

EXCAVATIONS AT THE BRENT CEMETERY SITE (44ST130), STAFFORD COUNTY

THE PROJECT

Several years ago, the St. William of York Parish in Aquia, in Stafford County, attempted to list a very old (ca. 1680s) cemetery on the National Register of Historic Places. The cemetery, located just off U.S. 1 at Aquia Creek, is owned by the Diocese of Arlington; St. William of York provides maintenance. Due to his well-known interest in historic cemeteries, the parish contacted Malcolm (Rich) Richardson (NVC/ASV) to assist their research.

A preliminary magnetometer survey of the property was conducted to find out where grave shafts might be located. The next task was to search for the remains of a possible early "Chapel." St. William Parish agreed to buy supplies for the excavation. A small group of very experienced volunteers from NVC/ASV, including four who work closely with Doug Owsley from the Smithsonian, agreed to shovel test the property outside of the cemetery; excavate a limited number test units; wash and inventory all artifacts; and produce a technical report on their finds. Shovel testing and excavation of two test units in the northeastern quarter of the property was completed last year (1997). Laboratory work was finished over last winter. Intensive testing of artifact concentrations has continued this year.

THE SITE

The Brent Cemetery includes the site of the original home and the family cemetery of George Brent of Woodstock. It is the oldest English site in Northern Virginia that has been investigated archeologically. The Brent Family played a significant role in the settlement of 17th century Maryland and Virginia. Three members of the Brent family emigrated from Gloucestershire, England, to Maryland in 1638. Ten years later, all three moved to Stafford County, where they were joined by a nephew, George Brent.

GILES BRENT, was a close friend of the Calvert family and originally was Lord of the Manor of Kent Fort, on Kent Island in the Chesapeake Bay. He married Kittamaquund, daughter of the chief of the Piscataways; their eldest son Giles, a notorious hothead, helped to provoke the conflict that eventually led to Bacon's Rebellion in 1676. Giles' sister *MARY*, a devout Catholic, lived for twelve years with her sister Margaret at "Sisters' Freehold" in St. Mary's City. *MARGARET BRENT* was one of the largest landowners in Maryland, and was listed on the tax rolls as "Mistress Margaret Brent, Gent." She served as "sole Executrix" of Leonard Calvert's estate. In 1648, she unsuccessfully petitioned the Maryland Assembly for voting rights as a member of that body.

In 1647, Giles Brent acquired property on Aquia Creek, where he established two plantations, "Peace" and "Retirement." Giles' sisters joined him in 1650. Margaret and Giles both bought

additional land along the Potomac in Virginia, including a tract that eventually was incorporated into the City of Alexandria.

GEORGE BRENT came to Virginia between 1662 and 1670 and established his plantation of "Woodstock." He was Attorney General of Virginia and Stafford County's representative to the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1688. George, his two wives, and at least two of their children, are buried in the cemetery at Aquia. Just east of the Diocese property, a large abandoned sand and gravel quarry marks the probable location of the eighteenth century plantation of "Woodstock," home of George Brent's heirs.

RESULTS

Testing and excavation have demonstrated that Native Americans used this location as early as the Late Archaic/Transitional (Savannah River) period. Almost every shovel test yielded flakes, debitage, and unfinished or broken tools. Quartz was the most common lithic material, but rhyolite, jasper, and various kinds of chert also were present. The most intensive prehistoric occupation of this site occurred during the Late Woodland period in the southwestern corner of the property, close to Aquia Creek, where many fragments Potomac Creek ware and triangular points were recovered.

The historic period artifacts indicate that George Brent constructed his first house on top of the Late Woodland camp. Nails, lead window strips, large pieces of hand-made brick, and two post-hole features provide evidence that a building stood in this location. Tobacco pipe stem and bowl fragments, wine bottles and glass tumblers, gunflints, upholstery tacks and ceramics clearly indicate that the structure was domestic and NOT a church or chapel. The date ranges of these artifacts correspond closely to those on the grave markers in the adjacent cemetery. The shapes of the tobacco pipe bowls, the wine bottle necks, the abundance of delftware and absence of 18th century ceramics indicate that the Brent site was occupied during the late 17th and early 18th centuries (ca. 1670 - 1720).

ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE DATA RETRIEVAL FORM

SITE NAME None (destroyed by gravel diggings) SITE NO 44 ST 3

SITE TYPE (1) (Historic/Prehistoric?) _____

(2) General function _____

SITE CHRONOLOGY (1) General time frame _____

(2) Specific dates 24 SEP 1969

ARTIFACTS FOUND pottery (VSL Acc #224)

FEATURES FOUND _____

DOCUMENTATION (Report, author, date) _____

recorded by H. A. MacCord, Sr

SITE NAME GOVERNMENT ISLAND SITE NO 44 ST 110

SITE TYPE (1) (Historic/Prehistoric?) Quarries/domestic?

