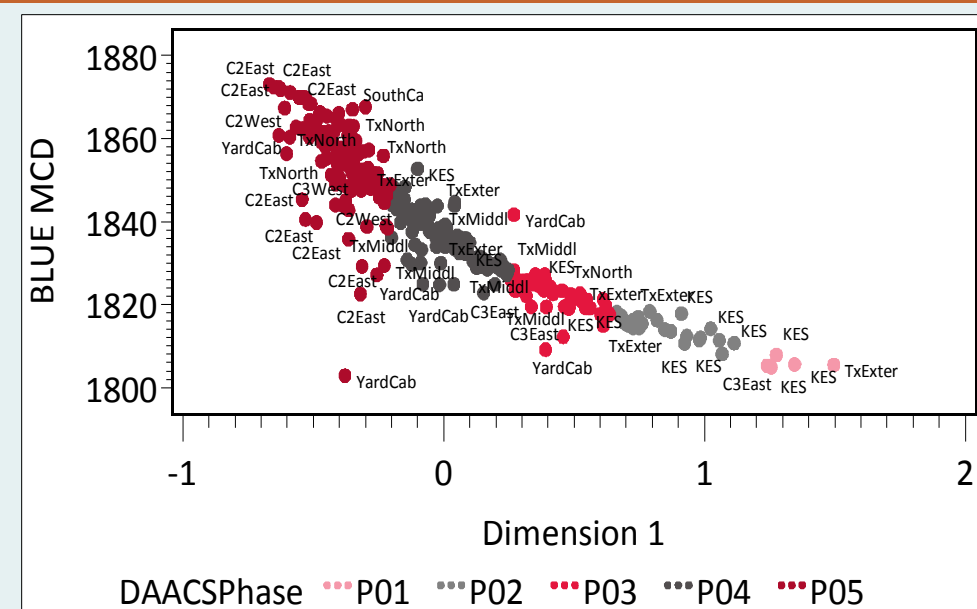


# Ceramic Variation Among Slave Quarter Sites at The Hermitage, TN

## 1. Introduction

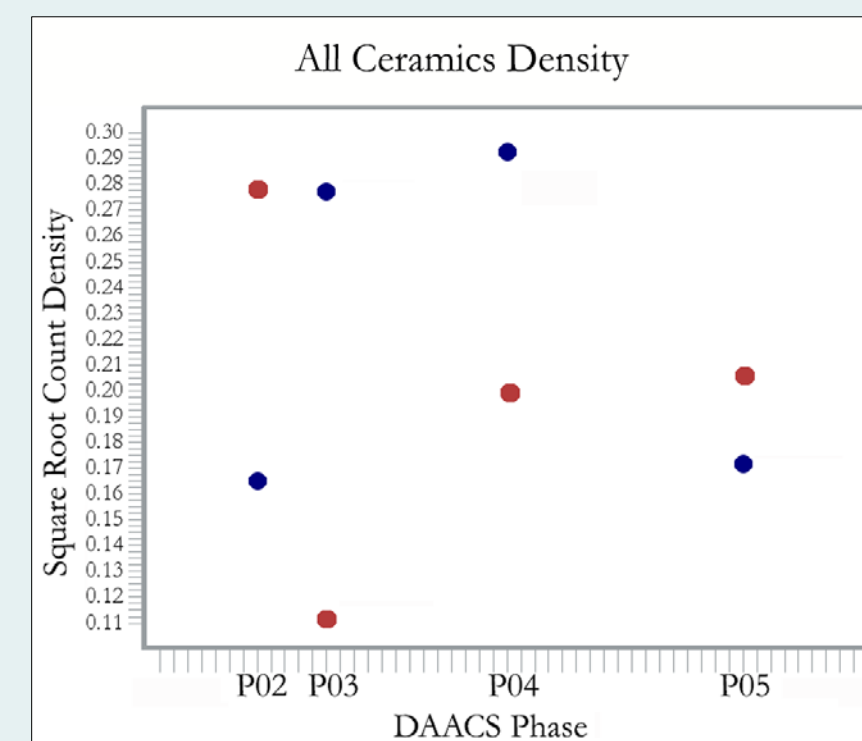
Variation in enslaved people's access to material goods at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage plantation has been interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, similarity of those goods suggests similar social strategies within the enslaved community (Thomas 1995, 1998). On the other hand, variation in those goods reflects the opportunities that some slaves exploited for specialized task work (Galle 2004).

