

Limited Archaeological Testing at the Sands House

Annapolis, Maryland

Report Submitted to
Four Rivers Heritage Area

by

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Lost Towns Project



of Anne Arundel County

February 10, 2012

In May-June 2010 Anne Arundel County's Lost Towns Project conducted limited archaeological testing at the Sands House on 130 Prince George Street in Annapolis in an attempt to shed more light on the structure's early history and building sequence. This collaborative project was sponsored by the Four Rivers Heritage Area and Sands House Foundation as part a FY 10 Mini-Grant. The research design for this project was approved by Patricia Blick, Chief of Historic Preservation for the City of Annapolis.

Archaeological work was directed by Dr. Al Luckenbach, County Archaeologist and Director of the Lost Towns Project. Excavations were carried out by Lost Towns Project field director Shawn Sharpe, assistant director John Kille, and interns Josette Graham and Matt Estes. Artifacts recovered from these excavations have been processed and are stored at the Anne Arundel County Archaeology Lab located at Historic London Town and Gardens.

The Sands House is one of the oldest and most important frame houses in Annapolis and Anne Arundel County (Figure 1). This historic structure has also been referred to as "...among the most significant early frame houses in the Chesapeake region."¹ The architecture and contents of this house, which is only a few steps from City Dock, represent a unique time capsule that reflects the changing tastes and lifestyles of a family, a neighborhood, and a town.



Figure 1-Sands House, 130 Prince George Street.

Architectural experts and colonial historians have long debated the age of the Sands House, and structural and documentary evidence has raised as many questions as answers. Dendrochronological testing on the building's interior rafters provided a date of construction soon after 1681.² However, the structure's architectural elements, notably a gambrel roof, suggest a later construction date of around 1739, the point at which Dr. Charles Carroll acquired the subdivided the property.³

The 2010 Lost Towns Project excavations at the Sands House followed investigations conducted by Archeology in Annapolis in 1988. This earlier work took place within the interior of a 1786 addition in conjunction with remodeling and uncovered a pattern of postholes in proximity to the original house now standing (Figure 2).

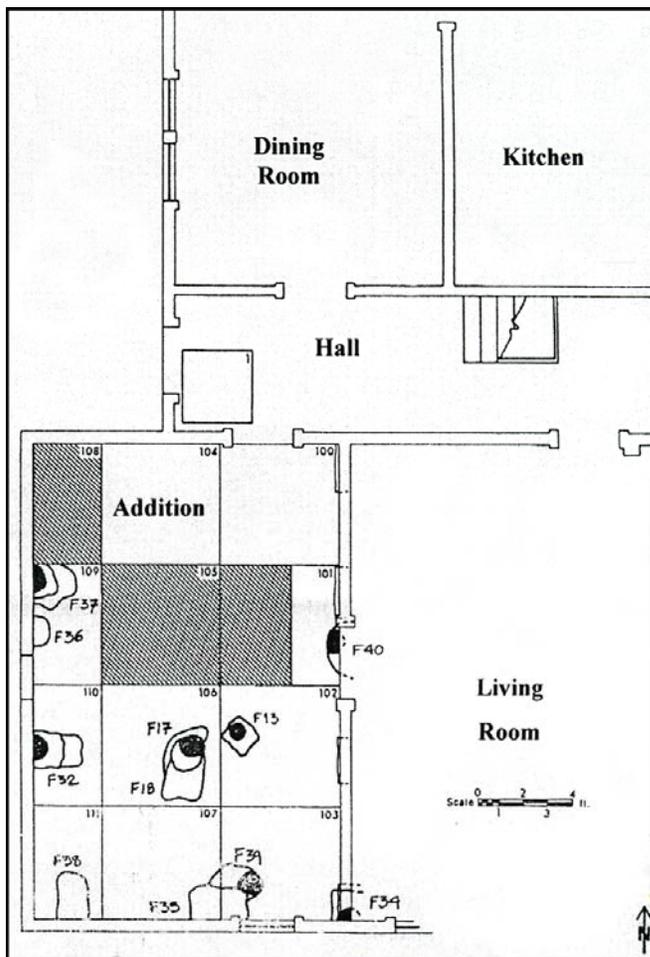


Figure 2-Archaeology in Annapolis archaeological site plan, Sands House.

The Lost Towns Project research plan allowed for the excavation of two 4.5' x 4.5' units or 20.25 sq. ft. in proximity to the house. Efforts were made to place units comparable to this total square footage, in the most strategic locations possible (Figure 3). Opportunities were severely limited due to later construction and disturbance. A single 5' x 4.9' unit was placed in a corner at the rear of the original Sands House, where it meets a ca. 1904 rear wing addition. Two smaller 2' x 4' units were placed along the west side of the house in an effort to see if the earthfast building uncovered by Archaeology in Annapolis extended outside the western confines of the 1786 addition.

