

Finds And Features



The grassy area within the Circle Drive is the most studied area at Sylvester manor. Archaeologists found ceramics, clay pipes, animal bones, and building debris here. These items and structures help us better understand the [daily lives](#) and [social relations](#) of 17th-century free and enslaved laborers.



Postholes are stains left in the ground by past fences or buildings. Archaeologists love postholes and other building remains because they act as clues to the appearance of the [past landscape](#). Many post holes have been found in the Circle Drive area.



Manhansett people most likely left many of the artifacts found at Sylvester Manor. Manhansett pottery and wampum have been found across the site; these help to highlight [Indigenous subsistence](#) and [persistence](#).



In the lawn behind the Manor house, archaeologists uncovered the remains of an early 19th-century dairy. Dairies were small buildings where cow's milk was made into cream, butter, and cheese. Dairying was done by [Black women](#) who lived and worked at the Manor. Artifacts and documents shed light on the lives and labor of free and enslaved Black women such as [Julia](#) and [Violet Havens](#).



From left to right: a Fleur-de-lis stickpin, horse tack, and wampum bead


Want to Get Involved?

At the [Fiske Center](#) and [New England African American Archaeology Lab](#), we continue to generate archaeological and historical research about the multitude of histories at Sylvester Manor.

Contribute

If you are a descendant and would like to contribute historical information to our research, please contact Dr. Nedra Lee:
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Follow

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Support

Donate and support ongoing collections and historical information to our research at the Fiske Center and the New England African American Archaeology Lab.



Contact Info



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www.sylvestermanor.org



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ARCHAEOLOGY AT SYLVESTER MANOR



History

Sylvester Manor was founded on Shelter Island in 1652 as a provisioning plantation. As a plantation located in the North, Sylvester Manor was organized differently than a southern plantation. Both Black and Indigenous people performed agricultural and household labor at the Manor. Their work supported a mixed agricultural economy that supplied food and other northern goods to populations on plantations in Barbados.

Sylvester Manor was one of the earliest places where captured Africans were taken in the United States to labor. Contrary to popular myth, slavery existed in the North. It was a fundamental aspect of northern society and was enmeshed in a broad, global economic system.



From left to right: decorative tack, ceramic jug sherd, and a bale seal

Timeline

✓ Pre-1651



Shelter Island, also known as Manhansack-Aqua-Quash-Aw amock, meaning "an island sheltered by islands" was inhabited by the Manhanset people for thousands of years before and after European colonization.

✓ 1651-1719



Sylvester Manor is established as a provisioning plantation to supply foodstuffs and timber to sugar plantations in Barbados. Indigenous people, enslaved Black people, and Europeans lived and labored at Sylvester Manor during this period.

✓ 1719-1859



The production scale decreases at Sylvester Manor as plantation activities focus more on dairying, hog rearing, meat smoking, and agricultural production for local markets. In 1735, Brinley Sylvester builds the current Manor house.

✓ 1859-1944



The Manor is used as a vacation home by the Horsford family. Eben Horsford and daughters commemorate the Quaker cemetery in 1884.

✓ 1944-present



The Fiske family works to preserve the history of the Manor. Andrew and Alice Fiske maintain the formal lawn, gardens, and the outbuildings that remain today.

Why Archaeology?

In 1998, in response to Andrew Fiske's interest in archaeology, his widow, Alice Fiske, contacted the University of Massachusetts Boston to conduct excavations in search of the original Manor house. The Fiskes were the 10th generation of the Sylvester family to use Sylvester Manor as a private home. Early excavations focused on the arrival of Nathaniel and his wife Grizzell in the mid-1600s and the Manor's operation as a provisioning plantation.

Current work aims to learn more about the Manor's 18th to 20th-century history and focuses on the preservation of the Afro-Indigenous Burial Ground. Historical and archaeological research continues to shed light on the lives of specific Black and Indigenous people who lived and worked at the Manor. These individuals were members of the Shelter Island community and made the prosperity of the Sylvesters possible. Archaeological research has uncovered 360,000 artifacts that continue to be studied. The archaeology at Sylvester Manor uncovers the history of the 3 cultures who came together at Shelter Island.

