was unlined, indicating that it was for a short-term project. Although John Cotter describes Structure 127 as a “probable first-quarter 17th-century enterprise,” based on the domestic tobacco pipe stem fragments found in the kiln fill, it is more likely that this kiln operated some time around the 1650s based on its location in “New Towne,” as well as from our current understanding of domestic pipes and their temporal affiliation (Cotter 1958:145-147; Emerson 1994; Mouer 1993:124-146).

Structure 102 is a massive, brick-lined kiln which measures 19 x 25 feet (Cotter 1958:96-98; Harrington 1950:23). Excavation revealed a large, brick-lined firebox with the remains of five channels and six benches.

Figure 4. Plan of Page brickyard at Bruton Heights (map by Kimberly Wagner and Heather Harvey).
Benches were three bricks wide and stacked in a herringbone pattern to facilitate heat distribution throughout the kiln. Presence of a replaceable brick lining indicates that Structure 102 was a permanent kiln. Artifacts recovered from Structure 102 suggest that the kiln was built to produce brick and roofing tile for several structures or a public building project. J.C. Harrington speculates that Structure 102 must pre-date 1683 because a land patent signed by Nathaniel Bacon in that year makes no mention of a kiln (Harrington 1950:28). Likewise, subsequent property deeds for the area surrounding the kiln are silent on the matter. The size of this kiln suggests it may have been built in response to the Cohabitation Act of 1662 which called for the construction of thirty brick buildings at Jamestown (Cotter 1958:96-98; Harrington 1950:23).

Although Structure 65 on Jamestown Island was identified as a brick kiln by archaeologist H. Summerfield Day in 1935, it was never completely excavated (Cotter 1958:74-77, 80-81). Judging from the limited data that exists, this kiln consists of a subterranean fire-box and stoking pit. Archaeologists determined that Structure 65 produced brick and roofing tile for Structure 31, “a substantial foundation of a brick house” (Cotter 1958:77). Given the location of Structures 31 and 65 on the “Sherwood Tract,” Cotter speculates that the structure and the kiln may have belonged to William Sherwood, whose house was recorded on the Ambler Plat dated 1680 (Cotter 1958:74-77). As such, Structure 65 appears to date to the third quarter of the seventeenth century.

Very little data exists for the kiln identified at Rich Neck Plantation located in Williamsburg. The Rich Neck property was originally patented by George Minifie in 1635, and passed to Richard Kemp upon Minifie’s death in 1644 (Muraca 1993:7). Thomas Ludwell, a colonial aristocrat who began serving as Secretary of State of Virginia in 1660, acquired the property sometime around the mid-seventeenth century. The Rich Neck property remained in the Ludwell family until the early nineteenth century (Muraca 1993:7-9). The Rich Neck kiln was identified by ground penetrating radar in 1994 (Metz 1994). A single test unit measuring one square-meter revealed the southwest corner of a subterranean firebox revealing scorched clay, charcoal, and brick fragments. A layer of burned oyster shell covering the floor suggests that lime was also prepared in this kiln. Based on this limited evidence, the Rich Neck kiln appears to be a semi-permanent kiln that probably dates to the construction of additions made to the manor house by Thomas Ludwell after he acquired the property at mid-century (Metz 1994; Muraca 1995).

The remains of brick clamps typically are ephemeral because they were completely dismantled after firing. While dating these features is difficult, most clamps were burned near the building under construction making a temporal attribution possible (Metz and Russ 1991). Nine clamps pre-dating 1725 have been identified in York County, James City County, and the City of Williamsburg. The remains of two clamps were identified on the campus of the College of William & Mary. Both appear to relate to the construction of the Wren building in 1695. Although the Wren building was constructed on top of the clamps, portions of both clamps were exposed during renovations in the early 1950s (Dearstyne 1951). Evidence of clamp technology has also been identified on Jamestown Island. Although few diagnostic artifacts were found in association with the scorched footprints of two kilns identified in 1993, both appear to relate to the construction of the Ambler House in the 1720s (Horning and Edwards 1998). Five early eighteenth-century kilns (sites 44JC84, 44JC86, 44JC87, 44JC89, and 44JC99) have also been identified at the
Governor’s Land at Two Rivers development in James City County (Brown 1986:152; Outlaw 1975b).

All five of the rectangular updraft kilns identified in Williamsburg and James City County date between 1640 and 1680, while the nine clamps considered in the survey postdate 1690. This pattern may reflect a transition in brickmaking from a trade practiced by craftsmen and indentured servants who were formally trained in the English manner of brickmaking to a by-employment where plantation owners with little or no training in brickmaking augmented their agricultural income by firing brick using the easiest technology available. Lois Green Carr and Lorena Walsh observe that prior to 1700, “white male servants or free laborers performed almost all artisanal work” (Carr and Walsh 1988:163). Indeed, brickmakers began to arrive in increasing numbers beginning in the mid-seventeenth century when their services came into demand. For example, Edwin Malin acquired a respectable estate firing bricks in York County in the 1680s, as did John Kingston, who was active in the same area in the 1690s (Bruce 1935:140). Likewise, many of the brickmakers trained in England came over as indentured servants. In the 1640s, Tidewater resident John Townes brought William Eale over from England because of his ability to make bricks (Bruce 1935:141). Furthermore, the English training of these artisans may account for the medieval style of the rectangular updraft kilns. Carl Bridenbaugh notes that “skilled artisans took with them the medieval English craft tradition as part of their cultural baggage” (Bridenbaugh 1950:3).

Based on this survey, it appears that clamps supplanted the more substantial rectangular-updraft kilns in the Virginia Tidewater as early as the 1690s. Several possible explanations exist for this transition. Clamps were often considered to be cheaper to build and easier to burn than the more permanent types of kilns despite greater waste. In the Hudson Valley, for example, Richard O’Conner, argues that “brickmakers selected only those portions of English technology which required the least amount of labor and Capital” (O’Conner 1987:52). Likewise, clamps appear to have been more attractive for the small-scale, localized production of brick for foundations and chimneys (Cox 1979:10). Clamps may also have been better suited to bi-employment in agricultural regions such as the Chesapeake. Clamps became the prevalent means of firing brick in the British countryside beginning in the fifteenth century since this technology fit well into the agricultural schedule, and because most of the preparation for brick manufacture was conducted during the winter lull of the growing year (Cox 1979:19; Smith 1985:41). Likewise, the Vanderhorst family began a large-scale brickmaking enterprise on Lexington Plantation near Charleston, South Carolina, in the nineteenth century because it provided employment for slaves at a time of the year when agricultural demands were low (Wayne and Dickinson 1990).

Perhaps the most compelling explanation for the shift in brickmaking technology lies in the transformation of the labor force in Virginia at the end of the seventeenth century. In the early days of the tobacco boom during the 1630s and 1640s, the demand for unskilled field labor was met by free whites and indentured servants (Galenson 1982:126). As tobacco became more profitable toward the mid-seventeenth century and production increased, waves of English immigrants, usually indentured, arrived to maintain the supply of ready labor. Many of these immigrants saw indentured servitude as a way of improving their lot in life despite the loss of a few years of freedom. Before long, skilled labor was needed to build houses and per-
form a wide variety of crafts associated with tobacco cultivation (Galenson 1982:126). Initially, indentured servants filled this need as well. However, the demand for skilled labor continued to grow, and the cost of white workers increased to the point that enslaved Africans became a cheaper alternative (Galenson 1982:126). At first, slaves filled the need for unskilled field labor while indentured servants or a free craftsmen would be hired to complete tasks requiring skill. Skilled labor became hard to come by after 1700 as many skilled artisans abandoned their trades when they received their freedom, choosing instead to plant tobacco or return to England. A planter living in Virginia during the eighteenth century expressed this sentiment when he wrote that, “we have no merchants, tradesman, or artificers here but what become planters in a short time” (Galenson 1982:126). Given this, the increased preference for the clamps by the early eighteenth century may reflect a greater reliance on slave labor as planters burned brick for their own use.

A survey of the nineteen industrial sites identified in James City County, York County, and the City of Williamsburg suggests that Virginians became more self-sufficient between 1650 and 1725. Virginians actively sought to replace imported goods with locally available alternatives. A planter living in 1650 probably purchased most of what he needed from English merchants, while York County boasted a wide variety of services by 1725, including a tinsmith, a watchmaker, joiners, glaziers and an armorer (YCR). Likewise, the archaeological evidence suggests that the Tidewater region developed local sources for brick, glass, and iron. Analysis of the fourteen brick-producing sites in the region reflects dramatic change over time. Early on, wealthy planters like John Page and Thomas Ludwell established brickyards with substantial permanent and semi-permanent kilns on their properties to produce brick and tile for their homes and dependencies. The historical data indicates that these men brought indentured servants with the skills they needed from England. By the eighteenth century, brickmaking was practiced by planters who used impermanent, single-use clamps to produce the brick they needed. In effect, clamps allowed farmers to become more self-sufficient by providing a cheaper alternative to hiring skilled artisans trained to make brick and tile. The massive importation of enslaved Africans beginning in the late seventeenth century undoubtedly played a crucial role in this transition by providing planters the necessary labor for tobacco cultivation, and the trades associated with it.

The transition reflected in brickmaking between 1650 and 1725 reveals how colonists transformed the production of their material world within the Chesapeake’s unique social, economic, and environmental conditions. As posited earlier, competition and the “differential distribution of power” (McGuire 1982) served as the impetus for ethnic group formation in Virginia, and served to temper the colony’s path to eventual independence. Through this one, particular shift in technology, colonists were in essence actively negotiating their socioeconomic relationship to Mother England, and asserting their newly realized ethnic identity as Virginia’s emergent and influential Creole population.
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On the last of the gently rolling hills at the foot of the Southwest Mountains of Virginia’s Blue Ridge, Peter Jefferson built the seat of his tobacco plantation, Shadwell. Jefferson and his wife, the former Jane Randolph, moved their growing family and African or African-American slaves to Shadwell sometime in the late 1730s or early 1740s. Thomas Jefferson was born there in 1743. The Jeffersons built a substantial home in this frontier world, still part of Goochland County. Peter Jefferson traveled Virginia’s frontiers as a surveyor, and drew, with Joshua Fry, the dividing line between Virginia and North Carolina, the Fairfax Line in Northern Virginia, and their famous 1751 map of Virginia. Jefferson was instrumental in the founding of Albemarle County in 1744 and held many public offices, including Burgess and Colonel of the Militia. He entertained in his official capacity, opening his home to his peers—other Virginia gentry, and at least one Cherokee warrior, Ontasseté. His public activities reflected the same frontier culture as his plantation, at once a statement about belonging to the great tidewater traditions of Anglo-Virginians, yet revealing cross-cultural contacts that suggest regular exchanges between colonists, slaves, and Indians.

The Shadwell house burned on February 1, 1770. By this time, Albemarle County was no longer frontier but a rural enclave of comfortable country seats for some of Virginia’s great statesmen. Thomas Jefferson’s few comments about his early years tell historians little about Shadwell. Documents and artifacts offer a complex yet incomplete picture of life on this plantation. Peter Jefferson kept plantation account books, left a will, and the court inventoried his estate after his death in 1757. Jane Randolph Jefferson died in 1776 and also left a will and estate inventory. These documents reveal a well-appointed world at least three days removed from the colonial political and cultural capital of Williamsburg. Recent archaeological investigation at Shadwell uncovered material evidence of the gentility lifestyle the Jeffersons expected even in this frontier world. They structured their plantation landscape to clearly assert their standing in the public realm and within the plantation community of five to 15 whites, and 50 to 60 enslaved Africans and African Americans. Research on the ten-acre domestic core of the plantation established the location of the main house, kitchen-related outbuildings, and a slave quarter area (Figure 1). Among the domestic, work-related, and personal artifacts on the site, archaeologists also recovered a small quantity of native American artifacts in both Anglo- and African-American contexts. These Indian materials, encountered in both the sites of the main house and two buildings known to house slaves, suggest that the entire population of Shadwell had contact with Indian peoples or were similarly curious about collecting local lithics.

How was Shadwell part of the cultural frontier of Virginia in the mid-eighteenth century? In this period Virginia had two frontiers of settlement: the Piedmont, east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, which was supposed...
to be devoid of Indians following the 1722 Treaty of Albany; and the Shenandoah Valley, west of the Blue Ridge, where Scots, Irish, Welsh, and Pennsylvania Germans joined a few Virginia planters to build along the Indian roads connecting Tennessee and North Carolina to Pennsylvania and New York (McCleskey 1991). Monacan Indians were probably gone from the Piedmont more than half a century before Europeans settled there, and according to Monacan archaeologists, the location of Shadwell seems unlikely for Indian settlement (Bushnell 1914; Hantman, personal communication 1996). Despite the fact that Indians traveling east of the Blue Ridge required a permit, colonial records indicate that Cherokees passed between the Valley of Virginia and Williamsburg with some regularity. Archaeological and documentary evidence for Indian, white, and black contact in this setting may answer some of the questions about the nature of this frontier.

The origins of the Indian artifacts recovered at Shadwell provide few clues to explain their meaning in the historic context. Indians produced these objects, but did these items identify native ethnicity during the middle years of the eighteenth century when colonial laws limited the native presence in the Virginia Piedmont? This study looks at how Indians in this period marked themselves within their own society and when visiting others, and asks what would remain in the archaeological record from exchanges between Indians, whites, and blacks on this frontier. The Indian artifacts from Shadwell will be considered in three ways. First is an analysis of the artifacts as archaeological evidence for
tact story of the Piedmont within the general cultural patterns there as determined by recent archaeological investigation of native sites. Second is an examination of the colonial documents that offer descriptions of Indian, white, and black interaction during the middle part of the eighteenth century, and considers artifacts as ethnohistorical evidence of contact. Lastly is a consideration that the artifacts may reflect both pre-settlement conditions and settlement contact within the specific historical and regional context of Shadwell.

**Chronology of the Piedmont and Shadwell**

Archaeology has not yet offered a complete picture of the native peoples of the Central Virginia Piedmont. Indians settled along Virginia’s rivers during the Late Archaic Period (2500 B.C. to 1000 B.C.), and established towns, trade, and craft production such as pottery making during the Woodland Period (1000 B.C. to A.D. 1600). Monacan Indians occupied the Piedmont region until the late seventeenth century when pressure from northern Indians forced their migration south. They eventually moved to Pennsylvania, leaving a few people here and there in Virginia and North Carolina (Bushnell 1914, 1930; Houch 1984). The Monacans built twelve burial mounds in the region during their final era in the Piedmont and may have used the mounds for burial as late as the seventeenth century (Hantman 1990; Hranicky and Painter 1993).

The historic period in question, from the late 1730s to the 1770s, coincides with the main settlement and occupation of the Shadwell site, but also represents an era when colonial governments and southern Indians formed alliances to use the other against its own enemy, other Indians or other Europeans. Pressures from northern Indians, along with shifting trade patterns in the colonies, pushed the Cherokees and Catawbas in particular into the arms (figurative and military) of the British in Virginia. The connections between the Cherokee world and the colonial capital suggest that this group had the greatest contact with settlers in the central Virginia Piedmont. For that reason, this investigation focuses on Cherokee activities in Virginia, although the documents make clear that Indians of many nations appeared in Williamsburg or at Western treaty meetings. The exchanges between the various European immigrants, African Americans, and Indians from across much of the eastern seaboard describe a complex cultural web during this period.

**The Artifacts and Archaeological Interpretations**

Did Shadwell’s first European settlers and their African-American slaves collect Indian objects nearby, or did Indian travelers along the road trade or share objects with both the white and black communities at Shadwell? A brief analysis of the artifact assemblage begins to outline the proper questions to ask. But archaeological evidence augmented with the historical record of Indian travel in eighteenth-century Virginia paints a much more complex picture of the possibilities of Indian, black, and white cultural interchange in this frontier world. Looking at artifact patterns on other Piedmont Indian sites provides a framework for establishing the origins of these objects, while the documentary record suggests that there is no easy explanation of how the objects got from their producers to the places where archaeologists found them.

The artifacts at Shadwell recall the familiar objects and materials of planation society in the middle of the eighteenth century. The dominant part of the assemblage affirms the Jefferson’s pursuit of the accoutrements of
gentry culture. The Jeffersons furnished their fashionable house with the best goods available on the Atlantic market: English table wares of white salt glazed stoneware, Chinese porcelain tea wares, Rhenish stoneware jugs, wine glasses with air-twist stems, case furniture with brass hardware, and fine walnut dining tables. The best room could seat twenty for dinner, served soup and dinner courses with complete settings of knives, forks, spoons, and napkins. Guests listened to music and danced with the socially adept Jefferson children. Punch and tea were served, business deals made, and books read and borrowed. Outside, flowers grew in the neatly kept garden, and nearby hills enticed young explorers.

Peter Jefferson established his house as the visual and geographic center of the plantation landscape. From this point, he could look across his tobacco fields to the Three-Chopt Road that connected the Chesapeake in the east to the mountain gaps visible in the west. He surrounded the house with a curtilage of ten acres that contained the necessary domestic improvements of plantation life. To the east of the house stood the kitchen, which also served as housing for slaves, and probably the smokehouse. Located farther east was a group of slave quarters. The kitchen and flower gardens, barns, and other work areas and outhouses stood within this domestic core of the plantation. Fence lines and gates partitioned the slaves’ houses from the Jefferson house, and controlled the approach of visitors to this gentleman’s seat in a frontier county. The surveyor Jefferson measured and proportioned the Shadwell landscape to enforce the social hierarchy of the plantation through clear mathematical and geometrical relationships of the parts (Kern 1996). A sundial set on a post, perhaps in the garden, oriented its viewers to the enlightenment idea that time and space could be measured and kept (CsmH: PJAB:19).

Because the artifacts of the dominant culture are so clearly defined on this site, the few objects that fall outside this pattern are easy to identify. Excavations around the quarter area and kitchen revealed artifacts related to the daily tasks and domestic activities of slaves. Additionally, a few artifacts are unique personal objects, some of which may have cultural significance. The correlation of specific artifacts to African American cultural activities remain open to debate (Singleton and Bograd 1995; Upton 1996), despite the assertions of some archaeologists. Shadwell produced a number of artifacts that archaeologists have associated with the ethnicity of slaves, including water-worn or polished pieces of ceramic, shell, and stone; blue, yellow, and black beads; and eleven sherds of colonoware pottery (Ferguson 1992:116-117; Heath 1996; Patten 1995:46; Stine 1996; Yentsch 1994:190-194). A large quantity of buttons and some scissors from around the slave quarter area could indicate a tailor in the group, although the buttons and beads could be someone’s collection of things useful for personal ornamentation, which the general randomness of button sizes, forms, and material also suggests (Heath, this volume). Additionally, the slaves dug a cooking or smoking pit in their yard, using their allotted yard space according to their own needs, or showing a preference for outdoor cooking in the humid Virginia climate (Ferguson 1992:57).

The Indian artifacts from Shadwell (Figure 2) constitute a negligible percentage of the entire assemblage. The 31 or so objects are slightly less than one one-thousandth of the whole collection, numbering over 42,000 items. The Indian objects penetrated both the slave and the free worlds at Shadwell, providing testimony that certain frontier experiences were common. Stone artifacts from the site include 21 projectile points, four other flake tools, and at least two ground stone
tools (Gallivan 1994). Metal objects include one brass tinkling cone and two similarly made cones of iron that may have been used as tinklers or projectile points. A single piece of Albemarle-type cord-impressed pottery represents local Indian handiwork. The eleven sherds of colonoware may also represent Indian influences but have a closer correlation to pottery that probably was made by slaves on Tidewater sites. The distribution of these 31 objects across the site is fairly even over the major historic-period occupation areas. Archaeologists recovered a quartz scraper, among other household debris in the cellar of the main dwelling house, and found four other stone pieces near the house. The kitchen vicinity, an area of intensive food production and storage as well as slave domestic life, revealed five points and one iron cone. Around the slave quarter site, archaeologists recovered seventeen stone objects, two of the metal cones, and the pot sherd. One point was in the contents of a root cellar. Although a small amount of quartz flaking was recovered, suggesting on-site working of the material such as might be found at a prehistoric campsite, no archaeological features indicated a pre-European context.

Excavations of other Piedmont Indian sites provide a regional context for most of the stone objects and the pot sherd. Archaeologists of Monacan mound sites report similar quartz and quartzite points and tools, and these materials occur abundantly in the region. These archaeologists also recover Albemarle-type pottery from mounds, testament to the last period of pre-contact, when Woodland Indians established towns, potting traditions, and ossuary burial practices. Similar pot sherds can still be found in river
wash and plowed fields in the greater Piedmont area. However, artifact groups from Indian mounds also include small numbers of stone points and tools made of non-local material, indicating that Indians traded across the mountains to the west and between tribes with some regularity. Of the 26 stone items from Shadwell, two are of distinctly non-local material, varieties of chert and flint that occur west of the mountains. Thus, the pottery and all of the stone objects, regardless of origin in Piedmont or Shenandoah Valley Indian cultures, could have appeared at Shadwell during the colonial period (Bushnell 1914, 1930; Hantman 1990; Holland et al. 1983; Mouer 1983).

The brass and iron tinkling cones also bear Monacan associations and symbolize the power held by the Monacans over other Virginia Indians because of Monacan proximity to copper resources. Hantman attributes the strained relations between the Powhatans and Monacans to this very thing after the availability of European copper in Virginia after 1607 (Hantman 1990). If the presence of chert and flint tools at Shadwell represents Monacan contact with western Indians, the metal cones represent contact to the east. The iron cones may reflect early trade with Europeans. The evaluation of 31 Indian artifacts from this single site located between mountain gaps and seaward rivers establishes a complex network of trade associations before and during initial European contact, and well before European settlement of the Piedmont.

The possibility exists, then, that when Peter Jefferson brought his family and slaves to the Piedmont, they collected relics during construction of their buildings, tobacco planting, or while walking along the Rivanna. For example, Thomas Jefferson had a lifelong passion for collecting and researching the artifacts of other cultures. *Notes on Virginia*, published in 1787, contains Jefferson’s catalog of Indian demographics, languages, and histories. When, as President, he commissioned Virginians Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to find the Northwest Passage, he also charged them to send back cultural artifacts, natural specimens, and botanical samples for his further documentation of the North American continent. In *Notes*, he recalled that “thirty years before” he followed a group of Indians to a mound on the Rivanna River, where he watched them mourn (Jefferson in Peden 1982:100). Thus a young Thomas Jefferson becomes a prime suspect for bringing home, and into the house, the artifacts of his native land’s earlier inhabitants. There are no documents to suggest who in the slave community may have collected these items. One additional find reflects the eighteenth-century interaction of settlers and Indians: a roughly made escutcheon plate of the sort made by the Europeans for trade guns. Historical evidence indicates that European guns completely replaced the lithic weaponry of southern Indians by the end of the first quarter of the eighteenth century (Hatley 1995:46). The escutcheon plate appeared near the slave quarter and yields no further information about whether a gun passed from white to Indian to black, white to black, or whether a slave, possibly an artisan, collected scrap brass.

**Ethnohistorical Interpretations of Travel Through Colonial Virginia**

The historic record describes a variety of social and diplomatic occasions for cultural interaction on Virginia’s frontier. Overnight accommodations of whites in the Indian world and Indians in the white world suggest that, like other rules of etiquette, the degree of comfort and privacy offered depended on the relative status of visitors and their hosts within their own societies and to each other. On occasion they camped together when
traveling. Often, a party visiting the other’s town on business pitched their own camp in the town or just outside its boundaries. When the meeting held high diplomatic value, the host offered a house in town to the guest. Planters allowed passing Indians to camp on their land or in outbuildings, but little record remains of the sleeping arrangements made on plantations for Indian guests who were friends of the planters.

En route from Big Island at Holston to Chote in 1761, Henry Timberlake and two companions camped with seven or eight Cherokee hunters they happened upon. They shared the Indians’ dinner of venison “dipped in bears oil, which served for sauce.” Timberlake lay down to sleep next to an Indian on a large bear skin and “[believed] his companions did the same.” (Timberlake 1765:14-15). The Indians shared both their food and bedding with the white woodland travelers. Although their camp included fewer than a dozen people, Timberlake was unsure of the accommodations given, or taken by, his interpreter and aide. Perhaps the Indians had their small shelters of skins on poles, obscuring Timberlake’s view of his mates’ sleeping arrangements, or perhaps they were spread through the woods. If Timberlake commented on sharing a bear skin because it was an unusual situation, the close quarters with the Indians were not unusual enough to engage his full attention to where the other white men slept.

When they reached the Indian town, the chief Ostenaco (Figure 3) gave Timberlake “a general invitation to his house, while I resided in the country.” (Timberlake 1765:31). Whether the chief’s language was symbolic or literal, the chief expected to offer an official emissary accommodations equivalent to his own, if not his own. Timberlake smoked, ate, drank, and celebrated with the Indians before seeking the quietude of King Kanagatucko’s hothouse, but he was surrounded by crowds of Indians at his bedside. All the smoking and curious onlookers prevented much rest and the bed provided little comfort for the white man. It was ”composed of a few boards, spread with bear-skins, without any other covering,” though the house was too hot for Timberlake’s own blanket (Timberlake 1765:35).

Timberlake’s mission of goodwill to the Cherokees afforded him a level of accommodation that was not automatic for all business transactions in Indian territory. At the 1752 Treaty of Loggs Town, the commissioners sent by Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie, including Joshua Fry, Lunsford Lomax, and

Figure 3. Austenaco or Ontasseté, from a 1762 engraving. Courtesy National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.
James Patton, halted three miles from Shonassim’s Town for preliminary peace rituals which involved dismounting, smoking the calumet, and firing salutes with a small group of Delaware Indians. The Virginians pitched their camp on the river bank, outside of town and up river, and raised the colors. They later went to the town to be met by the co-chiefs who “dressed after the English Fashion, had Silver Breast Plates and a great deal of Wampum.” The Governor’s commission heard an address by the chiefs that began, “You have come a long journey and have sweated a great deal” (Virginia Magazine of History and Biography [VMBH] 1905:154-155). The formality of the address echoed the literal and figurative limits placed on the Virginians’ access to this Indian world. This was not a wholehearted embrace of brothers, but a strategically regulated state occasion involving both protocol and formal distance.

Indian visits to the white man mirrored the white experience in the Indian camps. High-level visits demanded the presidential suite, while passersby were evaluated on a fairly personal level. A relatively large group of Indians—Jonnhaty, an Iroquois, with 22 Onondagas and 7 Oneidas—passed through the Valley of Virginia in 1742. They visited the Augusta County home of John McDowell and then camped on a nearby river for several days. Although the Indians’ visit to McDowell was friendly, other residents of the Valley felt it necessary to escort the group on their trip south, provoking suspicion and several incidents of violence (McCleskey 1991:249-252). Similar white reaction resulted in the death of ten Indians in Augusta County in 1765. John Anderson allowed Nockonowe and nine Cherokees to spend the night in his barn, whereupon his neighbors ambushed them in the morning (McCleskey 1991:285-6). Clearly, the hospitality of the trail offered by individuals did not represent how all backcountry residents felt about providing comfort to non-white travelers. Yet murdering Indian guests was unusual enough that most references to Indian visits go into no great detail about accommodations. What else McDowell provided for his guests is unknown.

Plenty of records indicate that Indians who came to town on business set up their own camps and established their separate cultural domain on a traveling scale. For example, Ontasseté camped with other Cherokees in Williamsburg the night before he sailed for England to meet George II. Jefferson wrote: “I was in his camp when he made his great farewell oration to his people the evening before his departure for England” (Lipscomb and Bergh 1904:XIII: 160). Jefferson specified “in his camp,” describing a place separate from the white world, even if the seventy or so Indians occupied the palace green. Likewise, in 1751, when the Nottoways marched into town with a white flag for the Cherokees who had come to council, the two groups met “in the Market place … singing the Song of Peace.” When the crowd became too great, the Indians went into the court house to meet. They exchanged wampum, heard orations, and smoked the peace pipe. They met later at “the Camp of the Cherokees; where making a large Fire, they danced together round it” (Virginia Gazette [VG], 16 August 1751).

The Indian activities that day illustrate a range of social and cultural interactions of the Indian in the white realm. The Indians sat with the Executive Council in the Governor’s Palace, meeting the white men on their ground. They then met other Indians and used a convenient British public building for their own business. But the Indians celebrated in places staked out as their own. The Indians used the public spaces of the capital again in 1777, when Cherokees came to town to talk about running a boundary to prevent encroachment on Indian land.
Following the talk, “they favoured the public with a dance on the green in front of the palace, where a considerable number of spectators, both male and female, were agreeably entertained” (VG, 30 May 1777).

All Indian visits to Williamsburg, however, were not remarkable enough to make the news. Timberlake’s diary indicated that Cherokee women accompanied the parties traveling to Virginia, yet the Williamsburg accounts rarely noted the presence of Indian women (1765:101). The newspapers scarcely mention Indians at the College or Indian School, and local Indians selling wares and produce appear only occasionally in account books. Fees paid “To the Indians for Earthen pans... [£] 0.2.6.,” and “To the Pamunkey Indians for Wild Fowl ... [£] 1.1.6.,” for the Governor’s Palace kitchen suggest that Indians doing business in Williamsburg were neither unusual nor always of diplomatic importance (CWF 3 March 1769; 9 November 1769). Clearly this colonial capital witnessed a variety of Indians from many nations in Virginia and beyond. Groups of Indians visiting Williamsburg on official business ranged in size from two Cherokee deputies in August 1759 (Maryland Gazette [MG], 30 August 1759) to a group of at least 56, including “King Blunt and thirty-three Tuscaroroes, seven Meherrins, two Saponies, thirteen Nottoways,” who offered to join the English against the French in spring 1757 (McIlwaine et al. 1925-1966:VI:38). A larger gathering of Indians returned from the wars in Ohio in May 1757. Newspapers reported the arrival of 100 Catawbas from Fort Cumberland with two Shawnee scalps, followed a few days later by 30 Tuscaroras with another scalp (MG, 16 June 1757). No mention was made of where these troops billeted.

