

Overview of  
Archaeology  
at the Trent House



Archaeological investigations on the property of the William Trent House Museum have been conducted since the mid-1990s by Hunter Research, a cultural resource management firm based in Trenton, NJ. As technology and research tools have evolved each investigation has used different methods to explore the history underneath the current surface. This overview outlines some of these investigations and their findings.



WILLIAM TRENT HOUSE

Clarke Caton Hintz





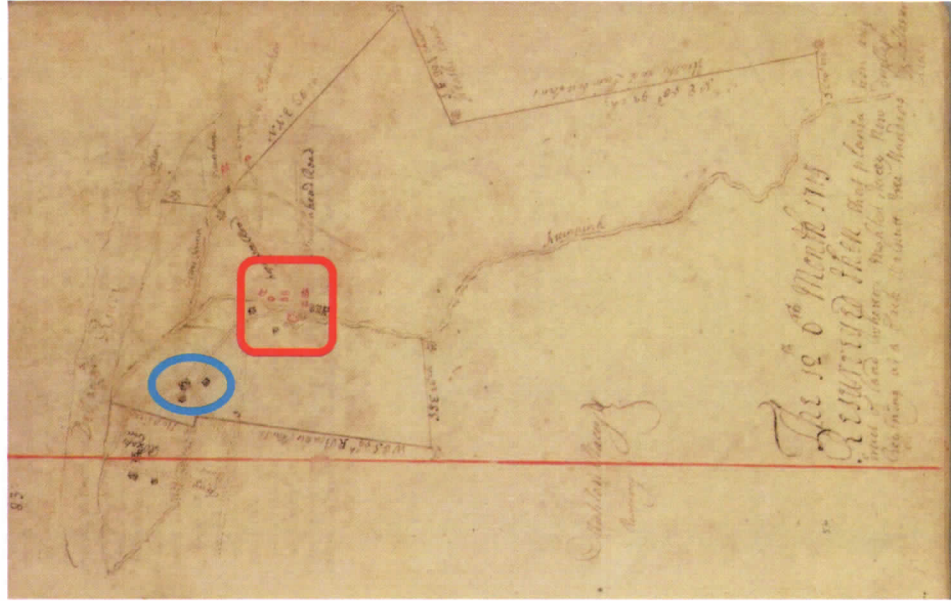
This aerial view of the Trent House property shows the 300 year old House as the large square near the middle of the image, connected by walkways and a gravel courtyard to the building on the left, a former carriage house which serves as the Visitor Center. The grounds are bordered on the west (left) by an exit ramp from a state highway; the Delaware River is directly to the west of the highway. To the north (top) and east (right) are city streets, and to the south (bottom) is a large parking lot serving a major state office building to the east.

The property was privately owned and occupied until 1929 when its owner at the time deeded it to the City of Trenton to serve as a cultural institution once it had been restored to its colonial appearance. While surrounded by urban development, this 2 acre plot of land is a relatively undisturbed site and has proved to be a rich source of archaeological artifacts from thousands of years before European colonization into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

1714 Basse Survey



1714 Basse  
Survey



William Trent House: Archaeology

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This map outlines the 800 acres sold in 1714 to William Trent, a Philadelphia merchant, by Mahlon Stacy, Jr., son of the first European colonist in the area. The map is oriented with the top facing north. The Delaware River is on the west (left) and the southern (lower) part of the purchase follows a major waterway, the Assunpink Creek.

