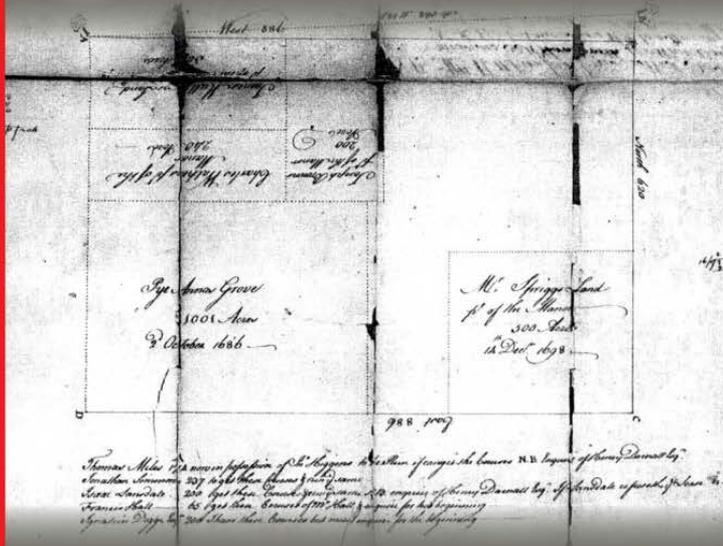




# What Lies Beneath

The History of Waterford Estates





## THE STORY BEGINS

Prince George's County has seen tremendous population growth since the 1980s, with people attracted by jobs in the government and business sectors. Large subdivisions, once found only within or near the Capital Beltway, began appearing in formerly rural areas, impacting many archaeological sites, which are important and tangible aspects of our history.



*The Waterford Estates property before archaeological excavations*  
Stantec

In 1966, the US government passed legislation to protect historic resources, including archaeological sites, where possible, and to study and document those resources that could not be preserved. As part of the subdivision review process, Prince George's County has also enacted legislation to investigate archaeological

sites and historic structures deemed important to local communities. Compliance with this legislation sometimes requires archaeological studies before a development project may proceed.

This is the story of one such project, the archaeological investigation of the Waterford Estates Subdivision in Bowie.

## THE INITIAL DISCOVERY

The archaeological investigations began with a walkover survey of the property in Spring 2004. Archaeologists found a scatter of 18th-century historic artifacts in an agricultural field near the standing Pleasant Prospect plantation house. These artifacts were the first clues that an archaeological site was present in the area.

Preliminary excavations were conducted that summer to better understand whether the artifact scatter was associated with some significant aspect of county history. Those excavations revealed a brick

An artifact is an object made or shaped by humans. A feature is evidence of human activity that cannot be removed from the ground as we could a piece of pottery or an arrowhead.

foundation wall and associated cellar, three trash pits, and two unidentified features.

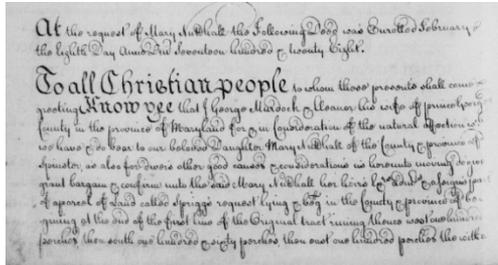
Based on these findings, the Maryland Historical Trust and the US Army Corps of Engineers determined the site was historically significant, and more extensive investigations were needed before construction could begin. These were conducted in Spring 2006.

## IN SEARCH OF THE OCCUPANTS

To identify the owners of the old plantation, archival research was conducted. Records such as land patents, deeds, and wills were studied to see if they shed light on the history of the Waterford Estates property.

The research showed that the building remains were associated with property originally called Sprigg's Request, a large, 500-acre plantation patented by Thomas Sprigg in 1698. When Sprigg died in 1704, the plantation was divided between his children.

In February 1729, Mary Nuthall, a granddaughter of Thomas Sprigg, received 100 acres of Sprigg's Request from her mother and stepfather. This was shortly before Mary's marriage to Richard Duckett, and the land was likely a wedding gift.



*George and Eleanor Murdock deed to Mary Nuthall, granddaughter of Thomas Sprigg  
Maryland State Archives*

## THE RICHARD DUCKETT FAMILY

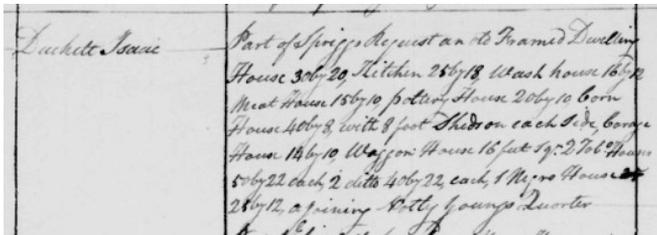
After Mary and Richard's marriage, they established their home and plantation on these 100 acres. Mary, however, died within a few years, and Richard Duckett married Elizabeth Williams in 1735.

