

# DIGGING FOR OLD DELAWARE

*The Archaeology of  
Country Life in the 1700s*

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## *THE PAST NEEDS YOU*

*Archaeology and Historic Preservation are for everyone. The Delaware Department of Transportation's historic preservation projects are designed with the public in mind, and cannot work without you. To learn more about Delaware archaeology, you can visit an archaeological site or a state museum, attend a lecture, or volunteer on a dig. Delaware Archaeology Month, held each May, provides many opportunities. You can also find DelDOT's archaeology reports in public libraries, schools, and historical societies throughout the state. For more information, contact DelDOT at 800-652-5600 or online at <<http://www.deldot.net>>, or the Delaware Department of Historic and Cultural Affairs at 302-739-5685 or <<http://www.state.de.us/shpo>>.*

*The cover illustration is a reconstruction of the Mahoe/Wallace Farm around 1750 drawn by artist John Poreda. It shows Samuel and Henrietta Mahoe and their apprentice Thomas making linen cloth: breaking flax to soften the fibers, boiling the cloth, and laying out the finished product to bleach in the sun.*

## AN OLD HOUSE IN A FIELD

Driving down Delaware's country roads, you often pass an old, abandoned house sitting alone in a field of wheat or corn. The windows are broken out, the paint has peeled off the old boards, the porch has collapsed, and bushes and vines half cover the ground floor. Have you ever asked yourself, looking at

such a house, who lived there? What were their lives like? Where did they go? If the house is not too old, the neighbors might know a thing or two. But in a few more years, people will have died, moved on, or forgotten, and you may not get any answer to your questions. In a few years, also, that ruined house



may not even be there: eventually it will burn down, or just fall apart, and all you will see is an overgrown pile of boards and bricks. When the boards have rotted away and the cellar hole has filled in with trash and dirt, the farmer will clear the remaining rubble away and plow it under. Corn or wheat will grow over the foundations, and from the road there will be no way to tell that a house was ever there. But if you walk out into the field when the crops are young, you may be able to see traces of the house all over the ground: bits of brick and glass, pieces of pottery, nails, maybe even a copper coin. Those things will stay for a long time. Hundreds of years after the house was torn down and the people moved away, the ground will still be covered with potsherds and bits of glass. Can we learn anything from those fragments about the people who lived on this spot so long ago?

Yes, we can. We can learn about them through archaeology. The old house has become an archaeological site, and archaeological sites are documents, like the paper documents preserved in archives and museums. Archaeologists can read them, something like the way historians read old parchments covered with obscure markings. Archaeologists can usually tell how long ago people lived on a site, and how big the site was, just by walking across it in the spring and looking at the objects lying on the ground. By digging we can learn much more.



*Eighteenth-century house in Stanton.*

Archaeological sites are part of the record of our past. If they are destroyed without proper excavation, that record is lost forever. In order to prevent such losses, the Delaware Department of Transportation has for over thirty years run a comprehensive program to find archaeological sites in the paths of new roads and either avoid or excavate those that contain important information about the past. Through this program, DelDOT and its archaeologists have turned what might have been a great loss into a marvelous opportunity to learn about people who once lived in Delaware.

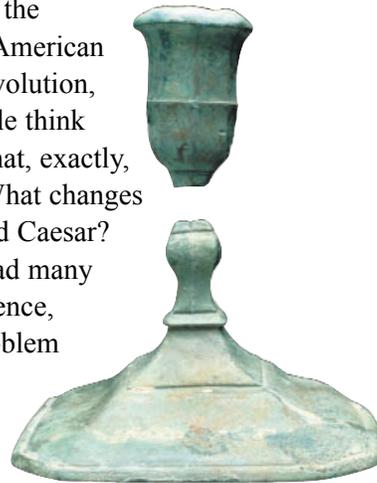
## THE REVOLUTIONARY CENTURY

The first European settlers in Delaware were Dutch and Swedes who came in the 1630s. They built forts and a few farms, mostly around New Castle, Wilmington, and Lewes. There were not many colonists in those days, probably never more than a few hundred. The English took over the colony in 1664, and in 1682 it became part of William Penn's new colony of Pennsylvania. Farms spread out across the countryside, roads were built, and towns were founded. Because the population was growing, archaeological sites from the 1700s are more common than those from the 1600s, and DelDOT has sponsored the excavation of more than a dozen of these sites.



*House cellar of the McKean/Cochran Farm, c. 1790.*

The years from 1700 to 1800 were a dramatic time in the thirteen colonies. Americans who lived through the eighteenth century saw the Enlightenment, the American Revolution, the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, and a long list of other changes that many people think led to the creation of our modern world. But what, exactly, does the creation of the modern world mean? What changes separate our age from those of Charlemagne and Caesar? Of course, historians and archaeologists have had many ideas about what defines the modern world: science, industry, democracy, cities, consumerism. A problem with most of these ideas is that they explain changes in our whole society based on the experience of only some of its members. If we focus on the growth of industry and cities, we exclude farmers. If we emphasize the rise of science or democracy, we exclude the millions who did not participate or believe in those things. Very great changes in people's material lives occurred in the eighteenth century, such as new kinds of houses, clothes, dishes, and furniture, and some historians have emphasized the new consumer culture as a hallmark of modernity. But millions of Americans could not afford to become consumers, and some of them lived in their log cabins, ate their traditional foods, and wore homespun clothes for a century after the modern consumer culture had allegedly been born. African Americans and Native Americans may have experienced these changes in very different ways, and so may German, Scottish, or Irish immigrants. Can we point to any important changes that everyone in eighteenth-century America experienced in roughly the same way? To put it another way, was Revolutionary America one culture, or many?



