GUNS OR PLOWSHARES: SIGNIFICANCE AND A CIVIL WAR AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPE

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Introduction

Archeologists, whether explicitly or not, deal with the concept of significance in all aspects of their work. Those working in an academic setting must choose sites interesting to themselves, but also to funding organizations. Those working for federal agencies or private sector cultural resource management firms must determine significance according to Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The managers of historic sites, whether private or public must take into consideration the protection and monitoring of archeological resources when considering significance. Significance, then, is an important and pervasive concept in archeology.

While conducting a cultural landscape inventory for Monocacy National Battlefield in Frederick County, Maryland, I struggled with the significance concept. The battlefield is primarily composed of several historic farmsteads, and I found one of these properties particularly intriguing. The Best Farm, originally settled in the mid-eighteenth century, has been a successful agricultural enterprise ever since. In addition to the property's long agricultural history, an important Civil War engagement took place there and the area also contains rich prehistoric resources. The Federal Government purchased the 280-acre farm in 1993. In this article, I examine the literature of archeological significance and then discuss how different interpretations of the significance concept could affect the management of the archeological and other cultural resources of the Best Farm.

The Historical Context of the Best Farm

The property known as the Best Farm is located in Frederick County, Maryland, approximately 45 miles north of Washington, D.C. and 45 miles west of Baltimore (Figure 1). Owned by the National Park Service (NPS), it is part of Monocacy National Battlefield. The northern property line of the farm is about 3 miles south of Frederick. The Monocacy River forms its southern and eastern boundary, with Interstate 270 on the west. Two major historic transportation features traverse the property. The older of the two, the Georgetown Pike (now Route 355), appears on the earliest maps of the area (Griffith Map 1795) and was chartered as a turnpike in 1805 (Robb 1991:98). The other is the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (now CSX). Construction of the B&O rail line, the first in the United States, began in 1828. The first train arrived at Monocacy Junction a few years later, in 1831 (Dilts 1993:146). The junction is located on what was historically a portion of the Best Farm.

Europeans explored the Frederick County area and traded with the local American Indians beginning in the first decades of the eighteenth century (Scharf 1968:58). In order to encourage settlement in western Maryland, Lord Baltimore released land for purchase in 1732 (Reed 1999:10). Initially, wealthy individuals from the Tidewater acquired vast tracts of land as speculative investments. Daniel Dulaney, an important lawyer and merchant-planter from Baltimore, was one of these early landowners. In 1745, he laid out the town of Frederick on one of these large land patents. Another tract owned by Dulaney, called

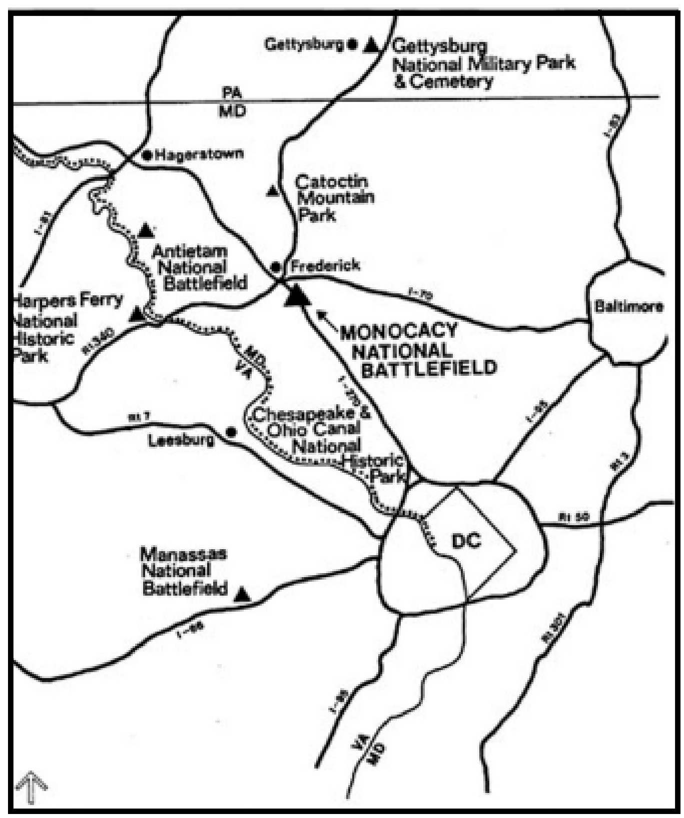

FIGURE 1. Map of Monocacy National Battlefield area (*courtesy of the National Park Service*).

