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Race and Ethnicity in Early America Reflected through Evidence from the Betsey Prince Archaeological Site, Long Island, New York

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Introduction

A small house, situated in the wilderness of northern Brookhaven Town, was built more than two hundred years ago. The house was occupied for roughly 50 to 60 years, then left abandoned and seemingly forgotten in the woods of Rocky Point, until the 1990s. It was discovered during Phase I and II cultural resource surveys conducted by the New York State Museum (NYSM) along New York State Route 25A in Rocky Point. These surveys were part of a New York State Department of Transportation project to widen Route 25A in the Town of Brookhaven, Suffolk County, New York (LoRusso 1998, 2000).

The site was determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places according to criterion D, for its potential to yield information about people who lived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that we know little about -- "free" African Americans. Mitigation was conducted at the site by the NYSM in 1993 (LoRusso 2000:195). The artifacts, field notes, and photographs from the site are curated at the NYSM.

Excavations revealed the foundation remains of a dwelling that measures approximately 3.35 by 4 meters (11x13 feet) in size. The walls consisted of unmortared fieldstones and small boulders. The cellar hole contained debris from the destruction of the house, including portions of collapsed walls and a chimney. A small storage pit was also found at the base of the cellar hole. Cultural material was recovered from excavations within and immediately adjacent to the foundation, as well as in portions of the yard that revealed the highest artifact concentrations during earlier testing.

For free African Americans, who made Long Island and other rural areas of New York their home in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, their presence in the predominantly white

rural settlements would have been conspicuous, and their lives impacted by segregation and racism. Their presence was real, and their stories are important for developing a more inclusive understanding of rural nineteenth-century life. This article investigates the presence of free African Americans in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Long Island by analyzing a small archaeological site known as the Betsey Prince site and its associated documents.

The Betsy Prince archaeological site was named after a woman who was listed as a free person of color and a head of household on the 1820 Federal census (LoRusso 2000:199). The site was occupied as early as 1790, maybe earlier, and was situated alongside at least two other households which were comprised of free African Americans between the years 1790 and about 1840. This small community was established in the wilderness along North Country Road, more than two miles southeast of the historic village of Rocky Point.

The occupants of the Betsey Prince site were variously identified as simply Prince, Prince Jessup, Rice Jessup, Betty Jessup, Betty or Betsey Prince, and Elizabeth Jessup in Federal census data (United States Census Bureau 1790-1850), deeds (Suffolk County Clerk, Suffolk County Center, Riverhead, New York [SCC]1818: Deed Liber [DL]84:858; 1833:DL S:265), a tax document (Brookhaven Tax Receipt for Prince, 1815, William Floyd Estate, Mastic, New York), and a probate inventory (Probate Inventory for the Prince Jessup Estate, Surrogate's Court, Suffolk County Center, Riverhead, New York 1816: Liber D:97). The inconsistencies in nomenclature may point to the biases of census takers, tax assessors, and government clerks. It is also possible that Prince and Elizabeth Jessup gave different names under different circumstances. One scholar (Horton 1993:155) notes that it was not uncommon for African Americans to change their names more than once, suggesting that it is important to consider the role people of color played in constructing their own identities in early America.

In order to interpret the archaeological record, it is important to understand the color line. During the early years of the recently freed American Republic, white politicians debated the meaning of freedom and sought definitions of citizenship (Gelman 2006; Johnson 2007; Morrison and Stewart 2002). The social and geographical presence of black people in this debate was dubious. While views about slavery were changing in the early nineteenth century, so were white ideas changing about the rights of free African Americans. An understanding of this socio-historical context is necessary for designing an analytical framework that may shed

light on alternative ideologies and meanings of the archaeological record.

Archival Research

The limited references to the African presence in the region come from documents hidden in the archives at the Suffolk County Center, the Suffolk County Historical Society, the William Floyd Estate, the Mount Sinai Congregational Church, and many small, locally owned and operated historical societies throughout Long Island (including the Wading River Historical Society, the Miller Place Historical Society, and the Moriches Bay Historical Society). These documents include church records, property and mortgage deeds, tax assessments (e.g., Brookhaven Tax Receipt for Prince, 1815, William Floyd Estate, Mastic, New York), and a probate inventory (Probate Inventory for the Prince Jessup Estate, Surrogate's Court, Suffolk County Center, Riverhead, New York 1816: Liber D:97).

Life in the North for people of color was characterized by racism, which manifested in their everyday lives through segregation in social and religious institutions and access to goods and services (Fitts 1996); the archival resources do not realistically reflect the experiences of the people, black or white, of the time. Nor do they suggest that the black residents of Rocky Point were privileged, treated equally or even treated fairly during business transactions or other activities in rural Long Island. Their ownership of property serves as proof that they carved out a presence within the community. The acquisition of the land, and the struggle to retain it, are significant factors that contributed to the presence of this group. Because these African-American residents are unique to Long Island history as it is known today, these documents have been of interest and researched by a few Long Island historians (Marcus 1995; Stiefel 2003).

The Betsey Prince archaeological site was identified thus through census data and deeds for adjacent properties (LoRusso 2000:199). Further documentary research indicates that this site was originally inhabited by a free black or racially-mixed person named Prince Jessup. A man named Prince is identified as "Negro" in the 1800 Federal Census, which states that he was the head of a household consisting of eight "other free persons" (United States Census Bureau 1800). He is identified next to two other households consisting of free persons of non-white or racially-mixed heritage. The Prince household is identified again in the 1810 Federal Census (United States Census Bureau 1810), and Prince, under the name of Rice Jessup, remains the

head of a household consisting of eight "other free persons, except Indians, not taxed," next to two similarly represented households.

The census data indicate that the Jessup household was located within a small succession of free black or racially-mixed heritage households between approximately 1790 and 1850. In fact, this is one of only two neighborhoods of free non-white households listed in the early censuses of the Town of Brookhaven. The other small neighborhood, located near the south shore of Long Island, was comprised of free and enslaved people of African, European, and Native American descent linked to the William Floyd Estate. William Floyd, who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, owned a large farm in Mastic near the present-day Poospatuck Indian Reservation located approximately 24 kilometers (15 miles) south of Rocky Point.

Some of the names of the other residents surrounding the Jessup household in Rocky Point (over a 60 year period) include Jonah Miller, Mineus Lyman, Benjamin Davis, and Titus Sell. The documents suggest that these men were farmers and laborers who acquired property from whites, but the acquisition of their property was not as clearly documented as their loss or sale of property. Miller, Lyman, Davis, Sell, the Jessups, and others were variably identified as colored, negro, black, mulatto, and mustey, and their names were often reported with variance. They will be referred to here as free African Americans and free black people.

These individuals represent a group that is invisible in history and the landscape. Nonetheless, their presence was real and unique to Suffolk County. The Miller, Davis, Sell, and Jessup families resided consecutively and owned property in the Town of Brookhaven during the period of gradual emancipation in New York (between 1799 and approximately 1830). At least one of these residents was enslaved and his manumission was recorded in the *Records of the Town of Brookhaven* in the early nineteenth century (Brookhaven Town Records 1888). Some of these residents were also among the earliest members of the Mount Sinai Congregational Church (established in 1789), located almost 6.5 kilometers (four miles) to the west of Rocky Point.

