

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

A. INTRODUCTION

The excavation and study of the McKean/Cochran Farm were guided by a research design prepared before the beginning of fieldwork. The field and laboratory methodologies were designed to answer the questions outlined in the research design. Archaeologists generally agree that their work is best carried out in this way, with a well-defined research agenda aimed at answering particular questions about the past. Although we cannot always anticipate the questions, or the kinds of data, that future archaeologists will find important, it is still preferable to attempt to answer a few questions than to conduct an unplanned excavation that may address none. The research agenda for the excavations at the McKean/Cochran Farm is described in this chapter, along with the field and laboratory methods designed to carry out that agenda. Of course, some of the discoveries made during the project were surprises, and the research has led us in directions we had not anticipated when we began. The new research themes developed during the course of excavations are also outlined here.

The overall context for federally funded or permitted archaeological research is provided by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Federal Agency Historic Preservation Programs. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards were designed as a tool to be used for organizing information in such a way as to provide a sound basis for decisions concerning the identification, evaluation, and treatment of cultural resources. The process begins with the creation of historic contexts that define the conceptual framework for a set of resources, or property types, that share a thematic or topical unity as well as relatively well-defined geographic and temporal limits. The importance of individual properties is determined within historic contexts, not in isolation; a significant archaeological site is one that can increase our knowledge about a particular historic context. Historic contexts should, therefore, include research questions against which the importance of a site's information potential can be judged.

In the state of Delaware, the first definitions of historic contexts were based on a simple grid with axes for time period, geographic region, and site type (Ames et al. 1989). Delaware history was divided into five time periods: 1630-1730, 1730-1770, 1770-1830, 1830-1880, and 1880-1940+, which correspond roughly to important stages in the history of the state. Five geographic regions were identified: Piedmont, Upper Peninsula (within which the McKean/Cochran Farm is located), Lower Peninsula/Cypress Swamp, Coastal, and Urban (Wilmington). Eighteen historic themes were identified, 10 of which are economic (such as agriculture and manufacturing) and eight of which are cultural (such as settlement patterns, religion, and major families). This grid approach provides a neat way to classify sites, but the gridded historic contexts were not well developed. Contexts for historical archaeology were developed somewhat further in a planning document specific to the discipline (De Cunzo and Catts 1990), although detail on research issues was still sparse. Attempts have since been made to develop detailed contexts, including research questions, for some of the most common types of sites. The most important such efforts for the excavation of the

McKean/Cochran Farm are LuAnn De Cunzo and Ann Marie Garcia's *Historic Context: The Archaeology of Agriculture and Rural Life, New Castle and Kent Counties, Delaware, 1830-1940* (1992), and *"Neither a Desert nor a Paradise": Historic Context for the Archaeology of Agriculture and Rural Life in Sussex County, 1770-1940* (1993). Although neither of these documents covers New Castle County in the 1750 to 1830 period, the research questions they identify do, in general, apply, and they have been used in formulating specific questions for the McKean/Cochran Farm.

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. *Rural Vernacular Architecture*

The study of rural housing is dominated by standing buildings, but there are reasons for believing that standing houses are not a representative sample of the housing stock of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Carson et al. 1981; Chappell 1994). In order to obtain a balanced picture of past housing, it is necessary to study buildings that have been destroyed as well as those that survive.

Housing was, and is, one of the most important components of human material culture, and knowledge of the houses in which people lived is essential to understanding their lives. The houses and barns people built reflect not only their technology and wealth, but also their ethnic heritage, their conceptions of beauty, their notions of order, and their assumptions about private and public life (Herman 1987; Neiman 1980, 1986; Upton 1982).

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, new intellectual and social norms emphasizing order, cleanliness, and the separation of public and private spheres developed in Europe; in Britain and America these ideas are usually referred to as "Georgian" (Deetz 1977). Under the influence of these norms, the better-off white people of America remade their houses and farms to provide a more orderly and private existence. In traditional European houses, even those of kings, sleeping, eating, and entertaining had been conducted in the same spaces. Dissatisfied with this arrangement, the rich began constructing separate bedrooms, dining rooms, and parlors. Privies, unknown in rural contexts from the seventeenth century, were dug, and small sheds were built over them to allow privacy. While the interiors of houses were changing to provide greater privacy, the exteriors were reshaped to provide a proper presentation of the owner's wealth and status. The Georgian facade, with its perfect balance and grand scale, was an almost philosophical statement of the order of the universe and the owner's role as an upholder of that order.

