Restoration Archaeology at the Paca House, Annapolis, Maryland

Stanley South

University of South Carolina - Columbia, stansouth@sc.edu
In 1965, Historic Annapolis, Inc. acquired the large brick structure that had once been the home of William Paca, signer of the Declaration of Independence. In the twentieth century the building had been the front of a large hotel known as Carvel Hall. This hotel has been razed, and restoration of the Paca House and garden is under way. The architect responsible for the restoration of the house is James Burch, AIA, who has been carrying out a detailed examination of the structure for many months. Realizing the need for archaeological work to accompany the study his office was making of the building itself, Mr. Burch, through Contract Archaeology, Inc. of Alexandria, Virginia made plans for a combination study designed to reveal information about the house and its occupants through historical and archaeological research. Although originally conceived as a team effort involving an historian and an archaeologist, this writer agreed to carry out both studies in a four month period, as well as recording, through photographs, the evidence being examined by the architects in the house itself. The work was done on a sub-contract basis for Contract Archaeology, Inc.

This approach of combining the information produced through architectural examination, historical research, and archaeology, represents the ideal situation for the study of an historic structure for the purpose of restoration. All possible care and deliberation is being exercised in the study of this building, and only after all the evidence has been
gathered will the architect finally attempt to make his working drawings for
the restoration. A complete report on the historical research, the
archaeological work, and the photographic study of the architectural clues
has been written and turned over to the architect. This volume constitutes
one of the cornerstones for the restoration, a necessary one in competent
efforts at the preservation of our heritage through historic structures.
This paper is a review of the work carried out on this project from June
through September, 1967.

The Paca House is a large brick country house built on Prince George
Street in Annapolis, representing only one of a number of fine homes built
in the mid-eighteenth century by gentlemen of wealth and position in that
city. The historical research revealed that it was built by William Paca,
beginning in 1763, and was probably completed enough for occupancy by 1765.
It was the home of William Paca and his wife Mary Chew until her death in
1774. After that time Paca was away from Annapolis a great deal, concerned
with the affairs of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. He sold the
house, in 1780, to a fellow attorney, Thomas Jenings, who made it the home
for his family until his death in 1796. The Jenings heirs rented the house
to Baron Henri de Stier in 1797, who was the only aristocrat ever to live
there. Throughout most of the nineteenth century the house was rental
property, serving during the last quarter of that century as a boarding
house, and climaxed as rental property by the construction of Carvel Hall
Hotel shortly after the turn of the twentieth century.
In 1878, the west wing was raised an additional floor, and in 1890 the east wing and hyphen were also raised to accommodate more boarders. These additions will be removed, and the kitchen wing and the office wing restored to their original one-story-and-garret appearance. During the removal of nineteenth century lathing in the ceiling of the main house, the architect discovered a note placed there by a carpenter who was carrying out alterations. This note stated, "This attic story was finished for Mrs. Dr. Kennedy By James L. Taylor, Carpenter, June 1885." It was Mrs. Kennedy who operated the boarding house.

The historical research was carried out in Annapolis, Washington, Philadelphia and Baltimore, in order to recover as much data as possible about the occupants of the Paca House, with emphasis, of course, on William Paca. The Paca family history was followed into the mid-seventeenth century to William Paca's great grandfather, Robert Peaker. The next step in this direction would be research in three counties in England where the Peaker family is located. Along with the genealogical research emphasis was placed on personal interests and qualities of the man William Paca, such as his interest in the Jockey Club, and his membership in an early social group known as the Homony Club. His activities in the field of public affairs as a prominent lawyer and judge, signer of the Declaration of Independence and governor of Maryland were not emphasized in this study since these phases of the activity of the man have been frequently covered by historians.

Of particular interest in regard to the formal garden known to have been located at the rear of the Paca House is the painting by Charles W. Peale of Paca, in the background of which there is a two story summer house, a smaller house (probably the bath house), a bridge with a Chinese Chippendale
motif railing, and a brick wall with vertical slots along its length. A photograph made from the dome of the Maryland State House in the late nineteenth century reveals the fact that a slotted brick wall such as shown in this painting separated the Paca House garden from King George Street. From this correlation we know that the scene depicted by Peale was indeed at the Paca House on Prince George Street, and from this the architect and the landscape gardener, are able to obtain valuable information for restoration of the garden.