Locust Level, included most of the acreage that would eventually become the Best Farm (Reed 1999:56). Like most area landowners, Dulaney leased out parts of Locust Level in the second half of the eighteenth-century. Typically, the leasee rented 100-200 acres for twenty years or two generations. In addition, these leases often required improvements such as the clearance of a certain amount of land and the construction of a dwelling and/or barn. A small limestone and log building on the Best Farm fits the description of such dwellings, and the limestone first level may date from this early settlement period (Reed 1999:57; see Figure 2).

The French and Indian War (1756-1763) disrupted the growth of settlement in Frederick County. European inhabitants fled the area, which was then considered the frontier (Reed 1999:18). After the war, new settlement patterns developed. Owners who resided on their properties or in nearby "Fredericktown" replaced land speculators and tenant farmers. One such owner was the Vincendiere family. In 1795, this French-Caribbean family developed a plantation of over 700 acres from land formerly included in Dulaney's Locust Level tract. They called the plantation L'Hermitage (Reed 1999:57).

The Vincendieres first settled in the town of Frederick two years before the purchase of the property that became L'Hermitage. Archival research indicates that they immigrated to the United States to escape a slave uprising in Santa Domingo (Dominican Republic) and the chaos created by the French Revolution (Reed 1999:58). Victoire, the nineteen-year-old eldest daughter of the family, owned the plantation. It is somewhat of a mystery why the eldest daughter, as opposed to the father, mother, or brother in this family, became the head of household and owner of record. The U.S. census of 1800 listed her as the head of a household of 18 and the owner of 90 slaves. This is one of the highest slave populations in Frederick County and the entire state for this period (Reed 1999: 57-58). The number of slaves on her farm suggests she attempted to set up a plantation style operation, perhaps similar to the type of agricultural arrangement found on the family property in Santa Domingo. No data as to the type of crops grown or sold on the plantation exists, however. Over the next 20 years, the number of slaves owned by Victoire declined to 48, indicating a major change in the management of the plantation (Reed 1999: 58).

While Victoire never married or had children, local tradition states that her nephew, Enoch Lewis Lowe, was born and spent his childhood at L'Hermitage. He later served as the governor of Maryland from 1851-1854. This same tradition claims that General Lafayette visited the Vincendiere's at the farm in 1824 (Scharf 1968:290, 459). Victoire owned and operated L'Hermitage until 1827. She then maintained a household in Frederick until her death in 1854 (Reed 1999:60).

After Victoire sold the property in 1827, evidence suggests that the Hermitage Farm (L'Hermitage) was never again owner-occupied and became a tenant farm. In 1852, the owners divided the farm into two separate entities, North and South Hermitage. South Hermitage remained in one family, the Trails, from 1852 until 1993 (Reed 1999:62). During this 141-year period, only a few different families tenanted the farm. Two of these families, the Bests and

FIGURE 2. Eighteenth-century limestone and log dwelling (*courtesy of the National Park Service, List of Classified Structures*).

the Wiles, lived and worked the farm across three generations: the Bests from at least 1850 through 1910, and the Wiles from 1928 through 1999. South Hermitage became known as the Best Farm after the tenant family who occupied it at the time of the Civil War.

