



Phase II and Phase III Archaeological Database and Inventory

Site Number: 18DO419

Site Name: Harriet Tubman Birth Site

Prehistoric

Other name(s) Brodess Farm

Historic

Unknown

Brief Description:

late 18th-19th century plantation, Harriet Tubman's birthplace, mid-19th century African-American site

Site Location and Environmental Data:

Maryland Archaeological Research Unit No. 3

SCS soil & sediment code OtA, EmA

Latitude 38.4546

Longitude -76.0463

Physiographic province Eastern Shore Coastal P

Terrestrial site

Underwater site

Elevation m

Site slope 0-2%

Ethnobotany profile available Maritime site

Site setting

-Site Setting restricted

-Lat/Long accurate to within 1 sq. mile, user may need to make slight adjustments in mapping to account for sites near state/county lines or streams

Topography

- Floodplain
- High terrace
- Hilltop/bluff
- Rockshelter/cave
- Interior flat
- Hillslope
- Upland flat
- Unknown
- Ridgetop
- Other
- Terrace
- Low terrace

Ownership

- Private
- Federal
- State of MD
- Regional/county/city
- Unknown

Nearest Surface Water

Name (if any) Green Brier Swamp

- | Saltwater | | Freshwater | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Ocean <input type="checkbox"/> | Stream/river <input type="checkbox"/> | Estuary/tidal river <input type="checkbox"/> | Swamp <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Tidewater/marsh <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Lake or pond <input type="checkbox"/> | Spring <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Minimum distance to water is 0 m

Temporal & Ethnic Contextual Data:

- Paleoindian site
- Woodland site
- Archaic site
- MD Adena
- Early archaic
- Early woodland
- Middle archaic
- Mid. woodland
- Late archaic
- Late woodland
- Unknown prehistoric context

- Contact period site
- ca. 1820 - 1860 Y
- ca. 1630 - 1675
- ca. 1860 - 1900 Y
- ca. 1675 - 1720
- ca. 1900 - 1930 Y
- ca. 1720 - 1780
- Post 1930 Y
- ca. 1780 - 1820 Y
- Unknown historic context
- Unknown context

Ethnic Associations (historic only)

- Native American
- Asian American
- African American Y
- Unknown
- Anglo-American Y
- Other
- Hispanic

Y=Confirmed, P=Possible

Site Function Contextual Data:

Prehistoric

- Multi-component
- Misc. ceremonial
- Village
- Rock art
- Hamlet
- Shell midden
- Base camp
- STU/lithic scatter
- Rockshelter/cave
- Quarry/extraction
- Earthen mound
- Fish weir
- Cairn
- Production area
- Burial area
- Unknown
- Other context

- Historic
- Furnace/forge
- Military
- Post-in-ground
- Urban/Rural? Rural
- Other
- Battlefield
- Frame-built
- Domestic
- Transportation
- Fortification
- Masonry
- Homestead
- Canal-related
- Encampment
- Other structure
- Farmstead
- Road/railroad
- Townsite
- Slave related
- Mansion
- Wharf/landing
- Religious
- Non-domestic agri
- Plantation
- Maritime-related
- Church/mtg house
- Recreational
- Row/townhome
- Bridge
- Ch support bldg
- Midden/dump
- Cellar
- Ford
- Burial area
- Artifact scatter
- Privy
- Educational
- Cemetery
- Spring or well
- Industrial
- Commercial
- Sepulchre
- Unknown
- Mining-related
- Trading post
- Isolated burial
- Other context
- Quarry-related
- Store
- Bldg or foundation
- Other context
- Mill
- Tavern/inn
- Possible Structure
- Black/metalsmith

Interpretive Sampling Data:

Prehistoric context samples Soil samples taken

Flotation samples taken Other samples taken

Historic context samples Soil samples taken N

Flotation samples taken N Other samples taken



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Diagnostic Artifact Data:

