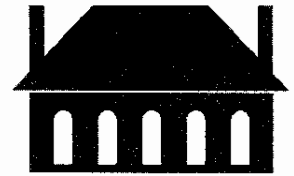


Hanover County Historical Society BULLETIN



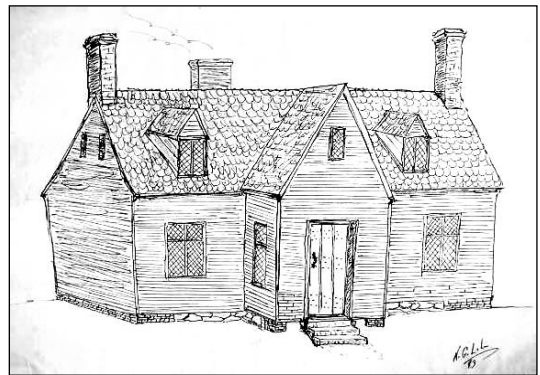
No. 82 *"I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past."* – Patrick Henry Summer 2010

Uncovering Hanover's Past: Broaddus Flats

Archeologist Tom Hobbs has been conducting excavations at the Broaddus Flats site since 1992.¹ He spoke to the Society in May about his findings at the site. A number of artifacts are currently on display in the Society's case in the Administrative Building at Hanover Courthouse.

Broaddus Flats is located on the Pamunkey River in northeastern Hanover County on land considered to be "frontier" by English settlers. A map dating from 1715, however, shows the territory between the Pamunkey and Mattaponi rivers as having been occupied by the Metsquin Indians. Native Americans undoubtedly lived on this flat terrain adjacent to the Pamunkey River for thousands of years as indicated by findings at this site, including glass trade beads, fire cracked rocks, projectile points of several types, pottery shards, and colono ware.² Because this part of Virginia was still in a "contact period" between the Native Americans and Anglo-American settlers, it was not surprising to find Indian pottery and pipe parts in the same context with colonial artifacts.

It was common for English settlers to build upon the sites of Indian villages because of their strategic locations on good agricultural land, usually along the edges of streams which provided transportation as well as water. Indeed, as indicated by the pattern of postholes discovered at the Broaddus Flats site, the house was built directly over the remains of longhouses believed to have been part of an Indian village.



**Artist's Concept of the House, c1690
by Gordon Lohr**

By the middle of the 17th century, only a handful of brave settlers ventured west of Virginia's fall line. Evidence for self-protection or participation in a militia may be deduced from some of the artifacts uncovered at the site, including flintlock gun parts and "used-up" gunflints, and an iron sword pommel to a 17th century rapier, a type of sword worn by officers and gentlemen of the day. Some fancy brass buckles from the house site may be from the hat bands of the type worn by militiamen in the 17th century.

As can be expected, defense was foremost on the minds of these frontier settlers. Evidence of a palisade enclosure of about a half acre was discovered around the house at the Broaddus Flats site. The palisade was equipped with a "catwalk" along the inside of the wall to allow one to see over the top or to look through gun slots cut into the wall. A great deal of thought obviously went into designing and laying out this triangular enclosure, utilizing a possible military design with strategic placement along

the fall line of the Pamunkey River. Although the palisade may have been built merely to fortify a house, the possibility that this may be the site of the 17th-century Fort Menaskin is worth considering.³

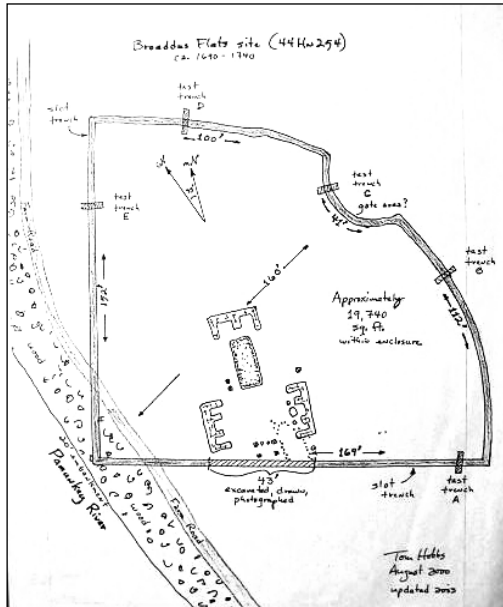


Diagram showing palisade.

Records have strongly suggested early ownership of this large parcel of land now known as Broadus Flats by a few gentlemen and a lady of the late 17th century. Today, some of the low ground still bears the old name “Woremeley’s Field,” undoubtedly a reference to Ralph Woremeley, Esq., of Rosegill Plantation in Middlesex County. Woremeley had vast holdings throughout upper central Virginia, including land in what is now King William County. One record shows that a large parcel of the 4,000-acre Broadus Flats property was known as Assassquin Plantation by the last quarter of the 17th century.

“Francis, Lord Howard...with the consent of the Council...do grant unto Mr. David Crawford ...1300 acres...in St. Peter’s Parish, within the county of New Kent...beginning on a back of York River at the mouth of Assaquin Run...first granted to Hannah Clarke by patent bearing date of the 10th of Feb., 1652, and by her death was ...and by deed from Wm. Taylor unto David Crafford, 4th Nov. 1685.”

