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Nicholas Bellantoni

Robert Gradie III

David Poirier

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Zooarchaeology and Social History of the Butler-McCook Homestead, Hartford, Connecticut

by NICHOLAS F. BELLANTONI,
ROBERT R. GRADIE III, AND
DAVID A. POIRIER

INTRODUCTION

The Butler-McCook house, located at 396 Main Street in Hartford, Connecticut, was constructed in 1782. Although altered from its original two-chimney central hallway plan by the later addition of dormers, a second story gable and a one-story side ell, this building is one of only two downtown Hartford structures which have survived from the 18th century. Further, the interior furnishings, which were bequeathed in perpetuity with the house by its last owner, represent a significant artifactual collection for interpreting and understanding the lifestyle of its 19th century urban, professional occupants (Krucko 1978). Anson McCook has aptly summarized the historical contribution of this structure to the City of Hartford:

My sister and I like to think of the house and land, linked together as they have been for centuries, as... a permanent landmark of the old Hartford, a Hartford that is fast disappearing. The homestead... would show graphically how successive generations of an old Hartford family had actually lived for almost two centuries in the same abode, at the same hearth and under the same roof... (Luyster 1970).

This wish has been admirably fulfilled through its utilization as a house museum, as well as the offices of the Antiquarian and Landmarks Society, Inc., which administers several other historically significant Connecticut houses. The Butler-McCook house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Dr. Daniel Butler (1751-1812), a prominent Hartford physician, as well as a grist, saw and paper mill owner, erected the basic twin-chimney central hall plan structure in 1782.

Butler's account book notes that his customers balanced their debts by performing tasks such as "clapboarding the west end of the new house ... working on chimney in the new house ... putting in three cellar windows ... whitewashing rooms and buttery" (Reynolds 1978). Dr. Butler's residence was built onto an existing small one-room blacksmith shop, which dated circa 1740, and which was converted into the kitchen ell of the main house.

John Butler, Daniel's son and a paper mill entrepreneur, acquired full rights to the estate from his sisters in 1814, two years after the death of their parents. In 1837, alterations undertaken in the kitchen and upper back room coincided with John Butler's marriage. Later, John's daughter Eliza commissioned noted landscape architect Jacob Weidenmann to design a formal garden for the rear yard. Weidenmann's surviving 1865 water color wash drawing of the garden plan has served as a historical blueprint for the restoration of this significant landscape feature by the Antiquarian and Landmarks Society, Inc.

In 1866, Eliza Butler married her second cousin, Dr. John James McCook, who achieved wide recognition for his pioneering sociological studies of Hartford's itinerant drunks and tramps (French 1977). Addition of the dormers and the side ell in the late 19th century enabled the structure to continue service as the residence and medical offices of the multi-talented McCook family until 1971, when the Antiquarian and Landmarks Society, Inc. was entrusted with its future preservation.

Serendipitous circumstances provided an opportunity to examine an archaeological component associated with the historic Butler-McCook house. During August, 1979, an unusually violent windstorm toppled a magnificent copper beach tree which was situated in the rear yard not more than 20 feet north of the kitchen ell. As the tree toppled, it pulled up a dense but shallow root mat. Visual inspection revealed the existence of artifactual and faunal material within the tree's shallow root matrix, which spanned 17.5 feet

in maximum diameter, but only 2.5 feet in approximate depth (Figure 1). The Antiquarian and Landmarks Society, Inc. permitted the salvage of the archaeological data within the limits of the exposed root area; circumstances precluded additional subsurface investigation of the deposit's spacial and stratigraphic context. Therefore, the archaeological context of the material recovered from the exposed area is imprecisely defined.

