

Commemorating a Rural African-American Family at a National Battlefield Park

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The Robinson House site is situated within the Manassas National Battlefield Park in northern Virginia. The original Robinson House was constructed in the 1840s and was occupied until 1936 by the same free African-American family. The National Park Service recognizes and interprets the Robinson House since it was part of the Civil War battlefield landscape during the First and Second Battles of Manassas. The original house went through a series of structural additions and alterations in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The house stood until 1993 when arsonists burned it, causing 60% damage to the structure. Today, the east chimney and the stone foundations remain. Amidst the many Civil War monuments at the battlefield park the interpretation of a century of occupation by the Robinson family through the remaining foundations adds meaning and depth to the area's local history. The Robinson House remains symbolize an African-American family's way of life as well as their struggle, to survive during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era. The foundations and site are a steadfast symbol of African-American cultural persistence that has prevailed for over 100 years on a battlefield landscape.

KEY WORDS: commemoration; African Americans; symbolism.

INTRODUCTION

At one time the National Park Service adhered to a policy of preserving nationally significant landscapes, sometimes at the expense of a community's local and regional heritage. This scenario existed at Manassas National Battlefield Park, where the interpretation was almost exclusively

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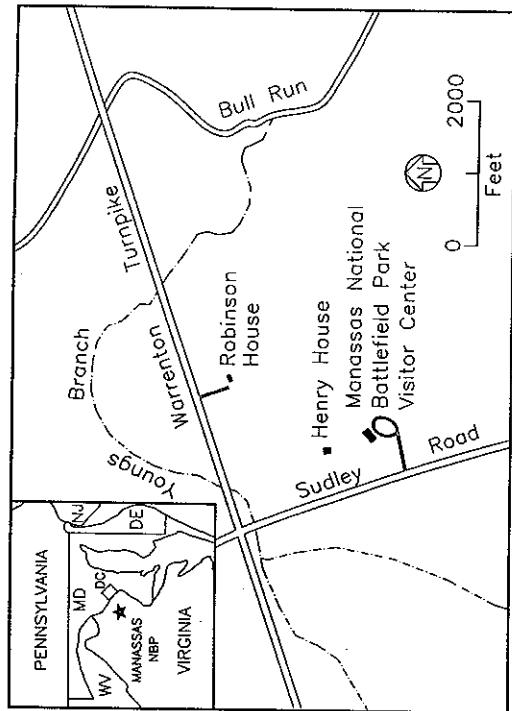


Fig. 1. Overview map of the location of the Robinson House. (Drawn by John Ravenhorst.)

on the First and Second Battles of Manassas. These battles, after all, were nationally significant events that had a tremendous impact on the Civil War. Recently, the research and interpretive trend at the park has become more encompassing, recognizing the contributions of the area's antebellum and postbellum local community.

The Robinsons, a free African-American household, occupied a portion of what became Manassas National Battlefield Park from the 1840s through 1936 (Fig. 1). Their longtime presence enables the National Park Service to expand upon their traditional, essentially synchronic interpretation of the area's national significance to one that is more inclusive and diachronic.

The original Robinson house was built in the late 1840s. Several additions were placed on the structure from the 1870s through the twentieth century. Arson in 1993, destroyed much of the wood frame structure and it was eventually documented and dismantled by the Williamsport Preservation Training Center, a branch of the National Park Service (Sandri, 1994) (Fig. 2). Only the chimney and foundations survive today. Preserving these ruins has met with varying degrees of success, and sometimes resistance, since the remaining foundations represent postbellum additions and do not fit into a narrow interpretation of the park's congressional enabling legislation—to interpret the First and Second Battles of Manassas.

