

**An Evaluation of Socio-Economic Status at a Domestic Site, Community III Structure G,
of the Longdale Mining Company, Allegheny County, Virginia**

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Introduction

Since the early 1990s, the abandoned Longdale Mining Company has been the focus of considerable research by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. Located in Allegheny County approximately 20 miles west of Lexington, the once thriving iron-mining community employed hundreds of people during a time period when neighboring lands were deemed the frontier. Sadly, little is known about the inhabitants of the various communities that were associated with the Longdale Mining Company outside what has been given to us from limited oral history reports, preliminary archival research, and the material artifacts from the archaeological sites. However, extensive student and faculty research in the past decades on the site have helped to shed light on the lifestyles of the people living at the Longdale compound, specifically on the inhabitants' various socio-economic statuses and cultural orientations.

History of the Longdale Mining Company

Before I began research this summer on the Longdale area, I had to become very familiar with previous research performed on the archaeological sites in this region. Industrial activity in the area eventually called "Longdale" can first be associated with a cold blast furnace, the Lucy Selina, which was erected in 1827 (Stroh n.d.). In order to increase the productivity of the iron mining company in view of competitive iron mining market, the owners constructed and completed a new, hot blast furnace named the Australia in 1854. Finally, the company was given its namesake when it was incorporated in 1871 (Stroh n.d). Eventually, the Longdale Mining Company was abandoned in 1911 as other competing iron producing companies become more productive and successful (Stroh n.d).

Archaeological survey has identified four distinct communities that existed in the time the mining companies were operating. Community 1 was comprised of at least 35 structures, 20 in Community 2, 16 in Community 3, and 8 in Community 4 (Stroh n.d.). Exactly which domestic structures are associated with which industrial periods is a matter of continuing research. Research during the summer of 2003 sought to address these and other questions.

I chose to work with Community 3 Structure G in the Longdale Mining Community as the focus of my research this past summer. Prior to the excavation and artifact analysis of Community 3 Structure G, W&L archaeologists inferred that the community existed as a shanty town, consisting of ethnic minorities of low socio-economic status. This hypothesis was based on three factors: a) the location of the site, which is relatively isolated from the mining complex and other associated communities; b) the sizes of the structures' foundations within Community 3, which are smaller than those in the other communities; and c) an oral history interview in

which a long-time resident of the area said that this community was a shanty-town inhabited by Italian- and African-Americans (Stroh n.d.). However, extensive artifact research which includes the spatial distribution of the artifacts around Structure G has revealed several other possibilities as to who occupied the structure, when, and how they used it. Dr. Alison Bell and I have agreed on the conclusions that shall be presented in the remainder of the paper.

STRUCTURE G

The first aspect of Community 3 Structure G that must be examined is the structural layout. When the site was first excavated in 1995 by W&L field school students, they uncovered a stone structure roughly twenty feet in length and eighteen feet in width. The western wall is not as complete as the other sides of the structure. Structures of this size in Virginia generally contained two rooms (Bell 2003b). However, my analysis suggests that the house may have been larger than this foundation. I will explain how artifact distributions show that the house may have had a third room, perhaps on piers, to the north of the existing foundation. Included within the structure is a stone hearth on the northern side. The presence of the stone hearth reveals that Structure G could have been heated and therefore occupied on a year-round basis. Also this hearth could have been used for cooking purposes. The ceramic evidence for cooking activities is mentioned below.

Our first and most readily-reached conclusion regarding Structure G was that it was a domestic structure. Evidence gathered from the artifacts recovered from the site support this conclusion. In all, 3,635 artifacts were recovered from archaeological testing at this site in 1995 and 2003. These include 303 ceramic sherds, 640 pieces of window glass, and over 1300 nails, as

well as buttons, buckles, smoking pipes, grommets, parts of combs and other personal effects expected on domestic sites.

