

## A CHANGING NEIGHBORHOOD

One of the properties selected for excavation by the archaeologists was located on Market Street, between Front and Second Streets. Historical information on the property showed that wealthy families probably lived here from the late eighteenth century to about 1810. One of these families was that of Dr. Nicholas Way, a prominent physician of Wilmington during the 1780s and 1790s. Archaeologists therefore expected to find materials used by the Ways and other well-to-do households on this property. Their expectations were confirmed. At the rear of the property was a large brick cistern which, after it was abandoned, was reused as a privy. Along with the disposal of "night soils" in the abandoned cistern, the occupants threw away large quantities of artifacts. From the study of these artifacts, the archaeologists were able to learn about the materials used by a wealthy late eighteenth and early nineteenth century household.

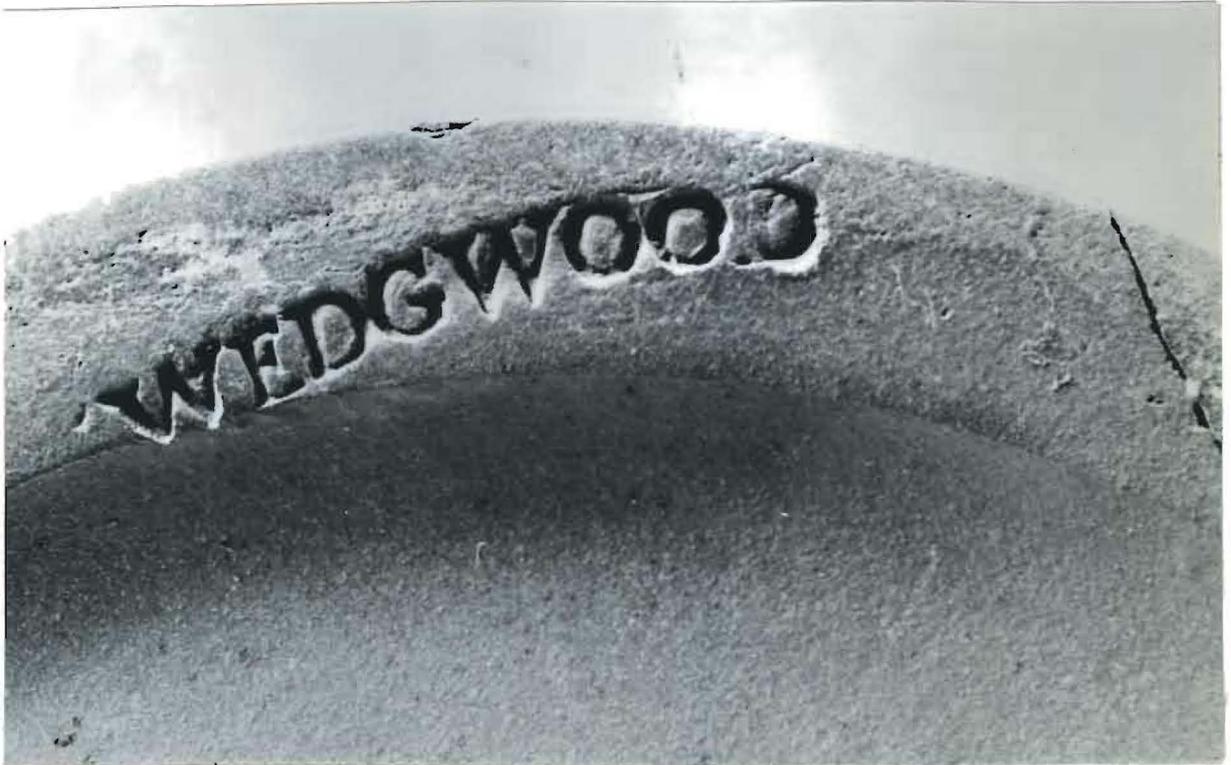
One thing that became very clear from the study of the artifacts from the cistern was the high cost of many of the items. The households that threw trash into the cistern had very expensive tea wares on their tables. Almost all of the tea dishes were imported Chinese porcelain (Plate 5), one of the most costly ceramics available at that time. Another expensive item found was an unusual black basaltic inkwell/quill pen holder, with the famous "Wedgwood" mark on its base (Plate 6). Basaltic ware was a black ceramic that became popular in Europe following a revival in the interest of art styles of ancient Egypt, after Napoleon's Nile campaign. In ancient Egypt, many pieces of art such as statues were made of black basaltic rock. English pottery makers were copying this ancient art form in their ceramics.

