ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT GUNSTON HALL PLANTATION (44FX113)

Report on 2009 Activities

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March 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The archaeology program at Gunston Hall is a project of the Gunston Hall Board of Regents, and funding to support labor costs is provided by that organization. However, the program is dependent on gifts and grants to cover the cost of supplies, equipment and other expenses. I am enormously grateful, therefore, to the support provided in this respect during 2009 by Mrs. Richard H. Turner and the National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Virginia, Town and County Committee.

The continued support, interest and encouragement given by members of the Board of Regents has been most gratifying. Particularly appreciated has been the personal attention bestowed by First Regent Priscilla Brewster, Regents Archaeology Committee Chair Sandy Smith, Regents Historic Grounds and Gardens Committee Chair Wylie Raab and all of the individual members of the aforementioned committees.

The program is indeed fortunate in that it is assisted by a corps of accomplished volunteers. Those providing assistance during 2009 were: Carol Boland, Janice Brose, Marge Budd, Katie Carbone, M.J. Grabulis, Nicole Grigg, Susan Hardenburgh, Alex Hazelwood, Susan Marquis, Mike Massie, S. Mitchell, Wendy Miervaldis, Lynne Murray, Dennis Murray, Ann Oliver, Crystal Ptacek, Sarah Sears, Rebecca Siegal, Sara Suarez, Karl van Newkirk, Don Ward and Gretchen Wendelin.

Thanks also go to Fred Grady, Natural History Museum, Smithsonian Institution, for assistance in the identification of faunal remains.

Since its founding in 1997, the Gunston Hall archaeology program has maintained a close relationship with the Fairfax County Park Authority's Heritage Resources Division. Dr. Elizabeth Crowell, Cultural Resource Protection Manager, serves as an advisor to the Gunston Hall archaeology program. In addition to meeting with us on a regular basis, both

Dr. Crowell and her colleague, Mike Johnson, have always willingly made themselves available to provide advice and assistance whenever requested.

During the 2009 season, we were fortunate to have Paul Inashima serve as field consultant to the program. In addition to the overall advice provided, I am particularly grateful for his survey work with a total station and his background research on the Colored School and Gunston Hall in general.

INTRODUCTION

At its peak, Gunston Hall Plantation encompassed somewhat over 5,500 contiguous acres on what is now known as Mason Neck, in Fairfax County, Virginia. The plantation served as the home of George Mason IV from sometime between 1746 and 1750, when he built a house at the tip of Mason Neck (Moxham 1975:10), until his death at Gunston Hall in 1792. Bequeaths and sales of parcels of land in the 18th and 19th Centuries left the plantation with the 550 acres presently occupied by the Gunston Hall historic site.

In 1759 Mason established himself in an elegant newly constructed Georgian mansion on the eastern tip of a ridge which extends across the midsection of the Neck. The mansion has survived intact to the present, and its interior has been restored and furnished to a condition that is thought to closely replicate its appearance in Mason's time. The same cannot be said of the landscape exterior to the mansion. None of the outbuildings and very few landscape features familiar to Mason survived. Further, there are no known documents from Mason's time describing or picturing the Gunston Hall landscape[*]. The only available clues concerning landscape features are included an account written late in the life of a son, John Mason (Dunn 2004). It was John Mason's purpose to recount his childhood memories of his father, but he does mention some landscape elements in passing. These are not described in detail, nor are their exact locations given, but their inclusions in the narrative do provide starting points for the archaeological investigation of the property.

A number of short-term archaeological projects had been undertaken at Gunston Hall during the 1960's through the 1980's (Farber 1986; Lembo 2001). In 1997, a full-time archaeology program was established, initially to provide evidence which would assist in the replication of a one-acre garden that John Mason said his father had established beyond the southeast, or river side, face of the mansion (Dunn 2004: 67, 73-74). The scope of the investigation eventually expanded to include other landscape features on the riverside of the mansion. In fact, work was confined to this area over the first eight years of the program. However,

[*] The personal papers of George Mason IV are thought to have been taken for safekeeping after the latter's death by a grandson, George Mason of Spring Bank, only to be lost in a house fire.

increasing attention has been given in recent years to the landscape on the north west, or land front, side of the mansion.

During the 2009 field season, attention was focused almost exclusively on an area located about one half mile north west of the land front face of the mansion (Fig. 1). This area contains a number of features of historic and archaeological interest, including: the property line between Gunston Hall Plantation and the neighboring Springfield Plantation, along which George Mason raised a fence "of uncommon height" (Dunn 2004:77); the sunken trace of the original entrance road to Gunston Hall; the site of the original Plantation entrance gate; the site of the Gunston Colored School building; the Gunston White School building (now part of Shiloh Baptist Church); the site of the 19th Century log structure which served as the first Shiloh Church building; and the still-active Shiloh Cemetery which dates to the same period as the log church (Fig.2). Excavations were conducted for the purpose of

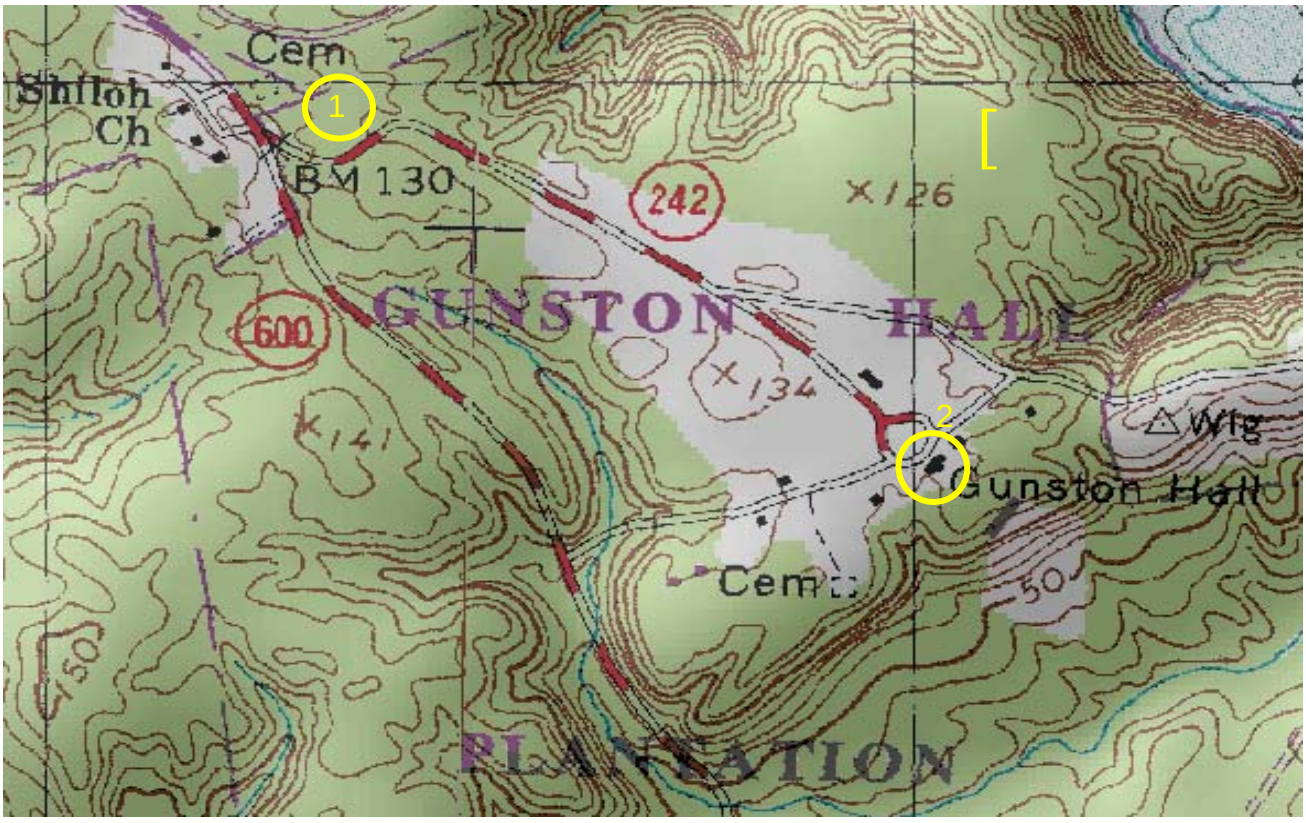

Figure 1. The location of the 2009 study area, 1, is shown in relation to the Gunston Hall mansion, 2. (Base map is a detail from USGS Fort Belvoir Quadrant.)

