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The Archaeology of Sylvester Manor

Stephen A. Mrozowski, Katherine Howlett Hayes, and Anne P. Hancock

This chapter introduces the history of the Sylvester Manor Project. It emphasizes the importance of the interdisciplinary approach employed during the project and the overall goals of the investigations. A discussion of pluralistic space and its importance as a central theme of the investigations is also presented. This is followed by a discussion of the Native American history of Shelter Island and its European colonization with particular attention given to the initial establishment of Sylvester Manor as a provisioning plantation, its connections to two large sugar plantations on Barbados, and its subsequent transformation into a commercial estate.

Ce chapitre, qui présente l'histoire du projet du Sylvester Manor, met en évidence l'approche interdisciplinaire utilisée tout au long du projet ainsi que dans l'ensemble des objectifs visés par les investigations. S'en suit une discussion sur les espaces pluralistes et leur importance en tant que thème central des investigations. On examine ensuite l'histoire des peuples autochtones des États-Unis d'Amérique sur Shelter Island et la colonisation européenne de l'île. Une attention particulière a été prêtée à l'établissement initial du Sylvester Manor comme plantation d'approvisionnement, à ses rapports avec deux importantes plantations à sucre à la Barbade, et à sa transformation ultérieure en domaine commercial.

Introduction

The image of enslaved African Americans laboring on southern plantations in the 19th century is a powerful and indelible part of the American consciousness. In a broad sense, this may be the image most frequently called to mind when we speak of slavery and the roots of modern racism. Far fewer Americans know of the deeper historical processes behind this, or that Native Americans as well as enslaved Africans toiled on plantations in the northern colonies for much of the 17th and 18th centuries. Throughout the New World these groups came together on plantations like Sylvester Manor to create pluralistic societies. A fundamental aspect of this process of creation was the radically different positions of power, history, and tradition that each group had to draw upon. Some, like the Africans, were unwilling participants who were forcibly captured and sold into slavery. Their very survival was accomplished in the face of scant resources and their removal from all structures of tradition. Others, like the Europeans, arrived with a sense of hope and promise of profit. Those who immigrated to the New World did so for a variety of reasons, but they too faced choices between maintaining cultural traditions and forging new identities. Native Americans saw their world changed by the arrival of European colonists. The plantations that were established punctuated a landscape that confronted the Native inhabitants of the area with opportuni-

ties and dilemmas. They could participate in trade with the Dutch and the English—a step that might enhance their power and prestige—or they could avoid interaction with the newcomers and try to maintain their economic and cultural independence. Out of this maelstrom of divergent perspectives emerged a society that was a mosaic of what historian Ira Berlin calls the “small beginnings” (1998: 18) of one of the most profound periods of cultural transformation in human history.

Sylvester Manor provides the context for just such a “small beginning” where Africans, Native Americans, and Europeans found themselves sharing space and negotiating their entwined futures. The Sylvester Manor project has sought to investigate the material and spatial expressions of this encounter with an eye toward understanding the transformational processes that shaped it. Established in 1652, Sylvester Manor was a major source of provisions for two Barbadian sugar plantations, owned in partnership by Nathaniel Sylvester and his brother, Constant, and two others, Thomas Middleton and Thomas Rouse. At the time it was established the northern plantation encompassed all of Shelter Island, some 8000 acres, located between the North and South Forks of Long Island (FIG. 1). Still known as Sylvester Manor, the current 250 acre estate represents the core of the plantation including the ca. 1735 manor house (FIG. 2), Quaker and African burial grounds, a large



Figure 1. Map of Shelter Island showing site location.

(2 acre) enclosed garden, several cottages, and farm out-buildings. The long-standing presence of enslaved Africans at Sylvester Manor is evidenced by Nathaniel Sylvester's 1680 Will that notes 23 Africans, all in family groups, as well as the "Burial Ground for the Colored People of Sylvester Manor" that was marked with a commemorative stone in the early-20th century. Documentary evidence of Native American roles in the operation of the plantation during the later stages of the 17th century is also present. A small account book owned by Giles Sylvester, the son of Nathaniel Sylvester, includes entries of payment to Native American workers between the years 1680 and

1701. These scant traces of evidence, along with others, suggest that Sylvester Manor was a dynamic setting for the interaction of individuals whose identities were shaped by different histories and cultural traditions.

