

The colonial tavern, built and first operated by Swiss immigrant Jacob Wirt, was hidden beneath a gravel-packed parking lot next to the George Washington House. Archaeologists accessed the site by excavating two, parallel trenches within the parking lot with heavy machinery. The Gradall operator slowly pulled back the layers of soil and stopped when the archaeologists noticed concentrations of artifacts, soil staining, or building material such as brick. After the trenches were opened, scientists further excavated in 5 ft x 5 ft squares, meticulously digging, screening, and recording the evidence left behind by the tavern keepers, patrons, and families who once lived here. After several weeks of excavation, the archaeologists found thousands of artifacts from the colonial period and even more items that dated to the time of Franz “Francis” Gasch, Bladensburg’s 19th century cabinet maker and undertaker. They also discovered the remains of an 18th century stone kitchen foundation; an old cellar filled with thick clay and mid-19th century artifacts; numerous dark stains from decomposed posts that once helped support buildings and fences; Gasch’s water well; and 19th century brick pads and stone foundations. Although archaeologists did not find the tavern building remains, they did find the backyard outbuildings and debris that indicated the Indian Queen Tavern catered to an upscale clientele. This is not surprising, since George Washington often stopped here on his way to and from Philadelphia. One of the most exciting finds related to tavern use was a copper-alloy cask tap. Based on this discovery, we know that casks of wines and ales were kept in or near the detached kitchen in the backyard.



Cask tap.

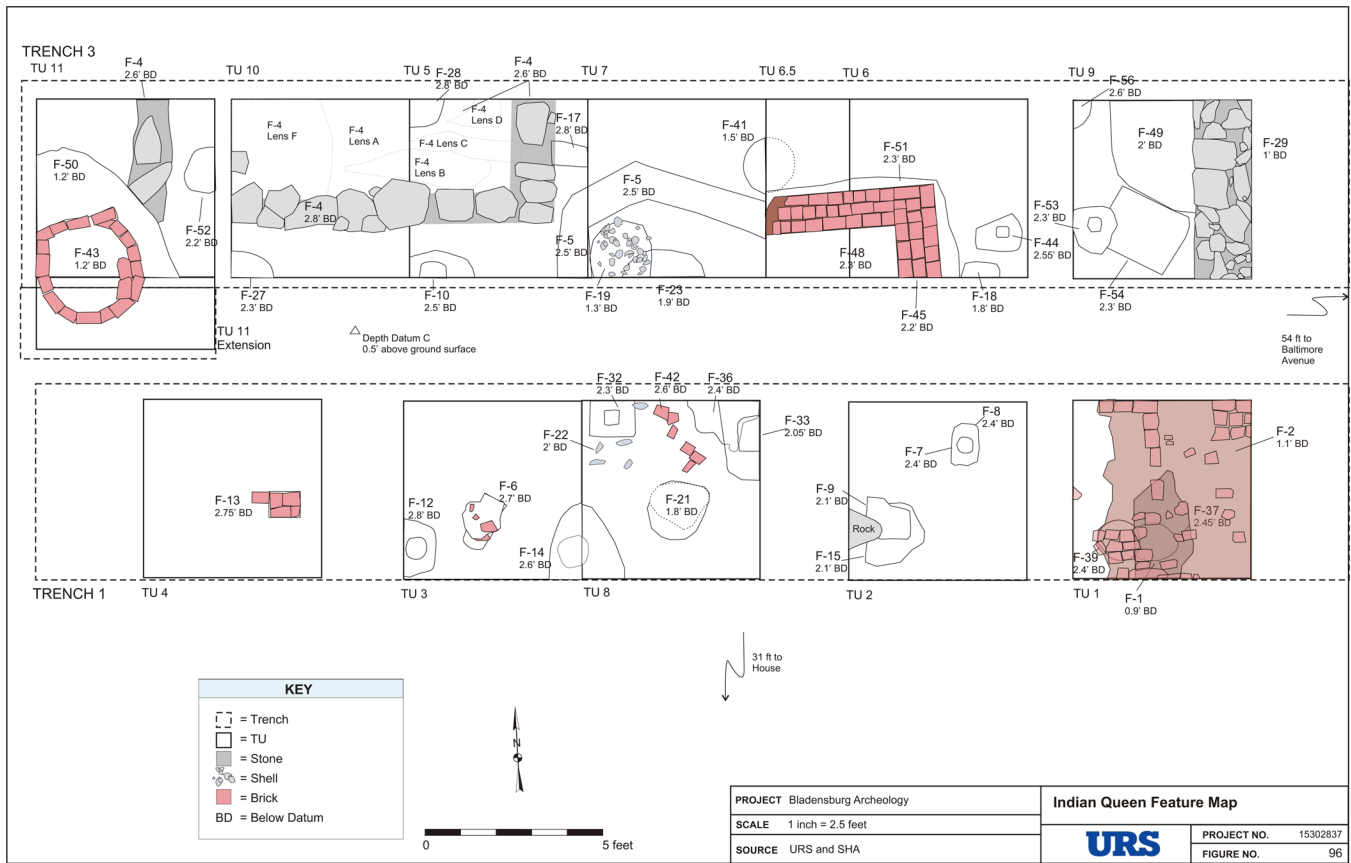
After opening the tap and dispensing the beverage from the cask, the server brought the spirits back into the main building for distribution. The tavern served these ales and wines in stemmed glasses and bright white, fine-grained stoneware from England. The customers enjoyed expensive cuts of beef, oysters, and lamb on beautifully decorated tin-glazed earthen wares, cream wares, and white salt-glazed stoneware. The recovery of flint corn cobs and wheat suggest the tavern served meals of hominy, grits, and stews with sides of bread. Archaeologists also believe that tea and coffee would have been served in porcelain, creamware, and fine stoneware called Nottingham.



top: pressed glass bowl; tumbler; glass stemware; bottom: pyrex glass lid; glass faceted stopper; stemware foot.

By the mid-19th century, the archaeology looked very different from the tavern assemblage. Historic documents suggest, and archaeology confirms that Francis Gasch moved onto the site and constructed a cabinet shop and home. Interestingly, archaeologists did not recover any evidence of coffin or cabinet hardware. They did find personal objects including a porcelain jar that once held hair pomade made from cow fat. The dishware reflects a typical working to middle class occupation. The Gasch’s poured milk and juice from white ceramic pitchers, drank from similarly styled cups, and ate a diet rich in pork served on floral transferprinted dishes from England.





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