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"In Delaware the Millennium Has Begun": 19th-Century Farmstead Archaeology and the Methodist Discipline

Cover Page Footnote

I'd like to thank the student competition committee for their kind support of this paper, the editors of this volume for their patience, and Angela Hoseth for giving me a shot at the site that no one wanted. Hope you like what I did with it. Most of all I'd like to thank my new wife Celeste Marie Gagnon, who read the text many times, provided thoughtful comments, and always understood.

“IN DELAWARE THE MILLENNIUM HAS BEGUN”: 19TH-CENTURY FARMSTEAD ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE METHODIST DISCIPLINE

Michael D. Scholl

By the beginning of the 19th century the Methodist movement had gained so many converts in the state of Delaware that Francis Asbury had likened it to the coming of the New Millennium. The growth of Methodism in the state was a powerful social force in rural 19th-century Delaware. Guidelines and behavioral rules were published annually in a series entitled the Discipline. The Methodist Discipline provides a contextual backdrop for understanding 19th-century farming families. This case study examines the Methodist farmer George W. Buchanan and his family who in the mid-part of the century established a farmstead in southern New Castle County. The Buchanan farm prospered until a dispute over a fence resulted in the death of a neighbor at Buchanan's hands. In the six years following the murder trial, the Buchanan family suffered a string of deaths that took every member of the household over the age of 10. The once successful Buchanan farm was broken up, leaving Buchanan's surviving sons a small plot of land only a tenth the size of their father's farm. The paper attempts to connect the archaeological and historical information with contextual bridges in order to piece together the circumstances of the failure of the Buchanan farm. The story behind the Buchanan farmstead has demonstrated that social factors, rather than agricultural practice, determined the origin and eventual end of this farm. This interpretation carries with it implications for future research into the people who operated 19th-century farms.

Au début du XIXe siècle, le mouvement méthodiste avait fait tellement de convertis dans le Delaware que Francis Asbury l'avait comparé à l'arrivée du Nouveau Millénum. La croissance du méthodisme dans l'État fut une puissante force sociale dans le Delaware rural du XIXe siècle. Des lignes directrices et des règles de comportement étaient publiées chaque année dans une série intitulée la Discipline. La Discipline méthodiste constitue une toile de fond contextuelle pour la compréhension des familles agricoles du XIXe siècle. La présente étude examine le cultivateur méthodiste George W. Buchanan et sa famille qui, au milieu du siècle, établirent une ferme dans le sud du comté de New Castle. La ferme Buchanan prospéra jusqu'à ce qu'une dispute relative à une clôture amène la mort d'un voisin aux mains de Buchanan. Au cours des six années suivant le procès pour meurtre, la famille Buchanan supporta une série de décès qui emporta chaque membre de la famille de plus de dix ans. La ferme Buchanan, autrefois prospère, s'en trouva démembrée, laissant aux fils survivants de Buchanan un petit lopin de terre seulement le dixième de la ferme de leur père. L'auteur tente de relier l'information archéologique et historique à des liens contextuels afin de colliger les circonstances de la faillite de la ferme Buchanan. L'histoire de la ferme Buchanan montre que des facteurs sociaux plutôt que la pratique agricole en ont déterminé l'origine et, finalement, la fin. Cette interprétation qui comporte des implications pour la recherche sur les gens qui ont exploité des fermes au XIXe siècle.

the Interpreter takes them . . . into a room, where was a man that could look no way but downwards, with a muck-rake in his hand. There stood also one over his head, with a celestial crown in his hand, and proffered to give him that crown for his muck-rake; but the man did neither look up nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, and the dust of the floor . . . [you see that] heaven is but as a fable to some, and that things here are counted the only things substantial.

—John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*

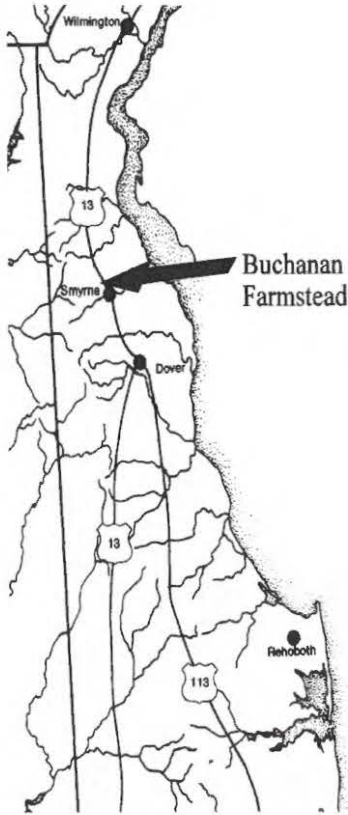


Figure 1. Location of the Buchanan Farm, New Castle County, Delaware.

Introduction

As many have pointed out, historical archaeology is not only the archaeology of the historical period, but also the process of melding the archaeological and written records to gain the fullest possible understanding of the past. In this paper I place the broken plates and post holes left by the 19th-century occupants of the Buchanan family farm within the context of the rules of behavior contained in the Methodist *Discipline*, to gain insights into the dramatic changes that occurred to the Buchanan family before and after a pivotal event.

The event that forever changed the lives of the Buchanan family occurred in 1859. In the spring of that year George W. Buchanan, apparently a good Methodist and recognized as an upstanding member of the community, killed his neighbor David C. Casperson.

Buchanan was found guilty of manslaughter and served five years in prison. Prior to Casperson's death the Buchanan family had enjoyed good health and operated a large and profitable farm. After Casperson's death the family's fortune took a dramatic turn. In the six years following Buchanan's trial, his wife Mary A., three teenage daughters, and Buchanan himself died. Buchanan's once prosperous farm was broken up leaving Buchanan's surviving sons with a small parcel of land that had once formed their step-mother's widow's dower. Buchanan's sons each made a vain attempt to farm the parcel that was only slightly larger than a tenth of their father's farm. Almost as if cursed, none of George W. Buchanan's sons lived beyond the age of twenty-six.

The Buchanan farm is located in New Castle County, Delaware, and was excavated by the University of Delaware Center for Archaeological Research under contract by the Delaware Department of Transportation (Scholl, Hoseth and Grettler 1994) and served as the topic of the author's Master's thesis at Temple University (Scholl 1998) (FIG. 1). University of Delaware archaeologists excavated more than 275 cultural features related to the Buchanan family's 19th-century farm and later occupations (FIG. 2). In 1921, a dairy farm was constructed to the south of the 19th-century farm yard leaving the latter intact. The remains of the Buchanan farm consisted of postholes and kitchen middens reflecting fence lines, barn, stables, tool shed, and a detached kitchen. A series of detailed analyses investigating the changing yard structure, comparisons of soil chemical distributions of the 19th- and 20th-century farm yards, comparison of the functions of glass and ceramic containers with other sites, living space comparisons with similarly dated houses, ceramic economic scaling, and faunal analyses were conducted. The results of these analyses, combined with extensive documentary research, are the foundations upon which this work rests.

