

THE LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY WESTERN FRONTIER OF MARYLAND:
A VIEW FROM HARMONY HALL

by

Stephen R. Potter, Ph.D.

and

Robert C. Sonderman

National Park Service,
National Capital Region
Washington, D. C.

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National Park Service archeological excavations in 1985-87 resulted in the discovery of a late 17th century earthfast house site located on the grounds of Harmony Hall, an 18th century Georgian manor in Prince George's County, Maryland. The property is owned by the National Park Service and was leased in October 1985 to a private firm under the provisions of the Historic Leasing Program -- a new program designed to lease historic properties not opened for public interpretation to preservation-minded individuals or entrepreneurs. The discovery was made during an archeological survey of the property to ensure that plans by the lessees for new construction and utilities would not destroy any significant historic resources.

Originally patented as 500 acres of land called Battersea, the property was surveyed in 1662 and recorded in the name of Humphrey Haggett. By the time the patent was granted six years later, the owner was Richard Fowke, who had married Haggett's widow. In 1688, Fowke divided the property in half, selling one portion to Philip Mason and the other to Richard Iles. The tract sold to Mason contained the land upon which Harmony Hall now stands (Nickels 1987).

Shortly after acquiring the property, Mason sold it to Thomas Lewis in 1692. Four years later, Lewis willed 100 acres to his son Richard, which included the house his mother was living in. This 100 acre tract also incorporated the future site of Harmony Hall. At the time of Thomas Lewis' probate inventory, his estate was valued at L50.10s, placing him in an intermediate group of planters whose living standards were between those of the poor and those of the middling and rich (Horn 1988:82-3).

Several important events occurred along this portion of the western Maryland frontier during the Lewis occupancy. In 1696, Prince George's County was formed, initially including all of the land which today is Prince George's, Frederick, Montgomery, Washington, Garret and Alleghany counties, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. The following year, the majority of the Piscataway, Choptico and Mattawoman Indians left their lands between Mattawoman and Piscataway creeks and crossed the Potomac River into Virginia, settling some place between the Bull Run mountains and the Blue Ridge (Cissna 1986:176, 180-85).

In 1709, Richard Lewis sold the 100 acres of land containing his parents' home to a carpenter named William Tyler. With Tyler's death in 1721, his "dwelling plantation called Battersea" was willed to his wife Elizabeth, and upon her death to his son William (Nickels 1987). For reasons which will become apparent later, the extant brick manor known as Harmony Hall was probably built before the elder William Tyler's death in 1721.

Beginning in the fall of 1985 and continuing intermittently until the summer of 1987, a series of archeological excavations were conducted on portions of the Harmony Hall property slated for

future construction or utility line installation. A total of 48 units, 5-by-5 feet, were excavated following the natural and cultural zones of deposition. All soil was screened through one-fourth inch wire mesh. To check for potential bias in the recovery of very small bones, samples of soil were water-screened through fine window mesh.

A variety of features were uncovered, including a mid-18th century trash pit located on the river-side lawn of Harmony Hall, northwest of the brick manor, and the remnants of a builder's trench for a frame kitchen dependency located at the south end of Harmony Hall. The most noteworthy discovery, the site of an earthfast house, was made during test excavations a few feet east of the brick manor. A total of twenty contiguous units, 5-by-5 feet, were excavated in order to uncover the post-supported frame dwelling and adjacent areas. Approximately 65% of the burned house midden was exposed, covering an area 18-by-22 feet and varying in thickness between 0.5 to 0.8 feet. Only 15% of the midden stain, describing three sides and two corners of the house, was excavated.

Feature 17, the burned midden of the earthfast house, is probably the archeological remains of the home of Thomas Lewis, built in 1692. Ceramics from the midden include North Devon gravel-tempered earthenware, black-glazed earthenware, Staffordshire slipware, monochrome blue and polychrome delftware, and Rhenish blue and manganese incised stoneware. These wares were common during the period 1675-1720 (Noel Hume 1970). However, a few sherds of slip-dipped white salt-glazed stoneware were found at the top of the burned midden, along with an English brown salt-glazed stoneware mug bearing a GR excise mark. The former dates ca. 1715-1775 and the latter is post 1714 (South 1977:211; Oswald et al. 1982:278). These ceramics were in use near the end of the occupancy of the earthfast house, sometime after 1715 and before 1720.

A total of 247 clay tobacco pipe-stems from the midden provide a Binford (1962) mean date of 1715.3. Comparing this with the datable ceramics, 1715 is closer to an end date than a median. This is probably due to the sample size.