If we are to interpret this social setting we must account for those complex traditions and histories. The rich cultural montage that was West Africa was a major source of variation in the creation of regional cultures in the New World (see DeCorse 1999; Posnansky 1999). Africans had to weather a continuous stream of traumatic episodes from their initial capture, to the passage across the Atlantic, often to the Caribbean—and work on sugar



Figure 2. The standing Manor house, built ca. 1735.

plantations—and then once again with their relocation to plantations in North America. In many instances the jarring character of these experiences was purposeful. New World slave owners sought to sever old social and cultural ties as part of a strategy to lessen potential cooperation between individuals and groups (Posnansky 1999: 25). As a result enslaved Africans developed a variety of personal strategies for coping with their situation that often involved the use of cultural tropes that allowed them to maintain different personas depending upon the context (Armstrong and Kelly 2000, Ferguson 1992, Franklin 2001, Wilkie 2000). Likewise, the cultural diversity of the native populations of New England and Long Island was itself an outgrowth of economic and ecological adaptations that had evolved over centuries (Bragdon 1996: 55–79; Strong 1997). Despite these long-standing cultural patterns, Native Americans adapted fairly quickly to new economic opportunities offered through trade with the Europeans. Over time, Native American/European interaction intensified and took on new dimensions. In some instances it involved working for the newly arrived Europeans, work that often brought them into direct contact with enslaved Africans.

The majority of studies that have examined plantation life in the north have focused on the lives of enslaved Africans (e.g. Bankoff et al. 2001; Berlin 1980, 1998; Fitts 1998, 1996; Garman 1998; Kruger 1985; McManus 1966; Sawyer and Perry 2003) with little attention given to the Native Americans who often labored along side them (but see Saunt 2002; Strong 1996, 1997). Although our initial goal at Sylvester Manor was to explore the interaction of European and African populations, the archaeology of the site presented a more complicated picture. As field investigations progressed, the preponderance

of Native American material culture in mixed contexts dating to the period of European occupation forced us to shift our focus to examine the interaction of all three groups and the landscape they inhabited and shaped. The space at the center of these investigations has proven a rich matrix that, while difficult to decipher, has nevertheless begun to reveal the intricacies of a multi-cultural encounter that resulted in the forging of new identities on the part of all of those who resided at Sylvester Manor.

The Archaeology of Pluralistic Space

Plantations like Sylvester Manor present a challenge to the archaeologist interested in the cultural interaction one assumes took place. Daily routines played out in shared space over decades have resulted in a complex archaeological record. In those areas where activities were most intensively focused, the archaeology is almost urban in character. Traces of daily practice were often interrupted by events linked to periods of significant transition. Among the most notable of these was the reshaping of the landscape at the time the current manor house was constructed, ca. 1735. Evidence of earlier events has also been unearthed and these too speak to periods of construction, destruction and landscape production. In this sense much if not all of our efforts have gone into trying to decipher an archaeological record profoundly shaped by cycles of production, demolition, and production linked to the establishment, maintenance, and eventual destruction of a series of landscapes. During the periods of relative spatial stability, the area at the core of the plantation appears to have served as the arena for social interaction, what spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre calls space as perceived or lived space (1991: 40–46; see also Harvey 1989: 261–263) or what Delle (1998: 36–40) has labeled material space (see also Mrozowski 2006: 13–16). At Sylvester Manor this would have been the physical space, including the built environment, through which people moved, interacted and worked.

This material space, also conceptualized as landscape, provides the physical context in which the various groups at Sylvester Manor interacted daily in commercial production, domestic activities related to the upkeep of the substantial Sylvester household, and interper-

sonal relations (Delle 1998: 38–39). Seamlessly indistinguishable from the material space described above, we conceive of social space as being a highly charged arena in which the social relations of production were constantly being negotiated and contested. As such we anticipated that it might be the most likely context in which to recover material evidence of the kinds of hybrid cultural forms often generated in colonial contexts that are critically shaped by the histories, skills, and cultural expectations of all of those involved.

The social space of Sylvester Manor was itself woven into a broader world that was being shaped by geopolitical and cultural forces that were at times global in scope. This too was a space, albeit a space in almost constant motion, demarcated retrospectively by broader cultural historical trends. The individuals who played out their lives in the social space of Sylvester Manor were embedded in this broader cultural historical fabric, however their perceptions of that reality were invariably shaped by the different histories they had experienced before their entanglement. In theorizing the spatial dimension of such entanglements we share common ground with Edward Soja's emphasis on "the simultaneity of and interwoven complexity of the social, historical and spatial dimensions of our lives, their inseparability and often problematic interdependence" (2000: 6–12; see also Harvey 2000: 14–16). As archaeologists, the interwoven character of our research extends to our own realities in which our experience of the contemporary landscape—political, social and cultural—influences how we approach and interpret the past.