In 1995, archaeologists hypothesized that the site examined consisted of only one structure, Structure G. However, in the spring of 2003 the field school students dug shovel test pits (STPs) every ten feet around the building. They also conducted a metal detector survey and placed excavation units in an area with a relatively high artifact concentration. Excavations in this area have revealed a possible second structure located approximately twenty-five feet from the southwest corner of the main dwelling. Based on Surfer artifact distribution maps created by Katherine Hill, a 2003 W&L graduate, the highest concentration of all nails is found in the main house, but this second location also has a notable concentration. The majority of these nails are 2-4 inch cut nails, which are primarily used for construction purposes. There were few small nails (less than two inches) which are often used for wooden trim. Therefore this building was probably not finished as nicely as the main house. In conjunction with the presence of cut nails of this length, a small amount of window glass (both by number and by overall weight within the units) was discovered in this locale. Because the presence of structural nails and small amount window glass was found here, it can be inferred that a small wooden outbuilding was located here. We were also able to deduce that this location housed a small structure and not simply a trash midden by the overall spatial distribution of the artifacts found at Structure G. Because the structure is located adjacent to a hill, it would be expected that the inhabitants discarded their trash at the bottom of the hill, away from their living area. However, testing at the base of the hill revealed few artifacts; nearly all of the artifacts of Structure G were recovered from two distinct locations. Therefore, the spatial distribution of the artifacts suggests the presence of another smaller, wooden building adjacent to the main structure.

At this point, a new question arose: what was the purpose of this second building? Archaeological testing in this area did not reveal clear evidence of a stone foundation. However, this does not mean that there could not have been a building here. One side of Structure G's foundation no longer exists, and it would not be surprising if an outbuilding had a very simple foundation or stone piers that are not in situ and can no longer be distinguished from the many other pieces of stone naturally occurring on the site.

Artifacts recovered from the second structure include pieces of a cast iron stove and substantial amounts of container glass, although the greatest container glass densities (by weight) are in the main house and just to the northwest of it. Negligible amounts of ceramics were found in the location of the outbuilding. We are not yet certain how to interpret this structure. The stove parts suggest that it was a heated building, and perhaps that cooking also took place in it. The container glass could support the idea that this structure was a detached kitchen. However, the ceramic evidence does not support this hypothesis. If this were a kitchen, we would expect to see more ceramic sherds around it. However, in support of our kitchen theory, roughly 20 % of the faunal remains were located at the spot of the second structure. The majority of the remaining bones were found in the northwestern corner and near the hearth of the main building, signifying the location of food consumption within the main building.

Even though we still have questions about the function of the outbuilding, the Surfer maps and artifact analysis shed allow great insight into the main building of Structure G. Looking at the Surfer maps showing concentrations of general construction nails (2-4 inches long) and smaller nails, we found that the main building was made of wood and potentially had wooden trim or lath. This is evident from the high number ($n = 616$) of various types of finishing nails (those nails under 2 inches). These nails are most heavily concentrated on the

northwestern side of the building. This may indicate that the room with the hearth was had more lath and trim than the southern room, which appears to have been unheated. In Virginia, if houses have just one hearth, it is in the hall, which is the more open and public part of the house (Bell 2003b). The distribution of small nails at this site suggests that this room was better finished than the more private parlor (or chamber).

Within the building as well we have found concentrations of window glass, primarily in two locations: one on the western wall and one on the eastern wall. There is virtually no evidence for windows on the north and south sides of the house. The hearth is on the north side of the house, and chimneys were generally on the gable ends of houses. Therefore it appears that Structure G had windows on the front and back facades but not on the gable ends. Because we do not know where the wall was between the two rooms of the house, we cannot tell which room or rooms had windows. However, the windows appear to have opposite each other, suggesting that the house was well ventilated.

The distribution of ceramics poses an interesting situation in terms of the actual size of the main building of Structure G. Based on the Surfer map for the distribution of ceramic sherds by weight, we found that two specific locations produced the most ceramics. The first location is along the western side of the structure. This is the rear façade of the dwelling that faced the creek. The ceramics concentrate along the northern end of this wall. This is a likely location for a doorway which would have opened into the hall (the heated room). Therefore the ceramic sherds that accumulated here may show that residents swept or threw small pieces of broken pottery out of this back door. This pattern also suggests that some food consumption may have happened in this room.

