

SUMMER 2015

Preservation Matters

Celebrating Charles County's Historic Places



CHARLES COUNTY GOVERNMENT
Planning & Growth Management
www.CharlesCountyMD.gov



EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF
PLANNING & GROWTH
MANAGEMENT

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Mission Statement – The mission of Charles County Government is to provide our citizens the highest quality service possible in a timely, efficient, and courteous manner. To achieve this goal, our government must be operated in an open and accessible atmosphere, be based on comprehensive long- and short-term planning, and have an appropriate managerial organization tempered by fiscal responsibility. We support and encourage efforts to grow a diverse workplace.

Vision Statement – Charles County is a place where all people thrive and businesses grow and prosper; where the preservation of our heritage and environment is paramount; where government services to its citizens are provided at the highest level of excellence; and where the quality of life is the best in the nation.

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Preservation Matters

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A Planning & Growth Management Publication

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Be a part of the news...

Would you like to be featured in
an upcoming issue of the Historic
Preservation newsletter?

Please call Beth Groth at
301-645-0684, or send an email to
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**THIS
PLACE
MATTERS**

Every single person in the country has places that are important to them...

Places they care about. Places that matter. Charles County is joining the National Trust for Historic Preservation by participating in the This Place Matters Program.

Get Started Today! It's simple...

- 1** Contact our office to pick up the This Place Matters sign, or download and print at SavingPlaces.org/ThisPlaceMatters.
- 2** Take a photo with the sign at the places that matter most to you.
- 3** Share your photos with us and online with hashtag [#ThisPlaceMatters](https://www.instagram.com/ThisPlaceMatters).
- 4** Look for your photo in the National Trust gallery, and stay tuned to [@SavingPlaces](https://www.instagram.com/SavingPlaces) on Instagram and Twitter as we spotlight our favorites.

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ON THE TRAIL OF AN ASSASSIN

A Journey to Rich Hill

Dave Taylor & Cathy Thompson

During the wee morning hours of April 16, 1865, two men and their guide approached the door of a darkened, Charles County, Maryland home called Rich Hill. “Not having a bell,” one of it’s sleeping occupants later recalled, the door was, “surmounted with a brass knocker’.” One of the three men on horseback, under the cover of darkness, reached out a hand and grasped the brass tool. He raised it upwards and, for the briefest period of time, the knocker was silently suspended in the air. In a fraction of a second, the handle would fall; striking the metal plate beneath it and “in the stillness of night the sound from this” would resound, “with great distinctiveness.” The silence of the night would be shattered and the lives of the family sleeping within the house’s walls would be changed forever. History was knocking at the door of Rich Hill and its harbingers were John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln, and David E. Herold, his accomplice.

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David Taylor portraying John Wilkes Booth for an audience of hundreds over the course of the Lincoln 150th anniversary weekend. Taylor is an accomplished historian and creator of the popular blog www.BoothieBarn.com.

Preservation along the John Wilkes Booth Trail – Rich Hill Historic Site

After leaving Dr. Samuel A. Mudd's house on April 15, 1865, John Wilkes Booth and his accomplice, David E. Herold, avoided Zekiah Swamp and made a wide arc around the village of Bryantown. Unsure of their surroundings, they soon enlisted the aid of a guide, Oswell Swann, who led them across the swamp to Rich Hill, the home of Samuel Cox. They arrived there shortly after midnight on April 16. According to Swann, Cox admitted the pair to the house where they remained "three or four hours." However, Cox later denied that they came into the house, and a young servant girl subsequently supported his testimony. Nevertheless, Cox did arrange to conceal the pair in a nearby pine thicket for several days, where they received food, newspapers, and information.



Many years after the tenure of the Cox heirs, Rich Hill began to suffer from neglect. Recently, it was acquired by the Charles County Commissioners in hopes of preserving this infamous chapter of Charles County's heritage. Historians and archaeologists are now working to plan for the site's preservation and understand the historic farm as it appeared in 1865.

The rescue of Rich Hill represents several years of work by the Historical Society of Charles County who mobilized the acquisition in preparation of the Civil War Sesquicentennial.

"It is important to preserve this part of the John Wilkes Booth Escape Trail," Mary Pat Berry, president of the Historical Society of Charles County commented. Prior to the county's obtaining possession of the property, the Rich Hill Historic Site was part of a 121-acre residential subdivision. The house today is located on a 2.4 acre lot

gifted to the county in 2014. Not only does the county plan to restore the home but hopes to expand the size of the property as well.

To kick-start preservation efforts, a state bond bill of \$750,000 was secured with the support of Senator Mike Miller. Charles County recently contracted with Ottery Group, who have extensive experience in working with local governments to develop sound preservation strategies for historic properties under their care. Preliminary documentation and a structural assessment were initiated in April 2015. The first phase of the site rehabilitation will be to demolish 1970's-era interior finishes in order to assess the condition of the historic frame.