The free black community at Rocky Point was not spatially isolated. Rather, they were situated among the contemporary white households, many of which included free and enslaved people of color residing in their homes. Church records (Mount Sinai Congregational Church membership records, Mount Sinai Congregational Church, Mount Sinai, New York) and account

books (Suffolk County Historical Society, Riverhead, New York) indicate that these free African-American individuals attended the same churches, frequented the same stores, sought care from the same doctors, and worked alongside white residents and their laborers. I do not mean to suggest that the free black residents were privileged members of the community. The social relationship between these individuals and their white neighbors was probably multifarious, and documents provide little evidence of such complexities. It is apparent, however, that these individuals were distinct from their enslaved neighbors in the manner of legal freedom, and their documented activities suggest a moderate degree of social mobility in the larger rural society.

The Early Black Experience

Little is known about the exact origins or African identities of captive Africans that came to Long Island. However, research on the trade of captive Africans to New York City suggests that West Africans (from the Senegambia, Sierra-Leone, the Gold Coast, the Bight of Benin, and the Niger Delta) were the largest African group imported to New York during the period of English rule in the seventeenth century (Medford 2004:60-61). Without providing direct evidence for the origins of captive Africans, shipping records indicate a continued direct trade between New York and the West African coast (Medford 2004:90-93). This trade was supplemented by a provisional trade between the Northeast and the Caribbean, which resulted in the importation of captive Africans (from West and Central Africa) via the West Indies (Medford 2004:83-89).

The 1790 Federal Census (United States Census Bureau 1790) provides an interesting glimpse of the black presence in Suffolk County, as it is the only federal census taken prior to the passage of manumission legislation in New York State. African Americans represented 13.5% of the population of Suffolk County, of which 49% were enslaved. All enslaved black individuals were listed as members of white households during this census. The average ratio of enslaved individuals to slaveholding households is 2.2:1. It has been suggested, however, that this calculation may not be an accurate indicator of the enslaved experience (Moore 2005). Approximately 1/3 of the enslaved population was listed in white-headed households that contained five or more enslaved black individuals (with or without free black persons). This

calculation helps to produce a more realistic reflection of slave-holding patterns in Suffolk County (Moore 2005).

The institution of slavery was distinct on Long Island in comparison to the mainland colonies that emphasized plantation development, and to the urban slavery of New York (Moss 1993). Enslavement was practiced by various individuals, mostly farmers, but also artisans, professionals, and governmental officials who, according to Moss "held, on average, less than four slaves and one hundred acres of land" (1993:xiii-xiv).

For most farmers, laborers were needed seasonally. Consequently, enslaved laborers were hired out for short-term work by their owners or themselves. The relatively small ratio of enslaved individuals to slaveholders suggests the frequent division of African, African-American, and Native American families throughout Long Island, as it was common practice for the enslaved individuals to reside in the homes of their owners.

The number of enslaved individuals residing in Suffolk County was highest between the years 1749 and 1790 (Hartell 1943), after which attitudes about slavery began to change. Although the total number of black residents in Suffolk County reached its peak near 1790, this population declined throughout the nineteenth century (Marcus 1995).

Historians of Suffolk County have suggested, based on general calculations of census data, that since slave-holding numbers were low, enslaved African Americans most likely led solitary lives. While most slave-holding households included low numbers of enslaved individuals, many of these households also contained free black individuals. In fact, 83% of the free black population resided in white-headed households (some of which included enslaved black people). In addition, the Federal Census data indicate that households that contained higher numbers of free and enslaved African Americans were listed in close proximity to each other on the census rolls for the years 1790 and 1830 in the Town of Brookhaven (United States Census Bureau 1790-1830). Yet little is known about the social networks created by free and enslaved black people at this time.

For Brookhaven, people of color represented 16% of the population in 1790. About 46% of this group was enslaved, and 40% of the enslaved population was one of five or more enslaved black people listed within a white slave-holding household. The remaining 54% of Brookhaven's African-American population was listed as "free," however, most of these individuals were listed as residents of white households. Of a total of 275 free people of color,

only 17% of these individuals were listed in households made up exclusively of free black persons.

The Gradual Emancipation Act was instituted in New York in 1799, sanctioning gradual freedom for individuals who were "born slaves" after July 4, 1799 (Berlin and Harris 2005:167-17, 25; Hodges 1999; Medford 2004:209-210). The *Records of the Town of Brookhaven* contain approximately 70 manumission records between the years 1798 and 1826, and the 1820 and 1830 Federal censuses indicate that many of these freed people took the surnames of their former owners (Brookhaven Town Records 1888). Many other people of color remained legally enslaved in New York until 1827.

Even after manumission, many free African Americans remained linked economically and socially with their former owners (Hodges 1998, 1999; Moss 1993; White 1989). Some free people remained in the households of their former owners, while others established individual households on land owned by their former owners. Others independently purchased property to establish homes. As the economy was largely agrarian, these freed people would often work as laborers on the farms run by their former owners.

The period between the 1790s and the mid-nineteenth century was a historically significant time, and the Betsey Prince site and the surrounding community must be understood within this context. By this time, America was free from British rule. Agricultural life on Long Island resumed at a slow pace, as many of the communities were recovering from the ravages of British occupation during the Revolution (Luke and Venables 1976). The non-white population on Long Island was heterogeneous, consisting of captive Africans and Indians, recently freed people (some of which participated in the Revolution), and people of color who were born free on Long Island, or elsewhere and relocated to Long Island (from various places, including New York City, New Jersey, Connecticut, and the Caribbean). Following contemporary debates about citizenship and freedom, this was a time when ideas were changing about slavery. Africans and African-Americans suffered many restrictions on their civil liberties. While enslaved black people were slowly gaining legal freedom, others were losing the rights they had attained. Racism was taking a new institutionalized form and this likely contributed to the disappearance or demise of the black community at Rocky Point.

The Black Residents of Rocky Point

Jonah Miller, probably one of the earliest black property owners in the community, was a farmer who accumulated a large amount of property between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. There is no indication that he was enslaved in the eighteenth century, although at least one local historian has suggested that his last name may have been acquired from his previous slaveowner, possibly one of the Millers of Miller Place located three miles to the west. In Brookhaven in 1776, Richard Miller held seven enslaved African Americans, while Timothy and William Miller each held one enslaved black person, but if there was a relationship between Jonah Miller and one of these men, it remains unknown (New York State Secretary of State 1968 [1868]).

