

Northeast Historical Archaeology

Volume 42 *Foodways on the Menu: Understanding the Lives of Households and Communities through the Interpretation of Meals and Food-Related Practices*

Article 2

2013

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Recommended Citation

Springate, Megan E. and Raes, Amy (2013) "The Power of Choice: Reflections of Economic Ability, Status, and Ethnicity in the Foodways of a Free African American Family in Northwestern New Jersey," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 42 42, Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.22191/neha/vol42/iss1/2> Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol42/iss1/2>

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The Power of Choice: Reflections of Economic Ability, Status, and Ethnicity in the Foodways of a Free African American Family in Northwestern New Jersey

Megan E. Springate and Amy Raes

The choices people make concerning food involve decisions well beyond biological sustenance. Food procurement and consumption, as well as the way in which a dish is served, are choices that are embedded with both overt and less obvious implications of social aspirations and validations (McKee 1999; Reitz, Ruff, and Zierden 2006). Food and the means by which it is prepared and consumed embody and communicate cultural traditions, as well as factors such as social identity, ethnicity, status, class, and consumer choice. In this article, we examine the faunal remains, tablewares, and food-preparation vessels recovered during excavations within a free African American household in an historically white town in northwestern New Jersey, and how these remains reflect and project the social identity of the household occupants, the Mann family. We compare the artifacts recovered from this site with other ante- and postbellum free black house sites in the northern mid-Atlantic region. While we note that some trends are common, like the use of wild species to supplement foods purchased in the marketplace and the presence of mismatched dishes, the amount of variation from site to site suggests each family responded individually to economic, social, and regional factors according to its own taste, beliefs, and ability. In addition to examining the Mann family's foodways in the context of other free African American sites in the northern mid-Atlantic, we also discuss how foodways played a role in the Mann family's display of status, as understood by both white and black communities.

Les choix alimentaires effectués par les gens impliquent des décisions bien au-delà de la subsistance biologique. L'acquisition et la consommation de nourriture, ainsi que la façon de servir les plats, sont des choix empreints d'aspiration et de validation sociales aux implications plus ou moins évidentes (McKee, 1999; Reitz, Ruff, et Zierden 2006). La nourriture et les moyens par lesquels elle est préparée et consommée incarnent et communiquent les traditions culturelles, ainsi que des facteurs tels que l'identité sociale, l'origine ethnique, le statut, la classe et le choix des consommateurs. Dans cet article, nous examinons les restes fauniques, la vaisselle et les contenants de préparation des aliments recueillis lors des fouilles d'une maison d'Afro-Américains libres dans une ville historiquement blanche dans le nord-ouest du New Jersey, et comment ces restes reflètent et projettent l'identité sociale des occupants, la famille Mann. Nous comparons les artefacts récupérés sur ce site avec d'autres sites de maisons d'occupants noirs émancipés, ante- et post-bellum, dans la région nord du mid-Atlantic. Bien que nous notions que certaines tendances soient communes, telles que l'exploitation d'espèces sauvages pour supplémer la nourriture achetée au marché et la présence de récipients dépareillés, l'ampleur des variations d'un site à l'autre suggère que chaque famille répondait individuellement à des facteurs économiques, sociaux et régionaux selon leurs propres goûts, croyances et capacités. En plus d'examiner les habitudes alimentaires de la famille Mann dans le contexte d'autres sites d'Afro-Américains libres dans le nord de la région mid-Atlantic, nous discutons aussi du rôle des habitudes alimentaires pour la position sociale de la famille Mann, tel que compris par les communautés blanches et noires.

Introduction

In 2008, Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc. conducted a data-recovery project at a domestic site on the periphery of Sussex Borough (formerly known as Deckertown), in the northwestern corner of New Jersey. The project was completed in advance of a New Jersey Department of Transportation roadway improvement project that included the demolition of the house at 37 Mill Street (Richard Grubb & Associates 2011) (FIG 1). Four generations of the

free African American Mann family owned and occupied this small house, from 1862 through 1909, in the predominantly white town (FIG. 2). Analysis of the archaeological and historical resources from the site (registered as the Cooper-Mann House site, 28-Sx-399) indicated an increase in the family's financial and social standing in the late 19th century. This paper focuses on materials related to foodways recovered from the site, including faunal remains, tablewares, and items associated with food preparation and storage. We compare

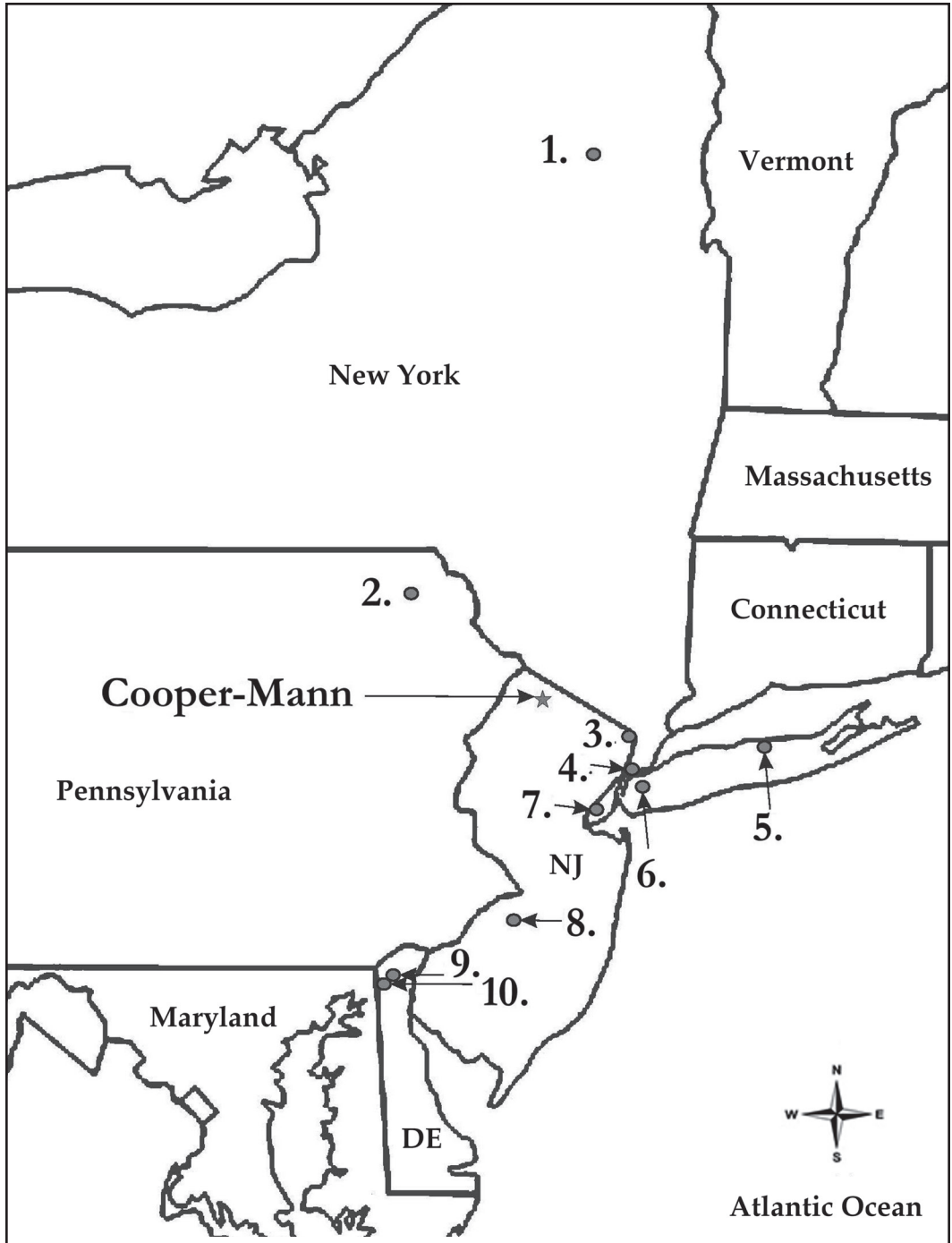


Figure 1. Location of the Mann House and other nearby free black sites mentioned in the text: (1) Timbuctoo, NY; (2) Dennis Farm, PA; (3) Skunk Hollow, NJ; (4) Seneca Village, NY; (5) Betsey Prince site, NY; (6) Weeksville, NY; (7) Sandy Ground, NY; (8) Timbuctoo, NJ; (9) William Dickson site, DE; and (10) Thomas Williams site, DE. (Map by Patty McEachen, 2009.)



