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Cover Page Footnote

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Digging the Repast: A Port Town Diet through the Lens of the Natural Landscape

Jocelyn Lee

This article presents the analysis of faunal remains from the Burch House in Port Tobacco, Maryland. The location of Port Tobacco provided access to water and land transportation routes, allowing the town to become an important commercial center in the late 17th century and through the 18th century. In the 18th century, the town served as the county seat of Charles County, Maryland. The faunal material discussed in this article was recovered during the 2010 excavation at the Burch House, one of three surviving 18th-century buildings in Port Tobacco, and provides a snapshot of household diet in a changing port town. The consistency of the assemblage from the early 18th century through the early 20th century is indicative of the lack of impact that the overall growth and decline of the town had on diet preferences.

Cet article présente l'analyse des restes fauniques de Burch House à Port Tobacco, dans le Maryland. La localisation de Port Tobacco donnait accès à des voies de transport par voie d'eau et terrestre, ce qui a permis à la ville de devenir un important centre commercial à la fin du XVIIe siècle et au cours du XVIIIe siècle. Au 18ème siècle, la ville était le siège du comté de Charles, dans le Maryland. Le matériel faunique évoqué dans cet article a été récupéré lors des fouilles de 2010 à Burch House, l'un des trois bâtiments restants du XVIIIe siècle à Port Tobacco, et fournit un aperçu du régime alimentaire des ménages dans une ville portuaire en mutation. La cohérence de cet assemblage du début du XVIIIe siècle jusqu'au début du XXe siècle est révélatrice de l'absence d'impact que la croissance et le déclin globaux de la ville ont eu sur les préférences alimentaires.

Introduction

According to a 1991 article from *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Sun* reported in 1910 that Port Tobacco, “[o]nce a thriving town, ... [is] now deserted and is but a place of bitter memories” (Bock 1991). Near the mouth of the Port Tobacco River in the Potomac drainage basin of the Western Coastal Plain, the town of Port Tobacco was able to thrive due to its strategic location. It was once Maryland’s second largest port, served as the county seat, and was home to a print shop and several hotels. However, as the Port Tobacco River began to silt up, the town began to decline (Quantock et al. 2009). Prior research (Gibb and Lawrence 2006; Gibb and Beisaw 2007, 2008; Gibb 2011; Quantock et al. 2009; Quantock 2014) conducted in Port Tobacco has documented the ways in which the relationship between alluvial deposition and the socioeconomic state of the town is reflected in the archaeology.

The Burch House is one of three surviving 18th-century buildings in Port Tobacco; archaeological material from resident households exemplifies the period from the early 18th cen-

tury through the early 20th century. While site reports on archaeology at the Burch house have been published (Gibb 2011; Gibb and Lawrence 2006; Gibb and Beisaw 2007, 2008), no study of faunal remains from the Burch House has been conducted. Zooarchaeology, when used as a tool to document human activities within a larger environmental context, demonstrates the influences human activities and environment may have on each other (Dincauze 2000; Miller 1984). The faunal assemblage from this study is from a 2010 archaeological block excavation that covered an area of 25 sq. ft. Faunal remains demonstrate that, despite the environment having a significant impact on the town overall, changes in the relationship between the environment and the town did not influence the Burch House residents’ diets.

Background

Located in Charles County, Maryland, the area around Port Tobacco has experienced growth and decline. This area was initially set-

tled by precontact Native American groups, such as the Potobac, prior to the arrival of European colonists in the 1650s (Beisaw 2007; Quantock 2014). In 1727, Maryland's General Assembly selected Chandler's Town (colloquially called "Port Tobacco" until its official name change in 1820) as the new seat of Charles County government, which initiated a period of slow economic growth for the town (Gibb 2011). The economic growth of the town is demonstrated by the increasing quantities of tobacco that were shipped from the inspection warehouse between 1763 and 1776 and the higher price tobacco from Port Tobacco commanded in comparison to other areas. (Lee 1994). From 1766 to 1776, the price of tobacco from Port Tobacco averaged 1–2 s./cwt. (shillings per hundredweight) more than that from other warehouses in the county (Lee 1994). These numbers demonstrate the significance of Port Tobacco for the local economy. Thus, Port Tobacco had become an important commercial center by the beginning of the American Revolution.

Port Tobacco began to decline after the Revolutionary War due to the national economic depression. Although the town was able to rebound economically for a brief period after the War of 1812, a series of factors lead to the gradual decline of Port Tobacco. One of the most significant of these factors was the silting of the Port Tobacco River, a process that had been recognized by the 18th century and was studied in the late 19th and 20th centuries (Gibb 2011; Gottschalk 1945). This silting was caused by intensive tobacco agriculture, which resulted in the erosion of upland soils that filled the river with redeposited sediments (Carr and Walsh 1991; Quantock 2014). The silting of the Port Tobacco River rendered it unnavigable by the early 19th century and prevented the use of Port Tobacco as a port (Gibb 2011; Gottschalk 1945). In addition, a new railroad that connected southern Maryland to Washington, D.C. was completed in 1873. Instead of passing through Port Tobacco, however, the railroad went through another town 2 mi. east. The creation of the new railroad

excluded Port Tobacco from an important transportation route. Lastly, Port Tobacco's courthouse burned down in 1883. This fire was seen as one of the chief contributing factors leading to the transfer of the county seat to La Plata. Together, these three major events led to the ultimate decline of Port Tobacco. Since the fire nearly all the original 18th- and 19th-century buildings have been demolished.

