



Phase II and Phase III Archaeological Database and Inventory

Site Number: 18DO486

Site Name: Handsell

Prehistoric

Other name(s) MIHP # D-127

Historic

Brief Description:

Late 18th century standing brick farmhouse, Late Woodland unknown

Unknown

Site Location and Environmental Data:

Maryland Archaeological Research Unit No. 3

SCS soil & sediment code FmA,FmB

Latitude 38.5122 Longitude -75.8120

Physiographic province Eastern Shore Coastal P

Terrestrial site

Underwater site

Elevation m Site slope 0-5%

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

Ownership

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

Nearest Surface Water

Name (if any) Unnamed tributary of Chico

Saltwater

Ocean

Estuary/tidal river

Tidewater/marsh

Spring

Freshwater

Stream/river

Swamp

Lake or pond

Spring

Minimum distance to water is 389 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

Contact period site ca. 1820 - 1860

ca. 1630 - 1675 ca. 1860 - 1900

ca. 1675 - 1720 ca. 1900 - 1930

ca. 1720 - 1780 Post 1930

ca. 1780 - 1820

Unknown historic context

Unknown prehistoric context

Unknown context

Ethnic Associations (historic only)

Native American Asian American

African American Unknown

Anglo-American 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

Urban/Rural? Rural

Domestic

Homestead

Farmstead

Mansion

Plantation

Row/townhome

Cellar

Privy

Industrial

Mining-related

Quarry-related

Mill

Black/metalsmith

Furnace/forge

Other

Transportation

Canal-related

Road/railroad

Wharf/landing

Maritime-related

Bridge

Ford

Educational

Commercial

Trading post

Store

Tavern/inn

Military

Battlefield

Fortification

Encampment

Townsite

Religious

Church/mtg house

Ch support bldg

Burial area

Cemetery

Sepulchre

Isolated burial

Bldg or foundation

Possible Structure

Post-in-ground

Frame-built

Masonry

Other structure

Slave related

Non-domestic agri

Recreational

Midden/dump

Artifact scatter

Spring or well

Unknown

Other context

Interpretive Sampling Data:

Prehistoric context samples

Soil samples taken N

Flotation samples taken N

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		Koens-Crispin	
Clovis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Perkiomen	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hardaway-Dalton	<input type="checkbox"/>	Susquehana	<input type="checkbox"/>
Palmer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vernon	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kirk (notch)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Piscataway	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kirk (stem)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Calvert	<input type="checkbox"/>
Le Croy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Selby Bay	<input type="checkbox"/>
Morrow Mntn	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jacks Rf (notch)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guilford	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jacks Rf (pent)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brewerton	<input type="checkbox"/>	Madison/Potomac	<input type="checkbox"/>
Otter Creek	<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	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staffordshire	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stoneware	
Astbury	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jackfield	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tin Glazed	<input type="checkbox"/>	English Brown	<input type="checkbox"/>
Borderware	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mn Mottled	<input type="checkbox"/>	Whiteware	<input type="checkbox"/>	Eng Dry-bodied	<input type="checkbox"/>
Buckley	<input type="checkbox"/>	North Devon	<input type="checkbox"/>	Porcelain	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creamware	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pearlware	<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		Other fired clay	
Flaked stone	<input type="checkbox"/>	Human remain(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ground stone	<input type="checkbox"/>	Modified faunal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stone bowls	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unmod faunal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fire-cracked rock	<input type="checkbox"/>	Oyster shell	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other lithics (all)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Floral material	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ceramics (all)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Uncommon Obj.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rimsherds	<input type="checkbox"/>	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

Fer quartzite	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sil sandstone	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jasper	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chalcedony	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chert	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ironstone	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rhyolite	<input type="checkbox"/>	Argilite	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quartz	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Steatite	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quartzite	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sandstone	<input type="checkbox"/>

Dated features present at site

Historic Artifacts		Tobacco related	
Pottery (all)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Activity item(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass (all)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Human remain(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Architectural	947	Faunal material	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Furniture	<input type="checkbox"/>	Misc. kitchen	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Floral material	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Clothing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Misc.	11024
Personal items	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

coal, slag, plastic, Styrofoam

Historic Features

Const feature	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Trash pit/dump	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Railroad bed	<input type="checkbox"/>	possible porch pier footing, brick porch piers, pit	
Hearth/chimney	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sheet midden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Earthworks	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Postholes/molds	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Planting feature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mill raceway	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Paling ditch/fence	<input type="checkbox"/>	Road/walkway	<input 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: 0 +/- 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 Handsell Site (18DO486) consists of the archeological deposits associated with an extant late 18th-19th century plantation house west of Vienna in Dorchester County. The site is situated on a roughly 3.05 m (10 ft) rise (maintained as grass) surrounded by agricultural fields. Chicone Creek is located to the south and west and the marshy floodplain of the Nanticoke River to the east. Soils at the site are well-drained Fort Mott loamy sands.