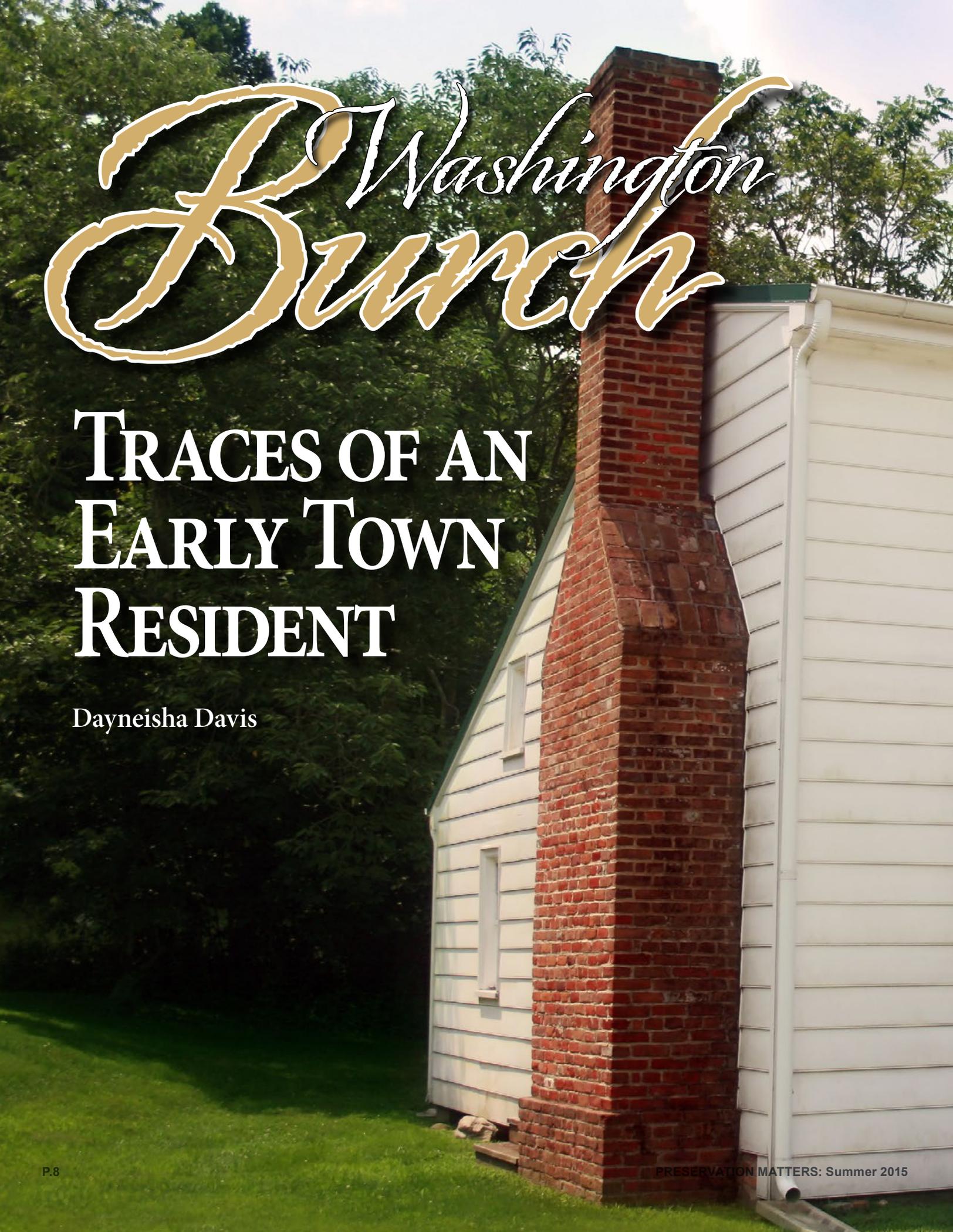
According to architectural historian and consultant David Berg, "the Ottery Group is genuinely excited to assist in the preservation of Rich Hill. Now that we have determined that the house is structurally stable, we have begun to look at both the documentary and physical evidence to determine the construction and appearance of the house as it existed both during Booth's time and in the eighteenth century. These investigations will enable us to make informed recommendations for the preservation and interpretation of this important historic resource for future generations."

Research is also underway to understand the 1865 appearance of the property. As part of the 150th anniversary of President Lincoln's death, archaeologists explored the remnants of the outbuildings as they appear in the historic photo below. These investigations will inform future decisions about site development and preservation. Archaeological and historical investigations will continue as plans move forward to rehabilitate this property. Part of the county's research will be to speak to family members or persons who may remember the property and its history.



RICH HILL HISTORIC SITE





Washington **Bunch**

TRACES OF AN EARLY TOWN RESIDENT

Dayneisha Davis

Continued on next page 



Washington Burch

Continued from previous page.

Having been a tour guide for a few years, I know how easy it is to fall in love with the stories and people of an historic town and with a town as special as Port Tobacco.

I am sure that after one visit you will fall in love as I did. Three days out of the week I feel privileged to walk the same path as so many important people before me and also to introduce the story of one of my favorite Port Tobacco residents, Washington Burch.

In Port Tobacco, you will find homes that were built as early as the mid-18th century, and that sheltered some of Charles County's most notable residents.

Washington Burch used to live in a small house on the south side of the village that Charles County residents refer to as the Catslide House or more appropriately, Burch House. The Burch House, originally built in the mid to late 18th century, is one of few surviving colonial buildings in Port Tobacco. Because it appears much as it did in the late 19th century, it is a great place to tell stories about some of Port Tobacco's lesser known residents and what life may have been like in the town after the Civil War.

Today, we do not know a great deal about Washington Burch but we are learning more through an examination of the few documents and artifacts he left behind. Washington Burch was an African American who was a resident of Port Tobacco after the Civil War. In the 1880 census he was

living with wife Henrietta and daughter Jane. In 1870, Burch became a registered voter at age 35. He purchased his house in 1874, just nine years after the Emancipation Proclamation was formed and was also able to serve as the African American representative on a committee to attend to voter registration lists in 1875. He became a Delegate of the State for the District Republicans Convention and in 1868, Burch along with other African American men of the community founded a school for African American children.

Washington Burch was an African American in Port Tobacco that went from a slave to an emancipated citizen of Maryland and to become a prominent member in his community. Through these scattered references we can only begin to glimpse the man but, I believe Washington Burch is just one example of someone who did all he could to remain involved in his community, nurture young minds, and encourage his people to celebrate their new freedom.



THE BURCH HOUSE IS ONE OF 14 PROPERTIES IN CHARLES COUNTY PROTECTED BY A PRESERVATION EASEMENT.

In 1957, the Society for the Restoration of Port Tobacco purchased the Burch House and sought to restore the historic integrity. In 2006, a new wing was added to the house which required extensive archaeological excavation in the area impacted by construction.

