Progress Report

Archeological Excavations at Fort Frederick
Fort Frederick State Park
Washington County
Maryland

prepared for

Department of Natural Resources
Capital Programs Administration
Tawes State Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland

by

National Heritage Corporation
309 North Matlack Street
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May 21, 1977

Progress Report Number Two
This is the second in a series of bi-weekly reports intended to keep the Department informed on a timely basis of the progress of archeological investigations at Fort Frederick, Maryland. It is hoped that the preparation of these reports will allow a periodic review of the excavation progress as well as an opportunity to contribute to the formulation of the strategy employed in the satisfaction of project objectives. Progress reports will focus upon a description of work completed, preliminary interpretations, and excavation strategy.
PROGRESS REPORT

This report is a summary of the progress of archeological excavations at Fort Frederick, Maryland, during the period from May 10 to May 21, 1977, representing the third and fourth weeks of field investigations. In addition to a descriptive summary of excavation progress, this report is also intended to make clear the development of excavation strategy employed in the pursuit of project goals.

The observation included in the first progress report that most of the deposits within the southwest bastion were observed to slope toward its center, continues to be characteristic of all unit profiles located around the periphery of the bastion, (e.g., squares N7E5 and N5E9). It has now become clear that this sloping is caused by the presence of a thick deposit of sterile clayey fill deposited around the periphery of the bastion with the construction of the fort. Obviously, the raising of the ground surface around the periphery of the bastion was in some way related to the nature of parapet construction and, with this in mind, close examination of several units adjacent to the bastion wall is planned. An additional deposit which has been found to lie around the periphery of the bastion is one comprised of shale. This does not, however, extend to the wall of the bastion, but is found in a narrowly defined zone, 2 - 5 feet in width, lying at least ten feet from the wall. The function of the shale is still unknown.

Excavation in the center of the bastion (e.g., squares N5E6, N7E7 and N8E8) has revealed a series of deposits which vary considerably from the situation described above. Beneath a dark humic topsoil is a layer of redeposited light brown fill containing fragments of brick and stone and very few artifacts. While lighter in color, this deposit is not strongly differentiated from the undisturbed occupational layer which lies immediately below. An exception to this occurred in square N8E8, immediately beneath the red and yellow clay. In square N7E7, the trenches appear immediately beneath a thick concentration of stone rubble, no doubt deposited by the CCC following the restoration of the fort walls. A close examination of the levels at which the CCC trenches originate indicates that, at the time of their excavation, the center of the bastion was at a significantly lower level (approximately 2 feet) than the area around the periphery of the bastion. This variation in contour is felt to be reflective, in a very general way, of the 18th century configuration of the southwest bastion.

Another interesting observation noted in each of the units excavated thus far (a total of ten) is the absence of any deposit which can be interpreted as having been the product of gradual accumulation during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather, the removal of CCC fill and modern topsoil reveals immediately an eighteenth century occupational deposit (albeit with an occasional clay pigeon fragment in its uppermost level) containing such materials as fragments of wrought iron nails, delft, scratch blue, stone and redware ceramics, dark green
bottle glass, brass and pewter buttons, etc. Bone is the most common material found in association with this layer, however, occurring in an extremely heavy concentration in square N5E6 where approximately fifty bags (each measuring 5-1/2 x 10-1/2 inches) were filled with bone refuse. With the excavation of each successive square, it appears more likely that any nineteenth century accumulation was probably removed by the CCC prior to their trench excavations.

The eighteenth century deposit itself is of varying thickness, but is largely restricted to the central area of the bastion, disappearing toward the sides of the bastion where it overlies a portion of the sterile fill deposited in 1756. Of the units excavated thus far, N5E6, contained the thickest portion of the early occupation layer, in addition to the faunal remains mentioned above. The relatively good condition of the bone and the thickness of the layer in which they are found, together with the natural slope of the original land surface from the northeast to southwest, suggests the possibility that the center of the southwest bastion may have been very muddy and, further, that it may have served primarily for the disposal of refuse. The peripheral embankments of clayey soil would also serve to retain water within the bastion, particularly as the clayey subsoil percolates very slowly. This possibility of water accumulation might also serve as an argument against the presence of a subterranean powder magazine in the southwest bastion.

Excavations were also conducted outside the walls of the fort in the form of two narrow trenches aligned perpendicular to the north curtain wall. Both trenches indicate that a ditch was not present outside the north wall of the fort and, further, that the walls were probably a good bit higher toward the northeast corner of the fort than at present. This latter interpretation is based upon the appearance of sterile subsoil at a depth of approximately one foot. The longest of the two trenches (presently twenty-six feet long and three feet wide) will be extended northward to examine the possibility of a palisade trench.