During the Civil War (1861-1865), the Monocacy area gained strategic importance due to its location as a transportation center. The Georgetown Pike and the B&O Railroad both crossed the Monocacy River here via bridges and connected the area to Baltimore and Washington, D.C. The community also contained a railroad junction, with a branch line leading north to Frederick (Figure 3). Consequently, several major troop movements, as well as the 1864 Battle of Monocacy, occurred on or near the Best Farm. Confederate troops destroyed the covered wooden bridge which carried the Georgetown Pike over the river and inflicted severe damage on the railroad bridge during the September 1862 Maryland Campaign. This led the Union army to construct two blockhouses near Monocacy Junction in order to protect the railroad crossing, located on the Best Farm property. In an oak grove located on the property, Union troops found the famous "Lost Orders" describing Lee's plans for the upcoming campaign. They ended up in the hands of the Union commander, General McClellan, leading directly to the Battle of South Mountain and Antietam (Grove 1928:238; Bearrs 1978).

In 1863, Confederate and Union troops passed through the property (via the Georgetown Pike) on their way to the battle of Gettysburg, but the war's largest impact on the Best Farm would occur the following year. The Battle of Monocacy took place on July 9, 1864 and the natural and cultural features of the Monocacy area played critical roles that day. Confederate General Jubal Early's Confederate forces arrived in Maryland after forcing Union General David Hunter to retreat from his defensive position at the northern end of the Shenandoah Valley and leave open the route to Washington, D.C. Marked as a Union loss, the Battle of Monocacy proved a valuable effort. Heavy Confederate casualties, a 24-hour delay in the march to Washington, and exhaustion of Southern troops prevented Early from engaging in a successful attack on the capital, only 50 miles southeast of the junction (EDAW 1993:4-9).

Union and Confederate troops fought on the Best Farm throughout the battle. Confederate forces placed an artillery battery at the northwest corner of the farm and used the bank barn near the manor house as cover for sharpshooters. This barn burned to the ground when hit by Union shells fired from a 24-pound howitzer located near the railroad bridge. Troops destroyed the covered turnpike bridge and the railway overpass bridge, and severely damaged the railroad bridge during the battle (Bearrs 1978:94).

John Best, the tenant at the time of the battle, rebuilt the bank barn after the war, and the farm returned to a quiet agricultural prosperity. By 1880, Best began to switch his focus from grain to dairy production. Completing this conversion to dairying, either the tenant family or the owners built a dairy barn and silo on the property in the early twentieth century. The property boundaries changed only slightly over the years. In the early 1900s, Charles Trail, the owner of the Best Farm, sold two small parcels located along the Georgetown Pike. On one parcel, the state of New Jersey erected a monument to the 14th New Jersey Regiment who fought at the Battle of Monocacy. Dedicated in 1907, this monument was the first on the battlefield (Worthington 1932:222-223). In 1914, the Daughters of the Confederacy erected a monument on the other parcel and dedicated it the "Southern Soldiers Who Fell There In Battle." The NPS purchased the Best Farm property in 1993, but continued to lease the property to the Wiles family. The family's dairy operation continued to flourish on the farm until 1999, when the NPS ended their tenancy. Currently unoccupied, the property will eventually become the site of the park's visitor's center, while its agricultural fields will be leased out to a local farmer for hay production (Trail, personal communication 1999).

Cultural and Archeological Resources

The cultural landscape of the Best Farm has remained remarkably intact since at least the mid-nineteenth century. The agricultural fields, road system, and building clusters have changed little and could provide a glimpse of farm life throughout the history of the property. This landscape includes several historic structures. Three buildings from the Vincendiere tenure are still standing. The family built a two-story brick manor house between 1795 and 1798 (Figure 4). A log kitchen, now incorporated into the manor house, may be from the same date. The manor house is represented on an 1808 map of the area by the symbol for a "plantation or farm" and the name "V. Vincendiere" (Varle Map 1808). Dulaney's tenants in the earlier settlement period may have built the smaller house located a few hundred yards east of the manor house. Vincendiere expanded this structure to include a second story of log construction and reoriented the building to face west towards the manor house, as opposed to east towards the Georgetown Pike (Reed 1999:64-69). The third building still extant from the period of the Vincendieres' ownership is a large hip-roofed limestone barn. It is very different from the more typical German-style "Swisser" barns of the area and its architectural style represents the family's French heritage (Figure 5). Two nineteenth-century buildings also remain on the property. One is a small log smokehouse directly west of the manor house and the other is a carriage house/corn crib located north of the smokehouse.