Other costly ceramic items included what archaeologists call blue transfer printed dishes, all made in England (Plate 7). These ceramics were not as expensive as the porcelain tea wares, but were more expensive than most other

**PLATE 5**  
**WILMINGTON BLVD.**  
**CHINESE PORCELAIN TEA WARE**



**PLATE 6**  
**WILMINGTON BLVD.**  
**BLACK BASALTES INK WELL/QUILL PEN HOLDER**



**PLATE 7**  
**WILMINGTON BLVD.**  
**BLUE TRANSFER PRINTED PEARLWARE VESSELS**



types of ceramic available at the time. It was interesting that all the transfer printed dishes, which were quite numerous, were tea wares, as were the Chinese porcelain ceramics. It seems that the households that used the cistern as a privy were breaking a lot of tea ceramics, and therefore were often using these tea items. The more often the dishes were used, the more chance they had of breaking and being thrown away. Tea was a very important social activity of the upper classes of early America, as it was in England. Given the large number of tea wares in the cistern, tea parties were probably very popular in the households that used the cistern.

The glass vessels found in the cistern also support the idea that the families did a lot of entertaining. Of the 102 glass vessels found, 35% were glass tumblers (Plate 8). From the unusual number of tumblers in this domestic trash dump (we know that a tavern was not located on this particular property), it also seems fair to conclude that these early Wilmingtonians did not hesitate to lift the occasional glass of imported wine, brandy, or rum.

