

**Scope of Work: Proposed Archaeological Investigation at George Washington's
Boyhood Home National Historic Landmark ("Ferry Farm"), Stafford County,
Virginia, 44ST174,
2026**

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Proposal Location, Property Description, National Park Service Review- Background

The conservation easement held by the National Park Service (NPS) over the 76-acre George Washington's Boyhood Home National Historic Landmark (Ferry Farm) stipulates the use of the property as "historic site and education attraction." Situated at 268 Kings Highway Fredericksburg, VA 22405 (Stafford County), the property's owner, the George Washington Foundation, manages a visitor center, interpretive structures, and other educational facilities where staff and programming interpret the story of the site's past residents.

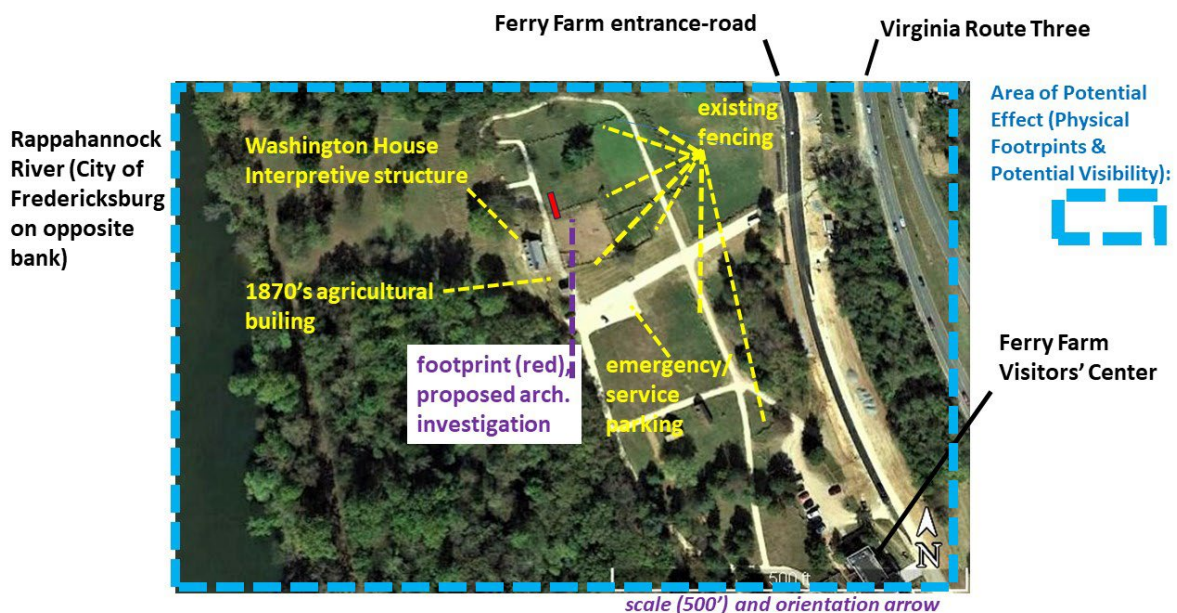


Figure 1. Site Map, George Washington's Boyhood Home NHL: Proposed Archaeological Investigation, 2026

The conservation easement makes provision for the George Washington Foundation to propose "archaeological investigations" to the NPS for review under the terms of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, investigations that would occur under the direction of a qualified professional archaeologist. The easement incorporates among its provisions pages 44734-44737 of *Archeology and Historic Preservation; Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines* (*Federal Register*, September 29, 1983), which stipulate that archaeological documentation, including "observation, directly, through excavation," may be "undertaken as an aid to various treatment activities, including research, interpretation, reconstruction..." Approved investigations, the easement continues, "shall be documented and reported." The easement also describes the right of the NPS to protect in perpetuity the natural, cultural, archeological, ecological, open space and aesthetic features of Ferry Farm and describes the restrictions of the easement as intended to prevent uses, which if allowed to occur, would have an individual or cumulative adverse effect.

The 2026 research design, as with previous archaeological investigations, includes the goal of developing a better understanding of the spatial use of the Ferry Farm landscape over thousands of years of its occupation.

