

Introductory Remarks

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Like so many North Americanists, I came into historical archaeology through the back door, that is, from prehistoric archaeology. I do not mention this defensively, for that is the way it commonly happened until recently (e.g., see Cotter herein), if it happened at all. The alternative all too often was that prehistoric archaeologists simply brushed aside the historic trash that littered their sites. In my own particular case, my essay into historic period archaeology occurred when I took up the challenge of the Tunica Treasure (Brain 1979). Because I was dealing with a known tribe, in a native context, but during the historic period, I coined the unhappy phrase "ethnohistoric archaeology" (Brain 1988). Although I may regret cluttering the theoretical landscape with more clumsy jargon, I maintain that the central thesis is valid: i.e., a study that follows an ethnic continuum from prehistory to history shatters that mythical boundary drawn between prehistoric and historical archaeology which is so often defended with such fierce advocacy by the respective practitioners. There is no earthly reason why someone with a little common sense, ability, and determination cannot operate effectively in both prehistoric and historic realms. And now I am not requiring an ethnic, not even a cultural, continuity (Brain 1997). To be sure, there are important differences—not to mention the added burden and benefit of historiography (that the prehistorian tends to approach with incredible naiveté)—but as one who has practiced prehistoric archaeology in Mississippi, ethnohistoric archaeology in Louisiana, and historical archaeology in Maine, I find that the differences are vastly overshadowed by a serendipitous perspective that enriches our understanding of these and other places, times, and peoples. But I stray from the topic.

This issue of *The Review Of Archaeology* is devoted to historical archaeology, and is especially focused on the period of European exploration and early colonization of the shores of North America. For this writer, the events of this period are the most exciting precisely because they occurred at the interface between prehistory and history, and the archaeological research often informs us about the Native American as well as the European. The interactions between the intruders and those intruded upon are a continual fascination as a source of human reaction and behavior in coping with new situations. There is also the challenge of pinning down the initial European contacts and footholds, for they tended to be exceedingly fleeting and astonishingly fragile affairs which left little evidence in the archaeological record. It is a study of ephemera that is clearly illustrated by a few examples.

There are historical legends that the Norse reached the shores of North America, but archaeological confirmation is limited to one site, L'Anse aux

Meadows, on the northern tip of Newfoundland. This was a logical location for a Viking beachhead, as attested by generations of later sailors who time and again followed the winds and currents to this same landfall, yet it took an intensive search and excavation to establish the fact. Had the site been reused, it is unlikely that its historical importance would ever have been revealed, so slender was the in-ground evidence. It is probably for this reason that no other Viking—or any other pre-Columbian European—site has ever been substantiated, never mind the ravings of an overly enthusiastic lunatic fringe. From the entire eastern seaboard of the United States, the most extreme possible Ulitima Thule of the Vikings, only a single authenticated Norse artifact, a coin, has been found in an archaeological site (Mellgren and Runge 1958; Seaby 1978). The context, however, was aboriginal and the object was probably traded through native channels from much farther north and so does not represent direct Viking contact, much less settlement.

Another case in point is that of the De Soto *entrada* into the southeastern United States (Clayton, Knight, and Moore 1993). The well-equipped conquistadores numbered more than five hundred and explored for four years, traveling through at least ten southern states. Yet, evidence of the expedition consists of only a handful of probable artifacts and one possible campsite. With the exception of the latter, we do not know where the expedition was at any time, from landing in Florida to departure from the Mississippi. For centuries, historians have traced the route over greatly differing paths that taken all together cut a vast swath across the Southeast (Brain 1985b). These hypotheses have obscured the one true route, but if there is any consensus along the way it is that the army must have passed in the vicinity of Tallahassee. And it is there that the one possible campsite has been identified in recent archaeological work by investigators who were aware of the possibility and knew what to look for (Ewen 1988, 1989, 1990). In other words, the identification would probably never have been made if there had not been close attention to detail, because the explorers had simply reused and adapted a pre-existing Indian site. Now that we know what the remains of such a camp look like, we might be able to find sufficient other examples to reconstruct a connect-the-dots outline of the route. Probable De Soto-era artifacts scattered across the Southeast (Brain 1975, 1985a; Smith 1987) provide clues, but their portability and provenience at native sites suggest that—like the Norse coin—they may have strayed far from the path of the army and in the absence of further contextual confirmation can only attest to the general presence of the *entrada*. A signpost for the actual route of the army requires a European context: in addition to temporary camps and fortifications, such might include the site of one of the many bloody battles described in the chronicles of the expedition, or perhaps the discovery of an accidental loss such as the remains of a fully accoutred man or beast drowned at a river crossing.

