

UTK Archaeological Field School at Coan Hall, June 3 –June 28, 2024

The 2024 UTK Summer Field School in Historical Archaeology will be held at 44NB11 (known as Coan Hall) near Heathsville in Northumberland County, Virginia. The site is located on a tributary to the Potomac River on Virginia's Northern Neck. The project explores the landscape of colonial encounters by documenting and interpreting cultural and environmental changes over the 17th century, and studying them in the context of broader regional changes and the wider Atlantic world.



Drone photo of mansion house at end of 2017 field school.



Excavations south of the manor house, summer 2019.

Site and Project History

Algonquian-speaking members of the Sekakawon polity occupied the area in the 16th and 17th centuries. John Mottrom, an early English settler on the Potomac's south bank, acquired the property from their leader, Machywap, and established a household at Coan Hall about 1643. The property quickly became the center of the Chicacoan community who took their name from the principal Indian village. Mottrom was elected to the House of Burgesses, and his property became the governmental and religious seat for the first English county on the Northern Neck.

Mottrom was one of the earliest planters in the Potomac Valley to use enslaved African labor. Elizabeth Key, who he attempted to enslave, contested her status in court and won her freedom following his death in 1655. Other Africans also lived in Mottrom's household.

Subsequent to his death, his son and grandson developed the property, expanded the labor force, and became prosperous planters and local leaders. Indentured and enslaved men, women and children lived at Coan Hall throughout this period.

Excavations from 2011 to 2018 exposed portions of the 21.5 ft. x 54 ft. manor house, one of the largest houses in Virginia at the time it was built. The house consists of a minimum of two rooms on either side of a masonry H-shaped chimney. The house was earthfast (built with posts set directly into the ground), repaired with new posts, and underpinned with brick. A large brick- and-stone-lined basement extends beneath the western room, and was accessed via a bulkhead entrance on the building's west gable end.



Basement floor, looking west, 2017.

Archaeological and geophysical findings hint at a complex landscape that developed across the six acres that surround the house. We have found features associated with probable outbuildings north of the house. We've also found evidence of fence lines, an Indigenous palisade, and the foundations of the 18th- century mansion that replaced Mottrom's house during excavations and through geophysical surveys of the site from 2015-2018. We have explored the nearby Indigenous Sekakawon village through a shovel test pit survey, surface collection, and limited excavations in winter 2020-2022.



Excavating an English fence line and a portion of the Sekakawon palisade, summer 2019.



Aerial view of west end of cellar, summer 2021.

2024 Goals

In 2024, excavations will continue within and around a large cellar that contains numerous white ball clay tobacco pipes, animal bones, and other domestic artifacts located some distance from the main house. The cellar appears to be associated with another building that may be the remains of a plantation store run by Mr. Hawkins in the mid-17th century. We will also trace a ditch that runs just north of the cellar and may be associated with it.

Course Objectives

Students will gain hands-on experience in archaeological field methods, including excavating, identifying and mapping cultural and natural features, classifying and describing sediments, identifying and recording changes in stratigraphy, total station and hand mapping, geophysical survey, and site photography. Students will also learn about Indigenous and English artifacts, and sampling and processing protocols for the recovery of plant and animal remains.



17th-century belly bowl pipe.



17th-century stamped pipe made of local clay

Schedule

Class will meet Mondays-Fridays from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm on site with some evening discussions or lectures. One field trip to an archaeological site in the region may be planned. Students are free on weekends to explore the Northern Neck region, visit Washington, DC or Richmond, VA, or just relax at the house.

Students will work outside in varying weather conditions. Fieldwork requires strenuous physical activity, including shoveling, screening, lifting heavy buckets, and pushing a wheelbarrow. Please come prepared to work in the sun doing physical labor.



Excavating the cellar, summer 2023.

Dates, Credits, Costs and Logistics

Dates: June 3-June 28, 2024(1st summer session)

Credits:

Students will earn 6 credits. Participants should register for Anth 430 or receive research-intensive credit by enrolling in 430R. Graduate students should register for Anth 530.

Participants must be enrolled as UT students to take this course. Prospective students who are not currently enrolled at UT can participate by following the instructions under "Visiting Students" at the UTK "Transient admission" (graduate students).



Excavations at 44NB11, 2018.

Estimated cost (tuition and fees):

	<i>Undergraduate In State/ Out of State</i>	<i>Graduate* In State/Out of State</i>
Six credit hours	\$2940.00/\$7596.00	\$4506.00/\$10,6740.00
* Summer school costs are covered for students holding graduate teaching assistantships at UTK.		

Housing and Transportation

Housing is provided for participants. Students and staff will share a house on Coan Wharf Road in Heathsville, located within a few miles of the archaeological site. Participants should budget for round trip travel from Tennessee to Virginia, food, and other incidental expenses during the summer session. Students without a car should contact Dr. Heath to arrange for carpooling to the site.



The house on Coan Wharf Road.



Field school participants and crew, 2023.

To Apply

Please contact Dr. Barbara Heath (974-1098; bheath2@utk.edu) and provide the following information.

- Personal information: full name, home address, phone number and email address.
- One page statement of your reasons for participating in this class and reviewing any prior archaeological experience (although prior experience is not necessary to participate).

Application deadline is April 15, 2024.



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