Figure 2. Cooper-Mann House prior to demolition. (Photo by Michael Tomkins, 2009.)

the assemblage associated with the Mann family to those from other free African American house sites in nearby Middle Atlantic states (Salwen and Bridges 1974; Schuyler 1974; Bridges and Salwen 1980; Geismar 1982; Askins 1988; Catts, Hodny, and Custer 1989; Catts and Custer 1990; LoRusso 2000; De Cunzo 2004; Rothschild and Wall 2004; Wall, Rothschild, and Copeland 2008; Orr and Barton 2009; Roby 2009, 2010a; Barton 2009, 2013; Kruczek-Aaron 2010; Barton and Markert 2012) and discuss the significance of foodways materials recovered from the Mann household, as understood by both white and African American communities. Other publications (Springate 2010, [2014]) address issues of choice, access to markets, identity, and ethnicity in other contexts associated with the Mann family.

Foodways are a window for anthropologists who study power structures. Larry McKee

(1999) describes foodways as an emotionally charged category of human behavior. While exploring issues of food supply within the plantation social order, McKee determined that plantation masters used food as a mechanism of social control, while those enslaved devised strategies to use food as a mechanism of resistance (McKee 1999: 342). These negotiations were regulated by two elements: whether the choice of food items was controlled by the master or the enslaved, and whether the actions engaged in obtaining food were permitted or forbidden by the master (McKee 1999: 232). Maria Franklin also describes food on plantation sites as a means of creating and maintaining group identity and boundaries shaped, in part, by food availability (e.g., provisions for the enslaved included cuts of meat that the planters did not want) and through pooled knowledge and resources (Franklin 2001). Some of this knowledge

includes the various foods and methods of preparation that enslaved Africans brought with them to the Americas. These foods and practices were incorporated into a cuisine that combined knowledge with availability and preference, and subsequently became identified as African American “soul food” (Franklin 2001; Carney and Rosomoff 2009). Food and foodways remain a core element of African American cultural identity (McKee 1999: 235), a conclusion that is upheld when examining the foodways of the Mann household.

Historical Context

Evidence indicates that the post-and-beam house at 37 Mill Street was built in ca. 1856, using hand-hewn, late 18th-century timbers recycled from an earlier building. Mahlon Cooper built the house next to his gristmill, likely as worker housing (Richard Grubb & Associates 2011). The house never contained a fireplace; instead, a coal-fired iron stove was located near the center of the house. It served as the only source of heat for comfort and cooking. From 1862 to 1909, the home was owned and occupied by several generations of the African American Mann family. Members of the Mann family who lived at 37 Mill Street during that 47-year period had, during their lives, variously experienced slavery, the Civil War, emancipation, and Reconstruction. They were able to vote after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment and felt the effects of the “separate but equal” Jim Crow years—all in a predominantly white town in an historically white area of New Jersey (Wacker 1975; Wright 1988). The African American population of Sussex Borough was small, in some years consisting almost entirely of the immediate Mann family. This area of New Jersey never had large populations of enslaved or free blacks. According to the 1860 census, while 3.8% (n=25,336) of the state’s total population of just over 672,000 was African American, 1.7% (n=324) of Sussex County’s population of just under 24,000 were “colored,” including 60 people identified as mulatto (Kennedy 1864: 314). Once freed, it is likely that most African Americans moved out of rural Sussex County to urban areas in search of both employment and community.

Not all black people living in New Jersey were enslaved; in 1687, several free blacks

from New York settled in the upper Hackensack Valley. Many of New Jersey’s enslaved people were freed prior to the end of slavery—some by service in the Revolutionary War, some via wills, and others for unspecified reasons (Geismar 1982: 8). Despite an early presence in the state, however, New Jersey was not a hospitable place for African Americans. Nineteenth-century New Jersey citizens figured prominently in the colonization movement that worked to return blacks to Africa, and New Jersey lawmakers refused to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery. While New Jersey passed the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in 1804, slavery continued in all but name only: the act freed children born after the law was passed, following lengthy “apprenticeships” of 21 years for women and 25 years for men. In 1846 the state passed the Act to Abolish Slavery, which considered those born before the law was passed to be indentured servants “apprenticed for life.” The state was required to end this *de facto* slavery by federal order in 1870 (New Jersey Legislature 1804, 1846; New Jersey Historical Commission 1984: 7–8; Hodges 1998: 28–29).

Following emancipation and into the Jim Crow years, African Americans had to contend with employers and others who, in the not too distant past, had considered them to be a form of property—if not their own, then that of someone else (Palmer 2011: 143). Early New Jersey laws codifying racial segregation include the sanction of school segregation in Morris Township in 1850, and the subsequent announcement in 1863 that all local school trustees had the authority to segregate their schools (Douglas 1997: 687). There was also intense *de facto* social segregation throughout the state, enough so that laws mandating desegregation were passed as early as 1881. In many cases, the desegregation laws were ignored (Johnson 1919; Douglas 1997). As segregation increasingly defined the relationships between blacks and whites, blacks relied upon their own community organizations. Churches functioned not just as religious centers, but as centers of African American intellectual and social life (Armstead, Horne, and Sorin 1988: 6). No such African American community organization was present in Deckertown, and the Mann family must have felt keenly the stress of trying to reconcile what was described

by W. E. B. Du Bois as a double consciousness or “two-ness”—the tensions and struggles of living both within and outside two distinct worlds defined by color (Du Bois 1903). Cultural theorist Chela Sandoval has described differential consciousness as a way that people survive and operate within oppressive environments while, at the same time, developing beliefs and tactics to resist domination and oppression (Sandoval 1991). This type of living within and resistance to domination and oppression plays out in many different arenas, including foodways—see Counihan (2008) for an ethnographic example.

African American leaders of the day advocated various ways to live within and resist white domination and oppression. W. E. B. Du Bois argued that, in striving for acceptance in the white world, many blacks were wasting their money on costly clothes, extravagant furnishings, expensive and elaborate entertaining, and “miscellaneous ornaments and gewgaws” (Du Bois 1899: 178). He proposed instead that African Americans should use their limited incomes to buy homes, educate their children, and accumulate savings. Perhaps not surprisingly, African Americans did not approach this double consciousness in a clear-cut manner, instead brokering “diverse, often ambiguous practices, values, and constraints to create and recreate a cultural style and material world, through the power of choice” (De Cunzo 2004: 269–270). Through the late 19th and into the early 20th centuries, Booker T. Washington and other activists encouraged blacks to assert and maintain a sense of dignity—to move away from paternalistic relationships and interactions with whites that limited their aspirations. One means of achieving this dignity was through self-sufficiency, which included self-provisioning (Price 1980: 132–133; Palmer 2011: 139). Individuals and families navigated their identities in various ways, guided variously by their own wants and needs, as well as philosophies of African American resistance and uplift.