Archaeological investigation in Port Tobacco was begun in the late 1960s and early 1970s by local avocationalists who dug trenches across the current study site to locate buildings and concentrations of artifacts (Gibb 2011). This local interest led to the 2007 formation of the Port Tobacco Archaeological Project (PTAP), a public archaeology project that seeks to study the history of Port Tobacco through archival and archaeological research (Gibb and Beisaw 2007, 2008; Gibb 2011). Shortly thereafter, in 2008 and 2009, the Archaeological Society of Maryland conducted two summer field sessions at Port Tobacco (Gibb 2011). Archaeological remains found during these investigations include artifacts from postcontact settlements of Port Tobacco, as well as some material from earlier indigenous occupations. In addition, preliminary surface collection and excavation of shovel test pits (STPs) undertaken in 2007 and 2008 provided archaeological evidence of the sedimentation caused by centuries of agriculture and possible storm activity (Quantock et al. 2009). In 2010, Gibb Archaeological Consulting conducted a large-scale data recovery excavation at the Burch House for the Society for the Restoration of Port Tobacco (Gibb 2011).

The Burch House

Located on the south side of Port Tobacco's town center along the eastern edge of the floodplain at the base of a ridge, the Burch House is one of Port Tobacco's three surviving 18th-century houses. Although deed records (TAB. 1; Gibb 2011) only go as far back as James Friedman granting the property to Daniel Jenifer in 1802, a chain of title traces the pur-

Table 1. Summary of deed records.

Principal Grantor	Grantee	Instrument	Liber/Folio	Date
Madeline Brooks	Society for the Restoration of Port Tobacco	Deed	PCM 130/450	6/10/1957
Gertrude M. Hubbard	Earl A. & Madaline B. Douglas	Deed	PCM 95/333	4/18/1951
Madeline Brooks Douglas	Gertrude M. Hubbard	Deed	PCM 95/330	4/18/1951
Elizabeth B.M. Johnson	Madaline B. Douglas	Will	GAW 21/37	1/21/1921
Joseph Smith	Elizabeth B.M. Johnson	Deed	CP 31/662	5/7/1917
Elizabeth B.M. Johnson	Mary A. Smith	Deed	CP 31/327	5/5/1917
Wesly Bowie	Washington Burch	Deed	BGS 4/31	8/27/1879
Washington Burch	Frederick Stone	Deed	BGS 4/24	8/7/1879
Frederick Stone	Washington Burch	Deed	GAH 4/215	4/21/1874
Frederick Stone	John D. Covall	Deed	GAH 4/215	4/1/1874
John Ware	Charles W. Barnes	Deed	WM 2/448	10/3/1847
Frederick Stone	John Ware	Deed	IB 17/168	10/12/1826
Alexander Matthews	Frederick Stone & James Weems	Deed	—	—
Nathaniel Causin	Alexander Matthews	Deed	IB 14/394	12/6/1821
Daniel Jenifer (Dr.)	Nathaniel Causin (Dr.)	Deed	IB 11/332	4/16/1816
James Freeman, trustee	Daniel Jenifer (Dr.)	Confirmatory deed for 1796 sale	IB 5/208	5/18/1802

Source: Gibb (2011).

chase of the lot to 1730. This provides evidence that the Burch House was one of Port Tobacco's earliest buildings, dating from the town's inception in 1727. Since its construction, the Burch House has gone through several stages of reconstruction, including various renovations and additions. The location and orientation of the Burch House dates the house to the 18th century beginning of the Chandler's Town settlement, as it does not fit into the later orthogonal grid layout of the town core (Quantock 2014).

The house is named after Washington Burch, one of the residents of historical Port Tobacco and a prominent figure in the African American community (Gibb 2006; Quantock 2014). Unfortunately, aside from government

records, the only written mention of the Burch House is a newspaper reference to an 1883 fire that burned a boarding house on the opposite side of the public square and set the Burch House roof on fire (Gibb 2011). A 1942 map, drawn from memory by Robert G. Barbour, the town historian, depicts the town in the 1880s, including a house labeled "Burch" (Gibb 2011). The house was drawn as square in plan with an addition and wing on the west facade.

According to deed records, the property had multiple owners. However, based on land titles, the families of Washington Burch and his predecessor, Charles Barnes, are the only documented occupants of the building. Additional archival research will be necessary in order to

identify other households that may have occupied the property instead of the owners. Land records and newspaper items reveal that Washington Burch played a leading role in the development of the African American community's church, as well as serving as the last jailer at Port Tobacco before the county seat moved to La Plata (Gibb 2011). One of Burch's more prominent community efforts was the 1868 joint purchase of a small parcel of land in order to construct a school for local African American children, who were excluded from white schools (Gibb 2011).