The first mention of Jonah Miller in the records was to register his cattle earmark with the Town of Brookhaven in 1789 (Brookhaven Town Records 1931:43). In 1799 and 1810, Miller was the only black property owner in the Town of Brookhaven to be taxed (Brookhaven Assessment List, 1799, Suffolk County Historical Society, Riverhead, New York; Brookhaven Tax List, 1810, Suffolk County Historical Society, Riverhead, New York). His property included one house (valued at $50) and 150 acres of land (valued at $300) in 1799, and he was taxed on property valued at $300 again in 1810. His prominence in the community is suggested by his serving as a witness for several financial transactions for his African-American neighbors, being a member of Mount Sinai Congregational Church, and having at least one child attend school.

The 1790 Federal census lists Jonah Miller as the head of a household of four free people of color (United States Census Bureau 1790). His household is followed in the census by three free black households: David (three free people of color), Bett Miller (four free people of color), and Press Miller (one free person of color). Some prominent, wealthy white residents of Brookhaven -- including Noah Hallock Jr., Jeffery Woodhull, Jacob Eaton, Thomas Helme, Samuel Davis, and John Woodhull -- were listed before and after this cluster, and a search of property deeds indicates that they were neighbors.

In 1800, the Federal census lists “Cain a Negro” (head of a household consisting of five free people of color), four white households (only one of which includes a free black person), then “Jonah a Negro” (head of a household consisting of eight free people of color), “Robbin a Negro” (head of a household of three free people of color), and “Prince a Negro” (head of a

household consisting of eight free people of color) (United States Census Bureau 1800). They are followed on the census roll by two white households, then another free black household of five ("David a Negro"). This is the first Federal census taken in New York after the Gradual Emancipation Law of 1799, and includes the first mention of the Prince Jessup household.

There is very little mention of Prince Jessup in the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century archives of the Suffolk County Historical Society and the Suffolk County Center. He was likely a laborer who married a woman named Betty or Betsey. There is no indication of him being enslaved prior to the 1800 Federal census, and there are no other individuals, black or white, by the name of Jessup in Brookhaven listed in the Federal census rolls for 1790, 1800, or 1810 (United States Census Bureau 1790-1810).

Prince Jessup was one of seven black property owners listed in the Brookhaven Tax Assessment of 1815 (Brookhaven Tax Receipt for Prince, 1815, William Floyd Estate, Mastic, New York). His property included a lot of 6 acres, 1 house, and 1 barn valued at $100. He died around 1815, and a Probate Inventory (Probate Inventory for the Prince Jessup Estate, Surrogate's Court, Suffolk County Center, Riverhead, New York 1816: Liber D:97) and Letter of Administration (Letter of Administration for the Prince Jessup Estate, Surrogate's Court, Suffolk County Center, Riverhead, New York 1816: Liber D:97) are marked by his wife Bettey Jessup in 1816.

By the time of the 1810 Federal census, the numbers of enslaved black residents residing in white households located around the free black households at Rocky Point were slowly diminishing (United States Census Bureau 1810). Jonah Miller was listed as head of a household consisting of six free people of color, followed by Tutus Sells (head of a household consisting of six free people of color), and Prince Jessup (head of a household consisting of eight people of color), identified as Rice Jessup this time. Tutus Sells is actually Titus Sells, formerly enslaved by Wessell Sells.

Wessell Sells was a prominent white settler of Wading River (located approximately 3.5 miles to the east of Rocky Point) who held slaves until his death in circa 1816. His household included five enslaved black people in 1790 and 1800, and four enslaved black people in 1810. Wessell Sells manumitted Titus Sells in 1811, according to the Brookhaven Town Records (Brookhaven Town Records 1888:150). However, one year prior to his manumission, he was listed as a free black head of household (United States Census Bureau 1810). It is evident that he

owned property in present-day Rocky Point in 1810-11, because in 1814 Titus and his wife Betty Sells sold their property, which was part of Lot 38 of the Wading River Long Lots, to John Woodhull for $100 (SCC 1814: DL D:353).

After the sale of their property, Titus and his wife Betty moved from Rocky Point to Wading River, then relocated later to Setauket. Titus was employed in agricultural labor, and his wife was a member of the Mount Sinai Congregational Church (Mount Sinai Church membership records, Mount Sinai Church, Mount Sinai, New York), located approximately six miles west of Rocky Point. She may have been buried in the Seaview cemetery adjacent to the Mount Sinai Congregational Church, where a headstone marks her death in 1852. There are a number of present-day residents of Suffolk County who have traced their ancestry to Titus Sells (Davis Gass, personal communication 2004; Carlos DeJesus, personal communication 2004).

In addition to federal and town records, documentation of the black residents of Rocky Point exists in deeds of the property of their white neighbors, which are archived at the Suffolk County Clerk's Office at the Suffolk County Center in Riverhead, New York. These deeds offer a glimpse into real placement and organization of the properties and residents at Rocky Point in the beginning of the nineteenth century, when maps are missing for this area and time period. By looking at the property transactions of the white residents in Rocky Point, it is evident that the white surveyors and neighbors recognized the black presence and their ownership of property into the twentieth century.

By 1822, Jonah Miller was declared an insolvent debtor and his property was sold to pay off his creditors. Some of his land was purchased by Mineus Lyman, another prominent black landowner in the community, and Miller likely maintained residence there until his death in 1837. Miller appeared as the head of a household of eight in the 1830 Federal census, after Betty Jessup (four free people of color) and Benjamin Davis (four free people of color). Mineus Lyman was the head of a free black household of seven nearby (United States Census Bureau 1830).

Betty Jessup remained in her husband's house after he died (circa 1815) and was identified as the head of household in the 1820 and 1830 Federal censuses (although she was variably identified as Betsey Prince or Betty Prince) (United States Census Bureau 1820; 1830). Later deeds for neighboring parcels suggest that the small estate was left to the heirs of Elizabeth Jessup, but the paper trail seems to end there by the close of the nineteenth century. Both

documentary and archaeological evidence suggest the site was abandoned soon after 1840, and it appears that the rest of the black community disappears around this time as well.

The African-American residents immediately surrounding the Jessup and Miller households slowly diminished and subsequently disappeared from the documents by the 1870s (see Manfra 2008 for early-twentieth-century history of the Rocky Point neighborhood).

Archaeological Research

Data recovery of the Betsey Prince site was performed by the NYSM in July and August of 1993 (Fig. 1). Excavations revealed a foundation wall and cellar hole in the eastern part of the house, a chimney base/sill in the western part of the house, a small storage pit dug into the cellar hole, a small midden in the rear yard 10.5 meters (35 feet) southeast of the house, and three additional artifact concentrations in the rear yard (LoRusso 1998:23).

The house contained two rooms: a main room which measured roughly 3.35 by 4 meters (11x13 feet), and a 1.8 by 2.45 meter (6x8 foot) kitchen wing with fireplace located west of the main room (LoRusso 1998:70; Fig. 2). The construction of the kitchen wing was contemporaneous with the remainder of the house. The house foundation and chimney base

Figure 1. Excavations at the Betsey Prince site (Photograph courtesy of NYSM).

consisted of unmortared fieldstone boulders, and the chimney was brick. The remainder of the house was likely wood frame and clapboard construction, as was typical of the New England building tradition on eastern Long Island (ibid). At this time, most houses were oriented toward the main road, but artifact distributions at the site suggest that it was equally likely that this structure was entered from the east, with the kitchen wing at the rear of the house (LoRusso 1998:71). An additional south entrance from the rear yard was also probable (LoRusso 1998:72).