Refuse Disposal

Ferguson (1976) notes that the attitude of Americans towards refuse changed throughout the 18th and 19th centuries from that of a simple nuisance to an unsightly health hazard. With these changing attitudes came changing methods of disposal. Deetz (1977) notes that during the 18th and early 19th centuries there were three methods of refuse disposal common in New England. These methods were indiscriminate broadcast, intentional pit burial and random dumping in abandoned cellars, ditches or other handy depressions. In the late 19th century, trash disposal was intentionally transported to community dumps. The circumstances surrounding the recovery of the Butler-McCook material present difficulties in the explicit identification of the particular form of disposal activity this deposit represents. Although artifactual material was available in abundance, damage to contextual evidence by tree roots and the restriction of recovery efforts to the exposed root pit precluded the search for detailed features such as stratigraphy, pit walls or other archaeological evidence. Thus, while the visibility of this deposit is excellent, its archaeological focus is not adequately defined. Currently, it is postulated that the deposit represents a midden resulting from material originating from the kitchen area which is approximately 20 feet to the north. This assumption is supported by the shallowness of the deposit, most material being found within 2.5 feet of the surface and the high incidence of faunal remains and food-related objects in the recovered sample. Confirmation of this assumption is dependent

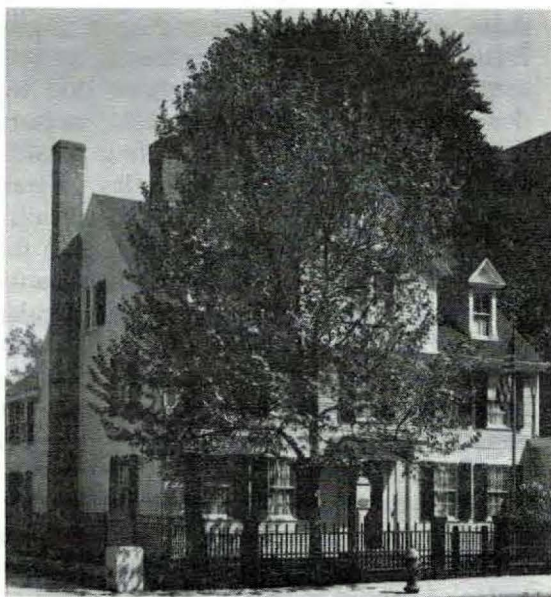


Figure 1. Main entrance to the Butler-McCook House. The copper beach tree (location of the archaeological deposit) is visible to the rear of the structure.

upon future controlled excavation within the midden area.

Recovery of the artifact and faunal data was accomplished by the removal of objects from the root matrix and the shovelling of material from the exposed root pit area; this latter material was sieved with a 1/2 inch wire mesh.

Artifact Analysis

Fifteen thousand, three hundred and fifty four artifacts were recovered from the midden, of which 94 percent, or 14,435, were ceramic sherds. The remaining 6 percent consisted of 100 glass sherds, 64 wrought nails, 6 buttons (4 bone and 2 brass), 19 common straight pins, 3 clay pipestem fragments, 3 wrought fireplace hooks, 457 bone fragments and 256 bivalve seashells.

To establish a temporal context for the midden, a not altogether successful attempt was made to date the deposit's ceramic assemblage applying the South Mean Ceramic Data Formula (South 1977) and the Salwen Bracketing Technique (Salwen and Bridges 1977). This produced a mean date of 1789.9 with bracket dates of 1758 and 1821. While these

dates span the known occupation of Daniel Butler, it is more heavily weighted to the 18th century while documents suggest that the domestic occupation was a 19th century phenomena. There are, at least, four possible explanations for this disparity. First, material from the circa 1740-1782 blacksmith shop occupation may be present within the midden. Second, it is possible that Daniel Butler was conservative in both his acquisition and disposal of ceramics and thus, many of his ceramics may have been older than the house which he was occupying. Third, the deposit may reflect the random acquisition of ceramics. His acceptance of "milk pans" worth three shillings as settlement for an outstanding debt is noted in a 1784 account book entry (Butler 1775-1790). Finally, the limitations imposed upon the data recovery efforts may have produced a biased sample.

Ceramic Assemblage

Eight categories of ceramics were discernable within the recovered artifact assemblage. These included two redware types, stoneware, Delft, creamware, pearlware, whiteware, and Chinese porcelain. Ninety percent of the recovered sherds consisted of undecorated creamware. A minimum of 86 ceramic vessels could be identified based upon minimum sherd count. Of these, twenty-five were redware, ten stoneware, three Delft, sixteen undecorated creamware, two hand-

painted creamware, five shell-edged pearlware, fifteen handpainted pearlware, six transfer-printed pearlware, and six Chinese export porcelain.

