

THE ARCHITECTURAL REMAINS OF SAMUEL CHEW'S "LARGE AND ELEGANT MANSION"

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Abstract

This paper describes the discovery and archeological excavation of a large brick mansion built by Samuel Chew II or Samuel Chew III between circa 1694 and 1720 in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. The structure was totally destroyed by fire in 1772 and never rebuilt. Emphasis here is placed on the architectural evidence uncovered relating to this remarkable building. Four years of fieldwork by Anne Arundel County's *Lost Towns Project* revealed the floor plan of a highly elaborate, 66' by 56' masonry structure that was apparently the largest home in the Chesapeake region when it was built.

Introduction

Between 2001 and 2004, the Anne Arundel County *Lost Towns Project* conducted field investigations searching for traces of the "lost" mid-17th century town of Herrington. Supported by a generous grant from the Maryland Historical Trust, this investigation eventually resulted in the rediscovery of this town's original location (Thomas and Lindauer 1998; Moser and Kille 2002; Kille and Moser 2002; Kille 2004, 2006, 2011).

A later outgrowth of this study involved the search for the home of the Samuel Chew family, whose patriarch was one of the town's founders, principal supporters, and perhaps its most prominent citizen—Samuel Chew I. Like the earlier search for Herrington (which ultimately turned out to be located adjacent to, rather than actually on "Town Point"), the discovery of the Chew home at first appeared to be rather simple undertaking due to the existence of a map. A virtual "X" marked the spot of the structure's location.

The Hoxton map of the Chesapeake contains a 1732 inset that demonstrates how to sail in Herring Bay while avoiding shoals and shallow water. As shown in Figure 1, navigating these tricky waters involved lining up the "Great Tree" and three structures, including the homes of Samuel Chew, Sr. and Samuel Chew, Jr. The most prominent structure, the home of Chew, Sr., was shown as a two-story building with hipped roof, paired chimneys, and a cupola. The other two were shown with quite different architectural features (number of stories, chimneys, etc.), somewhat improving the confidence level that the three

drawn structures depicted some approximation of physical reality. Of course, a certain abbreviation is assumed given that the depictions are rendered in a size of less than one-half inch.

Given the modern absence of the "Great Tree," the search for this building's location (funded in part by a mini-grant from the Annapolis, London Town and South County Heritage Area, and the Ned Crandell family) proved to be far more difficult than originally imagined. Eventually, however, John Kille and Shawn Sharpe located the structure during a Phase I shovel test survey in 2006, giving it the archeological site designation 18AN1372.

The *Lost Towns Project* then began four years of excavations whose primary goal was the discovery of the building's footprint. After the excavation of over 58 five-by-five-foot test squares, that footprint has come into clear focus. The most significant discovery was that the Chew Mansion was far larger than anything anticipated before excavations began. Its basic size of 66' by 56' ranks it as among the largest known structures in the Chesapeake. In fact, given its presumed construction date of circa 1694-1718, it was apparently the largest building in either Maryland or Virginia when it was built. Samuel Chew clearly meant his home to impress the onlooker with his wealth.

Architecture

As stated, the most surprising aspect of the Chew Mansion's discovery was simply its size. It was known from the onset that we were seeking the home of a very rich individual. Five generations of Samuel Chews (I-V) had seated on the lowlands of Herring Bay beginning with the first European settlement in 1650. By 1665 they had secured ownership of the ridgeline.

Around the time the brick mansion was built, the Chew family controlled over 2000 acres, owned hundreds of slaves, and at his death in 1718 Samuel Chew II left an estate valued at 7225 pounds sterling (Maryland Prerogative Court 1718a). However, the existence of the Chew Mansion and its size had so faded from history that we did not expect to discover what was clearly one of the grandest structures in the Chesapeake region.