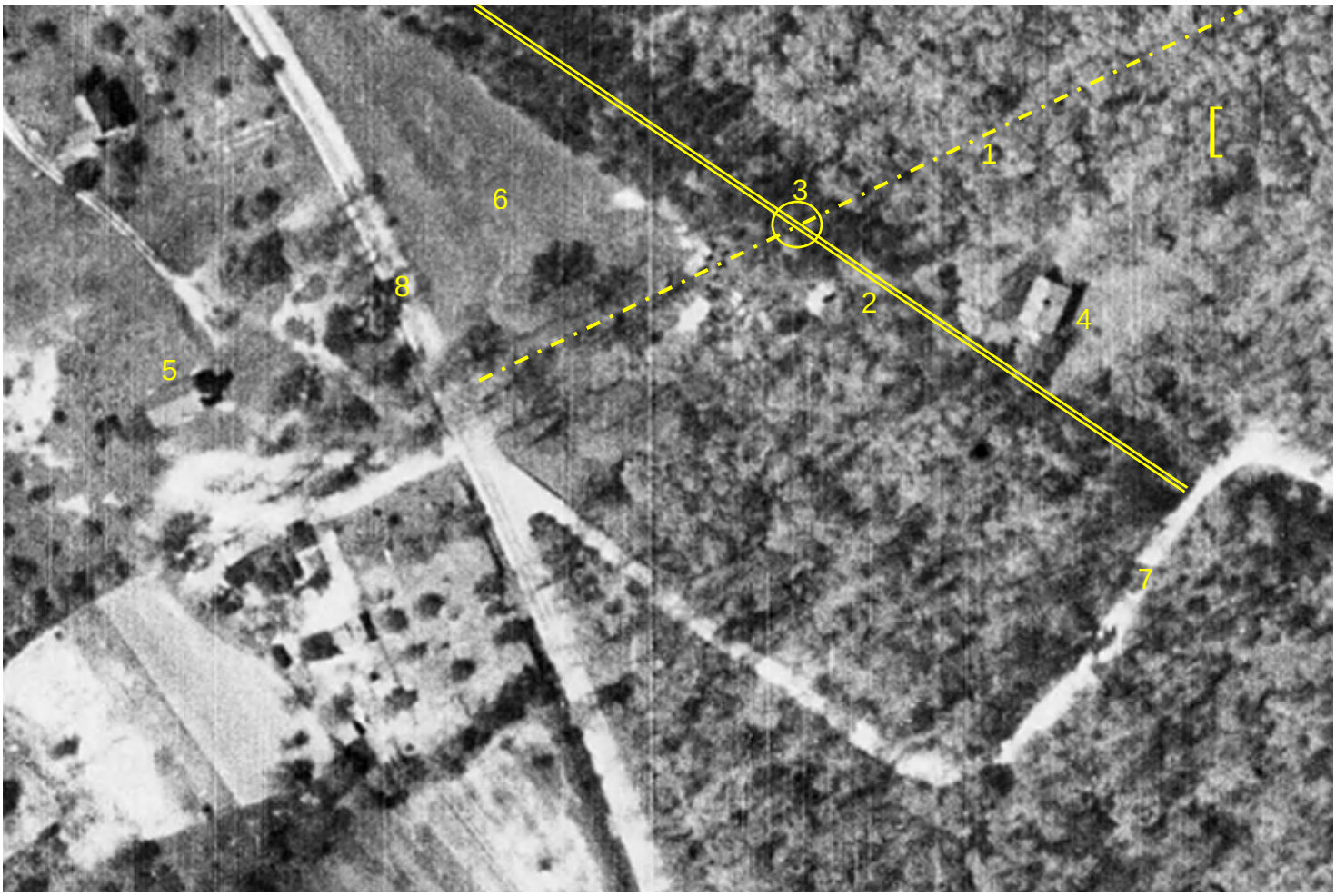

Figure 2. The derelict Gunston Colored School building, 4, is visible in this 1937 aerial view of the 2009 study area. Other features are: 1, the property line which separated Gunston Hall Plantation, below the line, from Springfield Plantation; 2, the sunken trace of the original Gunston Hall entrance road; 3, the presumed location of the Gunston Hall entrance gate; 5, the Gunston White School (Shiloh Baptist Church, at the time of the photo); 6, Shiloh Cemetery and original location of the log Shiloh Baptist Church building; 7, modern Gunston Hall entrance road; 8, Gunston Road. (Base photo is a detail from a U.S. Soil Conservation Service photograph).

locating remains of the Mason-era boundary fence and its associated gate, and of exposing a portion of the foundation of the Gunston Colored School building.

Environment.

The study area is located around coordinates 38.6682°N, 77.1682°W (UTM Zone 8, 311366E, 4282189N)[*]. It lies in the Low Coastal Plain Physiographic Province. This province is characterized as lying between sea level and 150 feet above sea level, and as consisting of unconsolidated sand, silt, clay and gravel strata deposited by ancient rivers and oceans (Fairfax County Public Works, etc. 2008: 5). The land surface is fairly level and slopes downward gently toward the east north east (Fig. 3). There is no surface water source at the study area, but, about 600 feet to the east, the land begins dropping into a deep ravine. The ravine holds a small, un-named, stream which empties into Gunston Cove, an embayment of the Potomac River.

The soil in the study area is a yellowish brown very fine sandy loam, with mottles of a strong brown clayey soil appearing below about 0.5 foot and increasing with depth. This soil is classified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service as Beltsville series (Fig. 4). Two characteristics of Beltsville soils, in particular, had an impact on the excavations. These are the underlying, nearly impermeable, frangipan layer, and the fact that the soil has a very low organic content (U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, etc. 1953: 6-7). After light and brief periods of rain, the soil drained well and was workable after a relatively short period of time. However, thanks to the frangipan, after heavy rains and long periods of rain, the excavation units flooded and the soil remained saturated over a long period of time. The low organic nature of the soil had the effect of causing organic traces of, say, wooden posts, to disperse into the soil leaving little or no evidence that they were ever there. (The fact that not a single resident earthworm was seen on the site can be regarded as evidence of the paucity of organic matter in the soil.)

The area of the excavations is forested, the main woody species being beech, cedar, pine, chestnut oak, southern red oak and mountain laurel. There is very little underbrush, probably because of heavy browsing by deer. The area within and immediately surrounding the school house foundation contained only saplings and relatively young trees. Very little

[*] The coordinates are an average of five separate readings taken with a hand held GPS receiver from the center of the school building foundation.

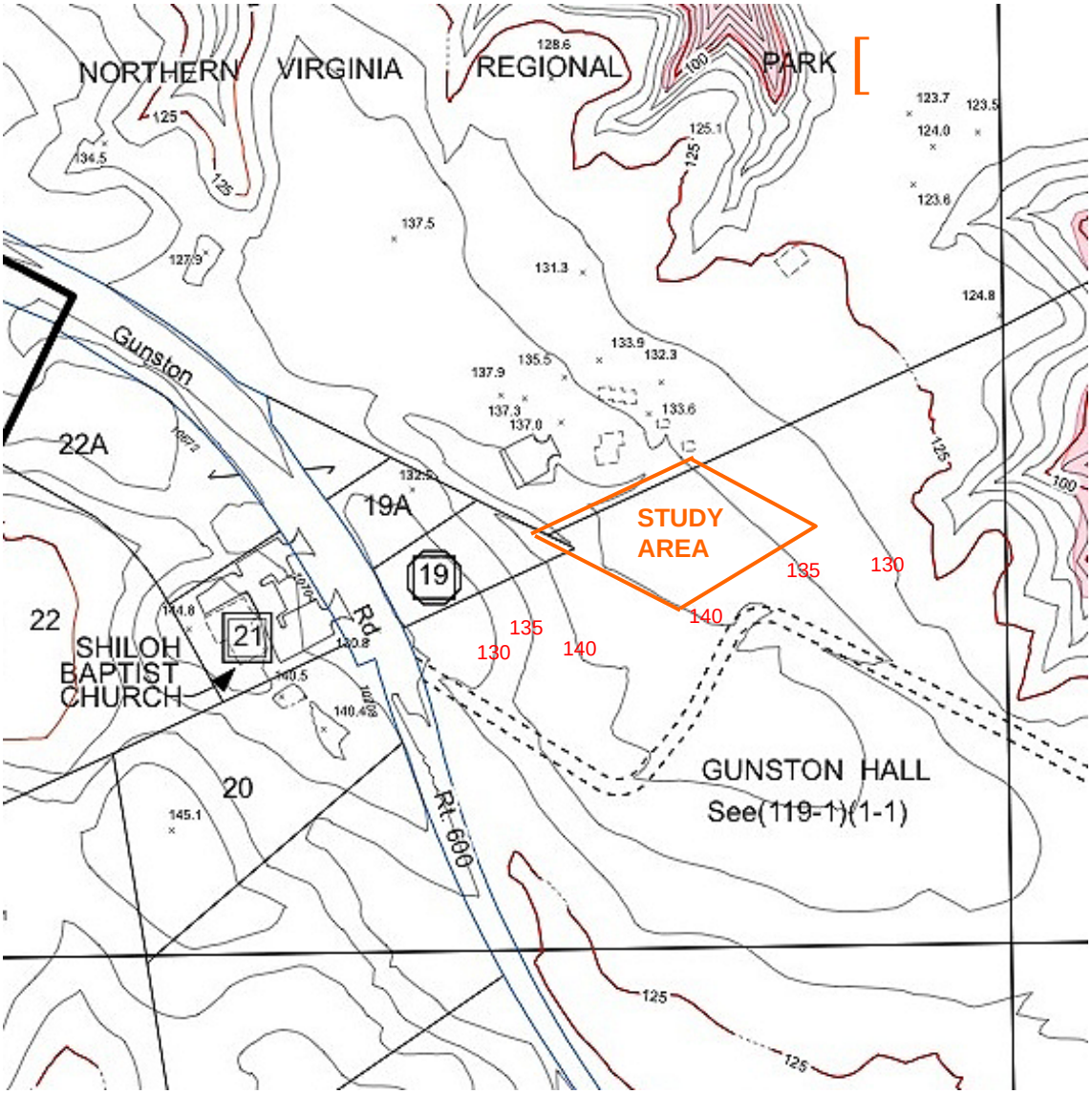

Figure 3. Topography in the vicinity of the 2009 study area. The elevations (in feet above mean sea level) of the contour lines passing near and through the study area are shown in red. (Base map is a detail from Fairfax County GIS and Mapping Services Property Map: Contour (3/04) Sheet 114-4, Jan. 2010.)

