

**Report on 2009 Archaeological Excavations
At Thwings Point, Woolwich, Maine**



Leon Cranmer
Maine historic Preservation Commission
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Introduction

During the week of July 13th, 2009, an archaeological dig and field school was conducted at Thwings Point in Woolwich, Maine (Figure 1). The dig was sponsored by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) and The Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB). The professional crew from MHPC consisted of Bill Burgess, Kathy Bridge and project director Leon Cranmer. The crew was assisted by many volunteers from FOMB. The purpose of the excavations was to try and locate the 17th century home of Thomas Ashley, the c. 1720 house built by Edward Hutchinson and the mid-18th century home of Nathaniel Thwing, all located on Thwings Point. The general location was first identified during a 2007 reconnaissance level archaeological survey funded by a grant from FOMB and funds from the Land For Maine's Future Board which are used for initial archaeological survey on land purchased in part with LMFB funds.

The FOMB volunteers included, in alphabetical order: Michael Baribeau, Kent Cooper, Sarah Cowperthwaite, Steve Cowperthwaite, Karen Davis, Ed Friedman, Griffin Han-Lalime, Alex Hardy, Kerry Hardy, Cassidy Howard, Michael Klimov, Luke Levesque, Mary Perkins, Hillary Warner-Evans, Bob Weggel, Diane Weggel and Cheryl Yeaton. We would like to thank everyone for their help and hope we have left no one out. We were given permission, which we appreciate, by Mrs. Farrington to park on her property near her camp. And last but most importantly, we wish to thank Claire and Michael Robinson for permission to dig on their property and an additional thank you to Claire who dug with us for most of an afternoon.

Historical Background

The first recorded reference we have to Thwing Point occurs in 1654 when a meeting of all residents of the Kennebec River takes place at the home of Thomas Ashley on Thwing Point, then known as Ashley's Point or New Merry Meeting Point. In 1628, the Plymouth colony received a patent for a large tract of land along the Kennebec River, extending from the Gardiner area north. By the 1650s Plymouth's monopoly of the fur trade and control of activity on the river had been greatly reduced. To regain its lost control and secure its existing patent, Plymouth petitioned Parliament for a grant to the

entire Kennebec River. The petition was denied, but Plymouth did receive authority to govern the entire river. Thus on May 23, 1654, all residents of the river met at the home

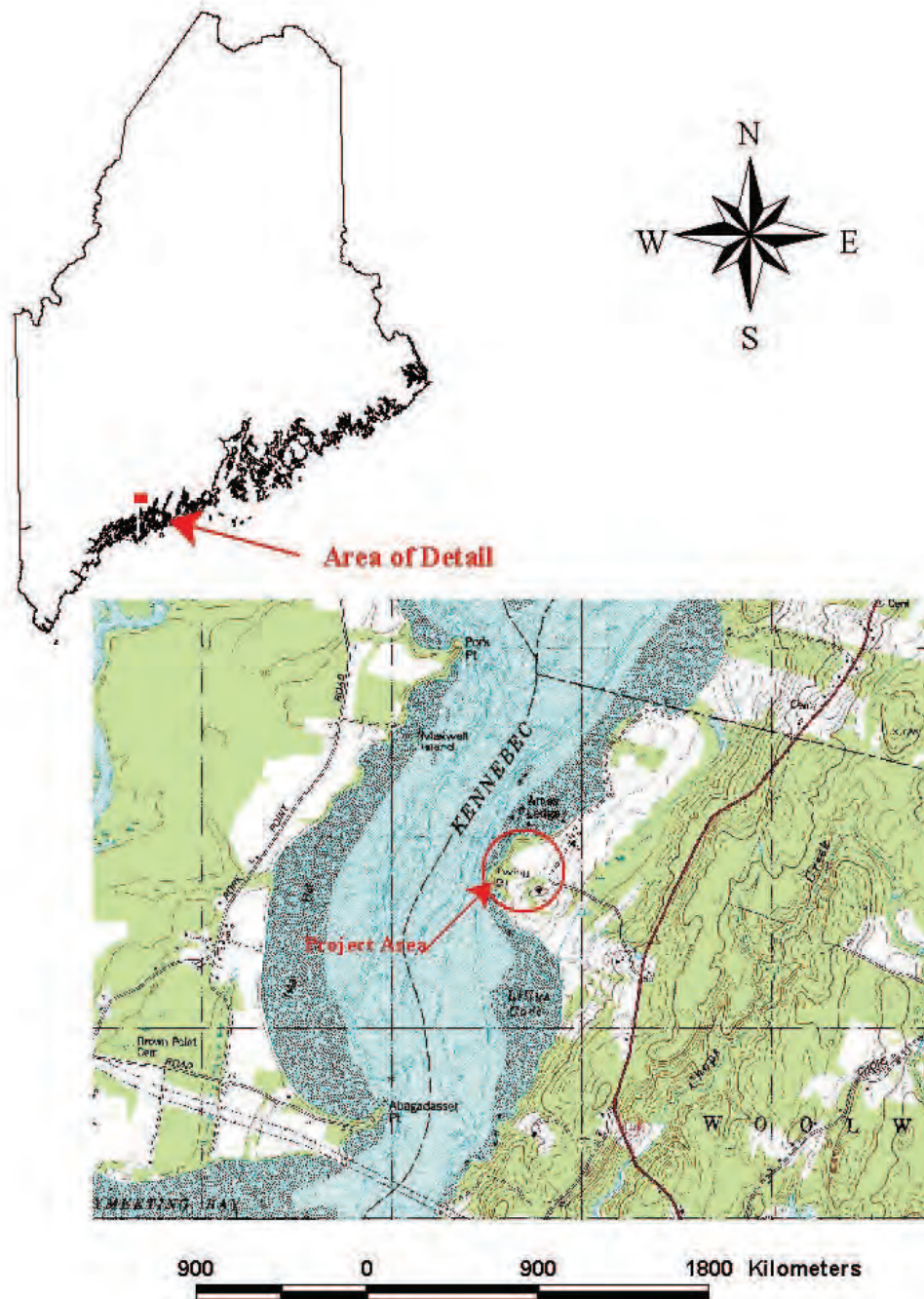


Figure 1. Project area as seen on Richmond USGS quad.