The standing 1½ storey brick manor house, Handsell (also known as the Webb House), is a late 18th century brick house bearing the name of a 1665 land grant. The original 484 acre grant has been in the Webb family since 1892. Handsell is significant for its architecture, as an example of a substantial Georgian manor house of the late 18th century. Its form, 1½ storeys over a raised English basement, is unusual in the region. The house retains evidence of a kitchen in the basement which apparently did not communicate directly with the upper story, a rare plan feature; the remnant of a beehive oven is also noteworthy (the only example on the Eastern Shore). Some rebuilding of exterior walls, and interior finishes dating from c. 1810-20, reflect the effects of a fire in the early 19th century. The house has remained vacant for some 70+ years, but despite deterioration and vandalism retains sufficient integrity to inform a comprehensive and accurate restoration.

A group known as the Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance (NHPA) was formed in 2005 with the goal of purchasing Handsell and restoring it to serve as a historic interpretive center open to the public. The NHPA acquired the house a few years later with the assistance of a grant from the Maryland Historical Trust for part of the purchase money. This grant required that a preservation easement be granted to the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) and terms of the easement stipulated that archeological studies would take place before any earth-moving activities are conducted on the property.

Archeological investigations at 18DO486 began in 2008. A grid aligned to the extant house was established over a 30.5 m (100 ft) area surrounding the structure. A very limited amount of work was conducted in 2008. Essentially, a narrow trench 61 cm wide and 1.524 m long (2 feet wide and 5 feet long) was excavated by a professional archeologist from the University of Virginia. Unfortunately, no notes for this dig are currently available, but it is known that excavation was not completed to subsoil.

Late in the summer of 2008, without professional supervision, a group of local Boy Scouts excavated at the northwest corner of the standing building. No layers were separated, but excavated soil was screened and a number of artifacts were collected. The excavation came down on a piece of foundation wall that articulates with the standing structure and clearly indicates the house was, at one time, larger than the present footprint. Artifacts recovered included a variety of materials dating from the 19th and 20th century and possibly the 18th century. Without the benefit of stratigraphic excavation, no interpretation is possible as to datable layers or features.

During the summer of 2009, a local archeological consultant was called in to take over management of the excavations at 18DO486 and see to more systematic investigation of the site. The 2009 excavations are by far the most extensive to-date and entailed geophysical and geomorphological work, surface collection, shovel test pitting, and test unit excavations. Overall, 10,123 artifacts (cataloged in the table above as miscellaneous objects) were recovered either during the 2009 excavations at Handsell or were cataloged by the 2009 principal investigator when examining the earlier collections that were made.

In an effort to cultivate the interest of the Boy Scouts who had work at the site the previous summer, the troop was invited back to the site in 2009 to serve as volunteers and to continue the corner dig that they had started. Their initial excavation pit(s) were expanded to a formal 1.524 X 1.524 m (5 X 5 ft) unit on grid, mostly by expanding the excavation on its north edge. This test unit was excavated in stratigraphic levels and all soils were screened through hardware cloth.

The excavations at the corner of the house reveal that information was clearly lost due to unsupervised excavation. Stratigraphic separation of the artifacts recovered here does not allow for a clear dating of the layers. The foundation wall was a major find, however, clearly indicating the house at one time had a larger footprint than it did today.

Also in the summer and fall of 2009, the property was surveyed using ground penetrating radar, a controlled surface collection, and shovel test pie (STP) excavations. Unit excavations were also carried out in the basement of the manor house and (in a more limited way) in the yard areas around the house.

The geophysical survey was conducted using ground penetrating radar (GPR) in 4 large test areas on the property: Area 1 – the road side of the house, Area 2 – the rear of the house, Area 3 – a large area outside the property fence, and Area 4 – a small area in front of the house. The GPR data was collected using a Terra SIRch SIR-3000 GPR System utilizing a 400 MHz antenna. Scans with the GPR unit were run over multiple perpendicular traverses of each test area at 61 cm (2 ft) intervals between scanning runs. The maximum depth of investigations was approximately 2.44 m (8 ft) below grade due to soil conditions and potential groundwater.

Little of significance was noted in Area 1. To the rear of the house, in Area 2, a large subsurface anomaly was found which may correspond to the original footprint of the house. A second, much smaller anomaly was noted at the north end of this test area. Its function is unknown. A single, quite large anomaly was picked up along the eastern edge of Area 3, northwest of the house. Information from a previous owner suggests that this was the location of a former smokehouse. An anomaly was also noted in Area 4, just to the east of the front steps. Its size and signature suggest that it is a buried concrete or gravel slab.