Changing agricultural practices and regional economics have been important themes used by both historians and archaeologists to study 19th-century farms. Initially, the research themes investigated at the Buchanan

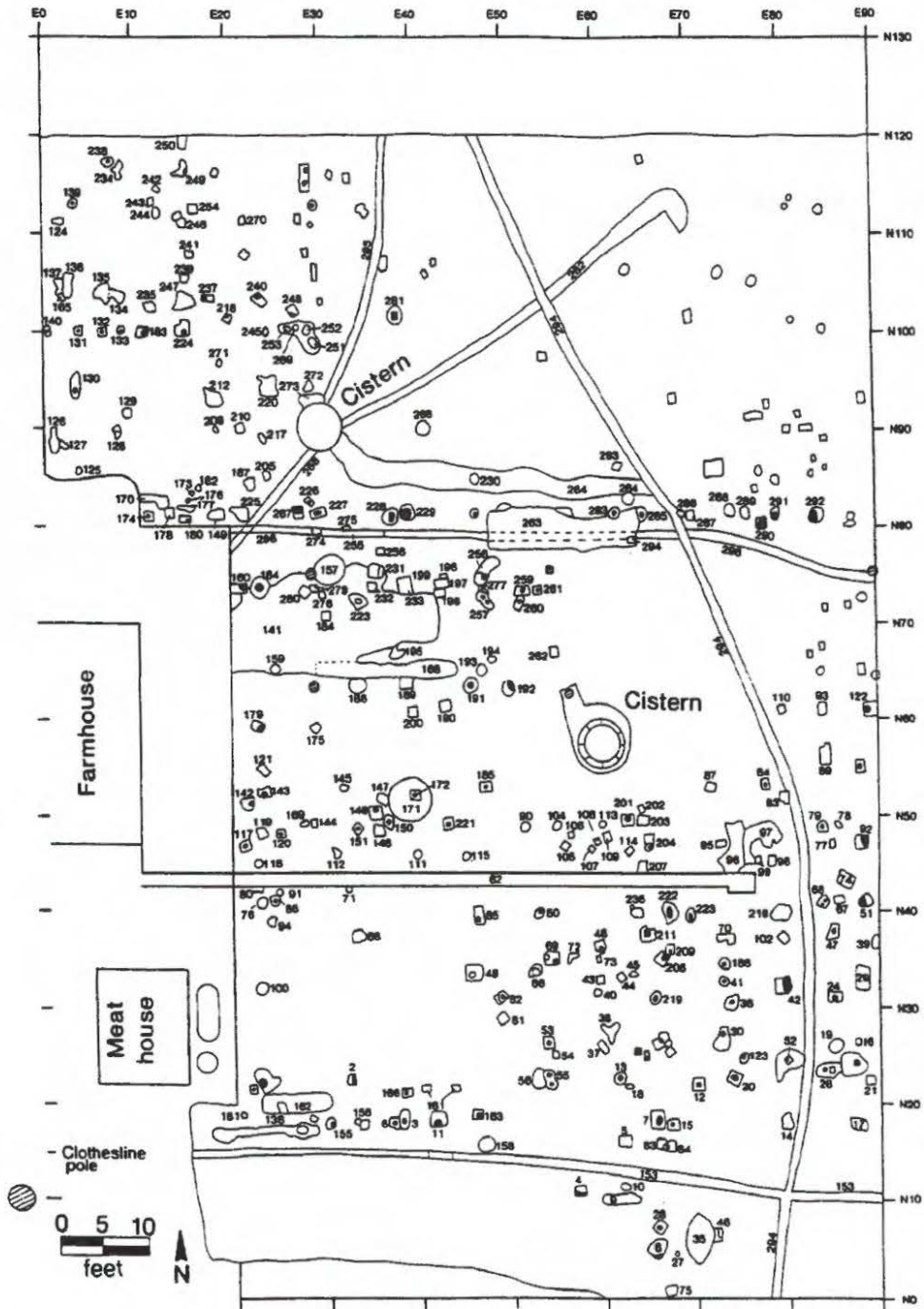


Figure 2. Site Map, Buchanan Farmstead.

farmstead revolved around agriculture and agricultural practice. As the story of the occupants of the Buchanan farmstead came to light, however, questions regarding the trends in Delaware agriculture became increasingly extrinsic to lives of the Buchanans. While agricultural reform and technological development of "modern" farming practice are contextually important to studies of 19th-century farming communities, I suggest that it was familial connections, social mechanisms, and the degree of compliance of the family to the dominant religious ideology that determined the initial success, and later collapse of the Buchanan farmstead after that covenant was broken.

The Buchanan Family

In 1846 George W. and Mary A. Buchanan took out a mortgage from Mary's father on a 269-acre parcel in what is today Blackbird Hundred (Appoquinimink Hundred before 1875), in southern New Castle County (NCC Deed R-5-9). The newlyweds paid only a small part of the mortgage before the land was given to the young couple. Mary A. (Fleming) was George W.'s second wife. George's first wife Elizabeth had died at an early age, leaving him with three young children (Dill, Dill, and Dill 1989: 1355). George W. Buchanan was making a new beginning. Besides a new wife, Buchanan switched careers from merchant to gentleman farmer (U.S. Census Bureau 1840). His second marriage was an advantageous one. Mary A. was the daughter of one of the wealthiest merchants in the region (Coleman et al. 1988).

Like most of their neighbors the Buchanans were Methodists. The Methodist movement swept through the Delaware in the late 18th and 19th centuries and became the dominant religion among farmers and rural craftsmen (Boehm 1865; Williams 1984). The Methodist movement was started in England by Charles and John Wesley, Oxford University theology professors who sought to reform the Anglican Church. The Wesley brothers and their followers aspired to change the practice of worship and were so dubbed the "Methodists."

Methodist teachings stressed a personal relationship with God and introduced greater participation from the congregation. Methodists rejected the ritualistic readings of the traditional Anglican church and gave spontaneous sermons without books or notes. When forced from churches Methodist preachers took to the open fields. They drew crowds of farmers, industrial workers, miners, and craftspeople, the middle and lower classes of English society. The Methodists rejected the Anglican Church's doctrine of predestination and taught the idea that each person was responsible for his or her own salvation. Through a personal relationship with the savior, believers could spiritually rise above their social station. It was a message that spoke loudly to women and minorities.

Methodists were quick to point out that the faithful had to take the first step to make a spiritual relationship. A common moral example to the working class was the "muckraker," a character from Bunyan's (1903 [1678]) *Pilgrims Progress*, a standard reading for the 19th-century Methodist. The muckraker epitomizes the working class "too concerned with his labor to raise his eyes and accept the crown of heaven" (FIG. 3; Bunyan 1903: 207).

Missionaries carried the Methodist teachings throughout the British colonies. The Methodist doctrine appealed to the rural farmers of colonial Delaware and the movement grew quickly. In 1775 the American ministry included 19 preachers with a congregation of 3,000 Methodists. Just four years later, the laity grew to 8,500 with 49 preachers. By 1784 Methodists outnumbered practitioners of any other single religion on the Delmarva Peninsula (Williams 1984: 49). Thousands were converted at "love feasts" or revival meetings that lasted several days. The unprecedented rate of conversion in Delaware had created such a "harmonious society" that Francis Asbury, the leader of the Methodist Church in the United States, proclaimed that "In Delaware the Millennium has Begun" (Williams 1984: 149).

The Methodist Discipline

By the first quarter of the 19th century Methodism was the dominant religion of rural



Figure 3. The man with the muckrake (Bunyan 1903 [1678]: 208).

Delaware. George W. and Mary A. Buchanan were reared in this environment and it is likely that their morals and philosophy were considerably influenced by Methodist doctrine. The rules of behavior and devotional guide for Methodism were laid down in a series of annual publications collectively called the *Discipline*. The *Discipline* described the behavior of an ideal Methodist and provided a context within which we can view the Buchanan family's material culture.

