

SITE HISTORY

A detailed discussion of the background research on the historical occupation of the William Strickland Plantation Site has already been presented in the report of the Phase I and II investigations (Gretler et al. 1991:59-87). A summary of the chain of title is presented in Table 2. At the time the Phase I and II report was prepared, the site's occupation was thought to span the second and the third quarters of the eighteenth century. Additional archival research and the results of the data recovery excavations described herein have refined these original dates, and suggest that the site was occupied from circa 1725 to no later than the mid 1760s. Thus, the following site history will focus on the eighteenth century occupation of the site, with specific reference to the second quarter of that century.

On 26 January 1684, the Proprietors of Pennsylvania, of which Delaware was a part, patented a 600-acre parcel including the eventual location of the William Strickland Plantation Site to Henry Pearman, whose name was also spelled Pearmain, Paremaine, Pairman, and Payrmain. The property was called "Paremaines Choyce" and in the spring of 1686, Pearman and his wife Jane Ana sold two

TABLE 2
Title Chain for the
William Strickland Plantation Site (K-6446, 7K-A-117)

TRANSACTION	ACRES	DATE	REFERENCE
From Walter and Virginia Speakman to the State of Delaware	30 1/2	4/16/1987	K-43-62
From Caroline Speakman to Cummins E. S. Speakman	152	10/31/1916	Y-10-366
From Dr. William Collins to John Cloak	98 1/2	1/3/1827	Z-2-212
From William Collins to his son Dr. William Collins	98 1/2	3/29/1823	KC Oct., H-154
Robert and Sarah Beswick, et al., heirs of Mark Cahoon, decd. to William Collins	--	8/14/1801	G-2-95
Mark Cahoon to Elizabeth Elliot, Rachel Crozier, and Jane Cahoon	49 1/2	8/28/1776	KC Will, L-194
Thomas Cahoon to Mark Cahoon at the death of mother Rachel and stepsister Rachel	49 1/2	--	KC Will, L-72
Thomas Cahoon to wife Rachel [Strickland] Cahoon and stepdaughter Rachel Strickland	49 1/2	9/12/1768	KC Will, L-72
William Strickland Corbitt to Thomas Cahoon	49 1/2	2/15/1764	Q-1-222
William Strickland to William Strickland Corbitt	49 1/2	11/19/1753	KC Will, K-86
Province of Pennsylvania to William Strickland	223	11/16/1743	KC Warrant, S-2-86
John Holland to Andrew Love	200	1691	
Henry Pearman to John Holland	200	1686	
William Penn to Henry Pearman	200	1684	

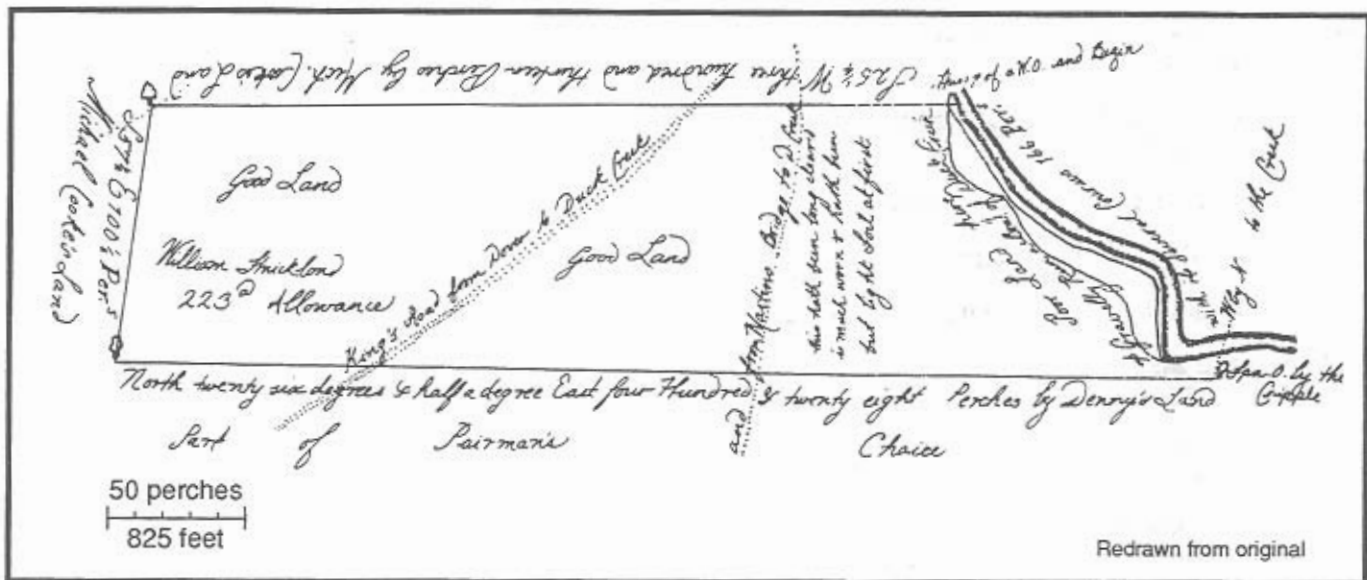
200-acre parcels, one to William Edwards and the second to John Holland. The parcel that Holland received was in turn sold by him to Andrew Love on 10 June 1691. Love retained the land only briefly, dying intestate and without heirs in the spring of 1692/93.

