



# Traces of Delaware's Past

## THE FAMILY FARM

### FARM SITES IN CENTRAL DELAWARE

Many of Delaware's farm sites have been discovered because of modern development arising from increased population and the need for new houses and roads. As this map shows, the locations of some of these farm sites cluster along the transportation corridors that cross the state. Our firsthand knowledge of the past, through archaeology, has been greatly expanded thanks to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 which requires state and federal agencies to examine what effects their undertakings will have on the undiscovered remains beneath our feet.



DELAWARE HAS BEEN FARMED since the arrival of the first Europeans in the 1600s. Its favorable climate, fertile soils, and coastal setting have made it ideal for farming. Over the course of three centuries, changes in the technologies of farming and the development of transportation routes to market farm produce have transformed Delaware's landscape.

### WHO WERE THE FARMERS IN DELAWARE'S PAST?

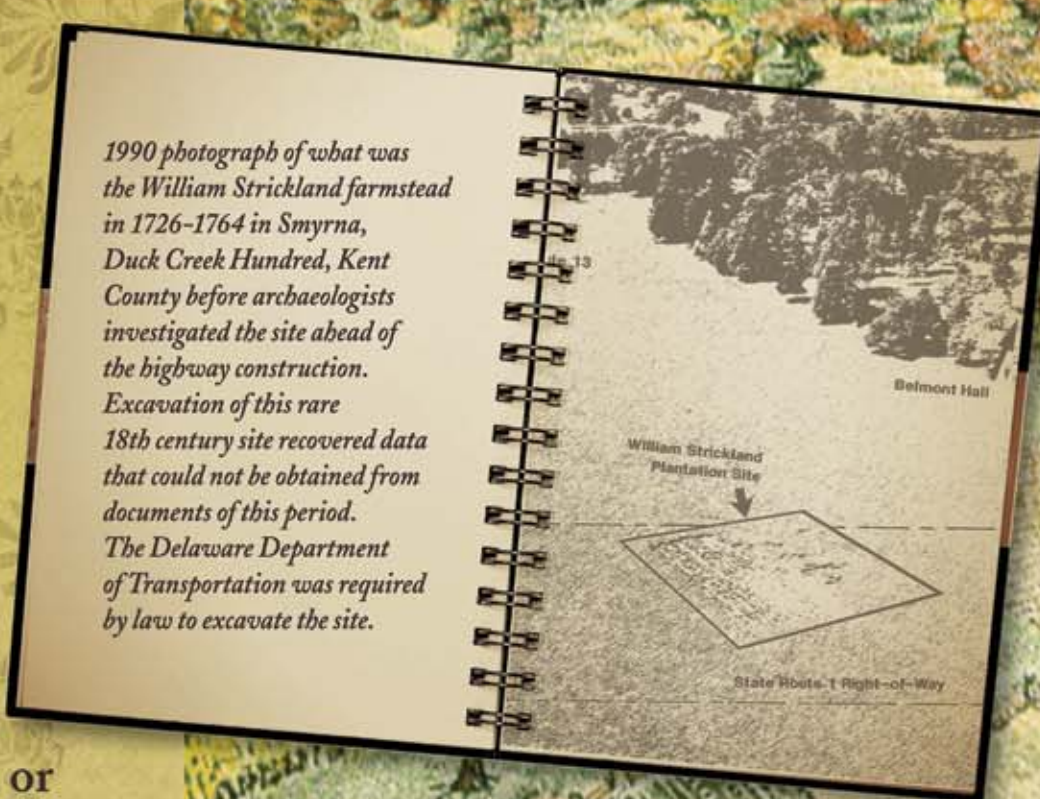
Most colonial Delawareans were farmers that came from Sweden, Holland, England, and Africa. These early farmers also included American Indians who adopted European ways and settlers who migrated from neighboring colonies. Throughout the 1700s and 1800s, there was a steady stream of immigrants from Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and Germany. Most farmers had large families who worked the farms, some with the help of indentured servants and one or two enslaved Africans. After the Civil War, free blacks and whites were hired as farm hands, often on a seasonal basis.

Today, the family farm has largely been replaced by commercial farming but the majority of land in Delaware is still farmed despite urban sprawl, the expansion of highways, and tourism.

### FARMS and FARM SITES

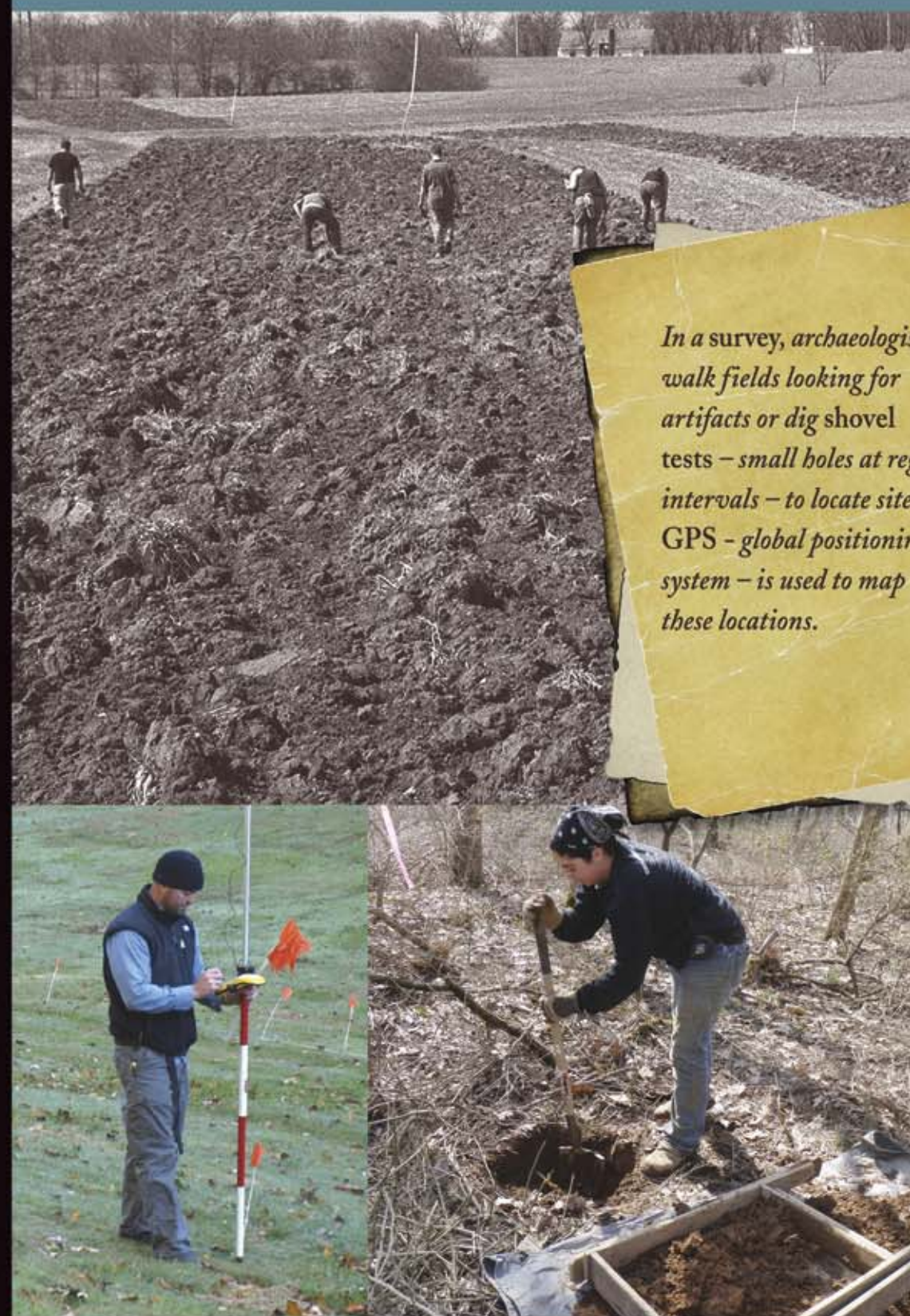
#### WHAT IS A FARM?