Park management has not yet thoroughly evaluated the archeological resources of the Best Farm. In the fall of 1999, archeologists from the NPS excavated two

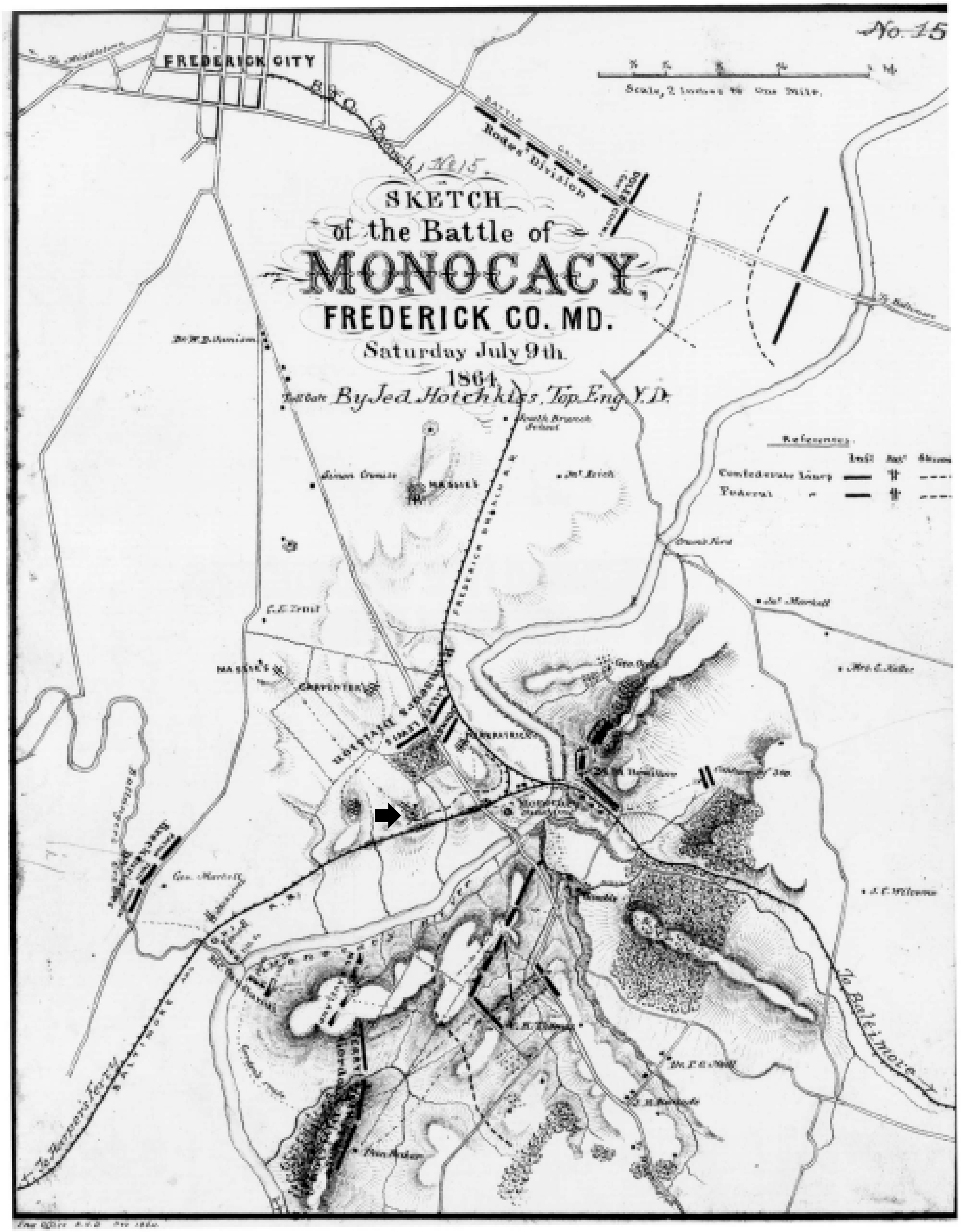

FIGURE 3. Map of the Battle of Monocacy, by Jebidiah Hotchkiss, 1864.
(*Arrow indicates Best Farm.*)

