

# A DAY AT GEORGE WASHINGTON'S FERRY FARM

June 30, 2012 Ashley McCuiston Community Archaeology, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2012, Digital Archaeology, Excavation, Historical Archaeology, Museum Archaeology 3D scanner, Allison, Archaeology, Bernard Means, Betty Washington, ferry farm, Fredericksburg, Geography of the United States, george washington, Ian, metal hatchet toy, metal pipe, Pewter, professor, public archaeology site, Stafford County, Victoria Garcia, Virginia

I spent my day today at Ferry Farm, the boyhood home of George Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia. George lived in this home for most of his childhood, and it remained in his family for quite some time after he moved out. Archaeology at Ferry Farm has been taking place for many years in an attempt to create a better understanding of the land and the life of the Washington's during their occupation of it. This year's excavation is taking place behind the Washington home site (excavated in 2008), and our goal is to uncover the location of the outbuildings that supposedly stood there. I just completed a five week field school at this site and had such an incredible experience that I elected to return as a volunteer for the rest of the summer. Today was my first day back, and I was eager to start digging!



Upon my arrival I was immediately assigned a new unit to begin excavating with my good friend and digging partner, Victoria Garcia. This unit is located in a particularly fascinating section of the site, as several odd soil anomalies and a myriad of strange artifacts have been discovered there. Artifacts have included plastic toys, Civil War-era bullets, various historic ceramics and most of a porcelain teacup. I have been very interested in all of the excitement that this particular area has stirred up over the past couple of weeks, so getting the opportunity to dig here was a real treat for me! We began by chopping up the topsoil with our shovels and removing it in small squares, which took significantly less time than I thought it would! Upon removing the layer of matted down grass and dirt, we came across a metal pipe that was sticking directly out of the ground. No one was quite sure what it was, but I am eager to find out as we excavate further! After removing the top layer, it was time to screen the matted down chunks of grass and dirt for artifacts. We found a piece of a terracotta pot and some nicely decorated ceramics, but nothing more than that in this layer.



*Our unit after removing the topsoil this morning.*

While we were screening a group of children from a summer camp program came to visit the site and helped us go through our topsoil. Ferry Farm is a public archaeology site where guests are encouraged to get their hands dirty at the screens as they learn about our work there, and I always enjoy being able to entertain and educate them. The kids who joined us were very helpful and I appreciated their enthusiasm, despite the fact that our dirt was terribly difficult to pick through and had close to no artifacts in it!

By the time we were done screening it was time for lunch, and instead of returning to our unit after eating, Victoria and I headed to the lab with our classmates, Ian and Allison. There, we joined our professor, Dr. Bernard Means, who was scanning Ferry Farm artifacts with his 3D

scanner. The four of us will be getting involved in his scanning project as interns this fall, so today was somewhat of a tutorial and demonstration for us. The scanner makes 3-dimensional digital copies of artifacts, which can be studied and saved on the computer, and even replicated with a 3D printer!

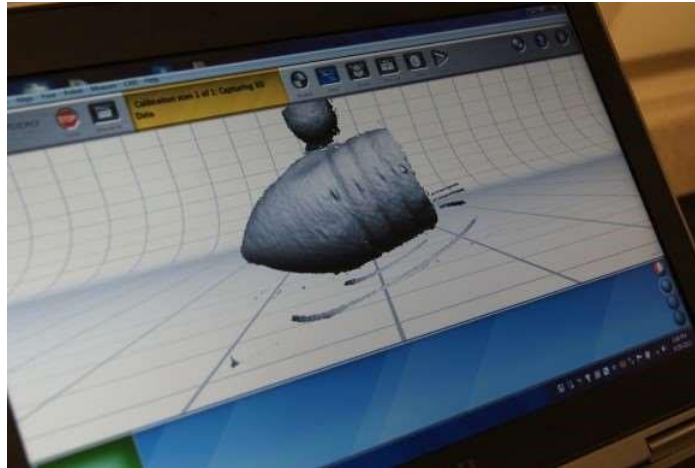


*The pewter spoon with the initials “BW” on it.*

He first scanned a pewter spoon that is inscribed with the initials “BW”, which belonged to George’s sister, Betty Washington. It was amazing to be able to see this piece in person, as I had only ever read about it or seen it in pictures prior to today. Dr. Means also scanned a lead alloy cloth seal, a small metal hatchet toy, and finally, a Civil War Minie ball bullet that Ian found during our field school.



*The Minie ball as it is being scanned.*



*The scan of the Minie ball as it appears on the monitor.*

In all, it was a great day in the field and in the lab! I love every minute of what I do here, and I feel so lucky to be a part of such a wonderful profession. I'm glad I could share my experiences at Ferry Farm with everyone here today, and I can't wait to read what others are up to on this Day of Archaeology!