Introduction

Prince George's County adopted subdivision regulations in 2005 that were intended to ensure that archeological sites deemed significant to understanding the history of human settlement in the county be identified as part of the subdivision review process. Historic sites dating to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (circa 1865–1958) are one of the most common categories of resources identified in archeological surveys in the county, with over 300 examples in the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) site files as of October 2007. However, additional investigations are being recommended at few, if any, of these sites. Still this time period witnessed many changes, including the subdivision of large plantations, significant changes in the relations of production, establishment of African-American-owned farms and communities, new technologies, transportation enhancements, and the growth of suburbia. Nevertheless, the contribution of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century archeological sites to the understanding of these changes in Prince George's County is either unknown or unappreciated.

The under-appreciation of the potential contributions of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century archeological sites to our understanding of history is common. The premise of the seminal article "We've Got Thousands of These! What Makes an Historic Farmstead Significant?" could be expanded to include all postbellum archeological sites (Wilson 1990). The problem of assessing the significance of postbellum archeological sites, regardless of their function, is not unique to Prince George's County. This problem has been recognized since the late 1970s and has increasingly become the focus of a number of working groups and conferences or conference sessions. For instance, Pennsylvania, under the guidance of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), has undertaken the compilation of a context of agricultural resources within the entire state. Lee (2007) provides a rationale for the undertaking of the Pennsylvania project, stressing the need for rigorous standards for the evaluation of agricultural properties that are clear and consistent. Lee also indicates that property evaluation should not be based only on integrity but should also incorporate significance into the decision-making process. These are much the same issues confronting Prince George's County for postbellum archeological sites as a whole. Lees and Noble (1990:11) attribute such problems to six characteristics of postbellum archeological sites:

- Professional/research biases against postbellum sites
- Large numbers and redundancy
- Recent age
- Other avenues of investigation available
- Small body of previous research
- Poorly articulated research themes

Klein and Baugher (2001-2002:172–173) identify two approaches that have been used when evaluating historic period sites for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), in other words, when determining if a site is historically significant. One approach is based on a ranking of sites by selected attributes, often including such attributes as site type and rarity, subsurface integrity, length of occupation, period of occupation, and the availability of documents and oral histories. Wilson (1990), Miller and Klein (2001-2002), and Hardesty (1990), among others, have advocated such an approach. Sites that have a high ranking (that is, having attributes deemed desirable by the creator of the system) are viewed as significant, while those ranked low are not significant. However, such a system, in Klein and Baugher's view, does away with the need to define research questions. Significant sites are managed, and, if need be, excavated prior to their destruction (Klein and Baugher 2001-2002:172–173). The site and excavation documentation and the recovery and analysis of artifacts provide an opportunity for post-project studies by researchers with specific research topics.

The second approach identified by Klein and Baugher (2001-2002:172–173) is that of the historic context. The US National Park Service (Townsend et al. 1999:25) defines a historic context as:

> *…a body of thematically, geographically, and temporally linked information that provides for an understanding of a property's place or role in prehistory or history. For a historical archaeological property, the historic context is the analytical framework within which the property's importance is understood and to which a historical archaeological study is likely to contribute important information.*

It is this second approach that Prince George's County has selected. Perhaps the most important, and most difficult, step in the creation of a historic context is the identification of information needs (Hardesty and Little 2000:14). Such information needs to provide the means for assessing whether a site (or data generated by investigating a site) is significant or not. Klein and Baugher (2001-2002:169–170) and others (Lees and King 2007a, b; Little 2007; Noble 2007; Purser 2007) caution that the identification of significant research questions or issues can be one of the most difficult tasks in the creation of any context. Questions or issues should avoid the trivial and should emphasize

contributions unique to archeology. In other words, research questions that are best addressed with other sources of information, such as archival documents, should be avoided. The overall consensus has been that archeologists and historic preservation specialists must create and rely on historic contexts for guidance regarding site significance, and site significance must be based on the ability of a site to yield information that would enable researchers to address "questions that matter."

