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HIST 4973
Capstone

The Worlds of Monticello Mountain:
How Space Reflected Power & Politics on an Eighteenth Century Chesapeake Plantation

While endlessly twisting and turning through the Virginian wilderness on the climb up Monticello Mountain, one would never image that the world would open up to embrace the commanding, yet delicately refined presence of Thomas Jefferson's mansion. As Margaret Bayard Smith commented in 1809:

When I crossed the Ravanna, a wild and romantic little river...I thought I had entered, as it were the threshold of his dwelling, and I looked around everywhere expecting to meet with some trace of his [Jefferson] superintending care. In this I was disappointed, for no vestige of the labor of man appeared; nature seemed to hold an undisturbed dominion. We began to ascend this mountain, still as we rose I cast my eyes around, but could not discern nothing but untamed woodland....¹

Jefferson knew that visitors would be astounded as they emerged from the rough countryside to embrace his mansion gracing the skyline (Figure 1). Without words Jefferson was signaling to all who entered this sphere of dominion, black slaves and white visitors alike, that he was the master of it. From his aerie position at the apex of the mountain, he commanded as far as the eye could see. He was superior and he was watching. When Jefferson constructed the layout of his eighteenth-century plantation he did so in terms of space which served as a subliminal signifier and determinant of power and politics. The plantation's layout affected the interrelationships amongst slaves as well as their relationship to Jefferson. Thomas Jefferson strategically organized space on the mountain to serve his own needs. He had no regard for how these placements affected power dynamics within the slaves' worlds, much less how

¹ Margaret Bayard Smith, 1809, in *Visitors to Monticello*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1989), 45-46.

slaves might attain control over their own existence. Historians and archaeologists can learn an enormous amount from the ignored worlds of Monticello through consciously choosing to look at and examine what Jefferson chose not to. Monticello Mountain examined through the size of residences, how people used and move through those spaces as well as the items they possessed which will be narrowed to the specific category of ceramics reveals how power, status and thus agency was structured on Jefferson's eighteenth-century Chesapeake Plantation.

The southern landscape was constructed, viewed and moved through very differently depending upon whether or not an individual was rich or poor, black or white, enslaved or free. Thomas Jefferson's world, as a white wealthy planter in the eighteenth-century, was carefully constructed by a series of signals and barriers which served to reinforce power and status. Status was determined by a white member of the southern gentry's ability to read these signals and to progress forward through the barriers. As archaeologist William Kelso writes, "The gentry landscape was experienced dynamically; its meanings could not be comprehended at a glance. The observer was required to move through space and piece together many partial signals."² As a member of the gentry moved forward through a barrier, a new status based organization had to be established. Individuals then had to reinforce their power and position within the space of that realm. This process of establishing status, and thus power, based on progression is best seen on the macro level by considering a plantation's layout as a whole; but for a more concise examination, we can observe the design of the plantation mansion itself. Mount Airy, located in Richmond county Virginia (Figure 2) is regarded by archaeologists and

² Dell Upton, "Imagining the Early Virginia Landscape," in *Earth Patterns: Essays in Landscape Archaeology*, ed. William M. Kelso et al. (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1990), 75.

historians alike as the quintessential plantation house that was designed with status barriers in mind.³

According to landscape archaeologist Dell Upton, “The sitting and architectural decoration at Mount Airy were manipulated carefully to make use of the principals of procession through distance and elevation to distinguish among users if the complex and to impress upon them John Tayloe’s centrality in Mount Airy’s microcosm.”⁴ Visitors to Mount Airy approached the house from an inferior position in space. The landscape was crafted so that as they approached, the distance from the low point in which they began their journey and the journey’s end at the elevated house was emphasized. A winding route circled an inset park which was designed to accentuate the height and grandeur of the house when the visitors arrived. Many architectural techniques were employed by plantation owners desiring to accentuate their power and position in the landscape. For example, Tayloe had wings constructed onto the house on either side which served to emphasize the central structure’s height and commanding presence. Once on the same level as the house, visitors had to walk across a terrace, up the front stairs to the open entrance porch, and into the main parlor. Each division of the landscape served as a barrier separating the plantation owner from his guests. The further a visitor was allowed to approach into Tayloe’s realm, the greater their status. Interestingly, the owner’s status was intertwined with that of the guest. The owner’s authority was elevated and reinforced by the guest at all times, because he controlled the guest’s right of

³ *Ibid*, 75-76.

⁴ *Ibid*, 76.

entry to the space of his realm and thus, he elevated his own worth through bestowing that access.⁵

For some visitors to Mount Airy, those with the least status and power within Tayloe's landscape, the parlor was the end of the line. Others would be invited to join the plantation owner in the dining room, considered the temple of southern hospitality by the gentry. The dining room was regarded as the most sacred place within a southern planter's home. It was the center of family life as well as a place to visit with close friends and discuss business, thus it was the most protected and controlled space. Blacks and whites were not allowed the same access to space nor were they able to move through it in the same manner. This concept is especially reflected in how the dining room was used by both. Family members as well as members of the gentry would enter or be graciously welcomed in through the main entrance, whereas black serving slaves would enter into the room from a secondary door which was devised to not draw the eyes of the guests. Mount Airy's spatial layout's ability to affirm or deny status in such a complete form helps archaeologists and historians alike to understand how Thomas Jefferson was able to craft the landscape of Monticello Mountain to place the focus upon him.⁶

Thomas Jefferson was a master landscape architect—everything within his realm was tamed to recognize him as master. He created an all encompassing universe on Monticello Mountain in which several diverse worlds of existence focused on the main house. This focus kept Jefferson permanently suspended above all others and constantly served to enforce his superior status and power. The first step in understanding how the worlds of Monticello are

⁵ *Ibid*, 76-78.

