

VI. UNDERSTANDING THE BOWMAN TRACT

A. DATING THE BOWMAN #3 SITE

The Bowman #3 Site dates to the eighteenth century, but which part? The question is an important one for assessing the site’s significance, since many more archaeological sites have been found in Delaware dating to the second half of the century than the first. The only evidence comes from the artifacts, especially the ceramics. The small size of the collection suggests a brief occupation, since other tenant sites in Delaware have produced thousands of artifacts.

Four cellar holes excavated during the SR 1 project provide comparisons. A small cellar at the Augustine Creek North Site (7NC-G-144) represents an occupation of the early to mid-eighteenth century (Table 9). The collection is similar in size to the one from the Bowman #3 Site. As with other Delaware collections from the first half of the eighteenth century, tin-glazed earthenware or Delft greatly outnumbers white salt-glazed stoneware. Westerwald blue and gray stoneware is a significant component, as is “Midlands Mottled” ware. No Jackfield-type ware is present.

TABLE 9. HISTORIC ARTIFACTS FROM FEATURE AT
SITE 7NC-G-144, A SMALL CELLAR FILLED BEFORE 1750

ARTIFACT TYPE/SUBTYPE	COUNT	ARTIFACT TYPE/SUBTYPE	COUNT
<i>Ceramics</i>		<i>Glass</i>	
Delftware (1640-1800)	16	Wine bottle, olive	18
White salt-glazed stoneware, dipped (1720-1775)	1	Unidentified bottle, clear	12
Astbury (1725-1750)	3	Stemware, clear	4
Refined redware, clear glaze	1	Tumbler fragment, clear	1
Midlands Mottled (1680-1780)	27	<i>Architectural</i>	
Westerwald blue and gray stoneware (1620-1775)	7	Handwrought nails	65
Coarse Red Earthenware	84	Cut or handwrought nails	70
Unglazed	2	Spike, unidentified	1
Clear glaze	1	<i>Other</i>	
Brown glaze	76	Sewing needle	1
Black glaze	5	Cufflink, white metal	1
Red-bodied slipware (1670-1850)	30	Button, white metal	1
Buff-bodied slipware (1670-1795)	1	Buckle, copper alloy	2
<i>Tobacco Pipes</i>		Hinge, copper alloy	2
White clay tobacco pipe bowl	25	Unidentified metal	7
White clay tobacco pipe stem, 5/64”	26	Total	490

Source: Bedell et al. 2001

The material from the earlier cellar at the Appoquinimink North Site (7NC-F-13), which seems to span the 1700 to 1760 period, likewise includes significant amounts Midlands Mottled ware, Westerwald blue and gray stoneware, and buff-bodied coarse earthenware. Delftware outnumbers white salt-glazed stoneware by 194 sherds to 44 (Bedell et al. 1999).

Collections more closely resembling the one from the Bowman #3 Site come from the cellars of the Thomas Dawson and Augustine Creek South sites. At the Thomas Dawson Site, 7K-C-414,

the cellar seems to have been filled soon after Thomas Dawson died, in 1754. That collection included 57 sherds of Delftware, four of Westerwald, and 163 of white salt-glazed stoneware (Bedell et al. 2002).

An even closer comparison comes from the Augustine Creek South Site. That site was occupied from the 1720s to around 1760, and the material in the cellar dated to near the end of the occupation. The abandonment of the site, or at least of ceramic purchasing for the site, can be dated rather precisely. The site yielded several fragments of early creamwares dating to the 1750s, including a green-glazed sherd for which the standard references give an initial date of 1759, but no plain creamware of the type that became so common after it was introduced in 1762. The collection is large, but two randomly selected 1x1-meter units provide a good sample (Table 10).

