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Cover Page Footnote

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Ordinary and Poor People in 18th-Century Delaware

John Bedell and Gerard P. Scharfenberger

The authors and their colleagues have recently carried out excavations at three 18th-century farm sites in central Delaware. The Augustine Creek South and Thomas Dawson Sites were both occupied by ordinary property owners in the 1730 to 1770 period. The Augustine Creek North Site was occupied from about 1750 to 1810 by unknown but probably poor tenants, possibly in two chronologically separate occupations. At all three sites, architectural remains and artifact deposits were found. Analysis of these sites has focused on the question of how fully ordinary and poor people participated in the social, economic, and intellectual changes of the 18th century. The answer seems to be that they did embrace some changes, such as tea drinking, but rejected others, such as the reorganization of farms and the separation of public and private space.

Les auteurs et leurs collègues ont récemment pratiqué des excavations à trois sites agricoles du XVIIIe siècle du Delaware central. Les sites Augustine Creek South et Thomas Dawson furent tous deux occupés par des propriétaires ordinaires au cours des années 1730 à 1770. Le site Augustine Creek North le fut d'environ 1750 à 1810 par des locataires inconnus, mais probablement pauvres, et cela peut-être au cours de deux occupations chronologiquement séparées. On a trouvé aux trois sites des vestiges architecturaux et des gisements d'artefacts. L'analyse des sites s'est penchée sur la question de savoir dans quelle mesure les gens ordinaires et pauvres participèrent l'évolution sociale, économique et intellectuelle du XVIIIe siècle. Il semble que ces gens adoptèrent certains changements, tels que la consommation de thé comme boisson, mais en repoussèrent d'autres tels que la réorganisation des fermes et la séparation de l'espace public et privé.

Introduction

It is easy to document a social revolution in 18th-century North America using documents and objects from the world of the wealthy. Rich people moved out of their old, vernacular houses and into new ones with balanced, Georgian plans that seem to reflect the rational vision of the Newtonian universe (Deetz 1977; Shackel 1993). The rise of the tea ceremony, the fork, the oval dining table, and new rules of etiquette have been seen as reflecting a serious attempt to impose a more rigid order on life, and on social relations in particular (Leone 1988). These changes in etiquette were associated with new kinds of consumer goods, and the spread of objects like forks and tea cups has been seen by historians Cary Carson (1994) and Timothy Breen (1988), among others, as a "consumer revolution" that indicates a profound change in the relationship of Europeans and European Americans to material things. This "new gentility" imposed strict requirements on the behavior of those who

wanted to be seen as respectable, and Richard Bushman (1992) has suggested that the attempt by people of the low and middle classes to acquire objects and adopt behavior associated with the gentry brought the classes closer together and helped to create a new, more unified idea of the good life.

To understand the full import of these changes we must, however, look beyond the world of the wealthy, for none of these changes took place in the same way for all the residents of the British colonies. Some of these changes, in fact, did not take place at all for ordinary and poor people. Millions of Americans lived in log cabins and tar-paper shacks until well into the 20th century; if moving into a Georgian house implies a shift from medieval to modern ways of thinking, did these cabin dwellers miss out on the Renaissance? If consumerism is the essence of modernity, to what extent were the poor of the 18th and 19th centuries modern? If we are to understand the 18th-century changes that so many experts believe led to the creation of the modern world, we must search for paradigms

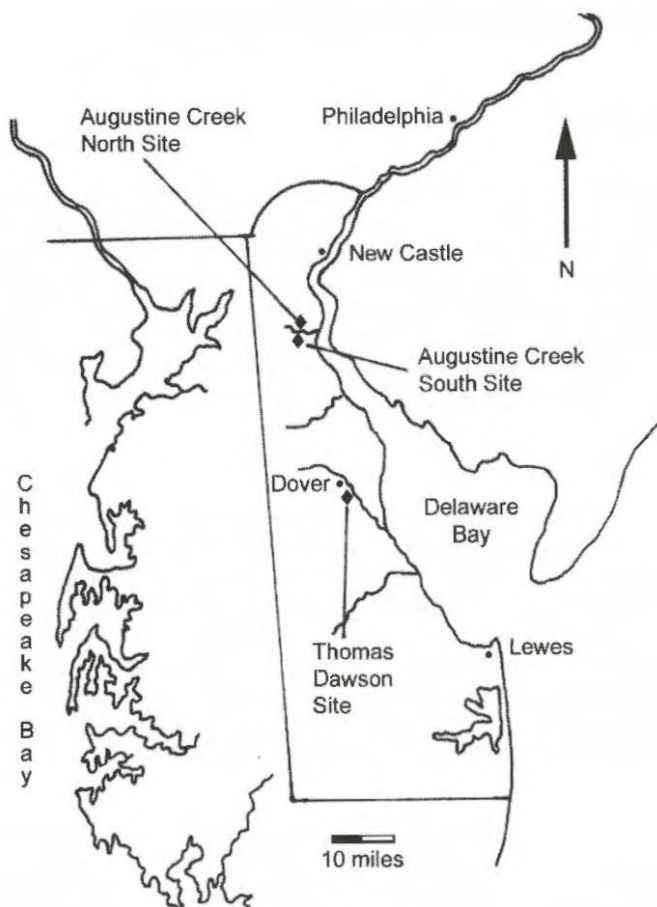


Figure 1. Location of the Thomas Dawson, Augustine Creek North, and Augustine Creek South sites.

that apply to the whole society, not just small parts of it.

To help us recover the lives of ordinary people from past centuries we have two main aids, written records and material objects. In the case of ordinary people, material objects generally mean things recovered through archaeology. Standing houses from the 18th century have been much analyzed, but archaeology and some records (such as the federal direct tax of 1798) suggest that even the poorest standing houses are nicer than what was normal during the period (Chappell 1994). We can learn about the houses of the poor and middling sorts only through archaeology. Likewise, the ceramics and furniture surviving in museums, even the pieces that are judged

"simple" or "folk," also belonged overwhelmingly to the better-off. Because the belongings of the poor are unlikely to survive above the ground, archaeology can provide a uniquely democratic perspective on the past.

Recent excavations at the Augustine Creek North, Augustine Creek South, and Thomas Dawson Sites in Delaware provide a wealth of data on the lives of ordinary farmers and poor tenants in the Middle Atlantic region (FIG. 1). These excavations were carried out in 1996 to 1998 by the authors and their colleagues at the Louis Berger Group, on behalf of the Delaware Department of Transportation. These sites date to the 1740 to 1780 period, a key time in most models of revolutionary change in the 18th century, and they therefore provide an

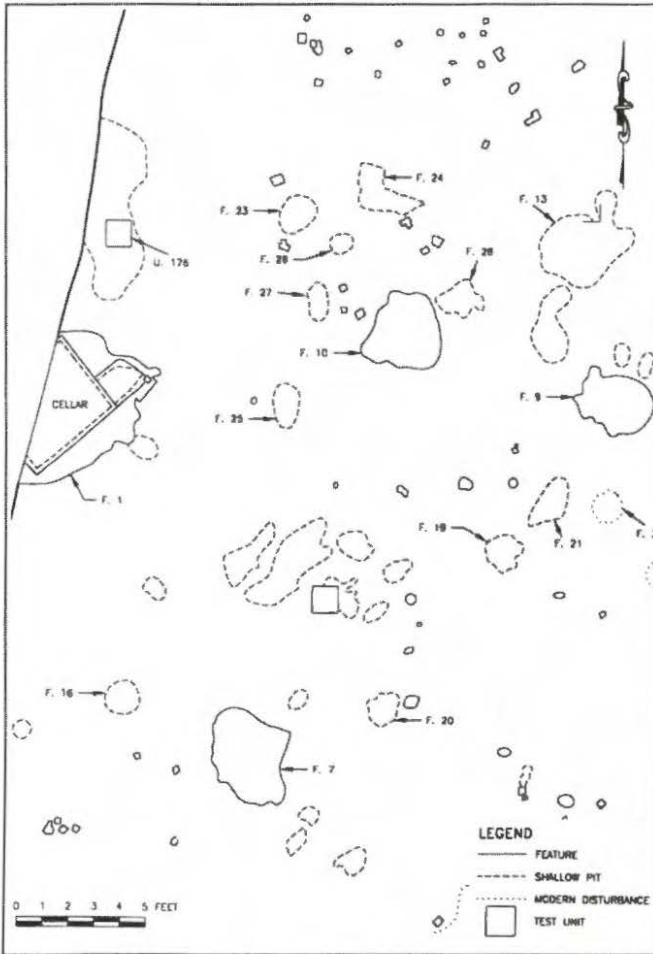


Figure 2. Plan of the central part of the Thomas Dawson site.

opportunity to evaluate the impact of radical social changes on the lives of ordinary rural people.