The main block of the building measures 66' by 56' (Figure 2). It forms what is basically a slight H-plan floor plan with the central third of the east and west façades

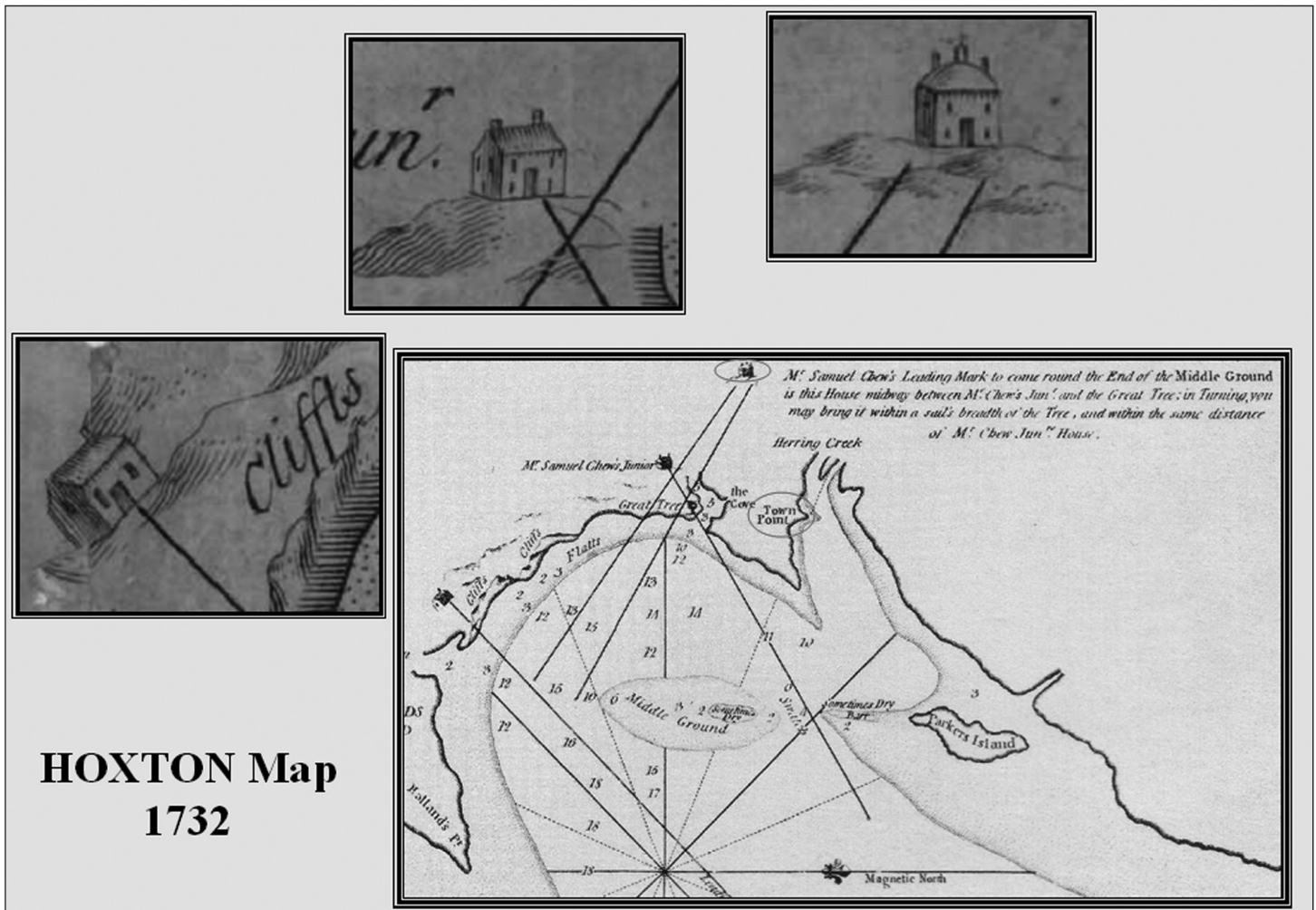


FIGURE 1. Inset (dated 1732) from the 1735 Hoxton map, showing Herring Bay navigation markers.