Archaeology of the Burch House

Initial archaeological fieldwork at the Burch House began in 2006 and continued into 2007. The investigation included STPs, as well as the excavation of a 3×3 ft. test unit at the rear of the Burch House lot (Gibb and Quantock 2006). Twenty STPs were excavated in the eastern, southern, and western portions of the property. Excavations in the eastern and

southern portions of the site yielded large quantities of mid- to late 20th-century domestic refuse. In general, artifacts recovered included a wide variety of 18th-century through 20th-century items.

In 2010, research continued as part of the PTAP, under the aegis of the Society for the Restoration of Port Tobacco. The PTAP opened 13, 5×5 ft. test units, many of which were excavated to a depth of 3 ft., revealing a succession of sedimentation events from the early 18th through the early 20th centuries. Sedimentation is likely related to the intensive agricultural activities associated with tobacco farming. Of these test units, 11 were part of a block excavation along the southern half of the west facade of the Burch House. Two additional units (95 and 96) were excavated outside the block-excavation area to examine the depth of sedimentation (FIG. 1). The results from these two units are not part of this study's faunal assemblage; however, closer inspection of these results may lead to a better understanding of the effects of erosion at a household level (Grady, this

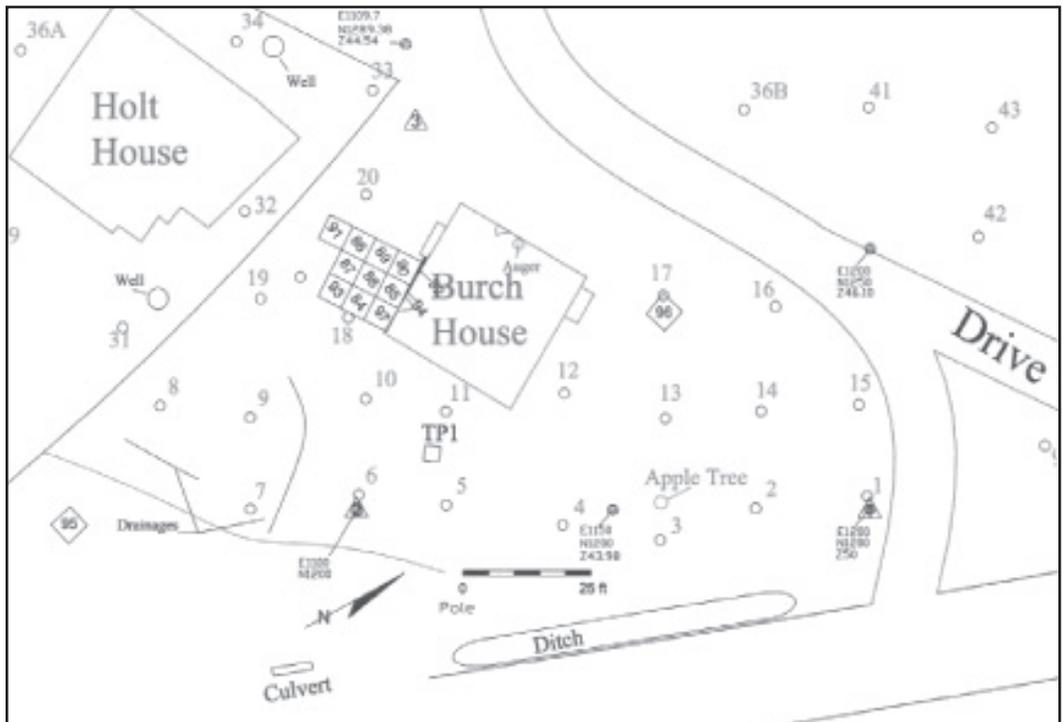


Figure 1. Map showing the Burch House excavations. (Figure by James G. Gibb, 2011.)

issue). The assemblage (n=39,980) from the 2010 excavations included a variety of ceramics, nails, glass, and small finds. Faunal remains represent approximately 18% (n=7,445) of this total assemblage (Gibb 2011).

Faunal Analysis

The faunal remains recovered from deposits around the Burch House were analyzed at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC) citizen science archaeology lab. Using a type collection available at the lab, the bones were identified by standard methods: first by element, then to the lowest taxonomic level possible, and to a rough size range and animal class when more specific taxonomic identification was not possible (Beisaw 2001). Large mammals were defined as those equivalent in size to cattle, medium mammals were defined as those equivalent to sheep/goats, and small mammals range from rodent- to muskrat-sized. Similarly, large birds were defined as goose-sized, while small birds were defined as chicken-sized. Tables 3–6 summarize the faunal assemblage for time periods by the identified species, number of identified specimens (NISP), percentage of NISP, minimum number of individuals (MNI), percentage of MNI, biomass (if applicable), and percentage of biomass.

Any taphonomic marks, such as evidence of burning, staining, weathering, or butchery, were noted. Due to time constraints, the majority of fish remains were not identified to

species or element. With the exception of indeterminate mammal and fish bones, all of the remains were weighed individually.

A total of 7,445 bone fragments were analyzed. A third of the assemblage consists of indeterminate bones, with mammal as the dominant identified class (TAB. 2). The weight of indeterminate bones is less than a quarter of the total remains in comparisons of total count with total weight, demonstrating that most indeterminate bones are small fragments. Over half the remaining identifiable elements are mammalian (n=3,060), while a quarter are avian (n=1,380), and less than a sixth are piscine (n=739) (TAB. 2). Twenty species were identified, the most common of which were pig, cattle, sheep/goat, chicken, and unspecified duck.