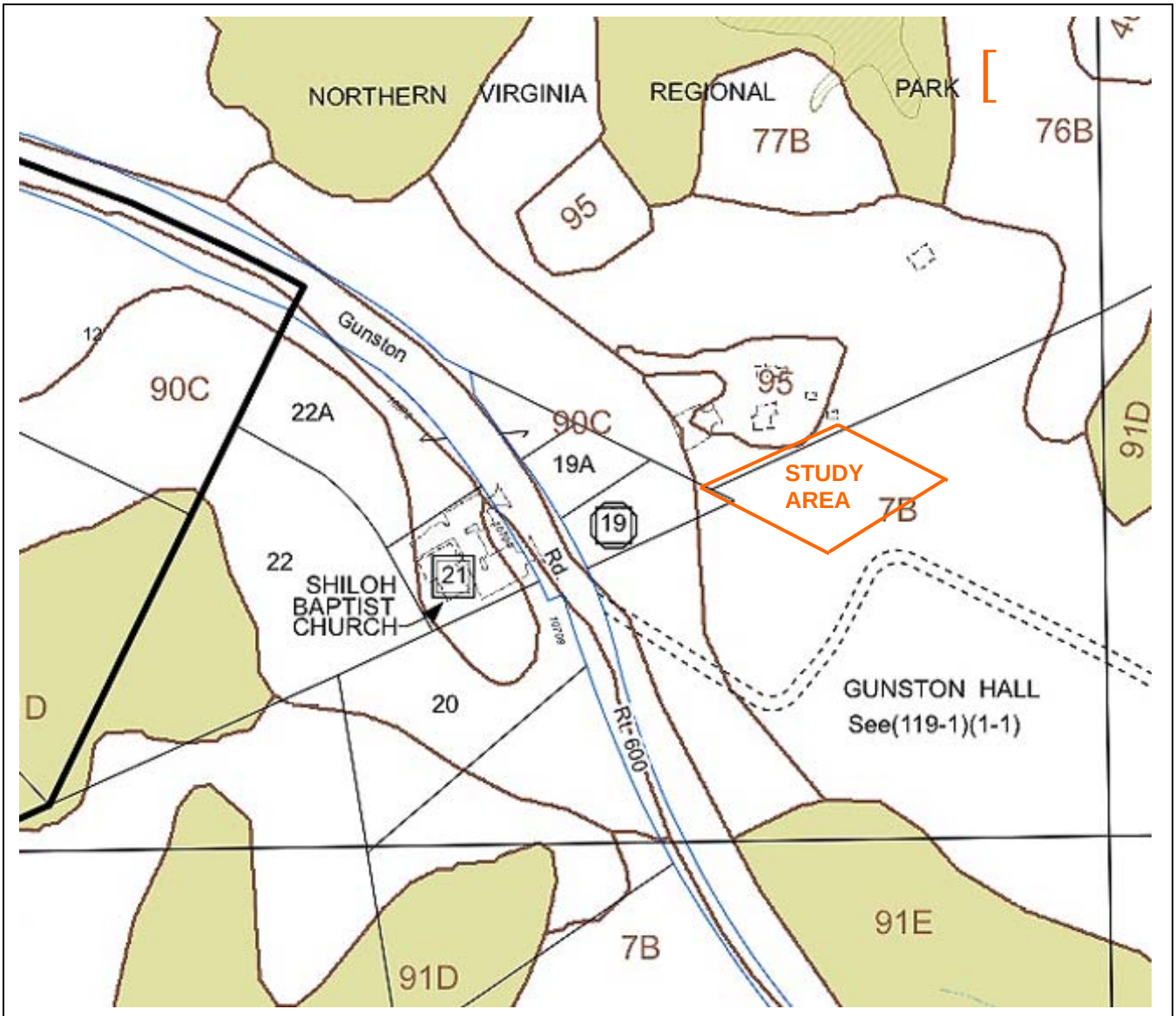

Figure 4. The soil in the study area is classified as the Beltsville series (7B). Other nearby soil types are: Matapeake (76B), Mattapex (77B), Sassafras (90C), Sassafras-Marumsco complex (91D, E), and Urban (95). The letter suffixes designate percent of slope: B = 2 – 7, C = 7 – 15, D = 15 – 25, and E = 25+. (Base map is a detail from Fairfax County GIS and Mapping Services Soils Map Sheet 114-4, Jan. 2010).

damage to the foundation by tree roots was seen. Many of the trees elsewhere on the site are fully mature, with their abundant root systems being much in evidence during excavation.

The study area is located on a part of the Gunston Hall property that is infrequently visited. Just across the property line to the north is a complex of structures belonging to the Pohick Bay Regional Park, and which includes the park headquarters, camp store and maintenance buildings (Fig. 3). Immediately to the east of this complex and just over the property line is a public campground. To the west of a portion of the study area is the Shiloh Baptist Church Cemetery (lots 19 and 19A in Figs. 3 and 4[*]). The cemetery lots extend more than halfway into the sunken road, although the cemetery fence is set about 30 feet back from this property line (Fig. 5).

Methods

The general excavation and record keeping procedures followed by the Gunston Hall archaeology program have been described in previous documents (2008b: 5; Shonyo 2008c). Normally, excavation units are aligned with a coordinate system which has its datum point on the south east corner of the mansion. Because of the distance 2009 study area from the mansion and the intervening obstructions, it was impractical to use the established coordinate system. Therefore, an arbitrary datum point was established in the study area and marked with a spike, which will be left in place. Coordinates were extended from this point along cardinal directions, creating the virtual grid on which the excavation units were aligned. (In contrast, the coordinates in the mansion area are aligned with the axes of the mansion itself.) The initial transit work was done the spring of 2008 with a standard mechanical transit. The later was replaced by a total station for work done in 2009.

Normally, all excavation work is done with mason's trowels. This, is fact, was the case of all excavations involving the school foundation. In several situations during the fence/gate investigation, however, flat shovels were called into play. Flat shovels were used to cut and

[*]Actually, a strip along the south eastern edge of the cemetery is on Gunston Hall property (Fig. 5). When unmarked burials were found in this area, an easement was granted to the church by Gunston Hall.

remove root and leaf mold layers, which were of considerable thickness in some places[*]. Also, flat shovels were sometimes used to remove deep soil deemed to be artifact-free and in which stratum changes had been established with a coring tool.

At the completion of the school foundation investigation, porous plastic ground cloth was laid over the unit floors, covering the foundation bricks, and the units were backfilled. The fence/gate investigation is ongoing, but those excavation units will also be backfilled upon completion of the project.

[*] This was particularly true in the sunken road bed. Here, bottles and other artifacts datable to the 1930's were found lying on the soil surface under a many-decades accumulation of leaf mold.

