ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT GUNSTON HALL PLANTATION (44FX113)

Report of 2007 Excavations

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Gunston Hall archaeology program suffered near extinction when it was completely de-funded in October 2002. Although two of the three full-time staff were lost at that time, that program had achieved enough importance in the area that local residents and businesses, as well as Gunston Hall regents, employees and volunteers, contributed sufficient funds to allow a reduced-scale program to continue. The program was wholly supported by gifts and grants until fiscal year 2006, when the Board of Regents Fund began supporting part of the labor costs of the single remaining staff member. Finally, starting in 2007, the entire labor cost was covered by the Regents Fund. However, the program is still dependent on the generosity of others to cover the cost of supplies, equipment and other expenses.

We are, of course, enormously grateful to all whose generosity has kept the program alive during these lean years. In particular, I want in acknowledge with thanks to those who contributed monies and equipment to the archaeology program during 2007. They are: Mrs. Gilbert Warwick Anderson, Mrs. Timothy George Dargan, Mrs. Dudley J. Godfrey, Jr., Mrs. Robert L. Ferril III, Penelope Payne, Esq. and Mrs. John Lane Wood.

The program could not function without a corps of dedicated and talented volunteers, and that is just what we have at Gunston Hall. Some of the archaeology volunteers have with the program almost from its inception in 1997. I would especially like to thank those who worked with the program on a regular basis during 2007. They are: Janice Bell, Carol Boland, Janice Brose, Bianca Brown, Marge Budd, Art Eaton, Jerry Foster, MJ Grabulis, Gloria Hamley, Susan Hardenburgh, Susan Marquis, Wendy Miervaldis, Ian Morgan, Ann Oliver, Karl van Newkirk, Donald Ward and Gretchen Wendelin.

Also essential to the functioning of the program has been the expert assistance provided by Dr. Liz Crowell and Mike Johnson of the Fairfax County Park Authority. Although not technically part of their duties with the Park Authority, neither Dr. Crowell nor Mr. Johnson has ever hesitated to provide the guidance needed to keep the Gunston Hall program on track.

INTRODUCTION

Gunston Hall Plantation was the 18th Century seat of George Mason IV (1725-1792). The original plantation was comprised of five contiguous farms on somewhat more than 5,500 acres on Dogues' Neck (now Mason Neck), in Fairfax County, Virginia. Mason built two successive homes for himself on the Neck. The first, built about 1746, was on the tip of the peninsula. The second, which he named Gunston Hall, was begun about 1754 and was occupied by Mason and his family by 1759.

The Gunston Hall mansion has survived the years with, excepting the basement, no major changes having been to either the exterior or the interior spaces. It sits on the 550 acres which remain of the original plantation lands. The Plantation is now owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia and is managed as a historic site by the National Society of Colonial Dames of America.

Unlike the mansion, there are only a few remnants are visible of the alterations Mason made to the landscape of his "home farm." These include the English boxwoods which form an alley between the river front entrance of the mansion to the remains of a terrace system. The boxwoods have been dated to Mason's time by dendrochronology. The terrace itself was almost certainly a Mason construction. The entry drive and Logtown Road probably follow their original 18th Century routes for most of their lengths.

No primary source documents which describe the plantation are known. Mason's personal papers, which would have presumably held clues to what was in the landscape, were lost in a fire after having been removed from the plantation by a grandson. The only useful source of information about the 18th Century Gunston Hall landscape that has come down to us is a manuscript written in the 1830's by one of George Mason's sons, John,. In this recollection of his early life at Gunston Hall, John Mason does mention in passing some landscape features. However, the location and description of these landscape elements are usually given only in very general terms.

The present archaeology program was established by the Gunston Hall Board of Regents in 1997 in connection with a planned restoration of the one-acre formal garden. At that time, the garden was of the colonial revival style, laid out and planted in the early 1950's by the Garden Club of Virginia. The Board of Regents had determined that the restoration would follow as closely as possible the original garden design of George Mason, based on clues which could be unearthed by archaeology.

In subsequent years, the areas of interest and objectives of the archaeology program have expanded from that original rather limited focus on the one-acre garden. The presently stated objectives of the program are:

1. Determine the origins of the landscape design that embraced the "home house" at Gunston Hall, and the alterations that George Mason may have implemented during

his lifetime. Also, attempt to relate the landscape design to Mason's personality and world view, and determine how the residents of Gunston Hall, including the enslaved persons, may have influenced and been influenced by the landscape.

2. Use archaeological techniques to determine the landscape features and their interrelationships as they existed during the period 1759 to 1792, when George Mason IV resided at Gunston Hall. Where feasible, Mason-era landscape features identified by the program are replicated on the site.

3. Present to the general public in an interesting and informative way the results, techniques and ethics of good archaeological practice. This is done on a day-to-day basis to individuals and groups visiting the site, and through special programs held at various times throughout the year.

During the 2007 field season, the primary emphasis was placed on attempting to elucidate the original structure of the garden terrace and on searching for a carriage circle on the land front side of the house. Work begun the previous season on the garden fence line and a possible cellar hole was completed. Finally, a shovel test pit survey was undertaken in an area which local tradition suggested may have been the site of the Logtown slave quarter. The artifacts recovered during the 2007 season had not been completely processed at the time of this writing, so no detailed analysis of that aspect of the work is included.

METHODS

The datum point for the historic core is located on the southeast corner of the mansion. More specifically, it is on the top, outer corner of the second quoin from the bottom. All distance measurements and elevations are taken from this point using a surveyor's transit. Although the long axis of the mansion trends more or less northwest to southeast, the coordinate system used assumes that the long side of the mansion is on an east-west axis. This allows excavation units to be placed so that their sides are aligned with mansion and the rest of the formal landscape. All linear measurements are taken in American engineering measure (i.e., in feet/tenths/hundredths).

All units are dug stratigraphically. In the case of relatively thick, uncomplicated strata, arbitrary levels 0.2' or 0.3' thick are excavated within the strata. The datum point of each unit is the ground surface at the southwest corner. In the few instances where this is impractical, the alternate corner is noted on the field forms. Elevation control is maintained during excavation with the aid of a line level attached to the datum corner. At the completion of each stratum or level, elevations are taken with a laser level.

Data are recorded by stratum/level or feature on a series field forms. A Summary Form permits a narrative description and interpretation of a single unit or group of related units. Scale drawings are made of at least one side wall, and other section, plan view and feature drawings are made when necessary. Photographs are taken of the finished excavation and at any intermediate stages that might yield useful information. Beginning in 2007, all photographs are made with a good quality SLR digital camera, rather than on film.

All soil is screened through one-quarter inch hardware cloth. Artifacts from each stratum/level, feature and feature component are collected separately in labeled paper bags. In the case of certain deposits, samples are fine screened by washing the soil through window screening.

Artifacts are cleaned by methods appropriate to the material, cataloged, labeled and packaged for storage. Some items are stabilized (e.g., bone, with polyvinyl butyrate) and some ceramic and glass items are mended with a reversible adhesive (Acryloid B72). Artifacts are packaged in archival quality plastic bags and stored in acid-free cardboard boxes. Cataloging data are organized digitally using the Re:discovery data management system.

RESULTS

Garden Fence

John Mason, in his *Recollections,* describes his father's garden thus: "It had been laid out originally on a simple plan both in rectangular walks and squares [with] gravel walks. It was kept with great care, was reduced to a perfect level, and contained, as I have often heard him say, exactly one acre on that level." (Dunn 2004: 67.) And, elsewhere in the *Recollections*: "From an elevated little portico on the [south] front, you descended directly into an extensive garden touching the house in one side & reduced from the natural irregularity of the hill top to a perfectly level platform, the southern extremity of which was bounded by a spacious walk running eastwardly & westwardly, from which there was by the natural & sudden declivity of the hill, a sudden descent to the plain considerably below it." (Ibid.73 -74.)

This is the entire sum of descriptive information that we have concerning the 18th Century garden at Gunston Hall. In is reasonable to suppose that the garden was fenced, but no mention of a fence is made by John Mason. (He does say, however, that the deer park on the plain below the garden was "…kept well fenced…" (Ibid:74)). George Mason's eldest son and heir to Gunston Hall, George Mason of Lexington (1753 – 1796), left a hint that that the garden itself may have also been fenced. In his will of April 7, 1795, he wrote, "I direct that the House at Gunston be kept in Descent repair & the Garden enclosed & the Expence paid of the Money arriseing from the profits of my Estate…" (Fairfax County 1794 - 1798: 259). It is not clear, however, whether his heir is being directed to enclose the garden or continue to maintain an existing enclosure.

