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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Enslavement and Autonomy in Late Eighteenth-Century Albany, New York

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**Abstract** In 1998, Hartgen Archeological Associates, Inc., excavated the remains of the John Bogart House basement in downtown Albany, New York. Archaeologists found a small artifact-filled barrel buried below the floor adjacent to an interior dividing wall. Most striking were the number of sharp and modified objects within this barrel and elsewhere under the basement floor that were likely hidden or lost by enslaved African Americans who occupied the space during the late 18th century. Albany underwent a dramatic social and political transformation at the end of the 18th century, causing anxiety and tension with the city. Within this uncertain post-Revolutionary climate, Albany's African American community expressed a measure of public autonomy through the Pinkster festival. At the same time, African Americans at the Bogart House were carefully curating multivalent objects to express personal autonomy and group identity in the face of often violent repression.

**Resumen** En el año 1998, Hartgen Archeological Associates, Inc., excavó los restos del sótano de la Casa de John Bogart en el centro de Albany, Nueva York. Los arqueólogos encontraron un pequeño barril lleno de artefactos enterrado debajo del piso adyacente a una pared divisoria interior. Lo más sorprendente fue la cantidad de objetos afilados y modificados dentro de este barril y en otras partes debajo del piso del sótano que probablemente fueron escondidos o perdidos por los afroamericanos esclavizados que ocuparon el espacio durante la década de 1790. Albany experimentó una transformación social y política dramática a fines del siglo XVIII, lo que provocó ansiedad y tensión en la ciudad. Dentro de este clima posrevolucionario incierto, la comunidad afroamericana de Albany expresó cierta autonomía pública a través del festival Pinkster. Al mismo tiempo, los afroamericanos en la Casa de Bogart seleccionaban cuidadosamente objetos polivalentes para expresar la autonomía personal y la identidad grupal frente a la represión, a menudo violenta.

**Résumé** En 1998, Hartgen Archeological Associates, Inc., a procédé à des fouilles dans le sous-sol de la John Bogart House dans le centre ville d'Albany, New York. Les archéologues y ont trouvé un petit tonneau rempli d'artéfacts sous le sol adjacent à un mur intérieur de séparation. Le plus surprenant était le nombre d'objets pointus et modifiés dans ce tonneau et ailleurs sous le plancher de ce sous-sol qui furent vraisemblablement cachés ou perdus par des Africains-Américains esclaves ayant occupé l'espace au cours des années 1790. Albany a connu une transformation politique et sociale dramatique à la fin du 18ème siècle, source d'anxiété et de tension avec la ville. Dans ce climat post-révolutionnaire incertain, la communauté Africaine-Américaine a exprimé un certaine autonomie publique grâce au festival Pinkster. Concomitamment, les Africains-Américains de la Bogart House créaient avec soin des objets polyvalents pour exprimer leur autonomie personnelle et leur identité de groupe face à une répression souvent violente.

**Keywords** slavery · New York · autonomy · basement

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## Introduction

The last half of the 18th century was a volatile time in the history of Albany, New York, as decisive battles of the French and Indian War and the American Revolution were fought to the north. Some measure of independence from Britain was achieved in the latter conflict, yet many people of color were still held in bondage under the brutality of chattel slavery. Within this paradox of the Revolution, wealthy descendants of the first Dutch families who settled the Hudson River valley fought to maintain the institution of slavery. And slavery in New York was every bit as dehumanizing and violent as it was on Southern plantations. Eventually enslavers were forced to settle for a system of gradual emancipation beginning in 1799 and ending in 1827.

Two major fires decimated portions of Albany in 1793 and 1797, at the same time that New York politicians were debating the fate of slavery. These fires destroyed the homes of many prominent Albany citizens, who were also enslavers. In 1997 and 1998, archaeologists from Hartgen Archeological Associates, Inc. (2002), excavated the remains of the John Bogart home destroyed in the 1797 fire (Fig. 1). Archaeologists discovered the burned remnants of the basement floorboards covering the subfloor layer of soil. Under these floorboards was a small barrel feature that had no apparent functional correlates, such as a sump, well, or other structural feature. Archaeologists working on the excavations speculated that the barrel, and artifacts contained within, may have been placed there by enslaved African Americans living in the house (Kirk 2002:5.30; Wheeler 2017:390).

Many of the artifacts recovered from the subfloor barrel were common refuse items including animal bone, oyster shell, ball clay pipe fragments, bottle glass, and ceramic sherds. Other objects appear to have been carefully curated. These include several knives, one awl, one ax head, two pot hooks, two iron bars from leg shackles, iron chains, and numerous personal items, such as buckles and one marble. Letters have been carved into some of the bone and clay objects. Other objects are rare on late 18th-century Albany sites, such as a complete reticulated cowry helmet (*Cypraecassis testiculus*). In addition, an ax head, chisel, wood plane, several coins, a copper cross, cut glass gems, a signed Catlinite tobacco pipe, buckles, and other personal objects were recovered from beneath the floor elsewhere in the basement along with faunal remains and other refuse. Archaeologists found that very few personal items, altered pieces, and metal tools were recovered from the privy and rubble above the floor (Kirk 2002). The artifacts from contexts were remarkably different in composition compared to the subfloor artifacts. If some or all of the contents of the barrel and those artifacts recovered from beneath the floor do not represent simple refuse, then what other interpretations might be drawn from these data?

Acknowledging the possible association with enslaved African Americans is a first step in realizing the potential cultural significance of the artifact assemblages. But a more thorough contextual analysis is needed to fully explore the barrel's placement, use, and possible association between other artifacts recovered from beneath the basement floor and the barrel feature. Our spatial, stratigraphic, and artifact analyses at the household level are contextualized within the local and regional cultural history of late 18th-century New York. We explore the tense milieu of Albany as the city transitioned from a colonial mercantile center to a state capital where African Americans' attempts to express their autonomy were met with physically and symbolically violent retribution. From this analysis, we argue that the barrel, and its material contents, were carefully curated by enslaved African Americans to create an autonomous cultural space and confront the conditions of slavery.

## Occupants of the Bogart House

Like many densely packed, poorly organized cities, Federal-period Albany witnessed its share of terrific conflagrations. The November 1793 fire consumed 26 homes and businesses, led to the execution of three African Americans convicted of the fire, and enflamed smoldering racial tensions (Gerlach 1977:306). Sporadic, smaller fires continued to unsettle the city for the next several years. In 1797, the northern part of the city suffered a far larger fire than the one endured on the southern end four years earlier. All told, 179 structures, including homes, businesses, stables, stores, and storehouses, were consumed by the suspected arson (*Weekly Museum* 1797).

Among the victims of the 1797 fire were several middle-class merchants along the east side of Watervliet Street, including the John Bogart household. By





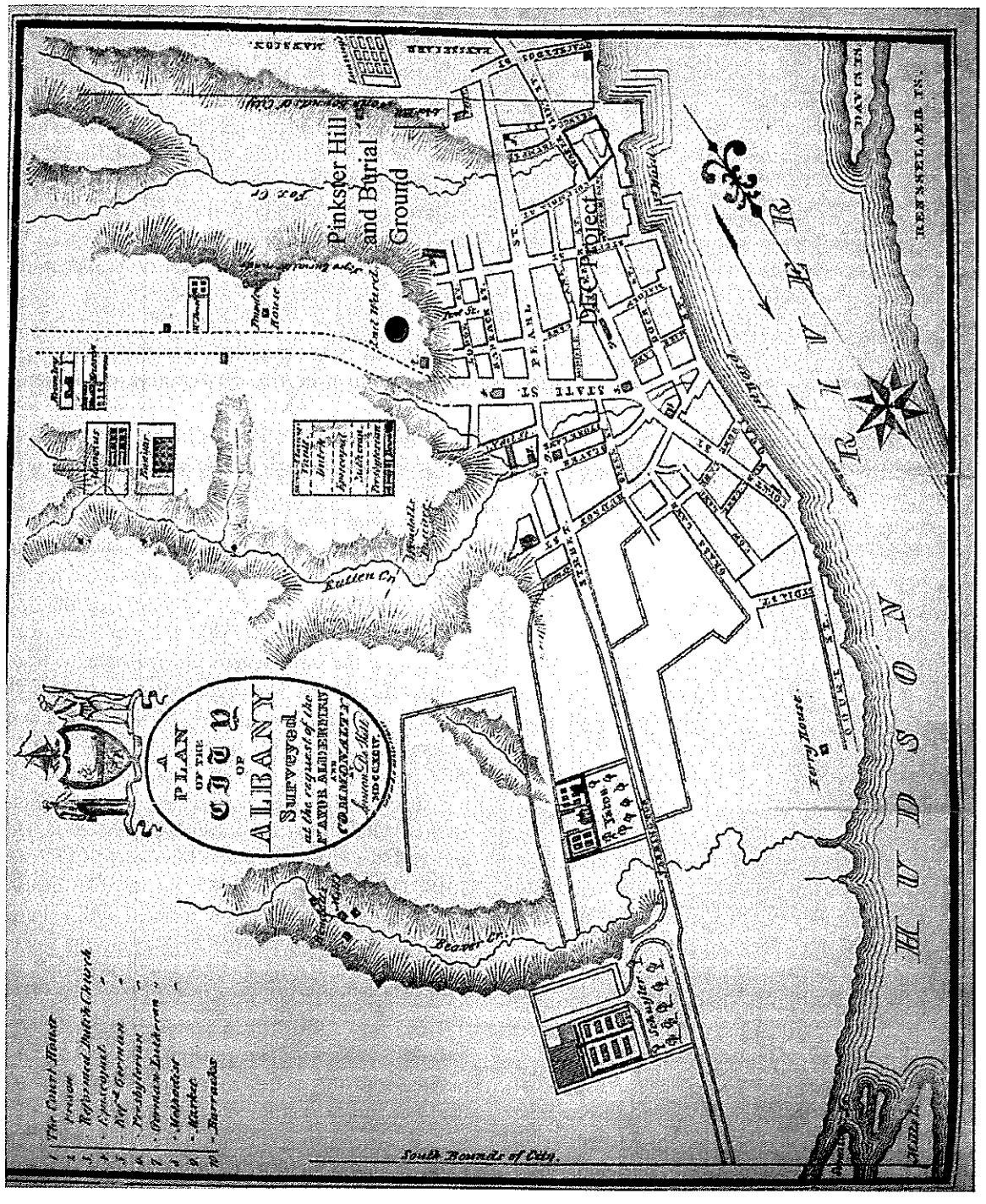



**Fig. 1** Map of Albany by Simeon DeWitt, 1794, showing the project area and Pinkster Hill. (Image courtesy of the New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Albany.)