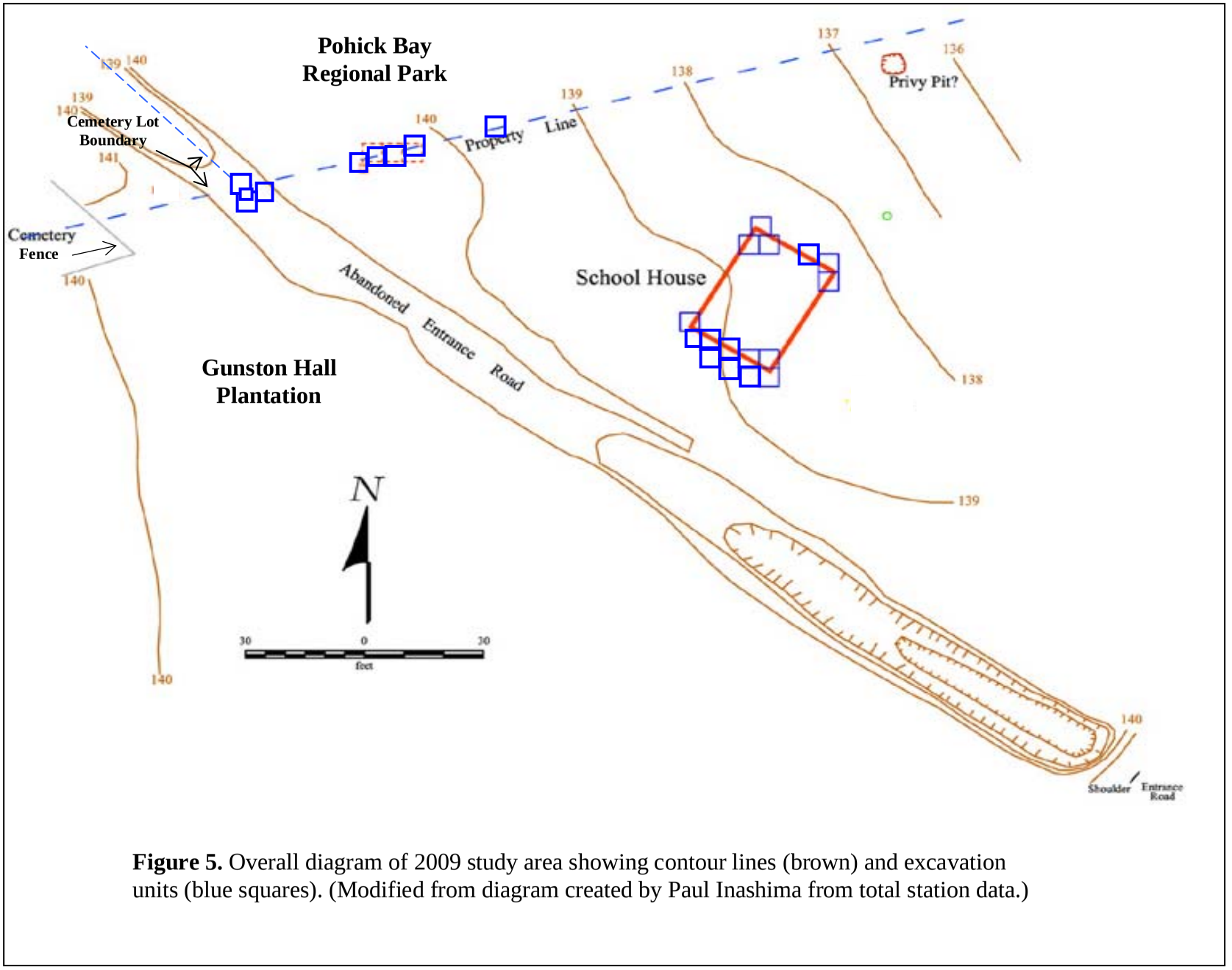

Figure 5. Overall diagram of 2009 study area showing contour lines (brown) and excavation units (blue squares). (Modified from diagram created by Paul Inashima from total station data.)

RESULTS

North Boundary Fence and Gate – 44FX113-10[*]

The 18th Century main entry gate to Gunston Hall, and its associated fence along the north boundary of the property, became a topic of interest when it became necessary to replace the current main entrance gate. John Mason, our only eye witness to the appearance of the plantation in the 18th Century, had this to say in his *Recollections*:

> "The isthmus [i.e., Mason Neck] on the northern boundary is narrow and the whole estate was kept completely enclosed by a fence on that side of about a mile in length running from the head of Holt's [Creek] to the margin of Pohick Creek. This fence was maintained with great care & good repair in my father's time in order to secure his own stock within the exclusive range within it and made of uncommon height to keep in the native deer, which had been preserved there in abundance from the first settlement of the country…" (Dunn 2004: 77).

John Mason does not mention a gate. However, a later descendant of George Mason, Kate Mason Rowland, does in her description of the entrance road:

> "From the front entrance [of the mansion]… there was, as has been described, an avenue of cherry trees, reaching the gate, 'the white gate,' as it was called. Then an English hawthorn hedge lead up to the 'red gate,' which opened out on the public road." (Rowland 1892: 106)

Rowland does not cite her source of this information, though it may have been family word of mouth. In any case she has left us with something of a quandary. The trace of the old entrance road crosses the property line and continues on former Springfield Plantation land

[*] When Gunston Hall was registered as an archaeological site with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the area covered by the site was not defined. It has been assumed, therefore, the site registration number (44FX113) applies to the entire 550 acres of the present plantation. As a matter of convenience, the Gunston Hall Archaeology Department has been appending a numerical suffix ('10,' in the present case) to identify discrete areas within the site.

for more than 500 feet to its intersection with the "public road" (Fig. 2). In Mason's time, this was the closest approach of the public road to the Gunston Hall. Was the red gate really on the public road, or was it in the more logical place where the boundary fence crossed the entrance road? Even if there was some sort of decorative gate where the entrance road met the public road, there certainly would have had to have been another gate where the entrance road passed through the boundary fence.

This project sought to find archaeological evidence, in the form of post holes and molds, of the north boundary fence and its gate at the entrance road. The purpose was to establish the location of the fence line, and to provide information on the size and spacing of the posts for use in designing the new entrance gate and attached sections of fencing.

Figure 6. A segment of the original Gunston Hall entrance road. This 18th Century road is over six feet below the surrounding land surface in places. (Photo by Maddy McCoy.)

It has been assumed that the property line that separates Gunston Hall from the Pohick Bay Regional Park today is along the same line that separated George Mason's plantation from Martin Cockburn's Springfield Plantation. However, neither Gunston Hall nor the Regional Park posses plats showing exactly where that line is. Also, is was not possible to know that the property line had not shifted over the past 250 years or how much the boundary fence might have been offset from the property line. We were thus faced with the rather formidable problem of attempting to find in a wooded area the evidence of a long-departed fence, without knowing exactly where to look.

The adjacent Shiloh Cemetery lot was surveyed in 1878, and a plat does exist (Fairfax County Deed Book 1878: 42-44). However, none of the reference points shown on the plat or mentioned in its accompanying description have survived. The Gunston Hall property line once proceeded directly across what in now Gunston Road and, assuming that it has not shifted, ran adjacent to the south boundary of the Shiloh Church property (lot 21 in Fig's. 3 and 4). This lot was surveyed in 1900 when it was purchased by the church (Fairfax County Deed Book 1900: 317-318), and there are surveyor's markers on the corners. Two markers were used as a basis for projecting a line through the study area ("Property Line" in Fig. 5) which was used as a reference for placing the excavation units. It was thought that the fence remains could be on either side of this line, so permission was obtained to excavate a short distance into the Regional Park property.

In the course of excavating in the bed of the sunken entrance road, an old surveyor's marker was found a short distance below the soil surface (Fig. 8). The marker may represent a property corner established during 1878 survey which defined the lot sold to members of Shiloh Baptist Church. This would have been the south west corner of the lot and would have lain along the Gunston Hall property line. According to the deed, the corner of the lot was on the north east side of the road and was marked by a gate post (Fig. 9). A rectilinear soil feature was, in fact, found about one-half foot from the surveyor's marker (Fig 8). It is possible that this is a mold of the fence post mentioned in the deed.