Evidence of what appear to be fences marking both the east and west margins of the one-acre garden were, in fact, found during the 2001 field season. A series of post hole/mold combinations was uncovered along the E76 and W136 transects (Fig. 1). This would place each fence line 96 feet from the center of the garden. The fence on the west side was found to extend beyond the north margin of the garden and turn 90° to meet the west wall of the mansion. Also, two post hole /molds aligned with the east fence line were found while excavating in the kitchen yard area. These had the same spacing and appearance as the post hole/mold combinations excavated along the garden margins. What seems to be a gate post hole/mold was found next to an 18th Century walkway, at the point where the eastern fence line would have crossed it.

All of the post features had a characteristic configuration. The holes were oblong and about two feet in their longest direction. The underground portions of the posts had apparently been charred, leaving a clear outline of charcoal around the sides of the molds. The post molds were always against one side of the hole. They were rectilinear in plan section, with the sides orientated 45° to the direction of the fence line. In longitudinal section, the molds tapered somewhat toward the base. The base itself had a wedge shape. There were usually brickbats or rocks adjacent to the base of the mold. The molds were spaced at ten-foot intervals. This would be characteristic of a post and rail fence, but it could also signify a paled fence.

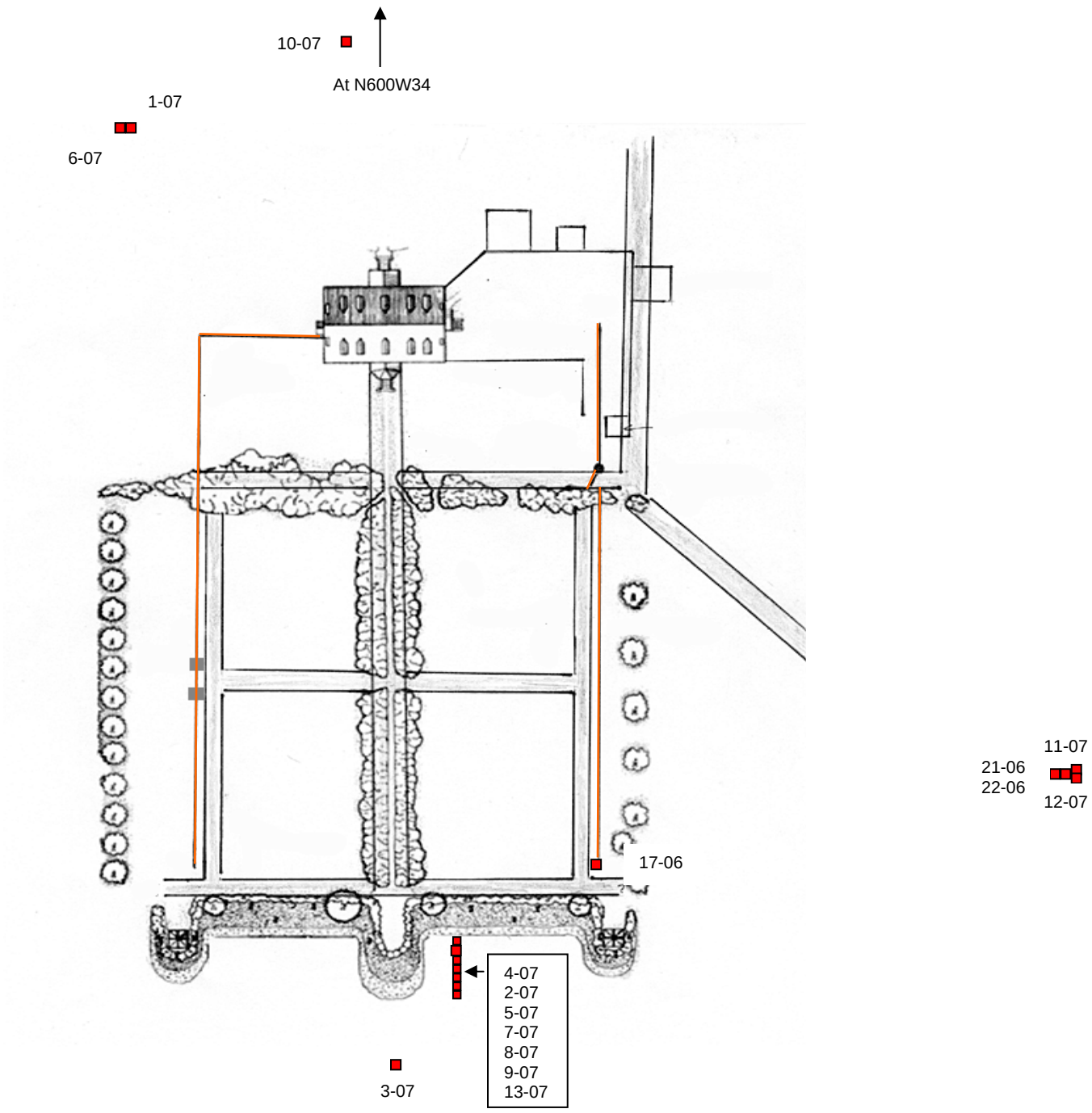

Figure 1. Approximate locations of units excavated during the 2007 field season. Excavation units are shown as ■ , with an accompanying unit number. The presumed 18th Century garden fence line is shown as —— .

One of the main unanswered questions at this point in the garden fence investigation involved the configuration of the fence line at the south end of the garden. Did the fence continue down the slope of the terrace, or did it turn one direction or another? If it turned, exactly where did it turn and in which direction did it go? A first step was taken to address these problems late in the 2006 field season. The intent was to expose a post hole/mold near the southern end of the east fence line, and put subsequent excavation units at ten-foot spacings in various directions from that point. The unit was excavated at S181E75, about 90 feet south of the southernmost post hole/mold previously excavated along the east fence line. (The east fence line was chosen for this investigation because the post features along the southern stretch of the fence line on the west side of the garden had been obliterated by two irrigation pipe trenches.)

The 5' x 5'excavation unit was designated EU 17-06 (Fig. 1). Below the top soil strata, the soil was a yellowish brown silty loam with about 25% mottles of various clayey soils. This stratum also contained a number of other soil disturbances almost certainly associated with gardening. At a depth of about one foot, a persistent problem with water seepage was encountered. The unit would fill with water overnight, and it was not possible to get the soil dry enough to excavate. By the end of the 2006 field season, the unit had been excavated to 1.04' below the unit datum, and was still in culturally-disturbed soil.

Excavation of the unit was resumed in the spring of 2007. However, water seepage continued to be a problem. When the clayey subsoil was reached, a sump was dig in one corner of the unit. This helped some with the standing water, but the soil remained saturated. Nevertheless, a soil feature of interest was encountered in the northwest part of the unit at 1.10' below the unit datum (Fig. 2).

This feature was designated Feature F1-07. It was first seen in the silty loam stratum, presumably just below the post-18th Century tillage disturbances, and extended into the underlying clayey subsoil. In plan section, the feature abutted and undoubtedly continued beyond the north wall of the unit. It measured 1.30' along the north wall by 0.70' in the north-south direction. A longitudinal section was excavated to 1.60'. At this depth water seepage exceeded the rate of soil removal, so excavation was halted. In profile, the sides of the feature sloped inward with depth – slightly in the east-west direction and more steeply in the north-south direction. The feature fill soil was a yellowish brown silty loam with clayey mottles. The mottles increased in frequency with depth.

Feature F1-07 was located exactly where one would expect to find another post hole/mold along the fence line, but it lacked some of the characteristics of such a feature. There were some small charcoal bits in the fill soil, but no mold could be seen. It is entirely possible that what is visible in EU 17-06 is part of an oblong post hole which extends into the unexcavated soil to the north. The post mold could be in this unexcavated part of the feature.

The constant, copious flow of water into this unit made it impractical to continue with the excavation. The floor of the unit was covered with plastic sheeting and it was backfilled. It may be speculated that the water problem here is caused by old irrigation pipes. Water

gets into these pipes through cracks and breaks. It may be flowing into the excavation area and pooling in the soil above the clay subsoil.

