

KING WILLIAM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Quarterly Newsletter
April 2021

IN THIS ISSUE

UPCOMING MEMBERSHIP MEETING

WILL BE HELD ON ZOOM

April 18, 2021, 2:30 p.m.

The Program: Archaeological Discoveries at the King William County Courthouse

By Elizabeth Donison and Dr. David A. Brown, The Fairfield Foundation

King William County Courthouse is the longest continuously active courthouse in the nation and a point of great pride for its citizens and all Virginians. The courthouse is one of several buildings that made up this centerpiece of King William County. As the focus of governing, economic development, or law enforcement, this area integral intersection included surrounding taverns, jails, clerk's offices, ordinaries, hotels, general stores, and many other buildings but few survive intact. The lecture will highlight the findings from the first field season of archaeological research and preview preliminary findings from this winter/spring's second season. A report will soon be published with the initial findings and subsequent field seasons will add to this, including an anticipated third field season in 2021. The lecture will also discuss plans for public engagement in the third field season, including the hoped-for return of all King William County fourth graders to explore the museum and participate in this archaeological research.

An email invitation for the Zoom meeting will be sent to those for whom we have email addresses.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

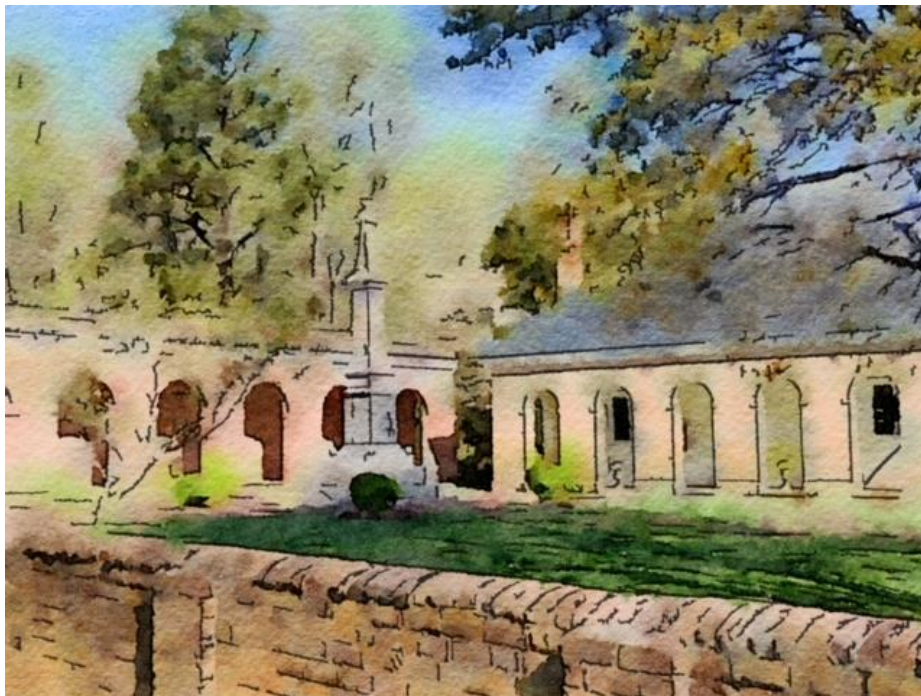
Dear Members,

Spring is in the air and it finally feels as if we are finding our way out of this shutdown state we have been in since Covid 19 showed up here over a year ago. The King William County Historic Society (KWCHS) board has been meeting but there has not been a meeting of the KWCHS membership since January 2020. This is about to change since we are planning to have a membership meeting via Zoom on April 18 at 2:30. The KWCHS Society will have a business meeting and Dr. David Brown will discuss the findings of the archaeology being performed at the Colonial Courthouse in King William. For those of you who receive the Country Courier, we got a teaser on the findings in the latest edition. Also, it is exciting that the archaeology project at the King William County Colonial Courthouse will be displayed at the new Colonial Tavern exhibit that is being built at the King William Courthouse Museum.

