

CONCLUSIONS

Data recovery investigations of the Richard Whitehart (7K-C-203C) and John Powell (7K-C-203H) plantations discovered the archaeological remains of two late seventeenth and early eighteenth century farmsteads. The Whitehart Plantation was a single-component site occupied by Richard Whitehart and his family from 1681-1701. The Powell Plantation was owner-occupied by John Powell and his family from ca. 1691-1721 and by unknown tenants from ca. 1722-1735. Intensive archival and historical research have been used to reconstruct the society, demography, and economy of early Delaware. Primary and secondary historical sources, including deeds, censuses, court records, and tax lists, provided additional information on the lives of Delaware's frontier settlers. The framework for this historical context was the research domains of domestic economy and landscape as established by De Cunzo and Catts (1990).

Richard Whitehart and John Powell were ex-servants from Maryland. Both men were born in England and spent their first years in America working as indentured servants, probably on a tobacco plantation. After completing his term, Whitehart moved to Delaware where land was cheaper and more readily available. Whitehart was probably fairly old, at least in his early thirties, by the time he finished his servitude and could strike out on his own. Like other settlers, Whitehart looked for unclaimed land along a navigable river. The parcel he chose was 400 acres of well drained, heavily wooded land at the confluence of the Leipsic River and Alston Branch, a small fresh water tributary. He named his tract "Little Tower Hill" for the 20- to 30-foot sandy bluffs along the flood plain of the tidal Leipsic River. When he first warranted the land in 1681, he was on the frontier of inland settlement of central Delaware; no other plantations on the Leipsic were so far inland.

Richard Whitehart and his wife Elizabeth began clearing the land at the confluence of the two rivers. They built a 15- x 30-foot post-in-ground house. The house probably had only two rooms, but was nearly identical to hundreds of other houses they had seen in Maryland and Delaware. The Whitehart's meager material possessions easily fit into the house and four outbuildings eventually constructed around the house. Between the house and the outbuildings was a small, but intensively used, workyard. Domestic refuse, including human and animal wastes were deposited in the workyard leaving soil stains that survived nearly 300 years of plowing. Fences bounded nearly the entire farm, including the nearby well. The fences protected the farmyard from free-roaming livestock and served to delineate the farm from the surrounding forests, marshes, pastures, and fields.

John Powell and his wife Ann settled on 300 acres of Little Tower Hill in 1691. Powell was settled on the land by Thomas Sharp who held two of Whitehart's mortgages. Tax records indicate that Sharp and a previous mortgage holder, William Johnson, paid Whitehart's and Powell's provincial taxes. John Powell built a small earthfast house on his plantation. The house was oriented to nearby Alston Branch. Powell also improved his farm with a well and three small earthfast agricultural outbuildings. Between the dwelling and outbuildings was an intensively used workyard containing numerous small daub and trash pits. Specialized activities including smoking and gunflint maintenance occurred near the front of the house. When John Powell died ca. 1716, his wife was quickly remarried to David Pugh and had two more children. The Powell-Pugh family, however, could not satisfy the mortgage of the farm and lost their plantation. Tenants then occupied the site and built a second dwelling alongside the earlier

dwelling. The second dwelling measured 15 x 15 feet and was built on continuous box-laid sills. The first house was probably razed prior to the construction of the second house. The tenants on the farm property from ca. 1722 until the end of occupation ca. 1735 were probably members of the Powell-Pugh family. Two other outbuildings were constructed on the farm. The most important of the two outbuildings was a 20- x 40-foot post-in-ground tobacco house probably built by John Powell or his heirs near the end of the first occupation.

The tobacco houses were the largest and most important outbuildings on both plantations. The tobacco houses were at least one and a half times larger than the Whitehart and Powell houses. Their investment in tobacco reflects uniquely their experiences and financial situations. Both Whitehart and Powell were plagued by debt, and tobacco was their best chance to satisfy their creditors and keep their farms. Land was readily available in frontier Delaware, but it was hard to own. Ex-servants like Whitehart and Powell were getting late starts in life and found it difficult to pay off their debts and gain title to their farms. By 1689, Whitehart had been forced to mortgage Little Tower Hill three times, first in 1686 and then in 1691 and 1689. Powell only mortgaged his 300 acres of Little Tower Hill once, but eventually defaulted on that loan.