Building on these previous studies, and the recent development of a site-wide chronology, we comparatively analyze ceramics from enslaved households to evaluate differential access to goods over time and space.



Galle et. al. (2012) established five occupational phases across seven slave dwellings at the Hermitage. The chronology is based on a fine-grained analysis of artifact and context data in The Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (DAACS, www.daacs.org).

## 2. Measuring Variation in the Assemblages



● Field Quarter  
● Mansion Backyard

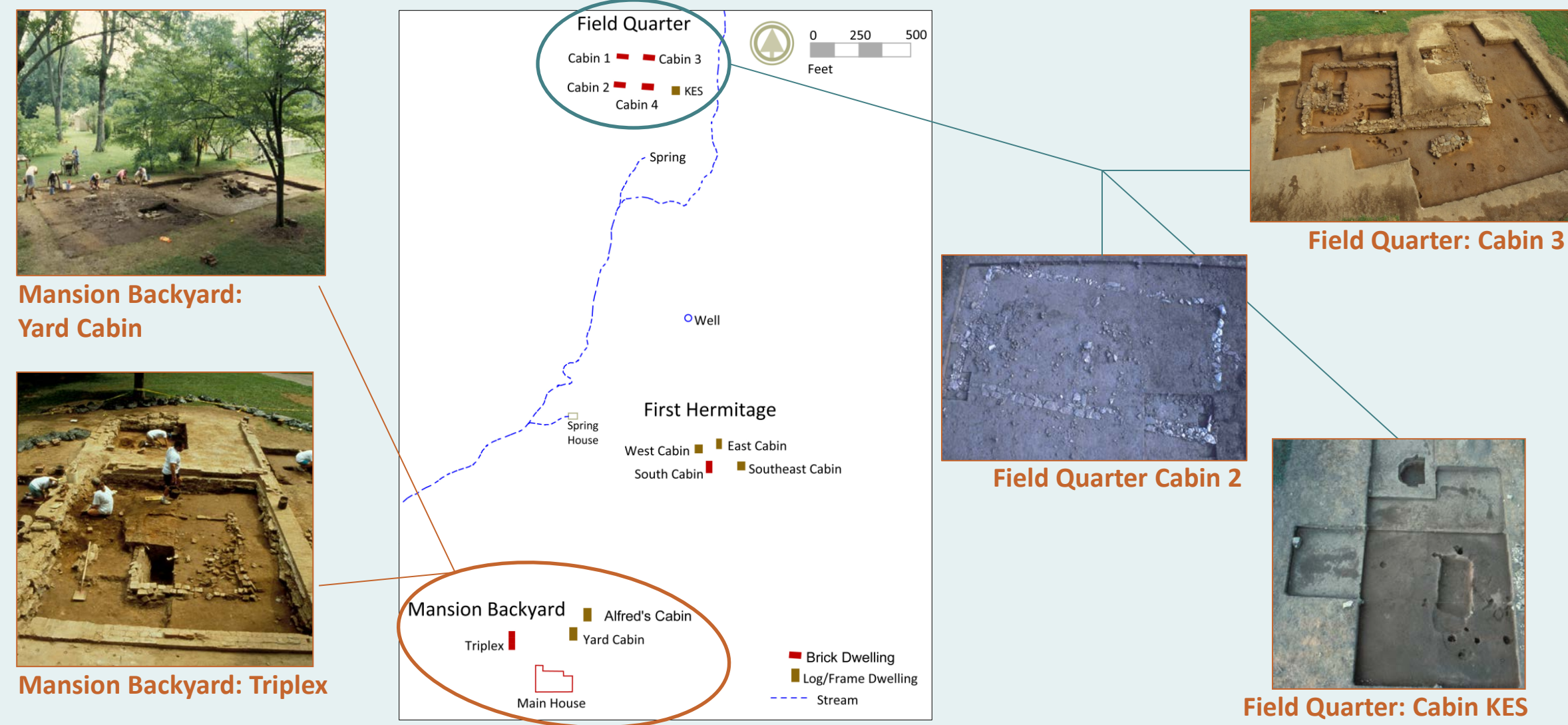
To measure variation, we use an artifact abundance index (AI), which estimates an artifact group's discard rate relative to the discard rate of a single baseline artifact group. This measurement is more reliable than relative frequencies since the baseline group either does not fluctuate with time, or fluctuates in a predictable way (Neiman et al. 2000). To determine an Artifact Group 2 for the Hermitage assemblages, we examined several artifact classes by comparing their square root densities (count per area of phased contexts) with mean ceramic dates (Galle 2006). We determined that there is no apparent trend in the count of **all ceramic sherds** over time.