1790, no less than seven homes, along with attached and detached stores and storehouses, and numerous other smaller outbuildings, crowded this small section of the block from Columbia Street to the creek. This neighborhood was considered one of the most fashionable areas for the burgeoning middle class, most of whom were enslavers.

Abraham Van Vechten, a prominent lawyer active in local government, took possession of the Bogart house between 1790 and 1792. Before moving to Albany, the Van Vechten family was living in the town of Caughnawaga in the Mohawk valley west of Albany. Their Caughnawaga household contained four free and three enslaved people immediately prior to moving to Albany (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1790b). For reasons unclear, Van Vechten moved his house and law practice from Watervliet Street in 1795 and, after months of advertising in the local newspapers, found a new tenant in John Bogart (*Albany Gazette* 1796a, 1796b).

Like many merchants in Albany, John Bogart was intimately involved with Hudson River sloop traffic and was an enslaver like his predecessors. During the early part of the Revolutionary War, Bogart served as a hand for his father on board the sloop *Magdalena*. A year later, in 1777, he was promoted to captain of the sloop and as part of the transport services worked under several quartermasters of the Northern Division. Bogart continued as a sloop captain into the 19th century.

A blacksmith shop of Levinus Dunbar and John Pruyn was situated off the rear of the Bogart lot, fronting along an alleyway that would later become an extension of Montgomery Street (*Albany Centinel* 1797). Dunbar, a carpenter by trade, built a dwelling along Watervliet Street around 1783 according to a recorded mortgage (Albany County Mortgages 1783; Bogart 1792). This relatively small house was placed between Bogart and Winne's homes. While it does not appear that Dunbar and Pruyn were enslavers, their nearby operation may have rented enslaved labor.

Personal letters from the time indicate Bogart purchased an enslaved person in early 1796, while living on Watervliet Street. An inquiry to his friend Peter Van Gaasbeek, indicated he wished to obtain a "Good Healthy Stout Negro man ... to join on Board the Sloop" (Bogart 1796a). Subsequent correspondence between the two regarding payments reveal the man was purchased from Doctor Peter Vanderlyn of Kingston (Bogart 1796b). The enslaved man was not named, but an advertisement in the local newspaper from John Bogart in 1798 allows for some speculation. In the spring of that year, a man named "Bill, or Will" about 35 years old who spoke both Dutch and English, ran away from Bogart with his enslaved wife, Bett, and their two children from the Troy area (*Albany Centinel* 1798) (Fig. 2). It is unclear if Bill and his family were ever recaptured.

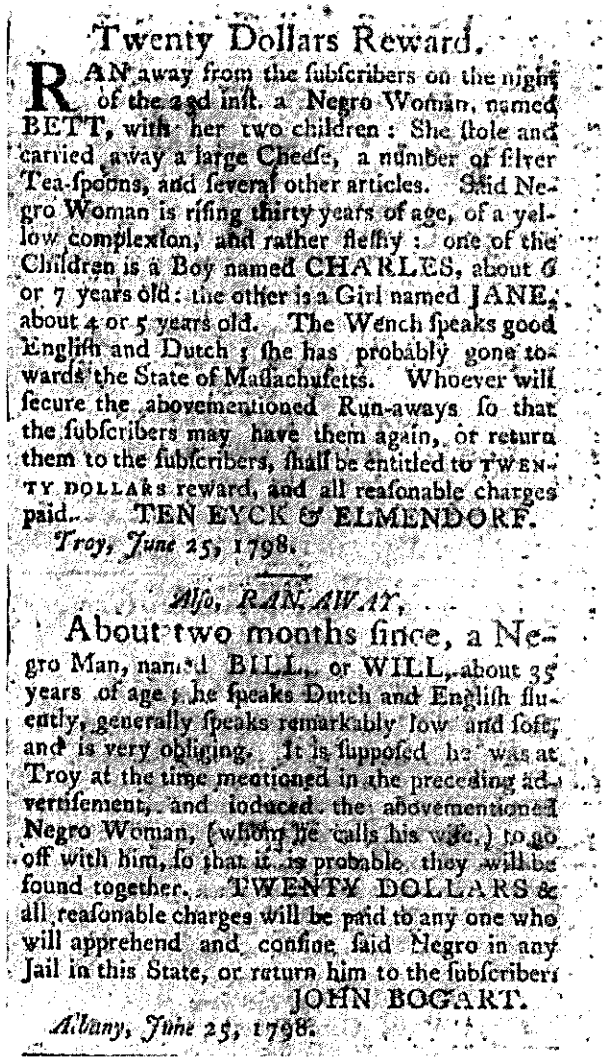
## The Bogart House and the Material Structure of Enslavement in Albany: Features and Layers

Identifying material culture directly associated with the lives of enslaved people is challenging in the North, and theoretical and methodological problems continue to vex a field accustomed to analyzing plantation archaeology. There were fewer buildings dedicated to housing enslaved people on northern estates. Ira Berlin (1998:56) summarized this interpretive dilemma, where "[n]o lines of slave cabins surrounded the slaveowner's Great House. ... Instead ... slave farmhands were reduced to near invisibility by being stuffed into garrets, back rooms, closets, and outbuildings." On some larger rural estates, or attempts at organized plantations, separate quartering spaces most often served as a separate "outer" kitchen (Grant 1817:12; Silber and Catts 2004; Delle and Fellows 2012; Rava and Matthews 2013:7; Gall 2019; Gall et al. 2020). Without separate quarters, the interpretive difficulties associated with culturally plural households (Phillippi 2018:7) are the same in Albany and New York City as in any urban place in the South.

Basements and cellars in New York often contained a hearth where meals were prepared during the winter months, and this subterranean space was frequently occupied by enslaved people. Hudson River abolitionist Sojourner Truth recalled one cellar where the "only lights consisted of a few panes of glass ... and the space between the loose boards of the floor, and the uneven earth below, was often filled with mud and water" with people "sleeping on those damp boards, like the horse, with a little straw and a blanket" (Truth 1850:14). Truth's personal recollections highlight the inhumanity of enslavement and hint about the archaeological context.







Twenty Dollars Reward.

RAN away from the ſubſcribers on the night of the 23d inſt. a Negro Woman, named BETT, with her two children: She ſtole and carried away a large Cheeſe, a number of ſilver Tea-ſpoons, and ſeveral other articles. Said Negro Woman is riſing thirty years of age, of a yellow complexion, and rather fleſhy: one of the Children is a Boy named CHARLES, about 6 or 7 years old: the other is a Girl named JANE, about 4 or 5 years old. The Wench ſpeaks good Engliſh and Dutch; ſhe has probably gone towards the State of Maſſachuſetts. Whoever will ſecure the abovementioned Run-aways ſo that the ſubſcribers may have them again, or return them to the ſubſcribers, ſhall be entitled to TWENTY DOLLARS reward, and all reaſonable charges paid. TEN EYCK & ELMENDORF.

*Troy, June 25, 1798.*

*Alſo, RAN AWAY,*

About two months ſince, a Negro Man, named BILL, or WILL, about 35 years of age; he ſpeaks Dutch and Engliſh fluently, generally ſpeaks remarkably low and ſoft, and is very obliging. It is ſuppoſed he was at Troy at the time mentioned in the preceding advertiſement, and induced the abovementioned Negro Woman, (whom he calls his wife,) to go off with him, ſo that it is probable they will be found together. TWENTY DOLLARS & all reaſonable charges will be paid to any one who will apprehend and confine ſaid Negro in any Jail in this State, or return him to the ſubſcriber.

JOHN BOGART.

*Albany, June 25, 1798.*

**Fig. 2** Runaway advertisements for Bill, Bett, Charles, and Jane. (Image from the *Albany Centinel*, 26 June 1798.)

Archaeological excavations in 1997 and 1998 at the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) headquarters site in downtown Albany located the ruins of several late 18th-century houses (Hartgen Archeological Associates 2002) (Fig. 1). The remains of the Bogart House were among the best preserved at the (DEC) site, including an area approximately 14 × 15 ft. of the basement floor. Other features included fieldstone foundation walls, brick-and-mortar exterior walls, wood flooring, interior walls, and a stone hearth. The floorboards and associated sleepers were highly charred, but so well preserved that individual planks could be easily discerned. Following the 1797 fire, the remaining shell of the building was demolished, some of the stone foundation robbed, and the charred debris used to fill the lot, leaving behind a mass of brick, mortar, and ash directly above the truncated foundation (Kirk 2003:47).

Much of the archaeological record of the house is defined by its destruction. Pre-destruction layers within the basement of the house were preserved and careful excavation of these components has made it possible to analyze the arrangement and use of this subterranean space. Only those artifacts recovered beneath the floorboards, and thus present when the house burned, are included in our analysis.

Architectural features structure the basement for enslavement. First, an interior wall divided the space into two rooms (Figs. 3, 4). The eastern room with the hearth located at the southern side served as the

**Fig. 3** Photograph of the Bogart House excavation showing the burned basement floor, hearth, and interior wall; looking south. (Photo courtesy of the New York State Museum.)

kitchen where meals would have been prepared for the household. The intended purpose of the western room is unclear. From the Bogart family perspective, these were places where tasks were completed for the household.

The basement space was further divided into subareas based on the composition of artifacts and their relative position to structural features. A small portion of the western room and a much larger section of the eastern room were exposed during the excavations. Even in the small section of the western room that was exposed, there were distinct differences between the north and south halves.

A small, rope-tied barrel measuring 18 in. in diameter and roughly 28 in. deep, was uncovered along the interior wall in the western room centered roughly 3 ft. north of the southern exterior foundation wall (Fig. 4, Feature 144). The barrel staves and ropes had disintegrated, but impressions from the ropes were clearly visible in the clay matrix surrounding the pit (Kirk 2003:47). This barrel was situated directly below the burned floorboards of the basement and was filled with artifacts of various types (Table 1) (Kirk 2002:5.15). Given its position, the barrel may have been placed at the threshold of a doorway joining the two rooms.