Of similar value are sketches made of the Paca House by F.B. Mayer in 1872, and photographs taken before the east wing and hyphen were raised in 1890. These are significant to the architect responsible for the restoration, providing information not available elsewhere.

The architectural study has involved the removal of floors to reveal earlier floors, removal of reinforced concrete floors to reveal old ground surfaces beneath, under which archaeological work was then carried out, and removal of later wall surfaces to reveal those earlier ones beneath. The archaeologist and architect literally worked side by side in the examination of hearths, walls, and floors in an effort at understanding the story to be revealed at the Paca House.

Through removal of plaster from walls, old doorways were revealed, as well as clues to original positioning of windows and floor levels. Study in the top floor of the main house revealed that there had originally been five dormers instead of the three there today. The outline of shelving against the exterior of the main house, with eighteenth century type plaster applied after the shelves were in place produced evidence pointing toward an eighteenth century date for the wide east hyphen. This is the sort of evidence being studied in the architectural examination of the house.
The archaeological goals were to establish the original grades in the area of the Paca House, both those present at the time construction began, as well as the grade originally established after construction of the house was complete. Through a series of squares all around the house this information was revealed. The area of the Paca House was an orange clay hill at the time construction began in 1763, no original topsoil being found in place anywhere on the site. Because construction was beginning at a subsoil level, i.e. on a hard compact clay, the builders felt that there was little need for construction ditches, and sat the building on the surface of the ground in most instances, adding fill against the house after construction was completed in order to landscape the area and force drainage away from the building.

Besides the goal of determining original grades, the discovery of the function of the two wings was desired, as well as the recovery of information relative to walks, old entrances, and any other features of significance that would aid in an understanding of the history of the house. Many questions were asked by the architect and the archaeologist, but only a small percentage were able to be completely answered, as is usually the case. New questions were also raised in the process of answering others.

During excavation at the rear of the west wing a brick surface drain was found two feet below present grade. This drain passed beneath a later brick lined walk containing mid-nineteenth century objects. In one area the drain had been partially removed in order to construct a plant bed, the outline of which could be clearly seen against the orange clay subsoil. The plant bed contained numerous fragments of wall plaster, along with ceramic
types dating from 1790 to 1805, indicating that repairs were very likely made to the house during this period. From the historical records we know that Baron de Stier made repairs to the house in 1797 and 1798, and from this we might conjecture that it was from these repairs that the plaster came to be in the plant bed. We know also, that the Baron brought his own gardener with him from Antwerp, Holland when he came to America.

From the work around the west wing we find that almost no kitchen midden material was throw into the yard here, ruling out this wing as the kitchen. However, in front of the west wing a walk of coal ash was discovered leading to a window. From an examination of this area of the brick wall beneath the window, it became apparent that a window had originally been here, and that it had been converted into a doorway, then back into a window again. From artifacts lying over the walk it was possible to determine that the change from a window to a door had occurred during the second decade of the nineteenth century, during the ownership of the house by Lewis Neth.

In front of the west hyphen a walk composed of oyster shells was found. Among these shells was a quantity of broken china dating from 1790 to 1805, indicating the period for the accumulation of this midden. The period of its accumulation would indicate that it was likely taken from a midden deposit of Thomas Jenings who lived in the house from 1780 until his death in 1796, or possibly from a midden accumulated during the occupation of the house by Baron de Stier from 1797 to 1800. The walk was likely built during the ownership of the house by Lewis Neth, and may have been constructed of shell from his own midden deposit of the first decade of the nineteenth century.
It was not until excavation was carried out to the east of the east wing of the house that material was found that could definitely be associated with the builder of the house, William Paca. Here, beside the door to this wing, a pile of oyster shells was found. Mixed with the shells and bone were fragments of Oriental porcelain, salt-glazed stoneware, delft, faience, and creamware, all types of the 1760's and 1770's, definitely establishing this deposit as that accumulated during the occupation of the house by William Paca. This midden was found to extend along the side of the house, beneath twentieth century bays that had been added to the wing. The presence of this deposit here definitely established this wing as the kitchen.