being indented. The principal east façade (facing the Chesapeake Bay) is recessed ten feet while the rear façade is recessed only five feet. The rear (west) façade also has a five-foot projection for a bulkhead cellar entrance (Figure 3) and elaborately constructed brick and stone subterranean drains to carry water away from the rear of the building (Figure 4). Two large H-shaped chimney bases (Figure 5) formed the support for the two prominent stacks seen in the contemporary sketch of the mansion. One basement hearth still contained abundant charcoal around an embedded iron ring (Figure 6). This feature obviously supported a large semi-permanent boiling pot of some sort (later salvaged) which is being interpreted as indicating a possible laundry location in the southeast corner of the basement.

Making adjustments for the recessed H-plan uncovered at the Chew Mansion leaves the basic footprint at 3696 square feet. Given that the building had a full cellar, and it is known from the depiction to have been two and a half stories high, the total floor space was approximately 14,784 square feet. These numbers place the Chew Mansion

among the top three largest buildings constructed during the colonial period, but its rivals (Stratford Hall and Rosewell) were both built as much as three decades after Chew Mansion. Stratford Hall (c. 1726) had a larger footprint, but at one story and a cellar, possessed much less total floor space. Conversely, Rosewell (c. 1730) had a smaller footprint, but at three full stories above a full cellar had slightly more usable floor space. Using either hypothetical construction date for the Chew Mansion—archeologically 1694, historically post-1718—the main block of the Chew structure had no rivals when it was built.

The large brick Chew structure had obviously been quite lavish. Architectural details recovered include five types of molded bricks (quarter-round, half-round, cove, ogee, and bevel; see Figure 7), which indicate a high degree of exterior embellishment. There are clues from their distribution that at least the beveled form was being used as a water table brick. One interesting beveled fragment bears the incised initials “I.B.” (J.B.), which presumably represents the mason who built the structure (Figure 8). As

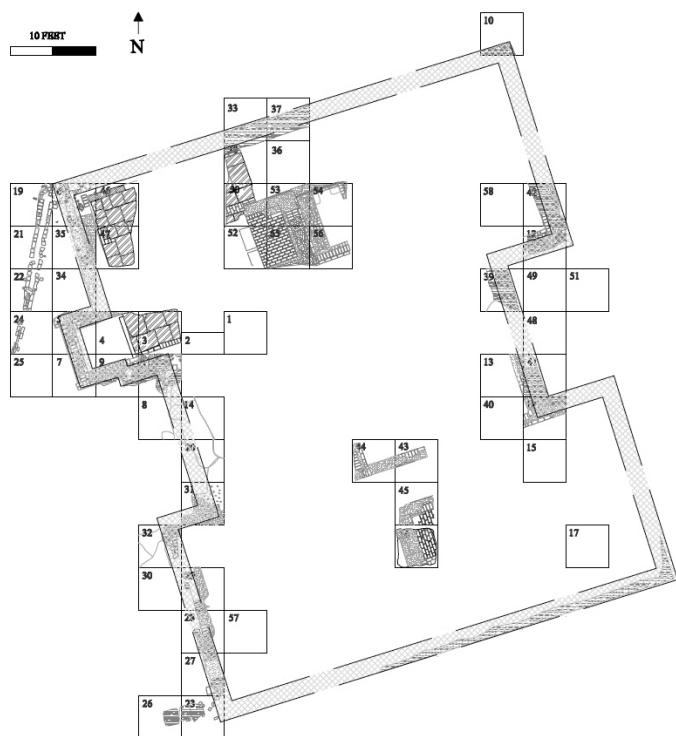


FIGURE 2. Excavated floor plan at Chew Mansion.



FIGURE 3. Bulkhead cellar entrance.

would be expected, the remaining types of molded bricks are clearly more prevalent near the principal (eastern) façade of the structure which faced the Chesapeake Bay.