The Thomas Dawson Site

The Thomas Dawson Site was located just south of Dover, Delaware, next to modern U.S. Highway 13 (Bedell et al. 1999). Part of the site had been destroyed during construction of that highway in the 1950s. The site had been plowed, and in the early 20th century a horse farm had been built just to the south of the site; in the 1940s a brick house was built just to the north. The brick house was torn down in 1988 using heavy machinery, and photographs taken at the time show the site as bare earth

crisscrossed with caterpillar tread tracks. Despite these disturbances, important evidence of the colonial farm did survive. Most of a cellar measuring 11 ft 10 in \times 13 ft 7 in (3.6 \times 4.2 m), probably part of the Dawsons' house, was found, as well as several amorphous pits containing rich archaeological deposits (FIG. 2). No evidence of outbuildings or fences survived, or anything else to indicate how the farm had been laid out. Artifacts in the plow-zone, including quantities of white salt-glazed stoneware and creamware, but no pearlware, suggested that the site was occupied from before 1750 into the 1770s.

Thomas Dawson had purchased a 100-acre tract that included the Dawson Site in 1740; according to the deed, he was already in resi-

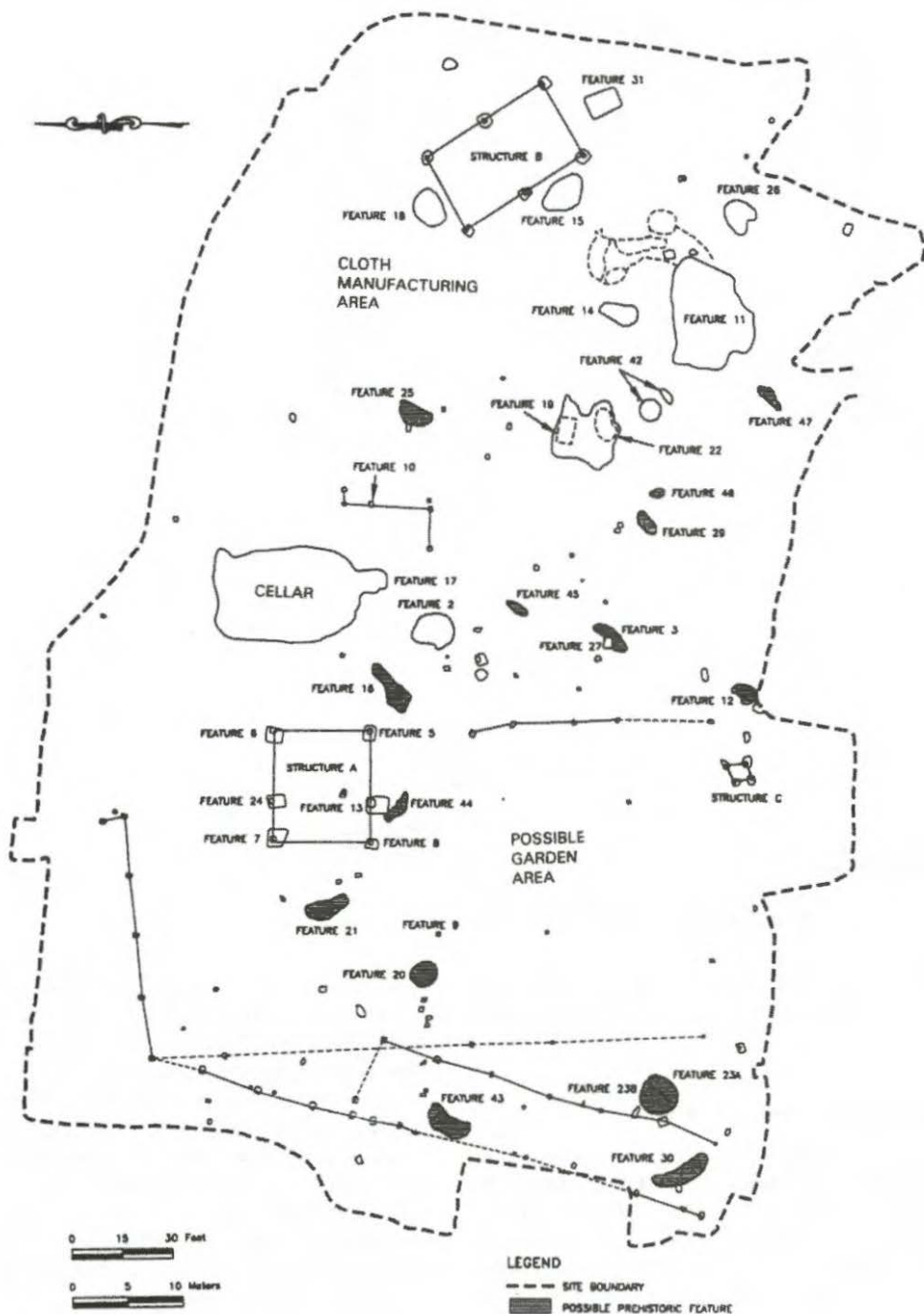


Figure 3. Plan of the Augustine Creek South site.

dence at that time. A survey of the property made in 1745 shows a house, a barn, a shed, and a malt house on the property. The excavations produced no evidence of the malt house, or of brewing or malting, and according to the map the barn and shed would have been underneath U.S. 13. Thomas Dawson died in 1754, and his probate inventory survives (Kent County 1754). The inventory shows that Dawson's household included his wife, Mary, and a single African-American slave named Jenny. The total value of the estate was £54. A study based on 7500 estate inventories from four Tidewater Chesapeake counties places the Dawsons at the lower/middle class interface (Carr and Walsh 1994: 68–70), and the Dawson inventory lists no luxury goods. Dawson's son sold the property in 1756, and from then until its abandonment in the 1770s the site was occupied by unknown tenants. The largest deposits on the site, including the one in the cellar, however, contained no creamware, and they seemed to date to the period of the Dawsons' ownership. These deposits yielded a large collection of ceramic vessels, mostly redware and white salt-glazed stoneware but including at least a few very elegant teaware vessels. A number of interesting small finds and a large collection of well-preserved animal bone were also recovered.

The Augustine Creek South Site

The Augustine Creek South Site was located in southern New Castle County, not far from Odessa (Bedell et al. 1998a). A farm was established on this spot by Samuel and Henrietta Mahoe around 1724. Archaeological remains included a cellar hole measuring 16 × 25 ft (4.9 × 7.6 m) and two post buildings (FIG. 3). The cellar hole contained a large deposit of artifacts apparently dating to the 1750s, including dozens of white salt-glazed stoneware, delFTWARE, and coarse redware vessels. One of the post buildings was in a part of the site identified as a separate cloth-manufacturing area. Nearby pits contained a distinctive ashy fill with an equally distinctive artifact pattern. The most common artifacts in most of the features of the site were ceramics and animal bone, suggesting kitchen trash. In the ashy pits there was little bone and almost

no ceramic, but there were numerous pieces of clay tobacco pipes and small bits of badly rusted metal. Tobacco pipe fragments were also common in the butchering area at the Whitten Road Site near Christiana, Delaware (Shaffer et al. 1988), and they may be characteristic of such separate work areas on sites of this type. The soil in the ashy pits at Augustine Creek South also had an unusual chemical signature, with concentrations of phosphorus and calcium more than ten times the site average. These chemicals could derive from urine or other organic matter and lime, both of which had many uses in cloth production (Bronson and Bronson 1817).

The Mahoes were Huguenots who came to Delaware from New York or New Jersey. Samuel identified himself in surviving documents as a weaver as well as a farmer. He is listed in a tax record from 1749, and a comparison with the assessments of his neighbors in St. Georges Hundred shows that he paid exactly the median amount. Samuel died in 1749, and Henrietta seems to have carried on the cloth-manufacturing business, since she went to court to bind her husband's apprentice to herself. She remained a widow for six years, remarrying in 1755 to Thomas Wallace. There is no evidence that she had any children in either marriage. The Mahoes and the Wallaces both had continual financial difficulties, and the Wallaces finally lost the farm in 1759. Evidence from the artifacts, including the lack of creamware, seems to indicate that the site was abandoned at that time or soon afterward.