The barrel was excavated in two layers of silty clay. The first layer (Level 5) was excavated to a depth of 24 cm (9.4 in.). Only 42 artifacts were recovered in this layer. The remaining 48 cm (18.9 in.) contained a dense assortment of artifacts and was excavated as Level 6. The barrel fill was sealed by the burned floorboards providing a *terminus ante quem* of 1797 and blue-painted pearlware provided a *terminus post quem* of 1775 for Level 6 (Miller et al. 2000:12).

Archaeologists first thought the barrel might have functioned as a sump to drain away water from the wooden floor. Sumps are clearly a feature necessary in many households, but this function was quickly dismissed in the field. If the barrel was intended as a sump, then the most practical placement would have been the corner of the house. Instead, the feature was situated near the southeast corner of the western room (Feature 4). Perhaps more importantly, the feature was sunk into impermeable clay, thus eliminating its drainage capacity.

Root storage is another possible use for the barrel, but this seems unlikely. Even if the barrel was used as a root cellar, it would be difficult to discern from the archaeological record, and the artifacts included would be post-cellar use. Root cellars are commonly located near the hearth to prevent freezing during the winter and sand was used to keep moisture away from perishable roots. None of the archaeological data suggests the storage of roots within the barrel.

Subfloor pits are one architectural feature often found in enslaved worker quarters that have received considerable attention and debate over the past four decades (Kelso 1984; Mouer 1991; McKee 1992, 2000; Samford 1994, 2000, 2007; Young 1997; Fesler 2004; Neiman 2008; Davidson 2021). Most of the scholarship on the subject comes from the Chesapeake, and Fraser Neiman (2008:176) has further contended that subfloor pits in slave quarters were a response to environmental conditions or expression of cultural dynamic, distinctive to the region. Whatever





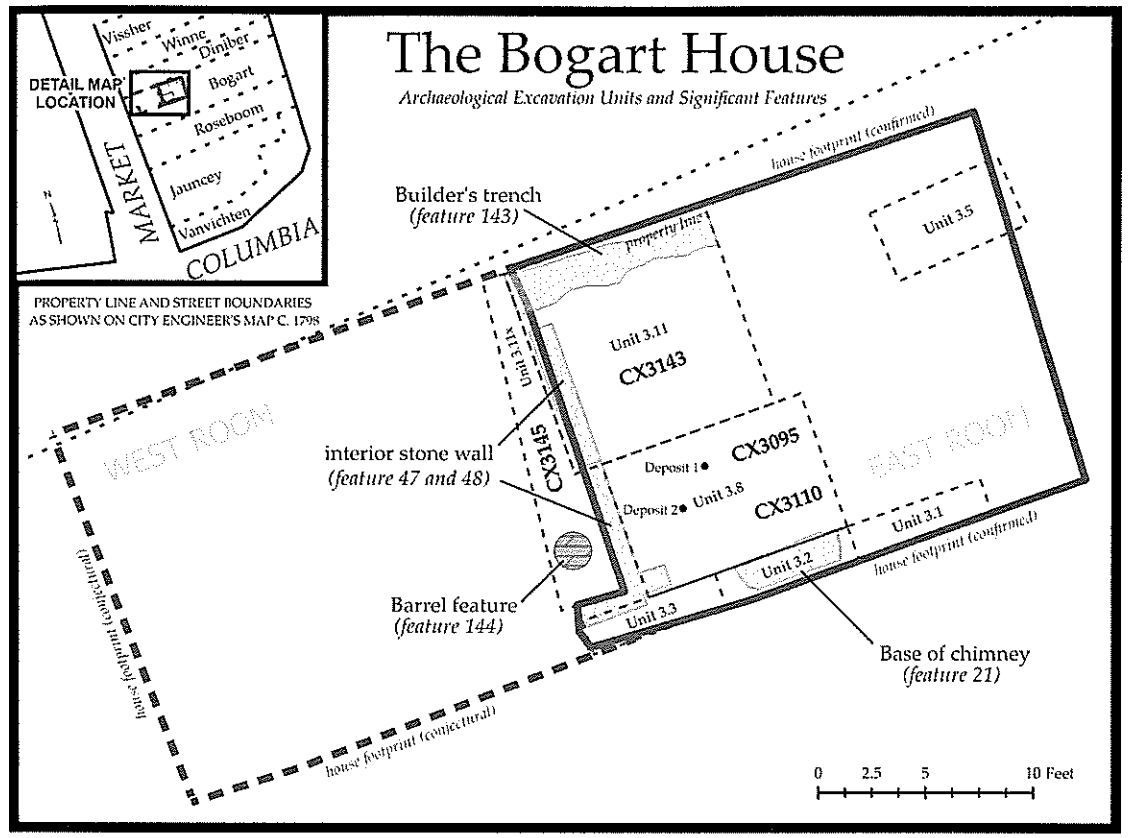



**Fig. 4** Orientation of the Bogart House with relevant features. (Drawing by Susan Winchell-Sweeney.)

the reason, subfloor pits are rarely documented as associated with the living spaces of enslaved African Americans north of the Chesapeake.

Patricia Samford's (2007) analysis of Virginia subfloor pits concluded that these features were used for a variety of purposes, including food storage, storage of personal possessions, and spiritual uses. Subfloor pits in the Chesapeake are clearly one archaeological feature that provides direct evidence of the material lives of enslaved people.

The collection of artifacts found under the floorboards north of this barrel in unit 3.11 (Fig. 4, CX3145) defines the second area we consider. Archaeologists confirmed that the floorboards were elevated on sleepers set in the underlying clay substrate throughout the basement. This configuration created a subfloor void where artifacts were deposited. Although this area represents a small sample of the western room, the composition of the assemblage is intriguing (Table 1). Over 400 artifacts were recovered under the floorboards in this small area against the interior dividing wall (Table 1). This context averaged 11 cm (4.3 in.) in depth. Blue painted pearlware provided a *terminus post quem* of 1775 for this layer (Miller et al. 2000:12).

A larger portion of the eastern room was excavated allowing for a better understanding of how the space was used. The excavations divided the eastern room into the north half (Unit 3.11, CX3143), south central quarter (Unit 3.08, CX3095), and south quarter (Unit 3.08, CX3110) (Fig. 4). Total artifacts recovered from these contexts are listed in Table 1. The presence of blue painted pearlware dates CX3143, CX3095, and CX 3110 after 1775 (Miller et al. 2000:12). Each of these subfloor layers averaged between 11 and 12 cm (4.3–4.7 in.) in depth.

The potential problem with the TPQs for dating the subfloor components is that the barrel and the subfloor layer likely represent the accumulation of material through time rather than a short duration. Many of

**Table 1** Artifacts recovered from beneath the Bogart basement floor

| Artifact Type | West Room Barrel F.144 | West Room North CX3145 | East Room North CX3143 | East Room South Center CX3095 | East Room South CX3110 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Personal, adornment | | | | | |
| Bead, glass | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Broach, silver | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Cross, copper | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Earring, silver | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Jewel, glass | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Pocket watch | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ring | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Shell bead | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Wampum bead | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Wampum production | 6 | 0 | 24 | 2 | 0 |
| Total | 8 | 1 | 30 | 5 | 2 |
| Personal, clothing | | | | | |
| Buckle, metal | 2 | 0 | 9 | 2 | 2 |
| Button blank, bone | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Button, bone | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Button, metal | 5 | 5 | 5 | 8 | 4 |
| Button, glass | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Scissors | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Shoe, leather | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Straight pin | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Thimble | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 9 | 5 | 18 | 14 | 6 |
| Personal, grooming | | | | | |
| Brush/comb | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Mirror | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Personal, toys | | | | | |
| Marble, clay | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Personal, other | | | | | |
| Catlinite pipe | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Coin | 0 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| Cowry helmet | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cupriferous chain | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Key | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Seashell | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Tobacco pipe | 26 | 24 | 79 | 87 | 119 |
| Total | 29 | 28 | 85 | 92 | 122 |
| Total personal | 50 | 35 | 136 | 111 | 131 |
| Food remains | | | | | |
| Bone, animal | 89 | 84 | 183 | 131 | 165 |
| Bone, fish | 7 | 12 | 67 | 104 | 9 |
| Shell, clam | 6 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 10 |
| Shell, egg | 0 | 0 | 27 | 2 | 3 |





**Table 1** (continued)

| Artifact Type | West Room Barrel F.144 | West Room North CX3145 | East Room North CX3143 | East Room South Center CX3095 | East Room South CX3110 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Shell, mussel | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Shell, oyster | 50 | 12 | 23 | 40 | 21 |
| Total | 152 | 108 | 303 | 280 | 208 |
| Tools | | | | | |
| Ax head | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Chisel | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Clothing iron | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Fork | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Gunflint | 1 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| Iron tool, unid. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Knife or awl | 16 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Pothook | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Slate pencil | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Spike | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Spoon | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Stone flake | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| Stone tool | 3 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 1 |
| Whetstone | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Wood plane | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 30 | 11 | 10 | 14 | 5 |
| Other metal objects | | | | | |
| Bilbo | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Clamp | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Horseshoe | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Iron chains | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Iron washer or ring | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Lead ball/shot | 1 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 3 |
| Lead unid. | 6 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Lead window came | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Wire, iron | 3 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| Total | 17 | 3 | 9 | 16 | 7 |
| Architectural | | | | | |
| Brick | 1 | 0 | 5 | 6 | 2 |
| Flat glass | 3 | 12 | 8 | 17 | 17 |
| Hinge | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Nail | 64 | 33 | 52 | 56 | 74 |
| Screw | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Shutter dog | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 69 | 46 | 65 | 81 | 93 |
| Other refuse | | | | | |
| Bottle glass | 36 | 47 | 21 | 9 | 10 |
| Can lid | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ceramics | 114 | 150 | 35 | 97 | 107 |
| Lamp chimney | 0 | 0 | 13 | 15 | 1 |
| Snail shell | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

**Table 1** (continued)

| Artifact Type | West Room Barrel F.144 | West Room North CX3145 | East Room North CX3143 | East Room South Center CX3095 | East Room South CX3110 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Table glass | 7 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Total | 159 | 205 | 73 | 124 | 131 |
| All artifacts total | 477 | 406 | 596 | 626 | 575 |

the ceramic types date anywhere from the mid to late 18th century (Table 2). At least seven of the coins are British half-pennies with the earliest dating to 1746 (CX3095). Since a construction date for the house has not been established, it is possible that material was accumulating under the basement floor since the 1760s or before. Also, we could not confirm that enslaved African Americans were living in the house prior to the Van Vechten occupation. Therefore, it is possible that Europeans living in the house could have contributed to the assemblages to some degree. That said, enslaved people would have spent much of their time in the basement cooking meals, sleeping, and performing other tasks when present in the house.

