

**Management Summary of archaeological testing
in the east and west gardens,
Stratford Hall (44WM0309), Virginia**

February 5, 2016

Prepared for:

Carter Refo

Executive Director

Stratford Hall Plantation

483 Great House Road

Stratford VA 22558

Prepared by:

Thane H. Harpole and David A. Brown

DATA Investigations LLC

1759 Tyndall Point Lane

Gloucester Point VA 23062

Fairfield@fairfieldfoundation.org

(804) 815-4467

The following is a management summary for recent archaeological testing by DATA Investigations LLC at Stratford Hall Plantation, Westmoreland County, Virginia. Testing focused within the western half of the west garden, and in the east garden upper terrace, with the goal of learning more about the stratigraphy and artifact concentrations in these areas. This testing is part of Stratford Hall Plantation's broader goal to investigate and rehabilitate the west garden into the west yard as it was used during the Lee family's tenure and better understand the complex landscape chronology of the east garden. The information recovered will help answer questions about the use and appearance of this vital space during the Lee period, as well as during other periods of the property's history, and will aid in the interpretation of this working landscape to the public.

The excavations build upon previous archaeology in the 1990s and 2000s by Dr. Douglas Sanford at the University of Mary Washington, in the 1970s by Dr. Fraser Neiman (previously of the Virginia Research Center for Archaeology, currently of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello), in the 2000s by John Milner and Associates, and by architectural historians Arthur Shurcliffe and Morley Williams in the 1930s. Their work identified significant elements of the historic landscape, including paths, foundations, landscaping activities, and cultural features from the 18th and 19th centuries. The synthesis of this past work is an essential part of the interpretive plans for the garden/yard areas. Test units excavated as part of this project "filled in the gaps" for untested areas, increased the sample of cultural material, and confirmed the stratigraphic sequence documented by Sanford. Recent excavations by DATA Investigations included twenty (20) five-foot-square test units spaced across the west garden area and six (6) five-foot-square test units (and two (2) two-and-a-half-foot-by-five-foot test units) in the upper terrace of the east garden (Figure 1).

The excavations commenced on September 7, 2015 and continued intermittently through January 12, 2016. The test units were excavated by hand and screened through ¼-inch mesh to ensure uniform artifact recovery. Each unit was excavated according to cultural layers, and was mapped and photographed in plan and profile. All features that were found were