The Augustine Creek North Site

The Augustine Creek North Site was a small tenant farm or dwelling in New Castle County, opposite the Augustine Creek South Site (Bedell et al. 1998a). The site was discovered as part of a highway project, but it eventually proved to be mostly outside the highway corridor. Therefore, most of the site was investigated only at the Phase II level (FIG. 4). This investigation consisted of the excavation of a sample of the plowzone across the site and the use of a backhoe to clear some strips and search for features. The only historical feature found was a small cellar, measuring 5 × 10 ft (1.5 × 3.05 m), with a bulkhead

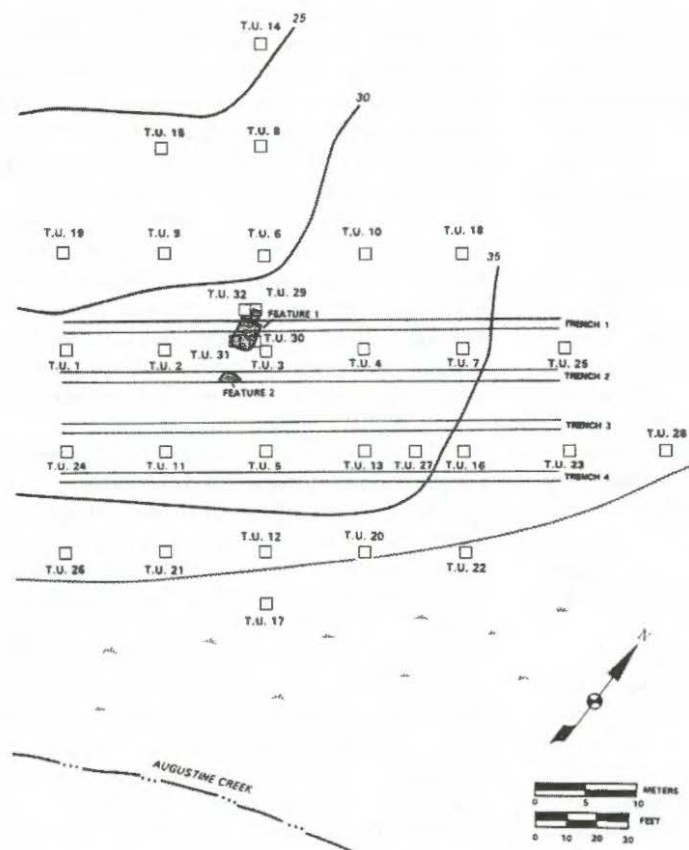


Figure 4. Plan of the testing at the Augustine Creek North site.

entrance; one half of this cellar was excavated. The artifacts from the plowzone suggested a long occupation period for the site, from before 1750 to about 1810. The site was small, about 120 × 180 ft (36.6 × 54.9 m), and the number of artifacts was not great, so the investigators believed it was a small tenant farm or residence. The site may have been occupied in two distinct periods, with a gap around 1770 to 1790. The cellar contained no creamware or pearlware and was probably filled in before 1770; the mean ceramic date was 1732. The site was located on sloping ground adjacent to wetlands along Augustine Creek, an unfavorable site, so the occupants were probably poor. In the 19th century, many of Delaware's African Americans lived in rather similar, swampy terrain, so the investigators of the Augustine Creek North Site think it may have

been occupied by blacks, especially in the 1790 to 1810 period (Heite and Blume 1995, 1998).

Housing

"Georgian" entered the historical discourse as an architectural style, and changes in housing remain central to the notion of a "Georgian Mindset" (Leone 1988). The archaeological evidence of housing in Delaware, however, does not give any support to the notion that 18th-century people were experiencing major changes in their outlook. The houses archaeologists have uncovered have overwhelmingly been small, traditional, one- or two-room constructions. Even the largest houses uncovered, at the homes of well-to-do farmers, have been hall-parlor structures with only a single end chimney, no

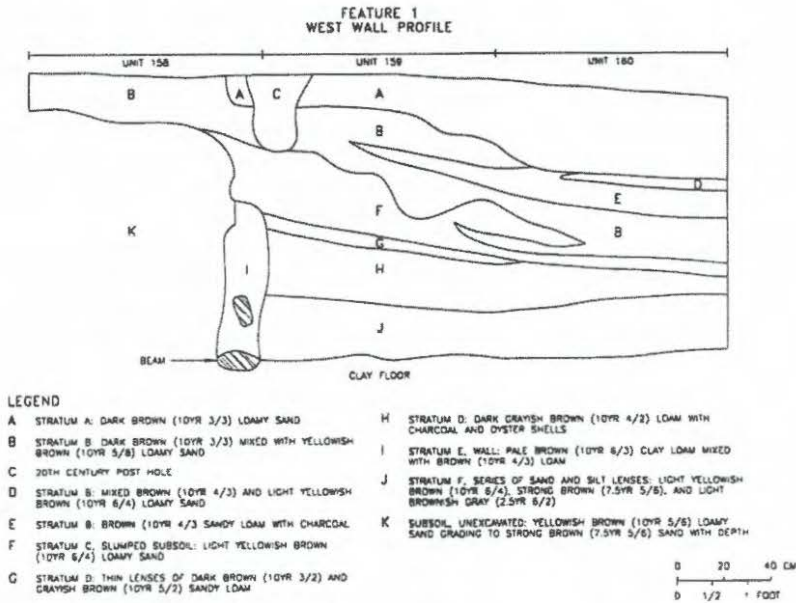


Figure 5. Profile of cellar fills at the Thomas Dawson site.

bigger in area than 620 ft² (189 m²) (Basilik, Brown, and Tabachnick 1988; Bedell et al. 1998; Coleman et al. 1984; Thomas, Hoffman, and Zeeboker 1994). No true Georgian house, with a central passage and two end chimneys, has been found on any 18th-century archaeological site in Delaware. There are several standing Georgian houses in the state (Herman 1987), but the archaeological findings suggest that such structures were rather rare. Richard Bushman (1992: 16) found that only three of the 18th-century brick houses standing in Kent County were built before 1740. The fashion for these structures did not take off until after that date, with 25 others built between 1740 and 1776. Yet only about half of these expensive houses had true Georgian plans; the others were variations of the traditional hall and parlor design (Bushman 1992: 16).

The house at Augustine Creek South was probably a frame construction on brick foundations. The brick foundations had been almost entirely robbed, but a few bricks remained in place and numerous brick pieces were found in the cellar fill. The cellar measured 16 × 25 ft (4.9 × 7.6 m), and there was no evidence that the house had been any larger.

At this size, it could have been either a one-room or two-room plan. The cellar was about 4 ft (1.22 m) deep. In the center was a small circular root cellar, 21 in (53.3 cm) in diameter and 17 in (43 cm) deep, its bottom lined with oyster shell. Only a small quantity of window glass and rather few nails were recovered from the cellar, so the house might actually have been moved to another location rather than torn down.

The cellar at the Thomas Dawson Site was directly adjacent to U.S. 13, and part had been destroyed during the construction of that highway. The cellar did contain very interesting architectural remains. All around the interior of all the cellar walls was a deposit of mixed olive gray clay and brown loam that the excavators initially called the builder's trench (FIG. 5; see also FIG. 2). This layer was about 8 in (20.3 cm) thick. Little brick or stone was found in the cellar, and there were no post holes in the cellar hole, so the actual construction technique used on the house remained a puzzle. The answer became clear when a substantial portion of the "builder's trench" had been excavated. Along the bottom of this deposit, lying on the subsoil at the bottom of the cellar, was a layer of medium brown loam

that clearly represented the remains of wooden beams. These beams, which must have been 8 in (20.3 cm) wide and about 12 in (30.5 cm) tall, once ran all around the cellar. Since such beams would not be placed at the bottom of builder's trench, they must have been the sills that supported the structure of the house. What the excavators had been calling the builder's trench was actually the wall itself. That wall had consisted of large beams, now decayed into brown loam, with clay nogging pressed into the spaces between them. Above the ground, the wall was probably covered in clapboards. It has long been suspected that colonial builders sometimes erected structures on sills laid directly on the ground, but after 250 years such structures leave little trace and few have been found.

Although part of the cellar had been destroyed, three corners did survive, so the dimensions could be determined. The structure defined by the sills measured 11 ft 9 in \times 13 ft 7 in (3.58 \times 4.14 m). On the southeast corner was a small extension that seemed to have had a wooden floor; this was probably a storage closet. These dimensions seem too small to have comprised the entire house, but the only other structural evidence found nearby was a single deep post hole on one corner of the small addition. Perhaps the house once extended farther in the direction of U.S. 13, or perhaps the other sections were supported by sills laid directly on the ground surface. Because of their large size it seems that the beams whose remains were found in the bottom of the cellar must have been structural elements of some kind, not just supports for cellar walls. The cellar was about 4 ft (1.22 m) deep and contained several fills, two of which contained quantities of domestic trash. More than 4500 artifacts and 4100 animal bones were found in the cellar. These included a large amount of ceramics, especially coarse earthenware and white salt-glazed stoneware but no creamware. A structure built on wooden sills laid in the bottom of a basement would probably not have lasted more than a couple of decades and could easily have collapsed within the 15 to 20 years that the Dawsons lived on the site. The tenants who lived on the site after 1756 must have built a new house, probably in the part of the

site that has been destroyed by U.S. 13. More than 1200 hand-wrought nails were found in the cellar, a large number that suggests the house above it was frame. Only 18 pieces of window glass were recovered, a very low number for a historical structure. The Dawsons' house probably did not have many glass windows, perhaps only one.

