



Parallel Lives, Common Landscape: Artifacts from the Royall House & Slave Quarters

Text by Alexandra Chan, Ph. D.
Exhibit Curator

Sponsored by the Royall House & Slave Quarters

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Please note: This binder contains interpretive information that originally appeared on wall panels in the Slave Quarters, as well as several additional images. Inevitably, there is some overlap with the current display text. It is reproduced here for the convenience of our visitors.

Introduction: Partners in the Same Dance

“Partners in the Same Dance”

The Royall House and Slave Quarters are among the last relics of the “Peculiar Institution” of slavery in New England. During the summers of 1999, 2000, and 2001, archaeologists probed the earth here in search of evidence of this oft-overlooked aspect of New England’s history.

The features, artifacts, ecofacts, and evidence of landscaping activities discovered in the grounds surrounding the two buildings and the adjacent park have provided the physical data for this exhibit, and opened a “portal” into the lives and minds of people long gone.

They also raise important questions about what it was like to be black and enslaved in New England, far distant from the Southern sugar cane and cotton fields of popular depictions of slavery.

The exhibit’s title – “Parallel Lives: Common Landscape” – captures, we think, the vastly different experiences of “master” and “slave” in a single landscape, and asks us to think about the very different ways in which this site would have been “home” to the black and white inhabitants who lived here for nearly 40 years, more than two and a half centuries ago.

The artifacts here are but a small sampling of the thousands found on the site, but they represent important aspects of these stories. To illustrate the theme of the Exhibit, they are presented in three groupings, by exhibit case:

Royall Luxury

Daily Life

Lives of Their Own: the Enslaved Africans

The Royalls and their slaves led vastly different lives, occupying the very highest and the very lowest strata of the social spectrum. Their lives were “parallel,” in that they rarely came into contact outside the context of slavery. And yet they were also inextricably linked, partners in the same dance, defined in part *by each other*.

Thus, it is in studying them together that we come to the richest understanding of who they were on their own, as well as how they all contributed – black and white – to the forging of a new nation. Moreover, we can better understand how their lives and the social and economic forces of so long ago still reverberate in our own times.

The Royall House and Slave Quarters Dig

Goals of the Dig

The Royall House dig was led by Dr. Ricardo Elia in 1999 and Dr. Alexandra Chan in 2000 and 2001, both of the Boston University Archaeology Department, and was aimed in part at helping the Royall House & Slave Quarters in its mission to better tell the “intertwined stories” of the Royalls and the enslaved Africans who lived here, as well as situate the Royalls within the cultural framework of colonial mercantilism and slave trading in New England.

From the outset, archaeology here has sought to go beyond mere site layout, dates, or construction methods. The real goal has been to investigate the *social meanings behind* the buildings, landscapes, and artifacts found. *How, for example was the physical world manipulated to negotiate culture, identity, or power?*

Some other questions that have driven the investigations here:

What symbolic worlds were the Royalls and those they held as slaves creating for themselves with landscape, architecture, and artifact?

How did these worlds complement and/or contradict each other?

What might they be able to tell us about the processes of race and class formation in this country?



Karen Mansfield and Trent Bingham excavate the unidentified outbuilding in 2000.



Artifacts start to emerge from the outbuilding foundation, in the West Yard.

The Royall House and Slave Quarters Dig

Discovery

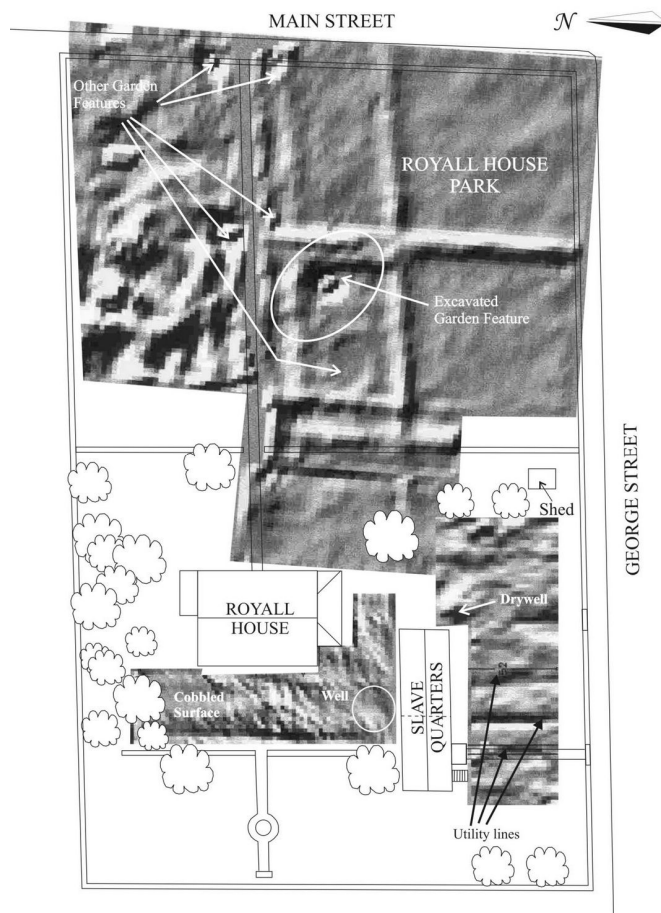
Archaeologists used a resistivity meter (a device that sends electrical currents through the ground and reads the resistance they encounter), and ground-penetrating radar to reveal the location of numerous features invisible from the surface, and good evidence of the Royalls' various landscaping activities, including the extensive formal gardens along present-day Main Street.

See illustration below.

Excavations yielded more than 65,000 artifacts and numerous features indicative of an 18th-century way of life

The site is also special because it contains archaeological evidence of the nature of northern bondage and the relationships that existed between northern masters and their slaves. Better yet, some of the evidence runs contrary to archaeological expectations, which were based on observations at slave sites across the South and in the Caribbean.

Are the differences in the physical manifestations of slavery at the Royall House merely idiosyncratic, or are they reflective of some deeper-lying systemic differences between northern and plantation slavery?



Resistivity Map of the dig site.

What will you see in this Exhibit?

In this exhibit are a small number of the over 65,000 finds recovered from the Royall House grounds, which are currently curated at the Boston University Archaeology Department. Before the days of municipal trash collection, colonial people threw their trash out in their own yards – sometimes in pits dug for the purpose, sometimes in the cellar-holes of abandoned outbuildings, and sometimes simply strewn across the ground in what archaeologists call “sheet refuse.” Evidence of all of these exists at the Royall House. Many thousands of artifacts from the Royalls’ household, and many of the ones you will see here, for example, were recovered from the foundation hole of an unidentified outbuilding just west of the Slave Quarters

The sheer number of artifacts, the presence of so many whole vessels, and the fact that they represent all household functions, from teapots to chamberpots and everything in between, suggests that this was where the house and slave quarters were emptied – more or less, in a single “depositional episode” – after the Royalls had fled to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and then to England, in 1775.

Slavery in New England

Curator Statement

"This project and the research surrounding it have been aimed at interpreting the daily existence and modes of cultural creation and expression among African- American slaves on the Royall estate, as well as the nature of their interactions with the Royall family who owned them."

