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## Field Excavations at Sylvester Manor

Katherine Howlett Hayes

*This chapter describes the overall field strategy and summarizes nine seasons of field excavations at Sylvester Manor. All tested site areas are described, with greatest detail given to the areas relevant to the research questions on the early plantation period, as well as the pre-Contact/Colonial Native American occupation areas. This overview of the excavations also provides a broad interpretation of the results relating to the early colonial landscape, associations between site areas, and the longer term Native American occupation of the site.*

*Ce chapitre décrit l'ensemble de la stratégie de fouille et résume sommairement les neuf saisons de fouilles au Sylvester Manor. Une description de tous les sites testés suit, et une attention particulière a été portée aux secteurs liés aux questions de recherche. Ces dernières portent sur le début de la période de plantation, les aires d'occupation associées à la période précontact ainsi que les peuples autochtones des États-Unis d'Amérique à l'époque coloniale. Cette vue d'ensemble des fouilles présente de plus une interprétation sommaire des résultats à propos des anciens paysages coloniaux, des associations entre les secteurs comprenant plusieurs sites, et de l'occupation à long terme du site par les peuples autochtones des États-Unis d'Amérique.*

### Introduction

As historical archaeologists, our point of entry and unique contribution to anthropological questions is in the weaving together of documentary, material, and spatial threads to produce rich interpretations of the past supported by interdisciplinary evidence. The extent and type of documentary evidence we employ may vary greatly, but our professional identity is grounded in the use of archaeological evidence and field methods. Accordingly, we continue our narrative of the Sylvester Manor project with the description of the field findings on the archaeological contexts to date. It is important to recognize that this choice in structuring the publication should not imply that the field archaeology is regarded as the basis from which all interpretation proceeds, and against which other lines of evidence are tested. Throughout the past seasons we have drawn on the results of other analyses to refine or refocus our strategies. These analyses may be mentioned within the discussion of field excavations, but are treated more extensively in the chapters that follow.

At Sylvester Manor our investigation of the archaeological record has unfolded in a somewhat organic fashion, as our research questions and field strategies have informed and changed one another. Starting from a small-scale exploratory survey, we have moved to focus intensively in some areas while continuing to conduct survey testing more exten-

sively. Excavations began in 1998, with an initial survey utilizing 50 × 50 cm shovel test pit coverage on a 10 m grid, to the north, west, and south of the Manor house. The subsequent intensive excavations were in 6 × 6 m gridded blocks divided into nine 2 × 2 m open units. We excavated each unit by observable stratigraphic layers, with arbitrary 5 cm levels within those layers. All sediments have been screened through 1/4" or 1/8" screen mesh, depending on the nature of the deposit or feature, and our current sampling protocol calls for a minimum collection of a 2 l flotation sample and a 50 ml geochemical sample per stratigraphic/arbitrary context. In some areas the archaeological deposits and features were less dense or were less relevant to our primary research questions, and consequently fewer units were opened, while other areas, such as the south and southeast lawn, have been progressively broadened to better understand the relationship of features across space. No survey area, however, failed to yield some material or feature.

It should be noted, at this point, that because of the tremendous volume of recovered artifacts, much of the material identification in this discussion is drawn from a general catalog (recording form and quantity). Unless otherwise noted, for those portions of the assemblage that have been subjected to more detailed analyses, more specific identifications of artifacts mentioned here are unavailable. In the following section, the site areas denoted on the

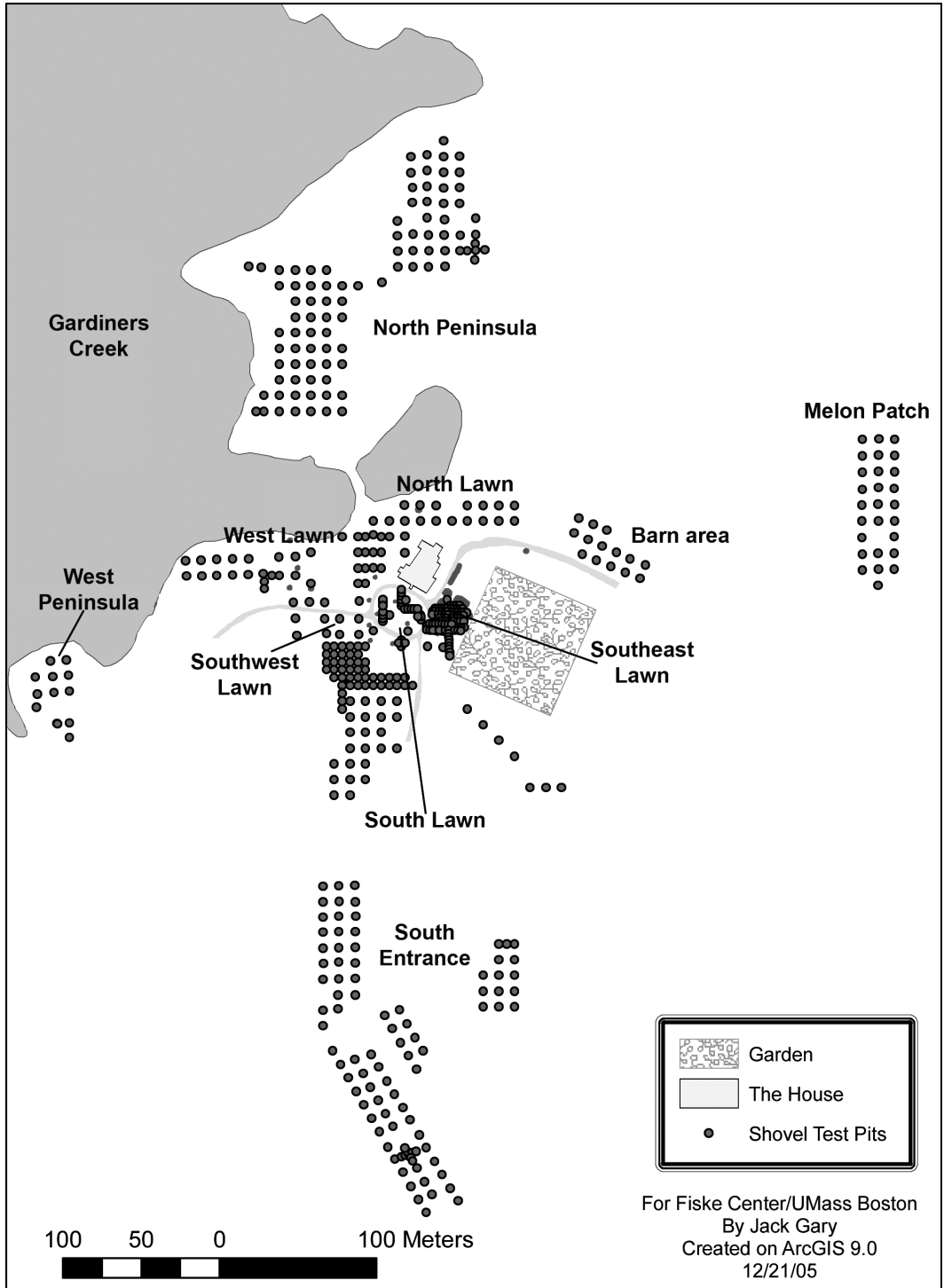


Figure 1. Sylvester Manor site areas with shovel test pit survey coverage.