Projectile Point Types			
Clovis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Koens-Crispin	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hardaway-Dalton	<input type="checkbox"/>	Perkiomen	<input type="checkbox"/>
Palmer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Susquehana	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kirk (notch)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vernon	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kirk (stem)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Piscataway	<input type="checkbox"/>
Le Croy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Calvert	<input type="checkbox"/>
Morrow Mntn	<input type="checkbox"/>	Selby Bay	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guilford	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jacks Rf (notch)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brewerton	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jacks Rf (pent)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Otter Creek	<input type="checkbox"/>	Madison/Potomac	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Levanna	<input type="checkbox"/>

Prehistoric Sherd Types

Marcey Creek	<input type="checkbox"/>	Popes Creek	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shepard	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keyser	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dames Qtr	<input type="checkbox"/>	Coulbourn	<input type="checkbox"/>	Townsend	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yeocomico	<input type="checkbox"/>
Selden Island	<input type="checkbox"/>	Watson	<input type="checkbox"/>	Minguannan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Monongahela	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accokeek	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mockley	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sullivan Cove	<input type="checkbox"/>	Susquehannock	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wolfe Neck	<input type="checkbox"/>	Clemson Island	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shenks Ferry	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Vinette	<input type="checkbox"/>	Page	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moyaone	<input type="checkbox"/>		
				Potomac Crk	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Historic Sherd Types

Earthenware				Ironstone		Staffordshire		Stoneware	
Astbury	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jackfield	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tin Glazed	<input type="checkbox"/>	English Brown	<input type="checkbox"/>
Borderware	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mn Mottled	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	Whiteware	207	Eng Dry-bodied	<input type="checkbox"/>
Buckley	<input type="checkbox"/>	North Devon	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	Porcelain	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creamware	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pearlware	11		<input type="checkbox"/>			Rhenish	<input type="checkbox"/>
								Wt Salt-glazed	<input type="checkbox"/>

All quantities exact or estimated minimal counts

Other Artifact & Feature Types:

Prehistoric Artifacts			
Flaked stone	2	Other fired clay	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ground stone	<input type="checkbox"/>	Human remain(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stone bowls	<input type="checkbox"/>	Modified faunal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fire-cracked rock	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unmod faunal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other lithics (all)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Oyster shell	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ceramics (all)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Floral material	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rimsherds	<input type="checkbox"/>	Uncommon Obj.	1
		Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Prehistoric Features

Mound(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Storage/trash pit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Midden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Burial(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shell midden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ossuary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Postholes/molds	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unknown	<input type="checkbox"/>
House pattern(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Palisade(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Hearth(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Lithic reduc area	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Lithic Material

Jasper	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fer quartzite	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sil sandstone	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chert	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chalcedony	<input type="checkbox"/>	European flint	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rhyolite	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ironstone	<input type="checkbox"/>	Basalt	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quartz	<input type="checkbox"/>	Argilite	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unknown	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quartzite	<input type="checkbox"/>	Steatite	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Sandstone	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Dated features present at site

Historic Artifacts			
Pottery (all)	1255	Tobacco related	4
Glass (all)	948	Activity item(s)	22
Architectural	323	Human remain(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Furniture	<input type="checkbox"/>	Faunal material	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Misc. kitchen	245
Clothing	3	Floral material	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal items	4	Misc.	91
		Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Historic Features

Const feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Privy/outhouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	Depression/mound	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unknown	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foundation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Well/cistern	<input type="checkbox"/>	Burial(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Cellar hole/cellar	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trash pit/dump	<input type="checkbox"/>	Railroad bed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Midden in east ditch	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hearth/chimney	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sheet midden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Earthworks	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Postholes/molds	<input type="checkbox"/>	Planting feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mill raceway	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Paling ditch/fence	<input type="checkbox"/>	Road/walkway	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wheel pit	<input type="checkbox"/>		

All quantities exact or estimated minimal counts

Radiocarbon Data:

Sample 1: +/- years BP Reliability Sample 2: +/- years BP Reliability Sample 3: +/- years BP Reliability

Sample 4: +/- years BP Reliability Sample 5: +/- years BP Reliability Sample 6: +/- years BP Reliability