Unexpectedly, the Surfer map for the distribution of all ceramics identifies another concentration of ceramics on the northern wall of the building with the hearth *outside* of the building. The distributions of ceramic sherds by number and weight both show this pattern. The refined earthenware sherds on the site were also concentrated in this location. We found this to be very odd because if the main building of Structure G was used for dining, it would be expected that the majority of ceramics would be recovered from the main structure and not outside of it. Also, having a door on the gable end of a house next to a chimney would have been unusual, and so we do not think that ceramics accumulated just north of the house because it was a doorway. With this in mind, we hypothesize that an additional room of the main building may have existed north of the visible foundation. Perhaps W&L archaeologists have not identified a foundation in this area because they have not tested it as thoroughly as the area to the south, or because the room on this end of the structure was on piers that do not survive. The concentrations of ceramics suggest that this room may have served as a kitchen, which makes sense because the hearth could have opened into this room (and into the hall to the south). Though further archaeological excavations in the future may provide better evidence for this hypothesis, some of the hypotheses we have presented thus far may be further supplemented in examination of the societal and cultural aspects of the inhabitants of the community.

THE INHABITANTS

In order to properly assess the hypothesis that Community 3 was a shanty town of low socio-economic status, several questions needed to be answered: a) when was this community operating? Which of the three furnace periods does the site correlate with? b) Who lived there?

Were they families, bunkhouses for male workers, ethnic minorities, etc.? and c) How did they live? What did they use in their daily lives and what kind of activities did they partake in that provides information as to their socio-economic status? By answering these questions to the best of our capabilities, we felt we would be able to provide insight into the daily lives of the inhabitants of Community 3 of the Longdale Mining Complex.

One of the first and most important questions that we wanted to answer regarding Community 3 Structure G is when the site was in operation. This has been a seemingly difficult subject. There is a wide range of production dates for many of the artifacts found on the site. However, we have been completely successful in disregarding the 1827 furnace period, as most of the artifacts, with the exception of cut nails (TPQ 1805), can be dated to after that period. Based on TPQ lists (McFaden n.d.; Miller et al. 2000) and other information, Community 3 Structure G can most accurately be dated to the Australian furnace period, 1854-1865 (cf. Stroh n.d.; McDaniel et al. 1998).

There are several artifacts that have enabled us to agree on this period of establishment for Community 3 Structure G of the Longdale Mining Complex. Recovered from the site were several hard rubber buttons and one calico button. The hard rubber buttons (one with molded "Goodyear & Co") have a TPQ of 1851 (McFaden n.d.). The calico button in the collection is similar to others that were first seen in the 1860s (Luscomb 1967:31). Two Virginia Confederate Civil War buttons have been identified on the site: one button with the imperial eagle on the front, the other with "Scovils & Co/Extra" on the back. These two buttons are similar to many produced during the early 1860s. Finally, four coins have been excavated from Structure G. There were two Indian head pennies from 1864 and 1870, a five cent piece dated to 1866, and another penny from 1865. The occurrence of these pennies is not unusual, as it was expected

that inhabitants of the Community may have had some petty change, but not enough to be deemed very wealthy. These coins can best be used for dating purposes. From the site we also see a nearly complete lack of manganese solarized glass and wire nails with TPQs of 1880 and 1860, respectively. There are also no decal-decorated ceramics, which were very popular beginning in the late 19th century. Therefore, our best estimate as for the first settlement of Community 3 based on the artifacts recovered from Structure G is the Australian furnace period from the 1850s and 60s.

Next to be determined is who lived at Community 3 Structure G during this time period. When the site was first excavated and believed to be a shanty town, the inhabitants were expected to be poor ethnic minorities that worked at the furnace. However, artifact analysis has revealed that the inhabitants of Structure G may in fact be male and female African-Americans of a more middle socio-economic status. There are many pieces of evidence and prior research that have enabled us to come to this conclusion.