Slavery in Colonial New England

Popular depictions of slavery have at times reinforced stereotypes that enslaved people were found *only* in large plantation settings, and *only* in the American South or the Caribbean. In truth, labor shortages in the New World ensured that *every* colony was a slave colony, and even those who did not often own slaves, such as artisans and small businessmen, were eager participants in their exploitation through the hire-out system. In 1645, Governor John Winthrop's brother-in-law, Emmanuel Downing, doubted Massachusetts would survive without "a stock of slaves sufficient to doe all our business. . . . And," he went on to say, "I suppose you know verie well how wee shall maynetayne 20 Moores cheaper than one English servant." ["Moores" is a catch-all term often applied to persons of color at that time, whether actually Moorish or not.]

In fact, Massachusetts was the first colony to legally sanction the institution of slavery, incorporating it in 1641 into the paradoxically named Body of Liberties.

The numbers of enslaved blacks in New England never reached those in the South and the Caribbean, but the black presence in New England was significant from early on. The concentration of enslaved people in economic, political, and social centers (such as Boston) exaggerated the effect of their comparatively small numbers. As early as 1687, a French refugee recounted that "there is not a house in Boston, however small may be its means, that has not one or two [slaves]. There are those that have five or six."

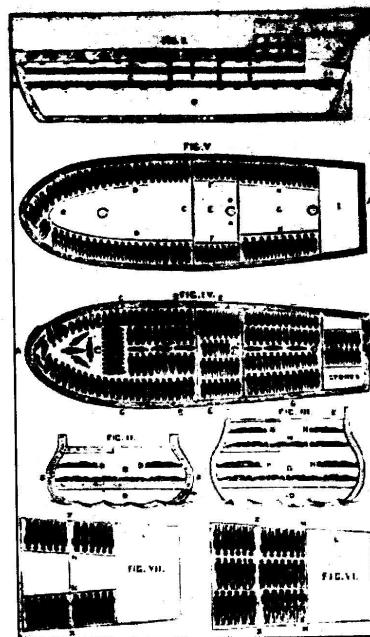
The Royalls far exceeded their neighbors, holding at their peak (1739), 38 people in bondage. Moreover, at least 63 black men, women, and children (and evidence of many more), supported the family's lavish lifestyle over the course of their 40-year tenure in Medford.



Slave Castle—Ghana Coast

Slaves were held in this "castle" (and 41 others) prior to shipment to the New World. Evidence suggests that many of the enslaved Africans at the Royall estate came from Ghana.

- Photo courtesy Medford Historical Society



Slave Trading Ship: Loading for the Middle Passage

The "Middle Passage" was the name given to the long and murderous voyage of slave trading ships to the New World. Slaves were stacked like cordwood below decks and manacled together. Thousands died at sea of disease, brutality, and despair. This diagram shows a typical ship.

- Image courtesy of the Medford Historical Society

Historical Archaeology

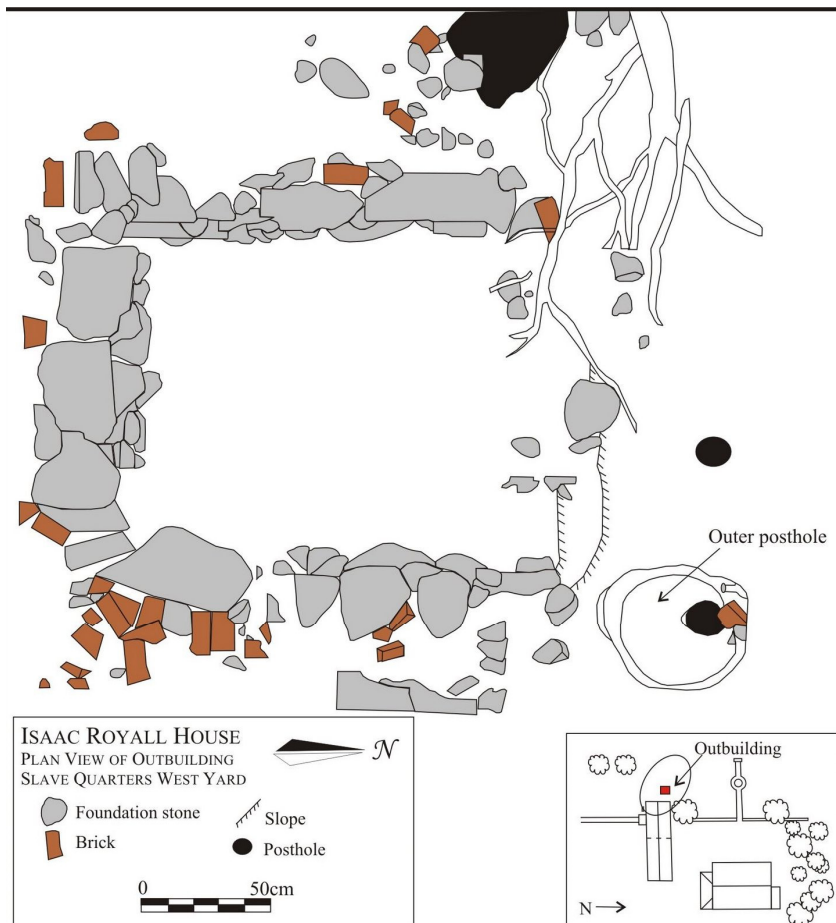
Why Historical Archaeology?

One great advantage that historical archaeologists have over other scholars of history is that their principal objects of study – artifacts – often serve as direct evidence of people forgotten or represented only indirectly in the written record, those sometimes referred to as “historically invisible.”

The very materiality of artifacts, too, lends itself to all kinds of analyses not possible with historical documents – physical, spatial, and stylistic.

Artifacts are not just inanimate objects, or discarded cultural leftovers. They are *metaphorical expressions of culture*. Historical archaeologists see objects, architecture, or landscapes as physical embodiments of the assumptions, attitudes, and values of the people who built, shaped, or used them. Material things could be manipulated to communicate messages, to “make statements” about who people thought they were, who they *wanted* to be, how they wanted to be seen by others, or how they thought the world ought to be.

When you move through this exhibit, remember that when people leave artifacts behind, they are, in a way, talking to you, if you know how to listen! At the Royall House and Slave Quarters, we have approached the artifacts, architecture, and landscape in just this way: as part of a “conversation without words” between master and slave.



Detailed drawing of the outbuilding foundation: Slave Quarters, West Yard

Historical archaeology often focuses on the most ordinary locations, in this case a hidden foundation of an outbuilding, the purpose of which remains a mystery. Nonetheless, thousands of finds emerged from the ground of this humble location.

Drawing by A. Chan.

Evidence of Royall Luxury

The Rituals of Elegant Dining and Drinking

Documentary and archaeological evidence reveal the Royalls not just as “rich,” but well equipped to lead an aristocratic lifestyle that revolved around conspicuous consumption, social display, and the numerous “rituals” of sociable dining and drinking that defined and perpetuated their place at the center of the social order. For example, see the Probate Inventory on the next page).