Surface collection was carried out following plowing, discing, and subsequent rainwashing of the agricultural fields around the house. Surface collection was done with the aid of a total station and all found artifacts were mapped in exact provenience. A total of 1,848 artifacts were collected, with brick fragments making up slightly over half of these artifacts (947 pieces). The various broad categories of artifact were mapped in an attempt to identify activity areas at the site or chronological change over time in the use of particular locales. Dense areas of architectural debris were noted in areas where dependencies are visible on a 1938 aerial photo. Otherwise, however, the distribution of surface artifacts provided few clues to the possible locations of buried features. The interpretation is that there is a general scatter of materials, with brick everywhere. With the re-construction of significant portions of the house after a catastrophic fire, it is not surprising that brick would be scattered around.

Grass covered areas of the parcel were surveyed with 83 shovel test pits (STPs) placed on a 6.1 m (20 ft) grid. Tests were conducted in two episodes and a 3.05 m (10 ft) disjoint in the grid occurred. STP work revealed that domestic artifacts were somewhat more concentrated near the rear of the house. Areas along the road were nearly devoid of cultural materials. A platted septic drain field (part of the restoration effort) is north of the house near the road and this is



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fortunate in its placement as little in the way of cultural material is there. This is also true of an area where wayside signage has been installed.

Should there be a need to place any structures with deep soil disturbance to the rear of the house and on the riverside, archeological investigations should be done first. At least one structural feature was encountered in a shovel test in this area. Obviously, the land close to the house (where the bulk of the domestic materials were encountered) contains a remnant deposit from the original house with intact cultural deposits dating to the earliest period of occupation. This is the most archeologically sensitive area of the property. Further to the rear, the ground-penetrating radar indicated a probable structure (see above) and aerial photography indicates early 20th century outbuildings to the riverside of the house.

The final stage of fieldwork conducted in 2009 was the excavation of 11 formal test units. Eight 1.524 X 1.524 m (5 X 5 ft) units were placed within the basement to determine the age and function of deposits there. Outside the house, two half units (.762 X 1.524 m or 2.5 X 5 ft) were placed to intersect the original foundation wall on the south side of the house. A 1.524 X 1.524 m unit was also excavated to clear a place for a new well.

Testing within the basement indicated that all culture bearing contexts are associated with 20th century use and disturbance. Underpinning the foundation is slated to be done from the interior as part of the restoration process, and it would be necessary to remove the remaining sediment from the basement. Based on the tests it is believed that additional archeological excavations would not produce significant archeological results. The remaining sediment in the basement was to be removed and the floor (subsoil) examined for any unexpected cultural features following the conclusion of the 2009 project.

Excavation to the rear of the house, over the foundation remnant provided important data concerning the destruction and rebuilding of the house. An 1820 large cent recovered from inside what would have been part of the original basement, under the burn layer, indicates the house burned sometime after 1820. Coupled with dendrochronology dates (from the extant structure) for a ca. 1834 reconstruction, this provides a period between 1820 and 1834 during which the house was destroyed and reconstructed.

The 2009 excavations also provided some, although incomplete, information about the original footprint of the house, including the existence of additional fireplaces. The materials recovered from inside the burned basement area indicate that there is likely to be a wealth of artifacts within the structure that could provide important information about life on the eastern shore during the early 19th century. Organic materials as well as more durable goods have survived the fire. This portion of the property is clearly the most sensitive in terms of the early history of the house. Hardware, wood (charcoal) samples for speciation could be important for restoration. The original configuration of the floor plan, by estimate around 42 square meters greater than the current plan could be revealed.

Future plans for development of the property are in flux. As needs arise, archeological study will be involved to recover archeological data before it is lost to ground disturbance. The most immediate concern is foundation underpinning and what effect it might have on archeological resources. Also, it is anticipated that there will be reconstruction of entryways, both front and rear. Archeological work in these areas could potentially assist in the design of these by locating features associated with previous porches or stairs. To the rear the reconstruction may impact the deposits in the buried basement and this area will need proper archeological study prior to any earthmoving required for entryway reconstruction.

Based on the research to-date, 18DO486 appears to have at least some intact deposits. Moreover, the intact deposits to the rear of the building and within the original footprint of Handsell represent a discrete period of occupation terminated by a fire in 1820. The assemblage provides a rare opportunity to observe a snapshot in time and the household remains of a wealthy planter family on Maryland's eastern shore. The site should be considered a significant archeological resource.

External Reference Codes (Library ID Numbers):

95001898