Table 1. Major features and deposits referred to in subsequent chapters in this volume.

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Relative Date</i>
Cobbled Surface	Diamond-patterned surface paved with quartz cobbles	Early Plantation period, covered in Formal Manor period
South Lawn Midden (A-2)	Dense, heterogeneous trash deposit 10-20 cm thick, dominated by architectural debris with smaller amounts of residential waste	Early Plantation period? Continues through Tenant Farm, capped in Formal Manor period
Brick and Mortar Layer	South Lawn layer with burned, redeposited building debris and clay (see Proebsting, this volume)	Plantation or Tenant Farm, capped by landscaping fill
Feature 226	Robbed builders trench (post-in-ground), partially backfilled with heavily burned wood and sediments	Early Plantation period, capped by mottled fill and Midden (A-2) deposit
Feature 221	Extensive stratified pit feature, containing butchery waste in early layers and dense residential and architectural debris in later layers	Early Plantation period, diagnostic material links later layers with Feature 226 backfill
Pipe trenches	Two utility pipes (lead and iron) cutting across southeast and south lawns, intersecting both F226 and F221	Early-20th century; cut through uppermost landscape fill layers

base map (FIG. 1) are summarized for field findings and initial interpretations. Major features and deposits referred to in this and subsequent chapters are summarized in Table 1.

It has been of great importance to the success of our work to date that certain “non-archaeological” sources of support and information were available to us. The communities of Sylvester Manor and Shelter Island have been inquisitive, supportive, and readily forthcoming with their memories and local histories of the property use and landscape changes. For our understanding of the past in the present, we are indebted to many people. First and foremost of these is Mrs. Fiske, our best supporter and source of local history and lore, and who most generously gave us access to the property that was her home, barring us only from the formal garden that was her labor of love. Her knowledge, humor, and charm are sorely missed with her passing in April 2006. Over the years Mac Griswold, Gunnar Wissemann, Rosie Wissemann, Tom Brennan, and Louise Green have also kindly provided additional aid and information.

## Excavation Areas

### West Peninsula, West Lawn, Southwest Lawn

The West Peninsula is a wooded area separated from an unpaved roadway by an infilling tidal marsh off Gardiner’s Creek. Three transects on a northwest bearing were tested on

the standard 10 m interval, in response to local lore, which held that Nathaniel Sylvester was buried there. It was also not an unlikely area for occupation, given its proximity and wide view to the creek as it broadens out to the harbor. An additional two open units were excavated for ground-truthing the results of geophysical testing (Kvamme 2001). This area yielded very little historic material, largely brick and nail fragments, and a somewhat higher volume of pre-Contact material (quartz debitage and projectile point fragments). All of the artifacts were recovered at relatively shallow levels, and in fact the stratigraphy of the West Peninsula as a whole indicated that the surface has been subject to considerable slope wash, and very little organic soil is retained. One likely reason for this is that the area had been cleared at least once in the past century, as most tree cover was relatively young.

The west and southwest lawn areas (FIG. 2), open with scattered trees, were also initially survey tested. Furthest west, scatters of architectural debris and late-18th- to 19th-century domestic material were recovered, though water seepage at approximately 40–50 cm below surface suggests that the water line of the creek may have filled in significantly over the years. This interpretation is supported by local oral report, indicating that much of this material was likely washed down from higher elevations. Closer to the house and the constructed land bridge, however, our testing

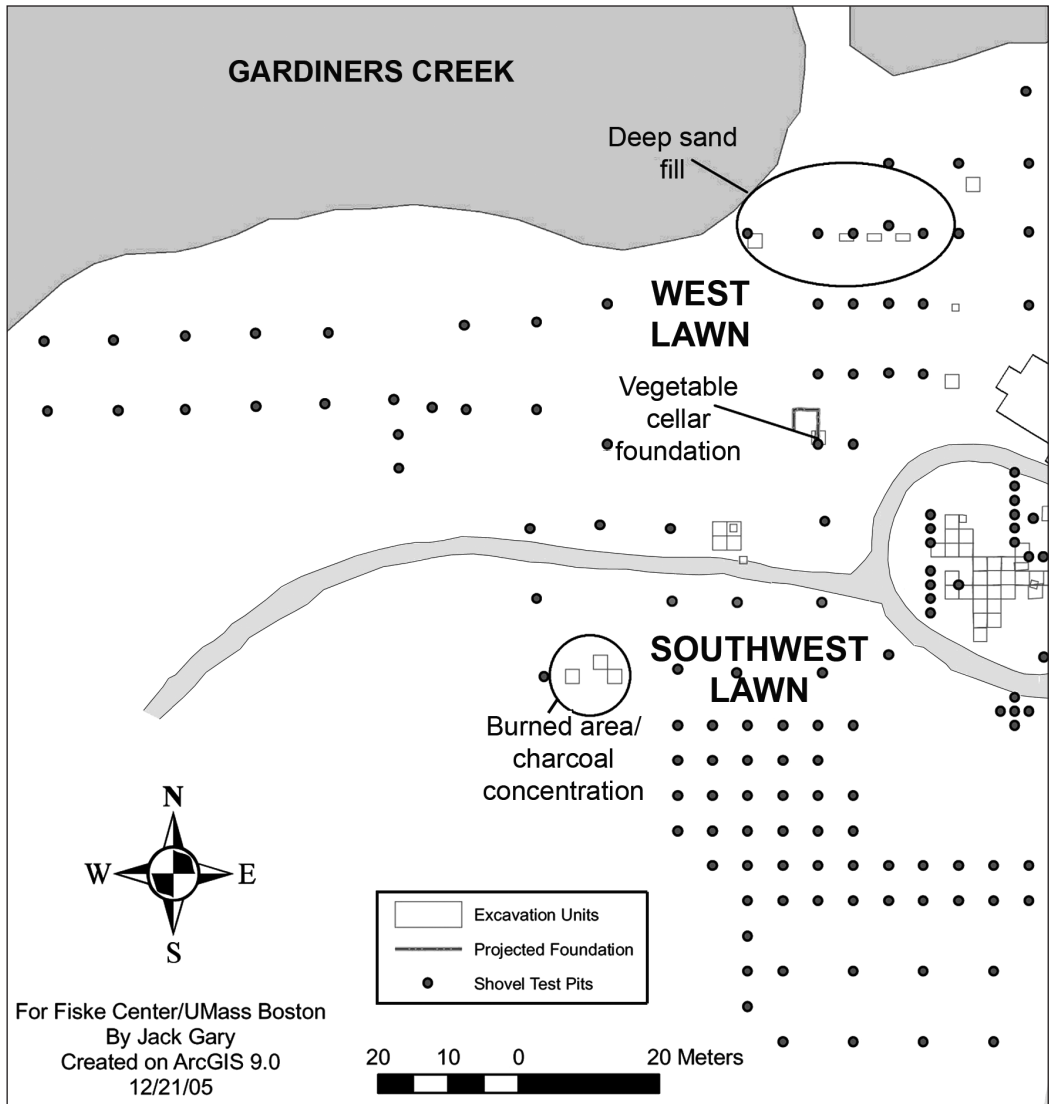


Figure 2. West and Southwest lawn areas.