Proposed Building Morphology

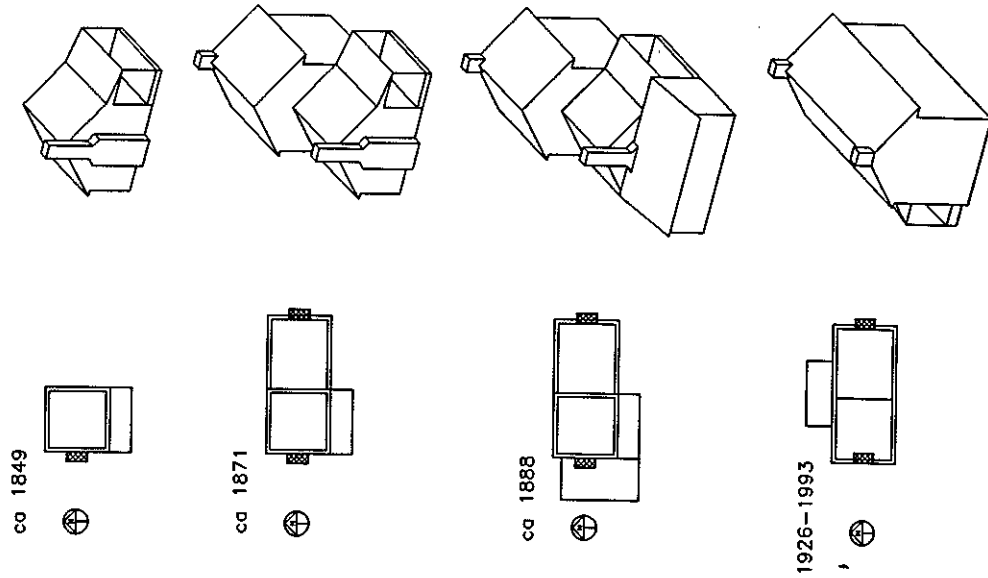


Fig. 2. Robinson House building morphology. (Drawn by John Ravenhorst, based on Sandri, 1994.)

While extensive archaeological work has occurred at Manassas National Battlefield Park (Little, 1995; also see, e.g., Galke, 1992; Parker and Hernigle, 1990), limited archaeological investigations had been conducted at the Robinson House (Hernigle, 1991; McGarry, 1982). Recent archaeological studies have examined the Robinson family's history and the land-

scape of the farmstead in an antebellum and postbellum context and demonstrate how the landscape and the built environment changed significantly during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era (Parsons, 1996). In addition, the examination of these changes as a strategy to conceal the affluence of an African-American family, as well as mislead the surveillance of Euro-American community members, are presented. Recognizing these changes and placing them in a larger context of white and black relationships in the postbellum era are important to understanding the meanings and uses of this African-American landscape.

ROBINSON FAMILY HISTORY

Little is known about James Robinson's early life other than the fact that he was born in 1799 (Turner, 1993b; Robinson, 1993). Oswald Robinson, a great grandson of James Robinson, lives near Manassas National Battlefield Park and has participated in many interviews and articles over the years, sharing his memories of his family's history. He traces his lineage from Landon Carter, a grandson of Robert "King" Carter, who took as his mistress one of the slaves on his plantation Pittsylvania, now part of Manassas National Battlefield Park. A son was born in 1799, named James, later known as "Gentleman Jim." James was born free according to a document of freedom registration (Sweig, 1977; *Centre View*, August 29, 1987, p. 1).

Although Robinson was born free, he apparently was "bound out," or indentured, for a period of time as a young man. The earliest known document related to James Robinson is an account statement dated 1827. The statement indicates that Robinson owed money to Thomas R. Hampton for a list of household items, including sugar, a sugar bowl, brandy, tobacco, shoes, a straw bonnet, and calico fabric. During the 1820s and into the 1830s, Robinson had a contract with Thomas Hampton and worked in his nearby Brentsville tavern (Burgess, 1994). In the 1840s James Robinson was able to purchase land and build a one and one-half story house.

James Robinson was married to a slave named Susan Gaskins. She was listed as Robinson's consort in the record of Robinson's death in 1875, since by law, slaves were not permitted to marry (Turner, 1993b). James and Susan Robinson had six children, all born into slavery. There is little known about two sons, Alfred and James who, based on oral tradition, were sold on the slave block and sent to Louisiana. Family oral tradition also records that Alfred made his way back to his family in Virginia in 1888, and son James was never heard from again. The four remaining children, along with their mother Susan, were the property of John Lee, a local landowner. John Lee's will, dated 1847, entrusted Robinson's wife,

two daughters, and two grandchildren to him. Robinson bought another son, Tasco, out of slavery and, at one point, bound out one of his daughters (Burgess, 1994).

The 1850 agriculture census indicates that the Robinson family had a 150.5-acre farm. They also owned four horses, three milk cows, and six swine, with a total value of \$175 in stock. Robinson had 100 lb of wool, 7 bushels of Irish potatoes, 200 lb of butter, and 5 tons of hay (Turner, 1993a). The Robinsons escaped injury during both battles of Manassas. While the family sought safety during the fighting, their house served as a significant landscape feature during the battles. General Franz Sigel, commanding the First Corps of Pope's Army of Virginia, established his headquarters on the Robinson farm (U.S. War Department, 1880, 1885, p. 32). It was also during this battle that the Robinson House was used as a field hospital (U.S. War Department, 1880, 1885, p. 302; *Irish-American*, 1863; Lyon, 1882). Family tradition notes that the Robinsons returned to their house to find blood-stained floors (Wilshin, 1948).

On February 2, 1872, James Robinson appeared before the Commissioners of Claims appointed under the Act of March 3rd, 1871. The testimony of James Robinson, George Harris, Albert Flagler, Arthur Harris, and Pusal (Tasco) Robinson were transcribed by a court stenographer (War Claim, 1872). The case stated that Union troops raided James Robinson's farm during the Second Battle of Manassas. Robinson claimed that \$2,608 worth of personal property was either taken or destroyed by Union men, under the direction of General Sigel. The claim included the loss of 25 tons of hay, 60 bushels of wheat, 20 bushels of corn, two horses, seven hogs, three barrels of fish, 800 lb of bacon, two fat cattle, 12 acres of corn, 25 acres of oats, groceries and provisions, beds and furniture, garden house and services, and fence rails (War Claim, 1872). Of the lost material, Robinson was reimbursed for \$1,249, less than half of what he claimed.

