

REPRESENTATION ISSUES AND THE HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Representing an institution's long past can be difficult, especially when that past covers over 250 years and includes a few of the biggest names in American history. Washington and Lee University's history is widely documented, but its historic campus also contains multiple archaeological sites in support of that history. Using both the historical and archaeological resources of the University would allow for a broader representation that appeals to a wider audience. Multiple options exist to expand the current representation, which could be implemented through interdepartmental and student work. Utilizing critical archaeology in combination with the many historical resources would better educate the public about the complete Washington and Lee University past.

INTRODUCTION

An institution over 250 years old can have a long and detailed past to share. Washington and Lee University (W&L) is such an institution (established 1749). Yet, the past shared by the school is limited by restrictions in scope. Over the years, W&L officials have focused on former W&L President Robert E. Lee (1865-1870) and his contributions to the school, and to a limited extent on George Washington as a patron of Liberty Hall Academy (1796). Recently, W&L has enlarged its focus on the past it presents to include John Chavis, a free black student who attended Liberty Hall Academy from 1795 to c. 1799. It is possible that school officials chose to raise Chavis to a more prominent level of representation because Chavis serves as Lee's opposite within W&L history. He represents a different aspect of W&L's past, still one of an important man, but a free black from the 18th century who is far removed from Robert E. Lee. This focus on the stories of prominent individuals is understandable; people find it easier to relate to such stories rather than more abstract historical events. Identifying with people makes their accounts more powerful compared to the story of the masses. However, in doing so, Washington and Lee University does not fully acknowledge and represent the more complex history of student life here over the past 250 years.

In this paper, I propose that it is possible to use campus archaeology to highlight and share this neglected history. Critical archaeology, as Leone *et al.* (1987) propose, involves teaching the public about archaeology, while helping such people develop questions and think analytically about the past being presented, as well as how that past affects each person's current life. The public here at W&L includes students, faculty, staff, parents of students, townspeople, and visitors. W&L officials could employ such a method on school grounds to help engage the public in campus history while catering to the primary interests of the community. For example, by portraying W&L's past through the tales of students, current student knowledge of the past could increase along with retention of W&L's rich legacy through an interest in students that preceded them. Undergraduates could utilize critical analysis in comparing and contrasting present and past student life. Campus archaeology could aid in encouraging such critical thinking. I believe that students best relate to fellow students, not Civil War generals and U.S. presidents.

Archaeology on the 18th century and present day campuses can bring student life to light for current and future generations.

RESEARCH METHODS

In order to observe and understand the extent of historical and archaeological knowledge held by the W&L community, I conducted targeted interviews and administered a survey (Jackson 2007). My aim here was not so much to gauge general public opinion, but to find out how well the current administration presents W&L's past to the public and to show that an audience exists for a more complete and critical approach to the historical representation provided by school officials.

I placed 100 surveys in W&L's Laboratory of Anthropology museum for visitors to complete after viewing the new exhibit entitled "History and Archaeology at Washington and Lee University." I received 58 completed surveys over the course of approximately a month and a half. These surveys allowed me to assess visitor's knowledge of W&L before and after viewing the exhibit. After reviewing the answers, I formulated interview questions to ask W&L students, faculty, and staff in order to assess individual knowledge and opinions about campus history and archaeology. To find out how people use W&L's historical grounds everyday and their possible awareness of the school's heritage as embodied in this landscape, my research also included observing campus flow patterns during class hours and student tours given to prospective students, as well as examining markers and monuments on campus. Details of my findings are available in Jackson (2007).

CRITICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Critical archaeology is the application of critical theory to archaeology. The ultimate goal of such an approach is to use archaeological excavations and analyses of the past to provide a forum in which the public can explore and critique basic assumptions about current and former norms of society. This kind of education thus aims to provide "emancipation from coercion, including coercion that is self-imposed" (Leone *et al.* 1987:283). By applying critical theory to archaeology, researchers attempt to separate archaeological interpretations from their own biases. Leone *et al.* (1987:284) write that "the claim of a critical archaeology is that seeing the interrelationship between archaeology and politics will allow archaeologists to achieve less contingent knowledge." The goal of any archaeologist or historian is to present the truth of a situation without bias, but this can only be accomplished to a limited extent.