Figure 2. Top of Feature F1-07. The water saturation of the soil has obscured the contrast in this photo between the feature fill and the surrounding and the surrounding soil. The fill is a 10YR 5/6 yellowish brown silty loam with about 10% strong brown clayey mottles. The surrounding soil is 10YR 5/8 yellowish brown silty loam. At 0.20' deeper, the surrounding soil becomes a more contrasting 7.5YR 5/6 strong brown clayey loam. The feature may be part of a post hole.

Carriage Circle

There is no mention of a carriage circle in John Mason's *Recollections*. However, such landscape features are the rule with plantation houses contemporaneous with Gunston Hall. There was, in fact, a carriage circle on the land side of the mansion until it was removed in 1979. This feature shows in a circa 1920 aerial photograph (Fig. 3), but it is not known when it was constructed.

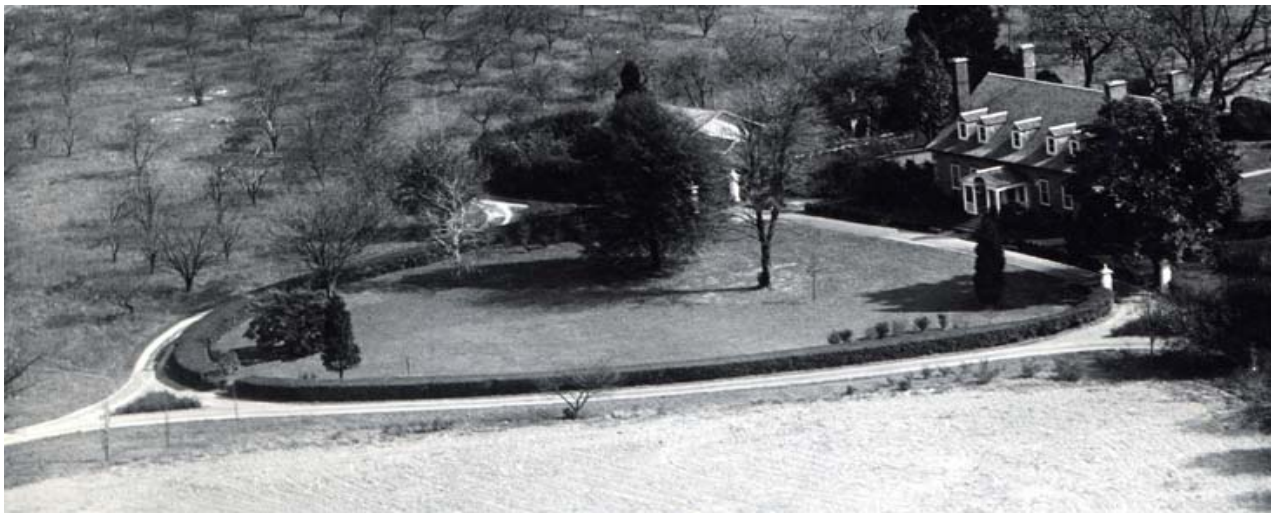

Figure 3. A carriage circle is seen in this detail from a c. 1920 aerial photograph. It is not known when this landscape feature was constructed, but there is no evidence that it dates to Mason's time.

Efforts to determine whether a carriage circle graced the land front in Mason's time were initiated during the 2005 field season. Initial attention focused on the bed of the carriage circle that was removed in the 1970's. The course of this drive can still be seen as a slightly raised area in the land front lawn. Two 5' x 5' units were excavated through this feature on the east side of the lawn (EU's 8-05 and 2-06). The old road bed was 0.20' to 0.50' below the present surface and was comprised of pebbles and small cobbles, with a scatter of crushed shell near the top. None of the diagnostic artifacts found within the bed material dated earlier than the 19th Century. Also coal and coal burning debris was found throughout the bed material. (No evidence of the use of coal at Gunston Hall during the 18th Century has ever been found.) The road bed rested on an artifact-free silty loam.

Since the bed of the drive was apparently no older than the 19th Century, and it did not seem to rest on an older road bed, in 2006 a series of test units was excavated east-west across the width of the west side of the land front lawn. Nine units, each 2' x 2' on a side and excavated to the culturally-undisturbed subsoil, were placed at 12' intervals along the N110 transect. The excavations revealed that the area along the transect had been massively disturbed over the years, but no evidence of an old road bed could be discerned.

The final unit along the N110 transect (EU 18-06) was 5' on a side and positioned over the old drive. Here, the road bed materials lay directly on a stratum of light yellowish brown sand. This is a kind of soil not normally seen on the Gunston Hall site. The sandy deposit extended down 0.70' below the base of the road bed to a stratum of clay mixed with sand.

It was thought possible that the sand might have been used to fill an old sunken road bed over which the later drive was constructed. This possibility was investigated during the 2007 field season with two contiguous 5' x 5' excavation units (EU's 1-07 and 6-07) placed slightly north of 18-06 at N117W147.5 and N117W152.5, respectively (Fig. 1).

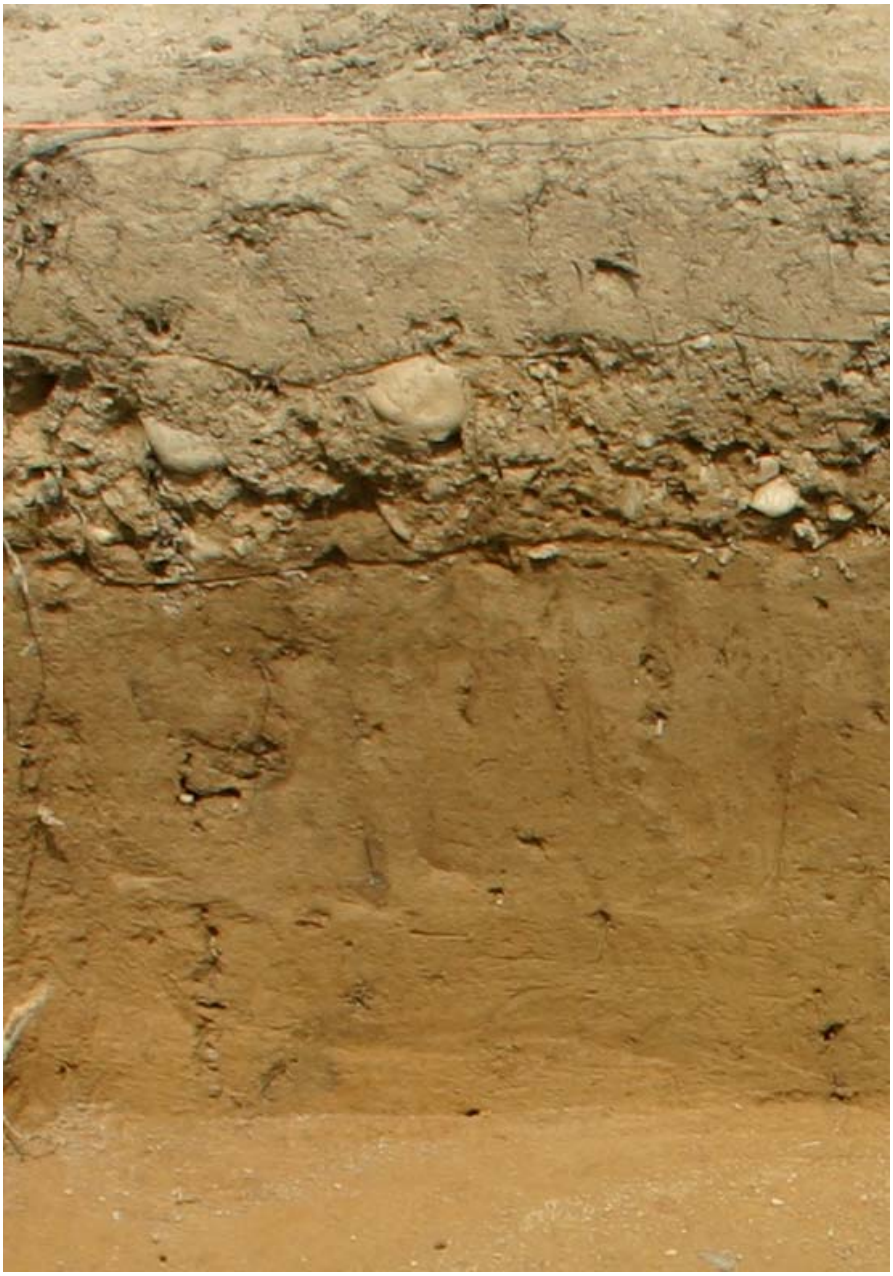

Figure 4. A section of the north wall of EU 1-07, showing the old road bed materials. The bed is about 0.35' thick here. It rests on a yellowish brown fine sandy loam which, in turn, sits on clayey loam subsoil.