Somewhat similar remains were found at the John Powell Site, ca. 1691 to 1735 (Grettlar et al. 1995). There, the stains left by wooden sills were found within a shallow pit. The pit measured about 15 ft (4.57 m) across, and the stains defined a 10 \times 11 ft (4.57 \times 3.35 m) rectangle. This pit was part of a cluster of shallow pits that were all interpreted as house remains. The pit cluster measured about 15 \times 30 ft (4.57 \times 9.14 m) overall, and the excavators thought this roughly defined the size of the house; it is not clear, however, how these pits were actually related to a house structure, if at all.

The only evidence of the house at the Augustine Creek North Site was the small cellar. The cellar measured 5 \times 10 ft (1.5 \times 3.05 m), plus a bulkhead entrance on one end, and was 3 ft 4 in (1.016 m) deep. Written records show that most tenant houses in 18th-century Delaware were log, and this one was probably no exception (Bedell 1998a: 51). Log houses were frequently built directly on the ground, or on flimsy stone foundations that would leave no trace on a plowed site, and the archaeology suggests that such houses were common on sites occupied by poorer people down to at least 1830. No foundations of any kind were found at the Bloomsbury Site, a tenant farm occupied from about 1761 to 1814 (Heite and Blume 1998). At the William Strickland (ca. 1726–1762), Benjamin Wynn Tenancy (ca. 1765–1820), and Loockerman's Range (1740–1760) Sites, the only clear house remains identified were root cellars and hearths (Catts et al. 1995; Grettlar et al. 1991, 1996).

Farm Landscapes

Today, most of Delaware's family farms are laid out according to a common plan. The main house, often a frame I-house built in the later 1800s, faces the nearest road. In front of

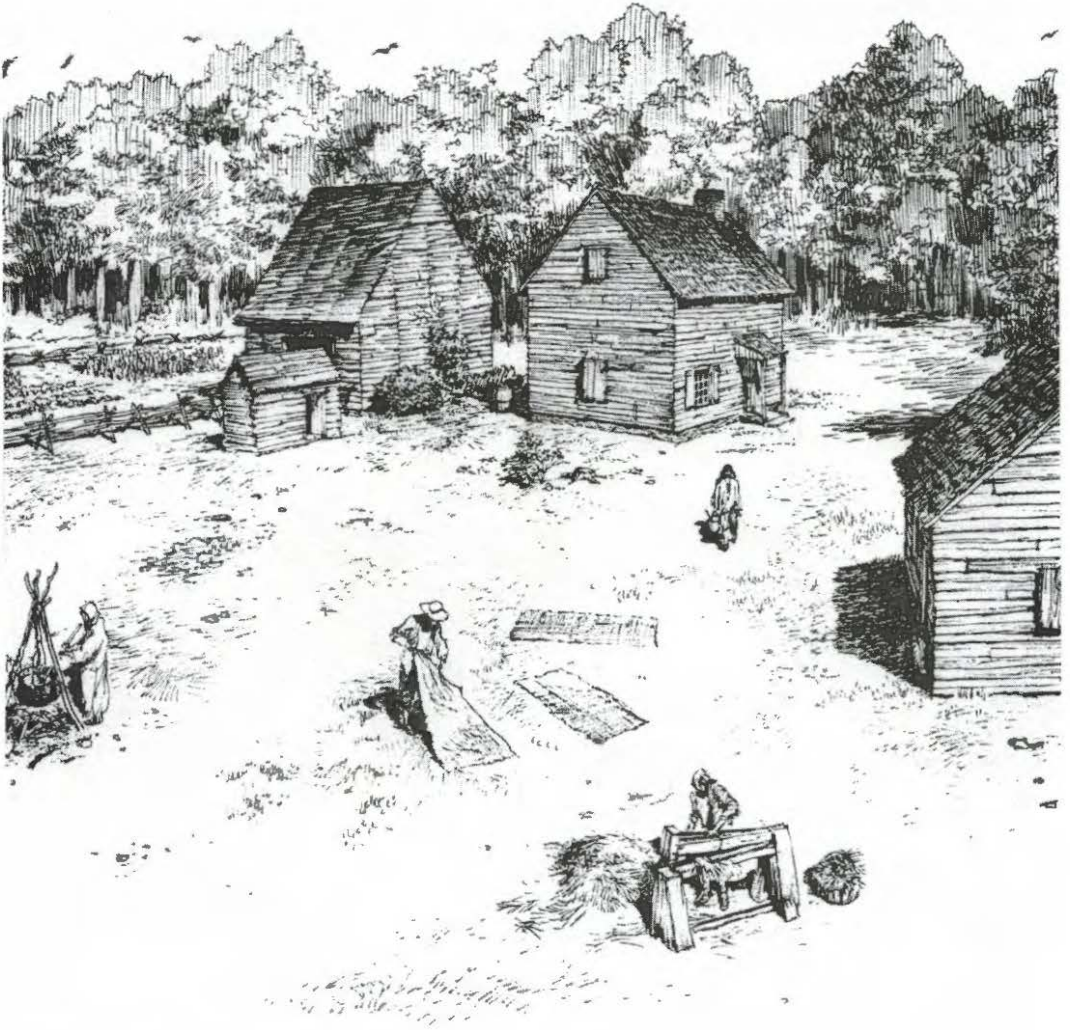


Figure 6. Artist's reconstruction of the Augustine Creek South site.

the house is a well-kept yard, frequently planted with flowers and shade trees. All of the barns, silos, equipment sheds, and other working outbuildings are behind the house. This division between the ornamental public space in front of the house and the working space to the rear is one of the hallmarks of Georgian farm planning, and it is old enough in Delaware to be referred to as "traditional" (Heite 1983). Archaeology has provided no evidence of such farm plans in Delaware before 1830, however. Looking at the plan of the Augustine Creek South Site, it is difficult

even to guess which side of the house was the front and which side the back, since working outbuildings were positioned on both sides (FIG. 6). Visitors approaching the site from the road would have walked directly past large, shallow pits containing kitchen trash and animal bones. The fences on the site were mostly short pieces with the posts at irregular intervals. Such bits of fence have been found on several other 18th-century Delaware sites, including the John Powell (1691–1735), William Strickland (1726–1762), and Charles Robinson (1762–1781) Plantations (Catts et al.

Table 1. Summary of bone, by minimum number of units (MNU).

	<i>Thomas Dawson</i>	<i>Augustine Creek South</i>	<i>Augustine Creek North</i>
<i>Mammal</i>			
Cat	1	2	1
Cattle	296	178	39
Deer	3		
Dog	3	1	
Goat	1		
Horse	10	8	1
Opossum	5		
Pig	426	143	42
Rabbit	20	1	2
Raccoon	2		
Rat	1		
Sheep	59	43	23
Squirrel, Gray	37	4	
Small	46	18	5
Medium	48		
Large	32	72	25
Subtotal	989	470	138
<i>Bird</i>			
Chicken	51	18	5
Duck	5		
Goose	2		2
Pigeon	1	1	1
Turkey		1	
Unidentified	43	29	7
Subtotal	102	49	15
<i>Fish</i>			
Catfish	4	7	
Drum	271		
Perches	11		
Striped Bass	1	5	
Shad	44		
Unidentified	194	619	65
Subtotal	481	675	65
<i>Reptile</i>			
Snapping Turtle	2		
Blanding's Turtle	1		1
Unid. Turtle	11	3	
Subtotal	14	3	1
Total	1586	1199	219

1995; Grettler et al. 1995; Thomas, Hoffman, and Zeeboker 1994). It seems that Delaware farmers did not have any interest in building long, straight fences around rectangular yards. The farm plans at these three sites also resembled that at Augustine Creek South, in that they consisted of rather random groups of buildings not aligned with each other or arranged according to any obvious design.

The recovery of landscape or layout information was limited at the Thomas Dawson Site by disturbance and at Augustine Creek North by the curtailment of field work. The distribution of artifacts in the plowzone at both sites gives some clues, however. High counts of domestic artifacts were found close to the houses at both sites, on all sides of the dwelling. The same was true of Augustine Creek South. Much of the trash at all these sites must have been broadcast around the house in the traditional manner. There was no sign at any of these sites of purpose-dug trash pits, or of privies. As with housing, the layout of these farms gives no evidence of interest in new, "Georgian" conceptions of order and the use of space.

Bones and Diet

Substantial numbers of animal bones were found at all three sites, including a large and well-preserved faunal collection at the Thomas Dawson Site (TAB. 1). The collections were quite similar to those from other 18th-century Delaware sites (Bedell et al. 1998b; Catts et al. 1995; Grettler et al. 1995). The bones of domesticated and wild animals were found, but the great majority were from domesticated species. The domesticated animals included horse, cattle, pig, sheep, cat, dog, chicken, and goat, the last represented by a single foot bone. The dog and cat bones were probably from pets, since these animals were not eaten. It is interesting to note, though, that old dogs and cats ended up in the trash rather than in pet graves. Most of the bones from these sites were either cattle or pig, and these two species account for almost all of the meat represented. Since cattle are bigger than pigs, each cattle bone represents more meat than each pig bone, and this collection actually reflects more eating of beef than pork. Sheep bones were

also rather common. The horse bones show clear evidence of butchering, so the Dawsons and Mahoes did eat horse meat.