and excavation revealed evidence of shoreline alterations and activities. Three  $1 \times 2$  m units opened most recently have shown deep grading and redeposition of sand fill over buried organic horizons, perhaps for roadbed construction, while a test pit and one  $2 \times 2$  m unit at the shoreline contained a high volume of burned brick with deep deposits of shell and redeposited fill cutting into the original ground surface. Further upslope, inconsistent deposits of glacial cobbles and one area of coarse cobbled surface were encountered. At the northeast periphery of this area, a single

small boulder was found directly adjacent to two posthole features, one of which was quite deep ( $\sim 50$  cm), with a coarse sand and gravel fill consistent with that found at the near-shore units. These results, coupled with the interpretations of the geophysical testing (see Kvamme, this volume), would indicate that significant shoreline landscape use and alteration occurred. It is also possible that one or more structures, such as a warehouse, may have stood in this area. Although we consider this span west of the house to the shoreline important, the array of material recovered and



Figure 3. North Lawn dairy foundation and floor.

the orientation and type of features, suggest that this area is complex and spatially quite extensive, and thus should be investigated more intensively with a broad, open-area coverage. For our current purposes, the results of the geophysical survey presented a clear enough view of the subsurface features that we decided to forego the tremendous effort necessary for complete excavations. As the results to date are somewhat ambiguous, and not clearly related to our primary research questions, we have therefore chosen to focus our limited field time elsewhere.

The southwest lawn, in test pits and 2 × 2 m units, showed both landscaping activities and structural features. In particular, a stone foundation or retaining wall and a heavily burned area were encountered. The stone wall may have been part of a vegetable cellar which is noted on an 1828 property map (see dower dispute map, FIG. 4). The temporal mixture of diagnostic artifacts in this area is likely the result of tree planting and removal, as significant root disturbance was seen here. The burned feature itself may have been the result of in-situ burning for tree removal or perhaps a longer-term effort at charcoal production.

### The North Lawn

Test pit survey showed this area to have dense deposits of cultural material, primarily dating to the 19th century. Open excavation units revealed at least one major structural feature, a mortared stone foundation with a brick floor (FIG. 3), containing among other things a large number of redware vessel fragments. The feature was interpreted as a dairy, which was later confirmed by an 1828 dower's

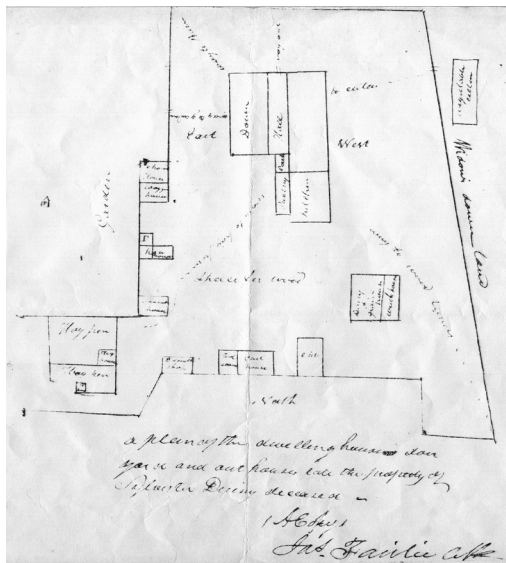


Figure 4. 1828 dower dispute map of property (Sylvester Manor Archive, Database #47, Scan #00326\_47\_1828, May 23.tif, Shipping Box # 12).

dispute map of the property (FIG. 4) that identified the dairy along with several other out-buildings such as a winch-house, hog-pen, and cart-house in the same area. Further excavation showed that deep deposits of stone rubble and 19th-century domestic trash were widespread to the north of the Manor house. The extent of the deposit is apparent in the geophysical survey data (see Kvamme, this volume), and also can be seen through erosion exposure at the edge of the creek. A scant amount of 17th-century material and pre-Contact Native American ceramics was recovered below this 19th-century deposit, as well as a small number of postholes. The stratigraphy suggests that earlier features were truncated or destroyed through grading and redeposition, dating to the period of construction of the large addition to the north end of the current Manor house, in the mid-19th century. Much of the stone and sand fill matrix is presumed to be cellar excavate. Surface topography at the northern periphery here, and in the barn area to the east (see FIG. 1), also indicate progressive infilling at the shoreline of the creek.

### The Melon Patch

This area is a presently uncultivated open field surrounded by hedge, to the east of the Manor core. This was surveyed in three test