The core of the *Discipline* is John and Charles Wesley's text entitled "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of our United Societies" (quoted in Emory and Strickland 1857: 196). Although the text was written in the mid-18th century, the General Rules formed the core of the Methodist doctrine throughout

the 19th century. The General Rules prohibited swearing, working on Sunday, drunkenness, buying or selling alcohol, fighting, suing your relatives, "returning evil for evil," haggling over goods, trading in black market goods, lending money at usurious rates, gossiping, spreading lies, "speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers," ostentatious dress and lifestyle, unproductive amusements, needless self-indulgence, and taking without intent of paying (quoted in Emory and Strickland 1857: 196).

Buchanans and the Methodist *Discipline*

I have compared the evidence contained in the archaeological and historical records to test the compliance of the Buchanan family to the rules outlined in the Methodist *Discipline*. Evidence suggests that the Buchanan family expressed expected behavior in terms of a strong work ethic, a modest lifestyle that excluded most self-indulgences, avoidance of alcohol, and—as court testimony attests—even the abstinence of swearing in emotionally charged situations.

A strong work ethic is a central theme of the Methodist *Discipline*. Music and literature unrelated to the church, and other forms of unproductive amusements were strictly condemned by the General Rules. It was believed that hard work not only made one successful in the material world, but also in the spiritual one. Perhaps the best evidence to demonstrate the Buchanan family's work ethic is the farm itself.

The Buchanan farm was a successful one. Between 1850 and 1860 Buchanan increased his livestock and crop production, and cleared woods to increase farmland. In 10 years he nearly doubled the value of the farm, a figure that exceeds the general 50-percent increase for the county as a whole, and he was able to lend money to other farmers (U.S. Census Bureau 1850, 1860). The archaeological imprint of the farm reflects orderliness (FIG. 4). Numerous replacement posts testify to constant repairs. Buchanan encircled his farm with an orderly square of fences that measured 64 ft (19.5 m) on a side. Buchanan built a carriage house, stables, a shed for grain and farm tools, a covered well, and several smaller

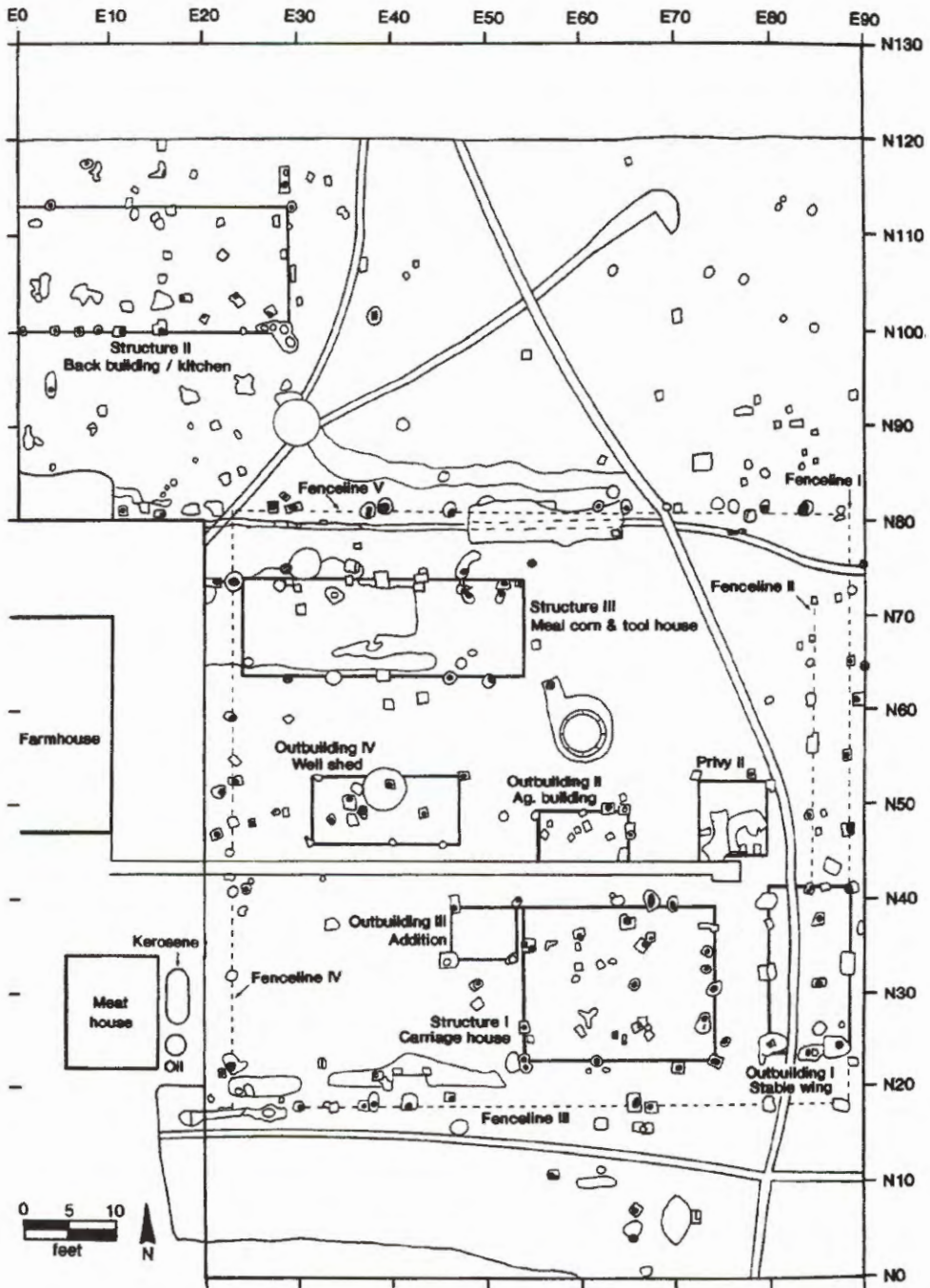


Figure 4. Archaeological evidence for outbuildings at the Buchanan Farm.

Table 1. First floor dimensions of 19th-century houses at New Castle County sites.

<i>House</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Occupant</i>	<i>Area</i>
Patterson Lane house	(Catts, Hodny, and Custer 1989)	1800–1900, tenant	1334 ft ² (120 m ²)
Buchanan tenancy #1	(Kent Mutual Insurance 1857)	1857, tenant	1152 ft ² (104 m ²)
Hawthorn house	(Coleman et al. 1984)	1738–1960, owner	1065 ft ² (96 m ²)
Wilson-Slack house	(Coleman et al. 1985)	1850–1983, owner	960 ft ² (86 m ²)
Buchanan tenancy #2	(Kent Mutual Insurance 1857)	1857, tenant	912 ft ² (82 m ²)
Temple house	(Hoseth et al. 1990)	1830–1955, tenant	840 ft ² (76 m ²)
Buchanan's house	(Kent Mutual Insurance 1857)	1857, owner	656 ft ² (59 m ²)
Ferguson house	(Coleman et al. 1983)	1837–1955, tenant	654 ft ² (59 m ²)
Williams house	(Catts and Custer 1990)	1845–1930, owner	459 ft ² (41 m ²)
Cazier Gate house	(Hoseth, Catts, and Tinsman 1994)	1844–1935, tenant	442 ft ² (40 m ²)
Dickson II house	(Catts, Hodny, and Custer 1989)	1845–1919, tenant	396 ft ² (36 m ²)
Grant tenancy	(Taylor et al. 1987)	1830–1942, tenant	347 ft ² (31 m ²)
Heisler tenancy	(Catts, Hodny, and Custer 1989)	1800–1900, tenant	252 ft ² (23 m ²)

Table 2. CC-index values of other 19th-century archaeological sites in the United States.