There is comparatively little documentary information available on Pearman, Holland or Love. Henry Pearman, because he lived until 1706 and served on the Kent County Grand Jury in the 1690s and 1700s, at least left a "paper trail." John Holland's name appears in a list of Kent County's householders about 1687, at which time he was recorded as a single, 26-year-old man with 1000 acres of land. Andrew Love is even more of a mystery. The only documentary information related to him is an illustration in the early Kent County Court Records of the ear mark, or brand, that he used on his cattle in 1688. Where Love came from, where he resided, and what he did are all unknowns. After his death in the spring of 1693 the administration of his estate was conducted by his wife Elizabeth Love (Kent County Wills).

The history of the Strickland parcel picks up again in 1743, nearly half-a-century after Andrew Love's death. In the fall of that year, William Strickland received a warrant from the Pennsylvania Land Commission for a 223-acre parcel, the part of the "Paimans Choice" tract that had been sold to John Holland and that had in turn been purchased by Andrew Love. Because Andrew Love had died

FIGURE 8

1745 Pennsylvania Land Commission Survey Map of the Land of William Strickland



“many years ago” and “without leaving any issue or known kindred or lawful heir,” the property had eschewed back to the Proprietors. Two years later, in January of 1745, Strickland had a return of the survey for the land (Figure 8). Petitions for the land, the final step in acquiring property from the Pennsylvania Land Commission, were issued twice, the first time in 1748, and again in the spring of 1752.

The surveyors notations on the plat are interesting, for they describe the quality of the land that comprised Strickland’s tract. The portion of the tract fronting on the south side of Gravelly Run (present-day Mill Creek) was described as “Poor Land here,” and the section of the land between Whitehall Landing Road and Gravelly Run as “this hath been long clear’d is much worn & hath but light soil at first.” The remainder of the tract, approximately two-thirds of the property, was described as “Good Land” (Kent County Archives, Warrants and Surveys S6#51A). The implication in this document is that someone had been living on and farming the property even though Andrew Love died 50 years earlier.

Based on the archival research and the results of the archaeological testing, which showed signs of an occupation predating 1743, it is suggested here that William Strickland and his family were residing on the tract long before it was warranted and petitioned to them. In effect, Strickland may have been “squatting” on the land until he was awarded the property by the Pennsylvania government. Strickland’s name first appears in the 1726 Duck Creek Hundred Levy List, when he was assessed for 12 pounds. At that time, there were 84 taxables in the Hundred, and Strickland’s assessment placed him in the bottom 50% of the people that held 25% of the taxable wealth (Kent County Assessments 1726: hereafter KCA). In 1727/28 Strickland and his wife Catherine were recorded as witnesses to the will of John Rees (deValinger 1944:55).