In terms of taphonomic marks, less than 2% of the total assemblage (n=128) had such marks. Butchering related marks from cutting and sawing are the most common taphonomic marks identified. Of the 128 fragments with taphonomic marks, 92 fragments have cut marks and 32 have saw marks. Aside from two chicken bones that had cut marks, all cut marks appeared on cattle, sheep/goat, or pig elements (the most common being cattle). In addition, 18 out of the 128 fragments are burnt, and 13 exhibit signs of weathering.

The faunal assemblage was divided by chronological strata for analysis. The dates for the strata assigned are derived from diagnostic indicators, such as ceramics, nails, and the presence of plastic. Unfortunately, a portion of

Table 2. Total weight and count of faunal remains.

Class	Weight (g)	Weight (%)	Count	Count (%)	Count (%) without Indeterminates
Mammal	7982	74.3%	3,060	41.1%	58.8%
Indeterminate	1834.2	17.1%	2,244	30.1%	—
Bird	718.4	6.6%	1,380	18.5%	26.5%
Fish	179.5	1.7%	739	9.9%	14.3%
Reptile	28.6	0.3%	22	0.4%	0.4%
Total	10,742.7	100	7,445	100%	100%

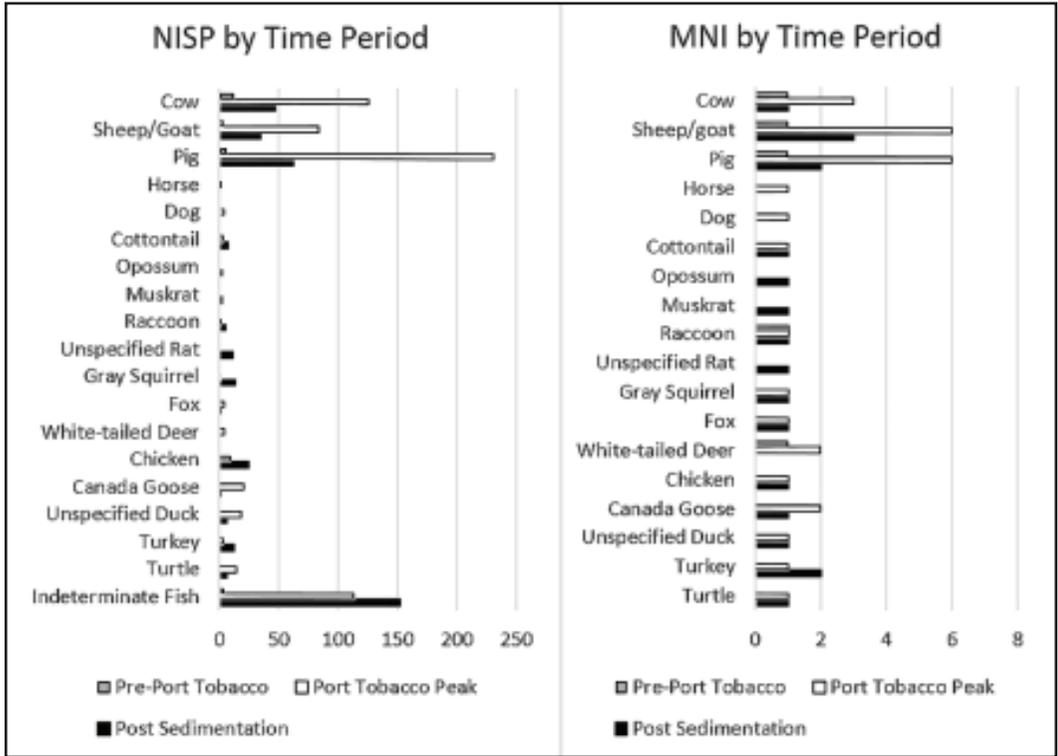


Figure 2. Chart comparing the percentage of animal classes by stratum. (Figure by Jocelyn Lee, 2019.).

the remains (18%) did not have associated contextual information and could not be placed in a chronological phase. These remains are not included in the in-depth analysis. Figure 2 graphs the fragment count relative to animal class for the 22 strata with faunal remains. The data can be roughly sorted into four phases: early 20th century/modern (Strata I–V), early to late 19th century (Strata VII–X), mid-18th century to late 18th century (Strata XI–XIV), and early to late 18th century (Strata XV–XXII).

Early 20th Century/Modern (Strata I–V)

Strata I–V represent the highest percentage of NISP in comparison to the rest of the assemblage. The presence of plastic in all five strata dates the faunal remains from these contexts to the period from the early 20th century to the present. Despite having the highest percentage of NISP relative to the other periods, faunal remains are only 11% of

the total assemblage recovered from these five strata. The majority of the fish remains found in the entire assemblage were from this period.

