

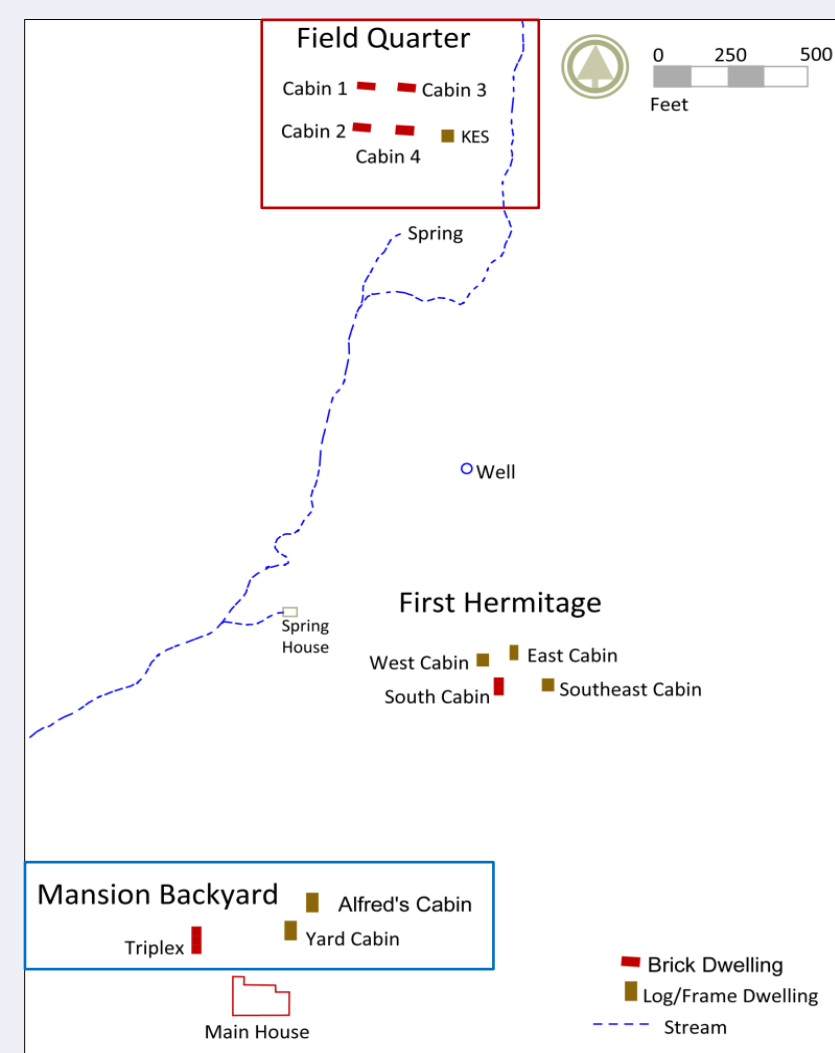
# Ceramic Investment by Enslaved People at The Hermitage, TN

## 1. Introduction

In the early 1820s, Andrew Jackson radically reorganized The Hermitage, his cotton plantation outside of Nashville, Tennessee, to accommodate his growing political ambitions and personal fortune. Reorganization included construction of a Greek-revival brick mansion, four duplex slave dwellings in the Field Quarter, and brick and frame slave dwellings in the Mansion's backyard. Jackson also added to his enslaved workforce, doubling the population in five years and expanding the number of skilled laborers working in and around the new Mansion.

Previous analyses of domestic slave sites at The Hermitage demonstrate that these changes in plantation organization and management increased enslaved people's access to goods (Thomas 1995, 1998; Galle 2004). Recent research suggests that slaves living behind The Hermitage mansion, who worked in skilled occupations, acquired ceramic vessels of greater value than enslaved families living in the outlying Field Quarter (Bates et al. 2014).

To test observed differentiation in acquisition patterns of non-essential goods between the two communities, we employ two new methods for measuring financial investment in ceramics over time and space. Specifically, we examine whether Mansion Backyard residents invested in expensive ceramic types more than Field Quarter residents, and whether that financial investment extended to other purchased goods.