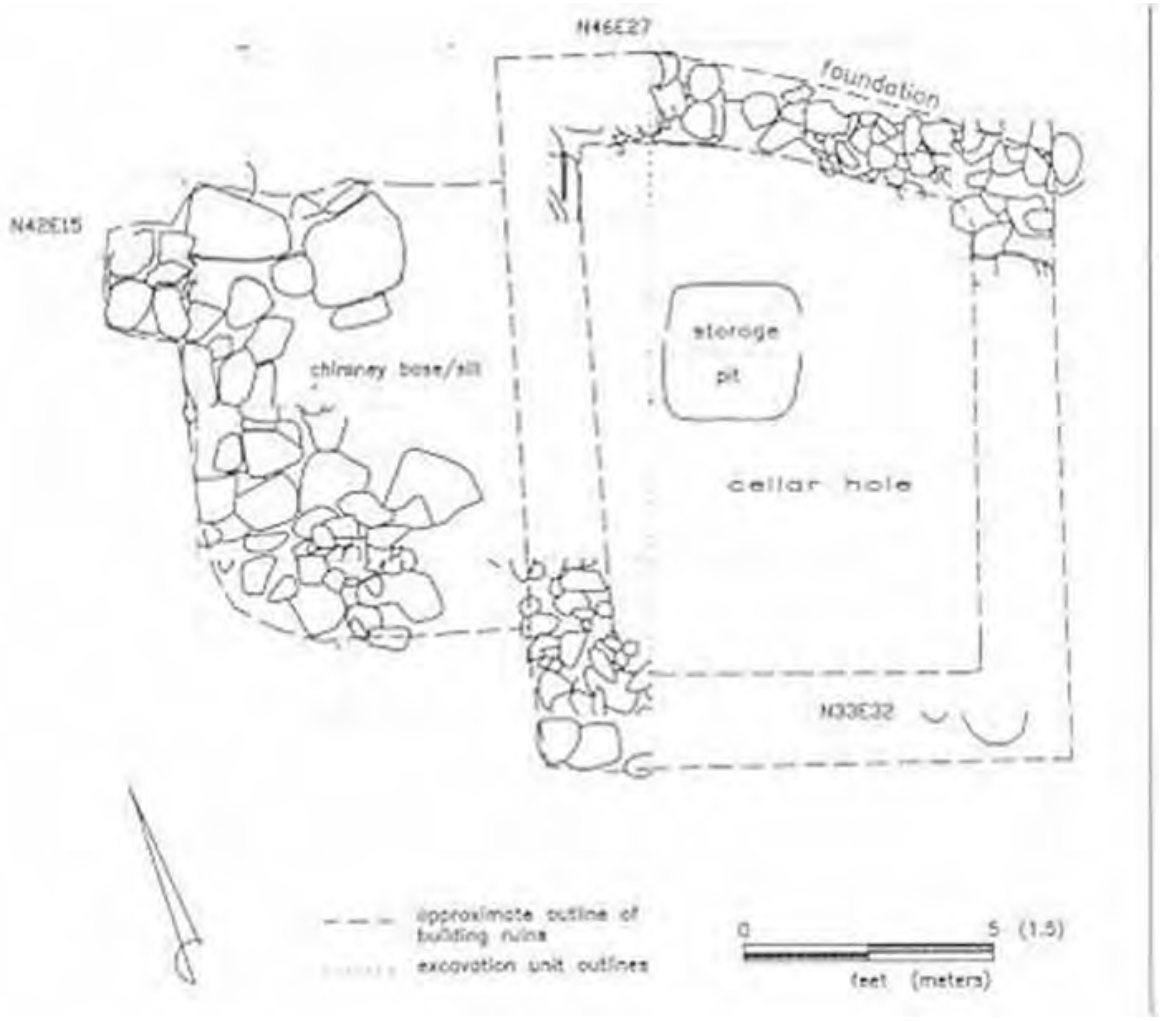

Figure 2. Outline of house foundation at the Betsey Prince site (figure courtesy of NYSM).

The archaeological record indicated that the house was originally built as a two-room structure, comprising a main room (3.35 x 4 meters [11 x 13 feet]) with a kitchen wing (1.8 x 2.45 meters [6 x 8 feet]) to the west, and was occupied with little evidence of change during a

55-75 year period (LoRusso 1998:62). It was primarily constructed prior to 1790, with some additional improvements between 1790 and 1820, and completed prior to 1830 (LoRusso 1998:65). The main entrance of the house would have been on the north or east side, based on low densities of artifacts and proximity to the highway (LoRusso 1998:72).

A total of 7,095 artifacts (exclusive of brick, shell, and mortar) were recovered from all phases of excavations at the Betsey Prince site. Most of the artifacts were recovered from within the dwelling structure and from the edges of the rear yard (LoRusso 1998:55).

At 84%, kitchen-related artifacts dominated the assemblage at the site, most of which were ceramics (LoRusso 1998:43). The minimum number of vessels is 117, comprised of 15-20 storage/dairy, 22-29 kitchen, 30-33 tablewares, 49 teawares, and one additional vessel (LoRusso 1998:43).

The density of artifacts within the structure was attributed to loss (in the case of buttons and other personal objects recovered from the cellar floor), intentional discard (in the case of the faunal remains concentrated around the chimney base/sill and on the cellar floor), or a combination of the two processes (in the case of the kitchen materials) (LoRusso 1998:61).

Outside the structure, domestic disposal was limited to specific areas of the yard. This activity was demonstrated through the higher densities of artifacts identified in concentrations located in the southeast (including ceramic fragments and food waste) and southwest (including ceramic, vessel glass, and lamp glass sherds with some clamshell) portions of the rear yard (LoRusso 1998:61). Most of the kitchen waste was transported to rear yard deposits early in the settlement of the site (LoRusso 1998:62).

Methodology: Artifact Analysis

The purpose of this project was to attempt to interpret the data that was recovered by the NYSM in a framework that accommodates the fluid, often complex processes of identity formation.

This project was an exercise in applying the body of knowledge accumulated by archaeologists, folklorists, and other scholars of the African diaspora to this early-nineteenth-century site. Were the consumption practices of the residents influenced by their ethnicity? What, if anything, can we learn from the material culture about the lives of African-American people during this time? These questions contribute to a larger interest in the process by which

Africans became African Americans and to the development of an African-American aesthetic over time.

The Betsey Prince site, at first glance, is an appropriate example for testing our knowledge of African-American archaeology. Thus far, it contains two of the three lines of evidence that are necessary for making inferences about ethnicity from the archaeological record: archaeological context and the documentary record (Wall 2000a). The third line of evidence, the artifacts, is the subject of this project. An analysis of the field notes, artifacts, and other data available from the site are necessary for understanding the relationships between stratigraphy, artifacts, features and the manipulation of the landscape. A re-examination of these data depends on knowledge of the present trends in African-American or African diaspora archaeology.