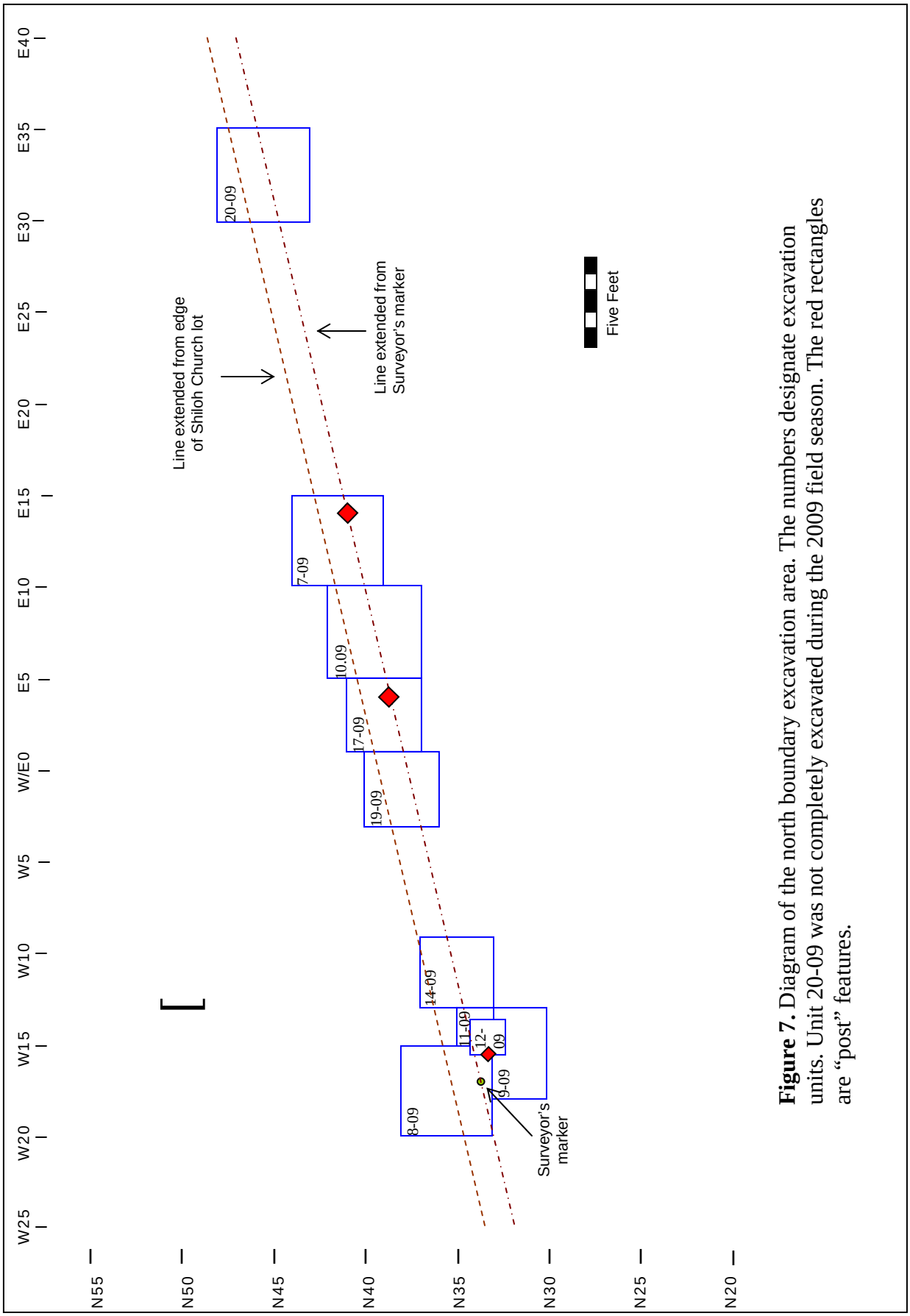

Figure 7. Diagram of the north boundary excavation area. The numbers designate excavation units. Unit 20-09 was not completely excavated during the 2009 field season. The red rectangles are "post" features.

Figure 8. This excavation-in-progress is in the bed of the sunken Gunston Hall entrance road. A bit of the road itself can be seen in the lower left corner. The remainder of the photo shows part of the eroded slope. The pink flagging tape indicates the location of an old surveyor's marker. The dark rectangular patch of soil may represent the mold of a gate post.

Excavation unit (EU) 12-09 (see Fig. 7) was dug to expose a vertical profile of the feature, so as to ascertain whether if it was in fact a post mold. The dark feature soil proved to extend only a few inches below the exposed surface, so it was not possible to positively conclude that this was a mold. Any mold that may have been there may have been disturbed beyond recognition by the roots of the adjacent tree, or the dark organic material may have disbursed into the otherwise very low organic surrounding soil. On the other hand, the feature was located on an erosional slope, so when the post was originally set in place the ground surface may have been about level with the surrounding land surface. In that case, the feature may represent only the bottom-most part of the post.

The size of the feature, and the fact the its sides are orientated 45° to the axis the boundary fence would have, are characteristics it shares with 18th Century fence post molds previously found near the mansion. Assuming that the feature is indeed a post mold, the question becomes: Was it made by George Mason's entry gate? Several considerations suggest that it would have had to have been a later structure. First of all, it is unlikely that a wooden post would have survived from Mason's time until the 1878 deed was drawn up, at least in a condition which would have allowed it to be recognized as a gate post. Then there is the matter of size. An entrance gate post was previously found associated with the road that ran from the area of the mansion to Mason's landing. It was 18 inches on a side – considerably larger than the size indicated by the feature. (Of course, it is possible the underground part of the post had been tapered from a larger above-ground size*.) An "uncommon high" fence

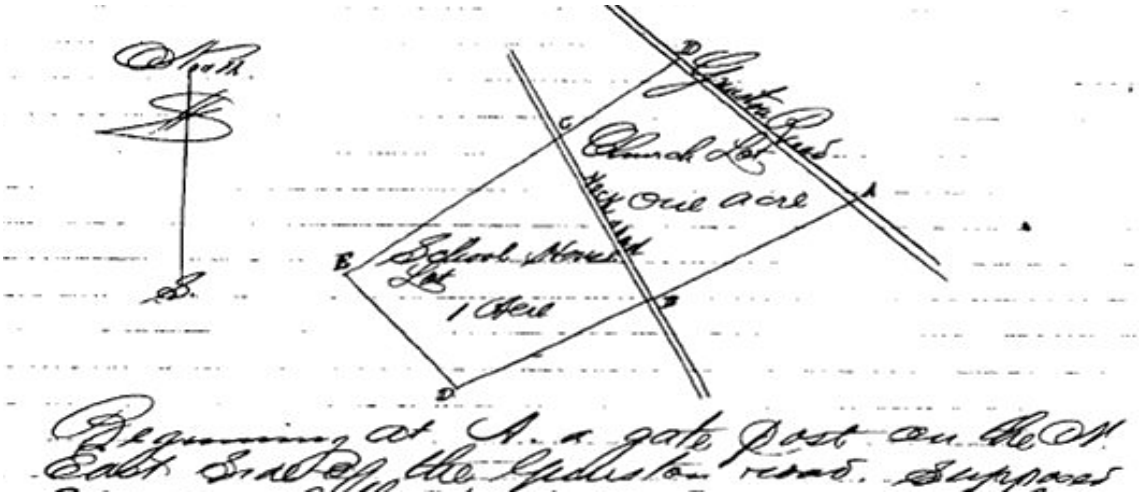

Figure 9. This detail from the 1878 deed which conveyed what is now the Shiloh Cemetery lot to the Shiloh Baptist Church shows the area in Fig. 8 as point 'A.' What is labeled here as "Gunston Road" is now the sunken entrance road trace, while "Neck Road" is the present Gunston Road. The "Church Lot" is now the cemetery lot (lots 19 and 19A in fig's. 3 and 4) and the "School House Lot" is the present Shiloh Baptist Church property (lot 21). A segment of the original Gunston Hall property line once ran along the line A-B-D. The text below the plat reads, "Beginning at A. a gate post on the N East side of the Gunston road." (From Fairfax County Deed Book Z4: 42-44, 1878.)

* The angle of the sides of the posts to the axis of the fence line, mentioned previously, was probably the result of shaving down the corners of the square posts to taper their lower portions. Tapering was seen in vertical sections of post molds excavated near the mansion.

would be pointless without an uncommon high gate, and such a gate would undoubtedly require quite a robust gate post.

The soil feature is about one-half foot from where the edge of the road must have been in 1878 (Fig. 8). The road bed, as exposed during the 2009 excavations, is slightly less than six feet wide. It is difficult to believe that it was not wider in Mason's time. Near the mansion, the road was 12 feet wide. It is quite likely that the road bed became narrower as it eroded downward. If were the case, the soil feature could not be evidence of the 18th Century entry gate post.

Until more substantial evidence emerges, however, one must keep in mind an alternate hypothesis that 1) this part of the entrance road was always only about six feet wide, 2) there was indeed an ornate entry gate 500 feet away on the public road and 3) the gate on the north boundary fence, where it crossed the entrance road, was strictly utilitarian and intended primarily to keep livestock from wandering off.

Prior to excavation in the road trace, excavation was begun in search for evidence of the boundary fence itself. Two 5' x 5' units were established side-by-side along the line projected form the edge of the church lot (EU's 7-09 and 10-09, Fig. 7). All previous 18th Century fence line posts found on the plantation had a ten-foot spacing so, if this were the case for the boundary fence, evidence of a post could be expected in one of the two contiguous units. The particular location was chosen because it was one of the very few places of sufficient size along the presumed property line that was free of trees and large surface roots.

The soil in the units, under the covering leaf mold stratum, was a uniform yellowish brown fine sandy loam with some small, clayey mottles appearing with depth. There was no evidence of plowing or other major disturbances. It was therefore assumed that evidence of a post should be relatively near the surface.