We note that the perceived lack of correlation with time for a given Artifact Group 2 may be influenced by factors such as site formation processes, or site occupation span. Here we interpret the abundance indices as measurement of relative investment by enslaved people in Artifact Group 1.

$$AI = \frac{\text{Artifact Group 1}}{(\text{Artifact Group 1}) + (\text{Artifact Group 2})}$$

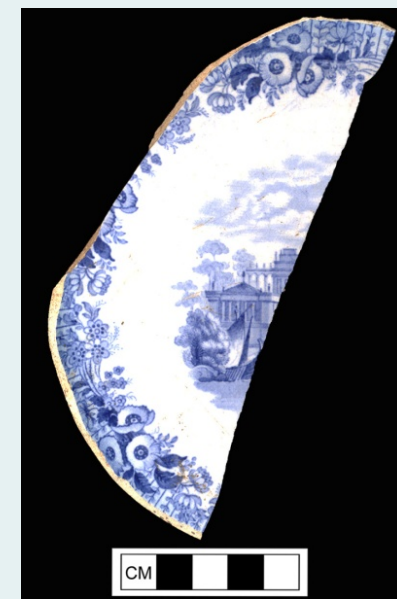
## 3. The Hermitage Assemblages

We compare ceramic assemblages from five structures located in two distinct quartering areas: the **Mansion Backyard** and the **Field Quarter**. In the early 1820s, Jackson revised the landscape of the property and expanded cotton production. His standardization scheme included the construction of a brick mansion, outbuildings, four duplex dwellings in the Field Quarter, and possibly the refurbishment of the Mansion Backyard area. These changes in plantation organization and management at the Hermitage may have led to disparate investment strategies adopted by enslaved people.



## 4. Hypotheses

Within the Hermitage spatial framework, we examine two specific attributes of ceramics that provide potential proxies for access to goods: **vessel form** and **decoration**.



We anticipate that the distribution of these attributes diverges in two ways:

- Residents living in the Mansion Backyard near the Jackson household had more opportunities to perform skilled tasks (Galle 2004), and thereby had greater access to specialized, non-essential forms, such as serving vessels, **and** to costlier decorative styles. The completion of the Jackson mansion and outbuildings in the early 1820s solidified the need for skilled labor in and around the Mansion. As a result, we expect that occupants of the Backyard consistently invested in these types of vessels over time.
- Field Quarter residents acquired fewer serving forms **and** decorated vessels relative to their counterparts at the Mansion Backyard. Increased surveillance and labor expectations after 1820 (Thomas 1995) limited the Field Quarter residents' access to all ceramics over time.