In 1990, Brown and Cooper challenged Eurocentric biases in previous interpretations of African-American material culture. They advocate the abandonment of archaeologists' current values, assumptions, and uses of items in order to understand the process of acculturation, because "artifacts indicative of ethnicity or ethnic retentions probably represent African or African-American behaviors which, for the most part, utilized the available European-American material culture" (Brown and Cooper 1990:9). This article challenged the simplistic attempts of archaeologists who sought the presence or absence of African traits on African-American sites. Although African diaspora archaeology has become more sophisticated in theory and method since this article was published, Brown and Cooper's article is still relevant for the future of the field.

Use of the term "acculturation" has been the source of much debate in the archaeology of ethnicity. Criticized for inherent Eurocentric biases (Singelton 1999:5), acculturation studies have largely been replaced by studies of creolization (Ferguson 1992) and cultural transformation (Armstrong 1999) in the archaeology of Africans in America. Mintz and Price (1992 [1976]) initiated the creolization model that has been extensively used in Americanist anthropological studies of the African diaspora. Both of these theoretical techniques are concerned with understanding the *process* of creating an African-American culture. More recently, Fennell (2007) has attempted to introduce the concept of "ethnogenic bricolage" in contrast to the previous syncretic (i.e., blending of cultures) approaches. Unlike acculturation and creolization studies, which are dependent on the recognition of an imbalance of power, this concept of ethnogenic bricolage emphasizes agency within a dynamic culture. Fennell states that

"in a process of ethnogenic bricolage, individuals of different cultural heritages interact over time to formulate new social networks with new repertoires of key symbols, communicative domains, and cultural practices. Those new symbols are created and developed over time in large part through engagements with the multiple elements of abbreviated, multivalent symbols from each of the contributing cultural groups" (Fennell 2007:129-30). In contrast to previous syncretist explanations of cultural formation, this method attempts to understand why certain cultural traits are selected for in the creation of the new blended culture. Its usefulness in accomplishing this task, however, is yet to be determined.

It is probable that the members of the indigenous, African, and Euro-American populations on Long Island, consciously or unconsciously, participated in the formation of a blended culture. In order to understand this process, regardless of the terminology we use to define it, it is necessary to first understand the features of each of these cultural groups. This project was an attempt to understand the material remains of the Betsey Prince site as they have been understood and/or left behind by the occupants of the site. That is why I have chosen to emphasize the African-American nature of the Betsey Prince archaeological site, with special attention dedicated to the indigenous and Euro-American contributions to the material (see Manfra 2008).

Multivalency and the Archaeology of African-American sites

Since artifacts can have different meanings in assorted contexts and to various people, I devised a plan for analysis that would allow for the exploration of multivalency in the archaeological record. My analysis of the Betsey Prince site began with the artifact assemblage. At the NYSM, I examined each of the artifacts for wear patterns, markings, or any other attributes that were not identified during the initial analysis. Working with the artifact database that was previously created by the Collections Department at the NYSM, I added data fields to record supplemental information I collected. On several African-American sites located in the southern United States, English artifacts were recovered that had been "modified in ways to make them gain West African-based cultural meanings" (Samford 1994). Recycling has been identified as a feature of West African culture (Posnansky 1999:33), so the identification of similar attributes on the Betsey Prince artifacts might provide information about alternative meanings and/or uses.

Posnansky (1999:33) notes "on archaeological excavations large sherds need to be examined for residues and wear patterns, and their locations carefully considered in order to determine whether a secondary function is conceivable." Following this recommendation, I examined all pieces of ceramic and glass for markings (such as an "X" or cross) and/or modifications, including smoothing, tumbling, or other re-working activities. On African-American sites throughout the southeast, modified ceramic sherds have been recovered from various contexts and have frequently been referred to as gaming pieces (Leone and Fry 1999; Russell 1997; Samford 1994; Wall 2000a). Modified glass items have also been recovered from various African-American contexts (Klingelhofer 1987; Wilkie 1996).

Metal items were examined for a possible discussion of activities, to understand placement and context within the site, and to discern any possible markings (such as an "X" or cross). Metal artifacts, including architectural nails, dining utensils, tools, straight pins, coins, and items of adornment (such as jewelry and buttons) have been discovered in pragmatic, but also spiritual contexts on African-American sites (Klingelhofer 1987; Leone and Fry 1999; Russell 1997; Samford 1994; Wall 2000a). Unfortunately, most of the metal artifacts from the Betsey Prince site have disintegrated, and are virtually unrecognizable. Most of the metal artifacts that were not exported for conservation were unidentifiable without the NYSM photographs and notes from the artifact analysis.

Faunal remains were examined to identify butchering, and types of bones, where possible. The context of each bone was also noted, as animal bones have been identified on African-American sites in various contexts (Leone and Fry 1999; Russell 1997; Samford 1994). However, few of the bones could be identified by species due to size. Shellfish remains were identified by type. Shellfish is commonly found on historic period sites throughout Long Island. However, the site's distance of more than two miles from the Long Island Sound should be considered when evaluating shellfish quantities and considering alternative explanations. With regard to African-American sites, some researchers have emphasized the relationship between shells and the sea, as water plays an important role in West African spirituality (Fennell 2007).

Lithic artifacts were recovered from the site in small quantities. These items are notable because lithic artifacts, usually prehistoric tools and quartz crystals, have been discovered on African-American sites (Brown and Cooper 1990; Russell 1997). Throughout Long Island, prehistoric artifacts are also commonly found on historic period archaeological sites. The lithic

artifacts were examined for markings and/or reworking. Archaeological context will be significant in explaining the presence of such items.

Architectural material, such as brick, mortar, and plaster, were examined for local environmental indicators, such as shell, sand, and quartz pebbles and gravel. In addition, these pieces were analyzed for indications of recycling activities. Recycled prehistoric material was discovered in the foundation remains of a contemporary site excavated on the east end of Long Island (Bernstein et al. 1994). The Bianco site, a modest site constructed of similar means as the Betsey Prince site and occupied during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, yielded foundation remains that included a worked cobble (prehistoric core) and a biface fused in mortar. The Betsey Prince architectural artifacts were examined for similar attributes. However, only a few pieces of mortar exhibited use of local materials, such as shell, pebbles, and sand. There was no evidence for recycling within the architectural materials. Two large, locally handmade bricks were recovered from the site. No markings were identified on these or any of the smaller brick fragments.

Each of the above mentioned artifact categories are significant within the context of the archaeological site. The search for these items is essentialist if they are considered apart from each other, or separate from their placement within the site. When found in specific contexts, these items can provide evidence of African-American meanings. Often identified in caches or bundles, these items have been found in hidden locations of African-American homes or workplaces, such as within walls, hidden beneath floor boards, within root cellars, in hearths, below doorways and windows, and in northeast corners of rooms (Leone and Fry 1999).

