Land and Community - An Interactive Educational Module

An important component of the "Engaging the Piedmont: Transitions in Virginia Slavery 1730-1790" project is public outreach. The project website seeks to inform both a professional and wider audience through papers, images, blogs and specific content aimed at K-12 and teachers.

The first educational piece is an interactive module, aimed at grades 10-12. It allows students to look at land patterns through an exhaustive study of patents. Students will engage with maps, and related primary documents, showing changing land ownership from 1710 through 1770. They will be asked to consider how rivers and roads affected development, and to consider the effect of land fragmentation and family ownership on the building of community, for both the land owners and their enslaved workers.

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The "Engaging the Piedmont: Transitions in Virginia Slavery" website is part of a National Endowment of the Humanities grant designed to encourage and enhance the teaching, study, and understanding of the history of enslavement in America. A secondary goal has been to present the complexity of historical archaeology: the process of the discipline as well as its results. The site is being updated throughout the duration of the grant period, which gives us some excuse for it being a work in progress at this point, halfway through the span of the grant period.

While I'm going to focus today on a section of the site labeled education, obviously the site as a whole is designed as an education and research tool. The final data repository will be included through a link to the Digital Archive of Comparative Slavery, and site reports will be included as PDFs. As noted in previous papers, the project encompasses three inter-connected sites: the North Hill quarter at Poplar Forest, Wingos, also part of the original Poplar Forest plantation, and Indian Camp, a plantation in Powhatan County owned by John Wayles, Jefferson's father-in-law. Each site has its own page, with a summary site history and archaeology sections.

A project history section acts as both a chronological history of the project, but also a record of the process in getting the grant and starting the archaeology. The grant proposal is included, as well as information on the section 106 process set in motion by the grant. The multi-faceted nature of an archaeological project is implicit in the time frame, and reference to stakeholders, collaborators and educational opportunities throughout the project.

The field work at the site has been closely tied to field schools. The field school pages act as both a record of activity and promotion for future field schools, with images chosen to

emphasize the process of archaeology: laying in units, excavating, screening and mapping. The "research-in-progress" aspect of the site is also reflected in blog activity from the field, as well as from lab research. The blog allows a more direct "experiential" text, describing activities in the first person in contrast to the "exhibit" and research text on the website.

Ultimately the site will include three educational modules and I'd like to present the first of these today. The broad goal is to look at aspects of building community - how did land ownership patterns form and change over time, and how did this process affect the social and economic relatedness of the owners, their families, and their slaves. The module, designed by Barbara Heath, draws heavily on the work of Crystal Ptacek whose paper was presented earlier, examining changing land ownership at Indian Camp through an exhaustive GIS study. A secondary goal is to reinforce the point that archaeology is much more than digging, much more than artifacts.

The education module will include a brief history of Virginia and plantations, locating the area under review within present day Powhatan County. Students will be trace the connection, through Francis Eppes and his daughter Martha, to her husband John Wayles, to Thomas Jefferson and the slaves that he owned. They'll also learn about "entail," the passing of land and slaves to one's children in perpetuity, with them then unable to sell the property, and how this gave some continuity to the slave community that Jefferson ultimately inherited.

The module starts and ends with the Jefferson Farm book page, listing the slaves at Indian camp, the piece of land at the center of the module. Primary documents are included, with translations, showing the inheritance document, as well as the original Eppes patent and Eppes

will. Students will be asked questions about the contents of will, noting the place of slaves with other property.

The maps show land patents from 1731 to 1770. The creation of these maps comes from patent information geo-referenced in GIS, and Crystal's paper covered how this work was put together. Images from the GIS were exported as jpegs and then imported into Adobe Flash. Land ownerships data were put into a related xml file. If we look at the resultant module, we are able to browse year to year for the range of the data: 1731 to 1770. Students using the module can jump to a specific year, or play an animation to see change over time.

Students will examine the maps to understand the following questions:

- How does landscape change?
- Where did people first settle?
- What pieces of land are most desirable early on?
- How does landscape develop?

For any specific year we can see who owned the different parcels of land, or limit the display to just the changes for that year. It's immediately apparent from the time animation that the land quickly fractured and sub-divided over a relatively short period of time. Ownership can be traced over the years, giving the module utility for researchers as well as students. I noted a Freeman patenting land in 1734, proving my connection to Virginia gentry, as well as my favorite name Merry Webb. For two families – the Woodsons and Wayles – we created an additional layer showing how family connections and ownership reconnected some of the sub-divided land.

The roads and rivers give clues to why land might have been settled as it was, but the larger intent is to show change and see what the cultural landscape of the people living in these communities might have been: who were their neighbors, what other properties might people have had access to. The scope of the study, forty years, lies within the scope of a single lifetime. For those people brought to work on the plantations who else might they have known, met and worked with? How did the land changes play a part in building or destroying community though land sales, deaths and partitions of land?

At the end of the animation we put the slaves back "in" the map. Clicking on the Indian Camp land tract for 1770 brings back up the page from the Jefferson farm book; giving a list of the slaves that lived at this property, placing them in the context of the resultant environment in which they lived. Hopefully, as Crystal said in her paper "Names [have become] become people; people become neighbors; neighbors become a network or a community interacting with each other frequently and intentionally."

An ambitious, so far conceptual, extension of this project would be a cultural map showing the lives of all the slaves that ended up in Jefferson possession. The Farm book provides lists from a number of sites Jefferson inherited from John Wayles. Locating an individual, or group of individuals on the map, would let you examine the places they lived, but also see the connections between the slaves over space and time, and the communities in which they tried to build their lives. It is intended that the next educational modules for this web site will go from the macro to the micro, looking at yard space at a Wingos, using artifact distributions and soil chemistry to understand the spaces slaves constructed and worked in. It might thus be possible for this cultural map to zoom out to see community and zoom in to see the spaces the slaves worked and shaped themselves.

In conclusion the website is intended both as a tool of education and research, and also archaeological advocacy. It will contain primary and summary data, but it will also emphasize both the archaeological process and multiple research strands of the discipline. As such it's part of a spectrum of sites by archaeologists that provide the public with the information to see archaeology beyond digging, to realize the broad spectrum of work that goes into a site and to hopefully understand the loss when artifacts are removed from sites without research and provenience.