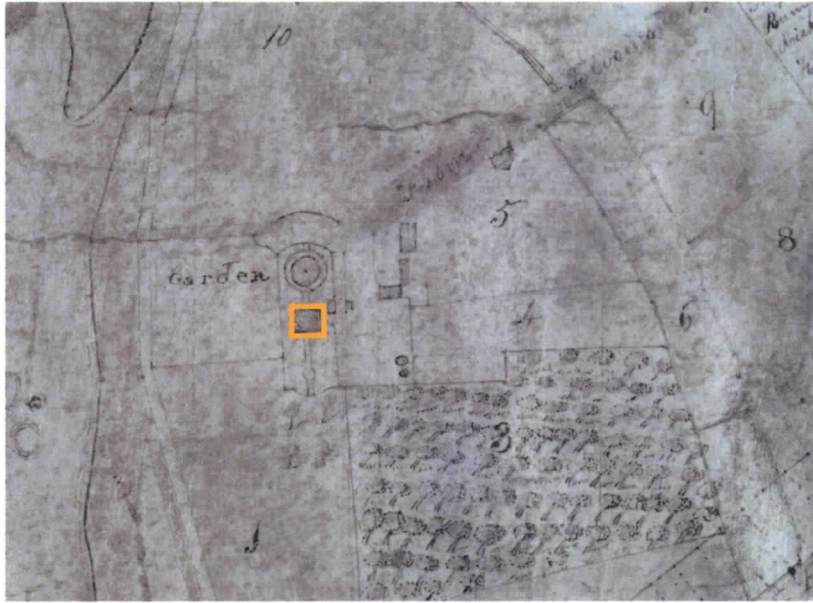
The area circled in blue is where the Trent House is located today; the buildings shown on this map were probably built by Stacy and included his house, which remained standing on the property until at least the 1740s. While not evident on this map, this area was on a slight knoll above the river.

The area marked in red indicates a small settlement with houses and a gristmill on the Assunpink Creek built by Stacy.

1789 Cox Map



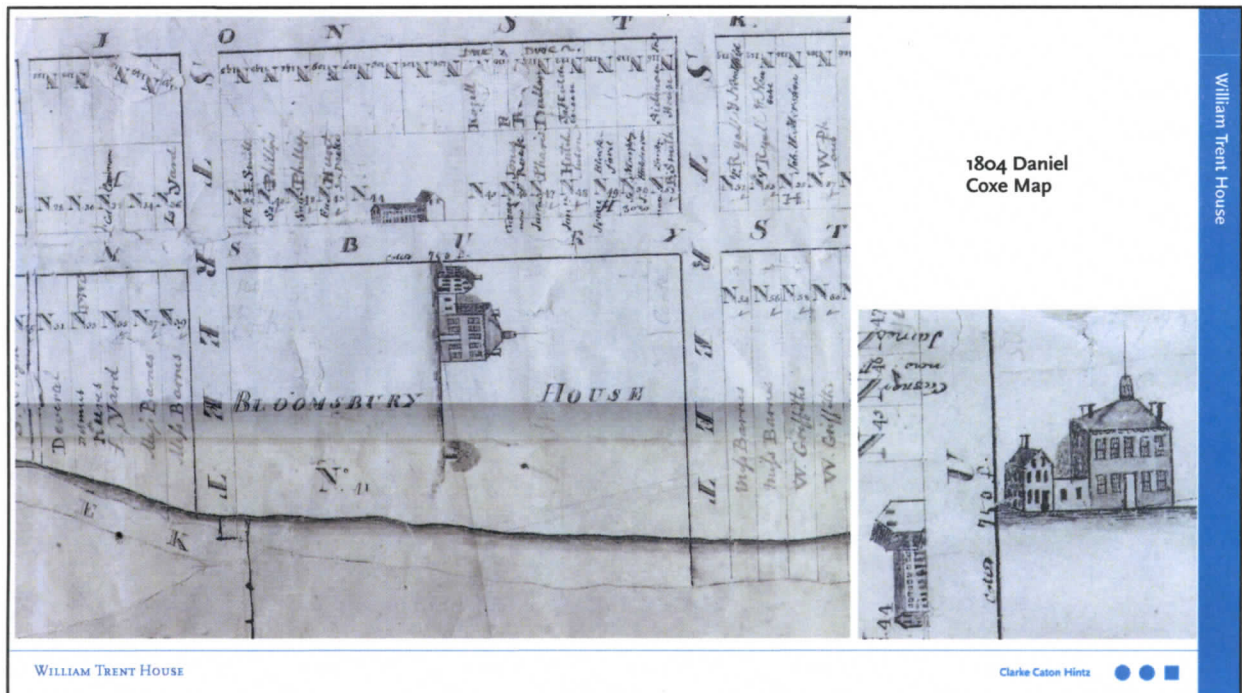
1789 Cox Map



This map from 1789 illustrates the extensive cultivation in the late 1700s of the area surrounding the current site of the Trent House. The house is in the yellow-outlined square near the center of the image, with ornamental landscaping to the north (top), a substantial kitchen garden to the west (left), and a large orchard in the southeast quadrant.







