

North Carolina
Archaeological Society

Newsletter

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

The Michal-Butt-Brown-Pressly House: Preliminary Investigations of a Nineteenth-Century Urban Farmstead in Lincolnton

by January Costa (Lincoln County Historical Association and Museum of History)

The Michal-Butt-Brown-Pressly house site (31Ln215), located in downtown Lincolnton, is a prime example of an extant nineteenth-century urban farmstead in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. The current lot is identified in the original town plan as Lots 4 and 5, between Main and Sycamore Streets (Figure 1). Today, the house is part of Lincolnton's West Main Street Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. During our preliminary investigations of the property, we hoped to establish the potential for intact archaeological features in the developed urban center of downtown Lincolnton and gain a wider perspective into the world of an urban Piedmont farmstead.

Our understanding of the property was aided by Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. The most helpful map, dating to 1890, shows the main house with an attached kitchen ell built of wood and an attached brick smokehouse (Figure 2). A wooden stable is located at the back of the property, with a second wooden stable at the bottom left. A two-story wooden structure of unknown function is centered in the middle of the property and a doctor's office is located next to the main house.

Activities associated with the property were primarily domestic, but the doctor's office served as a place of business for three different doctors who resided in the house over the years. The deed research for the house site, completed by Ann Dellinger, indicates that Conrad Michal acquired Lots 4, 5, 6, and 7 between 1818 and 1819 and that his dwelling was situated on Lot 4. This information leads us to believe that the house was constructed during that time. In 1825, the next owner, John Michal, acquired Lot 4 (where the house was located) and half of Lot 5. The property changed hands again in 1841, but Michal continued to live in the house. The next significant owner of the Lot 4 house site was Dr. Zephania Butt in 1847. A deed book shows that in May 1850 he was issued a \$1,000 policy from the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company. The policy coverage included the dwelling house (\$800) and household furniture (\$200). It also indicated that the house was built of



Figure 1. Lots 4 and 5 (marked by two dots inside circle) located on the original town plan.

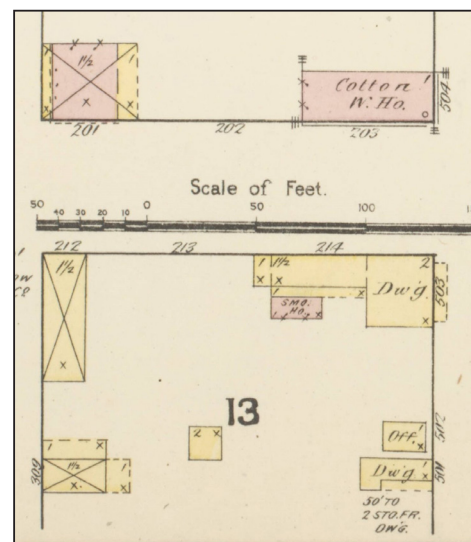


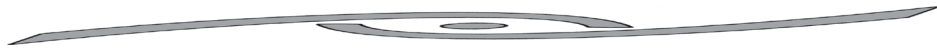
Figure 2. An 1890 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Lots 4 and 5 (numbered with a "13"). Main Street is to the right.

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Bill Conen, NCAS Treasurer, Retires

In August 2017, our long-term NCAS member Bill Conen stepped down as Treasurer of the Society after more than 25 years of dedicated service. Bill, a professional accountant, began his tenure in 1990 as Treasurer for Friends of North Carolina Archaeology (FNCA) and the following year became Treasurer of the North Carolina Archaeological Society, Inc., formed from the merger of FNCA with the Archaeological Society of North Carolina. A resident of Cary, North Carolina, Bill loved to travel the state looking for archaeological sites and projects so he could volunteer to help dig. He also was a loyal volunteer in the laboratory at the Office of State Archaeology, working evenings with other volunteers to wash and sort artifacts from various projects curated at the facility. His service to the NCAS was immeasurable as he worked diligently to keep our finances and records in order and our bills paid! He played a significant role in the important sale in 1999 of the Blue Banks property, which helped to establish the NCAS Endowment Fund, now called The Whitey Graham Award. Bill loved to go on field trips and outings with the NCAS membership and participated in quarterly Board of Directors meetings. On behalf of the NCAS, we wish to thank Bill for his many years of dedicated service to the Society and honor him with a lifetime membership. We hope to see him often at our annual meetings and in the field having fun!

Contributed by Linda Carnes-McNaughton (Secretary) and Steve Davis (Editor).



continued from page 1, The Michal-Butt-Brown-Pressly House

wood and in good repair. In 1857, Lot 4 was conveyed to Dr. Martin L. Brown, and then later to Dr. John Pressly.