TABLE 10. HISTORIC ARTIFACTS FROM UNITS 83 AND 105IN FEATURE 1 AT SITE 7NC-G-145, A LARGE CELLAR FILLED AROUND 1760

ARTIFACT TYPE/SUBTYPE	COUNT	ARTIFACT TYPE/SUBTYPE	COUNT
<i>Ceramics</i>		<i>Glass</i>	
Delftware		Wine bottle, olive	17
Blue decoration (1640-1800)	9	Case bottle, aqua	2
Eighteenth-century type (1700-1800)	9	Unidentified bottle, aqua	4
Polychrome (1750-1800)	3	Unidentified bottle, clear	2
White Salt-Glazed Stoneware		Stemware	2
Plain (1720-1805)	73	<i>Architectural</i>	
Scratch Blue (1740-1775)	63	Handwrought nail	9
Dipped (1715-1775)	2	Cut or handwrought nail	36
Handpainted (1740-1780)	1	Window glass	14
Creamware, vegetable shapes (1750-1800)	4	<i>Tobacco Pipes</i>	
Creamware, green glaze (1759-1775)	1	White clay tobacco pipe bowl (1720-1820)	2
Thin red body, black glaze (1745-1790)	10	White clay tobacco pipe bowl fragment	17
Midlands Mottled (1680-1780)	2	White clay tobacco pipe stem 4/64"	8
Coarse Red Earthenware		White clay tobacco pipe stem 5/64"	29
Black glaze	56	White clay tobacco pipe stem 6/64"	1
Brown glaze	120	White clay tobacco pipe stem, fragment	3
Unglazed	8	<i>Other</i>	
Streaked body, yellow-brown glaze	2	Shoe buckle	3
Yellow-brown glaze, dark brown decoration	3	Bone comb	1
Red-bodied slipware (1670-1850)	47	Stirrup	1
Red-bodied slipware, Philadelphia style (1740-1760)	8	Claw hammer	2
Buff-bodied slipware, combed lines (1670-1795)	6	Unidentified iron	16
Oriental porcelain	4	Total	

Source: Bedell et al. 2001

The collection from the cellar at Augustine Creek South likely dates mainly to the 1750s. It has much in common with the material from Bowman #3: refined wares are dominated by plain and Scratch Blue white salt-glazed stoneware, Delft and Jackfield-type wares are present, and all the coarse earthenware is red-bodied. Figure 26 compares the ceramics from the Bowman #3 Site with those from the other sites, showing the quantities of white salt-glazed stoneware, Delftware, and Westerwald stoneware as a percentage of the total count of refined ceramics.

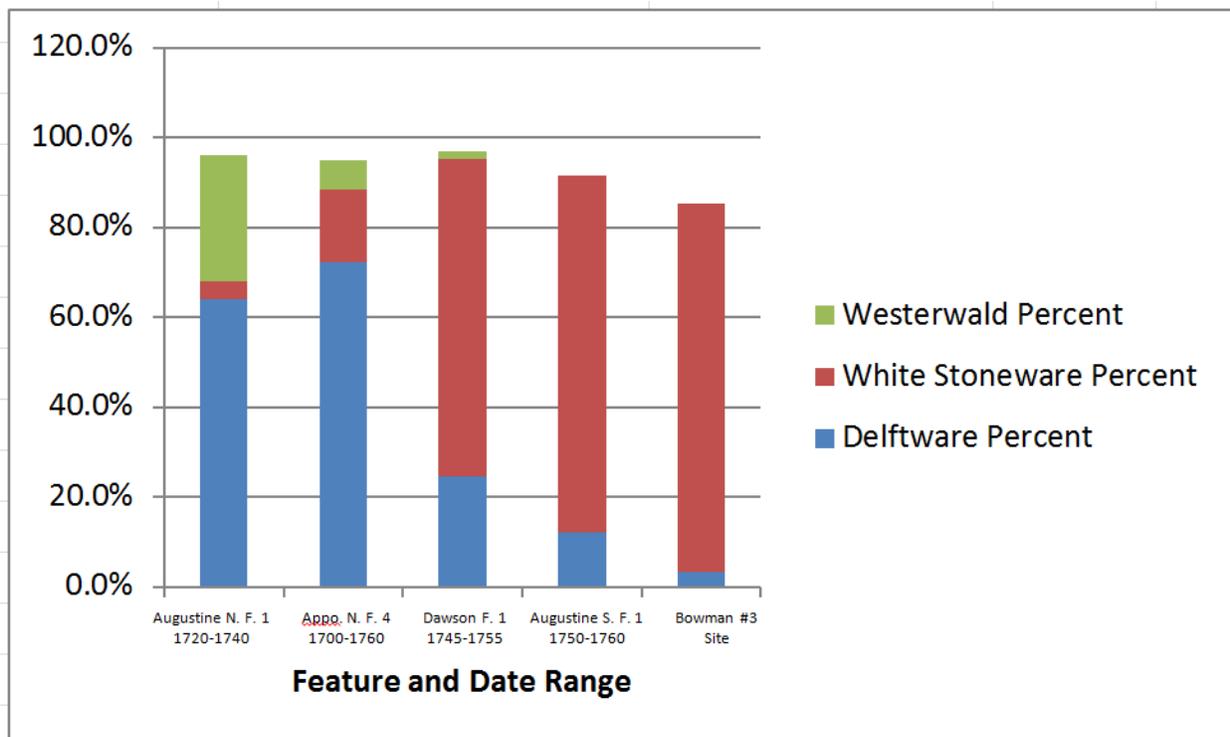


FIGURE 26. Comparison of Ceramic Types in Five Eighteenth-Century Collections
 Source: Bedell et al. 1999, 2001, 2002