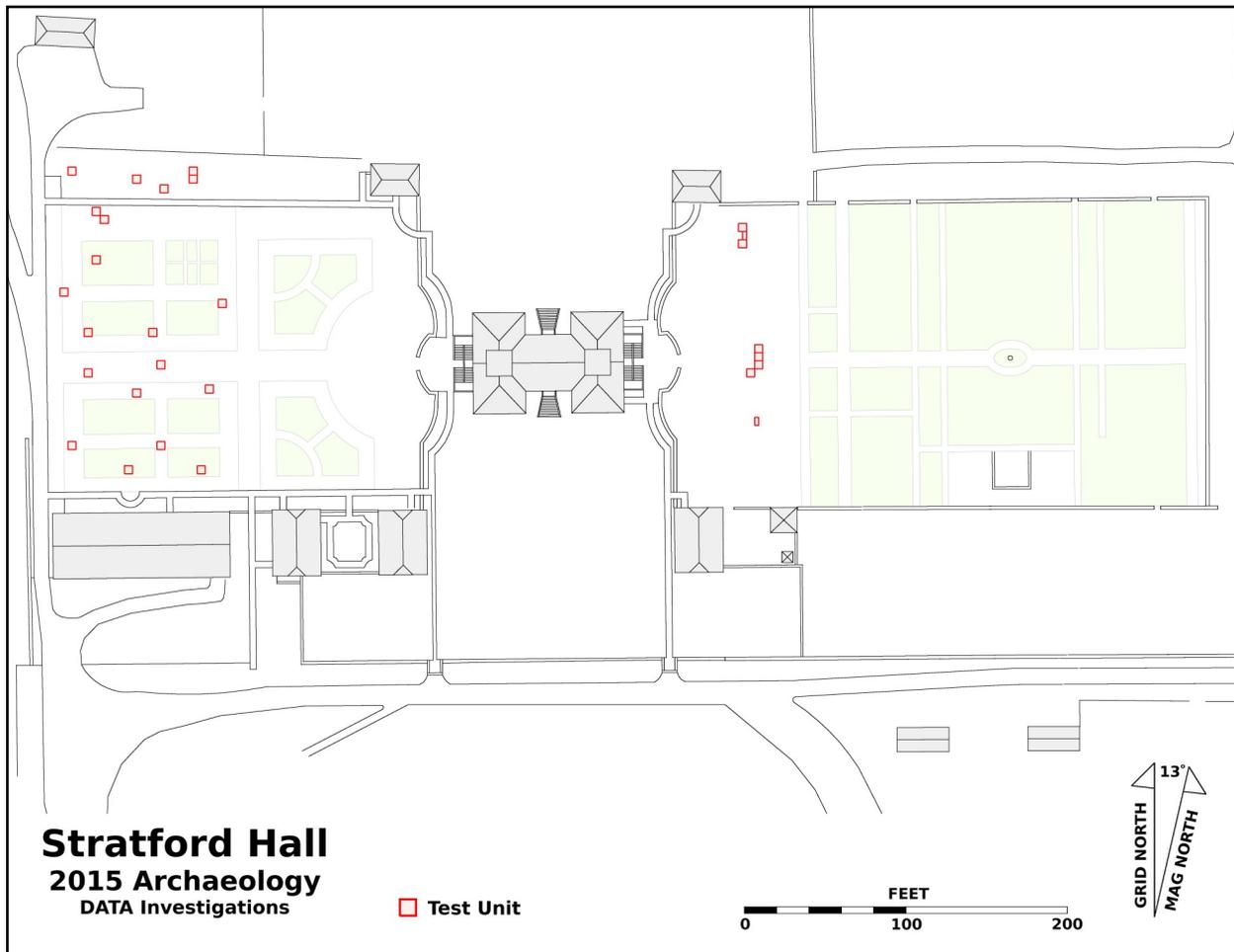


Figure 1. Plan of DATA Investigations Test Units in East and West Gardens, 2015.

recorded, mapped and compared with previously identified features and cultural strata. The excavation of features was limited to investigations of likely modern post holes cutting through earlier cultural layers, testing presumed 1930s trenches, and testing ambiguous soil stains to determine whether or not they were cultural. The artifacts were washed, sorted, bagged, and counted to assist with establishing estimates for cataloging by the Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (DAACS) at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. This process included weighing, and in some cases counting, brick, mortar, oyster and clam shell, and coal prior to discarding. The artifacts were then transferred to DAACS and a complete catalog is anticipated in 2017. This agreement was established prior to the initiation of the project, with the consent of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR), and ensures that the materials recovered will be included within a detailed, open-access, web-based catalog for use by scholars across the globe. A complete report, synthesizing all of the work undertaken during this project and potentially additional phases anticipated in 2016, will be prepared in the months following the DAACS cataloging. The excavations, artifact processing, cataloging, and curation follow DHR Guidelines for Archaeological Investigations and Curation of Archaeological Collections. Also, the DHR holds an easement for Stratford Hall Plantation, specifically Site 44WM0309, and each step of this project was undertaken following the review, comment, and approval of the DHR Easement staff.