The Lincoln County Historical Association (LCHA) had been in contact with the owners of the Michal-Butt-Brown-Pressly house site for many years, but no archaeological testing had ever been initiated. Last summer, in August 2017, the LCHA Archaeology Program decided to investigate this property. Over a three month period, we opened 20 units (4 ft. x 4 ft.) in the area directly behind the main house and attached kitchen ell. We excavated the units in four-inch levels, with most test units ending at eight inches below surface. The excavations were completed with the support of LCHA staff and our wonderful team of volunteers.

We encountered an interesting subsurface feature composed of bricks directly behind the kitchen ell (Figure 3). At this point, we are uncertain what this feature relates to due to the abundance of scattered bricks. The intact laid bricks, however, may be associated with an earlier detached kitchen built during the construction of the original house in 1819. Out of the 20 units excavated, most contained a variety of artifacts relating to the continued occupation of the property, which we are in the process of analyzing. We can establish a definite early nineteenth-century component at the site based on the diagnostic artifacts (Figure 4). Artifact identification and analysis will continue this year, giving us further insights into this urban environment, its various time periods, and functions.

In November 2017, we conducted a ground penetrating radar survey (GPR) on the property to investigate the potential for bricks, paths, or soil disturbances that would indicate the location of former structures and cultural features. The geophysical survey services were contracted through Keith Seramur with Seramur and Associates, PC. Geophysical data was collected at a one-foot transect spacing using a Geophysical Survey Systems SIR-3000 Single Channel GPR Data Acquisition System with a 400 MHZ antenna. GPR-Slice software was used to process the data and produce a 3D block diagram of each survey grid. Vertical profiles and horizontal depth slices from each grid were reviewed to evaluate GPR reflections and look for patterns that could indicate the location of cultural features. The GPR testing results indicate the location of the previous stable and two-story wooden structure seen on the 1890 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, along with two other features that might be privies (Figures 5 and 6).

The LCHA Archaeology Program will return to the site this spring to investigate the remainder of the brick feature located directly behind the main house, the area where the two-story wooden structure once stood, and the location of the two possible privies. Special thanks to Lindsey Porter for allowing the LCHA to continue to work on this property to learn more about Lincolnton's historic urban environment. If anyone is interested in volunteering or completing an internship with our program, please contact January Costa via email at jarchaeop@gmail.com.



Figure 3. Partially excavated brick feature located behind the main house and kitchen ell.



Figure 4. Ceramics, clay marbles, and a bone button recovered from the excavations.

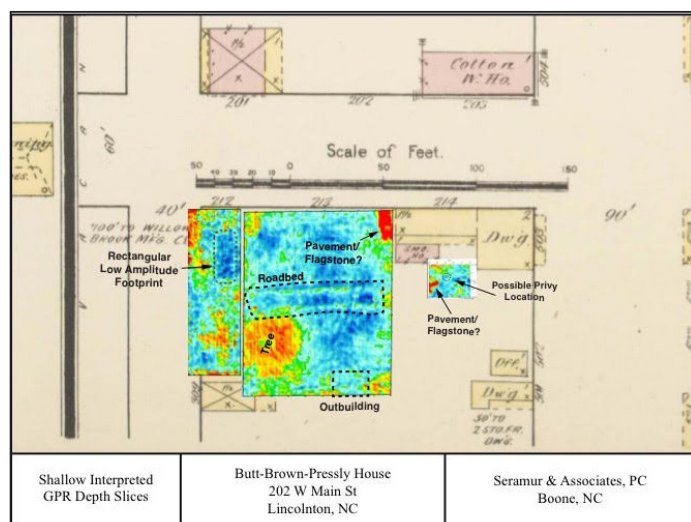


Figure 5. GPR grid test results overlaid on the 1890 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of the house lot.

