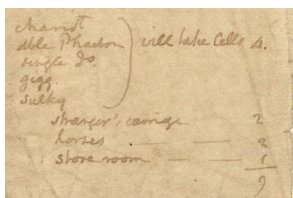


# Archaeological Excavations at the North Wing

by Crystal Ptacek - March 26, 2015



An unusually cold and snowy winter has not deterred Monticello's archaeologists in the quest to advance our knowledge of Jefferson's mountaintop. From November through January 2015, our intrepid crew of archaeological field assistants, led by Field Research Manager Crystal Ptacek, explored the North Dependency (now known as the North Wing), the enclosed space under the North Terrace, whose construction was completed around 1809. The terrace and dependency below it connected the main house with the North Pavilion. Documents suggest that North Dependency was essentially a garage. Jefferson designed the North Dependency to provide shelter both for visitors' carriages and horses and for his own carriages. Prior to its completion, the closest space for horses and carriages available to Jefferson and his visitors was the stable located on the far eastern end of Mulberry Row, a long walk from the main house. The North Dependency was a much more convenient spot.



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**Figure 1:** Jefferson's planned layout for the North Dependency, N540

Despite Jefferson's voluminous writings, the actual layout of the space under the North Dependency is uncertain. The stables that exist today are a reconstruction from 1940, designed by restoration architect Milton Grigg and based on the early-nineteenth century stables at John Hartwell Cocke's nearby Bremond Plantation. Grigg's use of Bremond as a model made sense, as Cocke employed many of the same skilled workers who built Monticello for Jefferson.

Grigg's restoration emphasized horse stalls. In contrast, two key Jefferson documents indicate he intended to use most of the space for carriages rather than for horses. In one of

Jefferson's plans thought to date to 1802, he specified nine "cells," or bays, for his



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chariot, double Phaeton, single Phaeton, gig, and sulky (Figure 1). Two additional bays were for “stranger’s carriages,” two for horses, and one for a storeroom ([view original here](https://www.masshist.org/thomasjeffersonpapers/doc?id=arch_N540&mode=lgImg) ([https://www.masshist.org/thomasjeffersonpapers/doc?id=arch\\_N540&mode=lgImg](https://www.masshist.org/thomasjeffersonpapers/doc?id=arch_N540&mode=lgImg))). Jefferson suggested an alternative layout in the margin of his 1809 letter to local Charlottesville merchant James Leitch that included several stables, a saddle room, and a coach room (TJ to James Leitch, 24 June 1809).

[www.s3.amazonaws.com/files/old/uploaded-content-images/n-dependency-prior-to-excavation.PNG](https://www.s3.amazonaws.com/files/old/uploaded-content-images/n-dependency-prior-to-excavation.PNG)). **Figure 2:** The North Dependency area prior to excavations and restoration in 1938



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trenches.PNG](https://monticello-www.s3.amazonaws.com/files/old/uploaded-content-images/cross-trenches.PNG)). **Figure 3:** Cross-trenches at the North Dependency in 1938

There have been two previous excavation campaigns. Prior to the North Dependency reconstruction, Grigg dug cross trenches across the area in a zig-zag pattern (Figures 2 and 3). Like his contemporary digging architects at Colonial Williamsburg, he used cross trenches in hopes of maximizing his chances of finding brick walls (for more on cross trenching at Monticello, see: [Archaeology on Mulberry Row – A Little History: Part 1](https://www.monticello.org/exhibits-events/blog/archaeology-on-mulberry-row-a-little-history-part-1/) (<https://www.monticello.org/exhibits-events/blog/archaeology-on-mulberry-row-a-little-history-part-1/>)). While a photograph shows the bags of artifacts Grigg’s workmen found, those artifacts are now missing. Grigg located what he thought was the original sill for the long-vanished frame north wall of the dependency. Forty years later, Monticello’s Archaeology Department, under the leadership of Dr. William

Kelso, sought to find evidence for a formal carriage turnaround in the yard north of the dependency.

A conjectural plan drawn by Jefferson ([https://www.masshist.org/thomasjeffersonpapers/doc?id=arch\\_N61&mode=lgImg](https://www.masshist.org/thomasjeffersonpapers/doc?id=arch_N61&mode=lgImg)) in the 1770s shows this feature. However, the lack of any archaeological evidence for it indicates it was never built.

This winter, archaeologists began by gridding the site into 5-foot excavation units or quadrats. They removed a layer of greyish sediment with a mix of nineteenth- and twentieth-century artifacts. The working hypothesis is that this layer was largely the result of Grigg’s excavations and restoration work. Below this layer, archaeologist discerned the outlines of Grigg’s backfilled cross trenches and a set of concrete-filled postholes that he designed to support partitions between the restored horse stalls (Figure 4). The postholes and trenches cut through a thin layer of organic sediment containing early to mid-nineteenth-century artifacts, pressed into the underlying decomposing greenstone bedrock that was the floor of the dependency. Archaeologists suspect that this layer documents the use of the dependency during Jefferson’s lifetime.



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quadrants.PNG](https://monticello-www.s3.amazonaws.com/files/old/uploaded-content-images/excavated-quadrants.PNG)). **Figure 4:** Archaeologist with excavated quadrats in the North Dependency



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artifacts.PNG](https://monticello-<br/>www.s3.amazonaws.com/files/old/uploaded-<br/>content-images/stable-<br/>artifacts.PNG)). **Figure 5:**

Artifacts found at the North Dependency-Stable excavations. (L-R): Cow's tooth, British stoneware vessel fragment, dark green bottle base fragment, bone utensil handle fragment; transfer printed pearlware, copper button, slate pencil.

The domestic artifacts in the layer including small sherds of transfer-printed tableware, mortar, slate and cut nails, as well as American stoneware storage vessel, green bottle glass, a copper button, animal bone (from meals), and a utensil fragment (Figure 5) raise the possibility that enslaved domestic servants accompanying Jefferson's visitors slept and ate in the dependency. A second but not mutually exclusive hypothesis is that the area became a dump for trash from the main house when the dependency roof collapsed after Jefferson's death.

A major goal of the current fieldwork was to identify evidence for partitions. There was none, indicating that the partitions were framed on sills that sat on the ground surface. The excavation team took column samples of sediment every two and a half feet in each bay. Spatial patterns in chemical element concentrations may reveal where horses were housed as opposed to carriages (Figure 6).

Stay tuned as the archaeology field and lab teams work together over the coming months to catalog and analyze the thousands

of artifacts recovered in the excavations.



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prongs.PNG](https://monticello-<br/>www.s3.amazonaws.com/files/<br/>content-<br/>images/horseshoe-<br/>prongs.PNG)). **Figure 6:**

Archaeologist holding the prongs of two different horseshoes

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