

From Oct 1, 2022, NY Archaeological Council [NYAC] program at the Huxley Auditorium, NY State Museum, Albany: 'Exploring African American Contexts in NY Archaeology'

Cobbler's Cellar Fireplace Cosmogram with Offerings underneath Altar Hearthstones
by Christoph Lindner, Archaeologist in Residence, Bard College, past-president of NYAC

1. Detail of Raisz's U.S. map to show the Hudson Valley, where people in bondage had worked on large farms, estates, docks and mills, enslaved by Dutch and Anglo-Americans, and later by descendants of the Rhenish Palatines who founded Germantown in 1710, just north of the K for Kingston near the center.



2. Beers 1858 Atlas of Columbia County includes 3 houses in a neighborhood of 20-some African Americans (Federal census, 1860) a block north of the Germantown hamlet. The Reformed Parsonage, the focus of this presentation, is located at its center.



3. A 1902 wedding of a daughter in the Robinson family, on Maple Avenue, a long block north of the Germantown hamlet in NY, that likely included their neighbors from the Persons family: Jonathan, Elizabeth, and Emily Jane. One of the Robinson men, possibly in center next to the Anglo-American preacher, will soon become a Methodist minister.



4. Parsonage photo from the turn of the 19th Century, for which I acknowledge its source, the Germantown History Department and its German American descendants, particularly Alvin Sheffer and Richard Coons. Fence posts in the photo were positioned in two roughly parallel lines, along Maple Avenue but back from the road.



5. Restored placement of fence posts that led to and surrounded the former well. Note the green panel depicting the well's excavation and the adjacent buried foundation.



6. On left is Vanessa Baehr, a Bard College alumna and Trustee of the Friends of Historic Germantown. In order to replace the fence posts, she looks at the house thru' a slide of the historic photograph, set behind the lens of her camera. She positioned the camera to exactly superimpose the two images. This enables her to direct a student colleague to put new posts in the locations of the those in the photograph.



7. Green Panel about the excavations in front of the Parsonage includes a map of the well and the 1746 house foundation, showing jaw bones analyzed by zooarchaeologist Sissie Pipes and the subject of an anthropology thesis in process by a Bard College student. The orange 26 at the northeast corner of the foundation indicates a concentration of tea bowl fragments; excavation for a nearby exhibit found a flint blade indicative of the contemporaneous presence of Indigenous refugees.

The 1746 Parsonage Well, Foundation, and Narrative of Parsonage Inhabitants

The Reflected Church community likely built a house on the lower yard around 1746. It sat on the first southeast corner to 17 feet east of the south of the two windows who accompanied the Parsons in their migration from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Two people (larger) looking between some stone blocks, searched a total window, Parsonage Van Houten, and several foundations for the site.

During the restoration of German merchant David Conrad Cook, 1760-1770, the entire Parsonage was built, possibly before the migration to Chelsea. On March 17, 1766, the owner, Mr. Charles, had been shown, who may have built the upper house. His widow's name brought the Parsonage to 1760 and present ownership. He was later to be seen, a plantation (the Hart) expanded the entire house. Catherine Van Houten had moved to the Germanic records of 1800 the birth of a daughter in her street, when she married with another man, but a plantation (the Hart). The stone probably built in the upper Parsonage well and may have been the lower yard structure as a common feature, with the other's well shown.

In the 1850s, 17 years after 1746, the new owner, Dr. Howard Van Houten, Van Houten in 1850 had to be shown, after in a separate house in an adjacent street. The Parsons, an African American, had been shown, from the Parsonage in 1850 and his daughter (the Hart) shown with it in 1911. The structure remains in the lower yard, and likely to have been present since the mid-1800s and the well 1746. After that, the site is a well in 1746, the entire upper house was built by David and Edward Hart in 1850. They called the Parsonage to the Town in 1850.