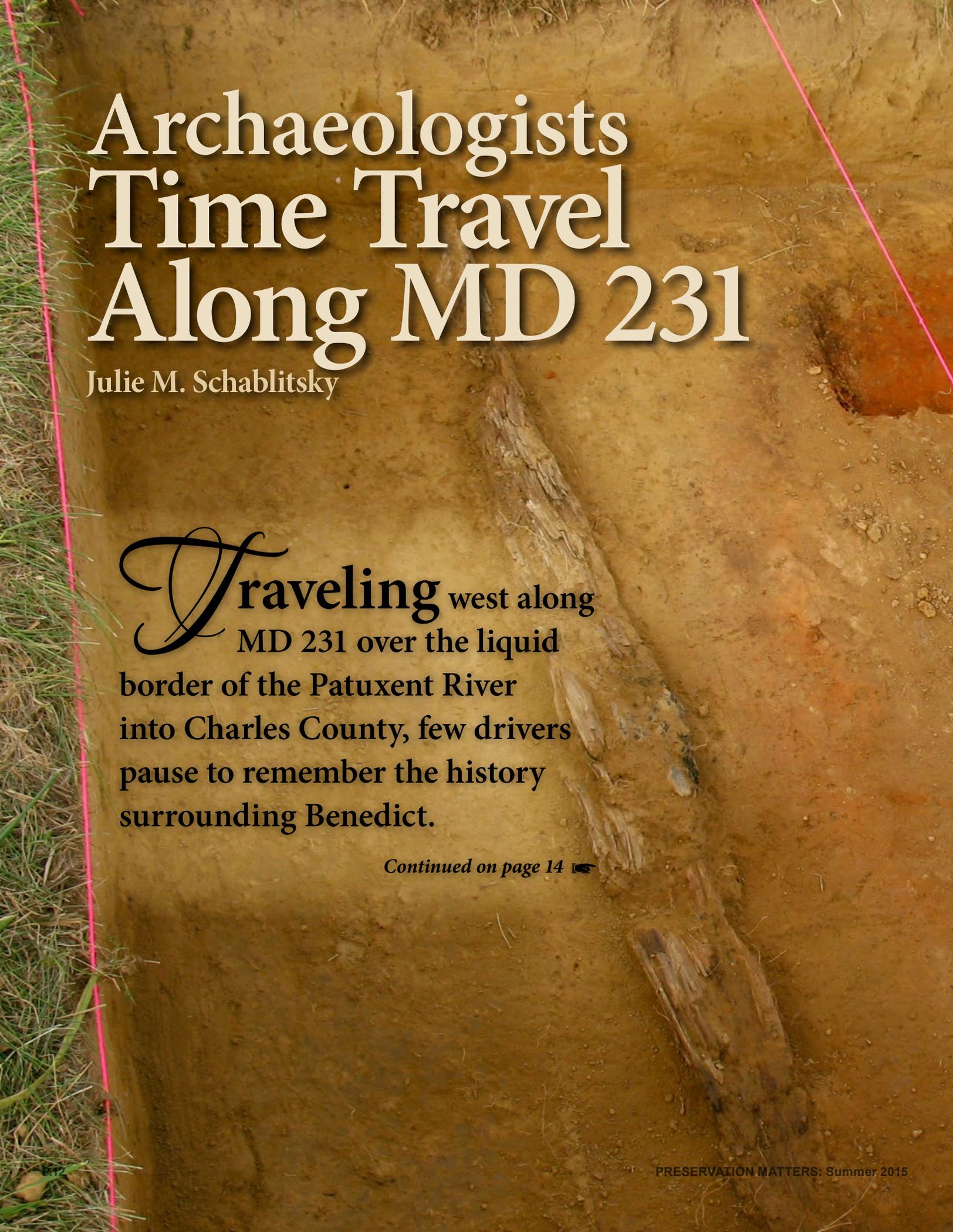
Gibb Archeological Consulting completed the data recovery efforts which unearthed extensive information on the era of Washington Burch as well as the property's 17th and 18th century occupation. The Charles County Archaeological Society of Maryland in cooperation with Dr. Gibb, Esther Read, the county's contract archaeologist, Port Tobacco Historic District staff and the Society for the Restoration of Port Tobacco are currently working on an exhibit entitled "The Archaeology of Washington Burch."

The house is part of the Port Tobacco village tour. For more information, please call 301-392-3418.

Burch House as it appeared in 1945.

The identity of the woman in the picture is currently unknown but may be a member of the Simms family and possibly a descendant of Washington Burch.





Archaeologists Time Travel Along MD 231

Julie M. Schablitsky

Traveling west along MD 231 over the liquid border of the Patuxent River into Charles County, few drivers pause to remember the history surrounding Benedict.

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MD ROUTE 231

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Admittedly, it is no easy task

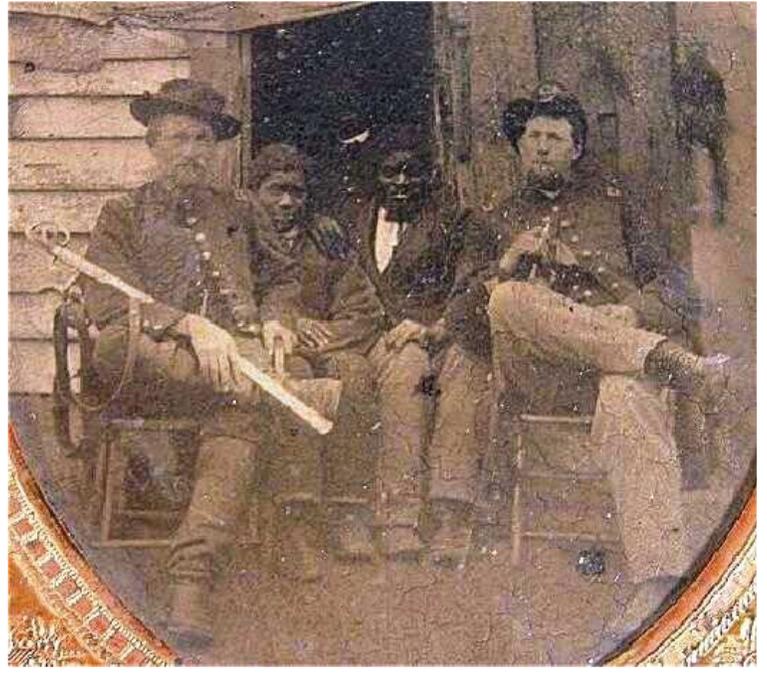
to imagine a 200-year-old British ship anchored in the river or African American Civil War soldiers marching along the highway.

But, time travel is possible here. Recent archaeological discoveries have now made it easier for you to not only see the manifestations of the past, but to learn something about the people who once called this place home.

Between 2011 and 2013, Maryland State Highway Administration archaeologists dug along MD 231 in an effort to better understand the people who lived here and the historical events that took place along this transportation landscape. As part of the former governor's bicentennial commemoration of the War of 1812 and state highway's stewardship efforts, state archaeologists attempted to search for the August 1814 British encampment rumored to be on the "slopes of the hill above Benedict." Fifty years later, between October 1863 and March 1864, the Union army used this same spot as a Civil War training camp for liberated African Americans. Camp Stanton (named after Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton) trained between 1,500-2,500 men who formed four Colored Infantry Regiments, the 7th, 9th, 19th and several companies of the 30th.

