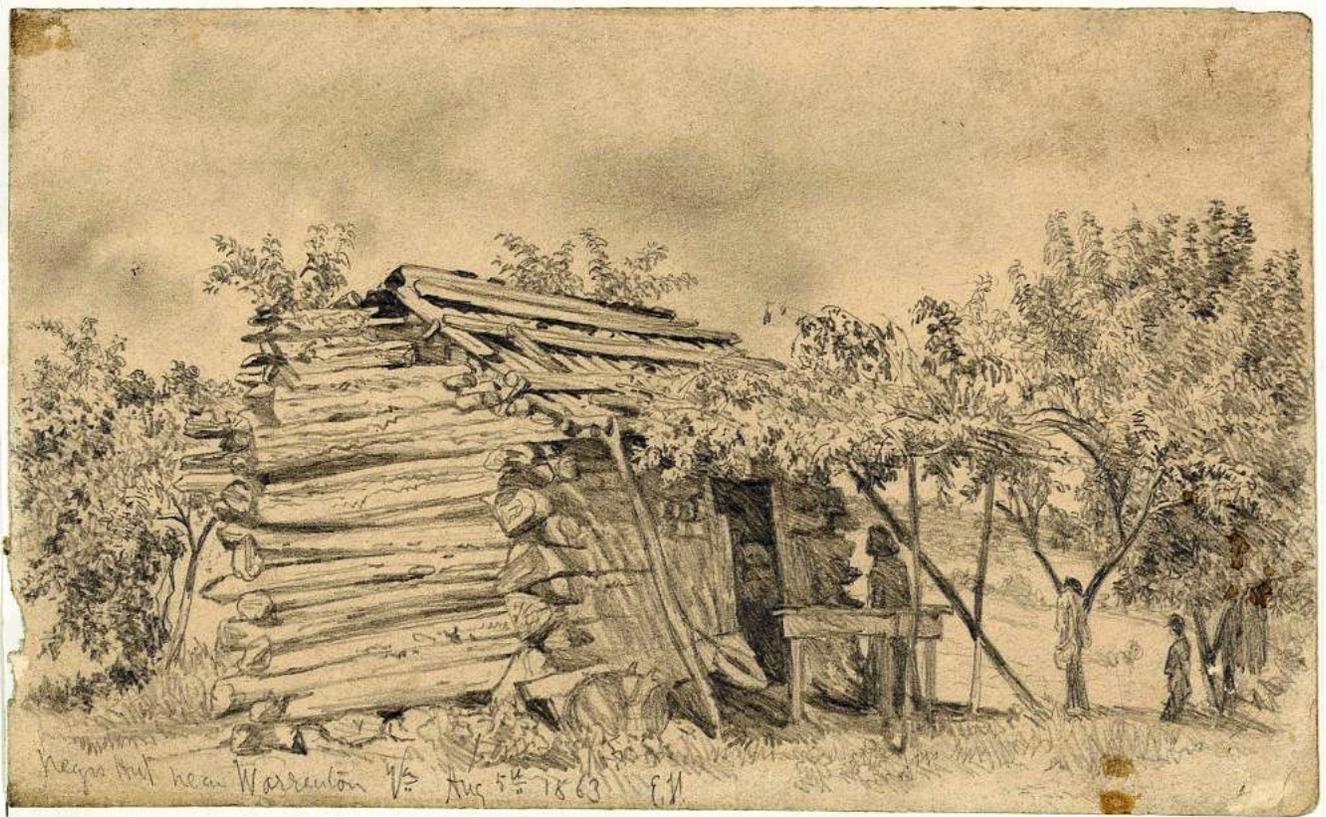


Far From the Big House



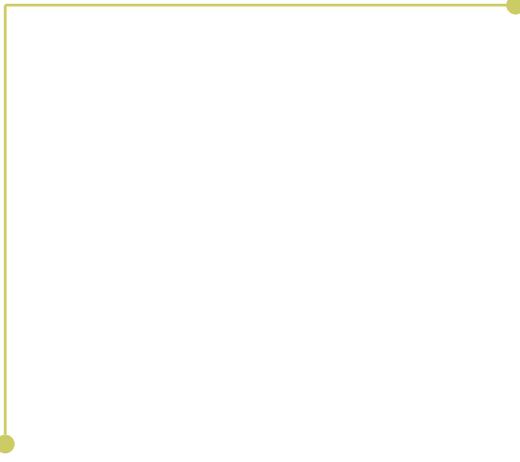
Investigating a Nineteenth-Century Slave Quarter Site (44PW1637) on Green Hill Plantation



The JAMES RIVER
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In 2005-2006, archaeologists of the James River Institute for Archaeology, Inc. (JRIA) identified and investigated a site (44PW1637) that likely was home to a small group of enslaved African Americans from Green Hill plantation during the first half of the nineteenth century. This publication describes