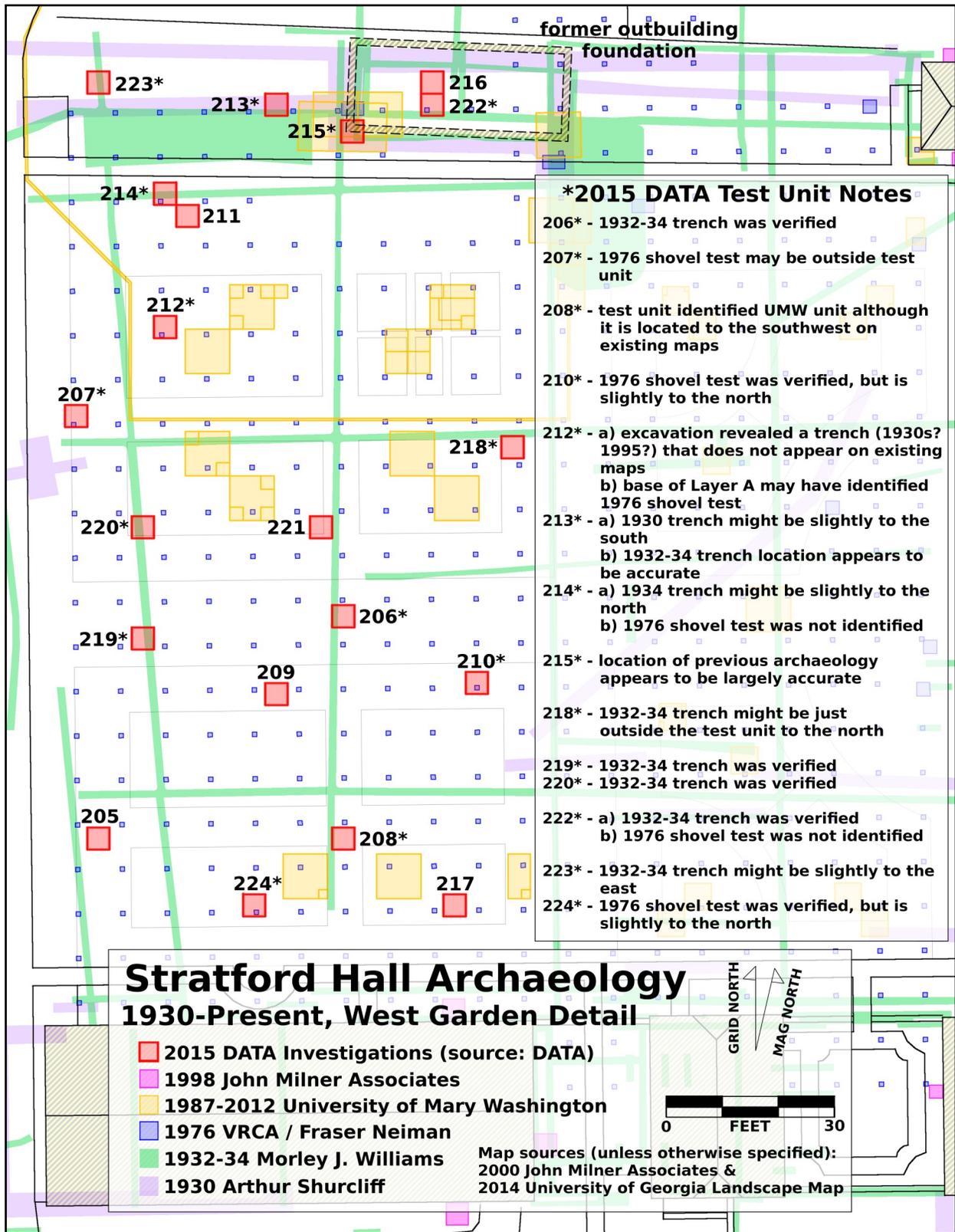


Figure 2. Plan of DATA Investigations Test Units in the West Garden/Yard in 2015.