Official records do note that the governor provided a house for the visit of the Cherokee emperor and empress and their son in 1752. The emperor’s address to Governor Dinwiddie began with the formal treaty language favored by the Indian, that they “had come through many Briers, Thickets, and great Waters,” for this meeting. After the official presentations, the governor gave orders to entertain the emperor’s family and attendants “with all necessaries.” They then “returned to the House appointed to receive them” (McIlwaine et al. 1925-1966:V:413-414). While Dinwiddie clearly saw the protocol necessary for this visit of a head of state, he did not make the offer of “his house” that the chief made to Timberlake in Tennessee. Perhaps the emperor’s family lodged with one of Williamsburg’s finest families, or perhaps they were given an adequate empty house equipped with government attendants and black slaves. Another Williamsburg residence that hosted an Indian belonged to Mr. Horrock, who invited Timberlake and Ostenaco (as Timberlake referred to Ontasseté) to “sup with him at the College.” It was here Ostenaco saw a picture of the king and asked to go to England (Timberlake 1765:112).

Timberlake tells us that the Cherokees left “their trinkets behind” when they went to war (Timberlake 1765:50). Descriptions of Indians visiting Williamsburg and London, however, indicate that Indians dressed and painted themselves when on official business. Whites traveling to Indian towns or camps were met by the chiefs wearing some combination of English dress, breast plates, and wampum. The colonial government gave fine suits of clothes to Indian chiefs and emperors and their families, who asked for “some Cloathes proper for people in their Station” (McIlwaine et al. 1925-1966:V:415). In 1746, the Cherokees received “blew cloth for a Suit of Cloaths and six double Breasted Coats and of Scarlet for a Suit and Callico for gowns for a Woman and Two children” (McIlwaine et al. 1925-1966:V:225). In 1752, Ammoscossity returned to Tennessee with “a
handsome Suit of Clothes for himself, his Empress and Son” (McIlwaine et al. 1925-1966:V:415). Governor Dinwiddie sent “fine ruffled shirts” and plain shirts to the co-chiefs of the Six Nations Iroquois at the Loggs Town treaty (Palmer 1968:I:249). The Indians relinquished none of the important material symbols of their power or cultural identity, yet embraced the visual impact of a fine European gentleman’s coat.

For all the close contact and commonalities shared by the Indians and the Virginians in this period, distinctions remained. Governor Dinwiddie offered his interpretation of Indian protocol to his commissioners to the Cherokee and Catawba treaty in 1755. He pointed out what the Indians expected in their peace ceremony, and advised them to express love, but not to promise any guns (Brock 1883-1884:303-304). The Indians needed equal coaching in their pursuit of diplomacy. Timberlake cautioned the Indians he escorted to London on how to act when meeting the king. He told Ostenaco not to offer the king his peace pipe nor to try to shake his hand (Timberlake 1765:126). Everyone involved in these two exchanges understood the other culture just enough to fear major catastrophe from a small breach of basic manners.

The colonial government required Indians traveling west of the Blue Ridge to carry a passport, and Indians on official business were often escorted across Virginia at the expense of the state. The routes taken by Indian visitors to and from Williamsburg depended on their point of departure and destination, and also on their escort. Staging for troops and supplies heading to Ohio in the 1750s took place in Winchester and Fredericksburg, suggesting travel routes north of Williamsburg and along the Rappahannock. Catawbas leaving the capital took the Jamestown ferry, traversing Southside Virginia for home (MG, 16 June 1757). Indians from the west, mostly Cherokees, passed through central Virginia. The usual route brought them from Tennessee, north into the Valley of Virginia, then east to Williamsburg. Some travelers undoubtedly used mountain gaps to the south and crossed Lunenburg County on their journey. But numerous groups came to the seat of Augusta County at Staunton then east through the pass named “Wood’s Gap” or “Jarham’s Gap” by the white settlers.

Colonel James Patton of Augusta escorted Cherokees from his home near Staunton to Williamsburg and back in 1751 (Figure 4). The colonial government paid Patton £50, and his expenses of £44.18.4 ½. An overly ambitious clerk recorded the tavern accounts for which he reimbursed Patton. Patton and an interpreter traveled with a number of Cherokee chiefs, one of whom may have been Attakullakulla, or the Little Carpenter, eight of their councillors, and about thirty attendants. They left Williamsburg in mid-August, following the Chickahominy River to New Kent Court House. From there, they followed the Pamunkey River northwest, stopping at Page’s Warehouse at Hanover Town and Hanover Court House. The next leg of the journey probably followed the westward path of the South Anna River, along which they stopped at Thomas Lankford’s and Winston’s Ordinary. In Albemarle County, they stayed with Thomas Walker at his home Castle Hill. Following the Southwest Mountains to Secretary’s Ford on the Rivanna, they passed over Peter Jefferson’s land, perhaps stopping for refreshment or to greet old friends. They stayed at Ferrel’s Ordinary before heading across the mountains via Wood’s Gap. Patton escorted them as far as Reed Creek where they parted, heading south to Tennessee. The accounts for the trip date its end on September 18, a journey of at least thirty days (Palmer 1968:I:244).
Ontasseté, the Jeffersons, and the Shadwell Artifacts

I knew much the great Ontasseté, the warrior and orator of the Cherokees; he was always the guest of my father, on his journeys to and from Williamsburg (Jefferson [1812] in Lipscomb and Bergh 1904:XIII:160).

The attention to protocol given by both whites and Indians in colonial Virginia describes a code of hospitality that Peter and Jane Jefferson surely followed in hosting their guests. In this case, Ontasseté and some of the other warriors most likely slept in the second downstairs chamber in the Jefferson house. The furniture in this room was almost as good as Peter and Jane’s in the first chamber, though the fireplace was slightly smaller. If this room was the regular domain of some of the Jefferson children, they joined their brothers or sisters in one of the two heated bedrooms upstairs, making way for the guests. If the Jeffersons felt their visitors to be superior in status, then, in the English custom, Peter and Jane probably gave up their room, the best in the house, to the best guest (Girouard 1978:64-65, 108-109). Jefferson’s 1812 recollection implies some frequency of Ontasseté’s visit. Perhaps the second chamber always served as guest quarters. The Indians probably found the beds as strange and uncomfortable as Timberlake found theirs. The Cherokees had their own hierarchy and clearly understood that of the colonists. Housing the chief in the best building and relegating his attendants to the surrounding dependencies appealed to both the Indians’ and the whites’ sense of propriety.

The rest of Ontasseté’s entourage probably bunked in outbuildings or slept under the stars. Perhaps they joined the slave cook and his or her family in the kitchen build-
ing, other slave families in their small houses, or found room in the barns. In inclement weather when the Indians built their small shelters, perhaps the plantation yard was dotted with Indian huts, campfires, and bear skins. The slaves who brought the Indians food may have traded with them and danced with them around the fires, exchanging glass beads for copper pieces, or buttons for wampum beads. Perhaps a slave showed the Indians the strange piece of pottery she found by the river, but the Indians may have shown more interest in the stew roasting in the plain colonoware pot that she brought from the Tidewater plantation where she was born. She may have shown them the white worked quartz found in the plowed fields, and they may have given her an old chert arrowhead carried for good luck. The Indians' visit nearly doubled the population of the plantation for a few days. It surely was an event in the lives of all who resided there.

Thomas Jefferson, a small group of Indian artifacts, and the colonial records of Indian activities place Ontasseté at Shadwell, dining in the best room, wearing a bright blue coat, drinking cider with Peter Jefferson, Fry, Walker, Lomax, Patton, and Timberlake. The reconstruction of Cherokee activities with their white counterparts in Virginia in this period clearly places the warrior and surveyor—and slaves and Indian attendants as well—in the same world, sharing, from time to time, their plantations and homes, food and drink, as well as the problems of partitioning Virginia’s frontier.

Conclusion

The ethnohistory of Indian, planter, and slave contact in the mid-eighteenth century blurs distinctions between the ethnicity of the material worlds of these three groups. Indians maintained parts of their own ornament, such as breast plates, paint, and wampum, even as they requested ruffled shirts and coats with brass buttons. Their own ornaments reflected their Indian-ness to the white world, and maybe their white counterparts expected them to look a certain way. Their requests for European clothes probably do not suggest a desire to become English, but they may have recognized the coats and shirts as status symbols that would give them another diplomatic tool in the white world. Timberlake noted the Indians’ dress in his diary and said the “old people remember and praise ancient days, before they were acquainted with the whites, when they had but little dress.” He commented that the Indians’ “dress is now become very much like the European; and indeed that of the men is greatly [sic] altered” (1765:51). Timberlake tells us that the Indians preferred some forms of European dress and wore it at home, and that they were well aware that it changed their world.

Standard archaeological categorization of various objects recovered at Shadwell allows us to label certain pieces as Anglo, African, or native American, a distinction that may reflect only who made the objects. The ethnohistorical evidence indicates that these groups shared more objects that were the same than were different, yet these groups recognized the other's ethnic identity. Contemporary descriptions of visiting Indians reveal only a few ornaments of native manufacture that would survive in the archaeological record as evidence of an Indian visit, and many objects used by everyone in colonial Virginia that an Indian might carry.

The written record suggests that all these groups recognized status as an important part of identity. Each of these ethnic groups understood hierarchy within their own system and appealed to each other’s sense of rank as part of their interpersonal and diplomatic relations. The presence of brass buttons among slaves may indicate emulation
of people who were free, whether Indian or white. The fact that Virginia probate inventories do not identify among household contents Indian trophies, such as an Indian would customarily present as a gift to a host, may indicate the perceived worthlessness of these objects in the Anglo world—at least to the officials taking the inventory. Even if status overshadowed ethnicity in this frontier environment, regardless of the fact that ethnicity often determined status, Indians used certain badges of their ethnic identity to reinforce their presence in the colonial world. Ethnic markers may have been more useful when one traveled as a visitor in another world, than within one’s own neighborhood.

The 31 Indian objects from the Shadwell plantation may have been relics of an earlier people at the time they were found and kept by slaves and planters there. The projectile points, stone tools, and tinklers were probably also relics of a past era to the Cherokees who carried guns and wore European clothes in the 1750s. Yet these same objects may have served well the Indians who visited Shadwell’s residents and sought to charm their hosts by exchanging some distinct cultural artifact. The use and ownership of objects changed, just as the use of ethnic identity changed according to the needs of its producers, owners, and users.

Endnotes

1 All archaeological records and artifacts, collection of the Monticello Archaeology Department, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Charlottesville, Virginia. See also Kern (1996).


3 The colonoware remains in the slave-related category for the purposes of this study.

4 The ridge that bears the name Shadwell was thoroughly plowed throughout the nineteenth century, providing a mixed, or plowzone, context for all artifacts from the top layer of soil, from the surface to a depth of 7 to 12 inches. While intrasite distribution studies incorporate plowzone material to help determine areas of activity, only features extending below the plowzone can have solid historic or prehistoric proveniences. Deeper features include cellars, postholes, cooking pits, hearth pits, and middens. The possibility exists that prehistoric settlement was superficial and plowed away, but there is no regional evidence to support this thesis. Excavations between the Shadwell ridge and the Rivanna River, on the unplowed sites of an historic-period burial ground and of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mills, recovered no Indian material.

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During the 1770s, scores of men and women fled from bondage throughout the mid-Atlantic and the South in acts of rebellion which slaveowners recorded in newspaper advertisements calling for their return. Three such individuals from Virginia, Charles, Aminta and Benjamin Harwood, demonstrated the racial and ethnic diversity characteristic of slaves at this time. Charles was described by his owner as a “new Negro”; Aminta had “much the look of an Indian,” being the daughter of a slave woman “brought from the Spanish Main to Rhode Island”; and Benjamin Harwood, “the son of a white man,” possessed a variety of useful agricultural skills (Windley 1983a:310, 131-132, 274-275).1 In the language of modern America, all were part of “the African-American community” of the late eighteenth century, a community that historical archaeologists have sought to understand through an examination of its physical remains.

Over the past three decades, anthropologists and sociologists have struggled to define and operationalize the concept of ethnicity. Although definitions vary, most include the following characteristics: ethnic groups are self-identifying, they maintain a myth of a common ancestry and a common past, they share elements of culture (which usually include language, dress, religion), they maintain a link with a homeland, and they perceive themselves as a collective “us” (Hutchinson and Smith 1996:7; Tonkin et al. 1996:23; Nash 1996:25-26; Eriksen 1996:29; see also Mouer 1993:110-111). The notion that a monolithic African-American ethnic community had taken shape by the eighteenth century, and that it left traces discernible to modern researchers, has been an unquestioned assumption among historical archaeologists for too long.

Archaeologists study the material residues of cultural choices. Isolating those choices based on ethnicity from others based on class, gender, occupational status or simply the availability of certain goods in the marketplace is a daunting task for those who study modern cultures. The problem is made even more complex when ethnicity is considered in relation to past people subjected to institutionalized slavery. Historians and archaeologists have only a poor understanding of the extent to which enslaved Africans maintained contact with each other in the New World.2 Clearly, people representing a variety of African ethnicities as well as those shaped by Native American and northern European cultures lived side by side.

This paper is based on the premise that in eighteenth-century Virginia, a structured set of choices that scholars today define as ethnic simply did not exist. Divisions between Africans and African Americans, between blacks, mulattos and mustees, and between urban and rural slaves negated a sense of shared identity. Artifacts, so long used by archaeologists to argue for evidence of ethnicity within slave quarter sites, are here employed to suggest that alternate factors shaped the material world of Virginia’s eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century enslaved population. One such category of ob-

Buttons, Beads, and Buckles: Contextualizing Adornment Within the Bounds of Slavery
Barbara J. Heath
jects, those associated with clothing, jewelry and hairstyle, form the units for analysis in this study.

Since the 1980s, the search for material evidence of ethnic behavior has been an important component of plantation-based archaeology in the American South (Singleton 1991:157-158; Samford 1996:100-103). Central to this discussion of ethnicity is the identification of individual objects, including blue beads, pierced coins, inscribed spoon bowls, and “lithic objects” as “Africanisms,” or more recently, as reflective of an African-American world view (Adams 1987:14; Klingelhofer 1987; Samford 1996:101-102, this volume; Stine et al. 1996). The tendency to focus on specific artifacts as markers of static ethnic categories or of an inclusive “African American-ness,” rather than as tools people used in the formation, maintenance and reinvention of ethnicity, has limited our understanding of the cultures of enslaved people (Singleton and Bograd 1995:24-29). Moreover, the focus on ethnicity itself as the principal explanatory device for interpreting the detritus of quarters, shops and other spaces inhabited by slaves risks diminishing the impact of slavery itself on individual choice and on the creation and maintenance of group identities.

More useful than looking for universals in “African” or “African-American” patterns of behavior is an approach which first seeks to elucidate the past with particularistic, site-specific, contextual data. Such an approach enables archaeologists to trace the ways in which enslaved individuals from diverse backgrounds began to form materially recognizable subcultures grounded in regional economics, community size and demographics, access to market and common experiences that eventually resulted in a shared African-American ethnic identity.

I am not suggesting that archaeologists studying enslaved people should ignore their African heritages, nor that cultural practices learned in the Old World were abandoned wholesale in the New. Further, I am not denying the existence of broadly shared cultural values that resulted in what Mechal Sobel has described as “world view” (Mintz and Price 1976; Sobel 1987:15-20). However, world views are expressed through multiple media, each the result of an ethnic group employing objects that carry specific meanings to its members. Given the diversity of vehicles through which shared beliefs may be expressed, any concept of “African-ness” is too broad to usefully explain the meaning of individual artifacts such as buttons or beads in a given place or time. While the search for expressions of ethnicity should play a part in plantation archaeology, it should be undertaken with the understanding that “ethnic markers” may vary from household to household and from decade to decade, as American-born descendants succeeded enslaved men and women with diverse African lifeways.

Archaeology at Poplar Forest

From 1993 to 1996, archaeologists excavated the remains of a slave quarter at Poplar Forest, Thomas Jefferson’s Bedford County tobacco and wheat plantation. Features, associated artifacts, and soil chemistry revealed the presence of three log cabins (designated structures I, II and III), a fenced workyard and extensive middens that characterized the site from circa 1790 to 1812 (Fischer 1996; Heath 1999; Moncure and Heath 1997) (Figure 1). Architectural and artifactual evidence suggests that members of four households shared the site, while documents provide general clues to their identities. Some came to Poplar Forest from Monticello and were at least second or third generation Virginians. Others like Guinea Will may have been African born, or may instead have come to
Bedford from John Wayles’ Guinea plantation in Cumberland and Amelia counties (Heath 1999).³

Prior to the completion of his octagonal house on the property in 1810, Thomas Jefferson was an infrequent visitor to his Bedford County plantation (Chambers 1993: 1-73). Thus, unlike the enslaved families at Monticello, residents of Poplar Forest had few opportunities to procure goods directly from the Jefferson household. Within the plantation provisioning system, overseers allotted to individual slaves and to families pork, preserved fish, corn, wheat flour and salt, as well as linen and woolens for clothing, bedding and blankets.⁴ On at least one occasion, Jefferson instructed that some of the milk cows—“enough for the overseer & negroes”—be kept at the Bear Creek portion of the Poplar Forest tract (Betts 1944:467). Women marrying within the plantation received a pot and a bed as a reward (Betts 1944:539-40). Beyond these items, no records survive suggesting that other objects were systematically purchased by Jefferson for the slaves’ use. With few exceptions, enslaved men and women living at Jefferson’s Monticello plantation received similar allotments (Stanton 1996:38; Gruber 1990:58-62). As a result of this limited provisioning, most objects associated with the Poplar Forest quarter are potentially rich sources of information on the formation of individual and group identities within a system that allowed

Figure 1. Poplar Forest excavations. Courtesy Thomas Jefferson’s Poplar Forest.
slaves to participate in a variety of independent economic activities and to exercise some degree of consumer choice (Heath 1997).

Among the thousands of artifacts recovered during excavations at the site, archaeologists found over one hundred objects relating to personal adornment. Studies of consumption throughout the mid-Atlantic indicate that items relating to adornment, including fabric, ribbons and clothing accessories, were among the most common commodities purchased by both free and enslaved people during the eighteenth century (Martin 1993:302-309; Heath 1997, 1998). This research suggests that a closer examination of dress should prove fruitful in examining cultural values associated with personal identity and social display, attitudes towards bondage, and ultimately, the beginnings of the formation of an African-American ethnicity. While it is recognized that free Africans and African-Americans in Virginia undoubtedly used clothing, jewelry and hairstyle to convey cultural messages within and beyond their communities, this paper will focus exclusively on dress and adornment practices within enslaved communities.

The Multiple Roles of Adornment

Objects related to personal adornment objects played multiple roles in the past. Men and women used them to define themselves within the confines of the quarter, exhibiting individual preferences by the combinations of buttons that fastened their coats or the arrangements of beads strung around their necks, wrists or waists. Beyond reflecting personal taste, adornment practices functioned as meaningful social markers within the larger enslaved community beyond plantation boundaries, perhaps identifying those seeking spouses, those with specialized occupations, or those with memories of Africa. Finally, adornment contributed to defining people as slaves to the broader population of free central Virginians.

Although the practice of adornment is universal, its meaning is closely tied to the cultural contexts in which it is carried out. Adornment can take many forms: permanent body modifications such as scarification, tooth filing, body piercing, tattooing, and cranial deformation; or temporary transformations achieved through dress, the manipulation of hair, the application of cosmetics and the wearing of jewelry. Within the context of adornment, the use and meaning of objects is often dynamic and multifaceted (Cordwell and Schwartz 1979; Karklins 1992).

Africans sold into slavery came from societies in which adornment established membership in specific lineages or in cult groups, indicated political power or subordination, expressed personal wealth, ensured health or success in one’s occupation, and marked rites of passage. Without the societies and cultures that had sustained them, few specific historic adornment practices appear to have survived transplantation to the New World. While slave masters noted the presence of “country marks,” filed teeth and pierced noses among newly imported, or “salt water” Negroes, scarification, dental modifications and body piercing (with the exception of ears) appear not to have survived even a generation (Handler 1994:114-118; Mullin 1992:28). However, new practices surely emerged within slave communities as succeeding generations of African Americans forged social identities in their new surroundings. The questions addressed in this paper arise from this premise, made tangible through the consideration of adornment items that archaeologists recovered from the Poplar Forest quarter site.
Adornment at Poplar Forest

Archaeologists recovered 122 buttons, two shoe buckles, three small buckles used as knee, stock or hat fasteners, a buckle used to fasten underclothing or ribbons, an aiglet, 35 glass beads, a pierced stone disc, and a tiny fragment of gilt chain, perhaps part of a necklace, from features within the cabins and plowzone (Figure 2). Moreover, the recovery of a steel-edged razor has raised the issue of adornment through hairstyle.

The discovery of this modest assemblage of objects raises broad questions about the extent to which slaves were able to exert personal choice in their appearance, and if such choice were possible, the means by which individuals acquired small luxuries. Further, they encourage us to define the multiple roles of adornment within slave communities, the extent to which individuals blended elements of African ethnic identities through their adornment choices, and ultimately, the ways in which groups established codes of adornment through clothing, hairstyle and jewelry.

These questions arose out of an archaeological study in which specific objects can be tied to a known time, place, and group of people. It seems clear, however, that these questions cannot be answered by archaeology. The adornment artifacts recovered at Poplar Forest suffer from all of the pitfalls of archaeological data in general. Organic objects such as those made of wood, textiles, leather and bone often do not survive. People treasured their jewelry, and particularly valuable pieces were carefully curated. Those items durable and common enough to be recovered are often found in contexts that relate to patterns of discard rather than use, or to post-depositional disturbances to sites such as plowing. Burials provide the most consistent opportunity to understand adornment practices and attendant objects in contexts that are specific to individuals (Handler and Lange 1978:129-131; Handler 1994:114; LaRoche 1994:6-11). However, given the ritual separation of the dead from the living, it is unclear how accurately the use of some items in burials reflects their meaning during life (Jamieson 1995:49; Stine et al. 1996:62-63).

To understand the Poplar Forest archaeological material, it is necessary to place it in its historical context. One useful source is a
study of slave clothing in eighteenth-century Virginia undertaken by historian Linda Baumgarten. Using documentary evidence from plantation records, personal correspondence, store account books and runaway advertisements, Baumgarten (1988) discusses the various types of slave clothing, how clothing was acquired, and the social meaning it conveyed within the larger community.

During the eighteenth century, wealthy women followed the fashions of England by wearing dresses with long, full skirts over elaborately ornamented petticoats. They wore bone-lined stays as undergarments, providing support and promoting good posture. Poorer women’s clothing was simpler and used less and coarser fabrics. It consisted of a short, loose gown called a shortgown or a more fitted waistcoat or jacket, worn over a petticoat shortened to the ankles to facilitate movement (Baumgarten 1988:30, 45). Whether rich or poor, women fastened their clothing with hooks and eyes, laces, or pins (Hinks 1988:5-6).

The well-dressed man typically wore a three-piece suit consisting of a coat, waistcoat, and knee breeches, a shirt and stock, shoes, stockings, a wig, and a hat. Working men, including slave artisans, often substituted a jacket for a coat, trousers for breeches, and used less expensive materials (Baumgarten 1988:29, 48). Buttons of varying sizes fastened men’s clothing, while buckles were used to secure stocks, knee straps and hat bands. Both men and women used buckles on their shoes, although working men and women, especially in the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century, fastened their shoes with strings as well (Hinks 1988:6-10).

Field slaves had their own characteristic clothing style, consisting of osnaburg shirts, cotton jackets and breeches, rough hose and locally made shoes for men, and waistcoats and petticoats for women. Slaveowners often ordered fabrics for field hand clothing in bulk, and typically issued new outfits twice yearly; a suit for spring and one for winter. Cloth often was of poor quality, and clothing generally was ill fitting when new, and stained, torn, or patched before it was replaced (Baumgarten 1988:40, 43-45, 48). Documents suggest that only a few favored domestic servants received hand-me-down clothing from their master’s family; for most, clothing was specially made. Some slaves purchased clothing secondhand (Heath 1998:11). Most slaves had little choice in the style or fabric of their work clothes, but these two attributes were important indicators of occupation and status to outside observers (Baumgarten 1988:39-40, 58, 60-61).

While Baumgarten’s discussion focused on fabrics and styles of slave clothing, this study considers the non-perishable remains of dress from the Poplar Forest quarter. Individuals may not have been able to choose most of their clothing, yet in a society where nearly everyone’s day-to-day clothing was cut from the same cloth, archaeological evidence suggests that people expressed social nuances by purchasing fancy buttons, wearing ribbons or acquiring fashionable buckles.

**Runaway Advertisements**

To contextualize the archaeological data, an adornment database was created using published collections of runaway slave advertisements dating from 1730 to 1826. The database includes all references to buttons, buckles, jewelry, hairstyle, and general statements characterizing the attitudes of specific runaways toward dress.

These advertisements display several types of biases, some of which are specifically problematic for this study. First, slaveowners wrote the advertisements based on their recollections of slaves’ appearances.
While in the northeast these recollections are surprisingly detailed, advertisements written by owners living further south, who often had little day-to-day contact with their slaves, are far less complete. In some instances it is difficult to know whether the frequency of adornment items recorded in the advertisements is a realistic reflection of current practices, or if owners failed to describe fairly common items because they were unaware of the details of slave dress. The results of the study must therefore remain impressionistic.

Second, since young men constituted the majority of runaways in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, adornment information is heavily biased towards that segment of slave society. If, as in many African societies, adornment practices in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America varied significantly by age group and by gender, the advertisements provide little opportunity for observing these variations.

Finally, runaways tended to be skilled artisans or house servants whose occupations afforded them some mobility. These slaves, mostly men, met with more opportunities for flight, and possessed the skills to support themselves in freedom. It is also likely that they had greater familiarity with European styles than did field slaves living on large plantations, and their adornment choices reflect their special circumstances.

In spite of these biases, runaway advertisements provide the most comprehensive and detailed information on slave clothing and adornment available in the documentary record. Like archaeological data, they preserve information that is temporally and spatially specific. The advertisements provide a context for archaeologically recovered items, portraying individual objects as part of an assemblage that together helped to define an individual’s social identity.

**Clothing**

For eighteenth-century slaves, clothing was valuable both symbolically and materially. Through dress, enslaved men and women conveyed their own sense of self worth. “Lennon ... is very fond of dress, very foppish, and assumes an air of importance among other Negroes,” reported a North Carolina slaveowner in 1821 (Parker 1994:686). Fanny was described by her Virginian master as “remarkable for her neatness in dress” while Tinah, from South Carolina, “generally dresses remarkably well” (Windley 1983a:381-382; Windley 1983c:408). A South Carolina slaveowner characterized Betsy as “a thick clumsy made Negro,” yet she obviously saw herself very differently, being “very fond of dressing well” (Windley 1983c:571-572).

Slaves’ clothing choices helped them to distinguish day-to-day existence from special events. In 1780, Isabella ran away from her South Carolina plantation dressed in “mourning cloaths for the death of her mother” (Windley 1983c:571-572). Jack fled a Virginia plantation wearing “such clothes as labouring Negroes are generally accustomed to wear, though ... he occasionally dressed gay,” while the enslaved woman Jenny was described by a South Carolina slaveowner as “dressing gay at times” (Windley 1983b:408-409; Windley 1983c:590).

Within the confines of slavery, clothing took on additional importance as a form of portable wealth and a fluid expression of social status. While many eighteenth-century slaves had few outfits, some accumulated substantial wardrobes, a practice that increased as the century drew to a close. Clothing, either owned or stolen, could be bartered for money before flight, used as a means of disguise, or sold on the run. Slaveowners recognized that by altering their appearances, runaways could pass as free men and
women. Peter’s owner reported from Virginia that “his holiday clothes were taken from him when he first attempted to get off …,” yet this attempt to control his mobility by governing his wardrobe ultimately failed (Windley 1983a:289-290).

Many of the social messages expressed by slaves through their clothing have vanished with the fabrics themselves. Some symbolic systems, expressed through color or form, may well represent choices based on specific ethnic preferences retained by individual Africans. Others may hint at the beginnings of an African-American aesthetic. The runaway advertisements preserve a few glimpses of what may have been much more commonly practiced, and suggest both subtle and bold modifications in dress.

Altering the color of white “Negro cloth” was one possibility available to slaves; adding fabric strips or shapes was another. In 1783, Anthony ran away from a Virginia plantation wearing “his usual outside clothing … of Virginia cloth … sometimes dyed with walnut, maple and other barks” (Windley 1983b:296). In 1770, Jamey “of the Angola country” was reported to have been wearing a “white Negro cloth jacket and breeches, with some blue between every seam, and particularly on the fore part of the jacket, a slip of blue in the shape of a serpent” when he ran away in South Carolina (Windley 1983c:436). In that same year, James and Adam of Albemarle County, Virginia, fled their plantations. Both wore coats with “hearts on the hips behind, and on the shoulders, doubled and quilted, with horn buttons.” Adam was described as an “outlandish fellow … and speaks broken English,” while James was “Virginia born” (Windley 1983a:305-306).