In addition to English standard sized bricks in a wide variety of colors, bricks of both notably larger and smaller sizes have also been recovered. Small Dutch yellow “klinker” bricks have also been found, as well as similarly sized red bricks. The latter are possibly Dutch products



FIGURE 4. Subterranean drain at the rear of Chew Mansion.



FIGURE 5. Northern chimney base.

from the Hudson Valley area.

Interestingly, a variety of brick bonds have been noted, including English bond in the bulkhead cellar entrance (Figure 9), and what appears to be Flemish bond on a possible fallen chimney stack. The possible stack provided the first opportunity to see the excellent external brickwork that included carefully scribed joints (Figure 10). Near the bulkhead cellar entrance a fallen wall has been uncovered



FIGURE 6. Southern hearth, with in situ iron ring.



FIGURE 8. "JB"-initialed brick.



FIGURE 9. English bond used in bulkhead entrance.

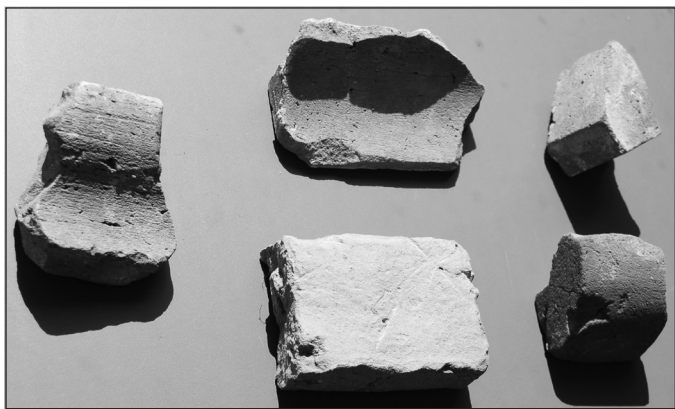


FIGURE 7. Molded brick varieties used at Chew Mansion.



FIGURE 10. Fallen chimney stack.

(like the possible stack, this wall overlays demolition rubble). This partially articulated fallen wall appears to support the use of Flemish bond on the structure. There is also evidence recovered from the demolition debris of thin "butter joints" as well as gauged and rubbed brickwork, and the use of closers in various locations.

In addition to brick masonry, a variety of quarried stone was extensively utilized in the construction of the Chew Mansion. Fragments of black and white marble, sandstone, limestone, slate, and ironstone have been recovered, as well as foundation stones made of ironstone, siltstone, and a highly fossiliferous material resembling caliche. A nose fragment from the front steps indicates that a hard, gray granitic material was used for that purpose, but again this feature appears to have been salvaged after the fire.

The polished “marble” fragments are probably what contemporaries called Purbeck or Belgian Marble, which is actually a type of hard limestone capable of taking a high polish. These occur in a variety of thicknesses inferring varying uses (Figure 11). Apparently the main entrance room of the mansion was floored with one foot square black and white marble tiles which were found in equal numbers. This feature is virtually identical to the flooring discovered at the Governor’s Palace in Williamsburg and at Rosewell near Yorktown, Virginia. Presumably this created a checkerboard floor.

In-situ stonework flooring has been uncovered at the base of the bulkhead cellar entrance where slate-like dressed stone is placed on a heavy sand base. The same stone treatment was encountered near the mid-point of the northern elevation during a search for the structure’s chimney bases—clearly evidencing an entire stone-paved room in the northwest corner of the cellar. The northwest corner of the cellar also was the apparent location of a corner closet of some sort (Figure 12) which was totally incinerated during the 1772 fire.

Further architectural embellishments are seen in the molded plaster fragments that have been recovered from the cellar fill. These presumably originated with interior room cornices from the higher floors. A particularly thick



FIGURE 12. Evidence of a corner closet in the northwest portion of the cellar.

layer of ceiling plaster was encountered under the northwest room, indicating a rather lavish application in this area, and indicative (along with artifactual evidence) of higher status activities above.

