

2011

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Muraca, David; Coombs, John; Levy, Phil; Galke, Laura; Nasca, Paul; and Muraca, Amy (2011) "Small Finds, Space, and Social Context: Exploring Agency in Historical Archaeology," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 40 40, Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.22191/neha/vol40/iss1/1> Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol40/iss1/1>

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The George Washington Foundation Department of Archaeology has combined a number of excavation and artifact-recovery techniques with a deliberate approach to artifact research and analysis in the laboratory to enhance interpretations of past behaviors. This article describes the elements of this approach and provides a case study involving the numerous 18th-century wig hair curler fragments found at the boyhood home of George Washington. The historical record together with the material culture assemblage allow us to demonstrate that the Washington family engaged in a home-based system of wig maintenance, allowing the economically struggling Washington boys to don wigs, an essential element of male gentry attire. This approach illustrates that conscientious recovery and analysis of small finds, such as wig curlers, can provide data used to reveal a great deal about the agency and consumer motivations of their owners.

Le département d'archéologie de la Fondation George Washington a intégré une série de techniques de fouilles et de cueillettes d'artéfacts, avec une approche résolument axée sur la documentation des artéfacts et l'analyse en laboratoire, afin d'améliorer les interprétations sur les comportements passés. Cet article se concentre sur la description des éléments de cette approche et utilise une étude de cas qui a trait à la découverte de nombreux fragments de bigoudis de perruques du XVIIIe siècle, retrouvés à la maison d'enfance de George Washington. La documentation historique, avec l'assemblage de culture matérielle, permet de démontrer que la famille Washington s'adonnait à l'entretien des perruques à domicile. Ceci permettait aux fils Washington, qui étaient dans une situation économique précaire, d'enfiler une perruque, un élément essentiel du costume de noblesse masculin. Cette approche démontre que la cueillette et l'analyse adéquate des menus objets, comme les bigoudis de perruques, peuvent servir à révéler les motivations des consommateurs et l'agency de leurs propriétaires.

Introduction

In June 1993, Julia King, an early advocate for excavating large areas of plowzone, visited the salvage excavation of Rich Neck Plantation on the outskirts of Williamsburg, Virginia. The site was scheduled for housing development, and a Colonial Williamsburg archaeological team had been given a few weeks to recover what it could. Earlier in the week, we had urged our William and Mary field-school students to “be the backhoe” when dealing with the plowed soils of this wooded site. We collectively rolled our eyes at the thought of the comments that our draconian approach to the archaeological record would draw from our renowned visitor. In the end, King was polite while advocating the merits of excavating the plowzone and held back her justified criticism until she was driving home in her car.

A week later, the Rich Neck excavation received an indefinite time extension along with a considerable grant from the developer and the City of Williamsburg to conduct a more-thorough excavation. We immediately began to rethink our approach to the excavation,

analysis, and interpretation of the social relationships using King's comments as a springboard.

The development of this approach continued over the next eight years until the same leadership team began contemplating the excavation of another site, the boyhood home of George Washington. Now called Ferry Farm, this site is in Stafford County, 100 mi. to the north of Rich Neck. The plantation served as home to George Washington from age 6 to about the age of 22 (FIG. 1). Members of the Washington family occupied the site from 1738 until 1772.

The excavation and analytical approach we employ at Ferry Farm was conceived and then refined in the 1990s during an eight-year excavation at Rich Neck Plantation. During this time, the Chesapeake region saw a small explosion in the quantity and quality of its regional archaeology. Institutions including the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (Metz et al. 1998; Levy 2000a; Edwards 2004), the College of William and Mary, Monticello (Neiman, McFaden, and Wheeler 2000),

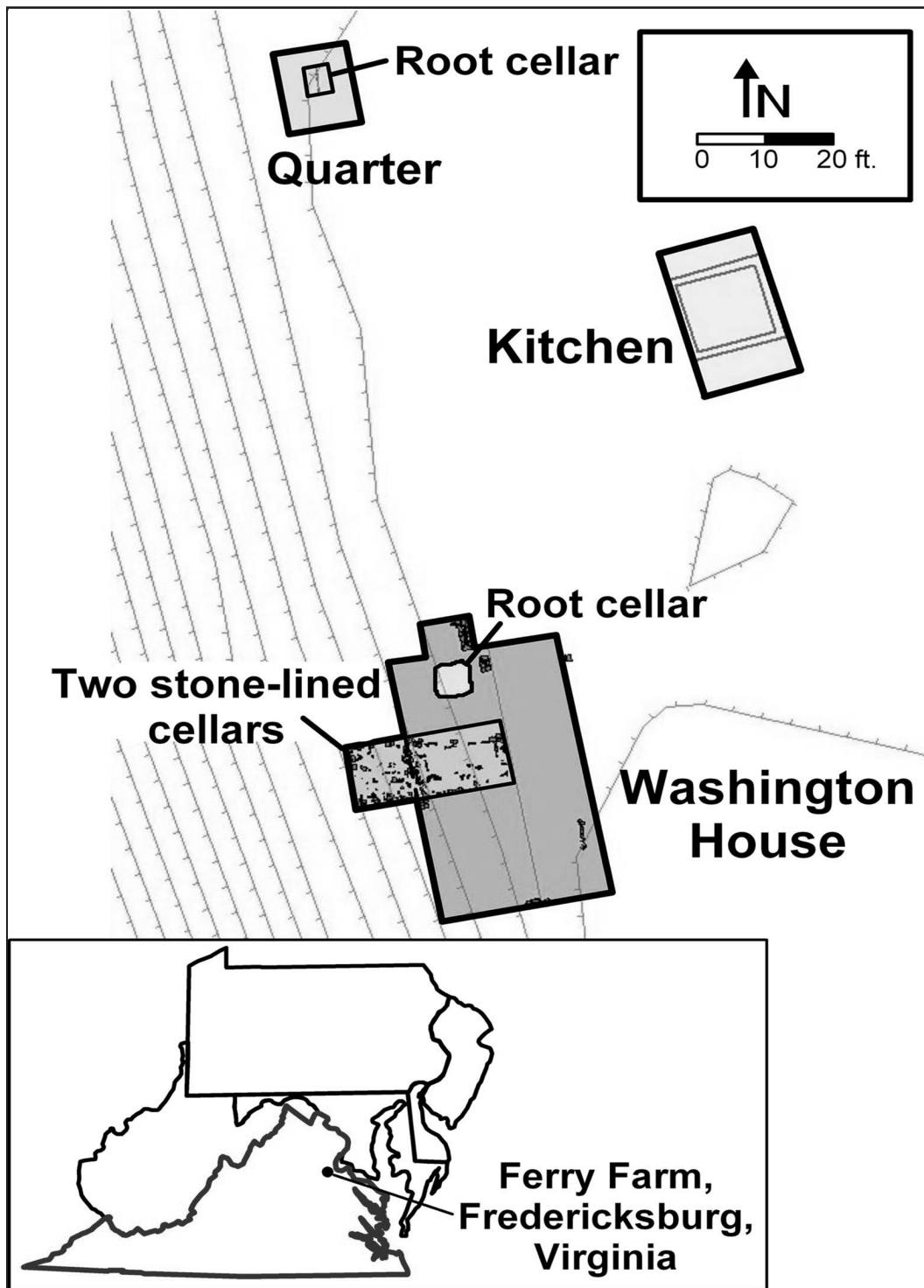


Figure 1. Plan View of Ferry Farm (44ST-174), showing location of site and major features encountered. (Figure by The George Washington Foundation.)

Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum (Chaney and King 1999), St. Mary's City, and Anne Arundel County's Lost Towns Project (Luckenbach, Read, and Ware 1995) all conducted large-scale investigations within their own arenas. Through discussion, observation, and data sharing, these and other institutions began to profoundly influence each other both methodologically and, to a lesser extent, theoretically. Discussions started as twice-yearly informal meetings of a group of practicing Chesapeake historical archaeologists that focused on a variety of topics including architectural elements, landscape features, midden analysis, and specific artifact types. These meetings frequently ended with complaints about the lack of comparative datasets. In 2002, colleagues from several institutions applied for and received grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to develop a comparative database for 18 archaeological excavations. These excavations were chosen in part because they contained at least most of the elements of the methodological approaches being developed in the 1990s. These data now exist on the webpage "A Comparative Archaeological Study of the Colonial Chesapeake Culture,"¹. From this wellspring of talent and creativity emerged a distinctive approach to dealing with domestic archaeological sites.

An emphasis on context and materiality provides the theoretical underpinning applied to the material culture recovery and analysis at Ferry Farm. Methodological considerations include excavation scale, a rejection of small-percentage sampling schemes for plowed soils, and small excavation-unit size. Combining these elements provides archaeologists with the empirical tools necessary to tease out new meanings and deeper insights from the types of plantation sites regional archaeologists encounter most frequently. By no means do we claim that all of this is brand new—we are fully aware that much of this has been known to historical archaeologists for quite some time. What we do see as new, though, is a growing self-consciousness of local practitioners in combining the various elements of this approach and, consequently, increasing the

value and sophistication of the region's work, discussions, and interpretations. See the Zekiah Archaeological Project², and Al Luckenbach and Taft Kiser's article (2006) on tobacco-pipe manufacturing in the Chesapeake for some recent manifestations of the approach.

Context

Gone are the days of ignoring the historical backdrop and personal circumstances of the individuals under archaeological study. An overreliance on single masterworks like Edmund Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom* to set the larger narrative has yielded to creative applications of primary sources, such as court records, travel accounts, diaries, and prescriptive texts (Levy 2000b; Mayne 2008). These sophisticated primary-source interactions work hand in glove with wide-ranging uses of nonregional secondary scholarship, including agricultural histories, demographic studies, Atlantic World and transnational approaches, historical narratives about postmedieval England, class and gender studies, and philosophical works (Bradburn and Coombs 2011). Increasingly historical archaeologists are developing historical contexts for sites from multiple sources and weaving together issues and discussions drawn from well beyond the sites themselves. This approach seeks to balance concern for local developments in the colonial context with a larger interest in the wider world of ideas and systems that shaped the minds, bodies, and homes of colonists. Additionally, researchers are increasingly sensitive to the complicated arrays of sociocultural reciprocities inherent in colonial processes (Silliman 2001, 2005; Loren 2010). Moving beyond narrow models of cores and peripheries or simple narratives of conflict and adaptation, we recognize that the formation of colonies, colonial societies, and colonial identities all resulted from dynamic and cross-informing transatlantic exchanges in which the movement of goods, people, ideas, and ecologies was only the most observable. Therefore, we understand sites and site components to be the products of interplay between a diverse

1. The url for this webpage is <<http://www.chesapeakearchaeology.org>>

2. The url for this webpage is <<http://www.zekiaharchaeology.wordpress.com>>.

array of local, regional, colonial, metropolitan, and international influences now studied within the framework of the Atlantic World. This collective and multifaceted perspective mirrors the intellectual and ideological dimensions of site formation as European, African, and Native American peoples with varying cultural identities and social statuses negotiated existing beliefs and practices to create a new American world. The use of a wide-angle lens is essential for this approach to succeed.

Scale

The scale of excavation is a vital component of this approach. The 1990s saw a move away from privileging a site's architectural components. Earlier excavations frequently centered on domestic structures and their support buildings, often neglecting landscape features, work spaces, and activity areas. Today, understanding the reciprocity through which space constructs individuals and how these individuals in turn construct space is vital to making sense of past behavior on historical sites. Physical barriers such as fences, hedges, and ditches, for example, were frequently used to control space around plantation seats. The existence and placement of these barriers was replete with cultural meaning, typically enforcing prevailing notions: the maintenance-intensive constructs of class, status, and race. Attributes such as fence type, height, sturdiness, repair history, and gate location all conveyed social messages (though not always the same messages) to masters, servants, and slaves (Upton 1984). Because this type of evidence requires field recovery to sustain analysis, the approach used at Ferry Farm requires controlled excavation of large areas within, between, and around structures. This is significant as it makes this overall approach both an interpretive method as well as a site excavation strategy.

Space and Plowed Soils

Understanding the spatial distribution of infrequently occurring small-finds artifacts is a critical and definitive dimension of the approach used at Ferry Farm. As with most Chesapeake sites, artifact-rich plowed layers are crucial to understanding what activities took place on the Ferry Farm landscape, and

spatial analysis of intensively excavated plowed soils works to assign particular objects to particular activities, structures, activity areas, and sometimes (on a well-documented site such as George Washington's boyhood home) even to indefinable individuals.

Since the late 1970s, Chesapeake historical archaeologists have debated what to do with the plowed soils found on almost all regional sites. In many eyes, plowing was an unfortunate occurrence marring a site's stratigraphy and creating nothing more than a contaminated layer to be sampled and removed as quickly as possible. Adherents of this approach understandably focused primarily on architectural finds and "glory" features like large and deep middens, wells, and burials. The great contribution of this archaeological work was that it recovered a large number of house plans and lot shapes, creating a baseline for subsequent discussions; but it also left vital material culture evidence on the scrap heap.

Maryland's archaeologists led the way in demonstrating the analytical value of plowed soils. Beginning with the excavation of the St. John's site between 1972 and 1976, plowzone sampling became an important element in St. Mary's City research design. At St. John's excavators collected 29% of the plowzone in 5 × 5 ft. and 10 × 10 ft. units (King 1988). In Virginia, Frasier Neiman recovered material from 120 10 × 10 ft. squares of plowzone when he excavated the Clifts Plantation during the 1970s, and in 1984 and 1985 Dennis Pogue analyzed 144 2 × 2 m squares at the King's Reach site (Pogue 1988).

Those advocating plowzone excavations incorporated two distinct lines of reasoning into their arguments. First, several studies indicated that historical plowing was less disruptive than imagined (Baker 1978; Lewarch and O'Brien 1981) and that it caused only slight movement of artifacts associated with large features such as sheet refuse and midden layers (Riordan 1988). Thus, while the precise dimensions of a feature might be ambiguous, the "cloud" of its plowed artifacts still clings fairly close to where the artifacts were originally deposited. Second, the same studies concluded that evidence of some past activities survived only in the plowzone and that machine removal of this level resulted in significant data loss. Examples of research questions that could be asked of plowzone

data include tracking temporal shifts in refuse disposal (Pogue 1988), identifying the location and spatial organization of past activities (King 1988; Galke 1998), recovering destroyed architectural details such as door and window locations (Keeler 1978), and understanding social relationships (Neiman 1980). Plowzone studies also have been useful in determining the functions of out-buildings (McFaden et al. 1999). These studies argued that, while site plans provide a blueprint for understanding the layout of a site, they cannot by themselves provide much information about how early Chesapeake settlers organized and used space. Such insight only comes through examining how the distribution of artifacts in the plowzone relates to surviving features.

Some institutions, including Lost Towns, Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, and the George Washington Foundation now advocate that, whenever possible, plowzone sampling strategies should be abandoned altogether, and excavators instead should dig as much plowzone as is feasible, even in areas that contain relatively few artifacts. At Rich Neck Plantation, for example, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation dug over 1,300 1 m squares of plowzone within the roughly 3 ac. site. Rich Neck's excavators argued that only by appreciating areas that contain only a few artifacts can those areas with heavy concentrations be fully understood. Of particular concern are areas used predominantly by enslaved Africans, who generally had access to fewer material goods than their free English counterparts. By ignoring areas with light scatters of artifacts, excavators may be excavating the English-controlled portions of sites at the expense of the slave-controlled portions.