The wild animals eaten on these farms were mostly small, although 3 deer bones were found at the Thomas Dawson Site. The most common mammals were rabbit and squirrel. In the well-preserved material from the Thomas Dawson Site, opossum and raccoon were also identified. The fish were mostly small species that can be taken with a hook and line in many Delaware streams, including shad, catfish, drum, and striped bass. Turtle bones were found at all three sites; a wide variety of turtles have turned up on 18th-century Delaware sites, including five different species at the McKean/Cochran Farm (Bedell et al. 1998b). Overall, the wild species suggest occasional hunting and fishing in the woods and streams around the farm, as much for recreation as for food, perhaps undertaken by boys. Oysters, however, which were found in quantity at all three sites, were probably purchased from professional watermen, since all three sites were some miles from the nearest oyster beds.

Cattle and pig bones were found from most of the parts of the animal, including the head, foot, chuck, round, loin, and prime rib. These collections therefore represent parts of the animal that are desirable and valuable as well as parts considered waste, or at least very poor food. This pattern, which has been found at other farm sites, provides important data on rural diets. On some urban and plantation sites, differences in the quality of meat eaten may point to status differences. In the Delaware Valley, and the northeast generally, farmers tended to eat all the parts of the animals they raised. Even quite wealthy farmers ate headcheese and pigs' feet, while bones from top cuts of meat have been found at the farms of poor tenants, like Augustine Creek North. The cattle and pig bones from all these sites had been chopped with a cleaver into large chunks of meat suitable for roasting or stewing, not into individual steaks or other small portions. This pattern, of farmers raising their own animals, eating all the parts of those animals, and hacking the meat into large pieces, is highly traditional (Bedell, Petraglia, and Plummer 1994). These families

Table 2. Ceramic vessels, by ware groups.

	Thomas Dawson		Augustine Creek South		Augustine Creek North	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Coarse Earthenwares	180	44.4	168	53.7	34	68.0
Refined Earthenwares	33	8.1	54	15.7	10	20.0
Refined Stonewares	171	42.2	79	25.6	5	10.0
Coarse Stonewares	3	0.7	4	1.3	1	2.0
Porcelains	18	4.4	4	1.3		
Total	405		309		50	

Table 3. Ceramic vessels from the Augustine Creek and Thomas Dawson sites.

		Augustine Creek South		Thomas Dawson		Augustine Creek North	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Tea	cup	30		32		2	
	saucer	37		24		1	
	teapot	8		10		1	
	misc.	5		4			
	subtotal	80	26	70	17	4	17
Table	plate	6		3		1	
	bowl	18		19		1	
	porringer	18		9		1	
	misc.	4		8			
	subtotal	46	15	39	10	3	13
Non-Tea Drinking	mug	30		14		8	
	cup	3					
	mug/jug			3			
	punch bowl	1					
	subtotal	34	11	17	4	8	33
Storage jar		20		9		1	
	subtotal	20	6	9	2	1	4
Food Preparation	milk pan	20		17		1	
	pipkin	1					
	subtotal	21	7	17	4	1	4
Multi-Function	dish	23		11		4	
	pan	26		9		1	
	jug	4		6		1	
	large bowl			2			
	subtotal	53	17	28	7	6	25
Sanitary	chamber pot	3		2			
	ointment pot						1
	subtotal	3	1	2	<1	1	4
Unid.	hollow	52		223			
	subtotal	52	17	223	55		
Total		309		405		24	

ate their beef and pork in a way that continued thousands of years of European tradition. The rather low number of some bones, especially vertebrae, suggests that the bones we found are primarily household refuse, and that the first slaughtering of the cattle was done elsewhere and the bones disposed of separately.

Artifacts and Consumer Culture

Although the houses, farm plans, and faunal material found at these sites seem to have been highly traditional, the artifacts did display contemporary characteristics. Several categories of recently introduced items, made with new technologies, were found. New types of ceramic and new vessel forms spread quickly in Delaware, indicating changes in eating habits. Clothing remains at these sites seem to represent an interest in fashion (Scharfenberger 1998). Artifacts also provide some evidence of the individual personalities of some of our subjects, especially Thomas Dawson, whose character can be imagined from the documentary and archaeological remains he left behind.

Vessels and Eating Habits

Minimum number of vessel calculations were performed on the potsherds from the largest features at all three sites. Taking the three sites together, 764 vessels were identified, all dating to the 1740 to 1770 period. This collection therefore provides an excellent opportunity for studying ordinary farm households at that time. The material all appeared to be redeposited, and a majority of the vessels at all three sites was less than 10 percent complete. Under these circumstances it is easier to distinguish different vessels in decorated wares, so the tables probably underestimate the number of vessels made of coarse redwares (TAB. 2).

Teawares were the most common vessels at both the Thomas Dawson and Augustine Creek South Sites (TAB. 3). No teawares were identified in the cellar at Augustine Creek North. One sherd from a white salt-glazed teacup was identified in the plowzone, however, as were several sherds from creamware and hand-painted pearlware teawares. Tea drinking at Augustine Creek North certainly began in the 18th century, although the evi-

dence from the cellar suggests that teawares were not in use on the site in its earliest stages.

At both the Augustine Creek South and Thomas Dawson Sites, the teawares were the best and most expensive dishes. All of the scratch-blue, white salt-glazed stoneware vessels at both sites were tea-related, as were 19 of 21 porcelain vessels. The 7 teapots found at Augustine Creek South included 2 with scratch-blue flowers and 1 of cauliflower-pattern creamware. The Dawsons' teawares were particularly elegant. Their tea dishes included white salt-glazed scratch-blue decorated cups, saucers, teapots, jugs, and a few porcelain and tin-glazed cups. Some of their scratch-blue teacups and saucers had very similar patterns and would have made a matched or nearly matched set. In addition, there was a sprigged and clouded early cream-colored teapot and an elaborately decorated molded white salt-glazed teapot made by Thomas and John Wedgwood, of the Big House, Burslem, before 1745 (Mountford 1971: Plate 98). Another unusual vessel was a pear-shaped teapot of reddish stoneware, most likely a piece made by the Elers brothers (FIG. 7). Elers pieces were never common and were among the finest English ceramics available to the colonists.

Since tea drinking was virtually unknown in much of rural America at the beginning of the 18th century, its adoption by farmers like the Mahoes and the Dawsons represents an important social change. This change spread across the Atlantic along the major trade routes, and its adoption has been shown to reflect, not just economic or social class, but the degree of sophistication of a given area and its proximity to international trading hubs (Bushman 1992: 76-77). On their own, these data on the relatively rapid spread of tea shows that rural Americans were open to new products and customs, and suggest that such people had some desire to acquire respectability through following fashion in their purchases and in their behavior.

The tablewares at all three sites included a mix of refined, imported vessels and locally-made earthenware forms. Plates made of both delftware and white salt-glazed stoneware were found, but in small numbers. Pewter plates were among the more common eating



Figure 7. Sherd from Elers brothers teapot or creamer.

vessels at this time and place, and Thomas Dawson's inventory lists 6 of them. The most common ceramic vessel forms in the archaeological collection were small bowls and porringers. The bowls at the Thomas Dawson Site include an interesting variety of decorated delftware pieces, including white-glazed vessels with blue, purple, and polychrome decoration and blue-glazed vessels with blue and polychrome decoration. Set side by side they suggest a gaudy table indeed. Two porcelain bowls were also found, and 5 small slip-decorated bowls. Small slip-decorated bowls, which are a distinctive part of the Philadelphia/Lower Delaware Valley redware tradition, were found at both the Thomas Dawson and Augustine Creek South Sites. These bowls have been found on almost all of the 18th- and early 19th-century sites that have been excavated in Delaware. The bowls and porringers are very interesting, because they speak to us about what, and how, the residents of these sites ate. Bowls could be used for

soup or "chowder" and stew, which were mainstays of the traditional diet, and also for porridges, puddings, and other soft, boiled bread products. The Dawsons and Mahoes obviously owned a good many small bowls, as did most of the other farmers in Delaware whose farms have been excavated, so porridge and similar foods probably formed an important part of their diets.

Mugs were common at all three sites. Most of the mugs were made of coarse red earthenware or white salt-glazed stoneware, but there were also examples made of Rhenish blue-and-gray stoneware, and the speckled earthenware known as "Midlands mottled" (Meta Janowitz, personal communication, 1998). Many of the redware mugs had heavy interior wear, as if their contents were stirred often and vigorously. A punch bowl was identified at Augustine Creek South, and it seems likely that the Dawsons also owned at least one. To people of the 18th century, rum punch was for entertaining; it would have been odd for a husband and wife to make up a bowl of punch for themselves. The probable punch bowl from Augustine Creek South was made of polychrome-painted delftware. One of the porcelain bowls from the Thomas Dawson Site was quite large, with a very large, tall foot ring, and this vessel was probably a punch bowl. A large punch bowl made of Chinese porcelain would have been an elegant and rather expensive item, well-suited for entertaining the neighbors. One delft bowl that was probably a punch bowl was also found at that site, as well as 3 bowls of unknown size, any of which could also have been punch bowls.

