

Overall, the exhibit reflects the present state of the scholarship on the subject, including its strengths and weaknesses. For example, the exhibit's Mississippian historical period highlights the visually impressive, large-scale settlements, while giving scant attention to the many smaller Mississippian farmsteads in the region. It is hoped that as researchers turn to new and neglected topics in the future the permanent exhibit can be updated, thus continuing the strong link between research and interpretation.

The exhibit has some flaws. The dominance of the Cherokee in the Historic section, while understandable in East Tennessee, tends to obscure the role of other historic tribes in the state. It implies that the Cherokee were the physical and cultural descendants of Mississippian peoples, an argument that can also be made for other groups such as the Creek or Natchez. Acculturation and trade between European Americans and Indians are discussed primarily in the context of the deerskin trade, but no mention is made of the substantial early trade in Indian slaves. The accompanying film has similar problems in emphasis. It notes, for example, that the Cherokee was the only tribe living in the state without explaining that this was because the Cherokee and Chickasaw twice combined in the early 18th century to drive the Shawnee out of Middle Tennessee. Both the main exhibit and film tell the story of the Trail of Tears, but the larger impact of Indian removal on Tennessee and the United States is unexplored.

Overall, the exhibit is attractive and well designed. It incorporates recent historical and archeological scholarship and strongly reflects the institution's mission. It is also innovative and effective in communicating the historical themes of cultural change, interaction, and persistence. *Archaeology and the Native Peoples of Tennessee* contains much of value for both cultural resource professionals and the broader general public. For preservationists, the exhibit directly confronts the difficulty of interpreting artifacts from sites later destroyed by

development, while providing a model for adding relevant context. For the public the exhibit provides a broad overview of the state's past cultures and their histories, enhanced by the fascinating objects these peoples created.

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*Highway to the Past:
The Archaeology of Boston's Big Dig*

Commonwealth Museum, Boston, MA. Curator:
Anne-Eliza Lewis

On exhibit into 2006

Boston's recently completed "Big Dig" gained widespread notoriety as the most expensive U.S. highway project of all time. The Central Artery Project, as it is officially known, replaced elevated highways with new tunnels cutting through Boston's congested waterfront and a third harbor tunnel link with Logan Airport. Federal and state sponsored survey and data recovery work by archeologists from area institutions and cultural resources management firms took nearly a decade to complete. By virtue of its scale, methods, and results, archeology of the Big Dig will shape the future practice of urban historical archeology in New England.

Highway to the Past: The Archaeology of Boston's Big Dig, its companion booklet, and virtual exhibit highlight the results of nearly a decade of Big Dig archeological discoveries.¹ The story of Boston, including the formation of the Boston Harbor and the city's pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial past, is ably told through a narrative highlighting Big Dig sites. The result is a unique and broad perspective on the material lives of countless generations of Bostonians.

Highway to the Past places the artifacts and other archeological evidence unearthed during the Big Dig in their historical environmental and social contexts. The peopling of the Boston region is presented in the context of the formation of Boston Harbor itself between 4,000 and 10,000 years ago. The exhibit takes advantage of new geotechnical data and advances in digital mapping technology to depict the shifting shorelines of Massachusetts Bay, and it presents data on the flora and fauna of the area along with lithic and ceramic artifacts from Spectacle Island, which was capped with Big Dig landfill. During the colonial era, area inhabitants cut docks into existing marshes, built wharves along the shorelines, and tapped area tidal ponds for running gristmills. These examples of how our colonial ancestors modified the environment to address human needs are among the more memorable environmental messages of the exhibit.

In terms of social context, the exhibit uses archeological evidence to explore the formation of Boston's distinctive and somewhat insular neighborhoods. Charlestown and Boston, for instance, were once separate towns, and their identities have been shaped by their different historical trajectories. Founded by English Puritans a year before they were invited to settle Boston proper, Charlestown is represented by three colonial sites: the Town Dock, the Parker Harris Pottery, and the Three Cranes Tavern. Respectively, these sites illustrate the commercial, industrial, and consumer habits of a prosperous Massachusetts Bay community on the eve of the American Revolution. Spectacular examples of reconstructed imported and local ceramics dominate the exhibit cases and are complemented by examples of metal, bone, and glass artifacts.