*Brass candlestick, c. 1750 (shown above). Stoneware teacup and saucer, c. 1750 (shown below).*



To answer these questions, we must study all kinds of people from the past, from the wealthiest and most powerful to the poorest and most obscure.

The wealthy and powerful are well-documented, but the ordinary are harder to reach. We can learn many things about poor and ordinary people through the study of written records, but not nearly everything we would like to know. The records are too few, and most of them were written by well-educated, well-to-do people who may have seen the world very differently. To understand the lives of ordinary people, and of minorities such as African Americans and Native Americans, we need the help of archaeology.

## WHAT ARCHAEOLOGISTS DO

Archaeologists dig in the ground to learn about the past. They learn about people who lived long ago by studying the artifacts those people left behind. These artifacts can include anything people have made or altered, from very big objects, like barns or bridges, to very small objects, like thimbles and pins. All of these things can tell us about the people who made and used them. From foundations and pieces of window glass we figure out what kind of houses people lived in, and from those houses we can learn about people's family lives. Dishes, iron kettles, and animal bones tell us about what people ate and how they cooked it. From tools we learn about the work people did and the technology they had mastered. Buttons and buckles tell us about their clothing.



*Taking field notes.*



*Excavating the well at the McKean/Cochran Farm, which was filled c. 1790.*

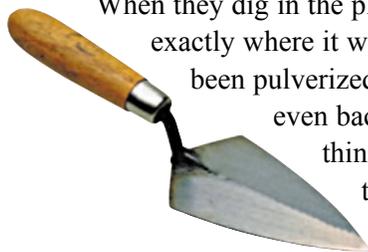
Decorations on these objects tell us about African designs, while images of China on dishes made in Europe point to the western fascination with the exotic east.

Archaeologists dig with many different tools, from dental picks to giant earth-moving machines. They try to match the tool to the kind of information they can recover from the place they are studying. They don't want to destroy important information by digging too hastily, but they also don't want to spend too much time and money digging very carefully where there is little to be learned. Most of the archaeological sites in Delaware are in plowed fields, and plowing mixes up artifacts, moves them around, and breaks them into small pieces. Archaeologists call the soil that plows have mixed up the plowzone.

When they dig in the plowzone, they know that nothing they find is exactly where it was dropped, and anything fragile has long ago been pulverized. So they dig in the plowzone with shovels, or even backhoes. Underneath the plowzone, however, things are different. Any hole that was dug deeper than a plow penetrates, such as a cellar, a well, or a grave, will still contain artifacts left pretty much where they were dropped by the last

person to touch them. In these "features" archaeologists dig carefully, because they may come across very fragile things, like soft bones or badly rusted iron tools. The tool they use most often for careful digging is a straight-bladed mason's trowel. They take careful notes while they are digging, and they draw many plans and take many photographs, so that anyone who wants to study their work years from now will be able to figure out what they did. After all, archaeologists destroy a site as they dig it, and their notes may be all that remains after the work is done.

After archaeologists have excavated a site, they take the artifacts back to a laboratory for study. All the artifacts are cleaned, a complete list or catalog is made, and that list is put into a computer database. Laboratory experts try to put broken pots back together, and the animal bones are studied to find out what parts of what animals were eaten.



*Laboratory processing.*



*Volunteers sorting artifacts at the Thomas Dawson Family Site near Dover.*

Sometimes things turn up that even the experts in the lab can't identify at once, so they do research in libraries or museums to find out what those things are. Some fragile objects, such as iron tools or bone knife handles, are conserved to keep them from falling apart. Archaeologists

may also use other scientific techniques, such as pollen analysis or soil chemistry. A preserved log found in a well at the Bloomsbury Site in Kent County was dated by dendrochronology, or tree ring dating, to the year 1814, giving us the most accurate possible date for the well's abandonment. Then the archaeologists mull over the field notes, drawings, and photographs, along with the list of artifacts and the results of the scientific tests, trying to understand what happened on the site and what that tells us about life in the past. They compare their site to others that have been dug, and ask if their data support theories that historians and anthropologists have developed about past societies. At the end of the process they write reports, present papers, and give talks to the public, because it does little good to excavate a site if other people never learn about the discoveries.