A similar trench is planned for the area outside the west wall of the fort, and attempts are now being made to arrange for a backhoe to assist in the exploration of this area. Within the southwest bastion, the discovery of brick rubble in the eighteenth century deposit in square N5E6 has prompted a decision to excavate square N5E5 in order to check for the presence of structural remains. Several additional units will also be investigated around the sides of the bastion to check for any evidence of parapet construction and to check the possibility of a powder magazine having been constructed against the bastion wall and partially buried by the deposits of sterile fill.
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July 8, 1977

Progress Report Number Three
This is the third in a series of bi-weekly reports intended to keep the Department informed on a timely basis of the progress of archeological investigations at Fort Frederick, Maryland. It is hoped that the preparation of these reports will allow a periodic review of the excavation progress as well as an opportunity to contribute to the formulation of the strategy employed in the satisfaction of project objectives. Progress reports will focus upon a description of work completed, preliminary interpretations, and excavation strategy.
This report was initially intended to summarize work completed during the final three weeks of field investigations at Fort Frederick, May 23 through June 10, 1977. The report has been expanded, however, to include an unanticipated one week extension of fieldwork, terminating on June 17, 1977. Excavation during this four week period was focused upon a continuation of the work being undertaken within the southwest bastion as well as upon a testing of the area outside the west curtain wall of the fort.

It was reported in Progress Report Number Two (May 21, 1977) that two trenches had been excavated outside the fort, perpendicular to the north curtain wall. Further note was made of the absence of any evidence of exterior fortifications in those units. In conjunction with backhoe excavations outside the west curtain wall, described in the following paragraphs, the longest of the two north trenches was extended to a total length of sixty-seven feet, still revealing no evidence of exterior fortifications. As with the first section of the trench, sterile subsoil appeared at a very shallow depth — less than one foot beneath the present surface. Artifacts were almost totally absent, and the slit trenches excavated by the C.C.C., so common in the interior of the fort, were not encountered in the area outside the north wall.

In an effort to determine the eighteenth century configuration of the area outside the west wall of the fort, five trenches were excavated by means of a backhoe. The trenches were aligned perpendicular to the west curtain wall and placed at intervals of seventy feet. Figure I illustrates the exact position of the trenches, designated West Trench I through West Trench 5 beginning with the southernmost trench. The trenches are, in addition, aligned with the overall site grid.

Careful examination of the stratigraphic sections in each trench failed to yield any evidence of exterior fortifications at Fort Frederick. Cultural deposits are, however, somewhat more extensive than was the case with the trenches in the area north of the fort, and artifact recovery was correspondingly greater. The artifacts and features noted in the five trenches were generally indicative of nineteenth century activities and contrasted markedly with the material recovered from the various units within the southwest bastion. Given the manner in which the trenches were excavated (i.e., with a backhoe) it was impossible to correlate artifacts with specific strata. West Trench 5, located adjacent to the northwest bastion, yield the most evidence of nineteenth century activities, this in the form of assorted artifacts together with pit and trench-like features. A nineteenth century roadway, marked by cobbles and cinders, was also found at the western end of this trench. C.C.C. activity was noted in the trenches close to the wall of the fort, mostly in the form of clay fill measuring
approximately six inches in depth. Slit trenches were not encountered.

In summary, excavations outside the north and west walls of the fort indicate an absence of traditional exterior fortifications such as a ditch or glacis. The absence of such evidence does not entirely rule out all possibility of some sort of outer fortification, however, as this might have taken the form of a simple wooden palisade or a system of detached redouts, either of which could have conceivably been missed by the backhoe trenches.

Within the southwest bastion attention was focused largely upon an investigation of peripheral areas in an attempt to retrieve additional information regarding the nature and configuration of parapet construction. At the same time, the excavation of two squares in the central area of the bastion was completed in order to answer questions which had been generated by the investigation of contiguous areas. (A preliminary excavation plan is included as a locational reference for the units discussed below.)

The excavation of Square N8E8, undertaken in an attempt to determine the relationship between the deposits in the southwest bastion and those in the central area of the fort, was completed with the removal of a comparatively thin seventeenth century deposit of dark brown humic soil. This layer was overlain directly by a sterile deposit of reddish yellow clay deposited by the C.C.C. (this same clay deposit is also found in the central area of the fort), and contained such items as fragments of bottle glass and seventeenth century ceramics, in addition to faunal remains. The absence of any intervening soil accumulation between the seventeenth century layer and the sterile clay fill lends further support to the hypothesized removal of overburden from the southwest bastion by the C.C.C. during the 1930's.