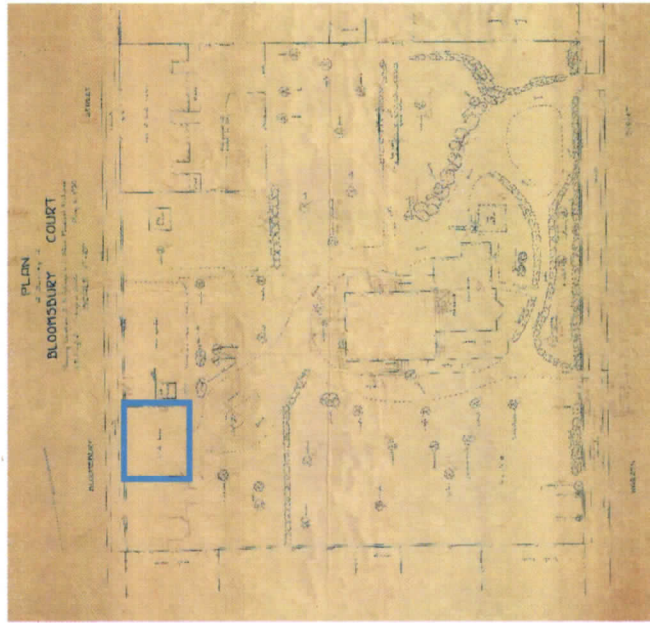
1804 Daniel  
Coxe Map

This map is oriented with the Delaware River on the west at bottom of the image. The map shows incipient subdivision of the area around the house, which is depicted as a large two-story building with a smaller wing attached to the east, connected by a covered walkway. This wing was constructed in 1742 as a kitchen at the request of Lewis Morris, the Royal Governor of New Jersey, replacing the frequently flooded kitchen in the cellar of the main house.

In his request, Morris noted that he wished the new building to have rooms above the ground-floor to house his enslaved servants. This is not the first known reference to slavery on the Trent House site. Mahlon Stacy, the original European colonist, although a Quaker, listed an enslaved man in his will, while William Trent himself owned eleven enslaved people – six men, one woman, two boys, one girl, and one male child – at the time of his death in 1724. The practice of slavery at the Trent House continued into the 1800s.