In accordance with that research design and also the Preferred Alternative (Alternative “D”) for treatment of the overall property—selected through an NPS National Environmental Policy Act/Environment Assessment public/agency/consulting-party review in 2013-2014, and including research on and creation (beginning with NPS agency/consulting party/public National Historic Preservation Act/Section-106 review in 2015 and 2021) of an interpretive landscape with missing Washington-era landscape features and structures—our proposed archaeological investigation for 2026, below, would emphasize seeking evidence of such features and structures.

Proposal Specifics

Overview

In 2024 and 2025, foundation archaeologists exposed a block that contained the architectural remnants of a 16 ft. square outbuilding that featured an Aquia sandstone block cellar foundation. The 2025 work plan called for a continuation of the search for outbuilding-related architectural remains outside the cellar, including potentially a chimney, along with evidence of the structure’s chronology and design. In 2025, we also began excavating the fill of the outbuilding’s cellar; exposing its stone foundations; identifying evidence of architectural details situated within the foundation walls; and identifying and excavating any builder’s trenches and a robber’s trench.

Proposed Investigation of FF-47 (site plan below)

For 2026, we propose investigating what we designate as excavation block FF-47. As mapped below, the excavation block is the same as that of FF-46 and measures 65 ft. E-W by 55 ft. N-S. In 2025, the cellar fill was divided into 4 roughly equal parts, and two quarters were excavated to subsoil, leaving one quadrant unexcavated and one that was previously excavated in the 1990s as part of the archaeology excavations conducted by Espey Huston and Associated for the then owner, Stafford County. We are proposing to excavate the last quarter of cellar fill and areas around the cellar itself and more of the area surrounding the cellar.

In FF-46 we also identified four 5ft. squares containing typical stratigraphy to be set aside for preservation, where no excavation will take place and the stratigraphic sequence will be preserved.

We will continue to water screen the cellar fill and take soil chemical samples as is our practice. Analysis of macrobotanical remains produced very limited results, so we will not take additional macrobotanical samples in 2026.

Like FF-44 and FF-46 adjoining, we anticipate that FF-47 will be extremely complicated for the same reasons – large scale disturbances to the site. See historic photos below. The Washington-era support structure burned sometime around 1740; the same location successively hosted a nineteenth-century farmhouse, a 1914 farmhouse that featured a concrete-lined cellar which also subsequently burned in the 1990s, an archeological excavation of part of the cellar-fill that decade (but prior to our ownership and creation of the NPS conservation easement), and an exhibit structure installed on top of the Colbert foundation by Stafford County. Upon our assuming ownership and management of Ferry Farm, the foundation removed the exhibit shelter and filled its cellar (a remnant of the Colbert farmhouse) with sand. This sequence of disturbances resulted in the removal of almost all the cellar's fill layer, most of two of the sandstone foundation walls, and much of the stratigraphy around the structure.

The subsequent disturbances to the architectural remnants and fill layers of this outbuilding dictate the one-time suspension of the Foundation's archaeology policy of leaving portions of significant, sealed contexts of all pre-20th century brick or stone foundation remains unexcavated. Because this feature has been disturbed by the construction of nineteenth and twentieth-century farmhouses, both of which had extensive underground basements, and by the subsequent archaeological testing of the area in and around this feature during the period Ferry Farm was owned by Stafford County, we propose the complete excavation of the heavily disturbed remains of this cellar.

