

I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE DOCUMENT

1. *In Context*

Decisions about whether an archaeological site is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and if it is eligible, how it ought to be excavated, can only be made in reference to the appropriate physical and historical context. To decide whether excavation of a site is likely to add to our knowledge of the past, we have to know what the current state of that knowledge is. Similarly, to decide whether a structure embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, we need reliable data on that type of structure and its characteristics. It is for these reasons that federal regulations provide for the development of “historic contexts” within which individual properties can be evaluated. A historic context must focus on a historical theme or group of related themes within a particular place and a defined time period. Examples of such themes would be “Revolutionary Politics in Philadelphia, 1760 to 1790,” or “Science and Technology in New Jersey, 1850 to 1930.” The context must also describe the property types that can be associated with the theme. Using the Philadelphia theme as an example, property types might include public buildings, taverns, the homes of political leaders, and monuments commemorating the Revolutionary period. A historic context usually also includes a narrative, or description, of the historical period covered, a discussion of why certain sites might be important to the theme, and criteria for distinguishing significant from nonsignificant sites.

In the state of Delaware, the first definitions of historic contexts were given in the state Historic Preservation Plan (Ames et al. 1989) based on a simple grid with axes for time period, geographic region, and historic theme. 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, 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). The plan also lists the major property types likely to be associated with each theme. This grid approach provides a neat way to classify sites, but there are 450 possible contexts, and the plan does not develop the individual contexts in any detail.

A more detailed look at historical archaeology was provided by LuAnn De Cunzo and Wade Catts in 1990. Their *Management Plan for Delaware’s Historical Archaeological Resources* described the work that had been done in the state by 1989 and, based on that work, made recommendations about future research directions. This document was followed by two detailed contexts focusing on the nineteenth century, 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, Sussex County, Delaware, 1770-1940* (1993). No detailed context has been produced for the archaeology of the period before 1770. In fact, in 1990, little work had been published on that period on which to base such a document. The only three eighteenth-century sites that had been excavated

and fully reported in the state were the William Hawthorn Site, the Whitten Road Site, and the Thomas Williams Site. In the past nine years, however, nine additional eighteenth-century farm sites have been excavated: the John Powell Plantation Site, the William Strickland Plantation Site, the Benjamin Wynn Site, the Charles Robinson Plantation Site, the McKean/Cochran Farm Site, the Bloomsbury Site, the Augustine Creek North and Augustine Creek South sites, and the Thomas Dawson Site (Figure 1). The excavation of these nine sites in just nine years has enormously increased our knowledge of eighteenth-century Delaware. A new summary statement therefore seems to be called for. Because the present document follows the state plan periodization, it includes the first 30 years of the nineteenth century. It therefore covers a group of sites dating to that period—the H. Grant Tenancy, the Charles Allen, and the Darrach Store sites.

It is the purpose of this document to provide a summary of recent archaeological developments in Delaware and a statement of how what we have learned from this work ought to influence future archaeological research in the state. It builds on earlier planning documents, especially the *Management Plan for Delaware's Historical Archaeological Resources* (De Cunzo and Catts 1990), but the author's approach is somewhat different from that taken in the contexts produced for agriculture and rural life in the nineteenth century (De Cunzo and Garcia 1992, 1993). Unlike those contexts, which include hundreds of pages of historical background, this one focuses more narrowly on historical archaeology and the work that has already been done in Delaware. Historical data are considered only as they have been used by archaeologists working in the state.

In terms of the state plan periodization, this document covers two periods: 1730 to 1770, designated "Intensification and Durable Occupation," and 1770 to 1830, called "Early Industrialization." For the 1630 to 1730 period, very little archaeological information is available. Amateur excavations were conducted in the 1960s at what was thought to be the site of Swanendael, and some testing has been done on the site of the Dutch fort at New Castle, but the only fully excavated and reported sites are the Richard Whitehart (1681-1701) and John Powell (1691-1735) plantations in Kent County (Grettlar et al. 1995). The archaeological record of early Swedish settlement is a complete blank, and that of the Dutch period exceedingly sparse. Because we know so little about the archaeology of this period, almost any site with integrity might contain important data, especially any site from before the Penn grant of 1682. No attempt has been made at this time to provide a context for sites dating to before 1730.

The archaeological record of Delaware becomes much richer in the 1720s. Thorough excavations have been conducted at the William Strickland Plantation Site in Kent County, occupied from 1726 to 1762 (Catts et al. 1995), and the Augustine Creek South Site in New Castle County, established in about 1726 (Bedell et al. 2001). Professional salvage excavations were also carried out by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) at the Thompson's Loss and Gain Site in Sussex County, which was occupied between 1720 and 1780 (Guerrant 1988). The Thomas Dawson Site near Dover was occupied by 1740 (Bedell et al. 2002), as, probably, was Loockerman's Range (ca. 1740 to 1760) (Grettlar et al. 1991). The year 1750 is listed as the beginning date of occupation for several sites: William Hawthorn (1750 to 1963), Whitten Road (1750 to 1820), the McKean/Cochran Farm (1750 to 1830), and Augustine Creek North (1750 to 1810) (Bedell et al. 1999, 2001; Coleman et al. 1984; Shaffer et al. 1988). These sites were all dated from their artifacts, and this clustering

of dates reflects the historical archaeologists' habit of classifying artifact collections by the quarter century, as in "third quarter of the eighteenth century." Although these dates need not be taken literally, they do show that a substantial group of sites from before 1770 has been identified and excavated. The record for the 1770 to 1830 period is even richer. Most of the large-scale, professional excavations of these sites have been funded by the Delaware Department of Transportation. Largely because of DelDOT's priorities, most of the sites have been in New Castle and Kent counties; Sussex County has been less studied. The work has been carried out primarily by the University of Delaware Center for Archaeological Research (UDCAR), which excavated 10 of the 16 sites, and Louis Berger & Associates, Inc. (Berger), which excavated four. Because none of the professionally excavated sites are in Sussex County, and because De Cunzo and Garcia have already provided a context for the 1770 to 1830 period there, this document focuses on New Castle and Kent counties.

2. *Organization of the Document*

This historic context includes:

- 1) a summary of the work done to date in New Castle and Kent counties on rural archaeological sites from the 1730-1770 and 1770-1830 periods;
- 2) a discussion of the distribution of these sites;
- 3) definitions of property types, based on those in the state plan;
- 4) suggestions for further research in this area;
- 5) suggested eligibility criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places;
- 6) a brief section containing practical advice on the excavation of these sites, based on experience to date in the state.

The organization of the document follows this plan. Chapter I contains the introduction, a brief description of Delaware history down to 1830, and a discussion of the main categories of written records that archaeologists have used in their work. Chapter II defines the relevant property types and the available information on how many such sites are likely to be extant and where they are likely to be found. Chapter III summarizes the excavations that have been done to date; it includes descriptions of the excavated sites and a discussion of the main data sets archaeologists have used in interpreting those sites. Chapter IV discusses eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places, including a discussion of the main research questions that have animated historical archaeology in Delaware and a definition of integrity as it pertains to these archaeological sites. Chapter V provides a discussion of some of the excavation techniques and analytical methods that have been used in the state, and some of the practical difficulties that have come up in previous excavations. Chapter VI consists of a brief conclusion.