Today, there is little debate within Chesapeake archaeology over the value of excavating plowed soils. In fact, an increased understanding of the value of plowed soils has changed the actual composition of artifact assemblages. The emphasis on recovery of plowzone artifacts has increased the number of small finds and expanded researchers' ability to address issues of social relationships and space.

Unit Size

Excavation unit size has a direct bearing on the interpretive potential of data recovered

from the plowzone. Several studies have demonstrated that one of the principle benefits of excavating plowed soils is the ability to uncover discrete activity areas that are not otherwise apparent, with examples including the location of a structure's windows and exterior doors (Birmingham et al. 1987; King and Miller 1987; King 2004). By examining the distribution of artifacts in the plowzone, it is often possible to identify where architectural elements of this sort once were located, although no other physical evidence of them has survived. The qualitative results of such an analysis, however, are obviously a function of the degree of precision employed in recovering the material being analyzed. This need for increased precision has led to the abandonment of 10 ft. and 2 m squares in favor of 5 ft. and 1 m squares, respectively.

Materiality and Small Finds

Mary Beaudry, Carolyn White, Diana Loren, and numerous others have done a great deal of research on small finds within historical archaeology. They employ an interdisciplinary perspective to material culture studies that emphasizes understanding the roles and meaning of small groups of personal artifacts, or small finds, which occur infrequently on sites (White 2005: 239–240; Beaudry 2006; Loren 2010). Most of these artifacts had special meanings to their owners (White 2009: 3). Small finds include but are not limited to items of personal adornment (e.g., jewelry, sleeve links, buttons, and buckles), accessories (e.g., folding fans and umbrellas), personal possessions (e.g., needlework tools and dining utensils), health and hygiene items (e.g., toothbrushes and combs), personalized items (featuring an individual's name, initials, or mark), tools (e.g., wick trimmers and flatirons), and items altered after manufacture (e.g., pierced coins, spoons, pottery, and thimbles).

Small finds often include objects closely associated with a single individual, that is to say, objects connected to one person's regular habits, tasks, or ritual as opposed to ceramics that might be parts of sets used by multiple people, or other classes of finds more connected to broader use patterns or even structures. Almost every object can be linked with past notions of gender, class, status, life cycle, occupation, and ethnicity. But

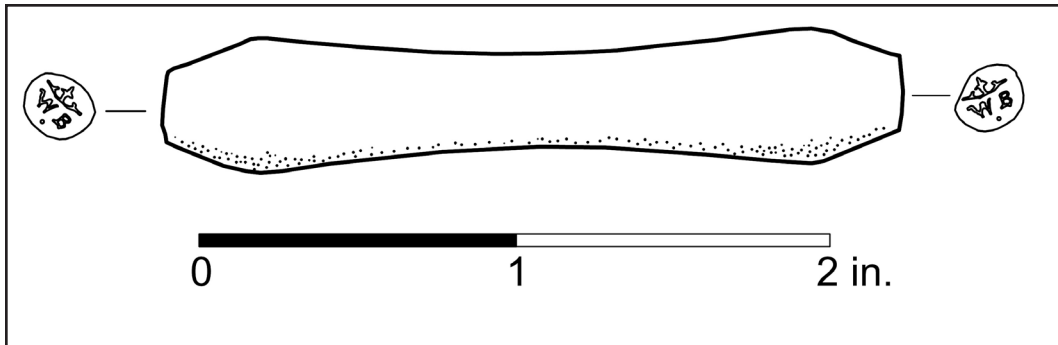


Figure 2. Illustration of a wig hair curler. (Figure by The George Washington Foundation.)

the frequently intimate associations between individuals and small-finds objects create more direct connections between these material goods and the above mentioned social traits (Galke 2009; MacLean 2009; White 2009; Hodge 2010).

Infrequent appearances and low overall totals within object categories mean that small finds often defy the larger-scale distribution-pattern analyses and statistical applications possible with more-commonly occurring artifact classes. Thus, analysis of rare small finds requires special attention to the context of each item. The process of identifying broken and damaged objects is itself challenging and laborious and can entail extensive surveys of collector literature to correctly identify the object and intensive research into an equally large body of primary and secondary sources to understand the object's contemporary social roles or messages (White 2009).

Wig Hair Curlers: A Case Study

To demonstrate the merits of this approach, we selected a particular small-find artifact that, typically, occurs infrequently on colonial sites: wig hair curlers (FIG. 2). Eighteenth-century hairdressers referred to these implements as *bilboquets*, *bigoudis*, *roulettes*, or *pipes*, and they were used to curl wig hair, not the hair directly upon the patron's head (Redfern 1909: 6; Warwick, Pitz, and Wyckoff 1965: 165; Botham and Sharrad 1980: 8; Corson 1980: 272; Le Cheminant 1982: 345–347; Garden et al. 2000: 54). To date, 153 curlers have been recovered at George Washington's boyhood home, including 17 complete curlers. Of the fragments recovered,

6 mend to form 3 complete curlers, so there is a minimum of 150 curlers on the site.

Eighty curlers were recovered from the Richard Charlton Coffeehouse, where one of Charlton's diverse professions during the second half of the 18th century included wigmaking (Garden et al. 2000: 54). Mount Vernon's collection of wig curlers consists of two fragments (Esther White 2010, pers. comm.). While curlers may at first seem to be rather mundane discoveries, these humble implements are associated with the maintenance of wigs (FIGS. 3 and 4), items of attire that were loaded with meaning, associated as they were with a class of nonessential, luxury consumer objects deeply connected with 18th-century male gender, status, and performance.

There is some discussion among scholars regarding the character of wig consumers. Some argue that only men wore wigs in colonial America. Included in this group are Karin Calvert (1994: 265), Margaretta Lovell (2005: 111), and Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton (2005: 45). Others indicate that both men and women (Corson 1980: 261, 331, 347–348; Le Cheminant 1982: 345; Wynbrandt 1998: 81; Haulman 2002: 108; Festa 2005: 52; White 2005: 115–116), as well as elite boys (Bierstadt 1885: 518; Earle 1894: 263; Corson 1980: 266, 279; Hoffmann and Bailey 1994: 287), were known to wear wigs, but their use was idiosyncratic, conditioned by a variety of social influences, economic considerations, and personal preference. Cunningham and Cunningham (1964: 167) indicated that, during the first half of the 18th century, women might wear wigs for special occasions, such as horseback riding (where male-oriented attire was fashionable) or at court—see also Corson (1980: 327–329) and