Caches or bundles have been found on African-American sites containing items such as "crystals, pebbles, gnarled roots, pieces of iron, metal, ivory, wooden rings, and crab claws, usually wrapped in leaves or a cloth" (Leone and Fry 1999:379). From an assortment of narratives collected by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) that discuss conjuring, healing, and divining, Leone and Fry have identified "pins, nails, buttons, beads, coins, white ceramics, crystals, jewelry, stones, cloth, and their contexts" as the material evidence of these activities (1999:382). Not all of these items are found, and some caches contain previously unmentioned artifacts. The diversity of items recovered from similar spiritual and/or healing bundles in various locations may be reflective of the diversity of resources available, ingenuity, the particularity of the conjuring or healing activity, and the heterogeneity of African-American

people. A survey of caches found at several sites was compiled as a reference for the variety of items found, and the importance of association.

On some sites, these caches have been identified as West African tool kits. They have been interpreted as reflective of West African spiritual practices, often used in curing, healing, divining, and protecting (Leone and Fry 1999). This approach is problematic because it assumes the presence of a generalized West African culture; it ignores the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity of the region (DeCorse 1999). The assumption that African-American cultural practices can be traced to this region relies on the belief that culture is static and bounded. One critique of the West Africanist perspective emphasizes change in African cultural practices and symbols in the Americas because Africans were unable to replicate the social systems of which they were a part (DeCorse 1999). Furthermore, modern African cultural practices may not be the same as those in the past, presenting the problem of projecting aspects of the present onto the past (Singleton 2006).

The search for Africanisms in African-American culture is a politically charged process of attempting to identify authenticity. In his study of black music Gilroy makes the point of distinguishing the challenges of two main approaches to interpreting identity formation within the African diaspora: the essentialist approach of ethnic absolutism inherent in Africentrism and its pluralist critique (1993). Residing at an intermediary position within this debate, he argues that "the unabashedly hybrid character of …black Atlantic cultures continually confounds any simplistic (essentialist or anti-essentialist) understanding of the relationship between racial identity and racial non-identity, between folk cultural ethnicity and pop cultural betrayal" (Gilroy 1993:99). Without denying the importance of African symbols and meaning to the formation of black Atlantic identities and cultures, Gilroy argues that the complex experiences of movement and culture contact have contributed to a hybrid Atlantic identity that emphasizes agency in the selection of cultural features.

Singleton (2006) provides a review of the debates surrounding the interpretation of African-American culture in anthropology and archaeology. She notes that although the identification of ethnic markers may provide an initial reference point, "all too often these artifacts become the primary focus of the archaeological discussion, and the interpretation of other objects is not given much consideration" (2006:62). As an alternative, she suggests that

researchers explore the possibilities wherein artifacts and practices may have acquired new meaning, as in appropriation.

The concept of ethnogenic bricolage presents the most useful theoretical framework for understanding the processes of identity formation and the creation of an African-American culture (Fennell 2007). This framework emphasizes hybridity and multivalency in the archaeological record. The archaeological record is therefore interpreted as an African-American design, created by people of African descent who chose aspects of the material and social culture that are available and may or may not appropriate new meanings to existing phenomena. The result is distinctly African-American.

Ethnogenic bricolage was employed as a model during this re-examination of the archaeological data from the Betsey Prince site. This analysis required the incorporation of stratigraphy information into my working database. This was effective for interpreting deposition processes at the site, the associations between artifacts, and understanding the differences between loss, discard, and intentional placement of artifacts. The special attention to artifact associations and placement within the structure should present the opportunity to identify recognizable aspects of African-American culture, including the toolkits discussed above. This methodology was utilized for its potential to illuminate aspects in the formation of an African-American culture.

Results

Analysis of the Betsey Prince remains began with the recognition of the sensitive zones within domestic structures for identifying African-American caches or bundles (Leone and Fry 1999). Particular areas of interest include the northeast corners of rooms, below doorways and windows, in hearths, and in root cellars. Meaningful cultural material has also been identified below floor boards in African-American homes. I consulted the excavation field notes and artifact catalog for the Betsey Prince site to discuss the conditions of these locations, where possible, and the potential to interpret the data as reminiscent of archaeological material recovered from other known African-American contexts. Unfortunately, the locations of windows and doors could not be identified at the Betsey Prince site. However, the chimney base/sill, cellar floor, and cellar storage pit were all thoroughly investigated by the NYSM.

The chimney base/sill was exposed in Unit N42/E15 and part of Unit N39/E15. The chimney base was constructed of unmortared stones and cobbles, and the chimney was built of brick. Rubble from the collapse of the chimney disrupted the integrity of the chimney base. During excavations, an intact fireplace hearth was never identified because of the poor integrity of the feature (LoRusso 1998:34). The artifacts recovered from this location include construction debris, kitchen ceramics, vessel glass, personal items (including a metal button and buckle), and kitchen metal. Although I was not able to identify most of these items (due to deterioration of the metal), they have been cataloged as fragments of utensils and cutlery, pot and skillet fragments, hooks and rings, and an andiron leg. All of these items would have been used in cooking or food preparation. Unfortunately, the poor integrity of the feature hindered the identification of the hearth and associated artifacts. Although this feature provides minimal evidence about the kinds of tools being used during cooking, it offers virtually no opportunity to explore the possibility of an African-American toolkit in this location. Whether or not items were intentionally placed here for cultural or spiritual meaning could not be determined.

The cellar hole was explored during excavations in order to understand the building sequence at the site. Most of the units that encountered the cellar hole were excavated primarily over fieldstone foundation remains to explore the layout of the house. Three strata were recovered in the cellar hole: occupation, destruction, and post-destruction (LoRusso 1998:25). The occupation level of the cellar floor measured approximately 20-30 centimeters (eight to 12 inches) and comprised items that may have been lost by the inhabitants over time. This context may also provide evidence of intentional placement of artifacts that is suggestive of spiritual significance as identified at other sites occupied by African-Americans.

Two units in particular, N39/E27 and N36/E27, yielded portions of the cellar floor adjacent to foundation remains. Only 53 artifacts were recovered from the cellar floor in these units. Due to the small exposures of the cellar floor and the minimal information available about the recovery of the artifacts, few, if any, connections can be drawn about intentional deposition of artifacts.

A similar problem is evident for the northeast corner of the house. Although part of the foundation wall was recovered in this location (in Units N46/E27, N46/E30 and N44.5/E33), very little access to the cellar floor and a low density of recovered artifacts provides limited data for interpretation. These units were excavated in order to assess the size and layout of the house-

not to gather information about artifact deposits in this location. However, the artifacts recovered from this location include a quartz projectile point fragment and a pierced grey slate pendant. Both of these items have prehistoric origins, but were recovered from contexts that contained late-eighteenth- through early-nineteenth-century artifacts. The recovery of these items from the northeast portion of the house is significant, as investigations at other African-American sites have produced similar results (Leone and Fry 1999). Unfortunately, it is virtually impossible to recreate the placement of associated artifacts. There may be more artifacts in this location, which together with the lithics, might comprise a recognizable toolkit. However, since the associations between these artifacts were not recorded, such possibilities will remain unknown. From the field notes, it cannot be determined if other artifacts were intentionally placed or accidentally discarded in this location.