Among the table- and teaware, a variety of different ware types and vessel forms bespeak the Royalls’ standing in the community and place them at the vanguard of Colonial-period consumption. In the dig, porcelain vessels outnumber those of any other material, representing over a third of the non-utilitarian vessel count (a minimum of 44 out of 129). Likewise, a minimum of 116 liquor bottles were recovered, representing imported French and English wines, port, gin, and beer.

We also know the Royalls were drinking punch, coffee, and chocolate, out of vessels specifically made for each beverage. These artifacts are more than just reflections of wealth and privilege. They communicate messages about the Royalls, such as: Who they were; who they wanted to be; how they saw themselves and strived to be seen; and how they legitimized the world they built.



“Chamfered” Liquor bottle with the Royall family seal embossed

These bottles were custom-made in Europe and include the round family seal. The family motto is “Pectore puro,” Latin for “pure of heart.” The seal survives today as the official seal of Harvard Law School.

- Photo courtesy A. Chan

Isaac Royall, Sr. Probate Inventory (1739) - Excerpt

The excerpt below is from: **Isaac Royall, Sr. Probate Inventory (July 29, 1739)** - Middlesex County Probate Court, File Papers, First Ser. 1648-1871, Case #19545) (Middlesex County Probate Court File Papers, First Ser. 1648-1871, Case #19545). The spelling is original. "Do" means "ditto."

<i>Item and Location</i>	<i>Valuation in English pounds £</i>	<i>Total Value</i>
<i>In the Best Room</i>		
1 peer Looking Glass	55:0:0	
1 pr Large Sconces	60.:0:0	
A marvel [marble] table with Iron frames	35:0:0	
2 pr brass Armes @ 40/	4:0:0	
A Jappaned tea table	7:0:0	
A Sett of Cheney [china] for the Same	13:0:0	
A Large mahogeny table	10:0:0	
A Small Ditto	7:0:0	
A Doz. Of walnut Chares wth Leather bottomes	30:0:0	
A pr of brass AndIrons	3:0:0	
A fier Shovel and tonggs	1:0:0	
A Turkey Carpitt	40:0:0	255:0:0
<i>In the Front Room Next to Medford</i>		
1 peer Looking Glass	55:0:0	
1 Sconce	15:0:0	
A mahogeny tea table	3:0:0	
A parcell of Cheney for the Same	3:0:0	
A Black walnut Desk	6:0:0	
An Easey Chear Covered wth Blew	7:0:0	
Illegible	30:0:0	
A walnut Chease	2:0:0	
1 doz. Burnt Cheney plates	7:0:0	
1 doz. of blew and white Do [ditto]	6:0:0	
3 Cheney Dishes @ 60/	9:0:0	
2 Small Cheney Bowles	2:15:0	
1 Glass Decanter	:10:0	
1 Coffee mill	1:0:0	
A case of Bottles Small	1:0:0	
1 doz. burnt Cheaney plates	7:0:0	
8 Cheney Dishes @ 30/	12:0:0	
1 fruit plate	:10:0	
6 wine Glasses & nine tumblers	3:0:0	
1 Iron back	2:0:0	
5 Custard Cups	:15:0	
2 blew and white Cheney Dishes	3:0:0	
6 Cheney Salvers	3:0:0	
1 pr Brass Armes	2:0:0	
1 Glass Salver	1:10:0	183:10:0

Isaac Royall, Sr. Probate Inventory (1739) - (Cont'd)

<i>Item and Location</i>	<i>Valuation in English pounds £</i>	<i>Total Value</i>
<i>In the Dining Room</i>		
A Large Sconce	30:0:0	
A Mahogany table	8:0:0	
A Small Ditto	5:0:0	
8 Leather Chears 25/	10:0:0	
A wooden Arm Chear	:10:0	
1 pr Brass AndIrons	3:0:0	
A fier Shovel and tonggs	1:0:0	
2 pr brass arms 40/	4:0:0	
2 fowling pieces @ £7	14:0:0	
1 Iron back	2:0:0	
1 doz. of burnt Cheney plats	7:0:0	
1 Glass Decanter	:2:6	
2 Glass Salts	:8:0	
1 Tubler [tumbler]	:4:0	
1 pr of tobacco tonggs	1:0:0	86:4:6

Evidence of Royall Luxury

Documents in the Interpretation of Meaning

The documentary record helps put these finds in wider context. For one, it amplifies the patterns seen in the ground. Isaac's 1739 inventory of plate shows 71% of it was Chinese porcelain (as opposed to the 34% found in the ground) — 26% the prestigious “burnt china,” represented by the saucer you see in the case.

Have a look at Isaac's probate inventory (previous two pages), taken in 1739. How many different vessel types can you find listed?

What do you think the significance is that over a third of the vessels are for the consumption of exotic beverages such as punch, coffee, tea, or chocolate?

What is the significance of having many vessel types in sets of six, eight, or twelve?

Both documentary and archaeological evidence combine in this case to show a concern with display and elegant hospitality. The abundance of vessels for the consumption of exotic beverages (as well as porcelain and glass presentation trays) establishes the Royalls' home as a center of hospitality by the early years of their residence in Medford.

But it was not just *what* one did, but *where* one did it that also had meaning. Isaac Royall's probate inventory (previous page) is especially useful in this regard, for the spatial information it contains about the family's table- and tea-wares when they were still in use. How these vessels were dispersed around the house and where they were set up as props is not retrievable from the ground, but is vital to the interpretation of their meaning.

What rooms do you notice that the Royalls kept their fancy tea- and tablewares in?

What does this suggest about their meaning?

Isaac Royall, Sr.'s probate inventory shows that all of the porcelain could be found in the Best Room, the Front Room, and the Dining Room. Such placement shouldn't be taken for granted. Andrew Hall, a fellow Medford resident at the time, and equally wealthy to Isaac Royall, kept *his* most expensive wares in the kitchen, away from public view. What we can conclude, then, is that the Royalls were self-conscious consumers of the fine goods they accumulated. They bought them to show them off.

Thus the probate inventory suggests that the ceramics found in the ground, which at the very least confirm the Royalls to have been rich, were also an important part of the visual symbolism with which the Royalls cloaked themselves as wielders of power and occupants of the inner circle of the colonial governing elite.

Work, Daily Life and Material Expressions of Identity

Enslaved Women at Ten Hills Farm

A minimum of 98 coarse earthenware vessels, representing 29% of the total Royall House ceramic vessel assemblage, can be associated with the kitchen duties of enslaved women. These were used in preparing food for the Royalls' larder (such as milk, cream, butter, and preserves) that fed, at its maximum size in 1738, the 37 black and white members of the household.

There would also have been meat to cure, laundry to wash, candles and soap to make, wool carding, spinning, and weaving to do. The amount of work involved in keeping such a large household running smoothly is hard to imagine and would have fallen heavily on the shoulders of the women.

In doing these many chores, however, enslaved women might have found an opportunity to work together with minimal supervision and forge a camaraderie through the drudgery of their work, traded gossip and idle chit-chat, and brought a new generation up into their "sisterhood." These relationships would have carried over after working hours and been invaluable in creating a supportive social network.

