

**North Carolina  
Archaeological Society**

**Newsletter**

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<http://www.rla.unc.edu/ncas>

## **Peace and Friends in Oberlin: Investigations of the John T. and Mary Turner House in the Freedmen's Settlement of Oberlin Village in Raleigh**

by Vincent H. Melomo, Thomas E. Beaman, Jr., Dru McGill, and Ryan Riley

During the Reconstruction Era, many recently emancipated African Americans sought to create their own free and independent communities throughout the South. In the 1870s, Oberlin Village was founded in the countryside two miles west of the capital city of Raleigh, and quickly grew to be one of the largest Freedmen's settlements in Wake County. The community, which included professionals and skilled and unskilled laborers, was home to many prominent figures in North Carolina's African American history. Oberlin Village continued to prosper into the early twentieth century, but many factors, from Jim Crow to suburbanization, challenged its integrity and survival over time (Little 2012). Despite these challenges, several key historic structures and the village cemetery still remain. The Turner House, a distinguished residence in the past and present, was the focus of archaeological investigations last summer by the William Peace University Archaeological Field School.

Since the mid-twentieth century, with the opening of the outdoor shopping center Cameron Village, Oberlin Village has been threatened by development tied to Raleigh's growth. In the past decade, residential and commercial construction in the area has been dramatic, resulting in increased concerns about the preservation of the community's physical features and its historical memory. The preservation of the community has been supported by a dedicated network of village descendants, current residents, and concerned others, organized as the nonprofit Friends of Oberlin Village. Recent efforts by this group have resulted in a National Register listing for Oberlin Village's historic cemetery and status as a Raleigh Historic District for a significant portion of the community that remains. Until recently, however, archaeology has played a limited role in documenting the community's past.

The investigations that have been conducted in Oberlin Village reveal the promise of archaeological research to preservation efforts there. Excavations have recently been conducted at two National Register sites in Oberlin village: the Latta House and University site by Scott Seibel and Terri Russ (2009) and the Plummer T. Hall house site by Russ (2015). Together, these investigations demonstrated the integrity of archaeological resources on undeveloped historic lots in Oberlin Village and their need for preservation. In 2016, John Wall, a doctoral student at North Carolina State University, completed topographic, pedestrian, and geophysical surveys of Oberlin Cemetery, resulting in a database of grave sites and grave markers. Wall's work was critical to recent efforts to preserve the cemetery, including its National Register status.

This past summer William Peace University partnered with Wake Tech Community College, North Carolina State University, and Friends of Oberlin Village to conduct an archaeological field school at the John T. and Mary Turner House (Figure 1). Built in 1889, the Turner House has been part of the Capital Area Preservation society since 1995, an official Raleigh Historic Landmark since 1996, and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in

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2002. One aspect that makes this property unique is that it has been in the same family through four generations since its construction. Cheryl Crooms Williams, a descendant of John T. and Mary Turner, is the current owner of the residence, a leader in the Friends of Oberlin Village preservation group, and an enthusiastic supporter of the field project.

The archaeological field school was jointly led by Dr. Vincent Melomo, Associate Professor of Anthropology at William Peace University, and Tom Beaman, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Wake Technical Community College. Ten university students from William Peace University, Wake Technical Community College, North Carolina State University, and the University of Kansas participated. The overarching goal of the investigations was to contribute to the ongoing efforts to preserve Oberlin Village as an important site in Raleigh's African American history.

More specifically, the research was conducted to provide a preliminary assessment of the archaeological integrity of the property, to define landscape elements associated with the Turner House, and to provide insight into the material life of the Turner family.

Over a period of four weeks, the field school collected data to address these questions, trained students in excavation techniques (Figure 2), and shared their work with a variety of community members (Figure 3). Excavations were carried out in nine test units placed in three different areas of the site. Two areas were chosen based on the location of structures indicated on a 1914 Sanborn map (Figure 4). These structures included a family-run store located in the front yard of the house along the main road, and what may have been a carriage house or garage located behind the house. A third area of investigation was located to the rear of the property on the edge of a historic garden area to identify potential related outbuildings or other landscape features.

While the investigations did not uncover any obvious features tied to the store or other outbuildings, a variety of artifacts were recovered that will provide a wealth of interpretive information. In total, the excavations and limited surface collections generated 78 catalog numbers. They are currently being processed at North Carolina State University under the direction of Dru McGill. The recovered artifacts were primarily fragments of glass, ceramics, and metal, including common household items such as beverage bottles, cosmetic and medicinal jars, and serving plates. Some of the more unique artifacts uncovered in the vicinity of the store were glass and clay marbles, a porcelain door handle, and a handmade wire "friendship" ring (Figure 5). One of the surprises of the investigation was the discovery to the rear of the property of a variety of artifacts associated with the historic Oberlin School, including safety window glass, pencil lead, and notebook paper. The school sat on the lot just north of the Turner House in front of the cemetery, and was the pride of the community until it was closed and demolished in the 1960s.

