

ARCHAEOLOGY IN ANNAPOLIS: EVERY DAY IS A DAY OF ARCHAEOLOGY

July 30, 2011 Beth Pruitt Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011 Amanda Tang, Annapolis, Anthropology, Archaeological sub-disciplines, Archaeology, Ben Skolnik, Benjamin Skolnik, Beth Pruitt, Bill, College Park, editor, Frederick Douglass, Geography of the United States, historical archaeology, James Holliday, Jocelyn Knauf, Kate Deeley, Kitty Eisele, Mark Leone, Maryland, news media, Ryan, satellite imagery, United States, United States Naval Academy, University of Maryland



Student volunteers Ryan and Bill wash artifacts collected from Annapolis, Maryland. Source: Kate Deeley

It is the last day of summer lab work for the Archaeology in Annapolis project. Out of the sun of the field and into the air conditioning, volunteer undergraduate students Bill and Ryan wash the artifacts gathered from this season's efforts. Toothbrushes in hand, they dust off the delicate or brittle artifacts made of bone or iron and scrub the harder finds with water. Free from dirt, the ceramics and glass pieces sometimes reveal maker's marks and unseen decorations. These features will be eventually cataloged and aid in the analysis of the site as they can provide relative dates for the levels in which they were found. Under the guidance of graduate student Kate Deeley, the volunteers learn the basics of laboratory methods, while she and the other graduate students work on their own research—independent but each related to the

Archaeology in Annapolis collective.

This Summer's Work

Archaeology in Annapolis is a 30-year project, run out of the University of Maryland, College Park. Under the direction of Dr. Mark Leone, a staff of graduate students—Jocelyn Knauf, Amanda Tang, Kate Deeley, Benjamin Skolnik, and Beth Pruitt—manages annual field schools and lab work, which contribute to their individual dissertation research. In the summer, the field school spends three weeks in urban Annapolis, Maryland and three weeks at the Wye House plantation on the Eastern Shore. As Archaeology in Annapolis learns about the lives of past people, we strive to explore the stories of those whose names haven't always made it into the history books, including enslaved African Americans and working class individuals.



Artifacts from the Pinkney House in Annapolis lay out to dry on screens. Source: Kate Deeley.

This year, the crew worked in the backyards of two households in Annapolis—the Pinkney House and the James Holliday House—both of which were owned by freed African Americans in the 19th century. In our excavations, we



Washing the artifacts from Annapolis exposes painted and transfer printed whiteware and overglazed porcelain.

Source: Benjamin Skolnik

have been interested in the lives of James Holliday, who worked at the United States Naval Academy, and his decedents, who passed the house down the familial line until the current homeowner contacted Archaeology in Annapolis with a request that we conduct work there. The Pinkney House was rented to multiple different families throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, including those who worked as washerwomen, servants, laborers, and Naval Academy employees.

At the Wye House, where Frederick Douglass was enslaved as a child, the crew successfully searched for two slave living quarters that were represented on the reproduction of a historic map, but had previously remained undiscovered. Ben Skolnik combined this map with historic aerial photographs, modern aerial and satellite imagery, Light Detection

And Ranging (LiDAR) data, and accounts written by Douglass to determine the locations of the quarters. He describes this process in detail at our blog in his post, [Why are we digging where we are at Wye?](#) Due to the success of his method at this site, Ben has been spending the last few weeks looking at other plantations, and the possibility that this same technique will work in locating the lost buildings on other similar properties.

Our Lab Becomes a Cityscape of Boxes

The field school is followed by three weeks in the Archaeology in Annapolis lab on campus, where students volunteer to gain additional experience. The lab environment, usually filled with music and chatting, is significantly calmer than the excavations, which generally looked like this:

Now, surrounded by towering boxes of artifacts, the students carefully clean and lay the pieces on screens to dry. Each screen is properly labeled with the context of the finds—the bag number, site, unit, and level. When this process is finished, the volunteers will catalog the artifacts, noting their material, type, use, and distinguishing features. Although we will close the lab today for the summer, the work will continue well into the school-year, when students have the opportunity to work in the lab for school credit. The collected data will culminate in site reports, which the graduate students will use for their research.

One box, set by a heater in the dry basement, contains around 30 soil samples, each in an individually labeled plastic bag. I took these samples at the Wye House from our excavation units and from an exposed wall in the property's 18th-century greenhouse. We cannot analyze the soil in our own lab, so we will send the samples to an expert, a palynologist, who will be able to isolate and identify fossilized pollen in the dirt. My work within Archaeology in Annapolis is focused on early scientific gardening—that is, the experimentation and study of local and exotic plants, like the plantation owners would have conducted in the greenhouse—and African-American gardening. With the location of the two slave quarters now identified, pollen samples from these units, combined with a pollen study of the greenhouse from last year, will help me look at how these two gardening traditions may have interacted within the landscape of the plantation. Since the field school has ended, my job has been to learn as much as I can about pollen analysis in historical archaeology and the legacy of African-American gardening that has been passed on to communities today.



The Archaeology in Annapolis lab, under there



*Excavations and screening
at the Wye House
plantation. Source:
Benjamin Skolnik*

Today, Dr. Leone, Amanda, and Ben are absent from the lab so that they can meet with NPR Supervising Senior Editor Kitty Eisele at the Wye House to record a piece for [Morning Edition](#) about our work on the plantation. We are very excited to hear how the interview goes and listen to the broadcast, due to go out to ears around the world in early September.

In its long history, Archaeology in Annapolis has endeavored to maintain a public presence, opening excavations to the public and working with news media like NPR. The sites at which we work currently in Annapolis and the Eastern Shore are private properties and largely inaccessible to the general public, which presented us with the problem of how to allow entry to our research. This year, the project began a blog, which has provided a means for us to share our experiences and for readers to ask questions or comment on our work. We invite, encourage, and thrive on this dialogue with an interested audience. To learn more about the excavations this summer and the individual research that the Archaeology in Annapolis staff conduct, visit [the AiA blog](#).