There are three distinct sources of evidence that support our hypothesis that the inhabitants of Community 3 Structure G were male and female African Americans. To support our inference that the inhabitants were both male and female, we relied on the exceptionally large number of buttons ($n = 204$) recovered from the main building of Structure G. The buttons, along with 2 scissors, show that some occupants of the house were productive seamstresses. Sewing was most commonly a female task in nineteenth-century Virginia. Though the majority of the buttons were made of white opaque glass (which were unisex buttons that could be used on most shirts or blouses), the remaining buttons could be classified as distinctly male or female buttons. Several different colored buttons (including the calico button), conical buttons, domed buttons, and embossed glass buttons recovered from the site were marketed in the nineteenth

century as women's buttons (citation). Glass beads found on the site were also mostly likely worn by females. A few other artifacts were more likely used by males. One Virginia Confederate button has been identified with certainty; two more potential Virginia Confederate buttons were found in Structure G, signifying that at least one person had access to clothing issued to enlisted men in the Armed Forces during the Civil War. Therefore, these artifacts support our hypothesis that Structure G was occupied by both male and female inhabitants. Interestingly, though, the artifact sample from this site contained no toys or other indications that children were present on the site.

The other two sources that we've used to conclude the inhabitants may be African American include the ceramics recovered from the site as well as the overall distribution of the artifacts from the site with respect to the two buildings within Structure G. The types of ceramics found in Structure G shed light on the ethnicity of its inhabitants. Based on the minimum vessel count that I performed, at least 31 vessels were found on the site. Of the 31 vessels, 12 could be identified as hollow, 9 were flat, and 10 could not be properly determined. The vessels identified included cups, saucers, bowls, and plates. None of the vessels identified were crocks or other large vessels for food storage. Several archaeologists have found this pattern – a lack of food storage vessels and the presence of many tablewares – on African American sites in Virginia and the South (Bell 2003a). It has been speculated that most of the food storage vessels used by African Americans were large gourds and other biodegradable products; thus, they would not appear in the archaeological record. The use of gourds, baskets and other perishable containers for food storage may explain why Structure G in Community 3 produced no ceramic utilitarian vessels.

Additionally, the appearance of pieces of adornment in Structure G may provide evidence for African American inhabitation. Recovered from Structure G were several multi-colored beads and a five-cent, 1866 coin with a hole punched in it. Research in other areas of Virginia and the South has shown the prevalence of pieces of adornment such as these in many African American settlements (Samford 1996:102). The presence of these artifacts was striking to us because blue glass beads and pierced coins have been central to debates within historical archaeology about material culture and ethnicity. On one hand, it seems that anyone (regardless of ethnicity) could have acquired and used such objects. In practice, though, pierced coins and blue glass beads are very commonly found on African-American sites from the nineteenth century. According to Patricia Samford (1996:101) African Americans commonly punched holes in coins as a charm to protect themselves from evil spirits and bad luck. Therefore, the combination of the beads and coin, the spatial distribution of artifacts, the prevalence of dinnerware ceramics, and the abundance of male and female buttons appears to support our hypothesis that Structure G was inhabited by male and female African Americans.

One of the major goals of our research on Community 3 Structure G was to determine who was living in the community at the time, how they made use of their time, and in turn, what their activities reveal about their socio-economic status. The artifacts recovered from the site suggest a more leisurely, more middle-class lifestyle among the inhabitants of Community 3 Structure G than the shanty-town designation suggests. From the artifacts we have drawn several conclusions about the people of Structure G.

The first and one of the most important pieces of evidence that shows a higher level of socio-economic status than expected was the proportion of decorated refined earthenware to undecorated earthenware on the site in comparison to some of the other sites examined by my

colleagues. Although the residents of Community 3 Structure G were not wealthy, their possessions were not very different from those of other nineteenth-century Longdale residents such as those who lived in houses with larger foundations in Community II. In Structure G, 10 of 27 refined earthenware vessels (approximately 37%) are decorated. On another local site, Community 2 Structure E, studied by my colleague Lisa Sauer, the proportion of decorated refined earthenware to undecorated refined earthenware is 5 of 15 (15%). On yet another local site, Community 2 Structure G, studied by my colleague Paul La Raia, the proportion of decorated refined earthenware to undecorated refined earthenware is 9 of 29 (approximately 31%). A comparison of the number of decorated refined earthenware sherds among my site, Sauer's and La Raia's has yielded percentages of 14%, 10%, and 17% respectively. It is inferred that Community II Structures E and G, though from the 1871 furnace period, were occupied by people of a middle socio-economic class (La Raia 2003; Sauer 2003; Stroh n.d.). It appears that the ceramic proportions from Community 3 Structure G are similar to a middle class in Community 2 Structure E. Therefore, based on this cross-community comparison, it seems that the inhabitants of Structure G may represent more of a more affluent family and household instead of our initial assumption of a low-class shanty-town house.

