

## Synthesis: Life at the Road's Edge

### THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN

The results of our two principal lines of research concerning the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site (7NC-F-94), historical and archaeological, are somewhat out of balance, as is often the case with historic archaeological sites. The historical record, for example, has provided a wealth of information on the owners of the Wilson Farm property. As with most nineteenth-century sites, we have been able to track changes in property ownership over the course of some two centuries. We know that the property was once a part of Bohemia Manor and that by the early 1800s, Thomas J. Jones owned it. In 1870, Manlove D. Wilson purchased what had become known as Choptank Farm for just under \$30,000. It would remain in the Wilson family for the next 69 years.

By 1880, George F. Wilson, Manlove Wilson's son, was living on Choptank Farm as a "gentleman farmer" with a foreman to manage the farm and a housekeeper to oversee his household, which also included three farmhands who presumably lived in the farmhouse or elsewhere within the main farm complex. And sometime prior to 1881, the Wilsons constructed three small dwellings along Choptank Road—two near the northeast corner of the property, and one farther south along the road. The locations on the roadside and the pairing of the two northern buildings indicates that all three followed the house-and-garden model and were intended to house agricultural laborers and their families. We can't be certain, but the site may have been occupied as early as 1870 by one of nine African American families listed along Choptank Road in that year. Unfortunately, the 1880 census is just as vague, offering few clues as to who would have occupied these dwellings. As noted in Chapter 4, sandwiched between the Wilson home and the home of white farmer Jesse Holton was the household of Isaac Cooper, a 40-year-old black farm laborer. He lived with his wife Mary, and in 1880 they had one child, one-year-old Isaac. We think, although we can't prove conclusively, that Isaac Cooper was probably one of the Wilson Farm's tenants. Another nearby home was headed by Mary Manning, listed as white and probably the mother of Choptank Farm foreman James Manning. Mary lived with her eight children and might have occupied one of the tenant houses.

After 1880, the historical record becomes even more vague as it relates to the occupants of the Wilson Farm Tenancy house. We know that by the early twentieth century, Molly Wilson, George F. Wilson's sister, was renting the farm to a series of white tenants (see Chapter 4, Table 3). We don't know if they were living in the Wilson's farmhouse, although it seems they might have been, even though Molly still had her furnishings there in 1939, the year she died. By the time of the 1920 census, the record suggests that the Wilson farmhouse may have been occupied by the household of William Sapp, a white "farm overseer," his seven children, a white farm laborer named Horace Warner, and a 74-year-old African American farm laborer named Wesley Croker. The census lists several white households nearby, and one household headed by an African American named John Hall. Hall was an unmarried 50-year-old farmhand whose household consisted of Andrew Miller, another single farmhand, Ellen Foarman, a divorced cook, and 20-year-old Addie Foarman. Again, it is not possible to say definitively that Hall was

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in fact the resident of Site 7NC-F-94, but only that he lived along Choptank Road on or near the Wilson Farm. Ten years later, the census taker, making his way along Choptank Road on April 29, 1930, recorded the names of Howard and Mamie Fillingame as the tenants in residence at Choptank Farm, where they lived with their black hired man, 21-year-old Arthur Henry. It would appear that the most likely resident of the Wilson Farm tenant house was William Ridgway, a 33-year-old black man who worked for the New Castle County Road Department. Ridgway, who was single, shared the house with 26-year-old Addie Hardy. After 1930, we lose sight of any possible tenants altogether.

