

EXCAVATION OF A MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY
TRASH PIT, WYNNEWOOD STATE HISTORIC SITE
SUMNER COUNTY, TENNESSEE

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ABSTRACT

In 1981, during monitoring of construction activity, an unusually large trash pit was discovered at the Wynnewood State Historic site, Sumner County, Tennessee. Subsequently, this feature was completely excavated and yielded an important collection of mid-nineteenth-century artifacts. This paper discusses the historic context and nature of this feature, its probable specific date (with a revised approach to use of the Mean Ceramic Date Formula), its site-specific function, and its broader socioeconomic and sociocultural implications. Efforts to extract useable comparative data from other nineteenth-century Tennessee sites indicate a pressing need for some degree of standardization of artifact reporting.

INTRODUCTION

The Wynnewood State Historic site (also known as Castalian Springs) is located in eastern Sumner County near the north edge of the Tennessee Central Basin (Figure 1). The state-owned tract, composed of 24.7 acres, contains a wide range of natural and cultural features. Focal point for the historic site is Wynnewood (Figure 2), a large two-story log building, the construction of which probably began in 1829. Originally conceived as a stagecoach inn and mineral springs resort, it has served a variety of purposes, including its major role as the home of Alfred Royal and Almira Winchester Wynne and their descendants from the early 1830s until 1971.

In addition to the main house, the state-owned tract contains other standing buildings and archaeological remains from various periods. Scattered artifacts are present attesting to some use of the tract during several prehistoric eras, and there is at least one substantial stone-box cemetery related to the nearby Mississippian period mound and village area known as the Castalian Springs Indian site (state archaeological site number 40SU14). At the base of the steep limestone-outcropped slope on which the house sits are sulphur springs (all but one now covered by alluvium) that flow into Lick Creek. This location, once called Bledsoe's Lick, is an important early historic landmark, and was visited by Isaac Bledsoe, as well as other "long hunters," in the late 1700s. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a number of buildings, in addition to the house, were constructed. A dozen of these still stand, and at least this many are represented by archaeological remains within or just outside the tract boundaries.

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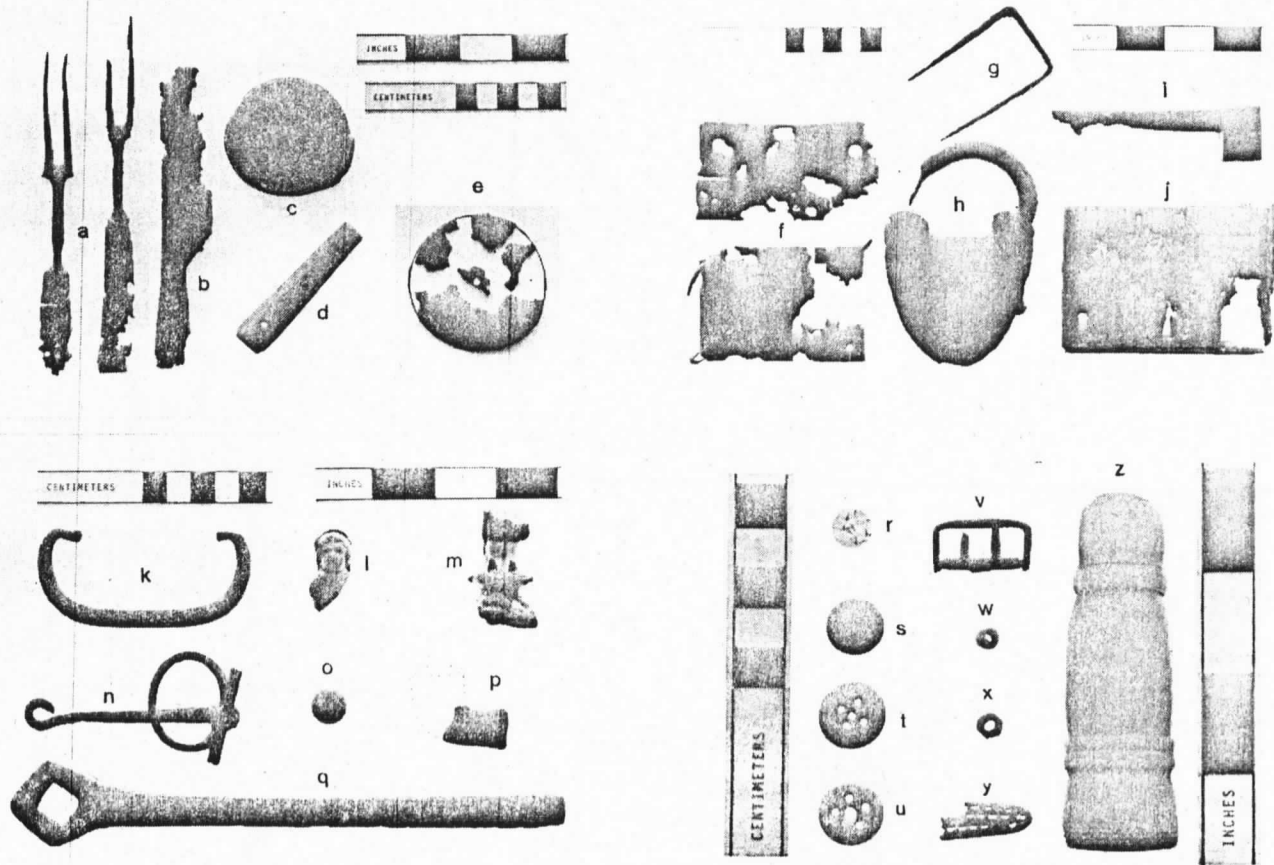