Sample 7: +/- years BP Reliability Sample 8: +/- years BP Reliability Sample 9: +/- years BP Reliability

Additional radiocarbon results available



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External Samples/Data:

Collection curated at

Additional raw data may be available online

Summary Description:

The Harriet Tubman Birth Site (18DO419), also known as the Brodess Farm, is a late 18th-19th century plantation, the possible site of Harriet Tubman's birth, and a mid-19th century African-American site. It lies at the edge of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge marsh, west of Bucktown, in Dorchester County. The ground in the project area is low and often wet, no more than 2-3 m above sea level. Soils at the site are primarily Othello silt loams and Kentuck soils. The site is currently no-till farmed in soybeans and corn although according to the current owner, it has been plowed deeply on at least one occasion with a chisel plow.

The site was investigated over 2 seasons in 2001 and 2002 by students of Washington College and with the help of several volunteers, and in 2003 by Goodwin Associates. The research was part of a larger collaborative effort between Washington College and the Maryland Historical Trust to broaden the current understanding of farm and plantation life in the Eastern Shore. The goal of the research was to locate and record evidence of the Brodess Plantation as it existed in the early 19th century. The project area encompassed approximately 8 acres in the center of a 168 acre tract, part of the holdings of Blackwater Farms, Inc., owned by the Malkus family.

Extensive archival research was conducted prior to field work. The Brodess Farm was the location of the plantation on which the famous Harriet Tubman was believed to have been born. The Brodess family purchased the property in 1792. Tubman was born in the early 1820's (possibly 1822 or 1825), and escaped in 1849. The existing house on the property does not date to the period when Harriet Tubman was at the site. It was moved to this location early in the 20th century (ca. 1920) when the property passed out of the hands of the Brodess family.

Prior to subsurface testing a GIS map analysis, which pinpointed the possible location of the Brodess farm structures, was conducted. This involved overlaying the GIS image of the survey area today on top of the 1877 map that indicated a structure at the site. The site was then divided into the west field and the east field. Between the two fields, a 20th century house and a single-story structure/outbuilding currently stand. There is a drainage ditch that runs along the east side of the structures. It was in the west field where ground anomalies pointed to the possibility of a structure. Prior to fieldwork a grid was established at 10 m intervals across the project area. A concrete marker was installed at grid point N110/E150 to form a permanent marker at the site.

Before any excavation began, the surface examination of the field to the east was completed. Artifact concentrations were mapped. Additionally, a magnetometer survey was done in the west field. It was done with reference to the site grid, with parallel transects laid out at 2 m intervals. A block totaling 106 m east-west by 140 m north-south was surveyed across the area where the GIS analysis indicated a house in 1877. The results from this block were confused and hard to interpret. More intense and focused patterns were observed in the second block. The second block was adjacent to, and south of, the first block and measured 80 m X 80 m. Areas of interest identified from the results of the magnetometer survey were prioritized for subsurface testing. Once the surface of the site had been examined, subsurface testing was done over the course of the field seasons by using shovel test pits (STPs), 1 or 2 m square excavation units, and through the use of larger clearing excavations.

In 2001, a total of 48 STPs were excavated at 10 m intervals around the existing structures and to the east of the structures. STPs 1-43 were dug primarily in the southwest corner of the field where the surface survey found higher concentrations of artifacts. Artifacts were confined to the plowzone and consisted of modern and older household/farmyard refuse. STPs 44-48 were dug in the grassy yard, in an arc around the north and west sides of the standing structures. The stratigraphy in STPs 44-48 was more complex and variable than that found in STPs 1-43. This area around the standing structures was more fully examined in 2002 and 2003 (see below). After the STPs were dug, six 1 m X 1 m excavation units were laid out with placement determined by the research goals, data from map analysis, and the results of the magnetometer survey, surface survey, and STPs. Unit 1 was placed in the east field in an attempt to locate outbuildings and to investigate the deep plowzone identified in the STPs in this area. Units 2-6 were placed in the west field in order to explore magnetic anomalies and to locate evidence of the main Brodess plantation house.