Over the years, Richard nearly succeeded in reforming Sprigg's Request to its original 500 acres. Between the 1740s and 1760s, Richard purchased substantial tracts of the former Sprigg's Request plantation as well as other property. While he was not among the wealthiest planters in the county, his property holdings suggest he was more successful than many others.

Upon Richard's death around 1788, his son Isaac inherited Sprigg's Request, described in Richard's will as the "Plantation whereon I now live." Isaac also inherited a slave girl called Rachel and household goods consisting of two pewter basins, two dishes, and one dozen plates.

Richard Duckett's estate inventory included livestock, farming equipment, personal goods, and slaves, all valued at 1,863 pounds, 9 pence, and 8 shillings. Seventeen slaves, ten men and seven women and girls, were listed in the inventory. Richard's livestock consisted of 16 horses, 82 cattle, 41 sheep, and 44 pigs. His farm equipment included such items as hoes, scythes, and seed plows, and other tools were wedges, axes, hand mills, a cider mill, saws, and hatchets. Richard also owned two wagons, two carts, and a carriage. Crops and other products included 37 hogsheads of cider, 30 bushels of wheat, 12 bushels of beans, another 2 hogsheads of wheat, 5 hogsheads of tobacco, 4,000 pounds of pork, 700 pounds of beef, 21 barrels of corn, and 40,000 pounds of hay.

Isaac Duckett probably lived in his father's house for several years before marrying and building his own home, the two-story brick mansion called Pleasant Prospect. We know he moved to the new house by 1798—the Direct Tax for that year described his new and "very elegantly furnished" brick home.



1798 Direct Tax for Isaac Duckett  
Maryland State Archives

The 1798 Direct Tax also described his late father's property as consisting of an old frame dwelling house (valued at 80 dollars) with a kitchen, wash house, meat house, pottery house, corn house with sheds, carriage house, wagon house, four tobacco houses, and one "negro house."

This description suggests that Richard's buildings were abandoned once the new house and outbuildings at Pleasant Prospect were in full use. They may have been left standing, or they could have been demolished and recycled for other uses.

Over time, their existence and location were forgotten—until 2004.

## BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE — ARCHAEOLOGY

Historical documents do not tell us everything about the past. History rarely records the details of everyday life that surround us—what clothes people wore, what they ate, or what tools they used.

Archaeology can fill in these blanks and help us better understand how people in the past lived. The artifacts and remains of Richard Duckett’s plantation provide a picture of mid-18th-century life for a Mid-Atlantic planter and his family.



*Backhoe removing plow-zone soils*  
Stantec

Archaeologists have various methods for investigating sites, and several were used in this project. Before the excavations, the site was plowed, which makes it easier to find artifacts. After plowing, the artifacts visible on the ground were mapped in place and then collected. This information helped the archaeologists determine where to excavate.



*Archaeologist excavating a feature*  
Stantec

On such a large site, heavy machinery is often used to remove plow-disturbed soils. At the Richard Duckett site, 34 trenches and blocks were excavated this way.

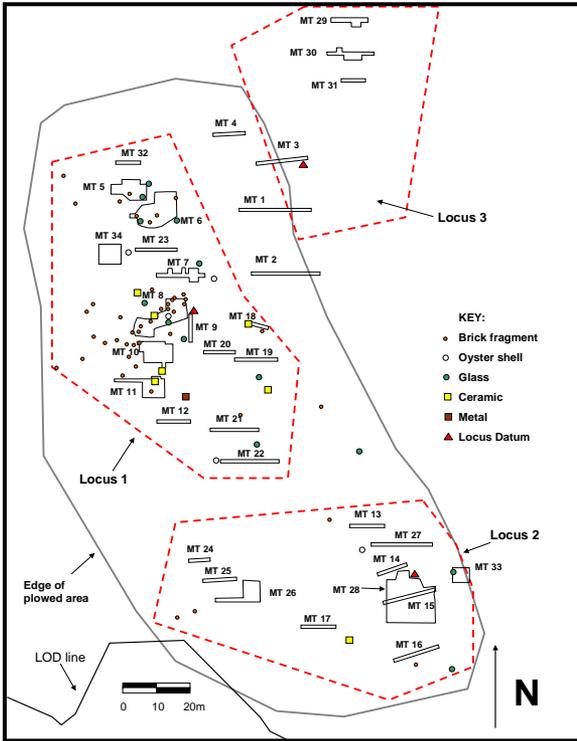
As a result, 42 features were identified, which were then hand excavated with shovels and trowels. The features included cellars, earthen floors, trash pits, post molds, and unidentified pits.