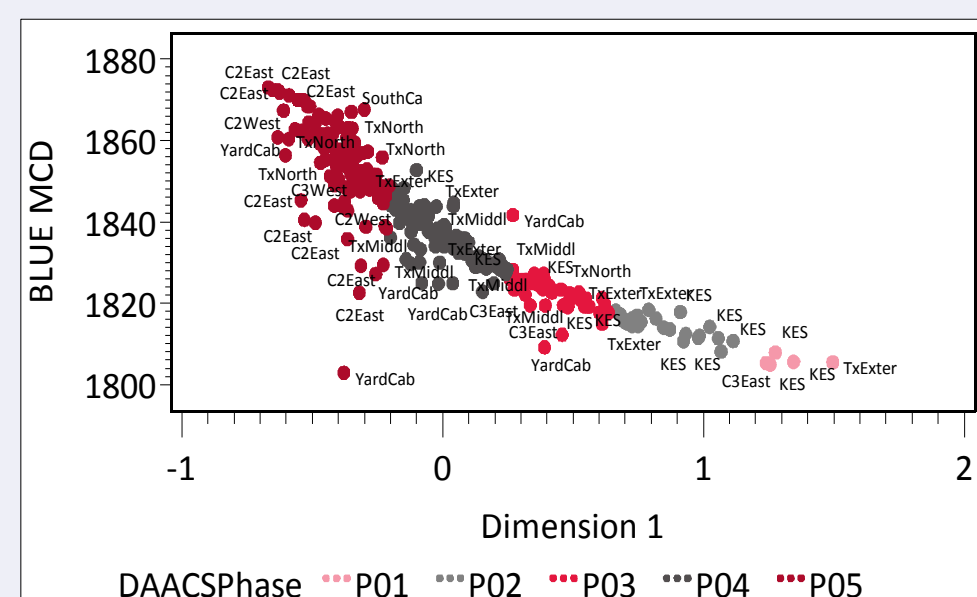
## 2. The Hermitage Assemblages

Archaeological data from three contemporaneous, spatially distinct quartering areas provide most of our knowledge about the more than 140 enslaved people living on the property by 1845. We compare ceramic and glass assemblages from five structures located in two of those quartering areas: the **Mansion Backyard (MBY)** and the **Field Quarter (FQ)**. Temporal control is based on a detailed chronology of archaeological data in the Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (DAACS; www.daacs.org), with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (see Galle et al. 2012).

The following analysis includes data from the Triplic and Yard Cabin in the MBY and three FQ cabins.



Triplex Excavations, Mansion Backyard



Field Quarter Excavations

## 3. Hypotheses

To test for differences in financial investment between the two communities, we examine specific artifact attributes that serve as proxies for access to non-essential goods.

### ➤ Ceramic Vessel Type Abundance:

Based on previous separate analyses of forms and decorations, we examine the intersection of these attributes in vessel type.

We expect that Mansion Backyard residents acquired more expensive decorated teawares and tablewares relative to their counterparts at the Field Quarter.

### ➤ Average Ceramic Vessel Price:

Similarly, Mansion Backyard residents invested greater funds in those same ceramics, reflected in an estimation of weighted average vessel price.

### ➤ Glass Tableware Abundance:

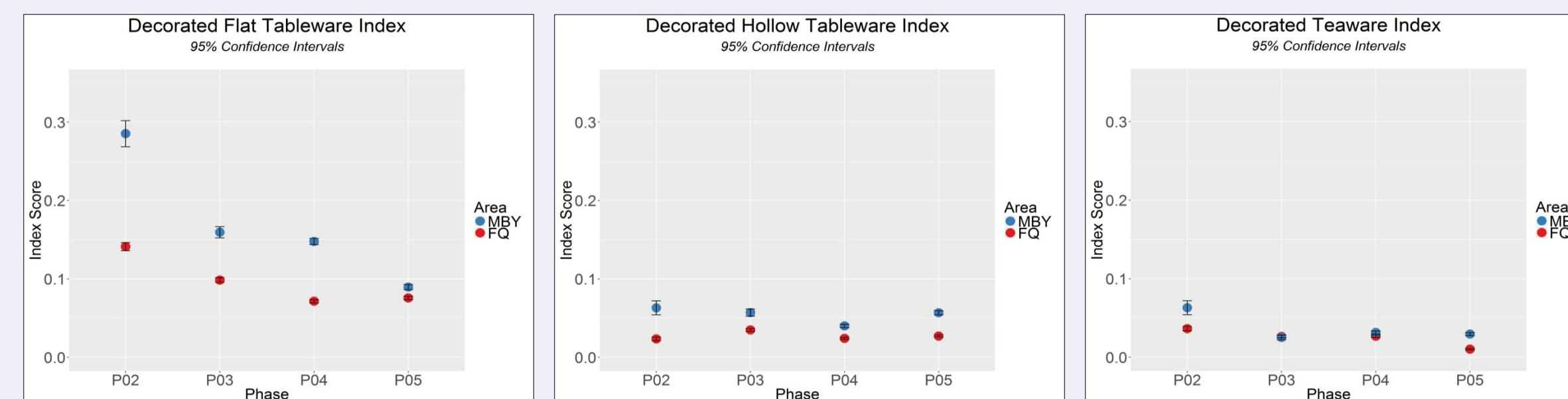
As a further measure of investment, we expect that Mansion Backyard residents also expended more resources on glass serving and dining wares.