Pools of window glass, melted in the 1772 fire, were in evidence everywhere at the Chew site. Initially these were assumed to represent the remains of newly fashionable sash windows, however the discovery of a complete quarrel (Figure 13) and a window lead marked 1694 indicate that casement windows must have been present in at least some locations. It is also possible that sash windows were installed at some time after the initial construction of the mansion.

Finally, one of the most prevalent architectural embellishments recovered was the numerous fragments of tin-glazed “delftware” tiles found in proximity to both chimney bases. These tiles appear to be of English manufacture, but this is not a definite attribution, so a Dutch origin is also a clear possibility. These polychrome tiles all depict a single motif—a flower pot—but do so in a surprising number of distinct variations (Figures 14 and 15). Unfortunately, a search of the available literature failed to



FIGURE 11. Marble tiles from Chew Mansion.

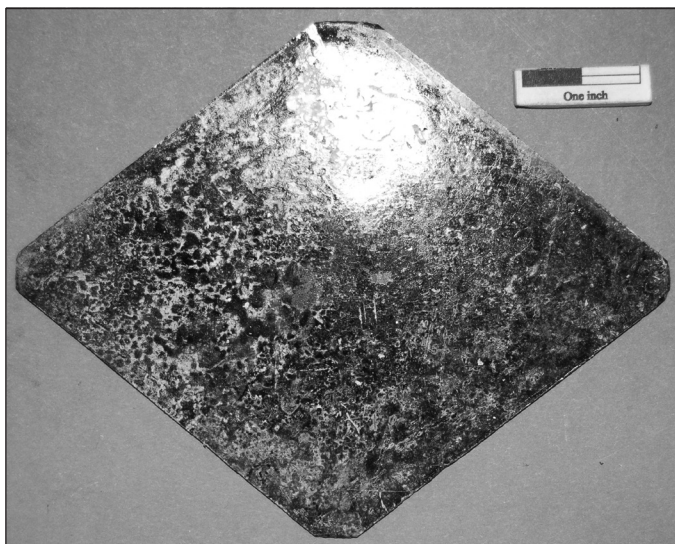


FIGURE 13. Glass quarrel.



FIGURE 15. Single polychrome tile.



FIGURE 14. Variations of Delftware flower tiles found at Chew Mansion.

produce exact analogies for any of these many variations. Although the basic flower pot motif has its origins in the early 17th century, the closest analogies are English examples which have been assigned a date of circa 1725. This might indicate a later upgrading of fireplace openings at the Chew site, support for the later hypothetical construction date, or (more likely) simply represents a lack of hard data bearing on the actual chronological placement of such tiles.

Construction Date

Despite its size and significance, the specific construction date for the Chew Mansion remains unclear. Surprisingly, direct historical evidence appears to be non-existent. Samuel Chew I first acquired the lowlands next to the bay in 1650. The overlooking ridge where the brick mansion was built was acquired by Samuel II in 1665. However, when Samuel II died in 1718 the inventory of his possessions does not take place in the excavated brick structure, but rather in a building with a porch tower (Maryland Prerogative Court 1718b). Since the brick mansion is clearly shown as a navigation landmark on a map in 1732 one might speculate from this bit of documentary evidence that construction took place around 1718, soon after Samuel Chew III assumes control of the property through inheritance.

The artifactual evidence, however, suggests a notably different story. The archeological recovery of a number of diagnostic 17th century artifacts including English Border Ware, Rhenish Brown Stoneware, Dutch yellow bricks, pewter “nipple” buttons, and a wine bottle seal of Caleb Chew (d.1696), suggest a much earlier date. Finally, the discovery of a 1694 dated window lead adds significant weight to a hypothetical construction date of circa 1695 or soon after. Perhaps Samuel II still resided in the family’s ancestral waterfront home (built by Samuel I around 1650) when he passed away, with the next generation already occupying the ridge top mansion.