The results from the 2001 field investigations revealed a number of artifacts had been deposited on the surface by plowing in the east field. Most of the artifacts observed were found in an area that extended about 20 m east from the ditch that separates the two fields, in the southwest corner of the east field. The items were mainly brick fragments, with a concentration of oyster shell to the north. There were no obvious early or pre-1900 artifacts in the east field. The concentration may indicate that there were outbuildings here (the current owners mentioned that there were a number of outbuildings near the standing house of no age or significance that were torn down), or the distribution may reflect materials brought to the surface during excavation of the drainage ditch. In Unit 1, a large piece of corrugated steel/metal roofing was encountered and the excavators suggested that it was deposited during the excavation of the adjacent drainage feature. However, it is likely that most of the distributions reflect artifacts that have been moved vertically by the plow from their original point of deposition. No subsurface features were identified in 2001. The only unusual finding was that the grassy area immediately around the house was apparently subjected to plowing. This may indicate that at some point between the destruction of the Brodess structures and the placement of the new house (between 1907 and ca. 1920) the area was used for agricultural activity.

During the 2002 field season, 12 units (Units 7-18) were laid out. Unit 7 was a roughly T-shaped unit in the west field made up of thirty-one 2 m² blocks and a single 1 m² block. Units 8 and 9 measured 2 m north-south by 4 m east-west in the west field near the standing structures. Unit 10 measured 2 m north-south by 10 m east-west, also in the west field near the standing structures. Units 11 and 12 were both 2 m² and placed in the west field southwest of the standing structures. Unit 13 measured 6 m north-south by 2 m east-west in the west field. Unit 14 was 2 m² in the grassy yard just south of the standing house. Unit 15 was 2 m² and situated in the grassy area south of the standing structures and between the east and west fields. Unit 16 measured 2 m north-south by 1 m east-west and was placed just east of the standing house in the narrow grassy area between the house and the ditch. Unit 17 was a thin T-shaped unit in the grassy yard north of the standing house (no size given). Unit 18 measured 1 m north-south by 2 m east-west and was located in the grassy yard south of the standing house between the house and the single -story structure/outbuilding. All excavated soil was screened through ¼" mesh in areas well away from the excavation area. The only exception was that not all plowzone was screened but was instead randomly sampled.

The results from the 2002 field season revealed only 1 structural feature. This was a posthole identified in Unit 15, but it is clearly of either 20th century origin or from the last half of the 1800's. Any other features encountered during the investigations turned out to be either natural (rodent hole or root stains) or related to agricultural activity. Units 14, 16, 17, and 18 were excavated on the 4 sides of the standing house. The stratigraphy in these units was more complex than that encountered in other units and the artifact densities were much higher than encountered elsewhere. A brick feature was encountered in Unit 16, on the east side of the house. This feature was interpreted as a coincidental grouping of materials (bricks) or bricks outlining a garden bed or path. Within



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Unit 18, placed to the rear of the house, a brick wall base was located below a level of more recent material. The brick was loosely laid in 3 courses of running bond, underlain by a bottom course of headers. The fill on either side of the brick likely dates to 1890 or later; however, it does include artifacts that date to a considerably earlier period, include wrought nails and pearlware, and thus the fill may represent the demolition of an earlier structure(s) or clean-up of a yard area littered with material from a prior demolition. The presence of wrought and cut nails suggests that these remains came from the original Brodess structures. Beneath these fill levels and on either side of the brick wall, artifacts date to the late 18th and early 19th centuries and no later was found. However, the excavation did not go deep enough to confirm if these lower levels were also subjected to plowing in the historic past. Given the complexities of the site and with the evidence that the house yard had been plowed in the past, it was determined that a different approach to the site was needed.