### **DIGGING AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SITE: THE MAHOE/WALLACE FARM**

Rather than just explain what archaeologists do in the abstract, it is easier to describe the excavation of one particular site. The Mahoe/Wallace Farm, excavated in 1997, is a good example. The study of the Mahoe/Wallace Farm began with a single piece of pottery that turned up in a shovelful of dirt. The archaeologists were digging shovel tests, round holes about 18 inches across, at regular intervals across an abandoned field. This particular field was on the south bank of Augustine Creek near Boyd's Corner, a few miles north of Odessa in southern New Castle County. Other shovel tests turned up a few more things,

but by the end of the day we had found only 28 artifacts. The artifacts included two sherds of white salt-glazed stoneware, a type of ceramic used in the 1700s, as well as sherds of coarse red earthenware and pieces of clay tobacco pipes that could have been that



*Excavating animal bones at the Mahoe/Wallace Farm.*

old. Because these artifacts told us that a very early farm might have stood on the site, archaeologists returned a few months later and dug more. On that second visit to the site we dug 12 square test units, each one meter square, or 3.3 feet on a side. In those 12 test units we found 600 historic artifacts, including 275 pieces of brick. When you think about it, 600 artifacts is not very many; one glass bottle could break into 600 pieces. Also, all of these artifacts had come from the plowzone, and we did not know if there were any intact foundations or other features buried beneath the plow's reach.

Meanwhile, documentary researchers went to the archives to see what they could learn about the site. They discovered that the property, which measured about 100 acres, had been purchased in 1724 by Samuel and Henrietta Mahoe from a land speculator. Samuel Mahoe was a Huguenot (a French Protestant) from New York or New Jersey. He identified himself in surviving documents as both a yeoman, that is, a property-owning farmer, and a weaver. The combination of farming with a craft like weaving or shoemaking was fairly common in the colonies. Samuel lived on the site until his death in 1749. In the 1700s most widows with property remarried very quickly, sometimes within a few months of their husbands' deaths, but Henrietta lived on her own for the next five years. She went to court to have her husband's apprentice bound to herself, so she must have tried to carry on the family cloth business. There is no evidence that the Mahoes ever had any children. Otherwise they seem to have been an ordinary rural household; in the 1749 tax roll for St. Georges Hundred they were assessed for exactly the average amount. In 1754 Henrietta married

Thomas Wallace, who was one of her neighbors. The Mahoes had borrowed heavily to set up their farm and had never been able to pay off the debt. The creditors finally called in the loan in 1759, and the Wallaces had to sell most of the farm. The artifacts suggest that the site was abandoned around that time, so it may be that it had no occupants other than Samuel, Henrietta, Thomas, and their apprentices or other servants.

Because of the interesting information we had now gathered about the site, both from the ground and in the archives, we went back to the site again to learn more. We fitted a backhoe with a smooth bucket four feet wide, since the teeth on a standard backhoe bucket would have made a very messy cut through the soil. The backhoe dug four shallow trenches across the site. The trenches were dug to the bottom of the plowzone, so they were about eight inches deep. With the plowzone removed, these trenches were like "windows" into the site. Through those windows, intact eighteenth-century features showed clearly. Specifically, we saw a cellar hole, two large postholes that had once been part of a building, and several small fence postholes. Some of the archaeologists dug a test excavation into the cellar, and they found animal bones, oyster shell, and broken pottery, showing that at least part of the cellar had been filled in with trash. The artifacts seemed to date to around 1750.

The Mahoe/Wallace Farm Site seemed important for several reasons. It dated back to 1724, making it one of the oldest historic farms to be excavated in Delaware. It had belonged to a family of ordinary means. It included a cellar hole, postholes, and other features, and it seemed likely that the cellar hole would contain a great many artifacts. The site seemed to provide a good opportunity to learn about ordinary Delaware residents in the 1700s. We therefore made plans for a final excavation.

We wanted to expose a large enough area around the cellar hole to find any barns, kitchen, wells, or other outbuildings around the house. Our plan called for digging part of the plowzone by hand and removing the rest from the site with a backhoe. We uncovered the entire cellar hole, which measured 16 by 25 feet, and two post buildings. Post-in-the-ground or "earthfast" construction was a common way of building barns and even houses in colonial times. Large posts were set into deep holes in the ground at regular intervals along each side of the building. The walls and roof were then attached to the posts, much as in a modern pole barn. These buildings were quite sturdy until the posts began to

rot, which could happen in as little as a decade or as much as 30 years. We also found several small pits, some fencelines, and a strange group of four large posts forming a distorted square about three feet on a side. The posts seemed far too big for a building that small, and we never did figure out what it was. Every site keeps some secrets, no matter how skilled and careful the archaeologists.



*Overhead views of the Mahoe/Wallace Farm excavations.*

The archaeologists spent most of their time on the site digging in the cellar hole. It was four feet deep and contained several layers of soil. The top layer was just topsoil that had washed into the cellar after it had been



abandoned, and this layer contained only small pieces of artifacts, just like the plowzone. Beneath this washed-in topsoil were several layers of soil mixed with artifacts and pieces of broken bricks. There were not enough bricks around to have made a whole house, so it was probably a frame house with brick foundations. Piles of broken bricks are quite common in old cellar holes: when a house is torn down, someone frequently salvages the usable bricks, but any broken ones are simply thrown into the cellar. Whoever salvaged the bricks at the Mahoe/Wallace farmhouse was very thorough, because almost the entire foundation had been removed. There was not much window glass or many nails in the cellar, either, so we think the whole house may have been moved. House moving was more common then, when houses were smaller and there weren't any power lines in the way, and a number of the oldest houses in Delaware have been moved at least once. The most common technique was to jack up the house and place it on logs, which served as rollers. A team of horses or oxen

pulled the house, while men picked up the logs as they came out from the back of the house and carried them around to the front.

