

Chapter I Introduction

A. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to develop a document through which to guide management, preservation, and interpretation of Woodlands Farm and Thomas's Wharf in Northampton County on Virginia's Eastern Shore. Such a report entails research, observation, and evaluation of the cultural landscape's significance and integrity. This foundation work is intended to provide the Virginia Coast Reserve with recommendations and choices for managing Woodlands Farm and Thomas's Wharf, according to a management philosophy. As a project of The Nature Conservancy, the Virginia Coast Reserve includes of 43,000 acres of preserved ecosystem, encompassing barrier islands, marshes, and seaside farms. Managed as a United Nations Biosphere Reserve, the Virginia Coast Reserve lands are designated for conservation, education, and research, thus providing diverse areas of study. Woodlands Farm and Thomas's Wharf is one of these diverse areas, a seaside farm laden with Eastern Shore history and culture that impacts delicate coastal ecosystems.

B. Methodology for Studying Cultural Landscapes

The U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service defines cultural landscape as "a geographic area (including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein) associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values."¹ This description is very broad and needs to be qualified. The definition condenses cultural landscape into four categories: (1) associated with a historic event, (2) associated with a historic activity, (3) associated with a historic person, and (4) having other cultural or aesthetic values. The first three categories are very precise. A site is either important because something happened there or someone was born or lived there. It is important because the time period or person is

¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, ed. by Charles A. Birnbaum with Christine Capella Peters (Washington, DC, 1996), 4.

easily recognized, such as a Civil War battle or a birthplace of a famous American. What it does not address in great detail is the fourth category, or the cultural geographer's cultural landscape, "the landscape made by humans."² This definition refers to the landscape that we see around us and live in on a daily basis, in other words, the ordinary landscape of everyday. These places or areas are not associated with any event or person, but are representative of the evolution of generations of changes that have occurred, and continue to occur. All landscapes are altered by man, and the question to ask is how and why these landscapes changed: what are the forces, issues, or technologies that dictate change in the landscape?³

Essentially, the places and scenes we see around us are cultural landscapes. The landscape have evolved, and by looking closely we can decipher what changes have taken place. But the why cannot always be answered as easily. It takes a method or a guide to begin to answer why a landscape looks the way it does and to identify the regional and local forces that shaped it. The National Park Service has addressed the importance of landscapes as context for traditional historic sites, as well as being an important cultural resource. The documentation, evaluation, and preservation of cultural landscapes, as proposed by the National Park Service, is intended for a broader understanding of time, place, culture, and history. The movement towards cultural landscape preservation encourages "a holistic approach to resource management by engendering an increased understanding of the inter-relationships between cultural and natural resources within a property."⁴

² Peirce F. Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. by D.W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 11.

³ Robert Z. Melnick, "Protecting Rural Cultural Landscape: Finding Value in the Countryside," in *Landscape Journal* 2, no. 2 (1983): 85-6.

⁴ Charles A. Birnbaum and Robert R. Page, "Revealing the Value of Cultural Landscapes," in *CRM* 17, no. 7 (1994): 3.

This thesis completes a study of a cultural landscape according to the methodology established by the U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service.⁵ The study takes the form of a resource document intended to identify, evaluate, and preserve the landscapes of Woodlands Farm and Thomas's Wharf. It provides the past history and present condition of a site, what makes it significant, and the steps involved to preserve and maintain the property according to a determined site management philosophy. The method devised by the National Park Service includes four steps: A cultural landscape is identified through (1) historical research, and (2) inventory and documentation of existing conditions; evaluated through (3) site analysis, and evaluation of significance and integrity; and finally, (4) preserved through recommendations for future management.

Historical Research

Historical research gathers of information pertaining to the property and landscape that speaks about its historic context and site history. The key to research of a landscape is understanding the historic context in which it evolved. Historic context is defined as “an important theme, pattern, trend in the historical development of a locality, State, or the nation at a particular time in history or prehistory.”⁶ For many landscapes it is not just one historic trend that influenced evolution, but rather several overlapping historic contexts. This only seems natural, for landscapes are constantly changing and adjusting to new technologies and land uses.

Researching the site history of a landscape involves using both primary and secondary sources. Historic context and “character of the [landscape] under study” should determine the source selection needed to adequately research the property.⁷ When

⁵ The goal of the method set forth by the National Park Service is completion of a National Register nomination. It is the intention of the author to use the method as a means of documenting and understanding the landscapes of Woodlands Farm and Thomas's Wharf to National Park Service standards.

⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 30, Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes*, by Linda Flint McClelland, J. Timothy Keller, Genevieve P. Keller, and Robert Z. Melnick (Washington, DC, n.d.), 7.