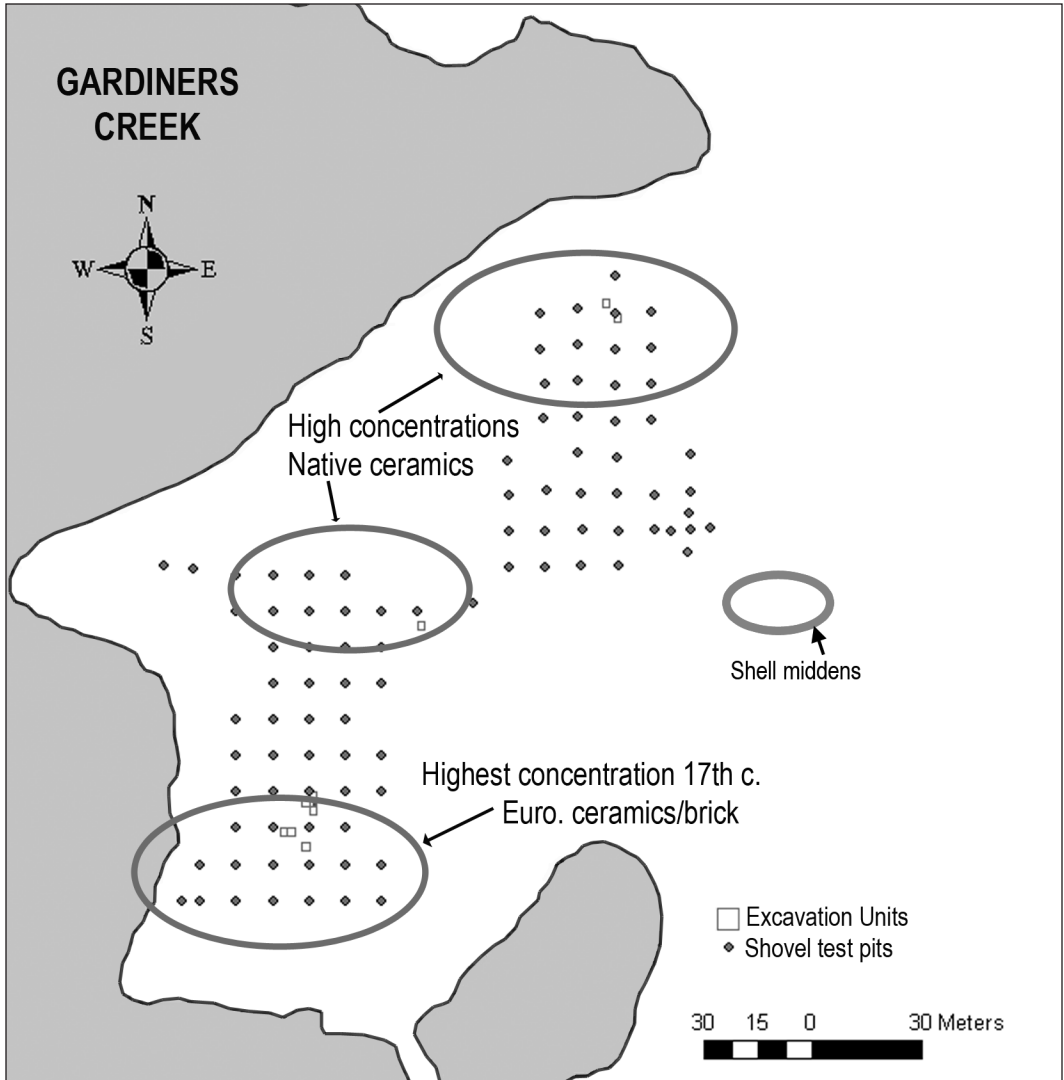


Figure 5. North Peninsula.

pit transects, to assess whether structural or occupation features could be discerned below the plowzone. This area contained a scatter of both late-19th-century and pre-Contact native (lithics and ceramics) material, and one possible fence posthole.

### The South Entrance

This area was also tested in transects, the majority of which were to the west of the unpaved entrance driveway in a moderately wooded landscape. A limited number of test

pits were added to the east of the driveway, adjacent to the family-identified slave burial ground. Of all the areas of the property tested to date, these yielded the least cultural material, and no features. Many test pits were sterile, while those that were not contained very few fragments of 18th- or 19th-century ceramics and clay pipes. As the stratigraphy appears undisturbed it is possible that this area was only used as pastureland. No further excavation is planned here, though further geophysical testing may be undertaken to better understand long-term landscape development.

## The North Peninsula

This section of the site is a tree-covered area north of the Manor core, jutting westward into Gardiner's Creek (FIG. 5). It is most easily accessible via the man-made land bridge, as an extensive eastward stretch of wetlands separates the peninsula from the core. Though currently undeveloped, oral and documentary sources have indicated that Native American and/or African populations may have lived there at one time. Three phases of testing and excavation have been completed in this area to date.

The first phase of testing, in 1999, covered seven transects in the northeast quadrant of the peninsula. The results of this were a single feature, the circular footprint of a 19th-century gazebo, and a broad scatter of architectural debris, 19th-century ceramic fragments, and Native American ceramics and lithics. The following year, two units (2 × 2 m) were opened in an area having yielded a high density of Native ceramic sherds, near to the creek shoreline. In one of these units was a stratified deposit of material, wherein the upper levels contained a mixture of Native and European materials, while lower levels contained only Late Woodland period (ca. AD 1000–1550) Native ceramics and lithics (for ceramics see Priddy 2002). This is interpreted as pre-Contact remains covered by post-Contact sheet refuse likely washed down the slope of the hill. Though there are a few poorly defined features in this unit, including a possible firepit, the unit does not appear to have evidence of a pre-Contact habitation *per se*. Water seepage at depths 10–15 cm below the earlier deposit, and the thickness of the deposit itself (16–28 cm), suggest that the area may have been infilling due to slope wash for some time. While all the materials of evident indigenous manufacture in these two deposits may date to the same pre-Contact period, the mixed upper layer was most likely removed from an original deposit upslope. The lighter soil matrix of the upper, later deposit may be the result of soil depletion or tree-clearing that accelerated the rate of slope wash at one time during the historic period. In either case, the density and character of the early deposit shows considerable time-depth for the Native American presence on the landscape. It seems likely that more intact features from pre-Contact contexts may exist at

higher elevations on the North Peninsula (FIG. 5; elevation rises to north and east on peninsula).

The second phase of testing was undertaken in 2004, providing coverage of west and southwest portions of the peninsula, which are heavily overgrown. The results of this testing showed a distinctly patterned distribution of diagnostic ceramics, wherein earlier (ca. 17th-century) materials were concentrated at the southern, low-lying areas, while later (18th- to 19th-century) materials were densest further upslope to the north (FIG. 5). At the farthest north area tested, which was also at the highest elevations, Native materials were predominant. Four excavation units were opened in the area of highest density of 17th-century material, in accordance with our overarching research questions regarding the layout of the early plantation operation. From another unit, a 50 × 50 × 70 cm soil block was removed for in-lab testing and excavation (see Piechota chapter, this volume). Two units revealed features resembling plow-scars and possible planting pits or fence posts; the third unit was opened in the hopes of seeing a continuation of a post-line. While no such continuation presented itself, an isolated pit feature was encountered with material dating to the late-17th and early-18th century. Given the absence of food waste in association with the ceramic and architectural debris, this area is thought more likely to have been a field or garden than a living area in the post-contact historic period. In a late 19th-century document relating observations on the North Peninsula the area was thought to have formerly been the site of the "Negro Garden," so there may have been local memory of such a use of the land. Subsequent open excavations in 2005 gave further weight to the interpretation of the area as having been plowed. Material culture ranging from pre-Contact lithics and ceramics through early 19th-century ceramics was recovered from the presumed plow zone, and any features were severely truncated.

The third tested area was the focus of the short 2006 field season. This entailed a combination of remote sensing and shovel test pit survey in the southeast quadrant of the North Peninsula. Two dense shell deposits approximately 1.5 m wide were identified in this manner. One of these was partially evident on the surface, while the second was encoun-



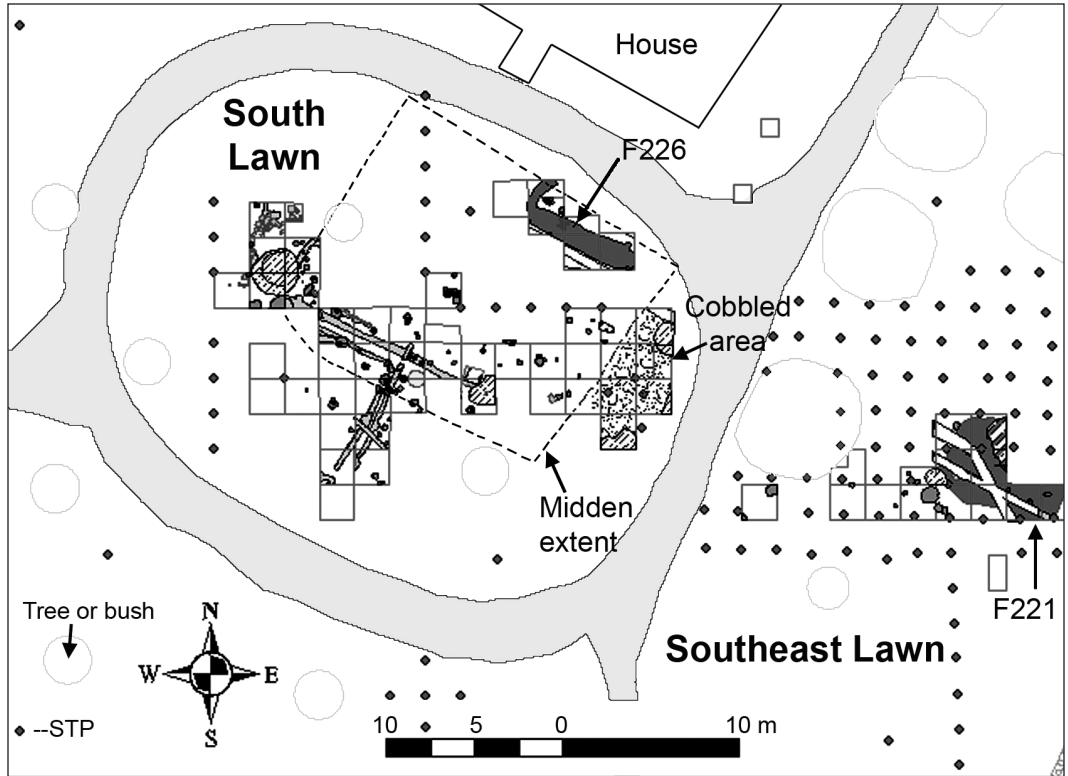


Figure 6. South Lawn features.