Early to Late 19th Century (Strata VI–X)

Strata VI–X represent the next series of faunal remains. At 1,415 fragments, faunal remains represent 17% of the total assemblage from this period. This phase had the highest percentage of bird remains in comparison to the rest of the assemblage. A third of the total bird assemblage dates to this period and, coincidentally, also represents a third of the total assemblage of the period. Mammal remains represent 40% of the total assemblage; of the seven identified species, four were domesticated mammals and three were wild. Cattle, pig, and sheep/goat have the highest representation among mammals. Less than 10% of the total assemblage is fish,

Table 3. Summary of the early 20th-century / modern faunal assemblage.

Common Name	NISP	NISP %	MNI	MNI %	Biomass (kg)	Biomass %
Cattle	54	2.55	2	5.88	6.13	32.02
Pig	99	4.67	2	5.88	6.85	35.78
Sheep/goat	43	2.03	3	8.82	3.65	19.06
Cottontail	9	0.42	1	2.94	0.21	1.08
Gray squirrel	13	0.61	1	2.94	0.04	0.21
Fox	4	0.19	1	2.94	0.18	0.94
Muskrat	2	0.09	1	2.94	0.03	0.15
Opossum	2	0.09	1	2.94	0.06	0.31
Raccoon	5	0.24	1	2.94	0.10	0.52
Rat	14	0.66	1	2.94	0.40	2.08
Dog	1	0.05	1	2.94	0.09	0.49
Unspecified artiodactyl	22	1.04	—	—	—	—
Small mammal	27	1.27	—	—	—	—
Medium mammal	7	0.33	—	—	—	—
Large mammal	—	—	—	—	—	—
Unspecified mammal	988	46.65	—	—	—	—
Chicken	34	1.61	7	20.59	0.30	1.56
Canada goose	1	0.05	1	2.94	0.07	0.34
Unspecified duck	13	0.61	2	5.88	0.21	1.11
Turkey	14	0.66	2	5.88	0.51	2.67
Pheasant	3	0.14	1	2.94	0.09	0.48
Small bird	17	0.80	—	—	—	—
Large bird	3	0.14	—	—	—	—
Unspecified bird	298	14.07	—	—	—	—
Turtle	8	0.38	1	2.94	0.11	0.58
Bass	3	0.14	1	2.94	0.01	0.06
White perch	8	0.38	1	2.94	0.02	0.08
Rockfish	3	0.14	1	2.94	0.03	0.16
Largemouth bass	1	0.05	1	2.94	>.001	—
Cod	1	0.05	1	2.94	0.00	0.02
Catfish	16	0.76	1	2.94	0.05	0.28
Unspecified fish	396	18.70	—	—	—	—
Indeterminate	9	0.42	—	—	—	—
Total	2,118	100	35	100	19.14	100

Table 4. Summary of 19th-century faunal assemblage.

Common Name	NISP	NISP %	MNI	MNI %	Biomass (kg)	Biomass %
Cattle	55	3.89	1	7.14	9.48	49.72
Pig	69	4.88	2	14.29	5.63	29.50
Sheep/goat	35	2.47	2	14.29	2.97	15.56
White-tailed deer	1	0.07	1	7.14	0.40	2.08
Cottontail	2	0.14	1	7.14	0.01	0.07
Gray squirrel	1	0.07	1	7.14	0.01	0.03
Rat	14	0.99	1	7.14	0.05	0.28
Dog	2	0.14	1	7.14	0.12	0.62
Unspecified artiodactyl	46	3.25	—	—	—	—
Small mammal	6	0.42	—	—	—	—
Medium mammal	3	0.21	—	—	—	—
Large mammal	1	0.07	—	—	—	—
Unspecified mammal	355	25.09	—	—	—	—
Chicken	1	0.07	1	7.14	0.01	0.06
Canada goose	8	0.57	1	7.14	0.23	1.21
Unspecified duck	13	0.92	1	7.14	0.16	0.82
Turkey	1	0.07	1	7.14	0.01	0.06
Small bird	14	0.99	—	—	—	—
Large bird	—	—	—	—	—	—
Unspecified bird	459	32.44	—	—	—	—
Turtle	1	0.07	—	—	—	—
Unspecified fish	114	8.06	—	—	—	—
Indeterminate	214	15.12	—	—	—	—
Total	1,415	100	14	100	19.07	100

all of which remain unidentified to species level.

Mid-18th Century to Late 18th Century (Strata XI–XIV)

Faunal remains of this period are minimal. These four strata contain only 146 fragments, less than 2% of the total faunal assemblage. Similarly, the total artifact assemblage dating to this period is also relatively low in comparison to the total assemblage. The lack of faunal remains and artifacts dating to this period is indicative of either a larger

trend or a changed use of the site. While the mid-18th century saw an improvement in the economy due to the prospering tobacco trade, there was also intense political upheaval created by the Revolutionary War. In September of 1775 access to the British commercial system was cut off and within weeks citizens of Port Tobacco could no longer earn income from exports (Lee 1994). Soon after the war, Port Tobacco was in a state of decline. One account described the once prominent church as in disrepair and the town buildings falling down (Quantock 2014). The lack

Table 5. Summary of the mid- to late 18th-century faunal assemblage.