## THE HISTORY UNDERFOOT

The features were not scattered randomly across the site. Instead, they were clustered in three areas.

The features found in Locus 1 fall in two groups separated by a yard. Four features in the south group represent structures. One is the masonry

cellar of Richard Duckett's house. Two features in the north group are likely also structures.



Feature locations at the Richard Duckett site  
Stantec

The function of other features is less well understood. The post molds may be from fences. Those located near structures may be part of the building or an attached shed or porch. The small pits may have been root cellars and the larger ones, trash pits.

In Locus 2, 15 features, all post molds and pits, were found. The post molds suggest this area was the location of an earthfast (or pole) structure, and the pits indicate that this structure was used for work-related activities.

The artifacts in these pits offer insights into the work done in Locus 2. The artifacts show it may have been used as a wash house or pottery house, both of which are mentioned in the 1798 Direct Tax. Clothing-related items, such as straight pins, a thimble, buttons, and shears, were all found. Another pit contained sandy red clay that could have been



Unidentified pit feature, possibly a root cellar  
Stantec

used for making pottery.

Six post molds and pits were found in Locus 3. The post molds suggest these were part of a fence. The two small pits are curious, in that they are nearly square in shape but yielded no artifacts. While their actual function is unknown, archaeologists have identified similar features at other sites as root cellars.

## THE ARTIFACTS

In all, 15,417 artifacts, almost all dating to the 18th century, were found in the 2006 excavations. Most of the items are English, but some are

from continental Europe and China. To better understand the artifacts from a site, archaeologists often group them by function into categories such as kitchen-related, personal items, building materials, clothing elements, work tools, furniture parts, and gun-related.

Nearly 11,000 artifacts were kitchen-related items such as ceramics (dinnerware and storage jars), glass bottles and drinking vessels, utensils, and food remains.



*Jackfield-type ceramic pitcher*  
Stantec

types of the 18th century, such as white salt-glazed stoneware, Delftware, creamware, and porcelain.

Most were imported from England, while others came from the European continent and China.

Ceramics include the most common



*Delftware vessel body*  
Stantec



*Glass bottle stamp with Richard Duckett's initials*  
Stantec

Bowls, plates, saucers, cups, mugs, jars, pans, and pitchers were all found.

Glass items, including many fragments of wine bottles and wine glasses, were found. If ever there was doubt regarding ownership of the property, it was settled by finding five bottle stamps marked "RD" for Richard Duckett. British merchants attached such stamps to bottles to identify the wine's purchaser for the long voyage to America.

Other kitchen artifacts include silver and pewter spoons and bone knife handles. The hallmark on one silver spoon showed the piece was made in 1782 by Hester Bateman, a London silversmith. In the 1700s, cash was scarce, and silver was the “bank.” Portable pieces like this could be sold or used as payment for goods and services. How this valuable spoon was lost in the kitchen cellar remains a mystery.



*Silver teaspoon made by Hester Bateman of London in 1782*  
Stantec

Food remains from the site reveal that corn and wheat were grown, and cattle, pigs, and sheep were raised. Wild animals and plants were much less common and may not have been eaten often.

Other types of artifacts were less common. Smoking pipes were rare across the site, and a single George II penny was found. Clothing-related items such as buttons and buckles, both from belts and shoes, were uncommon. Work-related items include horse tack, sheep shears, thimbles, straight pins, and hoe blades. Firearms were represented by English and French gunflints and two spent musket balls.

## PIECING THE CLUES TOGETHER

With the artifacts’ functions now identified, archaeologists worked to decipher the function of the features within which they were found. Some features, such as post molds, are easy to identify. Others require more study.

Six features were the right size and shape to represent structures. Two had deep cellars (more than 3 feet) and four were shallower. But what were the original buildings used for? Information gathered from the artifacts and records such as the 1798 Direct Tax and Richard Duckett’s estate inventory helps to answer these questions.



*Hoe blade for working tobacco fields*  
Stantec

From the 1798 Direct Tax, we know the Duckett plantation included a house, kitchen, work buildings, and a slave quarter. Think about your own home for a moment. Where do you keep your dishes and glasses? Your clothes? Laundry supplies? Chances are, not in the same place.