Slaves’ conception and expression of fashion was often at odds with that of European American culture. While some clothing and adornment choices derived from African customs, others may have developed in response to slavery. Combining what European Americans perceived as unlikely elements of dress may have been simply a matter of making do with materials at hand. In their study of runaway advertisements and African-American clothing, however, Shane and Graham White conclude that slaves appropriated and altered such elements of elite white fashion as velvet coats and powdered wigs in a conscious effort to subvert white authority through public ridicule (White and White 1995a:162-163). By the nineteenth century, an African-American aesthetic of contrasting colors, materials and patterns in clothing came to be a recognizable element of slave dress (White and White 1995a:168-173).

**Hairstyle**

Like clothing, hairstyles among enslaved men and women played multiple roles. Slaveowners described a variety of styles, including beards and whiskers, in the runaway advertisements. Dressing the hair provided a form of personal expression and served as a means of identifying ethnic affiliations (White and White 1995b:53-54). One owner from Virginia characterized his slave as wearing his hair “like a Madagascar’s,” while two other men, identified as “dark mulatto” and “mustee,” both wore their hair “Indian-like” (Windley 1983a:2; 1983b:325; 1983c:714).

Evidence contained within the runaway advertisements suggests that slaves may have had more control over how they wore their hair than about many other aspects of their outward appearance. Non-western hairstyles, often mixing shaved surfaces with long hair, persisted among enslaved men throughout the eighteenth century (Smith and Wojtowicz 1989:232; Windley 1983b:118, 148, 188). Some men adopted European styles such as the practice of wearing their hair
queued or clubbed. They combined the basic style with variations, however, such as the wearing of braids in the front or sides of the head, or wearing multiple braids in the back (Windley 1983b:410; Parker 1994:248, 542).

Braiding, or plaing hair in the front, back, or around the head, appear to be most commonly described for slaves living in North Carolina during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Parker 1994:75, 91, 179, 457). Historians Shane and Graham White have suggested that elaborate hairstyles may have substituted for other ritual body modifications, such as scarification, that accompanied the transition from boyhood to manhood in some West African cultures (White and White 1995b:64). By the antebellum period, hairstyles for enslaved men became much more uniform across the southeast, a phenomenon which may suggest the emergence of a more unified African-American aesthetic (White and White 1995b:65-66).

Slaveowners had less call to describe women’s hairstyles. For the most part, their descriptions are simple. Rachel, who was “uncommonly white,” wore “long black hair” when she fled from Virginia (Windley 1983a:396-97). Other runaways had “a bushy head of hair,” and one “wore her hair tied in a knot on the crown of her head” (Windley 1983a:161, 191, 205-206, 232, 262).

Beyond expressing style, hair became a battleground in a war of wills between owner and slave. Nineteen-year-old Hannah’s hair “was lately cut in a very irregular Manner, as a Punishment for Offences” when she ran away from Virginia (Windley 1983a:187). Hair was used alternately to distinguish or to disguise a runaway’s identity. Masters often noted that runaway slaves were likely to cut their hair to avoid recognition, and it is possible that some slaves favored long hairstyles for just that reason. When Watt disappeared from George Mason’s plantation in 1786, Mason noted that he “has had coss paths lately shaved on his head, to conceal which it is probable he will shave or cut close the rest of his head” (Windley 1983b:163). Negro Jack’s hairstyle, described as “pretty long, and … remarkably high on the forehead, and very pointed and low on his cheeks” was altered by a Maryland overseer, who “made a slip from the forehead back, and from one ear to the other, which freedom will very plainly appear.” This attempt to make him more recognizable, however, would only succeed “should the whole not be cut off” (Windley 1983b:185-186).

While rare and often difficult to interpret, hairdressing artifacts can provide a window into aspects of adornment that would otherwise go unconsidered. Archaeologists have recovered bone combs in slave quarter contexts at Monticello (Sanford 1994:126). At Poplar Forest a small buckle, which a resident of the site may have used to hold ribbons in her hair, and an iron razor, were found associated with Structure II. Whether the razor helped perpetuate the “outlandish” styles of a man with ties to Africa, or served instead to tidy the cheeks of a middle-aged, American-born man, will never be known.

**Jewelry**

Slaveowners rarely mention jewelry in the runaway advertisements, yet archaeological evidence from the American South and Caribbean makes clear that slaves and free blacks possessed and wore a variety of adornment items in life and death (Handler and Lange 1978:153-154; Singleton 1991: 158, 161-162; Yentsch 1994:191-194; Deagan and MacMahon 1995:35). Owners most commonly referred to pierced ears or earrings, and less commonly to finger rings and necklaces. It is curious that necklaces were so under-reported in these advertisements, since contemporary artists frequently depicted Af-
frican-American women, both enslaved and free, wearing them.

From 1763 to 1817, slaveowners list earrings of gold, silver, iron, brass or white stone in descriptions of runaways. Enslaved women pierced both ears, while men seemed to have pierced one or both. Eleven of the 35 recorded wearers of earrings appear to have been African born, while one man was born in Jamaica. The advertisements suggest that the remainder were American by birth. Two-thirds of those described with pierced ears or earrings were men. Among the white male population, the wearing of earrings was largely confined to men who went to sea and shared the belief that earrings warded off evil spirits (Fales 1995:146). Only one male runaway, “Negro Joseph” from North Carolina, might have been influenced by this nautical folklore, as he was described as “a nail cutter by trade, but has followed the sea for some time past” (Parker 1994: 362).

At least three runaway women, two from Maryland and one from North Carolina, wore finger rings. Eighteen-year-old Beck, “a mulatto wench … had a brass Ring upon one of her Fingers, but uncertain which,” while thirty-year-old Daphne, probably a “new Negro,” wore “a pewter ring with a heart on it” when she ran away in 1779 (Windley 1983b:82, 234). A runaway in North Carolina in 1815 named Ruth was described as wearing “a silver ring on her left hand,” perhaps as a wedding band (Parker 1994:433).10

In 1732, William Hugh Grove reported on the arrival of a slave ship and its cargo to a Virginia port. He observed: “The Boyes and Girles, all Stark naked; so Were the greatest part of the Men and Women. Some had beads about their necks, arms and Wasts, and a ragg or Piece of Leather the bigness of a figg Leaf” (Grove in Baumgarten 1988:28). Yet slaveowners were curiously silent on the topic of beads, with advertisements from Maryland alone describing their usage. In 1770, two “salt water” slave women, aged 15 and 22, and a boy of about three years “had beads with them” (Windley 1983b:82-83). Two other women were reported to have been wearing “a string of black beads” and “a string of large garnet beads” around their necks during the 1780s (Windley 1983b:269-270, 397). Finally, Negro Will wore “black string about his neck when dressed” (Windley 1983b:183).

Although not noted by slaveowners, it is possible that some enslaved women tied or wove beads in their hair. Travellers’ accounts from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries describe African women using beads in this way. Richard Ligon observed women at Cape Verde, noting that their hair was braided on the sides of their head, “of purpose to tie small Ribbon; or some small beads, of white Amber, or blew bugle … ” (Griebel 1995:219). More than 150 years later, Mungo Park commented on the differential use of hair ornaments among women of West Africa.

In Bondou the head is encircled with strings of white beads, and a small plate of gold is worn in the middle of the forehead. In Kasson, the ladies decorate their heads … with white sea shells. In Kaarta and Ludamar, the women raise their hair to a great height by the addition of a pad … which they decorate with a species of coral (Park in Griebel 1995:220).

Historical archaeologists have recovered beads used to adorn the body from a number of African-American sites. Most were manufactured from raw materials such as coral, semi-precious stones, glass, bone and shell (Handler and Lange 1978:127-129, 144-150, 274-281; Pogue and White 1991:30; Yentsch 1994:190-195; LaRoche 1994; Deagan and McMahon 1995:35, Stine et al. 1996).

Of the 35 glass beads recovered at the Poplar Forest quarter, eight are of a size consistent with stringing (Figure 3). Six are blue,
one is green and the other clear glass. Two are faceted, with the blue example retaining a ghost mark of gilt stars on each of its facets. Twenty seven beads are too tiny to have been strung, and were probably embroidered on clothing or sewn on other objects used by members of the household (Table 1). In addition, archaeologists found a shaped and pierced schist disc in association with a number of beads in the fill of a root cellar, suggesting that it too may have been worn.

Archaeologists recovered 26 of the beads at the site from the fill of a small storage pit or root cellar which sat beneath the floor of a duplex cabin (Structure I). Among these were all of the red beads (2 mm) and all but one of the faceted purple beads (3 mm).

While recovery methods explain some of the difference in bead numbers between various parts of the site—the cellar fill was wet-screened using fine mesh and the soil from plowzone was not—they do not explain them all. Archaeologists did not recover any small beads from Structure II and only found one small bead associated with Structure III. Soils associated with occupation layers from both buildings were wet-screened. Similarly, an examination of bead distributions in plowzone indicates that all but one of the larger beads are associated with Structure I or its adjacent yard.

These data suggest variations in bead use between households. Given the small sample size, it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions. However, it seems clear that residents used beads in more complex ways than simply to affirm a shared ethnicity.

**Buckles and Buttons**

Runaway advertisements described a variety of buckles used in slave clothing, including stock, knee, belt, hat and shoe buckles. Slaves favored buckles made of silver, pewter, pinchbeck, steel, iron, tin, brass, and copper. Slaveowners most commonly com-
Table 1.
Beads from the Poplar Forest Quarter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Kidd Type</th>
<th>Length/Diameter</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1130A/3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>WId3</td>
<td>5.5mm/10.3mm</td>
<td>wound donut, large blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1185A/2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(?)</td>
<td>19.3mm/6mm</td>
<td>drawn, large blue faceted, remains of painted stars on facets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1187A/4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>WId3</td>
<td>3.9mm/7.9mm</td>
<td>wound donut, large blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1207B/1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(?)</td>
<td>16.4mm/7.3mm</td>
<td>drawn, large aqua green faceted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1251A/1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Illa3</td>
<td>3.2mm/3mm</td>
<td>drawn, opaque red with clear green core</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>828A/1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>WId3</td>
<td>7.9mm/11.3mm</td>
<td>wound donut, large blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>829C/1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wllc13(?)</td>
<td>1) 3mm/3.7mm</td>
<td>wound pentagons, purple or amber red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) 2.4mm/3.7mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>829C/2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wllc13(?)</td>
<td>2.9mm/3.6mm</td>
<td>wound pentagon, purple or amber red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>829D/1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wllc13(?)</td>
<td>1) 2.8mm/3.7mm</td>
<td>wound pentagons, purple or amber red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) 2.4mm/3.6mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>829E/1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wllc13(?)</td>
<td>1) 3.1mm/3.3mm</td>
<td>wound pentagons, purple or amber red, one is very corroded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) 2.2mm/3.9mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>829F</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>IC1(?) or IC3(?)</td>
<td>very fragmentary</td>
<td>drawn square, reddish pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>829F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wllc13(?)</td>
<td>2.5mm/2.7mm</td>
<td>wound pentagon, purple or amber red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>829F/1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wllc13(?)</td>
<td>3.5mm/3.4mm</td>
<td>wound pentagon, purple or amber red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>829F/2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>WId1</td>
<td>5mm/6.5mm</td>
<td>wound donut, amber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>829F/2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Wllc13(?)</td>
<td>1) 3mm/2.3mm</td>
<td>wound pentagons, purple or amber red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) 2.3mm/3.6mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3) 3.1mm/3.1mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4) 2.6mm/3.5mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5) 2.7mm/3.4mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6) broken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7) broken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>829F/2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>IC1(?) or IC3(?)</td>
<td>1) 1.5mm/2.3mm</td>
<td>drawn square, reddish pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) 1.4mm/1.9mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3) 1.7mm/1.9mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1301B/1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>WId3</td>
<td>5.6mm/10.3mm</td>
<td>wound donut, large blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1372C/3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wllc3</td>
<td>2.5mm/3.6mm</td>
<td>wound pentagon, purple or amber red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1382A/4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>WId3</td>
<td>3.8mm/6.2mm</td>
<td>wound donut, light blue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Typology from Kidd and Kidd 1983.

Buttons are much more common archaeological finds, and were mentioned frequently in the runaway advertisements. The majority date to the period of 1760-1790. In the northeastern and mid-Atlantic states, 73 to 79 percent of the buttons described were made of metal, while for North Carolina and South Carolina, 60 to 65 percent were metal (Table 3). Typically, slaveowners categorized these as either yellow or white, incorporating a variety of metals within each category.

emented upon shoe buckles, but their descriptions were too few in number to support any meaningful analysis.

The buckles recovered at the Poplar Forest slave quarter support the notion that slaves attained at least a modest degree of luxury in dress (Table 2). Beyond footwear, men had access to accessories such as stocks or fancy hats. By the same token, women apparently fastened ribbons to their dresses or hair.
Beyond color, people used decoration or shape to describe buttons. Horn buttons were noted on slave clothing throughout the eighteenth century. From 1770 until 1790, a variety of other button types began to appear more frequently. These include buttons of hair or mohair, cloth covered and twist buttons, and buttons made of pearl and tortoise shell, wood and leather. The attributes of surface finish (enameled or glazed) or color defined other types.

The following advertisements provide a glimpse of the diversity of clothing hardware worn by American slaves, and the level of detail that some slaveowners could recall. A South Carolinian white described in 1769 “… a likely young new Negro fellow … about twenty-five years of age, had on when he went away a white Negro cloth jacket, breeches and cap, his jacket buttons are only notched cloth of the same, his breeches had no kneebands … ” (Windley 1983c:645). A decade later, a runaway from the same state was described as “… a country born Negro boy named Toby, betwixt 16 and 17 years old … [wearing] a homespun coatee and breeches twilled, a jacket of plain homespun with metal buttons of different sorts …” (Windley 1983c 552). Further north in Maryland, “A Negro Man, named Abel” ran away in 1784. He was described as wearing “a new homespun dark grey cloth coating coat, lined with white shalloon, the buttons of which were white metal, nearly as large as a dollar with a hollow in the middle, and an anchor stamped on them … ” (Windley 1983b:312-313).

Table 2.
Buckles from the Poplar Forest Quarter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provenience</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Decoration</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ER1009</td>
<td>copper alloy</td>
<td>stamped, rectangular</td>
<td>shoe buckle</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER1126A/1</td>
<td>pewter</td>
<td>none, rectangular</td>
<td>shoe buckle</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER1300V/4</td>
<td>copper alloy</td>
<td>tinned, rectangular</td>
<td>hatband?, stock?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER1300V/4</td>
<td>copper/tin alloy</td>
<td>none, D-shaped</td>
<td>hatband?, stock?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER829F</td>
<td>copper alloy</td>
<td>silver plated, chased, circular</td>
<td>knee buckle</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER1207C</td>
<td>copper alloy</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>ribbon / underclothes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.
Button Type by Region/State, 1728-1826

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/State</th>
<th>Yellow Metal</th>
<th>White Metal</th>
<th>Unspecified Metal</th>
<th>Total Metal</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N  Pct</td>
<td>N  Pct</td>
<td>N  Pct</td>
<td>N  Pct</td>
<td>N  Pct</td>
<td>N  Pct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>3  20</td>
<td>5  33</td>
<td>3  20</td>
<td>11  73</td>
<td>4  27</td>
<td>15  100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>7  39</td>
<td>4  22</td>
<td>3  17</td>
<td>14  78</td>
<td>4  22</td>
<td>18  100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>2  25</td>
<td>2  25</td>
<td>2  25</td>
<td>6  75</td>
<td>2  25</td>
<td>8  100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>23  32</td>
<td>23  32</td>
<td>11  15</td>
<td>57  79</td>
<td>15  21</td>
<td>72  100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>9  9</td>
<td>38  40</td>
<td>25  26</td>
<td>72  75</td>
<td>24  25</td>
<td>96  100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>2  12</td>
<td>5  29</td>
<td>3  10</td>
<td>10  59</td>
<td>7  41</td>
<td>17  100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>22  26</td>
<td>22  26</td>
<td>11  13</td>
<td>55  65</td>
<td>30  35</td>
<td>85  100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Button types described in the advertisements for Virginia and South Carolina from the period of 1760 to 1790 were compared to look for regional differences in dress.
Throughout this period, Virginian runaways more commonly wore white metal, while those from South Carolina wore yellow. During the 1770s, enslaved Virginian men were four times more likely to wear white metal buttons on their clothing than those made of brass or gilded brass. For the same period in South Carolina, yellow metal is more common than white, although the difference between the two is modest (see Tables 4 and 5).

The meaning of this regional pattern is unclear. It would be useful to have similar statistics for free men’s clothing for comparison before assuming that it is somehow linked with conditions of slavery. Information about cost would also help to better understand the differences observed between the two areas.

With the exception of those mentioned for South Carolina, the majority of buttons (53 to 75 percent) described in the runaway advertisements were sewn on to coats. Buttons from jackets or waistcoats made up between 25 to 40 percent of the assemblage, while buttons on breeches and hats were rarely mentioned. In South Carolina, slave clothing appears to have consisted of breeches and jackets or breeches and coats, with waistcoats being only rarely mentioned. This regional difference may indeed relate directly to the condition of slavery. Rather than reflecting practices based on ethnicity, these trends may indicate more uniformity in clothing within enslaved communities, with variations perhaps based in part on climatic conditions.

How do the Poplar Forest buttons compare to the documentary profile of button use? Of the 122 buttons recovered, 69 (57 percent) are white metal, 43 (35 percent) are yellow metal, 7 (6 percent) are unidentifiable metal (having lost their original surfaces), and 3 (2 percent) are made of glass or bone. Of the white metal buttons, 35 (50 percent)
are identifiable as silver plated, while of the yellow metal, 15 (35 percent) can be identified as gilt.

Unlike the bead distributions, which vary between structures and their associated yards, buttons types are distributed fairly regularly across the site. Buttons are associated with occupation layers and plowzone surrounding each structure, and no clear patterns of size, color or material could be discerned. The prevalence of silver plated buttons at this site, however, seems unusual.

Excavations carried out between 1995 and 1997 at an adjacent quarter site, called the “North Hill,” have yielded a total of 41 buttons to date. This site, occupied from the 1770s through the early 1790s, appears to have housed members of the Poplar Forest slave community in the years immediately preceding the construction and occupation of the quarter that forms the focus of this paper. It is possible, in fact, that the two sites together represent the debris of the same families over a forty year period. At the North Hill site, white metal buttons outnumber those made of yellow metal (62 percent to 38 percent), yet only a single silver plated button has been recovered. In contrast, 29 percent of the later quarter site buttons are silver plated.

The 1790-1812 site was occupied during a period of transition in button making technology and in style. Plain gilt buttons became fashionable for the general population in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and in the period from 1810 through 1830, they virtually replaced all other styles on men’s coats (Hughes and Lester 1993:178). The Poplar Forest assemblages appear to reflect a transition among slaves from the popular white metal buttons of the late eighteenth century to the plain gilt fashions of the 1810s (Figure 4).

An examination of the condition of the recovered buttons helps to test this hypothesis. Seventy-two metal buttons from the later quarter were divided between usable (intact and unbent) and unusable (broken)

![Figure 4. White and yellow plated buttons. The two in center show back stamps of “Best” and “Plated.” Photo by Les Shofer.](image-url)
Of 26 yellow metal buttons, nine have unbroken shanks and 17 have shanks that are broken or entirely missing. Of the white metal buttons, 29 are unbroken and 17 are broken. If the assemblage reflected simple button loss, an equal number of broken and unbroken buttons of each metal color in the sample would be expected. The recovery of greater numbers of intact, usable white metal buttons, and broken, unusable buttons of yellow metal, supports the hypothesis that slaves intentionally discarded the white. These data, together with the comparative data made possible through an examination of the North Hill assemblage, suggest that whoever was acquiring and using the buttons was familiar with changes in fashion, and desired to follow them.

Back stamps found on individual buttons contribute additional information to the question of button acquisition and use. While archaeologists recovered 56 marked buttons, only four stamps appeared on more than one button. The first, a simple wreath motif, was found on five gilt buttons of identical size; the second, a wreath with the word “BEST” appearing above, was found on three gilt or plated buttons. The third, impressed with “WALLIS” and “PLATED” flanked by two stars on either side, appeared on two silver plated buttons, while the fourth, bearing “PLATED” with two stars, appeared on two small domed silver plated buttons. The remaining 44 marks are unique. One would expect to find identical marks on buttons adorning ready-made clothing. The quarter site buttons suggest that slaveowners or individual slaves purchased few articles of men’s clothing. In fact, the diversity of marks points to a rather piecemeal strategy of button acquisition, perhaps more characteristic of episodic purchase by individuals than of purchase in bulk by the overseer for the entire slave population.

The Poplar Forest Assemblage Revisited

How a razor, beads, buckles and buttons came into the possession of the residents at the 1790-1812 Poplar Forest quarter will never be known. In the absence of records, it cannot be proven that the inhabitants of the quarter selected these adornment items for themselves. However, documentary evidence makes clear that slaves produced cloth and clothing at Poplar Forest at least as early as 1812, and suggests that they raised raw materials for cloth manufacture even earlier (Heath 1996). Slaves tended sheep for wool, and raised flax, hemp and cotton on the property. While shortages brought on by the War of 1812 increased the impetus to be self-sufficient, Jefferson had always favored home production when possible.

Artifacts recovered from the quarter indicate that activities related to sewing and cloth production took place throughout its occupation. Excavators recovered straight pins, two pair of scissors, thimbles and a spindle fragment within the cabins and in the surrounding yards. Indeed, if we assumed that the buttons recovered represent only a small percentage of those actually present during the occupation of the site, they themselves argue for a fairly substantial sewing industry.

Surviving documents indicate that individual slaves sold poultry and vegetables to Jefferson, and earned money within the plantation by performing tasks beyond those seen as customary. Three American one-cent pieces and a Spanish half real found on the site confirm the availability of currency to the site’s residents. With money in hand, there were stores nearby in which to spend it.

At least one man, named Will, bartered labor for merchandise at a local store. Significantly, his acquisitions included Kersey,
a coarse woolen cloth (Heath 1997). Perhaps this purchase indicates Will’s desire to supplement inadequate rations, or perhaps the cloth he bought was finer or more colorful than that produced on the plantation.

Although a single surviving shop account records the purchase of cloth by this Poplar Forest slave, contemporary accounts from across central Virginia document slaves purchasing pins, needles, knitting needles, buckles, buttons and various types of cloth (Heath 1997). The varieties of each item may have been determined by cost and availability at the local store, as well as by prevailing European fashions.

Documentary evidence from census and provision records from this period also indicates that most enslaved men, women and children at Poplar Forest lived in family groups. Thus it is possible to observe strategies employed by households, if not by individuals, to personalize items of clothing and to construct identity. Beads found at the site show differences between contemporary households in their use of adornment items; buttons indicate similar strategies among households at a given point of time, but clear changes over time. However these similarities and differences are interpreted, it seems clear that a complex series of choices involving cost, market access and availability, awareness of fashion trends, and household make-up contributed to the adornment decisions made by these men and women.

Conclusions

Understanding the interrelationships between cultural systems and the material culture which at once supports and defines them is a complex task. Class, gender, and ethnicity are just a few of the categories that social scientists typically use to explain patterns of behavior. To understand choice for many residents of eighteenth-century Virginia, the restrictions of slavery must be added to the equation. Finally, myriad contextual factors such as the regional availability of goods dictated by local economics, historic events such as wars or embargoes, and even local manifestations of broader fashion trends all contributed to the choices men and women made in shaping their individual and group identities with appropriate material goods.

Runaway advertisements from across the Southeast preserve glimpses of adornment practices tied to specific ethnic affiliations among “new Negroes.” For example, Dibbee, “from the Timini nation,” had “his ears bored” and “his teeth filed” (Windley 1983c:451). Slaveowners described some runaways by ethnicities they perceived, identifying these differences by the regions where slaves originated. Thus, they sought the return of “Angola,” “Congo,” “Guinea,” “Kissey,” or “Madagascar” negroes (Windley 1983a:2, 34; Windley 1983b:383; Windley 1983c:8, 15, 436, 459, 461, 645, 742). The ethnic expression of others was simply described as “outlandish” (Windley 1983a:143, 179, 202, 305-306, 344-345). By the second generation, however, slaveowners classed their runaway property as “nigger,” “mulatto” or “mustee.” Gone were the obvious adornment items and physical modifications that announced African ethnicities to the world.

In eighteenth-century Virginia, ethnic identities were not strictly codified. Only through a detailed study of adornment choices made with reference to a specific time and place can we begin to approach the social messages these items helped to convey. A closer study of the Poplar Forest assemblage and contemporary runaway advertisements points to the complexity of understanding material culture choices. To varying degrees, clothing, hairstyle and jewelry choices reflect economics, occupations and market access. They were also influenced by
regional styles and by gender. The combination of these factors, alongside beliefs about appropriate dress passed from one generation to the next, resulted in patterns of choices that ultimately came to be seen as African American.

By focusing our research on the complexity of constructing identity rather than the documentation of static ethnic markers, archaeologists can move towards a richer understanding of the world that Charles, Aminta and Benjamin Harwood helped to create. Comparative materials from contemporary sites throughout the Southeast, as well as from antebellum and postbellum sites inhabited by enslaved people and their descendants, may ultimately lead us towards a clearer understanding of the construction of ethnic identity, and in the roles that objects played in these processes.

Endnotes

1 Slaveowners used a variety of terms to describe the men and women who fled from slavery. The terms “new Negro” and “salt water Negro” refer to Africans newly arrived in the colonies; owners used the terms “mulatto” and “mustee” to define individuals of African and European ancestry (mulatto), or African and Native American ancestry (mustee).

2 An interesting exception to this statement is Colin Palmer’s study of marriage records in colonial Mexico City, in which he traces the retention of kin and ethnic bonds in the New World by African-born slaves (Palmer 1995:223-236).

3 Thomas Jefferson lists the division of John Wayles’ lands in 1773, noting that 5145 acres of the Guinea plantation lay in Cumberland County and 1221 acres lay in Amelia (Bear and Stanton 1997:329).

4 References to Jefferson’s provisioning system are scattered through his Farm Book, various memoranda and letters to overseers, and letters to local merchants. On blankets and bedding, see Betts 1987:25, 166-168; also “Slave Schedule,” Rosenbach Museum and Library. On unprocessed wool used by slaves, see Betts 1944:540. Jefferson notes his practice of giving a pot and a bed to women who choose spouses within the plantation in a letter to overseer Jeremiah Goodman in Betts 1944:540. Jefferson conducted a lengthy correspondence regarding the acquisition of barrels of salt fish (herring and shad) for Poplar Forest slaves between 1810 and 1822. He ordered fish in May, June or July. For a sample of correspondence, see Thomas Jefferson to Mr. Darmsdatt, May 27, 1810, MHi; Thomas Jefferson to Mr. Peyton, June 20, 1822, ViU. See also Joel Yancey to Thomas Jefferson, May 31, 1821, MHi. On provisions of pork, see Betts 1987: 161; Betts 1944:467 discusses pork and offal. On salt and wheat flour, see Betts 1944:517-518 and Thomas Jefferson to Jeremiah Goodman, February 3, 1814, ViU. On corn, see Betts 1944:535; Thomas Jefferson to Joel Yancey, July 18, 1815, MHi; Joel Yancey to Thomas Jefferson, February 27, 1829, MHi; and Thomas Jefferson to Archibald Robertson May 25, 1822, MHi. Jefferson also makes indirect reference to corn provisions for slaves at Poplar Forest in a letter to Martha Randolph, August 24, 1819, ViU.

5 This database included advertisements collected and published by Smith and Wojtowicz (1989) for the Pennsylvania Gazette from 1728-1790, Windley (1983a, b and c) from Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina from the 1730 until 1790, and Parker (1994) from North Carolina from 1790-1826.

6 Many slaves seem to have been able to accumulate substantial wardrobes by the early nineteenth century. Although I have not quantified the differences in descriptions, there is a clear increase in the number of slaveowners who made statements similar to that referring to the Virginia runaway Jack: “it is probable he may change his dress, as he has a number of other clothing” (Meaders 1997: 42).
Slave clothing also took the place of cash in less dramatic circumstances. Jacob’s master complained in a runaway advertisement he placed that, “his hat (if any) I cannot describe, as he lost his own at cards just before he went away …” (Windley 1983b:144).

While the wearing of beards or whiskers is not always included in descriptions for enslaved men, those advertisements which do describe facial hair indicate that beards and whiskers were rarely worn by men younger than 25, and most often worn by those over 30. For examples from Virginia see Windley 1983a:15-17, 34, 41, 44, 53, 68, 72, 88, 95, 97-98, 106, 109, 112-113, 118, 157, 183-184, 194, 219, 230, 271-272, 282-283, 324, 337-338, 394-395, also Windley 1983b:296.

See also Windley 1983c:507; Smith and Wojtowicz 1989:75-76.

That some slave women in early nineteenth century North Carolina had adopted the custom of wearing a wedding band is confirmed by Harriet Jacobs, a slave who escaped to freedom and later wrote her memoirs. Jacobs’ grandmother, upon hearing that her unmarried granddaughter was pregnant, “tore from my fingers my mother’s wedding ring and her silver thimble. ‘Go away!’ she exclaimed, ‘and never come to my house, again’” (Jacobs 1987: 56).

Buttons with bent shanks were not included in these calculations since it was not possible to determine whether their owners had considered them usable.

Using Yates’ correction, the association between metal color and condition at the time of discard was found to be statistically significant ($x^2 = 5.35; df = 1, p < .05$).
Cordwell, J. M., and R. A. Schwartz (editors)

Deagan, K., and D. MacMahon

Eriksen, T. H.

Fales, M.G.

Fischer, L.

Griebel, H. B.

Gruber, A.

Handler, J.

Handler, J., and F. Lange
1978 Plantation Slavery in Barbados, an Archaeological and Historical Investi-

Heath, B. J.


Hinks, S. L.

Hughes, E., and M. Lester

Hutchinson, J., and A.D. Smith (editors)

Jacobs, H.