RACISM AND LANDSCAPES

At the end of the Civil War, many African Americans faced the prospect of finding employment, while plantation owners and farmers were confronted with labor shortages. Almost four million slaves were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation and, although many refused to work for their former masters, some decided to stay where they had lived and worked (Orser, 1988, p. 49). The decision was based on individual circumstances. Newly freed African Americans, without the opportunity to possess their own land, thought that the tenant system would be the next best thing, "for at least they had more control over their own work schedules and had

privacy in their home life" (Boles, 1983, p. 208). Plantation tenancy was a system in which farm laborers were hired and compensated with a portion of the crop, a fixed amount of money, or a combination of the two. The system soon degenerated into a system in which black tenants grew indebted to their white landlords. Legislation such as the Black Code, passed in South Carolina, turned freedom for African Americans into a new kind of slavery. The code contained provisions that restricted labor and movement of freedmen (Orser, 1988, pp. 37-50; Foner, 1988; Morgan, 1986, p. 51).

Emancipated slaves were only nominally free. In response to racial tensions, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Reconstruction Act the following year. Other legal protection was given to freedmen such as legitimacy of children, passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, and the right to acquire property and to bring suit in court. Reconstruction had generated changes that established federal protection for the rights of African Americans. However, a counter-revolution during the 1870s once again transformed law into an effective tool for white control (Nieman, 1994, p. xi; Foner, 1988). By the first decade of the twentieth century a "wall of containment—a direct product of political and legal factors and extralegal violence—subordinated blacks to whites" (Williams, 1989, pp. 33), especially in the South. In 1896, the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* legitimized Jim Crow principles. Thus, by the twentieth century most states had laws requiring the segregation of African Americans (Williams, 1989, p. 33).

The Robinson family escaped the dilemma of accepting tenancy for their livelihood since they already owned their land. But for the Robinsons, control of their landscape and built environment was restricted by social, economic, and racial ideology, since they could not escape the forces of Jim Crow legislation. Their farm's landscape reflected many of their cultural traditions and indicates how they negotiated their status and relative wealth as a minority in their community.

Archaeological information on acculturation and cultural persistence of African-American landscapes, for the most part, has been derived from southern plantation archaeology. Architectural historians have amassed a large database and interpretations on African-American vernacular landscapes. These studies establish that the space around the dwelling was just as important as the dwelling itself. This area was the place where African Americans socialized, raised chickens and dogs, grew gardens with which they could supplement their diets, and used their produce as a bartering tool (see, e.g., Westmacott, 1992; Brown and Cooper, 1990; Epperson, 1991; Holland, 1990; Kelso, 1986; Upton, 1988; Vlach, 1993).

African Americans living in slave quarters were actually part of two landscapes, a white landscape including the main house and a black landscape that included the working quarters (Upton, 1988, p. 361). Each landscape was perceived differently by whites and blacks. The white planters' landscape was one which involved network and movement throughout the plantation, while their view of the slaves landscape was stationary and "discrete." The slaves, however, had another, "personal landscape which involved their own living space, as well as the space outside the cabins, including the woods and fields" (Upton, 1988, p. 366, 367; also see Epperson, 1991). Plantation owners created the contexts of the space on their lands, but did not control those spaces absolutely (Vlach, 1993, p. 1).

Forms of African-American identity were apparent in the landscape that immediately surrounded the house, such as gardens and yards. By studying these gardens and yards, we can see a continuity of African-American traditions in the use of space, buildings, and material culture (Westmacott, 1992, pp. 1-8). African agricultural practices survived in the United States, where slaves not only put their knowledge of African practices to work, but learned new ways of cultivation from Euro-Americans and Native Americans (Westmacott, 1992, p. 15, 19). Many slaves were allowed to cultivate their own gardens, and slave as well as free African-American yard areas served a variety of functions. They operated as an extension of the kitchen, a place for household chores, an area for recreation and entertainment, and for subsistence (Westmacott, 1992, p. 23).

More importantly, these gardens, and the use of yards provided feelings of "self sufficiency, self reliance, independence, and resourcefulness" (Westmacott, 1992, p. 91). Some similarities existed between the yards and gardens of free and enslaved African Americans and the use of space between rural and urban African Americans. For instance, both free and slave, urban and rural, African Americans used space outside of their dwellings as an extension of their houses. Yards were used in all situations to strengthen social ties and to reinforce a sense of community as well as independence. People lived outside and around their houses as much as they lived in them. In Africa, houses were used "primarily for sleeping, storage, and shelter during short periods of inclement weather; working, cooking, eating, and socializing take place outside" (Ferguson, 1992, p. 71).