Although the precise function of the buildings unearthed remains in doubt, they were clearly surrounded by space that was used for work related to the operation of the plantation and its multiple households. The many buildings and areas in which Africans or Native Americans would have worked on northern plantations seem the most likely places for them to have lived (Berlin 1998; Fitts 1996, 1998; Garman 1998; Kruger 1985; McManus 1966). Based on the combined archaeological evidence we believe we have identified a work area adjacent to several domestic/work buildings that may well have been a common working and living area for all three documented groups. As

social spaces in which cultural interaction was played out, these areas had multiple meanings (Beaudry, Cook, and Mrozowski 1991; Mrozowski, Delle, and Paynter 2000) and represent an opportunity to begin examining the transformational processes that would shape early American culture.

To realize the potential that Sylvester Manor represents we must critically examine both evidentiary and conceptual issues surrounding the investigation of pluralistic space. Access to areas for work or leisure must have played a part in accommodating the different groups, though some spaces were less negotiable than others. Although African domestic servants probably moved freely through the interior of the manor house, less than subtle boundaries were most assuredly maintained through a variety of mechanisms. In those instances where work and living space overlapped—possibly the case for Africans and Native Americans alike—more discrete, culturally sensitive deposits might be expected. Identifying these is difficult, however, especially on continuously occupied sites like Sylvester Manor. The construction and destruction of buildings and the recasting of the landscape were major forces in structuring the archaeological record at Sylvester Manor, making it virtually impossible to isolate deposits that can be linked to a particular group. Few undisturbed deposits have been found, yet the bulk of the recovered material appears to have resulted from the intense use of a relatively limited area at the core of the plantation. Although this was first viewed as an evidentiary problem it has since been framed as a conceptual problem as well.

Archaeologists working in pluralistic societies have recognized the difficulties of interrogating multi-cultural space and have approached it as a conceptual issue (e.g. Deagan 1983, 1985, 2003; Lightfoot 1995, 2003, 2005; Lightfoot, Martinez and Schiff 1998; Pauls 2006; Rothschild 2003; Trigg 2003, 2005). Rather than stressing the need to isolate the archaeological signatures of different cultural groups, these archaeologists have focused instead on searching for evidence of cultural interaction. They have also spent less time trying to compare "pre-Colonial" and "Contact" period deposits as a measure of acculturation. This has the added benefit of overcoming the tendency among some historical archaeologists to

emphasize European expansion at the expense of post-colonial perspectives (see Schmidt and Patterson 1995: 13–14).

Drawing on case studies in Spanish and Russian colonial contexts, Deagan (1983) and Lightfoot and his colleagues (Lightfoot, Martinez and Schiff 1998) have been able to compare artifacts recovered from households that were themselves pluralistic, often comprised of men and women from culturally different groups. By looking also at diet, architecture and trash-disposal patterns Deagan and Lightfoot have been successful in discerning evidence that points to both the persistence of cultural traditions as well as evidence of culture change (Deagan 1983; Lightfoot, Martinez and Schiff 1998). In a slightly different context, Trigg (2003, 2005) has found similar results. Her research centers on the Spanish settlers of New Mexico the majority of whom were born in the New World. Here creole diets were the mainstay, yet the use of Old World grains—rather than meat—was the critical marker of Spanish identity. Like Deagan and Lightfoot, Trigg's evidence points to the dynamic quality of pluralistic households resulting from colonial encounters. Rothschild (2003) compares the colonial experiences of Spanish and Dutch settlers, and indigenous groups in New Mexico and New York, and found very real differences in their experiences. In particular she found little evidence of multi-cultural households or the use of Native American laborers by the Dutch in New York (2003: 22).

In each of these cases evidence for change is found in practices that structured daily life such as trash disposal patterns and foodways. Lightfoot and his colleagues make explicit use of practice theory (e.g. Bourdieu 1977, Ortner 1984). The importance of this body of theory rests with its premise that daily practice is recursively constitutive of social structure. In pluralistic societies attempts to both maintain cultural practices and accommodate new ones should therefore be visible in the residue of daily routine. Deagan (2003) found, for example, that household level activities, like food preparation, often provided opportunities for Native American women to maintain cultural traditions. Spanish colonial influence was more evident in the public sphere in architecture and settlement organization. In New Mexico Trigg found that Spanish households

strived to maintain European identities despite the strong New World influence seen in their dietary practices. At Fort Ross, Lightfoot and his colleagues found a similar pattern in which Russian-controlled areas were by far the most in keeping with European spatial sensibilities. Like the mixed households of Florida, the Native Alaskan/Native Californian households outside Fort Ross exhibited evidence of both cultural persistence and change. Based on the analysis of trash disposal patterns and diet it appears that the Native Californian women controlled domestic space in ways consistent with their own cultural practices, while dietary preferences seemed to have leaned in the direction of the Native Alaskan men in these households. There was, however, other evidence that points to a melding of cultural practices in the manner in which foods were prepared.