History of the Mann Family

Benjamin Mann was born enslaved ca. 1800 in Sussex County, New Jersey—four years too soon to benefit from the state’s passage of the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery. It is not clear where Benjamin was enslaved or

who his owners were, or indeed if they were named Mann. While many slaves were given the surnames of their masters, ex-slaves often put aside these names and selected new ones (Quinn 2003). Whether Benjamin was given his name by his owners or chose it himself, the ability to select a name upon emancipation was a powerful opportunity, and was another way that freed African Americans engaged with and negotiated their identity. Benjamin may have remained enslaved through the late 1830s, but by 1840 he was free (Hodges 1998: 28–29; Richard Grubb & Associates 2010, 2011).

The quarter-acre property at 37 Mill Street was purchased in 1862 by Benjamin’s son William. Benjamin died of consumption in January of 1870; at the time of that year’s census, six members of the Mann family spanning three generations were living in William’s house, including his mother, Catherine; his wife, Louisa; his brother, Wilson; and individuals who appear to be his uncle and his grandmother. William and Louisa had three children, all of whom died before 1875. William joined the nearby Presbyterian church in 1873 and served as a sexton beginning in 1886. Upon his death 20 years later he was praised for his conscientiousness and sobriety, and “no colored person ... and but few of [the town’s] white inhabitants have ever won a more general tribute of respect” (*Wantage Recorder* 1896). William’s widow, Louisa, lived in the house alone until her death of typhoid in 1907, and the property was sold out of the family in 1909 (Richard Grubb & Associates 2010).

Denied access to nonmanual, higher-status jobs, African Americans negotiated and displayed social status differently than whites. Class distinctions among free African Americans were defined, because of the limited employment available to black workers, not by the manual or nonmanual nature of their work (as it was within the white community), but by their education and participation in moral-reform activities (Harris 2003). At Seneca Village and Little Africa, two African American communities in Manhattan, expressions of black middle-class status included literacy, home ownership, occupation of single- vs. multifamily dwellings, and work as laborers instead of domestic servants (Wall, Rothschild, and Copeland 2008). The Mann family met these criteria for middle-class status while also

expressing their standing within the white community in which they lived.

One public display of social status and economic ability was the Mann family's expansion of their house from a one-and-a-half story dwelling to a full two stories between 1880 and 1885. It was during this expansion that the Manns placed a ritual concealment (an iron hoe) in the ceiling between the first and second floors (Springate [2014]). There is an expanding literature regarding the ritual practices of African Americans in America that both documents examples and explores the meanings and significance of concealments recovered from archaeological contexts—see Fennell (2010) for an overview. While much of the discussion focuses on examples from Southern slave contexts, examples are increasingly being reported from free African American sites and from sites associated with both free and enslaved African Americans in the northern mid-Atlantic, including New York, New Jersey, and Delaware (Catts and Custer 1990; Greenhouse Consultants 1996; Wall 2000a; Staples 2001; Ruppel et al. 2003; De Cunzo 2004; Springate [2014]). Hoodoo (also known as conjure and rootwork) encompasses several systems of ritual and spiritual practices that incorporate elements of Christianity, Islam, African traditions, European traditions, and Native American traditions, but is not conducted in the context of a structured, hierarchical religion. Rather, the practice of hoodoo typically invokes a nonpersonified spiritual power, rather than individual deities (Fennell 2000: 297). Iron objects with sharp edges, including knives and nails or pins are often found concealed at openings between the inside and the outside of homes (like chimneys, doors, and windows) to protect the home's occupants from harm. Hoe blades are less commonly found in these contexts, but are not unknown (Derr 2007). The hoe itself is not magical; its placement and intention of use are what give it its protective power (Gazin-Schwartz 2001). The placement of the hoe may have reflected a protective impulse toward the family, while serving to protect its African American identity, as William gained a leadership position in the white Presbyterian church (Springate [2014]).

The financial means to expand the house and to purchase higher-status material goods were generated by both William, who worked as a day laborer, and Louisa, who, to supplement

the family income, took in laundry, washing it in the kitchen and doing the mending by the door in the better lit front room (Richard Grubb & Associates 2011). Archaeologists who investigate ethnicity have often looked for specific markers, like the presence of conjure items—including the concealed hoe, quartz crystals, and objects marked with an X—to denote African or African American occupation of a site (see, e.g., Klingelhofer 1987; Ferguson 1999; Fennell 2000, 2007). Despite the racial, legal, and symbolic differences, however, the material culture of both enslaved and free blacks was not overly different from that of poor whites and other ethnic groups (Reitz 1987; Perry and Paynter 1999; Fennell 2000: 304; Bedell et al. 2002). Archaeologists have largely moved beyond the association of certain artifacts with certain groups and are working with race as a complex structural process (Orser 2004, 2007). In this vein, Paul Mullins notes that it is not the specific items themselves that people chose to buy and have in their houses that made them important, but the meanings attributed to them and their use in negotiating racism and asserting identity (Mullins 1996, 2001). Gazin-Schwartz (2001) makes a similar argument about ritual objects: it is not the objects themselves that have meaning, but the intent with which they are employed. Other archaeologists have also addressed the use of material culture to negotiate status, identity, and ideology between dominant and dominated groups, particularly in the context of mass-produced goods (see, e.g., Little 1997; White and Beaudry 2009).

Comparative Sites

By comparing the archaeological assemblage from the Mann family home in Deckertown to the assemblages from other free African American domestic sites, archaeologists can begin to see how the foodways practices of the Manns not only reflected a change in household status, but also how these actions and choices were essential to the process of negotiating identity and status. Much of the archaeological literature regarding free African American domestic sites focuses on the Southern plantation states and on the years preceding the Civil War. There remains comparatively little archaeological research on free black sites,

especially north of the Mason-Dixon Line. In addition to the Mann household, several other free black domestic archaeological sites in the northern mid-Atlantic region, both ante- and postbellum, have been or are currently being excavated (TAB. 1) (FIG. 1). These include: Skunk Hollow, New Jersey (Geismar 1982); Timbuctoo, New Jersey (Barton 2009, 2013; Orr and Barton 2009, 2010; Barton and Markert 2012); the Dennis Farm, Pennsylvania (Roby 2009, 2010a, 2010b); the Betsey Prince site, New York (LoRusso 2000); Sandy Ground, New York (Schuyler 1974, 1977; Askins 1988); Seneca Village, New York (Rothschild and Wall 2004; Wall et al. 2004; Wall, Rothschild, and Copeland 2008); Timbuctoo, New York (Kruczek-Aaron 2010); Weeksville, New York (Salwen and Bridges 1974; Bridges and Salwen 1980); the Thomas Williams site, Delaware (Catts, Hodny, and Custer 1989; De Cunzo 2004); and the William Dickson site, Delaware (Catts and Custer 1990; De Cunzo 2004).

The selection of free African American sites for comparison across this broad temporal range (late 18th–early 20th century) is problematic. Politics, laws, demographic shifts, economic trends, and other factors were not static across this period, and we are not suggesting that these sites are directly comparable. While more work is being done on free African American sites in the Middle Atlantic, there remain few comparable, contemporary sites,

and so we broadened our criteria. By expanding the temporal range of sites studied, we also created a broad base from which to examine foodways that persist, as well as shifts in those practices across time, in a geographic region.