the archaeological and historical research that they conducted in advance of the Haymarket Landing development project, and what they learned in the process.

Finding the Site

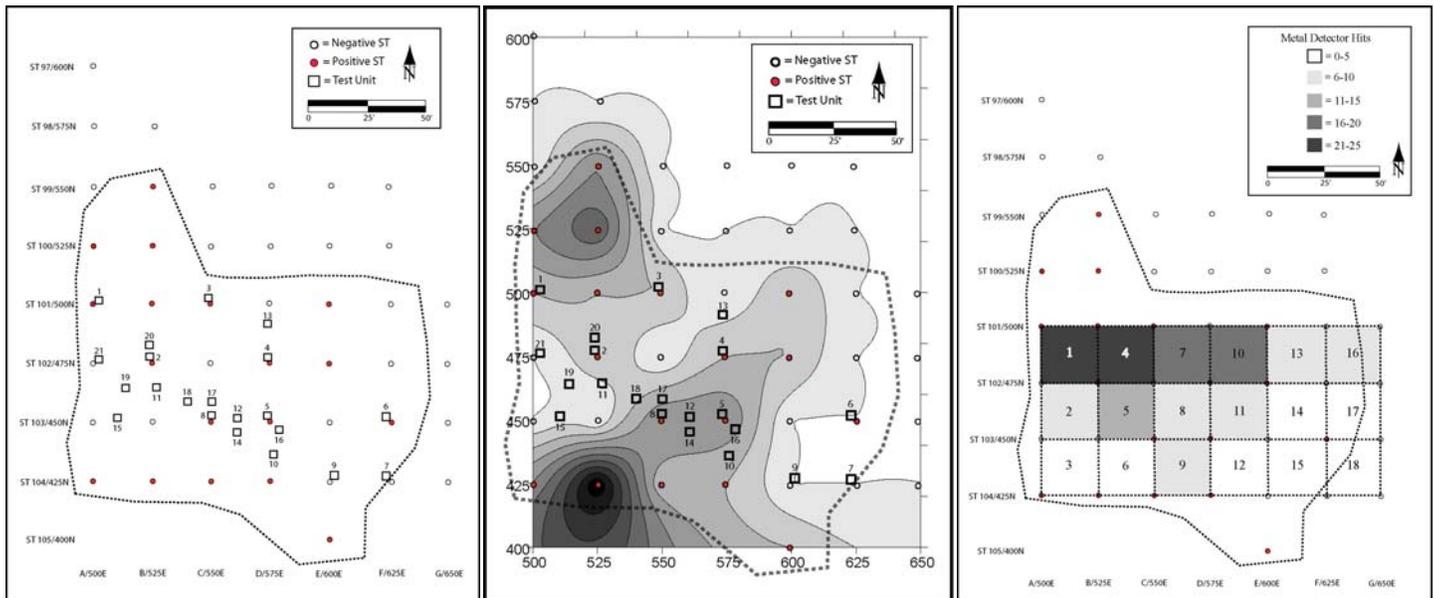
In the summer of 2005, JRIA completed a preliminary (“Phase I”) cultural resources survey of the proposed Haymarket Landing development, a 12.5-acre tract located one-quarter mile south of the Town of Haymarket. The study was conducted on behalf of Haymarket Landing, LLC, which had proffered the survey to Prince William County prior to construction.