The results from Fort Ross, St. Augustine, and New Mexico all suggest that a multi-scalar approach is essential in examining practices indicative of cultural change and persistence. The specific situation at Sylvester Manor, as a globally linked northern provisioning enterprise, and as a locus of Native American and African relations, demands that our interpretations also be constructed to account for interpersonal, communal, and intercolonial interactions. As the studies noted above make clear, the power of colonizing populations evident at the community level, especially in the use of public space, often has been found to contrast with that visible at the household level. This distinction is also consistent with another of Lefebvre's categories of spatial production, what he calls representational spaces (1991: 40–46) Representational spaces are often produced for the express purpose of reinforcing ideology and often contain landscape elements that are formal, ornamental, in some instances geometrical, while still serving a functional purpose. The domestic spaces (space as lived, to recall Lefebvre's term) can be intertwined or separate from the more public representational spaces, but more often than not it is here that daily practices are played out in a more private setting. It is in the representational spaces that archaeological evidence of organized or large scale cultural expression is most often found (Beaudry and Mrozowski 2001: 118–122; Deagan 1983, 1985, 2003; Lightfoot 2003, 2005; Lightfoot, Martinez and Schiff 1998).

All of these interpretations hinge on the ability of the archaeologist to establish the cultural, ethnic, or racial affiliation of individual or corporate households. At Sylvester Manor the situation presents different challenges. With no discrete spatial evidence of households of single or mixed cultural affiliation, the kinds of comparisons used by Deagan and Lightfoot have not been possible. Again, this may be less a problem of recognition than it is a conceptual issue. To date the archaeology has provided traces of working areas associated with the first 80 years of occupation, ca. 1650–1730, while the documentary record provides a broader context for understanding whom these laborers may have been. Based on this combined evidence our work has proceeded from the premise that Sylvester Manor was a landscape of social and cultural interaction. Destruction of buildings, deposition of trash and building debris, and the masking effects of landscaping activities such as surface grading have mixed and obscured the material and spatial traces of how Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans engaged with one another. Yet in a sense this admixture raises the question of whether such engagements always occurred as intersections of clearly bounded groups. One very real possibility is that social entanglements such as interethnic/interracial marriages have blurred the lines of identity. A basic tenet of post-processual archaeologies is that “cultural traits” do not change or blend in the absence of personal agency. Therefore it is necessary to explore the practical, relational actions of individuals as the middle ground between historical context and material remains.

Certainly this is not a radical or new idea, as the consideration of gender relations has become more commonplace in historical archaeology (Voss 2006; Wilkie and Hayes 2006). Interethnic marriage is well documented for the Spanish colonial period in the Americas, when the development of an extreme degree of racial consciousness resulted in multiple specifically named categories of “blood mixture” (Deagan 1983, 2003). The practice of interracial marriage itself warranted the term *mestizaje*. Deagan investigated the relationship of *mestizaje* to cultural creolization at Spanish St. Augustine in Florida. She found that both gender and ethnicity (e.g. Spanish, Native American, and mestizo) were discernable mate-

rially at the level of the household, impacting daily practices of food preparation, consumption, and public social representation (Deagan 1983, 2003: 7). The case of Fort Ross noted earlier is another example in which intermarriage between Native Alaskan men and Native Californian women may have been a nexus for culture contact and change at a fundamental, day-to-day level (Lightfoot and Martinez 1997, Lightfoot, Martinez and Schiff 1998). While prior models of ethnicity and acculturation relied primarily on proportional representation of material “ethnic” markers (Jones 1997, 1999), these studies have moved beyond *what* was used (an artifact-centered approach) into *how* it was used: the subtle and ambiguous expressions of social identities in practice. The explicit consideration of gender relations in these contexts, and more broadly the feminist perspective, has greatly enriched the interpretation of such colonial interethnic historical processes.

The work of Barbara Voss (2006, 2007) has been particularly helpful in this regard because it has raised important questions concerning the circumstances surrounding the formation of these interethnic households. Voss notes for example that much of the research that has examined gender relations has tended to reinforce dichotomies such as male/female (2006: 122). As a result, analytical perceptions of social units such as the household have implicitly assumed that a male/female pair lay at its core. Another result has been to envision the existence of a domestic sphere and its association almost exclusively with women (see also Jamieson 2000). Voss (2007) has also argued that colonial policies that promoted marital unions between European men and indigenous women raise serious questions concerning the power relations that may have characterized these interethnic households. The prevalence of sexual violence in colonial settings, for example, begs the question of just what the dynamics of an interethnic encounter at a site such as Sylvester Manor might have involved, and how might they have shaped the composition and level of interaction between the individuals who lived and worked there.

