


THE EXCAVATION OF A COLONIAL LOG CABIN
NEAR WILMINGTON, DELAWARE

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 The Delaware River valley is an important area in the history of the log cabin, for it was here in the Swedish settlements that log residences first made their American appearance. In another paper, the writer has emphasized that the 17th. century English colonists from Newfoundland to Virginia did not build their first American residences of logs nor did the Dutch settlers at New Amsterdam. (1) However, following the landing of the Swedes at Wilmington in 1638 the log complex became manifest in the architectural pattern of New Sweden, which included not only residences, but churches, barns, bathhouses, mills, storehouses, and blockhouses.

Thus, the starting point in any history of the development of the log cabin in America is logically the Delaware valley, and any existing structures in this area are worthy of more than casual examination. There are many log houses and cabins still standing, although the majority of them have been modified, usually by covering the logs with sheathing or clapboards. Some of them have the original logs exposed, but as the years go by these cabins become fewer, and it is extremely important that all available data be collected while the opportunity still exists.

It is extremely difficult to date the construction of an old log dwelling with accuracy, and this is usually due to incomplete historical data. In some cases the deed records of the property specify "dwellings" or "residences" but this can never be taken with certainty to mean a log structure that may now stand on the property. Consequently when we see an old log cabin today in the area which originally comprised New Sweden we cannot be certain either from its appearance or from the deed records of the property on which it stands that it was built during the Swedish era. Its construction may date to a later period when, for a time, people of several nationalities built and occupied log houses, following architectural styles set by the Pennsylvania Germans beginning about 1710.

Recently, an early log structure was located by Leon de Valinger, Jr., Delaware's State Archivist, who observed that what appeared to be a commonplace frame shack near the junction of old State Road and the Dupont Highway south of Wilmington was actually a one-room log dwelling. Covered with clapboards, enlarged by the addition of a frame lean-to, the original character of the structure had been concealed for many years. As the clapboards, weathered by exposure, rotted and fell away, the log walls of the cabin again became visible. The cabin had not been occupied for perhaps 25 or 30 years, and its last known resident was an aged colored man, in whose honor nearby residents knew the place as "Josh's Cabin". (2) At de Val-

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The general characteristics of this bowl also fit into the period of from 1800-1850, which suggests that of the above names Jonathan Dark is the most logical.

In summation, therefore, the clay pipe fragments unearthed at the cabin date from the early part of the present century back to the 1750-1800 period.

Miscellaneous

Some miscellaneous objects which do not fit into any of the above categories, but which are worthy of inclusion are as follows:

- 14 Clay marbles
- 10 glass "shooters"
- 1 iron ball (shot?)
- 4 pieces of tile, 1" square, 1/4" thick, yellow in color having a raised circular design on the top surface.
- 1 gold engagement ring--stone missing
- 1 child's gold ring
- 1 fragment ivory comb
- ✓ 16 beads of green, red, blue and black glass
- 1 wood bottle stopper
- 2 slate pencils
- 1 argillite arrowhead
- 1 puzzle of twisted nails
- 1 bowl of Briar pipe
- 1 circular ornament from horse bridle, ornamented with letter "R"
- 1 "agate" pipe stem
- 1 small conch shell ornament
- 1 rusted key
- 1 tiny clay doll, marked "Made in Germany"

All of the material recovered during the cabin excavation was presented to the State Archives Department at a meeting of the Archaeological Society of Delaware on June 7, 1952. It is now in storage at the State Museum and will be used for display purposes when the cabin is reconstructed.

Conclusions

Since this cabin was the first ever to be excavated in the Delaware valley, we are given an unprecedented opportunity to make a close study of the architectural features and the method of construction. Also we learned that the most prolific implement-bearing area of this type dwelling was in the earth directly beneath the floor.

The typology of the artifacts recovered clearly reflect the time sequence during which the cabin was occupied, starting with very recent iron, glass, buttons and coins used by modern residents and continuing down through earlier forms, representative of the original occupants.