As they conducted the survey, the archaeologists worked slowly across the landscape, excavating shovel test pits every 50 feet along regular grid lines, screening the soil and searching for artifacts or other clues that would indicate the presence of an archaeological site. As they reached the top of a narrow ridge in a wooded wedge of land between Old Carolina Road and Haymarket Drive, they found a small scatter of historic objects in the shallow soils on the terrace and its side slopes: a few sherds of earthen-

ware ceramics commonly used in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries; fragments of bottle glass; part of a glass tumbler; some hand-wrought and cut nails; a few broken pieces of window glass; and a chicken bone. These trace remains of household items and building materials hinted that someone had lived here roughly two hundred years ago. The archaeologists collected and bagged the artifacts, recorded the location of the site, and moved on to complete the survey.



Back in JRIA’s Williamsburg laboratory, technicians carefully washed, examined, and cataloged the artifacts that had been recovered. The archaeologists recorded the site with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in Richmond, which gave it the official state identification number of 44PW1637. In the final report on the survey, JRIA proposed that the small historic site they had discovered on the ridge had the potential to reveal more information about who had lived there and when, and recommended that a more intensive Phase II archaeological study be conducted before development proceeded in this area.



Taking A Closer Look

After consulting with Haymarket Landing, LLC, and Prince William County, JRIA returned to Site 44PW1637 in the spring of 2006 to complete the Phase II archaeological investigation. This time, the testing would be far more intensive. The archaeologists would use a combination of fieldwork methods to determine the boundaries of the site, collect a larger sample of artifacts for analysis, and search for below-ground features such as building foundations, trash pits, or post holes that could provide clues to how the site may have looked while it was inhabited. Equally important to understanding the site and its significance, JRIA's historian would also conduct intensive documentary research to determine who had owned and occupied this property over time.

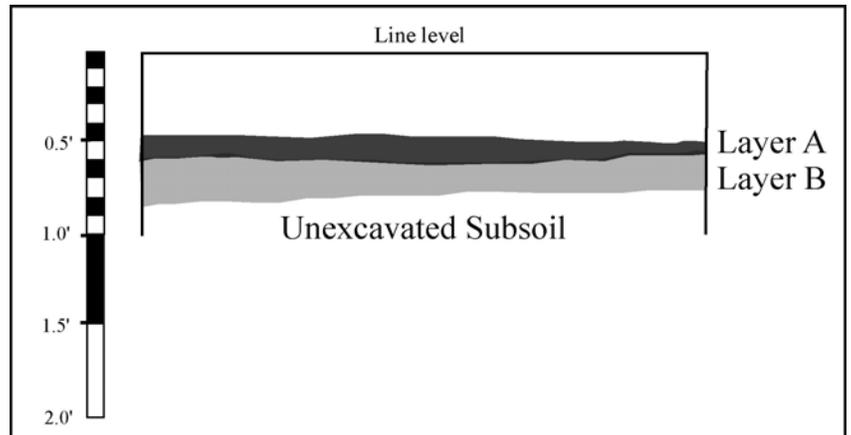
After laying out a grid across the site area, the archaeologists began the Phase II investigation by excavating additional shovel test pits, this time at 25-foot intervals. As with the earlier Phase I survey, these shovel tests yielded a relatively small number of historic artifacts within an area measuring about 150 feet (north-south) by 125 feet (east-west). The archaeologists then used a software program to create artifact distribution maps showing the location and density of artifacts found within the site. Interestingly, it appeared that many of the artifacts found through shovel testing came not from the level top of the ridge, where any building remains would be expected, but rather from the slopes to the north and south. This suggested that the residents had likely disposed of their household refuse down the hillsides. Once the site had been abandoned, plowing may also have caused some of the materials, particularly the building remains, to travel down slope through soil erosion.