Some interethnic relations were documented in the colonial northeast, often indirectly. It is noteworthy that the English colony in New York enacted a law in 1707 declaring that slave status of a child was to be deter-

mined by the status of his or her mother (Kruger 1985: 70–71; Strong 1997: 281). This indicates that by 1707 interracial marriage, or at least reproduction, had become widespread enough to necessitate legal clarification of racial categories. While we do not know what the demographic character was of the original group of enslaved Africans at Sylvester Manor, we do know the family groupings by 1680 (N. Sylvester, 1680). We must consider the possibility that by this time, some or all of the children named in this will were the product of interracial relationships. It is not unreasonable to think that an enslaved African man might have been inclined to marry a free Manhasset woman in the hopes that his children, at least, would be free, although in this case they were not. The need for legal statutes in regards to racial categories suggests that a gap existed between the designs of colonizers and the practices of those they presumed to control. A more detailed investigation of culturally derived naming practices may aid in this interpretation (for example, the occurrence of the surnames “Cuffe” and “Pharoah” in Montauk native populations). Certainly by the early-19th century, Eastern Long Island was home to a significant number of black and Afro-Indian whaling industry workers (Barsh 2002).

Archaeological investigations of culture contact have provided valuable interpretations of the interactions of Europeans with Native Americans, and plantation archaeologies have been an equally rich source of studies on African/African American experiences in North America. Archaeological linkages between Africans and Native Americans are far fewer. There is, however, a history and discourse being slowly constructed from the *documentary* record, of African/African American/Native American interactions. These histories are drawn at both community and individual scales, from colonial to post-colonial to contemporary contexts. For example, maroon societies—founded by fugitive Africans often with the inclusion or assistance of Native Americans—offer insight to cooperative measures of resistance and opposition to European settlers (Funari 1999; Weik 1997).

These histories have also shown that that New World slavery was not an institution restricted to Africans. Native Americans were also embroiled beyond the indirect effects

of increasing European economic power, in the direct enslavement of native populations. This is particularly well documented in South America (Funari 1999), but also occurred in North America, as in the example of “troublesome” native individuals in the northeast who were captured and sold as slaves in the West Indies (Hilden 2000). The enslavement of Native Americans is not simply an historical peculiarity to be noted in contrast to mainstream histories of American slavery. Instead this practice has bearing on our understanding of how racial categories, as situationally constructed identities, have developed. Particularly in the Colonial period, we must be critical of our assumptions about race and status (especially slave status), because this was a formative period, with unfamiliar settings and social configurations, without institutionalized rules for interactions (Berlin 1998, 2003; Deetz 1993). These rules, such as legal definitions of slavery or indenture, were developed from the experiences, desires, and fears of European settlers in this period. Further, the context of this institutionalization was not simply the unilateral action and reaction of European settlers towards enslaved Africans, but the multiscale, multiethnic interaction of Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans. While Lepore, for example, has noted the parallels between King Philip’s War and slave uprisings in events and Europeans’ responses, Hilden has pointed out how unlikely it is that these events are merely superficially similar, suggesting instead that the African and Native American rebellions were linked through lines of communication and interaction (Hilden 2001; Lepore 1998).

These historical studies have a fairly direct bearing on our research and interpretive frameworks at Sylvester Manor. There is no way to make simple “ethnic,” “racial,” or “gendered” attributions to materials or activity areas in this context because of the complex intermixture of peoples and the unequal power relations inherent in such social organization. Within the field of plantation archaeology, many scholars have rejected the utility of deriving “artifact patterning” (South 1977) as indicative of African or slave material culture. Instead, archaeologists seek evidence of historically contingent practices and strategies that may be tied to populations of enslaved labor through multiple lines of evidence. In this framework,

deriving *use* and *consumption* are as important as *production* in understanding the meaning of material culture and space (Singleton 1999, see also de Certeau 1984). This is perhaps part of the reason why archaeologies of slavery are most often framed at the singular site level, as the contextualization of such material and spatial evidence does not allow simple comparisons.

These questions surrounding the nature of the populations that worked at Sylvester Manor are part of a broader discussion that still resonates in today's world. Issues surrounding reparations for African Americans and government recognition of Tribal Nations all hinge on questions surrounding identity and early American history. Much of that history is dominated by narratives concerning the European colonization of the New World and seldom incorporate post-colonial perspectives generated by the colonized (see Schmidt and Patterson 1995). No one questions the importance of that history, yet it is part of a much more complex encounter that is only now being brought to light by investigations such as those at Sylvester Manor. The history of that encounter is a necessary backdrop to our investigations.