(2) General function _____

SITE CHRONOLOGY (1) General time frame _____

(2) Specific dates recorded 8-2-88

ARTIFACTS FOUND prehistoric pottery, flakes & the distal end of
several points/blades

FEATURES FOUND _____

DOCUMENTATION (Report, author, date) field sketch, 1806 watercolor

25 color photos in FAC of ASV Jack Edlund

ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE DATA RETRIEVAL FORM

SITE NAME 12TH Campsite (Rochambeau) at Peyton's Tavern SITE NO 44ST134

SITE TYPE (1) (Historic/Prehistoric?) Temporary camp - French

(2) General function 14 JUL 1782

SITE CHRONOLOGY (1) General time frame _____

(2) Specific dates recon survey 5-1-89

ARTIFACTS FOUND _____

FEATURES FOUND _____

DOCUMENTATION (Report, author, date) _____

reported by Mary Rothwell FAC/ASV 5-1-89, 6-5-89

Rochambeau's copy of MS in LC Rte 1 runs through site

SITE NAME _____ SITE NO _____

SITE TYPE (1) (Historic/Prehistoric?) _____

(2) General function _____

SITE CHRONOLOGY (1) General time frame _____

(2) Specific dates _____

ARTIFACTS FOUND _____

FEATURES FOUND _____

DOCUMENTATION (Report, author, date) _____

ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE DATA RETRIEVAL FORM

SITE NAME Agua Catholic Cemetary SITE NO 44 ST 130

SITE TYPE (1) (Historic/Prehistoric?) historic

(2) General function cemetary c 1680's

SITE CHRONOLOGY (1) General time frame _____

(2) Specific dates _____

ARTIFACTS FOUND _____

FEATURES FOUND 1687 grave 1933 altar marker for 1570 Jesuits

DOCUMENTATION (Report, author, date) pictures

Mary Rothwell + Jack Edlund FAC/ASV 4-16-89

maps; accounts in Goolrick, Stafford-1933

SITE NAME Woodstock SITE NO 44 ST 137

SITE TYPE (1) (Historic/Prehistoric?) historic

(2) General function domestic - estate of Geo. Brent

SITE CHRONOLOGY (1) General time frame c 1673-1832

(2) Specific dates _____

ARTIFACTS FOUND several wrought rosehead spatula tipped nails

several wrought headless (finish) nails

FEATURES FOUND borrow pit, well earlier - chimney(?)

DOCUMENTATION (Report, author, date) Mary Rothwell & Jack Edlund

pedestrian recon survey site drawing - Edlund photos - Rothwell

Rochambeau map shows a cluster of buildings on this site

Mary Rothwell 6-14-89

815 Sledgehammer Dr 6-26-89

Fred'bg VA 22405

The Brent Cemetery Site (44ST130)

Background

The Brent Cemetery Site comprises an approximately 2.5 ac parcel of land surrounding the late 17th - early 18th century burial ground of the Brents, a distinguished Northern Virginia family that moved to Stafford County from Maryland during the last quarter of the 17th century. Members of this family attained some political prominence in Maryland and Virginia. Margaret Brent, for example, served as executor of Leonard Calvert's estate, and Giles Brent, who married a daughter of a Piscataway chief and reportedly was somewhat of a "hothead," was involved in the preliminary conflicts that eventually spilled over into Virginia to precipitate Bacon's Rebellion.

The Brents amassed substantial property in Northern Virginia; at Aquia Creek and the Potomac River, they established three plantations (Peace, Retirement, and Woodstock, which was located immediately east of the Brent cemetery. Being Catholic, they had to receive special permission to practice their faith in Virginia (the site is located within the boundaries of the Anglican Overwharton Parish). As a result, this site has been commemorated by the Diocese of Arlington (and recognized by a state marker) as the site of the first Catholic congregation in Virginia.

The objective of the Brent cemetery project is to search for the location of a "mass house" at which Brent family members reportedly worshiped. Tradition has it that the structure, if it existed, was located adjacent to the family burial ground. A team of five members of the Northern Virginia chapter of the Archeological Society of Virginia has been conducting Phase I shovel testing at the site since April of 1997. Shovel test intervals have been 15 ft, with retests of positive tests at intervals of 5 ft. To date, a total of 194 shovel tests and retests have been excavated, and a continuous preliminary inventory of the excavated materials has been maintained. Two test units also have been excavated in the northeastern quadrant of the parcel in areas of dense artifact concentration.