FIGURE 4. Eighteenth-century manor house (*courtesy of the National Park Service, List of Classified Structures*).

five-by-five and one two-by-five foot test units during recent stabilization of the manor house foundation. Artifacts recovered during this process date from at least the early 1800s through the present and included ceramic sherds, glass fragments, and at least one clay pipestem. During this same stabilization project, workers found a large quantity of broken crockery beneath an area of the manor house kitchen floor. The crockery represented, in form and style, plates, glasses, and cups typically found in the kitchen of a mid-nineteenth-century farm. The size of the fragments, their date, and the lack of food remains in the form of bones indicate that this was not a trash dump. This may represent crockery broken during the battle (Trail, personal communication 1999). In addition, surface finds in the nearby plowed fields have included eighteenth and nineteenth century ceramics.

The archeological resources on the farm are likely to span both the prehistoric and historic periods. Prehistoric peoples in the Monocacy River valley favored riverside sites in both the Archaic and Woodland periods, and there is a river terrace on the property (Kavanagh 1982). Eighteenth-century settlement may also be represented archeologically by privies and perhaps the remains of additional housing that would have been necessary during the Vincendieres' ownership, due to the relatively high population of enslaved persons on the farm. Archeology may indicate troop movements during the Civil War period and provide new insights into the Battle of Monocacy. An analysis of both the landscape and archeological resources could be used to compare this farm with others in the Monocacy area and those further afield (e.g., Southern Maryland). This type of research can used to address such topics as ethnicity, slave and plantation life, and differences between eastern and western Maryland agricultural landscapes.

FIGURE 5. Eighteenth-century limestone barn (*courtesy of the National Park Service, List of Classified Structures*).

The Significance Concept

Significance, according to the dictionary (Stein 1984:1224) means variously: "(1) importance; consequence, (2) having or expressing a meaning, (3) having a special, secret or disguised meaning." This same definition includes, as synonyms, "momentous or weighty." All of these are applicable to the archeological sense of significance, and get to the heart of the arguments made in archeological discussions of significance.

The development of the concept of significance in the United States and what is known as CRM (cultural resource management) archeology go hand in hand. Section 106 of the National Preservation Act of 1966 guides most of the archeological research carried out in Maryland and this law requires an interpretation of significance. The Archeological and Historic Preservation Act (1974) created a provision for the protection of archeological resources and led to a major increase in archeological research (Kerber 1994:2). Archeologists conducted this type of research as part of a management framework that most often included decisions related to the preservation, use, and/or destruction of archeological resources. In other words, Section 106 stated that if the resource was significant it should be set aside and preserved for the future, or excavated and interpreted, and non-significant resources need not be protected from disturbance or destruction. In addition, the law stated that the treatment of significant archeological resources by excavation and data recovery had no adverse effect on the resource, in spite of the destructive nature of the archeological endeavor. A 1999 revision of the Section 106 regulations has changed this last provision, and excavation and data recovery are now treated as having an adverse effect on the archeological resource (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation 1999).

Archeology was not necessarily the primary motivation for the development of the concept of significance in Section 106. The concept arose from the implementation of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 in conjunction with the development of the National Register of Historic Places. The preservation community saw the National Register process as way to reach a consensus on which cultural resources represented our national heritage and should, therefore, be preserved. The National Register determines that the quality of significance is present if a resource "A) [is] associated with events that made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history, B) [is] associated with the lives of persons significant in our past, C) embodies the distinctive character of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or D) [has] yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history" (Townsend et al. 1993:16). The resource is then weighed against issues of integrity and historic context on a national, state, or local level (Townsend et al. 19931993). The Section 106 process, under which most archeology is done, only applies to significance as determined by these criteria.