Common Name	NISP	NISP %	MNI	MNI %	Biomass (kg)	Biomass %
Cattle	1	0.68	1	20	0.32	16.14
Pig	8	5.48	1	20	0.79	39.31
Sheep/goat	5	3.42	1	20	0.88	43.85
Unspecified artiodactyl	1	0.68	—	—	—	—
Small mammal	2	1.37	—	—	—	—
Medium mammal	—	—	—	—	—	—
Large mammal	—	—	—	—	—	—
Unspecified mammal	89	60.96	—	—	—	—
Chicken	1	0.68	1	20	0.00	0.15
Unspecified duck	1	0.68	1	20	0.01	0.55
Small bird	—	—	—	—	—	—
Large bird	—	—	—	—	—	—
Unspecified bird	12	8.22	—	—	—	—
Unspecified fish	9	6.16	—	—	—	—
Indeterminate	17	11.64	—	—	—	—
Total	146	100	5	100	2.01	100

of faunal remains may be a result of the declining state of Port Tobacco or an alternative use of the site that altered deposition practices.

Early 18th Century to Mid-18th Century (Strata XV–XXII)

Strata XV–XX yielded the lowest percentage of identified faunal remains and the highest frequency of indeterminate faunal bones. Despite this, faunal remains account for 29% of the total assemblage from these strata. The average weight of the indeterminate fragments from this time period was 1.5 g, indicating the fragmentary nature of the assemblage. It is also unsurprising, therefore, that mammals represent the largest identified class. Of the faunal remains, the majority of the fragments were from cattle, pig, or sheep/goat, the three most easily identified species. Based on the associated ceramics, these strata date, approximately, to the early to mid-18th century. The date range situates this assemblage

at the time of the initial construction of the Burch House and the beginning of Chandler's Town.

Discussion

Domestic vs. Wild

Comparison of domestic species with wild species across the four phases indicates that the residents of the Burch House consumed more domesticated livestock than wild species. Domestic species are characterized by mammals such as cattle, pig, and sheep/goat. Wild mammals include opossum, muskrat, raccoon, squirrel, fox, and white-tailed deer. The majority of the biomass is provided by domesticated livestock—cattle, pig, and sheep/goat—a trend that is seen from the early 18th century until the early 20th century (Tables 3–6). Similarly, NISP across the assemblage follows the same pattern of reliance on domesticated livestock. This is especially evident in the 18th-

Table 6. Summary of the early to mid-18th-century faunal assemblage.

Common Name	NISP	NISP %	MNI	MNI %	Biomass (kg)	Biomass %
Cattle	52	2.97	1	6.67	8.52	44.32
Pig	107	6.11	2	13.33	5.41	28.13
Sheep/goat	40	2.28	3	20.00	4.45	23.15
White-tailed Deer	4	0.23	2	13.33	0.51	2.67
Cottontail	1	0.06	1	6.67	0.01	0.06
Raccoon	2	0.11	1	6.67	0.08	0.41
Dog	1	0.06	1	6.67	0.05	0.24
Unspecified artiodactyl	11	0.63	—	—	—	—
Small mammal	6	0.34	—	—	—	—
Medium mammal	13	0.74	—	—	—	—
Large mammal	7	0.40	—	—	—	—
Unspecified mammal	255	14.56	—	—	—	—
Chicken	3	0.17	1	6.67	0.03	0.15
Canada goose	10	0.57	1	6.67	0.11	0.59
Unspecified duck	5	0.29	1	6.67	0.04	0.22
Turkey	1	0.06	1	6.67	0.01	0.06
Small bird	1	0.06	—	—	—	—
Large bird	1	0.06	—	—	—	—
Unspecified bird	90	5.14	—	—	—	—
Unspecified turtle	12	0.69	—	—	—	—
Unspecified fish	34	1.94	—	—	—	—
Total	1,751	100	15	100	19.23	100

century assemblages, which are almost entirely composed of domesticated livestock with a minimal number of wild mammals supplementing diets in the first half of the century. While wild mammals do increase in percentage during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the assemblages are still heavily dominated by domesticated livestock.

With the exception of chickens, species of the avian class are difficult to classify due to their wide diversity and, often, the lack of a proper type collection. For example, unspecified duck species of the Anatinae subfamily were domesticated in North America prior to European arrival but wild species are often found also (Smith 2007). In the early 19th cen-

tury, canvasback ducks were raised in the Potomac and Susquehanna rivers and shipped to all major East Coast cities (Smith 2007). In 1845 a Port Tobacco farmer described how the “canvasback” duck, found in the Chesapeake Bay, was known for its peculiar flavor (*Port Tobacco Times* 1845:1). Canvasback ducks are found both in the wild and raised as backyard fowl, demonstrating the difficulty in classifying duck as domestic or wild (Smith 2007).

Based on their high representation in the total assemblage, ducks play a significant role in the Burch House residents’ diet in terms of bird consumption (Tables 3–6). This may be due to the fact that not only did ducks provide meat, but their feathers were also used for

clothing and bedding. In addition, the stability of duck across the four phases indicates the consistency of the Burch House residents' diet and/or their need for feathers.