Since yards were seen as an extension of their homes, occupants often swept this area. Sometimes the dirt would become so polished it became almost like a cement floor, and excess refuse was easily swept away. This tradition continues even today in rural areas in the United States as well as in the Caribbean (Jackson, in Westmacott, 1992, p. 80) and is also practiced by other ethnic and regional groups.

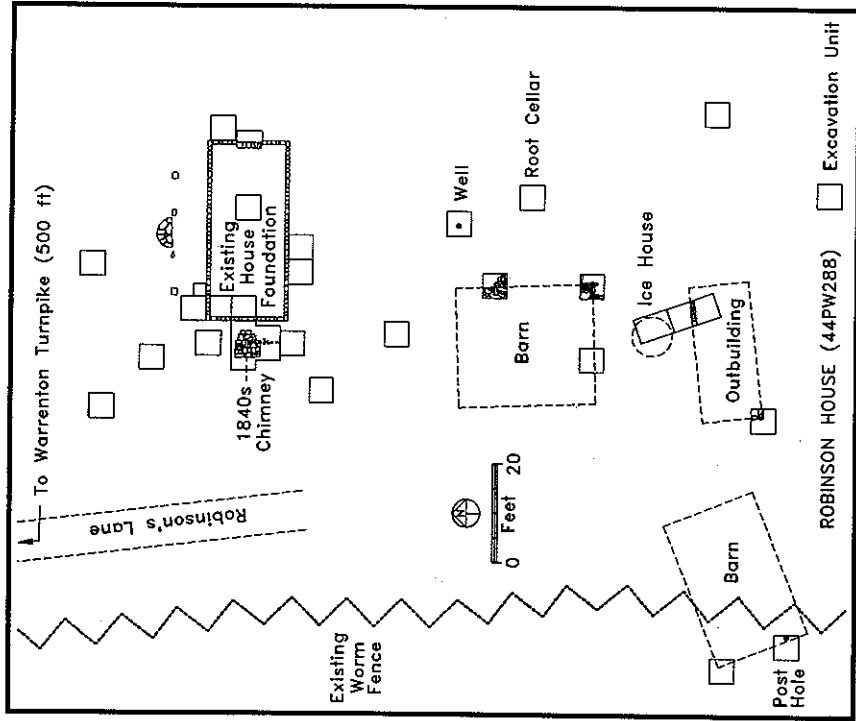


Fig. 3. Site map of excavations at the Robinson House. (Drawn by John Ravenhorst.)

The Robinsons made use of the space outside by using the porch on the south side of the house as a connection between outside and inside spaces, and in turn, the south yard was an extension of the house, where many work and leisure activities occurred (Fig. 3). The south yard contained outbuildings and gardens, and so it is not unfathomable that they spent a great deal of time laboring there. They also spent many hours socializing and entertaining on the porch and in the yard (Parsons, 1997, pp. 93-94, 101).

During the excavations at the Robinson house, archaeologists concentrated on the area immediately surrounding the house foundations as well as in the yards surrounding the house (see Fig. 3). A disproportionately small percentage of artifacts was found close to the house, while most of

the artifacts were located in those excavation units placed 50 feet or more from the house foundations (Parsons, 1997). Apparently, some type of yard cleaning or sweeping occurred and the soils tended to be a hard-packed clay. Excavations in the south yard area located the remnants of several outbuildings over 50 ft from the dwelling. A sampling of the outbuilding interiors reveals that once they were no longer used (late 19th century through 1930s), they became trash pits.

Excavations performed near the house foundations and in the backyard area produced several dozen examples of mancala gaming pieces, an ancient game derived in parts of Africa and Asia. The game is at least 3500 years old and it is still played today. Although the game was traditionally played with polished stones and cowrie shells, the mancala gaming pieces found on several antebellum African-American slave sites in Virginia and the Caribbean were fashioned out of small, reworked, polygonal shaped sherds of glass and ceramic (Parker and Hernigle, 1990, p. 207; Kelso *et al.*, 1991, p. 79). While the type of glass that was reworked or worn is unknown, the majority of ceramic gaming pieces appears to be either porcelain or unidentified white-paste ceramic. These reworked gaming pieces have been recovered at other nineteenth-century slave sites, including Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest (Patten, 1992), Monticello, (Heath, personal communication, cited by Parker and Hernigle, 1990, p. 207), Garrison Plantation (Klingelhofer, 1987), on Montserrat, at Galways Plantation (Howson, personal communication, cited by Patten, 1992), at Drax Hall in Jamaica (Armstrong, 1990), and at Pohoke and Portici Plantation at Manassas National Battlefield Park (Parker and Hernigle, 1990, pp. 207-208). In many cases these pieces have been attributed as mancala gaming pieces based on ethnographic comparisons. Although the reworked objects could be identified with other games and rituals, the frequency of these objects on slave sites leads us to infer that these objects at the Robinson House are mancala gaming pieces.

