

## **Recent History of the Morris Pottery Kiln Site, Including a Description of the Massanutten Chapter's Involvement**

Prepared by the MCASV Morris Pottery Kiln Committee from notes on file with MCASV.

1982: A 3500 square-foot lot on which the site is located was deeded to Eastern Mennonite College (EMC) by the Showalter family, whose intention was to “preserve the unique site for educational purposes.” EMC agreed to assume ownership, perform further excavation, undertake preservation measures and maintain the site. The College received a variance from the Rockingham County Board of Supervisors and the property transferred in January 1983.

Mid-1980s: Stanley Kaufmann, Chairman of the Art Department at Eastern Mennonite College, began a study of the kiln site as part of his research on the Shenandoah Valley pottery industry. Dr. Kaufmann, with the assistance of the JMU Department of Sociology and Anthropology and the Massanutten Chapter of the Archeological Society of Virginia, excavated a “wedge” out of the southeast quadrant of the kiln to determine its internal structure.

Late 1980s: Massanutten Chapter members cleaned and gridded the site and undertook systematic surface collection in 5' squares. All artifacts were processed and catalogued by Janice Biller and other MCASV members; objects and documentation from this effort remain in the possession of MCASV. No further excavation was undertaken. Eleanor Parslow and other members also contacted Morris descendants and pottery collectors in Rockingham County, photographing intact vessels and recording Morris-Coakley-Coffman family genealogy. Chapter member Paul Mullins presented several papers at regional archeology conferences on the history of the Shenandoah pottery industry, using the Morris operation as an example.

Early 1990s: Chapter member and JMU faculty member Carole Nash presented a paper on the chapter's site work at the Annual Meeting of the Archeological Society of Virginia, Staunton, Virginia. Chapter members began conversations with the Rockingham-Harrisonburg Historical Society (RHHS) about consolidating information and artifacts from pottery sites in the area.

Late 1990s: Chapter members discovered the kiln was beginning to collapse due to exposure to the elements, invasive vegetation, and the 1980s excavation. Robert Jolley of the Winchester Regional Office, Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR) completed a site survey form, resulting in the site being designated “44RM430.” Jolley encouraged the chapter to pursue a National Register nomination for the site.

1999: MCASV members contacted Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) President Joseph Lapp to discover EMU's intentions toward the site and to make him aware of its condition. A series of meetings followed, during which it became clear that EMU was no longer interested in maintaining the site. MCASV was given permission to clean the site and cover it with tarps as protection against the elements. The chapter established the Morris Pottery Kiln Committee to oversee work at the site.

2000: MCASV members and JMU archeology students and faculty re-gridded the site and an adjacent garden, making another surface collection and mapping the kiln in plan and profile.

Chapter members, led by Linda Waggy, continued cleaning the site, removing several pickup loads of trash, cutting trees, removing vegetation, and erecting fencing along the road. As a stopgap against collapse, the kiln was filled with 1/2 ton of sand. Discussions with Dr. Catherine Slusser and Robert Jolley of VDHR resulted in a list of suggestions for site management:

- a lease agreement between EMU and a preservation organization that would care for the site;
- the transfer of ownership to a responsible custodian;
- or a cost-share project between EMU, a preservation organization, and the State of Virginia (via a capital improvement grant from the Virginia General Assembly).

MCASV President Ralph Bolgiano also contacted the Archaeological Conservancy about the site; however, he was informed that this organization does not manage archaeological sites and would look for a local partner to oversee the site and take ownership.

2001: Phone calls and meetings with Dr. Lapp and EMU Attorney Ronald Piper continued, with the Pottery Kiln committee recommending that the chapter consider leasing the property for the short-term, constructing a shelter over the kiln, and erecting an interpretive sign. This act of “buying time” for the kiln would allow EMU and MCASV to locate an organization willing to accept the property. In September, Piper met with chapter members to outline the University’s decision about the kiln: the need to transfer the property to an organization that is better prepared to care for and preserve the site. EMU would not put further resources toward the upkeep of the site, which no longer met the objectives of the University. Chapter members talked with Attorney Lawrence Bowers, President, Rockingham-Harrisonburg Historical Society (RHHS), to discuss how to proceed in the matter (particularly in drawing up a rental agreement). Mr. Bowers indicated that the RHHS was in no position to accept the property and suggested that the ASV is the most appropriate organization to do so, given the Massanutten Chapter’s long-standing interest in the site. Mr. Bowers also suggested that, in order to assume liability, the chapter consider incorporating and accepting the deed outright. In consultation with Michael Barber, ASV President, chapter members agreed to pursue this question with the ASV Executive Board. In the meantime, the kiln tract boundaries were re-established by a local surveyor and property pins placed in the four corners.

2002: After further discussions with ASV Board members and a consideration of ASV organizational structure, the Morris Pottery Kiln Committee recommended that the ASV (and not the Massanutten Chapter) assume ownership, the State organization already having 501(c)(3) status and liability insurance. The committee drafted a formal proposal that was presented to the ASV Executive Board. The Board voted unanimously to accept the deed in January 2002. The ASV assumed ownership of the Morris Pottery Kiln in September 2002 and requested that the Massanutten Chapter continue as its caretaker. As part of its ownership responsibilities, the ASV agreed to work with the Massanutten Chapter in fund-raising for the construction of a permanent structure over the kiln, as well as developing interpretive signage. Fencing donated by local residents was installed along the western edge of the tract.

2003: Chapter member Linda Waggy met with contractors to discuss the design and construction of a pole shed over the kiln. Showalter Buildings and Supplies, Hinton, Virginia, submitted a bid of \$15,000 for materials and labor.

2004: A sign identifying the Morris Pottery Kiln was placed at the roadside on the western edge of the kiln.

Continuing through the present: MCASV members periodically meet to clean the kiln of vegetation, monitor its condition, and maintain a tarp covering to protect it from the elements. In 2007, MCASV is focusing on fundraising for this project.