

Abstract

This article is a brief analysis of an early Swiss-German settler's cabin, thought to be the earliest in Lancaster County. It will be covering the believed purpose of occupation, material culture and early colonial life. The PowerPoint will detail the excavation process of the 2016 MU Archaeological field school. In it, we will explore the history, importance of the site, and the findings and results.

Archaeology at the Hans Graff Site

The development of Lancaster County is important to American history. Lancaster County is often considered a "culture hearth," a highly influential region where initial development had profound cultural, political, and economic implications for many other areas over time. Throughout the 18th and 19th century, an overflow of population in the region resulted in migration to areas such as South Carolina, Ohio, West Virginia, Tennessee, and the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Knowing this key information about Lancaster County, Dr. Trussell decided to try to locate an early Lancaster County site to conduct an archaeological excavation. The Lancaster Colonial Settlement Project has been in the works for twelve years with the goal of finding a type of archaeological site that has never been found and excavated in Lancaster County before – an original pioneer cabin dating to the early 1700's.

Findings

In the Archaeological field school for the fall of 2015, an excavation took place at the Hans Graff Site in Lancaster County. The property that the excavation took place on was first occupied by Hans Graff, a German Mennonite settler. He patented the property in 1714, and the original tract of land was a massive, 500-acre area. Within those parameters, Dr. Trussell wanted to begin our testing project at a 19th century farm. He chose this specific area to do testing because he believed there was a high probability of finding clues to where the original pioneer settler's cabin may be located. Dr. Trussell instructed his students to dig test units throughout the yard. Test units are square pits excavated in a strategic pattern throughout the archaeological site. They are used to determine if the area yields any significant artifacts or features for the project in certain areas of interest. After digging for about two weeks, the corner of a stone foundation was unearthed. This was the moment we were all hoping for.

After revealing the corner of the foundation, excavation began to be centralized around that particular area of the site; however, there were still a few testing units in progress around the property as well. Thousands of artifacts were unearthed through this excavation, many of which were significant to help date the time of occupation of this site. For example, one of the main artifacts we excavate as archaeologists are ceramics. Ceramics can have a wide or narrow date range. A narrower date range of when the ceramic was manufactured can give us vital information about when a site was occupied. Philadelphia Slipware is a type of redware ceramic that dates from 1740-1820. If that type of ceramic were found in a specific soil layer, along with other mid-18th century-early 19th century artifacts, one could make an inference that the date of occupation was somewhere within that time frame or later.

By the second year of excavation in the field school for the fall of 2016, a large block excavation was in the works. Block excavation is when archaeologists excavate a large area to

see a bigger, more open view of the area in order to help piece together information that helps us learn even more about the site. Dr. Trussell wanted to do a full block excavation to expose the foundation in its entirety, and this revealed the size of the cabin to us— 18 feet by 20 feet. The size of the cabin (which was typical for the time period) as well as the artifacts found within the inner part of the walls indicated that the structure was built very early. The foundation itself was a simple stone foundation made up of un-mortared field stones. The cabin itself would have been built with logs that were laid on top of the foundation. Finding an original pioneer settler's cabin such as this was extremely important because it was the first of its kind ever discovered and unearthed in Lancaster County. The information brought to light through this excavation was all new information for archaeologists, architects and historians alike.

During the excavation on the inside of the cabin walls, the feature of a hearth began to take form. Originally, it was thought to be the fireplace hearth in the center of the cabin. Central fireplaces are common in Germanic style buildings rather than the English-style end fireplaces. Further excavation revealed that the hearth did not match up with the orientation of the building, but it was also too close to the wall to permit typical hearth use. It was concluded that the fire hearth was probably built sometime after the foundation, and it was possibly an outdoor cooking hearth not original to the building.

For nearly 300 years, the area around the cabin was part of a working farm, so it is expected that a great deal of ground-disturbing activity would happen during that time. Through our laboratory analysis after excavation, many 18th, 19th and 20th century artifacts were found in all areas of the site. Although there was a big mix of artifacts, there were still many dating back to the 18th century found in and around the foundation, which indicates the site had to be occupied during that time period. Some specific examples of significant ceramics found were Nottingham stoneware, Fulham stoneware, English White Salt-Glazed stoneware, and Staffordshire slipware. These would be very unusual to find in any other site besides one occupied in the 18th century because they all date to a specific date range from primarily the 1700-1725 period. Pipe stem fragments were also a huge find during the excavation. The bore diameter of a pipe stem can give a specific date range depending on the size. There were several pipe stems found that dated to the 1710-1740 period.

Among the many significant artifacts found, there was one blue glass, Native American trade bead found dating to the 1700-1735 period. This one bead has an enormous amount of significance to the site because it can prove that this cabin was indeed Hans Graff's original pioneer settler's cabin. Dr. Trussell was able to find historical documents in Philadelphia's Pennsylvania Historical Society that show that in 1718 a tax collector came to this area for the first time to conduct a survey to see who owned the lands. When the surveyor came to Hans Graff's property, he stated that Graff did indeed live there, but neighbors testified he was not there at the moment because he was trading with Indians at Conewago. Conewago is also known as Conoy Town, a Nanticoke Indian fur trading village dating from 1700-1735. In the 1970's, archaeologist Barry Kent conducted an excavation of Conoy Town. Kent found many trade beads in his excavation that are the exact type found at the Hans Graff Site. The matching of trade beads was significant, but having the match of artifacts combined with actual documentation of trading taking place during that time is key in bringing this information all together.

Excavation at the Hans Graff Site has now come to a close. The units were all backfilled and grass was replanted in their spots. After excavation, there is a lot of laboratory analysis to do to further our research of the site. In the lab, artifacts are cleaned, identified and catalogued in our database system so they can be used for future research. Currently, the lab supervisors, Jessica Conway and Curtis Hosey are working to lay out the significant artifacts from each unit. Some units may be more useful than others in determining dates of occupation depending on if the soil was disturbed or not. If a unit has undisturbed soil, the artifacts can give us more of a concrete date range. If a unit shows significant potential to yield more information to us, we can then proceed with our research and perform microbotanical and palynological analysis with the soil samples taken from certain units. A microbotanical analysis will reveal what species of plants were being cooked in a fire by studying the charred remains (usually found speckled throughout the soil while excavating) under a scanning electron microscope. This will tell us what foods they were eating during that time as well as the types of seeds that may have been tossed into the fire or even the types of trees they were burning for wood. Palynological analysis can tell us what types of vegetables were being grown. These types of analysis can aid us in seeing what types of plant species the pioneers might have brought along with them when they came to this new world.

Conclusion

The Hans Graff Site has proved to be very promising in helping to pave the way to understand what the pioneer period was like in regards to their daily life and culture. Dr. Trussell and every student that worked on this project were part of a huge discovery that sheds light on future excavations on colonial sites in Lancaster County for years to come. As archaeologists, our job is not simply to dig in the dirt. Our job is to examine sites through material culture and tell a story of the past that was once lost. The work done at the Hans Graff Site yielded an incredible amount of crucial information to the Lancaster Colonial Settlement Project. We are now one step closer to uncovering the mysteries of Lancaster County's past.