



A Window onto the Matthew Jones House

Courtney Birkett, RPA
Fort Eustis Cultural Resources, Fort Eustis, Virginia
Center for the Environmental Management of Military Lands

Introduction

Matthew Jones built the house that bears his name in the early eighteenth century. Originally built of wood, the house was soon upgraded to brick. Over the years additions were made to the house: a porch tower and rear shed room in the eighteenth century and a full second floor in the late nineteenth century.



The Matthew Jones House is located on Fort Eustis, in Newport News, Virginia.



The original steeply pitched roofline of the Matthew Jones House is visible in this view of the eastern elevation. In 1893 the house was remodeled from 1½ to a full two stories.

In 1980, archaeologists from the College of William and Mary conducted archaeological investigations at the Matthew Jones House. However, the areas they excavated were so disturbed by modern construction, destruction, and regrading that the project was ended after only six days (Graham et al. 1991:12). Ten years later, the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research (WMCAR) excavated inside the

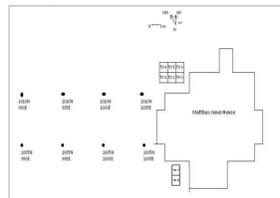
basement and adjacent to the house foundation as part of the research for development of a preservation plan for the Jones house. A builder's trench and several postholes were identified (Graham et al. 1991: 29-34).

In 2014 and 2015, as part of a project to improve the drainage around the house, the Fort Eustis Cultural Resources staff excavated several shovel tests and test units in the yard of the house to assess the integrity and research potential of the archaeological sources.

Methods

In 2014 eight shovel tests were excavated in the west lawn of the Jones house and six 1-x-1-m test units were excavated north of the northwestern corner of the house so that the stratigraphy could be assessed in advance of improvements to the drainage.

In 2015 two additional 1-x-1-m test units were excavated south of the southwestern window of the house with the goal of discovering whether any evidence of the eighteenth-century occupation remained.



Plan of excavations at the Matthew Jones House.

Results

All the shovel tests except for the two closest to the Matthew Jones House were disturbed and consisted mostly of fill. This is almost certainly because of the modification of the surrounding landscape done by the military, especially the construction of a railroad approximately 23 m (75 ft.) west of the house and the associated grading of the surrounding soils. The two shovel tests immediately adjacent to the house contained intact soils and artifacts such as sherds of whiteware, window glass, colorless vessel glass, and nails. Interestingly, one also contained a Spanish real coin dating to 1692.

In the test units north of the house, over half of the artifacts were architectural in nature. This included cut and wire nails, window glass, brick, mortar, plaster, and fragments of roofing tile.

The brick fragments recovered were overwhelmingly handmade. The bricks used in the construction of the Matthew Jones House were handmade, as were two outbuildings that once stood nearby. In the late nineteenth century, these outbuildings were demolished and the bricks used to construct the second story of the house. The brick encountered during excavation probably dates to this episode.

The identifiable nails were fairly evenly split between cut nails and wire nails, with slightly more cut nails. Wire nails began to be used in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and the mix of the two types fits with the proposition that the architectural debris is related to work that happened at the turn of the century.

Almost 600 fragments of window glass came out of these six test units, some of which were quite sizeable. The Moir window glass formula (Moir 1987) was used to see what date it would yield. The formula is $(84.22 * M) + 1712.7$ where M is the mean thickness in millimeters of the window glass fragments. A date of 1896 was obtained using this formula, suggesting that the window glass is associated with the 1890s renovation of the house.

Ceramic type	Beginning	End	Mean date	Number of sherds
Buckley	1720	1775	1748	1
Creamware	1762	1820	1791	4
Pearlware	1775	1830	1803	3
Amular ware	1785	1840	1813	2
Yellowware	1830	1940	1885	20
Whiteware	1820	2000	1910	131

Table of sherd types with dates based on DAACS 2006.

Four features identified in the test units north of the house appear to be varieties of posthole. Feature 2 lines up with the corner of the house in such a way that it could be part of an enclosure behind the house, similar to postholes found during WMCAR's 1990 excavations, which were interpreted as being part of a fenceline. Alternatively, some or all of these features could be postholes related to scaffolding used during the renovations.

When exploration moved to the south side of the house with Test Units 7 and 8, artifact types remained the same, and artifacts were found in similar proportions. For instance, whiteware still represented 83% of the ceramic sherd, and the numbers of cut and wire nails were roughly equal. Since fewer test units were excavated in this area, fewer artifacts overall were recovered, but although lesser in number it was more of the same.



Tree-related Feature 9 in Test Units 7 and 8.

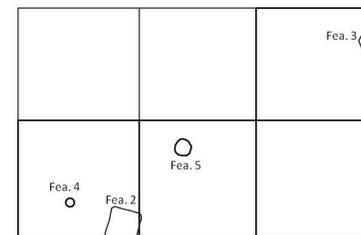


1940s photo of tree in the vicinity of Feature 9.

No postholes were encountered in the southern test units. Of the three features identified, one was thought to be simply a concentration of artifacts and one may be a depression that was filled with architectural debris. The third feature was determined to be related to tree roots. HABS photos from the 1940s show a small tree in the approximate location of this feature.



The western yard of the Matthew Jones House slopes down to the military railroad. Construction of the railroad caused great disturbance to the soils surrounding the house.



Features identified in Test Units 1-6.

Conclusions

The vast majority of the artifacts recovered in 2014 and 2015 appear to have been deposited at the time the Matthew Jones House was being renovated to have a full second story. Since the renovations were already known from historic sources, this was not a startling discovery.

The hope when these excavations began was that artifacts or features illustrating the eighteenth-century use of space would be found. Unfortunately for archaeologists, the area surrounding the house seems to have been kept swept clean.

The most significant finding was that, despite the extensive disturbance from twentieth-century construction in the area, the stratigraphy of the soils closest to the house is intact. The potential for future discoveries in other parts of the yard remains.



Works Cited

- Birkett, Courtney J.
2014 *Limited Archaeological Testing of Site 44NN4, the Matthew Jones House, at Fort Eustis, Virginia*. JBLE-E Cultural Resources, Fort Eustis, Virginia. Submitted to U.S. Air Force, Joint Base Langley-Eustis-Eustis, Virginia.
- DAACS
2006 *Mean Ceramic Date -Type File*. The Digital Archaeological Archives of Comparative Slavery <http://www.daacs.org/wp-content/uploads/mcdtypes.pdf>. Accessed June 24, 2014.
- Graham, Willie, William J. Davis, Donald W. Linebaugh, Leslie McFaden, and Vanessa Patrick
1991 *A Preservation Plan for the Matthew Jones House, Fort Eustis, Virginia*. William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research, Williamsburg, VA. Submitted to Telemarc, Inc., Vienna, VA.
- Moir, Randall W.
1987 *Socioeconomic and Chronometric Patterning of Window Glass. In Historic Buildings, Material Culture, and People of the Prairie Margin*, edited by David H. Jurney and Randall W. Moir pp. 73-81. Richland Creek Technical Series vol. V. Southern Methodist University, Dallas Texas.