3. *Narrating the Past*

The requirement that we determine whether an archaeological site is “significant” raises the question, significant for whom? And for what purpose? People tell different kinds of stories about the past and identify with history in different ways. For many Americans it is the national narrative that means the most, so the most significant sites are those related to the realization of freedom for the nation and its citizens: Independence Hall, Valley Forge, Gettysburg. Others are interested in more personal narratives, relating to their own families, their own neighborhoods, their own ethnic groups, or political movements they identify with, such as Civil Rights, feminism, or trade unionism. Some topics have a strong emotional appeal that excites certain people and lifts them beyond themselves: the exploration of the West, the struggles of pioneers and cowboys, immigration, invention, the “Lost Cause” of southern independence. Sometimes the same events are incorporated by different groups into radically different narratives. The westward march of European Americans does not mean the same thing to American Indians as it does to the descendants of Daniel Boone or Thomas Jefferson.

Academic historians and archaeologists tend to focus on the broad social, cultural, economic, and political changes that have shaped American society. Sometimes these interests overlap with topics of broad popular interest, as with pioneering or the Civil War, but much academic attention is devoted to topics, such as demography or trade patterns, that raise little enthusiasm among non-professionals. Archaeological sites are usually said to be significant because they contain information useful to academicians in developing narratives of social, economic, and cultural history. However, we should not ignore the kinds of narratives relating to the history of local communities and other groups. An archaeological site reflects not just the era when it was occupied and the class of its occupants, but the particular people who lived there. Sites can help us learn about particular households, not only about broad categories such as rural life in eighteenth-century Delaware. Archaeology can connect us to the past in several ways, and at several levels. Establishing broad patterns of artifact distribution can help us unravel regional changes in farming practices or household organization; the dating of a house can help us establish when a particular community was founded and how it grew; to hold a 300-year-old button in our hands can carry us back across the centuries to a different time and place and help make lost worlds real to us. All of this is significant to someone, and all should be taken into account.

B. DELAWARE FROM 1730 TO 1830

1. *Seventeenth-Century Background*

By 1730 the European settlements in Delaware were a century old. The first European to explore the Delaware River was Henry Hudson, who visited both the Hudson and Delaware rivers on his famous voyage of 1609. The English were slow to follow up on Hudson’s discoveries, and after 1610, Dutch traders plied the Delaware River. In 1631, the Dutch West India Company, formed to administer Dutch land claims in North America, established a fishing and agricultural settlement called Swanendael, near modern Lewes. This first European settlement within modern Delaware was destroyed by an Indian attack in 1631. Because the West India Company refused to support further settlement efforts, dissident Dutch merchants got backing for their plans from the Swedish crown. In 1638, the Swedish government “purchased” the land on both banks of the Delaware River

from Cape Henlopen to modern Trenton from various Native American groups and established a settlement called New Sweden. The center of the colony was Fort Christina, constructed at the confluence of the Christiana (now Christina) River and Brandywine Creek in modern Wilmington.

Dutch traders and Swedish settlers co-existed for a time along the Delaware, and by 1654 a village of about 400 people had grown up around Fort Christina. In 1651 the Dutch set up their own fort at New Amstel, now New Castle, and in 1654 they seized control of the Swedish settlement. New Sweden ceased to exist politically, but Swedish and Finnish settlers remained in the region. The log cabin of the American frontier may have been derived from their traditional building techniques. For a decade, New Amstel was the hub of the Delaware Valley, governing a colony of a few hundred Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish traders and farmers. Settlement began to spread out from the forts, following the navigable tributaries of the Delaware, especially the Christiana River, the Appoquinimink River, and the St. Jones River (Weslager 1961).

In 1664, during the second Anglo-Dutch War, the English seized control of all Dutch possessions in North America, including New Amstel. The English confirmed most of the Dutch land grants, however, and little changed along the Delaware for the next 18 years. A more decisive event for the future of Delaware was the granting of proprietary rights to the Penn family and the establishment, in 1682, of Philadelphia as the capital of Pennsylvania. The settlements in Delaware were politically incorporated into the Penn proprietorship and economically swept into the orbit of Philadelphia.

In 1682 the settlements along the St. Jones were incorporated as St. Jones County, soon afterward to be renamed Kent County, giving Delaware the three counties it still has today. Under the Penn regime they were known as the “three lower counties.” By the mid-1680s, settlement was spreading rapidly in these areas, as well as in the three upper counties—Philadelphia, Buckingham, and Chester—in what is now Pennsylvania. The total European population of this area in 1683 has been estimated as 4,000. A census of New Castle County made in 1677 counted only 307 tithables (adult males), 130 of whom had English names, and in 1682 Kent County could boast only 99 tithables (Reed 1947:73; Scharf 1888:1030). However, population grew rapidly thereafter, spreading beyond the original settlements along the rivers. The region’s overseas trade, based on exporting furs, cattle, lumber, and wheat, quickly became concentrated in Philadelphia.

Control over the land between the Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware River was then disputed between two English claimants: the Duke of York, and Lord Baltimore, the proprietor of Maryland. In 1682, the situation was further complicated when Charles II, to settle an old debt, granted William Penn a charter for Pennsylvania. Penn’s grant included all land west of the Delaware River between 40 and 43 degrees north latitude. Lest this grant be found to interfere with the Duke of York’s claims, a clause was inserted excluding all land within 12 miles of New Castle. (This clause is the origin of modern Delaware’s peculiar arched border.) Thinking that his new colony was too far from the sea, Penn then acquired Delaware from the Duke of York. Modern Delaware became the three lower counties of Pennsylvania, with political control based in Philadelphia. Lord Baltimore still maintained his claim, however, and he made many land grants within Delaware; the boundary dispute between Maryland and Delaware was not settled until the famous Mason and Dixon survey of 1770. The residents of the lower counties became disgruntled with their status in the

Pennsylvania legislature, and in 1704 they broke away and created the new colony of Delaware (Munroe 1993:42).

2. *1730-1770: Intensified and Durable Occupation*

The eighteenth century saw enormous population growth in Delaware, as in most of British North America. The population grew from perhaps 1,000 settlers in 1682 to 64,273 in 1800. Most of the residents were farmers, their homes widely scattered along the rivers and later along the main roads. They practiced a mixed, highly commercialized agriculture, including grains, especially wheat and corn, and livestock. Most farmers raised cattle, pigs, and sheep; live cattle and smoked pork were important exports. Delaware farms also produced apples, peaches, eggs, flax, lard, tallow, honey, and beeswax. Timber products, including oak barrel staves and cedar shingles, were important for many farmers.

African slaves were common, but most farmers owned only one or two, and no great plantations staffed by gangs of slaves were set up. Although the economy was based in farming and timbering, the need for craftsmen, merchants, and other kinds of specialists grew with the colony. By 1770 the widespread production of wool and linen launched a small-scale textile industry with many professional weavers and several fulling mills. Experiments in iron production were made at Iron Hill in New Castle County and at several places in Sussex County, where bog iron was available. Tanneries were set up to produce leather for local use and export, some of them employing slave labor. Many other kinds of craftsmen were at work, including coopers, tailors, shoemakers, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, and carpenters. Some of the craftsmen were farmers who did other work in the slow seasons, and some were full-time professionals.