Jamieson, R. W.

Karklins, K.
1992 Trade Ornament Usage Among the Native Peoples of Canada, A Source
Kidd, Kenneth, and Martha Kidd

Klingelhofer, E.

LaRoche, C. J.

Martin, A. S.

Meaders, D.

Mintz, S., and R. Price

Moncure, A. B., and B. J. Heath

Mouer, L.D.

Mullin, M.

Nash, M.

Palmer, C. A.

Parker, F. L.

Pogue, D., and E. C. White

Samford, P.
Sanford, D.W.  

Singleton, T.  

Singleton, T., and M. D. Bograd  

Smith, B. G., and R. Wojtowicz  

Sobel, M.  

Stanton, L.  
1996 *Slavery at Monticello*. Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Charlottesville.

Stine, L. F., M. A. Cabak and M. D. Groover  

Tonkin, E., M. McDonald, and M. Chapman  

White, S., and G. White  


Windley, L. A. (editor)  


Yentsch, A. E.  
The financial support of the Henry Luce Foundation, which provided funding for two seasons of field and laboratory work at the quarter site, is gratefully acknowledged. Thanks also go to the Poplar Forest Board of Directors and to Executive Director Lynn Beebe for their continued support of archaeology.

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Thanks also go to Linda Baumgarten, who shared her research with me, and to Curtis Moyer for his helpful comments on many of the adornment objects discussed in the paper. I am grateful to the developers of Re:discovery software, especially David Edwards and Mark Freeman, who created a database that enabled me to access and manipulate the runaway advertisements quickly and flexibly. I thank Fraser Neiman, Robert Schuyler and Cary Carson for reviewing an earlier draft of this paper, and Garrett Fesler and Maria Franklin for organizing and editing this volume.
“Strong is the Bond of Kinship”:
West African-Style Ancestor Shrines and Subfloor Pits on African-American Quarters

Patricia M. Samford

Torn from their families and communities, transported in miserable conditions across an ocean, and thrust unwillingly into a system of forced labor, peoples of African descent in the American South responded to enslavement in myriad ways. There are as many stories as there were enslaved Africans and African Americans who lived and loved, laughed and wept, toiled, struggled and died on American soil, far from that of their forebears. Some individuals rebelled swiftly and violently against the bonds of slavery, while others outwardly appeared accepting of a fate that surely seemed beyond their control. Most reactions probably fell somewhere between these extremes. Regardless of specific details, every individual met life’s challenges from perspectives influenced, albeit to varying degrees, by their African heritages.

The purpose of this paper to examine how ancestor veneration, one aspect of many West African traditional religions, may have been maintained and transformed in the Virginia Tidewater. Using a combination of ethnohistoric, archaeological, documentary, and ethnographic evidence from both Virginia and the West African societies whose descendants figured prominently in the Virginia slave population, these sources suggest that ancestor veneration continued to play a critical role in the lives of enslaved Virginians. Moreover, it is proposed that subfloor pits, a type of archaeological feature common on eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Virginia slave sites, functioned in some instances as ancestor shrines with antecedents in West Africa.

The paper opens with a brief discussion of the concept of ethnic identity and how such identities could have functioned for Afro-Virginians. Using an interpretive approach that views the meanings of material culture within historical contexts, I argue that the enslaved used personal identities as a tool or strategy for negotiating circumstances. After establishing which West African cultural groups were most likely represented in Virginia’s enslaved communities, I discuss the spiritual traditions of several of these cultures, with a focus on the honoring of ancestors. Evidence is provided for why the subfloor pits (also called “root cellars”) typical of Virginia plantation quarters were likely to have functioned in some instances as ancestor shrines. Two eighteenth-century pits believed to have served as shrines are described.

Theoretical Considerations

This paper explores manifestations of ethnic identity by examining features used in eighteenth-century Virginia as ancestor shrines. In exploring this topic, both identity and ethnicity need to be defined and considered. Individuals form a sense of personal identity by “drawing upon past experiences and ordering them in such a way as to make sense” (Thomas 1996:52). The term ethnicity has been discussed and used in many ways by anthropologists, but here it is defined, “in its narrowest sense, [as] a feeling of continuity with a real or imagined past, a feeling that is maintained as an essential part of one’s self-definition” (De Vos 1995:25). The term “eth-
nic identity” thus encompasses the ways by which an individual’s background and place of origin define how one characterizes his or her self and uses these elements to negotiate their daily life (Barth 1969; McGuire 1982; Shennan 1989). Personal identities are complex, multifaceted and non-static (De Vos 1995); an ethnic identity and expressions of it would only be one component of an individual’s identity.

I believe that some subfloor pits found in Virginia slave quarters functioned as a very personal form of identity expression in their use as West African-based ancestor shrines. Such shrines are an important household component in many West African societies in that they served as places where the living negotiated with the spirits of the deceased ancestors for guidance and benevolence (Ndubuike 1994:75; Offiong 1991:11; Parrinder 1954:24; Uchendu 1976:283). Thus, the use of such shrines by Afro-Virginians can be viewed as a means of negotiating circumstances and obtaining desired ends under the oppression of enslavement. Ethnic identities, by their very definition, involve to varying degrees a distancing of one’s self from others. In constructing and using such shrines, Afro-Virginians were not only practicing a traditional form of worship, but also differentiating themselves from their enslavers, thus drawing psychological boundaries. Shennan has suggested that “the process of ethnic identity creation only comes to have its power in a situation in which pre-existing forms of identity creation and maintenance—kinship, for example—are being destroyed” (Shennan 1989:16). For individuals living under the dehumanizing effects of enslavement, appealing to the ancestors and thus invoking a sense of continuity with the past made use of the strongest power available to them for manipulating circumstances in their lives.

Archaeologists interested in ethnic identity are faced with the task of teasing out how the material remains found on sites are expressions of such identities (Beaudry et al. 1991; Hodder 1986, 1987; McCarthy 1997). An interpretive analysis, by which the symbolic meanings of artifacts are recovered through careful analysis of historical and cultural contexts, is used here. To show how objects found in subfloor pits were symbols of ethnic identity requires an approach that views material culture within the context of West African spiritual practices. This paper reviews archaeological, ethnohistorical, and ethnographic sources of various West African religions whose members were later present in Virginia to reveal which objects served sacred functions, and how these objects were used on West African shrines. Particularly important is information on which objects typically are found in association with one another, and whether particular colors, materials, shapes, or designs are significant. Understanding the meanings of certain objects in West African cultures is crucial for determining how objects were used in ways that maintained and transformed ethnic identities in colonial Virginia. Although there are certain risks in drawing analogies between the present and the past and between different cultures (for a good discussion of this topic in relation to African-American archaeology, see Thomas 1995), careful reading and comparison of multiple sources can surmount some of these problems.

Demography of Virginia Slavery

In order to understand how West African-based religious traditions transformed in the Virginia Chesapeake, it is critical to determine the African origins of its enslaved population, as well as the regional contexts of slavery. In Virginia, the first Africans arrived in
1619 and their numbers expanded slowly throughout most of the century. Importation increased at the end of the century, rose steadily until the mid-eighteenth century, then fell as native-born Afro-Virginians began to predominate and as the tobacco market fell (Breen 1985:125; Kulikoff 1977; Walsh 1993; Westbury 1981:82). Most Africans were purchased either singly or in small groups, even by gentry planters (Walsh 1997). During the eighteenth century, most Virginia plantations had fewer than twenty slaves, who lived in settlements adjacent to the agricultural fields called “quarters.” Here, the enslaved formed communities, composed at first of Africans from various cultures. Before the Virginia colony’s legal importation of Africans ended in 1778, American-born blacks began to comprise the bulk of the enslaved population (Kulikoff 1986; Westbury 1981).

Various African cultures came together on Virginia’s plantations to form a creolized Afro-Virginian culture. Determining the African origins of Virginia’s enslaved population is hindered by a number of factors. Generally, slave trade records contain the names of departure and entry ports for slaving ships, but little specific information on which African cultural groups were aboard them. The difficulties are particularly acute for the seventeenth century prior to the formalization of the slave trade, since many slaving ships traveled up and down the coast of western Africa, gradually filling their holds at a number of different ports. Further complications arise due to internal political, economic, and social conditions in West Africa, where wars and slave raids became more common as the slave trade expanded (Manning 1990).

Despite these difficulties, a number of excellent studies on different aspects of the slave trade exist (e.g. Anstey 1975; Curtin 1969; Donnan 1935; Manning 1990; Westbury 1981), and patterns have emerged that allow researchers to draw conclusions about the cultural backgrounds of Africans enslaved in Virginia. Large-scale export patterns out of West Africa, as discussed by Curtin (1969) and Manning (1990), seem to correspond with analysis of known importation into Virginia (Westbury 1981, 1985), as well as dispersal onto specific plantations (Walsh 1997). Because it is known which African regions were traded with most heavily at different periods, generalities can be made about the cultural identities of the enslaved in Virginia. Westbury’s research (1981, 1985) divides the Virginia slave trade into three periods spanning the last quarter of the seventeenth century through the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Similarly, the demographic profile of the Africans enslaved in Virginia can be divided into three major groups, linked largely to time of importation.

Between 1670 and 1698, the first period defined by Westbury, approximately 1,300 Africans arrived in Virginia, largely through trade with the Royal African Company (Westbury 1985:229-230). During the latter half of the seventeenth century, the Africans brought to Virginia were gathered through trading along the entire length of the West African coast (Walsh 1997). As importation rose in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, there came to exist an almost exclusive direct trade between Africa and Virginia. Between 1727 and 1769, 91 percent of the enslaved entering Virginia were brought directly from Africa (Westbury 1985). The greatest influx of Africans occurred in the second to fourth decades of the eighteenth century, with approximately 17,000 individuals arriving in the 1730s alone (Westbury 1985:234). The largest numbers of Africans disembarked at ports on the York and Lower James rivers (Westbury 1981:71).

During the late seventeenth century and first two decades of the eighteenth, many of the slave ships arrived in Virginia from
Senegambian ports (Figure 1) (Manning 1990:49; Walsh 1997:55). The decreasing population in Senegambia, the Gold Coast area, and the Bight of Benin led to a decrease in export from these areas and a subsequent rise in trade in the Bight of Biafra (Manning 1990:94). In the first half of the eighteenth century trading focused in this area around the Niger Delta (Manning 1990:49, 69, 94; Walsh 1997). Nearly 50 percent of all African slaves arriving at Port York during two periods of heavy importation in the early eighteenth century were from the Nigerian tribes of the Igbo, Ibibio, Efkins, and Mokos (Anstey 1975; Curtin 1969). Slavers also tapped areas Angola, Benin, and Sierra Leone for slaves destined for Virginia ports (Curtin 1969:128-130; Donnan 1935:183-185; Manning 1990:69; Walsh 1997). Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, therefore, the enslaved on Virginia plantations were either African, or, if American-born, had ample opportunities for contact with newly-arrived Africans.

The quality of the documentary record makes it difficult to determine the exact demographic composition of enslaved communities on specific plantations, or even within regions such as the Chesapeake. It is likely that members of at least several African cultures were represented at any one time on individual plantations, since many of the enslaved were purchased singly or in small groups (Walsh 1993:171). Lorena Walsh’s study of the enslaved population at Carter’s Grove plantation outside Williamsburg revealed that people from three or more different West African cultural and linguistic regions (Senegambia, Igbo, and Sierra Leone) were present there during the second quarter of the eighteenth century (Walsh 1997). At Utopia quarter near Williamsburg, some of the enslaved during the first half of the eighteenth century also appeared to have been Igbo (British Museum n.d.).

Determining the cultures represented in the Virginia Chesapeake is critical as a start-
ing point for addressing what West African spiritual traditions and beliefs remained part of enslaved culture and how they manifested themselves archaeologically. At a regional scale, focusing on tobacco plantations in the Virginia Chesapeake, it is possible to examine the spiritual traditions of specific West African cultures whose members were enslaved in Virginia and to postulate how these traditions were transformed within the specific cultural and economic environment of the Virginia colony.

Religion and Ancestor Veneration

While many scholars have properly criticized pan-African interpretations as denying the cultural diversity that has always characterized that continent (Appiah 1992), the importance of spirituality in all aspects of life is a element common to all of Africa (Idowu 1973; Mbiti 1969). According to John Mbiti (1969:15), for an African “and for the larger community of which he is part, to live is to be caught up in a religious drama.” This overarching integration of the sacred and the secular guides daily activities, regulates family and community relationships, and guards the moral order.

This study defines religion as a cultural institution of beliefs and practices that allows groups and individuals to understand and contend with life’s experiences and uncertainties. Religion encompasses emotional, expressive, cognitive, and symbolic dimensions, and generally involves interaction between humans and supernatural entities. Scholars of West African traditional religions assert that the key to understanding West African world view lies in spiritual beliefs, which provide their followers structured approaches to balanced, purposeful, and successful living (Oramasionwu 1994:56; Quarcoopome 1987:10). Many West Africans and their descendants enslaved in Virginia brought with them these rich traditions of spiritual beliefs, which shared enough basic elements to allow the formation of beliefs and practices that were recognizably African (Mintz and Price 1992:9, 45; Parrinder 1954:11; Quarcoopome 1987). These elements included belief in a sovereign creator and ruler of the universe, belief in divinities and ancestors who acted as intermediaries between humans and God, and reliance on practices of magic and medicine to influence events and people (Quarcoopome 1987:12, 40-43).

West Africans generally view religion as an instrument for facing the anxieties and uncertainties of life, and as a means to attain important goals (Offiong 1991:18; Uchendu 1976:188). West African cultures also share a holistic world view, in which there is no distinct separation between the sacred and the secular or the world of the living and that of the dead. Emphasis is placed on the unity and interrelationships among all aspects of the world. European concepts that stress individualism and self-sufficiency are alien in West African philosophy; instead each person’s identity is linked intrinsically with that of the community, and in the social and historical contexts within which he or she and the community are embedded. Deceased ancestors are believed to play a critical and active role in the lives of those on earth and in the ongoing life of the community (Mintz and Price 1992:45, 68).

Belief in ancestors is particularly prevalent among small-scale, stateless African societies, where political and social control are descent-based (Ray 1976:140). The Igbo and Ibibio, among the groups enslaved in Virginia, were stateless societies during the period of the Atlantic slave trade. In such societies, ancestors remain one of the most powerful spiritual forces, generally acting as intermediaries balancing relations between the living and the higher deities (Fiawoo
Ancestral blessings can help assure individual health and achievements, as well as community well-being and agricultural plenty (Bockie 1993:18). Although honoring the spirits of the founding fathers, the living are not passive recipients of their benevolence or wrath; instead, they are actively engaged in strategic negotiations to enhance their own well-being. In cultures where ancestors are honored, continual contact is maintained through the construction of shrines and activities centered on these sacred places (McCall 1995; Offiong 1991:8; Thompson 1993a, 1993b). Shrines—places where people can commemorate or commune with ancestral spirits and deities—include a vast repertoire of living and non-living entities, such as sacred medicine packets, trees, waterfalls, and bonfires.

Ancestor-honoring activities include offering food and animals and pouring libations of palm wine or other liquids on the ground to soften the soil and ease communication with the founding fathers (Bockie 1993:19; Okezie-Offoha 1996:64; Parrinder 1954:57; Quarcoopome 1987:85-86). Shrines are critical as visible and tangible places upon which to place a gift made to an invisible and intangible deity (Awolalu 1979:117; Ndubuike 1994:108; Onwuejeogwu 1981:39). Modern-day shrines and archaeological findings suggest which objects were spiritually significant in West African cultures. Archaeological examples of spiritual objects recovered from ninth- and fifteenth-century A.D. burial vaults included iron tools, copper and bronze jewelry, pottery, beads, waterworn pebbles, shell, and ferruginous stone (Onwuejeogwu 1981:57; Shaw 1978).

Ethnographers working among the Igbo at the turn of the century noted that rounded pebbles, earthenware pots, cones of chalk or kaolin, and pieces of wood were commonly used as sacred objects (Talbot 1969:20-21). Colonial administrators writing about the Igbo and Ibibio in early twentieth-century Nigeria (Talbot 1926:20-21, 1967:10) and current ethnographies (McCall 1995:260; Ndubuike 1994:4) stress the importance of pottery: its placement on shrines, use in rituals, and burial in graves. Modern day Igbo ancestral shrine goods include carved wooden figures, metal or wooden dumbbell shaped objects called *okponsi*, and hollow vessels containing various objects, such as chalk, pierced coins, and kola nuts (Onwuejeogwu 1981:50).

The question, of course, remains as to whether the crucial roles ancestors played in West African societies would have continued, albeit transformed, on Virginia plantations. Clearly, ancestors are creatures of society, locked into a reciprocal relationship with the living communities dependent upon them for blessings and moral guidance (Durkheim 1915; Offiong 1991; Uchendu 1976). Given the demographics resulting from slave-purchasing patterns in Virginia during the colonial period, is it reasonable to expect that rituals centering around kinship-based practices would have re-crystallized in the plantation quarters? Some scholars have suggested that ancestor-related beliefs and practices would not have survived in the American colonies because ancestral spirits would have been left behind in Africa, and because the social disruption caused by enslavement was too great (Raboteau 1978:83; Sobel 1979).

Ethnographic work with modern Igbo peoples suggests that social disruptions caused by events such as warfare, migration, and slavery can prompt new founding fathers, who later attain ancestor status (McCall 1995). McCall argues that it is too simplistic to envision ancestors as a phenomenon based on unilineal descent; instead, the community plays an important role in the understanding and development of ancestors. It is just
these types of communities, at first of unrelated people thrust into a common situation, and later of related persons, that formed on Virginia plantations. If, at first, ancestors were functioning as manifestations of ethnic identity for enslaved Africans, they could have easily been later incorporated into the spiritual beliefs of slave quarter community and family life.

Clearly, given the holistic nature of West African traditional religions, particularly in dealing with life’s trials and tribulations, it is unlikely that enslaved Africans readily discarded their spiritual beliefs. Various attempts to Christianize both Africans and Native Americans were made in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries by the Church of England, but these efforts met with little success. A number of factors contributed to these failures and included the resistance of both white slaveholders and the enslaved themselves. Indifference, potential economic detriment and hesitance to share spiritual power were some of the reasons many plantation owners resisted conversion for the enslaved (Raboteau 1978; Sobel 1979). In addition to language difficulties and the ridicule of other blacks, the enslaved, for their part, were reluctant to relinquish their own traditional beliefs (Raboteau 1978, 1995; Sobel 1979). The Bishop of London’s 1724 inquiry into the state of religion in Virginia revealed that Afro-Virginians attended church in only 11 of the 29 parishes in the colony (Jernegan 1916:521). Only a few, and these mostly infants, had been baptized. The religious fervor of the Great Awakening (1740s to 1790s) appeared to have had little impact on enslaved African Americans. Even in Virginia, where the evangelical movement enjoyed its greatest popularity, less than 10 percent of the over 300,000 enslaved Afro-Virginians converted to Christianity by the end of the eighteenth century (Jackson 1931:180; Raboteau 1978:131).

Numerous excavations throughout the American South have yielded objects modified in ways that suggest use in ritual practices rooted in West and Central African traditional religions (Brown 1994; Ferguson 1992; Franklin 1997; Klingelhofer 1987; Logan et al. 1992; Pearce 1993; Saraceni 1996; Stine et al. 1996; Wilkie 1995; Young 1996). Archaeological and ethnohistorical research demonstrate that other components of traditional African religions, such as the sacredness of nature, the reliance on magic and the use of charms and other protective devices, were maintained and transformed in the American South (Dennard 1983; DuBois 1989; Hurston 1935). Interviews with former enslaved African Americans hint that beliefs in ancestors continued for many generations, transforming into an acceptance of the existence of ghosts and spirits. Special measures were taken with the deceased to insure that their spirits be appeased and rest quietly (Alho 1976:61; Rawick 1978). If beliefs in the importance of ancestors survived, then it is very likely that traces of practices related to honoring ancestors survived as well. Subfloor pits, common on structures associated with enslaved African Americans, may hold the clues to these practices.

Subfloor Pits and Ancestor Veneration

The presence of pits excavated into the ground beneath houses is typical of eighteenth-century African-American sites in Virginia, and has even been used in some instances as a marker for slave sites (Kelso 1984). To date, over 150 subfloor pits have been excavated on sixteen eighteenth-century Afro-Virginian sites in Virginia (Samford 1996). Table 1 lists excavated slave quarters in the Virginia Chesapeake and the number of subfloor pits found at each. These pits are generally rectangular or square holes, with straight sides and flat bottoms, cut into the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Foundation Type</th>
<th>Dimensions (Feet)</th>
<th>Root Cellars</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan’s Point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan-Farrar #17</td>
<td>earthfast</td>
<td>12 x 16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1620-1630</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jordan-Farrar #18</td>
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<td>14 x 16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1620-1630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure 15</td>
<td>ground sill</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>12 x 28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1700-1720</td>
</tr>
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<td>1700-1720</td>
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<td>earthfast</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1700-1720</td>
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<td>earthfast</td>
<td>12 x 16</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>earthfast</td>
<td>24 x 16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1720-1750</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1740-1781</td>
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<td>Oakland Park</td>
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<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1700-1740</td>
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<td>25 x 16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1730-1740s</td>
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<td>1730-1862</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field Quarter</td>
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<td>?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1740-1775</td>
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<td>Utopia II</td>
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<td>22 x 32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1750-1780</td>
</tr>
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<td>Kingsmill Quarter</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kingsmill 1</td>
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<td>20 x 18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1760-1781</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kingsmill 2</td>
<td>brick</td>
<td>28 x 20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1775-1800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mount Vernon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House for Families</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1760-1792</td>
<td></td>
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<td>North Quarter</td>
<td>brick</td>
<td>25 x 16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1775-1781</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rich Neck Plantation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 1</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>1769-1780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 2</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1775-1815</td>
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<td>earthfast</td>
<td>12 x 16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1750-1781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Littletown 2</td>
<td>earthfast</td>
<td>15 x 15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1775-1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampton Key</td>
<td>earthfast</td>
<td>28 x 24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1750-1781</td>
</tr>
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<td>Carter’s Grove</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building A</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1780-1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building B</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1780-1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building C</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1780-1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monticello—Mulberry Row</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Quarter O</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>20 x 12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1770-1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter R</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>12 x 14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1793-1809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter S</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>12 x 14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1793-1820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter T</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>12 x 14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1793-1810</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poplar Forest</td>
<td>earthfast</td>
<td>15 x 25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1790-1812</td>
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<tr>
<td>Magnolia Grange</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure 1a</td>
<td>ground sill</td>
<td>18 x 29</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1780-1820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure 1b</td>
<td>brick pier</td>
<td>18 x 29</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>1820-1865</td>
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<td>Monroe Farm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure 7</td>
<td>dry stone footing</td>
<td>14 x 14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1800-1850</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure 8</td>
<td>block piers</td>
<td>10 x 18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1840-1869</td>
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<td>Structures 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>ground sill or</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1810-1850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>block piers</td>
<td></td>
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Table 1 (cont'd).
Characteristics of Virginia Slave Quarters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Foundation Type</th>
<th>Dimensions (Feet)</th>
<th>Root Cellars</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>Gilliam Farm</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure 1</td>
<td>block piers</td>
<td>14 x ?</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>1820-1840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen/Quarter, St. 3</td>
<td>block piers</td>
<td>10 x 16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1820-1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valentine House</td>
<td>brick pier</td>
<td>15 x 25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1840-1865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcox</td>
<td>brick pier</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1840s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley Plantation</td>
<td>brick pier</td>
<td>20 x 40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1843-1865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portici Plantation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cellar Quarter</td>
<td>cellar room</td>
<td>12 x 14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1820-1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pohoke Quarter</td>
<td>stone pier</td>
<td>12 x 12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1820-1863</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * external


Subsoil clay under the houses. Some appear to have been lined with wooden boxes or partitioned into two or more sections, although most show no evidence of any interior structural components. These pits vary greatly in size, ranging from less than two feet square to 9 by 6 feet. The number of pits per structure is also quite variable. The Kingsmill Quarter outside Williamsburg contained eighteen; the structure dating to the third quarter of the eighteenth century at Utopia (44JC787) had six single pits and two large pit complexes, and one structure at Carter’s Grove Quarter contained thirteen (Fesler 1997a; Kelso 1984; Samford 1996). Other quarter buildings, including several quarters at Monticello, or the foreman’s house at Carter’s Grove Plantation, only have one subfloor pit (Kelso 1986; Samford 1996). Archaeological explanations of these pits have generally been attributed to storage of foods and goods (Kelso 1984; Neiman 1997). Within European cultures, such underground cellars are traditionally used for the storage...
of root vegetables and fruit throughout the winter months (Beverley 1947[1705]). The quantities of household items found on the floors of these features also have led to the hypothesis that they were used by the enslaved to store personal possessions and perhaps as hiding places for pilfered or valuable items (Franklin 1997; Kelso 1984; Neiman 1997).

These functional interpretations are plausible, yet somewhat unsatisfying as a comprehensive explanation for the presence of subfloor pits. The homes of colonial period yeoman farmers of European descent were often just as small and cramped as slave quarters, but subfloor pits are less typical in these structures. When they do appear on these sites, they are generally larger, rectangular, more substantially constructed, and located close to hearths (Fesler 1997b; Mouer 1991).

Some of the pits on Afro-Virginian sites contain unbroken or nearly complete items, such as bottles, ceramic vessels, and agricultural tools, resting on their floors. Why would these items have been left behind? At a time when even the wealthy reused bottles, surely individuals with more limited access to consumer goods would not have left these still functional objects there by accident. Is it not possible that the objects found on the floors of some pits were actually ritual objects left intentionally by the persons who placed them there? Some subfloor pits may have served transplanted Africans and enslaved African Americans as shrines to the ancestors.

How plausible is the placement of a shrine underground? Ethnohistorical evidence from the nineteenth century indicates that the Igbo used underground storage pits (Yentsch 1991), so the use of such pits would have already been familiar. In West Africa and throughout the African Diaspora, household shrines are often placed in a private part of the house, such as in the backs of closets or are disguised as laundry bins (Thompson 1993a:61). In the often-crammed space of a quarter, a hole cut into the earth under the house may have been the most private place within the building.

Moreover, in his discussion of sacred places of the Yoruba, another West African culture whose members were enslaved in the American South, J. Omosade Awolalu (1979:117) reveals,

... whatever form a sacred place takes, what is most important is the belief that such a place constitutes a break in the homogeneity of space; this break is symbolised by an opening by which passage from one cosmic region to another is made possible (from heaven to earth and vice versa; from earth to the underworld).

Is it possible that some Virginia subfloor pits represented the break between the heaven and the earth, the regions of the living and the dead? Only very rarely in African religions were the dead believed to reside in the sky, but were thought instead to live on the earth or in it (Sobel 1987:174). The Ibibio and the Bakongo of the present day pour libations onto the ground to call upon and venerate the ancestors (Bockie 1993:19, Offiong 1991:39). Today, Igbo in the Ohafia region of Nigeria pour palm wine into small holes cut into earthen floors of their homes, sending this libation directly into the mouths of their ancestors (McCall 1995). In the novel Things Fall Apart, the noted Igbo novelist Chinua Achebe (1994:89) discusses a ritual in which the spirits of the ancestors let their presence be known. During the ritual, “Evil Forest… thrust the pointed end of his rattling staff into the earth. And it began to shake and rattle, like something agitating with a metallic life” (Achebe 1994:89). Ala, also known as Ani, Mother Earth or Earth Goddess, keeps in close communication with the spirits of the departed Igbo ancestors (Achebe 1994; Ndubuike 1994). Her role entails “harbouring
the ancestors, nourishing and sustaining the living and through a demonstrated regenerative power, the Earth Goddess demands order, purity and balance” (Oramasionwu 1994:ii). Igbo elders will caution children “Toonti n’ani” (listen to the earth), for it is there that the wisdom of the departed ancestors resides (Oramasionwu 1994:155). Small balls of earth or mud represent chi, or each individual’s deceased ancestor reborn in the living, in special Igbo worship services (Isichei 1978:183). To the Ibibio as well, the earth (Isong) is sacred and protective charms are buried in earthenware pots in compounds to prevent harm to the family (Offiong 1991:5, 46-47).

Subfloor Pits as Ancestor Shrines — Two Examples

The contents of two eighteenth-century subfloor pits, one in Virginia and the other in North Carolina, both of which may have served a spiritual function as ancestor shrines, are here examined in some detail. Each of these pits displays distinctive characteristics that link them to West African, and more specifically, Igbo, spiritual traditions.

Utopia (44JC32 and 44JC787)

The Utopia site, partially excavated by the Virginia Research Center for Archaeology during the 1970s, and later by the James River Institute for Archaeology between 1993 and 1996, was the location of a rural plantation outside of Williamsburg (Fesler 1997a; Kelso 1984). The site contained four temporal components, stretching from the beginning of the fourth quarter of the seventeenth century to about 1780. The earliest component (ca. 1670-1710), containing the sub-surface traces of an earthfast house and outbuilding, a well and a garden, is believed to have housed indentured laborers and perhaps several enslaved Africans (Fesler 1997a). Archaeological and documentary evidence suggest that both the second (ca. 1700-1720) and third (ca. 1720-1750) components of the site were quarters for enslaved Africans and Afro-Virginians. At this time, the property was owned by the Bray family and most of the enslaved had been acquired from West Africa (Fesler 1997a). A fourth component (44JC787), dated ca. 1750 to 1780, was located some distance to the north. It also appeared to have been a quartering area for the enslaved or a plantation overseer (Fesler 1998).