Matched sets of ceramics and glassware in the Community 3 Structure G site support this hypothesis. From this site, we've found a matched set of painted polychrome ceramic bowls and saucers, as well as a matched set of embossed glass bowls and cups. The appearance of matched sets of both glassware and ceramics reveals a higher socio-economic status than expected, as it was typically more expensive to purchase sets of dinnerware or glassware than the pieces individually. Therefore, the presence of matched sets of ceramics and glassware helps to provide evidence for a higher socio-economic status than we originally thought.

Faunal remains from the site have also been promising in helping to determine the socio-economic status of the inhabitants of Structure G. Michael Barber, a specialist in faunal remains, looked briefly at the bones and noted that the inhabitants of Structure G were eating cows, pigs, chicken, and sheep. Some of the cuts of meat were better than others, but the faunal assemblage is not what Barber would expect in a very poor household. Good cuts of meat, based on the faunal remains found at Structure G, include a sheep's shoulder and pig's humerus, and chicken breasts and wings. According to Barber, the chicken bones could be suggestive of the residents' status because some studies have found that chickens were more expensive (pound for pound) than pigs or cattle. Also, we see a lack of pig's metatarsals and tarsal bones at the site. These bones represent parts of animals that had little meat and would be expected in a shanty town. Therefore, an initial glimpse of the faunal remains from Community 3 Structure G hint at a higher socio-economic status than we at first expected.

As for the residents' daily life, there are three distinct activities that occurred at Community 3 Structure G. As noted above, based on the high number of different forms of buttons (n = 204) and two pairs of scissors it appears that sewing was a regular activity at Structure G. This helps to show exactly who lived at Structure G. Because sewing was not typically a man's duty during the time period, it can be assumed that women existed with the men here at Community 3. Based on the sheer number of buttons that appeared in the archaeological record, it can be inferred that sewing was a productive activity occurring at Structure G.

One of the other and probably most evident activities occurring in Structure G was cooking and dining. As noted earlier in the report, the artifacts provide inconclusive evidence about whether cooking took place in the smaller building located to the southwest of the main

building. Pieces of a cast iron stove, a large concentration of structural nails, and a high volume of container glass indicates the likelihood of cooking in this building, but it contains very few ceramics. The ceramic distributions suggest that cooking and eating happened mostly in the northern room of the house, and possibly in an additional room that extended further to the north on the other side of the hearth base. In the main dwelling and to the northwest of it, we have found considerable evidence for dining. Knives and spoons as dining utensils have been recovered from this area, including a high volume of container glass, plates, bowls, cups, and saucers. Therefore, the primary activities occurring in Structure G are cooking, dining, and sewing. If the southern room of the main dwelling was a parlor or chamber, we would expect the residents to have used that space for sleeping.

The third other prominent activity occurring at Structure G is smoking. Parts of seven red clay smoking pipes and one ball clay smoking pipe were found on the site. The red clay pipes are elbow pipes that would have had reed stems. During this time period, smoking was primarily performed as a recreational activity by men, although some women are also known to have smoked pipes. Whether used by men or women, the pipes suggest some leisure time to sit and smoke after work mining or sewing.

CONCLUSION

After our summer's research on Community 3 Structure G, we have come to many realizations about the inhabitants of our site. It appears that the settlement was in occupation during the Australia furnace period in the 1850s and 60s. Its residents were probably male and female, and possibly were African Americans. Initially we hypothesized that they were of a lower class, but now we infer that they had more of a middling economic status. Their relatively

large number of decorated ceramics, for example, and cuts of meat are not consistent with the shanty town model. Artifact analysis has revealed the people were engaging in cooking, dining, sewing, and other forms of activities. We have abandoned our initial hypothesis that the inhabitants of Community 3 Structure G were individuals of low socio-economic status and are entertaining a new, unexpected hypothesis that African-American men and women of a middle class lived here during the mid 1800s.

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