In 1730 the main settlements of the colony were the ports of New Castle and Lewes. The old Swedish outpost at the confluence of Brandywine Creek and the Christiana River was refounded as Wilmington in 1739, and because of its superior location it quickly became the most important port in the Lower Counties. Kent County was set up before that area had a town of any consequence, and the county court met at various private houses until about 1697. At that time a courthouse was built near a landing on the St. Jones River in what is now Dover. In 1699 some of the residents began to petition the Assembly at Philadelphia to charter a town around the courthouse, finally succeeding in 1717. Trade was initially by water, and landings were set up at regular intervals along all the navigable streams where small ships, known as shallops, could load wheat and timber. The shallops carried their cargo to Wilmington, New Castle, or Lewes, or sometimes directly to Philadelphia, where it was loaded onto larger vessels. In the course of the eighteenth century many roads were built, tying the scattered settlements together. One of the most important was the north-south road from Wilmington to Lewes, which had been established by 1764. Where roads crossed the larger streams, small hamlets grew up, including places such as Christiana Bridge and Cantwell's Bridge (now Odessa).

The growing population was created both by large families among the settlers and a steady stream of new immigrants. Immigrants came from England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, and Africa, and from other, more crowded colonies, particularly Maryland. In the 1725 to 1750 period Scottish and Scots-Irish immigration was particularly heavy. Dissenters, such as Presbyterians, Quakers, and

Methodists, were a majority among these new arrivals, reducing the official Anglican church to minority status. By 1770 Delaware had a population of diverse background, including Swedish, Dutch, German, British, and African, as well as small groups of American Indians who adopted many European ways and remained within the area of European settlement.

3. 1770-1830: Early Industrialization

Although the colony had become independent of Pennsylvania, eighteenth-century Delaware retained close economic ties with Philadelphia, and many of the colony's leaders also had social and family ties to the city. These ties led Delaware to support the political ferment that preceded the Revolutionary War, even though the colony had suffered no atrocities at British hands (Munroe 1993:62). Only one Revolutionary War battle was fought in Delaware, at Cooch's Bridge near Scottsborough, during the campaign that led up the Battle of Brandywine in 1777.

After the Battle of Brandywine, a British victory, the British occupied Wilmington and threatened the state capital at Newcastle. To escape the threat—and also because many Kent and Sussex County residents were unhappy with the leadership being provided by Newcastle men during the crisis—the capital was moved to Dover. For a time the legislators met at various places around the state on a rotating basis, but in 1781, Dover was made the permanent capital.

The Revolution created uncertainties that slowed American growth. With the coming of peace, the new nation resumed rapid economic and population expansion, but Delaware did not (Table 1). Kent County's population grew hardly at all between 1790 and 1840, and most of the growth in New Castle County's population was concentrated in Wilmington. Because we know that Delawareans continued to have families nearly as large as those of the previous century, the lack of population growth implies that many people born in the state were leaving to seek their fortune elsewhere. The soils of Delaware, worn out by a century of often careless farming, could not produce like those of the newly opened lands in the Ohio Valley and the Great Lakes region (De Cunzo and Garcia 1992:24). Inflated wheat prices, brought on by the Napoleonic Wars, helped some farmers, but many still struggled and some gave up and headed west. Few of those who stayed could afford to divide their farms, so many younger sons had little choice but to move on. To arrest the decline, progressive farmers formed agricultural societies and experimented with new crop rotation methods, and their efforts led to more productive and less destructive agricultural practices later in the century (Herman 1987:8). New crops, especially potatoes, begin to show up in the inventories, and efforts to drain marshes intensified.

Table 1. Population of New Castle and Kent Counties, 1790-1840

Year	New Castle	Kent
1790	19,688	18,920
1800	25,361	19,554
1810	24,429	20,495
1820	27,899	20,793
1830	29,720	19,913
1840	33,120	19,872

Source: Munroe 1993

Industrial production increased, mostly in the Piedmont region, where water power was available to drive a growing number of gristmills, fulling mills, snuff mills, and paper mills. Wilmington prospered as an industrial and mercantile city, and its population grew from about 1,500 at the time

of the Revolutionary War to 7,000 by 1830. An interesting feature of Delaware society in this period was the large number of free blacks, who made up more than 75 percent of the black population of the state in 1810. Politically, Delaware, which had been the first state to ratify the constitution, remained staunchly Federalist throughout the period (Munroe 1954).

C. DOCUMENTARY ARCHAEOLOGY

1. *Site-Specific Research*

Historical archaeology concerns not only things dug out of the ground, but the relationship between archaeological data and history. Most of what we know about the eighteenth century, after all, comes from written records. Archaeologists working in Delaware have used written records both to illuminate the specific sites on which they were working and more broadly to study the society within which the occupants of their sites lived. Because the property records of New Castle and Kent counties survive nearly intact, it is usually possible to trace the ownership of any property back to the original patent. Knowing who owned a property, however, does not necessarily tell us who lived there. Most of the archaeological sites that have been excavated in Delaware were occupied by tenants for at least part of their history. Beginning in the 1790s, some Delaware tax records list the tenants of some properties. After that time it is sometimes possible to identify tenants from these records (De Cunzo et al. 1992:52; Grettler et al. 1996:102). Before the 1790s, however, tenants almost always remain nameless.

Other kinds of documents often used in site-specific historical research include property surveys, wills, probate inventories and other estate documents, and census records. Property surveys sometimes show not only the boundaries of a property, but the quality of the land, the course of streams, the layout of roads and ditches, and even, occasionally, the buildings on the farm. Figure 2 shows the 1745 surveyor's plat of Thomas Dawson's farm, which provided the only evidence of the malt house and other outbuildings on the site. Wills and estate papers can tell us several different things. Before regular census data are available, it is difficult to discover how many people, and what kind, lived on a site, but wills sometimes list the members of the household, and they regularly enumerate any slaves. Wills also provide precise economic data, telling us how much people were worth in land and other assets and what luxury goods they owned. Even better for this purpose are probate inventories, which are lists of the possessions of the deceased. Some of these inventories are very detailed, listing each cow, pot, and piece of furniture. They can therefore be an invaluable aid in reconstructing the material lives of eighteenth-century people. Four sites for which probate inventories survive have now been excavated in Delaware, allowing a direct comparison to be made between archaeological and inventory data (Bedell et al. 2002).

Because the 1790 U.S. Census for Delaware does not survive, census data can only be used for the nineteenth century. For the 1800-1830 period, however, census data are very useful, telling us how many people, both free and slave, lived in a household, and their approximate ages. Many archaeologists prefer to use the household as their unit of analysis, and data on the make-up of the household therefore allow good control of how the data are used. For example, differences between archaeological deposits might depend, not on economic differences, but on differences in the make-up of the households in question.