Such relationships of work and play among enslaved women are also evoked by the plant remains collected from the site. Charred and mineralized seeds suggest that picking berries was the primary way enslaved people at Ten Hills Farm were exploiting the environment. Various unidentified species of *Rubus* (which includes Allegheny blackberry, cloudberry, northern dewberry, black raspberry, and red raspberry); elderberries; and grapes were found, the latter probably raisins bought at market. Picking berries to make preserves, jams, jellies, juices, pies, or flavorings would have been an integral component of the women's work in the kitchen, and mothers and daughters or groups of women might have collected berries together over the summer to fill the Royalls' larder for the winter.

Berry-picking season was likely highly anticipated among the enslaved women on the estate. The men's work often took them far afield, but a woman's work was close to home. Berry-picking excursions would have been one of the few opportunities to get away from the confines of the kitchen and the main house.



Blackberries, common in Colonial America

The various *Rubus* species and elderberries are summer fruit, ripening in June and July, and yielding fruit for most of the summer. *Rubus* plants are found in thorny thickets that grow in hedgerows, along fence lines, or in forest clearings, while elderberries tend to grow on small shrubs found in meadows, clearings, and alluvial forests.)

- Photo courtesy A. Chan

Work, Daily Life and Material Expressions of Identity

Transformation into Luxury

Governor Belcher wrote to Royall in 1736, noting: “When you have done what you intend at Medford, it will be a fine Estate for a Gentleman to live on” (Royall Correspondence: Nov. 16, 1736).

In a mere five years (1732-1737), Isaac Royall, Sr. transformed the simple Usher farmhouse into a luxurious Georgian mansion. He added the Slave Quarters, farm outbuildings, apple orchards, and extensive landscaped gardens and walks. The latter included a “Summer House,” an elaborate gazebo some distance from the house with a statue of winged Mercury adorning its roof (see 19th century photo to right. The statue is now on display in the Slave Quarters.) The Royalls would have entertained guests and suitors here, and the view from the hill would have afforded a fine prospect of the gardens, orchards, and Royall lands that stretched to the horizon.

Thus, living in “parallel” to their enslaved Africans, the Royalls enjoyed the many benefits of great wealth and extensive leisure time.



A 19th Century photo of the remains of Isaac Royall's Summer House

The structure stood at one end of a long, formal garden. It was crowned by a statue of Mercury, the Greek messenger god, a favorite classical figure (now on display in the Slave Quarters).

The House was also elevated on a mound, to provide pleasant breezes and pleasing prospects of the grounds. Below was an ice-house.

The photographer is unknown.

Life in the Quarter

Black Folk Life and Leisure

Having time for leisure or play does not fit many people's notions about what slave life must have been like. And yet, as the archaeology of early African America has burgeoned in the last decades, evidence of leisure time activities has come to be seen as almost characteristic of slave sites. Why?

Recreation can be seen as an active reassertion of humanity within even the worst of dehumanizing conditions. The prevalence of such evidence on slave sites across the country attests to its importance, as do the often creative ways enslaved people had of creating and possessing recreational items.

Many of the artifacts of black folk life and leisure found here are either handmade or are household objects that have been reworked for alternative purposes, reflecting enslaved people's restricted access to goods and their creativity in making do with what they had.

"[Whites] live and die in the midst of Negroes and know comparatively little of their real character"

– Charles Jones, 19th-century slaveholder

"No, sir, one life they show their masters and another they don't show."

– Robert Smalls, former slave, 1863



Fragment of pipestem found in the West Yard near the Slave Quarters

The color and shape of this fragment suggests that it was made by hand using local clay and fired on the Royall estate. Pipe smoking was very popular in the eighteenth century.

- photo courtesy A. Chan

Life in the Quarter



Enlarged photo of the “Akan-derived” amulet in the Exhibit.

This charm or amulet may stem from a belief system of the Akan-speaking peoples of the Gold Coast, in which prehistoric stone projectile points were believed to have magical powers.

Nyame akuma, they were called, or God’s axes: thunderbolts that resulted when lightning struck the earth. Several of the Royalls’ slaves had Akan day-names and so likely came from that part of the world.

“Sacred” Landscapes of Ten Hills Farm

The amulet made to look like a Native American projectile point, and the ancient Native American stone pestle fall within a historically and archaeologically supported phenomenon of enslaved people curating Native American stone tools for religious and/or ritual purposes. They are scant but provocative evidence of the use of conjuration or “hoo doo” here at Ten Hills Farm and their recovery begs the question:

What use was magic at Ten Hills Farm? And what does it reveal to us about early black identities and master-slave relations at this estate?

Magic was one early keystone in the formation of black communities. Charms against evil or to promote health and happiness were commonplace, while “sent sickness,” poisoning, and witchcraft were common complaints among enslaved people wherever they lived. These categories of belief and knowledge were generally regarded by whites as “superstition” and were often dismissed or ignored by slave owners. Nonetheless, they became important factors in the creation of black identities, and gave enslaved people a sense of control and agency when there was little opportunity for either.

By and large the biggest challenge for the Royalls’ “people” was to create and maintain lasting family ties in the face of sale, estate division, and gift-transfer,

Artifacts of conjuration may speak to enslaved people’s own endeavors to harness higher powers to protect themselves from, or prevent the worst effects of, family and community instability.

Slavery was a brutal and inhumane system whatever the setting or circumstances of its existence. Artifacts such as these, when combined with the ethnographic and the documentary record, give us pause in searching for evidence of “kindness” among masters, and help put the Royalls’ claims of benevolence into perspective.

Operating the Royall Estate

Operating the Royall Estate

Though the Royalls maintained a sugar plantation in Antigua, the Medford estate (also called Ten Hills Farm) was a 500-plus-acre farm involved principally in wool and cider production, livestock, and English and Upland hay. These products were likely destined for the Caribbean, whose overwhelming emphasis on sugar production made the colonists there heavily dependent on the mainland colonies and European sources for necessities and foodstuffs.

Most of the tasks involved in Ten Hills Farm's production would have been carried out by slaves. The Royalls housed several slaves in the Great House, where Isaac Royall, Sr.'s probate inventory lists "negro beds" in the kitchen, the kitchen chamber, and the attic spinning garrets; as well as in the Out Kitchen – where you are now. Other people might have been housed in other outbuildings on the property, in closer proximity to their places of work, perhaps in barn lofts or boathouses.

The Royalls – as most New England slaveholders – employed more than just field hands. They rented at least two individuals out – one to a Boston baker in 1737, and Nancy, as a domestic servant in 1776. Others advertised as “fit for Town or Country labor” were probably jacks-of-all-trades. In addition there were likely one or more boatmen to carry the hay, cider, and wool that were the principal products of Ten Hills Farm down the Mystic River to Boston. Extended contact with larger, more established black communities, such as the one found in Boston, however, must have been intermittent at best and restricted mostly to the individuals whose jobs required the greatest freedom of movement. Many of the Royalls' slaves would have had little or no occasion to leave the estate at all.