Strickland’s arrival in Kent County at this time coincides with the eastward migration of small and middling farmers from the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Drawn by the good and comparatively cheap farmland of central Delaware and spurred by falling tobacco prices, this migration also included wealthy planters and counted elements of the Dickinson, Chew, and Mifflin families among its

membership (Munroe 1978:150-152; Clemens 1977). William Strickland did have family connections with Kent County, Maryland, for his aunt, Elizabeth Jones, willed 100 acres of land at the head of "Steelpone Creek" (present-day Still Pond Creek) to Strickland in the fall of 1732. At that time, Jones recorded that her nephew was living at Duck Creek (Baldwin 1920:251). A tract called "Strickland's Rest" was located in Kent County, Maryland by 1713, and ancestors of William Strickland were recorded in Calvert County, Maryland, in the late seventeenth century. These facts suggest that Strickland was probably a second or third generation Marylander, caught up in the migration and colonization of Delaware (Baldwin 1914:222).

By the second quarter of the eighteenth century, Duck Creek Hundred was a frontier area for the more populous regions around Philadelphia and on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. In 1726, when William Strickland first appeared, the number of taxables in the hundred totaled 84. Demographic historians researching the number of people per household in colonial America have approximated on average six people per household (cf., Greene and Harrington 1932; Alexander 1974; Snyder 1982; Potter 1984). Allowing for this rate, Duck Creek Hundred contained approximately 500 inhabitants, or about 95 acres per person. Measurement of acres per person is used here because it is considered to be more useful than other population methods such as persons per square mile (Clemens 1980:216; Mason 1984:114). Within five years the population of the hundred had more than doubled to 193 taxables, with 41.4 acres per person. From this time until Strickland's death in 1753, the population density fluctuated, dropping from a high of 65.6 acres per person (122 taxables) in 1740, to a low of 35.2 acres per person (227 taxables) by 1753.

The attractiveness of Delaware lands in the middle 1700s is apparent when the population density of the Eastern Shore of Maryland is compared to Kent County. In September of 1751, the Reverend Hugh Neill of the Anglican Church in Dover recorded that by the "exactest count" he could make, there were 1320 "taxables or families" in the county (Perry 1878:97). Using the same conversion factor noted above (six persons per household), Neill's figure approximates 7,920 inhabitants for 380,800 square acres of land, or 48 acres per person. At the same time on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, comparable measures were 26 acres per person in Kent County, Maryland, 23 acres per person in Talbot County, and 30 acres per person in Queen Anne's County. Population density was, therefore, quite low in Kent County, Delaware, in comparison to other areas on the Delmarva Peninsula.

By virtue of its role as the seat of local government, Dover was the largest community in Kent County, but according to the Reverend George Frazer in 1733, it was a "small village of about 15 or 16 families" (Perry 1878:70). Dover contained the County courthouse and jail, several taverns, and an Anglican Church that by the mid-eighteenth century was "in miserable condition" (Perry 1878:96). The nearest community to Strickland's farm was Duck Creek Village, located several miles to the northwest. Also known as Salisbury Town, by 1731 the community included a grist mill, Anglican Church, Friends meetinghouse, tavern, cooper shop, blacksmith shop, and several dwellings (Hancock 1976; *Pennsylvania Gazette* April 9 1730; August 19, 1731; May 29, 1735; March 30, 1738). The town began as a small hamlet called Duck Creek Village at the intersection of the King's Highway (present Route 13) and the head of navigation of Duck Creek (present Smyrna River).

The other main transportation route was the "Maryland" Road, present State Route 6, approximately three quarters of a mile to the north. The Maryland Road was in place as early as 1735 and connected the prosperous Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay with Duck Creek, and from there with the Delaware Bay and Philadelphia. East to west transportation from Maryland to Duck Creek Village very quickly became more important than north-south transportation along the King's Highway and the center of town moved accordingly. This new settlement called itself Duck Creek Crossroads to distinguish itself from the older Duck Creek Village to the west.