The stone pendant shows evidence of smoothing, and it was suggested by LoRusso that one side was used as a sharpening tool, due to the scratches into the stone (LoRusso 1998:52). Upon closer inspection, the scratches resemble the outline of an anthropomorphic character, possibly a man-bird or Thunderbird. The Thunderbird or thunder-being was an important deity among the Lenape (Strong 1997:115). The symbol may have held meaning for various Long Island Native American groups as well, as this imagery has been found on a pottery sherd near the Shinnecock Reservation in Southampton (Strong 1997:115). A similar item was brought to the attention of archaeologists at the Institute for Long Island Archaeology at Stony Brook University in the 1990s. The item, a pierced stone pendant with an anthropomorphic figure etched into it, was recovered by a pedestrian from the shores of Sound Beach, approximately 3.5 miles northwest of the Betsey Prince site (Daria Merwin, personal communication 2006).

The final opportunity for exploring location-specific deposits within the house is in the base of the cellar. The pit feature there was a storage pit that was excavated below the cellar floor by the site's occupants. As mentioned above, the precise function of this feature was previously unknown, but linked to storage of perishable foods. The possible association of this feature with African-American practices and/or the storing of valuables were also considered (LoRusso 1998). The storage pit was encountered in Units N40/E27 and N43/E27, measuring approximately 0.6-0.75 meters (two to 2.5 feet) wide and 40-45 centimeters (16-18 inches) deep (LoRusso 1998:26).

Below levels of fill from destruction and post-destruction was an intact occupation stratum. The color and texture of this level was markedly different from the levels above and in other units throughout the site. The occupation level in the pit was characterized by sand that was more clayey in texture. Sandy Long Island soils are frequently plagued by bioturbation. However, the clayey texture of this deposit provided a more distinct layer with potential for recreating associations between artifacts.

Cultural material recovered from this context includes one worked deer antler, two small animal bones, a chisel, metal knife blade and fork tine, eight nails, three buttons, clam and oyster shell, flat and curved glass, 24 historic ceramic fragments (including creamware, pearlware, Jackfield, and redware), metal container fragments, and a ceramic doll foot (documented in the field notes, but absent from the artifact catalog). Is this assemblage the result of basic domestic loss, or were these items purposely placed in this location? Artifacts such as these are commonly found in household contexts, but could this collection have spiritual and/or cultural meaning? This assemblage of items is similar to the contents of sub-floor pits found in slave houses in Virginia (Samford 2007) and the cache of artifacts recovered from an African-American healer's toolkit at the Levi Jordan Plantation (Brown and Cooper 1990).

Additional artifacts of interest were recovered from the levels above this context, including a crochet hook, a straight pin, a cross anchor pin, an earring, an assortment of metal buttons, two coins (1802 and 1807), a wrought iron fish hook, and iron stove and pot fragments. Although the association between these artifacts and the levels in the base of the storage pit remain unknown, the comparatively high density of personal items (compared to the rest of the site) in this location may have some significance. They could represent domestic activity, or might exhibit spiritual meaning. Unfortunately, nothing further can be discerned about the placement of these items.

As previously demonstrated, some of the items excavated from the Betsey Prince site have multiple uses and origins. This analysis was conducted by stressing multivalency in the interpretation of the archaeological record. Some of the cultural deposits demonstrated patterning that is similar to deposits recovered on other known African-American sites. What more can be understood from the artifact assemblage?

Teawares

As mentioned above, the assemblage of teawares -- initially a non-matched assemblage of creamwares, fine red earthenwares, Chinese porcelain, Jackfield, and red stoneware, and a later preference for polychrome pearlwares (LoRusso 1998:78) -- recovered at the Betsey Prince site raises questions about the social and economic status of the household. By the nineteenth century, tea drinking was a common practice in American households (Roth 1988). Tea serving and consumption is associated with domesticity (Wall 2000b), and it can be representative of social interactions (Douglas Armstrong, pers. comm. 2008). But are there any alternative meanings or explanations for the teawares? Might ethnicity be a factor in the acquisition of these items?

Wilkie considered the use of medicinal teas by root doctors, midwives, and healers, "brewed from medicinal herbs or substances, salves, or whiskey-based 'home made bitters'" (1997:85). Perhaps if the artifacts recovered from the pit storage are indeed reflective of an African-American healer's toolkit, then the use of teawares for medicinal, healing teas correlates positively with African-American influences on consumption at the site. Tea cups, tea bowls, and other teawares were also used by African-American spiritual leaders as vessels for conjure (Puckett 1968, Wilkie 1994). Women in colonial New England were recognized for their knowledge of roots and herbal remedies (Beck 1992:39). Perhaps knowledge of healing practices and recipes were shared among people of African, indigenous, and even European descent. If the teawares were used for a purpose other than traditional English tea drinking, then the influence of African, European, and indigenous healing practices may have been demonstrated in the alternative uses of these items.

The teawares could also demonstrate social interaction or social connectedness, and thus serve to identify a point of social congregation (Douglas Armstrong, pers. comm. 2008). This type of activity was observed through the recovery of matched tea sets at the Harriet Tubman home in Auburn, New York, where Tubman established a home for the aged and served others (Douglas Armstrong, pers. comm. 2008).

Spirituality

Cultural blending may also be demonstrated in the religious or spiritual aspects of African-American life at the Betsey Prince site. Many of the English settlements in northern

Brookhaven town included Christian churches of various denominations. As mentioned above, the nearest church to the Betsey Prince site was the Mount Sinai Congregational Church. Although there is no evidence that Betsey or Prince Jessup attended the church, some of their neighbors were recorded as members of the congregation. The presence of an artifact with a Christian symbol, a gilt brass pin with an anchor and cross, suggests a Christian influence at the site (LoRusso 1998). Several buttons with a similar motif were recovered from burials at the African Burial Ground, an eighteenth century cemetery for free and enslaved Africans in New York City (Bianchi and Bianco 2006).

In some American colonies where Catholicism was practiced among the Europeans, Africans may have incorporated aspects of the religion to their own spiritual practices. Raboteau notes that "making creative use of the similarities between Catholicism and the religions of Africa, African slaves and their African-American descendents incorporated elements from Catholicism and from diverse African religions into new African-American religions" (2001:12). In Cuba, the material remains recovered from a slave context suggest a similar blending of religious traditions (Singleton 2006). Although the early European churches and religious activities on Long Island were Protestant, it is still possible that African-American people incorporated aspects of African and Christian traditions in the formation of a new African-American religion. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries independent African-American churches, including the previously mentioned Bethel AME church in Setauket, began to form from black members of white Protestant churches (Raboteau 2001:19). It is likely that black people appropriated new spiritual meanings to artifacts, just as early-nineteenth-century black preachers interpreted Christian stories and symbols to accommodate the struggles and conditions of black people (Raboteau 2001:19-20).

