

Evolution of a Community-Based Archaeology Program

2002

Invitation from city

Selection of suitable sites with public access

Fieldwork with ongoing public visitation

Project website with regular updates and guestbook for feedback

Open house at "Hooray for Hopewell" celebration

Seek outside funding opportunities

Solicit participation from academic colleagues, students

2003

Archaeology Committee formed: local government, citizens, W & M, NPS, Historic Hopewell Foundation

Submit technical report of 2002 research

Town Hall Meeting for citizen involvement

Develop long-term plan for project

Project expands; public dig at local historic site

Web site expanded

Archaeology Month: public talk and dig

2004...

Annual technical report

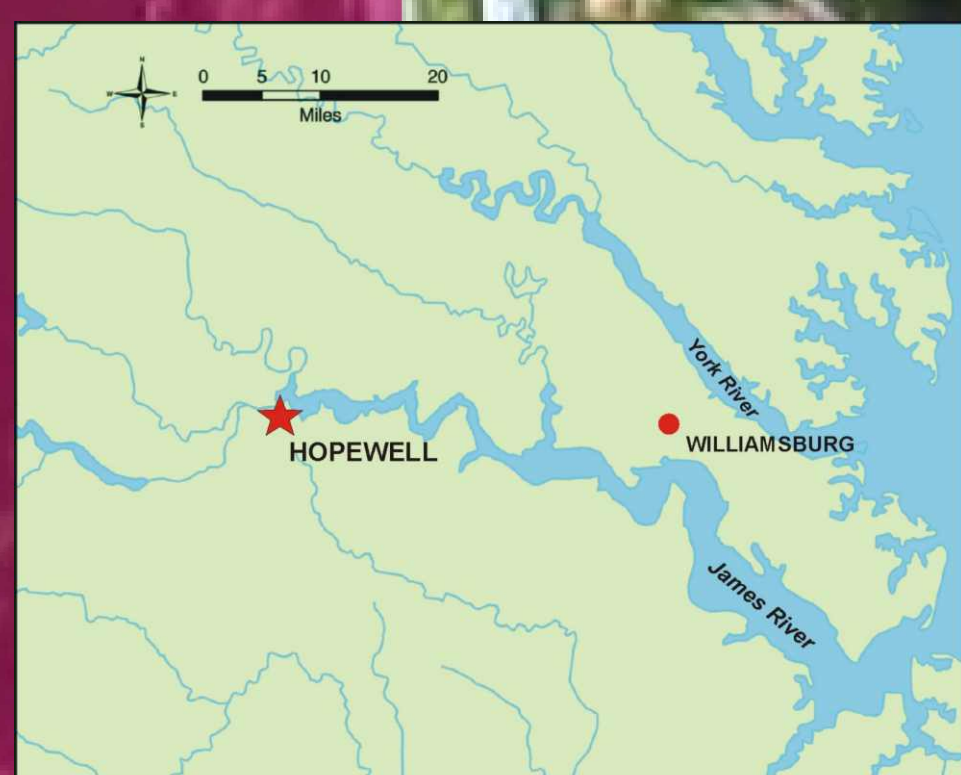
Field school

Permanent exhibits

Prepare for participation in Virginia's 2007 celebrations

Introduction

The City of Hopewell, Virginia boasts an extraordinary history, spanning from early prehistoric settlement through DuPont's massive guncotton manufacturing complex during World War I. It is probably best known for General Grant's City Point headquarters during the decisive siege of Petersburg. In July 2002, the City of Hopewell took the unusual step of enlisting archaeologists from the College of William and Mary to help the city better document, interpret, and promote its rich and unique human past and plan for future development. Close collaboration between city officials, local citizen groups, such as the Historic Hopewell Foundation, the National Park Service, and the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research has resulted in a continually evolving research design that addresses economic, public, and academic interests in Hopewell's understudied archaeological, cultural, and historical heritage. Such openness and cooperation is uncommon in the compliance-oriented world of cultural resource management, where, unfortunately, local citizens are often unaware of and uninvolved in what is happening in their own backyards.



Unlike picturesque Williamsburg 40 miles to the east, Hopewell's skyline of chemical factories scarcely brings to mind "historic tourist destination." Nevertheless, the citizens of this industrial town, like most communities, take pride in their heritage.

Events of 2002

During the late summer and fall of 2002, archaeologists conducted investigations in historic City Point at the request of the City of Hopewell. Local residents there were encouraged to stop by and speak with the archaeologists as the excavations progressed. To reach a wider audience, an interactive web site was created and maintained by William and Mary to provide visitors with explanations of our methods, goals, and expectations, regular reports and photographs of the latest findings, and a brief history of the City Point community. Excavations on three city-owned lots revealed Hopewell's amazing archaeological potential, recovering traces of human occupation from the Late Archaic period (3000-1000 BC) through the entire span of the historic era. A substantial find of 2002 was an underground storage pit, probably within a sutler's store, used during the Union Army's occupation of City Point. Analysis of its structure and contents, which featured a remarkably well-preserved faunal assemblage and a large assortment of storage and serving vessels, has provided a unique perspective on daily army life and diet at this key Civil War installation.