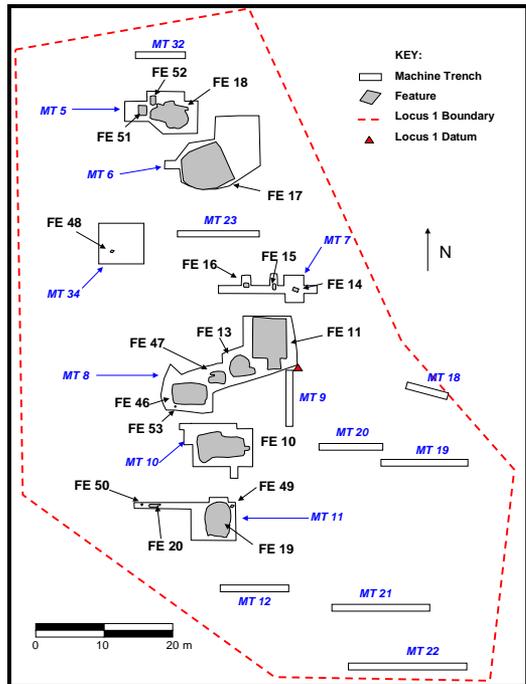
That would also be true on an 18th-century plantation. Richard Duckett would not have kept wine glasses and silver in a work building or laundry tubs in the main house. Knowing this, the archaeologists could interpret the feature functions from their shapes, sizes, and associated artifacts.

The Duckett house would have higher status attributes and artifacts than other buildings. Feature 11, the largest structure and the only one with a brick cellar, is the likely candidate. This feature held many kitchen artifacts, including wine bottles, porcelain, and other high-quality ceramics. Feature 11 also had most of the gun-related artifacts found at the site.

The kitchen would hold most of the artifacts related to food preparation and serving. In the 18th century, kitchens were usually 20 feet or more from the house to guard against fire. Feature 46 best fits a kitchen. It was the second-largest structure and held most of the kitchen-related artifacts such as wine bottles, porcelain, high-quality ceramics, and kettle fragments.

A slave's house was also listed in the 1798 Direct Tax. Based on excavations across

the Southern US, archaeologists have found that slave quarters have high numbers of kitchen-related artifacts and few or no tools, storage and food preparation vessels, or personal belongings. At the Duckett plantation, Features 10 and 18 appear to have these attributes. Both have high



Features found near the Duckett house  
Stantec

numbers of kitchen-related artifacts but low numbers of storage and food preparation vessels, clothing, personal artifacts, and tools.

## LIFE ON THE PLANTATION

The artifacts and estate inventory suggest that Richard Duckett used Sprigg's Request to both produce goods for the European market and to be independent of that market. From the 1760s through the 1780s, Sprigg's Request likely housed more than 20 individuals: Richard Duckett and his wife, their children, overseer or tenants, and an enslaved workforce that numbered 17 in 1788.

These people depended on Sprigg's Request for their immediate needs, and required some domestic self-reliance, much like Thomas Jefferson sought at his Monticello plantation. Many straight pins and buttons were found, and spinning wheels, cloth, and thread were listed in the estate inventory. This suggests that the family's and laborers' clothing was home spun, and the wool from the sheep listed in the inventory was likely the source.

Large quantities of meat are described in the inventory, as are corn and other grains. Richard's plantation supplied most, if not all, of the meat needed for his family and the enslaved workforce. A cider mill and press along with 37 hogsheads of cider were also listed. An American hogshead contains 63 gallons, so Richard had more than 2,300 gallons of cider at Sprigg's Request.



*An archaeologist screens excavated soils to search for small items*

Stantec

No plantation, however, was truly self-sufficient. For Richard to purchase goods that his property could not provide, income had to be generated. The 1798 Direct Tax indirectly shows what Sprigg's Request produced that could be sold to purchase dishes, wine, gunpowder, furniture, tools, and other items listed in Richard's estate inventory—four tobacco