of Thomas Ashley to pledge allegiance to England and to Plymouth, and to set up a government on the river. At the meeting, Ashley was given permission to operate an ordinary or tavern at his house. This tavern probably already existed and was a reason why the meeting was held at Ashley's. The permission just made the tavern legal in the eyes of the new government.

Plymouth's new authority apparently did little to improve Plymouth's position on the Kennebec since the Colony sold its Kennebec patent to four Boston merchants in 1661. In 1676 the effects of King Phillip's War was felt in Maine when Indians attacked the English throughout the region, killing or capturing the inhabitants, and destroying their homes. The Kennebec Region was abandoned. Apparently Ashley survived the attacks but his house did not. In 1677 Ashley sold part of his holdings on the Kennebec beginning at a cove northeast of his "late dwelling house on the great Point called New Merry Meeting" (York Deeds 1906: Book XIV Fol.385). The Kennebec River region remained virtually abandoned by the English until the Treaty of Utrecht offered the false hope that a permanent peace had come to the region. Heirs of the 17th-century landowners on the Kennebec began to reassert their claims to the land. Among these were Edward Hutchinson, grandson of Thomas Clarke, who, with his partner Thomas Lake built an extensive settlement on Arrowsic Island and had trading houses above and below the Plymouth colony patent. About 1720 Hutchinson built a house on the point of land in question, then known as Hutchinson. In this house Hutchinson had a tenant named James Rankin. After Rankin drowned, one Culberson reportedly lived there. Hutchinson was also instrumental in granting Robert Temple 1,000 acres along the Kennebec from the Chops probably to the Eastern River. A condition of Temple's grant required him to settle the land, so he proceeded to settle Irish immigrants on the river. At the same time, another group resurrecting old grants, the Pejepscot Proprietors, extended settlement further up-river by building a fort at Richmond and settling Swan Island. The native Americans viewed this encroachment up the Kennebec as a breach of promise and became increasingly hostile toward the English settlers. In June, 1722, the Indians began to attack and burn houses along the river and in Merrymeeting Bay, killing

or capturing the inhabitants. No doubt Hutchinson's house on the point was destroyed at this time.

In 1749, another group of heirs and Boston merchants began to resurrect the Plymouth patent. Their influence and power permitted them to claim and receive much more land than the original patent awarded. A minor proprietor, Nathaniel Thwing, a former Boston baker, was granted a lot of land along the Kennebec which included the point of land to receive his name, Thwing's Point. In 1754 Thwing reportedly built his home about 7 yards from an old cellar hole, probably that of Hutchinson's house. Thwing prospered, enlarging his estate, becoming a justice of the peace, colonel in the Massachusetts militia and was involved in various committees to govern the area. Although he returned to Boston where he died in 1768, his descendants continued to live on the property at least into the 1890s.

The next major event to impact Thwing Point was the ice industry. Between 1870 and 1920 the ice industry dominated activity on the Kennebec River. Ice houses were built at Thwing Point by the Morse Brothers of Bath. In 1891 the Thwing family leased the land to the National Ice Company of New York for ten years (Sagadahoc County Registry of Deeds B79 P124) Deed and documentary research has yet to identify the initial date of construction or closure of these ice houses.

Methodology

A series of standardized field and laboratory procedures were utilized for Phase II testing at Thwing Point. Subsurface testing was accomplished with the excavation of 1m² test units called test pits (TPs), or in three cases, a quarter of a test pit called a quad. These test pits were aligned with a metric grid superimposed over the site, using a tape and transit. Grid coordinates were written on pin flags. Test pits are designated by the grid designation at the southwest corner of each test pit. In other words, if the southwest corner of a certain test pit was located at the north 100 east 100 grid point, then that test pit would be designated N100 E100. Most initial excavation was done with sharpened shovels, and then trowels were used where appropriate. Excavations were done in arbitrary, natural or man-made soil levels. By natural levels we mean soil horizons and unmodified flood deposits. Man-made soil levels are present where human disturbance

has artificially created soil changes. Arbitrary levels are 10cm thick. All soils were screened through $\frac{1}{4}$ " mesh hardware cloth to insure the recovery of small artifacts. All soils were sifted onto tarps to facilitate backfilling the test pits and to leave less obvious ground disturbance. Profiles or floor plans of test units were drawn where needed. Digital color photographs were taken where relevant. Artifacts were bagged and returned to the MHPC Archaeology Lab in Augusta where they were washed and dried by provenience unit, counted, and weighed to the nearest 0.1 grams on an electronic balance, entered into a relational database using a cataloging program written in Visual dBase. Artifacts were then analyzed, and are temporarily stored at the lab. The artifacts are the property of the landowners, the Robinsons.

Fieldwork

Work began by establishing a metric grid over the site (Figure 2). We laid out an east/west baseline heading 270° (mag.) from a datum point at N200 E200. We then placed pin flags at 5m intervals from the datum to N200 E175. We positioned more permanent, 12" iron spikes at the N200 E200 and N200 E185 grid points. Work then began on excavating test pits. A total of $12\frac{3}{4}$ sq. m was excavated during this week long survey. Please refer to Figure 3, the site plan showing the location of excavated test units, for the following discussion.