## 4. Variation in Ceramic Vessel Type Abundance

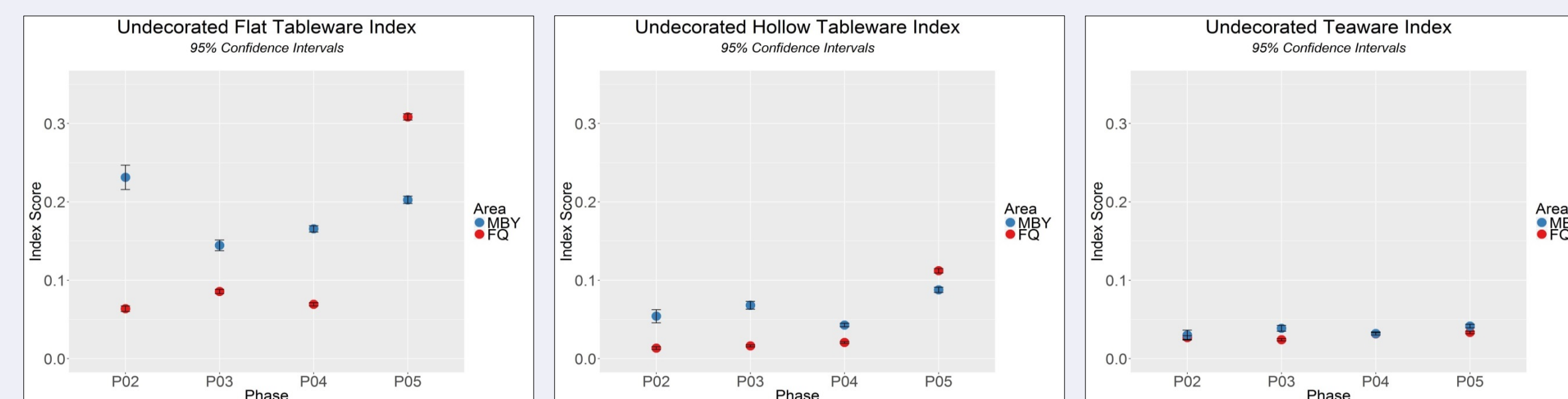
We create six ceramic vessel types based on a combination of form and decoration. To assess investment in each vessel type, we use an **artifact abundance index**.

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

➤ We expect that Mansion Backyard index scores should be consistently higher than those at the Field Quarter for each decorated type.



- Mansion Backyard values are greater than the Field Quarter values for each decorated type
- Similarity of decorated hollow tableware and teaware scores contradicts the expected difference in investment patterns; similarity of Phase 05 decorated flat tableware scores may be explained by a decrease in decorated plate cost by the 1850s



- Mansion Backyard scores are greater for undecorated vessels than Field Quarter scores, except in Phase 5 tablewares
- Similarity in undecorated teawares suggests that these vessels and their decorated counterparts were a rare, expensive acquisition
- Phase 05 values may reflect the increasing popularity of inexpensive, undecorated ironstone and "hotel wares" beginning in the 1840s

➤ **Results:** 1) Greater abundance of decorated and undecorated vessel types at the Mansion Backyard; 2) Differences in costlier decorated and undecorated teawares are not as significant as we expect; 3) Temporal variation is discernible, with Field Quarter residents selecting undecorated vessels over their decorated equivalents by Phase 05.