So, the historical record presents us with some snapshots in time, blurry and indistinct where the tenant laborers of the Wilson Farm are concerned. As happens so often with rural laborers, they go imperfectly recorded, if recorded at all, and we are left with informed speculation. If the labor relations between tenants and owners were at all typical of those in Delaware in general, and there is no reason to suppose they were not, then it is quite likely that the occupants of the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site moved on after a year or two (Siders and Andrzejewski 1997:158–159), although probably staying within the broader rural neighborhood. Some may have stayed longer, but again, we have no record of this. That some were African American—like Isaac Cooper and his small family in 1880, and John Hall in 1920—is likely, given their high representation among Delaware’s landless rural laboring class. The archaeological work conducted at the site turns this likelihood into a near certainty for the time period after 1894, with KSK’s recovery of a straightening comb, an object marketed to and used almost exclusively by African American women. The presence of Feature 26, located beneath the floor of the house, while more ambiguous, is also suggestive of an African American presence during the early twentieth century.

## HOUSE AND GARDEN

In contrast to the ambiguous documentary information bearing on Site 7NC-F-94’s occupants, the archaeological record of the Wilson Farm Tenancy is quite rich. Whoever lived at the site, they left behind numerous features and thousands of discarded artifacts. The principal structural feature of the site was, of course, the dwelling.

The house was generously sized for this class of building, measuring 26 feet long and 16 feet wide, and, once built, does not seem to have been enlarged—we found no evidence for any kind of addition, although it is possible that plowing destroyed any traces of subsequent building episodes. The mix of cut/square and wire nails suggests, however, that the house underwent regular maintenance for at least part of its existence. The dwelling had no cellar and was most likely of frame construction, either one and a half or two stories in height, supported by a shallow brick foundation with a crawlspace beneath (Figure 9.1). It probably consisted of one or two rooms on the lower floor and either one or two rooms in the top story. It is uncertain what the interior finish was like, but given the amount of plaster recovered from Feature 34, at least the lower floor was probably plastered and painted. The Wilson Farm tenant house was somewhat unusual in that the gable end faced Choptank Road, with the front door on this side of the structure (and thus bears a passing resemblance to the Wharton tenant house Siders and Andrzejewski [1997:157] describe), as recalled by local resident George Clough, who also remembered the existence of a porch. Our research also suggests that the dwelling had a side entrance in its south elevation, again partly due to its resemblance to the Wharton tenant house

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Figure 9.1 Hypothetical projection of the former Wilson Farm Tenancy dwelling.

with its multiple entrances, and to the swept yard space on this side of the structure (discussed later in this chapter).

Table 9.1 assembles some comparative information on house dimensions gathered from archaeological sites in New Castle and Kent Counties in Delaware; the sites selected have, in most cases, some temporal overlap with the Wilson Farm Tenancy. Square footage is given for first floors only (including the main block and additions), and does not include second stories or lofts. This method is intended to simply provide some sense of the range of variation in house sizes in Delaware during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

**Table 9.1 A Sample of House Sizes from Delaware**

Site	Dimensions (feet)	Area (square feet)
Patterson Lane House Late 18 <sup>th</sup> –late 19 <sup>th</sup> centuries Owner and Tenant	46 x 29	1,334
C. Kimmey House 1842–1970 Owner and Tenant	27 x 20 33 x 16 12 x 15	1,248
W. M. Hawthorne House Circa 1840 Owner occupied	29 x 21 12 x 21 12 x 17	1,065
Wilson-Slack House 1859–1983 Owner Occupied	32 x 30	960
Temple House Circa 1830–1955 Tenant Occupied	26 x 20 16 x 20	840
Ferguson House Circa 1810 Tenant occupied	16 x 24 18 x 15	654
Williams-Stump House* 1845–circa 1930 Owner occupied	27 x 17	459
Cazier Tenancy* 1844–1935 Tenant occupied	17 x 17 17 x 9	442
<b>Wilson Farm Tenancy*</b> <b>Circa 1880–1950</b> <b>Tenant occupied</b>	<b>26 x 16</b>	<b>416</b>
Wilson-Lewis House Circa 1852–1889 Tenant occupied	20 x 20	400
Dickson II* Circa 1880 Tenant occupied	18 x 22	392
Grant Tenancy Circa 1830–1941 Tenant occupied	16 x 15.5 16.5 x 6	341
Heisler Tenancy* Circa 1890 Tenant occupied	12 x 21	252