Understanding the relationship between politics and archaeology includes looking at ideology, which can veil or rationalize exploitations in public depictions of the past (Leone *et al.* 1987:284). In their discussion, Leone *et al.* (1987:284) define ideology as "the givens of everyday life, unnoticed, taken for granted, and activated and reproduced in use...the means by which inequality, bondage, frustration, etc., are made acceptable, rationalized, or hidden." These exploitations deal with the unequal treatment of the poor and rich, black and white, and other opposing groups that do not receive the same treatment in historical representations. An archaeologist must consider the ideology used in both the past and the present when attempting to understand why groups were exploited or excluded in histories. One must consider the viewpoints of previous scholarly works done on a site or project in order to comprehend any bias within the effort.

Leone *et al.* (1987:285) write, "A critical archaeology retains and reaffirms the discipline's commitment to understanding the past, but what past to construct becomes a matter of conscious choice." At W&L, the administration constructs a past focusing primarily on important personages, but the archaeology focuses largely on student life on the campus, due to the nature of the sites excavated. Administrators and archaeologists need to be cognizant of the repercussions of how they choose to represent the university's history. I believe that such an acknowledgement could lead to the creation of a more comprehensive and coherent representation of W&L's past that would encourage students, faculty, staff, alumni, and visitors to think critically about the educational experience at W&L.

For example, it is well known that W&L receives a large number of tourists interested in southern history, especially of the Civil War and post-Civil War eras. Tour guides and other school officials can encourage analysis and interpretation of this past by questioning the public during any educational sessions or presentations. A tour does not need to be simply a passive experience, but one where participants take part in the history and apply the knowledge to analyzing the past and how that history influences their current lives. Questions related specifically to southern interests could include “What type of school did Lee find when he took the job as President?” Lee is still a part of the picture, but the public would also consider the lives of students and the conditions of the school after the Civil War. Further questions could deal with the building of the school’s historic Colonnade to introduce the role that slave labor played in its construction. This new information and different approach could aid the public in thinking about new aspects of the past, ones they would not normally consider. John Robinson’s estate, which he left to W&L, included enslaved people who served as the labor and monetary source necessary for construction of much of the Colonnade. Knowledge of slave labor at W&L could help visitors critique the long history of tradition and honor that school officials present to the public. Students may have lived up to high standards throughout the years of the school, but they lived by the standards of their respective times. A comprehensive representation of W&L’s past could aid visitors in thinking about history in relation to the period, as in considering campus life during the period of slavery or the World Wars.

It is important to construct these presentations of the past with the needs of visitors and the university community in mind. As Parker B. Potter, Jr. (1997:37), a W&L alumnus and a coauthor of the article on critical archaeology I cited earlier, wrote, “It is dangerously easy to present an interpretation without giving careful consideration to what our audiences want and need, and without giving careful consideration to the social agendas embedded within our own interpretations.” The history of W&L includes more than just George Washington, John Chavis, and Robert E. Lee. Community members and visitors need to expand their idea of school history to include the masses, the students, faculty, and workers (enslaved people and staff), at W&L over the years. Campus excavations can help visitors with this growth. Excavation results provide others with a greater knowledge of W&L’s past through the artifacts and analysis from both the Liberty Hall (18th century campus) and Colonnade (19th century to present campus) sites. An interpretation without the support of archaeological work completed on the campus provides a view of history with a focus on a small group of individuals rather than on both students and the great men of W&L’s past.

ARCHAEOLOGY, REPRESENTATION, AND MUSEUMS

Campus tours and signs should incorporate these excavations, along with publications made available to the public. Providing such texts helps archaeologists meet their responsibility to share their knowledge with the public. Many in the field have overlooked the process of educating the public because archaeology “is a discipline that has hitherto shirked its responsibilities” (Stone and MacKenzie 1990:4). Stone and MacKenzie put together an anthology dealing with the excluded past, those aspects of the past that are rarely if ever presented to the public in educational venues. Archaeologists have the responsibility to share all of the past uncovered through their work, but even they sometimes fail to share the more controversial aspects.

I took advantage of my opportunity to design a new exhibit for the Laboratory of Anthropology to incorporate some of W&L’s past that does not often receive much attention. I included documents relating to enslaved people on campus as well as the details of the Colonnade’s construction. Such new information can help visitors realize that the past presented by the administration does not encompass the whole history of W&L. Visitors could begin to view the school’s current representation critically and hopefully encourage questions about other aspects that have been disregarded. An additional component of the Laboratory’s Museum is that of educating the public about archaeology itself. Archaeology here at W&L is largely unknown, both on campus and as a field (Jackson 2007).