Several colonial sites in Boston's North End were excavated and their original occupants identified through historical records. The most spectacular of them is also one of Boston's earliest: the Katherine Naylor privy. Katherine Naylor was born in 1630 in England and later became a North End resident. A privy dating to the last quarter of the 17th century



This mannequin sports 17th-century garb for the fashion display in the Highway to the Past exhibit. (Courtesy of the Commonwealth Museum)

was found at her house lot, containing artifacts reflecting the wealth of her merchant husband. Visitors can see well-preserved samples of the 250,000 seeds and more than 150 fragments of lace and shoes excavated from the site. The earliest known example of a wooden bowling ball was also discovered in the privy, and an explanation of the colonial version of bowling is featured in one exhibit case.

The North End site of John Carnes's 1730 workhouse returns the visitor to the theme of colonial manufacturing. Carnes was a metalworker specializing in pewter and brass. While only one pewter tankard attributed to him survives in museum collections, his site was littered with evidence of his tools and small decorative metal pieces. Thomas Cain's South Boston Flint Glassworks (1812-1827) and the American Glass Company (1847-1857) carry the exhibit's manufacturing theme into the 19th century.

Highway to the Past offers a unique archeological perspective on Boston's early inhabitants and fills a critical need for public access to archeological information. The exhibit includes interactive computer displays, a stratigraphy puzzle, general information on archeology, and even theater seating for group discussions and presentations. Exhibit captions tend to be lengthy and academic, which may discourage younger readers; however,

the elegant display of artifacts and visual information is sure to engage all.

Boston is rich in museums preserving and interpreting some facet of the city's past. However, only the Commonwealth Museum has succeeded in integrating material culture of common Bostonians into a remarkable story of environmental, social, and economic adaptation across centuries. This exhibit illustrates the value of federal and state historic preservation legislation, such as Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The cost of the Big Dig was considerable, but the public and scientific value of Big Dig archeology is priceless.

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1. An online version of the exhibit is available at <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcexh/musprv/prvidx.htm>, as well as an exhibit catalog, *Highway to the Past: The Archaeology of Boston's Big Dig* (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Historical Commission, 2001).

Furniture in Maryland Life

Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, MD.
Curator: Jeannine A. Disviscour; Exhibition team: Erin Kimes, Nancy Davis, Paul Rubenson, Gregory R. Weidman, Charles Mack, Paula J. Bogert, and Lynn Springer Roberts

Permanent exhibit

With a high ceiling, lots of light, and a jumble of fancy tables, chairs, cabinets, and desks arranged on two terraced levels along parallel walls, a first-time visitor could be forgiven for mistaking the Dorothy Wagner Wallis Gallery of the Maryland Historical Society for some sort of furniture shrine. The large rectangular room seems like the perfect setting for a narrowly-focused exhibit on the design nuances of early Republic furniture, which is why it comes as a pleasant surprise to find that

the society's permanent exhibit, *Furniture in Maryland Life*, attempts to address audiences beyond the aficionado. Indeed, rather than seeking a limited goal of portraying changing design or paying homage to famous upper-class Marylanders by placing their household items on display, the exhibit creators remind visitors of the common functions of furniture, past and present, and challenge them to "think about the furniture you use every day."

The exhibit promises to explore the manufacture, design, and function of furniture in Maryland from 1634 to the present. These three themes explicitly order the exhibit. Each major theme has a color designation, and each label carries a block of color, the theme title, and the subsection name in a header at the top to orient the reader. The usage theme is explained along the long north wall, with manufacturing arrayed along the south wall. Furniture design is explained in several freestanding displays in the center of the floor along the main axis of the room. The stories of manufacturing and design both move chronologically from west to east, but the displays in the usage section include artifacts from several time periods.

The exhibit attempts to be inclusive of the entire sweep of Maryland history from the organization of the colony in 1634 to the present day, but the display overwhelmingly focuses on furniture of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The period before the 1710s is represented only by a laminated reproduction of an estate inventory and a handful of archeological objects. The 20th century also receives relatively scant attention. Even in the exhibit's chronological area of strength, the objects on display largely represent the wealthiest segments of society; though a few objects, such as a barstool with its original deerskin seat (ca. 1830-1860) and a painted chair owned by a manumitted slave provide welcome exceptions. Much of this slant can be attributed to the fact that lower-class households before the 20th century had very little furniture at all, and what they did own tended to

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