⁶ *Ibid*, 78, 84.

understood in terms of space and power is to understand how Jefferson, as the puppet master, pulled the strings from the top of the mountain. Jefferson had long been inspired by both classical designs and the concept of an ornamental farm in which the fields, roads and structures all complemented the beauty of the plantation as a whole. Jefferson was a man who understood that first impressions meant everything and thus he wanted to impress upon his visitors his knowledge, status and power from the moment they entered into his realm. Even in the very naming of his mountain plantation, Jefferson was communicating his status. As the Chevalier de Chastellux wrote in April of 1782:

He [Jefferson] called this house *Monticello* (in Italian, Little Mountain), a very modest name indeed, for it is situated upon a very high mountain, but a name which bespeaks the owner's attachment to the language of Italy and above all to the Fine Arts, of which Italy was the cradle and is still the resort.⁷

Similar to Mount Airy, Jefferson used the landscape make comments to his visitors about his power and status. The landscape and the construction of space at Monticello was a signal to visitors that Jefferson was a superior and powerful man. He was wealthy, an intellect, and he possessed vast control within his realm. When entering into Jefferson's landscape, visitors made the circuitous journey up the mountain which "effectively shielded the visitor from any views of industry or enslavement, and created an experience of a wild and natural landscape,"⁸ until they emerged to behold his commanding mansion placed upon the summit. The placement of the house seemingly allowed Jefferson to see everything in the landscape from an unseen vantage point. The house itself was a testament to classical architectural principals which was a signal that Jefferson was a highly educated man. On a more subtle note,

⁷ *Ibid*, 84; Chevalier de Chastellux (1782) in *Visitors to Monticello*, 11.

⁸ Sara Bon-Harper, "Contrasting Worlds: Plantation Landscapes at Monticello" (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society for Historical Archaeology, Amelia Island, Florida, 2010) 4.

the mansions building materials served to communicate subliminal signals about Jefferson's deep coffers. It was traditional in Virginia for most of the seventeenth century for planters to construct their houses out of wood and to support those homes using posts that were placed vertically into the ground. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century, wealthy planters began to signal their wealth by completely constructing their homes with brick, which was one of the most costly building materials. In addition, we know from Francis Calley Gray's 1815 letter that Jefferson had them means to purchase and ship a replacement square piece of glass that had to be sent away for in Boston (Figure 3). The Monticello Foundation has roughly estimated the total cost of the Monticello mansion standing today to be approximately \$100,461.76, yet the Foundation also states that this number probably is only a fraction of the total cost.⁹

Once visitors reached the summit of Monticello Mountain, they too had to proceed through a series of spatial barriers which served to place distance between themselves and Jefferson. After crossing the front lawn, and the portico, guests were welcomed into the entrance hall. Its high eighteen and a half foot ceiling served to accentuate the grandeur of the home to would take a seat and wait to be formally greeted by a member of the family or Jefferson himself. Historians believe that the entrance hall was filled with chairs placed in two rows which is a testament to the sheer number of visitors Jefferson received at Monticello. For some, they would only get to see the entrance hall before being sent back on their way, but while they were there an impression was made upon them for the hall was likened to a

⁹ Fraser D. Neiman, "The Lost World of Monticello," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 64 (Summer 2008): 172-173; Upton, "Imagining the Early Virginia Landscape," 84; Francis Calley Gray (1815) in *Visitors to Monticello*, 58; "Monticello (House) FAQ," Monticello.org, accessed 15 November 2011, <http://www.monticello.org/site/house-and-gardens/monticello-house-faq#cost>.

museum filled with Native American and natural artifacts by visitor George Ticknor in 1815. These furnishings included a buffalo's head and elk horns, as well as the head of a mammoth and an Indian map on an animal hide—all were exotic and in being so, they elevated Jefferson's status and power by having them in his possession (Figure 4).¹⁰

The entrance hall, parlor and dining room were the most public spaces within Jefferson's home. From the entrance hall, prominent visitors would be allowed further access into Jefferson's space where they could visit with Jefferson in the parlor (Figure 5). The guests with the highest standing would then move from the parlor to the dining room, a space reserved only for those with the appropriate power and status. However, those who made it to the dining room did not necessarily possess the highest standing as judged by Jefferson. Most dining room worthy guests were still bound by the spatial barrier system because they were excluded from moving freely throughout the whole space of his home which was divided in terms of public and private space. Those he cherished and bestowed the highest status upon were those who had access to his library-study-bedroom area which was Jefferson's most private space. The true mark of a person's status and power was their ability to move through both Jefferson's private and public spaces, to dine in the dining room and then be invited into his study. On a rare occasion, Jefferson would invite scholars into his private space, but the only person to ever have frequent access Jefferson's most private and personal area was his daughter Ms. Randolph who would sit and talk with him while she sewed.¹¹

¹⁰ Susan R. Stein, *The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1993), 70.

¹¹ Stein, *The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson*, 82, 98, 103; Jack McLaughlin, *Jefferson and Monticello: Biography of a Builder*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1988), 327.

Jefferson was obsessed with securing control of his own privacy and that of his family. Throughout the house he implemented strategies and devices that would insulate himself and his family from the outside world as well as from being overheard by his black servants. Isolation from eavesdropping slaves manifested itself most prevalently in both the purchasing and manufacture of dumbwaiters operated in the dining room. Jefferson did not wish to have servers present during the meal. In order to achieve privacy, a revolving serving door, commonly referred to as a lazy Susan, was installed in one corner of the dining room (Figure 6). This device allowed food to be placed upon its shelves by servants unseen by Jefferson or his guests, then rotated so the food could be accessed by those in the dining room. Dumbwaiters were also installed on both sides of the dining room fireplaces so Jefferson could send down an empty bottle of wine to the basement where a slave would replace it with a new one (Figure 7). These devices grabbed the attention of visitors both in Jefferson's time, as well as the hundreds of tourists who visit his home each year, yet other devices were also used for the sake of privacy. One of Jefferson's most prevalent ways of protecting his privacy, and thus space was the installation of shutters. Windows posed a huge problem for Jefferson because they left him vulnerable and exposed to the eyes of the world, yet he cherished and relied on natural light coming into his home, thus the Venetian blind was a godsend. The blind's pivoting louvers allowed him to control the outsider's view of his space and remain unseen while maintaining the flow of natural light. Historian Jack McLaughlin states:

Public scrutiny of his private life made [Jefferson] all the more determined to protect his privacy by such architectural shields as blinds in his windows, screens at his bed, louvered porticoes at his doors, and even a wall of shutters across his portico that would have made the sainted Palladio shutter in his grace.¹²

¹² Stein, *The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello*, 71-94; McLaughlin, *Jefferson and Monticello*, 256, 327.