## 5. Variation in Vessel Form

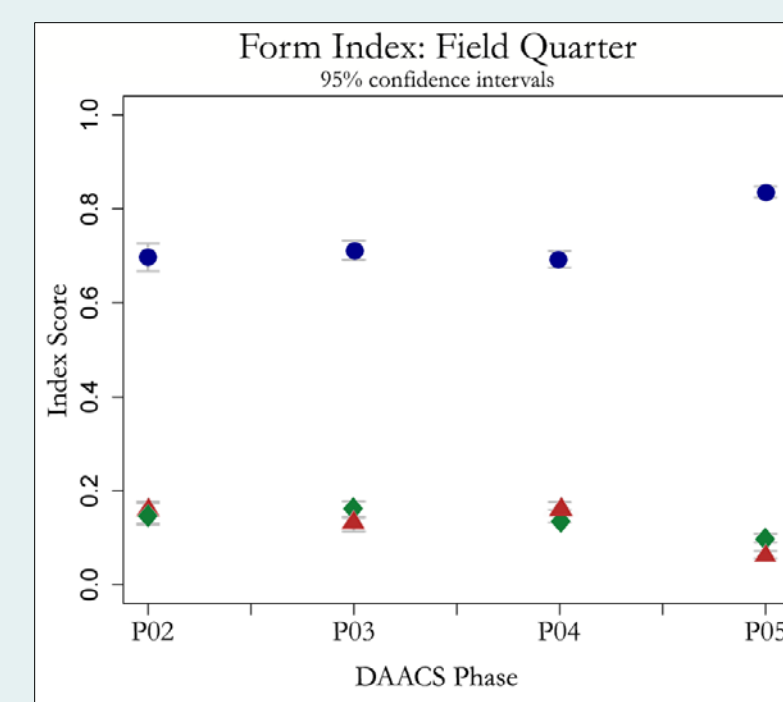
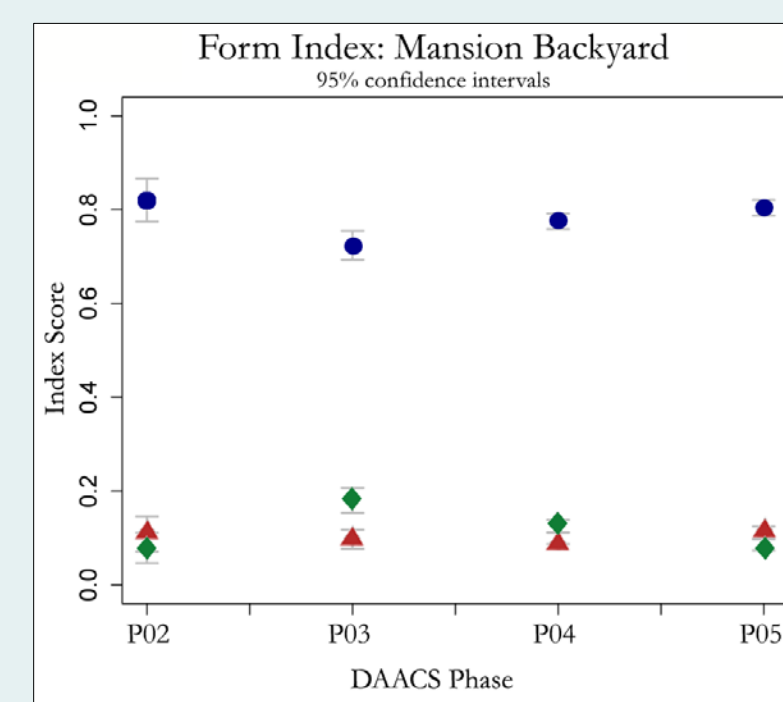
We categorize sherds with identifiable form into three groups: **servicing**, **dining**, and **utilitarian** vessels.

- Servicing** vessels are non-essential forms such as platters, pitchers, teawares, and other dishes.
- Dining** vessels are essential forms necessary for consumption such as plates, cups, mugs, and bowls.
- Utilitarian** vessels not associated with dining, including milk pans, bottles, and chamberpots.



Based on our hypotheses, we expect the following patterns:

- Mansion Backyard **servicing** vessel abundance scores should be consistently higher than those at the Field Quarter.
- Field Quarter abundance scores of **all forms** should decrease over time.