In the course of the nineteenth century Georgian conceptions of order spread into the middle class, developing into the ideology of proper home life we call Victorian. Privacy and the separation of home life from public life and work were further emphasized, although the emphasis on public grandeur was reduced. As Georgian ideas, which derived from the Anglo-Saxon elite, spread through the rest of the population, they interacted with the value systems and architectural traditions of other ethnic and economic groups. For example, the largely German population of central Pennsylvania developed both their own Georgian idiom and a different style of large, grand house, commonly known as the "Middle Atlantic Farmhouse" or the "Foursquare American." Technological

advances, such as affordable windows and machine-made nails, also influenced building techniques. Changes in housing therefore reflect profound changes in the whole intellectual structure of American civilization, and the interaction of those ideas with the many traditional value systems already present in America. The study of vernacular housing in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can help us understand the spread and reception of new ideas and technology, the retention and modification of traditional values, and the development of the American middle-class ideal—indeed, the social and cultural history of North America.

At the McKean/Cochran Farm Site, an attempt was made to learn as much as possible about the houses and other structures that stood on the site by a detailed study of traces surviving below the plowzone. Surviving structural elements, whether brick foundations, brick pier bases, or postholes, were carefully mapped and fully excavated (Plate 6). The fieldwork was supplemented by archival study of tax records and other documents that might include descriptions of the farm and its buildings, and extensive library research on other structures from the period, both those still standing and those uncovered by other archaeologists.



PLATE 6: Mapping Feature 1, Cellar of the Later House, 1800-1830

2. *Landscape*

Housing is only one component of the environment people shape for themselves. People also modify their landscape in many other ways. The arrangement of barns and farmyards, the building

of fences, the cutting or planting of trees, the construction of roads, and the plowing of fields all shape people's lives, and these activities are all guided by cultural assumptions. These activities also often leave traces archaeologists can uncover, and the study of these traces is usually called landscape archaeology (Adams 1990; Beaudry 1986; Kelso and Beaudry 1990; Leone 1989; Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1989; Rubertone 1986). Many of the same issues that arise in the study of housing—in particular, the development of new, "Georgian" conceptions of proper order and the separation of domestic space from work space—are also important to landscape studies.

The importance of imposing order on the landscape to some people in the eighteenth century is well illustrated by an essay written in 1786 by Benjamin Rush, a Philadelphia intellectual who was a regular correspondent of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. Rush divided the farmers of the Delaware Valley into three "species" (Herman 1994). At the bottom of this hierarchy Rush placed the rough frontiersman, his rude cabin and half-cleared fields symbolizing his lawless, ignorant nature. At the top was the model farmer, a civilized man whose belief in education, law, and religion was reflected in his straight fences, completely cleared fields, large barn, and embrace of new agricultural technology. In between was the norm, a sort of middling civilized state. This ethic equated progress with ordering the landscape, and implied a strong equation between that order and the creation of wealth. Texts like Rush's essay, however, do not tell us whether anyone actually lived in the way he described. By studying, through archaeology and landscape architecture, the layout and siting of farms, and reconstructing the historic landscape, we can determine the extent to which farmers actually adopted the ideas of Rush and other progressive intellectuals.

To study the landscape of the farm, archaeologists employ the tools of spatial analysis. On a plowed site such as the McKean/Cochran Farm, spatial archaeology has two dimensions: the distribution of artifacts in the plowzone and the distribution of features beneath it. The distribution of plowzone artifacts reflects, indirectly, both the organization of the activities in which the artifacts were used and the pattern of refuse disposal. The mapping and excavation of features provide several types of spatial data. The locations of buildings, fences, wells, privies, ditches, and other permanent structures can be determined directly. Also, the refuse deposits found in features provide further information about the location of activities and the pattern of trash disposal. The fullest understanding of the landscape of the site is derived from combining these two dimensions of spatial data.