Jefferson's construction of space on Monticello Mountain as a signifier of power and politics was not limited to white southern gentry alone. Jefferson while an intellect and statesman, he was also a large-scale slave owner. The landscape of Monticello Mountain was one that was used and moved through by both blacks and whites, though control and movement was very different between these two groups. Slaves were not bound by the rigid system of barriers and linear progression. Their duties allowed them to move more freely in some respects because the nature of their duties serving the planter required them to do so. A house slave could enter through a back or side door and move throughout the planter's home using hallways and passage ways a member of the white gentry was denied access to. Slaves also had access to move through space outside the traditional channels of white access. Their use of the forest and waterways allowed them to step outside the control of their masters and gain autonomy. Some slaves used their knowledge of these spaces to escape punishment or work, often hiding out for weeks at a time while owners searched in vain. Dell Upton explains that "Those areas effectively beyond the master's reach, whether they were ceded on traditional grounds, such as the quarters and shops, or whether they were seized by slaves, as in the cast of the woods and waterways, could be considered the slaves'."¹³

Thomas Jefferson's slaves did not occupy one universal slave landscape. Their power, status and movement were all connected to their spatial proximity to the main house and thus Jefferson himself. Historical and archeological evidence proves that slaves living within a close proximity to their owner had a higher status, greater control over their occupational and residential space as well as a better quality of life overall as compared to living in a quarter.

¹³ Upton, "Imagining the Early Virginia Landscape," 74.

The more directly associated spatially, the more interdependent the relationship was between Jefferson and his slaves. In the quarter, field hands were removed from the master and under the gaze of an oftentimes malevolent overseer. This theory holds true when looking at the status, living conditions and ceramic assemblages of the enslaved population living on Monticello Mountain. Mulberry Row was the nearest large-scale occupational and residential slave landscape that appeared on Thomas Jefferson's 1796 *Form of the Declarations for Assurance* (Figure 8). This plat was drawn and written by Jefferson to insure the buildings of Mulberry Row (identified by letters) against fire and was a detailed account of where buildings were located, what they were used for, their construction materials and dimensions. Located just south of and along the side of Jefferson's home (Figure 9), the occupants of Mulberry Row by their proximity to the main house enjoyed the highest status and power of Monticello's slave population.¹⁴

Between 1979 and 1991, archaeologist William M. Kelso conducted an archaeological investigation to locate the original structures of Mulberry Row and reveal how its residents lived their lives. His field crew was able to locate many of the original structures shown on the 1796 insurance plat which served as homes, workshops, and storage units. There were different housing structures which appeared in the archaeological record, some slave houses were twelve foot by fourteen foot rough hewn log cabins with dirt floors like Building R (Figure 10). While others like Building E with its neo-classical exterior measured thirty-four foot by

¹⁴ Monticello: building insurance, recto, 1796, by Thomas Jefferson. N133; K136 [electronic edition]. *Thomas Jefferson Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Boston, Mass. : Massachusetts Historical Society, 2003. <http://www.thomasjeffersonpapers.org>; W.E.B. Dubois, "The Home of the Slave," in *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscape of North American Slavery*, ed. Clifton Ellis et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 21; William M. Kelso, *Archaeology of Monticello: Artifacts of Everyday Life in the Plantation Community*, (Charlottesville: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., 1997) 51.

seventeen foot and contained a stone and brick fireplace and wood flooring. Only house servants, indentured servants, white workmen and slave artisans would have the privilege of calling Mulberry Row home. It appears that Jefferson over some time was attempting to replace the wooden structures and beautify Mulberry Row by constructing the buildings from stone. The buildings of Mulberry Row also reveal a slave hierarchy as cooks and butlers had better housing than maids or laundresses. Overall, Mulberry Row residents enjoyed better housing than those field hands living in the quarter because Jefferson was paying these structures active attention and was improving their living conditions.¹⁵

The most valuable discovery made by Kelso's team was the discovery and excavation of ten sub-floor pits that had been originally dug by slaves into the earthen floors of Mulberry Row structures (Figure 11). Sub-floor pits are features, meaning large scale immovable artifacts that appear in the archaeological record. These pits contained "tools, locks, nails, ceramics, some glass, a considerable number and variety of buttons, and butchered animals bones."¹⁶ Mulberry Row's sub-floor pits measured three foot by three foot to four foot by six foot, ranging from one foot to three feet in depth. These pits would have been formerly covered with wooden boards and were occasionally lined with wood, brick or stone. In the Chesapeake, a maximum of eighteen pits have been located under one enslaved residence. Archaeologists over the years have come up with four hypotheses to explain the presence of these pits. They could be root cellars, hidey-holes (for goods stolen from the owner), africanisms (meaning a traditional African feature continued in the Americas) or "safe-deposit

¹⁵ William M. Kelso, *Archaeology at Monticello: Artifacts of Everyday Life in the Plantation Community* (Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., 1997) 65-66.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 67.

boxes.” Currently the Monticello Department of Archaeology champions that sub-floor pits were indeed dug to protect slaves’ items of value. During the eighteenth-century slaves were grouped together in “barracks-style” housing, meaning that owners had no regard for the relationships of their slaves and would group unrelated individuals together in one room. As a result of this housing method, there was no connectedness between individuals and hence no trust. By placing their prized goods in sub-floor safety-deposit boxes, slaves were taking control over their forced space and exerting their power of possession. Safety-deposit boxes also provided the means of a surveillance system amongst the co-inhabitants; instead of placing goods out in the open, slaves were increasing the amount of time it took for someone to notice a person stealing from someone else’s box.¹⁷

The need to construct sub-floor pits as safety-deposit boxes and their frequency of existence has been proven by archaeologist to correspond the size of the living space provided for slaves. Garret Felser conducted a Virginia based examination of sixty-seven excavated slave quarters and found that the size of slave dwellings decreased throughout the eighteenth-century, especially after 1780. Felser found that “in 1700, house sizes averaged eighteen by twenty-four feet, or 432 square feet. By 1750, the average size had shrunk to sixteen by twenty-two feet, or 352 square feet, and by 1800, average house sizes were a mere twelve by sixteen feet, or 192 square feet total.”¹⁸ Although shrinking house sizes could possibly indicate that the poor treatment of slaves was increasing as they were forced to live in a more crowded

¹⁷ Monticello—University of Virginia Archaeological Field School, Summer 2011, Lecture Notes; Fraser Neiman, Leslie McFaden, Derek Wheeler, *Archaeological Investigation of the Elizabeth Hemings Site (44AB438)*, (Monticello Department of Archaeology Technical Report Series Number 2: December 2000), 16.