The majority of the identifiable objects possessed a social, as well as an utilitarian function. Solely utilitarian items included three Delft apothecary pots, three stoneware bottles, two stoneware crocks, two stoneware jugs, and five redware milk pans. The remaining objects consisted of diningware, tea sets and specialty items, such as an English white saltglazed basket and matching bowl with zoomorphic feet. The majority of these objects were either creamware or pearlware.

Of the eighteen creamware objects identified, eleven were undecorated plates with royal pattern rims. The remainder consisted of three undecorated mugs, one undecorated coffeepot, and three tea cups, two of which exhibited handpainted polychromic decoration. This plainness is contrasted with the pearlware which consists of five green shell edged plates, fifteen handpainted tea cups or saucers, and five transfer-printed tea cups or saucers. When plate sherds wear compared for use wear marks, fourteen percent of the creamware sherds exhibited such marks, while only five percent of the pearlware did.

While Chinese porcelain is represented by a minimum of six objects, three different styles are found including blue decorated, Canton plain and enameled overglazed. It is not clear

TABLE 1
CERAMIC INDEX VALUES FOR THE BUTLER-McCOOK HOMESTEAD

Plates	CC	$1.00 \times 10 = 10$
	Edged	$1.37 \times 6 = 8.22$
		$18.22 + 16 = 1.3$
Cups and Saucers	CC	$1.00 \times 3 = 3$
	Painted	$1.65 \times 14 = 23.1$
	Printed	$3.20 \times 5 = 16$
		$42.1 + 22 = 1.91$
Bowls	CC	$1.00 \times 0 = 0$
	Dipped	$1.20 \times 3 = 3.6$
		$3.6 + 3 = 1.2$

Note: Scale used 1802 (Miller 1980)

whether these represent a single set assembled over time from different styles or parts of three sets. All of the porcelain objects were part of tea services.

The Miller Average Expenditure Ratio (Miller 1980) was calculated for each of three functional categories within the ceramic collection (Table 1). These categories were plates, cups and saucers, and bowls. This procedure assigns a value of one (1.0) to the least expensive earthenware available in the 18th and 19th centuries, that is, undecorated creamware and pearlware. Ceramics within a collection are then categorized into four classes of increasing expenses: undecorated, shell edged, handpainted, and transfer-printed; and a ratio is calculated based upon the percentage of each classification within the entire ceramic collection. In the Butler-McCook ceramic sample, bowls had the lowest ratio (1.2), followed by plates (1.3), suggesting that relatively inexpensive objects were purchased in these categories (Table 1). Cups and saucers by contrast possessed a relatively high expenditure ratio (1.9) suggesting that relatively more expensive objects were purchased within this category, reflecting perhaps the social importance of their function as tea services.

Faunal Analysis

Faunal analysis for historic site data has primarily focused upon either rural (for example: Barber 1976, Bowen 1975, Olsen 1972, Otto 1977) or military sites (for example: Cleland 1970, Gramly 1978, Guilday 1970, Lyman 1977). In contrast, investigation of urban archaeological faunal data has been infrequent (Gust 1980a,b). The Butler-McCook faunal data provides an opportunity for examining the complex cultural, economic and environmental variables affecting urban EuroAmerican subsistence systems.

