



## Rediscovering the Past: Archaeology at Three Early Farmsteads in Manalapan Township, Monmouth County, New Jersey



Site Location

From 2006 to 2008, Richard Grubb & Associates (RGA) excavated one 19<sup>th</sup>- and two 18<sup>th</sup>- century farmstead sites associated with the Scotch Presbyterian Forman family, the English Hankinson family, and the Dutch Van Kirk family in Manalapan, New Jersey. The sites were located on a large parcel of land proposed for commercial and residential development between Millhurst and Woodward Roads and the Manalapan River and its North Branch. The three sites provided a

unique opportunity to recover significant information about 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century life among the rural upper class in Monmouth County. All three farmstead sites were eligible for listing on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places. K. Hovnanian Homes and Manalapan Retail Realty Partners funded the archaeological excavations.



Archaeological excavation of a post-in-ground house at the Foundation Site.

The Foundation Site was occupied from 1731 to the 1790s by Robert Hankinson, Jonathan Forman, and lastly by tenants. Occupation at the Manalapan Village House Site by Robert's brother-in-law William Van Kirk and later by Jonathan's sister Mary [Forman]

Walton, and brother William Forman occurred from 1742 to 1800. The Garret Forman Site was settled between 1800 and 1852 by William Forman's son Garret and later by tenants. All three farmsteads were sited on well-drained knolls overlooking the Manalapan River. Each produced tens of thousands of artifacts, along with building remains, garbage pits, wells, and posts. Together they revealed how early Monmouth County settlers lived during the 18th and 19th century.

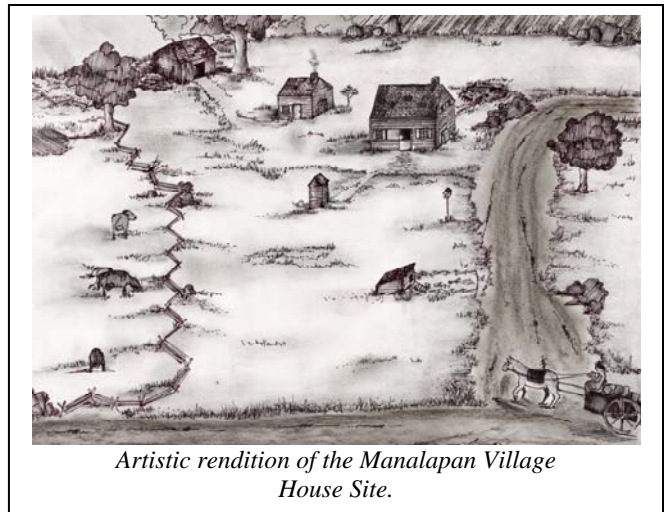
All three farmsteads contained the remains of a small house, ranging in size from 14 by 17.5 feet to 18 by 25 feet. All of the farm houses faced south to take advantage of solar heat. Of the three homes, the dwelling at the early 18<sup>th</sup>-century Foundation Site was built with post-in-ground construction methods, while the latter two rested on a stone foundation. In fact, almost all of the structures at the Foundation Site lacked stone foundations and were erected using Medieval post-in-ground construction techniques, typical of early settlement in the

region. By the middle of the eighteenth century, rural colonial settlers began to erect homes and some farm buildings on more durable stone foundations. After each site was abandoned, almost all available building material, including foundation stone, was gathered, recycled, and reused in the construction of nearby farmsteads. It is possible that some buildings were even lifted off of their foundations and relocated, a popular method of reusing buildings during this time.



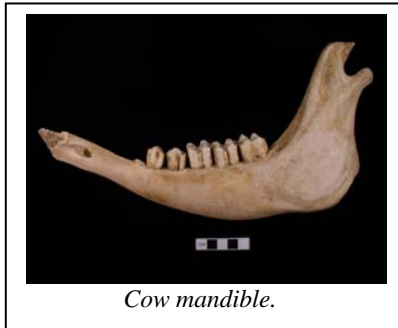
Out kitchen foundation at the Foundation Site.