Diet

Very little information about diet is available from the faunal remains at the site. A total of 16 fragments of animal bone was recovered during excavations of the Betsey Prince site, fifteen of which were identified as kitchen and/or unidentified bone. The paucity of animal bone may be indicative of the acidic conditions of Long Island soil, recovery methods at the site, or consumption practices by the site's inhabitants. The abundance of shell recovered from the site suggests that the household diet may have been more dependent on maritime resources, despite

the distance of more than two miles from the coast. African-American and Native-American men were frequently employed at sea during the early historic period on Long Island (Moss 1993). Perhaps someone living at or near the Jessup household labored at sea and returned with clams and oysters for household consumption. A probate inventory for the Jessup estate (Probate Inventory for the Prince Jessup Estate, Surrogate's Court, Suffolk County Center, Riverhead, New York 1816: Liber D:97) indicates that 14 fowl, three geese, and one cow were present on the small farm. The Jessup household diet was largely comprised of animal products and bivalve mollusks (clams and oysters).

Comparing Archaeological and Documentary Records

The probate inventory enumerated additional material that is indicative of household activities, including a hand saw, square, four chisels, a drawing knife, five axes, a grindstone, a pounding barrel, and a ladder. Similar items recovered during excavations include a horse shoe, a horse shoe nail, a whetstone, and five chisel fragments. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries people of color in rural Long Island performed various skilled and unskilled tasks for a living (Moss 1993). The cutting of cordwood was a common practice in the wooded interior portions of Brookhaven Town, and the material represented in Jessup's probate inventory suggests he may have engaged in this type of labor. In addition, the four or more chisels, drawing knife, and grindstone/whetstone mentioned in the archival and archaeological records suggest skilled woodworking was an activity performed at the Jessup household.

An interesting aspect of the probate inventory is the paucity of ceramic and glass items appraised. Four bottles, two stone jugs, one jug, and a two gallon stone jug are the only vessels listed for the storage or preparation of food and/or beverage. This presents a different image of household items than what was recovered during archaeological investigation. As with most documents, the probate inventory provides insight into what was valuable to the appraisers, and may not necessarily reflect what was valued by the owner. However, it is interesting that the extensive collection of teawares was not appraised. If Betsey Jessup owned the ceramic and glass items, then is it possible that her property was excluded from the appraisal? Perhaps the appraisers distinguished between his and her property, or perhaps the appraisers did not assess the ceramic and glass wares as valuable items. Alternatively, the presentation of the estate to the appraisers may not have included the ceramic and glass items. Perhaps Betsey kept these items

concealed when her husband's estate was appraised. It is also possible that she acquired her collection of teawares after her husband's death. Many of the wares, however, would have been out of date by then. There is a range of factors that contribute to the presence or absence of items in probate inventories, but with the archaeological record, it is incredibly useful for understanding the material assemblage with greater accuracy. It also provides an interesting glimpse at gendered activities and their corresponding material at the Betsey Prince site.

This article has attempted to interpret the assemblage from the Betsey Prince archaeological site within a framework that accentuates diverse cultural influences and the formations of new African-American traditions. The artifactual and documentary records have been integrated to illuminate aspects of everyday African-American lifeways at the site, such as diet and household activities. It was the author's intent to argue that people of color did not assimilate into white society, but rather chose items that were readily available and appropriated new meanings to existing items in the early stages of forming a new African-American culture. Africans and African-Americans in early America originated from different ethnic backgrounds, had different experiences, and were confronted with new cultures upon arrival in the Americas. Understanding how African-Americans responded to these challenges is crucial to understanding how Africans became African-Americans.

Conclusion

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries encompassed a period in the formation of the United States of America when identities were changing and notions of freedom and civil liberty were being explored. This was also the period when the State of New York sanctioned gradual manumission for enslaved Africans. During this time, the Betsey Prince site was a small household parcel on North Country Road in the wilderness of Rocky Point. The site was occupied by as many as eight free people of color at one point, and other free black households were established nearby.

Little is known about the occupants of the site. Prince Jessup was a farmer or laborer who died around 1815. The probate inventory from his estate indicated that he owned a collection of tools for woodworking and farming, furniture, domestic items, and farm animals. The archaeological record, however, presented evidence of an affinity for teawares at the site, which were noticeably absent from the probate inventory.

The Betsey Prince house was modest in size, constructed of unmortared fieldstone and comprising only two rooms (one of which contained the fireplace hearth/chimney base). Most of the artifacts at the site were recovered from post-destruction, destruction, and occupancy levels within the house. This was the subject of this analysis, as the archaeological record was investigated for the potential to yield evidence of African-American cultural traditions.

Two locations within the house suggested that African-American identity and cultural activities influenced consumption patterns and formation of the archaeological record. Near the northeast corner of the house, two prehistoric items (a quartz projectile point fragment and a pierced grey slate ornament) were recovered with other artifacts. Although the relationship between these and other artifacts could not be explained, the recovery of these items near the northeast corner is significant, as a similar pattern has been discovered at other African-American sites (Leone and Fry 1999).

In addition, a storage pit dug into the cellar by the occupants of the site yielded one worked deer antler, two kitchen bones, a chisel, metal knife blade and fork tine, eight nails, three buttons, clam and oyster shell, flat and curved glass, 24 historic ceramic fragments (including creamware, pearlware, Jackfield, and redware), metal container fragments, and a ceramic doll foot. This assemblage is comparable to the contents of sub-floor pits at slave houses in Virginia. It is also similar to a cache recovered from a presumed African-American healer or magician's toolkit on the Levi Jordan Plantation. This is compelling evidence that cultural practices and spiritual beliefs within the storage pit and the toolkit at the Levi Jordan Plantation are similar. However, the chronological difference between the two sites presents a problem for this comparison. The Levi Jordan site, occupied between 1850 and 1880, was much later than the Betsey Prince site. Chronological and regional differences between the two sites may have contributed to different experiences for African Americans. Consequently, different experiences may have resulted in different manifestations of cultural activity. Is it useful to compare these two sites? For this study, it is reasonable to compare these two sites because it is not the artifacts themselves that constitute an authentic African-American tradition. Rather, it is the process of cultural formation, and the multivalency of items from the archaeological record, that are compelling in this comparison.

An understanding of the multivalent properties of artifacts is necessary for providing alternative interpretations of the archaeological record at the site. It was this process that

illuminated the African, indigenous, and European influences to the archaeological record. Further research is necessary to explore the meanings of indigenous items in historical contexts. Additional research is warranted also to understand how meaning was assigned in African-American culture at the Betsey Prince site, and at other sites of early African-American habitation. Analyzing the archaeological record within a framework that emphasizes choice and multivalency is crucial to understanding agency on early African-American archaeological societies. This will, in turn, influence our understanding of the cultural processes behind the formation of African-American culture.

Note

* The author is a doctoral student at the CUNY Graduate Center; this study is derived from her MA thesis at Syracuse University.

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