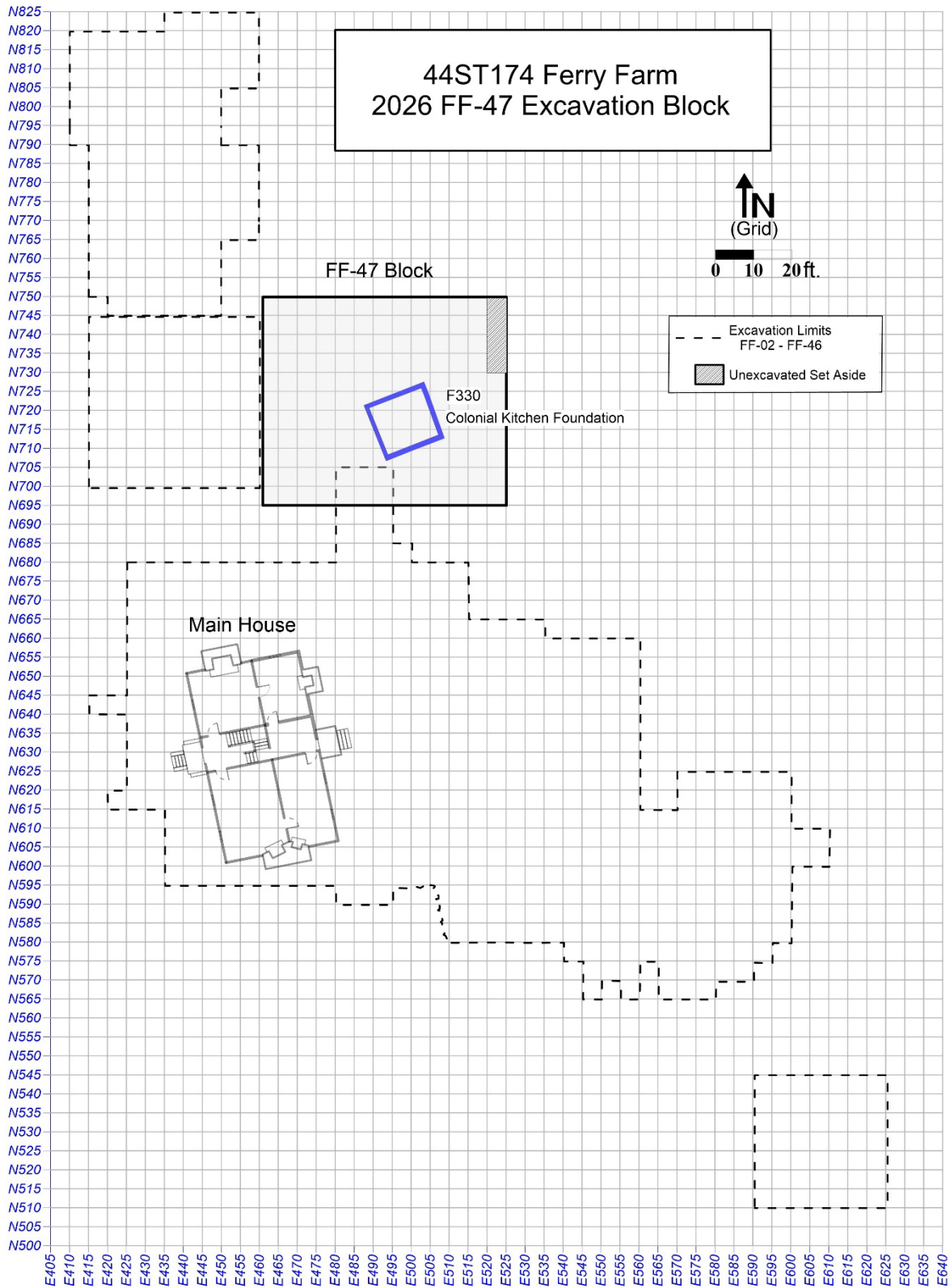


Figure 2. Site Plan: Proposed FF-47 Excavation Block (dark, shaded rectangle). “Colonial Outbuilding Foundation.”



Figure 3. Contributor to post-Washington era ground-disturbance-zone in block FF-47 (proposed for investigation in 2026): the now-demolished Carson House, which stood from 1876 to ca. 1914.



Figure 4. Contributor to post-Washington era ground-disturbance-zone in block FF-47 (proposed for investigation in 2026): the now-demolished: Colbert House after 1990s fire.



Figure 5. Contributor to post-Washington era ground-disturbance-zone in block FF-47 (proposed for investigation in 2026): the now-demolished: cellar of Colbert House being backfilled, 1990s.