The study of land-use patterns is closely related to issues of archaeological site formation. An understanding of past cultural activities must rest on at least a general understanding of the processes that formed the archaeological features and deposits used in analysis (Schiffer 1972, 1976, 1983, 1987). Objects can become deposited in the ground, and features formed, through a variety of different cultural and natural processes. In a plowed, unstratified site, such as the McKean/Cochran Farm, these questions are not as complicated as they are on urban sites, but they still must be addressed. For example, in the absence of stratigraphy it is often difficult to determine whether a series of post structures were in use at the same time or sequentially, and such indirect clues as the alignment of the structures and the quantity of artifacts in the posthole fill must be used to obtain an approximate result (Kelso 1984:56-79). Only after the chronology of the various features, structures, and fences has been determined can analysis of the landscape of the farm be carried out.



PLATE 7: Counting Artifacts from Feature 1, the Later Cellar, 1800-1830

3. *The Material Culture of the Eighteenth Century: A Revolution in Living Standards?*

During the excavation of the McKean/Cochran Farm, more than 38,000 historic artifacts and faunal specimens were recovered that could be used to study the material culture of the residents, and these artifacts have been made a major focus of the investigation (Plate 7). The material culture of a farm includes both items produced on the farm and items purchased by the residents. The archaeological record is biased toward purchased items, especially ceramics, glass, and metals, and the largest component of material culture studies in archaeology is therefore the study of consumer behavior. Archaeological studies focusing explicitly on consumer behavior have been common in the past two decades, and consumer behavior remains an issue of primary interest in historical archaeology (Gibb 1996; Carson 1994; Henry 1991; Klein 1991; Klein and Garrow 1984; Berger 1986a, 1990a, 1990b; Spencer-Wood 1987). Much of this research has focused on urban sites, but consumer behavior is an equally important issue in rural archaeology (Berger 1986b). We have learned from historical and archaeological study that none of the colonists in British America, neither the wealthiest plantation owner nor the wildest backwoodsman, was self-sufficient. Most settlers did not even produce all their own food, and only a few made all their own cloth and clothing (Bedell et al. 1994; Shammass 1990). Although historians disagree about the extent to which small farmers were

involved in the marketplace and the importance they placed on consumption, all of the colonists were in some sense consumers (Henretta 1978; Kulikoff 1989; Sellers 1991).

As defined by archaeologists, consumer behavior refers to the patterns of individual, household, or group expenditures, and specifically to the acquisition, use, and discard of material items (Wise 1984). This definition is narrower than that employed by other social scientists, who generally include expenses for such nonmaterial goods as charity and education (Henry 1991; Zimmerman 1936), but such expenses rarely leave any trace for archaeologists to uncover. What people buy, of course, reflects not only their material needs but their notions of beauty, proper behavior, the usefulness of technology, and their own status (Ferguson 1977; Meltzer 1981). Zimmerman (1936) has pointed out that values such as frugality and self-indulgence are closely related to consumption patterns. Purchasing patterns also reflect the economic world beyond the farm. Changes in the world economy, most importantly for this period the industrial revolution and the great increase in world trade, should lead to changes in the objects purchased, and those discarded in the ground, even at the houses of ordinary farmers (Larkin 1988).

Consumption and consumerism have also been used to divide historical periods. Some descriptions of twentieth-century American society emphasize that this is the consumer age, in which people express their identities primarily through consumption, and social classes and cultural groups can be defined by their different buying habits. If the great importance of consumption does differentiate contemporary society, it raises the question of when the consumer society originated, and whether the change was rapid or gradual. Historians have written a great deal on this question, and they have placed the origins of consumer society in the sixteenth century, the eighteenth century, the 1880s, and the 1920s (Shammas 1989). Behind these differences about the date of the change lie not only the typical historian's emphasis on the importance of his or her own period of study, but great divisions about what consumer society is, what it means for the people who live in it, and whether its development was good, bad, or indifferent for the world.