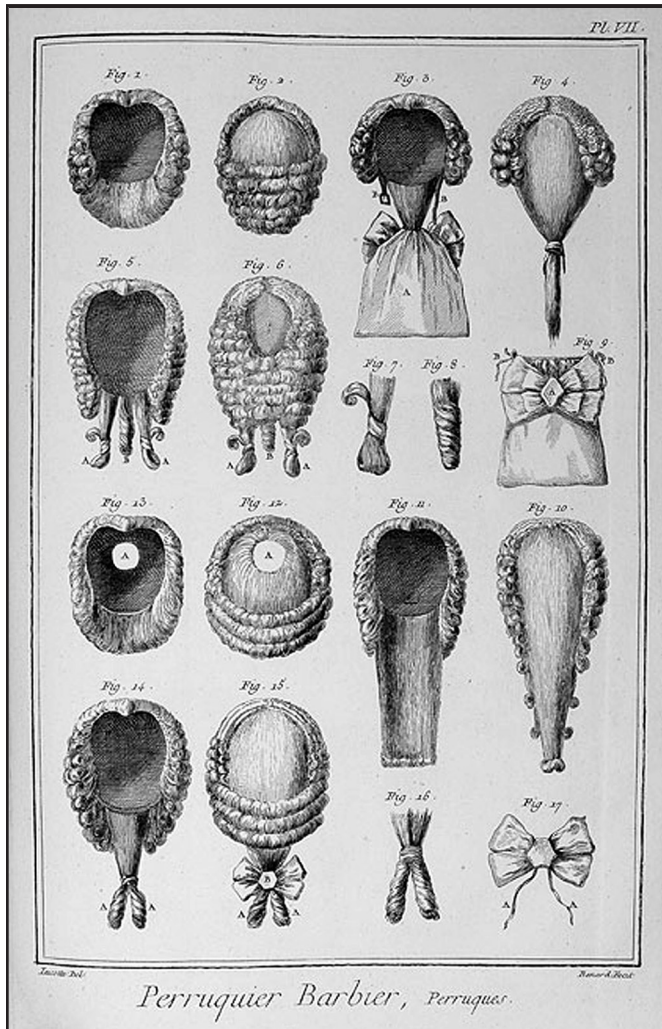


Figure 3. Perruquier Barbier, 1763, from Denis Diderot (1959). This figure illustrates a variety of possible wig styles available to the mid-18th-century gentleman.

Durbin (1984: 4). Carolyn White (2005) takes a more nuanced position and argues that women adopted wigs only late in the 18th century. Dorothy Mays (2004: 50) also supports a limited use of wigs by women, indicating that only upper-class women wore wigs and then only on special occasions.

The tall female hairstyles that characterized the later decades of the 18th century were typically achieved by allowing natural hair to grow long. These long tresses were then raised upon pads, cushions, or rolls (FIG. 5). The diary of Anna Green Winslow makes it clear that

women added artificial elements to their own hair. In the year 1772 she wrote:

I had my HEDDUS roll on, Aunt Storer said it ought to be made less, Aunt Deming said it ought not to be made at all. It makes my head itch, & ach, & burn like anything Mamma. This famous roll is not made wholly of a red Cow Tail, but is a mixture of that, & horsehair (very coarse) & a little human hair of yellow hue, that I suppose was taken out of the back part of an old wig. But D___ made it (our head) all carded together and twisted up. When it first came home, aunt put it on, & my new cap on it, she then took up her apron & mesur'd me, & from the roots of my hair on my forehead to the top of my notions, I mesur'd above an inch longer than I did downwards from the roots of my hair to the end of my chin. Nothing renders a young person more amiable than virtue & modesty without the help of fals hair, red Cow tail, or D___ (the barber). (Earle 1903: 513-514)

Sometimes false hair was used to add volume to these hairstyles, and only occasionally were complete wigs worn by women (Earle 1895; Cunnington and Cunnington 1964: 376-386; Corson 1980: 331-354; Festa 2005: 54; White 2005: 111-114). It seems that during most of the 1700s

wearing wigs was more popular among men (Cunnington and Cunnington 1964; Corson 1980; Pointon 1993; Ribeiro 2002: 129; Festa 2005: 52, 59-60; Lovell 2005: 111-113; Morgan and Rushton 2005: 45).

Likewise, the actual use of wig curlers is not obvious—contemporary manuals only offer imperfect glimpses into their daily function (De Garsault 1767: 14; Redfern 1909: 6; Corson 1980: 272, 332; Durbin 1984: 4). Some scholars suggest that clay curlers were restricted to the initial manufacture of wig curls (Botham and Sharrad 1980: 8; Durbin 1984: 6), and that



Figure 4. *The Wigmaker, 1763*, from Denis Diderot (1959). This image shows the interior of a barber shop.

devices such as heated iron pinching tongs were used to refresh the curls thereafter (Durbin 1984: 6). If so, the presence of wig curlers on domestic sites is difficult to explain. Of the few sources that describe in detail how curlers were actually employed, many indicate that the curlers were first heated (Redfern 1909: 6; Cox 1965: 8), and then the wig hair was wrapped around them and tied with string (De Garsault 1767: 14; Bullock, Tonkin, and Townsend 1957; Warwick, Pitz, and Wyckoff 1965: 165; Corson 1980: 272). Some hairdressers worried that the clay curlers became so hot in this process that they damaged the wig hair (Cox 1965: 8; Le Cheminant 1982: 346). An alternative method was to wrap the wig hair on unheated *billboquets*. The entire wig was then heated either by boiling it in water for three hours or placing it in an oven. Some sources specify that the wig was placed in a paper bag that was encased in dough and then baked in the oven (Warwick, Pitz, and Wyckoff 1965: 165; Le Cheminant 1982: 346; Durbin 1984: 4).

Typically, curlers are recovered from colonial domestic sites in modest quantities, from a few to

a dozen or so. Consequently, these objects have contributed little to the understanding of 18th-century life beyond serving as indicators of the presence of wigs themselves and are seen as little more than indicators of gentry purchasing power. What archaeological literature exists has treated these principally as a class of white ball-clay ceramic, and research has focused upon identifying their makers and their origins—an endeavor as much concerned with the manufacture of clay pipes (often produced by the same makers in the same factories) as it is with the wig curlers themselves (Le Cheminant 1982; Crowdy and Hall 2002). While this is certainly a useful pursuit, analysis must advance beyond issues of function and production to explore the meaning behind wearing wigs and the associated (and under-documented) home-based maintenance to which such archaeological discoveries allude.

Eighteenth-century England and its colonies were deeply socially stratified societies with social ranking resting on dimensions of age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, and class. Among elite consumers, an array of factors including property, officeholding, and other

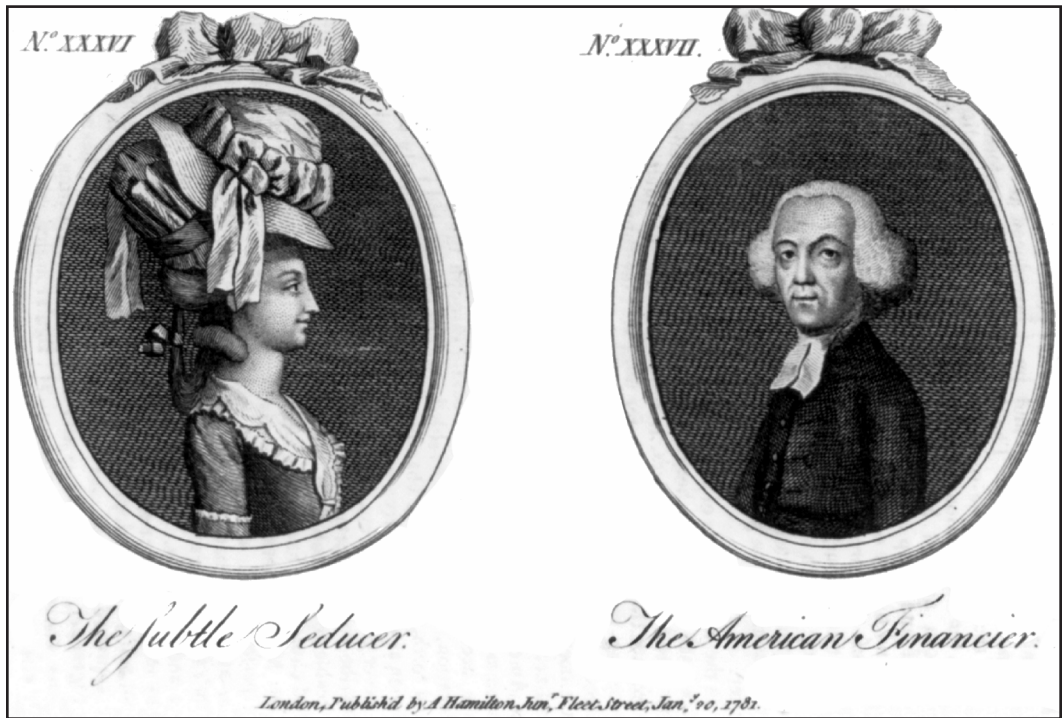


Figure 5. *The Subtle Seducer* and *The American Financier*, 1781, by A. Hamilton, illustrates an example of an elaborate hair style popular among women and the wig-adorned professional man.