● Dining Vessels  
◆ Serving Vessels  
▲ Utilitarian Vessels

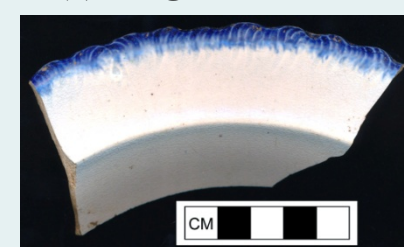
**Results:** In contrast to expectation, the abundance of **servicing** vessels is low at the Mansion Backyard. Surprisingly, abundance values of **dining** vessels remain higher relative to other forms over time **at both areas**. Overall, the pattern of investment in form is remarkably similar at both areas.

## 6. Variation in Decorative Genre

Given the similar patterns in form, do we see variation in decoration? To address this question, we examine different decorative genres on refined earthenware vessels. We use available cost information for these vessels (Miller 1988) to determine affordable versus expensive genres. We infer the same cost differential across all forms using the cost data for plates.

From Miller's work with decorated vessel prices, we employ the following relative scale of refined earthenware genres from least to most expensive:

(S) Edged Wares



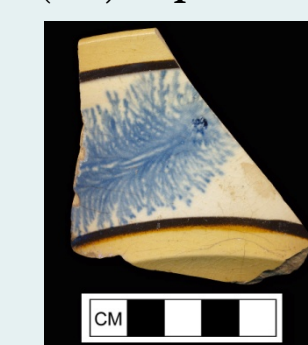
Shell Edge Plate, Field Quarter

(\$\$) Handpainted Wares



Handpainted Saucer, Mansion Backyard

(\$\$\$) Slipwares

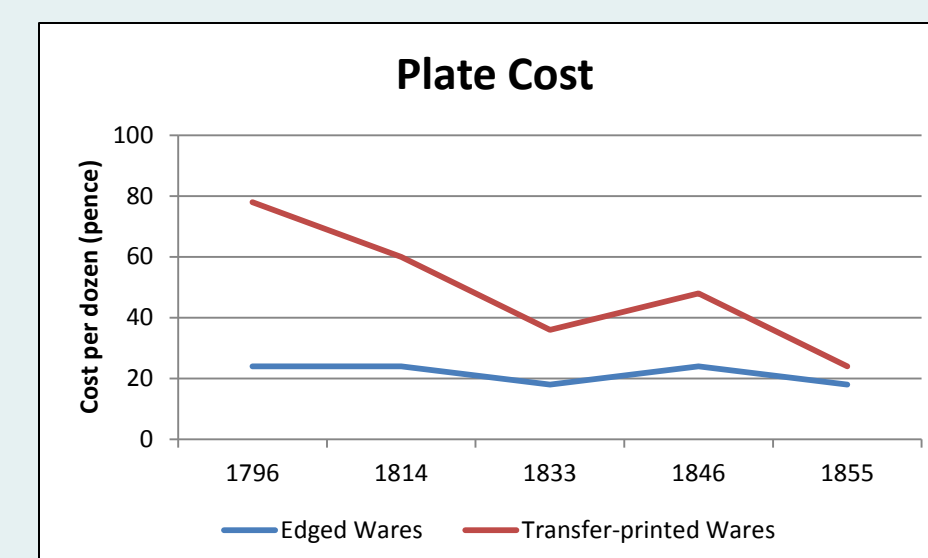


Slipware bowl, Mansion Backyard

(\$\$\$\$) Transfer-printed Wares



Transfer Print plate, Field Quarter



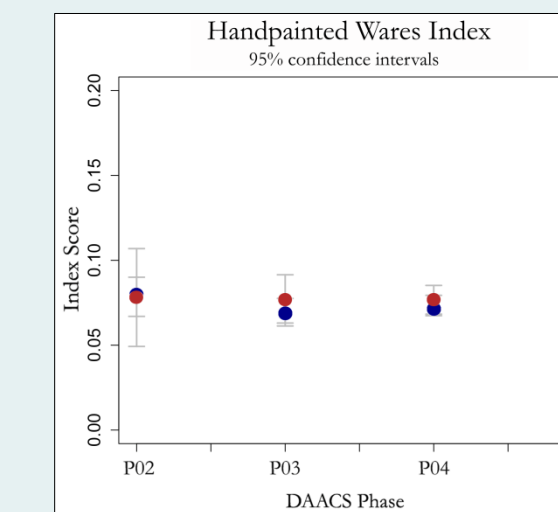
Trends in price from the Staffordshire, UK potteries for **Edged** and **Transfer-printed** plates (Miller 1988: Appendix C, pp. 24-25).

