



Phase II and Phase III Archaeological Database and Inventory

Site Number: 18PR410

Site Name: Abraham Hall

Prehistoric

Other name(s)

Historic

Unknown

Brief Description:

late 19th, 20th century social hall

Site Location and Environmental Data:

Maryland Archaeological Research Unit No. 12

SCS soil & sediment code

Latitude 39.0537

Longitude -76.8678

Physiographic province Western Shore Coastal

Terrestrial site

Underwater site

Elevation 0 m

Site slope 0

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 stream

Saltwater

Ocean

Estuary/tidal river

Tidewater/marsh

Minimum distance to water is

Freshwater

Stream/river

Swamp

Lake or pond

Spring

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

ca. 1630 - 1675

ca. 1860 - 1900

ca. 1675 - 1720

ca. 1900 - 1930

ca. 1720 - 1780

Post 1930

ca. 1780 - 1820

Unknown historic 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

social hall

Interpretive Sampling Data:

Prehistoric context samples

Soil samples taken

Flotation samples taken

Other samples taken

Historic context samples

Soil samples taken

Flotation samples taken

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	38	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 type="checkbox"/>	Ironstone	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rhyolite	<input type="checkbox"/>	Argilite	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quartz	<input type="checkbox"/>	Steatite	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quartzite	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sandstone	<input type="checkbox"/>
		European flint	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Basalt	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Unknown	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Dated features present at site

Historic Artifacts		Tobacco related	
Pottery (all)	38	Activity item(s)	9
Glass (all)	907	Human remain(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Architectural	88	Faunal material	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Furniture	<input type="checkbox"/>	Misc. kitchen	19
Arms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Floral material	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clothing	2	Misc.	255
Personal items	1	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Historic Features

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

Abraham Hall (18PR410) is a late 19th century social hall associated with the African American fraternal/social organization known as the Benevolent Sons and Daughters of Abraham. Abraham Hall (originally called Rebecca Lodge No. 6) was constructed near the end of the Reconstruction era in Prince George's County in 1889. It is located on the northeast side of Old Muirkirk Road in the center of the historic African American community of Rossville. Its secluded setting consists of woodlands to the southwest and northeast and scattered houses to the northwest and southeast. Abraham Hall is set back from the road on a 3.85-acre grassy lot with mature trees. The hall is a three-bay, two-story gable front frame lodge building with a brick foundation, wood lap siding with cornerboards, and a shake roof with a boxed cornice. A brick chimney rises from the northwest slope of the roof. Soils at the site are of the Christiana-Downer complex.

The site was first examined archeologically in 1989 as part of archeological testing conducted by the Potomac River Archaeology Survey of the Department of Anthropology, The American University, for a local architectural and planning firm. Because the interior and exterior of the structure were to be restored as a meeting and community assembly hall, archeological investigations were necessary in order to mitigate disturbance to possible cultural resources. A large, new parking lot was also proposed, and the area to be so impacted was tested to locate any activity area and/or former outbuildings or other structures.

Archival and informant interview work was conducted as part of the 1989 reconnaissance work. Abraham Hall is the earliest example in Prince George's County of a late 19th century Lodge, or Benevolent Society building for African Americans. The only other (known) surviving example, St. Mary's Beneficial Society Hall in Upper Marlboro, is a more modest one-storey example, constructed somewhat later than Abraham Hall. Abraham Hall was built in 1889 at the center of Rossville, a new community of freedmen. Twenty years earlier, local blacks had established a chapel a short distance to the west of the community on a 1/3 acre parcel of land deeded by William Minnix, a local white farmer. This log chapel, erected in 1868 on the south side of the old road to Muirkirk, was called Queen's Chapel, after Thomas Queen, one of the six church founders. Queen's Chapel became part of the Bladensburg Circuit of the Washington Conference of Methodist Churches; it was a religious and social center for the black farmers and laborers of the area.

In 1886, the Equity Court of Prince George's County ordered the division and sale of the real estate of the late Mark Duvall of Vansville. A 24.8 acre parcel of Duvall's land adjoined Queen's Chapel on the east. This parcel was surveyed by William H. Latimer and divided into 12 unequal lots along the north side of the Muirkirk road. Within a year, the 12 lots were purchased by the families of local African-Americans, most of whom were employed as laborers at the Muirkirk Iron Furnace. By 1889, structures had been erected on all but one lot. Two of the new owner-residents, Thomas Mattews and (K)notley Johnson had been among the 6 founders of the Queen's Chapel. Another, Augustus Ross, gave his name to the community.

