

**Final Report on Excavation at the Oak Hill  
Plantation Slave Quarter  
(44PY0440-0005),  
Pittsylvania County, Virginia.**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report presents the results of a small salvage excavation and data recovery conducted by the cultural resources staff of Hurt & Proffitt, Inc. (H&P). The project was awarded following a request for proposals by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR). The field work and a portion of the laboratory work were funded by a VDHR Threatened Sites Program grant awarded in 2015. A second Threatened Sites grant in 2016 funded the remainder of the lab processing and analysis. The second grant also included funds for the faunal analysis and production of this final comprehensive report.

The project took place inside a standing brick slave quarter located on the Oak Hill Plantation site in Pittsylvania County. The site is located approximately 8 miles (13 kilometers) west of the City of Danville. Most excavation at the Oak Hill Site took place on November 14 and 15, 2015. Additional excavation took place on April 2, 2016 to remove the last layer of one of the subfloor pits that could not be finished in the fall.

H&P completed the bisection of two brick-lined subfloor pits within the slave quarter. The larger of the two pits was designated Feature 1. It was located in Room 2 (of 4) and had been partially disturbed by treasure hunters. However, that pit was found to contain over 2ft. (0.6 m) of undisturbed fill beneath the recent disturbance. The pit was also unusual in that it contained a lower storage chamber created by a second brick liner that began approximately 1.3ft. (0.4 m) above the subsoil floor. It appears that boards would have been laid across the inner liner to create an elevated wooden floor with the contents of the lower chamber hidden from view. It is possible that the lower portion of the pit could have been used to hide contraband items. However, another plausible explanation for the lower chamber is that it was simply designed to maximize storage space.

H&P identified the second brick-lined subfloor pit, Feature 2, in Room 1. This pit was more conventional in depth and contained no lower chamber. Unlike Feature 1, the base of Feature 2 seemed to be intentionally lined with river-worn cobbles, perhaps as a way of dealing with the rather high water table at Oak Hill. Based on the presence of wire nails in Layer B, the upper portion of Feature 2 was filled in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century. Layer C contained no artifacts with TPQs later than whiteware. The laboratory analysis suggests that this layer, comprising the bulk of Feature 2, was created contemporary with the filling of Feature 1.

The result is that both Feature 1 and the C Layer of Feature 2 provide evidence of slave life during the plantation's first two decades in operation. The assemblage on the whole is what one might expect to find in a quarter from this period. Buttons and brass pins, kaolin smoking pipe sherds, glass beads, bone handled forks, a skillet handle and a variety of animal bones illustrate domestic life centered around the quarter's nearby hearth. Among the ceramics, a small quantity of high-end Chinese export porcelain sherds, likely from an earlier era, suggest provisioning from the nearby mansion. A single piece of lead shot recovered from Layer D of Feature 1 provides evidence of hunting for wild game to supplement provisioning from the plantation's stock. It was not

unusual for slaves to have access to firearms for this purpose. The faunal analysis conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Moore of the Virginia Museum of Natural History (VMNH) illustrates how the enslaved occupants took advantage of the availability of a wide variety of wild species (Appendix A).

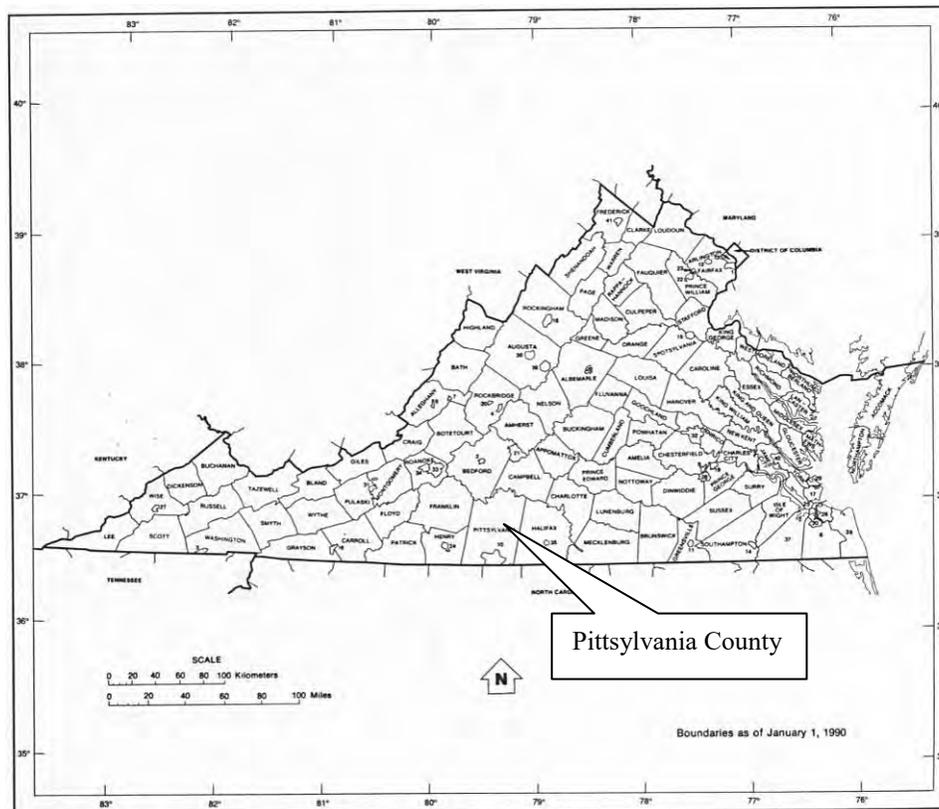
Altogether, the two subfloor pits yielded over 6,000 specimens. Over 70 percent of the identifiable specimens represented wild species. The domesticated species present included cattle, pig, sheep/goat and chicken. Most of those bones are cuts that would have yielded little meat. The relatively small quantity of burned bones suggests that much of what was consumed was cooked in soups or stews, away from the flame. A high concentration of wild species in the post-1880 layers of Feature 2 indicates that the postbellum occupants continued to rely on hunting and fishing to augment their diet.

Much research remains to be done at Oak Hill. The limited scope of the present salvage excavation precluded researching and writing an in-depth history of this once massive plantation and its hundreds, if not thousands, of historical inhabitants. Future archaeological investigation that would directly complement the present excavation would include examining the yard immediately surrounding the quarter, excavating in Rooms 3 and 4, and obtaining a representative assemblage of domestic refuse from the mansion house. Other obvious avenues of inquiry include a study of the massive terraced garden, excavation at any of the numerous other structures at the core of the plantation (including the ruin of a reputed schoolhouse), investigations further afield to obtain information on enslaved people who primarily tended crops and raised livestock, and identification of the numerous prehistoric sites that likely dot the former plantation as a result of its advantageous location along the Dan River. First and foremost, however, protection of this highly significant property from future development would insure that its information potential is not lost. Placing the property in an historic or conservation easement might accomplish this goal while conferring substantial tax relief and other benefits to its owners and should be encouraged.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a small salvage excavation and data recovery conducted by the cultural resources staff of Hurt & Proffitt, Inc. (H&P). The project was awarded following a request for proposals by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR). The field work and a portion of the laboratory work were funded by a VDHR Threatened Sites Program grant awarded in 2015. A second Threatened Sites grant in 2016 funded the remainder of the lab processing and analysis. The second grant also included funds for the faunal analysis and production of this final comprehensive report.

The project took place inside a standing brick slave quarter located on the Oak Hill Plantation site in Pittsylvania County (Figure 1). The site is located approximately 8 miles (13 kilometers) west of the City of Danville. It borders the south side of Route 311 (Berry Hill Road) approximately 5.6 miles (9 kilometers) southwest of its intersection with Route 58.



**Figure 1. Project location.**

The quarter consists of a one and one-half-story structure measuring approximately 70 feet long east-west by 18 feet north-south. It has four rooms of equal size fronting on the south. Each room has a hearth and sleeping loft with the east half of the building being in ruinous condition (Figures 2 - 8). This project was conducted in response to the partial

destruction of archaeological resources inside the quarter by the cast of a Discovery Channel television show called *Rebel Gold*.



**Figure 2. South elevation of slave quarter.**



**Figure 3. West and north elevation of slave quarter.**



**Figure 4. North elevation of slave quarter Rooms 1 and 2 (from right to left).**



**Figure 5. North elevation of slave quarter Rooms 3 and 4 (from right to left).**



**Figure 6. East elevation of slave quarter Room 4.**



**Figure 7. East and south elevation of slave quarter Room 4.**



**Figure 8. South elevation of slave quarter Rooms 1 and 2 (from left to right).**

Prior to initiating the field portion of the project, H&P compiled historic and environmental data regarding the distribution of known and potential sites in the project vicinity. This research included a review of site files stored in the Virginia Department of Historic Resources' (VDHR's) Virginia Cultural Resources Information System (V-CRIS), VDHR archives, Library of Congress digital map and photographic archives and local histories. A summary of that research follows; including information on all previously recorded cultural resources within a 1-mile (1.6-kilometer) radius of the Oak Hill site.

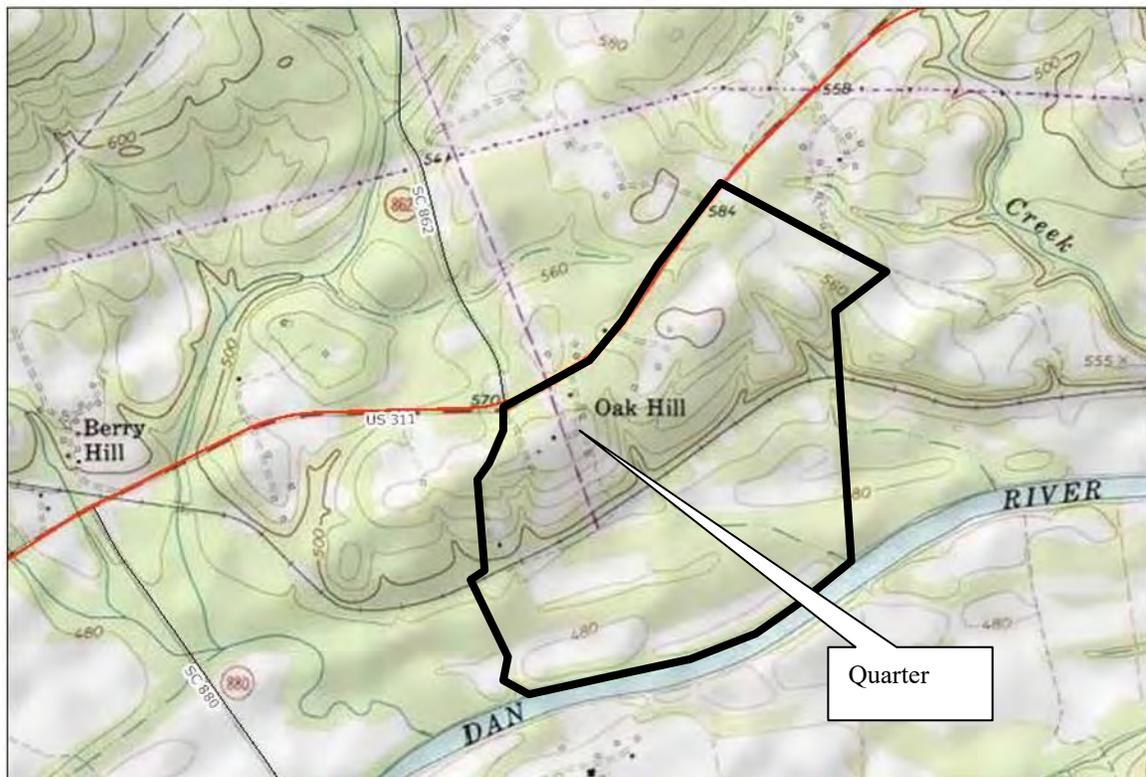
Most excavation at the Oak Hill Site took place on November 14 and 15, 2015. Additional excavation took place on April 2, 2016 to remove the last layer of one of the subfloor pits that could not be finished in the fall. The project was made possible by two grants from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources' Threatened Sites Program and by the volunteer efforts of a number of individuals. These consisted of Tom Klatka, VDHR Western Region Archaeologist; Sonja Ingram, Preservation Virginia; Elizabeth Moore, Virginia Museum of Natural History; and Lucy Treado, Virginia Museum of Natural History.

The excavation was conducted by a crew led by Randy Lichtenberger, H&P's Director of Cultural Resources and principal archaeologist for the project. The H&P field crew

consisted of Keith Adams, Director of the H&P Archaeological Materials Laboratory; Crystal Collins and Emily Tomlin. The field investigations and technical report meet the requirements specified in the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation* (Federal Register 48:190:44716-44742) and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR) *Guidelines for Conducting Cultural Resource Survey In Virginia* (2011a). The Principal Investigator performing the cultural resource investigations meets or exceeds the qualifications described in the Secretary of the Interior's *Professional Qualifications Standards* (48 FR 44738-9).

## 2. SETTING

The Oak Hill site is located in southwestern Pittsylvania County in the unincorporated community of Berry Hill. The site consists of a single tract of approximately 290 acres (117 hectares) situated on a hillslope and flood plain bordering the north side of the Dan River (Figure 9). The flood plain is traversed by a railroad for the entire length of the Oak Hill property. The nearest water source is an unnamed tributary of the Dan River that lies to the southeast of the slave quarter.



**Figure 9. Oak Hill Site depicted on USGS Brosville, VA quadrangle.**

The site lies near the southern edge of Virginia's Piedmont physiographic province in the Mesozoic lowlands subprovince. The Piedmont, Virginia's largest physiographic province, is bordered on the west by the mountains of the Blue Ridge province and on the east by the Fall Zone which separates it from the Coastal Plain. The Mesozoic lowlands

subprovince is characterized by modest relief and low slopes underlain by Mesozoic sedimentary and igneous rocks. Elevation in the subprovince ranges from 200 to 400 feet (61 to 122 meters) amsl (The College of William and Mary Geology Department 2011, Accessed 2016).

Soil in the immediate vicinity of the slave quarter and mansion ruin is mapped as Mayodan fine sandy loam (Figure 10). This well drained soil is found on 2 to 7 percent hillslopes. It is composed of residuum weathered from granite and gneiss. A typical profile consists of fine sandy loam from 0 to 9 inches below ground surface. This stratum overlies clay to a depth of 39 inches. A sandy clay loam horizon then extends from 39 to 65 inches in depth. This soil is considered prime farmland (NRCS 2007, Accessed 2016).



**Figure 10. Soil map of the Oak Hill mansion ruin and slave quarter vicinity (NRCS 2007).**

### **3. HISTORY**

#### *Site History*

Oak Hill was constructed from 1823 to 1825. It was the seat of power of Samuel Hairston (1788 - 1875). The Hairston family once controlled a large swath of land along the Dan River through a series of plantations in Virginia and North Carolina. They also owned plantations in Mississippi and were known as one of the largest slave-holding families in the south. Oak Hill has been referred to as the capital of the family empire based on Samuel having amassed several thousand slaves and tens of thousands of acres of land. He was considered the wealthiest man in Virginia on the eve of the Civil war.

The former two and one-half-story Federal-style mansion at the core of the site was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 as “probably the largest and finest of a group of 19<sup>th</sup>-century plantation residences erected along the Dan River in Pittsylvania County (National Register Nomination Form).” Unoccupied at the time, the house still retained remarkably intact Federal interior details, such as ornate mantels and stairways and wood-grained wainscot. Although today’s property includes 289.47 acres, the NR listing consisted of 17 acres centered on the main house. It included several dilapidated secondary resources, one of which is the slave quarter that is the subject of this project. The 17 acres extended southward to the extant railroad track and included the large terraced garden surrounding the house. A fire destroyed the mansion in 1986 and the property was subsequently delisted.

An extensive documentary history of the plantation is outside the scope of this limited salvage excavation. However, oral history particular to Oak Hill recorded in an account of the Hairston family plantations provides a glimpse into the lives of the site’s enslaved inhabitants (Wienczek 1999).