Excavations within the west half of the west garden/yard included Test Units 205 to 224 (Figure 2). The majority of test units included two layers: topsoil (Layer A) that averaged 0.3-0.4 feet thick, and a likely 1930s plowzone (Layer B) that generally ranged in thickness between 0.4 feet and 0.7 feet (Figure 3). The average depth of the twenty units was about one foot and the two dominant layers included a mix of artifacts from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, with a higher concentration of earlier materials in the lower layer, such as wine bottle glass, white salt-glazed stoneware, and a significant number of Native American lithic flakes and three likely Archaic period projectile points. Excavations confirmed the locations of previous excavation units (T.U.s 208, 215), shovel tests (T.U. 224), and 1930s trenches (T.U.s 206, 208, 212, 213, 214, 215, 219, 220, 222, and 223), along with potential grid datums (T.U.s 206 and 218). These discoveries are significant because they help place with greater accuracy past excavations which, in the case of the trenches, are over 80 years old. It also allowed us to evaluate the level of impact we can expect from these ground disturbances, with most trenches ranging in depth between 1.5 and 2.5 feet. The primary accomplishment included increased sampling across the west half of the west yard which will, after the completion of the artifact catalog by DAACS, allow us to more adequately evaluate historic activity across this area.

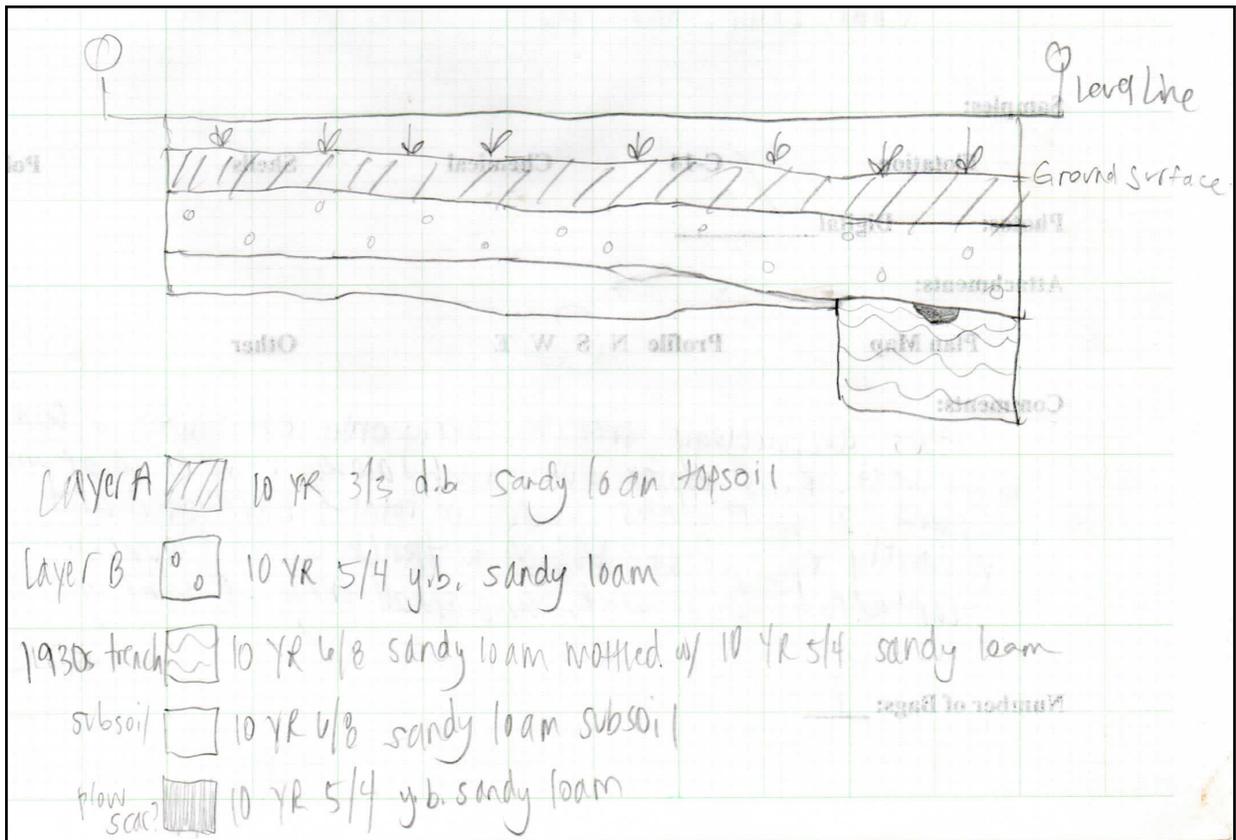
Perhaps the most dramatic new discovery in this area to date is an 18th-century brick pier which likely marked an interior partition within an historic building along the north edge of the west yard. While the building has been known archaeologically since the 1930s excavations uncovered evidence of its existence, and it is referenced in period documents, some of its architectural details, and perhaps its function, are poorly understood. This brick pier, measuring 1.6 feet east-west and 2.3 feet north-south (Figure 4), is composed of hand made compass bricks, which were likely leftovers from constructing a well on the property, and appears to follow the same orientation as the main house and other outbuildings. The pier was constructed within a linear feature that may have been a planned partition wall, and suggests that the plans for this building may have changed during construction. The association of this brick pier, several post holes, and the linear trench, with the north wall brings into question the construction sequence for this area and begs for additional testing to better understand its place within the landscape and connect it with prior excavations near the eastern gable of the building.