Because the refined wares at Bowman #3 were dominated by white salt-glazed stoneware, with only two sherds of Delftware and no buff-bodied earthenware or Midlands Mottled ware, the site probably does not date to earlier than about 1750. The Bowman #3 assemblage also includes seven sherds of plain creamware (1762 to 1820) and 19 of Jackfield-type ware (1740 to 1850), which seems to be strongly associated with creamware in Delaware collections, so the site was occupied into the 1760s. However, the count of creamware is only 17 percent of the count of white salt-glazed stoneware, and the pearlware is probably intrusive, so occupation may not have lasted long past 1762. The Bowman #3 Site was probably occupied between 1750 and 1770.

B. TENANCY AND THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

In rural Delaware, “tenant” was not really a static economic class. People rented farms of every size, even the largest. The 1880 U.S. Agricultural Census lists several big tenants in St. Georges Hundred, including James Gray, who leased a 443-acre farm worth \$35,000. Gray paid a share of his crop as rent, so he was a sharecropper, even though he was one of the biggest farmers in the county. In fact, the smallest farms, those under 20 acres, were usually farmed by their owners. So although land ownership was an important goal for many if not most Americans, this had as much to do with security and status as with wealth or income. It was possible to be a tenant farmer but safely in the middle class, even modestly well-to-do. To say that the residents of the Mrs. Bowman, Bowman Tenant, Bowman #3 sites were tenants does not tell us much about them. The people who lived in the Mrs. Bowman Site while farming around 200 acres of land were presumably seen differently by their neighbors from the poor folks who lived in the cabin nearby.

Some tenants were certainly poor. Estate records for Delaware farms sometimes mention tenant cabins that seem like poor places indeed. The Eliza Evans estate near Glasgow, surveyed for the Orphans' Court in 1806, included three such homes:

. . . there are on the premises three small log tenements Viz., one occupied by David Biggs in very bad condition, no out buildings or fruit trees, and about two acres of cleared land, one occupied by John Bratten in tenantable order no out houses or fruit trees about two acres land cleared; one occupied by Stephen Augustus in bad order no out buildings about three acres cleared land part of which is in Meadow [Catts and Custer 1990:48].

Such tenants were not “tenant farmers” in the usual language of the time. A “tenant farmer” leased a whole farm, usually of at least 100 acres. The tenants in small cabins were generally laborers. Many worked in agriculture, but others in construction or other trades.

Because of the very limited information, it is hard to be certain about the status of the residents at the Bowman #3 Site. Since they almost certainly had dishes for serving tea, at a date when the practice was not yet universal, they were probably not poor. The diversity of refined ceramics found on the site—white salt-glazed stoneware (plain, Scratch Blue, molded, dipped, and hand-painted), delftware, Oriental porcelain—also suggests that the residents were not poor. The small amount of material found presumably means that the occupation of the site was rather short, no more than a couple of decades. The most likely interpretation of the remains is that a farm family of ordinary or somewhat above-average means took up residence on the site, built a log house, and started to farm the land around their dwelling, and then something happened that made them pack up and move on. Perhaps there was a death in the family, or perhaps they just got a better offer somewhere else. In the colonial period, tenants were highly mobile and seem to have moved easily from one property to another, and many domestic sites are known from the colonial period that produce only a handful of artifacts.

Much more information is available about the Bowman Tenant Site. This site is shown on two maps, clearly indicated on both as a dependency of the main Bowman residence. It seems to have been a small log house in a wood lot. The house was never described in tax assessments, so it probably did not have any great monetary value. The archaeological site itself is also rather small, and no evidence of outbuildings was noted. The site seems to have been a “small log tenement” like those on the Eliza Evans estate. The occupants were probably agricultural laborers and their kin.