Although 1695 appears to be the most logical construction date, at this point the available evidence leaves us with an unfortunately broad quarter-century possibility of circa 1695-1720 for a build date. However, the date of the building's demise is quite precise. A *Maryland Gazette* newspaper article (Figure 16) in April of 1772 reports that the "large and elegant mansion house" of Samuel Chew caught fire, and "nothing could prevent its total destruction." Naturally, the evidence of this massive fire is a dominant feature of the archeological excavations at the Chew site.

Archeological Deposits

Four basic types of archeological deposits were encountered during the excavation of the Chew site. The most prominent were thick deposits of demolition debris which filled the basement. Clearly, after the 1772 fire had destroyed the structure, its bricks had been systematically salvaged with any broken examples simply thrown into the cellar. Besides bricks and mortar this deposit contained abundant melted window glass, nails, and plaster, as well as sections of collapsed walls and chimney stacks. Artifacts that were temporally diagnostic (beyond wrought nails) were practically non-existent in this deposit.

In certain areas, a thick ash deposit was encountered below the demolition layer. This clearly represents the actual destruction layer (Figure 17). Melted window glass, the remains of lead gutters, and highly burned artifacts such as pipes and ceramics characterized this deposit. This deposit was mainly discovered thickly banked against the cellar walls or in relatively thin layers on the cellar floor.

Primary trash deposits—those still in-situ after being discarded during the life of the structure—were in very short supply. The only notable accumulation was discovered under the burned wooden steps leading to the cellar from the bulkhead entrance. This deposit contained abundant artifacts including ceramics and prolific faunal



FIGURE 17. Archeological strata at Chew Mansion.

remains, including the skeleton of a domestic cat that apparently died in the fire.

A fourth class of deposit was encountered in several locations. Apparently the cellar location last served as a trash disposal site for a nearby 1830s structure now called the Collinson House (Figure 18). These deposits were found on top of the demolition levels, and were characterized by abundant early 19th century ceramics such as mocha ware, pearlware, luster, and annular ware.

Ceramic Evidence

It is not the intent of this work to describe the totality of the artifactual collection recovered from the Chew site. That is reserved for other venues. However,

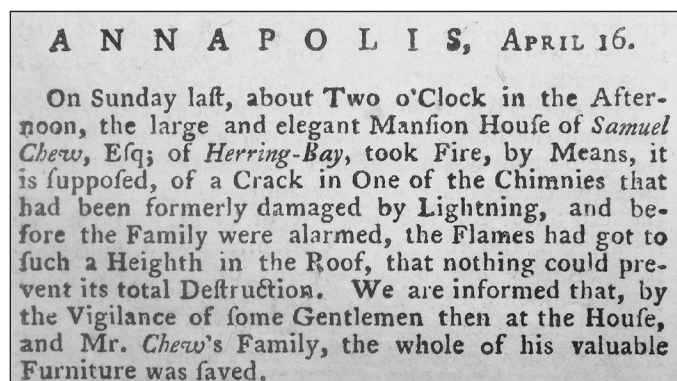


FIGURE 16. Article from the *Maryland Gazette* describing the 1772 fire at Chew Mansion.



FIGURE 18. 19th-century Collinson House.

some artifactual recoveries, notably ceramics, do serve to provide additional information concerning the mansion's architecture, particularly in regards to room use and function.

The ceramic and other artifactual evidence recovered from the Chew Mansion is quite extensive and informative. Naturally, almost all the ceramics recovered showed signs of extensive fire damage.

The total ceramics assemblage is portrayed in Figure 19. For distributional comparisons, the ceramic assemblage is divided into "table wares" such as porcelain, white salt-glazed stoneware, and creamware, and "utilitarian wares" such as coarse earthenware and utilitarian stonewares. The distribution of these categories can then