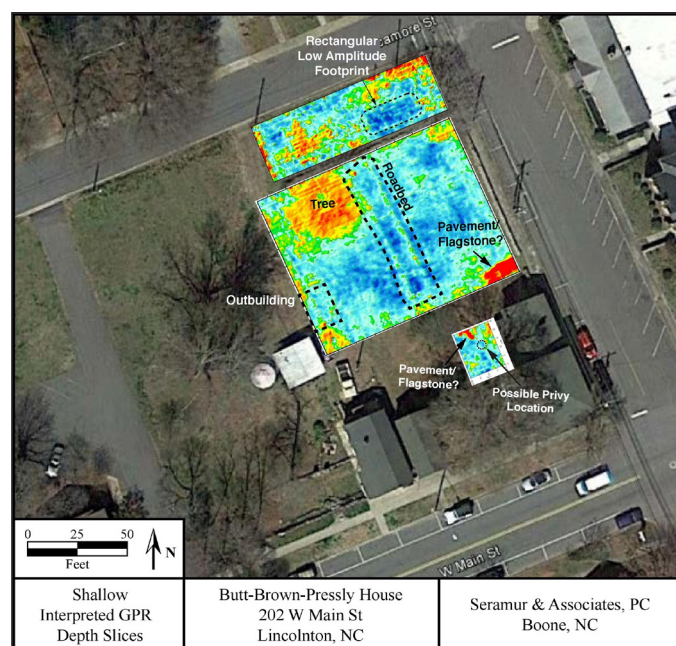


Figure 6. GPR grid test results overlaid on an aerial photograph of the house lot.



Upcoming Annual Meetings...

Middle Atlantic Archaeological Conference • Virginia Beach, Virginia • March 16-18, 2018
Society for American Archaeology • Washington, DC • April 11-15, 2018

The Montfort Move: A Brief Account of the 1910 Location, Exhumation, and Reinternment of Joseph Montfort

by Thomas E. Beaman, Jr. (Wake Technical Community College)



Figure 1. Portrait of Joseph Montfort, ca. 1765, by Sir Nathaniel Dance-Holland. Held in a private collection in Long Island, New York.

Joseph Montfort was a man of influence and prestige in Halifax, North Carolina, and greater region during the third quarter of the eighteenth century (Figure 1). He was a regular representative of Halifax in the State's General Assembly, a delegate to the Second Provincial Congress in 1776, and he held a variety of elected positions in the town and county of Halifax. As shown on the 1769 map of Halifax drawn by Claude Joseph Sauthier, Montfort's four-lot estate in the center of town, which included a large house and ornamental gardens, was a visual testament to his wealth and prominence. In addition, Montfort was the first Provincial Grand Master of Freemasons in America and he played a crucial role in the founding of the Royal White Heart Masonic Lodge in Halifax as well as other Masonic lodges in North Carolina and Virginia. After several years of ill health, Montfort passed away on March 25, 1776, just 17 days before the adoption of the Halifax Resolves, the first call for American independence from Britain (Stevenson 1991).

The search for and relocation of the remains of Montfort is detailed in a three-page letter dated to 1910 from Harry Gowen, Secretary of the Joseph Montfort Memorial Commission for the Royal White Heart Lodge, to John C. Drewry, the Grand Secretary of the Masonic Order. The following tale is summarized primarily from Gowen's account.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, members of the Royal White Heart Masonic Lodge undertook a search for Montfort's grave, intending to exhume his body for reburial on the lodge's grounds. It soon became apparent, however, that no one knew where he was buried, nor did the lodge records reveal this information.

Gowen and others first presumed that Montfort was interred in Halifax's colonial-era cemetery, but no marked grave could be found. In 1908, Gowen sought out Montfort's great-granddaughter, Mary E. Alston, and showed her pictures of the cemetery. She recalled that he had not been buried in the cemetery, but instead her great-grandfather had been laid to rest in the back of his house lot. At the time of this interview, there was no above-ground evidence of a grave on Montfort's historic lot as the entire area was planted in cotton.

The search for his remains continued until Gowen told the story to Uncle Jackson Barnes, an 80-year-old African-American blacksmith, who remembered seeing a "handsome brick tomb... go to ruins" in the back of the lot where the Montfort House once stood. He described the tomb as having a similarly shaped roof to the 1759 Clerk of Court Office on the adjoining lot. Barnes took Gowen to the spot where the tomb once stood, where they both observed many bricks and brick fragments scattered throughout the modern cotton field.

On March 21, 1910, a search party comprised of Gowen, Barnes, Fred Froelich (Lodge Secretary), Joseph L. Weller (Lodge Junior Warden), and two other African-American men went to the place of the brick tomb identified by Barnes. They searched for some time before the tomb was located on the extreme back of Montfort's lot. After uncovering the brick structure from the modern soil that had obscured it, Froelich broke open the top of the tomb with a shovel. The soil and broken bricks were carefully removed and each shovelful of material was examined carefully. In the light soil, narrow black outlines of "an ancient and peculiarly shaped coffin" appeared. Weller stepped down into the grave and removed the remaining soil with a large spoon, carefully sifting each spoonful, until the skeleton within was fully exposed.