The problem of identifying the archaeological ephemera of early European sites that consisted only of temporary structures and fortifications is well illustrated by the case of Fort St. George of the Popham Colony, the first English colony in New England. Founded in August 1607, the colony lasted for little over a year before being abandoned in the autumn of 1608. Such a brief existence would likely leave scant archaeological remains, yet the construction of fortifications consisting of a ditch and rampart could be expected to have scarred the soil sufficiently to leave a lasting impression. The first problem was to establish the location of the fort. The documents were unambiguous in placing the colony at the mouth of the Kennebec River in Maine, but that is a large embouchure with many islands and peninsulas that would have been suitable for the purpose. Many hypotheses, in fact, were presented over the centuries, but then an important clue was discovered in 1888: a map of Fort St. George, apparently drawn on-site in 1607 by one of the colonists, was found in the Royal Archives at Simancas in Spain. This map had been acquired in England by the Spanish ambassador who sent it to his sovereign, Philip III, in 1608. When the colony was abandoned and the fort destroyed, the map was deposited in the archives where it lay forgotten for nearly three centuries. So there was no question about its authenticity. It is a valuable document because it is the only detailed plan we have of an initial English settlement anywhere in the Americas, and in many respects illustrates the descriptions we have for Roanoke, Jamestown, and Plymouth. For present purposes, moreover, it provides precise locational information. Although the environs of the fort and geographical features are not indicated on the map, the odd configuration of the fort trace indicates that it was designed to conform to a specific topography. With the map in hand, local Maine historians soon pinpointed the obvious spot. Thus, the location was determined as closely as historiographic analysis and topographic survey could ascertain. However, in-ground proof was still lacking.

It was some years before archaeology had matured to the point where it was able to tackle the problem. It was only with the development of historical archaeology that the interest was pursued and the knowledge of material culture had evolved sufficiently to be able to discriminate seventeenth-century artifacts with accuracy. Thus, it was not until 1962 that the first archaeology was done at the predicted site of Fort St. George. This work did not achieve the desired result: no remains of a fort or early European constructions of any kind were uncovered, and it was concluded that the fort had not been at this location, or if it had been there, then it subsequently had been destroyed by human or natural agency. However, seventeenth-century artifacts were recovered and—such are the strides that have been made in the thirty years since then—many of these can now be recognized as diagnostic of the very early years of the century.

We then took up the task (Brain 1995). Further research convinced us that the predicted location had to have been the right one. Especially compelling was the discovery of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century maps that sited the fort at this same general location, confirming the earlier prediction. Another look was in order and excavations were carried out in 1994. The enormity of our task was immediately apparent. Although we were certain that this was the right location, we dug for weeks without finding any evidence of the fort, not even a definite seventeenth-century artifact. It seemed that the earlier excavators might have been correct concerning the extent of disturbance. Certainly, the site had a long history of human activity. There had been millennia of prehistoric occupation before the colonists had arrived, and then in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries several houses had been built with deep cellar holes. Capping it all in the early twentieth century were the support facilities for a modern fort. After they were razed, the site was farmed in the 1930s and 1940s.

We were, then, trying to discriminate one year out of 8000, sandwiched between robust prehistoric and historic occupations that had extensively modified the land. Most seriously, the recent farming had effectively destroyed all historical surfaces. Features from the various components, however, were intruded down into the prehistoric layers. Perseverance has its rewards and eventually we found in a small section of the site artifacts appropriate to an English colony of the early seventeenth century, some of which came from contexts that could be identified with Fort St. George, even to specific features depicted on the 1607 map. The point is that if we had not known precisely what we were looking for, both artifacts and features, and if we had not persisted, it is unlikely that we would ever have confirmed the location of Fort St. George, especially in such a disturbed multicomponent site.

Thus, unlike so much historical archaeology which is blessed with standing architecture, massive features, and enormous quantities of artifacts, the archaeology of the early historical period is spectral: tiny needles in a vast continental haystack. Similar examples of such archaeology of the ephemeral are presented in the following pages.