As overland transportation along the Maryland Road increased, Duck Creek Crossroads grew and eventually eclipsed Duck Creek Village. As the name implies, Duck Creek Crossroads was oriented more to the intersection of the King's Highway and the Maryland Road than with river navigation at Duck Creek Village. In addition, the head of navigation had moved away from the village and closer to the Crossroads. By 1760, siltation caused by erosion and cultivation had shifted the head of navigation to Holloway's landing near the present intersection of Route 13 and Duck Creek. This shift in river access firmly cemented the ascendancy of Duck Creek Crossroads over Duck Creek Village.

John Oldmixon described Kent County in 1708 as "settled like Virginia, not in Townships but in scattered Plantations," and this settlement pattern had not changed in the ensuing decades (Hancock 1962b:121). The landings and shipping wharves located along the major creeks fulfilled important roles in the transportation and communication networks for the inhabitants, particularly in the shipping of goods to and from the area. Patrick Gordon, the Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania commented in 1730 about this trade, stating that over the preceding decade shipping from the region had increased by one-third, and that "there are divers farmers and planters settled throughout these Counties who carry the produce of their labour mostly to Philadelphia to market" (Hancock 1963:348).

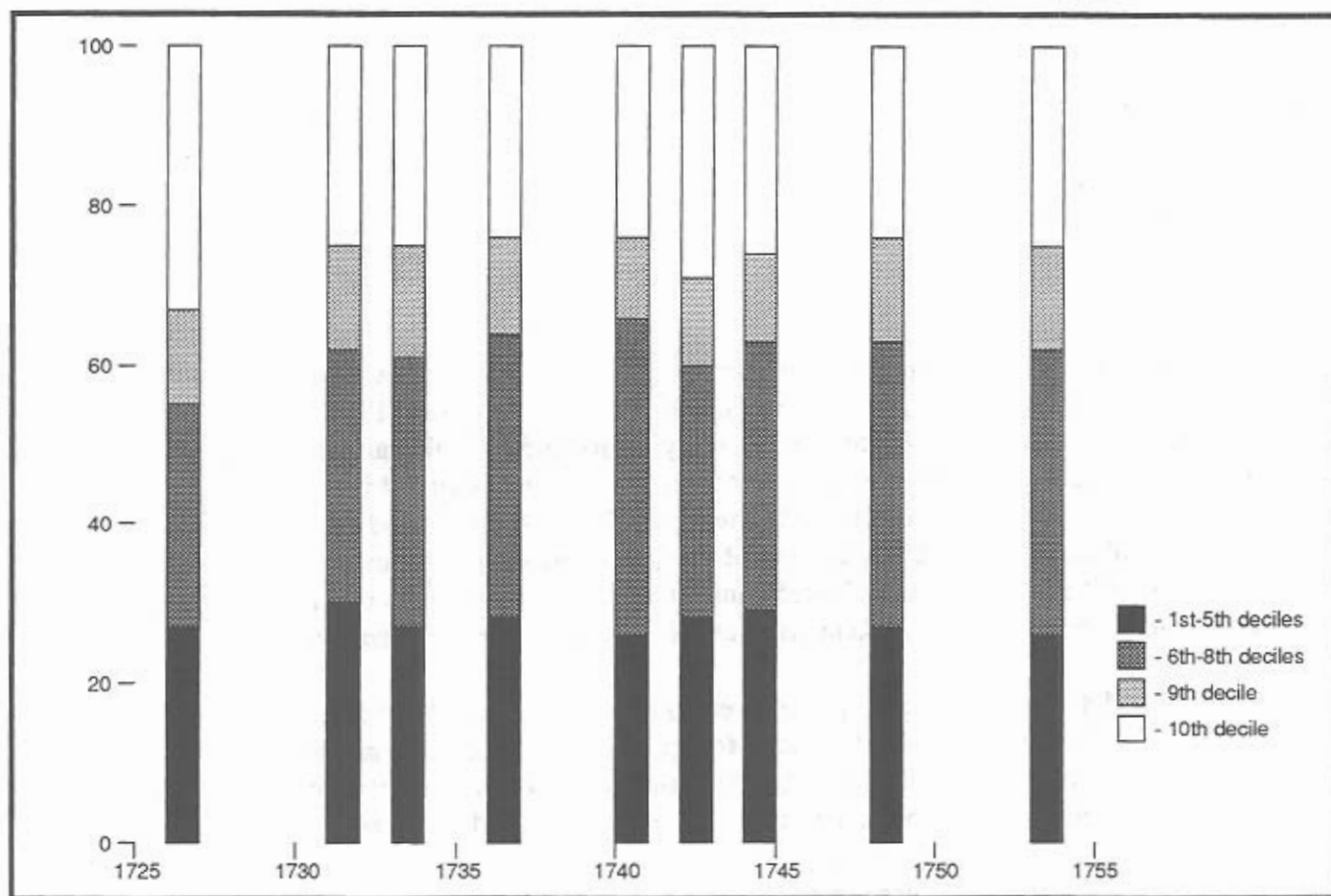
One reason for the relatively slow growth of Kent County beyond the St. Jones River drainage was a lack of any extensive network of navigable streams or good roads in the western part of Kent County. Land north and west of the navigable portions of Duck Creek, the St. Jones Creek, Little Creek, and the Murderkill River, was more sparsely populated than other areas in Kent County because of the absence of easy access to water transportation which was so important for the cheap movement of bulky agricultural products.