## Genre continued...

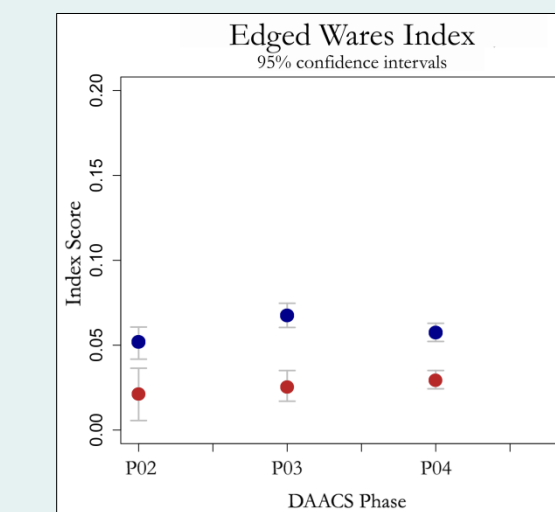
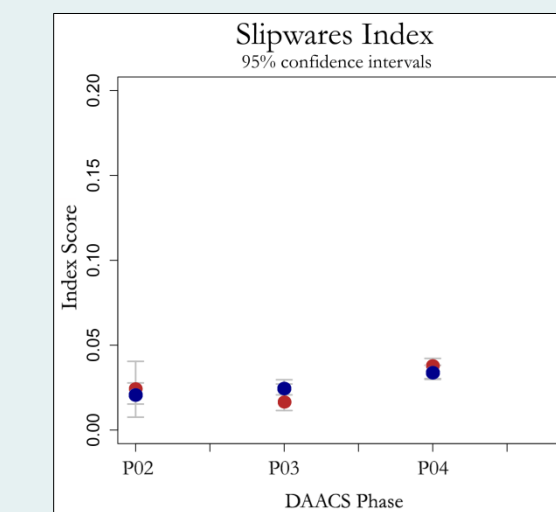
Based on our hypotheses, we expect the following patterns:

- As the most expensive decorative genre, the abundance of **Transfer-printed Wares** at the Mansion Backyard should be higher than that for the Field Quarter.
- As the least expensive genre, **Edged Ware** abundances should be higher than all other genres for the Field Quarter.

