

A SEARCH FOR THE "CITY OF SAINT MARIES"

Report on the 1981 Excavations in St. Mary's City, Maryland

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## Abstract

This report presents the results of the 1981 archaeological excavations in St. Mary's City, Maryland. Funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (#RO-20166), this was the first season of a three year project which seeks to study spatial patterning and the evolution of spatial behavior in the colonial Chesapeake. Primary goals of the 1981 excavations were to locate the center of Maryland's first European settlement and 17th-century capital, identify specific properties within it and, finally, link the historical documents to the archaeological record. To accomplish these goals and produce a firm data base for future study, a strategy of stratified random sampling at 7 percent was employed. This approach resulted in the recovery of a full range of prehistoric, 17th-century, and 19th/20th-century artifacts from the plowed soils of the site. Analysis of the colonial materials with the assistance of computer generated distribution maps of plowzone artifacts enabled all of these goals to be achieved. Among the major sites identified and discussed is the home of Maryland's first governor, Leonard Calvert (c. 1635), Smith's Ordinary (built 1666, burned 1678) and a 1675 structure known as Cordea's Hope. In addition, evidence is presented regarding a bastion of the 1634 fort detected during the final week of the 1981 season. The computer-aided spatial analysis of the plowzone artifacts discussed here not only revealed the early village and significantly altered ideas concerning its arrangement, but also provided the first graphic evidence of the birth, growth and death of this important early American community. In addition to the detailed consideration of the colonial artifacts, data regarding some 9000 years of prehistoric occupation at the site are presented. Finally, the efficacy of the sampling approach for 17th-century sites and the potential of plowzone data for understanding cultural processes are considered.

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## Beads

Six European glass beads were recovered from the Village Center site. These are of two varieties. There are five monochrome, drawn beads of blue glass which can be classified in the Kidd and Kidd (1970) bead typology as IIa40,43. The second variety is represented by a single specimen; a layered blue drawn bead with white stripes (Kidd Type IVb33). These are identical to specimens recovered from the St. John's and Chancellor's Point sites in St. Mary's City. At St. John's, they were found in pre-1660 contexts (Miller, Pogue and Smolek 1982). They are probably of Dutch origin.

Five of the specimens were found adjacent to the Country's House foundation and on all sides of this building. This obviously demonstrates some association with this structure. The other bead, a large plain blue specimen (Kidd IIa40), came from Square 1567H in association with Late Woodland pottery and a quantity of quartz debitage. It may be related to the Contact period Indian village known to have existed at the site.

## Small Finds

Grouped into this category are a variety of materials which are represented by only a few or single items in the artifact assemblage. Among these are brass objects such as curtain rings, upholstery tacks, a possible book clasp, one ornate lock plate from a trunk or cabinet, and a number of small pieces of scrap that were originally parts of brass pots or kettles. Iron objects include horse gear such as a bit fragment and two spurs, and several dozen buckles which, because of difficulty in dating, may be 17th or 19th century in date. Twenty fragments of knives were recovered, and most of these appear to be from the 17th century. Furniture remains consist of three drawer pulls, several iron door lock fragments, and a very small pintle which may be from a cabinet. Among more personal items are a jew's harp, a pair of dividers, and several sizes of hook and eye clothing fasteners. In this same category are bone objects including a pair of bone dice, several knife handle fragments, and one portion of a bone comb.

One of the more surprising discoveries is a piece of lead printing type. Although corrosion has made the letter unreadable, this specimen is almost certainly from the press of William Nuthead, first printer in the southern United States. Nuthead established his press in St. Mary's City in 1685 and worked there until his death a decade later. While locations of the several shops at which he printed are unknown, the recovery of seven pieces of type from the Van Sweringen site makes that one likely location where Nuthead worked. The discovery of another piece of type in what was the backyard of the Country's House could be indicative of another place in which Maryland's first press was operated.

Other lead objects include two bale seals and several folded or rolled sheets of lead which might have been fishing weights. Pewter is rare at the site with only two items found. One is circular, threaded and may be the cap from a case bottle. The other item is also in the shape of a cap, but with one small exterior loop and molded floral decoration on the exterior at opposite sides. It may represent a

bandolier cap, but of a different style than previously found in the Chesapeake region (Wittkofski 1979).