In an attempt to improve the roads in the Lower Counties, as Delaware was then referred to, the General Assembly in 1752, and again in 1761, called for the repair of the "King's Road" between the New Castle-Kent County border and Lewes. The eighteenth century laws called for the road to be 40 feet wide with all but 10 feet cleared. Secondary roads of 30 feet in width and all but 10 feet cleared were also to be constructed. From Duck Creek Village the post road continued south through Dover eventually reaching Lewes and Worchester County, Maryland (Laws of the State of Delaware 1797:320, 390-394).

Several Anglican ministers reported to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel about conditions in the Three Lower Counties during this time, and each stressed the sparse population size, dispersed settlement pattern, the distressing lack of Anglican churches, and the proliferation of "dissenting" sects like the Quakers, Presbyterians, and Anabaptists. According to the Anglican minister David Humphreys, writing in 1730, "the Country is very fruitful, but not so well planted [settled] as the others. The Families are not settled together in Towns, but live in scattered Plantations." The reason that Humphreys gave for the dispersed settlement was due to the presence of "many Tracts of excellent Land, which tempt the Inhabitants to fix in such separate Dwellings" (Hancock 1962b:145). As the Reverend George Ross of New Castle put it in 1727, those "who Manured the Ground lived dispersed up and down a large Compass of Ground" (Hancock 1962b:129).

The quality of the land and its agricultural potential exerted a significant pull on colonists to the area, and many, like Strickland, came from already settled regions. In this "New Settled Colony," the Reverend Alexander Campbell wrote from his church at Appoquinimink, "the Gross of the Inhabitants depend upon the produce of their Plantations, Wheat Indian Corn Barley Oates and Tobacco" (Hancock 1962b:132-133). George Ross felt that most of these settlers were of the poor or middling levels of society, being "generally low in their Condition but not indigent; having wherewithall to Support

FIGURE 9
Decile Rankings of Taxable Wealth
for Duck Creek Hundred (1726-1753)



themselves but little to spare.” Like Campbell, Ross described the average planter as “occupied in clearing and grubbing the Land, in Raising of Grain, as Wheat, Rye, Indian Corn, Oats and Barley; in improving their Stock such as Horses, Horn Cattle, Sheep and Hogs” (Hancock 1962b:128-129).

