

James City Historic Archaeological Site, James City, North Carolina

Historic James City, now an archaeological site, is located on the south bank of the Trent River across from New Bern, North Carolina. In 1989, approximately 26 acres were to be developed for condominiums by Bridge Pointe Development. New South Associates' data recovery project opened 2,360 square meters during the winter of 1988-1989.

Data recovery concentrated on a single representative block of the town selected on the basis of historical map research. The project was thus able to examine the relationships within and among the house lots on the block. Three lots were examined in close detail. The distribution of the artifacts recovered from 20 foot interval shovel testing was used to select the lots for hand excavation.



Mechanical stripping at James City Site

Following mechanical stripping of the southern half of the block, the artifacts and exposed features produced data on the development of the town and the interrelationships of the town's occupants. Comparisons with plantation slave sites and urban sites led to conclusions about the nature of studying ethnicity, culture change and African-American urban life.

Perhaps the most interesting conclusion, based on the historical documents and the archaeology, was that the inhabitants of James City lived a simple, communal life, which offered them protection from the trials of an oftentimes hostile outside world.

Archaeologically, this communal focus is well illustrated by the presence of communal wells in the center of the block, rather than a well in each house lot. This pattern of urban settlement is termed an "urban village" by the authors of the project report.

A report entitled *James City, North Carolina, Archeological and Historical Study of an African-American Urban Village*, in two volumes, authored by Thomas R. Wheaton and Mary Beth Reed with contributions by Rita Folse Elliott, Marc S. Frank and Leslie Raymer was prepared and submitted to Bridge Pointe Development, Inc., New Bern, North Carolina in December, 1990.

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