

1988 Excavations on the 18th century kitchen at Curles Neck Plantation

At the beginning of the season, a portion of the 18th century kitchen foundations remained intact just below the plowzone and abruptly stopped on the eastern and southern most portion of a previously excavated square. Excavation began in 1988 by opening more squares over and around the structural remains to get a clearer view, in plan, of the destruction of the kitchen wall and perhaps the nature of the kitchen area at the time of the destruction.

The destruction of the kitchen is most likely the destruction date established for the manor house. A civil war trash pit shared the same level as the destruction debris and top of the remaining foundations. The trash pit was excavated on the outskirts of the kitchen foundations where the remains suddenly stop. After cleaning down the square and adjoining squares, a circular trailing of mortar marked a slump filled pit presumably dug to rob the bricks of the foundations. Removal of the destruction debris covering the builder's trench on either side of the remaining portion of the kitchen wall brought the entire section of the site to a clay level with the remaining wall and builder's trenches interrupted by the slump filled pit. The clay, though dominant, was somewhat mottled in areas with brick scatterings and darker organic stains. A large portion of the brick scattering is an orange brick normally associated with the 17th century, and 17th century artifacts dotted the area with this type of midden/ destruction debris sometimes concentrating in a specific area. One possible feature which became more amorphous when cleaned was in the north west section of the kitchen where the walls had been robbed but any remains were covered in clay, most likely runoff from the clay floor on the inside of the kitchen. The "feature" was mottled with clay and the diagnostics were 17th century leaving me to believe it is an earlier surface level probably a 17th century surface level covered by the clay flooring of the 18th century. Evidence for 17th century occupation of this section of the site is not contained or defined at the level of 18th/19th century occupation.

The circular shape of the pit resulted from being dug to rob the corner of the building. There was a certain degree of difficulty in discerning the amount of intrusion of the robber's trench on the builder's trench. The only definite builder's trenches are those lining the exposed remains of the western wall, but a very probable undisturbed builder's trench was excavated separately from the rest of the robber's pit and contained a Buckley lead glazed cream pan, lying most likely in situ from the original building of the 18th century kitchen. As the robber's trench intruded on at least the remaining builder's trench diagnostic artifacts range from the 17th to 19th centuries with concentrations of earlier artifacts in the area believed to be undisturbed. The trench/pit was dug from the west toward the east as seen by the shovel marks and it seems the pit may have been left open for at least a rainstorm. The last course of bricks making the foundation was still

in tact but underneath a layer of clay that definitely separated the remainder of the destruction debris from the foundations. One brick from the wall still intact at the 18th/ 19th century surface level was found with mortar at the bottom of the pit but above the clay layer so it is most likely the pit lay open but probably not for long and whether the pit had any function beyond robbing the bricks is speculation however the pit is located near a trash pit which contained horse hardware as well as obvious civil war related artifacts.

After excavating the pit certain features of the kitchen were revealed that give us a clearer picture of its appearance and function. It became apparent that the kitchen did have dormers as is typical of the kitchens in that time period. The remaining course of bricks was one brick wider than the rest of the foundation walls and the depth of the foundations are indicative of a size that would accommodate dormers for housing for the kitchen slaves. There were some domestic artifacts such as pins, buttons, and scissors that can be associated with secondary kitchen activities, as well as numerous pig bones in the 18th/19th century surface level and destruction debris. A small posthole that did not show in plan is probably a remnant of the scaffolding set for building the kitchen. The clay layer was revealed in profile as being a definite flooring material covering an earlier surface, which contained two early pipestems sticking out horizontally from the profile. The pipestems and charcoal came from the organic soil similar to the above mentioned amorphous feature so it seems likely that a lot of early activity, a midden, previous kitchen, or as is common, a temporary house converted to a kitchen and any remains of this activity are virtually sealed beneath the clay floor.

There are as usual, many problems in interpreting an excavation, and in our situation it was profiles with information that obscured any obvious sequence of events. The destruction debris of the robber's trench/pit in profile appears to have two separate layers. The layer on the bottom is a dark organic soil with brick destruction and the layer on top of that is a clay with mortar and brick flecks. It is clearly two separate deposits that could have been made even 5 minutes apart but.....? Possibilities include the remains of an earlier structure, or root cellar, however the debris goes down to the kitchen foundations and I find it hard to reconcile the information as being the remains of an earlier structure. It is difficult though, to make a valid interpretation of the different deposits unless an earlier debris deposition is considered. It is possible an earlier wall was robbed and new foundations set while using the robber's debris as fill for the builder's trench. In this case the second robbing in conjunction with the first would serve to completely eliminate any definable remains of any original structure. In this interpretation of the deposits the lower debris of dark organic soil would be a possible heavily disturbed builder's trench slumped into the robbed trench of the foundation and filled with the clay mixed debris associated with the robbing of the 18th century kitchen. A rainstorm interrupting the soldier's robbing would possibly warrant as strong an argument, however the organic