Shelter Island and the Establishment of Sylvester Manor

Long before Europeans arrived along the Long Island coast, Native peoples had inhabited Manhansack-Ahaquatuwamock, "an island sheltered by islands" (Tooker 1911: 92) or what is known today as Shelter Island. The 17th-century Manhanset or Manhansacks, who were linked politically to the Montauk of Eastern Long Island (Ales 1993; Strong 1994), took full advantage of the rich and diverse resources Peconic Bay and the island had to offer (Lightfoot, Kalin, and Moore 1987: 30). These included shellfish, wild game such as deer, turkey and waterfowl, and when agriculture was adopted, ca. AD 1000, the island's fertile soils. The growth of settled life and an increase in the number of sedentary habitation sites starting approximately 1000 years ago is well documented archaeologically (Lightfoot, Kalin and Moore 1987: 65–77; Strong 1997; Witek 1990: 45–46). The clearing that accompanied the adoption of agriculture has also

been documented through the analysis of pollen cores collected throughout the region (see Bragdon 1996: 36–43). English and Dutch colonists interested in raising cattle, sheep, or horses prized islands with cleared land. Once planted with European grasses these areas made excellent pasturage. Predators could also be controlled more easily on islands where, often with Native help, Europeans would conduct drives to herd fox, bears, or lynx off the islands.

During the 17th century, Dutch and English designs on New York and New England resulted in a period of intense political turmoil between 1630 and 1675. Native groups used the competition between the Dutch and the English for control of Long Island, New York and southern New England, to further their own political agendas (Ales 1993; Priddy 2002; Strong 1996). Duplicity and assassination were common tools among the Mohegan, Pequot, and Niantic of Connecticut, the Narragansett of Rhode Island and the Montauk of eastern Long Island, who were all engaged in competition for land and political control. For the Montauk and their sachem Wyandanch, and the Manhanset under his older brother Youghco, the competition involved seeking alliances with the English when they feared attempts by groups like the Niantic to impose tribute status on them. The English also sought these kinds of alliances so that they could strengthen their land claims (Priddy 2002: 26; Strong 1997).

In the decade following the arrival of the Sylvesters on Shelter Island, the political ties between Nathaniel Sylvester and Youghco, who died in 1653, and later Wyandanch, were strengthened through numerous land purchases. The most notable of these, of course, was that of Shelter Island itself. In fact the Sylvesters and their partners purchased the island twice, as the Manhanset brought legal complaint to the Colonial Commissioners in Hartford that they had never been paid for the land by any of the previous Europeans claiming ownership, and this case was settled by payment to them (Mallmann 1899: 16–17). These ties also led to other purchases of land in the area. Further evidence of close relations between the Sylvesters and the Manhanset comes from accounts of Quaker visitors to the plantation. One such visitor was the English Quaker John Taylor who visited in 1659. In

recounting his stay he noted the “great many Indians” who lived on Shelter Island and how “Sober” and “Serviceable” they were as guides. Nathaniel Sylvester himself arranged for Taylor’s Native guide (Wortis 1973). In the same year that Taylor visited Wyandanch died, supposedly of poisoning (Ales 1993: 35). This was a major political blow since many people viewed Wyandanch as perhaps the most powerful Sachem on Long Island. A smallpox epidemic in 1664 may have killed as much as two thirds of the Native population in the area, leaving it weakened and relatively powerless. Several scholars have argued that this combination of factors resulted in deteriorating conditions for local Native groups that led many of them to seek closer ties to the English and Dutch colonists in the area. As laborers they often worked as whalers, unskilled workers, domestics or guides (Ales 1993: 43–45; Strong 1994: 565; 1997: 233–235), trades they continued to ply into the 19th century (Barsh 2002).

The opportunities afforded to Native Americans seem to have varied, but they also seem to reflect some recognition on the part of the Europeans of just what Natives could do for them. Based on documentary evidence it seems the Natives who worked for Giles Sylvester in the late-17th century engaged in activities that were probably not new to them, such as wood cutting or serving as couriers. What roles Native labor may have played during the initial phase of the plantation’s operation is not well documented historically. Yet based upon what is known about the establishment of Sylvester Manor and its early history, there would have been a tremendous need for labor.