Excavation Strategy for the Colonial Kitchen Cellar Remains

Unanticipated Discoveries

For the 2026 archaeological investigation, we propose to adopt the protocols, below, in the event of the discovery of human remains—the protocols adopted for our past archaeological investigations proposed to and approved by NPS through its Section 106 reviews:

The George Washington Foundation shall make all reasonable efforts to avoid disturbing gravesites, including those containing Native American human remains and associated funerary artifacts. The Foundation shall treat all human remains in a manner consistent with the ACHP's Policy Statement Regarding Treatment of Burial Sites, Human Remains and Funerary Objects (February 23, 2007; <http://www.achp.gov/docs/hrpolicy0207.pdf>).

If such are encountered, the Foundation will immediately notify the NPS, which shall immediately notify the SHPO and the consulting parties. All work involving subsurface disturbance will be halted in the area of the resource and in the surrounding area where further subsurface materials can reasonably be expected to occur. If the remains are determined to be of Native American origin, the Foundation shall comply with the provisions of NAGPRA and the accompanying regulations at 43 CFR Part 10. If the remains

are determined not to be of Native American origin, the Foundation shall comply with the Virginia Antiquities Act, Section 10.1-2305 of the Code of Virginia, final regulations adopted by the Virginia Board of Historic Resources published in the Virginia Register on September 20, 2016, 17VAC5-and found in the Code of Virginia 10.1-2305 et seq, or subsequent revisions.

Site Photograph



Figure 6. View to the south along portion of the proposed block (FF-47) extending through fence and intended to investigate the Washington/Strother-eras kitchen remains, amid the subsurface remains of successive 19th- and 20th-century structures. (Fence is a 2016 interpretive feature, approved by NPS during full Section-106 review in 2015, and designed to be removable without ground disturbance—as one section would be for proposed investigation--via a support-sill hidden under grassy berm along fence.)

Archaeological Documentation

The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Archaeological Documentation requires a Statement of Objectives, and a discussion of the methods and the techniques required to accomplish these objectives.

Research Design

Archaeological interpretations usually start by addressing some very basic questions that over time give way to more nuanced questions. Initial research questions include: When

was the structure built? How long was it in use? Which pieces were original to the structure? Which pieces were added and when? When were some of the pieces abandoned or replaced? A second set of questions deals with the notion of function. How was the structure used? Is it a domestic, agricultural, or support building? If domestic, who used it – master, overseer, servant, or tenant? Did the occupants change over time? Does the social standing of new occupants differ from the original owners as the land and buildings become rundown?

A large percentage of the artifacts recovered at Ferry Farm are situated in the plowzone. The rest are situated in sheet refuse and in feature fill. By understanding the distribution of these finds in association with the physical remnants of structures, fences, and work areas, and in conjunction with the local context provided mostly by the historical record, researchers can tease out meaning from these data sets.

Once the basic questions are answered, more sophisticated research questions can be addressed, including:

1. *Develop a better understanding of the spatial organization of eighteenth-century plantations.* The spatial organization of plantations from this period is poorly understood in part because few of these sites have undergone large-scale excavation. Of particular interest are the changing relationships between the planters, indentured servants, and the enslaved. Archaeology is well positioned to help delineate the spatial aspects of the systems put into place to ensure that these groups could co-exist even though they pursued vastly different goals in life.
2. *Develop an understanding of how George Washington came to exhibit certain unique attributes that served him well in his adult life.* Washington developed these characteristics as a boy at Ferry Farm. For example, George developed a fascination with the western portion of Virginia early in life, through his exposure to travelers heading west along the Ferry Road beside his home. This interest stayed with him throughout his adult life. His boyhood home promoted genteel English behaviors such as surveying, the tea ceremony, and proper plantation management. By exploring the material circumstances of his situation and those of his family we may be able to trace the origins of these character traits, traits which form the basis of the nascent American cultural psyche, an identity which Washington adopted, and which ultimately led to his enthusiastic support for, and participation in, the American Revolution.
3. *Develop an understanding of the economic and social circumstances of the Washingtons before and after Augustine's death.* While the death of a patriarch is a shattering experience for most families, Augustine's family suffered more than most. At his death Augustine Washington, following the practices of the day, provided a parcel of land to each of his sons, leaving the home farm and ten slaves to George, to be inherited when he turned 21. As tradition dictated, George's mother, Mary, managed the farm until he came of age. Mary remained a widow for the remainder of her long life. Lost revenues from the two expansive plantations given to Augustine's oldest sons greatly reduced the income of those family members that remained at the home farm.