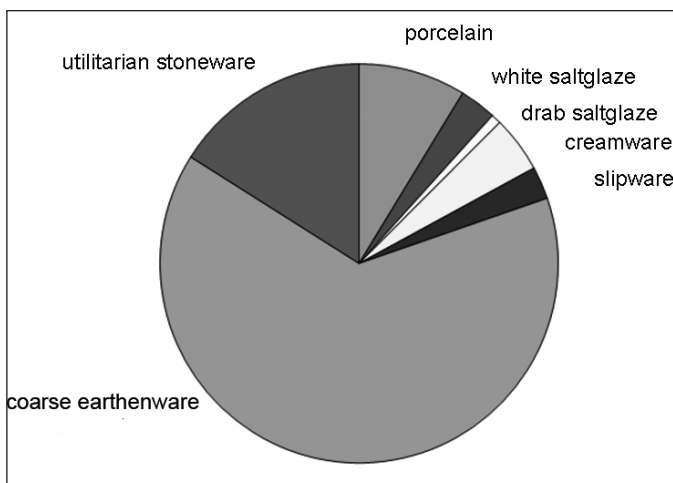


FIGURE 19. Total ceramic assemblage from Chew Mansion.

be used to help determine room use and function.

Based on the archeologically-derived footprint, architectural historians Cary Carson, Willie Graham, and Mark Wenger hypothesized a logical placement of first floor room functions (Figure 20). In this reconstruction, the front door leads to an Entry Hall (E) with marbled floor, flanked on each side by a Hall (H) and Parlor (P). Rear rooms consisted of a Chamber (C) and Dining Area (D). Access to the second floor was provided by stairs at the back end of the entry. In sum, these rooms represent a logical arrangement for a high-end structure of this period.

The distribution of table and utilitarian ceramics can then be compared to these hypothetical first floor rooms and their functions. It should be noted that some ceramics were undoubtedly derived from the basement rooms themselves, while others would clearly have originated from the rooms above as they collapsed downward in the fire. For example, while numerous fragments of large utilitarian ceramic vessels were common in the northwest cellar room around the bulkhead entrance, significant amounts of high end table wares seemed to originate from the room above. This situation represents an obvious interpretational complication.

It can be seen from the graphs (Figure 21) that both the front hall and parlor contained a mix of table and utilitarian ceramics in almost equal proportions, with utilitarian wares predominating on both instances. It is the two rear rooms which showed the most dramatic ceramic results with the dining room containing the highest concentration of table wares, and the chamber area the least. This contrast between the dining and chamber areas lends good support to hypothesized room functions.

Architectural Reconstruction

As has already been demonstrated, the Chew site excavations benefitted greatly from the active interest of a number of architectural historians from the Chesapeake region. Principal among these were Willie Graham and Cary Carson from Colonial Williamsburg and Orlando Ridout V from the Maryland Historical Trust, while a number of others are acknowledged at the end of this work.

After years of speculation concerning the excavation results, Carson and Graham enlisted the aid of Trey Tyler in creating a three-dimensional rendering of the Chew Mansion as it would have appeared before the fire. This reconstruction is based on a combination of the available archeological data and the extensive knowledge of contemporary architecture in both the Old and New Worlds assembled by Carson and Graham over their careers.

Although the digital rendering can be viewed from any angle, a single principal (east) elevation perspective of this reconstruction is illustrated in Figure 22. This shows the truly monumental H-plan structure that once dominated

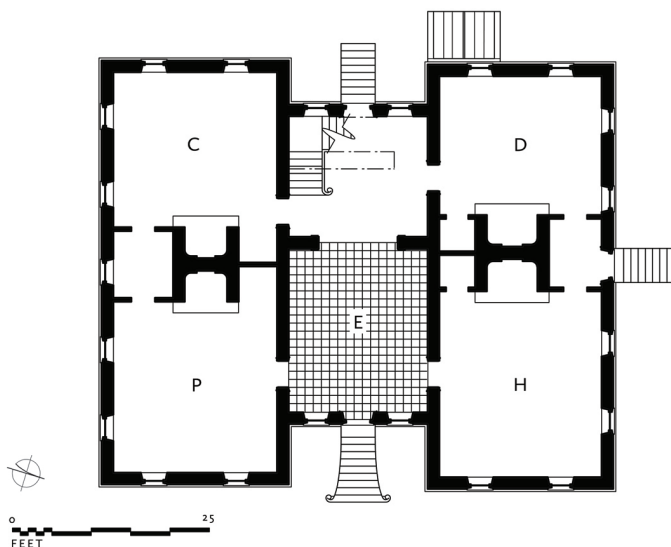


FIGURE 20. Hypothetical first floor plan. C, chamber; D, dining area; H, hall; P, parlor; E, entry hall.