tered 20 cm below the surface. A large number of ceramic fragments of pre-Contact Windsor Brushed tradition (Lavin 1998) were recovered from within the shell deposits, as well as a quantity of nutshells that will be used for radiocarbon dating. Column soil samples were taken from one test pit for subsequent microstratigraphic analysis, showing that the shell deposits were actually comprised of multiple episodes separated by sterile sediments. Although these features are some 20 meters in from the current shoreline, it seems likely that prior to the construction of the land bridge, which cut off part of the creek, they would have been more immediately adjacent to the water. This area may have been the preferred location for shellfish procurement, as no other significant accumulations of shell have been located on the site.

### The South Lawn

This area, defined as the lawn interior to the circular driveway segment, is the most extensively excavated area of the site (FIG. 6).

Shovel test pit transects on both 10 m and 2 m intervals have been used to identify dense and varied deposits and features. To date, over 180 square meters of the south lawn have been investigated through open excavation, much of which is contiguous; additionally, one 50 × 50 × 70 cm soil block and several micromorphology and pollen cores have been removed for analysis. The deposits and features uncovered in the south lawn are in no way straightforward. This area, only a few meters south of the front door of the current Manor house, appears to have been used intensively since the initial period of European settlement, and there is evidence of prior pre-Contact occupation as well. Given the volume of data from the south lawn, and ongoing analysis and interpretation, the following descriptions are broken into sections on "stratigraphy" and "features," in an effort to make them more coherent. In a general sense, stratigraphy here refers to sequential depositions, while features are below-surface cuts and fills and above-surface constructions of discrete spatial location. There is of course a degree of

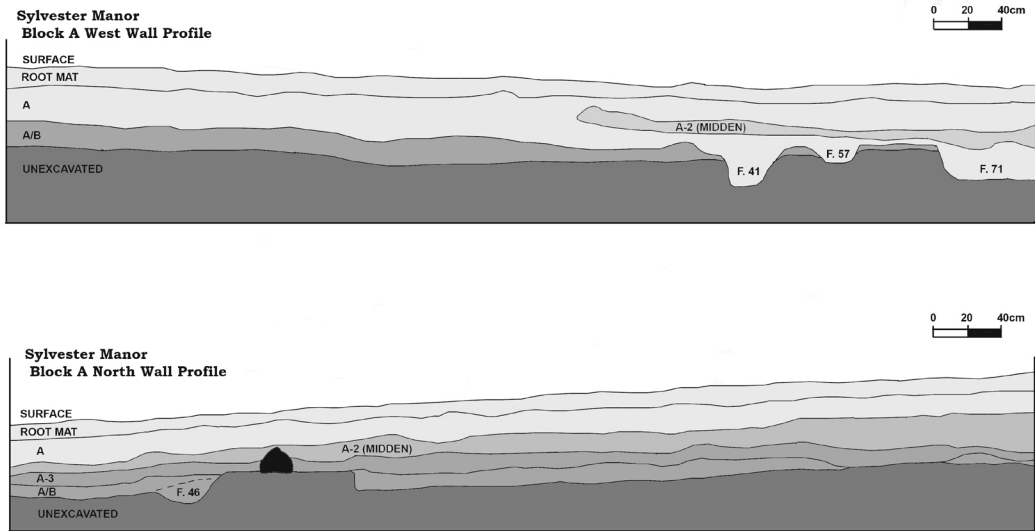


Figure 7. South Lawn Block A profile indicating A-2 midden deposit.

overlap in these categories, but I use these as a descriptive or narrative device only.

### Stratigraphy

The uppermost layer across the south lawn is the most consistent, a dark, organic loam fill (FIG. 7). There is currently a very slight slope of the surface trending down to the west, but the bottom depths of this loam fill (designated A-1) indicate an even steeper grade prior to filling, with as much as an additional 20 cm of loam at the western side. The A-1 fill contains a low density of artifacts, broadly datable to the 19th and 20th centuries. This layer is evidently disturbed and mixed with lower layers in at least four locations, which we have determined to be from uprooted trees. Overall, stratum A-1 is the result of major grading and landscape maintenance activities, the timing of which will be discussed below.

The A-1 fill is underlain by a few different types of deposits. In much of our excavation area there is a thick, artifact-rich midden deposit which is deepest at the center of the south lawn, but spreads across to the west, north and east (FIG. 6 for projected extent; Figure 7 shows midden in profile). This has been broadly designated A-2, with a dark organic sediment matrix, however it is not a homogenous deposit but rather a set of spatially distinct concentrations of particular materials. For example, high volumes of coral

and mortar were observed within a few contiguous units, while high volumes of brick debris were observed in several separate locations. Materials which appeared burned and charcoal-rich lenses were found inconsistently across the area in the A-2. While these concentrations are discernable, the integrity of the original deposits was apparently altered by “smearing” or spreading the midden over a broader area, possibly in grading and landscaping associated with the construction of the extant Manor house in the 18th century. This interpretation is supported materially, in that several crossmended ceramic vessels had sherds widely scattered, as much as 10 m, and the ongoing vessel mending may show distribution across even greater distances. Further, the few later 18th-century ceramics recovered from the A-2 were noted to have been at its surface. A subsample analysis of the arbitrary levels within the midden shows a consistent difference in ceramic and pipestem dates, with a slightly more recent date in the upper level (Hancock 2002; see also Proebsting, Piechota, this volume). This might be expected if the accumulation of debris occurred over a period of years, though alternatively it may simply indicate that post-depositional disturbance mainly impacted the upper level, introducing the later materials. The depth of this deposit varies over space, growing thicker from east to west, and dropping off at a line roughly parallel to an underlying trench feature run-

ning ESE to WNW. This would suggest that the original deposit was bounded by a fence or wall. The A-2 artifacts are a rich and diverse assemblage, but the evident disturbance of the distinct deposition events means we may only regard them in the aggregate as a stratum with arbitrary unit subdivisions. As such it is difficult to make positive associations of these artifacts with particular people or activities, or even to refine the dating of the deposit, as the mixed materials ranged in date from the mid-17th to the mid-18th century.