Recovered osteological remains at the Butler-McCook house site totaled 457 bone and tooth fragments and the bivalves of 256 shellfish specimens (Table 2). Fifty-four percent of the skeletal fragments were unidentified and consisted of the following: 1)

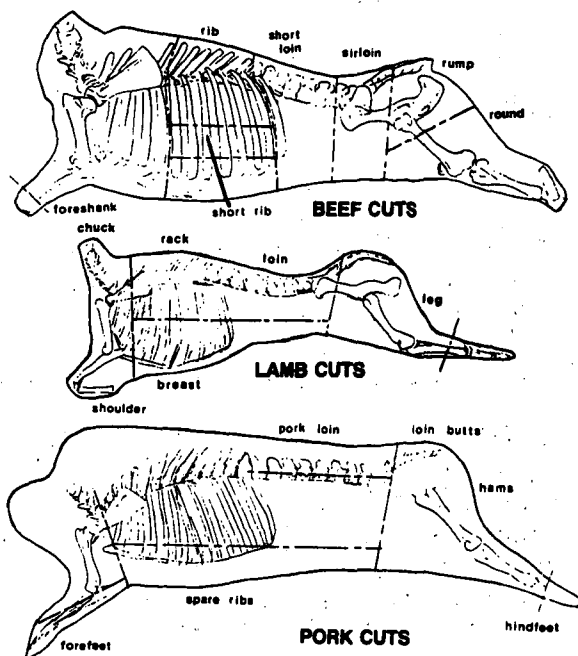


Figure 2. General butchering pattern of the domestic cow (*Bos taurus*), sheep (*Ovis aries*), and pig (*Sus scrofa*) inferred from the faunal remains of the Butler-McCook house deposit.

epiphyseal elements shattered from decomposition; 2) splintered long bones; and, 3) charred fragments. All identifiable mammalian species are domesticated animals: cow, sheep and pig.

Domestic cow (*Bos taurus*) bones are represented overwhelmingly (76%) by vertebrae and rib fragments, followed in decreasing frequency by pelvic and sacrum remains. This distribution suggests that the cuts of beef preferred by the inhabitants of the Butler-McCook homestead were prime rib, short loin and sirloin. Schulz and Gust (1980) have investigated the relative beef cut prices in the late 19th century which have revealed that prime rib, short loin and sirloin were the most expensive cuts of the era (Figure 2). Osteological remains also provide evidence for the utilization of the rump, round and short rib portions of beef. Age determination, based upon the fusion of the epiphysis to the diaphysis and the eruption of permanent teeth, indicates that the individual *Bos* are approximately 24 months old. The highest

quality of beef is found in animals ranging from 18 to 36 months old (Eakins 1924). Younger beef is not mature, older beef is too tough. Hence, the Butler-McCook specimens appear to be at the optimum edible age.

Domestic sheep (*Ovis aries*) bones also reflect a relatively high percentage of vertebrae and rib fragments (37%). However, dissimilar to the cow bones, sheep remains include seven forelimb and twenty-eight hindlimb fragments, probably utilized for chops and roasts. Eleven of the twenty vertebrae remains are lumbar fragments which may indicate a preference for the hind portion of the sheep. This is tentatively interpreted as a cultural bias for mutton chops, a thick chop cut from the loin section. Sheep bone age estimates reveal that most of the specimens represent younger, immature individuals. However, at least one of the individuals is older than 42 months. Preference would appear to have been for mutton, although lamb

was also consumed.

Domestic pig (*Sus scrofa*) bones were the most numerous mammalian remains and the distribution of elements differs dramatically from the cow and sheep samples. For instance, cow and sheep bones combined resulted in one mandibular and one tooth fragment, while pig remains produced seventeen cranial fragments (24%). In addition, vertebrae and rib elements are minimal (18%) when compared to cow and sheep samples. Foot bones comprise 38% (27 fragments) of the pig sample, inferring that pig's knuckles and/or pig's feet were a preferred dietary choice. Once again, immature individuals appear to have been the most desirable.