Where excavations and analysis have been completed, several similarities and differences between these sites are evident (Richard Grubb & Associates 2011: 3.10–3.23). Free African American dwellings and communities were generally situated in marginal locations—on the borders of villages, beyond the limits of urban centers, or, as in the case of both Skunk Hollow and New Jersey’s Timbuctoo, in areas inhospitable to agricultural pursuits. In southern New Jersey, these sites were often found near Quaker settlements (Barton 2009). For free blacks, land ownership—even on the margins—was a physical expression of “control, privacy, security, and a stake in the community” (De Cunzo 2004: 244).

Sources of protein on all of these sites were from a mixture of domestic and wild animals. Investigations into the similarities and differences associated with foodways demonstrated that a variety of domestic species were present on all of the sites, although there was a general preference for pork, followed by beef (often from aged animals), and then other species, including sheep/goat and chickens (at the Davis Site, Timbuctoo, New Jersey, the preference

Table 1. Comparative free black sites in the Middle Atlantic region. Map numbers refer to sites listed in Figure 1.

Map no.	Site name and location	Dates of occupation	Sources
1	Timbuctoo, NY	1846–ca. 1871	Kruczek-Aaron 2010
2	Dennis Farm, PA	1860–1921	Roby 2009, 2010a
3	Skunk Hollow, NJ	1806–ca. 1915	Geismar 1982
4	Seneca Village, NY	1820s–1856	Rothschild and Wall 2004; Wall et al. 2008
5	Betsey Price site, NY	ca. 1775–ca. 1840	LoRusso 2000
6	Weeksville, NY	1830s–ca. 1930s	Salwen and Bridges 1974; Bridges and Salwen 1980
7	Sandy Ground, NY	1830s/1840s–present	Schuyler 1974; Askins 1988
8	Davis Site, Timbuctoo, NJ	1920s–1940s	Barton 2009, 2013; Orr and Barton 2009; Barton and Markert 2012
9	William Dickson site, DE	1870s–1887	Catts, Hodny, and Custer 1989; De Cunzo 2004: 270–287
10	Thomas Williams site, DE	1887–1920s	Catts and Custer 1990; De Cunzo 2004: 236–265

was for beef with smaller amounts of pig and sheep [Barton 2013: 106]). The number and type of wild species eaten at these sites also varied, but rabbits and opossum, deer, muskrat, various fish, and turtle were common. The proportion of wild vs. domestic protein sources is not always reported; where available, the data for wild taxa identified within the faunal assemblages of various sites are presented in Table 2. At the William Dickson site in Delaware, wild taxa made up 66% of the faunal assemblage, and cut marks were identified on raccoon, muskrat, and rabbit bones (Catts and Custer 1990: 184). At the Thomas Williams site, also in Delaware, the assemblage associated with the Stump family contained 40% wild taxa, and cut marks were identified on raccoon, muskrat, and rabbit bones (Catts, Hodny, and Custer 1989). These cut marks suggest the use of these taxa for food and/or hides.

Both Skunk Hollow and Sandy Ground are located near what were then prolific oyster beds. Despite this proximity, archaeological evidence indicates that the residents of these settlements ate clams preferentially. One possible explanation is that people opted to sell their local oysters in New York City at a high market price and then purchase the less expensive clams for personal consumption (Geismar 1982: 116–119). Clams and oysters were also prevalent at the Davis site in Timbuctoo, New Jersey (Barton 2013: 105). Evidence of home preservation of food appears on several sites, including canning at Skunk Hollow, the Dennis Farm site, the Davis site, the Thomas Williams site, and the William Dickson site; and potting (preserving meat in fat) at the Betsey Prince site (Geismar 1982: 127–142; LoRusso 2000: 220; De Cunzo 2004: 276, 249–251; Roby 2009, 2010a; Barton 2013). Though interpreted as an expression of self-

sufficiency, canning requires specialized materials, including jars and lids available initially via the commercial marketplace (De Cunzo 2004: 276)—see Barton (2013) for an extensive discussion of canning in the early to mid-20th century. Families at Skunk Hollow, the Davis site, and the Thomas Williams site were also purchasing prepared foodstuffs from the marketplace, including canned goods, condiments, and powdered infant food. Engagement with the marketplace was not necessarily one way. We know that the Stump family at the Williams site sold surplus products from its farmstead (Geismar 1982: 127–142; De Cunzo 2004: 249–251; Barton 2013), and the Perkins and Dennis families at the Dennis Farm produced maple syrup and maple sugar, both for personal consumption and for sale (Roby 2010b).

Food-service items varied across sites, although the assemblages show that these families exhibited a general tendency toward the use of more plain wares for daily use. Five locations—the Dennis Farm site, the Davis site, Sandy Ground, Weeksville, and the William Dickson site—showed evidence of both everyday sets of dishes and fancy or special-occasion sets that included silver-plated cutlery, porcelain, hand-painted and transfer-printed tea wares, and pressed-glass serving vessels. Everyday dishes across the sites tended to be plain or only slightly decorated whitewares and, in at least one case (the William Dickson site), to be old, predating the occupation of the site and suggesting recycling, reuse, or continued use. Tablewares recovered from Skunk Hollow and the Davis site consisted of piecemeal, unmatched sets. Unable or unwilling to replace whole sets of dishes when things broke, people living on the margins often chose to replace individual pieces, leading to mismatched or limited-match sets

Table 2. Wild species present within comparative faunal assemblages.

Site name and location	Wild species present
Thomas Williams site, DE*	Deer, fox, muskrat, opossum, rabbit, raccoon, squirrel
William Dickson site, DE†	Deer, muskrat, opossum, rabbit, skunk, squirrel, turtle
Skunk Hollow, NJ‡	Opossum, turtle
*Catts, Hodney, and Custer (1989). †Catts and Custer (1990). ‡Geismar (1982).	

(Shackel 1993: 40–41; Barton 2013: 104). Liquor bottles were explicitly absent from some deposits, including those associated with the Walmsley family at the William Dickson site, but present in others, including at Skunk Hollow, the Davis site, and at the Thomas Williams site, suggesting that attitudes toward the consumption of alcohol—and perhaps towards a “politics of responsibility” (Higgenbotham 1993)—also varied (Salwen and Bridges 1974; Bridges and Salwen 1980; Geismar 1982: 127–157; Askins 1988: 283–284; De Cunzo 2004: 262, 283; Roby 2009, 2010a; Barton 2013).

At Sandy Ground, the assemblage of an African American oysterman had more stylistic variation in ceramics, a lower percentage of cups, a higher ratio of bowls to plates, and a higher percentage of porcelains than the assemblage of his white neighbor (Askins 1988). This greater investment in higher-status tablewares was interpreted by the author to mean the oysterman placed less significance on the tea ceremony than his white neighbor and used meals, not teas, as the loci for significant expressions of status (Askins 1988; see Roth 1961 and Wall 2000b for discussions about the tea ceremony in America. The prevalence of bowls over plates has been noted on other African American sites and is generally interpreted as a greater preference for stew and soup cuts of meat, rather than the more expensive steak-type cuts that would be served on plates (Otto 1984: 66; Landon 2009). This emphasis may be a reflection of cultural preferences or that cheaper cuts of meat tended to favor preparations served in bowls (Askins 1988). It is within this context of free African American foodways in the northern Middle Atlantic that the food and foodways choices of the Mann family, who lived at 37 Mill Street, Sussex Borough, New Jersey, are examined.