All parties involved in a representation must come to the realization that history is a contested phenomenon. I think that questioning the history presented by an institution is necessary from a critical

archaeology perspective. One method of stimulating discussions of W&L's past includes utilizing campus tours and museums to help visitors question the past they see and hear when visiting school grounds. Through analyzing the school's history, the W&L community can acknowledge a past that includes more than a few important people. Such a perspective can aid the public in their inquiries about W&L's complete history, one that includes student life and issues of slavery, among other things. Discussions and analysis can support the development of a comprehensive history that satisfies the wide range of interests held by the public and W&L community.

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE WASHINGTON AND LEE CAMPUS

Archaeology on W&L property is important because campus excavations allow W&L faculty and students to search for physical remnants of the school's past. Archaeology serves as a great tool for uncovering the smaller details of students' daily lives while providing information to create a broader understanding of campus history. Utilizing critical archaeology on school grounds could aid in promoting a clearer definition of archaeology while encouraging the public to view history and representations of it with a critical eye. Visitors should analyze the knowledge presented to them and question this information. History is about debating conflicting ideas, and archaeology can help stimulate that debate.

The W&L grounds contain wonderful archaeological resources because the school's 18th century campus was fortuitously preserved along with some areas on and around the Colonnade, which dates largely to the 19th century. Utilizing and understanding the archaeological resources on school property and incorporating them into a comprehensive representation of W&L's past could help support an awareness of school history while engaging more people in interpreting the past. The results of the various excavations on school grounds can help detail the portions of W&L's history excluded from various accounts of the school's past. Campus archaeology can help create an inclusive account of W&L's past, and through this representation, visitors can be encouraged to analyze the conclusions drawn from excavations in relation to what they already know, or think they know, about the past.

Professor John McDaniel created the university's archaeology program in the 1970s. From 1974-1979, McDaniel led summer field schools that excavated Liberty Hall and other parts of the 18th century campus (McDaniel *et al.* 1994). The original work done on the 18th century Liberty Hall property uncovered a large portion of the site. McDaniel and his students found that the back campus contains six buildings including the academic building, rector's house, steward's house, springhouse, brick kiln, and a stable. Excavation participants also believe that they found the area where the 1782 and 1783 wooden schoolhouses once stood, as well as structures that date to after Liberty Hall Academy.

W&L archaeologists returned to the campus in the spring of 2005 and again in 2007 when W&L's field school excavated on the fabled Colonnade alongside Newcomb Hall (Galke 2006a, 2006b). The 2005 and 2007 excavations provided a source of knowledge that allowed participants to compare the lives of students living on the Colonnade with those from Liberty Hall Academy. It is now possible to compare artifacts uncovered at the Ruins with those from sites on the Colonnade in order to get a more comprehensive view of student life in the past. Excavations on the Colonnade uncovered the foundations of the 1804 Union Hall in 2007 and the remains of the 1836 dormitory that replaced this structure (Galke 2006a, 2006b, personal communication 2007).

Artifacts uncovered alongside the Colonnade help tell the story of student life on the 19th century campus. Unlike Liberty Hall that burned to the ground rather quickly, the 19th century structures on the Colonnade were officially slated to be destroyed, giving students a chance to take their belongings with them. Perhaps this is why no marbles, dominos, or other entertainment related artifacts were uncovered at the site in 2005 and 2007. They were probably remnants of trash thrown away after original items broke in use. The Liberty Hall excavations uncovered a substantial amount of tobacco pipe fragments, but none were found on the Colonnade. This could suggest that the school administration decided to strictly enforce a no smoking policy after having three fires on the old Liberty Hall campus and that the students complied (Galke 2006a).

The artifacts from the campus excavations together help provide a more detailed picture of student life on campus. Recreating the lives of former students through archaeology helps to bring the past to life for current students. Students at Liberty Hall Academy broke the rules by drinking and playing games, which is something current students do as well. As stated previously, field school participants found multiple marbles and a domino as evidence for the broken rules at Liberty Hall Academy. Knowing a little bit about the students that came before us allows us all to get a better sense of W&L's long history. I believe that understanding the normal individuals that provided the school with life strengthens our ties to W&L. Life does not appear to have changed much in the past centuries as each generation continues the tradition of student life at W&L. Archaeology conducted at W&L can share a lot of new and detailed information about student life with the public. One method of presenting this information is through the Museum of Anthropology and the new exhibit on the "History and Archaeology of Washington and Lee." Such a project helps fulfill archaeologists' responsibilities to share their findings and conclusions with the public.

Archaeology on campus is a fantastic asset for teaching purposes, but also for expanding our knowledge of the school's past. New information comes to light during excavations and then needs to be incorporated into the broader view of W&L's past. This information helps recover the lost stories that most accounts fail to include in discussions of the school's history. Critical archaeology allows the public to question and analyze the new information as it is incorporated into the school's representation. Such an analysis of new knowledge helps archaeologists focus on discerning and presenting an accurate portrayal of their results within a broad historical and social context.