During the first 40 years of operation, Sylvester Manor served as the chief source of provisions for two Barbadian sugar plantations jointly owned by Constant Sylvester and his younger brother Nathaniel. Along with Thomas Middletown and Thomas Rouse, also of Barbados, Constant and Nathaniel Sylvester purchased Shelter Island in 1651 from the merchant Stephen Goodyear “for sixteen hundred pounds of good merchantable, Muscovado sugar” (Calder 1970: 59). In the early years of this agreement Thomas Rouse sold his quarter portion and share of the business to Thomas Middleton, who shortly turned it over to John Booth; this portion was ultimately sold for

700 pounds sterling to Nathaniel Sylvester (Mallman 1899: 25).

In 1652, the four merchants signed a document called the “Articles of Agreement” that outlined the nature of their business agreement and the plantation to be established on Shelter Island. The articles stated that all the profits, commodities, livestock and land were to be split equally, and improvements and additions constructed on the property would be held in common by all members of the agreement, as all four purchasers contributed equal portions of monies to buy the land. Furthermore, if all four members wanted to reside on the island they would each have access to the housing, land and everything appertaining until they could establish their own dwellings and homesteads. The overseer in residence was instructed to submit an annual account of all the stock and expenses incurred for housekeeping. The document also stated each of the merchants was free to seek trade with the English, Dutch, Swedish, or Native American neighbors, but they had to do so at their own expense as it was ancillary to the Barbadian supply trade. With regards to the plantation infrastructure the articles of agreement stated that until the general purse “can and will beare the charge nothing shall be done about building but what needs must be done for conveniency sake, to wit a house with six or seven convenient roomes” [sic] (Middleton et al. 1652). This house would serve as a corporate structure for the running of the northern provisioning business as well as accommodations for the overseer and his retinue.

We assume that the early house served as the primary residence of Nathaniel and his wife Grissell Brinley Sylvester as well as the business office of the 8,000 acre plantation. In this sense it may be aptly envisioned as a domestic/corporate structure (Abbott Lowell Cummings personal communication 2003). Grissell Sylvester’s 1685 will provides some details related to the main dwelling built for the family. In the process of bequeathing her possessions to her children, Grissell specifically noted some of the rooms in the dwelling house built on the property. Mentioned are a “closet or porchamber,” a “hall,” and a “long room” (G.B. Sylvester 1685). Notation of “the great chest which is above in the Long Room,” indicated that the long room mentioned appears

to be on the second floor of what appears to have been a two-story structure. Unfortunately the documentary record has not been able to supply more specific details regarding building design and layout.

The business of the plantation was supplying what was needed to support the sugar industry on Barbados. One of the most important items was barrel staves, by the thousands. These were used to construct the containers for shipping everything from foodstuffs, to rum, to molasses. Gathering these staves on a regular basis meant logging the woodlands of the area as well as collecting them from other parts of Long Island, Rhode Island or Connecticut. As early as 1654 Sylvester was inquiring as to the availability of barrel staves in Connecticut (N. Sylvester 1654). The 1680 will of Nathaniel Sylvester mentions a mill, cider presses and orchards, and stock and fowl, as well as 23 enslaved Africans, all in family groups of mother, father and children. The size of livestock holdings—both by Sylvester and those owned in partnership—give some measure of the size of the operation at the time with more than 400 sheep, 40 horses, more than 200 cattle and 120 pigs noted in the will (see Sportman, Cipolla and Landon, this volume). Unfortunately the will is silent on questions surrounding the architecture of the buildings or the surrounding landscape. What it does describe is the nature of the buildings that may have surrounded the early manor house including a warehouse, a barn, a salt house, a cider mill and cider press. Sylvester's landscaping activities also included the planting of a garden and an orchard in sight of the main dwelling.

The character of the early landscape of Sylvester Manor may have been influenced by Nathaniel's early life in the Netherlands where he lived in Amsterdam with his parents, Giles Sylvester and Mary Arnold Sylvester. The Sylvesters were one of the many English families residing and doing business in Holland in the late-16th and early-17th centuries. During this period of English immigration, Dutch cities experienced "rapid commercial expansion" (Barbour 1963: 15). They profited by the dissemination of skills and techniques that immigrants brought with them from across Europe (Barbour 1963: 11). This economic boom made cities such as Amsterdam a good location

for establishing a mercantile business. Some English merchants lived their lives between the two nations of England and Holland. In fact many Englishmen discovered that maintaining a business in Amsterdam was more lucrative. The circumstances surrounding Giles and Mary Sylvester's emigration to Holland are not clear; however they were married in Amsterdam in 1613 and raised their family there. Nathaniel was born there ca. 1620. The fact that Nathaniel spent his formative years in Amsterdam raises questions concerning the architectural style that would have characterized the buildings of the early plantation.