Field Methods

Yard areas of 37 Mill Street had been investigated previously, as part of the larger road project, and found ineligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (Richard Grubb & Associates 2001). The most recent excavations described here focused on deposits within and beneath the standing structure excavated prior to the building’s demolition (FIG. 3). Before excavation began, workers broke up poured-concrete floors in

the basement and northwest and southwest additions of the house, and pulled up floorboards covering the crawlspace to facilitate access for the archaeology crew.

Soils were generally excavated by natural strata, with deep fills excavated in arbitrary 0.5 ft. levels as a control. Descriptions of each context, including Munsell color, texture, sediments, and the presence/absence of cultural material, were recorded on standardized forms. Soils from each stratum were screened through quarter-inch mesh and artifacts were retained. In several cases (deep or heavily disturbed contexts), it was determined that a 50% sample of artifacts was sufficient. A full description of field methods is presented in the site report (Richard Grubb & Associates 2011).

A total of 19 excavation units (EU F–EU X), 4 shovel-test pits (STP A–STP D), and 3 trenches (Trench 1–Trench 3) were excavated. Deposits associated with the Mann-family occupation of 37 Mill Street were identified in the crawlspace that extended under the living room and northern portion of the kitchen area, under the concrete-slab floor in the ca. 1885 northwestern addition of the house, and beneath the garage (FIG. 3).

The Crawlspace

A shallow crawlspace extended underneath the living room and the northern portion of the kitchen area. Excavators removed the floorboards to access this space. Three fill layers (Fill 1, Fill 2, and Fill 3) above subsoil were identified. These were extensively disturbed by rodent activity, with 20th-century materials present even into Fill 3. Much of this later material was shredded plastic used to line the various rodent burrows. The number of 20th-century artifacts, however, is relatively small, and the accumulation in the crawlspace appears to be predominantly associated with the 19th-century occupation of the house. Because of these factors, the artifacts from the crawlspace were treated as a single context.

The Northwestern Addition

Based on architectural, documentary, and archaeological evidence, this addition was built by the Manns ca. 1885. Historical maps indicate that this addition once extended the length of the house, before being replaced in the southwestern quadrant by the ca. 1890–

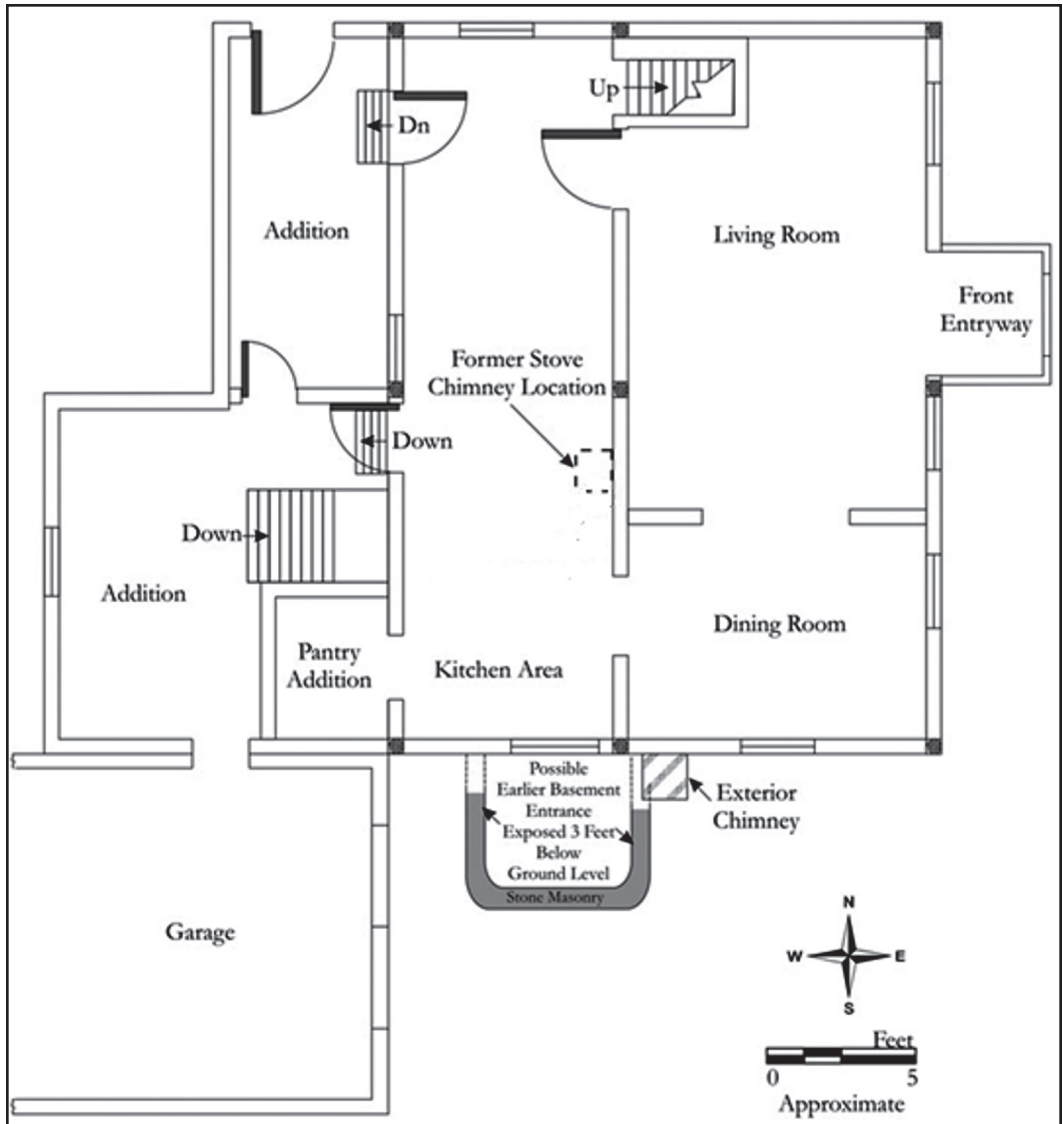


Figure 3. Cooper-Mann House, first-floor plan. (Figure by Richard Grubb & Associates, 2010.)

1904 addition. The poured-concrete slab present throughout this room was broken up and removed prior to excavation. Fills 1 and 2 postdate the construction of the addition; Fill 3 appeared to predate the construction of the addition, as did a buried topsoil layer.

The Garage

The garage at 37 Mill Street was built after 1947. The stratigraphy beneath its dirt floor consisted of several deep fills impacted by a

number of different pipe trenches, overlying a 19th-century secondary-fill deposit. Beneath this fill deposit were a buried topsoil layer and a trench containing a stone-and-brick box drain. The 19th-century fill deposit (excavated in two strata) appears to be a secondary deposit of soils from elsewhere on the property; in 1909, after the property was sold out of the Mann family, owner Charles Wilson graded the property and leveled it (*Sussex Independent* 1909). The conclusion that soils from elsewhere on the property were used to level the southwest

corner is supported by earlier excavations around the exterior of 37 Mill Street, indicating that large portions of the yard areas had been stripped (Richard Grubb & Associates 2001). While the artifacts contained within the secondary 19th-century deposit represent the Mann occupation of the home, it is not possible to further refine the stratigraphy.

The Mann Family Foodways

Our examination of the Mann family foodways included analysis of faunal remains; ceramics used for food service, storage, and preparation; and glass vessels. Because of the nature of the deposits in the crawlspace and under the garage, in many cases we could only talk about Mann family choices in the aggregate; however, some temporal distinctions were possible using artifacts recovered in the northwestern addition.