¹⁸ Barbara Heath, “Space and Place within Plantation Quarters in Virginia, 1700-1825,” in *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscape of North American Slavery*, ed. Clifton Ellis et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 164.

space, archaeologists have correlated the decrease in residence size with an increase of a slave's standard of living. All across the Chesapeake there is a significant change from large houses with multiple sub-floor pits to smaller housing units with less pits and by the end of the eighteenth-century the use of sub-floor pits seems to have died out completely. Even though slaves were living in small spaces with smaller rooms, this evidence proves they were now able to reside in kin-based groups, with family members they trusted and could work cooperatively with to improve their quality of life. Smaller housing units allowed slaves to significantly control their space and exert both power and authority over it.¹⁹

Sub-floor pits are an example of how slaves at Monticello were turning space into place. Slaves did not have control over the placement of their residential space, nor who would occupy that space with them, so they employed strategies to take that space and turn it into place. As geographer Yi-Fu Tuan states, "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value."²⁰ It is thus the role of archaeologists to "excavate space and subsequently hope to interpret them as places,"²¹ which they have been able to do in terms of slave dwellings. It was typical that a slave owner would only provide his slaves with a roof over their heads, a food ration (which at Monticello consisted of "one peck of cornmeal, one pound of pickled beef or pork, four salt herring, and a gill of molasses per adult per week."²²), blankets and iron cooking vassals. However, archaeologists have recovered evidence to support the existence shelving, musical instruments, stools and boxes recovered

¹⁹ Neiman, McFaden, Wheeler, *Archaeological Investigation*, 16; Heath, "Space and Place," 164-165.

²⁰ Garret Fesler "Excavating the Spaces and Interpreting the Places of Enslaved Africans and Their Descendants," in *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscape of North American Slavery*, ed. Clifton Ellis et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 28.

²¹ *Ibid*, 28.

²² Kelso, *Archaeology at Monticello*, 68.

from slave quarters. Slaves were turning their assigned space into place. They were asserting control and power over their situation by embellishing their residences and improving their quality of life. Sara Bon-Harper, the current Archaeological Research Manager at Monticello states, “While the physical order of a plantation such as Monticello was imposed by the owner, the intimate use of a landscape creates an alternative experience separate from the landowner’s orchestrated control.”²³ One of the most powerful representations of turning space into place and thus gaining control outside of the owner’s control is the existence of sub-floor pits discovered in slave dwellings.²⁴

Artifacts, especially ceramics, recovered from Mulberry Row also aid archaeologists in understanding the living conditions and status of its slave residents. The quantity and quality of ceramics reveal the access to resources slaves had. The more access to resources, the higher a slave’s status and the greater their power. The excavation of Building O, which included “the fill of the largest [sub-floor pit], the earth floor of the house, and in the surrounding yard for a considerable distance east and west,”²⁵ yielded two hundred and eighty nine ceramic vessels. “The collection includes thirty different forms and thirty-six different types, all primarily tableware and predominantly either English creamware or pearlware and Chinese export porcelain.”²⁶ Chinese export porcelain (Figure 12), pearlware (Figure 13) and creamware (Figure 14)—listed in highest to lowest price order—were high end, fashionable ceramics and the cost of purchasing them was greater than say delftware or refined earthenwares. A possible explanation for the appearance of these high quality ceramics is that they were

²³ Bon-Harper, “Contrasting Worlds,” 6.

²⁴ Upton, “Imagining the Early Virginia Landscape,” 74.

²⁵ Kelso, *Archaeology at Monticello*, 88.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 88.

originally broken in Jefferson's home and taken to be disposed of on Mulberry Row. However Kelso's field crew was able to recover ceramic from the dirt floor of Building O that were most likely broken through use and deposited there with the shards found in the yard. These pieces made of the same material or displaying the same pattern, were able to be directly matched. These ceramics were used, broken and discarded by Mulberry Row slaves.

The next question that was asked was how did these expensive ceramic vessels get into the hands of Mulberry Row slaves in the first place? After conducting an excavation on the foundation of Thomas Jefferson's mansion, Kelso was able to determine that "practically *all* the refined tablewares from the house foundations matched those from cabin "O" indicating that slaves were furnished or furnished themselves from the house stores."²⁷ This was further proven when Chinese potters examined some of the export porcelain recovered from archaeological excavations at Monticello. The potters were appalled that one of America's Founding Fathers would use underglazed blue floral plates that were "fit only for servants in China."²⁸ They wondered how Jefferson could be so cheap and possess such poor taste. However, Kelso revealed that the plates had actually been recovered from the excavation of Building O located on Mulberry Row. It was concluded that Jefferson purchased the second rate Chinese porcelain for himself because that was all that was available at the time. Chinese manufacturers initially only sent their cast offs west to be purchased by Europeans and Americans who were unable to distinguish between high and low quality Chinese porcelain. Jefferson would have given the plates to the occupants of Building O when he was then able to replace them with higher quality porcelain. It was concluded by Kelso that the slaves of

²⁷ *Ibid*, 90.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 92.

Mulberry Row had the means to possess the highest quality ceramics available at the time because of their spatial proximity to Jefferson and his home. The ceramics used by Mulberry Row slaves were only second to those placed upon Jefferson's own table.²⁹

Moving a mere three hundred and fifty feet south of Mulberry Row on the third roundabout, one of the most interesting spatial power dynamics occurred on Monticello Mountain. It is there that Elizabeth (Betty) Hemings lived out the last years of her life in a house built especially for her. Why was Betty Hemings's status so high that she warranted not only her own home, but its distinctive labeling as "B. Hems" on Thomas Jefferson's third roundabout plat (Figure 15)? Betty Hemings at age thirty eight, along with her ten children, was inherited by Jefferson at the passing of his father-in-law John Wayles. She was employed within the house and became a main member in its operation; her children were both house servants and skilled artisans. Jefferson's letters show that Betty and her children were highly valued because when circumstances allowed for unneeded slaves to be hired out to other plantations, he made sure it was clear that the Hemings' were excused from that labor detail. However, between age fifty-five and sixty, Betty had been sent to Tufton (one of Jefferson's quarter farms). Although the exact reason for her relocation is unknown, she most likely was sent there because her age made her less useful as a house servant and more suited to act as a babysitter for slave children. Again, without explanation, she was moved back to Monticello in 1795, and the construction of her house just out view, but close to Jefferson's home began.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 88-92.