### Armament Related Artifacts

Only one gun part was recovered in 1981 -- an iron cock. This specimen is complete, with the flint vise and screws still in place, although it is missing the flint. Since only the head of the cock screw remains, the shearing off of the screw shaft may be the reason the entire cock was discarded. There is some suggestion that the specimen had a doglock catch, and although dating is difficult, it is most probably from a late 17th-century doglock musket.

An intriguing find is an iron cannon ball which came from the trash-filled pit in the rear yard of the Country's House. It measures 3½ inches in diameter and weighs approximately 4¼ pounds (2 kilograms). This is the specified size and close to the specified weight of ammunition for a 17th-century weapon known as a saker (Firth 1921: 401-2). Sakers were used frequently as field pieces, and comprised the bulk of the artillery during the English civil wars. Only one reference to sakers in St. Mary's City has been found. In 1634, Lord Baltimore was sued for payment by a founder for eight cannons -- four sakers and four demi-culverns. Apparently, the order had been placed in 1633, and the weapons were intended for defense of the Maryland colony. These guns are known to have been placed aboard the Ark or the Dove (Carr 1969: 98), and this is confirmed in a "Relation of the Successful Beginnings", which was written in 1634 and states that:

For our safety, we have built a good strong Fort or Palazado, & have mounted upon it one good piece of ordinance, and 4 murderers, and have seven pieces more, ready to mount forthwith (Shea 1865: 20-1).

Since the ball was recovered within 70 feet of the Fort bastion, there is a strong possibility that it was ammunition for the Fort's guns. If so, it dates from 1634 and arrived with the first settlers.

Ammunition for small arms also was found and includes two balls, one of .60 caliber and the other of .67 caliber. Three smaller pieces of shot were found, and they were most probably intended for use with fowling pieces. Eleven fragments of melted lead were retrieved and may represent waste from shot casting activities at the site.

### Flint

A total of 204 pieces of European flint were found in the Village Center. These range in color from gray to dark brown to black and seem to have originally been in the form of small cobbles. Almost all of the assemblage is debitage, but a few professionally made, imported gunflints were found. Three of these are spalls of dark brown to black flint, and the fourth is a blade type made from French flint. Several of the flakes were utilized as strike-a-lights, as evidenced by their battered edges. It is obvious that some manner of flintworking occurred at the site and

seems likely the colonists were attempting to produce gunflints, as was found at the St. John's site (Miller and Keeler 1978). Additional excavation and analysis will be necessary to evaluate the success of flintknapping by the Village Center residents.

### Faunal Materials

Remains of animals were extremely common at the site with the random sampling squares yielding 12,251 fragments. It is difficult to distinguish 17th- from 19th-century animal remains, but preliminary indications are that much of the bone is of 17th-century origin. This is based upon the associated artifacts and the fact that most of the cut marks appear to have been made with an axe rather than a saw. In this region the use of saws in butchery became common during the 19th century. Although no faunal analysis has been conducted of this mostly plowzone sample, several species were identified during the process of cataloging. These are cattle (Bos taurus), swine (Sus scrofa), sheep or goat (Ovis aries or Capra hircus), deer (Odocoileus virginianus), chicken (Gallus gallus), Canada goose (Branta canadensis), sheephead fish (Archosargus probatocephalus), and box turtle (Terrapene carolina).

### Oyster Shell

Oyster remains are common on most colonial sites in the Tidewater Chesapeake, and the Village Center was no exception. Over 28 cubic feet of shell were recovered from the site in 1981. At a minimum, this amount equals 50,000 shell fragments. Although some of these are certainly from the 19th-20th-century occupations, the contexts of recovery and associated materials indicate that the majority of the shells are from the prehistoric or 17th-century occupations. The 17th-century middens are riddled with shell, and it is clear that oysters were heavily exploited during the period.

### Architectural Metal

Practically all of the architecturally related metal are wrought nails. There are 3963 in the collection. Because wood was the predominant building material in the 17th century, the recovery of this large quantity of nails is expected. Other items include large spikes, several pintels, a variety of hinges, door lock parts, and one key.

### Window Glass

There are 305 fragments of 17th-century window glass in the collection. All of these are from casement type windows assembled with turned lead. Originally this glass was tinted green, but chemical deterioration has made all the specimens dark brown to gold and very fragile. Preliminary analysis of the edge angles to which the glass had been cut reveals that both diamond and square or rectangular panes were used. While these fragments were widely scattered over the site, the majority clustered around the Country's House, and it is clear the structure