

Hancock's Resolution – A "National Treasure"

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Figure 1: Hancock's Resolution

As I pulled ashore at what was once a 410-acre plantation known as Hancock's Resolution, I took one step off my stand-up paddleboard (SUP) and another step back in time. I was now standing on land first [patented](#) in 1665 and likely used at that time for growing tobacco. My summer paddling clothes didn't quite fit in with the 18th century farmhouse or the docents dressed in period attire. But I was ready to be immersed in history...to see, feel, touch, smell, and even taste it.

My journey started at Downs Park in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. After paying the parking fee (\$6 as of 2019), I drove north to a cartop boat launch at the end of Locust Cove Road. I carried my SUP about 300 feet to the beach, put in at Locust Cove, and then made my way north on Bodkin Creek. As I paddled, I thought about the Hancock family making use of their close proximity to the water to ship goods to Baltimore. I pulled ashore on the north side of Back Creek, making sure to stay away from private property. The approximately 1.5-mile trip is easy, but knowing where to take out is not since there are no markers. You'll definitely want to study the [map](#) if you plan to get there by water. Or, if you prefer a more conventional mode of transportation, just look for 2795 Bayside Beach Road, Pasadena, Maryland 21122. There's no entrance fee and plenty of free parking.

I joined a small tour group that was greeted by James Morrison, President of the Friends of Hancock’s Resolution. He took us to the milk house (used to store dairy products) and then the reconstructed dry goods and grocery store. At the latter, he showed us a large collection of “pickers’ checks,” quarter-size bronze tokens that farmers gave to workers as pay for picking produce. According to [The Baltimore Sun “Arundel exhibit harvests relics of a rural past”](#) these were “used from the 1870s through the 1950s by truck farmers -- those who hired chiefly immigrant labor to harvest the produce they trucked to cities -- pickers' checks were made at hardware stores in Baltimore, where they were engraved with farmers' initials and a number, designating the amount of produce picked...” I am particularly fascinated with pickers’ checks because they are so closely associated with Anne Arundel County. Once slavery was abolished, farmers needed workers who would commit for the entire season, so they paid their help in pickers’ checks. This constrained them to buying goods from the farm store and/or trading them for cash at the end of the harvest season. The Hancock family had a tin pickers’ check embossed with the initials “J.A.H.” which stood for John Asbury Hancock.



Figure 2: James Morrison in front of the milk house

Mr. Morrison passed our group on to docent Dolores Reuter, who led us to the five-bedroom middle-class farmhouse where she gave us a lesson in archaeology. She explained how core samples were taken from the root cellar because it was likely built from the oldest wood in the farmhouse. Then, the science of dendrochronology was harnessed to study the tree ring growth and determine that the house was built circa 1785.



Figure 3: Dolores Reuter at the farmhouse front porch

Docent Peggy Hanna showed us other parts of the house and pointed out an interesting feature on the exterior called “galleting.” This involved pushing small pieces of stone into the wet mortar. Ms. Hanna explained it helped draw out moisture, though others claim it strengthened joints, added visual interest, or even protected a building from witches.



Figure 4: Galleting in the stone farmhouse

Moving on to the kitchen garden, we met master gardener Nancy Allred. Unlike the fields which were used to grow items for sale or trade, the kitchen garden was primarily used for day-to-day needs. Some examples we saw included

- Sorghum to make brooms.
- Hops for use as a preservative and flavoring.
- Mullein to treat wounds, to make torches, and for shoe inserts.
- Yarrow to make dye.
- Lamb's ear for toilet paper.

What made Ms. Allred's garden tour particularly nice is that she encouraged us to smell, feel, and taste some of the different plants. I think I got my daily serving of vegetables during my visit.

Docent Bill Blanchard took us to the 18th century well. Here, he pointed out the “dry laid” (i.e. no mortar) stones used to line the interior. After pulling up a bucket of water, he emptied it into two smaller buckets and had a school-aged boy carry the buckets using a yoke...maybe a daily responsibility he would have had back in the day.

Hancock’s Resolution is typically only open to the public 1pm to 4pm on Sundays, April through October. During this time, they often have various events such as folk music, musket firing, and beekeeping demonstrations. On the day I visited, a variety of historic surveying equipment was being displayed by Bill Bower, chairman of the Chesapeake Chapter, Maryland Society of Surveyors. Maybe some of it was used when Stephen Hancock, Jr. resurveyed “Homewood’s Range” after he purchased 127.5 acres of it in 1790. Mr. Bower also displayed modern robotic surveying equipment which allows a single person to measure great distances with extreme accuracy. Seeing this, I was reminded that I was no longer in the 18th century.



Figure 5: Bill Bower (left) with historic surveying tools

I was surprised to discover I'd spent more than two hours at Hancock's Resolution - it felt like less. After bidding farewell to this place once declared a "National Treasure" by a noted historian, I walked back on a dirt path to where I had left my SUP and paddled back to Locust Cove, vowing to return another day to share this experience with loved ones.



Figure 6: Locust Cove cartop boat launch in Downs Park

For further reading about Hancock's Resolution, see [Friends of Hancock's Resolution](#).