To the south and southwest in the south lawn area, the A-2 is absent, and the A-1 loam fill is underlain instead by a gravel-loam fill. This fill layer did not yield the remarkable density of artifacts of the A-2 but there was still a notable increase in the number and size of the artifacts. To the west this fill is also considerably impacted by tree root disturbance, and there were a few fragments of 19th-century ceramics mixed with earlier materials; this would suggest that either the area was filled in an early (18th-century) landscaping effort, and was subsequently disturbed by tree root growth, or that the gravel was introduced when backfilling a hole left by tree removal. Given that the disturbance is not localized but rather diffusely evident, the former is probably more likely. The amount of gravel mixed with the loam fill is variable, but it does invariably appear in profile as a distinct horizontal layer. It is unclear whether this inclusion was meant for improving soil drainage, though it is a possibility.

While the A-2 midden deposit and the A-gravel loam fill are the most widespread, there are peripheral locations where neither of these is identified below the A-1. These areas have not been pursued with further excavation as they also seem to lack discernable features. These absences, however, may be less a mark of unused space than of a deliberate removal of sediments. That is to say, if the south lawn area was once graded to provide a more level topography, this process may have included lowering some ground surfaces while raising others by adding or redistributing fill sediments. Barring further micromorphology studies over broader expanses, this notion remains hypothetical.

The A-2 midden and A-gravel loam deposition may then best be thought of as representing 18th-century landscaping activities that

effectively mask the 17th-century use of space. A single feature was evident within these fill layers. This was a degraded, shallow stone foundation or sill in the northwest quadrant of the south lawn. The temporal association of this feature is unclear, as it was filled with debris characteristic of the A-2, yet some of this material (primarily domestic livestock bone) was recovered *below* the stone in the feature. Further, the removal of some of these stones revealed post features below as well. These posts could possibly represent a pre-Contact occupation, but it is more likely that they are early Sylvester settlement-related, as the post fill contained a small amount of European material, and the shape and size of the posts were more reminiscent of European construction. One interpretation of this stone foundation is that it may have been a small outbuilding or summer kitchen associated with the current Manor house in its early (18th-century) occupation period. This definition is made difficult by a major tree disturbance at the center of the feature, causing heavy mixture of artifacts. Associated posts in this area are also difficult to interpret for this reason. The characteristically A-2 fill within the foundation may in fact be redeposited from the removal of the tree.

The stratigraphic layers below the A-2 and A-gravel loam fill are far more varied, and more difficult to read. In some areas, these fill layers appear to have been deposited directly over sterile subsoil and the below-surface feature cuts. More often, however, a shallow layer of mottled soil contains a lower density volume of artifacts. This layer, labeled in the field as either A-3 or mottled A/B, contains a proportionately larger number of Native American artifacts such as ceramics and lithics. The A-3 may be interpreted as an early living surface, where the mottling and "blurring" of organic fill with a subsoil surface has been exaggerated by bioturbation (see Piechota chapter). It is therefore not possible to discern whether the Native materials were deposited immediately prior to Sylvester settlement, or during the early plantation period. Perhaps this is an arbitrary distinction, and the materials are indicative of a continuous presence. There were also below-surface (cut) features evident in the A-3 mottled layer.



Figure 8. Plan drawing of South Lawn cobbled surface.

A more complex depositional sequence was evident in one group of units in the northeast quadrant of the south lawn (CC 1, 2, 5, 6 see FIG. 6). In these, the A-2 midden lay over a series of lighter mottled and darker burned layers (see FIG. 9), and in one area a 2–3 cm thick lens of unset mortar. These thin layers were apparently redeposited excavate or destruction debris associated with Feature 226 that appears to have been a robbed builders or foundation trench, and contained a small number of diagnostic artifacts dating to the early plantation period. In some spots these layers capped and protected a buried pre-Contact surface. For the most part this surface has been destroyed by the early plantation use of the landscape in the

south lawn, which will be addressed in more detail in the following description of features.

The subsoil in the south lawn is generally 40–60 cm below surface. It is a yellow/brown sandy sediment with some degree of larger glacial cobble inclusion. This is consistent with the subsoil found across the site.

#### *Above-surface features*

In the south lawn there are fewer above-surface than below-surface cut features. These include the coarse stone foundation or sill in the northwest quadrant, as discussed earlier; a linear arrangement of upright stones in the center, possibly a fence or pathway border; and an extensive cobble-paved surface at the east

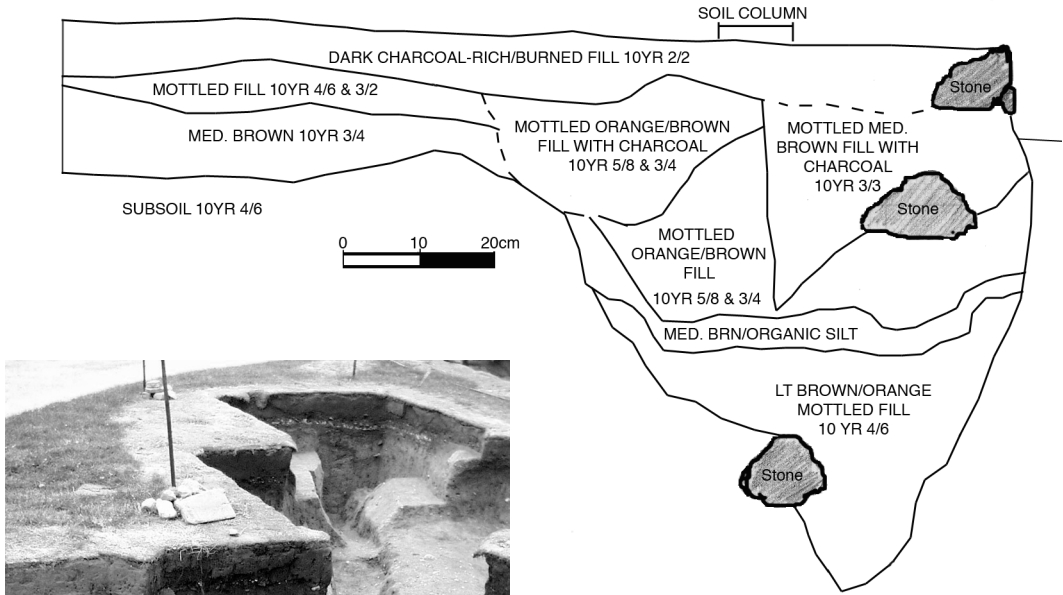
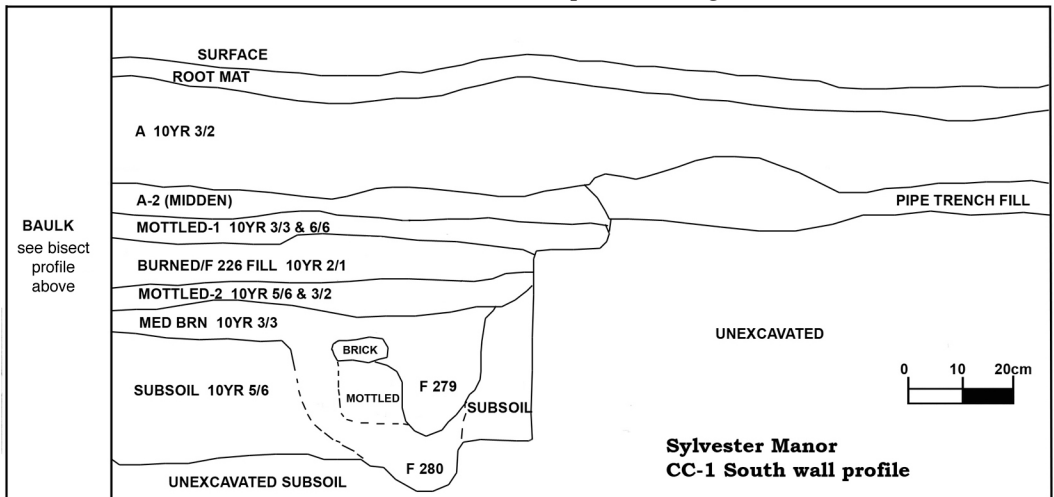