1930 Survey of  
Bloomsbury  
Court

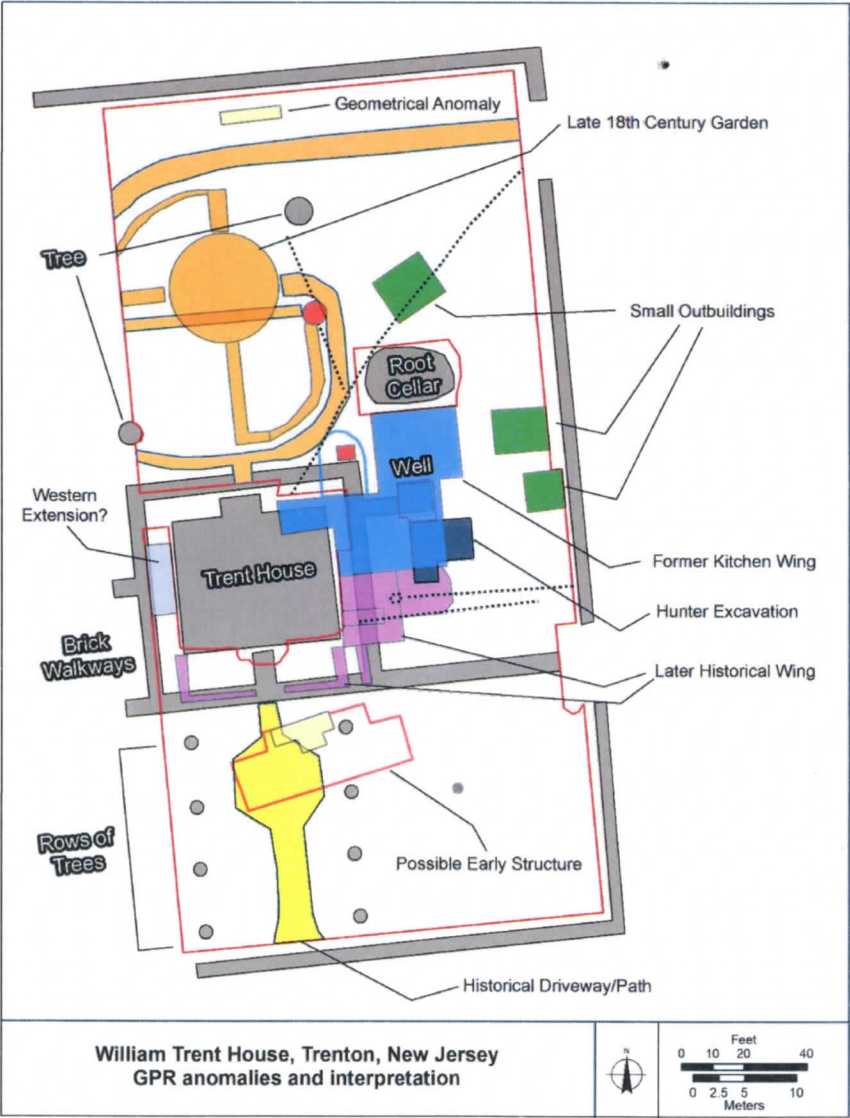


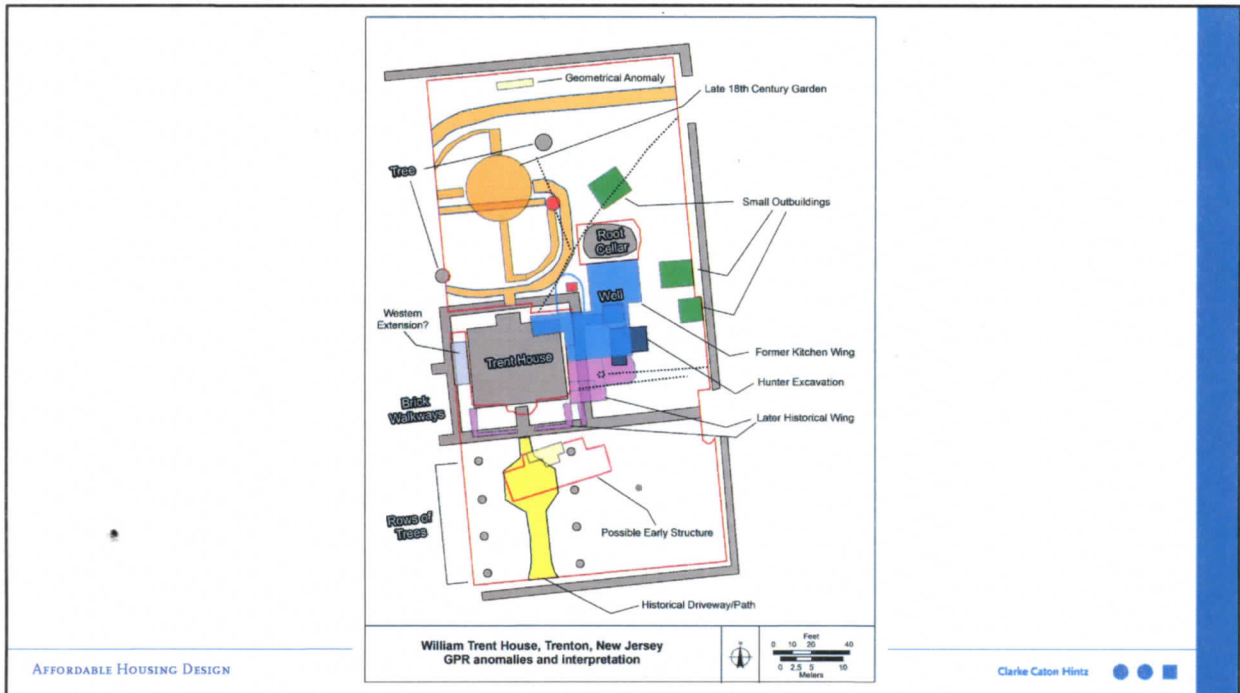
WILLIAM TRENT HOUSE

Clarke Caton Hintz ● ● ■

William Trent House

This map, drawn just prior to the house's restoration during the mid-1930s, shows the extensive two-story additions on the east (right), as well as landscaping and pathways. There was a carriage house (outlined in blue) on the property on what was at the time a city street. This building was expanded and remodeled during the restoration and now serves as the visitor center.





In 2016 a survey of the property was conducted using ground-penetrating radar. This study identified subsurface “anomalies” that suggested previous structures or geological features. Using these results it was possible to locate some of earlier known landscaping features to the north (top) and south (bottom) as well as what appeared to be the outlines of 19<sup>th</sup> century additions to the east (right) of the house. The results also appeared to confirm the location of the 1742 kitchen wing and to suggest other possible buildings to the northeast of the house (the green squares). Especially tantalizing was the rectangular anomaly directly to the south of the house – initially considered as perhaps being the foundation of the original Stacy house.





This image shows the locations of several investigations conducted in the early 2000s - shovel tests (small white circles) placed across the property in 2000 and 2001 and trenches excavated in 2001 and 2006 (outlined in blue) and 2002 (yellow). These investigations yielded a large number of artifacts ranging from Native American tools of the pre-contact period to ceramics and other items from the colonial and early American periods to various items