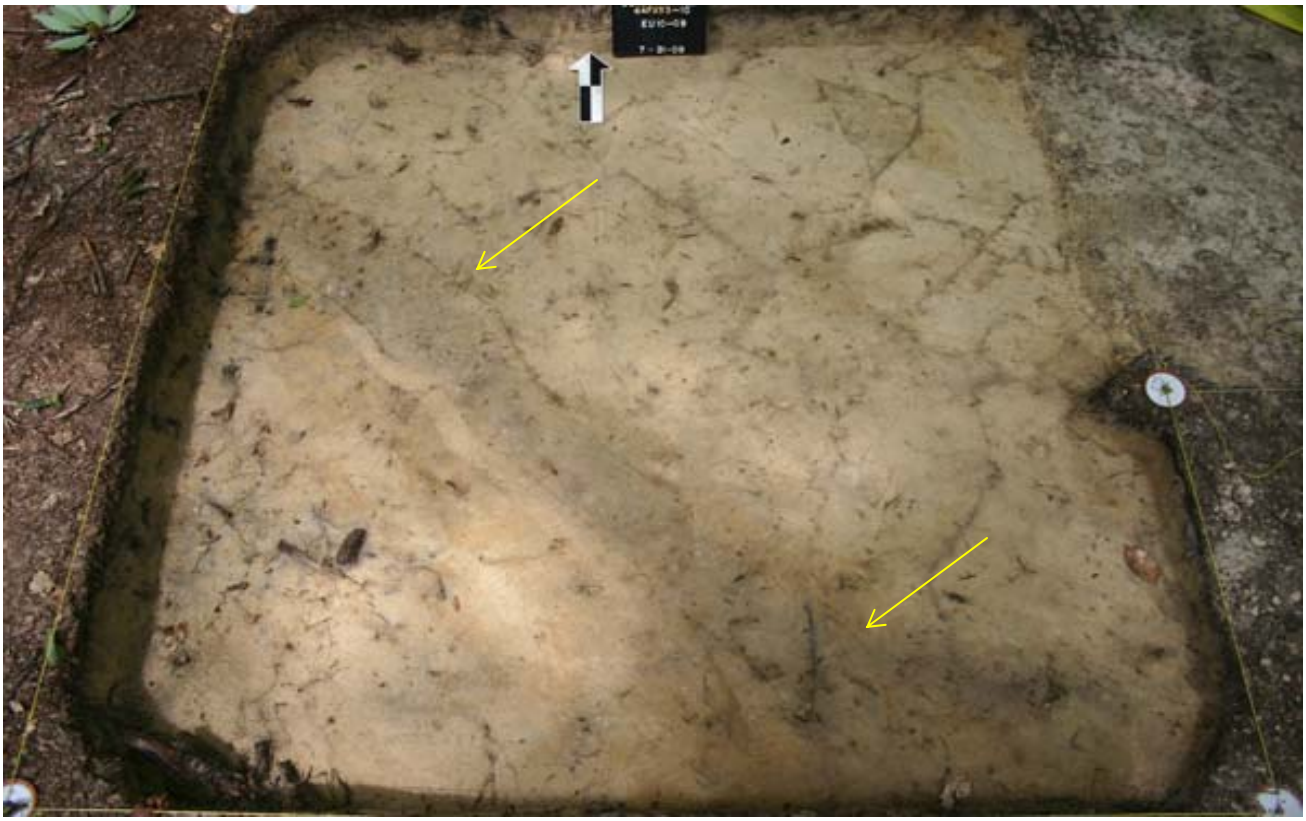

Figure 10. A linear soil feature (Feature F5-09) is seen in the floor of EU 10-09 (yellow arrows). A similar, parallel feature was found at a distance of five feet in EU 7-09, which adjoins 10-09 in the upper right of the photo. The features represent a pair of wheel ruts in a road bed that ran parallel to the original entrance road.

At about one-half foot below the surface, a linear soil feature was uncovered in EU 7-09. The feature extended diagonally from the south wall of the unit to the west wall. A similar feature was found five feet away in EU 10-09 (Fig. 10-09). The two features were parallel to each other and to the axis of the old entrance road. The feature fill soil contained a fairly large quantity of water rolled pebbles. No such pebbly material was encountered elsewhere in the excavation units. It appears that the features represent a pair of wheel ruts in a road bed which ran parallel to the sunken road. It is possible that the pebbles were dumped in the ruts in an effort to level them off.

Although it was not realized initially that EU's 7-09 and 10-09 were being placed in a road bed, the existence of the road was previously known. Where the land surface slopes downward near Gunston Road, the road bed becomes sunken. However, in the immediate project area, there is no surface indication of its presence. The road almost certainly was utilized as a bypass when the original entrance road became difficult to negotiate. It is not known when it came into use, or whether it was intended only as a wet-weather bypass or a permanent replacement for the original road.

Later in the field season, it was decided to excavate EU's 7-09 and 10-09 to a greater depth. In EU 7-09, at 0.8 foot below the surface, a patch of mottled soil was uncovered that had the size and appearance of a shovel-dug post hole. At about one foot below the surface a darker soil feature revealed itself. This feature was rectilinear in shape, with its sides aligned approximately 45° to the axis of the property line. At the level where the feature was first uncovered, the sides were about 0.8 foot long. In other word, the feature had the characteristics of a post mold. (The apparent post hole/mold was assigned feature number F6-09.)

The feature was excavated in vertical profile with a north-south cut to verify that it did indeed have the appearance of a post mold (Fig. 11). She sides tapered slightly, and the feature terminated about one foot below the level where it was first encountered (or, 2.10 feet below the present ground surface). The feature fill soil was loosely consolidated near the top, but became more compacted with depth.

The post mold feature sat exactly on the property line projected from the previously-mentioned surveyor's marker. Unfortunately, there was no way to determine whether the post dated to the 18th Century or was more recent. No artifacts were found in the portion of the feature fill excavated. The feature was completely under the road bed, so it obviously pre-dated that. The overlying soil did contain a scatter of artifacts. The only of these that were diagnostic were some cut nails and whiteware sherds, suggesting that the

Figure 11. The post mold feature in EU 7-09 is seen in profile (below the yellow line) and in partial plan view. Some of the loosely compacted soil near the top has fallen away from the face of the excavation. The soil became more compacted with depth. The mold tapered somewhat from top to bottom, and was rectilinear in plan view.

deposit originated in the 19th Century (after about 1830). So, the post could have been erected as late as the 19th Century, but possibly in the 18th Century.

One post does not make a fence line, so an effort was made to locate at least two additional post hole/mold features along the property line. Since the post molds of 18th Century fence lines found near the mansion are all spaced at ten-foot intervals, another unit was excavated ten feet west of EU 7-09 (EU 17-09 in Fig. 7). Here, a soil feature (F7-09) with the typical characteristics of a post mold was uncovered at just 0.22 foot below the surface. The feature was exactly ten feet from F6-09 and was, like the latter, positioned on the line aligned with the surveyor's marker. However, a good vertical profile could not be obtained. The dark soil seen in plan view extended only a few inches below the surface. From that point to about 0.7 foot below the surface, the feature could be distinguished by soil texture but not by color. Below that, the feature could no longer be detected. This might be due to the dispersal of organic material into a soil of very low organic content, or the lateral collapse of surrounding soil into a cavity left by a removed post. No artifacts were found in association with this feature.

The next excavation (EU 20-09 in Fig. 7) was placed along the property line 20 feet east of EU 7-09, which was the closest place that was not obstructed by trees or surface roots. However, bad weather forced the closure of the site before the excavation could be completed. Work will continue here at the start of the 2010 season.

The two post molds uncovered thus far are fairly good evidence of a fence along the Gunston Hall property line. The main uncertainty lies in whether they date to Mason's time. The molds have the shape and size of molds from 18th Century fences found near the mansion. However, the latter molds were outlined with charcoal, indicating that the underground parts of the posts were charred. Evidence of charring is lacking in the north boundary molds. Based on the limited evidence of the two post molds, it would seem that the posts were evenly spaced, at ten-foot intervals, and well aligned along the property line. This would be typical of a rigid fence, such as a rail or paled fence. A 19th or 20th Century fence marking a

property line would very likely be a wire fence. Such a fence would not require the posts to be aligned and spaced with such precision.

As was indicated previously, it is unlikely that the post mold found in the sunken road trace (Fig. 8) was made by a post that was part of Mason's entry gate. In fact, no evidence for such a gate post was found during the 2009 season. It is entirely possible that it has been lost through erosion of the road bed. The search will continue, however, during the 2010 field season.

Gunston Colored School – 44FX2862

On November 25, 1882, Edward and Ione Daniels, then owners of Gunston Hall Plantation, deeded one acre of Gunston Hall property to the Trustees of the Mt. Vernon School Board Fairfax County Deed Book 1882: 62-63). The lot fronted on the old Gunston Hall entry road and was within sight of the Gunston White School, which had been built four years earlier. It was here that a school building was constructed to provide for the formal education of the children of former slaves and of members of the free black community that resided on Mason Neck prior to the Civil War. The school was called the Gunston Colored School (Fig. 12).

At its height the one-room school served thirty or more children, ages five to seventeen (Elsey 1997: 98). Enrolment declined to 14 or 15 students a year by the late 1920's and early 1930's, resulting in the closure of the school after the 1932-33 school year (Russell-Porte 2000: 178). The one-acre parcel with its abandoned school building was returned to Gunston Hall in 1954. Soon thereafter, at the request of the Gunston Hall Board of Regents, the building was dismantled and the materials removed by a salvager.