The subfloor pit analyzed here was contained within Structure 50 (Figure 2), a 16-by-24-foot earthfast dwelling with numerous subfloor pits, dating to the third period of occupation (ca. 1720 to 1750). Feature 44, a rectangular pit measuring 4 x 3 feet, was located in the southeast corner of the building. The feature, with straight side walls and a flat bottom, was fairly shallow, extending one foot below the base of the plow zone. Two levels of fill were noted. The uppermost layer (Level A) consisted of organic brown sand containing 93 artifacts. These artifacts included large fragments of cow or horse bone, ten complete and two virtually complete fossil scallop shells, a complete kaolin pipe bowl with a partial stem, wrought iron nails, wine bottle glass, a flaked piece of quartzite, and tin-enameled earthenware. Level B, the lowest level of fill, was a grey sand, not spread consistently throughout the pit, but concentrated in a rounded area 0.4 feet thick in the center of the feature. Only six artifacts were recovered from this fill. Most of the artifacts found in the uppermost level were concentrated at the bottom of the layer, with many of them resting on the top of the mounded earth of Level B (Figure 3).

The effect of the fossil shells and large mammal bones resting on the raised sand is reminiscent of the elevated earthen platforms of early twentieth-century Igbo shrines and Mande ancestral shrines of the upper Niger
Figure 2. Plan of the ca. 1720-50 period occupation at Utopia (44JC32), detailing Structure 50 and Feature 44. Drawing from Fesler 1996, courtesy James River Institute for Archaeology.
Delta (Jones 1931; Thompson 1993a:117). The composition of the assemblage also bears striking resemblance to objects associated with West African spiritual traditions in several ways. First, almost half of the artifacts from Level A, including sherds of tin-glazed earthenware, kaolin pipe stems and shell, are white. White is a sacred color, symbolizing purity and the Supreme Being in many West African traditional religions (Awolalu 1979:4). White stones were used in West African ancestor shrines, and such stones and white ceramic fragments have been found associated with similar archaeological assemblages in Maryland (Saraceni 1996:21; Talbot 1967:128).

Additionally, water, symbolized by the feature’s fossil shells, is where the souls of the dead find temporary abodes while awaiting reincarnation and is considered sacred to the Igbo (Oramasionwu 1994:123-124). Sacrifices to Onishe, the Igbo river spirit, are always white (Isichei 1978:182). Early European visitors noted that Ibibio shrines often contained shells, since seashells were sacred to the spirit of the sea (Talbot 1967:10). Fossil scallops like those from the Utopia pit are common on the beaches of the James River around Williamsburg, where they have eroded from a 3.5 million-year-old deposit known as the Yorktown formation (DCR 1997). Enslaved Afro-Virginians at Utopia would easily have gathered these shells along the riverfront or removed them from the banks. Further, a large proportion (about 30 percent) of the artifacts from Level A are complete, and all of the objects (five shells and three animal bones) shown resting on the platform of sand are unbroken. Only 7 to 11 percent of the objects in other subfloor pits in this structure are unbroken, which further suggests that the objects on the platform in Feature 44 were placed there intentionally.

Level B, the earthen platform, contained only six artifacts, including a brick fragment, two pipe stems, a fragmentary wrought iron nail, a piece of daub, and a green and red glass bead. The small number of artifacts, as well as the fragmentary nature, small size and diversity of the assemblage, suggests that these objects were not used in a spiritual fashion.

A number of elements intersect to make the interpretation of this feature as an ancestor shrine a compelling one. The assemblage’s parallels with past and present West African ancestor shrines are noteworthy. The combination of white and water-related objects arranged on the earthen mound suggests that this pit may have contained a shrine that venerated the dead awaiting reincarnation.

Pollen analysis of the feature’s soil lends further support to this interpretation. The soil levels contained high quantities of grape pollen (Cummings and Moutoux 1998), suggesting that libations of wine were poured onto the platform, in a manner similar to the palm wines used in West Africa.

**Eden House Site (31BR52)**

A second example of a subfloor pit that may have served as a shrine was located at the
Eden House site (31BR52) west of Edenton, North Carolina. The North Carolina tidewater, originally settled by Virginians, was also a tobacco-producing region with many similarities to Virginia’s economic and social history. At this plantation, originally settled around 1660, excavators uncovered an earthfast structure that appeared to have been the original manor house before the construction of a more substantial dwelling (Lautzenheiser et al. 1998). The structure and its shed addition measured 24 x 16 feet and most likely was housing for the enslaved during the 1720s and 1730s, when Gabriel Johnston, Governor of the North Carolina colony, owned the property. Four subfloor pits cut the soil under the floor of the shed addition. One of these pits, Feature 3, contained an array of objects arranged on the flat floor (Figure 4). A pair of iron scissors and a kaolin pipe with four inches of intact stem were placed on either side of two complete wine bottles resting in the northeastern portion of the pit, forming an X-shaped configuration. In the northwest corner were two iron axe heads, crossed one over another, also in an X-shape. In the center of the pit was a complete colorless leaded-glass decanter and two more complete wine bottles. The shapes of the wine bottles and a leaded-crystal wine-glass engraved with the date 1733 establish that the pit was filled after that date.

Like at Utopia, the artifacts and their placements within this feature are suggestive of West African shrines. While no raised earthen mound had been created, the types of objects and their placements on the floor of the pit are significant. The wine bottle grouping was placed in the northeastern portion of the feature, paralleling findings from a number of other slave-related sites in Virginia and Maryland (Saraceni 1996:21). Although the significance of the northeastern placement of many groups of spiritual objects is unknown, it may be related to the northeastern quadrant of the Bakongo cosmogram, which corresponds with birth and life (Thompson 1983:108-116). In fact, most of the artifacts from the lower soil level were encountered in the northeast portion of the feature.

Not only are the placements of the artifact groups significant, but also the types of artifacts that constituted them. Olaudah Equiano, an Igbo enslaved in Virginia, noted in his autobiography that pipes and tobacco were placed in the graves of departed spiritual leaders (Equiano 1987). Ancestors are given libations of palm wine or other spirits daily, and the grouping of the pipe with the wine bottles links two types of artifacts with significance for ancestor veneration. The ax heads and scissors, with their cutting edges, could signify the protective powers of iron (Thompson 1993a).

Other items recovered from the pit that have spiritual significance in West African cultures include six chalk fragments. Chalk plays a crucial role in the Igbo creation myth, being the core material from which both the earth and humans are formed (Oramasionwu 1994:103). The Igbo heap pulverized chalk on ancestral shrines and also use it to decorate their bodies during sacred ceremonies (Achebe 1994; Oramasionwu 1994:269). Other artifacts include a flowerpot base.

Figure 4. Plan of Feature 3 at the Eden House site (31BR52), showing objects resting on floor of the pit. Drawing by the author.
whose round shape and pierced central hole are reminiscent of a Bakongo cosmogram and of pierced bone disks recovered from the Annapolis, Maryland cache (Adams 1993).

Conclusions

The last fifty years of research on African Americans of the Diaspora has clearly documented ties linking African-American and West African spiritual traditions (Brown 1994; Logan et al. 1992; Raboteau 1978; Sobel 1979, 1987; Thompson 1983, 1993a; Young 1996). The subfloor pits that have been analyzed here are but two very specific examples. Although different from each other, they share characteristics that make their attribution as ancestor shrines highly probable. Expressions of spiritual beliefs are individualistic and it cannot be expected that ancestor shrines will “look” a certain way or share a set number of physical characteristics. Each subfloor pit and slave quarter assemblage will need to be interpreted individually to determine whether it may have served a spiritual function. Clearly, not every pit will have functioned as a shrine, or retained enough integrity to allow that determination. But the sheer numbers of cellars on African-American sites alone should be a signal that something significant occurred.

Although the enslaved continued the traditional religious practice of seeking guidance and protection from ancestral spirits, it was set under new historical circumstances in the tidewater. In West Africa, an individual’s destiny was intricately bound with the larger community of the living and the dead. The ancestors, no longer embedded within the larger social system they had once occupied in Africa, came to serve individual needs in the colonial tidewater for persons coping with the shattering effects of enslavement. This concept works particularly well in view of the varied ethnic backgrounds of the enslaved on eighteenth-century plantations in the tidewater region. Shrines, hidden beneath floors, were intensely personal and presumably largely private, and did not need a larger, collective ethnic identity in order to be effective. By examining artifacts found in contextual groupings on the floors of some subfloor pits, it is possible to decipher formerly hidden expressions of identity that helped the enslaved negotiate their lives on colonial plantations.

Endnotes

1 Title quote taken from Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart (1994:167).
2 Manning (1990) includes Angola, Senegambia, the Bights of Benin and Biafra, the Gold Coast, Upper Guinea, and Loango in his discussion of the West African slave trade, a designation which I follow in this paper.
3 Archaeological excavation at the Brush-Everard House in Williamsburg revealed a tin-enameled earthenware drug jar buried in a hole cut through the clay floor of the kitchen (Frank 1967). Additionally, a coarse earthenware bowl was found buried in a work area used by slaves at Oxon Hill Manor in Maryland (John P. McCarthy, personal communication 1994). It is possible that these two vessels were used as protective charms.
4 Only the north half of the raised area was mapped in plan, so there may have actually been more objects on the southern portion of the platform.
5 A cosmogram is a visual representation of the worldview of the peoples of the Kongo. It consists of a cross enclosed within a circle, with the top half of the circle representing the world of the living, and the bottom half is the world of the dead (Thompson 1993a:53).
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Stirring the Ethnic Stew in the South Carolina Backcountry: John de la Howe and Lethe Farm

Carl Steen

On the face of it, South Carolina should be prime territory for the study of ethnicity in the archaeological record. Diverse groups settled in a fairly small area around Charleston in a relatively short time span, and lived in relative isolation for generations. Before we proceed with an examination of our supposition, however, it is necessary to define what is meant herein by “ethnicity.”

Without reviewing and assessing the many discussions of the matter by anthropologists, historians, archaeologists, and sociologists, let us simply say for the purposes of this paper that ethnicity refers to the constructs that distinguish social groups from one another. Within the context of colonial South Carolina an ethnic group was a subset of the whole, identifiable to members of the group as well as to outsiders by reasons of color, language, and custom. Ethnicity in material culture is reflected in items that point to this self-identification. Ethnicity does not have firm, material boundaries. Though readily identifiable characteristics like skin color or choice of outward symbols like clothing can serve as markers, it is not safe to say that everyone sharing a particular characteristic or group of characteristics is necessarily of the same ethnic group.

If the South Carolina colony is a likely place to study ethnicity in the archaeological record, then John de la Howe’s Lethe Farm should be the ideal study site. It is essentially an isolated microcosm of Lowcountry society, since many of its residents were likely raised and socialized in the Lowcountry before arriving to Lethe Farm. Lethe Farm was occupied by a French immigrant, two colonial whites of English extraction, and seventeen African and/or African-American slaves. Together they lived in a nucleated settlement isolated on the Backcountry frontier for as much as 30 years.

In this paper I hope to demonstrate that the issue of identifying ethnicity archaeologically is, even in the best of cases, far more difficult than it may seem. This is an object lesson which has implications for all archaeological interpretations.

Anthropologist Sidney Mintz set the tone for this study in his 1974 book Caribbean Transformations:

Searches for origins, if they are to serve scientific purposes, need to distinguish among form, content, and symbolic meanings, and to attempt to document the processes by which change can occur in the form, content and meanings of particular traditions. Otherwise, such studies run the risk of becoming only celebrations rather than documentary interpretations of the past, sometimes of a past made mythical by careless history (1974:26).

It is argued here that the two aspects of material culture commonly assumed by archaeologists to indicate “African” ethnicity—colonoware pottery and “clay-walled houses”—have not been subjected to a rigorous enough examination to empirically establish this as fact. This has thrown considerable confusion into the interpretation of sites which have produced both cultural forms throughout the British colonies in America.
Identifying Archaeological Evidence of Ethnicity

Despite the optimum conditions, identifying ethnicity on archaeological sites in South Carolina is hindered by many factors. First, the majority of people who came to the South Carolina colony during the seventeenth century (that is, African slaves) arrived presumably without an existing supply of even the barest of necessities, much less definitive ethnic goods like religious objects, clothing, jewelry and adornment, weapons, and specialized tools.

Second, the bulk of the white immigrants came from the lower classes, and did not possess great wealth in their homelands. Their property was minimal to begin with, and shipping was expensive. Most of their property was left behind, and therefore when they arrived in South Carolina most emigres outfitted themselves locally.

Upon arrival the experience of the two main racial groups, Europeans and Africans, diverged. Enslaved Africans were sold in the city and moved inland to plantations where they lived almost exclusively among other Africans, native-born African Americans, and Indian slaves. Unlike free immigrants, they did not purchase farm equipment, furnishings or new sets of cooking pots and dishes in town. Depending on where they ended up they would either be issued such items by their owners, or they relied on the local underground economy.

In the eighteenth century poor whites came to the colony in a steady stream from Great Britain, the other American colonies, and Protestant Europe. Their social statuses varied widely. Some faced the same immediate fate as the Africans; they were indentured and forced to work on the plantations alongside the enslaved Africans and Indians (Smith 1961). The colonies of the New World were often a place where “peoples of very different pasts but fairly similar presents jostled together in new social settings” (Mintz 1974:25).

Other white immigrants came in organized groups, or as extended families. Most received encouragement in the form of land grants upon their arrival, and immediately moved to their own farms and plantations. While a few came with boatloads of material goods, most purchased the necessities for planting and living in Charleston. Since most people (regardless of their country of origin) obtained material goods locally, archaeological expressions of ethnicity will be masked by their reliance on the British market economy.

Finally, neither lower-class Europeans nor African populations from which the settlers of South Carolina were derived have received intensive archaeological study in their home countries. This has potentially led us to both miss and misidentify archaeological evidence of ethnicity.

The Ethnic Makeup of South Carolina Society

Charleston and the Lowcountry were the home of three significant ethnic groups in the eighteenth century, along with the usual cosmopolitan mix found in port cities throughout the world (Joyce 1993; Zierden and Calhoun 1984). There were “Whites,” among whom the dominant group was British (i.e. English, Scots, Welsh, and Irish), along with native colonials from North America, Barbados and the West Indies (Kovacik and Winberry 1986). Early immigrants also included French Huguenots, who arrived in the 1680s and 1690s and settled north of Charleston along the Santee River and inland in what is now Berkeley County (Figure 1; Hirsch 1962).

During the same period rice agriculture became increasingly important to the colo-
African and Indian slaves, the other two significant groups, were imported in increasing numbers to fill the colony's need for labor. It is estimated that by 1708 African slaves were in the majority (42.8 percent), followed by Whites (42.6 percent) and Indian slaves (14.6 percent) (Menard 1995; Smith 1961:128; Wood 1974:144).

In 1708 the African slave population included 1,800 men, 1,100 women, and 1,200 children. The Indian slave population was comprised of 500 men, 600 women, and 300 children. Thus over 25 percent of the slave population was of Native American extraction, a number that held true through the 1720s (Menard 1995; Wood 1974). Indian slaving was discontinued after the Yemassee War of 1715 (Jones 1971). In contrast, the importation of Africans intensified between the 1720s and 1750s before being outlawed in the early nineteenth century.

As Mintz (1974:11) points out, the individuals responsible for maintaining the social order, or the continuity of social and cultural institutions in African societies (i.e. priests, kings, cult-groups, clans and ancestral societies), were not enslaved and brought to the New World. For that matter, neither were the material symbols of wealth, power, or social status. The institutions that allowed cultures to remain coherent in their homelands had to be reinvented in South Carolina. This negotiation of cultural transformation involved a number of groups, including influences from the British, and locally from the French. Although whites were not numerically dominant, they held all political
and economic power, and imposed their strict Protestant Christianity on the colony.

Whites invariably attempted to force their way of life upon an internally diverse population of enslaved Africans and Indians, all of whom adapted to different degrees. Although most black slaves came from West Africa, they were drawn from many distinct cultures, spread over an area that covered thousands of square miles. Further, there was a concerted effort to break up tribal groups upon arrival in order to discourage revolt (Wood 1974).

The origins of Indian slaves are equally vague. Early on, intertribal warfare was encouraged by colonists, and local Indians captured in battle were enslaved. Most were then traded to the Lowcountry settlers. Being close to home, however, they typically ran away at the first opportunity. Many, in fact, were exported to the West Indies because of this (Wood 1974:38).

By the early eighteenth century, Indian traders from South Carolina had forged relationships with tribes as far west as the Mississippi, especially from lands held by the French and Spanish (Moore 1996). Groups from throughout the southeast, including the Nottoway, Meherrin, Tuscarora and Pamunkey of Virginia and North Carolina, are mentioned in the Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade of South Carolina. Given this, it is safe to speculate that South Carolina’s Indian slave population was culturally diverse.

The formation of families among enslaved populations by the early eighteenth century is strongly supported by the presence of as many as 1,700 women and 1,500 children (see numbers quoted above). Since the family served as the foundation for socialization and the passing on of cultural knowledge, these numbers must indicate that a unique culture was in the making, if only to allow for communication and harmony among families and communities of mixed race and ethnicity.

In rice-growing areas in the core of the Lowcountry, enslaved Africans and Indians usually lived in groups of 20 to 100. A single, white family (generally the overseer’s, not the slaveowner’s) also typically resided on these plantations (Joyner 1984:37). Keeping in mind that Indians were not separated from other slaves after about 1730, statistics show a ratio of two slaves to every white through most of the eighteenth century (Menard 1995:283). In some areas the majority of the population remained African American into the mid-twentieth century (Kovacik and Winberry 1986).

The preceding demographics indicate two important points. First, in the early years of the colony African Americans and Indians formed the majority in the Lowcountry. At some level, a joint cultural aesthetic may have emerged and become dominant. Second, because of the social and political dynamics required to maintain the institution of slavery, whites of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds most likely banded together, despite their internal differences.

We might therefore hypothesize that distinct African and Indian (or a blending of the two) artifact assemblages will be evident, if not overwhelming. Still, European-derived material expressions of ethnicity should also be stridently clear, reflecting the solidarity necessary to allow a minority population to retain control over an enslaved majority. European immigrants often managed to bring with them their social institutions and the personnel responsible for their maintenance (in contrast to Africans and Indians who were captured and enslaved). As Mintz posits (1974:38), “[because whites generally] came to the New World under conditions far more favorable than those of enslaved Africans, there is an understandable tendency to suppose that European cultural continuities are
reasonably clear and intact.” Yet as Mintz further explains, and as this research will demonstrate, “the facts are otherwise.”

To summarize, in eighteenth-century South Carolina the population consisted mostly of enslaved Africans and blacks and Indians who tended to live in relatively large groups on plantations in the Lowcountry, with usually only one or two families of whites in residence. In the interior of the colony different conditions existed. Early settlements on the frontier consisted of groups of settlers from mainland Europe and Great Britain that were placed in relatively isolated areas. Their numbers were augmented by a steady stream of immigrants from England, Scotland, Ireland, and particularly by Scotch-Irish Protestants from the mid-Atlantic colonies. In all of these cases one would hypothesize that the retention of each group’s cultural/ethnic traditions should be protracted and measurable. Again, to paraphrase Mintz, for the most part the facts are otherwise, especially where material culture is concerned.

Two Material Expressions of Ethnicity?

In South Carolina, archaeologists have dealt only fleetingly with non-Anglo-European (such as French or German) expressions of ethnicity for two reasons. First, the artificial evidence overwhelmingly consists of objects produced in Great Britain. Thus many researchers have assumed a rapid assimilation of European populations into the British cultural mainstream, and that is at least partially true (see Hirsch 1962; Meriwether 1940; Wheaton et al. 1983). Unfortunately, however, this narrow viewpoint ignores the real and fundamental differences which did exist between groups. Recent research by historians (Fischer 1989) and archaeologists (Elliott and Elliott 1991, 1994; Elliott and Steen 1992; Horning, this volume; Steen 1992a; Steen et al. 1996) have successfully approached these questions of variability between colonial Europeans.

The second reason is that many archaeologists have focused their attentions on the presence, and vast influence, of the black majority. African-derived ethnicity is thought to be easier to identify archaeologically, and this is not an unreasonable assumption. As diverse as Euro-American groups were internally, the differences between them and African groups were even more profound. Africans and Europeans, along with their descendants, were distinct in many ways along the lines of language, social organization, song and folklore, religion, and in other social and cultural areas (Levine 1977; Mintz 1974). Further, as discussed above, African slaves in South Carolina mostly lived in large groups, among their own kind, with relatively little contact with whites. Legitimate Africanisms, using the strict standards defined by Melville Herskovits (1941), survive in present-day South Carolina in both the structure and lexicon of the Gullah language (Moore 1980), in folklore, religion, song (Joyner 1984), folk medicine (Deas-Moore 1987) and even in folk crafts such as basketry (Rosengarden 1988).

It should therefore be a simple matter to identify some obvious differences in material culture that are indicative of African or African-American ethnicity. In fact, two objects have been identified as expressions of African ethnicity in the archaeological record of the South Carolina Lowcountry. As the present paper will show, however, the presumed answers regarding the relationship between ethnicity and material culture leave much to be desired.

Clay-Walled Houses

Patrick Garrow and Thomas Wheaton (Wheaton, Friedlander and Garrow 1983;
Wheaton and Garrow (1985) uncovered structural remains in the slave settlements of the Yaughan and Curriboo plantations on the Santee River from houses that were built using wall trenches, upright posts, and packed clay walls. They claim these buildings have an African origin, both because clay-walled houses are common in Africa, and Africans likely inhabited these structures. Thus to Wheaton, Garrow, and many other researchers the explanation is simple: clay-walled houses are expressions of African ethnicity, or “Africanisms.”

Their evidence is valid at a certain level. Clay wall construction is common in Africa, as virtually any travel book will show. We might even add that wattle-and-daub-type houses are not uncommon in the Caribbean, and there is even a documentary account of a slave in Georgia building a wattle-and-daub structure he called an “African House” (Ferguson 1992:75). Yet can we firmly conclude, based on all extant evidence, that these houses really are African in origin?

Clay-walled houses with post-in-ground and trench and post foundations are also common in France (Kniffen and Glassie 1986). They are also common on French colonial sites in North America, even in the southeast (Gums 1988; Stone 1974; Walthall 1991; Walthall and Benchley 1981). Moreover, the owners of the Yaughan and Curriboo plantations when the houses were built were the Cordes family: French immigrants. Additional supporting evidence has also come to light. Ellen Shlasko (1993, 1997) discovered an excellent example of a wall trench structure downriver a few miles at Wattahan plantation, owned by Daniel Huger, a Frenchman. Another stellar example was found at Lesesne Plantation, on Daniels Island (Zierden et al. 1986), also owned by French Huguenots. So are these clay-walled houses found on plantation sites truly examples of African house-building techniques, or are they French farm structures built by slaves under the direction of French masters that also happen to look “African?”

To further complicate matters, the description of a German house built in 1750 sounds familiar:

It was about 16 x 20 feet. The sides were built by putting up in line eight fat lightwood posts, with eight or nine feet clear of the ground, about two feet apart… The spaces between the posts were filled … with a wicker work of small twigs made somewhat as small baskets are made. The outside wall was then plastered over with…red clay and the inside was quite smooth and nice looking when plastered with native lime (Salley 1898:223-224).

Traveling through South Carolina in the early nineteenth century, Abiel Abbott described the construction of a house at the Elms, Ralph Izard’s plantation in Goose Creek, near Charleston:

In one corner of the garden a favorite old servant is building a house for himself in the style of an English cottage. The walls are formed of mud filled with straw. Large rolls of this cheap composition are piled regularly one upon another, and pressed together. When a foot or two has been reared it is left to harden in the sun and the work is continued from time to time until the wall is completed … this mode of building is called cobbing (Abbot Diary, March 25, 1819).

In other words, the servant was using English cob-walled construction. Walls filled with clay, brick, and other forms of nogging are an ancient tradition in Britain (see, for example, Johnson 1993:99). Other types of typically “British” post-in-ground construction are common on early archaeological sites in the Lowcountry, giving way to frame structures elevated on brick or wood piers by the turn of the nineteenth century (Adams 1990). Farm buildings continue to be made in this fashion into the present (Steen 1997).
Finally, we must not forget that southeastern Indians lived in similar kinds of houses for thousands of years. In every case the various ethnic groups peopling eighteenth-century South Carolina possessed unmistakable cultural traditions of building houses with clay walls. Thus the issue of antecedents is far from clear. Non-rigorous explanations or interpretations that do not account for all of the likely possibilities should be carefully examined. In this case, just because houses in Africa today look similar to houses built in the eighteenth-century Lowcountry, we should not simply jump to the conclusion that the two are related without substantial proof.

It is important to elucidate these distinctions because the meaning is subtly different in each potential scenario. Are these clay-walled houses the expressions of the African and Indian slaves, seeking the kinds of houses they were accustomed to by tradition and culture, or were they the expressions of French farmers, seeking cheap housing for their labor force? Or Germans? Or Englishmen? Or all of the above and more? Clay-walled buildings are certainly an expression of ethnicity, but whose?

Colonoware

The second type of artifact taken to indicate African ethnicity is colonoware: a low-fired, unglazed, handmade earthenware. Initially colonoware was referred to as colono-Indian ware, as it was believed to have been made by Native Americans for trade to the colonists (Noël Hume 1962). In Virginia (Noël Hume 1962) and North Carolina (South 1976), eighteenth-century sites tend to produce a handful of vessels on a fairly uniform basis (Reinhart 1987). Remnant Native American tribes like the Nottoway and Pamunkey (Baker 1972; Binford 1964; Fewkes 1944; Harrington 1908; Charles Hodges, personal communication, 1989; South 1976) were known to have made wares for trade, lending this explanation a reasonable ring.

In the late 1970s archaeological excavations on plantation sites in the South Carolina Lowcountry uncovered large amounts of colonoware. At some sites up to 90 percent of all artifacts consisted of colonoware sherds. Here was something clearly different from the handful of vessels found on Virginia sites.

Leland Ferguson’s 1978 paper “Looking for the Afro in Colono-Indian Pottery” focused on this issue, and changed the way archaeologists have viewed colonoware ever since. He argued that colonoware, like clay-walled houses, was a retention of African traditions, reflecting its makers’ struggle to maintain their African identity in the face of the horrors of slavery. Surely there can be no doubt that the solace provided by a familiar object would be psychologically valuable for an enslaved individual. Yet on a day-to-day living basis it is the underlying need for the utility of a bowl that is more important than the emotional solace it may have provided. Thus when European-manufactured bowls began to be mass-produced and hence relatively inexpensive in the nineteenth century, they came into widespread and regular use, replacing colonoware bowls almost entirely before the middle of the century (Joseph 1993; Lees 1980; Michie 1990; Wheaton and Garrow 1985).1

Taken in this light the origin of the practice of producing colonoware is a question of fundamental importance. Colonoware is found in large quantities on a regular basis in one place only: the South Carolina Lowcountry (Steen 1991, 1992a). African Americans living elsewhere during the same period did not rely nearly as heavily on colonowares.

The question is, if colonoware reflects ethnicity, then whose ethnicity does it reflect?
That is, was the phenomenon of colonoware indicative of an African tradition? Ferguson points to the undeniable similarity in appearance and vessel form between colonoware and examples of contemporary West African pottery (Ferguson 1978). These observations were made during a visit to Ghana by Richard Polhemus, a highly reliable and competent archaeologist well-acquainted with Lowcountry colonoware (Ferguson 1992:9-10).

To my knowledge, however, there have been no published studies which address the issues of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pottery-making in their native land among any non-indigenous, non-white populations ending up in America. Instead of jumping to the conclusion that the wares are African-influenced, we must undertake a more thorough analysis. Even if today we could identify a place in Africa where pottery highly similar to colonoware is being produced, we must ask, "was this pottery the same then as it is now?" Isn't it likely that 200 years of colonial rule and disruption resulted in social and cultural changes throughout Africa that likely affected even pottery traditions? Such linkages and interpretations are usually based on casual observation rather than on a detailed ethnographic or ethnoarchaeological study to begin with. Further, such comparisons also fail to account for internal change in West Africa during the period of the slave trade and colonization. Yes, modern, unglazed African pottery does look similar to eighteenth-century colonoware, but do they have anything at all to do with one another?

As an example of the cultural dynamics and complexity we might expect in West Africa, we can refer to Holsoe and Hermann's book *A Land and Life Remembered* (1988). The book contains photos of dozens of houses and churches in Liberia that are indistinguishable from those along the back roads of South Carolina today. These were built by ex-slaves who participated in the "Back to Africa" movements of the nineteenth century. Might the pottery from Ghana identified as the antecedent to colonoware by Polhemus have actually been influenced by colonowares that traveled to Africa by way of ex-slaves in the same manner as architecture? Finally, this line of reasoning also makes the problematic assumption that all West Africans shared all cultural practices. The question regarding the origin of colonoware traditions is not as straightforward as it might seem.

In favor of an African-derived ethnic and cultural tradition, the sheer volume of colonoware strongly argues for it having been made by Africans, or rather enslaved Africans and blacks, rather than by Indians for trade. There were very few free Indians in the South Carolina Lowcountry, while at the same time there was an overwhelming amount of colonoware. The recovery of 3,000 to 5,000 sherds per site with minimum effort is common. At Yaughan Plantation, over 15,000 sherds were found, mostly in feature contexts (Wheaton and Garrow 1985:252). At the Pine Grove slave settlement a one percent sample of the plowzone around two slave houses recovered over 1,800 sherds (Steen 1992b). At Lesesne and Fairbanks Plantations over 8,000 colonoware sherds made up 33.5 percent of the historic ceramics (Zierden et al. 1986:7-26). These are not isolated instances; rather, they represent the norm (Steen 1993).