From their back porch the Robinsons had easy access to several work areas, including barns, stables, and an icehouse. The yard immediately adjacent to the dwelling was swept clean, creating a neat, debris-free yard for socializing, leisure, and gaming. The presence of mancala gaming pieces is a strong indicator of African cultural persistence found in the archaeological record.

ARCHITECTURE

The fact that James Robinson was a free mulatto living in Virginia on the eve of the Civil War immediately provokes images of strife and racial

injustice. The Robinson papers (Burgess, 1994), found in the attic of the house, provide some clues of his financial dealings within the Bull Run community (now known as Manassas). These papers include accounts, ledgers, letters, bills, and invoices. While Robinson lived in a racist society, the documentation indicates that he had successful business transactions with well respected members of the white, rural, Virginian society.

Robinson successfully interacted within a small, predominantly white community. Many of the names transcribed from his papers belong to prominent landowners in the Bull Run area. In 1847, a letter addressed to John D. Dogan, from Alfred Ball, contains a reference to Robinson wishing to "hire out" his daughter Mima to the two gentlemen. Ball was married to Sarah Carter, owner of the Portici Plantation after 1842 (Burgess, 1994). John D. Dogan was at one time the owner of Rosefield, originally built by Wormley Carter in the 1790s (Joseph, 1995, p. 11). John Lee, a prominent landowner near Manassas, also engaged in business with James Robinson, selling him property in 1840 [Prince William County Virginia Court Deed Book (PWCVC DB) 16, 1840, p. 223]. E. L. (probably Edwin L.) and L. (probably Landon III) Carter, descendants of Robert "King" Carter, Henry Matthews, owner of the Stone House from the 1850s to the 1860s, Wilmer McLean & Co., a Centreville mercantile, (Friedman, 1991), A. S. Grigsby, owner of "Four Chimney House" in Centreville (James Burgess, personal communication, 1995), and Edgar Matthew all had business dealings with Robinson (Johnson *et al.*, 1982). Robinson became the third wealthiest African American in Prince William County (Hernigle, 1991, p. 6). A closer examination of Robinson's dwelling and surrounding landscape provides some clues related to the underlying tensions between his family and the surrounding community.

In 1840, James Robinson acquired 170 acres south of the Warrenton Turnpike for \$484.94 from John Lee, although the land was not recorded to be in Robinson's possession until January 29, 1842 (Prince William County Virginia Courthouse Land Tax Records, 1842). In 1849, Robinson had 150.5 acres valued at \$5 per acre with a house valued at \$100 (PWCVC DB, 20, 1848, p. 107). Robinson constructed a one-and one-half story log dwelling which had approximately 400 ft² of living space. It had a stone chimney, a wood shingled roof, horizontal wood siding, and a wooden porch on the south side of the house, open to the yard area, gardens, and outbuildings (Fig. 4).

The 400 ft² structure stood unchanged until sometime around 1871. At this time Robinson built a two-story addition with another stone chimney attached to the east side of the first house (see Fig. 2). During these modifications, the porch, which served as a connection between the inside and the yard, work areas, and outbuildings, remained on the south side of the



Fig. 4. Photograph of Robinson House, ca. 1865. (On file at Manassas National Battlefield Park.)