Since soldiers were more likely to lose metal fasteners from their uniforms than to break a fancy porcelain teacup, archaeologists used metal detectors to search for the camps. The detectors swept across pastures of cut grass and scanned plowed fields for 19th century lead bullets and brass buttons.

After a thorough survey of the fields and highway right of way, archaeologists collected enough mid-19th century military artifacts to confirm that they rediscovered Camp Stanton. They could not say the same about the War of 1812 site. The British appeared to have been clean campers. Archaeologists only recovered a handful of brass buttons and .69 caliber lead shot. This larger ammunition is associated with the "Brown Bess," the preferred British musket. The history detectives would have to be satisfied with these meager bits of lead and brass—not enough



evidence to determine positions of the men, but plenty to confirm the historic map was accurate and that the British passed through the neighborhood.

The Civil War artifact assemblage was also a bit lighter than it should have been. Over the years, relic collectors had vacuumed up hundreds of Minie balls (Civil War-era bullets), brass buttons, hooks and buckles, among other personal objects that belonged to the soldiers. The paucity of physical evidence made piecing together the past a challenging proposition; the archaeologists knew the story of these men of war would never be as complete as it could have been. Despite realizing their history book would be missing pages, they continued their search. In some spots, they found the soils were deep and had more artifacts than other areas. Here, is where they decided to open up the earth.

After digging almost two feet deep, the archaeologists exposed a 150-year old living surface – and they could not believe their eyes. Ghostly apparitions of tents and fire hearths rose from the hard clay soil. One could make out faint outlines of four, 6 x 8 feet structures with a semi-circle of reddened clay on one end – the fire hearths. A fifth tent structure was also found near the highway. Based on the archaeology and historical accounts, we know these tents included a partial wooden frame with white canvas stretched up the sides and across the top to form the roof. The eastern ends of the tents supported a fire hearth with

a wattle and daub-like chimney crowned with a barrel. The hearths not only warmed the men, but the fires were likely used to cook and prepare food gathered outside of their daily rations. One of the tents even had a small collection of oyster shells, fragments of durable white teaware from England, and aqua glass next to the hearth. Another dwelling had a percussion cap ground into the floor. Camp Stanton was large and stretched at least 500 feet north to south. Imagine hundreds of tents, smokey fires, and the noise of a few thousand men drilling, singing, and living right next to Benedict. When the troops mustered out in the spring of 1864 the camp was burned to the ground.

The Other Side

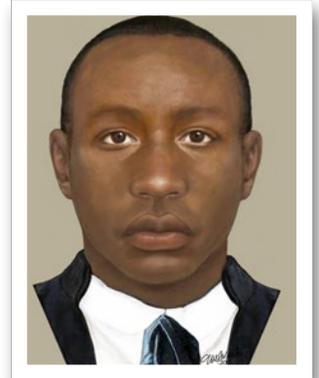
After discovering the huts of the African American Civil War training camp, archaeologists found themselves pulled to the north side of MD 231. At the end of June 2012, a majestic oak tree at Serenity Farm was pulled up by the roots and landed on a small home. The occupant survived, but her home did not. One of the property owners, Franklin Robinson Jr., asked the archaeologists to examine the deep hole left by the uprooted tree. At this time, they learned that a human skull and other bones were inadvertently discovered here a decade earlier during installation of a water line. The archaeologists took these bones to the Smithsonian Institution for identification.

Physical anthropologist Doug Owsley determined the skull belonged to someone of African descent that lived over 150 years ago. Could these human remains found ten years earlier be part of a slave cemetery? Since it was possible additional graves could be inadvertently disturbed in the future, they consulted the African American Heritage Society of Charles County to find out if they supported further research into the site. The Society, including Mary Louise Webb, Dorothea Smith, and Jeanette Camel among others, wanted to know who these ancestors were and how they lived. Webb wanted to ensure that anyone buried here be remembered through a ceremony and markers.

After gathering permits and creating a research plan, archaeologists stripped back the topsoil. Here, they found a collection of graves. The subtle soil change between the shafts and surrounding soil made it possible

to identify 23 burials without disturbing the interred. Some of the rectangles were large, and some were very small. The size of the burials suggested there were nine adults, six children, and eight infants. Since the cemetery did not need to be moved, only 13 of the 23 burials were excavated and then examined by physical anthropologists. After dating coffin nails and clothing buttons, archaeologists believe the burials date between circa 1790 and circa 1810. During this time, the property was owned by Henry Arundel Smith and these people were enslaved by his family. The United States federal census of 1800 enumerated Smith with 24 slaves.

Careful and respectful excavation of the remains showed they were buried in their clothing and/or wrapped in shrouds fastened with brass pins at the side of the face. Each person, including the infants, had a pine coffin custom made



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MD ROUTE 231

Continued from page 15.

for them. Grave shafts were dug as rectangles, but once a certain depth was reached, the hole was reduced to the size of the coffin. After the coffins were lowered into the grave, a series of wooden slats were placed on the dirt ledge (left from narrowing the hole), thereby creating a vault over the coffin.

All of the burials excavated were oriented with the head to the west and feet to the east, except for Burial 20, the 30 to 35-year-old man who was accidentally disturbed a decade earlier. Graves placed out of an east-west orientation generally reflected a desire to deny the person spiritual grace. People who were killed violently or the deaths of murderers, suicides, or those with spiteful personalities were traditionally denied a proper burial in West African cultures. If the man in Burial 20 had somehow wronged his community in life, he certainly redeemed himself in death. If it were not for the discovery of his skull, this burial ground would have remained lost.

Physical anthropologists studied what remained of the ancestors. Their bones tell of their hard work and that some suffered vitamin deficiencies and disease during their childhood. The body of a 25 to 34-year-old man was found with his lower legs splayed out, the tell tale sign of rickets, a Vitamin D deficiency. Throughout his life, he walked with difficulty.

DNA and isotope samples were collected to help determine the sex of the slaves, but to also trace their lineage. At this time, DNA recovery of the ancestry has not been successful—the genetic material is too degraded to be amplified with current techniques. The isotope results for Burial 20, however, are back from the laboratory. We know this man was born in the United States rather than Africa or another country. Scientists made this determination by the carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen levels found preserved in his bone. Here, they found a diet heavy on corn with moderate amounts of meat. The remaining results of the isotopes from nine other burials are expected back this summer.