THE CURRENT CAMPUS AND REPRESENTATION OF ITS HISTORY

All who visit or work on campus know, upon looking at the Colonnade, that they are looking at a historic place, but few people truly know the extent of that history. School officials took, and continue to take, small steps over the past decades to share parts of that past. There are currently three major ways that people can access our school's history – physical signs demarking areas or people of importance, a museum in Lee Chapel, and Washington & Lee University's website at www.wlu.edu. However, all of these venues have their shortcomings. First and foremost, many physical signs on campus remain overlooked because they are located in obscure or fringe locations that fail to draw the attention of visitors. These markers are important, but they need highlighting while other resources need further utilization. In addition, the Lee Chapel Museum currently focuses on Lee. W&L's webpage features brief historical overviews of the campus and serves as an excellent asset. However, this information is spread throughout various pages with no clear central webpage to access school history. These resources together fail to provide a clear coherent school history to the students, faculty, staff, and public, mainly due to the overwhelming focus on Lee and his presidency. The school's history as a whole also falls short of providing a critical representation that engages the public and W&L community in analyzing the history they see around them. For details of how W&L represents its past, see Jackson (2007).

When viewing all the resources available to visitors and the W&L community, the history presented captures the main highlights from the past centuries, but fails to achieve a comprehensive representation. A representation is needed that caters to various groups, not just students, faculty, staff, and alumni but also to guests who visit or utilize campus with different goals in mind. Such a representation needs a plan in order to integrate what exists with further developments incorporating new archaeological or historical information. By choosing a few key issues to focus on in W&L's past and then enhancing them through further details to connect everything, a solid and critical representation could be built to increase interest and awareness in W&L history starting in 1749 and ending in the present day.

I would suggest beginning with a focus on the early years with an incorporation of the archaeology at the 18th century Liberty Hall Academy campus to initiate a discussion of student life. A shift to the 19th century Colonnade campus would include archaeology on the first structures built here with an analysis of student life in comparison to that of the 18th century pupils. The representation could also include the evolution of the Colonnade to its current appearance. George Washington, Robert E. Lee, and John

Chavis will always have prominent positions within this representation, but the forgotten people of the campus could be highlighted with a discussion of student life, as well as the role of slavery in the construction of the Colonnade. The Colonnade excavations provide physical remains to help people think critically about past student life. Altogether, such efforts would only augment the representation currently utilized by school officials by increasing awareness of W&L's long history and appeal to a more diverse audience.

All my research leads to the fact that although some members of the W&L community know some of the school's history, such as details regarding Liberty Hall Academy, their knowledge is superficial. Historical representations focus on key figures in the school's past with little supporting information obtained from excavations on W&L grounds. If the campus excavations and resulting data were to be incorporated into the representation of W&L's history, a broader understanding of the people who came before us could be achieved. Archaeology on campus could also interest more people in the past here at W&L by approaching the history from a different angle and generating a more inquisitive nature regarding current representations. With each representation at various institutions or sites, the approach would differ, but here at W&L, visitors and members of the W&L community should inquire as to the missing facts. The information shared should not be accepted blindly, but rather be questioned and analyzed in order to acquire a clearer picture of both the past and how that past is utilized today. Such a critical analysis can be aided by tour guides, museum information, and other sources providing visitors and students with missing links that highlight how history impacts each individual in current times.

CONCLUSIONS

When reviewing the history represented on campus, one typically finds mentions of Robert E. Lee and other important figures from W&L's past, such as George Washington and John Chavis. The Liberty Hall Academy ruins garner attention when people relate the age of the University, but the extent of the archaeological remains on campus receive little consideration by school officials as to how they can include archaeology to expand the public's understanding of the University's history. Combining historical records, architectural evidence, and archaeology would allow for a broad and comprehensive representation of W&L's long past. A more detailed history can introduce the public and the W&L community to new aspects of the school's past while inviting them to critically analyze the account they know. Creating a broader representation could aid visitors in viewing the past through different points of view and in comparing the variety and different interpretations. How such a representation could be implemented is the next task that needs to be addressed. A comprehensive list of some possibilities can be found in Jackson (2007). Promoting an integrated history could help make history a daily part of campus life. W&L serves as an institution of higher learning and no one will forget its primary goal of educating students. Educating the public and making the entire school grounds into a museum is simply an additional step that could be taken in serving its educational purpose in a wider context and to a broader audience.

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