Clay tobacco pipe bowls and bowl fragments found in the burned house midden are typical of Bristol manufacture during the period ca. 1692-1720s. Unique among them is an unusual English belly bowl. On the smoker's right side of the bowl is a relief-molded cartouche bearing the initials "RC" over "PW." This specimen is similar to two others found in New York State except that it has no rouletting below the mouth of the bowl (McCashion 1979:146). This might indicate that the Harmony Hall pipe dates after the mold agreement of 1711, which heralded the disappearance of rouletting within a few years of that date. The pipe was probably made in Bristol, based upon the bowl form and relief-molded cartouche (Noel Hume 1970:305). Including this pipe, only three examples by the makers "RC/PW" have been reported for all of North America. Unfortunately, the pipemakers remain unknown (McCashion 1988).

Other archeological remains from the earthfast house include animal bones (which will be discussed later in greater detail), wine bottles, a wrought-iron strap hinge, a fragment of wrought-iron hearth furniture, turned window lead, gunflints, and eight drawn, glass beads; four round and four tube, representing five different types. Based upon the senior author's recent examination of glass beads in Amsterdam, all of the Harmony Hall beads are probably Dutch made.

Beneath the burned layer of the earthfast house, feature 63 was discovered, measuring 6.5-by-6.0-by-2.0 feet. Originally dug to serve as a storage pit accessed through a floor panel of the house, the pit was filled with trash shortly before the house burned. Among the discarded items were animal bones, a heavily worn, wrought-iron hoe blade, wine bottles, Staffordshire slipware, black-glazed earthenware, a rim/handle sherd from a Rhenish blue-gray incised stoneware mug, and 38 clay tobacco pipe-stems.

The small sample of stem fragments provide a Binford mean date of 1720.43. Once again, this is not a mean date for the occupancy of the earthfast house, but it is either a terminal date or one that falls a few years after the house was destroyed. However, as a relative date it supports the stratigraphic interpretation that the storage pit was filled late in the structure's history.

Near the stain of the southeast corner of the earthfast house, feature 22, a trash pit measuring 4.5 feet in diameter and 1 foot deep, intruded into a burned clay horizon created by a brick kiln used during Harmony Hall's construction, circa 1720. The top of the construction horizon corresponds with the construction layer that overlies the nearby site of the earthfast house. Scattered throughout the construction layer were little piles of cut bricks, including one cluster that contained a reverse, S-scroll water table brick which matches exactly the water table bricks of Harmony Hall. Thus, the construction horizon is the historic ground surface trod upon by the masons erecting the brick manor. Since Feature 22 is intrusive, it must date after the brick walls of Harmony Hall were constructed.

Mixed in the trash pit were sherds of Rhenish blue and manganese decorated stoneware, monochrome blue and polychrome delftware, English brown salt-glazed stoneware and wine bottles. A small sample of 29 pipe-stems yields a Binford mean date of 1728.68. One of the two pipe bowls from the pit is typical of forms in use early in the 18th century. Taken together, the stratigraphy and artifacts indicate the trash pit was filled during the 1720s, most likely around the time the brick manor was nearing completion or soon after.

Based on the previous information, the following historical interpretation is presented. In 1692, Thomas Lewis built a post-supported frame dwelling on a portion of the original Battersea patent. This structure and its lands were purchased by William Tyler, the elder, in 1709. The earthfast house continued to be occupied until a fire destroyed it sometime after 1715 and

before 1720. Shortly thereafter, William Tyler built the brick manor, Harmony Hall, prior to his death in 1721.

Having reconstructed the specific series of historical events responsible for the creation of the archeological record at Harmony Hall, we will now use these data to independently test hypotheses derived from a colonization model developed by Henry M. Miller (1984). Specifically, Miller's research predicts that in the earliest phases of colonization, the adaptive strategy will be more diffuse, with the settlers concentrating upon a broader range of resources than their contemporaries in the homeland. Over time, as available lands are occupied and the population grows, greater emphasis is placed upon fewer but more dependable resources which can be intensively exploited, and gradually the adaptive strategy becomes more focal.

Using animal remains and other archeological materials from 15 sites in the Estuarine Coastal Plain of the Potomac and James rivers, Miller's (Ibid.) analysis supported the prediction that early colonial subsistence practices in Maryland and Virginia depended upon a much wider range of animals than in Britain. He also discerned a trend in the data toward increased utilization of a few select resources. By the late 1680s, a more focal subsistence pattern emerged which deemphasized wild resources and emphasized two domestic species -- cattle and swine.