Figure 2. Laying out grid with tape and transit.

Excavation work began with the opening of three 1m^2 test pits located at N200 E198, N199 E193 and N199 E190 (Figure 4). Both N200 E198 and N199 E190 were excavated to a maximum depth of 36cm below datum (b.d.), and are typical of most of the test units



excavated. The “A” soil horizon or plowzone (Ap horizon) consisted of a

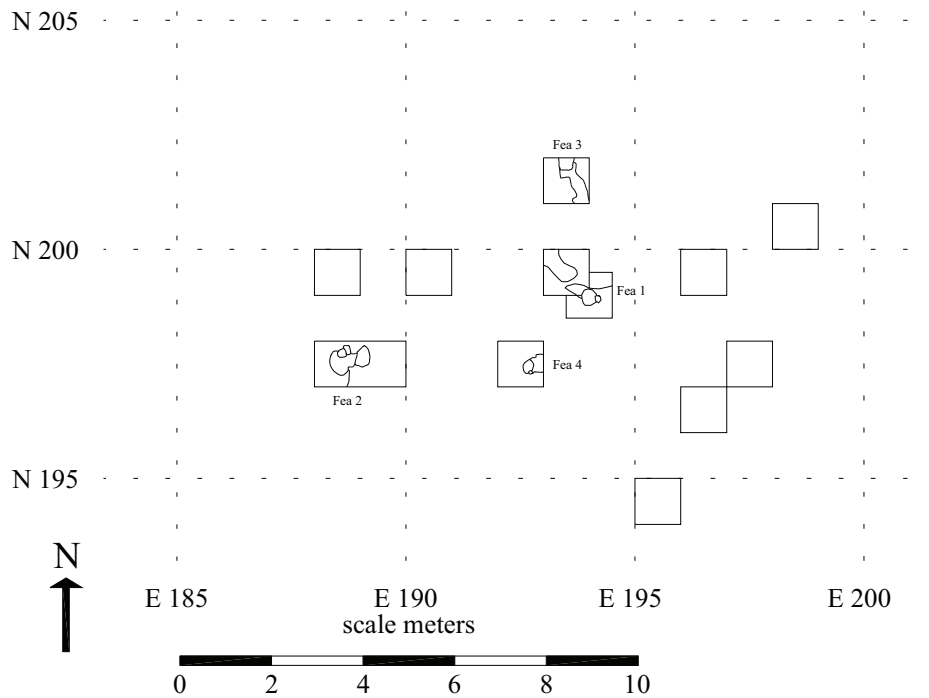


Figure 3. Site plan showing excavated test units and features.



Figure 4. Laying out a 1m² test pit.

dark brown silty fine sand, ranging from 18cm to 30cm deep. Below this was an orange/yellow “B” horizon of very fine sand. A total of 141 artifacts were recovered from N200 E198 and 484 artifacts from N199 E190. The artifacts dated from the 17th century through the 19th century in both test pits. Artifacts will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this report.

The test pit at N199 E193 was excavated to the “A/B” interface at a depth of 24cm b.d. where stains were observed in the floor of the unit. Two sets of linear stains running northwest/southeast through the square appeared to be plow scars, the line created when the bottom of a plow cuts through subsoil. Another stain in the southeast corner of the test pit was darker and contained charcoal. The adjoining quarter pit to the east, N199 E194 SWQ (south west quad) was opened to get a better view of this stain. Figures 5 and 6 show the results. It was determined that this dark stain was a post hole. It was given the designation of Feature 1. The exposed northern half of the feature was excavated, providing a profile of the feature in the south wall of the test units. As can be seen in Figure 5, the feature was bowl shaped and extended to a maximum depth of 38cm b.d. The two adjoining quarter pits to the south were opened at N198 E193 NEQ and N198 E194 NWQ. This half of the post hole contained more charcoal, a piece of 17th - century ceramic and a cut and a hand-forged nail. The post hole proved to be about 35cm in diameter.

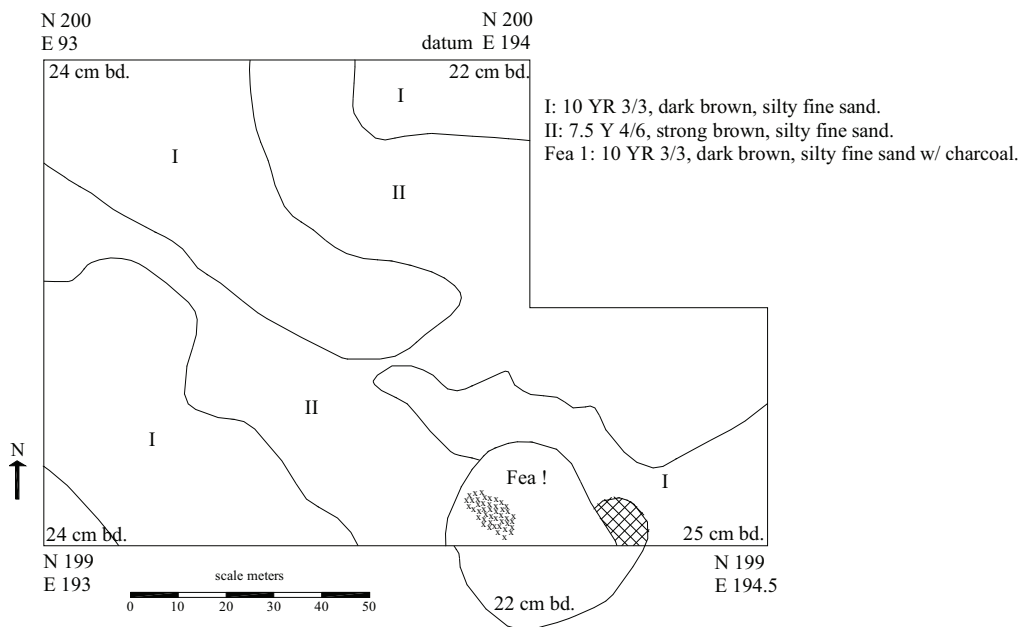


Figure 5. Floor plan of N199 E193/194 showing Feature 1 at 24cm b.d.