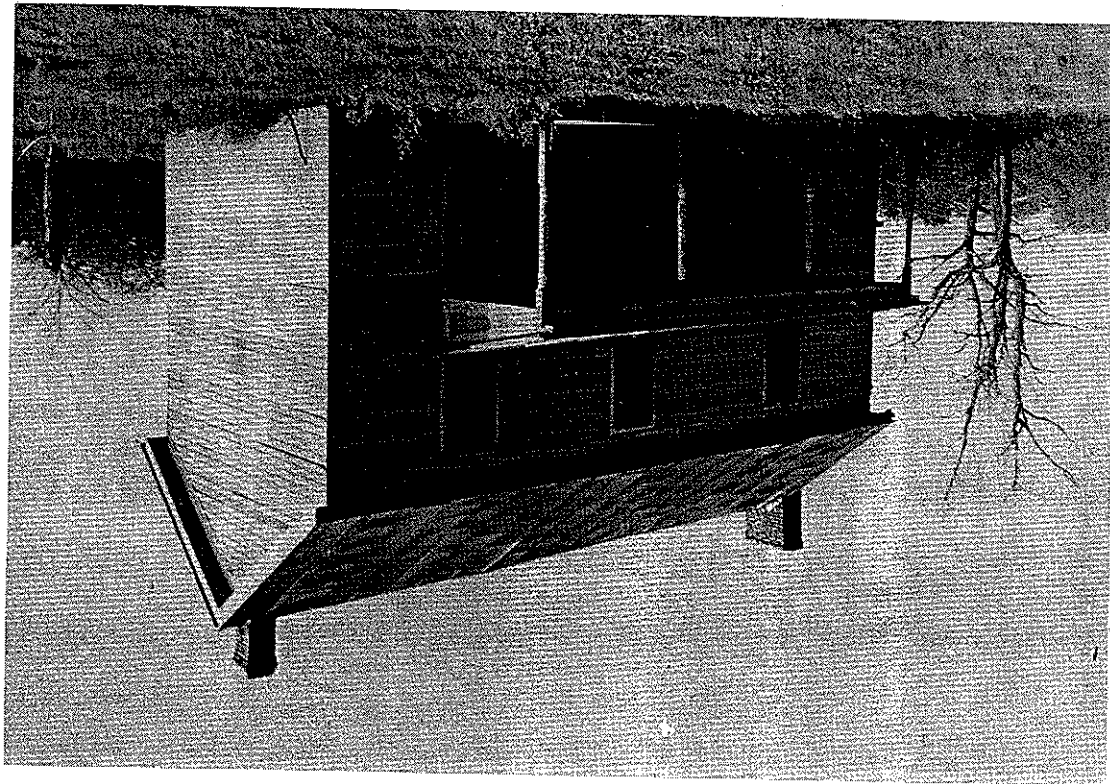


Fig. 5. Photograph of Robinson House, ca. 1926. (On file at Manassas National Battlefield Park.)

house. In the 1880s, James Robinson's heirs attached a shed to the west side of the 1840s structure (see Fig. 2). They probably used the shed as a kitchen extension and storage area. In 1926, the 1840s structure and the shed were dismantled, and the Robinsons constructed a new two-story addition on to the remaining 1870s extension. At this time the porch was moved to the north of the house, facing the Warrenton Turnpike (Fig. 5). The last Robinsons to inhabit the structure left the house in 1936, when it was finally acquired by the federal government.

Finally, in 1993, the remaining 1870/1926 dwelling was destroyed as a result of arson. The house was deemed unsafe, and the remaining exterior walls were dismantled. Today, the foundations to the 1926 dwelling remain, as does the 1870s chimney (Fig. 6).

Robin Ryder's study of the Gilliams, a free African-American family living in Virginia from the early 1800s to the early 1900s, provides additional insights and comparative architectural data. Like the Robinson family, the Gilliams were free and prospered financially. The various phases of building and rebuilding reflect each family's retention of African traditions, as well as their changing view of the landscape and their place within it. The Gilliam house was approximately 2000 ft², which was quite large, and was constructed of logs with a wooden chimney (Ryder, 1997, p. 7). A log house with wooden chimneys may imply a lower economic status, yet Ryder (1997, p. 6) indicates that during the antebellum period the family's resources were quite impressive and were larger "than 2/3 of the taxable population of Prince George County." Ryder's (1997, p. 9) explanation for this situation is that the Gilliam family put an unfashionable wooden chimney on their rather large house as a way of "lessening the possibility of being viewed as a threat to the existing social order by increasing social distance." If the Gilliam house had a brick or stone chimney rather than a wooden chimney, it would have much like a white neighbor's or planter's house, lessening the "otherness," and may have posed a threat to whites who wanted to define themselves as a superior group (Ryder, 1997, p. 9).

Compared to the Gilliams, the Robinson landscape shows some different approaches to negotiating racism during the same time periods. For instance, the Robinson's first dwelling consisted of approximately 400 ft² of living space; this was much smaller than the Gilliam's approximate 2000 ft². Gilliam had a wooden chimney, something representative of a lower economic class during the early 19th century, while Robinson had a stone chimney. Ryder suggests that the Gilliams did not want to seem ostentatious in their neighbors' eyes and, in turn, sought to compensate for their large house by building a wooden chimney rather than a stone one.

Robinson lived in a comparatively small dwelling for several decades, even though he became the third-wealthiest African American in the

