

*Ancestors of Worthy Life:
Plantation Slavery and Black
Heritage at Mount Clare*

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10 tables. \$74.95 cloth.

The premise of Teresa S. Moyer's *Ancestors of Worthy Life: Plantation Slavery and Black Heritage at Mount Clare* is relatively straightforward. Her book focuses on the site of Mount Clare, a former 18th-century iron and agricultural plantation located near the fall line in southwestern Baltimore, Maryland. This once-thriving estate fell into disrepair in the 19th century, contributing to the physical erasure of many of the plantation's ornamental landscape features and outbuildings. In the early 20th century much of the site was subsequently overlain by a Frederic Law Olmsted-designed urban park. These physical erasures were further exacerbated by what Moyer characterizes as a racialized choice to persistently privilege the interpretation of the site's wealthy white occupants to the detriment of the experiences of the enslaved men, women, and children who outnumbered their white counterparts by a ratio of 3:1 at the plantation's peak in the 18th century.

Moyer's work is a case study that foregrounds the potential of historic house museums (in general) and historic plantation sites (in particular) as ideal loci at which to deploy a range of interdisciplinary methods in order to address and redress

the interpretive silence regarding the site's former enslaved occupants. Her aim is to demonstrate how critical historiography, material culture studies, landscape analysis, historical archaeology, architectural history, ethnography, and a host of related fields can be harnessed as a tool for creating inclusive site histories, generating fuller narratives of relevance to modern visitors, and fostering an ongoing conversation about the legacy of structural and institutional racism that teaches about the past while simultaneously effecting positive change in the present. Moyer situates these efforts within a context of what she refers to as "insurgent preservation" and "dissonant heritage."

This work's goal is achieved, in large part, by the author's success in triangulating among surviving documentary, art historical, archaeological, biographical, and historiographic materials. These data were either readily available and/or provided to Moyer by the site's managers and those who have controlled the message for nearly a century. Moyer is candid from the outset about the challenges she faced in gaining access to archaeological collections controlled by the Carroll Park Foundation and to archival source materials and training materials created by and about the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Maryland. The latter were managers, docents, and stewards of the Mount Clare House Museum spanning the period 1917–2012. Readers will readily recognize, and simultaneously appreciate, that Moyer's efforts were

at times substantially hampered by a lack of access to collections and other data.

In many ways, the message of this book is not new. Pivotal works dating back decades include the following: events such as the Somerset Homecoming documented in Dorothy Spruill Redford's published work; past workshops on such topics as "Teaching Slavery at Historic Sites"; the National Trust for Historic Preservation and other groups' efforts to generate meaningful critique of what is both said and unsaid in public interpretive programs regarding the contributions of bondsmen and women at sites throughout the country; and the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program. These efforts laid the foundation for many of the points made in *Ancestors of Worthy Life*. There is also a good deal here that, if not new, provides important examples of best practices in the management of historic sites, the ethics of access to collections, the desperate need for adherence to the highest standards of collections care, and the importance of developing strategies for overcoming the physical erasure of elements of the past via the intentional reinsertion of those elements in meaningful and evolving site interpretation in the present. As a former Chesapeake-based landscape archaeologist who spent time engaged in historical archaeology in and around Baltimore, I can say that one of this book's crowning achievements in selecting Mount Clare as its focus is the spotlight it places on the data generated from the research. For many reasons, these findings have been relegated for far too long within the left-sock limbo of the gray literature.

Moyer's work, and the contents of its endnotes and bibliography, makes a whole new generation of practitioners aware of these heretofore underutilized datasets.

Moyer's consideration of "white widowhood" and how Margaret Tilghman Carroll redefined the use of plantation space and interacted with the enslaved population following her husband's death is an aspect of Margaret's lifestory that has not been explored previously. Coupled with the discussion of bequests and the role of manumission (and the several forms it assumed), Moyer provides insights about which readers will doubtless want to know more. I was particularly intrigued by Moyer's juxtaposition of the history of white women's historic preservation organizations and black women's uplift organizations. This is a topic that is largely absent from the published literature on the history of the historic preservation movement in this country. Historical archaeology's contribution to that evolving conversation remains to be seen.

Whether intentional or not, Moyer's work casts a number of important logistical issues into stark relief. Among them is the importance of the role of management documents such as thoughtfully articulated scopes of collections for museums, historical contexts, management plans, training manuals, and interpretive plans, as just a few examples. Related issues include the importance of institutional commitment to the highest standards of collections care, affording regular professional development opportunities and ongoing training for volunteer and paid interpretive staff alike, and fundraising/development efforts geared

toward those ends. To this reader, the book also underscores the ever-present point that it is incumbent upon us as archaeologists to ensure that the collections we generate will be housed, managed, regularly evaluated, and made readily available for study lest we become inadvertently complicit in the very sorts of silences Moyer's book works so hard to identify and address.

This book will be of interest to site managers, museum staff, historians, archaeologists, students, and educators in a number of fields. With luck, preparation of a paperback edition will make it financially accessible to a wider audience and attractive for classroom adoption.

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