Assessment of domestic and wild species for other avian species, such as Canada geese, would require morphometric measurements, which were not taken for any of the faunal remains in this analysis due to time constraints. Regardless of whether these birds are classified

as wild or domestic, it is entirely plausible that the residents of the Burch House either hunted waterfowl themselves or were able to purchase wild or domestic waterfowl elsewhere in town, assuming that past populations of waterfowl shared the same regions as do the present populations in the Tidewater (FIG. 3).

In a similar effort to understand the role of domesticated and wild species in diet in the same region of Maryland, Valerie Hall (this

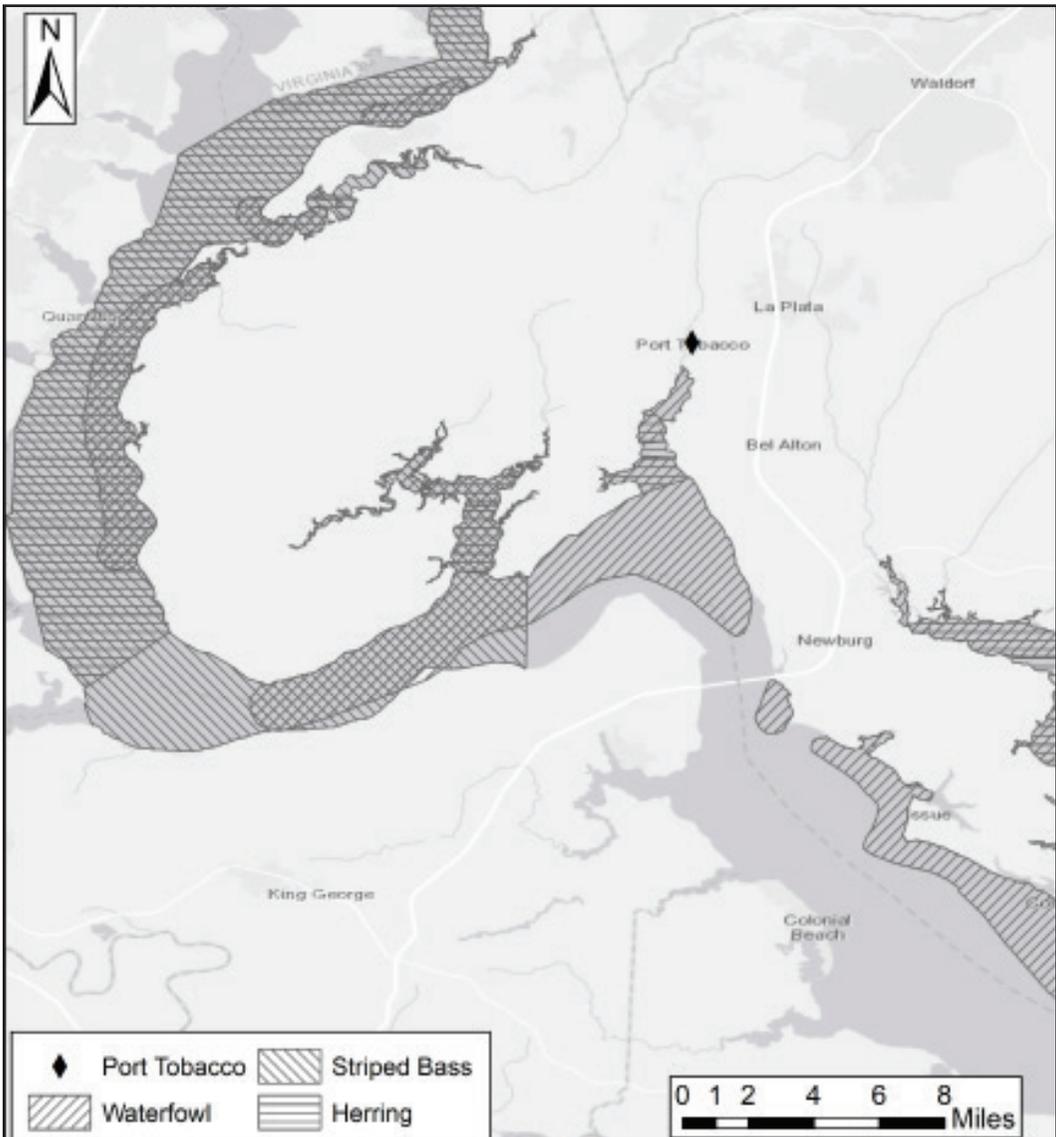


Figure 3. Map showing habitats of waterfowl, striped bass, and herring around Port Tobacco (Base map, Maryland's GIS Data Catalog [2010, 2014a, 2014b]; map by Jocelyn Lee, 2019).

issue) looks at the faunal assemblage of two sites, Shaw's Folly and Sparrow's Rest. Both sites are located near the Rhode River in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, approximately a quarter mile apart. Results of the analysis indicated that the families at the Shaw's Folly and Sparrow's Rest sites relied on domesticated livestock rather than exploitation of wild species (Gilbert and Gibb 2015; Hall, this issue). A similar reliance on domesticated livestock is evident in the Port Tobacco faunal assemblage. Although Hall's (this issue) research is based on two plantations dating to the 17th century, it provides additional explanation for the preference for domesticated livestock over wild species in a similar region where tobacco also played an important role in the local economy. While the Shaw's Folly and Sparrow's Rest sites provide a good comparison for the use of domestic and wild animals at the Burch House, Zierden and Reitz's (2005) study of Charleston, South Carolina's Beef Market, is a better comparison for the period in which Port Tobacco's economy was at its height.