Whitehart and Powell never escaped their debts. As ex-servants, both men were faced with carving a new farm out of the wilderness, providing for large families of very small children, and paying their taxes while still trying to satisfy the mortgages on their farms. The high costs of settling on a frontier and setting up households from scratch proved more than either family could bear. Both families lost their land when their fathers died. The Whiteharts lost their whittled-down plantation in 1701 when Richard died. The Powells barely kept possession of the farm after John died in 1716 only to lose it for good in 1721 after the mother, Ann Powell Pugh, died.

The experience of the Whitehart and Powell families can be summarized into four "facts of life" faced by Delaware's first settlers. Three facts of life concerned family structure, debt, and economic opportunity. Debt and land ownership were the two most important variables in all facts of daily life. The first fact of life was that Richard Whitehart, John Powell, and other settlers in central Delaware in the late 1680s were relatively old men with small, young families. Over half of the male heads of households in 1687 were ex-servants from Maryland and Virginia (Skordas 1968). Families were small because the parents, though seasoned, were getting a late start. The average household contained only four people: a father, mother, and two young children. Fathers averaged 38 years old and most men did not begin to have children until the age of 31 years. Their wives were slightly younger, 30 years of age. Women began having children at a much younger age, approximately 23 years of age.

Getting a late start in life on the Delaware translated into the second fact of life for ex-servants in Delaware, namely that land was easy to get, but hard to hold. Land was available, but mortgages were hard to pay off. Richard Whitehart and John Powell found land readily available, but neither could attain full ownership. Satisfying mortgages, building a plantation, raising a young family, and paying taxes all took cash or its seventeenth century equivalent, tobacco. Tobacco appears to have been much more important in central Delaware than previously thought. Whitehart, Powell, and other ex-Maryland servants not only knew how to grow tobacco successfully, but more importantly, probably felt they had to grow it. Whitehart and Powell were deeply in debt and struggling to raise their young families and pay off their debts. Tobacco was their best cash crop and, hence, provided the best chance for them to keep their land. Keeping their land would have meant much greater security for their children after they died.

The third fact of life for Delaware's first settlers was that many of the children of the first settlers fared worse than their parents. Losing the family plantation after the death of their father meant that the surviving family had lost their greatest investment, their improvements to the family farm. The material culture of the Whitehart and Powell families tells a very important part of this story. The material lives of the parents, the first generation of settlers, were much better than their children who never had the opportunity to own land. John Powell, for example, drank from refined German and English tankards and fine crystal wine glasses. His children, or at least the tenants who occupied the site after his death, drank from common, locally produced coarse earthenwares. Moreover, both the Powell and Whitehart families eventually disappeared from central Delaware after they lose the family plantations.

The fourth fact of life was that tenancy appears to have been rather benign in early central Delaware. Neither William Johnson or Thomas Sharp, the two men who held the various mortgages to the Powell and Whitehart sites appear to have aggressively pursued their debtors. Both men consistently advanced both Powell and Whitehart substantial sums of money. Johnson even helped Whitehart negotiate a second mortgage with Sharp. Both Johnson, and especially Sharp, were intimately connected with Philadelphia merchants and appear to have been more interested in keeping Whitehart and Powell on the land than displacing them. Tenancy, at least in this earliest period in Delaware history, thus appears to have been fairly benign. Despite their willingness to continue lending money to struggling landowners, however, both Johnson and Sharp were ready to foreclose if necessary.

In conclusion, research at the Whitehart and Powell plantations clearly identified land ownership and debt as key variables in the social and economic history of early central Delaware. Tobacco was clearly an important cash crop for at least some of the planters, especially the ex-servants who moved to Delaware from Maryland and Virginia. These settlers brought with them common Chesapeake building techniques, plantation layouts, and foodways. Demographic patterns were also similar, but the presence of old ex-servants and their young families underscored the importance of land ownership and debt in everyday life. Future research at similar sites in other parts of Delaware should seek to determine if the four "facts of life" for Delaware's first settlers operated in these areas as well.