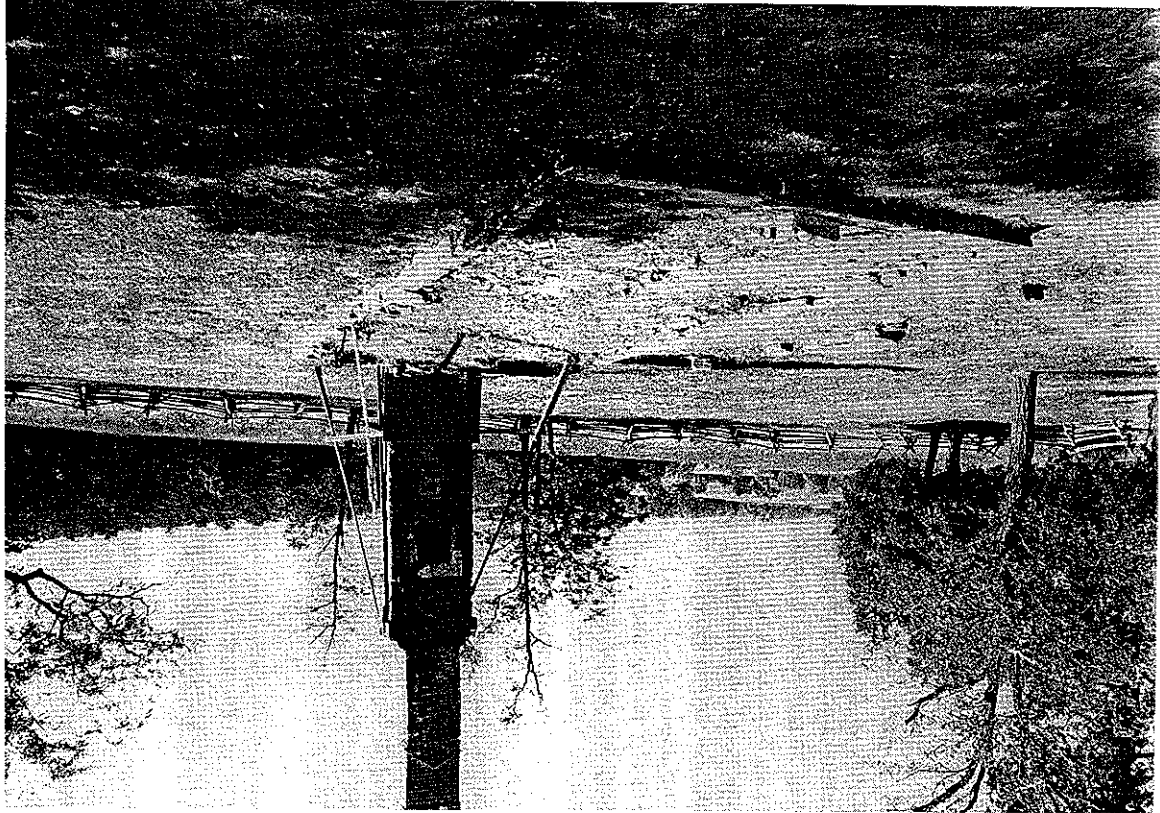


Fig. 6. Foundation Ruins of Robinson House, 1995. (Photograph by Mia T Parsons.)

county. According to the Agricultural Censuses from 1850 through 1880, the Robinson family had two to six times more wealth than the Henry family, their closest neighbor (Agricultural Census, 1850, 1860, 1870). Robinson's house was in clear view of the Henry house. The Henrys were not only part of the dominant, white society, but also descendants of Robert "Councilor" Carter. Even with Robinson's superior wealth, his dwelling was comparable in size to the Henry's house.

Shortly after the Civil War, the Henrys constructed a substantially larger dwelling. The Robinsons waited until the 1870s to build an addition to their home, after the Henry house had been enlarged. The structure was still smaller than the Henry house. Perhaps Robinson, not wanting to appear socially equal to or wealthier than the Henrys, chose not to erect a larger dwelling. Perhaps the Robinsons were using existing forms of material culture, like their house, to reassure the white community of their subordinate position, thus reducing potential conflict. The Robinsons knew that they were always under the watchful eye of their neighbors. Family tradition indicates that the Robinsons consciously and discretely used new farm equipment, and other goods. They made sure that they kept it out of view, placing the items in barns or storage areas when they were not in use (Robinson, 1996).

In the 1880s, the side shed, or possible kitchen extension, was added. These additions to the house may reflect the beginning of the dismantling of some African-American cultural traditions. A larger living space could accommodate more relatives, and possibly move some living activities, such as cooking and possibly socializing, inside. The shed, and extra chimney provided more space to perform indoor cooking, especially when the weather would not permit such activities outdoors. The Robinsons did retain some of their traditional cultural traits, as the porch remained on the south side of the house, maintaining a transitional area to the yard, gardens, and outbuildings. The archaeological record also supports the idea that some cultural traditions still occurred in the backyard. For instance, the mancala gaming pieces found across the site and throughout the 100-year occupation.

In 1926, the south porch and the 1840s dwelling were dismantled and a new porch was built onto the north face of the house (see Fig. 5). The addition of the porch to the north suggests that the Robinsons may have still spent a significant amount of time outside, but their perceptions and uses of the outdoor space changed significantly from those in earlier eras. The porch was no longer a transition area to outdoor work and recreational spaces. Rather, it became part of an area used to monitor and greet outsiders as well as to maintain access to the outside world via the Warrenton Turnpike. It was also at this time that trash deposits became prevalent in

the south yard area, between the house and the abandoned outbuildings. Excavations uncovered several deep outbuilding features in the south yard that were filled with domestic, agricultural, and architectural debris dating from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century.