It seems that many people are familiar with the Zoom platform now and perhaps we will be able to have some members from afar that are able to attend as well. I will have had my second shot of Moderna Vaccine by the time of the meeting and I am very much looking forward to seeing everyone on screen. Please watch your email for the Zoom meeting invite. Until then, please take care of yourselves and enjoy the fine spring weather.

Best Regards,

Sally W. Pearson
President of the King William County Historical Society



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND TESTING RESULTS 2019 & 2020

DATA Investigations LLC is happy to share that our initial draft report on the archaeological survey and limited test excavations in 2019 and 2020 at Site 44KW0076 (King William Courthouse) is complete. The archaeological survey and testing were intended to identify distinct concentrations of artifacts that reflect past human activities and confirm the presence of intact stratified cultural deposits that indicate the site has integrity and potential for future archaeological study. A survey grid was established with shovel test pits (STPs) spaced at 25' intervals across approximately 2-acres to the south of the King William County Courthouse. Additionally, two 5' square test units (TUs 1 and 2) were placed to the south of the courthouse to test for intact stratified cultural deposits. The area across Courthouse Road in the nearby lawn was partially surveyed to confirm the location of a late 19th-/early 20th-century hotel and not only confirmed its presence, but also an earlier site. Future archaeology could shed light on the nature of the sites near the courthouse, as well as the courthouse itself. As such, our report recommends that King William County preserve these resources in their current states and that the King William County Historical Society assist the County with preservation and interpretation initiatives. The results of this survey yielded interesting and somewhat unexpected information about the historic occupation of this area and confirmed the archaeological potential of the King William Courthouse.

There were two phases of work: Shovel Testing and Test Unit Excavations. The shovel test survey succeeded in identifying artifact concentrations and activity areas while also highlighting the need to conduct further testing outside the courthouse's enclosed wall areas to locate buildings associated with the area's history. More specifically, this survey identified the presence of archaeological deposits and confirmed the date range of use to the period contemporary with the historic courthouse buildings; the most intense occupation appears to be within the 18th-century and survives remarkably intact. This survey also identified the areas with the greatest artifact concentration being to the southeast of the courthouse building within the large brick wall. The artifacts from the STP survey indicate that a predominantly mid-18th- through late 19th-century site exists in the area around the eastern brick wall that separates the two enclosures. The concentration of domestic debris in this area suggests one of two likely scenarios. First, this is an area used for trash disposal by courthouse attendees dating from the courthouse's construction around 1725 into the late 19th century. Alternatively, this area was the most frequently used space by persons eating and drinking (a communal area), and disposing of associated broken elements (dishes, bottles, etc.) in the process. The new county prison and repurposed use of the courthouse buildings over time likely accounts for the decreased use of the courthouse space in the 20th-century and corresponding drop in the number of artifacts from that period. Alternatively, domestic debris decreased with proximity to the courthouse buildings at this time because citizens kept this area intentionally cleaner through changes in behavior associated with trash disposal in the 19th century. The areas with architectural debris largely appear to indicate the construction of the brick walls and both extant and no longer extant courthouse buildings and, potentially, associated with cataclysmic events like the

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND TESTING RESULTS 2019 & 2020, CONT'D