Basements and cellars were spaces for segregation and confinement wherever enslavement was inflicted in Albany and the surrounding countryside. Our assertion is that African Americans were the primary users of the Bogart House basement during the latter decades of the 18th century. If we are correct, then the artifacts represent the activities and agencies of Bill and all the unnamed enslaved people who occupied this space. An analysis of each of the subfloor contexts suggests the intentional construction and control of space, the curation of personal possessions, and the detritus of routine activities within the basement.

**Table 2** Number of ceramics per context recovered from beneath the Bogart basement floor

| Ware Type | Barrel | CX3095 | CX3110 | CX3143 | CX3145 | Dates[a] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Buff-bodied stoneware | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 6 | N/a |
| Chinese porcelain | 19 | 11 | 10 | 6 | 13 | N/a |
| Creamware | 3 | 22 | 23 | 8 | 12 | 1762–1820 |
| English brown stoneware | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1671–1775 |
| English soft-paste porcelain | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1745–1795 |
| Gray salt-glazed stoneware | 3 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | N/a |
| Jackfield | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1740–1800 |
| North Midlands slipware | 17 | 11 | 29 | 8 | 8 | 1660–1745 |
| Pearlware | 5 | 10 | 7 | 4 | 6 | 1775–1830 |
| Red stoneware | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1763–1775 |
| Redware | 1 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 20 | N/a |
| Slip-decorated redware | 14 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 25 | N/a |
| Tin-glazed earthenware | 17 | 10 | 13 | 1 | 20 | N/a |
| Untyped ceramic | 0 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 2 | N/a |
| Whieldon type | 11 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 23 | 1740–1770 |
| White salt glaze | 18 | 18 | 12 | 4 | 13 | 1720–1805 |
| White salt glaze, scratch blue | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1744–1775 |
| | 114 | 97 | 107 | 35 | 150 | |

[a]Date source: Miller et al. (2000).





## Intentionality and the Subfloor Barrel: Artifact Composition and Placement

African Americans occupying the Bogart basement likely organized the space in some way for their own purposes. If so, can a rearticulation of the basement area be demonstrated through the archaeological record? One method for addressing this question is determining whether the placement of artifacts or features suggest intentionality, and thus a particular orientation or use. The subfloor barrel and its contents present the most compelling case for an intentional placement within the basement.

Interpreting intentional spiritual concealments in walls, beneath floors, and in burials outside buildings has a long history in the archaeologies of the European (Manning 2014; Wheeler 2017) and African (Wilkie 1997; Leone and Fry 1999; Fennell 2007) diasporas. The volume of African-diaspora studies discussing concealments is heavily weighted toward Southern plantations (Brown and Cooper 1990; Brown 1994, 2015; Neiman 2008; Samford 2007; Schablitsky 2011; Davidson and McIlvoy 2012; Reeves 2014; Davidson 2015; Leone, Pruitt et al. 2018; Ruttley 2018) or urban places in the South (Cochran 1999; Jones 1999; Leone 2005:199–244; Leone, Knauf et al. 2014; Lucas 2014), and fewer examples from the Northeast (Bankoff et al. 2001; Springate 2014; Cantwell and Wall 2015; Rava and Matthews 2017; Wheeler 2017).

The act of placing objects in a barrel or under the floorboards may have nothing to do with spirituality. In his analysis of possible Obeah bottle deposits in Jamaica and Virginia, Matthew Reeves (2014) stresses the critical importance of the archaeological context in determining the intent of any concealment. Reeves's (2014) analysis provides case studies to show how a careful reading of the archaeological record can demonstrate how objects were deposited as refuse, for spiritual purposes, or in the act of simply hiding things and those actions related to things. James Davidson (2014:52) suggests three criteria for determining if otherwise mundane objects were used for spiritual or supernatural purposes: (1) Was the object recovered from a unique or unusual context? (2) has the artifact been altered or modified? and (3) do specific ethnographic observations or historical texts exist that support the use of an object in a spiritual context?

Several attributes of the Bogart House barrel suggest a carefully placed concealment. The barrel was buried along an interior east/west wall approximately 3 ft. from the southern foundation (Fig. 4). If this placement was neither coincidental nor random, then what purpose would this location serve? Was there a spiritual or supernatural meaning underlying the placement of the barrel and composition of the artifact assemblage?

Many of the artifacts recovered from the Bogart barrel could be taken for common refuse. The ceramics, pipe stems, and faunal material are not particularly suggestive of anything other than refuse on their own. What distinguishes the artifacts within the barrel are the number of marked or otherwise altered objects combined with the presence of many knives, chains, and other iron tools.

The artifacts from the barrel include five objects that have been marked after their initial production. These include one pistol-gripped knife marked with an X, one square-handled awl marked with a GW on all four sides, one antler-handled knife with two deep parallel cut marks, one incised marble, and one musket ball with a small hole drilled or punched halfway through. In addition to these artifacts were four objects marked during production including a complete tobacco pipe bowl marked WG inside a cartouche for London pipe maker William Goulding (Oswald 1975:80), a pewter U.S.A. military button, a bottle of Turlington's "Balsam of Life," and a portion of a stoneware crock marked with numerous incised symbols under the glaze (Figs. 5, 6, 7).

Incising, or otherwise altering an object, could be used to ascribe the piece as a possession. But were the altered objects in the barrel curated as personal possessions or were they collected *because* of the marks? For example, the GW on the bone-handled awl and the "B" shape on the marble might represent initials. The letters G and W also appear on the pipe bowl. The other recognizable symbol was the X carved on the handle of the pistol-gripped knife. Certainly an X carved into a handle could have also served as a signature of ownership, but the letters GW and X are also present on the stoneware crock fragments.

The two mended buff-paste stoneware crock sherds stand out among the other pottery from the barrel because of the unusual markings applied to the piece before firing (Figs. 6, 7). Two crossed lines inside of circles are visible on the piece as are

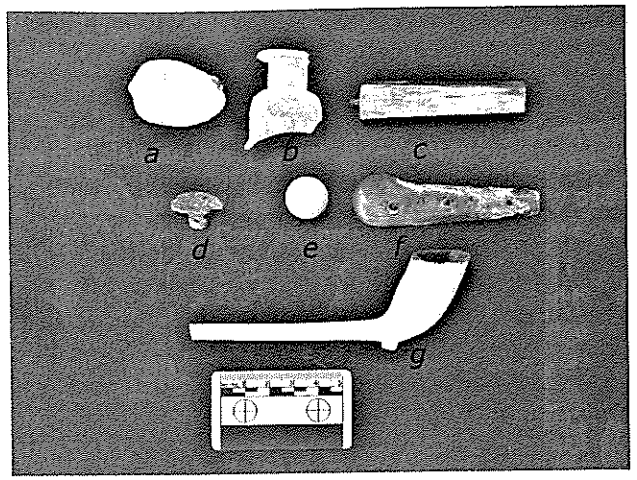



**Fig. 5** Selection of artifacts recovered from the barrel, Feature 144: (*a*) Reticulated cowry helmet; (*b*) Turlington's "Balsam of Life" bottle; (*c*) bone-handled awl with GW carved in the side; (*d*) U.S.A. Continental Army button; (*e*) clay marble carved with a B; (*f*) bone-handled knife with an X carved in the side; and (*g*) tobacco pipe with WG cartouche maker's mark on front of the bowl. (Photo by Michael Lucas, 2020.)

three small, crossed lines or Xs without circles. In addition to these there are two crossed lines within a triangle shape, as well as two other incised marks that appear to be a crude G and W.

The letter B could certainly stand for Bogart and GW could simply be the initials of any number of individuals. If GW does represent an individual living in Albany, then who might that have been? If the letters were not the initials of an enslaved person then they might represent one of the two heads of household living in Albany during the 1790s, George Wendell or Garret Witbeck (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1790a). Witbeck is by far the most

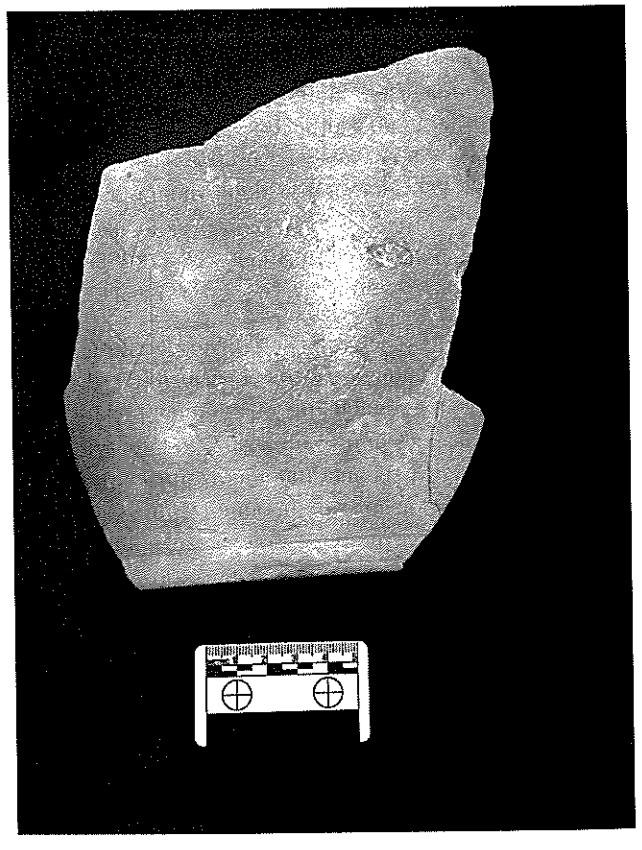


**Fig. 6** Buff-paste stoneware crock with markings under the glaze. (Photo by Michael Lucas, 2020.)





**Fig. 7** Buff-paste stoneware crock with markings under the glaze. (Drawing by Alexandra DeCarlo.)

likely candidate of the two, in that he lived in the neighborhood and owned a blacksmith shop near the docks during the late 1770s, different from the Dunbar and Pruyn operation (Bielinski 2021). The Witbeck or nearby Pruyn and Dunbar shops may have offered the occupants of the Bogart House access to tools and other iron objects that eventually made their way into the barrel.