Of particular interest here was the discovery that this wing was built on the stone foundation of an earlier structure, the early building having been some feet shorter than the Paca House wing. Another significant discovery was the fact that a drain passed from inside the wing through the brick wall, and into an underground pipe made of bricks. This drain was stopped up by oyster shells that had been thrown into the drain opening, causing a slowing of the drainage. Gradually it completely stopped with fish bones, scales, and other small fragments from the kitchen. From the ceramic fragments recovered from this drain it became apparent that it was not used as a drain much after 1785, and therefore was apparently clogged during the use of the house by Thomas Jenings.

During the excavation inside the east wing a small brick storage box was found in the position that was just beneath the original stairs to the garret. This was apparently a secret hiding place, perhaps used by certain
trusted servants. From excavation in the area of the east wall of the east wing a fault line was revealed, paralleling the wall, with an open crack occurring at the edge of the original construction ditch. This open crack in the soil was seen as a result of the raising of the wing in 1890, at which time a greater weight was added to the foundation wall, causing it to tilt slightly outward due to the fact that the brick bearing wall sat on the outer edge of the original stone foundation. As this wall gradually leaned out during the years after 1890, cracks appeared, and it showed signs of possible collapse. It was in the early years of the twentieth century, therefore, that the owners apparently saw the necessity of somehow buttressing the east wall to prevent its collapse. To do this they constructed two bays, which, in effect, provided four buttressing walls, supporting the leaning wing wall. From this interpretation of the fault seen in the ground, plus a study of the wing wall itself, the archaeologist was able to recommend to the architect that during restoration of this wing, these buttresses be left in place until the second floor weight was removed, then, with the lower floor strengthened, the buttressing bays could then be safely removed.

Excavation in the front yard of this wing revealed a brick cistern sealed with a stone placed over the cemented dome. When this stone was moved it was found that the cistern was twenty feet deep, and had eight feet of quicksand inside. Pipes leading into the cistern were traced to the corner of the house, where they had once fed rain water from the roof of the house into the cistern. It was probably constructed in the nineteenth century. Fill over the capstone produced artifacts from the late nineteenth century, indicating that this was the period during which the use of the cistern was stopped. In this regard a reference dated 1893 indicates that
in that year the old well was capped at a cost of one dollar. The old well referred to was likely the cistern archaeologically revealed to have been capped in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

In front of the east hyphen another oyster shell walk was found, matching that on the opposite side of the house. Beneath this walk, as beneath the other, was evidence that the original walk had been of brick. This walk at present stops at a window, but closure bricks, plus 1790 to 1805 period ceramics in the walk point toward a doorway here at an early date, before the present window was installed. A brick steps was found here also, leading down to the lowered floor of the hyphen. This steps dates from the nineteenth century, however, the original doorway having been at ground level.

In front of the house and parallel with it the remain of a brick wall was found. This was apparently a low retaining wall, possibly designed to prevent erosion of the front yard of the house. It was torn down in the nineteenth century, and replaced by a brick wall closer to the street. The fact that this brick wall passed over one of the shell walks in the front yard allowed its construction date to be fixed. Beneath the wall, in the shell walk, fragments of creamware and pearlware were recovered that would indicate that the wall was constructed probably between 1780 and 1790, during the period of Thomas Jenings' use of the house, and was not built until after William Paca sold the house.

From this short summary of the work carried out at the Paca House in Annapolis during the summer of 1967, some of the problems and accomplishments of a restoration archaeology project are highlighted. As more work is undertaken by responsible agencies toward the restoration of historic
structures, an ever increasing need will be felt for historic site archaeologists who are skilled not only in the competent excavation and interpretation of archaeological sites, but who can undertake to correlate the information so gained with the architectural examination and historical documentation relative to a standing building. Thus, the historic site archaeologist's particular emphasis on the systematic recovery of data from the earth, interpreted through analogy with information recovered through historical research, and correlated with evidence revealed in standing historic buildings, enables him to meet the unique challenge of restoration archaeology.