Based on archaeological evidence of plowscars and historic photographs, the west yard was plowed following the completion of trenching archaeology by Shurcliffe and Williams in the early 1930s. While this event would have turned over intact layers and dispersed artifacts to a limited extent, it does not appear to have been particularly deep and may not have covered the entire space to an equal depth. It is also possible that the plowscars could represent limited earlier plowing, as they lack the width and regularity of more modern plowing. Either way, it does not appear that plowing has significantly altered the interpretive potential of this layer, and this layer should continue to be treated as a valuable cultural context with information about activities in this area throughout its history.

Excavations within the uppermost terrace of the east garden included Test Units 200 to 204 and 225 to 227 (Figure 6). The primary goal of work in the east garden prioritized searching for evidence of historic pathways and other landscape features. The test units generally included three layers and extended an average depth of 1.1 feet. The uppermost layer included a mix of artifacts from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, such as window glass, wine bottle glass, brick, pearlware, Chinese porcelain, a white button, and a fragment of an iron lock. The lowermost layer typically represented a transition to subsoil, had very few artifacts, and was relatively thin (about 0.2 to 0.3 feet thick). The middle layers included a layer of highly



Figure 3. Test Unit 206 south profile photograph (above) and drawing (below) showing typical stratigraphy and a 1930s trench on the right side.



concentrated pea gravel (T.U.s 200-203, and 225-227) or artifacts dating predominantly to the late 18th/early-to-mid-19th centuries, including a case bottle base, wine bottle glass, American blue and grey stoneware, and other ceramics. Excavations uncovered recent postholes (Feature 1, T.U. 200), recent utilities (PVC water line, T.U. 203), and trench excavations from the 1930s (T.U.s 200 & 227). Importantly they identified a dense layer of pea gravel in both the central units (T.U. 200, 202, 226, 227) and in the northern units (T.U. 201, 203, 225) that may represent pathways from the late 18th/early 19th century, as well as a circular brick and sandstone deposit that may have served as a pad for a garden planter or statuary (T.U. 226) (Figure 5).



Figure 4. Test Unit 216 showing brick pier made of compass bricks and shell mortar.