\* occupied by African Americans

The houses that we compared with the Wilson Farm Tenancy dwelling include five owner occupied sites: Patterson Lane (Catts et al. 1989), the Hawthorn House (Coleman et al. 1984), the C. Kimmery House (Jamison et al. 1997), the Wilson-Slack House (Coleman et al. 1985), and the Stump occupation of the Williams House (Catts and Custer 1990). The tenant-occupied houses include: the Temple House (Hoseth et al. 1990), the Ferguson House (Coleman et al. 1983), the Dickson II House (Catts, Hodny, and Custer 1989), the Grant Tenancy (Taylor et al. 1987), and the Heisler Tenancy (Catts, Hodny, and Custer 1989).

Modest in comparison to all but one of the owner-occupied dwellings in Table 9.1 (the African American-owned Williams-Stump House), the Wilson Farm Tenancy house would seem to be fairly typical of the house-and-garden dwelling in terms of its size, if a bit larger than some of the prescriptions in the agricultural press. It certainly conforms with the dimensions of the house described in an 1858 edition of the *American Agriculturalist* Gall (2007) cites in his study of a cottager's dwelling in Somerset County, New Jersey. Except for the Temple House, occupied by a farm manager (Hoseth et al. 1994; cf. Herman 1987), the tenant laborer dwellings shown in Table 9.1 are uniformly small, and fit within the range of variation for house-and-garden dwellings observed by Siders and Andrzejewski (1997). That more than half of the tenant laborer houses were occupied by African Americans at some point during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is almost certainly not coincidental (although this is hardly a representative sample of the tenant-occupied structures in the state). In the aftermath of slavery, African Americans made up much of the agricultural labor force in Delaware, and as a group were relegated to the lower rungs of the agricultural ladder (DeCunzo 2004).

It would appear that once built, the house-and-garden dwelling, like the structure at the Wilson Farm, would usually not be expanded to any great degree, at least while inhabited by tenant laborers. The farm owner would likely have no real incentive to expend capital beyond the construction of the house in the first place and seeing to its occasional maintenance. As renters, the tenants would probably not have been inclined to spend time and resources to enlarge a dwelling they didn't own. Rather, what improvements they did make were probably internal (the purchase of furnishings, for example), and not necessarily structural (Affleck et al. 2004).

While the dwelling at the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site seems to conform to the house-and-garden pattern, the archaeological investigations at the site were less informative in regard to how this plot of land was organized spatially. Part of the problem arises from the fact that the project's limits of construction (LOC) extend just slightly west of the house, so virtually all of the rear yard space went unexplored. KSK's excavations did uncover a sizeable array of features at the site, particularly in the north yard, including pits, postholes, and shallow linear features. None of these could be positively associated with outbuildings. Although Features 68, 120, 128, and 129 were initially thought to possibly represent the remains of structures, this couldn't be conclusively demonstrated. Both sets of features were shallow and ditch-like; Features 68 and 120 may have been the seating trench for a fence line—a number of nails were found along their upper surface, just beneath the plowzone—or a drainage ditch extending along the side of a garden. Features 128 and 129 were even more enigmatic. In plan, they seemed to form a partially enclosed space, roughly parallel with the house foundation. No nails or other architectural materials were found in association with the two features. In profile, they formed very shallow ditches, and may in fact have provided drainage for a garden plot, although no

silting was observed. Alternatively, they may have represented seating trenches for a sizeable, if insubstantial, outbuilding.

Several pits are scattered across the north yard and beneath the house; like many such features, the purpose of these pits is uncertain. They may have originally been dug to extract clay, for example; the small number of artifacts recovered from most of these features contradicts any notion that they were purposely excavated trash pits. Equally unclear is the function(s) of many of the postholes found in the north yard and elsewhere on the site. With certain notable exceptions, they do not fall into any discernable pattern. KSK did map a series of postholes (Features 88–97) that extends in a line just to the east of the house and parallel with Choptank Road; none of these were excavated, since they appeared to be recent.