A farm is a tract of land that is cultivated for the purpose of raising crops and animals, most for food but some farms also grew tobacco and flax. It is the place where farmers, their families and help, live and work. It consists of one or more *dwellings* – houses – plus a number of specialized *outbuildings* that serve domestic and agricultural purposes. Outbuildings include barns, granaries, wagon or carriage houses, spring houses, ice houses, smoke houses, out houses or privies, sheds and animal pens. Associated with these buildings are yards, gardens, orchards, agricultural fields, and pastures. Dwellings on a farm may house the owners, or *tenants* who rent the farm, and farm hands. Many Delaware farms were occupied by tenants for at least part of their history.



William Strickland Plantation Site

### HOW DO ARCHAEOLOGISTS RECOGNIZE A FARM?



In a survey, archaeologists walk fields looking for artifacts or dig shovel tests – small holes at regular intervals – to locate sites. GPS – global positioning system – is used to map these locations.

**OVER TIME**, many farms were abandoned and eventually covered by earth. Building remains in combination with *artifacts* – objects that people used in daily life that were thrown away or lost – may form an archaeological site. Archaeologists use artifacts to figure out when a site was occupied, and what peoples' lives were like.

When a farm has completely disappeared from the landscape, old maps and written records such as deeds, tax assessments, property surveys, census records, wills and inventories provide clues about where to look. If no documentary information is available, archaeological excavation may still find evidence of a site.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL TECHNIQUES

When a site is found, archaeologists use many methods to identify and interpret its remains. While a *trowel* is the archaeologist's most recognizable tool, they also employ big equipment like backhoes to remove the upper, disturbed layers of a site. In cultivated fields, this is called the *plow zone* – the earth that has been churned around by the plow. After the plow zone has been removed, archaeologists skim the surface with shovels and trowels to expose soil discolorations that may indicate the presence of *features* – something that was made by people in the past that is too big or too fragile to take back to the laboratory for analysis. Foundation walls, wells, privies and trash pits are examples of features. Prior to digging, archaeologists lay out units across the site and excavate them layer by layer – *stratum*. The soil is screened through wire mesh to ensure that all artifacts are recovered. Archaeologists painstakingly photograph and draw each layer in order to create a thorough record of what they find.

To learn more about archaeological sites in Delaware, visit [www.archaeology.deldot.gov](http://www.archaeology.deldot.gov) or [www.history.delaware.gov](http://www.history.delaware.gov).