2. *Tax Records*

a. *The Economic Ladder*

Several categories of records have been used by archaeologists in Delaware to place their sites in a more general historical context, including tax records, Orphans' Court records, probate inventories, business papers, newspaper advertisements, and genealogical materials. Tax records have been used to study the overall distribution of wealth in eighteenth-century Delaware, and to place the site in question on the right rung of the socioeconomic ladder. In the colonial period, taxes in Delaware were based in part on the supposed annual income of the household, so the amounts of the assessment tell us, in a rough way, how rich each household was. There was also a poll tax, on the principle that every household ought to contribute something. Only a few Delaware tax rolls from before 1797 still survive. The surviving eighteenth-century lists are very brief documents, providing simply the names of the taxpayers and the tax assessment. The assessments were made by Hundred, which were divisions of Delaware counties roughly equivalent to the townships of Pennsylvania and New England.

Table 2. Economic Structure of White Clay Creek Hundred, 1777-1822, Based on Tax Lists

Percent of Taxables in Each Tax Bracket								
Year	£0-5	£6-10	£11-15	£16-20	£21-30	over £31	Taxables	
1777	49.3	31.8	13.5	2.0	3.4	.	148	
1780	19.7	47.3	7.9	8.3	7.4	9.4	203	
1785	31.0	38.6	7.6	8.8	6.4	7.6	171	
1790	56.7	25.7	7.6	5.3	1.7	3.0	171	
1795	64.4	22.1	5.7	3.8	2.4	1.4	208	
	\$0-264	\$265-504	\$505-744	\$745-984	\$985-1,464	\$1,465-1,944	over \$1,945	
1801	59.2	16.7	6.6	5.2	4.9	3.4	3.8	287
1807	66.5	11.2	6.3	4.8	5.4	1.8	3.9	331
1816	53.1	11.8	3.5	2.6	6.6	5.2	17.0	346
1822	70.7	8.6	6.8	6.0	2.6	2.6	2.6	383

Source: Coleman et al. 1984

The first Delaware archaeologist to use tax records in this way was Ellis Coleman, in his reports on the excavations of the Ferguson-Webber and William Hawthorn sites (Coleman et al. 1984). The William Hawthorn Site was located in White Clay Creek Hundred, which has surviving tax rolls for most years after 1777. Coleman established income brackets using the work of Main (1965) and Jones (1980) and generated tables showing the number of taxpayers in each bracket for each year. An abbreviated version of his table is given here as Table 2. The variations in the numbers from different years reflect, in part, the assessment rate, which we do not know. Thus, in the wartime years of 1780 and 1816, taxes were higher, and so more people show up in the higher tax brackets. However, the data are still roughly consistent, allowing Coleman to show that the owner-occupants of the William Hawthorn Site were consistently among the richest 10 percent of households in the hundred, and that most households did not own any property. Delaware changed its tax system in 1797, putting a greater emphasis on property, and quite a number of tax rolls from after 1797 survive. These rolls are much more detailed than earlier rolls. Most of the post-1797 rolls include valuations for land, livestock, slaves, and silver plate, as well as a personal tax. In 1797, the personal tax was either \$133, \$200, or \$267, depending on the income of the household. The 1797 tax roll for St. Georges Hundred was analyzed as part of research on the Augustine Creek North and South sites (Bedell et al. 2001). The return includes listings for 516 persons who lived or owned property in the hundred. Of these, 156 paid no personal tax, so they must have lived outside the hundred. These absentee landowners were an important factor in the local economy, since they owned more than a third of the land, including the six largest farms. Subtracting the absentee owners, the tax rolls list 360 households. Of these, 96 owned no taxable property. A further 131 households owned some property but no real estate; 133 households, or just over a third of those taxed, owned land. A total of 109 households owned slaves. Table 3 shows the community divided into 10 deciles, that is, groups representing 10 percent of the households, showing the distribution of wealth among them.

Table 3. Wealth Distribution in St. Georges Hundred, 1797

Decile	Average Wealth	% owning land	% owning arable land	% owning livestock	% owning slaves	% owning plate	Avg no. of arable acres
1st	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
2nd	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
3rd	\$1.50	.	.	28.0	.	5.5	.
4th	\$16.70	2.8	.	94.4	2.8	8.3	.
5th	\$43.70	5.6	5.6	97.2	11.1	22.2	4.0
6th	\$99.70	19.4	11.1	97.2	16.7	25.0	12.5
7th	\$182.70	27.8	11.1	94.4	30.5	33.3	51.3
8th	\$340.40	50.0	22.2	100.0	66.7	30.5	60.9
9th	\$817.00	80.6	66.7	97.2	80.6	63.8	156.6
10th	\$1,845.60	100.0	97.2	100.0	83.4	74.9	285.0

Source: Bedell et al. 2001. Households in the first two deciles owned no property.

The data from these tax rolls can help us understand the basic economic structure of Delaware society, and the place within that structure of the particular household whose remains we are excavating. They do not tell us much about the quality of life represented by the numbers. What was it like for the people who paid only the poll tax? Or for those who paid \$1,000 a year? For answers to these questions we must turn to other kinds of records, and to archaeology.

b. Farm Reconstruction

Two categories of written records that provide useful information on the layout of farms in eighteenth-century Delaware are the tax rolls and the records of the Orphans' Court. Newspaper advertisements have been used for their detailed descriptions of a few properties and for estimating average farm size, but such advertisements are not common and no one knows how representative the advertised properties are of all farms (Catts et al. 1989). Only the detailed tax records from after 1797 can be used for reconstructing farms. These tax rolls include the assessed wealth of each free adult in land, livestock, slaves, and silver plate, and they list the buildings on each farm. For the most part, only the houses and barns were listed and not the numerous smaller buildings we know were present on many farms. It seems that only valuable buildings were included. The material of buildings is sometimes given as well, especially for houses. For example, the 1804 tax list for Mill Creek Hundred identifies the material of 139 of the 190 listed houses, consisting of 50 log, eight frame, 34 wooden, 37 brick, and 10 stone (Coleman et al. 1990:21).

One of the better sets of these records was taken in 1797 for St. Georges Hundred (Bedell et al. 2001). The tax roll lists 155 properties, from James Derrah's unimproved eight-acre lot to Robert Haughy's 3,039-acre plantation, which boasted "13 houses, kitchens, barns, stables, cribs, granary."

The properties assessed had every number of buildings from none at all to 15, but nearly half had either four or five; the average was just under four buildings per property.

Table 4 shows the number of the most common types of outbuildings recorded. The most common types were kitchens, barns, stables, and corncribs. The common four- or five-building farm usually included a house, a kitchen, a barn or stable, and a crib or granary. Other buildings were much less common. Dairies or milkhouses were fairly common in the northern part of the county, closer to Philadelphia, but only one was recorded in St. Georges Hundred. Only two “Negro quarters” were noted, so most of the hundred’s 540 slaves must have lived in houses or in kitchens.

