

Archaeology

Over the last two decades, a great deal of archaeological work has been done at Ashland bringing to light much information about the site and its residents. This work has been done by the University of Kentucky Department of Anthropology and the Kentucky Archaeological Survey. Literally thousands of Kentucky school students have participated in Ashland's archaeological programs.

One of the most visible results of the research is likely the Springfield Gasworks installed by the McDowell's in the 1880s. This machine was excavated in 1998, restored, and is now on exhibit whenever Ashland is open.

In fields between the parking lot and Sycamore Road, elements of a barn, a three bay carriage house, and the remains of two fetal or newborn horses were discovered. They are the remains of the great Ashland Stud, Henry Clay's Thoroughbred operation which flourished at Ashland from the 1830's until the development of the farm in the 1920's.

Artifacts uncovered near the modern formal garden are evidence of a row of structures believed to have been slave quarters. Here resided many persons enslaved at Ashland during the Antebellum period. These enslaved African Americans likely worked in domestic capacities. One of the most interesting discoveries in the slave quarters is a simple lead pencil indicating these slaves were reading and writing, a most unusual and not entirely legal activity among the enslaved at the time.

Perhaps the richest excavations in terms of number of artifacts were those done in the original Henry Clay privy, which no-longer stands, and the still-standing privy built by James B. Clay in the 1850's. Privies were used as toilets and for garbage disposal and much can be learned from the refuse of the Clay family. The only known example of a teacup from Henry Clay's china, Henry Clay's shaving creme container, examples of medicine and wine bottles from the cupboards and tables of Ashland, and even the remains of the dinners served in the dining room have been found. This creates a very rich slice of life on this great estate.



Henry Clay's privy foundation is seen here as it was excavated. It has since been reburied for preservation and the site marked with modern stones.