material trappings of gentility guided what was deemed to be appropriate consumer choices (Bushman 1994; Rozbicki 2003). As Cary Carson (1994) has suggested, fashionability's mobility allowed it to become a significant conveyor of status for colonists removed from metropolitan settings and their long-established social networks. Fashion contrivances such as wigs, once limited to elite consumers in the 17th and early 18th centuries, became increasingly accessible to a wider variety of European and colonial consumers as the 18th century advanced (Stewart 1782: 203; Corson 1980: 265; Calvert 1994: 260–270; Carson 1994: 506–513, 642–661; Haulman 2002: 7–10; Ribeiro 2002: 129; Kwass 2003: 87–90, 2006: 634–640; Festa 2005: 52, 59, 69, 71; Morgan and Ruston 2005: 45–46; Peck 2005: 16–22; McNeil 2007: 381, 385–386; Evans 2009: 159–162). Such social dispersion was reflected in a mid-18th-century satirical encounter related by the Marquis de Mirabeau and published in *L'Ami des hommes* by Victor de Riqueti: "On Sunday a man came up to me wearing black silk

clothes and a well-powdered wig, and as I fell over myself offering him compliments, he introduced himself as the oldest son of my blacksmith" (Kwass 2006: 635).

Mastering shifting fashionable patterns became an important way to enact gentry performances. Wigs were a rather singular and visually prominent way to place oneself within the flows of fashion—for better or worse.

As with many other accoutrements of 18th-century fashion, the role of wigs was constantly changing and increasingly subject to satire (Mackie 1997: 193–197; Powell and Roach 2004: 85). A review of the scholarship on this aspect of sartorial splendor reflects its changing meaning over the course of the Georgian period. Tracing the origin of wigs to the mid-17th-century royal courts of France and England, some have argued that such luxuries entered gentry society principally as a way to emulate the prestigious fashionable manners of the elite and aristocratic (Simmel 1957: 542–543, 556; Veblen 2005; Kwass 2006: 641–643). Marcia Pointon's analysis of

18th-century portraiture suggests that wearing wigs was an essential communicator of masculine power (Pointon 1993: 128–130; Festa 2005: 59–60, 68, 82); see also Kwass (2006: 650–651) and Lovell (2005: 113). Michael Kwass argues that wig popularity was not a form of emulation but rather a statement of social class or convenience (Kwass 2006: 634, 650–651)—see also Peck (2005: 113)—a notion to which Carson (1994: 673–675) might be sympathetic. Indeed, Samuel Pepys claimed to wear a wig due to the inconvenience involved with cleaning his own hair (Festa 2005: 53). In this sense, wearing a wig during the second half of the 18th century represented a rational choice over the wearisome exertions associated with maintaining one's own hair.

Over the course of the 18th century, wigs proliferated in style and use. While some styles were connected to specific gentry professions like that of lawyer or minister (Stewart 1782: 203; Cunnington and Cunnington 1964: 89–96, 241–258; Corson 1980: 290; Calvert 1994: 265; White 2005: 117), such conventions were largely abandoned by the last third of the 18th century as a variety of consumers purchased styles without regard to rank or profession (Festa 2005: 70–73). Kwass (2006: 655–656) argues that by the later decades of the 18th century wigs came to reflect individual identity more than a social association.

For many, though, wigs in ever-changing sizes and styles were highly visible displays of fashion, gender, status, and nationality (Festa 2005: 82). Most wigs were made of textiles, human hair (higher-quality wigs), or animal hair (horse/goat/sheep, typically; less-expensive wigs), and even metal wires of copper or iron (Cunnington and Cunnington 1964: 255–258; Corson 1980: 276–277; Festa 2005: 59, 67; Kwass 2006: 650). The chances of an actual wig's archaeological survival are slim in most conditions. Consequently, wigs are most visible in the archaeological record via the more-enduring ceramic curlers that were part of their manufacture and maintenance.

Wigs were costly, delicate, and were typically compromised upon encountering any inclement weather, especially if moisture were involved (Festa 2005: 54; White 2005: 116–119; Kwass 2006: 650). Wigs could be uncomfortably hot to wear and represented one of the most

high-maintenance accessories in the male wardrobe (Warwick, Pitz, and Wyckoff 1965: 162, 165; Calvert 1994: 267, 269; Festa 2005: 57; Evans 2009: 162). Most wig consumers owned at least two simultaneously; one could be worn while the other was being maintained or the second wig might be worn when the occasion warranted another style preference (Botham and Sharrad 1980: 101; Ribeiro 2002: 129; Festa 2005: 70; Kwass 2006: 638; Evans 2009: 162). Wig styling and shaping each curl was unpleasant, messy, and required a great deal of skill.

Apprenticeships in wigmaking shops often lasted for seven years. When James Nichols opened a wig shop in Petersburg, Virginia, offering all aspects of wigmaking and hairdressing, he advertised for a barber who understood his business (*Virginia Gazette* 1772). Williamsburg wigmaker William Peale demonstrated the variety of material used to make wigs when he offered more-expensive wigs made of all sorts of human hair, along with those made of horse, goat, and mohair stained in a variety of colors and styles (*Virginia Gazette* 1751). Wigs had to be regularly sent for maintenance to the barber's or wigmaker's, where they were brushed and curled. Ideally, the curling and resetting of a wig should occur weekly (Warwick, Pitz, and Wyckoff 1965: 165; Le Cheminant 1982: 351), though more parsimonious consumers might forgo such dedicated maintenance: "many of the wigs worn by the men who were not wealthy must ... have been sorry affairs" (Warwick, Pitz, and Wyckoff 1965: 165). The curlers were heated and the wig hair wound tightly around them in order to refresh the curls (Redfern 1909: 6; Ribeiro 2002: 129). In 1772 and again in 1773, Robert Carter paid Williamsburg-based wigmaker Richard Charlton £2 3s. (equivalent to \$163.36 in modern currency) annually for dressing his wig (Barden 1982: 106).