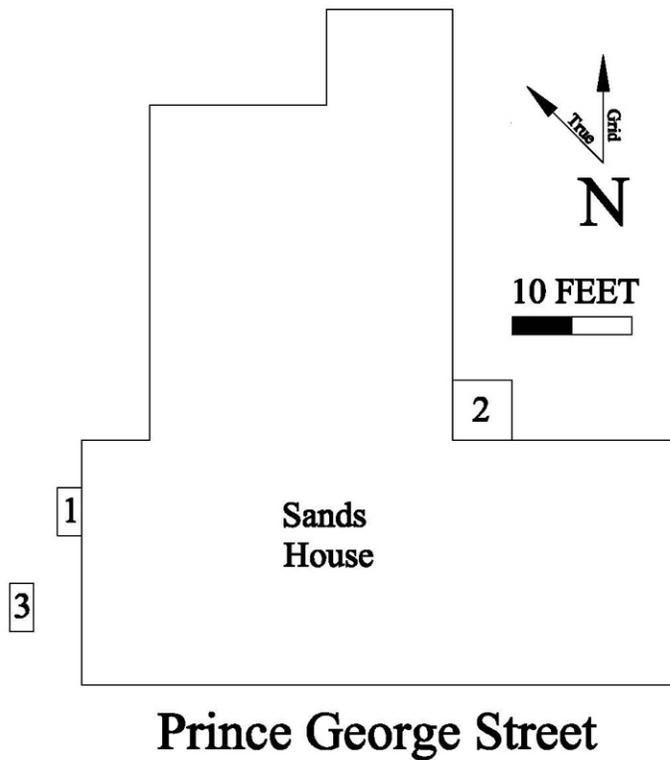


Figure 3-Site map showing location of Units 1-3 in proximity to the Sands House.

The following is a summary and analysis of archaeological work and artifacts recovered by the Lost Towns Project.

Unit 1

Unit 1 was the first of two 2' x 4' units placed along the west side of the Sands House in an effort to determine whether postholes from an earlier building discovered inside the present house extended to the exterior of the current structure.

The excavation of Stratum 1 in Unit 1 revealed a brick drain that once ran along the original foundation of the house (Figure 4). Whiteware in the overlying layer provides a date no earlier than 1820 for this drain. However, the use of sand rather than crushed oyster in the mortar between these bricks suggests that this drain probably dates to 1840 or later. Stratum 1 also contained post 1880 cut nails, oyster shell, and olive bottle glass.



Figure 4-Unit 1, Stratum 1 removed. Brick drain exposed.

Stratum 2, located directly under the drain also contained fragments of whiteware, as well as clear and olive bottle glass, porcelain, English and domestic stoneware, white

salt glaze stoneware, cut nails, slate, coal, and bone. The presence of whiteware dates this layer to post 1820, while the nail evidence suggests post 1880.

Stratum 3 contained relatively early artifacts such Rhenish stoneware, brown stoneware, porcelain, pearlware, tobacco pipes, a copper button, and bone. The presence of pearlware in this layer suggests it dates to around 1800. Subsoil was found at the bottom of Stratum 3, with no features, nor intact pre-19th century living surfaces remaining.

Unit 2

This 5' x 4.9' unit was placed at the rear of the original Sands House, in a corner where it meets a ca. 1904 rear wing addition. This unit proved to contain several deposits of 20th-century trash overlying an important 18th-century ash pit (Feature 9).

The removal of Stratum 1 revealed six 20th-century features (Features 2-7) containing trash deposited by a former occupant of the house. Upon the discovery of these late trash deposits it was learned from the present owner of the Sands House that a former occupant is known to have buried refuse in the area tested.

Artifacts found in Stratum 2, including yellow ware and whiteware, revealed a 19th-century context, while large concentrations of pearlware found in Stratum 3 indicate a circa 1800 date. Domestic debris, including shell and bone, was recovered from Stratum 4. The presence of white salt glaze stoneware and scratch blue stoneware and the absence of refined earthenware date this layer to the 1740s-1750s. The removal of Stratum 4 revealed an ash pit (Feature 9) comprising the eastern half of Unit 2.

Many types of early ceramics and animal bones were among the 18th-century domestic trash excavated from Feature 9. Lost Towns Project archaeologists tested only a small portion of this pit, in accordance with the limitations placed on this research project (Figure 5). However, a rich assemblage of artifacts was recovered.



Figure 5-Lost Towns Project archaeologist Shawn Sharpe and intern Josette Graham excavate Unit 2.