ANY Person that has a Negro Fellow
to dispose of, between 16 and 25 Years of Age,
that is sober, honest and healthy, and understands
farming Business, may hear of a Purchaser that will
give a good Price for him, by enquiring of ISAAC
ROYALL, Esq; of Medford — The said ROYALL
wants, and will give the full Value for a Pair of Coach
Horses, to match the pair he already has; N.B. They
must be black, with a white Spot on their Forehead,
fifteen Hands high, trot all, not above six nor less than
four Years old. — The said ROYALL also wants a
Coachman, that can be well recommended, and who
understands driving a Coach and Four; and if said
Person is Skill'd in Gardening, he shall have the
greater Wages. —

Boston Evening Post
6/15/1761

Royall's ad in the Boston Evening Post
(June, 1761)

Advertising for Enslaved Africans

Advertisements such as the one on the left by Royall himself and the samples set out below were made regularly in the Boston's many newspapers and suggest a substantially larger number of people passed through the Royalls' doors than the figures shown in the tenure table.

Sample Boston newspaper ad texts:

Also to be sold, Two likely Negro men, fit for the Country Business, and a likely Negro GIRL, fit for Town or Country, neither of which are sold for any Fault
- *Boston Gazette or Weekly Journal*, 1756

A Likely Negro Wench to dispose of, who understands Household Business, and something of Cookery: Also Four of said Wench's Children, viz. three Girls and one Boy.

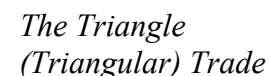
- *Boston Evening Post*, 1762

Slavery was Big Business

New England's real wealth, however, continued to lie in *slave trading* (rather than slave-holding) and the indirectly affected industries of shipbuilding, rum distilling, and other finished colonial products. By the 1760s, New England was producing rum specifically to outfit slave ships en route to Africa, rum being the preferred medium of exchange there, and Medford was one of the centers of that production. By the 1770s, an estimated 75% of New England's total raw and finished exports were tied directly or indirectly to the trade in slaves.*

* Ronald Bailey has written:

'Those valuable people the Africans': the economic impact of the slave(ry) trade on textile industrialization in New England. *The Meaning of Slavery in the North*, David Roediger and Martin H. Blatt, eds. New York: Garland Publishing, 1-31 (1998)



This is the Trade at its most basic. Other goods and routes were also involved: for example, England was also the source of much slave trading activity.

Two Perspectives on a Single Place

Black Family and Community in Crisis

Census and probate records have preserved the names of 63 men, women, and children enslaved by the Royalls. This number is probably representative, but it is known to be incomplete.

The Royalls prided themselves on being “kind” masters – Isaac Senior was even commemorated as such on his tombstone in 1739. But documentary evidence reveals that the Royalls threw their slaves into crisis on a regular basis. While there is no surviving evidence of physical cruelty, sales seem to have been commonplace, some individuals were leased out, and since even kind masters must die, estate division was inevitable. An examination of the list shown on the next page reveals that nearly 3/4 of the Royalls' known slaves lived at this estate for fewer than 10 years, suggesting that lasting ties of family, friendship, and community would have been hard to create and maintain.

Enslaved Africans at the Royall Estate

Name	1st and Last Dates Mentioned (Inclusive)	Min. Tenure in Years	Ultimate Fate
Hector,	1737 (in Antigua)	1	Burned alive for conspiracy to revolt
Quaco	1737 (in Antigua)	1	Banished to Hispaniola for conspiracy to revolt
Ruth	1726 – 1739	14	Unknown
Nan	1726 – 1727	2	Unknown
Cuff	1726 – 1739	14	Unknown
Peter June	1732	1	Sale
Cuffee	1735	1	Unknown
Peter	1726 – 1769	44	Death
Fortune	1725 - 1739	15	Unknown
Captain	1737 - 1739	3	Unknown
Black Betty ^a	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Abba ^a	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Quacoe ^a	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Diana ^a	1738	1	Gift-transfer
John ^a	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Nancy ^a	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Betty ^a	1738	1	Gift-transfer
George ^a	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Sarah ^a	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Jacob ^a	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Jemmy ^a	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Abba ^b	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Robin ^b	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Coba ^b	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Walker ^b	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Nuba ^b	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Trace ^b	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Tobey ^b	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Present	1738	1	Gift-transfer
Cato	1739	1	Unknown
Barron	1739	1	Unknown
Ned	1739	1	Unknown
House			
Peter	1739	1	Unknown
Robin	1739	1	Unknown
Quamino	1739	1	Unknown
Smith	1739	1	Unknown
Phillip	1739	1	Unknown
Trace	1739	1	Unknown
Sue			
(Susannah)	1739 - 1758	20	Death
Jonto	1739	1	Unknown
Old Negro			
Man	1739	1	Unknown
Santo	1739	1	Unknown
Girl (6)	1739	1	Unknown
Old Cook	1739	1	Unknown
George	1739 – 1776	38	Suicide
Abraham	1754 - 1768	15	Death
Betsey ^c	1754 - 1776	23	Manumission (freeing)
Nancy ^c	1754 – 1776	23	Let Out (rented for use by another person)
Cooper	1754 - 1775	22	Death
Hagar	1754 – 1776	23	Sale
Joseph	1754 – 1761	8	Death
Mira	1754 – 1776	23	Sale
Phebe	1754 - 1765	12	Death
Plato	1754 – 1768	15	Drowned
Stephy	1754 – 1776	23	Sale
Diana ^d	1761	1	Unknown
Joseph ^d	1761	1	Unknown
Belinda ^e	1768 – 1778	11	Manumission (freeing)
Joseph ^e	1768 – 1778	11	Gift-transfer
Prine ^e	1768	1	Unknown
Priscilla	1778	1	Gift-transfer
Bathsheba ^f	1778	1	Gift-transfer
Nanny ^f	1778	1	Gift-transfer

Black Labor at Ten Hills Farm

Black Labor at Ten Hills Farm

Enslaved people without a particular craft (“generalists”) were of necessity jacks-of-all-trades. They had to have the flexibility to harvest crops, chop wood, press cider, tend livestock, do carpentry repair, shoe a horse, mend a fence, or print a newspaper. Young, healthy males were preferred because of the physical requirements of many jobs. This greatly skewed gender ratios and made establishing families more difficult.

Although New England in the 18th century was about 95% white, the economy was diverse, and slaves worked as “butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers” – the whole range of free labor. This picture was reflected on a smaller scale at Ten Hills Farm here in Medford.

As the chief source of labor for the Royalls, the enslaved Africans did just about everything on the estate (often called Ten Hills Farm). Their labor reflected the skills of both the “generalist” and the “specialist.” The farm’s many products all required enormous amounts of daily labor. Care of the stables, horses and carriages also consumed much time and energy. At the mansion, slaves were responsible for cooking, serving, heating, laundry, cleaning, personal livery, and the myriad of skilled tasks required by a large and very wealthy household.

Skilled workers were often favored by their owners as profit-producing investments, and favored slaves could influence a master’s decisions about their or their family’s fate. In this vein, Isaac Royall, Sr., kept Black Betty, her five children, and five grandchildren together as a family unit at the division of his estate in 1739. In 1776 Isaac, Jr., wrote to his agent, Simon Tufts, about the liquidation of his assets, including several slaves:

“As to Betsey, and her daughter Nancy, the former may tarry, or take her freedom, as she may choose; and Nancy you may put out to some good family by the year.”