Table 4. Buildings Listed in the 1797 St. Georges Hundred Tax Return

Type of Building	Number Recorded	Type of Building	Number Recorded
house	115	granary	27
second house	31	smoke/meat house	18
kitchen	88	carriage house	8
barn	76	mill	5
stable	70	Negro quarter	2
crib	56	milkhouse	1

Source: *Bedell et al. 2001*

Since the tax rolls also include figures for the total wealth of each taxpayer, it is easy to compare the number of outbuildings on a farm with the wealth of its owner. The figures are not complete, because only wealth kept in St. Georges Hundred is listed and some of the richer people may have owned land in several jurisdictions. As one would expect, the richer farmers had more outbuildings and a greater variety of types. The average for the top tenth of residents was 5.3 buildings per property, as compared to about three for the remainder of the sample. There were, however, many exceptions. Robert Maxwell had only a house and barn on his valuable 536-acre estate, and Jacob King had only a house and kitchen on his 160-acre farm. On the other hand, numerous smaller farmers had five and even six buildings.

Particularly interesting is the number of outbuildings on some tenant farms. Many of the absentee owners were taxed on what was clearly a single farm, leased to one tenant, and some of these farms were large and well-equipped. Lewis Vandergrift was leasing out a 302-acre farm with a house, kitchen, barn, stable, granary, and crib, while David Kennedy leased out a 280-acre farm with a brick house, kitchen, stable, and crib. In this society “tenant” did not imply “poor,” and many tenant farms were indistinguishable from those of middling property owners.

3. *Orphans’ Court*

The most detailed records on the farms and houses of eighteenth-century Delaware are those of the Orphans’ Court, a branch of the Court of Chancery. When orphaned children inherited property, the court appointed guardians to look after the children and their assets. When the orphans came of age,

the guardians were supposed to hand their property back in the same condition they found it. To make sure that the guardians did so, the court usually recorded an assessment of the property at the time the guardian took over its management. Some of these assessments contain only cursory descriptions of the property, but some are quite detailed. An assessment of the property of Samuel Carpenter, made in April, 1778, runs as follows:

We the subscribers being Ordered by the above Rule of Court have Been on the Lands and Premises Late of Samuel Carpenter Dec'd, of St. Georges Hundred and Viewed the Same and find it Contains Two Hundred Acres of Land, Marsh & Cripple Ninety Acres whereof is Drain'd Marsh in Midling Order Ten Acres or there abouts not in order about sixty-five acres of cleared upland in tolerable good fence the Remainder Wood Land whereon is One Logg Dwelling House two stories high wants some Repairs such as two Hearths layed and twelve sash lights [window panes] in the Windows One Logg Kitchen in good Repair one Draw Well a paled Garden in Midling Order one Meat house in Good Repair One smiths shop in Repair one Logg Stable and hen house in Midling Repair One Corn Crib One Large Frame Barn wants some Repairs on the South End struck with thunder One Young Apple Orchard Containing seventy seven trees One Logg House not tenantable [New Castle County (NCC) Orphans' Court Case Files, Samuel Carpenter 1778].

As with most Orphans' Court documents, this description does not give the size of any of these structures, nor does it say whether the house had a cellar. On the other hand, it does indicate the material of many structures, and it does mention the orchard and the garden, two items hard to learn about from any other source. The particular vividness of these documents comes in the accounts of the condition of the buildings, especially those falling down. Samuel Carpenter's farm included a log house too badly run down even to lease to tenants, the house had 12 broken window panes, and the barn had been damaged by lightning. Even at the valuable estate of Peter Alrich, which in 1795 included a brick "mansion house" and six other buildings, the assessors found that the house needed a new porch and 35 window panes, the jambs on the cellar doors were broken, the kitchen was "not worth repairing," the other buildings were in "Tolerable good repair excepting the doors of the Chair house [carriage house] which are wanting," and the 120 acres of drained marsh were "mostly in bad repair, the drains want clearing" (NCC Orphans' Court Case Files, Peter Alrich 1795).

Any sort of real estate could wind up in the Orphans' Court, from large farms like Peter Alrich's to the property of Thomas Adams, which in 1799 consisted of 18 acres of land and "a small Log Messuage [house] scarcely Tenantable, a Sawed Log Barn about forty four by twenty four feet, in but indifferent repair, and about twenty one scattered Apple Trees." Benjamin Bunker died in 1795 leaving only "one old house in bad repair." Farms with four to five buildings are quite common, just as they are in the 1797 tax records. One such estate belonged to Francis Allen, who died in 1785: "there is on the Premises One Dwelling House which wants new shingling, One Kitchen which wants shingling, One Smoke House, One Barn which wants new flooring, and two hundred Apple trees" (NCC Orphans' Court Case Files, Thomas J. Adams 1799-1802, Benjamin Bunker 1795, Francis Alexander 1785).

Bernard Herman and his assistants at the Center for Historic Architecture and Design at the University of Delaware ([1980-1985]) have made a detailed statistical study of the surviving Orphans' Court cases from the 1770 to 1830 period for most of Delaware. The surviving cases

become more common after the Revolution, so at least two-thirds of Herman’s cases probably date to after 1800. Table 5 shows the buildings recorded in these cases.

One difference between the Orphans’ Court descriptions and the tax rolls is that the Orphans’ Court accounts mention more small outbuildings, such as smokehouses, carriage houses (which could be used for wagons as well as carriages), and chicken coops. Perhaps these structures had little monetary value, so they escaped the attention of the tax assessor. Their addition raises the average number of buildings per farm, which goes up in St. Georges Hundred from 3.7 to 4.4, and we see more farms with as many as 10 to 12 buildings.

One interesting feature of the accounts is that we can use them to identify the properties of craftsmen who had their own shops. Smiths, wheelwrights, and cartwrights (wagon makers) all make appearances. On these properties there were fewer other buildings (about three per property, versus about four overall) and on two properties the shop and the house were the only buildings present. For example, John Belville’s property was said in 1802 to include “a Dwelling House with Cellar underneath, a wheelwrights shop, in the Garden on Said premises are a few fruit trees.” The Benjamin Wynn Site, where the only identified structures were the house and a blacksmith’s shop, seems to have been a common sort of property.

Table 5. Buildings Listed in Orphans’ Court Property Assessments, 1770-1830

Type of Building	St. Georges	Appoquinimink	Duck Creek	Total
house	108	77	128	313
second house	12	15	28	55
smokehouse	58	29	68	155
kitchen	46	35	64	145
crib or corn house	45	33	63	141
stable	47	31	57	135
barn	56	24	48	128
granary	40	14	12	66
carriage house	24	8	15	47
chicken house	22	5	9	36
milkhouse	11	5	14	30
artisan’s shop	5	2	6	13
storehouse	3	2	3	8
mill	4	2	1	7
Negro quarter	2	2	2	6