But first we are given two very personal perspectives that demonstrate the breadth of thought encompassed by historic period archaeology. Not only are the expressed philosophies fundamentally different, but the very practices are distinct. Yet both have been instrumental in laying the foundations of historical archaeology, and both have contributed mightily to the field. John Cotter begins with an account of his early training and the state of archaeology in the 1930s and 1940s which formed the background for his pioneering efforts in historical archaeology. Within the context of a personal memoir of his experiences at Jamestown, Jack casts a critical eye on archaeological methodology and theory and the

changes that he has witnessed therein during his long career. He emphasizes in a covering letter to his article that he is fully cognizant of the constructive and worthwhile aspects of new approaches to the practice of historical archaeology, and does "not mean to deprecate 'theoretical archaeology,' but rather to deflate it until it shows the framework of possible evocation of the past that has always been there." He reminds us of the humanistic foundation of historical archaeology which is to "identify the lives and events of peoples of the past by documentation and material culture evidence as efficiently and completely as possible."

In the second paper, Stanley South's discussion of his commitment to scientific archaeology provides fine counterpoint to Cotter's comments. Stan believes that pattern recognition in archaeological remains reveals processes in past cultural systems, and that "a major concern of historical archaeology should be the understanding of the way world cultural systems use energy differentially, as reflected in the archaeological record resulting from social stratification." However, in order to achieve this ambitious goal, he offers a rapprochement with humanism and recognizes that "historical archaeology needs both science and humanism to most effectively achieve its mission of understanding and interpreting the past." This ecumenical approach should be acknowledged as the guiding light of all archaeological inquiry (Brain 1988: 2-4), although the emphases may of course differ—it is easy to imagine a scientific approach dominating in prehistoric studies, whereas a humanistic bent might assume more importance in a historical context where individual people may be known.

Bill Fitzhugh's Frobisher project is a perfect example of the blend of the scientific and humanistic: the most modern archaeometric and analytic techniques are used to illuminate remains of specific individuals and well-documented events. Martin Frobisher's venture was the first official organized English effort to explore and exploit North America after the initial voyages of the Cabots and was crucial background to the major colonization activities that developed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Frobisher is so well documented that Bill's first request for funding was rebuffed because the investigation was simply seen as a "duplication of published records" (that arrogant shadow so often cast over historical archaeology by historians!). Bill persisted, however, and the relevance of archaeological research within a broader interdisciplinary program is amply demonstrated. Because of its remote location, the primary Frobisher site on Kodlunars Island is remarkably well preserved, and the investigation revealed an unexpectedly ambitious and well-thought-out complex that was the result of careful planning not even hinted at in the historical documents (see also Kelso and Tuck herein). Bill's presentation focuses on a single category of artifact that ties all the research together, provides a cautionary story of

archaeological sleuthing, inevitably encounters the tangled problem of separating Viking remains from early post-Columbian in the North Atlantic, and offers a fascinating solution to the perceived conundrum.

The next paper returns us to where we began: Jamestown. Bill Kelso's Jamestown Rediscovery Archaeology Project continues Jack Cotter's explorations and is heir to many of the same problems and considerations expressed by Jack. Bill is fortunate in being able to excavate a portion of the site that Jack was only able to test briefly, and it is there that he thinks he has found at last a portion of the earliest walls and other features of James Fort. Those walls are surprisingly insubstantial affairs that probably would have been overlooked or misidentified by someone looking for a more conventional European-style fortification of the period. As Bill points out, however, they would have provided adequate defense against native enemies, while the site of the fort makes perfect military sense for commanding the river against foreign ships. The obvious military competence, as well as many of the artifacts contained within fort contexts, leads Bill to conclude that far more intelligence was given to the planning, recruiting, and supplying of the colony than has been credited historically (see also Fitzhugh and Tuck). Thus, the interaction of archaeological data and documentary history not only questions the traditional story of the settlement of Jamestown in 1607-1610, but also demonstrates the beneficial relationship between the disciplines of historical archaeology and history. The demonstration will, he hopes, finally lay to rest the hoary subject of archaeology being merely a handmaiden to history. Indeed, it is apparent that we have advanced far beyond this old identity crisis, and that historical archaeologists are doing both history and archaeology in an increasingly successful mutualistic approach that is proving its value in the investigation of the past.