By making an admittedly simplistic calculation it can be estimated that the volume of vessel production was literally in the millions. In 1790, 109,000 African Americans lived in South Carolina, with most residing in the core of the Lowcountry (Kovacik and Winberry 1986). Even if we assume that this
represents the total population of people who ever used colonoware, and also assume that they used only ten vessels each in their entire lifetime, well over a million vessels have to have been made. This does not even attempt to take into account the actual number of Africans living in the Lowcountry during the entire period when colonoware was in common use, and the ten vessels per person is surely a gross underestimate.

During the colonial period the number of Indians in all of South Carolina numbered only in the thousands. Most had been pushed back to the far borders of the colony by the 1760s. Isolated groups of “settlement Indians” remained in the Lowcountry, particularly in the swamps south of Charleston. But archaeological sites south of Charleston produce almost no colonoware!

The documentary evidence only complicates matters. Novelist and historian William Gilmore Simms states in his 1845 short-story “Caloya, or the Loves of a Driver”:

When I was a boy, it was the custom of the Catawba Indians … to come down from their far homes in the interior … bringing a little stock of earthen pots and pans … which they bartered in the city.

He states that they arrived empty-handed, set up camps “on the rich clay lands,” and made pottery for sale on the plantations and in Charleston. Simms details the pottery-making process from the digging of the clay to drying and firing the pots (Steen et al. 1996:132).

Later writers also tell us of Catawba Indians making pottery in the Lowcountry (Deas 1910:16; Gregorie 1925:21). Whether these observations are based upon first-hand knowledge or folklore is questionable. They may all have actually gotten the story from Simms (Steen et al. 1996). With a single equivocal exception (which will be discussed below), the sole documentary account which discusses the manufacture of these wares describe Catawba Indians coming to the Lowcountry to make and sell pottery to the slaves, not the slaves making it for themselves. But could the Catawba possibly have made millions of vessels? This seems unlikely.

On Lowcountry sites amongst the thousands of more common wares, we consistently find a few pieces of the fine, burnished ware that Wheaton and Garrow (1985) call Catawba pottery. Ferguson (1985) renamed this ware “River Burnished.” This typological separation was further refined by Ronald W. Anthony (Anthony 1989; Zierden et al. 1986). These sherds are very similar to the wares found in North Carolina and Virginia and like those, should probably be called colono-Indian ware rather than colonoware.

Is it therefore logical to assume that the more common type of colonoware is an expression of African-ness? Colonoware is found in overwhelming amounts on eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century sites in Charleston and Berkeley Counties, and in Georgetown County on the Waccamaw Neck (see Figure 1). Using South’s (1978) classificatory system to facilitate comparisons, Kitchen group materials make up over 59 percent of the artifacts from these sites. At the Yaughan and Curriboo slave settlement sites, colonoware made up 73-90 percent of the ceramics. A few miles downstream at the main house and kitchen of Hampton Plantation (Lewis and Haskell 1980), they made up over 54 percent of the ceramics, even without removing the later whitewares. At the Oaks on Waccamaw Neck (Drucker 1983), colonowares comprised 55 percent of the ceramics; in the Main House complex at Limerick (Lees 1980), the number was 38 percent of the ceramics. The list continues: at Middleton Place (Lewis 1979) over 54 percent of the ceramics were colonoware. At Pine Grove (Steen 1992a) colonowares made up over 25 percent of the artifacts in a 1%
sample, and over 40 percent of the artifacts from all excavation contexts at a site where occupation continued into the twentieth century.

Sites south of Charleston produce very little colonoware (see Figure 1). For instance, in 50-cm tests excavated at a 15 meter interval at McLeod Plantation on James Island only 14 percent of the ceramics were colonoware (Steen 1994). Across the island at the Dill property, Charleston Museum researchers report almost no colonoware at all from extensive, ongoing excavations. They recovered 4-5 percent at one site, and about 14 percent at another (Ronald W. Anthony, personal communication, 1995). At the Vanderhorst and Bass Pond sites on Kiawah Island, colonoware made up a maximum of 4.5 percent of the ceramics (Trinkley et al. 1993). At site 38BU1289, about 50 miles south of Charleston, less than two percent of the assemblage was colonoware (Kennedy et al. 1993). At Santa Elena the eighteenth-century plantation contexts produced only “about two dozen sherds of colonoware” (Depratter and South 1995:58). Sites in coastal Georgia, even when occupied by planters and slaves from South Carolina, do not produce colonoware (Singleton 1985).

There are no intervening variables that could explain the lack of colonoware at these sites. They were all occupied from the mid-eighteenth century into the nineteenth century, and thus date to the correct period for the peak production of colonoware. The demographics are the same; that is, enslaved Africans made up a tremendous percentage of the local population, up to 90 percent at times. Further, the same slaving ships supplied plantations north and south of Charleston. We cannot therefore argue that some tribal or cultural groups made colonoware while others did not.

Wheaton and Garrow (1985) have argued that acculturation explains the demise of colonoware. However, we can point out that the Sea Islands south of Charleston received smuggled cargoes of slaves well past the 1808 ban on importation, and the strongest evidence of legitimate African retentions in South Carolina do in fact exist in that area (Moore 1980). There does not even appear to be a link between rice cultivation and colonoware production. If we reconsider three sites which produced very few colonoware sherds, two (Santa Elena and Kiawah) are on Sea Islands where rice was not grown, while site 38BU1289 was in prime rice country. To take this argument further, if rice planters were choosing strongly for slaves with experience in rice-growing in Africa (as many historians argue, e.g., Littlefield 1980; Wood 1974), and they were the ones who made colonoware, we should find it in all of the rice-growing areas south of Charleston just as we do on Berkeley County rice plantations.

I propose that instead of colonoware being an indicator of African or Native American ethnicity, it is more reasonable to think of it as something entirely different: a cultural or ethnic material expression of African Americans and Indians living in a relatively small area of the Lowcountry which developed locally. Its sources are creole rather than simply either African or Indian, and since it was specifically adapted to the society within which it was made and used, the end result was a ware familiar to all who contributed to its creation.

Consider this alternative for its origin. Even as late as 1730, enslaved Indians, over 40 percent of whom were women, made up as much as 25 percent of the Lowcountry slave population (Ferguson 1992; Menard 1995; Wood 1974). Might these Indian women have taught their daughters, some of whom probably had African fathers, to supply themselves with ceramics for daily use? Could such traditions have been maintained
as family lore locally for a hundred or so years before dying out? Further, even if none of the Africans sent to the colony had ever made pottery, they could easily have learned from their Indian neighbors, and have interpreted pottery-making in ways that were comfortable to themselves.

The documentary record also gives credence to this idea. When ex-slave Albert Carolina was interviewed on the Waccamaw Neck in the 1930s, he recalled a childhood memory where his grandparents had made “a kiln of clay pots” and fired them. Albert Carolina’s grandfather was an Indian but his grandmother was an African American (Ferguson 1992:2-3).

The existing evidence is ambiguous only if we are seeking an absolute answer. Yet when we consider this alternative explanation, that colonoware was a creole expression, the evidence seems solid both from the material and documentary record. The idea that two (or more) traditions were interwoven seems far more logical than the alternatives, the first being that itinerant Indian potters camped on the riverbanks and made millions of pots. The second, that Africans living in one specific area of South Carolina insisted upon supplying themselves with homemade pots while their countrymen, both within this colony and the other American colonies (wherever they comprised a relatively large proportion of the population) did not.

Instead of looking to an answer that is simple and absolute, i.e., that colonoware production originated with either Africans or Indians, we need to recognize the complexity of human expression and not jump to conclusions that are ultimately “only celebrations” (Mintz 1974: 26). Colonowares found elsewhere throughout space and time are something altogether different, and will require a different interpretation. In many cases they may be colono-Indian wares. In others they may be distinctly African or African-American. But the only place where it is firmly established that African Americans made colonoware is the South Carolina Lowcountry, and at Lethe Farm, in the Backcountry frontier.

**John de la Howe and Lethe Farm**

John de la Howe’s Lethe Farm was not in the Lowcountry; it was 150 miles from Charleston in the Backcountry frontier (see Figure 1). To give the conclusions away before the evidence is presented, let us say that the findings at the John de la Howe site strongly support a European origin for clay-walled houses, and a Lowcountry African-American origin for South Carolina colonoware that sets them apart from colono-Indian wares and other African-American pottery (such as Afro-Carribean wares; Heath 1985). It is unique among Backcountry sites in both respects, and it serves as the exception that proves the rule.

The following reconstruction of Lethe Farm’s history and John de la Howe’s life was greatly aided by the research of Anne Gibert (1976, 1977, 1983), Anthony Warren (1996), and Alton Loftis (1996).

**Historic Context**

South Carolina’s initial settlements were along the coast, focusing on Charleston, and to a lesser extent, the ports of Georgetown and Beaufort (see Figure 1). By the 1730s, however, white settlers were feeling pressured by both the African-American population, which was double that of whites, and
by the Indians to the west. The colonial government reacted by establishing several townships in a ring around Charleston. These townships were designed to provide both a buffer between the Indians and the Lowcountry, and to insure adequate defenses in the event of a slave revolt (Meriwether 1940).

In the 1730s nine townships were laid out and settled by groups of British, French, Swiss, and Germans (Figure 2). Ebenezer, in Georgia, was similarly conceived (Elliott and Elliott 1991). During this same period, individuals and small groups started to move into the Backcountry both from the North and from the Lowcountry. This migration accelerated after the Cherokee border was pushed back in 1747, turning into a flood in the 1750s and 60s, when the French and Indians threatened the borders in the northern colonies.

To secure the new lands a second set of townships was established in the Abbeville area between 1762 and 1765 (refer to Figure 2). These included Boonesborough, Londonborough, Belfast, and Hillsborough (Kovacik and Winberry 1986; Meriwether 1940). Hillsborough was settled by French Huguenots, who named their town New Bordeaux. Later the township would be referred to by this name as well.

The New Bordeaux colony was led by Reverend Jean Louis Gibert. It consisted of about 200 settlers at first, with others arriving over the next few years. When they arrived at New Bordeaux in November 1764 they found “a magnificent forest” (Moragne 1857:19). With the assistance of established residents, the Scotch-Irish Calhouns, they built a town hall, a number of houses, and cleared fields. Grants were made for town lots, vineyard lots and a bounty of 100 acres.

![Figure 2. Colonial townships highlighted on the 1775 Henry Mouzon map. Locations and boundaries not shown on the Mouzon map are taken from Meriwether (1940).]
for each adult. Not long after, the new settlers moved on to farms along Little River, Long Cane Creek, and the Savannah River, well beyond the limits of the township.

It is at about this time that John de la Howe enters the picture. Despite his wealth and high social status very little is known of John de la Howe’s life. Although he was a physician and judge, he rarely appears in the documentary record, and unfortunately, left no personal papers. Most of what is known of Dr. de la Howe comes to us from William Moragne, a grandson of Pierre Moragne, one of the New Bordeaux settlers. In an 1854 address he stated (Moragne 1857:34-35):

Attached to the colony was the accomplished Jean de La Howe, the Hipocrates of this new region of the world... He is said to have been born in the north of France, or in Holland, or perhaps, in Flanders, where he received a finished education for that day in the Medical profession. He afterwards attached himself as surgeon to some French army, and at the close of the war visited first England, then Charleston.

The earliest reference to Dr. de la Howe in South Carolina places him in Charleston in 1764 (Warren 1996). Three years later, at 51 years old, he married the widow Anne Walker Boyd. John de la Howe’s name also appears in colonial and state land records from 1768 to 1791. In 1770 he purchased 200 acres on Long Cane Creek from Henry Marque, which is the first time that he is officially associated with the Lethe Farm project area. Over the next 21 years, seven plats (totaling 863 acres) in the Hillsborough/Long Cane Creek area were recorded in his name (see number 11 in Figure 2, and Figure 3).

De la Howe’s actions are not clearly documented, but it appears that he resided part of the time in Charleston and part of the time at Lethe Farm until 1785. The first definite mention of his having established a working plantation in the upcountry came in a 1775 advertisement in the Charleston Gazette, where he sought:

An Overseer well acquainted with the management of Negroes having a few of his own and willing to make indigo in the French way upon a healthy plantation in the Backcountry... (Charleston Gazette, Feb. 10-17, 1775).

In 1777 he returned to the Lowcountry to ride out the American Revolution. He maintained a residence in Charleston until 1785. His obituary for January 18, 1797, stated:

Died on the 2nd Inst. at Long Cane in Abbeville District of Ninety Six, in the 80th year of his age, Dr. John de la Howe. As a practitioner of Physic he was eminent in this country for upwards of thirty years past; as a man of extensive learning he had few equals and his benevolence endeared him to all who knew him. About 12 years ago he retired to Abbeville County, of which he was made a judge; there his whole time was spent in assisting those who stood in need of his advice. By his last will, having no children, he left his estate to support a public school in Abbeville County.

Thus by 1797 de la Howe had been a well-known figure in the Abbeville District for about thirty years, although he had only lived there full-time for twelve years. During the period between 1770 and 1785 Lethe Farm was apparently run either by a white overseer or a manager from within the African-American workforce. The latter is more likely, since no mention is made in the documentary record of his ever hiring an overseer.

The first U.S. Census in 1790 put Dr. de la Howe, a white woman, and 14 slaves at Lethe Farm. The white woman is likely Anna Cook, his housekeeper. In both his estate inventory and the later estate sale, the slaves are named: Pompey, James, Molley, Tuminy,
Figure 3. Location of Lethe Farm site. Courtesy U.S. Geological Survey.
Brister, Matilda, Liza, Little Molley, Boze and Little Bucky, Ben, Sam, Jack, and Felice. De la Howe manumitted his manservant Bacchus in his will. It is notable that in the 1806 sale of his estate, nine of the slaves were mentioned by name, but two families were sold as units.

One slave, Tuminy, seems to be the same fellow mentioned in newspaper advertisements in 1778. Dr. de la Howe advertised that “a negro boy named Charlestowne, his country name is Tam-o” had run away again. Given his African name, it may have been that Tam-o himself was African. The origin of the other slaves is not known. Some may have formerly been the property of his wife, Anne Walker Boyd, who owned a plantation on Daniels Island, near Charleston (see Zierden et al. 1986).

It is highly likely that the slaves owned by Dr. de la Howe viewed themselves as part of a family, or at least felt a strong sense of community. They lived intimately in an enclosure on a ridge top in the Backcountry of South Carolina for as long as thirty years. They could not leave, and opportunities for meeting other African Americans in that part of the colony were few before cotton agriculture swept the region in the 1790s, and the plantation system took hold (Davis 1979; Klein 1990). Together they formed their own community, one that was probably more self-contained, insular and culturally conservative than similar groups in other, more densely settled parts of the colony. The material culture associated with such close-knit social relations should be recoverable in the archaeological record, and the large amounts of colonoware found at the site support this assertion.

The individuals living at Lethe Farm were each in themselves unique, and together formed a distinctive, dynamic community. By the time de la Howe had arrived in Charleston, he had spent his formative years in France or Holland, and had already attained years of life experience. Although he would have had to make sacrifices to adapt to life in the colonies, it is clear that he was the kind of person who would have maintained his ethnic identity. De la Howe would probably never have fully “acculturated,” because there was little call for him to do so. He was not an oppressed minority, but a member of the power elite: a doctor, a judge, a rich man. He was not isolated amongst foreigners, as many of his neighbors were also French. Finally, even fifty years after his death he was still remembered for having “the polished manners of a French gentleman” (Moragne 1857). If it were possible to uncover archaeological evidence of French ethnicity on a colonial American site, then it should be found on a site once occupied by a person like de la Howe.

The African-American slaves living at Lethe Farm were as unique as Dr. de la Howe. The native-born blacks were likely from the Lowcountry, while the others may have come directly from Africa. Together they lived on a Backcountry farm in a region where African Americans were relatively rare. At Lethe Farm they were even more isolated from others than most of their enslaved contemporaries. Lethe Farm was occupied by as many as seventeen blacks, but only three whites. At times there may have been no whites at all. Thus African Americans formed the nucleus of, and contributed greatly to the social and cultural exchanges within this microcosm of South Carolina society, and most of what we see in the archaeological record was produced by them. As with de la Howe and French ethnicity, if evidence of African ethnicity is to be found, it should be uncovered on a site like Lethe Farm.

Finally, absent at Lethe Farm were Indians. When the site was settled in 1770, the last remaining Indians in the area had been pushed into the northwest corner of the
colony. White settlers poured into the new lands to pursue agriculture in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. By the 1830s all but a handful of Indians had been forcibly removed to reservations in the west.

Archaeology and Ethnicity at Lethe Farm

Archaeology at Lethe Farm (38MC637) began in 1991 (Steen 1992a). The extremely well-preserved site is located on a ridge toe overlooking Little River, now Lake Strom Thurmond (see Figure 3). Dr. de la Howe’s estate inventory mentions six buildings, including his dwelling and medicine shop, an overseer’s house, a store, a loom house, a cutting house, and a granary (Figure 4 and Table 1). Structure foundations are clear on the surface, and there are many more foundations visible than structures named (sampling also indicated additional structures). The problem has never been one of finding structures, but of assigning function to them. Notably there is no mention at all of slave dwellings. When the slaves were inventoried it appears that they were all standing together in the yard of the overseer’s house.

When we calculated artifact density, two structures, B and E, stood out from the rest. Structure B (Figures 4 and 5) was Dr. de la Howe’s house, as evidenced by its size and the upper-status indicators found within its artifact assemblage. Structure E is interpreted to have been a central kitchen. The following discussion will consider each structure individually. Findings from the artifacts associated with each structure carry significant implications for archaeological interpretations regarding the relationship between ethnicity and material culture.

Structure E

A scatter of fieldstones in the site area, along with a lack of clay daub, suggest that Structure E was either a log or frame building. It appears to have been reserved mainly as a cooking facility, which is highly unusual. In the Lowcountry, midden deposits at individual structures indicate that most slave families cooked for themselves, but at Lethe Farm it appears that everyone ate from a central kitchen. Excavations totaling 32 square meters in the midden at Structure E produced over 5,000 colonoware sherds, and 1,200 glazed ceramics (Table 2). Other domestic artifacts included bottle and table glass, and numerous clay pipes (made of both ball clay and local clay). We recovered approximately 10 kilograms of faunal material which included cow, pig, sheep, chicken, turkey, squirrel, deer, opossum, fish and turtles.

Although all of the structures produced colonoware, Structure E produced by far the most. This suggests that if the vessels were not in fact stored at this central location, then they must have been part of the kitchen’s equipage. In Table 2 the artifacts are summarized following South’s (1978) classificatory system. South initially considered colonoware a component of the “Activities” group, with the activity being trade with the Indians (South 1978:172-175). When archaeologists in the Lowcountry began to find overwhelming amounts of colonoware functioning in an everyday, kitchen context, they shifted it to the “Kitchen” group and created the “Revised Carolina Artifact Pattern” and “Carolina Slave Artifact Pattern” (see Wheaton and Garrow 1985:253-255). However, when we compare assemblages on a regional basis it is still useful to consider colonoware as an Activity group item. For example, on sites dating between the 1690s and 1830s on the outskirts of Williamsburg, Virginia, colonoware was rare, never making up more than one percent of the artifact assemblages (Steen 1992a). Placing it in the Kitchen group in those contexts would mask its uniqueness as a potential trade item.
Figure 4. Site plan of the Lethe Farm site. Map by the author.

Figure 5. Structure B detail. Map by the author.
Table 1.
The structures identified at the Lethe Farm site.

Structure A: This is a small distinct foundation of field stone enclosing a clay pad. Limited testing recovered few artifacts, so we might assume a non-domestic function. Dr. de la Howe’s will inventory mentions a loom house, a cutting house, a granary and a store. The latter had a cellar, and this structure does not appear to have had one, so that possibility can be ruled out.

Structure B: This is the main dwelling house. Discussed in detail in the text.

Structure C: This is another distinct foundation. Limited testing recovered a few domestic artifacts, so we tentatively assign a domestic function to this structure. This structure is located at the inside edge of the house lot, adjacent to a stone wall. Down slope about ten meters a slumped in well is visible. Dr. de la Howe’s will inventory lists several horses so we might suggest that the slave charged with their care and feeding may have slept here.

Structure D: This is an indistinct structure remnant consisting of a huge pile of rock and clay and a few artifacts. This may be the cutting house mentioned in the inventory.

Structure E: This appears to be a kitchen that served the entire community. It may also have housed the overseer, and cook. Extensive excavations were conducted in a midden deposit adjacent to this building. Discussed in text.

Structure F: This structure is across the lot from Structure C, and it is marked by a round depression that appears to be a cellar. It produced few artifacts and a non-domestic function is suggested. If horses were pastured across the stone wall then logic would suggest this as a good candidate for the granary.

Structure G: Structure G is all the way down on the point of the ridge that houses Lethe Farm. It is marked by a deep cellar hole, and chimney fall. It is likely the Store mentioned in the estate inventory.

Structure H: Structure H is about ten meters north of Structure G. It too is marked by a cellar hole and a scatter of fieldstone from the foundation and chimney fall. The excavation of sixteen square meters recovered a total of 465 artifacts in a strongly domestic pattern. After the close of the first year’s fieldwork I thought all three of the buildings on the point here were probably occupied by slave families. With the discovery that Structure G did not produce domestic artifacts in considerable numbers it may be that it was the store, and that this is the Overseer’s house.

Structure I: Structure I is about ten meters north of Structure H. It too is marked by a scatter of fieldstones, and a shallow cellar hole. Limited shovel testing around it produced domestic artifacts so we might still suggest that it served as a slave dwelling.

Structure J: There was no surface indication of Structure J, but the recovery of artifacts in shovel tests in the area suggest its presence. This may have been a shed or outbuilding.

Structure K: This structure is on a lower terrace of the ridge between the main dwelling and the water. Artifacts recovered there suggest a domestic occupation.

Structure L: Structure L was not at all clear on the surface, but the excavation of a two meter square uncovered a brick foundation remnant which may be a chimney base.

Structure M: This structure is located on the edge of a toe of land formed by erosion. The presence of lush greenery year around suggests the gully was the site of a spring, and that this may have been a spring house or dairy.

Structure N: This is a small platform with several large fieldstone. It may bee the site of a small shed or storage building. Shovel testing in the area did not produce artifacts.

Structure O: This is signaled by a round depression and associated rock pile, but no artifacts were recovered to suggest function.

Structure P: Finally, another structure is suggested by the presence of a few artifacts in the shovel tests and a vaguely defined depression.
### Table 2.
Artifact Pattern Breakdown for Structure B and E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group/Category</th>
<th>Structure B</th>
<th></th>
<th>Structure E</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kitchen</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceramics</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>1106</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonoware</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>5335</td>
<td>65.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total w/ Colonoware</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>6706</td>
<td>82.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total w/o Colonoware</td>
<td>1533</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>1371</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Architecture</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nails</td>
<td>1159</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>856</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Window Glass</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1457</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>884</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clothing</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Tools”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arms</strong> (total)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Furniture</strong> (total)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Personal</strong> (total)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pipes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonoware</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical arts.</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total w/ Colonoware</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>5458</td>
<td>66.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>3582</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>8170</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lethe Farm is unusual among the sites excavated in the Backcountry of South Carolina in its production of large amounts of colonoware. Very few historic sites in this area have been excavated, but Lethe Farm is in the middle of a national forest and on the edge of an Army Corps of Engineers lake. Thus tens of thousands of acres have been surveyed, and thousands of sites have been recorded in this area. U.S. Forest Service researchers have yet to find colonoware at any of these sites (James Bates, personal communication, 1996; Elliott 1984; Southerlin et al. 1993). Survey level work at James Petigru’s Badwell Plantation, about three miles downstream from Lethe Farm, yielded two sherds identified as colonoware (Drucker et al. 1984).

One site that did receive extensive excavation was Fort Independence (Bastian 1982), a fortified house and trading post, about eight miles away from Lethe Farm on the Savannah River (see Figure 1). This site dates to the same time period, and was also owned by a slave-holding, upper-class trader. It produced absolutely no colonoware, even though the owner was an Indian trader. If
Indians were indeed making it for trade, you would certainly expect to find a few pieces at a trading post.

In contrast, at Lethe Farm the 5,747 sherds of colonoware amounts to 46.7 percent of the entire artifact assemblage, and 79 percent of the ceramics alone. This compares favorably with sites like Limerick (Lees 1980), Yaughan and Curriboo (Wheaton et al. 1983), Middleton Place (Lewis 1979; Lewis and Haskell 1980), Hampton (Lewis 1979), Richmond Hill (Michie 1990), and others in the core of the Lowcountry (refer back to Figure 1). Early sites inland have produced few to no colonowares in comparison (Baker 1972; Lewis 1976), with the exception of the Howell site near Columbia, where colonoware made up about 25 percent of the collection (see Figure 1; Groover 1992).

The Lethe Farm colonoware total compares favorably with the assemblages from the Lesesne and Fairbank plantations excavated by Martha Zierden and Ron Anthony in 1986 (see Figure 1). Fairbank was partly owned by Anne de la Howe, as part of her inheritance from her father, Captain Thomas Walker. Both her widowed mother and her sister Elizabeth were married to the neighboring Lesesnes. Thus we might assume that at least a few of Dr. de la Howe’s slaves may have come from Daniels Island, in the heart of colonoware country. There is no evidence to suggest that he brought slaves with him from Europe, so the remainder were surely acquired after he arrived, and were most likely purchased in Charleston. Upon arriving at Lethe Farm these individuals would have began creating colonowares similar to the ones they would have been accustomed to in the Lowcountry.

When we compare the overwhelming number of colonoware from Lethe Farm with its absence at Fort Independence, it stands as proof that it must indeed have been African Americans who made colonoware for the most part, at least in the core area of the Lowcountry. The evidence from Lethe Farm simply suggests that wherever enslaved blacks from the Lowcountry may have been relocated to may also have served as sites for colonoware production.

The relative lack of colonoware elsewhere from contemporaneous sites possessing similar demographic characteristics indicates something that we may have overlooked in our haste to find Africanisms and cultural antecedents: the Lowcountry creation of colonoware is not something that is pan-African or even pan-African-American. It is a local phenomenon. The manufacture and use of colonoware, as argued earlier, drew from African, Indian and European traditions, and is not strictly attributable to any one of the three. It was a creole product of the New World, created and used within particular social and cultural circumstances, as indicated by the “anomalous” Lethe Farm case.

Structure B

The best material evidence of French ethnicity on the site is the de la Howe dwelling, Structure B. A rectangular hump of earth forms the outline of a building measuring 36 x 30 feet in length and width. At either end of the structure, external features suggest that “Shed Rooms” mentioned in the will inventory may have extended the building. These may not have had full foundations or clay walls.

It was believed that the rectangular hump would reveal itself to be a fieldstone foundation like the ones seen at some of the other structures. We were surprised to find, however, that the hump consisted almost entirely of raw and fired clay daub. In individual one meter squares this amounted to as much as 230 kg. Individual pieces were up to 30 cm thick, which confirms that they were used as wall fill.
Limited excavations have revealed structural posts, or wall uprights, indicating that this was a post-in-ground structure with clay filling the interstices, in the classic Poteaux en Terre architectural style (Figures 6 and 7; Kniffen and Glassie 1986:164). This establishes a firm, physically verifiable European antecedent for clay-walled structures in eighteenth-century South Carolina. In doing so, this case study highlights the serious dilemma of possible mistaken ethnic identity discussed above in the example of clay-walled houses.

The artifacts from Structure B fall out in a distinctly different pattern from those of Structure E (see Table 2). First, European ceramics and porcelain are more common, there is more wine bottle glass, far more ball clay pipes than colono pipes, and more nails, window glass, etc. Far more intriguing is the presence of numerous glass, salt-glazed stoneware and tin-glazed apothecary vessels. The evidence of de la Howe’s medical profession is gratifyingly clear.

Even though John de la Howe clearly identified himself as a Frenchman, and lived among French neighbors, except for the main house itself, the Lethe Farm site has only provided us with a couple of examples of “portable” artifacts which suggest French ethnicity. These include a French coin, a Bordeaux wine bottle, Norman stonewares, and a few sherds of tin-glazed earthenware thought to be French faience rather than English delft. Moreover, looking at Dr. de la Howe’s estate inventory, except for his medical books there is nothing mentioned by name which one might identify as “French” (see Steen et al. 1996). This leads back to one of the fundamental points raised earlier: even in cases
where ethnicity must surely physically manifest itself, one might think it would still likely be “overshadowed” by the dominant culture (in this case, British culture). Or should we instead say, dominant economic entity?

In the end, finding evidence of French identity among the French of British colonial America is a different matter than finding it among the French of the Louisiana Territory and Canada. It does not mean that de la Howe and his counterparts did not think of themselves as French, or that their neighbors did not see them as French, but rather that the vast majority of their material remains likely reflected the economic system in which they were obliged to participate.

**Concluding Remarks**

The low-fired earthenwares found in such large numbers in the South Carolina Lowcountry developed within that particular context, and failed to spread even within the colony, much less to the other colonies. Colonoware found elsewhere, e.g. in North Carolina and Virginia, must therefore be something else. Not necessarily something entirely unrelated, but a different nuance of cultural expression deserving an independent interpretation which considers all of the site-specific particulars that contributed to its creation. The presence of verifiably African-derived pottery in Virginia, for instance, would have a much different meaning because it would constitute an isolated example. With the plethora of colonoware makers in the Lowcountry, anyone there could have learned to make utilitarian wares locally, whereas in Virginia one would assume that knowledge carried over from Africa would have served as the direct source for “know-how.” Thus the potential meaning and even function of this hypothesized Virginia colonoware would be considerably different than that interpreted for Lowcountry wares. In the Lowcountry, colonoware is what people ate from every day. In Virginia, slaves making their own African-style pottery may indeed have been making a strong political statement, but it needs to be carefully demonstrated that the ware has an African origin before that conclusion can be made.