Daniel Hairston was an elderly descendant of Oak Hill slaves visited by the author. Hairston was born in 1920 with three of his grandparents having been slaves. Both his grandfathers, Gus Hairston and Jube Adams, had been slaves at Oak Hill. Gus used to cut ice on the river for the icehouse at Oak Hill. Daniel recounts a story of Gus working in the garden and getting himself some butter that he shouldn’t have. He was “whupped” for an unrelated offense causing the butter to fall out from under his hat where he’d hidden it. This discovery caused him to be beaten again. Daniel relates that his grandfather told it as a joke but it was a reminder that they had to take whatever was dished out just to survive (Wienczek 1999:28-30).

Daniel recalled another story of how Oak Hill’s enslaved people would sometimes gather at night to kill a hog and take it off into the woods to cook. They would use fence rails for firewood and burn up all of the inedible remains to hide them before dawn. Similarly, if the enslaved population wished to worship together they would gather in the woods at night, placing a large cauldron upside down to supposedly muffle the sound (Wienczek 1999:30).

A great aunt of Daniel's who was enslaved at Oak Hill was once slapped in the face by "Ol' Miss," or the wife of the plantation owner. His great aunt was so enraged that she stuck her long fingernails into the mistress's satin dress, tearing it. The aunt was so terrified at what she'd done that she left the plantation and went into hiding for two years. The oral history indicates that when she returned she was left unpunished for her absence. This tale was passed down through the family to show that the great aunt's faith in God gave her the strength to return home and helped her evade punishment (Wiencek 1999:31).

A thriving descendant community now lives in the town of Cascade, which was once part of the Oak Hill Plantation. Cascade's residents are descendants of a slave named Major Lewis Hairston. Major Hairston reportedly was a large, muscular man who bore rough treatment at the hands of Oak Hill's overseers as evidenced by the large whip marks on his back (Wiencek 1999:41). Born into slavery prior to 1835, Hairston purchased a small tract of land on the former plantation around 1870. His descendants gradually acquired more land, added a sawmill, and through their intense labor, prospered on the same land where their ancestors lived in bondage. The ruins of Major Hairston's cabin still stand (Wiencek 1999:35-37).

In late 2014 a team of treasure hunters assembled at Oak Hill to search for a large trove of silver allegedly hidden during the last days of the Confederacy. As Jefferson Davis and his cabinet fled south from Richmond in 1865, they carried with them the remains of the Confederate treasury. Rumor suggests that parts of that treasure, in the form of 39 kegs of Mexican silver coins, were hidden along the retreat route, one leg of which lay in Danville. The treasure hunt was filmed and recently aired in 2015 in the first two episodes of the Discovery Channel Series *Rebel Gold*. Video footage and a site inspection by H&P and the Western Region archaeologist have allowed us to piece together what occurred at Oak Hill.

The treasure hunting team first metal detected an unknown portion of the grounds immediately surrounding the ruins of the mansion. An unknown number of hits were dug in the yard without much fanfare. Their efforts then focused on a large depression that they observed to the northeast of the ruin. They correctly identified this as the remains of an ice house and surmised that the treasure could have been hidden in it beneath the ice. Hand excavation of the ice house eventually gave way to excavation using a backhoe. The team found a large number of artifacts in the pit but no evidence of silver, eventually punching into clay subsoil with the backhoe. An unknown number of mostly early twentieth-century artifacts and some late nineteenth-century artifacts were taken.

While the ice house was being excavated, a second team of treasure hunters began excavating in the standing slave quarters located directly east of the mansion ruin. The quarters consist of a long one and one-half-story brick building with four rooms. H&P and the VDHR have assigned the numbers 1 through 4 to the rooms from west to east. While the west half of the building is in relatively stable condition, the roof and one wall of Room 4 have collapsed and the roof of Room 3 has partially collapsed, taking part of the south wall with it. Room 4, in addition to being dangerous to work in, contains a

thick concrete floor, so it was left untouched. The treasure hunters received strong hits from their metal detectors in Rooms 2 and 3, so that's where they concentrated their efforts. Room 3's wooden floor had been removed some time ago, leaving the rotted joists lying on the surface of the ground. The team dug indiscriminately between the joists, recovering a mixed domestic assemblage as a grab sample and by using a makeshift wire mesh screen.

When the other team of excavators reached the bottom of the ice pit they joined their colleagues at the quarter and began digging in Room 2. Although it had once contained a wooden floor, Room 2 now has an exposed earthen floor, which made it easier for the treasure hunters to operate. They moved a large amount of earth in various parts of the room before stumbling onto a brick-lined subfloor pit in front of the hearth. Television footage shows the pit being excavated to a depth of approximately 0.5 feet below the top of the brick lining. At that point the team checked with their metal detector for a signal that could indicate the silver was at hand. Receiving no signal they decided to abandon the pit and with it Oak Hill plantation. They left the pit partially excavated and exposed to the elements and potential relic hunting. A large quantity of small finds from the slave quarter was turned over to the Pittsylvania County Historical Society in the spring of 2015. The assemblage includes ceramics, buttons, coins, thimbles and beads. The finds, for the most part, cannot be attributed to a particular room or feature.

The site is considered potentially significant on the state level for its association with one of the largest plantation owning families in the south and with the wealthiest man in Virginia on the eve of the Civil War. Samuel Hairston owned many thousands of slaves and it would be of particular interest to examine the lives of those who lived in closest association with the patriarch and his immediate family. Given the quarter's close proximity to the mansion house and incorporation into the formal layout of the grounds immediately surrounding it, the occupants of this quarter likely were in daily contact with the Hairston family. Oral history paints Hairston as a particularly strict master. Data recovered from the slave quarter can be used to examine the material conditions of enslavement at Oak Hill against this backdrop. To date, only 12 archaeological sites with an African-American cultural affiliation have been recorded in Pittsylvania County (V-CRIS accessed 6/1/16). The majority of these are Hairston-related sharecropper houses recorded in the adjoining Berry Hill industrial park. While quarter sites would have been numerous in the county, few existing sites are affiliated with the Hairston plantations and the quarter that is the subject of this project is the only one still standing at Oak Hill.

### *Previous Investigations*

The V-CRIS database shows that 39 archaeological sites and 13 architectural resources have been recorded within a 1 mile (1.61 kilometer) radius of the Oak Hill slave quarter. Most of these resources were recorded by Lyle Browning as part of his 2010 survey of the Berry Hill Mega Park.

Among the archaeological sites are the Oak Hill Plantation itself, 24 lithic scatters, 3 Woodland camps, 1 lithic workshop, 6 late 19<sup>th</sup> century tobacco farmsteads, 1 tobacco barn, 1 late 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century domestic site, 2 19<sup>th</sup> century dwellings, and a ford.

Architectural resources include the Oak Hill property, a bridge on Route 880, a Hairston cemetery, the Oak Hill caretaker's house, 2 houses, 2 tobacco barns and 2 farmsteads. No slave quarters are explicitly listed among the archaeological sites or buildings recorded.

#### **4. FIELD AND LABORATORY METHODS**

The goal of the present archaeological excavation was two-fold. One half of the effort was focused on salvaging a portion of the subfloor pit in Room 2 of the quarter. This pit had been partly and haphazardly dug by the treasure hunters. Upon leaving the site, the *Rebel Gold* crew had left the pit without backfilling. The other part of the current project involved searching for a second subfloor pit in Room 1. This pit was to be excavated as a comparative sample and also to preserve at least some data in case it was subjected to future looting.

H&P archaeologists began the field work by establishing a site grid in English measure with master datum N5000, E5000 located 53.6ft. (16.3 m) grid south of the southwest corner of the slave quarter. The grid was oriented such that the west wall of the quarter runs north-south along the E5000 line. Test Unit 1 was laid out in Room 1 with its northwest corner at N5065.05, E5007.5. Test Unit 2 was placed over the subfloor pit in Room 2 with its northwest corner at N5065.63, E5023.77.

The field methodology consisted of placing 5ft. x 5ft. (1.5 m x 1.5 m) excavation units over the Room 2 subfloor pit and the suspected location of the pit in Room 1. A third unit measuring 0.8ft. x 5ft. (0.24 m x 1.5 m) was required to the east of Test Unit 1 in Room 1 once the pit in that room was found to extend slightly outside of the original unit.

The units were excavated stratigraphically to expose the full dimensions of the two subfloor pits. All soil from the non-feature portion of the excavations was screened through 0.25-inch (0.64-cm) mesh to facilitate artifact recovery. The two subfloor pits then were bisected. All soil from the pits was either screened in the field through 0.125-inch (0.32-cm) mesh or, as a means of conserving limited field time, water-screened through fine mesh at the H&P lab or the Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville. Cultural materials were collected and bagged according to their provenience. All provenience data and a preliminary artifact inventory were recorded in the field. H&P produced digital photographs, plan views and profile views of each unit. Cultural features were mapped and photographed. Soil color and texture were recorded using Munsell Soil Color Charts and standard soils nomenclature (Kollmorgen Instruments Corporation 1992). All units and features were recorded on a field map referenced to the previously established site grid. H&P standard excavation unit forms were used to record detailed field data.

Laboratory processing and the curation of artifacts were carried out at the Hurt & Proffitt Archaeological Materials Laboratory in accordance with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources State Curation Standards (VDHR 2011b). All recovered artifacts were cataloged using a Microsoft Access 2010 database. See digital media included with this report for the full artifact catalog.

## 5. RESULTS

The project resulted in the identification and bisection of two brick-lined subfloor pits. The two pits were found to be aligned with and adjacent to the hearths in Rooms 1 and 2 of the slave quarter (Figure 11). H&P archaeologists were able to place a single 5ft. x 5ft. (1.5 m x 1.5 m) excavation unit over the outer dimensions of Feature 1 in Room 2 (Figure 12). This is the pit that was partially destroyed during the filming of *Rebel Gold*. In Room 1, where archaeologists had preliminarily identified the presence of a second subfloor pit through auger testing, H&P placed a 5ft. x 5ft. (1.5 m x 1.5 m) excavation unit approximately one foot west of the hearth. Once excavation started and it was clear that the pit extended further toward the hearth, a second unit measuring 0.8ft. x 5ft. (0.24 m x 1.5 m) was appended to the east (Figure 13).

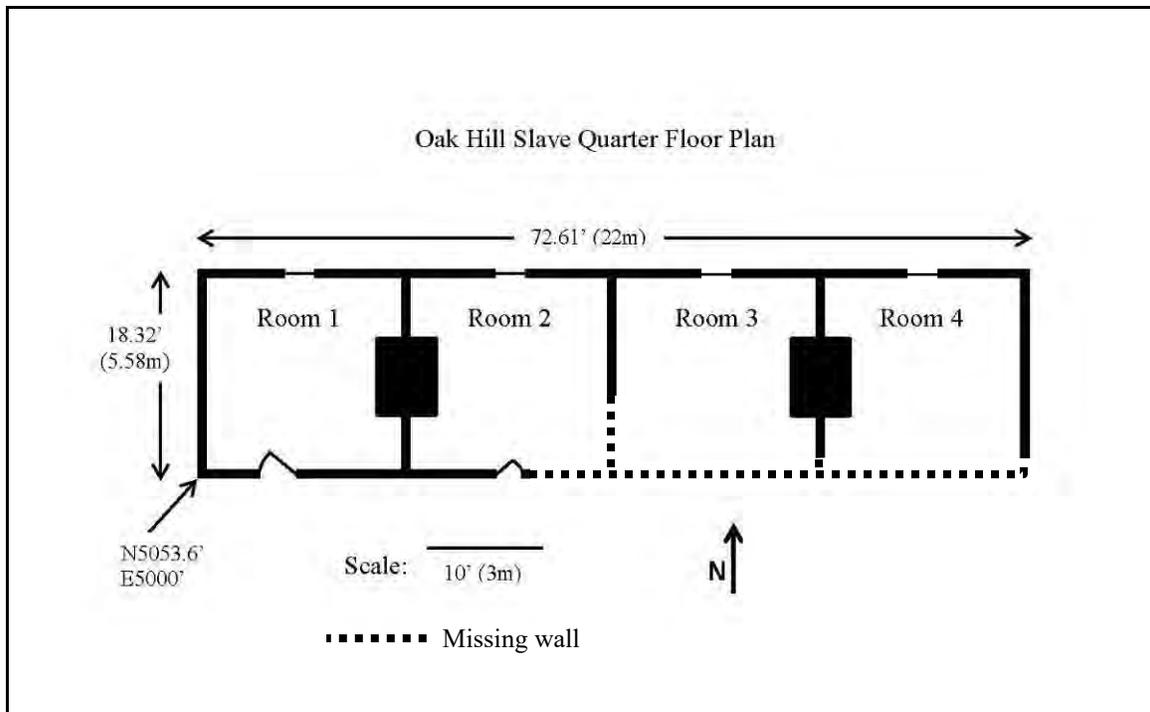
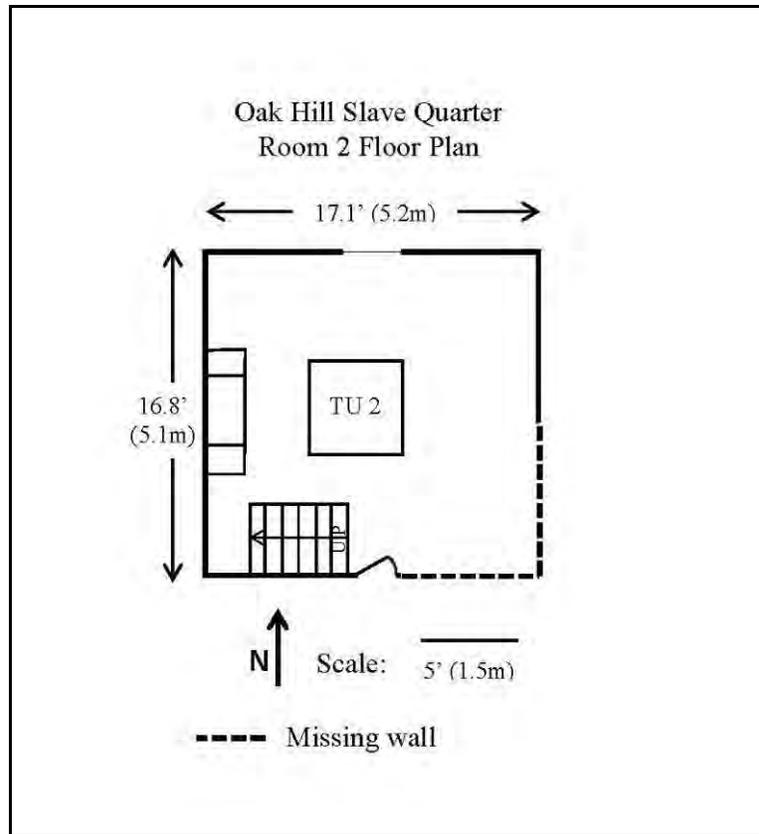
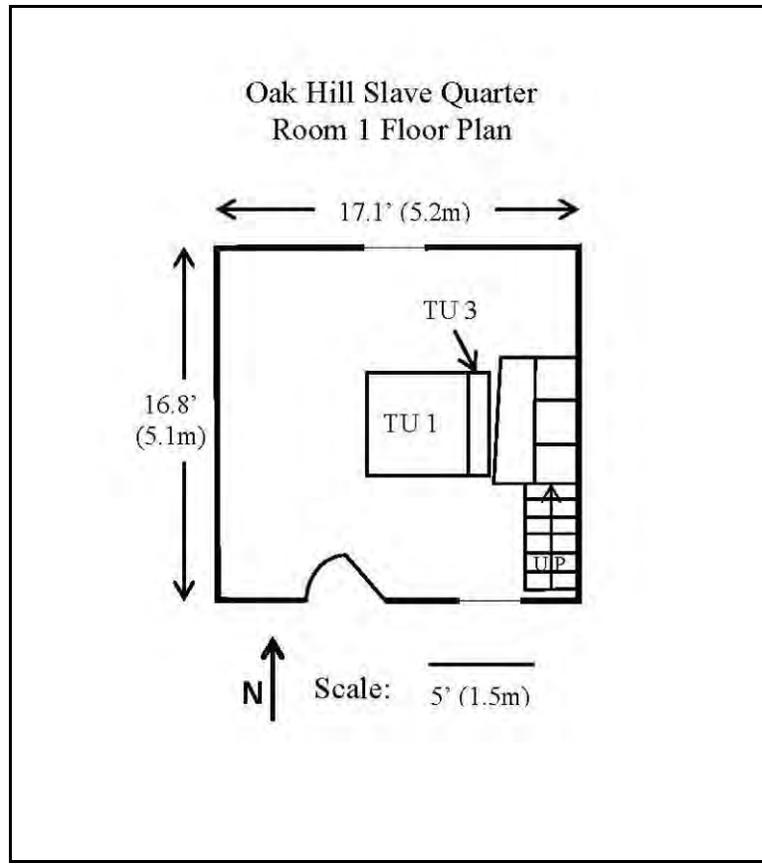


Figure 11. Oak Hill slave quarter floor plan.