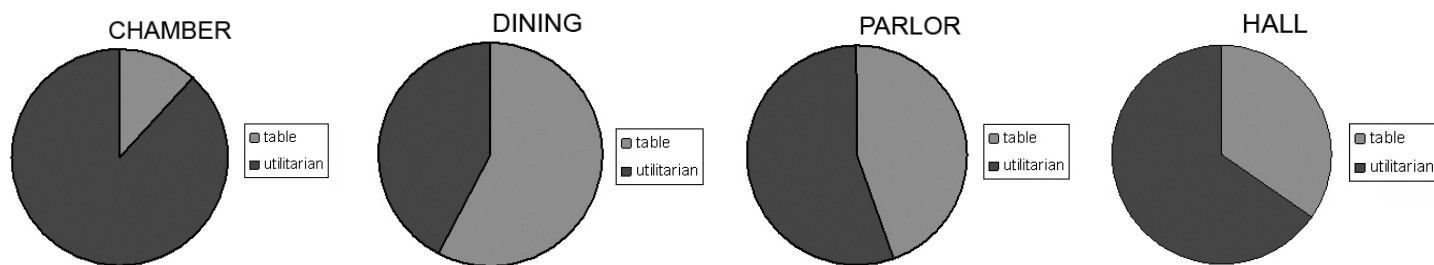


FIGURE 21. Table versus utilitarian wares from the four main first floor rooms at Chew Manor.



FIGURE 22. Rendering of Chew Mansion, east elevation.

Herring Bay. What Cary Carson calls “Samuel Chew’s very remarkable house,” was clearly an impressive expression of English upper gentry lifestyle.

Summation

Four years of archeological investigations at the Chew Mansion, and the digital reconstruction based on

their results, have allowed a perspective on a truly impressive structure for its period. At the time of its construction the Chew family was at the very top of Maryland’s wealth scale. The structure they placed on a high ridge setting was clearly intended as a demonstration of this wealth, visible even to passing ships.

Interestingly, after the 1772 fire there was no apparent attempt to rebuild and place another such grand

statement on the local landscape. The advent of the Revolutionary War and the shift in emphasis of the Chew family to Kent Island were probably both factors. But for at least three generations, the Chew Mansion stood as one of the grandest architectural expressions in the Chesapeake. That this fact was virtually lost to human memory is a clear demonstration of archeology's potential to add to our understanding of architectural history and to the lives these buildings represent.

Acknowledgements

As mentioned, the digital reconstruction project was aided immensely by the assistance of some of the best architectural historians in the country. Cary Carson, former Vice President of Colonial Williamsburg, Willie Graham, Curator of Architecture at Colonial Williamsburg, and the late Orlando Ridout V of the Maryland Historical Trust were the most prominently involved, but Carl Lounsbury and Ed Chappel of Colonial Williamsburg, Mark Wenger, Architectural Historian with MCWB Architects, and Ivor Noël Hume also added greatly to the discussion. The final 3D computer rendering of the structure was accomplished by Trey Tyler of *RenderSpere* in Richmond, Virginia. An immense thanks is due to all.

Thanks should also be extended to those that funded the Chew site excavations and various other aspects of the investigation. These include Anne Arundel County, the Anne Arundel County Trust for Preservation, the Maryland Historical Trust, the Maryland Heritage Alliance, the Four Rivers Heritage Area, the Ned Crandell family, the Ron Chew family, Cary Carson, and a number of other private donors.

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