EU 1-07 was positioned so the east margin of the old drive approximately bisected the unit in a north-south direction. EU6-07, which was separated from 1-07 by a 0.40' balk, was completely within the margins of the road bed. The thickness of the bed materials ranged from a bit over 0.10' at the margin to about 0.45' near the center (Fig. 4). The road bed materials rested on a 0.80' thick stratum of yellowish brown fine sandy loam. This stratum sat directly on a clayey loam subsoil. The sandy loam stratum contained a scattering of artifacts of mixed ages (18th Century and later), suggesting that it is fill soil.

The sand seen in 18-06 appeared only as an approximately 0.40' thick deposit which rested on the subsoil and extended slightly over 1.0' from a section of the east wall. No evidence of an earlier road could be detected under the cobble/pebble road bed. The fact that an apparent fill deposit sits directly on a relatively flat upper surface of a subsoil stratum suggests that soil may have been removed from this area at one time and subsequently replaced with the fill. This, of course would have removed any evidence of an existing road.

Yet another approach was taken in an effort to determine whether or not there was a carriage circle in the 18th Century. The entry drive leading to the land front entrance to Gunston Hall almost certainly follows the same route today as it did in George Mason's day, so evidence of the old road might be found under the current road. An attempt was made to test this supposition by excavating EU 10-07 along the west margin of the entry road at N600W34 (Fig. 1). If evidence of the old road could be found, it was thought that it could be followed southward, toward the mansion, with test units. If a carriage circle was indeed present, it should be possible in this way to locate where it joined the entry drive.

EU 10-07 was excavated as a 5' x 5' unit, the eastern 3.0' of which extended into the modern entry drive. The unit was dug to a depth of a little over four feet. The entire content of the unit was road construction fill, which appeared to continue still deeper. As the end of the field season was at hand, it was decided not to pursue this particular project further.

Garden Terrace

At the south end of the one-acre garden, the land drops steeply down some 50 feet to a more-or-less level area which had served as a deer park in Mason's time. Notched into the slope, about nine feet below its rim, is a platform measuring about 40 feet in the north-south direction and 220 feet east-west. Four to five feet below the platform is a rather narrow terrace of about four feet in width. It is known that the latter was constructed 1913 by the then owner of Gunston Hall, Louis Hertle (Hertle 1934: section 1913/37). Hertle called this feature the "fells walk."

Three earthen structures, called "mounts," project from the brow of the one-acre garden about 60 feet onto the terrace platform. There is one mount on both the east and west sides of the platform and one in the center. Excavations undertaken in 2003 established that the east and west mounts almost certainly date from the 18th Century. The central

mount was constructed in the 1950's. It is not clear whether there was a mount in this position during Mason's time. Hertle (1934: section 1913/36) suggests that there may have been, saying, "We took out the center hill & moved the hedges back to a straight line which enlarged the [platform] garden very much." Material from the "center hill" was used to build the fells walk.

A garden terrace with a single broad platform or step is something that would be very unusual, if not unknown, in an 18th Century plantation landscape. In his only mention of the terrace, John Mason said, "There were then some falls on the brow of the hill looking toward the river." (Dunn 2004: 67.) This suggests that there were more than one terrace steps and that they were near the top of the slope.

The only other known reference to the history of the garden terrace is from the *Recollections* of Louis Hertle (1934: section 1931/1). Hertle quoted a man who had lived and worked at Gunston since immediately after the Civil War as saying, in reference to the terrace, "The points and pockets were filled in or made by Mr. Specht." This is far from a clear statement, but it is indicates that Mr. Specht did some major reshaping of the terrace. (Joseph and Emma Specht owned Gunston Hall from 1891 until 1906.)

When, during a 2001 investigation of the mounts, a section was cut on the inner flank of each mount, a buried 'A' horizon was found. The shape of this horizon was such that it suggested, as one possible explanation of its origin, that another terrace step may have abutted against the mounts. This step would have been about one third as broad as the current step.

In December 2006, Dr. William Hanna was engaged to survey the terrace system with ground penetrating radar. The intent was to determine whether any subsurface features could be revealed that would offer clues concerning the original configuration of the terrace. The only compelling evidence for such a feature was a reflector inferred to be, "… nonmetallic and is estimated to be 2 to 3 ft deep… One of many possibilities is that this reflector, if through-going, may be the foundation of a buried garden wall, in alignment with other garden features" (Hanna and Petrone 2007: 9). This reflector was located on the broad terrace platform, running east-west parallel to, and about 15' south of, the foot of the slope that falls from the level of the one-acre garden.

In 2007, an excavation unit (EU 2-07, S335E0) was positioned across the area where the reflector was detected. The resulting excavation is shown in Figure 5. A clear discontinuity in soil types was apparent running in nearly a straight line east-west across the unit. On the north side was a mix of pebbles and cobbles in a reddish-yellow sand matrix. This material continues north to the terrace fall, in places visible on the ground surface. Both the slope that descends to the platform from the level of the one-acre garden, and the slope that falls from the platform to the deer park are also composed of this material.

At the line of the discontinuity, the pebble cobble mix dropped down almost vertically to a level about 1.50' below the unit datum point, where it formed a surface extending into

Figure 5. EU 2-07 in the process of being excavated, looking west. The soil to the right (north) is comprised of pebbles and cobbles in a sand matrix. This material extends north to the slope which falls from the level of the one acre garden. The slope is also comprised of this material. The pebble/cobble mix drops almost vertically to a level about 1.50’ below the ground surface, as seen in the upper left, and continues at this level.

the south, east and west unit walls. The soil south of the discontinuity, resting on the pebble/cobble mix, was dark yellowish brown fine sandy loam. Some mottling was seen in the upper approximately 0.80’, which was almost certainly the result of tillage. The artifacts recovered from this upper portion were a mix of 18th through 20th century items. The artifacts in the lower portion, which seemed not to have been affected by tillage, were all items which could have been present in the 18th Century.

The soil discontinuity was obviously the reflector detected by Hanna. In an effort to understand its significance and its relationship to the structure of the terrace platform, an additional six units were excavated. All were placed with their west margins along the ‘0’ transect, were contiguous along their north and south margins, and were separated from each other by 0.40’-wide balks. In effect, these excavations formed a 33.0’ long trench across most of the north-south breadth of the terrace platform.

Of these, a single 3’ x 3’ unit (EU 4-07) was placed just to the north of 2-07 at S330E0. Excavation confirmed that the pebble/cobble/sand mix encountered in 2-07 continued unbroken here a short distance beneath the surface. This material was present throughout the approximately 1.50’ depth excavated.

Five additional units were placed in a row south of 2-07 (EU's 5-07, 7-07, 8-07, 9-07 and 13-07), from S335E0 to S360E0. The units were 3' x 5', with the five foot dimension being in the north-south direction.

The northern-most of these units, 5-07, 7-07 and 8-07, were similar in stratigraphy (Fig's. 6 and 7). Below the "root zone" was a dark yellowish brown fine sandy loam containing mottles of various other soils. The artifacts in this stratum (Stratum 2) were of mixed age, from the 18th Century to recent times. The soil had obviously been disturbed by gardening activities down to about 0.80' below the surface.

Figure 6. Part of EU 5-07, looking south. EU's 7-07 and 8-07 are similar. The floor is the cobble/pebble/sand mix which forms the natural "fabric" of the terrace structure. Resting directly on this floor was a man-made surface of pebbles mixed with crushed shell. (Some of the shell can be seen flecking the floor.) None of the artifacts in the deposit are earlier than the 19th Century. This surface is visible as a dark band at the base of the sidewalls. Overlying this is a fine sandy loam fill containing artifacts indicating that it was removed to this location from an 18th Century deposit. The upper approx. 0.80' of the fill has been disturbed by gardening activities, and contains of 18th through 20th Century artifacts.