**Figure 12. Oak Hill slave quarter Room 2 floor plan.**



**Figure 13. Oak Hill slave quarter Room 1 floor plan.**

### *Feature 1*

Feature 1 was located in Test Unit 2 in Room 2 of the quarter. Approximately 0.6ft. (18 cm) of the top of the feature fill had been removed by *Rebel Gold* metal detectorists and some soil had fallen back into the pit from the loose dry deposits lining the outside of the hole (Figure 14). H&P cleared all of the loose soil from within the boundaries of the 5 x 5 and the pit itself before beginning to excavate. The loose soil was screened and artifacts recovered were bagged as Layer A. The cleanup soil contained a brick fragment (4.3g), a mother of pearl button, a porcelain button, a bone button, a bone and brass composite button, whiteware, lusterware, porcelain, bird and mammal bone, flat and bottle glass, a cut nail and a wire nail. The loose Layer A soil was easily removed from a much more compacted B Layer (Figure 15).



**Figure 14. North view of Feature 1 prior to excavation.**



**Figure 15. East view of Feature 1 after the removal of loose/disturbed soil (Layer A).**

Layer B was composed of reddish brown (5YR4/3) sandy loam. The layer extended from 0.3ft. (9 cm) below the top of the brick lining in the northwest corner of the test unit to a depth of 1ft. (30.5 cm). Excavation stopped when some bits of sandy mottling in Layer B suddenly became the dominant portion of the fill (Figure 16). The layer contained a wood utensil handle, 2 brass straight pins, brick (5.5g), pearlware, porcelain, whiteware, bird and mammal bone, mammal teeth, shell, flat glass, clear and green bottle glass, 9 cut nails, 5 wrought nails, sheet iron, an amethyst colored glass jewel, a kaolin pipe bowl fragment, and a quartz tertiary flake.



**Figure 16. North view of Feature 1 at the base of Layer B.**

Layer C was composed of dark reddish brown (5YR3/3) silty sand mixed with approximately 10% reddish brown (5YR4/3) sandy loam. The layer extended to a depth of 1.75ft (53 cm) below the top of the brick liner in the northwest corner of the feature. The layer began relatively sterile and then contained a quantity of large bones near the bottom. Excavation of Layer C ended arbitrarily where archaeologists found a second brick lining inside the larger lining. H&P initially believed this represented a brick floor, but the brick was only found in a single course along the walls of the pit (Figure 17). This layer contained a brass bead, a red faience bead, a white glass bead, charcoal, brick, lime mortar, pearlware, whiteware, Delft, porcelain, lusterware, mammal and bird bones, shell (bird and marine), mammal teeth, fish scales, flat glass, green and clear bottle glass, 50 unidentified nails, 15 cut nails, 8 wrought nails, a bone handled fork, a possible cast iron spider skillet handle, an iron pin, a kaolin pipe bowl fragment, a terra cotta pipe bowl fragment, 3 chert flakes and 1 quartz flake (Figures 18 and 19).



**Figure 17. West view of Feature 1 at the base of Layer C.**



**Figure 18. Top view of probable spider skillet handle found in Feature 1 Layer C.**



**Figure 19. End view of probable spider skillet handle found in Feature 1 Layer C.**

Layer D included the entire fill of the stepped-in portion of the pit. It consisted of waterlogged dark reddish brown (5YR3/3) silty sand. The layer ended atop sterile subsoil at a depth of 2.9ft (88 cm) below the outer brick lining at the northwest corner of the unit (Figure 20). A large flat iron encrustation was left in place at the base of the pit (Figure 21). All of the soil from this layer was wet-screened at the Virginia Museum of Natural History. Artifacts recovered from Layer D consisted of 4 glass beads, charcoal, 12 brass straight pins, lime mortar, a large quantity of brick (apparently from the collapsed parts of the liner), 2 bone buttons, 1 wooden button, pearlware, redware, whiteware, refined stoneware, Delft, mammal and bird bones, shell (bird and marine), mammal teeth, fish scales, flat glass, green and clear bottle glass, 43 unidentified nails, 6 cut nails, 6 wrought nails, sheet iron, 1 4.5mm lead shot, 2 kaolin pipe stem fragments, one quartz flake and one chert flake (Figure 22).

H&P completed plan and profile drawings of the Feature 1 bisection (Figures 23 - 25). The pit's outer dimensions were found to be 4.6ft. (1.4 m) east-west by 3.7ft. (1.1 m) north-south. It was constructed with its long axis perpendicular to the Room 2 hearth. The feature measured 1.9 ft. (0.58 m) in depth from the top of the larger brick liner to the top of the inner brick liner. The lower liner then extended an additional 1.3ft. (0.40 m) deep. Once drawing and photography were complete the feature was lined with plastic and backfilled.



**Figure 20. South view of Feature 1 after bisection (base of Layer D).**



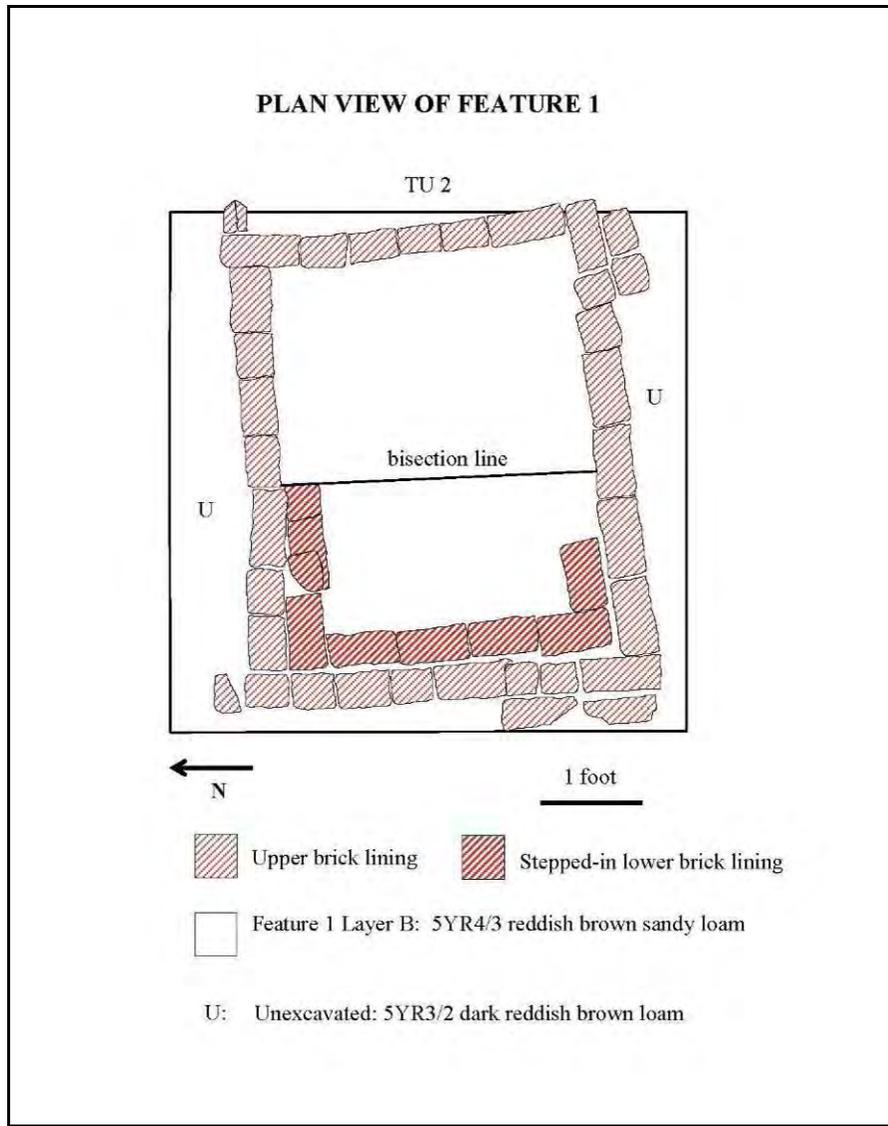
**Figure 21. Feature 1 overhead view of the completed bisection with east at the top of the photo. Note that the darker area at the right base of the feature is a large piece of iron that was corroded to the brick and left in situ.**



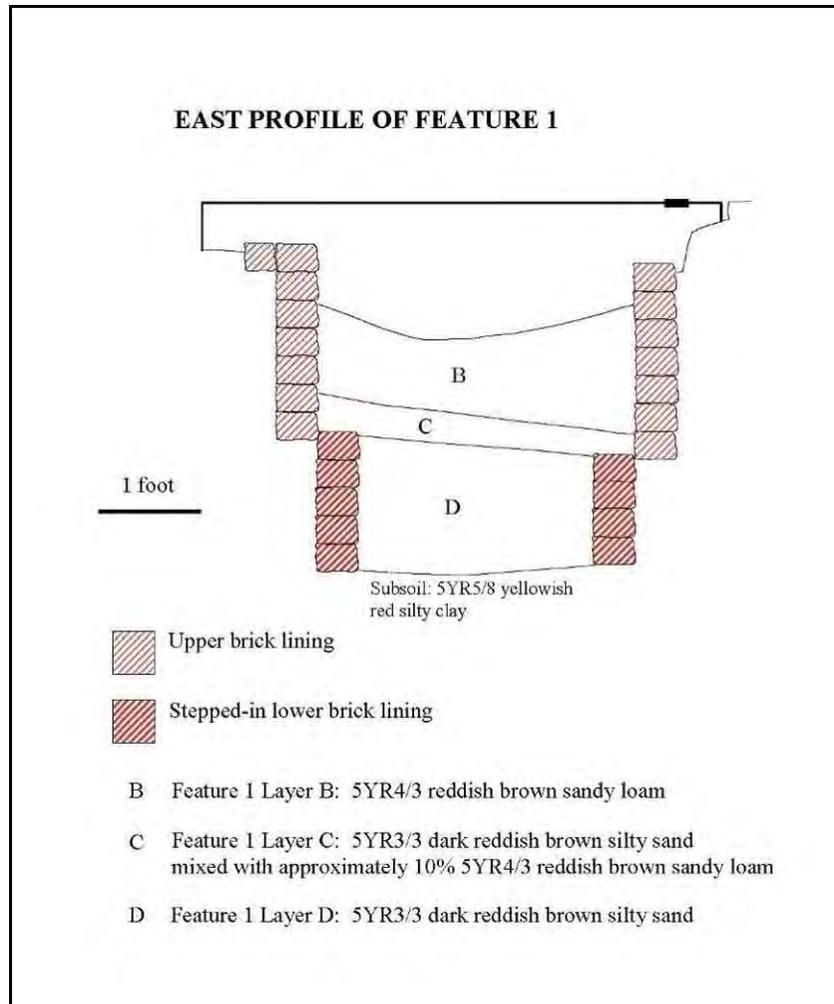
**Figure 22. Moche decorated pearlware recovered from Feature 1 Layer D.**



**Figure 23. Feature 1 plan drawing in progress.**



**Figure 24. Feature 1 plan view.**



**Figure 25. Feature 1 profile.**

### *Feature 2*

Feature 2 was located initially through auger testing during a field visit by H&P and VDHR staff. Test Unit 1 was placed in front of the hearth in Room 1 where archaeologists expected to capture all or most of the pit inside the 5 x 5 (Figure 26). A great deal of brick from the chimney had collapsed into Room 1 and had to be removed to the side of the room before the test unit could be laid out (Figure 27).



**Figure 26. East view of the Test Unit 1 top of Layer A.**



**Figure 27. East view of Test Unit 1 prior to excavation.**

Layer A of Test Unit 1 represented mostly recent loosely consolidated soil that covered all of Room 1. It was composed of dark reddish brown (5YR3/2) loam and averaged 0.1ft. (3 cm) thick across the unit. The layer contained a mix of modern and historic artifacts, including 3 brass rivets, a peach pit, brick (0.8g), 3 porcelain buttons, 2 plastic buttons, 1 mother of pearl button, porcelain, yellowware, whiteware, bird and mammal bones, mirror and bottle glass, 153 shards of flat glass (from the room's broken windows), 20 wire nails, 17 wrought nails, 17 cut nails, sheet iron, a fence staple, a nearly complete earthenware pipe bowl, a terra cotta pipe bowl fragment, a plastic screw top and several unidentified fragments of green plastic and white plastic (Figure 28). Layer A ended on two very well defined contexts. The quarter of the test unit contained a lighter brown compacted soil, while a dark organic layer covered the eastern three-quarters, suggesting the presence of a subfloor pit beneath (Figure 29).



**Figure 28. Clay pipe bowl recovered from Test Unit 1 Layer A.**



**Figure 29. East view of Test Unit 1 at the base of Layer A (top of Layers B and C).**

Excavators removed the thin B Layer to expose the brick lining and fill of the subfloor pit beneath (Figure 30). Layer B was composed of dark reddish brown (5YR3/2) loam similar to Layer A, however, the soil was more compact and localized to the top of Feature 2. The layer contained a porcelain button, a mother of pearl button, whiteware, pearlware, porcelain, bird and mammal bones, a fish scale, amber and clear bottle glass, flat glass, 14 wrought nails, and sheet iron.



**Figure 30. Test Unit 1 with removal of Layer B in progress.**

With Layer B removed, the subfloor pit was clearly defined, including a full single width brick liner and builder's trench (Figure 31). Since a small part of the pit liner extended eastward out of Test Unit 1, H&P extended a partial unit 0.8ft (0.24 m) eastward to the edge of the stone hearth. This unit was designated Test Unit 3. Since Layers A and B of Test Unit 1 were found to be similarly colored 20<sup>th</sup> century fill, a single A Layer was removed from Test Unit 3 to the top of the subfloor pit. This layer measured approximately 0.15ft. (5 cm) thick and was composed of dark reddish brown (5YR3/2) loam as it had been in Test Unit 1. The layer contained a peach pit, a brass rivet, 2 porcelain buttons, 1 plastic button, porcelain, whiteware, bird and mammal bones, a wire tack, 17 wrought nails, 1 cut nail, an iron cap and a fragment of white plastic.



**Figure 31. East view of Test Unit 1 at the base of Layer B showing the top of Feature 2, the brick-lined subfloor pit.**

With Feature 2 fully exposed its outer dimensions were found to be approximately 4.4 x 3.5ft. (1.3 x 1.1 m) (Figure 32). The long side of the feature paralleled the hearth, in contrast to Feature 1 which was constructed with its long axis perpendicular to the hearth in Room 2. Feature 2 was drawn in plan view, and given an east-west line of bisection so that the north half could be excavated (Figure 33).



**Figure 32. East view of Test Unit 1 (base of Layer B) and Test Unit 3 (base of Layer A) showing the full extent of Feature 2.**



**Figure 33. Plan drawing of Feature 2 in progress.**

Feature 2 Layer A was composed of dark reddish brown (5YR3/2) loam; soil that was identical to the stratum overlying it. This suggests that the feature had settled or that it was not quite filled when the 20<sup>th</sup> century fill accumulated across Room 1. Because it was modern the soil was screened through ¼" mesh. The layer was found to be only 0.1ft. (3 cm) deep across the north half of the feature (Figure 34). It contained a porcelain button, whiteware, mammal bones, shell, flat and clear bottle glass, 15 wrought nails and a chert flake.