The gravel deposits were noted in the 1930s as 'gravel layer' in the central portion, and 'gravel on brick' in the northern portion, which clearly shows that they predate the earliest archaeology. Based on the current archaeology, as well as probing across the upper terrace of the east garden, it appears that there may have actually been three wide gravel paths evenly spaced across the terrace, with one about 20 feet wide traversing the middle, an approximately 20 foot wide deposit adjacent to the northern building, and a roughly 16 foot wide gravel area extending away from the kitchen at the southern end. It is not clear when these deposits date to, although 19th-century artifacts, particularly fragments of a large stoneware pitcher likely made by Peter Herrmann of Baltimore between c. 1855 and 1900 (Kille 2005; Herrmann 2016) (Figure 7), were found directly on top of the layer. The brick and stone pad also appears to have been placed at the edge of this gravel deposit, suggesting that they are contemporary. No



Figure 5. Test Unit 226 showing brick and sandstone concentration.

additional matching pads have been located, based on limited probing of the area. The pathways, if they were indeed this wide, do not appear to have been edged with brick or other material, but the gravel ends fairly abruptly, and the other areas of the upper terrace are quite free of this gravel. Lastly, artifact concentrations increased significantly in the northernmost units (T.U.s 201, 203 and 225), suggesting a higher degree of integrity and the possibility of cultural features that may