Most important for the study of the McKean/Cochran Farm is the large body of recent scholarship, summarized by Carson (1994), that points to the eighteenth century as the key period for development of modern consumer culture. According to this view, it was in the years between 1650 and 1800 that household objects such as dishes and furniture first became a key component of the average person's social status and self-definition. In traditional European society, these scholars argue, status was largely determined by a family's wealth in land and livestock, the value of which their neighbors all knew. By 1800, status was generally judged by a new definition of proper behavior that rested largely on a person's skill in using certain household objects. The tea ceremony and a new way of dining, around oval tables with forks and matching sets of dishes, are the best examples of this new relationship between status and household objects. The great importance attached to these rather simple things led to the culture of mass consumerism we live with today and sparked a demand for mass-produced goods that helped ignite the industrial revolution. This "consumer revolution" spread Georgian canons of order and beauty, derived from the classical revival in elite circles we usually call the Renaissance, to ordinary people, and their local artistic and

craft traditions were swamped by a tide of classically inspired, mass-produced, and internationally recognized fashion.

A related body of work, much of it deriving from Annapolis, Maryland, sees the changes in eighteenth-century personal habits as symptoms of a broad shift in western society toward a more disciplined way of life (Shackel 1993; Shackel and Little 1994). The material corollaries of this new discipline include not only dishes and tea sets, which represent a more meticulous way of eating, but clocks, which impose tight control on the use of time, scientific instruments, which represent the imposition of law on nature, formal gardens and grid street plans, which bring rigid order to the landscape, and toothbrushes and chamber pots, which represent the imposition of discipline on the body. Paul Shackel, one of the leading theorists of this school, explicitly relates his ideas to Michel Foucault's work on prisons, which, according to Foucault, represent an attempt to impose a discipline favorable to the upper class on the criminal elements and the poor (Foucault 1978). We are thus led to imagine that the 1650 to 1800 period saw a great change in the western world, from a rather lax medieval society in which work was task-oriented, table manners atrocious, towns random in form, and criminals out of control, to a tightly disciplined modern society governed by the police, the clock, the surveyor's sextant, and the etiquette book. It is interesting to note that while Carson and Shackel both believe that the cultures of the rich and poor grew closer together in the eighteenth century, Carson sees this as evidence that the poor were striving to imitate the rich as best they could, while Shackel believes that the rich were forcing the poor to behave in ways useful to their betters.

Substantial claims are made for the importance of changes in consumption in the 1650 to 1800 period. On the one hand, these changes reflect a major shift in the way people conceived of their society, related to their neighbors, learned how to do their work, even thought about their bodily functions; on the other hand, these changes caused yet further developments, most importantly the industrial revolution. The claims, if correct, therefore seem to justify the notion of a "consumer revolution" in the eighteenth century. But a close evaluation of these claims suggests that they cannot be accepted uncritically. Examined in the wider context of Western history, the rise of consumerism and personal discipline are but parts of much broader social changes that took centuries to develop.

The main theorists under discussion here, Carson (1994) and Shackel (1993; Shackel and Little 1994), both tend to isolate the changes in eighteenth-century consumption from other changes in the society and to assign prominence to consumer behavior even when other factors have traditionally been seen as more important. Neither of these writers say much about the Renaissance, which seems a striking omission in works about the transformation of early modern Europe. If, as Carson maintains, the visible marks of status ceased to be lands and jewels and came to be a refined way of behaving, the classical education emphasized by humanist intellectuals is surely one of the most important parts of that new code, and the rise of the university education as a marker of gentility deserves mention alongside furniture and table manners (Bush 1939; Elias 1978). New standards of taste, which led to the redesign of houses and furniture, were also inspired by Renaissance classicism, and grid street plans were copied from Roman models. The introduction of the

Renaissance to the discussion takes us back to the fourteenth century, greatly stretching the time frame of these "revolutionary" changes.