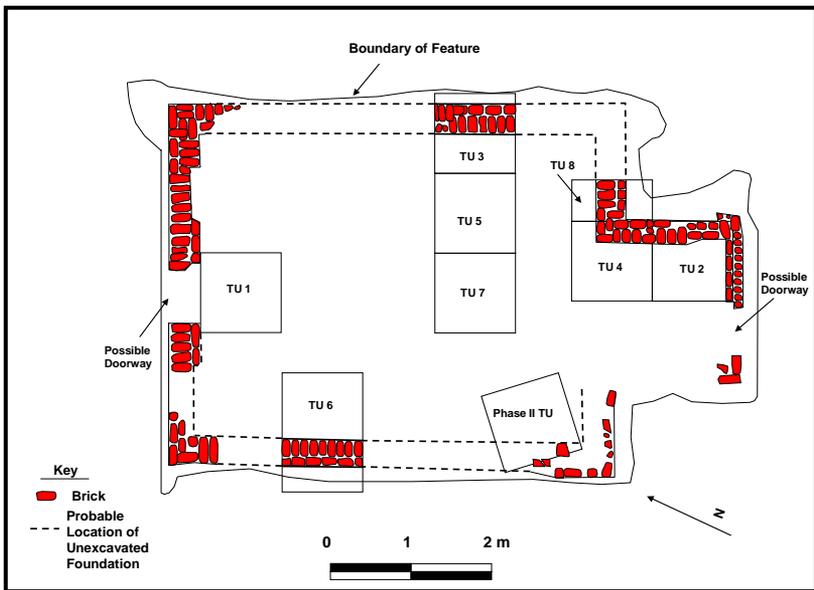
houses. Tobacco allowed him to buy the goods that Sprigg's Request could not provide.

### SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Richard Duckett would not have recognized his plantation within 25 years of his death. His son Isaac, to whom he left Sprigg's Request, abandoned Richard's home and building for the grander and more modern plantation house he built by 1798 and called Pleasant Prospect.

Isaac's new house was a two-story brick residence of Adamesque Georgian style, approached by a circular drive flanked with trees, and featuring a formal sunken garden in the rear yard. Isaac added to the landholdings that Richard had devised and created a larger and more successful tobacco plantation.

For reasons lost to time, Richard Duckett did not participate in all aspects of that current style known as Georgian. His house was average in size and number of rooms. The structure was wood rather than brick, although the brick cellar was less common. Richard Duckett's plantation was typical of many of the time.



Archaeologist's map of Feature 46, the remains of Richard Duckett's house at Stantec

Richard's material possessions, however, reflect acceptance of other elements of the Georgian lifestyle. The income generated from his plantation allowed him to participate in a Georgian lifestyle with an emphasis on consumer goods, most notably in dishes, furniture, books, wine, and the tea ceremony and all of its associated paraphernalia.

Despite adopting some aspects of Georgian life, Richard appears to have engaged in a more traditional display of wealth. He bought land and people to work that land. Richard's emphasis on land acquisition generated the wealth that allowed his son Isaac to participate more fully in the Georgian lifestyle by the late 1790s.

We do not know whether Richard Duckett was part of a broader group of aspiring elite in Maryland, although it is likely. Such aspiring elite families may have been more likely to reinvest their profits into land and enslaved labor. But as always, more information is needed. As this is gained, the information from the investigations conducted at the Duckett site will be available for review. When that time comes, the information and artifacts obtained as part of this project will have been preserved, awaiting the opportunity to more fully reveal this chapter in the history of Maryland.



*Archaeologist working in the field*  
Stantec



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## SUGGESTED READING

There are many publications and online sites that provide additional reading on colonial life in Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay region during the 17th and 18th centuries. A few of these are:

*In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life.* James Deetz, author, published in 1996 by Anchor Books, New York.

*A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America.* By Ivor Noël Hume, published in 2001 by Penn Press, Philadelphia.

*King's Reach and 17th-Century Plantation Life.* By Dennis Pogue, 1991. Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum Studies in Archaeology No. 1.

For information on 17th-century colonial sites, visit <http://www.chesapeakearchaeology.org/>

The Jefferson-Patterson Museum website has various papers on 17th and 18th century colonial life in Maryland at <http://www.jefpat.org/library.html>

*A Layperson's Guide to Historical Archaeology in Maryland.* James Gibb, editor, published in 1999 by the Maryland Historical Trust.

For more specific information on Prince George's County, see:

*Illustrated Inventory of Historic Sites, Prince George's County, Maryland.* Copies available through M-NCPPC or at [http://www.mncppc.org/county/historic\\_sites.htm](http://www.mncppc.org/county/historic_sites.htm)

*Prince George's County: A Pictorial History.* Alan Virta, author, published in 1991 by The Donning Company, Virginia Beach.

For younger readers:

*Archaeology!* Hettie Ballweber, author, published in 1996 by the Maryland Historical Trust.

*Archaeology for Young Explorers: Uncovering History at Colonial Williamsburg.* Patricia Samford and David L. Ribblett, authors, published in 1995 by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.