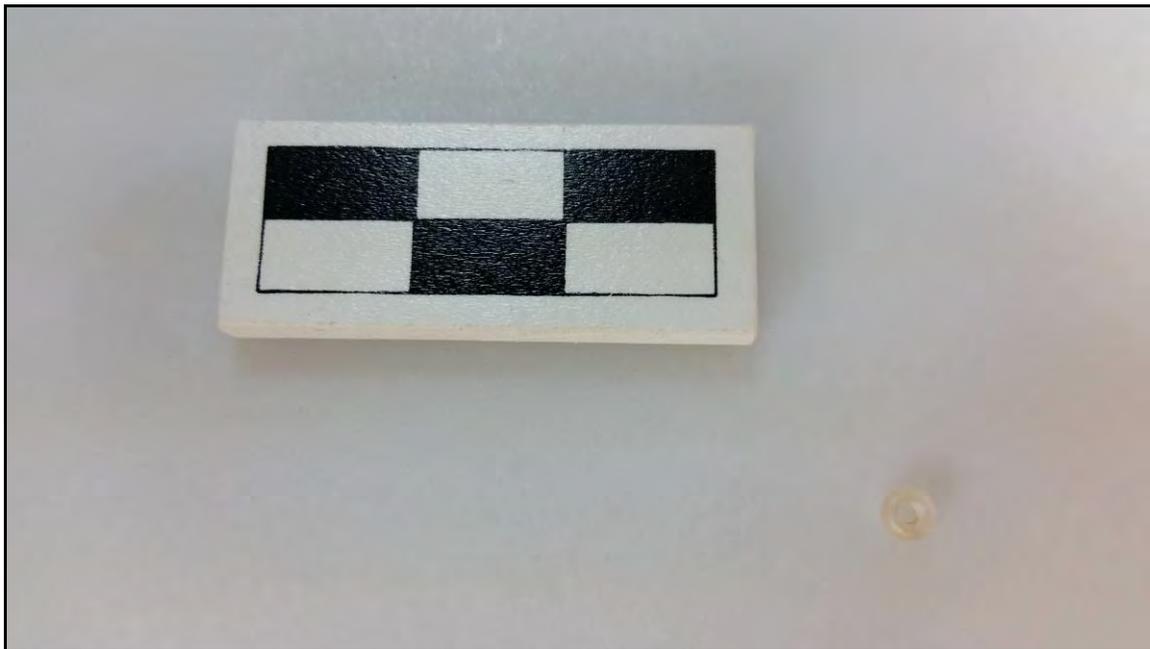


**Figure 34. East view of Test Unit 1 at the base of Feature 2 Layer A.**

Layer B was composed of dark reddish brown (5YR3/2) loam with inclusions of red (2.5YR4/6) clay and brown (7.5YR4/3) sandy loam. Each inclusion accounted for approximately 5% of the fill. The layer extended to a depth of 0.73ft. (22 cm) below the northwest corner of Test Unit 1, or 0.51ft. (14 cm) below the top of the brick liner at the northwest corner of the feature (Figure 35). Beginning with Layer B, all fill from Feature 2 was bagged and sent to the Virginia Museum of Natural History for water screening. The layer contained 11 glass beads (including clear, white, blue, light blue, dark blue and black), 8 brass straight pins, 3 sheet brass, 3 needles, a brass eyelet, brick, lime mortar, 1 milk glass button, 1 bone button, 2 porcelain buttons, 2 mother of pearl buttons, whiteware, creamware, pearlware, Delft, refined stoneware, porcelain, fish scales, shell, bird and mammal bones, mammal teeth; amber, clear and aqua bottle glass; flat glass, 24 wrought nails, 5 cut nails, 8 wire nails, sheet iron, a spring, part of a chain, a lead fragment, a graphite pencil head, and 2 kaolin pipe bowl fragments (Figure 36).

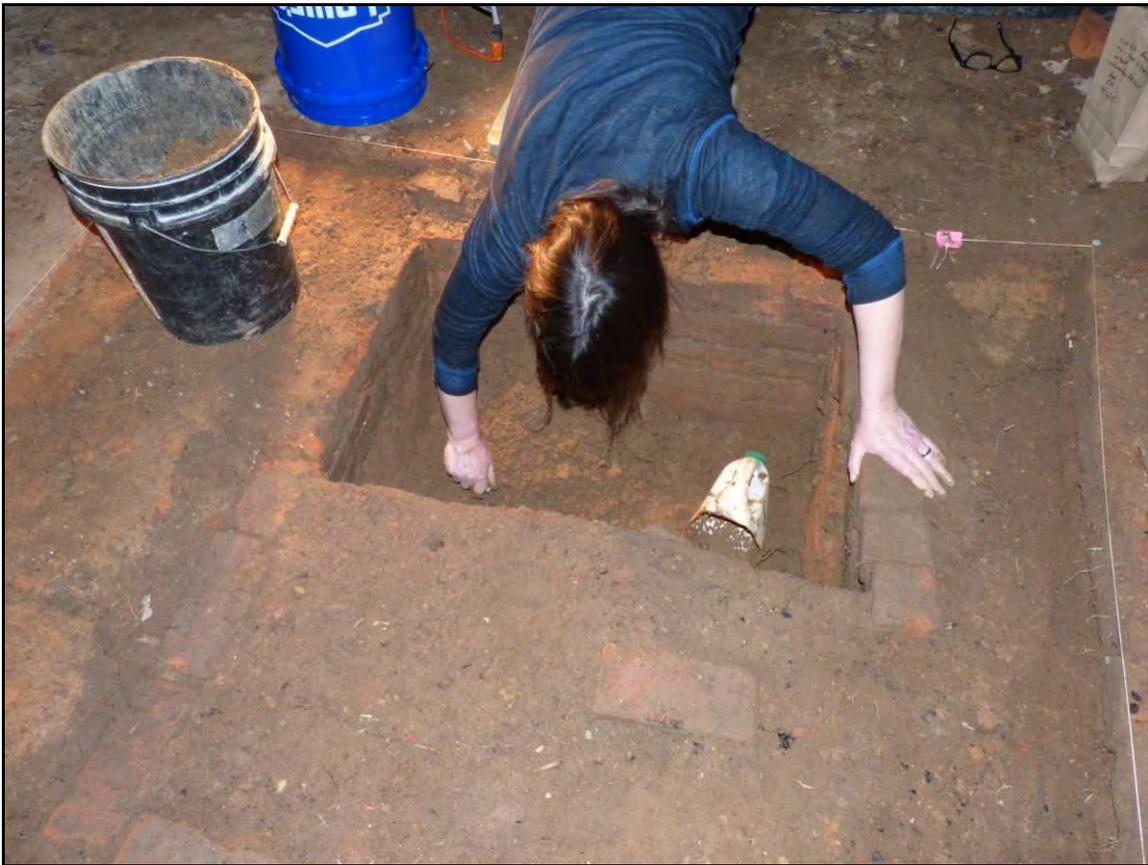


**Figure 35. East view of Test Unit 1 at the base of Feature 2 Layer B.**



**Figure 36. Clear wound glass bead recovered from Feature 2 Layer B.**

Feature 2 Layer C was composed of dark brown (10YR3/3) silt loam mixed with approximately 20% dark yellowish brown (10YR4/4) sandy loam. The layer was partially excavated on November 15, 2015 and left sealed when the team ran out of time. The remainder of the layer was excavated on April 2, 2016 (Figure 37). Unfortunately, recovery at the base of the unit was limited as the high water table turned the soil to a soupy consistency approximately 2ft. (0.6 m) below the top of the pit. Several large water-worn cobbles were recovered at the base of the feature in what appeared to be a matrix of brown (10YR4/3) sandy loam. The cobble layer sat atop sterile yellowish red (5YR5/8) silty clay subsoil. It appears that the cobble layer may have been built into the pit as a drainage feature. The soil excavated from Layer C on April 2 is still being processed at the Virginia Museum of Natural History as of this date, so only partial artifact data is available.



**Figure 37. Feature 1 Layer C excavation in progress.**

The partial Layer C artifact assemblage consists of 1 red glass bead, 1 white glass bead, 7 brass straight pin fragments, brick, lime mortar, 2 mother of pearl buttons, 1 bone button, whiteware, porcelain, pearlware, stoneware, coarse earthenware, fish scales, shell, bird and mammal bones, mammal teeth; amber, clear and green bottle glass; a press molded drinking tumbler shard, flat glass, 2 cut nails, 6 wrought nails, a bone handled knife, an iron tack, 2 iron straight pins, a tessera (possibly from jewelry), 1 kaolin pipe bowl fragment, 1 terra cotta pipe bowl fragment, and an Early Archaic Kirk corner-notched

projectile point (Figures 38 and 39).



**Figure 38. Representative pearlware and whiteware recovered from Feature 2 Layer C.**



**Figure 39. Early Archaic Period Kirk corner-notched projectile point recovered from Feature 2 Layer C.**

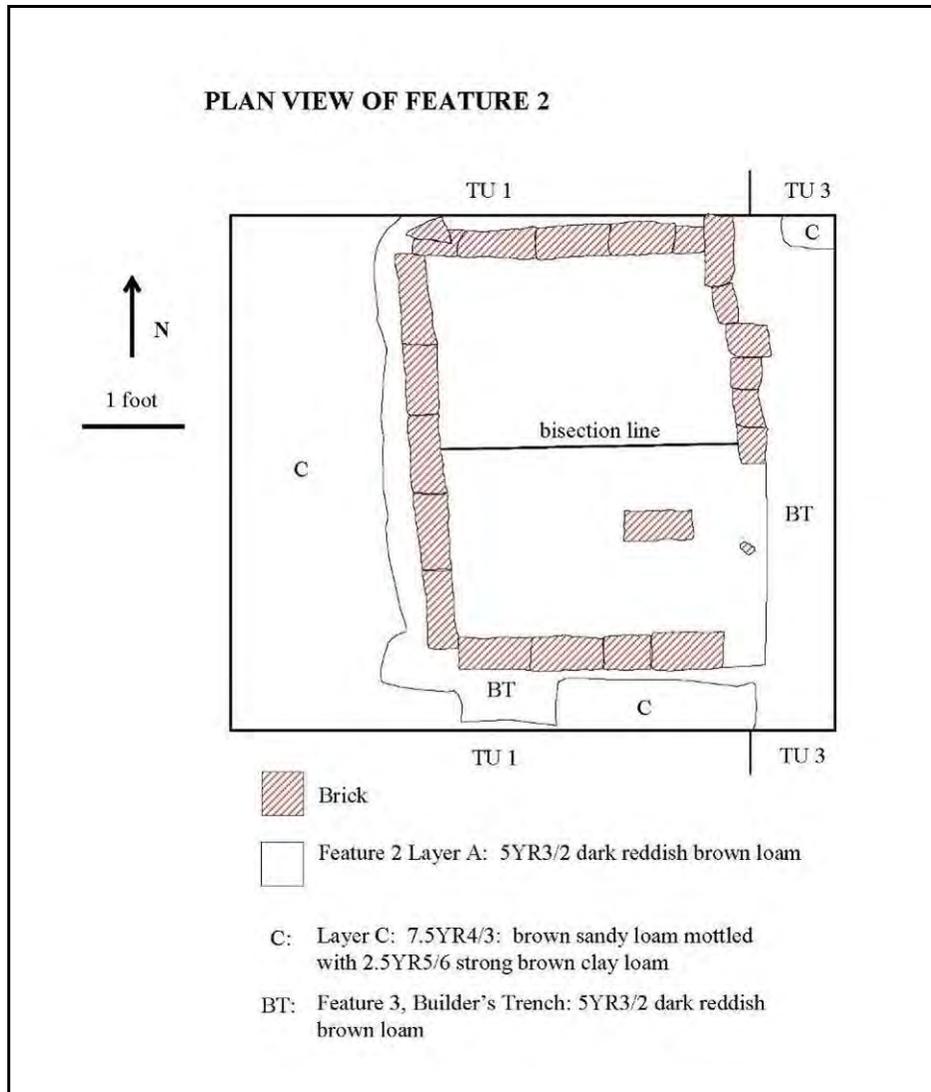
H&P took final photographs of Feature 2 and completed plan and profile drawings, before lining the pit with plastic and backfilling it to complete the investigation (Figures 40–43).



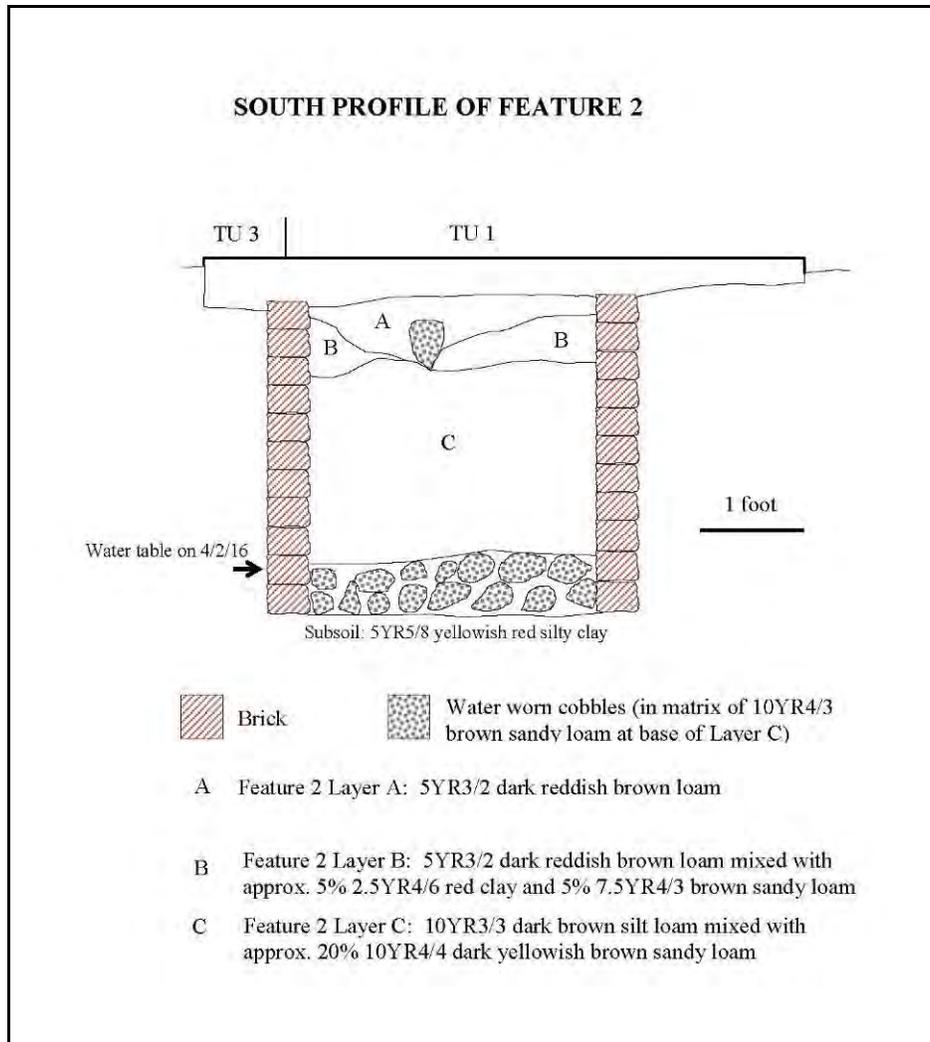
**Figure 40. South view of Test Unit 1 following bisection of Feature 2.**



**Figure 41. South view of Feature 2 profile after bisection (base of Layer C).**



**Figure 42. Feature 2 plan view.**



**Figure 43. Feature 2 profile.**

Laboratory analysis of the subfloor pit assemblages first focused on ascertaining probable dates of deposition. *Terminus post quem* (TPQ) dates were established by layer beginning with Feature 1. The thin A Layer consisted of loose soil that had been disturbed by the treasure hunters. It was contaminated by soil from the floor surrounding the pit and thus was excluded from the analysis. Incidentally, it was the only layer from Feature 1 that contained a wire nail, indicating a post 1880 date of deposition. Layers B through D contained only wrought and cut nails, among the identifiable nails, and each has a TPQ of 1820 based on the presence of whiteware. Given the long production range of whiteware and the fact that the quarters were not constructed until the mid-1820s, the TPQ does little to establish a date for the fill.