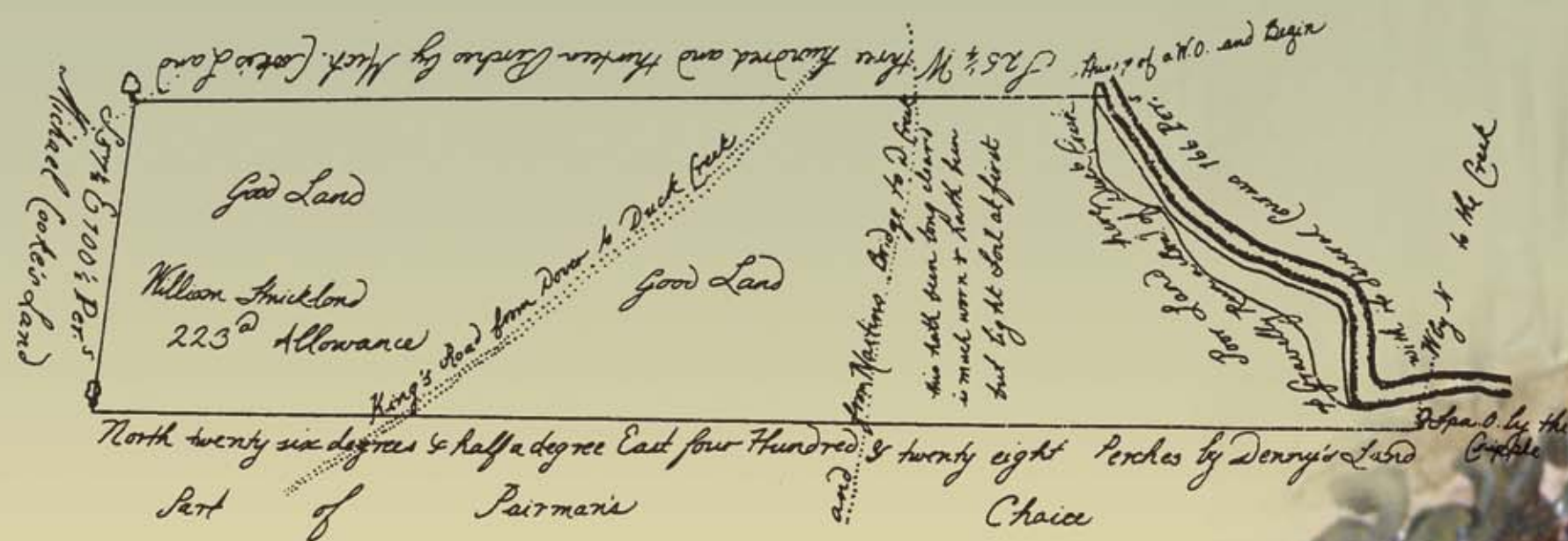


# Traces of Delaware's Past

## THE 18TH CENTURY FARM

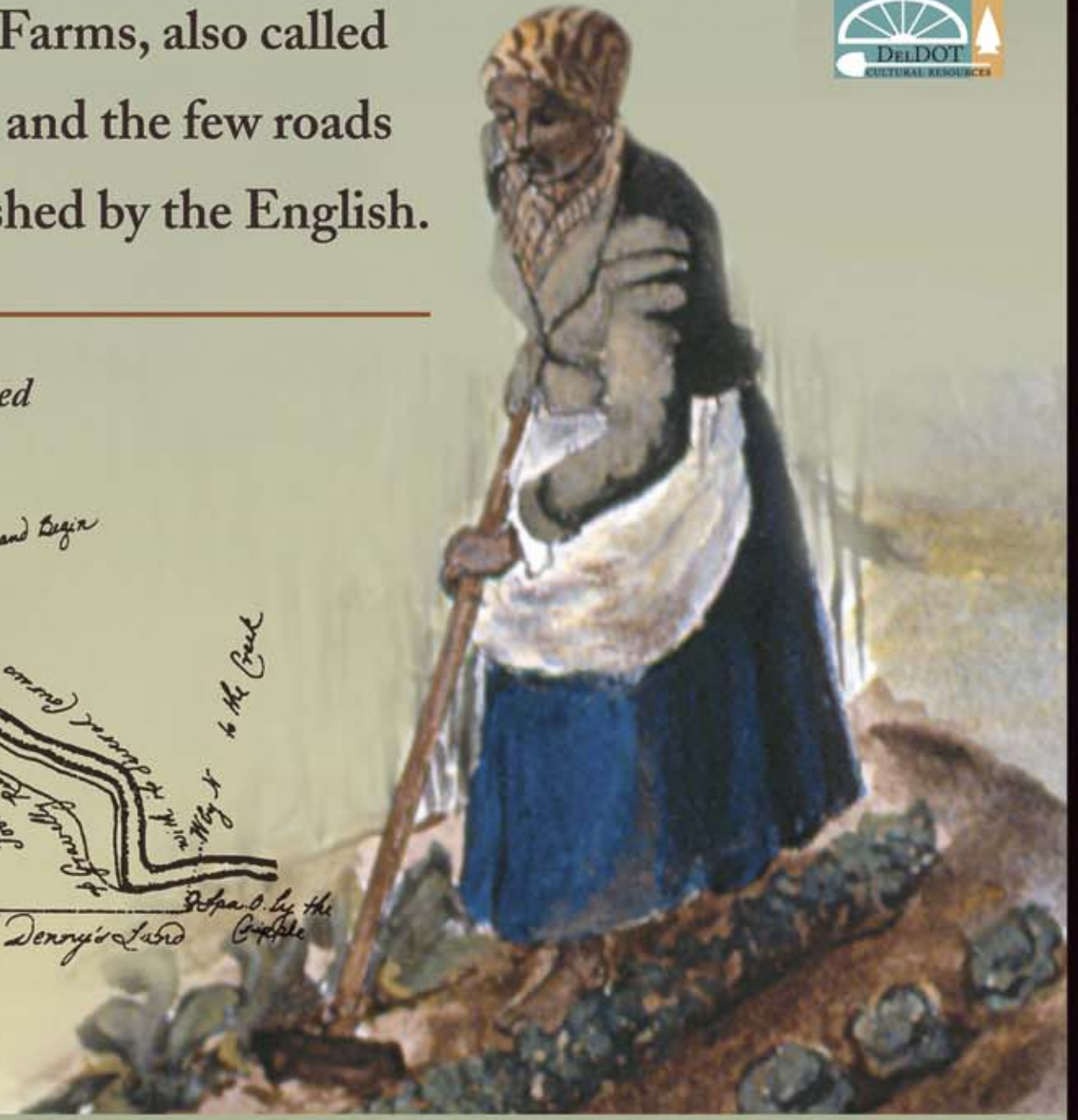
MUCH OF WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT FARMS in the 1700s comes from our general knowledge about what rural life was like in the colonial period. Early maps, legal documents recording the transfer of properties or personal belongings, and personal accounts provide a framework in which to fit the archaeological data. Delaware was sparsely settled. Farms, also called plantations, were widely scattered along waterways and the few roads within each *Hundred*, a geographic division established by the English.

*William Strickland's farm overlooked Mill Creek in Duck Creek Hundred and his crops were planted on the "good land".*



### FARMS IN THIS PERIOD

- These were *subsistence farms* – farmers produced the basic food for their families and livestock with surpluses sold to local markets. They grew wheat for flour to make bread and corn and oats to feed the livestock. Kitchen gardens supplied vegetables and orchards supplied fruit. Game, fish, and berries supplemented their diet.
- Many of the buildings were *earthfast* – a form of wood construction that could be erected quickly and cheaply after a piece of land had been cleared. Wooden posts were set into holes in the ground, then secured with walls of horizontal boards. Another common building type without a foundation was constructed of logs.
- Houses were heated with a fireplace and lit by candlelight, rush or oil lamps. The dangers of fire were very real so it was safer for the house, kitchen, and outbuildings to be separated so that all would not be lost if one caught on fire.
- Farms generally consisted of a cluster of four to five buildings.
- Historical accounts of stray livestock indicate that farmers allowed their livestock to forage freely. Archaeological evidence of posthole patterns on farm sites suggests that fences were built to keep animals out of the living areas.