If one feature at the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site stands out, it is Feature 26, located beneath the floor of the house, next to the south foundation. The apparently deliberate placement of the bricks, and more importantly, the iron artifacts, suggests a ritual or spiritual significance similar in practice, if not in purpose, to the caches found archaeologically at sites in nearby Annapolis (Leone and Fry 2001). In West African and African American culture, iron is considered to have spiritual and protective power, and it is perhaps for this reason that DeCunzo (2004:247) thinks an iron axe head was left at the bottom of the Stump family's dairy cooler. Feature 26 may have served a similar purpose; buried out of sight beneath the floor, it may have been intended to protect the house and those in it from malign influences.

The most notable feature uncovered at the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site, apart from Feature 26, was the well (Feature 34). Based on the artifacts recovered from the builder's trench, the well, located immediately behind the house, had been constructed sometime in the early twentieth century. It was somewhat crudely built of brick and evidently served as the occupant's principal source of water. The well appears to have been filled when the house was abandoned in the late 1940s or early 1950s, evidently using material from the demolition of the house, which would account for the large quantities of plaster, nails, window glass, and hardware collected from the plowzone in Units 11, 32, 35, and 36, and from the shaft fill (framing members and roofing/siding materials were apparently hauled offsite). This material was probably supplemented with fill collected from the yards around the house.

Typical of nineteenth- and twentieth-century sites, the occupants discarded household refuse in the yards surrounding the dwelling, where it was eventually (post-abandonment) mixed and fragmented during plowing. As we discussed in Chapter 8, the rear (west) and north yards received the bulk of the domestic discards—how far these concentrations might have extended to the west is uncertain, since the LOC was just behind the house. Broken ceramics were concentrated near the northwest corner of the house and in the north yard in the vicinity of Phase II Unit 3, a portion of the site that was termed the “midden.” Lower densities were present within the house. Household glass followed a similar distribution, although the plowzone overlying the foundation yielded fairly high densities of container glass, as did one of the units in the front yard. The latter may be at least partly the result of post-occupation roadside littering. One of the more interesting results of our plowzone distribution analysis was the presence of faunal remains, mostly bone, in and immediately adjacent to the house foundation. Lamp parts (mainly lamp globe and chimney fragments), personal items, and toys were recovered where

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they were broken and lost, primarily around and inside the house. The highest concentrations of arms-related artifacts, primarily 22-caliber shell casings, occurred immediately behind the house, and it is easy to imagine someone plinking at targets off to the west, maybe a groundhog rooting in the garden or a rabbit intended for the stewpot.

Overall, the impression we got from the distribution of broken bottles and highly fragmented ceramics among other household refuse is that there did seem to be some emphasis placed on keeping some of the yard space around the dwelling neat and tidy. Unfortunately, based on our analysis of the datable glass and ceramic artifacts, there did not seem to be any discernable temporal differences in the refuse tossed into the yards around the house—in other words, no change in the disposal patterns over time, and any such departure from this overall pattern would have been masked by 70 odd years of deposition. On the other hand, the bulk of the stuff disposed of found its way into the north and west yards. The north yard may, for a time, have been a garden area, so this material could have been turned into the soil where it would have worked to improve the drainage. We did see some tentative evidence for yard sweeping, an activity often associated with African American occupation (DeCunzo 2004:245), particularly in the South (we should note here that swept yards are also associated with other ethnic groups across the South, as well [Thomason 2002]). As DeCunzo (2004:245–246) notes, swept dirt yards tend to extend out from and surround the house (Heath and Bennett 2000:29, 43), and are characterized by low densities of artifacts in proximity to the dwelling (Smith 2002:54–55); what artifacts do remain tend to be small in size. At the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site, it does appear that some effort was made to keep the south yard in particular free of household refuse, as evidenced by the low densities of household glass and ceramics in the handful of units excavated in that part of the site. The same applies to the east yard, between the house and the road, although here there was a large spike in the density of household glass, some or much of which may actually be roadside litter. The east yard, fronting the road, was the public face of the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site, as was, to a lesser extent, the south yard, which faced not the road, but the property owner's dwelling to the southwest.