Account books show that Fredericksburg had at least one wigmaker during the 1740s. William Potter, barber and wigmaker, frequented the store of John Lewis. Potter fell behind in his payments and John Lewis accepted a wig made for his son Fielding Lewis as partial payment. Such bartering for wigs and barber services was not unusual (Lovell 2005: 259; Horner 2008: 45). Potter also purchased various wigmaking materials at the Lewis

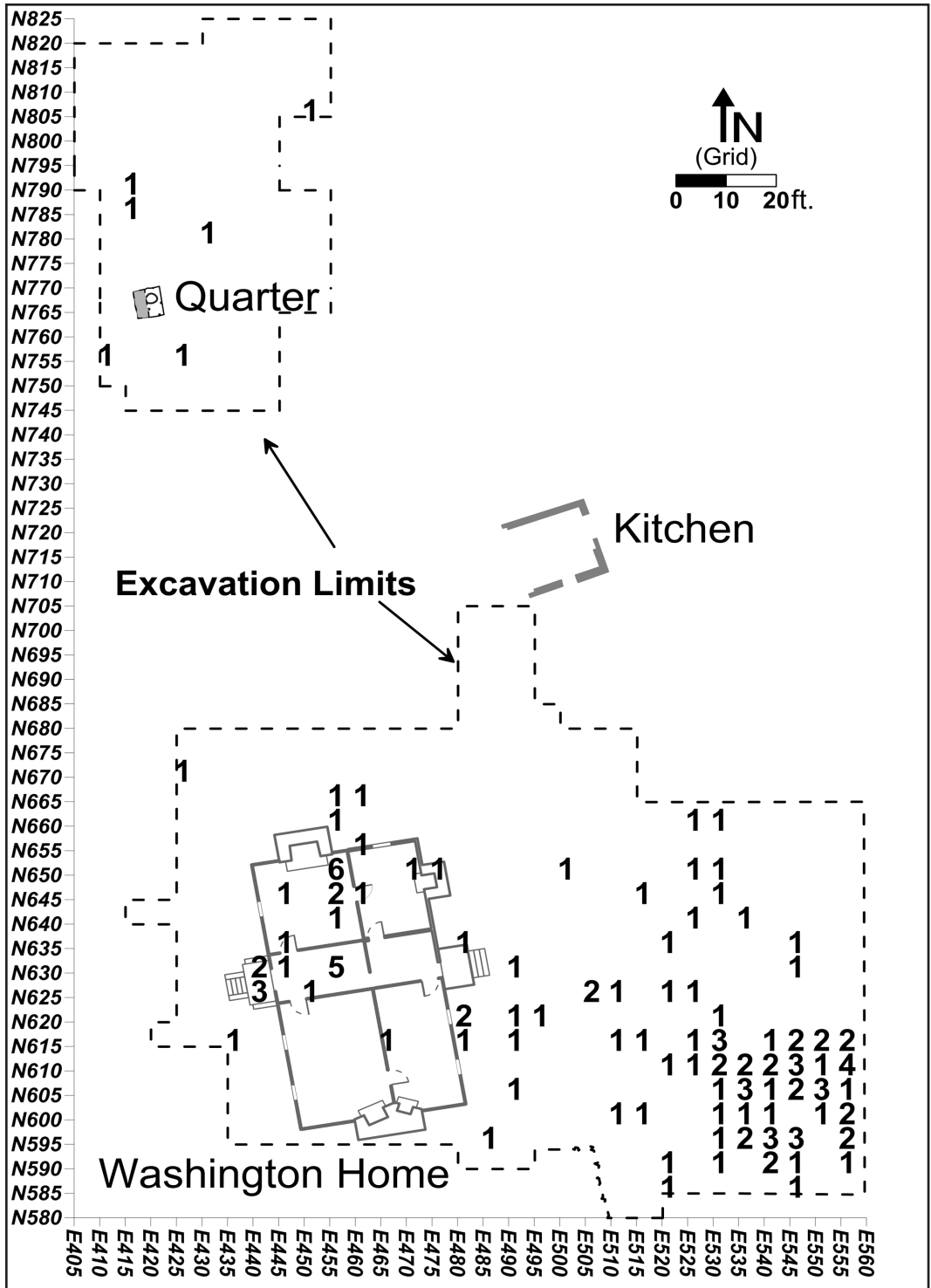


Figure 6. Plan view of Ferry Farm excavations, showing the distribution of curlers by location totals. (Figure by The George Washington Foundation.)

store, including wig curlers, paper, *cauls* (hairnets), and powder (Lewis 1744). Likewise, Le Cheminant (1982: 351) and Cunnington and Cunnington (1964: 260) report a 1778 receipt to an Oxford student for 16 “roulers” (made from clay, the Cunningtons assume), costing the client 2d. (\$14.76 in modern currency), and a wig dressing on the same receipt valued at 4d. (\$29.52).

With the exception of the Spanish colonies (Deagan 2002: 228), wig curlers turn up on archaeological sites throughout the Atlantic World. Examples have been recovered in the Netherlands, Scotland, England, and the Caribbean. In the North American colonies, curler fragments have been found in Virginia, Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. They are more common in colonial towns, where wigmakers set up shops to sell and style wigs, but are nonetheless found on plantation sites as well. Given that curlers were made from clay, wood, or tightly wrapped cord and fabric (Le Cheminant 1982: 346), their degree of preservation in the archaeological record is a factor influencing their discovery that can not be adequately assessed.

Like the wigs themselves, there is disagreement about who used wig hair curlers. Modern museum wigmakers interpreting the craft at Colonial Williamsburg assert that only wigmakers used these functionally specific tools. They suggest that curlers were part of the manufacturing process and unnecessary to maintain flagging wig curls. They also argue that wig maintenance was a task reserved for the professional wigmaker, not a personal valet. Ivor Noël Hume, the archaeologist who oversaw the excavations of Colonial Williamsburg’s principal wigmaking site, disagrees with the official museum position asserting that there was at least a limited role for curlers in the 18th-century home; however, he provides no definition for that role (Noël Hume 1991: 321).

Wig Hair Curlers at Ferry Farm

To date, Ferry Farm archaeologists have recovered 153 wig hair curlers, of which 17 are complete (FIG. 6). Six fragments mend to form three additional complete specimens for a total of 20 whole curlers. All of the Ferry Farm

specimens are of solid clay and have bulbous ends with narrowed midsections (FIGS. 2 AND 7). The curlers exhibit some variability in diameter, length, and end marks. The complete curlers found at Ferry Farm range in length from 2.3 to 2.9 in., and diameters range from 0.40 to 0.79 in. (FIG. 7). Based upon their maximum diameter, seven distinct sizes were used at Ferry Farm³. Variability in diameter relates directly to the size of the curls with curlers having larger diameters used for longer hair and producing larger curls. Most of the curlers found at Ferry Farm have narrow diameters, useful for shorter wig hair and yielding small-diameter curls (FIG. 7).

All but 2 (which cross mend) of the curler fragments that possess at least one intact end feature small marks on their ends incorporating the letters WB (FIG. 8). These marks were an incuse or negative impression that was created using either a signet ring or stamp. The WB mark is one of the most common marks found on curlers. Wig curlers stamped WB have turned up in London and throughout the United Kingdom (LeCheminant 1982: 352, 354). They have been found in small numbers in Rotterdam, The Netherlands; Mt. Vernon, Virginia (Mount Vernon 2010); Delaware; and on several sites in Williamsburg proper, including the Anthony Hay site, the Post Office site, and the Ravenscroft site (A. Noël Hume and Barrow 1990). In the colonial capital of Williamsburg, the earliest sealed context excavated containing wig curlers stamped with WB has a *terminus post quem* of 1770 to 1775 (A. Noël Hume and Barrow 1970).

At Ferry Farm, eight curlers were found within the root cellar that existed below the Washington family’s parlor room (FIG. 6). All of them featured WB marks, and all were derived from layers that were deposited during the 1760s and first half of the 1770s.

At Ferry Farm, the WB marks are configured in four distinct styles (FIG. 8). The most popular mark was a WB with a coronet above and a dimple below (FIG. 8, *Type 1*). This mark occurred on 61 percent (n= 80) of the curlers with intact ends. The next most common mark was a WB with an italicized *B* and no coronet

3. Size 1 (0.40–0.45 in.), 2 (0.46–0.52 in.), 3 (0.53–0.56 in.), 4 (0.59–0.61 in.), 5 (0.64–0.69 in.), 6 (0.70–0.75 in.), and 7 (0.77–0.79 in.). These divisions by diameter are based on laboratory analysis and may not strictly reflect historical categories.