Another goal of this project was to try and virtually reconstruct the faces of the individuals. Burial 13, a 25 to 29-year-old man, was the only individual with intact facial bones. His skull was carefully packaged in foam and sent to Baltimore County Police detective and artist Eve Grant. Archaeologists recovered pewter and brass buttons, suggesting he was buried with a waistcoat and likely worked as a house servant. Detective Grant took measurements of the skull and studied clothing from the period. Based on the cranium and facial bones, she created a likeness of a man who lived over 200 years ago.

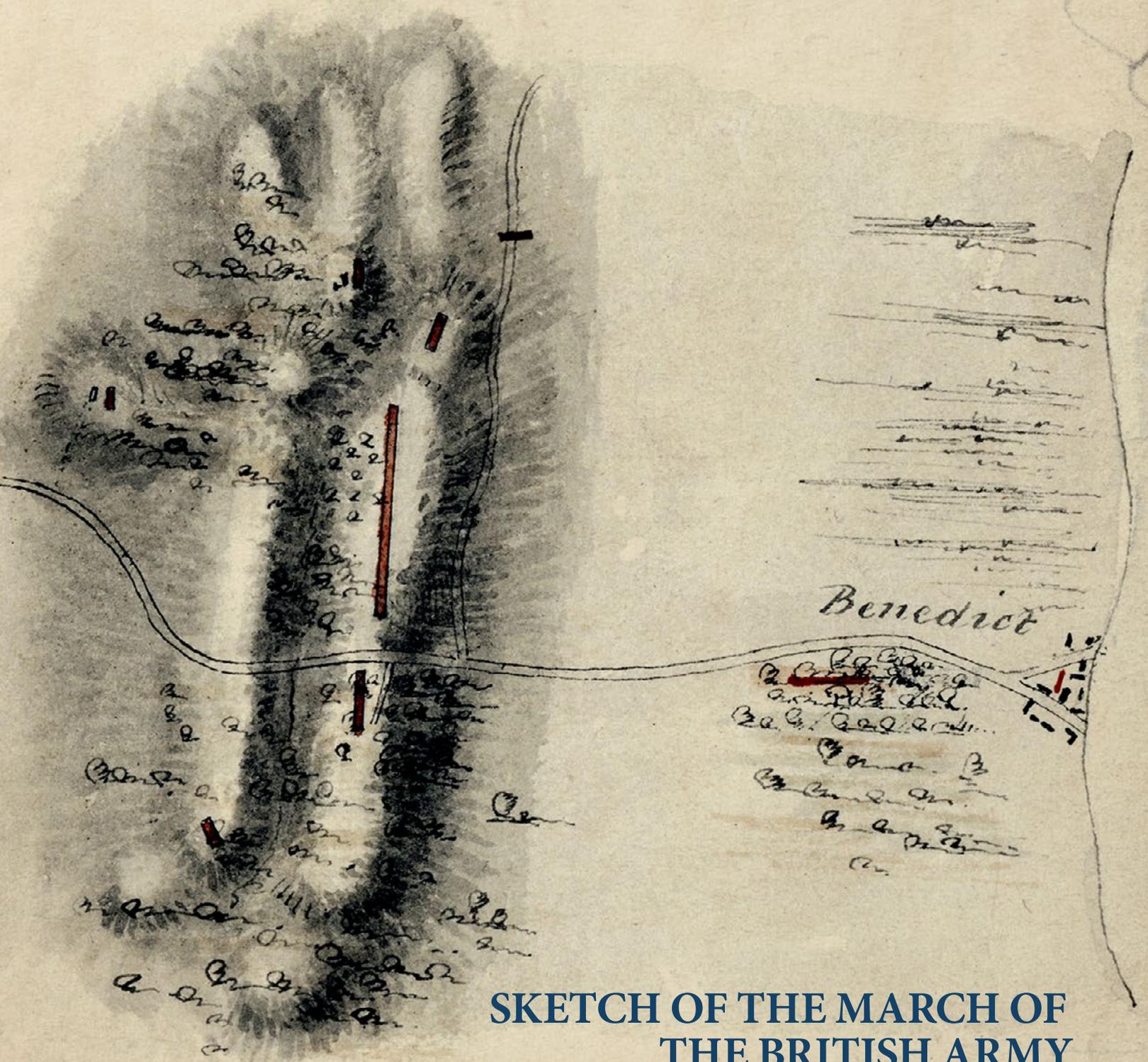
Within three months of being removed from the burial ground, the bones of the ancestors were studied by Dana Kollmann at Towson University and placed back into their original graves with a proper ceremony. During this time, the archaeologists, the Robinson family, and the African American community reflected back to life in Maryland over 200 years ago – fields were planted in tobacco, dirt paths and roads connected communities, and Maryland actively participated in a slave society. Many wondered what the enslaved African Americans living here thought about Camp Stanton just across the road. Did some of the men who labored in these tobacco fields join the colored troops?

This burial place is no longer forgotten. The graves are marked with red granite headstones and the cemetery is covered in a carpet of wildflowers. The Serenity Farm Burial Ground is the oldest slave cemetery in Charles County and one of the oldest known slave cemeteries in Maryland. It is a sacred place, and one where people can come to remember their ancestors.

So, the next time you drive along MD 231 in Charles County near the Patuxent River, think back to those who labored in the tobacco fields and the men of war who fought for freedom. A passing thought as you drive on by is all that is necessary to acknowledge those who created the county you live in today.



Position at A



SKETCH OF THE MARCH OF THE BRITISH ARMY

19th to the 29th of August 1814

Beinecke Rare Book and
Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Historic Preservation

IN CHARLES COUNTY

2015 Preservation Awards Event

The Charles County Historic Preservation Commission hosted a Preservation Reception and Awards Ceremony on Saturday, May 9, 2015, at Mount Aventine in Chapman State Park (3452 Ferry Place, Indian Head).

As part of this event, the commission announced the 2014 Charles County Preservation Award winners. Kay Volman, John F. Radtke, Father Thomas Clifford, S.J., and the Friends of Chapman State Park were preservation award recipients.

The Historic Preservation Award is presented annually to an eligible individual, business, organization, or project that deserves recognition for outstanding achievements in historic preservation. Awards are presented in two categories – Preservation Projects and Preservation Service.

The Preservation Service Award recognizes outstanding achievement in and support for furthering the aims of historic preservation in Charles County, including: education, research, development, planning, advocacy, and community leadership.

The Preservation Project Award recognizes excellence in the preservation and restoration of historic buildings, as well as the adaptive reuse of historic structures.