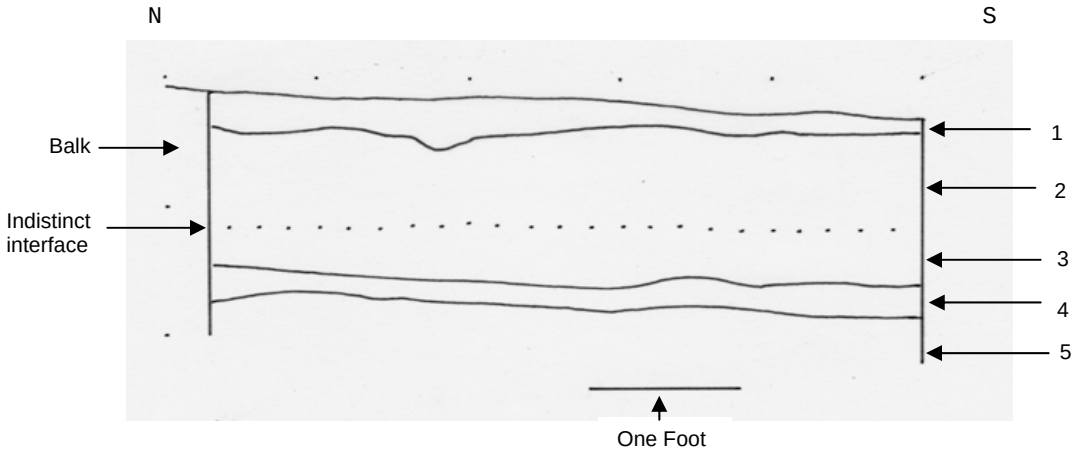

Figure 7. Drawing of the east sidewall of EU 7-07. Strata are: 1 – Top soil (10YR 4/3 brown humic silty loam); 2 – Planting zone (10YR 5/4 yellowish brown fine sandy loam with various mottles; 3 – 18th Century fill (10YR 5/4 fine sandy loam); 4 – 19th Century pebble and crushed shell surface; 5 – Subsoil (closely packed cobbles and pebbles in sand matrix). (Based on a measured field drawing.)

The fine sandy loam, but without mottling, continued to a depth of about 1.20' below the surface (Stratum 3). All artifacts recovered from this stratum were items which could have been on the plantation during the second half of the 18th Century. Coal-burning refuse (coal, cinders, slag), which was found in Stratum 2, was not present in Stratum 3.

Stratum 4 was a relatively thin (0.2' ± 0.05') layer of pebbles mixed with crushed shell. This appears to have been a walkway or similar surface. The crushed shell may have originally covered the pebbles. No artifacts older that the 19th century were recovered from this stratum. Curiously, Stratum 4 rested directly on the subsoil, which was the same cobble/pebble/sand mix first encountered in EU 2-07.

One may speculate about the origin of this inverted stratigraphy. The rocky subsoil, Stratum 5, is relatively level and has the appearance of having been scraped clean of overlying soils. This obviously had to have done during the initial construction of the terrace, but it may have been done again in the late 19th Century by Specht when he undertook the project mentioned by Hertle (1934: section 1931/1). While the subsoil was still exposed, a surface of small pebbles topped with crushed shell was laid directly on it. This surface has the appearance of other late 19th Century walkways uncovered elsewhere on the plantation. The artifacts found within the stratum are consistent with this time period. It is something of a puzzle as to why the pebble/shell material should have been laid down directly on the rocky subsoil.

As some later time, about a foot-and-a-half of silty loam was deposited over the pebble/shell surface. This was probably done to provide a soil which could be cultivated. This soil appears to have been collected from an area which experienced relatively intense human activity during the 18th Century. All diagnostic artifacts in the lower portion (stratum 3) are items which could have been deposited in the 18th Century. Further, the ceramics, glass and bone had been reduced to small pieces, suggesting that the items may have been subjected to foot traffic the site of their initial deposition.

The artifacts recovered from stratum 3 included a more-or-less typical mid- to late-18th Century assemblage of ceramic types, container glass (mostly olive and dark olive), wrought nails, an abundance of bone, teeth, fish scales and oyster shells. The ceramic types included lead glazed and unglazed red bodied wares, Staffordshire slipware, creamware, pearlware, tin glazed ware, cauliflower ware, Jackfield, Staffordshire manganese mottled, white salt glazed stoneware (the most abundant ceramic type), brown salt glazed stoneware, Nottingham stoneware, hard paste porcelain and white ball pipe clay. All bones, except a few from small mammals, were broken in pieces too small to allow identification based on morphology. Other than the breakage, the bones showed some of the best preservation yet seen on the Gunston Hall site, possibly due to the buffering effect of the oyster shell in the soil. In addition to mammal bones, there were bird bones, pieces of turtle carapace and fish bones.

A fine screened sample included straight pins, seeds, numerous fish bones (including many vertebrae), both leptoid and ganoid (gar) scales, and tiny conical teeth, which may be fish teeth. A relatively large number of gar scales were also found in the ¼"-screened material. In general, the character of the artifacts differs from that of any other deposit yet excavated at Gunston Hall. The gar scales suggest an association with African Americans, as it is generally assumed that whites did not consider gar an edible fish. For example, an 18th Century Polish visitor to Mount Vernon remarked that the red meat of the gar was "little esteemed," and served "only as food for negroes" (Niemcewicz 1805: 101).

The following major stratigraphic features were observed in the terrace structure (Figure 8):

1. A highly compacted mix of yellowish to reddish pebbles and cobbles in a matrix of 7.5YR 5/8 strong brown sand seems to be the natural "fabric" of the terrace structure. It forms the fall between the garden and the terrace platform ('1' in Figure 8). It is also seen at or slightly below the surface of the platform to a point approximately one third across its width. Here, it descends almost vertically nearly two feet and resumes across the platform at this depth until the deposit described in 5, below, is encountered. The compact pebble/cobble/sand mix is also seen in the fall that descends to the deer park.

2. The area between the vertical declivity and a berm at the lip of the platform contains a yellowish brown fine sandy loam to a depth of 1.60', or slightly more, below the surface. The upper portion ('2' in Fig. 8) has obviously been disturbed by gardening activities. It contains mottles of various soils and an assortment of 18th through 20th Century artifacts. Below this lies a stratum of the same basic soil type which appears

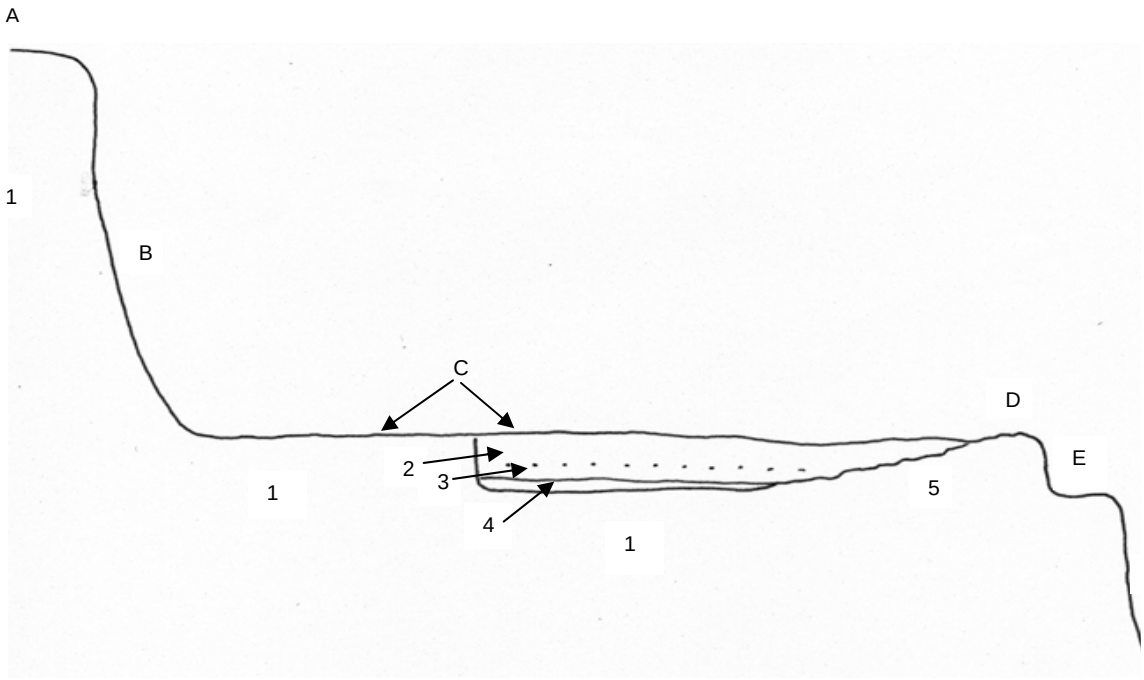

Figure 8. Schematic representation of terrace structure. (Not to scale.) Terrace topography: A – Lip of one-acre garden; B – Fall; C – Terrace platform surface; D – Berm; E – Fells walk; F – Fall to deer park. Major strata seen in excavations: 1 – Compact mix of pebbles and cobbles in sand matrix; 2 – Fine sandy loam disturbed by gardening activities; 3 – Fine sandy loam below tillage zone, with a mid- to late-18th Century artifact assemblage; 4 – Crushed shell and pebble surface, dateable to the late 19th Century; 5 – Loosely packed pebbles and cobbles in a sandy matrix.