Strickland was a member of the Anglican Church, and was one of the signers of the deed for the 40 acres of glebe land in Duck Creek Hundred in the summer of 1744 (Scharf 1888:1101). The Anglican congregation of Duck Creek Village built a small, wooden church by 1746, and a year later the church was described as “flourishing” with a “very numerous and attentive Congregation, there being two and sometimes 300 hearers” (Perry 1878:88,90). The wooden edifice was in “good repair” by 1750, but 10 years later, had to be replaced with a larger brick structure (Perry 1878:96, 108).

Strickland’s social and economic position in Duck Creek society is not well documented, but an examination of the tax lists of Duck Creek Hundred does show his rise from a landless laborer to a prosperous landholder. The levy lists for the period between 1726 and 1754, the date of Strickland’s death, show a gradual increase of his assessments, from 12 pounds in 1726 to a high of 24 pounds just before his death (KCA 1726-1753). The most significant increases occurred between 1748 and 1752, the years when he received the patents for the Pairman’s Choice property. Indeed, William Strickland rose from the bottom 50% of the taxables in Duck Creek Hundred to the top 10% by the time of his death. Based on the levy lists for the years between 1726 and 1753, the taxable wealth in Duck Creek Hundred was unequally distributed among the ‘upper, middling and lower sorts’ (Figure 9). Over the 27 year period, the top 10% of the taxables held an average of 26% of the wealth in Duck Creek

Hundred, while the bottom 50% of the taxables held an average of 27% of the wealth, and the middle group of taxables held approximately 53% of the wealth. The average assessment tended to drop over the period, from a high of 23.5 pounds in 1726 to a low of 13 pounds by 1753. At the same time, the median assessment value remained fairly constant at 12 pounds. The decline in average assessment and the corresponding rise in population suggests that land was readily available in this frontier setting, and that large planters were selling or leasing tracts to arriving immigrants. After 1742, the number of taxables rated above 20 pounds dropped considerably, and the number rated between eight and 20 pounds increased. Thus, the rise in Strickland's economic fortunes over time from landless farmer to propertied planter was remarkable because by the middle of the eighteenth century it was becoming increasingly more difficult for people in the bottom deciles of taxables to join those of the middling or upper deciles.

Appendix I lists William Strickland's inventory from 1754, and this inventory, and his will and administrations, which were prepared in the winter of 1753 and 1754, show that his plantation was a mixed grain and livestock farm, similar to those described by Lemon (1967) for Chester County, Pennsylvania, and Mason (1984) for Kent County, Maryland. Cattle raising was important, and Strickland had at least 55 head of livestock on the property and listed in his inventory, including 12 cows, four "yearlings" (calves), one bull, 23 sheep, and 15 hogs. Strickland also stipulated in his will that his wife be allowed an unknown number of "Hoggs in the Penn" as part of her legacy, and not as part of her widow's third. The size of Strickland's livestock herd suggests that he was a stockman, a common occupation for farmers in Kent and Sussex counties in the eighteenth century.

Cattle and sheep of this time period were often smaller than their modern counterparts and Strickland's animals were probably allowed to forage freely in the marshes and forests of Duck Creek Hundred. The importance of the livestock herds to the livelihoods of Lower county farmers should not be underestimated for considerable amounts of cash or goods could be exchanged for cattle. In late September of 1727, Caesar Rodeney recorded in his journal that George Yeates of New Castle County came to St. Jones to purchase 11 head of cattle from Rodeney's brother, paying three pounds for a steer and two pounds 10 shillings for cows. For a considerable time, Caesar and George Marson searched the neck of land where the steers and cows were free-ranging, "but could not find them." Finally the cattle were rounded up and driven overland to New Castle, but even with drovers there were stray cattle (Hancock 1962a:52). John Watson recorded in his journal, in 1750, that for Sussex County yeoman the "raising of Cattle is a very main Article with these people" (Jordan 1915:10), and the same held true for Kent County. James Tilton noted later in the century that cattle from the lower two counties were often driven to New Castle to be fattened on grass, and then sold in the markets of Wilmington and Philadelphia (Bausman and Munroe 1946:185). Tilton also makes it clear that, while cattle and sheep were part of the region's market economy, pigs were more often used for private consumption.