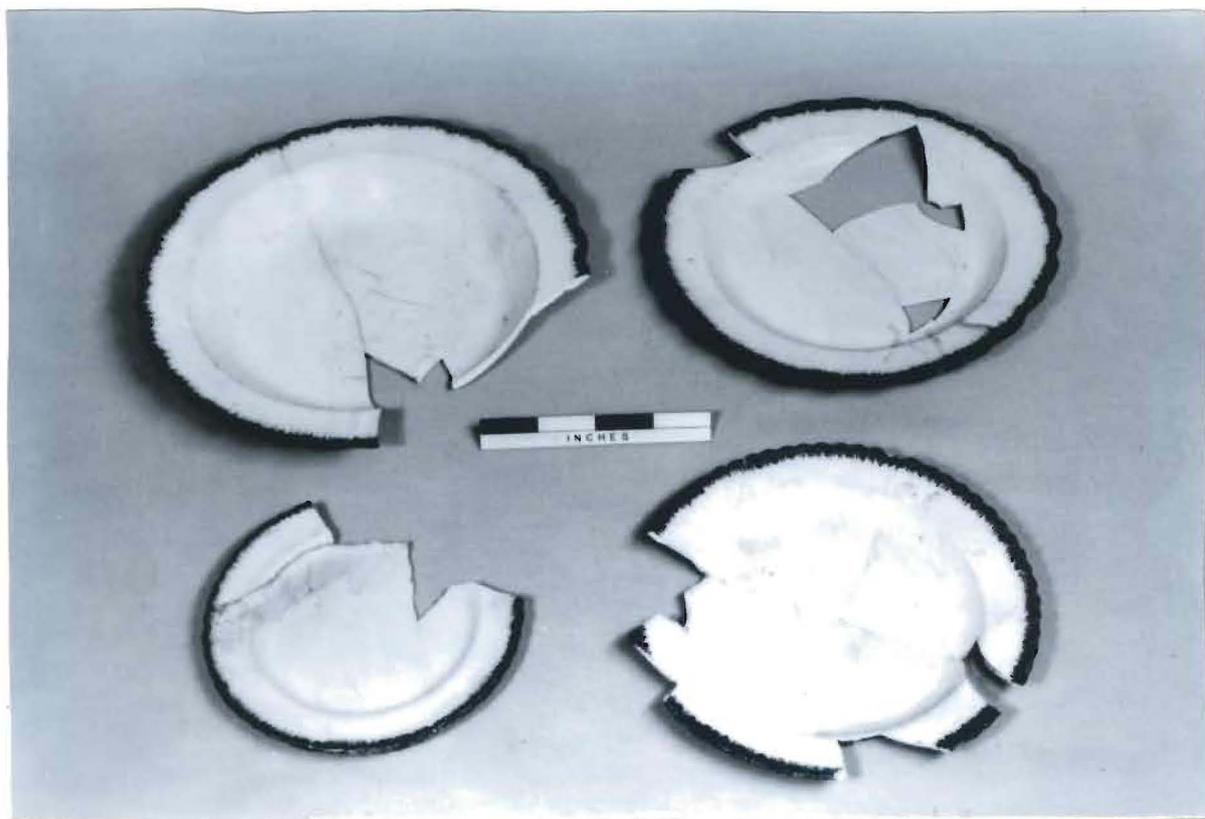
Thus, the families who lived on this property before 1810 were fairly well off, spending most of their ceramic purchases on the tea wares. What is interesting is that the dinner dishes from the cistern are not of an expensive variety. These dishes are plainly decorated and sometimes not decorated at all (Plate 9). One possibility was that the households did not place much importance in having very expensive dinner dishes, and that company were more involved in tea and spirit drinking than dining. Another possibility is that the households that used the privy were really not very wealthy, but were more what we call "middle class", perhaps they were trying to attain a higher social status by frequent entertaining, using their "best china."

Yet another explanation for the rather inexpensive dishes is that they came from the tables of later households that used the cistern. The historians learned

**PLATE 8**  
**WILMINGTON BLVD.**  
**GLASS TUMBLERS**



**PLATE 9**  
**WILMINGTON BLVD.**  
**PLAINLY DECORATED PLATES**  
**(BLUE EDGED PEARLWARE TYPE)**



that after 1810 this particular property was the location of a "slop shop", which was a shop that sold used clothing or clothing items for sailors. It is possible that the owner of the shop lived above it, although it was not very common at this time for people owning shops of this kind to live in the same building as the shop.

There are artifacts in the cistern that can definitely be linked to the slop shop. Archaeologists recovered a large array of clothing items from the cistern (Plate 10). These included 37 buttons, a copper buckle, 246 brass straight pins, 22 complete iron needles, and 33 iron needle fragments. One interesting observation was that none of the buttons matched, as one would expect if they came from a regular household. Other items related to the shop were large numbers of unsmoked, but broken pipes (Plate 10). These pipes were interpreted as breakage of a single box of pipes, as the pipes were found in a cluster. A shop catering to clothing for sailors could have easily sold smoking pipes that were purchased in bulk quantities.

The excavation of the cistern clearly showed the changing nature of lower Market Street. First, the street was occupied by either wealthy families, or families that were aspiring to higher social positions. The expensive tea wares were undoubtedly from these families, as they would be too expensive for a small shop owner. These families moved out of the area around 1810, and were replaced by a shop selling clothing and possibly other goods, such as pipes. Excavation of this one property on Market Street had clearly provided evidence of a changing Wilmington neighborhood.

**PLATE 10**  
**WILMINGTON BLVD.**  
**ITEMS FROM THE SLOP SHOP**