Because the shovel testing had identified relatively few artifacts, the surface testing was expanded to include a systematic metal-detector survey of the site. To accomplish this, the site was divided into eighteen 25-foot squares, or quadrants. The archaeologists then conducted metal-detector sweeps across each quadrant, first running north-south, and then east-west to ensure complete coverage. Each metallic find was flagged and mapped, and a 25-percent sample was excavated and collected. As expected, most of the metal objects recovered were nails. But a few other items were found, as well: iron spikes, a horseshoe, a buckle, part of a plowshare, and a strap hinge. When the concentration of metal artifacts was mapped by quadrant, the pattern was very similar to that observed with the shovel tests, with many of the objects found on the slopes rather than the ridge top.

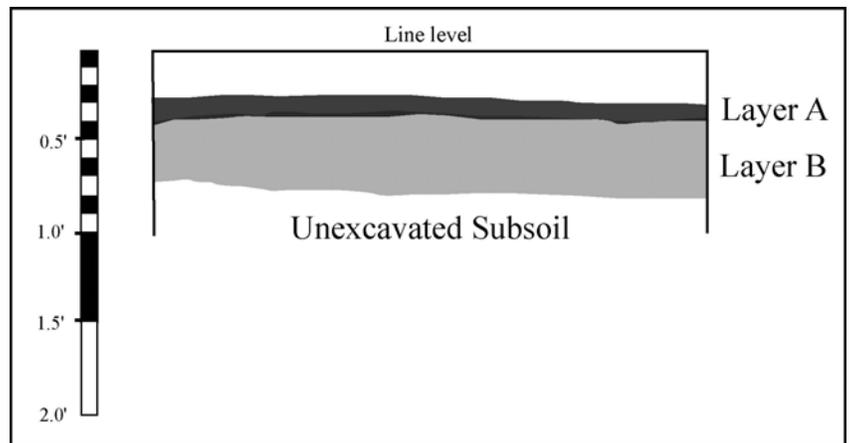


Looking east across Site 44PW1637

The yellow pin flags represent the location of metal-detector finds



Once the shovel testing and metal-detecting had been completed, the archaeologists excavated 21 test units across the site. These units, which measured three feet square, were situated across the top of the ridge where the potential remains of structures and other features were most likely to be found. The units were excavated by hand, and all the soil was sifted through $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch mesh screens. The soil layers were removed to the level of sterile subsoil, where evidence of subsurface features such as post holes or trash pits would be observed. Although the test units yielded more historic artifacts from the relatively shallow topsoil layers, no evidence of any historic features was found.



Analyzing the Evidence

The Phase II investigation of Site 44PW1637 yielded a relatively modest assemblage of 267 historic artifacts. These were divided into two main categories: domestic items, or those that would have been used and then disposed of by the people who lived at the site; and architectural materials, which formed part of a house or other structures.

Most of the domestic artifacts found at the site were ceramic sherds. Historic ceramics can be particularly helpful in dating archaeological sites, as the popularity and availability of specific types and styles of earthenware, stoneware, and porcelain vessels such as plates, bowls, and cups varied over time. Based on the analysis of the ceramics, it appeared that the site was occupied between 1800 and 1850.



Ceramic artifacts from Site 44PW1637

Clockwise from top: American blue and gray stoneware; American brown stoneware; pearlware (plain); blue transfer-printed whiteware; purple transfer-printed whiteware; spatter-sponged white-ware; and handpainted polychrome pearlware (center).



Glass artifacts from Site 44PW1637

Left: bottle glass and other hollowware fragments.

Center: tumbler fragments

Right: window glass fragments

Although no architectural features such as building foundations, post holes, or root cellars were found, there is little doubt that a house once stood here. The significant quantities of nails clearly came from a structure, and the presence of window glass strongly indicated that it was a dwelling. The absence of brick or building stone suggested that the house was probably a simple log or frame structure set on wooden sills or piers, and heated by a wooden chimney.

