

Archaeological Excavation at the Parsonage: Hypothesis & Evidence

Could the original door to the Parsonage have been where the lower west window is on the front wall?

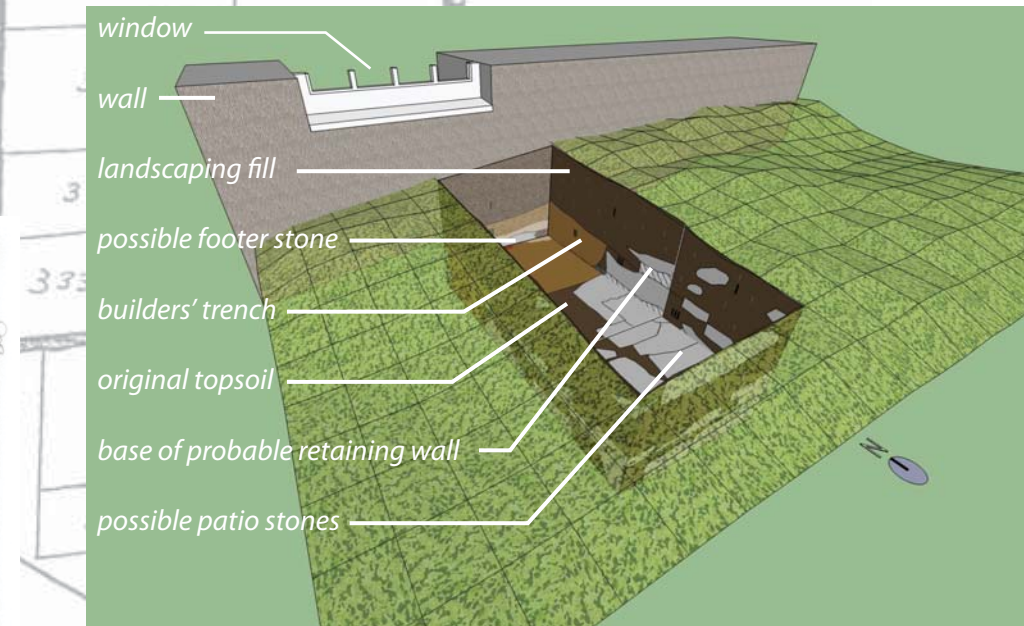
The Parsonage was possibly built first as a single, cellar-level room, with a sleeping loft overhead. Such dug-out or bank houses are known to have existed in the area in the 1700s, such as the Stone Jug on Route 9G, south of the village. The center of the house, where the front stoop and door are now, may have been extended to the side sometime later, with the eastern wing. The second story and attic were also possibly later additions.

Why is the door's location important?

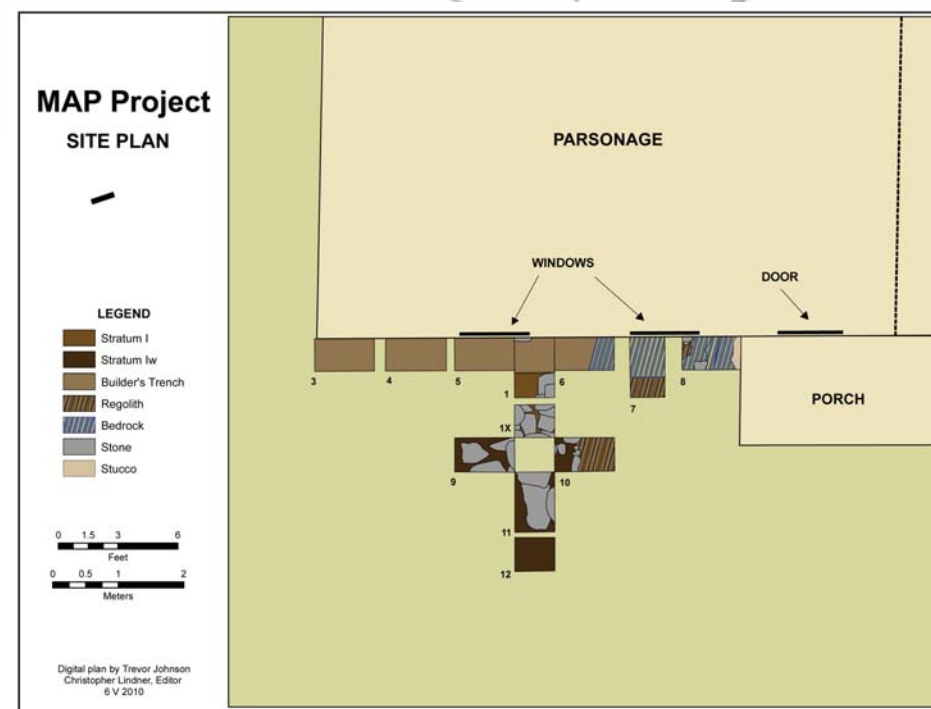
Knowing the location of the original door to the Parsonage can contribute to an understanding of architectural choices, landscape changes, the inhabitants' use of the structure, and the ways in which the building functioned in the Germantown settlements.