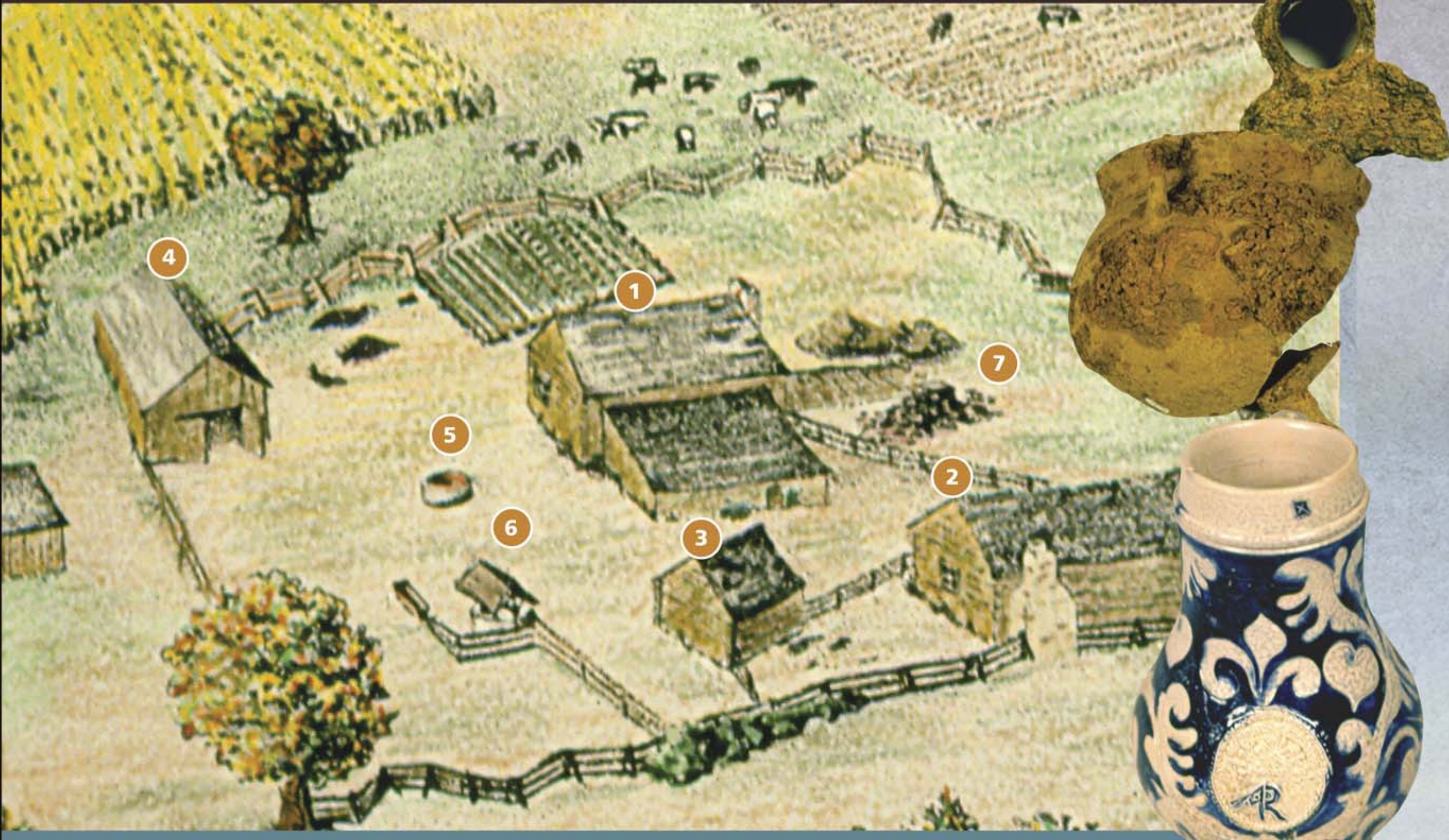


## STRICKLAND PLANTATION 1726 - 1764

**HOW WE KNOW** what was raised on the Strickland farm comes from the inventory of William's estate taken at the time of his death in December 1753. It lists—12 cows, 4 calves, 1 bull, 23 sheep, 15 hogs, 2 mares, 1 horse, and 1 colt. Crops included “wheat & rye in the ground, 12 bushels of oats, a stack of oats, a parcel of flax, and corn in the ear”. Also listed were “a plow and harrow, 2 scythes and a cradle, 2 mattocks, 3 hoes, and a pair of sickles.”

The proximity of Strickland's plantation to main roads was an important factor in its success. Archival and archaeological evidence of his success is documented in the amount of taxes he paid and by the number of expensive ceramics and silver he owned.

Brought Over		£ 106 : 6 : 0 (sic)
To a Dripping pan, Griddle & Sand		0 : 12 : 0
To a Dough Trough 7/6 three Sives 2/		9 : 6
To 6 Old Earthen pots		4 : 0
To a barrel 1 Barrel a 10 gallon & 5 gall cask		6 : 0
To parcel Old Tools		4 : 0
To 5 pewter Dishes 12 plates & some old Pewter		2 : 0 : 0
To a Brass Mortar		12 : 0
To a Tea Kettle Chaffing Dish & Gridiron		10 : 0
To a Box Iron & heaves		1 : 2 : 6
To 2 pall Bowles 2 Sm Ditto & 2 Juggs		12 : 0
To a Case & 9 Bowles		3 : 6
To a Mans Saddle		7 : 6
To a Square Table 6 old Chairs 1 arm Ditto		12 : 0
To 6 Bedstead & furniture outward Room		16 : 0
To 1 Ditto with Curtains		12 : 0
To a Bed Roomstead & furniture		7 : 6
To 3 Bedsteads 10/ 6 knives & forks 1/6		3 : 15 : 0
To 2 Chests & Trunk		3 : 10 : 0
To 2 Linn Wheels & 1 Wooling Ditto		11 : 6
To Check Reels, Water pce, & old Lumber		10 : 0
To 6 Old Baggas		1 : 0 : 0
To Some Wood & Wooding Yarn		12 : 0
To parcel old Books		15 : 0
To a horse 2 Hatters Horse lock 2 Butchers Knives		12 : 6
& 1 Set Horses shams		19 : 0
To 6 Silver Tea Spoons		7 : 0
To Old Silver 4/ Tea Table 15/		5 : 0
To 3 Brodies		6 : 0
To 6 Silver 4/ Tea Table 15/		1 : 0 : 0
To 19 : 0		19 : 0
To 7 : 0		7 : 0
To 1 : 10 : 0		1 : 10 : 0
To Corn fodder & Hay		
Carried Over		£ 134 : 18 : 6 (sic)



Artist's reconstruction of what the Strickland Plantation looked like circa 1750 based on the pattern of archaeological features.

Excavation on William Strickland's plantation uncovered the remains of two houses, one for his family **1** and another that was both a kitchen and quarters for his enslaved servants **2**, a smoke house **3**, a granary **4**, and a couple of wells **5** & **6**, all enclosed within a fence. A partially-dug cellar **7** found next to the main house indicates he was building an addition to his house at the time of his death. The space around the dwellings was kept relatively clean although a concentration of artifacts in an open area between the house and kitchen was interpreted as a workyard. Trash was placed along the fenceline some 40 feet from the house.



## FARMS IN THIS PERIOD

- More houses were constructed on brick and stone foundations with cellars that were used to store food in the days before refrigeration.
- By mid-century, houses were still heated by fireplaces but oil and kerosene lamps had replaced candlelight.
- Advances in plumbing, heating, and electricity moved activities traditionally carried out in separate buildings, such as the kitchen and outhouse, inside under one roof.
- As farms became larger, more specialized and more mechanized, new outbuildings were added to shelter the equipment and these were set further away to separate living areas from work areas.
- Farms were aligned along roadways with the houses facing the road. Porches on the front of the house were used for relaxing and socializing while farm work was relegated to the back yard.

While these advances improved life, not all farms prospered. Those farms which did not succeed, disappeared and became part of the archaeological record. The changes in lifestyle, mirroring the increasing complexity of life on and off the farm, can be seen in the artifacts left behind.



# Traces of Delaware's Past

## THE 19TH CENTURY FARM

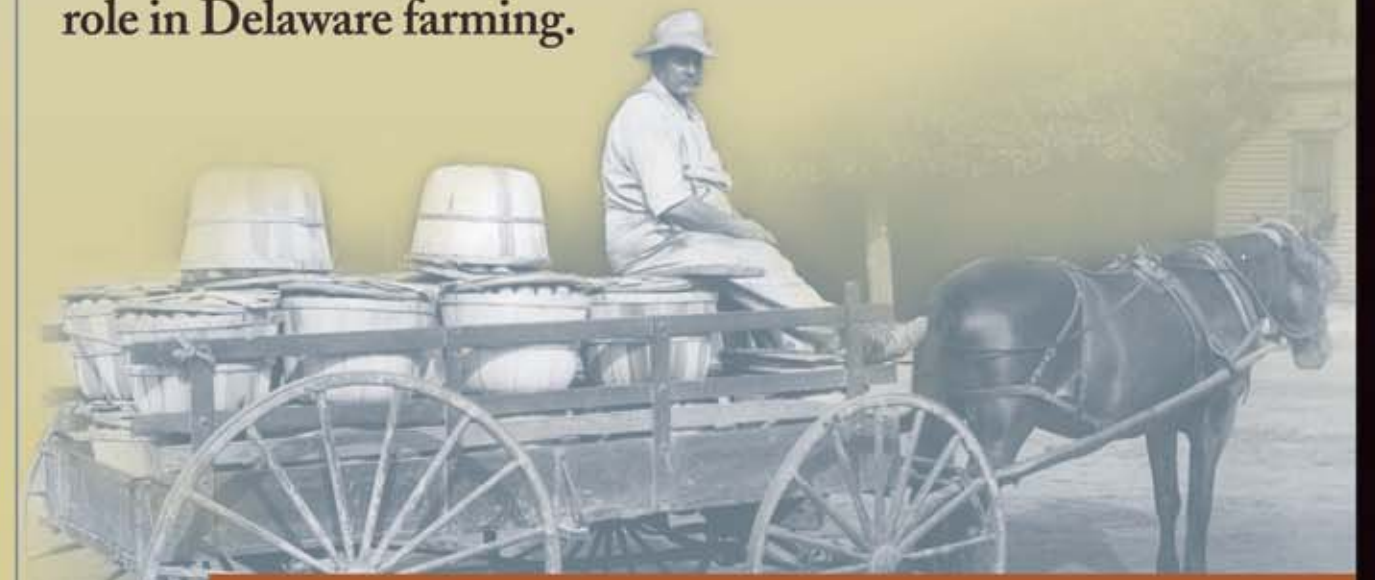
BY 1800, DELAWARE FARMERS were still practicing mixed agriculture – planting crops for food and fodder, growing vegetables in their gardens, harvesting fruits from their orchards, and raising livestock for their own use and the market. Farms in central and southern Delaware suffered from a lack of good roads, erosion and falling crop prices. These farmers were forced to clear land of poor quality and property values declined allowing wealthier landowners to buy the land at bargain prices and rent it to tenant farmers.