from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The areas outlined in red indicate where deeper excavations have been conducted more recently. Those with light shading inside the outline were conducted in 2014; these were reopened during the 2019 field school along with additional units which were also excavated at that time.

The excavation to the south of the house revealed that the rectangular anomaly found in the GPR study was not the foundation of a building but a large bedrock outcrop at a depth of around four feet. However, a wide range of artifacts were found during this excavation including evidence of early contact between Native Americans and Europeans traders.







These images are from the 2019 excavations on the site of the 1742 kitchen building to the east of the house. The image on the left looks down on the trenches excavated just south of the well. This well was probably the same one that was inside the kitchen building, according to descriptions of the time. The image on the right shows the foundation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century additions to the house. Remains of the foundation of the 1742 building are seen in the shallower white stones on the left side of the image (circled in yellow). The 2014 and 2019 excavations of the kitchen wing came close to identifying the full footprint of the building, confirming dimensions provided in the documentary record. Being able to fully outline the kitchen wing on the ground is one goal for future investigations, as is recovering evidence of use of the building by enslaved people who worked and lived there.

The generous support from the NJM Insurance Group for the 2019 excavations is gratefully acknowledged.

**Legend**

- Garden Wall
- Auger Testing (2020)
- Excavation Units (2014)
- Excavation Units (2019)