Mixed with the brick rubble was a trove of artifacts. We found more than 6,000 artifacts and pieces of bone in the cellar, all probably thrown away in the 1750s. Most of these were pieces of pottery and animal bones, but we also found fancy buttons and cufflinks, shoe buckles, pieces of stemmed goblets, a bone-handled



*Small objects from the Mahoe/Wallace Farm, including a sundial face (lower right), a button, a 1737 half penny, a bone comb, and a lock plate.*

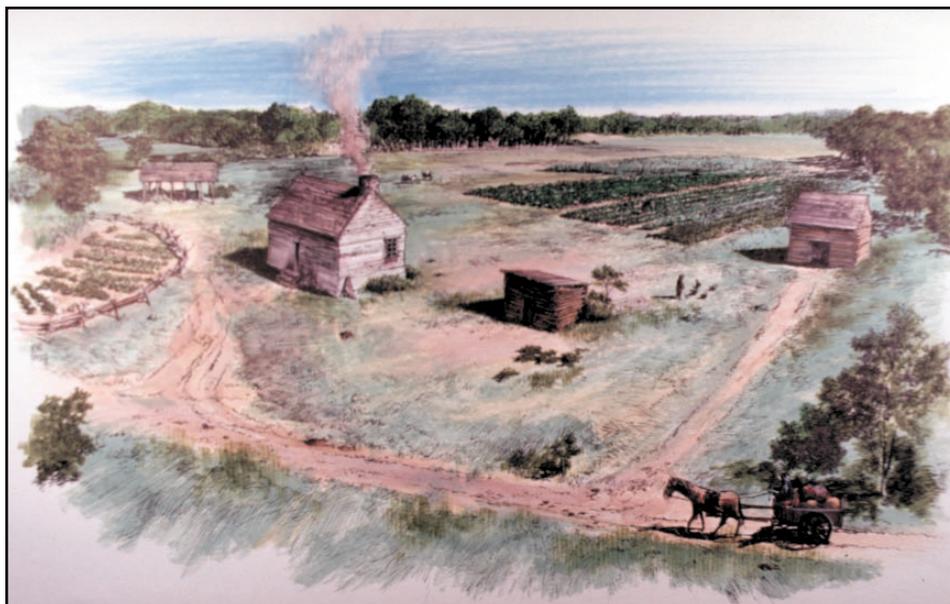
fork, a 1737 British half-penny, two claw hammers, and a child's clay marble. The ceramics included coarse earthenware pots and milk pans, plain mugs and porridge bowls for everyday meals, a decorated punch bowl, elegant teacups, and a teapot molded and painted to look like a head of cauliflower. The animal bones were

mostly cattle and pig, which were the main sources of meat. Hunting and fishing were regular activities, since we found bones of rabbits, squirrels, turtles, catfish, shad, striped bass, and a frog. Perhaps the most unusual thing we found was a small brass disk with a hole in the center and Roman numerals etched around the rim: part of a sundial.

Interesting discoveries were also made around the post building at the eastern end of the site, 70 feet away from the house. This structure measured 14 feet 5 inches by 24 feet. Around it were several pits containing soil that looked black from all the wood ash mixed in it. On most of the site the most common artifacts were animal bone and potsherds, but these pits contained little bone and hardly any pottery. Instead, they held many pieces of clay tobacco pipes and numerous bits of rusted metal. Looking at the ash and the tobacco pipes, the crew imagined men standing around smoking while they tended fires, and

they wondered they might have been doing. Tanning hides? Making soap? The discovery that Samuel and Henrietta Mahoe were weavers was made later, not during our first round of historical research, but as soon as we learned their profession we realized that we had found their workshop. Making cloth involved burning leaves for the ashes, boiling plants to extract dye, boiling and soaking the cloth, and other uses of fire (not to mention keeping the weavers warm in the winter) that could have produced all the ash. Broken tobacco pipes seem to have piled up wherever men worked in those days. Our artist's reconstruction of the site (on the cover) shows the Mahoes and their apprentice at work in the yard by the weaving shed, boiling cloth, putting finished cloth out to bleach in the sun, and using a flax brake to soften that tough plant so the fibers could be made into linen cloth.

A site like the Mahoe/Wallace Farm is a buried record of one family's life. By digging up the site and studying the things we found there, we have read that record. We have learned about the home the Mahoes and Wallaces lived in, the animals they raised, and the work they did. With trowels, shovels, and brushes, we have brought these ordinary people back into history, preserving their memory and honoring their struggle to survive and prosper in the New World.



*Artist John Poreda's reconstruction of the Thomas Dawson Farm in Dover, near the intersection of Route 13 and South State Street.*

## LIFE IN THE 1700S

Each archaeological site is different. Each colonial farm site we dig in Delaware tells the story of a different family in a different place. Yet these colonial sites are alike in many ways. They are similar enough to each other to show that the people who lived on them had much in common. By comparing these sites and studying their common features, we can begin to learn about life for all farm families in colonial Delaware. Archaeology tells us about particular sites, but it also tells us about entire civilizations of the past.