### **DOMESTIC ECONOMY: THE MATERIAL LIVES OF THE WILSON FARM TENANCY RESIDENTS**

First, a cautionary note: the following discussion is general, for the most part referring to the entire 70-year span of occupation at the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site. This broad scope is necessitated by the nature of the site, where the vast majority of the recovered artifacts were found in the plowzone, and where, with few exceptions, the features were largely devoid of precisely datable deposits. As a result, we have not been able to assign the assemblage, or parts of the assemblage, to a particular, discrete span of time, much less to an individual household. Nonetheless, the site did yield data that bears on the material lives of rural laborers in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Delaware.

Knowing what we do about the house and garden in Delaware, it's safe to assume that the occupants of Site 7NC-F-94 were folk of rather ordinary means, living as they did near the bottom of the agricultural ladder—farm hands were at the very bottom rung, followed in ascending order by tenant laborers (also called cottagers), tenant farmers, and farm owners. As best we can tell, the men of these households, white or black, worked as agricultural laborers for the Wilsons (or their principal tenant[s]), most likely in exchange for a place to live and a plot of

land to grow food, and may well have hired themselves out to other landowners in the neighborhood for wages. The women of these households would have labored in the garden, raising, harvesting, and processing their crops, taking care of the chickens, as well as maintaining the home, cooking, and cleaning. Agricultural produce from this small plot would have been consumed at home, with some exchanged with neighbors, and some perhaps sold to local stores in nearby Middletown. One or more of the tenant households appear to have owned a horse, evidenced by the presence of tack and horseshoes, and the recovery of wagon hardware indicates that they had some form of horse-drawn transport. That some of the households preserved fruits and vegetables is indicated by the more than 300 canning jar and lid-liner fragments recovered from various places around the site.

Faunal remains from the site suggest that apart from chicken there were no domestic animals raised here, a conclusion based largely on the lack of butchering waste. The vast majority of the identifiable species consumed are the usual domesticates—mainly pig and cow, along with chicken (possibly raised more for their eggs than their meat) and a single example of sheep. The meat cuts represented in the various contexts were a mix of the cheaper, lower-quality parts from the neck and lower limbs—essentially, the cuts used for stews and soups—and elements that indicate the consumption of roasts, chops, and hams, meat cuts that may have been served on special occasions. The low incidence of butchery waste suggests that some meat cuts were purchased locally, most likely from a butcher shop in Middletown. On the other hand, it is evident that the site occupants were also processing both pig and cattle heads. Meats from the skull could be used for head cheese or for scrapple, while the brains could be fried and served.

KSK also recovered a sizeable quantity of bone from wild species, including rabbit, muskrat, squirrel, opossum, raccoon, woodchuck, catfish, turtle (including one snapping turtle), and mourning dove. All of these species would have occurred locally, in the fields and woodlots near the house and in/along Great Bohemia Creek and its tributaries. Their presence attests to the site occupants' skill in hunting, trapping, and fishing, and to their knowledge of how to process and cook these wild species. At least some of the households at the site were also consuming oyster, quahog and soft shell clam, and welk.

Along with food they raised or collected themselves—or acquired through barter or purchase from neighbors and local shops—some of the site occupants purchased canned goods, as well. At least 39 food cans were identified in the Wilson Farm Tenancy collection, together with two can keys, the type that usually come with sardine tins. Other commercial foods appear to have included flour (Gold Coin Flour, produced in Ulm, Minnesota), jellies, pickled items, mustards, and other condiments, as well as Bosco chocolate drink mix.