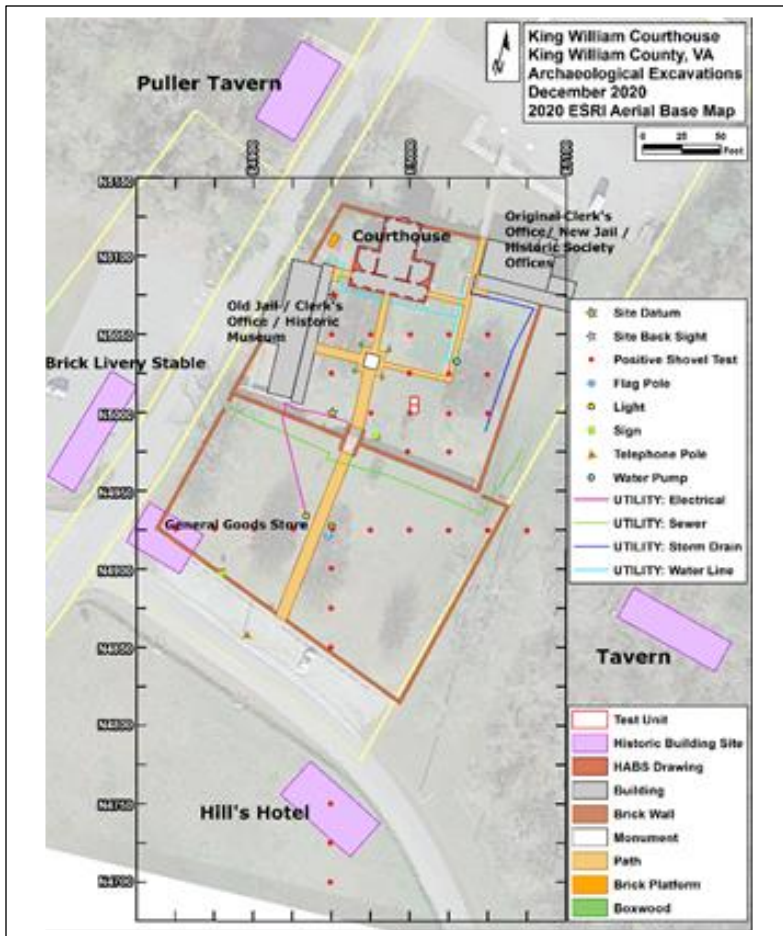
burning of the clerk's office. These may have overlapped with larger landscape modifications during more recent periods, such as the filling of shallow ravines close to the courthouse in order to create flat lawn spaces for ceremonies and other formal functions in the 20th century. Lastly, the area surveyed around the Hills Hotel and general store have a small concentration of domestic and architectural debris that likely confirm these buildings' locations. However, without more data from further shovel test pits in these areas we cannot say this definitively.

The artifacts recovered from the second phase of work, test unit excavations, reflect the earlier assessment of an intense mid-18th- to early 19th-century occupation in this area. Excavations recovered wine bottle glass, tin-glazed earthenware, creamware, pearlware, colonoware, Nottingham stoneware, English stoneware, North Midlands slipware, several imported tobacco pipes, nails, and copper alloy artifacts. Curious finds included a clay marble, gun flint, a bullet, and sandstone fragments. Most of the recovered ceramics were produced and used from the mid-18th to early 19th century. The presence of tobacco pipes are helpful dating tools since they had a significant evolution in bowl design and stem bore diameter from the 17th to 18th centuries. The tobacco pipe fragments recovered from these test units date from 1680-1800.

The historic artifacts recovered during the test unit excavation highlight the function and occupation of the southeast Courthouse lawn as either a trash disposal area or an activity area heavily associated with the use of ceramics and bottle glass from the mid-18th through early 19th century. Curiously, there is a near absence of animal bone (food bone). This may reflect a particularly acidic soil that would quickly break down the organic structure of the animal bone. Alternatively, there may have been little bone deposited in this area, suggesting that this is likely not a domestic trash disposal area. Rather, it is likely a site of leisure for courthouse attendees and a space where they felt free to dispose of trash on intermittent occasions (instead of the regular accumulation associated with middens). Activities such as drinking, eating, smoking, marbles, and riflery took place around the courthouse lawn, as well as more typical courthouse duties inside the buildings. Food and drink were consumed, people conversed, and objects were undoubtedly broken. Rather than sweeping these items up, the behavioral norms of the day likely accepted a certain level of trash in this area, with later periods expecting the resulting trash to be carted off (or those same activities took place elsewhere).