Residents from across the street, across town, and across the region were given the opportunity to stop by and see the excavated pit, view some of its cleaned and mended contents, and speak with William and Mary archaeologists during the "Hooray for Hopewell" city celebration. Many that visited the site were genuinely surprised by what lay hidden just below the surface and left with a newfound appreciation of and respect for their community's heritage and cultural resources.



Civil War-era trash pit excavated in 2002 (left); archaeological "Open House" (right).



W & M Anthropology Department's oral history project initiates local contacts at "History Road Show."

Events of 2003

Before the start of the 2003 field season, William and Mary archaeologists sought to find out what Hopewell's citizens expected from the city-sponsored public archaeology program. In June, the public was invited to share their experiences of Hopewell's past at the "History Road Show." History-related exhibits and displays by individuals, the Historic Hopewell Foundation, the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research, the William and Mary Anthropology Department, and Petersburg National Battlefield generated lively informal conversations. These individual collections and the memories of local participants brought a fresh perspective to our understanding of Hopewell's history.

Following the "show and tell" segment, citizens, researchers, and city officials took turns presenting their hopes, interests, and priorities, ranging from pre-colonial times through the industrial era. Input from this forum helped fine-tune a long-term plan for the evaluation and management of archaeological resources, which was presented to the City in the early summer. This long-term plan takes into account the recent work by William and Mary, archival sources, and sparse records of archaeology carried out by others. But most importantly, this plan considers local interests as expressed by city officials, the Historic Hopewell Foundation, and residents, and tries to anticipate interests of the National Park Service and the William and Mary Anthropology Department's developing oral history project. A new interactive web site was created to provide visitors with a copy of this long-term plan, more elaborate and detailed explanations of the methods, goals, and expectations of the 2003 Season, regular reports and photographs of the latest findings, and information about scheduled public talks and volunteer excavation opportunities.

The first part of the 2003 season focused on work at Weston Manor, one of the city's historic showpieces. While architectural historians have celebrated the craftsmanship and design of this late 18th-century Georgian mansion, we knew little about the surrounding grounds and plantation. This year's immediate goal was to explore the layout of the yard and locate the remains of outbuildings so we could learn about life at Weston, both for the owners and for the African-American slaves who labored on the property. Preliminary archaeological testing and historical research has resulted in the identification of portions of one mid- to late nineteenth-century outbuilding and possible storage pit west of the main house and a concentrated scatter of brick and mortar rubble associated with a possible contemporary kitchen east of the main house.



Early photographs of Weston Manor (this one from the 1870s) and other archival sources helped locate the foundations of outbuildings.



The public visibility of Weston made an ideal venue for the city's participation in Virginia's "Archaeology Month" celebration. Events included a public lecture on the results of recent archaeology in Hopewell and an exhibit dig at the Weston site. Over three days, volunteers helped William and Mary archaeologists sift soils, sort artifacts, and observe the methodical excavation of several small test units which uncovered two outbuilding corners and suggestions of a subsurface storage pit. Most of the volunteers were either senior citizens or home-schooled children. Regardless of age, all of the volunteers seemed to enjoy being active participants in the recovery of their community's heritage, frequently asking questions about the age of the artifacts, how they got there, and what they can tell us about who once lived there.

The other emphasis of the 2003 season was archaeological survey of areas of Hopewell believed to contain significant 17th-century sites based on archival research and topography. These included a pre-1622 colonial settlement called Bermuda City, contemporary late Native American sites, and later colonial sites like Broadway and City Church. Limited survey and testing has provided some tantalizing evidence of these early historic-era occupations, characterized by locally made "Chesapeake" tobacco pipes. Archaeological verification of these locations as areas of 17th-century occupation is critical in establishing Hopewell's place among the earliest English settlements in the James River basin and would likely provide additional insights into our understanding of regional 17th-century settlement and culture.



A chart of the James River shows the pre-1622 Bermuda City settlement within the present city of Hopewell. Recovery of locally made "Chesapeake" tobacco pipes indicates English sites dating to the 17th century.



Future Directions

The City of Hopewell has made impressive and ambitious strides toward highlighting its remarkable history for constructive purposes. Ultimate success, we believe, will depend upon ongoing, diligent coordination between the City, the Historic Hopewell Foundation, the National Park Service, interested citizens, and other stakeholders. Realization of the city's expectations hinges on planned, long-term identification and excavation of Hopewell's terrestrial and submerged archaeological resources. In other words, archaeology is essential for planning how to interpret, protect, and develop the historical potential of Hopewell. If properly applied, the long-term results of this city-sponsored public archaeology program will translate into an enhanced image and tourist economy for Hopewell as well as a clearer sense of place and stronger sense of pride in the city's extraordinary heritage for its residents.



A high school intern catalogs a donated artifact collection from Hopewell.

Sponsored by:
The City of Hopewell

Research by:
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Visit the program on the web:
www.wm.edu/CAS/WMCAR/Hopewell2003