

Sarah Janesko
Jane C. Waldbaum Field School Scholarship Report
August 15, 2014

This summer I had the privilege to work at two historical sites in Maryland through the University of Maryland's field school, [Archaeology in Annapolis](#) (AiA). Our six-week course was divided between two sites; a new site within the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC) in Edgewater, MD for the first three weeks, and an ongoing site at the Wye House near Easton, MD for the duration of the field school. Our team of eight students was led by three graduate students and Professor Mark Leone from the University of Maryland College Park (UMD). In addition to learning proper field methodology and excavation techniques, we held weekly discussions and field trips which touched on the theories and critiques surrounding plantation, landscape and public archaeology and the roles that race, class and gender play in archaeological research.

Both sites are located near the Chesapeake Bay (SERC on the Rhode River on the west side of the bay and Wye House across the Bay on the east side) and have been ecological and cultural landscapes since Native Americans first inhabited this region about 13,000 years ago. Thus far, archaeological research on the SERC campus has uncovered several sites from the Woodland period (about 3,200 to 400 years ago) as well as several, more recent standing structures from the 17th through the 20th century. These more recent buildings represent the landscape of the European settlers and the subsequent generations of plantation and land owners. While former plantation houses like the Sellman House at SERC and the Wye House near Easton have been preserved, the tenant houses and slave quarters have largely been abandoned, torn down or re-landscaped. This is where the archaeological record, along with historical documents and sometimes oral histories, can inform us about these abandoned structures, and, more importantly, about the people who inhabited them. The AiA field school has focused on the archaeological record of underrepresented people who lived and worked in



Author, at right,
recording oyster shell
feature at SERC.

this region but who were largely left out of the written record due to the institution of slavery and societal inequalities.

At SERC, we excavated around the remnants of a late 19th century and early 20th century building believed to be a tenant house on the Sellman property post-dating the Civil War. The Sellman house, or the Homestead House, was built in 1735 when William Sellman bought the land and built his own plantation. The Homestead House is made of brick from three different times of construction and renovation, and is currently being used as the archaeology lab for SERC. The tenant house, located down an unpaved road east of the Homestead, was most likely



Excavation at SERC near brick pier foundation.

constructed in the early 1890s using brick piers which held the wooden frame. We were told by a local resident that it was used until the 1970s, and it has since collapsed and overgrown with thick brush and a young canopy of trees. Since this site hadn't been excavated previously by SERC or AiA, I learned how to begin a new excavation – first, surveying the landscape and identifying structures on the surface then, digging Shovel Test Pits to locate the area of cultural activity before placing units for

excavation. Since our research questions were focused on who used this building and for what purpose, our units were strategically laid out in three places: one unit where we believed the front yard had been, another straddling the interior and exterior of the structure and the third behind the building.

The artifacts found in our units confirmed the time period we believed the house was inhabited and included bricks, nails, fence staples, oyster shells, vinyl record pieces, milk glass, a shoe sole, an ironstone ceramic plate, and an Indian Head penny dated 1893. These artifacts along with the location of the building indicate this was likely a residential home where the tenants of the farm lived, cooked and worked. Further research into the collected artifacts and future excavations could provide more information about the relationship between the Sellmans and their laborers, how the laborers used natural resources, what material goods they possessed and the kind of food they consumed. These cultural resources are part of the environmental landscape

of the SERC campus and the heritage of the Sellmans as well as the descendants the laborers who lived and worked there.

Digging at the Wye House in the last three weeks of the field school was an amazing opportunity to experience written history alongside the excavation process. Frederick Douglass was enslaved by Aaron Anthony, an overseer at the Wye House, and lived on the plantation for a short time during his childhood. He wrote about his experience in his autobiography “My Bondage and My Freedom,” which provided a rare glimpse of what life was like for enslaved individuals on the plantation. It was rewarding to be part of a public archaeology program that formed its research questions in collaboration with members of the local community whose ancestors were enslaved at the Wye House. Not only could our archaeological research be placed in Douglass’ historical narrative, but the information gathered over the years of AiA excavation at Wye House was relevant and meaningful to the living descendants and local community members.

The Wye House and surrounding land have been occupied by the Lloyd family since the 1650s and is still owned and inhabited by the Lloyd family descendants. It is situated in Talbot County near the Wye River and is remote (about an hour and a half drive from the UMD campus.)

Douglass’ account of the area and of the plantation revealed a long stretch of land on the east side of the property that he identified as slaves quarters called the Long Green. Previous excavations and non-invasive surveys using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping and Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) revealed several buildings along the Long Green that matched Douglass’ description with accuracy.

The three units we opened during this field session were located along the Long Green near a two-story brick quarter excavated in the 2011, 2012 and 2013 field seasons. My team’s Unit 89 was located north of the Quarter and downhill from the gravel road to the west of the unit. Our unit was also close to a marshy area on the east that was once filled with water from the creek and used for transport to and from the plantation. Before the hydrostatic pressure began filling our unit with water, stopping our excavation, we had uncovered brick, mortar, oyster shell, late 19th and 20th century ceramic, glass from bottles and lighting, roofing slate, iron pipes, charred wood and an oil lantern among other artifacts. Because of the proximity to the Quarter, we

hypothesized that our unit represented what was left behind when the Quarter collapsed in the early-1900s. This may be the last year at the Wye House and I'm glad for the opportunity to have assisted in the long-term excavation and research on this site.

The AiA field school strengthened my interest in historical archaeology and helped prepare me



for graduate school this fall at UMD. I would like to thank the Archaeological Institute of America and the Jane C. Waldbaum Field School Scholarship committee for aiding me with this wonderful learning opportunity. I hope to be part of the growing field of historical archaeology and public programs that support collaboration and education about heritage and cultural resources.

Author digging in a unit at Wye House.