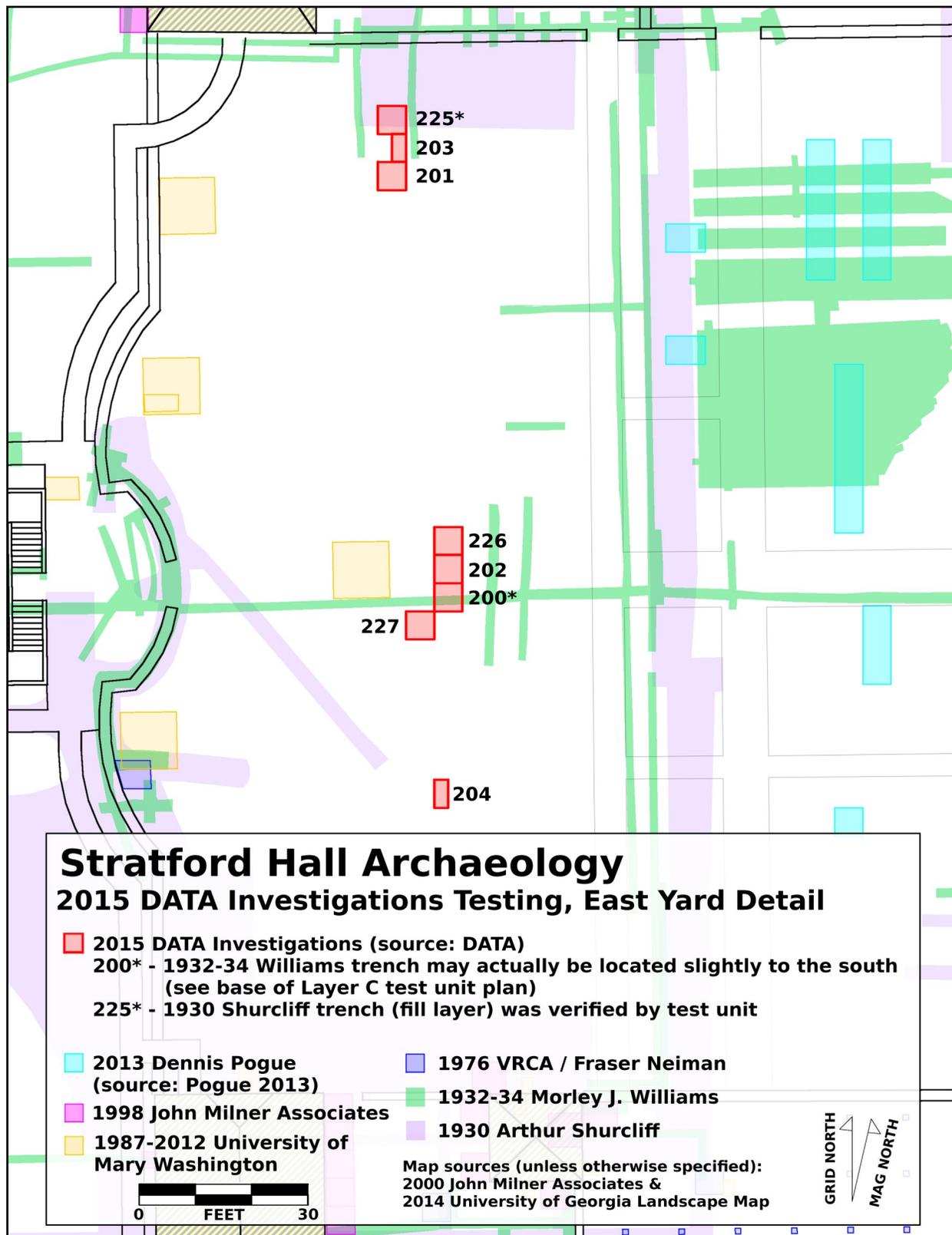


Figure 6. Plan of DATA Investigations Test Units in the East Garden in 2015.

contribute to a greater understanding of this complex landscape despite the disturbances of the 20th century.

Recommendations

This project has succeeded in its primary goals. We have increased the sampling of cultural layers in the west half of the west garden/yard, confirmed the stratigraphic sequence, identified intact cultural deposits, and helped relocate previous excavations which will allow for a more accurate synthesis of all prior archaeology. We have also tested several hypotheses regarding pathways in the upper terrace of the east garden, resulting in similar accomplishments, as well as locating likely gravel pathways and a probable planter or statuary base. This work substantiates the value of continued archaeological investigations with specific research goals that will also carefully integrate past fieldwork.



Figure 7. Mending fragments of a stoneware pitcher from Test Unit 225 Layer A likely made by Peter Herrmann of Baltimore.

Several specific recommendations have emerged from this work. First, the stratigraphy and artifact distribution across the west half of the west garden/yard, and presumably across the east half, has the potential to contribute to our understanding of how this area was used as a work yard during the Lee period of ownership, as well as learning more about a much earlier Native American occupation. While substantial evidence of buildings or landscape features were not found during this initial phase, beyond those related to the brick pier along the north wall, there is a high likelihood for their survival based on our confirmation of the limited impacts of plowing and previous archaeological testing. Pending analysis of the cataloged artifact concentrations, we may find additional clues to the locations of past buildings and/or activity areas, which could guide future excavations directed at understanding those specific elements. We discourage any activities that would severely impact soil layers below topsoil, including the large-scale removal of these layers mechanically, without additional sampling beyond that accomplished in this project.

Second, the upper terrace of the east garden also retains significant integrity and has high potential for containing important landscape features from the Lee period. Excavations to date revealed several cultural layers, include a dense layer of pea gravel in multiple locations. These wide gravel deposits required the excavation of a substantial area, along with probing, before we could begin to understand their extent. Future excavations should take into consideration the need to increase the number of contiguous units or the size of an open area excavation so that these substantial landscape features can be properly documented and understood.

Finally, we recommend an extension of the sampling strategy begun in the west half of the west garden/yard to cover the east half of this space. The strategy should share the same goals as the current project, with additional units excavated along the enclosing garden walls and immediately outside of these walls. The garden walls are important elements of the historic landscape and knowing their accurate placement and chronology is crucial for the accurate interpretation of the restored west yard. Prior excavations within and around the west garden by

Dr. Sanford suggest that the eastern portion of the west garden is also substantially more complex than the western half, and the time and funds budgeted for further testing in this area should take this complexity into account.

References Cited

Herrmann Stoneware: A History and Collection of Peter Herrmann Stoneware
2016 Website found at <http://www.herrmannstoneware.com>)

Kille, John E.

2005 “Distinguishing Marks and Flowering Designs: Baltimore’s Utilitarian Stoneware Industry,” in Robert Hunter, ed., *Ceramics in America 2005*, Chipstone Foundation. Available online at <http://www.chipstone.org/article.php/200/Ceramics-in-America-2005/Distinguishing-Marks-and-Flowering-Designs:-Baltimore’s-Utilitarian-Stoneware-Industry>