The types of nails found on historic sites can provide clues as to when buildings were constructed and repaired. At Site 44PW1637, there were roughly equal numbers of hand-wrought and cut nails. Hand-wrought nails were most commonly used throughout the eighteenth century; cut nails first appeared around 1790, and did not fully replace wrought nails until the early part of the nineteenth century. Based on the assortment of nails retrieved from the site, the dwelling most likely was built after 1800.

Metal artifacts from Site 44PW1637

Left and bottom: spikes

Center: strap hinge and buckle fragment

Upper right: cut and hand-wrought nails

Lower right: possible tool handle

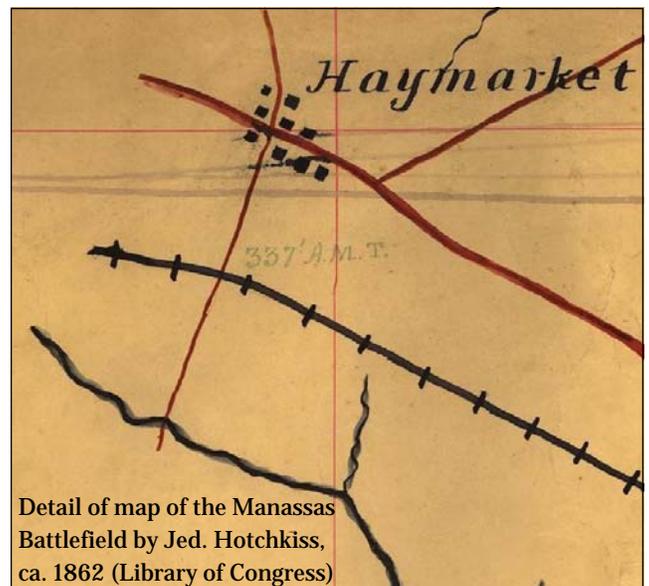


The Skinkers of Green Hill

While the archaeologists were conducting the fieldwork, JRIA's historian was also hard at work, digging up clues about the site through research at the Prince William County Circuit Court Clerk's office, the Library of Virginia, and the Ruth E. Lloyd Information Center (RELIC) at the Bull Run Regional Library.

A careful study of historic deeds and county tax records revealed that Site 44PW1637 had once been part of Green Hill plantation, which belonged to William Skinker, Jr., during the first half of the nineteenth century. In fact, the family had a long and significant association with this area. Skinker's great-grandfather first acquired a 500-acre tract on the North Fork of Broad Run in 1734. The property, which was located at the junction of the Old Carolina Road and the Dumfries Road, passed down through the family, and was inherited by William Skinker, Sr., in 1770. At that time, Skinker was working as a clockmaker in Norfolk. But, when the British burned the city in 1776, he moved with his wife and young daughter to his Prince William County estate. Here he built the plantation house on the north side of the North Fork of Broad Run, calling it Green Hill. Skinker also operated a tavern—the Red House—at the crossroads. Soon, a rival establishment, the Hay Market Inn, opened nearby.

When his wife died in 1798, Skinker moved away from Green Hill, allowing his nephew William Skinker, Jr., of Spring Farm in Fauquier County to manage the estate. Around that time, they petitioned the Virginia government to establish a town called "Skinkerville" on a portion of Green Hill plantation at the crossroads. The General Assembly approved their proposal, if not the name, chartering the "Town of Hay-Market" in 1799. (The name was officially changed to "Haymarket" in 1832).