Although foodways can also be examined through the analysis of ceramic and glass vessel forms, the artifacts from the Wilson Farm Tenancy were too fragmentary to do this effectively. Nonetheless, it was evident that most of the ceramics purchased, used, and ultimately discarded were whitewares and white granites, either plain or decorated, with molded or embossed motifs. These probably saw everyday use, while more colorful, somewhat more expensive decorated wares (painted, printed, and decal) may have graced the table on Sundays or for special occasions. Meals were accompanied by liquids drunk from glass tumblers, and the table may also have been set at one time or another with fancy pressed glass dishes and stemware. Some of

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the site occupants partook of mineral water, while others consumed whisky or other spirits. The tenancy households—or some of them, in any case—also used a variety of teawares, mostly in whiteware or white granite and in a variety of decorative styles. Only one identifiable teaware set was recovered: several cups and saucers in hard paste porcelain with a pink colored glaze dating between 1920 and 1960. This set would probably have been considered the “best china,” and would likely have been reserved for special occasions.

We have only a vague impression concerning the way the dwelling was furnished. As noted earlier, the interior was plastered and most likely painted or whitewashed. Two furniture casters recovered during the excavations may be from a bed, chair, or cabinet. Also among the artifacts is a curtain weight, indicating that one household at least had drapes covering the windows, most likely in the downstairs living area. A clock may have stood on a side table, possibly accompanied by one or more of the figurines (perhaps the peasant boy on the fence—a Japanese imitation of a similar figurine Hummel produced in Germany during the 1930s) that eventually ended up as refuse in the yard. There may have been a mirror on the wall, enhancing the light thrown from the oil lamps used well into the twentieth century. As the adults read, entertained friends, or made music (a guitar pick and harmonica attest to the latter), the children played with their toys—girls with their dolls, boys (and girls, too) perhaps shooting marbles (mainly an outside activity). Children may have also “done their lessons” indoors, perhaps at the kitchen table—KSK collected part of what appeared to be a writing slate and a number of slate pencils. Entertainment outside the home is evidenced in the recovery of the head of a carnival cane, shaped like a pair of dice (see Chapter 7), an item that would have been given away as a prize, most likely at a local fair or carnival.

The archaeologists from KSK recovered a number of artifacts that bear on the health of the Wilson Tenancy occupants. Several medicinal vials and syringes were found on the site, although their precise use is unclear—insulin is a possibility, having been discovered in the 1920s. However, like many households of this period, the site occupants went outside the medical establishment, purchasing patent medicines for a variety of ailments. One such nostrum, Poor Richard’s Eye Water, produced in Philadelphia, purported to treat weak and dim eyes, suggesting it was aimed at the aging, the near-sighted, or both. At least three bitters bottles were also represented in the site assemblage, concoctions often marketed as medicines, but were often used as vehicles for getting around temperance and prohibition laws (Delaware was essentially dry before national prohibition in 1920). KSK also recovered Three Vick’s VapoRub jars; VapoRub was designed to relieve coughs and congestion, and was probably available in local stores. Finally, a nearly complete bottle once used for Holme’s Fragrant Frostilla, skin cream for the face and hands, was recovered. Consisting mainly of alcohol and glycerin, Frostilla would have provided some relief for work-coursened hands. It was also advertised as a skin lightener.

Among the thousands of artifacts that KSK recovered from the site are more than 150 buttons, 29 beads, along with other clothing fasteners (including men’s clothing rivets and suspender parts), pins, and jewelry. The buttons span the period of the site’s occupation and are a fairly diverse collection, although more than half are porcelain Prosser buttons. While most, or even all, of these buttons and other fasteners were from clothes worn by the Wilson Farm Tenancy occupants, it is possible, given their sizeable number, that the women took in laundry work, an activity that would have brought in extra income for the household (cf. DeCunzo 2004:251–252 for a discussion in relation to the African American Stump household).