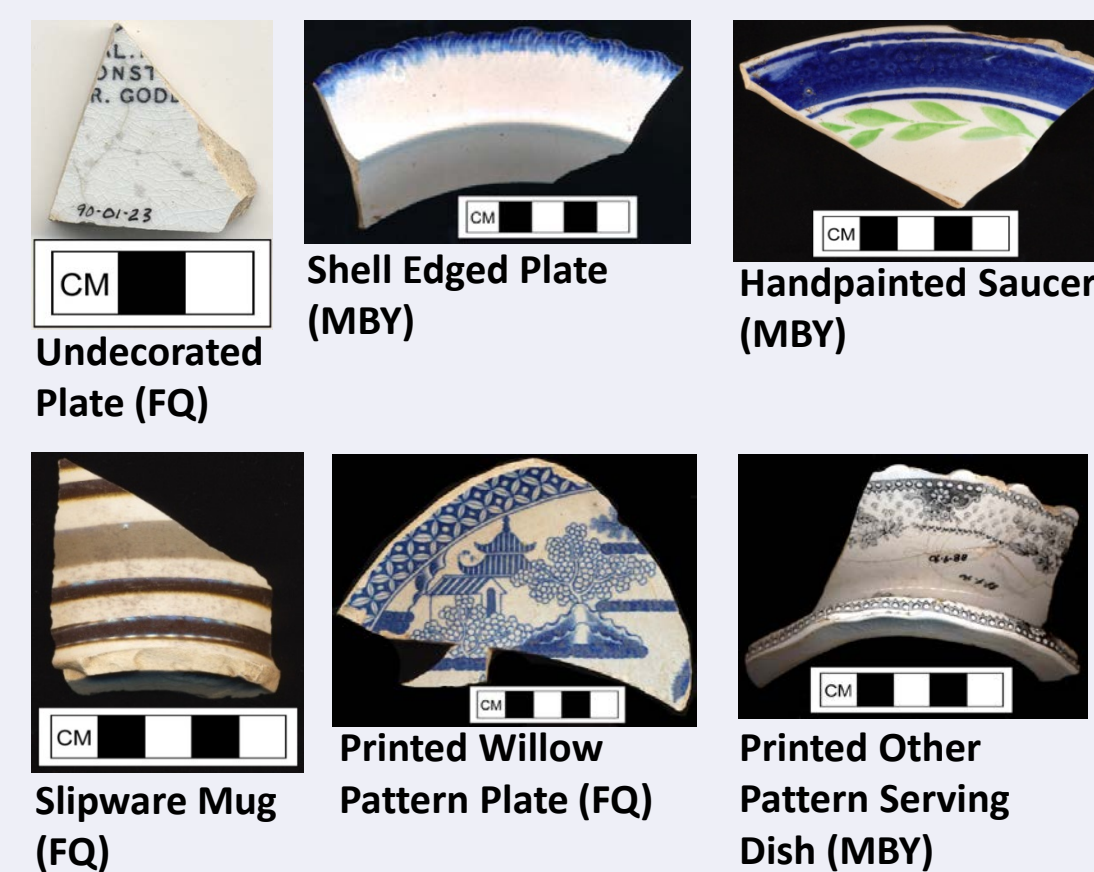
## 5. Average Ceramic Vessel Price

Given the patterns in broad vessel type abundance, do we see significant difference in the money invested in specific vessel types?

George Miller's research (1984) of vessel prices established by the Staffordshire potteries, the primary manufacturers of the ceramics recovered at The Hermitage quarters, provides the basis for the price estimation.

We differentiate decorated/undecorated and tea/tablewares into decorative categories and individual vessel forms produced by Staffordshire potters (examples on the right). All costs were scaled according to the most expensive vessel type in the total assemblage, in this case printed (non-Willow pattern) tureens.

This index is based on the discernment of an Artifact Group 2 that does not vary with time, or that varies in a predictable manner (Neiman et al. 2000; Galle 2004, 2006). For these assemblages, the Artifact Group 2 is **total ceramic count**. The density of ceramics recovered from excavations at the five sites does not correlate with time.



## Ceramic Vessel Price Continued

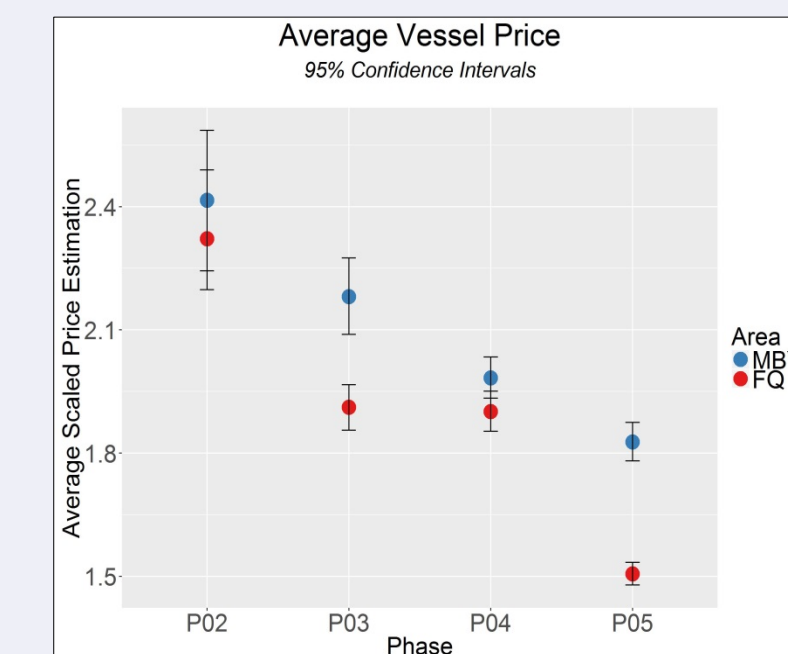
$$\text{Average Vessel Price}_i = \frac{\sum_i (\text{Scaled Price of Vessel Type} \times \text{Count of Vessel Type})}{\sum_i \text{Count of Vessel Type}}$$