Figure 6. Showing Feature 1 on floor of N199 E193/194.

Three additional features were identified during this week-long dig. Test Pit N197 E188 was excavated to the top of the “B” soil horizon at 30cm b.d. In the southeast quad an apparent post hole or post mold with stone around it was identified (Figures 7 and 8). The irregular shaped stain was roughly 40cm in diameter. This probable post hole was designated Feature 2. The feature was sectioned along an ENE/WSW line with the northern half of the feature excavated to a maximum depth of 43cm b.d. As the north half of the feature was excavated, more stones appeared lining the post hole as shown in Figure 9. The entire feature was eventually excavated and Feature 2 proved to be about 35-36cm in diameter. Next the adjoining 1m² test pit to the east, N197 E189, was opened to determine if a large flat stone associated with Feature 2 continued on as part of a stone wall or sill. No other significant stones were found in N197 E189. The “B” soil horizon was encountered at 30cm b.d. and the test unit was excavated to 40cm b.d.

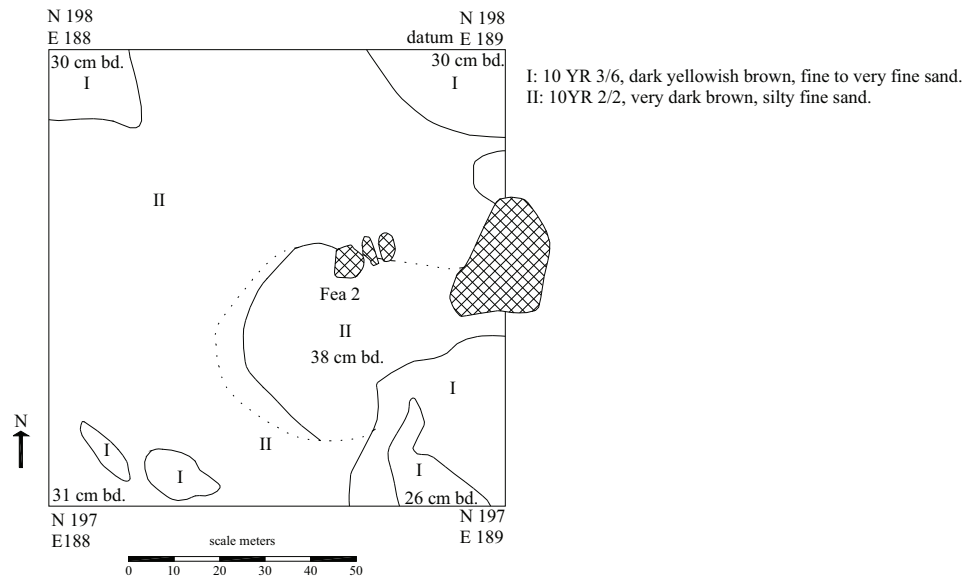


Figure 7. Floor plan of N197 E188 showing feature 2 at 30cm b.d.

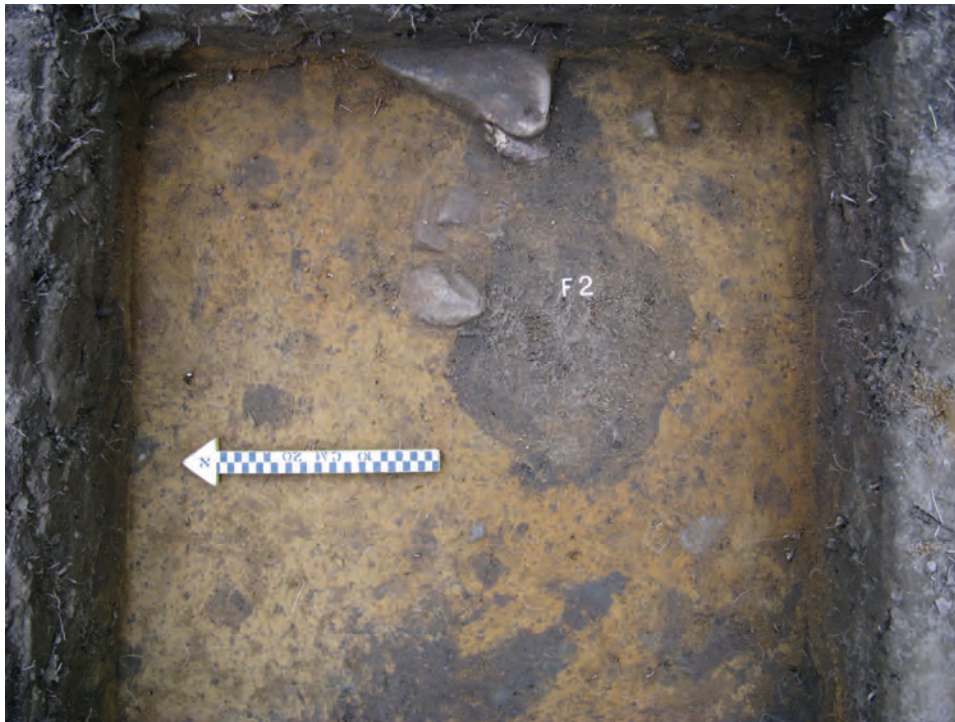


Figure 8. Floor of N197 E188 showing Feature 2 post hole at 30cm b.d.