The authors felt that a similar analysis of the animal remains from the earthfast house and associated storage pit at Harmony Hall would be instructive for several reasons. First, the site dates from 1692 until sometime after 1715 and before 1720 -- the very time that Miller predicts the emergence of a more focal adaptive strategy. Second, the earthfast house was located along the late 17th century western frontier of Maryland. And, the site is situated near the head of the Interior Coastal Plain of the Potomac River, providing a nice contrast to Miller's data derived from sites in the Estuarine Coastal Plain.

A total of 1,424 animal bones were analyzed from the earthfast house and storage pit. The composition of the faunal remains by Class equals 1,382 mammal, 35 bird, 2 fish and 5 turtle bones. Of the total number of animal bones, 325 or 22.8% were identifiable to genus or species.

Examination of the domestic faunal remains resulted in the following bone tabulation: 151 swine, 148 cattle, 4 sheep, 3 chicken and 2 dog bones. The percentage of bone by domestic animal to the total number of bones, both domestic and wild, is shown below the bar graph. Based upon an analysis of the minimum number of individuals, at least 8 swine, 6 cattle, 2 sheep, 2 chickens and 1 dog are represented in the sample.

The bones of wild animals were tabulated with the following results: 6 deer, 1 goose, 1 duck, 2 teal, 2 catfish and 3 turtle bones. Again, the percentage of bones by wild animal to the total number of bones from all animals is shown below the bar graph. An

analysis of the minimum number of individuals indicates only 1 animal is represented in each category.

At first glance, the Class makeup of the collection shows that fish were not especially important. Indeed, given the condition of the other bones from the site, if the occupants had been eating lots of fish, the evidence should have survived in the soil. Although this conforms to similar observations made by Miller (1984:290), it is curious that the settlers would have ignored the abundant anadromous fish runs for which this part of the Potomac River is famous. A similar situation was noted for Crow Village, a 19th century Eskimo site in Alaska (Oswalt and VanStone 1967:70, 103). Even though it was known from informants that fish were the mainstay of the villager's diet, no fish bones were found in the village midden because the fish were processed by the waters edge. Perhaps the occupants of the earthfast house at Harmony Hall also exploited the annual spring fish runs, processing their catch away from the living area.

When the percentages of domestic bone and meat are compared to the percentages of wild bone and meat, the differences are striking. Domestic animal bone accounts for 94.79% of the total identifiable bone or 95.66% of the total meat available. Thus, the analysis of the faunal remains from the late 17th and early 18th century earthfast house at Harmony Hall supports Miller's hypothesis that over time, subsistence patterns became focused upon two domestic animals -- cattle and swine -- with a corresponding decline in the amount of wild game in the diet. As Miller (1984:382) has succinctly written, "in addition to meat, dairy products, and cooking fats, cattle and swine also provided a secondary source of income, a buffer against economic difficulty, and a means of improving the lives of one's children through inheritance."

The archeological findings from the earthfast house at Harmony Hall are also supported by Thomas Lewis' probate record of 1697. His estate inventory lists 27 swine, 17 cattle, 17 sheep and 1 horse. When these figures are compared to the minimum number of individuals represented in the archeological sample, the results are interesting. Swine account for 44% of the domestic animals listed on the 1697 inventory and 42% of the domestic animals from the archeological sample. The percentage of cattle in the inventory is also very close to the percentage represented in the archeological sample: 27% to 32%. However, sheep comprise 27% of the animals inventoried in 1697 and only 11% of the MNI count. Perhaps, this indicates that swine and cattle were used more for meat, while the sheep were kept for their wool. Furthermore, the relatively large number of sheep on Thomas Lewis' 1697 probate supports Miller's (1984:172-73) observation that sheep raising and wool spinning increased markedly between 1680 and 1710.

When Thomas Lewis built his earthfast house in 1692, the inner coastal plain of the Potomac River basin, from Mattawoman Creek to the falls, was still home to groups of Piscataway, Mattawoman and other Indians, and only sparsely settled with English plantations.

The great natural trade routes, running roughly east-west along the river and north-south along the fall line, helped to make this a dynamic region prehistorically, as well as historically. Yet, by the late 17th century conditions along the western gradient of the Potomac River frontier had changed dramatically. Indian populations, although present, were drastically reduced and English planters new to the Potomac frontier were afforded some measure of stability by their links, however tenuous, to the earlier and more settled parts of the Maryland Colony not far to the east. Because of this, the late 17th century adaptive strategies of frontier planters, like Thomas Lewis, were virtually indistinguishable from those of their peers living along the more secure and populous St. Mary's and Patuxent rivers (Ibid.:52).

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