Figure 9. Left, Feature 226 fully excavated, view towards southeast; Bottom, profile drawing of stratigraphy relating to F226; Above, F226 trench bisect profile.

side (FIG. 8). The lack of surface-evident structural features, and broad coverage of capping fill layers, is a testament to the effort given to razing all prior structures and masking the early plantation landscape. The cobble paved surface was skillfully constructed using locally available rounded quartz cobbles, likely collected from glacial till deposits. It is patterned with square arrangements of stone, alternating squares of large (~12–15 cm) and small (~3–



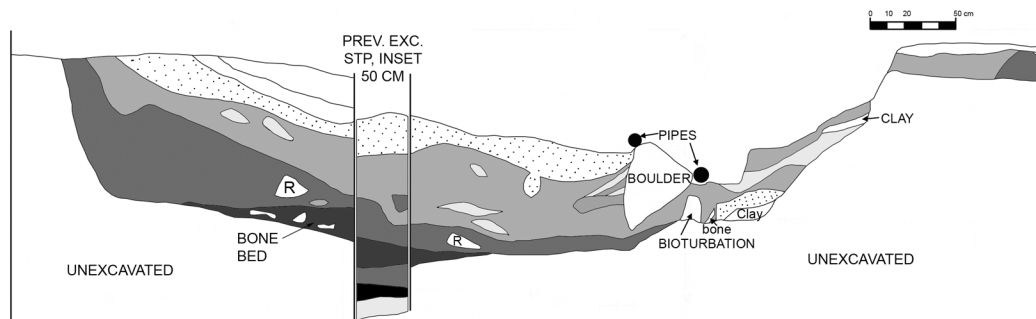


Figure 10. Feature 221 east facing profile of lower layers; solid colors indicate distinct sand fills, dotted areas indicate silty fills. Additional high concentration of bone was excavated above the bone bed indicated here, within residential debris in layers intersected by pipes.

6 cm) cobbles. Portions of two intact edges were uncovered, showing the paving to be approximately 3.5 m wide; though its total length cannot be discerned as the ends were destroyed, the intact segment is approximately 9.5 m in length. The surface may have been used as a long, narrow dooryard or courtyard, or possibly as part of the workyard with a “clean” surface. The care and time given to creating a patterned surface does, however, suggest an associated structure of appropriately high style and status. Given that we have found no evidence of such a structure, a second possible interpretation is that the cobble paved surface was instead a roadway. Whatever its function, this surface ceased to be used and was filled over. A thin (< 5 cm) layer of A-2 midden was deposited onto its surface, and was subsequently buried under A-1 loam fill. A small intact section of cobbles was taken up to better assess the feature’s temporal relationship to the broader area. As only pre-Contact period Native ceramics were recovered below, it is presumed to have been constructed in the earliest Sylvester settlement phase. Pollen samples were taken from above and below the paving, and further investigation of the surface’s construction and underlying contexts is possible.

#### *Below-surface features*

The surface and fill layers of the south lawn have created an open, level space, in direct contrast to the apparent profusion of activity evidenced by the below-surface features. Several dozen postholes and postmolds have been documented (see FIG. 6), but in no clear pattern indicating a single structure or set of structures. Instead the array is interpreted as

relating to more than one period or configuration of the space. A series of parallel and perpendicular shallow trenches is of clearer orientation. The function of these trenches is not readily apparent, although they could be sills, fence lines, or drainage. These trenches are cut by several of the postholes, and the fill from a few postholes contained ceramics that cross-mended to fragments from the A-2 midden fill. Thus at least some of the posts were associated with a later, perhaps tenant-related period of use. A moderately sized (~50 cm diameter) pit feature near the trenches may be related to either period, though its material inclusions are similar to the fill of the trenches. Further analysis of these relationships is ongoing.

In the northeast quadrant, the trench associated with the mottled and burned fill has been excavated to its fullest recoverable extent. The feature (F226), likely a robbed builders’ trench with approximately 6 m of length and one corner intact (FIG. 9), has been excavated in segments for a complete profile, showing charcoal-rich soil with a mixture of burned and unburned materials. Discrete concentrations of burned wood, stone, and brick suggest that a series of posts may have been set into this trench and partially burned in situ. However, the trench has multiple layers below this of lighter mottled fill with darker staining, possibly varves or decayed organic matter, extending to a depth of nearly a meter below surface. Much of the material related to this trench seems to indicate a Native American occupation: shell-tempered ceramics, rolled copper beads, and waste from wampum production. But it also contained European goods, dating to the mid-17th century, and a high



Figure 11. Feature 221 bone bed indicated on Figure 10 profile.

volume of fish bone and scales. Though the trench appears to have been repeatedly cut into and refilled, leaving the definition of associated posts unclear, it is perhaps our best window into the early plantation phase structures.

Of least importance, but greatest intrusion, are two additional trenches that cut through the upper fill layers and into underlying features. These are from iron pipes, one galvanized, likely placed in the early-20th century. These pipes in fact run across to the southeast lawn where they were also encountered cutting through earlier features.

### The Southeast Lawn

This is an open lawn area, located between the formal garden and circular driveway, directly east of the south lawn (refer to FIG. 1). It was originally shovel-tested on a 10 m interval, showing only a scatter of late-18th- to 19th-century materials, apparently subject to mixing due to landscape changes in the later

period. Family recollection and early-20th-century photographs also indicated that several large trees had once stood there but had been removed. A single 2 × 2 m unit on the west side contained a rubble-filled posthole, but no sign of the cobble surface and A-2 midden only 5–6 m to the west. Geophysical testing showed some anomalies, however, which seemed potentially structural in nature, and family lore had long held that the “original” Manor house had been east of the present structure. A second shovel test survey, on a 2 m interval, was thus conducted in 2003. This survey for the most part showed landscape disturbance consistent with the results of the earlier testing. In more spatially limited locations, though, instances of unusual deposition were observed. One cluster of test pits contained a buried A horizon that was artifact-rich. Diagnostic ceramics placed this deposition layer in the latter half of the 19th century, which gives a finer chronological resolution to the evident landscaping efforts. A

layer of sand fill, descending to the south, was also seen in a contiguous set of test pits. While initially these material concentrations were thought to have been temporally distinct from those south of them, more extensive excavations indicate otherwise.