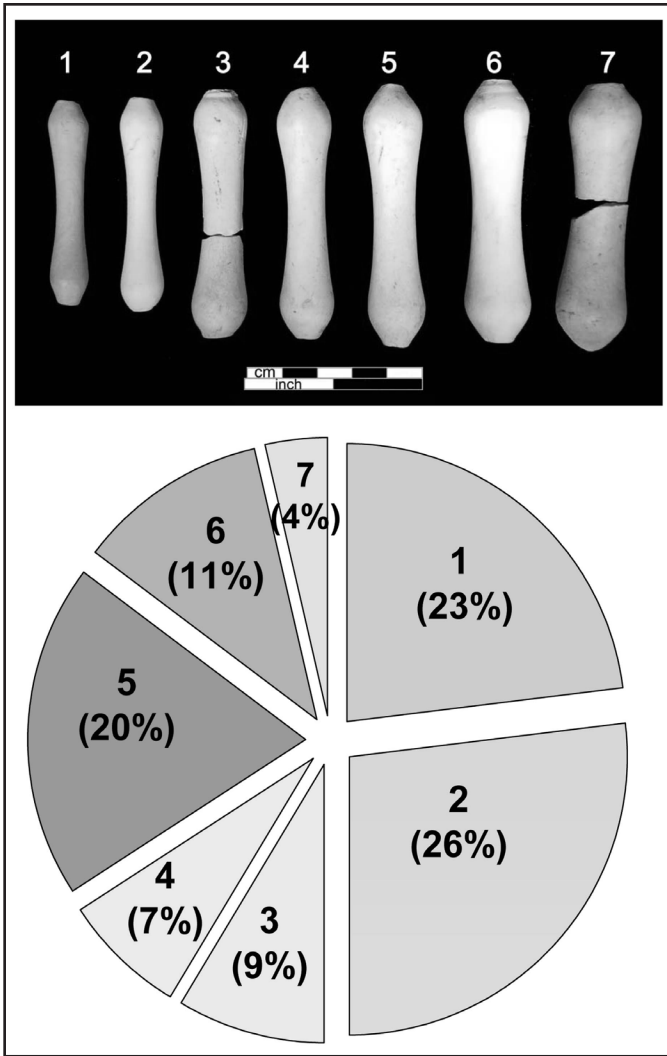


Figure 7. Photo of seven curler sizes discovered at Ferry Farm, and a pie chart of their proportions in the curler assemblage. (Figure by The George Washington Foundation.)

or dimple (FIG. 8, *Type 2*). This mark occurred on 27 curler fragments with intact ends. Twenty curlers featured a crude WB with a dimple above and below (some poorly executed examples only have a dot below the WB, an idiosyncrasy of the application (FIG. 8, *Type 3*). There is some speculation that the dots are part of the manufacturing process. It is hard to see how the dots would be helpful in manufacturing the clay curlers (Le Cheminant 1982: 352). Finally, there are five examples (two of which mend to form one

curler) of an unmarked curler (FIG. 8, *Type 4*).

The significance of the marks has never been satisfactorily explained. Some assume that they represent the makers' marks of pipe makers who produced wig curlers as part of their product inventory. To date only a single known clay-pipe maker's mark has turned up on a wig curler. In 1990, archaeologists excavated a clay-pipe kiln and recovered wig curlers mixed in with pipes and other kiln furniture (Crowdy and Hall 2002). A curler marked "WC" was found associated with a matching maker's mark on a clay pipe in Waterford, England. The kiln dated between 1750 and 1800 (Crowdy and Hall 2002). Pipe-kiln excavator David Higgins suspects that a small number of specialists are responsible for the majority of curlers found on archaeology sites (David Higgins 2009, elec. comm.). A handful of English pipe makers with the initials WB operated during the third quarter of the 18th century. It appears that none of these manufacturing sites has been excavated to date.

The curlers recovered at George Washington's boyhood home exhibit no post-manufacture modifications such as an X, initials, or any piercing to facilitate suspension for either adornment or amusement. There is also no evidence of any non-wig-

related use for the curlers. The curlers show no correlation with the recognized folk-magic artifacts found on the site (Muraca 2009). They also do not cluster in the areas that folk-magic artifacts are more usually unearthed, such as doorways, corners, or near fireplaces (FIG. 6).

Ferry Farm was home to the Washington family from 1738 to 1772. George Washington sold the property in 1774. The Washington family was headed by Augustine and his wife, Mary. Together, they had six children, including four boys and two girls.

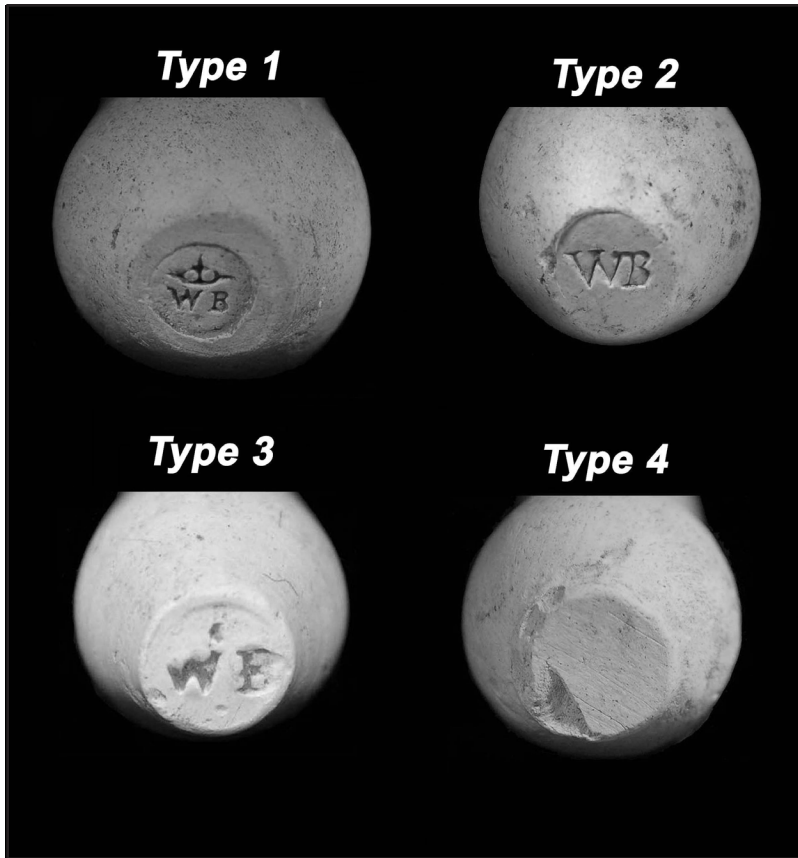


Figure 8. Four marks found on curlers recovered at Ferry Farm. (Figure by The George Washington Foundation.)

Who was wearing a wig at Ferry Farm? Mary's husband Augustine died in 1743 and she chose not to remarry. Had Augustine Washington been alive when the curlers were in use at Ferry Farm, there is little doubt that these tools would have been assigned to him by archaeologists. The curlers at the Washington farm, however, come from archaeological features (including the parlor root cellar and larger, stone-lined cellars) that were filled long after Augustine had died, in layers deposited during the 1760s and 1770s.