The featured guest speaker, Mr. Jeff Allenby, is director of Conservation Innovation at the Chesapeake Conservancy. His team explores new ways to use technology in historic resource and cultural landscape identification and conservation. The Conservancy has been leading conservation efforts associated with the Mount Vernon Viewshed, the Captain John Smith Trail, and other initiatives along the Potomac River.

For more information on Historic Landmark Designation, Historic Area Work Permit Applications, and the Historic Preservation Commission, please call 301-645-0684 or email GrothB@CharlesCountyMD.gov.



Award Recipients

Kay Volman received a Preservation Service Award for her lifelong dedication to preservation in Charles County.

A Preservation Project Award was awarded to **John F. Radtke** (craftsman; Boy Scouts of America Troop 424), and **Father Thomas Clifford, S.J.**, for their efforts to restore the exterior of St. Thomas Manor's Historic Servants' Quarters and Cooks' Kitchen, which was Mr. Radtke's Eagle Scout Project.

The **Friends of Chapman State Park** were recognized with a Preservation Project Award for their work to restore Mount Aventine in Chapman State Park.



Pictured from left to right, starting in front row:

1st Row: Michael Fleming, Bob Lukinic, Linda Dyson, Tom Radtke, Sandee Radtke, Father Thomas Clifford, S.J.

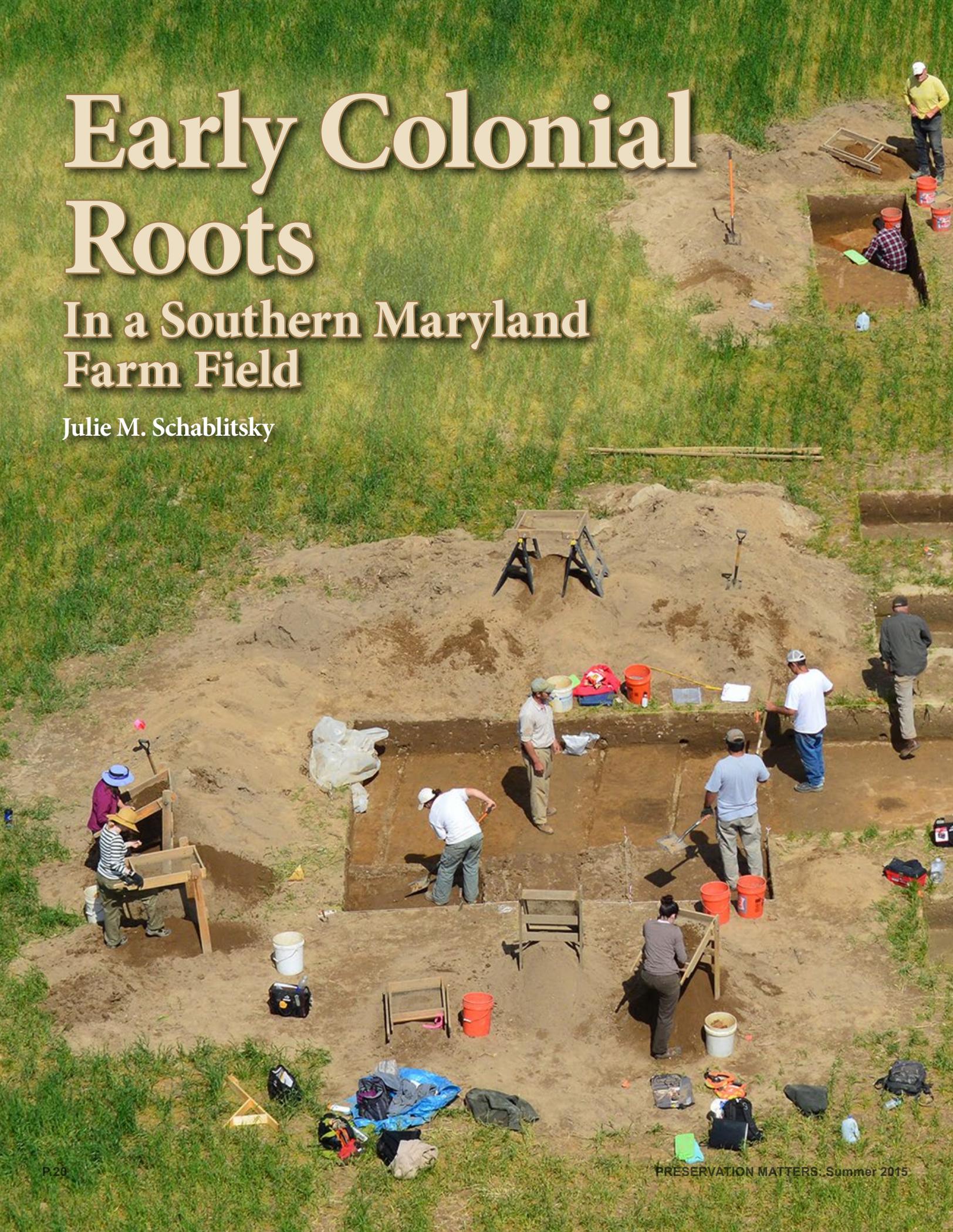
2nd Row: Alvin Smith, Tina Lohr, Franklin Robinson, Jr., Kay Volman, Beth Groth, Cathy Thompson

3rd Row: Nicole Tompkins and daughter Joleen, Elizabeth Keller, Wayne McBain, Commissioner President Murphy, Commissioner Ken Robinson