### *House and Home*

Archaeology can tell us a good deal about the kinds of houses people lived in. There are few objects we touch as often as we do our houses, and few objects that so strongly shape the way we go about our lives. Houses also show something about what is important to us. For example, Americans today greatly value their privacy, and many American houses are built to give each person as much privacy as possible. But the desire to be alone was not shared by many people in the past, and it was once common for whole families to live together in a single room. Many houses are also built to be beautiful, and from these houses we can learn about people's ideas of what is beautiful and proper. If we are to study people's lives using material objects, their housing is one of the most important things we must consider.



*The Wilson-Warner House, Odessa.*

Many Americans believe the cliché that "they don't build 'em like they used to." The old houses we can see have massive stone and brick foundations, and the floors and roofs are held up by wooden beams twice the size of today's two-by-fours. Our houses, we often think, are built in a shabby, shortsighted way and will soon be gone, while our

ancestors built to last. A moment's reflection would remind us that almost all of the houses built in the 1700s are gone and that the old houses we can still see must have been well-built, or they would be gone, too. In fact, the very few that survive, a tiny fraction of those that were built, are extraordinary. Also, most of the surviving examples have been extensively renovated, and many have been greatly enlarged. The typical house of 250 years ago was probably very different from the exceptional few we can still see today.

The most remarkable thing about the dozen or so colonial houses that have been excavated in Delaware is how different they are from one another. No two are alike. The houses were many different sizes and were built in several different ways. Even the largest, however, were not big by modern standards. At the McKean/Cochran Farm, a large site near Odessa, archaeologists found the remains of two houses and at least three other buildings. The first house, built around 1750, measured 15 by 18 feet, smaller than many modern American living rooms. It had a full basement and probably a second floor loft, but it probably had only a single room on each floor. The people who lived in this small house were tenant farmers, but they were not poor. Living at such close quarters seems impossible to us, but most Europeans had lived in one-room houses for thousands of years, and many Americans did into the twentieth century.

The first McKean/Cochran house burned down around 1790; the charred steps (pictured below) were still in place when the basement was excavated. The second house at the McKean/Cochran Farm was probably built around the time the first burned down. The farm belonged to a very wealthy woman named Letitia McKean, whose uncle, Thomas McKean, was governor of Pennsylvania and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. The archaeologists believed, although they were not sure, that Letitia McKean lived at the McKean/Cochran Farm for a time with her second husband, and they may have built the second house. That house was larger than the first, but it still measured only



18 by 28 feet. It probably had two rooms on each floor. The house had only one chimney, so only one of the rooms was heated. The heated room on the ground floor was usually called the hall, and the unheated room was often called the parlor, so we call this kind of house a "hall-parlor" design. The hall usually contained tables, chairs, and at least one bed; the children and servants slept in the unheated "chambers" upstairs. This second house had more rooms than the first, but the main room, the hall, was still used for cooking, eating, sleeping, and living. Similar houses have been found on sites where other well-to-do farmers lived.

Although the houses at the McKean/Cochran Farm were small, they were built on solid foundations. Less permanent techniques were used on other farm sites. Sometimes wooden wall sills were laid directly on the ground. This technique usually leaves little for us to find, but in the cellar at the Thomas Dawson Site, just south of Dover, archaeologists found dark brown stains left by beams that had rotted away, allowing them to trace and measure these wooden foundations. Of course, such foundations would not last long, and the Dawsons' house might have begun falling down within 10 or 15 years of its construction. Log houses often had thin brick or stone foundations that were set in very shallow trenches or even directly on the ground surface. Frame buildings were sometimes raised

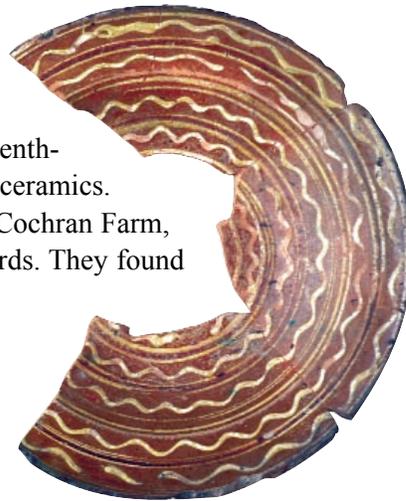


*Foundations of the dairy at the McKean/Cochran Farm.*

on brick piers, small square foundation piles put under the corners and other structural points. These, too, were often set directly on the ground, and only rarely was one dug deep enough to survive subsequent plowing. Sometimes wooden blocks were used instead of brick. On sites where these techniques were used, archaeologists sometimes find no clear traces of the house at all. At the Bloomsbury Site, the archaeologists estimated the size of the house at 15 by 20 feet, but all they had to go on was a space clear of pits or other features and four blue beads, found in the plowzone, that may once have marked the building corners.