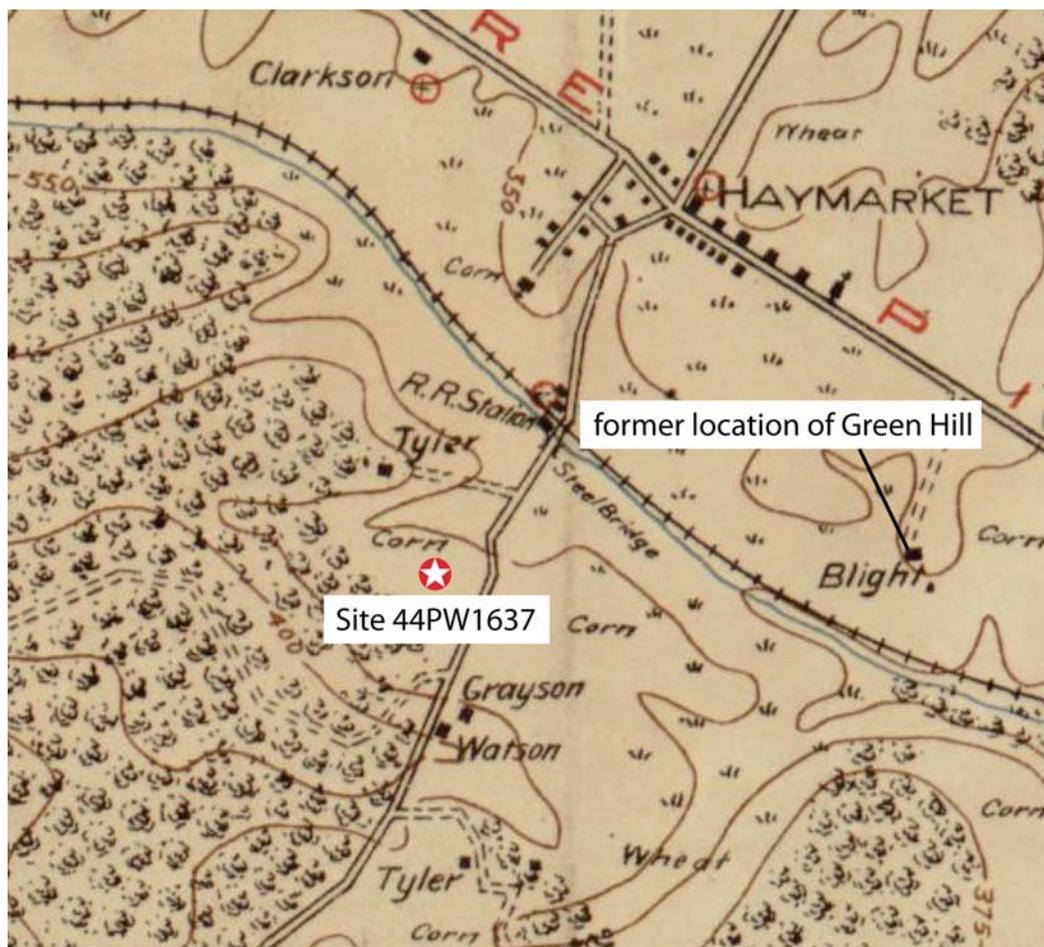


When William Skinker, Sr., died in 1810, ownership of Green Hill passed to his nephew. Over the next three decades, William Skinker, Jr., kept as many as 14 enslaved African American laborers on the property, which he eventually expanded to include over 1,000 acres. When William died in 1845, Green Hill passed to his son, James K. Skinker, who soon began to subdivide and sell the estate. John W. Tyler of the neighboring Woodlawn plantation bought much of the property, including the plantation house. Around 1853, Thomas A. Smith purchased the remaining acreage south of the North Fork of Broad Run which included Site 44PW1637. Smith, who owned only a handful of enslaved African Americans before the Civil War, resided in Haymarket. How he used the former Green Hill

lands is not known. He may have farmed it himself with his slaves or hired hands, or perhaps leased it to tenants.

The property remained in the Smith family until the early 1890s, and in 1901 it was purchased by Robert H. Tyler. Early twentieth-century maps of the Haymarket area indicate the location of the Tyler home north of Site 44PW1637. By then, any trace of buildings at the former slave quarter had long since vanished.