Like many farmsteads of the period, the remains of a small, one story out kitchen were identified near the homes at each site. Out kitchens were used as a place to cook, make and mend clothes, store food in shallow pits below floor boards, and even house tenants and slaves in overhead garret spaces. The separation of the kitchen from the main house helped prevent the spread of fires, which commonly grew out of control in an out kitchen. In fact, fire consumed the out kitchens at both the Foundation and Manalapan Village House Sites. Rich with burned debris, their crawl spaces and cold storage pits offered archaeologists a snapshot in time of the meals prepared, activities conducted, and use of space in such buildings.



Artistic rendition of the Manalapan Village House Site.

Structures like wells, storehouses, barns, corn cribs, animal pens, privies, hay barracks and an array of other buildings once stood close to dwellings and out kitchens at the three farmsteads. All areas around the dwellings, particularly front yards, were actively used. The divisions between domestic and agricultural activity areas at the sites often seem blurred, but would have been well understood by the sites' residents.



*Cow mandible.*

Recovered fragments of dishes, bottles, buttons, smoking pipes, animal bones, and shell further tell us how early Monmouth County residents lived, ate, and participated in the market. Artifacts recovered and the locations of garbage pits

indicated the sites' occupants, like those who resided in other parts of the state from the 1730s-1850s, casually discarded trash on the ground surface and in shallow open pits around their homes, where it was trampled by humans and rummaging pigs, chickens, and sheep.

The residents had a diet comprised mainly of domesticated animals, including chicken, cow, pig, sheep, and goat, supplemented by wild animals like turtle, deer, clam, oyster, and whelk. They also ate meat cuts not common today, such as jowl. Each farmstead



*Channel and knobbed whelk.*

butchered its own livestock, and likely received meat and other foods from neighboring farmers in barter exchanges.



*Redware dishes.*

Meals were typically prepared in cheap, locally produced redware ceramic pots, bowls, pans and dishes. Meals were served on local redware and imported British refined and decorated tablewares. Soups, porridges, stews, and baked meat

and vegetable-based puddings and pies, along with meat cuts comprised the diet of most mid 18<sup>th</sup>-century Monmouth County residents. These meals were often served in a communal manner and were eaten mainly for sustenance. During the late-18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century, ceramic vessels revealed that meals focused around family reunion and food servings became more individualized.

Another time of gathering, and one that transcended class lines, was the tea ceremony. Recovered teaware was more refined and ornately decorated than most tablewares, and utilitarian wares found. Ordinarily displayed on open shelves in cupboards,



*Two-cup teapot and teacups.*

these expensive imported vessels offered a hint of decoration in rooms with otherwise unadorned walls. Tea was consumed during times of relaxation and when guests called. It often served as a socially engaging time when residents could discuss the pleasantries of life, nature, news, family affairs, and politics. Locally made ciders and cider spirits (applejack) were equally as popular. Produced from apples grown on farm orchards that dotted the State's landscape, New Jersey ciders and cider spirits were heralded by travelers, foreign visitors, and locals alike. Commonly stored in jugs and large wooden barrels, most country folk owned an ample supply and often preferred it to imported wine.



*Buttons, cuff links, and a faux gem.*

The archaeological excavations of these three sites offered an important glimpse into the everyday lives of the Van Kirk, Forman, and Hankinson families during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. They, like other wealthy farmers in the

state, lived a modest lifestyle in small, cramped, one or two-room homes. Yards were often messy, littered with trash as broken dishes and food remains were casually tossed out of windows and doors. Clothing was simple. The families enjoyed smoking tobacco, and drinking tea, cider, and locally made whisky. Community, family, and religion were important. Life was tough, and neighbors relied on one another for help tending crops and erecting buildings. Exchanges of goods and labor were the norm. Ultimately, these rural country folk measured success in their ability to own land, give real estate to sons, purchase both livestock and slaves, and uphold their social, religious, and civil duties in the community.

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