The food preparation and storage vessels were the familiar forms found on all sites in the Delaware Valley. Milk pans were among the most common forms at all three sites, reminding us how important dairying was in the Delaware economy (Jensen 1986). Storage jars, jugs, bowls, and chamber pots were also found. The slip-trailed dishes and pans are very common on Delaware sites. The pans—round vessels with flat bottoms and sloping sides—had many uses, among them, making porridges and puddings. They are therefore part of the same food tradition as the small bowls discussed above, and their prominence in Delaware points to the importance of these foods in the 18th-century diet.

Eating Respectably

Other kitchen utensils confirm the impression of openness to new ideas and trends suggested by the ceramics. Knives and forks were recovered from both the Thomas Dawson and Augustine Creek South Sites, the Dawson site producing 3 fork fragments representing three specimens and 14 knife fragments representing at least 8 specimens, and Augustine Creek South yielding 1 fork fragment and two knife fragments. In addition, 5 fragments of bone utensil handles were found at Thomas Dawson House, 3 from a single piece. All of the knives and forks had bone handles, with 2 of the forks and 3 of the knives from Thomas Dawson House having enough of the handle intact to identify them as of a "pistol-grip" design, popular during the first half of the 18th century (Noël Hume 1969: 178–182; Neumann 1984: 299). The 3 pieces from Augustine Creek South had handles with the identifying tips missing, although the gradual widening of the handle before the break suggests the probability that these too were pistol-grip handles. Three of the knives recovered from the Thomas Dawson House had wide, slightly upward arching blades, 1 with the bulbous tip intact. This type of knife was common during the period 1700–1770 and was designed exclusively for use in tandem with a fork (Neumann 1984: 299; Noël Hume 1969: 178). Prior to the end of the 17th century, table knives were characterized by narrow blades culminating in a point to spear cut pieces of food (Noël Hume 1969: 177–178). With the appearance of the fork, knives lost their pointed tips in favor of flattened, or rounded ends (Neumann 1984: 299; Panati 1983: 80–81). This seemingly innocuous change was monumental to those in the 18th century, since a person using such a knife could not fake his unfamiliarity with the fork and the new habits it represented.

Several of the handle fragments from Thomas Dawson House had 4 small drilled holes arranged in a diamond pattern to accommodate a decorative inlay, a feature found on those pieces with pistol-grip handles, as well as the mendable handle-only fragments. This would indicate that the knives and forks from the Thomas Dawson House were all from one matching set, replete with nonfunctional orna-

mentation. During the first half of the 18th century, poorer people were content to own odd-lot assortments of utensils. After about 1760, matching sets of knives, forks, and ceramics become common in archaeological contexts, and historical records suggest that the pattern extends to sets of dining room chairs and other objects (Carson 1994: 505).

The evidence from these sites therefore suggests that ordinary farmers in Delaware took enthusiastically to the new style of dining that was spreading through 18th-century America. The new style required diners to sit around the table in straight-backed chairs; each would be presented with his or her own knife, fork, and plate. Food was to be kept clean and out of direct contact with the fingers (Bushman 1992: 76). Failure to properly exhibit a mastery of the new tableware was considered bad manners and the sign of an unrefined, lower-class individual (Carson 1994: 602–603). Before the advent of knives with rounded tips, it was acceptable for a man to pick his teeth with the point of his knife, an act abhorred during the 18th-century's striving for civility (Panati 1983: 80).

At least in the area of dining and taking tea, the ordinary farmers of Delaware seem to have shared the desire for material goods capable of enhancing a person's social standing. This desire seems to have touched many facets of daily life. In the course of the 18th century, traditional, locally-made home furnishings, tools, and cooking utensils were all increasingly replaced by polished, store-bought objects that were sources of personal prestige. As good manners and social mobility pervaded 18th-century thought, goods designed to showcase one's proficiency or, conversely, expose another's deficiency in the fine art of genteel behavior were produced (Calvert 1994: 271; Carson 1994). Nor is this emphasis on the simple knife and fork an invention of modern scholars, since the divide between those who used these implements and those who did not was commented on at the time (Panati 1987: 78–79). Dr. Alexander Hamilton, an English physician traveling through the colonies in 1744, recorded this scene at the table of a Delaware Valley ferry keeper, "They used neither knife, fork, spoon, plate, or napkin. I looked upon this as a pic-



Figure 8. Porringer from the Thomas Dawson site.

ture of that primitive simplicity before the mechanic arts supplied them with instruments for the luxury and elegance of life" (quoted in Bridenbaugh 1948: 8). The use or mis-use of forks in industrial pursuits was also noted by contemporaries, again suggesting a divide between those who were, and were not, familiar with the implement. In 1748, Swedish naturalist Peter Kalm noted how fishermen used three-tined forks to dig sea worms out of lowtide shorelines for bait (Benson 1937: 1).

The Mahoes and Dawsons seem to have been on the "civilized" side of this divide. If, as many modern historians and archaeologists believe, the use of a knife and fork was part of a larger overhaul in daily activities and personal mannerisms during the 18th century, Delaware farmers seem to have taken part in this transformation. The array of artifacts tied to this new set of behavioral standards is well represented on archaeological sites, especially as pertains to dining and taking tea. By 1810, even the poor residents at Augustine Creek North owned hand-painted pearlware teacups.

The evidence does not suggest, however, that the new style of dining completely replaced the old. Particularly significant in this regard were the porringers found on all three sites—18 from Augustine Creek South,

nine from Thomas Dawson, and 1 from Augustine Creek North (FIG. 8). From a purely descriptive point of view, porringers are simply small bowls with handles, but in terms of dining habits they mean much more. Poringers had handles so they could be held in the hand while eating or while feeding another; in recent times porringers have been particularly connected with feeding children. Poringers are best adapted for liquid or mushy foods eaten with spoons, and many archaeologically recovered porringers have heavy stirring marks (Janowitz and Affleck 1998).

In the 19th century, porringers came to be associated with poverty, and paintings of beggars sometimes included porringers as symbols of their destitution (Janowitz and Affleck 1998). The archaeological evidence from the 17th and 18th centuries shows that in colonial times porringers were used by better-off people as well. It is somewhat difficult to determine how common porringers actually were, because archaeologists do not seem to identify them consistently, and most are probably lost within a general "bowl" category. The list of ceramic vessels from the Charles Robinson Plantation in New Castle County (1762–1781) does not include any porringers, but a photograph of one is included in the

report (Thomas, Hoffman, and Zeeboker 1994: III-60). Sometimes porringers are identified in reports, probably because they still had attached handles, but because the identification is not consistent, the numbers reported from various sites are probably not reliable.

How, and when, did porringers move from being a common item of every kitchen to a symbol of poverty? Although comparative site material is hard to come by, we can make some general observations about the presence of porringers on 18th- and 19th-century sites. In general, from about 1760 onwards, the number of porringers decreases. At the McKean/Cochran Farm site near Odessa, deposits were found dating to two periods. The earlier material, much of which dated to the 1750s and 1760s, included 10 porringers among 152 identified vessels. The later material, dating to 1790 to 1820, included only 5 porringers among 431 vessels (Bedell et al. 1998b). There are two reasons for the declining number of porringers on archaeological sites. First, the way people ate changed, and grain gruels and bread soaked in various liquids were eaten almost exclusively at breakfast or by children or invalids, at least among the upper and middle classes in British North America. Also, the types of vessels used to serve these foods changed from redware porringers and bowls to creamware, pearlware, and even porcelain bowls. Although a porcelain bowl could be used to serve the same foods as a porringer, it could not be used in the same way. Bowls without handles, especially if they were made of some thin, heat-conducting material such as porcelain or pearlware, could not be held in the hands, but had to be used at a table.

The decline of the porringer, therefore, was part of the same process that led to the rise of the plate and teacup, a general refinement of dining habits. Porringers hark back to an earlier tradition of food consumption, in which people did not always sit at table together, if they in fact had a table at all. The ceramics at the Thomas Dawson and Augustine Creek South exhibit a mixture of old and new traditions. On the one hand, the household was holding onto traditional foodways, but on the other hand, they were adopting new, genteel ways of presenting food. That the Dawsons and Mahoes accepted, at least partially, the

new style of dining, we know from their plates and teacups. Their reluctance to abandon all their old eating habits is symbolized by their heavily-used porringers. Perhaps they sat at table for one major meal a day—probably dinner, at midday—and ate their breakfasts and suppers more casually, as many of us do today. These porringers are an important clue to how the adoption of modern dining took place: like most important social changes it was slow, partial, and did not completely change the people who experienced it (Sahlins 1981).