Source: *Bedell et al. 2001*

Orphans' Court records are also our best documentary source on Delaware houses. These accounts often describe the material of the house and they sometimes tell how many stories it had. Usually, they describe the house's condition. On the estate of Samuel Allen, 1778, the assessors found "a Frame Dwelling House wanting a joice in lower floor, the Sills to be Repaired." At the "Mill Plantation" of John Burgess, in 1793, the assessors found a two-story frame house with a cellar and "two rooms on the lower floor." Each room had a hearth and chimney, and the windows were missing 44 window panes on the lower floor and 34 on the upper. A log kitchen was attached. These and similar accounts summon up contradictory images, for even the largest and most refined houses were often in disrepair. How could the house at Mill Plantation be missing 78 window panes? Did a hurricane blow through, or had they just not replaced any broken glass for 10 years? Such numbers certainly explain why archaeologists always find hundreds of fragments of window glass around Colonial houses. Samuel Allen's frame house needed major structural work, since the floor joists and the sills are what holds a frame house up. In 1797 Abner Allston's frame house "wants the roof repaired and weather bording the windows glazed." Nor could he escape from the rain in any of his other buildings, since his barn, granary, oven, and stable all needed roof repairs as well. Table 6 summarizes the conditions Orphans' Court assessors said they found at houses in three central Delaware hundreds, in the 1770 to 1830 period. Even if we assume that all the houses that were not described were in good condition, those in bad or middling condition were still the majority. In Appoquinimink Hundred, an actual majority of houses were said to be in bad condition. It is interesting to note that in these records "old" seems to be a synonym for "bad," again undercutting the notion that people of the 1700s built to last any more than we do.

Table 6. Condition of Houses in Orphans' Court Proceedings, 1770-1830

	St. Georges	Appoquinimink	Duck Creek	Total
bad or sorry	37	41	16	94
middling or tolerable	34	13	23	70
good	7	15	8	30
not specified	29	10	64	103
Total	107	79	111	297

Source: *Bedell et al. 2001*

Table 7, also based on the Orphans' Court records, shows the material of houses in the same three hundreds. Most houses were log or frame ("wood" must mean one or the other). There was a substantial minority of brick houses, but many of these were probably constructed in the early 1800s (Chappell 1994; De Cunzo et al. 1992:41). In the eighteenth century brick houses probably made up no more than a tenth of the total, and even though brick construction was more expensive than wood, we should not assume that all of these were well built. The assessors noted several brick houses in bad condition, and problems with roofs and windows were common. At Arlington, on the eastern shore of Virginia, John Custis built himself a grand brick house three stories tall around 1670. The house had a vaulted cellar, molded plaster work, and other refinements. But it was so poorly built that it began to fall down within a few decades of its completion. Archaeology showed that the wooden scaffolding had to be put back up, and the house was probably covered in

scaffolding for the rest of its 50-year life. The foundations were so shallow that when archaeologists uncovered them, most parts had been entirely plowed away, and what remained was only one brick deep (Bedell and Lucchetti 1988). Some builders of brick houses wanted their homes to last, but others, like John Custis, were no doubt just trying to keep up with fashion and had no more thought of permanence than their neighbors who were building in wood.

Table 7. Material of Houses in Orphans' Court Proceedings, 1770-1830

	St. Georges	Appoquinimink	Duck Creek	Total
log	33	25	55	113
frame	35	15	16	66
wood	3	21	3	27
brick	16	12	30	58
brick and frame	.	1	.	1
stone and wood	.	.	1	1
unknown	20	5	6	31
Total	107	79	111	297

Source: Bedell et al. 2001

The word “tenantable,” which occurs in several descriptions, raises the question of whether tenants lived in worse houses than property owners. The answer seems to depend on whether the dwelling had been built specifically for tenants. Some farms came equipped with a main dwelling house and a separate tenant house, or “tenement.” In 1798, John Deakyne’s property included “one Dwelling Hous in Middlin Repair” and two “cabins,” which were presumably small houses for tenants. Andrew Fisher, who died in 1805, owned several tracts of land, including one with “a small log house in the occupancy of John Mullin and in bad repair.” At other times a whole property will be described as a tenement, as in the assessment of Daniel Cable’s property made in 1798. The assessors reported “A log tenement with two rooms on a floor two story high with a small log shed building adjoining, about fifty acres of land with all the fencing in bad repair, also five acres of marsh tolerably fenced.” These properties included no brick houses; all “tenements” were wooden, and all but a few were log. In general tenements do seem to have been smaller and in worse condition than owner-occupied houses. However, this was not necessarily so. The home of Daniel Cable’s tenants, with two rooms on each floor, was bigger than many houses occupied by their owners. Besides these designated tenements, as we saw in the first chapter, many large, well-appointed farms were leased to tenants. These farms may have been occupied for a time by their owners, or they may have been built by tenants who felt secure about their leases. On these properties we find brick houses, mills, and numerous outbuildings, so that we would have trouble distinguishing the properties from those where the owner was in residence. This sort of tenant, whose farm was very similar to those of most property owners, lived in a house similar to an owner’s as well.

The Orphans' Court records do sometimes give the size of houses, but only rarely, and this information is suspect. It may be that the dimensions of a house or barn are provided only because they are unusual. It is therefore dangerous to generalize from the few numbers these records give us. The height of the house in stories is given more often, but only in a minority of cases, and it is almost always two or one and a half stories (one full story with a habitable loft). When not given, does it mean that the height was one story, or simply that the assessors did not bother to write it down? Despite their richness, the Orphans' Court records leave many questions about eighteenth-century houses unanswered.

4. *Probate Inventories*

The best written records for information about the kinds of things that were in the houses are probate inventories. These documents were produced because of a quirk of the old English Common Law. When a man died without leaving a will, the inheritance of his movable possessions ("goods and chattels") was determined by ancient rules that set aside one-third of the goods for the widow during her life and otherwise divided them evenly among the children. To ensure that the estate was divided evenly, the goods had to be appraised. This task was usually performed by a group of two or three property-owning neighbors, "sufficient freeholders" in the language of the court, who went to the dead man's house and drew up a list of all the goods they found there. They also assigned values to these goods. Some of the lists are very detailed, enumerating each pot, bucket, shirt, chair, bed, and pig on the premises. Studies of Delaware probate inventories have been undertaken by the excavators of the Charles Robinson Plantation, Augustine Creek South, and Thomas Dawson sites (Bedell et al. 2001, 2002; Thomas et al. 1994).

Because hundreds of probate inventories survive from eighteenth-century Delaware, they can be used to make statistical studies of the kinds of things people owned. Such studies have been made for many parts of colonial America, and a great deal has been written about how to use these documents and what they tell us about the past (Carr and Walsh 1980, 1988, 1994; Jones 1980; Main 1988; Shammass 1982, 1990; Walsh 1992; Weatherill 1988). However, these lists contain many errors and some systematic distortions, and their apparent precision should not fool us into accepting them at face value.

For example, there are some questions about who was included in the inventory process. It is possible that the estates of poor people may have been overlooked, especially those of poor non-white people, because their worth was not enough to merit the attention of two neighboring property owners. Studies done in Connecticut seem to show that about 20 percent of households, primarily the poorest ones, were omitted from the inventory process (Main 1988). We also encounter many inventories of people who do not seem to have had independent households. For example, the estate of James Glenn, inventoried in 1762, consisted of his clothes, a gun, and a horse worth £20. Since £20 was a very high price for a horse, Glenn was clearly not a poor man, but a well-to-do young one who still lived with older relatives. Yet if we were just counting all inventories together, his would appear as a household too poor to own dishes, a table, a chair, or anything else. A trick for excluding these non-households, developed by Lois Green Carr and Lorena Walsh (1988), is to ignore every inventory that does not list a bed. We know from other sources, however, that there were some poor

people in eighteenth-century America who did not own beds (Smith 1988), so by excluding bed-less inventories we may be further reducing the number of truly poor people in our study.