The answer to the question, “Who could have built this structure?” is now fairly clear. Taking into account its location, its probable date of construction (1680s or 1690s), and who would have had the means to build a home of this size, the author feels sure that these excavations have been taking place on the David Crafford family seat of Assassquin Plantation. Crafford built the house sometime after 1685, served for a time as a Burgess from New Kent County, and was killed by Pamunkey Indians in 1710.

The plantation house at Assassquin burned about 1740 (reference only in archeological context) and this large acreage was soon subdivided. This “river-field” and another now called “middle field” appear to have been subdivided among six families in the mid-19th century. County records reveal that Rowland Broadus, grandfather of the present owner, purchased these river-front farmlands from all six owners about 1890.

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When excavations began at Broadus Flats in 1992, bricks were soon found *in situ* about twelve inches below the surface. In the coming weeks, the entire gable-end foundation to the west side of a structure was uncovered, stretching for 21 feet. Chimney “cheeks” for a six-foot closed-in fireplace were also clearly discernable. About 40 feet from the west foundation, another group of bricks constituting the east gable-end foundation was found. Suspecting that postholes must exist between the two brick foundations, a search was conducted. Not a single colonial posthole was found; however, a 135-pound stone was uncovered in the cellar. During a particularly dry summer, eleven large stones, some with tool marks, were found in a cluster in the river bed just below the embankment. Therefore, it is entirely conceivable that piers of stone may have been set under the sills for support of the north and south sides of the structure.

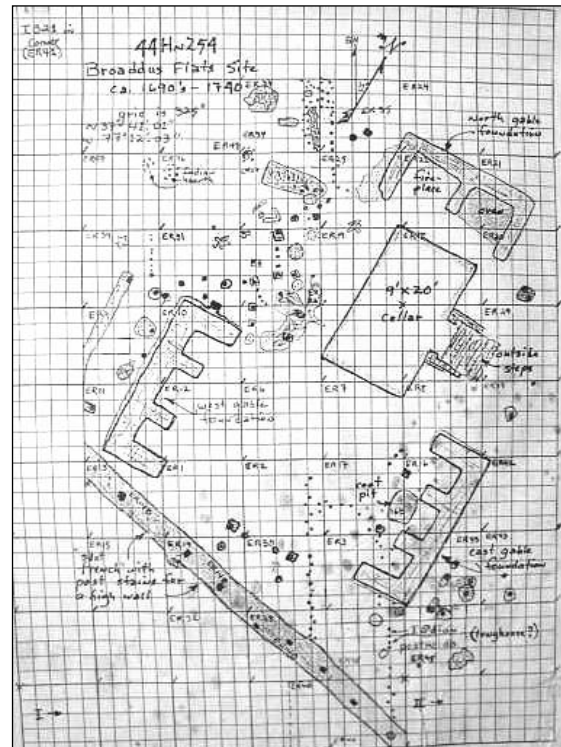
Working in a square on the north side of the house, excavators uncovered what turned out to be a rather large and irregular soil stain which appeared to be an extension of the main house to

the north, perhaps a wing stretching at least 30 feet from the house. In determining the profile of the wing, well-preserved exterior brick steps were found leading down to the cellar. No evidence of brick walls were found in the cellar, only scant traces of wooden boards running vertically on the south wall. Another line of bricks, stretching east-west for 17 feet appeared to be the foundation for the kitchen fireplace with slots for the main fireplace and for an oven. It is conceivable that this kitchen wing, located nearly in the center of the palisade, was actually the original house.

Research into building methods shows this structure probably had features characteristic of most Anglo-American homes of the so-called Transition Period, a building style that exhibited both the time-tested Medieval methods and the emerging Georgian style. What is fairly clear is that this structure shows all the earmarks of a hall-and-parlor floor plan, with a central passageway, and a rather good-size wing stretching northward to the back (or front). A cluster of postholes on the south face of the house indicates this structure had a covered porch entranceway, leading in to the central passageway which bisected the 42'x21' addition.

Many Anglo-American artifacts have been unearthed at the site: spoons, tableware, thimbles, horse furniture (bridle parts, ornamental brasses, stirrups), tobacco hoe blades, and a monogrammed sealing wax stamp. Ceramic finds include English delftware, Rhenish and English stoneware, imported and locally-made earthenware. English pipe bowl styles range from the 1690s to about 1740.

Although we have learned much about the Broaddus Flats site, new finds and research raise new questions. For instance, was the site occupied by English colonists before 1690? What other structures were located within the palisade? Could this site have had a military use or was it always a fortified private homestead which eventually ceased to need a palisade fence?



Details of site features.

¹Broaddus Flats (DHR #44Hn254) is a multi-component (colonial, prehistoric, and contact) site located 60 feet from the south bank of the Pamunkey River in northeastern Hanover County. Members of the Archeological Society of Virginia and student volunteers have worked at the site since 1992.

²Colono ware is unglazed, low-fired plain earthenware made in Colonial America during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Colono ware was not made according to the European method which utilized an enclosed kiln, but was fired on an open hearth. It is believed that Native Americans and enslaved African-Americans made colono ware for their own use.

³MacCord, Howard A., Sr. 1970. "Forts in Colonial Virginia," *The Virginia Cavalcade*. v. 20, n. 2: 4-11.

Visit virginiadigs.net
to learn more about
the Broaddus Flats site.