Buttons, Buckles, and Fashion

The Thomas Dawson and Augustine Creek South Sites both produced large and interesting collections of "small finds" (TABS. 4, 5). Some of these objects also demonstrated interest in the new products and fashions of the 18th century. In particular, a large number of buttons and buckles were found that give us some hint of how the Dawsons and Mahoes dressed. Clothing was a much larger part of the average person's purchases than ceramics, so clothing is actually a better gauge of consumer behavior. The hints about dress we can pick up from the surviving hard parts are therefore very important.

Buttons have a practical function, but from the beginning their purpose has been as much to ornament the wearer as to hold on his or her clothes. (To this day, some Amish and Mennonite groups consider buttons a violation of "plain" dressing.) The buttons from these sites clearly show their ornamental purpose. The most common type in the mid-1700s was the hollow brass button, which had been introduced in the 1500s (Noël Hume 1969: 88). These shiny objects were displayed in rows along men's coats, waistcoats, and breeches. The effect was enhanced by gilding, that is, covering the brass button with a thin layer of gold. By 1750 British metal workers could make the gold layer very thin indeed, so gilt buttons were not particularly expensive, but they cost more than brass specimens and were certainly a purely ornamental refinement. The Thomas Dawson Site still yielded 9 un gilt brass buttons, pieces of 6 others, and 13 gilt specimens. Augustine Creek South yielded 11 brass buttons and 5 gilt. Pewter buttons,

Table 4. Small finds from the Thomas Dawson site.

<i>Activities</i>	
Jews Harp	1
Clay Marble	1
Dividers/Calipers	1
Whetstone	1
File	1
Shovel	1
Sickle	1
Drill Bit	2
Punch	2
Misc. Tool Parts	2
Horse Shoes	7
Horse Tack	14
Stirrups	3
Harrow Tooth	1
<i>Clothing</i>	
Gilt Buttons	9
Brass Buttons	20
Pewter Buttons	4
Tombac Buttons	2
Bone Button	1
Button Inlays	5
Brass Cufflinks	2
Inlaid Cufflinks	2
Misc. Fasteners	3
Shoe Buckle	18
Other Buckles	3
<i>Furniture</i>	
Decorative	7
<i>Kitchen</i>	
Knives	17
Fork	2
Spoons	3
Utensil Handle	6
Jar/Can Lid Pieces	16
<i>Personal</i>	
Coins	9
Mirror Glass	2
Watch Crystal	1
Pendant	1
Comb Fragment	1
<i>Sewing Related</i>	
Straight Pins	39
Sewing Needles	4
Scissors	2

which were less expensive than brass but still nice enough to be used on gentlemen's clothing, were found on both sites.

In addition to buttons used on coats and breeches, several sleeve buttons or cuff links

Table 5. Small finds from the Augustine Creek South site.

<i>Activities</i>	
Sundial Face	1
Clay Marble	1
Claw Hammers	2
Tool Parts	2
Horse Tack	6
Hardware	17
<i>Clothing</i>	
Gilt Buttons	5
Inlaid Buttons	3
Pewter Buttons	2
Other Buttons	14
Brass Cufflinks	5
Inlaid Cufflinks	2
Shoe Buckles	8
Other Buckles	6
<i>Kitchen</i>	
Knives	2
Fork	1
Kettle Fragments	2
Can Fragments	3
<i>Personal</i>	
Coins	2
Glass Bead	1
Combs	2
<i>Sewing Related</i>	
Straight Pins	54
Thimbles	2

were found at these sites (FIG. 9). Sleeve buttons are easily distinguished from other buttons by the presence of a wire link connecting two pieces together or a worn or broken shank caused by the friction of the wire link, a condition not present on shanks attached by thread (Noël Hume 1969: 380). Sleeve buttons were made of the same materials as other buttons, but the shape of the disks changed a good deal over the course of the 18th century, so that many sleeve buttons can be dated. Sleeve buttons of the early 18th century were usually octagonal, and they were larger than those of mid-century. Early specimens measured about 11/16 in (27.9 cm) in diameter, while those in later years decreased in size to approximately 1/2 in (1.27 cm) in diameter. They changed in shape as well, with round and oval sleeve buttons becoming the rule by 1750 (Calver and Bolton 1950: 224–227; Noël

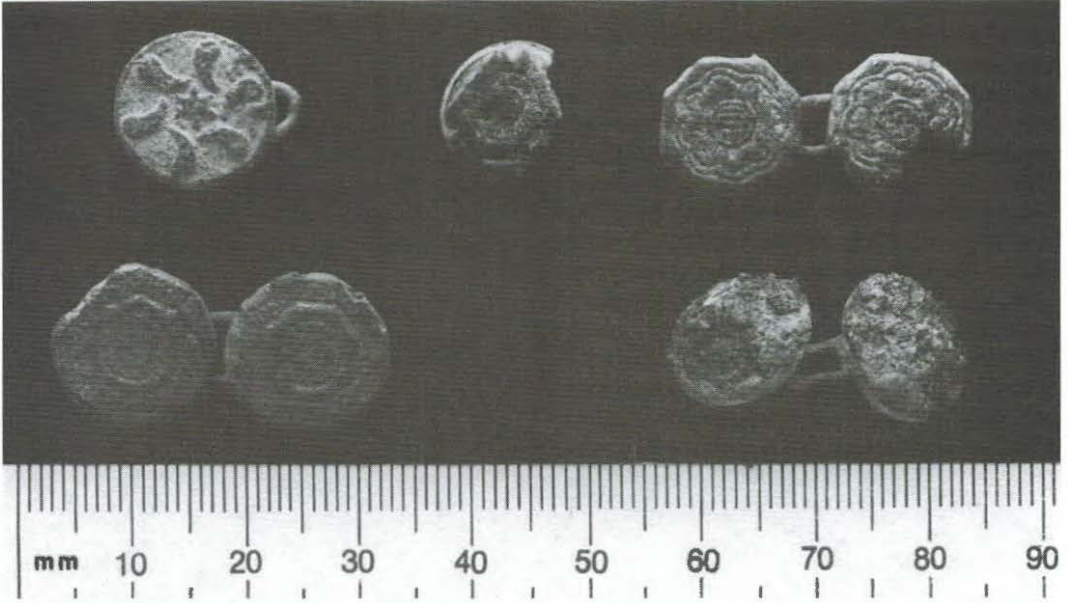


Figure 9. Cufflinks from the Thomas Dawson site.

Hume 1969: 381). Two pairs of octagonal brass sleeve buttons, measuring, respectively, 9/16 (1.29 cm) and 1/2 in (1.27 cm) in diameter with an intricate geometric design, were recovered from the Thomas Dawson Site.

More up-to-date were several sleeve buttons constructed of a copper or brass back with an inlaid glass or paste stone, along with unset inlays. Examples were found at both the Thomas Dawson and Augustine Creek South Sites. Paste, or "strass," is a form of faux gemstone invented around 1734 in France, which inexpensively simulated the look of colored precious and semi-precious stones (Albert and Kent 1949: 4). Buttons made of paste were almost always ornamental, and used to link the ruffled cuffs of a man's shirt or the multiple button-holed, folded boot-sleeves of coats and waistcoats (Warwick, Pitz, and Wycoff 1965: 154-156). The delicate structure of the diminutive paste sleeve buttons suggests their use as a decorative fastener: aesthetically pleasing, but functionally impractical, as opposed to ones sturdily constructed and intended to withstand the rigors of daily farming. These high-fashion paste sleeve buttons, along with the gilt and pewter coat buttons and the other sleeve buttons, seem to be

telling us something quite interesting about the residents of these sites. Although they were not wealthy and did not spend heavily on household goods, they dressed well and were willing to spend money to have some of the latest fashions.

Shoe buckles reinforce the impression made by the buttons and cufflinks (FIG. 10). During the 18th century, the shoe buckle was another part of dress whose function was clearly overshadowed by its decorative purpose. The shoe buckles worn by the wealthy were usually made from gold or silver and often inlaid with diamonds. Buckles worn by the masses were made from a variety of materials including brass, copper, jet, pinchbeck, steel, gun-metal, and, in some instances, wood. Occasionally, they would be inlaid with paste or glass stones (Moore 1933).

In all, 25 shoe buckles were found at these sites, 16 at Thomas Dawson, 8 at Augustine Creek South, and 1 at Augustine Creek North. These buckles were all brass or copper, with incised or molded designs for decoration. Neither frames capable of accommodating inlaid stones, either real or paste, nor any inscriptions were found among the identified fragments. Shoe buckles of the sort recovered



Figure 10. Shoe buckles from the Augustine Creek South site.

from these sites were understandably less expensive than those with inlaid stones or those made from gold or silver. Nevertheless, shoe buckles made from less desirable metals and set with paste stones were still considered valuable enough to be listed in wills, or advertised in newspapers as stolen items (Abbitt 1973: 262). These shoe buckles reinforce the impression given by the cufflinks and other buttons that someone on these sites liked to dress fashionably.