Zierden and Reitz's (2005) study takes a city-wide research approach to analyze Charleston as one large, related site. Though much larger than Port Tobacco was at its peak, Charleston's faunal assemblages are drawn from a mix of commercial and residential landscapes similar to those of Port Tobacco. The study demonstrated that wild species from local resources, such as waters, islands, and plantations, were an important aspect of the Charleston diet. The Burch House is a single site in comparison to the variety of buildings and sites that make up the Charleston assemblage but it provides clues to the diet of multiple households through time. Additional faunal analysis from Port Tobacco would provide insight on the variation of diet between the town and household levels.

Sedimentation

The silting of the Port Tobacco River was one of the direct causes of Port Tobacco's decline; however, the impact of this alluvial

deposition is not reflected in the Burch House residents' diet. As the river became silted, water transportation became more limited, creating economic instability in the town. In his study of Port Tobacco, Quantock (2014) described the close relationship sedimentation had with the economy of the town. Archaeological evidence demonstrates that large scale sedimentation occurred as early as the town's founding in 1727 (Gibb 2011). However, instead of trying to resolve the problem, the town continuously moved the warehouse landing farther down the river, allowing the river to continue to silt. By the 19th century, the river had lost several navigation channels, impacting the local Port Tobacco economy. Historical travelers' accounts indicate that, by 1894, the river had lost an additional 3 ft. in depth and 1,500 ft. in length in comparison to the 1860s, and only flatboat navigation was possible (Quantock 2014).

With the head of the Port Tobacco River three-quarters of a mile away, it is unsurprising that fish were part of the diet of local residents, and specifically the residents of the Burch House. At a total of 739 bones, fish represent 10% of the faunal remains, with the caveat that these relatively smaller and lighter elements are more prone to decay than those of more robust species. Bone elements include various vertebrae, cranial elements, operculae, parts of the fins, and scales. Comparison with the type collection available from SERC indicates that residents were catching *Morone saxatilis* (rockfish), *Morone americana* (white perch), and *Micropterus salmoides* (largemouth bass). Additionally, elements from the family Ictaluridae (catfish) and *Gadida* (cod) were also found in the assemblage. All of these species of fish are mentioned in Alice Jane Lippson and Robert L. Lippson's 1984 guide, *Life in the Chesapeake Bay*, which describes species of aquatic life that currently reside in the Chesapeake Bay. The presence of these species in the guide and assemblage provides evidence of how the marine ecology in Port Tobacco has remained

unchanged since the early 20th century. Based on percentage of NISP, the prior Burch House residents did not have as much of a relationship with the Port Tobacco River as did those of the 19th and 20th centuries. Further research and identification of the remaining fish assemblage need to be completed in order to better understand the role of fish in the Burch House residents' diet across time periods. Based on the faunal assemblage, the silting of the Port Tobacco River did not significantly impact the Burch House residents' diet choices.

Conclusion

Since the early 18th century Port Tobacco has experienced growth and decline linked closely with the environment. As one of the three surviving 18th-century buildings, the Burch House is a good example of how changes in Port Tobacco's economy impacted diet at the household level. The faunal assemblage from the Burch House in Port Tobacco provides an illustration of household diets from the 18th to the 20th centuries.

The faunal assemblage from the Burch House can be roughly divided into four phases: the early 20th century, 19th century, mid- to late 18th century, and early to mid-18th century. With the exception of the mid- to late 18th-century assemblage having a much lower number of faunal remains ($n=146$), the four phases of the site show a relatively consistent distribution between mammals and birds. Mammals reliably represent more than half of the classes and birds account for 15% to 27%. These distributions of mammals and birds, as well as the dominance of domestic mammals versus wild species, provide evidence of an unchanging diet. This shows that, despite the economic and social changes that were occurring in the town of Port Tobacco, the Burch House residents' diet was largely unaffected.

Comparative analysis of the Burch House's faunal data and data from Charleston's Beef Market site shows that, despite both assemblages coming from urban settings, reliance on

domestic and wild animals varies (Zierden and Reitz 2004). Charleston's assemblage demonstrates the use of both domestic and wild species. In contrast, the biomass and MNI count of the Burch House site indicate the majority of the residents' diet was beef, pork, and mutton, with wild animals as supplements. This reliance on domestic animals is similar to dietary evidence from Shaw's Folly and Sparrow's Rest, occupied a century earlier (Hall, this issue). In addition to understanding the choice of domesticated livestock over wild species, this study places the faunal assemblage in the context of the silting that took place at Port Tobacco and puts the Burch House residents' diet into its proper relationship with the larger environment.

Archaeology at Port Tobacco has been ongoing since the 1960s, but no formal faunal analysis has been conducted on any of the other excavations. Faunal analyses that include material recovered from other Port Tobacco archaeology excavations will create a better understanding of households in the town. A holistic consideration of the town as one site, as modeled by Zierden and Reitz (2016), could further elucidate the relationship between the dietary preferences of residents of a small port town and its larger environment.

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