Results of Phase I Testing

Prehistoric component

Because the Brent Cemetery site occupies a level terrace overlooking the confluence of a minor drainage and Aquia Creek, the location is ideal for Native American occupation. As expected, the site contains a heavy Native American occupation component dating primarily from the Late Woodland period, based on the recovery of sand- and grit-tempered ceramics (some of which has been tentatively identified as Potomac Creek ware) and fragmentary Late Woodland triangular points; the heaviest concentration of these ceramics is located in the southwestern quadrant of the site. There is some evidence that the site was also occupied temporarily or sporadically during the earlier Middle to Late Archaic/Transitional period; at least one fragmentary Holmes point, a possible Brewerton eared point, and a partial, unidentified broadspear type (probably broken during manufacture) have been recovered.

The primary lithic material on site is quartz, with moderate amounts of gray and black chert, sandy chert, rhyolite, and jasper; quartzite is almost entirely absent. Tool manufacture and curation apparently were the primary activities at the site. Flakes, shatter and broken points are the principal artifact types; some shovel tests have yielded as many as 25 flakes. Some blade manufacture also seems to have been attempted, particularly with gray chert. The principal source of these lithic materials appears to have been the cobble and gravel deposits that lie at depths of a foot or less in several areas of the site. In fact, most of the adjacent Woodstock plantation site has been destroyed in modern times by extensive sand and gravel mining.

No prehistoric features such as pits, postholes, or hearths have as yet been identified. This suggests that the site was utilized only as a temporary encampment rather than a long-term habitation location. However, excavation of additional test units in the southwestern quadrant of the project area may reveal evidence of structures or other features that will change this preliminary interpretation.

Historic component

On most of the site, historic occupation has been represented by widely scattered random materials such as tobacco pipe fragments, wrought nails, and a few historic ceramics. During the last two weeks of Phase I testing, a heavy concentration of historic material was encountered in the extreme southwestern portion of the parcel.

The historic ceramics from this area include primarily delftware and French faience (a relatively rare find on Northern Virginia sites). Also within the collection are grey, brown, and white salt-glazed stonewares, including Westerwald wares; red earthenwares, including one fragment that was slipped; and Staffordshire yellow wares. Very insignificant amounts of later eighteenth century ceramics such as pearlware, creamware, and white ware have been recovered. The assemblage also includes additional tobacco pipe fragments (bowls and stems, some of very early eighteenth century type); wine bottle and clear table glass; some early blue-green window glass; moderate numbers of wrought nails; at least one gunflint; and a broken iron table knife blade. Mortar and brick fragments, ranging from "crumb" size to an occasional brickbat, were found in almost every shovel test in this area.

Shovel-testing within this quadrant has produced no clear evidence of intact historic features such as building foundations, postholes, and the like. However, the presence of a concentration of architectural debris such as wrought nails, brick and mortar fragments, and window glass suggest strongly that some sort of building stood nearby. Some shovel test units also contained concentrations of stone rubble that were noted in no other location at the site. At this point, we are not sure whether the structure within the property lines of the cemetery, or whether it was located just outside of the fence. Further testing is necessary to ascertain the location of the building.

Preliminary Evaluation

The Brent Cemetery site has been very lucrative in terms of artifactual material. The prehistoric artifacts recovered leave little doubt that this location was occupied primarily during the Late Woodland period (A. D. 900-1600),

with some possibly earlier sporadic use during the terminal Late Archaic period (ca. 1,000 B. C.). The range of prehistoric artifact types and the absence of any well-defined features suggest that the area was a temporary encampment site used primarily as a location for tool manufacture and curation.

The historic component has yet to be fully defined. However, the presence of a building south of the formal cemetery is definitely indicated. The artifact assemblage suggests occupation during the early to middle eighteenth century (ca. 1700 - 1750). The earlier years of this time frame correspond to the dates on the grave markers within the cemetery itself, which cluster around the first decade of the eighteenth century.

The integrity of the site is in some doubt. Thus far, the historic and prehistoric materials have been intermixed, and no clear vertical separation has been noted. Until several excavation units in the southwestern quadrant of the site have been completed, we cannot be sure whether the site has been disturbed.

Recommendations

Due to the abundance of prehistoric and historic materials in the southwestern quadrant of the cemetery property, the project team hopes to be able to excavate a minimum of five 5 x 5 ft test units within the heaviest concentration of prehistoric and historic materials. These test units will resolve issues of site integrity, and also will expose any features that may exist on the site.

*PARTIAL GENEALOGY: THE BRENTS OF
MARYLAND AND VIRGINIA*