Other, less valued people did not receive such consideration. Of Stephen and George, Isaac, Jr., had only this to say:

“they each cost £60 sterling; and I would take £50, or even £15, apiece for them.”

Race, Status and the Law

Race, Status, and the Law

Black people in New England, both enslaved and free, had the right to life and property, police protection, legal counsel, and trial by jury; they could be heir and inheritance in a master's will, and they could and did sue and testify in court. They could also be seized, foreclosed upon, or sold at whim, however, to relieve debt or to increase an owner's income. And stringent social and legal codes did restrict black behavior, including curfews, restricted meeting laws, prohibitions on the carrying of any stick or cane that might be used as a weapon, and strict anti-miscegenation legislation.

Expanded legal rights were, therefore, not "extenuating circumstances" of slavery. They simply provided additional avenues for black people in New England to address their oppressors in their own terms.

The famed writer and activist Phillis Wheatley called on moral and religious principles in a letter to the *Massachusetts Spy* in Boston:

. . . in every human Breast, God has implanted a Principle, which we call Love of Freedom; it is impatient of Oppression, and pants for Deliverance; and [. . .] I will assert, that the same Principle lives in us.—God Grant Deliverance. (24 March 1774)

Another group of Massachusetts petitioners characterized their condition as being "in violation of the Laws of Nature & of Nations," so that

Your Honors need not to be informed that a Life of Slavery, like that of your petitioners, deprived of every social privilege [*sic*], of every thing requisite to render Life even tolerable, is far worse than Non-Existence. (13 Jan. 1777; MHC *Archives* 212:132)

Belinda's Story

Belinda's Story

The first known documentation of Belinda, a woman enslaved by the Royall family, occurs in 1768, when her son Joseph and daughter Prine were baptized in Medford, Massachusetts.

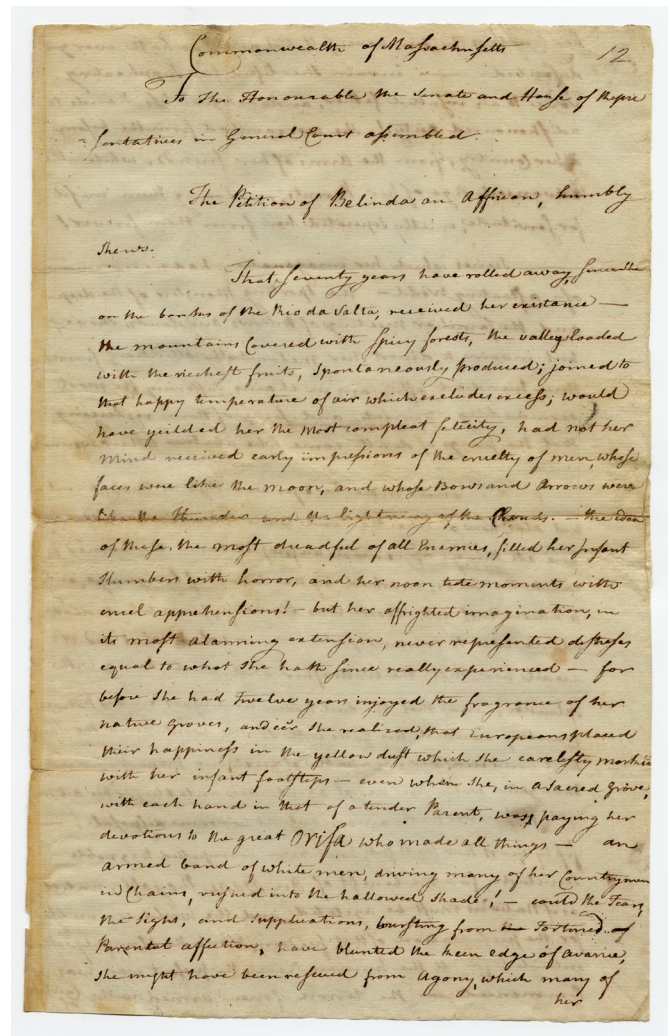
The next mention is in Isaac Royall Jr.'s will, dated May 26, 1778, and written during his exile to England. He notes in a codicil: "I do also give unto my said daughter [Mary Royall Erving] my negro Woman Belinda in case she does not choose her freedom; if she does choose her freedom to have it, provided that she get Security that she shall not be a charge to the town of Medford."

Royall instructed his friend Willis Hall, Medford's town clerk who served as the executor of his will, to pay Belinda "for 3 years, £30," and presumably this payment was made when Royall died in 1781.

In February 1783, Belinda presented the a petition to the Massachusetts General Court, requesting a pension for herself and her infirm daughter, assumed to be Prine, from the proceeds of Isaac Royall's estate. Willis Hall was first witness to the petition and his son was second. Belinda signed the document with an X, indicating that she was unable to write or, probably, to read. Scholars speculate that Prince Hall, an acknowledged leader of Boston's black community at the time, is likely to have written this document.

The Massachusetts legislature approved an annual pension of fifteen pounds and twelve shillings, to be paid from Royall's estate, but just one payment was made. Three years later, Belinda applied to Royall's daughter Mary and her husband, then living in Boston, for support, and in 1786 George Erving paid Belinda two pounds and two shillings.

Belinda again petitioned the Massachusetts legislature in 1787, and received her pension for three years. In 1790 Willis Hall refused to make another payment "without a further imposition" from the legislature, which appointed a committee to investigate and ordered resumption of the payments. There is no additional documentation regarding either Belinda or Prine.



The first page of Belinda's Petition.
Courtesy Massachusetts State Archives.

Belinda's Petition - a Transcription

Belinda's Petition to the Massachusetts General Court, February 14, 1783 (Original, MHC)

The Petition of Belinda an Affrican, humbly shews: that seventy years have rolled away, since she on the banks of the Rio de Valta received her existence—the mountains Covered with spicy forests, the valleys loaded with the richest fruits, spontaneously produced; joined to that happy temperature of air to exclude excess; would have yielded her the most compleat felicity, had not her mind received early impressions of the cruelty of men, whose faces were like the moon, and whose Bows and Arrows were like the thunder and the lightning of the Clouds. – The idea of these, the most dreadful of all Enemies, filled her infant slumbers with horror, and her noontide moments with evil apprehensions! – But her affrighted imagination, in its most alarming extension, never represented distresses equal to what she hath since really experienced – for before she had Twelve years enjoyed the fragrance of her native groves, and e'er she realized, that Europeans placed their happiness in the yellow dust which she carelessly marked with her infant footsteps – even when she, in a sacred grove, with each hand in that of a tender Parent, was paying her devotions to the great Orisa who made all things – an armed band of white men, driving many of her Countrymen in Chains, ran into the hallowed shade! – could the Tears, the sighs and supplications, bursting from Tortured Parental affection, have blunted the keen edge of Avarice, she might have been rescued from Agony, which many of her Country's Children have felt, but which none hath ever described, -- in vain she lifted her supplicating voice to an insulted father, and her guiltless hands to a dishonoured Deity! She was ravished from the bosom of her Country, from the arms of her friends – while the advanced age of her Parents, rendering them unfit for servitude, cruelly separated her from them forever!