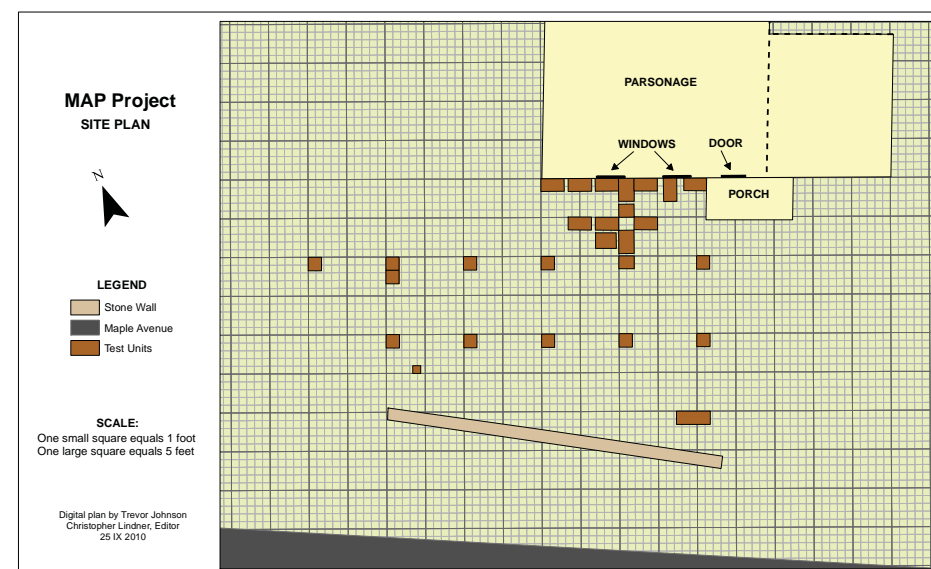
The Ekerts, who restored the house in the 1940s, commissioned this drawing, probably with a request that the artist add back the original cellar door. A local resident recalls Mrs. Ekert saying that, for security purposes, she had replaced a door with a window.



Step 1: a 3-D view of the initial trench, 2 ft wide by 5 ft out from the window, depicts a possible footer stone for the doorway, a builders' trench to construct the foundation, and the base of a wall to retain slope wash, all buried beneath 12 inches of landscaping fill.



Step 2: the above map of the April 2010 trenches shows bedrock that eliminated the right window as the former doorway. Stone slabs, mostly buried at 5 to 12 inches, either formed a patio in front of the cellar door or resulted from the retaining wall's collapse.



Step 3: tests of the grid in July 2010 found a coal deposit indicative of a walkway in line with trenches out from the western window. Artifact deposits in the western yard revealed evidence of another structure and of kitchen debris.