Draft animals on Strickland's plantation consisted of two mares, one horse, and a colt. The horse furniture listed in the inventory included "a Mans Saddle" and three bridles, along with two hackles, a pair of fetters, and a horse lock. A "Set of Horse fleams," or lancets for bleeding horses (Milward 1983:21) were also listed, suggesting that Strickland was concerned about the health of his horses.

The inventory taken in December of 1753 recorded that the farm was sown with "wheat and rye in the ground," and that there were 12 bushels of oats, a stack of oats, and a parcel of flax present. "Corn in the ear," worth 16 pounds, suggests that there was a corn crib or storage area for this crop.

However, such a structure may not have been needed because Tilton records that hays and grains were generally placed in round or square stacks outdoors (Bausman and Munroe 1946:183). Tilton also noted that oats had a tendency to spoil in stacks. Strickland's oats were stacked, suggesting that storage of oats in structures was an uncommon practice in 1753. Strickland apparently had harvested his summer crops of oats, flax and corn, and had planted his winter crops, wheat and rye. Corn fodder and hay were on hand for his livestock, and he had "wheat in straw & tharsht & cleaned." Farming tools listed in the inventory suggest a well-supplied and maintained farm, including a plow and harrow, two scythes and a cradle, two mattocks for working around stumps, three hoes for weeding the corn, and a pair of sickles.

To work this farm, Strickland had three slaves; two men, Boston and Andrew, and one woman, Nan, who was probably married to Andrew. Strickland left Andrew and Nan to his wife Rachel in his will. He may have had difficulties in disciplining his slaves, because a "Negroes Collar" worth about five pounds was also recorded in the inventory. Strickland's family included his wife, Rachel, and at least three daughters, Elizabeth, Rebecca, and Rachel. Rachel Strickland was William's second wife. He was married first to a Catherine Strickland, but by the spring of 1748, Rachel was his wife (deValinger 1944:123). Both Elizabeth and Rebecca were married and probably did not reside on their parent's farm, and were probably daughters by William's first wife. Elizabeth was married to Jacob Corbett of New Castle County, and Rebecca to a Peter Truewax, or Truax. Rachel may have been an infant child in 1753, because the inventory recorded a "sucking bottle," or baby bottle, among the property of the estate. A codicil to the will mentions another son-in-law, Charles Hudson. Strickland bequeathed to this son-in-law his wearing apparel, but to whom Hudson was married to is unknown. Thus, the farm at the time of Strickland's death probably was the home for Strickland, his wife, an infant daughter, and three slaves, for a total of six individuals.

Though not specifically stated in the inventory, the order of the items listed suggest that the men who prepared the inventory systematically went from structure to structure on the property, and separate rooms, or more probably buildings, can be discerned from the document. The furnishings of Strickland's kitchen/quarter include a variety of tools, such as four axes and a broad axe, four wedges, hand and cross-cut saws, a spade, and a hammer. Kitchen objects included a grind stone, a churn, a bucket, bowls and a cheese pat, old pots and pans, earthenware pans, fire place equipment, a dripping pan, a griddle, sieves, a dough trough, and several hogshead barrels and casks. Inside of the main house were more domestic items, including three beds, bedsteads and furnishings (one in the "outward room," and one with curtains), a gun, a warming pan, one square table, three chests, a trunk, two looking glasses, and one arm chair.

Strickland's position in the top 10% of taxables in Duck Creek society, in 1753, is reflected by the presence of tea service equipage, including six silver tea spoons, a tea table, and some teawares, a tea kettle, and some "old silver." Strickland was able to seat and provide utensils for six individuals at his table, because the inventory records six chairs, six knives and forks in addition to the spoons, and five pewter dishes, some old pewter, and twelve plates (probably ceramic) to complete the setting.