### SUBSISTENCE to MARKET FARMING

The discovery of marl, a natural fertilizer, during construction of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal enhanced the productivity of Delaware agriculture. The opening of the canal in 1829 and the construction of railroads 10 years later encouraged the production of market-oriented crops by providing more efficient transportation of perishable goods. This stimulated growth in the number and value of farms in central and southern Delaware and farms were transformed from subsistence to market farming.

The speed with which farm goods could now be transported opened up the market for

perishable fruits and vegetables and Delaware became a center for peach production. This triggered the development of a canning industry and soon commercial canned goods replaced home canning. By 1900, poultry and dairy production were beginning to play a big role in Delaware farming.



In the latter half of the century, it was a common sight in Delaware to see the roads leading to train depots lined with farm vehicles loaded with baskets of fruit and vegetables.

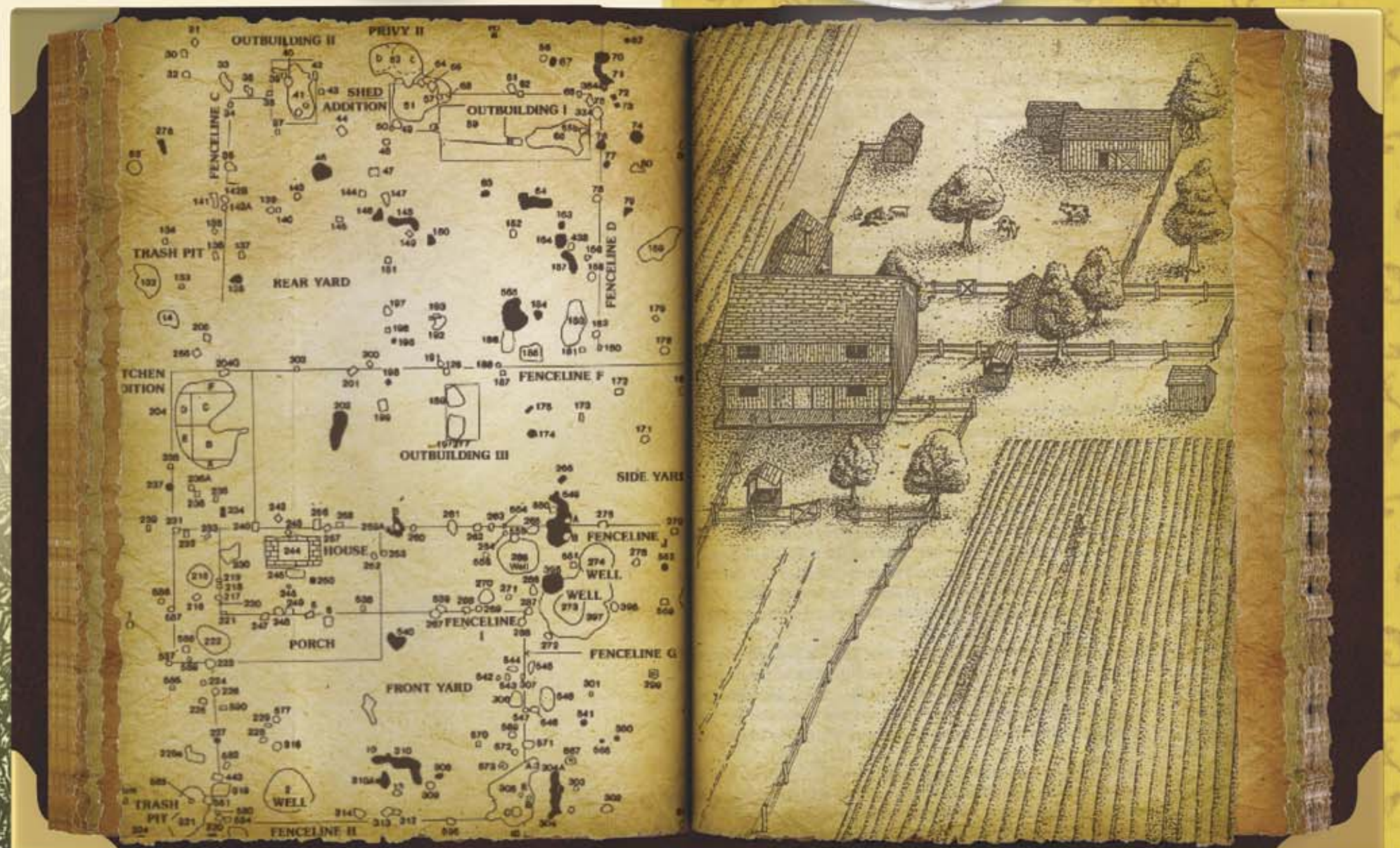
## MOORE-TAYLOR FARM, 1822-1931

**THE MOORE-TAYLOR FARM** was built in 1822 on 27 acres of land in Little Creek Hundred, Kent County, Delaware. This was a small farm that over a hundred years was owned by a succession of farmers who struggled to survive.

One owner, George Moore, bought the farm in 1849 and moved there with his family. According to the 1850 census, George lived there with his wife, Sarah Ann, their three daughters – Rebecca Ann, Susan, Amanda, – and a 12 year old African American farm worker named Francis Heath. Twenty-four acres were cultivated but Moore was not listed in the agricultural census, which means his farm produced crops worth less than \$100. He owned 1 horse, 1 yoke oxen, 3 cows, 3 calves, and 5 shoats (young pigs). Moore sold the farm in 1876 and continued on as a tenant for another three years.

Archaeological evidence reflects the improvements in home technologies made in this period. When Moore's farm was sold, the house was described as a "one-story frame dwelling and shed kitchen." Archaeology

revealed it to be 24 x 12 feet with the added kitchen, 20 x 12 feet, supported on brick piers. Charred earth and a metal plate on a brick pad at the center of the house are what remain of a stove footing. *Post molds* – stains in the ground left by decayed wooden posts – along the sides of the house represent the remains of a porch. Whiteware and white granite sherds found in the post molds date construction of the kitchen to the mid-to-late 1800s. In the side yard 25 feet behind the house were three barrel-lined wells and 50 feet from the house was a two-seater privy (outdoor toilet). A second privy was found on the edge of the farmyard. Though the farm survived until 1937, no evidence of indoor plumbing was discovered.



Artist's reconstruction is based on the mapped archaeological features.

