

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The Phase II and Phase III excavations at Blue Ball Tavern uncovered evidence of the site's long occupation and changing economic functions. Historical documents reveal that while Blue Ball was always a residence, its primary function evolved over time from that of a tavern to a general tenant farm to a farm specialized in dairy production. The archaeological investigations of the site have contributed to our understanding of some of the material manifestations of these functional changes.

Archaeological evidence that can be associated with the use of the site as a tavern, which spanned the years from at least 1787 to the 1850s, was found in the earliest foundations of the house and several discreet deposits of artifacts, including refuse scatter on a now-buried yard surface north of the house, fill within three pit features (Features 43, 91, and 95), and a bottle midden (Feature 81). The information gleaned from these material remains identified with the use of the house as a tavern reflects how the various proprietors of this particular establishment adapted the physical facility and its material inventory to suit the needs of their enterprises.

Excavations in and around the dwelling exposed what remains of the stone foundations and revealed evidence of one and possibly two episodes of expansion that occurred during the tavern era. The foundation was segmented into three rooms. The room on the north side was largest, with its long axis oriented perpendicular to the road. Two small rooms were built onto the south wall of this room, creating an ell-shaped footprint. If these were added in two separate construction events, as the evidence suggests, the southeast room surely preceded the southwest. The addition of the former created a longer, more imposing facade facing the road and possibly allowed for the construction of a central passage with a recessed entrance more in keeping with the architectural fashion of the day. While its construction date is uncertain, the addition of the southwest room allowed for more space to accommodate the needs of the resident family or lodgers or both.

Other details of the house foundation may relate to its use as a tavern. The evidence of the support structure for a large first floor hearth in the north room is consistent with descriptions of period taverns, which often had such a hearth for food preparation. In addition, the multiple direct entrances to the cellar may reflect the proprietors' attempts to separate the cellar from the upper levels of the house, allowing no direct access from the cellar, which may at times have been used as a public dining area, to the upper floors, which may have been reserved for family use and lodgers. Alternatively, at times the cellar may have served as a storage area for tavern supplies, and the multiple entrances were a means of controlling access to different cellar areas. While the archaeological evidence of the foundations left some questions about construction dates and sequence unanswered, the evidence does suggest that the house was constructed and modified to meet some of the particular needs of running a public house.

The artifact deposits on the yard surface, in the pit features, and in the bottle midden represent a sample of household refuse dating from the tavern period. The material in the bottle midden, however, dates to the end of this period, while the other deposits were likely associated with the earlier proprietors. The bottle midden is further distinguished from the other deposits as a secondary deposit, likely resulting from a clean-up event years after the property had ceased being used as a tavern. The quantities of architectural items further suggest that this event was associated with a demolition and/or renovation episode. Nevertheless, a comparison of the earlier and later deposits shows several interesting differences. The decrease in tobacco-related items over time may be related to changing tobacco consumption habits and the increasing popularity of chewing tobacco at that time. The decrease in glass tableware and refined ceramics and the increase in coarse ceramic wares may, on the other hand, reflect a change more particular to the history of Blue Ball. The decreased investment in the tavern serving inventory may have been the result of the diversification of economic pursuits on the part of the later tavern proprietors, who placed a lower priority on maintaining a high quality tavern inventory.

The comparison of probate inventories of tavern keepers, three from the Blue Ball Tavern and three from other establishments, helps to position the Blue Ball in the larger domain of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century public houses, a domain that encompassed a range of variability and changed over time. Taverns, in general, could offer a variety of services, including lodging, meals, and liquid refreshment, and fulfill a variety of community functions, including providing a public place for meetings, elections, auctions, and legal hearings. The particular combination of services and functions of any specific tavern at a given time depended on factors such as location, clientele, the demand for services, fashion, community needs, the socio-economic status and ethnicity of the proprietor, and the degree to which the proprietor was economically dependent on the tavern business. In general, it appears from the probate inventories that over time the Blue Ball Tavern remained equipped to provide the full range of tavern services, including lodging, food and drink. This is in keeping with expectations for a rural tavern in contrast to taverns located in more urban areas that placed greater emphasis on their "grog-room" functions than lodging and dining. The probate comparison also shows that the Blue Ball proprietors followed a larger trend whereby over time rural keepers invested increasingly larger proportions of their wealth in agricultural pursuits rather than their tavern businesses.

A comparison of the earlier and later artifact assemblages from Blue Ball with those of two other taverns shows conformity with other sites in regards to the decrease in tobacco related items and the increase in bottle glass. The Blue Ball assemblages are distinct in the large quantities of glass tableware present in the early deposits and the marked decrease in the later. Also in contrast to the other sites where the quantities of coarseware decreased over time, coarseware at Blue Ball increased. Again, this decrease in investment in the tavern inventory may be related to the much more widespread trend in the nineteenth century toward agricultural intensification and economic diversification.

