

Public Archaeology

Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum



In 1996, JPPM began offering its Public Archaeology Program. Initially, we focused on King's Reach Quarter, a colonial house site where an unusual building erected on closely-spaced posts was uncovered. In 2000, we began excavations at the Sukeek's Cabin Site, which contains the ruins of a 19th century house once occupied by African-Americans. Working with members of the Gross family, descendants of the cabin's original inhabitants, we carefully excavated this pristine site, looking for the traces of past life there.

In 2002, we moved our efforts to the area that formed the heart of the Smith plantation during the first half of the 18th century. Richard Smith Jr., a militia captain and Surveyor General for the colony, built a house here in the early 1700s, which was later occupied by his son Walter Smith, a delegate to the Maryland Assembly.

...this Deponent now stands where there was the appearance of an old Ditch [where] Mr. Walter Smiths Pasture fence formerly went... Deposition of Benjamin Mackall, 1772

Our investigations have been aided by a plat of the plantation that was drawn in the 1770s for a court case. The plat shows the locations of a number of buildings on the property. In addition, depositions taken during the case reveal other landscape features, such as fences and fields. The plat tells us that the area we are investigating contained the plantation owner's house, his storehouse and a detached kitchen, a quarter for enslaved workers, and barns. We also have detailed probate inventories taken in 1715 and 1749, which reveal the contents of each room in the main house. Using this historical information, the Public Archaeology Program is locating the buildings and will use them to learn more about life in Calvert County in the 1700s. Through archaeology, we have discovered that all but one wall of the Smith house washed into the Patuxent River long ago. We know that the kitchen had a central chimney with two large fireplaces. And we believe that a stable once stood next to the slave quarter, but was gone by the time the plat was drawn. This is based on the discovery of the remains of a large building, erected on wooden posts, which contained numerous horse-related artifacts, like stirrups, spurs, and bridle bits. Future excavations will try to learn more about the appearance of these buildings, so we can eventually reconstruct one or more of them.

...this Deponent now standing at a place where there is some appearance of an Old Building and a Old Well... that] was the property of the Plaintiffs great Grandfather... Deposition of Roger Johnson, 1773

...ye Dwelling House wherin the Plaintiff's Grandfather lived; on ye Gable end of which is Set, in Brick ye following Figures...1711. Information from the 1773 Plat key, giving the year Richard Smith, Jr. built his house.

Click on images below to see larger version of image.



1773 plat of the area that became Jefferson Patterson Park



Plat detail showing area where Public Archeology will take place

Excerpts from Richard Smith's 1715 Inventory and Walter Smith's 1749 Inventory.

Richard Smith 1715 Inventory

In the Porch Chamber

- 1 Chest of Drawers
- 1 Table
- 4 old Chairs
- A Small Looking Glass
- A Picture

In the Parlour Chamber

- A feather bed and Furniture
- 1 Cupboard
- 1 Chest
- 5 old Chairs
- One Looking Glass

In the Hall Chamber

- One old Flock bed and Furniture
- One old Feather bed and Furniture
- One old Chest of Drawers
- Two old Trunks and one Chest
- 4 old Chairs
- 2 old pictures

Walter Smith 1749 Inventory

Porch Chamber

- 2 feather bed and furniture
- 1 Table Looking Glass & Chair

Parlor Chamber

- 1 feather bed and furniture
- 1 ditto very old
- 6 Chairs 1 Table and Looking Glass

Plank Hall Chamber

- 3 feather beds and furniture
- 3 Chests Drawers 5 Chests
- 6 Chairs 1 Table and 1 Box



X-ray of an iron fireback found at site, showing an eagle motif decoration



Indian artifacts found with the fireback in a trash pit

Funding for the 2012 JPPM Public Archaeology Program is provided by the Marpat Foundation and by an anonymous donation. Past sponsors include the Maryland Humanities Council, the Marpat Foundation, the Calvert County Board of Commissioners, Baltimore Gas & Electric Company, Black and Decker Corporation, the Eugene Chaney Foundation, and the Friends of Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum, Inc.