Square N5E5 was excavated in an effort to define the relationship between the thick eighteenth century trash deposit encountered in N5E6 and the culturally sterile fill which lines the periphery of the bastion. While this relationship was somewhat obscured by the presence of a C.C.C. slit trench, it appears that the trash deposit simply overlaps, in an accumulative fashion, the sloping surface of the sterile fill. Of more interest and importance, however, is the discovery of three large stones resting upon the 1756 humic surface in an east-west alignment. These stones served a retaining function between culturally sterile fill on their north side and a humus accumulation on the south. In other words, the sterile fill protruded further into the center of the bastion on the north than it did on the south side of these large stones. The significance of this configuration is not yet understood, but a careful review of comparative publications may permit a tentative interpretation.
Investigation of the periphery of the bastion was begun with the excavation of square N4E8. Located close to the south wall of the bastion, culturally sterile fill was encountered immediately beneath the present topsoil, except in the northwest corner of the unit where a thin layer of eighteenth century humic soil was sloping sharply toward the center of the bastion. Stratigraphically, it appears that soil has been removed from the surface in this area, probably during the 1930's. Perhaps as a result of soil removal, a careful examination of the surface of the sterile fill revealed no evidence of postmolds or other features which might have been related to parapet construction. Examination of the 1756 humus level, beneath the sterile fill, likewise revealed neither evidence relating to parapet construction, nor even artifacts which might have been deposited during the construction of the fort.

Squares N5E10 and N6E10 were excavated against the east wall of the bastion in a further attempt to recover evidence of parapet construction as well as to examine the configuration and depth of the footing of the bastion wall. As in N4E8, culturally sterile fill appeared immediately beneath present topsoil and this fill, in turn, overlaid the 1756 humus layer. While no features could be discerned on the surface of the sterile fill (once again, soil removal by the C.C.C. is likely in this area), an unusual feature did appear at the level of the 1756 humus in both units. Oriented on an axis roughly parallel with that of the west curtain wall of the fort, a series of small parallel furrows filled with hard-packed gray soil were discovered just inside the bastion wall. Careful examination of the feature revealed a configuration suggesting a parallel alignment of small logs, long since decomposed and replaced with soil. Two possibilities exist: first, that this feature predates and is, thus, unrelated to the fort or; second, that it was somehow related to fort construction. The presence of sterile fill immediately above the feature (fill thought to have been deposited in 1756) argues against the feature having served any function following fort construction. While a similar feature was discovered at Fort Ligonier and interpreted as a service trench leading from a powder magazine to a battery (Grimm 1970:31), the feature in question at Fort Frederick is not associated with a trench.

In order to further investigate the above-mentioned feature, an additional week of investigation was financed by the Maryland Park Service. During this period, two small units, each measuring 3 x 8 feet, were excavated perpendicular to the north wall of the bastion in order to determine the presence or absence of an analogous and symmetrically placed feature. No such feature was discovered. Additionally, two units of the same size were excavated in Squares N7E10 and N9E10 in an effort to determine the northward extent of the feature. Fortuitously, the feature ended near the north edge of Square N9E10. It is significant that in both units, the feature was
found beneath a thin deposit of eighteenth century humic soil and, further, that it was not associated with other features.

Finally, Square N4E3 was excavated against the west wall of the bastion in order to determine the depth and configuration of the wall footing. In contrast with the east wall of the bastion, the footing for which appeared at a depth of about two feet, the footing for the west wall was discovered at a depth of three feet.

Surprisingly, stratigraphic evidence in this unit indicates that soil was not removed from the surface by the C.C.C., at least not to the extent indicated by the stratigraphic profiles from units along the east side of the bastion. No evidence was found, however, for parapet construction.

Following the completion of field investigations at Fort Frederick, all artifactual and faunal material was washed and inventoried. Arrangements are currently being made for faunal analysis and a selection of metal items for conservation has been made. Stratigraphic profiles for selected units will be prepared for the final report in the format illustrated by the enclosed example (constructive criticism of this format is welcome) and a single site matrix will be constructed in order to chronologically integrate all excavated strata.
Matrix

North face

East face

South face

West face

SQUARE N7E7
Profile sheet