Likewise, the misidentification of the antecedents of clay-walled buildings can mask their real meaning. Instead of being expressions of African-ness they may well be expressions of French, German, or English heritage imposed on, but interpreted and executed by, an enslaved African and American Indian population that quickly evolved into a unique, creole culture.

As I posited at the beginning of this paper, the evidence of ethnicity in the archaeological record of South Carolina is far from clear, for in colonial South Carolina there did indeed exist an ethnic stew. This idea of a “stew” is a reasonable metaphor for American culture, because it is possible to see ingredients that bind the whole and yet still identify succulent and spicy bits of various cultures.

**Endnotes**

1 This interpretation of vessel use was informed by the pioneering work of John Solomon Otto (1976) and George Miller (1980, 1991). African Americans living during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries along the Georgia Coast did not use colonoware (Fairbanks 1984; Singleton 1985; Singleton 1991). It follows that enslaved Africans and blacks may have needed bowls as a functional item, yes, but not necessarily or strictly colonoware bowls.

2 Please refer to Steen, Elliott, Folse-Elliott, and Warren (1996) for full documentation of the section to follow.
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Residents of the southern upland region of the eastern United States have long been characterized as possessing a unique and homogenous “folk” ethnicity, resulting from a presumed cultural, social and economic isolation. In reality, the Appalachian mountains became home to settlers from a variety of nations, and witnessed the development of numerous community and regional identities. Examining the nature of historic mountain communities, and the consequent impact of the imposition of an overarching Appalachian ethnicity, provides critical insight into the fluid nature of the process of ethnicity formation and dissolution. Archaeological investigation of three Blue Ridge hollows, located within the present confines of Virginia’s Shenandoah National Park, has produced invaluable data on the nature and variety of mountain settlement. This emerging picture of life in the Blue Ridge stands in stark contrast to that painted in the widely publicized sociological studies of the 1920s and 1930s which described the Blue Ridge inhabitants as living “in a medieval age” (Sizer 1932a). Such images, which served to foment public approval for the new national park, were based upon prevailing notions about a supposedly uniform Appalachian ethnicity.

Ethnicity and Appalachia

Ethnicity can be viewed as an emic construct—the manner in which members of a group perceive and define themselves in relation to other social groups, sharing particular traits and characteristics which may or may not be recognizable to outsiders. According to one historical archaeologist, “ethnic groups are self-aware, and are usually characterized by attributes that are determined by group members. Outsiders also may believe that members share peculiar characteristics” (Stine 1990:38). More often, ethnicity is defined as an imposed category, one forced upon a subjugated group by a dominant and powerful majority. For example, Steven Horvath Jr. (1982) defines ethnicity as being “… created at some specific point in time as a result of subjugation by a powerful conquering people, enslavement, immigration to a powerful host society, and so on. [Such that] … ethnic groups, by definition, only exist because of their relationships with other groups.” Moreover, Robert Schuyler notes that “ethnicity has little meaning until complex structures arose based on political domination” (1980:vii). Rather than being mutually exclusive, these two perceptions of ethnicity are descriptive of two identity systems which have operated simultaneously in the southern mountains, where emically constructed identities have existed at odds with an imposed “folk” ethnicity. This externally imposed “folk” ethnicity, however, has in many cases replaced the earlier emically constructed identities. The co-option, or acceptance, of the created ethnicity has both worked to the benefit and to the detriment of the region, in forging unity across a broad and varied geographic area, while forcing inhabitants to endure continual stereotypes and misunderstandings—the lot of any ethnic minority.

The tone for an Appalachian ethnicity was first set by “local color” writers for northern literary magazines during the post-Civil War period. With engagingly descriptive titles...
such as “A Strange Land and A Peculiar People” (Harney 1873) and “Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains,” (Frost 1899) these romantic musings served to legitimize northern middle-class life by presenting the mountain South as the “other”; at once both quint-essential American in its apparent preservation of a colonial lifestyle, and as wholly un-American in its failure to follow the Turnerian frontier model and progress with the nation (Turner 1893; Vincent 1898). While most often penned in the Appalachian plateau of Kentucky and Tennessee, the stories were accepted as valid descriptions of the entire southern upland region from the Ozarks of Missouri and Arkansas to the Allegheny mountains of western Maryland. Prolific novelist Mary Murfree (pen name Charles Egbert Craddock), for example, characterized the southern mountaineer as an ignorant, silent individual whose “habitual mental atmosphere” was a “vague, hazy reverie.” Murfree’s mountaineers could be found amongst the “indefinable tinge of sadness … that hovers about the purpling mountaintops, that broods above the silent woods … ” (1884: 90). Amusing as fiction, perhaps, but eerily echoed in the supposedly scientific study Hollow Folk, published in 1933 by sociologist Mandel Sherman and journalist Thomas Henry, which focused upon five Blue Ridge communities within the future Shenandoah National Park boundary: “The deep silence and drowsiness of the mountains,” wrote the authors, “are fascinating … an ideal bed chamber designed by nature” (Sherman and Henry 1933: 9). Lulled to sleep, inhabitants were “almost completely cut off from the current of American life … (they were) not of the twentieth century” (Sherman and Henry 1933:2).

Descriptions of the economic and moral poverty of these Virginia Blue Ridge residents engendered support for their removal to make way for the national park, just as the potential of the post-Civil War presentations of mountain peculiarity and degeneracy had been immediately seized upon by northern industrialists and New South proponents eager to develop the vast natural resources of the mountains.1 When the sanctity of land ownership came head to head with the future of the South, progressive zeal provided the ultimate solution. Moving mountaineers from the stultifying influence of the hills to the civilizing influence of mines and mills would be best for the backward hillbillies.2

The imposition of ethnic categories undeniably serves political motivations. In the case of “Appalachia,” even the imposed ethnicity changed according to the motivations of the chronicler.

To nativists, mountaineers were undeniably “pure Anglo-Saxon,” an opinion bolstered by early folklore studies which emphasized the so-called “Elizabethan” nature of mountaineers (e.g., Campbell and Sharp 1917; Frost 1899). Others preferred to tag mountaineers as Scots-Irish, a label often used to explain an assumed predilection for farming rocky slopes (e.g., Craighead 1878; Kephart 1913). A Scottish or Irish identity for mountaineers was acceptable to industrialists, accustomed to exploiting immigrant labor.

Efforts to assign a particular ethnic identity to mountain culture continue into the present. David Hackett Fischer’s Albion’s Seed (1989), which labels a presumably uniform Appalachian ethnicity as part of a so-called Scots-Irish “border culture,” is only the latest in a long line of ethnically focused studies,3 most of which use material culture as evidence of the exclusively English, German, Scottish, Scots-Irish, or even Finnish (see Jordan and Kaups 1989) origin of southern mountain culture.

Like the rest of the nation, the southern mountains were settled by a variety of
peoples from a variety of nations who retained many of their own cultural traditions while also adopting new forms of material culture, adapting to new environments, and intermarrying with members of other ethnic backgrounds. The oversimplification of the ethnic identity of the Appalachian region, which emphasizes the presumed isolation that allowed for the wholesale maintenance of Old World cultural traditions (whatever they might be), has obscured understandings of the complex history of the area, denied inhabitants any degree of agency in their own past, and more often than not has simply served the purposes of politicians and developers. Archaeological examination of historic settlement in Virginia's Blue Ridge has begun to disentangle this web of myth spun around the region's past, revealing a considerable degree of social and economic complexity, and posing an important, materially based challenge to notions of an Appalachian ethnicity homegrown in isolation.

Archaeological Study

In the 1930s, at least five hundred families were compelled to leave their homes in an eight-county segment of the Blue Ridge mountains slated to become Shenandoah National Park. The creation of the 180,000-acre park, which was officially dedicated by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1936, represented the fruition of the combined dreams of an odd coalition of conservationists, politicians, and developers. Agitation for a national park near the nation's capital had begun early in the 1920s, and attention had soon focused upon a segment of the Blue Ridge where one charismatic entrepreneur, George Freeman Pollock, had already established a mountaintop resort. President Herbert Hoover was cajoled into setting up a fishing camp nearby, and the die was soon cast. Hoover, who needed ready access to his camp, gave the order for the construction of the scenic Skyline Drive, to run along the very top of the Blue Ridge through the entire proposed park region. Deeds for the park land, acquired through condemnation proceedings as well as donations and straight purchases, were acquired by a state committee which then turned the land over to the federal government in 1934. All families had to be out of their homes in the park area by 1937, with the exception of a handful of elderly residents given special dispensation to remain in their homes (Engle 1997; Lambert 1971, 1989; Naylor 1934; Pollock 1937, 1960).

By 1937, 467 persons had vacated their homes in Nicholson, Corbin, and Weakley Hollows, in the shadow of Old Rag Mountain in Madison County, Virginia, to make way for Shenandoah National Park (Figure 1). All three hollows, which served as the focus of the 1933 study Hollow Folk, have been under examination in a National Park Service-sponsored archaeological study designed to inventory the rapidly dwindling number of historic resources in the Park, and to compile a revised understanding of the Park's human past.

The origin myth of the Blue Ridge, propagated and legitimized by sociologists in the 1930s and bolstered by the precepts of an Appalachian ethnicity, presents settlers as driftwood left behind unknowingly as the tide of westward migration swept past. The contrast between this human refuse washed up in the mountains with the successful lowland farmers to the west was made abundantly clear in the introduction to Hollow Folk, which juxtaposed the settlement of the Shenandoah Valley by “prosperous and frugal Germans,” with the migration of Scots-Irish settlers to the region. Described as “probably the poorest equipped and the least determined,” these Ulster settlers “appropriated what land their predecessors had left. This, naturally, was the least fertile and de-
sirable ... Others were forced upward ... to the sheltered hollows [where] the minimum of existence was assured” (Sherman and Henry 1933:11).

Mandel Sherman was perhaps intentionally echoing (without citation) his predecessor at the University of Chicago, George E. Vincent, who in 1898 suggested that the westward migration followed “physiographic lines of least resistance,” leaving “quiet pools in the mountains of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky” ensuring the survival of the ‘frontier’ “in practical isolation to this day” (1898:1). Along with accepting Vincent’s notion of a “retarded frontier,” Sherman and Henry bowed to overarching, if contradictory, notions of Appalachian ethnicity by first describing their “hollow folk” as “Scots-Irish” but also of “pure Anglo-Saxon stock,” speaking “a peculiar language which retains many Elizabethan expressions” (1933:1).

Nicholson, Corbin, and Weakley Hollows, along with two neighboring communities, were chosen for the sociological study because they appeared to represent the most isolated and poverty-stricken Blue Ridge settlements of the 1930s, an image exploited as a means of convincing the public of the necessity of land condemnation and park creation (Figure 2). Hollow Folk categorized hollow residents, the descendants of the above-described lazy pioneers, as “unlettered folk ... supported by primitive agriculture,” who were living in settlements with “no community government, no organized religion, and only traces of organized industry” (Sherman and Henry 1933:1). Archaeological evidence readily challenges that characterization, with the remains of automobiles rusting on former hollow homesteads only the most obvious contradiction to the assertion that Park dwellers were “not of the twentieth century.”

**Background**

Contrary to the characterizations of Sherman and Henry, archaeological, documentary, and oral historical sources reveal that community and economic life in the three hollows varied. The Weakley Hollow settlement, established in the late eighteenth century, was located along a main road traversing the valley between Old Rag Mountain and the Blue Ridge proper. Well watered and relatively level, the valley had earlier attracted extensive Native American occupation. In addi-
tion to farming and marketing produce, livestock, and crafts, residents earned income through providing services such as blacksmithing, milling, and cabinetmaking, aided by their proximity to the main thoroughfare (Sizer 1932b; U.S. Census 1850-1920). In direct contradiction to Sherman and Henry’s vision of an isolated, poverty-ridden mountain pocket, Weakley Hollow boasted two stores, two churches, a sawmill, a school, and its own post office by the 1930s. Additionally, the remains of a nineteenth-century grist mill as well as a probable distillery have been pinpointed through archaeological survey. Despite the assertion in Hollow Folk that “the ragged children, until 1928, never had seen the flag or heard the Lord’s Prayer” (Sherman and Henry 1933:1), Weakley Hollow’s churches, of which few traces remain, were preceded by the 1778 establishment of the nearby Ragged Mountain Baptist Church (see Perdue and Martin-Perdue 1979; Tanner 1978; Vernon 1976; Yowell 1926).

The Old Rag Post Office also served the residents of Corbin Hollow, a small settlement in a narrow hollow carved by Brokenback Run which flows into Weakley Hollow from the west (see Figure 2). By the 1930s, almost all Corbin Hollow residents were reliant upon the nearby Skyland resort—established in 1890—for employment and subsistence. The Nicholson Hollow settlement, situated along the fertile bottomland of the Hughes River and Hannah Run to the north of Corbin and Weakley Hollows, instead remained reliant upon farming and day labor for subsistence. Corbin and Nicholson Hollows, like Weakley Hollow, each possessed their own church and school.

Although much of the land on the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge is presently considered by geologists to be agriculturally

Figure 2. Nicholson, Corbin, and Weakley Hollows. Map by the author and Heather Harvey.
marginal, owing to its rocky nature (Furman 1997; Hicks 1997), previous settlers were not bound by the same perceptions. In fact, the level nature of much of Weakley Hollow encouraged extensive farming, while the slopes invited orchards and provided pasturage for hogs and cattle. The steeper, rockier landscape of Nicholson Hollow was continuously altered during its historic occupation in order to enhance its agricultural productivity. Slopes were extensively terraced, riverbanks were shored up, and fields cleared of rocks—rocks which were subsequently incorporated in walls designed to delineate and protect field systems. Landscape alteration was so successful, in fact, that during the nineteenth century Nicholson farmers consistently produced surpluses exceeding household needs, according to census data (Horning 1996a, 1997a).

Perceptions and manipulations of landscape may serve as more reliable indicators of ethnicity than individual aspects of material culture. Minette Church, in her recent archaeological study of mid-to-late nineteenth-century Hispanic and Anglo homesteads in southeastern Colorado, noted that while Anglo settlers considered the challenging High Plains environment barren and infertile, suitable only for cattle raising, Spanish-speaking settlers from New Mexico successfully cultivated crops in the same environment (Church 1996, personal communication 1997). Discerning similar ethnic attitudes towards landscape in the Blue Ridge is a difficult task, as eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century settlers in the Blue Ridge were a complex mixture of recent immigrants from Britain, Ulster (including Scots, native Irish, English, and Welsh), the Palatinate, and France, joined by second- and third-generation colonists from the Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia regions who were sometimes accompanied by African servants and slaves. Despite the complex mix of cultures participating in eighteenth-century settlement, it is clear that their early twentieth-century descendants did not consider themselves to be living on the margins. Vociferous defenses of the productivity of the land, and the abundance of natural resources, are a common theme in regional oral histories, borne out by census data (Horning 1997a; Smith 1983).

The extensive agricultural efforts indicated by landscape alteration in the hollows underscores the falsity of one of the more persistent myths about the Blue Ridge: the notion that mountain families owned no land. No squatters were recorded for Weakley and Nicholson Hollows, even in the depths of the Great Depression. Families had a long-term, vested interest in the productivity of their land. In contrast, over half of the families in Corbin Hollow were described as squatters in 1932—a situation anomalous for the entire park region, and one directly related to economic reliance upon the Skyland resort (Land Acquisition Records 1926-28; Sizer 1932b). Corbin Hollow clearly had few contenders for its position at the bottom of the Blue Ridge economic scale, and the evident poverty of the Corbin Hollow residents provided a useful model that could be presented to any persons doubting the wisdom and ethics of displacing mountain residents. As an example, park promoter George Freeman Pollock, founder of the Skyland resort on nearby Stony Man Mountain, made Corbin Hollow a regular stop on his promotional tours (Pollock 1960). In 1929, in an effort to impress Virginia’s Governor Harry Flood Byrd with the “poverty and wretchedness” of the mountain people, Pollock—by his own account—“rode next to the Governor telling him tales of the Hollow folk” (Pollock 1960:247).

In reality, George Pollock was indirectly responsible for the condition of the Corbin Hollow residents, as employment at his
Skyland resort became their primary means of subsistence in the early twentieth century. Settlement patterning in Corbin Hollow clearly reflects the importance of Skyland, as the rocky and agriculturally marginal upper reaches of the hollow were settled after 1880 owing to its proximity to the Skyland road. The increasing reliance upon Pollock’s resort for income was a chief cause of economic distress during the winter, when tourism declined, and particularly during the Depression years when even Pollock was faced with economic difficulties.

**Corbin Hollow: Image and Reality**

Sherman and Henry described Corbin Hollow as “at the lowest level of social development,” with hollow residents exhibiting “little initiative,” and “feeble ambitions and drives” (1933:5), a characterization still echoed in a 1991 trail guide calling the hollow the former location of a “very primitive and isolated mountain community” (Patuxent Appalachian Trail Club [PATC] 1991:197). Despite these descriptions, including one amateur sociologist’s assertion that Corbin Hollow was “a sieve through which possessions have largely passed” (Sizer 1932b:8), the material record reveals a greater complexity, as highlighted by a recent archaeological examination of the Corbin Hollow farmstead occupied in the early twentieth century by the family of Wesley Corbin.

Park records indicate that Wesley Corbin farmed 24 cleared acres on the north side of Brokenback Run, land that was extensively terraced. Although Corbin’s father Amos had purchased the property from a neighbor in the 1880s, a deed dispute surfacing when the proposed park was surveyed in the 1920s was settled in favor of an absentee owner, which then rendered the Corbins landless squatters. Amos Corbin’s original house burned in 1926, to be rebuilt by his son as a three-room log dwelling with a porch. Within fifteen years, Wesley Corbin’s house was put to the torch by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The Corps was charged with initiating the “natural restoration” of the park by removing evidence of human occupation. Aboveground traces of the Wesley Corbin home consist only of several courses of the stone chimney base and the footprint of the stone foundation. Outbuildings on the Corbin farmstead included a log barn and a frame henhouse. Accompanying the terraced agricultural land was a small apple and cherry orchard. Archaeological information suggests that Wesley Corbin, unlike most of his Corbin Hollow neighbors, chose to continue farming rather than seeking employment at Skyland.

Controlled surface collection of a 30-meter-square area at the site provided information about the lives of the Wesley Corbin family not revealed by any other source. While the eight-member family predominately relied upon subsistence agriculture as their economic mainstay, the goods discarded at their former home reveal that they actively participated not only in the wider regional and economic systems (difficult to avoid in the early twentieth century), but that they also shared an awareness and acceptance of broader social and cultural trends. Close to 800 surface finds were recorded at the site, ranging from agricultural tools to a variety of personal items. A number of toys were recovered, including several doll fragments, a portion of what appears to be a Mickey Mouse figurine, a metal truck, and most notably, a mock ray gun (Figure 3). *Buck Rogers* was a popular radio show of the time, and the nation would soon be shocked by Orson Welles’ realistic 1938 broadcast of H.G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds* when the Corbins were compelled to abandon their home. Whether the Corbins were tuned into the radio waves is not clear from surface materials at the site,
but the recovery of fragments of 78 RPM records suggests an interest in audio media.

Further indications of the family’s daily connections with the “outside world” are the automobile tires and metal lunch box left decaying at the Corbin site. The remaining surface-collected assemblage incorporated fragments of an array of representative consumer goods from the period, including mason jars, tin cans, and medicine bottles—containing products such as Vicks, Listerine and Moroline hair tonic. Also recovered were an assortment of American, English, and even Czechoslovakian ceramics, while kitchen goods included muffin tins, a colored-glass candy jar, and silver-plated utensils (Horning 1996b, 1997a).

In welcome contrast to stereotypes about barefoot mountaineers, 79 fragments of shoe leather and rubber shoe soles were also recorded, comprising almost 10 percent of the overall assemblage. The cash flow required to purchase the goods found on the Wesley Corbin site and sites in all three hollows was obtained by the marketing of surplus farm produce, as well as day labor on regional farms, local resorts, or nearby mining and lumbering operations. The Corbins purchased items not only at the local stores, but also through mail-order catalogues. Virgil Corbin (1979) of Nicholson Hollow recalled that his father George ordered him a toy-filled Christmas stocking from the Sears and Roebuck Catalog each year. Because the Wesley Corbin family opted to continue subsistence farming supplemented by day labor, they may have been more able to obtain mass-produced, non-subsistence items than their neighbors who relied solely upon wage labor to purchase staples. Surface collection of other Corbin Hollow sites bears out this observation (Horning 1997a).

The material evidence that hollow residents had access to and participated in the regional market economy does not imply any loss of cultural identity or community sense. Rather, the items found on the former Wesley Corbin farmstead illustrate the conscious and individual choices made by hollow residents in accepting, rejecting, and altering symbols of the wider national culture. Human beings are seldom passive consumers of material culture, instead exercising their rights to choose, modify, and manipulate those items which are available, a point made by both Samford and Kern elsewhere in this volume.

Architecture and the Mountain Folk Image

One of the material hallmarks of an “Appalachian ethnicity” has always been that potent American symbol, the log cabin. In reality, architectural styles varied throughout Nicholson, Corbin, and Weakley hollows, incorporating stone and frame as well as log construction. Perpetuating the folk image, however, has been the preservation of only two dwellings in the Park, both small and both built of logs. The George Corbin house in Nicholson Hollow, constructed in 1921, now stands alone, minus its six outbuildings.
and its former view of four neighboring farms, evoking further past images of isolation and hardship for Park visitors (Figure 4). Additionally, dwellings ranged in size from two rooms to nine rooms, with Weakley and Nicholson Hollow houses averaging four rooms apiece, and Corbin Hollow houses averaging three. One quarter of all farm houses throughout the upland and lowland South of the 1940s contained three or fewer rooms (Vance et al. 1946), indicating that housing in the Blue Ridge apparently was average to above average. Population increase and the economic downturn may have resulted in the construction of smaller houses, such as George Corbin’s, in the three hollows during the early twentieth century. The largest structures in the hollows, such as Haywood Nicholson’s three-story stone, log, and frame farmhouse in Weakley Hollow (Figure 4), consistently date to the mid-nineteenth century and possibly earlier.

While the relatively modest size of structures in the hollows is suggestive of economic concerns, it is critical to consider that perceptions of space can vary widely. For example, Leona Dyer Brown, who grew up in and shared a four-room Weakley Hollow house with ten other family members, fondly recalled the house as “large.” Returning to the site, now represented only by a fieldstone foundation, cellar hole, and collapsed stone chimney, Brown pointed out the location of the “big” front porch, the “big” room over the storage cellar, and the “big” room where she used to sleep (Brown 1997). Brown’s observations remind us that emic perceptions of space are key to understanding the past lives which created and interacted with the architectural traces we so often study only in terms of their physical features or placement on the landscape (Horning 1997b).

Further caution must be exercised when considering mountain architectural forms and styles in terms of the ethnic background of their builders and inhabitants. Corner-notching styles on log buildings, and the plans used in these structures, have both been interpreted as ethnic “markers” by past researchers (e.g. Kniffen 1965; Kniffen and Glassie 1966; Lay 1982). For example, romantically inclined writer Alex W. Bealer ascribed

Figure 4. Left, Haywood Nicholson house, Weakley Hollow; right, George Corbin house, Nicholson Hollow. Drawing by the author.
(without documentation) backcountry use of saddle notching to the “intrepid Scotch-Irish” whereas the more “meticulous German setters” used more complex forms of notching such as full dovetailing (Bealer 1978:41). Regardless of the ethnic background of their builders, all surviving examples of log structures in the three hollows employ one method, V-notching. According to Henry Glassie (1963, 1968, 1972, 1975), rectangular floor plans are typically Scots-Irish, while square plans are English. Of 54 recorded buildings in the hollow that are classifiable as cabins (loosely defined as a one and one-half story single unit structures), 63 percent are rectangular in plan (Horning 1996b). Making the assumption that 63 percent of the inhabitants of the hollows were therefore ethnically Scots-Irish, however, would deny the complexity of the colonial and post-colonial experiences of backcountry settlers. While the validity of assigning ethnic origins to architectural forms is not necessarily in question, assigning the use of these forms to individual ethnic groups, particularly by the second and third generation of settlement, represents a far too simplistic interpretation of material culture evidence. Unfortunately, this a priori link between material, maker, and user is a trap into which too many historical archaeologists have readily fallen.

Similar to the widespread manufacture and use of colonoware as discussed by Steen (this volume), log architecture was employed by members of a variety of ethnic groups, most of whom encountered the form for the first time on the “frontier,” and presumably found it to be an expedient construction method. The uniformity in corner notching found throughout the hollows under study may reflect the preference and knowledge of the first builders in the region, who may well have been Scots-Irish or English. Log architecture, however, has Central European and not British roots (Jordan 1980, 1985), so for these English-speaking settlers, the form represents, at best, a New World adaptation. Use of log architecture also cannot be viewed as a characteristic only of “Appalachian” settlement. The form also was employed widely in the construction of lowland slave quarters, and was carried westward by settlers as far as California and the Oregon territory. Finally, not all homes in Nicholson, Corbin, and Weakley Hollows were constructed of log—in the 1920s, nearly 25 percent of extant houses were constructed solely of frame.

Accompanying the variety of architecture and house size evident within and between the hollows, farm size varied as well. Holdings ranged from Hettie Hudson’s 453 acres in Weakley Hollow, to V. East Nicholson’s 110-acre Nicholson Hollow farm with 13 associated structures, down to Charlie Nicholson’s single acre and lone building in Corbin Hollow. Few who hike the now-wooded trails past the scant remains of these farms will ever guess at the former extent of development.

**Identity and Community**

Each of the three hollows developed emically constructed community identities, based in part upon the choices made regarding economic activities. The prevalence of kinship ties spanning the three hollows, however, suggests a wider community network that transcended hollow association. The extensive Nicholson family network in the three hollows reinforced community ties, but these kinship ties were easily broken by unacceptable behavior. For instance, Ray Nicholson, formerly of Weakley Hollow, recalled how one Nicholson family had dishonestly kept a mis-delivered package meant for him. The only action taken was to deny the errant Nicholsons community acceptance. As late as 1979, Ray Nicholson insisted, “They were Nicholson, but they weren’t no kin to me.”
That’s right. There were a lot of Nicholsons but they wasn’t kin” (1979).

Oral historical data from Corbin, Nicholson, and Weakley Hollows, while on one hand contradicting the Hollow Folk image, also provided testimony that former residents both manipulated and accepted their imposed ethnicity. In a series of interviews conducted during the 1970s, a National Park Service volunteer interviewer was continually frustrated in her attempts to unearth folk medicinal practices. When asked the leading question, “Your mother must have had a lot of knowledge of herbs, didn’t she?,” former Weakley Hollow resident Leroy Nicholson (1979) replied, “Well, she did… one of her main medicines was camphor … and Vicks.” Nicholson Hollow’s George Corbin (1977) was more direct in his reply: “We used the doctor.”

George Corbin was a particularly savvy individual who appears to have manipulated the mountain folk image to his own advantage. Although he owned the smallest holding in Nicholson Hollow—a five-acre farm—and lived in a three-room log house that he constructed himself, Corbin owned a Model-T which he regularly drove to West Virginia for railroad and lumbering jobs. Corbin also reportedly sold his homemade brandy and whiskey from the trunk of the same Ford as far away as Washington, D.C. Yet when it came time to sell moonshine to George Pollock and his wealthy guests at Skyland, Corbin left the car behind and hauled the products of his mountain still up to the resort on his back, sometimes also hawking rattlesnake skins (Corbin 1966; Pollock 1960). Another mountain resident recalled that as a young girl, she would put on her oldest clothes and walk up to Skyland to sell flowers and berries to guests (Dodson 1977). Clearly, the outside imposition of ethnic identities does not preclude manipulation of this identity by members of the “ethnic group.”

Nonetheless, George Corbin readily accepted an oft-repeated tale told of his grandfather, Aaron Nicholson. In his autobiography, Skyland proprietor George Freeman Pollock penned an apocryphal story of visiting Corbin’s grandfather, describing him as “massive,” “bowlegged” and “barefoot,” and loudly claiming for himself all the land “as fur as you can see, from peak to peak”—land which Pollock claimed to have owned (Pollock 1960:62-63).

In Pollock’s version, Aaron Nicholson was an ignorant squatter, while deeds archived at the Madison County Courthouse reveal instead that Nicholson, at one time, indeed owned over 200 acres in Nicholson Hollow. As a testament to the power of the written word, however, George Corbin (1977) referred to Pollock’s autobiography in discussing his grandfather, stating that “Pollock owned 5,271 acres and my grandfather, he claimed it all. And come to find out, he owned five acres.”

More insidious, perhaps, has been the acceptance of Sherman and Henry’s 1933 portrayal of Corbin Hollow by former residents. Ray Nicholson (1979), who as a child lived in Weakley Hollow, asserted that Corbin Hollow families “wasn’t as up to date … they wasn’t as bright as the others … [but] they were pretty hard workers. They could make baskets … the beautifulest baskets you ever seen.” Leroy Nicholson (1979), who also left Weakley Hollow as a child, described Corbin Hollow residents as “good people but, they was the poorest class of people that was up in there … It was very seldom that they got out anywhere or if any marriages taken place it was among, you know, in the families and all.” Archaeological evidence, however, indicates that settlement in upper Corbin Hollow was primarily a twentieth-century phenomenon, leaving little time to develop the isolated lifestyle suggested in Nicholson’s comments.
Of the legendary poverty of Corbin Hollow, Leroy Nicholson (1979) insisted: “I know, I’ve been to their house and I’ve seen … the Finnell Corbin family and they did not have a bed in their house.” In reality, several bed frames still lie in the hollow near the former Finnell Corbin house, and WPA photographer Arthur Rothstein even posed old Finnell on his bed. According to Hollow Folk, however, the typical Corbin Hollow bed consisted of “planks stretched across a wooden frame and covered by a sack filled with cornhusks” (Sherman and Henry 1933: 50), leading Park Superintendent J.R. Lassiter to wax romantic about how the mountain residents routinely “threw themselves on corn husk piles in the corners to dream of the hunts of tomorrow” (Lassiter 1936: 3). Certainly the Wesley Corbin family was not sleeping in piles of crunching cornhusks, judging from the five bedframes found at the location of their former home.