The Turlington's "Balsam of Life" bottle is an interesting addition to the assemblage. Turlington's cure-all was actively marketed to the shipping trades for the relief of sore muscles (Jones and Vegotsky 2016:29). John Bogart, Bill, or any other enslaved people may have used the remedy after long days plying on the Hudson. Another complete unmarked medicinal bottle was also recovered from the barrel. Perhaps these bottles themselves were retained for their healing powers long after the contents had been consumed.

A tremendous number of tools and other metal objects were recovered from the barrel (Table 1). Most remarkable were 16 knives, 1 ax surrounded by at least 2 pins, 2 bars from leg shackles (called "bilboes") (Fig. 8), a clamp, 2 keys, 2 sets of chains (Fig. 9), and 2 hooks. Along with these metal objects was a large whetstone recovered from the base of the feature. The nearly complete iron bar recovered from the barrel is identical in size to the bilboes recovered from the slave ship *Henrietta Marie* that sank off the coast of Florida in the early 18th century (Sullivan 1994:10) (Fig. 8). In addition, x-ray imagery of a completely oxidized artifact originally identified as a clamp, resembles a thumbscrew.

There was also a single whole brick at the bottom of the barrel. One large unbroken brick without any other fragments suggests this single brick was not discarded as architectural debris. The other remarkable aspect of the feature is the number of oyster shells compared to other faunal material. This proportion is much greater than the other areas of the basement summarized in Table 1. Personal objects include several buttons, buckles, 1 pocket watch, 1 ring, 2 marbles, 1 brush, and 1 mirror fragment.

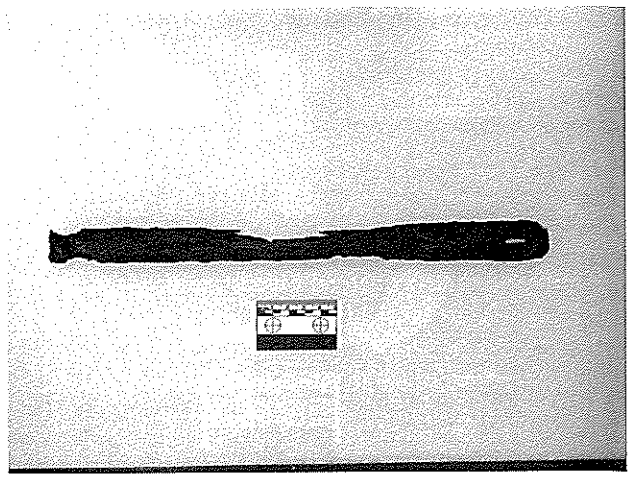


**Fig. 8** Iron lock bar from leg shackles, or "bilboes," recovered from the barrel, Feature 144. (Photo by Michael Lucas, 2020.)

A reticulated cowry helmet was also recovered from the barrel (Fig. 5). This shell is native to the warm waters from Florida south throughout the Caribbean. It is clear from their rarity in the archaeological record that plain reticulated cowry helmets were not widely distributed within Albany during the 18th century. But perhaps the most important observation is that this feature contains refuse, such as broken ceramics, bottle glass, tobacco pipe stems, oyster shell, and bone along with unbroken and useful objects like the complete pharmaceutical bottle, marble, and knives. The composition of the material is key for interpreting the assemblage. For example, John Sprinkle's (1991:91) summary of a documented list of valuables kept in a chest by an enslaved person in Maryland named Charles Cox includes some of the same types of materials found in the barrel, such as buttons, buckles, and three razors. What is different from the Bogart collection is the notable absence of faunal material, broken ceramics, and other refuse in the account (Sprinkle 1991:92). The mix of objects suggests the barrel feature is neither a collection of trash nor an exclusive space for storing valuables.

## Curating Personal Possessions and the Detritus of Action: Subfloor Artifacts

Over 2,200 artifacts were recovered beneath the basement floorboards beyond the barrel. Most of these artifacts represent the refuse of everyday life, such as broken ceramics, tobacco-pipe fragments, faunal material, and bottle glass. This material provides important data about the lives of enslaved people

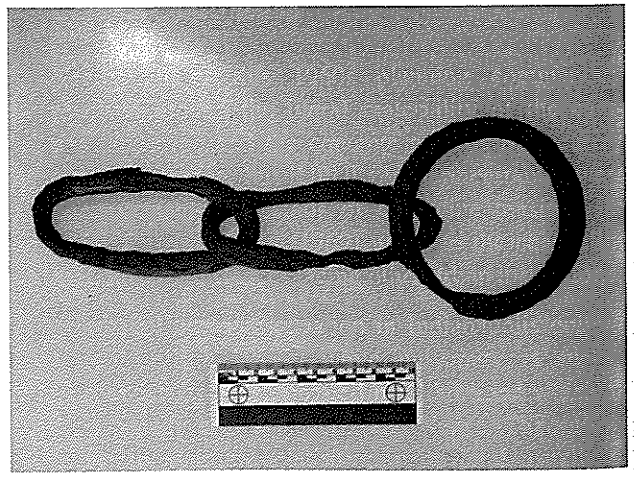


**Fig. 9** Iron chain recovered from the barrel, Feature 144. (Photo by Michael Lucas, 2020.)





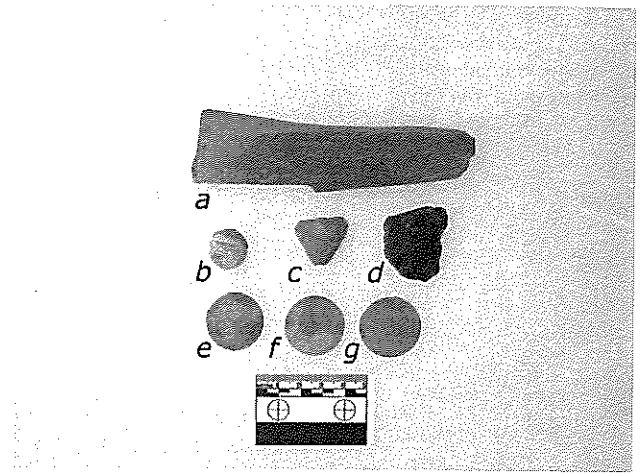



**Fig. 10** Selection of artifacts recovered from beneath the basement floorboards north of the Feature 144 barrel: (*a*) Whetstone with X cut marks; (*b*) smashed lead musket ball with cut marks; (*c*) gunflint; (*d*) chert stone tool; and (*e–g*) unidentified coins. (Photo by Michael Lucas, 2020.)

living in the basement, but we have narrowed the following discussion to those artifacts that had not exhausted their useful purposes resulting in discard, were found together as a possible single deposit, or contained alterations or design attributes that suggest intentional curation.

The first group of artifacts was found in the western room just to the north of the barrel in Unit 3.11x and designated CX3145 (Fig. 4). An ax head, chisel, part of a wood plane, two large iron spikes, four coins, one horseshoe, one button, one small Y-shaped shell bead, one smashed musket ball with deep parallel cuts, one complete musket ball, three gunflints, and one stone tool made from chert were uncovered along with other objects along the west side of the interior wall just to the north of the barrel (Table 1) (Figs. 10, 11). One of the most intriguing objects appears to be a small homemade whetstone. What is most curious about the stone is that there are several deep perpendicular cuts in the surface of one side forming at least two Xs (Fig. 10). Surface scratches are expected on whetstones commonly found in Albany collections, but vertical cut marks are not, unless the purpose was to dull the knife. Also, the fact that these lines are clearly perpendicular suggests that the cuts are intentional.

The eastern room was divided and excavated in three distinct horizontal contexts (Figure 4, CXs 3095, 3110, 3043). Among the small objects recovered were 1 glass bead, 1 silver broach, 1 silver earring, 4 cut-glass jewels, 3 wampum beads and numerous cut clam shells, over 2 dozen buckles and buttons, 10 coins, 2 clay marbles, 1 scissors, 2 straight pins, 1 thimble, 2 seashells, 1 cupriferous chain, 1 fork, 2 jackknives, 3 spoons, 1 slate pencil, 1 inscribed catlinite pipe, 1 copper cross, and numerous stone tools and gunflints (Table 1). The catlinite pipe has the name Johannes de Graef scrawled on the side. It is unclear who Johannes de Graef was, but the pipe may have been acquired because of this signature. Other larger objects, like a clothing iron and large ceramic sherds, were either discarded under the floor as refuse or intentionally placed there for storage or other purpose.

A couple of general trends are suggested by the distribution of artifacts. Artifacts found directly in front of the hearth (CX 3110) contained the highest number of tobacco pipes, the area approximately 3–5 ft. in front of the hearth (CX 3095) contained the most clothing-production artifacts, and a disproportionate number of cut clam shells, perhaps associated with wampum production, were found in the northern half of the eastern room (CX 3143).

Several pieces of evidence suggest that the eastern room of the basement served as the primary living area for enslaved people in the Bogart House. Most importantly, this was the location of the hearth where food was prepared and warmth was provided. The types and general distribution of artifacts also support this idea. Purely functional explanations could account for many of the artifacts recovered. Pipes were smoked by the fire, scissors, a thimble, and pins were used for mending clothes, gunflints and stone tools were used for starting the fire, and wampum was possibly made in limited quantities. There were also at least two caches of artifacts that may represent intentional concealments.