Ironically, this is the same year that Jefferson fathered his first daughter Harriet of six children by Betty Heming's youngest daughter Sally.³⁰

Without a doubt, Jefferson strategically selected the spatial location of Betty Hemings's home. It was removed from the large slave population of Mulberry Row, yet close enough to her children living there to care for her. She was out of sight from Jefferson's house and thus the preying eyes of his guests. They would have been aware of his indiscretions with Sally as of the year 1802 when a newspaper in Richmond published allegations against him. Although Betty was removed from the highest statured slaves of Mulberry Row, she was still separated from the field hands living in the quarter which were considered to be the lowliest in importance and power. Jefferson's separation of Betty from the field hands is revealed through her proximity to the two major water sources of the area South Spring and Bailey's Spring. Betty's house was located an equal distance from Mulberry Row and Bailey's Spring (Figure 15), meaning that this spring was significant to her. Bailey's Spring contained less water than the South Spring, yet it allowed Betty to be spatially removed from the field hands who relied on South Spring as their main water source. Bailey's Spring was also spatially attractive for Betty because she shared it with her white overseer neighbors. Betty Hemings's status and power was more significant than any of the other slaves' on Monticello Mountain. Jefferson specifically made sure that she had her own space in a landscape which complimented her status through its association with freed whites in positions of power over lowly enslaved black field hands.³¹

³⁰ Neiman, McFaden, Wheeler, *Archaeological Investigation of the Elizabeth Hemings Site*, 6-8.

³¹ "Sally Hemings," Monticello.org, accessed 14 November 2011, <http://www.monticello.org/site/plantation-and-slavery/sally-hemings>.

Archaeological investigations conducted on the Betty Hemings Site (Figure 16) have revealed that she did in fact possess a considerable power and status. There is no sub-floor pit within the footprint of Betty's home, which means she had great control over those living in her home as well as who had access to it. The lack of sub-floor pits on this site indicates that her house did follow the trend for Monticello slaves to gain more control over their lives in smaller homes shared with family members. Yet during the timeframe of Betty's occupation, slaves were still employing sub-floor pits; Mulberry Row Buildings S and T have revealed sub-floor pits and their construction dates were only a few years prior to Betty's residence. Betty may have felt her belongings were secure due to her relative isolation from other slaves living on Mulberry Row or in the quarter, or a lock was employed. Betty's power was also increased by her control over the outdoor landscape. When archeologists compared the yard areas of the Betty Hemings Site with Mulberry Row, they found that her yard was at least ten times larger. This is a considerable difference when taking into account that immediate outdoor space was used by slaves as an extension of their interior living area. Finally, excavations recovered thirty three ceramics vessels from the site; this small amount is explained by her short occupation of the area. Between the year the house was built and her death, Betty had only lived on the site ten years. Of the ceramics she did own, they were all high quality Chinese porcelain (Figure 17), pearlware and creamware. Up to ninety percent of the flatware recovered from the site was Chinese porcelain and pearlware, the most costly and fashionable ceramics at the time. Flatware vessels were also more expensive to own than other dining vessels. Betty Hemings

was a slave woman with considerable status and power within the spatial construction of her own world as well as the world of Thomas Jefferson himself.³²

If the Betty Hemings Site is the epitome of spatial status, then the slave residences of Site 7 and Site 8 were the lowest and most far from Jefferson. These two residential locations are set a half mile down Monticello Mountain from Jefferson's home as noted in his *Garden Book* on the twenty-third of October, 1778, and thus the field hands living there were the least regarded in Jefferson's spatial status scheme. There are no documents from Jefferson's time that formally name these locations, so they were labeled as such as a result the 1997 *Monticello Plantation Archeological Survey*. The Monticello Department of Archaeology believed that these sites were occupied together to form one settlement being that Site 8 is located a mere one hundred and thirty feet southeast of Site 7. During the 1770s and 1780s, Sites 7 and 8 were occupied by all most all of the Monticello field hands. Historian W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in 1901 that "The homes of field hands were filthy hovels where they slept. There was no family life, no meals, no marriages, no decency, only an endless round of toil and a wild debauch at Christmas time."³³ However, modern archaeologists conducting research on Sites 7 and 8 have revealed a stark difference from Dubois's conclusion. Archaeological excavations on Site 7 revealed a single log house with sill construction, meaning horizontal logs were placed on top of one another from the ground up. Its dimensions were similar to those of Mulberry Row structures, measuring twelve foot by fourteen foot which means that it was a kin-based home versus the earlier "barracks-style" housing. This residence did not contain any sub-floor pits,

³² Neiman, McFaden, Wheeler, *Archaeological Investigation*, 17, 24, 50, 52.

³³ W.E.B. Dubois "The Home of the Slave," 21.

which further supports it as a single family's residence. Site 7's house was also determined to be the oldest structure on both sites.³⁴

Thus far through a series of archaeological field seasons, archaeologists have been able to establish the existence of four houses on Site 8, yet it is believed that there are more to discover. The location of these structures was pinpointed through the excavation of features, meaning in this case sub-floor pits. House 1 contained two features which overlapped one another (Figure 18). This could suggest that the pits were not used simultaneously, but when examining the features' fill both contained "a dark reddish brown silty clay mottled with red clay and 10% charcoal,"³⁵ which assures archaeologist they were used concurrently. House 2's Feature 6 was an eight foot by eight foot square (Figure 19) containing tools, glass vessels, ceramics, brick and cobbles. Most of the features located on Site 8 did not produce large quantities of artifacts because it was believed that slaves took their possessions with them when they were forced to move in the 1790s. At that time Jefferson was changing his agricultural strategy from tobacco to wheat. Slaves living on Sites 7 and 8 were at the bottom of the Thomas Jefferson's power-status ladder, it seemed as though life on Monticello Mountain could not get worse for them. They had to collectively pool their resources to create some form of control over their world; these slaves were essentially hanging on by a thread. Jefferson's self-centered action to relocate these field hands from attractive wheat growing pieces of land to land that was more steeply graded destroyed what little control these slaves

³⁴ Bon-Harper, *Contrasting Worlds*, 2; Bon-Harper, *The Identification of Yard Space Using Artifact Size as an Indicator of Site Maintenance in an Archaeological Context* (Charlottesville: Monticello Department of Archaeology), 6; Sara Bon-Harper and Theresa McReynolds, *Who Sweeps Here? Site Maintenance and Cultural Tradition in Historic Contexts* (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology, Austin, TX, January 2011), 1; Sara Bon-Harper, *Site 8: Background* (The Digital Archive of Comparative Slavery: December 2006) accessed 14 November 2011, <http://www.daacs.org/resources/sites/background/10/>.