This is not to say that significance has not always been part of the archeological process. In the early period of archeology large, obvious, exotic and/or unique sites got the most attention. These include, among others, the Mississippian mounds, Stonehenge, and the great Egyptian, Roman, and Greek ruins. In the early days of American historical archeology, in addition to places like Jamestown, sites related to the elite sector of society garnered examination. These included the homes of Miles Standish and Abraham Lincoln (Orser and Fagan 1995:25-26). In Maryland, these sites included Annapolis and St. Marys City, both historic sites associated with the early European history of the state (Shackel and Little 1993). There was a certain consensus among archeologists and the national historic preservation movement as to what was significant. As stated by Lyon and Cloues (1997:1), "there was a shared, almost intuitive understanding…about what was important: large high-style houses, and places associated with national heroes and events of war and politics."

British archeologist, Timothy Darvill (1993), describes the history of significance in archeology as having gone through several phases. He uses the term "value" as a synonym for significance. In Europe, during the medieval phase (pre-1600), monetary value and curiosity defined significance. People treated archeological remains as treasure or objects of superstition and fear. Only the extraordinary, unusual, and inexplicable were deemed significant (Darvill 1993:5-6). With the arrival of the Renaissance, the consideration of aesthetic and historic significance began. Aesthetic significance included the artistic and cultural beauty of archeological remains. Unfortunately, this often led to "restoration" based more on current aesthetics, rather than historical reality (Darvill 1993:8). Archeological remains were viewed as a "true record of human progress and achievement" (Darvill 1993:9). A third phase began in the twentieth century when the concept of significance, or value, expanded greatly. In this period, the concept of archeology as a non-renewable and fragile resource developed (Darvill 1993:12).

A recent review by Briuer and Mathers (1997) of the American archeological literature pertaining to the issue of significance helps to clarify the development of this topic in the U.S. This analysis determines the "range of ideas and approaches" that American archeologists have proposed and discussed between 1972 and 1994. In addition, areas of consensus and disagreement were determined as to how significance should be defined and evaluated (Briuer and Mathers 1997:2). According to the literature review, there was basic agreement on the theoretical issue that significance in archeology is both dynamic and relative (Briuer and Mathers 1997:8). However, some see this concept as conflicting with preservation laws. These laws assume that all cultural resources are either inherently or not inherently significant, while the reality is that the entire concept of significance is a cultural construct. Significance is truly in the eye of the beholder and will change over time (Tainter and Lucas 1983). This aspect of significance proves to be the most difficult to deal with in archeological practice.

There was also general agreement on two methodological issues. One is the importance and utility of regional research designs (Briuer and Mathers 1993:17). The second issue is more relevant to the topic of significance: the importance of placing the evaluation of archeological significance within a context of research driven by current approaches to the solving archeological problems (Briuer and Mathers 1993:17). Most authors, when addressing the issue of problem-oriented research design, make clear that it must remain flexible, include public participation, and incorporate interdisciplinary collaboration and cooperation (Briuer and Mathers 1993:18). The inherent problem with problem-oriented design is that it deals with problems and questions of the moment. If archeologists base their definition of significance on "the moment," what happens when the moment passes?

It is an unworkable thesis that all archeological sites be termed significant. Tainter and Lucas (1983) suggest that archeologists base significance determinations on a research orientation and not assess non-threatened sites, as this may lead to their premature destruction. Another approach that may serve as a way to mitigate the subjectivity of the significance concept is that of preserving a sample of all site types (Dunnel 1984). McManamon (1990:15) claims an assessment of the archeological *data* is paramount. He suggests that determinations about the kinds of data, the importance of research questions the data can address, the uniqueness or redundancy of the data, and the current state of knowledge about the research questions are most essential in establishing significance. This approach is based on National Register Criterion (D), where significance requires that a property "has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history" (Townsend et al. 1993:16).

The National Register eligibility criteria have been crucial in the development and implementation of the significance concept. One way of viewing the purpose of the Register process is that of "bringing about consensus among professionals and the larger community about what is worthy of preservation" (Lyon and Cloues 1997:1). There is concern, however, that this process may be breaking down. As our society becomes increasingly diverse, the evaluation of what or whose past is important becomes less scientifically or positivistically determined (Lyon and Cloues 1997:2). Consensus, according to Lyon and Cloues, becomes harder to achieve under these circumstances.