⁷ *Ibid*, 8.

researching Woodlands Farm and Thomas's Wharf, selection of sources was specifically directed towards seaside shipping interests and local historians' writings. Particularly of interest were oral histories of Eastern Shore natives having some association with Woodlands Farm and Thomas's Wharf.

Inventory and Documentation of Existing Conditions

The second step of inventory and documentation of existing conditions is essential as a means to identify and understand the changes that have occurred on a property. There is another dimension to cultural landscape, one that considers landscape as a text or record of history: "every landscape - not just those with 'historic sites' - is part of a vast, cluttered, complex repository of society, and archive of tangible evidence about our character and experience as a people through all our history."⁸ Reading the landscape as history means looking to all the characteristics that make up that landscape. "Landscape messages can be conveyed by artifacts on the land, the material culture of a place . . . buildings, field, routes, gardens, and together landscape patterns speak of families, work habits, travel, tastes, and societal structure."⁹ Looking at the organizational elements of a landscape, such as spatial relationships and land use, allows for identification of patterns and conditions pertinent to the property's historic context and site history, while character of the site is defined by the following features: topography, vegetation, circulation, water features, and structures, site furnishings, and objects.¹⁰ These patterns and characteristics of the existing site can support, or disprove, historical research and interpreted local legend. Documentation of existing conditions provides a baseline from which to measure the changes and evolution of the property, providing important and valuable information

⁸ D.W. Meinig, Forward to *The Making of the American Landscape*, ed. by Michael P. Conzen (New York: Routledge, 1990), vii.

⁹ Ary J. Lamme, *America's Historic Landscapes: Community Power and the Preservation of Four National Historic Sites* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 19.

¹⁰ *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, 15-16.

for continuing research and use.¹¹ When analyzed in context with the history of the property, existing conditions inform future priorities and choices for the property, while influencing such measures as site interpretation and preservation procedures.

Site Analysis and Evaluation of Significance and Integrity

This relationship between historical research and existing conditions of the physical site is important for evaluating a property. Changes are understood best by comparing the information gathered from historical sources with existing conditions on site, thus leading to the evaluation of period(s) of significance and integrity of the property. Period of significance is defined as “the span of time during which significant events and activities occurred . . . [that are important] to the history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture of a community, a State, or a nation.”¹² Significance of a landscape is tied to the National Register criteria and must be significant in at least one of the four areas: (A) association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history; (B) association with the lives of persons significant in our past; (C) possession of distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinctions; or (D) have yielded, or likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.¹³ According to the National Park Service, a landscape is only significant if it applies to at least one of the above criterion. Any property that does not meet the standards of evaluation of significance is not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Dependent on the evaluation of significance is that of integrity. Integrity is a “property’s historic identity evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics from the

¹¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Preservation Brief 36, Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment, and Management of Historic Landscapes*, by Charles A. Birnbaum (Washington, DC, 1994), 5.

¹² U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 39, Researching a Historic Property*, by Eleanor O’Donnell (Washington, DC, 1991), 2.

¹³ *National Register Bulletin 30*, 20.

property's historic period.”¹⁴ Qualities of integrity include: location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Physical characteristics such as spatial features and organization, natural systems, vegetation, land use, and buildings and structures weave together to define each of these qualities of integrity.¹⁵ Determining if a place has integrity is not as simple as checking off the list of qualities or physical characteristics. Integrity is not composed of just one of these entries on a list, but rather the interrelationships and influences of each quality and characteristic with another.

Recommendations for Future Management

Determination of objectives and recommendations for the future use of the property is the final step in the process. A range of factors must be considered in order to select an appropriate treatment for the property, as well as provide pertinent recommendations: “These include the relative historic value of the property, the level of historic documentation, existing physical condition, its historic significance and integrity, historic and proposed use, long- and short-term objectives, operational and code requirements, and costs for anticipated capital improvements, staffing, and maintenance.”¹⁶ This information points the way for future work, but also influential are other factors, such as proposed use, staffing, and goals and objectives of interested and responsible stakeholders. In order to develop objectives and recommendations that are pertinent to the landscape of Woodlands Farm and Thomas's Wharf, the needs and concerns of the Virginia Coast Reserve and The Nature Conservancy were considered.

Recommendations are determined by choosing a treatment appropriate for a landscape, based upon the previous three steps. As a guide for the site management philosophy, the recommended treatment could be one of the four treatments options outlined by the National Park Service: preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, or reconstruction. (More detailed descriptions of these treatment options can be found in Chapter 6 - Recommendations.) Recommendations for future research of the property is

¹⁴ *Preservation Brief* 36, 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 22.

essential for continued protection and maintenance of the property. Without looking forward in time, the nature of a dynamic landscape is denied.

¹⁶ Ibid.