Members of the extended Tyler family continued to hold the property until 2003,

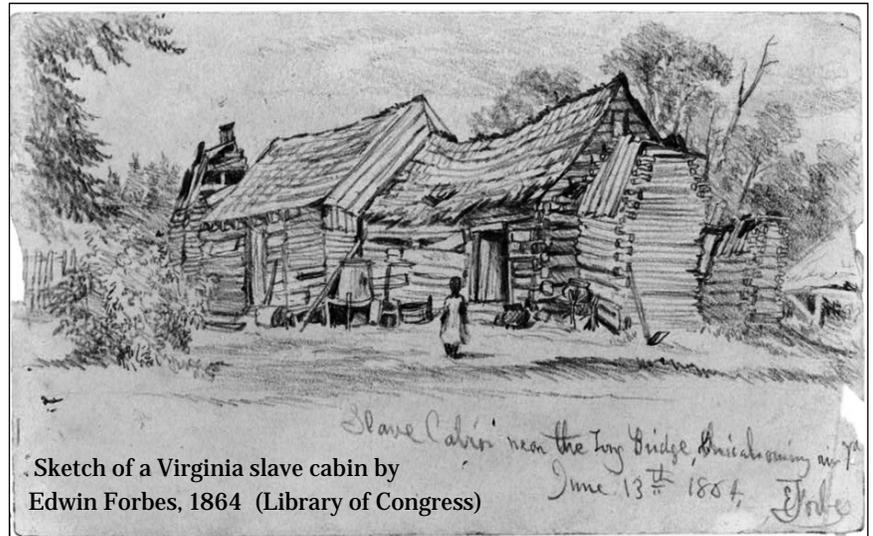


Detail of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers map, *Maneuver Grounds; Prince William and Fairfax Counties, Va., 1904* (Library of Congress).

By the early twentieth century, Site 44PW1637 and vicinity consisted of cultivated farm fields. The original Green Hill plantation house burned during the Civil War. The Bleight family acquired the property in 1883 and built a new house near the site of the old Skinker home. This later dwelling was dismantled when the property was developed in the 1990s.

A Humble Slave House

The archaeological investigation of 44PW1637 indicated that this small site, with a relatively insubstantial dwelling, dated to the first half of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the ownership of William Skinker, Jr., of Green Hill. Considering both the archaeological and documentary evidence, the site most likely was occupied by a small group, perhaps a single family, of enslaved African Americans who worked as agricultural laborers on this part of the plantation, a half-mile south of the main house across the North Fork of Broad Run.