These themes are given further substance by Jim Tuck, who presents us with a glimpse of the first English settlements in Newfoundland. Again, as is so often the case in these early sites, the remains are "nearly invisible and easily overlooked." Jim's explorations, however, have been rewarded with a wealth of detail, and he has achieved the enviable ability to distinguish between decades of settlement, even between the settlers themselves. In short, he is fast approaching Jack Cotter's goal of identifying the lives and events of past peoples. This achievement allows him to ask those dynamic questions we all wish to pose: in this case, about the colonization of Newfoundland and its comparison with other early English colonies in the Americas.

Introducing the French connection, Ric Faulkner describes his research in Acadian Maine. It is a fascinatingly detailed account of lonely outposts on the Penobscot River, and, like Tuck, he can even investigate specific individuals despite the delicacy of the remains. But equally impressive is the fact that as new data are analyzed, those vaunted models and

patterns that have achieved such theoretical prominence are increasingly brought into question. It may be that earlier patterns recognized in the data are too simplistic and inaccurate stereotypes that need to be replaced with more sophisticated models of European-Native American interaction and cultural exchange.

An important component of historical archaeology is the maritime exploration of shipwrecks and other underwater resources, and it is for this reason that the Society for Historical Archaeology and the Conference on Underwater Archaeology consistently hold joint meetings. Ships represent the most important European technological system during the age of exploration and colonization, and therefore they offer potentially the most rewarding archaeological discoveries. Probably nothing better illustrates the difficulty of establishing context in historical archaeology than shipwrecks. The original ephemera, ships are transient artifacts on a constantly shifting medium; when they are lost, they disappear from sight and are difficult to access. When located, however, they have the potential of providing an incredibly detailed time capsule. The successful search for the *Belle*, La Salle's flagship that sank in Texas's Matagorda Bay in 1686, is a perfect case in point. Under the leadership of Barto Arnold of the Texas Historical Commission, it took seventeen years and the most sophisticated of modern underwater remote-sensing technology to locate the ship, but the reward has been the recovery of the finest assemblage of seventeenth-century French maritime and colonial artifacts in the Western Hemisphere (Roberts 1997). As his contribution to this issue, Arnold provides us with an invaluable review of the literature of shipwrecks. An important part of this guide is to draw clearly the line between underwater archaeology and treasure hunting. I am personally very sensitive to this issue because of the Tunica "Treasure" and the circumstances surrounding its discovery and excavation. We are reminded by Barto how poorly defined the dividing line between archaeology and hunting for monetary profit is in the public mind. Symptomatic of the problem was a recent, and relatively respectable, television program that referred to a certain gentleman literally in the same breath as both a "treasure hunter" and an "underwater archaeologist" (incidentally, the smallest and historically least noteworthy ship in the fleet he discovered was found to contain the greatest amount of treasure, providing archaeological evidence for the suspected smuggling not revealed in the official documents; so much for the position that history has nothing to learn from archaeology). It is perhaps not such subtle irony that since profit was the prime motivation for the early explorers and colonists, these maritime contexts intimately associate the past and present. Is a Mel Fisher really that much different from a Sir Francis Drake (Winchester 1997)?

In the concluding paper, Fred West shifts our attention to a different place, time, and circumstance. Yet, by now, it is a familiar story of another lost site:

one briefly occupied, destroyed, and recalled only in sketchy historical documentation. Fred's anecdotal account of the ultimately successful rediscovery of Sitka fort details the tribulations and frustrations, as well as occasional lighter moments, of such endeavors. But most of all it reveals once again the holistic advantage to be gained from bringing together history and archaeology, as well as other disciplines and data, in exploring the past. And although couched facetiously, this account poignantly illuminates the hope that lurks within all of us that, because of our efforts, "the world would be a better place."

All of the papers assembled here provide thoughtful commentary on the practice of historical archaeology in this country during the 1990s. Scant decades after its development as a discipline distinct from the prevailing anthropological archaeology (and other "historical" archaeologies focused on foreign venues), it has achieved a certain maturity if such is measured by the probing nature of the questions asked, the sophistication of the interdisciplinary techniques and data employed, the success of the results achieved even under very adverse conditions, and most importantly of all the relevance it can demonstrate to the society which supports it. All of this progress has been achieved within the lifetime of one of our most accomplished historical archaeologists and lead-off contributor to this assemblage, Jack Cotter—and to him this issue is dedicated. □

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