Figure 9. Here Feature 2 in N197 E188 has been sectioned and excavated to a maximum depth of 43cm b.d. Possible shim stones around the post hole have been exposed.

Feature 3 was a questionable, shallow feature in N201 E193. The feature first appeared as a semi-circular stain centered along the north wall, extending 22cm out from the wall and running about 25cm along the wall (Figure 10). The feature was excavated to a maximum depth of 40cm b.d. and contained brick fragments and a little charcoal.

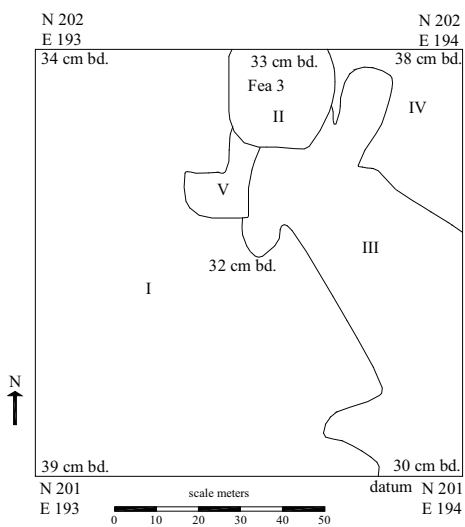


Figure 10. Floor plan of N201 E193 showing Feature 3 at 33cm b.d.

A definite post hole and mold, Feature 4, was identified in N197 E192. At a depth of 30cm b.d. the “B” horizon was becoming predominate and at about 35cm b.d. the feature was clearly defined (Figure 11). The feature could be seen as a post mold about 16cm in diameter and the post hole was about 45cm diameter. The post hole and mold were sectioned on a NNW/SSE line. The section was excavated to the base of the post hole/mold at 73cm b.d. (Figure 12). Brick, daub, a hand-forged nail and calcined bone were found in the section. The remainder of the post mold was removed and then the post hole was excavated to the east wall (Figure 13). Almost half of a large early brick (#1233) was found in the post hole.

The remaining four 1m² test pits excavated during the week contained no features. They encountered the “A/B” horizon interface at an average depth of 28cm b.d.

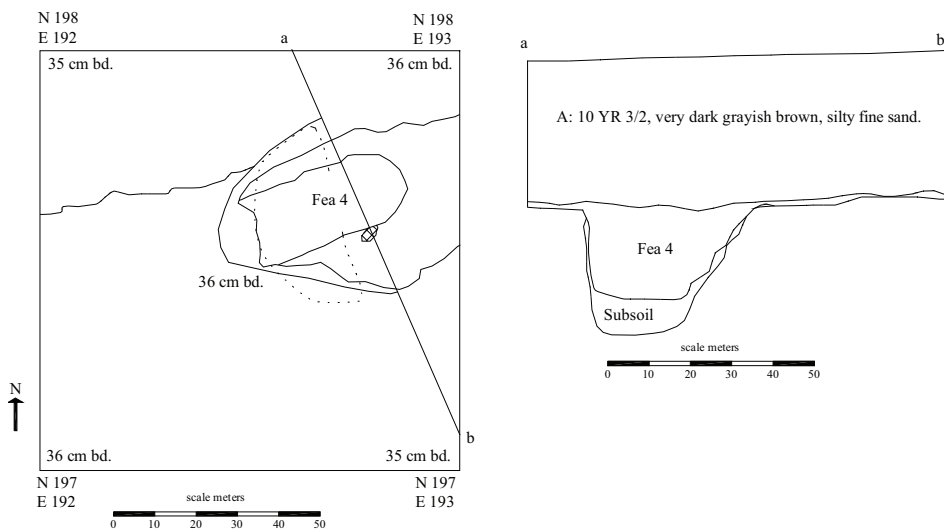


Figure 11. Floor plan of n197 E192 showing Feature 4 at 36cm b.d. The “a-b” line is the section line and the profile to the right of the floor plan shows the results of that section excavation.



Figure 12. Showing Feature 4 in N197 E192 section. The post hole and post mold can be distinguished.



Figure 13. Here Feature 4 in N197 E192 has been excavated to the east wall of the test unit, showing the remaining evidence of the post hole in the wall.

Artifacts

A total of 4311 individual artifacts were recovered during this one week survey. One of the most common and more diagnostic artifact types recovered at Thwings Point was ceramics. Of the 990 ceramic shards found, 337 of these were redwares. Redware, as the name implies, is a red-bodied utilitarian ware which in most cases is non-diagnostic, found on American sites from the earliest settlement to the present. The next most common ceramic types found were creamwares (n=276) and pearlwares (n=254) (Figure 14). Creamware was an English refined earthenware manufactured from 1762 to about 1820. Pearlware another English refined earthenware was first introduced about 1775, and produced in some forms until the mid-19th century. The latest ceramic type found was 28 pieces of hard white. Hard white or white ware, still manufactured today, was first produced about 1805 but is not common on American sites until about 1820.



Figure 14. Examples of creamware, at top, and pearlware, at bottom, found on the site.