METHODOLOGY

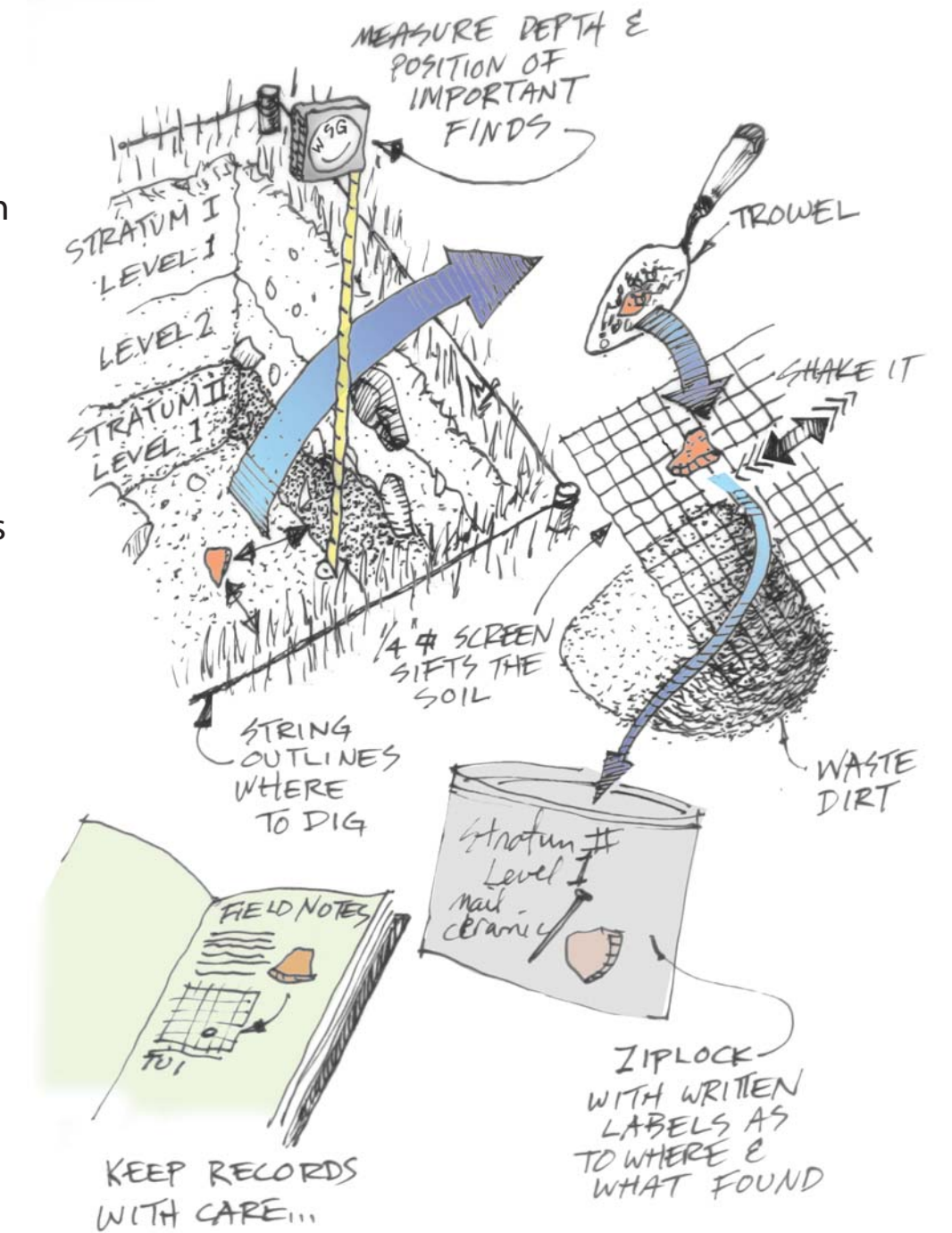
The tests were excavated with shovels and trowels, and the soil was sifted through ¼-inch mesh steel hardware cloth. All cultural materials were bagged according to their depths, so they could be analyzed separately.

Field notes and drawings recorded the depth, thickness, horizontal extent, and sedimentary characteristics of the layers within which the artifacts and ecofacts were found. When notable items were discovered, their positions in respect to fixed points were measured north and east, and in depth below surface, with an accuracy of one-half inch.

Next, each individual layer, known as a stratum, was identified depending on the content and position of the various deposits. The cultural materials were grouped by classes of items, such as bones, shells of mollusks and land snails, ceramics, smoking pipes, vessel glass, coal, and architectural debris (including flat window glass, brick, mortar, and nails).

From the field notes, drawings, and photographs, volumes of the excavated layers in cubic feet were estimated. Numbers of ecofacts and artifacts per layer were then averaged into frequencies per cubic foot, so that layers of various sizes could be compared in terms of the rate of occurrence of cultural materials within them.

The purpose of such ecofact/artifact density analysis is to assess the depositional history of the various layers. For example, if the several arbitrary slices, known as levels, of a fill layer have a similar density of artifacts, it is likely that whole stratum was put in place at the same time and originated at the same place. Once the strata are identified, the material within them can assist in determining the age of various deposits.



Alvin Sheffer and Helen Henderson examine the Parsonage cellar's fireplace.

Credits: The Germantown Library sponsored this project as an educational experience for the community. The Hudson River Bank and Trust Company Foundation provided a grant for a scientific report and three exhibits. Bard College funded research assistant Trevor Johnson, Bard '07, a University of Massachusetts-Boston graduate student. The Hover Family Trust provided field school scholarships for local high school students. Dr. Paul Huey, NY Bureau of Historic Sites, assisted in identification of ceramic artifacts. Historic photographs were courtesy of the Germantown History Department. Jane Dodds and Scott Guerin of 4274 Design Workshop designed and built the traveling exhibit and a Germantown Library exhibit. Dr. Christopher Lindner, Bard College, directed the Palatine 300th Anniversary archaeology exhibit project.