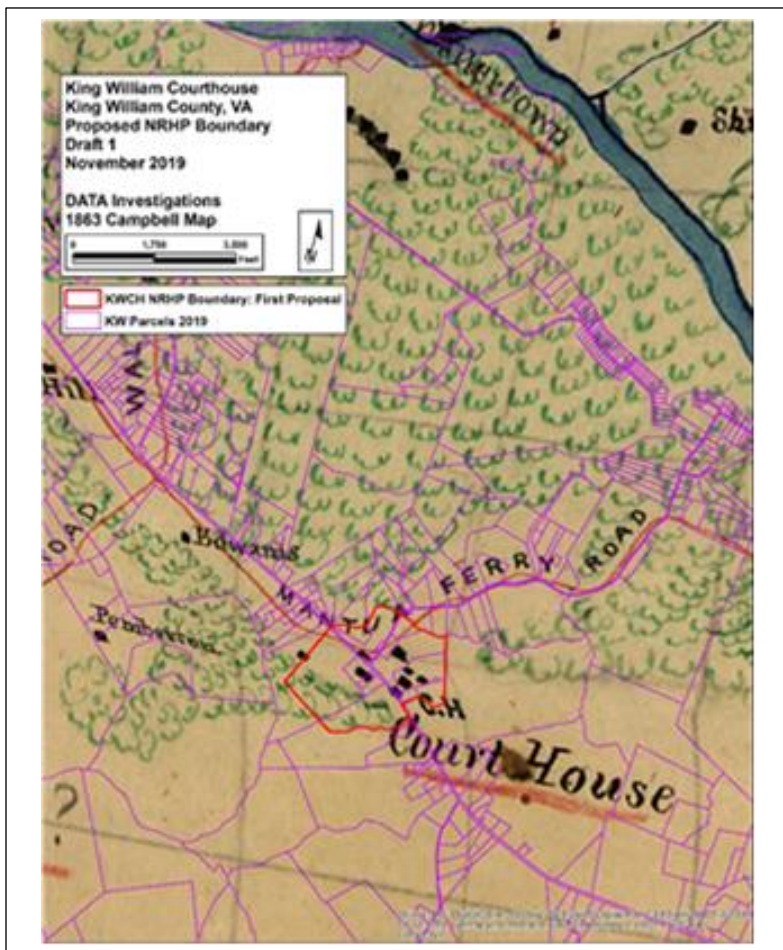
We are particularly proud of having the entire fourth grade visit the site and museum and participate in the excavations in 2019 and the Historical Society is committed to repeating this in 2021 as soon as safe conditions are present. Our work will continue over the next three months with the dual goals of expanding the survey area towards the tavern to the east (to compliment the upcoming exhibits planned for the museum) and additional test unit excavation to search for buildings and better understand the changing landscape of this hugely significant property. Further research into the history of this property, ideally coupled with a broader archaeological survey of the surrounding acreage to find the taverns, general store, and hotel, is also suggested to better explain the site's chronology and suggest research questions for future excavations. Sites of this type can yield significant insight into the development of early Virginia and the lives of the people who lived and worked on this land, but it often takes much more extensive fieldwork to arrive at these answers.

