



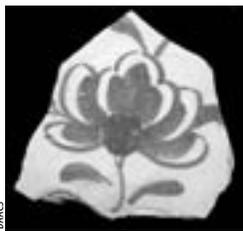
DAACS Web Site Breaks New Ground

Explore. Analyze. Discover.

These words greet visitors to the Digital Archaeological Archive of Chesapeake Slavery (www.daacs.org), a new Web site that



The home page of the DAACS Web site. Its logo includes a Delft china shard (below) excavated from Monticello's Mulberry Row.



promises to revolutionize the archaeological study of slavery in the Chesapeake region and have significant implications for the discipline of archaeology.

The DAACS site, which was launched by Monticello's Archaeology Department on Feb. 2, provides anyone with an Internet connection access to detailed data from archaeological sites at Monticello and elsewhere in the region that were once home to enslaved Africans and their descendants. What makes DAACS unique is

that information from different sites compiled by different researchers is – for the first time ever – comparable.

“DAACS will allow researchers for the first time to see broad temporal and geographical trends, understand

how particular sites depart from them, and begin to puzzle out the historical causes of the patterns,” said Monticello's Jillian Galle, the DAACS project manager. “By making readily available a large and continually expanding corpus of data conforming to a single standard, DAACS should promote the kind of inter-site analysis that has previously been impossible.”

For each site, DAACS features a short essay describing the fieldwork, principle findings, and documentary history. There are also sections on

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE.

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This Issue's Other Stories

-  ARCHITECTURE FIRM
-  BOARD MEMBERS
-  CIPHER WHEEL
-  GIFT REPORT
-  ICJS ANNIVERSARY
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-  JEFFERSON PAPERS
-  LIBRARY INTERNS
-  MONTALTO PURCHASE
-  MONTICELLO CABINET
-  NEWS & NOTES
-  PRESIDENT'S LETTER
-  SATURDAY SERIES

MONTICELLO



Web Site

CONTINUED, PAGE **TWO**

dating, stratigraphic relationships among the site's layers, and site plans and images. However, the real analytical power of the Web site resides in its sophisticated relational database that contains detailed and uniformly coded data on both artifacts and the contexts from which they were excavated.

An easy-to-use interface allows users to query the database with a few mouse clicks. Users can choose from a wide array of queries that can be customized to meet individual research needs, and the data returned to the user's Web browser can be examined on-screen or downloaded for further analysis.

DAACS is a collaboration among archaeologists and institutions engaged in archaeological research in the Chesapeake region, including Monticello, Colonial Williamsburg, Mount Vernon, Poplar Forest, the James River Institute for Archaeology, the Mary

Washington College Center for Historic Preservation/ Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research, and the College of William and Mary's Department of Anthropology. Funding for the project has included a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and a challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Web site was four years in the making. The process began by enlisting archaeologists and historians to devise classification and measurement protocols that would meet a wide range of research needs. These became the foundation of a relational database application for the data-entry phase of the project.

The DAACS team at Monticello then began to catalog artifacts and transcribe records from slave-related sites across the region into the database. Ceramics, glass, and other items from different sites were brought to the DAACS lab at Monticello, where they were cataloged from scratch. For artifact classes from sites with existing computer catalogs, Galle and her colleagues converted data to the DAACS format without examining the artifacts themselves.



Iron key from Mulberry Row.



Cowrie shell from Mulberry Row.

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Web Site

CONTINUED, PAGE **THREE**

At the same time, animal bones from the sites were analyzed at Colonial Williamsburg's Zooarchaeology Laboratory, and the information generated was added to the DAACS database.

Once data from several sites had been catalogued, work began on construction of the Web site, in collaboration with the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the University of Virginia and Category 4, Inc., a Web development firm in Charlottesville.

DAACS currently contains information from 10 archaeological sites – five on Monticello's Mulberry Row, three in the Williamsburg area, and one each at Mount Vernon and Stratford Plantation. An additional 10 sites are to be added to DAACS by the end of 2004. In the years ahead, DAACS will continue to grow, thanks to the NEH challenge grant, the nucleus of an endowment for the project.

“By providing high-quality data, an easy-to-use and powerful query interface, and research support, DAACS aims to become the center of a new kind of virtual community of scholars,” Galle said. “The ultimate goal is to advance our understanding of the society that slaves and slave owners created in the Chesapeake region.”

- FRASER D. NEIMAN

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Watch fob from Mount Vernon.

Colonoware pipkin from the Richneck site in Williamsburg.



COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org