Site	Source	Occupant	CC-index
Manuel Diaz, CA	(Spencer-Wood and Heberling 1987)	merchant	2.69
Cannon's Point, GA	(Otto 1984)	planter	2.63
Green Mansion, VT	(Spencer-Wood and Heberling 1987)	merchant	2.29
Evans-Black, DE	(Catts, Hodny, and Custer 1989)	tenant farmer	1.96
Cannon's Point, GA	(Otto 1984)	overseer	1.94
Williams-Stump, DE	(Catts and Custer 1990)	farm laborer	1.92
Cannon's Point, GA	(Otto 1984)	slave	1.92
Buchanan-Savin, DE	(Scholl 1998)	farmer	1.68
T. Hamlin, NJ	(Morin, Klein, and Friedlander 1986)	farmer	1.68
Black Lucy's Garden, MA	(Baker 1980)	slave	1.53
Thomas Cuff, MD	(Catts and McCall 1991)	day laborer	1.51
J. Hamlin, NJ	(Morin, Klein, and Freidlander 1986)	farmer	1.45
Moses Tabb, MD	(Miller 1980)	tenant farmer	1.42
Hale Cabin, OH	(Miller 1980)	farmer	1.34

utility sheds within the fenced enclosure. Soil-chemical analysis of samples collected from the interior of the stable contained only a weak trace of phosphorus, indicating that the stables were regularly cleaned and filled with straw to collect animal waste (Scholl 1998: 124-141). Buchanan worked side by side with his tenants and day laborers. Evidence of this fact is included in the court testimony of Buchanan's trial (*Smyrna Times* June 2, 1859). The weapon Buchanan used to strike down his neighbor was a briar scythe he had been using to cut brush.

Although wealthier than many of their neighbors, the Buchanans chose to live in a modest house and ate from relatively plain dinner ware. When George W. and Mary A. Buchanan first acquired their farm, they built a small house that measured a mere 16 by 20 ft (4.8 x 6 m) with one and one-half stories (Scholl 1998). In comparison with other archaeologically investigated houses of the same period in New Castle County, the Buchanan house was similar in size to economically disadvantaged families (TAB. 1). People of the Buchanan's social standing typi-

cally built houses half again as large. As the Buchanan farm became successful, George W. and Mary A. Buchanan acquired two tenant houses from Mary's father. Fire insurance records indicate that the tenant houses were newer, larger, and assessed at higher values than their own house (Kent Mutual Insurance 1857). The Buchanans chose to remain in the smaller farmhouse even though their household exceeded a dozen members. It is clear that the Buchanan family placed industry ahead of self-indulgence.

The Buchanan's ceramic dishes were plain in comparison with other land-owning families. Plates and platters were simply decorated, although bowls were often more ornate. George Miller's CC-index (1980, 1991) was used to compare the costliness of Mary Buchanan's dishes with those from other 19th-century sites (TAB. 2). The Buchanan family had less costly dinnerware than southern slaves, overseers, merchants, and some tenant farmers. Mary A. Buchanan purchased serviceable tableware of a modest pattern. The Buchanans could have well afforded any variety of dishes, but they appear to have fol-

lowed Methodist teachings and avoided the self-indulgence of setting an unnecessarily fancy table.

It cannot be said that the Buchanan family was entirely frugal. Results of an analysis of the functions of ceramic vessels suggest that the Buchanans used more flatware than hollowware ceramic vessels (Scholl 1998: 188–199). Flatware such as plates and platters reflect the consumption of prime cuts of meat, as opposed to bowls used to hold one-pot meals such as stews. In comparison with other archaeological sites the Buchanan family used a higher percentage of flatware than an urban merchant family, but less than a fellow New Castle County farmer. It appears that the Buchanan family practiced a certain level of economy at the dinner table.

The Buchanan family also obeyed the Methodist restriction against the use of alcohol. From a fairly large glass vessel assemblage, no bottles likely to have once held alcohol were found in deposits associated with the Buchanan occupation (although several liquor bottles dating to after the Buchanan occupation were found). The General Rules cautioned against drunkenness and the sale of liquor on Sundays. In 1780 the *Discipline* discouraged the buying and selling of liquor on any day. By 1820 preachers risked expulsion if they distilled or sold liquor (Emory and Strickland 1857: 185). Sixteen years later this rule was extended to church elders and deacons. The ban on alcohol steadily increased to the point that in 1864 grape juice was recommended as a replacement for wine at communion (Williams 1984: 155).

The Buchanans respected the ban on alcohol, but allowed lesser stimulants. The Methodist *Discipline* cautioned the faithful against “needless self-indulgences” which included the use of stimulants such as tea, coffee, and tobacco, although there was never a strong ban on these equivalent to that placed on alcohol. Several pieces of tea ware and a few clay tobacco pipes were found just outside the farmyard fence. Additionally, an 1867 inventory includes two spittoons, which suggests that tobacco was chewed in the house or detached kitchen. The spittoons may have been for the use of laborers, but their existence

suggests that the use of tobacco was condoned. It is probably the case that the Buchanans were fairly good Methodists, but not among the most ascetic concerning minor points of rule.

The testimony by witnesses to George W. Buchanan’s attack on his neighbor provides information on the most ephemeral of things, the spoken word. In 1859 David S. Casperson purchased land that bordered the Buchanans’ new property (Scharf 1888: 1129). Casperson accused Buchanan of fencing in part of his land; Buchanan disagreed. David S. Casperson was a gruff and confrontational man. Soon after his acquisition of the property, Casperson told a mutual acquaintance to relay the message that Buchanan was “running a great risk of your life to be about that piece of land so much.” Buchanan made light of the situation and did nothing. Later that month Casperson removed the offending fence (*Smyrna Times* June 2, 1859).

The matter went unresolved until spring when Buchanan and his workmen went out to replace the fence. Casperson and Buchanan met in angry confrontation. Buchanan struck his neighbor with a briar scythe and Casperson was seriously wounded. An artery in Casperson’s leg was severed and several days later he died of internal bleeding.

The “Distressing Affair”

The property line had been a point of contention in the past. A mill had operated at that location since 1760 (Scharf 1888: 1129). A prior disagreement over the same property line arose in the 1790s and was resolved by a court-ordered survey. It is not surprising that the property periodically came into question, since the division between the properties depended on the course of Duck Creek. The Duck Creek has a wide marshy flood plain and regularly shifts its course. The problem was further compounded by political boundaries. Buchanan’s land was positioned in New Castle County and Casperson’s in Kent County, Delaware. As deeds were kept separately in each county, it is unlikely that Buchanan’s deed was consulted when Casperson gained title to his land.

Because of the lack of contemporary court records, the local newspaper, *Smyrna Times*, served as the main source of information regarding the conflict between Buchanan and Casperson. Its byline "A Family Paper, Devoted to Temperance, Morality, Education, Literature, Agriculture and General Intelligence" mirrored the concerns of the dominant Methodist society and announced its desires to inform the public while preserving community harmony. On April 21, 1859, the *Smyrna Times* included an article entitled "Distressing Affair" and related the following unpleasant events:

On Friday mourning [sic] last, David S. Casperson, residing about two miles from Smyrna, was very seriously, and it is thought fatally, wounded by a briar-scythe in the hands of Mr. George W. Buchanan,.... Mr. Buchanan was arrested on Saturday, and committed to prison at New Castle, to await the results of the case.