not to have been disturbed since the time of its deposition in this location ('3' in Fig. 8). Underlying the silty strata is a layer of pebbles mixed with crushed shell ('4' in Figure 8). It averages about 0.2' thick. The diagnostic artifacts in this stratum suggest that it was deposited in the late 19th Century. The pebble shell mix rests directly the compact native soil ('1' in Fig 8), from the point where latter exhibits the two-foot vertical drop to near the margin of the loosely packed pebble/cobble deposit ('5' in Fig.8). It thus occupied, in the section investigated, approximately the middle third of the north-south width of the terrace platform.

5. A deposit of loosely packed pebbles and cobbles in a sandy matrix begins about two-thirds of the north-south distance across the terrace platform and extends to the lip of the platform ('5' in Fig. 8). The pebbles and cobbles are similar with respect to size distribution and color to those observed in the native "fabric," ('1'). This deposit slopes upward toward the platform lip. Several feet north of the lip, it rises above the

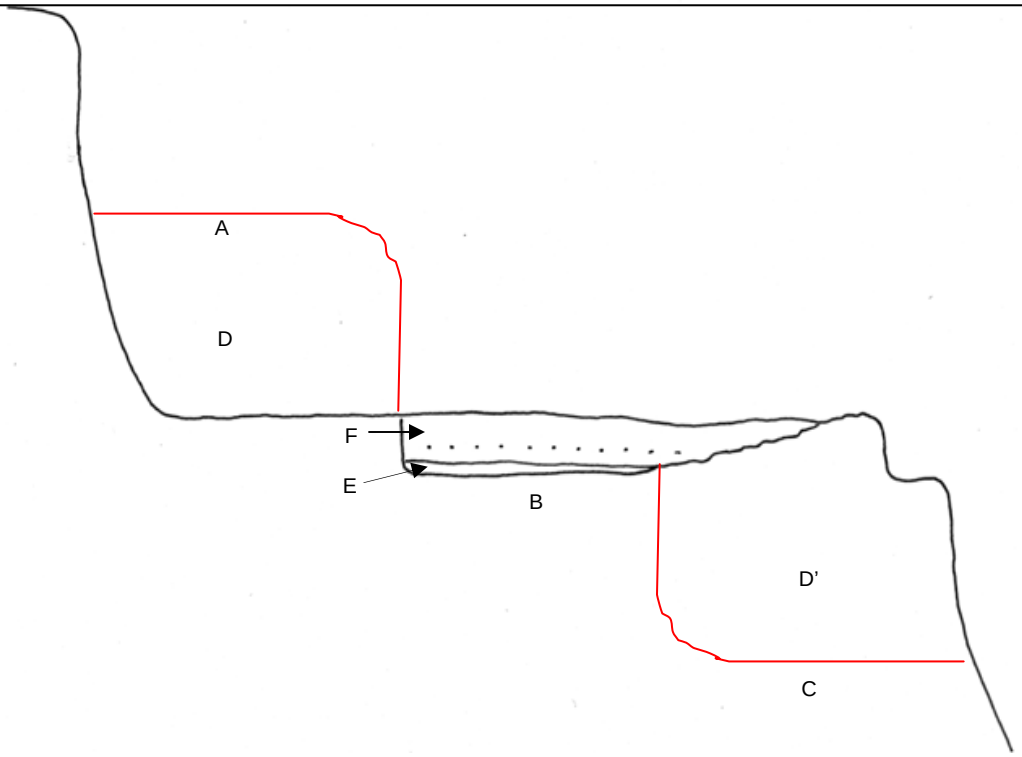

Figure 9. Schematic demonstrating a possible early configuration of upper terrace system. (Not to scale.) In this hypothetical arrangement, there would have been three terrace steps, with platforms at A, B and C. This hypothesis proposes that the material forming the upper terrace step, D, was removed and deposited on top of platform C, forming D'. The pebble/shell surface, E, may have been laid down before or after this earthmoving operation. The fill deposit, F, was added to provide a gardening area.

ground surface to form a berm. The pebble/cobble mix of '5' is clearly evident on the surface of the berm.

Although the origin of the stratigraphy observed could be explained in several ways, the following is offered as a working hypothesis which accounts for the known facts. This hypothesis essentially proposes that Joseph Specht, in the late 19th Century, created the present single broad terrace platform in an area once occupied by three smaller terrace steps (Fig. 9). A photograph on file at Gunston Hall shows that in the late 19th Century a pear orchard occupied the area of Mason's one acre garden. It is also known from photographic evidence and from Hertle (1934: section 1913/35) that Specht had constructed a garden pavilion (or "pergola," according to Hertle) along the upper edge of the terrace structure.

When Hertle acquired Gunston Hall in 1912, the only garden was on the terrace platform (Hertle 1934: section 1913/36). It is hypothesized that Specht created not only this garden, but the platform upon which it rested. The evidence that this was done by Specht lies with

the aforementioned statement that “the points and pockets were filled in or made by Mr. Specht”, and that a pebble and shell surface dateable to the late 19th surface lay beneath a deposit of garden fill soil.

The pebble/shell surface is quite similar in composition to 19th Century walkways uncovered elsewhere on the site, which have a pebble base and a crushed oyster shell topping. It is not clear, however, why this surface was laid down on the terrace platform before the garden was established, or why it had been laid directly on the compact pebble/cobble/sand mix that forms the native soil of the terrace area.

The material found in the area designated ‘5’ in Fig. 8 is similar in appearance to the material in areas designated ‘1’ except that it is loosely packed, not compacted. It appears, in fact, to the same material which had been excavated from somewhere on or near the terrace structure and deposited in its present location. It is hypothesized that this material was taken from a terrace step designated D in Fig. 9. This step would have completely removed down to the level of the present terrace platform surface. The present vertical drop in the pebble/cobble/sand mix may represent the base of the excavated step.

It is further hypothesized that there were originally two additional terrace steps, the platforms of which are represented by B and C in Fig. 9. The surface of B may have been removed to expose the native subsoil. In any case, the material that composed D appears to have been deposited on platform C to form the area designated D’ in Fig. 9. Finally, the depression between the vertical drop on the north and the berm on the south was filled with soil suitable for gardening. The artifacts recovered from the parts of this fill not disturbed by gardening activities indicated that it was obtained from an 18th Century occupation area. The location of the soil source has not been determined.

This hypothesis seems to be consistent with the observed stratigraphy, as well as with the buried 'A' horizons earlier found in the flanking mounts and statements concerning the terrace made by John Mason and related by Louis Hertle. However, it is based on a sampling of a very small part of the terrace. It remains to be seen whether the hypothesis can withstand the evidence of further excavations.

* * * * *

It is not uncommon for the terraces of 18th Century properties to have a staircase along their centerline. They have been found, for example, at Burwell’s Kingsmill (Kelso 1984: 149, 153) and Carter’s Grove (Gleason 1989: 31), two plantations which share a number of features with Gunston Hall. However, the terrace at Gunston Hall exhibits no obvious evidence of such a staircase.

Almost exactly on the centerline of the Gunston Hall terrace, a short distance below the lip of the fells walk, a portion of the flat surface of a fairly large stone could be seen. It was decided to determine whether this might be part of a staircase. Excavation unit 3-07 was placed with its southwest (datum) corner at coordinates S389W30 (Fig. 1).

The stone was revealed to be a rectilinear, flat topped boulder, 2.60’ x 1.70’ on a side (Fig. 10). It was embedded in soil that was used to construct the fells walk, so it could not have

arrived in its present position earlier than 1913. A soil probe was used explore areas both laterally to the boulder and a considerable distance down slope of it. No evidence could be found that would suggest the remains of a stairway along or near the centerline of the fall.