Among the artifacts found in the Feature 9 trash pit were duck, chicken, squirrel, and pig bones, including an impressive jaw bone and tusk (Figure 6).



Figure 6-Unit 2, pig jawbone in situ.

Several types of mid-18th-century ceramics were also recovered, including white salt-glazed stoneware, agated earthenware, tortoiseshell ware, dry-bodied red stoneware, and decorated porcelain (Figures 7-13). These ceramics provide a date range of late 1740s-1750s. Reference to extant examples helped make these finds come to life.



Figure 7-Fragments of agated earthenware excavated from Feature 9. Circa 1740s-1750s, Staffordshire, England.



Figure 8-Agated earthenware mug, Staffordshire, England. Circa 1740s-1750s. Courtesy, Rob Hunter, Chipstone Foundation.



Figure 9-Sherd of tortoiseshell ware excavated from Feature 9. Circa late 1740s-1750s.



Figure 10-Tortioseshell teapot, Staffordshire, England, Circa late 1740s-1750s.
(Private collection.)



Figure 11-Sherd of dry bodied red stoneware excavated from Feature 9. Circa late 1740s-1750s.



Figure 12-Dry bodied red stoneware teapots and cup and saucer, Staffordshire, England. Circa late 1740s-1750s. (Collections of Victoria and Albert Museum.)



Stratum 13-Fragments of decorated porcelain plates. Circa first half 18th century.

The depth of the pit in the area tested extended approximately 14” below the sill of the house and appears to run along the early structure’s later brick foundation (Figure 14).



Figure 14-Unit 2, South Wall Profile, Feature 9 removed.

This later brick foundation was added in 1904, when this dwelling was raised an additional eighteen inches off the ground.⁴ The house was apparently elevated as a consequence of the grading and level of the street changing over time. Additional

testing will be necessary to fully determine not only the size of the pit, but its exact relationship to the structure's original wooden sill and later brick foundation.

Unit 3

Unit 3 was another small 2' x 4' unit placed to the west of the Sands House. Unfortunately, this unit revealed an entirely disturbed context due to the placement of gas and water lines (Figure 15). Stratum 1 contained a mixture of fill, including gravel. Whiteware, glass, nail, and oyster shell. Stratum 2 contained clay and brick. Stratum 3 contained brick, as well as two large stones. Stratum 4 revealed modern intrusions, including terra cotta sewer pipe and a single gas line.



Figure 15-Unit 3, Stratum 4 removed. Sewer pipes and gas line exposed.

Public Outreach

This project successfully involved the local community in the process of exploration and discovery. Noted scholars and school children were given the opportunity to observe excavations at the Sands House, while college interns and several volunteers

actually participated in these hands-on excavations (Figures 16-18). Among the visitors who toured the excavations were Dr. Ed Papenfuse, Chief Archivist, Maryland State Archives and noted local historian Jane McWilliams.



Figure 16-Lost Towns Project archaeologist John Kille speaks to a school group visiting the site.



Figure 17-Volunteers John Tizol (left) and Sarah Sandefer (right) and Lost Towns Project intern Josette Graham (center) sift for artifacts.



Figure 18-Sands House property owner Ann Jensen (left) and local historian Jane McWilliams inspect excavations.

In conclusion, despite its limited nature, this research project has produced important clues concerning the architecture of the Sands House and the lifestyle of its occupants. This collaborative undertaking has made it possible to share the discovery of the past with people of all ages within the Annapolis community, including school children, interns, volunteers, and historians.

The excavation of two small units along the side of the Sands House documented a mid-19th century brick drain (Unit 1), as well as extensive disturbances due to the placement of sewer and gas lines (Unit 3). Evidence of 18th century material culture in a 19th-century context was discovered beneath the brick drain in Unit 1, including ceramics, glass, and architectural items.

Unit 2 placed in the rear of the house was found to contain a kitchen related ash pit comprised of many types of 18th century artifacts, notable ceramics and several types of animal bones. Noteworthy among the ceramics were fragments of refined mid-18th

century types, including agated ware, tortoise shell ware, porcelain, and dry bodied red stoneware.

Finally, the placement of the ash pit is intriguing and raises important questions. Notably, what are the dimensions of the pit? What is the relationship of the pit to the wooden sill of the early Sand's House and the later brick foundation added in 1904. Additional testing will be necessary to answer these questions. However, any further work would be the decision of the property owner, balanced against very limited available resources and local historic preservation rules and concerns.

¹Marcia Miller and Orlando Ridout, *Architecture in Annapolis: A Field Guide* (Crownsville, MD: Vernacular Architecture Forum and Maryland Historical Trust), p. 142

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. Carroll leased the Sands lot to a joiner, Joseph Evitts.

⁴ Ibid.