Masonic brothers Gowen, Froelich, and Weller remarked how the burial was conducted in proper Masonic tradition. The grave had been located on “the brow of a hill, and the body buried in this grave was six feet due east and west, and six feet perpendicular. The point of the compasses was exactly observed in laying the body, the head to the west...” They described the skeleton as being over six feet tall with a large frame and bones. The teeth indicated “a man in the prime of this life and but few are decayed.” The witnesses, impressed by the state of preservation, also remarked how even the finger bones had survived and “strangest of all, a little brown hair was on the skull.” Weller carefully removed the bones one by one and handed them to Gowen, who placed them in a box. Long brass pins, presumably from the burial shroud, and hand wrought nails as well as a collection of tiny pieces of wood from the coffin, were also saved. No other graves were identified in this area of the house lot, and the conclusion of those assembled was that they had indeed located the grave and recovered the remains of Joseph Montfort.

Montfort’s remains and the associated artifacts were taken to the White Heart Masonic Lodge in Halifax, with plans to raise funds for a new metal coffin. No written evidence was found to support the notion that a metal coffin had been obtained, but the remains of Montfort and the artifacts recovered from his tomb were soon reburied in a prominent location in the front yard of the lodge, surrounded by an iron fence (Figure 2).

The description of Montfort’s grave and exhumation provided by Gowen is generally consistent with the burial practices of upper-class individuals from the late colonial era, and presumably in tandem with burial rites of the Masonic Order. While much of the Montfort lot has been explored archaeologically (including the house foundation, well, and gardens), what might remain of Montfort’s brick tomb at the back of the lot has yet to be located and documented. Given that Joseph Montfort was an influential colonial statesman, elected official, and prominent citizen of colonial Halifax, it would be a worthwhile endeavor for archaeologists and the staff of Colonial Halifax State Historic Site to relocate and mark the place where his original tomb once stood.

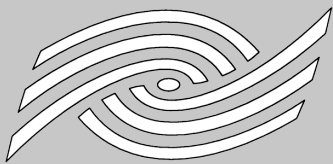


Figure 2. The Royal White Hart Lodge with the relocated grave of Montfort in the foreground. Photo credit: Frances Benjamin Johnston, 1938 (Library of Congress).

References Cited

Gowen, Harry P. (1910). Letter from Harry P. Gowen, Secretary, Joseph Montfort Memorial Commission, to the Honorable John C. Drewry, Grand Secretary, Raleigh. Copy on file, Historic Halifax State Historic Site, Halifax.

Stevenson, George (1991). Joseph Montfort. In *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, Volume 4 (L-O)*, edited by William S. Powell, pp. 289-290. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill. Accessed through NCPedia.org (<https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/montfort-joseph>) on October 4, 2017.



NCAS Contributes to SEAC Student Paper Prize

Every year at the Southeastern Archaeological Conference (SEAC) meeting, one student is awarded first-place in the Student Paper Competition. The winner receives an astonishing array of prizes (mainly books and journals) donated by various organizations, a package worth several thousand dollars. Last year, the Society contributed a one-year student membership, the five most recent issues of *North Carolina Archaeology*, and an NCAS t-shirt and visor to the prize package. Diana Simpson (University of Nevada, Las Vegas) won the 2017 award for her paper titled “Synthesizing Care and Violence during the Archaic Period in North Alabama.” Congratulations Diane!

NCAS Merchandise SALE!

The Society is offering select apparel at discounted rates for a limited time only! T-shirts are \$5-10 each (regularly \$15). To see sale colors and styles, visit <http://www.rla.unc.edu/ncas/Merchandise/>. Certain sizes are limited. For information about how to order, email Merchandise Coordinator (and past President) Tom Beaman at tbeamanjr@aol.com.

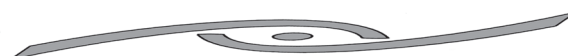
2018 Membership Dues Reminder

Renew your NCAS 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 28699-4619. Or, you can renew your membership online via PayPal at <http://www.rla.unc.edu/ncas/Join/PayPal.html>.

Your current (paid) membership year is indicated in the top right corner of the mailing label. Membership types include: Student (\$10) • Regular (\$15) • Family (\$20) • Sustaining (\$25) • Institution (\$25) • Life (\$250).

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NCAS Newsletter

Publication Schedule

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

Winter Issue – January 31

Summer Issue – July 31

Spring Issue – April 3

Fall Issue – October 31

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