

CUSTIS SQUARE PROJECT

> *Uncovering the stories of this once famous landscape.*



John Custis IV was known as a bold and scientifically curious gardener. He also enslaved more than 200 people who labored at his profitable tobacco plantations. His story includes threads that weave the history of Williamsburg together with events, contradictions and people who created a new American identity in the first half of the 18th century.

The Custis Square Project



Above: Archaeologist Megan Veness reviews a master plan for the excavation of the Custis property.

Below: Artifacts from the archaeology collection, soon to be showcased in the new Archaeology Center.

The Custis Square project provides an extraordinary opportunity to enhance our understanding of early American gardening, enslavement, colonial consumerism and 18th-century scientific thought. The project is focused on uncovering the remains of long-hidden landscapes, ornamental grounds and the places where enslaved men and women lived and worked on the property.

Generous donor investment provided support to undertake a five-year archaeological investigation of this four-acre site. During excavations, archaeologists discovered the outline of the central portion of Custis' famous garden and over 328,000 artifacts, including layers of underfired bricks believed to have been part of the construction of his home.

Archaeological investigation has been at the core of Colonial Williamsburg since 1928. Through active digs in the Historic Area, guests can watch the process, ask

questions and learn through discovery about past lives.

Custis Square is one of our most significant current projects. Two limited investigations of the site in the 1960s provided evidence of the property's structures, including Custis' Jacobean style house, a kitchen, a smokehouse

and two wells. However, little was previously known about the garden, and even less is known about the people who worked it.

Through modern archaeological methods and analytical techniques, we are uncovering the stories of this once famous landscape, located on the corner of South Nassau and Francis streets. Discoveries include evidence of structures and a 160-foot section of the gardens, south of the area where the house was located.

The project also advances the Foundation's educational focus. For example, we host a Public Archaeology Institute, working with high school students who learn about the archaeology process and interpretation, preparing them to create social media content about the project and lead site tours.

As we work through the archaeology project, additional investment will provide support to recreate the garden and outbuildings and allow us to interpret this site, which promises much to reveal about the gardens and the enslaved and free people who worked on the property.