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# Traces of Delaware's Past

## ARTIFACTS AND FEATURES

THE ARTIFACTS AND FEATURES on farm sites represent tangible, if fragmentary, evidence of how farming families lived in the past. By studying the things people left behind – as opposed to what was valued and passed on – archaeologists get a picture of how people organized their households and what they chose, or could afford, to own. Archaeologists can also evaluate what people ate and what they cooked with.

### HOW DID PEOPLE DISPOSE OF THEIR TRASH?

One of the subjects little discussed in written histories is trash, *refuse* – the material residue of living. Unlike today, people in the 1700s and 1800s didn't have the convenience of garbage collection. Although little went to waste on farms in this period, some refuse did occur and its study can provide a good deal of information on farm life in the past.

Like today, trash could be swept out the door, or left to accumulate on the ground where work was conducted – outside the kitchen door, in the yard under the shade of a tree, or near the well. Recycling was practiced: food remains – *garbage* – were fed to the pigs, and broken objects were repaired and reused whenever possible. The rest was carried away from living areas, where it piled up, or was tossed into a hole – a *refuse pit*. Wells and privies no longer in use were often used for this purpose.

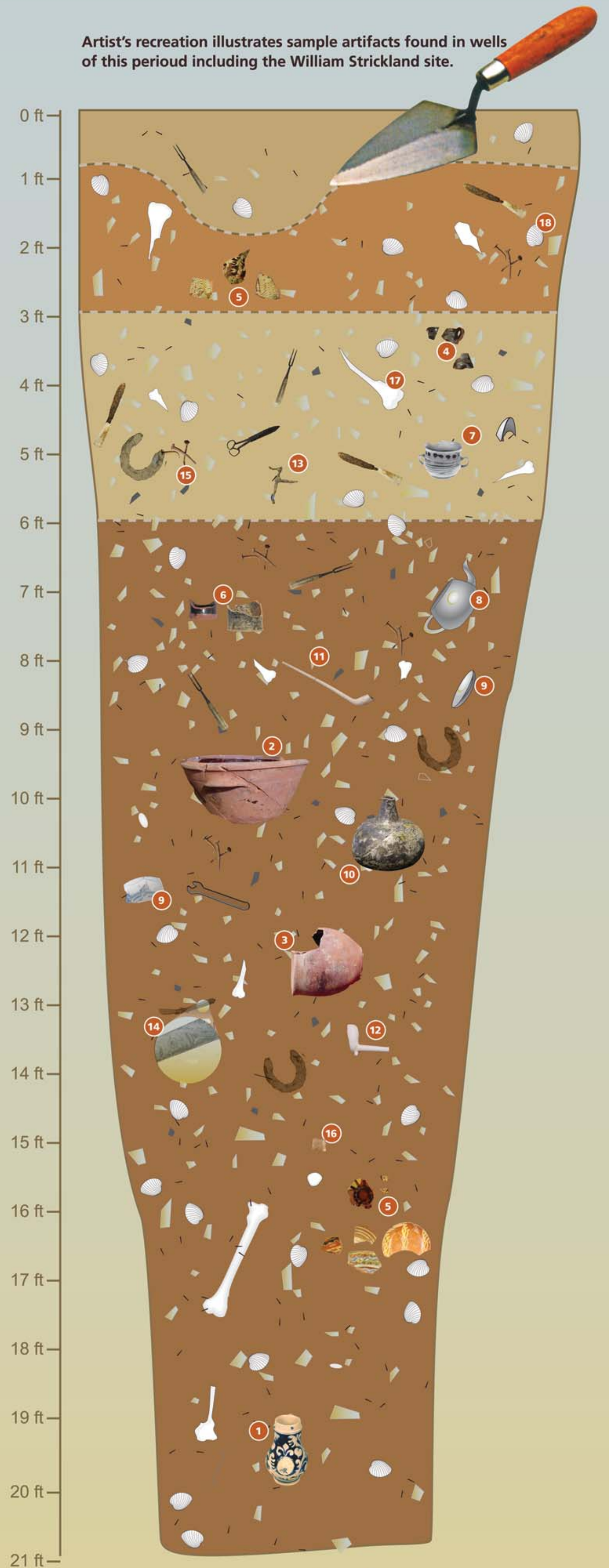


### REMNANTS of the FARMER'S PAST

THE WELL found at the William Strickland Plantation Site may have been lined with wooden cribbing. Post holes nearby indicate it was surrounded by a well sweep, a device used to raise buckets and swing them over to the side of the well. Dishes the family threw out made up the bulk of the assemblage and indicate the well was filled in around 1750. Objects made of wood, leather, and cloth may have been part of this trash but these materials normally do not survive in the ground.

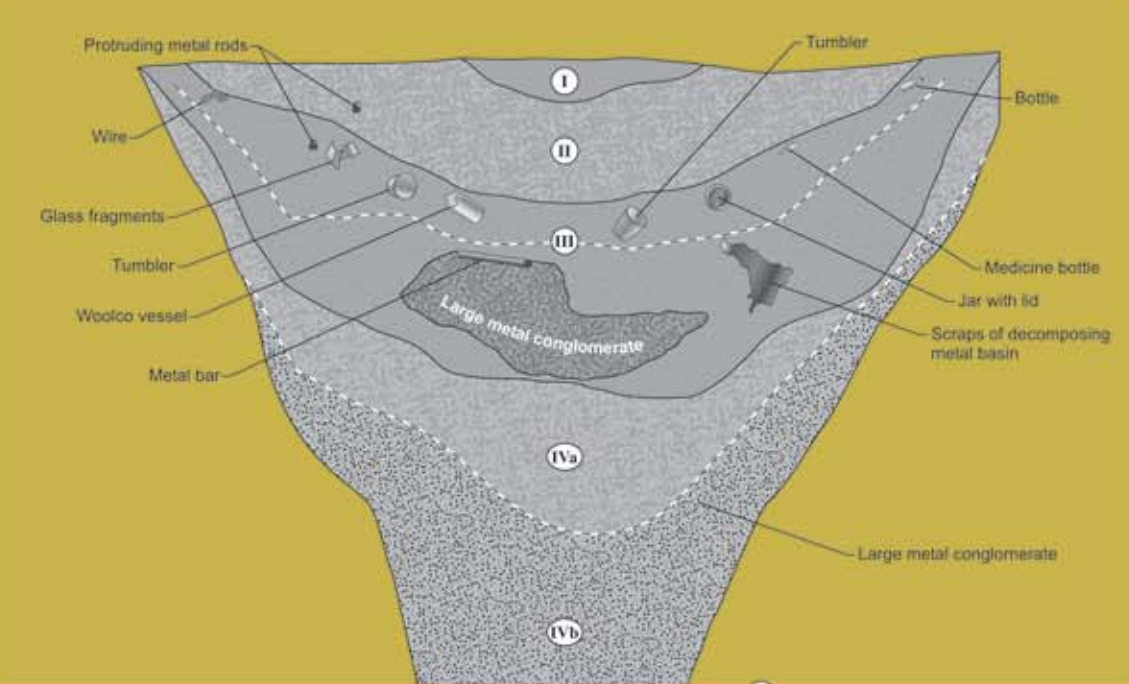
From these artifacts we can tell that the Strickland household used milk pans and butter pots for dairying. Most of the redware plates and bowls were locally made, however at least one was brought all the way from North Devon in England. The Stricklands drank from sturdy stoneware jugs and tankards imported from England and Germany, and sipped tea from fine English stoneware and Chinese porcelain cups.