Numerous faunal studies have discussed the correlation of the quality of meat cuts with socioeconomic status (see, e.g., Schulz and Gust 1983; Henn 1985; Lyman 1987; Reitz 1987; Crabtree 1989; Bowen 1992; Landon 1996, 2009; Reitz, Ruff, and Zierden 2006; Zierden and Reitz 2009.) The most commonly explored indicators of social status include differences in the quality of meat cuts, differences in the range of species consumed, and differences in the proportions of said species. Schulz and Gust (1983) argued that differential access to food sources was indicative of class or status, which they referred to as “economic rank.” Economic rank measured the purchasing power and, therefore, the income level of individuals through faunal remains and dietary refuse. Reitz, Ruff, and Zierden (2006: 105) expanded on this point by stating that “the

relationship between purchasing power and meat consumption is neither direct nor simple ... a household may feel compelled to obtain expensive foods they cannot afford in order to keep up appearances or validate social aspirations.” Culture, taste, religion, and availability also influence food choice, including the types and cuts of meat consumed.

Because of the nature of the site stratigraphy, we can only discuss the faunal remains associated with the Mann family in aggregate and not in terms of change over time. Analysis indicates that the Manns’ diet was heavily dependent on domesticated species, mostly pig and cattle, with very limited dietary inclusions from wild taxa (TAB. 3). The types of bones recovered and their butchering characteristics indicate that neither primary nor secondary butchering of livestock was done onsite; rather, as at the Davis site, the family was purchasing cuts of meat from commercial establishments (Barton 2013: 106). Furthermore, the land surrounding the Mann family home measured one quarter of an acre and was situated on a steep slope above the neighboring creek. The land itself would have been too small to raise livestock. Butchery marks on bones further support this conclusion: one cattle long bone has ridges from a wide-toothed saw blade on one end (likely from initial sectioning of the carcass) and marks from a fine-toothed saw blade on the other, the result of a local butcher preparing cuts for individual purchase (Halliday and Noble 1928; Landon 1996; Bedell et al. 2002: 77) (FIG. 4). This last cut was made in a hurried manner; the bone was not severed all the way through, but, rather, snapped off at the end.

Pig, traditionally the least expensive source of domestically raised meat (Davidson 1982; Henn

Table 3. Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) and Number of Identified Specimens (NISP) for faunal remains from undisturbed contexts associated with the Mann Family.

Common name	Scientific name	MNI	NISP
Bird, medium	Aves	1	3
Cattle	<i>Bos taurus</i>	1	5
Chicken	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	3	1
Mammal, large	Mammalia	N/A	2
Mammal, medium	Mammalia	N/A	30
Pig	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	2 juveniles, 1 sub-adult, 1 adult	36
Total	—	—	77

1985), was the most commonly represented animal in terms of both the raw number of identified specimens and the minimum number of individuals (TAB. 3). This preference for pork is common across free African American sites, although not exclusively (for example, the preference for beef at the Davis site [Barton 2013]). The Mann family tended to choose less expensive cuts of pork, including the feet and the head—cuts that in other species are generally considered butchery discards (Bedell et al. 2002; Landon 2009). The choice of pork, however, even the least expensive cuts, was likely not based solely on cost. Within the social context of enslavement and emancipation, the choice of pork, including commonly discarded cuts of feet and jowl, may have been the result of availability and economic circumstances, evolving over time into a cultural preference (Warner 1998; McKee 1999; Franklin 2001; Zierden and Reitz 2009).

Unlike pork, beef was commonly “used in settings that required significant displays of status aspirations or validations” (Reitz, Ruff,

and Zierden 2006: 119). The Mann family assemblage contained a significant amount of cattle bone (TAB. 3). While beef has been identified as the most expensive meat compared with pork, lamb/goat, and other common meats (Halliday and Noble 1928; Landon 1996), cattle remains from the Mann site represented cuts with a higher ratio of bone to meat, and also bones from older animals, the meat from which was not as tender. The acquisition of lesser valued cuts of beef, which would have been purchased at a higher market price than meat from pigs, may have been an attempt by the Mann family to express a higher social standing to themselves and/or guests. Evidence, including the expansion of their house to a full two stories, indicates that the Mann family had greater financial assets than indicated by their food remains, suggesting individual taste and/or cultural preference were a factor in purchasing decisions.

As at several of the other free African American sites, the Manns supplemented their diet with freshwater fish, possibly from the

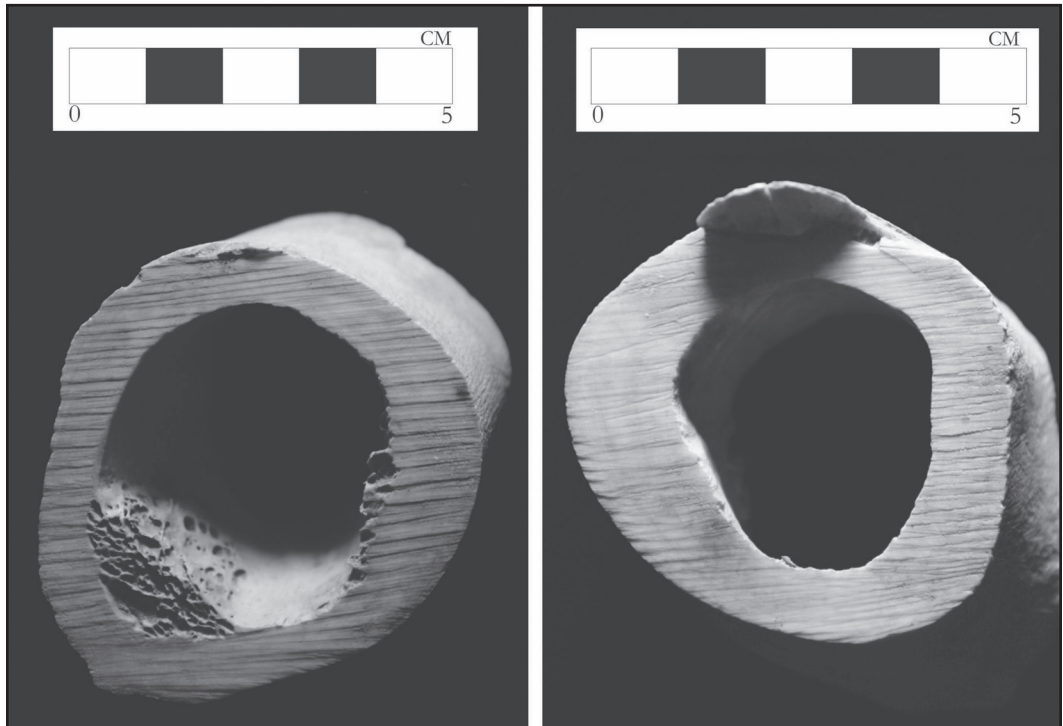


Figure 4. Saw marks on either end of the same cattle bone from the Mann assemblage. Ridge marks from a wide-toothed saw blade (*left*) are from primary butchering; the marks from a fine-toothed saw blade (*right*) are from secondary butchering into consumer cuts. (Photo by Amy Raes, 2009.)

nearby millpond. Although the faunal evidence for fish was sparse, possibly because of poor preservation (Barton 2013: 106), species identified include largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*), sunfish (a variety of species of small freshwater fish), and suckerfish (*Catostomidae* sp.) (FIG. 5) (Richard Grubb & Associates 2011). What is not clear is whether the fish recovered were procured specifically to eat, were a byproduct of fishing undertaken as a leisurely or social pastime, or were perhaps bartered for. Fish were the only wild taxa represented in the faunal assemblage relating to the Mann family; all the other bones recovered were from domestic animals. Similarly, though chicken remains and eggshells were recovered, the quantities do not seem to be adequate to suggest the family was raising its own birds (though again, preservation of delicate remains such as bird bone and eggshell may be poor). The Mann family's reliance on wild species was similar to that of the Davis site, where hunting and fishing were not a significant supplement (Barton 2013: 106), and at a much lower level than that of the families at the William Dickson and Thomas Williams sites in Delaware (Catts, Hodny, and Custer 1989; Catts and Custer 1990). When analyzing the levels of wild species within the faunal assemblage from the Williams Stump site (Catts and Custer 1990), the findings were contrasted against an assemblage from the Thomas Cuff House in Chestertown, Maryland,

which was the residence of a prominent, landowning pre-Civil War black laborer (Catts and Custer 1990: 179). While the authors determined that the combination of lower quality meat cuts with a minimal reliance on wild species was evidence that the domestic meat cuts were used as status indicators by the site occupants (Catts and Custer 1990: 180), it is possible that other factors, like taste, availability of wild species, and hunting ability, played a role.