YOU ARE HERE

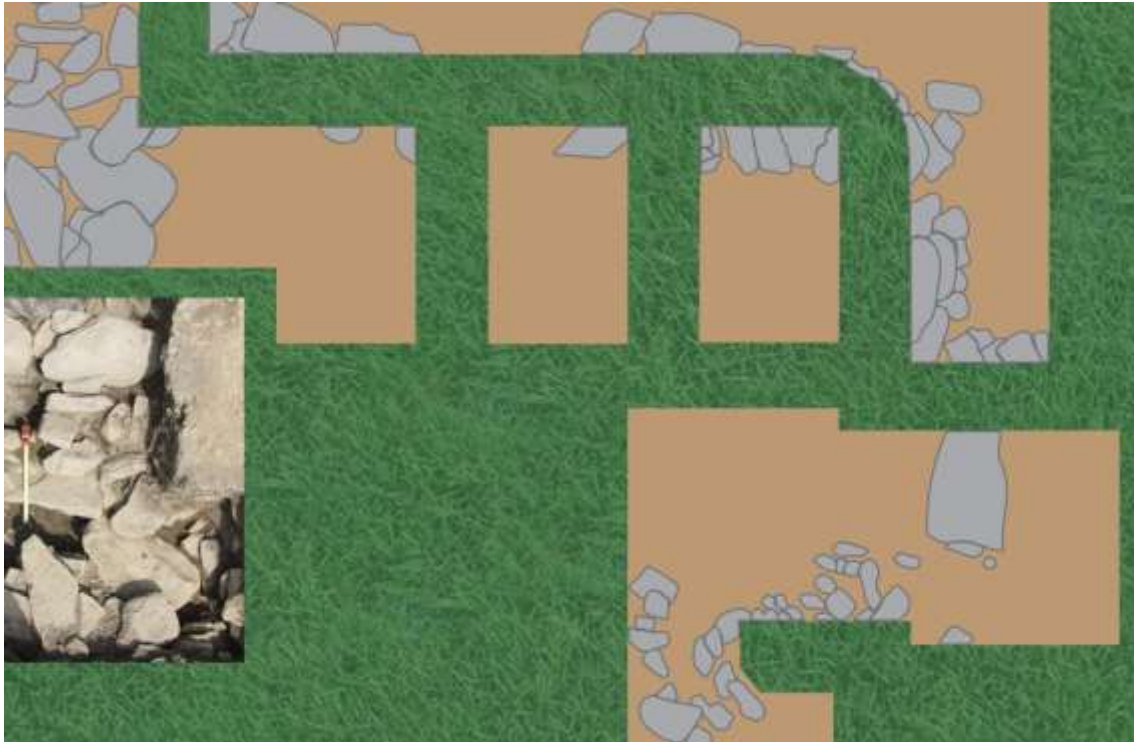
LEGEND

Numbers locate fragments of tea bowl.

8. The circa 1750 tea bowl (identified by Dr. Paul Huey) refit from the pieces in the tight cluster deeply buried outside the northeast corner of the circa 1746 house foundation.



9. A close-up of the foundation where the tea bowl was found. Donald Crews, a nationally recognized African-American illustrator and author of many children's books, would drive up almost daily to check on our progress and tell us 'you're crazy' to be digging. Note the thin vertical slabs at the northwestern corner of the foundation, where the largest quartz crystal came to light, possibly an African American concealment, an Indigenous emplacement, or remnant of German folk medicine.



10. The largest crystal and two other quartz crystals, one found inside the foundation and the other beside the well. Note their facets are hexagonal sided. Scale is in 1/16".



11. A 1976 Bicentennial greeting card commissioned by the Ekerts, a German American couple who restored the Parsonage. It was drawn from the 1900 photograph, with the fence placed incorrectly, but it put back a door that the Ekerts had made into a window.



12. The 2021 Bard Field School excavation at that window, once the entrance to the original room of the house. This window we hope to make into a door again, after exposure of the approach's walkway and large slabs of its workspace.



13. Counter-clockwise, a retaining wall, walkway, and workspace. Below but next to the top boulder were a broken ring of bone or horn, a mouth harp, and a whetstone, etc.



14. Just inside the window/doorway, he hearth excavation in the cellar, where Mary Persons probably was born in 1805. When it was visited by Ikechukwu Achebe, Cambridge University scholar of West African religion, son of Christie and Chinua Achebe, he interpreted a leather shoe heel found there. Stomping his foot, he said "it's where we make contact with 'Ala! Our Mother, the Earth!'"



15. A few of the concealment offerings underneath the hearthstones on the southeast, front center, and northeast [left to right]: mid-19th-century pottery & a modified quartz crystal; 2 blue glass beads; a double-X incised shale pebble of unusual color & an unmodified stone, in shape like a miniature effigy of a sheep or dog.



16. The hearth, before excavation, with paint partially covering the varnish on its wooden fireplace frame. The paint was chemically analyzed as late 19th-century in origin. It obscures punctate figures near center of the right, northern frame.



17. The cosmogram [*dikenga* in KiKongo] depicting the course of the human soul and the sun's path around the earth: from birth at sunrise in the east, to maturity at noon, to death at sunset, and rebirth at mid-night as a revered ancestral spirit that can ascend as a flash of lightning through the boundary between the underwater world and the world of the living. The heavily marked dawn 'moment' suggests ritual use in birthing. This is the only such figure in its original place, next to concealments, in North America.



18. Poster by C. Lindner and E. Dickerman (2020) was entitled 'Cosmic Contexts' to emphasize African-American religion, thru' demography, maps, photos, text, and even photomicrographs of fish scales that were found in profusion under the southeastern hearthstones, with oyster and clam shells in a cluster; and in the northeast corner, quartz crystals, iron bars, and the X-incised and effigy stones.



19. Tanya Jackson, artist and exhibition organizer, stands in center with family and friends, preparing a celebration feast in 2022 for a month-long Juneteenth exhibition at the Lightforms Art Center in Hudson, where the poster on the Parsonage appeared, originally done for an international conference of the Society for Historical Archaeology.



20. Juneteenth arrangement by Tanya Jackson of the 2020 poster, with its full title 'Cosmic Contexts, Emancipated Persons, Germantown Parsonage.'