A briar-scythe is a serious weapon. Shaped like a medieval pole arm, a briar-scythe has a long handle and heavy blade that terminates in a curved point. The weight of the blade made it one of few tools that could manage the thorny vines common to hedgerows and fence lines.

The attack took the community by surprise. The *Smyrna Times*, acting within its mission of public harmony, added the following to the April 21 article:

We forebear making any comments on this unfortunate occurrence. The matter will be fully investigated before the proper tribunal in a few weeks, when the causes, provocations &c., that have had a controlling influence in the premises will be made known. Of course, such a terrible affair in our midst has greatly agitated the public mind, but mostly, we believe, to excite commiseration and pity for the unfortunate parties. The most profound sympathy is exhibited toward the distressed families, and every possible kindness offered that will in the least mitigate their distracted feelings.

Despite a call for public support, George W. Buchanan's worries quickly increased. A few

days after the attack Casperson had died of his wounds. Buchanan was to stand trial for murder in the first degree (NCC CT. O.T. 1859: 95-96). A follow-up article in the *Smyrna Times* on May 19 reported that

THE BUCHANAN TRIAL will, we learn, commence on Monday next—the Grand Jury having returned an indictment for murder. As the time of the trial approximates the public excitement increases, and as usual, much speculation and many nonsensical statements are afloat which involve other than the parties really interested.

The community polarized on the issue of Buchanan's guilt or innocence. Buchanan was a large land owner, leased land and houses, employed local day laborers and lent money to many people in the community. Casperson was not only a large land holder, but also the local miller on whom farmers relied to transform their wheat into marketable flour. Buchanan and Casperson were both important to the economic well being of the community.

The Trial: The State of Delaware v. George W. Buchanan

The *Smyrna Times* devoted most of the front page of the June 2 edition to "THE BUCHANAN TRIAL — Verdict, Guilty of Manslaughter." The trial of the State v. George W. Buchanan for murder in the first degree of David S. Casperson took place on May 26, 1859. With sensitivity to their original contexts, the trial testimonies have been reordered for clarity. David Cullen, a friend of the Buchanans, related the events that led up to the day of the attack.

Sometime towards the last of January I was at Mr. Casperson's mill and after we spoke he asked me where Mr. Buchanan was; I told him I thought he was over on his farm; he asked me what he [Buchanan] was doing and if I did not think he [Buchanan] ran a great risk of his life fooling about with that piece of land? I said "I thought his business required him to be on his farm." He said "if he [Buchanan] did not take care he

[Casperson] would kill him about that piece of land yet." He [Casperson] had often spoken to me about it before. In the evening after I went home I was telling Mr. Buchanan that I had seen Mr. Casperson and he told me to tell you that you were "running a great risk of your life to be about that piece of land so much." Mr. Buchanan made very light of it; he did not seem to think it worth minding.

Buchanan seemed confident of his ownership of the land. In the trial Buchanan's right to the land was not a point of great controversy. Witnesses agreed to Buchanan's right to the land, and the traditional placement of the fence in question. Enoch Fleming, Buchanan's brother-in-law and son of the previous owner, often toured the property. Enoch Fleming testified that he had "known the fence in question to have been standing in the same place for 20 years" and did not think the fence had "moved a foot either way since I knew it." Elias Lockerman, Buchanan's tenant on the property, further stated that "we were putting the fence where the old fence had been part of the way, but where I was helping we did not put it out so far as the old one was . . . where we were putting the fence was Buchanan's land; there was no dispute about that." Witnesses offered convincing testimony that Buchanan was just in his possession of the land.

Casperson, unhappy with the boundary, removed the fence that he felt was on his land. Elias Lockerman, the tenant on the property in question, recognized Casperson's team of horses hauling away the fence rails "sometime in January." The following spring, Buchanan came to replace the fence, an action that led to a direct confrontation with Casperson. On that day Buchanan was assisted by his tenants and laborers Elias Lockerman, John Goldsborough, David Hazel, and William Fields.

Lockerman and Goldsborough rented houses on the Buchanan farm. Lockerman expressed his involvement as "My landlord called on me that morning and I felt it my duty to help put it [the fence] up." Tenants on farms in the 19th century often had explicit contracts of rights and responsibilities to their landlords, although more often these responsibilities were a matter of tradition. David

Hazel was a local day laborer. William Fields, a recent immigrant from Ireland, was a full-time employee and boarded at the Buchanan house.

The events of April 15, the day of the attack, were the focus of the testimony of Buchanan's laborers.

Elias Lockerman: We were at work putting up the fence when Casperson came out and said "what the devil are you putting the fence up there for!" Mr. Buchanan said he was putting the fence up for his own accomodation; Mr. Casperson said he would take it down again; Buchanan said that he would not do it in his presence, but in his absence.

John Goldsborough: He [Buchanan] told him [Casperson] if he [Casperson] took it away he [Buchanan] would put up a board fence next time.

Elias Lockerman: When Casperson swore he would remove the fence, Mr. B said calmly, "if you take this fence away in my absence and the neighbor's stock gets in, we will put up with it, but if yours get in they must abide by the consequence, and you must keep off also yourself" . . . [Buchanan] took the briar-scythe we had and went some distance off to cut bushes . . . Mr. Casperson said "he be d[amne]d if he didn't get over" . . . Casperson finally jumped over the fence and said, "I'm over and you can't help yourself"; I saw Buchanan start towards me and pass me with his scythe; I next heard a little noise and looked around; saw Buchanan and Casperson together.

David Hazel: B. [Buchanan] went very fast toward Casperson, with the scythe low down. Just as he got to him, he [Buchanan] put it out and gave the first jerk, low down; then gave the other, higher up, when C. [Casperson] fell, . . . when I got to him [Casperson] he said "O! my God, don't kill me."

John Goldsborough: Mr. Casperson had a hold of the scythe till I got to him and loosed his hand. . . Mr. Buchanan said "take care, John, I don't intend to strike him any more." Buchanan said, "John take that kerchief off his neck and tie it around his leg" and he also told me to go

to his [Buchanan's] house and get some camphor or laudanum and tell his son to go for a doctor.

Doctor Edward Daily arrived at Casperson's house around nine o'clock the following morning. The patient was found "lying in the entry on a buffalo-robe, almost pulse less." Casperson had bled throughout the night, and there was "a great quantity of blood on the robe and about him; his skin was cold." Casperson had two wounds. According to Dr. Daily one was "on the posterior and outside aspect of the left thigh, two inches below the great trochanter, four inches long and two and a quarter deep." This wound was not life threatening, as Dr. Daily reported it "would not have caused death; it was healing beautifully." Casperson's other wound "on the inner belly of the calf of the right leg, two inches long" was more serious. In his initial examination Dr. Daily observed that the leg wound "seemed irritable and disposed to bleed if meddled with." The wound failed to heal.

Dr. Daily: On Sunday, 17th, I found mortification had attacked the right leg; reaction had never taken place in that wound; it felt like a piece of marble from the first and never became warmer.

The next day a visiting doctor, John A. Moore found that "the mortification extended to his groin." The attending doctors agreed that the calf wound had been the fatal one. In court Doctors Daily and Collins reported that they:

made an examination post mortem of the right leg, and found the wound to have penetrated through the entire limb except the skin and integuments of the front of the leg, cutting muscles, arteries and nerves and fracturing the fibula or small bone of the leg . . . the wound passed between the bones, the instrument acting like a wedge in fracturing the small bone. This was the fatal wound, and was of itself sufficient to cause death.