Eleven shards of North Devon gravel-tempered ceramic were found (Figure 15). North Devon wares came from the West Country of England, principally around the towns of Barnstable, Bideford and Great Torrington, all in North Devon. North Devon wares were popular through the American colonies from the period of first settlement to into the 18th century. Gravel-tempered ware is distinguishable by the inclusion of coarse



Figure 15. North Devon gravel-tempered earthenware fragments from site.

gravel in the moistened clay or “paste.” Usually occurring in coarse utilitarian wares, gravel-tempered wares appear to have arrived in America later in the 17th century.

Eight pieces of stoneware recovered from the site consist of six pieces of English white salt-glaze, one piece of English brown stoneware and one piece of probable Rhenish salt-glaze stoneware (Figure 16). English White Salt-glazed Stoneware, a refined stoneware, dates from 1720 to 1805. Referring to Figure 16, artifact #595 is a portion of a foot ring and base probably from a tea pot or jug while #763 is a partial foot ring from a tea bowl (tea cup). Artifact #680 is a part of a handle attached to the molded body of an unknown vessel, possibly a tea pot, sauceboat or pitcher. Artifact #s 185 and 846 are probably from the same vessel, a colander or strainer. An example of which is shown in Figure 17. Skerry and Hood (2009: 142) suggest that the finer white salt-glazed examples such as the shards from Thwings Point might have been “intended for a role beyond the kitchen” such as “preparing convivial beverages.” Artifact #311 is a shard of English brown stoneware was manufactured from about 1672 to 1775. English brown stoneware can best be distinguished from German or American stonewares by the presence of dark flecks of hematite in the paste of the English examples. Although small,

artifact #899 appears to be a piece of German stoneware, a type first produced in Germany by the mid-16th century and continued in production into the 18th century.



Figure 16. Stonewares found during the 2009 excavations.



Figure 17. Example of English white salt-glazed stoneware strainer represented by shards #185 and #846 in the collection.

Ten shards of delftware were found at the site (Figure 18). Delftware is a soft, buff-to pink bodied, fine earthenware, with a thick tin-glazed enameled glaze or lead glaze made opaque with tin, manufactured from the 16th century into the early 19th century. Also shown in Figure 18 are the two pieces of porcelain recovered from the site. Porcelain was developed in China around 1500 years ago, and first imported into Europe in the 15th century. Some European countries began making porcelain in the early 18th century, but it was not until 1744 that England started producing Porcelain to compete with Chinese export porcelain. Shard #623 is Chinese export porcelain with a blue on white interior decoration (shown) and a brown exterior. This is known as “brownware” or “Batavian” ware and was most popular in the early 18th century. Its date of manufacture was from the late 17th century to about 1770. Artifact # 603 is also probably Chinese export, but little more can be said of it except the piece appears to have been burned.

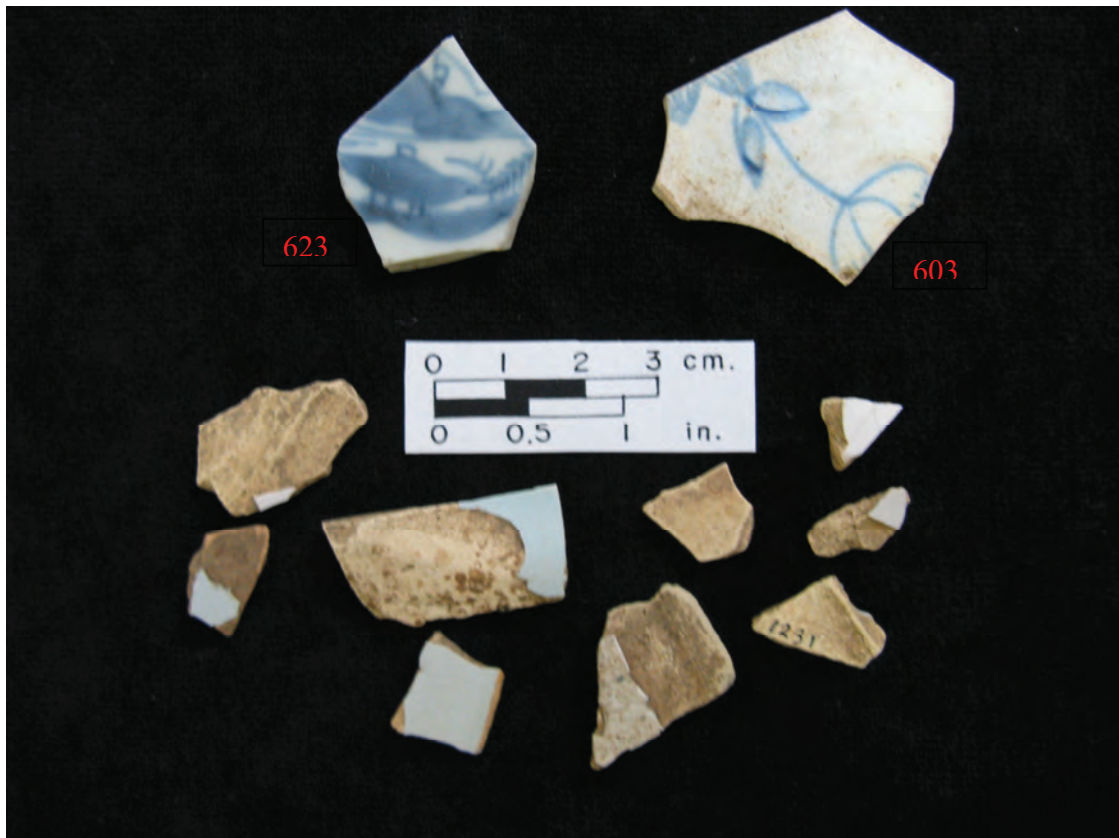


Figure 18. Showing two porcelain fragments at top and some of the recovered delftware at bottom.