Artist's recreation illustrates sample artifacts found in wells of this period including the William Strickland site.



- 1 QUEEN ANNE RHENISH STONWARE JUG decorated with the insignia of Anna Regina, probably fell into the well by accident
- 2 REDWARE MILK PAN, used for storing milk inside the kitchen and for separating cream
- 3 REDWARE BUTTER POT, for storing churned butter
- 4 REDWARE PORRINGER, commonly used for breakfast, porringers were used for eating porridge or gruel, soup or stew
- 5 PHILADELPHIA SLIPWARE PLATES, 1670-1850, were used for cooking and serving food, particularly pies
- 6 REDWARE MUG/TANKARD
- 7 STAFFORDSHIRE POSSET CUP, 1670-1795. This type of cup was used for drinking a warm mixture of wine, spices, and milk.
- 8 WHITE SALT-GLAZED STONWARE TEAPOT, c.1720-1805
- 9 SCRATCH BLUE SALT-GLAZED STONWARE SAUCER, c.1744-1775
- 10 ONION-SHAPED WINE BOTTLE
- 11 TOBACCO PIPE BOWL FRAGMENT stamped "TD", either for the pipemaker, Thomas Dennis (1734-1781) of Bristol, England or for Thomas Dormer (1748-1770), a pipemaker in London.
- 12 TOBACCO PIPE BOWL FRAGMENT stamped "RT", for one of three Robert Tippetts who manufactured pipes in Bristol, England from 1660-1720.
- 13 IRON SNAFFLE BIT, a piece of horse hardware
- 14 BONE KNIFE HANDLE with copper cap and band, engraved "As I am Thine So be thou Mine", possibly part of a wedding cutlery set.
- 15 HAND WROUGHT NAILS, made up until 1820
- 16 GUNFLINT, a piece of flint used to strike a spark on a flintlock weapon
- 17 ANIMAL BONES came from cow, pig, sheep, deer, squirrel, turtle, dog, rooster and other bird species. Many pieces were burned and gnawed, indicating they were originally scattered on the ground.
- 18 OYSTER SHELLS of the type that were collected in the mudflats and reefs at low tide in fresh or slightly brackish water.

## DODD FARM SITE 1851/1879-1930



Archaeologists are shown drawing the profile of a well feature at the Dodd farm site.



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## ROOTED IN LAND

### THE RHYTHM OF FARM LIFE

The rhythm of farm life did not change much through the 1700s and 1800s. Farming families rose early and went to bed early, a custom that did not change until the introduction of electricity in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Farm work varied with the season and the weather. While images romanticize farm life, the historical and archaeological records show that farm life was hard, the day long, and the work physically demanding. Family life before the era of television, computers, and cell phones was spent doing the necessary work to maintain the farm.



### FARMER'S CREDO

*Early to bed and early to rise  
Makes a man healthy,  
wealthy and wise.*

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



Winter evenings, after supper, might be spent around the light and warmth of the fire or stove. This was the time when mothers and daughters would sew, and card or spin wool while fathers and sons might perform other indoor tasks like shucking corn, fashioning household or farm implements, and making toys out of wood. In summertime, these activities could take place outside on the porch.

Children doubtless played with toys but these were far less diverse than today.

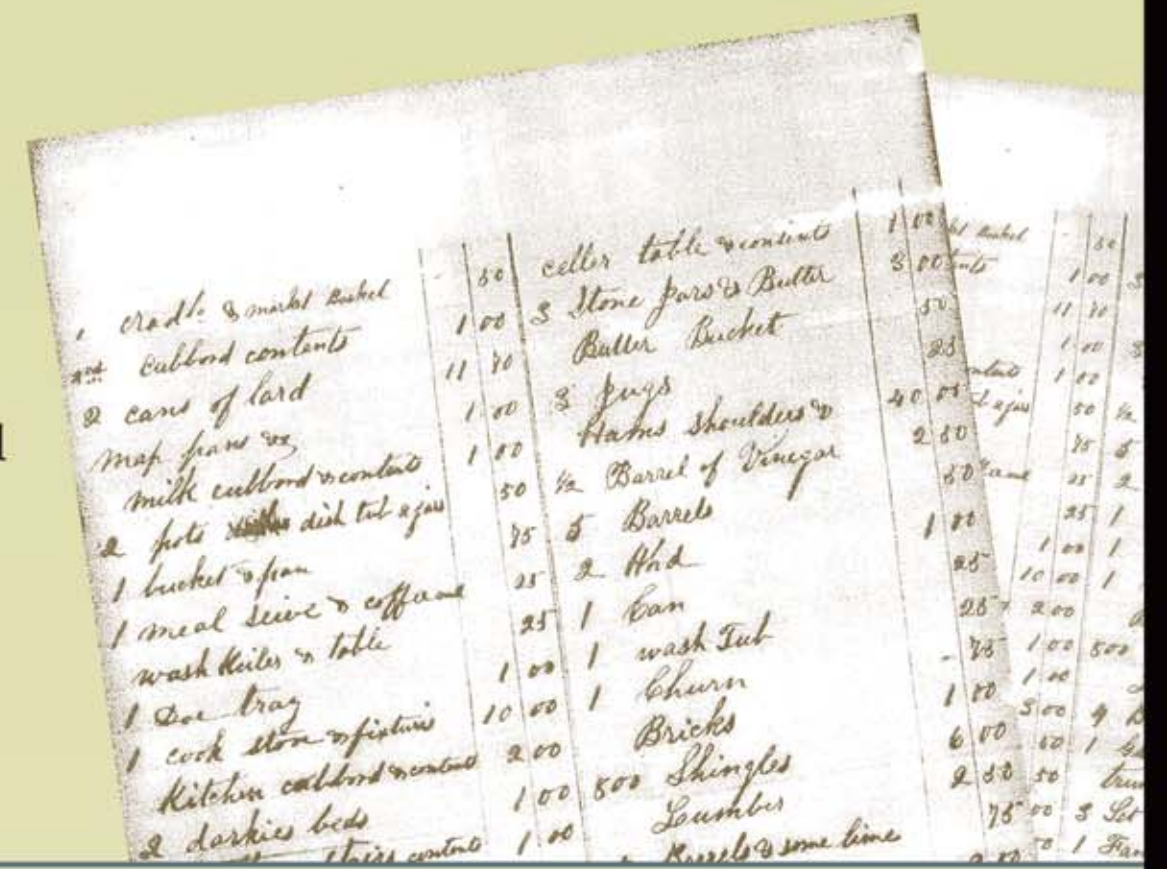


PIECING TOGETHER the PAST

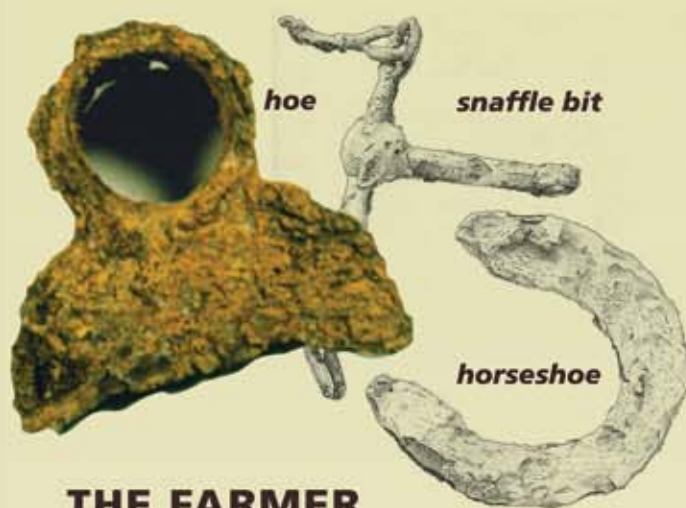
THE DELAWARE FARM FAMILY was an economic unit of production and each family member, young and old, had a role to play. Apart from the help of a few laborers – those that lived on the farm, enslaved or indentured, or those that were hired by the day or at harvest time, most of the farm work was done by the farm family. While a division of labor, based on sex, age and strength, was understood, everybody – men, women, and children – pitched in during certain operations when timing was critical, such as haying and harvesting. As parents, the farmer and his wife passed on their knowledge of farming and homemaking to their children, but it was up to the children to learn by doing.