David S. Casperson's fibular fracture severed an artery and caused dangerous internal

bleeding. The jury was faced with the fact that a blow struck by Buchanan led to Casperson's death. After deliberating the charge of murder in the first degree for two hours, the jury found Buchanan guilty of a lesser charge of manslaughter.

George W. Buchanan was sentenced to five years in the New Castle County jail ending May 27, 1864. In addition Buchanan was to pay the costs of the prosecution and a fine of \$4,000.00. Perhaps to relieve the hardship on the Buchanan family, Delaware Governor Burton filed a remission of all but \$1,000.00 of Buchanan's fine (NCC CT. OT 1859: 96).

"And the great wonder is how such an affair could possibly have happened"

The question that immediately leaps to mind is why? The editor of the local newspaper asked the rhetorical question "And the great wonder is how such an affair could possibly have happened" in the initial public announcement of the attack (*Smyrna Times*, April 21, 1859). Why would George W. Buchanan, who by all indications was a good Methodist and an upstanding member of the community, strike a neighbor in anger? The author believes that a partial answer lay in two things, the role that the farm played in Buchanan's self image, and the way in which 19th-century men were taught to handle anger.

The appearance, quality, and productivity of his farm were of the utmost importance to the Methodist farmer. As noted, the Buchanan family did not express its affluence through ornate dishes or a large house. Instead the Buchanan family proclaimed its success through the farm, which was therefore closely tied to the family's image. When Casperson threatened the farm, he threatened the Buchanan's expression of status in the community.

Even though Buchanan eventually attacked Casperson he seemed to try to follow the advice in the Methodist *Discipline*. The *Discipline* outlines that good Methodists should avoid "returning evil for evil, or railing for railing." When Casperson threatened Buchanan's life, Buchanan made light of it. When Casperson carried away Buchanan's

fence, he took no immediate action. As Buchanan and his workmen replaced the fence, Casperson swore at Buchanan and repeatedly threatened to tear it down again. Buchanan merely replied that he would put a stronger fence in its place. It was not until Casperson trespassed by hopping Buchanan's fence that Buchanan showed his anger. Even immediately after the attack, when one of Buchanan's workmen attempted to restrain him, his only statement was "take care John, I don't intend to strike him any more," an extremely calm response. Buchanan had reclaimed his stoic disposition despite the fact that he had just mortally wounded his neighbor.

The repression of anger was a developing ideal in the mid-19th century. Peter N. Stearns' 1997 essay entitled "Men, Boys and Anger in American Society" discusses 19th-century attitudes toward conflict. The 18th century male ideal included earnestness, selflessness, and integrity. Outbursts of anger were admired as the strongest form of earnest expression. A different ideal harkened back to Classical Greek philosophy, and advocated stoicism and the repression of anger. Most Methodist preachers in the formative years of the church were products of British schools which taught the advocacy of stoicism reflected strongly in the *Discipline*.

Casperson and Buchanan were similar in age and social status and yet the two men differed in their approaches toward conflict. Casperson sought to resolve the situation through an earnest expression of anger. Buchanan practiced stoicism and failed to react until he eventually was overcome with anger. Perhaps the two men's different methods for handling anger were tied to their faith. Buchanan attempted to live up to the Methodist ideal. Casperson was a Baptist, unbound by the Methodist *Discipline* and free to express his righteous anger. Casperson may have misinterpreted Buchanan's attempt at stoicism as a lack of conviction towards his cause, a cultural misunderstanding that proved fatal.

The Buchanan Family in the Aftermath of the Trial

Despite the family's earlier compliance to the Methodist faith, George W. Buchanan transgressions could not be forgiven. His break with the existing societal mores had a debilitating effect on the Buchanan family. George W. Buchanan was found guilty of manslaughter and spent the next five years in jail.

In 1860, the year after the trial, the Buchanan household was still largely intact. The 1860 population census records 11 members of the Buchanan family: George W. (who in actuality was incarcerated in the New Castle jail); his wife Mary A.; their daughters Bathsheba, Angelina, Catherine, Sarah Louisa; and two their two sons James and George W. [III]. Other people who shared the Buchanan home were three farm laborers, W. Fields (still employed since the trial), C. Jones, and R. Crossberry, and Moll Smith, a family servant since 1850 (TAB. 3). The older children from Buchanan's first marriage, Mary E. and Anne A., married into the neighboring Wells and Armstrong families, respectively, and no longer lived at the farm.

Despite George W. Buchanan's absence, the 1860 Agricultural Census detailed a successful Buchanan farm. The cash value of the land almost doubled from \$8,000 in 1850 to \$15,000 in 1860. Part of this increase in value was an expansion in Buchanan's land holdings through land sales and new acquisitions. A majority of the value, however was a direct result of Buchanan's hard work. Buchanan brought a larger percentage of his land under cultivation. Like his neighbors, Buchanan responded to market demand and introduced oats, sweet potatoes, and orchard crops and invested more heavily in livestock. This period marks the Buchanan farm at its peak, but the economic success of the farm could not safely carry the family through the period of Buchanan's incarceration.

In the second year of George W.'s prison sentence, the Buchanan family began to collapse. Perhaps the most serious blow was the

Table 3. Buchanan household, 1850 to 1880.

	Relationship	1850	1860	1870	1880	Notes
<i>George W. Buchanan (I) Family</i>						
George W.		X	X			deceased 1866, age 53
Mary A. (Fleming)	2nd wife	X	X			deceased 1861, age 41
Mary E.	daughter	X				married Denny 1853
George W. (II)	son	X				deceased by 1858
Anne A.	daughter	X				married Armstrong 1855
Bathsheba B.	daughter	X	X			deceased 1864, age 18
Angelina A.	daughter	X	X			deceased 1863, age 16
Catherine F.	daughter	X	X			deceased 1865, age 16
James H.	son	X	X	X		deceased 1877, age 26
Sarah Louisa	daughter				X	married Culleny 1872
George W. (III)	son			X		deceased 1881, age 23
Hannah (Sloan)	3rd wife		X			married 1862-1864
Anne E.	4th wife		X			married 1865-1866
<i>James H. Buchanan Family</i>						
Kate M. (Byrne)	wife			X		married Lingo 1877
Wm. F.	son			X		left with mother 1877
George H.	son			X		left with mother 1877
William Wells	nephew			X		returned to Wells farm
<i>George W. Buchanan (III) Family</i>						
Mary H. (Simmons)	wife				X	married Short 1891
Mary L.	daughter				X	left with mother 1891
George R.	son				X	left with mother 1891
<i>Domestic Servants and Farm Laborers</i>						
Moll Smith	servant	X	X			
Hannah Pouso	servant	X				
John Baker	laborer	X				
Samuel McElwee	laborer	X				
W. Fields	laborer			X		
C. Jones	laborer			X		
R. Crossberry	laborer			X		

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau 1850-1880; DSA Marriage Index; Dill, Dill and Dill 1989; DSA Vital Statistics Files; Greenwood Methodist Cemetery tombstones.

loss of Mary A. Buchanan in 1861. At the age of 41, Mary's death was unexpected and left the Buchanan children without mother or father. From jail, George W. Buchanan married Hannah (Sloan) Bradley the following summer. It is likely theirs was a marriage of convenience to allow George W. Buchanan, rather than the state, to choose a guardian for Buchanan's six children. Despite the care of a foster mother, the family fared badly. Two teenage daughters Angelina and Bathsheba passed away in 1863 and 1864, respectively (Dill, Dill, and Dill 1989: 27). Buchanan's

third marriage ended in divorce in February 1864, two months before his scheduled release from jail. Divorces were rare in 19th-century Delaware. Buchanan's was one of only a few on record, although divorce was in no way prohibited by the Methodist doctrine (DSA Divorce Index 1864).