Figure 19. Slip-trailed redware (#1167) at left and Jackfield (#186) at right

The final pieces of ceramic to discuss are one piece of Jackfield (#186) and one piece of slip-trailed redware (#1167) (Figure 19).

Jackfield is a refined, high-fired redware with a black glaze both inside and out, dating from 1740 to about 1800. Slip-trail decoration on redware was a practice used through the 17th and 18th centuries.

Another useful artifact type for the archaeologist, and one of the most numerous found on colonial American sites, is the clay tobacco pipe. The bore or hole diameter in the stem of a clay tobacco pipe is one of its more diagnostic characteristics and can be used to provide a mean date for the pipe's manufacture. From the introduction of the pipe in the 1570s until the 1750s, the bore in the stem of the pipe decreased in diameter at a regular rate. The bore sizes generally range from $\frac{9}{64}$ " for the earlier pipes to $\frac{4}{64}$ " for 19th and 20th-century pipes. Unfortunately, the formula used to establish the mean date of pipestems is less accurate on either end of the clay tobacco pipes' time span and requires a large sample of pipestems for accuracy. The pipe bowl is also diagnostic in that its size, shape, and decoration changed over time. A total of 33 clay tobacco pipe fragments were found at Thwings Point during this survey (Figure 20). There were only eight measurable pipestems which is not enough to obtain a meaningful mean pipestem date. Nonetheless, the recovered pipestems do give us a range of dates for the site. There were three $\frac{5}{64}$ " pipestems, two $\frac{6}{64}$ ", one $\frac{7}{64}$ " and three $\frac{8}{64}$ " pipestems. These cover a date range roughly from the mid-17th century through the 18th century.

There were also a few diagnostic pipe bowl forms recovered from the site. Three pieces, #s 352, 697 and 960, are fragments of "belly bowl" forms. Each exhibits a heel and the start of a large bulbous bowl. These are 17th century bowl forms. Artifact #1157 is a portion of another belly bowl with rouletting around the lip, but this example was

made from red clay. Generally red clay tobacco pipes were most common in the fourth quarter of the 17th century. The most complete bowl fragment, #1158, is a form dating from 1700 to 1770.



Figure 20. Clay tobacco pipe bowl and stem fragments with some pieces identified.

A total of 125 shards of glass were found at the site. Of these, 78 shards were window glass, almost all aqua tinted. We also recovered 23 shards of dark green wine bottle glass (Figure 21). One of these shards, #43, is a portion of the base of what is termed an “onion” shaped bottle. The form we have most closely matches bottles dated to 1713 and 1714 (Noël Hume 1969: 64). Two shards of clear glassware are decorated by wheel-engraving (Figure 22). Wheel-engraving became popular in England around the mid-18th century and are most often found on American sites in a 1780 to 1820 context, although earlier examples are also found. The larger example from this collection, #897, is a rim shard probably from a wine glass judging by the thinness and shape of the piece.



Figure 21. Wine bottle glass with large base shard, #43, at top.



Figure 22. Two shards of wheel-engraved glassware found on the site.



Figure 23. Flint flakes recovered from the site.

Seven pieces of gray (English) flint were found (Figure 23). All of the pieces appear to be debitage or flakes from working the flint rather than actual gunflints or pieces of broken gunflints.

Roughly 35% of the artifacts found during the survey fit in the architectural category. These

include 151 hand-forged nails and 1 hand-forged spike, 995 cut

nails and 47 cut spikes, and 40 wire nails and 3 wire spikes. Hand-forged or hand wrought nails were the earliest type of nail to be made in the American colonies, and were still used, but in a very limited number, after cut nails were introduced. The process for making cut nails was developed in 1790 and they are still used today, but their use declined dramatically when wire nails, developed in the 1850s, became widely used around the 1880s.

Daub (n=251) was another architectural artifact found on the site (Figure 24). Daub is a medieval building material consisting of a mixture of clay, straw and occasionally other ingredients such as manure, used as in-fill between woven sticks, called wattle, and used to form a wall. Wattle and daub construction was also used for chimneys, and daub



Figure 24. Some of the 251 pieces of daub found.

alone could be used as chinking between the logs of a log structure. This building technique was brought to America from Europe and used throughout the 17th and early 18th centuries by the earliest settlers to an area. Once sawmills were established, wattle and daub structures would be replaced or at least covered over with wood. When a wattle and daub structure burned, the daub would be fired and the end result resembles brick as seen in Figure 24. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between fired daub and brick.

Three prehistoric artifacts were recovered during the excavations (Figure 25). Two of the artifacts are pieces of debitage. Artifact #1236 is a biface reduction flake of crimson Munsungun chert. The striking platform is a biface edge with about a 60° piece of edge retained on it. Artifact #661 is a core reduction flake of a piece of a black volcanic or perhaps hornfels. About $\frac{1}{3}$ of the dorsal flake surface is cobble cortex, showing that this piece derived from a river cobble. The third artifact, #364, is a fragment of a dentate rocker stamped Native American pot. The interior surface is poorly finished. The thickness ranges from 6 to 7.5 mm. Based on the large size of the dentate teeth, the sherd dates to Ceramic period 3 (about 400-800 AD) or CP 4 (about 800-1100 AD).