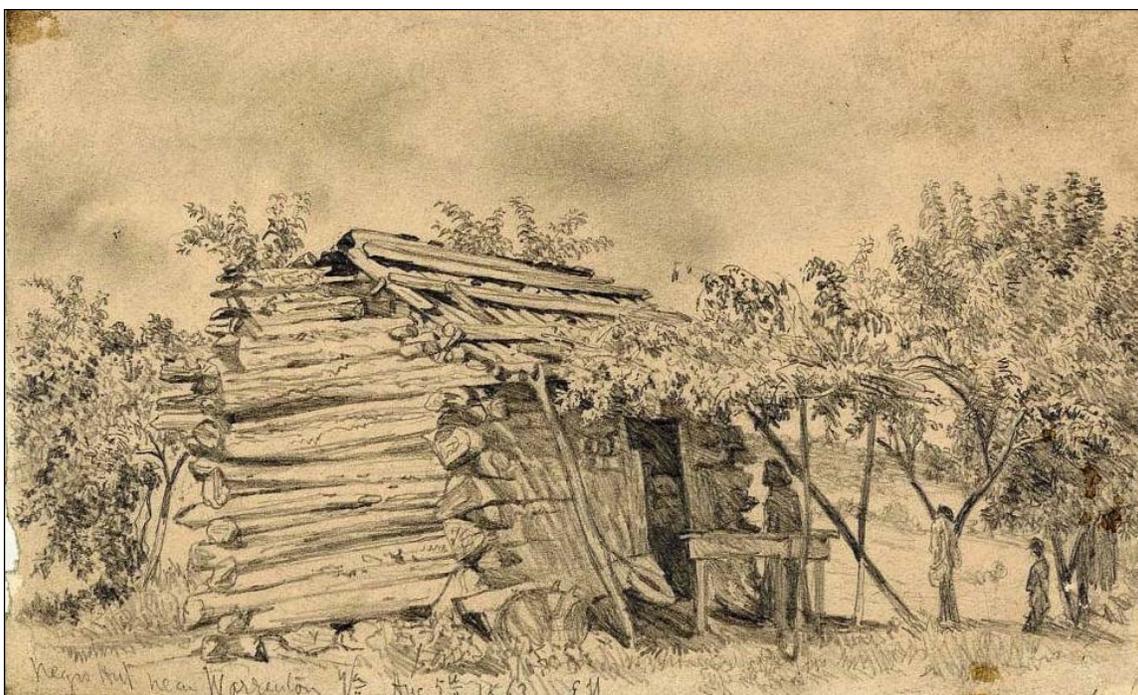


Sketch of a Virginia slave cabin by Edwin Forbes, 1864 (Library of Congress)

Over the past 40 years, archaeologists and historians have learned a great deal about the architecture and material culture of enslaved African Americans in Virginia prior to Emancipation. The type of building which once stood at Site 44PW1637 was typical of plantation slave quarters. Aptly described as “hastily built shacks,” slave dwellings typically consisted of post-in-ground or sill-on-ground structures with dirt floors and wooden, clay-daubed chimneys. The dimensions of these dwellings varied, but they nearly always were cramped, offering little privacy for their occupants. Even on prosperous plantations, slave accommodations were basic, at best. A European visitor to George Washington’s Mount Vernon in the late eighteenth century recorded his impressions of one of the plantation quarters:

We entered one of the huts of the Blacks, for one can not call them by the name of houses. They are more miserable than the most miserable of the cottages of our peasants. The husband and wife sleep on a mean pallet, the children on the ground; a very bad fireplace, some utensils for cooking, but in the middle of this poverty some cups and a teapot A very small garden planted with vegetables was close by, with 5 or 6 hens, each one leading ten to fifteen chickens. It is the only comfort that is permitted them; for they may not keep either ducks, geese, or pigs.

On plantations such as Green Hill, the enslaved people were organized into three groups: house slaves, skilled artisans, and field slaves. House slaves lived and worked closest to the planter family, and generally had access to better living quarters and food. Skilled artisans (usually men) practiced trades such as blacksmithing, carpentry, and shoe-making that made them valuable to the planter, and they sometimes had the opportunity to work elsewhere. In the plantation hierarchy, however, field workers ranked lowest. Despite their difficult physical labor, and rougher living conditions, they often lived at some distance from the “big house.” The residents of Site 44PW1637 were far enough from Green Hill to ensure at least some privacy at the end of the workday. Their possessions may have been few, comprised mainly of cast-offs from the master’s household, but they likely had the opportunity to keep a small garden or raise livestock to supplement their rations.



The slave quarter at Site 44PW1637 may have resembled the rudimentary dwelling near Warrenton, Virginia, depicted in this 1863 sketch by Civil War artist Edwin Forbes: a simple one- or two-room, single story, frame dwelling set on wood sills or piers, with a wooden chimney for heating and cooking (Library of Congress).

Typical of enslaved African Americans of this period, virtually nothing was recorded about the individuals who lived at Site 44PW1637. Without archaeology, this small, seemingly insignificant site would have remained forgotten. By piecing together the evidence unearthed in the investigation, however, we have been offered a glimpse of what life was like on the fringes of a large Prince William County plantation in the decades before the Civil War.