### *Food and Drink*

The most common artifacts on most eighteenth-century farm sites are pieces of pottery, or ceramics. Digging in the large cellar at the McKean/Cochran Farm, the excavators uncovered thousands of sherds. They found coarse, thick-bodied redwares, delicate porcelains, beautifully painted pearlwares, "petaled" slipware bowls made in Philadelphia, even a whole stoneware ink bottle. These were exciting discoveries, and that pottery can tell us many things about the past.



*Large (18-inch diameter) slipware dish.*

First of all, pottery tells us when people lived on a site. From about 1700 to 1850, the ceramics industry evolved very rapidly, with new products coming out in almost every decade and old ones going out of use. Ceramics therefore provide a very accurate way for archaeologists to date sites.

Ceramics also help us learn about what people ate and how they ate it. Milk pans have been found on every eighteenth-century site in Delaware, showing that dairying and butter making were very common. Large earthenware vessels called "dishes" and "pans" were also common. These vessels were used to make porridges and bread puddings, which were probably common foods. (Delaware Valley potters still make these vessels, in particular the shallow forms known as "pie plates," using decorative patterns that go back to the 1700s and before.) Mugs for drinking cider and beer are found on every site, and teacups on every site from after 1750.

One reason that ceramics changed so much between 1700 and 1800 was that the way people ate changed. Instead of sitting around a table, most Americans sat around the fire, or, if it was summer, outside. Few homes had enough chairs

*Spoons and forks.*



for the whole family, so many people sat on benches or chests. In 1700 forks were newfangled and rare, so most people speared their meat on the ends of their knives or just picked it up with their fingers. When people did sit around a table, they often ate from one common pot or platter, all dipping their bread into the same dish of stew.

This simple way of eating was very ancient in Europe. During the Renaissance (1400 to 1600), dining habits began to change, first for aristocrats and rich merchants. Etiquette books were written listing new rules of

behavior. More people ate sitting around tables, and they were more often provided with their own plates, bowls and utensils. Eating from a common pot came to seem as boorish as spitting on the table (such spitting was condemned



*Philadelphia-made bowl from the McKean/Cochran Farm, c. 1820.*

by Renaissance etiquette books, which urged people to turn aside and spit on the floor), and something resembling formal dining as we know it slowly developed. After 1700, these changes began to spread beyond the upper class. Along with the new standard of civilized dining came the tea ceremony, a little ritual of refinement that allowed ordinary people to practice gentle manners. Tea drinking, which in

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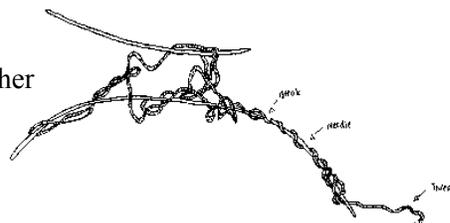
the later 1600s was a habit only of the rich, spread very rapidly after 1700. By the time of the Boston Tea Party in 1773 tea was one of North America's main imports. Tea was not simply a beverage that people drank; it was "taken" in a formal way that became a badge of social standing. Tea parties became a major form of polite entertaining, especially for women. Like the new formal dining, taking tea required a set of special objects — at minimum, cups, saucers, a teapot, a creamer, and spoons — which makes it very easy for archaeologists to trace the spread of this custom.

Did the independent men and women of America's frontier take up these new civilized refinements? Archaeology shows that both tea drinking and the new style of dining spread very rapidly in America. Plates and small bowls and dishes became increasingly common, as did forks and dishes in matching sets. Teacups and saucers have been found on all the Delaware sites dating to after 1750. The tea service tended to be the best dishes in the house, and it was often made of blue and white china or painted with multicolored flowers. Finding pieces of a flower-patterned teapot at a rough frontier farm reminds us that although the settlers' lives were often hard, they still tried to make them beautiful in the ways that they could. The poor tenants who lived at the Augustine Creek North Site around 1790, who may have been African Americans, had painted teacups. The people who lived at the Bloomsbury Site (1760-1814) in Kent County were Native Americans, possibly ancestors of today's Cheswold Lenape community, and they also had painted pearlware teacups. Excavations in other parts of North America show us that tea drinking spread to every part of the British colonies, including the areas where people spoke German or French. The spread of tea drinking makes us think that in this way, at least, the colonists were members of one society, sharing many tastes and values.

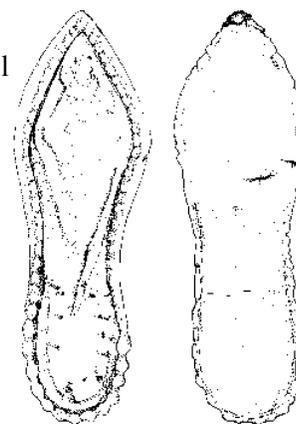
### *Tools*

Archaeology can also help us learn about the work people did around their farms and houses. When all tools were made by hand, they were expensive, and people took good care of them. Tools were repaired, rehafted, and resharpened rather than thrown away, so we don't find very many of them on archaeological sites. Still, we do find some, and they help us learn about people's working lives. A small iron spike from the Thomas Dawson Site turned out to be a tooth from an A-frame harrow, used to break up clods in the freshly plowed fields.