Rachel and her daughters were providing some income to the family through home manufacturing, as indicated by the presence of "2 Linn Wheels & 1 Wooling" wheel, check reels, 12 yards of cloth, and some wool and woolen yarn. A pair of andirons indicate that at least one room in the home was heated. Stilyards for weights and measures were located in the house, along with a brass mortar, suggesting that these objects were too valuable to be left in the kitchen/quarter. Case bottles,

several gallon and quart bottles, two jugs, a chaffing dish and a gridiron were also stored in the house instead of the kitchen/quarter, perhaps because of the presence of a cellar in the former. The interior of the Strickland home also contained evidence that Strickland and other members of his family were literate including a "parcel of old Books," and a bible. His literacy is also substantiated by the appearance of his signature on his will and by his wife's signature on the estate administrations. Other objects in the home indicate that domestic spaces in the mid-eighteenth century were still utilized for the storage of non-domestic items, such as three bridles, a saddle and saddle bags, a box of iron, and butcher knives. On the last page of the inventory were listed "Some Bricks & Lime" worth four pounds. It is possible that Strickland was in the midst of building on his property at the time of his death, and the archaeological evidence presented later in this report supports this conclusion.

Upon William Strickland's death in the winter of 1753, the 223-acre tract was willed to his wife Rachel, unless she remarried, in which case the property was to be equally divided between his daughter Rachel and two grandsons, William Strickland Corbett and Isaac Corbett. The grandsons were the children of Mary (née Strickland) Corbett and Jacob Corbett. Strickland's widow, Rachel, did remarry within eight months of her husband's death, for by August of 1754 she was the wife of Thomas Cahoon. The heirs therefore received the property, but since they were apparently still minors, the estate was administered by Jacob Corbett, Rachel (Strickland) Cahoon, and Thomas Cahoon.

There may have been some difficulties among the executors of Strickland's estate, illustrated by a Kent County Court of Common Pleas (KCCP) case of Cahoon vs. Corbett. In October of 1754, two months after the settlement of William Strickland's administrations, Jacob Corbett was accused by Thomas Cahoon of having broken into his home "by Force of Arms," stolen an account book valued at 80 pounds, and torn out and destroyed pages from the book. Cahoon's lawyers found the damages to Cahoon to be worth 200 pounds, and the case dragged along in court from November 1755 to February 1756, when it disappears from the records (KCCP February Term 1755), perhaps because Cahoon dropped the charges. In any event, the precise nature of the records that were contained in the account book are not known. However, Jacob Corbett was paying the taxes for that portion of the Strickland estate owned by his children, and since his mother, Rachel (Strickland) Cahoon was remarried to his step-father, Thomas Cahoon, it is likely that the book dealt with the estate. Jacob would continue to administer the estate until about 1758 or 1759. By 1761, William Strickland Corbett and Isaac Corbett were old enough to pay their own levy (KCLL).

By 1761, it seems that the Strickland estate had finally been divided among the heirs. The deed of conveyance in 1764 (KCD Q1:121) from William Strickland Corbett to Thomas Cahoon, and the deed from John Moore, Jr. (widower of Rachel Strickland, the daughter) to Thomas Collins in 1771 (KCD T1:112), both make references to a court decision requiring the sheriff, jurors, and a "skillful surveyor" to divide the estate. The county court under whose jurisdiction this matter fell could have been either the Orphans' Court or the Chancery Court. The precise court and date of the case is not known, but the result of the case was to create three "equal" parcels from the estate. William Strickland Corbett received a 49 1/2 acre-parcel in the center of the property, extending back from Mill Creek, Rachel received the 91 1/2 acre-tract to the west (the future location of Belmont Hall - Plate 2), and Isaac Corbett received the 82 acre-parcel to the east.

William Strickland Corbett's parcel was the smallest in terms of total acreage because it contained the improvements, or structures, related to the Strickland farmstead. A small 13 x 6- perch (214.5 x 99-foot) rectangle or "notch" was created along the eastern boundary of the Rachel Strickland tract and it is recorded in the metes and bounds of the Moore-to-Collins deed (KCD T1:112). This notch was