In 2003, a new strategy for 18DO419 addressed the need to systematically and completely survey the house yard and the field to the east and southeast. Professional archeologists were called in to complete surface collection and the excavation of STPs in the house yard and along the southern edge of the fields, adjacent to the woods. A total of 3.19 acres in the east and west fields were collected in 3 m squares. Fragments of brick, shell, mortar, and slag smaller than 5 cm in size, and modern debris were counted and discarded. It appeared that the largest concentration of artifacts were to the east and south of the present house, with additional scatters to the west. The eastern field had a much higher artifact density than the western field, with densities highest along the edge of the modern drainage ditch and in close proximity to the extant structures. Again, the material recovered dated predominately to the late 19th and 20th centuries. A 50 cm X 50 cm test unit was placed in the eastern field within a fairly dense concentration of oyster shell noted there during the surface collection. Only 2 strata were identified and there was no evidence of shell, any artifacts, or features beneath the plowzone.

Following the surface collection, 76 STPs were dug at 5 m intervals (37 around the house, 13 in the grassy area behind the outbuilding, and 26 along the edge of the wooded area south of the fields. The STPs produced few artifacts (and those relatively recent in date). However, 2 areas of interest were identified. In the vicinity of the site datum to the northwest of the current house, there was evidence of a possible buried A horizon. There were small quantities of whiteware, pearlware, shell, brick, bottle glass, and window glass. Another area of interest was near STP 94 where there was evidence of a disturbed stratigraphic sequence, but artifacts included whiteware, oyster shell, bottle glass, and miscellaneous metal fragments.

A total of 1,950 artifacts were collected in the course of investigations at 18DO419. The 22 activity-related items include 6 fragments of lamp glass, 1 fence staple, 6 electric fence insulator fragments, 1 battery part, 2 strap pieces, 1 bicycle pedal, 1 spark plug, and 4 pieces of non-electrical wire (1 aluminum). There were 323 architectural items including 2 shards of window glass, 2 asbestos tiles, 203 brick fragments, 1 fire-brick, 4 pieces of drain tile, 8 bolts, 1 handle, 1 hook, 1 door lock, 2 wire nails, 93 cut nails, 2 spikes, 1 utility pipe, and 2 galvanized gutter spikes. There were 3 clothing items including 1 shell button, 1 metal belt buckle, and 1 shoe insole. There were 1,500 kitchen-related items including 897 bottle glass fragments, 3 table glass shards, 36 milk glass fragments, 4 creamware sherds, 1 ironstone sherd, 2 pearl/whiteware sherds, 11 pearlware sherds, 24 redware sherds, 65 stoneware sherds, 207 whiteware sherds, 5 yellowware sherds, 2 metal jar lids, 48 animal bone fragments, and 195 oyster shell fragments. There were 91 miscellaneous objects including 10 unidentified glass shards, 10 unidentified ceramic sherds, 1 indeterminate object, 1 piece of slate, and 69 indeterminate pieces of metal. There were 4 personal items including 3 ceramic figurines (2 porcelain), and 1 key. There were 4 tobacco items including 2 clay pipe bowl fragments and 2 clay pipe stem fragments. Three prehistoric items included 2 chert pieces (flakes?) and 1 atlatl dart. In addition to those items that were collected, a further 2,698 objects were recorded but not collected. These are predominately 20th century/modern items but include 995 oyster shell fragments and 703 brick fragments.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from archeological investigations at the Harriet Tubman Birth Site (18DO419)/Brodess Farm. First, it appears the Brodess plantation house once stood in the area where the current house stands. Second, the higher density of material in the eastern field near the drainage ditch may be a result of clearing debris from the occupation site, and dumping at the edge of the adjacent field. This dumping may have included material from older structures as well as modern household debris. Third, it may never be possible to say with certainty that Harriet Tubman was born at the site. However, whether Tubman was born or not at the site does not materially affect the archeological or historical significance of the site because 18DO419 was her home during her formative years. The site is also representative of smaller plantation farms that characterize this part of the eastern shore during the 19th century, a resource not well-studied or understood. The site represents a significant cultural resource. More directed excavations and architectural research in and around the current house have the potential for eliciting information relevant to the time of the Brodess plantation and Harriet Tubman's life.

External Reference Codes (Library ID Numbers):

95001146