Hoes and sickles were also used in the fields and gardens, and hammers, saws, axes, and wedges remind us of all the other work that had to be done around a farm. Scissors, thimbles, pins, and needles tell us that the people who lived on these sites made and repaired clothes at home. Milk pans and butter pots were used in dairying, kettles and pots in the hard work of cooking over an open fire. Archaeologists have also excavated a blacksmith's shop and the Mahoes' weaving shed. Traces of work have even been found in the chemistry of the soil on archaeological sites, such as calcium from the lime used to treat skins and cloth and phosphorus that may be from the fat used in making soap.

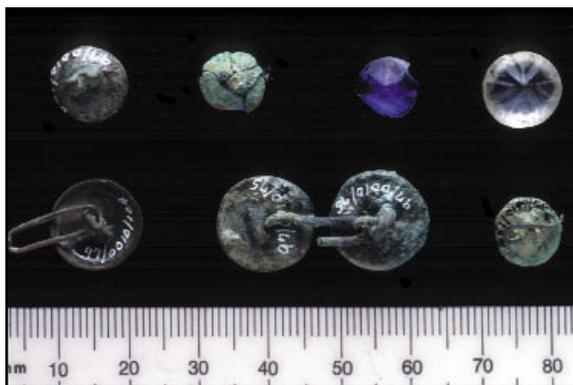


*Pieces of shoe leather and needles still threaded cobbler's style were found in the well at Bloomsbury, showing that one of the residents was a cobbler and that he used pieces salvaged from old shoes to make or repair new ones.*



### *Buckles and Buttons*

People use clothes for much more than just keeping warm, which makes clothing a fascinating subject of study. People choose their clothes to show off their wealth, proclaim their identities, and develop a sense of personal style. Little cloth remains in the ground for archaeologists to find, but



*Buttons and cufflinks from the Mahoe/Wallace Farm, c. 1750.*

buttons, buckles, and other hard parts do survive. These small objects can give us some idea of what people were wearing, and that can tell us a great deal about them.

Buttons were a rather new part of fashion in the 1700s. They do have a function, but their use as fasteners was from the beginning combined



*Fancy shoebuckles from the Mahoe/Wallace Farm, c. 1750.*

with their use as decorative accessories. (Even today, some Amish and Mennonite groups consider buttons a violation of "plain" dressing.) Many of the buttons we find on archaeological sites were obviously chosen for their appearance. Shiny brass buttons were the most common type, and some were gilded to make them shine even more impressively.

Other buttons were set with paste "gemstones." Cufflinks or sleeve buttons are fairly common, and some of them were also set with paste stones.

Elaborately molded brass shoe buckles were another common fashion accessory. Decorative buttons and molded shoe buckles have been found at the homes of several ordinary Delaware farmers, including Samuel and Henrietta Mahoe. These finds tell us that some Delaware farmers were interested in stylish dressing, and that not everything on the farm was hard work done in leather britches.

## THE PEOPLE OF OLD DELAWARE

The ordinary people of colonial Delaware have left few traces aboveground for us to see. But if we dig below the surface, we can find many things that these people left behind. We can find their tools, their toys, their dishes, and their homes. From those potsherds and piles of stone, we can learn about their lives. We can imagine them at work and at play. We know they farmed and raised animals, built houses and barns, married and had families, sewed clothes and made shoes, hunted and fished, served tea in the new fashion, dressed up for special occasions, and worried about today while dreaming of a better tomorrow. Ordinary farm folks may have lived in obscurity and died quietly, but they need not be completely forgotten. Thanks to the efforts of DeIDOT and the archaeologists who work with them, we have come to know a few of them rather well. In the future, we hope to learn more about our history and get to know more of the people who once lived in our land.

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## TO LEARN MORE

For more information about the sites mentioned in this pamphlet, consult these DelDOT Archaeology Series reports:

Bedell, John, Ingrid Wuebber, Meta Janowitz, Marie-Lorraine Pipes, Sharla Azizi, and Charles H. LeeDecker

1998 *The Ordinary and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Delaware: Excavations at the Augustine Creek North and South Sites (7NC-G-144 and 7NC-G-145)*. Prepared for the Delaware Department of Transportation, Dover, by Louis Berger and Associates, Washington, D.C.

1999 *Farm Life on the Appoquinimink: Excavation of the McKean/Cochran Farm Site, Odessa, New Castle County*. DelDOT Archaeology Series No. 156.

Bedell, John, Ingrid Wuebber, Meta Janowitz, Marie-Lorraine Pipes, Gerard Scharfenberger, Richard Affleck, and Charles LeeDecker

1999 *An Ordinary Family in Eighteenth-Century Delaware: Excavations at the Thomas Dawson Site*. Prepared for the Delaware Department of Transportation, Dover, by Louis Berger and Associates, Inc., Washington, D.C.

Catts, Wade P., Jay F. Custer, JoAnn E. Jamison, Michael D. Scholl, and Karen Iplenski

1995 *Final Archaeological Investigations at the William Strickland Plantation Site (7K-A-117), A Mid-Eighteenth Century Farmstead, State Route 1 Corridor, Kent County, Delaware*. DelDOT Archaeology Series No. 119.