- David Brown, of the Fairfield Foundation, and KWCHS Board Member

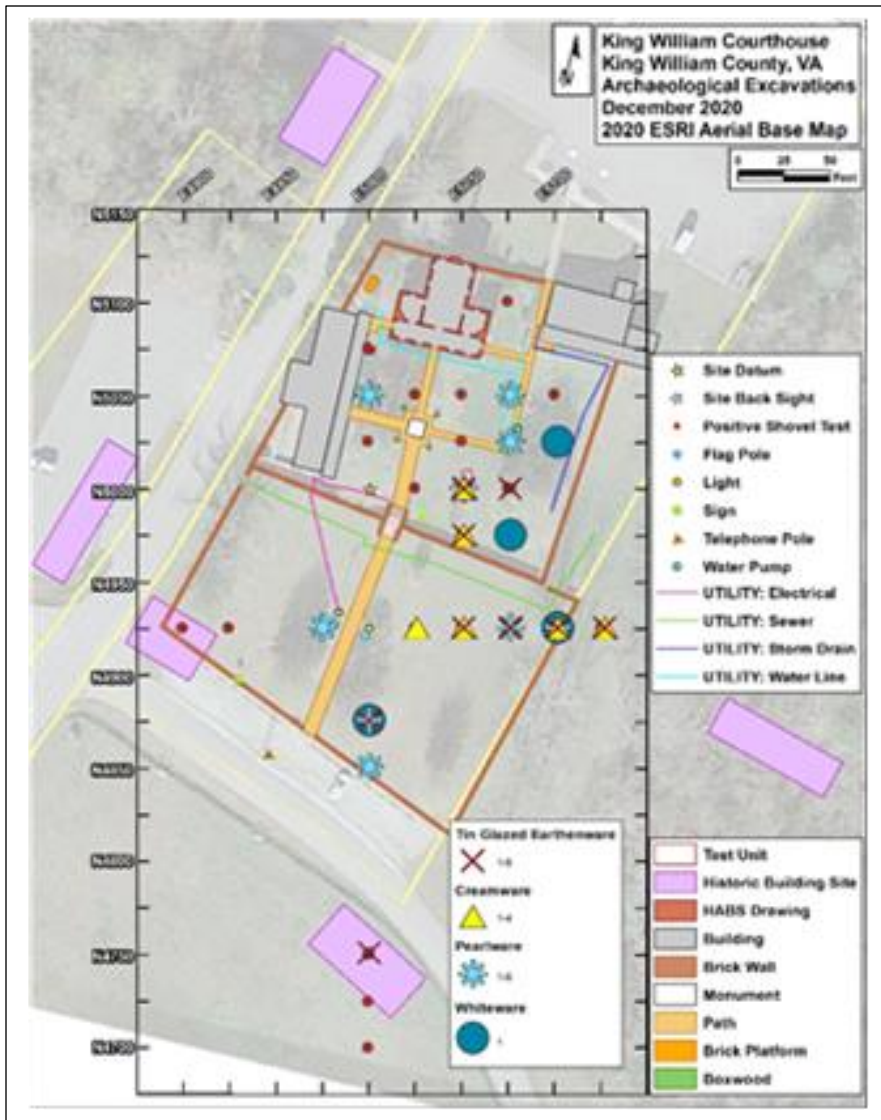


The three maps on pages 5 and 6 illustrate the excavations and findings of the archaeological survey.

This map illustrates the locations of shovel test pits and test units where we recovered artifacts and examined soil layers that reflect the complex past of the courthouse area. Also illustrated are the current buildings and a handful of approximate locations for no-longer extant buildings.



The second map is an overlay of the 1863 Campbell map and the county's current tax parcels (pink). This provides us with a sense for the number and general location of buildings that made up the courthouse area in the mid-19th century.



This map displays some of the artifacts we recovered during excavations and their locations. Ranging from the 18th century (delft, creamware) through the 19th century (pearlware, whiteware), these ceramics illustrate how the courthouse was both a center of government and social gatherings across several centuries.

RECORD BOOKS 1 AND 2 AVAILABLE

19 King William County Record Books were saved from the late 19th century fire that destroyed our clerk's office. Record Book 1 has been transcribed and published, and is available for purchase. The transcriptions are fully key-word searchable and one can read the original pages opposite the transcriptions, seeing the words as they were written. Work on Books 2 and 3 is now underway. The transcription is available on a thumb drive and is copyrighted, password protected and print restricted. Each copy costs \$50 with the proceeds supporting the King William County museum. For purchase, please email kwhs@kingwilliamhistory.org.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Annual Membership expires twelve (12) months after your last dues payment.

Family \$30

Student \$10

Individual \$20

Lifetime \$250

Artifact Level \$150+

Pamunkey/Mattaponi Level \$300+

Thomas T. H. Hill Benefactor Level \$500+

Corporate Sponsorship \$500+

Mail to:

King William Historical Society
P.O. Box 233
King William, VA 23086

MEMBER NEWS

The Museum Council, led by Chris Harris, has been busy in recent months working to improve the King William County Historical Museum. Plans are underway to replace flooring, improve software for some of the exhibits, and repair some displays. An exciting project for the museum is a new Colonial era tavern exhibit. Hopefully some of the artifacts found during the recent archaeological surveys can be showcased.

In addition, handsome wood shelving is being installed in the research room. This will help with secure storage of artifacts and research materials. A desk, printer and fast access to the internet will help with research as well. We will keep you informed of progress and plans to reopen the Museum.

*The King William Museum is closed
now for renovations.
Located at 227 Horse Landing Road,
King William, Virginia*



People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them.

- James Baldwin