The Bowman Tenant Site was occupied for at least 60 years, from around 1800 to after 1868. Other tenant dwellings nearby also had long occupations, including the Bird-Houston Site, 7NC-F-138, where unknown tenants resided for more than a century (Bedell and Shellenhamer 2011). The Thomas Williams Site was a tenancy from 1792 to 1875, which it was sold to the black laborer who lived there, and it then remained in his family until the 1920s (Catts and Custer 1990). The Jacob B. Cazier tenancy was occupied by tenants from 1844 to the 1930s (Hoseth et al. 1994).

The small log houses at the Bowman Tenant and Bird-Houston sites do not seem to have been very valuable, so investment in the property does not explain the longevity of the sites. Such houses are not likely to have lasted 60 years and certainly not 150 years, so they were probably

replaced or at least substantially rebuilt more than once. Why did tenancies remain in one place so much longer after 1800 than before? It seems that as Delaware grew more crowded toward the end of the eighteenth century, the landscape grew more stable. The boundaries of fields, orchards and woodlots were fixed, permanent roads and lanes were laid out, bridges built. Swamps were drained, forests cleared, and the amount of land not being used for some definite purpose declined. In 1750 much of the land was, from the point of view of the farmers, waste, but by 1800 this was much less true. So once a location was set aside for the houses of farm laborers, it was used that way for decades or a century. Racial factors may also have been involved, where the tenants were black and the nearby landowners white; once a local geography of race had been established, with certain houses, fishing holes, and stores used by blacks or whites, it probably became a cultural pattern for landowners and tenants alike to keep those existing boundaries rather than re-arrange them. Of course, the landscape did continue to change throughout the 1800s, just at a much slower rate than it had in the colonial period. The Bowman #3 Site was eventually abandoned, the wood lot cut down, and the location plowed over. But it had remained in place for at least 70 years, through multiple generations of people.

In the nineteenth century, under Bowman ownership, it seems that the entire farm was leased to tenants. The estate was tied up in probate for decades, which probably made leasing out the land the easiest option, and then Peter Bowman moved away. If, as seems likely, the Bowmans were all residing elsewhere in the 1840s, the new house at the Mrs. Bowman Site must have been specifically built to let to tenants. The old Bowman house must have been worn out by then, or perhaps the family had already decided to sell the land north of Hyetts Corner Road. Since the Bowman tract included around 200 acres of farmland, the tenant must have been a substantial farmer, a man who had the livestock, tools, and financial wherewithal to farm on a large scale. Such a large tenant would probably not have been willing to live in a log shack like the one we assume stood at the Bowman Tenant Site. This new house, then, was also a tenancy but of a different sort, one built for a farm family. It also stood for more than a century.

C. DIFFERENCE: TIME, MONEY, CLASS, AND OTHER VARIABLES

When an archaeological site is first discovered, the most obvious thing about it is usually its age. Especially for historic sites, the rapid technological change over the past 350 years means that a site can be dated to the right 50-year period from just a handful of artifacts. The three Bowman sites date to different periods, and this is visible in their artifact collections. Both the types and amounts of objects are different. As a general rule, the closer we get to the present, the more material goods people owned and the more we find at their sites; however, this is sometimes balanced by the increasing neatness of modern households. We have more belongings, but we burn our trash or transport it to landfills instead of just leaving it around the yards.

The material from the Mrs. Bowman Site shows a greater diversity of both ceramics and glass than the earlier sites, testifying to the ever greater productive capacity of industry. The electrical hardware and car parts point to other kinds of modernization.

Compared to the obvious differences in the collections created by technological change, the differences created by class and wealth are more subtle. One important difference is the size of the sites; the Mrs. Bowman Site is more than 10 times the size of the Bowman Tenant Site, representing a larger house, a larger yard, more outbuildings, and more goods. The Bowman #3 Site is also quite small. In terms of the quality of the artifacts, it is hard to see much difference.

The ceramics from the Bowman Tenant and Mrs. Bowman sites had the same range of decorative techniques and the collections look very similar. It may well be that the substantial farmers who lived at the Mrs. Bowman Site had large sets of new, matched dishes while the poor residents of the Bowman Tenant Site bought their dishes second hand, mismatched, and already chipped, but the broken sherds found on these sites do not show this. Since the residents of the two houses used similar dishes, they presumably ate in about the same style. The people who lived in the large and small houses were very much part of the same culture, at least in archaeological terms.