In his dissertation *Food and the Negotiation of African American Identities in Annapolis, Maryland and the Chesapeake*, Mark Warner (1998) acknowledged that, while backyard poultry raising and fishing for food could be attributed to poverty, they could also be interpreted as the actions of African American families who deliberately opted out of the commercial economy. This act of self-provisioning separated them from a racially loaded marketplace overwhelmingly run by whites. Although the Mann family mitigated its dependency upon a cash-market economy with the inclusion of poultry and some wild taxa, evidence from the archaeological assemblage suggests that they participated in the market economy to acquire their foodstuffs more than other free African American families in the region (Richard Grubb & Associates 2011).

The presence of canning-jar fragments in the early (pre-1885) Mann deposits indicates that, at first, family members were either preserving some of their own foods or perhaps buying and trading from other canners, rather than the commercial marketplace. No canning jars dating from the late 19th century onward are present in deposits associated with the Mann family, suggesting that they were acquiring all their food from the marketplace—perhaps as a display of status or as a means of exercising their greater economic ability (see Barton 2013 for an extensive discussion of canning in the 20th century). Pieces of a 4 gal. stoneware crock from Ellenville, New York (on the Delaware and Hudson Canal, 29 mi. northeast of Deckertown), fragments of English smoking pipes made solely for the Australian market (Springate 2010), and the use of Pennsylvania coal as a source of heat speak to the Manns' participation, not just in the local market economy, but in one that extended internationally.



Figure 5. Fish dentary (lower jaw) of a sucker fish (*Catostomus* sp.) found in the Mann assemblage. (Photo by Amy Raes, 2009.)

While faunal remains provide direct evidence of the types of food consumed, the study of foodways also encompasses the many different choices in how food is procured, distributed, prepared, and served, the results of which constitute culturally distinctive foodways or cuisines (Zierden and Reitz 2009: 333). When interpreting foodways archaeologically, “data classes that clearly had to be purchased ... such as dinnerware or ornamental objects, may be more suitable [than faunal remains] for studies of status” (Reitz, Ruff, and Zierden 2006: 120). A total of 48 ceramic vessels associated with the Mann family were recovered (FIG. 6) (TABS. 4, 5, and 6). Most of these (n=38) were recovered from the unstratified Mann family deposits in the crawlspace and beneath the garage (TAB. 4).

Of the 48 recovered vessels, 22.9% (n=11) were tea wares, including three teapots, four cups, four saucers, and a creamer. In general, these tended to have more decoration and greater cost than other vessels in the assemblage; the only two undecorated examples (a teapot and a cup) were made of white granite (1842–1930) and vitreous china (19th century). Both of these vessels were more expensive than undecorated whitewares (Miller 1991), though at quick glance would have appeared to be similar. The choice to purchase the more expensive items may have been a means for the Mann family to express its financial ability and status to themselves and visitors. It is likely not a coincidence that these more expensive items were ones used in taking tea—a practice



Figure 6. Ceramics associated with the Mann family. Top row (left to right): Bristol-glazed stoneware ginger-beer bottle (post-1835); stoneware 4 gal. pot (two pieces) from Ellenville, NY (ca. 1875). Bottom row (left to right): whiteware chamber pot (post-1820); blue transfer-printed whitewares (two pieces) (ca. 1842–1858); blue shell-edged whiteware plate (ca. 1840–1860); Bristol-glazed stoneware ginger-beer bottle (post-1835). (Photo by Amy Raes, 2009.)

Table 4. Ceramic vessels from mixed or secondary deposits associated with the Mann family (from the garage and crawlspace).

Quantity	Vessel type	Body	Decoration	Dates*
2	Teapot	Whiteware	Blue transfer print	1820–
1	Teapot	White granite	Undecorated	1842–1930
1	Cup	Whiteware	Mulberry transfer print	1820–1870
1	Cup	Vitreous china	Undecorated	19th cent.
1	Saucer	Whiteware	Black transfer print	1820–1864
1	Saucer	White granite	Blue transfer print, Columbia pattern with linear-pattern floral border. Gothic shape	1840–1861
1	Saucer	White granite	Blue sponged	1845–1930
1	Creamer	Refined red stoneware	Philadelphia-style, brownglaze exterior with whiteslip interior	Mid-18th–19th cent.
1	Bowl	Whiteware	Undecorated	1820–
1	Bowl	Whiteware	Annular blue slip bands, London shape	1820–1840
1	Bowl	Whiteware	Annular brown slip banding	1820–
1	Bowl	Whiteware	Blue transfer print, linear pattern	1842–1858
1	Hollow tableware	Whiteware	Annular, gray slip banding with black slip banding on the exterior	1820–
1	Hollow tableware	Whiteware	Hand-painted, chrome green and black floral	1830–
1	Hollow tableware	White granite	Molded rim	1842–1930
1	Hollow tableware	Whiteware	Cut sponge and hand-painted green and pink	1845–1930
1	Large bowl or pitcher	Late creamware to early whiteware	Undecorated	1775–1820
1	Plate	Whiteware	Flow black	1840s–
2	Plate	Whiteware	Unscalped blue shell-edge with minimal molding	ca. 1840s–1860s
1	Plate	Soft paste porcelain	Ivory tinted with luster banding	ca. 1850–1900
1	Plate	White granite	Undecorated	1842–1930
1	Large plate or platter	Whiteware	Undecorated	1820–
1	Tableware	Ironstone	Undecorated	1813–
2	Tableware	Whiteware	Flow blue	Popular 1840s–early 1900s
1	Dish	White granite	Molded	1842–1930
1	Unidentified	Pearlware	Undecorated	1779–1830
1	Pan	Yellow ware	Annular blue	1830–1940

Table 4. Ceramic vessels from mixed or secondary deposits associated with the Mann family (from the garage and crawlspace).*(continued)*

Quantity	Vessel type	Body	Decoration	Dates*
1	4 gal. crock	Gray stoneware	Salt-glazed exterior with stamped, cobalt-filled mark: ELLENNVI.../4 Albany-type slip interior. Rim diameter 12 in.	19th cent. The Ellenville, NY pottery was present at least in 1875, though the full history is unknown
1	Hollow storage vessel	Gray and tan stoneware	Albany-type slip interior	19th cent.
1	Hollow storage vessel	Gray stoneware	Salt-glaze exterior with Albany-type slip interior	19th–20th cent.
1	Hollow storage vessel	Brown stoneware	Salt-glaze exterior with Albany-type slip interior	19th cent.
1	Ink or shoe-polish bottle	Brown stoneware	Salt-glaze exterior with Albany-type slip interior	19th cent.
1	Bottle, ginger beer	Stoneware	Bristol glaze	1835–
1	Chamber pot	Whiteware	Undecorated	1820–
1	Flowerpot	Coarse red earthenware	Undecorated	—

*Sources used to establish these date ranges include Samford (1997), Furniss, Wagner, and Wagner (1999), Miller (2000), Magid and Means (2003), and Hunter and Miller (2009).

that was intimately tied up with status display and negotiation (Roth 1961; Wall 2000b).