A look at the spatial evidence helps decipher what is taking place at the Washington farm. The spatial distribution of unbroken curlers shows that they cluster inside the house, primarily within features (FIG. 9). This indicates that the curlers were at least occasionally used within the home. No such cluster of complete curlers exists for the kitchen dependency or

the slave quarter. Within the house, the curlers cluster below the parlor room (FIG. 6). The distribution of curler fragments shows a concentration in the yard midden to the east of the Washington home (FIG. 6). This distribution may reflect secondary refuse disposal; once broken, these tools were of little use and were tossed in the yard. But given the high counts from individual excavation units, the clustering of curler distribution, and the presence of whole curlers in non-feature contexts in the east yard, it appears that the southeastern area of the excavation block was the location of past wig-maintenance activities. The area immediately

adjacent (east) to the home has relatively few curler fragments (FIG. 6) suggesting that the most intensive tasks associated with wig hair maintenance took place some distance (about 55–60 ft.) away from, yet still within easy surveillance of, the main home. Such nuanced interpretation of spatial activity is possible thanks to the intensive excavations that have occurred in this portion of the site.

The distribution of both whole and broken curlers and the absence of secondary usage for these items indicate that the curlers were used by the Washington family to repair and maintain wigs. Once the curlers broke, they were of no value and tossed away. The presence of small quantities of curlers on other rural domestic sites supports the contention that some wig maintenance was performed at these homes, where access to formal barbers or peruke makers was limited or absent altogether.

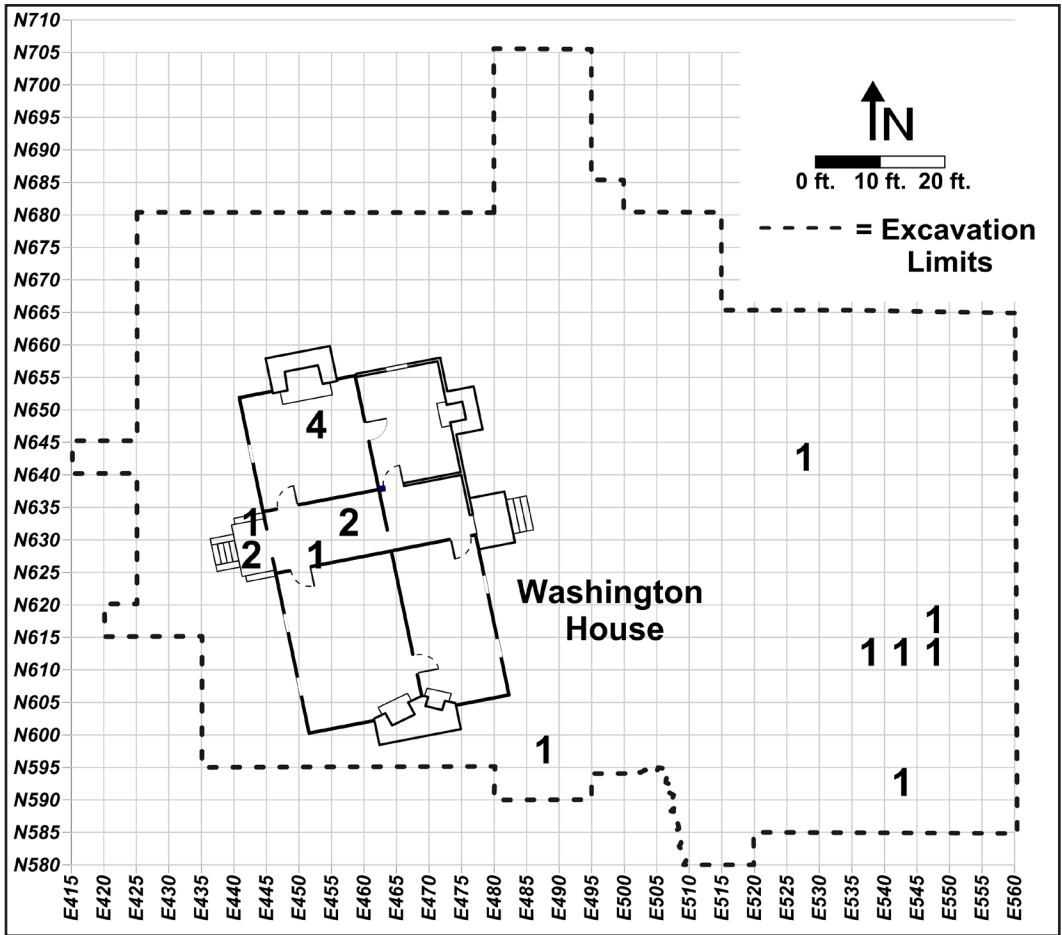


Figure 9. Plan view of Washington house excavation block at Ferry Farm, showing the distribution of complete curlers. (Figure by The George Washington Foundation.)

Because wigs were primarily worn by men during the 1700s, we argue that the curlers found at Ferry Farm reflect the sartorial ambitions of the sons of Mary and Augustine Washington: George (born 1732), Samuel (born 1734), John Augustine (born 1736), and Charles (born 1738). The family moved to Fredericksburg in 1738, and the youngest son, Charles, left Ferry Farm in 1760. We have discovered the identity of one of the wig wearers of Ferry Farm. George Washington’s account book provides documentary evidence that his younger brother, Samuel, owned a wig. In 1752, George purchased for Samuel “one grey cut wig” (Washington 1752). The choice of a gray wig represented a popular as well as a conservative choice at this time (Corson 1980: 276). In

addition, a privately-owned portrait of Samuel Washington completed around 1754 by John Hesselius shows Samuel wearing a different (i.e., not a ‘cut’) wig.

Given the popularity of wigs among gentlemen during the 18th century, it is likely that one or more of Samuel’s brothers wore a wig. It is certainly possible that all of the Washington boys, even George, at least experimented with this essential male fashion accessory. Wigs were so popular that gentlemen who did not use them dressed and powdered their natural hair in the fashion of a wig (Warwick, Pitz, and Wyckoff 1965: 167), a custom to which George Washington certainly ascribed and one which Cunningham and Cunningham (1964: 89) suggested might be practiced for economic reasons.

While the young sons of gentlemen might have worn wigs (Bierstadt 1885: 518), Morgan and Rushton (2005: 45) argue that wigs represented a rite of passage to which young men aspired in the years before they attained majority at the age of 21. If correct, wearing a wig for the Washington boys was an emblem of male gentility that they deemed crucial in the uncertain years following their father's death. Given the limited financial resources of the family after 1743, 18-year-old Samuel's investment in a conservative "grey cut wig" demonstrates just how important this accessory was to his aspirations. A cut wig would not require as much maintenance as one possessing curls. The popularity of wigs among men at this time suggests that Samuel's younger brothers, John Augustine and Charles, may also have worn wigs that were maintained at their home. Was Samuel further inspired to this fashion by some anxiety experienced by growing up in a household led by his widowed mother in the absence of a stepfather? To what degree the investment in a home-based wig-maintenance program was motivated by economic need, convenience, widespread practice, or was an amalgam of these impulses, we are not yet prepared to conclude at this time.

The lack of a wig maker in Fredericksburg made wig maintenance at the Washington home a necessity. The practice of having a valet or owning a slave with hairdressing skills was not uncommon and was widespread enough to have caused some degree of anxiety among professional wig makers in England and France during the second half of the 18th century (Ribeiro 2002: 130; Kwass 2006: 636; Campbell, Miers, and Miller 2009: 11; Kern 2010: 101, 111).

Conclusion

Archaeological investigations at Ferry Farm have employed a series of excavation and artifact-recovery techniques combined with a conscientious approach to artifact research and analysis, to enhance interpretation about past behavior. Wig curlers have traditionally justified only a mention as a curiosity in most archaeological reports. They rarely are used to advance arguments about consumer motivation, gender, class, or status. Small unit size, high plowzone retention, and an emphasis on

understanding the nuances of small finds, particularly their spatial distributions, all come together in this approach. When all of these elements are combined, we contend that scholars can wring the most interpretive bang out their excavation buck.

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