The building had an interior dimension of about 25 X 32 feet. The single door opened on a small covered porch. There were two windows in the front, three on each side and none in the back. The exterior was covered with clapboard siding (Fig. 12). The roof, at least at the time of the school's closure, was sheet metal (pieces of this were found at the site). Inside, along the back wall, there were two blackboards flanking a supply closet. In the

Figure 12. "Here, far from the present path of those who slowly trudge to the summons of the tolling bell, lost to view in dense and growing trees, the schoolhouse stands, short steps beyond, yet many, many years in time…" So wrote James O'Neill, Jr. in 1947 after snapping this photo of the derelict Gunston Colored School building. (Photo and quote from O'Neill 1947: 44.)

center of the floor was a wood-burning stove, with a chimney directly overhead. This size and layout seems to have been common to many of the rural one-room school houses of the period. This is the case with the Gunston White School, as well as all of the other rural schools of similar age that have survived in Fairfax County. When a larger structure was required, two of these modules were constructed end-to-end. The same pattern was used in many of the school houses built by the Freedman's Bureau in the immediate post-Civil War period. The Waterford Colored School in Loudoun County, Virginia is one of these for which good documentation is available (Scheel 1979).

The location of the school house site was known from an informal "walkabout" survey of the property done in 2000, at which time a scatter of window glass sherds and broken brick was noted on the forest floor. Aerial photographs from a 1937 Soil Conservation Service survey helped confirm that this was indeed the Gunston Colored School site (Fig. 2).

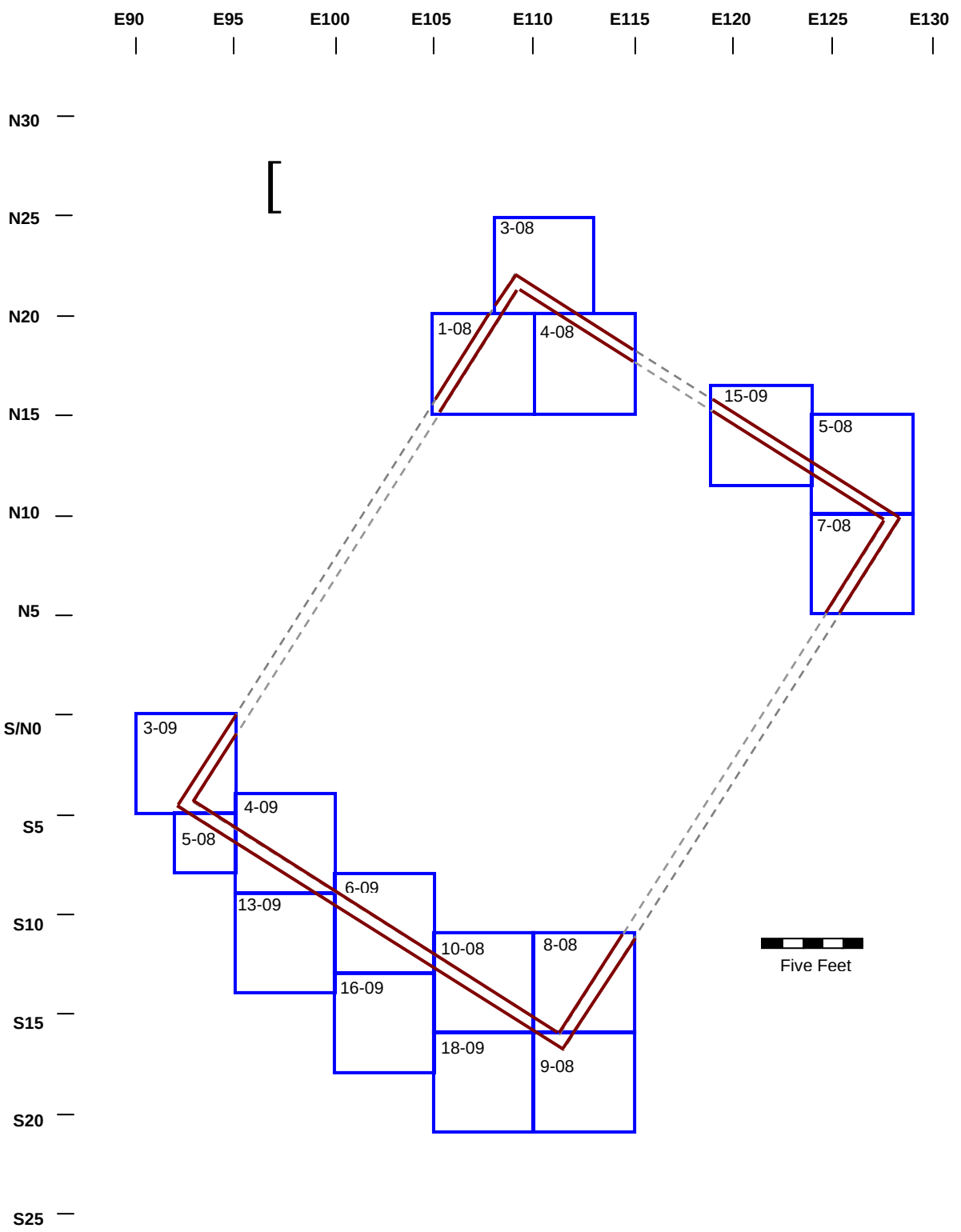

Figure 13. In this diagram of the Gunston Colored School site, the units excavated are shown in blue and the portion of the foundation excavated in red. The front of the structure is toward the bottom.

In the spring of 2008, a tile probe was used to locate the underground remains of the building's foundation and trace its shape. It was decided to expose segments of the foundation at the four corners for the purpose of possibly incorporating them into an exhibit. A complete archaeological investigation was not undertaken, although standard archaeological procedures and good archaeological practice was used throughout.

Figure 14. The single door of the school would have been about midway over the segment of the foundation in the excavation unit on the left. The sunken original plantation entry road can be seen in the background. The excavation unit on the right (4-09) has been completely excavated to the base of the upper course of bricks. Excavation of the unit on the left (6-09) has not been completed. (Photo by Maddie McCoy.)

Figure 15. The underground part of the foundation was composed of un-mortared brick, as seen in this segment passing through EU 15-09. The interior of the structure is toward the bottom of the photo.

A site datum was established in 2008, and eight 5’ x 5’ units were laid out over three of the corners. The “08” series numbers assigned to the units at the time were retained when excavations got underway in 2009.

A total of 16 units was excavated over or adjacent to the foundation. All units were 5’ x 5’ except EU 5-08, which was 3’ x 3’. The units were excavated to a depth equal to bottom of the top course of bricks (Fig. 14). Indeed, this was the approximate depth limit of artifact bearing soil.

The bricks of the underground part of the foundation seemed to be a mixed lot of brickyard “seconds.” They varied in the degree of firing and color, and some departed somewhat from

the standard dimensions of manufactured brick. None of them had any adhering mortar, so it is unlikely that they were salvaged from another structure.

The bricks of the underground portion of the foundation were dry laid, without the use of any mortar (Fig.15). (There were brick fragments with adhering mortar scattered on the ground surface, which suggests that the above ground part was mortared.) A sandy substance was used between courses to level the bricks. Evidence of a builder's trench, where it could be seen at all, extended only a fraction of an inch beyond the foundation bricks. It appears that the trench was dug only wide enough to accommodate the foundation, and the bricks lowered in. No effort was made to determine the number of courses deep the foundation extended.

A brick feature, about one foot square, was uncovered in EU 18-09. It was exactly aligned with the foundation. This was initially interpreted as a pier which supported a corner of the porch. For this to be the case, however, the porch would have had to extend closer to the corner of the building than is shown in Fig. 12. It is conceivable that there may have been an earlier, wider porch, but there is no other evidence for such a structure.

The areas interior and exterior to the foundation differed in both soil type and artifact content. At the base of the excavation, the interior soil was an olive yellow clayey loam, while the adjacent exterior soil tended to be an olive brown fine sandy loam. The artifact content of the interior was almost exclusively construction debris, from both the construction and demolition of the building. An abundance of construction debris was recovered from the exterior as well, along with the large variety of other items discussed below.

Although they were not investigated as part of this project, it should be mentioned that the school house was not the only structure on the school lot. The others were a 12' x 12' building, which may have been a wood shed, and two privies (Elsey 1997: 100). The roof of one of the privies is still on the lot . This is a pyramidal affair with an un-corrugated metal covering. The sheet metal is attached with wire nails, but the underlying wooden structure is constructed with cut nails. Next to the roof is a rectangular pit, over which the privy was almost certainly perched.