An analysis of the stratified deposits recovered from the northwestern addition indicates that the Mann family was partaking of tea early on in its occupation, but that these vessels were undecorated or minimally decorated whitewares (TAB. 5). By the late 19th century, and certainly by the time of the property's expansion ca. 1880–1885, the Mann family appears to have been using more expensive ceramics in general, including white granite, transfer-printed, and flow-blue plates, platters, and tea wares (TAB. 6). Tea wares were most often purchased by women, reflecting Louisa Mann's active participation in expressing the Mann family's social and economic status. While the presence of tea wares indicates the Manns' acceptance of the white cultural mandate to own tea wares, their use may have been both to express social status to the community directly, via tea service conducted in the presence of visitors, and also to assert that status within the family, during private consumption (Little 1997; Gray 2013).

Of the vessel types that could be identified, the Mann family assemblage included four bowls and six plates. Identifiable plates in the assemblage represent higher-status display (transfer printing, flow decoration, porcelain body) than the bowls that were generally decorated with lower-status slip banding (Miller 1991). The prevalence of bowls in black assemblages has been interpreted as evidence of a greater reliance on soups and stews, either because of cultural preference or because cheaper cuts of meat tended to favor preparation in these dishes (see, e.g., Askins 1988). It is possible that the Manns expressed their status, both within the family unit and/or to others, by serving individual portions of beef cuts on more highly decorated plates on special occasions. As at the other free African American sites described here, everyday dishes across the site tended to be plain or only lightly decorated, and often had manufacturing dates and popularity ranges predating the deposits in which they were found. Despite the variability in ceramics, the Manns appear to have made some attempt to have matching vessels. Ceramics recovered from the site, that may

Table 5. Ceramic vessels from pre-1885 contexts in the northwestern addition.

Quantity	Vessel type	Body	Decoration	Dates*
1	Cup	Whiteware	Undecorated	1820–
1	Saucer	Whiteware	Hand-painted red and blue bands	Mid-19th century

*Sources used to establish these date ranges include Samford (1997), Furniss, Wagner, and Wagner (1999), Miller (2000), Magid and Means (2003), and Hunter and Miller (2009).

Table 6. Ceramic vessels from post-1885 contexts in the northwestern addition.

Quantity	Vessel type	Body	Decoration	Dates*
1	Cup	White granite	Molded rim	1842–1930
1	Hollow tableware	Late creamware to early whiteware	Undecorated	1775–1820
1	Plate	Whiteware	Undecorated	1820 on
1	Plate	Whiteware	Flow blue	Popular 1840s–early 1900s
1	Platter	White granite	Blue transfer print, castle or cathedral	1842–1867
1	Tableware	Whiteware	Blue transfer print, linear design. Same border design as the Columbia pattern saucer	Linear popular 1842–1858, Columbia pattern 1840–1861
1	Dish	White granite	Octagonal rim with molded ivy and leaf pattern	1842–1930
1	Hollow storage or food preparation vessel	Red earthenware	Reddish lead glaze interior	19th century

*Sources used to establish these date ranges include Samford (1997), Furniss, Wagner, and Wagner (1999), Miller (2000), Magid and Means (2003), and Hunter and Miller (2009).

have been similar enough visually to represent sets, included two shell-edged plates, two vessels with the transfer-printed Columbia design, and undecorated or molded white granite vessels.

Of all of the artifacts recovered from Mann family deposits, pieces of only a single liquor bottle and a single ginger-beer bottle were recovered from the secondary fill deposit in the garage. Upon his death, William was praised for his sobriety (*Wantage Recorder* 1896), and the archaeological evidence indicates that members of the household generally abstained from alcohol. Some free black families were also temperate, including the Walmsleys of Delaware (De Cunzo 2004); others were not, including the Stump family, those represented by the Davis site assemblage, and residents of Skunk Hollow (Geismar 1982; De Cunzo 2004; Barton 2013).

Summary and Conclusion

Analyzed in conjunction with the documentary, archaeological, and architectural evidence, as well as information from other free black sites in the region, a picture emerges of the Manns as a middle-class black family negotiating both their position within their majority white community and their own black identity. These negotiations included their choices in how they procured their food, what they ate, and how it was served. Although most of the evidence from the site comes from secondary deposits and, therefore, can only be interpreted in the aggregate, artifacts recovered from undisturbed areas suggest that the Manns' foodways changed over time. Early in their occupancy of the house, for example, the family ate canned preserves and

dined and took tea using relatively plain ceramic wares. In the early 1880s—just as William Mann became a sexton in the local, predominantly white church, and the family expanded its house to a full two stories—canning jars disappeared from the assemblage, the family increased its reliance on food purchased in the marketplace, and they chose more expensive and elaborate ceramic wares. These shifts in the late 19th century would have been understood both by the African American and white communities as expressions of increased status. Not all the changes made by the Mann family were intended to be seen outside the family. Shifts to more expensive cuts of meat or more costly ceramics, that looked the same as less expensive varieties (whiteware vs. white granite, for example), would not necessarily have been intended to impress or express status to others. Rather, like placing the iron hoe in the chimney, these actions served to reinforce identity and meaning within the family itself.

Comparisons with other free black sites indicate that the ways in which blacks in the northern Middle Atlantic region negotiated their identity using foodways varied. For example, while self-provisioning by procurement of wild species for food is common across sites, the extent of this reliance varies widely, from little consumption of wild species by the Mann family, to a full two-thirds of the faunal assemblage in the case of the inhabitants of the William Dickson site in Delaware. Other examples included variations in the presence or absence of canning jars, wine and liquor bottles, engagement with the commercial marketplace as both consumers and producers, ratios of bowls to plates, and the level of decoration in ceramic tea wares and tablewares. Consistencies across sites are also present; in particular, the preference for pork at these free black sites is notable. The choices that the Mann family made to eat meals made from some of the cheapest cuts of pork, at a time when they apparently had access to greater financial resources, may reflect the expression of a cultural preference among African Americans for particular pork dishes, as identified at many other sites. The choices that the Mann family made in the context of their foodways, discussed here, and in other aspects

of their lives (Richard Grubb & Associates 2011; Springate [2014]) indicate that the family was actively negotiating its social status and identity on several fronts.

These negotiations of identity and social status were enacted through shifting patterns of consumption that variously engaged with and opted out of a commerce system dominated by whites—the very tension-fraught negotiations described by W. E. B. Du Bois as a response to a double consciousness or “two-ness” experienced by blacks in America. As more free African American sites are excavated in the Middle Atlantic and the Northeast, a more complete and nuanced view of how people lived and negotiated their identities will be revealed.

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to Michael Tomkins and Phil Hayden for their historical research, Rob Lore for assistance with the faunal analysis, the Richard Grubb & Associates field crew; and the many researchers who shared comparative data from their sites. Thank you especially to Karen Metheny for organizing the foodways session at CNEHA and this resulting collection of papers, and for her careful reading of drafts of this paper and suggestions for improvement. The peer reviewers of this article provided thoughtful and useful feedback that improved the final product. This research was conducted under contract with the New Jersey Department of Transportation; it has been very supportive in making the results of the investigation public. All errors and omissions are our own.

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