

About Excavations at Ferry Farm

Through a combination of physical evidence, dated materials and anthropological knowledge, Ferry Farm's archaeologists can, for the first time, begin to detail the landscape of the Washington home farm during the time of George Washington's childhood and adolescence. Since the Ferry Farm excavation began in 2001, staff archaeologists have consulted with experts in many fields, including other archaeologists, historians, architectural historians and architectural stone specialists, to help interpret the Washington structures and understand the lay of the land.

Project Overview

- Excavations at Ferry Farm began in 2001 and are expected to continue through 2013.
- The dig site encompasses four to five acres and is the second-largest open dig site in Virginia (Jamestown is the largest).
- Since the dig began, archaeologists have unearthed more than a half-million artifacts created by people from 11 distinct time periods.
- The oldest artifacts date back to the Clovis period more than 10,000 years ago.
- The remains of five farmsteads, each with multiple buildings, have been uncovered on the grounds.
- Ferry Farm employs four staff archaeologists who are accompanied each summer by several volunteers and paid interns as well as students from the University of South Florida's Field School.
- The project is funded through a combination of individual, government and corporate sources, including the Dominion Foundation (the philanthropic arm of Dominion), the lead corporate donor to this milestone effort.

The Washington Period

- Two major attempts were made in the 1990s to find the Washington house. The house was never located, however, most likely due to the small scale of those searches.
- The current team of archaeologists first excavated two other areas, finding houses belonging to other owners, before turning their attention to the current dig site.
- Workers excavated several architectural elements, many of which are fragmentary, as a result of the aforementioned trauma sources.
- Some building elements date to the original construction of the house, others were later additions and some were filled by the destruction of the house.
- Four cellars have been located. There are two root cellars and two stone-lined cellars.
- Three structures from the Washington period have been identified — a house, a kitchen, a slave quarter.
- The data collected from the dig site was compared to documentary evidence, period paintings and written recollections about the house in order to draw conclusions about the Washington landscape.

Significance

Archaeologists and historical experts at Ferry Farm have developed historically accurate architectural renderings of the Washington home and its outbuildings. These images show the house, kitchen and slave quarter and will be updated with additional structures as they are unearthed.

- The George Washington Foundation plans to reconstruct the house and its outbuildings as a living museum, preserving its history and educating future generations about the legacy of George Washington. The Foundation has a master plan for the farm that includes reconstructing the 1740 Washington house and other farm buildings on the landscape at Ferry Farm. As work continues, specific elements of the plan will undergo a number of review processes, adding to overall confidence in the success and accuracy of the site. A team of archaeologists, architectural historians and other experts will use the physical remains of the house, as well as artifacts and historical documents, as a basis to ensure that the reconstruction is as authentic as possible. The house will serve as a stage for educational programs about George Washington, his family and 18th-century life. Reconstruction is expected to begin in 2011, but surveys and the development of master plans, concept designs and schematics for exhibits are expected to take place in the next 24 months.
- Rebekah Wood, director of architectural restoration at Ferry Farm, will be responsible for the reconstruction efforts.