

FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WYE HOUSE

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[Editors' Note: Plantation archaeology explores the material record of multiple threads of American history: the daily lives of large-scale farmers, as well as the lives of their wives and children; the landscape modifications and farming practices used in early America; and the lives of those who worked on the plantations, including overseers, craftsmen, and enslaved Africans. When these groups' descendants still live on or near the plantation site, as in the case described here, the archaeologist's task is especially important as s/he must negotiate the aims and desired outcomes of the research among many different interests.]

Located in Maryland on the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, Wye House was once the center of a large plantation on land owned since the 1650s by the Lloyd family. Around 1780-90, Edward Lloyd IV, a delegate to several early US Congresses, built the present house near his older (1770s) and more famous "orangery"—a type of greenhouse where citrus trees were grown. Now a National Historic Landmark, Wye House, then known as the "Home House Farm," was also home, for a time, to Frederick Douglass— orator, writer, and abolitionist, who was owned as a slave by an overseer of Wye House plantation.

In all three of his autobiographies, Frederick Douglass described Edward Lloyd V, Wye House, and its large slave population. He also named and described the "Long Green" between the gate and the main house, where slaves and overseers lived.

In 2004, Mrs. R. Carmichael Tilghman, the current owner and 11th generation Lloyd descendant, offered the University of Maryland's Archaeology in Annapolis Project the opportunity and some of the funding to excavate the Long Green at Wye House. Two groups were

especially interested in the outcome of the Long Green work: the descendant Lloyd family and the descendant African-American community. The descendant Lloyd family wanted to know more about their property than documents alone could provide.

The African-American descendants living nearby in Unionville also welcomed an extensive archaeological project on their heritage. During the Civil War, the Union Army removed eighteen slaves from Wye House and promised them their freedom in exchange for fighting. After the war, they settled on Quaker land nearby. A senior member of the African American descendant community asked the archaeologists for information bearing on "slave spirituality" and "what the Lloyds did for freedom?"

Mapping the Landscape

To understand what is missing from the historical records, as well as from Douglass' accounts of the Wye House plantation and other plantations in the Chesapeake, the archae-



Wye House

ology team used both traditional excavations and LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), an aerial remote sensing technology that can see through some groundcover and leafless trees. This technology can locate roads, built terraces, and features such as the ruins of slave quarters that cannot easily be seen on the ground. These maps also show shorelines, fields, and forest cover. Comparisons to historic records and maps from ca. 1800 can measure changing farmland to forest ratios and shoreline loss due to both erosion and global warming. Such mapping also detects geometrically planned landscape designs, characteristic of the great plantations that surrounded the Chesapeake Bay.

Buildings of the 'Long Green'

Almost 50 University of Maryland undergraduates and seven PhD students have explored the rich and intact archaeology of Wye House. Over sixty 5'x5' squares have been excavated on the Long Green, all in buildings associated with slave life. Three buildings were excavated thoroughly enough to understand their changing functions. Since the archaeology did not match precisely Douglass' evocative descriptions, the archaeological discoveries clearly make important contributions to the property's heritage.

A Lloyd family inventory of their slaves in 1826 documented 166 enslaved persons at the Home House farm. Douglass describes slaves as being everywhere, living everywhere, and serving in a wide set of occupations. The project discovered one 16.5x16.5 foot slave quarter whose chimney and hearth were rebuilt two or three times that does not match anything described in Douglass' writings. Near the plantation's wharf, two small warehouses dating from 1790 were excavated, at least one of which was used as a slave quarter ca. 1840 and then abandoned and reused as the base for another building ca. 1865. It does not appear in Douglass' description or in historic photographs from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

On a rise on the Long Green, there is a 40 x 25 foot building exactly where Douglass described a blacksmith's and a cooper's shops. However, the archaeology shows a long low frail building containing no material



Excavation on Long Green. An open cellar, filled in the early 19th century, contained within one of the excavated buildings (the Middle Building, Locus 3). Photo courtesy Archaeology in Annapolis.

pointing to either of these types of industrial activity. The buildings and quarters we have discovered were frail, lacking interior walls, with evidence of frequent maintenance, and no room for storage. Despite Douglass' descriptions, it is not reasonable to assume that the large number of slaves that the Lloyds owned could have lived in these buildings. Additionally, there is no evidence of gardens or animal pens used by enslaved Africans.