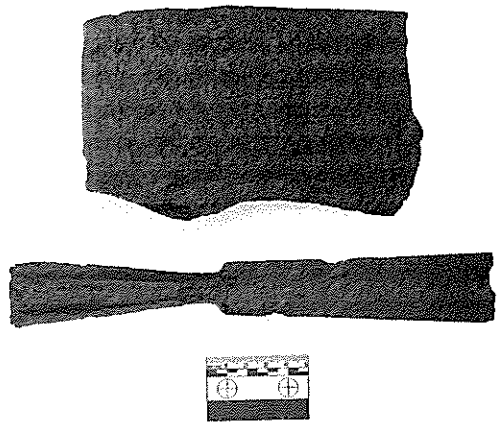


**Fig. 11** Iron ax and chisel recovered from beneath the basement floorboards north of Feature 144 barrel. (Photo by Michael Lucas, 2020.)

Archaeologists piece-plotted what appeared to be significant artifacts uncovered in the southern half of the room resulting in the identification of two concentrations of artifacts designated Deposits 1 and 2. The most intriguing collection of artifacts (Deposit 1) was uncovered about 4 ft. in front of the hearth (Figs. 4, 12, 13). Deposit 1 was comprised of eight oyster shells, two cut clam shells, one undecorated white salt-glazed stoneware saucer sherd, one clothing iron, one whetstone, three yellow brick, one red brick, one unidentified copper piece, one flat lead piece, one lead cross figure, two strap iron, one unidentified hardware, two nails, and one small carved shell bowl. There are three attributes that stand out in this collection of material. First, shell is represented by unmodified oyster shell, cut clam shell, and a small carved shell vessel with a hole in the bottom. Second are the metal objects including a clothing iron, a molded lead figure or cross, and other metal objects. Finally, red and white are the primary colors of the assemblage, except for three small yellow brick fragments.

The second set of artifacts (Deposit 2) were recovered beneath a stone directly east of the barrel in the west room. This collection includes seven undecorated tin-glazed sherds and one blue painted piece. The painted piece is remarkable in that it is a single blue flower with three concentric circles and petals radiating from the center (Fig. 14). This same pattern is present on two plates from the west room north of the barrel (CX3145). A similar painted ceramic was identified approximately 2 ft. west of the large cache of material. This example is a pearlware saucer base with a blue six-pointed star painted in the center (Fig. 14). A cup base with the same pattern was recovered from the lower layers of the fill west of the hearth in a less secure context and not included in our summary analysis. It is unclear if these locations were significant, but there are several reoccurring themes in the artifacts recovered directly beneath the floorboards, namely the presence of iron tools, clothing fasteners, circular objects, Xs or crosses, six-pointed stars, stone, and shell.

## Wider Contexts and Origins: The African American Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Albany

The artifacts recovered from the Bogart basement represent action at a specific moment in time and place. Many artifacts recovered from the barrel and beneath the floorboards meet Davidson's (2014:52) criteria for determining whether an object had a spiritual purpose. Davidson's final criterion asks whether specific ethnographic observations or historical texts exist that support the use of an object in a spiritual context. This is a much higher bar to clear. Three elements stand out in our examination of the artifacts within their archaeological contexts. First, they were all recovered from beneath the floor and, thus, inconspicuous within an active living and working space. Second, knives and metal objects, whetstones, and shell were important elements of the overall assemblage.





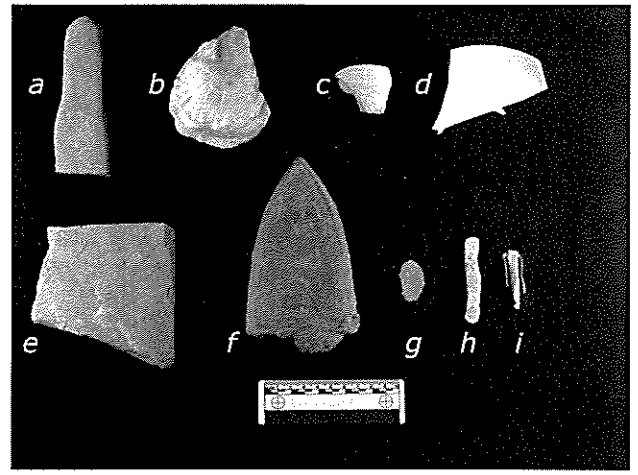



**Fig. 12** Artifacts recovered from Deposit 1 in the east basement room: (*a*) Whetstone; (*b*) oyster shell; (*c*) cut clam shell; (*d*) white salt-glazed stoneware saucer; (*e*) brick; (*f*) clothing iron; (*g*) iron fragment; (*h*) flattened lead piece; and (*i*) lead figure. (Photo by Michael Lucas, 2020.)

Finally, reoccurring shapes and the altering of objects suggest important expressions of agency.

Anna Agbe-Davies' (2017) pragmatic approach to exploring the intersection between wider cultural frames and the archaeological record is instructive for analyzing the Bogart House material. In her analysis of blue glass beads found on plantation sites in the Chesapeake, Agbe-Davies demonstrates how the importance of this artifact "type" is necessarily context bound. She demonstrates how pragmatism and inductive reasoning can be used to interrogate these objects in their archaeological contexts to generate new hypotheses. Most important, Agbe-Davies (2017:22) demonstrates that important discoveries can be found at the intersection of inductive and deductive modes of analysis. This approach allows us to consider the multivalent "possibilities" of the Bogart House archaeology in relationship to the fragmentary historical documentation of occupancy and the daily actions of enslaved African Americans throughout Albany. Why would any of our archaeological observations at a single site be relevant to understanding the lives of enslaved African Americans living in Albany during the last decades of the 18th century? If at least some items were intentionally kept hidden beneath the Bogart floor, then what are the wider

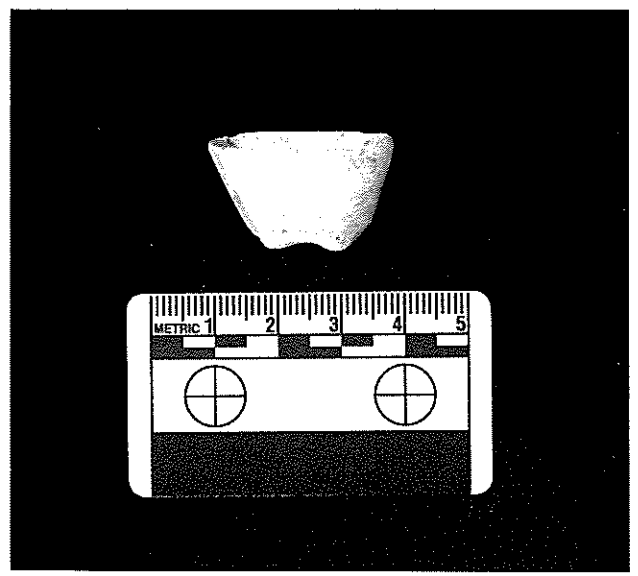



**Fig. 13** Carved footed shell bowl recovered from Deposit 1 in the east basement room. (Photo by Michael Lucas, 2020.)

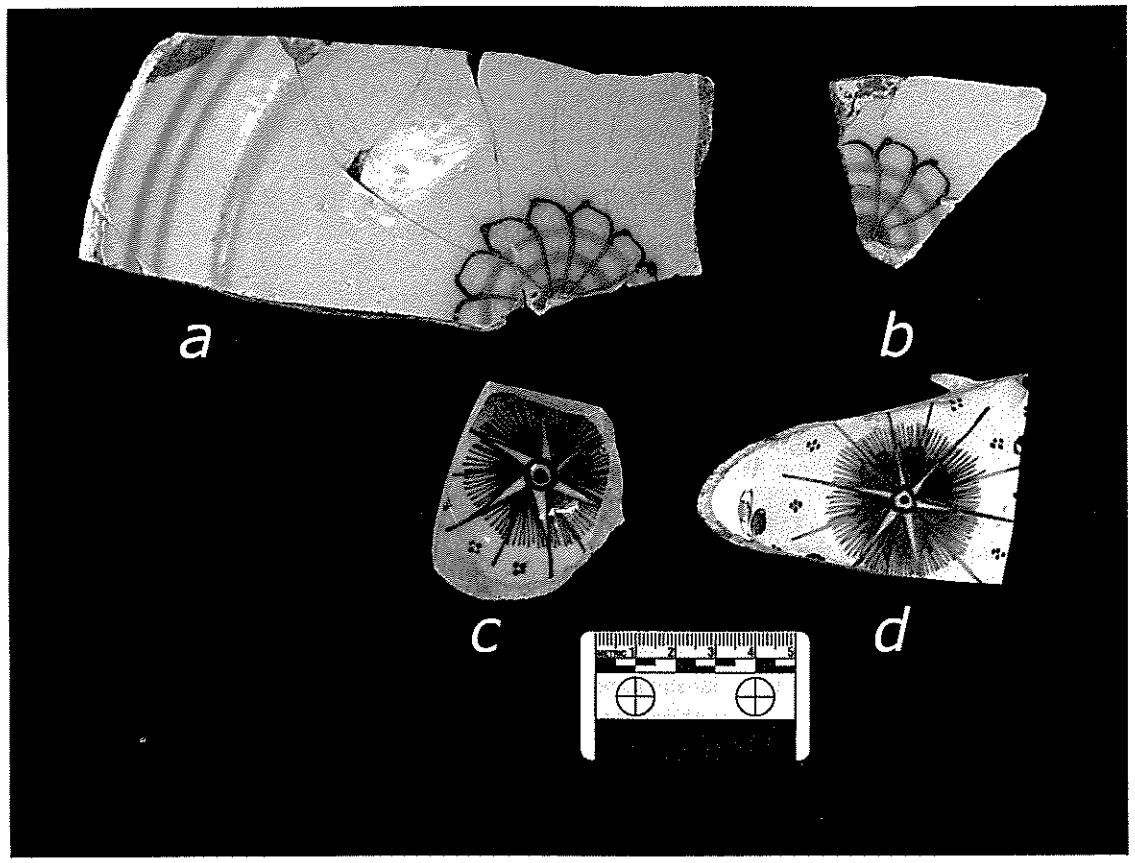



**Fig. 14** Ceramics with target and six-pointed star patterns from the Bogart basement: (*a*) Brittany blue-on-white painted tin-glazed plate, CX3145; (*b*) Brittany blue-on-white painted tin-glazed plate, Deposit 2; (*c*) painted pearlware cup, Unit 3.3; and (*d*) painted pearlware saucer, CX3095. (Photo by Michael Lucas, 2020.)

social conditions that may have contributed to that action?