Social discipline has long been one of the major themes of Renaissance historians, and Shackel has only scratched the surface of this vast topic. The Protestant Reformation has often been seen as a quest for a disciplined church, especially as practiced by John Calvin, John Knox, and their Puritan followers (McNeill 1967; Schilling 1981; Strauss 1980). The modern army, with its uniforms, matched weaponry, system of rank, and regular drill, was an invention of this period, developed by men who wanted to recreate an ancient Roman or Spartan standard of military discipline (Oestreich 1982). The stoics, the ancient philosophers who emphasized personal discipline over all else, were widely read and quoted in this period (Allen 1957). Modern athletics, which can be seen as another way of disciplining the body, also developed greatly in this period, often under the influence of classical models. These issues take us from Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses (1519) to the renewal of the Olympics (1896), again greatly stretching the time frame of the revolution.

Carson also asserts that the "consumer revolution" led to a great rise in demand for consumer goods and therefore caused the industrial revolution, but this equation suffers from a mismatch between the commodities important to the two developments. The objects Carson emphasizes are houses, furniture, dishes, and cutlery. Although the form of houses and furniture certainly changed in the 1650 to 1800 period, the way they were made, by hand labor with simple tools, did not. The manufacture of ceramic dishes and cutlery was transformed by factory techniques, but these items represent such small segments of the eighteenth-century economy that it is hard to see how they could have had a revolutionary economic impact. The key industries of the eighteenth century were cloth manufacture and iron and steel production (Hartwell 1968; Mathias 1988). Carson's model actually asserts that cloth and clothing became less important status markers at this time, and we know that iron and steel production was much more closely related to military needs than to consumer demand. Carson's evidence that ordinary people became more interested in the acquisition of consumer goods like those of the rich comes from sermons and other moralizing tracts complaining about the "uppity" behavior of the poor, who didn't know their place as they used to. Since examples of such moralizing could be produced in numbers beyond counting for every period of European history, these texts are actually evidence only of their authors' traditional moral bent and tell us nothing at all about eighteenth-century behavior (Delumeau 1977; Owst 1961; Strauss 1978). Again, it seems more appropriate to see both changes in consumption and the new style of manufacturing as deriving from intellectual changes begun in the Renaissance.

Nor is it clear that, as Carson asserts, consumer goods did not play a great part in defining social groups before 1650. Medieval people did not use forks or teacups, but they were very conscious of how people used other possessions. Knowing how to ride a horse, for example, was a key element of aristocratic behavior. (It remained so in eighteenth-century America.) And if one objects to use of the horse as an example, on the grounds that it is not a manufactured good, what about a sword? Every medieval gentleman (outside the church) had to own a sword, and his status was judged in part by the style with which he used it. There is certainly a difference between knowing how to ride a horse or use a sword and knowing how to make tea elegantly, but the difference does not lie in the

importance of properly using manufactured goods, which is essential in both systems. As for refined manners, Europeans had believed from at least the time of the Iliad and the earliest Irish sagas that an aristocrat could be recognized by his behavior no matter how far from home he went, even by people who had no idea of the amount of land he owned. The “courtly love” of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries has frequently been seen as a code of behavior that separated the aristocracy from everyone else, since only the aristocrats had the time to learn the complex rules of courtly romance (Elias 1978).

Questions have also been raised about the degree of change that actually took place in the eighteenth century, and many scholars see strong expressions of traditional attitudes well into the nineteenth century. Traditional rural patterns of neighborhood sharing, as expressed in communal activities such as barn raisings and quilting bees, interest-free loans between neighbors, and simple barter exchanges like meat clubs, remained common in the nineteenth century, suggesting that market attitudes and the desire to acquire consumer goods remained second to neighborliness for many people (Henretta 1978; Martin 1984). Amy Friedlander (1991) has shown that in early nineteenth-century New Jersey most farmers continued to use their wealth in a way Carson calls traditional, preferring investment in bigger barns and more livestock over the purchase of consumer goods. Edward Chappell (1994) believes that there was no great change in American housing until after 1800, and traditional building forms remained common in some parts of North America into this century (Glassie 1968; Noble 1984). Studies of bones from archaeological sites suggest that traditional dietary patterns remained entrenched in rural areas in the nineteenth century (Bedell et al. 1994). The recognition that many traditional lifeways endured into the nineteenth century, and that many of the undoubted developments of the eighteenth century were rooted in the Renaissance and the Reformation, turns the “consumer revolution” into a 500-year-long event, and the important changes in the ways eighteenth-century people ate and drank were part of a very slow process, not signs of a sudden social transformation.