A more important problem with the inventories concerns their basic accuracy. They were made by neighbors, and the attention these amateurs gave to their task probably varied greatly. They often seem to have omitted things that we suspect were actually present. Ceramics are the most obvious example; archaeologists find ceramics of some kind on every eighteenth-century house site they excavate, but the probate inventories record that as many as 40 percent of households in some income categories had no ceramics at all (Bedell 2000). This and other discrepancies suggest that the inventories are not particularly accurate, especially with regard to low-value items like coarse ceramics. With high-value items, such as beds and horses, they are probably more accurate, although still not perfect.

Despite these difficulties, inventories are an excellent source for studying the material world of the eighteenth century. They list many kinds of items that never survive in the ground for archaeologists to find, such as clothing and wooden furniture. By combining the study of probate inventories with archaeological research, we get a better picture of eighteenth-century material life than we could from either source used alone.

One of the things listed in most inventories was crops, whether still in the field or already harvested and stored in the barn. The three inventories listed in Table 8 give us some idea of the

	Benj. David	Alen Delap	James Corbin
Date of Inventory	Jan. 2, 1748	Dec. 1, 1753	Aug. 21, 1760
Total Value	£115 12s	£96 8s	£142 19s
Value of Crop (shillings)			
Wheat	400	460	280
Corn	241	140	490
Rye	60	.	35
Oats	50	3	35
Flax	10	10	35
Tobacco	.	3	4

Source: Bedell et al. 2002

kinds of crops raised by the larger farmers in Kent County. The inventories hardly ever list vegetables in the garden or apples on the tree, so the picture they give is not entirely complete, but it is still valuable for understanding the agriculture of the period.

Probate inventories can also tell us something about animal husbandry. The inventory takers usually listed all of the large animals on the farm, and sometimes they carefully described each horse and cow. The results of a study of the animals in 121 Kent County inventories, summarized in Table 9, show that most of these people lived with farm animals. Ownership of horses was strikingly common; overall, 87 percent of inventoried households owned at least one, including 71 percent of the poorer households. Horses must have been essential for getting around the widely dispersed farms and settlements of thinly populated Kent County. The other common animals were cattle, pigs, sheep, and geese. About 95 percent of households owned at least one farm animal.

The inventories tell us that the average Delaware house was rather simply furnished (Table 10). Beds, tables, chairs, and chests are the only items of furniture found in a majority of households. Some richer people also had desks, cupboards, or chests of drawers, but in the main they just had more beds, tables, chairs, and chests. In the Kent County inventory sample, poorer people averaged one or two beds, one table, three to four chairs, and one chest, while richer people had five to six beds, three tables, 11 chairs, and three to four chests. (Households in the middle group had three beds, three tables, and eight chairs.) The results in a study of 200 New Castle County inventories (Bedell et al. 2001) were very similar, although

Table 9. Presence of Animals in Kent County Probate Inventories, 1740-1769

	Total Value of Inventory		
	Less than £50	£50 to £225	More than £225
Total # of Cases	49	48	24
Item	Percent of Households Possessing		
horses	71	95	100
cattle	63	100	100
pigs	55	90	96
sheep	25	79	92
geese	6	15	25
turkeys	8	.	.
	Average Number per Household		
horses	1.6	3.5	6.3
cattle	4.7	9.3	23.1
pigs	12.3	18.9	32.3
sheep	6.1	10.4	30.3

Source: Bedell et al. 1999

poorer people in that sample were even less likely to have chairs or tables (25% in 1730-1749, and 44% in the 1760s). People without chairs probably sat on stools or benches that the inventory takers did not think it worth their while to record. Books were rather common; about 70 percent of middling and wealthy households owned them, and nearly 40 percent of poor households had at least one. The Bible was the most common work, but Kent County farmers also owned works on theology, history, law, and medicine.

The distribution of certain tools can help us understand the rural economy. It is often possible to identify professional craftsmen in the inventories, and also to determine how much people did for themselves. Spinning wheels are common, showing that many people spun their own yarn or thread, but looms are much rarer. Many people must have sold their yarn, or put it out to a professional weaver and paid him or her to make it into cloth. Or woolen yarn may have been used for knitting. In any event, it is clear that most people had to buy all the cloth they used in their clothing. The count of “dairy items” is surely too low, since the inventories also show that almost all farmers kept dairy cows. More prosperous farmers were much more likely to have more expensive tools like carts and cider mills, and some farmers probably supplemented their income by renting these items to their poorer neighbors. Only about half of farmers owned a gun.

The overall impression is that while a few people in the eighteenth century owned a great many material things, many people’s lives were very simple indeed. Joseph Nixon, who died in March

Table 10. Presence of Selected Items in Kent County Probate Inventories, 1740-1769

Item	Total Value of Inventory			All
	Less than £50	£50 to £225	More than £225	
Total Number of Cases	49	48	24	121
Percent of Households Possessing				
Household Articles				
metal pot	96	96	100	97
pewter	78	94	96	88
earthenware	71	85	83	79
books	39	74	70	59
bed/table linen	39	55	78	52
teaware	31	52	87	50
table forks	35	48	73	48
clock/watch	2	6	30	9
Furniture				
beds	100	100	100	100
chests	78	98	91	88
tables	63	78	96	74
chairs	61	72	96	72
cupboards	10	19	39	19
desks	4	11	61	18
dining tables	6	4	22	8
Tools				
spinning wheel	65	91	100	82
gun	35	57	87	54
wagon/cart	8	53	87	41
dairy items	20	23	17	25
carpenter's tools	10	28	43	23
loom	10	23	29	19
cider mill	.	6	30	8
shoemaker's tools	4	4	22	7
still	.	.	17	3
blacksmith's tools	.	.	8	2

Source: *Bedell et al. 2002*

1750, left an estate valued at only 11 pounds 2 shillings, listed in Table 11. Nixon and his wife owned little beyond a table, three chairs, a chest, a trunk, and some clothes. They did have a Bible, but their only luxury, if such it can be called, was a single mirror. Their kitchen was finished with a tea kettle, a mug with some brown sugar, and “old earthenware & tin.” According to the inventories, a majority of poorer people did not have table forks, bed linens, or fine dishes, while about a quarter did not have pewter plates or coarse earthenwares and more than a third did not even own a table. The only things that almost everyone had were clothes, beds, and metal cooking pots. Even among middling farmers, those worth more than £50, only about half had bed linens, teawares,

Table 11. Inventory of Thomas Nixon, March 15, 1750

One bed & bedding
Wearing apparel
Widow's wearing apparel
Large old Bible
Looking glass
Small old tea kettle
3 chairs
1 chest with meal in it
1 trunk with lumber
Hackled flax, 5 small pieces new lining
1 corse towel
2 old trowels & plum line & rule
1 old mugg with some brown sugar
Old earthenware & old tinn
1 old piggin & snuff bottle
2 turkeys

or table forks, and 28 percent did not own a chair. But were these probate inventories accurate, and can we trust their rather grim picture of eighteenth-century material life? Archaeology suggests that we cannot always do so, and more archaeology is needed to balance the picture provided by the inventories.