The first place to start is the institution of slavery in late 18th-century Albany. The enslaved population of New York had increased to over 21,000 by 1790, but that figure understates the embrace of the institution (North 1909:202). For example, enslaved people were held in 29% of all households in Albany at the end of the 18th century. The scale of slavery was even more pronounced in areas surrounding New York City, most notably Kings County, where enslaver households (58.8%) represented a far greater percentage of all households than in the tobacco-plantation state of Maryland (36.5%) (White 1991:16–18).

Legislative action to abolish slavery in New York inched forward in fits and starts in the 1780s (Polgar 2011:237). Throughout the 1790s, elected state officials drafted legislation to start the process of a "gradual emancipation." The Gradual Emancipation Law finally passed in 1799, but for many enslaved people in New York, the law was not entirely freeing as manumissions were often conditional (Meredith 2014:16; Groth 2017:53). For example, when Albany widow Elizabeth Ten Broeck emancipated 28-year-old Susan and her three young daughters in 1810, the manumission required Susan to "once a week come and do and perform as she hath been accustomed while her slave," with the full understanding that she would do so "without price, fee, payment, or reward" (Slave Manumission Register 1800–1829:84). According to the statute, children born into slavery after 4 July 1799, were "freed" after attaining the age of 25 for women and 28 for men. Those born before that date remained enslaved (Harris 2004). The act was amended in 1817, and many more enslaved





people were freed when the institution was officially abolished in 1827.

Abolition, gradual or otherwise, garnered more support in New York City than more conservative places in the Hudson Valley, such as Albany. The Albany Dutch Church continued to exert outsized influence on social norms, economic alliances, and political aspirations. Despite the church baptizing and even sanctifying marriages of enslaved people, there is little evidence that clergy spoke out against slavery from the pulpit. This theological attitude, either explicitly or implicitly, provided Albany residents no incentive to embrace the efforts of abolitionists in other parts of the state (Meredith 2014:33–34). John Bogart described the movement as "Abolition Bile" (Bogart 1796a). The sentiment Bogart expressed does not appear to be unique. In part, this broad sentiment within Albany arose in reaction to Quaker, Methodist, and other progressive religious organizations agitating for emancipation in New York.

While many African Americans in Albany spoke English, "low Dutch," sometimes French and Native languages, and had mastered a variety of skills, including sailing and navigation, enslavers tenaciously clung to the illusion that freed African Americans were incapable of "citizenship" in American society (Harris 2004:349). The uncertainty of "gradual" emancipation, reluctance to abandon enslavement, and the unwillingness to grant full citizenship to free African Americans were sources of anxiety within the community in Albany. Other actions of violence and retribution heightened fears among the community. The fire of 1793 is a well-known example.

Suspicion of arson was directed at the African American community when the fire of 1793 swept through downtown Albany. An enslaved man named Pomp (or Pompey) admitted to starting the fire in Leonard Gansevoort's store. Presented with limited information and driven by their own prejudice, many Albany residents immediately assumed and persisted in believing (Northrup 1900:283) that the fire was part of a "slave insurrection" or some other sinister plot against white residents.

Pompey and two young, enslaved women named Bet and Deen (or Dinah) were arrested and charged with arson within the week (*Albany Register* 1793; Gerlach 1977:306). Both women pled guilty, and Pompey later confessed, perhaps through coercion; thus all three were slated to be hanged on 2 March 1794, and Pomp's body directed to be handed over for dissection (Gerlach 1977:307–308). Due to various legal concerns and behind the scenes politicking, the women were not executed until 14 March, but, more curiously, Pompey was spared until 11 April.

Pompey claimed his motive was the promise of a pocket watch and money by several white conspirators who harbored a grudge against Mr. Gansevoort (Gerlach 1977). The white men were never found, nor does there appear to have been an honest effort to locate them. Despite corroborating testimony from other witnesses, many Albany citizens still supposed the act was one of rebellion by the enslaved populace, as evidenced by a hastily enacted curfew of "Negroes" and "Mulatto Slaves" on city streets after 9:00 P.M. (Stewart 2006:109).

Gradual emancipation, devastating fires, and racism heightened the anxiety, fear, and stress within the Albany community during the 1790s. It was within this climate of fear and violence in late 18th-century Albany that the archaeological record at the Bogart House was constructed. Knives and other potential weapons would have certainly been hidden. Simply owning a knife was forbidden by New York law. The fear of violent insurrection caused the New York Legislature to pass an act in 1730 making it unlawful for "any slave or slaves to have or use any gun, pistol, sword, club, or any other kind of weapon" unless under the direction of their enslaver (New York State Archives 1730). Possessing a collection of 18 knives, as found at the Bogart House, would have resulted in a serious breach of the law.

What few personal possessions Bill and other African Americans had would have also been in jeopardy given the anti-abolitionist sentiment of Bogart and other Albany enslavers. Keeping coins, gems, or other valuables among the inconspicuous refuse under the floorboards would have provided some measure of protection against confiscation, if in fact these objects were not simply lost. Fear and the potential for an active counter against slavery's violence might explain the presence of so many potential weapons under the floor. But there may be a more personal and spiritual explanation for the knives, as well as the general prevalence of metal objects and other artifacts recovered from the barrel and elsewhere in the basement.

Archaeologists are keenly aware of tracing the origins of practices and their potential archaeological signatures. One of the central problems with interpreting the collection of subfloor material is that it may have accumulated over time via several occupants. If objects were added to the barrel and floor deposits through time, then the uses and frames of meaning surrounding the artifacts would also likely change as new occupants arrived.

Knives and other metal tools would have been useful for defense or other practical tasks. Yet, the variety of metal and marked objects included in the bottom 18 in. of the barrel may suggest a spiritual purpose. The buried kettles discovered in the "Conjurer/Midwife's Cabin" at the Levi Jordan Plantation in Brazoria, Texas (Brown 2001), is similar in some ways to the Bogart barrel. Kettles at the Jordan site were nested with a layer of ash in the bottom of the feature, then wrapped in chains and buried near the doorway of the cabin. Furthermore, these kettles were in alignment with three other caches of artifacts, including more chains, a bayonet, "fake" knives, coins, spikes, and other objects, forming a cosmogram (Brown 2001:102). A large percentage of enslaved people in Texas were Yoruba, brought via the well-known smuggling operation from Cuba during the first half of the 19th century (Kelley and Lovejoy 2016:227). Given these close ties, Brown (2001:102) suggested that the kettles might represent an *amula* to Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron and war. More recently, Brown (2015) expanded his study of cosmograms incorporated into Southern plantation quarters. In this comparative study, Brown (2015:185–186) argues that the archaeological record supports a convergence of Christian practices and conjuration.

Christopher Fennell (2007:82–83) pointed out the apparent incongruity between the BaKongo tradition of the *dikenga* and the Yoruba symbolism around the orisha Ogun at Levi Jordan. In rectifying this apparent disjunction, Fennell (2007:86–87) proposes that the object-filled kettles at Levi Jordan are very similar to altars dedicated to Oggún or Zarabanda in Palo Monte Mayombe as practiced in Cuba with cauldrons wrapped in chains and filled with a variety of iron objects. Palo Monte Mayombe represents a blending of Yoruba and BaKongo belief systems that would make sense of the material arrangements at the Levi Jordan Plantation (Fennell 2007:86–87).

Unfortunately, the extent and nature of the excavation at the Bogart House precluded the identification of other intentional caches that might be linked to the barrel's placement as demonstrated at Levi Jordan. It is possible that the doorway leading into the eastern room of the basement was on the southern half of the interior wall. If so, then the composition of the barrel with chains, knives, bilboes, shells, ax head, complete red brick, shell, and other objects may have served a protective purpose. Anyone coming into the room would need to pass over the barrel to gain access. In this configuration, the barrel may have offered protection from John Bogart identified by the marble inscribed with a B. It is also possible that the barrel was installed prior to Bogart's tenure considering the volume of earlier ceramics (Table 2). If this is the case, then the B might replicate the rudimentary shape of the bilbo when turned on its side. In either case, a protective purpose would explain the artifacts in the barrel and indicate the importance of the eastern room. But does the composition of this feature have clear linkages to Yoruba and Ogun?

There are some key differences between the Bogart barrel and the Levi Jordan *amula*. First, the materiality of the holding vessel is different. The objects are held within a wooden barrel and not a metal vessel. Second, the Bogart example contains chains, but these chains are inside the vessel rather than surrounding and holding the instrument and its contents. And finally, though metal is a prominent component, it is not the only artifact type present. White clay tobacco pipes, ceramics, several altered objects, bones, the Caribbean cowry, bottle glass, and 50 oyster shells were also included. These three factors reduce the likelihood that the feature is purely a Yoruba derivative or shrine to Ogun, or Palo Monte Mayombe as developed in Cuba. More compelling observations support a connection to BaKongo metaphors.

Crossed lines in alignment with the four cardinal directions is a powerful metaphor in BaKongo cultural practices of west central Africa, predating the arrival of Portuguese missionaries in the 15th century, but incorporating Catholic elements after (Fennell 2007:31–33; Fromont 2011:115–119). In the context of the BaKongo cosmogram, or *dikenga*, the intersection of these lines represents the crossroads between the world of the living and the world of the dead, day and night, and so on (Fennell 2007:33). The *dikenga* that Fennell defined as a core BaKongo symbol within the African diaspora, is not merely a static carryover, but rather forms the basis for dynamic and creative expressions that change through time and by political context (Denbow 1999; Fromont 2011:110–111; Leone, Pruitt et al. 2018).