After the death of Nathaniel Sylvester in 1680, his wife and their eldest son Giles maintained the plantation, and when Grissell died in 1685, Giles took primary possession of the plantation. An account book (G. Sylvester 1680–1701) covering some of this period indicates that Giles Sylvester relied heavily upon day laborers in the operations of the plantation. Covering years between 1680 and 1701, these accounts note transactions with at least 50 individuals. Although many of the names that appear in the account book suggest the attribution of racial categories, for example "Squaw Hannah," "John Indian" and "Black John," or seem similar to names of known Native Americans, it is impossible to know for certain the ethnic or cultural identities of these laborers. Although frustrating, such documentary obscurity may be less a failure to fully record the details than an indication of the fluidity and situational nature of such categories for the historical agents. Analysis of the account book indicates that the workers performed a variety of services including cutting wood, collecting produce like pears, cranberries and corn, and most often receiving either cider or alcohol in return (Priddy 2002).

In 1693, Giles drew up a tenancy agreement with Edward Downing of Boston with a provision for him to reside in the eastern side of the house. This agreement appears to signal a period of transition when the role of Sylvester Manor as a provisioning plantation may have come to a close. The plantations on Barbados were no longer under the control of Sylvester family members by 1695 and Giles was already living in Boston when the agreement was written. During this period, Giles sold several large tracts of the island to non-family mem-

Table 1. Chronological periods at Sylvester Manor.

<i>Period (Date Range)</i>	<i>Primary Site Components</i>
Formal Manor Period (1735–present)	Standing Manor House and Related Structures
Tenant Farm Period (1692–1708)	Archaeological Deposits at Plantation Core
Early Plantation Period (1652–1680)	Archaeological Deposits at Plantation Core
Contact Period (ca. 1500–1652)	Native American Site at Plantation Core and on Peninsula just North of Core
Late Woodland Period (ca. 1200–ca. 1500)	Native American Site on Peninsula just North of Plantation Core

Note: With the exception of the Woodland and Contact Periods these period names refer to internal chronological changes specific to Sylvester Manor.

bers, and when he died in 1708, his nephew Brinley Sylvester inherited a much smaller property that was in considerable disrepair. After a lengthy court battle in which Brinley attempted to regain some of the land his father had sold, he undertook an ambitious program to transform the former plantation into an 18th-century, English Georgian estate. The most visible part of that process was the large Georgian manor house he had constructed between 1733 and 1735.

The ownership history of the manor points to several important periods of transition that we assume were periods of activity that left their mark archaeologically (TAB. 1). When compared with the archaeological evidence of a Native American presence prior to the arrival of the Sylvesters it has been possible to construct an occupational chronology that has served as an overall starting point for our investigations. These include the remains of two pre-Contact Native American habitation areas, one of which lies directly beneath the 17th-century European deposits, as well as extensive evidence of three generations of Sylvester ownership (ca. 1652–1735). Over the course of that ownership the Sylvester family appears to have undergone a transformation of its own. When the plantation was originally established in 1652 the political situation was still quite fluid. The Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, established in 1624, was lost to the English in 1664, regained briefly in 1674, and lost again. In this environment a family like the Sylvesters may have seen some advantage in constructing a landscape and material culture that expressed their mixed Dutch/English heritage. Some 80 years later, however, the situation was markedly different. The third generation of Sylvesters appears to have fully embraced polite, English culture, a transformation that included the recasting of their holdings on the model of a Georgian estate.

The landscaping that accompanied the recasting of the estate had a major impact on the archaeological record of the previous 80 years, yet evidence of intense cultural interaction is visible. Although there are deposits that can be linked to the period before the arrival of the Sylvesters, much of the archaeological record is a complex amalgam of European, Native American and possibly African material culture. This picture has emerged over the past nine years as excavations have been carried out along with analysis and documentary research.

The overall approach brought to our investigations of Sylvester Manor is both multidisciplinary and multi-scalar. The brand of historical archaeology employed draws on a wealth of sources of information including documentary evidence, oral history, and a suite of archaeobiological studies, as well as more traditional approaches such as spatial analysis, landscape archaeology and the study of material culture. The evidentiary record resulting from these various analyses speak to the local, regional and global forces that shaped the lives of those who lived and worked at Sylvester Manor.

The chapters that follow represent a portrait in progress and are therefore subject to revision. They outline steps in a process of discovery that include discussions of the excavations carried out to date, results of the geophysical testing, geo-morphological analyses, documentary studies, material culture studies, archaeobotanical and zooarchaeological analyses, and a summary of the overall results of the project. The product is multi-dimensional and endeavors to capture some of the complexity that characterized this early colonial encounter. Although unfinished, it nevertheless sets the stage for what is sure to be a story worth waiting for.

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