³⁵ *Site 8: Background* (DAACS), accessed 14 November 2011.

had achieved over their existence. As a result of Jefferson's new economic farming system slaves lost the sense of place they had created at Sites 7 and 8, a location that had formally merely been a forced location of residence. The Monticello Department of Archaeology currently believes that slaves from Sites 7 and 8 were relocated to a relatively steep slope now referred to as Site 6. From 1800 through the nineteenth century, Site 8 was being cultivated with wheat.³⁶

Despite the slaves' forced removal from Sites 7 and 8, their sense of place is still visible within the archaeological record. Historians and archaeologists have learned "through oral accounts as well as period images that African Americans in the American south used outdoor spaces as extended living areas for production and recreation."³⁷ Just as slaves turned their houses into places, they did so to the immediate outdoor landscape. Archaeologists have determined this through the application of a statistical method referred to as Artifact Size Index (ASI). The ASI is used to determine the differential between large and small artifacts which can determine the boundaries of a yard. A site's ASI is highly valuable when used in conjunction with the understanding of the McKeller principal, which states that people will discard large pieces of trash and leave little ones in place. Large pieces will be disposed of away from the activity site because of their potential to interfere or do damage to the site's occupants. Little pieces are often left in place because their size reduces their level of interference and hazard potential, thus they are not worth the effort of removal. The ASI and the McKeller principal thus reveal that "spatial patterning in artifact size [that] has the potential to measure the

³⁶ Site 8: Background (DAACS); Monticello-UVA Archaeological Field School, Summer 2011, Lecture Notes.

³⁷ Bon-Harper and McReynolds, *Who Sweeps Here?*, 1.

extent to which a site's residents intensely used certain areas and invested effort in keeping those areas clean."³⁸

Archaeologists have revealed that of the artifacts recovered from Site 8, the largest were moved to disposal areas on the outskirts of the occupational space. It has been discovered that the slave residents of this site shared one yard space, or activity area that encompassed all of the dwellings. This evidence suggests that field hands came together to keep this area clean. The presence of such a large sub-floor pit in House 2 also indicates that the residents of Site 8 came together and pooled their economic power and resources. The disappearance of sub-floor pits was a result of trust and cooperation amongst family members occupying the same residential unit; no longer did slaves have to worry about their possessions being stolen by an outsider. As Bon-Harper and McReynolds state:

Site 8's shared yard space likely follows the same principals, in which members of adjacent households, having established cooperative interaction on the basis of their connections through family relationships or other ties of choice, invested in cooperative productive efforts. These collaborations allowed greater productivity, likely by sharing skills and time as well as a single yard space.³⁹

By sharing yard space, slaves were turning that area into place. This process allowed them to gain and exert power and control over their landscape as well as their own lives. Although slaves on Sites 7 and 8 had the lowest status of all those residing on Monticello Mountain, they were still able to assert their own spatial agency.⁴⁰

A map of Monticello Mountain can be read as an acknowledgement of status and power, with Thomas Jefferson reigning superior over all others at the top and the slave field

³⁸ Bon-Harper and McReynolds, *Who Sweeps Here?*, 2.

³⁹ Bon-Harper and McReynolds, *Who Sweeps Here?*, 14.

⁴⁰ Site 8: Background, DAACS.

hands at the bottom trying desperately to possess control over their landscape. The spatial distance from Jefferson's home as the nexus of power is directly proportional to the status and power of those living on his mountain. This reading of Monticello Mountain allows for a more complete portrait of the past, one constructed in which all residents of the mountain are able to claim a place. Not much is known about the lives of Thomas Jefferson's slaves outside of Hemingses and his other select favorites, yet the presence of every enslaved man, woman and child can still be seen and have a place in the modern consciousness. Historians and archaeologists must come together and acknowledge holes in the historical record. They must use every resource at their disposal in an attempt to fill in those gaps, even if that means moving away from their standard methods of illuminating the past. Something as basic as space can be the platform upon which previously erased peoples can stand and proclaim their existence.

Figures

Figure 1: Ariel of Monticello



“Monticello Archaeology,” Monticello.org, accessed 15 November 2011
<http://www2.monticello.org/archaeology/fieldschool/index.html>

Figure 2: Front of Mount Airy



“Mount-Airy Plantation” accessed 15 November 2011
<http://academics.smcvt.edu/africanart/Ashley/plantation%20home.htm>

Figure 3: Front of Monticello



“Monticello Image Galleries: Monticello’s West Front,” Monticello.org, accessed 15 November 2011, <http://www2.monticello.org/gallery/house/exterior/westfront.html>

Figure 4: Monticello Entrance Hall



“Monticello Image Galleries: Monticello’s Entrance Hall,” Monticello.org, accessed 15 November 2011, <http://www2.monticello.org/gallery/house/interior/entrancehall.html>

Figure 5: Monticello Parlor



"Monticello Explorer: Parlor," Thomas Jefferson Foundation (2011), accessed 15 November 2011, <http://explorer.monticello.org/text/index.php?sect=house&sub=main&lid=207>.

Figure 6: Monticello Dining Room Lazy Susan



“Revolving Serving Door,” Monticello.org, accessed 15 November 2011, <http://www.monticello.org/site/house-and-gardens/revolving-serving-door>

Figure 7: Monticello Dining Room Wine Dumbwaiter



“Design and Décor,” Monticello.org, accessed 15 November 2011, Monticello.org, <http://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/design-and-decor-2>