The interpretation of crossed lines on pottery produced by African American potters has been the subject of interest and debate within historical archaeology (Ferguson 1999; Espenshade 2007; Fennell 2007; Joseph 2011, 2016; Steen 2011). This debate has offered explanations for why the marks were applied and what the archaeological context says about their meaning. The two circles on the stoneware crock closely resemble a fully articulated *dikenga* or cosmogram, whereas the Xs suggest a more rudimentary form that is also incised on one of the knife handles found in the barrel, and on the whetstone north of the barrel. It is unclear who created the pottery and why the marks were applied, or who carved the Xs in the knife and whetstone, but it is plausible that these objects were meaningful because the markings were present.

The six-pointed stars and circles on the blue pained pottery may also be important symbols, but their precise meaning and use is unclear (Fig. 14). The tin-glazed ceramic with the central flower surrounded by concentric circles resembles the target shapes that were prominent reoccurring symbols along with the six-pointed star at the plantation sites analyzed by Brown (2015:180). It is entirely unclear what either of these two symbols meant to the occupants of the Bogart House, but the fact that the star decorated portion was the only sherd of either of those vessels to survive at the site indicates that they were selected.

The barrel could be a BaKongo derived *nkisi* construction. Jason Young (2007:110) defines a west central African *nkisi* (singular version) as "a ritual object invested with otherworldly power, allowing it to affect special spiritual and material functions in the world." The closest form to the barrel contents would be nkisi Nkondi, often depicted as an object-filled wooden anthropomorphic statue with nails or iron wedges driven into it, that assists in warding off evil spirits (MacGaffey 1988:199; Fennell 2007:60–61). The placement of the barrel at the threshold of a doorway would be a placement consistent with this protective function. There are two problems with this interpretation. First, the barrel is not anthropomorphic in form, and second, driving nails into Nkondi is essential to enacting its powers. If the barrel was an *nkisi*, it would be far more extensive in overall composition and use of knives than any of the examples summarized by Leone and Fry (1999:388–403).

One reason to suspect the barrel and perhaps Deposit 1 are associated with a central African practice is the form of the *dikenga* found in the basement contexts. The copper cross, the carved bone-handled knife, the marked stoneware, and the incised whetstone all indicate use of crossed lines. The contextual data on the origin and cultural practices of the African American community in Albany provides further support for the continued use of metaphors deriving from central Africa.

Dutch merchants and privateers first brought enslaved Africans to New Netherland as early as 1626. Most of these first arrivals were from central Africa, in what is today Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo and were trafficked by the Dutch West India Company across the Atlantic to work on projects in New Amsterdam (Wagman 1980:36; Berlin 1998:50–52; Heywood and Thornton 2007:262–263; Cantwell and Wall 2015:32–34; Dewulf 2017:39). A brief, but intense, trade in enslaved people from Madagascar was orchestrated by Frederick Philipse and fellow New York merchant Stephen Delancey, resulting in the enslavement of over 900 people between 1694 and 1702 (Platt 1969:550; Bialuschewski 2005:406; Estimates Database 2009b; Hooper 2011:227–228).

Caribbean transshipments of enslaved people dominated the trade by the second quarter of the 18th century (Lepore 2005:61; O'Malley 2009:159). Most enslaved people were being brought into New York primarily from the Caribbean islands of Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados, and the Dutch Caribbean Islands, and mainland South Carolina between 1720 and 1740, with the Livingston and Schuyler families contributing much of the trade to the upper range of the Hudson River valley (Lydon 1978:388–390; Chase 2003:108; Estimates Database 2009a). This population joined the previous generations from central Africa and Madagascar. There were also enslaved people brought in smaller numbers from elsewhere in the Atlantic littoral. With steady sloop traffic from Albany to New York, the enslavers living in the Bogart House would have access to any arrivals, regardless of the origin. We currently know very little about connections between those African Americans living in the Bogart House and other areas of the Atlantic world. We do know something about the public celebrations held by the African American community in Albany at the end of the 18th century that provide a possible context for understanding the archaeological record.

The Pinkster holiday, also known as Whitsuntide, was celebrated at Pentecost, or 50 days after Easter Sunday when the Apostles received the Holy Spirit. Pinkster unfolded over the course of several days involving feasting, drinking, games, dances, and parades. Both free and enslaved people participated in Pinkster, although by the late 18th century the festival in Albany was entirely

coordinated by the African American community. Most scholars agree that Pinkster festival was a combination of African and European traditions. But how and where this syncretic festival was formed is debated. Shane White (1989:193, 1994:18) interprets Pinkster as a phenomenon brought to North America by the Dutch. More recently, Jeroen Dewulf (2013, 2017) has argued that the origins of Pinkster are found in the blending of Catholicism with existing cultural traditions in central Africa during the 16th century. In his interpretation, Dewulf (2013:258) sees the late 18th-century festival in Albany as a continuation of "an Afro-Portuguese, Atlantic Creole tradition" that enslaved Africans brought to New Netherland during the 17th century.

References to Pinkster in New York are rare and cursory before the late 18th century and the only detailed contemporary descriptions are situated in Albany. Almost every summary and analysis of Pinkster relies heavily on a lengthy description penned by an anonymous author and published in the the *Spectator* in 1803. In this telling, Pinkster is described as a combination of parades, bartering, feasting, drinking, and dancing lasting several days. Present at the festivities were "blacks and a certain class of whites, together with children of all countries and colours" (*Spectator* 1803). A leader of the African American community named King Charles presided over the celebration. Charles was enslaved by former Albany mayor Volkert P. Douw and was purportedly born in Angola. If true, King Charles's heritage as a native Angolan would have supported his leadership of the event.

The festival took place on a prominence known as Pinkster Hill located on the western edge of the city (Fig. 1). African Americans had gathered for generations to honor their ancestors at the burying grounds located on the hill. Charles would lead a procession through town riding a horse and dressed in a military uniform. Upon his arrival at Pinkster Hill, vendors who set up huts were required to pay tribute to the King in shillings. A highlight of the festival was the "Toto" dance performed by members of the African American community (*Spectator* 1803). Jeroen Dewulf (2013:263–264, 2015:28–30) argues that Catholic practices developed in west central Africa and brought to New Netherland in the 17th century, are suggested in elements of the Pinkster celebration and structure as described in New York during the 18th century.

Much has been drawn from the details included in the 1803 newspaper account, and the significance of the Pinkster festival to the citizens of Albany continues to be debated. Some explain Pinkster in part as a continuation of traditions brought by the enslaved people from central Africa during the 17th century (Dewulf 2013:246, 2017), or as an opportunity for enslaved African Americans to momentarily escape their condition through public ritual (White 1989:194, 1994:21). Rather than ritual confined to the African American community, Bradford Verter (2002) makes a powerful counter argument that the Pinkster festival was a direct challenge to the established political structure of the city. Like the threat of fires, riots, and the abolition of enslaved people, Pinkster represented an event that was largely beyond the control of Albany's political elite (Verter 2002:400–401). Verter (2002:410–412) interprets the 1803 publication as a call to rein in the threat posed by African Americans both free and enslaved, and the "certain class of whites" that took part in the festival. In Verter's (2002:399) analysis, Albany elites responded to this call through the racial segregation of the festival in 1804, and a law banning the event in 1811.

With the anxieties of gradual emancipation and the specter of conspiracies in the minds of Albany's political elites, Pinkster festival posed a potential hazard for the established political order of the city (Verter 2002:400–401). At the same time, the festival offered an opportunity for the African American population of Albany and the surrounding region to gather near the burial ground of their ancestors. It is not coincidental that the Albany Academy building was constructed on or near the burial ground four years after Pinkster was outlawed. The New York State Capitol buildings would soon dominate Pinkster Hill and abolish this sacred African American space.

Late 18th-century Albany was a volatile and uncertain place for African Americans. Gradual emancipation promised eventual freedom for some, but fear of lethal retribution was likely a constant stressor on the community. Pinkster may have functioned to relieve these tensions, as White (1994) suggests, or was a true threat to the political structure as Verter (2002) claims. Yet, in either case, the underlying possibility of real violence was not eliminated.

## Conclusion

Albany was a city in transition at the end of the 18th century. Deeply rooted Dutch families controlled the political levers of power in the city for more than a century after the first English administrative takeover of the colony in 1664. Slavery was integral to the power maintained by these wealthy elites. Profound changes came to Albany in the decades following the Revolution. Many of the Dutch families saw their prominence diminished as upstart merchant politicians rose to power. Albany became the capital of New York State as the fledgling United States learned to govern itself. At the same time, gradual-emancipation legislation was debated and finally passed, setting a delayed course for the abolition of slavery in New York. Enslaved and free African Americans continued to struggle against the brutality of their enslavers while shaping and maintaining the Pinkster celebration and honoring their ancestors at the burial ground.

Tensions were palpable in this environment. Racism led to executions for arson, segregation of Pinkster, and the elimination of Pinkster Hill and the burial ground with the construction of the State Capitol, Albany Academy, and other buildings during the first decades of the 19th century. We propose that, within this environment of change, fear, and outright violence, enslaved African Americans living in the basement of the Bogart House acquired objects that were symbolically and pragmatically useful.

Circles, iron, coins, Xs, six-pointed stars, and other symbols have been explored in many archaeologies of African America. Yet, as with pierced coins (Davidson 2004), the Sankofa symbol (Seeman 2010), and hand charms (Davidson 2014), the reoccurring material culture forms and symbols found in the Bogart barrel do not have inherent meanings outside of the specific social contexts in which they were used. More comparative examples from northern sites are needed. What the material culture from the Bogart basement does suggest is a carefully selected collection of personal objects and the importance of the eastern room as an autonomous space through the intentional placement of artifacts below the floor. Just as Pinkster Hill and the burial ground was a sacred public space where elements of central Africa survived through dance, perhaps the Bogart basement was a place where agency and autonomy were expressed through the BaKongo *dikenga* and the arrangement of objects beneath the floor.

In summary, many of the objects found under the floorboards were carefully curated and hidden, and, at times, unintentionally lost, by enslaved African Americans living in the basement. These objects represent expressions of identity and symbolic weapons against the inhumanity of slavery in the northern states. African American Albanians countered the violent racism that was Northern slavery with outward cultural celebrations like Pinkster and with their careful selection of material possessions and organization of living space. The contents of the barrel and other artifacts found under the floor of the Bogart House basement are rare and tangible evidence of a complex material world constructed by enslaved African Americans in Albany, New York.

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