

Fairfield Foundation 2015 Update

Five Fascinating Archaeology Sites on the Middle Peninsula

2015 has been as busy a year as ever for the Fairfield Foundation, as we continue to expand our archaeology, preservation, and education focus across Virginia's Middle Peninsula. Earlier this year we shared with you some of our favorite finds from across the region, and now we'd like to tell you more about some of the amazing, local archaeological sites that we've been working on! The Fairfield Foundation is constantly conducting research and leading public archaeology opportunities throughout the area.

1) Bailey Site, Mathews County

The Bailey site, discovered by the landowners as they walked the field near their house picking up artifacts turned up by the plow, appears to be one of the area's earliest colonial settlements, with artifacts likely dating to the 1650s. These bits of broken and discarded refuse included dozens of fragments of English tobacco pipe stems, North Devon gravel-tempered ceramic, German stoneware fragments, and dark green wine bottle glass. Each of these artifact types have much to tell us about colonial life, not the least of which is the international nature of the colonial material world. Our goal is to answer questions about the size and longevity of the site, and obtain more information about how these early settlers managed to survive in this new land. While little is known about the 17th century in Mathews, this century has been studied by scholars for decades, and continuing excavations like those at Jamestown have greatly enhanced our understanding of what happened during this tumultuous century. The Bailey site is representative of the hundreds of farmsteads that sprung up along the waterways of the county, but which have left no visible trace. The Bailey site was not large, and after a hiatus during the first half of the 18th century, new residents returned to the site, leaving behind a different array of artifacts that allows us to differentiate between the two occupations. More recent excavations, often including Mathews County school kids, have opened up several test units at the site with the goal of uncovering intact features that will allow us to virtually reconstruct what this early settlement looked like. Post holes dug into the ground for fences and building support posts, ditches, and cellars are all visible as stains in the soil. By mapping in these stains and figuring out which ones fit together, we can interpret the size and location of structures, yards, gardens and other features. More than five years of summer programs at the Bailey Site have exposed a variety of students to archaeology and local history, including Mathews County YMCA summer campers, high school interns, and Mathews County residents.



2) Hogge Site, Gloucester County

In the back yard of a local Gloucester couple, the Hogge Site tantalizes us with a glimpse into the lives of Native Americans, inhabiting the area long before Europeans. House construction in the 1970s led to the discovery of a remarkably intact Native American site, and excavations were undertaken by the Gloucester County Archaeology Project (GCAP). During the 1979 survey, the site yielded 1,177 artifacts from 254 shovel tests (one seen in the photo below left) and two 5' square test units. In the past few years the property owners have graciously allowed us to conduct public archaeology programs in their yard. With the help of volunteers (local residents as well as archaeology enthusiasts traveling from across the Middle Peninsula and Hampton Roads), excavations have helped confirm the intact nature of layers and features on this site, dating as early as the late Archaic period (2500 – 1200 B.C.), but primarily to the Woodland period (1200 B.C. – 1600 A.D.) This site is on a low flat terrace just above the waters of Fox Mill Run, which provided ample sources of foods and natural resources to its past inhabitants. Volunteers have recovered a number of stone projectile points from the site, including small triangular points that suggest an occupation in the Late Woodland period (900-1600 A.D.), and well-preserved sherds of pottery ranging from 500 B.C. to 1600 A.D.



3) Sandwich, Middlesex County

The house known as Sandwich, in Urbanna, is an important 18th-century structure in Middlesex. The colonial building and its 1930's Colonial Revival gardens stand as monuments to many people who have called this place home over the centuries. The building was also known as the Old Customs House, and may have functioned as the office for collecting customs prior to the Revolutionary War. Urbanna retains several early buildings and portions of its colonial-era street plan, but there is much that we don't understand about its history. Recent excavations at Sandwich are beginning to tell that story. The current property covers several original town lots, and these may have had structures dating to the beginning of the 1700s. With the help of community volunteers, members of the Middle Peninsula Chapter of the Archeological Society of Virginia, and Middlesex County high school students, we are exploring this land for the stories it can tell about the people and the buildings that formerly stood here. The Fairfield Foundation recently partnered with the Middlesex County Museum and Historical Society to hold a public artifact washing day. Participants got the chance to wash artifacts recently excavated from the

Sandwich archaeological site, providing them the unprecedented opportunity to engage with local history through hands-on archaeology.



4) Toddsbury, Gloucester County

Toddsbury is one of Gloucester County's best known properties, and legend has it that the house's core represents the oldest surviving home in the region. Our recent archaeological survey and test excavations on this historic landscape provided our students, and the many volunteers who work with us, the opportunity to peel back the layers of history that survive here. During our recent survey of the property, archaeological excavations led to the discovery of brick foundations representing at least five likely 18th-century outbuildings. Two of these brick foundations had been located and documented with a brief archaeological survey in the 1980s, but there was no previous knowledge of the existence of the three other foundations. All of these outbuildings, are aligned and extend east of the manor house nearly to the shoreline. These outbuildings do not exist in any known historic photographs of the landscape, and their discovery adds to this remarkable property's history. Through archaeology, we can begin to paint a picture of Toddsbury as it was at the time of the American Revolution - complete with the kitchen, smoke house, slave quarters, and other buildings that made up the core of the plantation. These buildings, artifacts, and features reveal the histories of all the people who lived here, adding depth to the already rich narrative of Toddsbury.



5) Fairfield Plantation, Gloucester County

We consider Fairfield Plantation our home base of archaeology, so even when we are excavating and researching new archaeology in neighboring counties, we always take some time to come back home to Fairfield. In 2015, we've been excavating at Fairfield with boy scouts from Bayport Scout Reservation in Middlesex, as well as with interns and volunteers from the pre-collegiate program at William and Mary known as the National Institute for American History and Democracy (NIAHD). Additionally, this year we are hosting two preservation workshops at Fairfield (in partnership with Adventures in Preservation), one of which went off without a hitch earlier this summer in June. The crew of workshop participants, staff, and volunteers dedicated the entire week to working on a section of the manor house foundations at Fairfield. Excavations focused on an area of rubble from the collapsed eastern wall of the 1694 manor house, and participants sweated it out while carefully and strategically removing hundreds of pounds of bricks and mortar from the exterior of the house. During excavations, we encountered a series of fallen wall sections that remain somewhat intact, albeit lying face down on the ground surface, allowing us to collect detailed information of certain architectural details from the construction of the house - such as water table bricks or other brick anomalies indicating window and eave locations. Amidst the piles of rubble, our crew also occasionally spotted some exciting artifacts, such as window glass and iron nails from the house's construction and repair, as well as other objects such as clothing buttons, a suspender clip (patented in 1883), and an iron plow blade. As in the past, participants also worked alongside Colonial Williamsburg historic mason Jason Whitehead, learning his craft as he repairs and repoints some of the crumbling sections of the manor house foundation. This unique blend of archaeology and preservation is what continues to draw participants to this workshop, and the successful pairing has led to a lot of great preservation work on Fairfield's foundations! At the conclusion of the workshop, the hard-working crew had removed all of the rubble from an area at least 15 ft x 15 ft just outside the east wall. Underneath this rubble, we've discovered a small strip just on the exterior of the house wall that represents a "burn layer", containing objects that were on the surface of the ground at the time of the 1897 fire that destroyed the mansion. We will leave the enticing discoveries to be made in this layer for the upcoming (second) workshop in August (visit www.adventuresinpreservation.org to learn more about the workshop opportunity!). Check out www.fairfieldfoundation.org to keep up with all of our latest projects.