**Utilities**

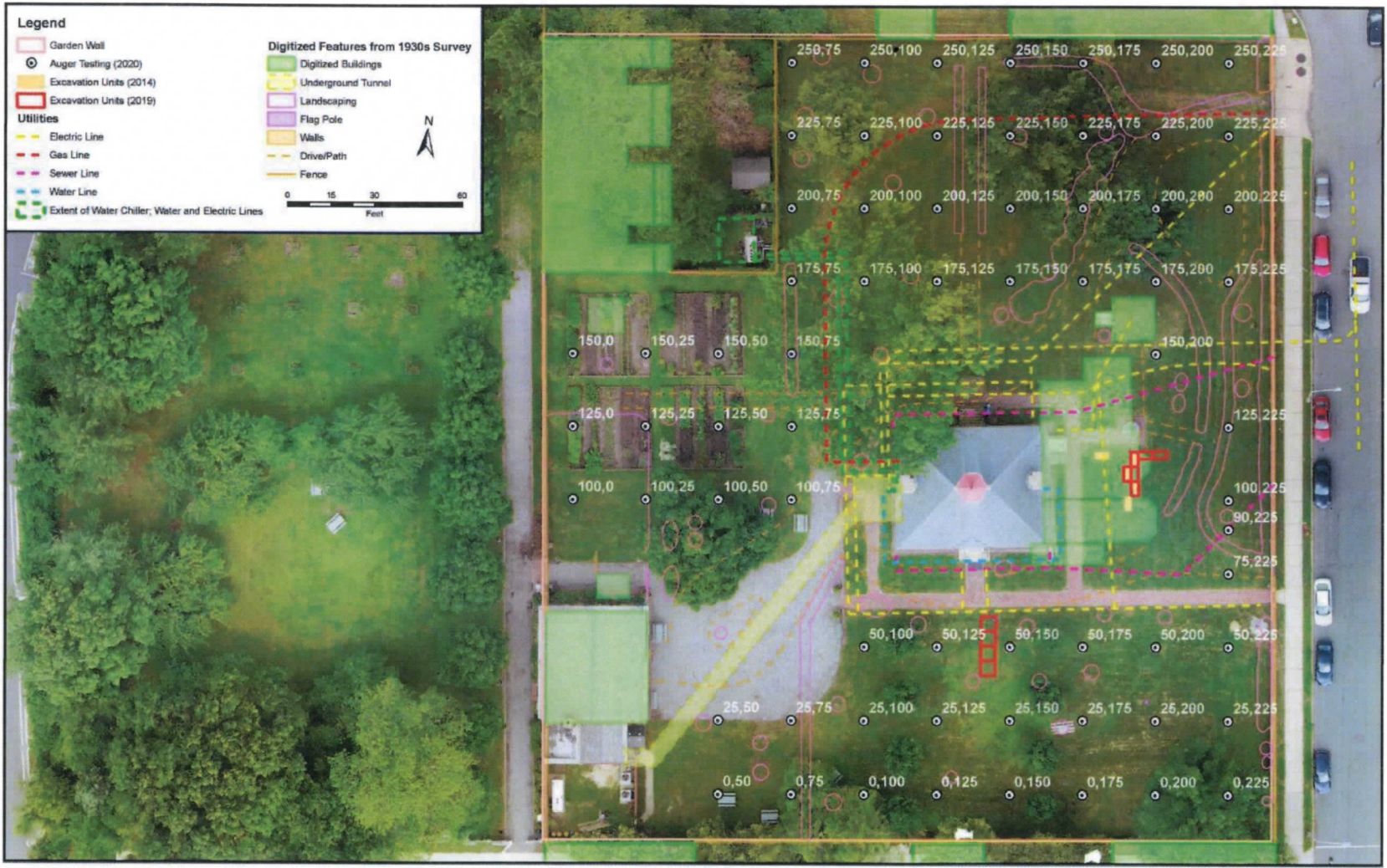
- Electric Line
- Gas Line
- Sewer Line
- Water Line
- Extent of Water Chiller; Water and Electric Lines

**Digitized Features from 1930s Survey**

- Digitized Buildings
- Underground Tunnel
- Landscaping
- Flag Pole
- Walls
- Drive/Path
- Fence

0 15 30 60 Feet

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A major recommendation of the 2019 project was to expand our understanding of the archaeological record of the Trent House property through future excavation and further test the results of the ground penetrating radar study. In the summer of 2020, again with support from the NJM Insurance Group, soils across the site were sampled to depths of around six feet by augering. This image illustrates the grid of sampling sites across the property. Analysis of the samples will indicate where soil layers have been disturbed as well as where they suggest potentially rich deposits of artifacts. Together with the GPR survey results, soil analysis will help identify the most promising sites for future excavation.



Each archaeological project at the Trent House offers opportunities for the public to observe and in some cases participate in the work, as shown in these photos. The 2019 excavations also served an additional purpose as a field school for undergraduate students from Monmouth University.

Hunter Research professionals and Monmouth University faculty take the time to explain excavation methods and identify artifacts as they are being excavated. Following analysis and cataloging, artifacts are put on display at the Trent House visitor center. These artifacts are also available for research and can also be loaned for display by other groups, including Native American communities.