The majority of bones with butchering marks exhibit saw cuts, rather than axe marks. Deetz (1977) notes that the use of saws allows the production of small cuts of meat which can be consumed individually,

TABLE 2
FAUNAL DATA IDENTIFIED TO THE LOWEST TAXON FROM THE BUTLER-McCOOK HOMESTEAD

<i>Mammals</i>	Fragment Count	Percent
Domestic Cow (<i>Bos taurus</i>)	59	14
Domestic Sheep (<i>Ovis aries</i>)	67	16
Domestic Pig (<i>Sus scrofa</i>)	71	17
Unidentifiable	218	53
Total Mammalian Bone:	415	100%
 <i>Aves</i>		
Ring-necked Pheasant (<i>Phasianus sp.</i>)	5	15
Ruffed Grouse (<i>Bonasa umbellus</i>)	1	3
Domestic Chicken (<i>Gallus sp.</i>)	5	15
Unidentifiable	23	67
Total Bird Bone	34	100%
 <i>Fish</i>		
Unidentifiable	1	100
Total Fish Bone	1	100%
 Total Bone and Tooth Fragments		
	450	
 <i>Shellfish</i>		
Oyster (<i>Crassostrea virginica</i>)	201	79
Hard-shell Clam (<i>Mercenaria mercenaria</i>)	39	15
Soft-shell Clam (<i>Mya arenaria</i>)	16	6
Total Shellfish Data	256	100%

while axe-cutting produces larger portions which must be either stewed or roasted and consumed communally, an expression of individualization typical of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Avian skeletal remains comprise 7% of the total bone fragments. Three species have been identified: 1) pheasant (*Phasianus sp.*), 2) ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*), and 3) domestic chicken (*Gallus domesticus*). Identified elements indicate that the assemblage is biased toward limb bones. No axial skeletal elements are present.

Shellfish remains are overwhelmingly accounted for by oyster (*Croassostrea virginica*), with hard-shell clams or quahogs (*Mercenaria mercenaria*), and soft-shell clams or steamers (*Mya arenaria*) in decreasing frequency. Early historical accounts reported an abundance of oysters along the coastal area of Connecticut. Early settlers found oysters an easily accessible source of protein. As populations expanded and urban areas developed, oysters were shipped to inland communities like Hartford in large numbers (Folsom 1979). As oysters began to be transported further inland, it was more expensive to ship oysters in the shell rather than shucked ones; as a result, shucking businesses began to flourish in the early 19th century. However, at this time, oysters were being overfished and local oyster companies began to import market-sized oysters, first from New York and Delaware Bay and finally from the Chesapeake Bay. In that the Butler-McCook occupants received their oysters with their shells, the archaeological sample probably predates this era of reduced availability. It should be noted that until the early 20th century, oysters were a common dietary staple of eastern Americans rather than a delicacy.

Summary

The Butler-McCook house serves to illustrate that archaeology and historic preservation may have mutually beneficial interests in that the preservation of this significant structure and its landscape has fostered the pres-

ervation of a valuable record of late 18th and early 19th century urban living in the form of archaeological data, which can be used to provide insight into the lives of the house's occupants. For example, Dr. Daniel Butler's account books suggest his cash-poor status, and his dependence in large part upon the bartering of goods and services. As a result, Butler's material possessions reflect the selection of relatively inexpensive items which must be purchased with cash, such as imported ceramics; socially important items, such as, tea services, represent exceptions. Likewise, analysis of individual vessels suggests differential usage of ceramics with very inexpensive plain creamware serving as everyday table settings. More expensive decorated pearlware possibly served as special occasion tableware. But in neither case do ceramics suggest a relatively high social status which one might expect for a physician or millowner.

Faunal analysis is more revealing. The recovered data suggest that the site's occupants utilized a variety of animal and food resources. Beef, pork and lamb were the dominant meat products, supplemented by fowl, shellfish and fish. The data further suggest that domesticated species and immature individuals were preferred dietary selections. Further, these were butchered and served as individual portions, rather than as stews and roasts. In all observable cases, the foods seem to be of consistently high quality and nutritional value. Thus, it might be tentatively concluded that the important social and economic status indicator within the Butler-McCook archaeological data is the food resource rather than the plate upon which it is consumed.

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*Authors:***NICHOLAS BELLANTONI**

University of Connecticut
Department of Anthropology
Storrs, Connecticut 06268

ROBERT GRADIE III

University of Connecticut
Department of Anthropology
Storrs, Connecticut 06268

DAVID POIRIER

Connecticut Historical Commission
59 South Prospect Street
Hartford, Connecticut 06106