ARCHAEOLOGY OF COMMEMORATION

In the late 1890s, the Civil War battlefield movement began with a patriotic motive to preserve a tangible past and to provide a coherent cultural identity (Rainey, 1983; Patterson, 1989, pp. 138ff). There were several unsuccessful attempts in the early twentieth century to commemorate the Manassas battlefield. Finally, in 1921, the Sons of Confederate Veterans committed themselves to establishing a Confederate Park at the Henry Farm, the location of heavy fighting during the First Manassas Battle. They developed the Manassas Battlefield Corporation, which represents the first successful attempt by an organization to preserve a segment of the battlefield. While the Park's mission sought cooperation and fairness between the North and the South, it also promoted the South's "distinct, wonderful, equally thrilling, all-important story" (from Zenzen, 1995, p. 42). The corporate directors wanted to change the direction of contemporary histories that portrayed their ancestors as "enemies of [their] country" (from Zenzen, 1995, pp. 42-43). The corporation saw the Confederate Park as a way to tell their story and convey what they perceived as the "full truth," since "truth shall make our children free" (Ewing, 1921, pp. 4-8, 12, 15-16). The corporation struggled to acquire the necessary funds to obtain the Henry Farm, and they made their final payment in June 1927. Litigation and maintenance left the corporation financially strapped.

In 1933, the National Park Service obtained control over the War Department's historic parks and monuments. Correspondences soon developed between the Manassas Battlefield Corporation and the National Park Service. By 1935, the federal government established over 1400 acres for the Bull Run Recreational Demonstration Area. It was part of the New Deal policy to develop recreational areas close to cities to improve the lives of urban residents. Northern Virginia's representative, Howard V. Smith, saw this as an opportunity to preserve significant historic sites, provide recreational facilities for area residents, and make submarginal land productive in the form of a military park (as well as win favor with his constituents, especially since he opposed many New Deal reforms). History, recreation, and work relief combined to develop this land. The recreational area did not include the Henry Hill Tract. The area was considered nationally significant and too important to be placed under the custodianship

of the federal government by the Manassas Battlefield Corporation, since it was the center of one of the battles. Therefore, some members resisted incorporation into the Recreational Demonstration Area. They also held reservations about the federal government administering a park that southern money had created. The following year, in 1936, they agreed to donate the property, although the transfer was not completed until 1940. That year the Secretary of Interior used the authority of the 1935 Historic Sites Act to designate 1600 acres of the Bull Run Recreational Area and the former Manassas Battlefield Confederate Park to create Manassas National Battlefield Park (Zenzen, 1995).

One of the prominent landowners in the development of the Recreational Demonstration Area was the Robinson family. Not only were they a free African-American family in pre Civil War Virginia, but they were economically successful and they interacted effectively within the northern Virginia regional economy. At the same time they were able to maintain many of their cultural traditions. Today the family is active in preserving and recording their family's history and ensuring that they are represented in future interpretations of the park. Not only have they provided oral accounts of their family's history, but they also participated in the architectural documentation and archaeological excavations of the site.

The archaeology at the Robinson house, as well as at other domestic sites at Manassas National Battlefield Park, provides additional information for park management regarding the depth of historical events within the boundaries of the park. Archaeology provides park managers with more inclusive histories and it allows them to share with the public a history of a people who have often been overlooked in traditional National Park Service interpretation. Archaeology at the Robinson house furnishes one such opportunity of an African-American family. As African-American history has played an increasing role in social history, it is fitting that we also recognize the contributions of African Americans to our national landscapes.

The goal of the archaeological research project at the Robinson House is to provide a more in-depth study of African Americans in a rural Virginia community. While it may be fitting, an artificial monument to commemorate this family's struggle in the antebellum and postbellum eras is not necessary. The remaining foundations and chimney convey the story of the human situation to struggle, persist, and survive in a racist society. It seems appropriate that this family's contributions to the area's local and regional history be commemorated, and the foundations and chimney be stabilized within the park. They are a testament to their postbellum effort to rebuild in a battle-worn landscape as well as to persist through Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era while maintaining some of their cultural traditions.

It is probably appropriate not only that the foundations of the Robinson house commemorate the Robinson family's struggle to survive under racist conditions, but also that they should serve to represent and commemorate the many unknown African-American families who struggled in similar circumstances. Their story focuses on how they aspired to be accorded the full rights of American citizenship without rejecting or being stripped of their African identity.

Commemoration has a long-time tradition in justifying social circumstances in America. In very much the same way today, historic sites help to affirm Americans' connection with a particular heritage. Preservation, reconstruction, or stabilization of public symbols and interpretation of past events in civic arenas influence people's beliefs about historic myths and the current attitudes they serve.

Allowing ruins to stand at the Robinson House creates a memorialization of past events. Preservation of ruins provides symbolic links to the past and a sense of continuity between past and present. Ruins show the impact of time and lend credibility to the long-term establishment of any particular institution that occupied that ruin. In the case of the Robinson House site, it is the persistence and survival of an African-American family through arduous times as well as their cultural identity that we can celebrate. Decay secures antiquity and ruins help to inspire reflection. As David Lowenthal (1985, p. 197) reminds us, "Remembering the past is crucial for our sense of identity . . . to know what we were confirms that we are."

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