Early Colonial Roots

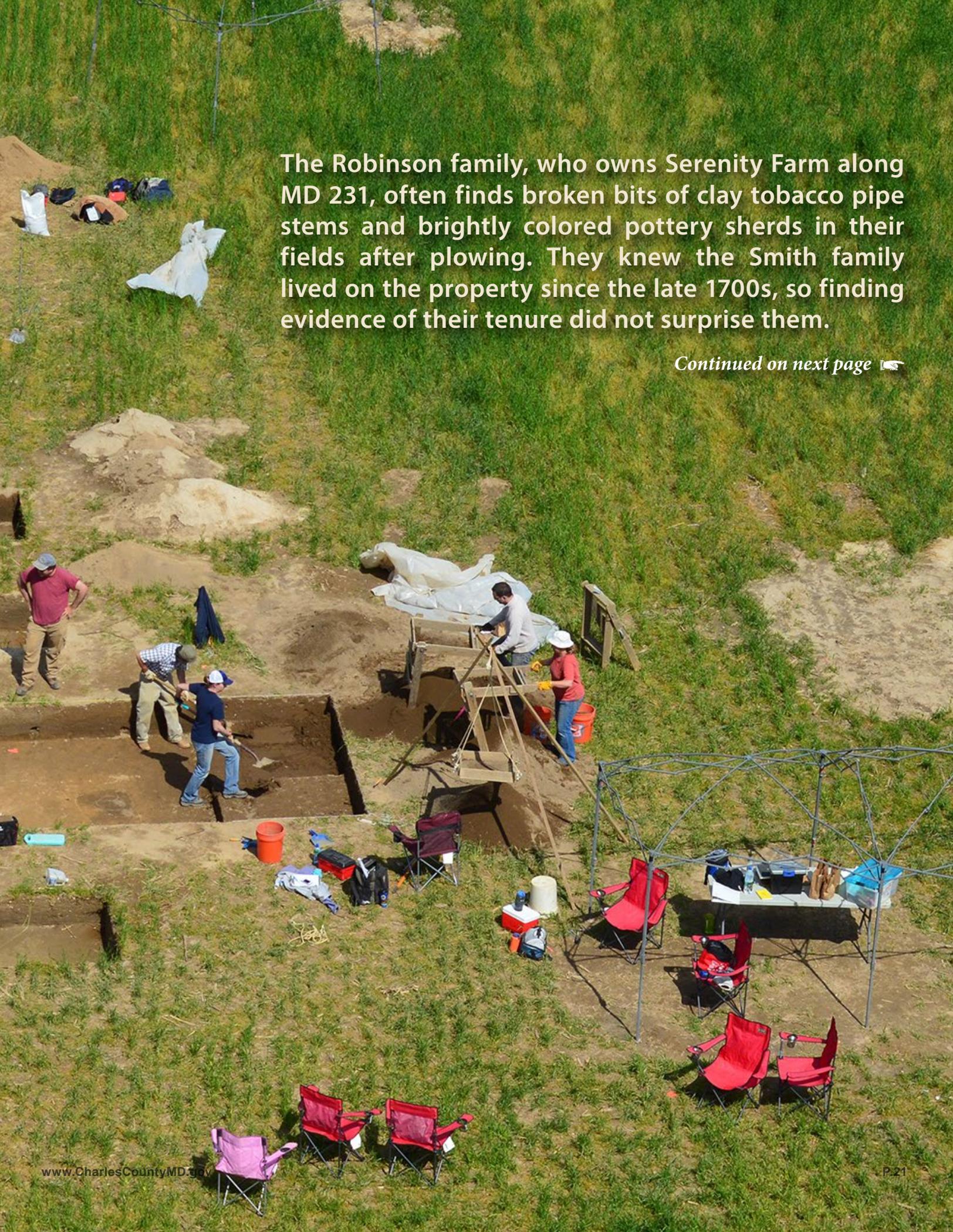
In a Southern Maryland Farm Field

Julie M. Schablitsky



The Robinson family, who owns Serenity Farm along MD 231, often finds broken bits of clay tobacco pipe stems and brightly colored pottery sherds in their fields after plowing. They knew the Smith family lived on the property since the late 1700s, so finding evidence of their tenure did not surprise them.

Continued on next page 



COLONIAL ROOTS

Continued from previous page.

When Maryland State Highway Administration archaeologists were searching for evidence of the War of 1812 British camp along MD 231, these small finds were shared with them. The scientists were so intrigued, they asked to be shown where the artifacts were found and requested permission to dig.

Since the ground surface visibility was poor, archaeologists dug a series of small holes in the field in a grid pattern looking for similar artifacts. Immediately, they encountered pieces of pottery from Germany, thick glazed ceramics from England, and hand wrought nails. Everything they found suggested a 17th century colonial site—an early site and rare discovery in Maryland.

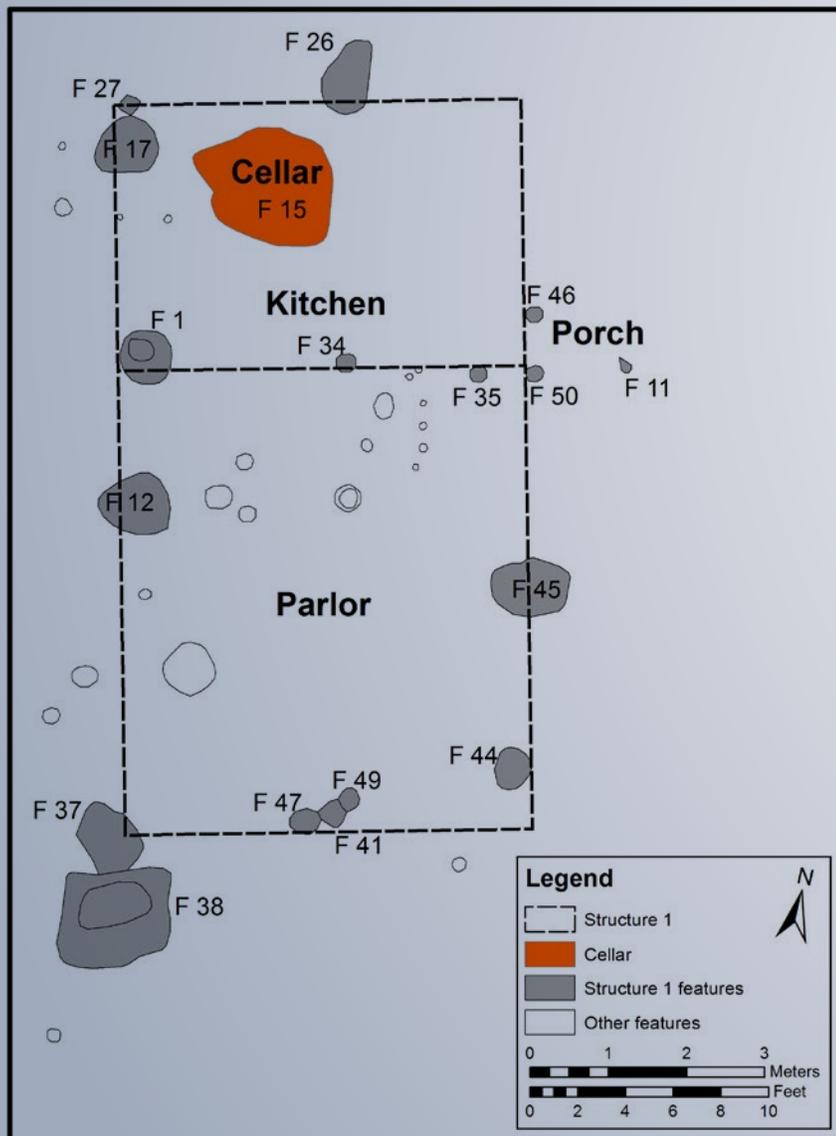
Since the archaeologists realized they had found an important historic site, they wanted to find out who lived here and how the place was used over time. The nearness of the site to the Patuxent River was not surprising. Rivers functioned much like our modern day highways, moving goods and people from one place to the next. The site was situated on a slight rise about one half mile west of the river and below the hills of Benedict.