Scenes which her imagination neer conceived of – a floating World – the sporting Monsters of the deep – and the familiar meetings of Billows and clouds, strove, but in vain to divert her melancholly attention, from three hundred Affricans in chains, suffering the most excruciating torments; and some of them rejoicing, that the pangs of death came like a balm to their wounds.

Once more her eyes were blest with a Continent – but alas! how unlike the Land where she received her being! here all things appeared unpropitious – she learned to catch the Ideas, marked by the sounds of language only to know that her doom was Slavery, from which death alone was to emancipate her. – What did it avail her, that the walls of her Lord were hung with Splendor, and that the dust troden underfoot in her native Country, crowded his Gates with sordid worshipers – the Laws had rendered her incapable of receiving property – and though she was a free moral agent, accountable for her actions, yet she never had a moment at her own disposal!

Fifty years her faithful hands have been compelled to ignoble servitude for the benefit of an Isaac Royall, untill, as if Nations must be agitated, and the world convulsed for the preservation of that freedom which the Almighty Father intended for all the human Race, the present war was Commenced – The terror of men armed in the Cause of freedom, compeeled her master to fly – and to breathe away his Life in a Land, where, Lawless domination sits enthroned – pouring bloody outrage and cruelty on all who dare to be free.

The face of your Petitioner, is now marked with the furrows of time, and her frame feebly bending under the oppression of years, while she, by the Laws of the Land, is denied the enjoyment of one morsel of that immense wealth, apart whereof hath been accumulated by her own industry, and the whole augmented by her servitude.

WHEREFORE, casting herself at the feet of your honours, as to a body of men, formed for the extirpation of vassalage, for the reward of Virtue, and the just return of honest industry – she prays, that such allowance may be made her out of the estate of Colonel Royall, as will prevent her and her more infirm daughter from misery in the greatest extreme, and scatter comfort over the short and downward path of their Lives - and she will ever Pray.

Boston 14th February, 1783

the mark of Belinda

Belinda's Petition - the Court Resolve

Commons Wealth
of Massachusetts

In the House of Representatives Feb¹⁹ 1783¹¹

On the petition of Belinda an African,

Resolved, That there be paid out of the Treasury of this Commonwealth
fifteen pounds twelve Shillings p^a Annum to Belinda an Aged
Servant to the late Isaac Royall Esq^r an Absentee¹³ for reasons set
forth in said Belinda's petition.

In Senate Feb²² 1783¹²
Read & concurred with amendment
at A & B. Sent down for concurrence
Saddams Seal¹⁴
at A insert, out of the Bonds and Profits
arising from the Estate of the late
Isaac Royall Esq^r an Absentee
at B delete from B to C & insert until
the further order of the General Court

Sent up for concurrence
Tristram Dalton Esq^r
In the House
of Representatives Feb²² 1783¹⁵
Read and concurred
Tristram Dalton Esq^r

Approved John Hancock

The Court Resolve of February 19, 1783

The Legislature here resolves (approves) payment of a pension of fifteen pounds and twelve shillings "during her natural life." Note John Hancock's signature at the bottom.

Courtesy Massachusetts State Archives.

Landscapes

“Reading” the Landscape

Landscapes can be “read” in the present as a map of social relations in the past. The landscapes of inequality found in various American slave regimes, for example, betray the hope of white masters that the spatial and visual dominance they created in architecture and landscape would result in an internalized acceptance of their social and political dominance in the world. See the Conjectural Site Plan on the previous page.

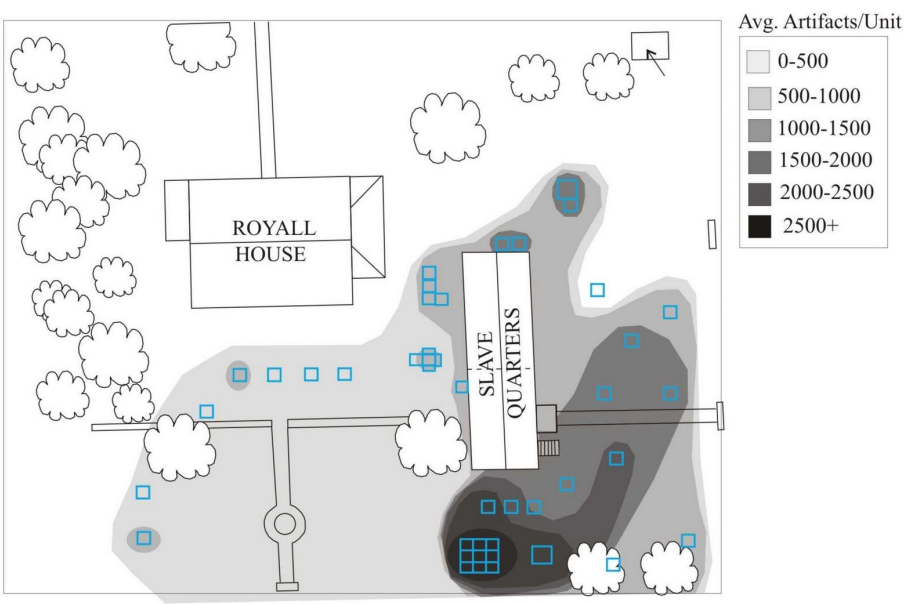
Among the Royalls’ peers, the Neo-Classical design elements of the Royall House recalled the villas of ancient Rome; the gardens and vistas, the country estate of a landed European gentleman. These lent the Royalls an air of legitimacy and an apparent longevity to the family’s elite status that belied the fact that they were barely a generation removed from coopering and carpentering.

Archaeology and the Landscape of Ten Hills Farm

Landscape archaeology has shed interesting light on race and class at this site as well. While the Royalls strolled through immaculate gardens and took in stunning vistas of their house and lands, archaeology has shown that the slave quarters’ back and side yards were stripped bare of topsoil, leaving only dry yellow clay, and left strewn with garbage, rubbish, and rubble.

A division in the functional use of space that relegated work and waste-disposal activities to the side and back yards of the Slave Quarters is meaningful. The trash-strewn work yards would have emphasized, on one level, the separation between master and slave, work and leisure, clean and unclean.

Artifacts recovered from these areas that seem to reflect not just work life but also the family life, leisure time activities, and craftsmanship of enslaved people, however, also suggest that these areas were understood by white and black alike to be a “black domain.” To the enslaved, these same work yards might have represented a welcome retreat from constant surveillance, despite their appearance or smell.



Artifact Distribution (1999-2001)

This shows the number of artifacts recovered from various parts of the archaeological site. Each small square represents one square meter. As shown, a large percentage of items came from the foundation hole of an unidentified outbuilding west of the Slave Quarters. Drawing by A. Chan.