Archaeologists observed during both excavation and laboratory processing that the ceramic assemblage from Layers B through D contained a high proportion of ceramics with earlier dates than whiteware. To quantify this observation, H&P calculated Mean Ceramic Dates (MCDs) for each layer as well as the pit as a whole (Table 1). MCD's

have been criticized for flaws such as not sufficiently accounting for lag time between production and discard and for over-simplifying dates of ceramics with long production runs. However, they still provide a valuable snapshot of the approximate occupation period of sites when combined with other data, such as TPQs.

The Oak Hill analysis leaves out some ceramics such as porcelain, as the beginning and ending points of production are either ill-defined or the subject of debate amongst archaeologists. Those wares are counted and listed in red text in the tables below. One additional modification has been made to better reflect the likely end date of deposition. Following Heath, *et. al.* (2004), the end date of whiteware production has been truncated at 1880. The absence of wire nails in Layers B through D strongly suggests that they were deposited prior to 1880. Oak Hill, like the Poplar Forest site in the Heath report, is otherwise rife with wire nails; on the floors and in the A and B Layers of Feature 2. Truncating the whiteware range at the begin date for wire nails thus provides a higher degree of confidence in the resulting MCD.

As suspected, all three layers of Feature 1 produce early MCD's. In fact, all three dates (Layer D: 1807, Layer C: 1809 and Layer B: 1819) predate the construction of the quarters. Taken as a whole, the MCD for the feature is 1811. The reason for this early date is primarily the result of the pit containing a high proportion of pearlware to whiteware.

Type	Count	Pattern/Dateable	Site Range	Midpoint	Product
<i>Feature 1 D</i>					
Porcelain	1				
Redware	2				
Refined earthenware	5	Badly burned or unidentifiable			
Salt glazed stoneware	1				
Tin enameled	1	Delftware	1600-1800	1700	1700
Pearlware	3	Undecorated	1780-1830	1805	5415
	1	Blue handpainted	1780-1820	1800	1800
	1	Blue transfer printed	1795-1840	1818	1818
	7	Industrial slip	1790-1820	1805	12635
Whiteware	2	Undecorated	1820-1880	1850	3700
	1	Industrial slip	1820-1880	1850	1850
Total	16				28918
					MCD=1807

Type	Count	Pattern/Dateable	Site Range	Midpoint	Product
<i>Feature 1 C</i>					
Porcelain	6	Underglaze blue Chinese porcelain			
	6	Chinese export porcelain			
Refined earthenware	4	Badly burned or unidentifiable			
Tin enameled	1	Delftware	1600-1800	1700	1700
Pearlware	13	Undecorated	1780-1830	1805	23465

	2	Blue handpainted	1780-1820	1800	3600
	1	Blue transfer printed	1795-1840	1818	1818
	2	Industrial slip	1790-1820	1805	3610
Lusterware	1		1790-1840	1815	1815
Whiteware	3	Undecorated	1820-1880	1850	5550
	1	Blue handpainted	1820-1880	1850	1850
Total	24				43408
					MCD=1809

Type	Count	Pattern/Dateable	Site Range	Midpoint	Product
<i>Feature 1 B</i>					
Porcelain	1				
Pearlware	4	Undecorated	1780-1830	1805	7220
	2	Green shell edged	1780-1830	1805	3600
	1	Blue transfer printed	1795-1840	1818	1818
	1	Blue feather edged	1820-1830	1825	1825
Whiteware	3	Undecorated	1820-1880	1850	5550
Total	11				20013
					MCD=1819
Feature 1 Layers B - D	51				92339
					MCD Feature 1=1811

**Table 1. Feature 1 Mean Ceramic Dates (MCDs).**

Feature 2 differed from Feature 1 in that it was fully undisturbed when excavated. Layers A and B of the feature, which accounted for less than half the volume of the pit, contained wire nails, establishing their TPQs as 1880. They also contained Prosser pressed buttons (TPQ 1840) and the tip of a wood-encased graphite pencil (TPQ 1866) further establishing the layers as post-dating Feature 1. The Layer C assemblage, however, was similar to the fill in Feature 1 and thus an MCD was calculated for this layer to make a better comparison (Table 2). The layer contained a somewhat higher proportion of whiteware to pearlware, which does push the MCD to 1830, but in most respects it is quite similar to Feature 1.

Type	Count	Pattern/Dateable	Site Range	Midpoint	Product
<i>Feature 2 C</i>					
Porcelain	2				
	1	Chinese export			
Coarse earthenware	1				
Salt glazed stoneware	2				
Pearlware	7	Undecorated	1780-1830	1805	12635
	3	Blue handpainted	1780-1820	1800	5400
	7	Blue transfer printed	1795-1840	1818	12726
	1	Blue feather edged	1820-1830	1825	1825
	4	Industrial slip	1790-1820	1805	7220
	2	Polychrome painted old pallet	1790-1810	1800	3600
Whiteware	13	Undecorated	1820-1880	1850	24050
	3	Handpainted	1820-1880	1850	5550
	8	Blue transfer printed	1820-1880	1850	14800
	2	Industrial slip/mocha	1820-1880	1850	3700
Total	50				91506
					MCD=1830

**Table 2. Feature 2 Layer C Mean Ceramic Dates (MCDs).**

As is often the case, the absence of certain types of common artifacts from the fill of Feature 1 and the C Layer of Feature 2 prove invaluable in narrowing the probable window of deposition. For example, these contexts do not contain yellowware (TPQ 1830), Prosser pressed buttons (TPQ 1840), ironstone (TPQ 1842), sponge decorated whiteware (TPQ 1845), handmade glass marbles (TPQ c. 1850) or hard rubber items (buttons, combs, etc.) (TPQ 1851). All of these types of artifacts are commonplace in quarter sites of the late antebellum period. Even within the Oak Hill quarter, Prosser buttons were recovered from the disturbed A Layer of Feature 1 (n=4) and the A Layer (n=1) and B Layer (n=2) of Feature 2.

Heath determined that Poplar Forest's Site A subfloor pit was filled sometime in the late 1850s or early 1860s (Heath et. al. 2004). By contrast to the fill in Oak Hill's Feature 1 and Layer C of Feature 2, the Poplar Forest pit contained sizeable quantities of the artifacts listed above. For instance, a single layer within the Site A pit produced a dozen white Prosser buttons, sponge decorated whiteware, a rubber comb and a rubber button.

Based on a combination of TPQs, MCDs and the absence of certain very common artifacts of the mid-nineteenth century, it is highly likely that Feature 1 and the bottom half of Feature 2 were deposited prior to 1850. It is also somewhat likely that these deposits predate the early to mid-1840s.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

H&P completed the bisection of two brick-lined subfloor pits within the standing brick slave quarter at Oak Hill. The larger of the two pits was designated Feature 1. It was located in Room 2 and had been partially disturbed by treasure hunters. However, that pit was found to contain over 2ft. (0.6 m) of undisturbed fill beneath the recent disturbance. The pit was also unusual in that it contained a lower storage chamber created by a second brick liner that began approximately 1.3ft. (0.4 m) above the subsoil floor. It appears that boards would have been laid across the inner liner to create an elevated wooden floor with the contents of the lower chamber hidden from view. It is possible that the lower portion of the pit could have been used to hide contraband items. However, another plausible explanation for the lower chamber is that it was simply designed to maximize storage space.

Feature 1 contained four strata, designated Layers A through D. Layer A was composed largely of loose soil that had collapsed into the pit from the modern deposits above. It was mixed with a small quantity of pit fill that had been loosened by the treasure hunters. The laboratory analysis revealed that Layers B through D were likely deposited by the early 1840s but almost certainly by 1850.

H&P identified the second brick-lined subfloor pit, Feature 2, in Room 1. This pit was more conventional in depth and contained no lower chamber. Unlike Feature 1, the base of Feature 2 seemed to be intentionally lined with river-worn cobbles, perhaps as a way of dealing with the rather high water table at Oak Hill. Based on the presence of wire nails in Layer B, the upper portion of Feature 2 was filled in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century. Layer C contained no artifacts with TPQs later than whiteware. The laboratory analysis suggests that this layer, comprising the bulk of Feature 2, was created contemporary with the filling of Feature 1.

The result is that both Feature 1 and the C Layer of Feature 2 provide evidence of slave life during the plantation's first two decades in operation. The assemblage on the whole is what one might expect to find in a quarter from this period. Buttons and brass pins, kaolin smoking pipe sherds, glass beads, bone handled forks, a skillet handle and a variety of animal bones illustrate domestic life centered around the quarter's nearby hearth. Among the ceramics, a small quantity of high-end Chinese export porcelain sherds, likely from an earlier era, suggest provisioning from the nearby mansion. A single piece of lead shot recovered from Layer D of Feature 1 provides evidence of hunting for wild game to supplement provisioning from the plantation's stock. It was not unusual for slaves to have access to firearms for this purpose. The faunal analysis conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Moore of the Virginia Museum of Natural History (VMNH) illustrates how the enslaved occupants took advantage of the availability of a wide variety of wild species (Appendix A).

The faunal analysis was aided by the fact that waterlogged soils from both pits were very difficult to screen in the field. Instead, most of the soil from Feature 1 and all of the soil from Feature 2 was wet-screened at the VMNH in Martinsville, leading to exceptional

recovery of small bones, fish scales and egg shell. Although fish scales and the large quantity of egg shells were not identified as part of the present study, Dr. Moore hopes to identify these in the future if appropriate reference materials become available.

Feature 1 contained more than 1900 specimens. These included mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, fishes, and invertebrates. A variety of pig, cow and chicken bones, representing domesticated animals, are supplemented by squirrel, opossum, rabbit, turkey, musk turtle, gar and probable freshwater mussels. A total of 48 fish bones and scales indicate fishing was an important part of the enslaved diet. Butchering marks are visible on many of the bones, confirming that they were consumed. The variety of skeletal elements present provides evidence that whole animals were processed by the slaves rather than having parts provisioned to them. Few bones exhibit burning, suggesting that they were more likely included in soups and stews than being fried or roasted directly over the fire. The recovery of a probable spider skillet part in Layer C would suggest at least some frying was happening, but this may have been more confined to items like fritters, cornbread or fish (Ross 2001). Evidence of rodent gnawing on eight of the bones indicates that they were left for a time on the floor or exposed in the pit where they could be scavenged.

A distinct lack of ash and charcoal lensing in Feature 1 is suggestive of a deposit that originated from floor sweepings and food waste discard rather than merely repeated hearth cleaning. The presence of several burned ceramic sherds, however, certainly attests to the fact that some of the waste originated directly from the hearth. In the future, a more carefully controlled and better lit excavation of the remaining half of Feature 1 may yield more data on the origins of the fill and timespan involved in its creation.

With 4,242 specimens, the Feature 2 faunal assemblage is more than double that recovered from Feature 1 (Appendix A). The post-1880 A and B Layers were analyzed separately from the pre-1850 C Layer. Generally speaking, all of the contexts contained a narrow range of domesticated species supplemented by a wide range of wild species.

Feature 2 Layer C contained 2,368 specimens. Layer C domesticated fauna consisted of cow, pig and chicken. By contrast, the layer contained 88 percent wild species (by NISP (Number of Identified Specimens)). These consisted of raccoon, opossum, rabbit, chipmunk, Anatidae (ducks/geese/swan), wild turkey, frog and fish. Gathered wild bird eggs also comprise a significant part of the assemblage, accounting for nearly all of the 472 specimens from Layer C. This compares with 73 percent wild species identified in Feature 1. The constant between these two features is the apparent importance of hunting and fishing in the diet of Oak Hill's enslaved population. This is particularly interesting because it includes those people who lived closest to the main house and who might be presumed to have the greatest access to plantation stores.

The faunal analysis of Feature 2 Layers A and B provides an important data set because the presence of wire nails in these layers dates them to the postbellum period. The occupants of the former quarter at that time likely were paid domestic servants or perhaps sharecroppers. Rather than reflect a trend toward a higher percentage of domestic

animals in the occupants' diet, as one might expect, the 1,874 specimens in these layers suggest a continued heavy reliance on wild game and fish.

Cattle, pig, sheep/goat and chicken are represented in Layers A and B but in relatively small numbers. The wild species once again dominate the assemblage, comprising 89 percent of the 298 identified specimens. Not only are wild species prevalent in these later layers, but the assemblage includes a substantial number of fish remains and a greater variety of wild birds than seen in the earlier contexts. Identified wild birds include goose, great blue heron and small fowl. These results indicate that the post-1880 inhabitants of the former quarter site had not markedly changed their pre-emancipation subsistence strategy. Further documentary research may reveal whether the same individuals or families continued to occupy the site after the war.

Much research remains to be done at Oak Hill. The limited scope of the present salvage excavation precluded researching and writing an in-depth history of this once massive plantation and its hundreds, if not thousands, of historical inhabitants. Plantation records, personal correspondence, government records and oral histories will provide invaluable information for further research. Coupled with the potential for engagement with a large local descendant community, there is great potential to shed new light on an archaeologically overlooked part of Pittsylvania County's history.

Future archaeological investigation that would directly complement the present excavation would include examining the yard immediately surrounding the quarter, excavating in Rooms 3 and 4, and obtaining a representative assemblage of domestic refuse from the mansion house. Other obvious avenues of inquiry include a study of the massive terraced garden, excavation at any of the numerous other structures at the core of the plantation (including the ruin of a reputed schoolhouse), investigations further afield to obtain information on enslaved people who primarily tended crops and raised livestock, and identification of the numerous prehistoric sites that likely dot the former plantation as a result of its advantageous location along the Dan River. First and foremost, however, protection of this highly significant property from future development would insure that its information potential is not lost. Placing the property in an historic or conservation easement might accomplish this goal while conferring substantial tax relief and other benefits to its owners and should be encouraged.