Two to six meters to the south of these clusters, another set of three test pits came down on a feature, which has subsequently been opened in six 2 × 2 m units and one 1 × 2 m unit. The feature (F221) was a large, deep pit filled with waste, cut by two modern pipe trenches and a refilled area from tree removal ca. 1940. Its careful excavation has revealed an interior portion measuring approximately 4 × 4 m with at least four distinct layers of fill. One of these layers was a lens of burned shell and clay following the contours of the pit, appearing to have been “spilled” in. Further, the large size and type of material suggest that this was rapid deposition. The waste material is primarily related to butchery of domestic livestock, but additional layers include both construction (mortar production) and destruction architectural debris. Further, a large number of sizeable native ceramic vessel fragments, ballast flint, and a smaller number of European ceramics and pipes were recovered, among other items.

In the lower levels of the feature, multiple layers of sand fill, composed of nearly sterile redeposited C-horizon material, covered an additional layer of faunal waste (also domestic livestock) approximately 120–150 cm below surface (FIG. 10; deposit marked as bone bed; FIG. 11). The redeposited sand appears to be the same as that identified in the test pits to the north, as part of a much larger feature. At the bottom of the feature lay a single layer of stone cobbles and a quarry-cut piece of banded gneiss. The pit itself may have been either a pre-Contact feature, such as a borrow pit, or a natural topographic depression, thus utilized for waste disposal by the occupants of the earliest plantation. The presence of the cut gneiss, however, raises the possibility that a building may have been constructed there, perhaps of post-in-trench construction style similar to that evident in Feature 226. Regardless, in the subsequent life of the feature it appears to have been cut and filled in multiple episodes, with the bulk of the butchery waste and sand forming earlier deposits while structural and residential debris was added in later periods.

Like the deep builders trench feature (F226) in the south lawn, the function and origin of this pit is yet unknown, given the lack of diagnostic material culture in the original cuts. But the mixture of Native and European materials in the refilling, dating to the Early Plantation period (mid-17th century), indicates that these two features are both temporally and spatially related. Indeed, though their artifact assemblages are not identical by any means, there is enough similarity to warrant further comparative analysis, and we suspect that there may be ceramic vessel cross-mends between the two.

Additional excavation units adjacent to this feature were opened in 2005, revealing several postholes. Preliminary material analysis indicates that sets of posts are distinguishable by temporally distinct ceramic types, with several very large posts indicating a possible late-17th/early-18th-century structure, while smaller posts may be remains of later fence lines. While the later (19th- and 20th-century) landscaping has hindered our ability to define the extent of the implied structures or fencelines, these posts suggest that the pit feature was capped early on, possibly before Nathaniel Sylvester’s death in 1680, allowing new buildings or yards to take its place on the landscape.

### **Discussion: Intrasite Stratigraphic Relationships**

While the discrete activity areas that have been excavated are each important in their own terms, our broader research questions impel us to also question the interrelationship of these in order to understand the whole plantation landscape. The evidence overwhelmingly shows multiple reconfigurations of the social and material spaces. These layered constructions of Sylvester Manor’s spaces are ultimately the goal of our interpretations, and what is presented at this time should be considered our initial thoughts. As more analyses of the many lines of evidence are completed, these interpretations will be refined and enriched, though some may be scrapped and reformulated.

Beginning again from the west lawn waterfront, our test excavations through non-contiguous units, plus remote sensing results, suggest that the shoreline area has been used and altered extensively. Although much of the archaeological context is the result of a



longer continuum of change than our period of focus, it is evident that this was a zone shaped to accommodate the traffic of a commercial enterprise: roadways, coarse cobbled surfaces, possibly structures for storage of goods. The extent and scale of this area has made it difficult to pursue these constructions in detail, but the testing has given ample general characteristics for comparison to other working areas of the early plantation and tenant phases. Though subject to later alterations, these features are of substantial depth and breadth and we expect that there is a high potential for further recovery.

The north lawn is an example of the extent to which the later occupancy was able to obscure the earlier. This area was also heavily utilized in the 19th century, as indicated by both archaeological and documentary evidence of the dairy and other outbuildings. This period of use culminated in the construction of the north addition to the Manor house, when enormous volumes of displaced fill and trash were deposited there. Despite this, faint traces of the early features and materials are discernable. The presence of the house itself and the tremendous redeposition of soils there remind us that, as it is today, the area would have been considered "behind" the house since the 18th century, when the current front-facing side of the house at the opposite end was constructed. Activity on the north-northwest lawn would have been out of the sightline from the public face, and thus could be expected to show continued heavy use over time. That it was subjected to deep post-plantation disturbances is then not particularly surprising.

The south lawn, on the other hand, was on the public, "representational" end of the house. Accordingly there is far less deposition of materials common to daily activity *after* the mid-18th century. Though ceramic cross-mends have linked the north and south lawns, the common use of these areas probably changed dramatically after the construction of the current house, dividing these into rather different social landscapes. This also raises the issue of *where* the first European residential structure was in relation to the waterfront working areas. Although the specific placement and function of plantation-phase structures has proved frustratingly elusive, we can say that there are enough materials linking north, south, and

southeast to hypothesize that these were all included in an expanse of working areas.

We had felt that it was perhaps unsuitable and unlikely that the Sylvesters' first residence would be in the midst of this, assuming that they would prefer to live at some distance from the working areas. If this was so, the patterned cobbled surface might have been a roadway proceeding through the working area; imagining this roadway by extending what remains along its apparent bearing leads us northeast to a currently silted-in section of Gardiner's Creek, and southwest towards a sparsely wooded area. This notion was tested in 2005, with a test-pit survey in the southwest wooded area. Much to our surprise the area was nearly sterile. This has led us to the conclusion that the plantation core was a tightly compact working and living area in the early plantation phase. Rather than expand outwards, the Sylvesters chose to rebuild and reoccupy the same space, perhaps consistent with Nathaniel's experiences growing up in densely urban Amsterdam. Further, we must conclude that their residence was in fact close by, as the bulk of the debris from a likely substantial structure was deposited over the South Lawn workyard, and it is unlikely that it would have been hauled any great distance away from its original footprint. As no chimney base has been located in the core area, the location of this first Sylvester residence may have been just where the current house stands today.

Finally, the north peninsula excavations and material culture have shown that though spatially separated from the presumed core plantation working areas, there is some degree of comparability. The recently delimited concentration of 17th-century artifacts at the southern end of this area, within sight of the plantation core, suggests that it was used contemporaneously, though it will require further investigation to know for what purpose. Upslope of the southern end is the largest concentration of pre-Contact Native American ceramics. While it would be tempting to treat the north peninsula as a temporally and socially separate area, the evidence is resistant to such interpretations; the materials recovered from each area are by no means identical, but they do share enough points of similarity to warrant exploring their connections. The most significant question in this connection is the movement and shifting

roles of the Manhasset. We will look to these areas to show us how their lives changed as Shelter Island became a site of pluralistic social interaction.

As we might expect for a site with such a complex and fragmentary history, our eight seasons of excavation seemed to have passed too quickly, and we have answered fewer questions than we have created. Our questions have become more refined, however, and we are indeed beginning to understand the material, physical worlds of colonial North America's "small beginnings."

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