Leone and Potter (1992) propose that one of the main problems with the National Register of Historic Places is its essentialism — that significance is to be found "within" relics of the past, rather than "growing out of the needs of contemporary societies" (Leone and Potter 1992:143). They go on to suggest that archeologists need to move away from a supposedly neutral, rational, positivistic method of determining significance. What is needed is a self-reflective (on the part of archeologists) and dialogic approach to the issue. This dialogic approach is set up in order to create a dialogue of equals, giving equal footing and input to the constituency for whom the site is significant (Leone and Potter 1992:140).

While there is still not total agreement on the issue of significance in archeology, one trend, at least among American archeologists, is clear. The consideration of significance has expanded. From a concentration on contemporary research issues, it now includes those of future research values, the importance and value of cultural resources to other disciplines, and, finally, to the consideration of broader public and social values (Briuer and Mathers 1997:28). While this broader approach does not come without problems, it is the best way for archeologists to deal with such a complex and complicated topic.

The Potential Effect of "Significance" on the Best Farm

The Best Farm is part of a larger landscape that has already been determined significant in one sense. Monocacy National Battlefield is a National Historic Landmark and listed on the National Register because a Civil War battle occurred there in 1864. The most straightforward interpretation of the significance of the archeological resources on the Best Farm would be that those resources relating directly to the battle are significant.

This interpretation is very narrow and does not take into account the very long history of the farm. The Battle of Monocacy lasted one day. Europeans first settled in the area of the Best Farm in the mid-1700s. Given its geographic location, it also may contain evidence of prehistoric settlement. Limiting its period of significance could have a very negative impact on the preservation and management of the archeological components of the farm. If areas containing Civil War era resources are always given precedence in terms of disturbance or adverse effects, the archeological resources of other periods may suffer.

Edward Linenthal (1991:3), in his book *Sacred Ground: Americans and their Battlefields*, describes battlefields as "sacred patriotic space, where memories of the transformative power of war and the sacrificial heroism of the warrior are preserved." Civil War battlefields appear to hold a special place in the American psyche. In recent years, managers of NPS Civil War battlefield parks have discussed the issue of broadening public interpretation at these parks (NPS 1998:9). It has been suggested that interpretation should include not only the story of the battle, but also "the breadth of human experience during the period" (NPS 1998:9). It will be difficult to do this without placing "the period" into the larger historic context. This means interpretation must include a more complete history of the site. The Civil War and its battles can only be understood and explained in terms of what came before. For example, at Monocacy National Battlefield, it is impossible to understand why the battle took place there without understanding the importance and development of the transportation network of train and turnpike. The importance (and perhaps significance) of the archeological resources relating to the railroad and the highway are not restricted to the year 1864. Such resources may be located on the Best Farm.

A broader interpretation of the archeological significance of the Best Farm allows for the preservation of much more than the battlefield. The agricultural history of the early American frontier, early railroad construction techniques, prehistoric lifeways, and evidence of Maryland's French connection are potentially part of Monocacy National Battlefield's archeological resources. There are those who will argue that the purpose of the park and indeed its congressional mandate is to preserve and interpret the site of the battle only. This can result in a very shortsighted approach to preservation and management of the archeological resources. Battlefield parks are often located in rural areas. In these times of sprawl and the loss of green space, they may hold some of the last remnants of a community's agrarian past. This may quickly become the case at Monocacy National Battlefield, where suburban development is approaching the borders of the park from all sides. In the future, the park may be the only place in the area where these kinds of archeological resources remain intact.

Conclusion

The Best Farm represents a typical farmstead of the area, but it also has many special qualities. These include its eighteenth-century French ownership, its 150-year history as a tenant farm, and its location as the site of a Civil War battle. This combination of the typical and the unusual should direct the determination of its archeological significance. The archeological resources of this property are likely to be rich and varied. If so, their significance should be based on the broadest possible considerations, including current research issues, possible future research values, and contemporary social issues at both a local and national level.

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