Glass

Teacups were part of a ritual introduced into Europe from Asia, a new refinement taken to with great enthusiasm. Europeans, however, had their own elaborate culture of drink, centered on the European aristocrats' beverage of choice: wine (Braudel 1992: I: 254). Stemmed wine glasses, the most obvious artifact of wine drinking, were found at all three of these sites. At Augustine Creek South, at least 3 stemmed glasses were identi-

fied, as well as 2 tumblers and 12 wine bottles. A minimum number of vessels analysis was not performed on the glass from the Thomas Dawson Site, but 27 fragments of stemmed glass were identified. Even the tenant dwelling at Augustine Creek North yielded 8 fragments of drinking vessels, including 2 fragments decorated with wheel-etched designs. While teacups represent change, in 18th-century contexts, stemmed wine glasses represent continuity with the European traditions of the past.

Other Finds

One of the most interesting artifacts found at the Augustine Creek South Site was a small brass disk, about 1 1/2 in (3.8 cm) across. In the center of the disk was a small, triangular hole. When this disk was cleaned off, Roman numerals could be seen around the rim. The disk was part of a small sundial. The hole in the center was for a triangular pole that cast the shadow. The yard of the Mahoe farm was

rather a mess, with trash on the surface and pits full of ash and bone scattered about. Where was the sundial? What purpose did it serve? Was it purely decorative, or did Samuel Mahoe (or Henrietta, or Thomas Wallace) check it to know what time to eat lunch or go to church? If it was a decoration, was some small part of the yard set aside for it? One can imagine a small square of bushes with the sundial in the center, like one of the small formal gardens at Colonial Williamsburg, but those gardens are not historically accurate, and the real gardens of 18th-century Williamsburg were probably much rougher and more practical (Brown and Samford 1990). Anyway, a neat, well-ordered garden seems impossible at Augustine Creek South, in the midst of the ashy pits.

At the Thomas Dawson Site a group of artifacts was found that, although of a common type, speaks to us of Thomas Dawson as an individual. These were the tobacco pipe fragments. One intact, highly decorated pipe bowl was found that bore the coat of arms and motto of the English royal family, a nice symbol of loyalty to the motherland at this colonial outpost. A different sort of symbolism may be contained in the large number of pipe bowls bearing the initials TD. The initials were applied by the maker of the pipes, in Britain. "TD" was a common maker's mark in the early and mid-18th century, and TD pipes have been found on other sites in Delaware, as well as sites in such far-reaching locations as New York, California, Michigan, Vancouver, and Nebraska, to name a few (Catts et al. 1995; Grettler et al. 1996). But nowhere have TD pipes made up as large a percentage of that total as at the Thomas Dawson Site. The excavators found 21 pipe bowls with maker's marks on the site, and 18 bore the initials "TD." Several different types of mark were represented, so it was not simply a case of Dawson having bought all his pipes in one lot. Most likely, Dawson chose the TD pipes because the initials matched his own. The desire to stamp possessions with a personal monogram was common in the 18th century, and wealthy men in Britain and the colonies had their personal seals applied to wine bottles, pipes, clothing, and other objects. Thomas Dawson was not wealthy enough to

order his own, specially-made things with his monogram, but he could take advantage of the coincidence that his initials matched those of several British pipemakers.

Some of the other artifacts from the Thomas Dawson site, combined with his probate inventory, suggest his character in interesting ways. Thomas Dawson came from a well-to-do family, but it seems that he never met his relatives' standards for worldly success. His economic path was steadily downward, and when he died he was surrounded by worn-out old things acquired years before. The Dawsons' house was a rough wooden place with rotting wooden foundations and a single window, and if Thomas had ever planned to replace it with a more permanent one he never got around to it. Many of the things in his house at his death may have come from his or his wife's family at the time of their marriage; his two finest ceramic pieces, the Elers brothers creamer and the Burslem teapot, were both 20 years old. A gun lock found in the cellar had once been part of a fine English fowling piece, but it later had to be repaired with a clumsily-made hammer. According to his inventory (Kent County 1754), all of his furniture was "old," and his old chairs, beds, tables, chest, and cupboard must have been badly worn to have been given such low values. Even his barrels and iron pots were old.

Although he was not much of an economic success, Dawson and his wife continued to keep up the social side of his upbringing. Dawson was educated, and he took his part in family affairs, serving as administrator of his relative John Dawson's estate and witnessing other documents. He enjoyed dressing well, with brightly-colored paste stones on his cuff links. For ordinary farmers the Dawsons seem to have had an extensive investment in entertaining. They had quite elegant teawares, including the molded white teapot and the red, Elers-type creamer, a vessel as fine as anything on the tables of the richest colonists. Archaeological evidence shows that they almost certainly had punch bowls, and this is confirmed by the probate inventory, which lists 3. The inventory also shows that Dawson had 20 gallons of rum, enough for some fairly serious celebrating. The many decorated delft-

ware bowls from the Dawson Site also suggest a love of display compatible with setting an elegant table. Whether serving tea, sitting down to dinner, or mixing up rum punch, the Dawsons seem to have had an active social life, and we can imagine them whiling away their winter evenings with neighbors and friends. We even know the identity of one of the Dawsons' social callers. When Catherine McClure died in May, 1744, her inventory takers noted that among her possessions were a black silk bonnet and gloves "at Thomas Dawson's," apparently left during a visit (Kent County 1744). Since Catherine McClure also owned a black silk gown, she was a person of some wealth, or at least she liked to appear that way.

We have no real evidence as to why Thomas Dawson was not more of an economic success, but there are some grounds for speculation. The 1745 survey map shows that he toyed with malting, but since this operation left no other evidence it does not seem that he did very well at it, and he had certainly given it up before the time of his death in 1754. Although he owned more than 100 acres of land, his inventory, made in January, reveals that only 12 acres of it was planted in wheat, and the value of his other crops is not impressive. Certainly he does not seem to have been a very energetic farmer. It is tempting to imagine him as one of those slightly lazy dreamers, full of schemes that never really went anywhere, perhaps because he spent time drinking tea with his neighbors or rum with his friends when a man more interested in money would have been out in the fields. He preferred, perhaps, to go to parties in his fine clothes, or just to stay home with his wife, friendly and sociable to all, and let others struggle to get ahead.

Conclusion: Message and Meaning

One way to think about the meaning of archaeological artifacts, or any other part of material culture, is to ask what messages the objects may have been intended to convey. All things made to be seen by others—clothes, teacups, building facades, gardens—are instruments of communication. The messages they send may not be especially complex, but

they may nonetheless be of the highest importance to both senders and receivers. As James A. Moore wrote, "style has a heavy information content—only a few bits of information are transmitted; these bits are heavily invested with meaning, however. By implication, style will not carry trivial information" (Moore 1983: 184). Artifacts associated with highly visible categories such as the outer layer of clothing and the exterior of dwellings provide a maximum potential for transmitting the most information to the largest number of people over the longest period of time (Wobst 1977: 328–329). What messages were the occupants of the Thomas Dawson and Augustine Creek sites trying to send about themselves?

At first glance, it may seem that the signals were contradictory. Surely, we might think, the message sent by a decorated teacup was undercut or cancelled by using that teacup in a run-down house on a farm without even a privy. The enthusiasm with which ordinary Delaware farmers took to many of the 18th century's new fashions suggests that they, at least, had no trouble understanding what these objects conveyed. To them, there was no contradiction in using newfangled consumer goods in their old-fashioned homes. Indeed, it might be that the apparent contradiction was part of the message. Their clothes, dishes, and other accessories showed that their log cabins and rough-hewn farms did not define these people, or limit their aspirations. By acquiring "high-style" possessions they may have been communicating that despite their narrow circumstances they still belonged to something larger, to the international high-style "culture" that transcended established ethnic and economic boundaries (Pendery 1992: 58). To the aristocrats whose fashions they copied, they may have been saying, "I'm as good a man (or woman) as you." If the residents of the Thomas Dawson site and the Augustine Creek sites spent so much of their decidedly limited resources on what are, *prima facie*, showy but non-essential trinkets, it may be because, to them, these items were anything but trivial. The message they sent about their owners was a very important one.

The relationship between the archaeological record of rural life in 18th-century

Delaware and recent theories of social revolution in the 18th century is therefore complex, and the data suggest an equally complex relationship between the lives of ordinary rural people and 18th-century ideas of the new gentility. It does not seem that poor and ordinary Delaware farmers either accepted or rejected the "new gentility" and the accompanying "consumer revolution." Instead, they adapted new ideas and new products to their own circumstances, taking up some innovations and ignoring others. The best way to understand their lives is not to sweep the details of individual lives into some revolutionary pile, but to consider each family or household as its own world, and to ask how each person we can learn about lived, building up our image of the past from as many cases as we can study.

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