Figure 9. Representative artifacts from the Kitchen Group (upper left), Architectural Group (upper right), Furniture Group and Activities Group (lower left), and Personal Group (lower right).

The most common class in this group is composed of 14 bone (Figure 9 t and u), 7 shell (Figure 9 r), 3 brass (Figure 9 s), and 1 iron buttons. One of the brass buttons has an impressed backstamp: "BEST QUALITY" "LONDON." It is also worth noting that no porcelain buttons were found. The rapid spread of mechanically-pressed "china" buttons after their introduction in 1840 (Lamm, et al. 1970:4-7) means that they should be common in post-1840 button collections.

In like manner all of the straight pins (Table 2) recovered (most of them from the water screened soil samples) are of the early type with wire-wound heads (see illustration in Smith 1976:207). According to Noel Hume (1970:254) the replacement of this type by pins with solid heads began with an 1824 English patent.

Other notable items in this group include two glass beads. One of them (Figure 9 w) is a translucent royal-blue bead made by the mandrel-wound process. It has a maximum diameter of 5.7 mm and is similar to type 46 in Good (1972:112). The second bead (Figure 9 x) is 6.3 mm in diameter and has a royal-blue outer layer and a sky-blue inner layers. It is hexagonal in cross section, faceted, and otherwise similar to type 11 in Good (1972:106). Similar beads were previously found at Wynnewood in association with the slave cabin sites (Smith 1975:88), and additional discussion (Smith 1977:159-161) has been given to the apparent widespread association between blue beads (particularly blue faceted beads) and slave activity areas. It is not difficult to imagine the loss of these beads by slaves working in the Wynnewood kitchen.

Personal Group

Included here are a partial slate pencil (made of soapstone) and several pieces of slate, probably from a writing tablet. Other items are a small brass ring, part of a bone handle toothbrush (Figure 9 y), and a bone handle (Figure 9 z), probably from a shaving brush.

Activities Group

South's (1977:96) Activities Group is composed of 13 classes, 7 of which are used here (Table 2).

The Toys Class is represented by one dark-gray stoneware marble (Figure 9 o) and one half section of a light-gray stone marble.

The Fishing Gear Class is composed of portions of 2 iron fish hooks.

The Tobacco Pipe Class is represented by a single stem section of an unglazed short-stem stoneware pipe (Figure 9 p).

The Storage Items Class is composed entirely of sections of iron bands from wooden burials.