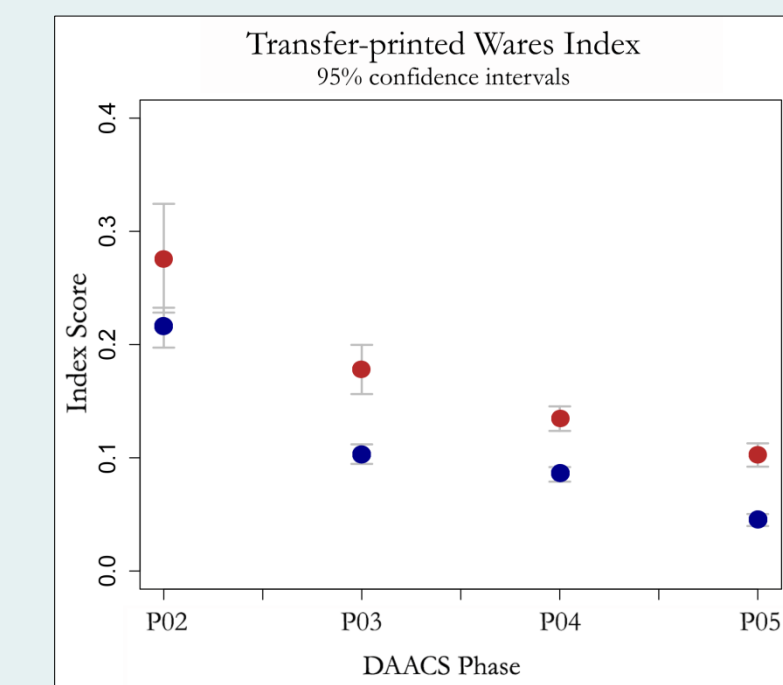
● Field Quarter  
● Mansion Backyard



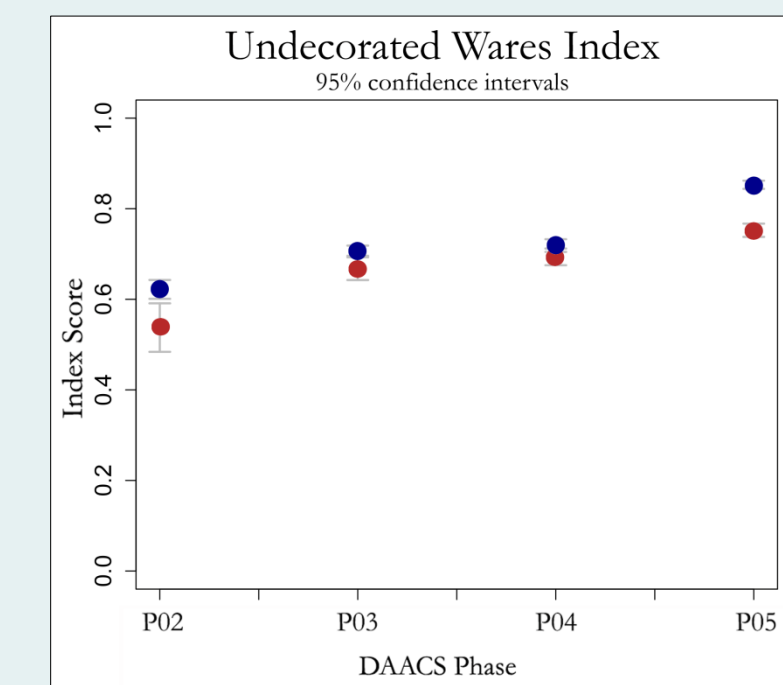
Low abundance values, and little change over time for **Handpainted** and **Slipware** vessels at both areas.



**Edged Ware** indices are low overall. Slightly higher abundance at the Field Quarter.



As expected, Mansion Backyard values for **Transfer-printed Wares** are high. Unexpectedly, this is the most abundant decorative genre for the Field Quarter. The abundance values of 'Transfer Print decrease over time.



**Undecorated Wares** are the most common at both areas, and their abundance increases over time.

**Results:** The most expensive refined earthenwares, **Transfer-printed Wares**, are the most abundant of the decorated vessels at both the Mansion Backyard and the Field Quarter. Inhabitants in both areas clearly chose to invest in these costly wares. In addition, the abundance of this decorative genre decreases over time. This shift may be linked to the increase in **Undecorated Wares** over time, with the introduction after 1840 of ironstone and hotel wares. Finally, the least expensive wares, **Undecorated** and **Edged Wares**, are more abundant at the Field Quarter than the Mansion Backyard.

## 7. Conclusions

Variation in forms and decorative genres suggests that, while slaves at the Hermitage had access to the same types of ceramic forms, there are differences in relative investment in decoration types.

**Trends at both areas indicate consistent investment over time in all ceramic vessel forms, as well as decorative genres.**

Although Field Quarter residents did not invest as much in the costliest transfer-printed wares as their Mansion Backyard counterparts, they acquired printed vessels more than any other decorated vessels.

Residents at the Mansion Backyard invested in costly vessels relative to their Field Quarter counterparts. In line with Galle's (2004) analysis, the data here suggests that people living in the Mansion Backyard focused their efforts on acquiring non-essential goods, perhaps another indication that this area was used for specialized tasks.

These comparative investigations of attribute-level artifact data suggest some points of departure for future research:

- Expansion of the dataset with the cataloging of **First Hermitage** materials by DAACS (Beyond the Mansion 2.0).
- Comparison of these trends to data from other plantation sites with distinct slave quartering areas and similar occupation spans.

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