Figure 8: Thomas Jefferson 1796 Form of the Declaration for Assurance

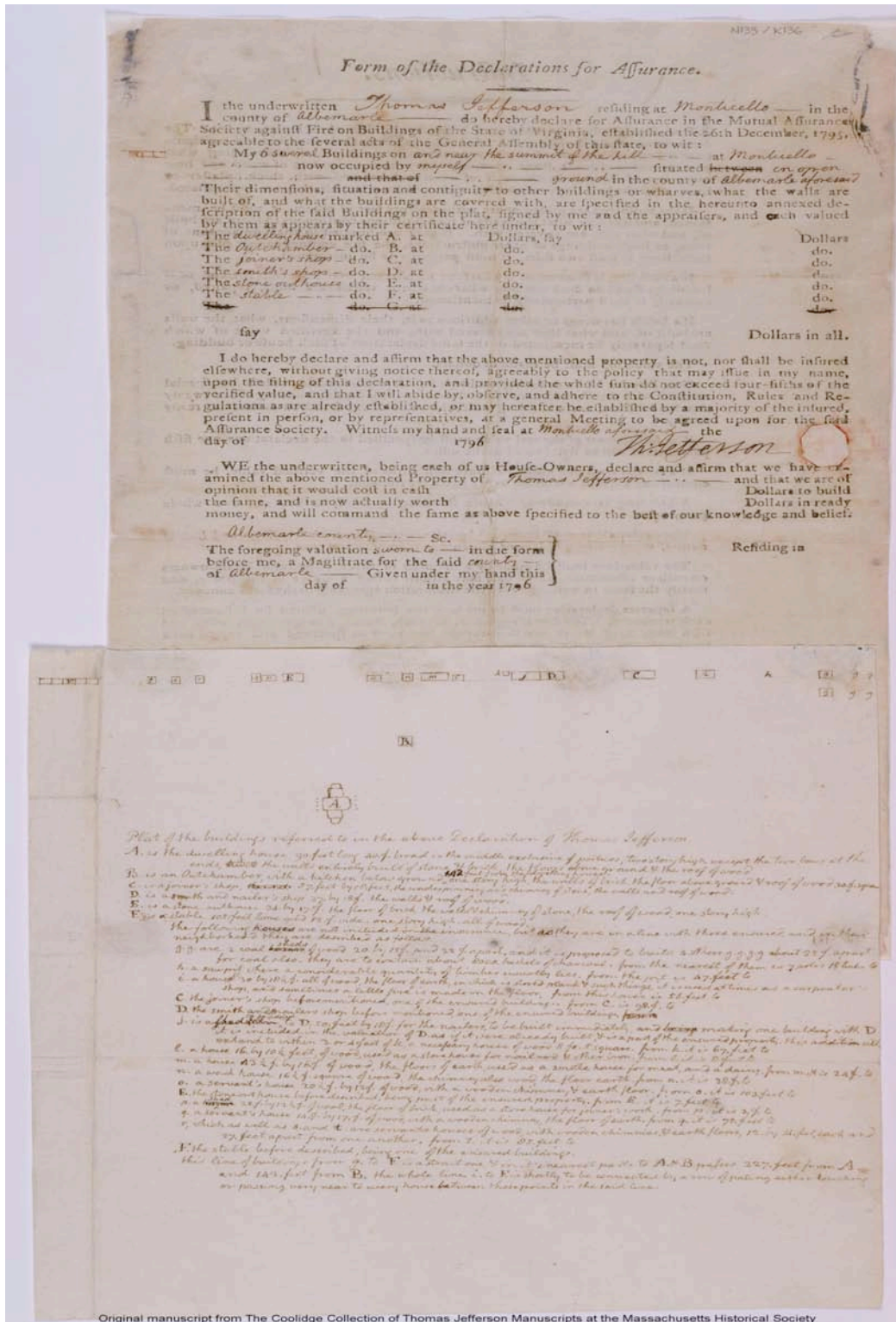
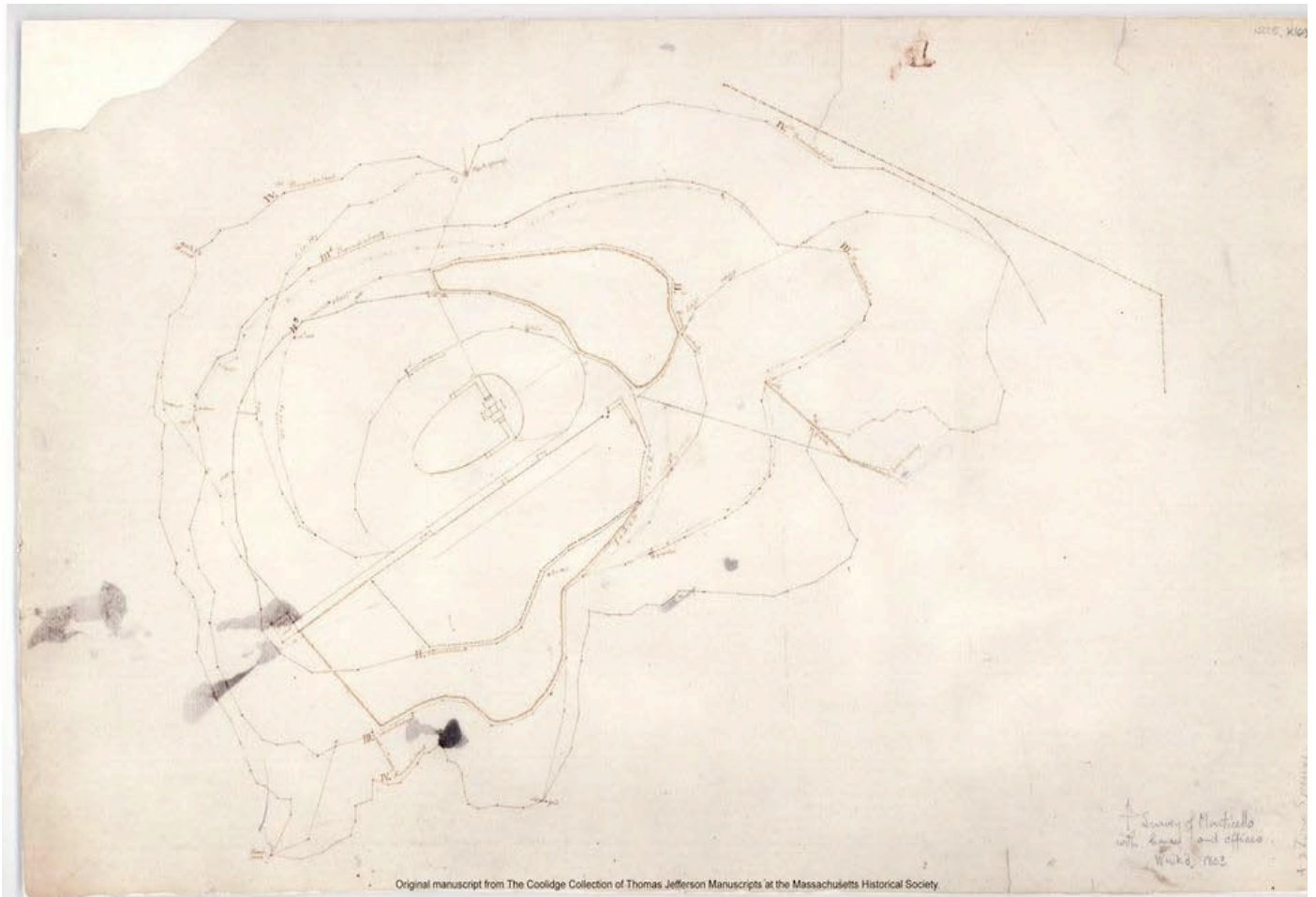