One of the buildings erected in 1889, and the only one which was not a residence, was the Rebecca Lodge #6 (Abraham Hall), a two-storey frame structure built on the largest, most centrally-located of the lots. The owner of this lot and structure was the Benevolent Sons and Daughters of Abraham, a fraternal organization which provided emergency financial assistance to members. The Rebecca Lodge had been chartered in 1877, and its charter members were already members of Queen's Chapel. Through membership in Rebecca Lodge, members were assured financial assistance for emergencies as well as death benefits, thus being provided a kind of insurance otherwise unavailable to blacks during this period.

The meeting house of the Rebecca lodge came to be known as "Abraham Hall". In 1889 the structure was assessed to have a value of \$550, and was probably built by John W. Jackson, a contractor and builder from Laurel who is known to have built at least two other buildings in Rossville that year. The hall served not only as a meeting place of the Benevolent Society, but also as a place of worship after Queen's Chapel burned in the 1890's. It continued that function until a new Queen's Chapel, a small frame building, was completed in 1901. Abraham Hall also served as a schoolhouse before the construction of Muirkirk School circa 1922. The hall was also the scene of many camp meetings for the congregation of Queen's Chapel and other local churches. The structure stood empty from 1976 until 1989 when the renovation work was begun.

Fieldwork at the site consisted of the excavation of 180 shovel test pits (STPs) and three formal test units. A series of 10 transects was laid out, covering the yard area of the hall and the area to be impacted by the proposed parking lot. These transects were placed 4.57 meters (15 ft) apart, and STPs were excavated every 3.05 meters (10 ft). Judgementally placed STPs were also used in some areas around the formal test units. Each STP was 30.5 X 30.5 X 30.5 cm (1 X 1 X 1 ft) in size and was dug in stratigraphic levels. All 3 formal test units were 91.44 cm (3 ft) long X 76.2 cm (2.5 ft) wide and were dug using observable natural or cultural stratigraphy until sterile subsoil was reached. Formal Test Unit 1 was placed contiguous to the south wall of Abraham Hall, Test Unit 2 was placed at the right corner of the front porch, and Test Unit 3 was located southwest of the hall adjacent to the remains of the base of a former gazebo that was used in historic times. All soil was hand screened through hardware mesh. Record photographs were taken, and profile drawings were made where necessary.

No buried structures or features were encountered during the course of fieldwork, however artifacts were discovered which are helpful for interpretive purposes. The full artifact assemblage included 9 activity items (3 pieces of chimney glass, 3 light bulb fragments, 1 stamped pewter band, 1 axe head, and 1 possible plow blade), 88 architectural objects (72 pieces of window glass, 3 cut nails, 9 modern wire nails, and 4 shingles), 2 clothing objects (1 brass button and 1 iron button), 1 personal object (a wheat penny), 745 kitchen-related artifacts (38 whiteware fragments apparently including "porcelain" lid liners, 688 glass container shards, 3 metal bottle tops, 1 aluminum pop tab, and 15 pieces of bone) and 255 miscellaneous objects (147 unidentified glass fragments, 50 unidentified metal objects, 50 pieces of plastic, and 8 fragments of paper).

The results of archeological testing offer only small insights into the activities connected with this 19th century social hall. Most importantly, excavation revealed that the foundation of the hall itself was constructed making ingenious use of the slag from the local Muirkirk Foundry which is what enticed so many in the Rossville community to the area. Evidence was also uncovered in the test units that at least some of the hall's window panes were at one time colored, either light green or blue. Colored window glass made up over 5% of the total artifact inventory.

Formality is reflected in the artifact inventory. Most of the artifacts from the site seem to post-date the use of the structure. There are very few artifacts that are contemporary with the hall. However, this is in keeping with the very nature of the building. It was not used for domestic or work purposes and, thus, was kept cleaner and clearer of yard debris buildup. A few plain, molded, and transfer-printed whiteware dish sherds and porcelain lid liners (suggesting the presence of canned goods) and, especially, a pressed glass pitcher (one of the glass container fragments), all reflect on the nature of the building and the social activities that occurred there. Reflecting on 19th century social ware, the metal buttons would have come from a coat, sleeve, or vest and reflect more dressy attire. At



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Brief
Description:

late 19th, 20th century social hall

Unknown

the time, most shirts and underwear buttons would have been made of porcelain.

Though no features were encountered at the site, no evidence of widespread disturbance were described in the full site report. The site is likely to retain significant research potential related to the lives of African Americans at the end of the Reconstruction era in Prince George's County, especially in the area immediately surrounding the hall's foundation. The site should be considered a significant archeological resource and additional mitigation efforts should be undertaken should future construction threaten the site.

External Reference Codes (Library ID Numbers):

00006647, Site Files