The debate about whether there was a rise in consumerism and, if so, whether it was gradual or rapid, sets a clear agenda for archaeological and historical research. If we can identify a period of less than 50 years when great changes took place in the ownership of several different classes of goods—for example, tea sets, forks, chests of drawers, and improved houses—we could plausibly point to that period as one of consumer revolution. If, on the other hand, we find that these changes were gradual, or that rapid changes in the ownership of different consumer goods took place at different periods spread out over centuries, we could argue for slow change. Also, if new consumer goods spread at the same time among different ethnic groups in different parts of colonial North America, we could argue for the existence of a single market and a single culture. However, if different groups experienced these changes at widely different times, or if some groups did not experience them at all, then we must allow that the reach of Anglo-American commercial culture was limited, and that traditional ethnic and community values continued to be of major importance. Obviously, archaeology is not the only way to approach these questions, but it certainly has a part to play in understanding consumerism and its role in the origin of the modern world.

4. *Culture and Environment*

The relationship between culture and environment has always been prominent in the study of American history. People have long wondered how much of the culture the early European immigrants to America brought from home was maintained in the New World, and how much the immigrants changed their ways to adapt to their new surroundings. The debate surrounding this question continues today (Bailyn 1986; Carson 1994; Fischer 1989; Greene 1988; Mouer 1993).

To study the relationship between culture and environment was not part of the original research design for the McKean/Cochran Farm. It was discoveries made in the field, especially a peculiar dairy building, that raised this question. Although this topic was introduced late into the research program, it has become central to the research. The Odessa area makes a fascinating laboratory for the study of this relationship, because although it is topographically very similar to the Chesapeake region, it is culturally much closer to Pennsylvania (Glassie 1968).

5. *Culture History*

The end goal of the research at the McKean/Cochran Farm has been to increase our knowledge about the past. The information we have discovered is both particular, relating to one farm and the families that occupied it during a few decades, and general, relating to the overall pattern of culture and culture change in America. Our detailed studies of the McKean/Cochran Farm, including its layout, the architecture of its buildings, and the material culture and diet of its residents, have provided data that are interesting in themselves, comprising an intense, micro-study of a particular farm. Yet these data gain greater importance when related to broader developments in American history. By combining the intense study of this farm with information from documentary research, material culture studies, architectural history, and the excavations of other similar sites in the region (e.g., Catts et al. 1989, 1995; Coleman et al. 1984, 1990; Grettler et al. 1995; Shaffer et al. 1988; Thomas et al. 1994), we have tried both to develop a picture of the lives of the inhabitants and to explore the relationship between their lives and the world they lived in. What impact did broad economic, social, and cultural changes have on the lives of these people? How were the ideas and ideologies of these people reflected in the ways they built, ate, farmed, and shopped?

A question of particular importance in this project has been the way we divide the Americans of past centuries. Much current research, especially among political liberals, focuses on the variables of race, class, gender, and ethnicity, which have now been incorporated into the National Park Service's "Thematic Framework for History and Prehistory" (Little 1997). However, people can be grouped for consideration in many other ways as well. Work on consumer habits emphasizes the difference between rural and urban residents, who had very different buying patterns in the eighteenth century (Carson 1994:608-609; Walsh 1983; Weatherhill 1988:70-90). Regional cultures play a great part in the work of many folklorists, and it appears from work at the McKean/Cochran Farm that its residents, wealthy people of British descent, acted differently, in many ways, from wealthy people of British descent in the Chesapeake region. Time also served to divide people. This was true not only absolutely—people of the same class, ethnicity, and gender lived quite differently in 1830 than

they did in 1750—but also in terms of how long a particular area had been settled and how long a family had lived on a particular farm. The wealthy Cochran family lived in a rather small, simple house for at least their first decade or two at the McKean/Cochran Farm, constructing grander dwellings only when they had made sufficient capital investment in their farm. Comparisons between different groups of people, however divided, have validity only if the time variables are carefully controlled.

With these questions in mind, we turn to the excavation of the McKean/Cochran Farm Site and the discoveries in the ground that have helped us to answer them.