As might be expected, the majority of the cultural artifacts recovered from the site related to the structure itself. These included window glass, brick, nails, strips of a “sheetrock” type of composite board, caulking (probably putty from the windows), sheet metal, staples, spikes, screws and mortar.

O’Neill (1947: 44) implied that the windows had been broken out at the time of his 1947 visit to the building. Shards of window glass and brick fragments constituted by far the most abundant types of artifact on the site. The brick was not collected. The window glass sherds were, however, removed from the site. They were weighed (22.3 kg. in total), and a representative sample from each unit was retained for curation. The glass shards were of various thicknesses, indicating some of the panes had been replaced over the years.

Of the 1,539 nails recovered during the excavation, well over half were unidentifiable as to nail type because of corrosion. This is not an unusual occurrence in the highly acidic soils of the area. The proportions of types found were:

Machine cut - 331 (21.5%)
Wire - 237 (17.1%)
Unidentified - 945 (61.4%)

Most of the nails found on the inside of the foundation were machine cut. These iron nails were largely replaced in general carpentry during the 1890’s by lower cost hard steel wire nails (Mercer 1975: 238). In 1886, 10% of the nails produced in the United States were wire. By 1913, this figure had risen to 90% (Visser 1997: 25). It seems reasonable to conclude that all or most of the cut nails were used in the original construction of the school building, and that most of the wire nails were used in later repair or renovation work.

Included in the count of wire nails are twenty-six lead headed roofing nails (Fig 16). These are standard ungalvanized 1¾” steel wire nails with a dome-shaped lead head molded around the regular head. Nails of this kind are used to attach sheet metal roofs. When pounded, the

lead seals the puncture in the metal made be the nail. Their presence on the site suggests that the roof may have been replaced sometime during the school's history.

There was no discernable pattern to the distribution of the construction-related artifacts. However, there were two areas in which other artifacts were relatively heavily concentrated. One of these was around the north west corner, in units 1-08 and 3-08. The other artifact concentration was across what had been the front of the building, in units 10-08, 4-09, 6-09, 13-09, 16-09 and 18-09. There is no discernable reason why this should have been the case around the north west corner. However, the rather obvious reason for the other area of artifact concentration is that this is where the door was. In the area centered on the door, the soil is somewhat mounded. This can be seen in the sidewall of the units in Fig. 14. This mound undoubtedly represents fifty years of floor sweepings that went out the door.

It might be mentioned that very little charcoal was found in the soil, in spite of the presence of a wood burning stove. The charcoal and ash from the stove was apparently being deposited elsewhere, and it is possible that other trash was being deposited in the same place. This is one of several features that remains to be discovered on the site.

Most of the artifacts not related to the actual structure were either associated with the conduct of the school or were personal items. In the former category, the most abundant single type of artifact was slate. O'Neill (1947: 44) provides a photo of the blackboard still intact in 1947, and writes of "old, old words, chalked upon the crumbling board." Some of the slate probably came from this classroom blackboard, but some was also from the hand held slates used by the children. That the later were present is evinced by the 22 pieces of slate pencil recovered from the site (Fig. 15). Other items related to the conduct of the school were lead pencil fragments (Fig. 15), pencil lead, pen nibs, axe head, lamp chimney sherds and a piece of an ornate glass lamp shade.

Items that could be classified as personal were more varied. These included: Ceramic sherds (whiteware – 22 sherds, bone china – 3, hard-paste porcelain – 11, red earthenware – 1, white ball clay pipe stem – 1); comb pieces; beads; jewelry parts; buttons (glass, metal, hard

rubber, bone, mother of pearl); safety pin; coins (pennies, nickels, dime); can fragments; knife blade; knife handle (bone with copper alloy inlay); possible utensil handle; clothing fasteners (e.g., for bib overalls). This assemblage certainly does not give the impression of an

Figure 15. Examples of some of the artifacts recovered from the Gunston Colored School site. Top row left: lead headed nails; top row right: jewelry parts; second row left: glass beads; second row right: buttons (glass, brass, hard rubber, bone); third row left: eraser end of a lead pencil fragment; third row right: uncertain object, but perhaps a handle from a small utensil; bottom: slate pencil.

Figure 16. These bottles were uncovered near where the door of the school building had been. The bottle on the left has an embossed label on the recessed panel which reads: "UNITED STATES MEDICINE CO NEW YORK." The center bottle has no label, but it has characteristics of a late 19th or very early 20th Century medicine bottle. The bottle on the right is embossed on the shoulder with the words "SEAGULL BAKING POWDER," and on the base with "SEAGULL SPECIALITY CO."

impoverished student body, and conforms with the local tradition that the African American community of Mason Neck was always relatively well off.

Also classifiable as "personal" are the food remains. These were in the form of bird and mammal bones. Of these, it was possible to identify bones from chickens, ducks and rabbits. More problematic is the presence of oyster shell (albeit, a relatively small 48g). The shells

were found only around the school house remains, not in the nearby north boundary excavations. Oysters don't grow this far north in the Potomac drainage, so it is unlikely that the children were eating them. Oyster shells are used as a food supplement for laying hens, so perhaps chickens were being kept as a school project. Or perhaps the shells were being brought onto the site by children for reasons only a child could explain.

Numerous sherds of container glass were found on the site, along with a few unbroken bottles (Fig. 16). Some were embossed with maker's marks or brand names. Among the latter, the following could be identified: United States Medicine Co., Davis Baking Powder, Rumford Baking Powder and Seagull Baking Powder. The baking powder bottles suggest that perhaps food was being prepared at the school. An account of the Ellicott City (Maryland) Colored School includes a recollection of a former teacher that she prepared food on the potbellied school stove to supplement the lunches of the children (Ellicott City Colored School 2004). Possibly this was happening at the Gunston School as well. Or, maybe some instruction in food preparation was part of the curriculum.

Although it was originally intended to leave the excavated parts of the foundation exposed as an exhibit, it was decided that the fact that the bricks were unmortared would leave the structure too vulnerable to damage. This is of particular concern because the site is difficult to monitor due to its remoteness from the main activity areas of Gunston Hall, and because of its proximity to a public camp ground. Therefore, at the end of the field season, the exposed foundation was covered with porous landscape fabric and the excavated units were backfilled. While excavations were in progress, presentations on the history and archaeology of the site were given on the site to interested individuals and groups (Fig. 17).

Figure 17. Presentations on the history and archaeology of the Gunston Colored School site were provided throughout the 2009 field season. (Photo by Maddie McCoy.)

PLANS FOR 2010

The projects intended for the 2010 field season will continue to follow elements of the Gunston Hall Long Term Strategic Plan (Shonyo 2008b), with the addition of the kitchen yard mitigation project summarized below.

• **Kitchen yard mitigation.** A wheelchair lift will be constructed to provide handicapped access to the east entrance to the mansion. This will require the disturbance of a 4' x 3' area to a depth of three feet. A brick pavement will be constructed to provide hard-surface access and maneuvering space. A 5' x 5' unit will be excavated where the lift will be constructed. If necessary, additional units will be excavated to one foot in the area where the bricks will be laid. The caveat "if necessary" is included because, at the time the Commonwealth of Virginia acquired Gunston Hall, a wooden structure covered the entire area to be mitigated. If this structure had a basement, full mitigation will not be required.

In addition, it is planned to realign the west side of the paled kitchen yard fence. Small units, two feet on a side, will be excavated where each of the new fence posts will be set.

• **North boundary fence and gate.** One excavation unit in this project area, EU 20-09, was not completely excavated at the end of the 2009 field season. This will be completed in order to determine whether it contains evidence of a post associated with the 18th Century north boundary fence. Additional efforts will be made to locate evidence of a gate post at the point where the fence crossed the original entrance road. It would be highly desirable to get a better fix on the age of the post hole evidence, and additional post holes/molds may have to be excavated in order to obtain this.

• **Carriage circle.** Several late 19th photographs show what appears to be a large carriage dismounting block in front of the mansion. If this stone block dated to Mason's time, as it well may have, it obviously must have set next to the original carriageway. An effort will be made to find evidence of the exact location of the block. If it can be found, evidence of the edge of the old carriageway may also be present. If so. It will be used as a starting point to

trace out the location and configuration of the old carriage circle. This is a different approach to investigation than that given in the Long Range Strategic Plan (Shonyo 2008b: 10-11). If it is not successful, recourse will be made to the original plan.

• **White gate complex.** This project focuses on an area where it is thought that several features of the 18th Century plantation landscape come together. Basically, two rows of cherry trees flanked the entrance road. A walkway ran between each row (Dunn 2004: 74-75). A "white gate" is supposed to have spanned the road where the cherry tree avenue ended (Rowland 1892: 106). This gate may have been attached to a fence which enclosed the area around the mansion. A short distance beyond the enclosed area, north west of the mansion, was the slave quarter called "Log Town" (Dunn 2004: 77). This effort will seek to find archaeological evidence of these landscape elements. The approach described in the Long Range Plan will be followed (Shonyo 2008b:7-9).

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