where *i* is an area-phase assemblage

➤ **Results:** At face value, comparison of the weighted average vessel prices confirms the greater expenditure per vessel by Mansion Backyard residents.

**Price estimations over time are intriguing:**

- 1) Phase 02: Overlapping values reflect a similar ability to invest in higher-priced vessels across the enslaved population prior to Jackson's reorganization and in the years following;
- 2) Phases 03 – 05: Increasing differences between the Field Quarter and Mansion Backyard expenditures. Slaves purchased for skilled occupations living in the backyard had greater opportunities to earn cash with those skills, increasing their ability to purchase non-essential goods. By Phase 05, differentiation between the two communities continues as Mansion Backyard residents invest in expensive vessels, while Field Quarter residents select less expensive, undecorated alternatives.
- 3) Overall decreasing trend in price may indicate greater availability of cheaper, mass-produced vessels.

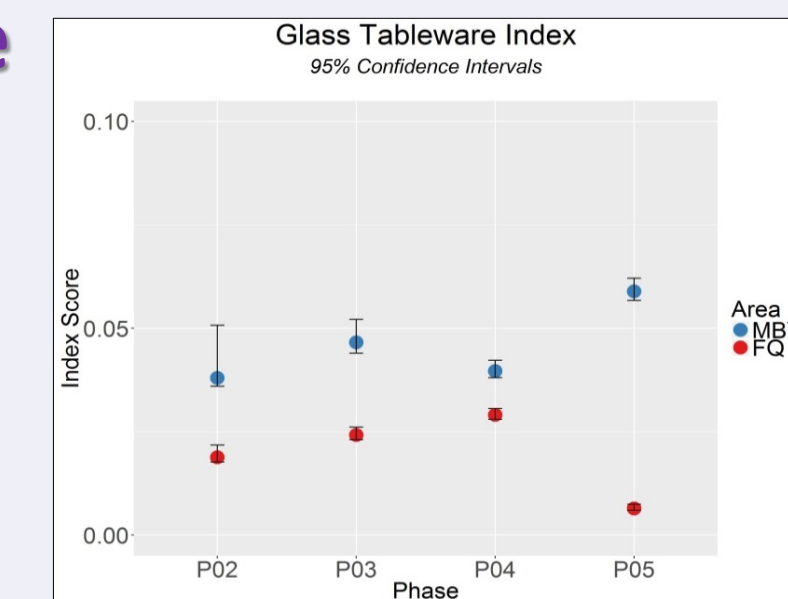


## 6. Variation in Glass Tableware Abundance

Glass vessels in forms such as bowls, tumblers, and stemware were available in shops alongside ceramic tablewares. The abundance of these expensive glass tablewares suggest the extent to which an enslaved community invested in other non-essential goods.



Cut Glass Tumbler (MBY)



➤ **Results:** 1) Glass tableware index scores indicate a greater abundance at the Mansion Backyard; 2) Distribution over time is comparable to hollow decorated ceramic tablewares, suggesting a similar strategy of investment in both materials; 3) However, in Phase 05, the Field Quarter investment drops sharply while the Mansion Backyard increases, mirroring the divide evident in ceramic vessel price.

## 7. Conclusions

The abundance of decorated ceramic tablewares indicate a greater investment of resources by the Mansion Backyard community consistently over time. The higher abundance of undecorated tablewares in the Field Quarter suggests a selection of these less expensive vessels over their decorated equivalents. The ceramic price and glass tableware data illustrate increasing differentiation over time in expenditures on non-essential goods.

During and soon after Jackson's reorganization, the enslaved community as a whole acquired ceramic vessels of similar cost. With the opportunities provided by skilled work, hired labor, and craft production, occupants of the Mansion Backyard generated cash and invested in expensive ceramic and glass vessels. The methods employed here demonstrate the analytical power of quantitative measurement and comparison within diverse assemblages.

**Next Steps:** Expansion of the dataset with analysis of materials from the East Cabin and West Cabin in the First Hermitage area. Further explore chronological variation across assemblages from the entire plantation.



Transferprint Plate, East Cabin

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