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In contrast to the Stump household at the Williams Site (DeCunzo 2004; Catts and Custer 1990), sewing, surprisingly, does not appear to have been a particularly important activity at the Wilson Farm Tenancy. Not a single needle or straight pin was recovered from this site. However, KSK did find three thimbles. One, of copper alloy, had a hole pushed through the dome. Pierced thimbles have been recovered from a number of sites, primarily in Native American and African American contexts. For the latter, thimbles are thought to have been used as charms or amulets (Yakubik and Mendez 1995), and have been linked to African American spiritual practices, possibly to malign conjuring (Leone and Fry 2001). It's tempting to consider this single artifact in that light, given the fact that African Americans were living at the site at some point in its history, and assuming the possible spiritual significance of Feature 26.

Returning to the clothing fasteners for a moment, buttons, of course, were not simply fasteners, but as articles of clothing conveyed a message about the individual wearing them. Personal appearance was important to at least some of the residents of the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site, although, as with so many of the artifacts recovered from there, we cannot put a name or a face to the wearer. Several highly decorative buttons from the site would have adorned a woman's coat, perhaps worn to church or for other dress occasions. Beads from the site could have been worn on clothing, while others could have been used to decorate braided hair. At least one resident of the site discarded a decorative celluloid comb (an inexpensive substitute for turtle shell), used by women to hold the hair off the neck, a style frequently worn in conjunction with a hat fastened with a large hat pin. Although no intact hat pins were recovered, KSK did collect two black-faceted pinheads that may have been used on a hat or lapel. The Wilson Farm Tenancy women were not alone in dressing finely. While most of the clothing items associated with men come from work clothes, a porcelain collar stud indicates that one of the male residents of the site sported more formal attire.

The celluloid combs represent one style of hair treatment; the straightening comb represents another. Marketed almost exclusively to African American women (the Kentucky Maid brand was sold by Madame C. J. Walker, the most prominent African American female entrepreneur in early twentieth-century America [Walker 2007]) symbolizes the often controversial subject of body image in the African American community, both at the turn of the twentieth century and now. Mainstream—i.e., white—notions of beauty emphasized light skin and straight hair as the ideal that African American women should strive for, that their African physical heritage was a thing of shame (Rooks 1996). While some African American women in the late nineteenth century may have straightened their hair for just this reason, for most it was more complicated than that—part desire for social acceptance (not usually forthcoming from white society), and more importantly, shaping an identity within the broader African American community. Over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, it was the social and ritual contexts of hair straightening, perhaps as much as the end result itself, which became important (Rooks 1996; Walker 2007).

## **PRE-CONTACT PEOPLES AT THE WILSON FARM TENANCY SITE**

Long before the Wilsons acquired their farm, Native Americans had made use of this location. The small pre-Contact assemblage consists of 74 artifacts, including debitage, projectile points, fire-cracked rock (FCR), a cobble core, a possible scraper, a hammerstone, and an axe fragment. The three diagnostic points indicate that the assemblage dates to the Woodland I period. Most of

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the artifacts were found within and around the house foundation and were in both plowzone and subsoil contexts. Three of the FCR fragments, the core, the Poplar Island point, and six pieces of debitage were found in contexts related to the historic shaft feature (Feature 34) and one piece of debitage was found in the builder's trench. Thus, the context of the pre-Contact artifacts has been significantly affected by the historic occupation of the site.

Lithic materials utilized for chipped stone tool manufacturing included chert, jasper, quartz, quartzite, and ironstone. All of these materials are found as gravels in the Columbia Formation, which underlies the site and much of the Delmarva Peninsula. The quartz core had cobble cortex, supporting the conclusion that gravel sources were utilized. A study of Columbia Formation gravel was conducted as part of the Hickory Bluff project (Petraglia et al. 2002). The analyzed sample of gravel consists of quartz (45.74%), quartzite (18.56%), sandstone (18.37%), and jasper (13.73%), with small amounts of chert, ironstone, ironstone conglomerate, and siltstone. In the Wilson Farm assemblage, jasper is the predominant material, comprising 49.25% of the chipped stone assemblage. Most of the jasper has cobble cortex. Chert (19.40%) is also more abundant in the artifact assemblage than in the Hickory Bluff cobble sample. Thus, the Native Americans at the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site exhibited a preference for cryptocrystalline quartz. Ten of the 33 pieces of jasper debitage exhibit reddening, suggesting thermal alteration, likely as a result of heat treatment to improve knapping characteristics.