On a different note, the created past of the Blue Ridge mountaineer has fostered a new community identity. Within recent years, an organization calling itself “Children of the Shenandoah” formed, consisting of descendants of the displaced families. While the initial motivation for some in the group was a generalized opposition to the Federal government, as personified by the National Park Service, the organization’s very existence is predicated upon the belief in a past mountain identity, perceived as a unique way of life denied to the children of the displaced. Descendants of members of geographically distant pre-Park communities now feel a kinship with one another, a kinship based not in past realities, but in recent political circumstance. Regardless of its foundation, this new Blue Ridge ethnic identity is real and meaningful for its members. Clearly, the creation of ethnicities can be a fluid and rapid process, readily able to traverse the boundaries of the emic and the etic.

Conclusion

The archaeological examination of historic Blue Ridge communities reveals not the material correlate of a unique hillbilly ethnicity, but instead highlights the complexities of rural life in an industrial age. The local cultures found in the Blue Ridge were not the product of geographic isolation; rather, those identities were the result of the conscious choices made by Blue Ridge residents in response to a wealth of factors, including the local environment, and predicated upon the adoption or rejection of the available aspects of the broader regional and national cultures. For instance, while the Wesley Corbin family chose to continue a traditional subsistence farming lifestyle, someone in the household spiced up their homegrown grits and eggs with hot sauce from a Tabasco bottle found discarded at the site. Conversely, the Corbin Hollow family of Eddie Nicholson abandoned farming to support itself through wage labor and the continued production of traditional handmade oak baskets for an expanding tourist market (Dodson 1977; Horning 1997a; Martin-Perdue 1983).

Examining the material, documentary, and oral historical records provides insight not just into the variety and complexity of past individual and community lives in the Blue Ridge, but more importantly into issues of identity and self-perception. Regardless of evidence underscoring the complex past of Blue Ridge residents which clearly contradicts the Hollow Folk portrayal and highlights the differences between the Blue Ridge and other southern mountain settlement areas, former residents and their offspring have accepted an Appalachian ethnicity—an “invented tradition”—that now shapes their past and guides their present. Despite its origin as an engineered and often imposed construct, the notion of an Appalachian ethnicity holds genuine meaning for its members.
As stated by Ray Nicholson (1979) in reference to his Weakley Hollow origins and his mountain identity: “Then I [didn’t], but I see it now … we wasn’t quite equal then were we?”

Endnotes

1 For example, the stories of John Fox Jr. (1892, 1896, 1901, 1908) about the mountains of the Virginia-Kentucky border focused upon the contrasts and conflicts between the mountaineers and the developers of the Appalachian coalfields. Inevitably, “civilization” wins out over mountain “savagery” in Fox’s stories. Fox himself had moved from the Kentucky bluegrass to southwestern Virginia to invest in the nascent coal and expectant steel industry.

2 Perhaps one of the most flagrant examples of this thinking could be found in the pages of the progressive rag known as *The World’s Work* in an article titled “Our Southern Mountaineers: Removal the Remedy for the Evils that Poverty and Isolation have Wrought” (Dawley 1910), which advocated transferring mountain residents to lowland cotton mill towns in order to exploit mountain timber resources.

3 Perhaps the most extreme example of the ethnic approach to the study of the southern mountains is the work of Grady McWhiney. In his book *Cracker Culture* (1988) the author asserts that the region is entirely “Celtic,” or highland Scottish, in nature evidenced by a supposed predilection for herding and a tendency towards lawlessness.

4 A small slice of Nicholson Hollow, along Hannah Run, lies within the borders of Rappahannock County.

5 This determination is based upon the lack of archaeological materials dating prior to 1880 found on upper Corbin Hollow sites, and also upon property ownership documentation.

6 Information on house sizes culled from land acquisition records on file at Shenandoah National Park.

7 See Michael Ann Williams (1987) for an insightful discussion of perceptions and use of space within mountain homes in western North Carolina.

8 Sample includes larger structures which incorporated an initial cabin.

9 Despite the occasional leading question and her underlying assumptions about mountain culture, volunteer Dorothy Noble Smith conducted an invaluable series of taped interviews with former Park residents between 1976 and 1979. Most have been transcribed, and all are archived at the Shenandoah National Park archives.

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Dimensions of Ethnicity
Fraser D. Neiman

How can historical archaeologists use the inert configurations of matter that they excavate to make inferences about the vanished social dynamics that we associate with ethnicity? The papers in this volume point in multiple, sometimes conflicting directions. I cannot pretend to do justice to them here. Rather my goal in these brief comments is to attempt to trace a few common threads that run though the rich tapestry assembled by the authors. This approach is not without risks. Common threads may bypass central designs. Readers are hereby warned that I cannot claim to have done justice to individual contributions.

Let me start by saying a word or two about ethnicity. As Dan Sperber has recently pointed out, socio-cultural anthropologists are loathe to offer rigorous definitions for their terms of art (Sperber 1996). Rather, words like “marriage,” “myth,” and “totemism” cover a variety of notions that bear a family resemblance to one another. Using them is something like a parlor game. The game begins when the anthropologist asks of all the things that these people talk about and do, which is like marriage? And it continues as operating notions of marriage are modified to accommodate, or not accommodate, the variety of things different people in different times and places do and say. By linking the things they do and say to things we do and say, the parlor game offers us some idea of their point of view and a sense that we understand them.

Ethnicity is, of course, just such an anthropological term of art. Hence, as Fesler and Franklin imply in their introduction, attempts to offer strict definitions are likely to generate more heat than light. But having said that, I want to follow their lead and suggest that there are two dimensions of family resemblance that repeatedly crop up in the discussions of human social dynamics which take place under the ethnicity label. These dimensions themselves have associated with them anthropological terms of art: primordialism and instrumentalism (Williams 1989).

Instrumental and Primordial Dimensions

Characterizations of group-related behavior are instrumentalist (or circumstantialist) to the extent that they see groups as arising out of strategies pursued by individuals. The anthropological locus classicus of the instrumentalist view is the work of Barth (1969). The basic idea is that individuals join ethnic groups or social coalitions when it is in their interest to do so. Benefits accrue to coalition partners in the context of competition with other individuals and groups for access to valuable resources. Coalitions make human social life interesting, and potentially dreadful. They exist at a huge variety of spatial scales and sizes. The big ones grab the headlines—Serbs and Muslims, Irish Catholics and Protestants. But smaller-scale alliances are, I think, equally, if not more important. This is the scale at which small but cumulatively vital matters in the lives of individuals get sorted out. For an enslaved African in eighteenth-century Virginia, it might be help running away. For his free owner, it might be help acquiring a choice plot of land.

The strategic perspective on human social behavior makes it possible to glimpse questions about the social dynamics associ-
ated with coalitions that might otherwise remain hidden. Most of these questions grow out of a recognition of the shifting of an evanescent quality of social coalitions. How do such coalitions come into being? How do individuals choose coalition partners? What holds coalitions together in the face of the temptation faced by all members to defect by reaping the rewards of membership, while paying none of the costs? How can we distinguish between social strategies designed to maximize individual advantage and those that aim for group benefits, at some cost to individual members? To the extent that artifacts figure as the ”hard parts” of the social strategies that individuals pursue, it is at least possible in principle to attempt to address questions in particular historical contexts using archaeological evidence.

Characterizations of ethnicity are primordial to the extent that they emphasize relationships of common descent among group members. Geertz’s (1963) emphasis on the importance of “perceived” blood ties serves as a relatively recent point of reference for studies with a primordial perspective. However, if the Geertzian perspective that emic notions of ethnicity are an aspect of ethnobiology is correct, then the primordial emphasis may capture a very old human representation. There is no doubt that talk about common descent is a key feature of much human social behavior that we want to call ethnic, including the headline-grabbing inter-group conflicts mentioned above. The primordial view thus allows us to see a complementary set of questions about human social behavior. At the top of the list is why claims of common descent are apparently so potent and such common features of the most dreadful episodes of among-group competition in human history. How can we tell when such claims are empirically correct, as opposed to invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983)? Despite the fact that formal variation in archaeological artifacts is caused by cultural transmission, and not the genetic continuity that is the key feature of the primordial dimension of ethnicity, it is still possible to investigate common descent archaeologically. In the archaeological case, common descent means continuity in vertical and oblique cultural transmission, that is social learning running from parents and unrelated members of the parental generation to children (Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman 1981). However, making good on this promise requires that we confront an ancient problem in historical studies, one that we share with evolutionary biologists and historical linguists: how to recognize when similarities in cultural form are caused by common descent.

This formulation implies that primordialism and instrumentalism are best seen as descriptive terms. They represent orthogonal dimensions of variation along which empirical case studies can be placed. Empirical studies, and the chunks of human history that they describe, can be both primordial and instrumentalist at the same time. The case studies in this volume bring into focus the existence of this variation, allow us to see how questions about its correlates and causes might be addressed archaeologically, and point the way to answers.

Social Coalitions

Let’s consider social coalitions first. How do we make inferences about the character of the larger social strategies in which the artifacts we excavate functioned? How can we distinguish variation in artifacts that arises out of cooperative interactions among individuals sharing long-term bonds from variation that arises from competitive interactions among individuals within groups? Only the former bears a family resemblance to
ethnicity. Several papers offer helpful and provocative clues. Using a combination of archaeological and documentary evidence, Barbara Heath builds a convincing case that the enslaved individuals who lived at Jefferson’s Poplar Forest quarter around 1800 spent their limited and hard-won resources on items of personal adornment, from buttons to hair ribbons. These small items were clearly important to the individuals who acquired them and Heath suggests to us why: they are signs of personal worth and hence useful in social display.

This explanation, which I think is correct, raises two issues that are worth considering here in more detail. The first is the matter of why buttons are good for social display. Or, to put the matter the other way round, what reason do we have for thinking that they were used in this manner in the past? The answer is that gilt buttons serve no practical function other than keeping your clothes on that could not be served just as well by some other, cheaper means. Gilt buttons are therefore a wasteful expense. They represent a form of conspicuous consumption. Heath’s elegant demonstration that old-fashioned white-metal buttons were tended to be discarded while still usable, while newly fashionable gilt buttons tended to be discarded only when unusable, attests to the wasteful character of button expenditure.

Why did individuals enslaved at Poplar Forest waste their hard-earned cash on fancy buttons? The question is enormously important because to answer it we need to engage in a much larger issue: why do humans engage in conspicuous consumption? The answer that I want to pursue here begins with the recognition that signaling personal worth or competitive ability is problematic business when there are conflicts of interest among signalers and receivers. Such conflicts are a pervasive part of human social interactions. Consider two individuals in competition for the same resource. The inferior competitor would benefit if she could send a signal of her competitive ability or quality that convinced a superior competitor that her level of quality was higher than it actually was, and caused the superior to cede the resource. In other words, signalers have an incentive to cheat. However, receivers of signals benefit from not being deceived. How can they eliminate the chance of being fooled by an inferior competitor? If a dishonest signal were too costly to produce, then it might not pay inferior competitors to try to send it. And if receivers insisted that signals be costly, then it would ultimately pay signalers to send only signals whose honesty could be guaranteed by their cost. In this model, the wasteful resource expenditure that we call conspicuous consumption is a predictable outcome of any signaling system that works in the context of competition among individuals within groups (Neiman 1997). In Heath’s example, individuals enslaved at Poplar Forest discarded their perfectly good white buttons and bought gilt ones because of the superfluous costs they thereby had to pay. Sporting new gilt buttons was a costly and thus honest sign of the owner’s competitive ability because individuals of lower ability could not pay this cost.

The implications of this argument are significant. Conspicuous consumption is a clue to the existence of conflicts of interest and competition among individuals within groups. This is clearly the case when individuals compete over resources. It is also true when individuals compete over access to valuable coalition partners, who can in turn be counted on to help in competition for resources. Hence finding conspicuous consumption among slaves at Poplar Forest might imply that their social interactions were often competitive, not cooperative.
may have been within-group competition, not cooperation, that drove the acquisition of gilt buttons.

If conspicuous consumption can arise out of a process of competition among individuals within a group, then perhaps a similar process of competition among groups within a multi-group competitive arena might lead to group-level conspicuous consumption. In the latter case, individuals within groups would cooperate to pool resources which would then be used as costly and hence truthful signals of group competitive ability. How could we tell the difference between the two kinds of regimes? There would appear to be two ways. First, we might expect group-level signals to be engineered in such a way that they required group action to construct them. Second, there should be no variation among individuals within the group in the extent to which they could associate themselves with the display.

Kern’s paper offers what looks like a case in point. In 1777 Cherokees came to Williamsburg, Virginia’s capital, to discuss fixing a boundary that they hoped would prevent further encroachment on Indian land. According to the Virginia Gazette, “they favored the public with a Dance on the green in front of the palace, where a considerable number of spectators, both male and female, were entertained.” Although we’d need more details to be sure, this dance might have been just the kind of collective display that among-group competition and within-group cooperation might produce.

Kern’s paper reveals that, on other occasions, competition among individuals appears to have been at work within Indian groups in eighteenth-century Virginia. For example, Indian elites clearly relished the fancy suits of cloths and ruffled shirts that English colonial officials bestowed upon them. The fact that Indian elites held onto these costly items, which thereby distinguished them from less politically powerful Indians, is a clue that we are seeing individual-level display. The appeal of European finery to Indian elites lay not only in its cost, but also in the fact that it honestly signaled the existence of a social relationship with English government officials. Sending an honest signal of the existence of this relationship was valuable in political competition at home.

How can these two examples of signaling in the Indian case help us understand the social dynamics behind gilt buttons at Poplar Forest? They suggest a way to evaluate the hypothesis that gilt buttons are a product of within-group competition among individuals. Can we find evidence for synchronous variation among individuals or individual households in their access to gilt buttons? Among-individual variation in levels of conspicuous consumption is apparently one hallmark of within-group competition. The Cherokees’ ruffled shirts and the slaves’ gilt buttons challenge us to invent the theoretical tools to unravel the complex social dynamics of which they are the surviving material trace. Meeting that challenge requires an acknowledgment that conflicts of interest, both within and among groups, are a perduring feature of human social existence (Sober and Wilson 1998).

Shared Fate and Common Descent

What determines the mix of individual and group-level competition that we see in particular historical circumstances? The context in which the Cherokees danced in Williamsburg in 1777 suggests an answer: the extent to which the fates of individuals within a group are linked. For the dancing Cherokee, all individuals would benefit more or less equally from ending English encroachment on their land. Similar cases of shared fate can be found in other papers, among them
Horning’s discussion of the Hollow Folk of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Here the shared fate of Blue Ridge residents is a product of their co-residence in an area that contains a contested resource: land.

The Blue Ridge case is particularly complex. It offers an opportunity to explore not only the effects of shared fate, but also the rhetoric of common descent, and a connection between the two. The local Blue Ridge land holders became a social coalition by virtue of resource competition with individuals from outside the area. At first the outside competitors were timber company officials. Timber interests were later replaced by Federal Government bureaucrats bent on building a park. As Horning demonstrates, the ethnic characterizations of Blue Ridge residents were initially pejorative stereotypes foisted on them by their encroaching outside opponents. What was the payoff to these stereotypes? By portraying the locals as economically backward, outside competitors made the prospects of winning the contest for their land look good. By making the chance of competitive success against a weak foe seem high, such portrayals may be a way of attracting additional coalition partners.

More puzzling is the extent to which common descent was a feature of the outsider’s characterizations. They claimed Blue Ridge residents were the product of a long period of genetic and cultural isolation. We have seen that emphasis on common descent is the common feature of the primordial dimension of ethnicity, but typically it is part of the groups’ own image and rhetoric. Common cultural descent implies a shared ontogeny, which in turn implies that individuals share an enormous investment in the acquisition of cultural knowledge and skills required to operate successfully in local natural and social environments. This shared ontogenetic investment translates into shared fate in the context of competition with other groups. In the Blue Ridge case, the success of timber interests and park planners would displace local residents from their land, their traditional livelihoods, and their social communities, forcing them into labor markets and social environments in which they would have been at a huge competitive disadvantage until they acquired the cultural capital to compete. Perhaps here we can glimpse the causal connection that lies behind the historical association between the rhetoric of common descent and high levels of intergroup hostility. Common descent is an ethnobiological metaphor or emic representation of shared fate, which mutes competition among individuals within groups so that groups themselves may compete more effectively. Thus the park planner’s emphasis on common descent in the Blue Ridge case may have been a way of preparing their allies to expect that the forced removal of the Blue Ridge residents would emerge as the only possible resolution of the conflict.

Of course, the notion that Blue Ridge residents were isolated and inbred Elizabethans stuck in time was an exaggeration, as Horning’s archaeological investigations have conclusively shown. The archaeological record reveals that the Hollow Folk participated in the wider national economy. If the park planners’ picture of shared descent was exaggerated, then perhaps we should expect to find evidence of within-group competition among the Hollow Folk. An archaeological record comprised in part of stylish consumer goods fits this expectation.

Investigating Common Descent

Clearly the extent to which individuals in a group share common descent is an important determinant of social dynamics associated with ethnicity. How can archaeologists reliably monitor common cultural descent in excavated artifacts? The claim that similar-
ity in artifact form is a reflection of cultural continuity is an old one in archaeology. It underwrote the culture-historical paradigm that dominated Americanist archaeology from 1916 to the 1960s (Lyman, O’Brien and Dunnell 1997). It is an interpretive mainstay in historical archaeology today; witness the popularity of this kind of explanation for such diverse phenomena as blue glass beads (Stine, Cabak, and Groover 1996) and Colono pottery. The problem of course is that not all similarity among artifacts and assemblages is homologous or caused by common cultural descent. Similarity may also be analogous, in which case the forms in question represent independent convergence on an adaptive optimum in the absence of historical connection. Or similarity may simply be the result of chance.

It would be helpful if we had some general notions about what sorts of formal variation in artifacts is likely to give rise to each kind of similarity. For an issue of such fundamental significance, explicit discussions in archaeology are surprisingly rare. Formal variation that is adaptively important to artifact users is likely to give rise to analogous similarity. Steen offers an excellent example in his discussion of wall-trench construction technology. Previous workers have interpreted the similarity between archaeologically-documented wall trenches found on eighteenth-century South Carolina slave sites and the ethnographically documented use of mud-wall construction in West Africa as a case of homologous similarity. But as Steen notes, this same technology can be found in the architectural repertoires of Huguenot planters and southeastern Indians. Wall-trench construction is a technological form that has been perfected independently on at least three different continents. This is precisely the kind of independently achieved adaptive optimum that does not indicate cultural continuity of any kind.

Metz’s description of brick clamps offers a similar example. Brick clamps occur at a high frequency in the eighteenth-century Chesapeake and across Europe in areas where timber was plentiful. Clamps offer an efficient means of firing bricks when fuel costs are low. The fact that clamps deliver an adaptive advantage in these circumstances means that it would be foolish to explain their popularity in eighteenth-century Virginia in terms of homology (e.g., a sudden influx of brick makers from the Black Forest). Brick clamps and wall trenches are “good tricks” (Dennett 1995), i.e., relatively easy to achieve, efficient solutions to problems faced by humans in a variety of historical circumstances.

This is not to say that cultural forms with adaptive value cannot be used to make inferences about cultural continuity. However, for such inferences to be valid, the forms in question must be complex adaptive constructions that have been collectively engineered over time by the cognitive efforts of multiple individuals in a social-learning community. The kind of engineering that matters is a population process in which successive design refinements are transmitted differentially among participating individuals, some adding incrementally to improved performance, with the improvements getting passed on. In contrast to simple good tricks, such complex adaptations, with long histories of research and design behind them, can testify to the unique historical trajectories that created them. Good tricks and complex adaptations are cultural forms that lie at opposite ends of a continuum of research and development effort. The greater the research and development effort behind a cultural form, the greater is its potential to inform us about cultural continuity, and the greater the chance that similarity with other forms will be homologous.

Steen’s path-breaking discussion of Colono pottery in South Carolina helps to il-
Ilustrate the point. In stark contrast to essentialist characterizations that suggest that Colono is pervasive and ubiquitous on eighteenth-century plantation sites across the Carolina Low Country (Ferguson 1992), Steen reveals that in fact Colono has a very localized spatial distribution. It is limited to those portions of the Low Country that were settled during the first quarter of the eighteenth century when Indian women comprised a significant portion of South Carolina’s enslaved labor force. This spatial correlation, plus the fact that early Colono carries designs found on proto-historic Indian pottery, strongly suggests that the ceramic technology in question is of Native American origin. Enslaved Indian mothers taught their African-Indian children how to make pots. Severe limits on slave mobility prevented the subsequent spread of the technology to other areas of South Carolina. The exceptions, like the Lethe Farm Site, prove the rule. They turn out to be cases in which slaves from the Colono heartland were imported as a group into the Piedmont.

Colono from South Carolina falls somewhere between a good trick and a complex adaptation. On the one hand, hand-made and open-fired earthenware has independently evolved multiple times around the world. It is a universal component of ceramic technology in traditional societies everywhere. Hence we can expect superficial formal similarity between Carolina Colono and traditional ceramics of Iron-Age West Africa, Mississippian Southeastern North America, or neolithic Japan. It represents the independently developed solution to the problem of preparing and consuming the starchy mush that is the mainstay of traditional diets supported by agriculture. It should therefore come as no surprise that claims that this similarity represents homology turn out to be dead wrong.

But at a deeper level, ceramic technology is sufficiently complex that its development does require a collaborative, multi-generational research and development process. In West African societies, this knowledge may have been confined to specialist producers who tended to be older females. West African elites who controlled the slave trade tended to keep individuals who possessed such skills for sale to other Africans who valued them and would pay higher prices (DeCorse 1999). Hence it seems reasonable to guess that very few females with pottery skills were shipped to North America. The complexity of the research and design process made it impossible for unskilled Africans to reinvent the technology in South Carolina.

The engineering complexity of ceramic technology and its relevance to understanding Colono is most clearly illustrated not in South Carolina, but in the Chesapeake. The majority of Colono from the eighteenth-century Virginia Coastal Plain is shell tempered, like the Late Woodland ceramics from the same region (Hodges 1993). In shell-tempered ceramics we encounter a technology of sufficient complexity that homology between sherds found on prehistoric sites and plantation sites is virtually guaranteed. Successful production of shell-tempered ceramics requires the solution of two difficult problems related to firing. Between 200 and 400 degrees, raw shell temper undergoes a phase transition from aragonite to calcite, which causes massive spalling. The solution to this problem is to burn the shell before using it as temper. As firing temperatures exceed 650 degrees, the calcium carbonate in the shell reacts with water to produce calcium hydroxide, a powder which not only causes spalling, but also renders the fired pot brittle (O’Brien et al. 1994). The solution to this problem is to fire the pot in a reducing atmosphere. It
took Native Americans generations to solve these problems and successfully produce the tough shell-tempered pots that were found all across the Eastern Woodlands just prior to contact. Given this complexity it is likely that, if Afro-Virginians did manufacture shell-tempered Colono, they learned how to do it from Indians. The spatial distribution of Colono in Virginia supports this inference. On Colonial-period sites, Colono frequencies are highest in the Coastal Plain and the Southside of the James. Both areas supported relict Indian groups (Hodges 1993). Colono is exceedingly scarce on Piedmont sites north of the James, an area that was largely abandoned by native groups in the early eighteenth century.

Complex adaptations with long research and design histories, like shell-tempered ceramics, are not the only sources of reliable information about homologies. Archaeologists are more accustomed to making inferences about common descent on the basis of similarity in non-functional or stylistic variation. Stylistic variation is free functional constraint and thus adaptive convergence is not an issue. Stylistic similarity tracks cultural information flows in time and space, for reasons archaeologists have only recently begun to fathom (Neiman 1995; Lipo et al. 1997). Thus reliable inferences from stylistic similarity to common descent often result. But they are not guaranteed.

Several methodological strategies increase the chances of empirical success. The design variation should be of sufficient complexity to rule out chance similarity: pyramids erected in 3000 BC in the Nile Valley and at 500 AD in Guatemala are not homologs. At a given level of design complexity, the likelihood of chance similarity increases as the number of cases examined goes up. Recent work on locally-made pipes in the Chesapeake offers a good example. Emerson (1994) examined hundreds of clay smoking pipes manufactured in the seventeenth-century Chesapeake, and thousands of artifacts manufactured during several centuries in a variety of media within diverse West African societies, in order to find four relatively simple geometric motifs that occurred on at least one object from the Chesapeake and at least one object from Africa. Given the study design, it is difficult to know what to make of the similarities identified. Do they indicate cultural transmission of the motifs in question from Africa to the Chesapeake, or the number of artifacts examined in the search?

Inferences about historical continuity or the lack thereof among social groups need not be hopelessly bedeviled by uncertainties about design complexity, sampling effects, and their interaction. The seriation method, invented in the second decade of this century by culture historians, affords reliable inferences about historical continuity. It is based on systematically measuring stylistic similarity among artifacts and assemblages to see if it varies clinally in time and space (Neiman 1995; Lipo et al. 1997). The seriation method was a key feature of early historical archaeology. Demonstrably and unequivocally successful case studies that employed it to track cultural continuity in time and space were a major force driving early interest in the discipline (e.g., Deetz and Dethlefsen 1965). It is ironic that as interest in homologous similarity has increased over the last two decades, the most reliable means for investigating it has dropped out of our methodological repertoire.

Some of the issues are nicely illustrated in Samford’s treatment of the subfloor pits that are ubiquitous on excavated eighteenth-century Chesapeake slave quarters. The pits have long been a puzzle and Samford’s suggestion that they represent subterranean ancestor shrines is the latest in a series of imaginative solutions. At first it might seem that
archaeological evidence of ritual performances might be the perfect place to look for the kind of stylistic variation that can be expected to yield reliable homologies, in this case connecting ancestor worship in Africa with ancestor worship in Virginia. However, two issues require clarification before we accept such an approach to the ritual content of subfloor pits. First, the ritual function of the two pits is identified not on the basis of similarity of any specifiable set of dimensions of formal variation with each other, or with documented ancestor shrines in West Africa, but simply because their contents look odd. The second is the sampling issue: with 150 pits in the sample, it is difficult to know what to make of two with odd-looking contents. Thus Samford is right to conclude that, in the last analysis, the case for the ancestor-shrine function must rest with an answer to the following question: “whether the crucial role ancestors played in African societies would have continued, albeit transformed, on Virginia plantations.”

Samford’s insightful question raises the larger issue of how different kinds of religious belief and ritual content might be linked to overall patterns of social organization. This is ground that historical archaeologists have never tread before. We could only benefit by accepting Samford’s invitation. To do so we will need some theoretical expectations about the kinds of social contexts in which religious sentiment and behavior might revolve around ancestors. We start with the idea that religious ritual is a social act that involves public assent to a supernatural claim that cannot be critically examined. Acceptance of such a claim communicates a willingness to accept uncritically the influence of others, giving public assent and thus fostering cooperation, and suppressing competition, among them (Steadman and Palmer 1995). This suggests that religious ritual centered on ancestors is a way of assuring one’s ancestors, or at least those still alive, and one’s relatives that one is willing to cooperate unconditionally with them. The ubiquity of ancestor worship in kin-structured societies, in which elders control access to the resources and skills necessary for survival and reproduction, is thus expected. Ancestor-based ritual is a means of building cooperative relationships among kin, in furtherance of competition among kin groups. If this argument has any validity, then the existence of ancestor shrines in a society in which parents, grandparents, and other kin were few, and in which their control of resources was attenuated, would be surprising. Perhaps further work will surprise us.

**Surprise**

It is important that we remain capable of being surprised. By that I mean that it is important that we continue to develop the theoretical and methodological tools that make it possible to examine critically our inferences about the past, based on the mute artifacts we excavate. Without those tools, our statements about ethnicity, or any other aspect of historical dynamics, become little more than ritual ploys, designed to sniff out who among our colleagues are willing to cooperate unconditionally with us.
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HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY, IDENTITY FORMATION, 
AND THE INTERPRETATION OF ETHNICITY

Historical archaeologists often have the assistance of written documents to guide their excavations. Yet, even at sites with a surplus of recorded information, only in the rarest cases does an archaeologist know from whose hand each artifact emanated. Most of the time the identities of the inhabitants of a site remain unknown, and each broken ceramic sherd, glass bottle fragment, or clay pipe stem can not be attributed to any single individual or even to an identifiable group. In lieu of names and faces, historical archaeologists search for other signs of identity. One of the most crucial and controversial elements of identity that historical archaeologists pursue is ethnicity.

Instead of approaching ethnicity as a visible entity, each contributor considers ethnicity as a tool exercised by various individuals and groups to facilitate practical ends. Instead of searching for the static patterns and correlates of so-called ethnic identity, the authors regard ethnicity as a dynamic agent of social and cultural negotiation. All peoples and the objects through which they manipulate daily life are imbued with ethnic overtones, whether it be in the meals they consume, the clothing they wear, or the spaces they inhabit. The essays herein are an attempt by a group of young scholars to come to terms with an issue that continues to confound archaeologists and non-archaeologists alike.

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