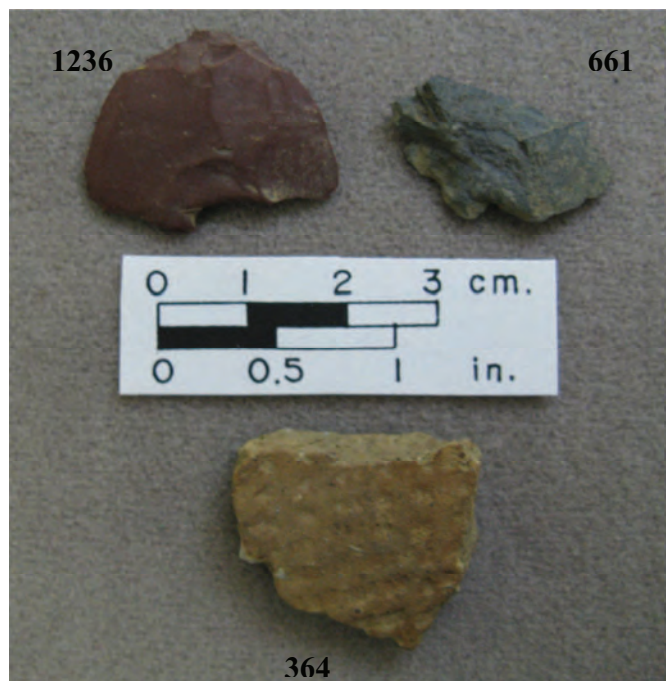


Figure 25. Prehistoric debitage at top, and pottery at bottom.

Conclusions

The common assumption has been that the existing house on the hill at Thwings Point, now owned by the Robinsons' included the original 1754 Nathaniel Thwing house. The Robinsons have done extensive renovations to the house, and in the process were told by several people that the house does not date any earlier than 1850. This theory was strengthened in 2007 when a reconnaissance level archaeological survey around the house produced almost no artifacts dating prior to 1850.

The 2009 excavations, however, yielded artifacts ranging from the 17th century through the mid-19th century. We also found four features probably relating to structures. The evidence thus far would suggest that the first three houses built at Thwings Point, Thomas Ashley's house (tavern?), Edward Hutchinson's house and Nathaniel Thwing's house, were all in the area of the archaeological testing. Besides the extensive archaeological evidence, these three houses being in this area makes sense from a logical point of view. From the 17th century when Ashley's house was constructed to 1754 when Thwing's house was built, the only method of transportation to the area was via the Kennebec River. The existing house sits well back from the river and is on top of a hill. These three earlier houses would certainly have been built more convenient to the river.

We have yet to find more substantial architectural evidence, with no evidence of at least two cellar holes (from Hutchinson and Thwing). As seen in Figure 26, the artifact distribution clearly shows the artifact quantities increasing toward the west, toward the river. Future work to the west of our 2009 test pits should produce additional evidence of these houses.

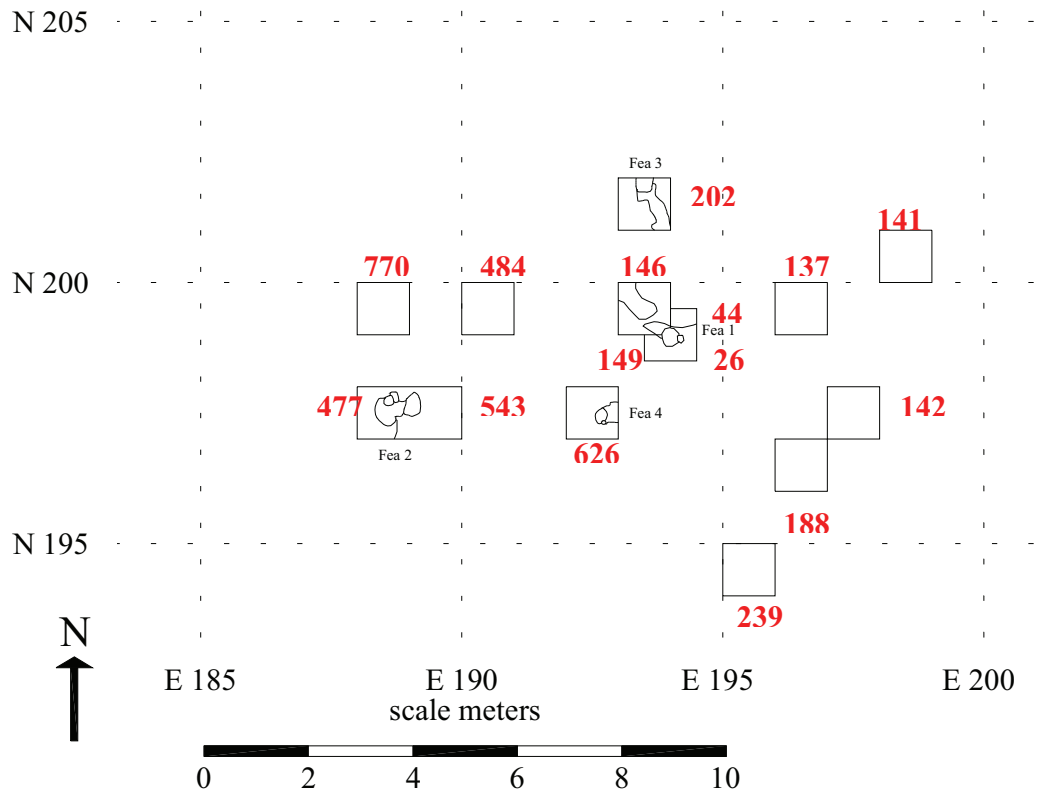


Figure 26. Plan view of site showing artifact distribution.

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