We have thus far not found the buildings where the majority of the enslaved persons lived. What we have discovered, though, is evidence of animal bones, fish, and shellfish, representing a much wider range of food than the Lloyds would have provided, a finding that runs contrary to their strict prohibitions on hunting and fishing. The enslaved population clearly and independently exploited the waterways and the woods far more than any historical record details.

Slave Spirituality

Slave spirituality is reflected in three sets of archaeological finds. Two years ago, the Tilghman family requested and sponsored archaeological work in their famous Orangery. Our work showed that Edward Lloyd IV built the first

greenhouse in the early 1770s and modified it around 1785 so that it contained a furnace and a channeled heating system known as a hypocaust. Next to the furnace room on the north side was a room now known as a potting shed, which appeared to have been a slave quarter from the 1780s through the 1820s.

Outside the door of the slave quarter, but buried directly in front of the threshold, were two projectile points and a coin. Both have importance within West African spiritual traditions. Inside the south room, over the arch where the furnace feeds hot air into the hypocaust channel, was a large granite prehistoric pestle mortared directly into the brick vault of the furnace. The pestle is pecked and rounded on one end and is reminiscent of stones commonly utilized in a number of West African spiritual traditions. The granite also contains inclusions that catch the light and sparkle. The entire furnace, with the pestle in place, was built by the same person.

In the attic, next to the chimney of an overseer's house ("the Captain's House") and overlooking the Long Green, was a two-headed, carved wooden figure that was



University of Maryland, College Park, students excavating a portion of the foundation walls of the open cellar on Long Green. Photo courtesy Archaeology in Annapolis.

about two inches long. The two faces on it sit back-to-back. It could be a two-headed doctor, known from the *Slave Narratives* collected by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s.

With these three artifacts, we have the beginning of an answer to the request for information about spirituality among the enslaved as well as to larger questions about the emergence of an African American religion that contained African beliefs and practices. We cannot yet reconstruct the enslaved Africans' commitment to Christianity.

The Lloyd's Contributions Today

What did the Lloyds do for freedom? To support education, research, and an understanding of their role in peoples' quest for freedom, all the Lloyd family papers have been placed at the Maryland Historical Society, with microfilm copies at the University of Maryland. For decades the family has supported the Historical Society of Talbot County, the Hammond Harwood House Museum, and innumerable visits to Wye House by educational and historical groups.

A younger generation of Lloyd family descendants is committed to conserving the Bay and its adjacent lands by using Wye House as a model farm with exemplary prac-



Frederick Douglass

tices. Such practices include no-till farming and wide grass buffer strips between agricultural fields and the shoreline to reduce run off, as well as a “living shoreline” along areas of significant erosion in lieu of stone “rip-rap” or bulkheads. The family also sponsors archaeological and historic explorations that help reestablish a balanced place for the Lloyds in Maryland and national history.

Lloyd descendants recognize that the Lloyds were no different from other wealthy plantation owners of the time, including many of the Founding Fathers, in their efforts to run slave-based plantations. Did Douglass portray the Lloyds justly in his autobiographies, they ask? This question goes to the heart of the descendant family’s concerns. While making a determined effort to preserve Wye House for the local and national good in the largest sense, descendant family members are also interested in promoting a balanced approach to the long history of Wye House, including both its early 17th century history when slavery was minimal in Maryland and also during the period after Emancipation. Archaeology may not only be able to illuminate the workings of the plantation during its days as a slave-based enterprise, but also to add balance to the Lloyds’ place in current appraisals of American history.

References for Further Reading

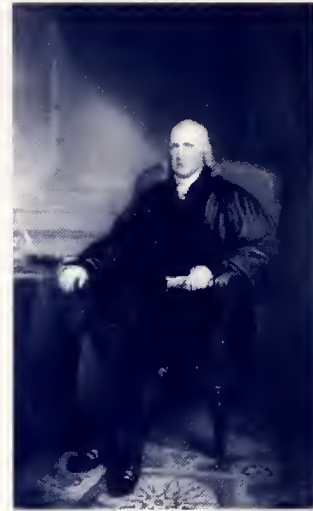
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A short video on the ‘Long Green’ excavations can be viewed at <http://news.discovery.com/videos/archaeology-wye-house-mysteries-unearthed.html>.

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