The return of George W. Buchanan to the family farm did little to reverse the family's misfortune. The following year Buchanan's daughter Catherine died at the age of 16 (Dill, Dill, and Dill 1989:27). The death of Catherine marked the fourth member of the Buchanan

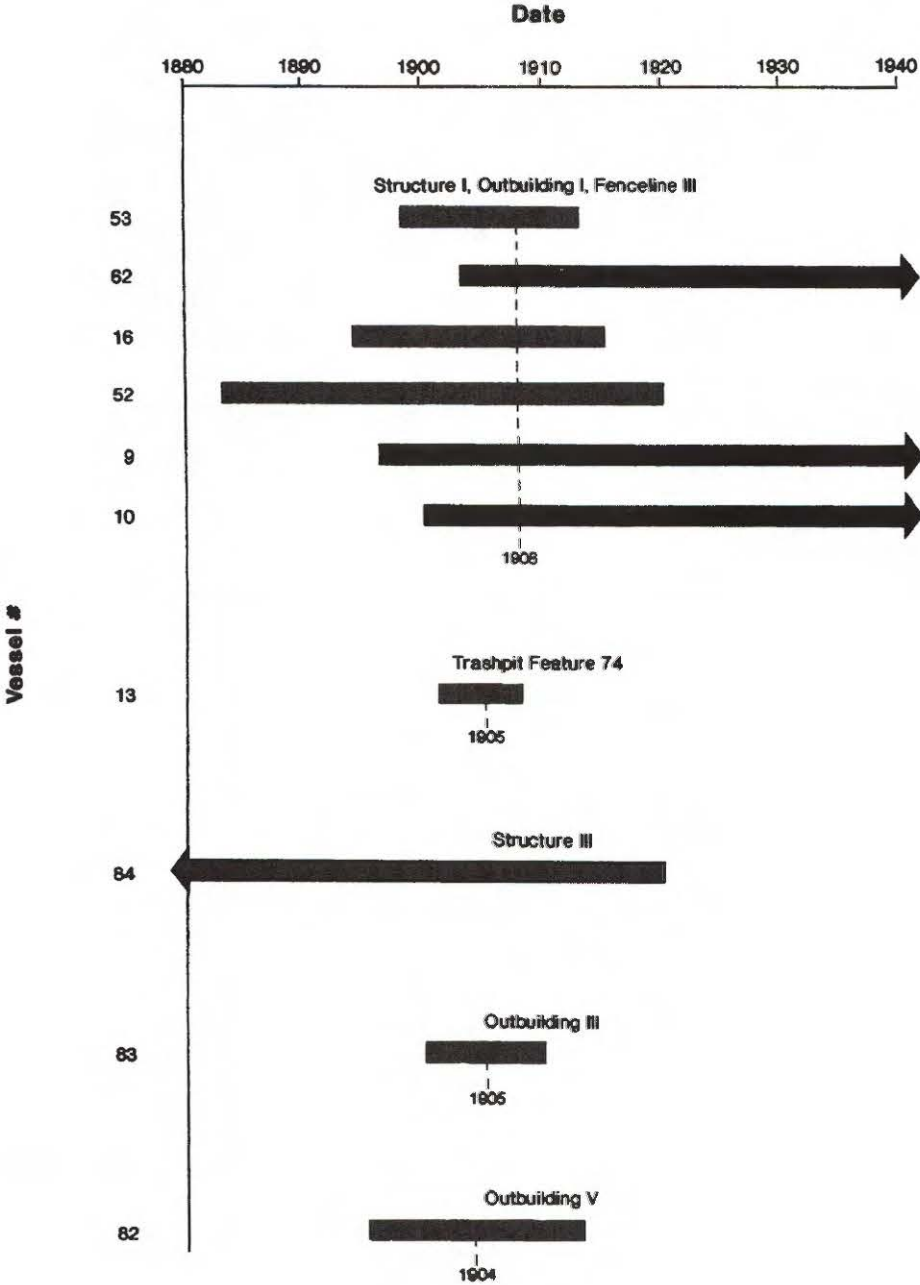


Figure 5. Date ranges of building demolition from dated glass vessels.

family to expire in the post-trial period. Within a year of his release Buchanan married his fourth and final wife, Anne. Any attempts he may have made to pull his family together were cut short. In 1866, less than two years after his release from jail, George W. Buchanan died. He was 53.

Prior to his death Buchanan had sold portions of his farm to his sons-in-law in the Armstrong and Wells families and the remainder was sold by order of the New Castle County Orphans Court (NCC O CT. z-1-284). George's widow, Anne E. Buchanan, received the Buchanan farmhouse and 34 acres of land as her dower right. Anne E. Buchanan soon remarried and the property passed to Buchanan's sons. Buchanan's sons, James and later George (III), attempted to farm the plot of land little larger than one-tenth the size of their father's farm (U.S. Census Bureau 1870 and 1880). Neither was able to make the farm successful despite the fact that it had a complete set of outbuildings. The pattern of Buchanan ill-health held true and both sons died in their mid-twenties. Of George W. Buchanan's 10 children, only three daughters who married and left the family farm lived past the age of 30.

Mary H. Buchanan, the widow of George W. Buchanan's youngest son, George W. (III), lived in the Buchanan farmhouse until she remarried in 1891. The farm passed to Francis Armstrong, the son of Anne A. (Buchanan). It was during Francis Armstrong's short occupancy of the site that George W. Buchanan's long unused farm buildings were torn down. The date ranges of glass vessels found in post hole features and cross-mends among glass fragments suggest that the carriage house, tool and meal shed, a fence line, and three small outbuildings were all torn down as one event between 1903 and 1913 (FIG. 5). In 1921 the property was sold outside the family and a dairy farm was constructed to the south of the 19th-century farm yard. The dairy farm was short-lived and the Buchanan farmhouse

became a non-farming rental property for most of the 20th century (FIG. 6). In 1991 the property was condemned and at present is the location of an overpass for State Route 1.

Epilogue

The story behind the Buchanan farmstead demonstrated that social force, rather than agricultural practices, determined the success or failure of this farm. Perhaps the best evidence of this fact is that the Buchanan farm failed despite the farm's economic health. George W. Buchanan's move to New Castle County was the result of the death of his first wife and subsequent marriage into a wealthy Methodist family. As specified in the Methodist *Discipline*, the Buchanans and their hired hands worked hard to increase the productivity of their farm by improving the land and keeping abreast of the market. The archaeological remains of the Buchanan homestead reflect an orderly farm yard that was well maintained. Buchanan is not credited with any farming innovation, however, nor does he appear to have been different from thousands of other farmers in the county. Buchanan was a capable agrarian and should be credited with improving his holdings, even if the initial creation of his farm was dependent on ties of marriage.