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**Appendix A: Faunal Analysis**

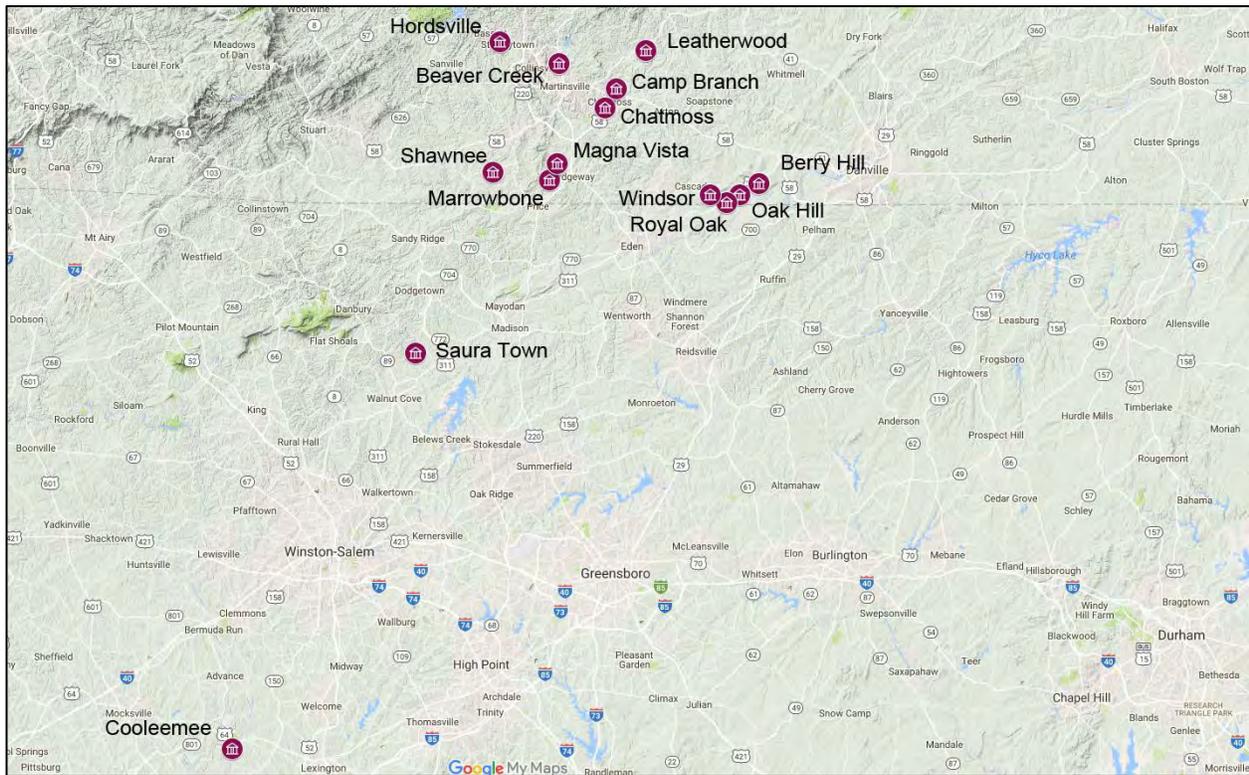
**Faunal Remains from 44PY0440, The Oak Hill Site**

Elizabeth A. Moore, PhD  
Curator of Archaeology  
Virginia Museum of Natural History  
2017



## Introduction

In late 2014, treasure hunters associated with the Discovery Channel show, *Rebel Gold*, arrived at Oak Hill Plantation in Pittsylvania County. Oak Hill is one of several plantations in the Virginia and North Carolina piedmont (Figure 1) and was built by Samuel Hairston who began construction in 1823 and finished in 1825. Oak Hill was the capital of the family empire, based primarily on Samuel's success with tobacco crops. On the eve of the Civil War, he owned tens of thousands of acres of lands, thousands of enslaved people, and, according to one article in a Richmond paper, was the wealthiest man in Virginia, if not the country. There is one estimate that the Hairston family owned ten thousand enslaved individuals. (Weincek 2000)



**Figure 1. Location of Regional Hairston Properties in 1860**

The treasure hunters were driven by rumors that some of the remains of the Confederate treasury had been hidden in the area as Jefferson Davis fled south from Richmond in 1865. Supposedly, kegs of Mexican silver coins were hidden along the retreat route. These treasure hunters had become convinced that some of this silver was hidden at Oak Hill Plantation. The looters used a variety of techniques to search for this treasure: they metal-detected then dug in positive locations and they investigated the ruins of an ice house, first with shovels, then with mechanical equipment which destroyed parts of the foundation. Finally, they excavated in a nearby standing slave quarter. They dug with shovels in two of the four rooms of the brick structure, including partially excavating a brick-lined subfloor pit in the second

room from the west. Finding no silver, they abandoned the site. Some of the artifacts from this looting were turned over to the Pittsylvania County Historical Society and include ceramics, buttons, coins, thimbles, and beads.

In 2015, Hurt & Proffitt was awarded a Threatened Sites grant to conduct a small salvage excavation and data recovery in the looted portion of the slave quarters and to document the structure. Excavations at Oak Hill were conducted on November 14 and 15 in 2015. Additional excavations were conducted in April of 2016 to complete removal of the last layer in one of the subfloor pits that could not be finished in November. A crew of Hurt & Proffitt staff, accompanied by volunteers from the staffs of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the Virginia Museum of Natural History, and Preservation Virginia worked on the site.

Excavation resulted in the identification of two brick-lined subfloor pits, numbered Features 1 and 2. Both pits were aligned with and adjacent to the hearths. The pit in Room 2 (Feature 1) had been partly excavated by the treasure hunters who left it open without backfilling. 5x5 foot units were placed over this pit and the suspected location of a similar pit in Room 1 (Feature 2). Units were excavated stratigraphically to the full dimensions of the pits. Disturbed soils were removed and screened through ¼ inch mesh. Because the soils in the lower layers of the pit were saturated, it was not possible to screen them in the field; these soils were bagged and wet-screened at the Virginia Museum of Natural History.

Wet-screening feature soils yielded a faunal sample containing a substantial proportion of very small (<5mm) specimens. Some of these specimens, in particular the fish scales and bird egg shell – are too fragmented for identification.

## **Analytical Methods**

All faunal analysis was done at the Virginia Museum of Natural History archaeology lab. Specimens had been cleaned prior to transfer and only a few specimens needed further cleaning prior to identification; this cleaning was done with water and a soft brush. Few bones exhibited recent breakage (*i.e.*, breakage occurring during or after excavation); those bone fragments were analyzed and bagged together but were not mended unless necessary for identification. In those cases where bones were mended to facilitate identification, B-72 in acetone was used as the adhesive.

The VMNH archaeology department maintains a skeletal reference collection focusing on the native and introduced (wild and domesticated) fauna of Eastern North America as well as an extensive library of published guides and illustrated keys (*e.g.*, Brown and Gustafson 1989, France 2008, Gilbert 1980, Gilbert *et al* 1996, Olsen 1985, Sisson and Grossman 1953, etc.). In addition, the domesticated animal osteology collection at the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine (VMRCVM) at Blacksburg, Virginia is available for a broader range of breeds and sizes of domesticated animals. The VMRCVM osteology collection contains individuals representing a range of ages, sizes, both sexes, and several breeds for pig, cow, horse, sheep, goat, and dog. This range of representation is particularly useful for domesticated animals that can have wide variation in bone morphology in adults as breeds were

developed for certain traits. Finally, VMNH holds an extensive (>10 million specimens) collection of fossil and modern mollusks of Eastern North America, both bivalves and gastropods, which can be used to identify invertebrate archaeological specimens.

Faunal data collection began with identification of all specimens to the lowest possible taxonomic category. Some specimens could not be identified to genus or species and were therefore placed in broader taxonomic categories referencing size of the animal. Specimens identified as “unidentified medium mammal” include all medium livestock (*i.e.*, sheep/goat), and wild animals (deer). Specimens in the “unidentified large mammal” category include large livestock (*i.e.*, cattle, horse). “Unidentified mammal” includes all mammals of any size where the bone fragment had no characteristics distinctive enough to distinguish size. A similar categorization is used with bird bone fragments with large (*i.e.*, turkey, goose), medium (*i.e.*, chicken) and small (*i.e.*, songbird) size indicated when a bone fragment contains enough diagnostic features to infer size of the bird. “Unidentified vertebrate” was used as the taxonomic identifying term when class could not be determined. Identifications made were conservative; unless bone exhibited features clearly diagnostic to species were present, identification was made to a broader taxonomic level.

In addition to taxon and size, additional data collected during analysis included age indicators (tooth eruption and wear, epiphyseal fusion), presence and degree of burning (burned, carbonized, calcined gray or white), evidence of butchery or other human modification, presence of animal modification (*i.e.*, carnivore gnawing, evidence of ingestion, insect damage, etc.), pathology, degree of fragmentation, and weight. Indeterminate bone (bone fragments which could not be identified to class) were counted and weighed for specimens greater than approximately 5mm in size. All specimens were assigned a number; a tag was generated with that number, identification, and provenience; and each bone or sample was bagged separately.

The primary derived measure used for this analysis is the Number of Identified Specimens (NISP). NISP is comprised of the number of bones or bone fragments present in the assemblage, taking into account refits of fragments, both pre-depositional and modern breaks that occur during excavation and processing (Reitz and Wing 1996). For example, a single bone may have been broken into five pieces during excavation. A count of bone fragments would be five but the NISP for those fragments would be one. The Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) was also calculated for each species. The MNI is the number of individuals needed to account for the specimens present. It is calculated using the most ubiquitous element present in the assemblage for each species. MNI was calculated at the feature level. All data were coded and entered into an electronic spreadsheet. A summary of the data by taxonomic identification for the entire site can be found in Table 1.

Butchering animals into usable units of meat (Evans and Green 1973) and the subsequent consumption of that meat and disposal of the associated bones can leave distinctive patterns of deposition. For many animals, butchering waste typically contains those parts of the body that are not meat-bearing elements, the head and feet. Food waste deposits are typically characterized as those that contain the meat-bearing elements – long bones, ribs, and vertebra – that have been cut into consumable portions. This pattern can be different for cattle and pig when compared to other animals, especially

smaller wild animals. For both cow and pig, some portions of the head are regularly consumed, such as brains, tongue, and cheeks. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (and even into the present), pig's feet were sometimes canned or pickled for later consumption, and calf's feet boiled for gelatin. This pattern of consumption varies depending on socioeconomic status. In particular, slave contexts rarely contain those elements and parts that represent highly valued cuts of meat.

## Results

A total of 6151 bone, teeth, mollusc, and egg shell fragments weighing 824.61 grams were recovered from the Oak Hill site. The distribution of the ceramics indicates that in Feature 2, Layer C is likely pre-1850, and the upper layers (A and B) are post-1880 (Randy Lichtenberger, personal communication). Given this interpretation of the layers in Feature 2, the data from both features has Layers A and B presented in the figures below separately from the deeper layers and MNI was calculated separately for the upper layers and the lower layers. Because there is no evident distinction at this time between the upper and lower layers in Feature 1, the discussion below presents the data for the entire feature unless an unusual distribution was noted otherwise. A summary of identified taxon by provenience can be found in Figures 2 (Feature 1) and 3 (Feature 2). Biomass was calculated for identified taxonomic categories; those calculations and the relative distribution of biomass across taxa are found in Figure 4.

Three percent of the specimens (n=174) are identifiable to species. These include cattle (*Bos taurus*), pig (*Sus scrofa*), white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*), squirrel (*Sciurus* sp.), Eastern cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*), chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*), house mouse (*Mus musculus*), white-footed mouse (*Peromyscus leucopus*), brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), chicken (*Gallus gallus domesticus*), wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), Great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*), musk turtle (*Sternotherus minor*), gar (*Lepisosteus osseus*), and Eastern elliptio (*Elliptio complanata*). Additional identifications include sheep/goat (*Ovis/Aries*), rodents of various sizes (Rodentia), duck (Anatidae), goose (Anserinae), small fowl (Galloanserae), perching birds (Passerines), frog/toad (Anura), salamander (Urodela), turtle (Testudines), bony fishes (Osteichthyes), snail (gastropod), and freshwater mussels (Unionidae).

### Feature 1

Feature 1, the brick-lined pit in Room 2 that had been partially damaged by looting, contained 1,939 specimens weighing 374.9 grams (Figure 3). Identified fauna and combined MNI for the feature include cattle (MNI=1), pig (MNI=2), rabbit (MNI=2), opossum (MNI=1), squirrel (MNI=2), brown rat (MNI=1), chicken (MNI=1), turkey (MNI=1), perching bird, musk turtle (MNI=1), gar (MNI=1), terrestrial gastropods, and freshwater bivalves. Cattle are represented by teeth (n=5), one lumbar vertebra fragment, and one 3<sup>rd</sup> phalanx; none of these are meat-bearing elements. All of these were recovered from Layers C and D.

**Figure 2. Feature 1 Number of Identified Specimens and Minimum Number of Individuals**

Taxon	Feature 1, Layers A and B						Feature 1, Layers C and D						
	NISP	% NISP	Weight (g)	% Wt. (g)	MNI	% MNI	NISP	% NISP	Weight (g)	% Wt. (g)	MNI	% MNI	
<b>Mammal</b>													
<i>Bos taurus</i> (cow)	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	0.4	70.9	27.7	1	12.5	
<i>Sus scrofa</i> (pig)	6	2.8	35.8	30.0	1	16.67	14	0.8	51.8	20.2	1	12.5	
<i>Didelphis virginiana</i> (opossum)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.06	0.1	0.04	1	12.5	
<i>Sylvilagus floridanus</i> (Eastern cottontail)	7	3.3	2.1	1.8	1	16.67	6	0.32	2.7	1.05	1	12.5	
<i>Sciurus</i> sp. (squirrel)	1	0.5	1.7	1.4	1	16.67	1	0.06	0.2	0.08	1	12.5	
<i>Rattus norvegicus</i> (brown rat)	3	1.4	0.5	0.4	1	16.67	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Rodentia (rodent)	2	0.9	0.2	0.2	-	-	1	0.06	0.1	0.04	-	-	
Mammal, large	2	0.9	47.8	40.2	-	-	6	0.3	46.4	18.1	-	-	
Mammal, medium	5	2.4	6.3	5.3	-	-	16	0.9	14.5	5.7	-	-	
Mammal, small	1	0.5	0.1	0.08	-	-	4	0.2	1.3	0.5	-	-	
Mammal	15	7.1	12.3	10.4	-	-	24	1.4	12.4	4.8	-	-	
<b>Bird</b>													
<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i> (wild turkey)	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.1	1.3	0.5	1	12.5	
<i>Gallus gallus domesticus</i> (chicken)	3	1.4	4.5	3.8	1	16.67	-	-	-	-	-	-	
c.f. <i>Gallus gallus domesticus</i> (chicken)	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0.2	0.4	0.2	1	12.5	
Passerine (perching birds)	1	0.5	0.1	0.08	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Aves, large (large bird)	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	0.2	0.7	0.3	-	-	
Aves, medium (medium bird)	2	0.9	0.2	0.2	-	-	10	0.6	1.2	0.5	-	-	
Aves, small (small bird)	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	0.2	0.4	0.2	-	-	
Aves (bird)	98	46.6	2.2	1.9	-	-	449	25.9	4.7	1.8	-	-	
<b>Reptile</b>													
<i>Sternotherus odoratus</i> (musk turtle)	1	0.5	0.2	0.2	1	16.67	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Testudines (turtle)	3	1.4	1.2	1.0	-	-	15	0.9	6.5	2.5	-	-	
<b>Fish</b>													
<i>Lepisosteus osseus</i> (gar)	-	-	-	-	1	16.67	1	0.06	0.1	0.04	1	12.5	
Osteichthyes (bony fish)	6	2.8	0.3	0.3	-	-	42	2.4	2.1	0.8	-	-	
<b>Molluscs</b>													
Bivalvia (bivalve)	1	0.5	0.2	0.2	-	-	5	0.3	1.2	0.5	-	-	
Gastropoda (gastropods)	1	0.5	0.1	0.08	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Indeterminate	52	24.8	3.0	2.5	-	-	1114	64.4	37.1	14.5	-	-	
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>		<b>118.8</b>				<b>1729</b>		<b>256.1</b>				

**Figure 3. Feature 2 Number of Identified Specimens and Minimum Number of Individuals**

Taxon	Feature 2, Layers A and B						Feature 2, Layer C					
	NISP	% NISP	Weight (g)	% Weight (g)	MNI	%MNI	NISP	% NISP	Weight (g)	% Weight (g)	MNI	%MNI
<b>Mammal</b>												
<i>Bos taurus</i> (cow)	1	0.05	21.2	10.2	1	4.2	3	0.1	21.7	9.6	1	7.14
<i>Sus scrofa</i> (pig)	18	0.9	43.7	20.9	1	4.2	24	1.0	58.0	25.7	1	7.14
<i>Ovis/Aries</i> (sheep/goat)	1	0.05	3.5	1.7	1	4.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i> (white-tailed deer)	1	0.05	2.6	1.2	1	4.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Procyon lotor</i> (raccoon)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.04	0.5	0.2	1	7.14
<i>Didelphis virginiana</i> (opossum)	4	0.2	5.8	2.8	1	4.2	4	0.2	2.2	1.0	1	7.14
<i>Sylvilagus floridanus</i> (Eastern cottontail)	7	0.4	4.3	2.1	1	4.2	5	0.2	3.8	1.7	1	7.14
<i>Sciurus</i> sp. (squirrel)	3	0.2	0.3	0.1	1	4.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Mus musculus</i> (house mouse)	16	0.9	1.6	0.7	2	8.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Peromyscus leucopus</i> (white-footed mouse)	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.1	0.2	0.9	1	7.14
<i>Tamias striatus</i> (chipmunk)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.04	0.1	0.04	1	7.14
<i>Rattus norvegicus</i> (brown rat)	5	0.3	0.4	0.2	1	4.2	2	0.1	0.2	0.09	1	7.14
<i>Rattus</i> sp. (rat)	9	0.5	0.9	0.4	1	4.2	4	0.2	0.4	0.2	1	7.14
c.f. <i>Rattus</i> (c.f. rat)	5	0.5	0.5	0.2	1	4.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rodentia (rodent)	4	0.2	0.3	0.1	-	-	4	0.2	0.3	0.1	-	-
Rodentia, medium (medium rodent)	2	0.1	0.2	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rodentia, small (small rodent)	7	0.4	0.7	0.3	-	-	3	0.1	0.3	0.1	-	-
Mammal, large	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	0.2	6.8	3.0	-	-
Mammal, medium	37	1.9	29.5	14.1	-	-	28	1.2	17.1	7.6	-	-
Mammal, small	55	2.9	5.4	2.6	-	-	25	1.1	2.5	1.1	-	-
Mammal	40	2.1	12.0	5.8	-	-	5	0.2	4.0	1.8	-	-
<b>Bird</b>												
Anatidae (ducks/geese/swans)	1	0.05	0.8	0.4	1	4.2	1	0.04	0.1	0.04	1	7.14
Anserinae (goose)	1	0.05	0.2	0.1	1	4.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
c.f. Anseriformes (c.f. goose)	1	0.05	0.1	0.05	1	4.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Ardea herodias</i> (great blue heron)	1	0.05	0.3	0.1	1	4.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i> (wild turkey)	1	0.05	1.0	0.5	1	4.2	2	0.1	0.7	0.3	1	7.14
Galloanserae, small (small fowl)	1	0.05	0.1	0.05	1	4.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Gallus gallus domesticus</i> (chicken)	11	0.6	10.4	5.0	2	8.4	3	0.1	3.5	1.6	2	14.28
Aves, large (large bird)	5	0.3	2.7	1.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Aves, medium (medium bird)	23	1.2	5.1	2.4	-	-	8	0.3	0.9	0.4	-	-