Landscape as Artifact

Landscape as Artifact

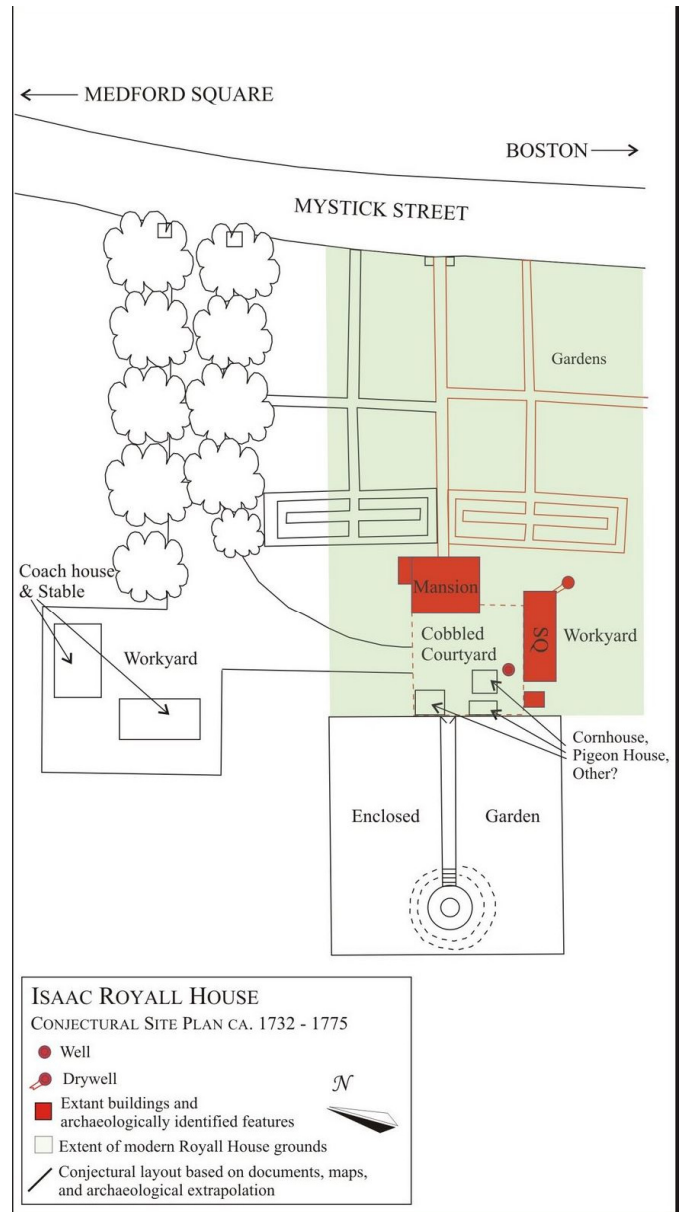
Landscapes are artifacts, too. There are natural landscapes and cultural landscapes, landscapes that have been designed for a particular purpose, and landscapes that just “happen” when nobody’s looking. The important thing is to recognize that landscapes are not just a backdrop to social life. They reflect *as well as shape* human relations, and give meaning and context to everyday life.

We’re now sitting at the heart of a meticulously constructed landscape. Obviously, it is a landscape designed and ordered by Isaac Royall, but what was he trying to say with it? In our interpretations of landscape, just as those of artifacts, the emphasis has been on the recovery of *meaning* from the evidence at hand.

What meanings might the Neo-Classical design elements of the Royall House have tried to convey?

What alternative meanings could this landscape have acquired for people who experienced the landscape differently (e.g., for those who built it, maintained it or were held imprisoned in it)?

What are possible meanings behind the fact that the Slave Quarters are in close proximity to, and seem to have been designed to complement the architecture of the Great House?



Conjectural Site Plan of the Core of the Royall Estate

This plan is based on existing structures, contemporary descriptions, historic maps, and extrapolations from the archaeology conducted 1999-2001.

Drawing by A. Chan.

Insights Gained: the Royall House and Colonial Society

Artifacts, Identities, and the Color Line

The Royalls manipulated material things not just to reflect identities but to actually recast them. Thus, an ambitious carpenter's son was able to use material statements of legitimacy to achieve access to the highest levels of society in Colonial New England.

The Royalls' many slaves, on the other hand, were forced to construct identities somewhere between how they wished to define themselves and how they were defined by others. History has preserved some of the ways that enslaved people's identities as "slaves" were imposed by white society. It is archaeology, however, that can offer a portrait of how these people might have constructed identities as individuals. This process is evidenced in some of the artifacts in this Exhibit.

Some of the activities reflected here might simply have been an effort to live as decently as possible, despite the legal status of slave, while others, such as wearing charms or using home medicinal remedies might have been an active response to the perceived natural and supernatural dangers of a life under slavery. In either case, we can argue that the result was the development and accumulation of a range of material things that gave "the Color Line" in 18th-century Massachusetts wide tangible expression.

Landscape and the Social Constructions of Space

The Royalls' landscaping efforts and the distribution of artifacts on this site betray a cognitive separation in the use of space that was being built into the very landscape of the estate before its occupants had even arrived.

They are significant because the Royalls' social construction of space presents one of our first clues about how the process of constructing/defining the categories of "white" and "black" at the Royall House – and therefore, in Colonial America at large – might actually have begun. In the efforts expended on the house and slave quarters and the visible areas of the property (and in the lack of effort shown in the domain of the enslaved), we begin to see how *ideas* about social differences were made tangible, entering people's psyches on a *sensory level*, and thus becoming perhaps more apparently "real."

Of course, for the enslaved, these yards would have been their own, and offered a welcome retreat from constant surveillance, and therefore, acquired different meanings and connotations from those the Royalls sought to project. Because a landscape's meanings are not fixed, but always open to reinterpretation by those who experience it in alternative ways, this represents one crack in the facade of total domination of the American Slave Regime.



Isaac Royall, Jr. and Family

The Robert Fekke painting of 1741 shows the Royalls in full splendor. From right to left: Isaac Junior; his wife, Elizabeth; their baby Elizabeth; Elizabeth's sister, Mary McIntosh; and Isaac's sister, Penelope Royall.

- Courtesy Special Collections,
Harvard Law School.

A Final Surprise

A Final Surprise: (Few) Plant and Animal Remains

Archaeology on early African-American sites in the South and Caribbean have almost universally found large quantities of wild animal and fish bone, which has suggested that enslaved people in these regions often hunted and fished for themselves to supplement the provisions supplied by their masters. Such activities would have provided extra calories, but more importantly, were social endeavors, offering enslaved people an opportunity to provide for themselves and their families as well as time and space away from their masters and obligations to the Big House.

Surprisingly, this was not at all the case at the Royall House. The floral and faunal remains suggest that, with the exception of the occasional berry-picking excursion, the Royalls' slaves were doing little or nothing either through the exploitation of wild resources or the cultivation of domesticated ones, to supplement the provisions they got from the resources of Ten Hills Farm.

What the precise meaning is of this apparently curtailed movement is not known at present, and as more northern slave sites are excavated and published, it will be of great interest to see if the same pattern plays out across the region, possibly hinting at some fundamental, systemic differences between northern and southern/Caribbean slave adaptations. For now, however, it remains one of the most fascinating aspects of the material culture here at the Royall House: that the one arena understood to have figured prominently elsewhere in the development of black identities under slavery seems to have been singularly lacking at Ten Hills Farm. It seems likely that this would have represented a great loss in autonomy for the people who were enslaved here.