A lack of resources prevented George from going to England for a formal, classical education, as his planter-class peers did. Money was so tight that George did not even attend a colonial college, instead becoming a surveyor. In a letter to Lawrence, George cancelled a planned visit for fear that his poorly fed horse was not up to the task. Archaeology will shed light on the material aspects of their lives during this difficult period. How did these hardships influence George Washington as he grew to manhood and became a proponent of the American Revolution? What was daily life like for the Washington families and the domestic enslaved workers who performed much of the work around the plantation house?

4. *Develop a better understanding of the spatial use of the landscape over the thousands of years of occupation at the Ferry Farm site.* The site was in use before and after the Washington Family occupation. Several thousand years earlier, American Indians used this area repeatedly as a temporary campsite. Excavations have unearthed numerous projectile points, tools, flakes and for the first time a concentration of Middle Woodland pottery was recovered in 2012. The 2014 excavation uncovered two prehistoric features. Several prehistoric features have been subsequently recovered along with an intermittently present American Indian layer. In the nineteenth century, Ferry Farm operated as an absentee owned farm and was impacted heavily by the Battle of Fredericksburg.

The recovery of the land and its continued agricultural use during the post-bellum period is an important, yet poorly understood and underappreciated aspect of Virginia history. Archaeological investigations will contribute significantly to an analysis of this era. A successful and expansive farming occupation was established here in the twentieth century. The Colbert Family appreciated the history of their property. In addition, popular movements to preserve the site began here in the twentieth century, well after such efforts were underway at Mount Vernon but in conjunction with the Wakefield National Memorial Association efforts at the birthplace of George Washington.

Excavation Strategy

The excavation employs a grid oriented 10 degrees west of magnetic north. All locations in this text are in reference to grid north. With the help of the National Park Service in the early 2000's, Ferry Farm staff established two permanent datum points south and west of the site that were tied into the USGS coordinate system using GPS. Using temporary grid coordinates for excavation units in the field, staff archaeologists later convert the temporary grid coordinates into USGS coordinates.

Using 5-ft.-square excavation units, the research design calls for the use of the open-area excavation technique. This technique requires archaeologists to uncover a site layer by layer resulting in a detailed "snapshot" of a particular point in time. For a large portion of the site, machine plowing created only two layers of stratigraphy (topsoil and plowzone). The areas directly north and east of the house are unplowed and several natural layers and

associated features have been encountered. Using trowels and shovels, excavators remove these layers in standard excavation units.

Layers and features are assigned unique numbers for identification purposes. Information about the physical attributes of these layers and features are recorded using the standard context form developed by the George Washington Foundation (GWF) Archaeology Department. Items recorded include Munsell color, soil texture, samples taken, documentation, and a general description. Features are further recorded using plan and profile drawings, photographs, and elevations. All measurements are taken in feet and tenths of feet.

All soils are screened. Plowzone, cultural layers, and features containing light concentrations of artifacts are passed through a ¼-inch mesh hardware cloth. Artifact rich-features are water-screened using 1/16th inch mesh. Soil chemistry samples are collected from both soil layers and feature fills.

Once inside the laboratory, artifacts are washed, sorted, identified, labeled, and cataloged in an Access database. Ceramics and glass are cross mended and are analyzed as objects instead of sherds. Artifacts are permanently stored in the Ferry Farm Visitor Center. Small finds in need of stabilization are conserved by an outside contractor. Additional details about small finds, including photographs and metric attributes, are recorded in the department's object catalog database.

The budget for the entire project is \$ 115,000.

Reporting

As per past reporting, we propose to provide to the NPS, for its review and comment-- and distribution to DHR and the NPS's Section-106 consulting parties for review and comment--an Interim Technical Report with the preliminary results of and our conclusions for the 2026 archaeological investigation. We have submitted such reports annually under the requirements of the Programmatic Agreement for Ferry Farm, we propose to continue this protocol for the 2026 investigation. An updated Programmatic Agreement was signed and put into effect in 2025.