Figure 9: Thomas Jefferson 1809 Mountaintop Plat



Monticello: mountaintop (plat), 1809, by Thomas Jefferson. N225; K169 [electronic edition]. *Thomas Jefferson Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Boston, Mass. : Massachusetts Historical Society, 2003. <http://www.thomasjeffersonpapers.org/>

Figure 10: Slave Dwelling



“Slave Dwellings,” Monticello.org, accessed 15 November 2011,
<http://www2.monticello.org/plantation/mulberry/dwellings.html>

Figure 11: Mulberry Row Sub-floor Pits



“A Housing Revolution” Monticello.org, accessed 15 November 2011,
<http://www2.monticello.org/archaeology/research/architecture.html>

Figure 12: Building O Chinese Porcelain



2011c Image Query 3, November 15, 2011. The Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (<http://www.daacs.org/resources/queries/submit/image/iq1/>).

Figure 13: Building O Pearlware



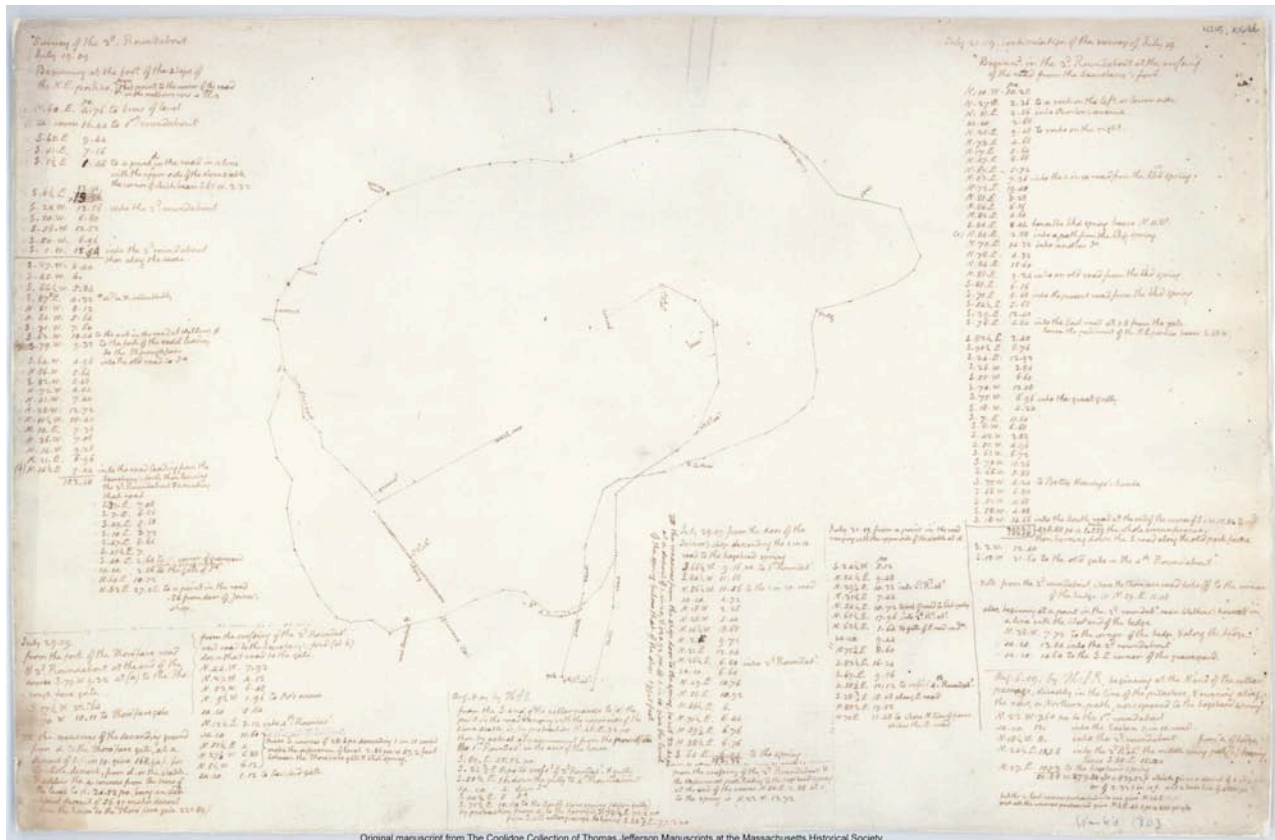
2011c Image Query 3, November 15, 2011. The Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (<http://www.daacs.org/resources/queries/submit/image/iq1/>).

Figure 14: Building O Creamware



2011c Image Query 3, November 15, 2011. The Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (<http://www.daacs.org/resources/queries/submit/image/iq1/>).

Figure 15: 1808-1809 3rd Roundabout Plat featuring Betty Hemings's House



Monticello: 3rd roundabout (plat), 1808-1809, by Thomas Jefferson. N215; K168d [electronic edition]. *Thomas Jefferson Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Boston, Mass. : Massachusetts Historical Society, 2003. <http://www.thomasjeffersonpapers.org/>

Figure 16: The Betty Hemings Site



2011d Image Query 4, November 15, 2011. The Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (<http://www.daacs.org/resources/sites/images/8/>).

Figure 17: Betty Hemings Porcelain



2011a Image Query 1, November 15, 2011. The Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (<http://www.daacs.org/resources/queries/submit/image/iq1/>)

Figure 18: Site 8, House 1 Sub-floor Pits



2011d Image Query 3, November 15, 2011. The Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (<http://www.daacs.org/resources/sites/images/10/>).

Figure 19: Site 8, House 2 Sub-floor Pit



2011d Image Query 3, November 15, 2011. The Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (<http://www.daacs.org/resources/sites/images/10/>).