

Historic St. Mary's Field School

Historic St. Mary's City is the site of the fourth permanent English settlement in North America, Maryland's first capital, and the birthplace of religious toleration in America. Historic St. Mary's City is an exciting mix of colorful living history and fascinating archaeology, all set in a beautiful tidewater landscape. Lord Baltimore's 17th-century capital stands ready to be rediscovered.

The Archaeology program at Historic St. Mary's City has been ongoing since 1971 when the museum hired its first staff archaeologist. We have recorded over three hundred archaeological sites and components within the limits of the National Historic Landmark. In cooperation with St. Mary's College of Maryland, Historic St. Mary's City sponsors an annual Field School in Historical Archaeology. Now in its 35th year, this is one of the longest running programs of its kind in the North America and a strong example of the affiliation between these two institutions. The field school has a reputation for rigorous training and attracts students from all over the United States as well as from other countries. Archaeologists trained in the field school have gone on to hold important positions in all aspects of archaeological research and historic preservation.

Over the past three decades, the archaeological field school has contributed significantly to understanding Maryland's history and the development of historical archaeology. Excavations on numerous sites such as St. John's, Smith's Ordinary, and the ca. 1667 Brick Chapel have revolutionized the understanding of colonial architecture and the material culture of the period. The field school pioneered techniques that are now thought of as standard in historical archaeology. It has been a leader in training the next generation of historical archaeologists.

These efforts have discovered and explored a remarkable diversity of archaeological sites. Chesapeake Indian sites range from Early Archaic camps to the Yaocomico Village acquired by the English settlers in 1634. While 17th-century sites are the primary focus of the museum, its archaeologists have also investigated 18th-century plantations, 19th-century tenant houses and the quarters of enslaved African Americans. Recent excavations have explored portions of the 1638 St. John's plantation, a late 17th-century inn run by a Dutch settler, and the site of the first Printing House in Maryland.

From its inception in 1971, the field school has involved a strong public component and was the first regular program in Maryland that offered visitors the opportunity of touring an excavation and learning about archaeology. At HSMC, the excavations are viewed as both a research effort and a museum exhibit. Throughout the nine week field phase, introductory lectures and guided tours of the excavations are given by the professional staff and students to a wide variety of audiences. This ongoing summer program has been enhanced each year since 1987 by offering the Tidewater Archaeology Weekend. During this hands-on program, visitors are invited to help screen for artifacts. Field School students get a chance to direct others in the field work, identify artifacts, and gain new appreciation for the public's interest in archaeology. Visitors learn about the

recovered objects, their value in interpreting the site and the museum's responsibility to record and curate these materials for the future. Special tours of the archaeological laboratory and lectures are also given during this event.

In addition to the field school in Historical Archaeology, members of HSMC's Department of Research and Collections teach a class on Archaeological Analysis and Curation at St. Mary's College of Maryland during the fall semester. This class involves hands-on experience working in the Archaeological Laboratory with the artifact collections of Historic St. Mary's City. It offers field school students the opportunity of following the artifacts they found during the excavations through the analytic phases of the archaeological process. Independent studies and internships are also offered to college students by the Department of Research and Collections.