

Tiffany Momon

2015 Field School Report – Clover Bottom Plantation, Nashville, Tennessee

From the start of field school, it was clear that my role in this excavation was bigger than myself. For six weeks, I worked as a field technician at Clover Bottom Plantation, currently the home of the Tennessee Historical Commission. For a month prior to field school, I worked as a genealogy research assistant for the project. This provided me with an interesting perspective when the actual excavation process began. Due to my research, I found myself connected to the enslaved and later freed individuals who had called Clover Bottom home. This informed my work here because I felt a sense of responsibility to make sure that their story was uncovered in a way that honored and respected their sacrifices.

Clover Bottom Plantation was home to John and Mary Ann Hoggatt. During their ownership of the site, they enslaved around sixty individuals. One of these individuals was John McCline, who had been enslaved at Clover Bottom as a child. He later wrote a memoir titled *Slavery in the Clover Bottoms* that detailed his life and also the lives of the other African Americans enslaved at Clover Bottom. This book provided details that would assist in the excavation. The goal of the excavation was to find enslaved dwellings that were no longer standing on the landscape. Within the book, John McCline described those dwellings as well as their locations which aided us in the excavation.

One part of my responsibility at the site was to work with the descendant community. Near the start of the field school, descendants of the African American Hoggatt's who had been enslaved at Clover Bottom came to the site for a tour. This tour, led by Steve Rogers, an

employee of the Tennessee Historical Commission took us around the Clover Bottom property as Steve discussed its history. On this day, I also had the opportunity to lead a presentation on the information I had uncovered about the African Americans who had lived at the site for the Hoggatt family. My presentation included genealogical information and traced the African Americans who had lived on Clover Bottom through emancipation and into their lives as freedmen and women in Nashville. This connection to the descendant community was very important as we excavated the site. I felt a responsibility to them to make sure that we included them as much as possible in the excavation.

Once the actual field work began it became apparent to me how much work an archaeological excavation was. We began with shovel test excavations. My first shovel test revealed a large concentration of coal and charcoal. This shovel test area was more than likely an area where someone discarded the contents of their fireplace. Subsequent shovel tests revealed artifacts such as a metal cup handle, a brown Vicks Va-tro-nol bottle, window glass, pieces of ceramic, a significant portion of chain link, and surprisingly a wooden fence post. Near the carriage house, my partner and I discovered not only the chain link, but also a wooden fence post that was still in tact in the ground. This fence post was in line with the carriage house wall leading us to speculate that it was possibly a post that had been used to chain horses in place while attaching or unattaching their connection to the actual carriage.



*Figure One: Shovel test containing wooden post.*

After shovel tests had been completed, we moved on the test excavations. My first test excavation was in front of one of the slave dwellings that still stood on the property. While excavating in front of the slave dwelling, I also had a chance to explore the dwelling itself. Excavating in front of the slave dwelling took on a new meaning for me. It was more than just work. It had become a calling. Excavating here revealed my first feature in the stratigraphy as it became apparent that rain water washing against the edge of the house had washed artifacts and dirt near the foundation and created a feature.

I also excavated near Slave Dwelling A, which was one of the foundations of a slave dwelling that was no longer standing on the landscape that had been recovered archaeologically. It was determined that what I was excavating was chimney fall and destruction fill from Slave Dwelling A. Within the two pits I excavated were an abundance of artifacts. It was here that I

found pieces of a mineral water bottle from Congress Springs in Saratoga Springs, New York. I also found pieces of a mason jar with an 1858 patent date. Also found were dolls eyes, ceramics, scissors, the heel of a shoe, pipe fittings, milk glass, a piece of a light bulb, large amounts of window glass, brown glass, load-bearing ceramic building tile, a flag pole ornament, countless nails, fish hooks, Pitcairn's 1891 ceramics, among other items. What all of these items reveal is the evidence of life at this site beyond enslavement.



*Figure Two: Excavating the chimney fall/destruction fill*

On rainy days, we took the field work indoors to the archaeology lab on the campus of Middle Tennessee State University to wash and sort artifacts. It was on these days that we got to explore what the other teams of students were recovering from their pits. We also got to see how far we had come as field techs. Our early excavations contained large amounts of charcoal, coal, and brick all items that would be deaccessioned. As we became more capable and learned field techs, large amounts of those items no longer made it into the lab.



*Figure Three: Washing and sorting artifacts in the lab.*

Due to my documentary research on the site I was often called upon to answer questions about the site. When we had visitors to the site, I often spoke with them and gave them a background history of the site. We had visitors that included the State of Tennessee archaeologists, archaeologists from the Tennessee Department of Transportation, Anthropology faculty members from MTSU, as well as the public because Clover Bottom is a site open to the public. Discussing the issues surrounding enslavement and race can be difficult when speaking with the public. Luckily, I was prepared for the challenge, and I often looked forward to discussing these issues. Educating the public is a part of public archaeology, and I felt adequately prepared to do so.

One of my favorite finds during the excavation was when I found fish hooks. What these fish hooks exemplified was that these people were establishing new foodways for their subsistence. This makes sense because Clover Bottom is in such close proximity to the Stones River. In addition to wondering how old the fish hooks were, I also wondered about fishing

during the time of enslavement. When would the enslaved have fished? Where would they have fished? What path did they walk to get to the Stones River or the nearby spring?

As someone immensely interested in what archaeology can tell us about those who have been silenced by history I am greatly appreciative of the funding I was provided to participate in a project such as this. The excavation at Clover Bottom and the subsequent excavations there will shed light on the enslaved African Americans who called Clover Bottom home. They will finally have a chance to share their lives through the material culture that they left behind.