Figure 10. Part of EU 3-07, partially excavated, facing north. The unit is on the fall that descends to the deer park, sloping steeply downward toward the bottom of the photo. The boulder appeared not to be part of a staircase descending the terrace fall. Sometimes a stone is just a stone.

East Yard Structure

In 2005, an area beginning about 220 feet east of the one-acre garden was cleared of a dense cover of undergrowth, bamboo and small trees. Two features of archaeological interest were revealed by the clearing. One was a road cut that was found to lead to the site of Mason's landing on the Potomac. The other feature was a rectangular depression about 12' x 18' on a side. Because the feature had the appearance of a cellar hole, in 2006 three units were excavated on the periphery of the feature, and three contiguous units were begun within the depression itself. Two of the latter, EU's 21-06 and 22-06 (Fig. 1), were not completed during 2006; work was continued on them during the 2007 season.

The depression has no masonry foundation, and no associated post holes were seen in the peripheral excavations. In the northwest corner of EU 21-7 and expanding outward with depth is a deposit (feature F13-06) containing an abundance of charcoal and ash, as well as melted glass and other artifacts that had been exposed to flame and high heat. This is

probably a deposit of debris from left from a fire which consumed several outbuildings in 1928 (as mentioned in Hertle 1934: section 1928/2). Around and partially over F13-06 was a deposit of loosely packed yellowish brown fine sandy loam containing mottles of clayey soil. The deposit contained numerous artifacts, mostly datable to the early 20th Century, but also some from the 19th and 18th Centuries. This soil had obviously been removed from some unknown location and used to fill the depression after the ashy soil of F13-06 had been dumped in this location.

In December 2006, Hanna investigated the area of the depression using both 300MHz and 500MHz ground penetrating radar (Hanna and Petrone 2007: 10-11, Figures 18-21). A total of 14 transects were run (Fig. 11). The maximum scan depth obtained, this with the 300MHz antenna, was about 20 feet.

Unfortunately, the radar scans did not show a clear distinction between the soil in the depression and the surrounding soils (e.g., Fig. 12). This is surprising, because the differences in soil type and density and type are otherwise quite evident. The soil in the depression is a fine sandy loam, while the soils surrounding it range with depth from silty

Figure 11. Bill Hanna (right), assisted by John Imlay, runs a transect with a 500MHz GPR antenna in the rectangular depression. Excavation units 21-06 and 22-06 are partially covered by a tarpaulin. A trace of the 18th Century road that ran to the river landing and passed close to the kitchen yard is just off camera at left. Part of the mansion, with the kitchen yard to its right, is visible in the upper right. (Photo from Hanna and Petrone 2007: Figure 19.)

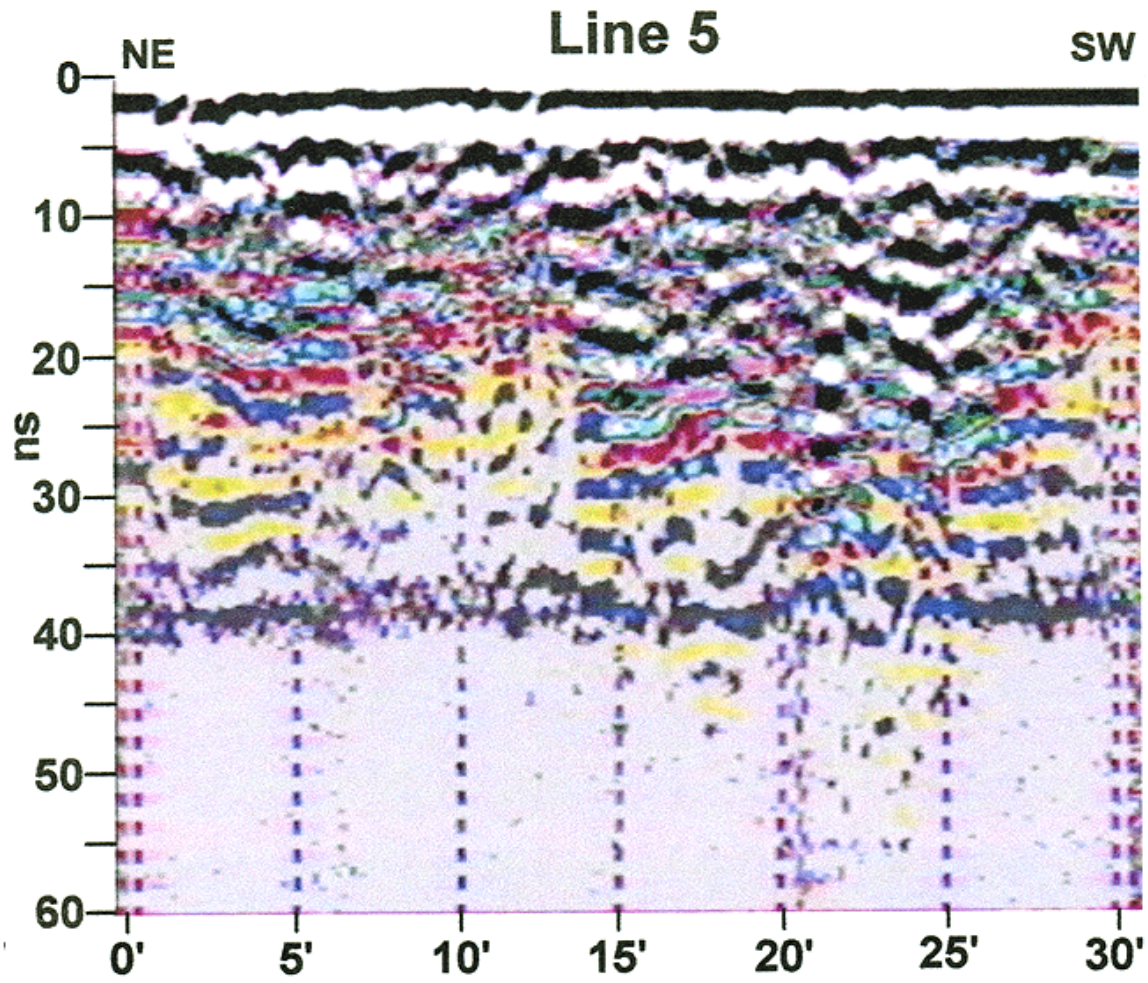

Figure 12. GPR return from the 500MHz antenna, recorded to a depth of about 10 feet. The depression was in the area from about 20' to about 30'. (From Hanna 2007: Figure 22.)

loam to clayey loam. Also, the soil in the depression was so loosely packed as to make it difficult to maintain vertical sidewalls, while the adjacent soils were normally compacted.

In 2007, additional work was done on EU's 21-06 and 22-06, and two more 5' x 5' units were opened in the depression. These were 11-07 (S225E290) and 12-07 (S230E290) (Fig. 1). These were dug only sporadically during the field season, serving mainly as "overflow" work areas for volunteers who could not be accommodated elsewhere on the site. In view of the relative abundance of artifacts in these units, they were also occasionally used as a part of archaeology demonstrations for groups of school children.

In the end, it was decided suspend the excavations in this area. No evidence had been obtained suggesting that the depression dated to Mason's time and, in any case, resources were not available to safely excavate a deep cellar hole (if, indeed, that is what the

depression represents). The units were excavated to a depth of about two feet. The character of the soil and artifacts remained the same throughout this depth in both F13-06 and the fill. Heavy plastic sheeting was used to cover the unit floors and the units were backfilled.

An aerial photograph from c. 1920 shows a very indistinct image of the ruin of a small building in the location of the depression. The roof appears to be lying on the ground next to it. No trace of the landing road, or any other road or path, can be seen. The building probably predates the 20th Century. There are only a few kinds of outbuilding that have a cellar. However, the determination of the age and function of this feature will have to until some future time.

Cabin Hill

John Mason, in his *Recollections*, mentions two slave quarters in the vicinity of the mansion at Gunston Hall. One of them is identified thus: "To the east was a high paled yard, adjoining the house, within or connected with which yard were the kitchen, well, poultry houses, and other domestic arrangements. And beyond it on the same side were the corn house and grainery, servant houses (in them days called Negroe quarters) …" (Dunn 2004: 75).