Aves, small (small bird)	13	0.7	1.3	0.6	-	-	19	0.7	0.8	0.4	-	-
Aves (bird)	431	23.0	5.4	2.6	-	-	568	23.9	8.4	3.7	-	-
<b>Reptile</b>												
Testudines (turtle)	1	0.05	0.1	0.05	-	-	6	0.2	1.8	0.8	-	-
<b>Amphibia</b>												
Anura (frogs)	1	0.05	0.1	0.05	1	4.2	2	0.1	0.2	0.09	1	7.14
Urodela (salamander)	3	0.2	0.2	0.1	1	4.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Fish</b>												
<i>Lepisosteus osseus</i> (gar)	1	0.05	0.3	0.1	1	4.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Osteichthyes (bony fish)	138	7.4	2.6	1.2	-	-	176	7.4	7.9	3.5	-	-
<b>Molluscs</b>												
<i>Elliptio complanata</i> (Eastern elliptio)	1	0.05	13.7	6.6	1	4.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bivalvia (bivalve)	1	0.05	0.4	0.2	-	-	4	0.2	0.2	0.09	-	-
Gastropoda	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	0.2	0.1	0.04	-	-
Mollusca	2	0.1	0.2	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Indeterminate	1022	54.5	30.7	14.7			1457	61.5	82.0	36.3	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>1874</b>		<b>208.6</b>				<b>2368</b>		<b>225.8</b>			

Figure 4. Biomass by Taxon, Feature, and Layers

Taxon	Feature 1						Feature 2					
	Layers A and B			Layers C and D			Layers A and B			Layer C		
	Bone wt.	Biomass (g)	% Biomass (g)	Bone wt.	Biomass (g)	% Biomass (g)	Bone wt.	Biomass (g)	% Biomass (g)	Bone wt.	Biomass (g)	% Biomass (g)
<b>Mammal</b>												
<i>Bos taurus</i> (cow)	-	-	-	70.9	1217.86	31.62	21.2	410.88	12.89	21.7	419.59	15.33
<i>Sus scrofa</i> (pig)	35.8	658.43	29.84	51.8	918.14	23.84	43.7	787.86	24.70	58.0	1016.48	37.14
<i>Ovis/Aries</i> (sheep/goat)	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.5	81.22	2.55	-	-	-
<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i> (white-tailed deer)	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.6	62.16	1.95	-	-	-
<i>Procyon lotor</i> (raccoon)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.5	14.10	0.52
<i>Didelphis virginiana</i> (opossum)	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.8	127.97	4.01	2.2	53.48	1.95
<i>Sylvilagus floridanus</i> (Eastern cottontail)	2.1	51.29	2.32	2.7	64.30	1.67	4.3	97.75	3.06	3.8	87.46	3.20
<i>Sciurus sp.</i> (squirrel)	1.7	42.41	1.92	0.2	6.18	0.16	0.3	8.90	0.28	-	-	-

<i>Mus musculus</i> (house mouse)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.6	40.15	1.26	-	-	-
<i>Peromyscus leucopus</i> (white-footed mouse)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2	6.18	0.23
<i>Tamias striatus</i> (chipmunk)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1	3.31	0.12
<i>Rattus norvegicus</i> (brown rat)	0.5	14.10	0.64	0.2	6.18	0.16	0.4	11.53	0.36	0.2	6.18	0.23
<i>Rattus</i> sp. (rat)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.9	23.92	0.75	0.4	11.53	0.42
c.f. <i>Rattus</i> (c.f. rat)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.5	14.10	0.44	-	-	-
Rodentia (rodent)	0.2	6.18	0.28	0.1	3.31	0.09	0.3	8.90	0.28	0.3	8.90	0.33
Rodentia, medium (medium rodent)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2	6.18	0.19	-	-	-
Rodentia, small (small rodent)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.7	19.08	0.60	0.3	8.90	0.33
Mammal, large	47.8	854.08	38.70	46.4	831.53	22.11	-	-	-	6.8	147.66	5.40
Mammal, medium	6.3	137.85	6.25	14.5	291.91	7.58	29.5	553.16	17.34	17.1	338.62	12.37
Mammal, small	0.1	3.31	0.15	1.3	33.31	0.86	5.4	120.00	3.76	2.5	60.00	2.19
Mammal	12.3	251.73	11.41	12.4	253.57	6.58	12.0	246.19	7.72	4.0	91.59	3.35
<b>Bird</b>												
Anatidae (ducks/geese/swans)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.8	16.67	0.52	0.1	2.51	0.09
Anserinae (goose)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2	4.72	0.15	-	-	-
c.f. Anseriformes (c.f. goose)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1	2.51	0.08	-	-	-
<i>Ardea herodias</i> (great blue heron)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.3	8.90	0.28	-	-	-
<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i> (wild turkey)	-	-	-	1.3	25.92	0.67	1.0	20.42	0.64	0.7	14.76	0.54
Galloanserae, small (small fowl)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1	2.51	0.08	-	-	-
<i>Gallus gallus domesticus</i> (chicken)	4.5	80.25	3.64	-	-	-	10.4	171.99	5.39	3.5	63.84	2.33
c.f. <i>Gallus gallus domesticus</i> (chicken)	-	-	-	0.4	8.87	0.23	-	-	-	-	-	-
Passerine (perching birds)	0.1	2.51	0.11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Aves, large (large bird)	-	-	-	0.7	14.76	0.38	2.7	50.41	1.58	-	-	-
Aves, medium (medium bird)	0.2	4.72	0.21	1.2	24.10	0.63	5.1	89.93	2.82	0.9	18.55	0.68
Aves, small (small bird)	-	-	-	0.4	8.87	0.23	1.3	25.92	0.81	0.8	16.67	0.61
Aves (bird)	2.2	41.84	1.89	4.7	83.49	2.17	5.4	94.73	2.97	8.4	141.61	5.17
<b>Reptile</b>												
<i>Sternotherus odoratus</i> (musk turtle)	0.2	10.76	0.49	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Testudines (turtle)	1.2	35.73	1.62	6.5	110.83	0.03	0.1	6.76	0.21	1.8	46.89	1.71
<b>Amphibia</b>												
Anura (frogs)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1	-	-	0.2	-	-
Urodela (salamander)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2	-	-	-	-	-

<b>Fish</b>												
<i>Lepisosteus osseus</i> (gar)	-	-	-	0.1	4.	0.12	0.3	11.62	0.36	-	-	-
Osteichthyes (bony fish)	0.3	11. 13	0.50	2.1	53.82	1.40	2.6	63.99	2.01	7.9	157.42	5.75
<b>Molluscs</b>												
<i>Elliptio complanata</i> (Eastern elliptio)	-	-	-	-	-	-	13.7	6.18	0.19	0.2	0.35	0.01
Bivalvia (bivalve)	0.2	0.35	0.02	1.2	1.18	0.03	0.4	0.56	0.02	0.1	0.22	0.01
Gastropoda	0.1	0.08	0.003	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mollusca	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2	0.35	0.01	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>2206.75</b>			<b>3852</b>			<b>3189.22</b>			<b>2736.8</b>	

Pig is represented by a more diverse range of skeletal elements; in the forelimb, these include one fragment each for radius and scapula, ten percent of the pig bones. In the hindlimb, specimens include two femura and one fibula fragment, fifteen percent of the pig remains. Thirty-five percent of the pig remains are found in the feet and include one 3rd metacarpal, one 2<sup>nd</sup> metatarsal, one unciform, one calcaneous, two 2nd phalanx, and one 3<sup>rd</sup> phalanx. The axial skeleton is represented by three thoracic vertebrae – one of which has cut marks (Figure 5) - fifteen percent of the pig sample. Finally, teeth comprise the remaining twenty-five percent of the pig bones. The pig elements consist of some small fragments of typical meat-bearing limb elements but the most frequent part represented are pig's feet, followed by teeth (Figure 6). The teeth may represent butchering remains from cheek and jowl removal. Cheeks and jowls were often considered preferred meat cuts and the remains from that butchery, the head parts, may have been given to the enslaved people.

The remaining domesticate in the Feature 1 assemblage is the chicken. Chicken elements recovered include one coracoid (forelimb), one femur (hindlimb), and one innominate (pelvis) fragment. Of the three domesticated animals in the feature assemblage, chicken has more meat-bearing elements. The presence of the chicken, duck, and geese may represent birds raised by the slaves for their own or the Hairstons' consumption. Weincek (2000) reports that ledgers kept by Ann Hairston at Beaver Creek Plantation north of Martinsville provide records of slaves raising turkey, duck, and geese for the Hairstons. Slaves were allowed to raise their own chickens and trade or sell them for other goods. Ann Hairston would trade lard and bacon for chickens; one chicken was worth one pound of bacon. If slaves were allowed to raise their own chickens at Oak Hill as they were at Beaver Creek, they may have had consumed some of the birds, not trading them all for other products such as bacon and lard.

Wild animals recovered in Feature 1 pit include rabbit, opossum, squirrel, turkey, musk turtle, gar, small land snails, and bivalves - probably freshwater mussels. All of these except for the small land snails represent remains of wild animals hunted for food. The land snails are not uncommon in disturbed soils and were observed elsewhere on the property during excavation and are most likely commensal, not remains of consumed fauna. Remains of a skull fragment (jugal), foot bone (4th metatarsal), and hindlimb

(tibia) of a rat was also present. There were no butchering marks on the rat but we cannot rule out the possibility that this animal may have been eaten.

Rabbit recovered in Feature 1 include one forelimb fragment - a humerus with cut marks - and head elements; rabbit was found in both upper and lower layers of the feature. Opossum was represented by one tooth, squirrel by forelimb (one humerus and one scapula), turkey by one cranial fragment and one ilium fragment, musk turtle by a humerus (forelimb), and gar. The variety of elements suggests that the occupants were hunting and consuming wild animals, not receiving discarded parts. Only one gar scale was recovered in the feature; no gar bones were present. Gar scales are extremely dense and preserve even in wet acidic soils like we see in this area. Gar teeth are needle-sharp and gar butchery often includes removing much of the head away from habitation areas to prevent accidental injury from the teeth. Gar may have been eaten at the site, or the scale could have been found near the river and brought back to the site for another purpose. There are 48 other small fish bones and scales in the Feature 1 assemblage and it is clear that fishing provided a portion of the diet.

Using NISP as a measure, wild animals represent 71% of the fauna in Layers A and B and 74% of the fauna in Layers C and D (Figure 7). There is some variation in the species present in the two parts of the feature (opossum only in the lower layers, brown rat only in the upper layers), but the proportion of wild to domesticated fauna does not vary significantly between the strata. Biomass for both upper and lower layers is dominated by the larger domesticated animals (Figure 4). In Layers A and B, pig, cattle, and large mammal (probably cow and pig) represent 68.54% of the biomass. In Layers C and D, those same categories represent 77.57% of the biomass. While wild species do not dominate the assemblage, they nonetheless play a significant role in providing food to the site occupants. Unfortunately, few of the smaller remains are identifiable to species, many of the smaller animal bones are too fragmented to be identified.

Specimens not identifiable to species include small, medium, and large mammals and birds. Two large mammal ribs and one medium mammal rib exhibit cut marks. Two of the large mammal ribs also exhibit chop marks produced by chopping large bones into smaller parts. This is often seen when larger bones are reduced to fit into pots for soups or stews or when larger portions are shared. The large mammal fragments are from cow or large pig-sized individuals. The medium mammal is a small fragment and identification cannot be inferred. One large mammal tibia (hindlimb) shaft fragment exhibits chop marks as well as spiral fractures on both ends of the bone. While spiral fractures can occur naturally, in butchered animal long bones they are produced when the bone is hit with a heavy blow (probably the visible chop mark) and twisted open to allow access to the bone marrow, a highly desirable part of the animal.

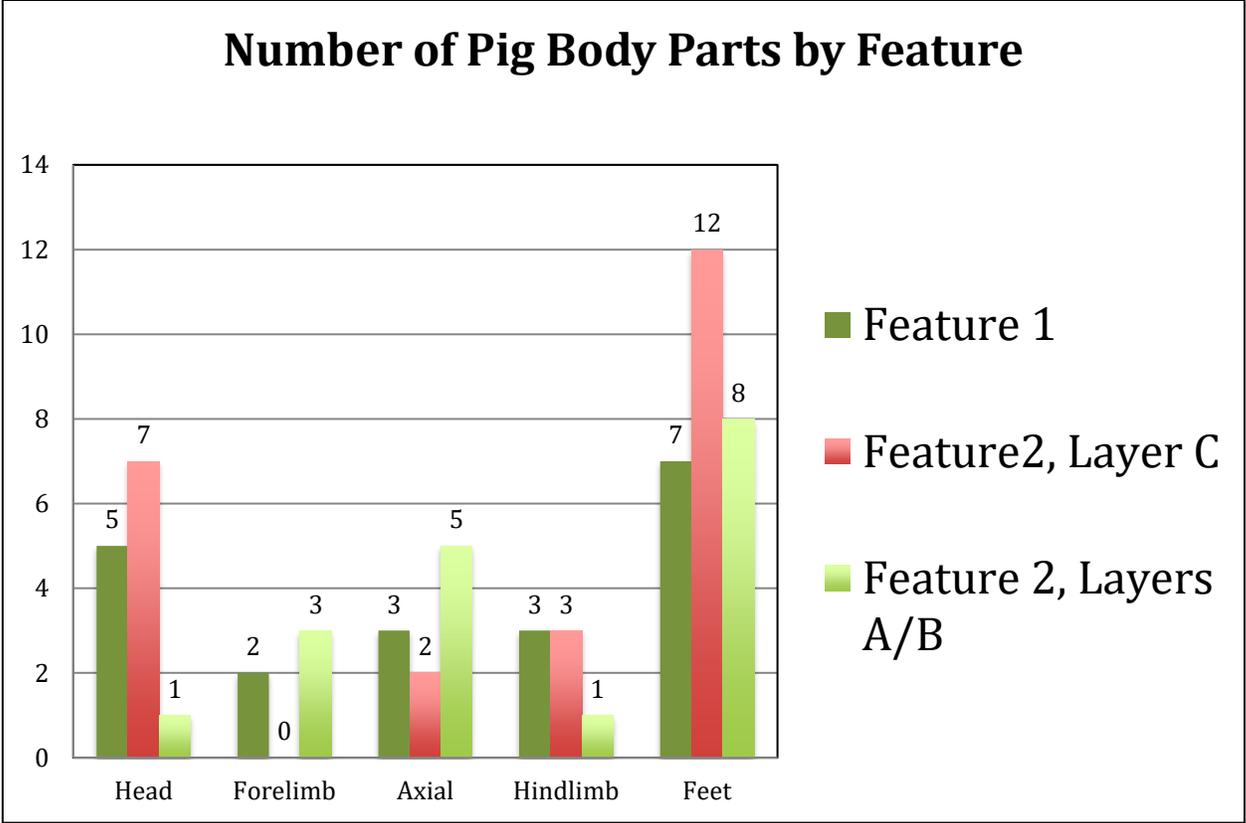


Figure 5, Number of Pig Body Parts by Feature



Figure 6, *Sus scrofa* (pig) thoracic vertebra with cut mark

**Figure 7. Proportion of Wild and Domesticated by Fauna by Feature and Layers**

	# Wild	# Domesticated	% Wild	% Domesticated
<b>Feature 1</b>				
Layers A and B	27	11	71	29
Layers C and D	86	30	74	26
<b>Feature 2</b>				
Layers A and B	265	33	89	11
Layer C	261	35	88	12

Nine percent (n=175, weighing 36.3 grams) of the specimens in Feature 1 have been burned. With an average weight of 0.2 grams, the majority of these are very small fragments. The exceptions to these small fragments include the cow third phalanx (toe), a medium mammal long bone fragment, fish vertebra, pig radius and thoracic vertebra, and the rabbit metatarsal. Given the proximity of the feature to the hearth, it is possible that the many small fragments fell into the pit during hearth cleaning.