The Buchanans worked hard to improve their fiscal standing. Despite their ability to live in a grander scale, George W. and Mary A. Buchanan economized by renting their larger and more highly valued farm lots and by eating from modest tableware. The Buchanans appear to have complied with the Methodist ban on alcohol, but were not as strict when it came to lesser stimulants such as tea and tobacco. In general, the Buchanans were good Methodists who attempted to follow the tenets of their faith. It seems clear from courtroom accounts that Buchanan did not intend to kill his neighbor, but there can be no doubt about his desire to do him bodily harm. The conviction of manslaughter was justified. In his

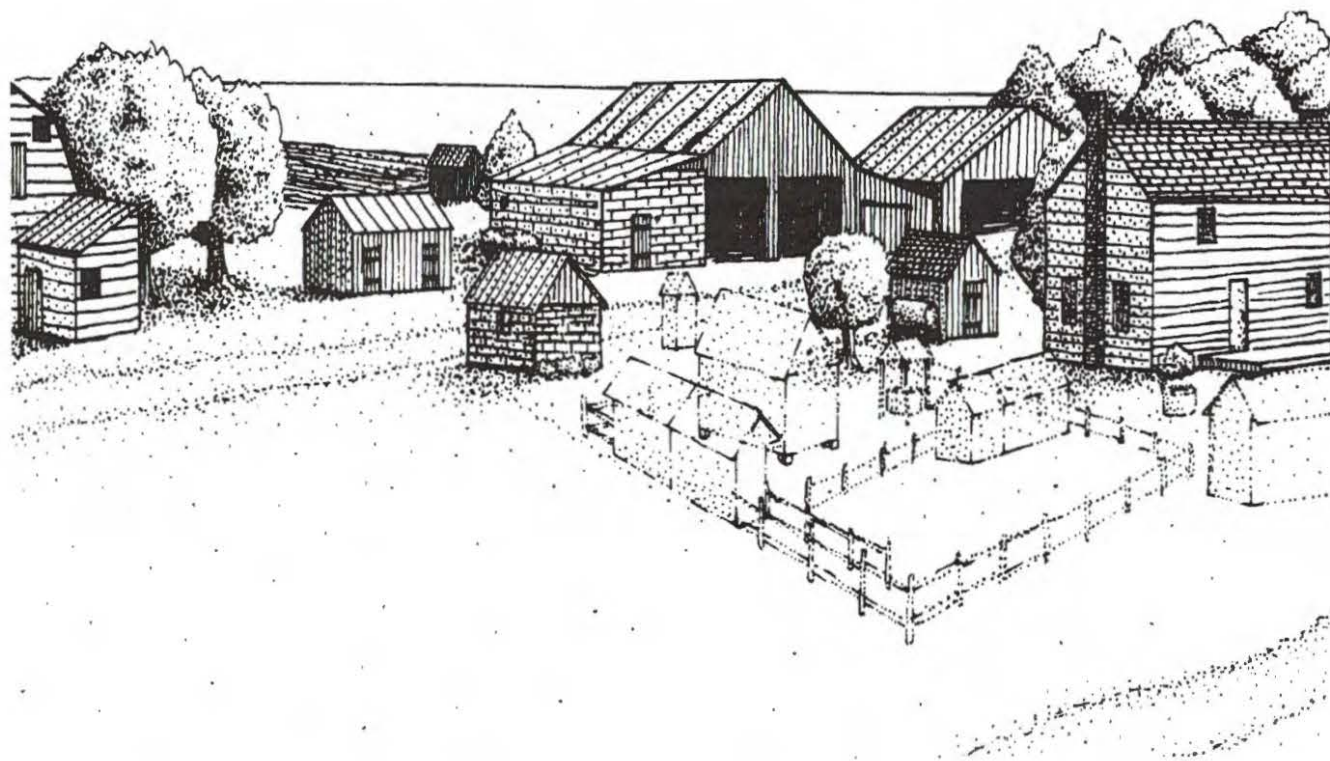


Figure 6. The Buchanan Farm in 1991 with the 19th-century buildings in outline (Drawing by Paul E. McCullough Jr.).

attack on David Casperson, George W. Buchanan failed as a Methodist, and began a chain of events that ended the economic prosperity of the Buchanan farm, resulting in the farm's eventual break up and leading to the disintegration of the Buchanan family itself.

In the six years following Buchanan's conviction, the family lost father, mother, and three teenage daughters. By 1866, every family member of the Buchanan household over the age of 10 at the time of the trial was dead. This was an incredibly high rate of mortality. Vital statistics for 19th-century Delaware are fragmentary. Massachusetts data for the year 1865, however, suggest a death rate of 20 persons per 1000 for the general public (U.S. Census Bureau 1960: 24-30). The expected mortality rate for the Buchanan family throughout the six years in question would be 120 persons per 1000 (or 0.120 per person). Only one of the eight members of the family would be expected to die in the six years following the trial ($0.120 \text{ death rate} \times 8 \text{ people} = 0.960 \text{ deaths}$). In comparison with the rate of mortality for the population as a whole, the Buchanan household was visited by death five times more often than was expected.

The severe death rate suffered by the Buchanans becomes even more apparent when the specific ages of the Buchanans are taken into consideration. The Buchanan household did not include the very young or the very old, the age groups with the highest rates of mortality. In fact, Bathsheba, Angelina, and Catherine Buchanan all died in their teens, the 10-year age group with the lowest expected mortality (7.3 per 1000). An age-sensitive calculation of expected mortality for the members of the Buchanan family is less than half that of the general population ($0.046 \text{ death rate} \times 8 \text{ people} = 0.368 \text{ deaths}$). The Buchanan's actual rate of death (5 per 8, or 625 per 1000) was 13.5 times higher than the expected value (46.2 persons per 1000) for the six-year period. Admittedly, there are problems of scale when applying population statistics to such a small number of people; the calculations demonstrate, however, that the Buchanan family suffered an extremely high rate of death for people of their time in history.

Interestingly, the deaths within the Buchanan household affected only the adults. The social repercussions of the death of David C. Casperson at the hands of George W. Buchanan would have most strongly affected the mature members of the household. Mary A. Buchanan's burden may have been particularly heavy. One of the changes from patriarchal Episcopalian and Anglican doctrine made by Methodist reformers was to elevate women to the role of "defenders of the faith." Compounded with public scrutiny, and emotional and physical stress of the separation from her husband, and the feelings of isolation from the surrounding Methodist community may have been too much for Mary A. Buchanan to bear. Similarly, it is quite possible that the recent loss of their mother, the social disgrace of a convict father, and a loss of prestige within the community at a time when they were expected to find appropriate husbands, may have been particularly overwhelming to 18-year-old Bathsheba, 16-year-old Angelina, and 16-year-old Catherine Buchanan. No documented evidence of the Buchanan women's deaths survives. A known, and perhaps culturally prescribed, method of suicide among young women in the 19th century, however, was an "accidental" overdose of an opiate, such as laudanum or camphor. We know from court testimony that these strong pain killers were part of the Buchanan's medicine cabinet.

This case study demonstrates that factors such as marriage, legal action, and social forces gave rise to, and then caused the collapse of, a farming enterprise. For more than a decade the Buchanans had a large prosperous farm of hundreds of acres. Only a small part of that successful farm survived Buchanan's break with the collective social mores. The story behind the Buchanan farmstead shows that more than planting and harvesting occurred on farms in the past. Farmers in the 19th century lived in a world with a rich social context worthy of inquiry by historical archaeologists. Getting to that story requires significant archaeological data, historical research, and a willingness to build contextual bridges that cross boundaries between disciplines. Perhaps, like the muckraker in Bunyan's parable, it is time for hardworking archaeologists to

raise their eyes from the “the straws, the small sticks, and the dust” on the ground and view the spiritual world that may not have been a “fable” to the people of the past.

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