The Wilson Farm Tenancy Site is situated on high ground, approximately 750 feet from the headwaters of a first-order stream that feeds Elk Creek. Given the low artifact density and distance from water, it is unlikely that the site functioned as a base camp. The presence of an axe is inconsistent with interpretation as a hunting camp. Therefore, the site could have been a short-term camp of some type. However, the small size of the assemblage precludes definitive interpretation of site function. Nothing in the recovered assemblage warrants a change in the conclusion that the pre-Contact component does not contribute to the significance of the site.

## SUMMING UP

For most of us who have worked in some capacity with the data from the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site, it has seemed a bit like a shadow world—indistinct figures glimpsed briefly and then gone. Such ambiguity or uncertainty comes with the territory when dealing with pre-Contact sites or site components. Woodland peoples left little behind that we can identify with an individual, much less an individual whose name is known to us. The artifacts from the site were, of course, produced by individuals, so these pre-Contact materials are imbued with a sense of connectedness to other human beings centuries removed from us. Aside from this strictly humanistic aspect, analysis of the artifacts can provide us with information on some of the activities that took place at this location—mainly stone tool production and maintenance. The axe fragment suggests woodworking, perhaps for the construction of a shelter. The presence of this material in this place suggests that these Native Americans picked this location for at least some of the same reasons as the people who would eventually replace them on the landscape.

As we come forward in time, just a few centuries past, we can begin to associate a location with a particular individual or household. For the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site, we know who the property owners were, beginning with Augustine Hermann, and have a good idea of who at least

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some of the residents of the Wilson farmhouse were from about 1820 onwards. The small house on Choptank Road is another matter.

Whoever the Wilson Tenancy Site inhabitants may have been—white or black rural laborers, for the most part as far as we can tell—they were almost certainly members of a rural underclass near the bottom of the agricultural ladder. Unlike the Wilsons (well-to-do and middling farm families whose names appear in the historical record and whose lives we know about at least to some extent), the occupants of the house-and-garden dwelling remain anonymous or largely so. We suspect that Isaac Cooper, an African American rural laborer, and his small family may have lived in the dwelling at the site in 1880. No further record of them has been found, and they may have only resided there for a year, if at all; the same applies to John Hall 40 years later. How many households lived here, under the eyes of the Wilsons and their farm managers, is unknown, and we can't be certain regarding the specific labor arrangements between tenant and owner. Like most house-and-garden occupants, they probably exchanged labor for shelter and a plot of land to work.

The household or households that occupied the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site evidently participated, to one degree or another, in the expanding capitalist consumer culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Each of course decided what they could afford and what was meaningful to them, from hat pins to figurines with romantic rural associations to straightening combs. In this world of goods, commodities and small luxuries flowed into Delaware from places as close as Middletown, Annapolis, and Philadelphia; from Saratoga Springs, New York, and Ulm, Minnesota; from Great Britain, and as far away as Japan. They could be purchased via mail order or bought in local stores. Some, most, or all of these households provided for themselves when they could, raising a few chickens for eggs, tending a garden, and planting field crops. At the same time, they purchased foods, either fresh or packaged, from the local stores.

Amid this modern abundance, some traditions still appeared to hold sway. Yard space still retained the clutter of refuse close to the house that would have been familiar to people a century or more earlier. Of more profound importance, we appear to have evidence of spiritual practices with their antecedents in Africa, cultural traditions refined and renegotiated in the creation of African America.