As will be discussed in later chapters of this report, many states and land management agencies have created, or are in the process of creating, historic contexts devoted, at least in part, to the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century period. However, most of these efforts center on the evaluation of farms and farm-related properties while others focus on standing structures. Prince George's County appears to be unique in its attempt to provide guidance on the significance of all classes of postbellum archeological sites within the county, from farmsteads to urban residences, and from military sites to commercial and industrial enterprises. This project represents the results of an effort by The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), assisted by Greenhorne & O'Mara (G&O), to create a context for postbellum archeological sites in Prince George's County.

Three goals had been set for the postbellum context project using the US National Park Service definition of a historic context. The first goal was to identify the significant patterns, themes, or trends in the history of Prince George's County between approximately 1865 and 1958. The second goal was to associate the patterns, themes, or trends with specific archeological site types or properties. The third goal was to provide guidance on the significance of the site types or properties. This also identifies the parameters used by team researchers to conduct this project.

The focus was on Prince George's County, Maryland, and was confined to the period between 1865 and 1958, although often references to events both before and after those dates are made. The year 1865 represents the termination of the Civil War and the year when slavery was abolished, while the end year, 1958, was chosen to coincide with the "50-year rule" for National Register eligibility. Finally, the focus of the context was on patterns, themes, or trends that are physically manifested as archeological sites.

Project Methods

The postbellum historic context of the Prince George's County project can largely be defined as library-oriented; no field investigations were conducted. Library-based research was conducted at various facilities in Prince George's County, Annapolis, and Baltimore. Among these facilities were various branches of the Prince George's County Memorial Library System, the National Agricultural Library at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, various libraries at the University of Maryland, the Laurel Historical Society, the

Maryland State Archives, the Maryland Historical Trust, and the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. A detailed list of archival and library repositories prepared by Michael Lane of Elizabeth A. Comer Archaeology is presented in Appendix A. Web-based sources were also used when possible, such as those of the US Census Bureau and the US Department of Agriculture for census information and of the MHT for the Maryland Inventory of Historic Places (MIHP) forms for Prince George's County. Numerous other websites were consulted, often in an attempt to identify non-web-based research leads. Finally, individuals with knowledge of aspects of Prince George's County history were also consulted. These included staff members of M-NCPPC, the Laurel Historical Society, the Maryland State Archives, MHT, the Maryland State Highway Administration (MSHA), various local and university libraries, and the Alexandria Archaeology Museum.

The process of creating this context was envisioned to be an iterative one. Many contexts and histories on aspects of Prince George's County have already been written with varying levels of detail. The first priority, then, was to identify and review these works. This led to the compilation of a brief overview of the postbellum history of Prince George's County, which is presented in Chapter 2. The process also was used to identify themes appropriate for this particular context (e.g., those with significant archeological potential) as well as the state of knowledge, particular to Prince George's County, associated with the identified themes. This stage of organization and research not only identified themes to be included in this work but also additional research that would be needed for each theme. In Prince George's County, MNCPPC has published a number of contexts that have aided greatly in the compilation of this context. These include Floyd (1989), Pearl et al. (1991), Pearl (1996), and Benson et al. (2003). Other histories include those by Virta (1991) and Thornton and Gooden (1997). Additional areas requiring research were identified based on the review of these other sources, and this additional research included consulting primary sources, such as census records (population, agricultural, and manufacturing) and maps (Sanborn maps, USGS topographic quadrangles, Martenet [1861], and Hopkins [1878, 1894]), as well as more obscure secondary sources, including several honors papers and theses written by students at the University of Maryland. Of particular importance in this respect were the Prince George's County MIHP forms, which not only chronicled the history of a particular resource but also discussed the broader historical context of the resource in Prince George's County. This information is presented by theme in Chapters 3 through 9.

Beyond the research on resource-specific themes within this report, the literature on evaluating archeological sites dating to the postbellum period was also reviewed. Much of this work is presented in scholarly journals such as Historical Archaeology and Northeast Historical Archaeology. Publications of the US National Park Service also provide guidance. Much of the discussion on the significance of postbellum archeological sites, however, is restricted to agricultural sites. Discussions related to this literature are largely restricted to

Chapters 1 and 3. Appendix B identifies the locations and dates of operation of all post offices in Prince George's County during the postbellum period.

Finally, the archeological site files and specific site reports for Prince George's County were reviewed at MHT. Data from the previously identified postbellum archeological sites are employed in Chapter 10 of this report in an attempt to operationalize the context themes that are detailed in Chapters 3 through 9.