

# Building a chronology for domestic slave sites at The Hermitage.

## 1. Archaeology at The Hermitage

Archaeology is a critical source for understanding slavery and landscape at The Hermitage, Andrew Jackson's 19<sup>th</sup>-century plantation located outside Nashville, Tennessee. Between 1988 and 2005, archaeologists uncovered hundreds of thousands of artifacts related to nearly 180 enslaved African Americans who labored in the cotton fields and lived in three distinct quartering areas (Battle-Baptiste 2010; Galle 2004; McKee 1995; McKee and Thomas 1998; Thomas 1998; Thomas and Thomas 2004).

Dr. Larry McKee, director of The Hermitage's archaeology program between 1988 and 2000, identified two distinct building episodes at the Hermitage. These two phases were identified based on excavation impressions; assemblages from The Hermitage were never systematically analyzed.

Now complete artifact and context data from seven slave dwellings at The Hermitage will soon be available through The Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (DAACS). We use the newly available data to refine McKee's chronology. We reveal the fine-grained complexity of The Hermitage occupation while also confirming McKee's more general two-phase chronology.



## 2. Pre-1821 Hermitage Landscape

In 1804, Jackson moved his wife Rachel and twelve enslaved laborers into three log dwellings located on an area of the property known today as the First Hermitage. Between 1804 and 1821 the First Hermitage consisted of three log buildings: the West, East, and Southeast cabins. They stood on limestone piers and each contained at least one unlined subfloor pit.

A slave quartering area was established 300 yards north of the First Hermitage. Archaeologists refer to this area as the Field Quarter. Archaeological remains of three dug-in-ground pits and a variety of early-19<sup>th</sup> century domestic artifacts suggest that at least two log or frame houses, known as KES and early Cabin 3, were occupied by several enslaved families between 1804 and the early 1820s.



The First Hermitage. Early Cabin 3 subfloor pit at the Field Quarter. Subfloor pits at KES, Field Quarter.

## 3. Post-1821 Hermitage Landscape

A boom in the cotton market and Jackson's salary as a U.S. general likely financed his second building campaign, one that formalized the architecture and landscape of The Hermitage. In 1819, slaves began making over 260,000 bricks used in the construction of the mansion, barn, stables, and smokehouse.

Six brick structures, containing a total of thirteen 20 x 20 foot dwelling units, were also constructed to house enslaved laborers. These included a three-unit building known as the Triplex, built behind the mansion, a two-unit duplex at the First Hermitage known as the South Cabin, and four brick duplexes at the Field Quarter, known as Cabins 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the early field quarter structures, KES and early Cabin 3, were removed by the time the Field Quarter's brick duplexes were constructed. Cabin 3's limestone foundation cuts through the large, unlined subfloor pit, Feature 590, associated with the Cabin 3's early log house.

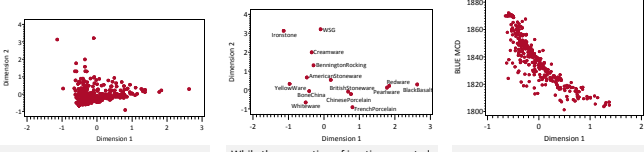


## 4. Refining the Chronology

Since 2008, DAACS ([www.daacs.org](http://www.daacs.org)) and The Hermitage, with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, have analyzed over 310,000 artifacts and 1,700 contexts from seven domestic structures and their surrounding yards.

Here we use two complementary statistical methods – correspondence analysis (CA) and mean ceramic dating (MCD) – to seriate assemblages associated with houses for enslaved laborers located at the Field Quarter and the Mansion Backyard.

### Correspondence Analysis



Our intrasite chronology starts with a CA of historical ceramic ware-type frequencies in stratigraphically excavated contexts with 5 or more sherds.

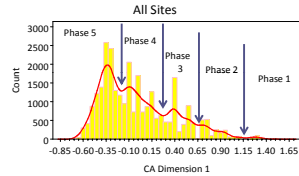
While the proportion of inertia accounted for by the first and second CA dimensions is modest (.16 and .14 respectively), the plot of ceramic ware types on the two axes suggests that the first axis successfully captures time, with later types on the left of the graph.

A strong relationship between CA dimension-1 scores and MCDs confirms that the latter capture time. We can therefore use the CA dimension-1 scores to aggregate assemblages into chronological phases.

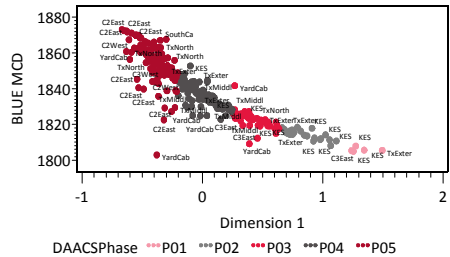
### Defining Phase Boundaries

To help decide where to put the phase boundaries, we use a weighted histogram of dimension-1 scores, where the weights are the total sherd counts in each assemblage.

The histogram bar heights measure the sherd counts in the assemblages whose CA scores fall in a given histogram bin. Histogram troughs measure fall off in sherd deposition. Dividing the continuum of CA scores at the histogram troughs, as highlighted by a kernel density estimate, yields five temporal phases.



### Results: A Five-Phase Occupation

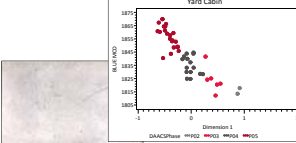


## 5. Building Chronologies

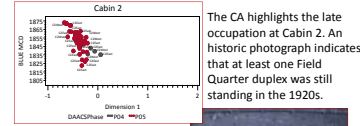


The CA confirms that KES was only occupied for the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The two assemblages that fall in Phase 4 likely contain yard refuse from later cabins.

The CA suggests that the early Cabin 3 structure may have extended to the east from Feature 590, as Cabin 3 East contexts dominate the first two phases.



This recently discovered photograph of the Yard Cabin, taken in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, confirms the CA results, which indicate a later occupation at the Yard Cabin.



The CA highlights the late occupation at Cabin 2. An historic photograph indicates that at least one Field Quarter duplex was still standing in the 1920s.



Yard assemblages comprise the two phases of Triplex, possibly pointing to early activity areas in the future mansion back yard area.

## 6. Conclusions

Establishing a reliable and detailed chronology for The Hermitage will allow for fine-grained analyses of material culture over time and space, allowing researchers to focus on how enslaved laborers engaged with material culture and the landscape in the early national, antebellum and post-bellum periods. Check in with DAACS at [www.daacs.org](http://www.daacs.org) for data and more analysis.

**Citations**  
 Battle-Baptiste, Whitney. 2010. *Swampy Spirits: Power and Transformation on the Plantation Landscape*. In *Archaeology and Preservation of Gendered Landscapes*, edited by Sherrine Baugher and Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood. New York: Springer, pp. 83-96.  
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