Eight of the bones recovered in Feature 1 exhibit rodent gnawing; none of these are burned. Bones with this damage include the brown rat tibia and three of the pig bones – the two femur shaft fragments and the metatarsal. Rodent gnawing is found when food or food waste is not buried immediately and is available for scavenging. The pig bones are some of the large specimens recovered from this feature; unlike the many small burned fragments, these may have been discarded on the floor and subsequently discarded in the pit. It is also possible that if the pit was a spot for rodents to scavenge, they may have carried the bones into the pit for consuming.

**Feature 2**

Feature 2, located in Room 1, was intact prior to excavation and had not been damaged by looting. It contained a total of 4,242 specimens weighing 434.4 grams (Figure 3). Identified fauna include cattle, pig, sheep/goat, white-tailed deer, opossum, raccoon, rabbit, squirrel, chipmunk, brown rat, white-footed mouse, duck, turkey, goose, great blue heron, small fowl, frog/toad, salamander, gar, and Eastern elliptio. Given the interpretation of the ceramics (see above) and the interpretation of Layers A/B and C/D representing different time periods, data for those two contexts are presented separately here.

**Layers C, pre-1850**

Domesticated fauna from Layer C include cattle, pig, and chicken. Cattle remains recovered in Layer C include one molar, one mandible fragment, and one fragment of the proximal end of a femur (upper hindlimb) and has an MNI of one. Cattle represent 15.33% of the biomass for this stratum. Twenty-four pig specimens, also with an MNI of one, were recovered from Layer C. Pig has the highest percentage of biomass in this stratum at 37.14%. Elements present include seven phalanges (toe bones), one 3<sup>rd</sup> metacarpal, one metapodial shaft fragment, one 3<sup>rd</sup> metatarsal, one lunar carpal, one cuboid (three of the foot bones), one fragment of the distal shaft of a femur, two fibula fragments, one thoracic vertebra, one

atlas fragment, one maxilla fragment with three teeth intact, and six loose teeth (Figure 5). There is no duplication of pig elements; it is possible that this assemblage could represent the butchery, cooking, and consumption of one whole pig or it could represent individual elements being made available at varying points in time. It is not possible to determine if these elements are part of one individual. Three chicken bones were recovered from Layer C; these include one complete humerus (wing) and two right femora. Chicken from Layer C has an MNI of two and 2.33% of the biomass for the stratum.

In addition to the domesticates, the Layer C assemblage also includes raccoon (NISP=1, MNI=1), opossum (NISP=4, MNI=1), rabbit (NISP=5, MNI=1), chipmunk (NISP=1, MNI=1), Anatidae (ducks/geese/swan) (NISP=1, MNI=1), wild turkey (NISP=2, MNI=1), frog (NISP=2, MNI=1), and fish (NISP=176). Rodents, which may be commensal or may represent food remains, include white-footed mouse (NISP=2, MNI=1) and brown rat (NISP=2, MNI=1). Wild animals comprise 88% and domesticates comprise 12% of the number of identifiable specimens (NISP) in the faunal assemblage from Layer C.

The identifiable wild fauna comprises 8.2% of the specimens in Layer C (Figure 7). Domesticates (cattle, pig, chicken) account for only 1.2% of the Layer C assemblage. With a few exceptions, the remaining 90.6% of the assemblage are highly fragmented and largely unidentifiable. Seven rodent bones are 0.3% of the specimens from Layer C. There are 63 Indeterminate mammal bones (2.52% of NISP for Layer C), too fragmented to be identified. Bird remains are more ubiquitous, with 595 specimens, for 24.9% of the NISP for Layer C. Most of the bird remains are not bones, but are 472 egg shell fragments with a combined weight of 3.7 grams and an average weight of 0.008 grams per fragment. These small fragments cannot be identified to species; while a few are thick enough to be from chicken eggs, most of them are thin and probably represent eggs from smaller birds, not eggs from chicken or the larger wild birds (duck, goose). Gathered wild bird eggs appear to have been an important spring and early summer seasonal food resource for the site inhabitants. Chicken eggs would have been available year-round although access to them appears limited.

Of the 176 fish remains recovered, 78 of them are scales. Most of these scales are not complete and these fragments are not identifiable. The fish bones include rib (n=5), vertebra (n=1), and vertebral spines (n=3). The remaining 89 fish bones specimens are small non-diagnostic fragments, not identifiable to element nor to species. While it is possible that these fish specimens represent a single fish, given the large number of fragments however, it is more likely that these represent several fishes. They may have been cleaned and major bones and scales discarded elsewhere.

One of the bones, a pig 1<sup>st</sup> phalanx, exhibit signs of rodent gnawing. Burning is present on 173 of the specimens including one Eastern cottontail innominate, one pig femur, one turkey fibula, two opossum head parts (one tooth, one maxilla with teeth), one medium mammal bone fragment, 18 egg shell fragments, 47 fish bones, and 102 indeterminate small bone fragments. 432 of the specimens are partially or completely calcined; this occurs when bone is burned for longer periods of time or at a higher temperature. These include three pig bones (three teeth, one 3<sup>rd</sup> phalanx), two medium mammal vertebra fragments, 47 fish bones, and 380 indeterminate small fragments. The calcined fragments have an average weight of 0.05 grams each. This small size is not surprising for calcined material, the burning process reduces bone to small pieces that are friable and easily broken. Four bones from this stratum exhibit signs

of butchery. One cut mark was observed on a medium mammal rib shaft. Three bones exhibit chop marks: one cow femur, a medium mammal rib, and a pig fibula.

### **Layers A and B, post-1880**

Cattle remains in the post-1880 stratum (which includes Layers A and B) include one right rib fragment weighing 21.2 grams with an MNI of one. Eighteen pig specimens were recovered in this stratum and include fragments of six phalanges, one 2<sup>nd</sup> metacarpal, one scaphoid, two humeri, one ulna, one tibia, one tooth, and five vertebrae which, combined, represent an MNI of one. These represent primarily non-meat bearing parts of the body. One rib from a sheep or goat was recovered in this assemblage. Care was taken to compare this rib with ribs from animals with similar rib size. Deer in the VMNH reference collection has ribs nearest in size to this sheep/goat rib but the morphology of the deer ribs is different from those of both sheep and goat, both of which are also present in the VMNH reference collection.

Eleven chicken bones weighing 10.4 grams with an MNI of two were recovered from this stratum. Chicken is represented by a wide variety of body parts including one nearly complete cranium, wings (one coracoid, two humeri, two scapula), legs (one femur), one innominate, one sternum, one toe bone, and one rib. The presence of the nearly complete cranium suggests that the chicken was butchered and cooked in or near the room. The chicken cranium shows no signs of cooking damage, either from roasting or boiling, and may have been discarded in the pit after removal from the body. This assemblage of chicken bones represents most parts of the body, indicating access to the whole animal, not individual parts or cuts of meat.

In addition to the domesticates discussed above, other animals recovered in the post-1880 deposit of the Feature 2 brick-lined pit include white-tailed deer, opossum, rabbit, squirrel, brown rat, house mouse, duck, turkey, goose, great blue heron, small fowl, frog/toad, turtle, salamander, gar, other bony fishes, and Eastern elliptio. Rodent pests (the mice, rats, and unidentified rodentia) account for 48 of the bones in this feature. These species do not typically burrow into the ground; they make nests in dark and protected areas. They may have been commensal at the time of occupation, feeding off of food waste, if they were not consumed themselves.

Rabbit in this stratum includes forelimb (one radius), hindlimb (two femur, one tibia), and axial (two cervical and one thoracic vertebra) elements. There is no duplication of elements and this likely represents a single individual. All of the rabbit was recovered from Layer B and is does not include intrusive material. Opossum remains include one hindlimb element (femur) and three vertebra fragments, all found in Layer B. This, too, is likely a single individual. Squirrel remains include one lumbar vertebra, one tooth, and one calcaneous giving an MNI of one. Deer is represented by one bone, a fragment of a left innominate (pelvis).

There are several wild birds in this stratum including great blue heron, duck, goose, and turkey. Each of these birds has only one bone each in the assemblage. Additional bird bones include one probable goose skull fragment, and a small fowl cervical vertebra that cannot be identified to species.

Gar in this stratum is represented by one cranial fragment. Gar is found in the Dan River today and would have been present in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Gar bones are fairly dense and have a unique diagnostic surface texture and, unlike most of the smaller bony fishes, preserve well. Smaller bony fish remains include 42 bones and 96 scales. Bones include ribs, fin spines, vertebra, one quadrate (head bone), and numerous fragments not identifiable to element. The indeterminate fish remains account for 54.5% of the specimens but only 2.01% of the biomass for this stratum.

Ten of the specimens in this stratum exhibit evidence of rodent gnawing. These include four pig (two phalanges, scaphoid, humerus), one chicken femur, one cow rib, one medium mammal humerus, and three bird fragments. Burning is present on 53 of the specimens including bird (18 egg shell, four bones), four pig bones (tibia, tooth, ulna, vertebra), one Eastern cottontail vertebra, one opossum femur, one brown rat humerus, nine mammal bone fragments, one fish bone, and 14 indeterminate bone fragments. 63 specimens are calcined, including one egg shell, one small bird fragment, two small mammal fragments, one squirrel calcaneous, one pig 2<sup>nd</sup> phalanx, and 57 indeterminate bone fragments. Only one bone in this stratum exhibit signs of butchery, a medium mammal with a chop mark on a calcaneous (bone in the ankle).

## **Summary and Conclusions**

Feature 1 contains a mix of domesticated (n=41) and wild (n=113) animals (Figure 7). While the number of wild animal specimens in Feature 1 is significantly larger, this is largely due to the number of fish remains. When we calculate biomass to examine dietary contribution, we see that the domesticates – cattle, pig, and chicken – account for 33.48% in Layers A/B and 55.69% in Layers C/D. Indeterminate bone fragments from large and medium mammals, those fragments too small to be diagnostic to element or taxon, account for 44.95% of the biomass for Layers A/B and 29.69% in Layers C/D. Given the lack of any wild animals in this size range, it is likely that these indeterminate fragments are from cattle or pig and their dietary contribution is likely large than is indicated by the identifiable fragments.

Feature 2 contains two distinct temporal components, one pre-1850 and one post-1880. The pre-1850 component contains a small number of cattle bones, a significant amount of pig, a diverse assemblage of wild mammals, some wild birds, a small number of turtle carapace fragments, and a substantial number of fish remains. The post-1880 component similar representation in cattle and pig but has more diversity in the mammals with the addition of sheep/goat and deer and in the birds, especially with water-fowl including goose, great blue heron, and small fowl. This component also has a substantial number of fish remains. The site occupants in both time periods were receiving largely non-meat bearing body parts from cattle and pig, may have had access to whole chickens, and were supplementing their diet with a mix of wild aquatic and terrestrial animals.

In his 2005 publication of subsistence behaviors within a rural African American slave descendant community in Natchez, Mississippi, Michael Tuma documented his observations of animal butchery, secondary processing, cooking, and post depositional activities. He then conducted spatial analysis of the

bone refuse from these activities, comparing it to data from slave contexts at the neighboring Saragossa plantation where the ancestors of the participants had lived.

Hogs were butchered in a series of steps including gutting, head removal, removal of the organs in the chest cavity, dismemberment, and disarticulation of the carcass. The animals were not skinned but the skin was softened through scalding and scraping, the hooves were removed, and the skin remained attached to parts removed from the carcass. Parts saved and eaten included the head, the tail, and skin from abdominal and back areas as well as standard parts seen with other animals. Occasionally, hogs were cooked whole, in which case after scalding, gutting, and head removal, the carcass was split along the medial plane with a saw. This produces a “half-hog” that is commonly seen in the Virginia southern piedmont today.

Fish cleaning was done in a variety of ways depending on the size and species of the fish. Smaller fish were scaled, the heads removed, and then guts and fins were removed, Gar have a particularly tough skin so they were processed differently; a cut was made behind the head allowing the skin to be peeled from the carcass, cutting around the fins. Once the skin was removed, gutting and head removal proceeded as with other fishes. Butchery observed was almost all done in a public yard, not inside the domestic spaces. Some of the waste was consumed by dogs and feral cats; the rest was swept to the yard edges.

The data from Oak Hill do not contradict the observations made by Tuma and noted for other slave sites in Virginia. Except for the chicken, there is little evidence of butchery and its associated waste in the subfloor pits; the assemblage appears to contain waste primarily from cooking and consumption. Very few of the bones exhibit any signs of burning. When present, discoloration is slight. One thoracic vertebra with minor burning also has a piece of charcoal embedded in a foramen; it is possible that the burning was from disposal with hot embers. Given the low occurrence of burning on the bones, it is likely that these bones represent cooking by simmering in a soup or stew. Frying, roasting, and baking often result in burned bone which we do not observe here.

In summary, the occupants of the Oak Hill slave quarter ate a mix of domestic and wild fauna. Domesticated mammals (cow, pig, sheep/goat) are represented by cuts that do not produce substantial quantities of meat. Most of the fragments are small and may indicate that they were simmered to extract any marrow and the small amounts of meat on the bone. Historic documents indicate that the enslaved people may have raised yard fowl which could be traded for other meat products – bacon and lard – which would not leave any evidence in the archaeological record. Chickens raised may have been traded for those pork products and to provide eggs, with the occasional bird being eaten.

Wild fauna consumed include a mix of small mammals and aquatic species. Fishes are represented by 364 unidentifiable small bone fragments and scales; fish are clearly providing meat to supplement the meat cuts provided. As seen in many slave contexts, the faunal evidence here indicates the food provided through food allotments and allowances by slave owners was insufficient. Hunting and fishing would have been critical to survival and included animals such as opossum and raccoon, rabbits that are garden pests,

rodents that would have been nuisance animals living and scavenging in the vicinity or in the structure, and fish and bivalves available in the nearby Dan River.

While triggered by the unfortunate looting at the site, these excavations give us the opportunity to learn more about the enslaved people who lived at Oak Hill and their access to critical resources for survival. Little archaeology has been conducted on the Hairston holdings. Given the extent of their property, both land and human, at the outbreak of the Civil War, examining sites associated with the Hairston family has the potential for understanding a great deal more about the daily lives of the people they owned. Descendants of the enslaved people owned by the Hairstons number in the thousands surrounding the former plantations and these sites can connect them with their past in a unique way. Concomitantly, family stories and records have the potential to inform the interpretation of the material culture in the archaeological record adding to our understanding of the lives of the people working and living on these properties.

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