5. *Business Accounts*

Two projects in Delaware's historical archaeology have made use of business accounts to illuminate the worlds around sites under excavation. The brick structure at the Darrach Store Site was operated as a store by John Darrach from 1775 to his death in 1805, when it was converted to a tenant residence. De Cunzo et al. (1992) conducted extensive historical research on storekeeping in Kent County that is quite valuable for understanding the local rural economy. Darrach's possessions, including the stock of his store, were sold at auction to raise money to pay his debts. Detailed accounts of the auction survive, listing each of the 181 persons who made purchases at the sale and the items bought by each. De Cunzo et al. analyzed this list in several ways.

They identified the main kinds of merchandise sold by Darrach and the other kinds of business, such as shipping grain and lumber, in which he was engaged. Using tax lists, they were able to identify 126 of the purchasers, and they showed that they included most of the prominent men from the Smyrna and Leipsic areas and many ordinary and poor people as well. The auction must have been a grand social event.

To provide a comparison with Darrach's activities, De Cunzo et al. (1992) also studied surviving accounts from two other Delaware merchants: Benjamin Coombe (1809-1817) and Jonathon Allee (1809-1810). Darrach's estate sale and Coombe's and Allee's accounts provide similar pictures of a Delaware storekeeper's business. This information is important not just for understanding storekeepers but also for the study of their customers, most of whom were rural people. The most important item sold by all three merchants was cloth, which accounted for just over half of all sales by value. Sewing equipment was also a major item, but the finished clothing sold had a value less than a fifth as great as the cloth. Home manufacture of clothing was clearly the rule. The other important categories of goods were ceramics, metal cooking pots, other kitchenwares such as glass and utensils, tools, and a limited set of imported foodstuffs: tea, sugar, pepper, coffee, chocolate, molasses, rice, and spices. Coombe, whose customers included shallop captains and other townsmen, also did a good business in staple foods such as flour and salt pork. The storekeepers sold all these items on credit to a customer's account. For payment they accepted cash and a variety of goods, including grain, flour, lumber, bacon, butter, eggs, muskrat skins, and whiskey. Darrach was a major merchant with his own shallops and warehouses, and he shipped much of this produce to Philadelphia himself.

As part of their research on the Mermaid Blacksmith and Wheelwright sites, Catts et al. (1994) conducted a study of blacksmithing in Delaware, based on the surviving accounts and business papers of five eighteenth- and nineteenth-century blacksmiths. The earliest of these documents are the account books of Jacob Vining, who worked in New Castle town between 1787 and 1803; the other documents date to the period after 1830. All of these blacksmiths worked at similar tasks, primarily the shoeing of horses, the repair of broken metal tools and parts, and the forging of replacement parts for plows, wagons, and the like. Farmers had regular recourse to blacksmiths for these repair tasks, making smiths vital members of rural communities. The records of payments for the repair of simple agricultural tools like hoes and pitchforks help to explain why such tools are rather rare in archaeological contexts; broken ones were repaired rather than discarded.

6. *Genealogy and Community Reconstruction*

Archaeologists are interested in the material world, and most of the records they use—land records, tax assessments, and probate inventories—are those that deal with material things. Some kinds of research topics, however, especially those dealing with ethnicity and community identity (see Chapter III), require a different sort of knowledge about the residents of the site. For example, thorough research on Samuel and Henrietta Mahoe, the owners and occupants of the Augustine Creek South Site, showed that Samuel Mahoe was a Huguenot whose father had immigrated to New York from France, via the Caribbean (Bedell et al. 2001). Limited research in Kent County, Maryland, identified John Powell of Kent County, Delaware, as a likely immigrant from the Maryland colony (Grettlar et al. 1995). These and other, similar genealogical researches are often vital for establishing the cultural background of a site.

The outstanding example of genealogical background research in Delaware has been undertaken by Edward Heite as part of the work on the Bloomsbury Site in Kent County (Heite and Blume 1998). Some of the residents of the Bloomsbury Site bore surnames that in recent times have been associated with Native Americans. Heite's research showed that Delaware's Indian communities, the Kent County Lenape and the Sussex County Nanticoke, have maintained a continuous, separate existence alongside their white and black neighbors since at least the early 1700s. The connections are hard to follow through the nineteenth century because the authorities were not much interested in Indians, and frequently classified them as black or mulatto. It took Heite a great deal of effort to sort out these confusions and show, not only that these Indian communities had maintained a real existence for 250 years, but that some of Bloomsbury's residents were undoubtedly Indians. Among the documents Heite cited were church baptismal certificates, muster rolls, censuses, land patents, court petitions, passport declarations, probate records, and an 1895 newspaper article. Work such as Heite's will provide the indispensable background for any serious discussion of ethnicity in Delaware archaeology.

7. *Summary*

The best historical archaeology will always be done in close cooperation with documentary research. For a complete view of material culture, we must use archaeological data along with information from probate inventories and other documentary sources. Without standing houses and documentary descriptions we would have little idea of what kind of houses once stood over the foundations we

uncover. To fully understand the economy of even a single rural household, we must take account of broader economic patterns revealed by documentary research and the detailed information from probate inventories and storekeepers' accounts. The rural economy of the region will also be best understood by combining archaeological and documentary data. For example, the only evidence of malting at the Thomas Dawson Site was provided by documentary research, but the only evidence of shoemaking at Bloomsbury was provided by the excavations. Neither archaeology nor documentary research, on its own, can give us a complete picture of life in rural Delaware, but together they can tell us an enormous amount.

The written records of Delaware in the 1730 to 1830 period are quite rich. For our purposes, one of the most important facts about them is that they grow richer over time. For the years before 1730, they are very sketchy, and it is hard to learn anything about a property other than its owner's name. The first surviving tax records date to the mid-1700s, the first detailed ones to 1797. The very detailed records of that year are a marvelous source for the study of rural life. The first U.S. census data date to 1800, allowing the first real demographic study of the state. Probate inventories and other estate papers are not preserved for most people in any part of our period, but they do become more common after 1750. Orphans' Court records, our best documentary source on houses and farms, are rare before 1770 and not common until after 1790. Personal letters, business papers, and other kinds of documents also become more common after 1790. The first detailed Delaware storekeepers' accounts date to around 1810, the first blacksmith's account book to 1787. Few personal diaries or autobiographies of ordinary rural people survive from Delaware in our period, but for the 1770 to 1830 period several do survive from other parts of the United States, including Pennsylvania and Maryland (Jensen 1986; Ulrich 1990). In terms of the state plan periodization, the years 1770 to 1830 are much better documented than the 1730 to 1770 period. By 1810, enough documents survive for a very detailed historical analysis of local rural communities and the economy that sustained them. For the period before 1770 we are much more completely reliant on archaeological data, making sites from the earlier period a more crucial part of the historical record.