### DOCUMENTS TELL US ABOUT SOME THINGS FARMERS DID....

Digging historical farm sites, archaeologists unearth pieces of the past that may be unrecognizable, because of their fragmentary condition, and because they may come from objects no longer familiar to us today. This is where historical records, such as merchant accounts and estate inventories that listed a person's belongings at the time of death, are useful in reconstructing – and providing a fuller picture – of the everyday things used by the farm family.



### ...AND ARCHAEOLOGY TELLS US MORE.



#### THE FARMER

It was the farmer's responsibility to run the farm, work the soil, plant the crops, and raise the livestock. In practice, he had to be something of a "jack of all trades" - an expression meaning he had also to be a carpenter, mechanic, doctor - to keep his house, the farm buildings, the farm equipment and the draft animals – horses and oxen - in working order and healthy.

#### Clear the land, cut firewood

**Construct houses, outbuildings, fences**  
**DOCUMENTS:** William Strickland's 1753 inventory lists "old tools, 3 wedges, a Spade & hammer, Old Cross Cut Saw, Some Bricks & Lime"  
**ARTIFACTS:** Brick, mortar, window glass, nails, tools

#### Plow fields, harvest crops, thresh wheat

**DOCUMENTS:** William Strickland's 1753 inventory lists "plow & Harrow, 3 hoes, Cart, 2 Hackles, 2 Sickles"  
Gamaliel Garrison's 1871 inventory lists "1 drag Harrow, 2 Horse Wiley Plough, 1 double Plough, 1 subsoil plough, 3 Cultivators, 1 Buckeye Reaper, 1 Roler, 1 grain Fan, 1 corn Shelter"  
**ARTIFACTS:** Fragments of farm tools, wagon parts, horse hardware

#### Raise livestock

**Hunt and fish**  
**ARTIFACTS:** gunflints, shotgun shells, traps

#### THE FARMER'S WIFE

The role of women in the family was to care for the children and manage the household. In addition, women made contributions to farm income by canning vegetables and fruit and making butter and cheese that were sold or bartered.

#### Care for the children

**DOCUMENTS:** William Strickland's 1753 inventory lists a "Sucking Bottle" (baby bottle)  
**ARTIFACTS:** child-sized cups and dishes

#### Cook the daily meals, bake bread

**DOCUMENTS:** William Strickland's 1753 inventory lists "5 old pots, 2 frying pans & skillet, a dripping pan, griddle & stand, 5 pewter Dishes, 12 plates and some pewter, a Brass Mortar, a Tea Kettle, Chaffing Dish & Gridiron, Stillards, 6 knives & forks, 6 Silver Tea Spoons, A Dough Trough, 3 Sives"  
**ARTIFACTS:** fragments of cast iron cooking pots, ceramic dishes and crockery, and eating utensils

#### Card, spin and weave wool/flax to make clothes for family use and for the market

**DOCUMENTS:** William Strickland's 1753 inventory lists "2 Linn Wheels, 1 Wooling Wheel, Some Wool & Wooling Yarn"  
Gamaliel Garrison's 1871 inventory lists "spinning wheel"

#### Sew, mend, knit, and launder family's clothes

**ARTIFACTS:** thimbles, straight pins, scissors, buttons

#### Milk the cows, make butter and cheese for home use and the market

**DOCUMENTS:** William Strickland's 1753 inventory lists "2 bowls & cheese pat, 6 earthen pans, 6 old Earthen pots"  
Gamaliel Garrison's 1871 inventory lists "Butter Bucket, 1 Churn"  
**ARTIFACTS:** redware milk pans, butter pots, bowls & jars

#### Plant and tend the garden

**Gather berries, nuts and medicinal herbs; preserve and store foods – meats, canning fruits and vegetables**  
**ARTIFACTS:** canning jars & lids, iron barrel straps, redware and stoneware crocks



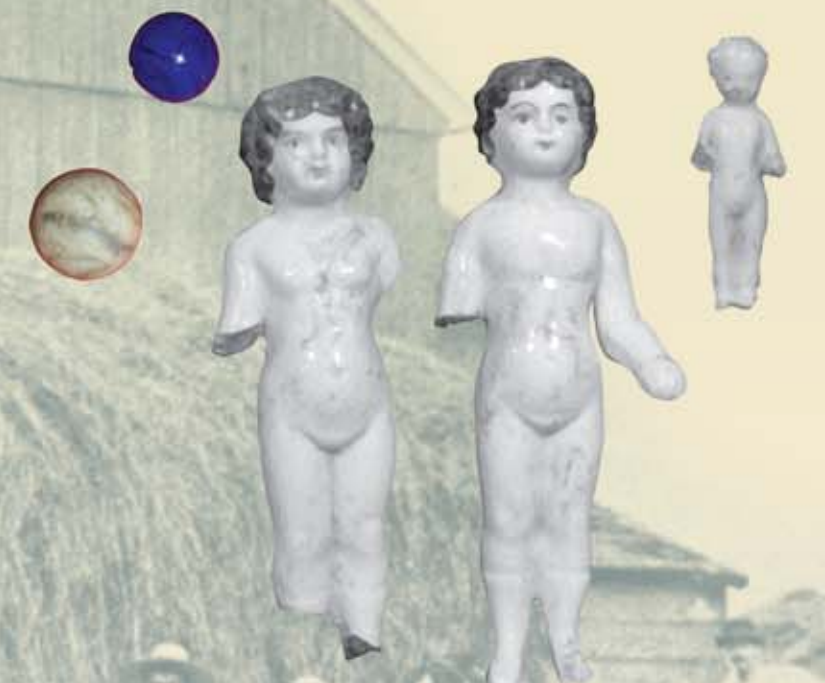
#### CHILDREN ON THE FARM

Children were taught to respect adults, and, as soon as they were old enough, they helped their parents on the farm. While chores prepared children for their future farming roles, it is unlikely that the evidence of these chores are visible in the archaeological record.

Young boys and girls helped with farm chores by

- driving cows to pasture
- carrying water to the men working in the field
- hunting eggs in the hay and fence corners
- feeding the chickens and livestock
- weeding the garden

Few toys are found on farm sites because they were often homemade, repaired and recycled.  
**ARTIFACTS:** Marbles, pieces of tea sets, and dolls



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