From the year 1862 until 1914, Blue Ball was probably leased to tenant farmers who resided at the site and apparently engaged in general mixed farming, raising livestock and growing a variety of field crops. Archaeological evidence that can be associated with this period of the site's history include modifications to the house, buried ground surfaces in the south and west yards, an extensive midden deposit in the north yard, drainage features, remains of a stone wall, the remains of an outbuilding foundation, and miscellaneous postholes. In general, this suite of features bears evidence of a period of time when the house and adjacent yards were adapted for intensified farming. The utility of the grounds surrounding the house and farm buildings was improved through the construction of drainage features. The facilities were expanded and enhanced through the construction of substantial outbuildings and walls and the probable construction of fences, impermanent outbuildings and/or animal enclosures.

As was mentioned above, it is not certain when the southwest portion of the house was constructed, but it may have dated to this period and corresponded to the reported nineteenth-century expansion and conversion of the dwelling from a tavern to a farmhouse (Scharff 1888:906). The relatively small cellar addition curiously had two bulkhead entrances and access to the older southeast portion of the cellar. The duplicate entrances might be the result of the construction of a wood frame porch or addition over the original entrance, rendering it unusable and necessitating the construction of a new entrance. It was also sometime during this period of time that the southeast entrance to the cellar was blocked and filled in. This event may have been related to the expansion of the cellar area and the construction of a new bulkhead entrance to the cellar. The large quantities of architectural items found in the north yard midden and on the south and west yard surfaces further support that this was a period of active construction, demolition, and/or renovation.

The artifacts recovered from the midden and on the yard surfaces included a far greater diversity of types representing a wider range of activities than artifacts from the earlier deposits. Not surprisingly, architectural and kitchen-related artifacts comprised the vast majority, but the deposits also included artifacts relating to arms, clothing, farming, and furnishings, as well as personal items. The artifacts represent the full range of activities centering around a home and family farm. The diversity of artifacts and their sheer quantities also reflect an increased availability of diverse and affordable consumer goods compared to earlier periods in the history of the Blue Ball site.

During the years of its occupancy following 1914, one of the Blue Ball farm's primary functions was that of dairy production, and the many alterations made to the grounds adjacent to the house attest to its adaptation for that use. Archaeological features associated with the Blue Ball Dairy include the following: the remains of a large structure apparently built for processing and storing dairy products; a stone conduit; a dry-laid stone floor within the remains of a building of uncertain age; stone remains of two additional structures, one of which may have been an animal pen; a barrel feature, and miscellaneous postholes. The use of plaster and concrete in the construction of the dairy building and its system of water-cooling troughs are evidence of early twentieth-century innovations in dairy production. Dairy farmers were increasingly aware of the

importance of hygiene and temperature control in the production of safe dairy products, and these factors became strictly regulated later in the century.

Additional archaeological features were found that could not be securely associated with a particular time of construction. These included the remains of a large stone building and a dry-laid floor within it, stone demolition rubble, and miscellaneous postholes. While these features cannot be identified with particular functions at Blue Ball, they all provide further evidence of the on-going transformation of the landscape to meet the immediate needs of its occupants.

The long history of the Blue Ball Tavern and Farm site provides a detailed view of the evolving economic landscape of New Castle County. Perhaps because of its strategic location on one of the earliest roads connecting key centers of commerce, its economic utility and value was particularly intertwined with larger regional trends. Yet it stands as a unique history with its own peculiarities and quirks. The history of Blue Ball offers the opportunity to see how regional history played out at one very individual site.

The Blue Ball site is located on what had first been a plantation known as Chestnut Hill, which was divided from Penn family holdings in 1678/9. While it is not known when the first dwelling was built on the property, it was most likely not on the Blue Ball property and not built until the 1720s when the land was owned by Israel Peterson. The earliest record of the road running by what would be the site of the Blue Ball Tavern dates to a 1685 deed, which specifies a right-of-way to a spring. It is also unknown when the Blue Ball tavern was constructed, but the probable first innkeeper was Peterson's son-in-law, Joseph Mortonson, and it is likely that the first dwelling/tavern was built around the middle of the eighteenth century. By 1745, the road was referred to as the "Road to Brandywine Ferry" and was becoming an important link in a larger transportation network. In addition, milling was a growing industry on the Brandywine at that time, and the road undoubtedly provided farmers access to this important service. It was an ideal location for a tavern. The tavern would have become one of a set of services that supported the rural economy of the region, while providing the owner/proprietor with additional income.

If indeed Joseph Mortonson did establish and run the tavern, he and later his widow Regina were the only owners of the property to do so. The first secure record of the tavern, however, is found in a tavern license issued to Regina in 1787. By that time, Regina's son had sold the property to Andrew McKee, Jr., who in turn sold it to John Dickinson in 1786. Regina Mortonson, then, was the first of the series of licensed Blue Ball proprietors, none of whom owned the property. In fact, none of the subsequent owners of the property lived on it, including those who owned it after the tavern ceased operations. While there is no information regarding the arrangements made between owners of the property and their tenants, the property has a very long history of having value as an investment for owners and as a means of generating income for its tenants. Tenancy was a particularly popular economic strategy in Delaware, and the Blue Ball property was no exception.