The research conducted by the 2018 William Peace University Field School will help to add detail and texture to our historical knowledge and the stories we tell about Oberlin Village. After further analysis, the artifacts will shed light onto the lifestyle and consumption patterns of the Turner family over time, contributing to our understanding of daily life in Oberlin Village. Through comparative analysis with materials recovered from excavations at other Freedmen's communities, we also hope to better contextualize Oberlin Village and contribute to a broader understanding of the African American experience beyond Raleigh and North Carolina. Finally, the recovered artifacts will also provide interpretive information and material for educational exhibits in the future. In all of these ways, we hope that the research will continue to contribute to the preservation of this important piece of Raleigh's African American history.



Figure 1. The John T. and Mary Turner House, site of the William Peace University 2018 Archaeological Field School.

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Figure 2. One of the more popular activities among students was screening excavated soil and finding interesting artifacts in their test units.



Figure 3. An important part of the field school was sharing our results with the Friends of Oberlin Village and other interested community members.

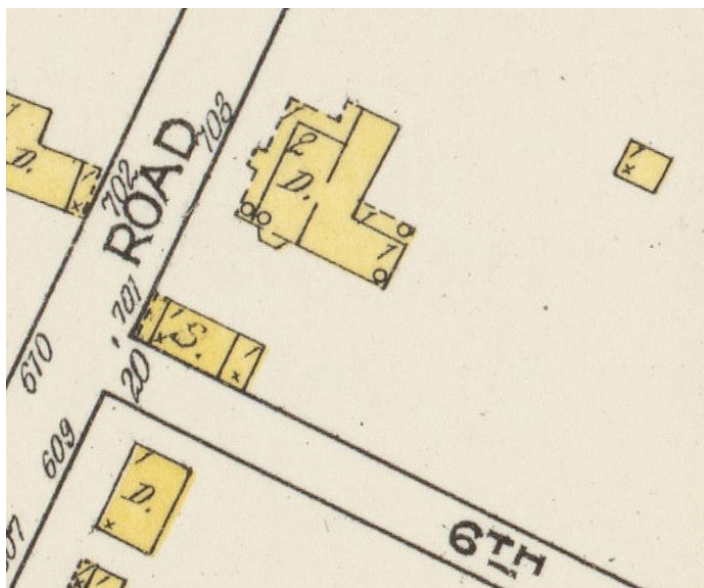


Figure 4. The Turner Property on a 1914 Sanborn map, showing the home, store, and an outbuilding.



Figure 5. A “friendship” ring made of copper wire was recovered from one of the test units in the former school area.

### References Cited

Little, Ruth M. (2012). *History of Oberlin Village*. Electronic document, <http://friendsofoberlinvillage.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/History-of-Oberlin-Village.pdf>, accessed July 19, 2018.

Russ, Terri (2015). Plummer T. Hall House: New Location Archaeological Assessment, Raleigh, Wake County, North Carolina. Report by Environmental Services, Inc, Raleigh.

Seibel, Scott, and Terri Russ (2009). An Intensive Cultural Resource Investigation: The Reverend M.L. Latta House and Latta University Site, Wake County, North Carolina. Report prepared for the Raleigh Historic District Commission and The City of Raleigh by Environmental Services, Inc., Raleigh.



## New NCAS Merchandise

We have new merchandise for sale, including t-shirts, light sweatshirts, and hats. They make wonderful gifts for yourself or your family and friends, all while showing your support for North Carolina archaeology! Take a look at some of our newest items below. To see *all* NCAS merchandise, check out <http://www.rla.unc.edu/ncas/Merchandise>. To purchase, contact Tom Beaman via email at [tbeamanjr@aol.com](mailto:tbeamanjr@aol.com).



Clovis fluted spear points from North Carolina, Front (\$20; Carbon Gray; available in S, M, L, XL).



Clovis fluted spear points from North Carolina, Back (\$20; Carbon Gray; available in S, M, L, XL).



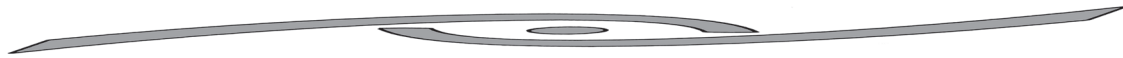
Gray and red hat with NCAS Logo, Front (\$20; one size).



Orange and black hat with NCAS Logo, Front (\$20; one size).