In order to focus on the exact location of past buildings and other related features, archaeologists brought out a geophysicist, Dr. Tim Horsley, to survey the area with his ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and magnetometer. GPR works by emitting small radar pulses through the ground.

When the pulses hit something, they bounce back and are caught by the machine. The differences in the subsurface soil can reveal whether there are buried pits, ditches, or other features unique to the surrounding area. A magnetometer works like a giant metal detector that searches for variations in the magnetic properties of soil. These magnetic changes can be created by concentrations of metal artifacts or from burned features such as fire hearths.

When the remote sensing survey was completed, archaeologists had a map showing them a large circular concentration of metal and a long linear feature. Instead of excavating across the field hoping they could find something, the scientists now had a map that directed their excavations to two locations likely to provide information about the site.

After weeks of excavating under the sun, the archaeologists had exposed a large area in the middle of the open field. Here, they found patterns of old post molds that were once part of a post-in ground home measuring 16 feet, east to west, and 30 feet north to south. A 4 foot deep boundary ditch cut south east of the site. In addition, the excavators collected thousands of artifacts that dated between the 1650s and circa 1710.



The variety of ceramics and glass suggest this plantation received expensive goods from the Netherlands, Germany, China, Italy, England, and France. In addition to such exotic products, the occupants also traded for locally made items such as redware vessels and tobacco pipes made from swirled pink and white clays. The faunal (animal bone) collection was quite sparse across the site within the plowed soil; however, the ditch held a well preserved collection of animal bones including: pig, cow, goat, unidentified bird, horse, small dog, a juvenile gray fox, eastern box turtle, and black drum. The northern part of the same boundary ditch had fewer, but similar faunal remains. All of the animal remains likely represent food consumption by the occupants; the likely exclusion would be dog and horse.

The landing for receiving shipboard goods would have been on the Patuxent River. Somewhere between Benedict and Smith Creek cargo would have been off loaded and possibly transported here or to a nearby factor. Smaller boats laden with goods may have even traveled up Smith

Creek. It is not certain whether the building discovered at the archaeological site also served as a factor (distribution location for goods) in addition to a plantation.

A thorough search through the Maryland State Archives revealed Maryland Provincial Court Land Records from 1707. This document mentions two occupations on the parcel: one plantation where Michael Swift “formerly” lived and a plantation “which Jenkins now dwells upon.” Swift died in 1694 and his probate shows over 4,600 pounds sterling in goods and chattels went to his daughters, Eliza and Mary, and his wife, Margaret.

By 1712, Richard Jenkins has passed, but his will mentions he lived with three orphans and a “beloved” female friend. His inventory shows one enslaved man of African descent and belongings valued at just over 96 pounds sterling. Based on the passing of Jenkins in 1712 and the approximate end date of our artifacts around 1710, it is probable that Jenkins was the last site occupant. The early ceramics and pipe stems suggest at least one other occupant prior to Jenkins lived here and possessed significant wealth.





Franklin A. Robinson, Jr.
*Chair, Historic Preservation
Commission*

My, How Time Flies.

As we move into our fifth year as a county-appointed board charged with preserving Charles County's irreplaceable historic assets, it's a good time to reflect on the progress made so far.

During our first year as a commission in 2011, we accomplished many things. We developed a county historic site application packet; instituted county-wide preservation awards for Preservation Service and Preservation Projects, as well as occasional Letters of Commendation for those who have in many ways aided preservation efforts within the county; and begun a yearly Preservation Reception. All this was done in addition to developing interpretive plans and brochures and keeping an eye on the revitalization plans for two of our historic towns, Benedict and Port Tobacco.

Completing our second year as a commission in 2012, we built on our prior accomplishments. We completed an interpretive plan for Maxwell Hall in Benedict, as well as the historic Benedict brochure. We continued our participation in revitalization plans for Benedict and Port Tobacco. We approved historic site designations for the Old Waldorf School and Bel Alton School, our first official county historic sites.

In 2013, we had the County Commissioners to thank for a major preservation-related victory in approving the county's purchase of Stagg Hall in Port Tobacco. This property, coupled with the previous purchases of Zekiah Fort and Maxwell Hall, moved the county positively forward in preserving historic sites important to the history of the county as well as the Southern Maryland region. The ongoing work at Port Tobacco to preserve and interpret the historic village is an amazing leap into the future and validation that Charles County does cherish its unique history and is working on ways to share that history with the broader public.

2014 was a year we commemorated the landing of the British Army at Benedict. The commission actively worked with many organizations to make it a year of awareness and education. The Commission sponsored talks in Benedict featuring Dr. Julie Schablitsky, Ralph Eshelman, George Howard Post, and Carol Cowherd. Each one focused on various aspects of the War of 1812 and how it manifested itself in Charles County. The year was capped with a gift to the County of historic Rich Hill, a stop along the John Wilkes Booth escape route.

Our county is blessed with numerous individuals and organizations dedicated to preservation and history. They have spent countless hours and funds preserving historical places, many having a unique historical setting that enhances the site. Historic sites may be found in the humblest barn, overgrown burial ground, well-preserved cabin, house, or place of business. As preservationists we not only care for historic structures and their contents, but what those structures represent, memories of people and events, ways of life that have passed, unique settings or architecture. These are the resources that help define who we are and they are dwindling year by year. The Charles County Historic Preservation Commission is one tool to ensure that our history is documented and protected.

Join Us!

In 2015, the Historic Preservation Commission will meet at the court house in the Historic Village of Port Tobacco on the following Mondays at 6 p.m.:

- September 21
- October 26
- November 9
- December 14

The public is welcome to attend.