Regina Mortonson's tenure at the Blue Ball is noteworthy also because of her status as an income-earning woman. Innkeeping was one of the few occupations open to women at that time, and given the length of time of her involvement with the establishment, Regina must have been reasonably successful. As was frequently the case, Regina likely took over the business after her husband died and later apparently had the assistance of her daughter and son-in-law. Although the family no longer owned the property, it appears that to some degree the family shared responsibility for the enterprise, and judging by Regina's and her son-in-law's probate inventories, they continued to invest considerable resources in the business.

During the second decade of the nineteenth century, the Wilmington and Great Valley Turnpike was planned and constructed on what had been called the Concord Road. The improvements and expansion of the existing road increased its utility and promoted its use by commercial traffic -- thus expanding the tavern's potential clientele. The continued importance of this road insured the viability of the tavern, which ran almost continuously from at least 1787 to about 1850. The archaeological evidence as well as the proprietors' probate inventories indicate that the tavern continued to offer a full suite of services including lodging, dining, and drink, suggesting the demand for such services remained fairly constant over time. The success of the business likely depended largely on the continued importance of the road -- as the use of the road eclipsed, so would the business.

During the nineteenth century, New Castle County saw continued growth of its industries along the Brandywine and other waterways and the intensification of agricultural production. The probate inventories for the last two proprietors of the Blue Ball, Robert Galbreath and Issac Anderson, both show significant investment in their agricultural endeavors. Compared to the earlier proprietors, their investments in the tavern represented a far smaller proportion of their total wealth, indicating a reprioritization of their economic pursuits. Nevertheless, both innkeepers maintained the full suite of tavern services during their tenures, while at the same time expanding their agricultural investments. The diversification of their economic ventures may be interpreted as part of a larger regional trend toward maximizing return on a variety of economic resources.

The records indicate that the tavern ceased operations after Anderson's death in 1850, although his widow may have stayed as a tenant for some time following her husband's death. The demise of the tavern business may have simply been a matter of the property owner's choice, or, alternatively it may have been a result of declining income due to a reduced demand for the tavern services. The temperance movement, new and expanding industrial centers, and the decreasing importance of overland transportation may have all factored into the tavern's end. Anderson's passing marked the end of the use of the property as a tavern and the beginning of the exclusive use of the property for agricultural production. The owner of the property at the time of Anderson's death later leased the farm to Joshua Hutton and his son, Hiett, who farmed the property until 1862. At that time the property was sold to Jonas Miller, who immediately sold it to the du Ponts. The Blue Ball property then became one of the many land holdings of the Du Pont Powder Company. The du Ponts apparently either leased the property or hired labor to

farm the property. It is not known who resided on the property after the du Ponts obtained it and before it was converted to a dairy operation in 1914, but it is clear from the quantity of domestic artifacts dating to the later decades of the nineteenth century and the reported pre-1888 renovation that the house was occupied during that time.

Following a regional trend to specialize in dairy production, in 1914 Alfred I. du Pont invested in the construction of a state-of-the-art dairy barn and milk house at Blue Ball Farm. From at least that time until the property was leased in 1943, Blue Ball Dairy and Farm supplied in part the needs of the Du Pont Nemours Estate, as well as produced goods for the market. Nemours was one of many such estates on the eastern seaboard, financed by industrial wealth linked to urban areas and built by wealthy entrepreneurs to demonstrate their status, culture, and ingenuity. Because of its special relationship to Nemours, the farm operation at Blue Ball was no longer an independent, self-sufficient economic enterprise, but rather a supporting component of a large country estate. Its status as such surely changed the rationale for its operation. Run largely by wage earners rather than tenants and likely occupied by workers rather than families, the farm's economic function during this time far superseded its function as a home for the resident proprietor or tenant farmer. Balancing its dual functions of supplying Nemours and generating some income on the market likely drove the decisions behind the many improvements and alterations of the landscape evident in both the historical record and the archaeological data. In 1943, the Blue Ball Farm was once again leased to an independent tenant and returned to its status as a leased property and associated family business, one that more closely resembled that of the earlier years of its occupation. The abandonment of the farm in 1977 and the destruction of all of its buildings except for the dairy barn and milk house marked the end of the site's value as an active economic enterprise.

The archaeological investigations and in-depth historical research of the Blue Ball Tavern site have produced a unique picture of how regional history impacted a single site. From early European settlement of a frontier in the seventeenth century to the twentieth-century decline of the agricultural economy in New Castle County, the Blue Ball Tavern and Farm evolved in response to the developing economy of the area. Owners and tenants adapted their use of the site to accommodate the demand for tavern services in its early years and later to increase its agricultural productivity and meet the demands of a specialized market. Improvements to overland transportation, growing centers of commerce and industry, increasing demands of an urban market for farm produce, improved technology for the production of perishable goods, and the ultimate decline of agriculture all left their mark on this single site centered on a dwelling constructed sometime in the middle years of the eighteenth century by the "road to the spring called Robert's well."