## Become More Involved with NCAS

Do you enjoy archaeology, the annual meeting, and receiving the NCAS Newsletter? Are you interested in becoming more involved in helping shape the organization? Two At-Large Board Member positions and our Newsletter Editor position will be up for election this fall. Each position serves a three-year term. Quarterly board meetings are hosted by the Research Laboratories of Archaeology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. If attendance in person is not possible, board members may use Skype to participate. If you are interested in running for one of these positions or just have some questions before getting involved, please contact NCAS President Hannah Smith via email at [hs@hannahpsmith.com](mailto:hs@hannahpsmith.com).



## Archaeological Fields Schools in Summer 2019

Participating in a field school is a great way to experience intensive training in archaeological field methods and techniques. Course-credit is offered to students enrolled in a college or university program. Many field schools also accept non-student volunteers and visitors. If you are interested in either option for the coming summer, please email the appropriate contact person below.

**Appalachian State Archaeology Field School • June.** Geophysical survey and targeted excavations will focus on a presumed Woodland settlement and associated quarry identified during the 1970s New River Survey Project, which located a cluster of Native American sites along the South Fork of the New River in Ashe County. Contact: Alice Wright ([wrightap2@appstate.edu](mailto:wrightap2@appstate.edu)), Department of Anthropology, Appalachian State University, Boone.

**Berry Site Field School • June 3 – 28.** Help discover one of the most important sixteenth-century colonial forts in the southeast—Fort San Juan, built in western North Carolina at the Native American town of Joara in January 1567 and destroyed 18 months later in May 1568. Over the past 17 years, archaeologists at the Berry site have discovered five burned Spanish buildings, the moat surrounding the garrison, and an earthen mound associated with the Native settlement. This summer excavations will focus on the fort and adjacent village to uncover more clues about Spanish and Native lifeways at the Berry site. Contact: David Moore ([dmoore@warren-wilson.edu](mailto:dmoore@warren-wilson.edu)), Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Warren Wilson College, Asheville; Web: <https://sites.google.com/warren-wilson.edu/arch>.

**Field School in Historical Archaeology at Brunswick Town State Historic Site • May 13 – June 16.** Brunswick Town, founded in 1729, was North Carolina's major port until it was burned during the Revolutionary War. Excavations will focus on the residential area in the Colonial town. Contact: Charles Ewen ([ewenc@ecu.edu](mailto:ewenc@ecu.edu)), Department of Anthropology, East Carolina University, Greenville.

**Siouan Project Field School at the Wall Site • May 13 – June 20.** The Wall site, located along the Eno River in present-day Hillsborough, is a Native American fortified town occupied during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by ancestors of the Shakori and Eno tribes, who were local to the Chapel Hill area. Excavations will focus on a dense trash midden located along the site's southern edge that contains large quantities of discarded pottery vessels and well-preserved food remains, represented by animal bones and charred plant materials. We will also sample previously unexcavated domestic areas within the village. Contact: Heather Lapham ([hlapham@unc.edu](mailto:hlapham@unc.edu)), Research Laboratories of Archaeology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Web: <https://archaeology.sites.unc.edu/siouan-project-field-school/>.

SAVE THE DATE

COMING  
UP

### Upcoming Annual Meetings...

Middle Atlantic Archaeological Conference • Ocean City, MD • March 21-24, 2019  
Society for American Archaeology • Albuquerque, NM April 10-14, 2019

## NCAS Newsletter is Going Digital!

Beginning with this issue (Vol. 29, No. 1), members will receive the NCAS Newsletter digitally via email. Printed newsletters will no longer be mailed, unless members select this option when they renew their membership. Need to renew your membership? Learn how below...

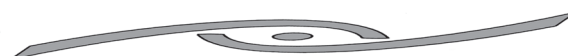
### 2019 Membership Dues

Renew your membership today to stay current with the Society's latest news. Please submit your dues payment to: NCAS c/o Mary Beth Fitts, Office of State Archaeology, 4619 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4619. Or, you can renew your membership online via PayPal at <http://www.ola.unc.edu/ncas/Join/PayPal.html>.

Membership types include: Student (\$10) • Regular (\$15) • Family (\$20) • Sustaining (\$25) • Institution (\$25) • Life (\$250). To find out the status of your membership, email NCAS Treasurer at [MaryBeth.Fitts@ncdcr.gov](mailto:MaryBeth.Fitts@ncdcr.gov).

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### NCAS Newsletter Publication Schedule

Members should submit articles and news items to Heather Lapham ([hlapham@unc.edu](mailto:hlapham@unc.edu)) for inclusion in the Newsletter. Submission deadlines are as follows:

<b>Winter Issue – January 31</b>	<b>Summer Issue – July 31</b>
<b>Spring Issue – April 30</b>	<b>Fall Issue – October 31</b>

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