Grettler, David J., George L. Miller, Wade P. Catts, Keith Doms, Mara Guttman, Karen Iplenski, Angela Hoseth, Jay Hodny, and Jay F. Custer

1996 *Marginal Farms on the Edge of Town: Final Archaeological Investigations at the Moore-Taylor, Benjamin Wynn (Lewis-E), and Wilson-Lewis Farmsteads, State Route 1 Corridor, Kent County, Delaware*. DelDOT Archaeology Series No. 124.

Grettler, David J., George L. Miller, Keith Doms, Brian Seidel, Macon Coleman, and Jay F. Custer

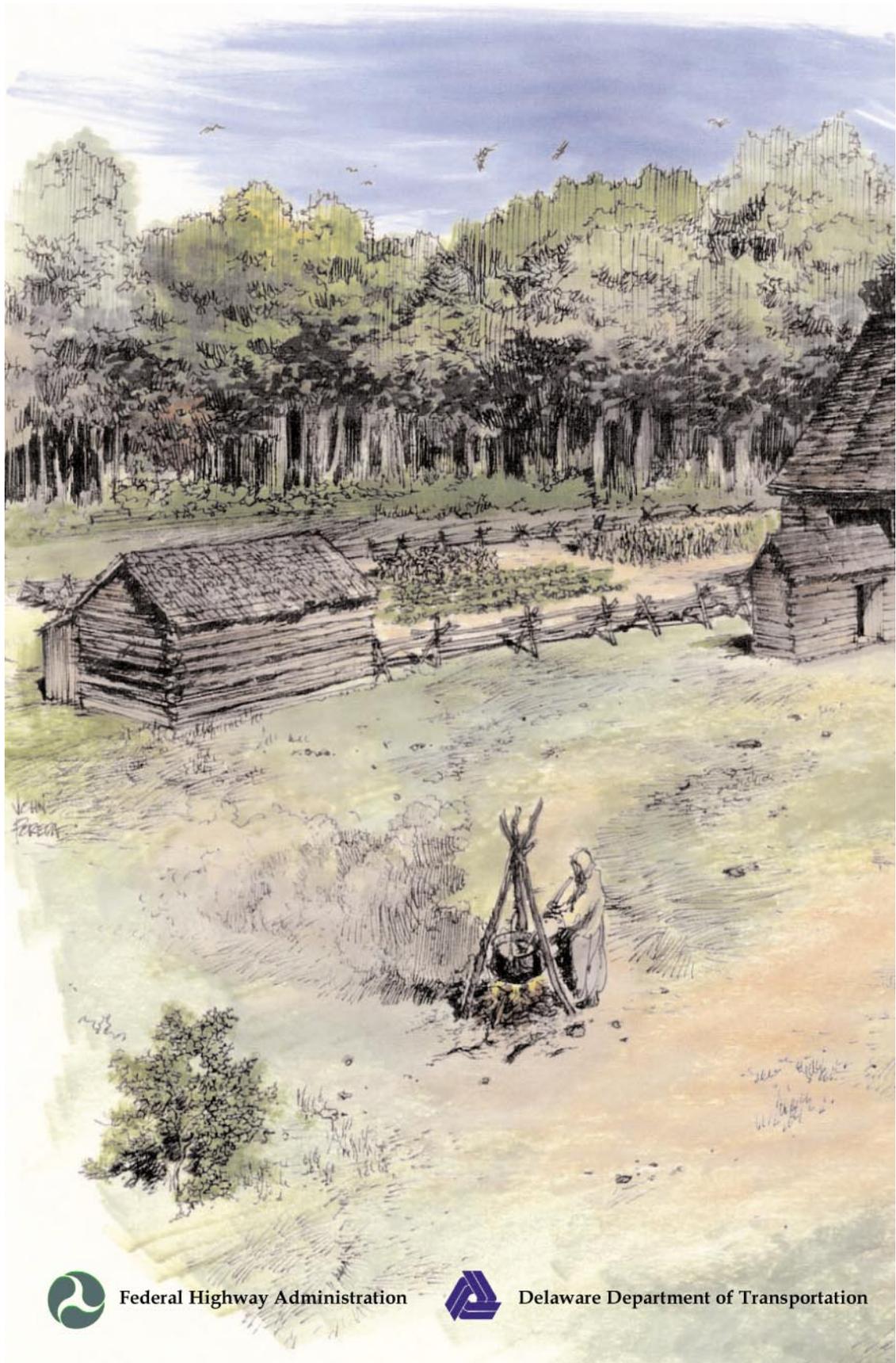
1995 *Landowner and Tenant Opportunity in Seventeenth Century Central Delaware: Final Archaeological Investigations at the Richard Whitehart (7K-C- 03C) and John Powell (7K-C-203-H) Plantations, State Route 1 Corridor, Kent County, Delaware*. DelDOT Archaeology Series No. 127.

Heite, Edward F. and Cara Lee Blume

1998 *Mitsawokett to Bloomsbury: the Archaeology and History of an Unrecognized Indigenous Community in Central Delaware*. DelDOT Archaeology Series No. 154.



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