Mason described the other quarter in slightly more detail: "The north west side of the [mansion] lawn or enclosed ground was skirted by a wood, just far enough within which, to be out of sight, was a little village called Log-Town, so called because most of the houses were built of hewn pine logs. Here lived several families of the slaves serving about the mansion house" (Dunn 2004: 77).

Several artifact clusters which may be secondary deposits of material taken from the area of slave quarters have been excavated. However, no archaeological evidence has been forthcoming concerning the exact location of quarters. In December 2007 a shovel test pit (STP) survey was undertaken at a site which had been suggested as the possible location of the Logtown quarter. The site is bounded on the east by a staff housing area and on the west by a small valley cut by Gunston Creek (Fig. 13). On the south is an unimproved road traditionally known as Logtown Road[*]. Long-time residents of Mason Neck refer to the area of the site as "Cabin Hill." In general, the location is consistent with John Mason's brief description.

A total of 38 STP's was placed on a grid at 10.0' intervals. The first row of STP's was placed parallel to Logtown Road, and 30.0' north of it. The test pits were excavated one foot on a side down to undisturbed subsoil. The top of the subsoil ranged from 1.20' to 2.50' deep across the site. The depths of the strata and their soil characteristics were recorded.

[*] For example, Logtown Road is mentioned by that name in the will of George Mason V (Fairfax County 1794 - 1798: 255).

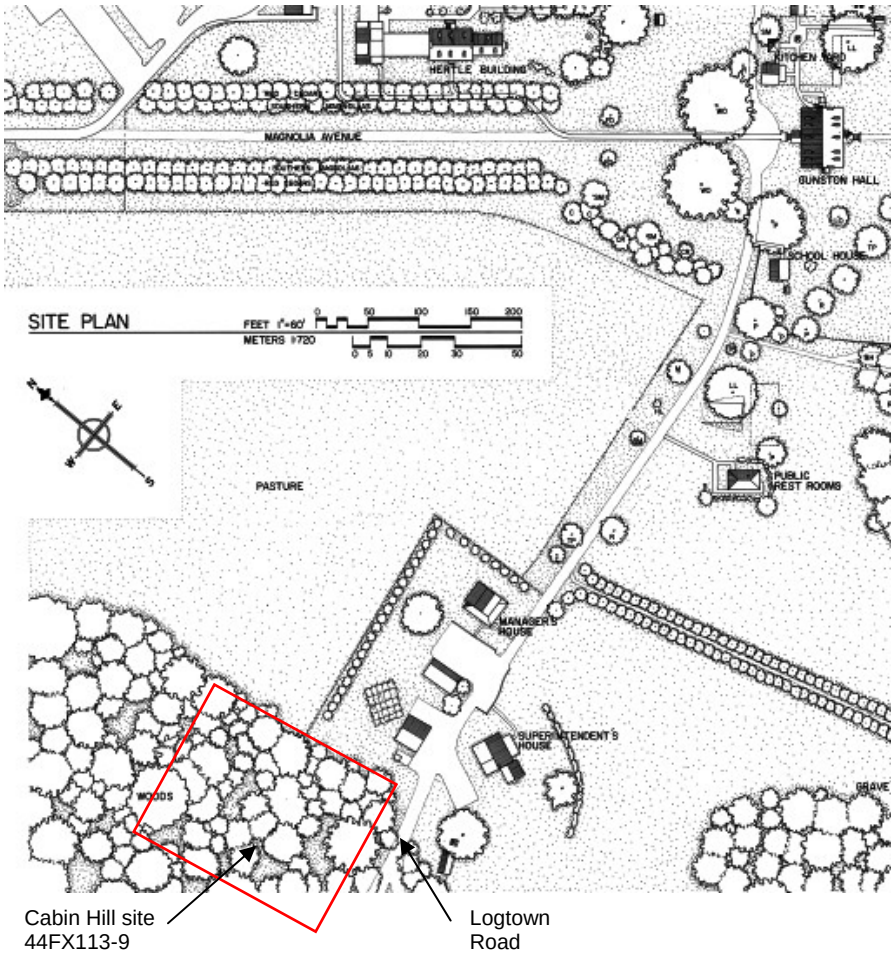

Figure 13. Location of Cabin Hill site. (Adapted from a drawing made for the Historic American Buildings Survey, 1981.)

Significant soil disturbances were evident across the entire site. Soil profiles generally varied markedly from STP to STP. The artifacts recovered amounted to a few modern nails and some brick fragments. One would expect a considerable artifact scatter at the site of a quarter. Nothing was found at the site that would suggest that it was a slave occupation area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Garden Fence

Several major questions need to be resolved before the garden fence can fully understood:

- What happened to the fence lines at the south end of the garden?

- Where were the gates?

- How did the fence in the present kitchen yard terminate?

The possibility that the fences on the east and west margins of the garden continued straight down the terrace seems more reasonable if there were originally three smaller terrace steps, rather than the present configuration with its long, steep slopes. In the cases of two of Gunston Hall's contemporaries, Burwell's Kingsmill and Carter's Grove, the garden fences do also seem to have enclosed the terrace structures. It is recommended, therefore, that at least some of the units excavated to test the three-terrace hypothesis be placed along the E76 or W136 transects so as to be in line with the garden fence. If the fence descended the terrace, post hole evidence may remain in at least the middle third of the terrace platform (B in fig. 9).

If the fences did proceed down the terrace along the E79 and W126 transects, there should have been gates where the fences crossed the walkway along the south edge of the garden (Fig. 1). Other reasonable places to seek post hole evidence for gates would be where the west fence line crosses the northern east-west walkway, and near where the west fence apparently joined the west wall of the mansion.

The kitchen yard area has been so badly disturbed over the years, that the chances of finding further post remains are slim. However, it is worth continuing the search north along the E76 transect. When the northernmost post hole/mold is located, an excavation should be made 10 feet to its west to determine whether the fence line turned toward the mansion at this point.

Carriage Circle

Carriage circles are such a common feature of 18th Century plantation landscapes that every possibility that one existed at Gunston Hall should be examined. It is recommended that a series of 2.0' x 2.0' test units be used to explore the lawn on the west side of the entry drive, between the mansion and a line 200 feet north of the mansion. We know from John Mason's *Recollections* (Dunn 2001: 74) that an avenue of cherry trees began 200 from the mansion, so a carriage circle should not extend north beyond that distance. The test units should be situated on a grid with 10 foot spacing, between transects W20 and E40.

Garden Terrace

The hypothesis that three terrace steps once occupied the area of the present single terrace platform was proposed on the basis of evidence from what amounted to a single 3.0' x 33.0' trench excavated on the platform. The hypothesis should be tested with additional excavations to determine whether a similar stratigraphy is seen elsewhere on the platform. If the hypothesis is valid, there should be, at minimum, evidence that suggests that a pebble/cobble/sand mix (5 in Fig. 8) had been deposited along south one-third of the terrace platform. On the north one-third, a compacted version of the mix would be expected at or near the surface (1 in Fig. 8). The middle third should contain fill suitable for gardening, although not necessarily with the same stratigraphy as that seen in the 2007 excavations.

It is recommended that excavations be conducted 30 feet west of the platform center line, along the W60 transect. (The 2007 excavations were 30 east of the center line.) Excavations should also be placed straddling the E76 or W136 transects. These would be on line with the garden boundary fences, so units should be checked for post holes and molds. If there were three terrace steps, any post evidence would have been destroyed on the north and south thirds of the platform, and appear only on the middle third. Additional excavations on the platform may be necessary in order to resolve the question of the Mason-era topography one way or the other.

East Yard Structure

There is as yet no documentary or archaeological evidence that this feature dates to the 18th Century. There is a good chance that it is a cellar hole, which would require shoring to excavate to completion. The Gunston Hall archaeology program currently does not have the resources to pursue such a project, particularly in view of the uncertain antiquity of the feature. It is recommended that further excavations not be undertaken at this time.

The exposed floors of the units excavated within the feature were covered plastic sheet before backfilling. Further, the southwest corners of the units were marked with spikes, which should make it possible to relocate them.

Cabin Hill

The Cabin Hill site proved to be so barren of any evidence of a slave quarter that it is recommended that no further excavations be undertaken. Early in 2008, evidence came to light that may make it possible to locate the enclosing fence line mentioned by John Mason (see the quotation on page 24). The location of the fence line would provide a better idea concerning the whereabouts of the site of the Logtown quarter. Further pursuit of the Logtown site should await the results of an investigation of the fence line location. It is suggested that the latter be given a high priority.

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